

## **The Image and the Symbol as Derridean "Différance" in Poems by Wallace Stevens**

### **Abstract**

Wallace Stevens is widely accepted as one of the most complex poets of the 20th century. Commonly recognized as a symbolist and as a modernist American poet, he resists categorization and displays changes in style while his poetic career matures in time. As his well-known initial verses in "Of Modern Poetry" (1923) suggest, his precept must have been to compose "the poem of the mind in the act of finding/What will suffice" (1-2). While this axiom may be accepted as an artistic attitude that seeks economy of language and a focus on the thing itself, it may also be perceived as an open-ended discussion about the relationship between the signifier and the signified, imagination and reality—Stevens' favourite themes. Such aestheticism and symbolism, therefore, give way to the use of imagery which both stabilizes and destabilizes the poem's semantic structures and also testify to his subversive status as a Modernist poet. Indeed, Modernist poetry aims to break down all conventional artistic modes but paradoxically maintains the need for an organizing principle and particular formal style. One of the forerunners of Post-Modernist philosophy, Jacques Derrida, has left a profound legacy concerning the discussion of the problem of meaning and signification. In Derrida's strategy of deconstruction, the logoi, i.e. the unifying principles are considered inaccessible and unavailable. The term that Derrida coins as "différance" becomes an epitome of the idea that meaning is always postponed, and cannot be exhausted in its totality. It is a matter of difference, as Saussure has also argued, that words or referents have meanings; but those meanings are also deferred, postponed, and delayed in Derridean thinking. Similarly, the symbols and images in Wallace Stevens' poems serve as linguistic demarcations which reflect a convulsive play of signification between the signifier and the signified, and, both challenge and justify his place in the Modernist strain.

**Key Words: Wallace Stevens, Poetry, Modernism, Derrida, Deconstruction, Différance**