

# Deconstruction of Poetic Discourse: Analysis of Wallace Stevens' Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

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## **Abstract**

*The paper in hand is an attempt to apply deconstructionist approach to analyze the poetic eloquence with various post-structural elements. Post-structuralism is postmodern phenomena, which is applied and explored widely. As part of post-structuralism, 'Deconstruction' is innovative and distinctive technique of interpretation. By this way, new linguistic and thematic vistas can be explored very well. The paper is an analysis of Wallace Stevens' poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" by the application of deconstruction. The study explores qualitatively signifiers and signified as non-structural elements. Then the presence in absence as deconstructing element, is explored, whereas, the contradictions, metaphor, différance (temporal and spatial) are found as significant and peculiar features of post-structuralism, and finally intertextuality is investigated as the instance of the unstable meanings and de-centred structures. Therefore, it is found that the poem in theme, form and the structure is the tall talk of flexible aspects of language indeterminacy.*

**Keywords:** Poetic discourse, deconstructionist approach, postmodern phenomena, post-structuralism, blackbird.

## **Introduction**

The world of literature and critical study has come across many well-known theories and principles in modern and postmodern cultural studies. It truly has seen new dawn with the emergence of structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure. Although structuralism has the basis in linguistics yet it spread widely to almost all humanistic social studies. Post-structuralism and deconstruction are the result of either pro or against the structuralism.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida's prominent contribution 'Deconstruction' is landmark in the history of literary criticism. This theory is widely used for the analysis and interpretation of binary oppositions, intertextuality, contradictions & metaphors, différance (spatial & temporal), presence in absence and sign or code (signifier/signified) for constructing meaning within text. Deconstruction is commonly known as modern, cultural, literary, and philosophical method of critical reading. This critical and contextual theory supports in exposing and understanding the weaknesses and the intrinsic structure of text by decoding the system of language. Deconstruction never destroys text but analyzes differences within it critically.

There are various interpretations to its origin yet it has closest association with Derrida. Kates (2005) states that the term 'Deconstruction' is coined by Jacques Derrida in 1967. The claim is well confirmed by Stocker (2006) that this term first appears in chapter 4 'Meaning and Representation' of Jacques Derrida's book *Speech and Phenomena* (1973). Similarly, Tyson (2006) reveals about the existence of the very term that deconstruction is chaotic theory; originated by unusual French thinker and theorist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Jacques Derrida in 1960s in France and it is mostly identified with 'Post-structuralism' for the reason that it not only emerged and pervaded after the linguistic theory 'Structuralism' but also is a

reaction against it. On the one hand, Howells (1999) construes that deconstruction got emergence in France and spread widely in England and the United States where Derrida became popular for this unusual modern and literary theory. On the other hand, Bertens (2001) opines that it was the time when Saussurean structuralism was in developing process. Thus, the deconstruction has come in vogue and succeeded in getting its peculiar identity.

From there Jacques Derrida has also been identified with the reading method in novel way. So, Derrida is called 'Poststructuralist' by philosophers and cultural & literary theorists (Stocker, 2006). Derrida best defines 'Post-structuralism'. He himself emphasized:

*Deconstruction is not a theory unified by any set of consistent rules or procedures, it has been variously regarded as a way of reading, a mode of writing, and, above all, a way of challenging interpretations of texts based upon conventional notions of the stability of the human self, the external world, and of language and meaning (as cited in Habib, 2011, p. 240).*

To many critics defining deconstruction in a nutshell is a hard nut to crack. However, 'Deconstruction' is defined by other many critics in different ways. Trifonas & Peters (2005) describe deconstruction as firm association with Derrida which depends mainly on the mode of interpretation, analysis, and criticism but basically on practicing both reading and writing. Bertens (2001) affirms that deconstruction as Derrida's practice is the way of dismantling and analyzing text to disclosing their inner complexities. The Yale poststructuralist Miller (1976) defines it, "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself" (p. 341). Belsey (2002) has his own view about this, putting it; 'Post-structuralism' is a theory of literary criticism which links human beings, the world they live in, and the practice of deciphering meanings. Stocker (2006) suggests on Derridean theory in philosophical point of view that 'Deconstruction' being philosophical theory and approach is the "movement within philosophy" (p. 177). Deconstruction is the on-going process of thought as we unavoidably "structure experience" (ibid., p. 182) while decoding the codes of language. According to Derrida, 'Deconstruction' is not destruction but as a "transgression of boundaries, a revelation of contradictions, and a dissection" (as cited in Zima, 2002, pp. 23-24). Derrida (1997) himself reflects upon his propounded theory, opining that deconstruction does not deconstruct deconstruction of a text explicitly but implicitly. This all proves deconstruction as showing different views in a broader sense in the assertions of different critics which widens its significance.

Derrida's deconstruction significantly applies for the analysis of the "familiar binary opposition" (Howells, 1999, p. 72) as binary oppositions are commonly used in text implicitly, wedded in a "text's metaphors" (Bertens, 2001, p. 128) for the detection of contradictions while this not only discovers opposite connection between two different terms but also their complicity within text for deconstructing the opposition (ibid).

For Derrida both philosophy and literature are 'texts' and the interpretation of a text discovers the 'play of a chain of meanings' (Howells, 1999, p. 78) as language of the text is the medium of play with the signification of presence and absence (Stocker, 2006). Derrida (1997) writes in his book *Of Grammatology* (1967) that no text can be completely dismantling or dismantled. Bertens (2008) justifies that one of the ways of deconstructing text is close reading of the text while Caputo (1997) argues that it is by close reading of the "literality and textuality of the text" (p. 83). According to Derrida (1997), 'intertextuality' is the intermingling or web of various texts that is further justified by Bertens (2001) that the text of language is slippery; that is the reason of Derrida's arguing that the words within text are unstable and unfixed in time.

Sign or code as signifier/signified is part of both theories, 'Post-structuralism' and 'Structuralism' with different concepts. According to Derridean post-structuralism, signified itself converts into signifier uncertainly, never reaches at conclusive meaning but keep on moving along "an endless chain of signifier"; Derrida names it 'metaphor' as it substitutes "one signifier for another" (as cited in Habib, 2011, p. 242). Derrida unbalances the association between signifier and signified. The signifier is a word having stable meaning but it signifies the signified that has inherently unstable meaning (Bertens, 2001). According to Belsey (2002), Saussurean structuralism also categorized the sign or code into the signifier/signified which clarifies the system of signification that the signifier (form) is "the sound or the visual appearance of the word, phrase, or image in question" (p. 11) while the signified is its meaning or concept (ibid).

According to Lodge (2000) estimation, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure is recognized as "the father of modern linguistics" (p. 1); stresses upon distinguishing two key terms of language, '*langue*' and '*parole*'. *Langue* is "Language as a system" (ibid., p. 24) or "superiority of system" (ibid., p. 28) while *parole* or speech is "an individual using language at a particular moment" (ibid., p. 24) or "instances of language use" (ibid., p. 28). For this system of signification Saussure favors 'synchronic' rather than 'diachronic' system of language (ibid).

Though 'Deconstruction' is the outcome of 'Structuralism', Derrida's technique of deconstructing language is not fully connected by Saussure's idea of language as a "system of relations" (Habib, 2011, p. 243) and the terms with dependent meaning are interconnected for the purpose of their significance (ibid). In this connection, Bertens (2001) claims that though post-structuralism continuously rejects structuralism, Derridean post-structuralism cannot be imagined without Saussurean Structuralism. On one side, "Post-structuralism continues structuralism's preoccupation with language" (ibid., p. 120) and on other side both theories have totally different view of system of language; in this whole process post-structuralism weakens structuralism by questioning deeply about 'deconstructing' (ibid). Deconstruction is far more complicated than structuralism but still goes beyond it (Caputo, 1997) and it has its own world of digging out the themes and meanings in the text.

A new term 'Différance' is the creation of best-known contemporary philosopher Jacques Derrida that also appears in his book *Speech and Phenomena* like the very term 'Deconstruction' (Stocker, 2006). The term has its origin from the "French word 'differer' which can mean both 'to differ' and 'to defer' in time". Actually the practice of writing is the "movement of différance" (Habib, 2011, p. 243). Defining 'Différance' contextual meaning, Stocker (2006) elaborates that it is a type of difference which shows "non-identity within the same" (p. 175) and asserts that "the regular kind of difference distinguishes between things that are taken as the same" (pp. 175-176) and it is a movement of involving "non-identity within identity" as a process of weakening the "identity of identity" (p. 176). "Différance" refers to the difference that the same contains; 'Deconstruction' refers to the same that contains difference" (ibid., p. 178). Derrida (1997) anticipates about post-structuralism, occupied by difference (conceptual oppositions), and is a permanently self-dismantling movement. Bertens (2001), focusing more, says that difference is deconstructed by Derrida and his practitioners as an endless play that not only has impact upon the text but also their own deconstructions. Stocker (2006) adds that deconstruction gives priority to the differences between different texts.

For Derrida, language and philosophy are inseparable (Stocker, 2006). Deconstruction is a philosophy (Caputo, 1997) in the world of literary criticism and Derrida approached it only implicitly (Stocker, 2006) to do justice with deconstruction as the theory of decoding text in system of language. Jacques Derrida presents his conclusive point of

view, pondering that this philosophy must perform its functions; what it shows must say (as cited in Stocker, 2006).

### **Literature Review**

One of the philosophical theories, best applicable on Wallace Stevens' philosophical poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird", is the philosophical approach of deconstruction. Different researchers have conducted deconstructive analysis but mainly system of signification (signifier/signified) and binary oppositions are analyzed within the poem.

#### ***Deconstruction as an analyzing tool for system of signification (signifier/signified)***

Aman (nd) has chosen Derridean post-structuralism as tool for the analysis in his research especially system of signification on the poem. He (Ibid) estimates it an endless series of images and symbols to be deconstructionist reading and an emblem of deconstructive interpretation where the system of signification remains unstable. Throughout each section of the poem, blackbird has dual function of signifier as well as signified to display the free play (constant play) between these signs or codes and the dual role of signification is observed in images or symbols like "eye" (I), "three minds" (II), "inflections" & "innuendoes" (V), "golden birds" (VII), "circles" (IX), "sight" & "light" (X) and "blackbird" (XII & XIII) (ibid., pp. 20-26). Above all, Aman (nd) portrays that one symbol 'blackbird' is interpreted with variety of linguistic exploration 'Deconstruction'. Madrugá (1998) quotes Derrida and Stevens, determining that for both "the chain of signification which deconstruction speaks of as the foundation and movement ("play") of language is actually a chain of (sign)ification which itself is governed by continuous representation and interpretation..."(pp. 121-122) in the poem.

Cleghorn (1997) addresses the poem as disjointed (signifier/signified) "Deconstructive play" and demonstrates that "deconstruction dismantles known structures by showing how language manipulates contexts" (pp. 9-10). Images like "The only moving thing," (I) and "three blackbirds," (II) are deconstructed by contrast and throughout the poem the diverse images appear when blackbird from the thirteen sequence occupies the same "static position" as that of section I (ibid., p. 8). So, Stevens calls the poem "a collection...of sensations" (as cited in Cleghorn, 1997, p. 10); deconstruction decodes by dismantling its various perspectives and thought through sense is generated (ibid).

#### ***Deconstruction as an analyzing tool for binary opposition***

Akın (2009) calls the poem as the representation of "Deconstructionist discourse" (p. 3). He construes about poststructuralist interpretation of the poem that 'the logic of imagination' is signified by the poet through the analysis of blackbird (ibid., p. 1). By preferring binary opposition as part of analysis for his research study, he presents that the binary oppositions (opposites) in the poem are set by the poet between the white ("snowy" -winter season) and black ("blackbird"), serenity ("twenty snowy mountains") and motion ("the only moving thing was the eye of the blackbird"); ("I"), two-dimensional perception ("mind" & "blackbird") and three-dimensional perception ("three minds" & "three blackbirds") (II); rest ("Whirled" - rapid but constant movement in an orbit) and action ("Pantomime" - without words) (III); singing ("whistling") and silence ("just after") (V); perceiver (static) and blackbird (dynamic) (VI), imagination ("golden birds") and reality ("blackbird") (VII); artificial (man-made) and natural ("blackbird") source of knowing (VIII); philosophy of life and omen of death (XIII) (ibid., p. 4). He (Ibid) briefly describes that the poet objectifies the blackbird by constructing binary oppositions (of concreteness & abstraction).



Many critics like Paul Bove, J. Hillis Miller, Melita Schaum and Michael Beehler have made possible the applicability of theory 'deconstruction' on the poem by dismantling the text of the language (Aman). Gwaltney (1995) approves that Stevens' poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" provides a solid platform for the analysis through critical methodology 'Deconstruction'. Bogen (2004) presents Stevens' exploration of the poem by dismantling the concepts (negative connotations) of the number "thirteen" and color "black" (p. 220). Maeder (1999), further, adds that the number 13 and the color of the blackbird are counterbalanced as both symbolize death. Covey (1997) encapsulates the focus of Derridean "Deconstructive criticism" (p. 54) on philosophical features of the poem.

Above study is presented as a brief sketch for the justification of current study that still there are spaces left by researchers in the applicability of theory 'Deconstruction' on Wallace Stevens' poem "Thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird" that are to be filled in the present study.

### **Research Methodology**

The paper in hand is an attempt of qualitative study of the poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird". The poem is analyzed by descriptive design of study and the text of the poem is the corpus of the study. The textual analysis in qualitative paradigm is well apt to analyze the elements of deconstruction i.e. its features like system of signification (signifier/signified), contradictions & metaphors, presence in absence, intertextuality and *différance* (spatial & temporal).

### **Discussion and Analysis**

The poem "Thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird" is well complicated and philosophical one in form and nature. Thus, it can well be decoded and unfolded by the philosophical reading by applying deconstruction. Deconstruction itself is very complicated and embodies various novel things and elements; challenged many previous conceptual frames and their methods. Being post-structural approach, it inculcates various theories from Marxism to Freudian psychoanalysis, from Barthesian codes to Propp's formal analysis. In all of them, deconstruction is committed to unfold and reverse the themes and concepts like finding presence in absence, phonocentrism, breaking hierarchy, dislocating signifier and signification, intertextuality, metaphor, aporia, contradictions and so on. Applying post-structural elements, many studies have already been carried out on this poem yet there are some elements to be applied and analyzed differently in the poem as such. It is such kind of effort.

### ***Signifier, Signified and Signification***

The poem is itself a loud talk of its fluid signification. The title of poem is not only suggesting about looking at a 'blackbird' using singular number of the metaphor 'black' and 'bird' but also showing fluidity of signification throughout the poem using plural 'blackbirds' metaphorically. If the signifier of the poem is a 'bird', it has many signifiers like singular to plural, sitting to moving, flying to riding, filling to crossing, tracing to marking, and so forth which shows the non-static condition of signifieds of the signifiers. If the signified is to portray the methods of looking at a bird/birds, various signifiers are embedded from human beings to cities, rivers, mountains, winds, etc., that can be perceived as the lacking of steady convey of meaning to construe one thing by its binary oppositions or similarities whatsoever may be the case. If the form of the poem is signifier it has no single signified genre/meaning to understand singular and peculiar concept as every stanza has its own fluid signifiers and signifieds.

### ***Contradictions and Metaphor***

The poem in its compact structure and form is full of contradictions and conflicting meanings. It starts probably from morning or dawn from first stanza:

*'Among twenty snowy mountains,  
The only moving thing  
Was the eye of the blackbird'.*

Metaphorically, it can be taken to mean that all the living things/beings could be at rest in early dawn as in such areas contextually see the snow at night and mountains covered with that. It may be said in the context of last stanza as

*'It was evening all afternoon  
It was snowing  
And it was going to snow.  
The blackbird sat  
In the cedar-limbs'.*

that when evening starts falling even immediately after afternoon the whole night can witness the snowing process, which can be evident from the stanza that all the mentioned mountains and other things (not mentioned, in Derridean terms concealed the presence in absence) were covered and people were still in rest but the quick movement of eye of the blackbird. The description of the poem is well contradiction of temporal and spatial terms. Similarly, we can see that there are many contradictions in the poem in various stanzas beginning from first one. The claim "The only moving thing/ Was the eye of the blackbird" is broken in the third stanza as 'The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds', in 6<sup>th</sup> stanza "The shadow of blackbird/ Crossed it, to and fro", in 7<sup>th</sup> stanza "Do you not see how the blackbird walks around" similarly, in 9<sup>th</sup> stanza "When the blackbird flew out of sight", by the same in 10<sup>th</sup> stanza "blackbirds flying in the green light", and finally in the 12<sup>th</sup> stanza "The river is moving/ The blackbird must be flying" suggests that the whole poem is full of contradictions and metaphors unlike the first stanza and claim that "The only moving thing was the eye"; here everything is moving. In addition to that, the title is not adhering to its unwavering meaning that it is not based on only looking at a blackbird rather observing, defining and suggesting.

The speaker 'I' links metaphorically himself with the "blackbird" in the stanzas 2 & 4 "three minds/Like a tree/ In which there are three blackbirds" & "A man and a woman/Are one./A man and a woman and a blackbird/ Are one" respectively.

Metaphorically, the concept of blackbird might be something present as signified in the notion of the poet. The color black might metaphorically be perceived as the pessimism of the poet or gloomy picture of his experience with human beings (both the genders) with special reference to 4<sup>th</sup> stanza;

*'A man and a woman,  
Are one.  
A man and a woman and a blackbird  
Are one'.*

Here signifier is left wide open and gesture is for the human gender with an indefinite article to convey the message and to explore the various signifieds. Significant point here is the last stanza where in the same snowing place the bird sits is cedar-limb:

*'It was evening all afternoon.  
It was snowing  
And it was going to snow.  
The blackbird sat  
In the cedar-limbs'.*

Here “afternoon”, “evening” & “snowing” as the consequent happenings of day and night stand as metaphor for the different stages of life near death while the last line of the poem “The blackbird sat/In the cedar-limbs” connotes death where the term ‘limb’ metaphorically is used to explain the idea of cedar tree which has sweet smell with large branches yet bird is preferred to sit in limbs. So, the poem is acknowledged with multiplicity of narrative.

### ***Presence in Absence***

In Derridean deconstruction, the identification of presence in absence occupies central place. Deconstruction on the basis of ‘logocentrism’ in which the concept of ‘First of all was the Word’ in new testament, unfurls the presence of word ‘spoken’ as the words of God are spoken one though Bible is in written form. Derrida and the deconstructionist approach give it the name of ‘phonocentrism’ in which ‘phone’ spoken words are given preference over written. Thus, Derrida studies closely that what prevents the sign for being fully present in the phonocentrism? The poem contextually embodies the both ‘phonic’ and ‘graphic’ transcription. Besides the basic divergence, the poem hides the presence of absent things when finding the centre of structural concept. In the first stanza the talking about only one thing moving in the body of bird is hiding all the internal structure working and keeping alive to the bird. Not only the existence of the bird is motion but also all the objects existing in material shape are subject to change as matter is in constant process and change. Above and beyond, throughout the poem the whole body of the bird is in process and movement.

The trace of spoken text in the written form of poem is very evident from many points in the stanzas like musing of the poet in 5<sup>th</sup> stanza “I do not know which to prefer” where the poet is engaged with conversation with himself or contextually with readers but in spoken structure with the choice of preference between “inflections” or “innuendoes” and “whistling” or “just after”. He is indecisive what to be preferred. Similarly, the addressing in stanza 7 in the form of figure of speech ‘apostrophe’ is as “O thin men of Haddam” is completely expression of presence of spoken language in the poem. Furthermore, in 8<sup>th</sup> stanza the identification of “accents” and “rhythms” is substantiation of presence of signifier as spoken text. In stanza 9, sudden absence of physical appearance of the blackbird “When the blackbird flew out of sight” causes the presence of limited perception of mind “It marked the edge/ Of one of many circles”. So, absence of one thing employs the presence of other thing in the text of the poem.

### ***Intertextuality***

Intertextuality is another significant constituent of post-structural study generally and deconstructionist approach particularly. Intertextuality is the method of identifying the text within some other texts. In this connection, the title of the poem itself is suggesting that there are various devised ways of looking at a blackbird. The ways are not clarified here in the poem means they are textually defined in some texts of human sciences. The number like 13, looking, and blackbird in the title are suggesting their presence in human discourse. Moreover, the concepts like “pantomime” in 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza, “Haddam” in stanza 7, “bawds of euphony” in stanza 10, “He” and “Connecticut” in stanza 11 can be said as the points of intertextuality which can be traced and found in the texts outside this poem. The genre and the structure of poem are textually intertwined with the special type of literature to put into words and confer the message particularly. Thus, the textual form is outcome of wide ranged literary activities with the evolution of human learning and experience of expression.

### ***Différance: Spatial and Temporal***

The *différance* as described is used for both concepts as to 'differ' and 'defer'. To differ is spatial and its signifier is spaced out in the system and to defer is temporal, which is endless postponement of the 'presence' of the signifiers. Spatially, the poem is body of disjointed concepts in the stanzas in which every stanza has its own look and shape. There are spaces of the meanings throughout the poem. The signifier of blackbird is fluid-like throughout the genre like somewhere the bird is like a man, like a woman and like both of them as in 4<sup>th</sup> stanza. Somewhere as in 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stanzas where in 1<sup>st</sup> stanza, the motion of one organ is differed from the movement of whole body as in 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza.

Speaking with reference to choice and knowledge of the speaker 'I', he is not invariable like he says in stanza 5 "I do not know" whereas in stanza 8 he maintains to know "noble accents". Whole the poem is full of such spaced out stretchy meanings of the signs.

Likewise, to defer is postponement of the 'presence' of the notions at varying extent. The time and tense of the poem is interplay of present and past and escorted with delaying tactics unless to reach the final stanza to grasp the activity fading at evening and start snow falling. Throughout the poem the readers are left to wait for grasping the conceptual unity of the poem and consequently observe the end of the stretch of elucidation. Resultantly, the reader comes across the present simple and past tenses which are end in themselves unlike other background temporal, progressive, and perfect aspects. The used tenses are carrying all embodied concepts and are considered self dependent. Consequently, the every stanza of the poem is beginning and end in itself.

### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that Wallace Stevens' poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" is an embodiment of Derrida's deconstructionism by presenting unstable and non-compacted form of poetry. The theory of deconstruction deals with clearing your mind to think about and observe many different directions things can be thought out and this way the poem dismantles the different ways life can be. The language and structure of the poem can verily be challenged at various grounds. Unlike the structural study which is dependent on the 'centre' of every structure, the poem is de-centred around many concepts and every stanza is self-centred thematically. The centre of meaning is vanished and themes are jumbled up. The structuralist centre is governing all the structures at its best, whereas, signifiers and signified, the presence in absence, the contradictions, metaphor, *différance* (temporal and spatial), and intertextuality are the instances of the unstable meanings and de-centred structures. Therefore, the poem in theme, form and the structure is the tall talk of flexible aspect of language indeterminacy. The theory of deconstruction deals with maximum possibility when analyzing words in any literary work. The whole poem makes a deconstructionist reading acceptable. The analysis shows that deconstruction is a good approach to grasp a literary form and to challenge the language of any genre and language activity in literature and communication paradigm. The analysis of the poem is also an evidence of contradictions, flexible and prolonged metaphors, decentred centres linguistically and thematically, text is borrowed to an extent from other text and cannot be seen in isolation and all the hidden things i.e. absences are present at large in the text of poem.



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## Appendix

### *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* by Wallace Stevens

#### I

Among twenty snowy mountains,  
The only moving thing  
Was the eye of the blackbird.

#### II

I was of three minds,  
Like a tree  
In which there are three blackbirds.

#### III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.  
It was a small part of the pantomime.

#### IV

A man and a woman  
Are one.  
A man and a woman and a blackbird  
Are one.

#### V

I do not know which to prefer,  
The beauty of inflections  
Or the beauty of innuendoes,  
The blackbird whistling  
Or just after.

#### VI

Icicles filled the long window  
With barbaric glass.  
The shadow of the blackbird  
Crossed it, to and fro.  
The mood  
Traced in the shadow  
An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,  
Why do you imagine golden birds?  
Do you not see how the blackbird  
Walks around the feet  
Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents  
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;  
But I know, too,  
That the blackbird is involved  
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds  
Flying in a green light,  
Even the bawds of euphony  
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut  
In a glass coach.  
Once, a fear pierced him,  
In that he mistook  
The shadow of his equipage  
For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.  
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.  
It was snowing  
And it was going to snow.  
The blackbird sat  
In the cedar-limbs.

