

Who, in the hubbub of his pilgrimage
 Through sweating changes, never could forget
 That wakefulness or meditating sleep,
 In which the sulky strophes willingly
 Bore up, in time, the somnolent, deep songs.
 Leave room, therefore, in that unwritten book
 For the legendary moonlight that once burned
 In Crispin's mind above a continent.

Stevens drags Crispin through more than the moonlight imagery in "The Comedian as the Letter C", and geographically moves him superhuman distances in a supposedly imaginative quest. Extending a literary figure, or persona, to the above limits is a comic and a broad hint by Stevens that Crispin's essence is more than human and that his experience is larger than human span. The interpretation of Crispin's mask as those of Beaumarchais' Figaro, and Voltaire's Candide is central in most readings of the poem and at least mentioned in others, and they certainly are the structures at work in Stevens presentation of his hero. Robert Buttel explores the allusive character to the fullest and introduces the factor of "the clown or fop of the English tradition of stage comedy." 3 His parallels between Jonson's "Sir Politic Would-Be" are well drawn. He also notes the borrowing by Stevens of the "Nota:" device, the examination of fleas, the idea of travel to a new environment, and vaguely the sea imagery. "Surely some of this nonsense prompted Stevens' statement, 'the eye of Crispin hung/ On porpoises, instead of apricots.'" 4 In literary particulars Stevens dresses Crispin as well as any poet has dressed a character, and the more he is explored the deeper the entanglement with the richness of language and symbology becomes. Since the character Crispin is studied from the third person entirely his description assumes top priority. In "The Comedian as the Letter C" the thinness of plot that moves Crispin enriches his blankness and despair as an active character, because he has only perceptions and attributes and nothing to say. But Crispin needs an even broader interpretation to take the reader from the morass of futility Crispin seems to work himself into. Crispin is described in a better way through the geography of the poem, the literary jumble of allusions chalked up on Crispin's blank slate are there for the comic effect, and for adjectival moralizing, and hide the motive force of the poem.

In adopting the most ancient Crispin as the Crispin Stevens intended for the main character, we never learn for certain from Stevens himself, the poem can be made to adhere somewhat closer to reality. The friendly unabridged dictionary will inform us that Crispin is Saint Crispin, roman missionary to Gaul, and patron saint of the shoemakers. As a classically trained literary scholar Stevens knew well of the old Roman Empire's difficulties in subjugating the populations to the north through his readings in Caesar. A missionary's work is a noble one and surely one of the imagination, although shoemaking is not an especially lofty occupation. In the course of ten pages Stevens did not mean to bat about the comic value of that image, and the base humor is an elite literary humor playing with Crispin as the opera hero and the rest. However, Crispin is very much a missionary, not traveling to Gaul, but to America. It is funny to see