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### Order and Chaos

Wallace Stevens wrote “Anecdote of The Jar” in the aftermath of the second industrial revolution, the invention of the assembly line, and at the brink of the roaring 20s (Engleman). It is an investigation of the tension between human imagination and the manufactured order of modern existence. With historical context in mind, the jar becomes a physical manifestation of the consumerist culture's obsession with order and functionality. The artistic chaos of natural existence is exchanged for the mundane imprisoning structure of a jar. Stevens uses literary devices to communicate the significance of the jar, a symbol of the manufacturing of order, which destroys the wilderness, a symbol of chaotic imagination and the artistic spirit.

Iambic tetrameter highlights stressed syllables, exposing the repetition of individual words and word families to reveal the jar's hidden characteristics (Shmoop). A word family derived from “round” is present. “Round” appears explicitly twice in the poem (Stevens 2,4), and appears three times as the root word of “surround,” (4) “around,” (6) and “ground” (7). “Round” is the stressed syllable in each case except for “ground.” The stress and repetition of round indicates the importance of the jar's roundness as one of its defining characteristics. The rigid form of the jar contrasts the nature of the wild, which does not conform to any moulded shape, but is a myriad of an infinite number of forms. “Wild” is consistently stressed and is repeated thrice, once explicitly (6) and twice as the root of “wilderness” (3,5). Wild is employed, instead of a synonym like nature, to emphasize the undomesticated nature of the wild and the boundlessness of creativity. Stevens uses stressed syllables and repetition to unveil crucial descriptions of the jar and the wild, which are interpreted as symbols of order and chaotic imagination.

The tension between the jar and the wilderness is a metaphor to symbolize the intangible struggle between the incessantly increasing order of society and the wildness of the imagination. When the jar is first placed on the hill in Tennessee, the wilderness “[rises] up to [the jar]” (5) in resistance, but is overpowered by the power of the jar and “[sprawls] around, no longer wild” (6). The jar embodies the destructive power of industrialization. An industrialized society values the manufacturing of order and functionality - a perfectly round jar. Rigid structure is the antithesis of the

enchantly chaotic wilderness, the madness of creativity and art. The manufactured jar “[takes] dominion everywhere,” (9) and is described as “gray and bare” (10). Stevens uses imagery to suggest that the colourful vitality of the creative spirit is suffocated by the viral expansion of the jar, which is the manifestation of industrialization and progress. The metaphoric struggle between the jar and wilderness conveys the delicate balance of order and the chaotic imagination, which can be shattered into a lackluster existence by excessive structure.

The meaning of “Anecdote of the Jar” is deepened using poetic devices like iambic tetrameter, repetition, metaphor, and imagery. Careful manipulation of form emphasizes the message of the poem, that a fragile balance exists between society and nature, fact and imagination, and order and chaos.

### Works Cited

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