

*The
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Journal*



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Souvenirs and Prophecies and Secrets

ROBERT BUTTEL

Certainly Stevens took great pains to conceal his private self behind his poems, which were carefully groomed for public display. "Keep all this a great secret," he said in a 1913 letter to his wife Elsie about his writing of poems. Several years earlier in another letter he confessed to her that "I like to be anything but my plain self; and when I write a letter that does not satisfy me—why it seems like showing my plain self, too plainly." Thus the extravagant personae in the poems to come, with the poet himself apparently removed, offstage. In one of his journal entries in 1900 he complains that "Harvard feeds subjectivity" and then adds that "Personality must be kept secret before the world." Stevens' reticence about himself is now legend. In *Souvenirs and Prophecies: The Young Wallace Stevens* (Knopf, 1977) Holly Stevens offers a persuasive rationale for that reticence:

He had been brought up in an era that placed strong emphasis on the "work ethic," on being able to provide; and an era which also looked askance at poets, as being effeminate and/or corrupt. Especially as an attorney, and as that role related to his occupation in the insurance world of bond claims, involving construction work, cattle herds, etc., it seems quite logical that in trying to establish himself both professionally and financially, my father would conceal—at least for a time—his poetic aspirations. (p. 247)

This may not be the full rationale, of course. Stevens was a complex being, and we note many signs of reticence not only in regard to his writing poetry but also in his personal relationships, even with Elsie. In a 1910 letter to her, after they were married, he said, "We have never been in the habit of saying this or that—yet I wish I *could* say how sweet you seem to me."

Still, in another sense, he could no more keep his personality wholly disguised than any other major writer had been able to do. Style is the man, or put another way, as Stevens put it in "Sur Plusieurs Sujets, I": the work does not matter much without "the presence of the determining personality" of the artist. If a poet employs flamboyant personae we indirectly know something about the nature of that poet. Critics—notably Helen Vendler—have observed a curve of development in Stevens' work ending in the partly austere, partly serene recognitions in *The Rock*—reflecting the denouement of an inner drama which involved the shedding of various forms of disguise, including irony. That drama as we derive it from the poems should suffice, but we are insatiable in our desire to know the private self of the writer. Nor is that desire necessarily unhealthy, except as it is catered to by the massive biographies, bloated by unsorted

data, which are now fashionable. A curiosity to know the person behind a great work is natural, human; it can lead to an expansion of our own lives. And the details of the life will often illuminate the work.

Despite Stevens' secrecy about himself, the lineaments of his biographical portrait have become more and more sharply defined. His daughter's superbly edited selection of the *Letters* has done more than anything else to present the poet close-up. Now in her new book she has provided material that fills in further details of the image we have of her father. With the passage of time it is as though we were looking at a slower version of one of those Polaroid photographs that prints itself as it is held in the hand, the outlines of the image becoming clearer, the colors deepening.¹ The basic image has not changed, however. In this book, as the subtitle tells us, the emphasis is on the young man, up to the time when he first published his poems professionally, in *The Trend*. The aim is to show the formation of the character and thought which were to sustain the mature poet.

To accomplish this aim Holly Stevens has included all of the journal entries that appeared in the *Letters* plus all the remaining extant ones; as far as they can be, the journals are now published complete.² To fill out the record for the period when Stevens' letters to Elsie began, as he said in his journal, "to usurp the chronicles that . . . I should set down here," she has used a selection of these letters, or portions of them, which resemble the journal "chronicles." Elsie became his confidant, sounding-board, and "student," and it would be marvelous to have her reactions to his poems and fervently expressed literary interests. Included also are all the known apprentice poems, from one Stevens wrote in high school through the poems that appeared in *The Trend* in 1914. Many of these have not previously been published. The scholarship is scrupulous, and it soon becomes evident that much research has gone into the book, not only a tracking down of factual details and literary references but also of what people who knew Wallace and Elsie in their younger years could report about them.

Holly Stevens' strategy has been to arrange the journal and letter selections in a chronological "narrative," interweaving her annotations and speculations and drawing connections with the later thought and poetry. She presents her commentary with becoming tact, as, for example, when she describes her mother's extreme self-consciousness and its genesis. She is aware that her strategy "made necessary," as she says, "the repetition of a good deal that has been previously published," so that a relatively high proportion of the book is a matter of *deja vu* for those familiar with the *Letters*. Yet the cost seems minimal given the gain of a continuous and coherent unfolding of the youthful development. True, many of the more striking sections are those previously published; nonetheless, much that is inherently intriguing as well as revealing appears here for the first time.

Souvenirs and Prophecies imprints a host of new impressions upon the mind, enlarging the sense of Stevens we have derived from the *Letters* and other sources. We encounter Stevens at Harvard in his cups, enacting a mock rape

scene with an amused waitress. Here was the flamboyant side of the young man asserting itself. We encounter, too, a more detailed account of his fishing and hunting trip in the Rockies of British Columbia, a trip which according to his daughter impressed him deeply—"in the last few weeks before his death he spoke of the trip frequently." He had to contend with a few minor irritations: one was his host, W. G. Peckman, in whose law office he served his clerkship and who he described in a segment of the journals used in the *Letters* as "translating Heine aloud endlessly; or else retelling his eternal cycle of stories." About a month later Stevens' view had grown more jaundiced: "W. G. P. (who has left camp—be damned to him) thinks that all the game is lurking in the clouds." After some six days of the trip, he reports: "We eat with our fingers entirely now" and "Here come the ants—heads, feet and bellies"—precursors of the worms in "The Worms at Heaven's Gate" but metamorphosed into transporters of bodily parts? But these irritations apparently failed to diminish the satisfactions of the trip, the physical exhilaration and visual splendor. And here is a series of three vignettes, a sample of some of the information Holly Stevens sought out and then interwove between passages from the journals and letters: Stevens reciting poetry in one of the large closets in his and Elsie's New York apartment; Elsie in anger pacing through the apartment slamming doors; her husband sitting in a corner reading while she conversed with the visiting sister of one of his friends.

A further random, though chronological, sampling:

July 18, 1899. In a discussion with a friend about nature and art: "I said the ideal was superior to fact since it was man creating & adding something to nature" (this conflict between fact and ideal, nature and art, is recurrent in the journals).

July 21, 1899. Refers to a fishing trip with friends and "a Miss Benz from Lebanon . . . gulping her literature from magazines and the latest novels. I told her that a good test of what was worth while was that she should distinguish between what she loved and what she merely liked."

March 12, 1901. "To illustrate the change that has come over me I may mention that last night I saw from an elevated train a group of girls making flowers in a dirty factory near Bleeker St. I hardly gave it a thought. Last summer the pathos of it would have bathed me in tears."

Stevens turns back in his journals to the summer of 1899 and writes, "What silly, affected school-girl drivel this seems to me now. WS June 14/04."

August 18, 1904. In a list of things recollected: ". . . the cigars I smoked late at night . . . & of memorizing several hundred lines of Maud . . ."

September 15, 1905. "Somehow I am Ambitious to work."

September 27, 1905. "I am indefatigable in procrastination."

October 11, 1905. "Procrastinating *encore*."

February 13, 1906. "I'm inclined to Schopenhauer & the fine arts."

April 22, 1906. ". . . one must begin to live out a certain, definite life."

May 29, 1906. "Looked over Oley."

July 26, 1906. "Sappho is like apples."

April 1, 1907. "Just back from a trip to Reading for Easter. Family about as depressing as usual; Elsie more or less unmanageable. Spring on the calendar but nowhere else . . . I am drifting."

April 7, 1907. In a letter to Elsie: "I must think well of people."

July 25, 1907. "I am scornful of the people around me—so many of them almost bestial. But it is just that they are 'plain.' Very—incomparably."

About September 6, 1907. In a comment about Sully-Prudhomme, who died on that date: "There is something *piquant* about a poet who leaves the feeling of reticence."

November 6, 1907. "Saw [Theodore] Roosevelt and [Charles Joseph] Bonaparte, and talked with both."

May 2, 1909. In a long letter to Elsie: "Next, on the road, she [Elsie] rode a little way on the giant's shoulder (pretending not to like it)—getting off just in time to avoid a meeting with four Italians (who would have been enormously astonished)."

June 9, 1909. To Elsie: "London continues to be the ultimate point of romance to me."

June 7, 1910. To Elsie: "Native earth! That makes us giants."

Some of this list is merely anecdotal, if interesting, but a number of the items resonate with suggestion—the motif of the giant, for example, which looms up so frequently in Stevens' mature work. Holly Stevens points convincingly to such a connection, between a 1904 journal passage wherein nature or the earth are likened to a giant—"There are his huge legs, Africa & South America . . ."—and the use in "A Primitive Like an Orb" of

an abstraction given head,
A giant on the horizon, given arms,
A massive body and long legs, stretched out, . . .

Some connections are more tenuous. I note, for instance, in a 1909 journal entry (not in the above list) what just might be an instance of the way Stevens absorbed hints from his reading and transformed them after a long gestation in his unconscious memory, into the texture of his own poems. After commenting that Laurence Binyon's "long poem 'Porphyryon' contains much that is beautiful," he quotes from it: "Out of the suspended hazes the smooth sea/Swelled into brilliance." It does not seem an impossible leap from this to some of the imagery in "Sea Surface Full of Clouds." But even if this surmise were provable it still would not be satisfactory evidence for explaining the really immense leap that took the poet from his apprentice work to his later achievement. The big secret remains: how did this particular writer of standard verses in the mode of the era become a major twentieth-century poet?

With this book in hand, one can at least consider partial answers. Surely, to begin with, *Souvenirs and Prophecies* makes evident a pattern of maturing which culminates in marriage (1909), a definite business career after considerable floundering, and publication of *The Trend* poems—and to observe the changes in the poems as the book groups them chronologically in their contexts is to realize the definite, if gradual, emergence of Stevens'

own voice. As Holly Stevens says, "one gets the sense that my father had to be sure that everything was in order before going ahead." The deaths of his father in 1911 and of his mother almost exactly a year later could only have intensified Stevens' maturation. I do not want to suggest a simplistic cause and effect relationship, but not long after that painful rite of passage he was composing the first *Harmonium* poems. He had wrestled with himself constantly about his beliefs, his aims in life, the divisions in his character, between dreaming and doing, for example, or between his ideals and his aversion to the grossness he found so prevalent in the masses of humans around him. Frequently, as the journals amply demonstrate, he suffered fits of despair, futility, vacillation and aimlessness (Elsie, however, seems to have inspired a sense of purpose; his letters to her are outpourings of one who has been pent up in self-absorption too long; they become a focus of his energies, a release). Moreover, he had to cut through layers of affectation and to cease posturing—even in his journal-keeping he often seems to be adopting self-conscious roles, with the journal-keeping itself a self-conscious literary act (in an 1899 entry, just after an observation of rain on clematis leaves, he records: "The thought occurred to me that it was just such quick, unexpected, commonplace, specific things that poets and other observers jot down in their note-books"). When he returned home following his first year at college, "he had," according to his daughter, "assumed 'airs' and a Harvard accent that were quite a source of amusement to the other members of the family." "Somehow what I do seems to increase in its artificiality," he reports (in another 1899 journal entry). The affectation infected his style too; note the effete idolizing tone of this 1907 journal sentence which stands alone: "Fénélon.—The name is enough." Under the preciousness, however, there ran a vein of high seriousness. But a good number of other highly serious young men with an aesthetic bent must also have been trapped, by the constrictions of that time. How, then, was Stevens different?

One possible hypothesis occurred to me after reading *Souvenirs and Prophecies*. Stunningly obvious—which is just why we might underestimate its importance—is the fact that in the journals Stevens exhibits two main passions: nature and literature. He was a prodigious walker in the countryside and an acute observer; and he read everything he could get his hands on, both randomly and with concentrated attention—spending one winter on the Greeks. He was a gatherer of sense impressions in nature: "there is a good chance here to write a sketch containing color, sound, & motion," he says of an 1899 summer scene: ten years later he refers to a glorious August day: "almost a September sun (I know them all)". Likewise, he was a gatherer of maxims, mainly literary ("Phew! My head is clogged with maxims," he exclaims in a 1906 journal entry) and critical opinions. Such terms as impressionist, aesthete, and dilettante come to mind, but by dint of intensity and an obsessive perseverance, both in his reading and his observations of nature, he transcended the shallowness the terms suggest. More important is the fact that these passionate activities went on concurrently; this is also so obvious that it may be overlooked, but I think it

a good part of the reason why Stevens was able to make the leap I mentioned. The two were interrelated, metaphysically linked, and they emphasized each other by contrast (it is emblematic, I think, that the walker sometimes spent an odd hour in a local library, and that the reader took with him on his trip to the Rockies Ovid's *Art of Love* and other books). It was this conjunction that lent depth to his speculations about the conflict between fact and ideal, art and nature, and led, finally, to his profound concentration on reality and imagination.

As he groped his way toward a coherent view of art and life he was also experimenting with language and metaphor; the journals and letters are a record of this experimentation. From the beginning he was alert linguistically. Recall the verbal display in those letters to his mother when he was 16 and 17 (in *Letters*). In the summer of 1899 he records listening to "the fine talk" of a Spanish student in a Reading saloon, "until after two in the morning. . . . He said that a man met Life like a roaring lion in a desert—a figure of tremendous force." He was constantly on the lookout for the telling figure and on one occasion (1906) notes a failure: "Then I noticed the way patches of trees stood on hill-sides, and couldn't think even of a simile." He did, however, think of an effective one while in the Rockies: "Saw the mountains near the Vermillion Pass hooded in the gray of their rocks like deathly nuns." Here one begins to see how the young Stevens would become capable of making that leap. Because of his constant devotion to the force of work and image, and his constant application, he had available, when the time came, a technique adequate to the demands placed on it by his metaphysical concerns.

Some of the private thoughts and attitudes of the young Stevens are offputting or embarrassing, even taking into consideration his redeeming ability to perceive and admit to himself his weakness. But I find something heroic in the dedication, the intense commitment, that enabled him to break through the encumbrances placed upon him by both his era and his personality. *Souvenirs and Prophecies* does bring us closer to an understanding of the poet, though many of his secrets will remain undisclosed. Holly Stevens is to be commended for her careful and intelligent presentation of the material. The book is an important contribution. It is also a sympathetic and sensitive, but not sentimental, act of homage.

FOOTNOTES

1. And Peter Brazeau, who has been interviewing Stevens' relatives, friends and business associates, is filling in still further details. See his "Poet in a Grey Business Suit: Glimpses of Stevens at the Office" in the first issue of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. These glimpses have the air of authenticity.

2. Many pages in the journals were excised and some words and phrases heavily crossed out. Holly Stevens says of the excisions, "Because I inherited the journals via my mother, I suspect that the excisions noted may have been made by her after my father's death, if she found personal references she did not wish preserved. On the other hand it is quite possible that my father edited the journal himself, knowing my mother's regard for privacy. At any rate, it was during the summer of 1904, when their courtship began, that drastic 'cutting' occurs." If Stevens himself did some of the cutting might he have done so with at least half a thought for posterity?

Stevens' Poetry of Being in "Description without Place"

THOMAS J. HINES

When Stevens writes that "a poet's words are of things that do not exist without the words" and continues this line of thought by concluding that "poetry is a revelation in words by means of the words (NA 32-33), he is expressing an idea of the function of poetic language and its relation to Being that is very similar to Heidegger's concept of the essence of poetry. And where Stevens' ideas about the relation between Being and poetry are rehearsed implicitly in the first sections of "It Must Be Abstract," in the later poem, "Description without Place," the function of the poetry of Being is explicitly proposed.

In "Description without Place," Stevens defines a theory of description as the way in which poetry makes manifest the Being of the things that exist.¹ He first defines "description" as "composed of a sight indifferent to the eye" (CP 343), where what is seen is not dependent upon or imagined by the perceiver, yet the vision fulfills the perceiver's projections.

It is an expectation, a desire,
A palm that rises up beyond the sea,

A little different from reality:
The difference that we make in what we see

And our memorials of that difference,
Sprinklings of bright particulars from the sky.
(CP 344)

As Stevens contemplates the relation between vision and perception, he describes the process of description as an essential part of the poetry of Being. Description, then, is not simply the measuring of appearances, the summary of spatial perspectives, the listing of qualities of color, size, and texture, or the attempts to reproduce or imitate in words the things seen. Stevens' sense of the word *description* includes the "difference" that the perceiver makes in what he sees. The "difference" is the process of vision by which the poet achieves an intuition of Being. More succinctly, the poetry of Being makes poetic description a process similar to Heidegger's phenomenological method of description. Like Heidegger's definition of phenomenology, Stevens' "description" is a method that seeks to uncover the Being of the things that exist. Thus, where Heidegger declares that phenomenological description "is the science of the Being of entities—ontology,"² Stevens writes that poetic "description" makes possible "a change immenser than / A poet's metaphors in which being would / Come

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true" (CP 341). For both philosopher and poet, "description" makes manifest the Being of the things that appear. Hence:

Description is revelation. It is not
The thing described, nor false facsimile.

It is an artificial thing that exists,
In its own seeming, plainly visible,

Yet not too closely the double of our lives,
Intenser than any actual life could be,

A text we should be born that we might read,
More explicit than the experience of sun

And moon, the book of reconciliation,
Book of a concept only possible

In description, canon central in itself,
The thesis of the plentifullest John.

(CP 344-345)

If description in poetry is revelation, what is revealed? The poet's method brings something to life that is neither "the thing described, nor false facsimile." In other words, the poet's description reveals something that is otherwise not possible to see. Yet, this "something" is not a thing like other things. One cannot feel or touch what is revealed. To repeat Heidegger's statement, "Das Sein des Seienden ist nicht selbst ein Seiendes"³ "The Being of the things that exist is not itself a thing." Yet, neither is it a nonexistent quality ("a false facsimile"). Stevens' "description" does not deal with fact but rather with ontology, creating a text, in theory, that reveals the Being of the world of things and the Being of the poet. Being is the artificial thing that exists (artificial because not a thing in itself—not a *Ding an sich* in Kant's terms). When disclosed by the process of vision (the intuition that is described in the first section of "It Must Be Abstract"), Being is "plainly visible / Yet not too closely the double of our lives." There is no identity of Being and appearance except where the intuitive process discloses that "to seem, it is to be" (CP 341). But such an equation wherein "to seem" (appearance) is identified with "to be" (Being) is only possible within the theory of description Stevens defines.

Stevens proposes the possibility of uncovering the source of the real through a poetry of description, but, as Helen Vendler points out, "the untoward modulations of tense [from "might" to "would" to "is"] are simply not available to the critic who tries to paraphrase Stevens in prose, and so an apprehension becomes a statement, an intuition becomes a dogma."⁴ In other words, the theory of description that Stevens offers in "Description without Place" is too frequently taken as doctrine that supports practice rather than an intuition of the poetry of Being that projects a possible poetic

method.⁵ In this matter of distinguishing between what critics sometimes take to be Stevens' evasiveness and what others take to be his hermetic way of explaining his poetry in his poems, I want to be very clear about the nature of both Stevens' and Heidegger's statements, for both philosopher and poet are dealing with possibilities (potential states of mind and potential functions of language) rather than actual, concrete, and provable theorems. The interest of both in ontology is largely a speculative interest, which is what Heidegger means when he explains of his phenomenological method that "Hoher als die wirklichkeit steht die Möglichkeit. Der Verstandnis der Phanomenologie liegt einzig im Ergreifen ihrer als Möglichkeit."⁶ The importance of phenomenology is in its possibility rather than its reality (actuality). As Mrs. Vendler implies, "intuition" and "apprehension" are not to be confused with doctrine and dogma. In "Description without Place" Stevens' theories, his "possibles" and "potentials," are speculations on the poetry of Being, the "supreme fiction" of the "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction." Only in the heightened perception of poetry can this possibility be realized.

Stevens proposes the possibility of a poetry that would contain:

The outlines of being and its expressings, the syllables
of its law:
Poesis, poesis, the literal characters, the vatic lines,
(CP 424)

In this late expression of the goal of poetry (it is from "Large Red Man Reading"), the poet figure reads from his book the poetry that is, in summary, a precise definition of the poetry of Being. As Canto III of "It Must Be Abstract" asserted, this possibility is part of the theory of the poetry of Being, the "supreme fiction" in which the intuition of the "first idea" will lead to a new poetry. If appearance (seeming) is the disclosure of Being through vision, this kind of appearance is made possible by the source itself. In "Description without Place" the unnamed female figure is once more a personification of the source.

. . . It was a queen that made it seem
By the illustrious nothing of her name.

Her green mind made the world around her green.
The queen is an example . . . This green queen

In the seeming of the summer of her sun
By her own seeming made the summer change.

In the golden vacancy she came, and comes,
And seems to be on the saying of her name.

Her time becomes again, as it became,
The crown and week-day coronal of her fame.
(CP 339)

In a compressed and highly figurative statement filled with internal rhyme and alliteration, the speaker again represents the disclosure of Being by the appearance of a mysterious female figure. Each appearance of the "green queen" as she "came, and comes" (as she is disclosed and vanishes in time) makes possible the revelation of the Being of the world of things. She stands for the force of presence (a transcendence in immanence—the only possible transcendence in a demythologized world?) that brings the world into the mind. She is an "illustrious nothing" who cannot be named except as an abstraction. Yet, "on the saying of her name," the act of poetic description that involves the naming process of poetic language, her existence is established. That act establishes her Being but, at the same time, covers it up in the evasions of metaphor. As Stevens attempts to describe the evasive nature of Being, he again suggests the double movement of poetry (which moves in time "between these points. / From that ever-early candor to its late plural" [CP 382]) that he describes in "It Must Be Abstract," Canto III.

In such a poetry of constant movement, the necessity for change that is demanded in the note "It Must Change," is here explicitly associated with the nature of Being. The cyclic decreation and creation are formal ways of paralleling the transitory nature of Being. By simulating the fluctuations that are observed, the poet can project that

There might be, too, a change immenser than
A poet's metaphors in which being would

Come true, a point in the fire of music where
Dazzle yields to a clarity and we observe,

And observing is completing and we are content,
In a world that shrinks to an immediate whole,

That we do not need to understand, complete
Without secret arrangements of it in the mind.
(CP 341)

This change, where in poetry, "Being would come true," defines the goal of the poetry of Being. But this change must remain a "possibility." Stevens' use of the conditional "would" qualifies the entire statement of the goal as a possibility rather than a doctrine, something latent rather than actual.

The "dazzle" of the world of appearances "yields to a clarity" where mind and world become transparent to each other as they are brought together in the presence of Being. This moment of vision, "where observing is completing," shrinks the world "to an immediate whole" as the poet envisions the unity of Being "without secret arrangements of it in the mind." More clearly, the vision occurs without imposing or forcing the unity through metaphor or metamorphosis. Not that the process of metaphor is denied, for it is a minor example of the kind of change that is

projected in the poet's version of the new poetic. Rather, the poet's metaphor-making is treated as a paradigm of the larger process of change. Hence, where the metaphor brings together the associations of two disparate things or concepts to form a third or metaphorical meaning, the intuitive apprehension of Being brings a change of meaning that is a similar transformation, but "immenser." The universe of things is brought together in a larger metaphor.⁸ The nature of the revelation is qualified in these lines. Description will not be the concrete description of things (their material or physical properties), but rather a description of the interaction of the mind and world that reveals the nature of Being itself. This theory is a refinement of the "poem of the act of the mind" (CP 240) that the poet had described in "Of Modern Poetry." In this case, description is no longer comparable to Husserl's common-sense meaning of the term, wherein the Being of the things described was never in question. Stevens' theory of description parallels Heidegger's concept of phenomenology as explained in *Sein und Zeit*.⁹ Both methods are calculated to let the Being of the things that exist (*das Sein des Seienden*) show itself. This explains the allusion to "the thesis of the plentifullest John" (CP 345). The logos that begins the gospel of John functions as the first revelation of Being. The new logos, for both Stevens and Heidegger, is the word of the poet, whose function, like that of the creators of the Gospel, is to create the essential word ("the supreme fiction") that will reveal the nature of Being. The difference is that the New Testament logos revealed a source that was divine, sacred. Both Heidegger and Stevens want to disengage the nature of Being from all religious or divine connotations.¹⁰ Stevens continues the refinement of a concept of poetic logos that approximates Heidegger's theory of the ontological function of poetic language in the concluding lines of "Description without Place."

Thus the theory of description matters most.
It is the theory of the word for those

For whom the word is the making of the world,
The buzzing world and lisping firmament.

(CP 345)

Heidegger's statement that "poetry is the establishing of Being by means of the word"¹¹ provides a way of explaining Stevens' compressed theory. The poet's language (the word) establishes what otherwise would remain unintelligible and this unknown, for the world without the poet's words is a "buzzing" and "lisping" inarticulate mass. The Being of the world is then:

. . . a world of words to the end of it,
In which nothing solid is its solid self.

(CP 345)

As the poet had suggested in "It Must Be Abstract," Canto III, only the words of the poem can "give a candid kind to everything" (CP 382), thus expressing the insolidity of the Being of the things perceived.

In "Description without Place," the poet proposes the function of description in the poetry of Being. At the same time, he evolves a rather complex theory of the temporal nature of spatial description. The expression of the title, "without place," has a temporal rather than a spatial meaning. For Stevens' "place" is conceived in the present time, the "now" of existence. Neither past nor future is actual. Hence any fictive effort to combine past and future into present time is called "description without place." This is why "The future is description without place, / The categorical predicate, the arc" (CP 344). since the future toward which the poet projects his possible mode of poetry is not yet actual, such a poetry is called "description without place." A similar concept is proposed to express Stevens' use of the past. Each act of recalling past experience reflects a temporal consideration: ". . . everything we say / Of the past is description without place, a cast / Of the imagination, made in sound" (CP 345-46). Thus the new mode of "description" proposed in this poem brings both past and future to the present, unifying the three primary temporal modes in much the same way that Heidegger's description of *Dasein's* modes of Being-in-the-world and Being-toward-death unify the temporality of existence, making use of each tense to project possible ways of Being toward the future.

From the incessant projective activity of *Dasein*, Heidegger derives a concept of unified time. *Dasein*, through its projections (into the future) of possible ways of Being, brings from past experience those possibilities that can be profitably repeated. The movement of *Dasein*, as it assures the possibility of projections into the future by recalling the possibilities of past experience, forms the temporal basis of Heidegger's explanation of how *Dasein* is constantly creating and recreating itself. For Stevens, poetry itself becomes a way of Being and the projections of possibilities in poetry are the ways in which the poet creates and re-creates himself in poetry. As the poet imagines the tasks of poetry, he can begin to fulfill them. Just as Heidegger's *Dasein* projects its own possibilities for Being into the future and then lives in the possibilities that it has imagined, so Stevens writes that poetry matters

And because what we say of the future must portend,

Be alive with its own seemings, seeming to be
Like rubies reddened by rubies reddening.

(CP 346)

The metaphor is precise. The future is possessed only by the man who has, as Stevens insists, "imagined well" (CP 383). Like the "rubies reddening" (becoming red) in time, the poetry of Being is brought to life by the imaginative projection of its possibilities. The insistence that "it is possible" (CP 339, 342), (a phrase that is frequently reiterated in Stevens' later verse) is fulfilled for the poet by the poems of the possible. The ontological possibilities of *Dasein* are more important than the actual present reality.

"*Dasein's* primary [temporal] meaning is the future." For Stevens, the poetry of Being is ultimately the poetry of possibility, always "Prologues to What Is Possible," as the title of one of the late poems phrases it (CP 515), rather than a verification of what is self-evident. The poetry of Being, like Heidegger's authentic Being-in-the-world, is of the future, dependent on the concept of possibility.

FOOTNOTES

1. None of the critics who comment on this poem have attempted to explain completely the kind of theory description that Stevens is proposing. For other readings of this poem, see especially Fuchs, pp. 124-25; Doggett, pp. 167, 201-2; Riddel, pp. 197-99; and Enck, pp. 172-74.

2. *Sein und Zeit*, p. 37.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

4. "The Qualified Assertions of Wallace Stevens," in *The Act of the Mind: Essays on the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*, ed. J. Hillis Miller and Roy Harvey Pearce (Baltimore, Md., 1965), p. 165.

5. Cambon thinks that the theory stated here is proved by the poem of "Nanzia Nuzio" in Canto VIII of Part II, "It Must Change," and thus seems to see an actual realization of the theory. I think that he illustrates Vendler's statement, since he seems to accept the poet's intuitive projection of a possible kind of "description" as a dogma. See Cambon, *The Inclusive Flame: Studies in Modern American Poetry* (Bloomington, Ind., 1963), pp. 107-108.

6. *Sein und Zeit*, p. 38. In *Being and Time*, this passage is translated to read: "Higher than actuality stands possibility. We can understand phenomenology only by seizing upon it as a possibility" (p. 63). Heidegger's concept of the importance of something as a "possibility" is a vital part of the structure that he describes of *Dasein's* modes of Being. To Heidegger, *Dasein* exists authentically as a possibility rather than as an actuality. The actual is related to the essence and, for Heidegger, existence precedes essence. Where Goethe could say "Become what you are," implying that there was an undiscovered essential self, Heidegger would say "you are what you become," with an understanding that your essence is always a possibility, never an actuality. This is why Heidegger will say later that *Dasein* exists primarily in the future, a concept that I will compare to Stevens' aesthetic at the end of this chapter.

7. I am indebted for this phrase, "transcendence in immanence," to Mircea Eliade, whose discussions of the mythic patterns of existence in primitive religions end with a suggestive chapter on the presence of mythic patterns in modern, profane, "demythologized" life. See particularly his *Myth and Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1963), pp. 162-94, and *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1959; paperback ed., 1959), pp. 162-98.

8. The most suggestive discussion of the nature of metaphor in Stevens' poetry is Northrop Frye's essay, "The Realistic Oriole: A Study of Wallace Stevens," *Hudson Review* 10 (Autumn 1957): 353-70. See also Donald Sheehan, "Stevens' Theory of Metaphor," *Papers on Language and Literature* 2 (Winter 1966): 57-66, for a recent analysis of Stevens' use of metaphor. Unlike Frye, Sheehan discusses only the theory and not the practice in the poems.

9. In *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 17-39, Heidegger explains what he means when he claims that phenomenology is the only fitting method for the study of ontology. Briefly, his argument is that the phenomenological method (and he makes clear that he is discussing a method and not a subject matter) is the proper method for letting the Being of the things that exist (*das Sein des Seienden*) appear or make itself manifest. For Heidegger, the nature of description is redefined so that description (like Stevens' theory of description) will reveal Being and, since the question of the meaning of Being is the central question of Heidegger's philosophy, phenomenology is the appropriate method. While Heidegger ignores the "reductions" and the concept of "intentionality" that are the keys of Husserl's method, he nevertheless acknowledges his debt to Husserl by insisting on the priority of "intuition" and "moments of vision" over scientific methods of controlled observation.

10. Both philosopher and poet are in accord in their rejection of the religious implications of their theories of the philosophy and poetry of Being, respectively. In Heidegger's "Humanismusbrief," an open letter written to Jean Beaufret and later published in Heidegger's *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (Bern, 1947), pp. 53-119, he explicitly denies any theological implications in his ontology. He refuses to consider as relevant to his concern (i.e., the question of Being) any inference about the existence or nonexistence of God. Stevens is considerably more explicit in his atheism, both in the poetry and in his prose.

11. "Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry," p. 281.



"Anecdote of the Jar": An Iconological Note

ROY HARVEY PEARCE

Sincerum est nisi vas, quodcumque infundis acescit.
Hor. Ep. I. ii. 54.

The controlling line in "Anecdote of the Jar" is of course the ninth: "It took dominion everywhere." The poet, figuring himself as having composed a Tennessee landscape by the act of placing a (fruit) jar "upon a hill," comes to understand the expense of his act. It is the realization that out there, outside the scope of the "imagination" (to use one of Stevens' compulsively favorite terms), there is, there perdures, a "reality" (to use another), in its rudimentary existence totally beyond being conceived directly by him who would know it. Thus the double negative in the last two lines, which in effect discover that "everything" in Tennessee except the poet in the exercise of his imagination "give[s] of bird or bush"—i.e., of "reality." In light of this understanding of "Anecdote of the Jar," I think it worth noting that Stevens as he wrote the poem must have had in mind a specific fruit jar, the "Dominion Wide Mouth Special," a photograph of which appears on the opposite page. Although manufactured in Canada, the jar has been widely distributed in the United States from 1913 to the present.¹ The exemplar photographed dates *ca.* 1918; Stevens was in fact travelling in Tennessee April and May 1918. (The poem was first published, it will be recalled, as part of the Pecksniffiana series, in *Poetry*, October 1919.) As a "wide mouth special," the jar is particularly notable, of its kind, as "tall and of a port in air." And its glass, compared to that of other fruit jars, is especially "gray and bare." Whether in Tennessee, in 1918, fruit jars were used as containers for "moonshine," I have not been able to establish definitively. Surely, granting Stevens' fondness for "moon" and "shine," the matter is worth investigating.²

FOOTNOTES

1. See Julian Harrison Toulouse, *Fruit Jars* (New York, 1969), pp. 94-95; Toulouse, *Bottle Makers and Their Marks* (New York, 1971), pp. 154-157; and Douglas and Marian Bird and Charles Corke, *A Century of Antique Canadian Glass Fruit Jars* (London, Ontario, 1971), p. 43. The photograph is by David Crowne—to whom thanks, as also to John Hathaway, who found the exemplar for me.

2. The Walsh Concordance lists over 200 uses of "moon," "shine," and their cognates.

A Note on Dante and Stevens

ASHLEY BROWN

Literary historians will have different ways of approaching American poetry in the first half of this century. One line of approach, so familiar now and yet so improbable, is by way of Dante. J. Chesley Mathews, a former colleague of mine at the University of California (Santa Barbara), used to trace the references to Dante in our 19th Century poets, Emerson, Longfellow, and the rest; Emerson's version of the *Vita Nuova*, which Professor Mathews published, might well be the starting point for a kind of native tradition. And in fact Harvard has had a tradition of Dante studies that seems to have been unbroken. But one could hardly think that this was a major issue in the 19th Century; it meant nothing to Poe or Whitman or Dickinson. I suppose the turn in Dante studies at Harvard came with Santayana, who prepared the way for Stevens, Eliot, and Aiken. It was Eliot, of course, assisted by Pound, who brought up Dante as a major issue in American poetry. This is one of the features of our literary landscape that makes it different from the British.

For Eliot, as we know, *The Divine Comedy* was a principle of order in most of the major poems and essays, and his long essay of 1929, written alongside "Ash Wednesday," initiated what I would call the "Dante period" in American poetry. In the following year, soon after the publication of *The Bridge*, Hart Crane read Eliot's essay (see his letter to Solomon Grunberg in September, 1930) and spent a summer with *The Divine Comedy*. Soon we had MacLeish's *Conquistador* and Cummings' *Eimi*, and by the end of the 1930s Dante was taken for granted by poets as different as Warren and Auden and the early Lowell. One of the most remarkable pieces of Dantesque came from W. C. Williams in "The Yachts," as fine in its way as certain passages in the earlier *Cantos*. And then there is Allen Tate, who has felt the pull of Dante most profoundly. I date the end of the "period" around 1952, the year of Tate's poems in *terza rima* and the Dante number of the *Kenyon Review* that Francis Fergusson edited for Ransom. Since then we have moved into another poetic age, but Mr. Fergusson's "A Suite for Winter," Lowell's "The Severed Head," and James Merrill's recent "Book of Ephraim" (in *Divine Comedies*) display the interest that Dante still has for contemporary poets. A very useful study could be written about the subject and its attraction for Americans.

Where does Stevens take up this interest? His Harvard education, which was altogether literary, did not include Italian—his languages were French and German. The *Letters* and the essays in *The Necessary Angel* record only a few conventional references to Dante. On the other hand the recent publication of the fragmentary "For an Old Woman in a Wig" (in *The Palm at the End of the Mind*) shows that Dante was on Stevens' mind as early as 1916, and one pair of tercets sounds like a rejoinder to the Tuscan master:

Is death in hell more dearth than death in heaven?
And is there never in that noon a turning—
One step descending one of all the seven
Implacable buttresses of sunlight, burning
In the great air? There must be spirits riven
From out contentment by too conscious yearning.

I have the feeling that this poem, fragmentary or not, will have to be considered one of the most important things that Stevens wrote at the time. (Robert Buttel, in *Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium*, first drew our attention to it a decade ago.) But Stevens' stylistic evolution went along other lines: the controlled free verse of "The Snow Man" (to mention one example) and the controlled Shakespearean splendor of "The Idea of Order at Key West" (to mention an example of the other kind). "For an Old Woman in a Wig" doesn't quite "work" as an immediate successor to "Sunday Morning."

And of this leads me to "Esthétique du Mal," the long poem that tries to confront evil and pain as they present themselves to the imagination. It was started off by Ransom, who simply suggested that Stevens write a poem for the *Kenyon Review*; and as it happened Ransom had recently published there a little essay called "Artists, Soldiers, Positivists" that can be considered the *donnée* for the poem, which Stevens composed within five weeks during the summer of 1944. (The essay, at times, looks like a gloss on the poem.) "Esthétique" draws on an extraordinary range of materials: Baudelaire, the Picasso of the Rose Period, Paul Klee, Victor Serge (whose "Vignettes of NEP" had just been published), Lenin, classical syllogism, etc. Dante figures in the third section:

His firm stanzas hang like hives in hell
Or what hell was, since now heaven and hell
Are one, and here, O terra infidel.

This entire section should be quoted, but the last two tercets will suffice:

It seems as if the honey of common summer
Might be enough, as if the golden combs
Were part of a sustenance itself enough,
As if hell, so modified, had disappeared,
As if pain, no longer satanic mimicry,
Could be borne, as if we were sure to find our way.

This passage almost refers to the pair of tercets from "For an Old Woman in a Wig"; it has the same authority of statement, but it also has an ease of style that Stevens had long ago attained. One would like to think that he had "reserved" his rejected fragment for the right moment. I mentioned that the early poem looks like a rejoinder to Dante. The later one may also be a rejoinder to Stevens' contemporaries Eliot and Tate. As an avid reader of the literary reviews, *Kenyon*, *Partisan*, and *Sewanee*, he was well aware of the

importance they assigned to the *Four Quartets*. Then the first number of the *Kenyon Review* for 1944 had opened with Tate's "Seasons of the Soul" with its epigraph from the *Inferno*. I suggest that "Little Gidding" and "Seasons of the Soul," the great Dantesque poems of the period, were something of a challenge to Stevens and his humanist vision. "Esthétique du Mal" opened the last number of the *Kenyon Review* for 1944, thus striking a balance, as it were, for Ransom, who admired Stevens tremendously. All in all, this was one of the most brilliant episodes in American poetry.

Asylum Avenue

Here is a region through which you move, yet which moves through you as you make your *paseo*; it is as if it were receptive to the space you bring along with you, and as if all the spaces flowed into each other like clear, green water. It is itself a wide walk past heavily meaningless cars and their motion, descending in curving and gracious declines into the business of being a street. Yet it never needs to become a mere boulevard, broadly proclaiming itself over buried and forgotten bulwarks, but remains the extension of what it comes toward, which itself kindly advances to meet what has been moving forward at it for so very long. It is the neighborhood of points of refuge through which you pass: they continually astonish you with their inventiveness, with the manner in which food and drink have been tucked away in them, with the devices by which you may see and not be seen. And suppose that there was an encounter to be had there (I think of a recently dead friend appearing at your door, his arms full of books and papers, in place of someone else you had invited, cheerfully assuring you that the reports of his sudden death in Italy were quite mistaken)—it would be as much part of your walk as your very setting out. It would not be occasional. Nor would the sidewalk along the asphalt shore constitute a road. It would be a way of getting to work.

—John Hollander

Stevens' Journal and "Sunday Morning"

JAY SEMEL

Recorded in a journal which Wallace Stevens kept as a young man are two entries which contain descriptions of scenes and feelings strikingly similar to those found in the monumental poem "Sunday Morning." These private remarks personalize and therefore intensify the poem's central conflict, illuminate its major themes, and may have possibly served as its source.¹

In the first entry, dated 15 June 1900, Stevens described the apartment in a cheap New York boarding house which he occupied for a year or so following the completion of his studies at Harvard:

The carpet on the floor of my room is gray set off with pine roses. In the bath room is a rug with the figure of a peacock woven on it—blue and scarlet, and black, and green, and gold. And on the paper on my wall are designs of fleur-de-lis and forget-me-not. Flowers and birds enough of rags and paper—but no more. In this Eden, made spicy with the smoke of my pipe which hangs heavy in the ceiling, in this Paradise ringing with the bells of streetcars and the bustle of fellow-boarders heard through the thin partitions, in this Elysium of Elysiums I shall lay me down. (LWS 38-39)

The garish peacock on Stevens' bath mat was to become in "Sunday Morning" a green cockatoo, while the other tawdry accoutrements of his apartment were to be translated into a scene of singular opulence:

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.

(CP 66)

Since Stevens' lodgings suffer in comparison with the elegant environment of the unnamed lady of the poem, his sanguine view of them provides a notable contrast to and commentary on her languid behaviour and religious morbidity. Of special significance is his willingness to perceive his mundane, artificial, confined habitat as a veritable heaven: for the very point of the poem is the woman's reluctance in developing a similar attitude toward a world of lush natural beauty. If he could view a city apartment filled with artificial flowers and cardboard birds as the "Elysium of Elysiums," why is it difficult for her to see the value of an Earth where "Deer walk upon our mountains and the quail/Whistle about us their spontaneous cries," and "Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness" (CP 70)?

Reflecting the source of the woman's difficulty is a journal entry written 30 April 1905. Both Stevens and his protagonist suffer from the same

malaise; and in each case the cause seems to be rooted in religion. Note also that the entry was recorded on a Sunday:

I am in an odd state of mind to-day. It is Sunday. I feel a loathing (large and vague!) for things as they are; and this is the result of a pretty thorough disillusionment. Yet this is an ordinary mood with me in town in the Spring time. I say to myself that there is nothing good in the world except physical well-being. All the rest is philosophical compromise. Last Sunday, at home, I took communion. It was from the worn, the sentimental, the diseased, the priggish and the ignorant that "Gloria in excelsis!" came. (LWS 82)

As Stevens perceived it, the "worn" enervated institution which is the church does not balance or enrich man's physical life with a spiritual dimension; rather, it is a negative force which demands commitment to dogma and deems physical-well-being unimportant or decadent. Inevitably this results in a condition of "pretty thorough disillusionment."

This is the condition of the peignored lady of "Sunday Morning" and the journal reference to "compromise" spotlights her essential dilemma. Her lovely surroundings do not bring happiness; in fact, "the pungent oranges and bright, green wings/Seem things in some procession of the dead" which eventually transport her to the site of the Crucifixion. Indeed, here is a perfect example of modern humanity's debilitating "compromise." The woman's religious beliefs are not strong enough to make her go to church at the expense of missing breakfast; and yet her subsequent guilt prevents her from enjoying her meal. Fully committed to neither alternative, she dangles somewhere between a heaven she cannot bear to believe does not exist and an earth which she shuns because of its transience. It is then the artist's task—successfully achieved in "Sunday Morning"—to convince the individual of the value and necessity of redeeming the physical world.

FOOTNOTES

1. Portions of "Sunday Morning" were originally published in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*, VII (Nov. 1915), 81-83. Stevens had submitted the entire poem as it later appeared in *Harmonium* and subsequent publications, but Miss Monroe selected five of the eight sections and printed them, upon Stevens' advice, in the following order: I, VIII, IV, V, VII.

Wallace Stevens at the Hartford

WILLIAM J. HARTIGAN

During Wallace Stevens' four decades at the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, where he eventually became Vice-President in charge of bonding claims, even the men closest to him found the poet a riddle. Anthony P. Sigmans, retired Secretary of the Hartford Accident, who may have been as close to Stevens as any man on earth, saw the poet, in part, as "an odd ball, a lonely man who had no friends, . . . a very difficult man to understand."

As was the poet, so was his poetry. Students, scholars, and critics have expressed an attitude probably best summed up by a statement made over a decade ago by Joseph N. Riddel:

Much of the tentativeness in recent Stevens' criticism results from incomplete knowledge of the man himself. . . . The paucity of this information has so far tempted critics to impute to Stevens an intellectual tradition of sorts and has motivated several essays which, confining him to one set of ideals or another, restricts the import of his poetics.¹

Much has been written about Stevens and his poetry since Riddel made that statement. Yet Stevens probably will never be fully understood until Stevens' intimates, other than his family, make public their personal views of the poet. One of those who shed light on Stevens' character was the late Wilson C. Jainsen, President of the Hartford Accident, under whom Stevens worked.

In an interview given the author of this article in Jainsen's office at the Hartford Accident eight years ago, believed to be the only interview with Jainsen on the subject, he recalled his personal meeting with Stevens in the early 1920's. In those days Stevens was under fire from critics who complained of what they believed to be the poet's hedonism, the result of his profuse employment of *objets d'art* and the such in his writings.

But now Stevens was in Boston, where Jainsen as a claims attorney, represented Hartford Accident. Previously the two had known one another only through the mails. Stevens wanted to buy a drinking goblet, something on the distinctive side. Jainsen took him to a shop known to carry just that sort of thing. After poking around, Stevens came up with "exactly what he was looking for." On leaving the shop, Stevens, in frank surprise, asked Jainsen: "How on earth did you ever come to know a shop like that?"

As time went on Jainsen came to know Stevens "as an elegant person, the type who bought his suits from Brooks Brothers in New York." Jainsen also emphasized that Stevens was "an intellectual snob." The speaker pointed out that "in his youth Stevens was not only a gourmet but also a gourmand. He was a hard drinker." Continuing, Jainsen said, "The man was devoid of

human instincts. He was self-centered and self-contained. His world pivoted around himself. He was a complete individualist and a complete perfectionist. He read exhaustively and conducted intensive research to find the exact words to convey his meanings. He went in for synonyms. Stevens was one of an erudite circle that liked attention such as receiving honorary college degrees and like honors."

It was Janisen who first mentioned that Stevens died of cancer at St. Francis Hospital and was believed to have converted to Roman Catholicism, a belief that has now been confirmed by the Rev. Arthur P. Hanley, pastor of St. Bridget's Roman Catholic Church in Cheshire, Conn., the priest who effected the conversion. Eight years later, Stevens' wife, also dying of cancer, followed her husband by converting to the same faith, the conversion being performed by the Rev. Cassain Yukus, a Passionist priest and close friend of the Sigmans.

Regarding Stevens as a businessman, Jainsen said: "Stevens was a great judge of human nature, at least as far as determining a man's business potential was concerned. For example, he was responsible for bringing three men into the organization and all three wound up as top executives. There was Sigmans, whom Stevens lured away from Glen Falls Insurance Co. He retired as Secretary of Hartford Accident. Manning W. Heard, whom Stevens brought up from New Orleans, retired from the company's highest position, Chairman of the Hartford Insurance Group and all its subsidiaries. Then, of course, there was myself who, after coming down from Boston, retired as President of Hartford Accident.

"Actually," Jainsen explained, "Stevens was the third highest man at Hartford Accident in his position as Vice-President in charge of bonding claims.

When a contractor defaulted it was Stevens' job to step in and take complete charge of the project from that point on with the aim of salvaging for the Hartford Accident whatever he could from the project. For instance, if a contractor building a bridge and bonded by Hartford Accident failed to perform, then it became Stevens' decision whether to abandon the project and pay off all claims, continue with a new contractor or give the original contractor another crack at the job. Once Stevens reached his decision that was it. No one ever questioned his judgment. He was the boss man on bonding and claims."

Jainsen, who described Stevens as a practitioner of Hegelian dialectic, recalled with humor his first encounter with the man back in the twenties. Stevens was in charge of the claims department at the home office in Hartford while Jainsen was a claims attorney representing the company in Boston. The owner of an oil burner had fallen behind in his payments. Stevens wrote Jainsen to take whatever legal action was necessary to protect Hartford Accident and summed up the situation as follows: "The owner has the oil burner. The seller has his money. We have the matter."

Jainsen subsequently came to Hartford in the company's downtown claims office. Some time later Hartford Accident was looking for a man to take charge of the home office claims department, Stevens' old job. There

was trouble finding the right kind of man to take over the position. As Jainsen tells the story Stevens came forward at this point and said: "What are you looking all over the country for when you have a man right here in your downtown office who is capable of handling the job?" Jainsen, as a result, was brought into the office as Vice-President and later became President.

To sum up, Jainsen said, "Stevens was a good businessman, a practical businessman. He was incisive in his thinking, very clear and logical. He had a great capacity for work. Once he turned a case over to a subordinate, he was through with it once and for all. Woe be to him who for any reason brought the case back to Stevens. He was hard, stern, strong-willed, but a just taskmaster."

Evidence that Stevens possessed a keen business insight as claimed by Jainsen can be found in an article he wrote in 1937 for the company's publication, the *Hartford Agent*, shortly after he became Vice-President. In those times, the nation was gripped by a catastrophic economic depression and social security schemes were being advanced as an antidote in the United States and other countries as well. Insurance circles, fearing nationalization of their industry, were attacking, along with others, proposed New Deal legislation as misguided "security from the cradle to the grave." Stevens pointed out that nationalization in one degree or another had already been adopted in Italy, Germany and England, and yet, private insurance had survived. His article "Insurance and Social Change" follows in part:

"In short, then, the activities of the insurance business are likely, the greater and more significant they are, to make one reflect on the possibilities of nationalization, particularly in a period of unrest and the changes incident to unrest, a period so easily to be regarded as a period of transition. Yet the greater these activities are: that is to say, the more they are adapted to the changing needs of changing times (provided they are conducted at a profit) the more certain they are to endure on the existing basis."

How right Stevens was. Social security insurance was adopted as a governmental function in this country. Many people for the first time carried insurance, although of a federal nature. They were quick to see that if a little private insurance were added to it they would have at least a small nest egg for their old age. The effect of the legislation, as foreseen by Stevens, was to popularize insurance. A boom swept the private insurance sector which has continued to the present. Never have any people carried the amount of insurance as do the American people today.

One explanation of the enigma surrounding Stevens could be found in the man's dual character. Eugene Paul Nassar relates: "When the serious critic examines these figures more closely he is aware of an aspect of them which consistently undercuts, in a conscious, ironic fashion, the doctrinal substance which other aspects of them are intended to bear. The critic is disturbed by this oddness implicit in the figures and in the troubled surface

of a given poem as a whole. The oddness is not really like that of other modern poets he has studied, if only by virtue of its constant presence, its diffusion into all areas of Stevens' figuration."²

Nassar attributes this oddness to what he terms "The Two Minds of Wallace Stevens." Continuing, Nassar says, "It is perhaps evident now that I see the central problem Stevens dealt with in a lifetime of poems as that of analogic fallacy. He passionately believed in the power of imagination to make at least a temporary order out of chaos by means of metaphor, but he saw clearly that such an irrational order can have only transitory value. The imagination is seen as both God and fake. Thus his vital figures have two aspects—one of value, one of nothingness."

This same duality which cloaked the poet and his poems in oddity could be traced in other manifestations. There is Jansen's description of Stevens as the "hard, stern, strong-willed" businessman and "Woe be to him who for any reason brought the case back to Stevens." Then there is the undercutting of this as seen in the world of *Harmonium*, Stevens' first book of verse published in 1923. Here is a world of comfortable living, *objets d'art*, voyages in the Carribbean, French phrases, sophisticated knowledge and wit, rich in imagery and in tonality, almost effete.

FOOTNOTES

1. Joseph N. Riddel, "The Contours of Stevens Criticism" in *The Act of the Mind: Essays on the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce and J. Hillis Miller (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p. 267.

2. Eugene Paul Nassar, *Wallace Stevens: An Anatomy of Figuration* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965), p. 13.

Reviews

Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens. By George Bornstein. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976. xiii + 263 pp. \$15.00

George Bornstein's book sets out to explore "the obsessive relation to British romanticism of three major poets of our century—Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens" (p. xi). He begins by citing the opening lines of Stevens' famous late poem "Of Modern Poetry": "The poem of the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice." "All Poetry," observes Bornstein, "is an 'act of the mind,' but Stevens is right to insist that the phrase particularly fits modern poetry. Since the romantics, acts of mind have themselves been the subject and substance of major poems in a direct way" (p.2). Thus Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" is "about Coleridge's mind"; Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" about Keats's mind, and Yeats's "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time" "is about himself rather than the Rose." Indeed, "Modern poems present a state of satisfaction less often than the act of finding it, the grail less often than the quest" (p. 4). And such emphasis on process rather than on product has "direct formal implications for poetic structure," the most notable genre being what Meyer Abrams has called "the greater Romantic lyric," a poem in which, according to Bornstein, "a speaker in a landscape progresses from description to vision to evaluation" (p. 9).

In his subsequent analyses of specific poems by Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens, Bornstein comes back, again and again, to their status as Greater Romantic Lyrics or as "Romantic Quest" poems. He observes, quite rightly, that some of Yeats's most important poems, for example, "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," follow the Romantic paradigm quite closely. Eliot, by contrast, is a Romantic against the grain. His personae—Prufrock, Gerontion, the Tiresias of *The Waste Land*—are failed visionaries; their "mental actions do not progress; they simply change, and form a sequence but not a consequence" (p. 139). Finally, Stevens, "Joyously welcoming the creative violence which Eliot feared," created a New Romanticism (p. 163). A lyric sequence like *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* "create[s] the illusion of actually developing action, but it proceeds wholly by conditionals and interrogatives." Stevens' genius thus transforms "the structure of a Greater Romantic Lyric into a poem of pure provisionality" (p. 228).

Many of Bornstein's individual readings—for example, his analysis of "double consciousness" in "The Idea of Order at Key West"—are excellent, but the theoretical and historical premises that inform his study are somewhat shaky. One would think, to begin with, that the poem as mental act was a Romantic invention. Following Bornstein's logic, we would have to assume that Marvell's "The Garden" is about the garden, that is, the Earthly Paradise, that Herbert's "The Collar" is about the Christian yoke, or that Donne's "The Sun Rising" is about the sun rising. But of course not even the most extreme Imagist poems like Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" are "about" their subjects in this simplistic sense. Ironically enough, Louis Martz's *The Poetry of Meditation* (1968) which Bornstein does not cite, uses precisely the same Stevens texts, "Of Modern Poetry" and "Man and Bottle," to define Donne's characteristic lyric mode and to relate that mode to its modern variants. In his opening chapter, "John Donne: The Poem of the Mind," Martz cites the following lines from "Of Modern Poetry":

The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice . . .

It has
To construct a new stage. It has to be on that stage
And like an insatiable actor, slowly and
With meditation, speak words that in the ear,

to extended reverie rather than to the visionevaluation pattern, is surely much closer in tone and structure to "Frost at Midnight" than are poems like "The Second Coming" or "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes."

"The act of finding / what will suffice" is not, in any case, a distinguishing feature of Romantic or of modern poetry. By using the Greater Romantic Lyric as a kind of absolute norm that modern poems should meet, Bornstein creates more problems for himself than he can solve within his chosen framework. But there are more serious loopholes in his argument. From the beginning, Bornstein sets up an imaginary adversary in the form of the Unnamed Critic who evidently insists that modern poetry is anti-Romantic. It is true, of course, that the New Critics, following Eliot, saw a sharp division between Romanticism and Modernism, but for the past two decades, the whole trend in criticism has been to emphasize the continuity of the Romantic tradition. John Bayley's *The Romantic Survival*, Robert Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience* and Frank Kermode's *Romantic Image* all appeared in 1957—that is, exactly twenty years ago. Since that time, critic after critic has studied the "Romantic survival" in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens, not to mention Crane, Williams, and Roethke. In his survey of Stevens criticism in *Sixteen Modern American Authors* (1972), Joseph Riddel has a whole section on the treatment of Stevens as "the modern Romantic." In this context, Bornstein's assertion that Stevens' "profound relation to romanticism has been mentioned so much and systematically explored so little" (p. 163) is simply not true. Let me cite just a few works that do "systematically explore" that relationship. Harold Bloom in his *Yeats* (1970), *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) and *A Map of Misreading* (1975) consistently places Stevens in the Romantic tradition. Geoffrey Hartman uses the same context whenever he refers to Stevens in the essays that comprise *Beyond Formalism* (1970) and *The Fate of Reading* (1975). In her *Walt Whitman and Wallace Stevens*, Diane Middlebrook examines the work of both poets in the light of the Coleridgean theory of the imagination to which both adhered. In *Wallace Stevens: The Poem as Act*, Merle Brown insists that a Stevens poem must be studied as process not product, as mental action not autotelic artifact. He too buttresses his argument by frequent references to "the act of finding / What will suffice."

Bornstein's adversary is thus a straw man. The view that Modernism is an outgrowth of Romanticism is, if anything, the new orthodoxy. Critics like Hillis Miller, Joseph Riddel and Helen Vendler who have countered this view are still in the minority.

But what about Eliot? Here, if anywhere, Bornstein's case should be convincing for Eliot is, by most critical accounts, the prototypical "modern," "anti-Romantic" poet. Bornstein convincingly argues that Eliot's aversion to Romanticism must be seen as a defense against his own deeper impulses, that the poet came to equate Romanticism with his own adolescent eroticism. The explosive powers of the psyche had to be suppressed and governed, and so discipline and order became the watchword.

If Bornstein had followed up on this excellent insight, he might have written an important essay on Eliot. But unfortunately what begins as a descriptive account of Eliot's peculiar hostility to Romanticism quickly turns into value judgment. The young Eliot who attacks Blake is, quite simply, wrong, and Bornstein takes pains to argue that Blake, rather than Eliot, is the poet of real order and discipline. Again, "Prufrock" is found wanting because it lacks progression. Although it begins as a dramatic monologue, seemingly moving toward vision and evaluation, it ends by brutally cancelling that vision. Similarly, "Gerontion ends where he began." The vision he has had "makes no difference to him" (p. 137). Accordingly, "Prufrock" and "Gerontion" are essentially failed Greater Romantic Lyrics. Bornstein writes:

In "Frost at Midnight" or "Among School Children" the order of the actions matters: first description, next memory, and then either future projection or present vision. This is not the case with Eliot's two speakers. They progress by

associative links arranged serially but not causally, until imagination arbitrarily and briefly erupts; but the sequence of links does not cause the eruption, which need not have occurred at just that place. (p. 139)

In this odd passage, Bornstein reveals his own bias in favor of Romanticism. He is quite right in describing the form of "Gerontion" as "sequence," not "consequence," quite right to note that associative structure and serial form now replace causal development. But, most of us would say, isn't that precisely what Modernism, as distinct from Romanticism, is all about? Isn't Eliot less the failed Romantic visionary than one of the first Moderns? If *The Waste Land* is, as Bornstein says, "an anatomy rather than transformation of fallen consciousness," does this necessarily mean that the poem is no more than "an abortive psychodrama" (p. 146)? Or is the fragmentary collage form of *The Waste Land*, with its shifting voices and filmlike dissolves precisely what makes this particular poem such a radical departure from prior lyric forms?

Transformations of Romanticism thus suffers from circular reasoning. The argument goes something like this. Modernism continues and develops Romantic tradition: note that Yeats and Stevens still use essentially Romantic genres, Romantic structures of imagery, and so on. The third "Modern," Eliot, defies such structures, at least in his earlier poetry and criticism. Thus he is not a true Romantic. But since all modern poetry has been declared to be squarely in the Romantic tradition, Eliot is then not a true Modern either.

Clearly, such reasoning won't do. Furthermore, Bornstein's narrow focus on Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens, makes it difficult to accept his generalizations about Modernism. For what about those other great Moderns, Pound and Williams? It is an astonishing fact that Williams' name does not so much as appear in Bornstein's index. Yet Hillis Miller's subtle argument for the "new poetic," the "new space" in which subject and object merge, an argument dismissed rather too easily by Bornstein in his theoretical introduction, takes Williams as its prime exemplar, Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens still being transitional figures caught between two worlds.

Near the end of his chapter on Yeats, Bornstein cites the following comment from Yeats's Preface to *Essays and Introductions*: "A little later poets younger than myself especially the one I knew best [Pound], began to curse that romantic subject-matter which English literature seemed to share with all great literature . . . and still, though getting much angrier, I was silent." Bornstein oddly concludes: "Yeats's evasion affected not just his own psyche but the subsequent study of literature in our century. Had he protested, he might have not just preserved us from a generation of facile anti-romanticism but hastened our understanding of the romantic roots of even overtly anti-romantic modernism" (p. 93).

This seems to me a peculiar misunderstanding of the way literary forms evolve. I have no idea what Bornstein means by "a generation of facile antiromanticism," but it is surely wishful thinking to assume that Yeats's protest would have stopped Pound from writing the *Cantos*, Williams from writing *Paterson*, Lowell from writing *Life Studies*, or Ashbery from writing "The Skaters." To talk of "Romanticism" and "Modernism" as if these were abstract norms, displaying fixed and measurable properties, is to ignore the fluidity of literary styles and genres. Bornstein's insistence that "Modernism" *should* (as opposed to *does*) remain within the "Romantic" orbit finally blinds him to the very real gulf, both ontological and stylistic, between a Greater Romantic Lyric like "Ode to Autumn" and such modern counterparts as Stevens' "The Auroras of Autumn" or Williams' "Spring and All." The critic must keep in mind Stevens' own cautionary words: "It Must Change."

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Poetry and Repression. By Harold Bloom. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976. 293 pp. \$11.95.

Beneath Harold Bloom's concern with the problem of poetic influence first articulated in *The Anxiety of Influence* and now applied to writers from Blake through Stevens in *Poetry and Repression* lies the deeper concern with the relation of poetry to criticism. In the wake of Cleanth Brooks and the New Criticism which exalted the work of art and humbled the literary critic, Bloom seeks both a "de-mystification" of the creative process (the "scandal" of poetic origins) and an elevation of the critic. The problem of anxiety does not confine itself to poets, but extends to critics who too must confront, envy, and appropriate the work of their fathers. Clearly Bloom's thesis in recent works that "there are no texts, only relations between texts" and that "poems are necessarily about other poems" is a slaying of his New Critical fathers; Bloom practices his own doctrine by appropriating and misreading Vico, Freud, and Nietzsche and by borrowing from Kenneth Burke, William Empson, and Northrop Frye. But his exposé of poetic origins in terms of psychic defenses, his devolutionary view of history, and his characterization of literature as a Darwinian Battle between the "strong" and the "weak" suggest that the real "anxiety" belongs to the critic who must pit his work against the sanctity of the literary text. For the critic's effort necessarily comes "after" that of the artist. Thus Bloom styles himself, as Blake's Satan, whose secondary status justifies his resentful blasts at God and traditional sanctities; he decanonizes poetry by unmasking its origins in lowly Oedipal strife. Bloom's works can be read as the Freudian "family romance" with poet as father and critic as son uneasily attempting to establish his own "priority".

Bloom's solution to the problem of criticism's stature—its apparent ephemerality in relation to the immortal poem—is to collapse the distinction between poetry and criticism. In its structure of analogues, Bloom's mythological system implicitly imitates the poetry he has studied most closely. His mythology, similar to that of Blake and Yeats in its elaborateness, brings together terms from the Kabbalah, Gnostic thought, rhetoric, and psychoanalysis. His pattern of six psychic defenses repeats a larger Kabbalistic pattern and both patterns emerge in individual poems, in the careers of poets and critics, and in the history of Post-Enlightenment poetry. His models thus create a text as dense and as misread as any modern poem.

Bloom's announcement in "A Manifesto" of *The Anxiety of Influence* that there "are no interpretations but only misinterpretations, and so all criticism is prose poetry" makes explicit his claims for criticism. "Strong critics" like "strong poets" misread texts. Reading itself, common to both poet and critic, is the source of creativity. It is as anxious critic that the poet marshals his defense mechanisms and writes poetry to ward off the threats of previous generations. Reading is poetry: "A strong poem does not formulate poetic facts any more than strong reading or criticism formulates them, for a strong reading is the only poetic fact, the only revenge against time that endures" (*Poetry and Repression*, p. 6.) The literary text, no longer a written or objective document, dissolves into a "psychic battlefield" whose only external presence is the literary language common to both critic and poet: "... poems are not things but only words that refer to other words, and those words refer to still other words, and so on, into the densely overpopulated world of literary language" (*Poetry and Repression*, p. 3). The individual poem fades into its echoes and precursors and into the outworn language of literary discussion. Bloom as debunker equalizes poetry and criticism by exposing their mutually debased origins in an effete tradition.

Bloom's mythologized six-stage act of "reading" locates the sources of poetic power—the son's final victory over the father—in a kind of Nietzschean rancor. But less a description of the ironic source of individual genius, it is a calling of poetry to the heels of criticism, an insistence that the poem proceed as critical act. *Poetry and Repression* ascribes to the six stages first articulated in *The Anxiety of Influence*—*clinamen* (creative swerving or misreading of the predecessor involving a denial of influence), *tessera* (antithetical completion which fails at completion), *xenosis* (humbling or

emptying out), *daemonization* (crisis of the Sublime), *askesis* (slaying of the precursor), and *apophrades* (return of the dead precursors in unthreatening forms)—their analogues in six Freudian defense mechanisms, six rhetorical tropes, and six kinds of imagery. The process describes not only how critics and poets read poems, but the necessary structure and subjects of poetry:

There is an opening movement of *clinamen* to *tessera*, in most significant poems of our era, that is, of the last centuries. I am aware that such a statement, between its home-made terminology and its apparent arbitrariness, is rather outrageous, but I offer it as merely descriptive and as a useful mapping of how the reading of poems begins. By "reading" I intend to mean the work both of poet and critic, who themselves move from dialectic irony to synecdochal representation as they confront the text before them.

Each time the poet/critic reads a poem, he passes through these stages. In addition, the poems themselves are "about" the poet/critic's anxiety and struggle. Indeed, they imitate structurally the "home-made" and apparently "arbitrary" terminology that the critic has mythologized in response to them. Bloom here demonstrates his own victorious *apophrades*, the transformation of the precursor (poem) into the follower through the usurpation of priority (the psychic defense of projection). His pretense to mere description suggests either *clinamen*—the poet's initial self-deceptive denial of influence and claim to "truth"—or a further confirmation of *apophrades*—the return of poetry (now dead) as the unthreatening follower of prior critical rules.

Bloom's self-reflexive criticism has distorted practical applications. It demonstrates for poem after poem in chapters on Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Yeats, Emerson and Whitman, and Stevens the expected formula of the six psychic defense mechanisms. More subtly though, it authorizes indiscriminate claims of "self-deception" and "repression" where it serves the critic. These liberties are most evident in the chapter on Stevens. Bloom first compares Stevens as critic unfavorably to Valéry for self-deceptively denying poetic influence, then makes that weakness into the chief index of poetic power. Stevens' intense "need" for denial qualifies him as Bloom's great poet of the Sublime (*daemonization*). By such reasoning, Valéry whose criticism does not repress the "truth" of necessary falsehood, should be considered a lesser poet. Yet Bloom implies the opposite, making him Stevens' great predecessor. It appears that the connection between repression and genius can be established at will. Bloom elsewhere exempts Shakespeare from such a tie since the latter's primary precursor is Marlowe, "a poet very much smaller than his inheritor." The real question becomes exactly what and whom is being repressed. Bloom's chronology never clarifies why a misreading involves one poet over another. One asks why Schopenhauer and not Keats as predecessor to Stevens. The choices seem arbitrary and the evidence mere assertion. The dimensions of the repression itself apparently can expand indefinitely, with the fluidity but not the precision of metaphor. Bloom's Stevens represses particular poets, then his whole American sense of "belatedness," and finally his exhaustion as modern poet at the end of an historical line.

Bloom's *Poetry and Repression* illustrates the envious strivings of criticism to usurp poetic territory. As a romantic critic, Bloom is careless and disdainful of empirical evidence while carefully illustrative and explanatory of the larger designs of his system. The study, frankly opposing the view of influence as a study of sources, verifiable misreadings (the poet could be misreading a poem he never read), and historical events, finally depersonalizes and de-poeticizes poetry in favor of the dialectical archetypes of the critic. It is uncertain whether or not the ensuing "anxiety" over Bloom's work will insure him the same "triumph over oblivion" sought by the "strong poet," but it is clear that Bloom wants it to.

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Communications

Ronald Lane Latimer

I became acquainted with Stevens because of my friendship with Ronald Lane Latimer, both during the *Alcestis* days and while we were undergraduates together at Columbia College. When the *Letters* appeared, I was disturbed by the vagueness of some of the references to Mr. Latimer, mainly because many readers would be apt to give them the worst possible interpretation. I let the matter rest, however, because I had heard nothing definite about Mr. Latimer since he left for Japan and had no way of knowing whether he was in a position to defend himself. When the *New York Times* printed a story on the Huntington Library acquisition and stated that Holly Stevens was working on a biography I decided to send her a full account of the Latimer story, as I remember it, for her own information and use.

As you know, the *Times* report was not quite accurate as to the completeness of the biography. Miss Stevens was glad to have my information as the *Alcestis* story had intrigued her for some time. She indicated, however, that she has no intention of continuing the biography at present and suggested that I try to place the material with some scholarly journal. While I was anxious to see justice done Mr. Latimer in a biography, I hesitated then, and still do, about publishing an article without knowing his fate or present whereabouts.

We both had heard that Mr. Latimer had returned from Japan and was living in New Mexico (it being the late 1960's at the time). But the reports came third or fourth hand and were impossible to trace beyond rumor to knowledgeable fact. Shortly after the *Letters* appeared, I checked the Columbia Alumni records, and did so again in 1975, without gaining information as to a current address. I did learn that a request came in for a transcript of his college records in 1957, but it was not clear if Mr. Latimer had any part in it or not. I also wrote to Frances Steloff of the Gotham Book Mart and a few college friends without result. I am now wondering if you might bring the matter up with the Stevens Society in the hope that the members might be able to provide some clues.

As the *Letters* left some doubt as to his various names, you might want to clear up any confusion. His original name, James Leippert, stayed with him through public schools in Kingston, New York, where he was born, and Columbia College, where he was graduated with the class of 1934. During the next year, which saw the start of the *Alcestis* Press, he took the name of Mark Jason, then Martin Jay. Not long after that he started calling himself J. Ronald Lane Latimer. The Ronald came from Ronald Firbank, one of his favorite writers, the Lane from John Lane, the English publisher whose career he would have liked to emulate. Besides being fairly unusual, Latimer simply caught his fancy at the time. The J was soon dropped, although Jay had been his nickname and remained so among his friends. After about another year, he went into court and made the change legal. There was no need to hide his identity or anything sinister about the changes. It was just something he wanted to do, and he may have done so again. More than likely he was given a Buddhist name in Japan, and he may have assumed another if he returned to the United States.

If the Latimer mystery is finally solved, I would be happy to offer my material for publication. As of right now, though, I want to wait until I know if Mr. Latimer can speak for himself, or, for some reason, desires that silence be maintained.

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Wallace Stevens: Entropical Poet

Some of our medical colleagues have recently remarked on an interesting phenomenon. It is what one might call a "lightening." It occurs shortly before a patient dies; it is characterized by a clarification of mind and lifting of mood, an ease, even, it seems, a happiness, as of the recognition and acceptance of impending, and then imminent, and then present death.

By analogy, one might say that some such "lightening" seems to have occurred during the period of the composition of Wallace Stevens' last lyrics, wherein the poet restated his lifelong themes, but *alla breve*, and with a sharp, new focus. From the vantage of these last lyrics, withering doubt must be thrown upon the straightforwardness of the entire enterprise: From that acutely slanted, midwinter angle, the life's long work can be seen to be almost entirely *voulu*, an act or reflex of willing. What is interesting are the reasons for that rather desperate will, so far as we may read them in the work, or intuit them from our own experience, not merely as common readers but as independent, lively spirits ourselves.

The dominant condition may come to be seen, as depression, not isolation and fastidious distaste and disgust, although these elements reveal themselves too. Against that depression goes a powerful poetical drive, weaving questions and tentative answers, never satisfied. The dissatisfaction should be a hint to us that man delights the poet not, no, nor woman neither. Also, that place is never real, or real enough, should tell us far more than all the rationalizations of metaphysics or metapoetry for that matter with which we usually choose to be entertained. That the mind may think itself alienated from matter may indeed be a philosophical problem, and of course a psychological problem, but the perspectives given in the poems, because they are poems, ought to raise our suspicions.

Query: is Stevens an ascetic by nature and temperament? This Vendler offers, making the premise the main thesis of her reading of the longer poems. It may be true, and we may not wish to press for a definition of the nature of the ascetic and his temperament. Yet is the appearance of asceticism, of an austere and wintry temperament, merely that, an appearance in metaphor only? Vendler immediately adds, "Stevens is of course the obverse of that other Stevens shown us by the critics, the doctrinal poet of ideas, advocate of hedonism. Both views will be corrected by history." (OEW 10-11)

Rather than thinking of Stevens as the ascetic, the hermit, why not observe that in those poems we read of the appalling discovery Stevens made, of the revelations vouchsafed to him, and so to us, of what can but feebly be described as a lifelong, and terrible, illness?

Of course, as an artist such an illness may be merely idiosyncratic to him, although made to seem part of his age too, because of his dexterity and our fascination with the act. Our disposition to be so fascinated by his sleight-of-hand, may also, of course, be attributed to the age, the climate of opinion. Though one may add here that it was an age defined by the very absence of the spirit, and the presence of something else, a real poverty, as Stevens put it, of the imagination, to say the least one could say of it. However, I think not.

I think it is an illness, and perhaps, as with all illnesses, this pandemic, the sickness of this era, is also individual sickness. One might, to suggest the nature of the illness, do worse than try out the model of addiction. The addict is one who will only renounce his habit, if ever he does, at the last edge, teetering on the dissolving parapet of annihilation, when he finally sees his own death. The very concept of the cure is unavailable to the addict until the intelligence, which is Stevens' tightly-gripped sceptre, is able and willing to acknowledge what it has been aware of, consciously or unconsciously, from the beginning—yet refused to recognize. The addict has furthermore known all along that his death is what he has been seeking, for whatever personal reasons, and with terrible force, with almost all of his being. In the real presence of death however, the personal inclination is

sometimes overcome, and a cure becomes possible, because, at the last instant, the will has been properly engaged. In Stevens' case, one notes his lifelong addiction, in poems, to what he terms *mind, imagination, intelligence*, as one polar limit, and to its opposite, in his lingo, *reality*, that is, all that's not spatial and temporal in its substantiality, not percipience itself, or of the self, or consciousness, awareness, meditative contemplation of landscape and weather, that percipience being what his poems imitate and discuss at such great length. The poems, however, usually avoid the expression of direct feeling, even the last poems, except, as has often been noted, as irony, mockery, sardonicism, parody. Exaltation and flights of fancy are also treated in these ways? But there is a programmatic naturalism, an emphasis on gravity and our attachment to the earth, which are insisted upon, from the beginning, with what amounts to earnestness. This doctrinal view, the legacy of Darwin, contains his feelings in what amounts to a sort of compulsive iterative saying, a speaking about that which in its "disorderliness" gives him pain, which in fact occasions (to use his term) his verse; but even there the feeling is hidden behind, within, or beyond his verse, except for "Sunday Morning," the mood of which is relentlessly abjured, abnegated after *Harmonium*.

Further, Stevens has many kinds of statements written to himself in the *Adagia*. Take one: "Reality is a vacuum." This seems contradicted by another that runs, "Poetry increases the feeling for reality." Or but partly contradicted, on the face of it. Poetry, then, increases the feeling for the vacuum? In Stevens' case, yes. By what authority does Stevens pronounce this axiom in apodictic form, a form toward which he was constantly inclined. His own authority, of course. It is a poetic statement, not a philosophic or scientific one. It reveals not only the basic inclination of this poet, as ascetic temperament, if you will have it so, but also explains the whole arrangement of his work: it tells us what the orientation of that pole, "reality," is in the universe of his discourse. At first glance, such a statement seems to be a clue to readers in this period of the 20th century: it suggests what we know of the history of our rationalistic, and positivistic, culture since the late 18th century: the steady disintegration of the various myths of Western civilization under the dissections of the physical sciences, and latterly psychology. It is what a poetic temperament might reduce the systematic relativisms of historicism to, say Spengler's schema. It is the "present shock" of the seven decades of Stevens' life. It also takes on significance in the critical thought of his contemporary, Wittgenstein. All this, and much more. It is, however, not a Platonic statement. Nor is it a hypergnostical statement.

But, we may permit ourselves to suspect it as rationalization too. Philosophical critics like Denis Donoghue have not had the taste for pursuing Stevens' formulations, and rightly; not as philosophy anyway. Or like Vendler, for instance, they come to the point of recognizing what is involved, but choose not to develop it by examining it closely, to start reviewing the poet all over again at that point . . . which he himself does not fail to do in his last lyrics, and his various remarks collected in the *Opus Posthumous*, and even in the merest topics for ten poems under the title of "The Abecedarium of Finesoldier." The renunciations and refusals, bitterly couched, that loom in *Opus Posthumous* need some attention.

Still, regarding "Reality is a vacuum," one thinks of another kind of authoritative statement: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." Hopkins' utterance has authority, and that not merely accruing from the word God, which Stevens says in the *Adagia* is merely "a postulate of the ego." Hopkins' authority comes, derives perhaps, from the "Hear O Israel!"; that usual announcement of the living God of the Old Testament. God is not for Stevens. God is a nothing that never enters the vacuum of reality with the words "Hear, O Israel!" Or, put another way, that postulate of the ego is a dead postulate: the postulate, that is, of a dead ego. Or dead, like Lazarus, until the last poems, it may be. Or again, as in Stevens' remarks on John Crowe Ransom, where he says that "one's cry of O Jerusalem becomes little by little a cry to something a little nearer and nearer until at last one cries out to a

living name, a living place, a living thing, and in crying out confesses openly all the bitter secretions of experience." Not sweet, one's experience, but bitter! And yet, progressively, through all the changes of terminology, by which Stevens denotes progress, there is a continued and continual attenuation and denial of that which is living, in reality, including reality itself, the vacuum. In that same paragraph of homage, Stevens alludes to the whole effort of the whole being, "as in one's last poems." In that aside, Stevens opens himself to us for the first time, though my surmise is that he never was concealed at all. Not if he wrote poems. And in his last poems, the living things are a dead leaf, the scrawny cry of a bird at the end of winter. The end of winter is not merely a statement about February—not from a lifelong wintry temperament. And, not from the poet who always spoke precisely. Those last poems speak truths about matters of fact which have become at last intimations of reality, even to himself.

Anyone who has read Stevens may see that what is suggested there is his own discovery of himself: that from the beginning the ascetic temperament was actually a will of negation, of denial, a rejection of and hatred for Eros, for mother and father, for the tribes of men, and much else besides: a hatred of Eros and/or a fixation on Ananke. One therefore may read his poems as scenes of the desperate struggle which, as in the neurotic conflict, both asserts and denies at once, denying by asserting that which is denied, and vice versa. The poet's intellectual and verbal power, his skill at sleight-of-hand, both confuses us as to his nature and yet reveals it by the same means. Stevens' critics have mostly been fascinated and bemused by the prestidigitator's act: his poems. Nevertheless, he himself could not finally have been so illuded. Which partially explains his lifelong search for poetry itself—which he knows is not in his poems. In Hopkins though, one thinks that it is present, and present as poetry. As it is in the Psalms, for example, where it is not *voulu*.

Should this assertion about Stevens require explanation, here is an instance. One frequently-cited line of Stevens concerns the destruction of the illusion of reality, that theater of illusion, which leaves the poet's mind, whatever that may be, standing on a naked stage. The figure cited is that of Cinderella, who is left in her original rags at midnight, returned to her ashes. Or as Stevens says elsewhere, "Exit the whole shebang." That midnight can be taken as death, or the hour of the death of an illusion, of existence, call it phenomenal reality, whatever, as it is variously denominated in Stevens' work. But the fact remains: Cinderella is sought for through the whole world of that kingdom, by her prince. And Cinderella is found: Cinderella is raised from the ashes, and married in glory. Not in Stevens. Is that the cynical, ascetic temperament? That is this poet's refusal and denial. What caused his disposition to disbelieve, to put Cinderella forever in rags and ashes, barren, forlorn and forgotten, what caused him to live his whole life in disbelief, pretending to us that he was methodically searching through the whole damned slagheap and dump of reality, when he was not, when he was concealing his disappointment and dismissing the very appearances, the parades and fantasias he so prodigiously observed and strung out as appositives in his long poems, one cannot say.

Or one could, but one forebears. But say it is the clue to a profound illness. What might that illness be? Another instance, mine now, not Stevens, although it might as well be his too, as in "Page From a Tale." Little Hans, in Anderson's "The Snow Queen," sitting in the palace of the Snow Queen, a little fellow of ice, is the paradigm of this poet's illness, the poet with the wintry mind at the beginning, in "The Snow Man," and again at the end, though there is a wakening at the end. Little Hans is frozen; but in the poet's poems we may attend the unsleeping consciousness, which he calls "In Modern Poetry" "the poem of the act of the mind." If you recall "The Snow Queen," you will remember that Hans has been trying to fit together ice letters, given him as a puzzle or anagram, into the word Eternity. He fails; with all his intelligence and rationality, he fails. And then he gives up, and becomes a living, frozen body. And little Hans would be there yet, had not Gerda come and kissed him, weeping over him. His responsive tears washed the distorting

glass splinter from his eye; her embrace warmed his heart, until it expelled the other glass splinter. This does not happen to Wallace Stevens. Why? One wonders. Perhaps because Hans is able to remember that he had once loved Gerda as himself, before he loved the Snow Queen; perhaps because Gerda had been a pilgrim lover searching the whole world over for him, until she was a grown woman. Had not Stevens ever, as a child, loved a Gerda, the principle of love? If not, one wonders again, why? Or, to put the fable on the wider plane of the world: the doctrines of philosophy and science, in Stevens' time at least, resemble that magic, that evilly-distorting mirror that the imps had carried aloft to mock the angels with.

Stevens is perhaps like little Hans, half-spiteful and perverse, half-unconsciously blinded by the splinters, when he says in "Decorations": "But the wise man avenges by building his city in snow." One trembles in horror at such wisdom. At such revenge. And, against whom? This is not simply stoicism speaking. It is not a religious, or atheistic or gnostical poet speaking. And not a pragmatist or naturalist either. In fact, one reads in Stevens this sort of equation: Art=Thought=Death. Or, Void=Extinction=Existence=Words=Poetry. As in, "The geography (of the physical world) would be intolerable except for the non-geography that exists there" ("The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet") In other words, as Stevens is wont to say, we invent the world in words, this is a stunning and modern half-truth, because, if we do invent the world, we do it by other means as well, and not merely by other arts. It is Stevens speaking of Stevens in that kind of axiom. For it says that the world did not exist before we invented it. It looks like solipsism. It sounds like Milton's Satan. But Satan knew better. And Stevens himself had said that Satan was dead. It has to be taken in another way: it is Stevens on Stevens: it is redolent with implicit bitterness and resignation, this poet's reluctant acceptance of the demythologizing by science and philosophy of the world. That is putting a social-historical gloze on it. (It may well be more frightful, essentially.) Of course the poet accepted that portion of his time, the reduction of mythical pretensions, the so-called humanism which is approved by the majority of Stevens' critics: it is part of the accession to power that began in Romanticism, the intellectuals' accession to power, or dreams of such accession; and it is part of the depreciation of the power of the poets, such as it ever was, Shelley notwithstanding, that is involved in the process of the development of complex social structures.

One wonders, however, why Stevens should have gone along with it, and not because he was taking his descent from the 19th century, from Emerson and Thoreau. But if his nature matched the *Zeitgeist*, what are we saying? That that is the way his life happened to fall? That is fairly deterministic, and doesn't sound like Stevens' own descriptions of the "act of the mind." And if his ascetic temperament found its rationale in the cultural ambience of his time, why has the greater part of Stevens criticism made all its genuflections with the terms "mind," "reality," "imagination," given and defined, be it noted, by Stevens himself in the poems? That is masterful prestidigitation indeed. If Stevens' ghost troubles to read its critics, the spirit that began to waken in the last poems must be appalled and overwhelmed with remorse, I should think.

One may rather ask, What is the meaning of his way with those key terms or metaphors? What do they signify for Stevens really? I would like to see them turned about in such ways that they might be made to yield up the secrets of the psychology that employed them in so queer a fashion. I would guess that from the beginning they were an idiosyncratic way of expressing that personal, private psychology, and not a means of making statements about places or people or things, about truth or wisdom or god, or even paintings, music and language. One might suggest that all of Stevens notorious mights, woulds, maybes, perhapses, and as ifs are concealing a fundamental No, concealing that No in plain sight, like the purloined letter. That at the close there is a possible Yes. That the reconstruction of the career, of the true history of the poet in his poems, might be an interesting, if not too agreeable task.

It is not merely that the world of the physics of Entropy is to be found immanent

in his poems, but that his response to that world is given in them. But one would like to know just what the hidden structure of that response is really like. This is the interesting secret. Not the how and the what, but the why of him. I suspect that it would be a tale full of sound of fury, signifying not Stevens' beloved inamorata, Nothing—but, perhaps, Something, for us, if not for him.

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The Journal encourages communications from readers, comments on articles and replies to letters. With permission from the writers, such material will be printed under the heading, **Communications**.

William Carlos Williams Newsletter

The WCW *Newsletter* began semiannual publication in the Fall of 1975. Its purpose is the sharing of information about the on-going study of William Carlos Williams' writing. The editors have tried in the first three issues to produce a small, specialized journal which is useful to scholars of modern poetry and interesting to more general readers of Williams' writing. Each of the first three issues included previously unpublished work by Williams, and the Newsletter intends to continue publishing such material as it becomes available.

The Managing Editor welcomes items of biographical and historical interest, note on comparative analysis and influence, explication of individual works or their parts, reports on translations, library collections, broadcasts, primary and critical bibliography, dissertation topics, forthcoming works, announcements of conferences and seminars, readers' queries and answers. At present, review and essays are assigned by the editor, and unsolicited manuscripts cannot be considered. However, the editor invites letters describing proposed articles and suggestions for projects.

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Current Bibliography

Boroff, Marie. **"Wallace Stevens' World of Words, II."** *Modern Philology*, LXXIV (November 1976), 171-193.

WS thoroughly exploited the resources of formal language, particularly the scholarly and hierophantic styles. Within this formal mode he achieves remarkable diversity of figure and effect. His vocabulary ranges from common, to elevated, to rare, transcending established boundaries of language with borrowings and innovative formations. Colloquial elements are almost wholly lacking. Sound-symbolic words (flicker, dazzle, glitter) are an important expressive source. Odd verbal combinations and Latinate words are also important. All these devices combine to speak a language we find in no other poet—a high rhetoric, at once abstract, changing, pleasure-giving, and human.

Cameron, Sharon. **"The Sense Against Calamity: Ideas of a Self in Three Poems by Wallace Stevens."** *ELH*, XLIII (Winter 1976), 584-603.

"The Snow Man," "The World as Meditation" and "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" group themselves together because they tell something about what it means to be separated from one's own experience and therefore diminished. The poems record three steps in the difficult task of self-acknowledgment. Each poem appears more solipsistic than the last, embracing less of the external world—especially the least accessible "Final Soliloquy."

Linebarger J.M. **"Stevens' 'Some Friends from Pascagoula,'"** *The Explicator*, XXXV (Winter 1976), Item 12.

The eagle ("Tell me more of the eagle, Cotton") is a religious image, rather than political, as Burney has suggested. The sovereignty of the bird, the association with it of sun and fish, and its descent into the world, combine to suggest a symbol of God or Christ; Stevens' own later comments on the poem notwithstanding.

McCann, Janet. **"Stevens' 'Somnambulisma.'"** *The Explicator*, XXXV (Winter 1976), Item 6.

The poem describes two worlds: with imagination, and without. The two parts of the major metaphor are the ocean (reality) and the bird (the imagination's product). The bird, resembling the water, except in its impermanence, is created by the scholar (poet) to provide a structure by which others can grasp reality and "awaken."

McCann, Janet. **"Wallace Stevens' 'The Good Man Has No Shape.'"** *Notes on Contemporary Literature*, VI (March 1976), 9-10.

Lazarus has been taken by commentators to be symbolic of death or miracle. But there is a second Biblical Lazarus, the beggar scorned by the rich man, who could not, after death, bring water to sooth the rich man's torment in hell. Since this poem is about participating in the world and denying it, about poverty and richness, this lesser known Lazarus would be the more logical referent.

Marre, K.E. "Narrative Comedy in Wallace Stevens' 'The Comedian as the Letter C.'" *The University of Dayton Review* XII (Summer 1976), 133-150.

The narrator creates the comedy of "The Comedian." Since Crispin never appears in the poem speaking directly, some other intelligence observes and comments, often idiosyncratically, on his actions and thoughts. The tones which he assumes toward Crispin explain, comment on, and evaluate Crispin's quest. The narrative comedy of the poem is essentially the comedy of the narrator's storytelling.

Mollinger, Robert N. "Wallace Stevens' Search for the Central Man." *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, XXI (1976), 66-79.

In his poetry WS seeks the "central man," that man who epitomizes the essential aspects of man, but vacillates between negative and positive attitudes toward him. In the early poetry of *Harmonium* (1923) Stevens fatalistically sees the common man of the mass, best exemplified by the imperfect Crispin in "The Comedian as the Letter C" as the essential man. In his middle poetry, 1937-1942, Stevens, accepting the efficacy of the romantic imagination, believes the hero—an exalted, saviorlike ideal—to be the central man. In his late poetry, from *Transport to Summer* (1947) to *The Rock* (1954), the poet, attempting to reconcile these two antithetical images of man, settles on a realistic view of the central man, the "major man," between his earlier fatalistic and romantic ones. The "major man" becomes for Stevens a humanistic ideal and the final embodiment of the central man. (RNM)

Rother, James. "Wallace Stevens as a Nonsense Poet." *Tennessee Studies in Literature* XXI (1976), 80-90.

A number of WS' poems share with the works of Carroll and Lear a fascination of nonsense not for its own sake, but in order to expose certain disparities between the varieties of fact and those of rational truth. Among these poems are "Bantams in Pine-Woods" (1922) and "Loneliness in Jersey City" (1938), both of which reflect the absurdity of forcing language into expressive molds prescribed by the rigors of science. Longer works like "The Comedian as the Letter C" (1923) best illustrate the extent of this influence of Nonsense, however. Stevens realized very early that Nonsense and the experiments of the French symbolists were similar in their aesthetic assumptions and methodologies, and although he never actually wrote verse describable as "pure" Nonsense, he did perfect a proto-Nonsense idiom which refined Carroll's and Mallarmé's technique of disorienting the reader in many of his expectations regarding language and the ways in which words communicate. (JR)

News and Comments

During the month of January 1977, the Foundry Gallery in Washington, D.C., sponsored an exhibition of works of art entitled "25 Artists in Search of Wallace Stevens". The 25 artists submitted 35 works in various media.

* * *

In September 1977, The Petersburg Press of New York and London will publish "The Blue Guitar", a portfolio of twenty color etchings by David Hockney. In a statement quoted in the *Times Literary Supplement* of January 21, 1977, David Hockney writes: "I read Wallace Stevens' poem and made some drawings last summer on Fire Island. It seemed to express something I felt about my own work at the time. The etchings themselves weren't conceived as literary illustrations of the poem but as an interpretation of its themes in visual terms. Like the poem, they're about the transformations within art as well as the relation between reality and the imagination, so there are pictures within pictures and different styles of representation juxtaposed and reflected and dissolved within the same frame, this 'hoard of destructions' that Picasso talked about . . ." The portfolio will be in an edition of 200, with 30 proofs, and the price is \$6,000.00.

* * *

"Three People Reading Stevens in a Room" is the title of a poem by George Bradley in *The Yale Review*, Vol. LXVI, No. 2, December 1976, p. 268.

Wallace Stevens (\$10.95), by Susan B. Weston, an introduction to the poet and his work, is scheduled for publication in July 1977 by the Columbia University Press. Cornell last year published *The Limits of Imagination: Wordsworth, Yeats and Stevens* (\$10.00), by Helen Reguerio. And on May 9, 1977, the Cornell University Press published Harold Bloom's *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (\$17.50).

* * *

STEVENS BOOK PRICES

At auction: Sotheby Parke Bernet Sale No. 3946, January 26, 1977: *Ideas of Order* (1936) and *The Man With the Blue Guitar* (1937), together, \$175.00. Sotheby Parke Benet Sale No. 3966, March 29, 1977—the Jonathan Goodwin collection: *Harvard Lyrics* (1899), \$250.00; *Harmonium* (1923), first binding, no dust jacket, \$350.00; *Owl's Clover* (Alcestis Press, 1936), Louis Bogan's copy of one of 85 numbered copies on Strathmore, signed by WS, \$1,700.00; *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* (Cummington Press, 1942), one of 80 signed copies on Worthy Hand & Arrows, \$1,100.00; *Three Academic Pieces* (Cummington Press, 1947), one of 92 numbered copies on Beauvais Arches, \$550.00.

In booksellers' catalogs: Black Sun Books, List #10: *Three Academic Pieces* (Cummington Press, 1947), one of 92 numbered copies on Beauvais Arches, \$400.00; John F. Hendsey, Catalog 23: *Three Academic Pieces* (Cummington Press, 1947), one of 102 numbered copies on Worthy Dacian, \$450.00—this copy is backed sheets with headbands, made ready for binding, but not bound or numbered; William Young and Co., Catalog 619: *Three Academic Pieces* (Cummington Press, 1947), copy number III of 92 numbered copies on Beauvais Arches, \$1,500.00—this copy is described by the dealer as "unique" in its "trial binding"; Serendipity Books, Catalog 36: *Selected Poems* (London, Fortune Press, 1952), \$60.00; *Transport to Summer* (1947), in dust jacket, \$90.00; *A Primitive Like an Orb* (1948), orange wrappers, \$45.00.

Dissertation Abstracts

THE HUMAN FIGURES IN WALLACE STEVENS' POETRY

WATSKY, Paul Norman, Ph.D.
State University of New York at Buffalo, 1974

This dissertation describes and analyzes Wallace Stevens' male and female figuration, a ubiquitous imagery strongly coloring the tonal effect of his verse. The dissertation contains three sections, an initial discussion of the necessity for treating Stevens' human figuration systematically, a phenomenological description of the figure patterns, and an interpretation of their significance for the analyst of Stevens' poems. The premise underlying my study is that the figures coherently project the poet's personal symbol dramas. By employing the theoretical framework of Jungian psychology, I will attempt to demonstrate that understanding how Stevens' figures function within their poems lightens the explicator's task.

Chapter One consists of two sections, the first describing the aspects of Stevens' verse to be elucidated, the second surveying criticism related to my theme, and indicating areas in which I am indebted to my predecessors and where I contradict or modify their findings. The next three chapters divide Stevens' human figures into distinct categories: Chapter Two dealing with poems dominated by female figures, Chapter Three with those dominated by males, and Chapter Four with the poems wherein male and female figures interact or are significantly juxtaposed. These chapters treat the figure patterns chronologically and indicate that during the forty years Stevens produced verse for publication he initially invested the female image with great power, love, and respect, then repudiated her in favor of an heroic male, who in turn was eclipsed by a diversification of figures in which the female achieved some renewed importance. The human traits Stevens rejects are incorporated in a parallel figuration polarizing Stevens' positive and negative human images and establishing a tension which can either heighten the poetry's effect or produce discordant ambiguities. Chapter Five explores the functional relationship of Stevens' metaphoric figure patterns to his personality, showing how contradictory pressures in Stevens' life anticipate the dramas his figures enact and proposing that the Jungian model of the psyche, particularly Jung's concept of enantiodromia, the interplay of psychic opposites, is a viable analogue for Stevens' figuration. I am less concerned with finding absolute meanings than with indicating how a transfer of affect from author to reader occurs, affect which appears random unless tested against psychological analogues.

Order No. 75-1529, 213 pages.

DA, v. 35, no.7 (Jan. 1975), 4568-A.

AN ANCHORAGE OF THOUGHT: THE STUDY OF APHORISM IN WALLACE STEVENS' POETRY

COYLE, Beverly Ann, Ph.D.
The University of Nebraska—Lincoln, 1974

Adviser: Melvin E. Lyon

Dictionaries and literary handbooks consistently use as the basis of their definition of aphorism the element of content—variously called the "truth" or "idea" of aphorism or its expression of a "principle," "opinion" or "accepted belief." But to associate Wallace Stevens' aphoristic style with such definitions, is, in the case of some critics, to confuse that style with a propensity toward didacticism and sententiousness. What I propose is a definition of aphorism which shifts the focus of concern away from an emphasis upon content to an emphasis on the linguistic structure of a statement. It is my contention that a reader responds to a statement as an aphorism essentially because its formal and thematic elements (sound and syntactic properties) create in him a sense of closure. Such closure (or centripetal force) *can* be established through the reader's response to the content of the statement—that is through his recognition of or familiarity with what the statement *means*. But his basic and initial response to the statement as an aphorism is to a seeming completeness in the linguistic structure of the statement—a seeming completeness produced by sound and syntax which may or may not include his perception of meaning.

Such a definition provides a means of identifying various kinds of aphoristic expression in all

of Stevens' poetry. Generally, Stevens' aphorisms in poems written between 1914 and 1937 (2The Man with the Blue Guitar) have an authoritative sound or closure which is characteristically undercut by a variety of means—(1) the use of aphorisms in sharp contrapuntal relationships in a series, (2) the use of witty and self-consciously elaborate sound and syntactic structures which produce a riddle-making language in the aphorisms, (3) the use of an ironic or mock-pedantic speaker. The poetry written somewhat later looks forward to eventual poetic structures which temper or balance out this extreme aphoristic style. Stevens' experiments with longer or more extended treatments of an idea play a partial role in his abandonment (for the most part) of aphorisms which employ self-deprecating or ironic techniques and his development of a straightforward definitive type of aphorism characterized by the predicate nominative sentence structure.

What Stevens discovered from experimenting with aphoristic expression throughout his poetic career was that aphorisms have a pleasurable affinity to the fragment-like nature of experience. We experience ideas and even sensations in pieces. Not only are these pieces not all of one kind, they are not even all opposite to one another; they have like and unlike relations, from equality to opposition to all degrees of relations in between. On the one hand, the tendency to experience life as fragments is a *centripetal* tendency closely akin to aphoristic expression, in which one pulls an experience into a self-contained statement for the moment. Yet, for Stevens, such aphoristic expression ultimately gives rise to the tendency to experience life as an interaction of fragments and thus to the discipline of not allowing oneself to get caught up in any one set of like or even unlike fragments. And this tendency is *centrifugal*, generating a sense of the multiplicity and plentitude of experience. In other words, whereas one ordinarily thinks of aphoristic expression as restricting the flow of experience, in Stevens' case it becomes a means of participating in the on-going wholeness of experience. Stevens' primary aim both as aphorist and poet was to present himself as imaginative man reflecting upon his ideas, penetrating through them to expose their tentativeness (and that of all ideas), and yet at the same time affirming the paradoxical whole that can be mediated from such fragments.

Order No. 75-3413, 203 pages.

DA, v. 35, no.8 (Feb. 1975), 5394-A.

WALLACE STEVENS' NOBLE RIDER: THE POETRY FROM 1923 TO 1942.

WESTON, Susan Brown, Ph.D.
Columbia University, 1974

Increasingly different from his earlier verse, Wallace Stevens' poetry of the thirties—*Ideas of Order*, *Owl's Clover*, *The Man with the Blue Guitar*—testifies to profound changes taking place during his more than half-decade of silence following the publication of *Harmonium* (1923). His letters of the thirties, in conjunction with new symbols and subjects in the poems, suggest that Stevens had responded and continued to respond to both inner and outer pressures to change his poetry. A changing psychological landscape and a changing cultural climate contributed to the development of his work.

During this period, from 1923 to 1942, Stevens began to evolve a central symbol which displays both psychological and social dimensions: the figure of the potential poet as hero. Responding to the changing intellectual climate and the political and social changes of the thirties, Stevens created the heroic young poet who represents a collective figure, Stevens' metaphor for poetry as a humanistic activity. This potential poet—called variously the noble rider, the figure of the youth as virile poet, ephebe—is able to confect from his struggle with words the abstract best of humanity: major man, the giant, "rugged roy."

Not only a response to the world of letters in which Stevens increasingly circulated during the late thirties, this symbol, beginning in *Ideas of Order* and complete with *Parts of a World* (1942), tells much about Stevens himself: about his sense of isolation from the world of reality to which he turned during the thirties, his struggle with words to name that reality in imaginative constructs that did not violate it, and his rejection of the "pure poetry" of *Harmonium* for a "masculine" imagination that might cope with a "slimy" reality of man in the mass, man in need of words to help him live.

The emerging heroic figure—the noble rider—makes possible Stevens' solution to these personal, social, and philosophical conflicts. Masculine, capable of creating the future with his words, a speaker of an "immaculate imagery" that does not violate the reality of the object, this noble rider also provides Stevens a vehicle for maintaining his own silence and isolation. This noble rider, then, becomes the heroic articulator of the world that Stevens perceived during the thirties: masculine, raw and solar, rather than feminine, luminous and lunar. He also

becomes the articulator of Stevens' own consciousness of that reality, providing a bridge between the silent masculine perceiver and the silent world of reality.

The creation of the noble rider is integral to the evolution of Stevens' poetry from *Harmonium* to *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction*. An expression of psychological pressures at work on Stevens' symbols and structures, the noble rider also represents Stevens' vast claims for poetry. *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* (1942) is a synthesis of Stevens' experiments, after *Harmonium*, with language and with the relationship between subject and object mediated by the noble rider. The period 1923 to 1942, and the evolution of the noble rider as a central figure, shows both Stevens' modesty and his pride, his inner dimensions and his response to cultural changes. The noble rider is a figure with enough breadth to allow Stevens the flexibility he needed during the thirties, and enough depth to represent the richest cultural energies of the late thirties and early forties.

Order No. 75-5266, 291 pages.

DA, v. 35, no.9 (March 1975), 6167-A.

SITUATIONS OF THE MIND: STUDIES OF CENTER AND PERIPHERY IN DICKINSON, STEVENS, AMMONS AND PLATH

McCLAVE, Heather, Ph.D.
Yale University, 1975

My concerns in this dissertation are largely phenomenological and formalistic as I attempt to determine how certain major American poets—Dickinson, Stevens, Ammons, and Plath—formulate their bearings in reality. For these poets, the metaphors of center and periphery serve as principles of order that describe how they conceive of themselves, the world, and their ontological situations.

In the introduction I sketch a brief history of circle imagery and its development from a sacred and holistic concept to a secular and dualistic one that makes the mind the perceiving center of a fragmented and alien world. The main text concerns how each poet views and expresses this dualism.

Dickinson approaches otherness, which she regards primarily as an Abyss, in terms of a protective Circuit that consolidates the self and an expansive Circumference that threatens to overwhelm it. Stevens creates arbitrary focal centers, or fictions, to organize temporary frames of reference in a changing reality. Yielding to circumstance, Ammons explores the organic exchanges of inner and outer forms and motions with occur on the periphery of being. Plath isolates herself at a fixed center, fundamentally paralyzed by a past that she defines and ritualistically resolves in terms of death.

Order No. 75-27,025, 186 pages.

DA, v. 36, no. 6 (Dec. 1975), 3715-A.

THE METRICS OF WALLACE STEVENS

JUDD, William Edward, Ph.D.
Columbia University, 1972

Since he believed that we now live in a time of broken or discarded systems of religion, philosophy, art, and culture, Wallace Stevens felt the need to write poetry in order to construct for himself various orderly ways of looking at the world. His poems sought to bring together in a temporary, harmonious relationship the realities he faced and the imagination he possessed.

While his liking for philosophy and his gift for metaphor are basic elements in his poetry, verbal play, especially as it is found in rhythm, is also a basic element. Rhythm tends to make poetry more physical than other forms of speech or writing are, and, because of this, it comes from the whole being of the artist and works upon the whole being of the reader or hearer. Rhythm in poetry is one way in which the physical energies of the poet pass into his work, much as the sensuous perceptions of the poet pass into his images.

Stevens, it appears, was a man of great physical energy who expressed his vitality in poetry somewhat the way a dancer expresses himself in the dance. Stevens, who often composed while walking, wrote that the rhythm of walking got into his poems. Stevens was also receptive to rhythms he experienced about him, from the jazz rhythms of the twenties to the rhythm of the sea. He was also attentive to the rhythms of folk dance and song.

Stevens was also a craftsman of great skill. While he is best known for his extraordinarily sophisticated use of words in playful configurations, he also used various metrical strategies in his poems, not only to underline points, but also to enrich the tone and texture of his work. Close attention to his metrics deepens our understanding of his poems and our appreciation of his artistic skill.

Stevens' use of iambic pentameter, especially, shows his skill as an artist. One of the great masters of blank verse in our time, Stevens used this form in a progressively freer way. He starts as a master of a traditional form, but, as he goes on writing in his middle and later years, the form becomes so much a part of his sense of composition that he is able to achieve great variety in it and yet not sacrifice the sense of pattern behind it. In his search for order Stevens found iambic pentameter a useful medium for giving order to his poems, especially the longer ones. This traditional meter is also a way of constantly reminding the reader that he is listening to ceremonious utterance that bases its authority on imagination as well as on perceptions of reality.

So complex does Stevens' iambic pentameter become that, in order to discover tendencies in it, an I. B. M. computer and an I. B. M. card sorter prove valuable tools. A computer program is offered that provides some indication of the relative regularity of blank verse scansions fed in into it. The computer confirms the tendency toward diversity in the history of Stevens' blank verse. The card sorter arranges lines into metrical types, which are then printed out, providing a thesaurus of Stevens' metrical patterns from a large sample of his work. Order No. 759341, 222 pages.

Da, v. 35, no.10 (April 1975), 6717A-6718A.

T. S. ELIOT AND WALLACE STEVENS: A CONCURRENCE OF CAREERS

MEANOR, Patrick Hugh, Ph.D.
Kent State University, 1974

Directors: Bernard Benstock and Robert Bertholf

T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens occupy antithetical offices of the poet. By comparing and contrasting their major poetic works chronologically, this study shall delineate the principal developments and achievements of these two influential poets. Chapter One defines the nature of their antithetical views and the role the "self" plays in their poetry. Because his vision of reality was basically linear and therefore anti-romantic, Eliot's earliest poetry denied the power of the self and the individual imagination a valid place in the world, because the major ordering structures had crumbled and been replaced by a demythologized nature. His early work depicts man desperately seeking for a sense of the self in the chaos of modern reality. After his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, Eliot's poetic office directs itself to the reChristianization of the world. Wallace Stevens, a romantic poet in the tradition of Wordsworth and Emerson, and whose vision of reality was cyclic, responded to the demythologized world with an assertion of the authority and veracity of a central perceiving self. His poetry throughout claims for man's individual imagination the capability of structuring a reality within private fictions which uncover the indigenous order alive in the world.

Chapter Two examines in detail the poets' early major poems to get at the core of their differing world views. While both men took the weary secular world as their early subject, comparisons between "Sunday Morning" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *The Waste Land* and "The Comedian and the Letter C" show that Eliot defined reality as both an interior and exterior wasteland in which man can only explore his fragmentary pain and isolation. Stevens states that reality is a wasteland only when man's imagination relinquishes its mythopoetic genesis.

Chapter Three analyzes the changing nature of the poetry during the Thirties. While Stevens' *Ideas of Order* and Owl's Clover flirt unsuccessfully with the social problems of the depression years, "The Man with the Blue Guitar" responds disapprovingly to Eliot's Christian proselytizing in "Ash Wednesday," *The Rock*, and especially "Burnt Norton." Eliot, by dogmatically positing the Incarnation as the still point, finds redemption from cyclic time. Stevens' *Parts of a World* intensifies his romantic claims for the power of the imagination to create and believe in its fictions which redeem man naturally from his fall into time and consciousness.

Chapter Four contrasts Stevens' cyclic vision in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," "Esthetique du Mal," and "Credences of Summer" to Eliot's linear, dogmatic vision in "East Coker" and "The Dry Salvages." Stevens insists on the necessity of change and the imagination's ability to project, enjoy, and sustain itself within fiction reality. These poems become Stevens' full proclamation of the abundant joy of living in fictive time.

Chapter Five concludes by showing that both poets maintained to the end their antithetical views. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk*, and *The Elder Statesman* all attempt to demonstrate that unredeemed reality is man's punishment for the Fall. Stevens' "The Auroras of Autumn," "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," and "The Rock," enact the process of reality itself, and become his most affirmative statements on the capacities of man's imagination to clarify redemption in the act of self-creation. Eliot concluded his career by defining his poetic station in terms of Christian dogma, while Stevens celebrated to the end man's ability to live joyfully in his fabulous fictions.

Order No. 75-11,991, 253 pages.

DA, v. 35, no.12 (June 1975), 7915-A.

STEVENS' READING IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH AESTHETICS: CHARLES MAURON, THIERRY MAULNIER, ROGER CAILLOIS

GRAVES, Barbara (Ann) Farris, Ph.D.

The University of Oklahoma, 1975

Major Professor: Madison Morrison

This study explores the relation between Wallace Stevens' reading in contemporary French aesthetics and his own poetry and prose from 1935 to his death. The effect of Stevens' reading on his late poetry raises the problem of "influence" in the case of a mature writer; I have suggested "confluence" as an alternative term. Stevens sought in French art and literature an intellectual and cultural milieu in which to nourish his poetry and poetics. The introduction, which contains lists of the French periodicals and books in Stevens' collection as well as names of painters whose work he acquired, establishes the significance of the French tradition in his creative life. The remaining chapters discuss three books of aesthetic theory in the light of Stevens' late work. Each contains a summary of the book in question, a comparison of its theory, and readings of poems apparently stimulated by theories and themes in the aesthetic discussions. I have chosen these three books because we can establish when Stevens read them.

The first chapter discusses Charles Mauron's *Aesthetics and Psychology* (translated by Roger Fry and Katherine John), which Stevens acquired in 1935. Mauron proposes a theory of the aesthetic experience based on the role of contemplation in art. Mauron's theories seem to be reflected in several essays in *The Necessary Angel* and to have stimulated a number of poems, some apparently testing and in effect validating parts of the theory, others apparently reacting against it. Certain late poems demonstrate, however, that Mauron's theories were finally too limited for Stevens' high concept of poetry.

The second chapter explores similar concepts of poetry in Stevens and Thierry Maulnier. Maulnier's *Introduction a la poésie française* (1939) defines poetry as a demiurgic activity, and his belief in the magical "verbe" is much like Stevens' poetry of logos. Both Maulnier and Stevens redefine *la poésie pure* to signify the magical powers of language. In Stevens' poetry we see this concept demonstrated in "Asides on the Oboe," "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," "Description without Place," and many others. Maulnier's discussions also help to illuminate the female figures in Stevens' late poetry and certain "solar" poems.

The third chapter demonstrates similarities between the framing sketches of Roger Caillois' *Les Impostures de la poésie* (1945) and Stevens' late elegiac poetry. Caillois' prose-lyric meditations on themes of man's mortality and the transience of his art are much like themes in Stevens' late work, as well as similar in imagery and tone. Caillois achieves repose at the center of a barren plain, much as Stevens returns to the bare rock. Caillois' stoic acceptance of death and mutability differs, however, from Stevens' affirmation of *poesis*.

Order No. 75-21,803, 184 pages.

DA, v. 36, no. 4 (Oct. 1975), 2196-A.

PAUL VALÉRY AND WALLACE STEVENS: THEIR POETRY AND POETICS

RUBERG, Merle Zena, Ph.D
Princeton University, 1975

This comparison of the poetry and poetics of Paul Valéry and Wallace Stevens defines their relation in terms of the poetic problem which faced them each individually, and compares their attempts to solve that problem. The possible reasons for the similarity between their solutions are explored.

The thesis of this essay is that the problem poetry posed for them was the non-abstract presentation of abstraction. This abstraction is very specific in nature. It is the abstraction which functions as the basis of consciousness. It forms the basis of any products of the imagination including those ascribed to the intellect. The techniques of their poetry directly reflect the epistemological theory on which their poetics is based.

The epistemology from which their poetics derives originated with Kant and evolved through the romantics. For the purposes of this study Kant, Fichte and Schelling represent this tradition. In Chapter I, the concepts of reflection, abstraction, possibility and limitation of consciousness, and the nature of the self are traced through their work. The transition from romantic epistemology to symbolist poetics is established through the poetic theory of Rimbaud.

Chapters II and III discuss, respectively, the poetry of Valéry and Stevens demonstrating how the poetry through its content and organization represents the concepts treated by them theoretically which were discussed in Chapter I. To this end an extensive comparison is made of *La Jeune Parque* and "The Comedian as the Letter C." The poems are discussed in terms of a process of self examination leading to acceptance of a frustrating limitation on human nature. The accommodation is presented in terms of images of equilibrium and fertility which redefine the nature of man as creative process. M. H. Abrams' concept of romantic plot, an epistemological allegory of paradise lost and regained provides a framework for the comparison. The techniques by which they develop concepts through imagery and manipulation of voice are main focuses of the comparison. The similarity between the images used and the similarity of their function within the poems are demonstrated.

A number of short poems are also discussed to illustrate how techniques of metaphor, transformation of images, and images of transition states directly translate epistemological concepts into images. The mental act and the verbal act are one. Poetry is only the purest case.

Order No. 75-23,236, 188 pages.

DA, v. 36, no. 4 (Oct. 1975), 2191-A.

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J. M. Edelstein is Chief Librarian at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

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