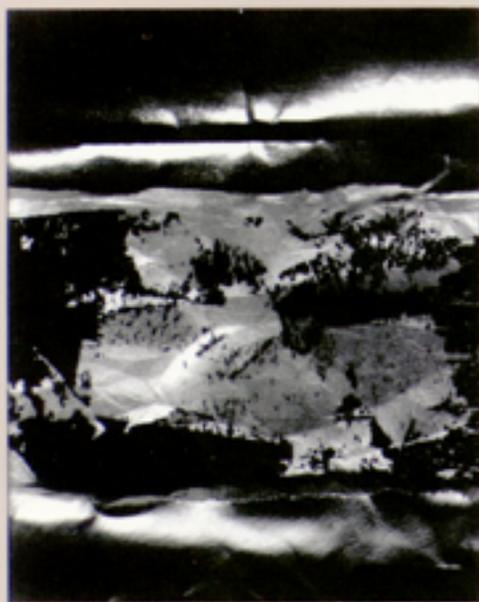


The Wallace Stevens Journal



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Volume 14 Number 2

Fall 1990

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I

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3:30-4:45 p.m. Addams, Hyatt Regency

Stevens and Structures of Sound, I

Presiding: Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, University of Notre Dame

1. "Pre-Verbal Strategies and 'Lapses' in Stevens's Poetry," Margaret McKenzie Dickie, University of Georgia
2. "Stevens's Armchair Travel: The Sound of the Foreign," Alison Rieke, University of Cincinnati
3. "Stevens's Meters: Simulating a Tradition," Dennis Taylor, Boston College

Respondent: Eleanor Cook, University of Toronto

II

Saturday, 29 December 1990
9:00-10:15 a.m. Addams, Hyatt Regency

Stevens and Structures of Sound, II

Presiding: Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, University of Notre Dame

1. "A Poet's Odyssey from Shakespearean Sonnets to Stevens's Not-So-Blank Verse," Diane Wakoski, Michigan State University
2. "The Secrets of Fictive Music," Anne Luyat-Moore, Faculté des Lettres, Avignon, France
3. "Images of Sound in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens," Anca Rosu, Rutgers University

Respondent: Eleanor Cook, University of Toronto

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Stevens' Home Front

ALAN FILREIS

After all, we keep warm at home. . . . However, it may be worse because no one knows whether or not there will be oil enough even to take care of the ration tickets.

—Stevens to Arthur Powell, mid-December 1942

He is just as practical in the realm of pragmatism as he is idealistic in the realms of the imagination.

—Powell, after quoting Stevens' statement above, to Hi Simons¹

[W]e can not and will not deny our soldiers the finest equipment in order to cater to the whims of those who don't seem to realize that their country is at war.

—Robert P. Patterson, Under-Secretary of War, deploring citizens' complaints about new nationwide gas and oil rationing, December 1, 1942²

[T]he supplying of oil to our armed forces and those of our Allies is no less than a prerequisite to survival. . . . [T]he successful carrying out of this task is one . . . which calls for . . . continuing sacrifice, affecting directly or indirectly in some way every man, woman and child.

—Harold Ickes, upon being named head of the new Petroleum Administration for War, December 3, 1942³

It is here, in this bad, that we reach

The last purity of the knowledge of good.

—Stevens, in "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters" (1943)

I

IN MARCH OF 1944, STEVENS SPOKE with a young captain on furlough. This same man, Fernand Auberjonois, recently recalled for me that it was an "occasion when we spoke at some length about the war."⁴ The Swiss-born Auberjonois, dear friend of Stevens' dear friend Henry Church and regular contributor to Church's beloved *Mesures*, had immigrated to the U.S. in 1933. He volunteered for service in the American army almost immediately after Pearl Harbor, having already established the NBC Radio French-language pro-

gram which he proudly transmitted to listeners in occupied France. His specialty became propaganda and intelligence (later he worked at the Voice of America).

Stevens knew Captain Auberjonois well by the time they dined together in 1944; Auberjonois was often a dinner guest at the Churches' Cleveland Lane home in Princeton, and the young man had joined the Churches and Stevens there and in New York on several occasions.⁵ He had attended the Churches' party for Stevens after the presentation of "The Noble Rider" at Princeton in 1941. Stevens was initially intrigued because Fernand was the son of the Swiss painter Rene Auberjonois. Stevens never failed, upon meeting people who knew intimately the lives of painters, to ask specific questions about work habits, personal oddities; finally, he came to recognize Rene Auberjonois as "a theorist grown abstract with age," a "figure" that "absorbs me."⁶ As for Fernand, he soon became absorbing, too: "He seems to be fresh and clean and right," one of the few acquaintances of whom Stevens would say, with no apparent equivocality, "I look forward to seeing more of [him]" (L 582). When Stevens met up with the Churches, he invariably asked about the young man.

He particularly followed Auberjonois' overseas service, curious also about the adjustments of the family the captain had left behind in Princeton. He knew, for instance, that when the water heater broke down at the Auberjonois residence, the Churches took what was for them an extraordinary measure: Fernand's wife Laura and their two children moved into the Cleveland Lane house.⁷ Throughout the war, Fernand's APO letters home were being shown to the Churches, who in this way were trying desperately to keep up with the progress of the Free French,⁸ "and I know," Auberjonois has written, "they were being shown to Stevens who, apparently, always asked about us when he came to see Barbara and Harry."⁹ The Churches also closely followed the work of the young French Section Chief of NBC's international branch—"very interested in this contact with the French, and they were hoping I could be heard by friends of theirs in Ville d'Avray."¹⁰ Auberjonois' outfit produced a pamphlet, *France Speaks to America: Letters from a Frenchwoman to the International Division of the National Broadcasting Company* (the letters were in fact addressed to Auberjonois personally). These fervent notes, postcards from a volcano, described the "collective self-examination" undertaken by a conquered people that "reawakened in each Frenchman a feeling of being French" and an equally strong hope that Auberjonois would convey to Americans "how UNITED you and we are." They expressed sentiments that should be understood, Auberjonois urged NBC's American listeners, "with your heart as well as your mind." The power of such appeals is hard to measure, but those who have attempted are certain it was great indeed.¹¹ Of these forceful pleas from France, Auberjonois has recalled for me: "I know the Churches were deeply moved and showed them to W.S."¹²

In early 1944, then, when Stevens and the captain met again, the poet naturally wanted to talk about the war. The captain had been engaged by the OSS as an intelligence officer attached to the unit that was more or less secretly

Stevens' Home Front

planning the invasion of the European mainland. Of course the very fact of an invasion, long an imminence, was hardly a secret to any discerning American like Stevens who heard the usual rumors of war. To be sure, as the young captain remembers, he "could not have said much about what was going to happen in June 1944. Not in detail."¹³ Yet it is certainly significant that in Stevens' "Repetitions of a Young Captain," a poem published that spring before the Normandy landings of early June,¹⁴ the soldier-speaker should modify Stevens' concept of the "major man" expressly in relation to a maneuver involving "millions" of men in a time of war. To Stevens the thought of these millions was, indeed, "An image that leaves nothing much behind." A man in such a situation, one of millions of men "In a calculated chaos," stands tall only insofar as he is part of the immense human whole:

Millions of major men against their like
Make more than thunder's rural rumbling. They make
The giants that each one of them becomes

In a calculated chaos: he that takes form
From the others, being larger than he was,
Accoutred in a little of the strength

That sweats the sun up on its morning way
To giant red, sweats up a giant sense
To the make-matter, matter-nothing mind,

Until this matter-makes in years of war.
This being in a reality beyond
The finikin spectres in the memory,

This elevation, in which he seems to be tall . . .
(CP 306-07)

That an American poet would anticipate a major episode of a major war—especially in generalized images like those the "Young Captain" presents—is hardly a meaningful event in itself. But that Stevens would is meaningful, if only because it shows his sensitivity to the not unreasonable contemporary claim that even after Pearl Harbor, for example in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" (written in the spring of 1942), his poems bore no marks of passion about the war. Typical is Harvey Breit's view, in a *favorable* notice of "Notes": "This last volume of Stevens' poems is nearly an anachronism. Its wholeness, its lucidity, its exactingness, its sanity, make you marvel that it managed its construction inside the wartime temper and that it somehow found living space between the abortive and the truncated."¹⁵ Yet the mostly unexamined facts of Stevens' realization of the American sense of the war's second phase, December 7, 1941, through 1944—his understanding of the vicissitudes of the home front, but also his knowledge of various military campaigns and even his perception of the danger of life under Nazi occupation—believe such an

assessment of Stevens' writing in this particular period, even when, as with Breit's view, that very judgment is intended to commend the poems.

What is especially important about the meeting with the furloughed Young Captain is that it allowed an experienced soldier-poet, a captain who had already survived landings in North Africa and Sicily, to demonstrate that he recognized Stevens' attentiveness to the war. Auberjonois, who has written a memoir of his ordeal as a soldier-writer, was well aware that the language used to describe the reality of war is but a version of the reality described; he knew that such description can make no absolute claim to bear witness to life *in extremis* without building in the qualification that words and war are not ever wholly one, no matter how strategically important the role of rhetoric. Stevens' poem anticipates the belated, perhaps faltering recitation of a soldier whose part in a major experience was itself minor but whose noncombatant listeners depended on the accuracy of the retelling. The poem deftly reproduces the difficulties of the secondary account; these strong images, these "Millions of major men," are, indeed, only and exactly "Repetitions" of the real; but, as such, as Emil Fackenheim has suggested, they are no less—and sometimes more—essential to understanding.¹⁶ No poem of war replicates the war; yet, qualified as it will inevitably be by the intricacies of memory and the screen of language, the war poem might beneficially attend to the difficulties of testimony, sustaining a basic indirectness that was already, as it happens, characteristic of Stevens' rhetoric. The captain-speaker is aware of these psycho-linguistic obstructions: a ruined building he recalls "*had been* real. It was *something* overseas / That I remembered, *something* that I remembered / Overseas" (CP 306; emphasis added). It was *something*, significantly, that while existing then in the unreal—the "new reality" of poetic disclosure—had once "stood" unambiguously "in an external world." The third section of the poem recites the story of the millions of men; in the preceding canto, the captain falls into appropriate awe of the difficulty of retaining an event so primary. In this recession or secondariness, the remembered event is *figuratively* a thing: "*Like something I remembered overseas.*" Again, then, the trauma of recollection affixes itself to the trauma of event. Not *overseas*—the clear pointing syntax of "Over There"—but *It was something overseas that I remembered*. The war poem as war poem absorbs eventfulness into the paradox of accounting for *what happened*, the urge to render as a latter-day rage for order, in relation to the reality of an occasion now forever lost. If the language describing events and reactions wielded by "The War Poets," as they were ubiquitously called, created a new telling absolutely, making the real original or fresh or "poetic" and thus a bit unreal-seeming in the very effort to retain the real—and, in the strict sense, *inarticulate* or (in Stevens' words) "desperate with a know-and-know"—then the meaning of the event may elude the nonwitness, and the experimental witness-poet may be accused of anachronism or irresponsible obscurity (as indeed many were).¹⁷ If the language used to describe events is, on the other hand, utterly imitable and straightforward in its effort to bear witness with precision, then the teller might not have made realization demanding enough

to allow for the pathos of memory and intensified subjectivity as the event dissipates—in the case of the June 1944 landings, appropriately so, as the image of individuality would fade especially into the total image of the millions involved. Confronted with the acute materiality of life *in extremis*, testimony and literature made a hard but necessary alliance. Expectations raised by the fidelity to life's experience in testimony were transferred to literature, as expectations raised by the fidelity to poetic language in literature were transferred to testimony. Stevens knew how the subgeneric convergence might work. The Young Captain's Repetitions, his relation of the millions of men in section III, is followed, shrewdly, by a qualification that marks the boundaries of this paradox. The speaker-poet joins the eyewitness to history (the Young Captain) and in one voice they powerfully anticipate the objection that will be raised up against their version of the witness to war—namely that “these were only words,” not, as it were, the real thing.¹⁸ As the detractors' anticipated doubt is strong, so the protest by the soldier and the war poet together is urgent:

If these were only words that I am speaking
Indifferent sounds and not the heraldic-ho
Of the clear sovereign that is reality,

Of the clearest reality that is sovereign,
How should I repeat them, keep repeating them,
As if they were desperate with a know-and-know,

Central responses to a central fear . . . ?

(CP 307-08; emphasis added)

Re-designating the nationalist war-poem subgenre by defying normal expectations created by it, Stevens' poem about war firmly stands as a “central response” to war's eventfulness. In this view, a war poem assimilating the difficulty of writing war poems is certainly itself a war poem, for a “central fear,” a home-front fear, “sweats up a giant sense” of war *especially* in the otherwise isolationist “matter-nothing mind” (CP 307). What matters, ironically, is the “matter-nothing mind.” The fear reasonably feared by the mind that “matters” is that no poem allowing an event of war to be related sufficiently conveys the horror of the “external world” as witnessed, especially as the captain himself only retains it as a vague but vast feeling, a distant visitation—“something overseas.” Yet Stevens and the Young Captain, combining forces, can together forestall the fate of retelling: their words are “only words” because they carry the realization of the subject-position and never do claim to be the reality reported. But how else may such a reality be conveyed to those whose sense of “overseas” is much vaguer still than “something”? So the soldier's emotional departure is reported. His inevitable return to the front after furlough is exactly enough of a war-poetry cliché to remind with its sentimentality that there is an “external world” to which the poet (this noncombatant poet, Stevens) does not follow, a place not tenable except in words of description without place and reiteration without stop. “Constantly, / At the railway station, a sol-

dier steps away, / . . . And goes to an external world, *having / Nothing of place*" (CP 308; emphasis added). Yet a very strong image, such as the millions of men in section III, remains. Even the Captain, when coming finally home, must prepare to "nourish" himself "On a few words of what is real in the world" (CP 308).

II

One of the facts of war Stevens learned from the young captain on that day in March of 1944 was simply that the soldier's life was not unremittingly dangerous. There were periods of boredom. Auberjonois described for Stevens military life in North Africa in 1943. "Outside of the operational upheavals," he later wrote, "the life of an occupying army is monotonous."¹⁹ "Repetitions of a Young Captain," accordingly, signals a final revision of the earlier heroic conception of the "major man," a version that characterized the pre-Pearl Harbor war poems (and several poems written during or very soon after December 1941, such as "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War," published in April 1942). In its earlier forms the "major man" stressed the mythic, the unreal and the fabulous, as in the frequently quoted "Asides on the Oboe" of 1940, where the hero is "The impossible possible philosophers' man, / . . . The central man, the human globe, . . . the man of glass, / Who in a million diamonds sums us up" (CP 250). The figure of the major man tends toward the irrational and the anti-historical, serving as it did a Nietzschean model urged, and somewhat screened, by Church;²⁰ in Milton Bates's accurate characterization of "Examination of the Hero," the champion "arises spontaneously and unaccountably."²¹ But by 1944, Stevens' representative man has been refigured; accountability is all. He is more overtly American and discernibly democratic. He is only, from war experience, "larger than he was" (he only "seems to be tall") because he "takes form / From the others" (CP 307; emphasis added). A democratic version of the major man, in other words, suggests that by 1944 and even earlier, as I will show, Stevens saw that the pure poet's valorous figure, the harlequinized "MacCullough" of "Notes," for instance—of whose role as wartime hero we are right to be skeptical, as Marjorie Perloff is²²—must finally be adjusted to the repetitions of the young captain who was actually there. Later, when José Rodríguez Feo asked Stevens to define the "major man" for him, Stevens wrote "Paisant Chronicle" as his answer on one day and then a few days later wrote again to say: "I came across the words *major men* in REPETITIONS OF A YOUNG CAPTAIN. In that poem the words major men merely mean the pick of young men"—recalling, I think correctly, that the use of the concept in early 1944 had meant to identify American fighting men sent in powerful but powerfully dehumanizing waves, the oxymoronic *special* force of *regulars*, the real democrats of D-Day (L 489).

The poet was keen also to know about the Young Captain's "monotonous" life in North Africa. "Stevens was interested," Auberjonois has recalled, "in my having met French writers and poets in Algiers and in the fact that I had written, while there, for the literary magazine *Fontaine* which had taken over as a vehicle for free expression from the collaborationist *NRF* [*Nouvelle Revue Fran-*

çaise] in Paris."²³ What was perhaps astonishing and delightful to Stevens—that “Surely one had a great need to write, and to read” while serving in war,²⁴ and that one could manage to do both—was a commonplace to his young captain. Furloughed from the front in Tunisia, Auberjonois would hasten back to Algiers “to check *Fontaine* in order to find out who in France or in exile had written what and under what pseudonym.”²⁵ Even the scene near the desert front was a “tolerable purgatory”²⁶ of anisette, jazzmen and fried food. But Algiers was a very special literary haven, where *Fontaine*, co-founded by Henry Church’s old friend Jean Wahl, acted as “a rallying point” for French, English and American writers, men and women, “both mobilized and civilian, who tried to write while on leave.”²⁷ The most strikingly clear image of the Young Captain’s story about Algiers was the regular meeting-place itself. This was the balcony of number 43 Rue Lys du Pac, which served as a kind of “loge of a theatre” (a figure Auberjonois liked to repeat), where the *Fontaine* writers “gathered in the evenings *not* to speak of circumstances or events” of war, and, raising glasses of red wine, “disengaged themselves from the *gangue*.”²⁸ Yet this psychologically protected cultural space also offered a direct view of actuality: perched above the Algiers harbor, the *Fontaine* group had found, as Auberjonois remembers it, a “perfect place to watch the German (or Italian) bombers zooming over the hill and dropping bombs on or near the ships down below. *It was, to us, a spectacle.*”²⁹ This striking image enabled Stevens to imagine for the Young Captain of his poem a special, excusable obliviousness to the war associated not with the noncombatant poet but with the soldier-speaker himself. Part of the *something* this intrepid “pick” of a person remembers overseas is indeed that “The people sat in the theatre, in the ruin, / *As if nothing had happened*” (CP 306; emphasis added). The theatre of combat, a “ruin” of war literally and of culture figuratively, in the otherwise inexplicable opening image of the poem, exists to help the enlisted imagination withstand the violence of war from without—Stevens’ “tempest cracked on the theatre” (CP 306) matches Auberjonois’ descriptions of the “paroxysm” of the air attacks seen from the balcony in Algiers³⁰—while a desperately literate culture is sustained. This sustenance symbolizes, in Stevens’ words, a *something* that “stood still in an external world,” the resilience if not inviolability of poetic thought and culture—an otherwise surprisingly confident notion of the survival of European, specifically French, culture in the unhappy months of 1943 and early 1944. It must have fascinated Stevens to hear from Auberjonois that when disembarking in Morocco the first thing the soldiers in his group did was to search “in vain for a cultural elite” there.³¹ The preservation of poetry in a time of the terrible North African campaign did not contradict the purposes of *Fontaine*, which were, reconcilably, to disengage the French writer from the loss of normal freedoms and the crushing defeat of his or her country and yet at the same time to offer an inducement for viewing wartime writing as liberating it.

It is even possible that for one rare moment Stevens conceived of his own writing as a liberating force in a small yet practical way. Auberjonois con-

firmed what Stevens, from Henry Church through Jean Wahl and Jean Paulhan, already knew about *Fontaine*: in Algiers, Auberjonois and others prepared a special number of the review in miniature format, delivered it to the Free French in London, where it was printed on rice paper and then dropped by parachute into France. "I never met anyone who saw it fall . . . but an RAF pilot risked his skin to let go several thousands," Auberjonois has explained; yet he has also warned, I think appropriately, "Do not disdain these symbolic gestures."³² Such small literary victories might have been "symbolic" to Stevens with a special intensity, for he was informed, at about that time, that Jean Wahl was at work translating portions of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," which the exiled French writers wanted to use in *Fontaine*.³³ Such evidence requires us to imagine Stevens imagining an RAF pilot risking his skin to drop his notes on the supreme fiction into occupied France; nor, surely, can we help but imagine Stevens imagining his verse undergoing selection by the literary *Résistance* as a "contribution about freedom," translated into French, printed in tiny type on lightweight paper and launched into Nazi territory.³⁴ Not qualitatively different, I would urge, is the idea generally of the soldier at rest, reclining on a balcony with a glass of wine, shoring up aestheticism against a time of universal pain, but continuing to feel that pain, as one that gave Stevens the boldness he would need to begin his ambitious aesthetics of pain, his "Esthétique du Mal," another poem of 1944, with this provocative wartime image: a person leisurely reads "paragraphs / On the sublime," contemplating "pain on the very point of pain" while lying, apparently out of harm's way, on a balcony at night. It is only from this unusual station in the general environs of pain, in relative comfort but still general discomfort, that the troubled writer-figure on the balcony is able to use this elaborately constructed poem to "communicate / The intelligence of his despair" (CP 313-14). From this disturbing point, in the second canto of a fifteen-canto poem, the figure of the poet is emboldened to restrain, within the same work, the opposing tendencies of, on one hand, a canto describing this special hell in studied, traditional stanzas—modified *terza rima* in homage, certainly, to Dante ("His firm stanzas hang like hives in hell")—and, on the other hand, the famous seventh canto, "How red the rose that is the soldier's wound," a war-poem set piece. What both Stevens and Auberjonois meant by the image of the balcony (Auberjonois in being there but later making productive use of its symbolism; Stevens in borrowing it for the troubled but contemplative speaker) was to indicate that in wartime the soldier-writer had the unusual opportunity "to look over the whole thing and to think about it as part of it." These words Stevens wrote, incidentally, to a young poet, Samuel French Morse—then an army sergeant (L 450; emphasis added).

Of course if Fernand Auberjonois had been the only soldier Stevens knew personally during World War II, we might as easily ascribe the Young Captain's anxieties about the rhetoric of retelling to Stevens' obliviousness as to a new nationalist acuteness. But, as with most nonmobilized Americans during a war in which an astonishing 17% percent of their fellow citizens were in uni-

form at once,³⁵ Stevens was hearing other accounts as well. The war experience of Sergeant Sam Morse was of special curiosity, as the Cummington Press, Stevens' publisher for two of his three wartime books (*Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* and *Esthétique du Mal*),³⁶ was the source of this information. Morse, Katherine Frazier wrote Stevens from Cummington, was serving in the army, adjusting to the soldier's life; he even seemed, she wrote, to be writing poems about the war.³⁷ Stevens agreed to write the introduction to Morse's first book; and given Frazier's hint that Morse was becoming a war poet, Stevens might have been surprised to find not a single reference to the war in the typescript of poems Cummington sent on. It was reasonable, of course, to read between the few lines of dedication—to the soldier's mother—and imagine a young man, at the dedicatory last moment, promising a return from service: "spare, inadequate / And sometimes grim, the poems stand. / Take them for what they are, *and wait*."³⁸ Wartime dedication or no, Stevens wrote the introduction gladly, doing his bit for a young poet cut off from his poetic milieu, New England. The New England matrix was incessantly there: "he tries to get at New England experience," Stevens wrote, "at New England past and present, at New England foxes and snow and thunderheads" (OP 244). But so was the thrill, though largely suppressed, that *Sergeant* Morse of the U. S. Army Air Corps would provide Stevens, at New England's home front, a new perception of life-and-death matters, of old things told definitively anew. "[A]s people live and die, each one perceiving life and death for himself, and mostly by and in himself, there develops a curiosity about the perceptions of others. This is what makes it possible to go on saying new things about old things." This was exaggerated praise of the poems themselves, as Morse much later admitted to me.³⁹ What purpose did it serve, then? Surely it was Stevens' subtle way of saying to the young poet-soldier that he would be pleased to have the view: "The fact is that the saying of new things in new ways is grateful to us" (OP 243). Frazier sent Stevens' introduction to Morse where he was temporarily stationed—in Florida—and soon she quoted back to Stevens Morse's elated response. Not only does Stevens do "beautifully what an introduction ought to do"; it was also truly a foreword, Morse felt, in that it gave the poet now working under difficult conditions "'a clue for future work'" and helped "'a possible audience discover what is there.'" Stevens aided Morse's readers, Morse realized, by giving them the "'wise and profound implication that poetry is more important than the work of a single poet,'" by helping in the general effort to view "poetry" at this moment—not poems but the whole project of American poetry—as just the sort of imaginative collectivity the nation was urging for all endeavors.⁴⁰ Stevens' unremarkable comments show the extent to which he too would engage wartime clichés when he felt they would serve to comfort. "The lot of a soldier," he told Morse, "is one of the great experiences, and I hope that you are happy to be having it" (L 450).⁴¹ How far Stevens had come from the skepticism of a late-1939 letter to Hi Simons in which he described soldiers waiting under the Maginot Line: before Pearl Harbor, in his isolationist phase, he had been seeking to demystify justi-

fications of nationalism, deeming wartime politics to be little more than a means of entitling individual soldiers to die willingly *pro patria* (see L 345-46). There is no trace of that doubt here.

Other soldiers gave him a picture of their particular wars. From his sister's daughter, Jane, who married a certain recently drafted Hayward Stone, he received long letters about the soldier's imminent departure for service overseas; his niece wrote him straightforwardly about the intensity of the couple's last days together.⁴² His views of the experiences of Private Stone, and that of his own nephew, John Bergen Stevens, Jr., were significantly a woman's views—views of and from the home front. His direct correspondence with John was itself gratifying, of course, especially when they discussed their common genealogy; John was pleased to be descended from the Dutch and not from the Germans, for obvious reasons. Actually, however, John's letters were notable for what they did *not* say about a soldier's attitude toward wartime politics. "As to the state of the world at present—the less said about it the better. I think we all understand what we want," John wrote in a letter mostly taken up with family genealogy—the past rather than the present.⁴³ The aversion to discussing war matters is at least partly explained by restrictions placed on what a serviceman could write about battles and troop movements; and indeed most of John's letters to his uncle bear the signs and seals—and intrusions—of military censors. In another letter John brought himself to the brink of saying exactly why he was delighted to know for certain that the Stevenses and Barcalows had come from Holland rather than England; that is, while he might have said explicitly why he disliked the idea of being English, and Alliance-sensitive censors be damned, for his father's brother Wallace he need not say more than that he was "pleased to know that [the family line] is definitely Dutch, although *I trust you will not ask me just why.*"⁴⁴ From zones of war—this letter was mailed from the Pacific—certain national biases were better left undefined. Not surprisingly, but crucially—and typically—Stevens knew a good deal more about the impact of war on his nephew from the young man's wife back at home, Anna May, whose second child, Laurie, was born on May 8, 1942, after John had gone off to war. It was not only a long while before John saw his child—in June 1944 he still had not seen her⁴⁵—but at least a month before he even knew that he and Anna May had had a daughter.⁴⁶ Alone and raising two children, Anna May confessed freely to her husband's uncle Wallace that she had no one to talk to. She was grateful to him for sending her phonograph records, which, she told him, she played over and over.⁴⁷ Her words for him were home-front words: "I've been alone so long and have had so much thrust upon me that I firmly believe in taking things as they come"; she described how to her judgment in John's two years of war "he has grown up."⁴⁸ Anna May's continued support of the war must have impressed Stevens with a sense at least of the rhetorical indomitability of the American home front, for despite having had "so much thrust upon her," she held the national line: "We all wish for the termination of this wastefulness, but we are all determined to stick it out."⁴⁹ John Bergen Stevens, Jr., served as an infantry

officer for four years; three of those years were spent in combat duty in the Pacific.

III

At some point before midsummer 1943 Wallace Stevens chose to make a pact with national reality. What will account for the difference between the Stevens of April 1941 who spoke of poetry as "resisting or evading the pressure of reality" (NA 30) and the Stevens of August 1943 who announced that poetry must make an "agreement with reality" (NA 59)? The cause of such a basic change of position is the Americanization of the world war, even if December 7, 1941, does not precisely date the shift. But no doubt in any case the change came soon after, for the fact of the nation's involvement in the world war, though so long imagined, was an overwhelming one for many Americans. Pearl Harbor might have attained a retroactive symbolism for Stevens particularly, as a little while later his daughter, Holly, used the transformations wrought by the Japanese raid as the basis for explaining to her distressed father her reasons for quitting Vassar College and going to work in the Hartford insurance world, a move that disappointed him perhaps more than any other single personal event in his adult life. But college, as Holly Stevens has later described it, gave her "no purpose after Pearl Harbor and the entrance of the United States into World War II" (L 397). To borrow for Holly her father's now suddenly outmoded, pre-Pearl Harbor conception of the imagination: college was an evasion of the pressure of reality. Whatever the specific cause for Stevens' new accord with actuality, and whatever its precise date, certainly the state of that world, in a crisis now involving many of the people around him, was the general cause. No surprise, then, to hear him saying things he had not said since the last of such agreements, made just after the advent of the Popular Front in 1935—statements urging that "one has to live and think in the actual world, and no other will do" (L 292) and that one must be concerned with "how to write of the normal in a normal way" (L 287). By July 19, 1942, that is, he could return to such a rhetoric of engagement: "The contemporary poet," he wrote Hi Simons, "is simply a contemporary man who writes poetry. He looks like anyone else, acts like anyone else, wears the same kind of clothes, and certainly is not an incompetent" (L 414).

Like other "competent," "contemporary" Americans, then, Stevens was forced to face the problems of the home front—oil rationing, drastic changes in the workplace, the enormous dislocations of soldiers coming and going, and shiftings in the American language adapting itself hastily and clumsily to the war. Not uncharacteristically, he met this last change with a measure of irony. In late February 1942 he described for Barbara Church how the frost had covered bits of debris strewn on the lawns of his neighborhood "in the early mornings." But here he stopped short to correct himself, already vexed by the pervasiveness of war usage: "perhaps I ought to say in the early war mornings" (L 404). This cynicism notwithstanding, he too formed for himself metonymically evasive, shorthand references to the war that became a part of daily life—in one, for instance, the war was "all the hubbub."⁵⁰ And while it

might have been typical of Stevens to doubt the need for such an all-out propaganda campaign to sell U.S. involvement overseas to the American people as was being mounted by the Office of War Information—with help from big literary names like Archibald MacLeish and Malcolm Cowley in its Writers' Division and in less important offices young poets such as John Pauker and Frederic Prokosch (both of whom were reading Stevens stave by stave and would later write about him)⁵¹—at the same time he might not have been aware of the extent to which he himself accepted the position being enterprisingly promoted. After all, the qualities he liked in Fernand Auberjonois—cleanness and rightness—were the very ones that led this literate, naturalized American to the OWI himself, a fact Stevens learned from Church.⁵² But more, the soldier canto supplementing “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction” in May 1942 is marked by the distinct impressions of the new, positive American rhetoric—perhaps, as some argue, to the detriment of the whole poem. The measurable “change in the atmosphere” Stevens felt (when the Cummington Press *Notes* was receiving little attention)⁵³ also explains Stevens' special use of the now-ubiquitous word “victory” in 1943 (*NA* 53) in his announcement of the agreement with reality; his audience on that occasion, not incidentally, was dominated by refugees (*NA* 39-67).

Stevens did, after all, continue to work every day in a workplace that was rapidly and radically changing. Talk of the war was ever-present, especially, one easily imagines, among the younger, draft-aged employees at The Hartford who were preparing themselves for enlistment. The company's magazine, *The Hartford Agent*, made much of employees' contribution to the war effort, regularly printing lists of men and women from The Hartford who had entered the service; it ran large photographs of enlistees as they left the home office, smiling and waving, and cited the military feats of those who dropped in at Asylum Avenue to say hello while on furlough.⁵⁴ The *Hartford* also spoke proudly of stateside employees' “moral and patriotic duty” to preserve the trade of field agents who had left for the service.⁵⁵ Perhaps the greatest sign of change brought on by the war at The Hartford, and certainly the most visible, was what the *Agent* referred to as “women in the agencies.” Holly Stevens' reason for moving from Vassar to war-work is affirmed by general studies such as Francis Walton's *Miracle of World War II*: after December 7, 1941, “Women instantaneously asked, ‘What can we do?’”⁵⁶ The oft-noted influx of women into the American workplace during the war was of singular importance to the insurance industry, where so many of the jobs vacated by men were clerical, jobs in service as opposed to manufacturing—a path already well worn by twentieth-century working women. The *Agent* chose to highlight this phenomenon as part of the company's nationalism, to stress, along with Susan B. Anthony (the younger) and others, “Women's Winning Role in the Nation's Drama.”⁵⁷ “They”—The Hartford's confident women—were displayed in group photos covering two pages. The *Agent* carried a new regular feature entitled, perhaps unnervingly to some traditionalists among the company officers,⁵⁸ “THEY'RE RUNNING THE AGENCIES NOW.”⁵⁹ Most of the men at Stevens' rank were too old

to be serving in the armed forces, of course, and the company's particular choice of slogan suggesting that women were *running* the insurance business was not an accurate description at the home office even as it might have been out in "the field," into which Stevens himself ventured less frequently than earlier; so, too, there is no telling what side of the question Stevens was choosing when he jotted in one of his notebooks of adages, "Women & Nationalism," save that the issue was on his mind.⁶⁰

Holly Stevens' experience as a confident young woman wanting war-work, starting at the bottom, as a clerk with the nearby Aetna (see *L* 432), would have made a plain fact of the war at home even plainer to her father, even in these months when she and he were not regularly interacting: if the war would alter the insurance world permanently, such change was containable at the lower ranks where most of the women worked and remained.⁶¹ This and other⁶² dramatic changes in personnel might not have substantially altered Stevens' manner of thinking about the war's effect on his work, but the modifications in insurance policies and in the way the industry radically changed its view of its relation to the national government would certainly have made its mark. To be sure, he worked for a while on a committee overseeing Harry Williams' management of all war operations, which included secret arrangements with the Manhattan Project. Williams told Peter Brazeau that Stevens "handled the responsibility perfunctorily." Williams also recalls, however, that Stevens asked "intelligent questions when he did get interested in a particular project," and if his memory of hurried weekend meetings at 118 Westerly Terrace—Williams would have spent Monday through Friday in Washington working with defense and regulatory officials—is generally that Stevens was "kind of useless,"⁶³ this impression may be due less to the poet's inattentiveness than to the discomfort he felt discussing insurance business on a day always reserved for "spasms" of gardening, catching up on journals, eating two-inch-thick slices of liverwurst delivered from Milwaukee,⁶⁴ "dozing outdoors"⁶⁵ and, occasionally, new verse. It is perhaps more helpful to remember that the company's home-front projects extended well beyond insuring the development and manufacture of weapons, and that as colleague John Lukens recalled for Richard Rogers, director of the PBS *Voices and Visions* documentary, Stevens "saw every contract bond claim, which was the most important type of claim and case that came into the company. Almost—he insisted that almost everything go across his desk."⁶⁶ We can be sure that Stevens knew well that his industry must rapidly shed its traditional resistance to government involvement, for the transformation far outdid any reform enacted by the New Deal:

Direct Federal Government Expenditures as Percent of GNP⁶⁷

1938	9.1%
1940	9.2%
1942	22.0%
1944	47.3%

If American conservatism did not give up certain aspects of its anti-government rhetoric, it might have to relinquish its entire sense of what was good for business—for now nationalism was good for business. In Hartford there were a large number of defense-related industries, for example Billings & Spencer, Pratt & Whitney Tool, Colt, and preeminently United Aircraft. The Army and Navy Munitions Board placed Stevens' city on the list of fourteen "most vital strategic industrial areas in the country." Stevens' Hartford changed forever, with no fewer than 18,000 new residents, mostly working and "pink"-collar class, moving to Hartford in just one war year.⁶⁸ Plants manufacturing war materials rapidly increased in insurable values; some factories now assessed at \$100 million had been not a fraction as valuable only months earlier, even though little may have changed in the visible, physical plant. The war yielded huge new areas of business for the insurance companies. The Hartford considered its main contribution to the national effort to be insuring such companies as the Diamond Hill Machine Shop of Cos Cob, Connecticut, which converted to war production after being assured by The Hartford of its capacity for covering the astonishing rise in value; and when Undersecretary of the Navy James Forrestal awarded the small company the Army-Navy E award, The Hartford shared the credit, and rightly.⁶⁹ Stevens' own work with surety bonds was altered by these increased values, at least quantitatively; qualitative changes came as new federal procedures governed war-damage insurance.⁷⁰ The same respected Surety Department that had managed the famous "construction miracles"—the contract bonds written for the construction of the Hoover Dam and the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge had been undertakings of The Hartford—now turned its attention to the so-called "Texas Towers" that would be anchored in the Atlantic to serve as outposts for detecting incoming enemy attacks. Indeed, The Hartford's greatest if least obvious contribution to the war effort might have been in the work of the departments handling surety and fidelity bonds. Surety bonds helped engineers and government planners organize and protect otherwise hurried bidding and contracting procedures. War work was also to be done, though perhaps less excitingly (and with less fanfare), in the fidelity department, where "blanket bonds" sheltered government-sponsored projects against loss through employee dishonesty. Stevens—who held uniquely creative views on, for instance, the "morbid[ity] of an embezzler . . . [who] keeps a memorandum" on his corporate theft⁷¹—was involved in these "certificate[s] of good character" just at the moment when home-front propagandists seized the idea (to the delight of employers) that employee theft was treasonous (see fig. 1).⁷²

Shifts in the rhetoric with which the company viewed itself and the insurance industry were hardly restricted to the surety and fidelity business, of course. Whereas in the lean years of the thirties the emphasis had always been placed on success that follows individual, competitive work,⁷³ now cooperation, teamwork and "unity" were the ideals. Corporate rhetoric was inverted: "it was their *collective* and not their *individual* effort," a company historian later wrote, "that contributed most importantly to the nation's war effort and to

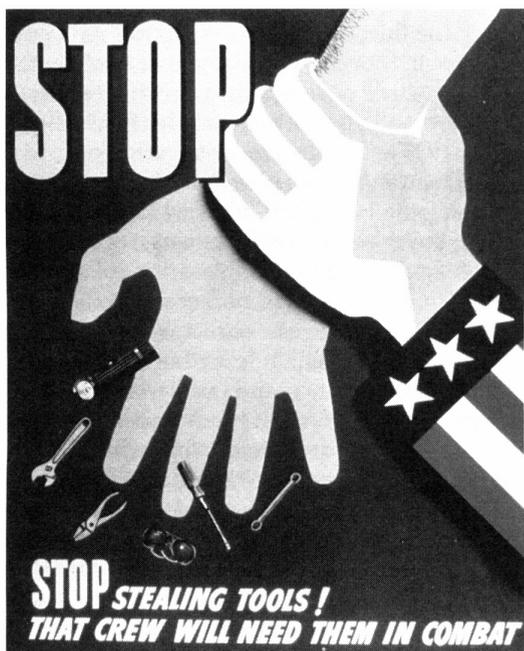


Fig. 1. "Stop," artist unknown, 1944 (U.S. National Archives).



Fig. 2. Norman Rockwell, "Let's Give Him Enough and On Time," 1942 (U.S. National Archives).

victory.⁷⁴ And having opposed in the thirties most government involvement in the insurance business, executives in Stevens' company now freely entered into agreements administered by wartime oversight boards; this conversion doubtless amused Stevens, who had stood virtually alone in his field when endorsing the Social Security Act of 1935 as conducive, not detrimental, to the continued good fortune of private insurance as an idea and a business.⁷⁵ Now here were many of the same men who had despised the New Deal's principle of government intercession, still otherwise stalwart business conservatives, sitting down at the conference table with Roosevelt's emissaries, collaborating on the creation of a War Damage Corporation, a government shield that would have caused many of these men to see red a few years earlier. Yet lucrative new terms and regulations were established under which "war damage" to insured defense industries, doing work previously not covered under standard policies, would now be amply secured—to the benefit of the American insurance establishment. This is not, then, to suggest that the industry suffered in wartime while individuals' belts were being tightened—rather, that propaganda directed within the company, designed to encourage salespeople to sell more and larger policies (ever The Hartford's goal, war or not), could defer to rhetoric of the new nationalism—unity and individual sacrifice. There was a double game at home, and The Hartford played it: "WAR FURNISHES DOZENS OF ARGUMENTS FOR PRODUCTS LIABILITY INSURANCE" is one unusually honest profit-minded headline in *The Hartford Agent*.⁷⁶ More typical is the article in the same issue of the *Agent* describing how Hartford employees would have to be watchful of "wartime sales methods." This approach and others served to bind the traditional goal of increased sales to the rhetoric of national propaganda aimed at all American home-front employees, such as the famous Norman Rockwell poster depicting a frontline soldier, machine-gun earnestly aimed, and bearing the caption: "Let's Give Him Enough and On Time" (see fig. 2). "Wartime conditions have challenged the agency's ability to maintain [the pre-war] standard, for it is determined not to fall into that dangerous frame of mind which uses war as an excuse for slipshod methods."⁷⁷ The requirement for insurance coverage under the new compacts with the government was hardly inessential or unreal. So, too, the company's campaign to cope with shortages of the most basic supplies, such as paper, might have seemed to short-term, war-minded employees only incidentally a means to save money, even as that obviously undisturbed corporate goal was clothed in allegiant rhetoric; oldtimers and other skeptics would remember that top-down requests to cut back on the use of office supplies were issued no less energetically in peacetime. Yet what the *Agent* fervently kept calling the "Paper Situation" forced the company to request that even its officers, though business was great and getting greater, use 25% less paper than the year before, to write and type on half-sheets whenever possible.⁷⁸ We know that Stevens, who wrote several thousand personal letters at the office (most dictated and then typewritten by Hartford employees on company time), adapted to the "Situation"; it is a small but telling irony, indeed, that one of the surviving let-

ters he sent to the strident anti-nationalist Allen Tate, explaining his own skeptical attitude toward poetry "doing its bit," was typewritten and carbon-copied on half-sheets provided by The Hartford for the emergency.⁷⁹

Paper presented the mildest of home-front problems. That shortage, if it affected Stevens to any degree—and even while it was characterized sardonically by one critic, when she surveyed all the unremarkable war poetry, as "a publisher's best friend"⁸⁰—did not bring the war home nearly as forcefully as the rationing of heating oil and restrictions on travel. Whereas the paper shortages might make it a little less convenient, or at least more expensive, for extremely prolific writers, novelists and journalists and more importantly, their publishers, neither Stevens, nor Knopf, nor even Cummington running on shoestrings, lacked the actual material for poetry during four of Stevens' most productive years. But the very real prospects in the winter of 1942-43 of a sizable home without heating oil, and a life without travel, forced him to accommodate to the realities of the home front his old conception of imaginative "impoverishment" (or "poverty," in the word he more often used). The result of this new thinking, a poem called "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters," gives direct expression to a war-induced ordeal that seems to have frightened Stevens: the heating oil that had been delivered to 118 Westerly Terrace on January 21, 1943 (100 gallons), and which would have to last for another month, would not in fact last, he calculated, even another week.⁸¹ There are other expressions of discomfort in Stevens' letters; such statements perhaps do support arguments that he was insulated from the greater suffering around him. But this truly was an exceptional moment for him, his fear both real and, I think, powerfully representative; in the frightful winter of 1942-43 Wallace Stevens would be no less cold than many. The federal Deputy Oil Administrator went so far as to predict that "some New Englanders might freeze to death this winter" and others agreed, putting the supply of heating oil ahead of gasoline on the rationing priority list.⁸² The cold was so unrelenting that some curbs on use of fuel oil were eased.⁸³ Stevens wrote Philip May in Florida, wondering how he would "go through the very coldest period of the year" with no heat.⁸⁴ But home-front rhetoric about heating oil, leading to thoughts of escaping on Florida vacations, combined with still more uncompromising rhetoric against inessential travel. Posters around Hartford, as in other American cities, asked, "Is Your Trip Necessary?"—a question Stevens would pose and answer affirmatively in his new poem, indicating the extent to which he was willing to modify his old thesis about the imagination, the poverty or "Snow Man" thesis, for the home front. That he did so at just this moment, when home-front propaganda implied that "non-essential" travel could lead to American deaths, suggests a perhaps surprising nationalist response.⁸⁵ The episode did not begin with such feelings, however, as he planned, with May, a return to sunny Florida, where he had not traveled since 1940, partly because the Navy had requisitioned his favorite resort, the Casa Marina in Key West. As Stevens considered renting in Winter Park, Sarasota, and Phil May's own Neptune Beach, he was not able to bring his rather strong powers of persua-

sion to bear on the harried West Hartford oil deliverer, who was operating strictly under the new rules of rationing. Eventually, Stevens was able to prevail upon this person, but, significantly, he never made the return to Florida; nor, of course, was he in any real danger of freezing, though the language of his letters to May, when the southern escape still had a strong hold on his mind, is dramatic. Yet the weather's special *new* relation to the news—the record cold and the extraordinarily drawn-out war—suggested to him the bleak verse of “No Possum, No Sop, No Taters,” a poem in which the old trees, standing under the cold sun in a frozen field, are subtly and ominously likened to horribly wounded, captive men, trying to cry out the story of their own version of wintriness:

Bad is final in this light.

In this bleak air the broken stalks
Have arms without hands. They have trunks

Without legs or, for that, without heads.
They have heads in which a captive cry

Is merely the moving of a tongue.

(CP 293-94)

The poem is a brilliant wartime rewriting of “Farewell to Florida,” that important transitional poem, as critics have suggested,⁸⁶ drawing the line between the period of fecund *Harmonium*-like poems and the bleak poems of the early thirties. But this “Farewell” is without even a last look at the warmth of the South—so far is it from the harsh realities of the moment. The title, borrowed from a phrase he used in a 1940 letter to the same Phil May,⁸⁷ gives us the only hint that there is a place where human life survives, though even there the attributes of the fecund life are a peasant's regional fare; even a recovery of the fertile, Floridian imagination would mean a tightening of the belt, a reduction in the standard of life—a new cultural motive for the acceptance of barrenness, bleakness, and (relative) poverty: possum, taters and sop (a meal as itself a sop against even less). Even that much is negated by the situation recorded in the poem: *no* possum, *no* sop, *no* taters. Borrowing from the negative rhetoric of “The Snow Man,” this crisis poem restores reality to that abstraction—for the first time a “poverty” poem can make the abstract claim of nothingness and yet respond in doing so to a physical and social reality, to things as they are. For things as they are, at this moment, were never more real as they were *not*. This was the distinct reality of the home front—doing somewhat without. The poem about doing without, marked by notions of ration and restriction, begins by telling us what is not, what is no longer (the imagination, like the horrible limbllessness it depicts, has reached an end). Yet suddenly—and this is typical of Stevens' American “agreement with reality” in the war's second or Americanized phase—out of the “savagest hollow of winter-sound” comes a poetry of imagined national redemption, a contemporary moral sustenance

that is discovered only by standing at a distance from what was once considered fertile. The speaker here decides resolutely to join a watchful crow "for company," gaining perspective on the cold situation and on his initial negative response to it. In *not* "evading the pressure of reality," now more than ever a "cold" and "hard" ground for a concept of the real, in *not* going to Florida, symbolically and biographically the source of the escape inscribed into the early career as poet, Stevens has chosen to remain with the horrible legless, handless figures standing out in the cold. By this point, the approach to reality—saying *no* to *there* is an acceptance of *here*, the hardness of the home front and the cold realities of national restrictions—becomes an aesthetic decision for the poetry spoken in moral terms:

It is here, in this bad, that we reach
The last purity of the knowledge of good.

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Notes

1Powell's letter to Simons quotes at length from a recent letter Stevens had written to Powell (December 15, 1942 [Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Hi Simons Papers]).

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2Quoted in "Rationing of Gas Goes into Effect on National Scale," *New York Times*, December 1, 1942, 15.

3Quoted in "President Widens Control by Ickes over Oil Industry," *New York Times*, December 3, 1942, 30.

4Letter from Fernand Auberjonois to Alan Filreis, March 16, 1988.

5"I met him often. I think I was there at a number of lunches that Barbara [Church] gave [in New York], but I also met him when he came to Princeton" (interview with Fernand Auberjonois conducted by Alan Filreis, December 22, 1987, Los Angeles).

6*Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 582; subsequently cited as *L* in the text. *Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954) will be cited as *CP*; *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Milton J. Bates (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989) as *OP*; and *The Necessary Angel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951) as *NA*.

7The Churches' willingness to help must have impressed Stevens, if only because in reporting the house full of guests Church was certain to add that he did not particularly like children. "Two babies and 2 girls from a former marriage and two women in the house," Church explained. "I always feel one should try a way of getting rid of them, perhaps drowning them as you do cats" (letter to Stevens, March 5, 1943 [Henry E. Huntington Library, Stevens Papers, WAS 3410]).

Stevens could sympathize: like Stevens, Church "didn't like disorder in his life," Auberjonois notes (interview).

8 "I was probably the only contact between the war and them. And I could write through APO. From Paris others could only have sent things through people coming over to the States" (interview).

9 Letter to Alan Filreis, March 16, 1988.

10 Interview.

11 *France Speaks to America* ([New York]: National Broadcasting Company, [1941]), 23, 11, [3]. Two contemporary studies of the power of wartime radio are Miles Henslow, *The Miracle of Radio: The Story of Radio's Decisive Contribution to Victory* (London: Evans, 1946); and Charles Rolo, *Radio Goes to War* (New York: Putnam, 1942), especially the chapter "The Story of International Broadcasting," 34-49; see also Richard Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?—The American Home Front, 1941-1945* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 224-27.

12 Letter to Alan Filreis, August 18, 1988.

13 Letter to Alan Filreis, March 16, 1988.

14 In *Quarterly Review of Literature* 1, 3 (Spring 1944): 155-58.

15 Breit, "Sanity That Is Magic," *Poetry* 62, 1 (April 1943): 48.

16 Fackenheim, once interned at Sachsenhausen, has argued that eyewitness accounts of wartime events may actually be less precise than *post facto* retellings (see, for instance, his "Sachsenhausen 1938: Groundwork for Auschwitz," *Midstream* 3 [April 1975]: 27-31).

17 For more on the singular way in which Stevens eluded this charge, see Part 7 of Chapter 2 of my *Wallace Stevens and the Actual World*.

18 This concept of testimony is informed by Barbara Foley's vigorous rejection of the by-now settled thesis that in documentary fiction "history is ultimately unknowable, that stable general meanings do not inhere in particular instances." Especially helpful to my conception of the formal pressures brought to bear on Stevens' poem as it retains the Young Captain to close the gap between experience and imagination, war and home front, testimony and literature, is Foley's modification of Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi's idea that in testimony "assumptions about mimesis and historicity have accordingly been altered in order to compensate for this dislocation of the link between writer and reader." Ezrahi has argued, in *By Words Alone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), that "no analogous relationship [exists] between the world described in the text and the world inhabited by the reader" (Foley's paraphrase). Foley's contentious reply: "But to acknowledge the difficulty of conveying a horrific experience . . . is not the same thing as to declare that reality itself has become 'fictual'" ("Fact, Fiction, Fascism: Testimony and Mimesis in Holocaust Narratives," *Comparative Literature* 34, 4 [Fall 1982]: 331, 332). Testimony emerging from survivors of World War II atrocities has elsewhere been used shrewdly to define broader areas of wartime witnessing, including American novels and poetry written by combatants; in all such eyewitness accounts the necessity of describing the indescribable not only disrupts traditional generic expectations but often requires the sort of collaboration between witness and nonwitness that I argue is itself the subject of Stevens' poem. For a helpfully skeptical view of the problem of world-interdependency in Stevens' political verse (or, rather, his poetic "views of the political"), see Melita Schaum, "Lyric Resistance: Views of the Political in the Poetics of Wallace Stevens and H.D.," *Wallace Stevens Journal* 13, 2 (Fall 1989), esp. 191-95.

19 "[E]n dehors des sursauts opérationnels, la vie d'une armée en campagne est monotone" (Fernand Auberjonois, "Écrivains-soldats à Alger," *Journal de Genève*, February 27, 1987, 2).

20 The case for this influence has been clinched by Milton J. Bates, *Wallace Stevens: A Mythology of Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 202-03, 247-65). David Bromwich has taken the Stevens-Nietzsche connection even further, in "Stevens and the Idea of the Hero," *Raritan* 7, 1 (Summer 1987): 1-27.

21 Bates, *A Mythology of Self*, 241.

22 Marjorie Perloff, "Revolving in Crystal: The Supreme Fiction and the Impasse of Modernist Lyric," in *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism*, ed. Albert Gelpi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), esp. 53-60.

23 Letter to Alan Filreis, March 16, 1988.

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24“Certes, on avait grand besoin d'écrire et de lire pendant ces années-là” (“Ecrivains-soldats à Alger,” 2).

25“Mais à chaque retour à Alger on avait hâte de retrouver *Fontaine* et d'apprendre qui, en France ou en exil, avait écrit quoi, et sous quel pseudonyme” (“Ecrivains-soldats à Alger,” 2).

26“... un tolérable purgatoire” (“Ecrivains-soldats à Alger,” 2).

27“*Fontaine* était le point de ralliement des Français, Anglais et Américains mobilisés ou en civil qui essayaient d'écrire durant les permissions” (“Ecrivains-soldats à Alger,” 2).

28“... ce faisant, de se dégager de la gangue qu'est la vie militaire, même en temps de guerre” (“Ecrivains-soldats à Alger,” 2).

29Letter to Alan Filreis, August 18, 1988; emphasis added. The figure is repeated in “Ecrivains-soldats à Alger”: “The balcony of the review *Fontaine*, 43 rue Lys du Pac, was a loge of a theatre. One stood there to midnight in the black-out, glass of red wine in hand, to attend the bombardment of the port by the planes of the *Luftwaffe*.” (“Le balcon de la revue *Fontaine*, 43, rue Lys du Pac, était une loge de théâtre. On s'y tenait vers minuit dans le *black-out*, verre de gros rouge en main, pour assister au bombardement du port par les appareils de la *Luftwaffe*.”)

30“Pendant les raids, au paroxysme des fusées” (“Ecrivains-soldats à Alger,” 2).

31“[N]ous avions cherché en vain une élite culturelle” (“Ecrivains-soldats à Alger,” 2).

32“Je n'ai jamais rencontré personne qui l'ait vu tomber des cieux ou ramassé, mais un pilote de la RAF (Royal Air Force) avait risqué sa peau pour en lâcher quelques dizaines de milliers. Ne dédaignons pas les gestes symboliques” (“Ecrivains-soldats à Alger,” 2).

33Letter from Church to Stevens, October 28, 1942 (Huntington, WAS 3405).

34In my interview with him, Auberjonois described this special issue of *Fontaine* in detail (the entries were generally “contributions about freedom”).

35In 1945, 12,133,455 Americans were uniformed personnel. As a percentage of the population, the figure of 16.93% is the highest in the nation's history. Morris Janowitz, *The Last Half-Century: Societal Change and Politics in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 187; for the percentage given, Janowitz uses a “Military Participation Ratio” and defines it in his table 6.2.

36Alfred Knopf published *Parts of a World*. The long poems, “Notes” and “Esthétique du Mal,” would not be collected in a trade edition until Knopf's *Transport to Summer* of 1947.

37Letter from Katherine Frazier to Stevens, March 28, 1943 (Huntington, WAS 664). In asking Stevens to write for Morse, Frazier conveyed to Stevens her strong feeling that those associated with the press who were *not* drafted would still be performing “intangible services” there; she was referring to Harry Duncan, her eventual successor, who had been temporarily deferred.

38Emphasis added. One reviewer of the book seems to imply this, citing the young poet explicitly as “Sergeant” Morse when quoting the maternal dedication (Sidney Cox, “Against Sickness of the Mortal Will,” *The Kenyon Review* 6, 2 [Spring 1944]: 293).

39Interview with Samuel French Morse, January 7, 1983, Milton, Massachusetts.

40Quoted from a letter to Katherine Frazier in a letter from Harry Duncan to Stevens, March 14, 1943 (Huntington, WAS 555).

41Stevens' disposition did not merely serve to gather up his own optimism about the war; he evidently sensed that Morse, who had been drafted on February 12, 1943—Stevens' letter was written on May 27—was “a reluctant member of the armed forces” (letter from Jane Morse to Alan Filreis, November 9, 1989).

42“[W]e are looking at the situation with as much common sense as possible,” Jane wrote her uncle at one point. “I want to be with him until the last possible moment, as once he goes, it will be a long time till we're together” (letter from Jane MacFarland to Stevens, May 23, 1943 [Huntington, WAS 2715]).

43Letter from John B. Stevens, Jr., to Stevens, January 19, 1943 (Huntington, WAS 2295).

44Letter from John B. Stevens, Jr., to Wallace Stevens, February 24, 1944 (Huntington, WAS 2296). This letter had been opened by the military censor.

45Letter from Anna May Stevens to Wallace Stevens, June 7, 1944 (Huntington, WAS 2304).

46On May 26, 1942, Anna May wrote this to Stevens from Oley, Pennsylvania (Huntington, WAS 2302). John had left the country before a telegram, announcing Laurie's birth, could reach him.

47Letter from Anna May Stevens to Wallace Stevens, March 3, 1943 (WAS 2303).

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48Letter of June 7, 1944 (Huntington, WAS 2304).

49Letter of June 7, 1944 (Huntington, WAS 2304).

50Typical of Stevens' own use of such euphemisms, this phrase was used in a letter to Nicholas Moore, an Englishman; Stevens had met Moore's mother, who was living in the U.S. in "prolonged exile" from Europe: he was glad "to know," he wrote, "that, at the bottom of *all the hubbub*, you are still alive and well" (letter from Stevens to Moore, September 15, 1943 [Huntington, WAS 1225]). "Everyone is so deeply involved in *what is going on*," Stevens wrote to Kerker Quinn, without any other mention of the war, "that your answer to that question is something to be watched and studied"; the "question" was, How would a literary review respond to "what is going on"? (letter from Stevens to Kerker Quinn, October 2, 1940 [Urbana-Champaign, Accent Papers]). Not surprisingly, the letters to Stevens after Pearl Harbor are full of similar usage: his niece, Jane, speaking of John Stevens' service in the Pacific, wrote Stevens of a time when "this *thing*" will be over (letter of October 24, 1943 [Huntington, WAS 2724]) (emphasis added throughout).

51Pauker, "A Discussion of 'Sea Surface Full of Clouds,'" *Furioso* 5, 4 (Fall 1950): 36-46; Frederic Prokosch in *Voices* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), 51-55. For material on wartime propaganda here and elsewhere, I have relied on general information in A. H. Feller, "OWI on the Home Front," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1943): 55-65; and Sydney Weinberg, "What to Tell America: The Writers' Quarrel in the Office of War Information," *Journal of American History* 55, 1 (June 1968): 73-89.

52At about the time Stevens saw Auberjonois on furlough, Church mentioned in a letter that he had telephoned Auberjonois at the OWI (letter to Stevens of March 10, 1944 [Huntington, WAS 3435]).

53Letter from Stevens to Philip May, January 22, 1943 (Houghton Library, Harvard University, May Papers, bMS Am 1543).

54*Hartford Agent* 36, 1-2 (Midsummer 1943): 12-13, 15.

55"We Pledge Ourselves . . . to Preserve Intact," *Hartford Agent* 34, 1-2 (Midsummer 1942): 16.

56Francis Walton, *Miracle of World War II: How American Industry Made Victory Possible* (New York: MacMillan, 1956), 373.

57See Susan B. Anthony II, *Out of the Kitchen and into the War: Women's Winning Role in the Nation's Drama* (New York: Stephen Daye, 1943).

58Francis Walton has offered evidence that corporate managers were indeed unnerved (*Miracle of World War II*, 372-77).

59See, for instance, *Hartford Agent* 35, 3 (September 1943): 31. That officers at The Hartford followed the trend noted by Francis Walton, and were disturbed by this influx of women, is purely speculation on my part. However, it is indisputably the case that a general alarm was sounded when the results of a study conducted by the Women's Bureau of the federal Department of Labor revealed that 75% of the women working had no intention of giving up their jobs; the response to this is described by Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987), 16-17.

60One of Stevens' "From Pieces of Paper" jottings, quoted in George S. Lensing, *Wallace Stevens: A Poet's Growth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 177.

61For a general description of this invisible barrier, see Richard Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1972), 146-50. To learn how the invisible barrier fell locally, I have worked with several detailed accounts of women's war-work in Hartford's insurance companies, transcripts of interviews conducted by the Center for Oral History, University of Connecticut: Esther Tracey, who began with the Aetna in 1942 (interview no. 126) and Teresa West, who found at the Travelers that women "had to fight sexist prejudices for higher job classifications" (no. 131).

62A general description of changes in the character of wartime personnel at The Hartford is provided by Hawthorne Daniel, *The Hartford of Hartford: An Insurance Company's Part in a Century and a Half of American History* (New York: Random House, 1960), 252, 255-56.

63Peter Brazeau, *Parts of a World: Wallace Stevens Remembered* (New York: Random House, 1983), 61.

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64"Of course," he noted of the liverwurst, "I only eat things of this sort on Sundays" (letter to Wilson Taylor, October 16, 1950 [Huntington, WAS 3933]).

65Letter from Stevens to Ronald Lane Latimer, May 10, 1937 (Chicago, Latimer Papers). This letter also refers to the "spasm of planting"; that was the "work" indeed that led to spending "most of the next day [a Sunday] dozing."

66I am grateful to Linda Gutierrez for providing a transcription of this interview.

67Reproduced from a table arranged by Arthur A. Stein, *The Nation at War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 57. Stein explains the comparison to the New Deal (58). He also notes that neither the Korean War nor the Vietnam War saw any such sharp increase in government purchases for private goods and services: the figure of 47.3% offers dramatic contrast to the figure of 20% for 1952 and 19% for 1969.

68Glenn Weaver, *Hartford: An Illustrated History of Connecticut's Capital* (Woodland Hills, California: Connecticut Historical Society, 1982), 126. For a discussion of the general demographic shift, see Stein, *The Nation at War*, 63-64.

69*Hartford Agent* 35, 1-2 (Midsummer 1943): 5.

70An exceedingly readable account of the function and impact of the War Damage Corporation is offered by Jesse H. Jones (with Edward Angly) in *Fifty Billion Dollars: My Thirteen Years with the R[econstruction] F[inance] C[orporation]* (New York: MacMillan, 1951), 451-55. War damage insurance, bolstering the services of 83 casualty insurance companies (as well as 546 insurers against fire), was suggested by Jones after Pearl Harbor because, "To our knowledge, insurance companies were not prepared to write this character of coverage" (451).

71Stevens, "Surety and Fidelity Claims," *OP* 238.

72A clear description of The Hartford's surety and fidelity business is offered by Daniel, *The Hartford of Hartford*, 267-68. Brazeau provides a background to Stevens' work with surety and fidelity bonds in Brazeau, *Wallace Stevens Remembered*, 4-6, 12, 18. The Blanket Bond, also known inside the business as "dishonesty insurance," is described by George E. Foster, *Hartford Agent* 25, 5 (November 1933): 67. Prior to World War II this provision, which was designed exclusively to protect the employer, was defined as a "moral" argument against even petty forms of worker pilfering (be sure to cover "the Moral side of the risk" was the particular slogan recommended in an article on the subject). During World War II nationalism supplanted moralism in the insurers' pitch for selling this form of protection. For the "Moral side" slogan, see J. Schmidt, Jr., on "Loss Prevention Service," *Hartford Agent* 25, 6 (December 1933): 84. Stevens' little essay, "Surety and Fidelity Claims," in the *Eastern Underwriter*, briefly discusses variations on the investigation of insured dishonesty (*OP* 237-39). On the subject of employers' delight over crisis rhetoric: this suggestion is a controversial one, and certainly not provable at The Hartford; British insurers were more openly giddy about wartime coverage boons, going so far as to suggest that an advantage might be won from employers' dread of social unrest stirred by nationalism: "After the outbreak of war," two British insurance experts wrote between the world wars, "events which are subjects of common knowledge caused the insured public to modify its attitude. . . . The popular demonstrations which followed the sinking of the *Lusitania* and general indications of labour unrest caused apprehension to owners of property and suggested protection by insurance against damage to property arising from such disturbances" (Sydney Preston and Alexander Ernest Sich, *War & Insurance* [London: Humphrey Milford; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927], 59; emphasis added).

73Typical is a November 1937 *Agent* piece written at the height of anti-New Deal sentiment within the company. Celebrating the successful management of a surety bond worth many millions, one supervisor wrote: "It's refreshing, [in] these paternalistic days, to find people doing things for themselves" (Walter R. Whitford, "A '\$220,000,000 Surety Bond,'" *Hartford Agent* 29, 6 [November 1937]: 103).

74Hawthorne Daniel, *The Hartford of Hartford*, 236. The propaganda war waged against wartime individualism, because it went against the grain of cultural messages that had always before encouraged the association of patriotism and financial success with self-reliance, was a particularly forceful common feature of corporate life. The "WHEN YOU RIDE ALONE YOU RIDE WITH HITLER" posters, for instance, urged a well-dressed white-collar worker to join a "car-sharing club" (Weimer

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Pursell, 1942, reproduced in Anthony Rhodes, *Propaganda, the Art of Persuasion: World War II* [New York: Chelsea House, 1976], 175.)

75For Stevens' support of social security, see his essay "Insurance and Social Change," *OP* 233-37. Evidence of other businessmen's opposition is plentiful: see B. M. Selekmán, "The Social Security Act," *Harvard Business Review* 15, 2 (Winter 1937): 174-188, see 184 especially; and "Industry Out to Wage War on New Deal / Business Leaders Ratify Creed Built about Assertion American System Has Not Failed," *Hartford Courant*, December 6, 1935, 4.

76E. W. Robinson, *Hartford Agent* 35, 1-2 (Midsummer 1943): 23.

77Alex B. Young, "Wartime Sales Methods in an Agency Which Has an Eye to the Future," *Hartford Agent* 35, 1-2 (Midsummer 1943): 10.

78"Paper Situation," *Hartford Agent* 35, 8 (February 1944): 153.

79Letter dated December 4, 1944. The original is at Princeton, in the Tate Papers; the carbon, retained in Stevens' office files, is at the Huntington.

80Vivienne Koch, "Poetry in World War II," *Briarcliff Quarterly* 2, 6 (July 1945): 65.

81Letter from Stevens to Philip May, January 22, 1943 (Houghton, May Papers, bMS Am 1543).

82For the deputy's statement and the comparison of needs for heating oil and travel, see "90-Day Driving Ban Proposed in East," *New York Times*, December 6, 1942, 31.

83*New York Times*, December 22, 1942, 1.

84Letter from Stevens to Philip May, January 22, 1943 (Houghton, May Papers, bMS Am 1543).

85Good measures of the intensity of this aspect of home-front propaganda are films released at this time, suggesting the implications of travel-as-usual: one, *Is Your Trip Necessary?* (1943), asked citizens to restrict travel to make transportation (and oil) easily available to the military. For more on the "shock" felt by "many naive Americans who formerly thought of essential imports in terms of Havana cigars," see Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse in Twentieth Century Reaction* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1957), 322-24.

86Two among many are Joan Richardson, *Wallace Stevens: The Later Years, 1923-1955* (New York: William Morrow, 1988), 109-112; and Harold Bloom, *The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 110-11.

87Letter from Stevens to Philip May, January 31, 1940 (Houghton, May Papers, bMS Am 1543). "How happy you all seem to be down there [in Jacksonville]; how you go on living in a land of milk and honey, or, to be more exact, possum, sop and taters." See Brazeau, *Wallace Stevens Remembered*, 109.

Doughty's Vesuvius in 'Esthétique du Mal'

ALISON RIEKE

IN NAPLES WITH ITS RESTLESS VOLCANO, which Goethe in his *Italian Journey* called a "peak of hell . . . rearing itself in the midst of a Paradise,"¹ Wallace Stevens found an ideal site for a poem about pain, evil, and psychic disease, a poem seeking an "Esthétique du Mal."² Vesuvius had erupted on 20 March 1944 with unusual violence, shortly after the Allies had captured Naples. During the eruption's explosive phase Pompeii had been reburied under nearly a foot of ash. As Eleanor Cook writes, "The place and time seem made to order for a war poem about an aesthetics of pain."³ Moreover, the locale seems ideal for a poem peopled with a multitude of ghosts. Its presences—Dante, Goethe, Nietzsche, Blake, among many others—are concealed in enigmatic word play and echo, and through them "Esthétique" vibrates with resonances, in spite of its dependence upon a specific historical coincidence of catastrophes, one human the other natural, for scene and situation. The restless ghosts of innumerable famous visitors who witnessed the eruption of Vesuvius speak from within the poem. In this literary exhumation, "the violets' exhumo" (XI/322), Stevens unearths the buried history of Naples, ancient and modern, classical and Christian, from the perspective of a traveling poet or artist who must, like his predecessors, find within himself an aesthetic response to the looming volcano.

Critics who explore "Esthétique" inevitably wrestle with its problematic compound ghost.⁴ That the poem is a gathering of "dark italics" (XV/326), submerged quotations of evil, with the Italian (or "italic") soil as a site of convergence, has been fairly obvious to its readers. Yet much remains mysterious, and perhaps that is part of the point: this is a poem of "engluted sounds" (X/321), "nebulous brilliancies" (V/317), "Warblings . . . / Too dark, too far" (II/314). The complicating features of "Esthétique"—its intentionally enigmatic word play and its overt allusions folded into more submerged voices—are part of Stevens' theme and method. Critics have rightfully continued to acknowledge them in an ongoing account of its intertextuality.⁵ Here Stevens studies "the nostalgias" (X/321) with a troubled recognition that catastrophe acquires significance only in human representations of it: "Except for us, Vesuvius might consume / In solid fire the utmost earth and know / No pain . . . except for us, / The total past felt nothing when destroyed" (I/314).

One voice speaking from within "Esthétique du Mal" is that of poet, traveler, and geologist Charles Montagu Doughty, author of the magnificent *Travels in Arabia Deserta*.⁶ While Doughty's voice is only one among many, and is sometimes blurred and indistinct, there are sufficient points of contact to link Stevens' most thoroughly developed poem on the sublime to Doughty's achievements. Possible echoes of Doughty must be approached with diligent regard to other submerged allusions; Stevens habitually plays voices off against each other in a tight intertextuality, allowing them to debate, to agree

and disagree, even to cancel each other out, as for example when Dante and Blake collide at the opening of canto III: "His firm stanzas hang like hives in hell / Or what hell was, since now both heaven and hell / Are one, and here, O terra infidel" (III/315). In "Esthétique," Doughty's presence can be felt in Stevens' composite portrait of a Mediterranean traveler or "adventurer / In humanity" (XV/325) who witnessed Vesuvius's activity and wrote about it⁷; in Stevens' broader concern for the traveler's moral eccentricity, specifically Doughty as an example of the "egotistical sublime"⁸; and in possible echoes of Doughty's two major literary accomplishments, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* and *Adam Cast Forth*.⁹ Finally, Doughty should be viewed as one of several literary presences who might have prompted specific passages in "Esthétique du Mal," but one who stands in the background of more prominent figures, such as Dante and Nietzsche, whom Stevens openly engages in intertextual debate.

On his path around the Mediterranean toward Arabia in 1872, Doughty, like so many others before him, climbed to the rim of Vesuvius. On August 30-31, he lingered to see the sights in Naples and ascended the volcano, then bubbling up in what was an unusually strong phase of activity. His biographer, D. G. Hogarth, describes his climb: "Having walked alone from Pompeii in the early morning of the 31st he reached an 'immense and terrific gulf [which] horribly rent the sides precipitous, yellow with Sulphur and stratified' on whose brink he killed 'a small yellow and venomous viper.'"¹⁰ Doughty, like others who had visited the site, was compelled to write about his experience: that day inspired an extended reminiscence of Vesuvius which he inserted into his account of wandering on the Arabian Aueyrid Harra (see *Travels* I: 404-406, 412-22), a desolate tract of volcanic rock, "a wilderness of burning and rusty horror" (*Travels* I: 405), barely fertile enough to support the growth of a few gum acacias (*Travels* I: 396). Doughty conveys the overwhelming "mal" of the Arabian landscape by comparing it to Vesuvius, and his descriptions emphasize its sublimity and evil: "pent vapours rising from the infernal magma beneath," "dreadful ferment," "reeking gutter of lavas," "fearful earth-shuddering hubbub," "terrible light of the planetary conflagration . . . dimmed by the thick veil of vulcanic powder falling" (*Travels* I: 420-21). He describes the lava in terms of the violence of war—"tossed aloft, and slung into the air, a swarm of half-molten wreathing missiles" (*Travels* I: 420). Throughout *Travels*, Doughty's volcanic landscapes are tinted with evil, as his geologist's objectivity gives way to emotive language heightening the barrenness of "an iron wilderness; a bare and black shining beach of heated vulcanic stones" (*Travels* I: 379). That Doughty inserts these impressions of Naples and Vesuvius into the narrative of Arabia shows how forceful they were in his mind. And it was to Italy and Naples that he returned, after wandering in Arabia for two years, to set down his *Travels* in minute detail.¹¹

In developing the tone of "Esthétique du Mal," Stevens rejected the rhetorical sublime, a mode dominating literary descriptions of Vesuvius.¹² However, Stevens' poet, with no efficacious response of his own, must turn to his predecessors, as he tries "to remember the phrases" (I/314) belonging to the

procession of ghosts who felt the sublimity of the violent earth. Turning to books and to other artists' experiences as a compensation for what he lacks, he remains coolly indifferent to the actual volcano as he reads paragraphs about the sublime.¹³ Stevens represents the poet's inadequacy metonymically, by way of submerged contrasts with literary forebears. Doughty's description of the volcano in *Arabia Deserta*, saturated with the rhetorical sublime and with sublime evil, is probably one of several texts about Vesuvius that works its way into "Esthétique." However, Doughty's presence is not incidental to the fact that he wrote a powerful account of Vesuvius, and is not restricted to the part he might play in the construction of a Mediterranean man writing in his cloister (XIII/324). His presence is deeply embedded within the poem's discussion and analysis of evil.

Stevens notes Doughty twice in *Sur Plusieurs Beaux Sujets*, once with reference to the sublime, the central concern of "Esthétique du Mal."¹⁴ Doughty's lack of artistic objectivity and remoteness as a poet is the subject of Stevens' first entry, taken from a review of Anne Treneer's *Charles M. Doughty: A Study of his Prose and Verse* and Barker Fairley's edition of *Selected Passages from "The Dawn in Britain"*:

"In the superficial sense that Doughty kept himself out of his poetry he is, of course, objective enough; but in the sense of being able to imagine and create a world of persons in whose existence we believe and in whose vicissitudes we are concerned Doughty was not objective at all. He is remote; which is a quite different matter."¹⁵

In the second entry, which seems to bear directly upon "Esthétique," Stevens continues quoting from this review. That Treneer and the reviewer found in Doughty an example of the "egotistical sublime" especially interested Stevens, who copied a substantial passage into his *Commonplace Book* about Doughty's successes and failures as a writer. Treneer wrote:

"'Could he have presented the passionate disorder in the hearts of men as he presents the passionate heat at the core of the earth he would also have been a great tragic poet. As it is, there is something in Doughty, call it moral fibre, or a sense of rectitude, or of noble reserve, which limited his field when treating of what is human in poetry.'¹⁶

The reviewer continues, summarizing Treneer's assessment of Doughty and emphasizing Doughty's lack of objectivity by recalling the phrase Keats used to distinguish himself from Wordsworth¹⁷:

"To use Keats's antithesis, Doughty as poet belonged to the 'egotistical sublime' and 'the men of character'. That is no defect in itself . . . [.] He belonged to the 'egotistical sublime' because he insisted on creating a world for himself in his poetry . . . [.] with most

of the troublesome humanity left out. . . .] He is manifestly in pursuit of an ideal simplicity of experience. . . .] Outside that extreme of simplicity his touch is faltering. . . . [T]hat poetic diction of his is not adequate to human behaviour as we know it."¹⁸

Doughty's failure to convey the "passionate disorder in the hearts of men," even though he touched the "passionate heat at the core of the earth," cannot help but recall the ethical confusions in Stevens' poem, and its powerful evocation of the volcano. At length, though obliquely, Stevens takes up the problem of the "egotistical sublime"—in Keats's sense, the poet's inability to remove himself from his art. A true poet delights in everything, according to Keats, but in "Esthétique du Mal" the poet delights in nothing; in a sense, the entire poem replies to Keats's concept of "poetical Character" standing in opposition to the "egotistical Sublime": "it [the true poetical Character] enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. . . . What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation."¹⁹ Doughty, as we shall see, is a "virtuous philosopher," not a "chameleon poet." Rejecting Doughty's perception of his world as yet one more provisional *apêçu* elevated to an *esthétique* (L 469), Stevens saw in him an example of how an artist's ethics infected his aesthetics.²⁰

Doughty's lack of objectivity as an artist is all the more intriguing because his best work did convey, with intense realism, the grim authenticity of his travels. Trencher finds Doughty's epic poem *The Dawn in Britain* to be inferior to his certain masterpiece, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, and even to *Adam Cast Forth*, his forcefully primitive play recounting the Judaeo-Arabic version of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden.²¹ *Travels* and *Adam Cast Forth* have in common an exploration of human pain, and both works imaginatively evoke volcanic landscapes as sites of human evil and loss. Both works spring from experiences in the desert that must be respected for their fierce authenticity, and, as we shall see, Stevens seeks authenticity—real, physical contact with the earth—in "Esthétique" as an antidote to the worn-out rhetoric of the sublime. T. E. Lawrence, in his famous introduction to *Travels*, said of Doughty, "He makes his hardships a positive profit to him, by distilling from them into his pages that sense of strain and desolation" (xviii). In *Travels*, Doughty's daily encounter with an utterly savage earth engendered a work of art, its success resting upon an overpowering realism and nearly intolerable absorption of human pain, suffering, and hunger. Yet in *The Dawn in Britain* Doughty failed "to set the humanity of 'Arabia Deserta' in motion again."²² These failures and achievements may touch "Esthétique," a poem in search of the "physical world" (XV/325) and an appropriate response to human pain.

A circle of references to the "self" and to the ways in which the poet's egoism exacerbates human "mal" prompts a close look at the phrase "egotistical sublime." The "mal" of "Esthétique," a number of critics have noted, is difficult to pinpoint because Stevens develops it ambiguously and because the poem's

moral grounding shifts with the various ethical positions it opens up to observation. Its title, of course, glances at Baudelaire, and within the poem are suggestions of every possible translation of "mal"—pain, evil, sickness.²³ It is not surprising that readings of the poem range far and wide in managing the poem's ethical fluctuations, among which its central figure wanders until the poem's close, where a heavily qualified resolution emerges, even though Stevens could not quite bring himself "to end the thing with an interrogation mark" (L 469). Otherwise, as a key passage asserts—one of Stevens' many submerged references to the volcano's flowing lava—"fault / Falls out on everything" (IV/316).

The speaker of "Esthétique" rejects wholly or partially every position he opens up for observation. The poem speaks forcefully against Christianity, often in Nietzschean terms, but its speaker is grounded in the Christian tradition and laments the passing of its mythopoeic evil. It blames Nietzsche's famous negation of God for the death of Satan, a terrible blow to the imaginative life of the artist who must write about evil, but then inconclusively tries on a Nietzschean affirmation (VIII/319-20). Blake is a target for criticism because he reduced the potency of evil when he brought heaven and hell to earth and fused them (III/315). The poem also finds fault with the aesthete who embraces art but disregards actual human pain and evil (I/314, XI/322). Another canto speaks against necessity, even though its inevitabilities, in a world of disturbing ethical problems, make it "destiny unperplexed, / The happiest enemy" (XIII/324). The poet questions "the nostalgias" (X/321-22; V/317)—his longing for what is past and absent collides with his desire for the earth, the "physical world" (XV/325).

Stevens' poet circles around the problem of "self" in the post-Christian modern world—metaphysical solipsism—and the artist's inflated ego is implicated in his imaginative and moral failings. "Esthétique" condemns the self-absorption which diminishes the force of the external, physical world. Stevens fears a world forever dispossessed of its animating gods, its evil geniuses of the earth, because without them the poet writes inadequately about pain. Having stripped himself of all but his most detached recollections of metaphysical evil, he draws no imaginative force from, say, the powerfully demonic volcano. He writes not of "the golden forms," but of the "damasked memory of the golden forms" (V/317). When the locus of divinity shifted from an external God to the human mind, the artist suffered a radical depletion of imaginative potency. Nietzsche is an alluring but dangerous thinker in "Esthétique."²⁴ In "Esthétique," no Nietzschean "overman" yet fills the gap left by a diminished Christian myth. There is considerable doubt in the voice here, no triumphant joy, and little artistic force—the speaker's grossly inadequate elegies on "How red the rose that is the soldier's wound" (VII/318-319) and on "pain that is indifferent to the sky" (II/315) speak to this point.²⁵ Ironically, as the artist is depleted of imagination and belief, his ego swells: he now embraces his limitations and elevates them in false versions of the sublime. He

cated in section V with "ai-ai," "I-I" (317).²⁷ Here the Christian resolves the necessity of death, the ultimate pain of life (again represented metaphorically by the volcano), by calling "it good, / The ultimate good" (XIII/324). The correcting voice in this section states, "Evil in evil is / Comparative" (XIII/324), a reminder that ethical positions are in a state of flux in "Esthétique," or that all evil within a Christian fallen world is "comparative" to the absolute evil of original sin. This moderating voice, however, warns against ethical absolutism, which appears as a series of appositions: "The ultimate good," "the longest meditation, the maximum, / The assassin's scene" (XIII/324). There is a terrible indictment of the good Christian here, the man who calls life good even when it must be evil and, "eased of desire" (XIII/324), suffers and endures.

In this particular section of the poem, Stevens' insistent choice of the word "assassin" tells us much about his assessment of an inflexible Christian ethos. The generalized meaning of the word *assassin*, "one who puts another to death," comes from its original, specific usage: an assassin was originally a member of a secret order of Moslem fanatics who was sent by his sheikh to terrorize and kill Christian Crusaders (*OED*). Doughty came appallingly close, repeatedly, to being murdered because of his fanatical commitment to Christianity. He deplored Islam, but endured, every moment, the danger of being a despised Christian in an alien culture: "Beduin . . . souls are canker-weed beds of fanaticism.—As for me who write, I pray that nothing be looked for in this book but the seeing of an hungry man and the telling of a most weary man; for the rest the sun made me an Arab, but never warped me to Orientalism" (*Travels* I: 56). Doughty persistently refused to call himself anything but *Nasrâny* (Nazarene-Christian), though the friendlier among the Arabs begged him to pretend he was Moslem to save his life: "I began to think of quitting this tedious soil . . . since it were impossible for me to conform to their barbaric religion—where my neck would be for every lawless and fanatic wretch's knife; and in what part soever I should pass, with great extremities, every soul would curse me" (*Travels* I: 252). Stevens would not have missed the irony of such pronouncements: each believer is a demon to him who passionately believes otherwise. An admirable and foolhardy man, his reckless inflexibility among the Arabs baffled those who read *Travels*, even his fellow Arabists Richard Burton and T. E. Lawrence.²⁸ He was cast out, shunned, jeered, left to starve. Yet ironically, his role as the near martyr imitating Christ's pacifism, his "adventure to be endured / With the politest helplessness" (XIII/324), probably saved him. With a perplexing mixture of passivity and stubborn resolve, the traveler patiently submitted to abuse and, even at height of danger, never resorted to his revolver. Stevens deprecates such Christian meekness, for which Doughty was infamous, in "politest helplessness. Ay-mi!" Near the close of his journey, Doughty, with his passionate religiosity, subdued a murderous Arab with a retort: "'Dreadest thou not to die!'—'I have not so lived, Moslêm, that I must fear to die'" (*Travels* II: 502).

Other sections of "Esthétique" can be read with Doughty in mind, though in the following instance, Stevens may have used the material as no more than a prompting for his own poetic idea. In section IX of "Esthétique," the speaker addresses the "round moon" as "effendi," conflating a number of allusions and references:

Panic in the face of the moon—round effendi
Or the phosphored sleep in which he walks abroad
Or the majolica dish heaped up with phosphored fruit
That he sends ahead, out of the goodness of his heart,
To anyone that comes—panic, because
The moon is no longer these nor anything
And nothing is left but comic ugliness
Or a lusted nothingness.

(IX/320)

Stevens' etymological word play confirms that "effendi," who is "phosphored," from the Greek, *phosphoros*, meaning "light bearing," wears the guise of Lucifer, whose name means "light bearer." The moon is also an honored Eastern lord traveling on a lusted journey through the night sky. Stevens certainly conjures the moon as "effendi" for its etymological origins suggesting "authenticity," and the "author" as lord or master: Turkish *efendi*, "master," ultimately derived from Greek *authentēs*, perpetrator, author, which also yields *authentikos*, authoritative, genuine.²⁹ Stevens' word play conceals a *real* moon, but one paradoxically inhabited by a wandering demon. An anecdote Doughty relates about Bedouin superstition helps us further with this passage; he describes those who were terrified of looking directly at the moon's light:

When I gazed at the clear beauty of the moon, they said, "Look not so fixedly on him, it is not wholesome." There is no danger, I think, to sleep abroad, with open face in the bright moonlight; for so do the poor nomads all the summer months of their lives: in Syria they have an opinion, that the moon, more than any sunlight, will blacken their faces. If any time I fell asleep, for languishing, after the assr [the sun at half afternoon height, time of the third Moslem prayer; glossary, 554], they roused me kindly saying: "Slumber not at this hour, Khalil, it is not for thy health." (*Travels* I: 444)³⁰

This moon, animated by primitive Moslem superstition, now bears no such significance "Here in the west" (IX/321), and this, rather than the moon's light, causes "panic": "The moon is no longer these nor anything / And nothing is left but comic ugliness / Or a lusted nothingness" (IX/320). Stevens has moved away from a specific account of eastern superstition, which Doughty could have given him, to a general observation about imaginative poverty, a "mal" especially plaguing us "Here in the west." The poet's lament also echoes Psalm 121, where a remnant of this primitive fear of the moon is accompanied by an invocation against evil: "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the

moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul" (121: 6-7). Another suggestion of this Psalm will reappear as a charm against evil at the close of "Esthétique." The poet longs for an efficacious fusion of physical and metaphysical, one not to be found in the imaginative vacancy of the post-Christian west. The poet's attempt to conjure an evil spirit inhabiting nature recalls these demons in his unfulfilled need for "Another chant" (IX/321).

In his personification of the moon as "effendi," Stevens' satanic moon travels from west to east by way of a word of Turkish origin. Stevens also recalls Satan's journeying in the Book of Job: "And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (1:7). While Stevens follows the tradition of Satan's associations with the Orient, his wandering in a land of infidels, it is interesting to note Doughty's own guise as "wanderer," or *Sâiehh*. The presence of the Christian in the land of the

Aarab was an enigma to them. . . . For there will no man take upon himself immense fatigues for naught. "Khalîl, say it once, what thy purpose is? Art thou not some banished man? comest thou of thine own will, or have other sent thee hither?—Khalîl loves well the Moslemin, and yet these books of his be what? . . ." I said, "I was living at Damascus and am a *Sâiehh* ['a world's wanderer'; see glossary, 654]; is not the *sâiehh* a walker about the world?—and who will say him nay! also I wander wilfully."—"Now well! Khalîl is a *Sûwahh* [also a 'world's wanderer,' glossary, 670]; wander where you list, Khalîl, and keep to the settled countries, there is nothing to hinder; but come not into the wilderness of the Beduw; for there you will be stripped and they will cut thy throat." (*Travels* I: 272-73)

The Arabs thought Doughty to be the worst of demons, which reminds us that "Evil in evil is / Comparative" (XIII/324). As the speaker of "Esthétique" points out, each believer is a demon in the mind of him who believes otherwise, "O terra infidel" (III/315).

In section IX, the poet comes up sharply against a realization that his world has been dispossessed of its spirits. He addresses the moon as his lord and master in a paradoxical gesture toward recovering belief, attempting by way of personification to conjure the missing spirit of Lucifer. Confusingly, however, "Esthétique" also questions anthropomorphic thinking: the poet longs for absent gods at the same time that he sees in that longing a symptom of self-absorption and a Christian taste for "A too, too human god, self-pity's kin" (III/315). In IX, the poet is able to animate the moon in verbal figures, but cannot feel deeply its animism and laments this fact. (Stevens' moon compares intriguingly with his anti-anthropomorphic "sun, in clownish yellow, *but not a clown*" [VI/318; italics mine].)

The conclusion of IX moves toward echoes of Biblical creation, with added suggestions of a destructive and renewing flood, in which the poet articulates

a need for a poetic of belief, a system with yet no name, "Another chant, an incantation, as in / Another and later genesis" (IX/321). Throughout "Esthétique," the speaker remains uneasily grounded in the Christian tradition and is thus circumscribed by its rhetoric and terminology. The canto closes, I feel, with a deeply ambivalent gesture toward destruction and renewal, one which might appear to be more positive than it actually is because "Esthétique" conveys so few convincing affirmations. Stevens confounds the image of renewal in the phrase, "A loud, large water / . . . drowns the crickets' sound" (IX/321), a devilish qualification in a poem seeking the earth, the "physical world," and seeming to assert, along with Keats, that "The poetry of the earth is never dead. / . . . The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever." Yet the close of section IX predicts that moral vacancy has not stilled the submerged demons of the earth. They will rise again; and their recovery will be signalled by the sound of "A loud, large water" (IX/321) echoing Genesis: "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. . . . and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas" (1:6-10). These spirits are as restless as the lava boiling in the mouth of Vesuvius, ready to declare "a primitive ecstasy" (IX/321), one which might be Nietzschean, but which never seems to disengage itself sufficiently from the Christian tradition of the fall.

Possible echoes of Doughty also appear in sections III and X, which are linked to IX by their concealed versions of Biblical creation. An analogue we might turn to for these cantos is Doughty's play *Adam Cast Forth*, which Stevens knew from the review of Treneer's book: the reviewer echoes Treneer's positive assessment of *Adam Cast Forth* several times, once to say that Doughty "produced one sustained masterpiece in poetry, 'Adam Cast Forth,' the only one of his poems which is comparable to 'Arabia Deserta'."³¹ Internal evidence in "Esthétique" suggests that Stevens might have taken a detailed look at this play, even though the primary presences in III are Dante and Blake. Both III and X allude to the myth of creation and the fall, an idea linking a number of cantos in "Esthétique." Section X develops themes introduced in III by focussing on desire, the primitive maternal force the poet seeks. Behind this figure is a primitive Eve born out of Adam, similar in conception to Doughty's first parents in *Adam Cast Forth*. To understand how Stevens makes a place for this Adam and Eve in "Esthétique," we should first turn back to III, where Stevens pays homage to Dante's *terza rima*.

In section III, Stevens' poet argumentatively engages Dante's *Inferno* and Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. He records the change in the conception of heaven and hell from Dante to Blake. (Nietzsche then put the nail in Satan's coffin.) Blake's vision sidestepped, and perhaps diminished, sublime evil by bringing heaven and hell to earth:

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

Doughty's Vesuvius in "Esthétique du Mal"

The fault lies with an over-human god,
Who by sympathy has made himself a man
And is not to be distinguished, when we cry

Because we suffer, our oldest parent, peer
Of the populace of the heart, the reddest lord,
Who has gone before us in experience.

(III/315)

Yet the passage affirms that humankind suffers and has not forgotten the origin of this "mal," the fall from grace. The speaker longs for another condition which would remedy our "uncourageous genesis" (III/315). As several sections in "Esthétique" close with a vision of a new paradise, so does section III, echoing Blake's "And on the barren heath / Sing the honey bees." In this section the poet envisions a honeyed paradise, one partaking of the "physical" earth, authentic and real:

It seems

As if the health of the world might be enough.

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.

(III/315-16)

Intruding upon these representations of a possible heaven on earth is the fallen world. Stevens' poet destroys the heaven he seeks by conjuring a force more primitive than the suave, literate, and rhetorically adept Satan of *Paradise Lost*, something perhaps closer to Doughty's grim, powerful Sammael in *Adam Cast Forth*, who, with rough gesture, rumbles underground thrusting up volcanos, their lava flow melting the earth as if it were wax:

Tumbled the sharded mountains up my foot,
From the low Plain; on heaps, I spurned them thus.
Such horns then and high places of Earth's dust,
I, for my pastime, overthrew again,
When I was wroth, These ruins of hard rocks,
My fingers crumble, as a little dust.

In my displeasure, ofttime mine hot breath
Kindled the Earth beneath: then flowed forth rocks;
The hills dissolved were, as an honey-comb.
In the shallow of my palm, I caught up oft
Deep's bitter Flood; and whelmed upon dry land!

(ACF 2-3)

In their fragility, Blake's "honey bees," Stevens' "golden combs," and Dante's "firm stanzas" hanging "like hives in hell" dissolve under the hot hand of Satan. The force of evil keeps boiling up out of the earth as the volcano from which "fault / Falls out on everything" (IV/316). Doughty's play, like Stevens' poem, aptly conflates the heat of Vesuvius and sublime evil. In *Marriage*, Blake's "red clay brought forth" recalls Adam without naming him, a method of evoking old gods and men Stevens appreciated. Blake's red Adam comes out of a long tradition originating in the literal meaning of his name in Hebrew, *adamah*, "the dust of the ground," which was also interpreted specifically as "red earth" or "red dust," not just the "dust" of Genesis 2: 7 or of Milton's Adam in *Paradise Lost* VII: 524-25. In *Adam Cast Forth*, Doughty insists that God made Adam of "red earth": "He formed me of red loam, a living flesh" (ACF 11); ". . . called God's creating BREATH / Me Adam forth, from *adamah*, the red dust" (ACF 28, 28n). These references show Doughty's knowledge of Hebrew commentaries on Genesis: Adam's redness is thought to come from an interpretation of his name as flesh and blood (*adom* = red). Stevens knew of this tradition—certainly from Blake—and he evokes it frequently, but in concealed ways. In "Esthétique," his "reddest lord," "our oldest parent, peer / Of the populace of the heart . . . / Who has gone before us in experience" (III/315), recalls this red Adam. Stevens will conceal him again as the primitive red lord of the earth in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" (III/400). Moreover, he may be behind other red men, such as Redwood Roamer who, in "the thickest shade / Of the garden," tells a story "which produces everything else" (II/286-87), and the "Large Red Man Reading" who revives with his own blood "those spenden hearts," the ghosts of the past, as he reads "from the poem of life" (423-24).

In section X, Stevens' speaker longs for the "grossly maternal," a first mother, an Eve to the earthy "reddest lord," "oldest parent" (III/315):

she is as she was, reality,
The gross, the fecund, proved him against the touch
Of impersonal pain. Reality explained.
(X/322)

She is concealed behind "the softest / Woman with a vague mustache" (X/321) as a Jungian *anima*, the feminine soul because, like many of Stevens' muses, she is wholly internalized, an aspect of the reflexive speaker and a result of his own creative act of flesh, blood, and heart. In wearing a "mustache," she is still associated with the poet's body, the man who created her. The poet wanders in this canto, cast out of Eden and seeking a home in the earth: "home / Was a return to birth, a being born / Again in the savagest severity" (X/321).

In *Adam Cast Forth*, the first parents are Adamu and Adama, and she, still so closely identified with her birth, retains the name of her father and husband. Only later, after she bears a child, does she become Hawwa, Eve (ACF, List of Persons in the play). She awkwardly calls Adamu "Spouse-Father" (ACF 12, for example), and Stevens, in his rendering of the "the creature / Who most

fecundly assuaged him" (X/321), hints at Eve's incestuous birth-marriage: "the child of a mother fierce / In his body" (X/321). Obviously, Stevens did not need Doughty's play to conceive her as he does, but she may tell us more about the tradition out of which Stevens invents his Eve. Interestingly, *Adam Cast Forth* retells a Judaeo-Arabic version of the fall which is available nowhere else in Western literature.³² In it Adam and Eve, when cast out of Eden, wandered apart for long ages and met again on Aarat, the Mountain of Recognition near Meccah, to confront their wickedness and rise above it. So too in "Esthétique" mountains and evil are paired, as the poet's search for recognition of evil, and then for an appropriate response to it, occurs under the shadow of sublime Vesuvius.

It is tempting to hear a suggestion of Doughty in the mysterious specificity of the yellow acacia (II/314)—certainly Stevens' version of Dante's and Eliot's multifoliate rose. Doughty frequently mentions this sturdy Mediterranean tree in *Travels* because it thrives in barrenness and helps sustain human and animal life: "In the sheltered lava bottoms where grow gum-acacias, we often startled *gatta* fowl ('sand-grouse'); they are dry-fleshed birds and not very good to eat" (II: 72). Like little oases, acacias attract bees and sweeten the desolation: "the little yellowish flower-tufts are seen in all the midsummer months. . . . I have found the flowering tree full of murmuring bees of the desert (*athubba*) and casting a weak perfume, as the sweetness of flowering vineyards" (I: 379-80). One anecdote in Doughty's *Travels* even tells of an acacia possessed by the *jan* (I: 273) or "earth-demons" (glossary, 606). However, these possible echoes make a difficult unity in a poem where multiple voices rise to the surface, and they teach us to read further in areas which interested Stevens.

Stevens' acacia in "Esthétique," along with his moon, is finally a barren reminder that the poet feels none of this tree's sacred associations. God instructed the children of Israel to build a tabernacle for the Ark of the Covenant out of acacia, or shittim wood (Exodus 25-26). To Stevens' poet, the acacia tree, despite its hanging scent that mimics the fragrant incense of the tabernacle (Exodus 25:3-9), represents "pain that is indifferent to the sky" (II/315). In "Esthétique," this passage is linked thematically with the enigmatic description of a sacred drapery in section V, which condenses a number of features of the tabernacle: "in-bar / Exquisite in poverty against the suns / Of ex-bar, in-bar retaining attributes / With which we vested, once, the golden forms" (V/317). God said, "make bars of acacia wood . . . You shall overlay the frames with gold, and shall make their rings of gold for holders for the bars; and you shall overlay the bars with gold . . . And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet stuff and fine twined linen; in skilled work shall it be made" (Exodus 26:26-31).³³ Moreover, Moses received God's detailed instructions by ascending a mountain covered in clouds out of which "the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain" (Exodus 24:15-17). By way of its involuted Biblical echoes, then, this passage makes a unity, though a concealed one, with the poet's lack of response to fiery Vesuvius. It reinforces his need to relocate divinity, indeed to recognize the "at-

tributes / With which we vested, once, the golden forms" (V/317), now for him only remotely sustained in others' written accounts of the sublime mountain.

In section XV Stevens posits yet one more paradise, this one inhabited by the "non-physicals," who might ironically, after death, glimpse an earthly heaven of "green corn gleaming":

After death, the non-physical people, in paradise,
Itself non-physical, may, by chance, observe
The green corn gleaming and experience
The minor of what we feel. The adventurer
In humanity has not conceived of a race
Completely physical in a physical world.
(XV/325)

Stevens continues section XV by recasting his "genius of misfortune" (IV/316), a personification of the poet's "mal" evoking possession by the primitive *jinn* (from which the word *genius* derives):

the genius of
The mind, which is our being, wrong and wrong,
The genius of the body, which is our world,
Spent in the false engagements of the mind.
(IV/316-17)

One might have thought of sight, but who could think
Of what it sees, for all the ill it sees?
Speech found the ear, for all the evil sound,
But the dark italics it could not propound.
And out of what one sees and hears and out
Of what one feels, who could have thought to make
So many selves . . .

(XV/326)

We might be reminded of the Evil Eye in the poet's speculation about him who sees nothing but evil. But here too may be a final reference to Doughty: always noted for his indefatigable realism, he claimed of *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, "The haps that befel me are narrated in these volumes: wherein I have set down, that which I saw with my eyes, and heard with my ears and thought in my heart, neither more or less" (xii). T. E. Lawrence, in his famous introduction to *Travels*, affirmed that "the realism of the book is complete. Doughty tries to tell the full and exact truth of all that he saw" (xxi). However, returning to an assessment of Doughty as a man possessed of sublime egoism, this particular "adventurer in humanity" never saw beyond his Christianity. This meant that every Moslem he met was tainted with evil. Doughty suffered and endured life among "infidels," and claimed to have spent only one good day out of two entire years of travel in Arabia.

Doughty's *Vesuvius* in "Esthétique du Mal"

Stevens' poet, wholly possessed of evil—eyes, ears, and heart—desperately seeks renewal, "the imagination's new beginning" (VIII/320), and even writes a charm against the Evil Eye. He is grounded in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and uses its terminology:

This is the thesis scrivened in delight,
The reverberating psalm, the right chorale.
(XV/326)

Psalm 121 reverberates in section IX as one of the poem's hidden charms, or prayers, against evil: "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil" (121:7). Back in Italy, Doughty wrote in his *Travels* how the superstitious Arabs looked to his strange powers of writing for a spell against evil: "In the Arabic border lands there is hardly a child, or almost an animal, which is not defended from the evil eye, by a charm.—What! do we not see the like even at this day in Europe? . . . They could well imagine, that the outlandish Nasrâny man might write them a quick spell" (*Travels* I: 258). He might well have written a quick spell in Naples, where the inhabitants maintain an entrenched belief in the fatal influence of the Evil Eye: "the modern Neapolitan blames [it] for every misfortune that may befall him or his."³⁴

Stevens calls for an art informed by "sensuous worlds" at the close of "Esthétique," and, even if obliquely, he may respond to Doughty by suggesting that any massively physical encounter with evil—through eyes, ears, and heart—should constitute its own kind of sufficiency in the creation of a work of art. Like Stevens, Doughty was a learned poet who had "studied the nostalgias," but more importantly, unlike Stevens, he was a bold traveler who, for all his emphasis on faith, declined to write about untried experiences. As Anne Treener says, "He sent down roots into the earth, binding himself to it in such a way as to prevent him from becoming a merely bookish poet."³⁵ He wandered in "the prehistoric Nest . . . from whence have issued and dispersed . . . those several human swarms" who preceded and formed him (*Travels* [xv]).

Against such examples—Doughty's and those of many others who found Naples an apt locale for sublime pain—Stevens could not help but defend his own insularity. He was prompted to write a war poem in 1944, when he read in *The Kenyon Review* a letter questioning the kind of poetry appearing there: the correspondent demanded "a poetry of time and place," claiming that contemporary poetry "is cut off from pain. It is intellectual and it is fine, but it never reveals muscle and nerve" (L 468).³⁶ At the close of "Esthétique," Stevens replies to this complainant, and to any detractor who might accuse him of being cut off from pain, by pointing out the poetic sufficiency of his own situation in Hartford: "who could have thought to make / So many selves, so many sensuous worlds, / . . . Merely in living as and where we live" (XV/326). "Merely in living" takes us back to the ordinary world of Hartford, where "the mid-day air, was swarming / With the metaphysical changes that occur" (XV/326). The verb "swarming," of course, reminds us that the poet seeks a real, physical, honeycombed paradise in "Esthétique." His own *being* as a writer is in need of

a renewed connection with the earth. But “metaphysical changes”? These concluding lines hint that Stevens might have placed himself among the metaphysicals, not the physicals, an admission, perhaps, that his own “greatest poverty [was] not to live / In a physical world” (XV/325).

“Esthétique” is, then, Stevens’ statement about human pain as he read about it, pain that he never would directly experience with his eyes, ears, and heart. The multiple “selves” peopling “Esthétique” all enter Stevens’ thought by way of books transporting him to the “obscure selvages,” his own version of Dante’s dark woods. Such journeying for the Hartford poet expands the boundaries of identity, not “physically” but “metaphysically.” In absorbing these presences, the solitary, inward turning “self” resituates himself as “So many selves” in “so many sensuous worlds” (XV/326). Later in his career, Stevens would remember in “The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain” how, from books, he had constructed a poem of a mountain: “There it was, word for word, / . . . He breathed its oxygen, / Even when the book lay turned in the dust of his table” (512).

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Notes

¹[Johann Wolfgang von Goethe], *Goethe’s Travels in Italy: Together with His Second Residence in Rome and Fragments on Italy* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883), 206 [letter of 20 March 1787].

²Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 1954). All references to Stevens’ poetry come from this edition and are parenthetically indicated by page number and, where appropriate, section number.

³Eleanor Cook, *Poetry, Word-Play, and Word-War in Wallace Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 192.

⁴Nearly everyone writing on the poem has added new names to the long list of possible presences Stevens wishes to evoke. For detailed accounts of the poem’s voices, see Harold Bloom, *The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 226-239; Rajeev S. Patke, *The Long Poems of Wallace Stevens: An Interpretative Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 164-90; and Cook, 189-213. While Helen Vendler, in *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens’ Longer Poems* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 206, feels that the fifteen cantos of “Esthétique” are formally random and “violently unconnected in tone,” her remarks about Stevens’ “secrecies of allusion” in *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 45-50, are pertinent to the submerged voices in the poem.

⁵Henry Weinfield, in “Wallace Stevens’ ‘Esthétique du Mal’ and the Evils of Aestheticism,” *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 13 (Spring 1989): 31, uses Bakhtin’s terminology to comment on “the poem’s many voiced texture . . . its polyphony.”

⁶Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd. & The Medici Society Limited, 1926). All page references are from this edition and appear in parentheses with the abbreviation *Travels*. This single-volume edition retains the pagination of a two-volume edition. All variant spellings in quotations conform to Doughty’s text.

⁷Cook, 192-195, 195n, lists prominent literary travelers who went to Naples, and I agree with her that Goethe’s *Italian Journey* is an important forerunner for the composite portrait in “Esthétique.” Even so, Stevens’ evocation of Goethe is argumentative, wholly rejecting his tone, his Romantic enthusiasm.

⁸“Doughty as an Influence To-Day: An Over-Simple Creed,” rev. of Charles M. Doughty: *A Study of His Prose and Verse*, by Anne Treneer; and *Selected Passages from “The Dawn in Britain” of Charles Doughty*, ed. Barker Fairley, *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 Nov. 1935: 716.

Doughty's Vesuvius in "Esthétique du Mal"

⁹Charles M. Doughty, *Adam Cast Forth* (Sacred Drama in Five Songs) (London: Duckworth & Co., 1908). All page references are from this edition and appear in parentheses with the abbreviation ACF.

¹⁰D. G. Hogarth, *The Life of Charles M. Doughty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 12.

¹¹Hogarth 115, 120. Richard Trench, in *Arabian Travellers: The European Discovery of Arabia* (London: Macmillan London Limited, 1986), 162, says that Doughty took a house in Naples to write his travels.

¹²Cook, 192-93, surveys accounts of Vesuvius reinforcing the mountain's associations with the sublime.

¹³Patke makes this point: "The activity of reading in the vicinity of the potentially cataclysmic volcano, and especially the reading of paragraphs on the sublime, is the 'mal' of the aesthetic" (169).

¹⁴Milton J. Bates, ed., *Sur Plusieurs Beaux Sujets: Wallace Stevens' Commonplace Book* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 43-47 [entries 30 and 33].

¹⁵"Doughty as an Influence To-Day," 716; *Sur Plusieurs Beaux Sujets*, 43.

¹⁶"Doughty as an Influence To-Day," 716; *Sur Plusieurs Beaux Sujets*, 43.

¹⁷In a letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, Keats wrote: "As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort, of which, if I am anything, I am a member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian, or egotistical Sublime; which is a thing per se, and stands alone,) it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—it has no character. . . . It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen." See *Letters of John Keats to his Family and Friends*, ed. Sidney Colvin (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1928), 183-84. Stevens owned the 1891 edition of this book; see Milton J. Bates, "Stevens' Books at the Huntington: An Annotated Checklist," *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 2 (1978): 53.

¹⁸"Doughty as an Influence To-Day," 716; *Sur Plusieurs Beaux Sujets*, 45-47.

¹⁹Keats, *Letters*, 184.

²⁰Wallace Stevens, *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966). All page references appear in parentheses with the abbreviation *L*. In this letter, Stevens said of "Esthétique du Mal": "I am thinking of aesthetics as the equivalent of *apérçus*, which seems to have been the original meaning." Arguably, every voice Stevens evokes in the poem represents another *apérçu*, all of them provisional. A remark Stevens made to Henry Church suggests that he may have felt Nietzsche's perception of the world to be an *apérçu* elevated to an *esthétique*: "In his [Nietzsche's] mind one does not see the world more clearly; both of us [Stevens and Church] must often have felt how a strong mind distorts the world. Nietzsche's mind was a perfect example of that sort of thing" (*L* 431-32).

²¹Anne Treneer, *Charles M. Doughty: A Study of his Prose and Verse* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), 169.

²²"Doughty as an Influence To-Day," 716.

²³A number of critics have discussed the problematics of the word "mal" in "Esthétique." For thorough coverage, see Bloom, 226-30; Cook, 190-91; Patke, 166-67; and Weinfield, 28.

²⁴See Weinfield's conclusions about Stevens' engagement of Nietzsche in "Esthétique," esp. 27-30.

²⁵See Vendler, *On Extended Wings*, 209, on the inadequacy of the "spell of Parnassian language" in the rose/wound canto.

²⁶It has been suggested by Patke that the passage I discuss here recalls Santayana in "a charming evocation of another Italian presence" (180-81). I have to disagree: the violent critique of Christianity implied in the word "assassin" is supported by other passages in "Esthétique" expressing the poet's great uneasiness with the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Moreover, there is an ironic undertone in the use of such Christian phraseology as "calls it good." While Santayana is certainly one of Stevens' models for other cloistered philosophers, aspects of Stevens' treatment of Christianity in "Esthétique" cannot be reconciled with his appreciation for Santayana, which he fully expressed in "To An Old Philosopher in Rome."

²⁷Cook, 202, notes this concealed punning.

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²⁸Sir Richard Burton's response to Doughty was complicated by a jealous recognition that his own record of Arabian travel, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, could never rival Doughty's accomplishment. Burton, who himself survived his travels by disguising himself as a Moslem, was appalled that Doughty made his journey as a Christian: "The obstinacy of 'Khalil Nasrâny's' contempt for Islam was in itself a challenge to one [Burton] who thought it necessary to adopt that faith, and still professed it; and the tale of the consequent subjection of an Englishman to indignity and persecution over half of Arabia and throughout the best part of two years seemed to him [Burton] told with a nauseating insistence" (Hogarth 129). However, Trench points out that Burton "could despise neither the man nor the book. The very extremities that Doughty had gone to left Burton reeling" (162). T. E. Lawrence deeply admired Doughty, and it was these same extremities of experience that inspired such awe; his response to Doughty's accomplishment is best expressed in his introduction to *Arabia Deserta* (xvii-xxvii).

²⁹Bloom, 233-34.

³⁰Sir Richard F. Burton, in *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1964), also notes the prevalence of this superstition: "Easterners still believe firmly in the evil effects of moonlight upon the human frame,—from Sind to Abyssinia, the traveller will hear tales of wonder concerning it" (154n).

³¹"Doughty as an Influence To-Day," 716.

³²Treener, 169-70.

³³I quote the King James Bible throughout, except here I use the Revised Standard Version because it translates "shittim wood" as "acacia."

³⁴Cecil Headlam, *The Story of Naples* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1927), 39.

³⁵Treener, 14.

³⁶Cook, 192, quotes a pertinent section of the letter to which Stevens refers. Stevens read the letter in John Crowe Ransom's "Artists, Soldiers, Positivists," *The Kenyon Review* 6 (1944): 276-81.

Pre-Elegiac Affirmation in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome"

LEA BAECHLER

What is, uncertainly,
Desire prolongs its adventure to create
Forms of farewell, furtive among green ferns.
—"An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"

STEVENS' LATER POEMS, BEGINNING with "Credences of Summer" (1946), variously assess the status of the vision masterfully crystallized in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," which explores the relationship between imagination and reality within the creative process and as part of a poetics of life. The vision which emerges carefully balances the paradoxical tension in the interplay between imagination and reality: while the inner life of imagination requires that the poet necessarily and continuously create new fictions, the outer life of reality demands that the poet cast a clear, objective eye on the "plain sense of things" (CP 502), "seek / Nothing beyond reality" (CP 471). In the later poems Stevens *re*-assesses his aesthetics of both poetry and life, but he does so from the scrupulously self-suspicious position of maturity, calling into account the work and thinking of a lifetime. Often considered more muted and musing than the earlier poems—less intensely energetic and stylistically "brilliant," incisive, and controlled—these scrupulous and carefully attentive poems assume a singular energy through the exacting dialectic of their meditations, as the poet moves closer and closer to the state "of mere being" (OP 141).

A distillation of explorations in poems from this period, "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" (CP 508) offers a notable complexity and perfection of expression. First published a few months before George Santayana's death in 1952, the poem incorporates elegiac conventions in what, on the surface, appears to be a eulogy—though the poem is, in its structure and by nature of its probing assessment, more a pre-elegy "about dying rather than death," proposing, perhaps, an example of what "preparation for death should be like" (Berger 133). The deceptive serenity of the poem's tone combined with its mental complexity masks, to some extent, the tremendous tension charged by the integration of its three motivations (eulogistic, elegiac, pre-elegiac) as Stevens—himself an aging poet at the poem's conception—*re*-examines his own position in relationship to Santayana's philosophy on imagination and to the philosopher's life lived with the value of that in art. That re-examination is, however, complicated by a subtler, pre-elegiac line of inquiry: in contemplating the "dying" and imminent death of another, Stevens confronts his own, exploring both Santayana's and his own aesthetics and their relationship to Santayana's "living and dying," testing once again the integrity of his own aesthetics against them.

Although never a formal student of Santayana, Stevens came to know him well in a student-mentor relationship during his undergraduate years at Harvard. He formed an intellectual bond with Santayana that remained a potent one for Stevens even in the years after their relationship was no longer active, and he later commented, "I always came away from my visits to him feeling that he made up in the most genuine way for many things that I needed" (L 482). The intellectual affinity between the two during Stevens' Cambridge years had been cemented in a more personal way by Santayana's response to Stevens' early poetry, most specifically to his "Sonnet" beginning "Cathedrals are not built along the sea" (first published in the *Harvard Monthly*, May 1899). When Stevens gave a copy of the poem to Santayana, the older philosopher and poet was so impressed by its theme—the contrast between ornate church art and the beauty of nature and life—and by Stevens' development and handling of that contrast in a "convincing pattern of word and images" that he immediately wrote a poem in response: "Cathedrals by the Sea" (Buttel 17, 18).¹ While this communion between their poetic sensibilities enlarged their interest in each other, "[t]he points of reference between Stevens' poetics and Santayana's early writings on aesthetics and art are numerous" (Riddel, *Clairvoyant* 39) and pointed. Santayana's *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, which first appeared in 1900, is "the key book to Stevens' thinking" (Kermode 81), especially with regard to Santayana's insistence, as in the following passage, on the interrelatedness of poetry and philosophy:

What is that [the doctrine of transubstantiation] but to treat facts as an appearance, and their ideal import as a reality? And to do this is the very essence of poetry, for which everything visible is a Sacrament—an outward sign of that inward grace for which the soul is thirsting. . . . [Poetry must] become an interpretation of life and not merely an irrelevant excursion into the realm of fancy. (285-86)

Santayana's correlation here between poetry and philosophic theory reflects Stevens' argument for the significant position of philosophy in poetry—"There is no reason why any poet should not have the status of the philosopher, nor why his poetry should not give up to the keenest minds and the most searching spirits something of what philosophy gives up and, *in addition*, the peculiar things that only poetry can give" (L 292; my emphasis). More importantly, however, in this passage Santayana articulates precisely Stevens' emerging theory of poetics: "to treat facts as an appearance, and their ideal import as a reality." Both Stevens and Santayana came to believe that the "realization" of such a perspective within their works could be attained only through a life experienced as if the life were itself such an achieved work of art. Thus, the endeavor to find a way to live such a life—and to live it—became an aesthetic imperative.

It is not surprising, then, that a memoir about the aging Santayana, alone in Rome, provided the occasion and the context for "To an Old Philosopher in Rome." Published in the 6 April 1946 issue of the *New Yorker*, Edmund Wil-

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son's account of his meeting with Santayana in the convent of the Blue Nuns provoked Stevens' thinking in a variety of ways. Wilson's narrative particularizes the outer circumstances of Santayana's life and evokes a sense of the quality of his inner, spiritual life, the details of which Stevens transforms in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome." What is at first most striking is the correlation between Wilson's description of the nuns and their appearance in the poem. Wilson's Blue Nuns are Stevens' "moving nuns . . . a moving transparency," and the "How easily the blown banners change to wings" eerily resonates Wilson's initial description: "The Blue Nuns were decorative and fantastic, for they actually wore great starched headdresses that had been dyed with some deep bluing" (59). Stevens subtly weaves into his poem Wilson's startling contrast of his journey through the streets of Rome—the complicated grandeur and clutter of the city's centuries-old culture, the nearly terrifying bigness of the Colosseum—to the austerity of Santayana's life in the convent. He converts the details of Wilson's first encounter with Santayana—"He occupied a single room . . . in which he both worked and slept . . . a table at his right, with papers and books, and, at his left, a small bed . . . [and] almost nothing else in the room" (59)—into the varied repetitions of "The bed, the books, the chair, the moving nuns." "The veritable small" at the poem's center and the "men growing small in the distances of space" are suggested by Wilson's first impression of Santayana: "I had not expected to find him so slight. Never tall, he must have shrunk with age" (59). The Santayana Wilson describes—a man of "simplicity and courtesy" (59) who "had none of the pomp of authority, none of the arrogance of reputation" (60) one might expect—Stevens extols as the "inquisitor of structures," the "master and commiserable man."

Of more interest, however, is the attention of the two writers to the endless conjunctions of reality and imagination in their treatment of the aging philosopher. Both Stevens and Wilson use the details of "reality" to probe and describe their more "imaginative" vision of Santayana. Wilson's image of Santayana—"alone with his plain table and narrow bed . . . yet with all the philosophies, the religions, and the poetry through which he had passed . . . conversing [with the world of men] . . . through reading and writing" (56, 66)—becomes for Stevens the image of a man who lives alone with "No more than a bed, a chair and moving nuns" yet "in the shape of Rome," a man who experiences the interpenetration of the two worlds: "The life of the city never lets go . . . It is part of the life in your room. / Its domes are the architecture of your bed."

In a few central passages, Wilson movingly recounts his experience with both the man and the world his mind and being inhabit: "the atmosphere of the convent was spooky, and while we were talking it had begun to rain, so that the room had become rather dark. It was at the same time respect-inspiring and disturbing . . . to find this little husk of a man, at once so ascetic and so cheerful, . . . inhabiting a convent cell, among the layers of historical debris that composed the substance of Rome, . . . [to experience] the readiness and grace with which he lived up to the classical role . . . of the sage" (62, 64). In the

poem's illumined other-worldliness of the dark and the candle, "the shadow of a shape" and "a moving transparency," Santayana emerges as a man who in "The immensest theatre" speaks "without speech, / The loftiest syllables among loftiest things."

Toward the end of the essay, Wilson recalls how after his visit Santayana's image would return to him on solitary occasions: "A shell of faded skin and frail bone, in which the power of intellect, the colors of imagination still burned and gave out through his books and his gentle-voiced conversation their steady pulsations and rays, of which the intensity seems to increase even as the generator is more worn by use" (66-67). Wilson's poignant rendering of the aging Santayana stirred in Stevens more than memory and admiration for a like spirit, portraying as it does a man "interested in his own thought as a work of art which owes its integrity to a rigorous avoidance of indiscriminate human relationships" (Wilson 66). In "Imagination as Value," first published two years after the Wilson tribute appeared, Stevens contends that "the life of Professor Santayana is a life in which the function of the imagination has had a function similar to its function in any deliberate work of art or letters. We have only to think of this present phase of it, in which, in his old age, he dwells in the head of the world, in the company of devoted women, in their convent, and in the company of familiar saints, whose presence does so much to make any convent an appropriate refuge for a generous and human philosopher. To repeat, there can be lives in which the value of the imagination is the same as its value in arts and letters" (NA 147-48). For a poet who argues that poetic value—not the value of knowledge, or of faith, but of imagination (NA 149)—is intrinsic, Stevens accords to Santayana—the poet,² the philosopher, the man—the highest possible honor, as both the above passage and "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" attest.

If Stevens perceives great sacrifice in Santayana's choice to live his life as "a work of art," the sacrifice is manifest not just in "the avoidance of indiscriminate human relationships" (Wilson 66) or in the struggle to transform loneliness into solitude, but in the commitment to continue to do so after so long a life, to achieve a state of sublimity and to remain patient—peaceful and tranquil—within the "continual flux" (NA 149) of a life enacted as a poetic value: "of how / Much choosing is the final choice made up" (NA 88). The "continual flux" of imagination and reality marks the poems of the "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" period as Stevens re-evaluates his relationship to reality. While in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" he claims that "We seek / Nothing beyond reality. Within it, / Everything" (CP 471), he writes in the concluding stanza that "It is not in the premise that reality / Is a solid" (CP 489) and notes earlier in the poem that "Reality is the beginning not the end" (CP 469). At the same time, his suggestion in "Imagination as Value" that "[t]he truth seems to be that we live in concepts of the imagination before the reason has established them . . . [and] reason [then] is simply the methodizer of the imagination" (NA 154) resonates with the line "We reason of these things with later reason" (CP 401), as if he were impelled to re-argue his way full circle from "Notes" to ar-

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rive at a "total reality . . . distilled / In the prolific ellipses that we know" (NA 87) and to re-affirm—"Of what value is anything . . . except the imagination?" (NA 155).³

Clearly Wilson's tribute engendered a line of speculative meditation that would, for the next few years, inform Stevens' poems, poems whose themes are rooted in the dialogue that had engaged Stevens and Santayana nearly fifty years earlier. The oscillations between fact and fiction that become part of the rhetoric of the later poems are no more clear than in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome." Both the poem's structure and its style of expression enact the process by which each new fiction of the imagination emerges and is "realized," becoming, as a part of "reality," the impetus which pressures the imagination to reactivate itself: "The imagination itself would not remain content with it [a chief image] nor allow us to do so. It is the irrepressible revolutionist" (NA 152). For those who believe, as did Santayana and Stevens, that the mind lives in a state of revolution, that poets must be "connoisseur[s] of chaos" (CP 215), imagination—that "irrepressible revolutionist"—makes possible discovery and creation (Young 267).

In "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" Stevens blends Santayana's philosophy with his own implicit aesthetic, translating ideas "into a consummate sense of the dramatic experience [with] . . . an effective tension . . . between the ordered but vital texture of the dying man's room and the ethereal and vacant Rome, between the hum of life which filters in from the streets outside and the suggested stillness toward which the spirit drifts" (Riddel, "Visibility" 492). Distilling⁴ the "idiosyncratic meditations" (Berger 144) of this period, Stevens honors—in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome"—that "more severe, / More harassing master" (CP 486) who, by living his life *as if* it were a work of art, extemporized the "Subtler, more urgent proof that the theory / Of poetry is the theory of life" (CP 486).

While a good portion of the poem eulogizes that "More harassing master," "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" also incorporates elegiac conventions—an interweaving structure (in this case, of oppositions and lyric meditation), images of light, a ceremonial tone, repetitions, conditional or hypothetical syntactic structures, and the sense that the mourned is in the position of mentor, father, or muse and has something the poet does not.⁵ And while most elegies are ultimately self-reflexive, the nature of the relationship between Stevens and Santayana and the constraints of the pre-elegiac conditions of the poem transform the usual elegiac motivations, namely the triumph or ascendance of the elegist over the mourned. Where the traditional elegy works through the process of mourning, focusing on loss in order that the mourner attain something greater (that which is inherited from the mourned and transcended by the poet), "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" works through the questions of how to live, how to shed anxiety or desperation in the urgency with which the states of "mere being" and death converge.

The five-line stanzaic form of "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" lends itself to the contemplative character of the pre-elegy, providing for a more medita-

tive dialectic than do the precision and incisiveness of Stevens' tercet. The stanzas here are more generous and allow the occasional lament (especially evoked in the middle stanzas) of the elegy to break through the surface structure of what appears to be mere eulogy. In the expansiveness of this stanzaic form the transformation of opposites—that is, their “transubstantiation”—occurs slowly, almost elaborately, as if such a process were organic and inevitable rather than startling or imposed. The first four stanzas achieve this remarkably well, focusing on the world outside the room, so that the movement of the first four stanzas to the fifth and sixth to the seventh becomes the movement from the outside to the inside to the man himself. After the command (a traditional elegiac convention) in stanza seven—“Be orator”—the eighth, ninth, and tenth stanzas through to the middle of the eleventh form the eulogistic and elegiac core in an extended, periodic sentence of eloquent intensity:

each of us
Beholds himself in you, and hears his voice
In yours, master and commiserable man . . .

Your dozing in the depths of wakefulness,
In the warmth of your bed, at the edge of your chair, alive . . .

In so much misery; and yet finding it . . .
Profound poetry of the poor and of the dead . . .

A reminder of the external world and of time ends the eleventh stanza—“It is older than the oldest speech of Rome. / This is the tragic accent of the scene”—and the twelfth positions the figure within that context: “And you . . . The one invulnerable man among / Crude captains, the naked majesty.” While a series of transformed repetitions and opposites characterizes the first four stanzas, the thirteenth stanza portrays the contingency of oppositions—“The sounds drift in . . . part of the life in your room,” the fourteenth extending the “effect” of that contingency: “Unwilling that mercy should be a mystery / Of silence.” The last two stanzas incorporate a series of transformations similar to those of the first four, but with a more complex and resonant texturing of the tonal, philosophic, and aesthetic. As well, they depend on and draw from an accumulated set of oppositions and transformations, more intricately interweaving the “continual flux” of reality and imagination and that process within the man himself.

The first four stanzas direct us to an “outer” world—or at least to one more general in relationship to the inner setting and the old philosopher emerging in subsequent stanzas. They begin with the poem's central trope, “On the threshold,” and establish a pattern of repetitions and transformation of opposites that will characterize the rest of the poem in both a more enlarged and more reductive sense. The figures in the street, Rome, the banners, and the human end—all emblems of reality, fact, and poverty—are transformed into the figures of heaven, the more merciful Rome, wings, and the spirit's greatest reach—the emblems of imagination, fiction, and oratory. The significance of

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the relationship between poverty and oratory does not become clear until the middle stanzas, but Stevens establishes that relationship from the first line through the expression of each "half" of the transformations. The language itself repeatedly moves from flatness and specificity to poetic eloquence and image: street figures to figures of majestic movement, Rome to more merciful Rome, banners to wings, mutterings to murmurings.

The two most important conditions of the poem—"Two parallels become one" and the "as if"—are also established at the center of these stanzas. Although the word "become" connecting the opposites implies transformation of one thing or idea into another, the lines "It is as if in a human dignity / Two parallels become one, a perspective, of which / Men are part both in the inch and in the mile" clarify that the apparent process, which through repetition structures the poem, is less an act of transformation than of "transubstantiation," both aspects being necessary to the possibility of "a perspective." As Stevens explains in his discussion on the rhetoric of analogy, we must think of analogy, in its relation to poetry, "as resemblance between parallels and yet parallels that are parallels only in the imagination" (NA 110). The transubstantiating power of "become" is, then, an act of imagination, the parallels remaining parallels even as they are "one," the "one" being possible only on the condition of the parallels as parallels.

The "as if"⁶ manifests a power similar to that of Stevens' use of "become." The "as if" construction paradoxically equates, equation being a component of reality, while simultaneously creating new fictions. The "as" establishes comparison, *x is or is like y*, and corresponds to reality, fact, poverty. The "if" establishes hypothetical condition—not what is but what through apprehension could be or is possible—and corresponds to imagination, fiction, oratory. The reality of "as" is contingent upon the conditional and fictive character of "if," while "if," which makes possible "the spirit's greatest reach," is contingent upon the "what is" nature of "as." The other two instances of "as if"—"Speak to your pillow as if it was yourself. / Be orator but with an accurate tongue / And without eloquence" and "As if the design of all his words takes form / And frame from thinking and is realized"—significantly affect the contexts in which they occur, the middle and end of the poem, respectively.

The initial line of stanza five introduces the first version of "The bed, the books, the chair, the moving nuns," and, according to the overall structure and pattern established in the first few stanzas, it should be and is emblematic of the outer world of reality and fact, of poverty. As a manifestation of the external reality through which the philosopher's mind and imagination pass, each particular in the line refers to a specific and objective thing, though those particulars are reductive of the more exotic figures and images of reality in the preceding stanzas and the line itself marks the transition from the world outside the room to the atmosphere within it, transforming the outer to the inner. Thus, within the stanza the line "The bed, the books, the chair, the moving nuns" correlates to the outer world of reality, but in relationship to the preceding stanzas it correlates to the inner world of the imagination. It functions,

then, simultaneously as an emblem of reality and of imagination. What at first appears to be a more illusory process of "becoming" is, in fact, an intensified image for the "continual flux" of reality and imagination that characterizes the structure, both overall and intricate, and motivation of the poem: "It is the philosopher's search / For an interior made exterior / And the poet's search for the same exterior made / Interior" (CP 481).

In the sixth stanza, the images from the fifth stanza reappear, but "In a confusion" as the "chaos" of an irrational universe. Out of the confusion of what is, "A light on the candle tearing against the wick" escapes from the real "To join a hovering excellence, . . . the celestial possible." At the heart of the poem the poet commands the philosopher to "Be orator but with an accurate tongue / And without eloquence," yet the subsequent lines of the periodic sentence are paradoxically eloquent, yielding to the language of eulogy in one of the most moving sections of the poem. But the command to be orator of the real corresponds to "Reality is the beginning not the end." Out of that beginning arises the fiction of imagination, and the command has been preceded by "as if," which signals the contingency of equation and creation, of reality and imagination. The "poverty" in which the philosopher lives is a necessary one, and Stevens uses the trope in the same way he uses the command. Reality in its most reduced state, poverty can be experienced only by one aware of things, one whose senses register "what is," yet out of this keenly alert state arises the "profound poetry" of the imagination. The philosopher impatient for the needed "grandeur" finds it through the clearest eye to reality, and "the afflatus of ruin" is inspiration contingent on the coldest real.

In the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth stanzas the eloquence of the poet has become the eloquence of the philosopher, who speaks without speaking "The loftiest syllables among loftiest things," among the "Crude captains" "Of bird-nest arches and rain-stained-vaults." Reality and imagination pass through each other as "sounds drift in" and "buildings are remembered." The life of the city impinges, but the philosopher so willingly submits to the intrusion that the domes of the city become the "architecture of. . . [his] bed." The repetitions that have informed the entire poem, that are Stevens' signature, continue here "In choruses and choirs of choruses," which resonates with the poem's other repetitions within and between lines. Never exact repetitions, each repeated word or image differs slightly from its predecessor: repetition but deviation in repetition—as if language itself is the convergence of reality and imagination. And while the accumulated effect of the interpenetration of repetitions is both elegiac and transformative, that interpenetration creates the structure by which the poet moves toward a pre-elegiac affirmation of the threshold where "the theory / Of poetry [as] the theory of life" (CP 486) is realized.

Within the "Total grandeur" of the final elegiac stanzas, *everything* of the visible world is enlarged, yet the visible is merely "a bed, a chair and moving nuns." The philosopher lives in "The immensest theatre" made possible in imagination, the "Total grandeur of a total edifice," yet the visible theater is merely

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"the pillared porch, / The book and candle in . . . [his] ambered room." The co-existence of reality and imagination is a life "Chosen by an inquisitor of structures / For himself." In that applied act of imagination, Santayana lives within the continuous "as if,"—the "impersonal person, the wanderer, / The father, the ancestor, the bearded peer, / The total of human shadows bright as glass" (CP 494). A poem radiant with a human warmth that illuminates a shared aesthetic (Morse 57), "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" enacts the convergence of all Stevens' opposites: the real and imaginary, exterior and interior, dark and light, language and silence (Riddel, "Stevens" 81). In the state of "as if" the convergences are perpetual, and in Stevens' vision of Santayana, the philosopher lives within that moment of "between" which continues to repeat itself. "It is a state of mind that defines itself between two poles . . . but [that] exists in its motion between its coordinates, a silence between sounds" (Riddel, "Stevens" 81). "He stops on the threshold," the ideal position for poet and philosopher, for it is the threshold between what is and what is possible, between "as" and "if." And on that threshold between the realized and unrealized—"As if the design of all his words takes form / And frame from thinking and is realized" (emphasis added)—Santayana joins "the hovering excellence" of "mere being."

All of Stevens' thinking, both poetic and aesthetic, motivated him to live and write a life in which he would join the company of figures like Santayana, not that of the "old men, who have chosen, and are cold / Because what they have chosen is their choice / No more" (NA 88)—though in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" and the poems surrounding it his fierce re-examination of the value of imagination, its continuous interplay with reality, led him to question whether he had "lived a skeleton's life, / As a disbeliever in reality" (OP 117). The intensity of his re-evaluations derives from his yearning for the state "of mere being" which Santayana seems to inhabit and to which he, Stevens, has aspired for so long. As an aging poet himself, aware of how long it takes an identity to become itself, Stevens confronts the new difficulty of old age: to be close to "mere being" and to death at once. In the waiting between the closeness of both "mere being" and death, the slight deviations in repetition occur with maddening slowness: "It makes so little difference, at so much more / Than seventy, where one looks, one has been there before" (CP 522). Yet the poet knows that even at this phase the conjunctions must continue:

Inescapable romance, inescapable choice
Of dreams, disillusion as the last illusion,
Reality as a thing seen by the mind,

Not that which is but that which is apprehended . . .
(CP 468)

Given the long history of their conjoint aesthetics, the rhetoric of these late poems, and the frequent allusions to Santayana (or Santayana-like figures)⁷ in poems other than "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," clearly Stevens saw himself in the portrait Wilson provided: he "is able to identify himself and his

poetry with the very real life of a man whose conduct both intellectually and socially was an applied act of imagination and whose philosophy, with its ambivalent devotion to both the real and the ideal, provided a dramatic union of the imaginative life . . . a life pregnant with humanity . . . and an effective repudiation of . . . despair . . . in its triumph over loneliness and isolation" (Riddel, "Visibility" 492). Santayana's triumph becomes "a powerful metaphor for Stevens' belief in the redemptive powers of the secular imagination, and therefore of poetry" (Riddel, "Visibility" 492), an assurance that in this phase when "mere being" and death converge the mind can rest, if only momentarily

In a permanent realization, without any wild ducks
Or mountains that were not mountains, just to know how it
would be,

Just to know how it would feel, released from destruction . . .

Without the oscillations of planetary pass-pass . . .
(CP 425)

And the mind's rest can be only momentary, even at this point—for when "permanent realization" becomes *permanent*, when "mere being" and death meet in that final convergence, the "heart . . . stop[s] beating" (CP 425). Stevens is able, however, through Santayana's dramatic union of imagination and life, to transform the "It is possible, possible, possible. It must / Be possible" of "Notes" (CP 404) into the "it exists, / It exists, it is visible, it is, it is" (CP 418). Although in the strictest sense the "it is possible" correlates to imagination and the "it is" to reality, the relationship between "it is possible"/imagination and "it is"/reality is a contingent, convergent, and transformative one. More importantly, the urgency of "it is," most notable in its haunting repetition, resonates in a particular way as Stevens searches, in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" and the other late poems, for a way to make the "it is" a pre-elegiac imperative to himself.

Nor is "the question of a poetic afterlife so [much] elided" (Berger 137) as dismissed in favor of a theory of *life*: the pre-elegy concerns itself with testing what the poet has already apprehended about living against what he apprehends in the present and needs for continuing to live in the future.⁸ Both Stevens and Santayana "remained to the last 'impenitent' as to the eternal and were, in the end, 'most penitent' about life itself" (Fuchs 163).⁹ Movingly direct and clear, authorial yet reflective, "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" achieves, through a complex structure that accommodates both the elegiac high-style formality necessary for the highest expression of tribute and for the probing assessment of life that the pre-elegy exacts, a perfect integration and execution of what lies at the heart of the poet's motivations and "desire." Meditating on an aesthetics of poetry that is an aesthetics of life *and* of dying, Stevens continues in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" to scrutinize the necessary interdependencies between reality and imagination, the dangers in either one subsuming the other, affirming that the potentially "infinite" conjunctions at

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the core of "a life lived as art," for both Stevens and Santayana, must necessarily be enacted even unto the last "lived" moment.

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Notes

¹The details of this encounter between Stevens and Santayana and a comparison of the two poems have been well-documented by both Robert Buttel and A. Walton Litz, among others.

²About Santayana "the poet" Wilson writes: "I felt, as I had done already in reading his later books, that he was a writer of passionate vocation; that this writer had been marking time during the years of his academic service . . . and had triumphed in the solitude of his later life, when, even more than through his early verse, he had revelled in a poet's power" (62).

³Stevens' theory of imagination calls to mind an Emily Dickinson poem—and since both Stevens and Dickinson inherit from the Emersonian American tradition, an excerpt here bears quoting:

The Brain—is wider than the Sky—
For—put them side by side—
The one the other will contain
With ease—and you—beside—
(—from "The Brain—Is Wider Than the Sky")

⁴The distilling process has significant ramifications, given that a poet who rarely "revised" (or at least not formally, in written drafts) modified several of the lines in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome"—as if it were immensely important to make the poem as precise and "true" as possible. The revision of "augustest large" to "illuminated large" altered what would have suggested reverence for a *worthy* figure of the world to reverence for a *spiritual* figure of the world. "[A]ugustest large" pins the epithet to the real; "illuminated large" expands the epithet, almost as an oxymoron, to include both imagination and reality. The small change in "Impatient of the grandeur that you need" to "Impatient for . . ." deletes the sense of irritability in the impatience and intensifies the relationship between the emotion and the object of the emotion. The revision of "The life of the city never lets go, nor do / You want it to. It is part of the life in your room" to "The life of the city never lets go, nor do you / Ever want it to. It is part of the life in your room" is an especially effective one. The second version line break stresses Santayana's tremendous will, creating as it does a line that structurally and accentually emphasizes the "you" and allows for a double reading, i.e., "nor do *you* let go." The metrics of the second line in the second version can, then, accommodate the addition of "ever," the word "ever" emphasizing the endurance of Santayana's will. (See Stevens' changes to the original manuscript lines in his 25 March 1952 letter to Joseph Bennett [L, 744-46].)

⁵Other conventions would include the slow revealing of intention, a movement from one state of mind to another (traditionally from grief to consolation), fire imagery, and attention to setting, among others. The conventions and psychological underpinnings of the elegy are thoroughly analyzed in *The English Elegy* by Peter Sacks.

⁶Jacqueline Vaught Brogan provides a useful interpretation of the function of this expression in her chapter "The 'As If'" in *Stevens and Simile*.

⁷There are numerous allusions to Santayana in the late poems, although many of the lines are self-referential as well. References to Santayana, Santayana-like figures, and/or the poet himself would include, among others, the following: "This is the refuge that the end creates. / It is the old man standing on the tower . . . By a feeling capable of nothing more" and "Pure rhetoric of a language without words" ("Credences," CP 373-74); "Here the total artifice reveals itself / As the total reality" ("Pineapple," NA 87); "We are not men of bronze and we are not dead. . . . [Our spirit] resides / In a permanence composed of impermanence" and "The venerable mask . . . death's poverty is heard" ("Ordinary Evening," CP 472, 477); and "The curtains . . . So long as the mind, for once, fulfilled itself" ("As at a Theatre," OP 118). Although these references have been abbreviated by the ellipses, the entire passages are relevant.

⁸W. B. Yeats's "Upon a Dying Lady," a septet of poems for the dying Mabel Beardsley, is a case in point. One of the first pre-elegies of the modern period, it focuses not on loss and mourning, nor is

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the overall tone one of lament. Rather, Mabel Beardsley comes to represent for the poet the best in a passing way of life: her noble courage in the face of a painfully wasting disease and imminent death elicits from Yeats a re-assessment of his own life. This series of lyrics is characterized, then, both by the poet's attempt to salvage from the past what continues to hold value and by his need to redefine value in relationship to the immediate demands of the present and the uncertainties of the future.

⁹Despite his later austere years in a convent at Rome, Santayana was, it has been remarked, "a Catholic in everything but faith" (Wilson 64), and his "impenitence" about life is appropriately in line with his skepticism and materialism. It could be argued, however, that Stevens' late conversion cancels his life-long "impenitence" in relationship to the eternal—though such a deathbed conversion, it could also be argued, has much to do with Stevens' being "most penitent" about life itself. A comment in a letter Father Hanley wrote to Janet McCann from Saint Bridget's Rectory on 3 July 1977 somewhat humorously points to such a penitence: "At least three times, he [Stevens] talked about getting into the fold—meaning the Catholic Church. The doctrine of hell was an objection that we later got through that [sic] alright." Father Hanley also notes that Stevens "often remarked about the peace and tranquility he experienced in going into a Catholic Church and spending some time," a comment that parallels a central theme in Stevens' later work: "the search for spiritual peace within the mind" (Riddel, "Visibility" 486).

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A Relativity of Angels: Wallace Stevens and Luce Irigaray

MARY DOYLE SPRINGER

A sexual or carnal ethics would demand that both
angel and body be found together.

—Luce Irigaray

[E]vade any definite representation but . . . depict
the figure the moment after it had vanished leav-
ing behind it tokens of its effulgence . . .

—Wallace Stevens, letter to his illustrator

I

TO LOOK AT WALLACE STEVENS' POEMS in the light of French feminism seems startling only until one is once struck by the connection, and after that one becomes increasingly impressed by it. A notorious francophile in any case, Stevens can also be seen to participate in a semiotic and feminine view of language, thought, and feeling that anticipates by decades the work of such French critics as Luce Irigaray. The feminine principle in both his ideas and imagery is exemplified at various times in his employment of angels as prominent figures in the poems. Irigaray also employs the angel figure, and Stevens' and Irigaray's angels cast light upon each other.

Stevens writes of angels repeatedly, but usually as objects of suspicion. In a poetic world that sets store by daylight and the here and now, a world which has scant use for the past and tradition, and almost no use at all for theology, angels cannot serve, except when they manage to wing their way past the conception of them as theological objects. It is better, for example, to have an "Evening without Angels" (CP 136) than to have angels arranged like lutanists "Above the trees," with the poet as "Eternal *chef d'orchestre*" (CP 136).¹ Any light that "fosters seraphim and is to them / Coiffeur of haloes, fecund jeweller" is a questionable light. And, further, the question is: "Was the sun concoct for angels or for men?" The answer is direct:

Let this be clear that we are men of sun
And men of day and never of pointed night . . .

The pity is that

Sad men made angels of the sun, and of
The moon they made their own attendant ghosts,
Which led them back to angels, after death.

The repeated word "made" is of key importance. Angels are constructs of moony sad men, and we "men of sun," for whom in any case "Death is the

mother of beauty" (CP 68), have no need for angelic protection. For us, "Bare night is best. Bare earth is best. Bare, bare." For us, the sounds of earth and of the air

are not angelic syllables
But our unfashioned spirits realized
More sharply in more furious selves.

It is worth pausing briefly to note Stevens' language in this poem. Because angels are somewhat fancy there is the use of French, employed so often both ironically and affectionately in his poems, as it is here in "*chef d'orchestre*" and "Coiffeur of haloes." We note also his use of "bare" Anglo-Saxon terms in which to express what is "best." True, that we have "unfashioned spirits" is a lack. But the aim is to realize them in "more furious selves," an absolute desideratum for Stevens, but one for which angels are unsuited. In one of his chants of repetition, we see that it is a good to be

huddled low
Beneath the arches and their spangled air,
Beneath the rhapsodies of fire and fire,
Where the voice that is in us makes a true response,
Where the voice that is great within us rises up,
As we stand gazing at the rounded moon.

Thus our most "furious" selves (our truest selves) are realized from within us. The "voice that is great within us," pregnant with a "true response," causes us to gaze upward at the "rounded moon," but not so high as to be lost among angels.

In an earlier poem, the question is raised: should poets "Pronounce amen / Through choirs infolded to the outmost clouds?" (CP 41). Surely not; the tone is derisive. "Seraphic proclamations of the pure" are really "Disguised pronunciamento, summary," and their music sticks in the "craw" (CP 45). As early as "Sunday Morning," Stevens' poems begin to elicit a "boisterous devotion to the sun" and the other non-spiritual elements of earth:

Not as a god, but as a god might be,
Naked among them, like a savage source.
Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
Out of their blood, returning to the sky . . .

It is a chant "like serafin" but arising from the things of earth, for

in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
The windy lake wherein their lord [the sun] delights,
The trees, *like serafin*, and echoing hills,
That choir among themselves long afterward.
They shall know well *the heavenly fellowship*
Of men that perish and of summer morn.

(CP 70; emphasis added)

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The only "heavenly" fellowship is thus not of winged immortals, not of the song of "serafin," but of a song of blooded humans, a song participated in by the trees, the windy lake, and echoing hills. Angels, by contrast (we learn in other poems), are found on "gates of hammered serafin," coldly observed by the eye of the "disbeliever" (CP 77). They form a deathly contrast with the lively stars:

Tonight the stars are like a crowd of faces
Moving round the sky and singing
And laughing, a crowd of men,
Whose singing is a mode of laughter,

Never angels, nothing of the dead,
Faces to people night's brilliancy,
Laughing and singing and being happy,
Filling the imagination's need.

(CP 218)

It is tangibles like stars, not angels, who are allied with the dead, that fill the imagination's need. The evening star, from early to late, is a favorite figure for Stevens because it spurs the poet's consciousness to usurp the heavenly role of angels and mediate, himself, between the spiritual ("angelic thought") and the earthly in a manner that admits both but keeps both as adherents of earth:

Our divinations,
Mechanisms of angelic thought,
The means of prophecy,

Alert us most
At evening's one star
And its pastoral text . . .

The star's "text" then appears to be delivered from the mouth of the poet:

"I am the archangel of evening and praise
This one star's blaze."

(CP 503-04)

This seems like an anticipatory answer to the demand we will hear from Irigaray that "angel and body be found together" when they enter the affairs of humans.² The poet's task is not to take celestial flights ("Never angels") but rather to seek an earthly reality, to speak "the gibberish of the vulgate" and

To compound the imagination's Latin with
The lingua franca et jocundissima.

(CP 397)

A poet charged with this task is a frequent figure in Stevens' poems and he is at terrific hazard always, just because of the power of his shaping imagination to

change what is in front of him. There he sits on a bench in the park, his "Theatre / Of Trope," and he is like a dangerous flirt, because he has "The eye of a vagabond in metaphor / That catches our own." Suddenly, in his vagabond eye, the water of the lake is

full of artificial things,

Like a page of music, like an upper air,
Like a momentary color, in which swans
Were seraphs, were saints, were changing essences.
(CP 397)

There is joy in that momentary color, but a swan turned seraph is no swan for a realist, no swan for him who wishes to speak "the gibberish of the vulgate." Gibberish, like the sound of nonsense, is always a good—it helps to fight the logic and rationality of our latinate speech and to produce that "lingua franca et jocundissima." (And what fun the poet must have had in saying just that in Latin.)

Angels have nothing to do with the vulgate. They are an imposition on reality, one of the "artificial things." In what is perhaps Stevens' most extended statement of purpose for the poet, "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," he suggests that it is possible

To find the real,
To be stripped of every fiction except one,
The fiction of an absolute—Angel,
Be silent in your luminous cloud and hear
The luminous melody of proper sound.
(CP 404)

The poet is the maker of that proper sound. He usurps the angelic nature and brings it closer to earth. He wants, himself, to do all that angels can, and he can:

What am I to believe? If the angel in his cloud,
Serenely gazing at the violent abyss,
Plucks on his strings to pluck abysmal glory,
Leaps downward through evening's revelations, and
On his spredden wings, needs nothing but deep space,
Forgets the gold centre, the golden destiny,
Grows warm in the motionless motion of his flight,
Am I that imagine this angel less satisfied?
Are the wings his, the lapis-haunted air?
Is it he or is it I that experience this?

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The answer is made obvious, for there is no question mark after the question that ensues:

Is it I then that keep saying there is an hour
Filled with expressible bliss, in which I have

No need, am happy, forget need's golden hand,
Am satisfied without solacing majesty . . .

And immediately the poet-speaker makes his brag against angels:

Whistle aloud, too weedy wren. I can
Do all that angels can. I enjoy like them,
Like men besides, like men in light secluded,

Enjoying angels.

(CP 404-05)

So there is after all no doubt that angels are enjoyable. They are one of the supreme poetic fictions that make the real bearable, that "help people to live their lives" (NA 29). Once they cease to be authoritative theological constructs and cease their pretensions of immortality, they are freed to join the wrens and the robins for whom "merely going round is a final good" (CP 405).

I have been quoting extensively from the poem that is as close to a major poetics as Stevens ever gets, but as he suggests later, in "A Primitive Like an Orb" (CP 440), there is no poem to be found in poetics itself. Rather, there is an "essential poem" discoverable in the world, lying "at the centre of things," and

We do not prove the existence of the poem.
It is something seen and known in lesser poems.
(CP 440)

Thus the later discovery, that "merely going round is a final good"—for wrens, robins, and angels—was something seen and known much earlier in the poem called "The Pleasures of Merely Circulating":

The garden flew round with the angel,
The angel flew round with the clouds,
And the clouds flew round and the clouds flew round
And the clouds flew round with the clouds.

(CP 149)

This poem, though imperturbably pleasant and "lesser," is already highly subversive of angels. Not only are they completely buried in cloud movements of earth before the poem is half over, but to fly "round" in this feckless fashion with gardens and clouds, in a Chagall-like surrealism, is subversive of the very definition of angels. Indeed, Stevens' visual aesthetic is sometimes much like that of Marc Chagall. Chagall's landscape is always a topsy-turvy carnivalesque version of a real village scene, often including a pair of lovers, a

rooster, the town violinist (poet-painter?), almost invariably an angel or two, and a donkey. In Chagall's vision, while religious as Stevens' was not, all these figures, including the angel, belong equally to the village, to the earth. Nor was Chagall's carnivalesque vision as naïf as it sometimes seems. He consciously observed a duty to:

Planter un tableau dans la nature parmi les arbres, les arbustes, les fleurs. Le tableau doit tenir. Il ne doit pas être une fausse note. Il doit s'accorder, prolonger la nature. S'accorder aussi inventé, illogique qu'il paraisse.³

[Plant a picture in nature among the trees, the shrubs, the flowers. The picture must hold its own. It must not strike a false note. It must be in accord with nature and extend it. In accord, but also invented, illogical as that may seem.] (my translation)

Is not Chagall's aesthetic in this passage like Stevens' idea of the jar in Tennessee (*CP* 76), or his varicolored sight of "green roses [which] drifted up from the table in smoke" (*CP* 370), as well as the angel flying round with the garden and the clouds?

The Encyclopedia Britannica points out that the word "angel" is "derived from the Greek word *angelos*, the equivalent of the Hebrew word *mal'akh*, meaning 'messenger.' . . . Thus [the literal meaning suggests] that angels have their significance primarily in what they do rather than in what they are." We may ask, how functional is a messenger who merely "flies round"? This appears to be exactly Stevens' point—the less sober the function of the angel, the better. The definition suggests further that "angels were believed to be celestial beings who controlled certain spheres through which a soul was to pass as it freed itself from the shackles of its material existence." This, of course, would be an automatic drawback for Stevens, who enjoys angels only when they splash a certain inspirational light, a light that makes the most of the reality of material existence, without a "golden destiny." They are at their best when he can consider them as fellow poets who breathe only slightly more rarefied air than himself, "seraph[s]" who inhale "the appointed odor" when they approach the sensual world of "Violets, doves, girls, bees and hyacinths" (*CP* 389).

A bitter change takes place in his war poems, where angels appear for the first time as messengers. In "The Men That are Falling" (*CP* 187) it is "God and all angels" whose message has seduced the soldiers to their deaths. The poem ironically begins like a prayer: "God and all angels sing the world to sleep." But we learn soon enough that to be sung to sleep is a fatal action, an acceptance of "absolutes, bodiless," of "immaculate syllables." In a hideous surreal image the speaker, representing "life itself," stares "at midnight, at the pillow that is black / In the catastrophic room . . . beyond despair."⁴ Upon the pillow "in the dark" there lies a disembodied head,

The head of one of the men that are falling, placed
Upon the pillow to repose and speak,

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and what it says are those "immaculate syllables" that "he [the soldier] spoke only by doing what he did." The cause for which he died was some totally imagined, unreal good which appalls the watcher:

God and all angels, this was his desire,
Whose head lies blurring here, for this he died.

Taste of the blood upon his martyred lips,
O pensioners, O demagogues and pay-men!

There is a reason why the corpse of the soldier has a head but no body. "God and all angels," figures for the "absolutes" that caused him to lay down his life, are not of the body but of the head, and the cynical "demagogues and pay-men" (those "pensioners" in the pay of governments, who set on soldiers to die for abstract principles) are invited, in a nauseous image, to taste the bloody lips of that severed head. Here is the maximum lack of mediation between heaven and earth. The message has been delivered, but "God and all angels" are, and send, forced abstractions that belong entirely to heaven. The danger and the pity are that they have inspired "belief": "This death was his belief though death is a stone," and the sickening irony of his martyrdom is that "This man loved earth, not heaven, enough to die."

The worst image of angels appears in "The Greenest Continent," a poem which Stevens worked and reworked with a devotion to its ideas, but which he ultimately kept from publication in the *Collected Poems*, apparently because he had second thoughts about its rather brazen didacticism and topicality (Italians in Ethiopia). But it is highly representative of his metaphor of angels as bringers of disaster. Here angels stand in for Christians invading Africa, "which had / No heaven," and where if a god were to rise like a statue "among the elephantine palms," one could depend that "Sleekly the serpent would draw himself across," for "No god rules over Africa" (*OP* 85-86).⁵ Thus the invading "angels" are the more grossly out of place:

Forth from their tabernacles once again
The angels come, armed, gloriously to slay
The black and ruin his sepulchral throne.
Hé quoi! Angels go pricking elephants?
Wings spread and whirling over jaguar-men?
Angels tiptoe upon the snowy cones
Of palmy peaks sighting machine-guns? These,
Seraphim of Europe? Pouring out of dawn,
Fresh from the sacred clarities, chanters
Of the pith of the mind, cuirassiers against
The milkiest bowmen. This makes a new design,
Filleted angels over flapping ears,
Combatting bushmen for a patch of gourds,
Loosing black slaves to make black infantry,
Angels returning after war with belts

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And beads and bangles of gold and trumpets raised,
Racking the world with clarion puffs.

The "clarion puffs" come from

The oracular trumpets round and roundly hooped,
In Leonardo's way, to magnify
Concentric bosh.

(OP 87)

Though I am pausing at the bleakest of the uses Stevens made of angels, I have offered enough varieties of evidence to suggest that his uses are subject to change according to the world of the given poem and that, as we also know, there is for him such a thing as a "necessary angel," to whom we shall return.

II

In "Sexual Difference," Luce Irigaray's essay on improving relations between the sexes, she characterizes that improvement as "the creation of a new *poetics*" (118) for human life. In the "poem" she builds, she suddenly introduces a metaphorical angel to help make her point. In doing so, she helps our vision of Stevens' ultimate use of angels.

Irigaray has been speaking in the essay of "desire" between the sexes in the same suspicious way that Stevens employs the term in "The Men That are Falling": the soldier's "desire" has moved only in one fatal direction, toward the abstract, with no saving reciprocity from earth. Irigaray describes the socially conditioned "desire" by which one sex, the female, is constantly drawn toward the supposedly superior magnet of the male. The engendered feminine motion is always, therefore, into an outer "*place separated from its 'own' place,*" and thus the female is always suspended in space and deprived of identity. "She is or ceaselessly becomes the place of the other who cannot separate himself from it." The force of this one-way desire is not only to lose her own place, but to crowd him into his: "Without her knowledge or volition, then, she threatens by what she lacks: a 'proper' place" (122). The identity of each sex is threatened by this lack of reciprocal movement, his by his rigidity and stasis, hers by a kind of "nudity," since "she cannot be located, cannot remain in her place" (a new meaning for an old phrase) and is thus stripped of any attributes that would tell her who she is.

What is needed, Irigaray believes, is a "third term." In order to construct an "ethics of the passions," an "ethics of sexual difference," it is necessary to "change the relationship between form, matter, interval and limit." The beginning of her solution is to introduce an almost mystical sense of "*wonder*" (Fr., *admiration*), that which, borrowing from Descartes, she calls "the first passion" from which all others flow, and which Stevens would call the onset of the poetic imagination. Sometimes, Irigaray says, "a sense of wonder is bestowed upon a work of art. But it is never found in the *gap between man and woman,*" for, she reminds us, that gap has always been "filled instead with attraction, greed, possession, consummation, disgust, etc.," leaving no space for the wonder

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which sees something, “sees something as though always for the first time, and never seizes the other as its object” (123-24).

Wonder, however, tends to sit still, and Irigaray not only interests herself in establishing a still space in which the sexes may know themselves, each in their distinct “places,” but she also hopes that they may learn to move in a “double loop,” in which each can move out towards the other and back to itself. At present “woman always tends *towards* something else without ever turning to herself as the site of a positive element.” And, Irigaray fears, “If these positive and negative elements are not present in both [sexes], the same pole [man] will always attract, while the other [woman] remains in motion but possesses no ‘proper’ place” (121). (Once again, there is a small language gap between “proper” and “*propre*.”)

Wonder might do this much—it “might allow [the sexes] to retain an autonomy based on their difference, and give them a space of freedom or attraction, a possibility of separation or alliance.” She chooses her terms carefully for, she specifies,

There would be no consummation. Such an idea is a delusion. One sex is never entirely consummated or consumed by another. There is always a *residue*. (124-25)

It is that “residue,” that lasting space between the sexes, that we have all treated too bluntly—“offered up to . . . God,” “incarnated in a *child*,” or “thought of as being *neuter*,” remaining always “an insurmountable distance, like a sort of respectful or deadly no-man’s land.” Far from being a fruitful distance that might be crossed and re-crossed with a “sense of that wonder conjured up by a *wedding*,” it acts like the traditional split

between body and soul, sexuality and spirituality, the lack of a passage for the spirit or for God, between inside and outside . . . Everything is constructed in such a way as to keep these realities apart, if not opposed to one another. They must not mix, marry or forge an alliance. (125)

Or so society has it.

At this point Irigaray introduces suddenly the metaphor of angel as messenger and mediator between all those falsely drawn dichotomies. *Angel* is defined as

whatever endlessly *passes through the envelope or envelopes* [that contain each sex] from one end to the other, postponing every deadline, revising every decision, undoing the very idea of repetition [of the past]. They destroy the monstrous elements that might prohibit the possibility of a new age, and herald a new birth, a new dawn. (126)

This definition of herald angel sounds like one Stevens would agree with when he speaks of “A matching and mating of surprised accords, / A respond-

ing to a diviner opposite" (CP 468); and both Irigaray and Stevens wish to make clear that the concept is metaphorical, not mystical, that it is untraditional, and as subject to shifting perspective as is the night sky:

Night-blue is an inconstant thing. The seraph
Is satyr in Saturn, according to his thoughts.
(CP 390)

Angels of this kind, says Irigaray, "are not unconnected with sex," and "They cannot be reduced to philosophy, theology or morality." Rather, they "appear as the messengers of the ethics evoked by art—sculpture, painting or music—though they can only be discussed in terms of the gesture that represent[s] them":

They speak as messengers, but gesture seems to be their 'nature.'
Movement, posture, the coming-and-going between the two. They
move—or disturb?—the paralysis or *apatheia* of the body, or soul, or
world. They set trances or convulsions to music, and lend them
harmony. (126-27)

(It is worth noting that, throughout French feminist thought, poets themselves are viewed as being like these angels—valuably marginal to society and tradition, making music of "trances or convulsions."⁶)

Returning to Stevens' poems, we can see now that, for all his disdain for angels as messengers bringing from heaven to earth the destructive "absolutes," there is for him also that "necessary angel" of complex design similar to Irigaray's angel, who works modestly upon the earth, not by messages from heaven but by indicative "gesture."⁷ Stevens, too, believed in the separate identities of the sexes, and in the delicacy of their coming together in a looping back and forth that destroys neither. In "Re-statement of Romance" (CP 146) he is already speaking of "our selves" as

Supremely true each to its separate self,
In the pale light that each upon the other throws.

Similarly, in "The World as Meditation" (CP 520), written much later, the Ulysses figure advances somewhat tentatively from his own distant place, a "form of fire," a "mere savage presence," coming from the "east" like a sun to awaken the world in which Penelope dwells. Unlike the relatively submissive wife drawn by Homer, she has been "long" composing a self of her own for this meeting:

She has composed, so long, a self with which to welcome him,
Companion to his self for her, which she imagined,
Two in a deep-founded sheltering, friend and dear friend.

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Stevens' ideas and expression here are startlingly like those of Irigaray when she speaks of a woman creating "a space for herself (as well as to maintain a position from which to welcome the other)" (123). The question is raised:

But was it Ulysses? Or was it only the warmth of the sun
On her pillow?

And the answer is given:

It was Ulysses and it was not. Yet they had met,
Friend and dear friend and a planet's encouragement.
The barbarous strength within her would never fail.

The relation between the sexes in this poem is nearly ideal from the point of view of Irigaray's prescription: he has a "savage presence" fit to awaken her world, and she in turn has an unfailing "barbarous strength" and a place of her own from which to welcome him. Penelope here is very like the "Women with other lives in their live hair" who rise

As if, as if, as if the disparate halves
Of things were waiting in a betrothal known
To none, awaiting espousal to the sound

Of right joining, a music of ideas, the burning
And breeding and bearing birth of harmony,
The final relation, the marriage of the rest.

(CP 464-65)

I see the term "rest" as like the "residue" spoken of by Irigaray, the material out of which the "right joining" is to be made. For Irigaray's "third term" is not lacking in Stevens. In "The World as Meditation" it is not an angel but a "planet's encouragement," a spirit belonging to the earth itself, that brings together this "Friend and dear friend." The self Penelope has "composed, so long" is "Companion to his self for her," and the double-loop of desire is manifest:

His arms would be her necklace
And her belt, the final fortune of their desire.

I have written previously about the metaphors of imagination and reality implied by Ulysses and Penelope in light of the title, "The World as Meditation."⁸ The epigraph which precedes the poem is also revelatory, wherein Enesco is a kind of Ulysses-poet:

*J'ai passé trop de temps à travailler mon violon, à voyager. Mais l'exercice
essentiel du compositeur—la méditation—rien ne l'a jamais suspendu en
moi . . .*

[I have spent too much time traveling and playing my violin. But the essential exercise of the composer—meditation—nothing has ever suspended that in me . . .] (my translation)

Stevens' metaphorical idea, in which the crossing between the worlds of imagination and reality is a kind of meditation, seems to me to respond to Irigaray's belief that an ethics and aesthetics of sexual difference concern also "the split between body and soul, sexuality and spirituality," a split "between inside and outside" (125). Ulysses is the "interminable adventurer" who comes from an outside world, while Penelope has as her place to welcome him, a "deep-founded sheltering," an inside. The ultimate celebratory coming together is not presided over by an angel mediator, but nevertheless by something one might call angelic in the best sense: "an inhuman meditation, larger than her own," a "planet's encouragement."

We can see Stevens' poem striving toward the kind of third term that is what Irigaray calls "both horizontal and vertical, terrestrial and celestial," but not metaphysical. She shares entirely Stevens' disdain for what she calls "a God of the Father who alone lays down the law, [and is] . . . the immutable mouthpiece of a single sex" (127). Both writers crave a kind of "pass-pass" (CP 425) of spirituality that is of this world. Irigaray beautifully describes the quality of that force: "It is as if the angel were the figurative version of a sexual being not yet incarnate," paradoxically "A light, divine gesture from flesh" (126).

Ultimately, Stevens recognizes that light, divine gesture in the "necessary angel" that appears in "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" (CP 496), and who becomes the title for his book of essays in poetic theory. Stevens' active theory of poetry may be summed up in his saying that "poetry becomes and is a transcendent analogue composed of the particulars of reality, created by the poet's sense of the world" (NA 130). Yet if "reality is the central reference for poetry" (NA 71), what use has the poet for angels? One answer seems to be that angels are welcome only when they cease to reflect heaven, except as heaven reflects some sparkling light that belongs to earth. "Bare earth is best" for this poet, but bare earth unmediated is a mere barbarity: "The plainness of plain things is savagery" (CP 467) and "There must be some wing on which to fly" (OP 201) since "Realism is a corruption of reality" (OP 192). That wing is the poetic imagination. This is the "necessary angel," grounded in the real and yet winged, the ally of the poet for whom "The world imagined is the ultimate good."⁹ Even the term "God" is acceptable if we say that "God and the imagination are one . . ." The ellipsis is Stevens' own, and it signifies a partial warning that the statement must not be made to seem a maxim, but merely what "We say," a prismatic seizure of the imagination, of "the central mind":

We say God and the imagination are one . . .
How high that highest candle lights the dark.

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,

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In which being there together is enough.
(CP 524)

In this late poem (interestingly entitled “Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour”), earlier dichotomies that split off “God and all angels” as being demons of abstraction and absolutism are melted as we “Light the first light of evening” and engage in one of those celebratory marriages advocated by Irigaray, achieved across opposing spaces. The world of reality and the spirit of imagination have come together as an ultimate good:

This is, therefore, the intensest rendezvous.
It is in that thought that we collect ourselves,
Out of all the indifferences, into one thing:

Within a single thing, a single shawl
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,
A light, a power, the miraculous influence.

Here, now, we forget each other and ourselves.
We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole,
A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous.

“[T]hat which arranged the rendezvous” is surely the “angel of reality,” the one “surrounded by paysans,” the “necessary angel of earth,” necessary

Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,
Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set . . .

While necessary, and of the earth, such an angel is entirely the gestural one perceived by Irigaray. The poem asks:

Am I not[,]

.....

A figure half seen, or seen for a moment, a man
Of the mind, an apparition apparelled in

Apparels of such lightest look that a turn
Of my shoulder and quickly, too quickly, I am gone?
(CP 497)

A flash, a relativity of angels to the “planetary pass-pass” (CP 425), a double-loop between the imagination and reality, not only out of necessity but delight: would not any other approach to angels seem itself too “stiff and stubborn,” too “man-locked”?

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Notes

¹My text employs the usual abbreviations for the primary works of Stevens: *CP*—*The Collected Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1954); *L*—*Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. and sel. Holly Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1966); *NA*—*The Necessary Angel* (New York: Knopf, 1951); *OP*—*Opus Posthumous*, ed. Milton J. Bates (New York: Knopf, 1989).

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²Luce Irigaray, "Sexual Difference," *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 188-130. Further references to this source will be cited in the text with page numbers in parentheses.

³Quoted by Gilbert Lascaut, "La Joie dans la Peinture," in the catalogue of the exhibition, *Marc Chagall: rétrospective de l'oeuvre peint*, Fondation Maeght, St. Paul de Vence, 1954.

⁴It is curious that in his conscious aesthetic Stevens opposed the surrealism of other artists, though there are poems of his own, of which "The Men That are Falling" is an example, in which his technique could readily be called surrealistic. My theory is that for him *displacement* (e.g., "the garden flew round with the angel"), is not surrealism but that *distortion* (e.g., Picasso's cubism) is. The bodiless head upon the pillow is hideously displaced but natural, the lips bleed naturally, and nature is the base for imaginative discoveries, however upsetting. Stevens says that "The essential fault of surrealism is that it invents without discovering. To make a clam play an accordion is to invent not to discover" (*OP* 203). The clam image is whimsical distortion, what Glen MacLeod calls "willful and calculating," and not a poignant discovery in nature, as is the head upon the pillow. (See Glen MacLeod, "Surrealism and the Supreme Fiction: 'It Must Give Pleasure,'" *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 14, 2 [Spring 1990]: 33-38.)

Stevens' concern about distortion is made manifest in a letter to Hi Simons: "Given the mobs of contemporary life . . . it is impossible to project a world that will not appear to some one to be a deformation. . . . At a time of severely practical requirements, the world of the imagination looks like something distorted" (*L* 372).

⁵It is hard to consult *Opus Posthumous* without a feeling of regret that so much of what Stevens discarded, or purposely declined to republish, should so often be brought up by critics from the archives (where it serves some proper uses) and given coequal status, as evidence, with the *The Collected Poems* and *The Necessary Angel*. Especially now that there is a new edition of *OP*, I invite other critics to join me in calling attention to the relative status of these collections whenever we feel moved to quote from *OP*. See Henry Reed on this problem, "[Review of *The Necessary Angel and Opus Posthumous*]," repr. in *Critical Essays on Wallace Stevens*, eds. Steven Gould Axelrod and Helen Deese (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1988), 61.

⁶I call attention especially to Julia Kristeva's studies of poets in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Rondiez, tr. Alice Jardine, Thomas A. Gora, Leon S. Rondiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

⁷Michel Benamou has commented acutely that "Stevens repatriated the angel to the American soil, and restored the original meaning of 'pure poetry' . . . The difference between Stevens and the French tradition hinges on the metaphysical meaning of the word *pure*. It is a contrast between feeling purity in the world, and reaching purity out of this world by an angel's flight" (*Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* [Princeton University Press, 1972], 68).

⁸Mary Doyle Springer, "The Feminine Principle in Wallace Stevens," *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, Special Issue: "Stevens and Women" 12, 2 (1988): 119-137.

⁹Stevens was at pains to explain the shifting perspectives he wanted for understanding this "necessary angel":

in Angel Surrounded by Paysans the angel is the angel of reality. This is clear only if the reader is of the idea that we live in a world of the imagination, in which reality and contact with it are the great blessings. For nine readers out of ten, the necessary angel will appear to be the angel of the imagination and for nine days out of ten that is true, although it is the tenth day that counts. (*L* 753)

For the poet of change, his opinions on his favorite subjects are as relative as any others—which does not mean that they are lightly arrived at.

‘Esthétique du Mal’ as Parody of Burke’s Sublime

THOMAS TRZYNA

Critical assessment of Wallace Stevens’ “Esthétique du Mal” has tended to be harsh, as Stevens himself anticipated when he first submitted his poem to *The Kenyon Review*. Helen Vendler, for example, dismisses “Esthétique” after observing that its ideas find better expression in other long poems (206, 217). Daniel Fuchs, who carefully explores the ways the poem both approximates and deviates from Santayana’s aesthetic, concludes that “the poem does not succeed despite its subject” (160). More recently, Henry Weinfield confesses a final “ambivalence” (27) about the poem he so lucidly assesses from the standpoint of its indebtedness to Baudelaire, Nietzsche, and Wordsworth. While these critical responses are highly instructive, they possibly misread Stevens’ intent and the specific tradition he had in mind to explore. Vendler and Fuchs treat “Esthétique” as part of a growing philosophical statement in which the boundaries between poems are of less importance than the continuities of meaning. Vendler, in particular, broadly compares parts of “Esthétique” to other poems, without attending minutely to the rhetorical needs, personae, or philosophical backgrounds that might shape Stevens’ meaning in this poem. Weinfield’s analysis locates the poem in several traditions, but does not explore its relation to the tradition of thinking about sublimity that extends from Longinus to Burke. And Fuchs’s careful analysis of “Esthétique”’s possible relation to Santayana’s aesthetic seems to have missed both a tantalizing passage in *The Sense of Beauty* and Stevens’ own droll hint that he was referring to a specific aesthetic theory, perhaps even Edmund Burke’s theory of the sublime. What follows must be speculative, however, as there is no firm evidence that Stevens read *The Sense of Beauty*: the poem itself constitutes the best evidence. Yet even if the specific connection to Santayana and Burke remains in doubt, a stronger case can be made that “Esthétique” draws on the eighteenth-century tradition of the sublime just as it does on the traditions identified by Weinfield and Fuchs.

Stevens’ correspondence with John Crowe Ransom suggests that he might have had Edmund Burke’s theory of the sublime in mind when he wrote “Esthétique du Mal,” and if the poem is read as a commentary on Burke’s characteristic positions, its meanings become much sharper. When he submitted “Esthétique” to Ransom at *The Kenyon Review*, Stevens wrote:

There are some odds and ends: “ensolacings” at the end of [section X], for instance, which you may not like. However, I think that there is more to be said for them than there is against them. . . . The last poem ought to end with an interrogation mark, I suppose, but I have punctuated it in such a way as to indicate an abandonment

of the question, because I cannot bring myself to end the thing with an interrogation mark.

I am thinking of aesthetics as the equivalent of *apérçus*, which seems to have been the original meaning. I don't know what would happen if anybody tried to systematize the subject, but I haven't tried. (469)

Reading "Esthétique" with these positions in view helps to explain Stevens' remarks about the "ensolacings" passage of "Esthétique," revealing that Stevens might have been parodying bad art, not creating it in that controversial section of the poem. For Stevens shows a subtle wit in his evaluation of the sublime. And while there is no evidence that Stevens ever owned copies of Santayana's works on aesthetics, Stevens' statement about *apérçus* is characteristically diffident: he misdirects the reader by denying knowledge of an aesthetic theory with which he was probably familiar. The philosopher who based an entire aesthetic theory on apperceptions, of course, was his friend and teacher George Santayana. And it is Santayana's major work on aesthetics, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outline of Aesthetic Theory*, that contains, in close proximity, both criticism of Edmund Burke's theory and several views that closely resemble themes in Stevens' poem. What neither Stevens nor Santayana attempted to systematize was a theory of aesthetics that would prescribe what people ought to feel ("in aesthetics the thing has no name," Santayana remarks [94]), which is precisely what Burke attempted to do in an extreme fashion. Burke is prescriptive not only in the sense that he tries to provide a universal psychological and philosophical explanation for aesthetic judgments, but also in the sense that he proposes to dictate which spectacles and experiences *ought* to produce feelings of sublimity and beauty.

In fairness, it must be added that Stevens' letter to Ransom indicates that he is responding most immediately to a letter quoted by Ransom in *The Kenyon Review*, a letter that stimulated Ransom to write an essay on the place of poetry in time of war. Ransom's anonymous soldier-correspondent had asked for poetry that would show more "muscle and nerve" and not be "cut off from pain" (281). Ransom's response includes many remarks that might have found their way into Stevens' poem, such as Ransom's emphasis on the "positives" of poetry, which resembles Stevens' Yes and No in section eight, and Ransom's criticism of Rupert Brooke for lumping all the flowers together as "the flowers themselves," which might have been transformed into Stevens' play on "All sorts of flowers" in section four. Stevens and Ransom agree that flowers should be experienced as individuals, not as a collective phenomenon. Moreover, Stevens' note to Ransom about closing "Esthétique" with a question mark may be a response to the soldier's request for a poetry that would do more, say more in time of war. Stevens may be indicating that his response to that request, like Ransom's, was to say that poetry's job during war is to keep doing what it always does, to provide the lasting works that define and record our civilization. The last stanza of "Esthétique" seems to say just that: isn't this

enough? When all of this indebtedness to Ransom's essay is taken into account, though, Stevens' arch remark about *apérçus* remains without explanation. Even if Stevens did not know Santayana's comments on Burke, even if the concluding disclaimer in his letter to Ransom genuinely means that Stevens was ignorant of the most fundamental concept in Santayana's aesthetic, "Esthétique du Mal" still moves in the tradition of the sublime as that tradition was understood by Burke and criticized by Stevens' mentor.

"Esthétique du Mal" plays on the tension between the views characteristic of Santayana and Burke, starting with an analysis of sublimity, stopping to reduce to absurdity several of Burke's prescriptive notions, and drawing toward a close with passages that echo Santayana's chief point, that we are to find beauty in "those necessary but imperfect fictions" (89), or as Stevens phrases the thought:

who could have thought to make
So many selves, so many sensuous worlds,
As if the air, the mid-day air, was swarming
With the metaphysical changes that occur,
Merely in living as and where we live.
(326)

Santayana directly attacks only one of Burke's statements, but Santayana's entire section on "Form" can be read as a commentary on Burke. In his eagerness to advance a theory of the sublime, Burke falls into the error of judging beautiful objects to be merely small or picturesque. A judgment of beauty, in Burke's analysis, often forms in the presence of things with which we are in sympathy and to which we have become accustomed. Sublimity, on the contrary, is a response to objects that are vast, vague, and terrifying. According to Burke, pain is a more powerful feeling than pleasure; it follows naturally for Burke that aesthetic feelings grounded in the terror of pain are nobler than aesthetic responses grounded in love, sympathy, or conventional standards of beauty. Burke's most extreme statement of these views is also the passage that Santayana picks out for attack. Burke writes, "hardly anything can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach toward infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see an object distinctly, and to perceive its bounds, is one and the same thing. A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea" (108). To this, Santayana responds, "the contention of Burke that the beautiful is small is due to an arbitrary definition. He only exaggerates the then usual opposition of the beautiful to the sublime" (93).

In the pages that follow this attack on small ideas, Burke enumerates the characteristics of the sublime: power, pain, vastness, extreme minuteness, infinity. Burke argues that beauty, on the other hand, is often merely the result of a mechanical response to phenomena, such as the way we perceive the quality of "smoothness" (213) when we hear harmonious sounds, or the way that well-blended colors impress us as "clear and fair" (220). "We must conclude,"

Burke reasons, "that beauty is, for the greater part, some quality in bodies acting mechanically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses" (210). As an example of a sublime and tragic event, Burke offers the case of public executions, which can empty a theater of patrons who prefer to see the true sublime of actual death (pain at a distance) rather than any mere theatrical imitation of the sublime (78). What we are supposed to enjoy at these times is pure astonishment, a state of being in which "all motions are suspended with some degree of horror" (78), in which thought stops in the presence of something too large to grasp. In short, Burke becomes so attached to this theory that he proposes to find an aesthetic effect in execution, an action that is by any other standard monstrous and, admittedly, confusing.

How then does "Esthétique du Mal" criticize a theory like Burke's while advocating the aesthetic views of Santayana and Stevens himself? Stevens' procedure is a combination of case studies and satire. Stevens opens the poem with a supposition: imagine a gentleman traveler (an eighteenth-century gentleman on the grand tour, perhaps) studying the theory of the sublime while sitting in a hotel room across the bay from Mount Vesuvius. This is as good a test of the theory as one might find. Stevens grants that it can be pleasant to sit at a distance and watch a volcano flicker, but that is as far as he will concede merit to the aesthetics of sublimity. As the persona considers the actual pain of Pompeii and his own death, his mind breaks off. Rather than astonishment, however, Stevens' hypothetical traveler experiences numbness and denial. Stevens comments that "we shrink" from the more extreme instances of the sublime. The question of what the earth would feel in our absence is beside the point of aesthetics. As Santayana comments, "but how things would appear to us if we were not human is, to a man, of no importance" (95). Stevens expresses the identical thought in these words:

Except for us, Vesuvius might consume
In solid fire the utmost earth and know
No pain (ignoring the cocks that crow us up
To die).

(314)

What the "cocks" think "that crow us up / To die" is not worth asking.

In the second section of the poem, Stevens queries Burke's notion of the sublimity of minuteness. "Warblings" and midnight distractions lead to insomnia and despair, not to sensations of sublimity. Further, insofar as the ideas of pain and destruction make one insensitive to "the sky" and "the yellow of the acacias" (315), an aesthetic of the sublime makes one incapable of appreciating the genuine beauty of the phenomenal world, especially in the terms of the aesthetic Stevens propounds at the conclusion of the poem, an aesthetic that places great emphasis on the joy of perceiving variations. Stevens' third and fifth sections criticize a theoretical position like Burke's by reducing it to absurdity. Is beauty to be identified with sympathy and love? Or is it, rather, the case that excessive sympathy cloys? In sections seven and ten, Stevens takes

up this theme again and concludes that squarely facing the facts of suffering and death allows one to escape the "sleek" and seductive "ensolacings" (322) of excessive sympathy, which is emphatically not a foundation for a judgment of beauty. These are the passages that Vendler condemns and which Stevens submitted to Ransom with reservations (although it is not absolutely clear whether, in his letter to Ransom, Stevens refers only to the word "ensolacings" or to these full sections). Stevens' reliance on a theory of aesthetic judgment similar to Santayana's, combined with his systematic rejection of a theory of sublimity like Burke's, supports the view that in the "ensolacings" passages Stevens meant to challenge the idea that calling an experience beautiful means that we feel sympathetic toward it, or that we inevitably find beauty in objects for which we feel sympathy. Burke might find such ensolacings attractive; Santayana and Stevens would not.

The fourth section of "Esthétique" attacks still other types of sentimentalism countenanced by such definitions of beauty, especially the sentimentalism of finding music or flowers pleasing not for their form or variety or what they actually are as individual creations or objects in the natural world, but because they are (in Burke's sense) smooth. According to Burke's aesthetic, one can appreciate music as a mechanical succession of smooth notes—"All sorts of notes," in Stevens' words, not "one / In an ecstasy of its associates" (316). Here, as elsewhere, Stevens reduces to absurdity Burke's failure to consider aesthetic form, context, and above all the human meaning that is integral to what Santayana called apperception. For what makes the *apérçus* special is precisely the "ecstasy" of association, the fact that something previously perceived is now remembered or re-experienced and fit into a pattern of connections that renders each part as well as the whole pleasing. Music constitutes a particular association of notes (a variation on a theme, for example); music is not a mere mechanical flow of sensory impulses. Each flower is a unique phenomenon, not an instance of "smoothness" interchangeable with any other instance of smoothness or any other flower. Section fourteen, perhaps, repeats this concern for context by rejecting Burke's notion that little ideas can be beautiful. Stevens proposes as a counter-example the monomania of people who have nothing but single ideas or fixations that are part of no intellectual structure. Such people's "extreme of logic," like Burke's, "would be illogical" (325).

Sections eight and twelve reject the possibility that there is aesthetic value in negating everything, a choice that Santayana described fully in his study of aesthetics. For him, negation was a road to indifference. Describing this type of false aesthete, Santayana writes, "a passionate negation, the motive of which, although morbid, is in spite of itself perfectly human, absorbs all his energies, and his ultimate triumph is to attain the absoluteness of indifference" (95). Section eight, which opens with the death of Satan, takes up both this idea from Santayana and, perhaps, Burke's peculiar conclusion that executions are sublime. The death of Satan was a "capital / Negation" (319), Stevens writes. While this is a pun on the Latin meaning of capital, or tenement, implying

Satan's death in the human mind, might there also be a pun on capital punishment? Stevens could be saying that opinions like Burke's are so ludicrous that he can poke fun at them: this kind of negation is not sublime or aesthetic in any sense. Negation of any kind reduces rather than increases the imaginative possibilities, the possible fictions. In section thirteen there is a contrasting reference to Santayana himself, who appears as a model of aesthetic behavior "in his Mediterranean cloister," able to face the world as it truly is and—with admirable self-control—"watch the fire-feinting sea and call[] it good" (324). Section seven, too, addresses the falseness of a theory that tries to aestheticize death. Neither a public execution nor the thought of "The wounds of many soldiers" (nor many notes nor lots of flowers) is sublime. The image of the woman stroking the dead soldier's head is another false nostalgia. Section eleven, similarly, rejects sublime and sentimental responses to disaster in favor of trying to see disasters for what they are as particular experiences. While it may be true that Stevens points out the curious tension of horror and sympathy one might feel in the face of those events, he is also showing the inadequacy of the aesthetics of sublimity by rejecting the tendency to generalize and stereotype, the tendency to subordinate the particular to the mass, that is the primary characteristic of Burke's method.

A man of bitter appetite despises
A well-made scene in which paratroopers
Select adieux; and he despises this:
A ship that rolls on a confected ocean,
The weather pink, the wind in motion . . .
(322)

Sections six, nine, and fifteen assert Stevens' own aesthetic views in a way that indicates strong general agreement with Santayana's theory of apperception in *The Sense of Beauty*. The imagination should create fictions, but always with an awareness of the realities that underlie the fictions:

The green corn gleams and the metaphysicals
Lie sprawling in majors of the August heat,
The rotund emotions, paradise unknown.
This is the thesis scrivined in delight,
The reverberating psalm, the right chorale.
(325-26)

One must hold on to one's sensibility, live in a physical world, and delight in the acts of perception, interpretation, apperception, and creation.

The reading of "Esthétique du Mal" offered here does not deviate markedly from the accepted understanding of Stevens' views of life and art, except to the extent that I find Stevens satiric where Vendler takes this poem more seriously and judges several sections flawed (206). Reading the poem in the context of these possible sources—Santayana and Burke—suggests that Stevens was not endorsing but rather analyzing and criticizing the mawkish sentimentality of

"Esthétique du Mal" and Burke's Sublime

the "ensolacings" passages. Recognizing that he might be misunderstood, Stevens cautioned Ransom that he had misgivings about the most sentimental sections of the poem (469). At the same time, Stevens presents his own version of Santayana's aesthetic of glimpses and sophisticated creativity. Stevens' letter to Ransom reveals a comedian at work, for Stevens deliberately yet disingenuously supplies clues both to the difficult passages and to the source of the poem's ideas. While the case I present may be impossible to prove, the "paper trail" that Stevens left in the poem itself and in his closing remark to Ransom may be sufficiently enticing to win at least a qualified assent for this interpretation.

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Wallace Stevens: A Survey of Bibliographies and Related Material, 1940-1990

VINCENT PRESTIANNI

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

1. Simons, Hi. "Bibliography, October 1937–November 1940." *Harvard Advocate*. December 1940. 127: 32-34.
PRIMARY: 1937-1940. Checklist, arranged chronologically. Covers periodical and newspaper appearances. Includes symposia.
2. "Bibliography." *The Shaping Spirit: A Study of Wallace Stevens*. William Van O'Connor. 146 p. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950. 141-146.
PRIMARY: 1920-1949. Checklist, arranged by genre, then chronologically within genre. Annotations. Covers separate publications, first appearance book contributions, periodical appearances. Includes symposia, letters. Cites revised version; notes varying contents. Cites reprints.
SECONDARY: 1924-1949. Alphabetical arrangement. Covers books, periodicals. Includes reviews, foreign-language items.
NOTE: Though selective, offers the first systematic bibliography in the first full-length study of Stevens.
3. Morse, Samuel French. *Wallace Stevens: A Preliminary Checklist of His Published Writings, 1898-1954*. 66 p. New Haven: Yale University Library, 1954.
NOTE: Revised and updated in #7.
4. "A Supplementing List of Items in the Wallace Stevens Collection at Dartmouth College." *Dartmouth College Library Bulletin* (New Series). December 1961. n.s. 4: 67-71.
PRIMARY: Supplements #3. Absorbed by #7, except for reprint periodical appearances.
SECONDARY: Absorbed by #7.
NOTE: See also #35.
5. Bryer, Jackson R., and Joseph N. Riddel. "A Checklist of Stevens Criticism." *Twentieth Century Literature*. October 1962–January 1963. 8: 124-142.
NOTE: Updated and expanded in #7.
6. Mitchell, Roger S. "Wallace Stevens: A Checklist of Criticism." *Bulletin of Bibliography*. September–December 1962. 23: 208-211. Continued in *Bulletin of Bibliography*. January–April 1963. 23: 232-233.
NOTE: Though "taken cognizance of" in #7, does yet include some minor items not in #7, e.g., "publications that deal only slightly with Stevens." May be found useful for its alphabetical arrangement—in effect, an index.
7. Morse, Samuel French, Jackson R. Bryer, Joseph N. Riddel. *Wallace Stevens Checklist and Bibliography of Stevens Criticism*. 98 p. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963.

A Survey of Bibliographies

PRIMARY: 1898-1961. Descriptive bibliography, arranged by form, then chronologically within form. Annotations. Index. Covers separate publications, editorships, translations by, first appearance and reprint book contributions, periodical and newspaper appearances. Includes translations of, interviews, symposia, speeches, letters, radio work, ephemera, piracies, juvenilia, stage production (p. 92). Mentions textual variants; notes varying contents and title changes. Identifies first edition. Cites first English edition (in one case). Cites reprints.

NOTE: Revises and updates #3. A comprehensive descriptive bibliography and the standard reference for its period.

SECONDARY: 1900-1962. Arranged by form, then alphabetically within form. Annotations. Covers books, periodicals, dissertations. Includes reviews, foreign-language items, dedications, portrayals.

NOTE: An extensive compilation of the early sources.

8. "Appendix II. A Chronological Index of the Poems and Stories Stevens Published as an Undergraduate." *Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium*. Robert Buttel. 269 p. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967. 252-253.

PRIMARY: Identifies a single early poem not in #7. Includes also appendices of Stevens' courses at Harvard, 1897-1900, and of Stevens' manuscript and fugitive poems used in Buttel's study, plus some miscellaneous manuscript material.

9. "Selected Bibliography." *Wallace Stevens*. William A. Burney. 190 p. New York: Twayne Publishers [1968]. 184-186.

PRIMARY: 1923-1967. Brief list, arranged by genre, then chronologically within genre. Chronology. Covers separate publications. Includes letters. Cites reprints.

SECONDARY: 1935-1963. Arranged by both form and genre, then alphabetically within category. Evaluative annotations. Covers books, periodicals. Includes reviews, foreign-language items.

NOTE: Useful for its critical comment.

10. [Ford, William T.]. "Some Notes on Stevens' Foreign Bibliography." *The Wallace Stevens Newsletter*. October 1969. 1: [1]-3.

PRIMARY: Notes eleven complete foreign-language editions plus numerous foreign-language translations of individual poems.

11. Huguelet, Theodore L. *The Merrill Checklist of Wallace Stevens*. 35 p. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill [1970].

PRIMARY: 1916-1967. Checklist, arranged by both form and genre, then chronologically within category. Covers separate publications, first appearance book contributions, periodical appearances. Includes translations of, speeches, letters. Cites first English edition. Cites reprints.

NOTE: Selective. The first list to cite first English editions.

SECONDARY: 1924-1969. Arranged by genre, then sometimes alphabetically and sometimes chronologically within genre. Covers books, periodicals. Includes reviews, reviews of secondary material, foreign-language items.

NOTE: Selected so as to provide students with "the most meaningful published resources." The first list to cite reviews of secondary sources.

12. Edelstein, J. M. *Wallace Stevens: A Descriptive Bibliography*. 427 p. Pittsburgh series in bibliography. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973.

PRIMARY: 1896-1971. Descriptive bibliography with facsimiles, arranged by form, then chronologically within form. Annotations. Index. Covers separate publications, editorships, translations by, first appearance and reprint book contributions, periodical and newspaper appearances. Includes translations of, interviews, symposia, speeches, letters, radio work, recordings, blurbs, ephemera, piracies, juvenilia, musical settings, stage productions. Specifies textual variants; notes varying contents and title changes. Identifies first edition, noting states and issues. Cites first English and Canadian edition. Cites reprints. Provides locations.

NOTE: A cornerstone compilation, essential to scholars and of interest to collectors. Provides publishing histories, usually in the words of Stevens himself.

SECONDARY: 1916-1972. Arranged by form, then sometimes alphabetically and sometimes chronologically within form. Index. Covers books, periodicals, dissertations. Includes reviews, reviews of secondary sources, foreign-language items, dedications, portrayal, obituaries.

NOTE: Most comprehensive single compilation to date.

13. Edelstein, J. M. "Wallace Stevens 1879-1955." *First Printings of American Authors: Contributions toward Descriptive Checklists*. Ed. Matthew J. Brucoli and Philip B. Eppard. v. 1-5. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1977-1987. v.1, pp. 359-363.

PRIMARY: 1900-1971. Checklist with facsimiles. Annotations. Covers separate publications, first appearance book contributions. Includes letters, speech. Identifies first edition, noting states and issues. Cites first English edition.

NOTE: Includes several limited editions, not commonly cited elsewhere. Of particular interest to the collector.

14. White, Ray Lewis. "Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Reviews of His Works, 1931-1967." *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. 1980. 4: 5-23.

SECONDARY: Many of the reviews not cited before in bibliographies. Provides excerpts from reviews.

15. "Reviews and Published Comments on Stevens' Work 1926-67, Not Reprinted in the Present Collection." *Wallace Stevens: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. Charles Doyle. 503 p. The critical heritage series. London and Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1985. 484-490.

SECONDARY: Additional citations, chronologically arranged. Comprehensive coverage of published comment, particularly reviews, provided by text citations and bibliography together. Critical trends on Stevens over the decades summarized in "Introduction," making it a useful survey of criticism.

16. [Various compilers]. "Current Bibliography." *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Spring 1977. 1. 1: 32-36.

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NOTE: See also *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 1. 2 (Summer 1977), 87-88; 1. 3 (Fall/Winter 1977), 136-138; 2. 1/2 (Spring 1978), 54-55; 2. 3/4 (Fall 1978), 63-64; 3. 1/2 (Spring 1979), 42-45; 4. 3/4 (Fall 1980), 72-76; 5. 1/2 (Spring 1981), 36; 8. 1 (Spring 1984), 63; 9. 1 (Spring 1985), 59-60; 10. 1 (Spring 1986), 62-63; 12. 1 (Spring 1988), 78-80; 14. 1 (Spring 1990), 95-96.

17. See also standard serial bibliographies and indexes: *MLA International Bibliography*, 1921–; *American Literary Scholarship*, 1963–; *Abstracts of English Studies*, 1958–; *Literary Criticism Register*, 1983–; *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 1938–. See also periodic issues of *American Literature*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, and *Twentieth Century Literature*.

SURVEYS OF CRITICISM

18. Simons, Hi. "The Vicissitudes of a Reputation." *Harvard Advocate*. December 1940. 127: 8-10, 34-44.
19. Riddel, Joseph N. "The Contours of Stevens' Criticism." *ELH*. March 1964. 31: 106-138. Rpt. *The Act of the Mind: Essays on the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*. Ed. Roy Harvey Pearce and J. Hillis Miller. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965. 243-276.

NOTE: "Surveys the reputation and the criticism from [Riddel's] own critical perspective."

20. Stern, Herbert J. *Wallace Stevens: Art of Uncertainty*. 206 p. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press [1966].

NOTE: "opens with a review of the early critical reputation and the more recent perspectives"—Joseph N. Riddel.

21. Eder, Doris L. "A Review of Stevens Criticism to Date." *Twentieth Century Literature*. April 1969. 15: 3-18.

NOTE: Aggressively selective and evaluative essay, designating "indispensable reading" from the period 1932-1967. Inclusive page numbers lacking in many citations.

22. Riddel, Joseph N. "Wallace Stevens." *Sixteen Modern American Authors: A Survey of Research and Criticism*. Ed. Jackson R. Bryer. [Rev. ed.]. 673 p. Durham: Duke University Press, 1974. 529-571. First ed. published in 1969 under title: *Fifteen Modern American Authors*.

NOTE: Essay. While given over primarily to criticism, also covers the following areas (in a primary unit and a supplement): Bibliography, Editions, Manuscripts and Letters, Biography.

23. Richardson-Picciotto, Joan Themia. "By Their Fruits: Wallace Stevens, His Poetry, His Critics." *Dissertation Abstracts International*. 1977. 38: 2103A.

NOTE: Not seen. Cited in *MLA International Bibliography* 1977, #10059.

24. Willard, Abbie F. *Wallace Stevens: The Poet and His Critics*. 270 p. Chicago: American Library Association, 1978.

NOTE: A comprehensive, book-length survey. A selective and evaluative series of thematic chapters, each chapter followed by a list of references. See also #33 for a book-length survey based on critical schools.

25. Lensing, George S. "Wallace Stevens in England." *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration*. Ed. Frank A. Doggett and Robert Buttel. 361 p. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. 130-148.
26. Schaum, Melita Christina. "Wallace Stevens: A History of Critical Appropriation." *Dissertation Abstracts International*. September 1984. 45 (3): 843A.
- NOTE: "Includes bibliography of criticism (1916-1983)." Not seen; cited in MLA International Bibliography 1984, #10932. Apparently the basis of #33.
27. Schaum, Melita. "Concepts of Irony in Wallace Stevens' Early Critics." *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Fall 1985. 9. 2: 85-97.
28. Butt, David. "Wallace Stevens and 'Willful Nonsense.'" *Southern Review: Literary and Interdisciplinary Essays* (Adelaide, Australia). November 1985. 18: 279-297.
29. Argyros, Alex. "The Residual Difference: Wallace Stevens and American Deconstruction." *New Orleans Review*. Spring 1986. 13: 20-31.
30. Schaum, Melita. "'Preferring Text to Gloss': From Decreation to Deconstruction in Wallace Stevens Criticism." *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Fall 1986. 10. 2: 84-99.
31. Schaum, Melita. "Misprision and Disclosure, History and the Abyss: Rewriting Stevens into the Eighties." *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Spring 1987. 11. 1: 32-54.
32. Newcomb, John Timberman. "The Canonization of Wallace Stevens, 1914-1940: A Study of Modernist Evaluative Practice." *Dissertation Abstracts International*. November 1987. 48 (5): 1204A.
- NOTE: Not seen. Cited in MLA International Bibliography 1987, #10291.
33. Schaum, Melita. *Wallace Stevens and the Critical Schools*. Foreword John N. Serio. xii, 200 p. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1988.
- NOTE: Most recent critical survey of a poet who seems inevitably to elicit evaluation and re-evaluation. A comprehensive and timely summation—in terms, this time, of the "critical schools." In Serio's words, "Schaum provides a clarifying framework for the plethora of Stevens criticism over the last seventy years." In Schaum's words, "This book aims neither to achieve a definitive closure nor to resolve contradictions in critical discourse but to identify and explore those conflicts and discontinuities which emerge in the ongoing debate over Wallace Stevens's place in American letters." List of "Works Cited" appended. See also #24 for another book-length survey, one based on themes.
34. Riddel, Joseph N. "Wallace Stevens." *Sixteen Modern American Authors: Volume 2: A Survey of Research and Criticism Since 1972*. Ed. Jackson R. Bryer. 810 p. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990. 623-674.
- NOTE: Essay. While given over primarily to criticism, also covers the following areas: Bibliography, Editions, Manuscripts and Letters, Biography.

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SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

35. "A Supplementing List of Items in the Wallace Stevens Collection at Dartmouth College." *Dartmouth College Library Bulletin* (New Series). December 1961. n.s. 4: 67-71.

NOTE: Includes manuscripts as well as published work.

36. Riffey, Madeline. "The Wallace Stevens Collection at the University of Miami." *Carrell* (Coral Gables, FL). 1972. 13: 16-18.
37. "The Wallace Stevens Archive at The Huntington Library." *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Spring 1977. 1. 1: 40.
38. Ingoldsby, William. "The Wallace Stevens Manuscript Collection at The Huntington Library." *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Spring 1977. 1. 1: 41-48.
39. Brazeau, Peter. "Wallace Stevens at the University of Massachusetts: Checklist of an Archive." *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Spring 1978. 2. 1/2: 50-54.

NOTE: Lists books, periodicals, and papers in the Special Collection of the University of Massachusetts Library at Amherst. Corrects several omissions in Edelstein's bibliography (#12).

40. Hendrick, George. "Wallace Stevens' Manuscripts at the University of Illinois." *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Fall 1978. 2. 3/4: 17-20.
41. Bates, Milton J. "Stevens' Books at the Huntington: An Annotated Check List." *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Fall 1978. 2. 3/4: 45-61. Continued in *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 3. 1/2 (Spring 1979), 15-33 and 3. 3/4 (Fall 1979), 70.

NOTE: Lists Stevens' library through four periods: The Reading Years, The Cambridge Years, The New York Years, and The Hartford Years.

42. Martz, Louis L. "Manuscripts of Wallace Stevens." *Yale University Library Gazette*. October 1979. 54: 51-67.
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44. Klarén, Ron. "Wallace Stevens and the Cummington Press: A Correspondence, 1941-1951." *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Spring 1990. 14. 1: 62-70.

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45. Riddel, Joseph N. "The Authorship of Wallace Stevens' 'On Poetic Truth.'" *Modern Language Notes*. February 1961. 76: 126-129.

NOTE: Corrects an attribution to Stevens.

46. Tanselle, G. Thomas. "The Text of Stevens's 'Le Monocle de Mon Oncle.'" *The Library*. 1964. 19: 246-248.
47. Heyen, William. "The Text of *Harmonium*." *Twentieth Century Literature*. October 1966. 12: 147-148.

48. "Appendix A: The Texts of *Harmonium*," [and] "Appendix B: Poems Not Collected in *Harmonium*," [and] "Appendix C: Revisions of *Owl's Clover*." *Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens*. A. Walton Litz. 326 p. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972. 301; 302-316; 317-319.

NOTE: Prints texts of the poems in Appendix B.

49. Morse, Samuel French. "A Note on 'Bowl, Cat and Broomstick.'" *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. Spring 1978. 2. 1/2: 11-12.
50. Felsky, Martin. "Wallace Stevens' *Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction*: A Textual Crux." *Publications of the Bibliographical Society of America*. 1980. 74: 277-278.
51. Martz, Louis L. "'From the Journal of Crispin': An Early Version of 'The Comedian as the Letter C.'" *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration*. Ed. Frank A. Doggett and Robert Buttel. 361 p. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. 3-45.
52. Brazeau, Peter A. "'A Collect of Philosophy': The Difficulty of Finding What Would Suffice." *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration*. Ed. Frank A. Doggett and Robert Buttel. 361 p. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. 46-56.
53. Litz, A. Walton. "Particles of Order: The Unpublished *Adagia*." *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration*. Ed. Frank A. Doggett and Robert Buttel. 361 p. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980. 57-77.
54. Strom, Martha. "Wallace Stevens' Revisions of Crispin's Journal: A Reaction against the 'Local.'" *American Literature*. May 1982. 54: 258-276.
55. Brogan, Jacqueline Vaught. "Wallace Stevens' 'Two Figures in Dense Violet Night.'" *American Notes & Queries* 1984. 23: 49-50.
- NOTE: Points out that Holly Stevens in *Palm at the End of the Mind* and J. M. Edelstein in #12 use the title "Two Figures in Dense Violet Light," instead of the originally published "Night" in *Harmonium* (1923) and *Collected Poems* (1954).
56. "Three Travelers Watch A Sunrise." *Wallace Stevens: A Poet's Growth*. George S. Lensing. 313 p. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986. 247-252.

Librarian
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Poems

Conversation in Connecticut

His mind made morning / As he slept.

—Wallace Stevens

“His mind made morning / As he slept.” And if
—Ah, Supposition but suppose, just for
The sake of saying so, he never woke.

What rosy fingers then for him but in
The genes he’s passed, those Love personifies,
The mind appropriately upper case

At times; there is a fragrance fills the room
And there’s been placed a vase with such motifs
You’d think the thing was planned the way we say,

The Angels would have sung the way we do,
The sun from Stables in the East would go,
The world would not tip winters into snow;

And so, José Rodríguez, we cling too;
The constant in the differences the day
That pear made memory deliciousness.

Nouveau Riche

I

Old statues occupy the universe; the decorator
Waltzes in, and, with a flourish of his wrist,

Insists, “*These* will not do! Those *curves*,
Too Rubenesque! Mon Dieu! that Dawn’s

As old as death. It’s best,
Monsieur, we start afresh, *n’est-ce pas?*”

II

Demurring, I can’t quite agree: The universe,
It seems to me, is big. Perhaps,

A corner, facing east; there
She, backgrounded by the sea,

Refurbished in resplendent pink,
Could niche —? “O dear!

III

Sir, don't you think—of course,
This *is* your universe—you might be more

Inclined toward something,
Shall we say, a little *less*

Divine." Je répondre, *Pour moi*,
A parvenu, it's true, it fits.

Robert Noreault
Massena, New York

Money

Money is a kind of poetry.
—Wallace Stevens

Money, the long green,
cash, stash, rhino, jack
or just plain dough.

Chock it up, fork it over,
shell it out. Watch it
burn holes through pockets.

To be made of it! To have it
to burn! Greenbacks, double eagles,
megabucks and Ginnie Maes.

It greases the palm, feathers a nest,
holds heads above water,
makes both ends meet.

Money breeds money.
Gathering interest, compounding daily.
Always in circulation.

Money. You don't know where it's been,
but you put it where your mouth is.
And it talks.

Dana Gioia

The Way It Happens

At twilight, the air leveling
in a sky, a spectacle of mauve, blue and red.
A raw palette of winter above snow fields . . .

If a man enters the world in this light,
he takes his leave marking the margins,
letters, bills of lading and the poem

he begins by observing the world's part,
a world from a window facing black trees,
while holding a teacup filled with leaves.

He begins to write, but crosses out the line,
the one about the body growing wild. He says,
This is not what it was meant to be. Must not.

He wonders. *Is this the poem worth dying for?*
Is it as dangerous as ice, as winter warnings,
the way wind chooses to beat against the breast

like bird wings in some nearby wilderness?
The catch is in the net, the telling of it.
The caw of the throat, the light tinkered with.

If this is the way it happens, he constructs
a stone nave where all secrets are born,
where they may enter and be kept for a long time.

There is no grief for the closing hour,
no way to surmise, beyond *should* or *might*:
dying is rising like a flame in his hands.

Harriet Susskind
Monroe Community College

No Crack in the Canopy

No crack in the cosmic canopy of afternoon.
To recumb prone in this viscous shell of cave.
To hear din of real at tertiary remove,
Without the sound from memory, ab ovo destitution,
Its hunger insatiate for ever intelligible song.
Just the coos and cackles, moos and roars,
Here, medleyed music, a real substitution.

Fordyce R. Bennett
Mount Vernon Nazarene College

The Fall

For Jerry Frese

Here, at Notre Dame, this September, autumn
leaves fall like the languages of men,

like generations of men, that fall
like whole countries, in war—

like whole continents in war—
but not yet like leaves in Eastern

Michigan or upper Vermont
where in April they will fall

like swallows in Florida,
like the eagle, all over

the country, exactly like
the extinguishing of themselves,

falling in masses, like whole
trees in Brazil, like whole tribes

in Africa, like generations
of men, like the language of men.

The Hand as Being

For Gloria-Jean Masciarotte

In the last moment of the catastrophic momentum,
Too conscious of too many devastations at once,
One man beheld the naked, shameless land

Touched it and wondered: why in the world
Mountains had seemed women in air
To conquer, with spikes and axes, and bare.

Too conscious of too many deaths at once
In the last moment of this escalated momentum,
The land decomposed as it decomposed the sea.

The drying wind scarred the trees, and ah,
It scorched the shrivelling limbs
Then spread its flames over the polluted lakes.

The land decomposed him like a hand seared,
Of an incensed gesture, a woman's hand.
He was too conscious of too many wounds

In the last moment of this ancient momentum.
Her hand took his and drew him near to her.
Her eyes looked on him and the singed dove flew

Across the vast reaches of the garden's end.
Of her, and of the land, at last he knew
And grieved over what could have been, with care.

Jacqueline Vaught Brogan
University of Notre Dame

Reviews

Bergson and American Culture: The Worlds of Willa Cather and Wallace Stevens.

By Tom Quirk. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

Although his focus is on the American national character rather than the British, Tom Quirk agrees in principle with Virginia Woolf that “on or about December, 1910, human character changed.” Quirk argues that “something happened” in American culture sometime between 1910 and 1915 that altered in a real way America’s view of the world and Americans’ understanding of their own experiences. His label for this alteration is a “new reality,” and his book is concerned with the relationship between a new American reality and Bergsonian vitalism. It is of course one thing for a lecturer to dramatize her sense of cultural change with an assertion that cleverly fixes the year and month for a transformation of human nature and quite another for a literary historian not only to document a shift in reality but to assess as well one philosopher’s role in it. Yet this is the burden of *Bergson and American Culture*, and if it appears from the beginning a task incapable of being realized, the book nevertheless offers an absorbing and frequently enlightening perspective on American culture shortly before the Great War. To be more accurate, it offers a number of perspectives, for Quirk too recognizes the difficulty of his project and his strategy is to circle his object, Bergsonism in America, rather than to approach it head-on. This oblique approach results in a mixture of methodologies that includes intellectual and cultural history, biography, a “soft” form of influence study, and Bergsonian readings of works by Willa Cather and Wallace Stevens.

Chapter One pursues a form of intellectual history in order to trace the debate early in the twentieth century among proponents of Spencerian naturalism, idealism, and vitalism. The intent is to situate Bergsonian vitalism as one of several philosophies combating the more dominant forces of materialism on the one hand and idealism on the other. Quirk’s conclusion is that by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century Bergsonism had become the “catalyst” for the transformation of sensibility he refers to as the new reality. Chapter Two moves to cultural or social history in an attempt to gauge the impact of Bergson’s ideas on American thought in the years between 1910 and 1915. Quirk’s method here is to review individual reactions to Bergsonism from various positions in American society—i.e., the Catholic Church, feminism, political thought (as typified, for example, by Walter Lippmann), literary theory (expressed most notably by Edwin Björkman). The second chapter also comes close to articulating the evasive link Quirk sees between Bergson and the temper of American society immediately before World War I. He is careful not to call Bergsonian thought the “cause” of the new reality. Bergsonism is said rather to act as an “epitome” of it, to provide access to the shape it takes, to serve as the “occasion” for certain reactions, or to provide a framework and a vocabulary that make coherent tendencies and interests.

Because Quirk thinks of the new reality he postulates in Bergsonian terms, his argument appears circular at times: Bergson also provides Quirk with a framework and a vocabulary for conceiving something that Bergson is then said to epitomize. To put it another way, one could presumably isolate any number of tendencies in American thought in, say, 1913, but Quirk is quite understandably drawn to those features which suggest a liberation from determinism or materialism, a reliance on

intuition rather than on reason, an emphasis on reality as flux, a privileging of a creative imagination that is equated with a vital or personal force, a belief in an authentic inner self prior to the social self, and other Bergsonian principles. To locate such tendencies in American thought is instructive; it is in fact what makes the study valuable. I am quibbling only with the form of an argument that tends to identify these features with a newly emerged "reality" that is in turn related to Bergsonian vitalism, so that Bergson is present both in the demonstration and in the conception of that which is to be demonstrated.

It would be misleading, however, to imply that Bergson functions in Quirk's argument only as epitome or occasion, for Quirk also wants to show that he was an important influence on the period in question and on many of its thinkers and writers, which brings us to Willa Cather and Wallace Stevens. Cather and Stevens enter the book after nearly a hundred pages, and at their point of entry Quirk's approach shifts from intellectual and cultural history to straightforward literary history and biography. Officially, Cather and Stevens are case studies for Quirk's investigation of Bergsonism in America; in practical terms they assume control of the book and Bergson at times recedes into the background, disappearing for long stretches and reemerging as he is needed. Quirk's biographical orientation is responsible for the dramatic shift in focus, and readers will need to adjust their expectations to a more leisurely pace and a more general application of Bergsonian principles once Quirk begins his review of the careers of Cather and Stevens in the book's final four chapters. Although Cather and Stevens may seem at first an unlikely couple, they are united here because Quirk believes that they were participants in and products of the new reality. His contention is that they were influenced in their conceptions of literature by the writings of Bergson in ways that transformed their art.

The case for Cather as a Bergsonian artist is more easily made. She read *Creative Evolution* sometime in 1912, perhaps between the composition of her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*, and her second, *O Pioneers!*, which is generally seen as her first significant achievement. Quirk demonstrates the manner in which the first novel represents a late nineteenth-century vision of the world and the second a new point of view that rejects a mechanical universe in favor of an organic and evolutionary one. The fact that the heroine of *O Pioneers!* is named Alexandra Bergson would suggest not only Cather's own recognition that the work was an expression of vitalistic philosophy but also her apparent immunity from a Bloomian anxiety of influence. *O Pioneers!* is Bergsonian primarily in relating its characters to a larger and more primitive life force, but it also exhibits a Bergsonian heroine who intuits the vital forces around her, trusts her authentic self, and carries within her a sense both of the ancient past and the future. Quirk admits that *O Pioneers!* is Cather's only true vitalistic novel, but he argues convincingly that Cather's later conception of the creative process parallels in a number of respects a Bergsonian epistemology, particularly in her notions about the relationship of art and memory, the antithesis of the authentic and social selves, and the place of personality, intuition, and desire in the creation of art.

The case for Stevens as a Bergsonian artist is not so easily made, and Quirk gains only a partial success for his contention in his two-chapter survey of Stevens' poetry (primarily *Harmonium*) and theory. I don't wish to minimize the success he does achieve, but I want to take up first the difficulties he encounters. Quirk is unable to discover any real evidence of Bergsonian influence on Stevens during the

period on which his study focuses, and he is therefore unable to locate the impact of Bergson at a specific point in Stevens' career, as he does so successfully in his discussion of Cather. (He must assume that the poems of *Harmonium*, written mostly between 1915 and 1923, were products of a prewar sensibility.) His analysis that traces Stevens' view of the world and his themes to Bergson also seems to me less compelling than his parallel discussion of Cather. Many of the areas of Stevens' thought that he identifies as Bergsonian—Stevens' antagonism toward rationalism, his celebration of flux, his belief in the power of the creative imagination, his elevation of the role of the artist in society—may be found in traditions or systems of thought that predate Bergsonism (Romanticism, for example) or flourished at the same time (Nietzscheanism, for one). This does not mean that Bergson played no part in the formulation of these attitudes, but it does mean that a poem like "Sunday Morning" that rejects being and postulates a world of becoming is not self-evidently a Bergsonian poem, for the celebration of becoming was a motif available to Stevens from other contemporary sources. In two instances—discussions of the roles played by the past and by memory in the creation of art—Quirk seems to me to misread Stevens or at least to ignore a large body of verse that is arguably anti-Bergsonian in its rejection of the past and its quest for an "immaculate beginning," "ignorance," or the "first idea." More attention to the later theoretical poems such as "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" where these issues are considered would have strengthened Quirk's claim that Stevens' conceptions of the past and of memory parallel Bergson's. What is perhaps most persuasive in the discussion of the poetry is Quirk's view that Stevens' conception of an "interior paramour" or subjective imaginative self owes something to Bergson's *moi fondamentale*, which is set against the practical or social self, although it is more difficult to argue that Stevens' creative self exists as the whole of human memory, as Bergson would have it.

In general Quirk is more successful in locating Bergson in Stevens' theoretical prose than in his poetry (even if he is no doubt equally present in the poetry). There is little question of Stevens' enthusiastic reading of Bergson or of Bergson's aid in validating and shaping Stevens' attitude toward poetry. Quirk makes a strong argument for Bergson's hand in Stevens' theory of resemblance and his notion of poetry as a product of the poet's personality. He offers a number of other intriguing insights (a link between Bergsonian intuition and Stevensian imagination, for example, or attention to the biological aspect of Stevens' poetics) that merit further attention. Quirk's study adds a dimension to our thinking about Stevens and Cather that must affect the way we read them. If the book's argument is more compelling with Cather than with Stevens, this does not mean, I suspect, that Bergson's presence is less significant in Stevens, only that Stevens is a more difficult artist to corral, surely among the most difficult of those in our century who continue to tease us with the possibility of discovering a key to their art.

B. J. Leggett
University of Tennessee

News and Comments

A substantial addition to the Wallace Stevens collection at the Huntington Library is 550 books owned by W. S. but kept in storage most of the time since his death in 1955. Acquired from Holly Stevens, these books double the number of titles in Stevens' private library at the Huntington.

Among the more interesting works are Nancy Cunard's *Parallax* (London, 1925) and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (Richmond, 1923), both printed by hand and published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf. Several Hogarth Press first editions of novels by Virginia Woolf are accompanied by Leonard Woolf's *Stones of East Richmond* (1921). The numerous Cummington Press imprints include *The Book of Job* (1944), two books each by R. P. Blackmur and Allen Tate, and one each by William Carlos Williams and Robert Penn Warren. There are also books published by the Egoist and Three Mountains Presses. Only a few of the recent arrivals contain annotations by W. S., but the new accessibility of these books will be of considerable interest to Stevens scholars and critics, for none could be listed in Milton J. Bates's analytical survey of Stevens' private library, "Stevens' Books at the Huntington: An Annotated Checklist," *WSJour* 2, 3/4 (Fall 1978): 45-61, and *WSJour* 3, 1/2 (Spring 1979): 15-33.

Another recent acquisition at the Huntington is the correspondence files (ca. 1975-81) of the late Peter Brazeau concerning his interviews of persons acquainted with W. S. This column reported last year the acquisition of Brazeau's tapes and transcripts, reproduced extensively but incompletely in his *Parts of a World: Wallace Stevens Remembered* (New York, 1983). In the combined files are tapes and/or transcripts and/or letters of such persons as Richard Eberhart, Samuel French Morse, José Rodríguez Feo, Richard Wilbur, Frederick Morgan, Mary Jarrell, Mary Aiken, Thomas Cole, Elder Olson, Ned Rorem, and Theodore Weiss. A few persons declined to participate in Brazeau's project; Allen Tate, for example, sent Brazeau two letters expressing his highly negative views of W. S. and his work. A few interviewees who were shown transcripts of their statements wrote letters asking for changes in their remarks. There are some 362 letters all together, not all of which concern W. S. The correspondence, of general interest to scholars of modern literature as well as of W. S., is now being processed and should be available for research by February, 1991.

* * *

Among the unusual W. S. first editions offered in recent dealers' catalogues are two books in Black Sun Books Catalogue 86 (April, 1990): a copy of Stevens' *Poems* (San Francisco, Arion Press, 1985) containing a signed aquatint by Jasper Johns, \$7,000; and a presentation copy of *The Auroras of Autumn* (New York, 1950), Edelstein A14a.1, \$2,200. *Three Academic Pieces*, Cummington Press, 1947, one of 92 on Beauvais Arches paper, was offered by W. & V. Dailey Catalogue 56 (February, 1990) for \$950. Joseph the Provider, Summer List 1990 (July), purveyed at \$500 the two mimeo pages that comprise W. S.'s National Book Award Speech, and the Fortune Press *Selected Poems* (London, 1952), a fine copy of what may be the easiest-to-find suppressed book of all time, at \$150. There appears to be some resistance to recent first-edition prices, but prices also can be stubborn: evidently the same copy (one of 300) of *Esthétique du Mal*, Cummington Press, 1945, very light rubbing to the tips of the spine but otherwise fine, appeared in In Our Time Catalogues 244 (February, 1990) and 248 (June, 1990), at \$850.

The Wallace Stevens Journal

Scholars using the W. S. archive at the Huntington during the past year include Michael P. Adams (Albright College), book on the influence of Renaissance poets on W. S.; Joseph Blount (University of South Carolina), article on W. S.; Leona M. Deorksen (Memorial University of Newfoundland), book on W. S.; Robert Faggen (Claremont McKenna College), book on Frost, London, and W. S.; John C. Farrell (Claremont McKenna College), article on W. S. and American modernism; Al Filreis (University of Pennsylvania), biography of W. S.; Celeste Goodridge (Bowdoin College), book on Elizabeth Bishop and W. S.; Andrew M. Lakritz (Miami University, Ohio), book on W. S.; Robert J. Wilson (University of Hawaii), article on W. S. and the pictorial and poetic conventions of the American Sublime.

John N. Serio writes that after he had seen the 27 May 1990 *Peanuts* cartoon featuring Wallace Stevens, he immediately wrote Charles Schulz. First he complimented Schulz on doing more for Stevens' reputation as a poet in the one cartoon that he himself had accomplished in nearly ten years as Editor. Then he requested permission to use the cartoon in the journal or in an advertising flyer. He received the following response, dated One Snoopy Place, from George Pipal, Vice President of United Media:

Thank you for your letter of May 30th to Charles Schulz. He has asked me to reply for himself and United Feature Syndicate.

We are pleased to authorize reproduction of the May 27, 1990 PEANUTS Sunday page in *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. We are not able to authorize an advertising flyer, but I suspect that since impulse buying is low on the list of subscriber motivation, this won't be a worry.

The cartoon will be featured in the next issue.

Daniel Woodward, Senior Research Associate
Huntington Library

Announcement:

1991 NEMLA Convention
Hartford, Conn.
6 April 10:15-11:45 a.m.

Topic: Wallace Stevens and the Arts

Chair: Nancy Arbuthnot, U. S. Naval Academy
Secretary: Margaret Dickie, University of Georgia

1. Glen MacLeod, "Stevens and the World of the Art Gallery," University of Connecticut-Waterbury
2. Laury Magnus, "Titian, Botticelli, and Stevens' Paltry Nudes," U. S. Merchant Marine Academy
3. Sascha Feinstein, "Stanzas of Color: Wallace Stevens and the Paintings of Paul Klee," Indiana University

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