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Guest Editor: Milton J. Bates
Marquette University

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1. "An Exemplar in Spite of Himself: Stevens via Frost, Rexroth, and Jarrell," William Harmon, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
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'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction': Allegorical Personae

HELEN VENDLER

THE MANY ALLEGORICAL PERSONAE in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" distinguish it from other longer poems by Stevens. In looking at these personae, we must account for their appearance, their natures, and their effect. Let me first enumerate them, conferring on them the capital letters we use to distinguish allegorical personae as if they were proper nouns: the Arabian "With his damned hoobla-hoobla-hoobla-how"; the Giant of the weather, "Not to be realized because not to / Be seen"; the MacCullough who is MacCullough; Major Man in his "old coat" and "sagging pantaloons"; the Seraph who "Is satyr in Saturn, according to his thoughts"; the President whose curtains servants adjust "to a metaphysical t"; General Du Puy on his horse; the Planter who loved his island; Nanzia Nunzio stripping herself before Ozymandias; the Blue Woman who abjures the pathetic fallacy; the weathered Head in the jungle; the Dead Shepherd; the Captain and Bawda who marry in Catawba; Canon Aspirin and his sister with her children; the Angel in his lapis-haunted air; the Fat Girl.

The Fat Girl—who stands, as Stevens said, for the whole earth—is named as "The fiction that results from feeling" (*CP* 406), and this appeal to the origin of fiction in feeling suggests how we might begin. I take both the speaker of "Notes" and the ephebe to whom he addresses his instruction to be the normative "real people" (in the ongoing fiction of the poem) for whom the allegorical personae serve as means of communication and as indices of potential discourses. The Supreme Fiction itself is rendered without personification in the Introduction, where it serves as a guarantee to all subsequent allegorical manifestations of its "living changingness" (*CP* 380). I should add that most of the allegorical personae, being "mythical" as well as conceptual, are seen in what might be called pastoral settings; that is, the poem locates itself in nonindustrial space. The pastoral quality of "Notes" is a topic for another essay, however, and I will not have more to say about it here.

Before I come to "Notes" itself, I want to look briefly at the poem in which Stevens discovered the fiction that results from feeling—"Sea Surface Full of Clouds." In each of the five parts of this theoretical program-poem, the narrator asks the question of origin ("Who did X?") and engages

in a subsequent allegorical construction. "Who, then, evolved the sea-blooms from the clouds / Diffusing balm . . . ?" "Who, then, beheld the rising of the clouds / That strode submerged in that malevolent sheen . . . ?" "Who . . . sure / Of the milk within the saltiest spurge, heard, then, / The sea unfolding in the sunken clouds?" "Who then beheld the figures of the clouds / Like blooms secluded in the thick marine?" And finally, "What pistache one . . . / Beheld the sovereign clouds as jugglery / And the sea as turquoise-turbaned Sambo . . . ?" In each of the five cases, the answer to the question "Who?" is given in French; it is implied that the agent who hears and beholds speaks French and must therefore be described in his native language; and although the questions are of different lengths, the answers are all one line long, and must therefore be describing the "same thing," since in poetry things equal to the same thing—here a French pentameter constructed around a set of nouns—are equal to each other. The answers are, respectively: "*C'était mon enfant, mon bijou, mon âme*"; "*C'était mon frère du ciel, ma vie, mon or*"; "*Oh! C'était mon extase et mon amour*"; "*C'était ma foi, la nonchalance divine*"; and "*C'était mon esprit bâtard, l'ignominie*" (CP 99-102). The prevalence in these lines of personified nouns—child, treasure, soul, brother, bastard spirit—suggests that it is only a step from imagining one's soul via these metaphors to imagining an embodied metaphor as one's soul. The chief endeavor of "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" is not the one usually ascribed to it—the description of one's varying perceptions of a neutral scene—though that is one of its concerns. The endeavor—as words like "*extase*," "*amour*," "*foi*," and "*ignominie*" insist—is one of value and self-judgment. If you see the sovereign clouds as "jugglery" and the sovereign sea as an "obese machine / Of ocean," a "turquoise-turbaned Sambo, neat / At tossing saucers," you deserve to be called a bastard spirit, an example of ignominy. Luckily, the wind will come with its "clearing opalescence" and give you another chance at virtue. The end of "Sea Surface" deliberately recalls, with its "fresh transfigurings of freshest blue" (CP 102), the end of *Lycidas*: "At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue: / Tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures new" (44).

"The fiction that results from feeling" is shown in its most theoretical form in "Sea Surface": what we find in "Notes" is a transformation of the rather vague nouns of the earlier poem—in which Stevens has not yet dared to create fully named versions of his soul—into the memorable creatures I have named earlier. "Notes"'s own point of origin for these figures is the demise of Phoebus in canto I:

The death of one god is the death of all.
 Let purple Phoebus lie in umber harvest,
 Let Phoebus slumber and die in autumn umber,

Phoebus is dead, ephebe. But Phoebus was
A name for something that never could be named. (CP 381)

That is, the static names for gods must be forgone in favor of fresh names forever arriving on the scene. Stevens' momentary gods arrive, do their work, and leave. There is no direct continuity among the personae in "Notes": it would be a mistake to try to connect the Blue Woman to the Fat Girl, or the Planter to the MacCullough. There is not a coherent structure of imagery even of the tenuous sort visible in "The Man with the Blue Guitar"; and Stevens denied the presence of a philosophical system in the poem. How, then, do the personae arise?

It is significant, I think, that the first persona is the closest to the old fictions of the gods. Unlike the other personae, who "stand for" nothing visible, the Arabian stands for the moon, and originated, as Stevens said, from the literalization of the petrified poetic phrase "the Arab moon." An Arab talks a language a Westerner cannot understand—and it is a mark of how far Stevens has traveled from "Sea Surface" that his soul no longer talks French, but rather the imagination's gibberish—"hoobla-hoobla-hoobla-how." The Arabian is Stevens as incipient writer, inscribing a primitive astronomy as he throws his semantic stars in various arrangements about the floor: "Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck, / And yet methinks I have astronomy," said his predecessor, Shakespeare (Sonnet 14).

Perhaps in revulsion against this naming of his soul from a petrified poetic phrase representing a petrified poetic convention (the Moon), Stevens next tries to think of his soul as what Frost called "inner weather." He defines his soul—the abstraction which is indistinguishable from the Supreme Fiction—at first in the terms of negative theology: "Not to be realized because not to / Be seen. . . . Not to / Be spoken to, without a roof, without / First fruits. . . . / Without a name . . ." But from this flurry of negatives a consolidating shape insistently makes itself known—the abstraction takes form as the giant of its surrounding weather. It is instantly and insistently dismissed in a conscious speech-act: "The weather and the giant of the weather, / Say the weather, the mere weather, the mere air . . ." (CP 385). The seventh canto of part I—"It Must Be Abstract"—continues this impulse of repression: "It feels good as it is without the giant, / A thinker of the first idea" (CP 386). But here we mark the end of the extirpation of figure; the rest of "Notes," having had its moment of sweeping the stage clean of the gods, compulsively repopulates its visual field. The Arabian and the giant smacked too much of the deity. It is time to derive the figures for the soul from man himself.

The first figure derived from the human scene—rather than from a celestial or fairy tale narrative—is the MacCullough. Here Stevens invokes the cultural fact of human titles. The head of the MacCullough clan is

called "the MacCullough." He is a corporate entity, a legal fiction. Nonetheless, he is real, and lives a historical human life (as the Arabian and the Giant do not). He is linked, in canto VIII, to a lower-case person called major man:

Can we compose a castle-fortress-home,
Even with the help of Viollet-le-Duc,
And set the MacCullough there as major man? (*CP* 386)

Major man is in lower case (unlike the corporate MacCullough or the personally named Bawda) because he is a discursive philosophical abstraction. He does not have the "thick description" of a fabular person, nor the individual contour of a particular being; and he represents Stevens' attempt to derive another inclusive category (like "the MacCullough") on a purely human scale. But major man, as a category, is not so simple as "the MacCullough": "the MacCullough is MacCullough. / It does not follow that major man is man." This little piece of set theory says that the MacCullough is a member of the class of MacCulloughs; but it may be that major man does not belong to the class of men. The transcendent is threatening to enter by the back door, as we confuse one set with another. But man "might take habit . . . from / . . . a leaner being, moving in on him, / Of greater aptitude and apprehension." In this scenario, man does not rise into an ampler dimension; the ampler dimension moves in on him. Stevens clinches his wish to avoid the transcendent in his allegories: "apotheosis is not / The origin of the major man. . . / The hot of him is purest in the heart." Major man is the fiction that results from ever-changing feeling, and therefore cannot be stabilized: "Give him / No names. Dismiss him from your images." Major man is not transcendent; he is what man can be, what man can do, when he is "an heroic part . . . of the commonal" (*CP* 387-88). Major man is therefore part of the set of men, distinguished by his heroism.

"Who is it?" asks Stevens at the end of part I of "Notes," reverting to his question of "Sea Surface." As a rabbi looks at the many faces of his congregation, as a chieftain looks at the many faces of his tribe, he sees "these separate figures one by one" and yet sees "only one." The one he sees, the first fully realized and visible persona in "Notes," is the Chaplinesque figure of the soul in cultural transition, "Looking for what was, where it used to be." Stevens is here raising the question of cultural change. His model is a prophetic one, in which a leader (scholarly rabbi or civic chieftain) realizes the claim on him made by the vain nostalgic epistemological and moral search of his group. The rabbi—"grown furious with human wish"—yearns to give illumination to his congregation; the chieftain walking apart—"crying / Most miserable, most victorious"—seeks a form for his troops. Both are charged with a single mission—to confect the

final elegance—culture—out of “The man / In that old coat, those sagging pantaloons” (CP 388-89). (They are earlier called “slouching pantaloons,” suggesting an affinity with Yeats’s equally suspended Rough Beast, waiting to begin a new cultural cycle as he slouches towards Bethlehem.) Consolation and sanctification are modes of the past; plain propounding on a human scale is the mode of the infinitive summoning the future.

These are all preliminaries. The man in the old coat is the transitional human figure—more concrete than the MacCullough or major man—who will enable the creation of the subsequent allegories of self. At last Stevens has dressed his soul in a Yeatsian coat, added to it his clown Crispin’s European pantaloons, and has placed this figure in a cloudless morning of inception.

Now, in “It Must Change,” Stevens begins to create a series of three personae—the Seraph, the President, and the General—all of whom embody a resistance to change. The first of these transitional figures, one pointing back to Stevens’ discarded Christianity, is the old Seraph, Stevens the boy-acolyte grown old. The Seraph sees change under the rubric of the old proverb: “Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.” The new girls resemble their mothers, and the Seraph changes predictably from seraph to satyr and back again. Nonetheless, the figure of the Seraph brings in lasciviousness, the erotic—as the giant, the MacCullough, major man, and the man in the pantaloons had not. The most important thing about the Seraph is how old he is and how many cycles he has seen; he sees even change as changelessness, and feels distaste for the “withered scene.” Even the erotic is now known to be half chemical (derived from “an obvious acid”) and to be “blunt, not broken in subtleties” (CP 390) as it was in youth. Stevens’ reaction against the distaste of the erotic grown predictable is a desire for an immortal self insusceptible to change, generating the fiction of the philosopher-President (upper case) who “ordains the bee [of Being] to be / Immortal,” and has his curtains adjusted to a “metaphysical t.” Nature cares nothing for the President’s indoor wish for stasis; outside his mansion, “the banners of the nation flutter, burst / On the flag-poles in a red-blue dazzle, whack / At the halyards” (CP 390). But the poem’s claim that Being is always Becoming, issued against the rigid President, is met by a counterclaim of a different sort of rigidity—not a metaphysical stasis but an aesthetic one. General Du Puy, immortalized in his equestrian statue, suffers the decline of the aesthetic cultural object during a period of cultural change. The permanence of art “made the General a bit absurd, / Changed his true flesh to an inhuman bronze.” In the end, though the statue is exactly as it had always been, “the General was rubbish” (CP 391-92).

We can now begin to see, with the dismissal of the Seraph of cyclical predictability, the philosopher-President (with his immutable truths ad-

justed to a metaphysical t), and the aesthetic-military-object General Du Puy (representing one of “our more vestigial states of mind”), Stevens’ preparation for a different sort of persona, one that allegorizes true change, felt newness. I believe that he found the sort of persona he needed in Keats, in the figure of Autumn—a personification that embodies change within itself. Keats’s Autumn is first a generative bride, then a careless thresher, then a careworn watcher over last oozings, and finally a muser on lost song. There can be no personification of a season that does not include change, since the concept of a season is an intrinsically temporal one.

“Without Contraries,” as Blake said, “is no progression” (34), and Stevens now invokes contraries as the generators of authentic change. However, he will not set his contraries in a dialectical relation, one contrary correcting another. Instead, he sets them in a relation of dependency, each in turn foreground to its partner’s background, or lover to the other’s beloved, or each standing in a synecdochic relation to the mass of others it resembles:

Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
On one another, as a man depends
On a woman, day on night, the imagined

On the real. This is the origin of change. (CP 392)

It is at the end of this crucial canto that we are most reminded of the French nouns in “Sea Surface”—“*mon âme*,” “*mon frère*,” “*mon enfant*,” “*mon extase*”:

Follow after, O my companion, my fellow, my self,
Sister and solace, brother and delight. (CP 392)

We see in this canto of change the very matrix of the construction of the allegorical personae, as proposition generates simile, simile generates personification, and personification generates persona. Proposition: “Two things of opposite natures seem to depend / On one another.” Simile: “as a man depends / On a woman.” Personification: “Winter and spring, cold copulars, embrace / And forth the particulars of rapture come.” Persona: “Follow after, O my companion.”

If Stevens is to be consistent, all future personae in the poem should be of the Keats-Autumn variety, allegories containing change within their concept. Are they such? We meet first the Planter. He is an exile, a concept including change in its definition. He is also a yearner, a figure who envisages another place. These incorporated notions of change are represented by the three places of the canto—“the land from which he came”—significantly not called an island; the “blue island in a sky-wide water” to which the Planter came and where he stayed; and the transcendent “island

beyond him" where there grew "the great banana tree, / Which pierces clouds and bends on half the world." The *déraciné* is represented by Stevens as someone who still thinks about possibilities for the future of the country he left, who is able to love the island to which he came, and to yearn for the "là-bas, là-bas" of the great banana tree. This mobility of mind marks Stevens' ultimate relation to his own past, to his religious nostalgia, and to his emotional conceptualization—while refusing it—of transcendence. The Planter stands as the ideal which criticizes, by its mobility, the "single text, granite monotony, / One sole face, like a photograph of fate" of the following canto, which, though it understands the single-minded identificatory chorus of romantic birds, sees their *tutoyant* as praiseworthy only by contrast to the "idiot minstrelsy" (CP 393-94) of purely natural sound.

The comic confrontation between Nanzia Nunzio and Ozymandias refutes the notion that change eventually comes to a halt. Nanzia Nunzio is modern enough to believe in progress (she becomes more and more unclothed) but nostalgic enough to believe in the static finality of apocalypse, when all is revealed. Ozymandias, who knows better, brusquely reproves both her fiction of progress and her fiction of apocalypse:

Then Ozymandias said the spouse, the bride
Is never naked. A fictive covering
Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind. (CP 396)

Nanzia Nunzio is a figure of perpetual change in spite of herself. The bride, as interior paramour, is never entirely knowable or entirely known. Ozymandias stands, in Shelley's poem and in Stevens' comic reprise of it, for the exploded fiction of static imperial power—a rigidity as impossible as the President's immovable philosophic curtains or General Du Puy's aesthetic immobility.

In closing part II, the program of change, Stevens quotes "Sea Surface" once again. Casual change is not a sufficient explanation of the universe; the universe itself seems to have a will to change. For the poet, positing an intrinsic dynamism generates a more acceptable model of the physical universe than positing an only casually disturbed inertia:

The casual is not
Enough. The freshness of transformation is

The freshness of a world. It is our own,
It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves. . . . (CP 397-98)

"[F]rom the two / Came fresh transfigurings of freshest blue" (CP 102). The shift from "transfigurings" to "transformation" shows Stevens' discarding of a religious word in "Sea Surface" in favor of an aesthetic word in "Notes." "Notes" is also persistently erotic:

Of these beginnings, gay and green, propose
The suitable amours. Time will write them down. (CP 398)

The poet also becomes self-conscious concerning his own personal will-to-change, as he manages his "Theatre / Of Trope" (CP 397) in the face of the curveting swans.

Stevens' self-consciousness about metaphor enables the flagrant artificiality of his personae; we are wholly unable to think of Nanzia Nunzio or Bawda as "real people." They do not last long enough to take on the complicated aura of Spenser's personae, who participate in so many fictions at once that their allegorical nature is forever indeterminate. Stevens' figures are cartoons of conceptual play, and they show us that for Stevens philosophical concepts often took on shapes—visual and playful ones—that were more amenable to aesthetic manipulation than the conceptual noun alone. The fabular and the anecdotal are for Stevens familiar philosophical resources, given his reading in Plato; but the cartoon-figures of "Notes" (though they bear some resemblance to Platonic figures like the charioteer and the spherical human beings before they enter generation) are exaggerated beyond the needs of philosophical exposition, and bring into play a world of large cut-outs closer to the work of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear than to Plato.

The last of the three parts of "Notes," "It Must Give Pleasure," needs to find a way to keep afloat part II's discovery of the persona-incorporating-change while not simply repeating part II's figuration. The negative theology of the canto opposing abstraction to the weather in part I—"not to be realized because not to / Be seen"—finds its reprise in the description of the Blue Woman, who, as Stevens said, stands for the weather of a particular day, a day of peculiar clarity in which there is no haze, fog, vapor, in which things can be purely themselves. But the repressing of personification in the weather canto is now seen for what it is—a wish for a realm of "the natural" unintruded on by human feeling—"not to be loved nor hated because / Not to be realized." This abstraction is corrected with a vengeance now: the Blue Woman, sky-colored, is explicitly said to be a creature of utmost artifice, "linked and lacquered." She represents the mind able to hold the present and the past in equable tension, not willing the present to be the past. She does not even vigorously refuse nostalgia, an act that would acknowledge its continued power. She is simply present to her own past, remembering it accurately without wishing for its return. Unlike the Seraph, who is a prisoner of his own past and its repetitive cyclicity, the Blue Woman remembers her past without distaste. Artifice though she is, *because* she is artifice, she does not desire artifice. Insofar as she is artifice, her artifice is "natural" and not "willed." She "Did not desire that feathery argentines / Should be cold silver [acting out their name], neither that frothy clouds / Should foam, be foamy waves [by metaphori-

cal resemblance].” Neither does she want to bring the flowers into harmony with her own posterotic state, dragging them into the pathetic fallacy: “Nor [did she desire] that the sexual blossoms should repose / Without their fierce addictions.” Nor does she want to transfer the natural form of the heat of summer into her own sleep. “It was enough / For her that she remembered. . . .” She remembers her own time of fierce addiction, and she lets the flowers have theirs. The flowers, she knows, do not resemble human beings: “the frothy blooms / Waste without puberty. . . .” The woman lets the heat go to sleep; she does not requisition it for her dreams, to give them an erotic tinge. “It was enough for her that she remembered.” The only act the Blue Woman performs is to name what she sees. She leaves the natural world “Clear and, except for the eye, without intrusion” (*CP* 399-400).

Admirable though it is, this too is a canto of repression, its repeated “did not desire” inevitably summoning up the desire it refuses. The “cold” nature of the Blue Woman’s acceptance of change, as she delineates and names successive states of her own psyche, is a necessary step on the way to “the fiction that results from feeling,” since the feeling that Stevens will ultimately summon is not a primary and spontaneous feeling but a mediated and formally mediated one. The Blue Woman is a stage on the way to symbolized feeling—the only kind of feeling that has a right of entrance to a poem. The pathetic fallacy alone has no rights.

How is the Blue Woman a persona-incorporating-change? She is an internalized version of the exiled Planter; she is in exile from her own past. She remembers it, but remembers it in perpetual change from it. She unrolls forever beyond her own past, while keeping it entirely before her in memory. The stasis of memory is contained, in an uncontaminating way, within the evolution of present selfhood. Though the whole canto is in the historical past tense, the concluding past tense—“The blue woman looked and from her window named / The corals of the dogwood”—is more recent than the first past tense—“The blue woman . . . / Did not desire” (*CP* 400, 399); only the originating absence of desire enables the final dispassionate naming which is her triumph of nonintrusion.

Stevens’ next figures—the “lasting visage in a lasting bush” who is replaced by the “dead shepherd [who] brought tremendous chords from hell” (*CP* 400)—might seem to depart from our paradigm of personae-incorporating-change. However, I think we are meant to see the Jehovah visage in the nonburning bush as only one manifestation of the deity, one that is inevitably countered by its “opposite,” the dead Christ-Orpheus harrowing hell and bidding the sheep carouse. “Two things of opposite natures seem to depend / On one another. . . .” In this poem of cultural transformation, the hopelessness of a Matthew Arnold thinking that the

/ Was what they loved" (CP 401). We can see Stevens here trying to invent personae who change: first they love, and refuse to marry; then they find a symbolic rather than an erotic function for each other, and can contemplate marriage; then they realize the necessary ingredient for a good marriage is a native home where it can enact itself. Will the bawdiness of Bawda and the puissance of the great Captain and the beauty of the ever-hill Catawba cause the "mystic marriage" to endure? And if so, will the couple eventually become one of the rigid forms falling into desuetude, like the General Du Puy? Can the whirlwind be stopped by signification? Will the elements be balked by the sun and Catawba sheltering the human pair? Stevens suggests, I think, by mentioning the whirlwind and the elements, that signification is only a brief stay against confusion; the couple take each other as "sign, *short sign*" (CP 401; italics mine), and transiency is necessarily built into vows, even marriage vows.

As if a twenty-one-line canto had now become too short to do justice to the allegorical personae Stevens needs to invent, the next persona—Canon Aspirin—undergoes significant mutation over several cantos. In the last development of the poem, a conceptual persona so embodies change within himself that he unconceptualizes himself (the last change possible to a concept), and, finally losing his allegorical character, becomes indistinguishable from the poet-speaker of the poem. Canon Aspirin is, of course, part of a pair (like Nanzia Nunzio and Ozymandias, or the Captain and Bawda, or, for that matter, like the early rabbi/chieftain and his dependent, the man in the old coat, since "Two things of opposite natures seem to depend / On one another" in Stevens' relentlessly comparative mind). The Canon's other half is his sister, who is nonaspiring, though religious. The poet, who dines with his Canon, elicits from the Canon some admiration for his sister and her "sensible ecstasy," her "pauvred color," her "widow's gayety." She receives, through Canon Aspirin, circumspect praise; when she looks at her two daughters, she "saw them as they were / And what she felt fought off the barest phrase" (CP 401-02). She is the ideal representing pure feeling without rhetoric. She does not have to invent "the fiction that results from feeling." She is the Platonic accurate observer, the simple namer, the rejecter of dreams. The world needs her, and perhaps it does not need Canon Aspirin, with his grand dreams, his soaring fictions, his complicate and amassing harmony of being. Through the sister, Stevens rejects the solution of the Blue Woman. We are verbally reminded of the Blue Woman with our last view of the sister's renunciatory mind:

Yet when her children slept, his sister herself
Demanded of sleep, in the excitements of silence
Only the unmuddled self of sleep, for them. (CP 402)

The sister, like the Blue Woman, demands too little. She does incorporate change: she has been married, has had children, has been widowed, dresses her children in colors she selects, goes through the alternations of day and night. The Canon, as he reflects on her, hums "an outline of a fugue / Of praise" (CP 402). Yet she forgoes sublimity; and Stevens is not willing, not yet, to forgo the Miltonic. Leaving the widow to her sensibleness, the Canon is off for ecstasy *tout court*:

So that he was the ascending wings he saw
And moved on them in orbits' outer stars. . . .

The Canon swings first to the ultimate of fact and then to the ultimate of thought, refusing to choose between them:

He had to choose. But it was not a choice
Between excluding things. It was not a choice

Between, but of. He chose to include the things
That in each other are included, the whole,
The complicate, the amassing harmony. (CP 403)

This is the principle of pleasure as it is finally enunciated in part III, which declares that the Supreme Fiction, abstract and changing, "Must Give Pleasure." It is not enough that the Supreme Fiction be abstract in itself (symbolic, not merely journalistic); it is not enough that it incorporate changingness in itself; it must have an effect, must do something for its creator (and perhaps its audience), must give pleasure. The "grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which [man] knows, and feels, and lives, and moves" (Wordsworth 79) can be nothing less than "the whole, / The complicate, the amassing harmony."

The Canon, as I have said, disappears before our eyes, undoing his own conceptuality. Stevens' canto VII continues with the same third-person pronoun with which canto VI had closed ("He chose to include"); canto VII opens with "He imposes orders as he thinks of them" (CP 403). That "he" can only be Canon Aspirin. But the poem ceases to use the indirect discourse with which it reported previously on the Canon's choices, and begins to use its own narrator's voice:

to find,
Not to impose, not to have reasoned at all,
Out of nothing to have come on major weather,

It is possible, possible, possible. It must
Be possible. It must be that in time
The real will from its crude compoundings come. . . .
.....

Angel,
Be silent in your luminous cloud and hear
The luminous melody of proper sound. (CP 404)

The Angel that the Canon became when he “was the ascending wings he saw / And moved on them” (CP 403) is now addressed directly by the poet-speaker, and in the next canto the third-person fiction of the Canon is entirely dropped in favor of first-person expression: “What am I to believe?” The speaking voice makes direct comparison of itself first to the angel—“Is it he or is it I that experience this?” (CP 404)—and next to Jehovah:

there is a time
In which majesty is a mirror of the self:
I have not but I am and as I am, I am.

With the naked declaration that selfhood finds majesty a mirror of itself, the fragmented selves conjured up within the allegorical personae vanish in a whiff of distaste:

These external regions, what do we fill them with
Except reflections, the escapades of death,
Cinderella fulfilling herself beneath the roof? (CP 405)

Yet one persona remains; she is the earth itself, in its potential for abstraction, its changingness, and its pleasure-giving. The primitive earth—“Fat girl, terrestrial, my summer, my night”; “my green, my fluent mundo” (CP 407-08)—is invoked to show that one cannot distinguish between the universe outside and the universe within, that there is no “Reality” beside which the Supreme Fiction exists as “Fiction.” What we see and experience as the earth *is* the Supreme Fiction, everything that is the case. “Things seen are things as seen” (OP 188). Stevens’ last address to the earth is suffused with tenderness because she is all there is, she is all he has. “I find you in difference,” he says. “[I] see you there / In a moving contour, a change not quite completed” (CP 406). She is erotic, arousing unprovoked sensations. The poet wants to “name [her] flatly,” proving his kinship with the Blue Woman and the Canon’s sister, but she remains irrational, or more than rational (he tries both formulations). The final paradox of naming the earth is that fluency cannot be crystalline, but that crystal can contain fluent motion:

flicked by feeling, in a gilded street,
I [shall] call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo.
You will have stopped revolving except in crystal. (CP 407)

"Gilded" and "crystal" stand for artifice; "feeling" and "fluent" stand against them for spontaneity; "mundo" stands for folk-reality and linguistic estrangement, and "green" stands for generativity. And "flicked"? It stands for both suffering (the flick of a knife) and illumination (the flicker of light). This closing tableau, the last of the allegorical pairs, joins the poet to the interior paramour, in another of the joinings of gender that for Stevens signify wholeness. The poet's impulse to "male" mastery and economy ("this unprovoked sensation requires / That I should name you flatly, waste no words, / Check your evasions") is lost in the tenderness and expansiveness of "I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo." The pleasure given by this changing abstraction, the green mundo of the mind, is exactly equal to the pleasure that realists, unaware of the inescapability of fictions, attribute to the entire earth itself.

When we think about "Notes" after having been away from it, we mostly recall, I suspect, its personae. They therefore serve as principles of memorability—an important desideratum in a long poem concerned with philosophical and aesthetic matters. Stevens was not a narrative poet, and could not (after his one Browningsque attempt in "The Comedian") write a "story," not even the simple story of a quest. Lacking story, how ensure vivacity in the midst of length? For the purposes of "Notes," Stevens decided on his gallery of allegorical personae, through whom we know him better: Stevens the banjo-playing Planter, Stevens the winged Canon, Stevens the withered Seraph, Stevens the severe Blue Woman, Stevens the obsolete Bronze Statue, Stevens the metaphysical President, Stevens the skeptical Ozymandias, Stevens the would-be Captain or Rabbi. We also know his opposites: the abstemious sister, the apocalyptic Nanzia Nunzio, the elusive Fat Girl, the pantalooned man in the old coat, and even the idealized maiden Bawda. The humor and self-deprecation of many of Stevens' self-portraits in "Notes" make it a philosophical poem of a post-Wittgensteinian sort, and link it in modernism to, say, the late sketches of himself as satyr and lascivious elder done by the old Picasso. Yet the refusal to abandon an at least temporary sublimity-in-poverty—"I have not but I am and as I am, I am"—gives "Notes" a foothold in postromantic romanticism, that romanticism that Stevens said never went out of date. Its conviction that men "can do all that angels can" enables it to forgo apotheosis; it even redeems repetition, "Until merely going round is a final good" (*CP* 405). All the larger-than-life caricatures are in the service, finally, of disestablishing both the classical god (Apollo) and the Christian angel that haunt this poem. In the end, the Planter is realer to us than Phoebus in his autumn umber, and the poet is realer than the angel. In our mind, the personae in their plenitude have ousted their predecessors, as they were designed to do.

There is of course another reason, a generic one, for Stevens' invention of his personae. They enable the poem to engage in that play of lyric genres and discourses that gives it variability and volatility. One might say that each persona comes with an accompanying genre and discourse, whether of poetry or painting: the Blue Woman is a genre painting, the Planter provokes elegy, the General Du Puy enables satire, Canon Aspirin provokes mock-epic, the President recalls philosophical discourse, the Giant of the weather lies in a landscape painting, the Man in the Old Coat is a still from a Chaplin movie, the Old Seraph is an architectural detail and an emblem of the "again" of cyclical discourse, the Arabian brings in prophecy, the Lasting Visage and Dead Shepherd and Angel evoke theology and myth, the Captain and Bawda mysticism of place, the Fat Girl the pastoral. The ephebe, needless to say, enables the whole scene of instruction which makes this a didactic poem; and the Introduction, the overture addressed to the Supreme Fiction, makes the whole poem a colloquy with a beloved: "And for what, except for you, do I feel love?" (CP 380). The Hidden Speaker—the one allegorical persona who goes unnamed—is the figure capable of instructing the novice-poet in all these discourses and all these generic forays: he is the Figure of Capable Imagination, who knows both "the imagination's Latin" and the "lingua franca et jocundissima" (CP 397).

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Space and Time in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction"

A. WALTON LITZ

LIKE *ULYSSES AND THE WASTE LAND*, "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" is one of those modern works that can scarcely be read apart from a history of their interpretations. For those of us familiar with the criticism, re-reading "Notes" fifty years after is partly a re-enactment of the critical tradition. When the poem first appeared it received loving attention from the classic new critics, especially Richard Blackmur, and later from their finest heirs, the youthful Harold Bloom and the even more youthful Helen Vendler. Then the poem became the property of structuralist and poststructuralist readers, such as J. Hillis Miller. More recently the playing field has tilted toward the newer historicists (James Longenbach, Alan Filreis, et al.), who have seen the poem as a product of an unusually stressful moment in history and in Stevens' personal life.

Written in the darkest period of World War II, and at a time when the aging poet felt his creative powers usurped by a virile, springtime alter ego, "Notes" has been restored to the "real world" by recent critics. Holly Stevens anticipated this in *The Palm at the End of the Mind* when she introduced the poem with Stevens' prose statement on the poetry of war (originally a coda to the unfinished "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War" [*Parts of a World*, 1942]), and she had been preceded by her father in his remark to Henry Church that the poem's companion piece, the 1941 lecture on "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," traces "the idea of nobility through what may be called the disaster of reality" (L 386). In the 1942 prose statement Stevens reflects that the poetry of war "is a consciousness of fact, but of heroic fact, of fact on such a scale that the mere consciousness of it affects the scale of one's thinking and constitutes a participating in the heroic" (*Palm* 206).

I suspect that few present-day readers would totally agree with Helen Vendler's observation in 1969 that the epilogue "is something of an anticlimax, repeating earlier material and resting on the rather too simply put interdependence of the man of action and the man of words. . . . [P]erhaps [it] would not have been appended to *Notes* if the war had not made some external justification of poetry seem necessary" (*On Extended Wings* 205). To many readers today J. Hillis Miller's remark that the "authentic voice of Stevens" (283) is not touched by historical and biographical factors, or

Helen Vendler's comment in the recent Harper anthology of American literature that Stevens' attempt to "treat social issues, including the war in Ethiopia and World War II . . . achieved no real stylistic success" (1528), are open to serious questioning. Today's historical critics are fully aware that the new critical and poststructuralist approaches to Stevens were based on important aspects of his art and life: his remoteness in human relationships, his fastidious dislike for doctrinaire arguments, his need to deflect the public occasion for a poem into its "cry," its linguistic equivalent. What they are uncovering is the "other" Stevens, the poet who lived in the actual world and was profoundly moved by the most traumatic public events of his lifetime: two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Cold War. (For example, my students find Stevens' elliptical poems about the Great Depression, such as "Mozart, 1935," more helpful in recreating the scene than 100 pages of *Paterson*.)

Stevens' poetic life was a long conversation between his private and public selves, and this recent emphasis on the historical Stevens will have a major impact on our reading. One thing is certain: the canon of Stevens' major poetry will be enlarged, and the same exemplary passages will not be cited over and over again. There is at best a partial truth in Heidegger's dictum that "language speaks" (190) not men; the countertruth is that all great writers, no matter how introspective and conflicted, write out of a particular culture, reflecting it while they try to reshape it.

"Notes" was written in spring 1942, when Eliot was completing the last of his three wartime *Quartets*, "Little Gidding." There is no evidence I know of that points to conscious intertextuality, but the two sequences have much in common. Both Eliot and Stevens are responding to an almost unbearable fracture in history, and both are attempting to "redeem the time," Eliot by viewing the temporal from a timeless perspective, Stevens by immersing himself in the unpredictable flow of secular time. Both sequences are late modern (even postmodern) critiques of the authors' earlier works, and both present a highly organized temporal-spatial structure. In the case of *Four Quartets*, Eliot modeled the intensely personal "Burnt Norton" after the five-part structure he and Pound had created in *The Waste Land*, and then felt compelled to replicate that structure three more times in "East Coker," "The Dry Salvages," and "Little Gidding." The progress of *Four Quartets* is from personal, momentary illumination to a steady vision of communal experience. "Notes" follows a different temporal path, moving from abstraction through change to pleasure as it follows the day-by-day progress of the season and the poet's wandering imagination. I believe that the cantos of "Notes" were mainly written in chronological sequence, and that the blue woman of "It Must Give Pleasure" (canto II) who has no designs on the weather was, as Stevens claimed, "the weather of a Sunday morning early" in April 1942 (*L* 434). In "Notes"

the weather represents all that is fortuitous and irrational in life: it is, as Stevens said, "not inaccessible and is not abstract. The weather as described is the weather that was about me when I wrote this" (L 444).

So the temporal progress of "Notes" follows the wavering movements of the mind and the season—"a thought revolved." But upon this almost irrational progress of association Stevens imposes—or does he discover?—a formal spatial organization. Just as in *Four Quartets* each section of a late quartet fleshes out the argument of earlier parallel passages, and must be read against them, so the parallel cantos in the three parts of "Notes" cry out for comparison. In *Four Quartets*, for example, the first section of each part V is concerned with language and the incarnation of words, while the opening of each part III pursues the theme of voyaging. With "Notes" as with the *Quartets*, one can re-read the poem as a spatial as well as a temporal construct, like reading through a palimpsest. For instance, canto IV of each of the three parts is concerned with the union or reconciliation of opposites: Adam and Eve in "It Must Be Abstract," the captain and Bawda in "It Must Give Pleasure," while in "It Must Change," at the dead center of the poem and just before the deferred invocation to the Muse, we find Stevens' pellucid, modernist version of the Coleridgean fusion of opposites.

Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
On one another, as a man depends
On a woman, day on night, the imagined

On the real. This is the origin of change.
Winter and spring, cold copulars, embrace
And forth the particulars of rapture come. (CP 392)

Abstraction plus Change equals Pleasure. This is the simple formula upon which Stevens plays his elegant variations.

One might say that the temporal progress of "Notes," with all its grace-notes and diversions, is the music of the poem, while the almost rigid spatial pattern is the poem's argument, its mental design. Ultimately the music wins out in this unending tug-of-war between opposites, as it must in all great poetry: after all, Stevens is writing philosophical poetry, not poeticized philosophy. But the tension between the two modes gives the poem its unusual vitality and abundant pleasures.

For Eliot and Stevens, then, repetition is a central thematic and structural problem. During the writing of the last three quartets Eliot was obsessed by the question of how to repeat without falling into mere repetition or self-parody. This danger haunted him in "The Dry Salvages," but was finally resolved in the Dantean imitation of "Little Gidding" (II, ii), where the motifs of previous parallel sections are subsumed in a brilliant pastiche that revolves around central images from Dante, Shake-

speare, Blake, Tennyson, and—above all—the Yeats of “Among School Children.” For Stevens, repetition presents a different burden: it is the sameness, the ennui, of perpetual cyclical repetition, the booming and booming of the unchanged bee. The aging Stevens believed that “Life is always new; it is always beginning” (L 434); there must be a “beginning, not resuming, this / Booming and booming of the new-come bee” (CP 391). Overwhelmed by monotony, the self desires change that creates change (L 438); the poet must, as Stevens says in “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,” accustom himself to the pressure of reality, to the “drift of incidents,” as we “accustom ourselves to the weather” (NA 19) which cuts withershins across our normal expectations. In this exciting but fallen world the cyclic comforts of “Peter Quince at the Clavier” and “Sunday Morning” no longer hold: there is no assurance in the fact that nothing will endure “As April’s green endures” (CP 68), no appeal to the “eterne in mutabilitie.” Rather, the poet and the reader live in a productive but unpredictable world where the man-hero can be described as “he that of repetition is most master.” By abstracting repetition through analogy, and then finding the appropriate trope for one leaf’s eccentric spin, the poet becomes “not the exceptional monster, / But he that of repetition is most master.” “How simply the fictive hero becomes the real” (CP 406-08), “How easily the blown banners change to wings” (CP 508) in this endless game of *As if*, this unending dialogue between fact and fiction.

During the 1930s both Stevens and Eliot went to school to Coleridge, each in his special way, and the presence of Coleridge looms over both *Four Quartets* and “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction.” Eliot meditated on Coleridge’s uses of memory in the “Wordsworth and Coleridge” section of his 1932-33 Charles Eliot Norton lectures, later published as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, and the appearance of I. A. Richards’ *Coleridge on Imagination* in 1934 quickened his long-standing absorption in the poet-philosopher (the Norton lectures ended with Eliot’s elegiac remark that “The sad ghost of Coleridge beckons to me from the shadows” [156]). Stevens was also an attentive reader of *Coleridge on Imagination*, and in “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” he invokes “Dr. Richards” in his delicate discussion of the distinctions between imagination and fancy. “The Noble Rider” is, in part, a dialogue with Coleridge in which Richards stands as mediator, and Richards was one of the other lecturers in the 1941 Princeton series where “The Noble Rider” was first presented.

The close to chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria* preoccupied Richards, and that sacred text of organic formalism—first given prominence in the early 1920s by Eliot and Richards—becomes in *Four Quartets* and “Notes” an occasion for elegant explication. In this lyrical passage Coleridge says that the Imagination

reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order. . . . (*Biographia* XIV, 12)

Eliot paraphrases and modernizes this passage in his long, parenthetical, balanced description of the ideal poem in "Little Gidding":

(. . . The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together) . . . (207-08)

Here Eliot borrows the image of the dancer from Yeats, who had welded that more stylized, symbolist figure onto the traditional romantic figure of organic unity (the chestnut tree). Similarly, in "It Must Change," canto IV, Stevens appropriates Coleridge for his own use:

Morning and afternoon are clasped together
And North and South are an intrinsic couple
And sun and rain a plural, like two lovers
That walk away as one in the greenest body. (*CP* 392)

In our temporal-spatial pilgrimage through "Notes" (and through *Four Quartets*) another remark by Coleridge, in his famous 7 March 1815 letter to Joseph Cottle, may stand as guide:

The common end of all *narrative*, nay, of *all*, Poems is to convert a *series* into a *Whole*: to make those events, which in real or imagined History move on in a *strait* Line, assume to our Understandings a *circular* motion—the snake with it's Tail in it's Mouth. (*Letters* IV, 545)

In order to imprison and at the same time liberate the strong, erotic forces that drive "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," Stevens chose an elaborate, almost numerological, spatial form of variation within repetition. The result is a poem characterized by the quality that Stevens sought, and that Pound many years earlier had discerned in Yeats's *Responsibilities*—a "curious nobility," a will to embody and transcend failure that is the hallmark of the greatest modern writing.

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'Of Minstrels Lacking Minstrelsy': Shelley and Wallace Stevens' 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction''

PAUL G. ITALIA

I

SHELLEY'S *A DEFENCE OF POETRY* and Stevens' "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" have a great deal in common. Each argues for imagination as the faculty responsible for all forms of order in human existence, and, to this end, each work indicates that poetry, human love, and musical harmony are parallel articulations of the desire for beauty and relation. But while Stevens accepts Shelley as critic, he depreciates Shelley as poet, and all echoes of Shelley's verse register discordantly. This discussion explores the many similarities between Stevens' "Notes" and Shelley's *Defence* in order to detail the differences between "Notes" and Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" and, further, to suggest reasons why Stevens' major poem presents Shelley's most famous poem the way it does.

"Ode to the West Wind" sounds in the second movement of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction":

The west wind was the music, the motion, the force
To which the swans curveted, a will to change,
A will to make iris frettings on the blank.¹

From this point, Stevens proceeds to declare that the origin of the "will to change" that we attribute to the wind actually resides within us:

It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves,
And that necessity and that presentation

Are rubbings of a glass in which we peer. (*CP* 398)

Shelley, too, places the will to change within himself and not in the wind, for it is the central irony of the "Ode" that the force that produces an infinitely repetitious cycle of vegetation should be enlisted to produce apocalypse. Yet Shelley's poem takes the form of an incantation that invokes the aid of the west wind in creating the change he cannot compass alone. Shelley, by his own admission, lacks what Stevens deems necessary

for any transformation, and that “freshness of ourselves” in Stevens’ relation to the west wind becomes in Shelley “A heavy weight of hours [that] has chained and bowed / One too like thee.”²

In this same final canto of the “It Must Change” section of “Notes,” Stevens takes another pass at Shelley when he designates the west wind “The eye of a vagabond in metaphor / That catches our own” (CP 397). By such a reference Stevens reverses what he sees as Shelley’s typical approach to physical phenomena, for Shelley’s descriptive language may indeed be seen as that of a “vagabond in metaphor,” most emphatically in poems like “To a Skylark” or “Epipsychidion.” Stevens’ impulse is, of course, to let nature provide the metaphors—not to catch her eye but to let her catch ours. Metaphor once had magic properties and represented an attempt to siphon energy from the powerful force with which one has identified oneself. In the “Ode,” Shelley no sooner identifies himself with the west wind (“one . . . like thee”) than he invokes in the very next line of verse its power for his own use (“Make me thy lyre. . . . through my lips . . . The trumpet of a prophecy!” [PW 579]). Perhaps Stevens derides Shelley for such an “abuse” of metaphor; and perhaps this is the reason that Shelley’s “Make me thy lyre” becomes the cry of one of those “minstrels lacking minstrelsy” (CP 394) whom Stevens ridicules in the sixth canto of “It Must Change.” And in the same canto, Shelley’s “Be thou, Spirit fierce, / My Spirit! Be thou me” (PW 579) is mocked in Stevens’ lines,

Bethou him, you
And you, bethou him and bethou. It is
A sound like any other. It will end. (CP 394)

Stevens’ last line seems an abrupt and brutal denial of Shelley’s particular quest for change propounded in the “Ode.” Indeed, Shelley’s “Be thou me” comes to sound like a curse, a “bedamned,” rather than an invocation.

In “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,” Stevens belittles Shelley’s best-known poem. Why? It may be that a poet’s instinctive sympathies are not always operating at full power when he confronts a major precursor. Harold Bloom’s sustained analysis of the “anxiety of influence” entered the postmodern critical canon twenty years ago and continues to provide a way to discuss evidence of literary influence in its elaboration of misprision,³ an essentially creative gesture analagous to the kind of repression that initiates cultivation of energy rather than its perversion.⁴ According to what is now a commonplace of intertextual reading and canon formation, a “modern” (post-Miltonic) poem is seen as coming into existence through a kind of graceful dodging of bayonets fixed and honed by the poet’s own fears of what he admires most. Bloom’s hypothesis may be applicable to the present reading of Stevens’ “Notes” in relation to

Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind." Perhaps we hear in the dissonant references to Shelley's "Ode" what Stevens misreads in Shelley. And perhaps it is no coincidence that Shelley's critical prose seems more congenial to Stevens in "Notes" than does Shelley's poetry, for it is Stevens' poetry that needs room to be, not his prose.

II

Stevens' schema for "Notes" readily applies to Shelley's *Defence*, and the similarities between the *Defence* and "Notes" outlined here serve to heighten the contrast between Shelley's "Ode" and Stevens' "Notes" discussed later. One could handily marshal all of Shelley's critical observations under Stevens' three categories in "Notes," each involving the other in a "complicate . . . amassing harmony" (CP 403). Thus Stevens echoes Shelley in the notion that poetry "must give pleasure." For, according to the *Defence*, "Poetry ever communicates all the pleasure which men are capable of receiving."⁵ Shelley further observes that

It is difficult to define pleasure in its highest sense—the definition involving a number of apparent paradoxes. . . . [T]he pain of the inferior is frequently connected with the pleasures of the superior portions of our being. (SP 292)

Stevens shares with Shelley a rigorous and complex view of pleasure. For Stevens it is a "facile exercise" to "speak of joy and to sing of it" at "accustomed times" (CP 398), as he states in the first canto of "It Must Give Pleasure." And, as though illustrating Shelley's "paradox," Stevens points to a hermit suffering in the deserts of North Africa, one who does indeed sing but whose "jubilas" are not a mere "facile exercise":

Jerome
Begot the tubas and the fire-wind strings,
The golden fingers picking dark-blue air:

For companies of voices moving there,
To find of sound the bleakest ancestor. . . . (CP 398)

Furthermore, the whole question of pleasure requires for Stevens as it does for Shelley a distinction between reason and imagination:

But the difficultest rigor is forthwith,
On the image of what we see, to catch from that

Irrational moment its unreasoning. . . . (CP 398)

Imagination is matched against reason not only in terms of intellectual intensity, but also in terms of priority. For each poet, the mind first and foremost apprehends pleasure, and it is pleasure that engages the mind

to the point where reason begins to function. Shelley challenges the rationalists of his own day by turning their favorite shibboleth against them:

It is admitted that the exercise of the imagination is most delightful, but it is alleged that that of reason is more useful. Let us examine as the grounds of this distinction what is here meant by utility. (SP 291)

Defining *utility* as that which is most useful in activating and sustaining consciousness, Shelley awards the palm to pleasure:

Pleasure . . . is that which the consciousness of a sensitive and intelligent being seeks and in which, when found, it acquiesces. (SP 291)

Stevens echoes Shelley's assertion of the primacy of imagination: according to Shelley, rationalists or "promoters of utility . . . follow the footsteps of poets and copy the sketches of their creations into the book of common life" (SP 291-92); according to Stevens, "We reason . . . with a later reason" (CP 399).

Note, also, the resemblances between Shelley's *Defence* and "It Must Change," the section in which Stevens mocks Shelley's "Ode." Early in the *Defence*, Shelley states emphatically that "poets . . . create afresh the associations which have been . . . disorganized" (SP 278) through language's habitual and unimaginative use. Further, a poet "makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar" (SP 282); and "Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight" (SP 283). Shelley's phrasing seems to echo in Stevens' verse and in similar contexts:

The poem refreshes life so that we share,
For a moment, the first idea. . . . (CP 382)

.
The freshness of a world. It is our own,
It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves. (CP 398)

Even their views on the relation of perception to creation run parallel. Stevens' "first idea," celebrated in "It Must Be Abstract," is both the perception and the articulation of an event. The "first idea" is not only the "quick / Of this invention" (CP 381), but also the invention itself: "The first idea is an imagined thing" (CP 387). For Shelley, too, the "first idea" is what Stevens calls an "abstraction blooded" (CP 385): language, for Shelley, is "at once the representation and the medium, the pencil and the picture, the chisel and the statue, the chord and the harmony" (SP 278). To use Stevens' terms, Shelley sees language as both the "quick" of the invention and as the invention itself. For Stevens the "first idea is an

imagined thing" (CP 387), and for Shelley, poetry "is arbitrarily produced by the imagination" (SP 279). Such congruence leads each poet to a similar view of mimesis; says Stevens:

We are the mimics. Clouds are pedagogues.
The air is not a mirror but bare board. (CP 384)

According to Shelley, we are conscious of this very-like-a-whale element in our intellect and recognize that such an idealizing tendency separates articulate human activity (art) from phenomenal reality (life):

men, even in the infancy of society, observe a certain order in their words and actions, distinct from that of the objects and the impressions represented by them, all expression being subject to the laws of that [imagination] from which it proceeds. (SP 278)

Of course, Shelley uses the word *observe* to mean that human beings *abide by* and *comply with* their "inventions," as Stevens would say. Such compliance with that "order in their words and actions," which is at once perceived and created, yields humankind its civilization. Again, for Shelley as for Stevens, the order perceived and expressed originates in the imagination: language, and therefore poetry, is a "representation of the actions and passions of our internal being" (SP 279).

Not only does Shelley's *Defence* anticipate the main observations contained in Stevens' "Notes," Shelley and Stevens also use the same themes—such as musical harmony and human love—as examples of "inventions" that are abstract, cause change, and yield pleasure. Both poets hold that human love is formed of the same stuff as the imagination, that the exercise of one is an articulation of the other, a poem an act of love. "Notes" is a love poem celebrating Stevens' *affaire-du-coeur* with the earth. The poem begins by asking, "And for what, except for you, do I feel love?" (CP 380). And Stevens immediately sets about fixing the ground rules for his elaborate courtship rite. In an instinctive (not to say ritual) divestation, Stevens gets down to essentials quickly:

The death of one god is the death of all.
Let purple Phoebus lie in umber harvest,
Let Phoebus slumber and die in autumn umber. (CP 381)

Phoebus Apollo falls, but Stevens replaces the sun-god with a more "central" figure who still combines the powers of lover and artist traditionally ascribed to Phoebus Apollo.

Love has a great deal to do with Stevens' "supreme fiction." It is the necessity that quickens imagination in the first place, and it is a manifestation of the achieved state of perfected relation that imagination strives

to create. In the final section of "Notes," Stevens presents the "blue woman," the Canon Aspirin's sister, and Bawda, all powerfully realized figures of the imagination in their trenchant poverty and sufficiency. We see the blue woman "coldly delineating" (CP 400); the Canon Aspirin's sister "rejecting dreams" (CP 402); Bawda as the only bride of the three. And it is her relation to her "captain" that seems so emblematic of Stevens' own love affair with his "Fat girl," planet earth. Bawda becomes the spirit of the place, and by extension, of earth itself as a place for humankind; for the captain loved "the ever-hill Catawba / And therefore married Bawda, whom he found there" (CP 401). And Bawda responds to the captain as Stevens expects the earth to respond to him: "Bawda loved the captain as she loved the sun" (CP 401). Stevens does not dismiss the romantic poet's courtship of nature; he "centralizes" it instead by replacing Phoebus-Apollo with Stevens-sun, the man-hero who links in one pure energy the imaginative and erotic powers of the deposed god of earlier romantic poets. Shelley, too, makes congruent the functions of love and imagination (by way of airing imagination's moral credentials):

The great secret of morals is love, or a going out of our own nature and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively. . . . The great instrument of moral good is the imagination. (SP 282-83)

The instrument of love is the imagination, "and poetry administers to the effect [love] by acting upon the cause [the imagination]" (SP 283). Furthermore, for Shelley and for Stevens, it is not pleasure alone that triggers the imagination into acts of love. Love is also the primary human response to the need to bring order out of chaos. In *Epipsychidion*, Shelley ascribes the same power to poetry, which

creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos . . . and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. (SP 295)

All of this strongly resembles Stevens' claim that "we make of what we see . . . clearly / . . . a place dependent on ourselves" (CP 401) in order "To stop the whirlwind, balk the elements" (CP 401). Love initiates creative change by revealing to us "the wonder of our being," as Shelley says above, or as Stevens says in the final canto of "It Must Change": "The freshness of a world. It is our own, / It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves" (CP 398). Shelley's Emilia in *Epipsychidion* resembles Stevens' Bawda to the

degree that each addresses herself to a spiritual vacuum in phenomenal reality described by both Shelley and Stevens as a lack of place:

From this the poem springs: that we live in a place
That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves
And hard it is in spite of blazoned days. (CP 383)

Even the phrasing is similar in the *Defence* and "Notes" on this point: Shelley's "chaos" and Stevens' "whirlwind"; Shelley's "the wonder of our being" and Stevens' "the freshness of ourselves"; Shelley's "purges from . . . sight" and Stevens' "what we see . . . clearly."

Moreover, Shelley's *Defence* and Stevens' "Notes" use the same informing metaphor—musical harmony—to illustrate the twin operations of love and poetry, for harmony is simply another created response to humanity's instinct and need for order. Shelley begins the *Defence* by expanding the aeolian harp metaphor:

But there is a principle within the human being . . . which acts
otherwise than in a lyre and produces not melody alone but
harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds and motions
thus excited to the impressions which excite them. (SP 277)

Such a statement recalls Stevens' description of imaginative vision as harmony:

It was not a choice

Between, but of. He chose to include the things
That in each other are included, the whole,
The complicate, the amassing harmony. (CP 403)

And we recall that the captain marries Bawda not for her sensual music, "The shoo-shoo-shoo of secret cymbals round" (CP 401), but for that "luminous melody of proper sound" (CP 404) which they are to produce jointly against the whirlwind. Harmony, as the cause and the effect of humankind's impulse to order, becomes, then, another term for poetry. It is not difficult to see, therefore, how Shelley can call the sum total of human endeavor the "great poem." Shelley goes so far as to speak of Rome's civilization as that culture's epic: "The imagination beholding the beauty of this order created it out of itself according to its own idea; the consequence was empire" (SP 287).

III

Shelley makes of history, as recorded poetry, one great "cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men" (SP 287); the products of imagination are all elements of one great myth. At this juncture, however,

Stevens parts company with Shelley. Stevens would not disagree with Shelley's naming history a cyclic poem, but he differs most significantly with Shelley to the degree that his argument antecedes Shelley's. Stevens adds a myth to Shelley's great poetic myth of history: "There was a myth before the myth began, / Venerable and articulate and complete" (CP 383). Stevens keeps always in view the priority of an implacably nonhuman presence. Thus while Shelley sees the poet as a legislator ordering a resistant yet malleable chaos, Stevens sees him as a soldier confronting an indifferently alien "muddy centre" (CP 383):

Soldier, there is a war between the mind
And sky, between thought and day and night. . . . (CP 407)

It is the abysmal music of this anterior myth that forms Stevens' counterpoint to the dominant and essentially Shelleyan harmonies in "Notes": "Abysmal instruments make sounds like pips / Of the sweeping meanings that we add to them" (CP 384). Only when the poet can "find of sound the bleakest ancestor" (CP 398) can he experience a "music issuing" (CP 398). Stevens' poet is a kind of hermit who translates the revelations of his destitute view of the world into a "lingua franca et jocundissima" (CP 397), as Jerome singing in the desert translated the Bible into vulgate Latin.

The fact of an anterior myth forces us to realize the limits of our own more recent myths and, hence, of all our institutionalized mythic names: lines such as "The sun / Must bear no name" (CP 381) and "Give him / No names. . . . The hot of him is purest in the heart" (CP 388) attempt to anticipate and thus undercut the need for a myth of change. Instead of the apocalyptic hero of cosmic renewal, "Notes" gives us a master of repetition. Shelley's autumn leaves, "Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red, / Pestilence-stricken multitudes" (PW 577), become Stevens' one gay leaf:

And we enjoy like men, the way a leaf
Above the table spins its constant spin,
So that we look at it with pleasure, look

At it spinning its eccentric measure. Perhaps,
The man-hero is not the exceptional monster,
But he that of repetition is most master. (CP 406)

Stevens the idealist agrees with Shelley the idealist up to a point—the point of origins.

Stevens goes back farther in time and thence deeper into the exploration of the limits of the imagination than does Shelley in an attempt to "correct" Shelley's anthropological observations by radically "completing" them. Stevens tries to "complete" Shelley by supplying him with the tool needed to break the endless chain of deadening repetition—and without the need

for apocalypse. Stevens offers that “myth before the myth” as a way of placing the dismal cycles of human life into cosmic perspective. See the earth as the sun does. Perfect in those movements, “she” is wholly unrelated to the revolutions of human history. To see her this way is to view a world at once densely alive and clear as crystal.

Shelley’s poem as “eternal truth” (*SP* 281) becomes Stevens’ “supreme fiction.” To Shelley’s poet as creator and legislator of human history in its very use of language, Stevens offers the poet as man-hero. If, to use a phrase that Stevens borrows from Shelley’s *Defence* (*SP* 293), poetry “is at once the centre and the circumference of knowledge” (*NA* 44), then the poet for Stevens is a heroic figure who constantly travels from center to circumference and back; he both extends imagination to the outer bound of reality in making necessary fictions and reflexively returns to the center in differentiating imagination’s product from reality. For Stevens, then, to borrow a phrase that he borrows from Pascal, the man-hero shapes a poetry “‘La sphère dont le centre est partout et la circonférence est nulle part” (*OP* 275).

However, Stevens’ pushing Shelley back toward that primeval “muddy centre” forces him into revealing his anxiety over Shelley’s influence. And Stevens’ severe consolation for his suffering from such anxiety is the implication that we are all late comers: our myths have nothing to do with the “myth before,” and we have no greater ontological priority as individuals than as a species.⁶ If we can consider Stevens’ concern with priority in terms other than purely philosophical, then Harold Bloom’s argument that all post-Miltonic poets labor under the psychological onus of late comers allows us to view Stevens’ treatment of Shelley as a mode of self-defense and to denominate as *tessera* that species of misprision Stevens uses to “complete” Shelley’s myth-making.⁷ From such a perspective, we may view “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction” as an “antithetical” presentation of Shelley’s poetry of apocalypse.⁸ But, and this is the burden of Bloom’s argument, such revisionist readings are always obtained at some cost. His antithetical reading of Shelley leads Stevens to articulate a kind of “anti-apocalypse,” and with that to claim a number of rather qualified, if not contradictory, triumphs. For example, for all his de-mythicizing of Shelley-Phoebus, Stevens still leaves us with the man-hero who is as central to human endeavor as the sun itself. Furthermore, while Stevens seems to deny the possibility of loving anyone for his or her own sake, he lays claim to loving the entire earth.⁹ Yet such a “mundo,” at once “crystal” and “fluent,” springs to life only at his bidding (“I call you by name” [*CP* 407]) and thus puts Stevens closer to Shelley than he thinks (“‘Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta,’” says Shelley in the *Defence*, quoting Tasso [*SP* 295]). Finally, by positing a “myth before the myth began,” eternally present with its “abysmal instruments” yet without

necessary ontological priority since it is not given as external nor as a subject, human consciousness should be freely one with the physical world. Still, we “live in a place that is not our own,” and Shelley’s “creator” becomes Stevens’ artificer.¹⁰ As Harold Bloom says of the modern poet in *The Anxiety of Influence*, he “is already the anti-natural or antithetical man, and from his start as a poet he quests for an impossible object, as his precursor quested before him.”¹¹

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Notes

¹Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), 397. Cited hereafter in the text as *CP*. References to Stevens’ *Opus Posthumous*, rev. ed., ed. Milton J. Bates (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), will be cited as *OP*; and to *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1951), as *NA*.

²Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 579. Cited hereafter in the text as *PW*. Stevens explicitly invokes Shelley the critic, and in a positive context, when he quotes from Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry* in “The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet” (*NA* 44).

³Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 8-9, 87-90. My essay invokes Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence* and not its elaborations in *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), or in *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), or in any other of Bloom’s literary influence studies. This essay makes use of the original “revisionary ratios” that “‘map’ the structure of a ‘history’ that is an economy of relations, . . . of authors, a history repeated in each particular ‘strong’ poem, or (mis)reading,” as Joseph Riddel aptly summarizes the thesis of *Anxiety* in one of two valuable studies of Bloom and poststructuralist criticism, the one quoted here, “Bloom—A Commentary—Stevens,” *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 1 (1977): 111-19, and “The Climate of Our Poems,” *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (1983): 59-75. And though this discussion of Stevens in relation to Shelley would be of some critical interest even without Bloom’s perspective on influence as anxiety, seeing Stevens in relation to Shelley as “precursor” underscores ongoing critical discussion of the interaction between Stevens’ anti-mythic realism and his notion of a myth-generating imagination and thus explores one critical approach among many to Stevens’ revisions of romantic crisis poems. For an example of another reading of Stevens’ revisions of the crisis poem see Michael Davidson, “Notes Beyond the Notes: Wallace Stevens and Contemporary Poetics” in *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism*, ed. Albert Gelpi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Melita Schaum, in *Wallace Stevens and the Critical Schools* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988) discusses Davidson’s essay in the course of providing valuable analysis of twentieth-century criticism in relation to Stevens’ poetry and poetics.

⁴Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 119. Many other sources of influence are manifest in “Notes.” Dante and Milton, for example, figure prominently in Shelley’s *A Defence of Poetry*, and Stevens struggles as strenuously in “Notes” with these formidable influences as he does with Shelley. Eleanor Cook, in “Riddles, Charms, and Fictions,” *Wallace Stevens*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985), cites Stevens’ oblique reference to Dante in “Oak Leaves Are Hands” and notes how “Stevens echoes sound but dislocates denotative

meaning, as he summons the ghost of a Dantean *topos* only to de-centre it. For Dante's *selva oscura* is not in the middle of life's way for Stevens—neither as doctrinal allegory nor as personal allegory nor as a place for poetry" (156). Her observation holds equally for Stevens in "Notes," where Dantesque references abound—from the thirty-plus-one cantos ("Paradiso"), to the *terza rima*, to the three-book division of the opus, to the invocation of a poet chanting in Virgilian cadences—and where the *Commedia's* central *topos* is de-centered when Stevens' vision of his "Fat girl, terrestrial" at the end of "Notes" replaces Dante's vision at the end of the *Paradiso* of his gracious lady, celestial. Then, in a fine reading of "Notes" III, viii, Cook goes on to describe the deflation that awaits that aspiring candidate for Miltonic apotheosis, Canon Aspirin, in Stevens' anti-climactic invocation of the Cinderella story in the final line. In the downward-tending movement of this canto, she sees Stevens' realism at work in divesting itself of all "idealized first worlds—childhood or erotic or religious paradises" (160), and with it all willing suspensions of disbelief as represented in the "aspiring figures of a biblical, Miltonic, Coleridgean" inheritance (164). Another "correction" of Milton, as of the Bible, I submit, occurs in "Notes" I, iv: where Milton faults Eve for seeing only "another sky" reflected in a "Smooth lake" (*Paradise Lost* IV, 449-70) instead of finding her image in Adam who in turn is God's image (*PL* IV, 299), Stevens points her to an external world that is "not a mirror but bare board." We are not imitations of an original, holds Stevens, who offers instead a nonhuman "myth before the myth" that is the outermost bound of any exercise of mind, imaginatively or realistically.

⁵Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Prose*, ed. David Lee Clark (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1954), 286. Cited hereafter in my text as *SP*. Stevens was well acquainted with Shelley's *Defence*, as with the entire romantic canon, as noted above with his quoting of the *Defence* in *NA* 44. For instances of specific critical discussion of Stevens' references in his verse to Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" see Susan B. Weston, *Wallace Stevens* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 83-109, who discusses the reference to Shelley's "Ode" in Stevens' "Notes" in terms of his rejection of romanticism. Joseph Carroll, in *Wallace Stevens' Supreme Fiction: A New Romanticism* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), observes Stevens the realist pushing off from both Shelley and Wordsworth and then trying to find a mediate position between "the mundane and the rhapsodic" (74) that will allow him to rescue both. For an instance of a recent critical estimate of contemporary views of Shelley in general, see the discussion of the "Faustian Shelley" in the review by Richard Holmes, "He Doth Not Sleep," rev. of *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views*, ed. G. Kim Blank; *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers; *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts, Vol. 11: The Geneva Notebook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, transcribed and ed. Michael Erkelenz; *Shelley's First Love: The Love Story of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Harriet Grove*, by Donald Hawkins; *Love's Children*, by Judith Cheranik; *Shelley's Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity*, by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, *New York Review of Books* (24 September 1992): 19-24.

⁶I take the term "ontological priority" from Paul de Man, "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1970), 65-77.

⁷Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 49-83. *Tessera* deals with the revisionary strategy by which a poet attempts to antedate a precursor's sense of origin as the poet "swerve[s] downward in time" (69). It involves that kind of misprision "in which the precursor is regarded as an over-idealizer, major instances of which would include . . . Stevens on all the romantics from Coleridge to Whitman" (69). Yet, according to Margaret Peterson, in *Wallace Stevens and the Idealist Tradition* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), Stevens "elected to defend the intellectual tradition of romantic poetry and to explore its basic assumptions. . . . Conversely, his attitude toward various modernist schools is notably detached" (10). Such support of the romantic idealist tradition on the one hand measured against

treatment of the romantic poet as over-idealizer on the other seems to argue for the notion of anxiety of influence as operative in Stevens.

⁸Patricia Parker in "Inescapable Romance," in *Wallace Stevens*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985), 109-14, discusses "Stevens' wariness of apocalypse . . . [as] partly a peculiarly American preoccupation" (112). For further discussion of Stevens and apocalypse, see Joseph Adamson, "Apocalyptic Hysteria in Stevens," *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 11 (1987): 3-11, who uses one of the crescendos of "Notes" (III, vii) as an occasion for exposition of the ways Stevens struggles with the tensions between reality (which involves disclosure, uncovering, revelation) and imagination (which resists such stripping-away or finds it impossible to achieve).

⁹Stevens has Ozymandias say "the bride / Is never naked" (*CP* 396) and has Bawda and the captain marry for what each represents to the other—hero and spirit of place, respectively—not for love.

¹⁰For an essay that deals with Stevens' creative struggle in "Notes" with the incongruity between his notion of fictive imagination and that of reality, see George Bornstein, "Provisional Romanticism in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,'" *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 1 (1977): 17-24.

¹¹Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 10.

Stevens, "J. Ronald Lane Latimer," and the Alcestis Press¹

ALAN FILREIS

I love the idea of bringing out a proletarian . . . poet in a deluxe edition! These lovely incongruities!

—James G. Leippert, a.k.a. Ronald Lane Latimer²

I think there ought to be a new deal / free from authors over 40 / Suggest you look up J. G. Leippert.

—Ezra Pound to Parker Tyler³

Latimer is an extraordinary person who lives in an extraordinary world.

—Wallace Stevens (L 391)

HOWEVER TEMPTING IT MAY BE to dismiss J. Ronald Lane Latimer, by far the quirkiest (and most mysterious) individual who figures in Stevens' career, the fact is that Latimer might have provided the most important literary friendship Stevens ever had. Certainly his importance during the thirties is unmatched. He formally posed questions about very recent poems in a manner that elicited the most revealing replies Stevens had yet offered anyone about his work. Latimer, moreover, was not just inquiring about Stevens' new poems, but was *publishing* them as well. The Alcestis Press materials scattered in odd archival corners verify Latimer's sometimes infuriatingly blunt encouragements as having persuaded Stevens to write and publish regularly again and to think about how new poems worked as a unit. *Owl's Clover* might owe as much to the Stevens-Latimer exchanges of 1935 and 1936 as indeed to Stanley Burnshaw's October 1935 *New Masses* review.

Remarkable in itself was that Latimer could have sustained his enterprise in the middle of the Depression, an extremely difficult time for all publishers, let alone publishers of verse—when Little, Brown's new third colophon was *Non refert quam multos sed quam bonos habeas, Fewer and Better Books*, hailed by Little, Brown's Alfred McIntyre unbecomingly in *Publisher's Weekly* as "Birth Control for Books,"⁴ and when, as Stevens said, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. "cannot possibly be interested in publishing poetry." "Better" in "Fewer and Better" did not, whatever McIntyre's and Knopf's

pretensions, mean volumes of poetry. Of course, Knopf was in fact publishing some contemporary poets,⁵ but the business was truly imperiled; books of verse were indeed among the first type to suffer cutbacks, and Stevens' remark was not much of an exaggeration. Alfred Knopf himself, hard hit but genial as ever, would not have disagreed with Stevens' observation that "selling poetry now-a-days must be very much like selling lemonade to a crowd of drunks" (L 284).⁶ John Crowe Ransom, paying tribute much later—and noting that through Knopf he was "proud of having a sort of family connection with Wallace Stevens"—nonetheless was going somewhat out of his way to mention that "*Poets too* are to be found in Alfred Knopf's clean, well-regulated stable"; this was really praise, for Ransom, ever the admirer of profit, knew that "poetry is always the speculative item on the publisher's book list."⁷ That amidst the Depression, when "speculative" was itself a dirty word, Knopf readily granted Latimer, a brash nobody, permission to publish new work by Wallace Stevens in strictly *limited editions*—Little, Brown's "fewer and better" taken to an extreme, as the *Alcestis* contract specified Latimer's exclusive right to do Stevens "deluxe"—implicitly acknowledged Knopf's sense of how badly trade editions of Stevens' sort of poetry would fare in the mid-thirties. Knopf did certainly want, in the long run, to remain Stevens' publisher, hoping for better times. A market that had netted American publishers \$42 million in 1929 was cut in half by 1933 (214 million new books sold in 1929, just 111 million four years later).⁸ In a single Depression year, the number of poetry books issued in the U.S. dropped by more than 20%.⁹ Alan Strook, the business manager of the *Hound & Horn*, described the dismal scene for Ezra Pound in Italy: "It is palpably no longer true that books are worth even the paper they are printed on. . . . The book business is so pell mell that it is impossible to tell from day to day what will happen. . . . [T]his is no time to put out books." And Strook, hardly otherwise a radical, insisted that the only way good work would see print was for writers to wait until "such idiots as Doubleday, Doran's, Scribner's . . . [are] wiped out."¹⁰ What Strook evidently did not realize—but Pound shrewdly did—was that a tide was turning toward small, semi-collective presses,¹¹ run by people precisely like Latimer, prepared to endure "unimaginable austerities," as he once put it, in order to float a few books of contemporary poetry "on very little but nerve."¹²

If Latimer was the most important literary friend Stevens had, he was also, without a doubt, the oddest. Latimer's activities make it hard to imagine that he and Stevens related personally on any level. That they did relate, and with relative ease notwithstanding the correctness and formality of Stevens' other friendships, is further new proof, I would contend, that the mid-thirties were for him a period of surprising openness to

strange new ideas, including political ones. And by all evidence, Latimer struck a figure as disconcerting as alluring. His closest allies were truly haunted by him. Ruth Lechlitner, one of the *Alcestis* Press poets, once dreamed that Latimer broke into Willard Maas's apartment to steal the manuscript of a play they had been writing. She wrote Maas that her association with "Jay" was the "first experience, in all dealings with people, that has completely upset me."¹³ And Maas, a poet who was for a time Latimer's closest friend, defended him as long as he could to the other *Alcestis* authors, but finally confessed his feeling that his own publisher and colleague was a "psychopathic worm."¹⁴ Allen Tate later remembered Latimer as "a fly-by-night opportunist." He could not fathom why "Stevens took him seriously and wrote him long letters about his poems."¹⁵

Latimer's eclectic interests kept him crazily occupied with various undertakings. During the time he was regularly publishing and corresponding with Stevens, he began seriously planning a narrative biography of Ernest Dowson¹⁶; was enrolled in business school¹⁷; became an initiate into the Order of St. Francis, in Albany, for which he took a (short-lived) vow of chastity and wore a monk's robe and cowl in private¹⁸; was engaged to a young woman from an established Rensselaer family while he lived with a succession of three men in Greenwich Village¹⁹; was giving away a small sum of money he inherited at his mother's death as if he himself were "passing out of the picture"²⁰; and was a more or less active member of the Communist Party.

His obsession with pseudonymity has certainly contributed to the difficulty critics and historians of modern poetry have had in locating even the most basic information about his important publishing venture.²¹ Maas was instructed to address him "exactly this way: J. L.—only initials."²² His own printer, the person who set the type of *Ideas of Order*, knew him only as "Mark Jason"²³ and "Mark Zorn."²⁴ Maas's mentor, S. Foster Damon, tired of keeping up with all the pseudonyms, began referring to the young publisher as "Mr. Hyphenate Latimer."²⁵ At a time when Maas was in daily contact with Latimer, even *he* expressed doubts that he could keep the names straight.²⁶ Robert Fitzgerald decided that there really was no such person as Mark Jason, that Maas had all along been running *Alcestis* by himself.²⁷ Latimer wrote to Sherwood Anderson as Martin Jay,²⁸ Witter Bynner as James Leippert (his given name),²⁹ Ezra Pound as Leippert in 1932 and as J. Ronald Lane Latimer in 1936 (Pound evidently thought he was dealing with two people),³⁰ and was introduced to Milton Abernethy, the radical editor of *Contempo*, as Jay Martin.³¹ "Imagine the applause when Latimer arrives in N. Y.," he signalled Maas in advance of one trip from Albany. "Leippert is dead, you must forget you ever knew him—& Mark Jason has resumed his right name, Latimer. But Latimer must remain an

unknown quantity—who he is, where he is, what he is—is a mystery. I love pseudonymity for its own sake."³²

Such indefiniteness made business dealings with the Alcestis Press impossible for some, and difficult for others at best. During his periods in Albany, where he stayed with his moneyed uncle, Frederick Lane, and seems to have led a secretly *conventional* life, Maas was left behind in New York to respond to letters from authors whose business with various Latimer pseudonyms could only be wildly guessed at. Maas complained that he was sending back evasive, invented responses to precise editorial questions, answers to which only Latimer could know.³³ Shortly after Alcestis published John Peale Bishop's *Minute Particulars*, the proud author dropped by the Alcestis office at 335 Fifth Avenue merely to arrange for a copy of his book to be sent to Louise Bogan, who might give it and the press prominent notice in the *New Yorker*; but Bishop, already uncomfortable with promoting his own book, found no one there, and had to resort to sending telegrams all around town, one of which later discovered Latimer in Albany.³⁴ No less influential a critic of modernist work than William Rose Benét seemed agreeable to reviewing Stevens' first Alcestis book, *Ideas of Order*, in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, but mistakenly addressed his inquiry to "Miss Lane"; Benét became so incensed at being unable to get a fix on the press, let alone the editorial gender, that Stevens himself finally had to intercede on Latimer's behalf.³⁵ Tate, whose book *The Mediterranean & Other Poems* was finally published by Alcestis after thirteen months of miscues and postponements, a lag that rankled him no end,³⁶ told George Marion O'Donnell (who knew of "Leippert") that "Leippert disappeared." "[W]e heard nothing," Tate lamented. "Now there is Latimer. . . . However, the discovery of James Leippert in a new role shakes somewhat my confidence in Latimer."³⁷

For Stevens, whose dealing with literary and nonliterary acquaintances had been almost exclusively by mail, and who kept an efficient system of records and updated addresses at the office, Latimer presented relatively little problem. Indeed Stevens seems to have enjoyed the relationship more than he might have otherwise *because* of the peculiar indeterminacy of his new publisher. Like no other Alcestis poet, Stevens assiduously tracked Latimer's every off-beat movement, with special doggedness during the last months of the press, when he had to send letters to his publisher in care of "The Green Shutters" (a gay bar along Charles Street in New York), "The Grab Bag" (the grocery store owned by one of Latimer's male lovers), or through one Vivian Stock at an Albany address bearing no evident relation to Latimer (but where, as it happens, I found Latimer's sister fifty years later).³⁸

Stevens remained mostly unentangled, to be sure; as in his ten-year friendship with José Rodríguez Feo, he watched, followed, and enjoyed—

but balked at a certain point of closeness.³⁹ Only once did Stevens really get caught up in Latimer's unorthodox life. He met Lew Ney of the Parnassus Press, Latimer's printer through mid-1936. Latimer and Maas had been playing a game with Ney, a penniless man whose "chief possession" was "a font of exquisite type" (L 283). Coming to the Alcestis office to bring installments of proof sheets of *Ideas of Order*, Ney met Maas but never saw Latimer himself, whose eccentricity it was the main rule of the game to glorify. In Ney's hearing, Maas referred to Latimer only as Mark Jason, letting on that Ney's Alcestis jobs constituted merely one of many projects this Jason had undertaken—that Jason was spending \$10,000 on fine editions.⁴⁰ In reality Latimer and Maas, nearly destitute themselves, were well behind in making payments to Ney for his work (later, Latimer's poverty would force him to sell off his furniture and then, as a last resort, his rare books).⁴¹ As Ney began to discern the real reasons for the secrecy, he sought a means of blackmailing Latimer: he would ruin his name among the famous poets, good relations with whom meant everything to Latimer, to force him to pay his printer's bills. Soon Stevens arrived in person, bearing the corrected proofs of *Ideas of Order*. Finding no one present at the Alcestis office, he telephoned Ney at home in Brooklyn; the printer immediately came to town, allowing Stevens to deliver the "precious" (L 282) proofs by hand. Having made Ney come a long way, Stevens thought it proper to ask him to lunch, "which [the poet] really very much enjoyed" (L 283), during which Ney "had a great deal to say about Latimer, most of which I was sorry to hear."⁴² Stevens wrote Maas to clear the record. The letter shows Stevens' great receptiveness to Latimer's strangeness: "Perhaps [Latimer] could not have done as much as he has done without doing some of the things that Ney likes to talk about. . . . If Latimer had been a millionaire, both in money and in sympathy, he could not have done more for me than he has done."⁴³ (This is not to say that Lew Ney's spreading rumors against "Mark Jason" through Wallace Stevens had no effect whatever on Stevens, who was careful to protect his own reputation, especially among his colleagues at The Hartford. He did, after all, destroy Latimer's letters. In 1934 Stevens was still storing in his office files at least some of the letters Latimer was sending⁴⁴; it could only have been at some later point, then, that he decided to discard them, retaining only the carbons of his replies.⁴⁵)

As the usual problems of the small Depression-era publisher began to mount, made still worse by rumors Ney was already spreading, Stevens continued to send his new poems. "At least Stevens sticks by us," Latimer wrote Maas at one especially desperate moment; "Bless the man."⁴⁶ Stevens did stick by Latimer, and not just the once when the risk of collaboration was wholly personal. He showed enormous patience and consideration when discussing with Latimer the possibility of doing a

collection that would bring together all the recent work.⁴⁷ Stevens firmly believed, he told Maas, that Latimer was doing “as much for poetry in this country during the last several years than anyone else than I can think of.”⁴⁸

And Latimer stuck by Stevens. Latimer had approached Stevens and William Carlos Williams when each was struggling intellectually. The situation gave Latimer an extraordinarily proximate view of the two eminent modernists enduring similar crises. Just as he received Williams’ Nov. 26, 1934, letter complaining bitterly of another of his early-thirties dry spells (a matter of weeks or months, not years as with Stevens),⁴⁹ there was a letter from Stevens more elevated than Williams’ but not a bit less anxious, telling Latimer that he wanted to publish again but that it was a question of managing to assemble even fifty satisfactory pages of poetry.⁵⁰ Latimer’s unqualified confidence made a great difference: word was reaching Stevens that the *Alcestis* editor rated Stevens highest among Eliot, Williams, Moore, and Pound.⁵¹ He told John Peale Bishop of his desire to make Stevens better known: “Wallace Stevens hasn’t had the recognition he deserves. . . . I have as great an admiration for the poet as I have for the poetry.”⁵² Latimer knew everything about the latest little magazines, the more peripheral the better; before making his first approach, he had carefully followed Stevens’ every halting step back into poetry, memorizing lines printed in the short-lived *New Act* and speaking knowledgeably of the Stevens poem in Chapel Hill’s *Contempo*.⁵³ The greatest surprise awaiting the scholar who might pursue the *Alcestis* archive, aside from Latimer’s communism, is the magnitude of the editor’s campaign for Stevens’ re-emergence. Only Latimer’s exertions made it possible for the number of poets discussing Stevens’ two *Alcestis* books to exceed by many times the number of copies actually printed—a compelling twist in publishing supply and demand only possible with limited editions.

While attending Columbia College, James G. Leippert and a few friends set up the *New Broom and Morningside*, and soon the *Lion & Crown*. The young man had an extraordinarily prescient eye for modern poetry: as an undergraduate he published Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Basil Bunting, Norman MacLeod, Conrad Aiken, and Gertrude Stein; and he was one of the earliest advocates of George Oppen.⁵⁴ He could demonstrate a remarkable poem-by-poem familiarity with *An “Objectivists” Anthology* soon after its appearance.⁵⁵ Thus Williams could hardly scoff at so ambitious an editor, who now proposed an all-Williams issue at a time when such offers were unimaginable. He took the idea of the number to heart, and negotiations concluded eventually in the decision to have Latimer become Williams’ principal publisher—and that he might have remained, had not James Laughlin come along precisely when he did.⁵⁶ At various points

Latimer and Williams discussed publishing the *Embodiment of Knowledge* manuscript,⁵⁷ the novel *White Mule*,⁵⁸ and the very beginnings of *Paterson*.⁵⁹

As early as February 1933, Stevens had agreed to contribute to the Lion & Crown series of paper-bound selections of American poets. Leippert approached Tate by informing him that Stevens had already agreed to have "Peter Quince," "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle," and "Sunday Morning" reprinted along with, in Leippert's words, "some unpublished poems" otherwise unidentified.⁶⁰ In midsummer the *Lion & Crown* gave way to the journal that would become *Alcestis*, though it was first to be called *Flambeau* and then *Tendency*.⁶¹ Five of the eight new Stevens poems Latimer would publish in the first number of *Alcestis* were actually solicited for *Flambeau* and were in the editor's hands a full *fourteen* months before publication. (It is likely, thus, that "The Idea of Order at Key West" and "Evening without Angels" were written as early as mid-1933.⁶²)

In early 1934 Martin Jay began to search around for a new idea. He wrote an acquaintance—it was Willard Maas, whom Latimer as Leippert had known from Columbia's English department—describing his notion of "a poetry quarterly which will aim to be the ultra-quarterly," and immediately mentioned that he already had in his possession new unpublished Stevens material.⁶³ Maas deferred his main objection to the nature of Latimer's program—the ideological implications of Fewer and Better. Maas's poverty was so extreme⁶⁴; his craving for a sympathetic publisher so strong; his, like that of other radicals, hatred of fancy limited editions still so relatively disorganized—that it is not surprising that Maas felt he must hold his political nose when reading about Latimer's ideas for *Alcestis*. "Knowing your taste in rare editions, etc. I'm looking forward to a pretty ritzy spread, but wouldn't care if it were pink toilet paper if you could get out a new first-rate quarterly."⁶⁵

Fortunately for the collaboration, Maas probably did not know about Leippert's own attempts at poetry. If he had, the scent of pure poetry on pink paper would have been too strong to ignore. "Monstreth," a poem "J. G. Leippert" submitted to the leftist *Contempo*—where Stevens published "The Woman Who Blamed Life on a Spaniard" just at this point—homoeroticizes the Eliotic line: "Over these roofs the chill / light of the shadowed moon / held in the sooty snow, / twists & is gone again. / Feeling ironical hands / reach and reveal the cold, / press and withdraw again / into the gutter's folds."⁶⁶ As "Martin Jay," Latimer was also attempting imitations of Hart Crane, about whose gay life he was an earnest collector of anecdotes.⁶⁷ (One dense effort, "Poem for A. T. P.," includes such constructions as "Orondure of reversal," "sardonic revocation of desire," "Green tumult in this universe of flesh," "chromatic conclaves on this heart."⁶⁸) Perhaps Latimer's development of a keen eye for modern poetry is all the more remarkable because his sense of himself as a poet

was obviously so poor; if so, of course, it would not be the first time an uninventive writer developed into an inventive editor. Maas was impressed by his friend's ambition and knack for signing the big names. By the time Latimer asked Maas to be his associate, the young editor could boast of having in his editorial drawer two long poems in the Stevens group, "as fine as he's ever done" (among them "The Idea of Order") and two short poems (probably "Nudity at the Capital" and "Nudity in the Colonies") as well as "four more Stevens" submissions, which Latimer had the luxury to "save . . . for a later issue." He was already speaking of doing a book—six months before he actually proposed this to Stevens!—called *Ten Poems of Wallace Stevens*, in an edition that would be strictly limited to one hundred signed copies.⁶⁹

In just two and a half years with Latimer, Willard Maas would put himself in touch with some of the most influential figures in American poetry. Four issues of *Alcestis* brought out twelve poems by Stevens, three by Williams, nine by Cummings, four by Bishop, three by John Gould Fletcher, as well as the work of Blackmur, Damon, Robert Fitzgerald, Merrill Moore, Parker Tyler, and younger poets, all political radicals: Jack Wheelwright, Harold Rosenberg, Isidor Schneider, Muriel Rukeyser, Lechlitner, and Maas himself. Of the volumes of poetry Latimer published under the *Alcestis* imprint, only two first books, Maas's and Lechlitner's, were by little-known writers. The rest of the list is astonishing: Stevens' *Ideas of Order* and *Owl's Clover*, Williams' *An Early Martyr* and *Adam & Eve & the City*, Tate's *The Mediterranean*, Bishop's *Minute Particulars* and Robert Penn Warren's first book of poetry, *Thirty-Six Poems*. Latimer and H. D. nearly closed a deal on a book after publishers had begun to ignore her.⁷⁰ The book he sought to do of Elizabeth Bishop's work would have been her first. As early as 1932 Latimer was urging Pound to let him publish new *Cantos*⁷¹ and four years later he approached Pound about doing a *Collected Poems*.⁷² He was also prepared in 1932 to put out an entire issue of Louis Zukofsky.⁷³

Immediately after the publication of *Ideas of Order* Latimer asked and was given permission to pose questions to Stevens about the poetry. In the decisive period between *Ideas of Order* of 1935 and *The Man with the Blue Guitar* of 1937, Latimer's queries, many of them addressing the connection between poetry and social change, left distinct impressions on Stevens' changing idea of order. Although in response to Latimer's request to be permitted to ask questions, Stevens warned, "It would depend on the questions. It goes without saying that I should try to answer them, but whether I could remains to be seen," he did answer them, and rather systematically.⁷⁴ Even as he dodged a few ("I am going to skip your question about fascism") he could hardly resist some response ("Fascism is a form of disillusionment with about everything else" [L 295]). It is

obvious that these questions appealed to Stevens in some very fundamental way. Yet it is a fact that they were written by an experienced, dedicated communist—it was Willard Maas—whom Latimer hired to write them:

Confidential (I don't want my literary sins to ever find me out . . .): I am in need of a "ghost" of sorts. . . . I want 50 pertinent *intelligent* questions on Marianne's *Selected Poems* and 50 on Stevens' *Harmonium* and *Ideas of Order* (or 50 each on the two Stevens if it cd/ be done). . . . I want to pop the questions at S. & M. now, while I have contacts . . . & I am so excruciatingly busy. . . . The remuneration isn't high (\$10-\$15 total), I'm aware. . . . But the questions *must* be intelligent & really get at the meat of the works.⁷⁵

This, then, is how Stevens came to ponder, as he began *Owl's Clover*, not merely fascism as a "form of disillusionment," but also "whether I feel that there is an essential conflict between Marxism and the sentiment of the marvellous." Stevens' reply of December 19, 1935 (*L* 302) alone suggests that some rendition of the following questions had been posed:

Q. Do you think art is or should be "to a greater or lesser extent didactic"?

Q. If you were not working in business, could you devote your lifetime purely to poetry, . . . "leading the special life" of the intellectual?

Q. "Does a poem about some natural object emanate from the object or from the poet?"

Q. Are there any specific reasons why in your poetry you favor Latin over Teutonic or "German" vocabulary?

Although Stevens' responses were "simply . . . off-hand" and he did not "want anything that I say in these letters to be regarded as anything more than a bit of letter writing," some answers were conscientiously evasive, for instance his reply to the perhaps leading question about German influence. Others were quite casual. One wants to know exactly what other questions Maas and Latimer asked that provoked the long letter of October 31, containing Stevens' initial comments about Mussolini. (Had the interviewee perhaps smelled a rat?) Latimer and Maas began to put the same or similar questions to Marianne Moore at just this time. Because one of Moore's responses quotes part of the question, we can confidently guess that the diction of the questions posed to Stevens was also straight out of Emile Burns's just-then popular *Handbook of Marxism* or Engels' freshly translated *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*.⁷⁶ Note Moore's reply: "I am not sure that I understand the second question—with

regard to 'the mastery of facts as associated with the possibility of more effective action in the historical sphere.'"⁷⁷

Stevens and Moore each evidently understood the political position from which Latimer (with Maas's help) was now coming. Readers of Stevens' published *Letters* are familiar with his responses—among them "I hope I am headed left, but there are lefts and lefts" (L 286)—to an approach that can finally be precisely characterized. Moore, earnestly answering the awkward question she claimed she did not quite understand—surely she meant that it had been so dully put—wrote to assure Latimer that, as far as "the possibility of more effective action in the historical sphere" was concerned, poetry was largely immune to ideological pressure: "I would say that aesthetic expression is, with me at any rate, a kind of transposed and protected doctrine of existence."⁷⁸ Four days later she wrote again, having had time to ponder Latimer's purposes in asking such questions. In the meantime, a complimentary copy of the Alcestis edition of Williams' *An Early Martyr* had arrived, and she took the occasion of overturning Latimer's communist rhetoric to mention her disapproval of Williams' new radicalized manner: "I wish in [Williams'] desperation against the unchangeable and the abominable he need not come so near ruining his thrust. There is nothing like it when it comes straight. One is maddened sometimes into taking the wrong revenge. Perhaps we are all maddened, and not steadied enough to say what is wrong or what right."⁷⁹

It is impossible to know how completely Stevens perceived Latimer's leftward move. He seemed less certain in his resistance to others' political writing than did Moore. She was firm, after all, about Williams' ruinous radical "desperation against the unchangeable," whereas Stevens merely said, "I don't like any labels, because I am not doing one thing all the time." The question apparently posed here was, "Which means more to you, poetry or life?"—and Stevens admitted after a few paragraphs written in reply that he was then at work on "Mr. Burnshaw and the Statue" of *Owl's Clover*, trying to "reverse the process" of the communist responding to the poet by having the poet respond to the communist (L 289). He *was* now doing "one thing" at one time, after all; it might be interesting to say in letters how *that* felt *while* he was writing the poem. "Even in its present condition I should be able to trace a process of thought: analyse for you what I have written, and by that means illustrate by a poem which might seem largely gaseous, the sort of contact that I make with normal ideas" (L 289).

Because Latimer as he corresponded with Stevens was increasingly obsessed with the notion of normalcy as a political (or rather anti-political—anti-gay and anti-communist) construction, Stevens' sense of his "contact . . . with normal ideas" cannot but be taken in the context supplied by Latimer's radicalization. Whatever interest in radicalism Latimer de-

veloped at Columbia—our only hint is that he roomed with someone whom his sister later described as an “evangelical” communist—remained dormant until Maas became associate editor.⁸⁰ But by the time Stevens had gathered the last poems into the typescript of *Ideas of Order*, Latimer’s radicalization was well underway. He arranged to dine with Corliss Lamont, specifically with the intention of educating himself about the intellectual left wing,⁸¹ made a five-hour drive to hear a speech by Earl Browder,⁸² and took to referring to himself as “the Albany Bourbon playing *Defender of the Faith*.” He supported Horace Gregory’s poetry against conservatives’ complaints and described an angry letter from agrarian George Marion O’Donnell as written “in reply to my exalted defense of Marxism in literature.”⁸³ By July 1935, he was expressing to Maas his real interest in “the publication of Communist literature”; Maas was thrilled by the prospect, and arranged to discuss the matter seriously.⁸⁴ A little later he officially joined the Communist Party of the United States and his “party assignment” (his phrase) was to work with the Workers Alliance. He did “some studying” of Marxist theory at the communist Workers’ School.⁸⁵ Eventually he wrote a letter to the editor of the *Partisan Review* as “one member of the Communist Party” prepared to tolerate the work of that breakaway journal.⁸⁶ He even tried his hand at revolutionary poetry, though this was no more publishable than the earlier imitations of Eliot and Crane. The new lines nonetheless document the changed thinking of Stevens’ publisher, even if they utterly impugn its originality. It is quite enough to know how his “Battle Hymn” begins: “Now we have come here to this last duty, called by revolution, the necessary / work of destruction that eventually brings / order from chaos & a final peace.” Other poems among the papers Latimer sold to the University of Chicago are similar.⁸⁷

To be sure, the man who founded *Alcestis* Press in 1934 and published Stevens in the first issue was not yet *then* the revolutionist of “Battle Hymn.” On the contrary, as Stevens would have clearly seen, *Alcestis Quarterly* was provocatively conservative. The editorial statement introducing the first number plainly criticized “art for propaganda’s sake.” If the poet chose “to attack social evils (as Messrs. Spender and Auden do)” he made “his art merely the instrument of an economic theory.” “[O]r should he (like Mr. Stevens and Miss Sitwell) rather try to capture and intensify the beauty of things as he sees them?” Though Latimer had agreed here that every poet “must make a definite choice” between the two sides, *Alcestis* had at that point chosen “purely artistic (as opposed to social) ends.”⁸⁸ His swift radicalization coincides with the growth and then official party approval of the popular front in 1935, and it is not atypical. But the effect of this change on Stevens cannot be underestimated, since here was someone who had, after all, named him—along with Edith Sitwell—in the very act of marking out the reactionary argument.

Although Maas's new influence at *Alcestis* cannot properly be described as communist "boring from within" (for one thing, Maas was only briefly secretive about his communism), and while proselytizing Latimer was a friendly and open matter and hardly the cloak-and-dagger sectarian strategy of postthirties mythology, the transformation of Latimer's attitude toward poetry and publishing was spectacular. When he and his friends had prepared and compared ranked lists of American modernists back in 1934, before the *Alcestis* project got underway, Latimer could not for the life of him understand why the communist Maas had left Eliot entirely off his list. Maas decided that *that* was the perfect moment to come out of the ideological closet.⁸⁹ "I personally might wish to see some revolutionary poetry published," he wrote, and Latimer soon knew exactly what he was getting in his associate editor. Maas strongly promoted Latimer's publication of Williams, knowing Williams was generally "on our side."⁹⁰ A year into the venture he knew why "Maas [could] find nothing to admire but the format" in Allen Tate's book.⁹¹ Maas tried to discourage Latimer from publishing Warren and Tate.⁹² He asked Wheelwright's advice and received this: "Perhaps your friend Jason could be persuaded that radical poets are the modern argonauts. Work that way & see if you can nail him down more securely, or he will turn." (He added: "I did not turn radical in order to get something to say but rather found that what I said turned me radical."⁹³) Then Maas recruited Ruth Lechlitner to help him draw Latimer's attention to the communist argument against the *Fugitives* and their conservative protégés. And when the attempt to block the publication of the *Agrarians* failed, and Lechlitner was angry with Latimer to the point of refusing to have anything more to do with *Alcestis* (and withdrawing her own book manuscript), Maas usefully calmed her: *Tomorrow's Phoenix*, Lechlitner's book of radical verse, emerged under the *Alcestis* imprint as planned.⁹⁴ Maas worked closely with Lechlitner, who in spite of her Stalinism at this point was a regular reviewer for the *New York Herald Tribune Books*. He involved her in several important *Alcestis* decisions that tended to radicalize the venture further. And he tried to arrange things with her *Herald Tribune Books* editors so that the *Alcestis* volumes would go to Lechlitner for review rather than to the more traditional Babette Deutsch,⁹⁵ even when, in Tate's and Warren's cases, and possibly also Stevens', the result of such a maneuver might be a politically unsympathetic review.⁹⁶ While Maas was never, it seems, quite certain of the depth of Latimer's ideological commitment, its effect was satisfying enough. He acknowledged his friend and editor in the last poem in his own *Alcestis* volume, *Fire Testament*. "Accolade for the Sun," dedicated "To J. Ronald Lane Latimer," metaphorizes Latimer as the poetic left's great emerging patron, "flame for our thoughts, fire for our singing," equal in fervor to the sun itself.⁹⁷

The radicalization of *Alcestis* had begun the moment Maas wrote a rejoinder to Latimer's "inane" editorial in the first *Alcestis Quarterly*, to which the communist had taken "violent exception."⁹⁸ Damon had warned Maas not to worry too much over political differences, adding that, after all, in the inaugural issue Maas could be found in print alongside the best Stevens Damon had seen in years—quite a compliment to both Stevens and Maas from a powerful literary arbiter of the day.⁹⁹ But Maas, ignoring this moderate advice, and hoping for sustained comparisons to Stevens and a reliable communist aesthetic in the journal, fired off a letter to the editor (never printed) expressing disappointment that he had been an invited contributor and yet had not been given advance warning of the magazine's reactionary stance. He dismissed as naive Latimer's division of art into two schools (one for propaganda's sake and the other for art's), and urged the founder of *Alcestis* to read "Marx and Lenin and learn any number of things about poetry and art and their function."¹⁰⁰ In a separate letter not for print Maas urged Latimer to allow the two of them to "experiment" with the "issue regarding our differences," that issue being whether "there is good revolutionary poetry."

Latimer then agreed that the fourth number of *Alcestis*, already scheduled for the summer of 1935, would be explicitly designated a "Revolutionary Number."¹⁰¹ From that moment until July 1935 Maas surveyed the radical poetic field widely in Latimer's name, recruiting communists for the special issue and playing up the firm commitment to revolutionary verse. He was especially pleased that the revolutionary number would come out just as Stevens' book did—"imagine coming out simultaneously with STEVENS!!!!"¹⁰²—convinced that the effect of such seemingly deliberate timing would be to assure his doubtful comrades of the high seriousness of Latimer's association with the eminent modernists. Maas never wavered in his judgment that Stevens' poetry made him an exception among incipient fascists, and never complained about its politics even while reproving that of so many others.¹⁰³ Maas assumed from the fact that Stevens admired his poetry—Stevens said so more than once,¹⁰⁴ then agreed to write a letter of recommendation in support of Maas's application to the Guggenheim Foundation¹⁰⁵—that Stevens might feel similarly about his radicalism. (Stevens did say he hoped Maas would use Lechlitner's radical poetry as the basis for "telling the story of the *Alcestis* Press as it deserves to be told.")¹⁰⁶ And one of the special thrills of radicalizing *Alcestis Quarterly* and *Alcestis Press*, and of bringing Stevens along by association, was to be able to refute the claim of his closest political friends, for instance, Lechlitner, that Latimer had fallen into the hands of the Eliotic Agrarians. He could hardly wait, he wrote Latimer, to hear what O'Donnell, a southern conservative, would think about the revolutionary number,¹⁰⁷ and he was elated at the alliance implied by the *Alcestis* brochure



“J. Ronald Lane Latimer”

After the demise of the Alcestis Press in 1938, Latimer spent time in Sante Fe (where he wrote an art column for a weekly newspaper), Japan (where he studied Buddhism), Wisconsin, and Florida (where he was ordained as an Episcopal priest). This photograph was taken in Florida and is dated January 14, 1959. James G. Leippert, a.k.a. J. Ronald Lane Latimer, took his own life on December 20, 1960.

Photo: courtesy of Madeleine Leippert Hall.

he helped design, namely that Maas's own poems, "whether . . . of love or revolution," were "suggestive of Wallace Stevens' serenity" (emphasis added).¹⁰⁸

Maas kept Latimer informed about his work on the special issue. As press time neared he assured Latimer that the poets they would print in *Alcestis* 4 were indeed "very close to the group you represent in your last issue, only they are Marxists."¹⁰⁹ He felt that the aspects of that "last issue," *Alcestis* 3, most persuasive of the journal's appeal to both sides were offered by Stevens: "Sailing after Lunch," "Meditation Celestial and Terrestrial," "Mozart, 1935," "The American Sublime," and "Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu." How exactly the revolutionary poets of number 4 were "very close" to Stevens in number 3, excepting their definitive "social" emphasis, must have made Latimer wonder—as it must have made Stevens wonder, in the very likely event that Latimer passed along Maas's intriguing evaluation. But it is clear that when Maas wrote that he wanted to make the revolutionary number "strictly revolutionary on the broadest possible basis despite the fact that my sympathies are all with the Communists," he was not saying anything that would strike most radical poets as contradictory or illogical.¹¹⁰

Stevens in any case received the fourth issue of *Alcestis* and realized surely that no poetry journal was going to remain free from the influence of the left, even one that only three issues earlier had proclaimed a position inimical to this development. If it is at all significant that Stevens saw *Alcestis* moving rapidly left and considered himself, for better or worse, implicated in its reputation, it is especially important that as *Alcestis* made this move radical readers, poets, and editors would be gaining access to Stevens in their own context. When Harold Rosenberg applauded Maas's work with Latimer, saying "[I]t's a good idea to take over a bourgeois instrument and make the most of it," he meant that the special issue would slant the others.¹¹¹ Aside from the revolutionary poets of number 4—among them, Rosenberg, Schneider, Wheelwright, James Neugass, and Rukeyser (Maas chose her emphatic "Child and Mother," which begins "Revolution shall be toy of peace to you, / Children")¹¹²—there was Lechlitner, already quite well known as a mainstream reviewer, announcing that Burnshaw was the best poet of the *New Masses* group.¹¹³ And for Stevens there was, once again, Williams with whom to contend: Williams' "Fine Work with Pitch and Copper," published in 4, was tonally and methodologically of a piece with the other leftist contributions. Stevens knew that Williams was writing to Latimer about the day when the revolution would come (not if); doubtless he saw that Latimer greatly admired "The Yachts," radicalizing *terza rima*; probably, too, that Williams was urging Latimer to be the one dauntless publisher to bring out Zukofsky's anthology of worker's poetry.¹¹⁴

Having brilliantly managed official relations between Latimer and the communist poets, Maas considered it only a matter of course that he would send all Alcestis books—certainly his own book *Fire Testament* and Williams' *An Early Martyr* but also Stevens' *Ideas of Order*—to the communist *New Masses* for review. We cannot now make the mistake of interpreting such a decision as anomalous or accidental. Latimer routinely approved, comprehending the politics of reviewing. On Monday, July 7, 1935, Maas wrote Latimer in a business-as-usual tone that should inhibit any temptation to assume belatedly that the forces bringing Burnshaw and Stevens—and generally radicalism and American modernism—together were extraordinary rather than ordinary. "I am so glad you felt you could give *New Masses* review copies," Maas wrote. "I merely sent Stevens' prospectus to [Isidor] Schneider with a note." He wrote again the next day: "I think it will be no end of fun reading their reviews, especially if some good critic like Schneider gets them, and I imagine he'll do them himself since the books are worth keeping to say the least."¹¹⁶ With this new information one cannot conclude that when Isidor Schneider handed over Wallace Stevens' *Ideas of Order* to Stanley Burnshaw at the offices of the *New Masses*, two poetic spheres converged eccentrically. For it was in the routine course of publication and reception that Stevens—and other noncommunist modernists of his generation, such as Moore and Williams—would be read and criticized by the thirties left. Burnshaw, seeing *Ideas* placed on his desk, never assumed once that writing on Stevens would be anything *but* "no end of fun." Asked recently if he remembered receiving and reading the book, Burnshaw laughed and said, "Rather, yes. I was fascinated. . . . I greatly admired what he had done in *Harmonium*."¹¹⁷

University of Pennsylvania

Abbreviations Used in Notes

AF	Alan Filreis
Arkansas	Special Collections, University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville
Beinecke	Beinecke Library, Yale University
b	box
Columbia	Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University
f	folder
HRC	Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas
Houghton	Houghton Library, Harvard University
Iowa	Special Collections, University of Iowa
JHB	John Hay Library, Brown University
L	<i>Letters of Wallace Stevens</i> , ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1966)
MM	Marianne Moore
Princeton	Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University
RLC	Regenstein Library, University of Chicago
RLL	Ronald Lane Latimer
RuL	Ruth Lechlitner
WM	Willard Maas
WCW	William Carlos Williams
WS	Wallace Stevens
WUL	Special Collections, Washington University, St. Louis

Notes

¹This essay, in a different version, will appear as part of chapter 3 in a forthcoming book, *Modernism from Right to Left* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For permission to quote portions of unpublished letters, I am grateful to Ashley Brown; Madeleine Leippert Hall; Stephen Maas; the late Paul Corey, and George E. Mathews, Executor and Successor Trustee of the Paul Corey Living Trust (for Lechlitner material); and Marianne Craig Moore, Literary Executor for the Estate of Marianne Moore. Physical rights to unpublished archival material, and in some instances literary rights as well, have been extended by Brown University Library; Washington University Libraries, St. Louis; Special Collections, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago; Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas; Henry E. Huntington Library; Houghton Library, Harvard University; Princeton University Libraries; Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; and Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University.

²RLL to WM, undated [late 1934] (JHB, WM Papers).

³Pound to Tyler, Apr. 24, [1933?] (JHB, Tyler Papers).

⁴Alfred McIntyre, "Birth Control for Books," *Publisher's Weekly* 120 (Dec. 26, 1931), 2711-13. See the chapter "Depression and Celebration" in *One Hundred and Fifty Years of Publishing: Little, Brown and Company, 1837, 1987* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1987), 84-96, esp. 84-85.

⁵Among them Louis Untermeyer's *First Words Before Spring* (1933), Witter Bynner's *Against the Cold* (1933), Sara Teasdale's *A Country House* (1932), and Leonie Adams' *This Measure* (1933).

⁶Knopf did publish his "Borzoi Chapbooks," for instance Frost's *The Lone Striker* (1933), a single poem of three pages, produced in an arrangement with the Plimpton Press.

⁷John Crowe Ransom, "The Poets Go Along," *Portrait of a Publisher, 1915/1965*, vol. 2 (New York: The Typophiles, 1965), 228, 230.

⁸*One Hundred and Fifty Years of Publishing*, 85.

⁹"Title Output Shows Sharp Drop," *Publishers' Weekly*, Jan. 21, 1933, 191; Edward Weeks, "Hard Times and the Author," *Atlantic Monthly* 155 (May 1935), 551-62; see esp. 555; "American Book Production, 1932," *Publishers' Weekly*, Jan. 21, 1933, 192. The brief portrait of Knopf in the Depression has been informed variously by Geoffrey T. Hellman, "Publisher," in three parts, *New Yorker*, Nov. 20, Nov. 27, Dec. 4, 1948, 44-47, 36-52, 40-53; see, e.g., Nov. 27, 37-39, Dec. 4, 40-41; Alfred Knopf, "Book Publishing: The Changes I've Seen," *Atlantic* 200.6 (Dec. 1957), 155-56, 160. I am also grateful for information shared by Peter Prescott, author of a forthcoming biography of Knopf.

¹⁰Qtd. in Leonard Greenbaum, *The Hound & Horn: The History of a Literary Quarterly* (London: Mouton, 1966), 49-50.

¹¹Even at the bottom of the Depression in 1933, three new small presses emerged and flourished: House of Books, The Cassowary Press, and Writers' Editions (the last founded by WS' friend Alice Corbin Henderson in Santa Fe).

¹²RLL to S. Foster Damon, Oct. 10, 1935 (JHB, Damon Papers, b14, uncatalogued f marked "L").

¹³RuL to WM, Sept. 4, 1937 (HRC, WM Papers).

¹⁴WM to George Marion O'Donnell, Jan. 4, 1938 (WUL, O'Donnell Papers).

¹⁵Tate to Ashley Brown, July 19, 1977 (Ashley Brown).

¹⁶W. Rothenstein to RLL, Nov. 28, 1934 (RLC, RLL Papers).

¹⁷RLL to WM, undated [early 1935?], undated [late Jan. 1935] (HRC, WM Papers); WM to RLL, Feb. 1, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers). He attended the Albany Business School (Madeleine Leippert Hall, interview with AF, Mar. 27, 1989).

¹⁸According to the records of Our Lady of Angels Parish, in Albany, New York, James Leippert was received into the Third Order (Secular) of St. Francis of Assisi, on Feb. 10, 1935, by Father John Murnane (Germain Williams, OFM.Conv. to AF, Nov. 6, 1989). By his profession RLL lived "in the world . . . but not of the world," wearing a habit consisting of scapular and cord in private which is easily hidden under everyday clothes (Father Conan Lynch, OFM.Conv. to AF, Nov. 11, 1989). "Unfortunately," RLL wrote WM, "complete monastic retirement from the world is impossible at this time but at the end of the year when I make my Profession I hope to enter the monastic branch of the Third Order. . . . One leads . . . a monastic life especially as regards renunciation of worldly luxuries and vanities—chastity and continence . . . are enjoined" (RLL to WM, undated [late Jan. 1935], [HRC, WM Papers]). To WM this was "dynamite news," understandably: "business school to monasteries!" (WM to RLL, Feb. 5, 1935 [RLC, RLL Papers]).

¹⁹WM to RLL, Jan. 21, 1934, May 27, 1934, June 26, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers); RLL to WM, undated [early May 1934]; undated [1934]; undated [late Mar. 1935] (HRC, WM Papers).

²⁰WM to RLL, Jan. 4, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

²¹To George Lensing, RLL is "the most enigmatic of those individuals who figure prominently in Stevens' career" (George S. Lensing, *A Poet's Growth* [Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1986], 122).

²²RLL to WM, undated [Apr. 1934] (HRC, WM Papers).

²³RLL to WM, undated [mid-May 1935] (HRC, WM Papers).

²⁴Lew Ney to Allen Tate, May 6, 1936 (WUL, O'Donnell Papers).

²⁵S. Foster Damon to WM, June 1, 1935 (HRC, WM Papers).

²⁶WM to RLL, Jan. 4, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

²⁷Robert Fitzgerald to WM, May 11, 1934 (HRC, WM Papers).

²⁸Martin Jay to Sherwood Anderson, Nov. 21, 1933 (Newberry Library, Anderson Papers).

²⁹Bynner to Leippert, June 4, 1933 (RLC, RLL Papers); see L 270.

³⁰Basil Bunting to Leippert, Sept. 26, 1932; and Oct. 30, 1932 (RLC, RLL Papers); Ezra Pound to RLL, Mar. 26, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

³¹Fanya Foss to Milton [Abernethy], July 2[5?], 1933 (HRC, Contempo Papers).

³²RLL to WM, undated [early 1935] (HRC, WM Papers). According to a Columbia classmate, the poet and journalist Gerard Previn Meyer (later a reviewer of WS' *Transport to Summer*), RLL justified the name "Latimer" "on the grounds that the Blessed Martyr, Bishop Hugh Latimer, who died at the stake in Oxford during the reign of 'Bloody Mary' with two others . . . had been an ancestor of his" (Meyer, "Immortality in a Footnote," *Journal of the Long Island Book Collectors* 3 [1975], 62). James G. Leippert despised his Germanic surname, and took "Lane"—from his uncle Frederick Lane, his mother's brother and one-time benefactor—in order to sever himself from his father's family (Madeleine Leippert Hall, interview with AF, Mar. 27, 1989; Charles A. Robertson to AF, June 18, 1987; from Gerard Previn Meyer to AF, Nov. 2, 1987).

³³WM to George Marion O'Donnell, Apr. 29, 1935 (WUL, O'Donnell Papers).

³⁴Bishop to RLL, Mar. 6, 1936 (RLC, RLL Papers).

³⁵Benét to "Miss Lane," Oct. 31, 1936; Alcestis Press to Benét, Nov. 27, 1936 (RLC, RLL Papers); WM to Sara Bard Field, Aug. 14, 1937 (Henry E. Huntington Library, C.E.S. Wood Papers, WD166[20]). On WS' intercession: Stevens to RLL, Nov. 6, 1936 (RLC, RLL Papers).

³⁶The manuscript of *The Mediterranean* was in the hands of Alcestis editors in June 1935, if not still earlier (WM to RLL, June 29, 1935 [RLC, RLL Papers]); it was not until the following July that Tate was sent proofs. See also Tate to RLL, Mar. 26, 1936 (RLC, RLL Papers).

³⁷Tate to WM, May 13, 1936 (HRC, WM Papers) (emphasis added).

³⁸WS to RLL, May 22, 1936; Aug. 29, 1936; Sept. 3, 1936 (RLC, RLL Papers); Willard J. Colling to AF, Apr. 20, 1988 and Feb. 3, 1989; Madeleine Leippert Hall, interview with AF.

³⁹See AF, *Stevens and the Actual World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 203-05.

⁴⁰WM to RLL, June 23, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers); Madeleine Leippert Hall, interview with AF; WM to O'Donnell, Nov. 26, 1937 (WUL, O'Donnell Papers).

⁴¹RLL to S. Foster Damon, Mar. 9, 1936 (JHB, Damon Papers, b14, f uncatalogued marked "L"); verso of WS to RLL, May 10, 1937 (RLC, RLL Papers); verso of WS to RLL, Nov. 2, 1937 (RLC, RLL Papers); verso of WS' letter dated Jan. 26, 1938 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁴²WS to WM, Feb. 4, 1937 (HRC, WS Papers).

⁴³WS to WM, Feb. 4, 1937 (HRC, WM Papers).

⁴⁴He mailed one letter he had received from Leippert to Witter Bynner, dated Apr. 4, 1933, which Bynner later sold to the Houghton Library along with his own materials. Here is the text of the letter WS retained, bearing a Columbia University return address (which Bynner had copied and, presumably, returned to WS):

Dear Mr. Stevens:

The mss. reached me safely, many thanks. It is quite legible and needs no rewriting. Am expecting H.D.'s mss. any day now & shall then proceed with getting out the first numbers (yours, H.D.'s[,] Ezra Pound's, and Marianne Moore's) though they won't be *published* till early in September. However, I'll let you know how things are progressing. I'd thought of having your copy bound in orange crushed levant and shall do so unless you object to that colour. If I don't hear from you regarding it I shall take it for granted that that will be satisfactory.

Sincerely yours, James G. Leippert.

Bynner jotted this somewhat misleading commentary for archival posterity:

Note: This man Leippert whom, I think, none of us had met, wrote a number of poets in 1933: Archibald MacLeish, Frances Frost and Elizabeth Madox

Roberts besides those mentioned in Stevens' letter [that is, in the letter from Leippert to WS] and myself, asking us to send him manuscript copies of poems to be luxuriously printed in reproduction. I believe that all of us responded with labor and mss. for him - none of which came to publication or as far as we could find later to any other use. W.B. (WS to Bynner, with enclosures [Houghton, WS Papers])

⁴⁵RLL saved WS' originals, carting them with him from place to place, job to job, and eventually sold them to the University of Chicago (RLL to M. Llewellyn Raney, Apr. 5, 1940 [RLC: RLL Papers]). Fortunately, RLL drafted some of his letters to WS on the reverse of WS' letters to him, and these are preserved in the RLL Papers at RLC. As for the possibility that the RLL letters were destroyed at The Hartford after WS' death, it seems quite remote.

⁴⁶RLL to WM, undated [Mar. 1935] (HRC, WM Papers).

⁴⁷WS to RLL, Nov. 2, 1936; Apr. 22, 1937; Apr. 27, 1937; Oct. 13, 1937; and Knopf to WS, Apr. 26, 1937 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁴⁸WS to WM, Feb. 4, 1937 (HRC, WS Papers).

⁴⁹WCW to RLL, Nov. 26, 1934 (RLC, RLL Papers). On WCW's dry spells, see Mariani, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 363, 303.

⁵⁰RLL's extraordinary view was even more special because in his letter WS spoke of his poetic inactivity in relation to WCW's activity: "Williams, I believe, writes every day or night or both, and his house must be full of manuscript, but it is quite different with me" (L 271).

⁵¹WM, John Wheelwright, David DeJong (a poet associated with the journal *Smoke*) and RLL prepared written rankings of contemporary poets: RLL to WM, undated [early May 1934] (HRC, WM Papers); WM to RLL, May 9, 1934 (RLC, RLL Papers); DeJong to RLL, May 2, 1934 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁵²RLL to Bishop, Apr. 4, 1935 (Princeton, Bishop Papers).

⁵³Martin Jay to WM, undated (JHB, WM Papers). The latter poem was "The Woman Who Blamed Life on a Spaniard," the former "Snow and Stars."

⁵⁴These poems were published in the Fall 1932 issue (unnumbered) and volume 1, number 2 (undated) of *The Lion & Crown*. Pound to Leippert, Nov. 20, 1932; Basil Bunting to Leippert, Jan. 4, 1933 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁵⁵RLL to WCW, undated [Oct. or Nov. 1932] (Beinecke, WCW Papers, Za Williams, Misc. f marked "L").

⁵⁶Of the all-WCW number, RLL wrote WCW: "I hope to make it a really great issue" (Leippert to WCW, Aug. 30, 1932 [Beinecke, WCW Papers, Za Williams, f marked "Misc. 'L' "]; see also WCW to Leippert, Nov. 30, 1932 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁵⁷WCW to RLL, Jan. 8, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁵⁸According to James Laughlin to RLL, Oct. 14, 1936 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁵⁹WCW to RLL, Feb. 6, 1936 (RLC, RLL Papers): "I have enough material for another book among the notes of the long poem, Paterson, which it has been my ambition to finish for several years. . . . When you are ready for a third book, that is to say, ready to print it, I'll have the script in condition for you to see." Obviously, no *Alcestis Paterson* was forthcoming.

⁶⁰James G. Leippert to Tate, Feb. 9, 1933; and Mar. 18, 1933 (Princeton, Tate Papers). By the end of April his list had already expanded to include Pound, MM, WCW, WS, Tate, Bishop, H.D., MacLeish, Robinson Jeffers, and Leonie Adams (James G. J. Leippert to Fletcher, Apr. 27, 1933; and from Macmillan Co. to Fletcher, June 5, 1933 [Arkansas, Fletcher Papers]). Sometime in June, Stevens sent his work—in care of "Martin Jay"; for some reason, the other poets had been approached by "James Leippert" (WS to Martin Jay, June 1, 1933 [RLC, RLL Papers]). This is the earliest letter from WS to RLL extant. MM's and Witter Bynner's submissions came at the same time (MM to J. Leippert, June 17, 1933 [Columbia, Frederick Coykendall Papers]; Bynner to Leippert, June 4, 1933 [RLC, RLL Papers]).

⁶¹Leippert, now almost exclusively “Martin Jay,” would co-edit the new magazine with Fanya Foss. Martin Jay to Milton Abernethy, undated (HRC, Contempo Papers); and Martin Jay to Sherwood Anderson, Nov. 11, 1933 (Newberry, Anderson Papers). On *Flambeau*: Fanya Foss to Milton [Abernethy], July 2[5?], 1933 (HRC, Contempo Papers).

⁶²“I think you will like the issue,” wrote RLL’s associate Gerard Previn Meyer to John Gould Fletcher, “among the things to be in it are *five new poems by Wallace Stevens*, a new translation of LaFogues’s *HAMLET*, and work by Erskine Caldwell, C[harles] E. Hudeburg, and Richard Thoma” (Meyer to Fletcher, Aug. 17, 1933 [Arkansas, Fletcher Papers]). Three poems Fletcher had submitted were accepted, but they did not appear until the third number of *Alcestis* (Spring 1935). The earliest confirmation of RLL having all eight new WS poems, ones that would appear in the first *Alcestis*, is late Mar. 1934: “Wallace Stevens,” RLL informed WM of prospective contents for the first number of *Alcestis*, “two long [poems] (as fine as he’s ever done) & 2 short. . . . I have four more Stevens but want to save them for a later issue” (RLL to WM, undated [late Mar. or early Apr. 1934] [HRC, WM Papers]).

⁶³RLL to WM, undated [mid-Mar. 1934] (HRC, WM Papers); from WM to RLL, Mar. 20, 1934 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁶⁴WM’s poverty: Harriet Monroe to WM, Dec. 18, 1932 and Sept. 30, 1933 (HRC, WM Papers); WM to “Jannine” [?], Dec. 10, 1937 [HRC, WM Papers, unidentified authors f]).

⁶⁵WM to RLL, Mar. 27, 1934 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁶⁶Enclosed with J. G. Leippert to [Milton] Abernethy, undated [1933]; and Martin Jay to Abernethy, Oct. 2, 1933 (HRC, Contempo Papers).

⁶⁷RLL to WM, undated [early Mar. 1934] (HRC, WM Papers).

⁶⁸Enclosed with Martin Jay to Milton Abernethy, Oct. 2, 1933 (HRC, Contempo Papers).

⁶⁹RLL to WM, undated [late Mar. or early Apr. 1934] (HRC, WM Papers); my dating of this important letter is determined by WM to RLL, Mar. 27, 1934 (RLC, RLL Papers), to which RLL’s letter is a direct reply.

⁷⁰WM to RLL, Dec. 26, 1934 and Mar. 5, 1935; H.D. to RLL, May 14, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers); and RLL to WM, undated (JHB, WM Papers).

⁷¹Basil Bunting to Leippert, Sept. 26, 1932 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁷²Pound to RLL, Mar. 26, 1936 (RLC, RLL Papers): Pound took the offer seriously, declining, finally, because a “Collected Poems wd/ include too much inferior work.”

⁷³Basil Bunting to Leippert, Sept. 26, 1932 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁷⁴Unpublished portion of WS to RLL, Sept. 25, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁷⁵RLL to WM, undated [internal evidence suggests early summer 1935] (JHB, WM Papers, f marked “Latimer, James R. L.”).

⁷⁶The former published by Random House, the latter by International Publishers, both in 1935.

⁷⁷MM to RLL, Oct. 3, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁷⁸MM to RLL, Oct. 3, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁷⁹MM to RLL, Oct. 7, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁸⁰RLL to WM, undated [spring 1934] (HRC, Maas Papers); Madeleine Leippert Hall, interview with AF.

⁸¹WM to RLL, June 23, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁸²RLL to WM, undated [mid-May 1935] (HRC, WM Papers).

⁸³RLL to WM, undated [early summer 1935] (JHB, WM Papers, f marked “Latimer, James R. L.”).

⁸⁴WM to RLL, July 7, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁸⁵RLL to RuL, Aug. 13, [1937] (Iowa, RuL Papers); RuL to WM, Aug. 14, 1937 (HRC, WM Papers); and Paul Corey and RuL to AF, June 27, 1987).

⁸⁶RLL, "And Three More," *Partisan Review* 4.2 (Jan. 1938), 63.

⁸⁷RLL's "Exhortation to My Brothers" begins: "Strong men, my brothers, the weak & crippled, / my brothers, also, who sit in the councils / through the hot nights and the cold nights / planning the day of justice & plenty. . . . / Be glad that the privilege is yours to awaken / the sleepers & yours to be the first in the battle / & yours the pain that will make you the stronger / to lift the gun & to lead the charge." One of the three poems is dated "Aug. '37." There are a number of autograph corrections, and these are certainly in RLL's hand (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁸⁸Editor's statement, *Alcestis* 1.1 (Oct. 1934), 3.

⁸⁹WM to RLL, May 9, 1934 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁹⁰WM to RLL, May 13, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁹¹RLL to S. Foster Damon, undated, postmarked Oct. 19, 1936 (JHB, Damon Papers, b14, f uncatalogued marked "L").

⁹²WM to RLL, June 29, 1935; July 7, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

⁹³Wheelwright to WM, undated (JHB, WM Papers).

⁹⁴"I agree absolutely with you," she wrote WM, "about Tate, Bishop, Warren, et al. RLL's giving ear to these makes me hesitate to submit anything which I may have to him. Doesn't he know that that outfit is not only passe today—but absolutely bad-smelling even in conservative camps?" (RuL to WM, Nov. 26, 1935 [HRC, WM Papers]); also RuL to WM, July 7, 1937 [HRC, WM Papers]).

⁹⁵See Deutsch's "Meaning and Being," *Poetry* 52.3 (June 1938), 153-56: poets "diverted by the noises of a panic-stricken crowd below" produced work that "employ[s] the facile vulgar style . . . [that] mak[es] an effort . . . at public speaking."

⁹⁶This was explicitly discussed (WM to RLL, July 16, 1935 [RLC, RLL Papers]). Although there is no specific evidence to confirm my suspicion that the uncommon delay in the production of Tate's book was politically motivated (if it was, Latimer knowingly approved), it is clear that energy and resources reserved for *The Mediterranean* were diverted to Stevens, and that Tate was "alarmed" about the evident bias (Ney to Tate, copy retyped by Tate for O'Donnell, May 6, 1936 [WUL, O'Donnell Papers]; Tate to WM, May 6, 1936 [HRC, WM Papers]; Tate to H. T. Stuart, with pencil notations in RLL's hand, July 7, 1935 [RLC, RLL Papers]).

⁹⁷The book was published in Aug. 1935. "Really *mon ami*," RLL wrote WM, "if all the left-wing writers were as charming as you, I'd publish none else" (undated [Sept. 1935] [JHB, WM Papers]).

⁹⁸WM to Wheelwright, Dec. 29, 1934 (JHB, Wheelwright Papers, b8, f23).

⁹⁹Damon to WM, Oct. 31, 1934 (HRC, WM Papers).

¹⁰⁰WM to "Editor of *Alcestis*," Nov. 1934 (RLC, RLL Papers).

¹⁰¹WM to RLL, Nov. 25, 1934 (RLC, RLL Papers).

¹⁰²WM to RLL, Dec. 15, 1934 (RLC, RLL Papers).

¹⁰³In early 1937 WM was still calling WS' new work "wholly delightful" and "brilliant" ("A Crisis in Language," *New York Herald Tribune Books*, Feb. 7, 1937, 14).

¹⁰⁴WS' first glimpse at WM's *Fire Testament* elicited a response of "Delightful," to which WM replied: "hot dickity-dog" (WM to RLL, June 29, 1935). Earlier WM's "Valediction at Repose" had appeared with WS' "Botanist on Alp" and "Hieroglyphica" in Kerker Quinn's *Direction* (Autumn 1934), 46, 12-13.

¹⁰⁵A now-lost letter from WS to WM is quoted by WM in WM to O'Donnell, Jan. 20, 1937 (WUL, O'Donnell Papers). WM's application essay is filed with the WM Papers at HRC. See also L 319.

¹⁰⁶WS to RLL, Aug. 11, 1937 (RLC, RLL Papers).

¹⁰⁷WM to RLL, July 7, 1935 (RLC, RLL papers): "I can just hear [John Gould] Fletcher and O'Donnell screaming."

¹⁰⁸Portions from *New Republic* and *Nation* reviews of WM's *Fire Testament* qtd. from proofs of the *Alcestis* brochure (filed with other press prospectuses in the WM papers at JHB). The first was Philip Blair Rice's ("Affirmation," *Nation* 142.3679 [Jan. 8, 1936], 53) and the second Kerker Quinn's (untitled, *New Republic* 85.1094 [Nov. 20, 1935], 55). Quinn had actually written: "Every poem in 'Fire Testament' is alive, healthily created, more color-strewn than any verse since the Imagists, suggestive of Wallace Stevens' serenity (*without his wit*) and of W. C. Williams' gusto (*without his concreteness*)" (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁹WM to RLL, May 13, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers) (emphasis added).

¹¹⁰WM to Wheelwright, Feb. 12, 1935 (JHB, Wheelwright Papers, b9, f3).

¹¹¹Harold Rosenberg to WM, Dec. 28, 1934 (JHB, WM Papers).

¹¹²Muriel Rukeyser, "Child and Mother," *Alcestis: A Poetry Quarterly* 1.4 (July 1935): n.p.; rpt. *The Collected Poems* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 52.

¹¹³RuL to WM, Jan. 24, 1936 (HRC, WM Papers).

¹¹⁴WCW to RLL, Nov. 26, 1934; Apr. 16, 1935; and Dec. 28, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

¹¹⁵When RLL was "sending a copy of Tate to New Masses" it was because he wanted "to see what they do to it" (WM to RuL, undated [late 1935] [Iowa, RuL Papers]).

¹¹⁶WM to RLL, July 7 and 8, 1935 (RLC, RLL Papers).

¹¹⁷AF and Harvey Teres, "An Interview with Stanley Burnshaw," *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 13.2 (Fall 1989): 111.

Wallace Stevens: The Adequacy of Landscape

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We never arrive intellectually. But emotionally we arrive constantly (as in poetry, happiness, high mountains, vistas).
—Wallace Stevens, "Adagia"¹

STEVENS WOULD BE PLEASED by the changing critical climate around his work, for "it must change." The poet of supreme fiction (the subject of formalist, epistemological, and phenomenological readings) has been replaced by a poet of contingencies. Psycho-social, political, economic, and linguistic contingencies have held our attention most; toward these Stevens is variously described as evasive or engaged.² What we have not addressed as much are the physical conditions of consciousness and the perceptual base of its activity, which Stevens so often invokes as both limit and need. Stevens' romantic resistance to materialist views of reality has blocked this line of relatedness. We have tended to follow his lead in addressing the Cartesian split as a problem to be solved by the pre-eminence of mind. But the body in the mind remains a part of his poetics even at its most abstract.

In a letter to Ronald Lane Latimer (November 15, 1935) Stevens describes his need to believe in both a subjective order and the contingency of all human orders:

In THE IDEA OF ORDER AT KEY WEST life has ceased to be a matter of chance. It may be that every man introduces his own order into the life about him. . . . But then, . . . [t]hese are tentative ideas for the purposes of poetry. . . . [E]veryone is busy insistently adjusting. Possibly the unity between any man's poems is the unity of his nature. A most attractive idea to me is the idea that we are all the merest biological mechanisms. If so, the relationship of origin is what I have just referred to as unity of nature. (L 293-94)

This is a long way from the unity of Nature imbued with Mind as Wordsworth or even Whitman understood it; Stevens' nature is conspicuously lower case. Stevens also referred frequently to the dependency of

the mind and culture on the outer world for its forms: "All of our ideas come from the natural world: Trees = umbrellas" (*OP* 189). This is rather different from Emerson's claim that nature is a metaphor of the human spirit. It asserts, instead, the material base of our ideas. It is generally argued that while Stevens insisted on "an alliance . . . between naturalism and a visionary faculty," the visionary faculty came to dominate his poetics.³ But Stevens insisted on the contingency of that visionary faculty throughout his career and critical serendipity is just beginning to uncover the particular stimuli of Stevens' most elusive images.⁴ To Ronald Lane Latimer's query Stevens replied: "While, of course, my imagination is a most important factor, nevertheless I wonder whether, if you were to suggest any particular poem, I could not find an actual background for you. . . . The real world seen by an imaginative man may very well seem like an imaginative construction" (*L* 289). This "actual background" defines not only an opportunity for the imagination but the limits of its independence as well.

At the same time, Stevens would come to affirm the "adequacy of landscape" (*CP* 243) and the need for its mediations. If our desire for the transparently real persists, many satisfactions are won from our provisional arrangements. The "inescapable choice / Of dreams" (*CP* 468) that is our apprehension of reality may serve rather than hinder our engagement if it is a choice constantly renewed, in "the never-ending meditation" (*CP* 465). Hence while dream is *inescapable*, creative *choice* is involved in each particular landscape. The idea of Nature with its lure of metaphysical presence, its promised totality, is something else, a term Stevens almost never uses. Stevens' landscapes are pragmatic and provisional, affording aesthetic and emotional if not intellectual arrival. Frequently Stevens' poems propose landscape as an alternative to confusion, as the only way of seeing an otherwise chaotic world. But increasingly he would limit the claims of landscape, valuing its affective power rather than its epistemological purposes.

While landscape remains a prominent subject in Stevens' poetry, then, his approach to it changes considerably in the course of his career. He began with a totalizing vision, though its consequence was less teleological revelation than specific observation, achieved by establishing a point of view. Later the observer's angle of vision and role in creating the prospect became important and the landscapes more provisional. In making this argument for the adequacy of landscape as a negotiation of the mental and environmental, I want to shift the accents given to certain points in Stevens' career. Instead of highlighting "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" and "Description without Place" I give greater import to *Parts of a World* as a transitional volume leading to late poems such as "The Plain Sense of Things."

The ambitions of landscape poetry have been bold, not merely decorative. Romantic poets imagined an intentional, subjective universe where the physical serves as a grounding for, not a condition of, the mental, not a location but a site of transcendental fade out. In the modern period the objectivist fixed gaze and immanentist immersions in soil turn circumstances to numinous depths. The autonomous fictive space of high modernism, "The poem of the mind" (*CP* 239), is not qualitatively different from these investments; all are concerned with closing the gap between the material and the mental, establishing a unified vision. Stevens was tempted by all these stances. But often for Stevens "The mind is smaller than the eye" (*CP* 161). In his emphasis on landscapes (the genealogy and rich variety of which is not my subject here) Stevens suggests an alternative. Without abandoning the old binarism of mind and world or promising paradisaic reconciliations, he seeks a creative liaison in provisional forms of arrival that acknowledge contingency and avoid the sense of crisis in object relations. "To live in the world but outside of existing conceptions of it" (*OP* 190) is his goal. Landscape is a temporary dwelling, an alternative to both skepticism and idealism.⁵ To say that this is more an emotional and aesthetic than an epistemological project for Stevens is not to suggest that he views the aesthetic as a discrete realm; quite the opposite is true. But it is nevertheless a distinct realm.

I don't mean to suggest that landscape description—mental picturing—is a primary aspect of Stevens' poetry. Even the early scenic landscapes are propositional and the movement early on is obviously toward an abstract geographic mapping of aesthetic sensibilities. But landscape—as a way of imagining the world and figuring ourselves—remains a prominent trope and should not be taken for granted. We need to ask not only what kinds of landscapes he imagined, but how he imagined them, how he understood their function.

"The exquisite environment of fact" (*OP* 190) is for Stevens primarily visual, and the eye reveals an aesthetic environment, to be probed less for its objective actuality than for its poetic "source of supply" (*L* 247). The root of "exquisite," as Stevens well knew, means to search out; the mind, unsatisfied with what it owns, seeks out what is "not realized before" (*OP* 190). "The world must be measured by eye," not by abstract ideas of "the truth" (*CP* 204). Yet the eye is also, at times, "the inexact eye" (*CP* 468), not searching out but apprehending, seizing reality for the mind, forming it to a landscape. He does not imagine the eye as an objective measure, a transparent conveyor of material truth. We have come (largely by way of feminist and ideological criticism) to critique the visual as specular desire and suspect it of evading contact with real lives and real time. Stevens certainly participates in the scopic tendency of romanticism in which the visual becomes a noncontingent faculty leading to the vision-

ary. But for Stevens, at least, this reach for manifest destiny forms only half the story. Stevens counters the noncontingency of the visual with language emphasizing the “force” of the physical world, which “smacks” the eye, repudiating old conceptions of reality. His landscapes are formed in the “inexquisite eye” from “the exquisite environment of fact.” Abstraction’s engagement with the actual marks more than an after-thought or mere consequence of its power to usurp the actual.

In painting, from which Stevens so often took example, landscape never really died though perhaps representational art, in terms of Renaissance perspective, is gone. In his essay “Painting a Landscape,” Peter Berger suggests a kind of interrelationship that might serve as a paradigm for Stevens’ own dynamics of imagination and reality. “As I work I am faithful to what I see in front of me, because only by being faithful, by constantly checking, correcting, analyzing what I can see and how it changes as the day progresses can I discover forms and structures too complex and varied to be invented out of my head or reconstructed from vague memories. The messages are not the kind that can be sent to oneself.”⁶ Berger’s chief example is, incidentally, Stevens’ as well—Cézanne.⁷ Stevens is obviously not a plein air poet, but this kind of interrelationship is more a part of his work than has generally been acknowledged. The usual argument is that the imagination usurps the authority and priority of this stimulus world, drawing it into autotelic space. But the logic of Stevens’ poems often goes the other way, even in the late work. (From “Of the Surface of Things”: “In my room, the world is beyond my understanding; / But when I walk I see that it consists of three or four hills and a cloud” [CP 57]). The poems, I believe, carry their contingency with them and seldom claim to surmount it completely. If nature is, as he wrote, a “source of supply,” it is also a condition of the imagination.

To present Stevens as a landscape poet would not obviously recommend him to contemporary readers, since landscape as a genre has been roundly discredited of late. The attack is not simply against the representational function of art, but against the mythologizing function of landscape *per se*. In founding a national identity on landscape, perpetuating an audacious Adamic freedom of the individual removed from local actualities, we Americans indulged in a precarious myth-making for which we must now do penance.⁸ If we indulged, on the one hand, in an imperialism of the eye (Bierstadt, Moran, Fremont), in which the vastness could be claimed for the spectator-self, our counter-myths of immersion and abandonment to plenitude in the visible world (Muir, Thoreau, Williams) merely manufactured an experience of “presence” and fetishized place. The result, so the argument goes, is the triumph of fictional space and the denial of particular locale and irreversible time; that is, description without place.

I will grant, for now, that in retaining landscape as the site of imaginative action Stevens withdraws, somewhat, from social and historical contingencies. Life, we know, was for Stevens a matter of places not of people, though he did not embrace the standard romantic apologies for this preference. Landscape is not a sufficient partner in our self-location, is not the only dimension in which we live. Certainly Stevens was well aware of what obsesses us since the Columbian quincentennial: that the national landscape on which we founded American identity involved more signifier than soil and required a critical erasure. To Latimer he writes of Crispin's colonizing venture: "I infer that, for you, environment means men and women; but, for me, it means my surroundings. . . . It is hard for me to say what would have happened to Crispin in contact with men and women, not to speak of the present-day unemployed. I think it would have been a catastrophe for him" (*L* 295). Postcolonial and feminist criticism will inevitably critique Stevens' representation of Southern regions, especially Florida, the Caribbean, and Mexico, as the feminine other. The politics of Stevensian pastoral is not my subject here, though it will no doubt haunt me. Stevens was aware of the limits of the myth of the American Adam and does not merely repeat it. Even within the idealized image of America as landscape, as open, unpopulated spatial field, Stevens treats the desire for specular totalities and "relentless contact" as elusive and aesthetically inadequate. Certainly Crispin's ideal of a "blissful liaison" between soil and intelligence requires him "to drive away / The shadow of his fellows from the skies" (*CP* 34, 37), depends, that is, on perpetuating the idea of an uncolonized wilderness, a primordial space that the mind can lay claim to. But Crispin's arrival in North America is not the Old Dominion re-enacted, nor an immersion in natural plenitude. If the turn from Bordeaux to Yucatan is from cultural excess to natural plenitude, the turn from Yucatan to Carolina is from the blank plenitude of nature to landscape.

The transformation of geographical place to metaphorical site, from local particulars to landscape does not imply an evasion of reality but a means of approaching it. Stevens' landscapes express the pragmatic and provisional nature of imaginative acts, tied to our position in time and place. They display the need constantly to return to a perceptual base in order to keep abstraction "blooded" (*CP* 385) and the reciprocal need to arrange reality as landscape. Later Stevens would emphasize the inevitability of landscape, its priority over our independent acts of consciousness. In "A Postcard from the Volcano" the children, unaware, see not with relentless contact but with the mediations of history, with "what still is / The look of things" (*CP* 159). Stevens shifts, accordingly, from New World to Old World (Pompeian) scenes, and from agrarian to urban and suburban landscapes.

Stevens' life-long habit of walking is certainly not sufficient evidence against the notion of his poetic world as a purely fictive, autotelic space. But it is worth considering how extended experiences in parks and rural scenes, where landscapes constantly adjust in relation to the beholder's changing position, might have shaped his imagination.⁹ The early journals portray a rather unconvinced transcendentalist, retreating to nature's purer text, but suspicious of his allegorical readings of nature.¹⁰ His journal of December 27, 1898 describes a walk through the woods "avoiding paths as much as possible" and wondering, with his back to the "smoky and noisy" city, "why people took books into the woods to read in summertime when there was so much else to read there that one could not find in books" (L 22). What can be read there he neglects to say. Instead, turning back toward the city, he hints at allegory, but with self-conscious irony. "Coming home I saw the sun go down behind a veil of grime. It was rather terrifying I confess from an allegorical point of view. But that is usually the case with allegory" (L 22). Yet he remains interested in the aesthetic, if not the epistemological satisfactions obtained there, particularly as broad vistas give way to particulars. In his journal he writes: "In a short time . . . these vast and broad effects lose their novelty and one tires of the surroundings. This feeling of having exhausted the subject is in turn succeeded by the true and lasting source of country pleasure: the growth of small, specific observation" (L 30). This is the opposite of the romantic logic of vision. The movement from broad vista and general proposition to close observation and attention to "the lyrics of song-sparrows" is a logic, however, not a choice of one over the other. Often in Stevens' poetry we find this logic, which implies that a landscape must be established before any seeing can take place, even while that seeing may reveal particulars that call the authority of the landscape schema into question.

On business trips Stevens continued the youthful habit of walking in the countryside. The letters to his wife that record the observations on these walks portray a man uneasy away from home, struggling to find a perspective, to arrive, to see a landscape in his new surroundings. On extended business in Tennessee Stevens wrote to his Elsie describing a scene in which he cannot get his bearings: cool and damp, but it feels like summer; the roses are out though at home in Connecticut they could not be; the streets are shadowy from the foliage. He concludes: "I have always been of two minds about Tennessee. Sometimes I like it and sometimes I loathe it. . . . [T]his midway South is an uncertainty" (L 206). But after a long walk in the Knoxville countryside he is able to describe a landscape with a broad prospect and his tone is more positive. "From Knoxville to the South East, one can see the Appalachian Mountains. Out near the golf club, at the Western end of the city, there is a really swank view. The Tennessee River makes a great bend through woods and cliffs and hills

and on the horizon run the blue ranges of the mountains." From this broad prospect he moves on to enumerate the particular splendors of Knoxville, the "peonies, tulip-trees, locust trees . . . the motherly old hens guiding their broods of ber-bers through the grass, already deep" (*L* 207) and so on. By deliberately placing himself in an elevated, spectatorial position Stevens is able to direct his attention to details where before his environment was a blur. The pastoral selection of the details typifies Stevens' early idealizing impulse in landscape, which would give way in later work to a vision of "poverty" not less dependent on landscape for the revelation of particulars. This movement from uncertain space to broad prospect to particular pleasures recalls the structure of "Anecdote of the Jar" and can help us read the poem as a pragmatic alternative to and not just a squabble between Hoon and the Snow Man. In the poem more than in the letter Stevens reveals his awareness of the part he plays in constructing the vision he beholds, and at the same time the limits of his control over that vision.

Even its title, "Anecdote of the Jar" over against "Ode on a Grecian Urn," marks it as provisional. The strategy of nineteenth-century representational painting was to make the jar invisible or all-encompassing, to present the order it defined as "natural" and absolute, to make the artist and observer feel one with the creator in his creation. Eliot's Chinese jar provides another contrast, suspended in fictive space, a still point in a turning world. Unlike these, Stevens' jar and gesture are located in time and space, yielding to local particulars. At the same time, the previously unyielding, slovenly wilderness, converted to "surroundings" by the positioning of the jar, now "gives" of bird and bush as perhaps it could not before. The jar and the landscape it creates also bring those particulars into focus, just as in his experience of Tennessee Stevens needed a landscape in order to see the flowering trees. The giving of bird and bush mark both the limits of the jar and the landscape it defines, and is a tribute paid to its qualified dominion. Stevens' imagination, in creating landscape, takes on an imperial air and defines an empire for the eye. Landscape is intoxicating in the power it lends to the beholder but the placed jar may carry moonshine in an age of prohibition and the intoxication wears off. No longer "of a port in air" (port wine? portent?), no longer a modernist aesthetic still point, it is still a portal, establishing a point of view by which the world can begin to reveal itself for the beholder even as it qualifies his authority. This is not a poem of lost or regained presence but of affects, "The way, when we climb a mountain, / Vermont throws itself together" (*OP* 140). "Anecdote of the Jar" anticipates this language from "July Mountain" (1955) and implies Stevens' early awareness of the part he plays in the formation of landscape.¹¹ Furthermore the jar is not an entirely alien object, but most likely a native product, not quite the essential image of a mythological age "out of his fields / Or from under his mountains" (*OP*

141) but regional nonetheless and close at hand. Stevens' is not an organic but a contingency theory of poetry. "Anecdote of the Jar," in combination with the letters he wrote from Tennessee, reveals a process by which landscape enables the poet to respond to his world affectively. Landscape involves the exclusion of certain realities and the transfiguration of others, but it also has the effect of disclosing what is otherwise unobservable. A similar process is more elaborately revealed in "The Idea of Order at Key West."

The letters from Key West show Stevens in an environment full of disturbances, not a slovenly wilderness, certainly, but a disordered and forbidding place, no *locus amoenus*. James Longenbach, in his commentary on the pastoral impulses in the poem, notes how the warships in the bay in Key West had disturbed the ease of the poet and are transformed into fishing boats in the poem.¹² But if the poem is a version of pastoral, it is not a static pastoral or simple utopian escape. It disengages from political troubles (not only the Cuban political disorders but the Depression at home), but it stages an encounter with disturbances in the physical world and works out a temporary peace with them. Landscape becomes, that is, a theater in which the poet can confront troubles that may be more recalcitrant in the social world. This is not pastoral as the escape from trouble or as the defense of the status quo. Stevens' emerging idea of order is by no means static or complacent. It helps to establish, not to delimit, an apprehension of the world. This transposition of trouble from human to natural scene is already at work in the letters Stevens writes from Florida. The wind itself seems, by a pathetic fallacy, determined to destroy his holiday composure: "While the sky is as blue and the sun as hot as ever, the wind cries in the eaves in a most melancholy manner, as if one were hearing the cry of the people who are tired of Winter and are whimpering about it" (L 258). The task of the imaginative man is to establish a landscape in this disturbed environment. "The Idea of Order at Key West" certainly does not open in a landscape. We begin with nature red in tooth and claw. Indeed, the wind he complains about in the letter finds its way into the poem, gasping against the sea's grinding force. The first response is to turn away from the alienating landscape to the solitary singer, as if the poet's task were simply to determine who she is, what her higher origin and destiny might be, indifferent to the background that is "merely a place" (CP 129). But Stevens will abandon this question and turn to the task of landscape, converting place to site in the second half of the poem. For Stevens, the idea of order turns out not to be thematic or nominative but spatial, not aural but visual first, a shaping of reality into landscape, not a theory of creation. In the second half of the poem problems of expression and authority drop away and the poem turns to spectacle. Stevens rede-

fines his project. Unable to establish questions of authority or metaphysics, he begins to construct a landscape.

The first landscape in "The Idea of Order at Key West," with its mountainous atmospheres and bronze shadows, theatrical distances and high horizons, is certainly reminiscent of nineteenth-century American sublime painting. This spatial arrangement comes, he says, as a direct consequence of the song, just as the jar placed in Tennessee turns the wilderness to a surrounding. But the images become more technological, reveal (without diminishing) the constructedness and hence the contingency of the vision. Surveyor's or navigator's instruments mark "acutest" angles and "measured" distances. These distances are also "measured to the hour," subject to time. Their angle is subject to the angle of the sun, which is declining in the west; it will soon be night in the poem and the sublime bronze landscape will be erased. The vanishing point in this landscape (her song made the sky "acutest at its vanishing") is demystified while its effects are still admired. It no longer sustains a notion of the beholder as a bodiless, metaphysical mind. The nightscape that replaces these "mountainous atmospheres" has no single vanishing point but many "fragrant portals" (CP 129-30). It cannot be centered or totalized. The navigational imagery suggests the pragmatic side of these landscapes. They help us make our way across "the veritable ocean" (CP 128), which we cannot face unaided. The connection between the boat lights and the stars, then, is not an absolute but a pragmatic, navigational one.

There is plenty of evidence that Stevens considered abandoning landscape during the 1930s, and certainly after "The Idea of Order at Key West" landscape, with its exalting vanishing points, wanes as a scene of meditation. Gone too is the charting impulse that sought to place landscape and imagination on the same indeterminate map. But as Stevens launched a critique of the totalizing space of classical and romantic landscape, he began a new approach to the genre, in which landscapes become parts of a world rather than ways of summarily ordering a world of parts. Hence fragments of landscape enter meditations through the space of memory and allusion in poems such as "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery," "The Auroras of Autumn" and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven."

As Stevens moved away from the scenic structures of romanticism he also called into question the European painterly traditions of spatial mastery that had helped to support the romantic vision of nature and that had been transposed onto the American scene. The names of Poussin, Claude, Constable, Corot arise in the poems, but it is the impact of these visions on American sensibility, through the art of Asher Durand, Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt, right up to George Inness and Albert Pinkham Ryder that is his primary concern.¹³ The imagery of Stevens' poems makes it clear how engaged he was with this landscape tradition in American painting.

The exotic Caribbean, Mexican and Floridian landscapes of these artists appear throughout *Harmonium*. Stevens' moon-lustered fields, sun-dazzled snow, and deer-studded wilderness all have their painterly analogues. These images had helped to shape how America imagined itself, grounding American vision in what was for Europeans an evasion of historical change. Stevens' early poems, especially "Sunday Morning" and "The Idea of Order at Key West," are certainly ready to conjure such sublime images of mountains and mountainous atmospheres as scenic symbols of individual freedom and self-determination. But at the same time he was developing a sense of the inadequacy of such images for a contemporary American aesthetic. "John Constable they could never quite transplant / And our streams rejected the dim Academy" (CP 154).

Stevens writes "Botanist on Alp (No. 1)" for an American audience, because he wants to suggest the inadequacy of the Claudian ideal (which so held the imaginations of American artists of the nineteenth century) to the modern American world. Such an ideal essentialized one-point perspective, making the beholder metaphysically powerful. It projected a vision of Nature as a unified, timeless realm against the vicissitudes of human history and appealed to the American wish to ground identity in a national landscape against the rotten institutions of Europe. Here the individual's yearning for expansion could be realized in the broad prospect. But American artists have always had trouble reconciling empiricist and idealist impulses. In proposing that Claude's Nature was itself "resting on pillars" (CP 134) of rhetoric that would crumble like the ruins it portrayed, Stevens abandons ideals of transcendent identity. As "botanist," he is drawn to the changing organic foreground, not the timeless geological background. He "live[s] by leaves," by transient things, rather than by final causes which remain for him in a cloud of unknowing: "corridors of clouds, / Corridors of cloudy thoughts, / Seem pretty much one: / I don't know what." If "Marx has ruined Nature, / For the moment" (CP 134) by depriving "the peacocks and the doves" (L 295) of their machinery of flight, their apostrophes and panoramas, he has not ruined it permanently for botanist or artist, who team up. The botanist who insists on nature's variety rather than its grand design has still the sense of "ecstatic air" for which he seeks a new landscape vision.

In surrendering the centered prospect of Claude (the world seen through arches) Stevens did not take up the rhetoric of immersion that could grant natural authority to the poet's vision, the rhetoric that began to evolve in the nineteenth century with Edwin Muir and Martin Johnson Heade and emerged in John Marin, Georgia O'Keefe, and Marsden Hartley. For them "nature," in its apparent stability and concreteness, is a donor of presence, an idea that American poets like Robert Bly, James Wright, Dave Smith, and Mary Oliver still propose. For Stevens such sinking into

place usually leads to a sense of panic in which signification and aesthetic order break down, in which he is washed away by magnitude. We need landscape to approach the world. The scope of consciousness cannot be grounded in the material field it seeks to embrace, even while it is dependent upon it.

"Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" offers landscape as an alternative both to dreams of plenitude and dreams of dominion. The often quoted but misread line, "we live in a place / That is not our own" (CP 383) suggests more than an assumption of alienation; it voices a qualified return to place. Stevens rejects dominion (we can't "own" the world), but makes a gesture of habitation that he began with Crispin but that remains incomplete. "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" is not a pastoral or aesthetic retreat from the dimension in which we live. Deconstructing romantic correspondences as well as empiricism, we have tended to read poetic habitation as indifferent to place, as the writing of human value on the blank of nature, the substitution of poems for mountains. But Stevens never believed in that substitution, or even that blankness, for long. The physical world is neither intransigent glyph nor animate space. "The world is a force, not a presence" (OP 198); sometimes for Stevens it is a substance. Aesthetic landscape is for him a form of engagement, a way of living in a world we do not own.

Stevens' self-consciousness in the 1930s about the lack of social import to his work is clearly one reason for his shift away from the scenic use of landscape. But the poems also suggest the natural atrophy of a style (parallel to shifts in American cultural identity away from landscape). As he writes in "The American Sublime," "One grows used to the weather, / The landscape and that" and turns to "The empty spirit / In vacant space" (CP 131). These are the assertions of an unendowed selfhood in an abysmal universe: certainly a recipe for modernist fictive spaces.¹⁴ Critics have eagerly leaped from this version of the sublime to "Description without Place" and on to "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" to claim in Stevens what Joseph Carroll calls the "ontological supremacy of poetic figuration."¹⁵ But this version of Stevens tells an incomplete story which largely bypasses *Parts of a World* in order to read "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" as the triumph of trope over matter. There is another line of thought in Stevens, which comes to eloquence at the end of "Esthétique du Mal" and forces us to read the late poem "The Plain Sense of Things" as an expression of the conditional imagination.

Parts of a World serves as a crucial transition between the scenic idealizations of early Stevens and the later iconic idealizations that critics over-emphasize. It is no accident, I think, that landscape is an important, repeated term in this volume, largely replacing the oppositional terms reality and imagination and now opposed to teleological truths, whether

transcendent or immanentist. In arguing for what he calls "the adequacy of landscape" against the fruitless search for "The the" (CP 203), Stevens' poetry sometimes sounds like simple perspectivism: "We were two figures in a wood. / We said we stood alone" (CP 203). But he is more the pragmatist who knows that perception requires a gestalt, an investment in a landscape. The grapes grow fatter on the road home after the seeker turns from The Way to accept contingencies of time and place. Stevens' world of parts consists of more than the plurality of fictive worlds or fictive selves. These parts are situated in palpable places; they fail when they are not so situated.

Certainly the "anti-master-man" of "Landscape with Boat," refusing to be situated, searching for the "neutral centre" of the "single-colored, colorless, primitive," is a painter in spite of himself (one in the objectivist mode that Stevens viewed as misguided). In "brush[ing] away" he makes a gesture equivalent to a brushing on; his "phantom, . . . uncreated night" is a scene among others ("floribund" even as it is moribund), but a fantasy escape rather than a landscape. More important to Stevens, in attempting to reach unmediated reality the anti-master-man fails as an artist. His "supposed" space is not habitable. In his preoccupation with intellectually "arriving" (his journey at sea supported by a boat he will not acknowledge), he refuses to "live" and refuses the emotional arrivals available to him. Stevens' critique of the anti-master-man argues rather laconically that "the world itself was the truth" (CP 241-42) including without hierarchy or center all its parts: the self, the illusions of color, the physical world as it plays upon our perceptions.

But of course this "peddler's pie" (CP 251), this assortment of parts, is not very satisfying either. We crave a landscape. At the end of "Landscape with Boat" Stevens gives us an alternative figure of capable imagination, a latter-day Hoon who sits on a balcony above the Mediterranean, admiring the empire of his eye in which description becomes revelation, adjective noun, "emerald / Becoming emeralds." Appearances alone (not nature or metaphysics) declare the legitimacy of his reign. If the ascetic was the anti-master-man, this latter figure is no Old Master but a different kind of modernist. His empire of the eye has an ironic element as "the palms / Flap green ears in the heat" (CP 243). But he is imaginatively engaged with his surroundings. The boat (perhaps carrying the baseless anti-master-man) enters the landscape of this beholder to break his solipsism. It reminds us of another perspective, another form of engagement, its wake another impression of reality. The two figures in "Landscape with Boat," then, represent a choice not between objectivism and solipsism, but between a deluded quest for transparency that leaves us at sea and a creative involvement with environment that affords aesthetic satisfaction but owns up to its limits.

Perhaps a more defining position for *Parts of a World* is the edge of the bed in "The Latest Freed Man." The latest freed man, upon waking, acknowledges that there must be "'A doctrine to this landscape'" to replace the "old descriptions of the world," but the investment of doctrine in landscape allows "'the moment's rain and sea, / The moment's sun'" to come into his window. If the speaker of that poem forgets the window, pretentiously calling it "being without description" (CP 204-05), he is just another doctor. The speaker is more the object of Stevens' irony than the figure beholding the landscape, the freed man as the speaker calls him, who never claims to know reality, only vivid landscape.

Stevens' later arguments for "description without place," and the opposite "freedom" there entailed, should be held to a similar skepticism about freedom (that is, the freedom of the metamorphosing imagination against the bindings of the material world). "Crude Foyer" is a kind of critic's Rorschach test with its equivocal argument "that the mind / Is the eye, and that this landscape of the mind / Is a landscape only of the eye," and with its ambiguous referents of "there" and "here." But if the "foyer of the spirit" (CP 305) is like the balcony in "Landscape with Boat," it is not a place in itself, not a detached space, but a perspective. We would expect a foyer to lead us into a chamber, a bronze decor, a private room for a rendezvous with the interior paramour. But if Stevens eventually hypothesizes the spirit as a final space, thought and imagination end here in the contingent space of the foyer in a landscape, a space without closure.

Despite its celebration of the "gaiety of language" (CP 322), "Esthétique du Mal" offers one of Stevens' clearest cautions against aesthetic autonomy. For if the world is poor, its poverty must be cured rather than abandoned because "The greatest poverty is not to live / In a physical world" (CP 325). In order to make this assertion palatable Stevens must retreat, in this poem, from the volcano as object of the sublime (so popular with nineteenth-century Americans, who flocked to the base of Etna and Vesuvius). The aestheticizing of European disaster was too distasteful during World War II. He closes, instead, on an image of fertile North America with its "green corn gleaming" as the appeal against metaphysical flight. This may indeed seem like one more version of pastoral (to which Stevens has tended all along), the idealized image of America evoked in our anthems. But the assertion that hope must be based on "living as and where we live" will outlast these idealizations and confirm the importance of landscape as a perennial genre. Sight remains Stevens' line of contingency, to what exceeds the capacities of the will. ("One might have thought of sight, but who could think / Of what it sees" [CP 325-26]). If the seen world represents the spatial expansion of the imagination, it also represents a challenge of renewal to the poet. "The imagination loses vitality as it ceases to adhere to what is real" (NA 6). The poet seeks connectedness

in his aesthetic. Stevens suggests not only that creation overwhelms human capability, that the physical absorbs the metaphysical, but that our "supreme fictions," our metaphysical inventions, learn their changes less from autonomous compositional laws than from physical surroundings:

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. (*CP* 326)

It may seem that I have made Stevens sound too much like Thoreau. That would be a healthy antidote to the obsession for linking Stevens with Emerson, that despiser of contingencies. Of course, the grand idea of Nature has grown shabby ("The greenhouse never so badly needed paint") and "the great pond" (*CP* 502-03) of "The Plain Sense of Things" hardly resembles Thoreau's Walden (although it does describe contemporary Walden pretty well). Stevens' pond is a trope of mind more explicitly than Thoreau's or even his own earlier "teeming millpond or a furious mind" (*CP* 155) in "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery," where perceptual and symbolic landscapes ebb and flow.

But "The Plain Sense of Things" is also a landscape of the eye—even our idea of plainness toward the world is borrowed from perceptions of the world's own changes. We need nature to figure our own habits toward nature; the pond of the mind begins in Elizabeth Park. In "The Plain Sense of Things" the imagination turns to surroundings to school itself in its own necessities. The idea of necessity is itself contingent. Thoreau went to Walden in a less exhausted mood to "know life." His pond is not a dirty glass but a transparency and a shimmering mirror. Stevens' pond and its surroundings in "The Plain Sense of Things" is always a landscape, not a revelation of nature. When he claims "the absence of the imagination had / Itself to be imagined" (*CP* 503) I hear less the resurgence of pride in the triumph of the imagination over fate (as Harold Bloom has suggested) than an acknowledgment that landscape is inevitable, whether our gaze is outward or inward. How far we are from the perspectiveless ideal of the Snow Man and the imperial gaze of Hoon. Here landscape is neither transparent nor opaque, littered with the waste of human imagining, a mutable nature strewn with deteriorating urban forms. The poet of "The Plain Sense of Things" chooses adjective, not noun. The "rat [that] come[s] out to see" (*CP* 503) is no transparent eyeball and wears no turban. He is a scavenger. In eliminating deity from vision since "Sunday Morning" and "The Idea of Order at Key West," in coming down from the hilltop to take this horizontal perspective, too low to see the reflections of heaven, Stevens positions himself close to contingencies (leaves, mud, the waste of lilies). This is the "near and dear" without the erotic drive toward nature. In this

sense I think "The Plain Sense of Things" represents a base landscape to which the poet can "return" (who cannot "return" to a condition of presence) when the "total grandeur of a total edifice" (CP 510) and even the consoling fictions of the leaves and the rock collapse.¹⁶

Critics have seized on the several architectural forms in Stevens' late poetry as evidence of a shifting idea of sublimity. They are fine for Rome, but Stevens continued to prefer American landscape even as he surrendered any sublime aspirations and any sensuous hedonism in it. Stevens also gave up his treasured pastoral images of America, whether the feminized tropics of imaginative renewal, the "berries ripen[ing] in the wilderness" (CP 70), the open cattle ranges of Oklahoma, or the more agrarian "gleaming corn." In the late poetry place becomes important again, particularly unidealized places near home in industrial Connecticut. Such places, if they are taken up into the meditating mind, are borrowed rather than appropriated.

"In Connecticut, we never lived in a time / When mythology was possible," Stevens writes at the end of his career (OP 141). To live as and where we are may mean to live without essential images, to live with landscapes only. If this relationship to the physical world was not the erotic consummation, the "blissful liaison" sought by Crispin and his romantic forebears, it was still a liaison, not a submission, conquest, or evasion. Stevens' paramour may be, by the end, entirely interior, but he still looks outside himself for an aesthetic habitation in a world he knows he cannot own.

Boston University

Notes

¹Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, rev. ed., ed. Milton J. Bates (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 198; hereafter cited as *OP*. References to *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, sel. and ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966) will be cited as *L*; *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954) as *CP*; and *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1951) as *NA*.

²Frank Lentricchia in "Patriarchy Against Itself" (*Ariel and the Police: Michel Foucault, William James, Wallace Stevens*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) historicizes Stevens in the tone of an exposé. Even Alan Filreis in *Wallace Stevens and the Actual World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), who presents a poet deeply engaged in the politics of World War II and the Cold War era, tends to emphasize Stevens' antihistoricism as an evasion of pressing historical matters. In a more personal arena, Mark Halliday in *Stevens and the Interpersonal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) presents an ethical critique of a poet who suppresses, but inevitably feels, the force of human relations. Other recent critics have been more willing to recognize Stevens' self-conscious involvement in the life around him. James Longenbach, in *The Plain Sense of Things* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), argues that the poet's creativity is directly related to his engagement with the historical and social realities of his time; Margaret Dickie in *Lyric Contingencies: Emily Dickinson and Wallace Stevens* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) de-

scribes a poet aware of contingencies in the act of writing itself, a poet involved with speaker, audience, and language as he constructs the world of the poem.

³Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 23. Bloom's position is continued by Joseph Carroll in *Wallace Stevens' Supreme Fiction* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1990).

⁴Robert A. Wilson locates Stevens' "fragrance of vegetal" in "Last Looks at the Lilacs" in a shaving lather (*Wallace Stevens Journal* 16.2 [Fall 1992]: 182). Helen Vendler has recently found "pax across the window pane" ("Puella Parvula") in Memorial Church in Harvard Yard.

⁵My thinking is influenced here by Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁶Peter Berger, *The Look of Things* (New York: Viking, 1974), 173.

⁷For a full discussion of Stevens' relationship to the visual arts see Glen MacLeod, *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art: From the Armory Show to Abstract Expressionism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁸Henry Nash Smith explored this notion of America as "the garden of the world" in his ground breaking *Virgin Land* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950). It has since become a tenet of American studies. A recent article by Angela Miller, "Everywhere and Nowhere: The Making of the National Landscape," in *American Literary History* 4.2 (Summer 1992): 207-29, describes the ideological function of landscape painting in the mid-nineteenth century as reinforcing expansionist myths.

⁹For an interesting discussion of the walk as "occasion" for meditation see Roger Gilbert, *Walks in the World: Representation and Experience in Modern American Poetry* (Princeton University Press, 1991), 75-106.

¹⁰For a discussion of Stevens' early transcendentalism and his evolving poetics of nature, see Guy Rotella, *Reading and Writing Nature* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 95-140.

¹¹Margaret Dickie quotes this poem to initiate her argument about lyric contingency.

¹²James Longenbach, *The Plain Sense of Things*, 155-65.

¹³Louis Martz's "From the Journal of Crispin': An Early Version of 'The Comedian as the Letter C'" in *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration*, ed. Frank Doggett and Robert Buttel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3-30, argues persuasively that Crispin's quest for a new aesthetic parallels the quest of American visual artists (mostly, I note, landscape artists) described by his contemporary Paul Rosenfeld.

¹⁴See Rob Wilson, *The American Sublime* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 169-96.

¹⁵Joseph Carroll, *Wallace Stevens' Supreme Fiction*, 171.

¹⁶My reading here is informed by James Longenbach's discussion of the poem in *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things*, 303-04.

A Keepsake of Wallace Stevens' Harvard Years

DANIEL WOODWARD

WHEN WALLACE STEVENS LEFT Harvard in June 1900, after three years of attendance as a special student, he had earned no degree but had taken as many courses as a regular student would have been expected to complete in four years. The influence of Harvard on his ensuing career (both professional and literary) was substantial, for it was at Harvard that this young man from provincial eastern Pennsylvania first encountered the macrocosm of economic, social, intellectual, and artistic life in his time. A commemorative pamphlet privately printed in May 1900, just before his departure from Harvard, contains poems by him and one of his classmates. This keepsake of the Junior Dinner of the Harvard College class of 1901, held at the Vendome in Boston on May 1, 1900, can be returned to service today as a keepsake of Stevens' Harvard experiences as well. As one would expect, neither of these undergraduate poems has any enduring literary merit, and Stevens' sweaty ode is readily available in a standard book about him.¹ Yet restoring them as a pair of poems, with the longer and more topical piece annotated for the first time, provides a supplement to existing accounts of Stevens' life at Harvard and extends the context of his other early but more inventive and finally more important literary experiments.²

Attending the Junior Dinner were 155 members of the class of '01, or about a third of those who enrolled as regular and special students in 1897. A partly serious, mostly amusing "Poem" about class members was recited by William Bond Wheelwright, who during his undergraduate career served as president of the *Harvard Lampoon* and was a member of the Harvard Union, the Hasty Pudding Club, the Institute of 1770, and the Signet. After graduation he worked in the paper business and in advertising and for five years during the Depression edited a digest of paper and printing news. He was a friend and admirer of Daniel B. Updike, the famous American printer, by whom he was employed for three years; eventually he became a member of the Society of Printers.³

The "Ode" at the dinner, a distantly Tennysonian piece celebrating "a night in May," was delivered by Stevens, who was president of the *Harvard Advocate* and a member of the O.K. Society, the Institute of 1770, and the Signet.⁴ For Stevens, who to the end of his life never entirely overcame

stage fright, the occasion must have been intimidating. A classmate reminded him of it many years later:

I remember when you wrote and read the most humorous poem I ever heard in my life. You drank a whole bottle of King William scotch just before spouting it at the class dinner, then, after reading it, you promptly passed out, and I had to take you home, and missed the rest of the dinner. When that poem was printed it did not have a humorous word in it, but was very fine indeed.⁵

The original manuscript appears not to survive. But Wheelwright's and Stevens' poems were printed as a twelve-page keepsake of the Junior Dinner.⁶ In 1951 Wheelwright's poem was reprinted privately in an edition of 500 copies, along with other verses he wrote about the class of '01 for the Sophomore Dinner in 1899 and reunions in 1907, 1919, 1931, 1936, 1946, and 1951.⁷ Stevens attended the 1951 reunion, and at the same time Harvard awarded him an honorary Doctor of Letters degree. He seems to have retained at least some interest in his Harvard class. He wrote to Barbara Church:

For me personally, this degree is the highest prize that I can ever win. . . . It was awarded in the presence of my class which was in Cambridge celebrating its 50th (and last) reunion. I did not see a very great number of my classmates at the time because they had had a tremendous blow-out the night before at Mrs. Jack Gardiner's Museum which was offered to the class for that purpose by the Museum people. But I saw a good many of them in the afternoon when I took part in a completely different set of exercises under the auspices of the Alumni Association. On this occasion those who received degrees stood on the steps of Widener Library and all the classes marched by. When my own class marched by, I borrowed the top hat of one of my neighbors and saluted them, very greatly to their satisfaction and without any real loss of dignity on my part. . . . [T]he whole thing has brought my morale up to an all-time high.⁸

Wheelwright's poem mentions Stevens in what is a disappointingly uninspired passage about Harvard's literary magazine:

For example, Wallace Stevens
Now rules the *Advocate*;
And though we never read it,
The *Crimson* says it's great.

The next stanza is cleverer about the tone of undergraduate journalism:

The *Crimson's* run by Eddie Loud,
Though he's a bully fellow,
I sometimes think his crimson sheet
Has just a tinge of yellow.

Although Wheelwright's poem ends with a serious and no doubt appropriate denunciation of "False standards, sham and snobbish pride" among class members intensely aware of social status, much of it is devoted to recording casually but pointedly their athletic prowess.

In his "Ode" Stevens struggles with the conventions of verse composed to be delivered on a formal occasion, but without much success. His effort to avoid clichés can be seen in these lines expressing what the Harvard experience means to him, and perhaps also to his classmates:

It is enough to feel our thoughts take wing
Into a happiness
Where none hath seen
A single, unenjoying, hopeless thing.
A life made keen
By its perfection!
All bright, all freshly glowing in the sun
That leads us into doing from what's done,
Without reflection.

This subject was of continuing interest to Stevens, who looked at the relationship between aesthetic experience and life generally in his play *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* (1916), and who as late as 1948 asked rhetorically: "What is the residual effect of the years we spend at a university, the years of imaginative life, if ever in our lives there are such years, on the social form of our own future and on the social form of the future of the world of which we are part, when compared with the effects of our later economic and political years?"⁹

The poignancy of Stevens' valedictory "night in May" was probably lost on most of the class, who unlike him would not face leaving Harvard for another year. To those who did not understand the intensity of Stevens' feelings about Harvard, perhaps his poem *would* seem funny when it was read aloud in an extraordinary manner, especially if, like his friendly classmate, they had no inkling of his embarrassment over reading aloud a poem that he clearly regarded as bad. It would have been in character for Stevens to refrain deliberately from taking fanciful chances in his ode for the class dinner, only to find that his caution had left him with a certain masculine enthusiasm and none of the wit and subtle discrimination found in a number of his other undergraduate poems.¹⁰ If Stevens' ode was seen

by Charles Townsend Copeland (Stevens' Harvard teacher and friend still remembered as the "Copey" who profoundly influenced his students' English composition), even he could not have guessed that this young man would accept the challenge of his ode, to "Take ye the ships and labor on the deep," as meaning that Stevens' occupation would include poetry, or that he would ever produce such triumphs as *Harmonium*, "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," and *The Rock*. According to Witter Bynner, Stevens' colleague on the *Advocate* editorial board, when Stevens said good-bye to Copey that June and announced his intention to become a poet, Copey's response was, "Jesus Christ!"¹¹

A copy of the rare Wheelwright-Stevens pamphlet is in the Huntington Library, which has granted permission for its reproduction here. A few minor variants appear in the 1951 text of Wheelwright's poem, but they are not compelling enough to supplant the original text, reproduced here in facsimile, as is that of Stevens' poem.

The Huntington Library

Annotations on William Bond Wheelwright's "Poem"

- 19 *Benny*: Harold Benjamin Clark, class secretary.
- 20 *Rotch, Daly and Jack Hallowell*: Charles Morgan Rotch, Charles Dudley Daly, John White Hallowell (the last also mentioned in 59-64, 80). Daly was the football player who was one of Stevens' roommates at Harvard. Charles O'Dowd, an associate of Stevens at the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Co., recalls: "He [Stevens] mentioned to me once that his roommate at Harvard was a famous football player who, when he finished, went to West Point and played four more years and was later coach at West Point and Harvard. He said, 'He had absolutely no interest in literature, and I had absolutely no interest in athletics. We were the most compatible roommates anybody had in college. We had nothing in common.' He [Stevens] was a funny guy" (Peter Brazeau, *Parts of a World: Wallace Stevens Remembered* [New York: Random House, 1983], 42). The original tapes and transcripts of this interview are in the Huntington Library. In them O'Dowd misremembers the name of the roommate, which I have corrected from the other details he mentions in the interview. Daly played quarterback at Harvard and was a member of the Institute of 1770 and later an honorary member of the Hasty Pudding Club. Stevens' professed indifference to football should be qualified, for over the years he regularly attended the Harvard-Yale game; and when he was president of the *Advocate* he editorialized favorably about athletics and related activities on four occasions (March 10, April 3, May 23, and June 2, 1900). At one time or another Stevens' classmates Arthur Pope and Harold Hastings Flower, together with such other Harvard students as Russell Loines and Herbert Pope, and fine arts instructor Martin Mower, lived in the Misses Parsons' board-

ing house at 54 Garden Street, Cambridge, where Stevens resided throughout his three years at Harvard. (See *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, sel. and ed. Holly Stevens [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966], 14 n; also Joan Richardson, *Wallace Stevens: The Early Years 1879-1923* [New York: William Morrow, 1986], 61ff). Daly's living in the boarding house seems not to have been deduced by Stevens' biographers.

- 26 *Jim*: James Lawrence, Jr.
- 29, 34 *Another oarsman . . . St. Louis Dwight*: Dwight Durkee Evans.
- 35, 37 *Heber*: Reginald Heber Howe, Jr., on the board of editors of the *Advocate*.
- 39-40, 42 *Endicott . . . Laurie . . . paper mill*: Laurence Endicott, who went to work for the Mutual Paper Co. in Seattle.
- 44 *Roger Swaim*: Roger Dyer Swaim.
- 48 *Indian, Erskine Wood*: Erskine Wood (1879-1981), nicknamed for his boyhood experience of living with the Nez Perce Indians in Washington state during parts of 1893 and 1894. His father was Charles Erskine Scott Wood (1852-1944), who after serving as an officer in the U.S. Army pursuing Chief Joseph and his band of Nez Perce, resigned his commission to protest the inhumane treatment of the Indians. Erskine Wood wrote a pamphlet, *Days with Chief Joseph* (Portland: Binford & Mort, [ca. 1950]), based on his diary of living with Chief Joseph's family in 1894.
- 51 *Henry Shattuck*: Henry Lee Shattuck. According to Harry Levin, Shattuck (the senior member of the Harvard Corporation in 1951) was instrumental in Stevens' receiving an honorary degree that year after Levin (a Harvard English professor as well as an eminent literary critic) had recommended Stevens to him (Brazeau 167 n). Stevens was entertained by Shattuck and stayed in the house of Shattuck's brother George when he went to Harvard to receive the degree (*Letters* 720, 720 n).
- 68 *Applegate*: William Augustus Applegate.
- 70 *Swan*: Carroll J. Swan.
- 80 *Jack*: John White Hallowell (see note on l. 20).
- 84, 87 *Reid . . . Will*: William Thomas Reid, Jr.
- 97 *Eddie Loud*: Edward Perry Loud, president of the *Crimson*.
- 101 *Rice*: Claude Thayer Rice, president of the Chess Club.
- 116 *Greene*: Warwick Greene, a friend of Stevens (see *Souvenirs and Prophecies* 71).
- 123-24 *José Louis Augusto Raimundo Camprubi*: José Augusto Luis Raimundo Aymar Camprubi, who joined the class as a junior.
- 125 *Dicky Dana, junior*: Richard Henry Dana, Jr., grandson of the author of *Two Years before the Mast* (1840).

- 132 *Pride in Nat*: Nathaniel Hart Pride, librarian of the Harvard Glee Club and chorister of the class.
- 136 *DuBois*: Floyd R. DuBois, also librarian of the Harvard Glee Club. As noted above, DuBois is the source of the information about Stevens' drunkenness at the Junior Dinner.
- 137-138, 140 *Wister Kendall . . . genial host . . . toast*: Isaac Wistar Kendall, in charge of the arrangements for the Junior Dinner and also toastmaster.

Notes

¹Holly Stevens, *Souvenirs and Prophecies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 63-65. She knew of only one copy of the keepsake, at Harvard. The Huntington Library acquired a copy in 1991.

²Stevens' ode is not mentioned in Joan Richardson's two-volume biography, *Wallace Stevens* (New York: William Morrow, 1986, 1988), or in Robert Buttel's pioneer study of his apprentice verse, *Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

³There is Wheelwright correspondence in the Merrymount Press archive at the Huntington Library. For information about Wheelwright and other members of the class of '01 I am indebted to the Harvard College Class of 1901, *Secretary's First Report* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press [for the class], 1903).

⁴A brief but useful survey of the social status of Harvard clubs in this period can be found in Milton Bates's indispensable *Wallace Stevens: A Mythology of Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 19-25.

⁵Floyd DuBois, letter to Wallace Stevens dated January 28, 1942, quoted by Holly Stevens in *Souvenirs and Prophecies*, 63. The letter is not in the Stevens archive at the Huntington Library.

⁶J. M. Edelstein, *Wallace Stevens: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), 145, Item B2. Page 2, blank, is not reproduced here. The broken letters on some pages (see especially 4 and 5) are in the original.

⁷William Bond Wheelwright, *Metrical Memoirs for the Harvard College Class of Nineteen-One* (Cambridge: Privately printed for the Class, 1951). Wheelwright provides an incomplete index of names which is nonetheless helpful toward identifying the allusions in his 1900 poem.

⁸Letter dated June 25, 1951, *Letters*, 720. Evidently Stevens received his copy of Wheelwright's *Metrical Memoirs* at the reunion or soon afterwards; it is now in the Stevens archive at the Huntington Library.

⁹Wallace Stevens, "Imagination as Value," *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 146.

¹⁰Stevens was careful to mask his more daring poetic ventures from potentially unsympathetic classmates. The most ingenious (and most "decadent") of his Harvard poems, "Ballade of the Pink Parasol," was published in the *Advocate* on May 23, 1900 (82) and signed by "Carrol More." In the index to v. 69 of the *Advocate*, however, the author was identified as Stevens.

¹¹Quoted by Holly Stevens in *Souvenirs and Prophecies*, 67-68; see also 269. In his journal for June 2, 1900, Stevens noted a more practical but, as it happened, unavailing vocation: "I am going to New York, I think, to try my hand at journalism" (*Letters* 34). Copey helped him by writing a letter of introduction to a newspaper editor (*Letters* 37). After a year of trying out journalism, Stevens gave up and entered the New York Law School in 1901.

HARVARD CLASS
OF '01

POEM

BY

WILLIAM BOND WHEELWRIGHT

ODE

BY

WALLACE STEVENS

JUNIOR DINNER

May 1, 1900

POEM.

WILLIAM BOND WHEELWRIGHT.

Another brief twelve-month has run
Since round this board the class of '01
Together met, to weld the tie
Of friendship and of unity.
Another year has gone, I say,
Though few of us are growing gray,
Yet we are changed a bit, I'm sure,
Yes, most of us are more mature;
And circumstance has changed a lot
Who otherwise had changèd not.
These days, when Harvard teams prevail,
Most all have helped to vanquish Yale
And make old Pennsy's colors trail,
Or twist the Princeton Tiger's tail.
Our men have been on track and crew,
And several went to England, too,
Where, though the British won the game,
It wasn't Harvard's fault, I claim;
For Benny ran until he fell,
Rotch, Daly and Jack Hallowell
All did their very utmost, too —
And that's as much as man can do.

Down at New London, we can tell,
Our class was represented well ;
And I would put up all my tin
None pulled a stronger oar than Jim ;
But ask him for a speech or two,
And probably he'd damn the crew.
Another oarsman here tonight,
In Freshman years obscured his light,
When put into a rowing shell,
As Germans say, he shone like " Helle."
I tell you, lads, he is all right,
That husky lad, St. Louis Dwight.
Then Heber steered the four-oar shell,
And fellows who were there all tell
How Heber all his spare time kills
In hunting after " Rubber-bills."
And Endicott was in that fight —
I wish old Laurie were here tonight.
But to his health your bumpers fill,
The poor chap's in a paper mill.
Speaking of men of rowing fame,
I wish to mention Roger Swaim.
I beg you fellows, don't forget,
He's trying for the 'Varsity yet.
Of other men who might be good,
Why there's that Indian, Erskine Wood,

He may be a good *blade*, but more
Is needed to complete an oar ;
And Henry Shattuck's just begun —
But here I guess I'll let her run.

Most classes are champions
In some branch of sport ;
In baseball and rowing
We fall a bit short.

Where our class is unconquered
Is out on the track,
And Hallowell there
Is a true crackajack.

He can hurdle, play football,
Can make a good speech,
And the fair *débutantes*
They just think he's a peach.

And speaking of fruit,
There's a man on our slate
Won the 880-run
In a quick *Applegate*.

We've got a new miler
In Swan, so I've heard ;
He was right in the swim,
And he runs like a bird.

We had other point-winners
In championship games;
But time won't permit me
To mention their names.

It's a puzzle to tell
The best card in the pack;
In euchre, for instance,
It's often a Jack.

But baseball's the rage now,
So diamonds lead;
And the king of all diamonds
Surely is Reid.

He's out to lick Yale boys,
And old proverbs say
That where there's a *Will*
There is always a way.

But enough now for athletes,
I've something to tell
Of various other
Good fellows as well.

For example, Wallace Stevens
Now rules the *Advocate*;

And though we never read it,
The *Crimson* says it's great.

The *Crimson's* run by Eddie Loud,
Though he's a bully fellow,
I sometimes think his crimson sheet
Has just a tinge of yellow.

And Rice in intercollegiate chess
Attempts to emulate;
True cautious players should observe
Their object is to mate.

One warning note I therefore sound,
Ye chess-players beware,
In case you ever chance to meet
The proverbial queen at the Castle Square.

An epidemic's struck the town
Of auto-mobilitis;
It's almost as expensive
To have appendicitis.

The awful ravage of this scourge
Most all of you have seen;
And one of the poor victims
Is really, truly, Greene.

Another thing to strike the town
Will be the Cuban teachers;

And of the Harvard Summer School
They'll be the leading features.

One member of our matchless class
May stay to teach, and he
Is José Louis Augusto
Raimundo Camprubi.

And Dicky Dana, junior,
Is reported to have said
That he would like to stay, because
The summer school's co-ed.

I'm glad we have a piano here,
At this our annual bat,
To have our class musician play,
For we take Pride in Nat.

The wind is good that blows no ill
To any man or thing,
And since we have pianos here
I fear DuBois will sing.

And as for Wister Kendall,
Who acts our genial host,
I think we all agree with him
That he's as warm as toast.

I well could mention many more
Familiar classmates here ;

But, like the farmer, I must save
Seed for another year.

To don once more the jester's mask
Has been tonight my humble task ;
To show amid the clinking glass
A fair cross-section of our class.
But, ere I end my verse, I feel
I'd like to make a class appeal ;
I make in all sincerity
A plea for greater unity.
There but remains a single year
Of fleeting life at college here ;
Let's seize the chance, before it flies,
To multiply our friendly ties.
Let's meet our classmates man for man
In cordial fellowship while we can.
In judging others cast aside
False standards, sham and snobbish pride,
And let the standard of our class
Be Harvard's standard, *Veritas!*

ODE.

WALLACE STEVENS.

I.

A night in May!
And the whole of us gathered into a room
To pack and bundle care away —
And not to remember that over the dark
The sea doth call —
Doth call from out an upward-rising day
For us to follow and to mark
How he doth stay
A patient workman by the city wall.
A night in May!
A night in May!

II.

A time will come to join him on the shore;
A time will come when other men who bore
Forth on his breast
To distant worlds will say,
“We long for rest,
Take ye the ships and labor on the deep.”
Then this one night that we are living now
Will be forgot in the exultant leap
And bound of our aspiring prow.

10

III.

But not in May!
It is enough to hear young robins sing
To new companions
In the morn.
It is enough to feel our thoughts take wing
Into a happiness
Where none hath seen
A single, unenjoying, hopeless thing.
A life made keen
By its perfection!
All bright, all freshly glowing in the sun
That leads us into doing from what's done,
Without reflection.
Simply to gather and be one again,
To know old earth a mother,
To fill our cups and touch like men—
And be to each a brother!

IV.

A golden time and golden-shining hour
From out the cloudless weather
Is such an hour and time as this
That finds us here together
In May! in May!
And we are careless of the night;

**We shall be ready for the day ;
We shall behold the splendid sight.
We shall set sail for near or far,
With a shout into the light,
And a hail to the morning star.**

Some Reflections on Donald Justice's Poem "After a Phrase Abandoned by Wallace Stevens"

CLIVE WATKINS

*The alp at the end of the street
Occurs in the dreams of the town.
Over burgher and shopkeeper,
Massive, he broods,
A snowy-headed father
Upon whose knees his children
No longer climb;
Or is reflected
In the cool, unruffled lakes of
Their minds, at evening,
After their day in the shops,
As shadow only, shapeless
As a wind that has stopped blowing.*

*Grandeur, it seems,
Comes down to this in the end—
A street of shops
With white shutters
Open for business . . .*

—Donald Justice¹

IN THE COURSE OF A RECENT ESSAY on Donald Justice, the poet and critic Dana Gioia discusses his short poem "After a Phrase Abandoned by Wallace Stevens" as an illustration of "the unusual manner in which [Justice] uses borrowed material to generate new poems," a device Gioia designates "generative quotation." Justice's poem, he says, bears

a family resemblance to Stevens' work. Justice not only borrows the opening line from his Hartford master. He also employs Stevens' characteristic dialectic between the sublime and the quotidian suggested by the borrowed phrase. Moreover, Justice uses some Stevensian stock characters, the burgher and the

shopkeeper. But no sooner has Justice established this Steven-
sian scene in the three opening lines than he liberates the town
from the elder poet's metaphysics. . . . He postulates no Steven-
sian struggle with abstractions of reality. Rather than transform-
ing his observations into the premises of a supreme fiction,
Justice accepts the loss of mythic consciousness as a condition
of modern life. Justice even celebrates—despite the touch of
irony in the last stanza—the functional beauty of the burghers'
workaday world.²

While Gioia usefully draws attention to the fact that "After a Phrase
Abandoned by Wallace Stevens" is built from recognizably Stevensian
elements, he underestimates, I believe, the subtlety of Justice's appropri-
ations. Indeed, in some respects, Gioia simplifies Stevens, too. Stevens'
theater of types, for instance, is more various than Gioia's reference to
"stock characters" implies and while the image of the mountain is impor-
tant throughout Stevens' writing, so is the image of the father, which Justice
uses very much as Stevens might have. The resulting dialogue, in which
Justice's poem draws close to and yet keeps at a distance from its literary
ancestor, is more interesting—but also more equivocal—than Gioia in his
brief remarks was able to explore.

As many have observed, one of Stevens' favorite devices is to heap up
definitions or descriptive phrases, sometimes so prolifically that the
phrases grow out of one another in a dizzying and ambiguous way and
seem in danger of losing touch with the original impulse of the series.
There are traces of this in Justice's poem. The alp, which is first of all
described as a "snowy-headed father," becomes (alternatively or in addi-
tion) a reflection. This image spawns a third, since the mountain is reflected
"As shadow only" "In the cool, unruffled lakes of / Their minds." Indeed,
a fourth variation emerges, for the "shadow" is "shapeless / As a wind
that has stopped blowing." The syntax here functions in much the same
way as the syntax in section II of "The Auroras of Autumn," with its
exploration of the various whitenesses visible in the beach-scene, though
a more apposite analogue (because of its mountain image and its anthro-
pomorphism) is the following passage from "Chocorua to Its Neighbor":

V

He was a shell of dark blue glass, or ice,
Or air collected in a deep essay,
Or light embodied, or almost, a flash
On more than muscular shoulders, arms and chest,
Blue's last transparence as it turned to black,

VI

The glitter of a being, which the eye
Accepted yet which nothing understood,
A fusion of night, its blue of the pole of blue
And of the brooding mind, fixed but for a slight
Illumination of movement as he breathed.³

In the blurring of the boundary between the imagined and the real, another characteristically Stevensian effect appears. Indeed, this duality is indicated by the opening two lines of the poem, where the alp is presented as having a double existence—as an external physical object “at the end of the street” and as a property existing also in the insubstantial realm of dreams. This duality is reinforced by what follows, for inasmuch as it “broods” “Over burgher and shopkeeper,” the alp is clearly a geographical feature; “reflected / In the cool, unruffled lakes of / Their minds,” however, the alp is a mental phenomenon, too. Justice’s use of active and passive verbs embodies this ambiguity. The alp “broods” over the inhabitants of the town, which may or may not indicate their consciousness of him as an active presence in their world; alternatively (or, again, in addition), he is passively “reflected” in their minds, whose very stillness allows this to take place. As the alp recedes into metaphor, the vehicle in this chain of metaphors comes to acquire more immediacy than the tenor, creating a circular pattern in which properties introduced ostensibly to describe the effect the alp has on the minds of the town’s inhabitants (“lake” and “shadow” and “wind”) are precisely properties we might reasonably expect to encounter in the physical world that alp and street seem to occupy: “lake” and “shadow” and “wind” belong, so to speak, both to the inner and the outer landscapes.

The syntactical rhythms, too, are fittingly Stevensian, miming the process by which thought improvises its own utterance. The placement of the adverbial phrases “at evening, / After their day in the shops,” which might have come more naturally after “reflected,” suggests that they had just that moment sprung into the speaker’s mind; and the second phrase has the air of a further, unpremeditated elaboration, prompted by its predecessor. The line-break after “shapeless,” by delaying the surprise of the final simile, contributes to this improvisatory effect. Such meshings of inner and outer and the transformations that result constitute, of course, one of Stevens’ major themes, but, as “Domination of Black” and “The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain” from the opposite ends of his writing life illustrate, Justice has borrowed from Stevens not merely one of his characteristic themes: he has taken over also a characteristic manner of developing them.

In order to “place” what he regards as Justice’s habitual practice, Gioia proposes a four-fold classification of quotation—generative, decorative, emphatic, and contrapuntal. It is a classification that, though suggestive, is hardly precise. As Gioia’s own argument demonstrates, for instance, Justice’s use of Stevens’ phrase is not merely “generative,” a means of leaping off into his own poem. “After a Phrase Abandoned by Wallace Stevens” must be read—intertextually—against the background of Stevens’ own work; but though he comments on the apparent and superficial echo of Auden’s “Fish in the Unruffled Lakes,”⁴ Gioia ignores the allusion to Stevens’ elegy for George Santayana, “To an Old Philosopher in Rome.” Particularly relevant are these lines:

It is a kind of total grandeur at the end,
With every visible thing enlarged and yet
No more than a bed, a chair and moving nuns. . . . (CP 510)

Given the explicit attribution that the title of Justice’s poem makes and the prominence of the poem in Stevens’ later work, it does not seem unreasonable to suspect a deliberate allusion here, but even if the parallel is fortuitous, reading the final section of Justice’s poem in the light of this passage illuminates both it and, by contrast, Stevens.

Echoing a passage from his 1948 essay “Imagination as Value,” Stevens presents his Harvard mentor as pausing at the close of his life on the “threshold of heaven,” “As if the design of all his words takes form / And frame from thinking and is realized” (CP 511). By a kind of conscious artistry, his life and death have been composed so as to combine the actual with the transcendent. (Earlier, Stevens has told us that “The life of the city never lets go, nor do you / Ever want it to. It is part of the life in your room” [CP 510].) In the same essay, Stevens had defined the imagination as “the power of the mind over the possibilities of things,” and in a later passage he spoke of how, by the operation of the imagination, “The world is no longer an extraneous object, full of other extraneous objects, but an image. In the last analysis, it is with this image of the world that we are vitally concerned” (NA 136, 151). The citizens of Justice’s “town” have likewise composed for themselves an image of the world, a particular life whose design maintains an ambiguous stance towards the mountain/father in whose shadow they live. How far, in fact, have they turned away from the transcendent and how far does it continue to affect their lives?

At one level, as Gioia indicates, the poem seems to say that true grandeur is not to be found in the inhuman splendor of a mountain: it is to be found in the world that men and women fashion for themselves in their everyday lives. In this sense, the poem repudiates the anthropomorphism by which the mountain is turned into a “snowy-headed father.” A feeling of loss remains, however, generated in part by the way the images in the

first section are handled and in part by the way the poem distorts the Santayana poem even as it echoes it.

For, as Gioia notes, it is the citizens who have abandoned the alp. There is no evidence that the mountain, though massive and snowy-headed, has ceased to care for his "children"; nor would such disproportionate attributes (size and age) necessarily imply in a human father any lack of fondness. We are invited, in fact, to feel pathos towards the neglected mountain, an invitation the poem only partly rejects. The note of pathos is sounded early in the poem through its very first verb, "Occurs," with its implication that the impact of the alp on the inner life of the town is almost casual and insignificant (as if the phrase "Occurs in" were shadowed by the ghost idiom "occurs to"). Perhaps we should simply understand that the "children," in growing older, have left behind the habit of demonstrating their affection by climbing on their father's knee. It is a sign of their independence—something that underpins their commercial life; and though he continues to appear in their dreams and to be reflected in their minds, he is no longer permitted to have an overt place in their lives. The collocation of "cool" and "unruffled" strengthens this sense of controlled feeling.

An early analogue for this ambivalence occurs in Stevens' journal for 18 April 1904. During the train journey back to New York from Tompkins' Cove after one of his long and solitary walks, he considered

how utterly we have forsaken the Earth, in the sense of excluding it from our thoughts. There are but few who consider its physical hugeness, its rough enormity. It is still a disparate monstrosity, full of solitudes + barrens + wilds. It still dwarfs + terrifies + crushes. The rivers still roar, the mountains still crash, the winds still shatter. Man is an affair of cities. . . . Somehow, however, he has managed to shut out the face of the giant from his windows. But the giant is there, nevertheless. (L 73)

The opening lines of Justice's second section can be read as commentary on "It is a kind of total grandeur at the end," where "at the end" indicates that Santayana's death is the culmination of a lifetime of philosophical and aesthetic effort. In one sense, the corresponding phrase in Justice—"in the end"—implies that high-flown talk of "grandeur" (of the kind adumbrated by Stevens) can be reduced to something quite ordinary—a street of shops open for business. The phrase "comes down to" re-reinforces this reductive interpretation with its sense of decline from some realm of higher values. Indeed, there is a general movement in the poem from high places—the alp is massive and broods "Over burgher and shopkeeper"—through the intermediate level of the "cool, unruffled lakes," to a point of apparent rest in the small town at the foot of the mountain, though perhaps the

three dots with which the poem concludes imply a continuing movement in the same direction. Much depends on how we read that little phrase “it seems” (“Grandeur, it seems . . .”), with its ambiguous note of regret. To whom does it seem that grandeur comes down to quotidian reality in the end? To the inhabitants? To the “speaker”?— And whose is the regret? Whether we attribute the anthropomorphic representation of the mountain as father to the “speaker” or to the inhabitants, its effect is to project a nostalgia for a lost (or at least attenuated) sense of the sublime.

An interesting parallel is afforded by “The American Sublime” of 1935. “But how does one stand”—the poem asks—“To behold the sublime? . . . How does one feel?”

One grows used to the weather,
The landscape and that;
And the sublime comes down
To the spirit itself,

The spirit and space.

—an account which veers from dismissiveness (“grows used to,” “and that”) towards an apparent assertion of transcendence (“spirit and space”), immediately undercut by Stevens with a bitterness typical of many of his poems of this period:

The empty spirit
In vacant space.

The poem ends with two questions—

What wine does one drink?
What bread does one eat? (*CP* 130-31)

—questions whose frustration and despair relate to both body and spirit. Though the burghers of Justice’s poem may appear to have responded with an equable worldliness to such questions and to have rejected the sublime, I believe Justice leaves these issues more open than Gioia allows.

What the last five lines indicate, perhaps, is the separation Stevens himself made between the imaginative and professional aspects of his own life. Gioia suggests that “Without mocking Stevens’ fixation on the loss of religious faith, Justice quietly moves beyond this late Romantic concern to create a poem of contemporary consciousness” (54), but this is to underestimate both the variousness of Stevens’ work and the degree to which it developed over a long life of writing. In particular, it is to underestimate the complexity of his poetic transactions with parent figures, both mothers and fathers, from his earliest poems onward, something to which Justice “quietly” and perceptively alludes.

Justice, then, plays with themes and procedures characteristic of Stevens. In its diction, however, and in the patterns of its verse, "After a Phrase Abandoned by Wallace Stevens" distinguishes itself sharply from Stevens' customary practice.

Viewed across the great expanse of his output, Stevens' diction is very various, encompassing words of all sorts, from the formal to the colloquial, including the native and the foreign—and nonce and nonsense words, too. Despite this variety, it is dominated by words of Latin or Romance origins, as any random opening of *The Collected Poems* or *Opus Posthumous* demonstrates. It is such words and their traditional associations with serious literary discourse that establish, directly and by contrast, the lexical extremes within which Stevens' poems function. Frequently Stevens plays different levels of diction off against one another, sometimes creating an effect of disconcerting rhetorical instability; typically, it is by such slippages of register that his meanings are enacted. In "Late Hymn from the Myrrh-Mountain," for instance, a poem of similar length to Justice's, the resounding title is followed immediately by the mocking "Unsnack your snood, madanna. . . ." Then, after the lyrical simplicity of "Already the green bird of summer has flown / Away," we are led into a passage of more elevated language:

These are not
The early constellations, from which came the first
Illustrious intimations—uncertain love,

The knowledge of being, sense without sense of time.

The poem ends with a return to directness and the simple notation of physical details presaging a bleaker season:

Take the diamonds from your hair and lay them down.

The deer-grass is thin. The timothy is brown.

The shadow of an external world comes near. (CP 349-50)

The distribution of words with Greek, Latin, or Romance origins conforms to the degree of "lift" in the language. The overall proportion of such words is typical of Stevens and, moreover, considerably higher than the proportion in Justice's poem. Apart from "grandeur," which he deliberately undercuts, the words of Latin or Romance origin which Justice employs can all be regarded, in terms of frequency, as part of the common stock. Though such expressions do, of course, occur in Stevens—for instance, in "Late Hymn from the Myrrh-Mountain," "place" and "colors"—rarer words (such as "artifice" and "intimations") play a significant role in his effects. By contrast, Justice's diction is chaster and its rhetoric altogether cooler and more level than we might have expected from Stevens, had he developed a poem of his own from this abandoned fragment.

As to its verse patterns, "After a Phrase Abandoned by Wallace Stevens" superficially resembles such poems as "Winter Bells" or "The Common Life." Like them, it is written in short, nonmetrical lines set out in unequal sections. The proportion of poems in *The Collected Poems* and *Opus Posthumous* with these features is, however, small—less than 9%. What is more, poems with these formal features are confined almost entirely to *Harmonium*. To this extent, "Winter Bells" or "The Common Life" (from *Ideas of Order* and *Parts of a World*) are themselves untypical, for in the later volumes Stevens relies increasingly on blank verse or its less rigorous derivatives. Thus, in its overall formal shape, Justice's poem holds itself at a distance from its thematic forebears.

A closer examination reveals another non-Stevensian feature—the "strong" enjambment that occurs in "the cool, unruffled lakes of / Their minds." Where, in his metrical verse, Stevens leaves a form-word suspended across an enjambment, such suspensions almost always resolve themselves into notionally stressed syllables, as, for instance, in these lines from "Evening without Angels"—

Sad men made angels of the sun, and of
The moon they made their own attendant ghosts. (CP 137)

Or these from section II of "Esthétique du Mal"—

and in
Its own hallucination never sees. . . . (CP 315)

Metrical resolution—though not always to stressed syllables—also tends to occur in verse that, though not strictly metrical itself, is haunted by the ghost of the iambic, as happens in "Anecdote of Canna":

Huge are the canna in the dreams of
X, the mighty thought, the mighty man . . . (CP 55)

and—with a greater sense of unresolved tension—in "So-And-So Reclining on Her Couch":

the flux
Between the thing as idea and
The idea as thing. . . . (CP 295)

In his free-verse poems, however, Stevens prefers to organize his line endings so that they coincide with the patterns of his syntax, and metrically unresolved suspensions of form-words occur only in a tiny handful of cases. There are, for instance, the striking, one-word lines in "Earthy Anecdote" ("And") and in "Metaphors of a Magnifico" ("Are"). There is another odd suspension in another early poem, "Architecture" (in *Opus Posthumous*):

Pass the whole of life earring the clink of the
Chisels of the stone-cutters cutting the stones. (OP 37)

These instances apart, however, Stevens seems not to have allowed himself such unresolved suspensions in his nonstanzaic free verse and only very infrequently indeed in his stanzaic free verse. Thus, the “strong” enjambment in “the cool, unruffled lakes of / Their minds” is also, it seems, untypical.

How far, then, should we regard “After a Phrase Abandoned by Wallace Stevens” as a pastiche? For instance, if, through some accident of transmission, Justice’s poem were to disappear from view to turn up again (without its title) in a hundred years as “a previously lost poem by Stevens, recently discovered,” should we be able—purely from internal evidence—to detect the mistake? Though Justice’s poem clearly reflects, in its theme and procedures, important aspects of Stevens’ practice, other aspects—notably lexical and prosodic features—distinguish it from its imaginative antecedents. After all, as Justice himself makes clear in his unassuming title, “After a Phrase Abandoned by Wallace Stevens” must be read in the shadow of Stevens’ own opus.

Huddersfield, England

Notes

¹Donald Justice, “After a Phrase Abandoned by Wallace Stevens,” *Selected Poems: Donald Justice* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), 38. The phrase “the alp at the end of the street” comes from a Stevens notebook entitled “From Pieces of Paper.” See George S. Lensing’s edition of the notebook in *Wallace Stevens: A Poet’s Growth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 167.

²Dana Gioia, “Tradition and an Individual Talent,” *Verse* (University of St. Andrews, Scotland) 8/9 (Winter/Spring, 1992): 50-58.

³Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), 297; hereafter cited as *CP*. References to Stevens’ *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1951) will be cited as *NA*; *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, sel. and ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966) as *L*; and *Opus Posthumous*, rev. ed., ed. Milton J. Bates (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989) as *OP*.

⁴The first two stanzas of this famous lyric distinguish humans, burdened by morality and time, from the beasts, which, existing in a purely physical universe, are free from such concerns. In the last stanza, the speaker rejoices that his lover (“my swan”), who has “All the gifts that to the swan / Impulsive Nature gave, / The majesty and pride,” should have added his “voluntary love”; that is, that he should have exercised his peculiarly human power of emotional election. On this reading, it is hard to find any link of meaning between source and apparent echo—which is why, no doubt, Gioia assigns it to the category “decorative.” Read as echo, it contributes only its own surface: the phrase sits snugly inside Justice’s text, and indeed it is only as echo that it obtrudes at all. Inasmuch as it does obtrude, drawing one’s attention purposelessly aside, it might just as validly be described as a blemish, an unresolved—and unresolvable—element entering the poem from an alien universe of language and thematic concerns.

Poems

The Glass Man

*He is the transparence of the place in which
He is . . .*

—“Asides on the Oboe”

This is where he washed to shore
during rough weather in November.
We found him in a nest of kelp,

salt bladders, other sea wrack—
all but invisible through
that lavish debris—and we might

have passed him by altogether
had he not held so perfectly
still, composed, so incoherently

fixed among the general
blowsiness of the pile.
Unlikely is what he was,

what he remains—brilliant,
immutable, and of speech
quite incapable, if revealing

nonetheless. Under his foot,
the landscape grows acute, so that it seems
to tremble, thereafter to dissolve,

thereafter to deliver to the witness
a suspicion of the roiling
confusion which brought him here.

Scott Cairns
Denton, Texas

Fire Pine

also called the Bishop pine,
it cannot release its seeds

(bound embryonic perhaps
forever) unless fire

melt the resin gluing
the scales closed—

like printed books
stored in libraries

with pages uncut.
Who could have thought

this logical? or that
whole strands of fire

pinetops stand in relief
at sunset with graceful

almost curling tops,
exactly like Japanese

woodcut prints?
who could have imagined

this particular display—
life riddling

such impossible
(mysterious) possibilities.

Jacqueline Vaught Brogan
Notre Dame, Indiana

Striding

I said to myself, this is a very healthy man.

—José Rodríguez Feo

The figure was appealing, stooping
to smell the flowers, stopping
when he cared to. Control, mastery,
dominance, and the surprising lack
of a driver's license. The glass coach
took him, when he didn't refuse,
from a domestic pole to the conditioned
air of the office. Lunch hours
found him outside. In winter
when he was of the mind
he walked by the raw duckpond
under the ice-pearled willow buds.
Spring, and fecund convolvulus
over the white arbors.
"Slow and rather symmetrical,"
says Mrs. Berkman, a neighbor,
"He almost walked in cadences."
Mr. Stevens' leather-shod
feet sang *Iamb, Iamb*
on sidewalks, pacing stanzas
on clear days in Connecticut.

Fred Redekop
Iowa City, Iowa

**La Flamme Éternelle:
At the Tomb of the Unknown Woman**

for S. V.

Messieurs, mesdames, this one
did not let unhappiness
close off her throat

with its knotted silks,
or let any literal words
grow in her like gallstones

or pearls of wisdom. But she
had looked into her very soul
and found nothing there

but fire, faded or swamped
by wind, and though others
seemed to whistle or sing

like kettles on a grid,
she could only sway
in her own flame—which

you see here before you—
hearing for yourselves the
moan, hiss and crackle

of its only question:
“Whom shall I love?”
Birds every morning

of this most torturous
bliss make sounds
like nails of light,

soft screams. Consider,
mes amis, how strange
that her fire is earth

and air and even water
pouring through its roots—
spreading and folding its

clipped wings, fluid,
dilatating, O my inconstant
soldat, everything but

put out, springing at once
completely unknown
and completely exposed.

Patricia Corbus
Sarasota, Florida

His Last Martini

*I have not been to the Canoe Club now for
a long time and believe that even a single
Martini would be a disaster.*

—Wallace Stevens

So clear it took so little
to imagine it. Liquid
like thought. Intoxicating.
There was no need
to drink it. It seemed
purer in its conjuring.
Achieving some end
the thing itself might dilute:
a final transparency
of vision; a distillation
as of light in gin in a glass
at the end of the bar.
But this time with no bar to rest it,
or glass, ephebe, or gin.

Chris Kingsley
Fallsington, Pennsylvania

Reviews

Wallace Stevens and Modern Art: From the Armory Show to Abstract Expressionism.

By Glen MacLeod. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993.

Glen MacLeod's new book *Wallace Stevens and Modern Art: From the Armory Show to Abstract Expressionism* is a carefully researched and well-written record of Stevens' deep and abiding interaction with contemporary visual art—and theories about the various movements within that art—throughout his poetic career. From his reading of *Harmonium* in relation to Dada and the Arensberg circle (which included Duchamp), through "The Man with the Blue Guitar" and its connection to Surrealism, through "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" and its relation to Abstraction (and, in particular, an essay by Piet Mondrian), to his reading of *The Auroras of Autumn* in relation to Jackson Pollock, MacLeod convincingly demonstrates that much of Stevens' poetry, from individual poems to entire volumes, was deeply influenced by or responsive to the most exciting and avant-garde art movements during his time.

This fact can be explained in part by Stevens' temperament and in part by the happy accident of his living first in New York City, which gave him access to such important exhibits as the famous Armory Show, and then in Hartford, home of the Wadsworth Atheneum, which, as MacLeod notes, was the "most modern museum in the United States," hosting avant-garde exhibits before they appeared in New York. This latter "accident" proves quite crucial to Stevens' career, allowing him to be in the midst of the artistic battle between Surrealism and Abstraction, with its quasi-resolution in American Abstract Expressionism. As MacLeod presents it, Abstract Expressionism meets precisely the conflicting demands Stevens always felt between the real and the imaginary, the personal and the intellectual, and provides the theoretical base for his great late poems. Perhaps most surprising is how thoroughly the visual artists, in turn, respected Stevens' theorizing about art. (For this, see MacLeod's next to last chapter, in particular the sections discussing Clement Greenberg's, Fairfield Porter's, and most importantly Harold Rosenberg's responses to Stevens.)

Besides showing how involved (rather than detached from) Stevens was with his times, MacLeod offers some rather rewarding surprises. For instance, Stevens' mysterious and famous seven-year silence after *Harmonium* appears to have been prompted in part by Arensberg's leaving New York for California. Dutch still life paintings prove to have, at least for Stevens, a powerful relation to Surrealism as well as to Abstraction. Such unexpected moments in the text—as well as its extraordinarily balanced tone—make this book a genuine pleasure to read.

However, no book can be all things. Perhaps most important is that for all his copious research and documentation, MacLeod's discussion of individual poems remains somewhat superficial, although admittedly explicating poems may not have been MacLeod's intention. His dismissal of the impact of Cubism on Stevens (and others) seems to minimize in a crucial way MacLeod's larger thesis about the connection between the visual arts and Stevens' poetry. Then, too, MacLeod is

curiously uninvolved with some important scholarship. When, for example, he turns to showing how for Stevens, with Dutch still lifes in mind, aesthetic attention to the “common” is actually an heroic resistance to war, he cites only a 1972 work by A. Walton Litz, ignoring the rather expansive and important work done on this subject in recent years. Finally, his assumption that “There seems to be general agreement that—after *Harmonium*, at least—Stevens was simply out of touch with the avant-garde art movements of his time” seems excessively general. In part because of MacLeod’s own first book, my sense is that we have known for some time that Stevens was in touch with the art movements of his time. It has been interpreting the ethical implications of that involvement that has remained debatable.

Despite these minor criticisms, let me stress that MacLeod’s book is first rate. No one before has shown just how thorough, on-going, and seminal Stevens’ involvement with the art world has been nor how important he was to it. One of the biggest pleasures the book offers occurs almost as an aside. After reading this book, I had a sense of Stevens as a person in the real world that the various biographies of Stevens have failed to offer. And it is, by the way, completely jargon-free, no small feat in itself, given the subject matter. In short, this is a welcome addition to Stevens scholarship.

Jacqueline Vaught Brogan
University of Notre Dame

Wallace Stevens and the Question of Belief: Metaphysician in the Dark.

By David R. Jarraway. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993.

It is one thing to say vaguely that “matters of faith were a perpetual source of creative inspiration through [Wallace Stevens’] lifetime,” and quite another to take a strong interpretive position one way or the other on this point. The statement just quoted can also be said of someone who spends a lifetime issuing invectives against all forms of belief—one’s conviction that God is dead can surely “inspire.” Clearly David Jarraway in *Wallace Stevens and the Question of Belief* means to say, but for some reason is not quite up to saying, that Wallace Stevens’ much-assumed anti-Christianity is really often a form of anti-anti-Christianity. Readers will reasonably ask: Is “Stevens’ entirely deinstitutionalized concept of faith” still a “faith” specific enough to require an argument as counter-intuitive as the one presented in this book? Jarraway argues that Stevens’ “spiritual project” is *based* on his continuous “resistance” to transcendence. This critical task requires the shrewdness necessary for interpreting the following passage as actually “*reopening* the question of belief”:

To see the gods dispelled in mid-air . . . is one of the great human experiences. . . . It is simply that they came to nothing. . . . At the same time, no man ever muttered a petition in his heart for the restoration of those unreal shapes. There was always in every man the increasingly human self, which . . . became constantly more and more all there was or so it seemed; and whether it was so or merely seemed so still left it for him to resolve life and the world in his own terms.

Jarraway asks us to hear in this passage a “however” after Stevens’ “At the same time” (he inserts one editorially—as I have not in reproducing the passage), even though the assertion that follows (that “no man ever” wanted the gods back after they were “dispelled”) does not logically reverse the trend of Stevens’ thought. Jarraway also believes he has sufficiently deconstructed the endorsement of the God-is-dead position here by italicizing “or so it seemed” and “or merely seemed,” even though the “seeming” refers first to the *degree* to which humanism became apparent to humans and secondly to the *accepted* fact that humans would now have to understand life in human terms. There is no convincing “alterity suggested by his ‘seeming’ self” in the passage, and one has to go a very long way against the common sense of the passage to see that it “appears to reopen the question of belief.” If one italicizes “appears to” in Jarraway’s phrase just quoted, the contention disappears into the seeming he, not Stevens, invented.

Jarraway makes his often counter-intuitive arguments best when he is reading poems, not when he is generalizing about belief. His reading of “A High-Toned Old Christian Woman,” while finally unconvincing, is at least clear as an interpretive provocation. Jarraway wants to oppose the usual reading of the poem as “a fairly broad satire of the doctrinaire Christian.” He sees satire extending equally to “those disaffected flagellants who cling blindly to a faith in the opposing law . . . built around an unpurged bawdiness.” The poem does not strike most readers as nearly so even-handed, but at least it is apparent how Jarraway’s reading supports his general argument in favor of belief-centered interpretations of otherwise obviously anti-theological poems. The problem may be in the way such “alternative” readings are introduced: in this instance the counter-satirization is clinched only after Jarraway has announced that his reading is based on an aspect of the poem “less often noticed.” But he is surely cheating himself a little here, since he has much stronger reasons for presenting this reading than that Stevens’ anti-anti-Christianity is merely “less often noticed.”

Too often in this book one finds merged the operative “question of belief” (which I take Jarraway as saying includes at some point an actual affirmation) and the “questioning of belief” (which surely suggests doubt and negation). As an interpretive category or limit, “questioning of belief” is gratifyingly more specific than “question of belief.” Does the poem “Examination of the Hero in a Time of War” raise a “question” or make a “questioning”? The answer lies under layers of Jarraway’s (not Stevens’) logical indirection: “His whole ‘Examination of the Hero in a Time of War’ is thus a searching attempt to affirm that the wellsprings of faith . . . must continue to remain ‘unaccountable’ . . . in spite of the ‘sudden sublimations’ of what the consciousness of man in the *sight* of God might dictate.” One is hard pressed to see anything affirmed in what follows the word “affirm” here; so affirmation (used in the context of belief never quite avowed) is merely tantalizing. It sends us forward, in Jarraway’s argument and in Stevens’ career, looking further.

One does have a feeling all along that the logical zigzagging will straighten out at the end. Do Jarraway’s final chapters bear out the uncharacteristically direct claim in his introduction that Stevens felt an “extraordinary commitment to the renewal of faith”? It is hard to know even this much. In the end we mostly get more on “Stevens’ *a/theological* discourse” (emphasis added). Accordingly we find poems as “a discontinuous series of attempts or random wagers at moments more

or less fraught with spiritual insight." "More or less" can sometimes mean "more," but "fraught" problematizes the "spiritual insight" Jarraway's readers have a right to expect they will reach. We do finally approach "reverence" in relation to "The Auroras of Autumn." Here Mark Taylor is helpfully cited as "one of several contemporary a/theologians who attach a *definite* religious reverence to the kind of writing Stevens puns on." Jarraway adds that in "Auroras" Stevens "comes very close to this sense of reverence," but the reading never nears Taylor's standard of "definite." Is there any theology in "the posttheological discourse"? Here is Jarraway's explanation: "In the a/theology of belief's text-event, we are given in Stevens' final volumes a highly volatile discourse, one full of assertions and reversals, feints and low blows, tackings and doublings and tracings, and, always, qualifications, intensifications, supplementations, and multiplications."

Fortunately, Jarraway ends with a relatively explicit reading of a poem about a religious institution—the remarkable "St. Armorer's Church from the Outside." The reading displays Jarraway's interpretive technique at its best. But even here the "question of faith" itself disintegrates: the poem that "*would have* done completely with the inner sanctum of universalizing faith"—a text about a church, once successful, now ruined—still contains the Church's "only hope for keeping its truth alive . . . for a better health" (emphasis added). We seem to be back, finally, to the renewal promised. Here Jarraway notes (but does not explain or interpret) the biographical information that some scholars would say is still unconfirmed—that Stevens converted to Catholicism on his deathbed. Fine, if Jarraway fully accepts or works with the significance of the fact. But these near-final pages have suggested a fairly specific and specifically affirmative ending to the story—potentially meeting Taylor's good standard of "definite reverence." Such definiteness in itself, to which this reviewer is favorably disposed, only serves to call into question the hundreds of pages of equivocal posttheology.

Alan Filreis
University of Pennsylvania

Angels of Reality: Emersonian Unfoldings in Wright, Stevens, and Ives.

By David Michael Hertz. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993.

A familiar passage from Emerson's "The American Scholar" refers to the inclination of a classifying mind to be "tyrannized over by its own unifying instinct." To express this instinct is to discover "roots running underground whereby contrary and remote things cohere and flower out from one stem," rendering clear what appears anomalous or chaotic. In David Michael Hertz's *Angels of Reality: Emersonian Unfoldings in Wright, Stevens, and Ives*, Emerson himself comprises the root system whose particular nourishment stems to three artists of profoundly disparate mediums: architect Frank Lloyd Wright; poet Wallace Stevens; and composer Charles Ives. To study the works of any one of them is a task forbidding enough. In proposing the coherence of three apparently contrary figures, Hertz assumes a larger challenge inherent in all interdisciplinary study: within an intricate discussion of complicated personalities and diverse fields, how can he ensure participation across the full spectrum of the subject area? Such a project may be

said to succeed if, borrowing from Emerson, a reader's "unifying instinct" commits to the critic's premises and becomes co-involved in classifying the anomalies at hand. So measured, *Angels of Reality* succeeds. Readers unfamiliar with one or the other of the artists under study, or with the technicalities of the mediums out of which they create, will be drawn nevertheless into the intricate tracings of Hertz's argument and will need to reclassify even their sense of their own inexperience.

Hertz establishes the geography of his position with particular care. His interest lies in similarity of attitude among the artists, not in result: "there is no reason to prove that a Stevens poem is the equivalent of an Ives sonata or a Wright house." Yet there is need to demonstrate "how the same ideological seeds generated different artistic fruit." What Hertz seeks is "ideological context," the norms, biases, and values that formulate the conceptual milieu out of which works of art, however disparate, are created. If the psycho-criticism disturbs in some places by seeming to stretch too far, we know from the beginning the nature of his goals. He wishes to know these artists through "an examination of their own subjectivity," to engage the creative minds that shaped the works that made them significant contributors to their culture.

To accomplish all of this, Hertz divides his study into two parts. In the first, titled "The Conflict of Creativity," he parallels the struggle of each artist to free himself from various precursors and, in the process of these "rebellious negations," to locate from the composite voices that had shaped him the new voice that will define his creative emergence and originality. In part two, "Metaphors of Value in Three Modern Transcendentalists," his concern shifts from the forming process to the matured creative minds of the artists and to their shared ideological imagery. His interest here is in analyzing how the creative and theoretical works of the three artists connect.

The discussion of precursors in part one partially issues from Harold Bloom's speculations in *The Anxiety of Influence*, yet Hertz swerves from Bloom's thesis in provocative ways and ends by debunking Bloom's theory as one-dimensional. Since creativity is "not a matter of tangling with or fleeing from a single Oedipal shadow," the weakness in Bloom's theory is that it "does not help us enough to understand how an artist can be influenced by many fathers and mothers, not just one father." Wishing to avoid Bloom's trap, Hertz sets for himself the task of locating artistic origin in "that moment of preanxiety" when the creative mind absorbs the "pastiche" of loved influences and rejects the "pastiche" of hated influences. Within this moment Hertz notices a pattern of cross-media influence that helps to justify his comparative study. In the process of negating a threatening precursor in their own creative field, Stevens, Ives, and Wright discover nonthreatening stimuli from one or several artists in other media or in foreign cultures. Thus Wright belittles his mentor, architect Louis Sullivan, and begins to read Emerson, Hugo, and Viollet-le-Duc as a means to escape the dominance of the Beaux-Arts tradition. Ives deflects direct musical competition by dismissing Mozart as "effeminate," and Debussy, his more serious musical rival, as a "sissy French composer," and embraces instead the "distant influence of native literature" founded in Emerson and the transcendentalists. Wallace Stevens, to free himself within his own medium from the intimate voices of Emerson and Whitman, develops passions for art, music, and French literature, thus "blocking out the dangerous lights of those bright stars, helping to make his art self-contained,

self-conscious and inward, yet enabling him to curtail the presence of precursors in the later and more mature poetry. That poetry is tighter, drier, and more uniquely his." Not only do these media-crossings enrich the "compositeness" of each artist's emerging singular voice, but they also allow for a quicker, less anxious absorption of earlier forms into their new creations.

Hertz is interested in demonstrating that Ives, Stevens, and Wright incorporate "a number of combining, conflicting, coalescing, mutually reinforcing earlier forces." As another way to examine the cross-media energies in their respective backgrounds, he transmutes Julia Kristeva's trend-setting phrase from the sixties, *intertextuality*, into a word more specific to the multidisciplinary nature of his treatise: *intertextuality*. The minute shift represents an ingenious coinage. Since "art works are often generated out of sources that are both multicultural and multiartistic," the coined phrase allows for study of the interrelationship of "textures" from various media rather than requiring a more stilted examination of "texts" alone. Having as one of his goals to "describe the true nature of interartistic activity," Hertz first develops a terminology appropriate to his task.

Although by this time the influence of Emerson cannot be a startling fact to a Stevens specialist, the lens through which Hertz examines the impact of what he calls "The Emersonian Fund" on each of the artists provides a particularly refreshing perspective from which to view the poetry of Stevens as well as the musical compositions of Ives and the architecture of Wright. The "fund" centers on Emerson's pivotal concepts of nature and organicism, on his insistence on original thought and self-reliant action, on his impatience with sterile consistency, on his pragmatism, and more. Hertz traces from Emerson Frank Lloyd Wright's concept of "organic simplicity" in architecture, a philosophy that enables the architect to reject the constrictions implied in the derivative recycling of classical and Renaissance motifs. Eventually Wright rejects even Sullivan's "beloved" Gothic arch as a central feature in architectural design, and replaces it with his "greatest triumph," the cantilever, which he describes with Emersonian bravado as "the most romantic, most free, of all principles of construction."

In the case of Charles Ives, the links to Emerson are more direct and dramatic. Ives claims that Emerson's elliptical style and dense prose helped him to discover his original sound. Applying his theory of interartistic influence, Hertz argues that "the idea of Emerson, transmogrified, however vaguely, into music, gave Ives an escape path from Debussy and helped make his music clearly different from competitors like Stravinsky, Mahler, or Scriabin." In achieving his dissonant style Ives substitutes "Emersonian ruggedness" for prettified harmonies. Freed from a sense of obligation to the consistency of logical musical sequence, as Wright scrapped the Gothic arch, so Ives removes the octave as a musical standard of tonality, and also introduces into his music an array of asymmetrical "quotations," everything from Beethoven to African dance to American rag. Insofar as the lines that extend from Ives to Emerson and the transcendentalists are beyond dispute (the four movements of *The Concord Sonata* are titled *Emerson, Hawthorne, The Alcotts, and Thoreau*), Hertz occasionally strains his discussion by exaggerating the linkage. While we are interested to know, for instance, that Stevens and Ives both were involved in the business of insurance, it seems extreme to remark that Ives's writings about insurance "resonate with the overtones of Emersonian

thought," or to suggest that for Ives "the establishment of life insurance is part of the inevitable organic rhythm of compensation."

For Wallace Stevens the Emersonian influence is conflicted. While Ives and Wright are "shielded from the power of the Emersonian source by the barriers of their art forms," in the case of Stevens, for whom Emerson was the "stern father" rather than the "helpful grandfather or benevolent uncle" he was for the others, Emerson's powerful voice, being more direct, is not easily overcome. Stevens' portrait of Emerson as the clownish Mr. Homburg in "Looking across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly" reveals for Hertz how the poet both deflects and builds upon Emerson simultaneously. If the composer and the architect can absorb Emerson's ideas without inhibition, Stevens must "rewrite Emerson in order to make room for himself" yet also "in order to stay close to him." Compelling as Hertz is on this point, he strays dangerously close to Bloom's *Anxiety* syndrome which he has already adroitly rebuffed. To construe Stevens as a "doubting student of Emerson," and as "flirting" with Emerson's views throughout his career while never able fully to accept or reject them, devalues unnecessarily Emerson's presence throughout Stevens' poetic canon. Other, friendlier conflicts Hertz discovers in Stevens lead to fine glosses of the essays and key poems. For instance, an excellent discussion of the poet's struggle with Sigmund Freud's notions of reality and of fate concludes: "in wrestling with Freud, Stevens articulates the place of the human imagination in the modern age." In another provocative if offbeat discussion of gender issues, Hertz notices Stevens' "fear of feminization," and tags the poet a "strangely machismo Symbolist" whose unresolved discordance in the poems may be traced to the fact that he was a "remarkable blend of American pragmatist and French poet."

As the borrowed phrase in its title suggests, *Angels of Reality* is a study based in a balance of delicate and necessary tensions of the kind implied not only in artistic structures themselves but especially in the minds that create them. Daring to place poet beside architect and composer, David Hertz provides a profound glimpse into the subtle ways that art issues from culture and value issues from both.

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Wallace Stevens and the Feminine.

Edited by Melita Schaum. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1993.

No critic of Wallace Stevens has failed to recognize the feminine as a central mythology in his poetry. But the hegemony of gender studies and the gradual shift toward biographical readings of Stevens' work has brought the question of Stevens and women to the foreground. The special issue of *The Wallace Stevens Journal* devoted to this topic was an inevitability. But the import of these essays (many gleaned from that special issue) is not simply to throw Stevens on the ash-heap of the Western Patriarchal Tradition. They explore his unique engagement with this traditional mythology, informed by his historical moment, his personal experience,

and his specific gifts. Happily, there is little here of the contempt or ridicule one hears in remarks by Frank Lentricchia or Mark Halliday. A clear respect for the poet's aesthetic and visionary achievement informs the best of these articles. Yet I am troubled by how much is put between the reader and the poetry. The tendency is to get at one "and" (Stevens and the feminine) by way of several others. Derrida, Barthes, and, of course, the full assembly of psychoanalytic prophets—Freud, Jung, Lacan, Kristeva, Irigaray—all intrude upon the poetry. Yet not one of the essayists here acknowledges (let alone considers) Stevens' own persistent challenges to psychoanalytic reductions (so well discussed by David Lehman). Similarly, his clear distinction between myth and allegory (set out in "The Comedian as the Letter C") and his distinctions between psychological and ontological tropes are never considered. Theoretical models are only useful when they leave room for the fluent, even ambiguous nature of the poetic. Since these theories are themselves so highly metaphoric, they claim all that license for themselves, leaving none to the poet. Fortunately, the "and" of "Stevens and the feminine" draws in literary comparisons as well—from classical mythology to Milton and Wordsworth. Astonishingly, though, the most obvious source of Stevens' idea of the feminine in relation to poetry is omitted. Keats is not mentioned once. Surely Frank Lentricchia, who reduces Keats to a symbol of the effeminate in "Patriarchy Against Itself," has not had the last word on Stevens' interest in the earlier poet.

Another problem throughout the volume is a tendency to conflate "women" with "the feminine." The division of the volume into "Texts" and "Contexts" does not solve this problem. Stevens is accused of essentializing the feminine by critics who themselves tend to essentialize gender. Also, since "the feminine" is itself part of a binary structure, shouldn't the volume really be called Stevens and Gender? Surprisingly, none of the authors included in *Wallace Stevens and the Feminine* is known as a feminist critic. I'm not convinced this credential would lead to more refinement in the application of the idea of "the feminine," but it would lend more authority to the collection.

These reservations aside, though, there is much to be learned from *Wallace Stevens and the Feminine*, about the poetry and the man. One of the best and most readable essays in the volume is "Sister of the Minotaur" by Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, a critic who has shown throughout her career how the rich range of critical theory can inform the reading of poetry rather than the other way around. Through close examination of poems covering the span of Stevens' career, Brogan traces Stevens' struggle with his metaphoric (Jungian archetypal) self-schism. He progresses, she argues, from efforts to purge or displace the feminine self to a profound "cure" of the failed phallogocentric impulse. Finally, Stevens is able to embrace the humanity of "woman" on equal terms with "man" and to form an ungendered "necessary angel" whose questioning nature (once projected as the feminine other) is the poet's completion. Her conclusion explains why "Stevens touches so many women": "Despite what seems to have been a very unhappy personal life, most of us still feel a certain health—humanity in its fullest sense—in reading Wallace Stevens."

Mary Arensberg also argues for a "cure" of gender separation. She traces the separation from prenatal unity through object relations to a transhuman meditative space that carries a "fetal imprint." (I was surprised she didn't mention the psy-

chologist D. W. Winnicott in this vein, whom Robert Rehder has invoked as a model for Stevens' idea of metaphor.) In the latter state the muse and the poet become "one neutral thing"—desire and presence together in one "shawl of fiction" threatened by the recurrent schismatic figure of the bearded queen or death-mother. Tiresias is the mythic standard here—man/woman split and reunited by the serpent. This is a helpful allusion, but I kept returning in my own mind to the figure of Pygmalion, the image of the interior paramour standing motionless as the narcissistic other. Barbara Fisher in "A Woman with the Hair of a Pythoness" rejects the Jungian paradigms that launch this volume of essays. For her they are too constricting to accommodate Stevens' idea of the feminine. She calls up a number of precursor texts, epic and mythological, to suggest this variable muse figure. Her reference to the biblical Song of Songs is particularly helpful. While I approve of this flexible approach, the abundance Fisher sees in Stevens' idea of the feminine eludes concise definition.

At the center of *Wallace Stevens and the Feminine* are two essays that, while they use different theoretical models, share a tendency to bury the poet in subtexts and supertexts. With Emerson before him and Kristeva behind him Stevens has little chance of being seen for himself in Daniel T. O'Hara's "Imaginary Politics." Stevens isn't even mentioned until nine pages into the essay and then just barely. Instead, we are presented with flickerings of Stevens and Emerson read through an elaborate prism of Kristeva, Nietzsche, Foucault, and "Twin Peaks" and various psychoanalytic and Marxist perspectives. I gave up hope of learning much about Stevens and moved on. Paul Morrison's Derridean reading (also informed by Lacan, Irigaray, and several Marxist theorists) is more attentive to poetic traditions and is particularly helpful in distinguishing Stevens from Milton and Wordsworth. (One wishes, though, that he had edited out all the references to "this chapter"; the essay is clearly part of a book and rather wobbles when forced to stand on its own.) Stevens reimagines the postlapsarian problem of naming and the "utopian possibility of sensuous consciousness." Morrison's notion that Stevens' "Fat girl" exists "in difference" rather than "presence that endangers figuration" or "danger that is figuration" is helpful and echoes Brogan's and Arensberg's notion of cure. But like O'Hara, Morrison seems so driven to resolve philosophical and psychological enigmas in Stevens that he forgets the aesthetic foundation the poet gives to these enigmas. After all, there is nothing really "utopian" about "sensuous consciousness" unless we posit, as Stevens does not, that "naming" is the only route to it. Isn't poetry—with its music, its images, and its power to call up physical responses in the reader—just that?

The second half of the volume, "Contexts," offers a medley of essays concerning Stevens' politics, religion, and personal history. C. Roland Wagner, along with everybody else in this volume, examines the "longing for union" with the mother and he insists, against Vendler, that these remain "first order" longings. This becomes the basis for his argument that Stevens had a religious "conversion experience" at his death. Rosamond Rosenmeier offers a more illuminating background to the feminine dimension of Stevens' religious feeling. She connects his elevation of the female muse to biblical Wisdom texts with their centrality (in the figure of San Sophia) in his mother's heritage, the Palatinate German refugees of Pennsylvania. Rosenmeier hints that this identification with the apotheosis of

female Wisdom provides a corrective to feminist critics lining up to denigrate the poet.

One of the best critics of Wallace Stevens in the entire volume is Marianne Moore, who enters these pages through Celeste Goodridge's astute analysis of their relationship. Moore criticized Stevens' early evasions and excesses where a false economy of desire and a discomfort with the world he inhabited were at work. Yet she defended the aesthetic distance of his later poetry as a higher order of imagination, remote from mob vision. Goodridge is helpful in interpolating Moore's condensed prose. However, the gender associations Goodridge makes are marginal in Moore. Here, as with many of the essays in the volume, the real subject is not Stevens and the feminine but Stevens and politics (although, surprisingly, books by Alan Filreis and James Longenbach, which comprehensively treat the topic of Stevens and politics, are never quoted in this volume of essays). The parallel subjects of "the feminine" and "politics" are most successfully integrated in the context of Stevens' poetry by Melita Schaum, editor of the collection. She juxtaposes Stevens and H. D. as high modernists in a time of political turmoil. Why, she asks, is Stevens blamed and H. D. praised for similar high-modernist strategies in such dramatic times? She resists the conclusion I feel drawn to—that there is a double standard at work. To me Marjorie Perloff's negative reading of Stevens and Alicia Ostriker's positive reading of H. D. are both tendentious. But Schaum's willingness to extend Ostriker's positive reading of aesthetic "resistance" to Stevens' poetry is a welcome corrective to reductive slams on High Modernism.

The volume concludes with Lisa Steinman's sensitive analysis of the male poet's self-conception in a culture that saw the literary as effeminate. The observation is not new (she made it herself in *Made in America*), but Steinman's sense of the double-bind of the domestic sphere is original and useful for understanding Stevens' struggle for independence. The domestic provides a place for poetry, but relegates poetry to female space, requiring for its support a male space where poetry is not.

The good news of *Wallace Stevens and the Feminine*: the poet is never reduced to a mere puppet of the Patriarchy. These essays reveal a complex writer who resists and reimagines, even as he participates in the myths that have shaped him. Such insights humanize Wallace Stevens and make us feel why we continue to need him.

Bonnie Costello
Boston University

News and Comments

Roland H. Lange, a retired vice-chairman of the board of the Hartford Insurance Group, is the author of an article in the Hartford *Courant* (August 1, 1993) which is that newspaper's observance of the thirty-eighth anniversary of W.S.' death. Noting that his acquaintance with W.S. was limited to his last years and even then only occasional, Lange begins with an anecdote pointing out W.S.' well-known impatience with small talk.

When I arrived at the home office in 1950, fresh from the West, I was given an introductory tour. I was told that I would do well not to insult Stevens' intellect with trivial or mundane conversation.

And so it was that when our habits brought us to the executive wash-room at identical times, I took pains simply to acknowledge his presence. He did mine and nothing more. This went on for some time until one morning he turned to me and asked in his resonant baritone for a word with me. I recoiled, wondering what gaffe I had committed. He went on, "You and I have been meeting in this sanctum for many months and you have said to me, 'Good morning, Mr. Stevens,' and I have said, 'Good morning, Mr. Lange,' and with that we have each gone our way. You have not commented on the weather nor the latest political fiasco nor some sporting outcome—and for that I wish to thank you."

Lange then reports other encounters with W.S., including a lively discussion of such topics as "the passing of classical scholars," "the threat of machines over minds," and "the place of euphemism in business letters" during a long luncheon at the Canoe Club. Lange adds, "The next day, we met in the hallway. It was as if the previous day had never occurred." It is good to have Lange's article, for somehow Peter Brazeau overlooked Lange when he interviewed W.S.' business associates for *Parts of a World*. (Lange appears neither in the book nor in the now fully-cataloged oral history collection of Brazeau's tapes and transcripts in the Huntington Library.)

For the second year in a row, the Lannan Foundation has generously contributed \$1000 to the Wallace Stevens Society, for which we are all grateful. Located at 5401 McConnell Avenue in Los Angeles, it continues to hold poetry readings by such award-winners as Carolyn Kizer, Walter Pavlich, Alberto Alvaro Ríos, and Benjamin Alire Sáenz in its attractive Poetry Garden, designed by Siah Armajani on the inspiration of W.S.' "Anecdote of the Jar." Admission is free. Information about programs and reservations can be obtained at (310) 306 1004.

Glen MacLeod calls to our attention a story by Nelson F. Crouch, "Mysterious Crossings," published in *The Washington Lawyer* for July / August, 1993, the winner of the Stuart Stiller Writing Competition for 1993. Crouch's story is an ingenious, plausible account of how W.S. spent August 10, 1937, Holly's thirteenth birthday. In the story W.S. settles honestly and logically an important insurance case and then, in the evening, works on stanza eight of his poem "Variations on a Summer Day."

There is one small error in realism: the unsuitable "long-play record" of Debussy's piano preludes that W.S. gives a disappointed Holly as a birthday present would not become available even to this resourceful connoisseur until after World War II.

Deirdre Kovac, a graduate student at the City University of New York, reports her discovery of a recently published Dutch translation of W.S.' "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction." "Notities voor een supreme fictie," the work of five translators, appears in *De Revisor* 19, no. 6 (December, 1992): 3-24. This W.S. issue of the magazine also contains essays about W.S. and poems and stories inspired by him.

Sharon Olds will be the W.S. poet at the Thirty-First Annual Wallace Stevens Program at the University of Connecticut on March 31, 1994. She will read from her own poetry and present awards to the student winners of the annual poetry competition. The Wallace Stevens Program is sponsored by the ITT Hartford Insurance Group.

One of W.S.' more unusual influences is reported in *The New Yorker* for June 29, 1992, under the title "Shades." Félix González-Torres, an artist participating in MOMA's "Projects" series, painted a picture reproduced on twenty-four identical billboards in New York City. Depicting an empty white and gray bed, slightly rumpled, with two pillows pushed close together still showing the impressions where two heads once lay, the picture, according to the artist, is a commentary on current social problems, including homelessness. But, he says, it also was inspired by the last two lines in "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour": "We make a dwelling in the evening air, / In which being there together is enough."

Poetry editor Joseph Duemer has been honored by having two of his poems set to music along with those of distinguished American poets, including W.S. Beth Wiemann's "Looks Like Rain," a trio for mezzo-soprano, viola, and harpsichord, includes settings of poems by Duemer, Louise Bogan, and Elizabeth Bishop. It received its premier by the Cembalto Trio on February 28, 1993, at the Boston Conservatory of Music and was performed again at Trinity College in Hartford on March 8, 1993. David Rakowski's "A Loose Gathering of Words: Four Songs on American Poetry," for soprano and mixed quartet, sets to music poems by W.S. ("Earthy Anecdote"), Duemer, Bogan, and Tom Chandler. The work was commissioned by the Composers Ensemble and will receive its premier in London in the spring of 1994.

Scholars using the W.S. archive at the Huntington during the past year include Joseph D. Blount (University of South Carolina), book on W.S.' letters to his wife; Allan Chavkin (Southwest Texas State), journal article on W.S. and Conrad Aiken; Charles Doyle (University of Victoria), book on W.S.; Jane Falk (Akron Art Museum), journal article on imagery of hair in W.S. and pre-Raphaelite influences on this; Sebastian D. Knowles (Ohio State University), book on Stevens and modernism; John C. Madruga (University of Southern California), dissertation on W.S. and John Dewey; Howard Pearce (Florida Atlantic University), book on W.S. and modern American poetry and drama.

W.S. and the poet Witter Bynner were undergraduate friends at Harvard. What appears to be an informative, still sympathetic letter dated a half-century later (July 18, 1951), W.S. to Bynner, was offered by David J. Holmes, Cat. 41 (October, 1992), for \$1,000. A run of fifteen W.S. trade editions appeared in James J. Jaffe, Cat. 29 (March, 1993). Most expensive were very fine copies of the second edition, first-binding of the 1931 *Harmonium* and the first trade edition, second-binding of the 1936 *Ideas of Order*, each priced at \$450. Thomas A. Goldwasser, Cat. 4 (June, 1993), had an almost as fine copy of the latter for \$475, and a fine copy with the spine very slightly faded of *Three Academic Pieces*, printed at the Cummington Press in 1947 (Edelstein A12), for \$850. A good copy only of *A Primitive like an Orb* (1948) turned up in Blackwell's Cat. B108 (August, 1993), for £225. *The Saint Nicholas Society of the City of New York*, 1945 (Edelstein B37), containing W.S.' "Tradition" and "Genealogical Record," a near-fine copy, was offered by the Boston Book Co., Cat. 47 (October, 1992), at \$225.

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