

*The
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COVER: "The Poet" from *The Blue Guitar*, a book reproducing twenty original etchings by David Hockney, accompanied by the Stevens' poem "The Man With The Blue Guitar" (Petersburg Press: London and New York, 1977).

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Art, Music, Angels and Sex: A Note on the Shorter Poems of The Auroras of Autumn

MICHEL BENAMOU

Unstable is the sex of angels. But the text of angels has won a secure place among the poems Stevens wrote in the nineteen forties. The angel is a necessary figure, as trope and as *trop peu*, of the supreme fiction. His—or—her oscillation between two modes of totalization, one borrowed from painting and the other from music, may help us progress beyond two equally extreme claims of recent criticism: Stevens as a modern romantic, Stevens as a postmodern deconstructionist.

Our starting point is Canon Aspirin whose name hides the soothing presence of Henry Church, to whom Stevens dedicated *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*. This angelic patron of the arts had inherited from his father the Arm and Hammer baking soda fortune. Hence the name: canon is to the church what aspirin is to baking soda. Anyhow, Stevens wrote him up as “the man who has explored all the projections of the mind, his own particularly.” (L 445) One of those archetypal projections involves the Canon in a flying dream which resolves the contradiction of fact and thought. The angel serves Stevens as a hyperbolic figure of musical totalization:

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

But note how the angel is silenced at the end of the next stanza:

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

Bluntly the next stanza begins with “What am I to believe?” In doubt is the subject of oneiric imagination, but also the subject of speech, even the subject of thought: “Is it he or is it I that experience this?” (CP 404) Meanwhile the angel’s flight ends up in Cinderella’s kitchen. Ashen wings. The kitchen cinders, rough earthenware, and baking soda replace the lapis-haunted air of mythic space:

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

“Escapades of death” means that by escape, capers, or parades, coming to terms with death suffices as poetry’s accomplishment. Only two years after the first publication of “Notes,” Henry Church died, and Stevens elegized his friend. He found solace in three angels, “death’s supremest images.” Two are masculine but the third one, the angel of earth, revives word for word the sequestered bride of earlier poems, such as “Yellow Afternoon,” as well as the inamorata of “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven.”

close to a face
Without eyes or mouth, that looks at one and speaks
(“Yellow Afternoon,” CP 237)

close,
... as a voice that, speaking without form,
Gritting the ear, whispers humane repose.
(“An Ordinary Evening . . .” CP 484)

quick,
And potent, an influence felt instead of seen.
She spoke with backward gestures of her hand.
She held men closely . . .
(“The Owl in the Sarcophagus” CP 435)

Her invisibility, her closeness to plural men, and her voice designate her as a collective anima projection of the masculine unconscious. “She was a self that knew, an inner thing.” (CP 435) Jungian psychology accounts rather well for this voice, which Harold Bloom aptly calls “the instrument of a logocentric vision of the universe.”² Logos as mythical origin and desired presence delivers itself to the subject through memory traces of a lost primordial parent. The angel of the threshold is, literally and psychologically, a figure of speech:

And she that in the syllable between life
And death cries quickly, in a flash of voice,
Keep you, keep you, I am gone, oh keep you as
My memory, is the mother of us all,
(CP 432)

The extra syllable, keep you *as* my memory, separates by linking, deepening the *mysterium* of the conjunction between mother and son. “One writes in order to die peacefully.”³ This formula which Maurice Blanchot applies to Rilke would fit Stevens with major qualifications. The main difference lies

in the oppressive strangeness that accompanies the discovery of the angel by Rilke. His angels are the angels of death as the revelation of the "terrible." Stevens' angel of earth appears in death as a consolation. A radical distance exiles man from angel in the Duino elegies, the only communication by-passing language, for song alone can express the unspeakable. As Blanchot explains, "to overcome means to go beyond, while sustaining what surpasses us, without turning away from it or aiming beyond it . . . It is very far from a mastery." (p. 151) On the contrary, in both his elegies of morning and autumn, Stevens seems to turn away from the terrible. His approach to death, as his approach to reality, cannot sustain otherness. "Poetry," he said "is a satisfying of the desire for resemblance." (NA 77)

And so the angel of death becomes the angel of earth, the necessary "Angel Surrounded by Paysans." (CP 496) The telling phrase authorizing this superposition comes at the end of the poem: "quickly, too quickly, I am gone." The rapidity of his—or should we say her⁴—disappearance signals the angel as Stevens' symbol for immediacy, the quality which he most admired in impressionism. At the time he bought the still-life by Tal Coat which provoked the metaphors of the crystal angel and earthenware peasants, he wrote to his Paris art dealer that he shared her delight in the impressionist school. "One is not conscious of the medium." (L 577) *Ut pictura angelus!* The impressionist painter performs, as does the angel, a disappearing act. Note how Stevens shifts from the art metaphor to the metaphor of language:

Yet I am the necessary angel of earth,
Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,

Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set,
And, in my hearing, you hear its tragic drone

Rise liquidly in liquid lingerings,
Like watery words awash; like meanings said

By repetitions of half-meanings.
(CP 496-497)

When the medium is language, Stevens' desire for immediacy of resemblance requires a rhythmic element of time, tempo, alliterations of liquid words, verbal forms of the noun. Both Vendler and Miller have commented on the language of momentary becoming in the poems of *The Auroras of Autumn*; words such as "enkindlings," "flitterings," "bellishings," "easings," "ouncings," "writhings," and now "lingerings." But rather than a poetry vying with impressionism, it seems to me that these multiplied plurals create a poetry of repetition, dissemination, infinite semiosis. The solidity of reality splits into half-meanings, chips of time, space, sound,

light, color. It is a poetry of flaked words, as one speaks of flaked stone, a phase of metaphorical toolmaking hailed by the deconstructionists as among the first achievements of the Age of Decentering. There is no quelling of that quarrel, because on the one hand immediacy contradicts all our notions of a fiction as factitious, theatrical, self-conscious, or even reflective, but on the other hand the very disappearance of the medium is an angel, a fiction. If so many poems of *askesis* begin with the image of the sun in the sky, it is because the sun has been obnubilated by metaphor. But then, why the ridiculous artifice of the angel trope? The answer is not simple. The impressionist impulse denounces metaphor as "evasion" (CP 199, 373), "deviation" (CP 471) or even "degeneration." (CP 444) The desire for resemblance resides in poetic language, elegiac consolation, and religious hymns. Stevens personifies his contradictions under the aureole of an angel or, in a poem published in the Summer 1950 issue of *Wake*, under the "queer chapeaux" of "Nuns Painting Water-Lilies."⁵ Those angelic emulators of Claude Monet work in "a clearness of the air / That matches, today, a clearness of the mind." (OP 92) The unity of mind and world, as subtle as a gauze tissue, reminds us of the angel's plasticity: its immediacy, its hygiene of the eye, its too quick disappearance:

We are part of a fraicheur, inaccessible
Or accessible only in the most furtive fiction.
(OP 93)

Fraicheur and *furtive* bring to mind the effect of many canvases by Monet, less the demi-tint pigmentation of the water lilies than the subtilization of a landscape suspended in the instant of a single glance. And what about the hesitant *accessible*, a word of the angelic threshold, at the vertiginous point where the visible becomes invisible? The impressionist desire for mobility, fluidity, volatilization, the temptation of a transparent art giving access to reality, the belief in immaculate origins and pristine innocence satisfy a romantic nostalgia rather than an ascetic purity. The pictorial model is utopian, an artifice creating the illusion of a new and ever-fresh nature, evaporating time to the mute instantaneity of a spectacle. This u-topia, this nowhere of nature, therefore inaccessible, an angelic no-place without distances, can be entered only by stealth, by the artist as thief and disguiser of stolen goods, not a supreme but a furtive fiction. Eventually the angelic desire for a mediation without a medium is reductive because it ignores the radical duality of culture and nature, language and world. It hides its ideology which posits a metaphysical Beginning. But Stevens does not hide "the supernatural of its origin." (CP 92) To heed his deconstructive language is to qualify the naive claims of the romantic imagination.

But what about sex? The pictorial fiction totalizes the self by abolishing the distance between the eye (the I) and visible reality. It is a quick collapse of the poles of perception, a "match," on the surface as innocent as nuns,

between opposites. The musical fiction, on the contrary, will sexualize the opposites and harmonize the self by an alchemy based on the control of time. Music is a three-term dialectic, where painting has only two. This is perhaps because of musical logic, which links a sensual with an abstract structure, tone with architectonics. Prepared by Stevens' piano practice in *Harmonium*, the supreme fiction as music is always explicitly linked with desire and with unity, a desire of harmonization in "Peter Quince," a harmonization of desire in "Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz." Stevens is a musician, albeit a skeptical one, more like Satie than like Strauss. If the word "hymn" links music with religion it is a displacement rather than a concordium: "Poetry/Exceeding music must take the place/Of empty heaven and its hymns." (CP 167) The aesthetics of the Supreme Fiction fulfill this program both in theme and structure. It turns the hymn into a hymen, the seventeenth-century word for marriage. Thus the sexual myth underlies the musical analogy: Music appears in "Notes," again and again, with the connotation of ecstasy, "As a man and a woman meet and love forthwith." (CP 386) While in its pictorial mode the supreme—or furtive—fiction sports a sort of prestigious virginity, and clothes itself with pure spectacle, in its musical mode it exalts the fecund amours of "things of opposite natures."⁵ (CP 392) Marriage and Music become synonymous. Metaphor is no longer the quick collapse of difference, no longer degeneration but re-generation, procreation, birth. The poem becomes a three-step waltz of words romancing marriage and music:

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

Of right joining, a music of ideas, the burning
And breeding and bearing birth of harmony,
The final relation, the marriage of the rest.
(CP 464-465)

This inspired prothalamium comes as a surprise in conclusion to two poems, "Study of Images" I and II, which Stevens—as wry as ever—criticizes "the image, a mere desire" and the "stale demands" of blood. (CP 464) Constantly these short meta-poems of *The Auroras of Autumn* reshape and split again the structure of fictive retotalization. On one side Stevens unrolls the musical metaphor, the chymical wedding, the romance of union. On the other side he resolves the life-and-death subject-object conflict by the pictorial fiction of a vanishing angel who speaks. The void in the middle, which Harold Bloom calls the *aporia*, is the place for meta-poetry, deconstruction, decentering.⁶

If we transport this opposition from the aesthetic to the symbolic plane, the same cleavage appears. Stevens' desire for union is archaic, turning to the past and early *participation mystique*, moving among archetypal shades in a

parental space. Norman O. Brown tells us that just as music is a resexualization, "symbolic correspondence is a marriage" and "metaphor a procreation."⁷ In "Things of August," Stevens elucidates this *mysterium* in the form of an alchemical image, the cosmic egg holding sea, earth, and all concentric. Everything partakes of everything else, "the cat hawks it and the hawk cats it." (CP 490) The cosmic egg brims with delights. But its protection changes into encirclement, the shell into a wall, egg into a grave. Language must break the maternal world of correspondences and deliver "words spreading sail":

Spread outward. Crack the round dome. Break through.
Have liberty not as the air within a grave

Or down a well. Breathe freedom, oh, my native,
In the space of horizons that neither love nor hate.
(CP 490)

It is a space in which Stevens abruptly shifts from archetypal symbolism to *écriture*. It is fascinating to watch the shift happen in "Things of August." The discovery of "the spirit's sex" and "the sex of its voices" (CP 489) came to Stevens as an epiphany of alchemical symbols. He was sitting in Elizabeth Park one autumn day when he "heard the voice of union." (CP 494) He saw the shape of a woman, not unlike Nerval's vision in the garden of *Aurelia*, rising to the sky, then more archaic forms, Jungian archetypes, the transpersonal Father, finally the crystal Anthropos, an image of transcendental peace and unity:

The total of human shadows bright as glass.
(CP 494)

All the more telling seems the silence separating this evocation of "archaic space" in stanza eight from the opening line of stanza nine:

A new text of the world,
A scribble of fret and fear and fate,
From a bravura of the mind,
A courage of the eye,

In which, for all the breathings
From the edge of night,
And for all the white voices
That were rosen once,

The meanings are our own —

...

A text of intelligent men
At the centre of the unintelligible,
As in a hermitage, for us to think,
Writing and reading the rigid inscription.
(CP 494-495)

The terms of the aporia stand here in clear clashes: on one side the majestic fiction of archetypal projections couched in the sexual language of union, music, and mystery. Then, abruptly, the fragile, feverish, furtive fiction, alliterating with fear, but nonetheless affirmative. This marginal, eccentric, metonymic text, no longer in logocentric space, writes itself in the space of writing itself, making meanings by writing, refusing the occult influences, the logocentric resonances, and giving privilege to the eye, the textual inscription, the text as medium. It is neither the transparent mediation of the angel, nor the alchemical mediation of the *hieros gamos*. Joseph Riddel quotes this passage from "Things of August" as proof of Stevens' postmodernity, that is to say his prophetic use of a scheme of thinking, writing, and reading which has gained favor in Europe from the work of postnietzschean philosophers such as Jacques Derrida.⁸ But the word "hermitage" leaves a problem in Riddel's astute interpretation. It links the "centre of the unintelligible" to the beautiful dream of the earth-spouse which Stevens published in 1952 under the logocentric title of "The Hermitage at the Center." So strong was the marriage myth in the poetry of Wallace Stevens that cracked domes were able to resist his deconstruction and to reappear as love nests for intelligent men and their interior paramours.

NOTES

1. This paper rewords Chapters 7 and 8 of Part III (pp. 374-402) in *L'Oeuvre-Monde de Wallace Stevens* (Paris: Honore Champion, 1975) which I wrote in 1972-73.

2. *The Poems of Our Climate* (Cornell University Press, 1977) p. 293.

3. M. Blanchot, *L'espace Litteraire*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1955) p. 110.

4. Stevens made his angel masculine in the 1949 poem "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" but wrote in a 1950 letter: "We shall have to put the angel of reality on the shelf. It was interesting to talk about her." (LWS 662)

5. This poem was anthologized by Samuel French Morse but not by Holly Stevens.

6. This opposition coincides with what I have mapped as the shift from metaphor to metonymy. (See *boundary 2*, Winter 1977) pp. 471-486.

7. Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body*, (New York: Random House, 1966) pp. 250-1.

8. Joseph Riddel, "Interpreting Stevens: An Essay on Poetry and Thinking," *boundary 2*, 1, No. 1 (Fall 1972) pp. 79-97. See also his review of my *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) in *English Language Notes*, 12 (September 1974), pp. 55-61. A long piece by him, "Metaphoric Staging—Stevens' Beginning Again of the 'End of the Book'" will appear in a collection of essays honoring Stevens.

Cat

But, of course, rouges means red.

Broomstick

A man with so firm a faith in the meaning of words should not listen to poetry.

Cat

Broomstick!

Bowl turns to the frontispiece of his book. Cat looks furtively at the portrait there.

Bowl.

I say tawny because it is obvious that Claire Dupray means tawny.

Broomstick

Her portrait tells you that?

Bowl

Yes; and her age tells me. She cannot be more than twenty-two.

Cat

And at twenty-two one does not like red flowers?

Bowl.

At twenty-two, with eyes as large as those of Claire Dupray, with hair combed as a girl combs her hair - concealing in its arrangement the things it begins to disclose to her - and then, most of all, with the look she has here, one goes in for things that go with one's own mystery.

Broomstick

And, of course, red flowers and one's own mystery -

"Missing" page from published version of "Bowl, Cat and Broomstick"
(See page 25, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*)

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A Note on "Bowl, Cat and Broomstick"

SAMUEL FRENCH MORSE

Opus Posthumous was intended to "add to the total body of the published work whatever is intrinsically interesting, from the real beginning"—that is, from Stevens' first appearance in *Poetry: a Magazine of Verse*, in October, 1914—"to the end." It was deliberately meant to be selective and representative rather than comprehensive, as the occasion seemed to warrant. It included none of the juvenilia; none of the "poems for Elsie," some of which Stevens arranged as "Intermezzi" in copies made in 1913; only a few of the "trial flights" in the more characteristic manner of "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" or "Six Significant Landscapes"; and omitted incomplete or tentative drafts, as well as a few early contributions to *Others*.¹ It also omitted the much worked-over and fragmentary piece in *terza rima*, "For an Old Woman in a Wig" (ca. 1916), which he sent in a version that apparently no longer survives to William Carlos Williams, and the play, "Bowl, Cat and Broomstick" (ca. 1917).

"For an Old Woman in a Wig" has attracted the attention of recent critics. "Bowl, Cat and Broomstick," however, has aroused something less than an excited response since its appearance in *The Quarterly Review of Literature* and *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, perhaps because it was printed from an incomplete copy. The carbon which Stevens presented to me is complete, even to title page, and is obviously an old one. He had little to say about the play; but he had been amused when I asked him if any copies of the text survived. He had also seemed pleased by my interest in tracking down uncollected pieces that Hi Simons had taken no note of in "Vicissitudes of Reputation," in the Wallace Stevens issue of *The Harvard Advocate*, most of which shared a disaffected and ironic glance at the quotidian and commonplace: such poems as "The Indigo Glass in the Grass," "Lulu Morose," and "Agenda." He had no illusions about their quality, although he thought better of them than he did of those undergraduate exercises that gave him "the creeps."

Perhaps "Bowl, Cat and Broomstick" ought to have been included in *Opus Posthumous*, even though it still seems to me a slighter work than the rather insubstantial "Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise" and the wittily self-indulgent "Carlos among the Candles." On the other hand, its "subject" occupied Stevens off and on throughout his career. As an early illustration of his interest in the "theory of poetry," "Bowl, Cat and Broomstick" concentrates on both the contemporaneity and the modernity of the poet and the poet's work, and on what Stevens ultimately came to think of as "the bearing of the poet." It also relates to his conviction that a poet should stick to "a fixed point of view," as he put it in a famous letter to Williams. Like the collected essays, as well as the "Memorandum" prepared for Henry Church concerning a "Chair of Poetry" at Princeton, and some still uncollected answers to questionnaires sent out by *New Verse* (1934), *Twentieth Century*

Verse (1938), *Partisan Review* (1939), and *Focus Five* (1950), the play provides insight into his own sense of his role as a poet. It also suggests that Stevens understood what he was doing better than some of his most recent critics are willing to admit.

"Bowl, Cat and Broomstick" was originally announced in the prospectus for 1917-1918 of the Wisconsin Players, along with "one-act plays from the Spanish, Japanese, and Russian"; "Carlos among the Candles," "Lima Beans," by Alfred Kreymborg, "The Woman Who Loved Jesse James," by Carl Sandburg, and "Suppressed Desires," by Susan Glaspell; and pieces by eight members of the founding group. The set was designed by Walter Pach, who characterized the play as "a book review." It was performed during the Players' brief New York season, a few nights after the disastrous single performance of "Carlos," but it seems to have received no review.

In a "complete" edition of Stevens, "Bowl, Cat and Broomstick" will find its proper place. To have the "missing" page easily accessible is useful; and it suggests, incidentally, that the approaching centenary may be an occasion for a new edition of the "Adagia," reproducing the texts in precisely the order in which Stevens jotted them down, and a printing of the brief "Poetic Exercises of 1948," as well as the miscellaneous items in various folders ("From Pieces of Paper," "Schemata," and "Memorias Antiguas"), and a number of other fugitive pieces.

NOTES

1. *Opus Posthumous* omitted "The Florist Wears Knee-Breeches," "Song" ("There are great things doing"), "Inscription for a Monument," "Meditation," and "Gray Room." Of these, *The Palm at the End of the Mind* includes "Inscription for a Monument" and "Gray Room."

NOTE: The Wallace Stevens Journal would like to receive information regarding University courses on the poetry of Stevens. How is the poetry presented? What is the classroom experience? Advice? Complaints? This can be in the form of articles or simply letters.

* * *

The Wallace Stevens Society would like to see The Journal reach more graduate students. If you know students writing on Stevens, or interested, ask them to contact The Journal. We will print comment under *Communications*, perhaps act as clearing house for questions & answers.

Wallace Stevens: At Home in Pennsylvania

THOMAS F. LOMBARDI

“It is an important thing to keep a true home in the world,”¹ Wallace Stevens once wrote, and home for Stevens meant where one grows up. That “true home” made a tremendous impact upon him and helped shape his interpretation of the world, which is clearly evident in his journals and correspondence, where memories and recollections of home abound. That Stevens was consoled and encouraged by the “familiar things” of home is a key to a comprehensive understanding of the man insofar as cherishing “the old scene” helped him to impose order on what he came to believe was an increasingly disordered world.

Stevens considered Reading, Pennsylvania, where he was born and where he spent his formative years, as part of a much larger neighborhood, which included, among other places, Lancaster, Harrisburg, Lebanon, all parts of a greater whole. To be sure, Stevens was thoroughly acquainted with those neighborhoods. Even after his departure for Harvard in 1897, he continued to return to his old haunts, discovering new realities, rediscovering old ones—fishing along the Maiden creek, day-long walks through Tuckerton, Temple, Pricetown and Blandon, canoeing up the Schuylkill River to Ritz’ lock where he would row into a world of solitude, listening to the locusts at Gomorrah, or rediscovering his initials—the “S” carved backwards—on the seat of one of the summer houses at the Ephrata Mountain Springs Resort.² His delightful description of all sorts of “interesting places” throughout his home territory—the “seclusion of Evansville with its business street of three or four houses”; “most perfect Hamburg, where, it is said, the pavements are scrubbed on hands and knees”; “Morgantown ‘supine upon a bed of carbonate of lime’”; and that wonderful tongue-in-cheek “unvirginal air of Virginsville”³—are rivalled only by the realities themselves. One conclusion, among several, can be drawn from a gloss of Stevens’ observations of the home scene: he possessed a familiarity with his region that a discerning native alone can boast. In a word, he was imbued with a sense of the provincial while simultaneously awake to the latest intellectual and artistic trends permeating Europe and America: the result being a unique visionary balance of local color and cosmopolitan sophistication not commonly realized in a single personality.

The towns and villages that surround Reading interested Stevens only slightly less than the country itself. “One cannot be comfortable anywhere except in the country,”⁴ he declared, and for several years he even considered buying a house there. Though Stevens was city-bred, as a resident of Reading—which he once characterized as “a terrible place except to the native”⁵—he enjoyed the additional advantage of experiencing beyond the city limits the serenity of rural existence. Even in the verse he

wrote as a student at Harvard, one detects his astute awareness of the dual reality—urban and rural—of his native experience. During his formative years, one must remember, in the area of Reading no gradual transition was discernible as one traveled from city to country. Where the city ended, the country abruptly began. In his brief poem “The Minstrel,” published in the *Harvard Advocate*, April 3, 1900, one suspects that Stevens was describing Reading and environs, where streets led into a world “Of daisies and of daffodils— / A world of green and amethyst, / Of seas and of uplifted hills.” Reading, located in the midst of “uplifted hills,” is in reality 125 miles from the Atlantic Ocean, but Stevens often employed the sea image to represent the undulating contours of Pennsylvania’s valleys and hills.

Reading, then, situated in the heart of Berks County, was—and is—surrounded by farms; Stevens made frequent excursions, usually on foot, into the countryside—sometimes through Dunkel’s cloverfield, walking the road from Adamstown to Reading in two hours, riding the trolley to Riverside, then returning to central Reading on foot; down Easter Egg Way, Oriole Road, up Stone Hill, by Eglantine Hedge, past Spies country church, and round the Lake of the Beautiful. Stevens was a solitary figure, quietly, methodically searching for the extraordinary in the ordinary: sitting on a stone wall surveying a field of green wheat in Ontalaunee, studying a barn swallow feeding its young, listening to the notes of a catbird singing in the rain or chickens scratching in the leaves, inspecting a lime-kiln, spending a night in a country hotel or sleeping in an old mill, conversing with a friend about farm implements, or drinking from a goblet at a farmer’s pump. He described himself in a peculiarly Whitmanesque manner: “alone on an up-and-downish road, in old clothes.”⁶ How similarly he pictured a youth in “A Day in February” as being “alone on the roads, free and high spirited.”⁷ In a fashion, Stevens seemed to feel that a review of life could be best accomplished along one of those up-and-downish Pennsylvania roads, philosophizing: “If I wanted to think all of life over, I think I could do it best up the Tulpehocken, or sitting on a fence along the Barnville Road.”⁸ A review of life in old surroundings had the decided advantage of introducing stability into the flux and change of day-to-day reality.

Many of the country roads that Stevens traveled wound high into the mountains, where he was always comfortable. “The heart,” Stevens wrote, “opens on high ground.”⁹ Unfailingly he took the paths and roads that led to the higher elevations, enthusiastically alert to the prominences of “hilly perspectives.” At times, he would climb the Pinnacle—the highest point of the land to the north bordering the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. Occasionally he walked the miles to Morgantown, which he described as a road that “winds toward distant upland spires”;¹⁰ alone or with friends he would scale Pulpit Rock, above Hamburg, via the Blue Rocks, afterwards meandering downward through hillsides thick with spruce. When Stevens was not hiking to the tops of mountains or hills, he was trekking below them, through McKnight’s or O’Reilly’s Gap, or simply wandering down

the Great Valley. Even though he lived most of his years away from home, he forever yearned to be “stalking the hills” in Pennsylvania.

Stevens’ love of hills and mountains—he used the words interchangeably when he spoke of home—was bequeathed to him during those early years when he used to hike up two mountains that encircle Reading to the east: Mount Penn and Mount Neversink. He periodically followed the trails up Mount Penn to either Kuechler’s Roost, a German vintner’s inn, or to the Tower, a hotel; other times he made his way to the top of Neversink, whose summit was also crowned with a hotel. Those two Reading mountains, which inspired beautiful poetic reflections of home, are part of the Blue Mountains, the first range of the Allegheny uplift that one encounters moving northwest up from Philadelphia. Those mountains left a profound impression upon his consciousness; throughout his poetry the effects of the impression are evident in his frequent use of mountain imagery.

The Blue Mountains, or Blue hills, as Stevens sometimes called them, were a major source of inspiration. Stevens unquestionably responded to their color (the green appearing blue, occasioned by the haze that often hovers above southeastern Pennsylvania), and the blue of those mountains might have been, in part at least, the unconscious source of Stevens’ symbolic use of blue for the imagination. Certainly, one understands the way those mountains charged his imagination. On one day, he would observe, the mountains were “blue indeed”; on another “white with misty light”; and on still others, “the hills lay blue in the mist.” On those walks in summer, he regularly sighted a mountain horizon “deepening its blue”; while during the summer he might catch a glimpse beyond snowy fields of “the little blue hills, very pale in the light, very delicate.” Those were the mountains that Stevens “meditated upon”¹¹—inspiring him, as he walked the roads in delight, to move toward the heights, “the nearest ridge.”

So mountain-conscious was Stevens that sometimes before he fell asleep he would deliberately imagine himself alone atop a green mountain. It is reasonable to assume that the green mountain was “a certain hill in Pennsylvania,”¹² namely Mount Penn. Indeed, Stevens’ association with mountain tops is commonplace, especially his intimate association with Mount Penn’s summit. In his compositions several instances qualify as reflections of Mount Penn settings: the figure of the old man in “Credences of Summer”; the three Chinamen in *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise*; and the sailor “alone on a mountain” in “The Desire to Make Love in a Pagoda,” undoubtedly connected with the Chinese Pagoda nestled on the southern tip of the ridge. By 1908, Stevens, who by that time had not been a resident of Reading for many years, nostalgically voiced a sense of the passing of a landscape and in a larger sense by implication, a way of life: “All my valleys were lost in mist and my sparkling hill-tops were miles in dark.”¹³ In the 1940’s, however, the Pennsylvania experience would offer Stevens an alternative to the instability of the war-ridden contemporary world.

It is possible that Stevens never wrote anything without recourse to a specific place as background.¹⁴ The incidents that follow transpired in Pennsylvania and find expression in his poetry. For example, "Ploughing on Sunday," sometimes interpreted as an indictment of blue laws, in all likelihood grew out of recollected Pennsylvania farm experiences. Two incidents especially suggest the atmosphere of "Ploughing": the May 2, 1909 incident—a Sunday—describing Stevens and Elsie skirting a field that had recently been ploughed, and the July 9, 1899 entry relating Stevens' encounter with a farmer whose "clothes were covered with splotches of clay from a field he had been ploughing." The "stellar summering" and "first inch of night" that darken the ambience of "The Desire to Make Love in a Pagoda" is implied in an excursion Stevens recorded on June 1, 1909, of "a walk up to the dark Pagoda, black in a night full of mysterious calm and heavenly beauty." Two incidents are reminiscent of the crow and the cornfield in the country poem "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters": on August 1, 1899, he cited an encounter with a "large, black crow," and in December 1920 he cited another incident with several crows in another cornfield. On December 20, 1908, he described the way he had followed wild ducks, an activity that parallels the movement of wild ducks in "Wild Ducks, People and Distances." On August 1, 1899, Stevens alluded to "the delicate deer-grass" and the "timothy"—flora that are mentioned in his lovely Reading poem "Late Hymn from the Myrrh Mountain." The colorful hay-making episode and the allusion to the summer heat and hard labor in the hay-mow, recorded July 18, 1899, can be no other than inspirational material for the Oley motif in "Credences." Of course, "Thinking of the Relation between the Images of a Metaphor" is unmistakably associated with his father who used to fish for bass along the Perkiomen Creek in Montgomery County, a fact revealed in a letter to Lilla James Roney (Nov. 2, 1942).

Approximately sixty miles southwest of the Perkiomen Valley lies Stevens, Pennsylvania, a little village in Lancaster County, twenty miles southwest of Reading. And though Stevens' letters and journals are repeatedly visited by little known Pennsylvania place names—Strausstown, Joanna, Sinking Springs, Fritztown, Lenhartsville, Antietam, and Hampden, to mention only a few—at no time is "Stevens, Pennsylvania" mentioned. And yet the name compels one to conjecture. Stevens frequently traveled to the area southwest of Reading, occasionally spending summers vacationing in Ephrata, a few miles from the village Stevens. And we have that somewhat comic vignette of Wallace Stevens in Reamstown—a scant two miles east of Stevens—munching six buns outside the local post office.

Actually, Stevens, Pennsylvania, located as it is, midway between Harrisburg and the Susquehanna River to the west and Bucks County and the Delaware River to the east, may be for geographical reasons more important than first glance would have one believe. Even a casual interest reveals that the village marks the center of the geographical extremes of Stevens country. In short, the region designated "Stevens country" Stevens himself called his "native land"¹⁵—Reading inspiring his mind to make

sketches of it when he was there, the countryside beyond Reading sometimes appearing a kind of German or Dutch arcadia. That mythical Pennsylvania arcadia would emerge in the poetry of the 1940's—particularly in *Transport to Summer*—a time during which he would become unusually preoccupied with past, ancestry, and origins. “True poetry is a remembrance of youth,”¹⁶ he wrote. And as late in his life as 1950, in “The Rock,” he was still pondering “the freedom of seventy years ago”—of a time, of a place, of a people that were, except in memory, far behind him.

NOTES

1. Letter to Elsie Moll, June 7, 1910. Background information and quotations are taken from the journals and letters of Wallace Stevens, published in the following texts: Holly Stevens, ed., *Letters of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966); Holly Stevens, *Souvenirs and Prophecies: The Young Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).
2. Pennsylvania place names that occur throughout the article, such as Maidencreek, Tuckerton, Temple, Pricetown, Blandon, and all others, are names that Stevens mentions in his journals and correspondence.
3. Journal, July 25, 1907; August 13, 1907.
4. Letter to Elsie Moll, June 23, 1910.
5. Journal, May 29, 1906.
6. Journal, February 5, 1906.
7. *The Harvard Advocate*, LXVI, 9 (March 6, 1899), 135-6.
8. Letter to Elsie Moll, June 7, 1910.
9. Journal, August 18, 1902.
10. Journal, August 31, 1907.
11. Journal, (no month or day) 1899; July 16, 1905; October 1, 1902; August 1, 1899; n.d.; July 25, 1907.
12. “A Day in February,” *The Harvard Advocate*, LXVI, 9 (March 6, 1899), 135-6.
13. Journal, December 7, 1908.
14. Letter to Ronald Latimer, October 13, 1935.
15. Letter to Elsie, June 1, 1909.
16. Journal, n.d.

Yeats' Byzantium and Stevens' Rome: A Comparison of Two Poems

ALAN D. PERLIS

After the ecstasy of faith in an eternal return has died, what comes to replace it and to satisfy the poet's hunger for belief? William Butler Yeats and Wallace Stevens came to this question slowly and by degrees, each beginning his career as a poet with a firm conviction that the natural cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth conferred an order on the universe and that the cycle itself contained enough of change to suggest many lifetimes of metaphors for poetry. For the Stevens of *Harmonium*, *Ideas of Order*, *The Man with the Blue Guitar* and *Parts of a World*, a strong sense of place found articulation in reflecting a continual change of form and hue; and though from the first he recognized that poetry and nature formed permanent antinomies, he persisted to believe for at least twenty-five years that "getting at" nature through poetry, however futile, provided sufficient impetus for creation. For the young and middle-aged Yeats, a complex symbol system that coalesced finally in a cone of interpenetrating but antithetic gyres embodying opposing historical movements confirmed the world as continual process and poetry as its appropriate response.¹

Until the final years of their careers, both poets relied on the continuity of change and, invoking remarkably similar patterns of symbol that collected around circles and spirals,² gave fealty to nature's unwearying role. The first significant indication of an alteration in attitude appears in Yeats' *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* and Stevens' *The Auroras of Autumn*, for each the second-to-last major volume of poetry. The word "poverty" appears in Stevens, the word "disdain" in Yeats: for the former, nature begins to appear less bountiful; for the latter, man's systemic return to nature for change and inspiration turns chronic and reflects a "mere complexity" as "fury" and "mire" inhabit human veins.

This emerging sense of a fall from nature's grace is perhaps most clear in Stevens' "Things of August," where the hottest month of summer seems fraught with a late Autumn chill:

The mornings grow silent, the never-tiring wonder.
The trees are reappearing in poverty.

Without rain, there is the sadness of rain
And an air of lateness. The moon is a tricorn

Waved in pale adieu. The rex Impolitor
Will come stamping here, the ruler of less than men,

In less than nature. He is not here yet.
Here the adult one is still banded with fulgor,

Is still warm with the love with which she came,
Still touches solemnly with 'what she was

And willed. She has given too much, but not enough.
She is exhausted and a little old.³

(CP 495-496)

The impending sense of a rex Impolitor, the discourteous king death, initiates one of Stevens' many "forms of farewell," as he calls them in "The Owl in the Sarcophagus": a taking leave of the physical world. We might want to conclude that Stevens is a forerunner of our contemporary literary entropists who write of a world that is exhausting itself. But evidence from other poems suggests that he is anticipating his own farewell, and that bride nature has turned dowager in the eyes of a frankly bored old naturalist.

Yeats' own form of farewell may be seen in his slow but very certain journey from Innisfree to Byzantium, or from the ethereal mist and linnets' wings of a tiny, isolated island which lies "in the deep heart's core" even when the poet wanders on "the pavements grey," to a splendid "artifice of eternity" where even the birds are man-made. Those that would live in nature are "caught in that sensual music" where "all neglect monuments of unaging intellect." And so Yeats finds in Byzantium and, as we shall observe, Stevens in Rome, an artifice of antiquity that gives their aging a companionable metaphor.

Stevens' "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" and Yeats' "Byzantium" respond to death: Stevens' poem to the death of his friend George Santayana, Yeats' to the death of an imaginary friend whose demise is the occasion of a mental journey to an ancient civilization.⁴ That Yeats needed such a pretext for his poem is significant. In *A Vision*, completed seven years before the composition of "Byzantium," he had constructed the personality types that he saw corresponding to the twenty-eight phases of the moon.⁵ He noted there that no human person corresponding to phases one and fifteen, the first embodying complete plasticity, the fifteenth complete beauty. These two phases may be seen as reflecting lifelessness, and it is for the latter, complete beauty, that Yeats invented Byzantium: an artifice that finds its analogue to death in fixed images that have the unreal quality of a "flame that cannot singe a sleeve." Stevens' Rome has a similarly unreal quality: it lies on "the threshold of heaven" where everything is at once tangible and ineffable or, as Stevens puts it "fire," and the urge "to escape / From fire and be part only of that of which / Fire is the symbol: the celestial possible." The two poets' symbolic fires suggest a triumph of the imagination over what Yeats calls "unpurged images." Yet like their idealized points of origin, they must rip timelessness from the fabric of nature to achieve their artistic design. The relationship of both Rome and Byzantium to death is clear: both cultures strive for a kind of perfection that art alone is privileged to intimate; but this perfection, however much it satisfies the human urge to see pure beauty manifest, denies the life that is the wellspring of imaginative perception.⁶

It becomes evident, then, that as both poets moved into the final phases of their careers, they reached an antinomian position with respect to the seemingly eternal conflict between the supremacy of art and the supremacy of nature.⁷ Yet rather than subordinate either domain to the realm of Kantian noumena, that great pit of unanswerable questions where, apparently, all meaningful answers lie, Yeats and Stevens use their poems to achieve a synthesis, or what Stevens called in an earlier poem "the impossible possible." Byzantium and Rome are concocted by a visionary imagination, the effort of which is no less than a reconciliation of the two poles simultaneous with a recognition of the poles' radical and irreparable separateness. Perhaps Stevens' threshold metaphor is the only one fit to embody the paradox: on one side of life, on the other death; the betweenness is the poem that steps from the threshold now in one direction, now in the other.

Yeats achieves this betweenness in the final stanza of *Byzantium*. Once the "unpurged images of day recede" and "a moonlit dome disdains / All that man is"—once the complexity of human life is purged from Byzantium and its magnificent mosaics seem to haunt a permanently pure and lifeless world—an image appears before the visionary poet that unwinds the "winding path." Yeats calls the image "the superhuman": the Heraclitan theme of "death-in-life and life-in-death" blooded in the veins of an ethereal presence who seems to hold an answer to life's mysteries and for all that must remain "shade more than man, more image than a shade." Byzantium's paradox is clear. The city of art is the city of death. All answers to life's mysteries must come from the grave. Yet only "breathless mouths may summon" the right answers, and so the living must be content to guess.

Yeats tries his best; the poem projects the artificial bird and artificial fire, cleansed of and cleansing "all complexities of mire and blood," which are the staples of Byzantine mosaic art. But they do not satisfy the complex of emotions which require ideal art to incorporate the human elements that reside in phases two through fourteen and sixteen through twenty-eight. Hence the dance of death is an "agony of trance" and an "agony of flame." The death-like fixity of a Byzantine mosaic exalts art by denying human life.

In fact, Yeats' Byzantium becomes a kind of hell, where "spirit after spirit" rides the mythical dolphin's back across the river Styx to eternal damnation. The Emperor's smithies "break the flood:"

Marbles of the dancing floor
Break bitter furies of complexity,
Those images that yet
Fresh images beget,
That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.⁸

The image of the dancing floor is a fulcrum on which nature and human complexity and art and the death of things human balance with magnificent delicacy. It stands between the golden smithies and the "gong-tormented

sea" of human life with a precise ambiguity that incorporates the greatness and the great agony of both.

Unfortunately, we have only one very qualified indication of Yeats' meaning for the dancing form. Norman Jeffares tells us that this image, which grows from that of the "Emperor's pavement" of stanza four, "is probably derived from W.G. Holmes' *The Age of Justinian and Theodora*." Yeats, having just finished reading Holmes, writes:

We . . . arrive at the Forum of Constantine, which presents itself as an expansion of the Mese. This open space, the most signal ornament of Constantinople, is called prescriptively the Forum; and sometimes from its finished marble floor "The Pavement."⁹

Given the floor's centrality in Yeats' Byzantine mythology, we can appreciate the image's importance in the poem. We cannot be satisfied with the notion that the poet is simply alluding to a floor for dancing. In fact Holmes never mentions its function, but only its significance as a model of high Byzantine mosaic. For Yeats, the artistic achievement which the floor represents is so extraordinary that it is credible to argue that the floor itself seems to be dancing: that a work of art has suddenly come alive.¹⁰ Though the dance may "break bitter furies of complexity," it resolves into a swirling motion that unites art and life. "That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea" is art's fleeting residuum.

Byzantium's concluding stanza provides a visionary moment. The poem's overwhelming direction is toward the antinomies; but it also allows for that rare experience when art seems so much a part of life's motion that it appears as its twin rather than its mirror. When Yeats wrote "Lapis Lazuli" six years after completing *Byzantium* he described the Chinamen carved in lapis "on the mountain and the sky," or amid both substance and transcendence. The delicate statuary become Yeats' miniature Byzantium, which came to breed fresh images of a visionary order.

One does not readily imagine Stevens joining Yeats' visionary company. The lawyer, insurance company vice-president, the poet who for so many years argued for the impossibility of an "imperishable bliss," the poetic naturalist who insisted that his referent was always "things as they are" seems hardly the writer to look over the rim of time and change. But now, as we begin to appreciate the seventy-five year old poet of *The Rock* as much as we do the quicker sleight-of-hand-man of "Sunday Morning" and "The Emperor of Ice Cream," we also recognize that Stevens never abandoned what he called in his final published poem a search for "a new knowledge of reality." This new knowledge is no more evident than in *The Rock*, where the word "poverty" appears in at least ten different poems to suggest that the planet earth has shrunk to such proportions that the elderly poet's language must become visionary in order to avoid becoming redundant. Like his representation of Ariel in "The Planet on the Table," Stevens began seeking "affluence" in the "poverty of . . . words" that correspond to a diminishing world. That this affluence emerged in a vision that looks beyond things as they are is most clear in "To an old Philosopher in Rome."

Stevens' poem eulogizes Santayana as an "inquisitor of structures" whose words seem to provide a perfect mental reflection of things real. The design of his words "take form / And frame from thinking," and is thus "realized." What the poem suggests is that the realist is also the transcendent idealist, or that the forms of heaven replicate a clearly perceived physical world. Hence "The Threshold, Rome, and that more merciful Rome / Beyond" are "the two alike in the make of the mind." Human dignity, is achieved when "two parallels become one" in which "men are part both in the inch and in the mile." In "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" the geometrically impossible and the "celestial possible" merge to suggest that the supremest act of the mind is a resolution of the antinomies.

Stevens fluctuates between inch and mile, earth and heaven, known and unknown like a spider joining poles with a web. The poem's greatest triumph is perhaps the solemn import conferred upon the most usual of objects and sensations: the sounds of newsboys in the street, the smell of medicine, the bed, books, chair, candles and moving nuns that surround the old philosopher on his deathbed. The web is a kind of grand confusion in which these quotidian elements, "the veritable small," as Stevens calls them, become "the illumined large." Santayana's little deathbed universe where, paradoxically, he gazes "in the depths of wakefulness," seems simultaneously to inhabit "two worlds."

Stevens' great compliment to Santayana is that the philosopher finds grandeur only in these commonplace affairs of daily life and in the "misery" of the human situation—an "afflatus of ruin" since the very decay of being alive sparks the creative impulse. "It is poverty's speech that seeks us out the most," says Stevens.

It is older than the oldest speech of Rome.
This is the tragic accent of the scene.

And you—it is you that speak it, without speech,
The loftiest syllables among loftiest things,
The one invulnerable man among
Crude captains, the naked majesty, if you like,
Of bird-nest arches and of rain-stained-vaults.

The sounds drift in. The buildings are remembered.
The life of the city never lets go, nor do you
Ever want it to. It is part of the life in your room.
Its domes are the architecture of your bed.
The bells keep on repeating solemn names

In choruses and choirs of choruses,
Unwilling that mercy should be a mystery
Of silence, that any solitude of sense
Should give you more than their peculiar chords
And reverberations clinging to whisper still.

(CP 510)

The loftiest syllables achieve their majesty in describing the simple things. Santayana, "the one invulnerable man," finds his contentment in "bird-nest arches" and "rain-stained-vaults," where the edifices of nature and of man find a profound resemblance. This then is the "total edifice" and final structure: the vision that is unified, as if at the point of death the known and the unknown become one.

And so for the dying philosopher confined to his room, the world outside—Rome—becomes "reverberations." The memory seems perfect; and its ability to reinvent things no longer seen or heard excites a hunger to remain alive. But the Heraclitan theme of death in life stalks this poem with the same persistency that it stalks "Byzantium." For Rome shares with Constantinople that lifeless quality in which "choruses and choirs of choruses" drone the heavenly note of stasis. As the church domes become the architecture of the philosopher's bed, they form a sarcophagus. The ancient city confers its intimation of immortality only at the expense of life and change. Hence the desire to cling to life and the living Rome competes with death and helps to form the poem's final image of a "total grandeur of a total edifice," that precise moment, stopped upon a threshold, when the foot seems to go in both directions. This is the moment when "men are part both in the inch and in the mile," or when the imagination seems to recognize its elevation over time and timelessness by envisioning both in the same instant. For the old philosopher in Rome, that moment comes when the mental design "takes form:" when thing and idea merge. The experience is as momentary as the time between life and death.

This experience and Yeats' dancing floor correspond as images of a vision: a momentary imaginative triumph over the antinomies of time and timelessness, art and nature. For the critic, this triumph has been difficult to grasp. Stevens' later poetry, for example, has only recently received serious critical attention, and much of this attention has focused on how the poet expanded his own earlier notion that "the poem of the mind" involved "the act of finding / What will suffice." Of modern poetry, Stevens wrote in mid-career that

It must
Be the finding of a satisfaction, and may
Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman
Combing. The poem of the act of the mind.
(CP 240)

We hardly expect that twenty years later the same poet would imply a man skating and not skating, a woman dancing and not dancing, or the poet himself not knowing the dancer from the dance.

Yet such a confounding of image, which results in a fleeting clarity, is evident in both "Byzantium" and "To an Old Philosopher in Rome." On one hand, it opens up to the critical mind the vast Romantic panorama, so that, for example, a scholar like Harold Bloom tries to locate Stevens and Yeats in the arena of Blake and Shelley. Bloom's "influence"¹³ argument, which has

been his credo for the past seven years, reads like the genealogy of begetting that introduces *The New Testament*. If we accept it, we expect Stevens to create his own geography of Heaven and Hell and Yeats to make Byzantium the earthly possible in Ireland.

For Bloom, though, the nature of influence is in the form of rejection. Poets from the past speak to those of the present in such a strong voice that the contemporary must symbolically slay his precursor in order to realize himself. It is evident what happens to criticism when Bloom tries to exercise his Freudian romanticism on the Yeats who was both antinomian and visionary. The critic writes in *Poetry and Repression*:

We can see, now, that his Gnostic [translate "mystical romanticism"] tendencies aided Yeats by giving him a wider context in a traditional ontology, however heterodox, since the Yeatsian antithetical, like the Nietzschean, can be defined as the ultimate resistance against the almost irrepressible force of a primal repression, or as a fixation upon precursors whose integrity was finally a little too terrifying.¹⁴

So Yeats is not simply paradoxical, a realist who can intimate beyond the real, but a kind of Hegel by way of Nietzsche's superhuman Prometheus who can almost rise above his stern father-poet repressors in an Oedipal revolt that is cast in the father's terms.

When Bloom comes to Stevens, he exaggerates such Romantic agonies even more by adding to his list of almost slain gods a "First Idea" which is unacceptable but must be imagined, which is not the truth but itself a fiction upon which the supreme fiction must dwell in its futile search for things as they are.¹⁵ But if Bloom overcomplicates, other critics have oversimplified. Bloom writes almost exclusively of Stevens' and Yeats' urge for transcendence. Frank Lentricchia writes of their persistent focus on the antinomies, and sees in it an existential denial of ultimate meaning. In the poetry of Stevens and Yeats, Lentricchia writes,

The continuum of nature has been fragmented. Consequently, Yeats and Stevens invite . . . historical probing as they place themselves in Camus' world of "irrational bitterness," a "semi-world" with no transcendental completion. Their acceptance of the naturalistic and even existential schemes of the world of experience puts poetry irrevocably back into time.¹⁶

The terms of Lentricchia's argument are troublesome. The poet's search for something beyond nature is not new; it is the stuff of the metaphysicals, and its demands did not include nature's fragmentation for them any more than it does for Stevens and Yeats. Nor is our two poets' world rent by an irrational bitterness so much as it wears thin on their patience of observation. Moreover, transcendence does not require "transcendental completion," so the poet can hint of a world beyond the quotidian without fixing our attention on his own there permanently. The point, here, is that

neither Bloom's nor Lentricchia's tradition satisfies the terms of Yeats' Byzantium or Stevens' Rome.

The significant departure from Romanticism is that in both poems artifact replaces nature. The man-made, the artifice of antiquity, lures the poet beyond his world; the urge to find transcendence in a union with nature is conspicuously absent or, to put things in Bloom's terms, the sons have slain their fathers. But what is most important, here, is that Byzantium and Rome are among humanity's highest artistic achievements. It is with these that the poet wishes, at least momentarily, to mingle, as if the great products of the human imagination were themselves a kind of victory over nature and mutability.

This is also the two poets' hedge against "irrational bitterness." Lentricchia would find in Stevens' declaration from "Esthetique du Mal"—"Natives of poverty, children of malheur, / The gaiety of language is our seigneur"—an edifice of language to erect in the midst of an absurd world as a symbol of the impossibility of discovering ultimate meaning. But like Yeats, Stevens pushed resolutely beyond this existential obstacle. The ultimate reach for both poets is, finally, the threshold. But from this vantage point the view is capacious. Perhaps the greatest achievement of the modern visionary is an ability to maintain his balance rather than accept any tradition as fully his own.

NOTES

1. See W. B. Yeats, *A Vision* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1961).
2. See my study of Stevens' preoccupation with circles and circularity in *A World of Transforming Shapes* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1976).
3. Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), pp. 495, 496. Hereafter referred to as CP.
4. Yeats' fascination with Byzantium was already long-standing before he wrote the poem. As evidenced in *A Vision*, he believed that Byzantine mosaic art was a high form of philosophical search for the truth. See *A Vision*, p. 276.
5. See especially *A Vision*, pp. 96-101.
6. This theme is most clear in Yeats' earlier Byzantium poem, "Sailing to Byzantium."
7. Frank Lentricchia takes this position in *The Gaiety of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).
8. "Byzantium," 11, 36-40.
9. Quoted from A. Norman Jeffares, *A Commentary on The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. 358.
10. Yeats' own diary entries for 1930 suggest his interest in the idea of living art. See Jeffares, p. 352.
11. CP, p. 510.
12. CP, p. 240.
13. See especially *Poetry and Repression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).
14. *Poetry and Repression*, p. 234.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 286-288.
16. See Lentricchia, *op cit.*, p. 189.

Stevens' "Affair of Places"

JOHN N. SERIO

In his poetic notebook, *Adagia*, Wallace Stevens provides an insight into his poetry when he admits, "Life is an affair of people not of places. But for me life is an affair of places and that is the trouble."¹ This statement is more complex than it may at first seem, for in suggesting a key to Stevens' poetry it also reflects the intricate nuances of thinking and feeling which that poetry manifests. The important phrase is "an affair of places," for the word "affair," with its etymological root in the French *a faire*, implies an act of making, a vital process of the imagination in response to place which becomes equivalent to Stevens' sense of poetry as an "act of the mind" (CP 240). As "an affair of places," life—and hence poetry—becomes for Stevens an act of the mind composing the scene in which it dwells, a willful composing of place that becomes the central act of the mind in a willful composing of self.

In his essay "John Crowe Ransom: Tennessean," which may very well have found its germ in the above *Adagia* entry, Stevens tells us of the importance of this activity to his poetry:

One turns with something like ferocity toward a land that one loves, to which one is really and essentially native, to demand that it surrender, reveal, that in itself which one loves. This is a vital affair, not an affair of the heart (as it may be in one's first poems), but an affair of the whole being (as in one's last poems), a fundamental affair of life, or, rather, an affair of fundamental life . . . (OP 260)

This movement from "an affair of the heart" in his early poetry to "an affair of the whole being" in his later work outlines the change in attitude towards a sense of place that emerges in Stevens' poetry. It is a movement reflected, perhaps, in his observation that "When one is young everything is physical; when one is old everything is psychic" (OP 167). But more than that, it is the recognition that the imagination (an affair of the whole being) and not the sensibility (an affair of the heart) is the true "operative force within us" (NA 164).

Essentially, I believe that the following correlative patterns distinguish Stevens' early poetry from his later meditations. As an affair of the heart, his early poetry is an affair with reality at a physical, and, thus, unalterable, level; it is an affair of chance. As an affair of the whole being, his later poetry, however, becomes an affair with reality at a *metaphysical* level; that is, it expresses the belief that reality is, ultimately, a fiction, and as such, transformable. As an affair of fundamental life, it becomes an affair of the imagination and, thus, an affair of the will.

In the short time that I have I would like to look briefly at two long poems—"The Comedian as the Letter C" and "Credences of Summer"—to illustrate this change. As a semi-autobiographical account of his early development, "The Comedian as the Letter C" puts into perspective the numerous responses to place that Stevens had been recording for almost a decade. The central question, whether one is made in the image of his landscape or whether one's landscape is made in the image of oneself, is the essential problem which concerned Stevens throughout his first phase. The turning point in "The Comedian as the Letter C" (and the perspective which unifies most of the poems in *Harmonium*) comes with Crispin's arrival to the new world (and the twentieth century):

Nota: his soil is man's intelligence.
That's better. That's worth crossing seas to find.
(CP 36)

Crispin's experience at sea has taught him to respect "the veritable ding an sich, at last" (CP 29). He becomes a "prickling realist" (CP 40) seeking "relentless contact" (CP 34) with the particulars of his new environment. Much like the Stevens who had formulated a "Theory": "I am what is around me" (CP 86), Crispin makes his own "singular collation. Thus:/ The natives of the rain are rainy men" (CP 37). Believing that "The soul . . . is composed/ Of the external world" (CP 51), Crispin projects a colony of regionalist poets in which the expression of the self "In its place,/ Is an invisible element of that place/ Made visible (CP 52):

Although [the men of the rain] paint effulgent, azure lakes,
And April hillsides wooded white and pink,
Their azure has a cloudy edge, their white
And pink, the water bright that dogwood bears.
And in their music showering sounds intone.
(CP 37)

As an affair of the heart, this correspondence between an inner and outer weather is also expressed in numerous poems from *Harmonium*. Perhaps the most moving example occurs in "Sunday Morning," where the measures destined for the woman's soul must be wholly contained within the weather of her landscape:

Divinity must live within herself:
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
All pleasures and all pains, remembering
The bough of summer and the winter branch.
(CP 67)

However, Crispin's consequent though unforeseen fall into an indulgent fatalism illustrates that responding to a sense of place at purely an unreflective, emotional level does not suffice. One cannot rely upon epiphanic balances between the self and the landscape. As an affair of the heart, poetry, which Stevens defines as the relationship "between a man and the world" (OP 172), becomes an affair of chance and can lead, as it does in Crispin's case, to environmental determinism. Ironically, Crispin's newly-found aesthetic belief that one is made in the image of one's surroundings, contains the seed of his own failure:

Crispin dwelt in the land and dwelling there
Slid from his continent by slow recess
To things within his actual eye, alert
To the difficulty of rebellious thought
When the sky is blue. The blue infected will.

...

But day by day, now this thing and now that
Confined him, while it cosseted, condoned,
Little by little, as if the suzerain soil
Abashed him by carouse to humble yet
Attach. It seemed haphazard denouement.

(CP 40)

Significantly, he gives up poetry, the life of the imagination, for "The words of things entangle and confuse" (CP 41). Stevens, seeing Crispin as a clown serving "Grotesque apprenticeship to chance event" (CP 39), pronounces him spiritually dead:²

Was he to bray this in profoundest brass
Aointing his dreams with fugal requiems?
Was he to company vastest things defunct
With a blubber of tom-toms harrowing the sky?
Scrawl a tragedian's testament? Prolong
His active force in an inactive dirge,
Which, let the tall musicians call and call,
Should merely call him dead?

(CP 41)

Whether this philosophical dead-end contributed to the nearly seven year's silence following *Harmonium* is not known. But when Stevens returned to poetry in the 1930's, it was with the sense that poetry must be more than an affair of the heart; it must become an affair of the whole being and, therefore, an affair of the will. Responding to the land with something of the tenacity alluded to in the Ransom essay, Stevens came to see the imagination as "the will to change" (CP 397), "the will to perceive the innumerable accords" (OP 242) between the landscape and the self. The two premises in "The Comedian as the Letter C" were no longer seen as opposites, but rather parts of an unending dialectic: although "we live in a

place / That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves" (CP 383), we must "make of what we see, what we see clearly / And have seen, a place dependent on ourselves" (CP 401). Out of such a process, out of transforming "Oxidia, banal suburb" into "Olympia" (CP 182), out of founding Juda in New Haven and the heavenly city in Rome, Stevens uncovers contingent revelations of the self:

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 397-398)

At the heart of this belief that a transformation of place constitutes a revelation of self is the very difficult affirmation in Stevens that the imagined and the real are one. I have chosen to look at "Credences of Summer" precisely because, at first appearance, it seems to be denying this premise. Most readers feel, I think, as Helen Vendler has observed, that "No previous long poem . . . had ever placed a lyric speaker firmly in a landscape of the present moment."³ Yet, the very richness of the physical setting is deceiving. Even in Canto I where we find ourselves immersed in the fullness of a midsummer stasis, Stevens reminds us of the dependence of this scene on the activity of the mind: "It comes to this and the imagination's life" (CP 372). The poem demonstrates that reality, even one of the limits of reality as it presents itself to us in the Oley valley when the hay is baked through long days and piled in mows, is, ultimately, "an activity of the most august imagination" (OP 110). Perhaps the best gloss on the poem is contained in a remark made by Stevens to Hi Simons:

One of the approaches to fiction is by way of its opposite:
reality, the truth, the thing observed, the purity of the eye. The
more exquisite the thing seen, the more exquisite the thing
unseen. Eventually there is a state at which any approach
becomes the actual observation of the thing approached.
Nothing mystical is even for a moment intended.

(LWS 444)

In Canto II, Stevens tells us of the process that is necessary in order to discover the plenitude in the setting:

Let's see the very thing and nothing else.
Let's see it with the hottest fire of sight.
...
Look at it in its essential barrenness
And say this, this is the centre that I seek.
...

This is the barrenness
Of the fertile thing that can attain no more.
(CP 373)

This process, certainly an act of the whole being, becomes "The point of survey . . . Axis of everything" (CP 373) in the next canto. It is a process similar to the one described in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" where the "difficest rigor" is to catch from the image of what we see the "Irrational moment its unreasoning":

As when the sun comes rising, when the sea
Clears deeply, when the moon hangs on the wall

Of heaven-haven. These are not things transformed.
Yet we are shaken by them as if they were.
We reason about them with a later reason.
(CP 398-399)

Thus, in the next canto, although "the distant fails the clairvoyant eye" (CP 374), the near does not, and "the secondary senses of the ear / Swarm" (CP 374) with meanings beyond articulation, "Pure rhetoric of a language without words" (CP 374). That is, until we reason about it with a later reason, until we create a fiction of reality that is credible in the face of independent Reality. We recall from "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" that in Stevens reality is never naked: "A fictive covering / Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind" (CP 396). Although in making a place dependent on us, we must utilize a "False flick, false form," it may yet become "falseness close to kin" (CP 385). Reality and our "recent imagining of reality" (CP 465), if only for a moment, are identical.

In Canto VII, one of his favorite cantos and certainly the climax of "Credences of Summer," Stevens comes closest to announcing his aesthetic creed. He first dismisses the false poets, for, finding it "difficult to sing in face / Of the object" (CP 376), they sing unreal songs far in the woods.⁴ Significantly, these incapable poets have avoided themselves in avoiding the objects: "the singers had to avert themselves / Or else avert the object (CP 376).

But Stevens' belief, we recall from the Ransom essay, is to turn to the objects of the land with ferocity, to demand that they surrender, reveal, that in themselves which one loves, "so that one's cry of O Jerusalem becomes little by little a cry to something a little nearer and nearer until at last one cries out to a living name, a living place, a living thing . . ." (OP 260). With something of the violence contained in the sexual embrace, Stevens seizes the objects of his place in an intense act of the mind. Unlike the singers who, in avoiding themselves, have escaped a true understanding of themselves, Stevens discovers a centrality of self by having first possessed the object:

Three times the concentrated self, having possessed

The object, grips it in savage scrutiny,
Once to make captive, once to subjugate
Or yield to subjugation, once to proclaim

The meaning of the capture, this hard prize,
Fully made, fully apparent, fully found.
(CP 376)

In his essay, "The World as Meditation," a title itself indicative of the kind of change that has occurred in Stevens' sense of reality, Louis Martz relates these three steps to the threefold process of formal meditation:

It begins with the deliberate creation of a setting and the placing there of an actor, some aspect of the self; this is the famous composition of place recommended by the Jesuit exercises. This is followed by predominantly intellectual analysis of some crucial problem pertaining to that self; and it all ends in a highly emotional resolution where the projected self and the whole mind of the meditator come together in a spirit of devotion. This threefold process is related to the old division of the soul into memory, understanding, and will; the exercise of meditation integrates these faculties.⁵

Out of this act of the whole being, this act of fundamental life, that which is "fully found" is identical with that which is "fully made." "Real and unreal are two in one" (CP 485). The visible world, "the more than visible, the more / Than sharp, illustrious scene" succeeds the invisible in the true "stratagems / Of the spirit" (CP 376). For Stevens seeks

Nothing beyond reality. Within it,
Everything, the spirit's alchemicana
Included, the spirit that goes roundabout
And through included . . .
(CP 471)

He has discovered that a composing of place is the central act of the mind in a renewal of the spirit.

Although this moment of balance between the real and the imagined collapses ["A complex of emotions falls apart" (CP 377)], Stevens, in the last canto, reasons about this life in the imagination with a later reason.⁶ Believing that reality, even the extreme limit of reality in the fullness of midsummer, is ultimately a fiction ["Thou art not August unless I make thee so" (CP 251)], he celebrates in poetry that moment when summer (that which is "fully found") and the self (that which is "fully made") are one: "Free, for a moment . . . Complete in a completed scene" (CP 378).

NOTES

1. Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 158. Further references to this source will be cited in the text with the abbreviation *OP* and page number in parentheses. References to Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), to Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), and to *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, selected and ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), will be cited in the text with the abbreviations *CP*, *NA*, and *LWS*, respectively, and page number in parentheses. (continued)

2. Compare this with what Stevens says of Crispin in a letter to Ronald Lane Latimer on November 15, 1935:

In THE COMEDIAN AS THE LETTER C, Crispin was regarded as a "profitless philosopher." Life, for him, was not a straight course; it was picking his way in a haphazard manner through a mass of irrelevancies. Under such circumstances, life would mean nothing to him, however pleasant it might be. In THE IDEA OF ORDER AT KEY WEST life has ceased to be a matter of chance.
(LWS 293)

3. Helen Vendler, *On Extended Wings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 231.

4. In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," Stevens writes:

The imagination loses vitality as it ceases to adhere to what is real. When it adheres to the unreal and intensifies what is unreal, while its first effect may be extraordinary, that effect is the maximum effect that it will ever have.
(NA 6)

5. Louis Martz, *The Poem of the Mind: Essays on Poetry / English and American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 215.

6. In "Imagination as Value," Stevens writes: "The truth seems to be that we live in concepts of the imagination before the reason has established them. If this is true, then reason is simply the methodizer of the imagination" (NA 154).

A Mind of Winter

The year was filled with winter:
I saw women form angel wings of
 snow
shake them from their backs
and shiver for a wet day
while frostbit babies wailed
at the slightest sound in the
 junipers.
I saw men of ice
crawl through their barren lives
with snowballs in their arms
The blackbirds
held winter in their beaks.

And I was a pine tree
carrying the same old needles;
but I felt the thaw.
When I bent my ear to the snow
I heard the tapping of a frozen sun.

—Robin Cecil Hemley

Reviews

The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens: Phenomenological Parallels with Husserl and Heidegger. By Thomas J. Hines. Bucknell University Press, 1976. 298 pp. \$18.50.

I recall a class with R. P. Blackmur a long time ago in which Eliot was one subject for discussion. Some of us were weary of Eliot's religion and dismayed by his movement toward abstraction. We were beginning to resist his established reputation. One day I was pleased to show the teacher a recent double-barrelled attack by Karl Shapiro. Blackmur only said, "Wouldn't you hate Eliot, too, if you had to live in Nebraska?" When I drove him home on a couple of occasions, he would tell me what "Tom" said, and recalled the time that "Stevens" came out to Princeton and proceeded to lecture him for giving up writing poetry, for not taking risks and settling for criticism and teaching: "Stevens, of course, was staying at the Waldorf." Blackmur was about the first to take Stevens' language seriously—he gave the poetry a poet's attention—but he was reluctant to award him the highest honors. After I had finished my essay comparing Eliot and Stevens, I asked him whether I had convinced him of Stevens' superiority. He said, in his usual off-hand but final manner, "You know, Stevens didn't have a first-rate mind."

I have yet to understand how "first-rate mind" applies to the poetic act, but I do know that Stevens is keeping some impressive intellectual company these days. Lucky for Mr. Hines that Blackmur is kept quiet, for he would surely be suspicious of "Phenomenological Parallels with Husserl and Heidegger." On the other hand, Mr. Hines does not claim that Stevens was influenced by these philosophers, for he states at the outset that it is unlikely that Stevens even *read* them. Unconsciously Stevens appears to have begun to "simulate" the methods of both philosophers and to reveal "affinities" (one of Hines' favorite words) that are sometimes "surprising" and sometimes "curious." I am not particularly amazed that Stevens should put to use in his poems philosophical ideas that are a part of his time and culture, and earlier critics have noted other "affinities." However, Hines believes that when poetic-philosophical relationships were pointed out in the past, they were often left unexplored and not brought to bear on "whole poems." He hopes to demonstrate what earlier writers only asserted, while maintaining a distinction between "the philosopher's idea and the poet's use of these ideas in the poems." As long as we acknowledge that parallels never meet, we can profit from Hines' study.

In line with the current view that Stevens' later poems are the most valuable, Hines begins plotting the poet's development with *Ideas of Order*, and, as one would expect, claims that "Farewell to Florida" signals that the poet has rejected the "aesthetic inadequacy" of *Harmonium* and begun to employ a method that aims at creating an "aesthetic of the Poetry of Being." After outlining Husserl's method, Hines writes: "As Stevens accomplishes these steps of rejection (a process that is analogous to Husserl's original intuition), reduction (a process that is similar to Husserl's demand for perception without preconceptions) and decreation (which is similar to Husserl's demand for minimal level of interaction between perceiver and the object of perception), he proceeds toward an apprehension of reality that is similar to Husserl's goal of the essence of the thing itself." The first part of Hines' study employs Husserl to delineate the *approach* to the "Aesthetic of the Poetry of Being." For instance, "The Man with the Blue Guitar" directly deals with such "reduction" and "decreation," necessary before one can make room for Being. In a reading that offers few surprises, Hines reiterates the subject-object, imagination-reality oppositions, but he ends up asserting that both poles have been brought ("reduced"?) to an essential unity, that Stevens has rejected "the subject-object dualism." Hines differs from Roy Harvey Pearce who claims that "the poems may move toward one of two ends: toward celebrating the power of the subject, the mind that not only wills but makes its knowledge; or toward celebrating the givenness of

the object, perdurably out there." In opposing this position, Hines states his thesis succinctly (oddly enough, in a footnote): "As a description of the poems of *Ideas of Order*, *The Blue Guitar* and the early poems of *Parts of a World*, Pearce's notion is correct. However, as I will show, the nature of Stevens' poetry of Being will break down this conflict in the poems after this point. Pearce's claim is that the subject-object conflict dominates Stevens' poetry until the final poems of *The Rock*, a claim that I hope to show is wrong."

The last half of Hines' book deals with the "poetry of Being" that he finds realized in the later poems, particularly *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* and *The Rock*. And whereas Husserl characterized the approach to Being, Heidegger takes over as the philosopher who apprehends Being. Heidegger's rejection of an absolute, his acceptance of being-towards-Death, makes him singularly appropriate to the late Stevens, and, for Hines, *The Supreme Fiction* is the Poetry of Being. Hines' reading of *Notes* is consistent and thorough, but it sometimes seems uninspired, since he moves around the counters provided by earlier Stevens critics, sometimes using critics for support but more often citing them for their failure to see Stevens the way he see him, here and in other poems. Thus Hillis Miller is "at a loss for words" and Riddel "misreads" and "mistakenly sees" whereas Nassar "refuses to see"; Bloom "confuses Major Man with the Idea of Man" and Doggett must suffer both "confusion" and "failure." It is so clear that others have taught Hines how to read Stevens that one expects, if not affected humility, a little less overkill.

I believe that Hines is right to emphasize the moments of unity and fulfillment that appear more frequent in Stevens' later poems as well as the "pleasure" that whole perception can give us, even when we are dealing with only parts of a world.

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.

Hines accurately describes Stevens' "fiction" as "a fiction that has numerous endings and hence numerous fulfillments" within a present and acknowledges that the poet offers satisfactions that the philosopher denies. Few who have labored through *Being and Time* would likely use the word pleasure to describe the experience, and Hines indicates the special advantage of art: "Since the poet can conceive of the difference between temporal existence and temporal duration, he can create fictive durations that will be self-fulfilling and hence pleasurable. The crucial difference between Heidegger's concepts of Being and time and Stevens' aesthetic of Being and time is that Stevens can project and then fulfill his projection." It is not every day that the world arranges itself in a poem, as Stevens says, but Hines is probably correct in believing that it happens more often in the later work where opposites are truly, in Coleridge's word, "reconciled."

In his urge to counter Stevens' characteristic vacillation between mind and world and to make the poet a totally unified being, Hines feels compelled to define, hence fix, some metaphors that many readers are willing to accept as ambiguous. In his discussion of *The Rock*, for example, he states: "What the rock represents 'is the truth!'" here quoting from an earlier appearance of the image in *Credences of Summer*: "The rock cannot be broken. It is the truth." But it seems to me that Stevens is never as certain as is his critic. As he wrote in "On the Road Home," "There is no such thing as the truth," only a series of possible truths, a truth. The rock may have "represented the completed experience of fulfilled Being" in *Credences of Summer*, but can we be certain of what the rock represents later on? Even Bloom enjoys more negative capability than Hines. Bloom asks a question: "Shall we say of Stevens' rock that at last it is both self and other, me and not-me, mind and sky, imagination and reality?" After considering this "possibility" he goes on: "As we begin reading

section II, *The Poem as Icon*, we can say, provisionally, that the rock is the given, the most barren of all first ideas, life as it is . . ." Bloom's question and his "provisionally" would be welcome in Mr. Hines' essay.

Hines' tendency to be dogmatic is perhaps a consequence of his desire to oppose readers like Pearce who see Stevens' final poems as more "notes" for a fiction never to be completed. Clearly, Hines is aware that metaphor can be ambiguous and evasive, that it "both reveals and evades the nature of the experience of Being." In an instructive comparison of Stevens' and Heidegger's attitudes toward language, Hines acknowledges the difficulty of Being and reiterates the artist's difficulty in finding words to declare Being: "Metaphor both reveals and falsifies the poet's experience of Being." But, of course, to have studied Stevens' struggle with metaphor would have led Hines away from his phenomenological parallels. The poem is the leaves, the icon, and the man, but these exist to cure the rock. To say that "The Rock is Being" may be true, but to say (again with Bloom) that "A cure of the rock is a cure of one's own reductiveness" is also true.

The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens is an intelligent book and its author unquestionably shows that he has grounded himself in the philosophical ideas and methods of Husserl and Heidegger. Moreover, he has read Stevens with considerable care and at no time does he subordinate the poetry to the philosophy. His allegiance is clear: "it is finally the poetry and not the philosophy that expresses the full sense of Being as being fully human." Husserl and Heidegger are in the end props, and as Emily Dickinson says:

The Props assist the House
Until the house is built
And then the Props withdraw
And adequate, erect,
The House support itself . . .

On the other hand, the poet's house is always being built and I, for one, am somewhat uneasy when Hines speaks of "the completed experience of fulfilled Being." Perhaps because I am still resisting the "made-up" mind that I years ago thought was Eliot's "first-rate mind," I still cherish Stevens' *seeming* to be, his incomplete becoming:

That which is always beginning because it is part
Of that which is always beginning, over and over.

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The Limits of Imagination: Wordsworth, Yeats, and Stevens. By Helen Regueiro
Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976. 222pp. \$10.00.

Helen Regueiro's *The Limits of Imagination* belongs to a series of recent books aligning modern with romantic poets. Such an enterprise can engage a variety of critics: one might be scholarly and historical, establishing what the later poets thought of their predecessors and how they used them in their own verse; another might explore the problem of literary influence; or a third might relate the literary tradition to its ongoing social context. Ms. Regueiro has chosen to link her three poets more philosophically, in terms of a dialectic between subject and object. This dialectic ultimately calls into question the adequacy of poetry to transcend imagination's self-consciousness and achieve its own avowed ends. Regueiro sees the process as tripartite for each poet. "I have chosen three major poets whose work is grounded in the dialectical relationship of imagination and reality and whose imagination is engaged in a struggle with itself," she writes. "Through them I have

traced the poet's attempt to balance imagination and reality, his withdrawal and enclosure in self-consciousness, and his final return to a temporal and natural reality as the only realm where the imagination may continue to exist." (p. 10) Regueiro successfully applies her thesis to all three poets while remaining admirably sensitive to their differences. The question of the new, in addition to the true, in her results is more complex.

The approach adds least to our knowledge of Wordsworth. Ms. Regueiro argues correctly that Wordsworth seeks to balance imagination and nature, and that he sometimes resists both the thrust of autonomous imagination and the recognition of imagination's linkage to self-consciousness. But she sticks closely to the most-discussed chestnuts of the Wordsworth canon and to the conclusions of her favorite Wordsworth critic, Geoffrey Hartman. We emerge with little genuinely new insight into Wordsworth. In places, too, Regueiro's method reveals its defects as well as its virtues. Her relentless focus on philosophic issues and on the poem's struggle against itself leads her into a slightly absurd gloss on the graceful Lucy lyrics: "We have thus in the Lucy poems a circular structure not unlike that of Dante's *Comedy* or Hegel's *Phenomenology*, one in which the narrative elements of the beginning presume the knowledge acquired at the end." (p. 49) The grandiose comparison works to vitiate rather than validate the interesting discussion of structure in Wordsworth's texts. Similarly, Ms. Regueiro's graceful command of Continental literature can degenerate occasionally into pointless and unexplained asides, as when she injects into a discussion of the protagonist of "The Solitary Reaper" the passing observation that "unlike the protagonist of Muller's 'Der Lindenbaum,' he never feels the temptation to linger." (p. 86) The comparison distracts rather than defines.

The argument takes an interesting turn with Yeats, whom Regueiro sees as moving from a dialectic between imagination and nature to one between the imaginative act and the imaginative creation. This insight leads to a provocative if at times murky discussion of the Byzantium poems and to a useful contrast of "Lapis Lazuli" to "Ode on a Grecian Urn." The comparison of "The Wild Swans at Coole" to "Tintern Abbey," however, would have been improved by considering the original as well as final order of the stanzas. And in some places the interpretations seem strained, as in the tortured gloss on Odysseus and Priam in "The Sorrow of Love." Similarly, the phrase "Whatever is begotten, born, and dies" in "Sailing to Byzantium" refers primarily to the creature caught in time and not to "an endlessly recurring pattern that cannot help its own recurrence"—the pattern is the subject of the song of the golden bird at the end of the poem, not the natural ones at its beginning.

Regueiro's approach works best for Stevens, whom she correctly sees as recognizing earlier in his career than the others that for all the joys of imagination the poet must ultimately forsake imaginative structures for the primacy of reality. In an apt phrase she contends that "Stevens comes to realize that the imagination transforms and destroys the real, leaving in its place painted strawberries and constructed pineapples." (p. 11) Through readings not only of the most famous poems but also of some more rarely discussed, she sustains her contention that Stevens seeks to decreate the intentional structures of imagination and to assert the validity of the particular object or sense. The interpretation of "The House Was Quiet, and the World Was Calm" deserves particular mention, as does the thoughtful discussion of "Domination of Black" (although its premise that the domination of black represents the domination of the conscious image remains problematic). Regueiro seems to me less successful with the longer than with the shorter poems, perhaps because one of her numerous and excellent aperçus applies as much to criticism of Stevens as to poetry by him:

But the problem with most of Stevens' longer poems is that they theorize about themselves without providing an enactment of their project. The 'there'

becomes a 'here' through an affirmation that the poem does not prepare and cannot sustain. The shorter poems are more successful because they can more easily turn against themselves and become willful deceptions. (p. 201)

That remark, too, points to some of the difficulties with the controversial school of criticism to which this book belongs, the circle of Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, and Paul de Man. Although Regueiro does distinguish herself from her mentors by retaining "the categories of imagination and reality as valid critical terms" rather than viewing "the relationships posited by the poem as existing within the poem itself" (p. 13), her work otherwise intertwines itself with theirs. This dependence ultimately limits her interesting argument by cutting it off from the results of other critical and scholarly inquiry. Indeed, with one lone exception the individual chapters on Wordsworth, Yeats, and Stevens cite no works on the three poets other than those by the faculty at Yale University. The book confirms one's sense of its narrow view of literary scholarship by stating in a theoretical preface: "As early as 1960 [sic], in his *Coleridge on Imagination*, I. A. Richards suggested that 'the notion of reality derives from comparison between images, and to apply it as between images and things that are not images is an illegitimate extension which makes nonsense of it.'" (p. 13) The remark startles not because 1960 was not so long ago, but because Richards first included it in the original 1934 edition of his famous book, which has had a rich subsequent impact on literary studies. Yet if *The Limits of Imagination* on occasion sounds too much like an ordinary evening in New Haven, it does help us to appreciate better the acts of mind upon which nineteenth and twentieth century poetry depend.

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Symbolism: The Manichean Vision. By Daniel J. Schneider. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975. 235 pp. \$10.95.

Daniel Schneider's book has the merit of a good deal of fine "practical" criticism; it has the weakness of a good deal of dubious "theoretical" criticism. The saving grace with respect to this latter is that Schneider admits over and over again to an uneasiness about the limitations of many of his theoretical assertions. These assertions exhibit a desire to assimilate and fuse various critical positions from the fifties to the present. The result is an unconvincing eclecticism.

His aim is sound, if perhaps over-ambitious:

"... how exactly does the imagination deploy its symbols when it seeks to apprehend life under the aspect of "the ambiguities"? What forms or structures are needed adequately to present the Manichean vision? For our final concern is practical criticism, and we would account for the inclusion and the mode of deployment of every detail in the work of art; we would trace every symbol to its source in the total structure of the work, the concrete whole with which all generalizations about literary symbolism must begin." (p.11)

So long as Schneider stays with the "concrete whole," the unique work of the individual artist, he articulates beautifully the impact of the "ambiguities" of life upon that artist's imagination, or "vision." It is when the critic begins to speak of "the" imagination and how "its" symbols present "the" vision that the book slips into the morass, the banalities, of discussions of the Collective Unconscious, its archetypal symbols and schema.

The term "Manichean" is, for all its recent popularity, unfortunate. Murray Krieger used it extensively in *The Tragic Vision* (1960, a book to which Schneider is far more indebted than he acknowledges) with all sorts of proper qualification, given its historical context. It comes to mean in Schneider simply the sense of life as a

hopeless mixture of "hateful contraries," of tragic antinomies. This position is better called tragic dualism. The adjustments one might make to such a vision are obvious: despair, or existential courage in its face, or aesthetic consolation in various illusions. There are of course other "non-tragic" positions one might take towards the contraries, the ambiguities of life. One might postulate a Platonic or Christian or other Transcendence of this world in another. Or one might postulate that the contraries are not hateful, but blessed, that the evil in this world is somehow responsible for the good, and worthy of equal worship. This latter is the position that William Wimsatt felt ought properly to be called manichean:

"The idea of harmony in spite of conflict, or simple reconciliation of apparent or superficial conflict, is a staple Greek and Roman, Medieval and Renaissance, idea. The idea of harmony, or at least of some desirable wholeness or sanity or salvation, only because of or through some kind of strife of contraries may not at first sound much different, but the difference between these ideas is actually profound . . . A certain obscurity in Blake's philosophy about . . . the difference between what it is to understand and face the fires of strife and what it is to live for and rejoice only in them may go far to account for the corruption of a certain amount of his poetry."

W.K. Wimsatt,
Hateful Contraries (1965, pp. 21, 22)

I go on at length about the term because Schneider's choice of great artists to handle, Conrad, James, Woolf, and Stevens, are all dualists of the tragic, not the manichean or "exultant," sort. When Schneider attempts to treat of true exultant dualists like Blake or Lawrence, he exhibits both discomfort and imprecision. One wonders incidentally how Schneider could avoid Wimsatt's book (and the Krieger-Wimsatt dialogue of the '60's, as in Krieger's *The Play and Place of Criticism*, 1967, ch. 14) since the celebrated critic takes on the twin topics of manicheanism and archetypal symbolism which are blazoned in the title of Schneider's study.

It is indeed in the area of archetypal symbology, that bailiwick of Northrop Frye, that Schneider has his worst moments. After some excellent analyses of some of Joseph Conrad's major novels, attitudes, and "symbols" (i.e. images that take on a contextual richness), the compulsion for converting resemblances into identities leads Schneider to this posture:

"And because he does not rule out the ideal in life, but sees it as wedded to the material, his symbolism is hardly different in any significant respects from that of Wallace Stevens . . . The color-symbolism of the two writers is also virtually identical, as is the symbolism of heights and depressions, spirituality and animality." (pp. 60, 61)

Such talk brings Schneider to further excesses, to amalgams such as "the ice-cream-like flux" (p. 155) and "the peacock-shriek, 'The horror! The horror!'" (p. 156). And worse: as when the linkage of but two authors is not sufficient to demonstrate a common language of symbols in the Collective Unconscious:

"The workings of James' imagination, as he develops the symbolism and structure of *The Portrait* are remarkably similar to those of other imaginations that have focused on the nature-art opposition: to Hawthorne's, as we have noted, in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Marble Faun*; to Wallace Stevens' in virtually all of his poetry; to Joseph Conrad's in half a dozen novels; to Thomas Mann's in *Tonio Kroger*, *Death in Venice*, and *Doctor Faustus*; to Emily Bronte's in *Wuthering Heights*. In all of these works—and in dozens more than might be named—nature is represented as wild, unrestrained, free; art, or the products of artifice, including social institutions, conventions, forms—civilization itself—

is contained, limited, ordered, restrained . . . Once the symbolizing imagination goes to work on equations such as these, the proliferations run in surprisingly similar channels." (pp. 75, 76)

In answer to which I can only return to Wimsatt on Frye:

"In his moments of most nearly pure archetypal abstraction, Frye's types are in a sense true patterns. But in that sense they are also truistic, simplistic, and uninteresting. More or less universally valid patterns of imagery and shapes of stories can of course be discerned in the canon of the world's literature. Fictional stories, it is true, are all about what we wish to have or to be and what we wish not to have or not to be, what we like and what we don't like. Love and marriage and banquets and dances and springtime and wheat and fruit and wine are good. Hate and strife and downfall and death, disease, blight and poison, are bad . . . If we rummage out all the ideas of the desirable and undesirable we can think of, they fall inevitably under the heads of the supernatural, the human, the animal, vegetable, and mineral."

"Northrop Frye: Criticism as Myth" *English Institute Essays*, 1965, reprinted in Wimsatt's *Day of the Leopards* (1976) pp. 86-87

And yet Schneider is often and appealingly his own antagonist. He spends pages on the limitations of Frye's archetypal images, patterns and categories, on the critical overemphasis of the unconscious at the expense of conscious artistry, on the limitations of symbol analysis in individual works and in the canon of one artist, and, of course, in the comparisons of the symbolic schema of several artists. He has, more importantly, consistently fine passages on individual artists and works, on Melville and his sense of "the Ambiguities," on Conrad and his sense of the duality of the "Dream and the Knitting Machine," on James' of the "Terrible Mixture of Things," on Woolf's of "Orts, Scraps, Fragments," on Stevens' of "A War That Never Ends." It seems to me then that Schneider is basically a talented "new critic" with his fine sensibilities often skewed by a desire to fuse, blend, harmonize, homogenize disparate critical systems.

The long Stevens essay is intended to be the capstone to the book and its theories, yet its effect on this reader and, it seems, on Schneider himself is demonstrated in the last chapter's honest summary assessment of the limitations of the book's methodology of linkages. Schneider is a good close analyst of the substance and tone of Stevens' images—this is a vineyard in which I have also worked—and his detailed analyses document a Stevens which I can only agree is the true Stevens: "The skepticism is boundless; but the fictionalizing, the translation of feeling into fictions, is endless too" (p. 159). And Schneider's description of the different manner in the weaving of his images in the early and the late poetry seems just right:

"In the early poetry, the symbols proliferate in relatively unmixed series or blocks, one block of symbols calling forth an antithetical block. It was not until some twenty years after *Harmonium's* publication that Stevens was able to write the meditative lyric in which the circulations between reality and the imagination are incessant and appear in virtually every line." (p. 191)

Schneider spends a good deal of time—to the reader's profit—in documenting this assertion with a close analysis of such incessant oscillations in "The Auroras of Autumn." One fears however as one reads that *Harmonium* is to be downgraded as a consequence:

"Symbolic Systems grow by accretion, and often very slowly, over several decades. The symbolist's first transmutations of images and metaphors into symbols are often hesitant, stiff, self-conscious. The writer, having discovered

a few expressive symbols, is not yet aware of the possibilities of his symbolism; the manifold extensions, the interlacings and crossbreedings, are yet to occur." (p. 204)

And yet the downgrading does not occur; rather Schneider launches into a bracing discussion of the "dangers in the working out of a symbolism with such single-minded persistence" (p. 205). As, for instance:

"The method of piling up appositives is thus dangerous because it invites mechanical repetition of the imagery.

Closely related to the difficulties caused by the use of the rhetoric of appositives is the weakness we may describe as 'illustrating'—instead of presenting—a subject matter." (p. 209)

And Schneider concludes with the healthy idea that "perhaps, then, it is a mistake to speak of symbols good in themselves or *intrinsically* powerful" (p. 211).

Why then was it necessary for Schneider earlier to vaporize his critical acuity in a search for a philosopher's stone:

"Thus to study this [Stevens'] great system is to trace the adventures of an intelligence that, in its patience and discipline, was able to create a model for all other symbolists to envy and to draw upon in the great effort to search out the reality of the human condition in this universe." (p. 160)

Stevens is a skeptical tragicomedian, as may be Henry James, but the comparisons between the "image-systems" of the two are not much more effective than the similar comparisons mentioned earlier between Stevens and the tragedian Conrad. The picture of James, Conrad, Mann, Bronte, or any other major "symbolist" "envying" or even using Stevens' system of images exhibits the thinness of the comparative approach. Schneider at his best admits this:

"The great danger for the symbolist—as Stevens' poetry illustrates, and as we find also in some of the work of Conrad, James and Woolf—is that the symbolic scheme, in its proliferation, may become so importunate, so insistently pervasive, that the symbols tend to drive out the sense of life itself . . ."

"The symbols of *Everyman*, I would suggest, are perfect—for *Everyman*. They would not be perfect for the fiction of Joseph Conrad or Henry James." (pp. 206, 212)

This is admirable in its willingness to undermine one's theories when one's theories come close to undermining one's critical sensibilities, one's sense of the uniqueness of an artist's "felt life," his "vision."

And in one final renunciation of theory, Schneider in his last chapter throws over the metaphysical implications of the aesthetic of symbol archetypes:

"These minds, determined to see life steadily and whole, were able to integrate thousands of unassimilated facts in symbolic patterns . . .

At the same time they were too intelligent to allow a single pattern to masquerade as the whole truth." (p. 215)

Certainly this is true of Stevens, Conrad, James and Woolf, but it has not been true of the exultant dualists, the archetypalists, the manicheans of Wimsatt's sense of the term. Schneider is at times in his book flirting with the sort of slippery rhetoric typical of exultant dualism:

"The synthesis, the admixture, the fusion is the great thing . . . He [James] is able, at last, to write the novel in which virtually every sentence reveals the strange admixture in life. Religious imagery fuses beautifully with imagery of rapacity, and the result is a novel of such rare balance that critics are still trying to decide whether Fleda Vetch is a beautiful "free spirit" or a pathetic and self-deluded slave of materialism." (pp. 114-115)

One may question whether James' late "total ambiguity" is a fit aesthetic state for the reader—Wimsatt would say no, Sallie Sears would say yes—but one *must* point out that synthesis, admixture, and fusion are three different things. To present the admixture of things dramatically is legitimate; to pretend that it constitutes a fusion, a synthesis, a Unity, is not. Schneider praises Virginia Woolf for her ability to "blend sympathy and irony, to balance positive and negative responses to life" (p. 152). Blending and balancing is all that the author can do with the hateful contraries, the terrible admixture of things, if such is his tragic vision. Schneider's language at times pretends to a synthesis of opposing aesthetics and a fusion of tragic and non-tragic metaphysics; most often his language is more careful than that.

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News and Comments

Wallace Stevens' name seems to occur frequently in many non-literary and non-poetic areas.

Everybody seems to know this except the booksellers. I have been conducting an entirely personal, informal and unofficial survey of the bookshops of Washington, D.C., and its surrounding suburbs. Periodically I inquire if one of the Stevens compilations which are listed in *Paperback Books in Print* is in stock; invariably not a single one is. It is *always* on order. There is a paradox here which I can not understand. If Stevens sells out as soon as he reaches the shelves, why is a continuous supply not maintained? The booksellers blame the publishers for poor distribution service; the publishers blame the booksellers for poor ordering procedures. We all suffer.

A quotation from Stevens, along with others, concludes Susan Sontag's recently published *On Photography* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977). The quotation from Stevens: "Most modern reproducers of life, even including the camera, really repudiate it. We gulp down evil, choke at good."

William S. Wilson's introduction to "Correspondence," an exhibition of the letters of Ray Johnson at the North Carolina Museum of Art, October 31 to December 5, 1976, begins and ends with reference to Wallace Stevens. Ray Johnson is a collagist, working and living in New York. Mr. Wilson's title is "Ray Johnson, The Comedian as the Letter"; his article ends with a quote from the Carolina section of "The Comedian as the Letter C."

"Private Lives," John Leonard's column of March 1, 1978, in *The New York Times*, is based on Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning." In addition to quoting and paraphrasing the poem, Mr. Leonard says: "The poem ["Sunday Morning"] was everybody's favorite poem back in the Pleistocene epoch when I was a college freshman and sincere."

Patricia Beer, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement* of February 10, 1978, calls our time the Age of Stevens. Her comments are in the short review, "Gaudy Nights," the topic of which is *Exploration*, a theatre piece based on a compilation of Stevens' words and staged in London earlier this year. I quote briefly from Patricia Beer's review: ". . . it is a measure of its success that in just over an hour it gives a very fair idea of his greatness . . . and by means of its general high spirits and intelligence resolves several of the puzzles . . . It includes some straight biographical information and an outline of Stevens' theories of poetry as well as nine of the poems themselves; mostly the better known ones . . . The programme would be an excellent introduction for newcomers to Stevens' work but caters, too, for buffs, aficionados and all those who believe in the Age of Stevens. Such often quoted lines as 'Looking for what was, where it used to be' and 'It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay' come out quite fresh. Some of the odder adjectives are spoken reflectively, as though their oddness was being savoured . . ."

David Hockney's *The Blue Guitar*, a suite of twenty etchings based on Stevens' poem, which was published by The Petersburg Press, has been on view at the Margo Leavin Gallery in Los Angeles, California, and at the Lunn Gallery/Graphics International Inc. in Washington, D.C. The portfolio of etchings has been reproduced and published in book form; it is for sale by The Petersburg Press for \$20.00.

A sampling of prices asked, and presumably obtained, for books by Wallace Stevens by rare and antiquarian booksellers in recent months follows: *The Man with the Blue Guitar including Ideas of Order* (Knopf, 1952)—\$75.00—Heritage Book Shop; *Parts of World* (Knopf, 1942)—\$160.00—Zeitlin & Ver Brugge; *Transport to Summer* (Knopf, 1947)—\$75.00—Joseph the Provider; *Three Academic Pieces* (Knopf, 1947)—One of 52, signed—\$900.00—Joseph the Provider; *Three Academic Pieces* (Knopf, 1947)—\$1500.00—William Young and Co., Catalog 620, Item 405: "This is copy number III of the 92 numbered copy special issue with initials handcolored in yellow . . . This copy which is unbound also contains an extra leaf front and back . . . Sheets unopened and in mint condition. The only trial binding of a Stevens' book that we have ever seen." [sic]; *The Necessary Angel* (Knopf, 1951)—\$75.00—Joseph the Provider; *The Necessary Angel* (Knopf, 1951)—\$100.00—Maurice F. Neville, *Selected Poems* (Fortune Press, 1952)—\$90.00—Joseph the Provider; *Selected Poems* (Faber and Faber, 1953)—\$100.00—William Pieper; *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* (Cummington Press, 1942)—One of 190 copies—\$350.00—William Young and Co.; *The Collected Poems* (Knopf, 1954)—\$125.00—Maurice F. Neville; *Harmonium* (Knopf, 1923)—first binding, no dust jacket, inscribed by Justin O'Brien—\$245.00—Serendipity Books; *Harmonium* (Knopf, 1923)—third binding, no dust jacket, bookplate—\$125.00—Serendipity Books; *Ideas of Order* (Knopf, 1936)—first binding, dust jacket, review copy—\$200.00—Serendipity Books; *Ideas of Order* (Knopf, 1936)—second binding, dust jacket—\$200.00—Serendipity Books; *Transport to Summer* (Knopf, 1947)—fine in dust jacket, with blue-green spine label—\$125.00—Serendipity Books; *A Primitive Like an Orb* (Gotham Book Mart, 1948)—edges a little faded, orange wrappers—\$55.00—Serendipity Books; *Mattino Domenicale ed Altre Poesie* (Einaudi, 1954)—\$85.00—Serendipity Books; *Poetry*, July 1916, containing "Three Travellers Watch a Sunrise"—William Young and Co.; *Gromaire*, Exhibition of Paintings, 1949, at the Louis Carre Gallery, N.Y.—Edelstein B43—\$55.00—William Pieper; *Transactions of The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, December 1949, containing "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"—signed by Stevens on the titlepage—\$250.00.

—J.M.Edelstein

Communications

Bloomusalem, Conn.

Poetic and Human Anxieties in the Early Poetry of Wallace Stevens

Preface

For a time I have been narrowly concerned with some poems of *Harmonium* and, more recently, with the transition to *Ideas of Order*, the span studied so well in A. Walton Litz's *Introspective Voyager* (1972). Well before I saw Harold Bloom's *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of our Climate* (1977), I was expecting to get help from it with at least one of the main problems of this period: after publication of *Harmonium* (Oct. 18, 1923), why did Stevens not write very much poetry, if any at all, for five or more years? Unfortunately, Bloom does not apply his theories of poetic anxiety, strong and weak poets, etc. to explain this "silence." Perhaps with the quantity and extraordinary quality of Stevens' lifetime work, five years off need not weigh heavily in the scales. If he had gone into the U.S. Army instead of deeper into the legal ranks of the insurance business, I would not question a period of no writing. Also, Holly Stevens tells us that in addition to giving more time to securing his livelihood, he had time to garden, to listen to the radio, and to putter around. Pressured by romantic notions about writers, e.g., Kafka's "The Hunger-Artist," romantic notions perhaps inappropriate to Stevens, I thought there should be something in place of the poems, some work like Paul Valéry's *Cahiers*, large tomes written during the twenty years of his "silence" (1892-1912). But there seems to be no writing for these years, and it seems important to get at some of the reasons for this. I ask "why did Stevens stop?" with the hope that answers will help me to apprehend more directly and, perhaps, even understand the inner workings of those important poetic changes that occurred in the transition from *Harmonium* to *Ideas of Order*.

I: Mothers and Daughters

Is there a clue in the poems as to why Stevens stopped writing? Bloom notes a melancholy, even morbid quality, in some of the poems written not long before his "silence," e.g., "The Man Whose Pharynx was Bad," "The Snow Man," and "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" (all of 1921). "The reader who masters the interrelationships of these three brief texts . . . has reached the center of Stevens' poetic and human anxieties and of his resources for meeting these anxieties. I will read the three poems as though they formed one larger, dialectical lyric when run together, akin to Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode* and Wordsworth's *Intimation*, ode. The *Pharynx* poem states the crisis of poetic vision . . . ; *The Snow Man* meets the crisis . . . ; exuberantly, the great hymn of Hoon . . . reimagines the First Idea . . ." (WS, 50). Bloom's analysis of the three poems approaches the questions of poetry as problems entirely poetic, tasks confronting Stevens' imagination. But his discussion of this inner crisis or a sequence of crises does not, as I see it, generate an explanation for Stevens' overt action of "silence." I believe Bloom missed an interesting opportunity to use his categories and methods to demonstrate the integration of the "poetic and human," of visible products and covert motivations.

Biography may assist. My friend, Michael Stegman, who is writing a dissertation on Stevens and William Carlos Williams, at Stony Brook, suggested that an important influence on the mood of these poems may have been the death of Stevens' sister, Catharine, who died in France, on May 21, 1919. On May 27, writing from Milwaukee to his wife, Elsie Viola Moll Stevens, Stevens said, "I am completely done up by the news of Catharine's death. I thought of nothing else on the way out. How horrible it is to think of the poor child fatally ill in a military hospital in an out-of-the-way place in a foreign country, probably perfectly aware of her helplessness

and isolation!" (L, 212-3) Some of the meanings of the news of his sister's death may be felt in the associations Stevens makes in his next letter to his wife. On May 29, 1919, he wrote, "What a shocking and horrible outcome of an effort on Catharine's part to do her share, unselfishly and devotedly! It is hard to think that she is in her grave. In many ways, she was extremely like my mother; so that the loss of her ends that aspect of life [Stevens' mother had died July 16, 1912]. I am more like my mother than my father . . ." (L, 213-4)

Of course, it is difficult for me to assess the significance of this terrible event, but it alone, quite plausibly, may be seen as sufficient to increase heavily the morbid concerns of these poems.

One tentative answer to our question, then, is that the groundwork for Stevens' decision to not write poetry after 1923 may have been prepared four years (1919: Catharine's death) and two years (1921: writing the three poems) before the publication of *Harmonium*.

In the *Letters* (1966), Holly Stevens suggests that Stevens did not write poetry because the force of circumstances was too strong. "Discouraged by the reception of his book, he seems to have spent these years on interests other than poetry. . . . And there were other distractions for Stevens. From 1924, when his first and only child was born, shortly before his forty-fifth birthday, until 1932, Stevens and his wife lived in a two-family house on Farmington Avenue in West Hartford. As the main thoroughfare running westward from Hartford to Farmington, Conn., and the countryside beyond, traffic was continually heavy and noisy with automobiles, trucks, and trollies." " . . . apparently, it was not a time or an atmosphere conducive to creativity. His energy, in this period between the ages of forty-four and fifty-two, went largely into his work at the insurance company." (L, 242) Clear basis for Holly Stevens' remarks is found in the explanations Stevens gave in his letters. There is no special reason to quarrel with this view, especially when we look ahead to Stevens' letters at his return to poetry and find, years later, his reasons and tone consistent with the earlier statements. It appears that he did not regard his silence or the absence of any writing on the topics of poetry as signs of a massive crisis of the imagination. Bloom, I should note here, who finds crises in every Romantic's every written word, is really unhelpful with this one—except to provide a label, that Stevens was severely self-repressive, "with Sublime repressiveness." (WS, 14) Holly Stevens' explanation that the seeping in of everyday trivia, and not an ocean, "blotched out" Stevens' poetic imagination fits well into Stevens' poetic theories and practices regarding the relations of the ordinary and the poetic; however, as an explanation for his not writing for five years, it seems inadequate. We can point out for a counter-argument passages in Stevens' earliest letters revealing his strong poet's motivation, his publications when in college, and his years of writing and serious reading before his first publications in *Trend* and *Poetry*; there are signs everywhere of his powerful ambition to make poems and to be recognized as a poet. The noise on Farmington Avenue could easily have been a spur to greater concentration and productivity. I would suggest the "silence" was the result of a calculated decision, with neither "Sublime repressiveness" nor truck and trolley traffic noise figuring importantly.

Published eleven years after the *Letters*, Holly Stevens' *Souvenirs and Prophecies* (1977) provides some information that might be important to my question: "While I was growing up my mother did not read my father's poems, and seemed to dislike the fact that his books were published. Questioning her about this after my father's death, she told me that he had published 'her poems'; that he had made public what was, in her mind, very private. At the time I did not understand what she meant but, with the discovery that when he first began publishing in 1914, he had used some of the poems in the books he made for her birthdays, her logic seems clear, her resentment comprehensible." (SP 227) Earlier in the book, Holly Stevens had written, "All her life, at least during the time I knew her, she suffered from a persecution complex which undoubtedly originated during her childhood, and which I was unable to

understand for a long time. . . . We did not get on well together until after my father's death. Part of his legacy to me was to carry on the devotion he had for her; and as I began to understand, I also 'grew up.'" (SP, 137) I believe that Stevens' wife's deep agitation was an important factor in his decision to not write poetry in these years. We know that later, when he returned to poetry, he always kept his literary friends at a great distance from his family. It was his devotion, his loyalty, even his sense of decorum supported by his abilities of self-repression, or a better word—self-control, that led to his not engaging anywhere in poetry.

Is there something in Stevens' sense of poetry to match his responsiveness to his wife's interests? Let us turn to Bloom's analysis of the problem of a crisis to learn what the history of poetry—Stevens' poetic ambitions, precursors and analogues—can provide. Bloom writes:

Emerson . . . experienced two major intellectual crises, the first culminating in 1832, when he was twenty-nine, and the second a decade later, culminating in his fortieth year. Whitman also can be said to have had two major spiritual and poetic crises, the first ensuing in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, when the poet was thirty-six; the second in the winter of 1859-60, when he was forty, and resulting in the great poems added to the third edition. . . . I do not find Wallace Stevens ever underwent an intense crisis of an intellectual variety, but his work is most certainly in the Romantic traditions—British and American—of the crisis-poem. To explain such judgment, I resort to the theory of poetic crossing. . . .

For Stevens, what I will call the crisis of Crossing of Election took place in 1915, when his first strong poems were written. The Crossing of Solipsism lasted a long time in him, but its crux was in 1921-22, and it was not resolved until 1934-36. (WS, 2)

Bloom's argument in this passage is extraordinary: Stevens never underwent an intense crisis—yet it lasted, the crisis or Crossing of Solipsism, for at least twelve years! Furthermore, it is because Romantic poetry must have a crisis sequence that Stevens' poetry must give evidence of such. This is a simplistic application of holistic perspective; it is a very sloppy move from *Kulturgeist* to the individual poem. That Stevens did not write poetry for five years and suffered a crisis of Solipsism for twelve does not hold Bloom's attention for very long and his discussion is, in my view, startlingly brief. Even if the argument for the congruence of Emerson's, and Whitman's, and Stevens' (non-existent) crises that follows this sort of tight-rope dancing two feet off the ground were powerful in some areas, it would still remain extremely vulnerable, for it does not confront the problems of "talking about what never happened."

In his move from the dialectic of "poetic and human" to the dialectic of poems with each other and within poetic tradition, Bloom imposes a hypothetical crisis in order to understand the poems. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in shifting from biography to a critical system in order to interpret literature, but if it is done without common sense, concern for critical methods, or theory, the criticism may obscure rather than illumine the poems studied. One result is that too much time must be spent just to understand Bloom's rhetoric of rhetoric. I do find much to quarrel with in Bloom's analytic methods; yet, more importantly, his selections and collocations of seemingly disparate materials and his idiosyncratic terminology do frequently prove to be very useful.

"What is gained by this location and naming of the crossings? How does it aid the interpretation of *Out of the Cradle* to know its negative moments in this way, and what difference will any interpretation of the poem make to a reading of Wallace Stevens? The answer to both questions is, again, 'stance.' Whitman makes of his rhetorical disjunctiveness a metaleptic stance, and Stevens, though with Sublime repressiveness, inherits Whitman's stance. Though he insisted he did not read Whitman, and resented Whitman's persona as the tramp-poet, Stevens is hardly to

be believed in his insistences.” (WS, 14) Bloom goes on to detail the features of Whitman that troubled Stevens. Then using Thomas Walsh’s *Concordance to the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (1963), he lists the many times echoes of an individual Whitman word may be found and may be described as still “haunting” Stevens. (By the way, I think Bloom uses the Walsh *Concordance* every time he presents an inventory of Stevens’ uses of a word, which he does frequently, but nowhere does he mention his debt to it as a tool; that is not the only case of such omissions, and I think some of the other workers in the vineyard have cause for just complaint.) Indeed, Whitman can and should be used here to signify one of the major “problems” or crises in Stevens’ career. (I have edited the following very dense passage in order to make Bloom’s difficult prose a little easier to grasp out of context:) “Night, sleep, death, the ocean, the mother; this Whitmanian composite trope of Power . . . because the strongest of Stevens’ reimaginings of that characteristic reduction he learned to call the First Idea . . . or simply the condition of his own soul, in the Whitmanian sense of ‘soul’ as unalterable character. *Out of the Cradle* . . . haunted Stevens because of its vision of solitude as the scene of instruction, its sense of lovelessness redressed by the coming of poetry, by its identification of the muse with a maternal night and the ocean of reality.” (WS, 14) While some of these views may be found in interpretations by other Stevens’ critics, this particular combination is Bloom’s, I think, and it is very useful.

We can use it in our seeking an answer to the question of why Stevens stopped writing. So far we have this plausible sequence or accumulation of determinants:

1. July 16, 1912: the death of Stevens’ mother, Margaretha Catharine Zeller. (Holly Stevens notes similarities of Stevens’ letter about her dying with some lines of “Sunday Morning”: “Death is the mother of beauty, mystical, / Within whose burning bosom we devise / Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.” (SP, 253-4)

2. May 21, 1919: the death of Stevens’ sister, Catharine; a Stevens letter speaks of the resemblances of his sister, his mother, and himself.

3. October 18, 1923: the noises of daily living, but more importantly, the intense psychological pain of Stevens’ wife at the publication of *Harmonium*.

My speculation is that as a consequence Stevens uttered, or assumed tacitly, a vow of poetic silence. In overly dramatic terms, perhaps, it may be said that his wife’s anguish prepared the way for the temporary death of his poetry. (I am resisting the temptation here of exploring the analogy of these three women as, at this time, a Triple Goddess of Fate or Death, but note, at least, the opening of “To the One of Fictive Music” (1922): “Sister and mother and diviner love, / And of the sisterhood of the living dead.” J. Riddel in *The Clairvoyant Eye* compares this with Robert Graves’ Goddess, pp. 67-8.) In less dramatic terms, the “poetic and human anxieties” surrounding the women in his life, the living and the dead, drew Stevens toward a sense of poetry and beauty as inspired by death; but excesses of pain and anguish and morbidity were pushing him toward giving up poetry.

II: The Fathers

Nevertheless, Stevens might not have translated the impact of *Harmonium* on his wife into poetic self-denial if there had not been still another set of linked significant figures. Reference to Stevens’ father, Garrett Barcalow Stevens, is entirely absent from Bloom’s comments, but in *Souvenirs and Prophecies*, it is clear that Stevens’ father, who died July 11, 1911, just one year before his wife, is the figure of economic prudence, for whom writing poetry must be subordinated to earning proper wages. To this father, Stevens would have had to prove he had not assumed for himself, in Bloom’s phrase, the stance of “Whitman’s persona as the tramp-poet.” In a letter to Harriet Monroe (July, 1924), Stevens wrote, “My royalties for the first half of 1924 amounted to \$6.70.” (L, 243) How could he have explained that ridiculous reward for his efforts to his father?

In Chapter V of *Souvenirs and Prophecies*, Holly Stevens gives much of the evidence needed for constructing a paradigm of the father functioning as the censor of Stevens' poetic motivation. In 1900 Stevens had struggled miserably to make a career in journalism. William Carlos Williams sketches Stevens at this his lowest point: "There is also the story of the down and out Stevens sitting on a park bench at the Battery watching the out tide and thinking to join it, as a corpse, on its way to the sea (he had been a failure as a reporter)." Williams describes, then, how Stevens turned his thoughts about the debris floating past into an article and ends optimistically: "But that finished him as a newspaper man. It may very well be that that moment was his beginning as a poet." (SP, 97) If so, then the road to poetry was via Reading, his father, and law. In his journal for March 11, 1901, Stevens wrote: "Went home last Thursday for a few hours. . . . Reading looked the acme of dullness. . . . I had a good long talk with the old man in which he did most of the talking. One's ideas don't get much of a chance under such conditions. However, he's a wise man. We talked about the law which he has been urging me to take up. I hesitated—because this literary life, as it is called, is the one I always had as an ideal & I am not quite ready to give it up because it has not been all that I wanted it to be." (SP, 100)

"March 12 . . . I recently wrote to father suggesting that I should resign from the Tribune & spend my time in writing. This morning I heard from him &, of course, found my suggestion torn to pieces. If I only had enough money to support myself I am afraid some of his tearing would be in vain. But he seems always to have reason on his side, confound him." (SP, 101)

Holly Stevens' comments point us in the right direction. She writes that "my father gave more thought to changing his career. It may be noteworthy that, many years later, in 'Auroras of Autumn'—a poem filled with parental images, especially of 'the father'—Stevens uses phrases that echo his journal entries of this time of crisis. (SP, 101) A portion of Part IV should be quoted here: "Farewell to an idea . . . The cancellings, / The negations are never final. The father sits / In space, wherever he sits, of bleak regard, / As one that is strong in the bushes of his eyes. / He says no to no and yes to yes. He says yes / To no; and in saying yes he says farewell."

This paternal training "of bleak regard," that in life economics precedes poetry, was justified, so to speak, by the image of Whitman as the figure of the "tramp-poet," the bohemian who must be rejected. That is, Whitman was the prime example of the poet as irresponsible. What made it all even more difficult for Stevens was that Whitman mediated a terrible vision of the poet's inner life, a vision that Stevens was slowly learning for himself: of solitude, lovelessness, muse, night, and ocean. "But most of all," Bloom writes, "because Stevens was as attracted by something in Whitman as he was repelled. . . ." (WS, 14) With Whitman's poetry and life as precursor to his own poetry and career, Stevens was stymied. It was as if Garrett Stevens and Walt Whitman had colluded in a psychodrama to leave Stevens no choice but to stop writing and to attend to business.

In terms of Bloom's Oedipal schema for describing the crises of the poetic imagination, there were the economic precursor (Garrett Stevens) and the poetic precursor (Whitman) against whom the impoverished son and ephebic poet must "compete" for the attention of the mother and muse, who appear at this time in a complex triple image of mother, sister, and wife, or Whitman's "night, sleep, death, the ocean, the mother." Bloom, after quoting Litz's views of "Sister and mother and diviner love" as a version of the muse-goddess reigning over natural harmonies and artificial accidentals, says, "She is a *familial* muse and prophesies the startling epiphany, a quarter of a century later, of the imago of the poet's own mother in *The Auroras of Autumn*: 'Farewell to an idea . . . The mother's face, / The purpose of the poem fills the room.' Poets have domesticated the muse in their wives as in their mistresses; Stevens takes the Oedipal risk, as Keats and Whitman did, and invokes the muse as his actual mother and as the other women of his family." (WS, 45-6) Thus Bloom arrives at conclusions by way of poetry—via Whitman and other poets

as well as the later poems of Stevens—conclusions that he might have had, more directly, by referring to the biographical information available alongside the poetry of the same period.

Bloom continues: "Am I overliteralizing [Stevens'] figurations? I think not, for the irony of thought somewhat concealed by his evasions is very much like the Whitmanian vision of Fate as the mother in *The Sleepers*. Stevens' poem is a speculation upon the transgressive origin of poetry and upon the transcendent purpose of the poem, which appears to be not separate from the origin . . . For Stevens, the art of the muses is his poetry and, however evasively, he is naming his own mother as the origin and purpose of his poetry. When Whitman gives us the fourfold of night, death, the sea, and the mother, we are not startled, but that is because Whitman's evasiveness lies elsewhere." (*WS*, 16) We are startled, Bloom is implying, that this supposedly impersonal poet, this evasive and sublimely repressive poet, Stevens, has visualized his muse as his mother. Reading the letters and journals along with the poetry and seeing Stevens identify himself with his mother and sister, we are less startled; but also, we can see clearly the transgression is directly related to the judgment his father might make of him.

The "poetic and human" crisis for Stevens in 1923 comprises the attack of the precursors (Garrett Stevens and Whitman) and the loss of his muses (sister, mother, and wife, and muse); indeed, it appears all the figures were allied to advise Stevens to cease his drive to make poetry. In this predicament it is no wonder that Stevens could not or would not write. One critic says of Stevens of this period that he would have written if he had a poem in him; No, he did not have a poem in him for the history of his family and the history of his poetic imagination had conspired to compel him to earn his wages and to not write poems.

III: From *Harmonium* to *Ideas of Order*

A test of these speculations would be to discover corroborations in *Ideas of Order*. Very briefly: This complex problem of the withdrawal or loss of the precursor and the muse, of father and mother, is reflected in the transition from *Harmonium* to *Ideas of Order* in several ways: the rich eroticism of the earlier book as well as its bitterness is gone from the later; and the brilliant over-writing of *Harmonium* is in the process of being eliminated from his style. The erotic and the over-writing are related, of course; it is appropriate to restate here Stevens' familiar rule, that "a change of style is a change of subject." (*OP*, 171) Having eliminated the eroticism and reduced considerably the over-writing, Stevens presents several poems reflecting companionable relations with men (conversations, walks, dedications to them) and distant relations with women ("grandmother and her daughters," "beyond the sea"). That is, again in the terms of Bloom's Oedipal schema, the father-precursor has disappeared from *Ideas of Order* and been replaced by the companion or (business) partner (Ramon Fernandez, for example, is an aesthete challenged as one might a partner in an inquiry to explain aesthetic power) and the mother-sister-wife-muse has been de-eroticized into older and younger women; and all is presented in a much calmer rhetoric. *Ideas of Order* reflects something of Stevens' age in 1932 (*WS*, 53), his separation of poetry and family, his extra-marital or extra-familial life of companions, male and female, and his work and successes in the domain of law and insurance. Having resolved or dissolved the cause of his poetic inhibitions or evaded them by stoically and politely accepting his "poverty," he advises himself, "Be thou that wintery sound."

This is only the beginning of a test of these speculations, but it seems to me that answering the question of Stevens' ceasing to write has provided help for understanding the poetry and its changes over the years as well as a possible answer to the next question we must answer—why did he return to poetry? How has he transvalued the "fathers, mothers, sisters, and selves" so as to make appear in himself the poems of the next thirty years?

Conclusion

I am not at all certain my speculations regarding the "poetic and human" life of Wallace Stevens in this period are truly accurate, even though I like the way they test out. I may have made an error in method, for example, in juxtaposing too closely Stevens' family history and Bloom's Oedipal schema. I think it is obvious to any serious Freudian critic that I am not attempting Freudian criticism; but, rather, I am trying to carry out what is implicit in Bloom's critical program, what Kenneth Burke calls "perfecting." I look forward to more news of Stevens from Holly Stevens, for it appears to me that in *Souvenirs and Prophecies*, Ms. Stevens has a much stronger "voice" than in her comments in the *Letters* and has begun to speak more directly of a troubled family situation. I have a great many quibbles and quarrels with Bloom's study: indeed, when I try to picture his combination of rhetoric, Kabbalah, Oedipal drama, Emerson, Nietzsche, Pater, Wilde, metaphysics, etc., the resulting image is that of a Rube Goldberg apparatus running around the room whose purpose is to turn the pages of a book in my hands. But these complaints are not as important to me as the appreciation I have for the guidance and useful misguidance his study offers for my exploration of the poetry of Wallace Stevens. It is difficult to know what one is learning from Bloom, but there is always the sense that something has been learned. I have been told Bloom has on the way a study of Freud's essays in parapsychology and a novel of fantasy: these directions were unpredictable, yet they are understandable. I look forward to reading these products of Bloom's increasingly playful and comic attitudes.

With the publication of Holly Stevens' and Harold Bloom's books, 1977 was a vintage year for Stevens criticism.

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Stevens' "The Virgin Carrying a Lantern"

Wallace Stevens' poem "The Virgin Carrying a Lantern" may have been based on the Biblical account of Jephthah and his daughter in Judges 11:29-40. Stevens' virgin carrying a lantern who "Walks long and long" is like Jephthah's child who wanders for two months in the mountains before she consents to be sacrificed as a result of her father's rash vow.

Jephthah had vowed to Yahweh that if victory in battle were given to him, he would offer up as sacrifice the first thing that greeted him when he returned home. His only child, a daughter, ran to greet him. Despite the fact that the Hebrews as a group had outlawed human sacrifice, the daughter agreed to allow her father to fulfill his oath. She placed one condition on her consent however, that she be "free for two months" to "go and wander in the mountains, and with my companions bewail my virginity." She walks, as did Stevens' woman, "as a farewell duty."

If Jephthah's daughter and Stevens' virgin are the same, then the "duty" referred to in the modern poem becomes a little clearer. The virgin must bid farewell to life and to her tribe. She must also seek forgiveness for violating her duty to her tribe—the obligation to bear children—instead of her duty to her father.

The negress watching the beauty's "pious egress" represents Stevens' blank realist. She does not understand the abstract concept of Yahweh's will and power formed in the imaginations of Jephthah and his daughter. She is filled "With heat so strong!" because the imagination of the virgin and her father is based on a false view of reality. Since Stevens believed that true reality was discovered through the synthesis of imagination and reality, if one were acknowledged to the exclusion of the other, then the resulting belief would be "false and wrong."

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Wallace Stevens at the University of Massachusetts: Check List of an Archive

PETER BRAZEAU

Though it is not generally known among Wallace Stevens scholars, the University of Massachusetts Library at Amherst (Special Collections) houses a small but noteworthy collection of the poet's papers and books. Soon after the 1959 Parke-Bernet auction of selected items from Stevens' library, a Hartford-area book dealer acquired some of the remaining volumes from Stevens' widow. The bookseller recalls purchasing between 200 and 300 items, some of them duplicates of little magazines containing Stevens poems. He also acquired a cluster of Stevens' papers. Almost all of this material was included in a larger purchase which the University of Massachusetts made from this dealer's stock for its general holdings. Though the university did not purchase the Stevens books because they had been part of the poet's library, it did place those items having internal evidence verifying Stevens' ownership in Special Collections.

I wish to thank Benton L. Hatch, Director of Special Collections at the University of Massachusetts, for his help in preparing this check list.

STEVENS' LIBRARY

Several works in this collection are of particular interest, as the following few examples suggest. Stevens' copy of Henri Focillon's *The Life of Forms in Art* shows the impact of this work on the poet. Though Stevens was not in the habit of extensively marking his books, Focillon's is liberally underlined on almost every page, with numerous summary notes in the margin and on the dust jacket. It is as unusual in this regard as Stevens' heavily marked copy of Charles Mauron's *Aesthetics and Psychology* at the Huntington Library. Also, Stevens' copy of Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* is of note, for in it the poet has underlined Freud's use of the name *Ananke*, writing both in the margin and on the dust jacket that Freud identifies *Ananke* with external reality. Stevens, of course, also used *Ananke* in "Owl's Clover." Further, a *Catalogue of a Few Fine and Scarce Prints Recently Purchased* (1900) is remarkable, containing young Stevens' sketches of certain prints, his reactions to others, and a 4-line verse quotation in his hand on the inside back cover. Many books are important, too, as Stevens' copies of works cited in his essays.

Among Stevens' periodicals, *The Bard College News Letter* (July, 1951) contains the first appearance of "A Poetic Act." This publication is not cited in Edelstein's *Wallace Stevens: A Descriptive Bibliography*. The head note to this issue indicates the speech was delivered on March 30, 1951, thus correcting the 1948 date assigned the address when it was printed as "Poetic Acts" in *Opus Posthumous*. Edelstein also misdates the speech in 1948.

*While Stevens was restrained in marking his books, he did occasionally underline passages and make notes in the margin and on the dust jacket or on the inside back cover. An asterisk beside a title indicates such markings.

Books:

- *Adams, H.P. *The Life and Writings of Giambattista Vico*. London: Allen & Unwin, [1935].
Notes on page from desk pad laid in.
Anacreon. *Greek Songs in the Manner of Anacreon*, trans. Richard Aldington. London: Egoist, 1919. 1 note.
- *Aristotle. *Aristotle's Art of Poetry: A Greek View of Poetry and Drama*, ed. W. Hamilton Fyfe. Oxford: Clarendon, 1940.
- *Bateson, F.W. *English Poetry and the English Language: An Experiment in Literary History*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1934.
Berdyaeu, Nicholas. *Solitude and Society*, trans. George Reavey. London: Geoffrey Bles: Centenary Press, 1938. Excerpt on front flyleaf in Stevens' hand from W.R. Inge's "The Philosophy of Berdyaeff." *Philosophy*, 21 (1946), 195-204.
- *Burckhardt, Jakob. *Reflections on History*, trans. M.D.H. London: Allen & Unwin, [1943].
Butcher, S.H. *Harvard Lectures on Greek Subjects*. London: Macmillan, 1904. Linings; signed, dated (April, 1907), with Fordham Heights address.
- **Catalogue of a Few Fine and Scarce Prints Recently Purchased: Exhibited by H. Wunderlich & Co.* New York: Wunderlich, 1900. Sketches; 4-line verse quotation in Stevens' hand; dated October 15, 1900.
- *Coulton, G.G. *Europe's Apprenticeship: A Survey of Medieval Latin with Examples*. London: T. Nelson, [1940].
- *Croce, Benedetto. *The Defense of Poetry: Variations on the Theme of Shelley*, trans. E.F. Carritt. Oxford: Clarendon, 1933.
- *Focillon, Henri. *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. C. Beecher Hogan & George Kubler. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1942.
- **Folios of New Writing: Autumn, 1940*. London: Hogarth, [1940]. "The Leaning Tower," by Virginia Woolf, and "The Creative Imagination in the World Today," by Stephen Spender, have notes and linings.
- *Freud, Sigmund. *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. W.D. Robson-Scott. London: Hogarth, 1928.
- *Green, F.C. *Stendahl*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1939. 3 scraps of paper with watercolors of flowers laid in.
Hoffman, E.T.W. *Mademoiselle de Scudery & Salvatore Rosa*. Paris: n. p. 1929. Note in Stevens' hand on jacket that book read at Atlantic City September 4-11, 1930, his daughter's first visit to the seashore.
- *Lucas, F.L. *The Criticism of Poetry*. London: H. Milford, [1933].
- *Raesley, Ellis L. *Portrait of New Netherlands*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1945.
- *Rimbaud, Arthur. *Prose Poems from LES ILLUMINATIONS of Arthur Rimbaud*, trans. Helen Rootham with introductory essay by Edith Sitwell. London: Faber, [1932].
- *Roth Leon, *Descartes' Discourse on Method*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1937.
- *Sinclair, W.A. *An Introduction to Philosophy*. London: Oxford Univ. Press, [1945?].
Stevens, Wallace. There are 3 books and 3 pamphlets in the collection.
Stevenson, R.A.M. *Velasquez*. London: G. Bell, 1902. Linings; signed, dated (April, 1907), with Fordham Heights address.
- *Wahl, Jean. *The Philosopher's Way*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1948. Excerpt in Stevens' hand from Marjorie Greene's review "Philosopher's Circus." *The Kenyon Review*, 10 (1948), 688-691.

Periodicals:

- Contact*, 1-4 (December 1920-n.d.; No. 5, June 1923, lacking).
- Les Lettres Parisiennes*, 1-9 (June 1918-April 1920). Newspaper clipping laid in.
- New Verse*, 1-31/32 (January 1933-Autumn 1938); NS 1, No. 1-2 (January-May 1939).
- Signature: A Quadrimestrial of Typography and Graphic Arts*, 1-15 (November 1935-December 1940; NS 1-18 (July 1946-1954). A.L.S. from S.R. Jones (1954) laid in.

Periodicals with Stevens Poems or Prose:

There are 61 items in this category. Two are not cited in Edelstein's bibliography: "The Bollingen Prize in Poetry," *Yale Alumni Magazine*, 13 (May, 1950), 8-9, contains a notice on the award and reprints 8 poems; "A Poetic Act," *The Bard College News Letter*, 4 (July 1951), 7, 10, is described above.

There are 9 issues of *The Harvard Monthly* and *The Harvard Advocate*, 7 with known Stevens pieces. One wonders if the remaining 2 *Harvard Advocates* (October 31, 1898 & December 20, 1898) were also preserved by Stevens because they contained his work under pseudonym.

Presentation Copies to Stevens:

There are 12 items; among these are books by Henri Pourrat and José Lezama Lima.

Publications and Features about Stevens:

There are 47 items; among these are magazine and newspaper articles, including some foreign notices, and a carbon typescript of a 1954 Italian radio commentary by Renato Poggioli.

STEVENS' PAPERS

There are 3 letters by Wallace Stevens in the collection: 2 to Henry Shattuck (Harvard Honorary Degree & 50th Class Reunion), 1 to Charles Tomlinson (Correspondence P-W). All other correspondence is to Stevens. The papers are separated into the following eight folders; I have added explanatory notes to the more important items.

Conrad Aiken

T.L.S. (1935) requests a new long poem for publication as a single volume in English series edited by Richard Church for J.M. Dent. Aiken indicates his esteem for Stevens' work and his hope of interesting Dent in publication of *Harmonium*.

Bollingen Prize

James T. Babb. T.L.S. (1950) from Yale Librarian informs Stevens of the award and of Yale exhibition of his work.
Miscellanea. Judges photo, news releases, etc.

Business Correspondence

John Rodker. 2 A.L.S. (1922), 1 T.L.S. (1923) relate to purchases or requests by Stevens.
Anatole Vidal. T.L.S. (1932) relates to Stevens purchase, accompanied by carbon from Rudolf Koch.
Miscellanea. Receipts, invoices, catalogues, etc. from English, Mexican, Austrian booksellers; Pennsylvania and English exhibitors; editors of French periodicals.

Correspondence B-M

Banyan Press announcement (1948).
Marius Bewley. 2 T.L.S. (1952). One letter invites Stevens to join in Adlai Stevenson tribute.
John Brown. T.L.S. (1953) accompanies carbon typescript of remarks published in *Panorama de la Littérature Contemporaine aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954, 288-289).
Henry Church. T.L.S. (1943) comments on art, fictions, Nietzsche, among other topics.

- John Gruen. T.L.S. (1954) reviews performance of Vincent Persichetti's song cycle *Harmonium* at New School for Social Research; Persichetti program and invitation to Town Hall performance of Gruen's song cycle *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black-bird* included.
- Victor Hammer. A.L.S. (1948) mentions Fritz Kredel, among other topics.
- Robert McAlmon. A.L.S. (1920-21?) comments on Stevens and Marianne Moore poems in *Contact*.
- Merrill Moore. A.L.S. (1938) accompanies carbon of Moore's review of book on life insurance medicine; T.L.S. (1938) thanks Stevens for appreciative remarks on Moore's poetry and invites him to Cambridge.
- Nicholas Moore. T.L.S. (1942) discusses *The Fortune Anthology* in which Stevens appeared.
- Deacon Murphy. T.L.S. (1944) notifies Stevens of election to Saint Nicholas Society on June 21, 1944; accompanying brochure.

Correspondence P-W

- Walter Pach. 3 postcards (1917, 1942, 1943). There is an additional 1952 postcard in the collection with an undeciphered signature.
- Renato Poggioli. Invitation (1954?) announces Rome lecture on Stevens; greetings inscribed by Allen Tate.
- Sister Bernetta Quinn. T.L.S. (1950) accompanies carbon typescript of her essay "Metamorphosis in Wallace Stevens."
- Max Reiser. T.L.S. (1942) replies to Stevens' request for reprint of Reiser's "The Symbolic Function of Aesthetic Terms." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1 (1942), 58-72.
- Michael Roberts. A.L.S. & postcard (1935) deal with permission to reprint Stevens poems in anthology *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* (?).
- Pitts Sanborn. Postcard (1919).
- Eugene Schoen. T.L.S. (1939) accompanies decorator catalogue.
- Elsie Stevens. Telegram (1927) remarks on domestic life while Stevens in Florida.
- Wallace Stevens. Carbon (1951) thanks Charles Tomlinson for essay on "The Comedian as the Letter C" and comments on the word *door-yard* (VI, 1. 44) and the sound of *c* in the poem.
- Superintendent of the Scrubs Estate, Ceylon. 2 T.L.S. (1938) reply to Stevens' request for tea and postcards.
- Maire Sweeney. A.L.S. (1953) thanks Stevens for copies of poems.
- G.T. (Genevieve Taggard?). Holograph light verse (1921) addressed to Stevens.
- Charles Tomlinson. A.L.S. (1951) accompanies carbon typescript of his essay "Wallace Stevens"; a carbon typescript of his "Credences of Summer. A Commentary on Wallace Stevens" is also in the collection.
- Robert Tucker. A.L.S. (1954) and brochure relate to *New England Anthology*, a series of readings in which Stevens participated.
- Irita Van Doren. T.L.S. (1954) thanks Stevens for his remarks in *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, October 24, 1954, section 6, p. 10.
- Leonard van Geyzel. A.L.S. (1938) discusses van Geyzel's background, among other topics.
- Jean Wahl. 2 A.L.S. (1943, 1947?). The first letter directs Stevens to Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy* on Heraclitus.
- Barrett Wendell. A.L.S. (1900) by Harvard professor introduces young Stevens to Oswald Villard, editor of *New York Evening Post*.

Walter Prichard Eaton

- A.L.S. (1933) to C.B. Dana. Though this letter does not refer to Stevens, Dana sent it to the poet with the note, "Dear Steve: Why don't you take over the Chair on Keats & Shelley?" Eaton had recently joined the faculty at Yale.

Harvard Honorary Degree & 50th Class Reunion

James Conant. T.L.S. (1951) notifies Stevens of Harvard decision to award honorary degree.

Henry Shattuck. 4 T.L.S. (1951) discusses plans for Stevens during his stay; Stevens was the guest of Shattuck's brother during this event.

Wallace Stevens. 2 carbons (1951) to Henry Shattuck detail Stevens' plans during the festivities at Harvard.

Memorabilia. Invitations, tickets, congratulatory telegram, etc.

Miscellanea

Bowl, Cat and Broomstick playbill (The Neighborhood Playhouse, October 23, 1917); English press reviews of Stevens' *Selected Poems* sent by Faber; Charles Henri Ford's *The Half-Thoughts: The Distances of Pain*, 1947 Prospero pamphlet sent by John Myers; inscribed or autographed poems by Elder Olson and Peter Viereck; mimeographed sheets of "From the Introduction to the Hebrew Translation of *Reality* and other writings by Paul Weiss"; note from T. Holliday on privately printed keepsake; typescript of a brief biographical notice on the author Grace Turnbull.

Current Bibliography

Baird, James. "The Prophetic Youth of Wallace Stevens." *Sewanee Review*, LXXXV (Spring 1977), 338-340.

With Holly Stevens' edition of *Souvenirs and Prophecies: The Young Wallace Stevens* (Knopf, 1977), she "enters the province of the scholar and critical biographer." Her book fills biographical and artistic gaps so that we better understand Stevens' "great leap" from his juvenile verses to "Sunday Morning" and his later meditative poetry. Emphasizes Stevens' "native solitude" and "his painters's eye."

Furia, Phillip and Martin Roth. "Stevens' Fusky Alphabet." *PMLA* XCIII (January 1978), 66-77.

Wallace Stevens uses the alphabet as a code to validate the philosophical concerns of his poetry. An understanding of this code informs certain poems where letters play an explicit and major role, such as "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," "So-and-So Reclining on Her Couch," "Connoisseur of Chaos," and "The Comedian as the Letter C." The alphabetical code also informs much of Stevens' other work and accounts for many of the apparent difficulties of his poetry—the curious vocabulary, the fantastic characters, and the exotic topography of his poetic universe. (PF and MR)

Rother, James. "The Tempering of *Harmonium: The Last Years of Wallace Stevens' Apprenticeship, 1908-1914*." *Arizona Quarterly*, XXXIII (Winter 1977), 319-338.

While a student at Harvard, Stevens incessantly borrowed from the techniques of the Esthetes, Symbolists, and Victorian Nonsense poets. In the last phase of his long apprenticeship he developed the beginnings of a mature style, one "whose pretensions to grandeur he could exploit almost as a natural resource . . . a fluid medium comprised of ambiguous imperatives and impersonal forensics."

Walker, Carol K. "The Subject as Speaker in 'Sunday Morning.'" *Concerning Poetry*, X (Spring 1977), 25-31.

Disputes previous critical opinions (Riddel, Boroff, Vendler, etc.) that there are two speakers—the poet and the woman—in "Sunday Morning." The poet, as omniscient narrator, simply witnesses and reports on the woman's inner dialogue between self and soul.

Dissertation Abstracts

POETS OF LIGHT: EZRA POUND, WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS,
AND WALLACE STEVENS

HATTERSLEY, Michael Elkins, Ph.D.
Yale University, 1976

Ezra Pound's earliest lyrics are attempts to isolate and clarify the "magic moment" of inspired awareness central to late Romantic poetry. His study of the troubadours led him to postulate that artists must integrate intellect and senses to achieve a "charged surface" receptive to "fine perceptions" that are units of form, the shapes of given works of art. In scholarship and criticism these forms are "luminous details"; in poetry they are Images, units of language that convey a state of total awareness in which a complex of sensations is perceived instantaneously. Fenollosa taught Pound that things are verbs and can exist only in relation to other things, that relations are more important than what they relate. Pound came to see the world as a monadic field of energy, dynamic nodes in relation. This was the prototype for the juxtapositional structure of *The Cantos*. Confucius and the Neoplatonists provided Pound with a systematic exposition of the refining of the sensibilities that issues in awareness of a luminous monadic world process. The expression of this vision in *The Cantos* is crippled by Pound's insistence upon the poet's ideal perspective. However the light that pervades the later cantos signifies the unitary awareness of a relative monadic world.

Almost from the start, William Carlos Williams insists upon a willed destruction of ritualized perceptual and linguistic patterns to prepare for a new language and awareness that can unite us to our present local world. The goal is to free ourselves from the illusion of transcendent value and the dualistic sensibility it implies. The imagination is a natural force and its product, the poem, a natural object. For the mature Williams, human awareness is a spectrum, stretching from homogenization of perceived reality through awareness of articulate detail to the stale ritual of "custom." Balanced imagination can render us a unitary vision of the dynamic ground unfolding itself into detailed form, multiple object-processes in relation: this is the model for the poetic space of *Paterson*. Williams develops an increasingly resonant understanding of those limitations on sensibility inherent in the human condition, and the role of poetic "invention" in countering them. In the final poems, Williams retreats from a more relative conception of the poet to a sovereign lyric voice. This stance grants him a vision of the light that signifies the achieved awareness of a monadic relative world as present to imagination.

We are confronted from the start in Wallace Stevens' poetry with the need to dismantle the ossified structure of a linear, hierarchical, dualistic world that blocks our awareness of a present, relative and metamorphic reality. This effort deprives us of structures of coherence such as the gods that have guaranteed order and meaning in our world. But human consciousness requires an abode to facilitate its encounter with a reality that, faced naked, may annihilate it. This is the order of the poem, a space where mind and world can cohabit as equals. Imagination is a spectrum of human response ranging from arbitrary "fancy" through cohabitation to solipsistic assimilation. Reality is a spectrum stretching from barren monolith through ordered metamorphosis to a chaos of unrelated particulars. Stevens' poems occur at every intersection between these two continuums. The goal is that the "structure of ideas" become one with the "structure of things"; this is the hypothetical "grand poem." In his mature work Stevens masters the poetry of perspective. Successive fictions of ideal perspective, the form of the poem, enact the relative status of poet-perceiver. In *The Auroras of Autumn* this strategy permits the poet to participate in indifferent "innocence" and experience the unitary light of a relative monadic world. Order No. 76-30,325, 262 pages.

DA, v. 37, No. 7 (Jan. 1977), 4353-A

THE POETRY OF OLD AGE: THE LATE POEMS OF ELIOT, POUND, STEVENS, AND WILLIAMS

WOODWARD, Kathleen Middlekauff, Ph.D.
University of California, San Diego, 1976

Chairman: Professor Roy Harvey Pearce

The Poetry of Old Age is a study of the late poems of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams. The *Four Quartets* (1943), *the Pisan Cantos* (1948), *The Rock* (1954), and *Paterson V* are considered in turn, each work being placed in the general context of the poet's poetry and prose and in particular, his social thought. It is argued that, taken together, these four central, late works generate a new genre which characterizes the last phase of American Modernism.

For these great American poets, old age came as fulfillment. Although each poet moved in his own way toward a graceful closure to his life in poetry, their individual solutions combine to offer a Modern answer to the problems of old age and death. Their collective wisdom, crucial as a corrective to the American frenzy for invention and the new, reveals itself in three basic ways: 1) the integrity of the wise old man as hero who must abandon what has long been avoided in order to complete a life cycle, 2) an emphasis on tradition as a stay against chaos, both personal and cultural, and 3) a new Western meditative mode which denies the long-held Cartesian view of the act of the mind as conscious, muscular, and dominating, and stresses instead an easy penetration of mind and world, an ecology of mind.

For each poet it is seen that art is a way of confronting death, that writing is a way of composing the self. In these poems, each poet reaches for a metaphor which will express this final integration of the self with the world. Eliot was the first to discover it. He called it, in "Burnt Norton," the still point. As a metaphor, the still point unites the Moderns as a generation. To the degree, that it is realized in their individual poems, it expresses their attainment of equilibrium, their reconciliation of opposites, their promise of peace and balance.

Of the four, only Williams fails to write such a meditative poem and does not establish for himself a convincing version of the still point. He misunderstands the basically dramatic strategy of the meditative mode which requires that one seek oneself in order to discover a stable perspective from which to include the universe. In "Little Gidding," Eliot dramatizes himself in the streets of London and sends himself a message from the past, the dead, the unconscious. In "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," Stevens projects Santayana as hero, a kind of doppelganger, who achieves — for both the character and the author — a monumental and fully human poise on the threshold of death. In the *Pisan Cantos*, Pound becomes a picaresque saint, now able to resacralize the landscape and invoke utopia, Wagadu. But Williams, by contrast, chooses to manipulate an unfamiliar symbolic image cluster — the virgin and whore, the unicorn, the uroboros — and fails to include himself. The disappointing result is that he does not so much experience as assert the existence of the still point.

Development psychology helps us to understand the process by which these four Modern American poets built their poetic lives. Both Erik Erikson and Erich Neumann, for example, offer models of the life cycle of the whole man which culminates in the attainment of wisdom. The image of the wise old man which we find projected in such theory largely parallels that which emerges from the poems. However, it is not the case that the theory predicts the poems, or that the poems verify the theory. Both theory and poetry are expressions of the collective imagination of the Modern American Age. Both reflect the needs and beliefs of a cultural period. Both hold the same assumptions about the possibility — in fact the necessity — of holistic integrations of individual lives for the survival of men and mankind.

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