


The Wallace Stevens Journal

SUNDAY MORNING



She hears, upon that water without sound,
A voice that cries, 'The tomb in Palestine
Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay.'
We live in an old chaos of the sun,
Or old dependency of day and night,
Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
Of that wide water, inescapable.
Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
And, in the isolation of the sky,
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
Downward to darkness, on extended wings.

Special Conference Issue, Part 2

A Publication of The Wallace Stevens Society, Inc.

Volume 29

Number 1

Spring 2005

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Cover

Image by Cheryl Jacobsen

From the broadside

"Celebrating Wallace Stevens: The Poet of Poets in Connecticut"

Designed and printed by C. Mikal Oness at Sutton Hoo Press

The Wallace Stevens Journal

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The Wallace Stevens Journal is published biannually in the Spring and Fall by the Wallace Stevens Society, Inc. Administrative and editorial offices are located at Clarkson University, Box 5750, Potsdam, NY 13699. Phone: (315) 268-3987; Fax: (315) 268-3983; E-mail: serio@clarkson.edu; Web site: www.wallacestevens.com.

The subscription rate for individuals, both domestic and foreign, is \$30 for one year or \$50 for two years and includes membership in the Wallace Stevens Society. Rates for institutions are \$37 per year domestic and \$43 per year foreign. Back issues are available. Also available are volumes 1–25 on CD-ROM.

Manuscripts, subscriptions, and advertising should be addressed to the editor. Manuscripts should be submitted in duplicate and in Works Cited format. Word-processed manuscripts will not be returned. Authors of accepted manuscripts should furnish a nonreturnable disk copy as well as photocopies of all secondary quotations.

The Wallace Stevens Journal is indexed or abstracted in *Abstracts of English Studies*, *American Humanities Index*, *Current Contents*, *IBR (International Bibliography of Book Reviews)*, *IBZ (International Bibliography of Periodical Literature)*, *MHRA Annual Bibliography*, *MLA International Bibliography*, and *Year's Work in English Studies*.

This journal is a member of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals.



Celebrating Fifty Years of
The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens



Joseph Wood Krutch, William Faulkner, and Wallace Stevens, left to right, hold gold medal awards presented to them at the sixth annual National Book Awards at the Hotel Commodore in New York City, January 25, 1955. Krutch's nonfiction book *The Measure of Man*, Faulkner's novel *A Fable*, and Stevens' book of poetry *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* were cited as best in their fields. (AP/Wide World Photos)

Introduction

GLEN MACLEOD
AND
CHARLES MAHONEY

THIS NUMBER OF *The Wallace Stevens Journal* is the second of a two-part special issue presenting the proceedings of the international conference *Celebrating Wallace Stevens: The Poet of Poets in Connecticut*, organized and hosted by the Department of English at the University of Connecticut, April 8–10, 2004. The conference was timed to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the publication of Wallace Stevens' *Collected Poems* in 1954. Coincidentally or not, the appearance of this second number marks the 50th anniversary of Stevens' receipt in 1955 of the Pulitzer Prize as well as the National Book Award for that same collection (see photograph on opposite page).

Over the course of three days at the University of Connecticut, almost fifty speakers from around the world examined a multitude of issues in relation to Stevens' work, its influences, and its varied legacies. (For a detailed overview of the conference proceedings, see our introduction to the first part of the published conference proceedings in the Fall 2004 issue of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*.) On Saturday morning, April 10th, twenty-seven speakers presented papers over the space of nine panels. These panels are presented here, in the order in which they appeared in the conference program. There are two exceptions to this procedure: (1) the papers from the first two sessions, "Stevens and Later American Poets" and "Early Stevens," appeared in Part 1 of the proceedings, published in the Fall 2004 issue of the journal; (2) Emily Wallace's paper on Stevens and Cézanne, from the session "Continental Stevens," will appear in a future number of the journal.

The Saturday morning panels illustrate the impressive array of perspectives that made the entire conference such a memorable event. Over the course of the morning, three panels in particular—"Early Stevens," "Middle Stevens," and "Late Stevens"—directed attention to the full range of Stevens' *oeuvre* as well as career. Established Stevens specialists were joined by a number of promising younger scholars in an effort to assess the work done in the fifty years since the publication of the *Collected Poems* and to consider future directions for Stevens scholarship. The quality of

work being done by so many fine scholars bodes well for the future of Stevens studies.

In addition, many international scholars—from Belgium, Portugal, England, Canada, France, and Japan—brought the planet to the table, so to speak, to celebrate *The Planet on the Table*, as Stevens refers to his *Collected Poems* in his poem of that title. One of these, Juliette Utard, concluded the morning's proceedings (and this number of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*) with her paper "Collecting Oneself: The Late Poetry of Wallace Stevens," an incisive consideration of what it means to "collect" a poet or a body of poetry. As she notes at the outset of her talk, "To celebrate Wallace Stevens' birthday and the publication of the *Collected Poems* conjointly is to reduplicate a connection Stevens himself orchestrated fifty years ago."

In "orchestrating" *Celebrating Wallace Stevens: The Poet of Poets in Connecticut*, we are delighted to have been anticipated by Stevens himself. Fifty years after Stevens "collected" his poems, it has been a pleasure and a privilege first to "collect" so many outstanding Stevens scholars in Connecticut and, now, to "collect" their work in the pages of this two-part special issue of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*.

University of Connecticut

The Fictive Coverings of Home

ANGUS CLEGHORN

THIS CONFERENCE SITUATES the mature Wallace Stevens in his resident-state, Connecticut. My paper investigates a different home in Stevens' poetry—the idea of home that the poet attempts to find. This domestic site is physical and metaphysical; it is Stevens' final fusion of body and spirit in language. In his final constructions of home, Stevens continues to manipulate figurative tropes to satisfy his sense of place. Specifically, I want to look at Stevens' leaves covering *The Rock* as metonymies covering the metaphorical boulder that fuses external and internal home. Because this rock's shadowy largesse, this subman, this muddy center, is too enormous and erratic to be represented fully by metaphor—"philosophy . . . is a walk on the slippery rocks," as Edie Brickell sings in "What I Am"—Stevens decorates it with leaves. These fictive coverings of home are the necessary fabrics of Stevens' fictions: they *must be abstract*, indeed, because each fiction is configured as a figurative relation. Yet they are provisional; they are layered in flux; they are metonymically placed on top of the big rock. In placing them, Stevens illustrates the necessarily material applique of language.¹

By covering the rock with leaves, the poet creates "a cure of the ground" (CP 526). These leaves are a cure for the ground precisely because these metonymical figures do not ground, or state a resemblance, or pin down a core idea; they merely add layers. Such accretion thus overlays traditional notions of grounding truth in an origin, or deep, originary essence. I am going to investigate this metonymic poetic action of "The Rock" through several of Stevens' late poems. The title "The Planet on the Table" alerts us to Stevens' bringing it home, yet the title's metaphor is a fat, obtrusive figure. The obtuse title has Stevens say, *as if* we could put the planet there in a book, yet we do flatten it and must perform such crudity in poems:

It was not important that they survive.
What mattered was that they should bear
Some lineament or character,

Some affluence, if only half-perceived,
In the poverty of their words,
Of the planet of which they were part. (CP 532–33)

Something “of” the planet, a “lineament or character” undermines the gross metaphor of placing the planet on the table.

As I open “The Rock” on my table, I hear: “It is an illusion that we were ever alive, / Lived in the houses of mothers, arranged ourselves / By our own motions in a freedom of air” (CP 525)—Stevens’ seventy-year-old memory of when he was at home. Now the “houses of mothers” (not one house or one mother) seem empty, dilapidated shells—linguistic vessels for the homes of nevermore.

As if nothingness contained a métier,
A vital assumption, an impermanence
In its permanent cold, an illusion so desired

That the green leaves came and covered the high rock,
That the lilacs came and bloomed, like a blindness cleaned,
Exclaiming bright sight, as it was satisfied,

In a birth of sight. The blooming and the musk
Were being alive, an incessant being alive,
A particular of being, that gross universe. (CP 526)

How quickly the perfume fills the air to infuse a room! That satisfaction is temporary, and section II, *The Poem as Icon*, digests it into the body:

It is not enough to cover the rock with leaves.
We must be cured of it by a cure of the ground
Or a cure of ourselves, that is equal to a cure

Of the ground, a cure beyond forgetfulness.
And yet the leaves, if they broke into bud,
If they broke into bloom, if they bore fruit,

And if we ate the incipient colorings
Of their fresh culls might be a cure of the ground.
The fiction of the leaves is the icon

Of the poem, the figuration of blessedness,
And the icon is the man. (CP 526)

And on goes section II in hyperbolic communion. The poem calls up the Holy Eucharist, yet this image of natural consumption as ritual divinates “a cure of the ground” as “a cure of ourselves” (CP 526); this fiction is extrapolated. But before the fiction loops around itself repeatedly, notice that Stevens writes “a cure / Of the ground, a cure beyond forgetfulness. / And yet the leaves, if they broke into bud. . . .” His syntax

proceeds via the “an and yet” method described in the first stanza of “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” (CP 465). “[A]n and yet” issues forth a description that is indefinite enough to be modified by “yet, and yet, and yet—.” Reconsiderations overlay an image time and time again. In this metonymical poetics a flexible, ungrounded philosophy can walk. The message is likely ecological, perhaps suggesting the necessity of curing our need to ground knowledge, i.e., pin it to some origin that, as far as the rock goes, rests deep in the earth-human-poetic body’s core.² (Stevens’ large but finally inaccessible shadowy subconscious is similar to the one Julia Kristeva describes in *Revolution of Poetic Language*, in which she describes our inner desires as thetic drives; her idea stems from Mallarmé’s poem “Un Coup de Des,” “Dice thrown will never annul chance” (107). In Mallarmé’s poetic statement we hear similar rolling options, as we do in that of Stevens. Each roll of the dice produces a new image-option, which has consequences in the game, but is outdone by the next roll, or image.) Regardless of the referents we attach to the poem, the rocky ground is covered temporarily by a leafy metonymy, overlaying the central rock metaphor, to which the final section of the poem returns.

The rock is the gray particular of man’s life,
 The stone from which he rises, up—and—ho,
 The step to the bleaker depths of his descents . . .

The rock is the habitation of the whole,
 Its strength and measure, that which is near, point A
 In a perspective that begins again

At B: the origin of the mango’s rind. (CP 528)

The rock is man’s center, the pit of the stomach, his cosmic-oversoul and “Night’s hymn” (CP 528). As grand as this universal and indefinable life-force is, it is still an evading metaphor; it must be accessed after the fact of feeling with “B . . . the mango’s rind”—this evidence itself is metonymic; it is “a cure of the ground” that cannot quite revert to represent fully the rock. The rock itself as a signifier is small and solid, yet underneath the rock is a large domain of recessive signifieds; on top the leaves are dancing signifiers.

A question remains: does the barren rock or fictive covering make home? This question is an unanswerable paradox that drives poetic representation. Are poets representing a human core or a linguistic dance? Stevens portrays this dialectic as a palimpsest, a layering of representation in “The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain.” In the title alone we see that when the poem represents a mountain, there is a gap or perhaps transgression taking place. Yet Stevens juggles both the mountainous atmo-

sphere, "breath[ing] its oxygen, / Even when the book lay turned in the dust of his table" (CP 512). The poem continues to use Stevens' monumental epic hike as a search to represent the rock in poetry:

It reminded him how he had needed
A place to go in his own direction,

How he had recomposed the pines,
Shifted the rocks and picked his way among clouds,

For the outlook that would be right,
Where he would be complete in an unexplained completion:

The exact rock where his inexactnesses
Would discover, at last, the view toward which they had
 edged,

Where he could lie and, gazing down at the sea,
Recognize his unique and solitary home. (CP 512)

The rocky destination of the epic is about finding an "outlook," a viewpoint where his lyrically fluid self would be shared by others who had edged toward (t)his perspective. The rock here is a perch, much less of an ordinary figure than in "The Rock." That is because he has shifted it—another one of his "variously interpretable figural emblems" (Monroe 136) so that it is no longer insurmountable. As he brings us on this climb, he has stopped a step short of bringing us home inside his corpus. Home is instead gazed at from this rocky vista, where the rock has become another layer, not an embodiment, but a layered platitude from which we can all "Recognize [our] unique and solitary home." From the book of poetry, Stevens has taken us inside the poem so that we may climb outside in order to get a late view of home—the sea, of which we are outside, yet able to recognize its interior as a "solitary home"—death—"the mother of beauty" (CP 68), the source of creation and life, the cyclical completion ("Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," "The Woman That Had More Babies Than That," *The Prelude*).

Home is where the heart is. For Stevens this is not a sentimental cliché. Home is where the heart of the world is—mother, earth, fat girl terrestrial, my summer, my night, "the waiting parent" (CP 507). (Mere and mer also sound the same in French, as Rimbaud intones in "The Drunken Boat.")

Farewell to an idea . . . The mother's face,
The purpose of the poem, fills the room.
They are together, here, and it is warm. . . . (CP 413)

This third canto of "The Auroras of Autumn" again offers home as the maternal origin in the palimpsest of poetic creation, although as the canto develops, home is engaged in a dialectical dance with the house. Both home and house can be dangerous for different reasons. We have already seen that home can be regressive, or as William Carlos Williams put it in reference to homely plot destinations in "The Great American Novel," "progress . . . is to suck a nipple" (112). Conversely, the house, as depicted in "The Auroras of Autumn," is

Nothing until this named thing nameless is
And is destroyed. He opens the door of his house

On flames. The scholar of one candle sees
An Arctic effulgence flaring on the frame
Of everything he is. And he feels afraid. (CP 416-17)

The house is the chosen domestication; it is home updated. As such, it quickly becomes a rotted name or fiery flame. Outside the frame, the chaotic and sublime lights overpower the interior.

In "The Auroras of Autumn" and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," cherished domestic images burn apocalyptically in poetic process. Every harness, every covering is blown off by the winds of apocalyptic uncovering. "Omega is refreshed at every end" (CP 469). Together with Alpha, they are "Custodians of the glory of the scene. . . ." Within these boundaries of representation, Professor Eucalyptus seeks "God in the object itself" (CP 475), "Part of the res itself and not about it" (CP 473). (But life "is faster than / Any character. It is more than any scene" [CP 192]). He finds it in "The tink-tonk / Of the rain in the spout," which "is not a substitute" (CP 475). Stevens' phonemes consistently articulate the real, although in a sense they are furthest from so-called reality since they are mere utterances. These signifiers, though classified as nonsensical by Hugh Kenner (which makes sense because they do not name anything in the classifying manner of nomenclature) are actually the most immediately real characters for Stevens. Phonemes immediately evoke phenomena, so that the word sings the world before we have time to muse about the representation of music. When Stevens finds God in the object itself, it is through such characters. These things themselves, "C," erratically jar us into suspending disbelief, the celebratory hoos divert from Stevens' consistently reflexive poetry-making. His poems tend to first engage us philosophically in the creative process, in which he creates space for immanence. And so time and time again readers feel "It was like / A new knowledge of reality" (CP 534). Each poem is a house in which he makes room for us to feel home: "Light the first light of evening, as in a room / In which we rest and, for small reason, think / The world imagined is the ultimate good" (CP 524).

Do we, then, find home? Do we believe that "The tink-tonk / Of the rain in the spout is not a substitute"? Stevens' phonemes are the nearest approximations of God in the object itself.

As it is, in the intricate evasions of as,
In things seen and unseen, created from nothingness,
The heavens, the hells, the worlds, the longed-for lands.
(CP 486)

Stevens' home was not in Hartford, only his house was; his home was in New Haven because the word "Haven" remade God's Heaven: tink-tonk, ahhh, rain, C? "The poem is the cry of its occasion" (CP 473); "New Haven" enables him to create a heavenly, ordinary evening:

The mobile and the immobile flickering
In the area between is and was are leaves,
Leaves burnished in autumnal burnished trees . . .
.....
as if,

In the end, in the whole psychology, the self,
The town, the weather, in a casual litter,
Together, said words of the world are the life of the world.
(CP 474)

Seeking the rock, Stevens finds, or writes, leaves. These "accent[s] of deviation" (OP 123) are life preservers. This quest for reality, instead of finding a core, is surprised by deviations. By "feigning with the strange unlike" (CP 88), the poetry becomes "less human" (CP 327), yet within that difference, our alienation from the natural world, we recognize our humanity in a poetry of the earth. "[O]ur memorials of that difference" (CP 344), from "Description without Place," are the closest home we can find to home. Between "is and was," leaves casually litter our places. As they rustle down the street, their temporary sound is metonymic. Phoneme and image cohere momentarily.

"Local Objects," from *Opus Posthumous*, presents the sought after memorial, which for Stevens is the "beautiful surprise" (CP 123) of novelty. When Stevens wrote "beautiful surprise" in the Depression's "Dance of the Macabre Mice," he parodied the old glory of the exclusive statue. By 1955 the parody is gone and the poems are just enough to keep the drowsy emperor awake:

He knew that he was a spirit without a foyer
And that, in this knowledge, local objects become
More precious than the most precious objects of home:

The local objects of a world without a foyer,
Without a remembered past, a present past,
Or a present future, hoped for in present hope,
.....

For which a fresh name always occurred, as if
He wanted to make them, keep them from perishing,

The few things, the objects of insight, the integrations
.....

That were moments of the classic, the beautiful.
These were that serene he had always been approaching
As toward an absolute foyer beyond romance.³

(OP 137–38)

At first, the speaker is “a spirit without a foyer,” without welcome-level or layered step, non-transcendent, unheavenly, because these local objects exist only with a felt “fresh name,” soon to perish. And “Because he desired without knowing what,” the objects arose with immanence and spontaneity. It is interesting that he defines these objects as beautiful classics approaching an “absolute foyer”—again divinating plain objects. Yet to be “beyond romance” is to be without the desire for an object: “The Rock” still engaged this metaphorical game. Then on top of that, its leaves adorned the metaphor with metonymical thingness, which led Stevens beyond the deeper substitutions of metaphor. At first these metonymies appeared superficially without the substance of the poet’s metaphorical core, then in “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” the local objects believably made noise, thus providing the spontaneity Stevens desired apart from romance.

In choosing a final poem from which to conclude, I read four or five completely different culminations for his *oeuvre*. “Of Mere Being” offers the imagination’s “palm at the end of the mind,” which is like an obverse metaphor of the rock—catapulted into space; yet, like the rock, it follows the same pattern of metonymical overlay—with the placement of “The bird’s fire-fangled feathers dangl[ing] down” (OP 141) bringing home the far out palm by layering attention in the leaves. That poem, therefore, works as a circular conclusion.

However, its polar opposite, the poem of barren reality, rests on the opposite page of the book: “The Region November” offers swaying trees that say things “On the level of that which is not yet knowledge: / A revelation not yet intended. / It is like a critic of God, the world / And human nature, pensively seated / On the waste throne of his own wilderness” (OP 140). This is the voice of barren reality Stevens found in “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven.” Except here, he has gone a step further and aban-

doned the notion of God in the object.⁴ Instead, the scene (for it is not only trees but the poem's composition of north wind, etc.) "is like a critic of God" and "human nature" because it is human nature that makes us seek God in the object. This poem shows us nature's cold indifference to that, especially because humanity is "pensively seated / On the waste throne of his own wilderness." His wilderness is his waste throne because he has formulated it. His wilderness is language, not the outer wilds, which is formless until the poet makes it new in "The Region November."

Notice too that the title, "The Region November," mixes contexts of place and time, while the poem depicts barren physicality. Conversely, "Local Objects," seemingly physical in title, manifests the spirit. Stevens' paradoxical reversals of expectation unsettle accepted notions of what it means to exist as a human being so that we reconceive and revive our relations to the earth, our place of home.⁵

Since the last two poems represent the poles of reality and imagination, I would like to use "A Clear Day and No Memories" to synthesize the innovative, spontaneous yet humble discoveries of the latest poems.

No soldiers in the scenery,
No thoughts of people now dead,
As they were fifty years ago:

.....

Today the air is clear of everything.
It has no knowledge except of nothingness
And it flows over us without meanings,

.....

... in this shallow spectacle,
This invisible activity, this sense. (*OP* 138–39)

This poem departs from the receding memory of home in "The Rock," "The Auroras of Autumn," and his war poetry. The sad part of it is that his "mind is not part of the weather." However, those former, youthful collisions of mind and sky have been so intensely lived and ruminated that he is likely thankful to be "clear of everything. . . . [N]o knowledge . . . without meanings." Existing invisibly in the strange unlike, Stevens is without figures. This is a seemingly odd departing image of the portly man in his steely suit with a palm at the end of his mind—until we recall that "This invisible activity, this sense" of "A Clear Day and No Memories" was once named "The Snow Man," in which he showed us how to first decreate so that the reality of the natural world could fill the imagination.

Trent University
Canada

Notes

¹Since his leaves cover the rock, they function apocalyptically (in accord with the root meaning of the word). As such, these leafy metonymies continue the apocalyptic poetics developed in the 1930s when Stevens collapsed the statues of automatic representation, whether civic or Marxist.

²Karen Helgeson recently charted the history of interpretation regarding "The Rock" in "Place and Poetry in Stevens' 'The Rock.'" "

³This poem runs counter to Keith Manecke's argument in "Wallace Stevens' 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven': The 'Inescapable Romance' of Place." Both of us cite Blasing to develop Stevens' poetics of metonymy.

⁴Carol H. Cantrell connects Stevens with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and First Nations People's ideas about the interdependencies of lands and minds in flux. She says that Stevens distinctly gives "the sense of *not* being native, and this sense of disconnection is where his poetry begins: 'From this the poem springs: that we live in a place / That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves . . .' This disconnection is compounded by the historical moment in Anglo-European culture of 'see[ing] the gods dispelled in mid-air and dissolve like clouds,' an experience that leaves the 'increasingly human self' dispossessed, 'alone in a solitude' "(17-18). I would add that this godless solitude can be conversely seen as the source for the liberating creation of a purely physical world, as presented at the end of "Esthétique du Mal."

⁵Cantrell writes: "His is a poetry not of landscape but of place, a more homely word that does not privilege a particular kind of scene and that signifies an interdependence between humans and the world" (24).

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Wallace Stevens at Home in the Wilderness

WILLIAM DORESKI

WALLACE STEVENS' "Metaphor as Degeneration" dramatizes the complexities of inhabiting the wilderness of the imagination while mediating this interiority with a place in the real world. The woods, black space, greenery, and river noises in the poem are characteristically American notions of both wilderness and home, which is not necessarily a place of domesticity but rather the site where one is most comfortably or fully one's self. Whether or not this corresponds to some ironic sense of Stevens' actual domestic situation, this vision of the imaginatively realized home in the wilderness is romantically and religiously American and, also, in its insistence on the fluid relationship of actuality and metaphor as a structural element in the image, essential to Stevens' grasp of the architecture of language. Although "Metaphor as Degeneration" dramatizes this thematic and architectonic problem, "The Man on the Dump" depicts a site where wilderness and domesticity interact, exploring Stevens' dichotomy of wilderness as both home and contested ground. Each poem illustrates the fluidity of Stevens' rhetorical narration, his use of character and situation to concretize the individual's powerfully inward, ongoing construction of the world.

Stevens' wilderness derives from the tame and scrubby hills of southeastern Pennsylvania and the deciduous woods of Connecticut. This places him squarely in the mainstream of American environmental psychology. The original wilderness in the American imagination was not the rugged White or Rocky Mountains but the sandy, gently rolling plains around Plymouth and Boston Harbors, the island of Manhattan, and the lower Delaware River valley. Although home to Indians and other potential disciples of Satan, these landscapes as physical settings were not entirely foreign to the English and Dutch imaginations.

William Bradford in his journal, with a glance at the coastal plain of what would become Plymouth, laminates a wilderness of the imagination on material immediacy:

[W]hat could they see but a hideous & desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts & wild men? and what multitudes there might be of them they knew not. Neither could they . . . go up to the

top of Pisgah, to view from this wilderness a more goodly country to feed their hopes; for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to the heavens) they could have little solace or content in respect of any outward objects. For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a weatherbeaten face; and the whole country, full of woods & thickets, represented a wild & savage hue. (95; spelling has been modernized)

This vision of the American wilderness is based on an ecological ideology of utility and hope, yet finds the only possibility of hope, solace, or content in its parenthetical appeal to the imagination: "(save upward to the heavens)."¹ Two hundred years later, this subtextual appeal to the religious imagination becomes explicit in the work of Emerson and Thoreau, but the paradox remains, as Thoreau in *The Maine Woods* acknowledges by noting that while a dose of wildness is essential for the well being of the imagination, he prefers the pastoral landscape of Concord as a place to actually live.

For Stevens, home meant both the suburban luxury of West Hartford and the American wilderness where metaphor wrestles with and within itself.² His Connecticut resembles the wilderness of Plimouth Plantation: "Everything seemed gray, bleached and derelict," he notes of Eastern Connecticut on a train ride reported in "Connecticut Composed." Entering the wilderness means returning to one's essence, or origin: "Going back to Connecticut is a return to an origin," he claims. Confronting one's essence results in an outbreak of pioneer virtues: "an origin of hardihood, good faith and good will" (*OP* 303–4). "Metaphor as Degeneration" offers one approach to the complexities of construing the wilderness home as a place of self-realization (as Plimouth Plantation and mid-nineteenth-century Concord were) and as a site of the construction of images that unsettle the conventional relationship of metaphor.

Paradox is central to Stevens' aesthetic and to his understanding of how the world exterior to the self makes self-realization possible. The self is largely a product of the imagination, but it is formed by the impact of reality on the imagination and vice versa. In the same way, the American wilderness is both a terrible, forbidding otherness and the very embodiment of a central aspect of the American notion of the self. In much the same way, metaphor is not a simple rhetorical act but a paradoxical one, which is why Stevens' construction of the wilderness is aesthetically significant, a shaping force in his poetics.

"Metaphor as Degeneration" opens in the conditional mode, and its credibility depends on the possibility of "a man white as marble," who "Sits in a wood, in the greenest part" (*CP* 444). This man, occupying the ripest part of the wilderness, claims a great deal of imaginative space by "Brooding sounds of the images of death." If that man does not exist, or if he is not as white as marble, then the "man in black space," and all the

other “images . . . reverberations” fail for lack of an opposing term. The condition of metaphor is essential in order to “make certain how being / Includes death and the imagination.” “The marble man,” however tentative, is a creature entirely of metaphorical construction, so “remains himself in space,” while “The man in the black wood descends unchanged,” descends in the Darwinian sense, becoming a part of reality. This man, by occupying a space we cannot define, makes available a river that at first seems non-metaphorical but by the end of the poem becomes the link between reality and the imagination. The man in black space, although or because he sat in “nothing that we know, / Brooding sounds of river noises,” begins as an image without becoming a metaphor and is therefore not dependent wholly on the imagination. Yet he too is conditional, being presented in terms of “So” (CP 444).

The poem turns in the third line of the fourth stanza, turns toward the river, and at first depicts it in terms of what it is not (“It is certain that the river / Is not Swatara”), challenging the possibility that it is also a metaphor, a river of the imagination (a “river of rivers” [CP 533]) rather than the link between the imagination and reality it later becomes. Swatara is a real creek in Pennsylvania, and to some extent this poem is about how Swatara frees itself from the grip of the imagination and becomes real enough to sport black violets and memorial mosses and to flow. In our first perception it is not Swatara; it is an archetype: “The swarthy water / That flows round the earth and through the skies” (CP 444).³ In this state it is not Swatara; it is “being.” The swarthy of the water remains distinct from the swarthy of the name the imagination bestows upon it. The question the poem asks, “How, then, is metaphor degeneration,” answers itself by closing the gap between the discordant terms of metaphor. The name “Swatara,” once it is imposed on the archetype, is one of the terms of metaphor and a way of claiming an actual river for the imagination (the same river occurs in “The Countryman,” but is used differently). When the name becomes the “undulant river / And the river becomes the landless, waterless ocean” (CP 444), then the distance between a modest reality and a large abstraction has closed. Metaphor does not have to represent degeneration. It can be a process through which the imagination and reality find each other. This possibility reminds us that with William Bradford, Emerson, Thoreau, Cotton Mather, James Fenimore Cooper, and John Muir, we Americans tend to construct our landscapes in our perceptions long before we learn to understand them as an otherness physically independent of us—if we ever do. Home—the place where we are most comfortable and most ourselves—is in the realm of metaphor, not in its degenerate state, in which one set of terms is more privileged than another, but as a regenerative process through which the imagination and reality balance and become more fully themselves.

A dump is a critique of both wilderness and domesticity, and the man on the dump assumes the task of reconciling its imaginative and real as-

pects. The dump is the place where cultural objects begin to metamorphose into natural ones. The objects listed in the poem represent various stages of that decomposition as well as various aspects of culture. Wilderness here shades into an ironic pastoral, in which culture and nature meet but nature gradually absorbs culture. One of the obvious lessons is that metaphor depends on the distinction between nature and culture, while culture itself requires constant use and renewal to prevent it from decomposing. Nature does not decompose into culture; it is always the other way around. The keyword “the,” invoked in closure with thunderous spondee, is the last bulwark against nature, since its power of singularizing objects is a primal means of producing culture and distinguishing it from nature. But metaphor, in its full complexity, breaks down or decomposes the distinction between its elements, and, as previously argued, represents a breakdown of dichotomies that prevents the imagination or reality from becoming oppressive. Wilderness without a touch of domesticity would not be livable, and the dump, if the cultural elements had completely returned to nature, would no longer be a viable metaphor or a suitable home.

Critics have most frequently read “The Man on the Dump” as a poem about rejecting one’s own poems, the dump rendered then as an intolerable place of ruin (Bloom 145). But I would argue that while the poem is indeed about rejecting stale and used-up poems, it is also about the dump as a place of refreshment and renewal. The dump is not merely a place of discard but one of possibly fruitful confrontation between rejection and purification through the reinvention of perception and metaphor. The dump is the place where dichotomies unravel and have to re-form or die off. The poem opens by reminding us that the perceptible world is made of images and that even large abstractions such as time are subject, in the imagination, to metaphor:

Day creeps down. The moon is creeping up.
The sun is a corbeil of flowers the moon Blanche
Places there, a bouquet. Ho-ho . . . The dump is full
Of images. Days pass like papers from a press. (CP 201)

The poems of everyday, those that embody the ameliorative qualities of the dump, are domestic objects fallen from grace and returning to nature. Although discarded and useless, these things are poems because poetry is the archetypal bonding of the imagination and reality, nature and culture:

the janitor’s poems
Of every day, the wrapper on the can of pears,
The cat in the paper-bag, the corset, the box
From Esthonia: the tiger chest, for tea. (CP 201)

It is not enough to say, as so many critics have, that Stevens regards these discarded poems with irony; irony here as elsewhere in his mature work is in tension with innocence, and it is never entirely clear which of these conditions prevails.

As the poem continues, the distinctions between nature and culture further blur, mediated by metaphor-making, yet becoming distasteful except in the act of metaphor that the dump embodies and promotes:

The green smacks in the eye, the dew in the green
Smacks like fresh water in a can, like the sea
On a cocoanut—how many men have copied dew
For buttons, how many women have covered themselves
With dew, dew dresses, stones and chains of dew, heads
Of the floweriest flowers dewed with the dewiest dew.
One grows to hate these things except on the dump. (CP 202)

Now with the coming of spring a new purification, a new vision of nature seems to displace the mediation process of metaphor, seems to introduce a “purifying change.” But this seasonal change is actually introducing a new cultural paradigm, a fresh way of making metaphor by invoking “the bubbling of bassoons,” the “elephant-colorings of tires” (CP 202). In this new paradigm everything becomes more itself. The moon is more wholly the moon—having temporarily shed its metaphors—and “you,” the man on the dump, see yourself as yourself, not as an image of yourself, and respond to that naked reality with a crude aesthetic act, beating on “an old tin can, lard pail” to introduce some abstraction to make metaphor possible and to upholster yourself against too heavy a dose of the real.

One beats and beats for that which one believes.
That’s what one wants to get near. Could it after all
Be merely oneself, as superior as the ear
To a crow’s voice? Did the nightingale torture the ear,
Pack the heart and scratch the mind? And does the ear
Solace itself in peevish birds? Is it peace,
Is it a philosopher’s honeymoon, one finds
On the dump? Is it to sit among mattresses of the dead,
Bottles, pots, shoes and grass and murmur *aptest eve*:
Is it to hear the blatter of grackles and say
Invisible priest; is it to eject, to pull
The day to pieces and cry *stanza my stone*?
Where was it one first heard of the truth? The the. (CP 202–03)

Life is not stasis, but its motion and renewal require contact with nature and the seasons to refresh the stock of available metaphors (as Thoreau

famously observed⁴), because one sometimes sees with little metaphor, sometimes with a great deal of mediation, and because one must continually manipulate those terms, readjusting to balance nature and culture, inner and outer worlds. What one believes in is life itself, and its process of discovery and invention is “what one wants to get near.” It could be “merely oneself,” but that self is a mediated one, haunted, like Keats, by the nightingale’s song. It could be “peace . . . a philosopher’s honeymoon,” or it could simply be the desire to make language and metaphor and begin the process all over again. Regardless, “one first heard of the truth” when one learned to distinguish things from each other, when one discovered the power of the definite article. This definite article makes both “the blatter of grackles” and pulling the day to pieces possible. The man on the dump beating on his tin pail is a voice at the intersections of nature and culture, wilderness and domesticity, irony and innocence, and his rage to make metaphor, even if self-delusively, is an act of renewal that makes home in the wilderness of the imagination both possible and pleasurable.

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Notes

¹ The Puritan conception of the wilderness was also paradoxical. On the one hand, the wilderness was a site of religious and social opportunity; on the other hand, it was the home of the children of Satan. Unlike the Jesuits in Canada, the Massachusetts Bay Puritans showed little interest in converting the Indians to Christianity, perhaps because the Puritan creed required so much introspection that it was difficult to offer as an easily packaged and assimilated faith.

² It may be appropriate here to distinguish Stevens as a poet of place as opposed to a poet of landscape. Wordsworth is a poet of landscape. Luxurious description enriches and enacts the human imagination, and the landscape, which is distinctly other than the speaker, functions as both an extension and a fostering of the imagination in the first person. Stevens, however, most characteristically uses place as a site of meditation by a fictional persona, and the interaction itself—the mediation between the imagination and the world—becomes the subject. In the landscape poem, the landscape retains its integrity, but in the poem of place, the place is less likely to enter or exit the poem with any integrity other than what the interaction constructs for it.

³ As Eleanor Cook observes in “Place-Names in Wallace Stevens,” elsewhere in this issue, “The Countryman” also reverses this process: that is, the poem begins with the world addressing the imagination rather than otherwise.

⁴ At the end of the Chesuncook section of *Maine Woods*, Thoreau writes, “not only for strength, but for beauty, the poet must, from time to time, travel the logger’s path and the Indian’s trail, to drink at some new and more bracing fountain of the Muses, far in the recesses of the wilderness” (156).

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“Inessential Houses” in Stevens and Bishop

JACQUELINE VAUGHT BROGAN

*And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses
began to melt away until gradually I became aware
of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch
sailor's eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world.*

—Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

APPROACH THIS PAPER with some trepidation, for much has already been written about the subject of place in Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop. Certainly, when it comes to Stevens, his well-known reluctance to travel—his lifelong preference to remain, largely, “at home”—has been thoroughly documented and discussed. Still, in a time of acute crisis in our public housing and of growing homelessness, in a period in which our White House has, in the name of Homeland Security, called for a “Patriot Act” that actually threatens our civil liberties, Stevens’ and Bishop’s poetic explorations of our most personal domestic structures have much to tell us about our larger political ones, however unlikely it might at first appear.

By now it is no longer news that poetry is almost always political, or that some of our best 20th-century American poets—such as Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop, who have been alternately praised or denigrated for being apolitical—were deeply political poets and, quite ironically, were so through a shared superficial avoidance of political concerns. Actually, as a number of fine critics have shown, our reading of these poets as being apolitical was finally superficial on our parts.

But is our sense of Stevens as being, finally, a political poet as commonplace as I have just put it? I ask that for, while I know that among Stevens specialists the fact that his poetry is ultimately quite political has been largely accepted for well over a decade, I also know that many contemporary critics of 20th-century poetry in general, such as Fred Moramarco, still regard him as an unremitting aesthete. Put differently, while a number of us readily agree that Stevens was actually engaged with the “actual world,” numerous critics still regard Stevens as being primarily philosophical, if not equally aesthetic, in his impulses and import. There is an enormous gulf, for example, between the Stevens that emerges from Milton Bates’s

excellent biography and the engaged, political Stevens that James Longenbach, Alan Filreis, and Angus Cleghorn find in their own convincing works. It would be fair to say that a similar discrepancy is found among readers of Elizabeth Bishop.

Whatever their reputations may be at this point, I would argue that these poets were almost always, or at least frequently, quite political, when “political” means that they used their poetry to examine and dismantle dominant and frequently unethical rhetorical posturings in our larger cultural scene. Despite Stevens’ well-known disclaimer that the poet owes no “social obligation” (NA 27), I find their poetry most frequently *political* when it comes to war. In this regard, one can think immediately of such famous World War II poems as Stevens’ “Esthétique du Mal,” which Eleanor Cook and others (including myself) have convincingly shown to be a poem ruthlessly examining wartime rhetoric. Bishop’s “Roosters” mocks and dismantles both militaristic rhetoric and religious rhetoric, suggesting that, ultimately, the two rhetorics are one and the same, at least as realized in human history. I think that Stevens would agree with Bishop in this regard, for as Longenbach has already shown in “The ‘Fellowship of Men,’ ” “Sunday Morning,” traditionally read as a poem espousing skepticism toward established religion, has a specific locus in the horrors of World War I.

It is not my purpose here, however, to argue anew the political insights and resistances of these poets, both of whom would subsequently influence such obviously political poets as Adrienne Rich and June Jordan, among others. Rather, I wish to concentrate on how these poets consistently excavate one of our most intimate of topoi—i.e., the common and perhaps naive distinction between “house” and “home”—in ways that offer significant insight into the current political crises with which I began. Looking carefully at how Stevens and Bishop explore the assumptions behind the words “house” and “home,” I found to my surprise that for all of them “homes” are, in fact, highly “suspect places” (a phrase I take from Mina Loy in an entirely different context [91]). As we seek that domestic space that implies intimacy and security—i.e., a “home”—we frequently ignore the fact that this very effort almost guarantees “other” empty houses by engendering a powerful and pervasive politics of inclusion vs. exclusion.

In a recent essay called “Home,” Toni Morrison seems to promote that same division—although, I should clarify, only seemingly so. Reflecting on the “questions” that have “troubled all of [her] work,” Morrison writes that she has been especially troubled by “How to convert a racist house into a race-specific yet non racist home” (5). What interests me here is how clearly she translates this common and immediate structural topos of “house” vs. “home” into a survey of our larger political landscape. It is not hard to imagine, after this concrete statement, that other writers, in-

cluding the poets with whom we are concerned, would easily employ this verbal distinction to make political commentaries of their own.

To give some examples, from the early "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," where Stevens complains of those "houses . . . haunted / By white night gowns" (CP 66), to the late poem "The Plain Sense of Things," where Stevens writes that "The great structure has become a minor house" (CP 502), houses in Stevens seem to stand not only for imaginatively bereft spaces, but also for spaces controlled by larger cultural "con-scriptions" that leave us ethically and spiritually dead. Similarly, from the "abandoned" "house" (34) in the early "Jerónimo's House" to that "rigid house" (123) of "Sestina," Bishop also suggests that houses are metaphors for especially negative and conscripting cultural roles, particularly when it comes to gender. In all of these examples, what should have been a home has been impoverished by larger political forces.

It would appear, then, that both poets use the word "house" as an image for negative cultural scripts affecting lives in reality—lives that need significant and imaginative revision if we are ever to have a "home." A cursory look at the word "home" in Stevens and Bishop supports this conclusion. In "The Auroras of Autumn," after saying good-bye to the structures of the father and of the mother, thinking "alike" apparently "made brothers of us in a home" (CP 419). In "Things of August," we find that "He could understand the things at home" (CP 493). In an early poem of Bishop's, we find "My home, my love-nest" (34). In "Questions of Travel," she asks us to "Think of the long trip home" (93).

But these examples ultimately provide a gross misrepresentation of what I have come to believe is a profound insight of these poets: our recourse to "homes" is simply the flip-side of our aversion to "houses"—that is, an easy but dangerous distinction that seems benign enough when we consider our personal spaces, but that actually encourages a largely accepted and unconscious cultural distinction that continues to encourage inclusion vs. exclusion, ourselves and "others," whoever those "others" may be, given a particular political crisis. Consider Bishop's early use of the word "home" in her well-known poem "The Man-Moth," in which it is the "pale subways of cement" that "he calls his home" (14). Bishop is clearly ironic here and equally so in a later poem where we are told, "Her home, when she is at home, is in Glens Fall" (89). Again, her irony is replete when she writes, "This is the soldier home from the war" (135) in "Visits to St. Elizabeths," or when she has the marooned but largely imprisoned Crusoe conclude, "'Pity should begin at home'" (163). In a similar manner, the opening of "Esthétique du Mal" introduces a student-poet who has learned old words in old poems supporting patriotism and war and who is ominously "at Naples writing letters home" (CP 313) as the Second World War begins. Or, more overtly, in "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War," Stevens sarcastically writes of "a profane parade,"

Young boys resembling pastry, hip-hip,
Young men as vegetables, hip-hip,
Home and the fields give praise, hurrah, hip,
Hip, hip, hurrah. (CP 278)

There is little doubt here that “home” can be metaphorically associated with the most nauseating and reductive of public rhetorics. Or, as Toni Morrison has succinctly put it in her novel *Paradise*, “Home is not a little thing” (213).

In her essay “Home,” Morrison asks a question that I consider to be most germane in understanding both Stevens and Bishop and their explorations of “house” and “home.” She says the biggest question that has troubled her work is “How to be both situated and free?” (5). Although she immediately translates this question into a racial problem, her abstract question seems to me to describe well both Stevens and Bishop—both the problems that trouble them in terms of our larger political society and the answers they attempt to offer, with deliberate restraint and reservations, in their highly subversive poetry.

Michael Beehler would concur, at least when it comes to Stevens. In his essay “Places for the Future to Come: Wallace Stevens and Frank Lloyd Wright,” Beehler convincingly argues that, while Stevens may not have known of Wright’s architecture and while Wright may not have read Stevens, both were trying in their various media to devise a form of established, but open spaces for larger political ends. In words remarkably similar to those of Morrison, Beehler writes:

How to build a space in which hope and futurity can live; how to construct a living space at once *rooted* in an enfolding present and *en route* toward an unfolding future for which it holds a place: what is a poetic problem in Stevens is an architectural one in Wright. What joins the poet to the architect is their shared antipathy for “the box”—the material box of a traditional architecture that forecloses the future by walling in space, and the conceptual box that enacts a similar foreclosure, walling in the world of “force.” . . . (50)

We could substitute the phrase “political box” for “conceptual box” and accurately describe not only these particular men and the problems they are addressing, but also the problems faced by Bishop.

This vexing dilemma forms the crux of a largely ignored poem by Stevens, “In the Clear Season of Grapes.” Far from being yet another poem concerned only with aesthetic arrangements, this poem dismisses such aesthetic gestures—that “table that holds a platter of pears, / . . . arranged for show”—as being shallow.

The mountains between our lands and the sea—
This conjunction of mountains and sea and our lands—
Have I stopped and thought of its point before?

When I think of our lands I think of the house
And the table that holds a platter of pears,
Vermilions smeared over green, arranged for show.

But this gross blue under rolling bronzes
Belittles those carefully chosen daubs.
Flashier fruits! A flip for the sun and the moon,

If they mean no more than that.

In the place of aesthetic posturings, the poem (or the poet) desires meaning—specifically, political meanings.

But they do.

And mountains and the sea do. And our lands.
And the welter of frost and the fox cries do.

Much more than that. Autumnal passages
Are overhung by the shadows of the rocks
And his nostrils blow out salt around each man.

(CP 110–11)

Thus, the most important line of the poem is “When I think of our lands I think of the house,” in which the “house” is clearly not a space of domestic intimacy, but precisely a cold place preferring aesthetic arrangements over the concern for the “conjunction of mountains and sea and OUR lands”—a place at once both political and natural.

In a similar fashion to that in which Frank Lentricchia read “Anecdote of the Jar” some years ago as a political allegory, I find “In the Clear Season of Grapes” to be an indictment of the way the dominant American culture produces an ethically empty house—a false structure that erases our real connection to the earth and each other. As Stevens might say, “Have I thought of this before?” and the answer seems to be yes, especially if he is remembering “Anecdote of the Jar.” Specifically, I think the gray jar corresponds to the “house” of “In the Clear Season of Grapes,” and Stevens’ disgust with this larger political situation in the latter poem is articulated by the last line (with its oddly non-referenced pronoun): “his nostrils blow out salt around each man.” Who is this possible “he,” if not the “he” that inhabits our founding constitution, guaranteeing (and hypocritically so) freedom to all men? Could it be that Stevens, like Toni Morrison long after

him, is indicting our actual "White House" for the social displacements and discriminations in these, supposedly, "our lands"?

Stevens seems to support the idea, however, that a "house" (rather than an inclusive "home") might yet be our best answer. In "Ghosts as Cocons" Stevens writes, "The grass is in seed. The young birds are flying. / Yet the house is not built, not even begun" (CP 119). Here the word "house" seems to resonate with the possibility of connectedness that the word "home" may well deny by its very exclusivity. Stevens appears to continue these reflections as a diptych, perhaps even a triptych, from these poems through "A Postcard from the Volcano." In this latter poem he postulates the fear—and the possibility—that for all of his and others' ethical, physical, spiritual, and political energy in building a better world, the next generation will find only "A dirty house in a gutted world" (CP 159). (Interestingly, this poem repeats the images of "foxes" and "grapes" that appeared in "In the Clear Season of Grapes.") Yet "A Postcard from the Volcano" introduces a new and important word—"mansion"—and asks will children ever know what we could "say of the mansion," as opposed to the "dirty house." Here, I cannot help but think of the biblical "mansion," with its many and inclusive rooms, that supposedly God makes ready for us. As in his final meditation on "The Rock," Stevens is invoking this biblical sense with the word "mansion" as an alternative to either "house" or "home." At the very least, as an aficionado of etymologies, he knew well that "mansion" means, as opposed to "house" or "home," to "abide," to "remain."

But as already noted, for Stevens the word "house" is not simply a negative space relegated to "Others"—nor is "home" naively presented as a space of intimacy and security. For example, in "Arrival at the Waldorf," Stevens contrasts the "green and actual Guatemala" with the sad and ironic return "Home from Guatemala, back at the Waldorf" (CP 241, 240). Stevens' dismantlings of our normally perceived dichotomy between "house" and "home" become quite pointed in "Certain Phenomena of Sound," in which he inverts the words' normal connotations:

So you're home again, Redwood Roamer, and ready
To feast . . . Slice the mango, Naaman, and dress it

With white wine, sugar and lime juice. Then bring it,
After we've drunk the Moselle, to the thickest shade

Of the garden. We must prepare to hear the Roamer's
Story . . . The sound of that slick sonata,

Finding its way from the house, makes music seem
To be a nature, a place in which itself

Is that which produces everything else, in which
The Roamer is a voice taller than the redwoods,

Engaged in the most prolific narrative,
A sound producing the things that are spoken.
(*CP* 286–87)

Here, the barely veiled irony of the return to “home again,” like the return home to the Waldorf, yields to an openness of the “house,” past the garden, in which nature is yet entwined with human sounds. As with the houses designed by Frank Lloyd Wright that Beehler discusses, Stevens appears here to favor the intermingling of inside and outside, included and excluded. Put differently, Stevens’ hovering ambivalence about the connotations of the words “house” and “home”—and his anxiety about the power of those words in realized life—seems remarkably similar to those of Toni Morrison in passages already cited from her essay “Home.”

Nowhere does Stevens explore this increasingly complex *topos* more fully than in “The Auroras of Autumn.” As opposed to the “mansion” of “A Postcard from the Volcano,” here Stevens introduces a “cabin”—a structure that I regard as the most immediate precursor to Bishop’s cabin, variously described by Bishop as the “proto-dream-house,” the “crypto-dream-house” (179) in her famous “The End of March.” Canto II of “The Auroras” begins with “Farewell to an idea . . . A cabin stands, / Deserted, on a beach.” It is notably “white, / As by a custom or according to / An ancestral theme or as a consequence / Of an infinite course.” Later, in the same section of the poem, “A cold wind chills the beach. / The long lines of it grow longer, emptier, / A darkness gathers though it does not fall / And the whiteness grows less vivid on the wall” (*CP* 412).

In canto III, that cabin is replaced precisely by a “house” we would normally call a “home”:

Farewell to an idea . . . The mother’s face,
The purpose of the poem, fills the room.
They are together, here, and it is warm,

With none of the prescience of oncoming dreams,
It is evening. The house is evening, half dissolved.
Only the half they can never possess remains,

Still-starred. (*CP* 413)

As with Bishop, whose structures everywhere are always on the edge of dissolving, the emphasis here is precisely on the dissolution—a yielding to something that remains but that we cannot possess. Again, I sense here

the underlying politics of inclusion and exclusion that Stevens wishes to disrupt. As an emblem, perhaps, the half-dissolving house of this section seems to answer the question, "How to be both situated and free?" I find it no accident, then, that the canto concludes with this otherwise mysterious line: "Upstairs / The windows will be lighted, not the rooms" (*CP* 413).

This speculation is amply supported by the next cantos of "The Auroras." In contrast to the dissolving house (and the dissolving mother, by the way) of canto III, canto IV of the poem introduces the archetypal patriarch who seems bent on domination and possession: "The father sits / In space, wherever he sits, of bleak regard" (*CP* 414). More important, the contrast is made quite clear in canto V, where "The mother invites humanity to her house / And table"—a table of a very different kind from that found in "In the Clear Season of Grapes"—while "The father fetches negresses to dance, / Among the children," as well as fetching "his unherded herds, / Of barbarous tongue, slavered and panting halves / Of breath, obedient to his trumpet's touch" (*CP* 415). As opposed to the mother and her dissolving house, the father seems to represent exactly the kind of politics of inclusion and exclusion Morrison bemoans in the essay "Home," right down to the specifics of ethnic domination and prejudice.

The underlying political commentary disavowing such exclusionary structures reaches its extreme in canto VI. "This is," Stevens writes,

Nothing until this named thing nameless is
And is destroyed. He opens the door of his house

On flames. The scholar of one candle sees
An Arctic effulgence flaring on the frame
Of everything he is. And he feels afraid. (*CP* 416–17)

Ambiguous in its hope and despair, canto VIII boldly states, "There may be always a time of innocence. / There is never a place" (*CP* 418). The reason there is "never a place" is an insight fully explored in one of Stevens' best-known wartime poems, "Description Without Place," in which he clarifies that it is not an actual place in which we live, but the descriptions of it—i.e., our rhetorical structures that are realized, frequently with great harm, in our actual world.

In sum, Stevens' poetry, especially his exploration of place, is not merely political: it is deeply subversive in ways that anticipate and perhaps influence many contemporary poets writing today. Yet I should also note that Stevens sustains the possibility, as tenuous as it may be, that with the right words, the right descriptions, we can create a world beyond inclusion and exclusion, not only in this country or polis, but in the world at large. He reiterates this point in poem after poem. I find it most fitting that he opens

this more optimistic possibility in a poem called "Architecture." There he asks, with nuances and ramifications that ripple through time from his own concerns to ours, "In this house, what matter of utterance shall there be?" (*OP* 37). At this particular moment in time, as we are rhetorically committed to an escalating war in Iraq in the name of Homeland Security, it is a question we—as well as our White House—should be asking ourselves even now.

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How Dutch Was Stevens?

BART EECKHOUT

All this so that Marco Polo could explain or imagine explaining or be imagined explaining or succeed finally in explaining to himself that what he sought was always something lying ahead, and even if it was a matter of the past it was a past that changed gradually as he advanced on his journey, because the traveler's past changes according to the route he has followed: not the immediate past, that is, to which each day that goes by adds a day, but the more remote past. Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had; the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places.

—Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

TO MAKE MY STORY comprehensible, I need to start by reminding readers of the historical ties between what are today called Flemings and Dutchmen. In today's national terms, I am a Fleming, which means that I was born and live in the northern part of Belgium, where the official language is Dutch—so called “Nederlands.” This means I speak roughly the same language as citizens from the Netherlands, which lies to the north of Flanders—though everything of course depends on how one defines a language. If one follows the sociolinguistic rule that a language is a dialect with an army, a navy, and an air force, then I speak a different language, because Belgium has all of these (if barely). But if one looks at things a little more historically and structurally, then Dutchmen and Flemings do speak very much the same language. The spelling of words is even jointly laid down by law in both countries. There are, to be sure, a few differences in vocabulary and pronunciation, much as one has between the kinds of English spoken in England, Scotland, and North America. But Flemish poets and novelists are almost all published in Amsterdam and sometimes even find a wider readership in the Netherlands than in Flanders. Occasional misunderstandings about vocabulary and pronunciation are merely sand in the cogs of communication and, especially for lovers of literature, more a source of riches and amusement than of irritation or obscurity.

Thus, I am writing here as a Fleming to talk about Stevens' Dutch background. First a few personal anecdotes. I grew up in a little village to the south of Ghent, where I am currently living and teaching. In this village, there was a Mr. Stevens, a friend of my father's. He had two sons about the same age as my brother and me and often on weekends we would meet on the organ loft of the local church, where my father played the organ during Mass and Mr. Stevens sang along. From as far back as I can remember, in other words, and almost twenty years before I ever heard of a certain Wallace Stevens, I grew up with the name of Stevens around me—though of course we did not anglicize the pronunciation and pronounced it in proper Dutch, which is closer to something like "Stayvens."

Anecdote two: below is a photograph of the wall behind a cemetery I passed by every day on my way to high school (see Fig. 1). By then my parents had decided to move to a suburb of Ghent and I took the bus every day to go to school in the city. On that bus, if I was not cramming Latin into my head or discussing my favorite soccer team, I would notice this wall of a kind of autorepair factory—it was never clear to me exactly what the building contained, but I knew these seven blue art-deco letters formed the largest-written name anywhere in my immediate surroundings. Little did I know how its almost daily repetition would condition me into choosing a Ph.D. topic, years later. Maybe what we are seeing in the picture is the point of origin of my career as a Stevens critic. But then, this paper will revolve exactly around such "maybes," especially when we are talking about points of origin.

First there was Mr. Stevens when I was a small kid, then the mysterious big blue name of Stevens every day on my way to high school: a mere coincidence? Not really. Anecdotal fact number three consists of a page from the current telephone directory for Ghent (too banal to reproduce in these pages). The directory, it appears, contains no less than



Fig. 1. The name "Stevens" seen on a factory in Ghent, Belgium.

155 Stevenses with a private telephone listed under each of their names. Have I been living all this time in the heart of Stevens country somehow? But he was of *Dutch* descent, was he not?

What I am presenting in this paper is just a tiny fraction of the research I am currently undertaking for my second book on Stevens, which carries as a working title "The Planet on the Table: Re/Globalizing Wallace Stevens." This book will explore different aspects of Stevens' global connections, much of it based on research I undertook in the Stevens Collection at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Thus, I am planning to write chapters on Stevens' correspondence with Rosamond Cary in Japan, Paule Vidal in Paris, and the young Korean globetrotter and later UCLA professor Peter Lee—all fascinating material. I would like to look also at a few unstudied international items from his library, such as the letters of the pianist-composer Ferruccio Busoni, and reconsider some of Stevens' poetry from the perspective of current globalization theories. The unifying concept in these analyses will be that of the construction of cultural identities. In one of my chapters, I am going to sink my teeth into the question of Stevens' Dutch ancestry and his genealogical investigations into this matter. A few of my working materials are what I am serving here as an *hors d'oeuvre*.

"[S]traight out of Holland," right? Some readers may remember the phrase: Stevens used it himself when he was waging a domestic war by epistolary means. When his daughter, Holly, threatened to drop out of Vassar, in the fall of 1942, he sent her a letter urging her to reconsider her decision. He was willing to take part of the blame for their quarrel, though in a somewhat ambiguous way. "My own stubbornness and taciturn eras are straight out of Holland," he wrote, "and I cannot change them any more than I can take off my skin" (L 422). In a bemusing reversal of the geopolitical situation, Holland in 1942 was coming to Stevens' rescue, allowing him to throw up his arms and exclaim to his daughter: Yes, I'm wrong, but I can't help it! It was, as we know, to no avail: Holly could lay claim to the same genealogical stubbornness—the same skin she was unable to take off—and so she clung to her decision and dropped out of college for good.¹

To a present-day Fleming, however, Stevens' association of Holland with stubbornness and especially taciturnity is a little surprising, to say the least. The last thing one can say of the Dutch today is that they are taciturn. Cultural stereotypes are in fact the reverse: for various historic reasons that I cannot begin to unpack here, Flemings are the more reticent ethnic group, while it is the Dutch who are endlessly chattering away and pride themselves on their ability to solve all conflicts through discussion. Maybe "straight out of Holland" should be understood as "circuitously out of Flanders"? I said I was going to focus on the "maybes."

I took the trouble to investigate the issue of nomenclature a little further and, in fact, it proves easy enough to argue that Stevens' oldest known ancestor in a direct male line was more likely of Flemish than of Holland Dutch descent. My next pieces of evidence are two maps showing the distribution of the name Stevens in Belgium and the Netherlands. They may

be found by visiting the Web sites <www.familienaam.be> and <www.familienaam.nl> and typing in Stevens' name in the Zoek ("Search") field (see Figs. 2 and 3). The map for Belgium tells us that the name appears 9,524 times. It is actually number 28—which is fairly high—on the list of most common names in Flanders. In the Netherlands, by contrast, the search engine spews out only 3,322 occurrences, and this in spite of the fact that the population of the Netherlands is almost three times that of Flanders: some sixteen versus six million people. This would mean that the name "Stevens" is almost nine times as likely to appear in Flanders as in the Netherlands. And, no surprise, when we look at the map of Belgium, we see that it is especially in and around Ghent, where I live, that the name to this day appears most frequently. It does look as if I *am* from the heart of Stevens country after all. Or maybe so.

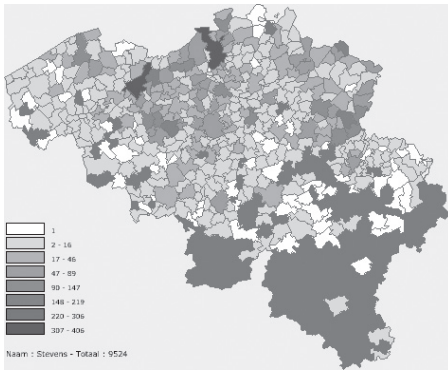


Fig. 2. Stevens in Belgium. From <www.familienaam.be>, 2004.

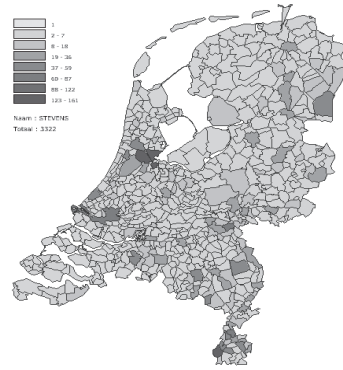


Fig. 3. Stevens in the Netherlands. From <www.familienaam.nl>, 2004.

"Maybe," because, for one thing, the two maps turn out to draw on a different kind of database. The Belgian figures are quite accurate, but upon closer inspection the Dutch ones have to be multiplied by a factor 2 or 2.5, which would bring the estimated total closer to 6,000 or 7,000—still fewer than in Flanders and in terms of relative frequency still no more than one Dutchman for every four Flemings, but at least it reduces the starkness of the contrast somewhat.²

But here is another "maybe." Maybe I should don a historian's hat and tell a few things about the massive emigration of Flemings to the north at the end of the sixteenth century—not too long, that is, before the first Stevens ancestor in a direct male line (whose precise origin remains shrouded in mystery) set foot on American soil. The political and cultural split between what we now call Flanders and the Netherlands was effectuated only during this period. As a consequence of a time of severe political and religious unrest, the Southern Netherlands (which was to become the current Flanders) was left under the control of the Catholic Spaniards, while the United Provinces of the Netherlands (a coalition of seven small

republics in the north, with Holland as its most powerful member) managed to stay independent and turned into a haven for non-Catholics from all over Europe, especially Calvinists. This political, cultural, and religious division got entrenched after the fall of Antwerp in 1585. Until that moment, the Southern Netherlands had been more prosperous and culturally richer than the Northern Netherlands. The following century, the seventeenth, by contrast, was to become the “Golden Age” of the Northern Netherlands and especially of Holland. It was during this period that Amsterdam thrived, New Amsterdam (later New York City) was founded, and the Dutch started emigrating to America.³ But here is my point: after the fall of Antwerp, 40% of the population of that city emigrated to the north and by 1611 about half of the 300 most powerful merchants in Amsterdam were actually from the south—from what we now call Flanders (Verhulst 64). In other words, when Amsterdam succeeded Antwerp as the most important port in Northern Europe during the seventeenth century, a great deal of its wealth and business success derived directly from immigrated Flemings. Since to this very day “Stevens” is a name that appears considerably more often in Flanders than in the Netherlands, would it not make good historical and statistical sense to suppose that Wallace Stevens’ ancestors in a direct male line were more likely of Flemish than of Dutch pedigree? Remember also the very Flemish taciturnity.

Let me interrupt this little bit of historic sleuthing to ask: How would Stevens himself have responded to my argument so far? The answer is: it depends. More precisely: it depends on when he would have heard it. During almost all of the years 1943–44, he would have dismissed it out of hand. He would have pointed out, dryly, that his earliest male ancestor was not named Stevens at all but Steven Jansz. This is the family tree he would have produced at that point⁴:

*WALLACE STEVENS

BORN OCTOBER 2, 1879. ELECTED JUNE 21, 1944.

Garret Barcalow Stevens	1848–1911	Margaretha Catharine Zeller	1848–1912
Benjamin Stevens	1808–1894	Elizabeth Barcalow	1811–1899
Abraham Stevens	1767–1817	Maria Hogeland	1769–1842
John Stevens	c. 1735–1811	Sarah Stoothoff	1745–1825
Abraham Stevens	Bapt. N.Y. 1709–1760	Blandina Janse Van Woggelum	(After 1700– 1760 after)
Michiel Janse Stevens	(Not re- corded before 1732–)	Ryertie Mol (Bapt.) N.Y.	1676 (not recorded)
Jan Stevensen	c. 1650–1685	Lysbeth Lucas	After 1686–
Steven Jansz	162[?]- after 1663	Mary Goosens	162[?]- Will probated 1687–

*Life Membership

Only the ancestor two branches down on this tree, Michiel Janse Stevens, shared the same family name, though in his own correspondence Wallace Stevens spelled the name usually as Stephenszen (Bates 612). Yet noticing that he had a captive ear for such discussions, Stevens probably would have gone on to explain the vagaries of nomenclature as he had become familiar with them from his genealogical investigations. He would have picked some books from his shelf such as those by George Beekman and Teunis Bergen. On the basis of such books, he would have explained that the name Stevens is a patronym, that it stands for the “son of Steven,” and that these patronyms were not yet fixed on the European continent at the time his direct male ancestor crossed the Atlantic. The Stevens surname in his family tree got fixed only because of the English convention to do so. If the English had not ruled over the American East Coast during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the family name might have jumped around a few more times and we would now be talking of a poet called Wallace Michelson or Wallace Abrams. In the Low Countries (which is the collective name for the current Netherlands and Flanders), the name of Stevens got fixed, together with all other family names, only during the occupation by Napoleon, in the early nineteenth century. Needless to say, this thoroughly complicates any speculation about the ethnic distribution of the name Stevens in the Low Countries and the precise origin of Stevens’ male ancestors, though even then the fact remains that the first name Steven derives from that of the first Christian martyr and that Flemings as a predominantly Catholic (which is to say saints-venerating) people were more inclined to use it than Dutch Protestants. It is no coincidence that James Joyce in Catholic Ireland gave his literary alter ego the name of Stephen Dedalus.

But look next at what would have happened at the very end of 1944. As Milton Bates tells the story, Stevens was shocked to learn that what he had believed in for two years on the basis of the genealogical research he had so amply funded—the fact that he descended from Steven Jansz—was dismissed by specialists of the Holland Society (Bates 612). All of a sudden, his oldest male ancestor on American soil was no longer Steven Jansz, but the said Michiel Stevens, and this man, to his further bewilderment, seems to have arrived not from the United Netherlands but from Danzig in Prussia, the present-day Gdansk in Poland. By consulting the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, one can see how Danzig at the time was the most prosperous port on the Baltic Sea, that by 1754 it had the largest population of any eastern European city, and that it shipped especially grain to other countries. But how this specific Michiel Stevens ever wound up in Poland before he came to America his descendant Wallace Stevens was never able to sort out. So the chances are still considerable that this Stevens in Poland actually hailed from Flanders, either directly or indirectly through Flemish emigrants who had recently moved to the Netherlands. Though Wallace Stevens might have had some trouble letting go of the long-standing

conviction that the male line in his family tree was solidly Dutch, he would have had to admit that my guess was as good as his. After all, he did accept being of German descent and, once the right evidence was produced, that he was partly Scottish, too.

Fortunately, a precise determination of Stevens' direct male line of ancestors is not something I am inclined to worry about. I intend to investigate the presence of Flemings and Dutchmen in Danzig a little further, though I do not expect to find much. What I am much more interested in is the inevitably speculative and provisional nature of such genealogical (re)constructions, and especially the aporetic quality of any attempt at defining a cultural identity through history. I am fascinated above all by the fact that Stevens' attempts at constructing an ethnic or cultural origin for himself forced him to confront a constant paradoxical forking.⁵ In the by now already dated language of deconstruction, any of these points of origin that Stevens sought to establish proved to be always already internally divided against itself. This does not mean I am out to confirm deconstructive dogmas—if anything of the sort may be said to exist—but rather that I want to retrace some of Stevens' search into his cultural and ethnic ancestry with a poststructuralist awareness of its theoretical implications about the construction of identities. In other words, I take Stevens' investigations into his ethnic identity (and the as yet undiscussed effects on his poetry, which I am saving for a later occasion) quite seriously, as I do the work of all competent historians, but I also believe that all historicist criticism gains from staying alert to questions of undecidability, impurity, and hybridity—categories that anybody with a narrowly racial, not to mention a racist, agenda has a tendency to ignore.

I would argue, in fact, that Stevens' own genealogical search constantly vacillated between two experiences, whose dynamic tension he actively sought: the pleasure of detecting roots and the (sometimes equally pleasurable) uncertainty of being uprooted. Digging into his family history allowed him both to settle upon certain facts and to linger in the dissemination of meaning. Thus, it gave rise to one more of those endless cycles between reality and the imagination that were so dear to him in his poetry as well. What is more, Stevens' quest for cultural roots, undertaken with such an unusual investment of time and money, established what I think was an equally productive tension with his status as one of the great "modernist" poets who depended on the need to write poetry as if on a blank slate. Always a figure too complex to fit into neat typologies, Stevens was after all a poet who could fulminate against "modernism" as a "disease" and a kind of "snow-blindness."⁶ If being a modernist artist meant giving dogmatic priority to, and believing in the superiority of, the new, or the here and now, without any deeper awareness and constant study of the past, then Stevens quite clearly considered it preposterous.

I would suggest, moreover, that as the cautious genealogical historian Stevens was not all that far removed from the daily lawyer he was at the

office: somebody, that is, who tended to look with a cool, rational eye at facts and their complex interconnections and who saw genealogy as “the science of correcting other genealogists’ mistakes” (*OP* 196); somebody who clearly loved to dig into specific cases, was used to judging facts, weighing pros and cons, and who tried to narrow things down by following specific rules in the hope of arriving at a conclusion that offered the satisfaction of snapping into place. But also—and here the poet comes into play again—somebody who liked to study these genealogical cases to feed his imagination. The incompleteness and partiality of the facts he gathered opened ample space for his imagination; they were mere “parts of a world” that demanded a rich imaginative life to piece them together—and frequently allowed for what Stevens so much appreciated: a provisional piecing together that remained open to modulation, adaptation, reconsideration. We should remember that this is a poet who never showed much enthusiasm for novels. Instead of imagining realities and alternative worlds through the reading of narrative fiction, he did so through the reading of historical records. Indeed, a glance at some of these records is enough to realize how such reading was anything but arid. I am thinking here of the hilarious patriotic doggerel Stevens came across in reading George Beekman’s book on early Dutch settlers of Monmouth County.

In my more elaborate future discussion of such issues, I hope to address questions such as whether or not Stevens’ backward look should be called nostalgic. Recent critics such as Svetlana Boym and William Sharpe have argued that there are at least two very different types of nostalgia, one that is reactionary and another that is critical or even politically progressive. From this perspective, the quality of Stevens’ nostalgia remains to be studied. In addition, I want to unpack some very concrete pieces with which Stevens was able to toy in constructing a mental image of his Holland Dutch ancestry. These pieces take the form of descriptions and definitions that he found in some of the books in his library, now at the Huntington. One is *The Dutch: A Portrait Study of the People of Holland*, which is a genial, lighthearted volume by Adriaan Barnouw, born in Amsterdam but a long-term emigré to the United States, who was at the time Queen Wilhelmina Professor of the History, Language and Literature of the Netherlands at Columbia University in New York. (Incidentally, Professor Barnouw describes the Dutch as “obstinate individualists” [256], thereby confirming Stevens’ ethnic self-identification as “stubborn,” though I have found nothing to confirm the taciturnity.) A second book, already referred to, is George Beekman’s *Early Dutch Settlers of Monmouth County, New Jersey*, where, yes, Beekman writes that the Dutch are “a quiet, grim and taciturn people” (21).

Finally, I intend to have a closer look at the history of the St. Nicholas Society of the City of New York, the hereditary society of Anglo-Dutch settlers of which Stevens became a proud member, as well as that of the Holland Society, into which he was never admitted. I have already gath-

ered materials in this respect, including an as yet unpublished photograph of Stevens at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel during the 100th Paas Festival of the St. Nicholas Society, but I must reserve publication for another occasion.

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Belgium

Notes

¹It is a little puzzling to observe how, almost twenty-five years later, when she was drawing up the index to her father's letters, Holly would come to suppress—or perhaps simply overlook—her father's ethnically inspired self-analysis: under the entry for "Holland," we do not find any reference to this particular letter, although it offers one of the rare instances of Stevens defining the cultural psyche of what he took to be his main ethnic origin. It adds to the curiosity of the omission, furthermore, to note that Holly was making short shrift with her page references under "Holland" on more than this single occasion: four of the page references listed in the Index under "Pennsylvania Dutch" point to passages actually dealing with the Holland Dutch.

²The figure of 3,322 Stevenses in the Netherlands applies to people listed in the national telephone directory for 1993. Although most spouses have apparently been included in this count, this is not the case with children or people who either did not have a telephone at the time or refused to have their names listed. I am grateful to Dr. Ann Marynissen of the Linguistics Department of Catholic University of Leuven for clarifying this issue in private correspondence.

³That the United Provinces of the Netherlands acted as a magnet to persecuted people from all over Europe is illustrated by the fact that a majority of the first settlers of New Amsterdam (and so the later New York) were in fact French-speaking Walloons, from what today would be the south of Belgium, who had recently escaped to the Northern Netherlands and were sailing under Dutch flag; see Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace's Pulitzer Prize-winning history of New York published a few years ago, as well as, for a specific account of the first "Dutch" settlers in what was to become New York, Russell Shorto's recent book on this topic.

⁴What follows is the reconstruction of Stevens' male line of descendency as reprinted on page 134 of the anonymously authored/edited *The Saint Nicholas Society of the City of New York* ([New York]: Saint Nicholas Society, 1945), which is part of the Stevens Collection at the Huntington Library. It has been reproduced before in abbreviated form by Milton Bates in his essay "To Realize the Past" (611).

⁵I use the term "forking" here because it is more easily associated with the visual image of a family tree, though Gilles Deleuze's even more overused image of the rhizome captures more precisely the process of signification I am referring to. The reader should be reminded in this context that tracing Wallace Stevens back to his first American ancestor in a direct male line is a heavily patriarchal undertaking that obfuscates the actual plurality of the poet's ancestry: the Michiel Stevens under discussion here was merely one of Wallace Stevens' sixty-four ancestors in the sixth generation before him. Whatever the precise ethnic origin of this particular ancestor, or perhaps of his own parents or grandparents, we do well to remember how his hereditary DNA was diluted to almost homeopathic proportions by the time Wallace Stevens received his genetic blueprint.

⁶See an unpublished part of Stevens' letter of May 9, 1949, to Paule Vidal, otherwise reprinted in Holly's selection of the letters (*L* 637–38). Some of the introductory

words excised by Holly read as follows: "The letter of Bernard Dorival infuriates me. He is a modern and modernism is a disease—something like snow-blindness. When one is a modern one can only see modern things" (The Huntington Library, WAS 2932). The quotation is reproduced by permission of the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. I am grateful to Sara S. Hodson, Curator of Literary Manuscripts, and to the staff at the Huntington for their generosity and wonderful professionalism.

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Modernist Muses that Matter: Inspiration Revisited in Pessoa and Stevens

IRENE RAMALHO SANTOS

Rasgar-me todo, abrir-me completamente, tornar-me passento. . . .
—Pessoa, “Ode triunfal”

The body quickened and the mind in root. . . .
—Stevens, “The Rock”

THE CONCEPT OF inspiration, fallen into disrepute in modernist theories of creativity, seems to be coming back. In 1997, Timothy Clark, explicitly following the lead of Maurice Blanchot’s chapter on inspiration in *The Space of Literature* (*L’espace littéraire*, 1955), published a whole book entitled *The Theory of Inspiration*. In this book, Clark, like Blanchot, takes up the muse as well. To discuss inspiration and deal with the question of the muse, including the invocation, is to rethink the being and very foundation of poetry. At about the same time, Jean-Luc Nancy wrote a book entitled *Les muses* (1994; 2001) that is a kind of counter-Hegelian reflection on art and poetry. Asking anew Heidegger’s question in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, 1956) “What is art?” (*Was ist die Kunst?*), Nancy takes the plurality of the muses to constitute a proper model for interrogating the plurality of art. Why nine muses, rather than just one? Why so many forms of art, rather than just one?

The myth of the nine muses, with their various specializations, helps Nancy to formulate the question that gives the opening essay of his book its title—“Why Are There Several Arts and Not Just One?” (*Porquoi y a-t-il plusieurs arts, et non pas une seule?*). The plurality of the worlds is his simple answer, elaborated on in many ways in the course of the book. In this articulation of the plurality of the arts with the plurality of the worlds, however, the problem that really concerns Nancy in *Les muses* is still the Heideggerian one of how to understand the being and origin of art. Heidegger, conceiving of art as the composing (*dichten*) of itself as unconcealedness (*Unverborgenheit*), or the truth (*aletheia*), insists that all art is *in essence* (*wesentlich*) poetry (*Dichtung*).

For Nancy, too, poetry is the most important of the arts because, in its very saying, in its *being a saying*, it constantly formulates *and* questions the

mystery of its own being, thus fully engaging the senses, while aspiring to transcend them. Art interrupts thought through the senses, and poetry, because language is its medium, is a particularly critical witness to the complexity of such a process. After all, the traditional muse is no more than a figure to explain the inexplicable: what is the being, or essence (*Wesen*), of poetry? What grounds its power? In modernity, when mimesis and the technicity of rational composition by and large take precedence, the figure of the inspirational muse appears necessarily less credible as a way of asking the most profound and demanding questions about poetic power. Hegel stated this in a different way when he said, not disapprovingly, that art, which he claimed modernity does not need anyway, is a thing of the past (*ein Vergangenes*) and no longer yields full satisfaction (*volle Befriedigung*), but rather knowledge (*Wissenschaft*) (*Einleitung* 30–31; Introduction 11).

Whenever mimesis and the excellence of the poet's craft are emphasized in conceptions of poetry, the muse must go on a diet and make herself scarce. This happened in antiquity as well, whenever *techné* took precedence over *poesis*. Right at the beginning of the *Aetia*, Callimachus was happy to receive the following piece of advice from Apollo: "Poet, feed the sacrificial victim to be as fat as possible but, my friend, keep the Muse slender" (7). I would like to insist, however, that the concept of inspiration and the figure of the muse, as what founds the poem, are indispensable for our understanding of lyric poetry in modernity as well. In this paper, I appropriate Judith Butler's famous title (*Bodies That Matter*) to signify that the modern poet's muse is often indistinguishable from the poet's own body. The poet's body is the poem's grounding. Poetry speaks sense by letting the senses speak.

The figure of the transcending muse was the ancient prerogative of the male poet in the tradition. (Women poets are a different story and I deal with that in another section of my work.¹) Invoking the muse was supposed to grant the poet poetic power. But in the nineteenth century something happens. Walking along the streets of the modernized city in the age of capital, the poet finds the muse sick and he is derisively dismayed that she has to sell herself to survive. Remember the opening line of Baudelaire's "La muse malade"? "Ma pauvre muse, hélas! qu'as tu donc ce matin?" (My poor muse, alas! what is the matter with you this morning?²) Of course, if you read Baudelaire's entire sonnet carefully you realize that there is nothing wrong with the "muse." It is the poet who feels the weight of time and history, the impingements of Christianity, and the demands of the market economy and consumer society. In Baudelaire, modernity itself becomes the muse and, for better or worse, provides the music.

A century later, things get worse. Stevens speaks of a "bad time" in which the "muse of misery" must be shunned (*CP* 426–27); and Pessoa realizes that the muse is not there at all, cannot even be addressed, and the word (or song) seems totally out of reach.³ Abandoned by the truant muse, the

male modernist poet is thus forced to rethink the old notion of inspiration all over again. What I would like to suggest is that, like women poets ever since Sappho, men poets in modernity have no choice but to turn to their own mortal bodies to ground their poetry writing. Stevens calls it "poverty" sometimes, as in "In a Bad Time," the poem just alluded to. Not surprisingly, it is up to the contemporary American poet to formulate the implicitly paradoxical predicament. "The mating of Mnemosyne with Zeus, resulting in the birth of the nine muses," writes Próspero Saíz, "is out of memory. The muses no longer call upon the poets with the gift of the poetic word."⁴ Saíz goes on joco-seriously to rethink the poetic in our time by concerning himself with his "circulatory system," his "sympathetic nervous system," the capacity of his heart to produce the "atrial natriuretic factor," and the "electromagnetic signals" of the "breath-turning" of his heart. In the passage from which I am quoting, Saíz takes Paul Celan's "Atemwende" [breathturn] as the quintessentially poetic gesture and literally traces its anatomy in the organic functionings of his own biological body. For the American poet in the twenty-first century, only the *cæsura* of the heartbeat "gathers" poetry.⁵

Unlike the contemporary American poet, however, neither Pessoa nor Stevens was ever totally comfortable with his body. Stevens (large, visible, opulent and American at the outset of the modern empire) is a virile poet of noble sounds, yet excessively bulky, bulging, and too vastly accumulating, and never quite sure of being a native in his own world. Relishing, like Kierkegaard, Friedrich Schlegel's dictum—"Nur Gesundheit ist liebenswürdig" (Health alone is lovable [NA 17])—Stevens toys with the idea of transcendent inspiration but firmly embraces mortality as the ultimate foundation. "Death is the mother of beauty" (CP 68), he proclaims in "Sunday Morning" and, in "Peter Quince at the Clavier," he states: "in the flesh [beauty] is immortal" (CP 91). At the same time, in a number of poems, Stevens goes on insisting on health and good food—and the senses.

"With my whole body I taste these peaches" (CP 224), Stevens writes in "A Dish of Peaches in Russia," and of these peaches, which further down he tells us sensuously are "red," have "soft" "skin," and are full of "juice" and "colors," he goes on to say: "I touch them and smell them. . . . I absorb them. . . . I see them as a lover sees." Moreover, when in Stevens we encounter the "major man," one of his names for the modern poet, he may be seated in a café, as in "Paisant Chronicle," and "There may be a dish of country cheese / And a pineapple on the table" (CP 335). Or, more luxuriously still, as in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," he may be found eating "lobster Bombay with mango / Chutney" washed down with "Meursault" (CP 401).

Pessoa, on the other hand (slight, ill-disposed, obscure, and Portuguese to boot at the dead-end of the old seaborne empire), is often overwhelmed by sickness. He does not seem to need any food at all and is not particularly fussy about wine, for the end of wine is "vomiting" (*Obra poética*

355). In any case, both poets came to realize, albeit with different kinds and degrees of reluctance, that all they could have to ground their poetry writing was their own mortal bodies.

Here is the Portuguese modernist poet's lament for the inadequate replacement of the absent muse by his diminished, sickly body:

Os Antigos invocavam as Musas.
Nós invocamo-nos a nós mesmos.
Não sei se as Musas apareciam—
Seria sem dúvida conforme o invocado e a invocação.—
Mas sei que nós não aparecemos.
Quantas vezes me tenho debruçado,
Sobre o poço que me suponho
E balido "Ah!" para ouvir um eco,
E não tenho ouvido mais que o visto—
O vago alvor escuro com que a água resplandece
Lá na inutilidade do fundo . . .
Nenhum eco para mim . . .
Só vagamente uma cara,
Que deve ser a minha, por não poder ser de outro.
É uma coisa quase invisível,
Excepto como luminosamente vejo
Lá no fundo . . .
No silêncio e na luz falsa do fundo . . .

Que Musa! (*Obra poética* 330)

[The Ancients invoked the Muses.
We invoke ourselves.
I don't know if the Muses appeared—
It would no doubt depend on the invoked and the
invocation.—
But I know we do not appear.
How often have I leant over
Into the well that I suppose myself to be
And bleated "Ah!" to hear an echo,
And have heard nothing more than the seen—
The vague dark dawn that is the water's sheen
Down there in the uselessness of the depth . . .
No echo for me . . .
Only a face vaguely,
Which must be mine since it can't be anybody else's.
It's an almost invisible thing,
Except as I luminously see
Down there in the depth . . .

In the silence and false light of the depth . . .

What a Muse!]

What I have just quoted is a poem signed by Álvaro de Campos, one of Fernando Pessoa's major heteronyms. It is not just that the vagabond muse has been gone a long time. What happens is that poetry has no grounding any more. Forced to invoke himself, the modern poet is unable to respond to the call. The narcissistic gesture of self-invocation mixes up the myths to signify the poet's lonely silence. Left but with the barely visible reflection of his own face at the bottom of the deep well that *is* his own being, the poet is like a bodiless Narcissus that dares not embrace his own image and is therefore denied even the echo of a voice. The reflected face that he believes to be his own, apparently "because it can't be anybody else's," is really not his proper face, but rather a heteronymic face, and the reflection of a heteronymic face, at that. What a (non)muse indeed!

Thus left alone with bottomless inspiration, the modernist poet has no choice but to grapple its corporeality. A sick body is Campos' usual way of poeming (*dichten*). In a poem that reads like an ironic account of his poetic career at the end of his life, Campos claims finally to have understood himself, by sensing his stomach. The "truth" is unconcealed in his feeling it with his bowels (*Arre, encontrei uma solução, e foi preciso o estômago! / Encontrei uma verdade, senti-a com os intestinos!* [Darn, I found a solution, and I had to use my stomach! / I found one truth, felt it with my intestines!]) (*Obra poética* 345). The very existence of "Álvaro de Campos," the heteronymic person that is not Pessoa himself, is, of course, already a problematization of poetry (*Dichtung*). It points to the "crisis" that is Clark's concern in *The Theory of Inspiration*, whose subtitle is *Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing*.⁶ But Campos' poeming pushes it further.

In Campos' poetry, Pessoa recreates the muse and restores inspiration by indulging in his highly (homo)sexualized, masochist, masturbatory body, a body that a would-be straight Pessoa, in a very macho, deeply prejudiced Portugal at the beginning of the twentieth century, could not but sense as profoundly sick. In "Ode triunfal" [Triumphal Ode], Pessoa's body-as-muse is powerfully expressed by an extraordinary, untranslatable metaphor: *passento* (*Obra poética* 240–45).⁷ The use Pessoa makes of this unusual word—*passento*—in Campos' ode requires all the meanings associated with the verb *passar* [to pass], both transitive and intransitive (passing, letting pass, suffering, enduring, disappearing, dying). As the ambiguities of the triumphal chant get under way—the feverish poet torn between the elating force and the crippling pain of the machines—a timely cry for inspiration is put in place. What muse could bring the poet the words capable of expressing all the contradictions of modernity, which of course include all the contradictions of antiquity and of all time? How can

the poet express the promiscuity of time and space and their intersections and passages? There may be no answer to these questions. All we have is the poet's sensuously hyperbolic desire, suggesting that the answer must lie in the promiscuous organicity of his own homoerotic body. Aroused by his own astonishment at the complex accomplishments of modernity, the poet is inspired by his physical, corporeal incapacity to voice them:

Ah, poder exprimir-me todo como um motor se exprime!
Ser completo como uma máquina!
Poder ir na vida triunfante como um automóvel último-
modelo!
Poder ao menos penetrar-me fisicamente de tudo isto,
Rasgar-me todo, abrir-me completamente, tornar-me
passento
A todos os perfumes de óleos e carvões
Desta flora estupenda, negra, artificial e insaciável!
(*Obra poética* 240)

[Oh to be able to express my whole being as an engine
expresses itself!
To be complete like a machine!
To go triumphantly through life like the latest model car!
To be able at least to penetrate myself physically with all this,
Rip myself wide open, and become *passento*
Of all the perfumes of the oils and hot coals
Of this stupendous, artificial and insatiable black flora!]

There is no such *passento* body in Stevens. The closest you may get in Stevens to Pessoa/Campos' unhealthy imaginings is the sick man who, in the poem of the same title, chooses the good speech "out of himself" (*OP* 118).⁸ But I would like to suggest that the body as "susceptible being" is for the American poet, too, the proper site of inspiration. I have just alluded to "A Discovery of Thought," a late poem of Stevens' that locates itself "At the antipodes of poetry" (*OP* 123, 122). Here, images of birth, infancy, and generation abound to stress the "Surviving being born, the event of life" at the end of the poem. The "first word spoken," the poem states, is "the susceptible being arrived," and the "susceptible" is identified with what Heidegger called unconcealedness ("disclosure," is Stevens' word), that is to say, with the truth of poetry:

The first word would be of the susceptible being arrived,
The immaculate disclosure of the secret no more obscured.
(*OP* 123)

In "The Rock," another late poem in which an aging Stevens reminisces about poetic creativity by articulating nature, the senses, and the imagination, a striking corporeal image makes its appearance halfway through. The leaves, the poem says,

are more than leaves that cover the barren rock.

They bud the whitest eye, the pallidest sprout,
New senses in the engenderings of sense,
The desire to be at the end of distances,

The body quickened and the mind in root. (CP 527)

In the last two lines of this passage ("The desire to be at the end of distances, / The body quickened and the mind in root"), we hear how the poet's desire, engendered by the leaves, not only includes the aliveness of the body but also calls for the animality of a mind in root. Strikingly enough, "in root," like the snout of a hog in search of food, syntactically parallels "in love" in the next line ("[The leaves] bloom as a man loves, as he lives in love"). No wonder, then, that Stevens' poet is more often than not a "massive body and long legs, stretched out," a "giant ever changing" (CP 443), a "naked man" (CP 262), a "central man" (CP 251), a "hero" (CP 274), a "human globe," a "man of glass," whose "naked" "transparence" (CP 250–51) binds him firmly to the stark reality of the earth-as-human-dwelling.

In an earlier essay "The Woman in the Poem: Wallace Stevens, Ramon Fernandez and Adrienne Rich," I discuss Stevens' deconstruction of the muse myth in "To the One of Fictive Music" and "The Idea of Order at Key West." In the first of these two poems, the poet engages in deconstruction by playing with, or amusing himself with, the very word "muse," and making of the myth a mortal affair of human generation. Often, in Stevens' poetry, the name of the sister and, particularly, the name of the mother are invoked as "the purpose" of the poem (CP 413). In "The Idea of Order at Key West," the traditional invocation of the woman's voice as the source of poetry-making gives way to philosophical musings on the nature and function of poetry. That Ramon Fernandez, the regular critic of *La nouvelle revue française*, is made to play the dumb part as an irrelevant interlocutor, may well signify that the meaning of poetry lies in the poetic itself, and not in the "old descriptions of the world" that so much tire Stevens' "latest freed man" (CP 204–05). A fine counterpart to these two muse poems is "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon":

Not less because in purple I descended
The western day through what you called
The loneliest air, not less was I myself.

What was the ointment sprinkled on my beard?
What were the hymns that buzzed beside my ears?
What was the sea whose tide swept through me there?

Out of my mind the golden ointment rained,
And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.
I was myself the compass of that sea:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
Or heard or felt came not but from myself;
And there I found myself more truly and more strange.
(CP 65)

Harold Bloom's uplifted *and* uplifting reading of the poem, in which Hoon, Whitman, and "the girl at Key West" are, according to the critic, brought together to signify the essence of poetry, is well known (63–67). But let me highlight in the poem the body that matters, that is to say, the poem's sensuous insistence on the physicality of the image. The subject descending, walking, and feeling; the oblique mention of bodily fluids; and the question about the senses: seeing, hearing, the suggestion of touch in the implications of "ointment," and even taste in the promised tea of the title—the body is, to my mind, where the poet finds himself "more truly and more strange." Stevens' lifelong engagement with the complex articulation between reality and the imagination comes down to this: that poetry is nothing if it is not "the real." When, in "Metaphor as Degeneration," the poet denies that metaphor is degeneration and insists that "being / Includes death and the imagination," he cannot but have the promise and mortality of the human body in mind: the man "in black space" counters the man "white as marble" (CP 444).

"The body is the great poem" (OP 194), Stevens writes in one of his "Adagia." In "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" (the essay in which Stevens compares poetry with philosophy to conclude that poetry *is not* philosophy), the poet takes up the question of the muse once again in terms that are not unexpectedly generational and patriarchal, alluding to "son" and "father" and the male sex of centuries (section 5 begins with the much-quoted sentence: "The centuries have a way of being male"). The muse, the (female) muse is dismissively defined as "a kind of sister of the Minotaur," "somehow more than human" and "half-beast" (NA 52) as well. A few pages down, the beast-like, "mystic muse" is discarded altogether. Interestingly enough, as he recreates the self-sufficient poet, it is as if Stevens-the-thinker were quoting Stevens-the-poet by setting-off from the rest of the text and highlighting with italics the following statement about the senses replacing the muse, presumably authored by his poetic self:

No longer do I believe that there is a mystic muse, sister of the Minotaur. This is another of the monsters I had for nurse, whom I have wasted. I am myself a part of what is real, and it is my own speech and the strength of it, this only, that I hear or ever shall. (NA 60)

The poet's reasoning on the foundation of poetic creativity thus requires "a return to fact," "sense," and "sensibility," leads to the realization that "poetry is only reality" and reaches the conclusion that "fact" is what constitutes "poetic truth" (one is reminded here of "The eye's plain version" [CP 465] at the beginning of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven").

Fact-as-imagination (or the muse-less embodied poet) is what modern poetry is all about. The imagination is nothing but the real, for the world of fact is the equivalent of the world of the imagination: "Real and unreal are two in one" (CP 485), he says in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." After all, reality and the imagination, Stevens insists in "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," "look" alike. The body grounds the real ("fact") and the unreal ("the imagination") at one and the same time (NA 61). And so the poet repeats his own *sense* of himself as poetic foundation: "*I am myself a part of what is real and it is my own speech and the strength of it, this only, that I hear or ever shall*" (NA 63; repeated with variation on 67). The essay's last couple of pages insist on "sensibility" and "feeling" to stress the young poet's virility, an idea that, far from being merely theoretical (or, as Stevens puts it, far from being "lost . . . in the folds of the garments of the ghost or ghosts of Aristotle"), underwrites the physicality of the "masculine nature" of "genius" (NA 66-67).

I have written elsewhere about the unsurprising masculinism of Stevens' "supreme fiction."⁹ Here, I just want to point out that, in himself, in his own body, the poet still remains inscrutable to himself. He may have discarded the "mystic" muse, but precisely for that very reason he needs to address the female other, or, we might say paraphrasing Karen Swann (and Stevens, for that matter), the male poet needs to "harass the muse" in order to justify his own autonomous manly being.¹⁰ "*Inexplicable sister of the Minotaur,*" Stevens apostrophizes as he substitutes himself for the muse in his conclusion, "*hear me and recognize me as part of the unreal*" (NA 67). In Canto X of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," the poet goes even further, invoking the "more than natural" figure to put her finally in the "difference" of her place and thus establish his (that is to say, poetry's) own grounding. Whether familiar or aberrant, seductive or overworked, the woman brings the corporeal sensuousness ("Fat girl, terrestrial"; "my green, my fluent mundo") that confirms the undisputed mastery of the male (heterosexual) poet, whose fiction, the supreme fiction, "results from feeling" (CP 406-07).

I agree with early Gerald Bruns that Stevens often sounds as if he were finally making true the idealist coincidence of poetry and reality as propounded by the German romantics (e.g., Novalis' assertion that "poetry is

absolutely and genuinely real" [*Die Poesie ist das echt absolut Reelle*, Fr. 1853]) (209). But I would bring in as well Stevens' "fascination" with the senses, as Charles Altieri calls it, to understand rather that, in Stevens, the real *is* the ultimate, absolute poem. The poem's ambition is *to be* reality, to take the place of a mountain and breathe its oxygen. In "The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain," in a truly Whitmanian manner, Stevens' poet and poem are one with their own material locality. The poet's "breath" (what used to be called inspiration) somehow achieves completion as a mountain that *is* the poet's own body. It is tempting to surmise that Stevens may have had New Haven's Sleeping Giant in mind. More important than that, however, is to account for poetry making (*poietiké*) as coinciding with the human act of existing. Heidegger's conception of poetry as building, dwelling, thinking (*bauen wohnen denken*) is in order here. Acting, or sensuously grasping (*greifen*), is what poeming (*dichten*) is all about.¹¹

Philosophy may worry about distinguishing the "real" from the "un-real," but poetry delights in the disquieting confusion of "is" and "as." For the poet, we learn in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," "made up" minds are fatal (CP 472). Poetry provides no answers. Poetry questions and interpellates. Poetry extemporizes. That the poet's extemporizing in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" relies heavily on the senses (particularly, but not exclusively, on sight) is easy to demonstrate. What is perhaps not so visible is the extent to which the poem's imagery calls for the reader's sensuous engagement as well: how else could the "little reds" be truly "realized"? (CP 488). Poetry requires three bodies: the poet's, the poem's, and the reader's. As Pessoa once memorably said through Campos' body, "the poem is always written the following day" (*Obra poética* 310).

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Notes

¹ In a separate paper-in-progress, I deal with the question of the woman poet's muse ("Remembering Forgetfulness: Women Poets and the Lyrical Tradition").

² Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

³ For a fuller treatment of this problem in Pessoa's work, see my "The Truant Muse and the Poet's Body."

⁴ Próspero Saíz, "In Time, Keep the Muse Thin." A Portuguese version of this paper, first presented at the IV International Meeting of Poets in Coimbra (1998), will appear as "No tempo, a Musa quer-se magra," trans. Maria Irene Ramalho, in *As novas poéticas/The New Poetics*, edited by Graça Capinha and Maria Irene Ramalho.

⁵ Cf. the conclusion of "In Time, Keep the Muse Thin/No tempo, a Musa quer-se magra." See also Paul Celan, *Der Meridian* (1960), GW, III, 187–202; *Atemwende* (1967), GW, II, 11–107; and *Breathturn*.

⁶ Pessoa is unfortunately not one of the poets studied by Timothy Clark.

⁷ See also Richard Zenith's translation in *Literary Imagination*.

⁸ I deal with sickness as a metaphor for poetry in Pessoa and Stevens in "A doença do poeta."

⁹ Cf. Irene Ramalho Santos, *Atlantic Poets*, 212–13.

¹⁰ Swann, 81–92. Cf. the "harassing master" in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" (CP 486).

¹¹ For the Heidegger references, which suggest to me a reading of Stevens' "hands" and "touch" somewhat different from Carolyn Masel's in "Stevens and the Language of Touch," see "Building Dwelling Thinking" and "What Calls for Thinking" in *Basic Writings*, 343–91. Cf. *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 129–62.

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Privative Synecdoches

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THIS PAPER EMERGES from a continuing interest in the following question: What happens when, in a work of literature or any other text, society is conflated with the physical world? It is not surprising that this conflation, or confusion, should occur: after all, people en masse have in common with material reality a quality of surrounding the individual, and statements in which “the world” refers ambiguously to society or the encompassing physical whole are so familiar that we rarely give them special notice. Nonetheless, it should be obvious that any collapse of the distinction between the totality of human relations and the totality of the material environment can have important consequences. In the discourse of human development, for example, various prescriptions for education have followed from an imputation to material nature of what we might rather regard as effects of social practice (or vice versa); in practical politics, one method of evading demands for change is to attribute problems of provision to a fundamental scarcity of resources instead of inadequate institutional arrangements.

I have noted elsewhere (see *Solid Objects* 219–21) that Wallace Stevens enters this general territory in 1937’s “The Man with the Blue Guitar,” where the familiar call for a poetry of engagement with the masses in hard times (“ ‘But play, you must, / A tune beyond us, yet ourselves’ ” [CP 165]) is answered, several cantos later, with a declamation about the earth’s misanthropy:

The earth is not earth but a stone,
Not the mother that held men as they fell

But stone, but like a stone, no: not
The mother, but an oppressor, but like

An oppressor that grudges them their death,
As it grudges the living that they live. (CP 173)

If “The Man with the Blue Guitar” tends to conceal its modulation from the social to the physical, however, other Stevens poems seem rather to foreground the problem of how the two relate. One such poem is “In a

Bad Time," which appeared in *The Hudson Review* in spring 1948. In the Brazeau oral biography of Stevens, Frederick Morgan recalls soliciting a poem from Stevens for the first issue of that periodical, to which request the poet responded with both generosity and modesty. "If the enclosed poem is of any interest to you," he wrote, "'you are most welcome to it. Since you make a point of being incorporated not for profit, let me say that I don't want to be paid for the poem if you use it'" (218). "In a Bad Time" appeared as the second item in that very first number, following an essay on Dostoevsky's *Possessed* by R. P. Blackmur and preceding, among other entries, an article by Herbert Read on the state of visual art in Europe and poems by e. e. cummings, W. S. Merwin, and Josephine Miles. Since 1948, however, the poem has attracted little comment—which is a great shame, because it is extraordinary in several ways.¹

The first five tercets run as follows:

How mad would he have to be to say, "He beheld
An order and thereafter he belonged
To it"? He beheld the order of the northern sky.

But the beggar gazes on calamity
And thereafter he belongs to it, to bread
Hard found, and water tasting of misery.

For him cold's glacial beauty is his fate.
Without understanding, he belongs to it
And the night, and midnight, and after, where it is.

What has he? What he has he has. But what?
It is not a question of captious repartee.
What has he that becomes his heart's strong core?

He has his poverty and nothing more.
His poverty becomes his heart's strong core—
A forgetfulness of summer at the pole. (CP 426–27)

In the first three tercets, social and economic want materialize in what we might call privative synecdoches. Cold, night, bad bread, and bad water are all positives that figure forms of lack—lack of heat, lack of daylight, lack of bread easily obtained, lack of sweet water—and are legible, together, as markers of a more general deprivation. What gives the poem its subtle power, I think, is the way in which Stevens deploys these privative synecdoches in tercets four and five. There, the beggar's "poverty becomes his heart's strong core," as though, in a peculiar transubstantiation, the lack embodied in the bread has worked its way into the tissues of the one who ingests it. An external absence appears to embed itself as a substan-

tive internal poverty, in other words, although it is not clear whether the principal conduit here is the gaze or the closer physical contact of eating hard-found bread, drinking miserable water, and growing cold. Indeed a central question raised, but not clearly answered, by this poem is how a situation beheld finally relates to a situation consumed. Is there a causal relation, somehow, between beholding and belonging? Is there a difference between the statement that one beholds and *thereafter* belongs and the statement that one beholds and *therefore* belongs? Is Stevens laying stress on the *difference* between looking and consuming by way of showing that one who merely gazes on an order will not belong to the scene in the way one embedded in calamity will? Or is he rather stressing the likeness of the two modes of contact, to make the lesson of the beggar applicable to any beholder?

Further complicating matters, here, is the fact that tercets two and three speak not of the beggar's absorbing calamity but of calamity's absorbing the beggar: "And thereafter he belongs to it," not it to him. Yet in the fifth tercet, as we have just seen, poverty becomes his heart's strong core. The strange upshot of stanzas two through five taken together, then, is that the beggar and his world have become synecdoches of each other.

The poem then concludes,

Sordid Melpomene, why strut bare boards,
Without scenery or lights, in the theatre's bricks,
Dressed high in heliotrope's inconstant hue,

The muse of misery? Speak loftier lines.
Cry out, "I am the purple muse." Make sure
The audience beholds you, not your gown. (CP 427)

Unexpected as these closing tercets may seem at first, they prove on closer inspection to draw out an implication of the earlier part of the poem. For if it is true that poverty has been introjected by the beggar, then the locus of the tragic can really only be within—in the heart—not in the external scene of deprivation. As Stevens would suggest in a rather different register in "The Auroras of Autumn," tragedy is never outside in the material world, which bears the innocence of the insensate. To believe that it inheres in an external bareness would be to mistake Melpomene, the tragic muse, for a genius loci.

What this point suggests in its turn, however, is that tragedy is no respecter of classes. To be sure, when the speaker bids the muse see how tragedy is a matter of self rather than setting or costume, he sets up a metaphorical relation between her and the beggar. But the larger implication of these lines is that Melpomene can find a figure in a person of *any* degree of affluence, being no less herself even in a theater of plenty. One would have as high a capacity for tragedy being rich as one would being poor.

None of the critics whom I have found mentioning this poem (in my admittedly imperfect survey of the literature) has asked what it would portend were it in any degree about actual beggars. Not without reason, they have treated the beggar as a figure for the person with or without imagination, the poet confronting the dramatist, or the subject in general. Yet insofar as the poem does display an attitude toward indigence—and it would seem a strange limitation on poetic meaning to insist that it displays none—the foregoing considerations make it a profoundly troubling exercise. And this in at least four senses.

For one thing, the poem seems to perform something like the conflation I described at the beginning of this paper, in which a contingent scarcity is rendered indistinguishable from an inevitable existential barrenness. In this tableau, the ground of the beggar's hunger and exposure is not a social order that might have been done better by its least fortunate members, but the immutable orders of night, cold, and perhaps the sky. A second score on which the poem feels problematic is its seeming to make the beggar's misery into an aesthetically or intellectually pleasurable spectacle for the reader. In this respect, the lines, "For him cold's glacial beauty is his fate. / Without understanding, he belongs to it," may be nearly as troubling as the notorious "How red the rose that is the soldier's wound" (CP 318) from "Esthétique du Mal."

A related difficulty, and perhaps the most intractable, is that "In a Bad Time" seems to want to ennoble the beggar's suffering by sheer fiat and in so doing declare that suffering redeemed. The beggar's heart-embedded poverty becomes, insistently, something he "has," a possession of strength that seems not just to compensate for material possessions denied, but also to nullify the problem of nostalgic longings for ease by erasing them ("A forgetfulness of summer"). This effect is, of course, reinforced by the description of Melpomene as the *purple* muse, which implies that possession of tragedy is, in its way, the highest affluence. Fourth and finally, the final tercets seem to add insult to injury by taking back some of the admiration apparently bestowed on the beggar in the previous lines. In suggesting that Melpomene can inhabit scenes of plenty as well as stint, they imply that those awash in material comforts need not feel morally or metaphysically inferior to the beggar. In this poem, it would appear, the deprived have small right either to complaint (since poverty is transfigured into strength) or to special admiration (since ennobling tragedy can live with everyone, not just the poor).

It is not my intention to deny that tragedy touches the comfortable as well as the deprived in real life, of course, nor am I asserting that every figurative invocation of poverty should be accompanied by pious denunciations thereof. I am suggesting, however, that its peculiar treatment of want makes "In a Bad Time" hard to number among Stevens' unambiguous triumphs of sensitivity—however admirable it was as a gift to a fledgling magazine. Yet even here there are complications. Before closing, I want

to tease out another strand of this poem that counters, if it does not exactly cancel out, the more troubling one I have just described.

We might begin by noting that one of the things the privative synecdoches do, here, is compel us to think of poverty in some concreteness. In line 4, what the beggar gazes on is "calamity," but in the succeeding lines, Stevens displaces this large abstraction with painful particulars evoking senses more tactile than sight—bread hard found, water tasting of misery, and cold. The effect is not only to stress that the beggar is without the luxury of detachment, but also to remind us that calamity would have been averted by the provision of bread easily obtained, water tasting sweet, and warm accommodation. The beggar's "poverty *becomes* his heart's strong core," but it does not begin there, just as a "forgetfulness of summer at the pole" implies that summer was once present to feeling, though no more. If one pull of the poem is toward making deprivation mental and implacable, then, an opposite tug comes in this insistence that the origins of want are external and contingent.

It is in this light that line 7, "For him cold's glacial beauty is his fate," must be understood. Detached from its context, it could suggest that deprivation is precisely the beggar's inevitable, proper, or condign destiny—his "fate" in the sense of what is cosmically ordained. In its context, however, the line helps to undercut precisely such a view, presenting "fate" not as what must inexorably occur in one's life but simply as what has happened to one. "In a Bad Time" thus asks us to separate two aspects of tragedy that are usually entangled: inescapable destiny, on the one hand, and the inherent tragicness of the tragic figure, on the other. In this poem, in other words, tragedy is both intrinsic and contingent. It is intrinsic in the sense that when the beggar suffers, the tragedy is part of him, resident in the self rather than the scene; but it is contingent because the tragedy was not always with him, because he might not have suffered this poverty, might not have become a beggar at all. Misery, then, has no *necessity* in a strong sense. And this is of no small moment, since it is precisely on such a belief that any action taken against suffering will effectively be premised.

One more element: I have just suggested that part of this poem's work is to recall that the evil of suffering is a fate by no means fated. But if suffering is only evil, what of the closing tercets' evocations of Melpomene as purple muse and of tragedy as authentic possession? "In a Bad Time" manages to suggest that even if one wished to retain tragedy for the ennobling or elevation it confers, the relief of material suffering would remain a wholly worthy project. It does this precisely by stressing, in its closing tercets, how tragedy is something other than the outward show of deprivation. For if Melpomene can perform as well in a gorgeous theater as in a shabby one, then the grandeur of tragedy would surely remain even in a world of perfect plenitude. The end of material want would not require the flight of tragedy from the earth.

Such a lesson may not seem particularly resonant until we recall how many writers and thinkers have believed tragedy requisite for dignity, found in suffering the least dispensable of confirmations that life is truly being lived, or worried that an earthly paradise would spell the end of human meaning. One of the least appreciated but most important themes of Stevens' later writing, I think, takes the form of a rebuttal to just this mistrust of what we might (with due caution and qualification) call utopia. This point is arguably implicit even in "Sunday Morning," where a younger Stevens names death the mother of beauty. That poem does make a requisite virtue of our sense of things' transience, but it is precisely because this sense is sufficient to render things radiant that *additional* kinds of misery cannot be justified by an appeal to meaning or experiential richness.

For the later Stevens, the matter is even more central. As I have argued in "Wallace Stevens for the Millennium: The Spectacle of Enjoyment," one of the continuing questions of his poetry, especially that written in the years after the Second World War, is that of how meaning might continue to emerge in a world of achieved plenitude. One of the potent answers of other late poems is that we would still have meaning because we would still have change—in the nuances of weather, in the small surprises of the quotidian, and (best of all) in the supreme fiction of poetry. The poem before us takes a rather different approach, focusing on tragedy rather than change but stressing that the former too will persist amid abundance. It is by way not of affirming but of condemning material deprivation that Stevens makes woe more than its trappings and stresses that Melpomene, sordid and lofty, thrives not just in bad times but in good.

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Notes

¹ Among recent books, George S. Lensing's *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons* (2001) treats the poem at greatest length. For Lensing, "In a Bad Time" is to be read in conjunction with "The Snow Man" and "The Course of a Particular," Stevens once again presenting a "man of winter" here, but in this case giving one who does not "forfeit his selfhood and consciousness in pursuit of nothingness" (147–48).

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“Being There Together”: Stevens and the Postcolonial Imagination

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WHEN JOSÉ RODRÍGUEZ FEO asked whether his Cuban journal risked accusations of imperialism for the inclusion of articles of non-national concern, Wallace Stevens replied, “I should say that the risk is not a risk in respect to imperialism but in respect to e[c]lecticisism” (L 495). Stevens seldom strayed far from home and never lived outside of his native Northeast, but he understood the significance of the home-country and knew the exclusions needed to maintain the hyphenated concept. He encouraged Rodríguez Feo to make these exclusions thoughtfully: “The act of editing a review is a creative act and, in general, the power of literature is that in describing the world it creates what it describes. Those things that are not described do not exist, so that in putting together a review like *ORIGENES* you are really putting together a world” (L 495). Now in 1945, a Cuban identity was certainly still in need of construction; the *Negrista* poetry, popular into the 1930s, was a poetry of imports, of African rather than Cuban things.¹ Thus it is not surprising that Stevens was quick to urge a revision of this trend: “Cuba should be full of Cuban things . . . not of essays on Chaucer,” he told Rodríguez Feo. Yet Stevens, writing always from the United States, filled his poetry with Cuban things . . . and Irish things, and Chinese things, and Ceylonese things.

I wish to examine this seemingly hypocritical contradiction between Stevens’ advice to those writing from postcolonial regions and his own hunger for exotic objects in the hopes of absolving him of the postcolonial critiques that have been brought against him. By examining the intersections of Stevens’ interest in formerly colonized regions and his own negotiations of the local, I will argue that Stevens’ longing for contact with “faraway world[s]” (L 381) discloses not an imperialistic sensibility, but a maturing sense of what it means to dwell together in a global community.

Stevens understood the diminishment of local society as the natural counterpart to globalization. In a letter concerned with the escalating war with Japan, he writes,

I think people here have no interest whatever in the Orient,
and the truth about Japan seems to be difficult for most of us to

grasp. . . . The Japanese war is likely to change all that. . . . What all this means is a general change in our ideas respecting other people. (L 506–07)

Such an adjustment naturally required a simultaneous change in ideas concerning home; after two world wars it was clear that America would never again, as Stevens writes in the same letter, consist of an isolated “hamlet among elm trees and farms” (L 507). His late poems are at ease with the global perimeter of this new community; they show a contentment in bearing but “some lineament or character, / . . . Of the planet of which they were part” (CP 532–33). But Stevens must labor for that contentment. His early work is burdened by what Rosemary George would refer to as the politics of exclusions and inclusions that surround the concept of community.

I will look at these early explorations of how local and foreign objects figure in poetic constructions of home and community before turning to Stevens’ later work. Where better to begin than with the transatlantic journey of Stevens’ Crispin? Crispin may be a colonizer, but he is fraught with the problems of the postcolonial exile. At the beginning of his journey, Crispin is a poet of homey things. His eye, “most apt in gelatine and jupes, / Berries of villages,” fulfills the dictum that begins the poem: “Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil” (CP 27). The proposition surpasses its bland ontological claims by way of the possessive pronoun: man’s intelligence is of a particular soil, of *his* soil. Crispin’s “eye of land” can philosophize on sails and compose music of pears; his barber’s eye helps shape the community. Nevertheless, finding these phenomenological extremes tiresome, Crispin abandons them for the sea, and in losing the grounding of his homeland, loses also his community. Crispin’s “eye of land” is transformed into an island; he floats in an inhospitable world, surrounded not by people but by porpoises, whose shared status as mammals he cannot comprehend: “Inscrutable hair in an inscrutable world” (CP 27). His journey of voluntary exile is ended not by a moment of self-discovery (these are multitudinous along the way), nor by the discovery of a singular style (these too are many and fleeting), but by the return of home. The absent preposition is significant here; Crispin does not return to home, to the place where his journey began. For Crispin, the return of home occurs through the physical proliferation of family; home comes to him in the establishment of community.²

Initially, this seems the easy resolution: the adventuresome young man finally settles down, marries, buys a house, and fills it with children. But before Crispin is able to do this normal thing, he must overcome his anxiety about what can be brought into a homey structure, be it a physical or a poetic one. It is this anxiety over exclusions and inclusions that aligns the poem most closely with postcolonial writings. For instance, Crispin’s desire to exclude nightingales from poems of the Yucatan corresponds to the

attempts of postcolonial poets to break from the "great tradition" of British literature and write of parrot-squawks rather than nightingales.³ Crispin's embrace of the (for him) exotic wildlife in the Yucatan strips him of the homegrown labels that he abhors—"The lutanist of fleas," the "general lexicographer of mute / And maidenly greenhorns"—and of the foreign garments, with which he originally decorated himself—"cloak / Of China, cap of Spain" (CP 28). Crispin experiences a Shakespearean sea-change (another widespread motif in postcolonial writing) and emerges purified, stripped of nonnative influences and landscapes and, most importantly, of his self: "The sea / Severs not only lands but also selves. / . . . Crispin beheld and Crispin was made new" (CP 30). It is here that Stevens' journey, which according to Bloom "shares fully in the obsessive quest that it only ostensibly mocks" (70), diverges from Crispin's. Unlike Crispin, who "was too destitute to find / In any commonplace the sought-for aid" (CP 30), Stevens does not insist on a poverty that strips him of the allusive community provided by a tradition.⁴ Only after detailing his "comprehensive island hemisphere" (CP 38) does Crispin understand that *although* the sloughing off of tradition is a process of exclusion, it is the local objects of home that condition community.

The exclusion of the human in particular ruins Crispin's colonial intentions and furthermore his poetic ambitions. Crispin cannot write his poem until he becomes more than the I-land that has floated from Bordeaux to Yucatan, to Havana, to Carolina. Only after Crispin supplants his "Idea of a Colony" with "A Nice Shady Home" "And Daughters with Curls" does he "Score this anecdote" (CP 45). The anecdote, of course, is the poem itself, which comes into being only with the populating of Crispin's home—the reestablishment of a community. Though the final two cantos have so often been read as Crispin's failure, in Helen Vendler's words, his yielding to the "simple perpetuation of self, [which is] no real poetic solution" (49), the fact that Crispin is able to write only after his "return to social nature" (CP 43) cannot be overemphasized. Moreover, although the environment out of which he writes is not the American sublime he originally expected, Crispin's poem, having been "perfectly revolved / In those portentous accents, syllables, / And sounds of music coming to accord / Upon his lap," having been perfectly revolved within the "Four questioners and four sure answerers" (CP 45) that are his daughters, achieves that longed-for liaison between his self and his environment. If the actual purpose of his pilgrimage was "to drive away / The shadow of his fellows from the sky" (CP 37), Crispin's intent is fulfilled in the writing, not in the realization of a certain type of poetic life, and the mishmash of pun, slang, and play that is "the Comedian" suits the insurgent nature of Crispin's new life perfectly.

"The Comedian as the Letter C," of course, is only one of Stevens' negotiations of home, and an early one at that. The poem renders his desire for home clear, yet the conditional ending suggests a Stevens ambiguously

content with Crispin's home-building. Overtones of castration disquiet the poem's final line, particularly in its affiliation with "relation," which suggests that fertility in the realm of home may lead to impotency in the realm of poetry. The final line—"So may the relation of each man be clipped" (CP 46)—would thus operate prescriptively: the relationships of home are to be severed. I would suggest, however, that the dangerous overtones of the line concern not the cutting off of home but the process of exclusions that enables Crispin to build his cabin in the first place. On his journey, Crispin repeatedly comes upon the unfamiliar. Unversed in the exclusions of poetic home-building, he attempts to include the abundance confronting him; but the "earth was like a jostling festival / Of seeds grown fat, too juicily opulent" (CP 32). As we have seen, rather than establishing a principle of belonging according to which home includes some things and excludes others, Crispin begins his poetic construction of self anew each time he encounters something foreign; the exotic constantly dispossesses him of all the local things he dwells among. Throughout the poem, various forms of a newly purified poet expose the extremity of Crispin's exclusions: "Exit the mental moonlight, exit lex, / Rex and principium, exit the whole / Shebang. Exeunt omnes" (CP 37). Such a process cannot result in a coherent sense of identity. Hence the conditional ending of the poem; Stevens and Crispin join us in wondering whether "the anecdote / Is false," whether "Crispin is a profitless / Philosopher" (CP 45–46).

Alan Filreis concludes that this critique against Crispin applies to Stevens, who strives to "sustain distance from and imperviousness to the 'longed-for lands'" (184). Stevens' letters are certainly sprinkled with reminders of the distance between his Hartford and the longed-for lands of which he wrote. But these reminders do not suggest a desire to maintain that distance as much as an acknowledgment that a sense of home is derived from the principle of exclusion. If Stevens were not to distinguish between the relative centrality of Hartford and Ceylon in his construction of the real, he would become as Crispin in the Yucatan, a man "grown in his demesne" (CP 31), but rattling inwardly as he wrote in indigenous dew. Moreover, Stevens makes the very same distinctions for Leonard C. van Geysel. In a letter of 1940, Stevens writes:

I am also writing to New York today to ask a dealer there to send you a copy of Willa Cather's *SAPPHIRA*. Miss Cather is rather a specialty. You may not like the book; moreover, you may think she is more or less formless. . . . But the book will take you *far away* from Ceylon.

I wish that this could reach you in time for Christmas. The pictorial came shortly after the Gita. These contacts with your *faraway* world are a delight to me. (L 381; emphasis mine)

Yes, Ceylon is a faraway world that Stevens feels himself drawn to, but so too is the United States a faraway world fascinating to van Geyzel. The equivalence asks us to look at Stevens' attraction to the exotic as a global rather than an imperial impulse.

Stevens' desire for objects from distant locations can be explained by his sense of an expanding global community and his sense that poetry should correspondingly become abundant, "concerned with everything and everybody" (L 495). His exclusions are not a stripping away as Crispin's are; they are a clearing of the center, which allows for an integration of the local objects of others. In his requests for things from Ceylon, Stevens repeatedly reminds van Geyzel to be sure that the objects he sends are "truly representative of Ceylon," not "tourists' junk," and preferably "not procurable, say, anywhere else, at least not procurable in the general market" (L 327, 333, 324). The objects he seeks are local objects, objects "More precious than the most precious objects of home" (OP 137). For Stevens, these objects particular to place are fundamental. In "Adagia," he admits that "Life is an affair of people not of places. But for me life is an affair of places and that is the trouble" (OP 185). Filreis explains this erasure of the human, which we saw as problematic in "The Comedian as the Letter C," thus: "because [Stevens] wanted to let Ceylon remain Ceylon, impervious and 'unchangeable,' he was more likely to overlook the people," and suggests that Stevens orientализes the East:⁵

He could thus conceive of the distant land as a natural, depictable scene, what Edward Said has called "the vision of the Orient as spectacle, or *tableau vivant*"—wholly realizable in pictures and yet pleasingly unavailable to the distorting processes of political thought as well as inimical to poetic theory. (163)

The absence of humanity in Stevens' scenes, however, opens them up for habitation and transplantation; this is one of the primary ways that his exclusions are translated into vaster inclusions. The effect has been noted by Vendler and Mark Halliday, who describe the technique respectively as that of an algebraic equation into which each can substitute subjective values and as that of an outline to which each of us can bring "his or her own peculiar, colorful substance to fill it in" (Halliday 119).⁶

Bonnie Costello's reading of Stevens' eccentric vision may explain how Stevens escapes the imperialistic impulse to locate the West as center, while still excluding what is human: "Stevens is never at home in his houses, or in the world, because the center is a moving target" (78). For Costello, Stevens is more concerned with "living in a world we do not own," or gesturing toward habitation, than actually building houses (67).⁷ Indeed, as his journey diverges from Crispin's, Stevens advances toward a sense of home that does not require such enclosing structures and thereby enables those objects originally excluded in the construction of home to be

localized. "Local Objects" explains the significance of Stevens' desire for exotic things in a context that takes us beyond the critique dictated by orientalism:

He knew that he was a spirit without a foyer
And that, in this knowledge, local objects become
More precious than the most precious objects of home:

The local objects of a world without a foyer. . . . (OP 137)

The distinction between local objects and objects of home is possible only in a world without a central hearth for all to gather around. Local objects are those belonging to a particular place and thus belonging only to those who live in that particular place. But the local objects of which Stevens speaks are unattached to possessive pronouns. They are not those objects within the vicinity of a fixed observer, objects near the observer as he looks out on the world. These local objects are as objects sprinkled around a world that is seen from above, a vantage point that eliminates relative distances. The vacant space of "Local Objects" does not pretend to offer a global home around which all may gather, but it does announce the construction of a community through objects that are *designated* as local. The community may be an artificial one, but, as the subsequent poem, "Artificial Population," suggests, it is nonetheless "like / A healing-point in the sickness of the mind" (OP 138). Produced when "the Orient and the Occident embrace," such an artificial population is unified by a shared desire for that "absolute foyer," around which we can dwell together.

Stevens imagines this "absolute foyer," the center that will suffice for all, in "A Completely New Set of Objects." Justin Quinn reads this poem as evidence of Stevens' interest in heritage and his own ancestors (117), but he overlooks what is specifically foreign in the poem:

From a Schuylkill in mid-earth there came emerging
Flotillas, willed and wanted, bearing in them

Shadows of friends, of those he knew, each bringing
From the water in which he believed and out of desire

Things made by mid-terrestrial, mid-human
Makers without knowing, or intending, uses. (CP 352)

The makers in this poem are certainly, as Quinn suggests, connected to the earth, but they do not belong to the locale of the Schuylkill, a fact indicated by their offerings, which constitute a completely new set of objects. Rather, these mid-terrestrial makers come, quite literally, from the center of the earth—the only possible foyer of global dimension. The en-

trance of their eerily familiar objects into the Schuylkill region results in community. They come

Carrying such shapes, of such alleviation,
That the beholder knew their subtle purpose,

Knew well the shapes were the exactest shaping
Of a vast people old in meditation . . . (CP 353)

The shapes are both the image “Of a vast people old in meditation” and the force that creates such a community. Stevens’ location of a center here is surprising because it counteracts his image of the globe, that solid, rotating sphere, whose center is inaccessible. Yet in locating a center that produces completely new objects rather than the familiar, Stevens discloses the significant interrelation of exotic and local objects in the construction of communities. Completely new objects are the most exact way to shape a community capable of responding to them, for as the poet’s local imagination normalizes the exotic (the local objects of others) it invests them with a doubled sense of home.

Stevens concludes his essay “Imagination as Value” by describing the “portal of the imagination”:

It is the vista a man sees, seated in the public garden of his native town, near by some effigy of a figure celebrated in the normal world, as he considers that the chief problems of any artist, as of any man, are the problems of the normal and that he needs, in order to solve them, everything that the imagination has to give. (NA 155–56)

The problem of normalization is the problem of the local. In his negotiations of home, Stevens abandons his solipsistic houses as he becomes more and more comfortable with the idea of dwelling together—of making other people’s local objects a normal part of his surroundings. Yet as he moves along this trajectory, Stevens does not forget the process of exclusions by which conceptions of home are first established. Normalization can occur only within the vista seen from one’s native town. In his construction of a globalized poetry, Stevens thus begins with an object that we can understand as local to all communities—the sun. In “Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing itself” sound is given primacy; a bird’s cry induces the perception of the sun as a thing outside of the room and the concomitant perception of “A new knowledge of reality” (CP 534). Stevens gives the cry that effected this final perception of the real no distinguishing attributes. In fact, he marks it as normal by connecting it to “c,” the note at the center of the musical scale,

That scrawny cry—it was
A chorister whose c preceded the choir.
It was part of the colossal sun,

Surrounded by its choral rings,
Still far away. It was like
A new knowledge of reality. (CP 534)

This chorister's "c," the center, is a part of the sun, that local object that defies the confinement of home. Here, in a single image, Stevens resolves all the ambiguities that we were left with at the end of "The Comedian as the Letter C." Crispin, the first to hold the place of the normal, chooses first the exotic and then the local, but never learns how to integrate the two; he never learns how to bring exotic objects in and set them next to the local, in order to expand his community without losing his self.

For Stevens, this active integration is necessary enough to carry an ethical import; he understands "doing this sort of thing [exchanging local objects] as part of the interest of living" (L 328). In "Imagination as Value," he is even more specific about the process: "[W]hen we speak of perceiving the normal we have in mind the instinctive integrations [of essentials from elsewhere] which are the reason for living" (NA 154–55). Attending to these problems of the local in Stevens' poetry moves us beyond routine rhetoric of postcolonial critiques. In "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," one of Stevens' last poems, he offers us the perfect integration:

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

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

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough. (CP 524)

Stevens insists on a communal "we," despite the fact that the poem is a soliloquy and the speaker an *interior* paramour. The intense privacy of the meditation, which depends upon so many exclusions, is what makes the final community possible. Just so, it is precisely through his exclusions

that Stevens comes to contain the world in his verse—to place the planet poetically on the table.

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Notes

¹Negrista poetry or Afro Cubanism, which in lieu of an indigenous population focused on the African element of Cuban identity, arose in an effort to reject all things European. Despite its efforts to establish a primitive ancestry, however, Afro Cubanism depended chiefly on imported artifacts: although the poetry is marked by Africanisms, the African words that appear in the poems are rarely idioms of Cuban speech. Such tendencies are common to early efforts at nation building. Landscapes and idioms of a more local nature generally replace the imports rather quickly.

²"From the Journal of Crispin," the first version of the Stevens' "The Comedian as the Letter C," concludes without this return of home. His journey is amputated and we are left with Crispin still the ephebe in "his attic [as he] shapes the book / That will contain him" (*OP* 59).

³In an attempt to distance themselves from the exported colonial tradition, poets in newly independent regions frequently begin their poems with such negative claims. H. D. Carberry, a Caribbean poet, begins the poem "Nature" by first setting the British tradition at a distance: "We have neither Summer nor Winter / Neither Autumn nor Spring. / We have instead the days" (25). Harold M. Telemaque begins his "In our land" similarly: "In our land, / Poppies do not spring / From atoms of young blood, / So gaudily where men have died: / In our land, / Stiletto cane blades / Sink into our hearts, / And drink our blood" (58).

⁴Stevens' postcolonial concerns are further confirmed by comparing his "Man on the Dump" to Derek Walcott's "The Castaway," which also preserves that which it pretends to discard:

Godlike, annihilating godhead, art
And self, I abandon
Dead metaphors: the almond's leaf-like heart,
The ripe brain rotting like a yellow nut
Hatching
Its babel of sea-lice, sandfly, and maggot,
That green wine bottle's gospel choked with sand,
Labelled, a wrecked ship,
Clenched sea-wood nailed and white as a man's hand.
(*Collected Poems 1948–1984* 58)

⁵Viewing the distanced land as an unchangeable center is a characteristic compulsion of writers in exile. Andrew Gurr writes: "There is another principle which exiles find quite as compulsive as the need to claim the universality of their local experience. This is the essentially static nature of the fictionalised home" (22).

⁶Mark Halliday reminds us that "the palatability of the inclusion [Stevens] offers us, should force us to consider the question of its implicit exclusions" (120). By this, Halliday primarily intends Stevens' elitism, one of his "moral failings." To reverse this reading, as I have, and understand Stevens' exclusions as forcing us to consider the question of his implicit inclusions, is to avoid the condescension that Halliday reads as keeping people homeless.

⁷Writers from postcolonial regions who understand the want of ownership in a much more literal sense approach this theme more aggressively. For example, in a poem entitled "Homestead," the Caribbean writer, Eric Roach, suggests that the right to land and to the keeping of home is derived from a laboring over that land, be it an agricultural or a poetic laboring.

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Reading Stevens with Lacan on the Real: Toward a Poetics of Destitution

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WHAT FOLLOWS IS our analyses of “Blanche McCarthy” and “Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour.” We hope to open Wallace Stevens’ poetry to a Lacanian approach and to develop Lacanian theory in light of our critical explorations. Our ultimate goal is to produce several demonstrations of such a dialectical give-and-take between modern literature and theory, so that we might define the poetics of destitution as the “real” substance of modernism. For convenience’s sake, we will now present a brief outline of Jacques Lacan’s theory of subjectivity, insofar as it informs our readings of Stevens.

Over the course of his career, Lacan proposes three “registers” (or “orders”) of psychic reality. These registers are the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. This sequence also appears to map the way the human being suffers its own passionate forms of subjectivity, moving from the Imaginary, through the Symbolic, to moments when the Real breaks through in some unforeseen and traumatic fashion. However, this apparent chronology of the orders is highly unstable and tends to break down unpredictably along singular fissures and splits in the psyche.

The Imaginary (or mirror-stage) occurs first—from age six months to eighteen months—when the infant jubilantly assumes the specular image reflected in the mirror as his or her own ideal of perfection. The image appears to unite and master the body, but once this fantasy is recognized as such, the stage ends in an aggressive assertion of the still unmastered body over the image in a self-shattering or traumatic experience. Out of the Imaginary come all the dreams of aesthetic wholeness and completion that inform the imaginative artist’s work, often with nightmarishly destructive consequences.

Once the specular image is recognized as instantiating what Lacan characterizes as “the *I*’s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination” (5), the subject can emerge into the Symbolic and establish a relationship to language. The Symbolic is the register that refers to cultural structures, rituals, and institutions that organize the hu-

man subject's life in society. Dubbed "the Big Other" by Lacan, the Symbolic is most evident in the structuring operations of language, but can be observed almost equally as well in the function of legal or kinship systems. In the scene of instruction that is the mirror stage just discussed, the primary care-giver's role of support and command, of teacher, is representative of the Symbolic, with all the ambivalences that this role is bound to inspire in each subject over time. What Lacan refers to as the master-signifier of the phallus serves this suturing and anchoring function in the productions of discourse, especially evident in the discourse of the Other.

The Real, as Jean-Michel Rabaté indicates in the preface to his recent *Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, is the most difficult to analyze concretely (xiv). The least obscure means of access to the concept is via the body. The virtually helpless child's body accommodates itself to the demands of the Symbolic and compensates itself for making the sacrifices of pleasure that necessarily follow from the Imaginary and its fantasies. But portions of the body and the libidinal energies attached to them escape both the body's mapping by the Symbolic into approved and taboo zones and any compensating Imaginary fixations of infantile pleasure. These bodily sites and energies are the objects and propulsion sources of the drives that define the Real.

The Real is thus what cannot be incorporated into the socially approved body of the human subject in a particular culture. It manifests itself both as an indivisible remainder, like a sharp stick in the eye, and as a hole or gap, abyss, crack, or crevice that punctures the Symbolic order and that the Imaginary would veil with aesthetic splendor deploying its diverse sublime fantasies of formal objects of desire, what Lacan ultimately will term *objets petite a*.

Later in his career, Lacan represents the three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real as three interlinking rings, the Borromean knot. This is an interdependent figure. If any ring is detached from the others, the entire structure collapses. Lacan proposes that the pathologies afflicting the human subject often impel the subject to such a destructive fate. Analysis can help to provide the subject with what art provides the artist (Joyce is his quintessential case in point). This alternative to self-destruction involves the individual learning to love his or her symptom by incorporating it not into the fantasies of the Imaginary, nor into the approved rituals of the Symbolic, but into what Lacan christens *le sinthome*.

Le sinthome is not like the phallic signifier, a phantom sign supposedly able to master phantasmatically the discourse of the Other. Rather, it is the material letter itself, invested with all the drive energies otherwise circulating endlessly and meaninglessly around one's own body's sites or those that are displaced onto the body of the beloved other. By means of *le sinthome*, one may reinvent oneself by giving birth to one's own otherwise purely secret and specular name or identity.

With the exception of the first chapter of Harold Bloom's *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate*, surprisingly little work of significant theoretical reflection has been done on Stevens' early poem "Blanche McCarthy." It is appropriate that this poem shares in *Harmonium's* lush, somewhat indulgent imagery that usually leads to the solid hope that the addressed female figures can break through, at least momentarily, into what we would describe as a Lacanian Real that is desirable and liberating.

Significantly, Bloom presents a tripartite structure for the poem involving the operations of alternating embodiments of his own specialized concepts, those of logos, pathos, and ethos, whose definitions he derives from the romantics both in England and America. Bloom primarily draws from Emerson for these ancient Greek concepts that he revitalizes as stages in a progressive poetic dialectic. They mark the stages of power, will, and freedom, with pathos standing for "the sudden manifestation of the vital will . . . [v]ictory and ecstasy, a seizure, as in the etymology of the word" (5).

Though gaining access to the Lacanian Real is not a spontaneous event, like Emerson's pathos but one that requires tremendous discipline, the Real also may involve the ultimate assertion of a form of individual agency radically different from the expected formulations of society that are presented especially in language. The ecstasy Bloom mentions can be interpreted as an equivalent of jouissance, the paradoxically enjoyable experience of overwhelming tension that, in its pure form, produces a dangerously desirable combination of unstoppable pleasure and pain.

Although generally dismissive of Lacan, Bloom provides an early example of the circulation of this poem among three interlinked registers that parallels the Lacanian registers quite closely. Although Bloom's terms are not synonymous with Lacan's, we can put to use their underlying message that Stevens' poetry, as evidenced in "Blanche McCarthy," moves toward a separation from society to a painful, yet longed for, independent jouissance that, ironically enough, may become socially symbolic.

Written in either 1915 or 1916, "Blanche McCarthy" presents a linear movement through Lacan's stages with each stanza instructing the female figure to move progressively forward from what we would see as the Imaginary, to the Symbolic, and finally to the Real. Two of the poem's ironies are that, after infancy, the movement within the Lacanian registers is not linear and the Real can easily lapse into the network of symbolic convention or the web of imaginary fantasy, so long as the one possessed or seized by the Real remains dependent on the dogmatic instruction by an authority figure, what Lacan calls a so-called master supposed to know. Thus, Blanche can never gain what the speaker hopes for her; the critical reader, however, can use this poem as a primitive model for how she herself can escape or at least reconfigure her image in the "terrible mirror."

The poem's first stanza, "Look in the terrible mirror of the sky / And not in this dead glass, which can reflect / Only the surfaces—the bending arm, / The leaning shoulder and the searching eye" (*OP* 17), can be read

as a direction to the female figure to confront her specular image and recognize her weakness vis à vis its imaginary strength. This confrontation would eventually allow the female figure the ability to move into the Symbolic, under the authority of the poem's narrator. Usually, this event occurs during the first two years of life, but there is little in the poem to indicate that the speaker is addressing his command to a child. Instead, Blanche, being a traditional name for a female of great beauty and virginity, taken from the tradition of chivalric or pastoral romance, indicates that the female addressed here is a young adult emerging out of the façades and set-pieces of an American pastoral idyll.

In her recent book *Pastoral Process*, Susan Synder, clearly indebted to William Empson, postulates that time in pastoral poetry is the domain of the female figure, while space is primarily governed by the male figure. Temporality requires a dynamic work of circulation, while spatialization requires a static hierarchical structure. If we turn to Lacan to help develop this critical insight, the spatial dimension would be linked primarily to the Symbolic register, as that is the expansive domain for society's operations and traditions. The Imaginary's confrontation with the Real and the human subject's movement along the Borromean knot are located in time. This is a weird time that, for Lacan, a most complicated topology of psychic invagination and explicitly feminine jouissance can best embody. Thus, female figures, if already linked to temporality, as in Synder's argument, have the best chance for free interchange in this critical confrontation between the Imaginary and the Real.

The "terrible mirror" is not located, however, in the pastoral space of the poem, but is instead set above it, reflecting downward, making the entire pastoral landscape a dependent plain. The poem's speaker wants the female figure to acknowledge, in a painful break, that what she sees above are only fragmented and unfixed parts, with crooked limbs and a hunting gaze. There is nothing stable or fixed—or finally fixating—in these potentially fetishistic image-parts. The speaker points this out ironically both to disabuse Blanche of any source of pleasure therein and to reassure Blanche of her ability to move on from such body morsels. The poem ironically mirrors not so much the Imaginary's mirage of wholeness as the Real's provocative challenge to it.

Blanche's journey in the second stanza is not necessarily positive, but unavoidable. It is here that the female figure is initiated into the Symbolic and experiences the greatest level of subjugation to the male speaker. The refrain, "Look in the terrible mirror of the sky" now ends with a period, indicating a greater level of authority from the speaker than the comma that ended that same instruction in the first stanza, as a strict imperative admitting no alternatives. Stevens then repeats the word "bend," from the first stanza, but in this instance it is her own female figure and not the image she faces that is bending. She is being directed, by the poem's speaker, in the place of the Big Other, to subordinate her will to that of his

gaze. She is to approach the “symbols of descending night; and search / The glare of revelations going by!” (OP 17).

The speaker implies that there is a visionary process occurring above the female figure that she must approach in order to know its truth. That is futile, as there can be no transcendent truth, since no symbol or concept outlined in language can ever escape mediation to represent a single or universal object or concept. The speaker is thus purposefully deceptive in this stanza because it is necessary for Blanche to be initiated into the Symbolic, to formulate a relationship with language and space, before she can ever attempt to move beyond that register. Otherwise, she would be drifting without anchor-points along the endless networks of signifiers without any even provisional master signifier to take off from again.

The poem’s final stanza then shows how it might be possible for a person to complete that temporary journey into the Real. It gives promise to the reader, but not to Blanche, as she remains, sadly, under the direction of the speaker. The speaker commands Blanche again to confront the “terrible mirror” above so that she can now apprehend all that is void: “See how the absent moon waits in a glade / Of your dark self, and how the wings of stars, / Upward, from unimagined coverts, fly” (OP 17). Blanche and the moon are conflated into one presence that must rid itself of all its component parts.

The sky, Blanche’s original specular image, is already able to create a void, the self as an obscure darkness, and she, as the originator of that image, must follow suit if she wants to attain the joy indicated by the separated word, “fly.” Blanche can never truly fly though, as she is grounded by the speaker’s commands, which the word “unimagined” underscores. Any abnegation or destitution of self on her part would be at his command and not at her own initiative. Even if she follows his directives, therefore, the female figure’s flight will not finally be joyous, because it is a journey that originated in the conscious imperatives of the Big Other. Bloom’s big claim, that Blanche McCarthy’s “dark self” may prophetically project the moon out of her self each night, just as in “Song of Myself” Whitman imaginatively projects the sun out of himself each day (21), is ultimately a dazzling if rather moot point. For Blanche to achieve a Whitmanesque projection out of herself as the moon, she would actually be creating her own “sinthome” by which she sees the reflection of her emptiness and through which she can create her new non-dependant identity. Essentially, what flies from Blanche at the end of the poem would have to return for her to claim ownership of it as a divested medium that only she can recognize and use. Stevens does not let this happen; Blanche cannot call back to reformulate what she casts out. Thus, she begins a journey into the Real, but her limited agency forecloses the possibility of her complete initiation in that phase.

“Blanche McCarthy” serves, then, as an example of the ambivalence that will hauntingly drive Stevens and his poetry in regard to the desire

for the Real throughout his entire career. Although Stevens is frequently willing to show the reader glimpses of the Real, those moments are always quickly foreclosed, apparently by Stevens' equally strong affinity for the lullaby of the Symbolic.

"Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," written in early 1950 and published in *The Collected Poems* (1954), is one of a group of poems summing up Stevens' poetics and career. Stevens thought so highly of the poem that, on the advice of Marianne Moore, he added it as "the concluding poem in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber; 1953)" ([L 733 n]), which introduced his poetry to the British public. Clearly, it is a testamentary poem, defining his corpus' significance and hoped-for legacy.

Once again Harold Bloom in *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* is apropos for us. Bloom only refers in passing to the poem twice before discussing it for little more than a page. Most of this discussion is about the apparent echoes lifted out of Coleridge, Whitman, and Stevens himself. The truly terrifying late poem on the muse, "Madame La Fleurie," is Bloom's source text in this instance. Bloom's summary remarks on "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" do provide us, however, with a point of departure for our reading of the poem: "The last of the great poems of 1950, the year of *The Rock*, is the popular *Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour*, where the title may imply not that the muse is about to perish but that poet and muse are about to be so joined that every remaining poem will be a dialogue of one" (359).

We would agree with this assessment, as far as it goes. The problem is that it leaves unexplored the nature and structure of that "dialogue of one," as well as that conjoining. This is unfortunate because the poem and those following it do not instantiate the wall-to-wall discourse of the crazed, pedantic monologist. They do continue a dialogue, but a very curious one, which Lacan on the Real can help us unfold. Jacqueline Vaught Brogan in her new book, *The Violence Within, The Violence Without: Wallace Stevens and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Poetics*, suggests that this late poem overcomes Stevens' habitual displacement of "divisiveness" into "a split between a dominating male poet/author/authority and a submitting, potentially chaotic feminine world" (117). She claims further, correctly in our view, that "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" marks the "discovery . . . of the feminine voice, which was so silenced in the early poems, especially in *Harmonium*" and that this discovery "opens up the space in Stevens for the magnificent tones and visions of his later years" (118). Lacan can help us to elaborate more comprehensively on this point, in part by underscoring how this space of voice is more accurately characterized as the creative temporality of voice.

The six unrhymed tercets of "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," a familiar Stevensian innovation, can be divided into two parts of three stanzas each. The first part, from the opening line ("Light the first light of evening, as in a room") to line nine ("A light, a power, the miraculous

influence" [CP 524]), enjoins upon the poet the muse's desire for a final display of power, "the miraculous influence," the seizure of the Real. The absence of a suave-voiced verbal playground of any kind testifies to the fact that the poem speaks in the muse's own idiom. Yet, as line three makes clear ("The world imagined is the ultimate good"), the approach to the Real, to this spectacle of power, can be only through the new Imaginary that Stevens' entire career has elaborated.

The terms and figures of this new Imaginary, however, are those of destitution in which the Symbolic function has been stripped down to its bare elements and operations, as lines five through eight underscore:

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

Within a single thing, a single shawl
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor. . . .
(CP 524)

This first part of "Final Soliloquy" then rehearses the interlinked pattern of the Lacanian registers, unfolding the drive for the Real via the Imaginary's phantasm as it is collected "Out of all the indifferences" into the destitute Symbolic of the modern poet and his muse. By focusing on the feminine figure of "the shawl" as the fleeting but ever returning manifestation of what joins poet and muse together in an impoverished yet uncanny thing, Stevens makes possible a modern American sublime.

Part two, the poem's final three stanzas, doubles the developmental pattern of Lacanian registers by ironically scrambling them. Lines ten through thirteen present a Symbolic Order that obliterates distinctions rather than producing and multiplying them, all for the purpose of marrying poet and muse within the mind:

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

Within its vital boundary, in the mind. (CP 524)

This new Symbolic Order is the knowledge akin to Blanche McCarthy's "dark self," the mind's awful power to terrify and redeem. Such knowledge produces a temporal union of muse and poet that at once dissolves "all the indifferences" (as well as differences) and contains them as in a symbiotic relationship where precisely over time the host and the hosted become indistinguishable, thereby virtually creating an entirely new being, "Within its vital boundary, in the mind." This mind is not the sole

possession of the poet or muse, because they are possessed by it in the moment of vision.

In this new Symbolic Order, designed by the poet/muse's own imaginative discourse, a new Imaginary gives us a simple demotic idiom that is yet familiar to us from the visionary projects of the romantic poets: "We say God and the imagination are one . . ." The dreams of Wordsworth and Blake, for just two examples, are contained within the bare words of this quietly prophetic declaration. Father-God and Daughter-Soul, like the poet-prophet Los and his muse-emanation Jerusalem at the moving climax of Blake's greatest visionary epic named for her, are caught at the fugitive moment of their simultaneously spiritual and bodily reunion. Lacan's theory of the registers allows us to perceive this spectral staging of visionary desire, and Stevens' poetry clarifies the larger romantic contexts informing Lacanian theory.

Lines fourteen through eighteen of the poem encounter the Real that has promoted the transformation of the Stevensian subject and its diverse structural splits (of muse and poet, poet and insurance-man, and so on) entirely into pure light, the pure light of the figural:

Light the first light of evening, as in a room . . .

.....

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough. (CP 524)

This prospect of a Real is like the place of daemonic beings that dwell in the middle air between the highest sphere of the empyrean and the earthly realm. Given Stevens' long fascination with moon and evening/morning star symbolism derived from Shelley, it is not too farfetched here to suggest that the room the poem projects becomes at the poem's conclusion a region of the sky, as in the astrological conception of house and dwelling site. Be that as it may, the Real expressed here, haltingly to be sure, is an experience of apotheosis, in which a new God figure, containing muse and poet, appears as the central mind symbolized, perhaps, in a new constellation "dwelling in the evening air," closer to earth but still indicating a slight transcendence.

The abstract figure of "the central mind," in this context, would suggest that it is akin to what Lacan christens "*le sinthome*," that "letter" or "word" holding together in a new configuration the psyche of the subject. The material letter acts as a prosthesis re-suturing the registers of Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real into an order of the subject's own devising (here, Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real), the ultimate effect of the revisionary process is to grant the subject concerned a remade and chosen identity: "How high that highest candle lights the dark" because "being there together is

enough.” Existence is ever two in one, the third thing of poetic voice that seizes poet and muse in the creative utterance.

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The Absence of the Poet as Virile Youth

STEPHEN BURT

WALLACE STEVENS' 1943 lecture "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" puts forward several propositions about the ideal-typical poet, whose experience epitomizes "poetry" as Stevens defines it. Poetry represents, says Stevens, "a process of the personality of the poet," found most plainly or clearly "in the lives of those who have just written their first essential poems," in "the young man or young woman who has written a few poems and who wants to read them" (NA 45, 50). "[T]he seventeenth century" presents for Stevens the "Miltonic image of a poet," along with a "background"

from which a younger figure is emerging. . . . This younger figure is the intelligence that endures. It is the imagination of the son still bearing the antique imagination of the father. It is the clear intelligence of the young man still bearing the burden of the obscurities of the intelligence of the old. It is the spirit out of its own self. . . . For this Aeneas, it is the past that is Anchises. (NA 52–53)

This virile poet incarnates modern poetry, Stevens implies, because he can separate himself from the "official" (NA 40) concerns of his own society, both philosophical and practical: "There is a life apart from politics. It is this life that the youth as virile poet lives" (NA 57). Using the first person plural ("When we look back . . . we are remembering" [NA 52]), Stevens seems to expect his audience to accept this picture, this "simple figure of the youth as virile poet" (NA 54), on the basis of shared experience.

Those expectations make sense: Stevens' youth as virile poet, his young man whose works make the best example for poetry in general, has impressive precedents. One line of these precedents dates back to Chatterton, to young Werther, to the posthumous constructions of Keats and Shelley, even to Arnold's "Scholar Gypsy": the young man alone whose imaginative faculties alienate him from society and who stands for the promise (never, by definition, completely fulfilled) of romanticism as we have come to define it. Walter de la Mare celebrated inspired and masculine "Youth" in a bombastic poem of that name from 1906:

Youth hath the raiment of his childhood doffed
 At morning-prime by life's resounding sea,
 And lonely in beauty stands confronting Heaven.
 He strides lithe-limbed, magnificently armed;
 His young head helmeted with high desire;
 His heart a haven of braveries fleet and eager;
 His eyes like heroes never to be subdued,
 And all man's passionate history in his blood. (85)

This powerful young man proved compatible with later, more wide-spread, ideas about adolescence, a word that achieved widespread currency after the psychologist G. Stanley Hall's 1903 book of that name. "Between 1890 and 1920," writes the American historian Joseph Kett, "a host of psychologists, urban reformers, educators, youth workers, and parent counselors gave shape to the concept of adolescence" (5-6). Writers in America and England during the first decades of the twentieth century lauded the adolescent, the virile youth, who seemed to define imagination and who either incarnated "poetry" or wrote it. Hall says (to quote Patricia Spacks's apt summary), "Poetry's 'very highest function' would be to describe the 'new inner dawn' which marks adolescence" (Spacks 233). The social critic Randolph Bourne's *Youth and Life* (1913) declared, "it is young people who have all the really valuable experience" (qtd. in White 37). The historian Paula Fass finds that during the 1920s "young and old were beginning to look upon youth as models" (128). The modern poets to whom Stevens felt closest, William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore, would both venture several poems about modern youth. Williams took up the concept of adolescence, and the rebellious youth of the 1920s, in several poems (and in all his experimental prose). Parts of *Spring and All* and *The Descent of Winter* follow "gigantic highschool boys," "boys fifteen and seventeen" (303, 221), or quote dating rituals; Moore offered counterexamples in the studious young men of "The Student" and "The Steeple-Jack."

Stevens' undergraduate sonnets record a remarkable preoccupation with "youth," both the idea and the word. Sonnet II begins, "Come, said the world, thy youth is not all play"; sonnet V hopes for "eyes undimmed and youth both pure and strong" (*SP* 29, 31).¹ The very Keatsian sonnet VIII begins, "The soul of happy youth is never lost / In fancy on a page"; in sonnet X, "youth is better than weak, wrinkled age . . . and no disturbing gleam . . . Mars the high pleasure of youth's pilgrimage" (*SP* 32, 33). Sonnet XII begins, "I sang an idle song of happy youth," then sighs, "Ah well, my youth is ending"; sonnet XIII concedes, "Dear youth, thou also art a pleasant flow'r" (*SP* 34). Sonnet XIV (echoing Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale") has Stevens drink "From out the sweet-rimmed goblet of my youth" (*SP* 35). The sonnets show how early (to quote Helen Vendler) Keats "had penetrated Stevens' consciousness and imagination absolutely" (176). They

even adopt his rhyme-words: the sestet to XIII successively quotes or alludes to "To Autumn," "Bright Star," and "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"). Was Stevens himself a beautifully fragile, ideal-typical poetic youth, like Keats, or one who (like Keats) feared consignment to "fancy on a page," while the truly strong young men made their marks in the world?

Devoted to romantic forebears, observing their own generation, and wondering how they would make their way in the new (and newly age-graded) world, many young poets of Stevens' generation must have explored similar preoccupations in their own undergraduate verse. What is surprising is not the appearance of "youth" (as idea and word) in Stevens' Keatsian apprentice work, nor its reappearance in his later lecture, but (given those appearances and given his peers' interest in adolescence) the very infrequent appearance of the poet as youth in Stevens' modernist poetry. Stevens put lines from his lecture into the 1945 poem "Recitation After Dinner," which he wrote in response to a commission and chose never to collect (see *OP* 114). He did describe imaginative or inspiring young people in some poems of the 1920s, but these young people are never the poet himself, never the voice that speaks the poem.

That voice, in fact, often identifies itself as old. Though critics sometimes view Crispin (in "The Comedian as the Letter C") as a young man, he seems to himself, at the outset of his voyage, already alienated from the forms of natural vigor (of "spring") that his journeys reveal: "Could Crispin stem verbosity in the sea, / The old age of a watery realist . . .?" (*CP* 28). The figures whose speech and reactions most resemble the poet's own, or whom the poet expects to resemble, are, from the 1910s through the 1950s, middle-aged or old men: consider "Anglais Mort à Florence," the "old sailor" in "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," the enduring sun in "The Brave Man," that deliberate, sleepless uncle Canon Aspirin in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," or Professor Eucalyptus in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." The first long poem in *Harmonium*, "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle," takes up the embarrassments of middle age; it pursues simultaneously the poet's doubts about his virility (consider the almost sarcastic stanza X, with its description of a penis) and his fears about his poems:

In the high west there burns a furious star.
It is for fiery boys that star was set
And for sweet-smelling virgins close to them.
The measure of the intensity of love
Is measure, also, of the verve of earth.
For me, the firefly's quick, electric stroke
Ticks tediously the time of one more year. (*CP* 14–15)

The star is the evening star, Venus, the sign of "amours"; it is also the star of *Adonais*, the star of the romantic poet-youth, in whose company

"men at forty" (CP 15) may not belong. "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" first appeared in *Others* in 1919; that journal's high proportion of poems about youth and lust perhaps heightens the contrast, or the ironies, "Le Monocle" assumes.

When Stevens does depict inspiring young people, they are usually not virile youths but beautiful women, who inspire (secondary or imitative) imaginative activity in others. *Harmonium* opened with several young muse figures, the Botticellian "paltry nude" and the girls in "The Plot Against the Giant." The singer in "The Idea of Order at Key West" "was the maker," who "sang . . . words . . . of ourselves" (CP 129–30); the poet's verbal activity is secondary to hers.

In a poet like Frost—aloof from modernist little magazines and drawn to older forms of (rural) life—the paucity of figures of youth might require no special explanation (though even Frost drew on a 19th-century poem about youth for the title of his first book). In Stevens that paucity looks like a conscious choice. "*It's a strange courage / you give me, ancient star: / Shine alone in the sunrise / toward which you lend no part!*" (CP 18): Stevens took this 1917 poem of Williams' as an occasion for his own "Nuances . . ." Long past adolescence himself, Williams saw a model for his own linguistic vitality in the contemporary youth he observed, as an "ancient" star might observe the sun. Yet Stevens' "Nuances of a Theme by Williams" make the star not a model of age facing youth but an inhuman object, like the boughs in "The Snow Man," that "reflects neither my face nor any inner part / of my being" (CP 18). (Glen MacLeod writes that Stevens' revision resists "too-easy identification of the star with the speaker" [85].)

Stevens did not, then, attempt to incorporate models of adolescence into his style, as his modernist peers did; nor did he incorporate into his own self-presentations the analogy between youth and poetry which his lecture (and his undergraduate poems) take up. Instead he wrote poems about his refusal to do so. The "figure of capable imagination" in the much-discussed poem "Mrs. Alfred Uruguay" rushes past in a flurry of questions:

Was it a rider intent on the sun,
A youth, a lover with phosphorescent hair,
Dressed poorly, arrogant of his streaming forces,
Lost in an integration of the martyrs' bones,
Rushing from what was real; and capable? (CP 249)

This rider—who "created in his mind . . . The ultimate elegance: the imagined land" has a Shelleyan access to imaginative purity, a Shelleyan ability to escape the world in which he began, which neither the poet (who describes this world) nor the mountain-climbing Mrs. Uruguay attain. Harold Bloom identifies the rider as a "figure of the youth as virile poet, the ephebe as reborn Apollo"—but Stevens himself, Bloom continues, is

"more in sympathy with the donkey," since "The youth scorns the real" (161–62).²

Young men do enter Stevens' poetry when there is a war on. They did so in "Lettres d'un Soldat" and in "The Death of a Soldier"—the poem he culled from it—and again in the "hero" poems of the Second World War. In "Credences of Summer" the primary imagination appears once as a "bristling soldier": "Stripped of remembrance, it displays its strength— / The youth, the vital son, the heroic power" (CP 375). Yet this young man turns out to be, not the poet nor "the author" of the day, but one of "the personae of summer" the poem describes, who "speak . . . Their parts as in a youthful happiness" (notice that "as") (CP 377–78).³ Poems explicitly devoted to the Second World War also conclude that young soldiers' struggles resemble, and inspire, but can never simply *be*, the more abstract struggles of art: "Repetitions of a Young Captain," for example, tries to move from the theater of war (where the physical condition of individual bodies matters) to the theater of imagination, its "beau language without a drop of blood" (where they do not) (CP 310). "Description without Place" invokes "potential seemings, arrogant / To be, as on the youngest poet's page"—proto-poems, poetic materials; these seemings include "the death of a soldier, like the utmost will. . . ." Yet the seemings become works of art only when "another breath emerging out of death . . . speaks for him such seemings as death gives" (CP 340–41). The young man suffers with one breath; another figure (neither the soldier nor "the youngest poet") makes art with another, out of a later reason. Stevens' young soldiers are not, in other words, young poets, though their heroic acts may defend, or prompt, or make possible, a poet's poems.

Stevens' poetry perhaps approximates sympathy with the youth as virile poet in the young reader, "Andrew Jackson Something," portrayed in "The Lack of Repose." This "young man seated at his table" leaves his "gang," his contemporary identifications, as he enters the "cloud in which a voice mumbles." Disclosed by the book, that cloud makes present to Andrew "the grandfather he liked, / With an understanding compounded by death" (CP 303). To have written a book, for Andrew, is to be old, and Andrew congratulates himself on not having done so:

not yet to have written a book in which
One is already a grandfather and to have put there
A few sounds of meaning, a momentary end
To the complication, is good, is a good. (CP 303)

The poem comes as close as Stevens' poetry gets to direct description of the experience "Virile Youth" records, the experience of having written one's true first poems, of entering an imaginative line. But Stevens concludes with "not yet": the poet who has created Andrew Jackson Something appears to congratulate Andrew on not having become a creator

himself, on remaining within his generation, without the remove or the abstraction of art.

A similar dissociation between virile young men and makers of thoughtful art informs another, angrier poem from *Transport to Summer*, "The Pediment of Appearance." Here "Young men go walking in the woods," in search apparently of imagination itself, which they expect to recognize by "its form alone" (CP 361). The young men (like Moore's "Novices," or Stevens' Chieftain Iffucan)

go crying
The world is myself, life is myself,
Breathing as if they breathed themselves,

Full of their ugly lord. . . (CP 361)

George Lensing writes rightly that this poem attacks the young men's "absorption too exclusively in the self": besotted by their egos, they find the "pediment" but may not recognize it, and in any case it rejects them (*Seasons* 211). Stevens' unusually harsh line breaks (more like his Thirties verse than like most of his Forties pentameters) reinforce the pediment's "ugly scowl." These young men are (like Andrew Jackson Something, but much less attractive) counterexamples: they may be virile, but cannot be poets until they have lost the arrogance of their youth.

If Stevens noticed the poet as romantic youth—and if his peers appropriated that figure for their own verse—why did he work around it, or negotiate it at such distance, in his own poetry? Why do his poems (except his apprentice work) glimpse that figure only fleetingly, or parodically, or as the raw material (often in uniform) for another figure's poems? One answer might be that Stevens saw his own poetry (though not other people's) as deeply and inevitably involved with middle age. That answer might find support in his biography: Stevens spent his own youth pursuing journalism and the law, partly under pressure from his father. He began writing modern poetry only in his mid-thirties; when *Harmonium* appeared he was forty-three. The figure of Aeneas supporting his father, his youthful energy renovating his father's line, might have seemed, given Stevens' life, precisely the inherited example Stevens himself could not follow. Even after *Harmonium*, we can find in some of Stevens' work a sense (which "Mrs Alfred Uruguay" suggests) that there is some other kind of poetry, as there is some other kind of life, more immediate, more vital, more energetic, to which Stevens and his poems have no direct access: "The poet is a god," he wrote in "Adagia," "or, The young poet is a god. The old poet is a tramp" (OP 198). Stevens cannot cast himself as a god; he can, however, envision himself as a worshipper, or as a latecomer, building (as in "Saint Armourer's Church") a new chapel where the crumbling church had been.

Yet to see Stevens' sense of himself as sentimental rather than naïve, as an "old poet" rather than a young virile one, is to see only half of Stevens' answer to the idealizations of adolescence that his modernist peers endorsed. If Stevens claimed in "Of Modern Poetry" that the modern poem must "learn the speech of the place," "face the men of the time" and "meet / The women of the time," he also argued repeatedly that the ideal poem require a certain distance from biology, current events, and generational trends, that it must "make the visible a little hard / To see" (CP 240, 311). "Reply to Papini" explained that "the nucleus of a time is not / The poet but the poem," not one man's life course but "the growth of the mind / Of the world" (CP 446). "Esthétique du Mal" advances a similar conclusion:

It may be that one life is a punishment
 For another, as the son's life for the father's.
 But that concerns the secondary characters.
 It is a fragmentary tragedy
 Within the universal whole. The son
 And the father alike and equally are spent,
 Each one, by the necessity of being
 Himself, the unalterable necessity
 Of being this unalterable animal. (CP 323–24)

Claims about generational struggle, about age and youth, are "fragmentary"; the poem instead pursues "the . . . whole."

Stevens' aesthetic of abstraction, in other words, requires some independence from the life of the poet, or indeed from anyone's life, considered as biographical fact—some independence from youth and age, father and son, even as *metaphors*. (An age or era, "Description without Place" had argued, is "merely a thing that seems" [CP 340], one subject among many for poets to take up.) Stevens' 1943 lecture likened adolescence, with its imputed confidence and its firstness, to poetry-in-general; he distanced his own sort of poetry, and his own standards for it, from adolescence in his earlier poems—and in the only play he completed but chose not to publish.

"Bowl, Cat and Broomstick" saw its only performance in October 1917.⁴ Its titular speaking parts spend the entire play discussing the work of a French poet, Claire Dupray. Bowl and Cat admire Dupray greatly, both because of her own apparent youth and because that youth enables her to represent her era, to be absolutely contemporary (Bowl and Cat view these qualities as inseparable). Bowl enthuses over Dupray's photograph: "She cannot be more than twenty-two," "with hair combed as a girl combs her hair—concealing in its arrangement the things it begins to disclose" (OP 169). Twenty-two, Bowl explains, "is an age when red becomes tawny, when blue becomes aerial—and when a girl, at least, when a girl like Claire Dupray, becomes a poetess" (OP 169). The characters read her French poems aloud (in English prose): "Does not such a poem, so young, so com-

municative, warrant the definition of the poetess made by her portrait? How new she is!" (OP 174).

Broomstick gradually disabuses Cat and Bowl of their admiration. He first attacks the assumed link between the poet's youth and the "newness" of her expressions: "She is young. Therefore she is new. Or her poetry is young. That is one of the most persistent of all fallacies. Her poetry is young if her spirit is young—or whatever it is that poetry springs from. Not otherwise" (OP 175). Dupray's poetry, Broomstick claims, "imitates the point of view and the feelings of a generation ago." She is no new poet, but "a poetess in the old-maidenly sense of the word," and (worse yet) she turns out to be fifty-three; the photograph Bowl has admired is thirty years old.

Though some of Dupray's work suggests Gertrude Stein ("green, green, green, green, yellow, green, yellow, green" [OP 174]), the play as a whole appears to attack the public success of Edna St. Vincent Millay, who began publishing poetry in her teens, winning a national award for "Renascence" in 1912; Millay's first book appeared in 1917. Critics in sophisticated journals discussed Millay almost exactly as Bowl and Cat discuss Dupray: "the artless and passionate artistry of this rhapsody of girlish mysticism," one writer for *The Double Dealer* concluded, "makes Miss Millay one of our ranking American poets" (Nethercot 205). William Rose Benét's *Poems for Youth* introduced Millay as the author of "'Renascence,' the most remarkable poem by a girl of nineteen that has ever appeared in America" (478). Gorham Munson remembered the vogue for Millay as "the symbol of the 'flaming youth mood'"; the editor John Hutchens later described her as "the lyric voice of the newly liberated and uninhibited young" (3; 19).

"Bowl, Cat and Broomstick" may dramatize a middle-aged male poet's anxiety about this young woman's success, or his desire to demonstrate that his poems were more original than hers. We might also see in its comic situation a larger argument about—or rather against—a 1910s and 1920s' understanding of youth (adolescence, immaturity) as imaginative energy, an understanding present both in the coterie modernism of *Others* and in the wider public that admired Millay. That understanding, the play insists, is either metaphorical (and understood as an inherited metaphor), or it is false, a received idea any poet (but especially an older poet) must clear out of the way. It is no coincidence (though it is also a joke) that Bowl, Cat and Broomstick belong (or say they belong) to the "seventeenth century," the time that Stevens twenty-six years later would identify with his sometime own perception of imagination as youth.

The late poem "Saint Armorer's Church from the Outside" may be Stevens' last word on generational succession and on the value in youth, invoking in its American outdoor "chapel" "the need of each generation to be itself." Yet even here Stevens finds no young man, and no young woman, but a more abstract, adaptable "air of newness," of "That which is always beginning, because it is part / Of that which is always begin-

ning, over and over" (CP 530). "Newness (not novelty) may be the highest individual value in poetry," Stevens would declare in other late prose (OP 201): that newness, he would suggest, had less to do with stages in a life, with biological age, or with adolescence in any of its twentieth-century manifestations, than many of Stevens' contemporaries believed.

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Notes

¹ For another discussion of these sonnets, see Lensing's *A Poet's Growth*, 75.

² Other critics disagree: for Richard Blessing the rider "is the poet-hero," Stevens' own "mind's will" (78); James Longenbach considers "Mrs. Alfred Uruguay" a "bluntly masculine poem," one of a "series of defensively programmatic poems about the masculine power of the hero" (227).

³ Vendler discusses this stanza's distance from the figures it describes: the poet himself experiences "not youthful happiness, but a state resembling it," and that perhaps only "for a moment" (184).

⁴ On the performance—and for another reading of the rarely discussed play—see Litz 55–60.

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“Amen to the Feelings”: Wallace Stevens and the Politics of Emotion

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THE TWO HALVES of my title come from “Montrachet-le-Jardin” and “Esthétique du Mal,” but my paper focuses on “Montrachet-le-Jardin.” The former work articulates two different “politics of emotion” (CP 324), two different ideas about how our ethical and political lives are related to our affective lives. The different politics are related to different emotions—one to the unifying force of love, and one to the divisive force of ill will and hatred, the feelings that produce what Wallace Stevens calls, in “Montrachet-le-Jardin,” “the x malisons of other men” (CP 261). It seems reasonable enough that Stevens should develop a distinctive polity around each of these two affects. But “Montrachet-le-Jardin” is oddly divided in the way it develops each of these politics. My purpose here is simply to articulate this division and identify its significance in relation to the development of Stevens’ “politics of emotion” during the war years; I will suggest, finally, that it marks a certain tension between two tendencies in Stevens’ treatment of these issues—a tendency toward idealization and a countervailing pragmatic flexibility.

“Montrachet-le-Jardin” initially seems a rather optimistic and even idealistic poem, as Bates and others suggest (Bates 245–46, 265; Brogan 38–39; Carroll 142–145); and it is particularly so in its attitudes toward the “mal” to which Stevens would return in “Esthétique du Mal” two years later. Most important in this regard is a twelve-line sentence situated almost exactly at the poem’s center. At this midpoint in the poem’s progress, the speaker issues the following advice:

Fear never the brute clouds nor winter-stop
And let the water-belly of ocean roar,
Nor feel the x malisons of other men,

Since in the hero-land to which we go,
A little nearer by each multitude,
To which we come as into bezeled plain,

The poison in the blood will have been purged,
An inner miracle and sun-sacrament,
One of the major miracles, that fall

As apples fall, without astronomy,
One of the sacraments between two breaths,
Magical only for the change they make. (CP 261–62)

The desire to arrive at the “hero-land” can be read as a wartime refiguration of a long-standing and central impulse in Stevens’ poetry, namely, the millenarian and apocalyptic impulse that emerges as early as “Sunday Morning.” There, Stevens envisions a sky that “will be much friendlier than than now” (CP 68) (though still “A part of labor and a part of pain”) and hears pre-echoes of a future “chant of paradise” (CP 70). Even if we understand the “hero-land” as an inner state, rather than an actual community, its presence in “Montrachet-le-Jardin” still seems somewhat unusual among the war poems that consider ideal futures free of evil, poison, pain, and so on.

In 1942, “Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas” offers only a hypothetical response to its opening questions about being “clean” of “the lascivious poisons” (CP 252): “If earth dissolves / Its evil after death, it dissolves it while / We live” (CP 259). The poem ends pessimistically with men going to defeat, not victory. In the same year, “Dutch Graves in Bucks County” considers the possibility of “An end of evil in a profounder logic” (CP 291), but later descends into “the pit of torment that placid end / Should be illusion” (CP 292); and in 1944, “Esthétique du Mal” refuses any final, apocalyptic separation of good and evil, as does the earlier “Asides on the Oboe.” “Asides” acknowledges that during the war “We found, / If we found the central evil, the central good” (CP 251). “Esthétique” identifies the “evil in the self” (CP 316); it insists, in a distinctly antiapocalyptic gesture, that “heaven and hell / Are one, and here, O terra infidel” (CP 315), and later rejects the idea of a “third world” in which “there is no pain” (CP 323)—pain being the main sense of “mal” in the poem. The optimism, then, of a projected entry into a “hero-land” stands out even more starkly against these other encounters with poisons, evil, and pain.

The largely optimistic stance of “Montrachet-le-Jardin” is not limited to this central millenarian promise. It is equally evident in the way the poem interweaves four dominant concerns. It is evident, first, in the poem’s concern with “feelings” and with the feeling of “love” in particular; second, in its concern with speech and with the capacity “to speak simply of good” (CP 262) in particular; third, in its concern with the relationship between “feelings” and “speech”; and, finally and above all, in its concern with the relationship between the three preceding issues and our eventual arrival at “the hero-land.” In other words, Stevens suggests that the

capacity to feel love and to speak simply of good can lead us to the hero-land.

Despite the importance of “speech” in this formula, the poem places the source of this progress at an affective and preverbal level. The “feelings” and “sounds” to which the speaker says “Amen” (CP 260) are described as “players / Of aphonies” (CP 260), a strange phrase that, through either a musical or theatrical metaphor, links “feeling” initially not with speech but with an absence of speech. “[T]uned in from zero” and “fuddle-fiddling lumps” (CP 260) similarly suggest a relationship to something prior to or beyond words; the latter phrase also figures the primary articulation of “feelings” in musical rather verbal terms. Such is the point, too, of the description of the “shadow” as “a flourisher / Of sounds resembling sounds, efflorisant” (CP 260). Stevens approaches the issue from a different perspective in the “mercy in Asia” (CP 262) section, but still gives priority to the feelings: if “to speak simply of good is like to love” (CP 262), then speech and especially speech on the subject of moral good are now linked by resemblance to the preverbal level of affect.

This shift from a metonymic to a metaphoric relationship may be driven by a need to assert the force and value of speech: speech now has, by resemblance, a unitive force similar to that of love itself—and, in fact, “Montrachet” as a whole is overwhelmingly concerned with the unitive force of love, as Charles Altieri suggests (162): love links us to the hero; and as a shared human impulse, it even unites Americans with the “lean sacristans” (CP 262) of an Asia that has recently bombed Pearl Harbor, as Jacqueline Vaught Brogan notes (39). Perhaps what is most important, then, in the earlier parts of the poem, is that the speaker retains the capacity to say “amen, / Amen to the feelings about familiar things” (CP 260), the capacity to sacralize the affective life and assert a lasting faith in the validity and utility of that life. If these “feelings” are “The blessed regal dropped in daggers’ dew” (CP 260), then they function not just as a source of regulation but also as a sanctified ruler over crucial aspects of our lives. In this politics of emotion, emotions are our wise rulers rather than the ruled, a source of the values and of the principles of law and regulation that will lead us to “the hero-land.”

Or at least they *can* lead us there. There are, after all, other emotions, emotions that are potentially or inherently destructive, and the knowledge of their existence is marked elsewhere in the poem by a certain uneasiness and ambiguity about the relationship between “feelings” and our progress toward “the hero-land.” In “Montrachet-le-Jardin,” the “something more to love” (CP 260) is “the hero,” and, therefore, “the hero” is the vague presence initially described as “now a senseless syllable, / A shadow in the mind, a flourisher / Of sounds resembling sounds” (CP 260). He is then presented as “Approaching the feelings or come down from them” (CP 260). Is the hero a presence made known to the feelings but originating elsewhere, or does he descend to us from the feelings, as though by

inheritance? In an alternate reading made equally possible by the passage's complex syntax, it is the "sounds" that either "Approach[] the feelings or come down from them." Such a reading situates the hero one step further from the feelings. Either way, he remains in a strange, liminal space between these different possibilities, or between different relationships to the feelings.

The absence of this ambiguity in other near-contemporaneous poems helps isolate the struggle unfolding in this poem. For example, in the almost contemporaneous "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War," we learn plainly enough that "The hero is a feeling, a man seen / As if the eye was an emotion, / As if in seeing we saw our feeling / In the object seen" (CP 278). Here, the qualifying of "as if" has a far less unsettling effect than the different options considered in "Montrachet-le-Jardin." Why should "Montrachet" be more tentative here than "Examination"? Why should this part of "Montrachet" be more uncertain in tone than the rest of the poem?

One answer emerges in the central passage with which I began my discussion. As would have been evident from merely listening to the poem's central tercets, the speaker's most optimistic assertion comes only at the tail end of a command that exposes the speaker's consciousness of the difficulties involved in "purging" the blood of its poisons: "Fear never the brute clouds nor winter-stop / And let the water-belly of ocean roar, / Nor feel the x malisons of other men." The last phrase seems especially pertinent. Juxtaposing a different metaphoric domain (the human realm) to the natural forces named in the two preceding lines, it reminds us that "malisons" are as inevitable as those natural phenomena. If the speaker commands us not to "feel" them, it is precisely because he knows we *will* encounter them. Stevens thereby foregrounds the absolute necessity of confronting the "mal" of "malisons" on the human, social, and political levels.

Perhaps more telling still are the shifts in the specific imperative verbs through which Stevens establishes the proper stance toward both natural and human violence—"Fear never," "let," and "feel." All three counsel the maintenance of a stoic strength against a "violence without" (NA 36). But there is a peculiar doubleness about the command not to "*feel* the x malisons" (my emphasis) of other men, a doubleness that is not present in the first two imperatives. As was just suggested, *not* to feel these "malisons" is, first, to adopt a kind of stoic affective autonomy in the face of other people's expressions of ill will; yet the phrase also commands its readers not to feel "malisons" within themselves, i.e., it warns them not to formulate malisons within themselves as other men do; it warns them not to feel the way men of malisons feel. This warning hardly seems surprising in a world where human violence has so outstripped natural violence; but it seems oddly divided between a projection of the desire to utter "malisons" onto others, and an acknowledgment of its potential presence

within "us." And it seems particularly problematical that "feelings," at the very center of the poem, and at the center of its most optimistic assertion, should be linked not to good speech, not to the kind of speech that is "like to love," not to "The blessed regal," but to "malisons," to bad speech, to curses and maledictions that result from ill will and create divisions and further ill will within society and between human beings.

This central gesture has a force quite opposite to that of the "mercy in Asia" section and to the more obviously optimistic stance of the whole poem. It also unsettles some aspects of the speaker's earlier "amen" to "the feelings about *familiar* things" (emphasis added). Obviously enough, this "amen" marks a boundary between the familiar and the unfamiliar, that which comes within the limits of our domestic purview and that which remains "outside" of that purview; it may mark, too, a boundary between whatever bears a "family" resemblance to ourselves or to aspects of ourselves, and whatever does not. This boundary, it appears, is disrupted or at the very least questioned by the ambiguous command not to "feel the x malisons of other men." Unfamiliar feelings, the undesired other, may come closer or already *be* closer than we wish. The mere fact that the speaker uses the imperative mode here further complicates his previous "amen" to the feelings. Clearly, there are feelings that need to be disciplined, controlled, or avoided altogether; clearly, we need to be told to discipline and control those feelings, to make moral choices about what sorts of feelings we give sway to in our affective lives; we need to enter into the kinds of social relationships constructed within or through language that can help us to learn these strategies of self-discipline and self-control—as we are already doing, in fact, in listening to or reading this poem. Here, then, Stevens constructs a very different politics of emotion, one in which "feelings" are no longer a "blessed regal," no longer a source of value, but must be subject to some other form of regulation. Oddly enough, the poem does not identify the source of that regulation.

But the key issue here is not simply that two different emotions demand two different politics of emotion; rather, the issue is that the poem articulates these two politics in such different ways. "Montrachet-le-Jardin" overwhelmingly emphasizes the benefits of "good" emotions and gives only the most limited articulation to an awareness of "mal"; yet its central imperatives seem designed to create or act out a disciplinary relationship between text and reader, to create a relationship between text and reader on which the reader can model his own government of the more dangerous "feelings." The need to discipline "mal" is both marginalized and privileged. We are left, then, with a poem that, on the one hand, demonstrates a remarkably optimistic millenarianism founded on a faith in "the feelings about familiar things," but that subtly emphasizes, on the other hand, that we cannot be certain of experiencing only those kinds of feelings, or of speaking of good rather than uttering "malisons." There may be a tension between what the poem wants or tries to do emotionally and what it

can actually achieve intellectually, logically, or rationally; or there may be a tension between two different affective demands or requirements—between a need to celebrate the unifying force of “love” and a need to acknowledge the destructive potential of “malisons.” In this poem, the politics of emotion does not “appear / To be an intellectual structure” (CP 324), as Stevens says it “must” in canto XIV of “*Esthétique du Mal*.” It appears to be an emotional one, and a complex and contradictory one at that, which perhaps is as it should be. In this, at least, Stevens’ politics of emotion look less like the work of a “lunatic of one idea” (CP 325) and more like a “true sympathizer[]” (CP 317).

These considerations help to situate “*Montrachet-le-Jardin*” more precisely in relation to some of Stevens’ other war poems, which can thus seem to be haunted in different ways by similar tensions. Those poems that deal most thoroughly and explicitly with the problem of evil—“*Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas*” and “*Examination of the Hero in a Time of War*”—remain unconcerned with “the hero” or the “hero-land.” Those that most fully elaborate the origin and function of the hero, on the other hand, do not confront evil in the same way. “*Montrachet-le-Jardin*” seems in this regard an odd and unsuccessful hybrid, a work whose poetic failings may originate in part in the crossing of two characteristically Stevensian modes or genres in “the x malisons of other men.” It tries to close its eyes to evil, but gives in, if only briefly, to a compulsion to look.

Yet the solution Stevens finds in “*Esthétique du Mal*”—if he is searching for a solution there—does not quite answer all the problems raised by the half-articulated acknowledgment of “mal” in “*Montrachet-le-Jardin*.” In the fourth canto of the later poem, Stevens gives far greater weight to the meaning of “mal” than before, so that it comes closest to that of “malisons” in “*Montrachet*.” It is Stevens’ own version of a perhaps rather Protestant emphasis on the soul’s radical corruption—“that evil in the self, from which / . . . fault / Falls out on everything” (CP 316). It is only after the full acknowledgment and exploration of this evil that he can, in the poem’s fifth canto, celebrate a countervailing capacity to sympathize and, above all, to utter “phrases / Compounded of dear relation,” to remain within the “in-bar” of the “familiar,” to utter phrases that create “So great a unity, that it is bliss” (CP 317). But “*Esthétique*” separates “evil” from inarticulate affect and places it in the mind; it is kept separate from the canto devoted to the unitive force of sympathy, the familiar, bliss, love, and so on. And cantos IV and V of “*Esthétique*” maintain careful distinctions between different kinds of oneness and unity, between the totalizing evil that is the “genius of / The mind” (CP 316–17) and the unifying “services / Of central sense,” “love” and “sympathy” (CP 317). Despite its more complete acknowledgment of the problem of evil, “*Esthétique*” still protects the capacity to say “Amen to the feelings.”

The most we can say, perhaps, is that for Stevens the particular politics of emotion in which we engage depends upon the specific emotion in question. This is a straightforward enough point. One could simply say that Stevens is, after all, Stevens, a major poet and one intelligent enough to resist any obvious sentimental or idealistic generalizations about the value of all affect—a flexible pragmatist rather than an idealist. Yet “Montrachet-le-Jardin,” in granting such different articulations to its two politics, suggests the presence of an uneasy and only partially acknowledged relationship between idealizing and pragmatic tendencies at this point in Stevens’ career.

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Good-bye Major Man: Reading Stevens Without “Stevensian”

EDWARD RAGG

INTRODUCTION

MAJOR MAN, A NEW ROMANTIC, the supreme fiction, the first idea, the abstract, the death of the gods, the imagination-reality complex, the fluent mundo: every self-respecting reader of Wallace Stevens' poetry and prose will be familiar with this specialist Stevensian vocabulary. What literature devoted to Stevens often fails to mention, however, is that most of these terms derive from “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction” or, if they do not appear in “Notes,” emanate from the period where a self-reflexive idiom became a priority for Stevens: namely the decade 1935–45. This omission has in large part to do with the hold Stevens' vocabulary has over the criticism devoted to the body of his work. It is a seductive idiom. It is part of what makes Stevens an attractive poet. In John N. Serio's and B. J. Leggett's *Teaching Wallace Stevens*, Joan Richardson even suggests that we need to learn Stevens' language before we can begin to read his verse.

Certainly, no one would deny that acquiring familiarity with the difficult terrain of Stevens' voluminous work requires sustained reading. But if the “fluent mundo” (*CP* 407) is coextensive with the Stevens corpus, rather than, in the view of this paper, merely a crucial phase in Stevens' overall development, then Stevens criticism would have little more to do than explicate Stevensian terms. Rather than learn Stevens' language, we need to contextualize how and why the poet developed the vocabulary he did and why he came to have no further use for this personal idiom in the last decade of his career. In addition, scholars need to be wary of the extent to which “Stevensian”—if I can call it that—can inform the kind of self-confirming, rather than merely self-consistent, criticism that secondary literature on Stevens all too often displays. To trope Richard Rorty's wry comment on Heidegger's language—“Heideggerese is only Heidegger's gift to us, not Being's gift to Heidegger” (65)—we could say “Stevensian is only Stevens' gift to us, not The Abstract's gift to Stevens.” Contextualizing how Stevens' language arose will point up not just its function in the cor-

pus, but those other parts of the poet's work that frequently escape attention, what Angus Cleghorn calls "the neglected rhetoric."

My concern in this paper is threefold: first, to acknowledge and modify recent developments in revisionist Stevens criticism, in particular the "poetics of resistance" argument offered by Melita Schaum, Jacqueline Brogan, and others; second, to venture an alternative reading of the 1945 poem "Description without Place" that beefs up recent criticism dependent on the notion of "description" with the thesis that Stevens dismantles his own 1942 poetics in the course of that poem; and third, to suggest why I think Stevens no longer required an evocative vocabulary in his post-1945 work. This last argument will hinge on Stevens' assumption of a mature abstract aesthetic, rather than one that requires a vocabulary to advertise "it must be abstract."

REVISIONISM AND THE "POETICS OF RESISTANCE"

In "Description without Place," Stevens ironizes his 1942 need for a personal idiom. Written only a few months after "Paisant Chronicle"—the poem in which Stevens claimed to have defined "major man" for José Rodríguez Feo (*L* 489)—"Description without Place," like "Paisant Chronicle," dispatches the poet's "major man" figure. Stevens criticism has not given this manoeuvre due attention, perhaps because "Description without Place" principally attracts scholars for its linguistic philosophy, for its pragmatist and poststructuralist conviction, "It is a world of words to the end of it" (*CP* 345). Brogan and Schaum focus on "description" in order to exonerate Stevens of the guilty aestheticism laid at his door by Marjorie Perloff. In their view, Stevens' interest in description signifies a poet with new priorities, post-"Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," to meet the "actual world" head on—a position similar to Alan Filreis' argument about Stevens' preference for an "'agreement with reality'" (28) in Stevens' essay "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet." Although I agree Stevens can be exonerated of aloofness to the world, "Description without Place" is better read as an exercise in heaving off an old vocabulary, specifically the poet's 1942 rubric, than it is as evidence for wanting to subvert the received descriptions of political discourse. Before addressing those respects in which Stevens moves on from his 1942 idiom, I want briefly to illustrate some of the problems with casting the poet in a politically utilitarian vein.

In the "poetics of resistance" argument, Stevens' interest in description is read as evidence of the poet's desire to write beyond the rhetoric of war propaganda. Scholars like Brogan and Schaum feel the understandable pressure to depict Stevens in this way because they are themselves resisting Perloff's criticism that "Notes" implies "the real action takes place in the country of metaphor" (42). But if we resist the embarrassing claim that Stevens is irresponsibly resisting the reality of war, we accept Perloff's implicit challenge that asks: "If Stevens is not resisting such global con-

flict, what *is* he resisting?" Although Stevens talks about "resistance" in the early 1940s—and even earlier in "The Irrational Element in Poetry"—scholars would be well advised not to argue with Perloff on her own terms. As pragmatist discourse cautions, such a move only gives credibility to the very argument one wants to put in question. In addition, the argument for "resistance" should be wary of using "description" to rehabilitate Stevens as a politically concerned poet, particularly if its ruling assumption is a) all language is political and b) Stevens uses language, therefore he must be political.

We risk promulgating a watered-down Stevens if we read the poetry for politically acceptable gestures. As Milton J. Bates suggests, "sympathetic critics" risk reductively politicizing Stevens if they attempt to fill in the "gaps" that "[u]nsympathetic critics" (208) deplore. This is, after all, the poet who in "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" famously declares: "There is a life apart from politics" (NA 57). I am not saying the political situation of the 1940s did not have its impact on Stevens. It certainly did. There is nothing incompatible, however, in asserting there is a realm of experience *beyond* the political sphere, while also realizing the pressure that sphere exerts on this "life apart." We should not argue from the wrong point of departure about a poet whose political affiliations require more nuanced reading if their place is to be understood in Stevens' developing poetics. More seriously, the project of reclaiming Stevens as "politically correct" overlooks other avenues for reading the poet's interest in descriptive power. If Stevens' turn to "description" is viewed as part of a more complex response to a wider world—one where, I argue, the poet becomes self-confident about a fully abstract aesthetic—the richness and variety of Stevens' post-1945 verse can be readily grasped. As Stevens matured he addressed more singular themes—"metaphor," "resemblance," "analogy"—and would not return to his "figure(s) of capable imagination" (CP 249). The turn to "description" is an important part of that process.

"DESCRIPTION WITHOUT PLACE"

In "Description without Place" Stevens aims to re-create his poetic world not as a specifically named place, such as the crystalline "mundo," but as a descriptive terrain without explicit figures: no "major man," no "supreme fiction," no "first idea," and so on. The poem specializes in rewriting other literary "descriptions" as well as Stevens' 1942 aesthetic. The first section of the poem echoes two Shakespeare plays and a number of different Stevens poems. These echoes are not direct allusions. That would identify the poem all too clearly within a web of literary reference—including the "mundo" itself—where "Description" could become more a poem of nostalgia than departure. What Stevens' echoes achieve is a space for new poetry, a space created through troping other texts:

It is possible that to seem—it is to be,
As the sun is something seeming and it is.

The sun is an example. What it seems
It is and in such seeming all things are.

Thus things are like a seeming of the sun
Or like a seeming of the moon or night

Or sleep. It was a queen that made it seem
By the illustrious nothing of her name. (CP 339)

The poem echoes here both *Hamlet* and “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction.” In Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet preserves the “seeming”/“being” distinction Stevens dissolves in his first four couplets. Answering Gertrude’s charge that his grief “seems . . . so particular,” Hamlet famously retorts: “Seems, madam? Nay, it *is*. I know not ‘seems’ ” (1.2.75: 657). In “Description without Place,” however, “seeming” is no longer a matter of mere appearance. It is the indication of “being.” Such an idealist elision is evoked in the curious punctuation of the poem’s first line: “It is possible that to seem—it is to be. . . .” Stevens favors an em dash rather than a comma to suggest that “seeming” might be “being” after all. This transforms the hypothetical “It is possible” into less tentative diction. The line visibly yokes “seeming” and “being” together such that it is impossible to wrest the two apart.

“Description without Place” also alludes to “Notes,” particularly Stevens’ 1942 tendency to *name*, irrespective of the denials in “Notes” itself that, for example, the “sun / Must bear no name” (CP 381). In fact, both echoes of *Hamlet* and “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction” coalesce in the word “sun.” The Prince’s first words pun on his lamentable situation in being Claudius’ son, but not his biological son. He is “too much i’th sun” (1.2.67: 657) both in his new filial role and in the reflected light of Claudius’ recent marriage to Hamlet’s mother. What marks the difference between “Notes” and “Description without Place,” however, is not an attitude toward appearance or ideas but an attitude toward the act of naming. “Notes” tries not to name by resorting to general description: opting for “gold flourisher” over “Phoebus” (CP 381). But “Notes” is a predominantly naming poem and “gold flourisher” is close to becoming a proper noun. “Notes” introduces “the Supreme Fiction,” “the first idea,” “major man,” and “the major abstraction” (CP 380, 381, 386, 388). It even begins by naming: “Begin, ephebe” (CP 380). It tries hard to render “the MacCullough” (CP 386). Leaving aside the multiple characters who make up the poem’s “anecdotes”—“Nanzia Nunzio,” “the Canon Aspirin” (CP 395, 401)—“Notes toward a Supreme Fiction” cannot resist creating a nomenclature for its own aesthetic concerns. As if to resist “the mundo” itself,

"Description without Place" echoes various texts to foreground "description" over naming. In effect, the poem enacts in microcosm what Stevens' poems after 1945 achieve at large: the dismantling of those terms that have become familiar "names" in the Stevens oeuvre.

This disinclination to name is made clearer by another echo of Shakespeare's. To reiterate, "Description without Place" features a queen who, despite possessing a name, remains significantly unnamed:

Thus things are like a seeming of the sun
Or like a seeming of the moon or night

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

The poem echoes *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which Theseus argues against the "imagination" of poets:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name. (5.1.12–17: 329)

Stevens' references to "moon," "night," and "sleep"—all important catalysts in Shakespeare's comedy—anticipate his echo of the play. But it is the "queen" who, through the "illustrious nothing of her name," establishes the link between texts. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, two queens inform the drama: Theseus' bride-to-be, Hippolyta, and Oberon's Queen of the Fairies, Titania. Both undergo challenges as to what they perceive to be real and what is actually real, a distinction washed away in the dream of the play itself (see Robin Goodfellow's Epilogue, CW 332). To this extent, the play also chimes with the initial dilemma of *Hamlet*. Even before the Prince meets the Ghost—where Horatio worries that Hamlet "waxes desperate with imagination"—Marcellus feels the need to defend what he has seen against Horatio's doubt: "Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy" (1.4.64: 661; 1.1.21: 655).

But what is the effect of Stevens' "queen" and her unnamed name? "Description without Place" modifies the pejorative connotations of Theseus' "airy nothing" to "the illustrious nothing." Defying Athenian rationalism, Stevens jumps to the poet's aid by insisting that "reality" is always already an imaginative construct. Without the imagination, there is "nothing"; that is, there is no thing existent in a palpable sense. The "queen," a cipher for the imagination, is an "illustrious nothing" not only because the idealist imagination illustrates "reality," but also because it is the most

distinguished faculty humans possess. More significant, "Description without Place" not only resists Theseus' charge that it is "airy nothing" the poet informs; it also goes one step further, referring to "things unknown" but refusing to give them "a local habitation and a name." By 1945, Stevens is content not to nominate any of the "unknown" or mysterious qualities in which his verse excels. "Description without Place" simply allows the name of its unnamed "queen" to be. In fact, where this "queen" comes into being is "on the saying of her name," which, ironically, is no other appellation than "green queen." She is the unnamed "gold flourisher," if you like, of Stevens' 1945 poem, like the "sun," purely another "example," as the poem says, of the imagination's propensity to construct "reality."

Stevens' echoes of Shakespeare create the space for a retrospective and ironic glance at "major man." In canto II of "Description without Place," Stevens questions the "style" and intent of a "major mind," replacing the symbolic "major man" with the less grand "major manner":

Such seemings are the actual ones: the way
Things look each day, each morning, or the style

Peculiar to the queen, this queen or that,
The lesser seeming original in the blind

Forward of the eye that, in its backward, sees
The greater seeming of the major mind. (CP 339–40)

The gravitas and difficulty of Stevens' tone here might distract readers from the playful critique the poem levels at "the major mind." I take the lines "The lesser seeming original in the blind / Forward of the eye that, in its backward, sees / The greater seeming of the major mind" not as an endorsement of a "major mind" but as a criticism of the kind of vision that only *seems* original—Stevens uses the word pejoratively here, I think—if it upholds a distinction between "forward" surface (or appearance) and "backward" substance (or essence). These lines argue that if a "major mind" takes hold of the imagination something is lost in the "forward" of the eye and lost precisely because of the "greater seeming" the "major mind" lends. The poem not only aims to distance itself from any dualism that makes appearance superficial, it also defends itself from the "major mind" that traffics in dualistic thinking.

This becomes clearer in the latter part of canto II. "[I]dentity" itself is "merely a thing that seems" (CP 340), but the ironic use of "merely" emphasizes the fact that seeming is part and parcel of identifying. Moreover, if we live in descriptions rather than places, nothing can be "original" in the sense of having an ultimate source because language itself has no ultimate source or place. If there were ultimate sources for descriptions, then "apparition" would indeed be a mere superficial veil (as the poem asks:

"If not, / What subtlety would apparition have?" [CP 340]). Stevens continues his echo of *Hamlet* here. At the start of the play, Marcellus explains he has urged Horatio to confront the Ghost not merely because Horatio is a doubting Thomas, but also because the scholar might cause the "apparition" to declare itself (1.1.24–27: 655). That Stevens chooses the word "apparition" rather than "appearance" highlights the poem's assault on an appearance/reality distinction. As Marcellus, Hamlet, and even Horatio would agree, an "apparition" has undeniable substance, and in "Description without Place," "apparition" is part of the subtlety of what things are. It is in this sense that there is no disjunction between seeming and being, which is why the "style" of a thing is never mere aesthetic ornament. Whereas "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" insists that the people of earth are "inhabitants of a very varnished green" (CP 383), "Description without Place" ventures that "the green" of its queen is part of her "major manner" (CP 340), part of her style. And if her style is green, then for all intents and purposes, she *is* green. In fact, the end of canto II stresses a semantic link between "seeming" and "seeing": "These are the actual seemings that we see" (CP 340). For just as "major *man*" is literally and figuratively a subset of the word and project of a "major *manner*," so too is "seeming" also a form of "seeing."

STEVENS POST-1945

What this reading is meant to suggest is not only that Stevens' interest in descriptive power marks his need to respond to an "actual world," but also that his 1942 vocabulary cannot, by 1945, inform a maturing poetics. In fact, it is the unsuitability of the 1942 idiom to his postwar concerns that most immediately reveals a changing poet. "Repetitions of a Young Captain" desires "nothing fobbed off, nor changed / In a beau language without a drop of blood" (CP 310). The "Beau linguist" (CP 387) of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" is guarded against at all costs. It should be noted that Stevens' seductive vocabulary is itself abstract: its terms are hard to envisage and it is a quality of the mature verse that, as "The Creations of Sound" says, the visible becomes "a little hard / To see" (CP 311). Some scholars oppose the abstract to the human. But Stevensian abstraction is a thoroughly human affair; and Stevens knew, I think, what bloodless abstraction is. During the mid-1940s he became increasingly distrustful of "rhetoric" and in his correspondence advises Rodríguez Feo against a literary life, arguing for an "abundant poetry" over "pure poetry" (L 495).

I think Stevens no longer needed a demonstrative vocabulary in the last decade of his career because he was able to meditate directly on abstract notions or ideas without having to advertise abstraction—as with "resemblance" or "metaphor" in "Three Academic Pieces" (NA 71 ff.). In effect, he became accommodated to the thesis of "The Man with the Blue Guitar," even though in the mid-1930s he felt his biggest danger was abstraction (see L 302). That poem says, "Poetry is the subject of the poem"

(CP 176). Stevens does not mean that other poems are necessarily the subject matter of poetry, although they might well be. He imagines an abstract “poetry” that catalyses the creation of actual poems, just as the “supreme fiction” is “immanent” in the poet’s mind, even though it can never take on palpable form (L 434). Immanence and not the realization of a vocabulary characterizes Stevens’ response to his middle career. What makes Stevens an ultimately human poet—and this is how he *can* be defended from irresponsibility—is the quality an abstract poetics affords: the space for multiple readers to project their imaginations onto suggestive poetic terrain. Arguably, Stevens’ 1942 vocabulary risks forcing abstraction down readers’ throats. The older poet accordingly moves on. In short, what scholars of Stevens should consider is the role the 1942 idiom plays in creating the space for the later, and perhaps greater, poetry of Stevens’ last decade.

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Wallace Stevens' Commonplace

LIESL M. OLSON

Tomorrow I am going to New York to do a number of errands and otherwise nothing at all. Perhaps I shall have my hair cut. I know almost no one there any more, so that I am like a ghost in a cemetery reading epitaphs. I am going to visit a bookbinder, a dealer in autographs, Brook's about pajamas, try to find a copy of Revue de Paris for December because of an article about Alain that it contains, visit a baker, a fruit dealer and, as it may be, a barber. An ordinary day like that does more for me than an extraordinary day: the bread of life is better than any soufflé.

—Letter from Wallace Stevens to José Rodríguez Feo,
February 19, 1952

The fundamental difficulty in any art is the problem of the normal.
—Wallace Stevens, "Adagia"

I WISH TO EXPLORE Wallace Stevens' conception of the "commonplace," a word he began using in the mid-1930s somewhat interchangeably with the words "ordinary" and "normal." I would like to show how the commonplace becomes an intensely theorized aspect of Stevens' late work, functioning not only as empirical subject matter, but also as a certain kind of attitude that acknowledges the necessary negotiations between a private life and the social world. Stevens first used the word "commonplace" to describe *Owl's Clover*, a group of poems that he chose not to include in his *Collected Poems* (1954).¹ Dissatisfied with how the poems grappled with art's relationship to contemporary issues, or "To What [*sic*] one reads in the papers," Stevens eventually called the poems "rather boring" (L 308).

Strikingly, Stevens' notion of the commonplace develops, in part, out of his first-time attempt to write poems that would account for the socio-political problems of the day. Stevens rarely again addresses, directly, the political issues of his moment, but one way that Stevens engages with a social world is by looking at other people's ordinary experiences—that is, the way in which other people live their everyday lives and how their days are shaped by a particular political climate. Stevens' love of the commonplace is picked up by a poet like John Ashbery, and it has become a

quality in contemporary poetry that critics such as S. P. Mohanty and Jonathan Monroe have described as Ashbery's "everyday": "the node of interaction of life as it is lived with its unacknowledged, unsung *others*, in effect the entanglements of self with world which define human—social—consciousness and experience" (41). Seeking out the commonplaces of *others*, I will show, constitutes Stevens' ultimate engagement with the social.

First, I would like to draw on a bit of biography, in the sense of the real satisfaction that Stevens took in the routines of work at the Hartford, which distanced him (physically and in spirit) from cultural, artistic, and political centers of activity (or at least this was his long-lasting self-conception, a conception that deeply informed his theory of the commonplace). I will suggest that Stevens' very concept of language is affected and informed by this theory: although many other modernist writers were preoccupied with ordinary experience (and how best to represent it), what makes Stevens unique, in this respect, is how he dwells on language as a satisfying, pleasing medium. I will turn to "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" as a case in point. Here, ordinary experience, itself elusive, is not disappointed by what language can and cannot do. Although I will not have time to explore this poem at great length, I will ultimately suggest that Stevens' poetics are important to many contemporary poets who value the commonplace in a post-romantic tradition, trusting in language's ability to negotiate the relationship between the private and the social.

In a 1940 letter to the critic Hi Simons concerning "The Comedian as the Letter C," Stevens explains the "normal" as something his poetry attempts to "achieve." He reacts against the claim that his work exists in an isolated, imaginative realm:

People say that I live in a world of my own: that sort of thing. Instead of seeking therefore for a "relentless contact," I have been interested in what might be described as an attempt to achieve the normal, the central. So stated, this puts the thing out of all proportion in respect to its relation to the context of life. Of course, I don't agree with the people who say that I live in a world of my own; I think that I am perfectly normal, but I see that there is a center. (L 352)

Stevens develops a theory of the normal in place of "relentless[ly]" addressing contemporary events; he even reconsiders his early poetry as part of a new poetic project. The older Stevens here rereads the verbal extravagance of his younger work, recasting "The Comedian as the Letter C" in a light more conducive to his new emphasis on the "normal."

But the quotidian differs for everyone. One of Stevens' adages, in apparent contradiction to his statement about being "perfectly normal," celebrates diversity: "I don't think we should insist that the poet is normal or, for that matter, that anybody is" (OP 193). Wry, Stevens connects his

theory of the “normal” with a comment upon his own markedly bourgeois normalcy, which we can never say was entirely “normal,” if only because the normal cannot be associated with an affluence that was in fact unusual during the Great Depression.² Essentially, Stevens’ satisfaction with the ordinary grows out of a lifelong commitment to the rhythms of work, making money as a successful surety lawyer, and enjoying the simple things (books, pajamas, haircuts) that money can buy. “Money is a kind of poetry” (*OP* 191), Stevens shamelessly maintains, valuing a secular and material world rather than the world of “silent shadows” and “dreams” (*CP* 67) considered in “Sunday Morning.” His theory is both poetic and personal; to attend to the ordinary, in poetry, is to value the ordinary as “the bread of life.” However, Stevens’ poems do not depict the commonplace as particular kinds of activities (which his letters often do), but as an approach to life, allowing a reader to understand the commonplace given one’s own quotidian.

Stevens’ commonplace book, in which he transcribed various quotations and aphorisms, contains a prophetic, cryptic passage on the normal from a 1933 architectural review. Here, the normal is defined as a perfect subject for art:

And, the normal is not the average, neither in art, in letters, nor in commerce. The average can never rise to great perfection but the normal can be perfectly expressed in any activity of man, be it architecture or poetry—painting or agriculture. . . . Modernity and newness are as inseparable from normality as are the ways of an animal in any chosen period of its long and slow changing evolution. The Normal is not static, it is of the Universe, and with the Universe it forever changes. It is so much with us that it needs no search to find it, no theory to teach its presence . . . (25–27)³

Pursuing the normal, Stevens also realizes, ironically, that the normal “needs no search to find it.” Hence, Stevens writes to Henry Church: “For myself, the inaccessible jewel is the normal and all of life, in poetry, is the difficult pursuit of just that” (*L* 521). His statement again conflates art and life, the “activity of man” and the poetry he produces. Yet writing about the normal is no easy task. In 1935, he writes to Ronald Latimer:

You will find occasional references in my poems to the normal. With me, how to write of the normal in a normal way is a problem which I have long since given up trying to solve, because I never feel that I am in the area of poetry until I am a little off the normal. The worst part of this aberration is that I am convinced that it is not an aberration. (*L* 287)

Stevens essentially admits that representing the normal without altering it amounts to an impossible task.

Poetic limitation, however, as it defines Stevens' search for the commonplace, differs from the way in which many other modernist writers thought about the possibilities of language. "Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish, / Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, / Will not stay still" (19), T. S. Eliot writes in *Four Quartets*, realizing language's inability to represent the shock and disorder of modernity. Stevens' commonplace also emerges out of a particular historical moment, but the commonplace is not simply another expression of (or reconciliation with) the modernist frustration with language. For Stevens, whose subject matter was not the traumatic, language seems like a trustworthy medium. Unlike his contemporaries, Stevens rarely expressed despair at what language could *not* do. Although he said very little about Eliot (as compared with his more local peers William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore), Stevens wrote of *The Waste Land*: "If it is the supreme cry of despair it is Eliot's and not his generation's."⁴ Stevens instead emphasizes what language *must* do: "It must / Be the finding of a satisfaction, and may / Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman / Combing" (CP 240). But "Of Modern Poetry," like *The Waste Land*, responds to a radically changed world amid war, as Stevens' poetry itself was changing; it poses the question: What should poetry *be now*? It answers with a call for a new kind of language and a new understanding of audience: "It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place" (CP 240).

In this vein, Stevens' 1948 lecture "Imagination as Value" turns to the commonplace as "what will suffice" (CP 240) during human suffering; Stevens closes the lecture with the following statement: "[T]he chief problems of any artist, as of any man, are the problems of the normal and that he needs, in order to solve them, everything that the imagination has to give" (NA 156). The imagination becomes the human faculty capable of finding the commonplace; the imagination is not a vehicle of escape, but a requirement of life. Stevens, however, was quite aware that poetry has real limitations. He never believed that his poetry could actually ameliorate social conditions or change the way that people (or politicians) behaved. And in this respect, it is striking to compare him with a poet such as Auden, who famously claims "poetry makes nothing happen" (82), but who also writes successful political poetry, work that Stevens admired. In contrast, celebrating the commonplace enables someone such as Stevens to live completely and fully in the routines that he chose, without venturing into the world of politics or the academy, as Auden did. The routine of ordinary life deeply satisfied Stevens. The intellectual sphere of the academy never seemed solid footing enough for him, never the "rock" of work. In one rather resigned letter to José Rodríguez Feo, Stevens writes:

I have been working at the office, nothing else: complaining a little about it but content, after all, that I have that solid rock under my feet, and enjoying the routine without minding too much that I have to pay a respectable part of my income to the government in order that someone else representing the government may sit at the Cafe X at Aix or go to lectures at the Sorbonne. (*L* 767)

With a trace of self-mockery, Stevens values his productive (and recognizably dull) life at the office and imagines that his work actually enables the European intellectual or the university scholar to pursue more leisurely philosophical matters. But as “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction” emphasizes, “the Sorbonne” epitomizes a hubristic quest for order and control that experiences of the irrational beautifully undermine. “[F]licked by feeling,” the poet celebrates “twilight” understandings, not academic abstractions (*CP* 406–07).

But Stevens’ love of the commonplace is actually contingent upon, and fed by, a social world constructed through a circle of friends and acquaintances, of which Rodríguez Feo is an important part. Stevens’ wide-ranging and longtime correspondence with particular people, all over the world, surfaces as his personal method of solving “the problem of the normal,” of learning how the commonplace functions for other people, in other places.⁵ Stevens’ attention to the quotidian and rejection of the exotic is one of the most frequent themes in his ten-year correspondence with Rodríguez Feo. Stevens most enjoys the details that he sends concerning Cuban food, animals, and domestic conversations, for “Cuba should be full of Cuban things” (*L* 495). But for Rodríguez Feo, who was educated in the northeast but eventually returned to Cuba, settling for the quotidian sometimes seemed like settling for a cold, Puritan, passionless life. In a 1949 letter, Rodríguez Feo writes:

And the anguish remains: the realization that after all one *cannot* live at the peak or “cumulus” of intensity. That life must be dull, monotonous, if then, later, we are to enjoy moments of excitement or discover a mysterious relation between the quotidian and the marvelous. But if you are not prepared, and I thought I was, to accept life as something shot with dull moments, and the notion, Christian?, that for a moment of joy there are ten of boredom, much more horrible than suffering, or perhaps the acutest form of personal suffering—then one is very unhappy. (*Secretaries* 168)

Stevens did not view ordinary experience in this way; as I have been arguing, his satisfaction with routine trumped any desire to “live at the peak or ‘cumulus’ of intensity.” The “normal” man with the “normal” job,

Stevens envisions himself as part of a world of people who simply carry on. In a 1954 letter to Barbara Church, he writes:

Our own days are the days of wind and rain, like today. Yet it is precisely on such days that we give thanks for the office. Sometimes one realizes what an exceeding help work is in anyone's life. What a profound grace it is to have a destiny no matter what it is, even the destiny of the postman going the rounds and of the bus driver driving the bus. (*L* 843)

Stevens does not conceive of himself as divided between work and poetry; rather, he continued the repetitions of both, relatively unchanged, even after he received the Bollingen, two Pulitzers, and the National Book Award.⁶ As Stevens grew older, this satisfaction with the normal became even more pronounced, finding full expression in his last two volumes of poetry, full of figures looking backward and poems that value the normality of the normal. "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" stands as Stevens' most important and extended poem on the subject. Understanding Stevens' investment in the commonplace opens up the poem's central preoccupations: the celebration of repetition as a way of living and moving forward, the eschewal of abstraction in favor of the physical earth, the pervasive and elusive quality of the everyday, and the desire to see things for what they are, untransformed.

Stevens locates the commonplace in the plain, wintry mood of New Haven. The poem understands the ordinary as something satisfying to a businessman traveling to a lackluster city on a midweek winter day, a trip that Stevens himself would have undertaken. Organized in stanzaic triads, a form that Stevens often used for his longer discursive poems, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" extends what "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" left off, but "An Ordinary Evening" is marked by a darker, colder climate of solitary meditation. Wintertime cajoles a stark self-analysis, reflected by a barren world:

So lewd spring comes from winter's chastity.
So, after summer, in the autumn air,
Comes the cold volume of forgotten ghosts,

But soothingly, with pleasant instruments,
So that this cold, a children's tale of ice,
Seems like a sheen of heat romanticized. (*CP* 468)

Like Stevens' snowman, imagining "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" (*CP* 19), the poem strips away the romantic and yet creates a new romanticism in ordinary objects. For Stevens, the common-

place should not remove us from the world, but reconfirm our commitment to it,

At the centre, the object of the will, this place,
The things around—the alternate romanza

Out of the surfaces, the windows, the walls,
The bricks grown brittle in time's poverty,
The clear. (CP 480)

Stevens explores the relationship between what he calls “the distant and the near” (CP 481): the things outside and the things within, divided by windows, walls, and bricks. The images that emerge from the poem capture this tension between near and far, what is seen and unseen, such as the blowing wind, or “wafts of wakening” (CP 473), or “misted contours, credible day again” (CP 470). The poem nonetheless cautions against being caught up in the purely metaphysical. The challenge remains to reject the temptations of “lunar light” (CP 472), to reject romanticizing, and to respond to change. No wonder the “endlessly elaborating poem” itself is so long, and self-effacing, suggesting that “A more severe, / More harassing master would extemporize / Subtler, more urgent proof that the theory / Of poetry is the theory of life” (CP 486). The poem renounces the notion of mastery, of theoretical proofs that cannot be challenged. To settle on any notion of the real—stable and non-transforming—is to deny life. Achieving definition is death.

Moreover, “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” will not arrive at a conclusion, but revels in the circling round, returning to the subject from various angles so that we even sense the way in which the poem came together as a meditation, an improvisation. Unless one counts all five poems of *Owl's Clover* together, “An Ordinary Evening” is Stevens’ longest poem, partly because he became increasingly fascinated with the subject as he wrote. In a 1949 unpublished letter to the Secretary of The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences (where Stevens first read a shorter version of the poem), Stevens admits: “When I wrote the poem I liked the subject and continued to work with it as long as it interested me even though it became much longer than I could possibly use in New Haven.”⁷ And in a May 1949 letter, Stevens describes the process of writing the poem, concentrating on the stark nakedness of his subject:

[H]ere my interest is to try to get as close to the ordinary, the commonplace and the ugly as it is possible for a poet to get. It is not a question of grim reality but of plain reality. The object is of course to purge oneself of anything false. (L 636)

But Stevens also acknowledges that the everyday cannot easily be represented without being objectified. Describing this difficulty, he writes to Barbara Church: "The trouble is that poetry is so largely a matter of transformation. To describe a cup of tea without changing it and without concerning oneself with some extreme aspect of it is not at all the easy thing that it seems to be" (*L* 643). "An Ordinary Evening" considers the changes language effects upon experience itself, proposing that poetry can never exactly pin down, or master, what it is after. The poem acknowledges the allure of metaphor—the creative power of "like" and "as"—to transform the unknown,

As it is, in the intricate evasions of as,
In things seen and unseen, created from nothingness,
The heavens, the hells, the worlds, the longed-for lands.
(*CP* 486)

The poem works to reveal the "nothingness" that stands behind longing, espousing ordinary experience "As it is," as the only substantial truth; to crave something else (sublimity, divinity, or some other location) constitutes an "evasion" of reality. Yet language also becomes the power that gives life and makes meaning in a world without a God. In this sense, the ethos of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" is more resolute than earlier poems such as "Sunday Morning" and "The Idea of Order at Key West": the death of God leaves Professor Eucalyptus in "An Ordinary Evening" "without much choice" (*CP* 475); his option is to turn to the earth, to commonplace experiences, as the only powerful substitute for the illusions of religious imagining.

Stevens' emphasis in his poetry on the ordinary fundamentally differs from that of other modernist long poems that employ ordinary language or that theorize the ordinary, such as Williams' epic of the local, *Paterson*, or Gertrude Stein's celebration of the ordinary as a source of linguistic and domestic pleasure in *Tender Buttons*. The formal diction and conventional syntax of "An Ordinary Evening" has a gentler and more mannered effect than Stein's radical experiments with language or Williams' use of American vernacular. Stevens is concerned less with upsetting grammatical norms than with contemplating ordinary experiences that language describes. In fact, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" acknowledges that poetic attempts to represent the ordinary may objectify the ordinary, making it "extreme." This paradox (representing the ordinary but resisting language's ability to transform it) challenges many contemporary American poets concerned primarily with language's performance, with what language can *do*. Stevens' method is to move towards something unachievable, as his opening stanza states: "Of this, / A few words, an and yet, and yet, and yet—" (*CP* 465). Stevens avoids the colloquial altogether, crafting fresh phrases such as: "vulgate of experience," "crude

collops," and "gay tourna^monde" (CP 465, 466, 476).⁸ The last word is simply Stevens' own neologism, suggesting, as he explained, "an image of a world in which things revolve" (L 699 n).

In one sense, language itself is a commonplace. We construct words in habitual ways, based on the rules of grammar, or "how to do things with words," in J. L. Austin's phrase. To write poetry that foregrounds language's *inability* to represent ordinary experience is to write poetry that must defy, above all, grammatical conventions. The poet must do much more than simply respond to Pound's call to "MAKE IT NEW." Although Stevens aspires to dismantle the complacency of poetic observations, neologisms and fresh phrases are not enough to undermine the habits of language. But, it must be noted, this is not Stevens' real objective, as he knew when distancing himself from Eliot's "supreme cry of despair." In a world that lacks the direction and order of traditional modes of belief, ordinary experiences become essential to the question, "What am I to believe?" (CP 404), as Stevens asks in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction." In "Sunday Morning," the question is phrased differently ("Why should she give her bounty to the dead?" [CP 67]), inspiring a gorgeous medley of images of the earth. The images in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" are less mobile and varied; color and change come up against a sedentary acknowledgment of more banal experiences. The power—the overriding conviction of the poem—derives from ordinariness as the sole entity left at the end of life and a reconciliation with its centrality. There is no doubt that Stevens could imagine a "supreme" world beyond everyday experience, but Stevens' late poems in particular seem conflicted about the possibility of world stripped of human desire, or a world where human complications and frailty do not exist. The poignant knowledge of "An Ordinary Evening" derives from its reconciliation with the commonplace as the only satisfaction humans can fully trust.

Stevens' belief in language's ability to offer moments of completeness and power is endemic to his belief in the commonplace, a quality that influences many contemporary poets who acknowledge but reject a poetics of linguistic limitation. Ashbery, and poets as diverse as Robert Hass and Jorie Graham, turn toward the commonplace with the weight of Stevens' influence: no longer does the search for some ultimate "value" resolve the desire for "good," as poetry looks to the ordinary as a source of direct knowledge, wholeness, or immediacy, particularly in response to (or in collusion with) the swallowing profusion of mass media and technological innovation, a definitively new feature of the everyday since Stevens' era. Although it is possible, here, only to gesture to poets such as Graham, who favors a focus on materialism, and Hass, who identifies how political power is located in the small things we see and do everyday, I conclude with the assertion that Stevens' emphasis on the commonplace has become a kind of natural birthright to many contemporary American

poets. "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" loads language with a remarkable power to "transfix[]" (CP 471) the ordinary, to help see it clearly through the circular experience of the poem's construction, and to resound through recent poetry now being set spinning.

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Notes

¹In a May 22, 1936, letter to Ronald Lane Latimer, the young publisher of two of Stevens' limited editions, Stevens settles on the title "Owl's Clover" for a collection of his poems because this "commonplace" title seems more relevant to "the day's news" than the other title under consideration, "Aphorisms on Society." As Holly Stevens notes, owl's clover "is the common name for the genus *Orthocarpus*, a weed and herb" (L 311 n).

²Stevens' salary during the Great Depression was altered only by a modest pay cut during 1932–33. See Brazeau 231–32.

³Stevens quotes from A. R. Powys reviewing *The Revival of Christian Architecture*, by A. Welby Pugin, *The London Mercury*, 28 (May 1933): 63–64. Most of the quotations that comprise Stevens' commonplace book are similarly random, generally from periodicals and journals and rarely from well-known works of literature.

⁴Stevens' comments on *The Waste Land* are part of a November 11, 1922, letter to Alice Corbin Henderson: "Eliot's poem is, of course, the rage. As poetry it is surely negligible. What it may be in other respects is a large subject on which one could talk for a month. If it is the supreme cry of despair it is Eliot's and not his generation's. Personally, I think it's a bore" (Filreis 19). In a much later letter to William Van O'Connor, Stevens corrects a mistake in O'Connor's scholarly work on Stevens, and Stevens' comment reveals his obstinate desire to separate himself from contemporary poets, despite obviously knowing their work: "I am quoted as saying that I knew [T. S.] Eliot only slightly and principally through correspondence. As a matter of fact, I don't know him at all and have had no correspondence whatever with him. . . . Eliot and I are dead opposites and I have been doing about everything that he would not be likely to do" (L 677).

⁵Other frequent correspondents include Leonard C. van Geysel, who lived in Ceylon and often sent Stevens tea; Thomas McGreevy, the Irish Catholic poet in Dublin; Paule Vidal, the Parisian bookseller; Walter Pach, the art collector and critic who often traveled through Europe; and Marianne Moore, whom Stevens more frequently wrote to than went to meet in Brooklyn.

⁶Stevens always kept the lower right drawer of his office desk open, filing poetry notes whenever he thought of something during the day—an especially apt metaphor marking the fluid relationship between his insurance work and writing poetry (Brazeau 38).

⁷Huntington Library WAS 468, Box 40. See the carbon copy of the shorter version in WAS 2997, which consists of eleven sections (of the longer thirty-one) in the following order: I, VI, IX, XI, XII, XVI, XXII, XXVIII, XXX, XXXI, XXIX (L 662 n).

⁸See Marie Borroff's *Language and the Poet* for a sharp, thorough discussion of Stevens' style. Borroff describes Stevens' language as contrastive, foregrounded, scholarly, sacred, and playful, and less frequently colloquial than the language of other modern poets.

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The Mind's Lyric and the Spaces of Nature: Wordsworth and Stevens

JAMES APPLEWHITE

STEVENS' INCORPORATION OF Wordsworth centers in his utilization of similar figures in landscapes. The "She" of Stevens' Key West, like the many species of birds that enliven his shorter lyrics, is a muse brought into the dynamic of the poem to mediate between transformative desire and the observed reality of a site. This singer brings forth music from mere fact. Wordsworth's solitary reaper, cuckoo, and Lucy in her various guises also locate a more passionate expression in spaces, making "dreariness" appear "visionary." These briefly seen, beautiful creatures are bounded by an inaccessible otherness: they sing in Erse ("The Solitary Reaper" [*Major Works* 319, 717 n]), or seem more "wandering voice" than bird ("To the Cuckoo" [*Major Works* 245]), or are subsumed by the landscape in premature death.

Wordsworth's poetics of encounter endows his *genius loci* with disappearance yet persistence. Lucy Gray's ballad-factuality suggests that she fell from a bridge in a snow storm and that her body was swept away by the torrent. Lyricism is located in the peasantry's belief that she remains on the moor, a "living child," that her "solitary song" still "whistles in the wind" (*Major Works* 150). Wordsworth's imagination, like Stevens', works *through* observation, transforming datum into expressive trope. This belief contrary to fact, in "Lucy Gray," has analogues in the conclusion of "The Thorn" and in the mind of the little girl in "We Are Seven," who experiences her dead siblings as still present. Wordsworth's covert purpose is to seed his descriptions of places with vitalistic suggestion, to make "bare" and "naked" vistas emotionally habitable.

Wordsworth's spirits of place tend to be alternative, partial embodiments of a pervasive, animate nature—that "motion" and "spirit" of "Lines: Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey." Thus, the various voices he projects onto birds, dead Lucys, and the solitary reaper are dramatized as external to the self. In contrast, Stevens is continually aware of his inspirational presence as the "One of Fictive Music." She is, he knows, incestuously close: "Sister and mother and diviner love." She is the imagination's muse, who presides over "the music summoned by the birth / That separates us from the wind and sea" (*CP* 87). Knowing her all

too well as alter ego, Stevens is nevertheless self-conflicted over his demystification of her. He invokes, still, "The difference that heavenly pity brings" (CP 88).

In "The Idea of Order at Key West," Stevens walks a narrow boundary between fact and imagination, resisting the temptation toward romantic transcendence. This is the possibility that the "outer voice" of sky and sea may be speaking directly to him, or may be represented by a ghostly figure, the embodied divinity of nature.

It may be that in all her phrases stirred
The grinding water and the gasping wind;
But it was she and not the sea we heard. (CP 129)

This *stirring* of water and wind suggests reanimation. The former grandeur of romantic landscape comes alive again in "bronze shadows heaped / On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres / Of sky and sea" (CP 129). Yet for Stevens, the romantic substance of this expressive figure has been emptied out. She is now locus more than corpus, occasion for conceptual music rather than recollection of Lucy Gray, with biography, home, and grieving parents. The entity "like a body wholly body" is the ocean itself, even as slightly dematerialized into an earlier guise: "The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea" (CP 128, 129). The alliterative resemblance of the monosyllables *she* and *sea* represents the narrator's temptation to identify the singing he hears with the place where he hears it.

But this blank verse meditation on an evocative nature-site—beginning in description and veering toward metaphysics; utilizing an ambivalently present-and-absent figure earlier and a clearer alter ego later; then returning for closure to a version of the opening landscape—is not "Tintern Abbey." This speaker insists, "it was she and not the sea we heard"—and who therefore voices an elegiac solitude: "there never was a world for her / Except the one she sang and, singing, made" (CP 130). This speaker both metaphorically embodies the sea as a cowed figure, as in Caspar David Friedrich's "Monk by the Sea," and finds that form strangely absent, "fluttering / Its empty sleeves" (CP 128). Romantic spirits of place, haunting the Scottish highlands or Somerset moors, left memorial figurations in Wordsworth's verse. A ghostly romantic cloak and hood remained for Stevens by the sea at Key West, which he reanimated in its final exorcism.

Wordsworth's prefigurations of Stevens' muse-figures came about through a poetics of imaginative possession, which suppressed consciousness of its sexual implications. His aesthetic recreates figures and events, along with emotions at variance with the interpretations of the poet. These meetings—with girls and women, in remote, wild, or desolate places—evoke a subliminal sexual thrill, as the moral, idealistic, yet passionate and implicitly powerful male poet in some way comes to *know* the beauti-

ful, innocent female. His imagination penetrates her, and the circle of landscape she represents (and is represented by), tends to probe downward, under the visible surface. He feels, and transmits to the reader, the buried bodies of the bereft child's siblings in "We Are Seven." Lucy, in her various incarnations, is likewise imaginatively *known*, even in her grave. The "solitary Highland Lass," who reaps and sings more sweetly than "Nightingale" or "Cuckoo-bird," voices the landscape like a fountain of sound, "overflowing" her vale. The underwater implication, here, is followed in stanza three, as the speaker moves backward in time, taking for himself the lass's subjective genealogy of "old, unhappy, far-off things, / And battles long ago" (*Major Works* 319). Possessing her through an appropriated if imagined history, the poet walks on, the musical trophy enlivening imagination. Using her image as inspirational muse, he has crossed a boundary into some deeper layer of his own poetic identity, achieving thereby a more intense lyric expression.

The elegaic melancholy intertwined with the beauties of Wordsworth's Lucy-lyrics, as with bird-singing lass and other children-in-rhyme, connotes a loss associated with regressiveness and with possibly incestuous wishes. Coleridge thought Dorothy a model for the Lucys; however that may be, the landscape associated with these figures has a primordial aura, oceanic in Freud's sense. The child is stationed by the seaside in Wordsworth's sonnet on his daughter with Annette Vallon ("It is a Beauteous Evening, calm and free"). In the "Intimations of Immortality" ode, the backward glance of souls, from their "inland" journey, can "see the / Children sport upon the shore, / And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore" (*Major Works* 301).

Stevens encountered female figures also, in fact as well as in imagination, and sometimes by the sea. Like Wordsworth, he transformed them into muses, but unlike Wordsworth, could acknowledge their sexual dimensions and avoid the Wordsworthian melancholy of repression and loss. One of these muses is a version of Aphrodite, not shell-borne, "But on the first-found weed," where "she scuds the glitters" (*CP* 5) of waves. In the most substantial of this class of minor poems from *Harmonium*, she is

Donna, donna, dark,
 Stooping in indigo gown
 And cloudy constellations. . . . (*CP* 48)

A sexuality extended in landscape is presented in the title ("O Florida, Venereal Soil"), and this figure centers it bodily, and yet is subsumed into tropical night by Stevens' modernist poetics, which represents her partly through aspects of the landscape she typifies:

Conceal yourself or disclose
 Fewest things to the lover—

A hand that bears a thick-leafed fruit,
A pungent bloom against your shade. (CP 48)

Here, imagination unifies emotion around this Donna of dark, who is both of, and apart from, the humid climate. Stevens, like Wordsworth, builds interpretive commentary on his poetry into that poetry itself. He constructs explanations of how his poems crystallize the ineffable elements of landscape into centering figures, which are also images and sounds.

The dress of a woman of Lhasa,
In its place,
Is an invisible element of that place
Made visible. (CP 52)

Likewise, the poem makes visible otherwise unseeable elements, in this case, by a “dress” that is more sound than substance. In the following poem, “The Apostrophe to Vincentine,” the heroine is more a name than a figure:

I figured you as nude between
Monotonous earth and dark blue sky.
It made you seem so small and lean
And nameless,
Heavenly Vincentine. (CP 52)

Here “nameless” is paradoxical, because it is primarily through this word, “Vincentine” (which rhymes also with “clean” and “green”), that the poet “sees” her, “as warm as flesh” (CP 52). On a small scale, in this slight poem, Stevens shows how the centering figure of a site may be abstracted into a name and that name serve as cohesive lyric focus.

Stevens’ modernist landscape lyrics, then, play on, reiterate, yet alter and invert the romantic practice as exemplified by Wordsworth. The greatest instance of the change within continuity from *Harmonium* is “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.” The blackbird as lyric vehicle recalls Wordsworth’s cuckoo, and the nightingale shared by him with Coleridge and Keats. Yet it is recollection with a difference. In “Autumn Refrain,” in *Ideas of Order*, Stevens resolutely distances himself from nightingale country: “I have never—shall never hear that bird” (CP 160). Instead, his sometimes anti-poetic American birds include peacocks darkened by hemlocks (“Domination of Black”); a buzzard (“O Florida, Venereal Soil”); a cockatoo, in its “green freedom” (“Sunday Morning”); a “parakeet of parakeets” (“The Bird with the Coppery Keen Claws”); the famous blackbird (“Thirteen Ways . . .”); the grackle of “Autumn Refrain,” who “grates these evasions of the nightingale”; and the crow, who looks “rusty as he rises up” (“No Possum, No Sop, No Taters”). There are lovelier birds, red ones, and

the elegiac pigeons/doves of the end of "Sunday Morning." There is even that thin bird-likeness of "Somnambulisma," an ordering illusion created by the imagination over a shore, where the "generations of the bird" are "by water washed away. . . ." Yet still they "follow, follow, follow. . . ." This "bird that never settles," mind-created like the singer on the shore at Key West, saves the landscape from becoming "a geography of the dead" (CP 304). Finally, Stevens *invents* a bird, whose "Mere Being" is a singing in language, as its "fire-fangled feathers dangle down" (OP 141).

But it is our blackbird, with its live eye and sharp cry, that best mediates between romantic and modern, lyric and landscape, center and expanse, imagined and real.

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird. (CP 92)

The blackbird's perspective is singular, distinguished from the "twenty" mountains. Adjective as number suggests that place is objective, made of facts to be enumerated, not felt. In contrast to static site, the blackbird's sight is alive, recalling distantly that motion was for Wordsworth a synonym of life. The blackbird's "eye" is "moving," also, as stimulus and locus of emotion. Yet the blackbird is one of Stevens' "evasions of the nightingale" (CP 160). The music spilled out by Wordsworth's solitary reaper or cuckoo unifies a present landscape and even connects it with a past. Stevens' bird analytically separates the moments of perception, just as Cézanne painted each of the perspectives from which he saw village and mountain. Still, the blackbird as moving center, common to each piece of the landscape, allows their collage-like recollection.

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes. . . . (CP 93)

Woman is "bird" in British slang, suggesting slightness, vulnerability, as well as uncatchability, evanescence. Woman as cause for poetic song, in Shelley or Byron, leaves the poet always seeking a newer muse, one exotic for the initial occasion only. Stevens' blackbird provides "inflections"; Stevens knows that the "innuendoes" come from inside himself—"just after." He therefore does not fuse this bird with the landscape, into a gestalt tempting him toward some erotic, deathly merger, such as Keats envisions in his nightingale ode. Stevens' address to the "thin men of Haddam" incites them toward an available satisfaction:

Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird

Walks about the feet
Of the women about you? (CP 93)

Stevens separates human sexual union from the song-mediated romantic reintegration into nature:

A man and a woman
Are one.

Then, as if indicating his romantic sources while marking his distance from them, he reunites bird, woman, and man in a formulation that preserves the identities of each:

A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one. (CP 93)

Keats's nightingale, which Stevens here displaces, presides over a compendium of romantic features: landscape, singing bird, woman-in-landscape, a deepened, downward time-perspective, the idea of homesickness, and an ocean-image suggesting reunion with nature in death. The lyric bird-voice seduces the speaker into the thicket of pure imagination. There, he internalizes its sonic suasion with "cannot see," "soft incense," "darkness," and "guess" (Keats 280). The nightingale's intoxicating liquidity parallels and replaces the imaginary wine, extending the idea of an entire landscape within the mind. Like the song of the solitary reaper, it leads downward past the thought of death and back into history, past biblical Ruth, "in tears amid the alien corn" (281). This emotive homesickness evokes ultimate sources—Stevens' "fragrant portals," words of "ourselves and of our origins" (CP 130). Keats configures the liminal boundary as "magic casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas" (281).

Stevens thus shares romantic identification with a singer in a landscape—in the paradigm case, beside a sea. He differs, in seeing (and hearing) this singer, bird, woman, or bird-singing woman, as both more clearly within the self and as more clearly factual. That is, Stevens does not, for example, configure the Key West singer as a Lucy-like character with name and biography and then appropriate her and her singing anyway as part of his lyric identity. Whether or not an actual woman was seen and heard, Stevens makes us aware of his awareness that this singing is within his mind. Still, Wordsworth, Keats, and Stevens all create lyric intensities by identifying with singing alter egos on the other side of some boundary.

The *romantic* identification, however, wishes to be total. The song has become an intoxicant, and the "perilous seas" seethe with reunion-suasion, a cocktail mixed of Eros and Thanatos. The romantic backward-perspective is a black hole offering time-travel and death. Keats's "Now more

than ever seems it rich to die" (281) is succeeded by Whitman's "Death, death, death, death, death," which, in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," the sea, "like some old crone rocking the cradle" (253), whispers to him. Keats, like Whitman, faces fecund, moving waters associated with earlier time, historically or personally. Both realize the alternatives before the male poet as death and music. This music has led into an exploration of an undiscovered country within the self, and, having arrived at the wave-line boundary "in faery lands forlorn," or on "the sands of Paumanok's shore" (Whitman 251), they choose between an eroticized biologic reabsorption by nature and a poetic vocation newly lyricized by the "inland journey" (*Major Works* 301). Stevens re-inscribes this boundary-encounter, but without the emotive suasion toward deathly merger. His birds remain feathered creatures, demythologized American species, as much a part of fact as of the imagination. They do not vanish into their songs. The blackbird "whistles"; the grackle "grates"; the crow "looks rusty as he rises up." Stevens' bird-based phrases are rich with internal echoings, but it is a music mixing real and imagined, music and noise. Still, he felt the call of the romantic landscape-ghost, at least enough to reinfect it in a modernist register.

The conundrum is this: the male artist is, in aesthetic terms, seeking a heightened access to a confined potentiality within the self. Yet he experiences this expressive longing as an impulse to approach and apprehend some beauty in nature. The lyric figure represents and localizes an otherwise ineffable sublimity. The poet-figure in Shelley's "Alastor" voices his own aching isolation within nature upon seeing a swan returning to its mate. Whitman realizes his bereft, torturing relation to the fecund, seductive sea through the male mockingbird, who sings heartbreakingly from a stake "amid the slapping waves" (249) when his mate does not return. The Freudian version of this death-whispering regression, toward immemorial place and time, suggests that the present singer recalls an origin-enigma when woman *was* landscape, large enough, relatively, to configure gardens, hills, and the "deep romantic chasm" (182) of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan."

In the Wordsworthian encounter with a girl in the remote highlands or moors, there is a conscious/unconscious duality. The adult speaker consciously faces a surface representative of beauty, while subliminally wishing that the silicate chemicals and vegetative growth beneath her reveal an opening answerable to desire. The romantic sound-eroticism arises from this regressive vista. The bird, or solitary lass, voices the poet's swooning sigh of reunion/recognition. Coleridge's "deep romantic chasm which slanted / Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover" (182) is the most explicit expression of this enticing/forbidden rift in the surface of the real. The description subsumes topography into emotive suasion, as "enchanted" echoes "haunted"; the female exponent, identifying this chasm as uncanny, alliterates "woman wailing" with "waning" moon (182). This

"woman" rhymes with "demon," and "lover" with "cedarn cover." The Gothic wailing is the infant's long-buried cry of possession and *for* possession. In a double deferral, Coleridge's singing woman, in landscape via simile, voices the poet's ancient song of forbidden desire.

This extraction of verbal intoxicant, presided over by the muse-like singing bird or woman, was intuitively absorbed by Tennyson, Swinburne, Poe, Whitman, and many others, establishing an emotive irrationality as a central romantic legacy. Poe's proto-modernist attempt to re-rationalize this poetics proposes a calculation of effect based on aesthetic analysis. "The Philosophy of Composition" purports to revisit the origin of "The Raven" as a deductive search for "the most sonorous vowel" and the "most producible consonant" (457). The death of a beautiful woman as subject, and the melancholy of the bereaved lover, are also pseudo-deducted, yet the romantic evocative landscape and singing bird are merely mirror-inverted, in this chamber with "silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain" (36). Yet Poe's black bird is part of the genealogy of Stevens' black-bird, as is also Whitman's mockingbird. Both, in different fashions, begin an Americanization of the romantic nightingale that Stevens will complete. Poe and Whitman signal their descent from Coleridge with the word "demon" in contexts recalling the "demon"/"woman" rhyme in "Kubla Khan." Poe's final stanza positions black male raven on white marble Pallas Athena, his eyes like "a demon's that is dreaming" (39). This altered alter ego does not sing, but only intones "Nevermore." Whitman comes closer to understanding the psychological nexus among landscape, bird, and subliminal origin-memory, calling the sea "savage old mother" and the mockingbird "Demon or bird" (251). Whitman and Poe both suggest that the bird speaks for the poet. Whitman clearly sees his mockingbird as "projecting me," conferring upon him a vocation, one of "perpetuating" the bereft male's "cries of unsatisfied love" (252).

Stevens' modernism transformed this bird-sung landscape of desire, using technical clarity and an analytic distinction between the singing in nature and that within the self. Moreover, when he positions women in landscapes—as "Donna, donna, dark"; or as "Vincentine" between earth and sky; or as Susanna, "In the green water, clear and warm" (*CP* 90)—he retains these possibly available, womanly identities. He does not project them into an emotively immemorial region, marked off psychologically by incest prohibition. He acknowledges his muse-figures as part of the self, as interior paramours. He is the poet of self-conscious intellect confronting its object accurately. His major problem is that he may find himself alone with nature—or alone with himself.

This issue is played out also in Wordsworth. Margaret, in her progressively more ruinous cottage, obsessively replaying the return of her probably dead husband, represents on one level the imagination deprived of its object. Keats's Isabella sheds erotic tears over a pot of basil holding the severed head of her lover. Keats's Madeline, in "The Eve of St. Agnes,"

goes devoutly and supperless to bed, hoping for a vision of her destined husband. Young Porphyro half wakes her with a lute song and attempts to enter her dream, but there is a painful disjunction when she sees him “pale as smooth-sculptured stone” (237). Keats’s narrative falters, just at the point where he tries to convince the reader that Madeline really *can* accept him simultaneously into her dream and into her body. In “Lamia,” the serpent-become-woman fascinates young Lycius and takes him to her bower, where a “haunting music” was “lone / Supportress of the faery roof” (354). There, Lamia withers and vanishes under the skeptical gaze of the philosopher Apollonius. The post-Wordsworth suspicion that the places habitable for emotion had to be made by the imagination, in separation from reality, derived partly from Coleridge and constituted the central thematic struggle for Keats. Tennyson continued to orchestrate enchanting other-worlds with his verse-musicality, as in “Mariana” and “The Lotus-Eaters.” “The Lady of Shalott” makes allegorically explicit what these poems suggest: that the woman in a special environment, one reflective of her rich interior, but isolating, is a trope for the poet, alone in a world of his own imaginative creation. Like the protagonist of “The Palace of Art,” the Lady leaves her tower for the real world, which in her case proves fatal.

As Alfred North Whitehead pointed out in *Science and the Modern World* (1925), the cause of this disjunction between the imagination and reality was not the influence of Coleridge, but an incommensurability at the center of Western thought. Tennyson, he argued, diagnosed the problem exactly in *In Memoriam*, with the line “ ‘The stars,’ she whispers, ‘blindly run’ ” (III). The speaker is an effigy constructed by the deterministic physics and world mechanism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This view of reality makes unreal everything of value for Whitehead: vitalism, purpose, free will, sacredness, meaning. The romantic *genius loci*, representing for Wordsworth the ultimate vitalism of nature, has become a figure voicing solipsism, despair:

“And all the phantom, Nature, stands—
With all the music in her tone,
A hollow echo of my own,—
A hollow form with empty hands.” (Tennyson 180)

Whitehead praises Wordsworth for refusing priority to this science-based abstraction. This explains the most essential resemblance between Wordsworth and Stevens. Stevens also refused to subordinate the truth of experience to the abstraction and skepticism of his age. Wordsworth appears to model for him the way that imaginative affluence can arise directly from the poverty of fact. In “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,” Stevens refers to a philosophic view analogous to the one behind Tennyson’s emptied goddess of nature—a world “of solid, static objects

extended in space," a world that is "blank," "without color," a "complete poverty" (NA 31). As an antithesis, he then quotes from Wordsworth's "Composed upon Westminster Bridge":

*This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning, silent bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air. . . .* (NA 31)

This imaginative vitality, stimulated by experience, exemplifies "a world of poetry indistinguishable from the world in which we live" (NA 31). If the event remains prior to preconception or theory, then life arises refreshed from the encounter of mind with the landscape. The "she" at Key West explores this boundary between self and other as a projection beyond ordinary rational identity. She is Stevens' version of Wordsworthian imagination in action, synthesizing the vital world of landscape with the consciousness deriving from its distant ancestor, nature. The word "bare" is a nexus between the visions of the great romantic and the great modernist poets.

Stevens' indictment of the "bawds of euphony" (CP 129) contrasts his sound technique with romantic lushness. Like imagination itself, any musical suasion of language is to arise from things encountered. The imagined need not be sonically rich, nor the real verbally poor. Just as the imagined and the real counterpoint one another thematically, so do sounds of richness and poverty mix, as in "The Emperor of Ice-Cream." Technical abundance and sparseness are directions on a scale, not opposite poles. Though the whistling blackbird is opposed to the singing nightingale, the haiku-like stanzas it organizes create their own slender music.

The significant use of *bare*, first prominent for Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads* stanzas such as the following from "Lines Written at a Small Distance from My House," represents a similar commitment to accuracy and to the essential.

*There is a blessing in the air,
Which seems a sense of joy to yield
To the bare trees, and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field.* (*Major Works* 55)

For Wordsworth, the landscape needed only some rudimentary marker of human action or presence, as center or opening for imagination's slightly altering enhancement, "Working but in alliance with the works / Which it beholds" (*Prelude* 80). The poet, when a boy, separated from his "guide," entered a place where in the past a murderer had been hanged.

Only a long green ridge of turf remained
Whose shape was like a grave. I left the spot,
And reascending the bare slope I saw
A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
The beacon on the summit, and more near
A girl who bore a pitcher on her head
And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
Against the blowing wind. (*Prelude* 9)

Perhaps "in truth" an "ordinary sight," the landscape with grave-like ridge, pool, and girl has both extent and center. It releases a "visionary dreariness," wherein the "bare" and "naked" sights produce an intense recognition of otherness as familiar. This landscape includes death and human striving. The goal, and the burden borne toward it, remain obscure; the meaningfulness of looking at the human journey through time, in a borderland where reality and the imagination merge, remains. If this woman on the existential slope is a mother almost fused into nature, she is also a version of the self, born to climb into the wind and to remember. The poet walks again as a child with her, close to home. This nature may be harsh, but its goddess-figure is not hollow.

Stevens' relation to Wordsworth has been obscured by the relation of the later romantics to Wordsworth and by the relation of the later Wordsworth to the proto-modernist author of the 1799 *Two-Part Prelude*. But in his greatest encounters with things as they are, as here, Wordsworth, like Stevens, bumps directly into fact. Wordsworth's imagination gave him new aesthetic modes, which his critical mind did not always fully appreciate or explain to itself. Otherwise, he would not have self-edited so badly: would not have embedded "The Ruined Cottage" in the book-length *Excursion*; would not have removed the phrase "spots of time" and the associated "visionary dreariness" from the majority of those dense, self-bounded landscapes of strange being with which they were continuous in the 1799 *Prelude*.

It is permissible now, I believe, to read Wordsworth through Stevens and to appreciate Stevens' prescient appreciation of the great romantic, even as Stevens' thought-language is recreating the earlier language, along with his present experience, into another great poetry. Stevens located poetic mind in workaday twentieth-century America, but adopted Wordsworth's bare objects and inexplicable linguistic uprisings. Stevens knew poetry as "reason's click-clack" (CP 387), but also as music. In "The Creations of Sound," X should have known this also, "that it came to him of its own, / Without understanding, out of the wall / Or in the ceiling, in sounds not chosen" (CP 310). These words are the speech of a "being of sound, whom one does not approach / Through any exaggeration" (CP 311). They arise from the ordinary floor, in syllables that are "the sponta-

neous particulars of sound" (CP 311), the mind's music, the extraordinary shapings of its muse, whom Stevens knew how not to understand.

His muses, as he acknowledges, were drawn from his experience. They appear to have been his mother, remembered; Elsie, his wife, when young; women encountered on jaunts with his male friends to the fishing camp at Key West. These all faded gradually, as he was aware, into figures within the mind. "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" narrates the sad cooling of sexual and psychic passion for Elsie. Section III of "The Auroras of Autumn" records the attenuation of his mother into a sign, a fetish: "The necklace is a carving not a kiss" (CP 413). "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" acknowledges what no romantic poem does—the ultimate interiority of the inspirational female alter ego. There, the psychic couple perform a ritual worship of God-through-imagination, or God-as-imagination, before a single candle flame, which connects with the highest star.

"Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art" (Keats 247): Stevens unifies the Keatsian duality of identity in his own sublimated erotic contemplation. These two sides of being—the female that the romantics configured as landscape, as in Keats's breast-like "snow upon the mountains and the moors" (247); and the masculine flame of cognition, Keats's star—are co-present as figures in Stevens' upper room, "a single thing, a single shawl / Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor" (CP 524). But this poverty, this bareness of contemplation, becomes "A light, a power, the miraculous influence" (CP 524). We may hear this last word as *affluence*, that richness of the imagination with which Stevens, from start to finish, enhanced the merely real. Stevens unified and extended imaginative identity, making it plural, like "North and South" and "sun and rain"; like "two lovers / That walk away as one in the greenest body" (CP 392). He had as his greatest love the world, the substantial *real*, the "Fat girl, terrestrial" (CP 406).

Stevens' terms of negation, which distinguish him from the romantic, serve also to establish a connection. In "Evening Without Angels," the absent traditional winged beings leave residual transparencies in the air, which "glitters round us everywhere" (CP 137). The sounds of it "are not angelic syllables," but the medium out of which we humans create our own voices. He gives us a landscape of houses arced over by sky and simplifies daylight into nightfall:

Bare night is best. Bare earth is best. Bare, bare,
Except for own houses, huddled low
Beneath the arches and their spangled air,
Beneath the rhapsodies of fire and fire,
Where the voice that is in us makes a true response,
Where the voice that is great within us rises up,
As we stand gazing at the rounded moon. (CP 137–38)

This time, the voice, in its “true response,” is described directly, rather than projected into bird or singing woman. Yet the lyric is centered as the speech of the place. The voice holds the greatness, but only in response to this glory of the actual, this “spangled air,” this “fire and fire.”

I intend no diminishment of Stevens in asserting the analogy with Wordsworth’s lyric paradigm. On the contrary, the inclusiveness of Stevens’ assimilation of romantic precedent, and the completeness of its transformation, is one of the foundations of his greatness. The central English-speaking poets of modernism, especially Yeats, Stevens, Eliot, and Pound, engaged explicitly or implicitly in an agon with romanticism. Yeats, closest to the legacy, worked *through* his Irish-inflected version, into a relatively late modernist flowering. Eliot, self-dividedly, both disavowed and echoed the romantics, especially Shelley, until his landscape-meditative assimilation and transformation in the *Four Quartets*. Pound’s relative conceptual incoherence is in part a function of his denial of romantic influence and of his displacement of emotive yearnings toward muse-figures and numinous landscapes into Provençal, Latin, Greek, Italian, and Chinese textual sites, which tend to lack intelligible interconnection. Remarkably, from the earliest poems of *Harmonium*, Stevens was able to acknowledge his immersion in Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley through the precise demarcations of his language of assimilation. He was able to use and to reinscribe the romantic site-lyric, their human muse-figure, the romantic singing bird—even romantic blank verse, as in “Sunday Morning,” “Le Monocle de Mon Oncle,” “The Comedian as the Letter C,” “To the One of Fictive Music,” “The Idea of Order at Key West,” “Evening without Angels,” and “To an Old Philosopher in Rome,” among other poems. Stevens was able to take Wordsworth’s visionary dreariness and to reinscribe this “mere poverty” of the real as imaginative affluence, appropriating and making his own even Wordsworth’s use of the word *bare*. Only a most powerfully gifted poet could have extracted “The voice that is great within us” from an ordinary evening in America, under a moon, distant from but the same as the one that lighted the way for Wordsworth and Coleridge on a Somerset moor.

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Stevens' Revisions of the Romantic Sublime in "Esthétique du Mal"

BURTON HATLEN

IN THE FIRST WAVE of Stevens criticism, from the 1950s through the 1970s, most critics saw his work as resistant to any transcendental temptation. Here, it seemed, was a poet who, recognizing that the "great poems of heaven and hell" had already been written, set out to create the "great poem of the earth" (NA 142). In *Poets of Reality* (1965), J. Hillis Miller offers a classic statement of this position: the "vanishing of the gods, leaving a barren man in a barren land, is the basis of all Stevens' thought and poetry" (219).¹ In the past three decades, however, this "secular" reading of Stevens has been challenged by a series of critics who have seen Stevens' poetry as engaging issues that are, at least in a loose sense, "religious." In *Imagination and Faith* (1973), for example, Adalaide Kirby Morris sees Stevens as returning "again and again" to the idea that "poetry is mystical: that it has a spiritual meaning neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to reason alone and that it relates to or results from an individual's direct communication with what might hesitantly be called ultimate reality" (84).² I should say immediately that my Stevens is still, at bottom, a great poet of the earth, *not* a poet of heaven and hell. Yet I am persuaded that Stevens, at some moments at least, wants to affirm a sense of the numinous in human experience,³ and that we need a vocabulary for talking about how these "religious" aspirations shape his poetry.⁴

In common with some other recent critics, I propose to invoke the category of the sublime as a way of describing Stevens' engagement with "ultimate reality." Like other recent explorers of this territory, I take as my starting point Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime*. "The essential claim of the sublime," says Weiskel in the opening sentence of his book, "is that man can, in feeling and in speech, transcend the human" (3) by entering into relationship with what Kant called the "boundless." Insofar as the sublime begins in a sense of awe, wonder, and terror before something infinitely larger than the self, it clearly constitutes a continuation of religion by other means, but I would argue that the attractions of an aesthetics of the sublime derive specifically from its separation of religious *experience* from religious *belief*. By the end of the eighteenth century, an expanding knowledge of the world and of non-European ways of life and thought

had fostered a growing skepticism about Christianity in its dogmatic and institutional forms. But artists in particular were haunted by a sense of the numinous, and an aesthetic of the sublime allowed them to re-ground this experience in non-credal terms. While rejecting all religious belief-systems, Stevens too sought to engage modes of experience that we can justly describe as “religious,” and in thus separating religious experience from religious belief he locates himself within the territory of the sublime.

I am not the first critic to link Stevens to the tradition of the sublime. Indeed, two of our most influential commentators on the poetry of Stevens, Helen Vendler and Harold Bloom, have emphasized the centrality of the sublime to the poetics of Stevens. For Bloom, the poetry of Stevens represents “the culmination of the American Sublime, or even of the Sublime in modern poetry” (283), while Vendler declares, “The preeminent question life asked of Stevens was whether the sublime was livable” (“False and True Sublime” 683). Bloom, however, has tended to treat the sublime itself as a static, ahistorical category, so that Bloom’s Stevens becomes, without much qualification, simply a belated romantic poet. Vendler’s description of the Stevensian sublime is much more nuanced, as she distinguishes between a “false sublime” of a more-or-less undiluted romanticism and a “true sublime” that turns away from the search for a transcendent perfection, instead accepting “the imperfect and the tragic” (693) as fundamental qualities of the human condition. I am in fundamental sympathy with Vendler’s approach to this theme, but I want to make a somewhat larger claim than she does for the Stevensian sublime by placing it within what I see as a broad historical shift from the romantic or transcendental sublime to what I call the modernist or immanent sublime. Stevens clearly felt a powerful impulse toward the transcendental sublime throughout his career⁵; but he also, I propose, recognized that the romantic sublime was no longer viable in the twentieth century, and those moments in his poetry that invoke the transcendental sublime are almost always inflected toward irony. Yet Stevens does not remain suspended in a state of ironic skepticism; rather, like other poets of his generation, he sought a new artistic vocabulary that would allow us to see the world afresh, to, in Stevens’ own words from “Large Red Man Reading,” “step barefoot into reality,” a reality that is filled, moreover, with numinous presences—“the pans above the stove, the pots on the table, the tulips among them” (*CP* 423).⁶

In this paper, I want to argue for the centrality of the immanent sublime in Stevens’ poetry through a (perforce much condensed) reading of “*Esthétique du Mal*,” a poem that inevitably occupies a central position in any discussion of the Stevensian sublime, simply because it invokes the sublime in its opening lines.⁷ The sublime of these opening lines is still, I would argue, a romantic or transcendental sublime, but as it proceeds, “*Esthétique du Mal*” works its way from a transcendental sublime that has degenerated into a pallid aestheticism to a robust affirmation of the immanent sublime, although not, obviously, under that name.⁸ A recogni-

tion of the ways “*Esthétique du Mal*” dramatizes a debate between the two sublimes will, I hope, not only support my broader argument concerning the immanent sublime in Stevens’ poetry, but will also allow us to recognize a unity in this specific poem that critics have often missed. Vendler, for example, sharply criticizes “*Esthétique du Mal*”: “its fifteen cantos are,” she says, “violently unconnected in tone,” so that “*Esthétique du Mal* is at once the most random and the most pretentious of Stevens’ long poems” (*Extended Wings* 206). Joseph Carroll echoes Vendler’s judgment: “‘*Esthétique*’ has a skeletal structure, but this structure does not constitute a truly dialectical progression toward a comprehensive synthesis or climactic moment of resolution. . . . ‘*Esthétique*’ is a mélange of meditations on pain, evil, religion, war, ideology, metaphysics, and poetry; and these meditations, though often prosy, are also vague and inconclusive” (187).⁹ “*Esthétique du Mal*” does not, in fact, lay out a clear, consistent argument, but it does, as I will here try to show, carry us through a process that culminates in a new vision of human possibility; and in this respect it represents a central text in Stevens’ unfolding “great poem of the earth.”¹⁰

“*Esthétique du Mal*” begins by introducing us to an unnamed “he” who is in “Naples writing letters home / And, between his letters, reading paragraphs / On the sublime” (*CP* 313). Meanwhile, outside his room, “Vesuvius had groaned / For a month,” evoking a sense of “terror” and of “pain / Audible at noon, pain torturing itself, / Pain killing pain on the very point of pain” (*CP* 313–14). Edmund Burke links the sublime to terror, and he also argues that what most terrifies us is the fear of bodily pain: “the idea of bodily pain, in all the modes and degrees of labour, pain, anguish, torment, is productive of the sublime; and nothing else in this sense can produce it” (86). In linking terror and pain, Stevens has thus located his poem in the territory of the sublime, but already Stevens ironically distances himself from the eighteenth century conception of the sublime. Within the “paragraphs” that our aesthete is reading, the sublime is tamed, distanced, so that he finds “pleasant” the experience of contemplating the mountain’s apparent pain. However, the volcano is an appropriate embodiment of an absolute otherness, for it, quite literally, breaks through into “our” world from an unimaginably alien space—the molten interior of the earth. In the opening stanza, we learn that “paragraphs / On the sublime” cannot in the end diminish the intransigent otherness of the volcano, which is separated from us by a boundary as mysterious and unbridgeable as the line between life and death: “The volcano trembled in another ether, / As the body trembles at the end of life” (*CP* 314).

The second canto of “*Esthétique du Mal*” eases back from the irony of the first canto to become a classic statement of the romantic sublime. As our aesthete contemplates the scene outside his window, “The moon rose up as if it had escaped / His meditation. It evaded his mind. / It was part of a supremacy always / Above him. The moon was always free from him, / As night was free from him” (*CP* 314–15). The romantic sublime

demands that we must wholly accept the otherness of the abyss if we are to take imaginative possession of it. At this point in the poem, the aesthetician has in fact given himself over to the night and the moon.¹¹ Further, by acknowledging that the moon will never allow itself to become merely a metaphor, a figure in an aesthetic mediation, our protagonist can become a poet. As the colon after "space" suggests, the third stanza of canto II is an "elegy" that takes shape in the experience of the aesthetician and that he then performs for us:

It is pain that is indifferent to the sky
In spite of the yellow of the acacias, the scent
Of them in the air still hanging heavily
In the hoary-hanging night. It does not regard
This freedom, this supremacy, and in
Its own hallucination never sees
How that which rejects it saves it in the end. (*CP* 315)

Pain, it seems, turns us away from everything external to the self, whether the sublime infinitude of the sky or the odor of acacias. Thus where for Burke pain is "productive of the sublime," Stevens' aesthetician instead proposes that pain blocks us from entering a space where we can affirm the "freedom" and "supremacy" of the "hoary-hanging night." Yet at the same time, "pain is human," as the poem has already acknowledged, an inescapable part of human experience. The poem continues to hope that an experience of the otherness of the world will "save us in the end" (to modify Stevens' phrase slightly). But if pain has become an obstacle rather than a means to the experience of the sublime, then it would seem that the sublime itself, at least in the traditional Burkean/Kantian sense, has become impossible. Indeed it seems to me no accident that the word "sublime," after making two notable appearances in canto I, thereafter disappears from this poem.¹²

If the romantic sublime thus founders in contradiction, if we must now see pain, not as a path to the absolute, but simply as "human," can we nevertheless find a way of affirming the wonder and mystery of What Is? This is the question that Stevens will explore throughout the remainder of "Esthétique du Mal." Canto III proposes that the essential problem is our longing for "an over-human god, / Who by sympathy has made himself a man" (*CP* 315). The "over-human god" is of course Jesus Christ, who took our sin (evil) *and* our pain upon himself. We can allow ourselves to believe that this God pities our own sufferings, and He invites us to believe that through these sufferings we participate in His divinity. But in eroding our sense of the world as other, Christian faith ends by projecting our self-pity onto the universe as a whole. If we could only cast off this "too human god," Stevens proposes in the final lines of canto III, perhaps "the health of the world might be enough":

It seems as if the honey of common summer
Might be enough, as if the golden combs
Were part of a sustenance itself enough,

As if hell, so modified, had disappeared,
As if pain, no longer satanic mimicry,
Could be borne, as if we were sure to find our way.

(CP 315–16)

In rejecting the Christian demand for transcendence, Stevens also implicitly rejects the romantic sublime, which no less than Christian faith sought to leave the things of this world behind, to recover an infinity lying behind and above what is present to our senses. What is the alternative to the Christian and/or romantic demand for a mode of understanding that will allow us to make ourselves at home in the infinite? First, a realization that we no longer need a hell as the necessary counterbalance to an unattainable heaven; and second, a willingness to accept that “pain is human,” that it represents neither satanic alienation nor a potential path to the sublime. But at the same time, the finale of canto III holds out the possibility of a rhetoric and even perhaps a “religion” of immanence. The possibilities opened out here seem religious insofar as we are promised health, sustenance in the form of a sacramental honey, fortitude in the face of pain, and even a “way”—“I am the way,” said Jesus. The poet has not, then, surrendered the hope of achieving a vision of the sacred and a sense of an ultimate meaning in human experience, and in this respect Stevens’ poetic project remains rooted both in the Christian heritage and in the secularization of that heritage represented by a poetics of the sublime, even as he rejects the “too human god” (CP 315).

The remaining twelve cantos of “*Esthétique du Mal*” examine, from many different perspectives, what a rhetoric and a “religion” of immanence might look and feel like. Limitations of space prevent me from following through each stage of the zigzag path that Stevens traces, as he moves away from the failed romantic sublime of cantos I and II, in quest of a way of experiencing ourselves as, in the words of the triumphant last canto, “a race / Completely physical in a physical world” (CP 325). Instead, I will focus on two key moments in this process. Canto V offers what seems to me Stevens’ most explicit statement of the mode of vision that I have labeled the immanent sublime. The voice that here addresses us invites “all true sympathizers” to join the speaker within “the actual, the warm, the near,” where “So great a unity, that it is bliss, / Ties us to those we love” (CP 317). The canto closes with a grandly eloquent statement of the superiority of the immanent sublime over the transcendent sublime:

Be near me, come closer, touch my hand, phrases
Compounded of dear relation, spoken twice,

Once by the lips, once by the services
Of central sense, these minutiae mean more
Than clouds, benevolences, distant heads.
These are within what we permit, in-bar
Exquisite in poverty against the suns
Of ex-bar, in-bar retaining attributes
With which we vested, once, the golden forms
And the damasked memory of the golden forms
And ex-bar's flower and fire of the festivals
Of the damasked memory of the golden forms,
Before we were wholly human and knew ourselves.

(CP 317)

The "clouds, benevolences, distant heads" and the "suns / Of ex-bar" are clearly reminiscent of the rhetoric of the romantic sublime. The "golden forms" point to the golden calf of Genesis, a false object of worship promising an illusory transcendence. But the various rhetorical layers in which the "golden forms" are wrapped (the "damasked memory" of the forms and then the "festivals" that evoke these damasked memories, etc.) also suggest the deliberate rhetorical self-elevation of the romantic sublime. Against the putative grandeurs of this "ex-bar" world, Stevens counterpoises the "minutiae" and the deliberately chosen "poverty" of the "in-bar" world of "dear relations." But note that the in-bar world "retain[s] attributes / With which we vested, once, the golden forms" of the ex-bar world. Thus my insistence on the concept of the "immanent sublime." It seems that in the old order (that is to say, the order of the romantic sublime), we projected a sense of the sacred onto the "golden forms" and then worshipped these forms from afar. But now we have entered a new dispensation, in which the warm bonds of human relationship and the sheer sensory splendor of the world infuse immediate experience with a "religious" and even "sublime" sense of awe and wonder.

I turn finally to the end of "Esthétique du Mal," where Stevens arrives at the affirmation of the possibility toward which the entire poem has been moving:

The greatest poverty is not to live
In a physical world, to feel that one's desire
Is too difficult to tell from despair. (CP 325)

These lines direct us back toward the figure of Konstantinov, introduced in the previous canto, who lived by "one idea / In a world of ideas, who would have all the people / Live, work, suffer and die in that idea" (CP 325). These lines also refer back once again to the aesthete of the opening cantos who, unlike Konstantinov, was not indifferent to the sensory world and instead actively sought a way of entering into relationship with

the “sultriest fulgurations” of the volcano, the “roses in the cool café,” and, in the second canto, the “yellow of the acacias” (*CP* 313–15) and the rising moon. But the tradition of the romantic sublime invited our aesthete to look for the meanings of his sensory experiences in a “beyond,” an infinity shadowed forth by the things of this world. This impulse, we have learned in the first two cantos, issues in pain and despair, and Stevens now returns to this theme in his finale, emphasizing that those who attempt to live in the world of the spirit find that their “desire”—the desire, by my reading, for the experience of the infinite promised by the romantic sublime—is “too difficult to tell from despair” (*CP* 325), because we can never arrive at the object of our longing. Those who seek meaning in the world of the “spirit,” the poet now proposes, can never experience the overwhelming immediacy of what the senses offer us, each moment of our lives:

Perhaps,
 After death, the non-physical people, in paradise,
 Itself non-physical, may, by chance, observe
 The green corn gleaming and experience
 The minor of what we feel. (*CP* 325)

To accept the dazzling gift of the vision of “The green corn gleaming,” we must also be willing to accept ourselves as physical beings. A “paradise” in which the human spirit escapes from the ills of the flesh is, for Stevens, at best only an attenuated shadow of the world that offers itself to our senses at every moment, here and now.¹³

As an alternative to the futile search for a “beyond” into which the spirit can escape from the ills of this world, Stevens summons his readers to a new kind of quest:

The adventurer
 In humanity has not conceived of a race
 Completely physical in a physical world.
 The green corn gleams and the metaphysicals
 Lie sprawling in majors of the August heat,
 The rotund emotions, paradise unknown. (*CP* 325)

What I am calling the immanent sublime demands, first, an acceptance of this world, the world of everyday experience, as enough. Such an acceptance is, I take it, the import of Stevens’ vision of a “race / Completely physical in a physical world.” But the immanent sublime also requires that we see this physical world as not in any sense impoverished in comparison with the transcendental worlds envisioned by Christian faith or by the aesthetics of the romantic sublime. We must, that is, experience the “green corn gleaming” as radiant, numinous. A more imagistic poet such

as William Carlos Williams or Ezra Pound or even Marianne Moore would attempt to communicate such a sense of immediate experience by a deictic pointing to the thing itself: Williams's red wheel barrow in *Spring and All*, or Pound's wasp emerging from its pupa in *The Pisan Cantos*, or Moore's carriage from Sweden. But Stevens works in a more allusive or symbolic mode, here taking a set of mental constructs, the "metaphysicals," and turning them, with a single metaphoric twist, into contented animals—or, perhaps, happy peasants lying in the sun, for the lines evoke an image of Pieter Brueghel's *The Harvesters*, housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and thus potentially part of Stevens' experience. The "metaphysicals," it is clear, are no longer claiming mastery over the green corn or anything else that exists in the physical world. Instead they are happy to be part of that world, as they become not systems of ideas but "rotund emotions." As the "metaphysicals" surrender their claims, we see the prospect of a different kind of paradise from the one inhabited by the bodiless spirits, a "paradise unknown." With this vision, the musical key shifts from the minor tonalities that accompanied the experience of the bodiless souls in heaven to a triumphant major key, heralding "the thesis scrivined in delight, / The reverberating psalm, the right chorale" (CP 326). Words like "psalm" and "chorale," along with the claim to offer a vision of paradise, suggest that Stevens sees himself here as proclaiming a new religion. The members of a "race / Completely physical" will not, it seems, experience the physical world that they will inhabit as desolate of meaning. Rather they will experience this world as radiant, even holy.

The "right chorale," Stevens immediately emphasizes, affirms the reality of a world that is not simply a function of our own perceiving consciousness, but rather *real*, and as proof of its reality he appeals to the very "mal" that he has been interrogating throughout this poem:

One might have thought of sight, but who could think
 Of what it sees, for all the ill it sees?
 Speech found the ear, for all the evil sound,
 But the dark italics it could not propound.
 And out of what one sees and hears and out
 Of what one feels, who could have thought to make
 So many selves, so many sensuous worlds,
 As if the air, the mid-day air, was swarming
 With the metaphysical changes that occur,
 Merely in living as and where we live. (CP 326)

If this world were simply a product of my will and my ideas, surely I would not have created a world infected by the ills that I see about me every day. The more purely human world of speech might be easier to accept as "ours," but even here an evil is at work that seems beyond our power to create or control. (Stevens is, we might remember, writing dur-

ing World War II, when the “dark italics” that reverberated around Hitler’s voice were still in all of our ears.) The ills of the world in which we find ourselves prove that this world is not “ours,” not simply a function of our minds, but the sheer multiplicity and plenitude of that world also serves to demonstrate that we did not invent it—that, rather, it comes to us as a gift, simply by virtue of our presence here, now. The time is noon, the moment of vision. The defining characteristic of the world we live in is change, not the permanence that the metaphysical tradition had sought. The metaphysical itself changes, depending on when and where we live. This change itself reveals the world as an ongoing miracle, but we can experience this miracle only insofar as we accept our own contingency as creatures of this time, this place.

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Notes

¹ Other key figures in the first generation of Stevens scholars, including Frank Doggett, James Baird, Joseph Riddel, and A. Walton Litz, also offer an essentially secular Stevens, resolved to find a way forward after the death of God.

² For other “religious” readings of Stevens, see Joseph Carroll, Barbara M. Fisher, Janet McCann, and Charles M. Murphy.

³ The word “numinous” was introduced into theological discourse by Rudolf Otto to denote an experience of the sacred, independent of any belief system.

⁴ Barbara Fisher, refusing to speculate about Stevens’ possible religious beliefs, instead focuses on patterns of erotic desire in his work, and in this respect I feel more sympathy for her reading of Stevens than for some of the other “religious” readings summed up above.

⁵ In this respect he is indeed, as Henry Weinfield declares, the “legitimate heir to Milton and Wordsworth” (27).

⁶ Other important recent commentators on the Stevensian sublime include Joseph Carroll, who asserts, “The normative mode of Stevens’ visionary poetry is that of the Romantic sublime” (5). However, Carroll does not fully theorize the role that the sublime plays either in the works of the romantic poets or in Stevens’ poetry. More elaborately, Michael Beehler has argued that what Stevens calls the “irrational,” in his 1937 essay on “The Irrational in Poetry,” is analogous to the romantic sublime, insofar as the “irrational,” like the “sublime,” lies ambiguously within and beyond the horizon of representation. Beehler finds in “Stevens’ poetry a dynamics of the sublime that underlies that poetry’s continual circulation of ideas of language and poetry, and of metaphors of metaphor” (131). Paul Endo’s recent essay offers a wide-ranging discussion of the role of the sublime in Stevens’ poetry, but his “two sublimes” are very different from the two sublimes that I (and, with some terminological differences, Vendler) see at work there.

⁷ In particular, Rajeev S. Patke (164–90), Eleanor Cook (189–213), Henry Weinfield, Thomas Tryzna, James Longenbach (239–46), and Angus Cleghorn (136–50) have usefully, at times brilliantly, explored the modalities of the sublime in “*Esthétique du Mal*.” Moreover, several of these critics have anticipated my argument that in the poem Stevens moves toward a new mode of the sublime. Patke argues that in “*Esthétique du Mal*” “conditions of mutability and mortality become sublimities in themselves” (190). Cook sees “*Esthétique du Mal*” as an exploration of what she calls the

"Normal Sublime" (189). Longenbach finds in the poem the "paradox of a humanistic sublime" (243). Most recently, Cleghorn proposes that in the poem "sublimity" becomes "a condition of living on earth—being a part in awe of the whole" (150). I share with all of these critics a belief that "Esthétique du Mal" attempts to un/recover a sense of the sublime in everyday life. But none of these critics fully theorizes the sublime, and none explicitly addresses the ways in which the immanent sublime of modernism differs from and challenges the transcendental sublime. Patke offers perhaps the most elaborate schema proposed to date concerning the modalities of the sublime in "Esthétique du Mal," but his typology (laid out on page 171) includes so many sub-categories that the very concept of the sublime threatens to become meaningless.

⁸ Cook anticipates my argument, arguing, "battles with the transcendental sublime, old style, run all through the poem," as "Stevens marks out his own middle space . . . , excluding both the up and down of the old sublime" (210).

⁹ I would like to think that perhaps Carroll's antipathy to this poem is caused by his insistence on seeking transcendental resolution to the poetic dilemmas that Stevens' poetry adumbrates. Unable to find such a resolution in this poem of the immanent sublime, Carroll therefore rejects the poem.

¹⁰ In contrast to the negative judgments of Vendler and Carroll, see Patke, who says that "Esthétique du Mal" is, "in spite of its unevenness," Stevens' "great poem of the earth" (178). See also Wells, who describes "Esthétique du Mal" as "one of the major poems in American literature, along with masterpieces such as 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed,' 'The Waste Land,' 'Paterson,' and 'The Bridge'" (35).

¹¹ Carroll sees Stevens as turning at this point to "the consolatory aspect of the Romantic sublime. The emblem he chooses to represent this sublime is the moon." Specifically, "the remoteness of the moon serves as a means of salvation" (188).

¹² Up to this point in the poem we have remained within the territory of the romantic—or, may I propose, the "Bloomian" sublime. In the following sections of "Esthétique du Mal," we will move from the territory of the romantic sublime into the territory of what I am calling the immanent sublime. However, as I have already noted, for Stevens, as for Bloom, the word "sublime" denotes what I am calling the romantic sublime. Stevens has no single term for the immanent sublime. He works his way toward such a concept through a critique of the romantic sublime, but he never proposes a fixed label for this alternative possibility. As a consequence, some readers have taken the poem as essentially a repudiation of the sublime. For example, Longenbach, despite his suggestion that "Esthétique du Mal" may propose the "paradox of a humanistic sublime" (243), ultimately sees the overall movement of the poem as "forsaking the sublime for the minutiae, the humdrum, the merely human" (246).

¹³ Compare George Castellitto: "paradise for Stevens is not one inhabited by spirits, but rather it involves the physical world in which the imagination perceives the object (the green corn) in its imagistic essence, devoid of any meaning except for its own inherent substance and identity" (305).

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Vaihinger and Stevens: A Rumor That Won't Go Away

LEON SURETTE

EVER SINCE FRANK DOGGETT invoked Hans Vaihinger's *Philosophy of "As If"* in his 1966 study *Stevens' Poetry of Thought*, the possibility of Vaihinger's influence has persisted as a minor thread in Wallace Stevens criticism. Milton Bates's authoritative assertion in *Wallace Stevens: A Mythology of Self* (1985) that there is no evidence whatever that Stevens read Vaihinger was perhaps too late to discourage Jacqueline Brogan from devoting a chapter of *Stevens and Simile: A Theory of Language* (1986) to a discussion of affinities between Stevens and Vaihinger.

Although I have found nothing to qualify Bates's assertion, Vaihinger's articulation of the nature and cognitive utility of avowed fictions nonetheless provides a useful context for Stevens' theory of poetic fiction, a theory about which there is still much disagreement. What makes Vaihinger worth revisiting is that his position does have a "family resemblance" to Stevens' and it is far more clearly articulated. In addition, Vaihinger serves to place Stevens' amateur speculations in the context of contemporary post-Darwinian philosophical speculation about the nature of knowledge and belief. It is not so often observed in literary discourse that Darwinian evolutionary theory had as devastating an impact on philosophical idealism as it did on Christian belief. Vaihinger, like the American pragmatists, is explicitly responding to that challenge. So, too, is Stevens, though less explicitly.¹

C. K. Ogden selected *The Philosophy of "As If"* for inclusion in the series on psychology, philosophy, and scientific method that he was putting together for Routledge, and he translated it himself. His inclusion of Vaihinger indicates that he thought *The Philosophy of "As If"* appropriate for the age of skepticism in which he, like Stevens, found himself. It is clear that some of Vaihinger's perceptions found their way into *The Meaning of Meaning*, a canonical work of New Criticism that Ogden and I. A. Richards published together in the same series three years later.²

Doggett's discussion of Stevens and Vaihinger in *Stevens' Poetry of Thought* gives the impression that Vaihinger occupied a Nietzschean skeptical posture, and Doggett misleadingly cites the Nietzschean passages found in Vaihinger without carefully indicating that it is Nietzsche's views,

not Vaihinger's, that are being expressed. Doggett does not explain to his readers that Vaihinger explicitly rejects Nietzsche's skepticism (or "perspectivism," if we accept Alexander Nehemas' take on Nietzsche). For his part, Vaihinger insists that his theory of fictions is Kantian.³

One particular Nietzschean passage that Doggett cites as evidence of a community of interest between Vaihinger and Stevens is noteworthy because Stevens comments on that very passage in an unpublished letter to Henry Church. Doggett cites the following query of Vaihinger's: "'and why should the world in which we live not be a fiction?'" (105 n). Doggett fails to identify it as from Nietzsche, thus permitting his readers to suppose that it represents Vaihinger's position, which it does not. Henry Church quoted the same passage more fully (and untranslated) in a letter to Stevens of April 16, 1943. The remark is from Aphorism 34 in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

Why could the world *which is of any concern to us*—not be a fiction? And he who then objects: "but to the fiction there belongs an author?"—could he not be met with the round retort: *why?* Does this "belongs" perhaps not also belong to the fiction. (66)⁴

At first, this remark seems compatible with Stevens' position on fictions, but on closer examination it becomes clear that it is the inverse. Stevens sees a fiction as something we can *invest* with belief. Nietzsche, in contrast, suggests that our beliefs are *always* fictions. Stevens' comment seizes on this incompatibility:

The Fiktion of Aphorism 34 is the commonplace idea that the world exists only in the mind. So considered it is an unreal thing, in which logic does not have a place. Since an Urheber ["author"] is a projection of logic, it is easy to dispose of him by disposing of logic (and by the way, how beautifully this is proved by all that one sees of surrealism, in which everything is illogical and nothing is original, because there is no Urheber).⁵

Stevens perhaps misses some of the subtlety of Nietzsche's position, regarding it as nothing more than common or garden-variety solipsism, but there can be no doubt that he finds it antipathetic.⁶ The important point is that Stevens rejects Nietzsche's view that we are self-deceived by our fictions, which is just what one would expect from Stevens. In short, he rejects the whole reflexive school of philosophy that runs from Nietzsche through Marx to Derrida and company, which holds that we *invent* that which we erroneously believe to be the case.

Vaihinger's view is distinct from that of both Nietzsche and Stevens. He believes that fictions are necessary cognitive tools, but they are *only*

tools. Unlike Stevens, he sees no necessity to *believe* fictions; they need only be *entertained* as heuristic devices. He is careful to distinguish fictions from scientific hypotheses:

the real difference between the two is that the fiction is a mere auxiliary construct, a circuitous approach, a scaffolding afterwards to be demolished, while the hypothesis looks forward to being definitely established. The former is artificial, the latter natural. . . . The hypothesis tries to discover, the fiction, to invent. . . . Thus natural laws are *discovered* but machines *invented*. (88)

A Stevensian fiction is much more like Vaihinger's hypothesis than it is like Vaihinger's fiction. Certainly, it is something to be entertained, and it is not known to be true, like Vaihinger's fiction, but the Stevensian fiction is like a hypothesis in that it is not known to be false either. Stevens has articulated this view in a myriad of ways, but perhaps most cogently in one of his "Adagia":

The relation of art to life is of the first importance especially in a skeptical age since, in the absence of a belief in God, the mind turns to its own creations and examines them, not alone from the aesthetic point of view, but for what they reveal, for what they validate and invalidate, for the support that they give. (*OP* 186)

It is hardly necessary to demonstrate that Stevens attributes the need for fictions to the "absence of a belief in God," but it is perhaps just as well to have clear testimony to that view in front of us. Stevens' appreciation of fictions "for what they reveal" is still within Vaihinger's heuristic model, but for the latter it is only hypotheses that can "validate and invalidate." The idea that either fictions or hypotheses give us emotional support is quite alien to Vaihinger.

It may seem nit-picking to insist on the distinction between a merely heuristic device such as a fiction and an investigative device such as a hypothesis, but I believe that the essence of Stevens' posture lies in that narrow gap. A hypothesis can be verified or rejected by empirical tests. Stevens' fictions are not of that nature; yet he claims that the "mind turns to them . . . for what they validate and invalidate" and "for the support that they give." Since he invokes the "absence of a belief in God" as the cause of the turn to fictions, to the mind's "own creations," it is obvious that his fictions are meant to fill at least one of the functions of religion: to provide hope, solace, and beauty.

Although no longer a topic of much interest to mainstream literary criticism, the "absence of a belief in God" was a major issue for most of Stevens' contemporaries, at least for any in the least bit reflective. Some, such as Eliot, returned to orthodox Christianity; others, such as Yeats, Robert

Graves, and Ezra Pound, turned to more esoteric forms of belief.⁷ Stevens alone among the major figures sought to articulate an alternative faith, one that made shift to do without transcendence, and without divinity, but without surrendering the emotional intensity of religious belief. In choosing that route, Stevens chose the more difficult course.

Notice, too, that Stevens never speaks of the *death* of god as Nietzsche does, or even of His absence as others have done, but rather of the “absence of a belief in God.” The issue for him, then, is not that there is no God, but rather that we have ceased to *believe* in a God. That is to say that as a culture we have lost *faith*. Faith, quite simply, is unwarranted belief. Most of what came under the umbrella of faith for the two thousand years of Christianity is now considered by educated persons to be mere superstition.

Unlike Stevens, Vaihinger is not concerned with the loss of faith, but he does provide a convenient account of the decline of religious belief as it played itself out in earlier cultures. He identifies three stages in “the decline and break-up of a religion”: “dogma,” “hypothesis,” and “fiction.” He explains:

At first all religion consists of general dogmas (*the dogma has itself perhaps developed from an hypothesis or even from a fiction*). Then doubt appears and the idea becomes an hypothesis. As doubt grows stronger, there are some who reject the idea entirely, while others maintain it either as a public or a private fiction. This last condition is typical of every religion so far known when it has reached a certain age. It can be seen to great advantage in Greek religion, where the Greek folk-deities were at first general dogmas, though for Aristotle and many other philosophers they were only hypotheses. Subsequently they became fictions for the educated classes, who adhered tenaciously to the worship of God, or rather of the gods, although convinced that the ideas represented nothing real. (129; my emphasis)

The last stage of decline in religious faith, when fictions are adhered to tenaciously despite disbelief, corresponds rather closely to Stevens’ fictions, except that Vaihinger is speaking of what might be called “the husk of belief,” a hollow shell maintained out of nostalgia for an earlier, innocent age. Stevens dreamt of the possibility of creating a fiction so compelling, so subtle, so intricate that it would attract faith, though still acknowledged as a product of the imagination, as a fiction. In Vaihinger’s terms, Stevens wants to create a fiction so powerful that it could become a dogma,⁸ although Stevens would no doubt be horrified by such a description of his project.

Stevens makes this point again and again, perhaps most declaratively in “The Relations between Poetry and Painting,” a lecture he delivered at the Museum of Modern Art on January 15, 1951, a little more than four

years before his death on August 2, 1955, and where he explicitly characterizes the imagination as a surrogate for faith, “the reigning prince”:

in an age in which disbelief is so profoundly prevalent . . . poetry and painting, and the arts in general, are, in their measure, a compensation for what has been lost. Men feel that *the imagination is the next greatest power to faith: the reigning prince*. Consequently their interest in the imagination and its work is to be regarded not as a phase of humanism but as a vital self-assertion in a world in which nothing but the self remains, if that remains. So regarded, the study of the imagination and the study of reality come to appear to be purified, aggrandized, fateful. How much stature, even vatic stature, this conception gives the poet! He need not exercise this dignity in vatic works. How much authenticity, even orphic authenticity, it gives to the painter! He need not display this authenticity in orphic works. (NA 171; my emphasis)

By asserting that “the imagination and its work” are not “a phase of humanism,” by invoking vatic and Orphic powers, and by speaking of “authenticity” Stevens goes far beyond anything Vaihinger would endorse. He is, in effect, claiming prophetic powers for the poet—as Blake and Shelley had done before him—all the while disclaiming that assertion.

What would it mean if “the imagination and its work” were merely “a phase of humanism”? The answer to that question will give us some sense of what Stevens is claiming for the imagination and for poetry. Humanism was a *bête noire* for Stevens, as it was for Eliot. To them it meant a denial of the transcendent, of the “inhuman.” Of course, for the Christian Eliot the inhuman *is* the divine. It is more difficult to know just what it is for Stevens. He not infrequently speaks of the “inhuman” in his poetry. In “Sunday Morning,” Jove is assigned an “inhuman birth” (CP 67), suggesting that the inhuman is the superhuman. However, in “The Idea of Order at Key West,” the sea’s voice is described as “Inhuman” (CP 128), suggesting that the inhuman is nature, the subhuman. Other occurrences do not offer much help. In “Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers,” the colors of the flowers are described as “inhuman” (CP 247), that is to say, natural, like the sea’s voice. In “Examination of the Hero in a Time of War” and “Gigantomachia,” the heroism of the soldier is described as “inhuman” (CP 279, 289), that is to say, superhuman. But in “Credences of Summer,” the inhuman is aligned with the *author* of the natural world, traditionally with the divine, but perhaps here with Darwinian random mutation:

The personae of summer play the characters
Of an inhuman author, who meditates

With the gold bugs, in blue meadows, late at night.
(CP 377)

By contrast, in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," the inhuman is the artistic fiction, though an inadequate one:

a suspension, a permanence, so rigid
That it made the General a bit absurd,

Changed his true flesh to an inhuman bronze.
There never had been, never could be, such
A man. (CP 391)

Finally, in "The Owl in the Sarcophagus," his elegy for Henry Church, the inhuman is death itself, or perhaps the afterworld:

This was peace after death, the brother of sleep,
The inhuman brother so much like, so near,
Yet vested in a foreign absolute. . . . (CP 434)

We may conclude, then, that in Stevens' view humanism is characterized by a denial of the inhuman, of that which exceeds, or, to use a Derridean term, "supplements" the human.

We know from Stevens' letter to Hi Simons of January 9, 1940, that "Winter Bells" is intended to express his attitude toward humanism. Unfortunately, it is one of Stevens' more opaque poems. Commenting on "Winter Bells," he admits to Simons "that it is a habit of mind with me to be thinking of *some substitute for religion*" (L 348). His qualification of that remark is helpful for a reading of "Winter Bells," a poem about church going:

I don't necessarily mean some substitute for the church, because no one believes in the church as an institution more than I do. My trouble, and the trouble of a great many people, is the loss of belief in the sort of God in Whom we were all brought up to believe. (L 348)

Once again, it is "the loss of belief" that he laments, not the death, absence, or non-existence of God. Like the Greeks and Romans in Vaihinger's account, Stevens wishes to preserve the trappings of worship even in the absence of belief. It would seem that what he finds lacking in humanism is precisely his nostalgia for the *forms of belief*. He continues:

Humanism would be the natural substitute, but the more I see of humanism the less I like it. A thing of this kind is not to be judged by ideal presentations of it, but by what it really is. In

its most acceptable form it is probably a baseball game with all the beer signs and coca cola signs, etc. If so, we ought to be able to get along without it. (L 348)

In comparing humanism to a baseball game, he seems to be suggesting that it offers nothing more than distraction, a forgetfulness perhaps of the sanctity of life, a forgetfulness that is seen as inadequate in "The Rock":

It is not enough to cover the rock with leaves.
We must be cured of it by a cure of the ground
Or a cure of ourselves, that is equal to a cure

Of the ground, a cure beyond forgetfulness. (CP 526)

Stevens then offers a gloss on this dismissal of humanism:

I make this comment because this poem ["Winter Bells"] is an illustration of what I have just called a habit of mind. "Nigger Cemetery" IV is not in any relation to this except that the "rules of the rabbis" is another allusion to regulations of the spirit. (L 348)⁹

Earlier in the letter he explained that the phrase "regulations of his spirit" in "Winter Bells" was "an allusion to Descartes." The import of that allusion, however, is not self-evident. We can get some help from a remark in another letter to Hi Simons where he comments on the following lines from "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction":

The first idea was not our own. Adam
In Eden was the father of Descartes
And Eve made air the mirror of herself. (CP 383)

He explains, "Descartes is used as a symbol of the reason. But we live in a place that is not our own; we do not live in a land of Descartes; we have imposed the reason; Adam imposed it even in Eden" (L 434). "[R]egulations of the spirit," then, means the reason and its rules,¹⁰ which are placed in opposition to the irrational, inhuman world that Darwinian evolution revealed, and that is represented synecdochically by Eve.

But even with this help, the import of the phrase, "regulations of the spirit," remains elusive. In "Like Decorations of a Nigger Cemetery," the rabbis are described as "Happy men, distinguishing frost and clouds" (CP 151). I take this to be an allusion to the transcendental nature of Judaism, as opposed to the incarnational nature of Christianity. That is, in Judaism God made the world, but does not enter it as the Christians believe. The Christian doctrine of incarnation is, of course, blasphemous within Juda-

ism, smacking as it does of pagan pantheism. Incarnation breaches the distinction between “frost” (earth) and “clouds” (sky). (Notice that frost and clouds are but different manifestations of condensed water vapor.) The “rules of the rabbis” are presumably the various rules governing the behavior of observing Jews, especially the rules governing the preparation and consumption of food.

To make sense of “Winter Bells,” we must assume that he who “preferred the brightness of bells” is the non-observant Jew, who serves as an exemplar of the humanist:¹¹

The Jew did not go to his synagogue
To be flogged.
But it was solemn,
That church without bells.

He preferred the brightness of bells,
The *mille fiori* of vestments,
The voice of centuries
On the priestly gramophones. (CP 141)

The humanist and the non-observing Jew have both abandoned belief. They both *enjoy* the Christian rituals of devotion (“the *mille fiori* of vestments”), but only for their aesthetic properties. Stevens’ remark in the same letter to Hi Simons (January 12, 1943) supports this reading: “Notwithstanding his exacting intelligence, the Jew is a good example of the man who drifts from fasting to feasting” (L 348).

Even though Stevens’ explanation of the poem was written more than five years after its composition, and even though he is not confident that he remembers what he intended, his guess reflects a persistent attitude toward religion:

I suppose I thought that the strength of the church grows less
and less until the church stands for little more than propriety,
and that, after all, in a world without religion, propriety and a
capon and Florida were all one. (L 348)

In short, religion without belief is no more satisfying than a baseball game, a good meal, or a Florida holiday, at least two of which Stevens himself enjoyed. Church-going in an age of unbelief, then, is just an approved form of shared enthusiasm, one that may provide momentary forgetfulness, but not “a cure beyond forgetfulness” (CP 526).

To return to “The Relations between Poetry and Painting,” we find Stevens expressing a view that seems quite mystical:

The theory of poetry, that is to say, the total of the theories of poetry, often seems to become in time a mystical theology or, more simply, a mystique. The reason for this must by now be clear. The reason is the same reason why the pictures in a museum of modern art often seem to become in time a mystical aesthetic, a prodigious search of appearance, as if to find a way of saying and of establishing that all things, whether below or above appearance, are one and it is only through reality, in which they are reflected or, it may be, joined together, that we can reach them. Under such stress, reality changes from substance to subtlety, a subtlety in which it was natural for Cézanne to say: "I see planes bestriding each other and sometimes straight lines seem to me to fall." (NA 173–74)

Of course, it is not at all clear why "the theory of poetry . . . often seems to become in time a mystical theology." The illustration he offers of "the pictures in a museum of modern art" becoming "in time a mystical aesthetic" is not very helpful. However, his characterization of the pictures as "a prodigious search of appearance" suggests that what he has in mind is the familiar romantic idea that art gives us new eyes and new ears.

At first, Stevens' remark that "all things, whether below or above appearance, are one" sounds rather Swedenborgian, which would put Stevens in the same camp as Blake and Yeats, visionaries who imagine that they have symbolic access to a noumenal reality. His continuation seems to reinforce such a supposition: "it is only through reality, in which they are reflected, or, it may be, joined together that we can reach them." It would seem, then, that Stevens postulates a world of *things* that subsist both below and above appearance and a *reality* in which they are "reflected." Though this sounds rather Swedenborgian—or perhaps just the more modest Wordsworthian pantheism—I think that it is closer to Bergson's *élan vital*.

We must remember that the central issue for Stevens is not *truth*, but *belief*. He accepts the skeptical posture of pragmatism, but his test for the viability of an idea is not theirs. Pragmatism accepted the Darwinian hypothesis and applied it to thought. Thought, too, adapts itself to the environment, the test, as with the organism, is survival. Those ideas and hypotheses that survive empirical and logical scrutiny must be accepted, albeit only provisionally, as the best we can do at this stage of the evolution of human thought. Bergsonian intuition is a more mystical version of the same tendency. Intuitive knowledge, like pragmatic "knowledge," cannot be said to be either true or false. It is simply the kind of cognitive content that is adaptive for the survival of an organism such as a human being.

If we turn to Vaihinger, we can find a more perspicuous articulation of this position than Stevens ever managed. Vaihinger identifies the prov-

enance of his thought in Kant, Schopenhauer, and Darwin. Speaking of his discovery of Schopenhauer as a young man, Vaihinger writes: "Now for the first time I came across a man who *recognized irrationality* openly and honorably, and who attempted to explain it in his system of philosophy. Schopenhauer's love of truth," he says, "was a revelation to me" (xxix; my emphasis). Schopenhauer's "irrational," like Stevens', is not something to which humans have mystical contact, but simply the "inhuman." Nature and chance are "inhuman" in this sense. Vaihinger goes on to link Schopenhauer's insights to Darwin's, though *The World as Will and Representation* preceded *The Origin of Species* by forty years:

What struck me most was [Schopenhauer's] proof of the fact that originally thought is only used by the will as a means to its own ends, and that only in the course of evolution does thought free itself from the bonds of the will and become an end in itself. . . . Darwin's theory of evolution, which was being worked out at this time [i.e., of Vaihinger's reading of Schopenhauer] corroborated Schopenhauer's contention, which gave me a fundamental insight into reality. (xxx)

Vaihinger explains that after reading Schopenhauer and Darwin the "limitation of human knowledge to experience," which Kant emphasizes over and over again, no longer struck him "as a deplorable deficiency in the human mind, compared with a potential higher form of mind, not bound by these limits." On the contrary, he says: "This limitation of human knowledge seemed to me now to be a necessary and natural result of the fact that *thought and knowledge are originally only a means to attain the Life-purpose.*" As a result, "thought is confronted by impossible problems, which are not merely insoluble to human thought while possibly soluble to a higher form of thought, but *problems which are utterly impossible to all forms of thought as such*" (xxxii; my emphasis).

Vaihinger believed that those problems can be addressed, though not "solved," by a cognitive ability that lies outside rational thought, one that is, to use Stevens' term, "irrational":

But there is one solution of this and similar torturing questions; for *in intuition and in experience* all this contradiction and distress fades into nothingness. *Experience and intuition are higher than all human reason.* When I see a deer feeding in the forest, when I see a child at play, when I see a man at work or sport, but above all when I myself am working or playing, where are the problems with which my mind has been torturing itself unnecessarily? *We do not understand the world when we are pondering over its problems, but when we are doing the world's work.* Here too the practical reigns supreme. (xlv; my emphasis)

These remarks sound very like Bergsonian intuition. But Vaihinger never mentions Bergson.¹²

For his part Stevens does not seem to have been as impressed by Bergson's thought as I would have expected him to be. But he does invoke him in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" to support an assertion of his own that is similar to Vaihinger's:

The subject-matter of poetry is not that "collection of solid, static objects extended in space" but the life that is lived in the scene that it composes; and so reality is not that external scene but the life that is lived in it. Reality is things as they are. *The general sense of the world proliferates its special senses.* It is a jungle in itself. As in the case of a jungle, everything that makes it up is pretty much of one color. (NA 25–26; my emphasis)¹³

His assertion that "the general sense of the world proliferates its special senses" is the most perspicuous gloss on the familiar Stevensian formula, "things as they are," that I have been able to find. The stress here is on the exfoliation of "things as they are" in the perceptions of a natural organism. Reality is that exfoliation for Stevens, not some "'collection of solid, static objects extended in space.'" The "special senses," of course, are his fictions. They are the output of "the general sense of the world," a sense instantiated in the organisms that nature throws up and of which humans are one "special sense."

If my interpretation of Stevens is correct, he is very close indeed to Vaihinger, who wrote:

It must be remembered that the object of the world of ideas as a whole is not the portrayal of reality—this would be an utterly impossible task—but rather to provide us with an *instrument for finding our way about more easily in this world. Subjective processes of thought inhere in the entire structure of cosmic phenomena.* They represent the highest and ultimate results of organic development, and *the world of ideas is the fine flower of the whole cosmic process;* but for that very reason it is not a copy of it in the ordinary sense. *Logical processes are a part of the cosmic process* and have as their more immediate object the preservation and enrichment of the life of organisms; they should serve as instruments for enabling them to attain to a more complete life; they serve as intermediaries between living beings. (15–16; except for the first italicized phrase, my emphasis)

Vaihinger's remark—"Subjective processes of thought inhere in the entire structure of cosmic phenomena"—seems to me to be equivalent to Stevens' remark—"The general sense of the world proliferates its special

senses." Indeed, Vaihinger employs the same metaphor as I do in attempting to articulate Stevens' meaning when he writes, "the world of ideas is the fine flower of the whole cosmic process." Stevens' concern, of course, is not so much with the world of ideas as with the world of fictions—that is, with articulations of the taste, feel, and smell of "things as they are."

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Notes

¹In a way, this paper is a response to Denis Donahue's caricature in *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot* of Stevens' poetry as offering a "bogus claim," which he believes is derived from pragmatism:

The main difference between the pope and Wallace Stevens is that the pope does not claim to have invented, or deduced from his private desires, the articles of his belief. This is what Stevens claims, and he is self-deceived, since most of what he claims to have invented he has inherited from a certain philosophic tradition. (184)

²Although they mention Vaihinger only once, they do so disparagingly:

The fictitious entities thus introduced by language form a special variety of what are called fictions. But, as Vaihinger's own use shows, this term is very vague and so-called fictions are often indistinguishable from hypotheses, which are simply unverified references. (98–99)

The Philosophy of "As If" was Vaihinger's life work. He began it in 1876 (when he was only twenty-four-years old), but it was not published until 1911 and was repeatedly revised up until its translation by C. K. Ogden in 1924, for which Vaihinger wrote a preface. The translation went through four editions—1924, 1935, 1949, and 1952—indicating reasonable interest among the English-speaking readership. He died in December of 1933.

³It can be shown, and has been demonstrated at length in the present volume, that the theory of Fictions was more or less clearly stated by Kant, who was proud of his Scottish descent. Nearly 100 pages of the work are devoted to this question and it is there proved in detail that for Kant a large number of ideas, not only in metaphysics but also in mathematics, physics and jurisprudence, were Fictions. The metaphysical ideas were somewhat confused by Kant himself in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (Theory of method) but were definitely called 'heuristic Fictions.' This was overlooked and not understood in Kant's own day and for a long time after" (Vaihinger, Preface viii–ix).

⁴Henry Church cited the passage in German:

Warum dürfte die Welt, die uns etwas angeht,—nicht eine Fiktion sein?
Und wer da Fragt: "aber zur Fiktion gehört ein Urheber?" dürfte dem nicht rund geantwortet werden: warum? Gehört dieses "Gehört" vielleicht mit zur Fiktion? Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Aphorism 34. (Huntington WAS 3415)

⁵To Henry Church, April 21, 1943 (Huntington WAS 3512). This letter was found after Holly Stevens published *Letters*.

⁶It is striking that Stevens should think that logic has an existence independent of mind. In this respect he would seem to be a philosophical realist such as the Bertrand

Russell of *Principia Mathematica* and unlike Wittgenstein, who shook Russell's faith in the reality of logical relations. See Ray Monk, 55–56.

⁷For a discussion of the ubiquity of alternative belief systems in high modernism, see my *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot and the Occult*.

⁸It is perhaps worth noting that mainstream Christian theology has adopted pretty much the same position, especially as articulated by Albert Schweitzer in *Quest for the Historic Jesus* (1906). Following Ernst Renan and others, Schweitzer argued that although the Bible stories of Jesus could not be accepted as historical, that is, they could not be believed, nonetheless the fabric of Christian faith could survive the discovery that the Life of Christ was a fiction.

⁹Stevens is referring to the following lines:

Under the mat of frost and over the mat of clouds.
But in between lies the sphere of my fortune
And the fortunes of frost and of clouds,
All alike, except for the rules of the rabbis,
Happy men, distinguishing frost and clouds. (CP 151)

The point would seem to be that the rabbis-like Descartes can discriminate between the material or corporeal and the cognitive or spiritual, whereas Stevens regards them as inextricably implicated in one another.

¹⁰Some, notably J. Hillis Miller, have seized upon this sort of remark to align Stevens with the anti-rationalism typified by Derrida's disdain for what he calls "logocentrism." See J. Hillis Miller's "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure."

¹¹I think it probable that Eliot, too, was thinking of humanists when he made his infamous remark about "free thinking Jews" in *After Strange Gods*. I mention Eliot's remark only to support my supposition that Stevens' Jew stands in for the humanist, that is, the secular man.

¹²Vaihinger began his study in 1876, but it was not published until 1911. Bergson's *Creative Evolution* was published only four years earlier, in 1907, but since he had been publishing his ideas on intuition since 1889, it is surprising that Vaihinger makes no reference to Bergson's similar arguments.

¹³The quoted words are from the British philosopher C. E. M. Joad, who is commenting favorably on Bergson.

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“The World Is My Idea”: Similar Worlds (Similar Ideas) in Wallace Stevens and Arthur Schopenhauer

P. MICHAEL CAMPBELL

HERE IS A STORY A FRIEND of mine used to tell about what his father did during the war. (The story, I should note, is most likely apocryphal, or at least a tale much exaggerated in the retelling. It is also, I might add, not your typical father-in-the-war narrative, unless you factor in that my friend and I were students at the time at that bastion of intellectual and antiwar activity known as the University of California at Berkeley.) My friend’s father, the story goes, worked in the Second World War as a cryptographer (a code-maker and code-buster) for the U.S. government and was also a sort of armchair dabbler in modern philosophy (his first love) and modern poetry (a lot further down his list). One of his pet cryptography projects during the war, according to the story, involved inserting occasional odd words and rhythms into the difficult writings of German philosophers and modern American poets in order to hide sensitive diplomatic data. The image this story has always called up for me is of various government and military types (on both sides) being forced to read truckloads of arcane poetry and philosophy in order to find the occasional nuggets of information needed to wage war or conduct affairs of state.

It might be helpful to hold a similar image in your mind as I attempt to describe how I see the modern poet Wallace Stevens reading the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, searching not for Schopenhauer’s view of the world, *per se*, but for pieces of himself, for a version of Stevens’ own engagement with a self-constructed world, and finally for the chance to incorporate Schopenhauer’s ideas and words into Stevens’ imaginary/poetic war with himself.

But, before I try to develop this larger thesis, I want to begin with two observations. First, let me attempt, as they say these days, to “situate” myself in terms of my own critical/theoretical biases. I think of myself as a practicing poet concerned with craft, on the one hand, and as a critical rhetorician of modern poetry, on the other. In keeping with the etymology of the word “poetry” and the ancients’ thinking about the practice, I con-

sider poetry first and foremost to be something made, something constructed from various parts and pieces. In the particular case of lyric poetry, I am referring to a hybrid literary/musical work constructed by the piecing together of words, ideas, tropes, and sounds. (I do not mean to suggest that these components are, in any way, independent of one another or that any one component trumps another; instead, I believe that these components work together to constitute what might be termed a poetic effect or to identify the resulting product as a poem.) Thus, to my understanding, a poet picks from various building blocks and tools what he or she needs to create a desired effect (be it music or argument), and a critic likewise attempts to understand how a poem is made by looking at how the parts of the poem are put together and how these parts work together to create the world that is the poem (that is also, if all is working well, the effect the poem has on its readers).

This brings me to my second observation, which constitutes a mini-argument or meditation: for me, Stevens has always been a poet of many voices and one voice, simultaneously. Unlike T. S. Eliot, say, who thought of titling "The Waste Land" (after Dickens) "He Do the Police in Different Voices," and who, in "The Waste Land," manages to weave together the interactions and inflections of various character voices into a single work, Stevens' voices are, I would argue, all variations on his own singular poetic voice. To my way of thinking, then, a typical Stevens poem involves Stevens arguing with himself, or among his selves, as it were, with some of these selves originating in particular Stevensian experiences that we might in some way identify (be they personal, or political, or historical, such as those noted by a biographer such as Milton Bates, or new historicist critics such as Alan Filreis and James Longenbach; or romantic such as the voices of Wordsworth or Whitman or Emerson; or voices discovered while reading other poets, à la Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence; or, as is often the case in Stevens, viewpoints derived from reading certain philosophers concerned with issues that appealed to him or intersected with his world). Wherever these voices might be said to originate, by the time they are filtered through Stevens' idiosyncratic diction and syntax and sensibility, they sound, I would argue, like voices in his own head clamoring with each other for attention or recognition—"clattering" like "the bucks . . . / Over Oklahoma" in "Earthy Anecdote," even as another opposing voice/presence in the poem, the firecat, "bristle[s] in the way" (CP 3).

For some, Stevens' arguments with himself seem merely cerebral, or impersonal, or even frivolous (see, for instance, Christian Wiman, the editor of *Poetry*, bravely slamming Stevens' perceived failure to engage the world, or critics such as Mark Halliday who voice similar complaints about Stevens' lack of humanity). This also applies, to a certain extent, I think, to those critics who dismissed Stevens early on as a "dandy" (or continue to dismiss him as such, in the case of certain contemporary British readers, if one accepts George Lensing's account of the British reaction to Stevens).

Not surprisingly, I disagree with these dismissals; not because they are entirely wrong, but because they overlook the countervailing desire Stevens has to engage the world even as he remains removed, or isolated, from it. This isolation is not icy indifference or effete snobbery, but a characteristic of a certain type of poetic disposition or sensibility, that of a near-introvert who feels out-boxed and overshadowed in a world of pugilistic exhibitionists and larger-than-life self-advertisers; a small single man desperate for the company of others, who also happens to be a large, well-fed, married, working man for whom solitude (ironically) affords a rare chance for meaningful human/intellectual connection and interaction, even if such connections and interactions take the form of merely, say, giving oneself over wholly to a book, or “recollecting in tranquility” some past or imagined intersection with others. Occasionally, the intersection is the scene of a collision of competing ideas, or (to change metaphors) a cockfight among poets and philosophers (the bantams battling it out, hidden among the pine woods), where Stevens gets to choose (to create even) the battlefield and (to be) the combatants, so that the battles are fairly matched (Stevens vs. Stevens) and not too bloody or contracted.

One of Stevens’ favorite philosophical gladiators is his Schopenhauer-self: the Schopenhauer, whose ideas are close enough to Stevens’ own that he can be successfully imagined into combat, representing a certain pessimistic take on the imagination and its ideas, but who is also removed enough from Stevens’ own willed optimism that a suitable imaginary opponent-self might also be sent into battle against him.

But before I get to this trope, I want to look at a fairly obscure Stevens poem, “A Dish of Peaches in Russia.” For me, the poem is, in part, about the sadness of speaking to oneself (a theme I see running through most of *Parts of a World*). “Who speaks?” our speaker asks at the end of the first stanza, and the answer, not surprisingly, developed immediately after in the second stanza is the poet/speaker himself: “I absorb them as the Angevine / Absorbs Anjou” (CP 224). “Who speaks?” the speaker asks again at the start of the fourth couplet. “But it must be that I,” answers the poet. Although Helen Vendler argues the “I” here is not literally Stevens—who is not, of course, a peach-loving Russian exile nostalgic for the peaches of his past—the voice, to my ear, is finally more trope than character, more Stevens than Nabokov, say, or some other fully imagined Russian émigré remembering actual Russian peaches. By the end of the poem, the “I” being torn apart is, I think, the same “I” and “he” and “one” that struggles everywhere in *Parts of a World* for connection, to hold his world and self together. In “The Glass of Water,” the poet concludes: “In a village of the indigenes, / One would have still to discover. Among the dogs and dung, / One would continue to contend with one’s ideas” (CP 198). In “Phosphor Reading by His Own Light,” later in the book, Phosphor struggles to read a blank page, “a glass that is empty when he looks” (CP 267), and then seems to metamorphose into a “realist,” or perhaps “he” merely addresses

another "realist" version of himself he calls "you," who is a child and student of "the green night, / Teaching a fussy alphabet" (CP 267). As I read *Parts of a World*, these are all parts of Stevens' world (the Russian, Phosphor, the realist, the teacher, the parent, the student, the child, and especially the "one . . . continu[ing] to contend with [his own] ideas"), all parts and pieces of the world Stevens wills into existence.

It seems to me that these poems (and especially the end of "A Dish of Peaches in Russia") get at the very human sadness that I find everywhere in Stevens (but that Wiman, Halliday, et al. seem not to see or at least acknowledge). It is a sadness of disconnection from a world that Wiman and Halliday must presumably occupy unproblematically, a world they feel Stevens avoids or evades. Here, my own experiences with the world are closer to Stevens', and it is hard for me not to feel that Wiman and Halliday are either sore winners (ready to condemn those to whom the world seems a less easily occupied or negotiated place) or are disingenuous in some way. How can they not be moved, I wonder, by Stevens' willingness to confront his own failures and pain:

The sunlight fills

The curtains. Even the drifting of the curtains,
Slight as it is, disturbs me. I did not know

That such ferocities could tear
One self from another . . . (CP 224)

For Stevens, a "self [torn] from another" is not merely pathos, although I do not want to discount the pain he chronicles in so many poems. It also affords an opportunity, however limited and restricted, to find something that will "suffice," to discover some pleasure in a world that seems Hobbesian, at best: savage, "nasty, brutish, and short" (107). This split in the self offers Stevens a chance to engage in what I will call "monologue as dialogue" (in effect, to argue with oneself, as for instance Hamlet does in his famous soliloquies), and in the process to create of the self a fiction that might offer an escape from the self and the world that Stevens (taking his cue from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) sees as a creation of the self. Thus, Stevens finds cause for some minimal optimism, a chance to engage the Coleridgean imagination (temporarily to "suspend disbelief") and to attain an ephemeral escape into the world of willed fiction.

It is here (in this limited optimism) that Stevens diverges from Schopenhauer, about whom Bertrand Russell writes, "He is a pessimist, whereas almost all the [other philosophers throughout history] are in some sense optimists" (753). Schopenhauer's concept of will, in fact, seems clearly the precursor of Stevens' supreme fiction, although it differs from Stevens' idea more in terms of emphasis and disposition than anything else. Ac-

ording to Schopenhauer, speaking metaphorically about the need for self-delusion: “ ‘we blow out a soap-bubble as long and as large as possible, although we know perfectly well that it will burst’ ” (qtd. in Russell 756). Similarly, Stevens writes:

The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe it willingly. (*OP* 189)

When Schopenhauer claims, “Before us there is certainly only nothingness” (*The World as Will and Idea* I, 531), he does not find this reality to be liberating, and when he argues that we create a fiction of belief to survive in a world of illusion and nothingness, he sees the delusion as anything but “exquisite.” This divergence, as I will argue shortly, coupled with the otherwise striking similarities between Stevens’ ideas and Schopenhauer’s, makes Schopenhauer a particularly appropriate voice to call up when Stevens (as he often does) wants to create a dialogue between a faint hope and no hope at all.

Of course, as countless other books and articles have pointed out over the last four decades, Stevens frequently turns to other philosophers as well in constructing his poetry and poetics, such as Santayana, Bergson, and Nietzsche, to name just a few. It is interesting, I think, that these philosophers (Schopenhauer included) are generally considered by other philosophers to fall on the poetic side of an imagined poetry/philosophy divide. About Schopenhauer, Russell writes: “His appeal has always been less to professional philosophers than to artistic and literary people in search of a philosophy that they could believe” (753). If I may give another personal anecdote, I was once asked to make a formal presentation on the philosophy of humor before a philosophers’ club, and I talked there about theories of humor constructed by Bergson, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, leaving out in the process similar theories devised by Emerson and Baudelaire (thinking that the club members wanted to hear about philosophers and not poets). After the presentation, several questioners pointed out that the theorists I chose to look at were “poets” and “not philosophers” at all.

This may account for why Stevens turns so often to “poetic” philosophers such as Schopenhauer for inspiration. These philosophers offer Stevens an opportunity to work through (in poetry) various issues dealing with romanticism (the importance of the imagination, creation, etc.) and to establish (for himself at least) the value of poetry in offering solutions to otherwise irresolvable philosophical problems. Through rhetorical and musical tricks, in poem after poem, Stevens creates imaginative poetic solutions that would not satisfy a stern philosophy professor, but do, for those of us who love poetry and the magic of rhetoric, offer up some artistic/intellectual sustenance, enough maybe to “suffice.”

Although many critics and commentators have touched on intersections and interconnections in the thinking of Stevens and Schopenhauer, there is still much in this area to consider and explore. The only sustained critical exploration of the Stevens-Schopenhauer connection I can find is Richard P. Adams' excellent but relatively brief 1972 article "Wallace Stevens and Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*." In it, Adams makes clear Stevens' debt to Schopenhauer in writing "The Snow Man" and other poems and in his ideas about music and the power of the will. In his recent *Wallace Stevens and the Limits of Reading*, Bart Eeckhout sketches out various ways to read "The Snow Man," including one from a Schopenhauerian perspective. And B. J. Leggett, in his new book on Stevens' late poetry, devotes a chapter to Schopenhauer's influence.

I would like to sketch out three points of similarity between Stevens and Schopenhauer. The first point of similarity is the way both writers make use of a comparison/assertion trope in which the "world" is equated, sometimes metaphorically, sometimes literally, with "ideas." For example, Schopenhauer begins an argument with the claim, "The world is my idea" (*The World as Will and Idea* I, 3). The world, in other words, is not just an "idea" (or construct) but also one tied closely with long-standing theoretical/philosophical concerns about authorship and subjectivity; according to Schopenhauer, the reader reads the world and, in the process, creates it. Similarly, Stevens writes, in "The House Was Quiet and The World Was Calm," about a merging of reader and book, of the world and ideas about the world. For both Stevens and Schopenhauer, the world beyond the self is, ironically, part of the self and a product of the self.

The second similarity is of a different sort, having more to do with tone and a set of general assumptions about the nature of human existence. Both writers share a sense of the human world as a basically sad and fallen place, where we are all isolated from one another and our true selves. Stevens writes, in "Gubbinal," that some think "The world is ugly, / And the people are sad" (CP 85). Schopenhauer, in an essay titled "On the Suffering of the World," sounds a similar note, arguing that "misfortune in general is the rule" and that "the world is Hell, and men are on the one hand the tormented souls and on the other the devils in it" (*Essays* 41, 48). However, as I described earlier, there is a significant difference in this regard between the conclusions drawn by Stevens and Schopenhauer about whether life is simply not worth living or whether one should simply succumb to despair. In fact, I would argue that in "Gubbinal," and in many other similar Stevens poems, the imaginary argument being set out is taking place between Stevens' pessimistic Schopenhauerish self and his other, more optimistic self. Although, here, the optimist is making a series of seeming concessions ("Have it your way," he says twice; "The world is ugly, / And the people are sad" [CP 85]), he also suggests, through an ironic tone, an alternative, more hopeful poetic take on things (i.e., maybe the world is *not* ugly and the people are *not* sad).

A third area of similarity between Stevens and Schopenhauer hinges on a shared notion of the liberating possibilities of humor and laughter. Stevens writes numerous “comic” poems, although the apparent silliness of this work does not negate Stevens’ concern with serious issues, especially those having to do with the failure of rational thought to give us pleasure or satisfy our basic needs. It is only through the interplay of comedy and seriousness that Stevens is able to achieve a balance (or at least the illusion of a balance, which is enough) between the essential sadness of the world and the limited pleasures it offers. Schopenhauer, in his “On the Theory of the Ludicrous,” similarly describes “the conflict between what is thought and what is perceived” (*The World as Will and Idea* II, 271) and develops a theory on how this disparity leads to “pleasure” (in the form of our “apprehension” of the humor in a situation). “[R]eason,” Schopenhauer writes, is an impediment to pleasure, and he compares it to a “troublesome governess” (*The World as Will and Idea* II, 280) whose rule we are pleased to see overthrown. Stevens also suggests that we should “resist” the rule of reason and he offers poetry as a potential escape route.

Overall, the evidence seems clear that Stevens was familiar with Schopenhauer. I believe that he did not simply read Schopenhauer as he read many other philosophers, but that he found in Schopenhauer’s writing some of the key elements he needed to formulate his own poetic ideas and to create what he would later call his “planet on the table,” the poetry that formed his world.

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Philosophical Parallels: Wallace Stevens and Paul Valéry

LISA GOLDFARB

*He wanted his heart to stop beating and his mind to rest
In a permanent realization, without any wild ducks
Or mountains that were not mountains, just to know how
it would be,
Just to know how it would feel, released from destruction,
To be a bronze man breathing under archaic lapis,
Without the oscillations of planetary pass-pass,
Breathing his bronzen breath at the azury centre of time.
—“This Solitude of Cataracts”*

WALLACE STEVENS' SPEAKER in “This Solitude of Cataracts” looks at a river that keeps on flowing, although “never the same way twice” (CP 424), and longs to halt its movement as well as the movement of his own heart and mind. Caught in the constant motion of his mind and the natural world, he feels that if he could only fix this fleeting world, he might finally be able to see it, to understand it in a “permanent realization” (CP 425).

In this poem and in many other poems and essays, Stevens articulates questions that he shares with Paul Valéry: equipped with restless minds, how can we understand what we see of our incessantly changing world? If our minds and language only mirror the disorder of the external world, how can we create poetry that expresses our minds yet also resists the flux? As they wrestle with similar philosophic questions, Valéry and Stevens also express markedly similar frustrations with philosophic discourse. Both see and employ poetry as a means of demonstrating, at once, the limitations of philosophy and the promises of musical-poetic language as a response to and even a means of resolving their respective philosophic questions. If philosophy is, on the one hand, systematic and, in Valéry's understanding, restricted by the nature of discursive language, poetry, on the other hand, is anti-systematic and endlessly versatile in its ability to tackle questions concerning the flux of the mind and world. For both

Stevens and Valéry, poetry is simultaneously a way of challenging systematic thought and a way of responding to that challenge by reconceiving or remaking the world.

In their prose and poetry, both poets share a view of the limitations of philosophic inquiry. Let us turn first to the broad outlines of Valéry's critique of philosophy in his prose. Valéry envisions philosophy not simply as rational thought, but as speculation about all manner of human being and action. He is interested in the nature of being in its entirety—in experience, in self-reflection, in observation, and in the very process or "act" of thought itself. He works at successive concepts or definitions of philosophy in his notebooks and explains that we misunderstand philosophy when we reduce it to a discipline, to one mode of thought. Rather, he writes, "Philosophy is imperceptible. It is never in philosophical writings—one feels it in all human works. . . . [I]t evaporates as soon as an author *wants* to philosophize. . . . It appears everywhere there is a union between a man and a particular subject, or a man and a particular aim" (*Cahiers I* 480; all translations are mine). Given Valéry's understanding of philosophy, it is no wonder that the ways in which philosophy has tended to separate body and soul, thought and emotion, as well as the rational from the irrational, become the frequent targets of his criticism.

The central feature of Valéry's critique of the way philosophers practice philosophy hinges on their dependence on discursive language, which, he contends, is inadequate to express the full range of philosophic activity. Valéry insists that discursive language is, by nature, imprecise. "All language," he writes, "is born in approximation or the 'almost' and plunges its roots there" (*Cahiers I* 736). A philosopher can hardly hope to rest a system of meaning upon such faulty ground. Valéry consequently concludes that "all of philosophy is born of illusions about knowledge that are, in turn, illusions about language" (*Cahiers I* 413).

What is most remarkable for our study of Stevens and Valéry, however, is the way in which Valéry's criticisms ultimately help him to shape his own poetic project, not his insistent attacks on the discipline of philosophy. For Valéry does not abandon his desire to see interior life or the process of thought, the unity of body and soul or the movement intrinsic to the mind and world expressed in language. It will be, however, a language transformed, expressed not in discursive prose but in poetry. Régine Pietra, a contemporary scholar of Valéry's, compellingly studies Valéry's "negative philosophy" and maintains that Valéry's own philosophical stance and poetry grow out of his critical view of the discipline (Pietra 85). I include here some of the principal ways that Valéry transposes his philosophical reflections into his poetic ideas, especially those aspects that are suggestive of Stevens' work.

As we have just seen, Valéry is skeptical about the expressive possibilities of discursive language. He consequently imagines and crafts a poetics centered in his idea of "resonance." Resonant language, for Valéry, spe-

cifically redresses the limitations of discursive language. If philosophical language suffers from the rupture between an abstract word ("judgment," "cause," "being," "consciousness") and its basis in experience, resonant language repairs that rupture. Often, variously repeated words such as "diamond," "gold," "being," and "knowledge" will ring through whole poems of Valéry's, yet they are not simply repetitions; each time the poetic speaker utters them, their meaning becomes more multifaceted and richer. Such resonant language accomplishes the representation of our interior lives, which Valéry finds absent from philosophy. Valéry means, then, in poetry, to make the interior life palpable in a language where the reader rigorously examines and tests each word in relation to the texture of the whole poem.

Most important to our comparison between Stevens and Valéry, however, is Valéry's own direct proclamation of his philosophic point of view, which we will see Stevens echo in theory and practice. Valéry writes, "My philosophic point of view is the diversity of points of view" (*Cahiers I* 494). Valéry here invites the poet, and I cannot help but think of Stevens as that poet, to compose poetry that experiments with such different viewpoints. Elsewhere, writing admiringly of the musical form of theme and variations, Valéry suggests that this form, above all others, would enable the poet to enact philosophy (*Oeuvres I* 1501). This call anticipates Stevens' own poetic practice in variation poems such as among so many others, "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," "The Man with the Blue Guitar," "Variations on a Summer Day," and "Credences of Summer."

Like Valéry, Stevens reflects on the relationship between philosophy and poetry in his prose; however, when he compares the two, he seems to delight in using language full of the discursive binaries that Valéry consistently challenges. In "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," Stevens compares philosophic and poetic truth, and names the former "the official view of being" and the latter the "unofficial view" (*NA* 40). Both, he maintains, approach truth: philosophy by way of reason, and poetry through the imagination. Later in the same essay, he writes that the difference between philosophy and poetry is the "difference between logical and empirical knowledge" (*NA* 54), thus reinforcing the notion of a clear, unambiguous line between the two different ways of knowing.

We must not, however, leap to the conclusion that Stevens is content with such clear-cut categories. That he returns to the comparison repeatedly in his prose is both acknowledgment of the complexity of the relationship between philosophy and poetry and testament to his ongoing desire to understand it more thoroughly. A closer look at his comparison between the two in "A Collect of Philosophy" reveals that, like Valéry, Stevens comes up against the very same limitations of language that are at the heart of Valéry's critique. Consider the following passage:

The uses to which the philosopher and the poet put the world are different and the ends that they have in mind are different. This statement raises the question of the final cause of philosophy and the final cause of poetry. The answers to this question are as countless as the definitions of philosophy and poetry. The other day I read a phrase in Alain: "the history of doctrines." These words give us a single sense and an inadequate sense of what philosophy is. If I say that poetry constantly requires a new station, it is a way, and an inadequate way, of saying what poetry is. To define philosophy and to define poetry are parts of the repertory of the mind. They are classic exercises. This could not be true if the definitions were adequate. In view of this difficulty about definitions, any discussion of the final causes of philosophy and poetry must be limited, here, to pointing out the relation between the question of purposes and the miscellany of definitions. (*OP* 278)

Stevens works in the above passage to clarify what, at its very basis, differentiates poetry and philosophy. To do so, he employs a language of logic that aims to tease out the complexities of their relation; he writes of the "uses" of poetry and philosophy, "questions" and "answers," "causes" and "final causes." The style of the passage is marked by frequent repetitions throughout: it is as if Stevens, by holding close to the language and keeping the field of reference tight, will be able finally to reveal what makes philosophy, philosophy and poetry, poetry. However, Stevens acknowledges the paucity of his own vocabulary when he discusses "definitions." Although he says that defining both "are parts of the repertory of the mind," indicating that such attempts may bear fruit, at the same time, he undercuts the reader's expectations of precision. Referring to the phrase in Alain, Stevens indicates that the words are inadequate to convey a real sense of philosophy. Similarly, although creating definitions is a natural expression of our mental capacities, the definitional process is neither finite nor precise; it is simply an "exercise[]." He throws even more doubt on the definitions when he suggests that we must reduce our expectations for clarity: "the final causes of philosophy and poetry must be limited."

Given the limitations of his definitions, we must wonder why Stevens persists in measuring philosophy in relation to poetry. Like Valéry, Stevens is fascinated by the areas of philosophic speculation that he discusses in "A Collect of Philosophy." These concepts are among the most compelling in both his and Valéry's poetry: the infinity of the world, the nature of thought, and the study of perception are but a few. Stevens, however, does not simply note the failures of discursive language and then move on to poetry; rather, like that of his French contemporary Valéry, his poetics grows out of his understanding of the limitations of linear philosophic discourse, and his philosophic critique and interests are embedded in his

poetics. Anca Rosu's understanding of Stevens' poetry as engaging a "special kind of rivalry" (138) with philosophy is remarkably close to Pietra's understanding of Valéry's negative philosophy. What Rosu writes of Stevens is equally applicable to both poets: "Stevens shied away from constructing a philosophical system, but he was nonetheless haunted by philosophical questions. . . . He tends . . . toward a view of language that will enable him to unfold his antiphilosophical philosophy and to make poetry the very substance of thought" (84, 136).

Now we arrive at the contours of Stevens' poetics that offer striking parallels to Valéry's. If Stevens consistently returns to the dichotomous language that helps him to draw clear lines between the two disciplines, he does not rest his case at an impasse. Stevens clearly exalts poetry over philosophy: In "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," he opposes the imaginative world of the poet with the "gaunt world of the reason" (NA 58). When he discusses Leibniz in "A Collect of Philosophy," he identifies the philosopher as "a poet *manqué*" (OP 268). Like Valéry, he crafts a poetics that seems to address philosophy's shortcomings; he emphasizes poetry's ability to represent the interior life, its eschewal of logic and enactment of experience, and its flexible and ever-renewable forms.

What ultimately brings Stevens' poetics the closest to Valéry's is his understanding of the synthesizing power of the poet's imagination. For Stevens, the imagination enables the poet to go beyond rational thought, to draw his own interior life and sensory experience into the quest for knowledge. In "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," he suggests that, in part, what distinguishes the poet's from the philosopher's search for truth is that the poet's search is marked by his own "personality." By "personality," Stevens does not mean simply his personal experience, but rather "an element in the creative process," the "physical and mental factors that condition him as an individual" (NA 48). The poet, then, brings his own temperament, his own sense of the world, to his view of the world. By so doing, he binds, in a sense, what Valéry's philosopher tears asunder—the interior world and the exterior world, the heart and the mind, the unknown and the known. Stevens' emphasis, then, on the binding, integrative force of the poet's imagination recalls Valéry's vision of a poetically resonant language that aims to create a living and breathing poetic language finely tuned to our interior sense.

Although he clearly identifies the poet's imagination as the distinctive feature, that which elevates poetry to be "at least the equal of philosophy," and "may be its superior" (NA 43), it is important to note that Stevens does not believe that the power of poetry lies in an imagination severed from reason. Rather, Stevens maintains that, at his best, the poet puts the imagination in play sometimes in concert and sometimes in tension with reason. He writes in "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" that in order to fulfill himself, the poet must accomplish a poetry that satisfies "both the reason and the imagination" (NA 42). Stevens' understanding of the

balance that the poet must achieve is again reminiscent of a core aspect of Valéry's poetics. In his essay "Poetry and Abstract Thought," Valéry discusses how the poet must balance the competing demands of the intuitive and sensory aspects of language with its connotative aspects in order to reach toward poetry's distinctive kind of knowledge (*Oeuvres I* 1314). Stevens' discussion of the necessary interdependence between reason and the imagination beautifully complements Valéry's idea of the poem as a pendulum-like movement between sound and sense.

The greatest bond between Stevens and Valéry lies in their mutual ambition to present, not one fixed or absolute vision of the world, but poems that express their own variable vision of a changing reality. Stevens' characterization of our time in "Two or Three Ideas" as "a time of truth-loving" (*OP* 265) and his persistent references to our modern search for truth might initially suggest that he believes in the existence of an absolute truth. However, one of his central ideas about poetry—that the poem consists of a precise and delicate balance between the imagination and reality that must be re-achieved in every poem—contradicts the very idea of a static or absolute truth. Because the poet "constantly requires a new station," because he sees reality differently in each poem, each poem expresses a truth that coexists with a number of others. He writes in "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" of poetic truth as "an agreement with reality, brought about by the imagination of a man disposed to be strongly influenced by his imagination, which he believes, for a time, to be true" (*NA* 54). We noted Valéry's philosophic point of view as "the diversity of points of view" and of his call to poets to produce such variations (*Cahiers I* 494). Stevens' notion of the poem as expressive of agreements with reality that exist for a time closely follows upon Valéry's philosophic point of view. With each poem, Stevens repositions himself and sees the world anew. For both poets, each poem ideally expresses a difference, however slight or great, in the way we see the world, a world that we perceive and that appears "never the same way twice."

Valéry's "Profusion of Evening" and Stevens' "Evening without Angels" both take up the subject of evening to explore questions that recur in much of their verse. Both poems ask questions about perception and challenge the reader to think about the transition from a heavenly to a humanly ordered world. More important, however, than the fact that they explore these similar questions is how both poems grow out of their respective critiques of philosophy. As its title suggests, "Profusion of Evening" is not a fixed portrait of dusk, but a poem of evening as it permeates the universe. The poem occurs in the meeting between the poetic viewer and the waning light of day. Valéry develops a number of themes in "Profusion of Evening" that dovetail with the philosophic questions that most engage him in his prose: the contemplative process; the relationship between heaven and earth; the mystery of the natural world; and the process of artistic creation. However, more than trying to express his thoughts on

any one of these issues, Valéry emphasizes the passage from one way of seeing to the next—what he names poetic “modulation” (*Cahiers I* 629). The poem’s form approximates the structure of a musical sonata, with three distinct movements, and the language is characterized by a restricted vocabulary of resonant words that echo throughout its development.

In “Profusion of Evening,” as James Lawler observes, Valéry composes the “most uncompromising of [his] poetic works” (79), for in this poem he successfully resists closure and invites the reader to participate in the on-going act of contemplation and creation. Valéry does not directly address the rivalry between philosophy and poetry in “Profusion of Evening” or in any other poem; rather, in his rigorous recreation of language, he successfully redresses the failures of the discursive language on which philosophers depend. He brings the interior life to questions of the universal order and, by approximating musical form, focuses on movement rather than on resolution.

Stevens, too, in “Evening without Angels,” questions how we make poetic order out of the natural world we observe about us. Unlike Valéry, however, who reenacts the drama of perception in the figure of the viewer as he faces the dissipating day, Stevens begins with questions that propel the rest of the poem. The poetic speaker asks why we persistently explain the order of the universe within divine frameworks. He asks directly: “Why seraphim like lutanists arranged / Above the trees? And why the poet as / Eternal *chef d’orchestre*?” (CP 136).

If Stevens asks similar questions as Valéry does about divine and human order, and the way we create poetic order, he goes about it in a way that sharply differs from his French counterpart. In contrast to Valéry’s indirect manner of addressing the debate between poetry and philosophy, Stevens directly engages the rivalry between philosophy and poetry in the very language of “Evening without Angels.” One might even say that he creates a philosophic dialogue in its first few stanzas. After the speaker poses the questions, he begins (and we as readers begin) to answer those questions: we find explanation in a language that proceeds in a seemingly logical, linear way. To answer, the speaker looks at the elements of the natural world: to the air and to the light. Midway through the poem, his voice intensifies, underscoring the need for an explanation: “Let this be clear that we are men of sun / And men of day and never of pointed night” (CP 137).

At the same time as he seems to structure “Evening without Angels” in a straight discursive manner, Stevens also cultivates a competing discourse in the poem, a language marked by musical suggestion endowed with the power of incantation. Even as he “answers” the opening questions, we can note the musical vocabulary with which Stevens subtly punctuates the poem: The “sounds” of the air are “realized / More sharply.” We are, in stanza three, “Men that repeat antiques sounds of air / In an accord of repetitions” (CP 137).

It is toward the close of the poem, however, where Stevens heightens the musical language of the poem, as though he were proclaiming as he does in his prose the language of poetry to be “the superior of philosophy.” In the last stanza of the poem, as the speaker celebrates our distinct human perception of the natural order, the language is filled with musical references, alliteration, repetition, and assonance:

. . . Evening, when the measure skips a beat
And then another, one by one, and all
To a seething minor swiftly modulate.
Bare night is best. Bare earth is best. Bare, bare,
Except for our own houses, huddled low
Beneath the arches and their spangled air,
Beneath the rhapsodies of fire and fire,
Where the voice that is in us makes a true response,
Where the voice that is great within us rises up,
As we stand gazing at the rounded moon. (CP 137–38)

Stevens thus encourages us to reach beyond the scope of the poem’s earlier language of explication in the rich sonorous language and in the resonant repetitions that close the poem. Although Valéry modulates his poem without using the word itself, Stevens employs Valéry’s favorite term of modulation to show his readers that the sources of our “divinity” are not to be found with Valéry’s philosophers, nor with the “lutanists . . . / Above the trees,” but in the beauty of our own voices and the imaginative language of poetry.

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God, Imagination, and the Interior Paramour

B. J. LEGGETT

IN 1950 WALLACE STEVENS contemplated a long poem on God and the imagination. If he had completed it, the poems of *The Rock* might now be read somewhat differently, much as the reflections of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" modified our reading of the poems of the previous decade. As it happened, he completed only the opening lines, which he titled "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" and sent to Joseph Bennett, editor of the *Hudson Review*. He told Bennett, "I had originally intended to write a long poem on the subject of the present poem but got no farther than the statement that God and the imagination are one. The implications of this statement were to follow, and may still" (L 701). Lucy Beckett writes that "the implications never followed" (190), but some of them did in fact follow in later poems of *The Rock* and after. Some of them are intimated in "Final Soliloquy" itself, although masked by an enigmatic language that has allowed readers to interpret the proposition in the most conventional sense.

Although only a fragment of a poem he never wrote, "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" obviously held some significance for Stevens, and he chose it as the concluding poem—his own final soliloquy—of *Selected Poems*, published in England by Faber and Faber in 1953. He wrote to Herbert Weinstock of Knopf that "this is an extremely good poem with which to wind up the English book" (L 734). It is the only poem of what would become *The Rock* included in *Selected Poems*—most of these had not been completed at the time Stevens made his selection. Its tone of finality and its placement toward the end of *The Rock* are thus deceptive in that it was apparently one of the earliest of these poems to be composed, establishing the direction for those to follow and contributing the line that underlies so much of the late poetry—"We say God and the imagination are one . . ." (CP 524). Stevens' remarks to Joseph Bennett indicate that this was, for him, the central concept of the poem, and I want to pursue some of its implications, attempting what Stevens had projected for himself in the long poem never written.

Taken out of its context in "Final Soliloquy," the line would appear to be merely another of Stevens' glorifications of the imagination, the human imagination as a successor to God, and overwhelmingly readers have

interpreted it as some variation of this construction. The poem is, for Anthony Whiting, a reaffirmation of “the power of the imagination to create the ‘supreme fictions,’ the fictive constructs that are the world in which we dwell” (166). Denis Donoghue alters the line, adding *human*, to make his point that in the tradition of American poetry to which Stevens belongs, “the only way to heal the breach between God, nature, and man is by becoming God and rearranging things according to your own ‘light.’ . . . Hence we say, God and the human imagination are one. The saint is the man of thought” (15).

Donoghue’s alteration makes explicit what is assumed, with one exception, in earlier readings, that the imagination alluded to is the *human* imagination and that Stevens is elevating the human imagination to the level of God. Janet McCann, the exception, rightly observes that “it might as readily be taken to mean what it says: that God *is* imagination” (131). That is what it literally says and that appears to be the explication Stevens gave it in his own gloss in “Adagia”:

1. God and the imagination are one.

2. The thing imagined is the imaginer.

The second equals the thing imagined and the imaginer are one.

Hence, I suppose, the imaginer is God. (*OP* 202)

Here Stevens restates his thesis by substituting “the thing imagined” for God and “the imaginer” for the imagination, and he concludes that God is not simply the thing imagined, the assumption of his poetry almost to the end, but that God is in fact the imaginer, the assumption of many of the last poems. If we read the line in the way that Stevens does here—that God is the imaginer, the agent and not the object of the imagination—the poem as a whole says something quite different from its customary interpretation.

It begins, as so many of the *Rock* poems do, in an atmosphere in which poverty and weakness lead to transcendence.

Light the first light of evening, as in a room
In which we rest and, for small reason, think
The world imagined is the ultimate good.

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

Within a single thing, a single shawl
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,
A light, a power, the miraculous influence. (*CP* 524)

If God is the *source* of imagination in the poem, the imaginer, and if the speaker and his world are that which is imagined, then the meaning of the third line shifts dramatically. "The world imagined" is not the world of the speaker's imagination—in his weakness he seems incapable of imagining a world. It is the world conceived, "for small reason," as God's imagination. ("The world imagined" preserves the ambiguity of agency, as is so often the case when Stevens speaks of the imagination in *The Rock*.) Irrationally, illogically, the speaker finds comfort in thinking of himself as residing within the mind of God, and he recognizes in his hyperbole the extremity of his conception. It is the "ultimate good," the "intensest rendezvous," and, one might argue, the supreme fiction. It is the one "thought"—reality is imagined by God—that offers protection in a setting that is otherwise dark, cold, poor, and indifferent. The frailty of such a belief, the recognition that it is without basis, no more than a fiction, is conveyed by Stevens' image of the thought as "a single shawl / Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor." A shawl is a humble, seemingly inadequate form of protection, one associated with old age and infirmity, but here it is "a warmth, / A light, a power, the miraculous influence."

"[M]iraculous" would be an extravagant term if the poem were not in fact suggesting a moment of transcendence, the speaker's sense of being in touch with God by means of what is no more than a thought, a fiction. Interestingly, each time he approaches his conception of God and the imagination, Stevens' speaker backs away from the enormity of what he is saying by qualifying it. He does not say that the world imagined is the ultimate good, only that he *thinks* so, for small reason, nor that God and the imagination are one, only that he *says* so, again presumably for small reason. These qualified assertions are in keeping with the speaker's own sense of weakness and imaginative poverty. He is in the curious position of wishing to introduce a daring supposition about the nature of reality without taking credit for it. Like the speaker of "A Quiet Normal Life," the poem that immediately precedes "Final Soliloquy" in *The Rock* and is another version of it, he wishes to convey the impression that "His place, as he sat and as he thought, was not / In anything that he constructed" (CP 523).

It is thus curious that "Final Soliloquy" has so often been read as a poem about the power of the human imagination, the elevation of the self to Godlike status. As is the case with all of the late poetry, the endeavor of the poem is in the opposite direction, effacing the individual imagination or mind as a mere inhabitant of a larger imagination, a "central mind." However obscurely, the speaker senses an "order" or "knowledge" within which he rests, and attributes to this larger self, not his own best-forgotten self, the volition that "arranged the rendezvous":

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

Within its vital boundary, in the mind.
We say God and the imagination are one . . .
How high that highest candle lights the dark.

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough. (CP 524)

In the fifth stanza the conception of God as imagination is the metaphorical “highest candle” and provides the light in which the speaker makes a “dwelling.” Harold Bloom, missing the point of Stevens’ candle metaphor, asks, “How high does any single candle, even the highest, light the dark? Stevens is not being ironic, but the passage, and the poem, assert less than they seem to assert” (359). On the contrary, if Stevens’ intimations about God and the imagination are disclosed, clearly the passage and the poem assert much more than they have appeared to.

Bloom’s reading also brings up another vexing question, or at least one that has provoked readers’ speculations, and that is the identity of the “Interior Paramour” of the title, which in turn leads to questions about the poem’s speaker. Most readers have followed Bloom in labeling the paramour as Stevens’ muse. While resisting the notion that she is a traditional muse, Barbara Fisher concurs that it is she who speaks: “Perhaps for the first time, in this very late poem, we are permitted to hear the poet’s interior voice directly” (*Intensest Rendezvous* 85). Jacqueline Brogan (16) and Mary Arensberg (40), among many others, depict the interior paramour as a feminine muse-like figure within Stevens’ male authorial voice.

The assumptions behind all these readings is that the paramour must be feminine and that she is “interior” because she resides within the poet. As Barbara Fisher observes: “The literary muse, conventionally summoned from above and beyond, represents inspiration that strikes from without; she is external to the poet. In contrast, the paramour is an inner presence” (“A Woman with the Hair of a Pythoness” 48). Both these assumptions—that the paramour is feminine and that she resides inside the poet—are, I believe, mistaken, although quite understandable, and they have skewed readings of the poem, especially in regard to the poem’s speaker. *Paramour* is a notably interesting word in the context of the poem since, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it originated as a shortened form of “for love of God.” It was, in devotional language, used to refer to the Virgin, Christ, or God, and in sexual language it was and is more apt to be used to refer to the person beloved than to the lover. That is, the paramour is most often the recipient of love, and the term, it is necessary to note, need not be feminine, since it is used to refer to a beloved of either sex.

Stevens’ title indicates that the poem we are reading is the soliloquy of the interior paramour, which creates something of a problem with the cus-

tomary readings, since they identify the paramour with the feminine muse or some related feminine figure. These assumptions lead Thomas Grey, for example, to the conclusion that Stevens here “speaks in the voice of a female, no longer the silently inspiring muse, who has actually at last absorbed her poet” (49). The voice of this poem, however, sounds no different from the voice of the surrounding poems. It is clearly the aged persona whose voice pervades *The Rock* who speaks here as well, a persona whose circumstances and voice reflect those of the poet. Readers have tried to evade this problem through various strategies—suggesting, for example, that the muse speaks through the poet (Carroll 310), or that the voice is a kind of duet, male and female (Arensberg 40)—but these are unconvincing. What has not been recognized is that the Stevens-persona who speaks throughout *The Rock* is himself the interior paramour, who, it turns out, is not, and need not be, a feminine figure.

It is perhaps the word *interior* that has led to the confusion. Why would the lover be described as an *interior* paramour if she or he did not reside within the poet? In what other sense could a paramour be thought of as *interior*? The answer lies relatively close to the surface in the poem’s binary of interiority and exteriority, and it is necessary to note carefully what is enclosed, contained within, and what constitutes the container. This spatial pattern runs throughout the poem. In the first stanza the speaker thinks, for small reason, “The world imagined is the ultimate good,” and it is “in that thought” that he collects himself out of the indifferences “into one thing.” This is repeated with a slightly different emphasis to underscore the sense of being contained within some larger order: “Within a single thing,” he begins, and finds a figure adequate to his sense of being the thing contained: “a single shawl / Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor.” It is within this enclosure that he feels, obscurely, “an order, a whole, / A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous, / Within its vital boundary, in the mind.” This last line is especially revealing, since the speaker identifies the container within whose boundary he is contained as something apart from himself, and it is at this point that he says, “God and the imagination are one,” linking God as imagination with the “mind,” “knowledge,” “whole,” and “order” of the preceding lines and the “central mind” of the last stanza.

The imagery shifts at the poem’s conclusion, but it continues its spatial perspective. The thought that God is the imaginer has become the “highest candle” that “lights the dark,” and it is from this thought that the speaker makes a “dwelling,” “In which being there together is enough.” The poem begins with its speaker enclosed within a “single shawl” and ends with him enclosed within a “dwelling.” (In the preceding poem he is an “inhabitant” of a place not of his own construction.) It is the speaker’s interiority that is made emphatic throughout the poem, and it is the speaker who takes comfort in the thought that he is the paramour, the recipient of “a warmth, / A light, a power, the miraculous influence” of “that which

arranged the rendezvous." He is not the active partner in this rendezvous, the arranger, the lover; he is the beloved. His mind does not contain or imagine the world; he is contained within the world's imagination, the imagination of a "central mind." It is this extraordinary conception, inscribed ambiguously not only in "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" but also in *The Rock* as a whole, that has impeded readings of the last poems and especially of this one, which appears to wish both to disclose and to conceal the most eccentric and whimsical of all Stevens' fictions.

There is one word in the title that perhaps indicates Stevens' wish to disclose it. The poem is the *final* soliloquy of the interior paramour, and that term has appeared particularly puzzling. What is final about the soliloquy that becomes the poem? It has been taken to mean that the interior paramour will no longer appear to the poet, that is, "final" as coming at the end. A sense of finality is certainly present in many of the poems of *The Rock*, as here, but "final" has another, perhaps more relevant meaning in the title. It also carries the sense of conclusive or definitive (as in "final cause" or "final purpose") or ultimate, as in "the ultimate good," the final good, of the poem's third line. Stevens had earlier used the term in this sense, as in the "thing final in itself and, therefore good" and the "final good" of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" (CP 405). The paramour's soliloquy is final, in this sense, in that the poet says flatly and conclusively what before has been evasive—God and the imagination are one, the ultimate statement of the final fiction. It may at first appear ironic, then, that readers for the most part have been resistant to the fiction of the poem, preferring to interpret it as a conventional poem about the power of the human imagination, but the poet must bear some of the blame for that, holding back from the finality of his soliloquy and never completing the longer version that might have made it final.

Or perhaps not. Stevens' attempts at amplification usually led to further conjecture and speculation, and I am mindful of the lack of finality in my own reading of the poem, which runs counter to almost everything written about it. I would be less confident of it were it not supported by the surrounding poems of *The Rock*, although to pursue that argument—that the poetry of *The Rock* as a whole is significantly shaped by the fiction of a Godlike cosmic imagination—obviously requires a much more extensive examination. My larger argument, however, is that Stevens' late poetry, unlike his earlier notes *toward* a supreme fiction, does in fact embody a version of this fiction, not merely as description or definition but as a thought given concrete form. What he says of Santayana's vision at the conclusion of "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" applies equally well to himself: It is "As if the design of all his words takes form / And frame from thinking and is realized" (CP 511).

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Stevens' Prosody: Meaningful Rhythms

NATALIE GERBER

WE NEED TO ACCOUNT for Wallace Stevens' rhythms, because rhythm not only makes his work distinctive, but also it serves as the means by which some of his most important ideas and compensatory moves occur. I will go so far as to speculate that Stevens' refining sense of rhythm comes to take the force of philosophy for him, and to offer a sustainable mode for meaning, one that could compensate for the failure of the semantic, which as Stevens witnessed, occurred as history subjected statements to evisceration as rhetoric. By exploring how Stevens treats words not only in their referential sense, nor only in their figurative, but also in their compositional aspect—as plastic entities—we can approach the late poems and their remarkable rhythms in a way that begins to apprehend the power of their cadential speech.

Stevens' earliest metrical poems reflect his fascination with permuting rhythms and his dawning apprehension that poetic meter governs language based on the stress contours of individual words (Gerber, "Moving Against the Measure" 50). Thus if one can manipulate the stress of words, one can manipulate the range of so-called metrical rhythms. Time and again, Stevens harnesses the force of the meter to focus our attention on the sounding and resounding of the sounds of words. To demonstrate this briefly, I have chosen three sets of examples that involve different linguistic factors affecting rhythm.

The first involves contrasting stress rules between languages or across time periods. Pragmatically speaking, Stevens' appeal to a foreign noun or to the foreign pronunciation of an English derivative, as in the examples below, satisfies a requirement for metrical stress in line-final position. Yet more intriguingly this appeal also creates a contrast with the normative stress pattern of English words, particularly English nouns, which largely lack stress on their final syllables, in contrast to their French counterparts; notice the contrasting stress patterns of "falcon" versus "toucan" here.

1. In spite of hawk and falcon, green toucan (CP 30)¹

W S W S W S W S W S

2. His infinite repetition and alloys (CP 144)

w s w s w s w s w s

Likewise, the following examples show this same flexibility within a single language, at different historical times.

1. Of ocean, perfected in indolence (CP 102)

w s w s w s w s w s

2. More exquisite than any tumbling verse (CP 37)

w s w s w s w s w s

The source poem for the first line—"Sea Surface Full of Clouds," which is explored further in the next set of examples—drives home the point that when Stevens says he "like[s] words to sound wrong" (L 340) and that there is a value to the "variation between the sound of words in one age and the sound of words in another age" (NA 13), we might understand these winking gaffes and stunts not merely as garish ornaments but as play in its purest sense—as a productive value or creative force advancing his poetics.

To this end, I want to focus our attention on "Sea Surface Full of Clouds"—to show how the impressionistic changes in perception rightly celebrated in this poem are inextricably connected to changes in the quality of linguistic rhythm. Here, the italicized text below focuses on the descriptive adjective preceding the word "chocolate" in each section of the poem: they are "rosy"; "chop-house"; "porcelain"; "musky"; and "Chinese."

I

In that November off Tehuantepec,
The slopping of the sea grew still one night
And in the morning summer hued the deck

And made one think of rosy chocolate
And gilt umbrellas. Paradisal green
Gave suavity to the perplexed machine. . . .

II

In that November off Tehuantepec
The slopping of the sea grew still one night.
At breakfast jelly yellow streaked the deck

And made one think of chop-house chocolate
And sham umbrellas. And a sham-like green
Capped summer-seeming on the tense machine. . . .

III

In that November off Tehuantepec,
The slopping of the sea grew still one night
And a pale silver patterned on the deck

*And made one think of porcelain chocolate
And pied umbrellas. An uncertain green,
Piano-polished, held the tranced machine. . . .*

IV

In that November off Tehuantepec
The night-long slopping of the sea grew still.
A mallow morning dozed upon the deck

*And made one think of musky chocolate
And frail umbrellas. A too-fluent green
Suggested malice in the dry machine. . . .*

V

In that November off Tehuantepec
Night stilled the slopping of the sea. The day
Came, bowing, and voluble, upon the deck,

*Good clown. . . . One thought of Chinese chocolate
And large umbrellas. And a motley green
Followed the drift of the obese machine*

*Of ocean, perfected in indolence.
What pistache one, ingenious and droll,
Beheld the sovereign clouds as jugglery*

*And the sea as turquoise-turbaned Sambo, neat
At tossing saucers—cloudy-conjuring sea?
C'était mon esprit bâtard, l'ignominie.*

(CP 98–102; emphasis added)

These descriptive adjectives all share a disyllabic falling rhythm compatible with their scansion in the metrical template, as given here (emphasis added).

1. And made one think of *rosy* chocolate

W S W S W S W S W S

2. And made one think of *chop-house* chocolate

W S W S W S W S W S

3. And made one think of *porcelain* chocolate

W S W S W S W S W S

4. And made one think of *musky* chocolate

W S W S W S W S W S

5. Good clown. . . . One thought of *Chinese* chocolate

W S W S W S W S W S

Yet beyond this minimal requirement, the sound of each word—in particular the sound of the unstressed syllable in a weak position—varies. These variations are not random; they represent an exemplary subset of rules involving the assignment of stress to words in English, including simple vs. compound stress (“chop-house”), as well as quite subtle debates regarding the underlying weight of final vowels (“rosy”; “musky”) and the phonological reduction of sonorant sequences (“porcelain”). The crowning achievement comes in the fifth section. In isolation, the word “Chinese” has stress on its second syllable. According to a special rule of stress assignment known as “the rhythm rule,” however, the primary stress on the word “Chinese” is retracted to the first syllable in this phonetic environment in order to avoid adjacent stresses on the last syllable of “Chinese” and the first syllable of “chocolate.” The phrase “Chinese chocolate” thus fulfills the stress pattern mandated by the meter via an ingenious recasting of the language. It is just one example of many in this single section where the speaker bends and reshapes a voluble mélange of language and languages to his will.

The subtlety Stevens displays in varying the aural qualities of these several realizations shows a finesse beyond mere metricality (that is, legibility of the meter) that speaks rather to the nature of meter and of words themselves. It suggests that Stevens is not only intensely aware of the quality of words that impact linguistic rhythm, but also that he is equally aware of the quality of the meter, what it constrains and what it does not constrain, and how these qualities can be used to refract the rhythm and the nature of words.

To wit, in the third example, Stevens obtains even more philosophical effects from his canny use of grammatical words such as conjunctions, prepositions, and pronouns. Such words, also known as nonlexical words, are, by conventional wisdom, doubly abstract. First, they lack lexical content or external referent, a fact Stevens playfully exploits in lines such as “Where was it one first heard of the truth? The the” (CP 203). Second, being that they are not lexical, they have a unique capacity to have their stress disregarded. Many of Stevens’ best-known lines gaily deploy nonlexical words’ categorical linguistic and contextual abstraction to unmoor us from any final statement. As just one example, near the climax of “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,” the question that opens the eighth

canto, "What am I to believe?" (CP 404), is answered by a twelve-syllable, entirely nonlexical line, flush with equivocation:

I have not but I am and as I am, I am. (CP 405)

Since none of these words possesses primary stress, the language offers no cue to anchor the line into the meter. Instead, the words' mapping onto the meter is entirely discretionary, and one's radical freedom in electing among competing scansion (thus, competing rhythms) necessarily involves taking an interpretive stance.² This move challenges semantic functions and displays how our apparent sense of ideational content depends upon the material nature of words *qua* words and is at least partially derived from their phonological qualities, which are in themselves abstract. In short, shifts in rhythm lead to shifts in meaning.

It is this connection between rhythmic and semantic effect that becomes increasingly important as one looks at Stevens' mature writing, where he works through the philosophical dilemma facing his generation: given the vulnerability of words to the restatements and reversals of historical casualty, sustainable "meaning" cannot be found in the semantic dimension of words, since semantics is subject to being emptied out as mere rhetoric. Stevens' partial solution lies in the rhythmic dimension of words, in the potential for a certain arrangement of language to achieve individual expressivity without dependence on any perishable action or narrative. The aural or cadential becomes semantic not in reference to a particular meaning but as a possibility, a flow, to reinvigorate meaning. The remarkable cadences of Stevens' late line—with their stripped-down language and pure, elemental rhythms—are his attempt to reinvigorate meaning, not a particular meaning but the generative force of meaning itself.

Consider, for example, the late poem "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," where the temperament shifts from one of implied anxiety over the failure of objects to transfix to a celebration of the mobility of rhythms to transfigure. The poem evokes a choir of song from the recurrence of a few simple words ("Rome"; "figures"; "heaven"), or objects (a bed, a book, a candle) and the slight grammatical, syntactic, and phonological shifts that occur. In the fourth stanza, only a slight phonological change is required to smooth the newsboys' "muttering" into another murmuring. As these strident cries, full of the significance of a day's events, cede to the mere cadence of the cry, so the reluctance of matter to cede its specific embodiment gives way to the sheer aural pleasure in attending to the stream of history.

Far from grand statements of politics or powers, the late poems find tremendous resonance in rhythmic rearrangements of statement itself and in the ability of these rhythms to transfigure the simple fixtures of a room—a bed, a chair, a candle—into greater emblems of themselves. In doing so,

the rhythms overcome the physical borders of the room and open toward the vaster accommodations of the mind, where versions of freedom are obtained through the power of the imagination to reorder the real:

The bed, the books, the chair, the moving nuns,
 w s w s w s w s w s
 The candle as it evades the sight, these are
 w s em w s w s w s w s
 The sources of happiness in the shape of Rome,
 w s w s w s w s w s
 A shape within the ancient circles of shapes,
 w s w s w s w s w s
 And these beneath the shadow of a shape
 w s w s w s w s w s

In a confusion on bed and books, a portent
 w s w s w s w s w s em
 On the chair, a moving transparence on the nuns,
 w s w s w s w s w s
 s

A light on the candle tearing against the wick
 w s w s em w s w s w s
 To join a hovering excellence, to escape
 w s w s w s w s w s
 s

From fire and be part only of that of which
 w s w s w s w s w s

Fire is the symbol: the celestial possible. (*CP* 508–09)
 w s w s w s w s w s em

When the implicit connection between rearranging the objects of a room and rearranging the words of a stanza (the Italian word for room) is made explicit, the possibilities of sustaining rhythm and sustaining interest become clear. The inquisitor of structures—of poetic as much as physical forms—obtains a space of freedom from crafting poetic lines whose ample rhythms exceed the seeming limitation of their form:

It is a kind of total grandeur at the end,
 w s w s w s w s w s
 With every visible thing enlarged and yet
 w s w s w s w s w s
 No more than a bed, a chair and moving nuns,
 w s w s w s w s w s
 The immense theatre, the pillared porch,
 w s w s w s w s w s

The book and candle in your ambered room,

w s w s w s w s w s

s s

Total grandeur of a total edifice,

w s w s w s w s w s

s

Chosen by an inquisitor of structures

w s w s w s w s w s em

For himself. He stops upon this threshold,

(w)s w s w s w s w s em

As if the design of all his words takes form

w s w s w s w s w s

And frame from thinking and is realized. (CP 510–11)

w s w s w s w s w s

It is this power of variable rhythms to articulate variable, slightly modified propositions that the poems ultimately celebrate. After poems that skeptically entertain a search for “The poem of pure reality” derived from “the sight / Of simple seeing, without reflection” (CP 471) come these poems of pure reflection. Prosodically, these poems use the continuous shifts in the rhythm of a few words or a simple phrase to convey the shifting ground of consciousness, which underlies speech. The transfiguration of seemingly solid meanings into the remarkably vacillating aural bodies of the words becomes a metaphor for the similar transformation of the seemingly solid world of things into the imaginative subjects of the mind.

Or, as Stevens writes in an earlier poem, “Description without Place”:

Thus the theory of description matters most.

It is the theory of the word for those

For whom the word is the making of the world,

The buzzing world and lispings firmament.

It is a world of words to the end of it,

In which nothing solid is its solid self. (CP 345)

This pleasure in sounds merely circulating is not only a prosodic matter, though meter does provide the pressure that heightens our attention to the circulation and shape of words’ continuously changing arrangements, and makes them resonant. The sounding and resounding of words becomes, as Stevens puts it in “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,” “Part of the res itself and not about it”:

The poet speaks the poem as it is,

Not as it was: part of the reverberation
Of a windy night as it is, when the marble statues
Are like newspapers blown by the wind. He speaks

By sight and insight as they are. There is no
Tomorrow for him. The wind will have passed by,
The statues will have gone back to be things about.

The mobile and immobile flickering
In the area between is and was are leaves,
Leaves burnished in autumnal burnished trees

And leaves in whirlings in the gutters, whirlings
Around and away, resembling the presence of thought,
Resembling the presences of thoughts, as if,

In the end, in the whole psychology, the self,
The town, the weather, in a casual litter,
Together, said words of the world are the life of the
world. (*CP* 473–74)

The mistake most people make, Stevens cautions, is to treat words like statues, as things about and not as things in themselves. For Stevens, words of the world are the life of the world only to the extent that they circulate, since their reverberations can suspend monumental status or fixed meaning. Far from any Horatian or classical drive to erect poems as monuments, he elects to make poems that are part of the occasion, not a monument to it. They are in themselves a system of exchange, a circuit of rhythm, in which the mobility of words resembles the mobility of thought.

In order to emphasize this aspect of words, their rhythmic mobility, and not their referential monumentality, Stevens uses meter in order to make words return upon themselves and modify their sensibility. As he writes,

Bringing out the music of the eccentric sounds of words is no
different in principle from bringing out their form & its eccentricities (Cummings): language as the material of poetry not its mere medium or instrument. (*OP* 196)

Stevens conceives language not as what the melody is played upon (that old dilemma between sound over sense in Yeats) but as the melody or the play itself (sound as sense or as Stevens says, "There is a sense in sounds beyond their meaning" [*CP* 352]). Recognizing Stevens' own intuitive understanding of the play of words and the ability of meter to augment our awareness of this play is thus crucial to capturing how his poems evade

the modernist fate of words as emptied gestures by turning to their material nature and harnessing it as a grounds for experience capable of abstraction and usable as a principle for composition.

Thus, when Stevens says, as he famously does in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," that "above everything else, poetry is words; and that words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds" (NA 32), it is not merely a felicitous or coy statement, nor an erratically ordered one, but one bred of an intensive inquisition into the underlying structure and malleability of the phonological nature of words and their particular process regarding the structuring of sound into semantically viable units of language.

This particular aspect has not been fully elaborated in the excellent criticism written about Stevens' sound play.³ Since this literature focuses on his use of sonic devices, such as rhyme, alliteration, and auditory puns, which all have immediate semantic effects, it does not explore the possibility that the sound of words admits play without involving a particular semantic register. Yet it is the particular aural properties that derive from the sound structure of words and the ways in which these properties can be used to show how words can modify each other not merely semantically but also phonologically that Stevens' artful practice teaches us.⁴ An art begun of "sounding words wrong" (to paraphrase Stevens) and playing with the variable sound of words evolves into a more finely tuned practice of merely sounding words and deriving what pleasure there is from the vividness of their expression. The remarkable plasticity Stevens achieves from this seemingly simple decision to treat words in this way as compositional elements is responsible for these metrical poems' versions of freedom that are Stevens' answer not merely to issues of aesthetic form but also to a particularly modernist dilemma of what work art can accomplish and what constitutes a defensible mode of heroism.

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Notes

¹The assumptions of my scansion method are that iambic pentameter consists of a template of five duple feet organized into a series of alternating weak (w) and strong (s) metrical positions; that the maximal position size corresponds with a prosodic unit of linguistic weight known as a phonological foot; and that a strong syllable of a polysyllabic word is prohibited from occurring in weak positions. An extrametrical position (em) indicates linguistic material that is not factored toward the meter and typically occurs at major syntactic boundaries. An underscore beneath a single syllable indicates that this syllable possesses stress (even though it is mapped into a weak metrical position or its contemporary pronunciation lacks stress). An underscore beneath two or more syllables indicates that all the linguistic material designated maps into a single metrical position. The foregoing terms address scansion marks found underneath a line of verse; they represent the meter. In contrast, scansion marks above a verse line indicate the actual stress rhythm of the language; these marks designate exceptional

circumstances; in this article, the few instances where an “s” is indicated above a verse line show that the stressed syllable of a polysyllabic word is exceptionally mapped into a weak position via a well-known proviso frequently referred to as “inversion.” See Hanson and Kiparsky for a discussion of the theory on which this methodology is based.

²Charles Altieri writes about the “philosophical grammar” conveyed by the operator “as,” saying, “The ‘I am’ is not a matter of locating identity in a stable substance about which descriptions can be posited. Rather, it is relational or aspectual—a matter of the intensity with which a reflective consciousness becomes the exponent for a situation, and thus takes on the activity of testifying for what a given stance can make of experience” (*Painterly Abstraction* 343). The linguistic rhythm all the more reinforces this shift toward relative stances as it is entirely ungoverned and a matter less of identity within the meter than positing different relationships to meter and hence different rhythms.

³The titles that follow discuss Stevens’ sound play: *Poetry, Word-Play, and Word-War in Wallace Stevens* and “From Etymology to Paronomasia: Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, and Others” by Eleanor Cook; *Stevens and Simile: A Theory of Language* by Jacqueline Brogan; *The Metaphysics of Sound in Wallace Stevens* by Anca Rosu; and several essays in the special issue of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, *Stevens and Structures of Sound*, edited by Jacqueline Brogan.

⁴Stevens uses the sound structure of words to create rhythmical interest by manipulating the ways in which the combination of words can change the inherent stress pattern of each. His variable rhythms also frequently invoke the different classes of words (grammatical versus content words, simple versus compound words) and the different processes of stress assignment relevant to them. He allows the sounds of words to modify each other not merely semantically but also phonologically.

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Collecting Oneself: The Late Poetry of Wallace Stevens

JULIETTE UTARD

TO CELEBRATE WALLACE Stevens' birthday and the publication of *The Collected Poems* conjointly is to reduplicate a connection Stevens himself orchestrated fifty years ago. Indeed, Stevens' last book, a collected edition, appeared on the eve of his 75th birthday,¹ on October 1, 1954. Stevens' personal copy, now at the Huntington Library, bears on its first page the signatures of the friends and poets who had gathered for the double celebration: Marianne Moore, Lionel Trilling, W. H. Auden, Conrad Aiken, and many others. Perhaps it was then and there that Stevens really became the "poet of poets in Connecticut."

The choice of date for Stevens' last book was intentional. Stevens had carefully programmed the occasion as early as 1952.² Looking back, it appears that his very first grouping of poems had marked yet another birthday celebration: in 1908, Stevens had assembled "The Little June Book" as a present for Elsie Moll's birthday on June 5.³ Obviously, collecting and celebrating were closely linked in the poet's mind. Yet *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* was different in that Stevens was commemorating his own birthday. Fifty years later, the gesture seems oddly self-celebratory. It makes one wonder what exactly it meant for Stevens to collect himself into a collected edition, "at so much more / Than seventy" (CP 522). This, then, was a time for collecting, and more specifically, a time for collecting oneself. The stakes were both poetic and existential, since by collecting his poems, Stevens was really trying to repossess his work.

NOT MERELY WRITING

Walter Benjamin in his 1931 essay entitled "Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting" gave prominence to the act of *collecting* as a significant and creative practice. More recently, Susan Stewart in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* studied the collection as a "mode of control and containment" (159) by which the collector "constructs [a] narrative of interiority" (158), and transforms "history . . . into space, into property" (xii). The purpose of this essay is to suggest ways in which a collection of poetry partakes of the greater ensemble of collections as defined by Benjamin and Stewart.

The importance of Wallace Stevens as a collector cannot be overemphasized and it would be a mistake to consider it peripheral to his poetic activity. A study of his correspondence shows how Stevens modeled his collections of poems after his collections of objects, deriving from the latter both a source of inspiration for specific poems, and a sense of composition for the groups. The practice of poetry in its modern form has much to do with that of collecting, defined as the gathering of existing verbal material and poems into a signifying format, as opposed to creating *ex nihilo*. Stevens himself wrote in his notebooks that “the acquisitions of poetry are fortuitous: trouvailles. (Hence, its disorder)” (*OP* 195). In Stevens, “collecting oneself” has both a psychological and a literary meaning, as in the following quotation: “I must *collect myself* and put *order* in this jumble, if I can” (*L* 114; my emphasis). To collect oneself is to gain (or regain) control of oneself, to deliberately calm oneself or prepare oneself psychologically. The statement seems to imply that such control may be achieved through the creation of an order.

The verb “to collect” appears again in Stevens’ “Adagia” in two definitions pertaining to the practice of poetry and the process of the mind. This again signals its potential as a key word in Stevens’ theoretical reflections. “Thought,” he writes, “tends to *collect* in pools” (*OP* 196; my emphasis). Here ‘to collect’ is used as an intransitive, suggesting the image of an autonomous gathering, something like a coalescence of thought. In addition, Stevens wrote: “The *collecting* of poetry from one’s experience as one goes along is not the same thing as merely writing poetry” (*OP* 185; my emphasis). In that adage, Stevens points to a fundamental aspect of his poetics by defining two modes—not just one—within the practice of poetry. Poetry is not “merely writing”; it is also a matter of “collecting.”

SELECTED AND COLLECTED

Stevens in his last years understood the “collecting of poetry” as an editorial process, by which he could recreate—and become the author of—his *oeuvre* “as finally magnified” (*CP* 515). Collecting poetry, as opposed to writing poetry, can be understood as the process by which poems are chosen, then assembled into groups, for the public and publication. It also means creating a kind of reserve of poems from which the poet may or may not choose to retrieve elements for exhibition, as in an art collection. “The collection’s space must move between the public and the private, between display and hiding” (Stewart 155). My aim here is to interrogate the practice of poetry in its editorial dimension, at the intersection of the private and the public, choosing to focus specifically on the tension between selecting and collecting.⁴

The years from 1950 to 1955 were years of intense collecting activity for Stevens. They were framed in by a first attempt at a *Selected Poems* in 1950 and *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* in 1954. In the meantime, Stevens delivered a paper entitled “A Collect of Philosophy” (University of Chi-

ago, 1951); more important still, he witnessed the reissuing of his earlier volumes of poetry and collected his lectures into book form. *The Necessary Angel* is, in a way, the prose counterpart to *The Collected Poems*. In the preface, Stevens defines the book as a “collection” of papers (NA vii), and the essay entitled “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” itself reads as a collection of quotations and reading notes.

The shift from selected to collected in the editing history of Stevens can read as simply a shift in publishing strategy; but in fact it reconfigures Stevens’ poetry, both contextually and textually. Although the collected, supposedly comprehensive, advertises an objective grouping, the selected, based on choice, affirms its subjectivity. Tony Sharpe in *Wallace Stevens: A Literary Life* regarded both projects as part of the “institutionalization” of Stevens and summed up the complicated fate of the selection in the following words:

The other significant step in the consolidation of [Stevens’] reputation lay in the compilation of a Selected Poems: which involved a volume which was projected but never issued, a volume which was issued but should not have been (and was withdrawn), and, last of all, the *Selected Poems* issued by Faber in 1952, which marked Stevens’s first volume for the British market. (185)

The series of obstacles that stood in the way of this selected edition can be seen as innate to the problem of choice; all selections—because they suppose a selector, a selectivity, and selectee—are a battleground for authority in which poets and publishers compete as makers of the book. In comparison, Stevens’ collected was issued, only two years later, in a relatively smooth context, despite Stevens’ long-lasting reticence.

In a letter to Knopf dated April 22, 1954, Stevens made it clear again that, although he did not like the idea of a collected, he was willing to accept merely because he wanted a new volume to be published on his birthday.⁵ His utmost concern seemed to be one of timing, not of format. In another illuminating letter, also of April 1954, Stevens commented on both formats rather disparagingly:

A collection is very much like sweeping under the rug. As for a selection I always thought that someone else should make it. But the question has come up again. I had written to [Knopf] to say that I was content to have a collection published and that is probably what will be published because if anything is to be published at all more or less at the same time as my birthday it ought to be started at once since it takes about six months to manufacture a book.

I have no particular objection to a selection against a collection. They are different in the sense that people read selected poems but don't buy them. On the other hand, they buy collected poems but don't read them. I am willing to do anything that Knopf wants. (L 829)

Stevens' nonchalance concerning his format of publication cannot, however, be taken at face value. Generally speaking, he had extremely specific ideas about what he wanted his books to look like—type, format, and cover alike. He thought that a selection should be made by someone else and had in fact suggested Marianne Moore for the task (see letter to Herbert Weinstock of November 5, 1951). This strikes me as an interesting suggestion as it displaces the question of authorial responsibility, transferring it onto another poet. But Knopf wanted Stevens to preside over the choice, a more traditional formula by which the poet becomes a reader of his own work.

Although the idea of a selected originated in Knopf's decision to export Stevens overseas for the British public, Stevens was always more interested in a national version, a project that was abandoned by Knopf. In a letter to Barbara Church, Stevens mentioned the upcoming publication of the Faber & Faber *Selected Poems*. He commented on its format and concluded by noting that collecting oneself into a book also meant, paradoxically, losing a sense of self and authorship:

There is going to be a *Selected Poems* published in London shortly. I returned the proofs yesterday. The book seemed *rather slight and small* to me—and unbelievably irrelevant to our actual world. . . . As one grows older one's own poems begin to read *like the poems of some one else*. (L 760; emphasis added)

Reading his poems had in fact always seemed to Stevens a harrowing experience at the worst, an experience of estrangement at the best.

The question of size and format is of importance in the editing of a selection. Small selections are usually issued with the idea that we are given "the quintessential Stevens," whereas large selections capitalize on something like "the portable Stevens." In this respect, Stevens' propositions were, again, both specific and innovative. He was in favor of either an enlarged selection, or a series of small selections. This last suggestion of a collection of selections, so to speak, is an interesting concept, in that it incorporates the selection into the principle of series.

Another thing that Stevens' *oeuvre* teaches us is that collected editions, which are different from complete editions, are always selective themselves. *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* came out only after Stevens had supplied Knopf with "a list of the things [he didn't] want to go into a collected edition" (L 829). Caught between his preference for an enlarged

selection and the resulting abridged collection, Stevens was obviously working toward an intermediary format, obeying his own poetic constraints.

Another proof of that lies in his suggestion of a title for the book, designed, he wrote, to “get away from the customary sort of thing” (L 831). Choosing a title for his book also meant, of course, appropriating his *oeuvre*. But there again Knopf imposed the “machine-made title” (L 834) of “The Collected Poems” instead of “The Whole of Harmonium: Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens.” Stevens knew these were crucial battles; in the poem “Of Ideal Time and Choice,” he asked the following question: “Of how / Much choosing is the final choice made up, / And who shall speak it?” (NA 88).

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

With *The Collected Poems*, Knopf certainly had in mind the definitive Stevens; but Stevens himself, “at so much more / Than seventy,” was deeply aware of the necessity of preparing his own legacy. Benjamin insists on the link between collection and transmission: “[I]nheritance is the soundest way of acquiring a collection. . . . Thus it is, in the highest sense, *the attitude of an heir*, and the most distinguished trait of a collection will always be its *transmissibility*” (59–67; emphasis added). Stewart herself bases her distinction between collection and souvenir on the fact that “[w]e go to the souvenir, but the collection comes to us. The collection says that the world is given; we are inheritors, not producers, of value here” (164). Stevens clearly had a preference for the definitive and had a habit of discarding manuscripts and earlier versions of his poems. Collecting his work was a way for him to clarify questions of copyright and literary ownership for after his death. As he wrote to Barbara Church, “I have held off from a collection for a number of years because, in a way, it puts an end to things. But I am reaching an age where I don’t have much choice: it is good housekeeping for me to do what I’m doing” (L 832).

Stevens was working toward an order. The fact that there was a prose corollary to the “collecting of poetry” shows that Stevens was ready to compile his work and make it accessible, but in a format closely controlled and previously authenticated. By recomposing his work into a coherent whole (“The Whole of Harmonium”) and by privileging the definitive versions of his poems over their earlier stages, he was not just sacrificing to an editorial ritual; he was also containing and controlling his poetic archive.

Collecting as a form of “good housekeeping” recalls what Jacques Derrida discusses in *Archive Fever*. Derrida’s working definition of the archive has to do with an authority based on “housing” official documents.

[T]he meaning of “archive,” its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the

residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians." (2)

Derrida then adds, "The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignment, that is, of gathering together" (3), so that gathering together in the same place (house or book) becomes clearly identified as an archival gesture.

Collecting oneself was an authorial and archival gesture for Stevens. He was closer to a monumental approach to the book than a documental one. His idea of a book of poetry placed him in the lineage of poets such as Stéphane Mallarmé, as opposed to the open, overflowing collections exemplified by Whitman and Pound. In fact, Stevens' collecting practice was highly symbolical, implying not just a sense of order, but also the sense of an ending.

THE ROCK: COLLECTING AND ENDING

Providing the sense of an ending is precisely what *The Rock*, Stevens' last collection of poems, is devoted to. "Rock, of valedictory echoings" (CP 179) wrote Stevens in an early poem. *The Rock* reads as a valediction. Placed at the end of *The Collected Poems*, it functions as its epilogue, and ushers us into the "final soliloquy of [Stevens'] interior paramour."⁶ The choice of title for this last collection is eloquent and suggests Stevens was playing with the idea of adding the last stone to his poetic edifice.

The Rock is usually referred to as a section, because it never appeared separately from *The Collected Poems*. It does not seem to have acquired full status as a collection. Yet in its involvement with closure and finitude, it is as close as possible to Stewart's definition of a collection. In fact, although Stewart does not include books of poetry within her study of the collection, her remarks are often extremely relevant to Stevens and possibly other poets as well. Stewart notes that collections "play with the fire of infinity" (159) inasmuch as they pursue a form of seriality in objects. Benjamin, on the other hand, plays down the nostalgic impulse at work in the collecting practice. Yet even his description, based on his own experience as a book collector, hinges on closure and summons the architectural metaphor:

The most profound enchantment for the collector is the *locking* of individual items within a magic circle in which they are *fixed* as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them.

Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious,
becomes *the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property.*
(60–61; emphasis added)

In composing *The Rock*, Stevens was tempted to “lock” the volume “within a magic circle,” to “fix” it within the architecture of a “total book.” The rock was both “The stone from which he [would] rise[], up—and—ho,” and “The step to the bleaker depths of his descents” (CP 528) in a paradoxical movement typical of the “archive fever.” Sharpe rightly argues:

In consenting to the collection Stevens had internalised the reality of his own dying, and the poems about being old and looking back . . . seem to be written from the centre of his own condition. (188)

To take one example, the poem “Madame La Fleurie” is carried out “like a duet / With the undertaker” (CP 177). It is, word for word, the poem that takes the place of a funeral. From the laying down of the corpse to the sealing of the chamber, and lastly to the ponderous rhythms of “The black fugatos . . . strumming the blacknesses of black” (CP 507), the scene is clearly one of burial. Even the title (literally “Mrs. Flowered”) suggests a tomb (a feminine word in French) covered with flowers. In retrospect, the “peculiar plot” (CP 501) mentioned in the opening poem and the “cure of the ground” (CP 526), prescribed in “The Rock,” both become related to a funeral context. This was convincingly argued by Charles Berger in *Forms of Farewell*:

The poems from Stevens’ last phase—everything from 1950 onward—can all be considered versions of the *tombeau* in that they devise figures for the poet’s own legacy after death. . . . In “The Rock,” the presence of the tomb is made explicit, whereas most of the lyrics from this period inhabit a landscape so pervaded with end signs as to make the objectification, or even the mention, of death redundant. (143–44)

With *The Rock*, Stevens cast a retrospective glance on his life and work and seemed to be writing his own epitaph. The poems are highly self-referential, not only in the sense that they refer to themselves as poems, as in the poem “Long and Sluggish Lines,” but also in the sense that they refer to Stevens himself, through his achievements (“Ariel was glad he had written his poems” [CP 532]) and in the specific references to his age (“*Seventy Years Later*” [CP 525], “at so much more / Than seventy”).

Stewart observes that the collection, like the souvenir, “contracts the world in order to expand the personal” (xii). In line with this argument, Stevens’ self-collecting took the form of a belated, unobtrusive return of

autobiography. He, who had so consistently worked to “suppress the merely personal” (L 413) from his poetry, had chosen a date of publication centered on the self. The choice stands in sharp contrast with Whitman’s Fourth of July celebration, exactly one century before. Was it, then, against the Whitmanian collection that Stevens was writing? In publishing *The Collected Poems* on his birthday, Stevens had apparently decided to conflate the private and the public on what he knew would be one of the last occasions. But he had also found a way of circumventing the (funerary) pomp of a collected, with its pre-elegiac overtones, by re-centering it on his birthday.

THE UNCOLLECTED LATE POEMS: “BECOMING POSTHUMOUS”

A collected mood characterizes the poems gathered in *The Rock*. Randall Jarrell depicted them as “calmly exact” (qtd. in Sharpe 188). It is also a characteristic of the collecting practice to belong to a meditative, reflexive mood, while the “mere writing of poems” (to modify Stevens’ phrase) belongs to the time of production and action. This solemn quality is emphasized in French, where a book of poetry is called *recueil*, a word stemming from *recueillement*, meaning “contemplation” or “meditation,” especially in a religious or funerary context.

Just as there is a characteristic collectedness in *The Rock*, there is a characteristic un-collectedness in the last poems, which manifests itself in images of dangling and suspension. “As at a Theater” mentions things “not recollected,” such as “A bubble without a wall on which to hang” (OP 119). The idea of being suspended may have originated in the un-collectedness of these poems, the fact that they were not attached to a group or volume. Indeed, Stevens’ last poems were gathered only after his death, first in *Opus Posthumous*, then in the “Late Poems” section of the Library of America edition. Stevens died within a year after publishing *The Collected*, a little before his 76th birthday. It is probable that most of the last poems were written with the knowledge that they would never be a part of the big book. Therefore, *Late Poems* reads as a kind of *anti-collection*, a collection in which Stevens situated himself beyond the book, already in the realm of the posthumous.

The word “posthumous” was etymologically written “postumus,” meaning “born after the death of the father” and, more generally, “coming after”; only later did it take on the meaning of “post-humus” (after the burial), by the erroneous adding of an “h.” Stevens’ last poems belong to the aftermath of *The Collected Poems* and it is as such that they are posthumous. The sick man’s voice emerges from “here in the North, late, late” (OP 118). “The Role of the Idea in Poetry” mentions “a time existing after much time has passed” (OP 121). In the same poem, lateness becomes a region, echoing the compelling title “The Region November”: in the phrase “clouds that hang lateness on the sea,” “lateness,” a direct object of “to hang,” becomes objectified, as if it hovered over the sea. The last poems almost consistently develop a time frame that is existentially *late*.

Becoming posthumous was already a concern in the previous collection. For instance, "Vacancy in the Park" was about withdrawing from the world and leaving the place vacant. In *Late Poems*, though, there is a new exhilaration involved in this withdrawal from the world, as if a freedom had been newly acquired: "This is an escape / To principium, to meditation. / One knows at last what to think about / And thinks about it without consciousness, / Under the oak trees, completely released" (OP 137). Coming after the collection of collections, the last poems may in fact have been construed as a kind of miraculous surplus, an improbable production exceeding the clear, well-constructed edifice. It is almost as if the last poems were free, at last, of the responsibility of closing the book and could share in the pure pleasure of poetry, such as, for instance, the pleasure of repeating, unhampered by the fear of repetitiousness.

Choosing out of *himself*, out of everything *within him*,
Speech for the quiet, *good hail of himself*, good hail, good hail,
The peaceful, blissful words, well-tuned, well-sung, well-
spoken. (OP 118; emphasis added)

This essay originated in a bilingual reflection on the word "collection." Although it exceeds the realm of poetry, this term has much to say about the practice of poetry. It is particularly relevant in the life and work of Wallace Stevens, where collecting (in its various forms) was a constant. But to collect oneself into a single book, as into "a single shawl" (CP 524), is a highly symbolic exercise. From Stevens' last book to his last uncollected poems, the elegiac mode persists, though perhaps with a shift from the discretely autobiographical or *self-collected* to the *collective*; from the lonely chorister (CP 534) of *The Rock* to the "Voices in chorus" and "Drifting choirs" (OP 118) of the end.

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Notes

¹"I am going to be 75 on October 2 and, although I have not paid the slightest attention to birthdays heretofore, I do feel a certain amount of interest in this one because it at least marks the beginning of the last quarter" (L 846).

²In a letter to Alfred A. Knopf dated Sept 2, 1952 Stevens wrote: "My 75th birthday falls in the autumn of 1954. That may be an appropriate time to publish a selected volume. In any event, I favor a selected volume as against a collected volume" (L 759-60).

³A second book was in progress for her following birthday, obeying the same format of twenty poems: "That is to be in my second 'Book' for you, which you will not see for a year—or almost—on your next birthday" (L 109).

⁴For lack of space I am not including a precise discussion of Stevens' *Selected Poems* in their different versions. This is nonetheless work in progress. In comparing exter-

nal choices with Stevens', I am using Stevens' lists of poems, which he prepared for the various readings he gave toward the end of his life. These lists—the choice of poems and their order—can be regarded as Stevens' working sheets for the selected; they are clearly linked, once again, to a sense of occasion.

⁵"I think that I should have difficulty in putting together another volume of poems, as much as I prefer that to a collection. But I might as well face the fact. If, therefore, you are interested in a collected volume, it is all right with me. It would save a lot of work, assuming that you have a complete set of my books which you could use to work from, if I could send you a list of the things that I don't want to go into a collected edition. Moreover, this would expedite the job. My seventy-fifth birthday falls on October 2, which is only about five months away" (L 829).

⁶"Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" was included in the Faber & Faber *Selected Poems*, rather belatedly, upon Marianne Moore's suggestion. Stevens placed it at the very end of the volume. "[T]his," he wrote, "is an extremely good poem with which to wind up the English book" (L 734). In that particular book, the poem has indeed fulfilled the role of "final" poem or epilogue.

⁷This phrase is borrowed from Jeremy Tambling's *Becoming Posthumous: Life and Death in Literary and Cultural Studies*.

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Poems

Elegy

Donald Justice 1925–2004

There is no art of time
But only art & time.

In fall the ditches bloom—
Thistle, asters, broom.

The loneliness of clocks
Seeds rust in every lock.

The loneliness of time
Is the final truth of time.

If I can think of time
As nothing more than time

I have conquered art
Though time is outside art.

Murder trumps rhyme;
Art hates these brutal times.

And this is all my art,
My negligible art—

To say a quiet good-bye.
Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye.

Joseph Duemer
South Colton, N.Y.

Reviews

Poetry for Young People: Wallace Stevens.

Edited by John N. Serio. Illustrations by Robert Gantt Steele. New York: Sterling Publishing Co., 2004.

The first thing you notice about this book, an introduction to Wallace Stevens' poetry for young readers, is the sheer beauty of the watercolor illustrations. The cover image depicts realistically the scene of "The Load of Sugar-Cane": a convincingly muscular boatman, wearing a red turban, poles his flat-bottomed boat through the Everglades; two white birds fly up before him; a few brilliant shafts of light cut across the dark trunks of trees, illuminating the swamp with multicolored mists, shadows, and reflections. The luminous color harmonies are a fitting analogy for the patterns of natural resemblance that are the subject of the poem. The other illustrations in the book are equally beautiful and equally effective.

Serio's four-page introduction presents Stevens' life without oversimplifying it or talking down to the reader. He selects a few choice anecdotes and quotations to highlight those aspects of Stevens that will most interest children: his relations with his mother, father, and siblings; his delight in nature; his mischievous sense of humor; his love of walking and swimming—and his love of reading. To convey the romance in Stevens' courtship of Elsie, Serio suggests an activity: "If you want to see what Mrs. Stevens looked like, find a Mercury Dime. . . . They were minted between 1916 and the mid-1940s." He does not sugarcoat life: "Stevens knew that life is not always cheerful and that it sometimes includes pain or loss." And he makes clear the centrality of poetry to Stevens: "He believed poetry helps people to live their lives, for it comforts them during sorrow and releases joy during happiness."

Each poem is introduced with a sentence or two that provide an easy way into the poem. On "Tea": "*Have you ever felt warm and cozy drinking a cup of hot chocolate indoors while a storm raged outdoors? As winter approaches, this person enjoys a cup of tea in a parlor and feels transported to a tropical paradise.*" Difficult words or references are glossed unobtrusively after each poem.

The twenty-five short poems, most from *Harmonium*, give a remarkably full sense of Stevens' range of interests, including the fearfulness of "Domination of Black" and the cold realism of "The Death of a Soldier." The illustrator has taken full advantage of Stevens' vivid natural imagery. There are lots of animals (rabbit, cat, lion, firecat, bucks, horse, turkey, blackbirds, peacocks); tropical and exotic locales (China, Lhasa); sun, moon, and stars; and the contrasting beauties of day and night and of the shifting seasons.

This is an introduction to Stevens' poetry for "young people" of all ages.

Glen MacLeod
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13 Ways of Looking at Images: The Logic of Visualization in Literature and Society.

By Mervyn Nicholson. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Red Heifer Press, 2003.

This is a difficult book to evaluate; indeed, its difficulties are manifold and overlapping, requiring careful attention before the reader can turn to the particular argument Mervyn Nicholson sets forth regarding the “logic of visualization.” The central difficulty—from which subsidiary difficulties flow—begins before one has read a single word of Nicholson’s text. How to situate this book within contemporary critical discourse? The text, which appears to present itself as a literary study of images, seeks to be read innocently and directly, without any mediation; the ability to read with such innocence, alas, has receded over the horizon. Every critical reading is interrogative. In any case, *13 Ways of Looking at Images* is not such an innocent piece of work as it might at first appear.

In physical appearance, *13 Ways of Looking at Images* is at first unremarkable. Anyone who reads literary criticism will be familiar with the heft of the volume, the slickness of the dust jacket, and the semiotics of title-plus-subtitle common to the genre. But a suspicious reader—a reader without innocence—will be struck by an absence of dust jacket endorsements from other critics, finding instead some strangely free floating and anonymous text that the suspicious reader suspects may be the author’s own, in which he refers to himself in the third person. Opening the volume, a reader finds, after all, four blurbs for the author’s previous book, *Male Envy*, the first taken from a brief review posted at Amazon.com, the others from reputable literary scholars. The statements are brief and generic: “A provocative and penetrating study that ranges widely in intellectual history, literature and culture,” writes Tilottama Rajan; “hard hitting and grand, and also, it needs saying, right,” says Donald Wesling (a critic for whom this reviewer has deep respect). Yet, the reader without innocence might raise a critical eyebrow at such generic statements. “Surely this is going too far!” exclaims a reader more innocent than the author of this review. “Everyone knows that jacket copy is not to be taken seriously. Surely you are being unfair,” says such a reader. Perhaps.

On the back flap one finds a description of Red Heifer Press: “a small, independent press devoted to the publishing and audiopublishing of works of unusual interest and merit in literary fiction, poetry, documentary memoirs, belles lettres, Torah/Judaica, sheet music, and scholarship in the Humanities.” The name of the press will perhaps cause the suspicious reader, the reader lacking in goodwill and innocence, to do a bit of research. Some nagging association will send such a reader to the Internet, where he will discover that in radical Jewish and fundamentalist Christian eschatology the ashes of a perfect red heifer are required to cleanse those who will build the Third Temple in Jerusalem. These religious beliefs are closely linked to extremist political movements in Israel and the United States. Perhaps it means nothing, and surely an author cannot be held responsible for the name of the press that publishes his work. The innocent reader will again level the charge of unfairness. But Nicholson draws heavily on Freud’s early work in *13 Ways of Look-*

ing at *Images*, and Freud reminds us that everything is susceptible to interpretation, so why not the name of a literary press? Surely the name was not chosen randomly.

Nicholson's use of Stevens is iconic, if not entirely arbitrary. In addition to his allusion to Stevens in the title, he appends one stanza of "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" to the end of each chapter, printing it in bold typeface and centering the lines rather than left-justifying them as Stevens had. It is difficult to make direct connections between the particular stanzas and the material in the chapters to which they are appended. Although the book is well footnoted with a magpie's collection of sources that range from Francis Galton and Northrop Frye to Wallace D. Wattles' self-help book *The Science of Getting Rich*, it lacks a bibliography or index.

There are many interpretive strategies and hermeneutical methods; the reviewer is not required to adopt the approach the author prefers. In an interpretive space organized along more and less sympathetic ways of reading, the reviewer ought to choose the approach most productive of understanding. Since Nicholson explicitly offers his text as a "critique" (though "a critique in passing") of poststructuralism and New Historicism, he invites the application of these approaches to his own work. It's only fair.

In the event, Nicholson mostly takes a pass on the business of critiquing poststructuralism and the New Historicism, which he dismisses as being "pre-occupied with the abstract, the non-sensory, with abstract reasoning and abstract thinking, with arguing and intellectual conflict" (16). Nicholson then proposes to put in place a new way of reading literature founded on what he calls "imagethinking." He begins this process by rejecting the Platonic view of art as a mirror held up to nature. This territory has been thoroughly mapped out by Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, but while Rorty is content to shatter the mirror of philosophy and art and make a mosaic from the pieces, Nicholson is much more ambitious: he wants to replace one comprehensive model of thought with another. He offers *13 Ways of Looking at Images* as an introduction to the logic of imagethinking, or, as his subtitle has it, a "logic of visualization in literature and society." The jury is still out on whether Rorty succeeded in his anti-essentialist project, but he certainly made all forms of philosophical essentialism more difficult for those who wish to build comprehensive systems.

Nicholson begins, then, with a double rejection: first, of the approaches of contemporary criticism and, second, of the Platonic view of the relationship between human creative thought and the rest of reality. This is Nicholson's most interesting notion. The mind can stand outside itself only by the agency of the imagination, itself a function of the mind. (He also makes the important point that what we think of as reality consists of a relation of images.) Unfortunately for Nicholson's argument, the double rejection of the materialist critical approaches of poststructuralism and New Historicism and at the same time the idealist tradition of the mirror of art deriving from Plato leaves very little critical ground to occupy. In the end, Nicholson's argument fails to convince. In place of current approaches to literature, Nicholson offers an amalgam of neo-Platonism, high romanticism, Arnoldian uplift, and a kind of

golf-coach doctrine of visualization that amounts to a denatured, New Age theosophy of the image:

The immediate antecedent to the New Age idea that visualizing creates our reality is found in the 1920s, in an earlier phase of “meta-physical” thought, as it is called, in writers such as Florence Shinn (*The Game of Life*, 1925), Emmett Fox (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 1936), and the influential Judge Thomas Troward, whose *Edinburgh Lectures on Mental Science* (1909) had a large readership. (236)

Such sources may of course be useful in delineating the intellectual history of visualization, but Nicholson is using them as a basis for his logic of visualization. Even readers less materialist in orientation than this reviewer may find such sources problematic, especially when they are more or less equated with Shelley’s note, in a letter to his friend Thomas Peacock quoted by Nicholson: “Such is the human mind, and so it peoples with its wishes vacancy and oblivion” (237).

“Unless we visualize what we want, we aren’t very likely to get it” (238), Nicholson writes (with the certainty of a New Age guru) of Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry*. It is in this discussion of Shelley that Nicholson’s project fully reveals itself, however. It is, in fact, his response to the critical schools he begins by dismissing. Nicholson proposes that poets—and by extension readers of poetry—be elevated to their rightful role as “legislators.” In other words, it is high romantic codswallop.

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Phone: 800.832.4042

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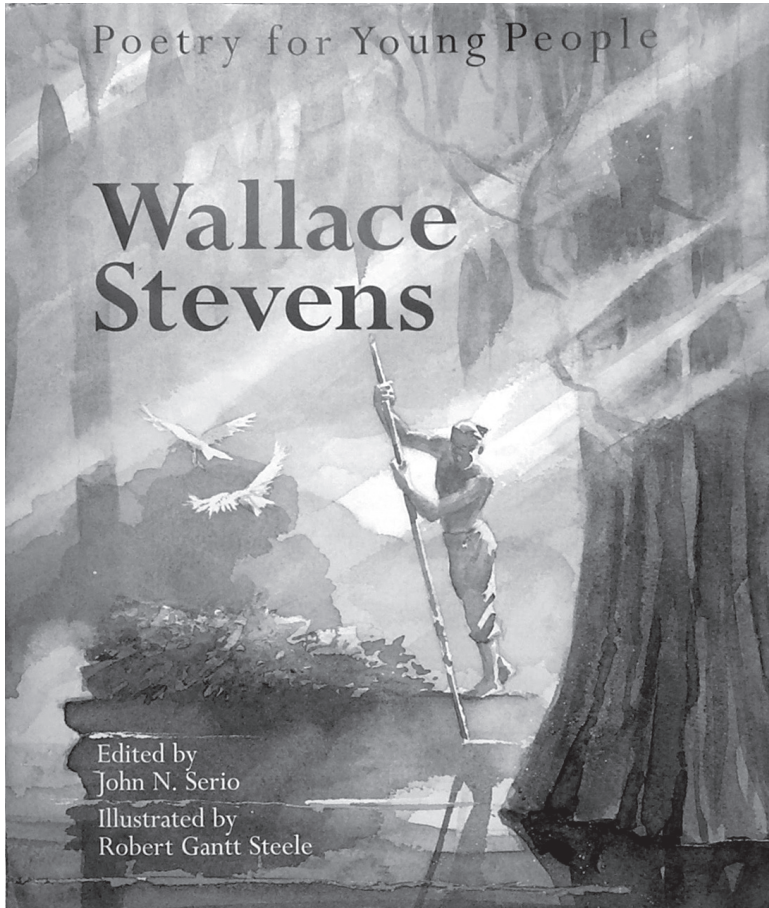
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