

The Wallace Stevens Journal



Stevens' Erotic Poetics

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Contents

Special Issue Stevens' Erotic Poetics Edited by Angus Cleghorn

Introduction	— <i>Barbara Fisher</i>	131
Erotics of Sound in Wallace Stevens	— <i>Lisa Goldfarb</i>	138
“Keener Sounds”: Stevens, Intimacy, and Gender Politics	— <i>Carolyn Masel</i>	159
Angels in Florida: Stevens and Sublimation	— <i>Charles Berger</i>	171
Love, Wine, Desire: Stevens' “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” and Shakespeare's <i>Cymbeline</i>	— <i>Edward Ragg</i>	183
“Both Sides and Neither”: Stevens, Santayana, and the Aestheticism of Androgyny	— <i>David R. Jarraway</i>	210
Poems		226
Reviews		231
News and Comments		243

Cover

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The Wallace Stevens Journal

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Introduction

BARBARA FISHER

I DID NOT UNDERSTAND why Wallace Stevens' poetry should be so seductive. My first encounter with it occurred in 1971 during an undergraduate summer course, American Literature after 1890. After the prose selections, we read Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. Then the professor hit us with "The Snow Man," "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," and "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black-bird." He introduced Stevens to us as the "poets' poet," the "enigmatic poet," the "philosophical poet" and commented on the influence of George Santayana and William James during the young poet's Harvard years. He spoke of Stevens' lifelong affinity for Plato. Finally, he assigned "Peter Quince at the Clavier." I was hooked—head over heels in love with a "philosophical" poetry I did not understand.

Years later, when I was introduced to Stevens' daughter, Holly, she told me that her father had held onto his beloved two-volume edition of Plato's *Dialogues*, the Benjamin Jowett translation that he had acquired just after leaving Harvard. He had annotated the margins, she said, and they would have been a treasure trove for Stevens scholars, but when his library was auctioned at the Parke-Bernet Galleries after his death, both volumes had disappeared. I was in graduate school at the time, knee-deep in dissertation research, and had begun to think that Stevens' poetry was rooted in eros. Not only the sensual, lyrical passages, the ecstatic moments, the hedonist sensibility, but all of it: yearning aimed at the unknown; descents into utter negation; the contemplative turn, the love of abstraction, the attraction of "mere Being." Eros prompted the journeys and quests, sparked the riddling impulse, the giddy, bizarre language, and startling *outré* pronouncements. Eros fed urgent themes of motion, cycles, seasons, change. And, most surely, eros was present in the depth of feeling, the significance attached to clouds, snow, sky, mountain, a garden, a black-bird, the sea. I knew Stevens had read Freud. Was Freudian "sublimation" of libido the dynamic that rerouted sexual energy into Stevens' poetry? Or was it Plato's construct of eros-as-philosopher, hungry to know, always searching, moving from sensual objects toward more rarefied realms of gratification? I suspected a Stevensian merger of the two great theorists of eros.

What drew me and so many others to these playful, riddling, sonorous, often outrageous poems? It could be the music, from a single flute-like melody to fugal flights, from variations on a theme to grand symphonic orchestrations—"ten thousand tumblers tumbling down" (*CPP* 325). Stevens' oddball language was intriguing, even before one had fully absorbed the idea that for this poet, "The gaiety of language is our seigneur" (*CPP* 284). Who else would style the buzzing of crickets a "primitive ecstasy" (*CPP* 283), as Stevens does in "Esthétique du Mal"? There was the warm painterly coloration, the sharply defined images; coffee and oranges in a tropical setting, a green vine "angering for life" (*CPP* 77); "junipers shagged with ice" (*CPP* 8) in winter; that astonishing portrait of Walt Whitman—"His beard is of fire and his staff is a leaping flame" (*CPP* 121)—reminiscent of some Blakean engraving. Sudden explosions of energy might burst from a poem: "So, in me, come flinging / Forms, flames, and the flakes of flames" (*CPP* 77). Throughout Stevens' poetry, there was the continual turning from fertile thought to physical sensibility—from mind to body and back again to thought—set forth so simply in the opening tercet of "Peter Quince at the Clavier."

There were other attractions: teasing, quirky, provocative titles such as "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" and "Of Bright & Blue Birds & the Gala Sun," and the frank sexuality of Susanna in "Peter Quince at the Clavier," bathing naked, sensually aroused, then startled by the "roaring horns" (*CPP* 73) of lust-ridden Elders. But danger was not always attached to desire in the poetry. There was also that long-delayed joyous copulation in the final verses of "Sea Surface Full of Clouds":

The wind
Of green blooms turning crisped the motley hue

To clearing opalescence. Then the sea
And heaven rolled as one and from the two
Came fresh transfigurings of freshest blue. (*CPP* 85)

The combined freshness and pleasure and beauty of this virtuoso conclusion grants us a rare moment in modernist poetry. One must go back to the seventeenth century, to the opening lines of George Herbert's "Virtue," to find anything like it:

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridall of the earth and skye. . . .

I hope it is not beyond the scope of an introduction to Stevens' erotics to point out that his daughter and only child was born in August, exactly nine months after "that November off Tehuantepec" (*CPP* 82). On the single voyage in which the poet was accompanied by his wife—a fifteen-day

cruise in 1923 to California by way of Havana and the Panama Canal, they sailed through the Gulf of Tehuantepec. Holly Stevens notes in *Letters* that they actually passed the Mexican city in late October, citing her mother's journal entry at the time (L 241). For whatever reason, Stevens chose to situate the scene in November. And 1923, of course, was the year of publication of *Harmonium*, his first volume of poetry.

From *Harmonium* right through the very late poetry, Stevens offers the reader a curiously cool yet engaging intimacy in meditations such as "Sunday Morning"—or the alien consciousness of a Snow Man. Surely, there is restraint, a tight control of emotion as much as of metrics in these reflections. The remarkable thing is that this poet could choose to inhabit a woman's mind as easily as that of a man, or snow man. The late "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" is couched in the Paramour's voice, and the equally late "The World as Meditation" dramatizes not Odysseus but his ever-waiting spouse, living a beguiling, half-awakened dream scenario, a fantasy that owes as much, perhaps, to Joyce's Molly Bloom—Stevens had a copy of *Ulysses* from its first printing in 1922 (L 231)—as it does to Homer. Perhaps Stevens merged Homer's Penelope with his own beautiful but distant wife, with her long fine golden hair:

She would talk a little to herself as she combed her hair,
Repeating his name with its patient syllables,
Never forgetting him that kept coming constantly so near.
(CPP 442)

One senses that this poet takes pleasure in the sight of a woman combing her hair. He seems to like women, or the idea of woman. There is something *companionable* in his treatment of the sex, something inviting, welcoming.

This equable attitude toward the feminine in Stevens' poetry is not necessarily shared by his fellow modernists. It departs radically from that of his most gifted male contemporaries. Eliot, in the first section of "The Waste Land"—"The Burial of the Dead"—pictures a sexually desirable hyacinth girl, "Your arms full, and your hair wet," but the character who returns with her from the hyacinth garden is speechless and impotent, neither "Living nor dead" (54). In "The Tomb at Akır Çaar," Ezra Pound's narrator is obsessively engaged with the object of his desire—a mummified body he has been trying to get into for a long time: "I am thy soul, Nikoptis. I have watched /These five millenia, and thy dead eyes / Moved not, nor ever answer my desire'" (15). The poetics of necrophilia?

Stevens gives us maidens who "stray impassioned in the littering leaves" (CPP 55); a triple goddess, "Sister and mother and diviner love" (CPP 70), serves as his muse; and the poet imagines God Himself responding to the virgin Saint Ursula with "a subtle quiver, / That was not heavenly love, / Or pity" (CPP 17). Is this blasphemy or Dionysian inspiration? Mortality is present in all three of these instances, of course, but physical death is

linked with fecundity, productivity, as against physical or aesthetic impotence. In "Sunday Morning," we are told "Death is the mother of beauty" (CPP 55); the One of Fictive Music is "of the sisterhood of the living dead" (CPP 70); and Saint Ursula, who is in love with her Seigneur, must be pierced by arrows and die a violent death before experiencing divine union. In contrast with the theme of death as morbid, unhealthy, obliterating, as in the cases cited, Stevens' poetic universe honors the natural cycle of coming to be and passing away. Death is not only the dark mother of beauty, part of the apocalyptic and diurnal cycle of existence, but also the intensifier of passion. As for impassioned maidens, we discover that Stevens has chosen a delicious pun for those who stray: "littering" carries the animal sense of bringing a number of young to birth as much as it suggests the fall of dry leaves. Here is "gaiety of language" distilled to an elegant simplicity—generation and corruption married in a single dactyl, with just the slightest salting of humor.

Yet the god of love has his dark underside in Stevens' poetry. Moments of stimulation, pleasure, amorous attraction, and the promise of romance are counterbalanced by painful elements: unfulfilled yearning, unrequited passion, enforced solitude, the embrace of emptiness, and black negation. Nowhere is this elemental aspect of eros, the sense of terrible loss, more striking than in "Farewell to Florida," the poem that opens *Ideas of Order*. This was Stevens' second volume, published some thirteen years after the appearance of *Harmonium*, and the emotion-laden "Farewell to Florida" is that of a lover who is forced to tear himself away from the love object, who feels torn out of his body, like the snake that "has left its skin upon the floor." Is the beloved Poetry herself? Florida? the South? Or does the heat that invests this poem, the tonalities of heartbreak and despair, suggest a human love? Harold Bloom called the second stanza "so erotic . . . that the reader needs to keep reminding himself that this Florida is a trope of pathos . . . not desire itself" (110–11). But one wonders.

Her mind had bound me round. The palms were hot
As if I lived on ashen ground, as if
The leaves in which the wind kept up its sound
From my North of cold whistled in a sepulchral South,
Her South of pine and coral and coraline sea,
Her home, not mine, in the ever-freshened Keys. . . .
(CPP 97)

Again, the ship coursing north appears to reflect a disturbed state of mind—as well as graphic erotic encounters:

This darkened water cloven by sullen swells
Against your sides, then shoving and slithering,
The darkness shattered, turbulent with foam. (CPP 98)

Classical scholar David Campbell comments on Sappho's love lyrics, "When her subject is the turbulence of her emotions, she displays a cool control in their expression." Her images are sharp, he notes, and she lingers on them, but "above all, her words are chosen for their sheer melody" (262). Maybe we can understand Stevens' sullen swells, his snakelike shovings and slitherings similarly, as sheer sound and lingering images. In "Farewell to Florida," north and south are cloven apart and the "high ship" carries the speaker to a climate empty of joy: "My North is leafless and lies in a wintry slime / Both of men and clouds, a slime of men in crowds" (*CPP* 98). Happily, the separation does not last; North and South accomplish a reunion in the later poetry.

Perhaps the most eloquent passage on the union of opposites in Stevens' poetry, and possibly the most beautiful, is to be found in the second section of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction." Here, at the very center of the canon, the poet accomplishes a perfect fusion of cool abstraction and vivid figuration. In it, the contemplative mode and erotic energy achieve a delicate counterbalance—of dependencies, affinities, the embrace of opposites—and we are moved by this contrapuntal music toward a final resonant chord. It should be read slowly, *largo*:

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

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

Music falls on the silence like a sense,
A passion that we feel, not understand.
Morning and afternoon are clasped together

And North and South are an intrinsic couple
And sun and rain a plural, like two lovers
That walk away as one in the greenest body. (*CPP* 339)

The essays that compose this special issue are markedly divergent in approach. Selections chosen to illustrate Stevens' erotic poetics range from *Harmonium* to *The Rock*, while contributors' varying perspectives illuminate the protean versatility of eros throughout the canon. Lisa Goldfarb's informed and wide-ranging study, "Erotics of Sound in Wallace Stevens," outlines the many ways that Stevens "redirects the erotic dimension into the sounds of his language." With impeccable scholarship she moves from Stevens' preoccupation, in his last years, with the writings of Paul Valéry to earlier prose works and exemplary poems such as "Autumn Refrain,"

"Somnambulisma," and, notably, "The Red Fern." Goldfarb constellates a universe of sound in Stevens that serves to "collapse the distance between humans and nature." Carolyn Masel's "Keener Sounds: Stevens, Intimacy, and Gender Politics" captures the intensity, the moments of vulnerability, the "echoic doubling" in Stevens' verse, and theorizes a "modulation of erotic desire into poetic anguish." Her reading of "The Idea of Order at Key West" is possibly the most satisfying, and most challenging, interpretation of that poem in current criticism. Masel reveals its elusive turns and changing modalities with a rare precision and suggests the way gender attitudes determine its sonorities.

Charles Berger's virtuoso "'Angels in Florida'" focuses on the sublimation of the procreative drive to the creation of poetry. Sprinkled with familiar Bloomian blossoms of rhetoric—*catachresis*, *askesis*, *aporia*, "crisis poem"—Berger's essay is yet original, rich in insight, and often surprising. His reading of Stevens' pivotal Key West poem supplies a "gendered" alternative to Masel's analysis, a dialectical opposition most radically manifest in the representation of the solitary singer of the shore. Where Masel presents the poem as a "transition from masculine rhetoric to intimacy [that] wholly re-orient[s] the speaker in relation to a feminine other," Berger reads its "erotically arousing sound-scenarios" as "the masculinist allure of the sea-shore topos," and suggests that "the singing woman's schematic schism between voice and cry [is] programmatically exaggerated by the male poet's defensive needs." Stevens places the striding human figure at the point where earth, sea, and sky conjoin. Berger provocatively locates the *genius loci* of "The Idea of Order at Key West" among a "counter-erotic line of sea drifters." The link he proposes between Stevens and the younger Hart Crane is both thought-provoking and reasonable, while his treatments of "Stars at Tallapoosa," "Evening Without Angels," and "The Men That Are Falling" encapsulate Stevens' erotics as an ambivalent "tendency to play at the margins of oceanic origin, summoning and avoiding engulfment through acts of verbal legerdemain."

Edward Ragg's brilliantly detailed examination of "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" approaches Stevens' erotics of language from two linked perspectives: political and pastoral. First published in 1942 in *Partisan Review*, this enigmatic poem places its readers in a wine garden in the midst of war. Ragg portrays a "passionately ambiguous" Stevens refusing to be engulfed by partisan politics, a poet who imagines instead an abstract, composite Burgundian vineyard—an impossible ideality in the face of the "humiliation of the French under Nazi occupation." His reading delicately aligns the Francophile Stevens with Voltaire and with *Candide's* concluding injunction that merges the pastoral with the practical: "Il faut cultiver notre jardin."

But "Montrachet-Le-Jardin," in Ragg's reading, is "significantly, a love poem." He carefully illustrates how Stevens employs Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* to trade mistaken identities and deaths with misplaced desires,

Montrachet-Le-Jardin's invented appellation ironizing actual and imaginative projection as both a violent and intrinsic source of beauty and peace. He shows how tensions between the earth and our monuments ask us to return to skeletal first ideas, like that other notable poem of 1942, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," as desires turn love and wine into war. In both these poems, as elsewhere, Stevens adumbrates an ancient truth: "Et in arcadia ego"—death too inhabits arcadia.

In "'Both Sides and Neither': Stevens, Santayana, and the Aestheticism of Androgyny," David R. Jarraway explores the lifelong influence of George Santayana on Stevens, moving from "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" in the very late poetry back to the exchange of sonnets between the older and younger man during Stevens' Harvard years. Jarraway argues that the essence of the erotic poetics in both men is "to establish a necessary ambivalence about gender identity," and he expands on themes of "vagueness," "self-opacity," and "androgynous figuration" in Stevens, Santayana, and others, summoning an impressive array of critics and Queer theorists to illuminate his points. His thoughtful exposition ranges from Abolitionist concepts of friendship and "Catholic eroticism" to touch on Melville and Henry James, Whitman and Frost. In his discussion of Catholicism, so pertinent to Santayana's last years, Jarraway accepts as fact the claim of Stevens' "deathbed conversion," so strongly denied by the poet's daughter. His nuanced reading of "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" is nonetheless persuasive, based as it is on a classical ideal of friendship. As Jarraway puts it, "that splendidly specific enlargement of the human self beyond its libidinally 'routine limitations' . . . might be thought the primal attraction of Santayana for Stevens from the very beginning to quite likely the very end of his poetic career." In truth, one might add, each of the essays in this collection has, in its own way, shown precisely that enlargement of the human self in Stevens' poetry, a spirit that transforms and drives eros beyond its routine limitations.

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Erotics of Sound in Wallace Stevens

LISA GOLDFARB

I

DURING THE LAST winter months of his life, Wallace Stevens took on the unusual project of writing prefaces to two of Paul Valéry's philosophic dialogues, an undertaking that would, as he wrote in a letter to Barbara Church, "keep [him] busy for some time" and enable him "to know Valéry better" (*L* 855). Though Stevens initially hesitated to commit himself to the project, he soon found that Valéry's dialogues gave voice to his own central poetic questions concerning the relation between poetry and physical life. His prefaces highlight Valéry's lifelong study of the human impulse to create—poetry in its greatest sense—and include strings of quoted passages Stevens admired. In the one that follows, Stevens quotes the words of Eupalinos, Valéry's semi-fictional architect, who speaks of his own all-consuming desirous drive toward beauty:

"I feel my need of beauty, proportionate to my unknown resources, engendering of itself alone forms that give it satisfaction. I desire with my whole being. . . . The powers assemble. The powers of the soul, as you know, come strangely up out of the night." (*CPP* 886)

A bit later in the dialogue, Valéry's Socrates speaks again of the architect/poet's tremendous desire to encompass the world. Valéry, through Socrates' voice, emphasizes in his repetitions and in the mounting power of the passage our intrinsic human desire to merge ourselves with the surrounding world:

Nous voulons très exactement que les Cieux innombrables, et que la terre, et que la mer, et que les cités; et que les hommes aussi, et les femmes particulièrement; et leurs âmes, et leurs forces, et leurs grâces; et que les animaux comme les plantes;—et même nous voulons naïvement que les Dieux,—ne soient tous ensemble, et chacun selon sa beauté qui s'adapte à notre désir. . . . Nous croyons que toutes les choses et que toute

l'opulence du Temps, ne sont qu'une bouchée pour notre bouche, et nous ne pouvons penser le contraire. (*Oeuvres II* 140–41)

[We expressly want that the numberless Skies, that the earth, that the sea and cities; and also that men, and particularly women; and their souls, and their forces, and their graces; and that the animals like the plants;—and also we naïvely want that even the Gods—could be gathered together, each according to its own beauty which would adapt itself to our desire. . . . We believe that all things and all the opulence of Time, is only a mouthful for our mouths alone, and we cannot think otherwise.]¹

I begin this essay with Stevens' preface to *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte*, not to dwell on the dialogue itself nor on the larger relation between these two great poets, but rather as a lens that may help us to understand Stevens' erotic poetics of sound. For in *Eupalinos*, Valéry likens his architect to a poet much like Stevens, one with a voracious appetite for life, who longs to merge with the external world by transforming words into sounds nearly as physical as the architect's materials. Socrates speaks of these words:

Il faut donc ajuster ces paroles complexes comme des blocs irréguliers, spéculant sur les chances et les surprises que les arrangements de cette sorte nous réservent, et donner le nom de 'poètes' à ceux que la fortune favorise dans ce travail. (*Oeuvres II* 113)

[It is necessary to adjust these complex words like irregular blocks, speculating on the chance encounters and surprises that arrangements of this sort offer us, and to give the name of poets to those whom fortune favors in this work.]

Stevens is, of course, one of those favored by fortune, his words and particularly his sounds giving form to desire. Yet, much as he admired Valéry's work for the way the latter poet "traced so much of man's art to man's body" (*CPP* 885), fusing the abstract and the sensuous aspects of poetry, Stevens' relationship to this vital connectedness, better described as the erotic dimension of poetry, is not expressed quite as directly nor as consistently as his comments on Valéry might suggest. As readers of his poetry well know, Stevens, in early work such as "Peter Quince at the Clavier" and "The Idea of Order at Key West," celebrates in sensuous language how "the body's beauty lives" (*CPP* 74). Often, however, in later work, Stevens' poetry seems to ignite such desire for unity, yet his poetic speakers often meet with the starkness of an unyielding natural world

and a sense of our separation from it. It is the premise of this essay that the way Stevens wrestles with connectedness or the lack of it is as intrinsic to the erotic dimension of his poetry as are the great Florida poems. Further and most important, the relation between eros and sound is elemental in Stevens' verse, for it is through sound that Stevens seduces his readers into his experience of and desire to embrace the physical world.

Given the complexity of the subject of eros in Stevens' work, it is not surprising that an abundant critical literature has grown to address it. Scholars quite different in their approaches have devoted attention to aspects of Stevens' treatment of eros: some focus particularly on those poems that consider the subject of romantic love, while others turn their attention to love of place or the linguistic dimensions of the topic. All in their various ways, however, seem to follow upon Helen Vendler's assertion that the most powerful presence in Stevens' work, and one especially in the early criticism of the poet much misunderstood, is desire—or "passionate feeling" (10). Barbara Fisher explores desire in relation to "[t]he full range of emotion in Stevens' work" (xxiii), and in her thorough study demonstrates how it is "the presence of eros and the transformation of eros that determine the vital structures and the configuration of the entire canon" (xxiv). Also central to the subject of eros are Eleanor Cook's exploration of Stevens' word-play and Angus Cleghorn's understanding of his rhetoric, especially in the way their respective studies suggest the primary relationship between Stevens' unusually inventive language and the erotic dimensions of his work.

If Stevens may be said largely to abandon eros as *subject* in his later work, as Cook suggests (72), he redirects the erotic dimension into the sounds of his language and, crucially, into the dynamic between poetic speaker and reader. As Cleghorn suggests, Stevens "makes room for a universal apprehension of the non-human, physical world—[so] that our relation to the earth charges the body of the reader called into the poems" ("Embracing Theatrical Distances" 1). The way that Stevens "makes room" for the physical world is through his use of sound; he embeds eros into the very experience of reading the sounds of a poem. If the language of his late verse is not as sensuous as that of the earlier poems, the sounds, at times, strain toward the kind of completion or satisfaction for which the reader yearns along with the poet. In the pages that follow, I will examine Stevens' prose to show the erotic underpinning of his poetics with particular attention to the centrality of sound. I will then turn to Stevens' poems to demonstrate their sensuous development, from the early sonorous lyrics to the later work, from "Peter Quince at the Clavier," "Autumn Refrain," and "On the Road Home" to "Somnambulisma," "The Red Fern," and "World Without Peculiarity." By examining the arc of his verse, we will see how Stevens poignantly practices the erotics of sound, inviting his readers into his evolving poetry of earth.

II

*There is nothing that I desire more intensely than to make
a contribution to the theory of poetry. (L 585)*

Any discussion of Stevens' poetics, and particularly one that focuses on eros and sound, must begin with the sense of urgency with which Stevens voices many of his lectures and essays. As the above passage from his 1948 letter to William Van O'Connor suggests, Stevens very much wanted to contribute to the theory of poetry, and his intense desire to do so bears a relation to how he perceived the state of his contemporary world—both physically and spiritually—and the importance of poetry in it. In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," "Two or Three Ideas," and "The Irrational Element in Poetry," Stevens measures the poet's role and the place of poetry in relation to "the pressure of reality" (CPP 650), the "age of disbelief" (CPP 841), and "[t]he pressure of the contemporaneous" (CPP 788). His various definitions of poetry and his discussions of the poet's role are marked by repetitions and insistent questions that bespeak the importance of his task—"to elevate the poem to the level of one of the major significances of life" (CPP 845), to articulate how "it deploys itself throughout the lives of men and women" (CPP 842). As Alan Filreis, James Longenbach, and Jacqueline Brogan have shown, Stevens' work shows the mark of his deep awareness of the pressure and politics of contemporary life and of the corresponding sense of fragmentation in the modern consciousness. He voices his essays, as he does his poems, against his own and his contemporaries' sense of loss (of divine figures) in a culture ruptured by two successive world wars. Much of Stevens' discussion of poetics rests on repairing this rupture, hence the tone of urgency with which he sometimes speaks. From essay to essay, in "Adagia" and *Letters* as well, Stevens' discussions and definitions of poetry sound a familiar refrain: "One feels the desire to collect oneself against all this in poetry as well as in politics" (CPP 788). The poet must, Stevens contends, lift the imagination so that it "press[es] back against the pressure of reality" (CPP 665).

When we consider eros, then, in its largest sense, both as the expression of love and desire that often overcomes our reason and as the expression of a force that unifies people and nature, Stevens' poetics are profoundly erotic. If there is one constant note in all of his prose, it is that poetry is a gathering together and, therefore, it resists dispersal. Stevens suggests in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," for example, that it is the role of the poet, and of poetry, to find figures to which the modern mind can "yield" (CPP 644). Because the poet, he writes, is "*un amoureux perpétuel* of the world that he contemplates" (CPP 661), his task is to bring the poet and reader together, "to make his imagination theirs," so that "his imagination become[s] the light in the minds of others" (CPP 660–61). When he writes of resemblance, the starting point for metaphor, in "Three Academic

Pieces," he refers to our human need or "desire for resemblance" (CPP 690), and again uses the unifying language of eros. Of resemblance, he asserts, "It is significant because it creates . . . relation. . . . It binds together" (CPP 686). Similarly, in his short acceptance speech "On Receiving the Gold Medal from the Poetry Society of America" in 1951, Stevens refers again to the active erotic force that drives poetry. Interestingly, he feminizes the "genius of poetry" (CPP 833) and writes, "Her power to change is so great that out of the love and thought of individual poets she makes the love and thought of the poet, the single image" (CPP 834).

To discuss the process by which the poet works to meet his reader, Stevens uses the language of desire. We can see this most sharply in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words." That Stevens uses Plato's *Phaedrus* as his starting point for the discussion of the "nobility" of poetry is worth noting, for scholars have debated Plato's true focus, as they now do Stevens' poetry: Which subject was Plato (and now, Stevens) really arguing about—the nature of love, or language and rhetoric? Is there a relation among the various parts of the dialogue (and the various dimensions of Stevens' verse)—the recitation of speeches, the discourses on love, and the debates about the relative merits of oral versus written language—or are these disparate components of a loosely structured body?² In Stevens' essay, we can hear the resonance of these questions and the blending of the two subjects of love and language. When he writes of the exchange between poet and reader in Plato's dialogue, Stevens refers to their partnership—the speaker, "in this case Socrates," is "insistent and [his] insistence moves us"; he is a "speaker . . . who, for the moment, feels delight" (CPP 644) and communicates that delight to us. Stevens continues to refer to the active, vital dynamic between speaker and reader throughout the essay using the language of eros: he writes of the responsiveness on the part of the reader, whose ability to give himself over to the poetry of a given era is contingent on a number of factors. The poet who can strike the right tone or find the right word is the "potent" one, whose imagination "penetrates life" (CPP 712, 733); when he is "able to make his imagination theirs," "he fulfills himself" (CPP 660).

The language of desire and fulfillment persists throughout Stevens' writing on poetics—in his continued discussions of the dynamic between poet and reader, of the poet's own process, and in the larger metaphor he draws between the poetic imagination and the earth. In "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," Stevens considers the relationship between rational and imaginative ideas, and uses the vocabulary of desire. Consider the following passage in which he repeats variations of the word "satisfy" no fewer than twelve times:

Since we expect rational ideas to satisfy the reason and imaginative ideas to satisfy the imagination, it follows that if we are

sceptical of rational ideas it is because they do not satisfy the reason and if we are sceptical of imaginative ideas it is because they do not satisfy the imagination. If a rational idea does not satisfy the imagination, it may, nevertheless, satisfy the reason. If an imaginative idea does not satisfy the reason, we regard the fact as in the nature of things. If an imaginative idea does not satisfy the imagination, our expectation of it is not fulfilled. On the other hand, and finally, if an imaginative idea satisfies the imagination, we are indifferent to the fact that it does not satisfy the reason, although we concede that it would be complete, as an idea, if, in addition to satisfying the imagination, it also satisfied the reason. (*CPP* 668)

It seems that by repeating the word "satisfy," Stevens urges readers of the essay to focus less on the apparent subject (the relationship between imaginative and rational ideas) and more on joining the poet's search for poetic satisfaction. He certainly underlines this point in his comment that "if an imaginative idea satisfies the imagination, we are indifferent to the fact that it does not satisfy the reason," for, after all, Stevens suggests, the aim in poetry is fulfillment, "a momentary existence on an exquisite plane" (*CPP* 786), and only secondarily rational comprehension. In "Three Academic Pieces," his sensuous language becomes more pronounced as he attempts to describe poetry's singular way of satisfying the desire for resemblance: "in the act of satisfying the desire for resemblance it touches the sense of reality, it enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it" (*CPP* 690). Stevens, in his use of words such as "touches," "enhances," "heightens," and "intensifies," clearly borrows words, so often used to describe sexual experience, to make of poetry an analogously palpable physical act.

Importantly, by describing the poetic process as a nearly erotic act, the poet both expresses his own sensibility and imaginatively taps into the larger, more "potent imagination"—that of natural creation—which, Stevens writes in "The Effects of Analogy," "is his affair to try to get at" (*CPP* 712). Stevens emphasizes the physical dimension of the poet's relation to his work by referring several times to the poet as a "biological mechanism." In "The Effects of Analogy," he writes: "It is agreeable to think of the poet as a whole biological mechanism and not as a subordinate mechanism within that larger one" (*CPP* 716). He stresses the erotic force behind much of his poetry when he writes in "Adagia," "A poet looks at the world somewhat as a man looks at a woman" (*CPP* 905), and underscores its physical nature in his assertion, "The body is the great poem" (*CPP* 908). Crucial to our discussion of particular poems, however, is the way Stevens then conflates the activity of poetry (between the poet and his subject, as well as poet and reader) with the earth and nature. "The earth," he writes in another one of the "Adagia," "is not a building

but a body" (*CPP* 902), and it is this body of earth—and our human experience of it—that Stevens wishes to embrace and encompass in poem after poem.

The question that Stevens' whole discussion of the dynamic relationship between poet, reader, and earth begs, at this point, is just how the poet ultimately accomplishes this task. How, he asks in "The Noble Rider," does the poet lure the modern reader—burdened by the "pressure of . . . events on the consciousness" (*CPP* 654) and by the loss of an overarching belief system—into the poetic process, not as an observer but as a participant? How does he make of poetry an "act" analogous to the "incessant creation" (*CPP* 687), equal to the force (not merely the presence) of nature and earth? At the heart of Stevens' erotic poetics lies his understanding of the role of sound—and we will see this most strikingly in the poems themselves. But before we turn to the poetry, it is worth bearing in mind two points that will guide our readings. As many of Stevens' critics have noted, Stevens understands sound first as transformation and, second, as expressive of the irrational component of poetry.³ Both qualities of sound, in turn, inform his poetic practice.

Stevens suggests sound as the agent of poetic transformation in several of his letters, among them two early ones to Elsie during their courtship. Relating to her his visit to the National Academy, he shares his thoughts about the difference between visual and auditory memory and asserts that it is sound that has the power to bring back a memory or presence of another world. As enthusiastic to see the German pictures in the Metropolitan as he was, when Stevens discusses Schubert he writes, "It is ten years since I heard [Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*]. An echo ten years old—surely the world is a magical place. But think of music a hundred years old.—There is a difference between the thought of motions long ago and the thought of sound long ago" (*L* 117). The difference Stevens points to is the physical quality of sound that renders or seems to recreate experience. He underlines this physical quality and its power and continues, "So that ten-year-old do-re-mi-fa reanimates—and by closing the eyes—it is ten years ago" (*L* 117).

Although Stevens refers specifically to musical sound here, in other letters and in essays (see especially "The Effects of Analogy," part 3), he clearly associates and works to transpose musical to poetic sound. In another 1909 letter, Stevens composes what seems more like a prose poem than a letter, musing on a rainy day in New York City. He again points to the transformational nature of sound when he describes the sound of the rain as changing the city into the country. "The sweet sound of the down-right rain changes the city into something very much like the country," he writes, and, in listening to the rain, he seems to anticipate "Human Arrangement," his later poem on the evening rain: "So much for the sweet sound of the down-right rain!—The whistles on the river are drowned in it, the noise of the Elevated is swallowed up, a neighborly mandoline is

quite lost (except in snatches.)—One long, unbroken, constant sound—the sound of the falling of water.—A sound not dependent on breath. One sound made up of a multitude” (L 145).

For Stevens, a vital poetry that binds the reader to the poet and both to the earth rests on his understanding of its irrational component. “Poetry,” he writes in “Adagia,” “has to be something more than a conception of the mind. It has to be a revelation of nature” (CPP 904). He suggests that in order to create such a revelation, the poet must, largely through his use of sound, and particularly repetition, dislocate the reader’s search for fixed meaning and instead involve him in the search for satisfaction or consummation. We saw earlier how, when Stevens discusses the distinction between rational and imaginative ideas in “The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet,” he uses repetition to reroute the reader’s path. He points once again to the auditory quality of repetition as a way of engaging the reader in “Two or Three Ideas,” when he discusses the principle of style and emphasizes the role of sound in the process.

Now, if the style of a poem and the poem itself are one; if the style of the gods and the gods themselves are one; and if the style of men and men themselves are one; and if there is any true relation between these propositions, it might well be the case that the parts of these propositions are interchangeable. Thus, it might be true that the style of a poem and the gods themselves are one; or that the style of the gods and the style of men are one; or that the style of a poem and the style of men are one. As we hear these things said, without having time to think about them, it sounds as if they might be true, at least as if there might be something to them. (CPP 844–45)

Stevens here again practices the repetition that dislodges the reader’s search for rational meaning. His language is replete with repetitions that urge the reader to suspend rational expectations and accept the “truth” of the proposition through sound. He emphasizes this point in the last sentence when he asserts that the sound of the truth trumps the thinking about the proposition—“without having time to think about them, it *sounds* as if they might be true” (my emphasis).

Stevens’ essays, as we have seen, are marked by the language of desire, and while it is rare when he directly associates eros and sound in his prose, he does so in two remarkable, often-quoted passages, one from his “Adagia” and the other from “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words,” both of which seem to summon forth so many of his poems. He writes in “Adagia,” “In poetry, you must love the words, the ideas and images and rhythms with all your capacity to love anything at all” (CPP 902), emphatically placing love (or eros) at the very center of poetry. His use of the second person—“you”—suggestively refers simultaneously to both poet

and reader as one. That he uses the imperative also underlines his point that poet and reader must join in the loving act of poetry. He goes even further to conjoin the two in "The Noble Rider" and, in the way he refers to sound, suggests that the satisfaction that poetry offers derives from the physical sound of its words:

I do not know of anything that will appear to have suffered more from the passage of time than the music of poetry and that has suffered less. The deepening need for words to express our thoughts and feelings which, we are sure, are all the truth that we shall ever experience, having no illusions, makes us listen to words when we hear them, loving them and feeling them, makes us search the sound of them, for a finality, a perfection, an unalterable vibration, which it is only within the power of the acutest poet to give them. Those of us who may have been thinking of the path of poetry, those who understand that words are thoughts and not only our own thoughts but the thoughts of men and women ignorant of what it is that they are thinking, must be conscious of this: that, above everything else, poetry is words; and that words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds. (CPP 662–63)

Stevens thus argues, much as Socrates does in the *Phaedrus* and Valéry's Socrates does in *Eupalinos*, that love and language go hand in hand, and it is the poet's desire and vocation to make it so. In his use of the successive present participles ("deepening," "loving," "feeling"), of imperatives ("makes us listen," "makes us search," "must be conscious of this"), and in the figure of the "unalterable vibration" for which together poet and reader listen and long, Stevens draws the outlines of an erotic poetics of sound that comes alive in his poems.

III

In the verses of *Harmonium*, Stevens lushly sounds the breath of eros. Poems such as "Infanta Marina" and "Jasmine's Beautiful Thoughts Underneath the Willow" figure forth a fluid interchange between our human presence and the surrounding earth. In "Infanta Marina," the seashore embodies the human spirit and in "Jasmine's Beautiful Thoughts," the speaker internalizes the "ocean's rocking" in "long, capricious fugues and chorals" (CPP 63). Stevens presents the human entities and the waters in fertile interaction—one becomes and is the other.⁴ He emphasizes this give-and-take, this oneness, in the sounds of the lines. Of "Infanta Marina," he writes, "she roamed / In the roamings of her fan, / Partaking of the sea, / And of the evening, / As they flowed around / And uttered their subsiding sound" (CPP 6). The repetition of round sounds and echoing words—"roamed," "roaming," "flowed," "around," "sound"—along with the

present participles—"roaming," "Partaking," "subsiding"—creates a sense of the continuous and ongoing union between humans and the forces of nature. Stevens' language in poems where he proclaims such unions often rings jubilantly, as it does in "Life Is Motion," as he invites the reader into his celebration of "the marriage / Of flesh and air" (*CPP* 65).

Of the early poems, it is "Peter Quince at the Clavier" that best demonstrates how Stevens uses sound to summon the reader into an earth "charged with erotic energy" (Fisher 1). Although criticism has traditionally separated discussion of the poem's musical form from its central subject of desire, B. J. Leggett argues persuasively that the two are intimately bound.⁵ Most broadly, the poem's four-part sonata-like structure parallels the theme of natural change and our human relationship to it.⁶ In the way that one movement succeeds to the next in a musical piece, the poetic speaker similarly moves the reader from the exposition (sound as desire, I), to development (Susanna's story as emblematic of desire, II and III), and recapitulation (the drawing together of the body of the poem as the continuous voice of desire, IV). The overall structure of "Peter Quince at the Clavier" draws the reader into the poem and, as one section gives way to the next, the reader becomes a participant in (rather than an observer of) the "incessant creation" (*CPP* 687) that is the poem itself.

Stevens invites the reader into the poem-as-act by counterpointing logical and sensuous language, which, in turn, generates the movement of the poem and complements its overall structure. The speaker opens the poem with an analogy—"Just as my fingers on these keys / Make music, so the selfsame sounds / On my spirit make a music, too" (*CPP* 72). As one analogy leads to the next—"Music is feeling, then, not sound"—the speaker asks the reader to follow a line of thought that would seem to unfold in a series of logical steps. Stevens encourages this expectation in his use of sequential words—"Just as," "so," "then," "thus." However, rather than fulfilling the reader's rational expectations, Stevens undercuts the seemingly logical sequence with the insistent vowel repetitions and the figurative language of the speaker's desire. In the sibilants that run through the lines and the long, distracting "a" sounds—"It is like the strain / Waked" (*CPP* 72)—Stevens turns the reader's attention away from the logic and into the substance of the speaker's imaginative vision of Susanna. By the last two stanzas of the opening movement, Stevens has demonstrated sound as the transformative agent it will continue to be in his work. Much as the sounds rising from the speaker's fingers on the keyboard transport him into the field of his own "desiring," Stevens' poetic sounds overcome the opening analogical language and, as readers, we are similarly transported from the speaker's room into Susanna's "still garden" (*CPP* 72), from the interior space of human thinking to the natural, albeit cultivated, environment of the garden.

When the poetic speaker retells the story of Susanna and the Elders, Stevens offers his readers explicitly erotic lines:

In the green water, clear and warm,
Susanna lay.
She searched
The touch of springs,
And found
Concealed imaginings.
She sighed,
For so much melody. (*CPP* 73)

Much has been written of the musicality of this stanza and those that follow and of how their varying, yet constant rhyme and rhythm contribute to a moving portrait of Susanna—she “lay,” “she stood,” “She walked,” “She turned” (*CPP* 73)—so I will not dwell on details. What is most pertinent to our understanding of Stevens’ use of sound, however, is the way his rich poetic sounds express such eroticism in Susanna’s relationship to nature itself. Susanna is immersed in the earth: she lies “In the green water,” and in her “touch of springs,” we may read both the evident auto-eroticism and her desirous touch of nature’s waters. Susanna’s “melody,” then, issues both from her own body and in her physical relationship with the earth. Such consummation is rare in Stevens’ work, and, when he struggles in other and later poems to celebrate the “touch” of earth, this auditory image of Susanna echoes in the background as a reminder of earth’s hidden promise.⁷

We discussed earlier in relation to Stevens’ prose, his understanding of how the poet may use sound to bring us to a “truth” that we cannot reach by reason alone. In what are among the most musical lines in Stevens’ verse, he enacts this process, and draws his readers into one of the central paradoxical ideas of his work.⁸ Stevens famously proclaims in the opening lines of the final movement,

Beauty is momentary in the mind—
The fitful tracing of a portal;
But in the flesh it is immortal. (*CPP* 74)

Our logic may tell us to trust the mind over the body; however, Stevens demonstrates the opposite through sound. Though the beginning of each line refers to the death of the body, evening, and garden, each successive second clause refutes the earlier assertion with insistent rhymes and repetitions.

The body dies; the body’s beauty lives.
So evenings die, in their green going,
A wave, interminably flowing.
So gardens die, their meek breath scenting

The cowl of winter, done repenting.
So maidens die, to the auroral
Celebration of a maiden's choral. (CPP 74)

Each word and sound uttered in these lines recalls one that has come before—the “body” recalls Susanna bathing; the evening, the “green evening” of the opening section; the “garden,” the earlier “still garden.” By means of such repetitions and sonority—the succession of full vowels and present participles—Stevens draws the “body” of the poem together. Further, he uses the language of analogy, with which he began the poem, and repeats the word “so” to link each of his assertions, as if it were simply a matter of logic that beauty should outlive death. In the culminating stanza of “Peter Quince at the Clavier,” the very sounds of the poem summon the reader to bask in its physicality and persuade us to “believe . . . beyond belief” (CPP 295) in the longevity of desire.

If Stevens takes up the subject of eros less frequently or directly in *Ideas of Order* and his later work, his poetry is no less erotic, for, in the way he attempts to draw the reader into his poetry of earth and the alternating success and failure of his efforts, he kindles the flame of desire. Even in a poem such as “Autumn Refrain,” which initially seems to reverse the promise of “Peter Quince at the Clavier”—its first half stressing the absence of all the warmth necessary to bind us to the earth, with “evening gone,” “grackles gone,” and “sun, too, gone” (CPP 129)—Stevens cannot help but imagine hidden fertile ground. For every word or sound that suggests absence in the first seven lines, there is one that suggests possibility in the second half of the poem:

And yet beneath
The stillness of everything gone, and being still,
Being and sitting still, something resides,
Some skreaking and skittering residuum,
And grates these evasions of the nightingale
Though I have never—shall never hear that bird.
And the stillness is in the key, all of it is,
The stillness is all in the key of that desolate sound.
(CPP 129)

Stevens' use of sound in the above lines suggests that even this hard ground might yield to human touch. “The skreak and skitter of evening gone” becomes “Some skreaking and skittering residuum,” the present participles indicating an underlying activity in which the reader might partake. The repetition of “b-” and “still-” words—“beneath,” “stillness,” “being still,” “Being and sitting still,” “stillness” (uttered twice in the last two lines)—creates in sound the sense of a heartbeat-like presence into which the human may be welcome. The “stillness,” at the close of “Au-

tumn Refrain," hardly transports the reader into the "still garden" of "Peter Quince at the Clavier"; its more "desolate sound," though, holds out the possibility for "all" that our desire might bring to it. That Stevens closes the poem twice repeating "key"—"the stillness is in the key" and again, "The stillness is all in the key"—intensifying the sentence in the last line, is evidence that the apparent "desolation" in "Autumn Refrain" is just the temporary underside of a corresponding fullness. George Lensing, in his careful reading of this poem, writes of the final line, "The poem itself ends as sound reverberates into stillness" (78). It is through such play of sound, then, in the way that sound alternately offers frustration and fulfillment—that Stevens ignites the reader's desire.

It would be difficult to discuss Stevens' erotic play of sound in poetry without addressing those poems in which he ponders more directly how the poet stirs the reader's desire. As we have seen in our earlier discussion, Stevens is acutely aware of the position of the modern reader and of how difficult it can be for the poet to find language to which the modern mind can respond. In "The Irrational Element in Poetry," he writes that the poet "somehow [has] to know the sound that is the exact sound; and [does] in fact know, without knowing how" (*CPP* 789–90). One of the principal ways that he addresses the reader's desire in his poems is to invite her into his musings about "how" to know the right sound and which words and sounds might bring the earth nearer. In "Of Modern Poetry," he considers the subject of the poet's relationship to the reader rather straightforwardly and suggests that it is the responsibility of the poet to negotiate this fragile relationship. Of the language the poet must find, Stevens writes, "It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place. / It has to face the men of the time and to meet / The women of the time" (*CPP* 218–19).

He considers the relationship between poet and reader again, though more indirectly and movingly, in "On the Road Home," a poem in which he initially seems to invite the reader into a debate about the search for truth or truths. Stevens structures the poem as a conversation that the poetic speaker recalls. By creating a dialogue in the poem itself, Stevens carries the reader into the speaker's own journey and, in the give-and-take of conversation, posits a relationship about the language that we use, how we speak, and the activity of nature. The speaker in "On the Road Home" reveals slowly and intently, as he recounts that conversation, that it is only when he sets aside the abstract language of truth that he can feel the proximity of earth:

It was when I said,
"There is no such thing as the truth,"
That the grapes seemed fatter.
The fox ran out of his hole. (*CPP* 186)

“When” is the resonant word here, for the whole poem emanates from it: Stevens’ speaker is less concerned with the debate about truth than he is in revisiting the moment when the earth came alive for him, when he experienced the *feeling* of the growing and active earth, and it is into the speaker’s search for this moment and feeling that Stevens draws the reader. In each successive stanza, speaker and reader move closer together and to being part of nature’s activity, until both fully celebrate earth’s nearness in a succession of sensory superlatives:

It was at that time, that the silence was largest
And longest, the night was roundest,
The fragrance of the autumn warmest,
Closest and strongest. (CPP 186)

Of his later volumes, it is in *Transport to Summer* in which Stevens practices the erotics of sound with the greatest virtuosity, touching the reader’s desire with poems that alternately counterpoise frustration and fulfillment. The eroticism of this volume derives from the constant interplay of human and natural forces—what Eleanor Cook refers to as “[t]ransport as ecstasy” (172).⁹ At times, Stevens offers us poems, such as “Chocorua to Its Neighbor,” that stimulate our sense of a bond with the physical earth, where speech is “part / Of sky, of sea, large earth, large air” (CPP 263). In other poems, however forcefully Stevens’ sounds draw us into a sense of summer’s physicality, as do the “seeming” sibilants in “Description Without Place,” Stevens reminds us that we can be only as much a part of summer and of each other and the earth as our language permits. Because “It is a world of words to the end of it” (CPP 301), it is Stevens’ use of sound that lifts us into momentary, if not lasting, connection with each other and with the earth.

Stevens returns to familiar places in *Transport to Summer* and to none more affectingly than he does the ocean in “Somnambulisma.” As Helen Vendler demonstrates in her careful reading of this poem as a rewriting of “The Idea of Order at Key West,” the sounds of this poem echo the verses of his Florida poems and recall the sensuous rhythms of the earlier lines (69–71). However, they do so with a difference. Although the earlier poems suggest either the fluid interchange between the human and the natural (“Jasmine’s Beautiful Thoughts”) or the difficulty in discerning between the two (“The Idea of Order at Key West”), in “Somnambulisma,” though the two worlds “resemble” each other, they never “settle” or touch. Herein lies the eroticism of the later poem. Stevens stirs the memory of the reader and the poem’s sonorous lines strain toward the earlier fulfillment; however, that fulfillment never comes, and the poem simply kindles and re-kindles desire.

Stevens structures the poem in six stanzas, and in the first three sonorous verses, he establishes the relentless pattern of our human desire.

On an old shore, the vulgar ocean rolls
Noiselessly, noiselessly, resembling a thin bird,
That thinks of settling, yet never settles, on a nest.

The wings keep spreading and yet are never wings.
The claws keep scratching on the shale, the shallow shale,
The sounding shallow, until by water washed away.

The generations of the bird are all
By water washed away. They follow after.
They follow, follow, follow, in water washed away. (*CPP* 269)

To render a sense of our continuous desire and frustration, Stevens creates a tension in the language itself. On the one hand, he signals frustration in the way he refers to the ocean and its environment: it is an "old shore" and a "vulgar ocean." Though we usually associate the ocean with sound, here it moves repetitively and "noiselessly," as if our constant return made us deaf to its roar. However, at the same time as Stevens' language suggests frustration, particularly in the figure of the bird/poet, whose "wings keep spreading" and "claws keep scratching," his lush alliterative "sh" sounds, which whisper seven times in five lines, approximate the near touch that might bind, in some lasting way, the bird, the shore, and water. Though the ocean "rolls / Noiselessly" in the poem's first few lines, and though the "generations of the bird are all / By water washed away," poets, Stevens suggests, like the generations of the bird, will nevertheless continue to "keep scratching," and we, as readers, will "follow." Although the meaning of the words suggests frustration and impermanence, the sounds of the language express the human ache or desire for connection.

In the last three stanzas, Stevens ponders what the earth might be without our human presence and conveys a sense of just how unimaginable this is in the sounds of the lines:

Without this bird that never settles, without
Its generations that follow in their universe,
The ocean, falling and falling on the hollow shore,

Would be a geography of the dead: not of that land
To which they may have gone, but of the place in which
They lived, in which they lacked a pervasive being,

In which no scholar, separately dwelling,
Poured forth the fine fins, the gawky beaks, the personalia,
Which, as a man feeling everything, were his. (*CPP* 270)

Stevens underscores the difficulty of the bird “That thinks” in the sentence and sound structure of the above stanzas and again counterpoints frustration with fulfillment. First he asks the reader to imagine a “noiseless” world, the natural world without the human, and more, without the bird/poet. To impress the reader with how difficult a task this is, Stevens unfurls this meditation in one long sentence. In contrast to the sharp images that punctuate the first half of the poem (the shore, the wings, and the generations of the bird) and its rhythmic motion, each stanza begins with either a prepositional or a conditional phrase that serves to undermine the direction of the lines: “Without this bird,” “Would be,” “In which. . . .” Images that denote absence and insistent negatives also echo through these lines and further hamper their movement: the shore “Would be a geography of the dead.” Of the possible place for the bird to settle, Stevens writes it is “not of that land / To which they may have gone.” However, in the last two lines, Stevens muses on the activity of the bird, and shows us what the bird/poet does with language. In the succession of the hard consonantal sounds and, particularly, in the repetitive “f’s” that sound forcefully through these lines—“Poured forth the fine fins, the gawky beaks, the personalia,” Stevens turns the reader’s attention away from the bird’s difficult thought and into the realm of the “man feeling everything,” the poet who returns to the “old shore” to feel again the near touch of the earth and its water. “Somnambulisma” ends neither in fulfillment nor in frustration, but rather, in what Paul Valéry would call a regenerative movement; its sounds call the reader back to listen again, to re-experience both the movement and feeling of the poem.¹⁰

Although Stevens sometimes portrays the ongoing movement of human desire in a plaintive mood, as he does in “Somnambulisma,” there are other poems in *Transport to Summer* that express, in more hopeful tones, the promise of fulfillment. “The Red Fern,” though rarely discussed, beautifully demonstrates Stevens’ aim to make of poetry an act analogous to nature’s incessant creation. What is most remarkable about this poem is the way Stevens uses sound to collapse the distance between humans and nature. As we read its four stanzas, its dense language enacts the growth of the fern as a figure for a single summer day, and powerfully transforms the reader from an observer of earth into a participant in its every motion.

Stevens sets forth the growth of the red fern in four unrhymed stanzas that, from the first, hardly have a static moment. He voices the poem in clear confident tones and paces the first three stanzas with quick staccato-like movements that approximate the day’s rising.

The large-leaved day grows rapidly,
And opens in this familiar spot
Its unfamiliar, difficult fern,
Pushing and pushing red after red.

There are doubles of this fern in the clouds,
Less firm than the paternal flame,
Yet drenched with its identity,
Reflections and off-shoots, mimic notes

And mist-mites, dangling seconds, grown
Beyond relation to the parent trunk:
The dazzling, bulging, brightest core,
The furiously burning father-fire . . . (CPP 316–17)

Stevens chronicles the birth of day in language that emphasizes its physicality, as if the sun's ever-mysterious force had thrown its seed out on the earth, and we were able to watch its growth. This day (or this fern), Stevens suggests in the opening stanza, is both like and unlike all others and, though we may have seen many similar ones, its generation is particular and arduous. The language of the first stanza is rich with repetition that approximates painful growth. Repetitive "p's" and "f's" comprise the sound pattern—"rapidly," "open," "familiar," "unfamiliar," "difficult," "fern," "Pushing and pushing"—and culminate in a fertile red, for Stevens, the color of eros and life.

The "difficult" birthing work done, in stanzas two and three, Stevens creates a sense of the fineness of the leaves and their abundance in a rapid succession of sounds and images. He again accentuates their physicality in insistent sounds—"f's" that bring forth images of the original fern—"the father-fire"—and extend beyond it in new combinations that demonstrate in sound the growth of fresh forms—"Reflections and off-shoots, mimic-notes / And mist-mites." Stevens represents their ongoing motion in lines which, full of pauses, end in ellipses that indicate their continuous motion. The present participles that close stanza three emphasize the brilliant birth of plant and day and underscore its ongoing vitality: It is "dazzling," "bulging," and "furiously burning."

In the fourth and final stanza, the speaker addresses the reader and reflects briefly on the dramatic fulfillment that each summer day holds.

Infant, it is enough in life
To speak of what you see. But wait
Until sight wakens the sleepy eye
And pierces the physical fix of things. (CPP 317)

It is striking that Stevens suppresses the address to the reader until the last stanza and that he refers to him as "Infant," the naïve (or inexperienced) reader who has never imagined such promise in the physical world nor in the language that represents it. It is as if he wanted the reader to first participate in nature's growth in language before asking him to reflect upon it—to listen before thinking and to act as if he were part of the

teeming earth. Stevens instructs the reader in this last stanza as he does in prose: "To speak of what you see," he suggests, in a sonorous and sensuous poetry, yields vision; it "pierces the physical fix of things." He closes the poem, then, by stimulating the reader's desire in the language of anticipation: "But wait," he writes, for such plants, days, and poems promise more fulfillment than what is simply "enough in life."

It is rare in Stevens' later volumes to see so clearly the circle of desire that we meet in "Somnambulisma" or the expectation of fulfillment in "The Red Fern." Lest we come to the conclusion, however, that eros recedes, I would like to close by taking a brief look at one late poem, "World Without Peculiarity." The structure and language of this poem demonstrate that though the speakers of Stevens' late poems may, at times, lose the will to "pierce[] the physical fix of things," as long as there is speech, and particularly poetic speech, there will be the desire, as Valéry suggests in *Eupalimos*, to embrace the physical world. Stevens addresses the tension, as he does so often in his poetry, between what we know and what we feel in the very structure of this late poem, its first three stanzas voicing the pain of dispersal and the last three reasserting the promise of fulfillment.

Though the poem begins with a day "great and strong," which recalls the beginning of "The Red Fern," this time the speaker's knowledge of its impermanence haunts him, and we feel this in the tone of the language and the mood of the poem. When the speaker, alone, in the first three stanzas ponders this knowledge, "Nothing could be more hushed" than the language Stevens uses to suggest our human separation from each other and the natural world. Although "The red ripeness of the leaves" and "spices of red summer" indicate that the earth lies ready for our human touch, the speaker notes only signs of separation. Of the sun-lit day (father), moon (mother), and earth (lover), the speaker says, "his father . . . lies now / In the poverty of dirt," "his mother . . . returns and cries on his breast," and "she that he loved turns cold at his light touch" (CPP 388). Every image and sound in these first three stanzas speaks of dispersal.

It is at the moment that the speaker appeals to the listener, or reader, and draws us into the poem that he can again feel the earth's pulse. The crucial turn in the poem happens when the speaker sets forth the question to which all his observations lead him:

What good is it that the earth is justified,
That it is complete, that it is an end,
That in itself it is enough? (CPP 388)

Stevens suggests, then, that the speaker's question itself is a mode of desire. As he has throughout his poetry, he persuades us that in the poetic speaker's appeal to another—the reader or listener—and in the utterance itself lie our "answer." He stresses the power of the combined effort of the

speaker and reader in the marked and changed tones of the last three stanzas. To counterbalance the tentative and mournful language of the first half of the poem, Stevens asserts the presence of earth and day in a succession of sentences that affirms the presence of father, mother, and lover: "It is the earth itself that is humanity. . . . / He is the inhuman son and she, / She is the fateful mother, whom he does not know." In the latter sentence, Stevens powerfully juxtaposes the despair that knowledge brings in the first three stanzas with what we do not and, perhaps, cannot know in the last three. Only when we join together in what we do not know, but *feel* "Among the breathless spices" does "difference disappear[]"; then, he reassuringly asserts, we experience desire and the possibility of fulfillment.

And the poverty of dirt, the thing upon his breast,
The hating woman, the meaningless place,
Become a single being, sure and true. (CPP 388)

Surely, "If there must be a god in the house" (CPP 288) and in Stevens' poetic world, it is Eros himself who, from Stevens' earliest and most sonorous poems to his starker later ones, breathes the wind of desire into his sounds and words, unobtrusively binding poet to reader and both to his "great poem of the earth" (CPP 730).

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Notes

¹Translations of Valéry are my own.

²See Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff's introduction to the Hackett edition of Plato's *Phaedrus*. The final part of the introduction addresses the critical debate about the interlocking of the two subjects of love and language and whether "its two parts constitute elements in a single, coherent structure" (xxxvii).

³Anca Rosu offers a comprehensive study of sound in Stevens' work, and considers the primary role sound plays in his poetry and poetics. Also, see Charles Altieri's essay "Intentionality as Sensuality in *Harmonium*" for an insightful reading of the early sensuous lyrics in relation to Stevens' thought. Altieri writes, "Stevens might matter as a poet because he could exemplify what happens when poetry accepts the imperative that whatever art might claim for the spirit has to be based on a radical commitment to the primacy of the senses" (165).

⁴Eleanor Cook names "Infanta Marina" a "'flowing'" or "'fluency' poem," "one of those playing on the motions and sounds of flowing language and flowing water, usually rivers" (39).

⁵See B. J. Leggett's article "Apollonian and Dionysian in 'Peter Quince at the Clavier,'" in which he counters the prevailing critical separation of form and desire with a Nietzschean reading of the poem. He writes, "readings of the poem for the past four decades have attempted to find ways of ignoring or blurring the equation here of music and human desire. These commentaries have, on the whole, equated music with aesthetic form, usually with the purpose of setting this sense of music as form *against* desire or feeling" (48).

⁶ Among pertinent musical readings are Joseph Riddel's "Stevens' 'Peter Quince at the Clavier': Immortality as Form" and Phyllis Nelson's "Stevens' 'Peter Quince at the Clavier,'" which look at the poem as sonatina and sonata, respectively.

⁷ See Carolyn Masel's essay "'Receding Shores that Never Touch with Inarticulate Pang': Wallace Stevens and the Language of Touch" for an extended discussion of the question of touch.

⁸ Bart Eeckhout discusses how the final section of "Peter Quince" "resist[s] our intelligence . . . by inverting our most deeply entrenched patterns of expectation." He, in turn, relates Northrop Frye's description of Stevens' final stanza (29–30).

⁹ Eleanor Cook says of the title metaphor of the collection, "From the point of metaphor to summer-reality: this is a scale or spectrum, from imagination to reality: this is a soliloquy where transport speaks. . . . Transport as ecstasy moves in similar ways" (172). I borrow her expression "transport as ecstasy" to emphasize the interplay between human and natural forces.

¹⁰ Paul Valéry discusses the regenerative movement of poetry throughout his essays and notebooks. For a thorough overview of his ideas about the subject in a single piece, see his essay "Poésie et pensée abstraite" (*Oeuvres I* 1314).

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“Keener Sounds”: Stevens, Intimacy, and Gender Politics

CAROLYN MASEL

AS MANY OF HIS defenders have been at pains to point out, Wallace Stevens is not a poet for whom emotion is separable from intellect. Nor is he, we could add, a poet for whom intellect is separable from eros. His poetry as a whole evinces a preoccupation with the erotic that is just as pronounced as his philosophical preoccupations; his poems are, variously and in combination, sensual, phallic, romantic, comic, bawdy, tender, arch, voyeuristic, sad, and transgressive. “Lulu Gay” is possibly the most extraordinary of all, although other poems are perhaps more profoundly unsettling: “Two Figures in Dense Violet Night,” for example, or “Peter Quince at the Clavier”:

Music is feeling, then, not sound;
And thus it is that what I feel,
Here in this room, desiring you,

Thinking of your blue-shadowed silk,
Is music. It is like the strain
Waked in the elders by Susanna. . . . (CPP 72)

Even within a single short lyric, Stevens can modulate one kind of erotic diction into another. Compare the first and final lines of “Late Hymn from the Myrrh-Mountain”:

Unsnack your snood, madanna, for the stars
Are shining on all brows of Neversink.
.....
Take the diamonds from your hair and lay them down.

The deer-grass is thin. The timothy is brown.
The shadow of an external world comes near. (CPP 305)

Any reader of Stevens quickly becomes familiar with the modulation of erotic desire into poetic anguish, a poignant melancholy that character-

istically increases in intensity through the operation of rejection and deflection. The most succinct statements of the case are represented by "Gallant Chateau" and "The Well Dressed Man with a Beard":

No was the night. Yes is this present sun.
If the rejected things, the things denied,
Slid over the western cataract, yet one,
One only, one thing that was firm, even
No greater than a cricket's horn, no more
Than a thought to be rehearsed all day, a speech
Of the self that must sustain itself on speech,
One thing remaining, infallible, would be
Enough. Ah! douce campagna of that thing! (CPP 224)

This is probably as explicit as Stevens gets; more often, the erotic manifests itself in the inventions of poetic diction: in "the roller of big cigars" (CPP 50), the "memorabilia of the mystic spouts / Spontaneously watering their gritty soils" (CPP 13), or the "Castratos of moon-mash" (CPP 310).

There is another group of poems, however, in which the predominant tone might be described as "tender" or "loving" or "intimate." In this group are the very short lyric "Tea," the penultimate poem in *Harmonium*; the superbly romantic prefatory poem to "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction"; "The World as Meditation"; and "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour." Arguably, none of these poems is wholly without an element of defensiveness, but in comparison with most of Stevens' poetry, they are models of vulnerability. Then there are passages within other poems—not many, so we notice even lines and half-lines—that seem tender in this way. Some of the passages that we find most profoundly satisfying, felicitous, and acute in Stevens are also the most intimate, imbued with a contained erotic energy. There are moments of clarity and calm, which, although they are characteristically approached through defensive figures of will, and sometimes even through masquerades of masculine *Sturm und Drang*, are yet sites of a serene energy that spreads out and upholds—moments of exactitude at once peaceful and triumphant.

Stevens arrived at these moments infrequently. There is ample evidence to suggest that he found the language of intimacy especially difficult. Sometimes he achieves it fleetingly—as he does, for example, in the fifth section of "Esthétique du Mal": "Be near me, come closer, touch my hand" (CPP 280). At other times, intimacy is achieved as the result of being steadily—if obliquely—worked toward, as the object of a quest. In "The Idea of Order at Key West," the transition from masculine rhetoric to intimacy is marked; indeed, it is physically marked as a rupture in the fabric of the verse, a breaking open, as of some dammed-up emotion, that wholly re-orientes the speaker in relation to a feminine other.

"The Idea of Order at Key West" displays possibly the most voluptuous lyricism of all of Stevens, beginning with one of the best first lines of poetry in the language. With its richly sensual music that, from the beginning, imitates the repetitive yet variable rhythms of breaking waves, it is a poem to make you swoon. It is also a poem that makes claims about mimesis, which require the reader to overcome, albeit reluctantly, a resistance to analysis created by its pleasurable surface. Stevens undoes Poe's aesthetic of enchantment by embedding an ethos of creativity within the poem. To read it is to dwell at once within and beyond the pleasure principle.

Stevens' music is not all of a piece. The predominant music, with its echoic doubling, itself makes claims about mimesis, casting, on one side, "us" and, on the other, the singer and the veritable ocean. Fortunately for "us," the mediating narrator whom we *can* hear is nearly as adept a mimic as he proclaims the singer to be. Most of the poem is markedly repetitive and, with its superficially simple syntax, instantly memorable. One verse paragraph, however, stands out for its stubborn tendency to resist memory: it is the section that precedes the climax that follows the dramatic line break:

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
That rose, or even colored by many waves;
If it was only the outer voice of sky
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
However clear, it would have been deep air,
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
Repeated in a summer without end
And sound alone. But it was more than that,
More even than her voice, and ours, among
The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
Of sky and sea. (CPP 105)

The reader is guided through this difficult music by the syntax, to which one clings as if to a life-preserver in a tumultuous seascape—although those initial *ifs* soon start to look like precipitous whitecaps in the midst of a swell: "If it was only . . . If it was only . . . it would have been. . . . But it was more than that, / More even than . . ." Like a buoy in turbulent waters, the verb on which everything depends is "rose"; apart from that cumulative rising, nothing is definite—the detail of the imagery is wildly associative and the internal grammatical boundaries are ambiguous, permeable. Here (repeating a pun employed in "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle," XII), *rose* is a verb but also a color that tints "the dark voice of the sea," "the many waves," and "the sunken coral water-walled." The variant possibility "or even colored by many waves" is the first clear block to inter-

pretation. Would the voice of the sea, so colored, still be “dark”? Would it be augmented or dissipated? And what about gender? Are we to read the “dark voice of the sea” as an evocation of Whitman’s “fierce old mother” (321), and the “outer voice of sky / And cloud” as a non-supernatural revenant of the creative voice of Genesis? What, in that case, is the relationship of that “outer voice of sky / And cloud” to the “the sunken coral water-walled”? Is there a submerged *choral* taking place down there, and, if so, are the choristers calcareous variants on the angels traditionally present at the Creation?¹

Syntactically, “the dark voice of the sea” is linked with the “outer voice of sky / And cloud” and “the sunken coral water-walled.” But with the addition of a qualifying phrase, “However clear” (which, typically, clarifies nothing), Stevens pauses—before confounding us utterly. None of the voices is to be connected, after all, with ordering speech; the only thing that remains clear is the pattern of build-up and deflation signaled by the syntax, leaving the hollow, if loud, sonority of “sound alone.” The significant entities—her voice, ours, plunging water, wind—are swept up and joined by “Theatrical distances” and “bronze shadows heaped / On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres / Of sky and sea.” This is Stevens as magus, giving a Prospero-like demonstration of his power. In this highly rhetorical passage, the suggestive yet indeterminable imagery functions primarily to suspend the syntax, delaying its resolution. We recognize a deliberate piece of stalling, a wild prelude that promises a definitive statement. The passage as a whole, with its large gestures, its wielding of large pieces of moving scenery, its willfulness, its violence and its indecipherability, is authoritarian. And its voice seems indubitably masculine.

The clarity of what follows is a new thing altogether. The strange thing is that, for all Stevens’ insistence that “it” was more than the accumulation of “her voice and ours” and the whole heaped-up seascape, the declaration of what her voice does, in fact, signify is not itself spoken in a voice that suggests excess or superfluity or even commonality. Rather, all rhetoric seems to have been stripped away, allowing a more distinct, more accurate and, somehow, truer voice to be heard. Its speech is utterance; its triumph is impersonal; it is resonant without being loud. It is anything but the voice of revelation, yet it is as if this voice, quite as much as the figure of the solitary singer, had been revealed in a sudden clearing of violent weather. It is this momentary calm, clear, lyrical voice that signifies intimacy in Stevens. It is not a whit less publicly oriented than the preceding rhetorical passage, nor is it less masculine—yet it seems to share the singer’s solitude. It is a voice capable of proclaiming what is closest to the heart. One cannot overstate the importance of the line break in the creation of this effect. Without it, the claims made for her voice are merely the accumulation of the effects that precede it, not a freeing of the poetry from those effects.

This intimate voice is momentary. It has a clarity that, to my ear, Stevens manages to sustain for only two-and-a-half lines, before it, too, falls away, becoming occluded by thought:

*It was her voice that made
The sky acutest at its vanishing.
She measured to the hour its solitude.
She was the single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker.*
(CPP 106; emphasis added)

The diminution that ensues after those two-and-a-half inimitable lines has something to do with the repeated “She” at the beginning of the next line, which seems to mark a new impulse, and something to do with the awkward rhythm of the line, “She was the single artificer of the world.” The choice of “artificer,” presumably because of its connotations and because, like “maker,” it lacks the connotations of “creator,” is largely responsible for this rhythmical clumsiness. The poetry returns to the kind of prevailing repetitiveness that characterized the first three sections, and is only momentarily mitigated by the strikingly evocative image of her “striding there alone.” However, if that image gives her energy, it also gives her distance; as Stevens completes his articulation of her self-created, self-contained world, he seems to seal her off in a bubble in a gesture of farewell:

Then we,
As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made. (CPP 106)

As for the climactic lines themselves, despite their seeming irreducible, they are as rich as any in Stevens. Since it is the sky’s rather than the sea’s vanishing that is significant in this image of the horizon, one tends to read the image temporally, as an image of sunset.² The word “acutest” suggests the smallest possible fraction of a degree above the horizon where the setting sun is still visible; although the word itself is a superlative, what it signifies is asymptotic rather than absolute.³ Like many superlatives in Stevens, “acutest” also has a considerable emotional freight, being literally poignant—like the “receding shores / That never touch with inarticulate pang” (CPP 55) of “Sunday Morning,” or, like life’s nonsense, “pierc[ing] us with strange relation” (CPP 331), as it does in “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction”; thus, we are pierced with the acutest sense of the particularity of the present moment, with the bitter-sweet consciousness of the irremediable passing of time. The grammar of the following

line (“She measured to the hour its solitude”) complicates every relation. The block to interpretation is clearly intended here, since—although we measure “to the minute” and “to the day” as well as “on the hour” and “by the hour”—we do not customarily measure “to the hour.” Does the reiterated “its” refer to the hour, or to the vanishing sky, or to some vexed combination of both? We might think of this sky as existing in solitude, since it lacks an inhering presence (especially that of a divine creator)—hence, all measurement is human—and we note that the word “solitude” has the sun in it, like the vanishing sky. But the sun is not just an object in the sky: it is a means of measuring time, and the line tempts us to supply images such as, for example, a sun-dial, with the singer as the gnomon.⁴ Or perhaps she resembles the vertical axis in a three-dimensional Cartesian graph. Yet even as we add the notion of the Cartesian graph to the rest of the mapping terms with which this poem abounds, we become conscious of Stevens’ undoing of the illusion of objectivity that is the principal virtue of this system of measurement. For it is her *voice* that makes the sky acutest at its vanishing, not any notional fixed point (e.g., under her feet) that would constitute the intersection of the three-dimensional axes. To be human, to measure humanly, is to exceed any fixed system of measurement; we are more flexible in our dynamic with the world and more mysterious, capable of the ineffable and the transcendent.

Indeed, the climactic lines of the poem are an occasion where intimacy and transcendence coincide. What is being transcended is the enclosed agency of the singer, so that the poem’s narrator can recognize, if only for a moment, the changed world as it takes shape through her song. In the context of the continuing debate about the gender politics of this poem, it seems worth noting that this seems far from being an appropriative move on the narrator’s (or Stevens’) part. Hers is the supreme moment, hers the feat of shaping the world; only the triumphant appreciation of that feat belongs to the masculine speaker, and it is, theoretically, a lesser triumph. Nonetheless, every reader of the poem must wonder from time to time how *all that* can be claimed for an entity created almost entirely by the use of a gendered pronoun, and one’s wonder persists despite acknowledging both the enduring cultural viability of the littoral muse and the fact that pronouns are precisely about the attribution and distribution of agency. “She” is the shadowiest of figures—figured, indeed, only by her possessing a voice and by her walking/striding. As a gendered other, “she” can support any number of identities, and we might want to add to the numerous sources of her identity already posited the figure of Wisdom from the Book of Proverbs, since her singing “beyond the genius of the sea” supports a reading of her antedating creation according to the Book of Genesis (see Proverbs 8:22–24).

Thinking about the *poetic* source of her gendered power, however, it seems that, just as her gender establishes the contrasting masculinity of the narrator *and his companion* (the companion is the true litmus), so her

gendered power is also derived from being seen against the studiously gender-neutral background of the sea. In a characteristic abstraction, a defensive move against the figural (i.e., the bodily), Stevens has partly de-gendered the maternal ocean left him by Whitman and sanctioned by Freud, leaving the traces of that process everywhere, like clothes strewn around a room: the emptied fluttering sleeves, the empty “ever-hooded” waves. He has rendered the sea, indeed, almost “inhuman,” and the result enhances the gendered power of his barely embodied littoral muse. We have already begun to detect a further de-gendering strategy in the lead-up to the poem’s climax. If we hear a faint allusion to Whitman’s maternal sea in “the dark voice of the sea” and if there is a hint of a masculine voice in “the outer voice of sky / And cloud,” then Stevens has subverted their positions as contraries by adding a tertium quid: the bathetic sunken coral, the gender of whose voice is anyone’s guess. This is a move as radical as any Derridean reversal of a hierarchized binary (e.g., man/woman) and at least as elegant. Stevens used this strategy years earlier: “A man and a woman / Are one. / A man and a woman and a blackbird / Are one” (CPP 75).

The difficulties we experience in reading those two triumphant, intimate lines—which are essentially difficulties of ascription—are typical of the poem’s difficulties as a whole and intrinsic to its method. We experience a similar difficulty, for example, in reading,

Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
 It was the spirit that we sought and knew
 That we should ask this often as she sang. (CPP 105)

We have to choose between denotation and lineation in the way we read these lines: between “because we knew / It was the spirit that we sought and [so we] knew / That we should ask this often as she sang” and “because we knew / It was the spirit that we sought and knew.” We are encouraged to read lineally since the witness to her song did not *ask* “Whose spirit is this?” but *said* it. If we read it in this way, we arrive at a proleptic (anticipatory) passage that is not primarily about questioning but about recognition: “we” recognize the spirit of this gendered other as “our” own. And in this reading, “we” keep asking, “our” questions rising and subsiding like the “ever-hooded” waves.

Thus far, it seems that Stevens has created a permeable kind of grammar for this poem—a grammar where agency is incompletely bounded—and the consequent proliferation of meaning is essential to the poem’s strategy. Why, then, does the poem return to an explicitly masculine diction in the last two verse paragraphs? For there can be no doubt that it does, not only in the apostrophe to Ramon Fernandez, but also in the explicit reference to “Master[ing] the night.” The transfer of order from the singer’s completed performance to the nightfall scene of the fishing boats—

that mysterious transfer that Ramon Fernandez cannot explain—seems utterly dependent on the permeable method exemplified by the poem up to this point. But just at this point, the imagery hardens; we watch as a new scene is reified before our eyes: the diction is that of cartography, navigation, astronomy, perhaps even heraldry—all of which suggest the act of taking possession, the act of containment:

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,
Why, when the singing ended and we turned
Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
As the night descended, tilting in the air,
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night. (*CPP* 106)

Here being enchanted is something like being in thrall. This masculine ordering, which has clearly been enabled by “The maker’s rage to order words of the sea,” is nevertheless different in kind from the feminine singer’s ordering song. As well as (or because of its) being masculine, it is also social, supporting its work of ordering by comparing it with other masculine endeavors—with a whole history of masculine endeavor. It invokes the community of fishermen, the community of astronomers, of navigators, cartographers—the very town they turn toward has become predominantly a community of men by the end of this passage. One recalls the “ring of men / . . . chant[ing] in orgy on a summer morn” (*CPP* 55) of “Sunday Morning” and the mysteriously resolving effect of their “boisterous devotion to the sun” on the feminine questioner whose doubts about the received religious formulations of her day shape that poem. That resolution seems about four-fifths rhetorical and one-fifth philosophical: once “she” hears that studiously non-gendered voice announcing Jesus’ mortality, the poem moves straight into its public anthemic closure.⁵ Something similar happens at the end of “The Idea of Order at Key West.”

Given our concern with the language of intimacy, the question remains whether the outcry with which the final section begins—“Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon” (*CPP* 106)—constitutes a further example of intimate language. To me, it does not. Rather, the outcry can be situated in the almost exclusively masculine tradition of the ode, which is pre-eminently a public form; the speaker clearly conforms to Wordsworth’s dictum of “a man speaking to men.” This might seem to contradict what I have said earlier about the voice of the climactic lines of the poem’s not being less masculine or less public for being intimate. The difference here lies in the genre; the text-book apostrophe to Ramon Fernandez colors the context of what follows: it brings in an audience, as the narrator and his companion return (just as Emily Dickinson does after her intimate encounter with the

sea) toward the town.⁶ In the poem's final paean, the narrator is singing in full voice before an audience already constituted, whereas in the lines I have specified as intimate, the lone voice is surrounded by silence. It is that quality that makes the poem's speaker seem to share her agency.

Even the poem's final triumphant lines are not, I think, entirely homogeneous. We could hardly fail to notice the presence of eros in "Words of the fragrant portals," a point reinforced by Stevens' employment of an unnecessary hyphen in "dimly-starred" to invoke that most erotic of shades, John Keats (perhaps already suggested by "pale" in "pale Ramon"). Eleanor Cook has usefully characterized the poem as being against ghosts (130–33), and it seems significant that Keats is invited into the poem only once the final/orinary gates are in sight. Still, in the allusion here, and in the choice of "fragrant"—previously tried and tested in "To the One of Fictive Music"—there is something of mustering the troops, of utilizing what comes readily to hand. By contrast, "ghostlier demarcations," an image that blends the almost transparent and the crystalline, is a complete product of the diction of mapping and repudiating of spirits that runs right through the poem; polysyllabic and consonantal, it forms a frosty defense against the directness of "ourselves" and "our origins." With "keener sounds," the poem's final words, however, Stevens verges on the intimate again. The effect has something to do with the long vowels, as the poem moves toward silence; their effect is of needing a keener ear to hear them. But the poem approaches silence: it does not trail off into silence, and perhaps more than anything else, it is the sense of effort, as if the words were not readily available but had to be dug for, that makes them seem to come from the heart.

I have been arguing that something special happens in the middle of "The Idea of Order at Key West" that does not happen often. As we have seen, arriving at a diction free from defensiveness—a genuinely intimate language—is not fully explicable in terms of gender politics or even gender crossing. To make this point clearer, I want to look at a similar pattern of gender crossing in which Stevens stops on the very brink of articulating the most intimate thing: the name of his "green, [his] fluent mundo" (CPP 351).

Many readers wish that Stevens had ended his poem "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" with the final numbered canto (the one that begins "Fat girl, terrestrial" [CPP 351]). The existence of the multiply problematic epilogue has tended to obscure some other issues, such as the relationship of cantos IX and X, which, especially in comparison with the epilogue, we tend to read as a natural progression, an inevitability. I want to conclude my discussion by querying that assumption of inevitability, arguing that Stevens was not required by the terms of his own philosophical logic to move from the exclusively masculine camaraderie of a wood to the personal romance of the evening return through a Paris street. I want to suggest that it seems curious in some respects that, having written the final canto X, he should have constructed an exclusively masculine world to follow it.

There are many possible readings of canto IX, but in all of them, its masculinity seems indisputable:

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

Enjoying angels. Whistle, forced bugler,
That bugles for the mate, nearby the nest,
Cock bugler, whistle and bugle and stop just short. . . .

.....
And we enjoy like men, the way a leaf
Above the table spins its constant spin. . . .

.....
Perhaps,
The man-hero is not the exceptional monster,
But he that of repetition is most master.
(CPP 350; emphasis added)

Logically speaking, what might be addressed by a master of repetition, a man-hero speaking on behalf of a community of men, can only be either that community itself or else a trope of alterity, which is likely to be marked as feminine. The feminine addressee of the last canto is exactly such a trope, her evasiveness perpetuating desire and desirous language and ensuring that the speaker's gestures are directed otherwards. The earth as ground is traditionally feminine, and the earth as planet is an image of wholeness able to be apprehended, via synecdoche, in its entirety. The use of the trope, then, is entirely traditional—yet the strangeness remains; it is as if the gendering of the earth, in reinforcing the exclusivity of the gendering of the penultimate canto, made the man-hero less a master of all and necessitated, almost in a compensatory way, an appropriative move on the speaker's part in the final canto. Nevertheless, this quasi-compensatory move itself seems far from inevitable, since the last canto could just as well have been directly addressed to a community of men by a figure who had gained most mastery—and who, indeed, within the terms of Stevens' masculine social world, might have purported to be more representatively human in doing so. A public diction and large gestures would have been understandable in that homosocial context and would have provided an equally triumphant closure. What we have instead is a speaker who has separated himself out from that community of men to address the world as a single, private lover. There is no public ethos involved. The final spousal canto is not a necessary part of the poem's logic; it is entirely voluntary.

I do not want to suggest that Stevens ought to have addressed canto X to a masculine community, but rather that there is a strategic option at the end of canto IX of which he chose not to avail himself. One could even argue that in having, in addition to the final canto, an epilogue that does address an all-male community, Stevens merely deferred that option, having it, as it were, both ways. In any case, the shape of the end of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" follows the same pattern of return to a masculine diction as "The Idea of Order at Key West."

After more than sixty years of reading "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," and reading it with particular attention to the mix of humor, lyricism, and masculine authority that informs this last canto, the general critical tendency is still to gloss that first transgressive yet affectionate epithet, "Fat girl." It is as if we want to ward off its still shocking potential. So we have recourse to the meaning of *gras* in *mardi gras* and we emphasize the artifice of its vocativeness. Here, I simply want to point out how defensive a locution it is: it seems the very opposite of the intimate language we located in the middle of "The Idea of Order at Key West." It risks nothing; in fact, it curtails the imaginative possibility of a credible other. Stevens carefully mixes abstract planetary tropes with figural (i.e., bodily) ones, and where the representation of the addressee is most figural, the speaker feels constrained to "hold [her] to [her]self" (CPP 351) in a pre-emptive repudiation of reciprocity.

Attention to the presence of an intimate language or to its defensive converse can aid us in refining our analyses of what Stevens achieves in the course his strategic gender crossings. Without intimacy, such crossings may be merely strategic and may prove appropriative and conformist. Intimate language, on the other hand, creates, through its riskiness, a vulnerable self but also a self that is resonant and free of prescription, a self strong enough to speak without defensiveness.

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Notes

¹ Cf. Job 38:7, which mentions the "sons of God shout[ing] for joy" at the Creation; these have commonly been interpreted as angels. For a possible source for "water-walled," see Jonah 2:5: "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head." I am, however, not entirely convinced of Stevens' high seriousness here: it may be that the voice of "the sunken coral" might, if heard through walls of water, *sound like* "water-walled"—i.e., "water-walled" might well be a kind of nonce word intended to be heard as much as puzzled out. Taking quite another tack, "water-walled" might evoke Poe's poem "The City in the Sea," with its sunken "Babylon-like walls" (72).

² Angus Cleghorn, in *Wallace Stevens' Poetics: The Neglected Rhetoric*, also arrives at sunset but via quite a different route (44).

³ In this I differ from Eleanor Cook's gloss on "acutest": "An acute angle can become acuter, then acutest when it is 0 degrees and vanishes" (133).

⁴ Clearly, these are merely impressions; yet some times seem more likely than others: mid-day, if one thinks of a clock face, or 3 p.m. We might also note that degrees are, like hours, divisible into "minutes" and "seconds." One hour corresponds with fifteen degrees—an acute angle, certainly, and one suggestive of sunset, but not "acutest."

⁵ It would seem that the social world in Stevens is always the world of men; we might have invented the word "homosocial" solely to define him. For a succinct account of the growth of that world out of the individual male, see Stevens' poem "The Creations of Sound."

⁶ See Dickinson's "I started Early—Took my Dog—" (520). There is a comparable ending after an intimate encounter with a worm in Dickinson's "In Winter in my Room" (1670).

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Angels in Florida: Stevens and Sublimation

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WALLACE STEVENS' DARK decade of the poetic soul, which ran roughly from 1923 to 1933, was definitively broken, never to return, by the writing of "The Idea of Order at Key West" in 1934, his first major poem since "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" (1924). It is one of the oddities of modern poetry that Marianne Moore experienced a similarly long, troubled sleep at almost the same time, though in her case silence lasted eight years, from 1924 to 1932. Poets were searching for Stevens in the late 1920s and early 1930s, none perhaps more so than Hart Crane, who wrote these lines to Louis Untermeyer nine months before his suicide: "Does anyone know what has happened particularly to Wallace Stevens of late? I miss fresh harmonies from him almost more than I can say. There never was anyone quite like him, nor will there be!" (*Selected Letters* 478). Stevens wrote openly, for him, of how dark those years were in "The Sun This March": "The exceeding brightness of this early sun / Makes me conceive how dark I have become" (*CPP* 108–09). "The Sun This March" is a superb poem, an epigrammatic testament to the poet's rebirth under the aegis of winter and cold—"Our element, / Cold is our element and winter's air / Brings voices as of lions coming down"—but it is a poem that signals the coming change, as opposed to bringing it about. It was "The Idea of Order at Key West" that marked the rebirth of Stevens' poetic career. In this programmatic, dark lyric, Stevens begins again. It is his second version of "Sunday Morning," a rediscovery of vocation. This rediscovery has everything to do with finding himself able to write once more, burningly, about erotic depths and measures taken to defend against those depths, measures taken to measure the depths of eros, to take the measure of eros.

For Stevens is not able to start writing again until he is able to forge a deep connection with the erotic sources of his poetry. Toward the end of the *Harmonium* cycle, in the early 1920s, Stevens produced a number of vexed valedictions to libidinous vitality: the final two sections of "The Comedian as the Letter C," the whole of "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," "O, Florida, Venereal Soil," "Last Looks at the Lilacs." Certainly, as with "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" from 1919, plenty of energy persists despite the lamentations of loss, though the poems of 1922 and 1923 are tinged with an acrid odor largely absent from "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle," even as

they probe erotic identification and counter-identification more deeply than most of Stevens' earlier poems. They are more frankly anatomical (these are no anatomies of monotony): "To what good, in the alleys of the lilacs, / O caliper, do you scratch your buttocks . . .?" (CPP 39). For whatever reason, having little to do with poetic worth, such poems marked an impasse for Stevens. It is possible that he could not build a poetry upon a sense of erotic disenfranchisement or engulfment. He needed to find a way of mastering erotic influx.

Ten years after writing "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," he returns to another version of the sea-shore ode, as it has been called—too touristy a name for these plumbings of oceanic desire. "The Idea of Order at Key West" is a breakthrough poem because Stevens is able to gain access to what he spurns and craves, even if such access appears by way of trespass. No poet is more mediated than Stevens and no poem of his more screened than "The Idea of Order at Key West." What he stages as a breakthrough in this poem emerges with the propulsive force of primal erotic insistence, negation itself serving as the sheerest filter for the bass note of pre-vocalized desire. This is not an expression of thwarted or tormenting desire; Stevens takes us into an erotic danger zone, but he takes prophylactic measures to ward off the threat.

For the poem's *mise-en-scène* (spellcheck helpfully suggested "muse" in lieu of *mise*) demands that we go through that tutelary sentry of the liquid merge line, the Floridian Diana, chaste *chasseur* of the shore line, so that "we" can be assured that it is possible to survive a singing contest with the sea. "She" is one of Stevens' most conspicuously allusive figures. She comes by way of Misenus, Trojan trumpeter dashed to pieces by Triton in Book VI of the *Aeneid* for daring to sing beyond the genius of the sea; and she passes through Wordsworth's Solitary Reaper, Whitman's nightingale, Stephen Dedalus' bird-girl. Stevens projects her as "the single artificer of the world / In which she sang" (CPP 106), though she is most surely a complex artifact. She is a figure of mastery, as fashioned by her auditors. The sea will not knock her off her stride. She is no dark donna, sprung from venereal soil; her seductive power comes from her ability to repel, for she, too, adopts a defensive mode. Of course we do not know what she really sings; what counts most is what her auditors choose to hear against the trumpeting, trumpeting background noise of the sea, which demands to be described, never to be circumscribed. While marveling at the woman's song, the poet manages to circumscribe her, for the rhetorical tactic of ironic negation, omnipresent in the poem, does precisely what Freud said it would do—it licenses disruption through the disavowals of denial. I am not hearing the dark voice of the sea, the poet declares, and what I am not hearing sounds like this. The rhetorical surface of the poem betrays this disruption through the built-in flaws of deliberate catachresis. "The Idea of Order at Key West" is studded with key syntactic and semantic dislocations. Stevens cracks the well-wrought urn, just as he was to do some years later

when he wrote "The Poems of Our Climate": "The water never formed to mind or voice, / Like a body wholly body"; "If it was only the dark voice of the sea / That rose, or even colored by many waves"; "It was her voice that made / The sky acutest at its vanishing" (CPP 105–06).

But why is it so important for us to hear her and not the sea? Why is it so important to deny the register of what is being registered in these vivid descriptions of the dark sea? Stevens' language for the "inhuman," "meaningless" plunges of sea and air delves more deeply into a primordial erotic cauldron than any *Harmonium* poem, even as the poet attempts to cordon off the site by formal boundary markers, evidenced in words such as "measured," "artificer," "portioned," "order," "Arranging," "demarcations." Overriding the sea wall of form, however, is the auditory deluge and its visual echo of non-mimetic, but erotically arousing, sound-scenarios: "The grinding water and the gasping wind," "heaving speech of air," "meaningless plungings," "fragrant portals" (CPP 105–06).

What Stevens professes not to hear and see summons a vast image of erotic gigantomachia. But instead of being deluged by this vivid vision of eros writ large, Stevens chooses to purvey a belief that lyric can exist in a metonymic, contiguous relation to the power of the "choric," in Julia Kristeva's sense (*Revolution* 25–30), embodied by the "sunken coral water-walled" (CPP 105). Song can sever itself, cut itself off from pre-symbolic cries, to use a word that is always important in Stevens' poetry. The singing woman's schematic schism between voice and cry, programmatically exaggerated by the male poet's defensive needs, blazons the motto: It Must Be Abstract. When Stevens declares that, for her, "The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea / Was merely a place by which she walked to sing" (CPP 105), he acknowledges the masculinist allure of the sea-shore topos (place). The double pun on "mere"—"mer" and "mère"—works to deflate the mystique of the ocean for her, placing her in the counter-erotic line of sea-drifters including Marianne Moore ("A Grave") and Elizabeth Bishop ("The End of March"). Certain women singers, it is implied, can abstract themselves from maternal-material embodiments of oceanic erotic desire and certain men like to watch them—I mean, behold them—in full stride.

A late *Harmonium* poem, "Stars at Tallapoosa" maps the erotic seascape of "The Idea of Order at Key West" with keen accuracy, which is not surprising considering that Stevens is, after all, expounding an erotic complex built upon regression and anxiety. "Stars at Tallapoosa" invests in the distinction between the pleasures of the queen and huntress, chaste and bold, wielding "A sheaf of brilliant arrows flying straight, / Flying and falling straightway for their pleasure" and the drone of "The criers, undulating the deep-oceaned phrase" (CPP 57). Clearly, Stevens had Whitman in mind when writing those words, and Whitman is without question also one of the sought-for spirits in "The Idea of Order at Key West." "Whose spirit is this?" (CPP 105), the poet asks, and the question floats freely between singer and sea. "The maker's rage to order words of the sea" (CPP

106) reminds us that the original title of "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life" was "A Word from the Sea." "Stars at Tallapoosa" declares, "The night is not the cradle that they cry" (*CPP* 57), thereby summoning Whitman by way of denial, a rhetorical prefiguration of the technique employed to summon the unlicensed in "The Idea of Order at Key West." But I think that there may be an example closer to hand as partial explanation for Stevens' charged ambivalence toward erotic violence, and the nearer precursor is always more threatening.

I would argue that when Stevens writes about the sea as a destructive-seductive element, engendering in the gendered imagination a vision of colossal consumption between bodies wholly body, his poem moves in the orbit of Hart Crane's "Voyages," a more extreme representation of the "Infinite consanguinity" (*Poems* 36) of oceanic desire. *White Buildings* (included here in *Poems of Hart Crane*) was published in 1926; Crane was dead by April 1932. Crane tracked Stevens from early on; a 1919 letter to Gorham Munson advises him to read Stevens' latest work in *Poetry* magazine, adding: "There is a man whose work makes most of the rest of us quail" (*Selected Letters* 26). There is no mention of Crane in Stevens' letters, though seasoned readers of Stevens have long known that, although his letters comprise a remarkably revealing record of the poet's interior obliquities, few give specific details about books and writers.

There is, however, overwhelming evidence that Stevens kept up with new events in the world of poetry and books in general. As he wrote to Williams in 1925: "As the Chinese say, two or three days without study and life loses its savor" (*L* 245). Nor could Stevens have missed the publication of *White Buildings* in 1926, if for no other reason than that the volume was rapturously reviewed by Waldo Frank in *The New Republic*, which Stevens read faithfully. Crane was twenty years younger than Stevens, but his career took off at a much earlier age than was true for Stevens, so Crane's writing in the early 1920s closely resembles Stevens' own experimental rhetoric of excess. "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" and parts of "Voyages" are composed and published at the same time that Stevens is completing the last poems in *Harmonium*. Stevens and Crane are each following Keats's advice to Shelley, in the famous letter of August 16, 1820, to "load every rift' . . . with ore," creating conspicuously packed poems at the brink of libidinous overload. In some sense, then, Crane picks up at the point where Stevens left off. My guess is that Crane's suicide in April 1932 brought him strangely alive for Stevens, especially since Crane went overboard north of Havana, not far from Key West. Stevens' most recent trip to Key West, in February 1934, just prior to the writing of "The Idea of Order at Key West," found him taking long walks on the beach, not with Ramon Fernandez, but with his confrère Judge Powell. Here is how he describes the scene to Elsie, freezing to death back in Hartford: "This morning we walked down to what is called Porter's dock, and looked off over the water of the Gulf which has what must be a

Mediterranean beauty. The air was crystal. We could see the whiteness of occasional sails at immense distances in the morning sun" (L 268). As Stevens sought the genius loci haunting the shore in the poem that would follow, did he fail to think of Crane? Would it disfigure the poem to subtitle it: At the Tomb of Hart Crane? Is "The Idea of Order at Key West" a buried elegy for Crane?

What compels me to ask the question is the poem's hyperbolic association of eros with the oceanic body, gendered as female and marked by "fragrant portals" identified with "origins": "Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred, / And of ourselves and of our origins" (CPP 106). The censored material, the censored materiality, of "The Idea of Order at Key West" focused on the originating female body, marks an extreme moment for Stevens. Interestingly, the closest analogue to such an act of identification may come in several passages from "Sunday Morning," located at the explosive beginning of his canonical career. "Death is the mother of beauty, mystical, / Within whose burning bosom we devise / Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly" (CPP 55). When the reader winds the ribboned water lanes, to borrow from Crane, flowing between poems, it becomes difficult and pointless to ignore the startling prefigurations of Stevens in the central third poem of "Voyages." Not only does Crane help to establish the key signature of Stevens' erotic composition by presenting it in even bolder accents, but he also sheds light on the older poet's motives for mediation. Indeed, as Crane himself puts it in "Voyages I": "The bottom of the sea is cruel" (*Poems* 34). More dangerous still is the opening assertion of "Voyages III": "Infinite consanguinity it bears" (*Poems* 36). Such reciprocity, as Crane will demonstrate, can be delivered only by death. "Infinite consanguinity" is another phrase for "origins" and the poetry of origins, whether found in Whitman's "Sea-Drift" poems or Crane's "Voyages"; it collapses selves and origins in a poesis of epiphanic erotic identification with the body of the mother. Here is Crane in "Voyages III":

Infinite consanguinity it bears . . .
 And so, admitted through black swollen gates
 That must arrest all distance otherwise,—
 Past whirling pillars and lithe pediments,
 Light wrestling there incessantly with light,
 Star kissing star through wave on wave unto
 Your body rocking!
 And where death, if shed,
 Presumes no carnage, but this single change,—
 Upon the steep floor flung from dawn to dawn
 The silken skilled transmemberment of song. (*Poems* 36)

This is the vision of erotic extremity closest to what Stevens summons and then defends against in "The Idea of Order at Key West." His own

language of material oceanic embodiment comes close to Crane's, close enough indeed that Stevens feels it necessary, at the poem's end, to posit a saving distance or distinction between selves and origins: "And of ourselves and of our origins" (CPP 106). The woman's song resembles various abstract, schematic designs from *Harmonium*, though shorn of wit. Stevens is deeply invested in the power of song divorced from origins, for he fears the Orphic dismemberment summoned by extreme transmemberments of song, so he hypostasizes the singing woman's defiant distancing, but he cannot rid himself of the sense that "The measure of the intensity of love / Is measure, also, of the verve of earth" (CPP 12), as he phrased it so memorably in "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle." The poem's final act of distancing comes with the grand illusion of the mapped zodiac against the night sky, said to "Master[] the night and portion[] out the sea" (CPP 106). But this mastery, as Stevens well knows, is a compensatory act of sublimation, sublimity as sublimation, a vast, disembodied substitution.

"The Idea of Order at Key West," I have argued, triggered Stevens' rebirth into the writing of poetry. In this poem, he found a way to submerge and sublimate, to court engulfment and to draw aesthetic boundaries around the destructive element. He could observe those boundaries and he could trespass upon them. Playing with origins released something in Stevens that allowed him to move forward as a poet, for he never writes a poem quite like "The Idea of Order at Key West" again. He will return, periodically, to sites of embodied erotic consanguinity, but he will never summon and celebrate the threat in such charged terms. The direction that Stevens follows after "The Idea of Order at Key West" is more precisely mapped not by that poem's nocturnal light show, for the ghost of origins still haunts the singer, but by a great poem that Stevens paired with his Key West ode in the fall of 1934, in Ronald Lane Latimer's *Alcestis*: "Evening Without Angels."

"Evening Without Angels" is not nearly as well known as "The Idea of Order at Key West," though it puts Stevensian sublimation into play, puts it on display, perhaps more fiercely and beautifully than anywhere else in Stevens' poetry. The act of stargazing at the end of this poem moves beyond momentary tricks of the eye as it establishes a chaste and chastened program for intellectual vision that surrenders nothing to the lost vehemence the midnights hold. The kind of seeing that Stevens projects in "Evening Without Angels" is what he will call a "project for the sun" (CPP 329), when he writes of the importance of seeing in the opening sections of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" in 1942. Sight seethes in the closing lines of this poem and sight is tied to a vision of voice that marks itself as deliberately different from the murmuring bass-line *liebestod* of "The Idea of Order at Key West":

... 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. (CPP 112)

“[A] seething minor” is as good a phrase as one will find to describe what Freud would accept as a successful substitution. Stevens here demonstrates the power of secondary object choice, detouring his touring eye toward a conspicuously sublime object of identification, which he then reduces to bareness without any sacrifice of power. The siren song of origins has been banished but not at the cost of repressive deformation. The “arches” of this poem retain the force of the arche, the origin, but they now signal a teleological destination achievable by thought. Nor does the true response of this poem’s voice depend upon the self-sacrificial violence of the singer. But the erotic *askesis* of “Evening Without Angels” would not have been possible, apparently, without a prior descent into the vortex of origins, however mediated.

As these two Floridian poems demonstrate, Stevens tends to spatialize the dialectic of descent and sublimation along a predictable vertical axis. But his verbal variations on the character of the competing poles is virtually inexhaustible. Stevens, no less than Freud himself, needs a topographic model in order to express the charge and discharge of energy between sublimation and erotic fixation or regression. It is important to note that Stevens never regards sublimation as a static state or condition; rather, it is the very epitome of momentary stays against erotic confusion. His tendency to write poems in sections captures the transitory “victory” of whatever process might be labeled as “sublimation.” No sooner is the position held than it dissolves, as one section replaces another. The frequency of short poems in his canon also achieves this effect of calling attention to achieved dissolutions, dissolving achievements.

A canto from “The Man with the Blue Guitar” serves as a sharp illustration of Stevens’ tendency to play at the margins of oceanic origin, summoning and avoiding engulfment through acts of verbal legerdemain. Canto XVIII, “A dream (to call it a dream) in which / I can believe, in face of the object,” posits a form of desire that does not avert itself from the face of presence, or the present face. Such desire (and I am equating dream with desire) does not turn away from the present or presented object in order to pursue greater satisfaction with original objects of cathexis:

A dream (to call it a dream) in which
 I can believe, in face of the object,

A dream no longer a dream, a thing,
Of things as they are, as the blue guitar

After long strumming on certain nights
Gives the touch of the senses, not of the hand,

But the very senses as they touch
The wind-gloss. Or as daylight comes,

Like light in a mirroring of cliffs,
Rising upward from a sea of ex. (CPP 143)

An embodied dream, so the posited argument runs, eliminates the need for dreaming altogether, since, for a fused moment at least, the faced object proves sufficient to desire. The erotic supplement of the dream state is not renounced but fulfilled in face of the object. Yet we begin to notice what Stevens means by having us face the object, rather than dwell on or in the face of the object. The opening for distance soon widens, the possibility of the face disappears, and we are given over to a sensorium generated by the trick of prestidigitation. Instead of embodiment, we have manipulation, “the touch of the senses,” as if the best we can hope for is a powerful aura surrounding embodied desire, a full-bodied reflection of corporeality. “Like light in a mirroring of cliffs” is worthy of Dante in its precise rendering of reflected radiance. It is also a powerful and honest act of idealized sublimation—is there any other kind?—insofar as it celebrates a “Rising upward from a sea of ex.” “Ex” graphically foregrounds an almost cartoonish apprehensiveness toward the dangers of the sea conceived as a cradle of origins. Later in his career, in “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,” Stevens will talk about “the big X of the returning primitive” (CPP 405), but here it is “ex,” not the letter itself. What is the difference? “Ex” holds open the possibility that the primitive can be declared over with, former, as if abolished by a successfully secondary reflection in the mirror of concrete object. Of course Stevens knows better, but his guitarist likes to play with possibilities, so why not posit a full-bodied reflection of origins that is adequate to desire?

The closing poem in the volume *The Man with the Blue Guitar and Other Poems* is one of the more graphic Stevensian meditations on desire and the defenses against desire that we sometimes label “sublimation.” Indeed, “The Men That Are Falling” might be read as something of a satire against the possibility of sublimation. Published in *The Nation* at the outset of the Spanish Civil War, the poem earned Stevens the *Nation* Prize for 1936. Alan Filreis has written a brilliant, detailed study of the poem in *Modernism From Right to Left*, placing it in a richly ambivalent slot between the competing sides in that conflict (31–40). After Filreis, there is no need to probe the poem’s overt politics, such as they are, any further. However,

Filreis achieves his groundbreaking reading by putting aside the poem's burning erotic issues. But there is no need to jettison one part of the poem in order to read the other. The poem joins erotic deprivation and historical mutilation in a jagged coupling.

"The Men That Are Falling" opens with a gliding slant-rhymed couplet that situates itself with perfect poise between mock-prayer and nocturnal notation: "God and all angels sing the world to sleep, / Now that the moon is rising in the heat" (CPP 173). The poem quickly sounds a Wordsworthian note of uneasy naturalism, substituting memory for the realm of the senses: "crickets are loud again in the grass. The moon / Burns in the mind on lost remembrances" (CPP 173). We are back in the *Harmonium* setting of "lost vehemence the midnights hold" (CPP 57), only at this stage in his life (Stevens is 57) the poet regards the remembrances themselves as imperiled. The drive of desire drives off the possibility of sleep, for at this moment of crisis the insomniac poet no longer trusts to sleep as a recompense for erotic lack. "This is not sleep. This is desire" (CPP 173) declares erotic excess unassuageable by surrender to sleep.

Nowhere else in Stevens' poetry does he present erotic deprivation so bleakly as he does in "The Men That Are Falling." Alone in bed, but leaning toward an object in face of which he might gain satisfaction, "leaning on his elbows," searching for full-bodied gratification even in fantasy, the sleeper/dreamer/silent poet feels the pillow turn "black / In the catastrophic room" (CPP 173). This is not the "old catastrophe" (CPP 53) of "Sunday Morning," for this sense of falling, being overthrown, does not derive from the revival of ancient cultural myths; rather, the would-be sleeper of this room experiences an acutely present sense of vertiginous plunging "beyond despair." Not only does he fail to find an adequate object of desire, but also he cannot locate the source of desire itself: "What is it he desires?" runs the question, and the question itself runs into the abyss of aporia: "But this he cannot know, the man that thinks" (CPP 173).

At this point, when thought and self-analysis prove incapacitated by the anxiety produced through unbounded desire, Stevens takes the poem into a swirl of syntactic irregularity, signaling not so much a descent into chaos as a surrender to the force of what he calls "life itself." No amount of parsing can order the broken syntax of this middle section, for Stevens makes it impossible to order the elements of this syncopated passage so that we might attempt to trace agency, for example:

What is it he desires?
But this he cannot know, the man that thinks,

Yet life itself, the fulfillment of desire
In the grinding ric-rac, staring steadily

At a head upon the pillow in the dark,
More than sudarium, speaking the speech

Of absolutes, bodiless, a head
Thick-lipped from riot and rebellious cries,

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

Speak and say the immaculate syllables
That he spoke only by doing what he did. (CPP 173–74)

To declare that life itself brings the fulfillment of desire is tantamount to regarding Necessity as a kind of erotic teleology, a grim form of compensation indeed. Moreover, the violence of “grinding ric-rac,” especially within the context of accepting the power of the life force, puts one in mind of Shelley’s darkly triumphalist Chariot in “The Triumph of Life,” an allusion reinforced by the wheel imagery of “rack.” The abysmal ache of unsatisfied desire is quelled but only at the cost of inviting the mutilated figure of the decapitated historical body into the catastrophic bedroom itself. On one level, it is possible to read the severed head as a grotesque parody of “the man that thinks,” presenting us with the trophy head of a man who did not think but acted instead, yet lost his life as a result, indicating the futility of action as well as thought, until action is recuperated by thought under the aegis of sacrifice. There is a disturbing element of conspicuous, near-racialized othering in the portrayal of the rioter as thick-lipped, especially when that head is gathered to the black pillow. The phantasmagoric appearance of the victim of violent political absolutism as eerie answer to the poet’s unspoken prayer of erotic fulfillment further complicates the question of desire. For, rather than fulfilling the poet’s desire, the decapitated political martyr seems to embody a willingness to surrender the body for the sake of eternal speech, an act of sacrificial sublimation pushed to a grotesque extreme. The poet honors such sacrifice by blessing the victim and declaring his syllables “immaculate.” The poem returns to “God and all angels” but with bloodied lips, “the blood upon his martyred lips” (CPP 174), indicating that the bad taste left by confessing to a queasy link between sublimation and political violence cannot be cleansed by hyperbolic eulogy.

“The Men That Are Falling” is more of a crisis-poem, especially in terms of erotic anxiety, than one usually encounters in Stevens. A more characteristic meditation, but one that also brings a disembodied head into bed, is “Yellow Afternoon,” written three years later, in 1939. The poem deposits Stevens securely at the center of primary narcissism, where one can say that “one loves one’s own being,” which is a “visible and responsive peace” (CPP 216). This place or, better yet, topos, is associated with “the middle

of his field," "the bottom of things." Everything conspires to convey the feeling that the poet is centered even in a time of violence, for he has accepted the "fatal unity of war" (CPP 216). "Yellow Afternoon" presents sublimation as a delving down into the core of a stabilized, narcissistic center, held in place by energetic eloquence. Held in place, that is, until the center fails to hold:

The thought that he had found all this
Among men, in a woman—she caught his breath—
But he came back as one comes back from the sun
To lie on one's bed in the dark, close to a face
Without eyes or mouth, that looks at one and speaks.
(CPP 216)

No sooner does the poet declare that the center of his primary narcissistic being might be found in a woman who catches his breath than he catches his own breath and pulls back from the sentimentality of erotic idealization into the rich vacancy of disembodied desire. Stevens withdraws belief from the hollow of earthy fullness and returns, regresses, to the embodied darkness of disembodied corporeality, the dark blank face of "body wholly body" (CPP 105) even at the extremity where one expects a visage. Quiescent in tone, "Yellow Afternoon" remains nonetheless a gaping anatomy of lack.

A few months after writing "Yellow Afternoon," Stevens produced "Arrival at the Waldorf," in a flurry of lyric activity attendant upon returning from Key West. A humming hymn to home, the poem sketches a jaunty exposé of endless erotic substitutions, a dance of inexhaustible object swaps in which all notions of libidinal authenticity or genuine satisfaction evaporate in an air of sealed self-satisfaction. Never did resignation sound so breezy. Sublimation is all about substitution, a word Stevens invokes in the poem, writing it out and writing it off, in the high *Harmonium* measure of self-analytical mockery. This self-declared "wild poem"—let us call it "Wilde"—sings the enduring pleasures of the supplementary simulacrum as momentarily, but wholly, satisfying motive for metaphor. It is one place to end a meditation on desire and sublimation in Stevens:

Home from Guatemala, back at the Waldorf.
This arrival in the wild country of the soul,
All approaches gone, being completely there,

Where the wild poem is a substitute
For the woman one loves or ought to love,
One wild rhapsody a fake for another. (CPP 219)

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Love, Wine, Desire: Stevens' "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" and Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*

EDWARD RAGG

INTRODUCTION

MONTRACHET-LE-JARDIN" was published in early 1942 in *Partisan Review*. Wallace Stevens' poem appeared alongside Victor Serge's "On The Eve" (a graphic account of the humiliation of the French under Nazi occupation) and "On The 'Brooks-MacLeish Thesis,'" a heated dismissal of Van Wyck Brooks's and Archibald MacLeish's nationalist call for a patriotic and preferably non-modernist literature in time of war (23–33, 38–47). "On The 'Brooks-MacLeish Thesis'" involved condemnation from figures as influential as Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Louise Bogan, Lionel Trilling, William Carlos Williams, and Henry Miller. Stevens' poem thus found itself in a milieu debating the direction literature should take only three months after Pearl Harbor and the entry of the United States into the Second World War.

Of course, "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" does not speak directly to the pressure of that conflict, either with regard to the French occupation or US involvement. But it is a poem, like "Esthétique du Mal" (1945), that confronts an increasingly disturbing world ("the x malisons of other men" [CPP 235]); that speculates—like many other poems in *Parts of a World* (1942)—on the figure of the hero ("Man must become the hero of his world" [CPP 235]); and that preoccupies itself with appropriating spaces ("of Terra Paradise / I dreamed") or being at the mercy of occupying influences ("Consider how the speechless, invisible gods / Ruled us before, from over Asia" [CPP 236]). Similarly, although "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" is not concerned with a "war literature," it is a representative text in the sense expounded, albeit vaguely, by the *Partisan Review* editors: "Our main task now is to preserve cultural values against all types of pressure and coercion. Obviously we cannot even speak of the survival of democratic civilization apart from the survival of our entire cultural tradition" (2). Stevens would never write the war poetry of Karl Shapiro, Randall Jarrell, or Keith Douglas, just as he refrained from the literary-political invective of Tate

and the New Critics. But this demanding poem, with its baffling French title, must have appealed symbolically to the *Partisan Review* editors, particularly to their belief that literature under war should be as fecund and challenging as ever, if not more so.

For *Partisan Review* that meant, in fact, becoming less partisan; at least, the journal aimed to eschew a political line on the war. "A Statement by the Editors" involves a significant change in editorial policy:

For some time . . . the editors have disagreed on major political questions. The complexity of the world situation, indeed, is reflected in the fact that no two editors hold the same position on all major issues. . . . It is clear, therefore, that PARTISAN REVIEW can have no editorial line on the war. Its editors will continue to express themselves on the issue as individuals.

We believe that a magazine like PARTISAN REVIEW cannot under-take to present the kind of programmatic guidance one expects of a political party. (2)

This statement does not necessarily have a bearing on the kinds of poems *Partisan Review* favored during the war. But on the issue of a "war literature," there was an editorial consensus reflected in "On The 'Brooks-MacLeish Thesis.'" Thus, although editor Dwight MacDonald single-handedly spearheaded the debate in "Kulturbolschewismus Is Here"—an attack on Brooks's "Primary Literature and Coterie Literature," which had appeared in the previous issue of the journal—the pluralist attitude that dismissed "Brooks-MacLeish" could not have upset the other *Partisan Review* editors. Whether or not one can be partisan about pluralism, the magazine would have to publish diversely to retain its literary and cultural pulse—hence, perhaps, the appeal of Stevens' passionately ambiguous "Mont-rachet-Le-Jardin": a "pro-French" poem that has the advantage of saying nothing distinctly pro-French.

One wonders too about Stevens' impulse to submit to *Partisan Review*. Although not an editor, Stevens was minutely aware of the problems facing literary journals during the war. As early as 1940 he wrote to Henry Church, who was himself debating whether to re-establish his French *Mesures* in the States:

The crisis in Europe may come out of a blue sky, but I don't expect it to do so. I am afraid that what is going on now may be nothing to what will be going on three or four months from now, and that the situation that will then exist may even involve us all, at least in the sense of occupying our thoughts and feelings to the exclusion of anything except the actual and the necessary. (L 365)

In the same letter, Stevens allied his concern at the European conflict with the demise of various American journals:

The mere fact that the SOUTHERN REVIEW and the KENYON REVIEW are petering out speaks for itself. Again, the fact that the PARTISAN REVIEW, so much closer to politics, so much more in the movement, should seem to be growing more and more attenuated speaks for itself. (L 365)

Being too close to politics, being “more in the movement” than is desirable, was, at least for Stevens, a recipe for imaginative attenuation.

By contrast, Stevens’ position would have dismayed Allen Tate, who even before the *Partisan Review* attack on “Brooks-MacLeish” wrote to Cleanth Brooks in December 1941:

I happen to get every week some inside information on the doings of MacLeish; when I add to it what I hear about Van Wyck Brooks’ influence and the workings of the Donovan committee, I am convinced that something like a conspiracy is under way to suppress critical thought in the United States. Brooks’ doctrine is the official program of the movement. . . . It all adds up to Dr. Goebbels. (Brooks 83)

Tate was unaware, of course, that his own pursuit of “conspiracy” was the mirror image of the extremism laid at Van Wyck Brooks’s and Archibald MacLeish’s doors. Perhaps, then, Stevens’ impulse to submit “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” to *Partisan Review* was prompted, consciously or otherwise, by the hope that the magazine might become less partisan, might avoid submersion in debates that were, for Stevens, extraneous to producing robust poetry. Certainly, the poem arrived at the right time from the point of view of the editors’ “Statement.” Although that statement was not motivated explicitly by a desire to publish a broad range of poetry, it did imply the hope of creating the kind of space in which Stevens’ poem might find a home.

“Montrachet-Le-Jardin” is also, significantly, a love poem; at least, it meditates upon the condition and possible object(s) of love—“object” in the allied senses of what a lover seeks to obtain (a beloved) and a lover’s overall objectives. In what follows, I venture a partial reading of the poem that draws on a number of suggestive contexts. Section I speculates on the relationship between “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” and Stevens’ favorite French wine region, Burgundy, discussing the place of Stevens’ title in a poem that eroticizes imaginative terrains and plays with vinous allusion. Section II involves a closer reading that meditates on the poem’s portrayal of love and discusses an ingenious allusion to Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*—one illuminating how “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” shares that play’s taste for as-

sumed names and beguiling identities. In fact, the shape-changing of the *amour* characterizes much of the imaginative work of this “Francophile” poem; and part of its Protean subtlety, I will argue, is to appear to wrest a piece of France and project it into Stevens’ own backyard, an abstract appropriation implicit in the poem’s very title.

I. WHAT’S IN A NAME? “LE MONTRACHET” AND STEVENS’ LOVE OF BURGUNDY

Few discussions of “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” consider the nature of the poem’s title; nor does the relationship between the poem and its title invite much commentary. This is hardly surprising because, unlike those of his other “Francophile” poems, Stevens’ title is coy, refusing to invite a “manner” of reading. “Le Monocle de Mon Oncle” ironizes “men at forty” (CPP 12), who are themselves prone to irony; “Esthétique du Mal” confronts the relationship between aesthetics and human suffering. The title “Montrachet-Le-Jardin,” however, does not offer any explicit clues as to how to read Stevens’ poem, and the poem itself forges no overt relationship with France—the closest it gets is the “châteaux” of stanza twenty-six, combined with a penchant for French vocabulary: “lascive,” “malisons,” “friseured,” “demoiselles” (CPP 235–36). In fact, one might think “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” a fictional entity, an invented place-name, or some other proper noun, with only a passing, even eccentric, relationship with France.

However, Stevens’ title does evoke Burgundy and the shadow of occupied France in 1942. Le Montrachet is a Grand Cru vineyard situated in the heart of Burgundy’s Côte de Beaune. It is planted with some of the world’s best Chardonnay and is shared geographically between the villages of Puligny-Montrachet and Chassagne-Montrachet (see figure 1). However, the vineyard site takes precedence over the village name. Thus, “Le Montrachet” is typically prominent on the labels of wines made exclusively from this Grand Cru appellation. In fact, the names of many Burgundian villages are double-barreled to reflect their associations with particular Grand Crus. For example, in the Côte de Nuits, the village of Gevrey-Chambertin advertises its proximity to Le Chambertin (the vineyard Napoleon allegedly had his troops salute in homage). Likewise, Chambolle-Musigny appropriates Le Musigny; and Vosne-Romanée incorporates the famous vineyard of La Romanée (see figure 2).

The case of Le Montrachet is unusual, however, because it is claimed by the competing villages of Puligny-Montrachet and Chassagne-Montrachet (until the late 19th century known simply as Puligny and Chassagne). The name is also etymologically compelling. *Mont rachel* means “shaven mountain,” the undulating nature of the Montrachet slopes being an unusual feature in the Côte de Beaune (as though each slope were a “shaven hill”). In fact, the only discernible “mountain” in the area is the hill comprising Le Corton and Corton-Charlemagne, the Grand Crus of Aloxe-Corton to the north of Beaune. The noun “Montrachet” is also infectious because the

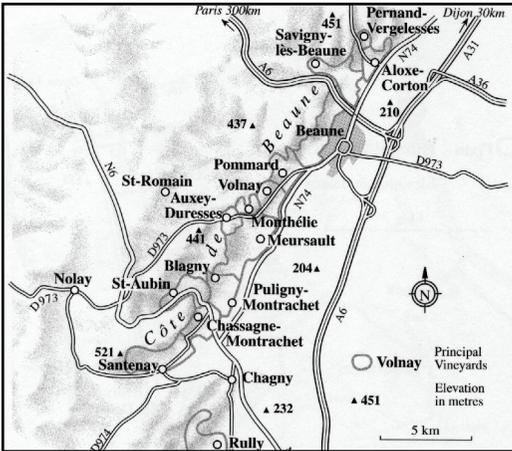


Fig. 1. Côte de Beaune

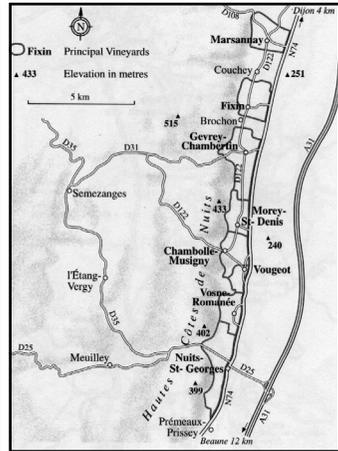


Fig. 2. Côte de Nuits

other Grand Cru vineyards associated with these two villages also hyphenate to raise their status, as in Chevalier-Montrachet, Bâtard-Montrachet, Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet and Criots-Bâtard-Montrachet.

The word *bâtard* (“bastard”) signifies much about Burgundy’s history, culture, and viticulture, as well as establishing a compelling relationship with Stevens’ poem. Burgundian vineyards are subdivided geographically, qualitatively, and proprietarily. Bâtard-Montrachet is not as cherished as Le Montrachet, although in practice the quality of wines deriving from either Grand Cru depends more on standards of viticulture and wine-making than on *terroir* (the French term embracing the viticultural aspects of specific vineyard sites). Hundreds of different *climat*—each with its own *terroir*—are thus further subdivided through ownership, and the number of different producers working most Burgundian vineyards is staggering (a legacy of Napoleonic inheritance law that stipulates that assets be divided equally among offspring after death). The situation is reflected in the names of Burgundian domaines today, as is the advantageous intermarriage of Burgundian families. Thus in Chassagne-Montrachet there are the domaines of Fontaine-Gagnard, Gagnard-Delagrangé, and Jean-Noël Gagnard as well as Albert Morey, Bernard Morey, Jean-Marc Morey, Marc Morey (et Fils!), and Michel Morey-Coffinet. Historically speaking, then, whether one was a legitimate son or daughter was particularly important in a Burgundian family.

“Montrachet-Le-Jardin” seems to echo this phenomenon in the lines “Bastard chateaux and smoky demoiselles, / No more. I can build towers of my own” (CPP 236). In addition to this covert allusion to a “bastardized” Montrachet (or even Bâtard-Montrachet itself), the “smoky demoiselles” also evoke a particular Burgundian site. For part of the Chevalier-Montrachet Grand Cru is known as “Les Demoiselles.” In brief, a “demoiselle” is an unmarried bourgeois woman and the subplot “Les

Demoiselles" was owned, in the 1880s, by two sisters called Viollot, who would have been addressed as "Mesdemoiselles" (see Norman 211 and section II for further discussion). In a poem preoccupied, therefore, with occupying and "owning" spaces—be they actual locales or places of desire—Stevens' title assumes a knowing resonance. But what about that title's own hyphenation, Stevens' inversion of "Le Montrachet" and the tag of the more "lower key" *jardin*?

There is no site in Burgundy called "Montrachet-Le-Jardin." There is a parcel of vines in the environs of Puligny-Montrachet popularly known as "Le Jardin," but this is not officially recognized and does not appear either on wine labels or on maps of the region. It is, therefore, extremely unlikely that Stevens would have heard of the "Le Jardin" vines (even supposing that those vines were called "Le Jardin" in the early 1940s, which would be hard to verify). Instead, Stevens simply follows the Burgundian habit of raising status by stressing proximity to a fecund and valuable locale (as though the garden of 118 Westerly Terrace presented everything Le Montrachet could offer the poet as an armchair imaginative traveler). More compellingly, Stevens may imply that in the harsh climate of the war, one must still, as Voltaire's *Candide* concludes, cultivate a garden, wherever one might be: "*Il faut cultiver notre jardin*" (*Candide* 166). Certainly, the poet associated Voltaire with freedom of action and expression. In a 1948 letter alerting Barbara Church to the socialist politics of *Partisan Review* backer Allan Dowling—note how that magazine surfaces again—Stevens speculated on the Cold War ideologies that put "freedom" at a beguiling premium: "The total freedom that now endangers us has never existed before, notwithstanding Voltaire, and so on" (L 620).

Stevens' allusion follows Dr. Pangloss' words to Candide:

"There is a chain of events in this best of all possible worlds; for if you had not been turned out of a beautiful mansion at the point of a jackboot for the love of Lady Cunégonde, and if you had not been involved in the Inquisition, and had not wandered over America on foot . . . you would not be here eating candied fruit and pistachio nuts." (*Candide; or Optimism* 144)

Candide acknowledges Dr. Pangloss' argument, but ventures, "but we must go and work in the garden" (a translation lacking the gravitas of "*Il faut cultiver notre jardin*"). The relationship between honest endeavor and "this best of all possible worlds" marks an acceptance of "things as they are" (CPP 135), an argument Stevens partially acknowledges in his "notwithstanding Voltaire and so on." Although the "*jardin*" of "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" can only be an echo of *Candide*, Dr. Pangloss' words also eerily evoke the France of the early 1940s in which evictions from mansions "at the point of a jackboot" (*Candide; or Optimism* 144) were not uncommon. In fact, the above translation dates from 1947; so it is unsurprising that its

translator might render *Candide* in an idiom attractive to a postwar readership.

That Voltaire's resourceful tale does, however, respond to such contemporary interpretation follows the spirit of Stevens' possible allusion. For "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" understands the privilege of having the freedom to eat "candied fruit and pistachio nuts," appreciating how that pleasure is partly informed by the investment in labor that precedes and succeeds the relative leisure of consumption. As the poem suggests, we may say "amen to our accustomed cell" (CPP 235)—accepting a Panglossian "chain of events"—while also desiring a world of "*responsive fact*" (CPP 237; emphasis added) in which we have the freedom to project ourselves imaginatively, the freedom Voltaire also signifies for Stevens.

Whatever the association of Voltaire, Stevens' "Jardin" does echo occupied France. Maintaining France's vineyards during the war was a matter of national pride, and the practice of bricking up cellars to conceal prestigious bottles from the Nazis commonplace, particularly in Burgundy (the Gestapo often being fobbed off with indifferent wines [see Kladstrup and Kladstrup]). Admittedly, Stevens' poem lacks a garden setting, unlike, for example, the gastronomic "Certain Phenomena of Sound" (1943): "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" (CPP 256). In fact, the "persona" of "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" who dreams of a "Terra Paradise" finds his fireside meditation ironically deflated: "I affirm and then at midnight the great cat / Leaps quickly from the fireside and is gone" (CPP 237)—a resignation similar to, though less plaintive than, Yeats's "Lines Written in Dejection" (1915/19): "When have I last looked on . . . the dark leopards of the moon?" (195). However, the basic human pleasure of cultivating a garden space is clearly of relevance to Stevens' 1942 poem. The word "*jardin*" assumes an evocative resonance.

Stevens' inversion of "Le Montrachet" also takes pressure off the definite article "Le" (rather than affirming *the* "Montrachet" distinct from its sub-vineyards). In "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" the article applies equally to "Jardin," the garden in which Montrachet might be absorbed, unless the phrase signifies "Le Jardin de Montrachet" (where the garden would be a subset of Le Montrachet). But Stevens' hyphenation naturally involves some two-way travel between garden and vineyard, perhaps neither subsuming the other but both becoming instead parts of a larger, metaphorical whole. Certainly, the cachet of the name "Montrachet" persists, as if Stevens were playing on its etymology—taking his own "shaving" from the "mountain" and transplanting it home, grafting that space onto his imaginative roots, or, in the reverse movement, projecting those roots onto Le Montrachet.

Perhaps, then, the *Collected Poetry and Prose* should retain the title "Montrachet-Le-Jardin"—as it appears in *Partisan Review*—rather than adopt "Montrachet-le-Jardin." In fairness, Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson note: "The present volume prints the text of the first printing of the Knopf

edition [of *Parts of a World*]” (CPP 972), and that printing indeed has “Montrachet-le-Jardin” in its “Contents,” with the poem’s title appearing in block capitals.² Moreover, Stevens never insisted his definite article be capitalized; so my suggestion is preferential rather than practical. However, the article “Le” should be capitalized because of the poem’s ostensible relationship with Le Montrachet; unless, of course, one argues the title “Montrachet-le-Jardin” deliberately attenuates the cultural dominance of the French site. Without an authorial preference, however, it would be hard to make this case, if at all, whereas the existence of Le Montrachet does, at least, suggest Stevens is responding to a proper noun.

Perhaps more problematic in the *Collected Poetry and Prose* is Kermode and Richardson’s vinous gloss on Stevens’ title: “*Montrachet-le-Jardin*] A white wine” (CPP 1001). No such wine of this name exists, and I can find no evidence that Stevens ever found one. The poet did, however, have more than a passing interest in wine; his library contained two significant gastronomic titles: Paul de Cassagnac’s *French Wines* (1930) and Atherton Fleming’s *Gourmet’s Book of Food and Drink* (1933) (Moynihan 83, 86). Of the two, *French Wines* is more relevant to this discussion, but one can imagine Stevens relishing the adventurous palate of the Englishman Fleming, who devotes a whole chapter to “Curry” together with details of the numerous recipes he has “collected.” There are even ones for curried lobster (“Jhingá (Lobster)”) and mango chutney (103, 106), although “lobster Bombay” probably remains Stevens’ creation (see CPP 347, and discussion below of “Meursault”).

French Wines is passionately aimed at specific readers:

This book is . . . addressed to the gourmet who is seeking theoretical and practical information: to the Frenchman who loves the treasures of his country, and to the foreigner who wants to understand all that is France. (8)

Compellingly, Cassagnac has much to say about the gourmet and connoisseur, which doubtless appealed to the poet of “Connoisseur of Chaos” (1938), another vinous piece from *Parts of a World* (“a law of inherent opposites, / Of essential unity, is as pleasant as port” [CPP 195]):

The real connoisseur uses without misusing and remains moderate in his pleasures—a moderation all the more praiseworthy because of the occasional temptation to overstep it: his love of wine is based on the pure aesthetic appreciation of its perfection. (6)

For Cassagnac, such connoisseurship is not exclusive to wine. He often ventures literary analogies:

Take, for example, Margaux 1900. A magnificent bottle of wine without a fault. But it fails to sweep us . . . to those giddy heights to which, for example, that same Margaux, but an 1875, lifts the admiration of the connoisseur. An exact parallel is the difference between a work of art executed classically and a masterpiece; or a poem, the prosody of whose verses is perfect, and an inspired poem, Abbé Delille and Alfred de Musset. (27)

But if Stevens lacked firsthand experience of Château Margaux, Cassagnac's writing would certainly have captured the poet's imagination, particularly through its vicarious journeys: "Jump into your car and start from Paris for the south, pottering along the road. As soon as you reach Olivet you'll find the vineyards of the Loire" (14). This narrative quality would have attracted Stevens as much as a letter or *objet d'art* from Thomas McGreevy, Leonard van Geysel, Ebba Dalin, or Anatole or Paule Vidal. Although less "personal" for Stevens, Cassagnac's language nevertheless enchants: "You stopped to lunch, tea, and dinner at good inns or at friends' houses: you got out of your car to admire and examine the vineyards: you asked for information on . . . the methods of culture and vinification" (14–15).

Cassagnac also explains why the Burgundian region takes its early 20th-century shape, mentions "Montrachet" frequently (141, 143), and accounts for the significance of Burgundy's double-barreled names ("There is no doubt that Gevrey would be unknown if it hadn't tacked on Chambertin" [150]). He describes the subdivision of the Burgundian vineyard and discusses the problem of poorly made, even adulterated wines, which appropriate prestigious names as a misleading index of "quality" (142–52). When *French Wines* was translated, Burgundies were not, as they usually are today, domaine-bottled, and this left the *negoçiants* (and even merchants in other countries) some hand in blending. In short, there was no guarantee that a bottle labeled "Le Montrachet" contained any wine derived from that vineyard. What was an authentic Burgundy in the 1930s and '40s—certainly before the adoption of the Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée system—was anybody's guess. In this vinous allusion, therefore, Stevens' title speculates on what counts for a legitimate or authentic name. But I will turn to this aspect of "Montrachet-Le-Jardin," particularly its conjunction with *Cymbeline*, in section II.

It could be objected that while Stevens owned a copy of this book, he rarely consulted it, let alone became acquainted with Burgundy (and I am certainly not arguing Stevens relied on Cassagnac when writing "Montrachet-Le-Jardin"). However, the book does chime with Charles Mauron's contemporaneous *Aesthetics and Psychology* (1935), a work that also blends aesthetic and gastronomic pleasures: "Without the originality of artists our human world would lose half its taste" (52). Moreover, Stevens' po-

etry and correspondence amply demonstrate his appreciation of wine as well as a personal predilection for Burgundy.

Take the opening of canto V of *It Must Give Pleasure*:

We drank Meursault, ate lobster Bombay with mango
Chutney. Then the Canon Aspirin declaimed
Of his sister, in what a sensible ecstasy

She lived in her house. She had two daughters, one
Of four, and one of seven, whom she dressed
The way a painter of *pauvre* color paints.

But still she painted them, appropriate to
Their poverty. . . . (CPP 347)

Meursault is not far from the villages of Puligny and Chassagne-Montrachet. As a gastronomic token, the wine reflects the contrast between leisured consumption and the tougher search for what "gives pleasure," not least for the Canon Aspirin's sister (and does the Canon require aspirin in instances of overindulgence?). Certainly, the canto comments on the relationship between aesthetic and gustatory pleasures. Indeed, for Stevens, Cassagnac and Mauron, gastronomy and literature are parts of a larger aesthetic whole. Significantly, it is having eaten that the Canon meditates upon his sister's poverty, which, in turn, initiates further artistic speculation: "The Canon Aspirin, having said these things, / Reflected, humming an outline of a fugue / Of praise, a conjugation done by choirs" (CPP 347). For Stevens, material conditions have a stake in imaginative freedom and vice versa (as his comments on Voltaire suggest).

Stevens also refers to Burgundy in his correspondence. Following a trip to New York, the poet wrote to Barbara Church:

Since I had a car I brought home a load of mangoes, fresh apricots, the outsized cherries that I like, a little Chablis and a little Meursault. . . . This last always seems the coldest thing in the world on a hot day in the garden where I like to have lunch occasionally if the neighbors are away as they often are. (L 682)

Stevens' passion for consuming Meursault in an undisturbed *garden* space suggests how the title "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" might have attracted the poet. Indeed, his knowledge of Burgundy was sufficiently advanced that when Nelly de Vogüé, daughter of the Comte de Vogüé (owner of the eponymous domaine based in Chambolle-Musigny), came to America to establish a literary magazine in the early 1950s, Stevens wrote to Barbara Church about the matter (see WAS 3768) and mentioned to José Rodríguez

Feo that he associated “the name of de Vogüé either with the *Revue des Deux Mondes* or with a moderately good Burgundy” (L 741).

The correspondence also mixes aesthetic and gastronomic concerns. Writing to Henry Church about his “supreme fiction,” Stevens commented:

When I get up at 6 o'clock in the morning . . . the thing crawls all over me; it is in my hair when I shave and I think of it in the bathtub. Then I come down here to the office and, except for an occasional letter like this, have to put it to one side. After all, I like Rhine wine, blue grapes, good cheese, endive and lots of books, etc., etc., etc., as much as I like supreme fiction. (L 431)

What is fascinating about this letter is the proximity of palpable, physical objects (“Rhine wine, blue grapes, good cheese, endive and lots of books”) to that abstract construction: “supreme fiction”; especially where the abstraction has a physical effect on Stevens’ imaginative nervous system (“the thing crawls all over me; it is in my hair when I shave [etc.]”). But note how without its usual indefinite article, “supreme fiction” is almost in danger of becoming a *definite* article, such as German wine, grapes, or books (usually, when Stevens refers to “a supreme fiction” he asserts that “it would not take any *form*: it would be abstract” [L 430; emphasis added]). The poet also plays with articles and abstraction in “Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas” (1940) (“There was that difference between the and an, / The difference between himself and no man”), where “an” refers to an abstract “empty place” as opposed to a particular, defined space (“the empty place” [CPP 230]). This slightly earlier poem also precedes “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” in *Parts of a World*, the later poem acting as a kind of commentary on “Extracts from Addresses” (see section II below).

I have suggested elsewhere that Stevens’ “abstract” desires to be mediated—to become “an abstraction blooded” (CPP 333)—while that which is already mediated can be re-configured imaginatively only through an abstract aesthetic (otherwise the senses turn off quickly to the habitual or mundane [“Pragmatic Abstraction” 11 ff.]). Stevens’ above “etc., etc., etc.” suggests further desired items to be purchased through office work, but the acquisition of these physical things is clearly on a par with “supreme fiction” (which also has a place in the office, albeit relative). In other words, there is an abstract dialectic in much of Stevens’ imaginative pleasure in which physical palpability vies with abstract re-configuration, at work, at home.

The push to palpability—whether it is feeling an abstract thing crawl or the desire for Rhine wine—is a phenomenon related to what Benjamin Lee Whorf (that other famous employee of the Hartford) called “linguistic binomialism.” For Whorf, “Standard Average European” languages intrinsically give forms to amorphous quantities: “Our language patterns often require us to name a physical thing by a binomial that splits the

reference into a formless item plus a form." This works well for already physical objects, as in "stick of wood, piece of cloth, pane of glass" or "cake of soap" (138, 141). It is less successful for abstract qualities, as in the title *Ideas of Order* (the nouns "idea" and "order" are immaterial and, as parts of Whorf's binomial, create poetic ambiguity). What we see in the above letter, therefore, is a dialectic in which Stevens' physical pleasures are inextricably bound up in the process of abstract imagination. Moreover, physical reality will remain responsive only if it is re-constructed through imaginative communion, such as is found in "Montrachet-Le-Jardin," to which we will now turn.

II. "MONTRACHET-LE-JARDIN" AND *CYMBELINE*

In 1942, love was on Stevens' mind. The epigraph to "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" captures the elusive presence of Stevens' desired abstraction:

And for what, except for you, do I feel love?
Do I press the extremest book of the wisest man
Close to me, hidden in me day and night?
In the uncertain light of single, certain truth,
Equal in living changingness to the light
In which I meet you, in which we sit at rest,
For a moment in the central of our being,
The vivid transparence that you bring is peace.
(CPP 329)

To feel love for "a vivid transparence," manifest in the "uncertain light" of "certain truth"—a light matched by the more mutable "light" in which that love is met—seems a private, even spiritual desire. But Stevens' rhetorical questions suggest something less covert. The presence of the "supreme fiction" is contrasted with a truth "hidden": either in the most superlative ("extremest," "wisest") book or locked up within whoever keeps that book "close." To be "For a moment in the central of our being" suggests a larger reciprocity—not merely one between poet and "supreme fiction"—in which that possessive pronoun ("our being") accentuates the relationship between the second person "supreme fiction" ("for you," "I meet you," "you bring") and any reciprocating "lover." Thus it is not merely Stevens' "I" who receives the "peace" offered by a loving "you," but "the central" of a larger human "being," a being paradoxically alive precisely because it is abstract.

A few months earlier Stevens had composed "Montrachet-Le-Jardin," which has its own apostrophe:

What more is there to love than I have loved?
And if there be nothing more, O bright, O bright,
The chick, the chidder-barn and grassy chives

And great moon, cricket-impresario,
And, hoy, the impopulous purple-plated past,
Hoy, hoy, the blue bulls kneeling down to rest.

Chome! clicks the clock, if there be nothing more.
(CPP 234)

"Montrachet-Le-Jardin" practically caricatures apostrophe. It repeatedly gestures to the creation or discovery of something "to love" but teeters on naming its beloved. It is not, therefore, a poem that knows, nominally speaking, what it should apostrophize, an important aspect of its textual desire (just as it shies from naming directly such places as Bâtard-Montrachet or Les Demoiselles). To that extent, the poem contrasts significantly with "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," particularly its epigraph. The rhetorical question opening "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" is both desirous and one that feigns world-weariness. It asks literally, "Is there more for me to love than I have loved?" and resolves ironically, "Can there really be more to love than I have loved?" Stevens' giddy "Hoy, hoy" and ironic poetic apostrophe, "O bright, O bright," perhaps outweighs the literal sense of the question (and there is mock-finality in "Chome! clicks the clock": time is up, or at least passing by). By contrast, "Notes" both feels the presence of a beloved and can name that love, even if its object is an abstract "supreme fiction." It is also the poem that has given us the largest glut of Stevensian names, a nomenclature for the poet's mid-career advertisement of abstraction.

Admittedly, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" also pivots on a tension between naming and resisting the desire to fix by nomination:

But Phoebus was
A name for something that never could be named.
There was a project for the sun and is.

There is a project for the sun. The sun
Must bear no name, gold flourisher, but be
In the difficulty of what it is to be. (CPP 329)

The word "flourisher" is a palpable echo of "Montrachet-Le-Jardin," Stevens using the word only on these two occasions in the *Collected Poems* (see Serio and Foster). However, "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" considers "something" to love that is even harder to locate than Stevens' "supreme fiction"—a "something more" that *is* unnamable (and certainly resistant to the ironic nomination of "Notes" with its "gold flourisher"):

But if, but if there be something more to love,
Something in now a senseless syllable,

A shadow in the mind, a *flourisher*
Of sounds resembling sounds, efflorisant,
Approaching the feelings or come down from them,

These other shadows, not in the mind, players
Of aphonies, tuned in from zero and
Beyond, futura's fuddle-fiddling lumps,

But if there be something more to love, amen,
Amen to the feelings about familiar things,
The blessed regal dropped in daggers' dew,

Amen to thought, our singular skeleton,
Salt-flicker, amen to our accustomed cell,
The moonlight in the cell, words on the wall.

(CPP 234–35; emphasis added)

I quote this complex sentence entirely to illustrate a number of qualities. Stevens' desirous anaphora ("But if, but if")—an obvious contrast with the playful repetition of "O bright, O bright"—heralds a significant synaesthesia. The poem favors something in a "senseless syllable," an abstract "shadow in the mind," which recalls Stevens' extensive play on the centrality of mind in "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas": "It cannot be half earth, half mind; half sun, / Half thinking; until the mind has been satisfied, / Until, for him, his mind is satisfied" (CPP 232). But that shadow, "a flourisher," obviously has a sonorous base ("Of sounds resembling sounds"). Moreover, the paronomasic "efflorisant"—which clearly *resembles* "flourisher" in sound and appearance—offers another visual dimension (following on from the sonorous "shadow") because "efflorisant" is a French-sounding adjective derived from the English "effloresce": to burst into flower (the English adjective is "efflorescent" [OED]).

"Efflorisant" also evokes the "Salt-flicker" of Stevens' "singular skeleton"—the figure for "thought" the poem goes on to explore—because "efflorescence" is also a chemical term for the crystallization of salts. Those spatial lines where Stevens' "sounds" are "Approaching the feelings or come down from them" mimic emotion becoming crystallized. As the OED says of "effloresce" in its own spatial language: "(Chem., of crystalline substance) turn to fine powder on exposure to air, (of salts) *come to the surface and there crystallize, (of ground or wall) become covered with salt particles*" (emphases added). In short, Stevens has added a saline dimension to his other crystalline pronouncements in *Parts of a World*, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," and his other 1940s poems (see Serio and Foster for the frequency of "crystal," "diamond," and "glass").

"But if there be something more to love": this anaphora is only punctuated by Stevens' stately "amen," a competing anaphora designed to as-

suage those doubts about “other shadows” arising in stanza five. The poem is performative in that it silences, grammatically speaking, the clause beginning “These other shadows, not in the mind, players / Of aphonies.” Stevens capitalizes here on his earlier habit of offering “dramatic” unresolved subordinate clauses in “The Man with the Blue Guitar” (1937) (see canto III [CPP 135–36]). This is ironic because “aphony” is precisely a loss or lack of voice, as though Stevens’ poem were giving voice to a voiceless threat that must itself be silenced. At least the poem indicates a crystallization of feeling in which the unwieldy nuisance of “futura’s fuddle-fiddling lumps” is prevented from interrupting Stevens’ incantatory “amen.”

The relationship between this desirous “amen” and the clumping line, “futura’s fuddle-fiddling lumps,” is neatly textual. “Futura” is a sans-serif typeface that looks similar to Arial or Century Gothic (both being derived from Futura). Sans-serif type lacks the curls and squiggles that make body text easy to read, but it has the advantage of not kerning, thereby standing out in titles or newspaper headlines (I presume it is coincidental that the title “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” actually appears in a sans-serif type very like Futura in *Partisan Review* and that the magazine’s editors were not paying much attention to “futura’s fuddle-fiddling lumps”). Certainly, those cold, futuristic “lumps”—absolute blocks “tuned in from zero and / Beyond”—assume little weight as “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” turns its attention to lauding more “familiar things.” But Stevens remains playful because one of those familiarities is the mock-tragic; there is certainly a quasi-Shakespearean relish in “The blessed regal dropped in daggers’ dew.” Nevertheless, the poem also marks an acceptance of our mortal coil (“amen to our accustomed cell”), albeit tempered by “thought,” the “singular skeleton” that bolsters the fragile skeleton within.

Stevens’ making a typographic allusion is unusual, but not surprising given his hand in the appearance of his *Alcestis* and *Cummington* books—*Ideas of Order* being quirkily set in the Gothic script Inkunabula (which prompted the young Elizabeth Bishop to write to Marianne Moore: “I am so pleased to have [*Ideas of Order*]—but isn’t the print dreadful?—and the price?” [45]). The deliberately clumsy “futura” of “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” suggests the tension described earlier between palpable physicality and abstraction. Those “fuddle-fiddling lumps” are coarse, unlikely objects of love. They certainly lack the inspiration of Stevens’ “words on the wall,” words that transform the confined “prisoner” of stanza eight who, for all his confinement, is delivered by “thought,” by imaginative action.

Significantly, “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” turns the prisoner’s cell—both his literal chamber and body—into a site in which an impalpable “murmuring” becomes physical, becomes “a throat,” or speaking organ:

To-night, night’s undeciphered murmuring
 Comes close to the prisoner’s ear, becomes a throat
 The hand can touch, neither green bronze nor marble,

The hero's throat in which the words are spoken,
From which the chant comes close upon the ear,
Out of the hero's being, the deliverer

Delivering the prisoner by his words,
So that the skeleton in the moonlight sings,
Sings of an heroic world beyond the cell,

No, not believing, but to make the cell
A hero's world in which he is the hero.
Man must become the hero of his world. (*CPP* 235)

These lines continue an ongoing debate in Stevens' early 1940s poetry between being and belief, between the "actual" and the "rhetorical" spirit that encourages belief. In "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War" (1942), Stevens' long meditation resolves: "The hero / Acts in reality, adds nothing / To what he does. . . . It is a part of his conception, / That he be not conceived, being real" (*CPP* 249). One is encouraged to believe in the "reality" of the hero, in this sense; but a rhetoric of belief can easily become a substitute for the hero's "conception," which only betrays the distance between conception and "reality."

"Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas" is also preoccupied with belief and desire:

To have satisfied the mind and turn to see,
(That being as much belief as we may have,)
And turn to look and say there is no more
Than this, in this alone I may believe,
Whatever it may be; then one's belief
Resists each past apocalypse. . . .

What

One believes is what matters. Ecstatic identities
Between one's self and the weather and the things
Of the weather are the belief in one's element,
. . . the repeated sayings that
There is nothing more and that it is enough
To believe in the weather and in the things and men
Of the weather and in one's self, as part of that
And nothing more. (*CPP* 232–33)

Such "repeated sayings"—as in Stevens' "there is nothing more," "one's self," "the things," "the weather"—contrast with the economic repetitions of "Montrachet-Le-Jardin," which explicitly dispatches a "rhetoric" of belief: "No, not believing, but to make the cell / A hero's world." Thus in the

poem that follows "Extracts from Addresses" in *Parts of a World*, an important concatenation of phrases converts the impalpable "night's undeciphered murmuring" into something concrete, both physical and usefully abstract. The night's "murmuring" becomes "a throat" that is the basis of the "hero's throat" through which those lingering "words on the wall" are matched by "the words [that] are spoken." The "hero's throat," now speaking, becomes "the chant" that emerges "Out of the hero's being," a point of transport delivering the prisoner not to execution or final judgment but to a novel, imaginative locale. Thus the "accustomed cell" grows less accustomed and becomes instead a place of creative transformation (no longer, at least in a pejorative sense, "nothing more").

This abstract quality involves pursuing desirous figures that are frustratingly hard to locate. Thus Stevens' "salty skeleton" continues his crystalline dance while a floating "third person" enters the poem: "He hears the earliest poems of the world / In which man is the hero. He hears the words, / Before the speaker's youngest breath is taken!" (CPP 235). The ambiguity surrounding "he" and the possessive "his" goes back to the line "Delivering the prisoner by his words," which primarily suggests it is the hero's words that deliver the inmate, but which also implies the prisoner delivers himself by his own words. In the lines quoted above—"to make the cell / A hero's world in which he is the hero"—Stevens' pronoun cannily refers both to the hero who becomes his world and to the "skeleton" who also sings "of an heroic world." This tension persists in the poem even after Stevens' more aphoristic statement: "Man must become the hero of his world."

Such ambiguity feeds our uncertainty about who "hears the earliest poems of the world" (the sole uncomplicated use of "he" occurs in the line, "The salty skeleton must dance because / He must"). What I am suggesting is that just as "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" ambiguously alludes to a garden space that capitalizes on the prestige of a Burgundian vineyard—and just as it presents its own beguiling flowers ("Licentious violet and lascive rose") but not much of a garden—the poem's reader struggles to delimit *where* its abstract figures move and breathe, whether they be "the hero," the "salty skeleton," "the speaker," or even the "prisoner" (the latter hardly confined to a cell, at least not one of walls). There is a lingering French note in "lascive," the French form of the English "lascivious," which at the very least implies playfulness (from *lascivus*, "sportive"). In the poem's desirous spaces, its evocation of a "Midsummer love" in which one is disorientated by "night creatures" who echo "rhetorics more than our own" (as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" is concerned with unnamable and un-locatable desire, the abstract meditation on a love that discovers neither a habitation nor a name.

Shakespeare emerges, in fact, from the "breath" of Stevens' speaker. As we consider "the earliest poems of the world," the poem alludes to *Cymbeline*:

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. (CPP 235–36)

On initial reading, Stevens' abstract "hero-land" cultivates a space intact from earthly trouble, a frontier beyond life. It is a "bezeled plain" because a "bezel" is a sloped edge, specifically the "oblique face of [a] cut gem," from the old French *besel* (thus in Stevens' ironic simile a plain that cannot be plainly seen). The "hero-land to which we go" does not sound as forbidding as that final frontier from whose bourn no traveler returns. But Stevens has more than *Hamlet* in mind in desiring a land where the "poison in the blood will have been purged." The poem tropes the sacraments paid to Innogen as she is laid to rest by Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus in *Cymbeline*, Act 4, Scene 2.

The song the mourners sing, like the skeleton's song in "Montrachet-Le-Jardin," is of "an heroic world beyond the cell." As Guiderius begins:

Fear no more the heat o'th' sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages.
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages.
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Arviragus adds:

Fear no more the frown o'th' great,
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke.
Care no more to clothe and eat,
To thee the reed is as the oak.
The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this and come to dust. (CW 4.2.259–70: 1154)

The surface parallels between Stevens' poem and *Cymbeline* are obvious enough. The imperative "Fear" links the texts, as does Stevens' modification of "no more" to "never." But Stevens' "Fear never" sounds more defiant than resigned, being more a call to arms than "Fear no more," the diction of last rites. Stevens' phrase reads not only as imaginative defiance, however, but also as a self-protective ballast. It is designed to anchor one against quotidian pressure, just as Mrs. Dalloway, in Virginia Woolf's novel, conjures up the same "Fear no more" couplet from *Cymbeline* as a means of buoying herself before her party (141). In short, both *Cymbeline* and "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" aim to defend themselves from a winter of discontent (accepting that Stevens' "winter-stop" is an ambiguous kind of threat).

But the allusion to *Cymbeline* becomes far more important for its dramatic import. Innogen's burial is neither a proper burial, nor is it just Innogen who is "buried." To Guiderius and company, Innogen is the boy, Fidele; but neither Fidele nor Innogen is actually dead (Innogen merely having taken the drug Pisanio assured her would conquer sickness [CW 4.2.38: 1152]). The other figure jointly buried with Fidele is Cloten, who, though he is known by the company to be Cloten, is wearing the clothes of Posthumous, Innogen's love (Cloten's ploy, sore at being denied Innogen's hand, having been to murder Posthumous wearing Posthumous' own clothes, before rapping Innogen). As Cloten ironically complains: "she held the very garment of Posthumous in more respect than my noble and natural person" (CW 3.5.34–36: 1150). After Guiderius et al. have delivered their "obsequies," Innogen, waking from her induced sleep, mistakenly recognizes Cloten's body for that of Posthumous. It is only because Cloten is decapitated that she does not realize her mistake.

Cymbeline thus trades in mistaken identities (and deaths) as well as misplaced desire. Stevens' allusion to the burial scene is ironic because "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" is also supremely desirous and trades in elusive identities and assumed names—not least by appropriating "Le Montrachet," which, historically, has proven both attractive and lucrative. In fact, the desire to produce inauthentic wines that bear prestigious names is no different from Cloten's ploy of promoting himself as Posthumous. The name "Fidele" obviously derives from "fidelity," and at several points in *Cymbeline* the assumed name is played on for its connotations of truth and faith (see CW 4.2.382–83: 1155). But it is a false name. Belief, and by extension faith, is something "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" also critiques, at least any belief that fails to create an imaginatively responsive world.

Where "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" insists on creating "hero-land," however, it does so largely without the first person speaker who "starts" the poem and resurfaces only in its close. One must have faith, then, in the power of the imagination to create a heroic world (without the figure who nominally "makes" that world). Stevens' first person does not reappear until stanza twenty-four, and the floating "he" of stanza fourteen proves

no surrogate. In *Cymbeline*, Fidele-Innogen's song is likewise misplaced. The song itself was originally sung at the funeral of Arviragus' and Guiderius' mother, Euriphile. As Arviragus instructs Guiderius: "let us . . . sing him to th' ground / As once our mother; use like note and words, / Save that 'Euriphile' must be 'Fidele.'" Not only is the song improvised out of Euriphile's sacraments, it is also not actually *sung* in the play at all, at least not entirely. Guiderius replies: "I cannot sing. I'll weep, and word it with thee, / For notes out of tune are worse / Than priests and fanes that lie" (CW 4.2.237–43: 1154). "Fear no more" becomes, then, a spoken song; Stevens is troping more a poem than a song, something not immediately clear in the allusion.

Both texts also rail against the trials and tribulations of everyday life. Stevens' poem withstands "the x malisons of other men," a malison being a curse, deriving from the Old French "*maleison*" (perhaps "*mal son*," bad sound). "Malison" is also a "doublet of *malediction*, just as benison is of *benediction*" (Skeat 357). Implicit in this phrase, therefore, is the need to resist not just the particular cursing of other men, but also their malediction, the sum of evil speech (from the Latin *maledicere*). For it is the "x malisons" of men that pose a threat rather than the malisons of "x" numbers of men. Diction that is "mal," therefore, is comparable to or exceeds the actual threats of "other men" (as is the case with the "dark italics" of "Esthétique du Mal" [CPP 287]). Thus both texts desire a release from harmful speech. As *Cymbeline* states, "Fear not slander, censure rash. . . . No exorcisor harm thee, / Nor witchcraft charm thee" (CW 4.2.273–78: 1154).

But both texts also confront nominally less serious threats. *Cymbeline*'s song is one of consolation: "Thou thy worldly task hast done, / Home art gone and ta'en thy wages." By contrast, Stevens imagines a garden for "hero land," or at least an imaginative, horticultural space in which miracles "fall / As apples fall." As stanza twenty-four declares: "A little while of Terra Paradise / I dreamed." Thus the tone of the *Cymbeline* song, with its injunctions to "care no more to clothe and eat," is turned from consolation in death to consolation in a living, imaginative world: an earthly paradise. Although "death's element" intrudes on "Montrachet-Le-Jardin," the consolations of *Cymbeline* serve to reconstruct the miraculous, imaginative space Stevens' poem so desperately desires. Writing to Robert Frost a few months after "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" was published, Stevens uncharacteristically imagined inviting Frost to his house, claiming: "How nice it would be to sit in the garden and imagine that we were living in a world in which everything was as it ought to be" (L 422–23). "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" transforms the funereal connotations of Shakespeare's play to achieve precisely such an imagined state (one upon which Stevens knew he would never act, at least in terms of inviting Frost).

Cymbeline also comments more covertly on "Montrachet-Le-Jardin." Having met Fidele, Guiderius and company—in proleptically ironic comments, given Fidele's impending "death"—discuss the "grief" the boy endures:

ARVIRAGUS How angel-like he sings!

GUIDERIUS But his neat cookery!

BELARIUS He cut our roots in characters,
And sauced our broths as Juno had been sick
And he her dieter. . . .

GUIDERIUS I do note
That grief and patience, rooted in him both,
Mingle their spurs together.

ARVIRAGUS Grow patience,
And let the stinking elder, grief, untwine
His perishing root with the increasing vine.
(*CW* 4.2.49–62: 1152)

In “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” we read:

But to speak simply of good is like to love,

To equate the root-man and the super-man,
The root-man swarming, tortured by his mass,
The super-man friseured, possessing and possessed.
(*CPP* 236)

Stevens’ “root-man” naturally chimes with Le Montrachet and the “Bastard chateaux” the poem also observes. But the root and vine that metaphorically struggle in Fidele also coincide with the equation of Stevens’ “root-man” and “super-man.” The notion of love thus links these texts in ways Stevens likely did not foresee. On meeting Fidele, Guiderius announces: “Were you a woman, youth, / I should woo hard but be your groom in honesty” (*CW* 3.6.66–67: 1151), and he later declares: “I love thee: I have spoke it; / How much the quantity, the weight as much, / As I do love my father” (*CW* 4.2.16–17: 1151). Even Arviragus—as his name suggests, and, in Stevens’ language, the “plus gaudiest vir” (*CPP* 236) of the band—says: “I know not why / I love this youth” (*CW* 4.2.20–21: 1152). Indeed, Innogen’s fate throughout *Cymbeline* is to be pursued, as Stevens has it, by the “possessing and possessed.” There is a struggle to love, just as there is a struggle “to speak simply of good.” All men may be able to “speak of it in the voice of gods” (*CPP* 236), but with the “x malisons of other men” to endure, all speech, any constructed paradise on terra firma, involves the struggle of root-men and super-men.

This struggle involves “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” in a dialectic that mirrors the physical/abstract tension that informs the poem at large. An earthy imagination battles with an unworldly one (both of which are implicitly

critiqued). The “super-man” is “friseured,” which makes him sound like a figure who is both “coiffeured” (“*friser*” is the French “to curl”) and prone to indulgent frissons (he both possesses and is self-“possessed,” a poseur). But “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” also critiques the desire to capitulate to an earthier, “Antaen” imagination, one that erroneously conceives of poetry as an ivory tower enterprise:

A little while of Terra Paradise
I dreamed, of autumn rivers, silvas green,
Of sanctimonious mountains high in snow,

But in that dream a heavy difference
Kept waking and a mournful sense sought out,
In vain, life’s season or death’s element.

Bastard chateaux and smoky demoiselles,
No more. I can build towers of my own,
There to behold, there to proclaim, the grace

And free requiting of responsive fact,
To project the naked man in a state of fact,
As acutest virtue and ascetic trove. (CPP 236–37)

The poem is again paronomasic. Those earlier “*sacraments* between two breaths” become the orations of “lean *sacristans*,” only to come up against the “*sanctimonious* mountains” of Terra Paradise. Such mountains are hardly *monts rachet* but stand aloof “high in snow.” But if a sanctimonious imagination is insufficient—and reminds one, even in a dream, of the “heavy difference” between idealized aesthetics and the realities of “life’s season or death’s element”—neither can Stevens’ speaker find solace in his Antaen “root-man” (who is hardly Antaen because he is unable to derive strength from the ground). He is “swarming, tortured by his mass,” a further ambiguous use of “his,” indicating that the “root-man” is either overwhelmed by his own bulk or, like the struggling vine, forced to compete with his surrounding masses. Thus two caricatures of the imagination are satirized in Stevens’ poem: the impossibly idealized “Terra Paradise” (whose very name proves inadequate) and the ironically deracinated world of Stevens’ “root-man.”

“Montrachet-Le-Jardin” thus favors some tower-building of its own: the construction of a robust imaginative space that neither aspires to the height (or attitude) of “*sanctimonious* mountains” nor capitulates to being smothered in “heavy difference[s].” Those defiant lines, “Bastard chateaux and smoky demoiselles, / No more. I can build towers of my own,” mark a desire to transcend commonplace struggle (for example, reappropriating the properties of illegitimate usurpers or saving those attractive damsels in dis-

tress, the “smoky demoiselles”). As was noted earlier, a “demoiselle” is an unmarried bourgeois woman rather than a “dame” of noble birth, the word adding to the poem’s love affair with Burgundy, always a more agricultural and mercantile region than aristocratic Bordeaux (“demoiselle” is also from the Old French, “*damoisele*” [Skeat 154]). Whether or not Stevens knew of the “Les Demoiselles” plot of the Chevalier-Montrachet Grand Cru (or about the Viollot sisters), his poem imagines a world in which conflagrations of desire may be assuaged and transcended. One should note how Stevens’ “No more” now echoes *Cymbeline*’s “Fear no more.” Again, just as Stevens’ “Fear never the brute clouds” transforms *Cymbeline*’s more consolatory “Fear no more the heat o’th’sun,” “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” adapts Shakespeare’s vocabulary in order to erect its own protective walls: “Bastard chateaux . . . No more. I can build towers of my own.” The best form of attack is strategic defense.

This aesthetic stance recalls Stevens’ earlier response—in his Introduction to Williams’ 1934 *Collected Poems*—to the “Ivory Tower” rhetoric that characterized 1930s literary criticism:

What, then, is a romantic poet now-a-days? He happens to be one who still dwells in an ivory tower, but who insists that life there would be intolerable except for the fact that one has from the top, such an exceptional view of the public dump and the advertising signs of Snider’s Catsup, Ivory Soap and Chevrolet Cars; he is the hermit who dwells alone with the sun and moon, but insists on taking a rotten newspaper. (*CPP* 770)

In the same month “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” was published, Stevens wrote to Hi Simons: “One of these days I should like to do something for the Ivory Tower. There are a lot of exceedingly stupid people saying things about the Ivory Tower who ought to be made to regret it” (*L* 403). Stevens’ comment indicates how much this was still a subject for debate by the 1940s, save that its point of reference moved from the Depression to literature under war. In 1939, Cleanth Brooks made the provocative claim that it was the public that inhabited an ivory tower and not poets. Moreover, the whole “Brooks-MacLeish Thesis” would have become neither a “thesis” nor a debate were it not for the implication that the irresponsible nature of “coterie literature” was precisely that its exemplars believed they could still retain their ivory towers.

Stevens’ comment on Williams, by contrast, shows how one can enjoy ivory towers along with “Ivory Soap” and implies that the person who really knows “the public dump” is the hermit who has an “exceptional view” of it. The phrase “heavy difference” recalls Wordsworth’s idiosyncratic use of the noun in *The Prelude*, in contexts lying somewhere between the “common” and “sanctimonious.” The Second Book lauds any “difference / Perceived in things where to the common eye / No difference is,

and hence, from the same source, / Sublimar joy" (1805 version, 318–21: 82) (Wordsworth amending "common eye" to "unwatchful eye" in the 1850 version, 300: 83). Similarly, the Third Book of *The Prelude* notes: "I had an eye / Which in my strongest workings evermore / Was looking for the shades of difference / As they lie hid in all exterior forms" (1805 version, 156–59: 98), lines Wordsworth again altered in the 1850 *Prelude* by substituting "the bodily eye" for "I had an eye" (158: 99).

I make this parallel because "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" frequently desires a third space, intermediate between such binary constructions as "super-man" and "root-man," ivory tower and "Bastard chateaux," "sanctimonious mountains" and the earthier "sacraments" of "two breaths" (oblations perhaps, but ones lacking the false show of piety the word "sanctimonious" implies). This desire is reflected in the poem's earlier wish to conceive an abstract "naked man." As *Cymbeline* makes clear, assuming garments and disguises signifies what one wants to be, become (or evade). However, in a stripping bare that anticipates the "first idea" topos of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," Stevens' poem conceives a totally naked man, stripped of all trappings.

Ironically, it is the skeleton who "proposes" the naked man:

The skeleton said it is a question of
The naked man, the naked man as last
And tallest hero and plus gaudiest vir. (CPP 236)

This "naked man" is an abstraction who is nevertheless "in a state of fact" (the word "fact" resonating throughout the end of the poem). He is impossibly superlative: the "tallest" hero, the "plus gaudiest" man, someone of "acutest virtue" as well as being "ascetic," excessively abstinent. But "the naked man" still lives by "responsive fact." That the poem concludes with a number of abstractions presented as "items" marks a similar tension. In other words, even although the poem attempts to "itemize" its abstract figures—to convert its abstractions into particular entities—there is always an abstract resistance to the particular. This has a pragmatic spin-off because such a tension enables "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" to pivot on the paradoxical "facts" of desire (for example, the wish to conceive an entirely "naked" man) that can never be facts in a commonplace sense. Stevens' "naked man" has no such matter and, like his other abstract figures, is significantly insubstantial.

Despite its attempt to capture various loves, however, "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" is finally a frustrated poem:

And yet what good were yesterday's devotions?
I affirm and then at midnight the great cat
Leaps quickly from the fireside and is gone. (CPP 237)

The poem thus ironizes the “items” that stand dogmatically in its penultimate stanzas. They are too “absolute” to be reached, despite the desire to touch the “naked”:

Item: The cocks crow and the birds cry and
The sun expands, like a repetition on
One string, an absolute, not varying

Toward an inaccessible, pure sound.
Item: The wind is never rounding O
And, imageless, it is itself the most,

Mouthing its constant smatter throughout space.
Item: The green fish pensive in green reeds
Is an absolute. Item: The cataracts

As facts fall like rejuvenating rain,
Fall down through nakedness to nakedness,
To the auroral creature musing in the mind. (CPP 237)

Each item—“cocks,” “wind,” “green fish,” “cataracts”—is preceded by a capitalized definite article, as though the poem were attempting to fix its facts/items as exhibits in a court of law. But “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” is still proficient in dislocating the reader’s sense of the relations between figures. The poem recalls its interest in sounds without words (or images), its “absolute” of “a repetition on / One string”—an image that again recalls “The Man with the Blue Guitar”—traveling toward “an inaccessible, pure sound.” Even the “imageless” wind can only mouth itself “throughout space,” unidentifiable save for its “smatter.”

Stevens’ final “item,” however, is neither an object nor requires a capitalized definite article:

Item: Breathe, breathe upon the centre of
The breath life’s latest, thousand senses.
But let this one sense be the single main. (CPP 237)

The imperative “breathe” recalls the floating “He” of stanza fourteen who, hearing the “earliest poems of the world,” also “hears the words, / Before the speaker’s youngest breath is taken!” (CPP 235). Stevens implies that capturing “The breath life’s latest”—that which assaults the present with a “thousand senses”—is the most valuable “absolute” we can have. Like “*Esthétique du Mal*,” the poem thus critiques the tendency in *Parts of a World* and “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” to idolize centrality or singularity. Rather than favor a single man, be it “major man” or Stevens’

other hero-figures, the poem recommends “the single *main*,” the plethora of life’s latest and “the major miracles” (CPP 236) that fall our way.

But “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” will not settle for so nameable a proposition as “the single main.” The possibility of fabricating a rival Le Montrachet disappears as we depart from the “garden scene” and find ourselves in a palpably domestic interior at the fireside. Stevens’ poem thus domesticates its desires, be they for love or wine, and tailors its imaginative grandeur within bourgeois limits, even if (and because of the fact) those limits are defined by the desire to “build towers” of one’s own. “Montrachet-Le-Jardin” is, finally, despite its title, a poem that resists naming the spaces closest to its heart.

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Notes

¹The information on Burgundy derives from Antony Hanson’s *Burgundy*, Remington Norman’s *The Great Domains of Burgundy*, and Jancis Robinson’s *The Oxford Companion to Wine*.

²The “Montrachet-le-Jardin” of the contents page appears as “MONTRACHET-LE-JARDIN” (*Parts of a World*, 141–47). I am grateful to Jonathan Strange for confirming this.

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“Both Sides and Neither”: Stevens, Santayana, and the Aestheticism of Androgyny

DAVID R. JARRAWAY

An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction which it at first demands, and who allows his erotic and ambitious wishes full play in the life of phantasy. He finds the way back to reality, however, from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind.

—Sigmund Freud

To be irrational and unintelligible is the character proper to existence.

—George Santayana

men grow[] small in the distances of space . . .

—Wallace Stevens

THAT a number of contemporary American gay writers continue to return to the poetry of Wallace Stevens (Michael Cunningham and Mark Doty have been my own signal instances in recent years¹) will probably suggest the limit case for Stevens’ “erotic poetics.” Several years ago, in examining the extensive correspondence between José Rodríguez Feo and Stevens gathered together in *Secretaries of the Moon*, I was keen to note the considerable interest shared by the letter writers in a number of homosexual authors familiar to both at the time: Walter Pater, Arthur Rimbaud, André Gide, Djuna Barnes, Osbert Sitwell, Ronald Firbank, and Truman Capote, among others. The shadow presence at back of this gay pantheon, as I have argued in an earlier essay, might have been the philosopher George Santayana, “a thinker with whom Stevens first became intrigued—as revealed in an exchange of poems with the famous professor of philosophy—while Stevens was an undergraduate at Harvard, and in whom a welcome interest had latterly been revived in correspondence with Rodríguez Feo,” while Feo was himself an undergraduate at Harvard during the Second World War (“Creatures of the Rainbow” 172).

For an even longer period of time, however, I have been fascinated by the preeminent place accorded Santayana by Stevens late in life by featuring him in one of the longer poems from his last collection, *The Rock*, entitled "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," composed in 1952. According to John McCormick, Santayana's most recent and perhaps most reliable biographer, Santayana was almost certain to have been gay, involving himself in at least one amatory relationship with John Francis Stanley, second Earl Russell (and brother to Bertrand), whom Benjamin Jowett once suspended from Balliol College, Oxford, for "entertaining" another man in his rooms overnight (Lane 170–71). When Santayana composes a sonnet in response to several that Stevens had read to him over the course of several visits while a Special Student at Harvard, it is possible to add Santayana's name to that pantheon of gay writers noted previously.² "Obviously, his mind was full of great projects of his future," Stevens remarks on these meetings in a letter to Rodríguez Feo from 1945, "and while some of these have been realized, it is possible to think that many have not. . . . [Nonetheless, Stevens concludes,] I always came away from my visits to him feeling that he made up in the most genuine way for many things that I needed [for] [h]e was then still definitely a poet" (L 481–82). But according to Ezra Pound, not very much of one.

Milton J. Bates cites a satirical sketch from Pound's *Pavannes and Divagations* (1918) that dismissively indicates what Pound really thought of Santayana and his circle of Aesthetes fancifully translated from Harvard to Oxford around the turn of the century when Pound himself had emigrated to England a decade or so later. In Pound's parody, the epitome of the effete decadent aesthete becomes:

This little American went to Oxford. He rented Oscar's late rooms. He talked about the nature of the Beautiful. He swam in the wake of Santayana. He had a great cut glass bowl full of lilies. He believed in Sin. His life was immaculate. He was the last convert to Catholicism. (qtd. on 24)

Stevens' daughter, Holly, who cites the same letter of her father to Rodríguez Feo alluded to above, records a quite different impression. "It is obvious Santayana had a lifelong influence on my father," she observes, adding a quotation from Santayana (from another of her father's letters from 1949) that perhaps crystallizes Stevens' memory of him: "I have always bowed, however sadly, to expediency or fate" (SP 69). Hence, prolonged inspiration combined with poignant sadness contrive to produce, several decades later, some of Stevens' most moving lines in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome"—lines composed just a couple of years short of Stevens' own conversion to Catholicism on his deathbed. In these lines, it is Santayana's fate to lie

In so much misery; and yet finding it
Only in misery, the afflatus of ruin,
Profound poetry of the poor and of the dead,
As in the last drop of the deepest blood,
As it falls from the heart and lies there to be seen,

Even as the blood of an empire, it might be,
For a citizen of heaven though still of Rome.
It is poverty's speech that seeks us out the most.
It is older than the oldest speech of Rome.
This is the tragic accent of the scene. (CPP 433)

At first glance, these lines convey perhaps more the sense of the elegiac than the erotic. But if the erotic is passionately coterminous with human desire, it may be helpful to remember that desire, as Mark Doty observes, most often “has less to do with possession than with participation, the will to involve oneself in the body of the world, in the principle of things expressing itself in splendid specificity . . . which enlarges us, which engages the heart, [and] takes us out of the routine limitations of the self” (20). The self-enlargement that Doty has in mind here would thus appear to transcend any specific or particular sense of a “gay” identity. Hence, in Santayana’s philosophical novel, *The Last Puritan* (1935), “What remains at the core of the novel is not homosexuality,” as Irving Singer observes, “but rather friendship as an ideal intimacy. In view of the love that it generally incorporates, it may be called erotic; but nothing is gained by reducing it to one or another type of libidinal sexuality—whether overt or merely ‘latent’ as Freud would say” (59). Indeed, that splendidly specific enlargement of the human self *beyond* its libidinally “routine limitations” or characterizations perhaps might be thought the primal attraction of Santayana for Stevens from the very beginning to quite likely the very end of his poetic career.

American historian and cultural pundit Edmund Wilson had a long-standing attraction to the philosopher for much the same reason. Visiting with Santayana in his convent room at the Hospital of the Blue Nuns in Rome seven years before Stevens composed his justly famous poem, Wilson, on assignment for *The New Yorker* magazine, observes that even in old age, “[Santayana] is still in the world of men, conversing with them through reading and writing.” Continues Wilson:

While others, in these years of war, have been shaken by the downfall of moralities or have shuddered under the impact of disaster [this is not so with Santayana]. . . . He has made it his business to extend himself into every kind of human consciousness with which he can establish contact, and he reposes on his shabby chaise lounge like a monad in the universal mind. (qtd. in Mishra 31)

According to his most recent biographer, Lewis M. Dabney, Edmund Wilson himself had also “made it his business to extend himself into every kind of human consciousness with which he can establish contact,” since in Wilson’s view, “the writer who is anything more than an echo of his predecessors must always find expression for something that has never yet been expressed, must master a new set of phenomena. . . . With each such victory of the human intellect, we experience a deep satisfaction” (qtd. in Mishra 33). If for Wilson the model for such deregulation of the limitations of human consciousness was George Santayana, conceivably Stevens himself derived a “deep satisfaction” in equal measure from this most ancient of mentors.

The splendid specificity of that “afflatus of ruin” in the lines of Stevens’ poem cited above, and elsewhere in the text with “The bed, the books, the chair, the moving nuns, / The candle as it evades the sight,” and so forth—such specificity becomes for Stevens and his Old Philosopher “The sources of happiness in the shape of Rome, / A shape within the ancient circles of shapes, / And these beneath the shadow of a shape” (*CPP* 432). In light of Wilson’s preceding commentary, the “shadow of a shape” I therefore take to mean that inarticulable human space quite outside the routine limitations of selfhood that expediency or fate had required Santayana otherwise to bow down to throughout his long life, as noted in Stevens’ letter to Rodríguez Feo in 1949 (see *L* 635) and which the philosopher’s shadowy presence now allows him to escape in Stevens’ majestic poem by virtue of his placement in-between:

Your dozing in the depths of wakefulness,
 In the warmth of your bed, at the edge of your chair,
 alive
 Yet living in two worlds, impenitent
 As to one, and, as to one, most penitent,
 Impatient for the grandeur that you need. . . . (*CPP* 433)

Hence, worldly specificity becomes for Santayana the condition of his very own non-specificity—“The extreme of the known in the presence of the extreme / Of the unknown” (*CPP* 432), as Stevens puts the case earlier in the poem—and it is within that very condition of non-specificity or self dis-possession that I aim to locate the eroticism of Stevens’ late lyricism.

Robert K. Martin’s brief but penetrating reading of Santayana in *The Homosexual Tradition of American Poetry* attributes something of the status of a dispossessed self to the poet, observing that “Santayana’s sense of himself as a Latin, or half Latin, was an important part of his self-definition.” “One might say,” Martin further remarks, “that he felt incomplete, a permanent alien, too English for Spain, too Spanish for England or New England. His dual nature made him an outsider and observer of life,” adding in a shrewd footnote that “the half-Latin figure may be seen as an

emblem of the androgynous self" (112, 232 n 37). But Santayana's androgynous dualism is a characterization he was perhaps prepared to take upon himself, as he records in an early passage from his autobiographical *Persons and Places*, from which I have taken my title: "I am born cleric or poet. I must see both sides and take neither, in order, ideally, to embrace both, to sing both, and love the different forms that the good and beautiful wear to different creatures" (155).³ This kind of tacking between identities within the non-committal rhetoric of the androgyne (to go with Martin's suggestion) would appear, indeed, to be the very condition of eroticism itself, as Freud might be thought to imply (in the opening epigraph). Suspended somewhere between the renunciation of reality and the playfulness of phantasy, according to Freud, the artist hypothetically sides with *both*, finding his way back to reality "by making use of special gifts to mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind" (qtd. in Shand-Tucci 75).⁴ In this way, Stevens can suggest (in another letter to Rodríguez Feo from 1945) that "in the world of actuality, in spite of all I have just said [about reality], one is always living a little out of it" (L 505–06)—an idea, Stevens goes on to remark, that is suggested to him (like Santayana as we shall see momentarily) by Henry James.

With the emphasis firmly upon multiplicity—"different forms" in Santayana, "truths of a new kind" in Freud—we are thus led back to Stevens' "To an Old Philosopher," once more, where the eroticism of the poetics is so insistently sustained by a similar emphasis upon a like multiplicity—"distances of space," "circles of shape," and so forth—from which the androgynous "inquisitor of structures" significantly placed upon a "threshold" repeatedly takes "form / And frame" (CPP 434) by the end of the poem. A spiraling eroticism (to go with Stevens' "circles of shape") might be the best characterization at this point, a term that hypothetically can also be extrapolated from Santayana, whose own "spiral theory" of subjectivity "denies that there is any inner kernel to be identified with one's real nature." "At any moment," as Singer explains this theory in much of Santayana's writing, "a person is just the sum total of his or her experiences. . . . On this view there is no break between the self and its experience, for experience *is* the self: in toto, the self is only a series of past, present, and future experiences" (30).⁵ Hence, according to Malcolm Woodland, in more global terms "Stevens's poetry presents many ways of being masculine, and there is often considerable tension among the different versions of masculinity that emerge in his texts," the main one perhaps lying in that tension between "masculinity as a capacity [solely] for heterosexual relationships" and "the somewhat hyperbolic and strangely incomplete alternative [of] an exaggerated homosocial masculine stance set up in resistance to this [former] temptation" (28, 67).⁶

One might even hazard the conjecture that much of the erotic contouring of Stevens' final collection of poems is pendant upon the dismantling of bifurcated or antinomous forms of identity where figures of various

kinds are located again and again at the intersection between contrary states of experience. In "An Old Man Asleep," for instance, which begins the volume, we find in the very first line "two worlds are asleep." These are then matched in the second stanza with "The self and the earth" which stand in some kind of "peculiar" relation to each other as a threshold-like river interposed between them aims to suggest, though riddlingly, with its own peculiar nomination by the letter "R" (*CPP* 427). Further along, in the somewhat related "Long and Sluggish Lines," a certain "wakefulness inside a sleep" presents another form of bifurcated identity, but a more insistent one this time—"a kind of uproar, because an opposite, a contradiction" as the poem states—and where the temptation is to resolve the conflict in some way, "talk it down" (*CPP* 443), as it were. And so on to the collection's very concluding poem, "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself," where "a scrawny cry from outside" the mind is never easily separable from "a sound in [the] mind" itself, the interanimation of inside and outside in some psychic space in-between thus forming, as with Freud's truths previously, "A new knowledge of reality" (*CPP* 451–52) in the poem's terminal line.

The two-sidedness of much of this rhetorical self-division conduces to produce throughout the volume some androgynous figures indeed. In "Madame La Fleurie," for example, "a bearded queen, wicked in her dead light" (*CPP* 432) is specifically intended to be something like we have never seen before: "a language [one] spoke . . . yet did not know . . . in the handbook of heartbreak," hence "crisp knowledge [] devoured by her, beneath a dew" (*CPP* 431). Not quite male or female, the androgynous figure in all of its polymorphous perversity in this text thus forges a clear link to a similar kind of pre-Oedipal figuration in "Long and Sluggish Lines" once again, namely, "these—escent—issant—pre-personae" that establish another strong polarity: here, the division between a childhood world of "comic infanta" and an adult world of "tragic drapings" (*CPP* 443).⁷ Precisely what gendered form (or forms) human identity is expected to take as it bursts all routine limitations of discursive self-possession is entirely open to speculation. At this point, we perhaps become one with the oarsman in Stevens' "Prologues To What Is Possible" when he discovers that the heavy vessel buoying him up for most of his life has suddenly lost all ballast, and he finds himself "voyaging out of and beyond the familiar," removed, the text scruples to point out, "from any man or woman, and needing none":

The object with which he was compared
Was beyond his recognizing. By this he knew that likeness of
him extended
Only a little way, and not beyond, unless between himself,
And things beyond resemblance there was this and that
intended to be recognized,
The this and that in the enclosures of hypotheses

Of which men speculated in summer when they were half asleep. (CPP 438)

Here, nothing short of “a fantastic consciousness” (CPP 445) would seem up to the task of enclosing Stevens’ androgynous figurations in some kind of hypothetical or speculative formulation. Not unexpectedly, Stevens positions this phantasy consciousness (the link to Freud, once again, is inescapable) “at noon at the edge of [a] field” in the opening section of his longest poem, the eponymously titled “The Rock,” and it is there, I would argue, that the erotic poetics of Stevens’ late work comes into its own in what this text refers to as “a queer assertion of humanity” (CPP 445).

What by now seems clear about Stevens’ androgynous aesthetic throughout much of this late work arguably undertaken in homage to Santayana is its suspicioning of any determinate knowledge or understanding or certitude with respect to human identity. Yet it is a suspicioning that is longstanding with the poet. “There is a perfect rout of characters in every man,” Stevens records in a journal entry from 1906, “—and every man is like an actor’s trunk, full of strange creatures, new & old” (SP 166). Almost fifty years later, then, we should not be surprised to discover once more an Old Philosopher whose “spirit’s greatest reach” pushes beyond the known—“beyond the eye” (to go with a favorite pun of Stevens) in “that more merciful Rome / Beyond”—and thereby positions himself “in the presence of the extreme / Of the unknown” that becomes coterminous with a “celestial possible,” and an “O, half-asleep” that is “the memorial of [Santayana’s] room” (CPP 432–33) in the convent in Rome. As one gloss on that important “O” just cited, Kate Bornstein aptly hypothesizes, “[The] zero must be the point where people and their ideas move out *beyond* their boundaries to become their opposites” (212; emphasis added).

If knowledge of identity, in such terms, is a zero-sum game, Stevens’ “queer assertion of humanity” would appear to be extraordinarily prescient in view of how queer theorists today are predisposed to view that vexed term “queer”: not by “the contradictory and incoherent definitional content of ‘the homosexual,’ ” but rather by “a position that is . . . constituted not substantively but oppositionally” and by “a deessentialized identity that is . . . properly speaking not gay but *queer*” (Halperin 61–62). But if it is possible to hear Stevens behind the queer theorist today, under the impress of an erotic poetics it should be even more possible to hear Santayana behind Stevens some time ago—the Santayana who once remarked that “this world is contingency and absurdity incarnate, the oddest of possibilities masquerading momentarily as fact. . . . To be irrational and unintelligible is the character proper to existence” (in *Soliloquies in England* [1936], qtd. in Posnock 213). Stevens’ own “Irrational Element in Poetry” would thus appear to provide the perfect gloss on Santayana’s queer assertion of human unintelligibility. For there, the poet himself as-

serts: "That the unknown as the source of knowledge, as the object of thought, is part of the dynamics of the known does not permit of denial." Furthermore,

It is the unknown that excites the ardor of scholars, who, in the known alone, would shrivel up with boredom. We accept the unknown even when we are most skeptical. We may resent the consideration of it by any except the most lucid minds; but when so considered, it has seductions more powerful and more profound than those of the known. (*CPP* 791)

Arguably refurbishing the irrational as an elemental force in his last collection of verse, Stevens perhaps pushes the unintelligible aspect of his androgynous aesthetic to the limit by allowing his erotic poetics to take expression, in Santayana's case at least, within the context of his (and perhaps Stevens' own) Catholicism given by the convent setting of "To an Old Philosopher in Rome." But how can Catholicism and eroticism be thought to co-exist?

In his landmark study of architect and aesthete Ralph Adams Cram, Douglass Shand-Tucci, citing Eric Gill, insistently makes the claim, "The erotic and the spiritual are not opposites, nor separable" (176; see also 198, 293, and *passim*). The linkage between Catholicism and homosexuality is "an old tale," Shand-Tucci contends, Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* being the greatest modern instance (175). But even in ancient times, "the type of 'passionate friendship' familiar to the early Church [from Classical Greece] was common . . . while 'the loving relation of [male] teacher and student in religious communities was very much a medieval ideal'" (189). Indeed, as Shand-Tucci further points out, "The Catholic moral law (as opposed to zealous polemicism) has *always* held to the teaching that homosexual sexuality as such is not sinful and is morally neutral; it is only its genital expression (like all genital expression outside heterosexual marriage) that is problematic" (176).⁸

For Donald Yacovone, the Boston-based group of abolitionists allied to William Lloyd Garrison come to exemplify much of the eroticism of fraternal love extending back to the Middle Ages, but in America, making its quite visible appearance a generation or two before Stevens and Santayana met at Harvard at the turn of the century. "As members of a profoundly religious movement," Yacovone writes, "abolitionists discovered that the language of ecstasy represented the only discourse that could express the intensity of their emotions and the depth of their commitment." Yet while their expressions of undying love for each other through much kissing, tear-shedding, and hand-clasping all reenacted "a ritual as old as Christianity," more to the point was the abolitionists' "language of fraternal love [that] symbolized a rejection of rigid definitions of gender and reflected a theory of Christian social androgyny that sought to restructure

American society" (86, 87). For Garrisonians, in this regard, their role model was the Christ himself, "a feminized fraternal figure, a model man, perhaps reflecting women's strong influence within the Garrisonian community," but in any event, a personage betokening that "Humanity is dual," according to one fervent abolitionist, "and yet when perfected is one . . . [since a] perfect character in either man or woman is a compound of the virtues and graces of each" (91). However, cautions Yacovone, as in the case of many historians of gay and lesbian culture today, we can too easily distort the view of androgyny presented here "by mistaking the language of religious ecstasy and sincerity, or agape, for homoeroticism or outright homosexuality," reducing it, that is to say, to a narrow reflection of our own faddish knowledgeable about such matters rather than, as with the irrational element in Santayana and Stevens' eroticism, allowing its language to speak a more "generous construction" of human identity in Yacovone's fine phrase (93–94, 95). On that level, as Stevens once again reminds us, knowledge mediated by the irrational elements of poetry "has seductions more powerful and more profound than those of the known" (CPP 791).

Precisely this "irrational" construction of religion, therefore, is forwarded in Shand-Tucci's historical account of Ralph Adams Cram. If Catholicism for this Victorian architect becomes "the principal expression or carrier of his sexual orientation," it had to be understood "in a most characteristically Platonic way" (198). Here the model for Cram was, not surprisingly, the Platonic aestheticism of George Santayana with whom, like Stevens, Cram was repeatedly in contact with at Harvard during the fin-de-siècle—the Platonism, that is to say, of Santayana's *Sonnets and Other Verses* (1894), where the name of the "great love" of Santayana's rather ascetic life at the time, Warwick Potter, is withheld, and the cryptic "W.P." is inscribed in its place (173). In this Platonic model, it is "the form of [the] young man [that] leads to a truer, more eternal form," according to Robert Martin once again, that form of the "imaged Word" giving itself over ultimately to its source "in the mystery of the Incarnation, as expressed by St. John, that most Greek of Christians" (qtd. on 198). Shand-Tucci thus cites Camille Paglia (from her *Sexual Personae* [1990]) on the sexual import of the Christian Platonism here; to wit, "Decadence . . . is drenched in sex, but sex as thought rather than action." "The Platonic ideal," Shand-Tucci concludes, "is not only the model that best reconciles Cram's religion with his sexuality but also accords with the way in his era aesthetes and decadents were inclined to feel the creative process was sustained," explaining further that a "relationship that does not fully satisfy genital needs can still be primary if not exclusive if the people involved regard intellectual needs as primary and physical needs as secondary" (196, 255; see also 256, 259, 292, and 383). In *Persons and Places*, Santayana provides his own justification for "the total abdication of physical, social or egotistical claims" on the psyche when he remarks: "The passion of love, sublimated, does not become bloodless, or

free from bodily trepidation, as charity and philanthropy are. It is essentially the spiritual flame of a carnal fire that has turned all its fuel into light. The psyche is not thereby atrophied; on the contrary, the range of its reactions has been enlarged. It has learned to vibrate harmoniously to many things at once in a peace which is an orchestration of transcended sorrows" (429). Hence, in the sonnet that Stevens composed at Harvard, "Cathedrals are not built along the sea" (for which Santayana provided an answering sonnet), we should notice in Stevens' concluding couplet that "Through gaudy windows there would come too soon / The low and splendid rising of the moon" (*SP* 33).

"Santayana, the last and the best of the poets of the Genteel Age," Martin surmises, "left in the end a legacy that was as vague as that of the earlier poets" (114). "Vague" is an important word here. It is interesting to note, for instance, the emphasis lent this particular epithet in Ralph Adam Cram's collection of Gothic horror stories, *Black Spirits and White* (1895), for example, in "The White Villa," where in a rather Stevensian-like setting, the protagonists find themselves "lying in the grass to the east of Poseidon, looking dimly out towards the sea, heard now, not seen,—vague and pulsating murmur that blended with the humming of the bees all about [them]" (qtd. in Shand-Tucci 196). In Ross Posnock's illuminating comparison of Henry James and George Santayana, he observes that James rejected "his father's flaccid, genteel idealism" and, in its place, came to feel, according to James's *Autobiography*, "'confidence in the positive saving virtue of vagueness' itself" (203).⁹ Matching the import of vagueness in James, Stevens' final collection of poetry perhaps offers the "slight dithering" (*CPP* 438) in "Prologues to What Is Possible." But whether vague or dithering, the point of the erotic poetics in both Santayana and Stevens is to establish a necessary *ambivalence* about gender identity and about a depersonalizing desire in general—an ambivalence that not only "renders heterosexuality noninevitable," as Christopher Lane cogently argues, but also "preempts the possibility of a purely gay-affirmative reading" as well (185).¹⁰ In sum, therefore, an ambivalent eroticism renders the androgynous aesthetic a liberatory egress from *all* sexual economies, and thus allows it to reinstall itself on a more generic plane: "the beauty and passion informing poetry" *tout court* (Lane 177).

In an important essay on "The Reinstatement of the Vague" in American literature, Richard Poirier cites a passage from William James's *Will to Believe* that is especially appropriate to the kind of ambivalent identity that, after Santayana, Stevens' own erotic poetics can be seen repeatedly to gesture toward throughout his final work. I say repeatedly because, according to James, "The bottom of being is left logically opaque to us, as something which we simply come upon and find, and about which (if we wish to act) we should pause and wonder as little as possible" (qtd. on 279). Santayana's close association with James and the philosophy of pragmatism at Harvard during the period when Stevens was a student would

undoubtedly have made this important notion of self-opacity fairly portable among all three writers (see Lentricchia, Chapter 2; and Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* passim). As Stevens himself recalls a decade or so later: "Reality is the great *fond*, and it is because it is that the purely literary amounts to so little" (L 505). But the *fond* notion of self-opacity is one that also extends back to Melville and Whitman (if not beyond) where "the image of the ungraspable phantom of life" was perhaps first instated (Poirier 279).¹¹ Poirier's focus upon the parallel images of gap and abyss for a self instinct with absence and mystery throughout the poetry of Frost reveals that the notion of the phantom subject would continue to have considerable futurity as well (see esp. 280–81). Several of Stevens' own invocations throughout *The Rock* say as much: in "The Plain Sense of Things," the "inert savoir" and "the absence of the imagination" (CPP 428); in "The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain," the "unexplained completion" and the "inexactnesses" (CPP 435); in "St. Armorer's Church from the Outside," the "mystic eye" and the "outward blank" (CPP 448); and so forth, in addition to phantom titles such as "The Hermitage at the Center" and "Vacancy in the Park." "That Stevens stands as an epitome of this tradition [that argues for "the virtue and necessity of vagueness"]," as Bart Eeckhout astutely remarks, "is one more telling indication of how far he managed to go in his poetic attempts at resisting the intelligence almost successfully" (34)—and never more so, as I have been arguing, when that intelligence is fully trained upon the problematic of human identity with George Santayana as the poet's lifetime guide.¹²

In conclusion, then, I think it would be a terrific oversight to underplay the important function that Stevens' erotic poetics plays in his late work in solemn deference to more sober or sedate concerns, given his seniority and stature as an accomplished and much celebrated writer in his twilight years. Focused as his eroticism is upon the possessive forms of selfhood that relinquish ambivalence and the "luxurious disbanding of identity" (the phrase is Lane's on 192) at their peril, Stevens' androgynous aestheticism firmly in the wake of Santayana, and contrary to the Pound era, offers the "Prologues to What Is Possible" well beyond the phobic essentialism of what that poem refers to as the "ordinary" and the "commonplace": "What self, for example, did he contain that had not yet been loosed, / Snarling in him for discovery as his attentions spread . . . [b]y an access of color, a new and unobserved, slight dithering" (CPP 438). Here, we perhaps may recall some of the potential ditherers that Jackson Lears takes up in an important chapter in *No Place of Grace*, renowned New England thinkers contemporary with Stevens and Santayana such as George Cabot Lodge, Charles Eliot Norton, and Van Wyck Brooks. These men "were most restive under bourgeois definitions of gender identity," but they nonetheless "sought to resolve contradictory impulses toward autonomy and dependence, to unify a fragmenting sense of selfhood, to preserve some ethical or religious framework amid evaporating creeds" (223, 225).

For Jackson Lears, a strong counter-example to those men previously listed might have been an intellectual such as Stanley Hall: "For Hall, the androgynous adolescent symbolized his own effort to recast sexual ambivalence. His program for adolescent education was a revealing litany: 'repose, leisure, art, legends, romance, idealizations, in a word, humanism.' The moon-goddess presided over the curriculum. It embodied a 'feminine' alternative to male ego ideals, an alternative with links to the mythopoeic unconscious." In the end, however, as Lears observes, "Hall remained committed to the masculine ethos, [gradually] insisting that the exposure of male adolescents to feminine values was only a temporary, vitalizing preparation for adulthood" (249). For Ralph Adams Cram, clearly the alternative to male ego ideals lay in his immersion in something as impersonal as architecture, for, according to Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "Architectural meaning . . . originates in the erotic impulse itself, in the need to quench our physical thirst. . . . [T]he effect of architecture is always beyond the purely visual, evoking the memory and expectation of erotic fulfillment. . . . Architectural meaning, like erotic knowledge, is primarily of the body" (qtd. in Shand-Tucci 83). In Stevens' tribute to Santayana, interestingly, we notice that "The life of the city never lets go, nor do you want it to. It is part of the life in your room. / Its domes are the *architecture* of your bed" (CPP 434; emphasis added)—architecture here revealing that poetry perhaps performed the same erotic function for "an inquisitor of structures" (and for Stevens) as that other professional preoccupation did for Cram.

As in Stevens, then, Santayana for Lears acquires a stature bordering on the heroic, for it was men such as Santayana who "sought liberation from the 'straitened spirit' of the late-Victorian bourgeoisie by casting beauty in many guises," his model of aestheticism contrarily promulgating "the romantic activist's suspicion that possibilities for authentic experience had diminished if not disappeared in late-Victorian culture" (191). Edmund Wilson as we noticed much earlier was of a like mind in his own response to the philosopher. When Wilson endeavored in his work to show "how writers and intellectuals of an extraordinary successful society [such as America] may have to 'break down the walls of the present' . . . to move beyond the bitter nostalgia and radical optimism of their native ideologies in order to seek 'the untried, unsuspected possibilities of human thought and art'" (Mishra 33), we sense that for Wilson, Santayana was the model inquisitor of ideologies that Stevens had known right along. The key, of course, would lie in all those unsuspected possibilities just mentioned. Santayana's phantom presence as the driving force behind Stevens' erotic poetics throughout *The Rock*, I would finally argue, continues to sustain such possibilities for authentic experience. In the volume's title poem, they become "New senses in the engenderings of sense," despite our "desire to be at the end of distances" (CPP 446), that is to say, the imaginative possibilities for self-enlargement that, following Santayana's

example, it is now conceivable for us to put between the tired old “transcendent forms” (CPP 444) of human identity as in “A Quiet Normal Life,” and their opposite: “A new knowledge of reality” (CPP 452) in Stevens’ concluding poem. Elsewhere, I argue at considerable length about the important safeguarding of distance in American literature’s fraught relationship with dissident identity (“*Going the Distance*” [2003]).¹³ But if “men [are] growing small in the distances of space” (CPP 432) that Stevens would have us imagine in “To an Old Philosopher in Rome,” it is only because we underestimate the power of eroticism’s “spectral otherness”: “not a representation of male or female,” as Marjorie Garber most recently reminds us, “but of precisely, itself: its own phantom or ghost” (278). Both sides and neither, as an Old Philosopher in Rome might say.

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Notes

¹ See my essays “‘Creatures of the Rainbow’: Wallace Stevens, Mark Doty, and the Poetics of Androgyny,” “Doty, Deleuze, and ‘Distance’: The Stevens Intertext,” and “The Novel That Took the Place of a Poem’: Wallace Stevens and Queer Discourse.”

² In *George Santayana, Literary Philosopher*, Irving Singer remarks, “Hardly anything is known about Santayana’s sexuality,” but proffers further: “One of the rare bits of evidence occurs in a conversation between Santayana and [Daniel] Cory [author of *Santayana, The Later Years: A Portrait with Letters* (1963)] that is often misquoted. They have been reading the poetry of A. E. Housman, and Santayana remarks: ‘I suppose Housman was really what people nowadays call “homosexual.” . . . I think I must have been that way in my Harvard days—although I was unconscious of it at the time’ ” (57).

³ In Bates’s view, it is in fact Stevens who offers the more compelling model for androgynous dualism contrary to Santayana’s self-attribution: “If Santayana and Garrett Stevens [Wallace’s father] could not be one man [“vacuous gentility” in the former as opposed to “vulgar opportunism” in the latter], they could still be—and were—cobegetters of the poet who spent a lifetime trying to restore these halves to their first integrity, surprising critics who thought the task impossible and dismaying those who thought it misguided” (35).

⁴ The link between Freud and Santayana (and by implication Stevens) on the issue identity in relation to eroticism is nicely suggested by Singer, who notes that “like [Freud] too, Santayana derives all ideals from human interest in the sense that nothing could be an ideal except in relation to some need or desire. [Hence,] Santayana’s ideal objects are just imagined satisfactions, and authoritative only as human beings choose to make them so” (89; see also 62, 91, 98, 101, and 133).

⁵ “In order to know whether someone is fulfilling his or her real nature,” Singer clarifies further, “we would look not for integrity with an underlying core of personhood, but rather for a spiral that harmoniously wends its way through the universe,” and he offers the well-known lines of Madame Merle in Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* as an example: “What shall we call our ‘self’? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us—and then it flows back again” (30).

⁶ Elsewhere, Woodland astutely clarifies his more global hypothesis, noting that in Stevens, “the poetry’s figurations of gender do not just alternate between masculine and feminine positions, but explore . . . a wide range of different masculinities . . . son, lover, husband, father, businessman, poet and so on” (69). In so doing, Stevens’ poetry engages a type of homosocial “sympathy” quite prevalent in a bygone era of American literature that Caleb Crain exhaustively explores in works ranging from the gothic romances of Charles Brockden Brown, through the essays and lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, to the sea narratives of Herman Melville, where “at the height of sympathy’s reign, American men could express emotions to each other with a fervor and openness that could not have been detached from religious enthusiasm a generation earlier and would have to be consigned to sexual perversion a few generations later,” thus giving the lie, once again, to tensile states of “double mental existence” as figurations of “imposture” (35, 77, 78). I shall return to the particular link between homosociality and religious enthusiasm later in my argument.

⁷ In the “androgynous mixing of genders” that Ross Posnock attributes to Santayana—an androgyny “that incorporates otherness into the self”—Posnock views such mixing of “flexible gender identifications” as one “occur[ring] in the pre-Oedipal phase” of human development (200). In relation to American literary history, this phase is arguably coordinate with Emerson’s pre-Freudian antebellum discourse, as in his lecture on “The Heart” (1838) wherein, as Caleb Crain writes, “[Emerson] seems to have fused his experiences with men (i.e., [Martin] Gay) and his experiences with women (i.e., [Lidian] Jackson) into one narrative of how affection coaxes the self into belief in *other* selves . . . [since] Emerson did not distinguish homosexual from heterosexual relationships. As he wrote in his essay ‘Love,’ ‘Thus are we put in training for a love which knows not sex, nor person, nor partiality’ . . . [because it is an] androgynous relationship that concerns ‘The Heart’ ” (190; emphasis added).

⁸ Michael Kimmel in his monumentally landmark study *Manhood in America: A Cultural Study* would tend to corroborate Shand-Tucci’s historiography, enlarging it to the end of the twentieth century, and beyond, by claiming succinctly that “Masculinity is largely a homosocial enactment,” and that even though homosociality can sometimes be “deeply erotic and emotionally as well as sexually charged,” nonetheless “genital sexuality is not a requirement for homosociality as the foundation for masculinity; in fact [Kimmel goes on to explain], homophobia becomes a cultural requirement to separate the erotic charge that often accompanies homosocial interaction. I argue that historically masculinity is largely a homosocial enactment but that it is also an enactment among heterosexual men, and that homophobic fears of effeminacy ensure its heterosexuality” (7, 392 n 95, 366 n 11). On the question, therefore, of whether the male nineteenth-century American writers he studies had sex, Crain admits he has no interest in pursuing (13), and for reasons that seem especially germane to the aestheticism of androgyny shared by Santayana and Stevens that I am attempting to explore in this essay. Explains Crain: “From the vantage of our era, it is difficult to appreciate the cultural experimentation of the eighteenth century—which encouraged individuals to follow a sympathetic attachment as far as it would go. They dwelt in possibilities that we cannot help but reduce to prose. Whether or not a couple had sex is a natural question to ask, but the answer will not allow us into the private meaning of their bond” (33; see also 239). I shall return to the issue of “possibilities” in my conclusion.

⁹ In Marjorie Garber’s work on the sublimation of sexuality in more contemporaneously androgynous figures such as Liberace, Valentino, and Elvis, it is further interesting to note that “‘The Pelvis’ [sobriquet for “Elvis”]—the anatomical region which seems at first specific, but is in fact both remarkably vague and distinctly engendered—became the site of speculation and spectatorship” (275). I shall return to Garber’s work briefly at the essay’s conclusion.

¹⁰ "We must remember," Yacovone once again observes (citing Robert K. Martin as well), "that 'many Victorians managed what seems to us the difficult balancing act of believing that love between men which had no overt physical consequences was therefore untouched by physical motivation.' " A salutary sense of the vague, therefore, perhaps becomes something of a psychological out "For some individuals of the nineteenth century [where] there may indeed have been ambivalent, disturbed, or incomprehensible sexual drives behind their friendships" (94).

¹¹ Bates observes that in giving the name "Genteel Tradition" to a group of New England writers—upper class, tasteful, masculinely heroic—at Berkeley in 1911, Santayana "praised Walt Whitman as the only American writer who managed to escape it completely" (23). Singer, to the contrary, detects some notable "opposition to pragmatism" on Santayana's part (31; see also 17).

¹² Stevens' punning "mystic eye" can bring us back once again to the phantom subject in William James, whose pragmatist model for it in his very last essay composed before his death was the conspicuously "Ungenteel" American poet Benjamin Blood, who clearly has a direct connection to Santayana when James records: "'Simply,' [Blood] writes to me, 'we do not know [about life]. But when we say we do not know, we are not to say it weakly and meekly, but with confidence and content. . . . Knowledge is and must ever be secondary—a witness rather than a principal—or a "principle"!—in the case. Therefore mysticism for me!' " James's further characterization of such non-knowledge, and indeed of a pluralistic mystic like Blood himself, is, interestingly, "queer and cactus-like," and in an even more phantom-like phrase, "ever not quite" (1312). James Russell Lowell's honorific of "mystic practicalism" might suit the case here, but Bates is correct, I think, in attaching the "mystic" side of that descriptor more to writers such as Santayana (and Emerson and, I would add, Benjamin Blood before him) (34–35).

¹³ In "Doty, Deleuze, and 'Distance' " (2004), I focus more specifically on the topology of distance throughout Stevens' work. But a quatrain of the poet's published in the June 2, 1900, issue of the Harvard *Advocate* reveals that a preoccupation with this notion was with Stevens from the beginning. The stanza reads: "He sought the music of the distant spheres / By night, upon an empty plain, apart; / Nor knew they hid their singing all the years / Within the keeping of his human heart" (*SP* 70)—and so at the termination of Stevens' career with "The desire to be at the end of distances" just cited. Significantly, Holly Stevens observes that the much earlier quatrain "could have been dedicated to Santayana" (70).

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Poems

Somnambulimia

a man feeling everything

—Wallace Stevens, “Somnambulisma”

All things under the waking sun grist for his meal,
yet even in sleep his one hunger gnawing, gnawing,
I want, I want, I want. An old refrain

deep underground murmuring its subtext.
Nothing comes of nothing except the deserted night
where he hungrily stumbled, expecting emptiness,

landscape of absences as thin as gruel,
but found it morseled, foddered for his appetite,
memories, desires, wanderings, maunderings.

The rooted, rooting pain. Disgust to overcome.
Heedless of the nature of nurture, raging,
foraging any pasturage for pastoral, gluttoning glottals,

his palms at the itch, a dumb-ox at the trough.
What he mumbled became his mumbo-jumbo,
motive for twist and turn and tweak and trope.

So we should not starve, he ravened and gluttoned,
a man feeling everything, feeding on everything,
savaging, salvaging the night's unutterable feast.

Eugene Hollahan
Decatur, Ga.

The Poetissimo in Pure and Paraphrase

On the far shore the sun of Stevens is passing like
Walt Whitman singing and chanting the things
That are part of him, but the poetissimo is not there.
He is having late coffee and oranges in a sunny chair
Or perhaps tea at the palaz of Hoon or else
He is in Oxidia, banal suburb, immersed in policies
And a tune upon the blue guitar
Since things in Hartford are as they are.
Delight, he insists, like the idea of order,
Lies in flawed words and stubborn sounds.
He hears centurions guffaw and beat
Their shrilling tankards on the table-boards.
He knows that poetry is the supreme fiction, madame,
For the only emperor is the emperor of ice cream.
His stride is the stride of vanishing autumn.
He writes his couplet yearly to the spring.
Savoring rankness purifies him, making him see
How much of what he saw he never saw at all.
(Life is an old casino in a wood.
Poetry is a finikin thing of air.)
He visits his three planets: sun, moon, imagination.
He is the impossible possible philosophers' man
Who in a million diamonds sums us up.

What more shall we say of this more than Proteus,
Forever writing his canto in a canton,
In a canton of Belshazzar, beholding
The nothing that is not there and the nothing that is?
Out of his nothing how great is his voice that rises,
This musician of pears, principium and lex.
The prologues are over. It is a question
Now of final belief. Say this, say only this:
He is the necessary angel of earth
Since, in his sight, we see the earth again.

John Martin
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Conjuring

He doesn't show his poems to his wife.
Decided not to bother years ago.
Save both of them the grief. By now his life's
so compartmentalized he doesn't notice
anymore. How, by daylight, he's
the lawyer, nights, he's someone else . . . She's

the one stays constant, cool. She lives in snow
he only passes by. That's why he flees
to Florida . . . Places she won't go.
Sometimes he's grateful, yes. The letter C
depends on its surroundings, now a knife—
kuh, kuh—and now a spoon—*suh, suh*. He's rife

with it, the camouflage she begged him, please,
to wear, no peacocks' tails for him. Describe
a world, that doesn't make it yours. At least
she bore a daughter once . . . And then she . . . died.
Oh Crispin, so dramatic still. You know
she's perfectly alive, it's you who go

too far . . . Off to tumble every night
with Ariel. She sees it's Prospero's
the one you worship, leaping from those heights
she hates. Can't take the heat. It's you keeps flowing;
she stands firm. *Oh Wallace, Wallace, please—*
Years ago, he walked her down the aisle,
conjuring. Then he touched her, slowly felt her freeze.

Kate Adams
Mountain View, Calif.

Northern Shore

She's scarcely left this house in twenty years.
Her dear Ulysses, look, he sets off in
the morning, sails the sidewalk, disappears.
She wanders through the house alone, begins
where she left off the night before, weaving
her own shroud. He calls before he leaves

the office: *You need anything?* It's him
she needs; the rest is merely fallen leaves
she'll sweep away. Nights, she rubs her skin
with ointments from his sunny south, easing
off, as best she can, the ancient fears:
Ulysses has a separate fate, he steers

by stars she can't remember, can't believe
he loves . . . A thousand words where she'd use merely
one. He sails off to his bedroom—*Briefs*
to write, he says, but she can see he's nearly
there, that farther shore, Calypso in
his eyes . . . Underwater, fits his fins

and floats away. Dear God, he disappears,
leaves her on this northern shore so distant
from herself. Hasn't slept in years,
her rigging, rusted, creaks all night, insistent
cries. She had a daughter once, so brief
those years. The sea retreated, left old fears
exposed alive, deep tide . . . That scarred moon grips her, grief.

Kate Adams
Mountain View, Calif.

A Definition of History

A vision of history
Passes below our senses
And finds its place
Beneath a monument;

And every conviction
That we hold, for whose
Belief we must deny
Our true experience,
Becomes a fallacy—

We accept what we
Could never believe
If we had given it
Fully to our intellects—

*These are the things
That happened,
And if they cannot
Be proven by logic
Or the common sense*

Found in our natural
Relation to the world,
Then they are merely
Fiction; history becomes

A careful lie—

Lawrence Buentello
San Antonio, Tex.

Reviews

Enigmas and Riddles in Literature.

By Eleanor Cook. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Sphinxes, griffins, and sibyls animate Eleanor Cook's *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature* and inform her study of Dante, Lewis Carroll, and Wallace Stevens, among many other writers. Cook's examination of "riddle" and "enigma" is a great contribution to the theory of literature and a new lens on Stevens. For literary scholars, Cook maintains, "the words 'riddle' and 'enigma' pass by unexamined, as if we all knew quite well what they mean" (xi). She demonstrates that these overlooked terms are central in literature, for in the words of folklorist Archer Taylor, "the essence of riddles is closely allied to the essence of poetry" (27). Although she explains that work has been done on aspects of riddle—Old English riddles and those of particular authors—much remains undone. Cook redresses the gap, and presents exactly what has been missing: a rich study of riddle and enigma from classical literature to the present.

Cook advances a powerful argument that "we reinstate the figure of speech known for centuries as *aenigma*" (2). In contrast to those who would reduce such rhetorical study to "'mere' words" (62), she maintains: "Some sense of what is at stake in the reading of tropes matters to this day in everything that we read and think" (63). She begins with a historical overview of the legendary creatures of the sphinx and griffin, and in subsequent chapters presents the history of the trope of enigma, tracing it from Aristotle to its decline in the 17th century. She considers questions of genre, includes three literary case studies, and evolves a careful theoretical vocabulary. In chapter 2, Cook differentiates between riddle and enigma: "When a riddle has a 'metaphoric texture,' we might say it is using the trope of enigma" (29). For St. Augustine, who figures prominently in Cook's discussion, enigma is a "'species of . . . trope that is called allegory,'" though one that is "'obscure, and difficult to see through'" (39). His reflections on St. Paul are crucial to Cook, particularly the way he moves from analyzing a "small . . . conundrum" (the horseleech's riddle) (39) to a meditation on Paul's words, "'For now we see through a glass darkly; but then, face to face'" (1). Importantly, Augustine ponders how humans see both like and unlike God. By putting "pressure on the word 'like' and the whole matter of 'likeness'" (40), Cook explains, Augustine "links the smallest of riddles in the Bible to the enigma of everything" (41). Indeed, "following Augustine's lead" (61), she then suggests five types of enigma underlying literature: "Pauline," "Oedipal or . . . Sphinxine," "Cyclic," "Random," and "Sibylline or long-term, as in Wallace Stevens's use of 'enigma' in his late work" (65).

Stevens is a steady presence in *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature*, for Cook plants the seeds of her case study in the chapters that precede it. She turns to Stevens in her preface to demonstrate the relationship between the theory of poetry and rhetoric. Later, she finds a modern illustration of Augustine's understanding of how the smallest riddles lead to the greatest enigmas in the

way Stevens' phrase "the obscurer selvages" (CPP 280) in "Esthétique du Mal" echoes both Dante and Eliot. In her discussion of Virgil's Sibyl, where Cook identifies the locutions "'wrapped,'" "'enveloped,'" and "'folded'" (186) as figures for enigma, she again summons Stevens, this time in "The Owl in the Sarcophagus": "There he saw well the foldings in the height / Of sleep, the whiteness folded into less" (CPP 372). More examples abound, as Cook laces and "folds" Stevens into the very fabric of this book.

In her case study on Stevens, Cook sets forth an argument that extends her work in *Poetry, Word-Play and Word-War in Wallace Stevens*. She revisits some of her earlier readings, yet with a distinct difference. She shows comprehensively, in the light of this wider study, how Stevens' small riddles lead to larger ones and point toward a "masterplot" discernible in later work. She begins in the familiar territory of *Harmonium* with such poems as "Earthy Anecdote" and "Tea," a "small riddle-poem" (211), and then demonstrates that from first to last poems, Stevens "proposed enigmas to his mind" (210) that grow in significance. His use of the phrase "the obscurer selvages" is key, for it reveals at once the workings of the trope of enigma and proposes a challenge to the Pauline enigma. In her overview of enigma's manifestations, she also attends to proper names, claiming that some, like Professor Eucalyptus ("An Ordinary Evening in New Haven")—with its play on "apocalypse" and "eucalyptus"—"require unriddling" (214). Cook explains how Stevens directs his readers away from the "transcendent or legendary source" toward "an enigma offered by nature" (214). It is hard to say which reading is her most impressive. Given her treatment of Augustine's reading of "St. Paul's famous text," her discussion of how "Stevens writes against it in all three sections of 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction'" (214) is especially insightful. Yet, she also keenly detects the presence of a Solomon-like figure in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," and connects it to an increasing interest in "wisdom writing and references to wisdom" in late work (216). It seems to me that Cook is a master "unriddler."

Her formulation of the "Sibylline enigma" in Stevens is Cook's most compelling discovery, one that takes her earlier study of his word-play to a new level. Like Jacqueline Brogan in *The Violence Within / The Violence Without*, she is drawn to the conclusion of "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," where she finds a challenge to her earlier reading of Stevens' work as illustrative of "the unanswerable riddle" (81). Although Cook, like Brogan, sees in the "Inexplicable sister of the Minotaur" (CPP 685) the supplanting of an outmoded male muse for a more vital female one, she focuses on Stevens' description of the muse as "enigma and mask" (CPP 685) and studies the use of the word "enigma" from 1943 to 1954. She uncovers in letters, essays, and poems of this period a masterplot that replaces the Pauline type with "The perpetual enigma of a muse-figure" (225), earthly and continuous. This Sibyl, Cook argues, is an "everyday" (82) one that, like "*The great sail of Ulysses*," remains "*Alive with an enigma's flittering*" (CPP 467). Toward the chapter's end, Cook considers Stevens' admiration for Valéry's notion of an "'admirably exact'" (225) yet still mysterious language in relation to the "*enigma's flittering*." Striking for this reader is the way she thereby promises further affinities between these great poets.

Cook's new book is enormously suggestive and will, no doubt, inspire future studies. Now that she has shown us the designs that literary riddles and enigmas take, we might use her theoretical types to open up the more puzzling aspects of a particular poet's work or delve further into questions of genre such as the relation between "charm" and "riddle" poetry. We might also see what insights arise when we consider more closely Stevens' penchant for both. Fortunately for us, Eleanor Cook finds in Stevens the Sibylline, "perpetual" (225) type of enigma. Her more precise vocabulary will surely keep us engaged in contemplating Stevens' exquisite and ever-elusive poems.

Lisa Goldfarb
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Wallace Stevens: Poetry and Criticism.

By Tim Morris. Cambridge: Salt, 2006.

Tim Morris has a useful, accurate take on Wallace Stevens' poetry, but readers of this British poet's first critical volume may have to work too hard to find it. Stevens, Morris asserts (if I understand him rightly), pursues the great questions of metaphysics and epistemology, being and language, reality and imagination, while demonstrating that neither his, nor any other, literary and intellectual enterprise can find stable answers. Those demonstrations, and (even more so) the process of forever-unfinished, self-revising search, distinguish Stevens' poetics in general, and his major long poems in particular, from rivals, inferiors, and forebears. Over and over, the mature Stevens discovers that some apparently ultimate logos, some blank and supposedly final "real," itself bears marks of imaginative creation: no knowable concept underpins all the rest.

Stevens' "preoccupations," Morris writes, "are those of all poetics concerned with the meditation of phenomenological relations from the initial condition that these relations are at the present time of writing incomplete. His achievement is his recognition that these meditations do not end" (178). Morris' argument may recall the deconstructive readers of the 1970s and 1980s, such as J. Hillis Miller. In all the long poems discussed here save "The Comedian as the Letter C"—that is, in "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery," "The Man with the Blue Guitar," "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," "Credences of Summer," "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (which Morris treats, attentively, as a sequence), and "The Auroras of Autumn" (which Morris treats almost as if it were Stevens' last work)—"the technique [involves] the replacement of any possible end into a self-consuming present condition which must be permanently contested, as its only proof is the cessation of proof's necessity in a given condition" (164). The poems seek, but cannot settle in, "an iconography of experience which need not 'represent,' but become final effigy of that which motivated its making" (156).

I have quoted Morris' description of "The Auroras of Autumn"; he gives the poem a sensitive, thoughtful, lengthy reading, the best in his volume. Yet it is not a reading that I can comfortably recommend to undergraduates, nor

indeed to anyone not already professionally involved in the study of Stevens, not because Morris' book is too scholarly (it is scholarly enough), but because Morris' prose is so often a mess. At best it is abstract because it must be, since it describes the "abstractions" that, for Stevens as for Morris, "have no external guarantee" (74). At worst it is nearly impossible for an informed reader to know what Morris means. "The Auroras of Autumn" "is engaged in a suppression of will as appropriation of the self in favour of a desire for inclusion and assimilation by that which seems to mark the boundaries of what can be imagined in total" (154). Does Stevens' engagement appropriate his suppression, or does he attempt to suppress something called "will as appropriation" in order to embrace (or truly feel, or coldly approve) a desire that he (or "the self") be included (in something)?

As for "meaning as self-identity, seen not just as the suppression of decision-making 'between' contexts, but as the absolute non-participation of the necessity of deciding" (81), I can guess—but only guess—what it means. "When a lyric poem is seen to set aside, ritualise and give care to certain distinct and estranged tones, we come to recognize that, far from a form which is the naturalised image of an indeterminate 'intention,' the poem's style is motivated by a submission or surrender to the control of certain sites of necessary posture" (142). "All projective questioning which may lead a reader into speculation and interpretation coloured by chance convergence must eventually be reined in to its textual baseline, giving the argument a yo-yo quality" (xxv). The author of "The Plain Sense of Things" deserves better.

If this new book alters subsequent Stevens scholarship, the most likely alterations will come from Morris' work with Stevens' personal library and with Stevens' manuscripts. He deploys letters and drafts to give a fine reading of "The Man with the Blue Guitar," with its series of "tropes for the inauthentic" (114). He makes too much, I suspect, of the segments Stevens deleted, proposing only intellectual reasons why Stevens got rid of them; one suspects that aural and other aesthetic considerations played a role. Morris also tells us what Stevens underlined, and (speculatively) why, in Benedetto Croce's writings, and in Henri Focillon's *The Life of Forms in Art*. Morris, a former student of J. H. Prynne at Cambridge University, sometimes approaches American poetry in a way that posits Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Carlos Williams, and Charles Olson as its central figures, from whom any divergence requires note: discussions of Stevens and Emerson recall—and might have benefited from—Richard Poirier's wider-ranging speculations about pragmatism in American poetry.

Morris scores welcome polemical points with his afterword, which considers, first, Stevens' politics and, second, Stevens' presence in more recent verse. Whatever news we can find in particular lines and letters, "Stevens' political focus is always dominated by the search for an abstract principle" (176). As for attempts by Alan Filreis and others to link Stevens to a contemporary avant-garde, Morris finds in the poet such a strong desire for closure, such a drive to find what will suffice (even though nothing found can prove final), as to vitiate all such attempts: "Stevens' . . . negations," unlike, say, Charles Bernstein's, "proceed from a strongly-focussed sense of possible restoration, a lingering

lyrical hope" (173). Yet Morris does find some surprising heirs: traces of "The Auroras of Autumn," he shows, find their way into Frank O'Hara's "In Memory of My Feelings" (169).

Whatever the faults of his own prose, Morris has clearly inhabited Stevens' long poems, has spent enough time with them to make them—for all their "evasion of conceptual determination" (97)—congenial to his own thought. He accepts them, though, as poems of thought, as ways of thinking in verse, more than (I am tempted to say rather than) as works of art. Sound, construction, proportion—all the aspects by which "Credences of Summer," for example, resembles a set of paintings—get scanted in favor of the aspects by which it resembles a philosophical treatise. The challenge for Stevens' critics, now as always, is to do justice to both sets of aspects at once.

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Poetry, Politics, and Culture: Argument in the Work of Eliot, Pound, Stevens, and Williams.

By Harold Kaplan. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006.

Harold Kaplan, who has written interestingly about democratic humanism, seeks here to describe what he calls a "direct connection" between modernist poetics on the one hand and cultural history and politics on the other. Although Stevens is intellectually and theoretically at the center of his discussion, Kaplan does a remarkably good job of moving between and among four major figures. Eliot and Pound of course are assiduous culture warriors. Williams and Stevens, less well known for assuming such a role, here bring forth a humanist poetics aligned with liberalism and democratic values. Of course, the four are essentially of the same generation, people who came of age poetically at the time of the great crisis of culture embodied in World War I. All four feared the ill health of language and imagined actual social consequences, Stevens snootily but nonetheless perspicaciously, Eliot nervously, Pound crazily, and Williams lovingly (as in *Paterson*, in its presentation of the city's bedraggled but beautiful people). All four called for a new civilization and their great theme was the power of the imagination to create and also to destroy. Introducing this familiar literary-historical point, Kaplan provides an excellent introductory summary of the cultural apocalypse that made modernism. Indeed, the first chapters of this book, despite its later complications and nuanced theorizings, I would recommend to new students of American poetic modernism.

Kaplan arranges things so that readers are treated to a clearly foregrounded "major quarrel," a conflict that is, frankly, fun to watch as it is very deliberately laid out. This book thus seeks to master one of several methods in which critics can refute the conventional notion that American modernists were blind to political life. The debate, Kaplan argues, was "closer to the edge of practical politics than even today" (9) in the era of postmodernism (and, for one thing, its unrestrained merging of political and poetic languages).

This is a thesis-driven book and in that sense predictable as it courses through readings of poems by the four greats. Yet along the way there are treats. Eliot is given a full-blown cultural poetics. Kaplan at times surprises us with his choice of Stevens' poems to make this or that point. And there are dazzling passages on Williams' Emersonian affirmations, Eliot's dissociative program and his xenophobic shock tactics, a good new look at the problem of the anti-poet, Pound's interest in "the old sublime," connections between Stevens' evolved comic man and Prufrock, and one of the finest renderings of Stevens' necessary angel I have read. "The City as a Man" is an old Williams trope, almost as old as the first critical essays about Williams—nothing new there, alas, but again a fine summary of a key point.

A concluding series of chapters (the best is "Cultural and Humanist Poetics") generally pushes points already clear from the prefatory work and the actual analyses of the poets. These might have been integrated into the earlier sections. Theoretical appendices are vestiges, perhaps, of fealty to theories of ethical humanism and presumably Kaplan's original reason for undertaking this study—an appropriate devotion to Emmanuel Levinas in particular. As appendices these theoretical summaries are unfortunately skippable, worthy as they are.

All the chapters here are short and there are many of them. They behave intellectually like interpretive and theoretical vignettes, *notes toward* something. This reader (who likes to work hard for his understanding) thrived in such a seriatim structure, but not all will. The same novice readership that would gain much from the first chapters of the book might well get lost later.

Proponents of Stevens-Williams modernism—such as it is, as an odd whole harmonium—will feel affirmed by this fascinating study. The book claims that these two Americans evolved a poetics refuting cultural hierarchy and doubting the fallen state as properly descriptive of the human.

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Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry.

Edited by Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins have compiled a fabulous collection of essays that, although first published in 2000, still represents a timely and challenging addition to the criticism of modernist poetry. Taking its lead from Peter Nicholls' *Modernisms* (1995), the book questions the commonplace assumption that modernism is "a transnational or even supranational entity" (4). Without denying the international ramifications of modernist letters, the essays account for the local conditions in which the various dialects of modernism formed. But the metaphor of a "dialect" suggests a parallel "standard language," whereas Davis and Jenkins argue that during the advent of mod-

ernism no such orthodox literary movement can be traced. The book's attention to British, Irish, Welsh, and American modernist verse attests to this sensitivity to region and perspective, featuring compelling contributions on Hugh MacDiarmid, Basil Bunting, David Jones, Dylan Thomas, Edward Thomas, Louis MacNeice, Brian Coffey, and Denis Devlin as well as Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, Langston Hughes, and the American poets who came of age during the Second World War. Most of the contributors are British or teach in British universities, and their perspectives provide refreshing insights together with new narratives.

Readers of this journal will be most interested in Jenkins' "Wallace Stevens and America." But Fiona Green's "Locating the lyric: Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop and the Second World War" is an important companion piece that takes a number of leads from Stevens. Jenkins' essay is nuanced and vital: nuanced because it explores "an early and a late 'regionalism' in Stevens' *Collected Poems*" (178) with pertinent examples and convincing close analysis, and vital because it unashamedly reexamines why Stevens was drawn to his "major man" and other hero-figures during the war years—an area that has, in Jenkins' view, been neglected and that remains insufficiently understood ("The 'hero' makes Stevens' poetry of the forties more problematic than many of his exegetes are prepared to acknowledge" [190]).

Jenkins' point of departure is Stevens' attention to place in *Harmonium* (particularly in "Infanta Marina," "O, Florida, Venereal Soil," and "The Comedian as the Letter C"). She contrasts Stevens' ambivalent relationship with terrain with William Carlos Williams' localism and goes on to establish Stevens' ideas of place in gender terms ("Farewell to Florida" providing a convenient lead). Some readers may debate whether the latter poem is one "of disturbing sexual repression," but Jenkins is surely right to ask whether the poet is saying good-bye to more than the gaudy aesthetic of *Harmonium* in this self-conscious 1936 piece (the headline poem for the trade edition of *Ideas of Order* composed after the Alcestis Press version). In fact, Jenkins' own relationship with Stevens is healthily ambivalent. In discussing historicist Stevens criticism of the mid-to-late 1990s, she observes that scholars are "right to assert that there is a linkage between Stevens and the wider world." "Yet at the same time," she continues, "Perloff is surely right in suggesting that the relationship between Stevens and America . . . is a problematic one" (180).

If Stevens' relationship with America is problematic, it must be in the ambivalent senses Jenkins finds (even Stevens observes: "In what sense do I live in America if I walk to and fro from the office day after day" [L 610]). Stevens qualifies that remark by saying that writing to a friend in Oregon for some Kieffer pears amounts to living in America. Jenkins' own analysis deftly mirrors such rhetorical changes of heart. She sensibly interrogates the crystalline figure in "Asides on the Oboe" ("The glass man, without external reference" [CPP 227]) and argues that the "sceptical poetry of relativism," which informs part of *Parts of a World*, "is uneasily juxtaposed with a poetry which welcomes closure and synthesis . . . and which celebrates centres, spheres, self-sufficient worlds" (183). But she also finds in late Stevens a poet who refines his relationship with the "actual world." The last poems do not "suggest a final reconcili-

ation with Williams' cultural localism so much as a reconciliation with . . . the ambivalent 'regional' poetic of *Harmonium*" (197).

These arguments are recapitulations of Jenkins' *Wallace Stevens: Rage for Order* (2000). But the concision of her essay is captivating and her contextualizing arguably more refined. Jenkins reassesses Stevens' strained relationship with the New Critics, a distance that Stevens ironically "closed" by describing John Crowe Ransom in regional terms (see "John Crowe Ransom: Tennessee"). The essay is both survey and refreshing polemic, Jenkins showing how late Stevens makes peace with the rhetorical flourishes of middle Stevens, how the last poems, particularly those of *The Rock*, comprise that part of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" the poet was unable to write: "*It Must Be Human*" (see *L* 863–64).

Fiona Green's "Locating the lyric" is a superb exploration of the changing poetic stances of Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop. Capitalizing on Stevens' 1936 statement "Resistance is the opposite of escape" (*CPP* 788), she shows how Moore and Bishop adjusted their attitudes toward lyric in accordance with a shifting international situation. Specifically, Green demonstrates how various media inform the subject matter and material awareness of Moore's and Bishop's verse. The radio and the speaking clock haunt Moore's conception of voice; she is also fascinated by typewritten text and the accuracy of quartz clocks. Bishop's lyricism is influenced by maps, printing, and even grinding lenses (in 1943 she worked briefly in a naval optical shop). The complex relationship between the two poets is brought into sharper focus when Green explores the transaction of their poems through correspondence. Paper, watermarks, and postmarks enter their poetry in unexpected ways (although Green is quick to point out how Bishop's partner, Louise Crane, heiress of the Crane Paper Company fortune, supported both poets).

In brief, Green transforms the New Critical concept of the poem as well-wrought urn or verbal icon into the poem as material, showing how the larger historical situation is written into these analogues for lyrical space. Jenkins' and Green's essays are companion pieces that exemplify the refined criticism this volume incorporates.

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Poetry and Repetition: Walt Whitman, Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery.

By Krystyna Mazur. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Poetry and Repetition: Walt Whitman, Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery by Krystyna Mazur is something of a period piece. The author admits as much in her first sentence. "This book began as a dissertation I wrote as a doctoral student . . . almost ten years ago." She adds, "I would have not revisited this project had it not been for the encouragement and support of a number of friends and colleagues" (ix). Readers have reason to be grateful that she did

revisit the project. The subject of repetition is a rich one and proves a valuable way of approaching the poetry of Whitman, Stevens, and Ashbery.

Not all the news is good, however. The book would have benefited from a more thorough revisiting process. Almost all the books and articles cited were published in the 1980s or before. In addition, there are errors of carelessness. In the introduction, Mazur refers to the book as her dissertation. Canon is spelled as "cannon" throughout. There are more serious problems. The book is flawed in ways that are perhaps easier to see now than when the author wrote it. Eager to avoid binary thinking at all costs, the author falls, ironically, into the kind of binary thinking common to the period in which she conceived the project. The reader quickly understands that there are conditions to avoid and conditions to attain. Conditions to be avoided include the symmetrical, the categorical, the systematic, the hierarchical, the continuous, the linear, and the logical. Those to be attained include the unstable, the polyphonic, the indeterminate, the contradictory, the indefinite, the uncanny, the uneasy, the problematic, the fluid, the dreamlike, the excessive. An unwary reader might conclude that repetition itself must be something to avoid. Mazur is eager to show such a reader—it seems to be, in large part, what motivates her book—that repetition is, in fact, a kind of royal road to indeterminacy and fluidity. Whitman, Stevens, and Ashbery are compelling figures for Mazur to the extent that they use repetition in a way to make us think of—to allow us to imagine ourselves as participating in—the positive states of mind listed above. Thus, "repetition in Whitman's hands is a particularly powerful tool for affirming the all-embracing and a-categorical nature of his utopian vision" (xviii). The poets are cheered on when they use repetition in a way that the deconstructionist critics of the 1970s and 1980s championed.

Still, there are a variety of intriguing and rewarding insights in this book. Mazur begins by enlisting Kierkegaard, Derrida, and Deleuze to establish her theoretical framework. This allows her, as she says, to introduce a vocabulary, to create a dictionary. The dictionary is already present, though, and it is the jargon of deconstruction. "Establish" and "framework" are obviously not the right words. Mazur writes, "The fact that I do not extract a coherent set of principles from theoretical texts (to then apply them to the poems) seems justified . . . by the fact that the theorists I discuss define and use repetition in ways which prevent their arguments from becoming systematic and closed and that they resist reducing their work to an applicable system" (xvii). What the author values in the three philosophers is precisely that they do not formulate a "satisfactory definition of repetition" (xvii). This is a brave and risky approach, because the success of the chapters to follow will depend on the sense of excitement and purpose the author is (without a satisfactory definition) able to sustain.

The excitement comes and goes. Certainly, the chapter on Stevens is the strongest in the book. Mazur's reading of Stevens' poetry is agile and suggestive. Repetition is, she argues, not merely a decorative structural element of individual poems but the key to reading Stevens' oeuvre. By creating patterns of symmetrical doublings, repetition contributes to the poem's regularity. At the same time repetition serves for Stevens as a mechanism for discerning minimal

shifts in the poem's landscapes. In addition, the tension between reality and the imagination is, Mazur argues, mapped onto his repetitions. The poems interrogate their own desired status as an ideal repetition or copy of the world they are describing. Mazur's readings of "Domination of Black" and "The Place of the Solitaires" are resourceful and rewarding. She argues that "Stevens's early poems both posit and question the status of representation as repetition: they play with the possibility of recovery through repetition, only to undermine it by discovering that repetition forges a reality of its own" (79). In addition, she argues (with Steven Shaviro) that Stevens' poetry does not progress from a simple beginning to a more complex and fuller end. She shows that accretion and refiguration, rather than linear development, define the dynamic not only of Stevens' career but of individual poems as well.

Mazur is, throughout the book, deft at discussing structural patterns, but she can sometimes be tone-deaf when it comes to questions of voice. "[I]n his conception of the origin of the self," she tells us in an endnote, "Whitman seems a precursor to Judith Butler's critique of essentialism" (157). The same deafness is exhibited when, in the Whitman chapter, Mazur takes a long passage from Gertrude Stein and asks us to imagine that it would not stand out if inserted into a Whitman poem.

Poetry and Repetition would have been improved, I think, if Mazur had, in revisiting it, freed herself from some of the conceptions and formulations taken for granted in the period in which she wrote it. Motivation may have been lacking. Her focus has now, she tells the reader, "shifted toward more contextual readings of poetry" (ix). Still, the book is intermittently quite strong. There are a number of moments throughout the book in which Mazur's eagerness to follow the theme of repetition wherever it might lead causes her to write movingly about her subject. At such moments, one can hear her own voice, rather than the voice of, say, Jonathan Culler or J. Hillis Miller. Here, for example, are some sentences from a wonderful paragraph at the end of the introduction:

as we continue repeating, we begin to discover the strangeness of our own words. Repetition makes them sound foreign or like the words of a stranger. We begin to hear in our own words echoes of some other presence, something not our own, something not of our making. That moment is a moment of compensation for the loss. Paradoxically, it is the loss of control over our own language which comes to our rescue, at the very moment when we begin to fear that our own language is all we have, that our own stale repetitions fail to recover anything beyond our own desire. It is reassuring to hear our voice resonate with other voices at the moment when what we dread the most is the solipsism of our language, the prison of our subjectivity. (xxi)

In such moments the author moves beyond not only "stale repetitions" but also "other voices" and takes on a more independent, more original sensibility.

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Six Modernist Moments in Poetry.

By David Young. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006.

It sounds strange to say it, but the strengths of David Young's *Six Modernist Movements in Poetry* include its not forwarding a single (or for that matter arguable) thesis, not setting a critical context for its arguments, and not proceeding from a well defined central assumption. Although these characteristics may seem to be the *sine qua non* of publishable essays, they each have contributed to the thinness of some criticism. There is no compelling reason why critics with five interesting things to say should restrict themselves to one; some essays seem more interested in placing themselves within a body of criticism than in saying anything worthwhile; and many a rigorous critic has forced a work onto theory's procrustean bed.

Nobody will ever accuse David Young of reading reductively. The implicit, and sometimes explicit, claim of this book is that, if you *really read* the six poems and allow Young to act as your guide, the experience will change your life. In an age of skepticism and resistant readings, Young's goal is that of Walter Pater and Hugh Kenner—a criticism that seeks to open up literature, which it values for its own sake, interweaving biography, context, close reading, and the odd digression. Young would have his reader ask constantly, "What does this poem have to teach me? How do its difficulties challenge me to see anew?"

The six "moments" are Rainer Maria Rilke's "The Bowl of Roses," William Butler Yeats's "Among School Children," Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning," William Carlos Williams' "January Morning," Marianne Moore's "An Octopus," and Eugenio Montale's "Mediterranean." The chapters on Rilke and Montale are particularly good, since Young has translated the poems himself and has the translator's attention to nuance and detail. On the other hand, I cannot for the life of me understand why "January Morning" was chosen. Young says the poem's "elation" is "infectious," but I have always found it an uneven effort that attempts to manufacture poetic excitement by using frequent exclamation points. Within a few years, Williams would learn how to create energy by constructing tense lines describing movement.

The book's strengths and weaknesses can be seen in its chapter on "Sunday Morning." The chapter's thesis is hardly revelatory: the "heart of the poem," he argues, is a "redefinition of the sacred, in terms of the human and natural realms" (53). Along the way he relates the poem to modernist visual art, notes the poem's traditional form, and adds a few biographical details. Thus, the book's value cannot be said to rest in the originality of its theses but in the richness of its reading, which presents an alert and informed attention to text.

Careful scholars, however, are apt to feel uncomfortable in places. For example, Young claims that Harriet Monroe was "shocked" (54) by the poem and insisted on "censoring" (63) it. However, if she was so shocked, it is hard to imagine why she published it at all. She did feel the poem was too long for *Poetry* (I suspect she really felt stanzas II, III, and VI were redundant) and insisted that a line she did not understand be rewritten. The aspects of the

poem that might be said to invite censorship, such as its religious skepticism and sensuality, are clearly evident in the *Poetry* version of the poem. A better verb for what Monroe did is "edit."

Problematic, too, is one of Young's central assumptions: that the poem is a rather one-sided dialogue between a male speaker and a female subject. Young maintains that the patriarchal (though he does not use that word) speaker wants to "protect" the woman from the darkness of traditional religion and assumes "that her sensibility matches his, but the reader senses his urge rather than his success. He may or may not understand her mind and emotions" (56). In the end, the woman "is more or less dismissed" (64) as the speaker pursues his ideas. Personally, I have always read the work as entirely proceeding from the woman's consciousness, with the poem's quotation marks indicating the internalized claims of traditional religion. When Young says that the speaker "discusses her as though she occupied a different space or time," like a "picture" (59), I think his analogy to painting betrays him. A visual artist painting from life may indeed imagine, incorrectly, the subjectivity of the woman he paints. On the other hand, I do not think anybody supposes Stevens wrote the poem while looking at a real person. Thus, Young speculates about a false understanding of a nonexistent person's interior life. Moreover, Stevens' comment on his own poem suggests that the poem is meant to be the monologue of a divided consciousness. He wrote to L. W. Payne that the poem "is not essentially a woman's meditation on religion and the meaning of life. It is anybody's meditation" (L 250). This would seem to reject the gender dynamics Young finds all over the poem.

I am not saying that Young's reading is indefensible, just that it is not well defended. Another example of this is the claim that the poem evinces Stevens' desire to create a distinctly American modernism. Young cites the concluding stanza of "Sunday Morning" as proof, yet a British citizen could just as easily walk among deer and quail while watching pigeons sink to darkness, and the desire to replace traditional religion with something else is characteristic of international modernism. Moreover, when asked directly about his desire to write in an American way, Stevens generally parried the question: "I should not say that I was flagrantly American" (CPP 800), he told *Twentieth Century Verse*; "I don't believe in factitious Americanism," he told the *Partisan Review*. He added, "An American has to be an American because there is nothing else for him to be" (CPP 805). These sorts of comments do not conclusively refute Young, but to my mind should be considered in such an argument.

Similar types of objections can be raised by most informed readers for all the readings in the book. The margins of my copy are full of quibbles and qualms. Yet even after reading a chapter in which I disagreed on virtually every page, I found myself enjoying the book. So this is a good book to read and to recommend to the general reader, so long as the book is handed over with this admonition: "Consider this book as half a conversation. You're supposed to talk back."

Chris Beyers
Assumption College

News and Comments

Heather Thomas reports that on October 8, 2006, the Berks Bards celebrated a recent honor bestowed on Wallace Stevens by his home county. More than 50 years after Stevens died in 1955, Berks County has named the date of Stevens' birthday, October 2, as Wallace Stevens Day. The celebration was part of "Reading Reads: The Greater Reading Literary Festival," which was held at the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts in Reading, Pa.

* * *

The featured speaker for the WS Birthday Bash on October 7, 2006, at Hartford Public Library was Lawrence Joseph, whose talk was entitled "Stevens, Lawyers, Poetry." Joseph, who has published five volumes of poetry, interspersed his talk with readings of poems by WS and himself. The recipient of two NEA poetry fellowships, a Guggenheim, and other awards, he is the Tinnelly Professor of Law at St. John's University School of Law in New York. His book *Lawyerland* is being developed into a film by John Malkovich. His talk was followed by an informal panel discussion with Hank Murray, a lawyer and board member of the Hartford Friends and Enemies of WS; Richard Kay, Wallace Stevens Professor at UConn Law School; and Kerri Driscoll, Prof. of English at St. Joseph College in West Hartford. Glen MacLeod reports the evening was "lively, varied, and not too long. The food was great, too!"

* * *

Two chaired professorships in Stevens' honor have been established. The University of Connecticut has created the Wallace Stevens Professorship of Law. The first to hold the chair is Richard S. Kay, who cites his own admiration for the poet as a contributing factor in his selection. The New York Law School, from which Stevens received his law degree in 1903, has also established a chair. The first to be named to the Wallace Stevens Professor of Law is Anita Bernstein, who holds the position concurrently with her appointment as Sam Nunn Professor of Law at Emory University School of Law.

* * *

Michael Palmer has been selected as the recipient of the 2006 Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets. The prize, which carries a stipend of \$100,000, recognizes outstanding and proven mastery in the art of poetry. Robert Hass has called Palmer "one of the most original craftsmen at work in English at the present time." Past recipients include Gerald Stern, Richard Wilbur, Adrienne Rich, and A. R. Ammons.

* * *

The annual WS Memorial Poetry Reading was held in Elizabeth Park on Saturday, June 24th. Hartford Poets Clare Rossini and Dennis Barone read in the Pond House.

* * *

William Reese Co. listed in its Catalog 247 (July 2006) a second edition of *Harmonium*, one of 397 copies bound in tan boards with paper label, at a price of \$450.

* * *

A first edition of *Ideas of Order*, one of 135 signed and numbered copies published in 1935 by Alcestis Press, was listed for auction in the May 25, 2006, Swann Galleries catalog, with a suggested bidding range of \$1,500–\$2,500.

* * *

Christie's New York offered in its June 14, 2006, auction a lot of eleven signed, typewritten letters by Stevens, written to his publisher Alfred A. Knopf and to William Cole of Knopf and the National Book Award from 1936 to 1955. With suggested bids of \$15,000 to \$20,000, the letters deal with such items as the manuscript of a new volume of poems, WS' post as a judge for the National Book Award, and his response to winning the award in 1955.

Sara S. Hodson
The Huntington Library

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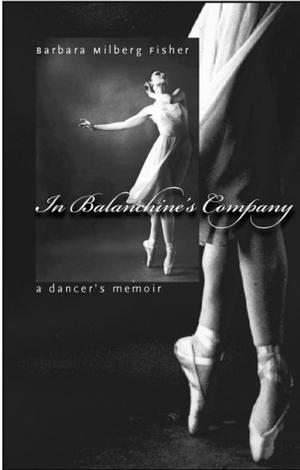
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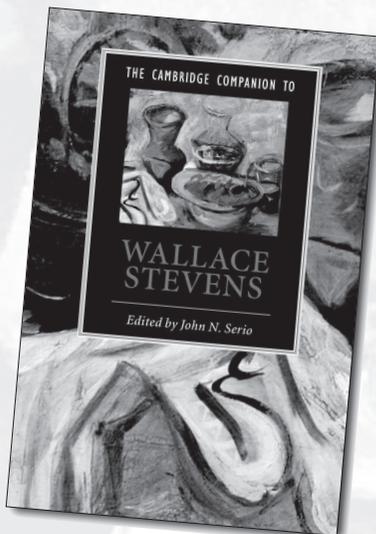
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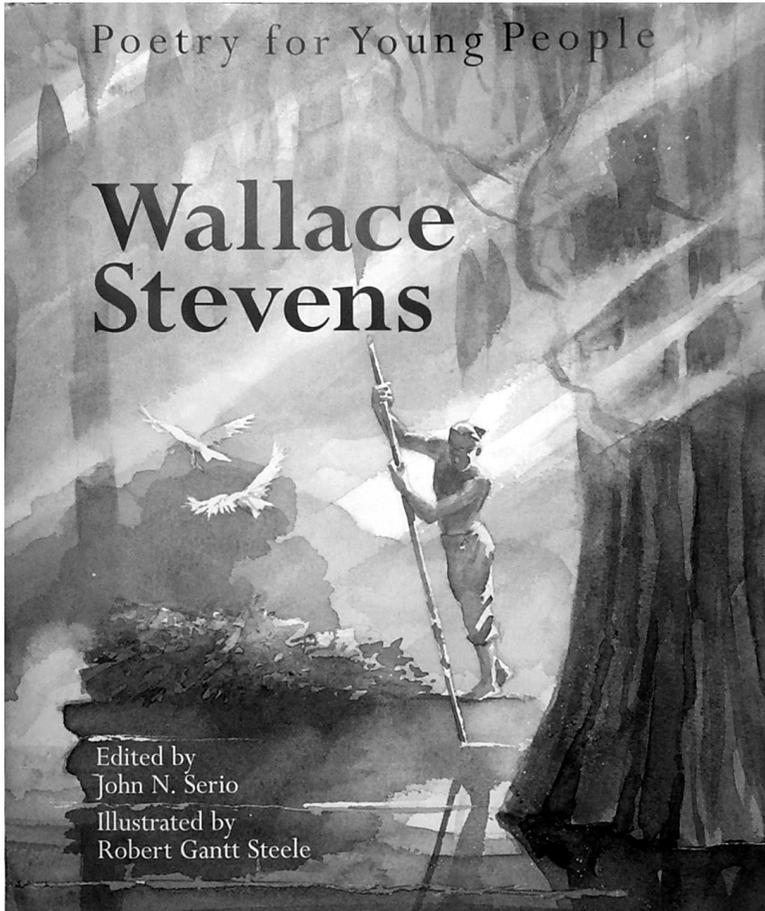
CONTENTS

Introduction, John N. Serio; *1. Wallace Stevens: a likeness*, Joan Richardson; *2. Stevens and Harmonium*, Robert Rehder; *3. Stevens in the 1930s*, Alan Filreis; *4. Stevens and the supreme fiction*, Milton J. Bates; *5. Stevens' late poetry*, B. J. Leggett; *6. Stevens and his contemporaries*, James Longenbach; *7. Stevens and romanticism*, Joseph Carroll; *8. Stevens and philosophy*, Bart Eeckhout; *9. Stevens' seasonal cycles*, George S. Lensing; *10. Stevens and the lyric speaker*, Helen Vendler; *11. Stevens and linguistic structure*, Beverly Maeder; *12. Stevens and painting*, Bonnie Costello; *13. Stevens and the feminine*, Jacqueline Vaught Brogan; *14. Stevens and belief*, David R. Jarraway; *Guide to further reading*; *Index*

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