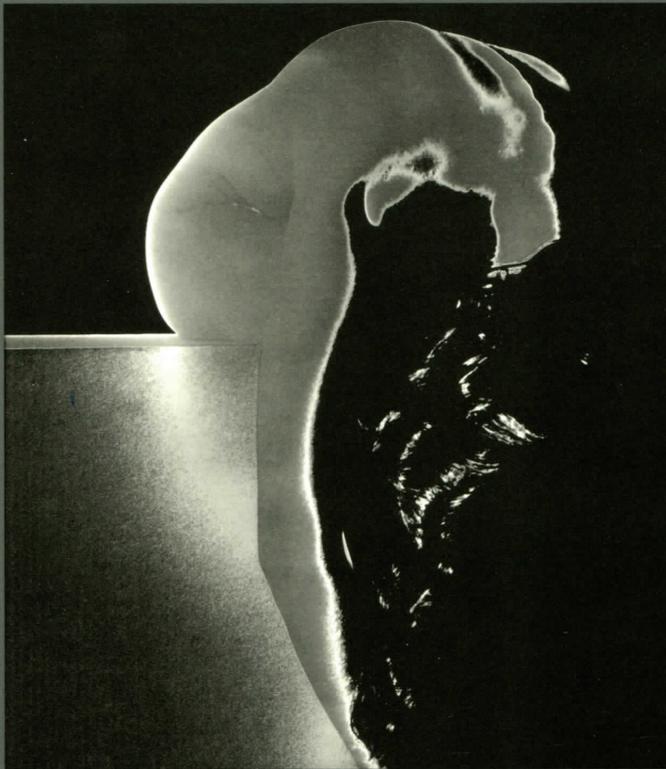


*The
Wallace
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Special Issue
Stevens, Freud, and Psychoanalytic Theory

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Stevens, Freud, and Psychoanalytic Theory
Edited by
Jacqueline Vaught Brogan

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Cover

Faye A. Serio

“The curving of her hip, as motionless gesture”
from “So-and-So Reclining on Her Couch”

Silver gelatin print

The Wallace Stevens Journal

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Introduction

JACQUELINE VAUGHT BROGAN

THIS ISSUE HAD AS ITS genesis a remarkable panel on Wallace Stevens and Sigmund Freud organized by Charles Berger at the Louisville Conference on Literature & Culture Since 1900 in February 2009, which featured papers by Berger, Bethany Hicok, Thomas Sowders, and me (two of which appear here in expanded form). At the time, I thought the four papers brought such a new perspective on Stevens that they might form a special section of an issue of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. John N. Serio thought the interplay of these two important figures might be worthy of an entire issue, and he was right. Although most of the special issues of the journal have pitted Stevens with another poet or writer, such as Elizabeth Bishop or Henry James, or with a given topic, such as “place” or “France,” this issue called for readers of Stevens to consider him in relation to a dominant thinker of his own time, a curious but fruitful conjunction that had been largely unexplored. The results of this challenge have yielded a variety of new insights into Stevens.

In Bethany Hicok’s reading of the “crucial intersection between the cultural Freud and the cultural Stevens”—she observes that Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion* “provided an essential framework for Stevens’ thinking about both the search for belief and the dangers of totalitarianism.” Although this subject allows Hicok to give us entirely new readings of several of Stevens’ poems, it also expands our understanding of Stevens not only as a political poet but also as a political thinker, deeply invested in the consequences of what Freud’s late privileging of the scientific over the imaginative or poetic might have in the modern, increasingly technological world. As Hicok argues, Stevens’ concerns were quite prescient, anticipating for him and other contemporaneous writers the kinds of excesses that would allow for the rise of Hitler and other extreme forms of dominance. Raina Kostova, in “The Dangerous Voice of the Realist,” mines a similar field, though with slightly different nuances. According to Kostova, Stevens exaggerated Freud’s commitment to scientific rationalism in *The Future of an Illusion*, which even Freud himself said was one of his weakest works. Despite their slightly different approaches to the same text, both Hicok and Kostova make a convincing case that Freud had a direct influence on Stevens’ thinking in both his essays and major poems.

Other critics are concerned less with matters of influence than with the kind of interpretations a Freudian reading might give to Stevens' poems. Thomas Sowders, in his essay "The Lion and the Girl," gives us an interpretation of Stevens' consistent sublimation of sexual desire (aligned with the "ordinary," the figure of "the girl," and basic "lust") in order to transcend to the "extraordinary Poet." Consequently, Sowders argues, there are "two kinds of 'girl' poems" in Stevens—one "angry and anguished," the other "meditatively purging him of sexual desire." In a different, though related vein, Thomas Dilworth, in "Death and Pleasure in Stevens' 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream,'" offers an intriguing, if not disturbing, interpretation of the poem as containing "daring implications of erotic perversion." Although not arguing for direct influence, Dilworth makes a convincing case that the major tenets of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* would have had common currency when Stevens wrote the poem and that the speaker of Stevens' poem fully understands the "truth" that *pleasure* includes pleasures that "most of us would consider immoral or perverse."

Brian Glaser also aligns Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* with Stevens, only this time offering a survey of several categories of Stevens' use of animals in his poetry in order to defend a particular reading of Stevens' work that, when aligned with that text, is arguably "posthumanist." In so doing, Glaser considers Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's critique of Freud, as does David Jarraway, in his essay "'Ancestor of Narcissus': Stevens and Psychoanalysis Between Freud and Deleuze." Jarraway's interest in this shared subject is arguably more theoretical and includes the insights of the later Jacques Derrida's work on narcissism, allowing Jarraway to argue for a "poetics of androgyny" in several of Stevens' key poems.

Finally, the subject of Stevens and Freud inevitably leads some theorists to consider Stevens and psychoanalysis more generally, as does Axel Nesme, in "Wallace Stevens and the Lacanian Ethics of Desire." Nesme argues that Stevens' "connection to Kantian ethics lies in his treatment of the Thing, not as the *noumenon* beyond the reach of perceptual knowledge, but as the kernel of bodily enjoyment . . . which is Lacan's version of the Freudian *das Ding*." In an entirely different manner, Gina MacKenzie and Daniel O'Hara consider Stevens' poetry in relationship to D. W. Winnicott's theory of "personhood" in his *Playing and Reality*. Their conclusion is that "in Stevens' world, play occurs on the precipice of nothingness," thereby underscoring "the terrifying reality underlying Winnicott's theory and therapy."

There is, then, much new and varied to enjoy in this special issue. It is one of the more intriguing volumes I have had the pleasure to oversee as guest editor. But, in the end, I must once again thank Serio, not only for suggesting that I edit this issue, but also for (as always) doing the really hard and meticulous work of preparing this issue for publication.

University of Notre Dame

Freud, Modernity, and the “Father Nucleus” in Wallace Stevens

BETHANY HICOK

IT IS NOW A FAMILIAR narrative of Wallace Stevens scholarship that in the 1930s and early 1940s, Stevens, like many modernists of his generation, turned more directly, in his writing and in a series of university talks, to the dire political situation. As Stevens told his audience in a 1936 talk he gave at Harvard, “The pressure of the contemporaneous from the time of the beginning of the World War to the present time has been constant and extreme. No one can have lived apart in a happy oblivion. . . . We have a sense of upheaval. We feel threatened. We look from an uncertain present toward a more uncertain future. One feels the desire to collect oneself against all this in poetry as well as in politics” (*CPP* 788). Eugenic discourse, social engineering, the rise of totalitarianism, even the question of the welfare state at home in America brought to the forefront the question: What is the good society?

It is interesting, then, that as Stevens turned to consider the role of the poet in times of crisis, he also turned more directly to Freud. In this same Harvard talk, entitled “The Irrational Element in Poetry,” Stevens told his audience that Freud had “given the irrational a legitimacy that it never had before” (*CPP* 783). As we will see later, the word “legitimacy,” with its affiliation with paternity, is an important point of authority in Stevens. Freud’s theory of the unconscious gave scientific legitimacy to irrational thought, which, for Stevens, was synonymous with the workings of the imagination. This legitimacy removed the feminine taint, as well, that might be carried by the word “irrational.” But Stevens’ most direct reference to Freud’s work during this time was not to the early Freud of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which Stevens had read in the teens as part of the Walter Arensberg Circle in New York, but rather to Freud’s later, cultural work, *The Future of an Illusion*. We have here a crucial intersection between the cultural Freud and the cultural Stevens, providing an important hinge on which to hang a discussion of how Stevens and Freud were thinking through some key questions that concerned both men during this period: What defines the good? How do we deal with the problem of authoritarian religion and totalitarian governments? What is the relationship between

reality and the imagination? What is the intellectual's role in society, particularly a society in crisis?

We know from Joan Richardson's biography of Stevens that he probably read Freud's monograph *The Future of an Illusion* in 1928 when it came out in the English language edition published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press (58),¹ although we cannot be entirely sure, since Stevens was cagey about his reading habits.² Still, he owned a copy, which is now housed at the University of Massachusetts. He refers specifically to the text in two public talks he gave in the 1940s, and in his own copy Stevens noted particular passages in pencil and indexed those pages on the back flap, which suggests he read the book with some care. James Longenbach has discussed the influence Freud's text might have had on Stevens' preparation of the 1942 talk he gave at Princeton, assuming that he read it at that time (287). Again, we do not know for sure, but it seems likely that he first read it in 1928 or 1929, when it first came out. Richardson speculates, for example, that Stevens borrowed the figure of Ananke (necessity or fate)—which appears throughout Stevens' poetry of the 1930s and early 1940s, well before his Princeton talk—from Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*. But it seems to me now, as I place Freud's text alongside Stevens' poetry and prose in this period of social, economic, political, and global crisis, that Stevens is having a deeper conversation with Freud than has been acknowledged. My purpose here is to show the ways that Freud's essay *The Future of an Illusion* provided an essential framework for Stevens' thinking about both the search for belief and the dangers of totalitarianism.

Stevens directly critiques Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* in his now well-known talk about poetry and the artist, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," which he gave at Princeton in 1942 in the midst of World War II. The talk is generally considered to be Stevens' official statement, as it were, on art and aesthetics in times of crisis. "What is [the poet's] function?" (CPP 660), Stevens asked in that talk. "[I]t is not," he told his audience, "to lead people out of the confusion in which they find themselves. Nor is it . . . to comfort them while they follow their leaders to and fro" (CPP 660). His "function," rather, "is to make his imagination theirs"; consequently, "he fulfills himself only as he sees his imagination become the light in the minds of others" (CPP 660–61). The poet's role, "in short," Stevens argued, "is to help people to live their lives" (CPP 661). What makes this possible? "[W]hat makes the poet the *potent* figure that he is, or was, or ought to be," Stevens said, "is that he creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it and that he gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it" (CPP 662; my emphasis). Unfortunately, Stevens argued, Freud's later cultural work had struck a blow to that very poetic imagination. Stevens had no problem with the underlying premise of Freud's argument—that belief in God is an illusion. His problem was that Freud's emphasis on scientific

knowledge (at the expense of the imagination) as the only legitimate way of understanding reality had, quite simply, “cut poetry’s throat,” Stevens told his audience, quoting what the seventeenth-century French poet and critic Nicolas Boileau had said of Descartes (*CPP* 651). Freud, it would seem, had become the modern equivalent of Plato and banished the poets from the Republic.

Since Stevens had previously argued that Freud’s theory of the unconscious had supported the poetic imagination, it is worth taking a moment to consider the contradiction. As others, most famously Lionel Trilling, have done, Stevens acknowledges here the difference between early and late Freud. Freud’s early focus on the individual was liberating for the artist; his later cultural work tended to be viewed as more conservative and pessimistic. For Stevens and other intellectuals, this later work came down too hard on the side of reality. Trilling, for instance, had written that although “Freud’s thought has significant affinity with the anti-rationalist element of the Romanticist tradition,” there was a fair amount of it that was also “militantly rationalistic” (40).³ Trilling’s (and Stevens’) critique of Freud makes sense within the debate over scientific positivism, which was raging at about the same time in the literary journals that Stevens liked to read, a point that to my knowledge has not been made in discussions of Stevens and Freud. Just a year after Stevens gave his now well-known talk on poetry and the imagination at Princeton, where he criticized Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion*, a debate over scientific positivism was being waged between *The Chimera*, a new little magazine, and *The Partisan Review*. Stevens read and published in both. Indeed, one of Stevens’ quintessential poetic statements of the period, “The Motive for Metaphor,” had been published in *The Chimera* in the previous issue.⁴

On the side of scientific positivism in a special issue of *The Partisan Review* were such prominent New York intellectuals on the left as the pragmatist John Dewey and his student Sidney Hook, as well as Ernest Nagel, who would become one of the most important philosophers of science in the twentieth century.⁵ Both Hook and Nagel were quite young men at the time of the *Partisan Review* articles. Hook, initially a Marxist, became increasingly ambivalent about the promise of Marxism after Stalin’s purges in the late 1930s. All of them took the position that scientific rationalism was the answer to totalitarianism. Their positions focused on what they saw as a recent move toward “obscurantism” and “mysticism” in public discourse and away from science. We might remember the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1926, which Freud mentioned in *The Future of an Illusion*, and the efforts of William Jennings Bryan to make the teaching of evolution unlawful.

Dewey, Hook, and Nagel were all reacting to a strong move toward religious fundamentalism that they saw happening in reaction to the stresses and rapid changes of modernity. Those on the other side of the scientific positivism debate included W. H. Auden and Kenneth Burke.

Burke, champion of such modernist avant-garde writers as Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, and Hart Crane, had been brought up as a Roman Catholic but later became an agnostic. Neither Auden nor Burke was anti-science, and, as we can see, Burke had no particular stake in promoting Christianity. Indeed, Nietzsche and Freud were major influences on Burke's thought. But they objected to the idea that science alone could solve all our problems.

As the philosopher Phillip Wheelwright argued in his suggestively named essay "Dogmatism—New Style," "The most important of human problems—the search for values by which to live and the experiential testing of such values both inwardly and outwardly—cannot be settled by scientific techniques alone" (16). All three saw the issue as of "crucial importance for education" (Wheelwright 16). Wheelwright was concerned that during the last thirty years, "liberal education has felt an increasing emphasis on the social sciences at the expense of the humanistic disciplines" (16). This trend was good up to a point. After all, it "developed," in Wheelwright's words, "a more intelligently active social conscience together with more objective methods of discovering what the social facts really are," but, on the down side, students, he thought, were too often "encouraged in the false notion that ability to handle statistics is a more important educational aim than the discipline of what the Stoics accurately called the Inner Self" (16). The methods of seeking truth "are not reducible to any one formula," he argued: "The basic aim of education now and tomorrow is what it has always been: the discipline and encouragement of discriminating sensitivity to the best values which speak, or may speak, within men's hearts" (16). Or as Kenneth Burke put it, "Both faith (a philosophical synthesis that must recommend itself on dialectical grounds rather than by strictly scientific tests) and knowledge (the kinds of analytic observation that develop out of the perspective established by the faith) are necessary to a complete dialectic for the discussion of human motives" (25). Auden objected to the element of prophetic declamation on both sides. Both the clergyman, who declares from the pulpit that "'Christianity is the only hope of a Post-War world,'" Auden argued, as well as the scientist, who claims that only scientific knowledge "will set us free," are wrong and will not be taken seriously with such declamations, or at the very least, such statements of certitude will not help us to live our lives (21–22).

That same year Stevens gave us one of his great poetic sequences along these lines, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," in which he reasserted the modernist values of abstraction and pleasure as fundamental to artistic endeavors. Stevens ended his Princeton talk with that now well-known formulation that reasserted the power of the imagination to push back against the violent reality of global war, brutal totalitarian governments, and economic disaster: "It is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pres-

sure of reality. It seems, in the last analysis, to have something to do with our self-preservation; and that, no doubt, is why the expression of it, the sound of its words, helps us to live our lives" (CPP 665).

Stevens was critiquing Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*, I think, because he felt its underlying scientific positivism had struck a blow to the imagination as a way of understanding and shaping reality. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud "notes the decline of religious belief," Stevens told his audience, but Freud felt that people could "do without the consolation of what he calls the religious illusion" (CPP 651). Freud believed, rather, that people could indeed "endure the cruelty of reality" without appealing to the gods (CPP 651). Therefore, Stevens said, Freud's conclusion was "that man must venture at last into the hostile world and that this may be called education to reality" (CPP 651). Stevens disagreed with Freud on this point. As he told his audience, the "object" of Freud's essay was "to suggest a surrender to reality" (CPP 651). Stevens' main problem, like Burke's, was that Freud came down too hard on one side of the dialectic. But Stevens' rather pointed and specific critique may have clouded our response and hampered our understanding of the impact that Freud's text had on Stevens' thinking about questions of belief at this time. David Jarraway has provided the most thorough analysis of Stevens and the question of belief in his book-length study and has constructed a compelling link between Nietzsche and Stevens in the poetry of the 1930s and 1940s, but he only briefly mentions that Stevens read *The Future of an Illusion*. Attention to Stevens' reading of the cultural Freud, however, adds an important dimension to the process of Stevens' thinking as he worked through questions of belief.

A more thoroughgoing approach to Freud's text is in order at this point. Freud arrives at the central question of *The Future of an Illusion* at the beginning of Chapter 3 when he asks: "In what does the peculiar value of religious ideas lie?" (692). The psychical function of the gods, Freud notes, is threefold: "they must exorcise the terrors of nature, they must reconcile men to the cruelty of Fate, particularly as it is shown in death, and they must compensate them for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them" (695). The rich "store of [religious] ideas is created," he argues, out of "man's need to make his helplessness tolerable and built up from the material of memories of the helplessness of his own childhood and the childhood of the human race" (695). Therefore, religious beliefs, Freud writes, are "fulfillments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind," which represent "the need for protection—for protection through love" stemming from our childhood helplessness (703). Such a need, "provided by the father" in childhood, according to Freud, nevertheless continues throughout our lives, which "ma[kes] it necessary to cling to the existence of a father, but this time a more powerful one," Freud argued (703).⁶ This is what Freud called "the father nucleus"—that psychical combination of our memories of helplessness

ness, and our subsequent need for comfort and protection. It is the father we find, Freud argued, “hidden behind every divine figure as its nucleus” (696). The “primal father,” therefore, “was the original image of God,” Freud wrote, “the model on which later generations have shaped the figure of God” (712). Hence, our attraction to authoritarian fathers. Freud’s conclusion? Religion is “the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity,” which “arose out of the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father” (713).

As Freud knew, this addiction to a father-god authority could lead to tyranny, as Mark Edmundson puts it in his recent work on Freud’s late career. Edmundson argues, “Freud came to believe,” in his late work, that “human beings . . . are addicted to authority and often to destructive authority at that” (54). It is, then, “frequently our strongest desire, oddly enough, . . . to find a figure who will control our desires” (54). Ultimately, Freud had argued, “we wish to be dominated. We wish to submit” (54). Freud’s late work, Edmundson argues, “predicted two shocking phenomena of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries”—“the rise of tyranny” and “the new birth of the fundamentalist urge” (239; 240). Hitler’s and Stalin’s, for instance, “were both governments of the patriarch, appealing to the same perverse and all-too-human desire” (Edmundson 218). So, “from the Freudian perspective,” Edmundson argues, “authoritarian religion and authoritarian politics are two sides of one debased coin” (240–41). *The Future of an Illusion*, in addition to several other texts of Freud’s late career, *Totem and Taboo* (1912–13), *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), which immediately followed *The Future of an Illusion*, and finally *Moses and Monotheism* (1938), all applied psychoanalytic theory, which was primarily concerned with individual psychology, to culture, and in each case Freud took on the problem of the primal father’s dangerous and destructive authority. This “father nucleus,” as Freud called it, is a crucial aspect of Stevens’ thinking about these issues as well. The problem of god-the-father, in other words, seems to me to be a central one of this phase of Stevens’ career—papal fathers bellowing decrees, Cotton Mather loudly preaching to silence the doubt, “to quiet that mouse in the wall” (*CPP* 196), the “unmerciful pontifex” (*CPP* 581) Ananke, the Stalinist captain on the battleship *Masculine* in “Life on a Battleship,” as well as other figures Stevens used to explore this nucleus of phallic power and authority.

Stevens may also have been influenced by the form that Freud’s monograph takes. Freud’s approach throughout most of the monograph is dialectical. As Salman Akhtar has noted in his introduction to a new book of essays on Freud’s monograph, “The exchange between Freud and his imaginary God-believing interlocutor fills the pages of *The Future of an Illusion*” (3). Freud is no doubt arguing with himself here—the “Godless Jew” and the “God-believing interlocutor” (3). Hence, the monograph, in Akhtar’s view, “is a literary battlefield where ‘Freud, the atheist’ is in-

volved in a bloody combat with 'Freud, the Believer!' " (3). Such tension and ambivalence can also be seen in Freud's correspondence of the period. As the letters indicate, "Freud had two pictures of God in mind. One was an anthropomorphized, concrete, and stern but protective father-like presence, which he resolutely defied. The other was a sublime object of wonder, humility, and gratitude, to which he gladly paid homage. The former demanded idolatry, which revolted Freud. The latter evoked humility, which Freud was fearless to experience" (4). So there are two contradictions in Freud's view of religion—one "between his belief and non-belief in God" and the other "between his two visions of divinity" (4)—the authoritarian bad father vs. the sublime one. Whether or not this ambivalence was a direct influence on Stevens, we cannot know for sure, even though we know he read Freud, but what we can read in Stevens' own letters, poetry, and prose of this period is a critical address of the same questions and a dialectical model for thinking through these problems from a deep psychological perspective—the dialectic that we find in his 1937 sequence "The Man with the Blue Guitar," for instance.

We might begin to think about Stevens' exploration of authoritarian fathers by looking first at the use he makes of a figure from *The Future of an Illusion*: Ananke, or fate. In the margins of his 1928 copy of *The Future of an Illusion*, Stevens wrote the annotation, "Ανάγκη=external reality," which is how Freud defines it in the essay (*Future of an Illusion* 93).⁷ Stevens uses the figure in a number of poems, beginning with the 1935 epigrammatic sequence "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery"; Ananke appears again several times in the 1936 *Owl's Clover* and again in an excised stanza from the 1942 "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War" (CPP 1001–2).

Another possible and related source of Ananke is Stevens' exchange with the painter Mario Rossi, whose words Stevens had used as an epigraph for his 1934 poem "Evening Without Angels." The epigraph reads: "the great interests of man: air and light, the joy of having a body, the voluptuousness of looking" (CPP 111). Stevens' meditation on air and light, which turns away from God and toward the "self for help," as Stevens might have put it, prolongs desire ("desire for day," "Desire for rest") through pleasurable repetition and lengthening verb forms: "Encircling," "making visible," "giving form," "flashing East," "descending sea," the dark's "very darkening," "silence spreading," until we arrive, ultimately, at "Evening," where Stevens is able to clear the ground, as it were: "Bare night is best. Bare earth is best. Bare, bare," in order to create momentarily an earthy paradise, bare "Except for our own houses, huddled low / Beneath the arches and their spangled air, / Beneath the rhapsodies of fire and fire," and here he can conjure "voice" in a moment of visionary delight: "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). The very fullness of the image "indulge[s] the instinct of joy" that Stevens had said characterized Van Gogh's painting in one letter he wrote

during this period,⁸ and it marks a consistent pattern of circling inward and establishing the self as sovereign and ultimate authority. We will see later that as Stevens contends more fully with the dire political situation, the authorizing of the self takes place as an antidote to the outside authority of the god-like leader.

Stevens' exchange with Rossi, which he recorded in his commonplace notebook, *Sur Plusieurs Beaux Sujets*, indicates a point at which this shift may have occurred for Stevens. Rossi apparently qualified his thoughts on pleasure: "I don't think indeed man has *only* such interests," Rossi wrote (emphasis mine). "I meant to say that amongst human interests, the simple pleasures of life—living pure, as it were—have a paramount importance. . . . Poetry and pleasure alike have something elemental in themselves. . . . But don't forget . . . [.]there was the imperscrutable Ananke. Call it destiny, call it God, call it predestination—it comes all alike. It gives a sense to the marvelous spectacle of the world'" (*SPBS* 35). In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud himself used a similar formulation when he argued that Eros and Ananke—the power of love and external necessity (which created the compulsion to work)—formed the foundation of society (Gay 548).

Rossi also, it should be noted, names Ananke God, which suggests a link between Stevens' exchange with Rossi and Freud's arguments about the dangers of our reliance on the gods in *The Future of an Illusion*. Milton Bates, in his edition of Stevens' notebooks, calls Ananke "a 'thing created by the imagination' and [a] surrogate object of religious belief" in Stevens; in that sense, he is an "immediate precursor of Stevens' supreme fiction," Bates argues, an observation he bases on his reading of a letter Stevens wrote to Hi Simons, in which he said that "one's final belief must be in a fiction" (*SPBS* 35 n5; *L* 370). Ananke, as he evolves in Stevens, though, also becomes a stand-in for the dangerous primal father, for the totalitarian leader, and authoritarian rule—whether by gods or men—and so, in that sense, becomes a warning.

In Ananke's first appearance in canto XII of "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery," the figure seems more closely associated with its more conventional usage as fate or death, something like "the cruelty of Fate, particularly as it is shown in death" (695), as Freud describes it when he discusses the function of the gods:

The sense of the serpent in you, Ananke,
And your averted stride
Add nothing to the horror of the frost
That glistens on your face and hair. (*CPP* 122)

Eleanor Cook points out the echo here of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in Ananke's averted stride: Death comes, she quotes, "With horrid strides; Hell trembled as he strode" (35).⁹ As Ananke evolves in Stevens' work, how-

ever, he becomes more recognizable as a totalitarian leader. In canto VI of "The Greenest Continent," from *Owl's Clover*, "Fatal Ananke" transmogrifies from "common god" to "the final god" to an "obdurate ruler who ordains / For races, not for men . . . ," the "unmerciful pontifex," who "'caused the statue to be made,'" and "fix[ed] the place where it will stand" (CPP 162).

By the time we get to an excised stanza from "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War," Ananke comes close to the Freudian formulation of the "father nucleus." We are told of "the antiques wishing" of the soldiers who "bear virile grace before their fellows," which is "the self-same rhythm" that "moves" in "the bold, obedience to Ananke" (CPP 1002). In this sexualized discourse, we glimpse the primal father. Stevens' formulation is uncannily close to Freud's 1921 text *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, although we do not know whether Stevens read it. In *Group Psychology*, Freud argued that the group was bound by libidinal ties to each other through identification with each other and their obedience to the leader. Extending the argument originally made in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud argues that this is the model for all group formations, in which "The leader of the group is still the dreaded primal father; the group still wishes to be governed by unrestricted force; it has an extreme passion for authority. . . . The primal father is the group ideal, which governs the ego in the place of the ego ideal" (76). Freud's work anticipated the kind of group psychology and the adoration of the leader that would soon operate so chillingly in the mass rallies held by the Nazis.

Part of Stevens' response to the political, social, and economic crises of the 1930s and 1940s is just such an investigation into these group dynamics, which he links even more closely to the current political climate in one of the great poetic sequences of the twentieth century, his 1937 "The Man with the Blue Guitar." Structurally, the poem's major rhetorical device, like Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*, is dialectical, featuring a conversation between a skeptical and shifting audience and an equally skeptical and shifting artist, the "harmonious [and sometimes unharmonious] skeptic" (CPP 101) we saw earlier in "Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz." The sequence enacts a conversation about the purpose of art and the interplay between a constantly shifting reality ("things as they are") and the imagination that plays "things as they are." If this sequence offers a challenge to conventional belief structures, as Jarraway has suggested,¹⁰ it does so in ways that align those structures with totalitarianism and deep psychic desire in the way that Freud had done. The poem argues strenuously against final, fixed solutions and against turning the desire for something in which to believe—a major preoccupation of Stevens' work—into the worship of leaders mistaken for gods: "behold," the speaker tells us in canto X, "The approach of him whom none believes, / Whom all believe that all believe, / A pagan in a varnished car" (CPP 139).¹¹

Stevens provides a deeper understanding of what compels belief, which has much to do with spectacle; belief can be reinforced and compelled by spectacle and parade. Freud had argued in *Group Psychology* that the leader's power, like the hypnotist's, is manifested in the gaze: "his most typical method of hypnotizing is by the look" (73–74). In "The Man with the Blue Guitar," Stevens takes a significant verb from his own lexicon, "behold," and uses it in a different context, emphasizing the difference between visual and auditory images. Consider, for instance, how Stevens used the word "behold" before in his work in this passage from the *Harmonium* poem, "The Snow Man":

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is. (CPP 8)

In this intensely metaphysical moment, where the poet dwells in the intensity of being and nothingness, his beholding paradoxically has to do with hearing (he is "the listener, who listens"), not seeing. Whereas in "The Man with the Blue Guitar," the word "behold" initiates a spectacle and thereby compels belief. In canto X we are told to "behold" the "pagan in the varnished car," a moment of pure spectacle in the field of vision that deflects us from its surfaces, rather than a moment of insight and wonder that embraces us, as in "The Snow Man."

In canto XXX, Stevens uses the word again in what very well might be a direct reference to the Nazi's creation of a murderous mythology of self and origins. Here Stevens presents Oxidia, "banal suburb," where the residents buy on credit, "One-half of all its installments paid" (CPP 149). In this canto, the poet uses the Latin for behold. "Ecce," the speaker tells us, "Oxidia is the seed" (CPP 149), and then, "Oxidia is Olympia."¹² Olympia, Greek home of the gods, may have linked Stevens' mock utopia directly to current events for Stevens' readers, a reference that somehow Stevens' later readers have missed entirely. Because for the first time in the history of the modern Olympic Games, the torch relay began in Olympia, thought to be the birthplace of the ancient games, and ended in Berlin where the 1936 games were held. The contemporary context deepens the ironic vision of the utopian city that Stevens presents here, for as Leni Riefenstahl's 1938 film *Olympia* symbolically suggests, the decision to begin the torch relay in the Greek home of the gods was a way for the Nazis to posit a classical origin for German godliness in the twentieth century. The connection is a chilling one. Stevens reminds us of the dangers of social control, of how the desire to find a substitute for religion might lead into dangerous forms of hero worship, of the tendency of utopia in its social blueprint form, as Paul Ricoeur has argued, to eventually rigidify into ideology (281).

To put it simply, the problem is one of submitting to divine authority unquestioningly, represented by the “bellowings of [papal] bulls,” for instance, in canto XXIX. Rather, for Stevens, as he states in canto XXI, the “substitute for all the gods” must be the individual, “this self,” as it was for Freud. Both were schooled in the classical liberal values of John Stuart Mill (Freud translated several essays from Mill’s collected works¹³); the creative individual, as Emerson would have put it, was the prime authority. But, and here is where Stevens’ alignment with Freud comes in again, the individual must be on guard not to magnify the self in its helplessness into the ego ideal. As Stevens puts it, the “substitute for all the gods” must be “This self, not that gold self aloft,” which would become “one’s shadow magnified, / Lord of the body, looking down” (CPP 144). It must be, rather, “One’s self and the mountains of one’s land, / Without shadows, without magnificence, / The flesh, the bone, the dirt, the stone” (CPP 144). Freud had described the phenomenon of what Stevens calls the “gold self” in *Group Psychology* as that moment of “triumph” when “something in the ego coincides with the ego ideal” (81). That is the moment to guard against, Stevens argues. Turning to the self for help in Stevens did not mean magnifying the self into the ego ideal but, rather, turning, once again, to the humbler, imperfect self, the self “without magnificence.” In other instances, Stevens would just as easily glorify the magnificent self, but I think the context is different. Here, in his more political mode, he must stay away from magnificence, for there is more at stake.

Stevens’ apparent intersection with Freud on the subject of the “father nucleus” intensifies in the early 1940s, most notably in poems, such as the 1942 “Life on a Battleship,” which shares with Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion* a conversation over dogma. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud’s imagined “opponent” argues for religious doctrine, which he claims “is a practical problem, not a question of reality-value” (718), a point that Stevens marked in his 1928 copy: “If you want to expel religion from our European civilization,” says Freud’s opponent, “you can only do it by means of another system of doctrines” (718). The present religious system is a practical way to education, the skeptic argues in *The Future of an Illusion*, “precisely on account of its wish-fulfilling and consolatory power” (719). “Life on a Battleship” parodies the process of establishing an alternative doctrine, in effect demonstrating the substitution of communist doctrine for religious doctrine, thereby suggesting a fundamental problem with both.

Lee Edelman has argued rightly that “Life on a Battleship” is a work that “self-consciously reads gender, sexuality, and class in terms of a social organization centered on phallic authority” (45), an authority, as I have been suggesting, that is centered in the “father nucleus” of Freud’s analysis. As Edelman argues, “‘Life on a Battleship’ repudiates a Marxist-inspired ideal of collective society in favor of an Emersonian celebration of individual autonomy, and it does so by analyzing this ideological conflict as itself an enactment of differing ways of constructing masculinity” (45–46). More-

over, Stevens' language—the poem begins, “The rape of the bourgeoisie accomplished, the men / Returned on board The Masculine”—“locates this exercise of power in the realm of sexual authority” (46).

Edelman does not, however, mention the social context of the poem. The “father nucleus” coalesces for Stevens in a certain kind of virile masculinity as it describes life on the recognizably Stalinist ship, the not-subtlety named “*Masculine*.” The image of Stalin in socialist realist art of the 1930s at the helm of the ship of state makes this parody a particularly multi-layered one. Stevens deploys Marxist ideology in order to dismantle it and to shift the center from the totalitarian captain and his ship (the collective) to the individual. The poem begins:

The rape of the bourgeoisie accomplished, the men
Returned on board The Masculine. That night,
The captain said,
“The war between classes is
A preliminary, provincial phase,
Of the war between individuals. In time,
When the *earth* has become a *paradise*, it will be
A *paradise* full of *assassins*. Suppose I *seize*
The ship, make it my own and, bit by bit,
Seize yards and docks, *machinery and men*,
As others have, and then, unlike the others,
Instead of building ships, in numbers, build
A single ship, a cloud on the sea, the largest
Possible *machine*, a *divinity of steel*,
Of which I am captain. Given what I intend,
The ship would become the *centre* of the world.
My cabin as the *centre* of the ship and I
As the *centre* of the cabin, the *centre* of
The *divinity*, the *divinity's* mind, the mind
Of the world would have only to ring and ft!
It would be done. . . .” (CPP 198–99; my emphasis)

Creating such a utopian experiment on earth will create a “paradise full of assassins,” a machinery of death, led by one man, on a single ship of state, the “divinity of steel,” where the captain becomes the center of the universe. The poem’s speed picks up at the end as if mimicking this machinery that we are led into so easily and “ft!”—it would be done, a variation on “Thy will be done.” As is appropriate to this captain who makes himself the center of the universe, “I think, therefore, I am . . .” This captain, the speaker tells us, is an “apprentice of / Descartes.” In the captain’s Cartesian, rational universe, the “rules of the world” are drafted, and rule number one is, “The grand simplifications reduce / Themselves to one” (CPP 199). Edelman argues that this poem, despite all the parody,

ends up re-inscribing phallic authority, albeit authority centered in the figure of the individual poet, rather than in the Stalinesque captain. The poem ends with a reversal of the opening lines, so that “the hand fails to seize” what the poet defines as “The good, the strength, the sceptre” that “moves / From constable to god” (CPP 201). As Edelman argues, “the divine hand . . . ‘fails to seize’ . . . the phallic ‘wand’ that would represent, in such a worldview, the source of all authority” (48), but, as Edelman points out, the final lines of the poem move “toward the rehabilitation of the phallus” (50), as “the hand / Of a man” seizes that power:

Our fate is our own. The *hand*,
It must be the *hand of one*, it must be the *hand*
Of a *man*, that *seizes* our strength, will *seize* it to be
Merely the *centre* of a *circle*, spread
To the *final full*, an end without rhetoric.
(CPP 201; my emphasis)

Stevens, Edelman argues, presents here an “embattled male heterosexuality that expresses therein its disquieting . . . confusion about how to respond to its culturally mandated investment in the phallus” (50).

However, the bizarrely titled “The Woman Who Had More Babies Than That,” which immediately follows “Life on a Battleship” in *Parts of a World*, makes quite a different statement:

The self is a cloister full of remembered sounds
And of sounds so far forgotten, like her voice,
That they return unrecognized. The self
Detects the sound of a voice that doubles its own,
In the images of desire, the forms that speak,
The ideas that come to it with a sense of speech.
The old men, the philosophers, are haunted by that
Maternal voice, the explanation at night.
They are more than parts of the universal machine.
Their need in solitude: that is the need,
The desire, for the fiery lullaby. (CPP 202)

I agree with Angus Cleghorn that the “maternal muse” that “perseveres” in this poem counters the hyper-masculine desire of “Life on a Battleship,” offering “an alternative to the *Masculine* by enlarging the scope of the spirit” (135; 132). It is significant, too, that Stevens emphasizes the mother’s voice, not the mother’s body. Stevens works against stereotypical images of women in western culture here by making the mother’s voice the origin of “acutest speech,”¹⁴ “the fiery lullaby.” In Freud’s earlier work, focusing on the individual, the mother plays a significant role in the child’s life. In the Oedipus complex, the (male) child’s desire for the mother creates

the central drama of family life. But in Freud's later cultural essays, the mother disappears from the Oedipal triangle.¹⁵ Stevens restores her; the mother's voice then becomes an important source of the imagination, the child's first language teacher, offering "the explanation at night," a generator of "good" speech, and a challenge to the authoritarian fathers.

One final poem is worth considering in terms of Stevens' dialectic with Freud's "father nucleus," and that is the only poem where Stevens mentions Freud by name, the 1946 "Mountains Covered with Cats." The poem, significantly, features both Stalin and Freud among its cast of characters. The poem begins with a jarring mixture of descriptions of the natural world altered by a kind of mechanical human agency:

The sea full of fishes in shoals, the woods that let
One seed alone grow wild, the railway-stops
In Russia at which the same statue of Stalin greets
The same railway passenger, the ancient tree
In the centre of its cones, the resplendent flights
Of red facsimiles through related trees,
White houses in villages, black communicants—
The catalogue is too commodious. (CPP 318)

On one level, the poem is about the dangers of aesthetic imitation, which leads to an "impotent" art.¹⁶ But Stevens specifically links it here to totalitarian ideas through the figure of Stalin, and, perhaps, to the repetitive nature of Soviet socialist realist art. When the government dictates what art should be, for Stevens, art becomes, quite simply, impotent.

Art and potency come together in another poem, "The Red Fern," composed at about the same time, which Stevens had selected, along with "Mountains Covered with Cats" and nine other poems, as a group, which he sent off to the *Quarterly Review of Literature* under the title "More Poems for Liadoff."¹⁷ Here, as Lisa Goldfarb has noted in her reading of this poem, Stevens shows how artistic creation can be seen as "analogous to nature's incessant creation" (153). However, the poem's highly sexualized discourse suggests to me a less positive (or at least a more gendered) reading than Goldfarb allows, particularly in the context of the other poems in this grouping. The initial "birth" of the fern in the first stanza, "Pushing and pushing red after red," is imitated "in the clouds"—the "doubles" of the natural fern to be found in the workings of the imagination (CPP 316). Stevens describes these ferns of the imagination as "less firm than the paternal flame"; they are "dangling seconds" compared to "The dazzling, bulging, brightest core, / The furiously burning father-fire" (CPP 316–17). Compare this "burning father-fire" to the mother's "fiery lullaby" in "The Woman Who Had More Babies Than That." If there is more of a promise of fulfillment here in the workings of desire and the imagination in Stevens, as Goldfarb suggests, it is a fulfillment with a phallic inscription.

On the other hand, in the second stanza of "Mountains Covered with Cats," there is a shift to the margins and away from such images of phallic potency:

Regard the invalid personality
Instead, outcast, without the will to power
And impotent, like the imagination seeking
To propagate the imagination or like
War's miracle begetting that of peace. (CPP 318–19)

We have several different kinds of impotence here: that of the mentally challenged or ill, the outcast, the artist who is merely a mimic, and finally, the impotence of a language that has become doublethink, where, as Orwell would say it a few years later, "War is Peace." Stevens' language—"the invalid," "the outcast"—is richly suggestive of the eugenics that led the Nazis to the logic of extermination, initially experimenting on children who were mentally or physically "invalids" before moving on to the Jews. On a recording, Stevens pronounces the word "inválid" (Cook 207), emphasizing both physical weakness as well as wrongness, as in a badly chosen word, for example. The poem's title, taken from the cover of Wanda Gág's 1928 children's book *Millions of Cats*, which Holly Stevens owned, alludes to the invalid's status as possible hero.¹⁸ In the story, the rogue cat's outsider status helps him to survive and become triumphant and accepted at the book's conclusion. The invalid also has affinities with the poet; Charles Berger has linked this invalid to that of the figure beneath the volcano in "Esthétique du Mal" (7). There is also, of course, a sexual shadow cast over the poem by Stevens' use of the words "impotent," and then potency. Again, Stevens, like Freud, places primal desire as the source and origin of these tensions.¹⁹

In the third and last stanza, Freud enters the scene. To save the day? It is a strange stanza, and Freud is no hero; he is a ghost. Yet that seems important. He must, in a sense, be seen as less solid than Stalin's statue in order to have the power to topple it. Only his eye retains phallic power, but one that is mediated by a microscope:

Freud's eye was the microscope of potency.
By fortune, his gray ghost may meditate
The spirits of all the impotent dead, seen clear,
And quickly understand, without their flesh,
How truly they had not been what they were. (CPP 319)

Stevens' use of "meditate" as a verb without a preposition suggests that Freud's ghost does not merely meditate *on* the spirits of those impotent dead, he meditates them into something else; it makes meditate a productive rather than a contemplative action, producing out of his potency, a

new world, as it were, and, perhaps, as Stevens suggested in “The Irrational Element in Poetry,” a new art. By making Freud’s “eye/I” the microscope of potency (reminiscent of the “eye of a vagabond in metaphor” from “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” [CPP 344]), he is resisting fixing Freud into a heroic image. Microscopes reveal a world that cannot generally be seen with the naked eye, a tiny world that, unlike the spectacle of pageantry and display, requires the observer, the eye looking through the microscope, to interpret and analyze.

In a 1948 lecture he gave at Columbia, “Imagination as Value,” Stevens returned to Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion*. Apparently still bothered by Freud’s move away from the power of the imagination, but eager to redeem him, he asked his audience: “What would [Freud] have said of the imagination as the clue to reality and of a culture based on the imagination?” (CPP 728). One can almost hear the pause, as Stevens thinks through an imaginary conversation with Freud. Then, he continued, answering his own question: “Is it not possible that [Freud] might have said that in a civilization based on science there could be a science of illusions?” (CPP 728). Stevens goes on to think this through: “If when the primacy of the intelligence has been achieved, one can really say what a man is actually like, what could be more natural than a science of illusions?” At that point, Stevens argued, the imagination might become the very “clue to reality” (CPP 728). Such a statement might have been wishful thinking on his part, but with its utterance, Stevens finally reformulates Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion* to accommodate both the scientist and the poet and thereby unites, in one brilliant stroke, science and the imagination.

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Notes

¹Richardson’s biography is one of the few extended discussions of Stevens’ reading of Freud that I know of, although psychoanalytic and Freudian readings of Stevens are part of the critical reception of his work from the 1970s, most notably in Harold Bloom’s *Poems of Our Climate*. James Longenbach, in *The Plain Sense of Things*, provides the only other discussion of Stevens’ reading of *The Future of an Illusion* in the historical context of the war years.

²David Jarraway has written, “Stevens was notoriously secretive about his reading and writing and sometimes even downright mendacious” (113). See also Milton Bates, *A Mythology of Self*, 248; and Peter Brazeau, *Parts of a World*, 139, 142, 149.

³Trilling’s now seminal essay, “Freud and Literature,” published in book form in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950), first came out in 1940, and Stevens may have read it then. However, he quotes from it in *Sur Plusieurs Beaux Sujets* in 1947 when it was republished in *Horizon* (SPBS 91).

⁴“The Motive for Metaphor” was first published in *The Chimera* 1.3 (Winter 1943): 42.

⁵The special issue in question was *Partisan Review* 10.1 (January–February, 1943). Articles defending scientific positivism included Sidney Hook’s “The New Failure of Nerve,” 2–23; John Dewey’s “Anti-Naturalism in Extremis,” 24–39, in which he argued,

"Lack of respect for scientific method, which after all is but systematic, extensive and carefully controlled use of alert and unprejudiced observation and experimentation in collecting, arranging and testing facts to serve as evidence, is attended by a tendency toward finalism and dogmatism" (35); and Ernest Nagel's "Malicious Philosophies of Science," 40–57.

⁶Freud first presented the theory that religion is rooted in a primal need to be protected by the father (and a rebellion against him) in *Totem and Taboo* in 1912–13, where Freud argued that the formation of culture is rooted in the Oedipus complex.

⁷I am grateful to Danielle Kovacs of the Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Massachusetts Amherst for sending me copies of the pages Stevens had annotated of his edition of Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*.

⁸In a 1935 letter to Ronald Lane Latimer (L 296).

⁹Cook's guide is an excellent resource for Stevens scholarship; she provides concise readings and notes possible allusions and numerous references and cross-references to other poems in Stevens' oeuvre. Cook cites here from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book II, line 676.

¹⁰Jarraway 74.

¹¹According to Alan Filreis, this portrait seems to have a direct correlative with a politician in the "real" world, the "demagogue of the moment," Franklin Delano Roosevelt. For his second inauguration, the Hartford *Courant* "had carried a large photograph of the landslide victor riding in an open car," which may well have been the model for this stanza (287). Many people were concerned at the time that FDR would become another dictator, which seems to be the sense of Stevens' critique.

¹²Jarraway notes that this is probably also one of a number of references to Nietzsche that can be found throughout "The Man with the Blue Guitar"—in this case to Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* (89).

¹³Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* 36.

¹⁴See "Chocorua to Its Neighbor": "To speak humanly from the height or from the depth / Of human things, that is acutest speech" (CPP 267).

¹⁵In his brilliant analysis of Freud's evolving theory of culture in his late work, the historian Carl Schorske argues that Freud became increasingly focused on the masculine and on the father to explain cultural origins, turning away from a bisexual theory of culture that he had outlined in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess in 1901, where he said he planned to write a big study called "Bisexuality in Man" (202).

¹⁶In an early poststructuralist essay on Stevens and Freud, Kathleen Dale discusses Stevens' poetry with Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud had argued there that "the human psyche . . . seeks to maintain a low level of excitation . . . for its own preservation," a "tendency" that "involves repetition and sameness instead of the novelty of high excitation" (257). Stevens, like Freud, notes the pleasure to be found in repetition. As Stevens wrote in the "It Must Give Pleasure" section of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," "The man-hero is not the exceptional monster, / But he that of repetition is most master" (CPP 350). In this instance, according to Dale, "poetry becomes a mode of defensive resistance, and its most effective weapon against outside threat and change is resemblance (repetition)" (259). But Stevens knew, of course, that such repetition also produces a sterile poetry. For Stevens, Dale argues, it is the imagination that helps to create a reality that is "more dynamic" than "ritualized resemblances" (261).

¹⁷The other poems in the set are "A Woman Sings a Song for a Soldier Come Home," "The Pediment of Appearance," "Burghers of Petty Death," "Human Arrangement," "The Good Man Has No Shape," "From the Packet of Anacharsis," "The Dove in the Belly," "The Prejudice Against the Past," "Extraordinary References," and "Attempt to Discover Life." They were apparently written under the impetus of Stevens' interest in the "tone poems" of the nineteenth-century Russian composer Anatoly Liadov. Stevens

owned recordings of Liadov's *Enchanted Lake* and his folktales, according to Michael Stegman's discography.

¹⁸ Again, I have Cook's book to thank for making these crucial connections (207).

¹⁹ These figures, as John Beckman has argued, are alternative heroes, supplanting the phallic mythic father, identified as "major man" in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," with the "'singular' man who . . . is no sure model of masculinity, but on the contrary is an impoverished figure of utter risk" (83). The invalid, the rabbi, the tramp—all supplant this "paternal metaphor" (82). Drawing on Derrida's analysis in "Plato's Pharmacy," Beckman argues that Stevens engages in a kind of parricide where, in Derrida's words, "the father's death opens the reign of violence. . . . By announcing the father's death, by aligning himself with the unstable sign whose violence he publicly underscores, Stevens flaunts the father's murder and his own exposure to risk: He performs and he plays within this new realm of violence, well aware that his playing leaves him open to epistemological peril" (81).

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Death and Pleasure in Stevens' "The Emperor of Ice-Cream"

THOMAS DILWORTH

I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream.

—Tom Sacks, 1928

COMPLEX AND RIDDLE-LIKE, "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" exemplifies what Wallace Stevens says about poetry: it "must resist the intelligence / Almost successfully" (*CPP* 306). This is Stevens' most widely read (Beckett 79), best loved, and most famously playful poem. Its play involves the contrast, noted by many critics, between vital enthusiasm in the first stanza and cold realism in the second stanza, and it involves a good deal more. As Paul Valéry writes, "the play of figures" in a poem "contain[s] the reality of the subject" (192). In this poem, a shifting network of imagery achieves a complex articulation about pleasure, which is the primary subject. Interpreting the poem requires questioning with radical openness the meaning of "ice-cream" and therefore of its "emperor." Play in the poem includes unusual, mind-teasing implications—some of which are morally and emotionally uncomfortable—that have not previously been considered. Primary among these is the apparent contrast between what Sigmund Freud, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), calls Eros (or the pleasure principle or life instincts) and the death instinct. In implied reader response, the poem approximates Freud's confusion about these and anticipates their synthesis in his later work and in post-Freudian consensus about the all-encompassing scope of eros.

The relationships between the reader of the poem, the speaker of the poem, and the figure of the emperor of ice cream are complex and vexed. Most readers' sympathies are engaged in the first stanza but alienated in the second. As response to the speaker becomes emotionally problematic, so does ethical reaction to the emperor of ice cream. Faced with the uncomfortable choice of whether to accept what the speaker implies about the emperor, the reader must reach some conclusion about the meaning of the emperor, who is the key to the riddle of the poem.

Determining the full significance of the emperor are two interwoven motifs, one dominant, the other subordinate. Unmentioned in prior interpretations of the poem, the dominant motif involves pleasurable contents

within containers. This motif pervades both stanzas, helping to unify the poem. It establishes a theme that is at once hedonistic and epistemological. Some connotations of imagery and language are sexual and comprise the subordinate motif, which suggests sexual perversion. Hedonistic connotations are prevalent in the first stanza and subordinate in the second, where they remain as a subtext suggesting disquieting continuity between eros and thanatos, pleasure and death.

Similar disquiet arising from the same tension—between Eros and Thanatos—troubles Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, first published in English translation in 1922. The correspondence between Freud's book and Stevens' poem may not be coincidental, since Freud's ideas were the subject of general intelligent conversation in the 1920s. We know that Stevens thought highly of Freud and that he read the 1928 English edition of Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*.¹ In the late 1930s, in a lecture on "The Irrational Element in Poetry," he praises Freud as "[o]ne of the great figures in the world" (CPP 783). In "Mountains Covered with Cats" (1946), he writes, "Freud's eye was the microscope of potency," and his ghost now understands about the dead, "How truly they had not been what they were" (CPP 319).

I am not arguing for direct influence on "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" of the English translation of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Stevens' poem was first published in *The Dial* in July 1922, probably before he could have read the book, if he ever did. He nevertheless may have known its thesis and basic concepts, since it had been published in German two years earlier. In any event, Stevens dealt with the same problem as Freud in that book and with greater subtlety and psychological insight.

Stevens critics like to read "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" as a rollicking celebration of innocent all-American fun alternating with phenomenological exhortations which, while not enhancing pleasure, diminish or preclude pain. That is the conventional reading of the poem and a good one but it is, I think, incomplete. I hope to show that the poem contains daring implications of erotic perversion, which need to be addressed if it is to be fully understood and appreciated.

The kinds and variety of the poem's images suggest that the concern of the speaker of the poem is not, as is usually assumed, funeral preparations but life in general, about which he initially adopts the attitude of an impresario.² The main difficulty with the funerary assumption is that it renders incongruous the speaker's happy enthusiasm in stanza one. There are several other reasons to think that the speaker is probably not concerned with a wake or funeral. In the second stanza, he orders that a sheet be spread over the corpse "so as to cover her face" (CPP 50), which suggests that the death occurred or was discovered only moments before. Covering the face is the first act conventionally done to a corpse (after closing its eyes, if necessary) and certainly precedes the making of funeral arrangements. Moreover, for a wake, the corpse is not covered with a sheet but dressed,

usually in the deceased's Sunday best. Nor, usually, is the face covered. It is doubtful, furthermore, whether flowers are brought even to working-class wakes or funerals in old newspapers. "[W]enches" attend wakes and funerals in their best dresses, moreover, not in "such . . . / As they are used to wear" (lines 6, 5). Encouraging or celebrating all these aspects of a wake or funeral would hardly precede the covering of the deceased's face. What the speaker envisions is, then, probably not a wake or funeral.

Stevens may have had no particular setting in mind, since the poem was, he writes, "an instance of letting myself go" (*L* 293). In its process of composition, it approaches the condition of automatic writing and may, therefore, to a large degree be composed in and by his subconscious. Automatic writing is the solitary, literary equivalent of Freudian free association, and a means to achieving artistic spontaneity.³ If the action of the poem is not funeral preparation, it is part celebration of life and part simple statement about life as involving, among other things, wenches in ordinary dresses, boys bringing flowers, plain wooden dressers, embroidered sheets, and corpses.

Many have noted the contrast in subject and tone between the two stanzas. In the first, language is exuberant, rhythm and imagery are vital, and tone and content harmonize. The speaker seems enthusiastically to initiate acts of vitality and approve expressions of desire. According to Stuart Silverman, he displays the crass enthusiasm of a circus-barker (168). In the second stanza, the primary subject is a woman's corpse. Tone there ceases to be exuberant and becomes, instead, restrained, imperative, matter-of-fact. Here are the two stanzas:

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.
Let the lamp affix its beam.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. (*CPP* 50)

The discrepancy between subjects in the stanzas and the unsympathetic tone in the second stanza constitute the initial interpretive challenges of the poem.

In the first stanza, the speaker repeatedly uses the hortatory verb form: "Let the wenches dawdle . . . let the boys / Bring . . . Let be be," and in the second stanza he says, "Let the lamp affix its beam." These soft imperatives establish rhetorical affinity with the biblical God, who nine times creates by means of hortatory injunction: "Let there be light . . . Let there be a firmament . . . Let the earth bring forth grass . . . Let there be lights in the firmament," etc. (Gen. I: 3–26). Both the speaker in the poem and God at the opening of Genesis are concerned with light. Emphasized by the biblical echoing, the power of the speaker is, however, largely illusory. Whether or not he commands that the roller of big cigars be called to do something he would not otherwise do, the speaker is certainly saying, "Let the wenches" and "the boys" do what they already do and would do anyway. John Dolan has noted this "lack of power over the event" on the part of the speaker (215). Rather than exercising agency, the speaker is indulging in celebratory approval. The evocation of archetypal creative power ultimately suggests that power in this poem is a mere figment, something no sooner implied than shown to be irrelevant or illusory. The God of creative power may initially appear to be the archetype underlying the speaker, but it is an archetype denied. This is borne out as we go on to discover that the emperor (of whom the speaker seems to approve in stanza one) is not a doer or maker but an enjoyer, and the speaker is not a doer or a maker but a knower.

At the conclusion of the first stanza, the speaker adds, "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream." What precisely the emperor symbolizes has been a matter of considerable debate, which, during his lifetime, Stevens declined to adjudicate. When informed that the emperor in his poem was interpreted by some as life and by others as death (to quote Richard Ellmann), "he said, in effect, 'So much the better!'" and refused to choose between them—not that the emperor must be identified as or aligned with either life or death or, as Ellmann argues, a combination of both (93). The meaning of the figure of the emperor is determined by context, especially the phrase identifying him. The word "emperor" connotes neither life nor death but power or dominion. Having power over ice cream has little if any meaning, however, so the phrase "the emperor of ice-cream" is a statement implied in an oxymoron. You can have no power over ice cream; you can only enjoy it. So the initially suggested power of the emperor is illusory—like that of the speaker (in contrast to God in Genesis). Occurring at the end of the first stanza, which celebrates pleasurable vitality, ice cream is the paradigm of pleasure. In the phrase "the emperor or ice-cream," pleasure eclipses power. Dominion becomes appetite or enjoyment, and the emperor becomes an archetype of hedonism.

As such he is antithetical to the biblical archetype of power: the emperor represents unrestrained pleasure while God in Genesis arguably restricts pleasure by designating the forbidden fruit. God in Genesis also opposes knowledge, since the forbidden fruit grows on the Tree of Knowledge. As an enjoyer, the emperor seems aligned with the speaker as knower in denying the biblical archetype of creative power.

Moreover, because ice cream has been a treat available to virtually anyone in the United States, it is symbolic of democratic happiness, which Americans have a constitutional right to pursue. From 1921, the year before the poem was published, ice cream was served to all immigrants to the United States upon arrival at Ellis Island. (During the Second World War, the Japanese discouraged the eating of ice cream as betraying pro-American sympathies.) The final statement of the first stanza, and subsequently of the poem, seems therefore to contradict, or at least radically to modify, evocations of divine power and imperialism by replacing the supremacy of individual power with universally accessible pleasure. Ice cream reduces imperialism to egalitarianism. The emperor of ice cream is an archetype informing anyone experiencing pleasure, including a child engrossed in one of the most delightful pleasures of childhood. The speaker seems to approve, and so probably does the reader, eager to celebrate and enjoy life.

In the first stanza, the speaker's tone—his enthusiasm and playful alliteration—generates the atmosphere of the arcade, which is the modern equivalent to and debasement of Arcadia. The link to Arcadia was made by Maureen Kravec (8), who reads the poem in the context of Renaissance Arcadian literature. I think, however, that the Arcadian evocation is primarily to a theme in historical Western painting, with which Stevens was, of course, familiar. The corpse in the second stanza corresponds to the skull present in the corner of Renaissance paintings of an otherwise idyllic scene to express the motif *et in Arcadia ego*, the words of Death: "Here I am, even in Arcadia." Conventionally, this topos alters appreciation of the idyllic scene. The corpse in the second stanza certainly does this although it is not, like skulls in such paintings, small and peripheral but occupies four of its eight lines. In response to the new, cadaverous content, the speaker's tone in this stanza seems incongruous. Although no longer exuberant, he appears emotionally detached.

In stanza one, the speaker combined enthusiasm for life with matter-of-fact realism. In stanza two, he becomes solely a matter-of-fact realist. In Freudian terms, the "reality principle" entirely displaces the "pleasure principle."⁴ The detached tone in the second stanza seems continuous with that of the anomalous penultimate line in the otherwise rollicking first stanza: "Let be be finale of seem." The line means, "Accept appearance as the whole of reality." Even in this line, however, "seem"-ing or appearance is influenced by what Carmen Ludowyk calls "fanfare," for, as Milton Bates points out, "finale" is from the vocabulary of "theatrical or

musical performance" (23). The repetition of "be" is awkward and therefore slightly playful. In the penultimate line of stanza two, the speaker makes a corresponding statement at first glance utterly devoid of fanfare or fun: "Let the lamp affix its beam" (line 15). The line implies awareness that some, perhaps most, would prefer not to see the corpse but to keep it in the dark, out of sight, out of mind. (In this regard, he anticipates general reader response to the poem.) The injunction is linked to its counterpart in the first stanza, not only by parallel placement but by verbal high jinks, albeit at a syllabic level. The doubling of the ontological verb in line seven, "be be," is echoed in line fifteen in the word "beam," a joining of "be" and "am," the latter also present in the word "lamp."⁵ But in context here, the speaker insists that we look at what many would rather not see. This, his final injunction, would be a good motto for interpreting the poem.

Confirming the meaning of line seven ("Let be be finale of seem"), in stanza two, the speaker implies that appearance—"how cold she is, and dumb" (line 14)—is all there is. (His peculiarly specific descriptive references—to month-old newspapers, the missing "three glass knobs," and "horny feet"—serve to emphasize appearance/reality in its specificity.) Accept what you see, he implies, without grief, anxiety, disgust, or any further thought. Freud writes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, "Most of the unpleasure that we experience is *perceptual* unpleasure" (11). As if in agreement with Freud, the realist-speaker urges a purified stoical perception. He wants us to accept all appearances, even that of death, as merely real and not as eliciting subjective response such as grief or regret. As we shall see, discouraged "perceptual" reactions may also include moral response.

The sympathy of the reader with the speaker changes. Most if not all readers would endorse the implied preference for pleasure over power in stanza one, but readers tend to fall out of sympathy with the speaker in stanza two—as generations of critics have attested (Dolan 209; Vendler 52). Upon realizing that "she" in line 11 is a corpse, the reader may feel a degree of surprise, sympathy, disgust, or regret, or expect at least some indication of such feeling from the speaker, who has known the woman or known about her. Moreover, she had a life that was, to some degree, creative: "she embroidered fantails once" (line 11). But the speaker expresses no sympathy, no regret. One critic calls him callous (Nasser 129). Another blames him for ignoring human anguish (Halliday 37). Moreover, implicitly telling the reader (in lines 7 and 15) "accept appearances and do not wonder, analyze, or feel beyond the limits of simple sensation" is a little like urging, "do not think of an elephant"—which ensures that the hearer cannot but think of an elephant. To say "Let be be finale of seem" may, paradoxically, invite the very wondering and emotion it urges against. Why is this speaker so uncaring? Why is emotional—and even, perhaps (as we shall see), moral—response forbidden? One answer is that he remains aligned with the emperor as embodiment of the pleasure principle

to this extent, that what he advises prevents displeasure. Nevertheless, his injunction often has the opposite effect, for, by the end of the poem, many readers are inclined to adopt, instead of the speaker's point of view, one absent but paradoxically elicited, that of a person who feels poignancy in the face of death, regrets mortality, and grieves for the person who died.

For such readers the final line of the poem is problematic. Reacting negatively to the apparent heartlessness of the speaker in the second stanza, these readers would probably regard the refrain as insensitive or emotionally shallow and harsh. If the "only emperor" is "the emperor of ice-cream," in the presence of death anyone with strong feelings or personal attachments would hardly honor, respect, or wish to be or be associated with such an emperor. Or the suggestion that pleasure replaces power may seem ironic, since death limits pleasure.

But the speaker is urging the reader against precisely such negative reactions. He is saying that death merely produces a corpse that should simply be clearly seen as that. His point of view has changed. It no longer includes the apparent enthusiasm of the first stanza. But in stanza two he neither endorses nor contradicts hedonism, and it may be unfair to call him callous. The realism he urges requires a degree of concentrated awareness of the sort advocated by Eastern religions, an awareness that only "the now" is real, that there is no truth or reality in what was but is no more: to regret absence or loss is to wallow in illusion and to indulge in the emotional equivalent of attempting to exercise power over mortal life, which is ephemeral, like ice cream. The speaker seems to say that the only honest response to reality, including corpses, is to accept it apathetically or with equanimity. As we shall see, he is also challenging the reader to accept with equanimity the possibility of more than mere death.

At the end of stanza two, what does the repetition of the refrain mean? How does it correspond to the principle of acceptance of appearances as reality without negative response? If, instead of reacting, the reader can join the speaker in stoic realism, then the repeated statement is not ironic: the only power is in enjoyment, i.e., power is replaced by, or is merely a means to, enjoyment. That is what he means, although in saying so he also asserts and demonstrates the alternative value of awareness. In this respect, the speaker becomes a foil to the emperor of ice cream, though the latter is a symbol rather than a character. What, then, is the relationship between the realism of the speaker and the hedonism symbolized by the emperor?

In the context of the speaker's insistent realism, the title of the poem and the declaration that concludes both stanzas may recall the "The Emperor's New Clothes," a cautionary tale against pretending to see what you do not actually see. The fairy tale has not previously been considered in relation to the poem—despite a chapter in *Teaching Wallace Stevens* entitled "'The Emperor' and Its Clothes," which concerns only the "costume" of the poem's imagery (Bates 24). As though agreeing with the moral of

the famous fairy tale, the speaker in the poem advocates sensation without interpretation. If, in the first stanza, he seemed to advocate enjoyment of experience and, through his choice of words, to indulge in revelry, he also urged acceptance of semblance as the whole of reality (line 7). Now, in stanza two, he foregoes enjoyment but once again urges realistic awareness: let the corpse be seen neither sentimentally nor, as Lucy Beckett asserts that he sees it, cynically (79), but clearly and merely as a fact of life (line 15). In the fairy tale, of course, it is the emperor who is finally seen as he actually is, naked. So here the challenge may well be to see or understand what the emperor of ice cream really is. What does it mean to be the archetype of hedonism? To fully appreciate the emperor, let us look more closely at the imagery that is a large part of his determining context.

Most of the imagery of this poem contributes to a thoroughgoing motif of contents within containers. Although not previously considered by interpreters of the poem, this motif is a formal aspect with important thematic implications. The motif occupies most of the first stanza. The "roller of big cigars" (line 1) probably makes cigars by wrapping in tobacco leaves the inner column of shredded tobacco. Some see "the roller" as a smoker who rolls his cigar between thumb and fingers before and while smoking (Baird 249), but idiomatically that would be a "smoker," not a "roller." He whips "curds" "In kitchen cups" (line 3). If we take the word "curds" literally, his activity makes no sense. Curds are presumably dairy, however, and therefore related in essential substance to ice cream. If "curds" can be taken as a metaphor for ice cream lumps, he may be asked to whip lumpy ice cream into soft ice cream, a gratuitous act and unusual, although most of us have done it. He cannot, however, be about to make ice cream or, as some suggest, milkshakes (Baird 249; Neill 89), since neither can be made in "kitchen cups," which are presumably tea or coffee cups. Whatever he is to whip, it may be enough to see the act as energetic and the result as edibly enjoyable. "[W]enches" are in "such dress / As they are used to wear" (line 5), which means—in the year of first publication of the poem—ordinary neck-to-calf-length dresses. Boys bring flowers in "last month's newspapers" (line 6). (These, together with the word "wenches," suggest that the setting and its occupants, though not perhaps the speaker, are working class.) In each instance, the materially contained substance—tobacco, curds, wenches, and flowers—is an object of pleasure. The momentum of this motif therefore implies that wenches, too, are pleasurable. In each instance, except that of the cigar, the containers are merely useful (kitchen cups, ordinary dresses, old newspapers), contrasting in this respect with their pleasurable contents. The last line of the stanza establishes ice cream as the paradigm and subsuming symbol of all the preceding sources of pleasure. It may also be significant that none of this containing is complete, that in every instance the contained substance, objects, or object is partly visible and, by implication, accessible.

The motif of contents in containers continues in the second stanza but with important changes. The “dresser” (line 9, echoing the “dress” of the wench) contains a sheet embroidered with “fantails” along the top edge (line 11), where they would show on a bed above a blanket or bedspread. (This sheet is the only content entirely contained, if and when the dresser drawer is closed.) Having symbolically subsumed cigars, flowers, and wench, ice cream now also includes the sheet—which is white, as all bed sheets then were. If the commodities and the wench of the first stanza give pleasure, so does the sheet, even though its pleasure in this instance is aesthetic rather than merely sensory. The motif of containers-and-contents goes on to include the sheet almost wholly covering, and in that sense containing, the corpse—apparently the sheet is too short to cover both face and feet. The motif of containment implies that ice cream, which is almost always contained (by cartons, cups, bowls, or cones) and which symbolically incorporates the other contained pleasurable, also symbolically subsumes the woman’s corpse. However odd and unappetizing, the implication is that “she,” too, gives pleasure. The corpse especially corresponds to ice cream because, as Ellmann first noticed, it is “cold” (line 14) like ice cream (94). More than anything else in the poem, except possibly the “curds,” the corpse when covered by the white sheet resembles vanilla ice cream. The hedonistic motif that dominates the first stanza survives in the second stanza, therefore, as an implied subtext. As in the first stanza, the motif culminates in the figure of the emperor of ice cream.

Unlike ice cream, the corpse is probably not pleasurable for the reader, who may feel revulsion at the idea of a pleasurable corpse. Neither is it pleasurable for the speaker of the poem. As a realist, he is merely calling a corpse a corpse and symbolically (through the motif of containment) designating it as a potential source of pleasure. In the second stanza, he is no longer celebrating pleasure. Instead, he is expressing “the whole truth” about pleasure by implying that its scope includes perverse erotic pleasures. Neither would it make sense to say that the emperor enjoys corpses—“he” is not a living agent but a symbol. The emperor does, however, represent uninhibited taking of pleasure of any sort, and while that undoubtedly includes all innocent pleasures, erotic or other, it must also include pleasure that most of us would consider immoral or perverse. This is simply to say that the speaker insists not merely on only knowing (without imposing response or meaning) but on knowing as much as possible, including aspects of reality that may be unpleasant or objectionable. In the second stanza, the point of view of the speaker differs from the significance of the emperor. What the speaker does (he knows) and what the emperor signifies (enjoyment) are distinct from one another, although they are not oppositional. Instead, one contains the other: what the speaker knows and urges us to know largely includes enjoyment as its object.

The speaker’s knowing and his phenomenological imperative may, furthermore, be affirmed by the motif of containers and containing, which

seems to imply a pun on comprehension. "To comprehend" means, first of all, to know and, secondly, "To contain; to embrace; to include" (see *Webster's*), so seeing is the way of comprehending (and in that sense containing) the real. And comprehension implies containing or acknowledging all of it.

The inclusion of perversion within the scope of pleasure may seem too much to claim as a topic of the poem. It would be if based solely on the motif of contained objects of pleasure. But there is also in the poem a good deal of sexual vocabulary. The alignment of the corpse with the other sources of pleasure, especially ice cream as symbol of all pleasurable commodities, is emphasized and sexualized by two nearly synonymous adjectives, which establish a verbal correspondence between "concupiscent curds" (line 3) and "horny feet" (line 13). "[C]oncupiscent curds" is oddly inappropriate, and so ought to draw attention to itself, but its correspondence with "horny feet" has gone unnoticed because the word "horny" is sufficiently employed in (and therefore camouflaged by) denoting callused skin and/or thick toenails. Moreover, to most readers, if not to the speaker or the emperor, sexual "horny"-ness in this context would be repugnant. Owing to centuries of colloquial usage, however, "horny" does connote lust and in that sense echoes "concupiscent," even though concupiscence denotes a wider range of desire. The feet of a corpse cannot be sexually horny, of course, but neither can curds be concupiscent, as in the poem they are said to be. "Concupiscent curds" is a metaphor in which attribution is reversed: the curds are actually desirable, not desiring. Correspondence with "horny feet" implies that the corpse or, more precisely, its feet are also desirable and, in this instance, sexually desirable. The implication operates as part of the subtext of the second stanza.

The word "come" in line 13 is idiomatically inappropriate and, like "concupiscent," calls attention to itself. The adjectives "concupiscent" and "horny" and the verb "come" extend sexual innuendos already well under way in "The muscular one" who rolls phallic "big cigars" and "whip[s]," in the wenches who dawdle, and in the boys who bring flowers, probably to the wenches. Silverman notices the sexual connotations of "horny" and "come" but, uncertain about how they contribute to the poem, writes only that they "emphasize the final silence of the body" (167). We have seen that they do more than that. The addition to this sexual motif of a woman's corpse may imply necrophilia, and the focus on its feet may imply fetishism; there is no reason to exclude these from the range of possible pleasures. In the Old Testament, feet are euphemistic for genitals. This poem is not the Old Testament, of course, and all the sexual connotations in the poem may imply no more than the underlying erotic nature of even apparently non-sexual pleasure—but then the relation of the corpse to pleasure is thrown wide open. The point is that anything that may be construed as pleasurable falls within the domain of the emperor. To him it is all ice cream. As such, it is also within the domain of the speaker, whose business is to know about it. In combination with the sexually charged

vocabulary in the poem, the motif of contained pleasurable implies that pleasure is sometimes erotic and that a source of pleasure may be a woman's death or her corpse. This, implicitly, the speaker knows.

The perverse extremes of hedonistic possibility are disquieting to most readers, as they may be to Stevens critics, since they have declined even to acknowledge them. The reader may prefer innocent, emotionally healthy pleasures, but pleasure and goodness and mental health belong to three distinct categories of meaning, which do not always coincide. (Some pleasures are immoral or deviant.) In their discomfort, readers resemble Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which he announces that his view is "dualistic" (53) and that he cannot reconcile the pleasure principle with the death instinct, even when the latter is outward-directed, i.e., cruel or sadistic (53). Just as Freud wished to separate life-affirming pleasure and perverse behavior, most readers personally abhor perversion. Abhorrence may influence interpretation, as it evidently has with this poem, but remember, we are reading, not expressing sexual or moral preferences.

An important element of the sexual motif that supports the inclusion of erotic perversity as a possible pleasure is the embroidery on the sheet. "Fantails" can only refer to fantail pigeons—the word has no other meaning. These birds are usually seen by interpreters of the poem as neutrally ornamental, but in relation to art, to the (former) woman, and to the bed, they evoke the doves of Aphrodite. The designations "pigeon" and "dove" are interchangeable because they belong to the same order of birds. Shakespeare writes of "Venus' pigeons" (*Merchant of Venus* II.vi.5). Oliver Wendell Holmes writes of Venus:

The lady of a thousand loves,
The darling of the old religion,
Had only left of all the doves
That drew her car one fan-tailed pigeon. (238)

Sexual love or hope for sexual love in the embroiderer may account for the fantailed pigeons on the bed sheet. Instead of (or in addition to) sexual love, she receives death, symbolically related in the Renaissance to "the little death" of orgasm. So the evocation of the goddess of love is ironic, but the irony may also extend to erotic desire sometimes being perverse. The only critic to have previously noticed the evocation of the doves of Aphrodite is James Baird, and maybe his sense of its significance is not as outlandish as it seems: he writes that the dead woman is Venus (250). Insofar as her living body was, or her corpse is, an object of sexual desire, her underlying archetype is inevitably Venus.

At the end of the poem, ice cream must be one of two things: 1) ice cream literally or 2) everything and anything that is enjoyable. The latter is more likely. Otherwise the poem loses meaning, unity, and wildness, and there would be no point to the resemblance between vanilla ice cream

and the white-covered, "cold" corpse. If the emperor's sole concern (all that remains of imperial dominion) is enjoyment, so that pleasure is all that matters to him, the distinction is clear between him and the speaker, whose main concern is truth. So is the tension between most readers and the emperor.

As we began to see when considering the Renaissance Arcadian trope, there is in this poem a motif of mutability. The newspapers are old, their written contents no longer news. Their material contents are cut flowers, which will die sooner than if they had not been cut. "Wenches" will become corpses, as will the "roller," the "boys," the speaker, and the reader. Only the emperor is immune to the passage of time, since he is a universal archetype rather than a living character. He exists as long as there is pleasure anywhere for someone. Ice cream melts. All pleasures pass, as do all sources of pleasure. (In this regard, critics have made much of ice cream melting as somehow defining the significance of the emperor. His domain, however, is only ice cream, not the sweet, flavored cream that remains after the ice in ice cream has melted.) The motif of mutability is ambiguous in its possible effects, an ambiguity captured by two medieval tropes: *sic transit gloria mundi* ("so passes the glory of the world"), urging detachment from worldly pleasure; and *carpe diem* ("seize the day"), an abbreviation of the stoic slogan, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Throughout stanza one, the stoic speaker joins the hedonistic emperor in seizing the day. But in stanza two, at least, mutability does not motivate him; it is merely part of what he implicitly knows.

Before ceasing to consider pleasures that violate moral taboos, let us address the possibility that the woman has been murdered—a possibility no critic has mentioned but which was raised by Alan Caldwell, an undergraduate student of mine. However unlikely murder may seem, it is supported by Stevens' early flirtation with Lord Henry Wotton's proposition in Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* that murder might afford "extraordinary sensations" (Bates, *Mythology of Self* 111). As an epigraph for an early poem, Stevens uses words by the French soldier Eugène Emmanuel Lemerrier urging the aesthete to recognize "*la beauté triomphante de toute violence*" (CPP 539), in particular the "beauty" of murder. If the woman is murdered for pleasure, her killer would correspond, during the killing, to the archetype of the emperor of ice cream.

This possibility is strengthened, if only by way of example, by a current widespread association between ice cream and an actual emperor. The legendary originator of the prototype of ice cream is Nero. He is widely credited with creating the first frozen dessert by mixing snow brought from the Apennines with spices, crushed fruit, and honey. This was the first gelato, more like sorbet or a snow cone but generally acknowledged to be the origin of ice cream, which became a dairy dessert at the end of the eighteenth century. I do not know whether Nero was popularly associated with ice cream when Stevens wrote his poem, perhaps not, since

the association has little or no basis in classical texts. I can find no mention of Nero flavoring snow, though he did have snow brought from the Apennines, which was stored in pits and which, in the summer, was used to cool his bath-water (Suetonius IV.xxvii.2). He also experimented with snow, using it to cool boiled drinking water (Pliny the Elder XXXI.40), and we know that Nero's wealthy contemporaries cooled wine with snow (Pliny the Younger XI to Septitius Clarus).

Regardless of whether he invented proto-ice cream, Nero does serve our purpose as a historic example of the perverse possibilities symbolized by the poem's archetypal emperor. During his fourteen-year reign, Nero was a dedicated hedonist and prolific murderer. That is, he exemplifies perversion within the greater totality of pleasure, which the emperor in the poem symbolizes. Among those Nero murdered were his mother, his adoptive brother, his first two wives, scores of strangers periodically killed in the streets of Rome for fun, and the hundreds if not thousands of Romans who died in the famous week-long fire of 64 AD. (Whether or not he set the fire, he certainly commanded that it not be extinguished.) About this fire we colloquially remember, "Nero fiddled while Rome burned," words reflecting ancient reports that, after praising the beauty of the flames, he accompanied himself on a lyre while singing about the burning of Troy (Suetonius IV.39.2). It is inconceivable that the pleasure of this historical emperor would be in the least diminished by a corpse such as that in the second stanza of Stevens' poem. Nero is proof, if we need it, that pleasure can be perverse. This is not to say that the emperor in the poem would, if he were a living person, behave like Nero, but he might. The emperor of ice cream is the archetype underlying any hedonist, including one whose pleasures are perverse. It is merely a bonus, from our point of view, that he is now the emperor popularly regarded as deserving the epithet "of ice-cream."

In the poem, ice cream as a symbol includes every innocent pleasure, and the vast majority of pleasures are innocent. But its symbolism also includes perverse pleasures, such as murder, fetishism, and necrophilia. The phenomenological realism of the speaker insists on this. Since some people kill for pleasure, ice cream as symbol of all pleasure must include murder. This is implied, as a possibility at least, by the presence of the woman's corpse. Together with erotic imagery, sexual language, and the motif of contained pleasurable, the corpse implies that ice cream includes sexual perversion. All this makes sense as the intended meaning of a speaker interested in the whole truth, however unpleasant or deplorable aspects of that truth may be.

He does not bring moral judgment to knowing. What amounts to his avoidance of moral judgment resonates with his (and the emperor's) symbolic displacement of the God of Genesis in stanza one—God being the source of the first prohibition, which gave humanity (Adam and Eve) a moral life.

The poem challenges readers much as Freud is challenged in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* when he opposes the death instinct, which he says is of the ego, “to the sexual instincts of which the libido is the manifestation” (61). This opposition is owing partly to Freud’s (basically Kantian) identification of pleasure with “life” and the verbal opposition of “life” instincts to “death” instincts. It also reflects his resistance to Carl Jung’s contention that the libido encompasses all instinctual forces (53). Yet Freud himself is troubled by this “great opposition between the life and death instincts,” for, as he continues in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

From the very first we recognized the presence of a sadistic component in the sexual instinct. As we know, it can make itself independent and can, in the form of a perversion, dominate an individual’s entire sexual activity. . . . But how can the sadistic instinct, whose aim it is to injure the object, be derived from Eros, the preserver of life? Is it not plausible to suppose that this sadism is in fact a death instinct which, under the influence of the narcissistic libido, has been forced away from the ego and has consequently only emerged in relation to the object? (53–54)

About displacement of the death instinct, he goes on to admit, “I am not convinced myself” (59). He attempts to reassure himself that “We need not feel greatly disturbed in judging our speculation upon the life and death instincts by the fact that so many bewildering and obscure processes occur in it—such as one instinct being driven out by another” (60)—the ego’s death instinct driving out the libido’s life instincts, which are erotic and pleasure-seeking. He admits, “It looks suspiciously as though we were trying to find a way out of a highly embarrassing situation at any price” (54). His conundrum resembles that of readers of Stevens’ poem who want its pleasure principle, embodied in the emperor of ice cream, to be entirely, innocently life-affirming and who wish to see the woman’s corpse as having nothing to do with pleasure. Unless those readers imaginatively detach from their preference, they resemble the majority of spectators in the fairy tale about the emperor in being willfully blind to the implication that, for some, pleasure is uninterrupted or even enhanced by death, murder, fetishism, or necrophilia. This is, I think, undeniably implied by the corpse, the motif of contained pleasurable, and the speaker’s sexual vocabulary.

Because human experience testifies so clearly and continually to the pleasure of aggression, consensus in psychoanalytic circles eventually turned against Freud’s antithesis between pleasure and death instincts.⁶ In writing published after *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, even Freud backed away from his strict dualism. In “The Economic Problem of Masochism” (1924), he writes that when death instincts are directed outward, they mix with life instincts “so that we never have to deal with pure life instincts or

pure death instincts but only with mixtures of them in different amounts" (164)—an admission that aggression "is always fused with some quantity of libido" (Slap 372). In his essay on "Humour" (1927), Freud considers "pleasure that has been obtained in the service of aggression" (163). In "Moses and Monotheism" (1939), he writes, "If the id in a human being gives rise to an instinctual demand of an erotic or aggressive nature," the satisfaction of the demand "is felt by the ego as pleasure" (116).⁷

For the reader of Stevens' poem, especially the sentimental or romantic (or, at one time, Freudian) reader predisposed to think of pleasure solely as life-affirming and therefore incompatible with murder or perversion, the challenge is to see that the death of another and erotic perversion do not necessarily preclude pleasure. In fact, to see dualism here is to commit a category error by confusing hedonistic possibility with moral approval or mental health.

What is the point of view of the reader of Stevens' poem at its conclusion? He or she is likely to have reservations about the speaker but to feel closer now to him than to the emperor. The motif of *et in Arcadia ego* may generate fear in the reader that diminishes pleasure. Death elicits grief, which diminishes or precludes pleasure. Many readers will disapprove morally of some varieties of pleasure and therefore react against the emperor, for whom all pleasure is only pleasure. Many readers will be inclined to side with the speaker, if only as an available alternative to absolute hedonism. The speaker's rhetorical force and the plausibility of his strict realism—along with its affinities with eastern mystical concentration on the here and now—resist an emotionally or morally charged alternative point of view. Moreover, not to align with the speaker is to fail to acknowledge the existence or possibility of perverse forms of hedonism, which are implied by the imagery of the poem and which, we all know, do exist. If the reader abhors necrophilia or murder, he or she is going beyond the insistence of the speaker that we merely acknowledge what is.

The speaker seemed to endorse the emperor of ice cream at the end of stanza one, and, as readers, most of us joined him then. At the end of stanza two, the speaker repeats what seemed an endorsement, but now must instead be seen as an expression of stoic apathy and unflinching realism. The reader may disapprove of the absolute hedonism symbolized by the emperor of ice cream if only in disapproving of the perversions encompassed by absolute hedonism, but the reader can hardly disapprove of the speaker's unflinching awareness. It is good to know the truth. The whole truth has unappealing aspects, and some readers—resembling Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—will wish to exclude perversion from the scope of reference in what they want to be a simple, happy poem expressing (despite its emphasis on the corpse) vitality and innocent enjoyment. But the poem they prefer does not exist.

Symbolically, the reader inhabits the poem by aligning with either the emperor or the speaker as knowing about the emperor. If the poet symbol-

ically inhabits the poem, where is he? Most readers assume Stevens' identification with the speaker, and it is true that the speaker does his work for him. But if the poet corresponds to anyone or is symbolically present in the imagery of the poem, he is the artistic "she" who "embroidered fantails once." Metaphorically the poem is the poet's remains, his corpse, which the reader enjoys. But does the reader merely enjoy it, like those who decline to follow the implications of the poem into moral and emotional discomfort? Such readers resemble the emperor, dedicated solely to pleasure. Those who follow the implications of images and language in the poem into areas of moral darkness and psychological deviance may begin by liking the emperor but they conclude by siding with the speaker and, like him, "Let the lamp affix its beam."

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Notes

¹Stevens' marked copy is now in the library of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. My thanks for this information to Glen MacLeod.

²R. P. Blackmur was the first to make the assumption, writing in 1932 that "the poem might be called Directions for a Funeral, with Two Epitaphs" (117).

³Not that Freud introduced free association to modern artistic creativity. Spontaneity in writing had been practiced, for example, by Gertrude Stein (who seems not to have been influenced by Freud), and she was, in the mid 1920s, influencing other writers along with the musical composer Virgil Thomson, who later remembered that, following her example, "I could write almost automatically, cultivate the discipline of spontaneity, let it flow" (Thomson 124).

⁴In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud writes that "the reality principle . . . does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure" (10). My references here and subsequently are to the *Standard Edition* of Freud's works, since the 1922 translation by C. J. M. Hubback is stylistically greatly inferior without significant difference in meaning.

⁵For noticing this syllabic play, I am indebted to the medievalist Lois Smedick in conversation. For suggesting the epigraph to this essay, I am indebted to another medievalist, Joanna Luft.

⁶Joseph Slap observes that H. Hartmann, E. Kris, and R. M. Loewenstein write, in a 1949 essay entitled "Notes on the Theory of Aggression," that "'the very fact of discharge of aggressive tension is pleasurable'" (370). In his 1967 study, Slap adds: "There is no reason to suppose that the discharge of the externalized death instinct toward objects cannot afford pleasure" (371).

⁷Freud's corrective second thoughts are actually a return to his earlier, less confused assumptions before feeling in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that he had to disagree with Jung. In "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious" (1905), he had written of the "comic pleasure" resulting from "aggressiveness, to which making a person comic usually ministers" (200), and in "A Childhood Recollection from [Goethe's] *Dichtung und Wahrheit*" (1917), he had written, "There is no need to dispute a child's enjoyment of smashing things" (152).

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“Ancestor of Narcissus”: Stevens and Psychoanalysis Between Freud and Deleuze

DAVID R. JARRAWAY

Freud's eye was the microscope of potency.

—Wallace Stevens, “Mountains Covered with Cats”

To become imperceptible oneself . . . [t]o have dismantled one's self in order finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line . . . this, precisely, is a becoming only for one who knows how to be nobody, to no longer be anybody. To paint oneself gray on gray.

—Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*

the ego is not . . . master in its own house and cannot aspire to Cartesian certainties

—David Macey, “On the Subject of Lacan”

COMMENTATORS ON Wallace Stevens' poetry and prose are usually prone to observe a skeptical aloofness with respect to the poet's investment in the writings of Sigmund Freud and in psychoanalysis more generally. “[Stevens] barely mentions Freud,” Daniel Schwarz remarks (35); and when the poet does, he is likely to be somewhat dismissive, as in Stevens' well-known remark in the *Letters* that he would “probably not be able to stand up to Freudian analysis” (488).¹ To persist nonetheless in embracing a fruitful critical relation between Stevens and Freudian psychoanalysis, as I aim to do in this essay, would require commentators to indulge a certain degree of the poet's own skepticism just noted. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (along with psychoanalyst Félix Guattari) evinces a quite similar arm's-length approach to Freud in the two volumes that comprise *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, namely *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), and for an excess of “egotism” in readings of Freud that Stevens himself, in the letter to Ronald Lane Latimer from 1936, is prone to find in an analogy to “sex” in Freud as “the explanation for everything” (L 305, 306). Hence, “[t]he relations between the ego and reality,” Stevens tells us in the prose portion of “Three Academic Pieces,” “must be left largely on the margin” (CPP 691).

Problematizing excessive egotism within a certain institutionalized reception of Freudian psychoanalysis, therefore, and putting in its place a considerably de-institutionalized notion of “schizophrenia” accounts fairly much for the measured skepticism taken toward Freud throughout a good deal of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. As Daniel W. Smith observes, “Following Karl Jaspers and R. D. Laing, [Deleuze and Guattari] attempted to examine schizophrenia in its *positivity*, no longer as actualized in a mode of existence (an ego), but rather as a pure *process*, that is, as an opening or breach that breaks the continuity of a personality or ego, carrying it off on a kind of voyage through an intense and terrifying ‘more than reality’ ” (189). For some purveyors of psychoanalysis, as Deleuze and Guattari themselves remark, “Freud doesn’t like schizophrenics. He doesn’t like their resistance to being oedipalized [because] . . . [t]hey mistake words for things . . . are apathetic, narcissistic, cut off from reality . . . [and] resemble philosophers—‘an undesirable resemblance’ ” (*Anti-Oedipus* 23). But in a more enlightened psychoanalytic discourse, that is, a discourse not quite so insistent upon the theoretician’s “ideal forms of causation, comprehension, or expression,” a human identity that is “more than reality” or more than egotism, in Daniel Smith’s terms, can conceivably take shape “as a distinct personality if the process [of production] is halted,” and such a unique personality “is allowed to go on and on endlessly in a void, so as to provoke that ‘horror of . . . extremity wherein the soul and body ultimately perish’ ” (*Anti-Oedipus* 23, 24). The “greatness” of Freud, according to Deleuze and Guattari, lies precisely here; and, so I shall contend, the basis for Stevens’ guarded attraction to Freud as well.² By voiding “libido or sexuality” of all “objects, aims, or even sources (territories),” Freud initially sets the human personality endlessly adrift within “the wide open spaces” of longing and desire and, in his earliest work at least, imparts to it all the vagaries of “an abstract subjective essence” (*Anti-Oedipus* 270)—a vagueness and an abstractness to which I shall return later specifically in the context of some of Stevens’ later work principally to be found in *Parts of a World*, published in 1942.

As the fourth of seven gatherings of verse, *Parts of a World* is targeted by many of the poet’s critics, including me (see *Question of Belief*, esp. 1–19), as that volume demarcating the programmatic shift to a “late Stevens,” and under that rubric, as a significant rhetorical as well as critical transition in the Stevens canon from formalist to more realist concerns, or, in more rigorous theoretical terms, from structuralism to poststructuralism, from aestheticism to historicism, or perhaps from High Modernism to Postmodernism. As Krzysztof Ziarek puts the case (following the later commentary of J. Hillis Miller and Joseph Riddel), “For [Stevens’] late poetry does not simply move toward a unity that would resolve the oppositions and leave a sense of balance achieved through a unifying concept; on the contrary, it underscores the remainder, a residue of distinct otherness, however unnameable, which because of its ineffable character resists any

unification. Such implication of a 'beyond,' of a poem that never reaches words, cannot, then, be explained or interpreted in traditional metaphysical terms which inform the critical categories used to describe Romantic and post-Romantic poetry" (108–9).³ In the quite delimited context of gender and sexuality, then, the programmatic move to Otherness with all its implication in the "beyond" in the construction of identity—the "distanctiated subject" as I elaborate it further in *"Going the Distance": Dissident Subjectivity in Modernist American Literature*—secures the place for a "poetics of androgyny" in Stevens' work, as I explain below.

In Stevens' subsequent collection *Transport to Summer* (1947), and in the late lyric in particular entitled "Mountains Covered with Cats" (1946), which provides readers with the only nominal reference to "Freud" in the entire *Collected Poetry*, the shift from an "invalid personality"—"outcast, without the will to power / And impotent"—to its powerfully imagined opposite—"spirits . . . seen clear . . . without their flesh" (*CPP* 318–19)—this shift would uncannily appear to chart rather closely the one from ego-analysis to schizo-analysis in Deleuze just described, indeed right down to the liquidation of the hoary body-and-soul binary. But if "Freud's eye [as] the microscope of potency" accounts for this shift in psychoanalytic paradigms in Stevens' poem, it is only because that "eye" has placed human personality *beyond* form, *beyond* comprehension, and *beyond* expression in that "more than reality" just as Deleuze (and now Stevens) describes: "The spirits of all the impotent dead, seen clear, / And quickly understand, without their flesh, / How truly they had not been what they were" (*CPP* 319).

As I have argued in these pages and elsewhere, the "poetics of androgyny" in both early and late Stevens puts readers very much in touch with an open-ended continuum for the serial construction of subjectivity coterminous with Deleuzian deterritorialization and abstraction that Stevens himself is arguably prone to formulate in terms of "A shape within the ancient circles of shapes, / And these beneath a shadow of a shape" as the poet's programmatic "queer assertion of humanity" in all of its shape-shifting and shadowy forms (432, 445).⁴ As I frame the case most recently in an essay on the complex relationship between Stevens and philosopher George Santayana, the aim of the poetics of androgyny in both writers is "to establish a necessary *ambivalence* about gender identity and about a depersonalizing desire in general—an ambivalence that not only 'renders heterosexuality noninevitable' . . . but also 'preempts the possibility of a purely gay-affirmative reading' as well . . . [thus providing] a liberatory egress from *all* sexual economies" ("Both Sides" 219).

Having made the case for the "enlargement of the human self *beyond* its libidinally 'routine limitations' or characterizations" ("Both Sides" 212), I would like now, with this issue's focus on psychoanalysis, to elaborate further upon the linkage between Stevens and Freud mediated by Deleuze through the means of another later lyric of the poet from which I draw, in part, my title. For it is in the poem entitled "Jumbo" (1942), to recur to

Stevens' previous book once again, where in the final stanza we encounter the poet's only reference to the mythological figure of "Narcissus."

Ancestor of Narcissus, prince
Of the secondary men. There are no rocks
And stones, only this imager. (CPP 241)

Yet it is mostly under the rhetorical impress of that very figure, so I shall argue in Deleuze's own parallel referencing of "narcissism" in the psychoanalysis of Freud in what follows, that we come fully to understand just how microscopically potent Stevens may have imagined "Freud's eye" to have been in the context of the publication of *Parts of a World*, other texts from which I shall allude to in passing.

The trees were plucked like iron bars
And jumbo, the loud general-large
Singsonged and singsonged, wildly free.

Who was the musician, fatly soft
And wildly free, whose clawing thumb
Clawed on the ear these consonants?

Who the transformer, himself transformed,
Whose single being, single form
Were their resemblances to ours?

The companion in nothingness,
Loud, general, large, fat, soft
And wild and free, the secondary man,

Cloud-clown, blue painter, sun as horn,
Hill scholar, man that never is,
The bad-bespoken lacker. . . (CPP 241)

Right from the opening stanza, the setting at liberty of the eponymous "Jumbo," the "wild and free" "Ancestor of Narcissus" in Stevens' text, arguably accounts for its exhilarating and celebratory tone. But if it is a tone that Freudian psychoanalysis may go a good way to explain, as I aim to show, this application of Freudian theory is one that, like Stevens' own reticence about Freud's writings, Deleuze himself takes up with considerable caution. Before proceeding any further, therefore, with a psychoanalytic reading of the poem licensed by that allusion to Narcissus, we should perhaps understand better the nature of the French philosopher's caution.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (as paraphrased by Keith Pearson) observe, "every molar [i.e., consciously socio-symbolic or ideo-

logical] formation has a molecular unconscious (a multiplicity or a population), which both marks its tendency to decompose and haunts its operation and organization" (182). From such an insight, commentators on Deleuze are fairly much persuaded, as with Stevens, of a generally dismissive attitude brought to bear on the discourse of psychoanalysis by the completion of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* through the 1970s and 1980s. "Psychoanalysis is to be critiqued," Pearson for one observes, "for reducing becomings to the *one* complex, the complex of molar determination (Oedipus, castration)," and elaborates further: "Freud's psychoanalysis is critiqued not . . . because it reduces becomings solely to articulations of Oedipal desire, but rather for employing this enunciation in order to delude patients with the belief that through therapy they will be able to speak finally in their own name as unitary organisms" (182). Elsewhere Pearson remarks, "Freud's conception of organic life runs counter to the deepest tendencies of Deleuze's thinking of difference and to his affirmation of univocal Being *as difference*" (113).

In Deleuze's earlier work, *Difference and Repetition* (1968), however, certain lineaments of this critique can already be descried. Adumbrating in that previous text what Deleuze calls "a mobile distribution of differences . . . within an intensive field," and finding these differences extraordinarily coordinate with "what Freud called the Id, or at least the primary layer of the Id," Deleuze is unequivocal about the fact that "It is here that Freud's problem begins": the binding up of difference's intensities into what Deleuze calls "a genuine reproductive synthesis, a *Habitus*":

This binding or investment of difference is what makes possible in general, not pleasure itself, but the value taken on by pleasure as a principle: we thereby pass from a state of scattered resolution to a state of integration, which constitutes the second layer of the Id and the beginnings of an organisation. (96)

Thus, from "an activity of reproduction which takes as its object the difference to be bound," according to Deleuze, there "emerges a new difference," and an eldritch one to be sure: "the formed eye or the seeing subject," an instauration of the dread Cartesian cogito from a former hoary age of rationalist Enlightenment (96).

Yet upon closer inspection of this earlier work, we find that this particular critique of Freud is not entirely how Deleuze perceives his relationship to psychoanalysis. Counterpoised to the formed or integrated subject just scanned are various manifestations throughout *Difference and Repetition* of what Deleuze is pleased to refer to in the "Conclusion" as "an ante-I or ante-self" (277): the larval subject, the cracked identity, the schizoid personality, and so forth, all to which Freud's eye "as the microscope of potency" beckons us to return in a moment. Such manifestations of what in the *Dialogues* with Clare Parnet a decade (1977) later would become

instances of “non-personal individuation” or “deterritorialized identity” (123)—these instances of the so-called subjectless subject would continue rapturously to preoccupy Deleuze to the very end of his career.

In the previously cited “Mountains Covered with Cats,” the poem’s concluding “How truly they had not been what they were” (318) might be Stevens’ gloss on such instances of “pre-personal individuation,” subjectless subjects that perhaps fall generally within the androgynous rhetorical ambit of Stevens’ “shadow of a shape” throughout the poet’s final gathering of verse, *The Rock* (1954), that I explore at length in “Both Sides” (213 ff.). But the imagery of shadows in Stevens’ much earlier *Parts of a World* directs us to premonitory instances of pre-personal individuation that Freud’s microscopic eye perhaps persuades us to think might be significantly related: “the shapeless shadow cover[ing] the sun” (*CPP* 190), for instance, in “A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts”; or, “The noble figure, the essential shadow, / Moving and being” (*CPP* 206) in “The Candle a Saint”; or, maybe best of all, “the shiddow-shaddow of lights revolving . . . through iridescent changes, / Of the apprehending of the hero” (*CPP* 249) in “Examination of the Hero in a Time of War,” among others. Yet for Deleuze (and herein the further link to Stevens), the governing model in *Difference and Repetition* for such instances of pre-personal individuation is that of narcissism itself emanating from Freud’s theory, although it is the narcissistic ego extrapolated from Freud by Paul Ricoeur that Deleuze is especially drawn to, a subject whose “perpetually disguised” and “perpetually displaced” lines of flight would appear to be “interiorising the difference” to just the right degree (110).

In a rather adulatory passage not often characteristic of Deleuze, he observes that “the narcissistic ego is related to the form of an I which operates upon it as an ‘Other;’” and continues this decidedly Freudian moment by venturing further that “This active but fractured I is not only the basis of the superego but the correlate of . . . a complex whole that Paul Ricoeur aptly named an ‘aborted cogito.’” “Moreover,” continues Deleuze,

there is only the aborted Cogito, only the larval subject . . . the fracture of the I . . . no more than the pure and empty form of time, separated from its content . . . [Hence,] [t]he narcissistic ego is . . . the phenomenon which corresponds to the empty form of time without filling it, the spatial form of that form in general [whose] phenomenon of space . . . assume[s] the ultimate shape of the labyrinth, the straight-line labyrinth which is, as Borges says, “invisible, incessant.” Time empty and out of joint. (110–11)

For some theoretical pundits today, the Borgesian passage just cited from Deleuze appears uncannily proleptic. In *The Man without Content* (1994), Giorgio Agamben remarks notably on a “radical tearing or split”

in modern art when the artist sets aside “the inert world of contents in their indifferent, prosaic objectivity,” and thereby allows a “free subjectivity” to “soar[] above the contents as over an immense repository of materials that it can evoke or reject at will” (35). Indeed, it is possible to argue that the notion of a “contentless subject” is the leading theoretical crux as well in much of Deleuze’s own work. The destruction of human identity, for instance, as a “silent, imperceptible crack, at the [subject’s] surface, a unique surface Event” in Deleuze’s subsequent *The Logic of Sense* (1969) (155) redoubles the “fissure or crack in the pure Self,” in *Difference and Repetition*, and thus affords the human subject “a mysterious coherence in the last instance which excludes its own,” what Deleuze, in a further bow to Freud (via Ricoeur), is pleased to call “A Cogito for a dissolved self” (58).

Yet the rending and subsequent soaring of the modern contentless subject in Deleuze here (and later, Agamben) is arguably the theoretical crux of Stevens’ very own “Jumbo,” composed decades earlier. Conceivably, readers are privileged to access this interpretive crux via Deleuze’s extrapolation of narcissism from the early Freud as pre-Oedipal subjectivity’s “pure and empty form” just described, or in the poet’s own words, “companion in nothingness,” hence the “Ancestor of Narcissus”:

Who was the musician, fatly soft
And wildly free, whose clawing thumb
Clawed on the ear these consonants?

.....

The companion in nothingness,
Loud, general, large, fat, soft
And wild and free. . . . (CPP 241)

Released from any imprisoning shape in the poem’s opening stanza—“The trees were plucked like iron bars”—Stevens’ jumbo-sized Narcissus thus breaks with any identifiable continuity of personality, and soars off into a wild blue yonder of singular and transforming indetermination that, as “Cloud-clown, blue painter, sun as horn,” may (or may not) have “resemblances” to our own quite “secondary,” perhaps because more rock-and-stone-like, determinations. For art enthusiasts of every sort, Stevens and Deleuze included, this modernist dissolution of selfhood registers a moment of considerable exhilaration. For as Agamben further observes: “Art is now the absolute freedom that seeks its end and its foundation only in itself, and does not need, substantially, *any content*, because it can measure itself against the vertigo caused by its own abyss” (35; emphasis added).

Clearly, then, “To theorize narcissism, it is not necessary (for Deleuze) to embrace Freud’s moral message” in the more standardized reception of

psychoanalysis, so Dorothea Olkowski contends. Perhaps the same might be said for Stevens in his own cautious appropriation of psychoanalysis. In the Deleuzian *Ruin of Representation*, according to Olkowski, narcissism can become “the condition of creation, [one] that transforms the child from a pathetic, revengeful ‘patient’ into a life artist, a creative and reflective spirit” whose “displacements and disguises” and “originally multiple nature” therefore “imply that it is something it is not and never could be, [namely] something unified and integrated, something signified by some ultimate myth or symbol” (172, 157, 172–73). Rather, as Stevens himself remarks in his prose “Adagia”: “The subjects of one’s poems are the symbols of one’s self or of one of one’s selves” (CPP 904; emphasis added).

As in Stevens’ “Jumbo,” then, the “floating and fluid character of individuality itself” as “a multiplicity of actualisation” not unexpectedly greets us once again near the end of *Difference and Repetition* (258). As Deleuze emphatically adjures: “no doubt the I and the Self must be replaced by an undifferentiated [*sic*] abyss, but this abyss is neither an impersonal nor an abstract Universal beyond individuation” (258). At this point, we perhaps are given to query how narcissistic egos so “withdrawn from the external world,” and so insistent upon “keep[ing] away from their ego anything that would diminish it” that they would “plainly [be] seeking *themselves* as a love-object” (the very characterizations in Freud’s essay on “Narcissism” in *Complete Works* 75, 89, 88)—how such an estrus of interiority might possibly represent for Deleuze, as well as for Stevens, a model for “the universal concrete individuality of the thinker or the system of the dissolved Self” (259). Here, an apposite commentary on the subject by Jacques Derrida may be helpful, and useful as well perhaps in gauging a more positive measure of both Stevens’ and Deleuze’s otherwise chary relation to the standard oedipalized version of psychoanalysis.

In a broadcast interview from 1986, and translated a decade later as “‘There is No *One* Narcissism’ (Autobiographies),” Derrida gestures toward a notion of narcissism considerably resonant with that of both Stevens and Deleuze once past the rationalist binary of narcissism/non-narcissism. “Narcissisms” (the plural is important here), Derrida explains, are “more or less comprehensive, generous, open, extended” because in their very “movement of narcissistic reappropriation,” they establish the self’s truest “relation to the other” in order for “love [in the image of oneself] to be possible”: namely, “the experience of the other as other” (199). Narcissism’s experience of otherness qua other thus makes it a function of “non-knowing” which, Derrida scruples, is not “the limit of . . . a knowledge,” but rather “the limit in the progression of a knowledge” (201). By viewing interiority as the functional limit of exteriority, and exteriority as the very condition of interiority—by turning narcissism inside out as it were—Derrida would invite us to view it in the contentless and formless and subjectless terms that both Stevens and Deleuze would impart to it as a species of the ante-I or ante-Self of pre-personal individuation noted earlier.

Just on this point, we can imagine the microscopic eye of Freud turning now to other parts of Stevens' depersonalized and discombobulated poetic world from 1942 for corroboration, for instance, to that "impossible possible philosophers' man" from "Asides on the Oboe" who, as a species of larval or cracked identity, is an invisible or transparent "glass man, without external reference":

The impossible possible philosophers' man,
The man who has had the time to think enough,
The central man, the human globe, responsive
As a mirror with a voice, the man of glass,
Who in a million diamonds sums us up. (CPP 226–27)

Without external reference, that is, as a relation of otherness *in extremis*, narcissism is thus arguably "a structural non-knowing, which is heterogeneous, foreign to knowledge," or as Stevens characterizes his Narcissus prototype in "Jumbo," a "bad-bespoken lacker" (CPP 241).⁵ Continues Derrida:

It's not just the unknown that could be known and that I give up trying to know. It is something in relation to which knowledge is *out of the question*. And when I specify that it is a non-knowing and not a secret . . . it is not at all in order to calculate or to intrigue or to bar access to something that I know and that others must not know; it is a more ancient, more originary experience, if you will, of the secret . . . an experience that does not make itself available to information, that immediately encrypts itself. (201; emphasis added)

Stated in these terms, experience is a very important word to set beside narcissism which, like knowledge, appears to be so much beside (rather than inside) the point of its psychic construction: *out of the question*, as Derrida's interview emphatically makes plain. "I rather like the word experience," he playfully remarks, "whose origin evokes traversal, but a traversal with the body, it evokes a space that is not given in advance but that opens as one advances" (207). It is precisely these experiential terms—for the remainder of my essay, I shall speak to three in particular—that help to refurbish our thinking about a possibly more redemptive linkage between Stevens and psychoanalysis via the philosophy of Deleuze, at least via Deleuze's psychoanalytic theory from the period of *Difference and Repetition*.

First, for a reading of Stevens hypothetically positioned between Freud and Deleuze, it can hardly be underestimated just how important the perception of a psychoanalytic unconscious ought to be in revolving the whole question of self-identity in exactly the undecidable manner charted

by experience in its secret and cryptic traversal of the narcissistic body as rendered by Derrida. Rosi Braidotti, while suspicious of “the normative cage within which psychoanalysis has enclosed [human desire]” on behalf of “the authors of the *Anti-Oedipus*,” and perhaps on behalf of the author of a poem such as “Jumbo”—Braidotti is nonetheless entirely persuasive about the importance of the Freudian unconscious for Deleuze. “I take the unconscious,” writes Braidotti, “as the guarantee of non-closure in the practice of subjectivity. It undoes the stability of the unitary subject by constantly changing and redefining his or her foundations [thus providing] a constant return of paradoxes, inner contradictions and internal idiosyncrasies, which instill instability at the heart of the self . . . [and thereby] allow for forms of disengagement and disidentification from the socio-symbolic” (100, 99, 39–40).

Stevens’ own hypothetical linkage to a psychoanalytic unconscious perhaps establishes itself in one important sense along the line of such forms of disengagement in his explorations of selfhood as his critics are prone to observe. Bart Eeckhout, for one, following Helen Vendler, offers “distancing ploys” as the equivalent of “forms of disengagement”—subjective ploys that arise intermittently from Stevens’ own “violently fluctuating moods and multiple ambivalences” that, from a psychic point of view, reveal the poet to be “a highly divided figure who was able to dramatize his own inner contradictions” just as Braidotti describes (42, 43; and farther on 36, 38, 108 n100, 139, and 220 n26).

It is arguably the case, therefore, that narcissism is for both Deleuze and Stevens a preeminent “Idea” that they draw from psychoanalysis for no other reason than the fact that, as Deleuze puts the case, “the Idea is not the element of knowledge but that of an infinite ‘learning,’ which is of a different nature to knowledge”—knowledge that is “extra-propositional or subrepresentative” having to do with “the presentation of the unconscious, not the representation of consciousness” (192). Stevens’ own conception of “the unknown as the source of knowledge, as the object of thought [as] part of the dynamics of the known,” is astonishingly coordinate with Deleuze’s ruminations about “the Idea” of (or perhaps, *on the way to*) knowledge. Stevens’ formulation appears in “The Irrational Element in Poetry” (1936), the title of which essay has obvious connections to the psychic unconscious just described, and is elaborated further as follows:

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)

In this “unknown” way, then, identity remains a “problem” throughout much of Deleuze’s writing since, as in Derrida’s experience previously, problems “always open questions which draw[] spectator[s] . . . into the *real movement* of an apprenticeship of the entire unconscious, the final elements of which remain the problems themselves” (192; emphasis added). But conceived as either Idea or Problem, as one of the “‘differentials’ of thought, or the Unconscious of pure thought,” narcissism has no direct relation “to a Cogito which functions as a ground or as a proposition of consciousness, but to the fractured I of a dissolved Cogito; in other words, to the universal *ungrounding* which characterizes thought as a faculty in its transcendental exercise” (194). Hence, the importance accorded to the unconscious in psychoanalysis prompts Deleuze to conceive of most modernist works of art (in this instance, his examples are novels since James Joyce, but they could just as easily have been some of the later collections of Stevens) as “developed around or on the basis of a fracture that [such works] never succeed in filling” (195).

The tropology of fracture here, and elsewhere throughout *Difference and Repetition*, presents us, therefore, with a second psychoanalytic contour that Stevens’ *Parts of a World* would appear to exploit as well—a contour fashioned after experience conceived in terms of a space that the narcissistic ego can open up (or on to) only as it advances. As such, it becomes coterminous with open space itself: “a space which is unlimited,” Deleuze avers, and one in which “[n]othing pertains or belongs to any person, but [in which] all persons are arrayed here and there in such a manner as to cover the largest possible space” (36). At this point, we can now imagine Freud’s potent eye microscopically gravitating from the sunny blue skies of “Jumbo” to the enigmatic nighttime setting of “Phosphor Reading by His Own Light” also in Stevens’ *Parts of a World*, where a breathtaking ellipsis dead center in the text provides for the maximization of such subjective space just at that moment when the narcissist’s proverbial glassy mirror dissolves, and something quite Other comes to take its place:

The page is blank or a frame without a glass
Or a glass that is empty when he looks.

The greenness of night lies on the page and goes
Down deeply in the empty glass . . .

Look, realist, *not knowing what you expect*.
The green falls on you as you look,

Falls on and makes and gives, even a speech
.....

Teaching a fussy alphabet. (*CPP* 240; emphasis added)

In the Derrida interview, the relation to otherness (as an interruption of normative psychic economy) is rendered in similar terms: “the *possibility* of the relation to the other” (209; emphasis added). The rendering of a limitless possibility is indeed how Freud himself winds up his synopsis of the “narcissistic type” from the purview of object-choice: to wit, “A person may love . . . what he himself *would like to be*” (*Complete Works* 90; emphasis added). Hence, “In every psychic system,” Deleuze surmises, “there is a swarm of possibilities around reality, but our possibles are always Others,” given “the Other as *the expression of a possible world*” (260, 261). Once again, we are very much in the psychic vicinity of Stevens with his “impossible possible philosophers’ man” from “Asides on the Oboe.” In a further uncanny link between Freud’s narcissism and Stevens’, Deleuze can conclude only, “There is no love which does not begin with the revelation of a possible world as such, enwound in the other which expresses it” (261).

At this point, the larval subject for Deleuze arguably becomes the rival of the narcissist, a notion suggested to him by the treatment of embryology in “the celebrated 1895 Freudian *Project for a Scientific Psychology*” (*Difference and Repetition* 118). But in terms of maximizing the possibility or potentiality of psychic space “experienced only at the borders of the livable, under conditions beyond which it would entail the death of any well-constituted subject,” it is perhaps Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* that lies at the back of the larval subject’s “vital movements, torsions, and drifts, that only the embryo can sustain” (118). As fractured conduits to unknown possibility, the “terrible movements” of nightmares, accordingly, are entirely unsuited to “a substantial, completed and well-constituted subject, such as a Cartesian cogito,” and thus “can only be sustained under the conditions of a larval subject” (118). Indeed, because thought at the level of possibility “cannot be an essence, a substance, a philosophical meaning,” and to that extent becomes “what ruins philosophical legitimacy in advance,” nonetheless as Derrida reminds us, it is also the unthought “which prevents philosophy from closing on itself” (119). Psychoanalysis, too, is all about such riddling narcissistic *disclosure*, so that, according to Deleuze, “Even the philosopher is a larval subject of his own system” (119)—an “impossible possible philosopher,” shall we say?

But as a third and final term conditional to psychoanalytic experience, even riddling disclosure may be venturing overmuch about the limitlessly unspeakable nature of narcissism for both Stevens and Deleuze. For the latter, “the subject can henceforth represent its own spontaneity only as that of an Other,” he tells us in *Difference and Repetition*, “and in so doing invoke a mysterious coherence in the last instance which excludes its own” that I cited much earlier (58). “Represent” is hardly the right word here, since much of that mysterious coherence he tells us later in *A Thousand Plateaus* has to do with becoming imperceptible to oneself as in my opening epigraph: “To have dismantled one’s self in order finally to be

alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line . . . this, precisely, is a becoming only for one who knows how to be nobody, to no longer be anybody. To paint oneself gray on gray" (197). In Stevens' "Bouquet of Belle Scavoir," also in *Parts of a World*, just such a dark encounter is staged between a potential ancestor of Narcissus and his double in the form of a cryptic female "scavoir"—a female presence that is obviously intended to defeat knowing patriarchal self-reflection by means of her perpetual evasion:

III

How often had he walked
 Beneath summer and the sky
 To receive her shadow into his mind . . .

IV

The sky is too blue, the earth too wide.
 The thought of her takes her away.
 The form of her in something else
 Is not enough.

V

The reflection of her here, and then there,
 Is another shadow, another evasion,
 Another denial. If she is everywhere,
 She is nowhere, to him. (CPP 211–12)

Meeting one's true double at the other end of a narcissistic line of flight is merely another of those inside out convolutions of the dissolved Cogito back in *Difference and Repetition* where "the self of 'I think' includes in its essence a receptivity of intuition in relation to which *I* is already an other," and where "for a brief moment we enter into a schizophrenia in principle which," Deleuze would have us believe, "characterizes the highest power of thought [since it] opens Being directly onto difference" (58). In Stevens' "Bouquet of Belle Scavoir," however, such empowerment is entirely lost on the male persona as it collapses into a more conventional and more stereotyped narcissism of vain self-absorption and self-reproduction at the end of the poem where, impossibly, "It is she that he wants, to look at directly, / Someone before him to see and [more impossibly] to know" (CPP 212).

In distinct contrast to the "bad-bespoken lack[]" of "Jumbo's" "Ancestor of Narcissus," the conventional narcissist in "Bouquet of Belle Scavoir" would appear to be disadvantaged by the lack of such "lack" as it were, "lack" understood in terms of what Ziarek brilliantly unpacks in Stevens' much later "Lebensweisheitspielerei" (1952) as an "indigence of light."

Perhaps “Phosphor Reading by His Own Light” initially experiences such benighted indigence in the earlier *Parts of a World*. As Ziarek goes on to explain, “The indigence of light . . . spells a lack of cognition . . . [that] also intimates the possibility of otherness outside or beyond the range of intellection,” as arguably symbolized by the “Belle Scavoir” figure. Ziarek continues:

The fact that we are native to otherness and indigent of light ironizes the image of a self-identical subject [the masculine self-absorbed Narcissus stereotype, I am arguing], for whom the other comes as a surprise, a threat . . . and an indication of the limit placed on the household of consciousness. For if otherness can indeed disrupt the apparent peace of self-sameness, it is only because alterity is native to identity, a sort of “internal paramour” as [another] of Stevens’s poems suggests. (131–32)

I shall return to Stevens’ “household” troping of conventional consciousness in a moment. But as a means of rounding out this psychoanalytic portrait of a quasi-Freudian Stevens courtesy of Deleuze, it may be worth commenting upon a rival discourse to psychoanalysis very much in play between both thinkers that arguably provokes Stevens and Deleuze to continue to revolve the gray on gray imperceptibility of human identity that the extremes of difference are likely to disclose. Here, I refer to the philosophy of American Pragmatism as a further engaging parallel that helps instructively to fill out the psychoanalytic one. I conclude with this comparison not because Anglo-American writers are generally superior to European ones, so Deleuze himself contends (*Dialogues*, Chapter 2); nor because William James, the father of American Pragmatism, authors two volumes on *The Principles of Psychology* with which both Stevens and Deleuze were undoubtedly familiar.⁶

More important is the fact that the Pragmatist approach to experience is ineluctably predisposed to foreground so much of the secretive and mysterious and inarticulate that Deleuze helps us to think Stevens himself might have found so compelling about psychoanalytic approaches to identity if his several ancestors to Narcissus scattered throughout *Parts of a World* are any indication. An important citation from the nineteenth-century American poet Benjamin Blood, which Deleuze extrapolates from William James (via Jean Wahl) and positions in an early chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, says as much: “Nature is contingent, excessive, and mystical essentially,” writes Blood, “and there is in it as much wonder as of certainty. . . . Not unfortunately the universe is wild . . . [for] Nature is miracle all. She knows no laws; the same returns not, save to bring the different . . . never an instant true—ever not quite” (qtd. on 57). That telling phrase, “ever not quite,” thus serves as the provocation in William James’s own ruminations on the poet to laud the “genius of reality” for

escaping from “the pressure of the logical finger” in much the same terms that Stevens, somewhere between Freud and Deleuze, champions the self’s mysterious coherence: “no complete generalization, no total point of view, no all-pervasive unity,” continues James, “but everywhere some residual resistance to verbalisation, formulation, and discursification” (*Writings* 1312–13). As Deleuze himself puts the case for the narcissist’s “ever not quite” at the end of *Difference and Repetition*: “there is always *something else* implicated which remains to be explicated or developed,” then, in another Derridean formulation, concludes, “all this is made possible only by the Other-structure and its expressive power in perception” (281; emphasis added). All of which, of course, should put us in mind of Stevens’ “Belle Scavoir” once again: “The sky is too blue, the earth too wide. / The thought of her takes her away. / The form of her in *something else*” (emphasis added).

The mysticism of American Pragmatism as a rejoinder to the narcissism of Freudian psychoanalysis would likely send Deleuze off to any number of American novelists for exemplification: Herman Melville, Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, Henry Miller (among others) are all favorites throughout the Deleuzian canon. Because, as Braidotti argues, Deleuze’s own particular brand of “pragmatic philosophy . . . rejects the ghosts of metaphysical interiority, the ‘hauntology’ of missing presence” to favor a more “vitalistic pragmatism” of “just do[ing] it” that is “relevant to today’s world” (185, 75, 115), several other of Stevens’ poems in *Parts of a World* strike me as especially de-interiorizing—deterritorializing, Deleuze would say—in this very inside out kind of way.

In “The Sense of the Sleight-of-Hand Man,” for instance, as in “Jumbo,” the emphasis is all on “bluish clouds . . . above the empty house . . . As if someone lived there” (*CPP* 205). In “Man and Bottle,” the directive is to “Destroy[] romantic tenements / Of rose and ice” (*CPP* 218), and so like the one in “Variations on a Summer Day” to “Pass through the door and through the walls,” and join up with “Those bearing balsam . . . [and] Pine-figures bringing sleep” outside (*CPP* 215). As “Montrachet le Jardin” frames the case for all these texts, “Man must become the hero of his world,” and so “Sing[] of an heroic world beyond the cell” (*CPP* 235). If it is the case, as Freud famously remarks in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* that “the one typical . . . representation of the human figure as a whole is a house” (qtd. in Chandler 11–12), the epigones of Narcissus secreted throughout some of Stevens’ later writing at least help us to see, thanks to Deleuze, how intensely problematic are the strict demarcations of domestic space as quasi-extensions or figurations of human personality.⁷ As David Macey sums up the case for all these epigones in a decidedly post-Freudian mood (cited in my final epigraph), “the ego is not . . . master in its own house and cannot aspire to Cartesian certainties” (74). We are invited once again to position Stevens’ narcissistic figuration *beyond* a household consciousness. “In other words,” as Ziarek finesses this

point in late Stevens, “poetry begins at the moment the mind realizes that there exists an exteriority, otherness, ‘not ourselves,’ which cannot be subsumed under consciousness. This otherness not only cannot be explained in terms of the unity of the self and world, but rather should be seen as itself precluding any possibility of such unification”: “Parts of a World,” in “other” words. “For what Stevens’s work discloses,” Ziarek concludes, “is a difference at the origin of language . . . more fundamental than the one between the mind and the world” (111).

Bowing to Freud just in this household context, Deleuze (along with Guattari) also acknowledges that “Everything begins with Houses” (*What Is Philosophy?* 189). But in further ironizing domestic space in American literature (following Herman Melville especially rather than Stevens) by viewing it in terms of “a kind of *deframing* following certain lines of flight . . . in order to open it onto the universe” and by “dissolv[ing] the identity of the place”—and by implication, human identity—“through variation of the earth” (187), Deleuze sets the stage for a more cautious Freudian interpretation of psychic interiority in Stevens’ work which the “hauntology” of Narcissus (to recur to Braidotti’s apt phrasing) answers to precisely.⁸ But much before Stevens and Freud, it is the father of American Pragmatism himself, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who reminds us in an essay on Plato that “The experience of poetic creativeness . . . is not found in staying at home, nor yet in travelling, but in transitions from one to the other” (qtd. in my *Question of Belief* 30 n10). As an augury of “the transformer, himself transformed” in “Jumbo,” this Emersonian aperçu hypothetically places Stevens’ “Ancestor of Narcissus” somewhere between the two “Contrary Theses” in *Parts of a World*; that is, between “The bareness of the house [where] / An acid sunlight fills the halls” (CPP 239) in part I and “a final refuge, / From the bombastic intimations of winter” (CPP 242) in part II as Stevens’ “abstract subjective essence” (*Anti-Oedipus* 270) in the latter labors to reveal:

He walked toward

An abstract, of which the sun, the dog, the boy
Were contours . . .

.....

The abstract was suddenly there and gone again.
(CPP 242)

A “deep disparateness” settles over such human abstraction, Deleuze might say, “to the extent that the disparates have first invented their order of communication in depth,” only later “tracing hardly recognizable intensive paths through the ulterior world of qualified extensity” (*Difference*

and Repetition 236) as their mystic narcissistic energy or intensity is turned inside and outward.

"Within intensity," Deleuze further remarks, "we call that which is really implicated and enveloping *difference*; and all that which is really implicated or enveloped *distance*" (237). According to Ziarek, therefore, "the difficulty of 'to be' lies precisely in maintaining a distance," that is, a distance "suggested in a non-spatio-temporal understanding of place" that is contradicted by the "household" of consciousness alluded to above (116, 131–32) that Stevens does so much to ironize in *Parts of a World*—distance as a "Description without Place" as it were in the subsequent 1947 *Transport to Summer*. "Difference, distance and inequality are the positive characteristics of depth" in relation to human experience, Deleuze concludes (238). As I hope to have demonstrated throughout this essay and elsewhere ("Doty, Deleuze, and 'Distance'" and "Going the Distance" more generally), Stevens' own psychic abstractions trace similar barely recognizable paths or "distances" throughout his later work, but more especially the one we might now think he deliberately places between himself and Freud, as Deleuze so usefully helps us to see. But just barely, since, as "Montrachet-le-Jardin" reminds us at its close, anything more "I affirm[,] then at midnight the great cat / Leaps quickly from the fireside and is gone" (CPP 237).

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Notes

¹In *Wallace Stevens and the Question of Belief*, I cite that remark, adding, "In response to a *New Verse* questionnaire on matters generally poetic, [Stevens] indicates that he had read only Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, though it is Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* that is recorded in Stevens' library," according to Peter Brazeau. I note also that "Stevens' dismissive attitude toward Freud in his letters may be further sampled in communications to Ronald Lane Latimer (January 10, 1936) and Harry Duncan (February 23, 1945), which carries over into some of the prose of *The Necessary Angel*" (see CPP 650–51 and CPP 728–29) (*Question of Belief* 42, 42 n24).

²An anonymous reader of this essay thus raises the very conundrum I aim to address throughout; namely, whether "Stevens' relationship to the Freudian" is the same as "Deleuze's largely negative/doubtful response to Freud," or whether a general "parallel between Stevens and Deleuze" can be said to exist at all. As I aim to show, the "parallel" exists precisely in the "negative/doubtful" response, but one that serves only to mask an otherwise procreant *attraction* to psychoanalysis in its decidedly "deinstitutionalized" form that my title can only make promise of at this point.

³With her own focus on *Parts of a World* (in addition to Stevens' subsequent *Transport to Summer* [1947]), Jacqueline Brogan accounts for the "later" Stevens as the result of "his response to the Second World War" so that readers "find the beginnings of Stevens's change from a rather posturing 'masculine' or 'virile' poet, quite full of the 'rage to order,' to a poet increasingly open to what we might metaphorically call the 'feminine' or

'other,' including racial 'others' . . . that culminated in a genuine 'revolutionary poetics' that remains important to us today" (7, and farther on 105, 109, 119, and passim).

⁴The issue of "androgyny" in Stevens has elicited several psychoanalytic readings provoked by the writings of Karl Jung: Frank Doggett, Edward Kessler, Susan Weston, and Denise Frusciante most recently. My own approach has been to take up the matter in more historically and culturally resonant terms than those of Jung, but not in quite so disparaging a way as Frank Lentricchia, alluded to by Brogan (175 n21). In response to the "open-ended continuum for the serial construction of subjectivity" just alluded to, Daniel Schwarz therefore suggests that "we may find it helpful in reading Stevens to abandon the concept of a consistent persona and to admit the possibility of hearing multiple—and at times contradictory and cacophonous—voices, as if they were intersecting planes on the order of a Cubist collage or diverse motifs in a symphony" (7; further on 6 and 28).

⁵Accordingly, "The creation of [this] concept of the Other Person," so Gregg Lambert contends, "represents perhaps the most profound and yet most subtle transformations (*sic*) in Deleuze's entire philosophical system" (10), and in light of "Jumbo's" elephantine "transformer, himself transformed" (CPP 241), perhaps the most profound alteration in Stevens' own canon as well. Hence, "Narcissism," Stevens reminds us in "Three Academic Pieces," "involves something beyond the prime sense of [a] word," that is, "a sense of reality keen enough to be in excess of the normal sense of reality," which he links to the "ambiguity" of resemblance rather than the "identity" of imitation or representation (CPP 692, 691, 687)—otherness *in extremis* once again.

⁶For further contextualizations of Stevens and Jamesian Pragmatism, see Lentricchia, Grey, and Poirier most prominently, in addition to my "Both Sides" 210–11. The linkages of American Pragmatism to Deleuze, in addition to the reference taken up below in *Difference and Repetition*, are more abundantly developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where "a pragmatics (semiotic or political)" is invoked "to define the effectuation of the condition of possibility" referred to previously (85; see also 25, 85, 148, 217, and passim). Inna Semetsky enlarges these linkages to the second-generation American Pragmatism of John Dewey.

⁷Anent Braidotti's "hauntology" as subjectivity's indigent lack, see also the Freudian "Coda" to Mutlu Blasing's *Lyric Poetry*, entitled "The Haunted House of 'Anna'" (198–203).

⁸"In fact," however, as Deleuze and Guattari further observe, "the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between . . . multiplicities" (*Thousand Plateaus* 249) as it stages its breakaway from the home's "black hole" alluded to elsewhere (*Thousand Plateaus* 311), and thus corroborating a further compelling remark in *What Is Philosophy?* that "even houses are drunk and askew . . . like a poem by Emily Dickinson" (164–65). A further gloss from Emily Dickinson thus serves to summarize Stevens' earlier "Belle Scavoir" most appropriately: "Peruse how infinite I am / To no one that You—know—" (qtd. in Fuss 60).

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Wallace Stevens and the Lacanian Ethics of Desire

AXEL NESME

WALLACE STEVENS' PLAYFUL reference to the *ding an sich* in "The Comedian as the Letter C," his insistence that "It is never the thing but the version of the thing" (CPP 292), and his final shift away from what "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" terms "the fiction of an absolute" (CPP 349) toward the hypothesis that poetry might voice "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself" (CPP 451), all bring to mind the theory of the *noumenon*, the Thing-in-itself as distinct from the phenomenal world, expounded by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. These echoes, being all too readily identifiable,¹ make it easy to overlook how Stevens' poetry stands vis-à-vis Kant as the author of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which theorized the moral imperative as radically distinct from the sphere of self-interest to which moral philosophy had been confined since Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Although the connection between the realms of poetics and ethics is highlighted by Stevens in the three titles of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," all of which are voiced in the form of imperatives conflating the moral and the aesthetic, Stevens' literary ethics might at first sight seem drastically at odds with its Kantian counterpart. Indeed, Stevens challenges outright Kant's premise of the incompatibility between the "pathological"² and moral law, since they are both subsumed under the poetic imperative: "It must give pleasure." Yet, although Kantian ethics rests on "a structurally 'missed encounter' between the pleasure principle and the dimension of the ethical" (Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real* 8), Stevens does not advocate some mildly hedonistic return to the joys of poetry. His connection to Kantian ethics lies in his treatment of the Thing, not as the *noumenon* beyond the reach of perceptual knowledge, but as that kernel of bodily enjoyment lurking beneath the Kantian moral imperative, which is Lacan's version of the Freudian *das Ding*. In this paper I propose to examine how new light might be shed on Stevens' poetry by Lacan's unorthodox thesis that despite the apparent divorce between the object of desire, which directly concerns the body, and the sphere of moral decisions, which are supposed to be reached independently of the subject's personal interest, the two might well turn out to overlap or be identical, like the seemingly distinct surfaces of a Möbius strip.

In order to show this, we might begin with an anecdote of two jars—a jar in Tennessee, and, less predictably perhaps, a potter’s vase. In the chapter of his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* discussing *ex nihilo* creation, Lacan adduces the example of the potter’s art as “the most primitive of artistic activities” (*Ethics* 148), whereby emptiness and plenum are ushered into the world. Much as the potter’s vase is fashioned around a central void, Lacan argues, the poetic signifier revolves around a Thing that, although resisting symbolization, is also the focal point of human desire (Lacan, *Ethics* 150). Thus, “*das Ding* is at the center only in the sense that it is excluded. That is to say, in reality *das Ding* has to be posited as exterior, as the prehistoric Other that it is impossible to forget—the Other whose primacy of position Freud affirms in the form of something *entfremdet*, something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me, something that on the level of the unconscious, only a representation can represent” (Lacan, *Ethics* 87–88). According to Lacan, this intimate/external or *extimate* Thing underlies the conception of the *summum bonum* that is the underpinning of Aristotelian and Kantian ethics: being located beyond the pleasure principle, it is what the subject most aspires to and also what poses the most radical threat to its integrity. Thus, “Good is only the mask of radical, absolute Evil” (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 161), and the Kantian universal maxim, although seemingly free from all relations to the individual, may prove to define “the very terms in which *das Ding* presents itself” (Lacan, *Ethics* 68).

Stevens’ jar in Tennessee structures the landscape around it by placing at its center a shape that circumscribes a void: by “‘sculpting the Nothing’” (Zupančič, “Ethics and Tragedy” 188), not only does it thus tame the “wilderness” without; it also shapes the emptiness within, such as it is designated by the odd double negative that brings the poem to a close in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the apophatic style of negative theology: “It did not give of bird or bush, / Like nothing else in Tennessee” (*CPP* 61). The jar domesticates chaos as “*senseless form*” (Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real* 157), the sublime manifestation of nature as the locus of the Other’s *jouissance*, which can be experienced only as an inner lack. This lack is itself the pure “ideational transparency” (Costello 30)³ of the Thing. It is what Žižek refers to when he writes that the “lesson of modernism is that the structure, the intersubjective machine, works as well if the Thing is lacking, if the machine revolves around an emptiness” (*Looking Awry* 145). Stevens’ poetry invites us to examine how this void delineates the “*extimate*” space of the Freudian Thing, which Lacan situates at the core of his ethics of desire, as exemplified by the classic embodiment of ethical choice, Sophocles’ Antigone. The character’s specific allure, as Lacan sees it, stems from her venturing into the space “between two deaths” (*Ethics* 332–48), where beauty and horror coalesce, or, in Stevens’ own idiom, where “Death is the mother of beauty” (*CPP* 55).

As I have just indicated, the Lacanian Thing is “something that on the level of the unconscious, only a representation can represent” (Lacan, *Eth-*

ics 87–88). This representative function, in Lacanian theory, is performed by “object *a*,” which may be defined as the result of the subtraction of demand from desire, a leftover of non-signifiable enjoyment that results from the inadequacy of articulate speech to signify the whole of a subject’s desire and being. The object comes into play both on the level of fantasy, as the answer to the enigma of the other’s desire, and of the drive, a circular motion around erogenous zones resulting from the “impossible junction of enjoyment with the signifier” (Žižek, *Sublime Object* 123). One novelty of Lacan’s reading of Freud is the introduction of the voice as one of the objects that the unconscious drive circles and constantly misses—an object that has no contour of its own, except that which it receives from the circular trajectory of the drive that curls around it. Lacan bases his conception of the voice as object on Theodor Reik’s analysis of Jewish rituals requiring the use of the Shofar, a liturgical musical instrument that, Reik argues, represents the voice of God as both the ur-father of the primitive horde and the origin of moral law, a mythical figure embodying the tyrannical demands of the superego which, by forbidding access to enjoyment, paradoxically turns it into the only imperative worth obeying.⁴ Like the sound of the Shofar, the Lacanian vocal object is primarily detachable, i.e., separable from the significations it carries. It is both a metonymic fragment of primitive enjoyment and the medium of the pacifying law that restricts it. Its purest avatar is thus the cry, a mere vocal expression that falls short of meaning until it is interpreted through the agency of the symbolic Other and stripped of its connection to enjoyment by being inserted within the network of signifiers.⁵

Lacan devotes a chapter of his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* to a central theme of provençal lyrics, which was the figure of the commanding mistress, the “*domina*.” In the *domina*, the idealization of the loved one and the superego’s absolutism are merged, which prompts Lacan to conclude: “By means of a form of sublimation specific to art, poetic creation consists in positing an object I can only describe as terrifying, an inhuman partner” (185). The aporia of desire, therefore, is that it “cannot help but demand . . . to be deprived of something real” (184), sublimation being a way of resolving this aporia by creating a “*vacuole*” (184) around the inhuman Thing, and of temporarily filling this void with various imaginary objects.

In “O, Florida, Venereal Soil” this “inhuman partner” wears the mask of a “Donna, donna, dark” (*CPP* 39), whom Stevens defines as “tormenting, / Insatiable” (*CPP* 38). A more intriguing avatar of the troubadours’ *domina*, however, may be found in “Domination of Black,” one poem on which several aspects of Lacan’s theory of sublimation may be brought to bear. Here, the non-signifying object, which acts as a substitute for the missing Thing, is the cry of the peacocks, a prefiguration of the “spontaneous cries” (*CPP* 56) of the quail at the close of “Sunday Morning,” and of what Stevens later called “a cry, / That was not ours although we understood, / Inhuman, of the veritable ocean” (*CPP* 105). In “Domination of

Black" this cry embodies the other of structured speech, a realm of utter shrillness associated with the color black, whose empire bears witness to the voice's double status as the vehicle of the superego's dictates and the metonymic remnant of a mythical locus of enjoyment both foreign and intimate to the subject.

Helen Vendler describes the poem as "a scherzo on *different* prepositions and conjunctions" delineating "all possible relations" and setting those off against the color black, which represents "another order of being—death, perhaps suicide" (67). In other words, Stevens weaves connections *around* an absolute which in and of itself dissolves all links. I would add that the poem inscribes in its letter the characteristic motion of the vocal drive around an absence not only made audible by its hauntingly repetitive rhythm, but also visibly represented by a punctuation sign, the dash of line 18, located in what might be called the dead center of the poem's 36 lines, at the juncture where the cry resolves itself in the stillness of the death drive that is its silent substratum. Harold Bloom once described the poem's middle section as "one of Stevens' earliest achievements of the Sublime" (378). This is consonant with Žižek's Lacanian definition of the Sublime as "the paradox of an object which, in the very field of representation, provides a view, in a negative way, of the dimension of what is irrepresentable" (*Sublime Object* 203). It also coincides with Lacan's notion of *sublimation* as the literary process by which an object is raised "to the dignity of the Thing" (*Ethics* 138), which, in Stevens' poem, translates into a form of writing around the silence of the death drive, a silence made audible by the cry-as-object, which fashions it in the same way that the sides of a vase or jar give shape to the void they enclose.

In Vendler's reading, the cry of the peacocks is incorporated by the human speaker, and the poem is seen as a confrontation between two "magnitudes," "animal utterance and meaninglessness" (67). Within the purview of the Lacanian theory of the vocal drive, however, this dichotomy no longer holds, since it is through the very agency of the cry that the color black asserts its domination. Indeed, if we follow Bloom's own identification of Stevens' visionary mode as "a seeing that hears" (405), black as the absence of light and the cry as the silent meaningless dash at the poem's core may be interpreted *jointly* as the synesthetic imprint of the drive. However, although in Bloom's reading "Domination of Black" stages a potentially endless regression of tropes,⁶ I would argue that the poem does hit upon a non-metaphorizable core that brings metaphorical regression to a halt. Black may be a metaphor of the cry that then tropes the lack at the center of the poem, but this lack itself, corresponding to the Lacanian concept of object *a*, has no metaphor⁷: it is, quite literally, a bar crossing a blank, a non-signifying signature where we may locate the atopic space of *Das Ding* as "that which in the real suffers from the signifier" (Lacan, *Ethics* 154). As for the onset of anxiety staged in the poem, it may be traced to the paradoxical experience the subject faces when "lack

comes to be lacking" (*Le Séminaire* 53), as Lacan puts it, i.e., when an object appears at the precise location where, in the fantasy space of the subject's mirror image, there should normally be a void corresponding to what is non-specularizable in the body, namely those objects that fall outside the circuit of social exchange. Those "pre-specular" (Safouan 249),⁸ libidinally invested objects *a* are what the subject does not project into the narcissistic reflection of him/herself that constitutes his/her ideal ego. Anxiety is the only experiential structure enabling the subject to apprehend the function of those "separable pieces, the primitive vehicles of something connected with the identity of the body, yet preceding the body itself in the constitution of the subject" (Safouan 253).

I pointed out earlier that the Lacanian Thing is the real insofar as it resists symbolization. One of Lacan's often quoted definitions of the real is "something that always returns to the same place" (*Ethics* 92), and the stars and planets are his most frequent illustration of this definition. As for anxiety, Lacan defines it as a "signal [of] an irreducible mode in which the real presents itself in experience" (*Le Séminaire* 188). Lacan adds that anxiety "most probably designates the deepest, the ultimate object, the Thing" (*Le Séminaire* 360). Although in certain literary texts it may sometimes be labeled as fear, its hallmark is that "the subject feels that he is in the grip of something which concerns the most intimate part of himself" (*Le Séminaire* 187). In "Domination of Black," this becomes clearly perceptible when the two iambs of the penultimate line, "I felt afraid," suddenly constrict the rhythm in order to translate the speaker's anguish as he sees "the planets" gather, a phenomenon that corresponds to what Lacan describes as that "irreducible mode in which the real presents itself." The poem's ethical stance is inseparable from its willing confrontation with this anxiety as the signal of the threatening proximity of the kernel of enjoyment from which the speaker is barred by his subjection to the symbolic order. Beyond simply thematizing the death drive, a concept Bloom somewhat reductively treats as mere evidence of Freud's indebtedness to romanticism, Stevens' poem approaches that zone of ethics where, according to Lacan, the Kantian categorical imperative and the Marquis de Sade's scenarios of absolute pain and ecstasy share the same purpose of "forcing an access to the Thing" (*Ethics* 98).

Stevens achieves a similar result by deploying such literal strategies as are necessary to venture into the liminal space where the tragic hero dwells and to approach the non-signifying core beyond the pleasure principle and beyond anxiety—that safeguard that ordinarily prevents the subject from crossing over from the realm of desire to that of *jouissance*. Lacan indicated in his reading of Joyce that the *letter* itself as "that which is most alive and most dead in language" may prove "our only means of access to the real" (qtd. in Aubert 184), which is the locus of "opaque enjoyment exclusive of meaning" (Lacan, "Joyce le Symptôme" 36). This is evidenced in Stevens' last published poem, "Not Ideas About the Thing

But the Thing Itself," where the thingness of "the Thing Itself" is once again approached via a specific *object*. Here, the "scrawny cry from outside," which is identified as "A bird's cry," nonetheless seems to originate partially *within* the subject's mind. Although the poet denies that it stems from sleep's "vast ventriloquism," the cry is internalized as a memory, all the while being part of the choir that surrounds the "colossal sun" (*CPP* 451–52); it thus straddles two spaces and becomes an object that mediates between the subject and the absolute otherness of the real, which it makes knowable. Not even a syllable, it is the note C, i.e., a letter, a fragment of the real whose materiality is brought into relief by the heavily alliterative penultimate stanza:

That scrawny cry—it was
 A chorister whose c preceded the choir.
 It was part of the colossal sun. . . . (*CPP* 452)

We know that throughout "The Comedian as the Letter C," Stevens was consciously playing with the letter C and its various phonetic realizations (as the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ and velar plosive /k/). This is definitely also the case in "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself" where, as Stevens stated in his correspondence, we "have the thing hissing and screeching" (*L* 294), which also aptly describes how the void of the Lacanian Thing is delimited by the cry at work in the vocal drive and by the alternating vocalizations of the letter C. In Freud's text, Lacan points out, it is through the cry that "the stranger, the hostile figure, appears in the first experience of reality for the human subject" (*Ethics* 66). Next to the fellow human being, the "*Nebenmensch*" whose value is extolled by the commandment "love thy neighbor as thyself," lies the absolutely Other at the origin of this meaningless cry. The "complex of the *Nebenmensch*" (Freud, qtd. in *Ethics* 61) is this split between the other-as-neighbor and the Other-as-Thing, both of which are subsumed under the moral imperative. It is the ability to negotiate with that absolutely Other that defines the common ground between Stevens' writing and Lacan's revision of Kantian ethics.

In the Lacanian reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*, the tragic heroine's beauty is at its most radiant when, about to step into the tomb, still alive but already dead to the rest of her community, she utters a lament that is the purest expression of the death drive precisely because it echoes from that fringe where the Thing is found to be missing, a zone halfway between physical and symbolic annihilation that Lacan calls "in-between two deaths" (*Ethics* 332–48) and that Slavoj Žižek describes as "a place of sublime beauty as well as terrifying monsters . . . the site of *das Ding*, of the real-traumatic kernel in the midst of symbolic order" (*Sublime Object* 135). It seems appropriate, in this context, to examine "The Owl in the Sarcophagus," another late poem featuring three enigmatic "forms" that

Stevens calls “monsters of elegy” (CPP 374; my emphasis), whose speech is compared to a cry heard “in a flash of voice” (CPP 371).

In book XXX of *Paradiso*, Dante, having reached a place beyond time and space, describes as “intellectual light full of love” (l. 40) the light that shines forth where divine intellect and love are merged. Stevens’ personification of Sleep in section III of “The Owl in the Sarcophagus” seems to echo Dante: “Sleep realized / Was the whiteness that is the ultimate intellect, / A diamond jubillance beyond the fire” (CPP 372). The dazzling whiteness surrounding sleep places it beyond the Empyrean whose vision the poet Dante is granted in the last books of *Paradiso*. Stevens’ “ultimate intellect” and “diamond jubillance” signify the Sovereign Good, the beautiful “as a function of a temporal relation,” which is always apprehended “at the very point of the transition between life and death” (*Ethics* 365). This punctiform interval, which already separates the present and past participles in the polyptoton “vanishing-vanished,” may be traced at the end of section III as the limit between the participles “accomplished” and “fulfilling,” where the morphemes *-ed* and *-ing*, now in reverse order, once again capture the infinitesimal transition between two synonymous terms. It is in this liminal temporality that we witness the transition from the beautiful to the sublime and to the horror beyond it. Indeed, when Stevens compares Sleep to “moving masses” and to a “moving mountain” (CPP 372), the reader is reminded of the familiar passage in Book I of *The Prelude*, where Wordsworth allegorizes the birth of the sublime as a literary category:

[N]o familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty Forms that do not live
Like living men, mov’d slowly through my mind
By day and were a trouble of my dreams.
The Prelude (1805) I, ll. 422–27

These hieratic yet moving forms that mark the irruption of the Burkian sublime in the romantic imagination still haunt “The Owl in the Sarcophagus,” where, in order to contemplate the radiance of personified Sleep, it is necessary to cross a threshold (“A diamond jubillance *beyond* the fire” (CPP 372; my emphasis) and reach beyond the beautiful into the region of the sublime, where the horror of death hides behind the mask of his brother Hypnos, the first of Stevens’ “monsters of elegy.” For although Sleep, as the depository of a power it can bestow upon the Cyclopean “wild-ringed eye” (CPP 373), is a metaphor of death as the apex of Orphic visionary experience, it is also associated with the horror of blindness and the demise of writing that its whiteness conjures up. It thus preserves a degree of threatening inhumanity. Like Peace, which is appointed “To watch us

in the summer of Cyclops" (CPP 374), it represents what Alenka Zupančič calls "a kind of bodying forth of the cruel, unbridled and menacing superego—the 'real or reverse side' of the moral law (in us), of the superego as the place of *jouissance*" (*Ethics of the Real* 156). This is why in the same poem Stevens also ranks Sleep among "the forms of dark desire," reaching beyond the pleasure principle into the realm of the subject's archaic past, of the monstrous and of the illicit, where "sleep the brother is the father, too" (CPP 371).

The personification of "peace, the godolphin and fellow, estranged, estranged" (CPP 373), captures the same duality. It blends familiarity and strangeness, as is made clear by the neutral and the masculine pronoun that designate it alternatively and by the association of the noun "fellow" with the fairly cryptic "godolphin"—a linguistic veil cast over the absence of the primitive Other. Even more significant, although the poetic imagination is depicted as the space where tropes originate and where poetry's "harmonious prodig[ies]" (CPP 372) are created, death itself turns out to generate its own "images." The imagination, as the "parental space" where supreme fictions are born, and death, as the begetter of its own "supremest images" (CPP 374), thus turn out to be reversible metaphors of each other. What is most intimate to the poet, his creative faculty, becomes one with death as the absolute Other. Like Lacan's Antigone, Stevens' personification of elegy crystallizes this paradox of *extimacy*: it is both "an inner *thing*" and a "motion outward" located "on the edges of oblivion" (CPP 374; my emphasis), the space between reminiscence and symbolic death materialized by the enjambment between tercets VI and VII of the poem's first section. As that form of poetic utterance that, like Antigone's lament, is heard "in the syllable between life / And death," and like Freud's *Nebenmensch*, the elegy dwells in the same interval as what Stevens calls "the mother of us all" (CPP 371), which according to Lacan is the hidden face of Kantian ethics' sovereign good.

Like the Freudian thing, death can only "enter the symbolic order as a kind of an absolute signifier, as a 'negative' signifier of everything that the subject *is*. 'Negative,' because instead of endlessly enumerating all that can constitute a subject's being, it condenses this 'all' in the form of the 'loss of all'" (Zupančič, "Ethics and Tragedy" 186). In "The Owl in the Sarcophagus," the personification of Peace functions as this negative signifier. The cloth that covers him may potentially encode the meaning of any subject's destiny, since it contains "an alphabet / By which to spell out holy doom and end" (CPP 373). Although its "sliding shines" designate the potentially endless metonymy of the signifiers of desire, the figure itself, however, remains "hollow" and "immaculate" (CPP 373), as if to indicate that the power to trope all meanings is inseparable from the absence of a signifier serving as the ground of metaphor.

We know that Stevens wrote "The Owl in the Sarcophagus" in memory of Henry Church and that he considered adding the inscription, "Good-

bye H. C.," underneath the title, but was unable to submit the idea to Barbara Church before the poem was published in *Horizon* (L 566). Although practical reasons suffice to explain this omission, it is worth pointing out that it is consistent with Stevens' indication in a letter that the poem "is not personal." It is also consistent with the fact that in "The Owl in the Sarcophagus" the personification of elegy is designated twice as "she that says / Good-by" (CPP 371; 374) without any addressee being specified.

As I have tried to show, what Stevens calls "these, in their mufflings, monsters of elegy" (CPP 374), may also designate what the poem conceals, veils, or shrouds in the very act of eliding the name to which it was intended to be inscribed. In the final analysis, it is the elegy's own absent addressee who is thus made to occupy the place of the Thing as "that which in the real suffers from the signifier" (*Ethics* 154). As for the anonymous protagonist featured in the brief rewriting of the Orpheus myth in section II, we are told that he beheld "a likeness of the earth, / That by resemblance twanged him through and through, / Releasing an abysmal melody" (CPP 372). In what amounts to a Stevensian self-portrait, the poet's body itself is compared to a lyre, or possibly to a blue guitar—in any case a string instrument that, like the poetry of courtly love according to Lacan, makes the void resonant and adopts as its categorical imperative the creation of a "mythology of modern death" (CPP 374) capable of substituting for the cry the *note* as the supreme fiction of the Thing.

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Notes

¹Bart Eeckhout recently pointed out that the reference to the Kantian notion is featured "[a]lmost too conspicuously" (110) in Stevens' poems, and Milton J. Bates concurred by stressing the "idealist component of the supreme fiction" (49) as well as the move toward idealism noticeable in "Looking Across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly," a hypothesis explored at greater length by Simon Critchley's *Things Merely Are* on the connection between Stevens and Kantian transcendentalism.

²In order for the Kantian categorical imperative to qualify as a law, it must be free from all connections to personal interest or pleasure, which belongs to the non-ethical sphere of the pathological: "Laws must be sufficient to determine the will as will, even before I ask whether I have power sufficient for a desired effect, or the means necessary to produce it; hence they are categorical: otherwise they are not laws at all, because the necessity is wanting, which, if it is to be practical, must be independent of conditions which are pathological and are therefore only contingently connected with the will" (Kant <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/ikcpr10.txt>>).

³Bonnie Costello argues that Stevens' jar in Tennessee "may signify the object as container rather than surface, a thing to put ideas in and also an ideational transparency around which things can be organized" (30).

⁴"Well now, the step taken by Freud at the level of the pleasure principle is to show us that there is no Sovereign Good—that the Sovereign Good, which is *das Ding*, which is the mother, is also the object of incest, is a forbidden good, and that there is no other

good. Such is the foundation of the moral law as turned on its head by Freud" (*Ethics* 85).

⁵Hence Jacques-Alain Miller's definition of the voice as "everything which, in the signifier, does not contribute to the effect of signification" (49) (translation mine).

⁶According to Bloom, "Came striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks" tropes on a previous trope, "Came striding" (*CPP* 7).

⁷Lacan writes, "I could suggest that object *a* may function as a metaphor of the subject of *jouissance*. This would be accurate only if object *a* was assimilable to a signifier, whereas it is precisely that which resists being assimilated to the function of the signifier. This is why it symbolizes that which, in the sphere of the signifier, always presents itself as lost, as what is lost in the signifying process" (*Le Séminaire* 204). (All translations from Book X of Lacan's *Seminar on Anxiety* are mine.)

⁸All translations of Safouan's *Lacaniana* are mine.

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The Lion and the Girl: Wallace Stevens, Sublimation, and the Problem of Being Ordinary

THOMAS SOWDERS

*Slowly, one man, savager than the rest,
Rose up, tallest, in the black sun,
Stood up straight in the air, struck off
The clutch of the others.*

—Stevens, “Thunder by the Musician”

WALLACE STEVENS OFTEN gives extraordinary qualities to the personages in his poems, whether they are a “bloody lion in the yard at night” (*CPP* 390) or a “ten-foot poet among inchlings” (*CPP* 60). Stevens may have been a playful poet at times, but his self-conception, as it pervades his oeuvre, shamelessly exhibits a grandeur similar to the extraordinary natures of his characters. Critics often recall his lofty, self-stated ambition to give voice to “that nobility which is our spiritual height and depth; and while I know how difficult it is to express it, nevertheless I am bound to give a sense of it” (*CPP* 664). From this charge, Stevens seems to have derived power and enough evidence to agree with those of his contemporaries who deemed him extraordinary.

Stevens was not ashamed about his vanity. In 1934, a questionnaire administered by *New Verse* (his favorite literary journal, a journal published by a man with “his eyes on the right values”), asks him, “As a poet what distinguishes you, do you think, from an ordinary man?”¹ Stevens’ reply: “Inability to see much point to the life of an ordinary man. The chances are an ordinary man himself sees very little point to it” (*CPP* 771).² Clearly, Stevens does not include himself as “an ordinary man”; the poet can only speculate as to how an ordinary man might consider his own ordinariness.

The first point upon which this essay is predicated is that for Stevens poetry worked in some capacity for the cause of wish-fulfillment. In “Creative Writers and Daydreaming,” Freud writes, “The creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of fantasy which he takes very seriously. . . . The motive forces of fantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single fantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of un-

satisfying reality" (510–11). Stevens was an imaginative genius working for an insurance company. Need one say more? In the evenings, when, secluded from his wife and daughter, he wrote, he must have wanted to feel extraordinary, imagining himself as a strange, godlike figure: a "man, savager than the rest" (*CPP* 203), a "dauntless master" (*CPP* 390). My second point has to do with Stevens' binary conception of poetry/Poetry. Famously atheistic, Stevens cannot intellectually believe in God, but he does profess to believe in a Supreme Fiction. But what is a "Supreme Fiction"?

Eight years after Stevens returns to the literary sphere with the force of "The Idea of Order at Key West" (and the year he implies his extraordinariness in *New Verse*), the poet goes to work on a book-length poem in three sections called "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," which, as he writes to the Cummington Press, "are three notes by way of defining the characteristics of supreme fiction. By supreme fiction, of course, I mean poetry" (*L* 407). But it is more complicated. He tells one of his close correspondents that what he is going for with "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" is "THE EPITOME OF ADAGES" (*L* 409). Thinking of this, we might recall Stevens' own adage: "God is a symbol for something that can as well take other forms, as, for example, the form of high poetry" (*CPP* 907). This adage is predicated on a modernist faith; Stevens does not believe in God, but he does believe in *something*, "something that can . . . take other forms" than God. After finishing "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," he writes to Henry Church that he had been "trying to create something as valid as the idea of God" with poetry (*L* 435). Stevens is vague about what the Supreme Fiction is, but his continual comparison of it with God suggests that the Supreme Fiction is something that unifies, that helps people live their lives. Despite the enigmatic undertones of what Stevens calls the Supreme Fiction, one can see how Stevens, as artificer of that spiritual "something," may have fantasized that his societal role was more meaningful than those of "ordinary" people.

How does this relate to his binary concept of poetry? One must note above that Stevens' "something" transcendent can take the form of "high poetry." He is making a distinction between high Poetry and what we might call descended poetry. I believe that sexual desire and sublimation are fundamental to Stevens' perception of his poetry's efficacy as a substitution for God and therefore of his poetry's ability to keep him feeling extraordinary, like a Poet—not an "ordinary man." For when he fails in poetry, it is implicit that he recognize his own ordinariness, and this is unacceptable to his ego.

Harold Bloom writes that "in Freud's vision, only sublimation can give us a kind of thinking liberated from its own sexual past" (116). It follows that sublimation, the submersion and alteration of sexual energy, can either have remnants of an erotic past or not. The key term in Bloom's assessment of Freud is "liberated." Stevens seeks liberation from the sexual past of much of his poetic thought. The poet believes lust is a distraction

to him, and susceptibility to this distraction indicates the kind of ordinariness that he fears. For the Poet of "high poetry," desire must be platonic.

We might refer to Stevens' "high poetry" as poetry *of* desire, "high" Muse poems such as "Sunday Morning," "The Idea of Order at Key West," and "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour." Charles Berger notes that "The Idea of Order at Key West," for example, is a powerful rebirth into poetry because in the poem Stevens "[f]inds] a way to submerge and sublimate" his sexual desire, to "Play[] with origins," so that what begins as desire becomes strong poetry. The poem demonstrates sublimation as "a way of mastering erotic influx" and is so powerful because it "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" (172). Considering Berger's observations, we might posit that for Stevens a lot rides on the ability to balance libidinous energy with measures taken to disguise this energy's sexual origin, and that such a balance is profoundly difficult to achieve. Berger notes that Stevens cannot often "ward off the threat" of animal desire. My contention is that cases in which the poet cannot ward off this threat allow us a new way to view Stevens' work.

The poet aspires for poetry *of* desire, but he often settles for poems *about* desire, poems such as "The Plot Against the Giant," "Girl in a Nightgown," "Puella Parvula," "The Weeping Burgher," and "Forces, the Will, & the Weather." These slighter poems have traditionally been studied less than his Muse poems, but they offer much insight into his best work. In each of them, Stevens' speakers struggle with ordinariness perceived in sexual desire, manifested as the figure of the "girl."

The figure of the girl conveys Stevens' sexual desire from the beginning of his career until its end. As if believing that an apparent sexual cathexis threatens to adulterate his poetry, the poet, for most of his career, alternates the form of his verse, attempting to transcend lust and transition from ordinary poet to extraordinary Poet. In doing so, he writes two kinds of "girl" poems—angry and anguished poems, masculine in form, which express anger toward the girl and his own susceptibility to erotic distraction, and poems feminine in form, which acquiesce, embrace the redolence of the girl, and work toward meditatively purging him of sexual desire. Stevens becomes most successful as a transcendental poet when he alters the perspective of his poetry, not just its form.

"Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," the intended "epitome of adages," represents a careful self-examination and is in some ways both a poem *of* and *about* desire as it self-consciously addresses the difficulty of trying to overcome erotic desire in order to reach that transcendent "something" through "the form of high poetry." The third section of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," titled "It Must Change," addresses the way lust, generated by girls but displaced onto bees, creates a "booming" that never leaves, even as the beholder ages. This booming is like an energy that in-

filtrates the entire universe and repeatedly turns the poet's thoughts from platonic to wild and sexual:

The Italian girls wore jonquils in their hair
And these the seraph saw, had seen long since,
In the bandeaux of mothers, would see again.

The bees came booming as if they had never gone,
As if hyacinths had never gone. We say
This changes and that changes. Thus the constant

Violets, doves, girls, bees and hyacinths
Are inconstant objects of inconstant cause
In a universe of inconstancy. This means

Night-blue is an inconstant thing. The seraph
Is satyr in Saturn, according to his thoughts.
It means the distaste we feel for this withered scene

Is that it has not changed enough. It remains,
It is a repetition. The bees come booming
As if—The pigeons clatter in the air.

An erotic perfume, half of the body, half
Of an obvious acid is sure what it intends
And the booming is blunt, not broken in subtleties.

(*CPP* 337)

The "erotic perfume" of the Italian girls is "obvious acid" in its intention to distract the poet. Here, in 1942, Stevens blames the girl for making him become satyr when he would and should be seraph. His fluctuation between seraph and satyr "is a repetition," and the fact that he cannot break this "repetition" is the subject of his "distaste." The Italian girls generate such desire in the poet that erotic catharsis, incomplete and leaving remnants of its "sexual past," cannot escape its libidinous origins. Instead of helping Stevens believe that poetry can provide the thinking man what religion provides, the gullible, catalytic sexual desire—chaotic and excessive—leaves Stevens in the base place where he had begun. "Violets, doves, girls, bees and hyacinths": erotic energy imbues everything the speaker of the poem conjures, causing him to realize that these objects of desire "ha[ve] never gone" from his mental make-up, that the "withered scene . . . has not changed enough" for him to feel good about the efficacy of his poetry. As Stevens writes elsewhere in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," the poet is a "foundling of the infected past," who tries to be pure, who believes that "The hot of him is purest in the heart" (*CPP*

335–36). But Stevens has trouble accessing the sacred purity locked in his heart. He is distracted even in making this point about erotic distraction: “The bees come booming / As if—The pigeons clatter in the air.”

If “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” is a meditation on how poetry can substitute for God (and make Stevens extraordinary), then clearly the “girl” and sexual distraction are fundamental to this pursuit. But in 1949, seven years after “Notes,” Stevens writes “Puella Parvula” (Latin for “Little Girl”) and in it conveys the sense that meditating on his difficulty regarding the “girl” alone cannot assuage the situation. Lustful wishes still remain a continual distraction, and censoring the libido, disguising the sexual origins of his cathexis, seems to become a more urgent priority. “Puella Parvula” seems written out of a long-held frustration about the problem of the girl—evidenced by Stevens’ reluctance even to use the word “girl.” It is as if Stevens fears that the word may invoke her too strongly and crack the dam holding his excessive desire; he prefers the more strange and musical “puella”—that, and “bitch”:

Keep quiet in the heart, O wild bitch. O mind
Gone wild, be what he tells you to be: *Puella*.
Write *pax* across the window pane. And then

Be still. The *summarium in excelsis* begins . . .
Flame, sound, fury composed . . . Hear what he says,
The dauntless master, as he starts the human tale.

(CPP 390)

Stevens explicitly demands the girl to be what he tells her to be: “*Puella*.” For, if not, she will be a “girl”—the manifestation of the “mind / Gone wild.” It seems there is something less dangerous for Stevens about the Latin word, which works with the Latin “*summarium in excelsis*,” to evoke the Old World, Muses, and platonic sublimity. We can see also how Stevens wants the girl to change when he has her write “*pax* across the window pane.” Not only does this image depict a girl without a voice to distract the poet; it invokes the mythological Roman goddess of peace, Pax. Naming the girl more innocuously, making her silent and inactive, he hopes to become the “dauntless master,” and, with the urgency of the approaching end, command sexual desire to stop enticing him, to stop making his mind wild, to “keep quiet” and “Hear what he says.” He strips her of voice to make room for his own. Stevens is seventy-one years old and fed up with erotic distraction, determined nobly to “start[] the human tale.” That he calls her a “wild bitch” seems a culmination of aching desire and bitter resentment repeatedly present in the “withered scene” of Stevens’ mind.

If Berger is correct that balance achieved through desire and sublimation accounts for the success of “The Idea of Order at Key West,” a repre-

sentative strong poem of the author, then it is worth exploring the possible origins of that energy that begins sexually, that before being altered will not allow Stevens to write what he calls the Supreme Fiction. Although we cannot explicitly track poems to all their potential sources, some external origins of the “girl” can be located in Stevens’ courtship letters to Elsie Moll, his girlfriend, fiancée, and eventual wife.

Milton Bates remarks, “Stevens’ courtship . . . was as much an affair of the imagination as it was of emotion,” and, considering this, George Lensing demonstrates the way Stevens constructs an imaginary Elsie during their longtime, long distance courtship (qtd. in Lensing 199). In his letters to Elsie, Stevens often addresses difficulties experienced during visits to her house in Reading, Pa., and, creating a highly noticeable contrast, expresses a romantic joy surrounding imagined versions of her—Elsies of the imagination—while they are apart. Indeed, there is the sense that Stevens’ intoxication by the idea of Elsie strips him of inhibition so much that his candor borders at times on something like romantic belligerence. Lensing illuminates the line that Stevens writes to Elsie, “You know that I do with you as I like in my thoughts” (qtd. in Lensing 199). Here I want to explore two ideas of Elsie that can be discerned in Stevens’ courtship letters and that set the course for Stevens’ poetic career: Elsie as sexualized “girl” and Elsie as sublime Muse.

Elizabeth Stevens, Stevens’ sister, once remembered the young Elsie as “a pretty doll-like creature who never said anything. We couldn’t understand Wallace having an interest in somebody like this” (qtd. in Brazeau 260). Yet, perhaps it was precisely Elsie’s doll-like quality itself, her little girlness, one might say, that catalyzed libidinous energy “booming” in his imagination. Stevens’ courtship letters to Elsie often demonstrate his sexually charged perception of her as “little girl.”

Nowhere else in his letters is he so wanton (and so insistent upon the conceptualization of Elsie as girl) as he is in the Spring of 1907. In March, he writes with a tinge of that romantic belligerence, “Elsie . . . you will never grow old, will you? You will always be just my little girl, won’t you? You must always have pink cheeks and golden hair” (Blount 74).² In April, deeper in Spring, Stevens begins to show signs that he has considered the dualistic nature (Real and Imagined) of his beloved. He writes, “You are too young to be anything but a girl; but, of course, you are not really a little girl, except in the sense that every woman is always a little girl” (Blount 84). It seems that this difficulty in grasping who and what Elsie really is, anchored by deep, churning desire for her, only makes him the more intoxicated and the happier. He writes, “It is a great adventure to be writing to you to-night, calling you my little girl, yet knowing that you are a woman, almost—not that I should ever use the word” (Blount 85). It is as if the idea conjured by the word “woman” lacks the arousing magic that he finds so compelling in the word “girl.” We can recognize the immorality of conceptualizing Elsie as a girl—the inherent sexism in both Stevens

and his cultural context—but I believe that this line of inquiry illuminates something curious in the poet's work. Stevens continues the above letter, "To think of you one way to-day, helps me to think of you another way to-morrow" (Blount 85). The "one way," sexualized and as a girl, must give way to "another way" of thinking of her. But two days later, in another letter, Stevens writes that his friend Arthur, after meeting Elsie, "liked [her] voice and [her] manner" (Blount 86). Stevens continues, "So he said! I shall not tell you what more he liked, because little girls should not hear such things about themselves" (Blount 86). Stevens' internal struggle thus begins to be expressed in his letters, and the stakes for him and his poetry continue to rise even as Stevens reaches twilight. Already, in his twenties, Stevens is aware of a burgeoning dichotomy in his idea of Elsie and, more important, he seems to understand on a certain basic level that he needs to think of her in "another way."

Stevens wants Elsie to be his little girl, but he also writes, "You must always be my poetess and sing me many songs. I shall hear them in strange places and repeat them afterwards as half my own. —Goodnight, dear poetess! The wind storms around my windows like the violent wings of Night. You can see that already I am half-dreaming" (Blount 72). Stevens sublimates his desire for Elsie here in a manner not so overtly sexual as his lines about pink-cheeked girls or doing what he likes with her in his thoughts. Her beauty inspires the less carnal (but still discernibly sexual) storming (which recalls the "booming") around his windows. Stevens writes to Elsie, "Your voice comes out of an old world. . . . It is the only true world for me. An old world, and yet it is a world that has no existence except in you. —It is as if I were in the proverbial far country and never knew how much I had become estranged from the actual reality of the things that are the real things of my heart, until the actual reality found a voice—you are the voice" (L 131). When Stevens writes that Elsie's "voice comes out of an old world," it is transparent that Stevens' imagination cannot help but appropriate and enhance her. This might seem to exhibit more consideration of her actuality, but it is not without reference to his vision/version of her as Muse.

We can see how the conceptualizations of girl and Muse are different fantasies of Elsie—the "girl" clearly more erotic. Stevens explains in another letter to Elsie in March 1907 that when he imagines her, "You [Elsie] are perfectly yourself and that is a little different I think, although not so very much, from the way you are sometimes when we are together. . . . [N]one of the denials you make me are made there. You are my Elsie there" (Blount 67). We can see that Stevens understands that both of these—Muse and girl—are conceptions distinct from the actual Elsie. Although Stevens quickly tries to backpedal in this letter and emphasize that the difference between Elsie and Stevens' idea of Elsie is minute, virtually nonexistent ("I do not think you have ever said or done anything there that the real Elsie wouldn't say or do—only you have not made me beg so hard there" (Blount 68), Ste-

vens is talking about a strangely coherent idea of Elsie separate from “the real Elsie,” an imagined Elsie that is “more perfectly [her]self”; this just means she is more perfect for Stevens (more willing, more passive). Eventually, long after the desired has become acquired, as Stevens and Elsie’s marriage begins to go bad, the real Elsie becomes a source of melancholy for the poet.³ Stevens begins to live for the ageless constructions of both Muse and girl, originally inspired by Elsie, who, for Stevens, no longer has either the girl’s sexual prowess or the Muse’s sublime inspiration to offer, even though she—once—had both.

“Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” and Stevens’ letters to Elsie help us see Stevens’ conceptualization of the “girl,” whether pink-cheeked or with jonquils in her hair, as a source of inspiration and an imaginative catalyst distinct from the Muse of “Sunday Morning” or “The Idea of Order at Key West.” Berger observes that “Stevens tends to spatialize the dialectic of descent and sublimation along a predictable vertical axis” (177). Similarly, I argue that the girl (as descent) and the Muse (as sublimation) represent different spaces in a polarized dialectic. Although the attention of most critics, following Stevens’ lead, of course, has been on the Muse, I think the “girl,” the condensed site of sexualized femininity, also plays a key role in his work and manifests that which makes Stevens the tormented and striving, if “inconstant,” poet he is.

Jacqueline Vaught Brogan reads the wartime poem “Girl in a Nightgown” as an expression of “a pervasive cultural angst” that exhibits Stevens’ concerns about the catastrophic nature of World War II (31).⁴ Additionally, I think that this poem expresses a more local angst, an angst expressed in regard to the personal culture of Stevens’ imagination. “Girl in a Nightgown” displays Stevens’ libidinous desire, incompletely purged and not liberated from its sexual past. Rather than the “high poetry” of “Sunday Morning,” in which the Muse sits wearing a peignoir, “Girl in a Nightgown,” with a title that evokes a similar image with more ordinary language, is a purging of excessive lust in an ongoing effort to reach “the repose of night,” a “strong place, in which to sleep” because, with this sexualized girl in view, this safe, balanced place has become “shaken” (CPP 194).

The poem begins seemingly aware of its own repression regarding the girl: “Lights out. Shades up. / A look at the weather” (CPP 194). The truncating period marks, as defense mechanisms, attempt to contain the signified and prevent the kind of deferred meaning that invites the realization that when one’s “lights” are “out” and “shades” are “up,” one can see out of a window without being seen. A look at the “weather” (one wonders if it is “storming” outside) easily becomes a look at something else—perhaps a “Girl in a Nightgown” in a neighbor’s window.

Once it was, the repose of night,
Was a place, strong place, in which to sleep.

It is shaken now. It will burst into flames,
Either now or tomorrow or the day after that.
(*CPP* 194)

The idea of the girl in her nightgown sends the landscape of Stevens' imagination into a hellish turmoil, causes it to "burst into flames," recalling the "Flame, sound, fury" that the girl ignites in "Puella Parvula," and which the dauntless master must extinguish in order to be "composed." This is Stevens' catharsis, his purging of desire. He is like an insomniac scribbling the thoughts out of his head onto paper to create composure "in which to sleep." The stentorian voice, the "leaden trumpets" and "booming" (*CPP* 194), like the "booming" of the bees we have seen in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," demonstrate the depths of his distracting longing.

We can find less panicked, less mature instances of this crisis: a "puffing" instead of a "booming" occurs twenty years earlier in "The Plot Against the Giant," in which the "First Girl," "Second Girl," and "Third Girl" plot to "run before" our poet, the "giant," and respectively "check," "abash," and "undo" him:

FIRST GIRL

When this yokel comes maundering,
Whetting his hacker,
I shall run before him,
Diffusing the civilest odors
Out of geraniums and unsmelled flowers.
It will check him. (*CPP* 5)

The idea of girls coming in a succession with the single, collaborative "plot" to "check" the poet establishes the idea that all the manifestations of Stevens' lust, all of his "girls," represent a force that threatens to make him ordinary. If we (and Stevens) believe the girl, then Stevens' pursuit of "high poetry," the kind "as valid as the idea of God," becomes mere poetic "maundering," and Stevens, instead of Poet, is merely a "hacker," a "yokel." The quality of civility personifies the flowers, and the association of the First Girl with the odorous flowers imbues these lines with a foreboding, antagonistic, erotic, female force. The girls antagonize Stevens' giant so successfully that Marie Borroff finds that "the boorish and menacing figure" of the giant "seems lifted from 'Jack the Giant-Killer'" (915). This may be plausible, but I am more inclined to observe that in this case it is the girls who are "menacing," and that the giant, as a personage masking for Stevens, is positioned as a victim of their malicious distraction.⁵

The Second Girl uses "Arching cloths besprinkled with colors / As small as fish-eggs" (*CPP* 5) to distract Stevens' giant. Any Stevens reader who knows "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" understands that the poet has a

penchant for the strange; the mention of “fish-eggs” may be enough alone to “check him.” The Third Girl even speaks French:

THIRD GIRL

Oh, la . . . le pauvre!
I shall run before him,
With a curious puffing.
He will bend his ear then.
I shall whisper
Heavenly labials in a world of gutturals.
It will undo him. (CPP 6)

All three girls in their individual stanzas make the same utterance: “I shall run before him.” Considering this, we can find a connection to the “obvious acid” Stevens attributes to the Italian girls in “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction.” Stevens exhibits complacency here, an utter helplessness; the girls actually make Stevens’ speaker will his own distraction. “He will bend his ear” to hear the Third Girl’s whispered “Heavenly labials,” her lip-sounds. That the giant will open himself to this distraction makes it “obvious” that he cannot curb his susceptibility to sexual desire and suggests that Stevens finally “undo[es]” himself.

In 1919, Harriet Monroe, the editor of *Poetry*, received a letter from Stevens stating that he wanted to replace his poem “Aux Taureaux Dieu Cornes Donne” with “The Weeping Burgher” for her upcoming edition: “Not to provoke, but to stifle, discussion,” reads the letter, “my reasons [for eliminating “Aux Taureaux Dieu Cornes Donne”] are that the element of pastiche present in Aux Taureaux will not be apparent and the poem will go off on its substance and not on its style” (L 214). Stevens suggests that the content of the poem is problematic, and that he wants to “stifle discussion” about this problem. Thus Stevens, in classic textbook fashion, compulsively reveals his desire (by submitting the poem) and then desperately tries to hide what he had allowed to be revealed. “Aux Taureaux Dieu Cornes Donne” amounts to a study in style for Stevens, and as a finished product, the poem is far from his best. Furthermore, Stevens seems to have worried, it too transparently reveals the libidinous energy that has spurred the poem’s content.

Why are not women fair,
All, as Andromache—
Having, each one, most praisable
Ears, eyes, soul, skin, hair?
.....
I wish they were all fair,
And walked in fine clothes,
With parasols, in the afternoon air. (CPP 548)

Stevens shows his tendency to objectify women in this retracted poem about girl-watching, in which he wishes all women were enticing, with “praisable” features, like Hector’s wife and Neoptolemus’s later concubine, Andromache. Stevens’ splenetic replacement poem, “The Weeping Burgher,” seems a corrective reaction to the kind of mood that produced “Aux Taureaux Dieu Cornes Donne,” although the ordinariness—and not the immorality—of objectifying women likely caused the reaction.⁶

Stevens introduces “The Weeping Burgher” with a melancholy couplet, as if to set a mood. Rather than enhancing the external world with imagination, Stevens tells us that he will proceed to distort it, and we can see immediately that the “strange malice” he feels is directed toward himself.

It is with a strange malice
That I distort the world.

Ah! that ill humors
Should mask as white girls.
And ah! that Scaramouche
Should have a black barouche. (CPP 48)

Stevens’ girls “mask” for excessive distracting desire, what Stevens calls here “ill humors,” that keeps him, he thinks, from progressing as a serious poet. The Burgher, the Scaramouche, is comfortable and impotent—there is no important work and no important result. In this way he imagines himself ordinary. “Aux Taureaux Dieu Cornes Donne” must have stricken Stevens as the work of a dandy—another version of himself antithetical to his lofty poetic ambitions.

Stevens ends the “The Weeping Burgher” in a bewildered panic, calculatingly soured by ironic rhyming:

Permit that if as ghost I come
Among the people burning in me still,
I come as belle design
Of foppish line.

And I, then, tortured for old speech,
A white of wildly woven rings;
I, weeping in a calcined heart,
My hands such sharp, imagined things. (CPP 48)

If Stevens should come among his readers with “foppish line[s]” arranged in feminine “belle design,” he suggests he will find himself trapped in a cocoon-like “white of wildly woven rings,” in which he cannot develop as a strong poet. “Weeping in” instead of *with* “a calcined heart” further conveys a feeling of imprisonment, and his hands, though sharp and capable

of effective tearing, are merely “imagined” in this scenario, and therefore useless. He is left “tortured for [the] old speech” that he wants so desperately from Elsie as an alternative to her sexualized girliness. The fact that few or no poems are written during the following year should be of no surprise given the draconian nature of this “strange malice.” It is as if he has reached a dead end.

Twenty-three years after Stevens’ letter to Harriet Monroe about “Aux Taureaux Dieu Cornes Donne,” he published in *Parts of a World* “Forces, the Will, & the Weather,” another “girl” poem about desire. But twenty-three years seem to have cooled Stevens off a bit, and, even though the “girl” still attempts to prevent him from writing “high poetry,” he does not wax bellicose. Here, Stevens’ speaker finds himself “without ideas in a land without ideas,” and in this “land without ideas” he places a “pink girl” among blooming dogwoods. It is as if Stevens wants to suggest that there is no real purpose in this poem, no theme, but instead, in the girl’s perfumed realm, images evoking other images by merit of their sound. “[T]he peer yellow” becomes “The pair yellow, the peer.” “[T]he dogwoods, the white ones and the pink ones” becomes “A pink girl took a white dog walking” (*CPP* 210). Pretty stasis, myriad blooms as potent sites of feminine condensation, are Stevens’ poetic purgatory—a trap that entices and arrests him. The giant here is the fluffy dog—Stevens again as clunky walking libido:

A pink girl took a white dog walking.

The dog had to walk. He had to be taken.
The girl had to hold back and lean back to hold him,
At the time of the dogwoods, handfuls thrown up
To spread colors. There was not an idea

This side of Moscow. There were anti-ideas
And counter-ideas. There was nothing one had. There were
No horses to ride and no one to ride them
In the woods of the dogwoods,

No large white horses. But there was the fluffy dog. (*CPP* 210)

As a dog, he reduces himself to an oddly silly id, with a libido, but “not an idea,” especially not an “Idea of Order.” But instead of astringently repressing a desire that has been booming, as in “Girl in a Nightgown” and “Puella Parvula,” Stevens purges his desire and acquiesces to write with the languid energy of post-cathartic exhaustion. He realizes that there is no chance for the nobility of “high poetry” here, no “horses to ride” like the horses as “images of nobility” in “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” (*CPP* 644). The girl takes Stevens’ dog on a walk and conjures

up heavy blooms, throws them up in “handfuls” like the “Arching cloths besprinkled with colors” “thrown up” by the Second Girl in “The Plot Against the Giant.” Stevens matter-of-factly and even contentedly sums up his compulsion to write and his fondness for girls: “The dog had to walk.” The girl, previously a villain, is now almost a benevolent figure, walking the dog. This is different from the suffocating cocoon imagery of “The Weeping Burgher.” After all, this gentle sublimation of a libidinous drive allows him to write a poem, and this exercise we can see as representative of the purging necessary for Stevens to continue working toward his Supreme Fiction. One can see this kind of acquiescence as well in “The Hand as a Being.” But instead of being in a place “without ideas,” Stevens suffers an opposite problem: he is “too conscious of too many things at once.” This dither also manifests itself with line repetition:

In the first canto of the final canticle,
Too conscious of too many things at once,
Our man beheld the naked, nameless dame,

Seized her and wondered: why beneath the tree
She held her hand before him in the air,
For him to see, wove round her glittering hair.

Too conscious of too many things at once,
In the first canto of the final canticle,
Her hand composed him and composed the tree.

(CPP 242)

Our speaker “Seize[s]” the “naked, nameless dame,” the object of his desire, because she disrupts his focus; she makes him “Too conscious of too many things at once.” Immediately after the dame simultaneously mesmerizes and flummoxes our poet with her “hand before him in the air” and her “glittering hair,” the poem undoes itself, recalling the Third Girl’s prediction that her “curious puffing” and whispered “labials” would undo him. The first two lines repeat in reverse order, like someone tiptoeing backward out a door just entered. The “dame” now has control as “our man” retreats, compulsively retracting his poem. The following line, “Her hand composed him and composed the tree,” implies a doubly conveyed, double meaning of the word “composed” and shows how the “dame” has sent this poem in a direction far from what our man seeks to write. By *composing* him and the tree, the dame has both *tranquilized* and *re-created* him as a subordinate. Like the girl in “Forces, the Will, & the Weather” who takes the dog walking, the “naked, nameless dame” takes the reins of the poem, so that Stevens’ speaker is no longer “our man” but a tree, and the girl is no longer a naked dame but the wind:

The wind had seized the tree and ha, and ha,
It held the shivering, the shaken limbs,
Then bathed its body in the leaping lake. (CPP 242)

The girl has undone Stevens. "Shivering" and "shaken," he must now watch as she whirls up the surface of the lake. He suffers a modicum of cruelty. But in the last stanza he realizes that the "dame" exists so that he can write this very poem: "at last he knew / And lay beside her underneath the tree" (CPP 242). Similar to "Forces, the Will & the Weather," Stevens does not rage against this erotic source of distraction here. Instead, he writes languidly "without ideas" and, since there are no ideas, he just writes what he can—a meandering fantasy about a girl. Again, however, this is not the poem that Stevens wants to write; it does not express "that nobility which is our spiritual height and depth."

Unfortunately, the girls in these descended poems are very much objectifications, projections, one might say, of Stevens' sexual desire, which seems to be so excessive at times, due no doubt to his trying so hard to repress it and write something "extraordinary," that its original libidinous energy cannot be sublimated without sexual desire left over, finding nowhere to go but into the lines of his poetry unchanged, still explicitly lustful. So how does he make the transition from ordinary poet to extraordinary Poet? One clue resides in the very form of his work.

We should note a distinction in Stevens' girl poems. The sections we have looked at from "Puella Parvula," "Girl in a Nightgown," and "The Weeping Burgher" express anger and anguish at the poet's distracting libidinous excess, while other poems, such as "The Plot Against the Giant" and "Forces, the Will, & the Weather," seem to be complacent ones, intoxicated by desire. The former poems exert an active condemnation on the self for having become so wanton (and therefore common). The latter poems exhibit a more passive approach to deal with desire. Not coincidentally, in the above sections of the three former poems, there is a total of only five feminine endings, while twenty-three of the line endings are masculine. For the latter two poems, there are twenty-one feminine endings and only one masculine ending. Although the poetical terms for designating lines masculine or feminine exhibit the sexism inherent in early literary study, this detail about Stevens' girl poems may be of some use to us. For breaking down the perceived necessity of making assertive poems "masculine" and complacent poems "feminine," Stevens takes an important step in his methodological approach to writing high (platonic) poetry.

Deconstructing the masculine/feminine hierarchy stylistically helps Stevens' poetry become transcendent insofar as it allows the poem to go beyond the disconnection between masculine and feminine. The explicit alternation between masculine and feminine form represents an impulse that is affirmed by some of his stronger late poetry, most notably "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," a poem that attempts to transcend

gender in its perspective. In "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," understanding that formal femininity will not suffice (is superficial), Stevens makes the poem formally masculine, with only one feminine ending. In the much earlier Muse poem, "The Idea of Order at Key West," as has been pointed out by critics, when the Muse "s[ings] beyond the genius of the sea," Stevens does not give her a voice but instead "safely" describes it for us.⁷ But now Stevens attempts to de-gender his content by giving the Interior Paramour voice. It is *her* "soliloquy." This is more significant than merely altering the poem's form.

The crucial lesson that "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" teaches us is that before Stevens can completely purge his sexual desire through sublimation, liberate his thinking from its sexual past, and write poetry of desire, he must alter his perspective. Even though this is a symbolic act, feminizing his voice begins to break down that dichotomy of male and female that inevitably leads to satyr and "girl." His most transcendent poetry demonstrates an ability to become more feminine (and therefore less inclined to objectify the girl).

In "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," we find our speaker and the Muse together, and "the miraculous influence" of Stevens' imagination is libidinous, godlike, with a force that begins in desire and at last is fully sublimated and "liberated from its own sexual past." It is as if Stevens and his Muse fuse into a single god/goddess in the poem, sharing a pure, holy domesticity in Stevens' imagination—looking through his eyes, speaking through his throat, but being independent of his wanton, objectifying tendencies. This unification yields a new inviolability in "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour":

Light the first light of evening, as in a room
In which we rest and, for small reason, think
The world imagined is the ultimate good.

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

Within a single thing, a single shawl
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,
A light, a power, the miraculous influence. (CPP 444)

The poem is masculine in terms of line endings, but the speaker is feminized. The presence of a distinctly "other" female does not send the poet off task. Transcending separation from his Muse, Stevens is finally able to say "God and the imagination are one"—individual but interconnected, as in the concepts of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; as in our imaginations and the external world:

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

Within its vital boundary, in the mind.
We say God and the imagination are one . . .
How high that highest candle lights the dark.

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough. (*CPP* 444)

Charles Berger writes that Stevens' "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" (177). "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" is such an example of a poem that is short because its victorious dissolution of the hierarchical male/female binary is, if still incomplete, honestly attempted and therefore, to a degree, honestly achieved.

Freud writes, "In young men egoistic and ambitious wishes come to the fore clearly enough alongside of erotic ones" (653). Returning to the origins of our study, I hope to have shown that Stevens' nascent philosophical dichotomy of Elsie-as-girl and Elsie-as-Muse in the spring of 1907 sets the course for his entire poetic career. His letters reveal that he was intoxicated by erotic desire as well as "ambitious wishes" regarding poetry during this period, something that anyone who has spent a spring longing for someone far away might understand. Feeling, we must imagine, very poetic, he writes to Elsie on March 10, 1907:

and you want me to take you into my heart! Oh, wonderful girl—you will have to turn into something else before I can take you into that little chamber—or strange forest, or whatever else it may be. (Blount 67)⁸

It seems that Stevens spends his whole life trying to turn the potent girl "into something else"—into a Muse, into a *Puella*—so that he can let her into the "strange forest" of his heart. He does so with some success, we might say, several times, but too often desire translates into torment for Stevens. Nevertheless, one could say that Stevens' lifelong struggle to fulfill his wish to be extraordinary is itself extraordinary. The conclusion of "Farewell to Florida," a poem about the necessity to wrench oneself from intense earthly desire, gives us an image of Stevens' pursuit of sublimity and is emblematic, I think, of the interplay of lust and ambition in Ste-

vens. As the ship carrying Stevens' speaker from Key West to Connecticut crashes over the grinding sea, Stevens expresses a dauntless desire "To be free again" from ordinary lust, to go from the heat of the ordinary to the coldness of the extraordinary: "carry me, misty deck, carry me / To the cold, go on, high ship, go on, plunge on" (CPP 98).

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Notes

¹Stevens writes to Leonard van Geysel, "The best poetry magazine is *New Verse*. . . . This is Geoffrey Grigson's magazine; Grigson has his eye on the right values" (L 332).

²According to Freud, the unconscious is indeed timeless and immortal. Thus Elsie as the sexualized girl remains Stevens' unacknowledged muse.

³Stevens and Elsie had a notoriously cold marriage. In a letter to critic Janet McCann, Father Hanley, the Catholic priest who spent much time conversing with Stevens in the hospital prior to the poet's death (and who attests to Stevens' baptism), relays that when he died, "Wallace and his wife had not been on speaking terms for several years" (McCann 5).

⁴Jacqueline Brogan offers in *The Violence Within/The Violence Without* Stevens' 1939 written statement, "As the news of the development of the war comes in, I feel a horror of it: a horror of the fact such a thing could occur" (qtd. in Brogan 30).

⁵In *Words Chosen Out of Desire*, Helen Vendler advises that any Stevens neophyte should learn to "substitute 'I' whenever Stevens says 'he' or 'she'" because he is usually talking about himself. This clearly extends beyond just "he" and "she" to other characters, arguably to all characters in one way or another (Vendler 44). In this instance, for example, the character of the giant in a way represents Stevens himself. He was, as we know, a man of size. He often refers to this, for example, in "Large Red Man Reading" and "Jumbo." More splenetically, in "Bantams in Pine-Woods," he addresses himself, "Fat! Fat! Fat! Fat! . . . You ten-foot poet among inclings. Fat!" In 1909, Stevens even signs a letter to Elsie, "Your Giant" (L 160). Furthermore, all the lions, giants, historical figures, and other extraordinary personages in Stevens help us understand the importance of the imagination in conceptualizing oneself.

⁶If this sexualization of girlhood, its repression and thus its site of excitement, which gives way to sublimation (and melancholy), is truly a repetition compulsion of Stevens, then even this exchange of poems and the poems themselves are an enactment of his relationship with Elsie.

⁷See Vendler's *Words Chosen Out of Desire*; Mary Watson's "Wallace Stevens and the Maternal Art of Poetry"; Carolyn Masel's "Keener Sounds: Stevens, Intimacy, and Gender Politics"; Albert Gelpi's "Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop at Key West: Ideas of Order"; and Santos' "The Woman in the Poem: Wallace Stevens, Ramon Fernandez and Adrienne Rich."

⁸This achievement for Stevens, of course, occurs within a context in which both the forms and terms associated with them are highly gendered, and problematically so. What today might strike us as only a limited deconstruction of premises in terms of gender, nevertheless, marks a considered, committed struggle by Stevens in wrestling his psychological demons by refashioning his poetical tools and methods.

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Ambivalent Posthumanism: A Few of Stevens' Animals

BRIAN BRODHEAD GLASER

WALLACE STEVENS MADE a single explicit statement about Freud in only one poem, "Mountains Covered with Cats." It contrasts Freud and Stalin and expresses a sure preference for the former figure—Stalin stands for a utopian, dulling vision, whereas Freud more capably sees "the invalid personality" through "the microscope of potency" (CPP 318–19). But the poem targets Freud as well. Insofar as the title refers to the Catskills—Eleanor Cook's insightful suggestion (207)—it mocks Freud's eagerness to hear words buried in other words. If the poem's admiration for the ability of the "gray ghost" of Freud to "quickly understand" the "impotent dead" and "How truly they had not been what they were" (CPP 319) is genuine, it is framed by a warning that the Freudian hermeneutical method can be carried too far. Among the various things it is, the title of Stevens' poem about Freud is a bit of a cryptic joke about Freud. The poem celebrates Freud's ability to discover latent meanings and essences underneath manifest contents, but it frames this praise with awkward mockery. Why?

Freud's remarks on joking in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* are helpful in explaining. One clearly relevant point he makes is that jokes with a hostile impetus are a vessel through which aggression may be directed at "the great, the dignified and the mighty, who are protected by internal inhibitions and external circumstances from direct disparagement" (105). A mask of humor is appropriate for dealing critically with such a powerfully influential thinker and evidently admired man. Though a jest like Stevens', which requires some conscious thought to process, tends, as Freud points out, to deflate its own comic effect, still, the attempt at humor is a distancing and disarming gesture.

But from a Freudian perspective there is more to such a joking tribute as well. Among the types of jokes Freud discusses are what he calls "non-sense jokes," which he claims give a pleasurable release from inhibitions against playing with thoughts by allowing for the closely related substitute pleasure of playing with words (138). These jokes, like many others, do what Freud calls "joke-work" in which "a preconscious thought is given over for a moment to unconscious revision and the outcome of this is at once

grasped by conscious perception" (166). Nonsense jokes make particular use of one form of unconscious revision—the one Freud calls, reaching back to the analyses of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, displacement. Like dreams, nonsense jokes displace meanings from one image to another, one word to another, one sound to another. These displacements are generally motivated by the desire to circumvent an inhibition or ease a repression.

Read not only as a mocking joke—Freud calls it a kind of “tendentious joke” (90)—but also as a nonsense joke, the title of Stevens’ poem exhibits a meaningful displacement. The cats covering the mountains are echoes heard in the name of a chain of mountains when listened to with a Freudian ear, but they are also displaced images, come to along a thread of word associations, standing for mountain lions. Displacement has turned lions into cats. So the joke is not only targeted toward Freud. It is an ironic treatment of the less-than-heroic strain in Stevens’ own “personality,” in which fear of something wild is acknowledged and submitted to. Stevens had written in “Poetry Is a Destructive Force” of a man who feels himself to have “an ox in his breast”:

He is like a man
In the body of a violent beast.
Its muscles are his own . . .

The lion sleeps in the sun.
Its nose is on its paws.
It can kill a man. (CPP 178)

The power of poetry is exalting, but it is also threatening—clearly too strong for a man to control. Something in the power that poetry has for him threatens Stevens’ sense of the integrity of his being, and the lion is a figure for that menace. In “Mountains Covered with Cats,” Freud’s hermeneutic allows him to see himself experience this threat more manageable as coming from an entity that is part mountain and part cat. One way of responding to one’s sense of being threatened by a metaphorical mountain lion is to make a cryptic joke.

AMBIVALENT POSTHUMANISM

Carrie Rohman, in her study *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal*, identifies a tension in modernist culture between what she calls the Darwinian and the Freudian conceptions of the subject. There is, she claims, a “reductive capacity in psychoanalysis that works to tame the Darwinian threat of human origins” (24). In a criticism of Freudian therapeutic goals indebted to Deleuze and Guattari’s arguments against Freud in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Rohman claims that psychoanalysis, “like much of the Western metaphysical tradition, wants to code the human as psychically nonanimal, as mastering its inherent ani-

mal memories that reside in the unconscious" (24). The emphasis in her book falls on exposing writers who must distance the animal as an other in order to shore up an ideal of the human. She celebrates the few writers, such as D. H. Lawrence, who manage to register "the radical alterity of [the animal] and elaborate[] the narrator's profound inability to comprehend its experience" (97).

Rohman's project is shared, in broad terms at least, with Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* and Philip Armstrong's *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, though her account of Freud's complicity in the modernist tendency to efface the radical alterity of animal life is particularly pronounced. But "Mountains Covered with Cats" can light up another view on Freud's role in mediating the presences of animal life in modernist culture. Freud's interest in the latent in its many forms, Stevens realized, can reveal how human encounters with animals are rife with subsurface dynamics—anxieties, projections, cathexes, associations.¹ Recognizing radical alterity is one of the many ways that humans can ethically and imaginatively be alongside animals. Stevens credits Freud with the knowledge that animality is not simply a human trait to be mastered, that it is rather a domain of experience and relatedness in which many thoughts and feelings may be latent.²

In this essay, I would like to follow the opening into the territory of emotional ambivalence made by "Mountains Covered with Cats" with the purpose of showing that for Stevens animals are not only radically other but also living entities to experience and know with a mixture of positive and negative emotions. Psychoanalytic discussions of how ambivalence is at work in animal imagery and human/animal encounters will play a recurring role in this exploration. My argument is that looking at how the phenomenon Freud discussed as ambivalence is at play in Stevens' representations of animals can give us a sense of how, in the modernist period, cultural encounters with nonhuman creatures involved more than knowing the limits of the human. For Stevens they often also involved the self-aware exploration of an emotionally complex state. In each of the following three sections, I will look at how different kinds of animals—cats, birds, and rodents—aroused distinct sorts of ambivalence in Stevens.

IMPRACTICAL CATS

Stevens wrote a number of poems with lions in them. "Lions in Sweden," "The Sun This March," "The Man with the Blue Guitar," "The Glass of Water," and "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" mention lions, usually representing them as they are in "Poetry Is a Destructive Force," reposing in potency. Another big cat in Stevens' work is a jaguar, described once at the end of "Jouga." Unlike Stevens' lions, the jaguar is captured in motion, as seen in a dream. But the poem begins on another note:

The physical world is meaningless tonight
And there is no other. There is Ha-eé-me, who sits
And plays his guitar. Ha-eé-me is a beast.

Or perhaps his guitar is a beast or perhaps they are
Two beasts. But of the same kind—two conjugal beasts.
Ha-eé-me is the male beast . . . an imbecile,

Who knocks out a noise. The guitar is another beast
Beneath his tip-tap-tap. It is she that responds. (*CPP* 295)

This is a self-portrait. The masculine self, Ha-eé-me, is perhaps Jaime, a name Stevens, who linked the ocean with the south, might associate with the seaside setting of the poem, but it suggests more strongly a mirthfully ironic representation of the poet's "me." To borrow a word from an earlier and related piece, it is a poem of thorough, retrospective disillusionment. The man with the blue guitar has become an "imbecile" and a "beast" who "knocks out a noise." His world, and his music making, are "meaningless," and the poem ends with a longing for what will happen after he has "gone to sleep" (*CPP* 295) and been visited by the great, in the investiture of an animal. Like the "old sailor" in "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," the self surrogate in "Jouga" responds to a sense of malaise by turning to a dream of big cats.

What will the great cat in "Jouga" restore to the "physical world" of Stevens' Ha-eé-me? In the earlier cat/dream poem, "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," the enlivening power of the animal is clear:

Only, here and there, an old sailor,
Drunk and asleep in his boots,
Catches tigers
In red weather. (*CPP* 53)

The tigers' energy is diffused into the surroundings, as the weather takes on wildly intense coloration, and the power of the cats is on display but harnessed by the dreaming man. This dream is a pretty wish-fulfillment, in which much of what disappoints in the first half of the poem is redressed by the vision in its latter part. In "Jouga," however, it is not so obvious how the "little sound" (*CPP* 295) of the jaguar will answer the frustrations registered by the poem. What is the poet's hope for this animal dream?

The Freudian concept of ambivalence may be useful here. Freud transcribed and reflected on perhaps the most well-known dream of a predatory animal in the modernist milieu, the nightmare of his patient, "the wolf man," in which "six or seven wolves" sat perched in a tree outside of his window (*From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* 29). In Freud's analysis, the wolves represent the patient's father, who, he fears, will castrate him.

This interpretation has been influentially challenged by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who argue in *A Thousand Plateaus* that the wolves represent not a single fear or figure but a process they call “becoming-animal”:

The wolf, as the instantaneous apprehension of a multiplicity in a given region, is not a representative, a substitute, but an *I feel*. I feel myself becoming a wolf, one wolf among others, on the edge of the pack. A cry of anguish, the only one Freud hears: Help me not become wolf (or the opposite, Help me not fail in this becoming). It is not a question of representation: don't think for a minute that it has to do with believing oneself a wolf, representing oneself as a wolf. The wolf, wolves, are intensities, speeds, temperatures, nondecomposable variable distances. A swarming, a wolfing. (32)

At a first look, the reading that Deleuze and Guattari give to the wolf dream seems to offer a fuller interpretation of the function of the running jaguar in “Jouga” than would Freud's. There is little to suggest that the animal poses a threat to the dejected Ha-eé-me, whereas it does seem that the jaguar's intensity and speed could intimate a transformation that has come over the dreamer's consciousness by the end of the poem—what had seemed meaningless noise comes to be a quickening sound, and the bestiality that the poet had sensed in his surrogate is transformed into a more glorified alien being, “the great jaguar” (CPP 5). A reading that emphasizes the fluidity of boundaries between human and animal, rather than the fears and longings that inhabit their relation, captures a sense in the hoped-for dream.

I would suggest at this point though that seeing a bit more in Freud's text than Deleuze and Guattari give us can help us to see a bit more in Stevens' poem as well. In his analysis of the dream, Freud does not only perform the kind of unifying reduction that the critique would have one see. Although the anxiety caused by the wolves in the dream has according to Freud a single source, the figures of the animals themselves are also multiplicities, with a number of simultaneous meanings he discovers through an exploration of the wolf man's associations:

For the proper appreciation of the wolf phobia we will only add that both his father and mother became wolves. His mother took the part of the castrated wolf, which let the others climb upon it; his father took the part of the wolf that climbed. But his fear, as we have heard him assure us, related only to the standing wolf, that is, to his father. It must further strike us that the fear with which the dream ended had a model in his grandfather's story. For in this the castrated wolf, which had let the others climb upon it, was seized with fear as soon as it

was reminded of the fact of its taillessness. It seems, therefore, as though he had identified himself with his castrated mother during the dream, and was now fighting against that fact. (47)

Understood in the context of the patient's associations, the wolves are mother and father, source of identification and source of threat. A wolf does not have a single meaning as an Oedipal father. Indeed it is potent in the fantasy life of the dreamer because it can function as both sides of an animalistic coupling at once.

If we read this poem as a self-portrait characterized by this kind of two-sidedness or ambivalence, Stevens seems to be doing a bit more than longing for a dream of animal potency to dispel disenchantment with the powers of his art. The middle stanzas of the poem are concerned with the "two conjugal beasts," which are "two not quite of a kind," the man with the guitar and his instrument itself. They make a disappointing music, as a mismatched conjugal pair might do and as the partners wind and sea seem to. If the jaguar is Ha-eé-me's dream of himself as wholly other, it is a flight, a "running" (CPP 295), from what he hears in relation to what he would like to hear in his head. But if we hear the jaguar as both man and instrument, the disparaged and the longed-for, "male beast" and "she that responds," then the "little sound" becomes significant not only because it is contrasted with "noise" but because it is "little." We are to listen to the little sound of the jaguar, and hear as the "jag" becomes an audible echo of both the "conjugal" music in the poem and the "jouga," playing in "modern Provençal," in the title (Cook 194). There is little here to love, the poet says. But sound is its own good, the repetitions say. Seen this way, Ha-eé-me does not take flight from a mood by becoming animal. He plays in the absence of meaning and so creates the figure of the wild creature. The jaguar is not an opening into destabilized release from the self as it is known. It is an image in which the dejected poet can see himself in "the physical world" as "two not quite of a kind," one for whom that world is an emptiness and "there is no other," and one for whom, much more hopefully, "There are many of these beasts that one never sees" (CPP 295).

BLACKBIRD

The class of animal Stevens most often hears is the bird. This is in part because of where and how he spent his life and in part because of the romantic tradition of poetry that influenced him. The poem that most clearly acknowledges the confluence and tension between these two domains of exposure to the sounds of birds is "Autumn Refrain":

The skreak and skritter of evening gone
And grackles gone and sorrows of the sun,

The sorrows of sun, too, gone . . . the moon and moon,
The yellow moon of words about the nightingale
In measureless measures, not a bird for me
But the name of a bird and the name of a nameless air
I have never—shall never hear. (*CPP* 129)

The nightingale is not a bird for Stevens as an American poet, for it is not native to America. The grackle is his bird instead. In this sense, Stevens' poem grapples with what Lawrence Buell calls the "environmental unconscious," and this poem writes against a distorting influence of English romantic poetry on the perceptions of animal life in American verse. Like Gary Snyder's tactics and those of others Buell refers to, Stevens' "approach has been to take a form of readily recognizable spatialized experience, so recognizable as to be taken for granted, and to achieve a certain bringing to awareness by exposure of chronic unawareness" (26). His poem makes the "skreak and skritter" of grackles audible for a poetic tradition that has perhaps not learned to listen for them, even if these sounds are to be heard only in memory as the poem begins.

But why the repeated and somewhat uncharacteristically dramatic assertion that he will never hear the nightingale? One answer to this is that this is a poem of late middle age, in which the poet acknowledges the finitude and limits of the choices remaining to him in life, and performatively discovers that he will never make, literally or metaphorically, the costly crossing hearing the nightingale would entail. Another answer lies in the opposition between evening, which is gone at the start of the poem, and night, which has begun. The nightingale is "not a bird" for the poet but "the name of a bird and the name of a nameless air." The nightingale is any bird heard at night which the poet pursues, as Keats does, seeking a merger with or dissolution into its song. Stevens will never hear birdsong this way. He has instead chosen stillness, "Being and sitting still" (*CPP* 129), after the grackles at evening have left.

Read this way, Stevens seems to be eschewing what Gregg E. Gorton calls in an essay on the psychodynamics of human-bird relations "projective" understanding of the nightingale (162). He will never hear birdsong as the voice of an immortal surrogate, and so will seek to hear instead the sounds of birds without identificatory distortion. The contrast between the singular nightingale and the various grackles in the poem lends weight to this reading. To hear a number of real birds, as opposed to an imagined single one, is to hear the birds not through an essentializing idea of them but as they exist and make their sounds. Stevens does not hear *the* grackle because he will not hear *the* bird per se. Instead he hears the "skreak and skritter" of various birds.

Still he is left with a "desolate sound," which raises the possibility of identification at some level with the nightingale, particularly since one of the chief sources of birdsong is a male's search for a mate. This sound has

come from the grating of the “evasions of the nightingale” with a “skreaking and skrittering residuum” (*CPP* 129), and at this late point in the poem Stevens has moved toward a kind of private use of language that suggests a heightened awareness of what is happening inwardly. The birds have left him, and he has chosen not to follow—hence the desolation. But the sound comes from somewhere, within or in the real world. What is the source of the desolate sound?

A remark Gorton makes in his discussion of the effects of birdsong on humans is relevant here. Using Lacanian terms to discuss Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” and other poems, he points out that the songs of birds can make humans experience the way that language mediates their experience as a kind of confinement, or “coop”: “I will argue (along with Lacan, Chomsky, and others, albeit from diverse perspectives) that *Homo sapiens* is caught always within the invisible ‘bars’ of the symbolic register and the very structure of human language itself” (179). The desolate sound at the end of “Autumn Refrain,” on this reading, would be the “words about the nightingale,” and it would suggest that Stevens has gone from recognizing himself as opposed to a Keatsian attitude toward the bird to finding that his own words get him no closer to a real experience of the sound of birds. He is without the romantic desire to merge into the being of the bird and leave his humanity behind, but is rather the poorer for that, because the language he refuses is only a part of the language that separates him from the nightingale.

That reading of the desolate sound would emphasize the function of the “refrain” in the title as a verb and stress how the poet has chosen to mark his difference from romantic views of nature and has accepted that this leaves him alienated from much of what calls to him in his environment. But the play on the word is a sign of the ambivalent relationship to the sounds of birds that runs through the poem. The poet cannot refrain from speaking about the nightingale in the way that the grackles can: “not a bird for me.” He struggles against the force of the word “bird” in bringing together what he would like to keep entirely distinct—grackles and the nightingale. He answers the dangerous synthetic force of this word, one from the “yellow moon of words about the nightingale,” with “skritter,” a sound he invents. Insofar as it seeks to challenge the force of known language in the sonic field of the poem, the word is perhaps a posthuman description, but it is an ambivalent one—his utterance is both a careful attempt to hear the sounds of grackles without the concept of the nightingale and, in its placement, an acknowledgement that he cannot know the world of either imagined birds or real ones. His language is the key in which the birds’ sound is heard and desolate.

A RODENT GALLERY

A late poem of Stevens’ in which a similar kind of solitude is passed through by an animal presence is “The Plain Sense of Things.” After a

writing life spent celebrating and testing the powers of the imagination, Stevens comes in this poem to name its efficacy at its ownmost limits. James Longenbach's biography takes its name from this central poem, about which he says that Stevens rejects "the world of poetry as a place to dwell" and chooses a poetry that makes "the world of ordinary experience seem hospitable" (304). As a gesture along these lines, Longenbach says, Stevens equates "the return of ordinary experience with a rat's low vantage point on the world" (303). What is significant about the rat, on this reading, is that like the grackles in "Autumn Refrain" it is a figure for sensory experience that is not filtered through an elevating set of ideals:

The great pond,
The plain sense of it, without reflections, leaves,
Mud, water like dirty glass, expressing silence

Of a sort, silence of a rat come out to see,
The great pond and its waste of the lilies, all this
Had to be imagined as an inevitable knowledge,
Required, as a necessity requires. (*CPP* 428)

It may be that it is the world as seen by the rat that Stevens is describing here, but what is more readily apparent is that he attributes both a curiosity and a silence to that animal. The "silence of a rat come out to see" is an image of what the imagination must do "After the leaves have fallen" (*CPP* 428), in the season of barrenness and cold. Remarks of Freud's about rat symbolism, made in at least two places in his work, cast some light on the pitilessness of this passage. Rats, Freud writes, are thought of as the carriers of dangerous diseases; but they are also associated with babies or children ("Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis" 214, 216). In a sense these passages treat the rat as a condensation of these two aspects of the animal's psychological charges or meanings. There is danger in the finality of this scene, a sense of latent threat in the very plainness of it, the eerie reflectionlessness. The rat's attraction to "waste," a part of its danger, is described directly. But at the same time the rat's presence is a birth of a kind, in which the new "knowledge" that the imagination discovers at its limits is described as a kind of silence from one who has just "come out." The necessity named at the end of the poem carries this birth imagery further—the emergence of this new knowledge cannot be restrained. Connected with a recurrent squeamishness about the physicality and corporeality of birth that runs throughout his poetry, Stevens represents the imagination's arrival at the plain sense of things as a dangerous birth in this poem to emphasize both its urgency and its unpleasantness for him.³ The rat is a deeply ambivalent image of hope.

Another rodent appearance in Stevens' poetry replicates this suspension of negative valuations. In both "Dance of the Macabre Mice" and

"The Blue Buildings in the Summer Air," Stevens uses mice as symbols of a kind of critical skepticism that Freud can help us to appreciate. In the first of these poems, published in 1935, Stevens uses a contrast between a statue of "The Founder of the State," an armed man on horseback, and a group of mice crawling over it, to criticize the symbolic language in which autocratic regimes argue for themselves:

We dance it out to the tip of Monsieur's sword,
Reading the lordly language of the inscription,
Which is like zithers and tambourines combined:

The Founder of the State. Whoever founded
A state that was free, in the dead of winter, from mice?
What a beautiful tableau tinted and towering,
The arm of bronze outstretched against all evil! (CPP 101)

The grandiosity of the statue—its language, its sword, its posture—is deflated with a remark about the indefatigability and ubiquity of mice. "The horse is covered with mice" (CPP 101), say the mice themselves. Promises of purity or absolute reform, fascistic or communist ideals of the state, must face the limits of their ability to control how creaturely life goes on without regard for the mighty moral gestures of leaders and their displays. In this respect, the horse of the statue is something of a totem animal in the sense in which Freud discusses this in *Totem and Taboo*, and the mice might be thought of as anti-totems. Freud argues that "the totem system . . . was a product of the conditions involved in the Oedipus complex" (132). What he means by this is that the system of social organization in which a group sees itself as protected by an objectified or animated spirit—often an animal—is attributable to the group's ambivalent memory of doing violence against its patriarchal founding leader. The totem animal stands for that patriarch. Stevens' macabre mice expose a dynamic that Freud argues underlies the phenomenon of totemism and associated taboos: ambivalence. The mice are the ambivalent response that a community has to such a leader, by covering him and his totem animal. They are a swarm of jubilant but threatening members of the family created by this figure, and they reject the special status that the armed leader declares himself to have. Like the rat in "The Plain Sense of Things," these animals are figures for ambivalence, but instead of this being, like the horse, an ambivalence that is frozen into a grandiose form that suits the theatrical needs of a regime, it is an ambivalence that moves with an irrepressible energy of inquiry.

The mice in Stevens' other mouse poem, "The Blue Buildings in the Summer Air," work in a similar way. In this poem, Stevens' target is not authoritarian government but Puritanism. "Cotton Mather died when I was a boy," begins the poem, and the metaphoric meaning of this remark

becomes apparent by the end of the poem when the mice are exhorted to “go nibble at Lenin in his tomb” (CPP 196). Puritanism has had a long life in American culture, Stevens is saying, and it persisted into his own formative years. This gives him a particularly close understanding of the psychodynamics of Mather’s own pursuit of ironclad evidence of his special bond with God:

Cotton Mather died when I was a boy. The books
He read, all day, all night and all the nights,
Had got him nowhere. There was always the doubt,
That made him preach the louder, long for a church
In which his voice would roll its cadences,
After the sermon, to quiet that mouse in the wall.
(CPP 196)

The mouse that haunts Mather is the voice of a nonbeliever in his church, one that shares one of the numerous buildings in the poem without participating in the spirit of faith for which the buildings have been built. So there is “eminent thunder from the mouse” and “grinding in the arches of the church,” which leads Stevens to wonder whether the “mouse should swallow the steeple, in its time” (CPP 196). Though he decides that this could never happen, the mouse is a voice that torments the Christian conscience by pointing out an animal’s self-sufficient capacity to co-exist in the spaces that believers would rather see as monuments to the totality of their vision of creation.

Just as Stevens and Freud shared an interest in exposing the ambivalence that underlies patriarchal social organization held together by the spectacle of righteous force, so the two shared an interest in exposing the illusory nature of Christian belief. In *The Future of an Illusion*, published about fifteen years before Stevens’ poem, Freud argues that Christianity is a defense against humanity’s sense of helplessness at the hands of nature and of mortality, or Fate (21). Stevens’ mouse is the voice of nature, reminding the users of the “buildings” of faith that it is in part simply their need for shelter that inclines them to the grand, “Byzantine” (CPP 196) structures of their belief. It is again the voice of critical objection, of skepticism, that opposes the theatricality of moral conviction with the reminder that absolutes are, however tempting, untenable. It is a symbol for an ambivalent response to absolutes, an ambivalence that is latent in social worlds that are organized in the pursuit of certainty and enduring order.

STEVENSIAN POSTHUMANISM

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud makes an unconvincing argument about the instinctual lives of animals: “the germ of a living animal is obliged in the course of its development to recapitulate (even if only in a transient and abbreviated fashion) the structures of all the forms from

which it is sprung" (37). Freud is discussing the conservative nature of instinct in humans in the context of his larger consideration of what he called the repetition compulsion, and he uses somewhat suspect analogies with the animal world to demonstrate the existence of a drive in humans just as deep-seated as the urge for pleasure. His desire to support his theory with concrete organic instances leads him to generalizations about animals that he cannot substantiate.

Returning to Rohman's arguments against Freud's presentations of animality, we might see this as quite damning evidence of his framing of the therapeutic process of analysis as in conflict with an animal substratum of the psyche. As an assessment of Freud alone, there is likely a good deal of truth to that. But an account of the imagination of exchanges with the animal element in the human psyche in the modernist period would do well to supplement Freud's view with one that Stevens articulates in the tenth section of "Esthétique du Mal":

He had studied the nostalgias. In these
He sought the most grossly maternal, the creature
Who most fecundly assuaged him, the softest
Woman with a vague moustache and not the mauve
Maman. His anima liked its animal
And liked it unsubjected, so that home
Was a return to birth, a being born
Again in the savagest severity,
Desiring fiercely, the child of a mother fierce
In his body, fiercer in his mind, merciless
To accomplish the truth in his intelligence. (CPP 283)

The conservative dimension of animal instinct that Freud remarks is also described by Stevens, in a scene in which an anima's animal produces "a return to birth." Like Freud, Stevens associates the animal with an instinctive reversion to origins. But for Stevens the "savagest severity" is not a drive to be mastered or overcome. It is a desire to "accomplish the truth." There is here no split between the Darwinian and the Freudian subject—what the subject of this poem wants is to be at home as an animal. Seeing Stevens' encounters with animals as probing through layers of complex attitudes and responses can give us a sense of the ferocity of this desire.

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Notes

¹It is possible that Stevens' reference to Freud in this poem is connected with comments he made about him in two essays. He claims in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" that Freud advocates a "surrender to reality" and is therefore "inimical to poetry" (CPP 651). He claims in "The Irrational Element in Poetry" that Freud, although

"responsible for very little in poetry," has "given the irrational a legitimacy that it never had before" (CPP 783). I am though inclined to read this poem as focusing on Freud's method of reading for subsurface dynamics and latent content because of the last lines of the poem: "And quickly understand, without their flesh, / How truly they had not been what they were" (CPP 319).

²In this his animals can be contrasted, in schematic terms, with those of Marianne Moore, whose "stable, often hard-crustured animals," according to Mary Allen, "more closely resemble *things* than any in American literature" (98).

³For my discussion of this discomfort, see "Masculine Fecundity and 'Overinclusiveness': Imagery of Pregnancy in Wallace Stevens' Poetry," 60–65.

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The Dangerous Voice of the Realist: Wallace Stevens' Extended Critique of Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*

RAINA KOSTOVA

ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO clear record that Wallace Stevens read Sigmund Freud's 1920 groundbreaking essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, his poetry and prose demonstrate that he was inclined to a Freudian line of thinking related to the pleasure principle and the reality principle, as noted by scholars such as Roy Harvey Pearce, Alan Bass, Rainer Emig and Kathleen Dale.¹ Stevens' interest in the psychoanalytic sense of reality, however, has been most strongly emphasized by one of his most passionate advocates, Harold Bloom. Bloom considers Stevens' propensity toward "realism" so clearly pronounced that he argues that Stevens is "a naturally Freudian poet" (POC 169). According to Bloom, Stevens appears as the descendant of several traditions that share "the quest for a reality principle, a moral, aesthetic, and psychological reductiveness willing to risk the ruin brought about by the destruction of illusions, in oneself and in others, by knowing the worst truths about our condition" (POC 54). As Bloom indicates, this "reductive fallacy" (POC 54), celebrating the "very ecstasy of reduction" (POC 53), is pivotal to Stevens' renowned poem "The Snow Man," and it culminates in his 1942 long poem "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (POC 88). In this respect both poems yield to Freud's appeal for an "education to reality" (FI 86), which will eventually reconcile men to the hostility of the external world as the decline of religious belief becomes more prominent.

In this essay I plan to present an alternative to Bloom's interpretation of Stevens' response to Freud's call for the destruction of illusions (through a systematic "education to reality") as it appears in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927). For this purpose, I will shift the method of inquiry from a strictly psychoanalytical approach to an analysis of Stevens' critique of Freud as a cultural figure, for as such, Freud becomes arguably one of the major adversaries of poetry and the imagination. Stevens explicitly criticizes Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* as "inimical to poetry" (CPP 651) and admits that Freud's is the dangerous "voice of the realist" (CPP 651), which, as I will suggest, is the voice of scientific rationalism. As Stevens' essay "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" implies, scientific rational-

ism presents a danger to the imaginative potential of human development because it restricts reality to the forms of logical thought. The danger that Stevens foresees in the popularity of scientific rationalism is that it asserts itself, especially in Freud's later work, as the only legitimate replacement for religious belief. It is precisely this dogmatic aspect of Freud's essay that Stevens resents, suggesting that rationalism not only forecloses the development of the creative imagination, but that it also partakes of the inflexible nature of religious structures. Both "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" present a critique of rationalism as a substitute for religion, since, as Stevens implies, the desire for objective logical thought is as problematic as the desire for religious belief. The problem that Stevens sees in Freud's rationalism is that it closely resembles the nature of religion as an illusion, that is, as a wish-fulfillment. As it appears in Stevens' later poetry and prose, Freud's appeal for the destruction of illusions with the help of scientific thought ironically works as an illusion because of the unconditional faith in reason that it advocates. My interpretation does not intend to contest the psychoanalytical approaches to Stevens developed by Bloom, or by the scholars mentioned earlier, but rather to add to the understanding of the complexity and ambiguity of Freud's influence on Stevens.

The Future of an Illusion appeared in the English translation of W. D. Robson-Scott in 1928, a few months after its original publication, and according to Joan Richardson, Stevens probably read it sometime in late 1928 or early 1929 (58). As he read *The Future of an Illusion*, Stevens left sections of the book heavily underlined and took notes on the inside back flap of the dust jacket for future reference (Richardson 54). *The Future of an Illusion* starts with a concern for the future of Western civilization as it experiences the decline of religious belief. Religion, as it appears here, is "the most important part of the psychical inventory of a culture" (FI 24). Freud defines culture as "all the knowledge and power that men have acquired in order to master the forces of nature and win resources from her for the satisfaction of human needs; and . . . all the necessary arrangements whereby men's relations to each other, and in particular the distribution of the attainable riches, may be regulated" (FI 9). Religion has functioned as the most valuable asset of culture because historically it has protected human beings both from nature and from their own destructive instinctual wishes.

Although beneficial to human needs and survival, culture, which Freud sees as synonymous with civilization (FI 8–9), is continuously faced with hostility by the individual. This resentment is caused by the sacrifices imposed upon the individual by culture, so that "a communal existence may be possible" (FI 9). Freud observes that in his lifetime the rise of discontent in individuals is proportional to the decline of religious belief, and predicts that this phenomenon could endanger the stability and the very existence of culture. To counteract this danger, Freud proposes a practical solution to the enmity associated with the decline of religion and, consequently,

with the decline of culture. He suggests a rational shaping of civilization, so that in the future, culture firstly “diminish[es] the burden of the instinctual sacrifices imposed on men; secondly, . . . reconcil[es] them to those that must necessarily remain; and thirdly, . . . compensate[es] them for these” (FI 12).

Religion has successfully fulfilled these functions in the past precisely because it has offered satisfactory compensations for men’s sacrifices to civilization by allowing the gods to “adjust the defects and evils of culture” (FI 31). However, since religion has no rational and empirical foundation, Freud concludes that in an age marked by the ever growing power of knowledge, religion “has the weakest possible claim to authenticity” (FI 47). Natural science has pointed to the “errors” contained in religious documents (FI 67), and the “comparative method of research has revealed the fatal resemblance between religious ideas revered by us and the mental productions of primitive ages and peoples” (FI 67–68). In particular, Freud questions religion’s authenticity from a psychoanalytical standpoint by disclosing its psychical origin as analogous to the infantile helplessness of children typical of the Oedipal stage of development (FI 40–42). The centrality of the father figure in most religions, thus, appears as the effect of the infantile desire for protection recurring in the adult’s psyche. In this sense, as Freud has claimed earlier in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), religion is a mental production (FI 48) that, like poetry for Stevens, helps us to live our lives.

Having specified that such mental productions, like religious ideas, are illusions associated with infantilism, Freud proposes that these illusions act as wish-fulfillments. To clarify his understanding of illusions, he distinguishes them from errors, and suggests that only errors in which one’s wishes play a key part can be considered illusions. For example, Aristotle’s belief that vermin evolved out of manure was purely an error, while Columbus’ belief that he had discovered India was an illusion, because of the significant part played by his wishes in his error (FI 53).² Thus although religion has been able to fulfill the strongest wishes of mankind, such as the desires for “the brotherhood of man and the reduction of suffering” (FI 93), it is an illusion comparable to the obsessional neurosis of children at the Oedipal stage of development. Freud foresees that as children outgrow the Oedipal drama, civilization will naturally overcome its neurotic stage of development marked by the centrality of religious belief (FI 92).

Despite its increasing fragility in the early twentieth century, however, religion for Freud is far more dangerous than beneficial to culture (FI 62). He suggests that the greatest threat will occur as the uneducated masses discover its illusionary nature: “So long as they [the masses] do not discover that people no longer believe in God, all is well. But they [will] discover it, infallibly, and would do so even if this work of mine were not published” (FI 68–69). Thus Freud warns against the destructive potential of the disillusioned majority: “If you must not kill your neighbour, solely because God has forbidden it and will sorely avenge it in this or the other

life, and you then discover that there is no God so that one need not fear his punishment, then you will certainly kill without hesitation, and you could only be prevented from this by mundane force" (FI 69).

To offset this danger Freud calls for a "mental awakening," which should lead to a "fundamental revision of the relation between culture and religion" (FI 69). This is what Freud also specifies as "an education to reality," which should reconcile men to the cruelty of reality and help them maintain the peaceful existence among themselves. This education requires the establishment of a "purely rational basis for cultural laws" (FI 73), which will "enrich culture" (FI 84) and make life tolerable so that no one will be oppressed by culture (FI 87). Thus, the main purpose of *The Future of an Illusion* is to advocate the idea that "it is possible for scientific work to discover something about the reality of the world through which we can increase our power and according to which we can regulate our life" (FI 95). Freud concludes his essay with unquestionable confidence in the power of scientific reason to provide an alternative to religion. As he addresses his imaginary opponent and supporter of religious ideas, Freud insists that the future of civilization is in the hands of the god Logos, who has a much better chance than the traditional deities of meeting the needs of modern civilization.

The impression that *The Future of an Illusion* left on Stevens was apparently a lasting one, since he decided to revisit it in 1941, as he was preparing for his Princeton lecture "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words." The essay outlines Stevens' defense of poetry in light of the growing politicization and rationalization of modern life. Like Freud in the latter half of *The Future of an Illusion*, Stevens adopts the first person plural "we" as the predominant narrative voice, and explains that he refers to himself and others not as "individuals but as representatives of a state of mind" (CPP 645). Showing his concern for the future of poetry, Stevens describes the political state of affairs in the United States and the world, and points out that "the pressure of reality" has disturbed the balance between reality and the imagination in modern society. Stevens makes it clear that by reality he means "external reality," including the "extraordinary pressure of news . . . of the collapse of our system, or, call it, of life" (CPP 655). This ominous aspect of external reality in "The Noble Rider" has been recognized by scholars such as Joan Richardson and Harold Bloom as a reference to the ancient Greek god of necessity, Ananke, featured by Freud in *The Future of an Illusion*.³

Regarding the state of modern collective consciousness, Stevens, apropos of Freud, claims, "Little of what we have believed has been true" (CPP 655). Unlike T. S. Eliot, however, Stevens exhibits no nostalgia for a past of unquestioned faith; like Freud, he posits lost belief as a matter of fact. Even before his encounter with Freud's work, as a young man Stevens described his lack of belief in traditional religious formulations as something he did not have particular difficulties accepting.⁴ Yet in "The Noble Rider

and the Sound of Words," he announces the evacuation of belief as a point of crisis in modern civilization. Stevens thus shares Freud's concern for the future of civilization faced with the demoralizing effect of a sudden retreat of religion. As the poet recounts, "All the great things have been denied and we live in an intricacy of new and local mythologies, political, economic, poetic, which are asserted with an ever-enlarging incoherence. This is accompanied by an absence of any authority except force, operative or imminent" (CPP 652).

Despite Stevens' apparent agreement with Freud that physical violence is the most problematic effect of the decline of religion, "The Noble Rider" exhibits severe criticism of Freud at the very mention of his name. In fact, within the remarkable eclectic list of philosophical and artistic talents that the essay refers to (ranging from Plato, Verrocchio, Cervantes, Vico, Shakespeare, Coleridge, and Wordsworth to Bernard Russell, James Joyce, Picasso, and Virginia Woolf), Freud's name, along with that of Descartes, stands out as probably the most resented. The Freud that Stevens criticizes, however, is not the Freud of the unconscious, or, as Stevens puts it, "the subconscious," but the Freud of scientific rationalism as expressed in *The Future of an Illusion*. The following account of *The Future of an Illusion*, from the "The Noble Rider," is the longest explicit reference to Freud that Stevens ever made:

Boileau's remark that Descartes had cut poetry's throat is a remark that could have been made respecting a great many people during the last hundred years, and of no one more aptly than of Freud, who, as it happens, was familiar with it and repeats it in his *Future of an Illusion*. The object of that essay was to suggest a surrender to reality. His premise was that it is the unmistakable character of the present situation not that the promises of religion have become smaller but that they appear less credible to people. He notes the decline of religious belief and disagrees with the argument that man cannot in general do without the consolation of what he calls the religious illusion and that without it he would not endure the cruelty of reality. His conclusion is that man must venture at last into the hostile world and that this may be called education to reality. There is much more in that essay inimical to poetry and not least the observation in one of the final pages that "The voice of the intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest until it has gained a hearing." This, I fear, is intended to be the voice of the realist. (CPP 651)

Stevens' take on Freud seems quite unusual compared to that of the mainstream understanding of Freud as a defender of poetry, since he famously gave credit to the poets for intuiting his psychoanalytic insights long before he did: "We may take comfort, too, for the slow advances of

our scientific knowledge in the words of the poet" (*BPP* 78). Joseph Riddel finds Stevens' particular reading of Freud so aberrant that he considers it a "deliberate misreading of Freud as a kind of positivist" (23). Riddel notes that Stevens' earlier essay ("The Irrational Element in Poetry") had "heralded him [Freud] for giving authority to the irrational" (23). The same ambivalence toward Freud can be noted in "The Noble Rider" essay as well, since the sentence preceding the above quoted segment seems paradoxically to give credit to Freud as an advocate of the imaginative: "The interest in the subconscious and in surrealism shows the tendency toward the imaginative" (*CPP* 651). It is this tendency toward the imaginative that Stevens advances throughout the essay and his poetry in general.

What Stevens finds problematic with Freud, however, is his unquestionable belief in scientific reason, or the god Logos, who seems to have replaced other possibilities for the future according to the father of psychoanalysis. The latter half of Freud's essay *The Future of an Illusion* reads as a genuine futurist manifesto as it announces the inevitable success of science in achieving the same wishes that humans have traditionally expressed in the forms of religion—love of man and the decrease of suffering. Addressing his imaginary religious opponent, Freud claims:

The primacy of the intellect certainly lies in the far, far, but still probably not infinite, distance. And as it will presumably set itself the same aims that you expect to be realized by your God—of course within human limits, in so far as external reality, *Ανάγκη*, allows it—the brotherhood of man and the reduction of suffering. . . . Of these wishes our god *Λόγος*, will realize those which external nature permits, but he will do this very gradually, only in the incalculable future and for other children of men. (*FI* 93–94)

Stevens found the rationalistic resolve in these words astounding, as he attributed them to the dangerous voice of "the realist." The sense of threat from the increasing rationalization of life appears also in a letter that Stevens wrote to Henry Church, his lifelong friend and sponsor for the Princeton lecture. The letter, dated January 30, 1941, offers a condensed one-sentence summary of the essay "The Noble Rider," which Stevens was about to start writing: "[The essay] will trace the idea of nobility through what may be called the disaster of reality, and particularly the reality of words" (*L* 386). Reality, as understood here, is not only external reality, Ananke, but Logos, whose original Greek meaning "word" and "speech" the letter to Church recalls. Stevens finds this reality, centered on rational thought, menacing and even disastrous: first because it stood in the way of his own poetic career throughout his life, as he had often to relinquish his poetic inspiration so that he could first secure a comfortable material existence as an executive in a large insurance company. Second, but more

important, reality based on scientific rationalism, as formulated by Freud, stood in the way of the future of poetry and the imagination, since they seemed to be marginalized by people who saw rational thought as their primary means of understanding and shaping reality.

As on other occasions, in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" Stevens instructs the young poets to counteract the forces that deem poetry irrelevant to empirical reality. In this respect he claims, "A possible poet must be a poet capable of resisting or evading the pressure of the reality of this last degree, with the knowledge that the degree of today may become a deadlier degree tomorrow" (*CPP* 659). Stevens undeniably refers to the reality of increased physical violence throughout the world. However, we can also interpret his statement in terms of his assessment of the state of art during his lifetime, as he insists that "the idea of nobility exists in art today only in degenerate forms or in a much diminished state, if, in fact, it exists at all . . . [and] this is due to failure in the relation between the imagination and reality" (*CPP* 649–50). Nobility in this context is closely associated with the sublime imagination, whose historical development Stevens traces since Plato's *Phaedrus* to suggest that such imagination has progressively retreated from modern literature and art. The pressure of reality, which Stevens specifies as the leading cause for this phenomenon, coincides with the tendency toward denotative expressions in language and art. The works of Locke and Hobbes, both of whom "denounced the connotative use of words as an abuse" (*CPP* 650), appear as examples of the progressive development of this trend. Stevens' renunciation of Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* appears in the same paragraph, only a few lines after this comment, which implies that Stevens saw Freud's essay as exerting a similar pressure of "the denotative" against "the connotative" in contemporary societal discourse. As Stevens proposes, "A tendency toward the connotative, whether in language or elsewhere, cannot continue against the pressure of reality" (*CPP* 652). Thus, it seems that for Stevens, external reality, or Ananke, extends beyond the natural and societal phenomena, which Freud defines as threatening to the individual, to include Freud's very solution to the problem of religious crisis—a worldwide education based on logical reasoning. Stevens proceeds even to categorize the rationalistic predisposition of his contemporaries in psychoanalytic terms, indicating, "We have been a little insane about the truth. We have had an obsession" (*CPP* 663). The unconditional search for universal truth, therefore, mimics the pursuits toward religion, which Freud had identified as "the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity" (*FI* 76).

Despite the brevity of Stevens' direct references to Freud, not only "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" but also several of Stevens' most prominent later poems focus on the declining power of religion and the necessity to find an adequate replacement for religious ideas. In poems such as "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" and "Esthétique du Mal," as well as "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," Stevens questions the

aspirations of rational thought to provide an alternative to religion. It is not that rationalism lacks supporters or political potential, but, as Stevens implies, its ideas are based on illusions similar to the religious illusions, which act as wish-fulfillments. As I shall suggest, in each of the three poems, Stevens indicates that such "rational" illusions are not harmless, as Freud had claimed,⁵ but that they are detrimental to the development of society because they limit the scope of the imagination to rationalistic formulations of reality.

As evident from its highly pedagogical and didactic nature, Stevens' "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" stages precisely what Freud calls an "education to reality." The opening of the first section, "It Must Be Abstract," has usually been interpreted as Stevens' advice to the ephebe, the ("virile") poet youth of the future, to face reality with clarity and detachment:

Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea
Of this invention, this invented world,
The inconceivable idea of the sun.

You must become an ignorant man again
And see the sun again with an ignorant eye
And see it clearly in the idea of it. (*CPP* 329)

Harold Bloom sees the beginning of this canto as permeated by "the familiar [Nietzschean] desire to be stripped of all metaphysical illusion[s]" (*POC* 176), and J. Hillis Miller likewise proposes that "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" is one of Stevens' poems that "keep close to the quality of life as it is" (147). These two interpretations reaffirm the idea that Stevens most likely perpetuated Freud's appeal for dismissing religion, along with other cultural beliefs, as an illusion, so that one could see plainly into the world as it is—that is, in what Stevens calls its "first idea." For Bloom the First Idea, "though imagined, is a thing; that is, the "first idea" is man, the earth, or the sun washed clean by being taken up into the imagination" (*POC* 189). It is in this sense that Bloom understands Stevens' strong attraction to Freud's plea to face the cruelty of reality in a world devoid of metaphysical illusions.

I find Stevens' alleged acquiescence to Freud here, however, a bit overstated in view of the subsequent stanza of the above-quoted canto. Still instructing the ephebe in the significant poetic matters, the poetic voice, presumably Stevens' own voice, proclaims:

Never suppose an inventing mind as source
Of this idea nor for that mind compose
A voluminous master folded in his fire. (*CPP* 329)

The idea that Stevens references is the “first idea” that Bloom discusses; that is, the idea that the ephebe “must become an ignorant man again / And see the sun again with an ignorant eye,” so that he can perceive the world clearly without the metaphysical formulations of the past. The repetition of the words “ignorant” and “again” in the second stanza, however, points to the inherent irony in Stevens’ teaching: paradoxically the ephebe needs education so that he can eventually become ignorant again as a result of serious methodological training. Thus the young poet has consciously to regain the ignorance that the first man on earth felt, or that he himself experienced as an infant. Although the paradoxical formulation unmistakably resembles the romantic ideals of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Schiller, it seems that Stevens does not apply these ideals literally, but rather underscores the ironic nature of romantic education through the rhetoric of repeating “ignorant” and “again.” Stevens’ skepticism about the possibility of an objective perception of the world through systematic training appears also as a challenge to Freud’s unquestionable faith in an “education to reality.”

The next lesson from “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” is no less controversial, as it starts with the injunction to “never suppose an inventing mind as source / Of this idea.” Formulated in the negative imperative, this lesson undermines the validity of the previous one, which advised the ephebe to become an ignorant man again. If Stevens intended the ephebe to seek objectivity in “the plain sense of things,” why would he suggest to him the possibility that the idea of objectivity itself is an imaginative construction, or maybe a new illusion that we happen to live by? As he adds in canto VIII of the poem, “The first idea is an imagined thing” (*CPP* 334). Thus, in addition to undermining the possibility of both authentic and regained innocence, Stevens implies that he considers “disillusion as the last illusion” (*CPP* 399). Despite the possibility that Freud’s call for objectivity is the latest illusion, the systematic search for truth is far from harmless, as “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” suggests:

and yet so poisonous

Are the ravishments of truth, so fatal to
The truth itself. . . . (*CPP* 330)

The poem’s warning against the threat of the “ravishments of truth” brings to mind Stevens’ allegiance to Nietzsche over Freud, which Bloom observes in a number of Stevens’ later poems. Like Freud, Nietzsche calls for the demystification of the inner self as a fiction (*POC* 189), but unlike Freud, Nietzsche more considerably emphasizes one’s constant self-reinvention and transformation (*POC* 200).

“Esthétique du Mal,” too, seems to foreground the precarious potential of realism to distort reality, as the poem resonates with Stevens’ idea

becomes, / In misted contours, credible day again" (CPP 401). In "Esthétique du Mal" Stevens implies that the celebration of positivism emerges from people's fear of the existential void after the "blue" phenomena of religion have left them. Thus when "the shaken realist" first sees reality devoid of its former imaginative constructions and recognizes its terrifying emptiness, he hastily substitutes his former denial of religious belief with the affirmation of his own faith in reason. It is the realist's "passion for yes" that is his embracing of rationalism, though, that Stevens finds much more tragic than the tragedy of the existential void. In this sense, tragedy "may have begun / Again, in the imagination's new beginning, / In the yes of the realist."

Stevens, however, was prone to believing that Freud's own unrelenting insistence on the soft, yet powerful voice of logos was an illusion. Freud himself admitted this possibility to his imaginary opponent: "If this belief [in science and Logos] is an illusion, then we are in the same position as you" (FI 95). Stevens' idea that "The more intensely one feels something that one likes the more one is willing for it to be what it is" (CPP 913) corresponds to Freud's implication that human beliefs tend to fulfill people's strongest desires.⁷ The impossibility of avoiding illusions appears so radical in Stevens' poetry that only if we could go out of our natural human elements—air and earth—could we entertain the possibility of dismissing illusions. Only after returning from the moon (as in "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas"), "drowned in the air of difference," could we forsake our beliefs, and "naked of any illusion, in poverty, / In the exactest poverty," could we feel "that return to the subtle centre" (CPP 233). The repetitive occurrence of the conditional mood, as well as the exaggeration of poverty as the "exactest" poverty, however, undermines the genuine intent of the poem to seek disillusion. Instead, as in the beginning of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," it appears to underscore the fundamental impossibility of reaching beyond our convictions and desires. In this sense *disillusion*, that is, the lack of illusions, itself becomes a new belief system, or a new illusion.

From a Stevensian point of view, Freud's rationalism is deceptive not only because it obeys our innermost desires for the future of civilization, but also because it overlooks the power of the imagination inherent in our cultural traditions. As implied in "The Bed of Old John Zeller"—named after one of Stevens' Dutch ancestors whose records Stevens discovered in the latter part of his life as he got seriously interested in his genealogy—we inherit our desires, and hence, our imagination, from our ancestors. As he puts it, "It is more difficult to evade / That habit of wishing and to accept the structure / Of things as the structure of ideas" (CPP 287). In this sense, we cannot reach true "decreation" (CPP 750) of historical realities (as imaginative constructions) because they are so pervasive in our own habit of thinking that we inherit even the desire for a rational understanding of the world from our predecessors' metaphysical obsession for *the*

truth. Thus, Stevens implies that in any present and future imaginative order of reality, there is and will be a residue of the imagination of the past. As Freud too admits: "If you wish to expel religion from our European civilization you can only do it through another system of doctrines, and from the outset this would take over all the psychological characteristics of religion, the same sanctity, rigidity and intolerance, the same prohibition of thought in self-defense" (*FI* 89).

Thus, Stevens' image of New Haven from "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" is also structured around the same demands that religion had established in the past, even though the inhabitants of the city might believe that they have disowned their religious ideas. As Joan Richardson remarks, it was after having read Freud that Stevens started to doubt his own agnosticism and realized that religion, which he had questioned much earlier, might still have had after all a subtle but unyielding presence in his life (327).

In "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," like the young Stevens, the ruler of New Haven, Professor Eucalyptus, seems to believe in his freedom from religion. Replacing the search for god with a search for reality, Professor Eucalyptus resembles the Freudian figure of the realist: "Professor Eucalyptus said, 'The search / For reality is as momentous as / The search for god'" (*CPP* 410). A few lines earlier the professor appears as a new metaphysician who seeks truth in the materiality of the world: "The dry eucalyptus seeks god in the rainy cloud. / Professor Eucalyptus of New Haven seeks him / In New Haven with an eye that does not look / Beyond the object" (*CPP* 405). In addition to the explicit, yet undecipherable reference to the Australian evergreen eucalyptus tree (which here strangely enough is dry),⁸ the name of the central character in this case could possibly refer to the tree worshipped by the Saxons, which St. Boniface cut down. Freud recounts the story in *The Future of an Illusion*: "When Saint Boniface felled the tree which was venerated as sacred by the Saxons, those who stood round expected some fearful event to follow the outrage. It did not happen, and the Saxons were baptized" (*FI* 70). Stevens appears to respond to that Freudian remark in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven": "What was real turned into something most unreal, / Bare beggar-tree, hung low for fruited red / In isolated moments—isolations / Were false" (*CPP* 413). Applying Freud's own example of defeating illusions, Stevens projects the idea that Freud himself, as Professor Eucalyptus and as the figure of the realist, is a promoter of illusions in the form of logic, science, and truth. As such the figure is caught up in the "ancient cycle" of taking one's wishes for the basis of one's belief.

In canto IV of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," Stevens introduces an image of a man who, like Professor Eucalyptus, "has fought / Against illusion": "The plainness of plain things is savagery, / As: the last plainness of a man who has fought / Against illusion and was, in a great grinding / Of growling teeth, and falls at night, snuffed out / By the obese

opiates of sleep" (CPP 399). Since the defeat of illusions is the core purpose of *The Future of an Illusion*, we cannot dismiss the possibility that the "plain" man might refer to Freud as a rationalist. As Michael Palmer points out, Freud considered the destruction of illusions as a major aspiration of his life's work (72). In canto IX of the poem, Stevens pictures a whole society of "realists," who, trying to discard any deviation from reality, "keep coming back and coming back / To the real":

We keep coming back and coming back
To the real: to the hotel instead of the hymns
That fall upon it out of the wind. We seek

The poem of pure reality, untouched
By trope or deviation, straight to the word,
Straight to the transfixing object, to the object

At the exactest point at which it is itself,
Transfixing by being purely what it is,
A view of New Haven, say, through the certain eye,

The eye made clear of uncertainty, with the sight
Of simple seeing, without reflection. We seek
Nothing beyond reality. (CPP 402)

Like most of Stevens' poems, this canto is highly ambiguous in relation to his own theoretical speculations on poetry and the imagination. On the one hand it seems merely to observe the necessary conditions for existence in the modern world: that is, the necessity for overcoming past metaphysical illusions and experiencing "pure reality." In this context, "reality" itself does not bring up negative connotations; in "Adagia" Stevens even claims, "The ultimate value is reality" (CPP 906). Elsewhere in his letters he implies that the necessary angel (from the title of his most significant collection of essays) is not the angel of the imagination, but the angel of reality (L 852). As long as reality exists in a balanced relationship with the imagination—that is, as long as it does not "pressure" the imagination to the point of the latter's dismissal from everyday life—reality does not pose a threat, but is rather a necessity. In this case, the search for the real is a movement of collective sensibility and thought that Stevens recognizes as essential to normal existence.

On the other hand, Stevens seems to oppose what he calls "realism." The statement immediately following the above-quoted proposition from "Adagia" claims, "Realism is a corruption of reality" (CPP 906). It is in light of this statement that we can understand Stevens' figure of the "rigid realist," and consequently, the figure of Freud from *The Future of an Illusion*. In this sense, the poem seems to maintain its ironic distance from

“reality” and its connotations. The repetitive pattern of the clause “We keep coming back and coming back / To the real,” as well as the emphasis on a “pure reality, untouched / By trope or deviation, straight to the word, / Straight to the transfixing object, to the object,” suggests a kind of dogmatism that forecloses any possibility for difference. This overstated accent on the pure transparency of the real recalls the rigorous thought of the realist, who will not accept any compromises with the imagination as part of his value system. As in “Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas,” where the character looks for the “exactest poverty” (*CPP* 233) in outer space, here “we” reach “to the object / At the exactest point at which it is itself.” This insistence upon “the real” resonates with the paradox at the beginning of “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction,” and like that poem, “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” seems to intercept the call for an objective reality with its rhetoric of irony and overstatement. For Stevens the advocacy of rational and scientific thought partakes of an idealism that acts in the same way as illusions do for Freud, that is, as wish-fulfillments.

The famous ending of “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” contributes to the paradox in the search for an objective reality as an illusion:

That’s it: the more than rational distortion,
The fiction that results from feeling. Yes, that.

They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne.
We shall return at twilight from the lecture
Pleased that the irrational is rational. . . . (*CPP* 351)

The emphasis on “They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne” calls to mind Professor Eucalyptus of New Haven, possibly as representative of the academic culture of Ivy League universities. The line also elicits the emphasis on rigor and precision associated with Freud’s “education to reality,” as discussed earlier, and it seems ironic in the same sense. The statement is also at odds with Stevens’ often quoted last line from “The Man on the Dump”: “Where was it one first heard of the truth? The the” (*CPP* 186). Stevens’ take on Freud, which I emphasize here, seems to agree with the judgment that scholars such as David Riesman and James DiCenso have passed on Freud. Riesman argues that Freud’s “whole effort as a scientist was to make the irrational understandable—to capture it for rationality” (24), while DiCenso points out that “one of [*The Future of an Illusion*’s] structural themes is the transition from irrational to rational morality” (35). Of course, these seem to be reductive views of Freud’s life work; yet, since Stevens was clearly exposed to and influenced significantly by *The Future of an Illusion*, the figure of the realist in his later poetry is inseparable from Stevens’ overall understanding of Freud.

Although Stevens would agree with Freud about the nature of religion as an illusion—he writes in “Adagia,” “God and the imagination are one” (CPP 914) and “God is a postulate of the ego” (CPP 910)—he disagrees with the leading idea in Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion* that the future belongs to reason in the form of scientific advancement. Stevens proposes an alternative to that future: “God is a symbol for something that can as well take other forms, as, for example, the form of high poetry” (CPP 907). High poetry can be considered synonymous with what he calls a “supreme fiction,” and poetry has the double meaning of poetry as verse and poetry as an established (or a future) order of reality: “Every poem is a poem within a poem: the poem of the idea within the poem of the words” (CPP 912). Stevens continues: “The poetic view of life is larger than any of its poems (a larger thing than any poem); and to recognize this is the beginning of the recognition of the poetic spirit” (CPP 912). These statements suggest that Stevens sees religion as “the [larger] poetic view of life” or “the poem of the idea.” All specific “poem[s] of words” partake of that larger imagination, which is also the collective imagination of a culture at a particular period. Maybe it is in this sense too that we can understand Stevens’ fragments: “The greatest piece of fiction: Greek mythology. Classical mythology but Greek above Latin” (CPP 915).

From his reading of *The Future of an Illusion*, as well as from his implied references to Freud (in the figure of “the rigid realist”), it seems possible that Stevens recognized the true genius of Freud, that is, his powerful “poetic spirit” that could contribute to the establishment of a future order of reality. It is because of Freud’s serious poetic potential and skillful use of language that Stevens is so particularly critical of him, and, as I suggest, considers him among his most serious opponents. However, the Freud that Stevens criticizes so severely seems to be also quite an un-Freudian version of Freud himself. As Todd Dufresne points out, Freud expressed disappointment with *The Future of an Illusion* and was highly self-critical of the finished manuscript, even before its publication: “In October of 1927, referring to the advance proofs of his manuscript, Freud admitted to Sandor Ferenczi that *The Future* ‘already strikes me as childish, I basically think differently, consider this work analytically frail and insufficient as a confession’ ” (28).

Several Freudian scholars who have studied *The Future of an Illusion* agree not that the essay is “childish” or un-Freudian, but that it partakes of Freud’s creative imagination expressed in his other great works. As Daniel Wildlöcher argues, the illusions that Freud discusses in his understanding of individual, as well as collective, psychology “have a compulsive power and are perceived as [psychic] realities” (327). The psychoanalyst, as Wildlöcher notes, is part of a tradition of creativity “that opens the way to discovering the power of illusion existing in the unconscious id, and consequently in our dreams. . . . Psychoanalysis, by making the ego conscious of its illusions, of its omnipotent wish fulfillment fantasies (or destructive

fantasies), makes the ego capable of playing with these realities" (327). Formulated in this way, the practice of Freudian psychoanalysis helps patients recognize their neurotic symptoms as based on illusions (and disillusionments) and achieve mental health as a result of detaching themselves from and "playing" with these illusions. The possibility of such detachment from an illusion is part of Stevens' poetics of his "supreme fiction." Although the detachment from previous ideologies or states of mind cannot be absolute, as "The future must bear within it every past" (*L* 373), change is integral to the flow of life, and every established belief system changes as a result of the fading of a previous one and the emergence of different worldviews projected by "extraordinary" individuals.⁹

Both Michael Palmer and James DiCenso underscore Freud's creative capability in positing figures, such as the primal father and Oedipus, as foundational to human psychology. Palmer also notes the discrepancies between the Freudian sense of illusion and D. H. Winnicott's sense of illusion. These strongly resemble the discrepancies between Freud and Stevens discussed in this paper: "So art is the creation of poetic illusion, enabling the artist to fashion and communicate an inner world of his own devising. What Freud sees as a contradiction of reality thus becomes for Winnicott the vehicle for human creativity" (73). Paul Ricoeur is among the advocates of Freud as a creative mind who contributed to the establishment of thought that cannot be reduced to rationalism. Following Husserl, Ricoeur asserts that Freud is one of the champions of "the mythopoetic imagination" of origins as manifested in the origins of totemism and monotheism. As Ricoeur puts it, "the father figure is not simply a return of the repressed; it is rather the result of a true process of creation" (73), and "religion is more an art of bearing the hardships of life than an indefinite exorcism of the paternal accusation" (77).

Harold Bloom, too, in his collection on Freud from the *Modern Critical Views* series, takes a more appreciative stance of the father of psychoanalysis, as he considers his reality principle, or death drive, as a true "catastrophe creation" in the sense of a Gnostic belief system, since catastrophe "restores the Abyss, while any order that steals its materials from the Abyss is only a sickening to a false creation" (*SF* 156–57). In this sense Freud lacks the reductiveness that Bloom observes in relation to Stevens. As Bloom puts it, "Against the literalism and repetition of the death-drive, Freud sets, early on, the high figuration of his poetic will to an immortality. . . . Only the strongest poets, and Sigmund Freud, are capable of so luminous a vision of Eros" (*SF* 162).

It is precisely because Stevens recognized the strong poet in Freud that he exhibited such strong judgments on the few works that he read. Although acknowledging the strength of Freud's vision on religion as wish-fulfillment, Stevens feared that Freud's voice from *The Future of an Illusion* was the "dangerous" voice of the realist who intended to constrict the future belief orders to that of Logos. As I have suggested in this essay,

Stevens' poetry and prose exhibit a sense of ambivalence toward Freud, alternating between the poet's simultaneous attraction and resistance to the different (Freudian and, maybe un-Freudian) aspects of the writer of *The Future of an Illusion*. In the end, Stevens' resistance seems not to be directed specifically against Freud as a thinker, but against the figure of the realist that Stevens believed Freud could potentially become for others. If Stevens' reading of Freud is a deliberate misreading, then, as Joseph Riddel suggests, it is a misreading that purposely defends against other possible misreadings of Freud that could celebrate him as the truth-seeker and positivist that he was not. As Stevens claimed, "in the long run the truth does not matter" (CPP 915).

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Notes

¹The persistence of the reality principle in Stevens' earlier poetry has been suggested by Roy Harvey Pearce, who observes that, although Stevens never uses the term in the poems before *Transport to Summer* and *The Auroras of Autumn*, the Freudian reality principle nevertheless appears in the form of "a terribly bounded assurance of what, in the nature of things, our limitations in this world of rocks and stones and trees 'really' are" (66). Yet, in Pearce's account, Stevens does not eventually find a resolution to the problem of reality as a limitation but learns "to rejoice in both his day- and his night-time powers, but alternatively" (76). Pearce's postulation of Stevens' alternative rejoicing in both his day- and night-time powers evokes the variance and tension between Freud's pleasure principle and reality principle, which, as Rainer Emig claims, are employed in Stevens' essay "Three Academic Pieces" (78). In Emig's view, this tension resides in the uncertain status of the subject in Stevens' poetry, where "The choice is between not becoming a subject and becoming a mutilated and split one" (95). Alan Bass discovers a similar Freudian splitting of the ego in relation to "The Snow Man," which "requires us to think of a permanently unstable, oscillating reality that itself necessarily produces alternating, mutually complicated misery and enjoyment" (325). For Kathleen Dale, Stevens' understanding of resemblance as a source of pleasure relates to Freudian logic, as does Stevens' compulsion to break up ordered connections often associated with what Stevens calls "decreation" (CPP 750). Dale interprets this process as "an impulse toward joy and power that goes beyond the pleasure principle of which Freud spoke" (271).

²In the same place Freud also distinguishes between illusions and delusions, claiming that, although illusions may have a very small chance of corresponding to reality, delusions, on the other hand, are wish-fulfillments in radical conflict with reality (FI 54).

³Cf. Bloom, POC 8; Richardson 58.

⁴In a letter to his future wife, Elsie Moll Kachel, from March 10, 1907, when he was twenty-eight years old, Stevens wrote that although he was "not in the least religious," he was able to experience spiritual peace and happiness in nature: "The sun clears my spirit, if I may say that, and an occasional sight of the sea, and thinking of blue valleys, and the odor of the earth, and many things. Such things make a god of a man" (L 96).

⁵In relation to his renunciation of religious belief as an illusion, Freud writes, "I myself consider my undertaking to be completely harmless and free from danger" (FI 62).

⁶The most compelling interpretation that Bloom offers for Stevens' "passion for yes" is related to the figure of Hoon from "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon." Hoon, like Whitman in

"Song of Myself," says Bloom, "rises triumphantly to the challenge" of discovering the sublime within; thus, Hoon's senses exclusively shape the world of external reality for him, so that "nothing through which he moves is outside him" (POC 65). My reading of the "passion for yes," however, touches upon the possibility for irony and overstatement (as in the case of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"), allowed by the exaggerated emphasis on affirmative and celebratory language. My reading does not contradict Bloom's, as the image of the self-sustained intellect or imaginative mind in the figure of Hoon matches the image of the self-sufficient rationalist who celebrates his control over the external world. My point, however, is that there is a possibility that Stevens does not strictly identify himself with Hoon as the man of the poetic imagination, but allows for the possibility of a distance between himself and his character, as indicated by his language and as implied in the rest of the poems I discuss.

⁷The rhetoric of desire and its creative potential in Stevens is unquestionable, as Helen Vendler has demonstrated:

Desire, its illusions and its despairs, is Stevens' great subject. Another way to put it is to say that the human illusions engendered by desire are his great subject. We are helpless, he sees, in this matter. It is not possible for us to be without desire; we cannot help but engage in that process that Freudians call idealization and trace to Oedipal causes. (31–32)

I wholeheartedly agree with Vendler's interpretation, and, especially with the way it sheds light on canto II of the "It Must Be Abstract" section of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction: "The priest desires. The philosopher desires. / And not to have is the beginning of desire" (CPP 330).

⁸Harold Bloom observes, "The flowering leaf of the eucalyptus is a well-covered flower until it opens, hence the tree's name from the Greek for 'covered' or 'hidden.'" Bloom also suggests that Professor Eucalyptus could be a figure for a Yale Professor of Metaphysics, who is "himself a mapper of yesterday's earth and tomorrow's heaven" (POC 322). In addition, Bloom sees Professor Eucalyptus as merging with Stevens "as the meditation attains a majesty of fresh desire, as much as a part of this poem as in any vision of a reality principle" (322). My reading of the canto, however, proposes that Stevens maintains an ironic distance between himself and Professor Eucalyptus, the way he keeps distance between himself and the figure of "the realist," which is reminiscent of Freud.

⁹As Stevens puts it in "Adagia": "The individual partakes of the whole. Except in extraordinary cases he never adds to it" (CPP 902).

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Beyond Romance: Wallace Stevens with D. W. Winnicott on the Objects of Insight

GINA MASUCCI MACKENZIE AND DANIEL T. O'HARA

LOCAL OBJECTS" IS A LATE poem uncollected by Wallace Stevens in his lifetime but readily available now in the Library of America volume devoted to his poetry. Helen Vendler in *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire* first brings the poem fully to the attention of Stevens critics. She claims, in "no poem is Stevens' human loneliness more nakedly revealed," even as, at the same time, "we know more acutely the intense satisfaction he felt when desire found names for his local objects" (7).

We agree with this assessment of the poem's singular achievement. But we think, despite Vendler's poignantly suggestive reading, that the poem's quiet power remains barely plumbed. The poem's power and poignancy arise not only from its intensely, aching personal narrative, but also from the power of that narrative to capture and express Stevens' view of the modern condition. For Stevens, the poem is founded in the realization that the "local object," belonging to one small person in one small place, is all that truly exists. It ironically reveals what is missing—any viable larger picture or story—by focusing so relentlessly on the singular reality of personhood. Such a view, we find, is the naked mirror image of D. W. Winnicott's fully dressed theory of transitional objects explored in the playing space.

In *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott explains, "I have introduced the terms 'transitional objects' and 'transitional phenomena' for designation of the intermediate area of experience, between the thumb and the teddy bear, between oral erotism and the true object-relationship, between the primary creative activity and projection of what has already been introjected, between primary unawareness of indebtedness and the acknowledgement of indebtedness" (2). To simplify, the transitional object is the object-choice of the infant used to replace the breast, before the infant can choose a love object of her own. The transitional object allows the infant to gain control over her world, in much the same way Freud explains the infant does with the "FORT-DA" game.

The infant needs a means of bringing comfort to herself and a means of controlling her surroundings. The transitional object is one of the infant's own choice, thus allowing immediate control through the exercise

of freedom of choice. The object, as a stand-in for the mother's breast, gives comfort and psychological sustenance, allowing the infant's maturation process to continue.

Melanie Klein's work sheds much insight into what may occur when a transitional object is not chosen and the breast continues to dominate the child's world. As Winnicott himself points out, "It is interesting to compare the transitional object concept with Melanie Klein's (1934) concept of the internal object. The transitional object is *not an internal object* (which is a mental concept)—it is a possession. Yet it is not (for the infant) an external object either" (9). This intermediary object is also not directly attributed to Klein's two positions: depressive or omnipotent. In the depressive position, which for Klein is a positive psychic state, the ego literally deflates through harm coming to the good internal object. This results in a desperate need to repair the internal object which is perceived as broken.

In Winnicott, we can see the integration of the theory of omnipotence and the poetic line. Winnicott writes, "Omnipotence is nearly a fact of experience. The mother's eventual task is gradually to disillusion the infant, but she has no hope of success unless at first she has been able to give sufficient opportunity for illusion" (11). To use this concept metaphorically for poetic creation and a narrator, the poet must first create an illusory world, which itself, as it represents adulthood, is the agent of disillusionment.

Disillusionment is at the core of the break between mother and child. That break is facilitated by the act of play, which gives the child some level of control over its speed and means. According to Winnicott,

In playing, the child manipulates external phenomena in the service of the dream and invests chosen external phenomena with dream meaning and feeling. . . . Playing implies trust, and belongs to the potential space between (what was at first) baby and mother-figure, with the baby in a state of near-absolute dependence, and the mother-figure's adaptive function taken for granted by the baby. (51–52)

The play becomes a staging of the baby's move from total dependence toward independence. It is not only a psychic act, but also, we would argue, an aesthetic one as well, and the "dream" that Winnicott references is not one of sleeping, but one akin to a daydream (7), which, as Freud theorizes, is the conduit to the sublimated act of artistic creativity.

Play, for Winnicott, is an important psychotherapeutic technique that can never be directed; he writes, "in playing, and perhaps only in playing, the child or adult is free to be creative" (53). In theater, the creativity of play is put into a communal context. No actor, director, or audience member creates theater in a vacuum; it is a collaborative process. As such, the creative individual self must temper the original creative impulse and

learn how to distill out of that impulse that which is most artistically essential to it, while making it feasibly akin to the other participants' impulses.

Perhaps such creative compromise is why Winnicott also writes, "only in playing is communication possible" (54). The players must not only be able to articulate individual vision in play, but also be able to justify that vision with others' visions. Winnicott interestingly tries to locate play in both a physical and psychic space, and questions, "if play is neither inside nor outside, where is it?" (41; emphasis added). We would argue that play, for Stevens, is located in the interaction of the transitional object and the adult narrator's perceptions of and reactions to that object as a means of either regressing back to childhood or creating a new experience, one akin to infancy, during which there is no thought, only feeling.

"Local Objects" centers on the relationship of a man to his particular things and the ways in which those things are endowed by him with greater or lesser significance by means of his fresh namings. That act of naming is the enunciated subject's act of play. The poem demonstrates why Stevens is rightly said to be a master of ironic modernist allusiveness: his fresh namings. Paradoxically, it contains no concrete image, aside from the idea of the foyer. When we recall the meanings and associations of that word, in English and in French, we enter a space filled with echoes playing all around us—from the dictionary, from the history of architecture, of theater, of museums, churches, or suburban houses; from the grand debates about tradition and its loss or recovery; and of the tags from earlier in Stevens' work concerning the crisis of modernity: "Of Modern Poetry" and "The American Sublime," among others. The poem begins:

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

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

Objects not present as a matter of course
On the dark side of the heavens or the bright,
In that sphere with so few objects of its own.

(CPP 473–74)

The poem proceeds to condense into lucid yet multi-layered words its myriad of resonances. As Susan Stewart, in a chapter on Stevens from *Poetry and the Fate of the Sentence* has shown, the sentences made up out of the words accrue their meanings by a series of appositions, often introduced under the sign of negation, but then slowly or rapidly take on as

they move a positive sense, often at odds or even in contrapuntal relationship with each other and/or the whole. This Keatsian project of loading every rift with allusive ore, as Jacqueline Vaught Brogan has suggested, is also the maximum of introjected psychic violence pushing outward again, but imaginatively, against the violence from without.

Little existed for him but the few things
For which a fresh name always occurred, as if
He wanted to make them, keep them from perishing,

The few things, the objects of insight, the integrations
Of feeling, the things that came of their own accord,
Because he desired without quite knowing what,

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

(*CPP* 474)

A foyer in architecture is a place of both entry and waiting. It is not generally a space with its own function or definitive identity, but a liminal gate-keeping space, a place to pass through, eventually, to other, larger, more important and definite places or actions. To be a spirit living in a world without a foyer means the spirit and its objects border directly on each other; there is no mediation between subject and object, as in the past. This is both exciting and new, potentially liberating in all kinds of ways, but it is also scary, threatening, and painful.

One of the things this poem does, as all of Stevens' poems do, is create that transitional space in which the objects of the world can become local objects, if not objects of home. That is, like the child, the poet can imagine or adopt and adapt objects as toys to his needs for psychic growth; but unlike the child, only via poetry can the poet project the transitional space, the foyer of the spirit, where that imagining can occur productively. Stevens splits himself into the subject of enunciation ("he") and the enunciating subject (the narrator) in "Local Objects" as part of this creative process of producing and inhabiting the transitional space, playfully, yet really, with full reality. Modernity, in other words, is such that the imagined worlds we occupy are not a luxury illusion, but the only viable mediations between the self and the world. All other mediating institutions and practices are bankrupt formalities or coercive impositions of the past.

The enunciated subject of the poem holds its narrative focus and, in doing so, takes the place of the playing child. This subject too must break with the place of warmth and intimacy, the "home" of the poem. Stevens writes, "local objects become / More precious than the most precious objects of home." The local, solipsistic world in which the subject exists has

taken the place of the larger sphere of home. In relief against the world of local objects, removed from time and space, Stevens implies that "home" is a place of grounded safety, a place with a foyer, if you will. When there is no home, or familiar structure to which one can attach oneself or return, play and the objects with which one plays are raised to a newly dangerous level of importance. Instead of play occurring in the safe space of Winnicott's office, or the child's home, in Stevens' world, play occurs on the precipice of nothingness. Stevens thereby underscores the terrifying reality underlying Winnicott's theory and therapy.

In that transitional playing space, the objects of play are themselves in flux, forcing the subject constantly to rename them or endow them with fresh identity, "to make them, keep them from perishing." Winnicott's play initiates the subject into a world of trust and self-confidence that will allow the subject to grow. The goal of Stevens' playing subject, given his age and condition in life, is to preserve growth or movement on the absolute edge of human non-existence. This subject longs for "moments of the classic, the beautiful," that Kantian principle of arresting, almost completely, the subject's swirling drive, like a lynchpin poking lightly and repeatedly into the ever spinning cog of modernity: "These were that serene he had always been approaching / As toward an absolute foyer beyond romance." "Local Objects" is Stevens' playing most memorably with death.

The lines of the poem sing ironically against and beside their own unrhymed *terza rima* form adapted from Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Shelley's "The Triumph of Life." We see how at this micro-level the impetus of poetic utterance is about to break fully and at last with traditional poetic form, in an act of spontaneous creative combustion, as it were: "The few things, the objects of insight, the integrations / Of feeling, the things that came of their own accord, / Because he desired without quite knowing what." The accord is still there, but about to go.

This standing, looking out over and down into the abyss without falling or growing dizzy, with a demonically witty chuckle, perhaps, would be, for Stevens, the modern form of the beautiful, even as the sublime in its most radical form has then to be constantly evoked. From such radical interplay arises the speaker's claim to knowledge on behalf of the subject about whom he speaks definitely: "He knew that he was a spirit without a foyer / And that, in this knowledge, local objects become / More precious than the most precious objects of home."

Rather than become skeptical of such apparent absolute self-knowledge, we should suspend any disbelief, since what both subjects, the narrating and narrated one, share is the modern circumstance par excellence of unconscious desire: "Because he desired not knowing quite what." To be serenely certain in these circumstances is to know only that you have always been only ever "approaching / As toward an absolute foyer beyond romance."

Like Yeats's "as in the gold mosaic of a wall" (191) from "Sailing to Byzantium," what to make of such "as's," without making an "ass" of oneself, is ever the critic's comic challenge. We suggest then that just as Yeats in that poem uses the "as" to stress the reality of the vision of his spiritual sages—ghosts taking real form but for our benefit, as in what we already know of Byzantium mosaics—Stevens wants to underscore the fictional nature of any destination, even an absolutely provisional one of an absolute foyer (a heavenly reality beyond romance), without our thinking too that such a visionary prospect, however desired, is not to be distinguished too easily from death.

As in Stevens, so too in Winnicott: "the objects of insight" are the most valued "local objects," neither material objects equipped already with pre-fabricated names, nor intimate objects of home, for which, perhaps, no name is absolutely required. Instead, they are delightful provocations for the spirit without a foyer—without an entrance hall out to the world's beauty, nor one into the grandeur of the subject's throne-room—to create the fresh name that always occurs in poetry's ever-transitional space, the fresh name for the modern imaginative reality of playing repeatedly with one's own death.

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Farewell

JOHN N. SERIO

The full of fortune and the full of fate. . . .

—Wallace Stevens

AFTER NEARLY THIRTY YEARS, I am retiring as editor of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*. It has been an exceptionally gratifying experience. I will miss the appreciative comments that have arrived almost daily from individuals all over the world. The unflinching help of volunteers—as passionate and devoted as I am to this work—has invigorated me for three decades. Although there are far too many names to mention, I am especially indebted to a stellar editorial board. Many have served with me from the start. They have given selflessly of their time and expertise to help elevate the *Journal* to its status today. I could not have done it without each of them, and I offer each of them my sincerest, heartfelt thanks.

The *Journal* has had a remarkable rise in reputation. Beginning as a small publication, usually with fewer than forty-eight pages, it has emerged as one of the more prominent single-author periodicals, hefty in volume and notable in quality. Published on schedule for thirty-four years, it now features issues that run more than 120 pages and that on occasion have exceeded 200 pages. The *Journal* has attracted cutting-edge research on Stevens from both new and well-established scholars, and it has garnered international recognition. Having both flexibility and openness, it has published on a spectrum of subjects related to Stevens, from New Critical approaches to comparative ones, from theoretical issues to cultural studies, from archival and biographical works to bibliographic checklists. Although a scholarly journal, it has featured issues devoted to creative responses to Stevens by contemporary poets and artists. Each issue has offered fresh insights into Stevens, and the variety of approaches, topics, and perspectives has never failed to engage readers.

Retirements are occasions for reflection, and I hope you will indulge me in a bit of nostalgia about the early days and the role destiny played not only in my selection of Stevens for my life's work, but also in my response to the technical challenges posed by producing the *Journal*. On the occasion of my twenty-second birthday, while pursuing a Master's degree, I received a copy of *Wallace Stevens: Selected Poems*, edited by Samuel

French Morse. I had never heard of Wallace Stevens, and, although I did not read the book immediately, its presence on my bookshelf tugged at me. When the opportunity to read him arose several years later during my work toward a Ph.D., I realized Stevens was a poet after my own heart. His magnificent poetry expressed my deepest thoughts and feelings; it filled a spiritual void created after my loss of faith; and it inspired an inner strength to cope with the burdens of life and sparked an ennobling joy to celebrate its ecstasies. Over forty years have passed since then, but my passion for his poetry has never wavered.

There was another, coincidental aspect to the role destiny played in my editing the *Journal* that dovetailed with my dedication to Stevens: my attraction to the personal computer. The present techno-savvy generation might not realize what a novel invention the personal computer was and what an absolutely stressful time it created. When my university gave its faculty desktop computers in 1982, I felt at a crossroads: either I jump on the bandwagon and learn about this new contraption, or forever be left behind. I jumped, and I immediately signed up for a course in BASIC programming. In those days, as many of you will recall, computers were used primarily for data processing. (Remember those stacks of punched cards at course registration time?) When I took over the editorship that fall, however, I discovered the computer's surprising usefulness for producing a journal. I thought to myself, why send corrected typescripts to a publishing firm only to have the text re-keyboarded and then have to re-read the galleys for newly introduced errors, when it could all be done once, and done right? In other words, I realized I could typeset the *Journal* on my desktop computer.

That meant quite a steep learning curve. Word processing programs were in their initial stages of development; they were command driven and, to say the least, non-intuitive. The age of page layout software that provided a WYSIWYG interface ("what you see is what you get") had yet to dawn. Using plain ASCII text, I had to learn how to code all the material in the *Journal* to indicate formatting (page size, spacing, font type, font size) and special characters (©, à, é). Then I had to proofread the articles on mono-spaced printouts from a dot-matrix printer. The instructions for setting up a page might look like this: [pal, b] [ch 12] [ll 27.5p]; an italicized word like this, /i/help/xi/; and a special character, such as an umlaut in Hölderlin, like this, H[AC3]olderlin. The slightest error—a missing bracket, for example—spelled disaster. No wonder my eyeglass prescription increased every year.

Next I had to learn how to send the files via a modem (another new gadget) over a phone line to a typesetting firm in New Jersey. Believe it or not, in 1982, the 1200 bit modem cost \$535 and each journal page \$10. But the outcome was glorious: I would receive roles of photocomposition paper nearly ten feet long with page after page of the *Journal* in sequence. The high-resolution print looked as precious to me as an Ansel Adams

photograph. Although the process was expensive, at least the *Journal* did not suffer the fate of many other small periodicals, which published using low-resolution type from a laser printer. Producing each issue became a family affair: my wife would cut out each page and affix it with hot wax to a piece of cardboard; I would box up the stack of pages and ship it to the printer in Michigan; our twin daughters would stuff the printed journals into envelopes for mailing.

That fascination with the personal computer led me into other areas as well. I had to master a bare-bones internet protocol to communicate with authors and those interested in the Society or *Journal*. I had to tackle complicated database management and spreadsheet programs to maintain subscription records, send invoices, and undertake mass mailing campaigns (the latter tripled our subscriptions in a few years' time). Finally, I had to learn illustration and imaging programs to create journal covers, ads, and publicity. It was a dizzying, but exhilarating time.

More recent developments in software, such as InDesign and Photoshop, have made all this much simpler. One of the most remarkable advances has been the development of PDF (portable document format). This eliminates entirely the need for typesetters. For nearly a decade, I have been able to prepare final pages on my desktop, send the files electronically to authors for approval, and then transmit the entire journal electronically to the printer. There is no longer a need for the printer to send "blues" for verification, since what I send is exactly what I receive.

As the *Journal* enters a new phase, I cannot help but think fortune has played its role here as well. What better way to sanction our scholarly work on Stevens than to be selected by The Johns Hopkins University Press to join its impressive lineup of quality publications? And I can think of no one who is better suited to be editor of *The Wallace Stevens Journal* than Bart Eeckhout. I have worked with Bart for over ten years, and I can attest to his acuity, intelligence, and skillfulness. He is an accomplished Stevens scholar, and he is impressively knowledgeable on a wide range of topics, including literary theory, philosophy, cultural studies, and music. He is fluent in three languages, and he reads three more. And he is meticulous. He has the sharpest eye for detail that I have encountered in my many years as editor. Positioned as he is in Europe, he will enhance the international reach of Stevens and of the *Journal*.

This transition to The Johns Hopkins University Press with Bart Eeckhout as editor is, for me, the "roundness that pulls tight the final ring" (CPP 379). I could not be happier about the future—and good fortune—of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*.

Clarkson University

Poems

Winter in Context

It is not hard to imagine the likeness of winter
or a squirrel conspiring against or with its likeness—
like a fire, flame, cutting through water, darkness
benign as the sun in its quotidian setting.
For they exist in our imagination
as much as in our mind—the egg I cracked
and froze like a fly in amber . . . Only it was
in a dented Scout mess-kit pan I had found
along the road to Maroney's pond, for instance.
The gold Cyclops eye of that egg has stayed
with me and probably always will because
it meant more at the time than mere fortune can explain—
a wealth of the probable in an improbable frame.

Ed Orr
Peoria, Ill.

Sing Undulation

Kayak a capella . . .
drifting in middle tide . . .

the intracoastal waterway
sounding the safe waves

while birds play bard,
flapping stanzas in standing water.

Above the terns, the jets play
techno music, all base—

and a crane whoops it
up, one silver note

in a drip-red sunset . . .
kayak a capella . . .

David Athey
Palm Beach, Fla.

Shades

Once it had been the color
Of her parasol that caught his eye,
Its lining of the deepest indigo
Calling to mind an Italian night time sky;
Now the night time sky above Bellagio
Called to mind the color
Of her parasol, covering
The world in deepest indigo.

Neil Curry
Ulverston, England

To Wallace Stevens

An insurer, you secured
man to life,
bound him to the hope
of reaching,
with you—like you—the summit.
At night,
you rendezvoused with the lines,
flowers of pleasure
culled in the field of duty.

As for me, son of the European lyrists
and of *trobar leu*,
perhaps you wouldn't
have liked my style.
We'd have agreed
about poetry—
emergency words,
secret archaic code,
gold of the species.

Tonino Milite
Milan, Italy
Translated by Massimo Bacigalupo

Poultry Poem

*He is a sad but triumphant figure . . .
whose final note is a cock cry.*

—William Carlos Williams, review
of Stevens' *Opus Posthumous*

So much also depends, ephebe, upon the fowl,
who ignorant, plumb the well of poetry
with tick-tack talons, seeking worms—

the humble barrow's been enhanced with paint:
quinacridone perhaps, alizarin crimson—
of glaze, perhaps it rained.

The rooster sets the winds to blowing, and eggs
of a morning are exquisite gifts
from chickens.

Ruth Moon Kempher
St. Augustine, Fla.

Bad Money at the Six O'Clock Mass

To improve the sewers in Jerusalem. . . .
—"The Comedian as the Letter C"

Shared coins display that Emperor's brow,
Laurel-crowned and wise,
Your paragon, your ten-cent hero —
Attend, though, to his eyes:

Can't avarice be seen, vain grasp
At worldly power and wealth;
His tick of time on Earth elapsed,
Now left with precious else

But an empire dust would someday fill,
As Herod's filled?
In due course,
Such silver's covered by a bill —
With a face that looks like yours.

Michael Corrigan
Lewiston, Maine

Portrait without Pose

Her hand composed him and composed the tree.
— “The Hand as a Being”

Put a dog in, show it wig-wagging out to greet us in the presto
of the morning
Put the house right there, rising rings and falling sparks, those
trembling, sheltering leaves
Draw a man beside it, a woman, a child, curlicues of chimney
smoke, the lion sun
Put the dream in, too, in its silver cloud of sleep
Vivify connection: narrow trope of branch, bare loop of wire
Then put the song in, and the woman singing it — and the
golden bird, the green bird, the center of the scene

Now set them to wondering beneath the zizzing skies of noon,
the rattapallax of evening
Let them learn: show the child’s wild O of laughter; show
those others tuning baffled faces against the constant wind
Let them see, this time
Let them hear, this time

Now let it all end
Now let it all begin again

Michael Corrigan
Lewiston, Maine

Reviews

Wallace Stevens and the Aesthetics of Abstraction.

By Edward Ragg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

It is a great challenge to write a monograph on the work of Wallace Stevens, especially one like Edward Ragg's *Wallace Stevens and the Aesthetics of Abstraction*, which proposes a version of the chronological development of Stevens' ideas and practice. The narrative is intricately worked out around a strong and original thesis and set with a number of exegetical cameos that might be called "deft"—a word Ragg uses to describe several of Stevens' own poetic maneuvers. Highly focused on a specific facet of Stevens' poetry and ideas, and concentrated on a small number of less frequently analyzed poems, the book nonetheless freshens our perspective on the entire arc of Stevens' oeuvre. Ragg richly details Stevens' changing view of abstraction as an intellectual problem, its place in the art and thought of his time, and its manifestations in his prose and poetic creation. In exploring the protean variations "abstraction" came to take during Stevens' development, Ragg also identifies pivotal moments, most notably the mid-1930s, when Stevens turned toward incarnating abstraction in a speaking voice, and the mid-1940s (notably after "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"), when the poet jettisoned overt engagement with an abstract idiom.

The useful introduction describes the author's intention and thesis and contains a discussion of previous critics' treatment of abstraction (including those of B. J. Leggett and Charles Altieri). The first two chapters cover the period culminating in what for Ragg is the milestone of "The Man with the Blue Guitar" (1937). Chapter 1 pays central attention to "The Comedian as the Letter C" and "Academic Discourse at Havana" in the context of Stevens' discomfort with universals, "pure poetry," and the "new romantic," and his inability to form a poetic project. Any more exclusive sense of "abstraction" figures only proleptically as the horizon of the mid-thirties, discussed in chapter 2. Here "abstraction," a term Stevens still does not use, becomes a major actor that Ragg defines and refines. In particular, he leads readers through the first half of "The Man with the Blue Guitar" (and the flowering in cantos XXVIII and XXXII) as its "I" speaker tries out various positions in relation to the audience, the guitar, the "imagination-reality" duality, the space it is creating. The riveting exegesis, among the most detailed of the book's probing readings, displays not only the speaker's linguistic versatility but Ragg's ability to see and communicate the multiple linguistic feats the poem performs. "Abstraction" as it emerges here is akin to being apart, incarnated in the aptly called "'unlocatable' speaker" (55), an elusive "I" in an abstract space. In chapter 3, Ragg temporarily puts Stevens' art aside to examine the idealist legacy and phenomenological assumptions inherited primarily from Coleridge, and those developed in the twentieth century by thinkers such as Maurice Mer-

leau-Ponty and Maurice Blanchot. The latter are not evoked with a view to determining a particular (and here improbable) influence, as Henri Focillon is, but are discussed in order to “proffer terms” for reading middle and late Stevens “without indebtedness to the poet’s own vocabulary” (88). One of the chief values of this searching discussion is to nuance our understanding of a subject-object duality that, when oversimplified, has too often led readers to reify the human mind and the object world or pit the “real” (as concrete particulars) against the “ideal” (as universal abstractions of some sort).

The complex discussion of phenomenology therefore informs Ragg’s treatment in chapters 4 and 5 of the “idealist ‘I’” (110) that inhabits some of Stevens’ poems of the early 1940s. In chapter 4, we find detailed discussions of the “robust poet” (121) of “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” (1942), who aligns himself with Cézanne’s idea of the artist and prefigures the “personality” of “The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet.” “Landscape with a Boat” (1940) serves to illustrate how an “idealist ‘I’” can overcome a supposed subject-object dualism in a poem. Chapter 5 problematizes this figure primarily in “Montrachet-le-Jardin” (1942). Commentary on a plenitude of place names serves as a prelude (both ludic and cultural) to engaging with the poem’s gradual stripping away of human trappings. The poem’s “I” is read as inadequate, ironical, paradoxical, a sign that Stevens was searching for “other modes of abstract address” (165). Chapter 6 centers on the disappearance of the idiom of abstraction in the late 1940s. Although the chapter seems confusingly stitched together, it clearly explains the move from the abstract rhetoric of “major men” or the “first idea,” for instance, to Stevens’ idealist defense of the theory of resemblance in “Three Academic Pieces” (1947), presented as an alternative and more direct means of broaching the problem of abstraction. Here Ragg treats the poem “Repetitions of a Young Captain” in terms of the emergence of abstraction in itself, unhampered by the human subject. Ragg’s major exegesis of “The Pure Good of Theory” (1945) brings together theories of interpreting metaphor with a demonstration of how the drive to abstraction can become the motor for renewing metaphor beyond the predetermined or the already known. Chapter 7 puts literary explication aside. It subtly examines Stevens’ distaste for factitious artistic and intellectual movements and his attitudes toward painters known and less known, notably in his post-war correspondence with the Parisian book and art dealer Paule Vidal. Stevens’ physical turning toward the domestic and “bourgeois” while longing for the exotic in the commonplace guides Ragg’s formulation of “pragmatic abstraction” (185). We can hope that Ragg will some day refine this notion and elucidate Stevens’ late poems through it.

Chapters 2 and 4 to 6 thus probe the avatars abstraction takes in Stevens’ poetry. Several sections within these chapters have appeared as articles in *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, where the arguments around individual poems are given a different emphasis and the text edited more rigorously. In comparison, the relative heterogeneity of the book expands the intellectual scope of exploration. To keep the reader on track, synthetic encapsulations of main points sum up retrospectively or underscore their relevance for what will follow. Although sometimes redundant and artificial, these temporary conclu-

sions illuminate the collective whole. For Ragg is demanding of himself and of his readers. He proceeds, as he says, “in a broadly chronological fashion” (4), but within his chapters he entwines past and future to inform the present of a text’s compositional moment, sometimes underscoring a chiming effect among texts (as with “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction,” which is not examined directly). He preserves relative order by providing signposts—dates, an “earlier” here, a “later” there, an occasional past perfect—yet he cannot insist too much. Ragg’s exposition espouses fluidity for hermeneutic reasons, as implied above: it avoids the rigidity of a strict chronological order, which might misleadingly imply chains of influence or causation; it allows for a more creative development of critical notions; and, more profoundly perhaps, it respects the unraveling of human experience which, as William James postulated, always contains the beginning of what is not yet at the peak of consciousness.

Using traditional critical methods, Ragg has extrapolated Stevens’ intellectual and artistic ideas from the markings he left in the books he had in his library, his 1940s lectures, and his letters, besides taking stock of his art collection. Quotations are contextualized and scrutinized in relation with other texts. Difficult poems are regarded with the same scrutiny, without being forced into meaning. The poems are read, moreover, primarily for their internal dynamics rather than for any transparent expression of “ideas.” Ragg’s is the rare book that combines intellectual rigor with literary sensitivity in all areas, harmonizing the discussion of ideas and debates with well-informed, multifaceted, and sensitive readings of poems. “It Must Bring Pleasure.” And it does.

Beverly Maeder
University of Lausanne
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Beleaguered Poets and Leftist Critics: Stevens, Cummings, Frost, and Williams in the 1930s.

By Milton A. Cohen. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010.

Milton A. Cohen’s *Beleaguered Poets and Leftist Critics* is a welcome indication that the outpouring of historicist scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s has finally come full circle—that scholars now feel sufficiently free to read modernist poetry from left to right as well as right to left. Thanks to acts of historical retrieval by scholars such as Alan Filreis, Walter Kalaidjian, James Longenbach, John Lowney, Cary Nelson, Robert Schulman, and Michael Thurston, students of modern poetry no longer associate an orientation to “the left” with a narrow-minded allegiance to the Communist Party; nor is it now credible to dismiss leftist writing as uniformly opposed to the stylistic innovations of high modernism. As a result of these scholarly labors, our knowledge of leftist poetry and its context is built upon a greatly expanded archive of primary sources. With these formerly hidden poets now in view, it is time for a richer and more nuanced understanding of those poets who were *not* leftist in any consistent

way, if at all, and whose body of work was therefore never in danger of being repressed on political grounds. This is the central premise from which Milton Cohen's study takes its bearings: "canonical poets, rather than being scorned for the supposed sins of earlier critics who focused on them exclusively, now deserve renewed attention, reconsideration within the same political and social contexts that have been applied to the 'forgotten' poets" (7-8). Whereas formalist scholars were once defensive or embarrassed by responses to the left by the likes of Wallace Stevens, E. E. Cummings, Robert Frost, and William Carlos Williams, Cohen suggests that this responsiveness is in fact a mark of integrity and a clue to these poets' enduring claim on us today.

Beleaguered Poets and Leftist Critics is comprised of five chapters: a long introduction sketches several contexts for understanding developments in leftist writing in the 1930s, while the remainder of the book features case studies of four poets. The first chapter offers perhaps the most readable brief introduction to leftist literary activity in the 1930s that I have read. I wish this book had been available when I was in graduate school, as it would have saved me from sorting through a lot of tedious details about the partisan turf wars and internecine quarrels among obscure leftist intellectuals. Still, the briskness and digestibility of Cohen's narrative comes at a price: his story treads over well-worn historical ground, and many of the characters and sources will be strikingly familiar to scholars of the 1930s. Thus, we encounter representative quotations from Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, V. F. Calverton, Granville Hicks, Joseph Freeman, and Waldo Frank as they declaim on the failure of capitalist democracy and the bankruptcy of individualism and the urgent need for writers to stand behind collectivist political solutions. The first chapter also features a short account of the major tenets of the proletarian aesthetic, several trends in documentary reportage, and a useful survey of the different political orientations of leftist magazines in this period—not just the usual suspects such as *New Masses* and *Partisan Review*, but also mainstream left-liberal periodicals such as *The New Republic* and *The Nation*, two magazines that exerted a broad influence in the 1930s but which have not been studied by literary scholars as exhaustively as many of the staunchly radical little magazines. Although quite a bit of chapter one derives from the primary research of other scholars, and the narrative leans heavily on standard accounts by Malcolm Cowley, Alfred Kazin, and Daniel Aaron, it is to the author's credit that he does not clutter this introductory section with minor details about various factions within the far left, a common fault among studies of the 1930s literary left. In addition to producing an accessible, synthetic narrative, Cohen has clearly done an admirable amount of research into the various magazines and reviewers of the period, which allows him to dig up some lost gems, such as this mock list of rules for the aspiring proletarian critic, first published by Margaret Mitchell and Mary McCarthy in *The Nation* in 1935:

1. He must . . . applaud any proletarian novel, no matter how inept, on political grounds. . . .
2. As a corollary . . . , the Marxist critic must, willy-nilly berate the bourgeois. . . . (34)

All told, Cohen proves himself a dependable and trustworthy guide to the general movements and issues of left-liberal activity in these complicated years. If I were asked to recommend a single book on the way modernist poets who were not political in the 1920s responded to the somber mood of social responsibility in the 1930s, Cohen's is the study I would recommend.

But what difference does this context make for a comparative analysis of individual poets? At some level, Cohen's study makes no attempt to answer this question, despite his stated intentions. He summarizes the "central thesis" of the book as follows: "Scholars have studied the poets individually in social and political contexts, but the four have never been grouped together to reveal comparable patterns in the exertion of and responses to these pressures" (2-3). His aim then is not to point out the significance of the left for individual poets so much as to identify common models of leftist affiliation and disaffection. Unfortunately, Cohen never clearly identifies the nature of these "comparable patterns," which sometimes leads to ambiguous formulations of the book's organizing idea: "comparable patterns of rejection or accommodation of the Left" (3; my emphasis). A pattern of rejection is not the same as a pattern of accommodation, and indeed the case studies in this book split evenly along these divergent trajectories. The chapters on Stevens and Williams portray two poets who both experienced a "contradictory and ambivalent" romance with the left in the 1930s—but a comparison of their careers in these years does not indicate a shared "pattern" so much as a shared antagonist, a set of pressures that motivated each poet to pursue idiosyncratic forms of accommodation (199). As Cohen argues convincingly, Williams' leftward inclinations preceded the 1930s and lingered for some time afterward, whereas Stevens' engagement was confined primarily to the years 1934-36. Stevens never took the practical step of joining political committees or signing petitions, as did Williams. For this reason, it is difficult to see how Stevens and Williams embody a shared pattern of action. It seems more accurate to say that they shared a single political stimulus and similar impression of how the literary atmosphere had changed. Both were attracted and repelled by "a common source" of leftist agitation, and both were tempted on several occasions to write poems that adopted some of the premises about art and politics of their leftist interlocutors, if only half-heartedly and temporarily (198).

The chapters on Cummings and Frost, by contrast, document a shared affinity for opposing the left. Both poets were deeply suspicious of collectivism in any form, and each chose to espouse an idiosyncratic variety of self-reliance: a zany, free-wheeling anarchism in the case of Cummings, and an agrarian Emersonianism in that of Frost. Still, the differences in their anti-leftist positions are at least as conspicuous as their similarities: by the mid-1930s, Cummings was primarily concerned with satirizing any attempt to make poetry responsible to political imperatives, whether left or right, whereas Frost, in poems such as "Build Soil" and "Provide, Provide," tried to articulate an alternative political vision rooted in the psychology of individualism and the attachment to place. Cummings chose to respond to the left with bitter mockery ("let's start a magazine / to hell with literature / we want something redblooded" [99]), while Frost offered his enemies a note of caution about depending on the

state for assistance (“We’re too unseparate. And going home / From company means coming to our senses” [119]). This basic difference in political outlook is something that Cohen points out, even though it seems to conflict with his general thesis. As he writes, “Cummings’s political satires in the mid-thirties were more defensive and reactionary” than those of Frost, who sought no escape from political argument, but actively “enjoyed challenging left-wing ideas of his time—socialism, collectivism, later the New Deal’s welfare state” (121).

Though *Beleaguered Poets and Leftist Critics* does not quite accomplish what it sets out to do, its chapters on individual poets in the 1930s remain valuable in several respects. For one thing, the book locates Cummings and Frost within the broader geography of modernist poetry. This is an unusual and welcome approach to the subject. Despite the continued lip service paid to Frost as a genuine “modernist,” his poetry rarely factors into comparative studies of this kind, and Cummings has all but disappeared from recent discussions of modernist poetry, despite his palpable impact on figures such as Kenneth Burke, Malcolm Cowley, Hart Crane, and Marianne Moore. The chapter on Cummings is stuffed full of quotations from unpublished letters and poetic manuscripts. Cohen’s book introduced me to scores of comments and poems by Cummings that I had not read before—and could not have read without his archival research. (It is a shame to acknowledge that many of these documents prove just how egregiously insensitive, undemocratic, and shrill Cummings became in his later career, despite his persistent stylistic innovations.)

Advanced readers of Stevens are not likely to find a tremendous amount of new information or a radically different view of Stevens’ mid-career poems after reading Cohen’s account. His description of the complex nostalgia of “Mozart, 1935,” the confusion and ambivalence of “Owl’s Clover,” and the transitional discoveries of “The Man with the Blue Guitar” generally confirm the findings of studies by Milton Bates, Angus Cleghorn, Alan Filreis, James Longenbach, Joseph Riddel, and others. Cohen is especially good at close, careful consideration of how Stevens was reviewed by contemporaries such as Eda Lou Walton and Horace Gregory. He also gives a readable blow-by-blow account of the infamous Stanley Burnshaw review of *Ideas of Order*, “Turmoil in the Middle Ground.” Despite the familiarity of this episode in Stevens scholarship, I was often pleasantly surprised at just how aptly Cohen was able to summarize the stages of Stevens’ conflicted response to pressures from the left in the 1930s: “Owl’s Clover,” he writes, “responds, quite abstractly, to the Marxist philosophy Burnshaw represents from a sympathetic, but non-Marxian perspective” (63). Or again, “It is not that Stevens is writing in bad faith, but rather that he is trying to convince himself of something that, in his heart of hearts, he doesn’t really believe” (69). At times the scholarly urge to politicize Stevens has made it seem as if he *were* something of a Marxist after all, but Cohen rightly reminds us that Stevens’ flirtations with the left were much more about looking at the world in light of its poverty and the desire for justice than they were concerned with the intricacies of historical materialism or class conflict. Although Stevens’ shift from center to left to center-left may not be quite as cut and dry as Cohen sometimes suggests, it is bracing to encounter his level-headed summations of the political orientation of individual poems, such as this one about

"The Man with the Blue Guitar": "the poem represents a repudiation of Stevens's efforts to accommodate leftist aesthetics" (72). For those of us who have grown overly accustomed to celebrating Stevens in all his sublime singularity, Cohen's book is a healthy reminder that Stevens was far from alone in his need to work through ambivalence toward the left in these turbulent years. At the same time, viewing Stevens in comparative perspective throws into relief what many of us have suspected all along about the character of his political imagination: that this poet of solitude regarded himself as a genuine "exponent of the imagination" in his society and "more than an exception, part / Though an heroic part, of the commonal" (*CPP* 997, 336).

Patrick Redding
Manhattanville College

Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form.

By Judith Brown. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.

"We do not generally think of literature, even modernist literature," writes Judith Brown in her provocative new book, *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form*, "as glamorous" (8). But as Brown demonstrates across a range of suggestive readings that embrace an almost disorienting abundance of materials and discourses, this is a mistake that as much reflects a history we have forgotten about this strangely cool and rich aesthetic as it does our own occasional tendencies, as literary critics, toward desultory fashion choices and low self-esteem. Brown argues with considerable authority that "literature set the terms for what glamour was in the early twentieth century, translating it from older notions of the sublime" into a "streamlined" phenomenon that tracked, within the very difficulties and abstractions of "modernist form," some of the most elusive aftershocks that followed on new styles of consumer culture and commodity experience (8). This is to say that one thing Brown decidedly avoids is any undue glamorizing of her subject: for although she draws on various strains of new modernist critique and queer theory that have helped recuperate the status of popular culture from the disregard of mid-twentieth-century modernist intellectuals who often made their canons at its expense, she does not suggest that figures such as Greta Garbo manage to resolve the contradictions of their period's fascination with glamour any more successfully than T. S. Eliot or Virginia Woolf. Indeed, a particular strength of Brown's book is the way it shows just how a pervasive sense of glamour's "negative aesthetics of the sublime" came to flourish in the 1920s and 1930s throughout both Anglo-American literary culture and culture at large. She thus explores what she describes as "the dimensionality of modernism" as it negotiated a world of "sold forms buttressing the nothing, a world without god, a sense of cultural vacancy" (16). The broad and often treacherous appeal of glamour provides the occasion for Brown to marshal a surprising cast of characters—including Coco Chanel, plastics pioneer Jacques Brandenberger, and Josephine Baker alongside such literary figures as Wallace Stevens, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Gertrude Stein—in sometimes ag-

gressive juxtapositions that, at their most effective, imaginatively reconstruct the material and visual cultures that modernism shaped.

Brown begins by describing the emergence of a particularly modern type of glamour in the early-twentieth century that, though derived in part from the languages of the Kantian sublime or Wildean aestheticism, did not definitively appear until the development of cinema and its complicated apparatus for reproducing celebrity on a massive, and massively visual, scale. Only with the proliferation of the photographed image—and the image of movie stars especially—does glamour's curious aura of detachment, mystery, and sex appeal come to pattern Anglo-American popular culture. In a highly suggestive genealogy of her central term, Brown traces the use of "glamour" in its modern sense back to Sir Walter Scott—as a corruption of "grammar" linked to the occult and supernatural connotations of the Middle English "gramarye"—and suggests that these early intimations of magical effects, captured and intensified by language itself, shadow even the most highly technological variations on the larger aesthetic that the term exemplified for writers and artists of the 1920s and beyond (10). In a chapter pairing *The Great Gatsby* and Katherine Mansfield's story "Je ne parle pas français," Brown discovers that the glamour Nick Carraway's narration imparts to *Gatsby* is an illusion that not only dramatizes the "rejection of base material" in favor of the "enchantment" of illusion, but also uses a vocabulary that combines metaphors of visual technology with hints of necromancy (69). Her discussion of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and the career of Josephine Baker similarly explores a set of tensions within a logic of "primitive glamour" between the racialized "energy and erotic frisson" of modern life and the irresistible, atavistic desires for bodily experience that both Larsen and Baker knew that whites were more than willing to project onto African Americans (126). In these chapters and elsewhere, Brown suggests that glamour is at once a signature effect of industrial modernity and its productive forces and a fantastic longing for moments of timelessness and almost supernatural composure that convey a sense of "pure reflection" and transcendent superficiality that are "enveloping, seducing, and charming" to both the artists who achieve them and the audiences they mystify (172).

The same ambitions that let Brown range so widely across early twentieth-century culture do occasionally render her topic somewhat protean, and identifying "six dimensions" of modernism's glamour is all but to invite her readers to understand her argument as a series of intellectual adventures that do not aim to produce a single narrative, or impose too much coherence on an aesthetic whose power, after all, depends in part on its ineffability. Lines of argument that tie the impersonality of Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," for example, to the character of Garbo's fame make for a tantalizing moment of cultural proximity between two icons of the period whose different shades of *haute couture* undoubtedly accentuated their respective appeal (100-1). Yet the farther Brown goes into the details of Hollywood lighting design and studio photography that enabled Garbo's signature style, the harder it becomes to see anything Eliotic in the fixation on the actual performer that so many, from Gilbert Seldes to Roland Barthes, see radiantly shining through her various performances. Brown pursues an even less intuitive juxtaposition in a chapter

on Coco Chanel and Wallace Stevens, a pairing that at first seems flamboyantly obscure, and then powerfully imaginative, as Brown starts to unfold the story of Chanel No. 5 and the chemistry behind its sublime status in the history of fragrance. Thus as the first perfume “to rely on a mixture of synthetic and organic scents, at least eighty of which went into its secret formula,” Chanel No. 5 represents an ideal olfactory counterpart to Stevens’ own heady concoctions of artifice and romanticism (20).

Chanel’s main chemist, Ernest Breux, employed compounds known as aldehydes to produce the metallic undertones and dry notes that established the modernity of Chanel No. 5, and Brown persuasively proposes that Stevens’ own poetry aspires to “aldehydic effects” that estrange the reader from perceptions of mere sensory objects to more “magical” emanations of complexity and structure. “Through a lexicon of coolly shimmering elements,” Brown writes of Stevens, “he would introduce a poetry devoted to the fleeting, vaporous, or volatile effects of language” (25). Brown does not simply use an evocative vocabulary to place Stevens’ style and poetics in the cultural moment of Chanel No. 5. She carefully reads both familiar and less familiar works to highlight the degree to which Stevens challenges the “thingness” that such writers as William Carlos Williams or Gertrude Stein try to assert in language (25). In both “The Poems of Our Climate” and “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction,” Brown traces the motion “from the real to the illusory and back again” that figures prominently throughout Stevens’ poetry, and argues that his aesthetic pushes toward a model of the sublimity that, like the vapors left behind by the scientific process that gives its name to this artistic power, leaves us with a sense of the material world that fascinates us with intimations of reality as it “dissolves and becomes abstract and unreachable” (34). As Brown admits, Stevens himself cuts a figure anything but glamorous at the level of biography, and she demonstrates that even some of his strongest critics—Harold Bloom and Helen Vendler—have perhaps neglected aspects of his project because they have too rigorously maintained exactly the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime that the glamour of his language fuses into a singular aesthetic (36). She ends her discussion of Stevens with accounts of both late and early poems (*Transport to Summer’s* “Description Without Place” and *Harmonium’s* “To the One of Fictive Music”) that call attention to the “concentrated intensity of poetic perception” that conflates more traditional categories of experience to stress instead the power of a self-contained, self-referential, and finally self-annihilating way of seeing the world that leaves us pleasurably estranged from nature, even as its fragrance, so to speak, lingers in the glamour of the artwork that becomes its substitute.

Other sections of *Glamour in Six Dimensions* are equally compelling, and Brown’s account of cellophane—a cheap way for manufacturers to lend a bit of glamour to everyday commodities that enters the world of fashion in the 1930s—brings her book to a satisfying end. Brown recounts the use of cellophane by Florence Stettheimer in the stage design and costumes for Virgil Thompson and Gertrude Stein’s *Four Saints in Three Acts*, and suggests that part of what contributed to the show’s unlikely success was the way that Stettheimer’s attachment to this most modern of materials helped to accentu-

ate the dazzling incoherence and “shimmering surfaces” of Stein’s language (162). Although perhaps not so iconic in retrospect as Jean Harlow’s platinum blonde hair or Jay Gatsby’s strenuously effervescent parties, *Four Saints in Three Acts* provides Brown with a fitting occasion to remember modernism’s glamour, which could “capture” audiences in the period “as if by a spell that fascinate and arrests” (171). That Gertrude Stein was, in her way, as glamorous for a time as Harlow is only one of the alluring features of twentieth-century culture that Brown illuminates here with style and sophistication.

Mark Goble
University of California, Berkeley

The Poetics of the Everyday: Creative Repetition in Modern American Verse.

By Siobhan Phillips. Columbia University Press, 2010.

Siobhan Phillips’ excellent contribution to a growing field in modernist studies—the everyday—concentrates on the work of four poets: Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, and James Merrill. In a series of smart, detailed readings Phillips focuses on a specific aspect of the everyday, “recurrent time,” the pattern and rhythm of one day followed by another (7). She treats recurrence as both a form that the lyric embodies and as a subject upon which each poet dwells. Phillips argues that this aspect of the everyday is “transcultural” (7)—everybody experiences the succession of days—and also particularly relevant to these four American poets who examine daily time with more attention than many other poets. Her book traces influences and draws affinities; Phillips emphasizes several shared thematic concerns that grow out of the everyday such as “memory and mourning, guilt and atonement, submission and assertion” (8). The work of other poets might benefit from Phillips’ subtle analytical skills—for instance, that of William Carlos Williams, not included since his poetry according to Phillips “records quotidian instants rather than diurnal repetitions” (8). Fundamentally her selection of poets hinges on an argument that for these four the everyday becomes a kind of substitute for religious faith. “[T]heir twentieth-century wisdom literature,” Phillips writes, “is drawn from common sense” (16).

In a chapter on Stevens’ work that includes lucid readings of “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” and “The Auroras of Autumn” among many other poems, Phillips acknowledges Stevensian modes such as “idealism” and “abstraction” quite different from his poems of “daily compromise” in which she is interested (74). Her studies of Bishop and Merrill are illuminated by her authoritative knowledge of Stevens’ influence. “The most Stevensian poem that Bishop ever wrote, ‘Anaphora,’ ” Phillips writes, “recommends a poetic trust, replacing religious faith, in the promise of the ordinary” (123). Phillips argues that Stevens registers “ambivalence” about daily time and suggests that it has “disadvantages” though she does not specify what these might be (74). Instead, Phillips ultimately affirms the “power of the daily” in Stevens’ work (111).

Positioning Stevens' poems more fully in a historical context might have put pressure—to use Stevens' word—on the everyday reality that Phillips celebrates, clarifying the everyday's "disadvantages." In this sense, the strength of Phillips' book is also a weakness: her close attention to the nuances of poetic form and her emphasis on shared themes eclipses a sense of a historical framework to explain why twentieth-century poetry turned to the everyday. Was it primarily a loss of religious belief? Phillips frequently draws upon biography—she refers to which poets underwent psychoanalysis in the context of discussing Freud's approach to the everyday (15)—but my suspicion is that the answer to this question for her is much more complex. She usefully engages with various twentieth-century thinkers—Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Freud, and American pragmatists, for example—but she assumes a backdrop of twentieth-century despair that is too generalized to be rhetorically useful; for instance, she argues that the everyday becomes relevant "in the potentially purposeless world of the twentieth century" (26).

Historicizing the everyday would strengthen Phillips' argument in the sense that she expressly denies the equation of lyric poetry with timelessness. That is, she aims to revise the idea advanced by other critics that narrative is "what happens next" and lyric is "what happens now" (22). But recurrence as a theme and as a formal strategy is not limited to poetry of the twentieth century, which raises two larger questions. First, what does it mean that earlier and later lyric poets treat diurnal repetitions? (Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Wordsworth, and Frank O'Hara immediately come to mind as poets who take the everyday as a theme, and any poet who composes sonnet sequences would engage recurrence as a form.) Second, during a literary era that blurred the boundaries between prose and poetry, what do the repetitions of a modernist novel—and the desire to escape closure—tell us about dailiness as a modern phenomenon?

Several studies of modernism and "the everyday" (including my *Modernism and the Ordinary*) include prose fiction, but Phillips wants to distinguish why poetry as a genre is distinctly suited to the subject. Her chapter on Merrill treats the issue directly by noting that Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover* begins and ends with a nod to genre (and to Dante): "Admittedly I err by undertaking / This in its present form" (New York: Knopf, 1993 [3]). Merrill originally wrote his Ouija-board epic as a novel but found that the novel did not "press back enough" as he writes in *Sandover* (in an allusion to Stevens) (66). Merrill's draft of a novel included too much "word-painting" and "mannerism," his description that suggests the novel's detachment from the everyday. "In verse," Merrill explains in *Sandover*, "the feet went bare" (4).

Merrill's genre distinctions are unique and counter-intuitive in light of the novel's long history of realism and naturalism and the exquisite artfulness of Merrill's own lyrics. Phillips does not consider these distinctions but rather the temporal dimensions of each genre, noting that poetry need not be "ecstatic and timeless" but rather can be "[w]orldly and recurrent" in the case of Merrill (176). Phillips implicitly suggests the possibility that the same could be said of fictional modes through her deft comparison of *Sandover* with Proust's long novel, *In Search of Lost Time*, noting that Proust was Merrill's greatest in-

fluence. She celebrates the recurrence of Proust's "poetic forms," which return a reader back to the beginning of his narrative much like the final scene of *Ephraim* and the trilogy's "spiraling terza rima" (162, 175). But the ramifications of this comparison beg the larger question of whether there is a meaningful difference between lyric and narrative forms in treating the everyday.

One danger of studying the everyday is that the concept is difficult to define. Phillips refers to the everyday across a spectrum of experience, for example, the "quietly terrifying" daily moments in Frost's poetry (34), Bishop's "horrific everyday" (143), and Merrill's "cosmic dawns" (155). Moreover, at the heart of studies of the everyday lies a paradox: how can the everyday—that which, by definition, gets overlooked—be examined without being transformed? Phillips' emphasis on recurrence suggests that time itself is a leveling force, allowing the everyday simply to remain everyday. But the lyric cannot resist aesthetic transformation, as her descriptions of the everyday's various incarnations suggest.

Phillips' evaluation of the everyday within an American context ultimately demonstrates how Frost, Stevens, Bishop, and Merrill accept and even redeem the everyday. She extends her argument in a conclusion that treats the work of contemporary American poets John Ashberry, Robert Hass, Kay Ryan, and Frank Bidart. Throughout her study she shows how the history of American pragmatism has shaped the American lyric and played a distinct role in the lyric's transformation of the "malady" of the quotidian into a rejuvenating force (1). Phillips does not engage with the everyday of cultural studies, the continental strain of thought led by the Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre and others (Michel de Certeau, Maurice Blanchot, Roland Barthes) advanced the idea that the conditions of everyday life are driven largely by a capitalist culture in which actions have become mechanical, alienating, and soul-destroying. Phillips' alternative American model is a refreshing corrective to our understanding of the everyday and to our appreciation of American poetry from the twentieth century through the present.

Liesl Olson
The Newberry Library

News and Comments

Beginning January 1, 2011, *The Wallace Stevens Journal* will be published by the Johns Hopkins University Press for the Wallace Stevens Society. Although the journal will not change in substance or style, the Press will assume all aspects of publishing, managing, and distributing the journal in both print and electronic form. Individual subscribers will continue to become members of the Wallace Stevens Society and rates for individuals are not scheduled to increase.

Bart Eeckhout, University of Antwerp, Belgium, will serve as editor. Submissions or correspondence should be sent directly to him at bart.eeckhout@ua.ac.be. Bonnie Costello will serve as book review editor (boncos@bu.edu); James Finnegan as poetry editor (jforjames@aol.com); and Alexis Serio as art editor (aserio@uttyler.edu).

The Wallace Stevens Society will also have new leadership. Lisa Goldfarb, NYU/Gallatin (lisa.goldfarb@nyu.edu), will serve as president; Glen MacLeod, University of Connecticut, Waterbury (glen.macleod@uconn.edu), as vice president; and Natalie Gerber, SUNY at Fredonia (natalie.gerber@fredonia.edu), as secretary-treasurer.

Retiring editor John N. Serio was honored at the “Wallace Stevens, New York and Modernism” conference held March 4–6, 2010, in New York. Organized by Lisa Goldfarb and sponsored by NYU/Gallatin and the Poetry



Retiring editor John N. Serio, conference organizer Lisa Goldfarb, and keynote speaker Milton J. Bates at the “Wallace Stevens, New York and Modernism Conference.”

Society of America, the conference featured numerous panels on the impact New York had on Stevens' poetry, especially the span from 1901–1916, when he lived there. Milton J. Bates was the keynote speaker, and poets, including Edward Hirsch and Mark Strand, participated as well. A dinner was held in Serio's honor at the NYU Torch club, where he was presented with a first edition of Stevens' *The Auroras of Autumn*.

Joan Richardson will be the featured speaker at the next Wallace Stevens Birthday Bash, to be held November 6, 2010, at the Hartford Public Library. Richardson, a professor at CUNY Graduate Center, is the author of a two-volume biography of the poet. She co-edited, with Frank Kermode, *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose* and, in addition to numerous articles, has recently published *A Natural History of Pragmatism: The Fact of Feeling from Jonathan Edwards to Gertrude Stein*. Her talk, "Wallace Stevens' Radiant and Productive Atmosphere," will trace how the poet came to translate faith into his "supreme fiction." Birthday cake and champagne will follow the presentation. The annual celebration is sponsored by the Connecticut Center for the Book at the Hartford Public Library, with help from the Friends and Enemies of Wallace Stevens (www.stevenspoetry.org).

At last year's Birthday Bash, Deirdre Ford donated to the Hartford Public Library a bronze bust of Wallace Stevens that her husband, the late William Ford, had commissioned. The bust, created by sculptor Frederic Blatt in 2002, rests on a pedestal in the Wallace Stevens Room at the library. It is flanked by two broadsides ("The Plain Sense of Things" and "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour"), which were donated by the Friends and Enemies of Wallace Stevens.



Bronze bust of Wallace Stevens by sculptor Frederic Blatt (2002), which was donated to the Hartford Public Library by Deirdre Ford in 2009. Photo courtesy of the Hartford Public Library.

The Friends and Enemies of Wallace Stevens is selling note cards featuring a drawing by Bringham Troy of Stevens' house on Westerly Terrace in Hartford. Orders for packets of twelve cards for \$6 may be sent directly to James Finnegan, P.O. Box 2482, Hartford, CT 06146-2482; for more information, contact him at jforjames@aol.com.



Benjamin Grossberg and Margot Schilpp were the featured poets at the annual Rose Garden Reading, held in Elizabeth Park in Hartford on June 19, 2010. Grossberg teaches poetry and creative writing at the University of Hartford. His books include *Sweet Core Orchard*, winner of the 2008 *Tampa Review Prize* and *Underwater Lengths in a Single Breath*, winner of the 2005 Snyder Prize (Ashland Poetry Press). Schilpp's collections include *The World's Last Night* (2001), *Laws of My Nature* (2005), and *Civil Twilight* (forthcoming in 2012), all published by Carnegie Mellon University Press.

"American Poetry" was the theme of the 41st Poetry International Festival, held June 11–18, 2010, in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Poets from around the world—from Afghanistan to the United States, from Brazil to South Korea, from Sudan to Russia—participated. The opening night was titled "Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," and on June 17, Bart Eeckhout hosted a special double program on Stevens. The first session featured two Dutch and two Flemish poets discussing their experiences as translators of Stevens, and the second showcased three international poets (including Michael Palmer and Christian Hawkey), who read and discussed Stevens as part of a multimedia show that included live music.

Wallace Stevens: Selected Poems, edited by John N. Serio and published by Alfred A. Knopf, was named one of the best books of 2009 by Independent Booksellers. About Stevens' poetry, the announcement notes: "Full of a passionate sensibility that captures the music of the English language and humble reckoning with the world, these poems are a thrill to read aloud and a welcome challenge to ponder." A paperback edition of the book is scheduled to be released in January 2011.

For National Poetry Month in April, the Academy of American Poets designed a handsome poster featuring this quotation from Stevens' "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour": "We make a dwelling in the evening air, / In which being there together is enough." Along with the Academy, the poster was co-sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, Merriam-Webster, the Poetry Foundation, and the *New York Times*. It was distributed widely to libraries and organizations and to thousands of members of the American Library Association as an insert in the professional magazine *American Libraries*.

We note the passing of Frank Kermode. The author of over fifty books and innumerable essays, Kermode published one of the earliest and most influential books on Stevens (*Wallace Stevens*, 1960). Most recently, he co-edited with Joan Richardson *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose*. Kermode died on August 17, 2010, at the age of 90.

Sara S. Hodson
The Huntington Library

Stevens Program at the MLA Convention Los Angeles, January 6–9, 2011

136. Wallace Stevens's Voices 5:15–6:30 p.m., Diamond Salon 8, J. W. Marriott

Program arranged by the Wallace Stevens Society
Presiding: Elisabeth Oliver, McGill Univ.

1. "Less and Less Human: Stevens, Gibberish, and the Cry of the Animal," Thomas Sowders, Louisiana State Univ., Baton Rouge
2. "The War of 'Of' and Other Polyvocal Syntaxes in 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,'" David Joseph Letzler, Graduate Center, City Univ. of New York
3. "The Poet's Voice in the Echo of Stevens," Dean Rader, Univ. of San Francisco



THE WALLACE STEVENS JOURNAL IS MOVING TO JOHNS HOPKINS

We are pleased to announce that effective January 2011, the Johns Hopkins University Press will assume all aspects of managing and publishing *The Wallace Stevens Journal* for the Wallace Stevens Society. Subscriptions will be handled through the Press, and individuals who subscribe will continue to be members of the Wallace Stevens Society.

A new editorial team, including an expanded panel of distinguished readers, will come aboard as well. Bart Eeckhout, University of Antwerp, Belgium, will become the editor. Submissions or correspondence should be sent to him at bart.eeckhout@ua.ac.be. Bonnie Costello will serve as the book review editor (boncos@bu.edu); James Finnegan as the poetry editor (jforjames@aol.com); and Alexis Serio as the art editor (aserio@uttyler.edu). The journal will not change in substance or style.

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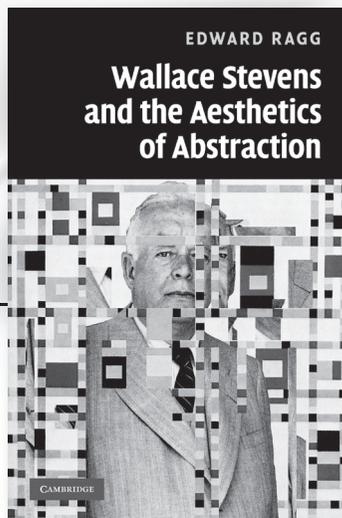
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Published August 2010

"Ragg's book shows what can be done by scrupulous scholarship on a carefully chosen and crucial individual feature of a poet's oeuvre. Ragg brings to the topic of abstraction an enviable combination of elegant clarity, subtle and imaginative readings, the construction of an engaging and rich dialectic within Stevens' own career and incisive philosophical analysis that provides a significant conceptual place for the role of idealization in poetry."

—Charles Altieri, *University of California, Berkeley*

Edward Ragg's study is the first to examine the role of abstraction throughout the work of Wallace Stevens. By tracing the poet's interest in abstraction from *Harmonium* through to his later works, Ragg argues that Stevens only fully appreciated and refined this interest within his later career. Ragg's detailed close readings highlight the poet's absorption of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century painting, as well as the examples of philosophers and other poets' work. *Wallace Stevens and the Aesthetics of Abstraction* will appeal to those studying Stevens as well as anyone interested in the relations between poetry and painting. This valuable study embraces revealing philosophical and artistic perspectives, analyzing Stevens' place within and resistance to Modernist debates concerning literature, painting, representation and 'the imagination'.



Contents

Acknowledgments; List of abbreviations; Introduction: 'Stevensian' and the question of abstraction 1935–2009; 1. The abstract impulse: from anecdote to 'new romantic' in Harmonium (1923) and Ideas of Order (1935); 2. The turn to abstraction: Owl's Clover (1936) and the 'un-locatable' speaker in The Man with the Blue Guitar (1937); 3. The 'in-visible' abstract: Stevens' idealism from Coleridge to Merleau-Ponty; 4. Abstract figures: the curious case of the idealist 'I'; 5. Abstract appetites: food, wine and the idealist 'I'; 6. The pure good of theory: a new abstract emphasis; 7. Bourgeois abstraction: poetry, painting and the idea of mastery in late Stevens.

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