

The Wallace Stevens Journal



A Publication of The Wallace Stevens Society
Volume VIII Number 1

Spring 1984

The Wallace Stevens Journal

Volume VIII Number 1

Spring 1984

Contents

A Modern <i>Ut Pictura Poesis</i> : The Legacy of Fauve Color and the Poetry of Wallace Stevens	—Doratheia K. Beard	. . . 3
Poem as Process: Wallace Stevens' "Metamorphosis"	—Laurence N. de Looze	. . . 18
Imaginative Origins: "Peter Quince at the Clavier" and Henry James	—Daniel Mark Fogel	. . . 22
Wallace Stevens' Transforming Imagination	—Ellwood Johnson	. . . 28
A Selection of Poems	—R.H. Deutsch	. . . 39
Tribute: R.H. Deutsch		. . . 50
Reviews		. . . 57
Current Bibliography		. . . 63

Cover by Kathy Jacobi—from a painting of her husband, R.H. Deutsch

The Wallace Stevens Journal is published biannually (Spring, Fall) by The Wallace Stevens Society, Inc. Administrative and editorial offices are located at Clarkson University, Potsdam, NY 13676. Subscription rates are \$15.00 for individuals, \$20.00 for institutions; back issues are available. Checks should be made payable to The Wallace Stevens Society, Inc.

Subscription to *The Journal* by individuals carries with it membership in The Wallace Stevens Society, Inc. Manuscripts, advertising, and subscriptions should be addressed to the editor, Clarkson University, Potsdam, NY 13676.

Manuscripts should be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope, with loose stamps attached.

The Wallace Stevens Journal

EDITOR
John N. Serio

ART EDITOR
Kathy Jacobi

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR
George S. Lensing

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
Carolyn Gould

EDITORIAL BOARD
A. Walton Litz
Joseph N. Riddel
Frank Doggett
Marjorie Perloff

Robert Buttel
George S. Lensing
Dorothy Emerson
Roy Harvey Pearce

The Wallace Stevens Society, Inc.

PRESIDENT
John N. Serio

ADVISORY BOARD
Kathy Jacobi
George S. Lensing

A. Walton Litz
Marjorie Perloff

Robert Buttel

This issue is respectfully dedicated
to the memory of
Robert Harmon Deutsch
1915-1983
teacher, poet, and founding editor of
The Wallace Stevens Journal

A Modern *Ut Pictura Poesis*:
The Legacy of Fauve Color and the Poetry of Wallace Stevens

DORATHEA K. BEARD

However dangerous comparisons between differing artistic media may often be, in the case of the poet Wallace Stevens, such comparisons are inescapable. Stevens had a wide range of pictorial interests, and while references to painting are most numerous in his published letters, there are also many allusions to art in the poetry, for instance: "Panoramas are not what they used to be. / Claude has been dead a long time" ("Botanist on Alp [No. 1]"); or his reference to the bold contemporaneity of "Matisse at Vence" ("St. Armorer's Church from the Outside"), referring to the exquisite 1951 Chapel of the Rosary which Matisse designed in gratitude for the care the nuns had given him during a serious illness.¹ In addition, he was an omnivorous, if somewhat unselective reader about art, with a particular fondness for exhibition catalogues, and he wrote several prose essays concerning art, the most important of which is his 1951 lecture for the Museum of Modern Art in New York on "The Relations Between Poetry and Painting," in which he exhibits a knowledge of the art and writing of many modern artists, including Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, and Paul Klee, and conveys his particular delight in an exhibition of the paintings of Jacques Villon which he had recently viewed at the Louis Carré Gallery in New York.² Stevens did indeed go to museums and galleries whenever possible; he also gradually built up a collection of modern French paintings, mainly the work of younger members of the School of Paris who were strong colorists, like Jean-Jules Cavallès and Pierre Tal-Coat.³

But what makes comparison essential (even more than his avowed interest in painting) is Stevens' remarkable visual sense, unequalled by any other twentieth-century poet, and his parallels with artistic theory. In Stevens' case, one might well reverse the old analogy and say that his poetry is like painting, that his use of color words, in particular, stems from (or is at least remarkably similar to) the "liberation" of color from the object found in French Fauve painting, and that this color usage becomes an abstraction, color-in-itself, however much of its beginnings may have been tied to specific sensory objects. It was Henri Matisse and his fellow Fauves, notably André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck, who deliberately set out to free color from subservience to the representational object, so that the artist might be free to paint a red tree or a green sun if the structure of the painting or its mood demanded it. Indeed, red trees became a special hallmark for some Fauve painters, especially Vlaminck, as in his *Landscape with Red Trees*, 1906-07 (Museum of Modern Art, Paris), *The Gardener*, 1905 (Private Collection, Paris), and *Banks of the Seine at Carrières-sur-Seine*, 1906 (p.c., Paris).⁴

Chronologically, Fauvism is the first of the strictly twentieth-century art movements to manifest itself; one may speak of the Fauve "liberation" of

color from the object as the first of the twentieth-century pictorial liberations, from which follow the Cubist "liberation" of depicted space from Renaissance illusionistic perspective, etc. The colorist ideas and experiments of the Fauves essentially coalesced in the summer of 1905, when Matisse and Derain painted together at the fishing village of Collioure in the south of France. After their return to Paris in the fall, their paintings, along with those of Vlaminck, Charles Manguin, and Albert Marquet, were placed together in one room of the Autumn Salon, where the critic Louis Vauxcelles, seeing a Renaissance-type bust of a child in the center of the room, surrounded by these brilliant new paintings, quipped "Donatello chez les fauves," hence the nickname "wild beasts." (Vauxcelles repeated the phrase in his written account of the salon for *Gil Blas*, on October 17, 1905.)⁵

By initiating this liberation, the Fauves started color on a trail that led to a form of total abstraction in which flat, broad, simple areas of color, undiluted by half-tones or nuances, function as the major constructive elements in a painting. This Fauve and Fauve-descended abstract color I see as a key to Stevens' own developing abstractness, though it was not necessarily a conscious relationship. He himself says, in the 1951 Museum of Modern Art lecture, that it is immaterial "whether these relations [between poet and painter] exist consciously or unconsciously. One goes back to the coercing influences of time and place" (*NA*, p. 171).

But it is certain that he must have seen a good deal of Fauve painting. He attended the epochal 1913 Armory Show in New York, where Fauvism was well represented.⁶ He was a member of the Walter Arensberg circle (Arensberg had been a classmate at Harvard) in the years immediately thereafter, when Arensberg was acquiring his collection. And of course he obviously visited the Museum of Modern Art in New York many times, where he could have seen Matisse's *Red Studio* and *Goldfish and Sculpture* of 1911 and his *Blue Window* of 1913, as well as Derain's 1906 *London Bridge*.⁷

Stevens' use of color is striking enough to have been commented on by a great many scholars, and it is this element which first attracted me to his poetry years ago in a seminar with John Crowe Ransom, where I was struck by phrases like: "blasphemously pink"; "central, essential red"; "goldenest generating"; "savage blue," "bluest reason," and "blue phenomena"; "red-emerald, red-slitted blue"; "sun's green," "elemental parent, green night," and "green barbarism turning paradigm."⁸ What little had been written at that time about Stevens' sense of color discussed only affinities with French Impressionism, and when my interest was revived twenty years later, I discovered that, although the literature on Stevens had mushroomed, most of the discussion regarding his color was still following the same paths.⁹ No one has made a serious attempt to consider Stevens' possible relationship to the coloristic tradition in twentieth-century painting that develops from the Fauves and leads to such color theorists as the German-American painter Hans Hofmann.

And there is a parallel, or correspondence, with certain ideas of Hof-

mann, though the possibility that Stevens read any of Hofmann's theoretical writings is slight (however, Hofmann's important *The Search for the Real in the Visual Arts and Other Essays* was published during the poet's lifetime¹⁰); yet these parallels appear to me to be closer and more far-reaching than those—equally unprovable—concurrences proposed concerning Klee and Kandinsky (notably in the panel discussion held on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition of Stevens' collection at Trinity College in Hartford, on May 7, 1963; see Baird, p. 175). Such parallels are especially interesting in the sense of indicating shared sources (both theoretical sources and the styles of painting from which they stem) as well as the existence of "ideas in the air" at the same time, since the manifestations of abstract but structural color, of "pure painting" as opposed to "tonal painting," to use Hofmann's terms, are contemporaneous in both poet and painter.

The omission of serious concern with the most important twentieth-century color theorists is astonishing, given the startling impact of Stevens' handling of color throughout his poetic oeuvre and its centrality, since color often provides the "clue" to the poet's basic themes and meaning. And so, considering that literary scholars, however well-intentioned, still appear to be wearing visual blinders, it seems appropriate for an art historian to enter the lists.

The most important author to maintain an "Impressionist" source for Stevens' color is Michel Benamou, who advanced this thesis in a 1959 article entitled "Wallace Stevens: Some Relations Between Poetry and Painting."¹¹ His error—and that of those who followed him—may stem from having restricted his initial range of choice among painting styles too much and especially from having placed too much emphasis on a few isolated statements in Stevens' prose writing when seeking his parallels, such as the statement in "Notes on Jean Labasque" (*OP*, p. 293), that Impressionism was "the only great thing in modern art," a statement which is not nearly so unequivocal in context. It must also be remembered that French Impressionist painting (essentially a phenomenon of the 1870's) and Impressionism in literature are by no means identical. Therefore, Benamou made the *a priori* assumption, without looking further, that Impressionist painting must have had the greatest influence on Stevens' poetry and that his use of color must of course also be Impressionist, as well as his sense of light and weather change. But Impressionism is not the only artistic movement with an interest in color, and writers with a literary background (including Stevens himself) seem prone to include far too many divergent artists and styles under the blanket term "Impressionism," thereby also ascribing too much importance to the position of that style in the development of modern art.

In any case, however nuanced or broken into prismatic touches they may be, the colors of the French Impressionists are derived from optical sensations and thus are tied to nature (for example, look at Claude Monet's *Bridge at Argenteuil*, 1874, and *Gare St. Lazare*, 1877, both in the *Jeu de Paume*,

Paris),¹² whereas Stevens' color nomenclature is not simply used in an effort to describe visual images; to classify his color solely as Impressionist is to restrict it to a descriptive function, which diminishes Stevens' creative achievement and undermines the power of his impact, which is often carried by color. If anyone wishes to encounter serious attempts at conveying descriptive color in words, let him look at a white-sale catalogue. I counted seventy-three color names in a single one a few years ago, of which only white and yellow were listed as pure, unmodified colors, and there were whole groups of colors (such as the teals and avocados) which were not present, presumably since they were not popular colors for sheets and towels that year. Better still, try a nursery stock catalogue: in one Wayside Gardens catalogue I counted nearly as many color names for azaleas alone—which are unavailable in half the spectrum—as Stevens uses in the whole of his poetic oeuvre.

No doubt there are certain descriptive, perhaps even Impressionist-related elements in some of Stevens' poems, such as the fifth stanza of "Study of Two Pears":

The yellow glistens.
It glistens with various yellows,
Citrons, oranges and greens
Flowering over the skin

(CP, p. 196)

or "Variations on a Summer Day" which begins:

Say of the gulls that they are flying
In light blue air over dark blue sea

(CP, p. 232)

but does not really make any extensive or notable use of color words. Sometimes he may refer to multiple shades without naming them, as in "Tea," where he writes of "sea-shades and sky-shades" (CP, pp. 112-13). Typically, in fact, the poems where it appears that Stevens does use color in an ordinary descriptive sense are not those which make the strongest use of color words. Generally, even very early in Stevens' career, his color is descriptive only in the most primitive or primary sense; the sea *is* green, the sky *is* blue for him, in a way that is more basic than sensory description.

Even in "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," (1924, CP, pp. 98-102), whose title would seem to suggest an Impressionist interest in reflections, and which scholars seem to consider an Impressionist poem par excellence, in the visual sense, some of the color effects have a better relationship with later painting developments.¹³ Take the treatment of green throughout the poem, especially the odd modifiers Stevens assigns to it in each of the five segments: "paradisial green," "swimming green," "sham-like green," "uncertain green," "too-fluent green," "thinking green," "motley green." I

maintain that such terms do not create Impressionist nuances and variations; they are not subtle touches of many hues, designed to capture evanescent visual sensations, as they would do if Stevens were painting an Impressionist picture; rather, they set up jolting, ambivalent reactions in the reader (more parallel with Matisse's deliberate tampering with linear perspective, as in his 1905 *Interior at Collioure* [p.c., Switzerland] and the *Red Studio*¹⁴) and evoke strange associations, associations which are certainly visual, but not in an Impressionist sense, expressing the fundamental complexities of the world in a way that has little to do with surface appearance.

And what of "chocolate" in this poem? There is "rosy chocolate," "chop-house chocolate," "porcelain chocolate," "musky chocolate," and finally "Chinese chocolate." This is a typically ambiguous word, which Baird takes to refer to a color (p. 186), though Stevens never uses the word chocolate as a brown in any other poem. And it should be pointed out that, even in this poem, only the "rosy chocolate" reference has any suggestion of a hue. Furthermore, there is a letter by Stevens which clearly refers to the drink only:

Then about Chinese chocolate: It may be that this is what may be called an embryo for charivari. The words are used in a purely expressive sense and are meant to connote a big Chinese with a very small cup of chocolate: something incongruous.

(*Letters*, p. 389, to John Pauker, June 3, 1941)

Thus, even in a poem which may have some Impressionist elements and in which the use of color words is certainly striking, it is so largely because that usage evokes non-naturalistic visual images. In later years the purely descriptive elements increasingly decline; ultimately, as Ransom maintained, Stevens is not a descriptive poet, in spite of all his "pop" references to concrete "things," whereas Impressionism is essentially descriptive.¹⁵

But Stevens' color, in its blunt forcefulness, delivers the greatest punch when, in addition, it stands for abstract concepts or "clues us in" to their presence. "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," 1942, deals with the search, via the arts, for a "supreme fiction," in which "men could propose to themselves a fulfillment," as a substitute for religion (Autobiographical note, written in 1954 [*Letters*, p. 820]); this was to be the central theme of the rest of Stevens' oeuvre. In the first section, entitled "It Must Be Abstract," Stevens wrestles with the inaccessibility of the abstract, with the movement to and fro between the abstract and the real (in a letter to Hi Simons, January 12, 1943, in *Letters*, p. 434), saying of the former:

Not to be realized because not to
Be seen, not to be loved nor hated because
Not to be realized.

And, after moving to the "real" (the weather) signals the return to the abstract by the use of pure color:

And yellow, yellow thins the Northern blue.

(p. 385)

In a slightly later poem entitled "The Ultimate Poem Is Abstract,"

The lecturer
On This Beautiful World Of Ours composes himself
And hems the planet rose and haws it ripe,

And red, and right.

And then,

this placid space

Is changed. It is not so blue as we thought. To be
blue,
There must be no questions.

(*CP*, p. 429)

Such abstractions could perhaps be described as symbols: yellow, which Stevens once called the "first color" (in "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight," *CP*, p. 431), might then become the fount of reality; red seems to be primitive energy (sometimes becoming ferocity and violence) and fertility; blue he equates with imagination, or the world of the imagination which produces art, which is one side of the basic polarity Stevens constantly expresses through color, in which the other pole is green, the concrete reality of the actual world ("my green, my fluent mundo" ["Notes," p. 407]). But these color abstractions are more than simple symbols; Stevens can convey a distillation of various moods and express a concatenation of meanings by this means. All the complex interweaving of reality and imagination and their essential unity, which he finds in art, are conveyed with utmost economy of means through abstract color: "If all the green of spring was blue, and it is" ("Connoisseur of Chaos," *CP*, p. 215); or "The sun rises green and blue" ("A Fish-Scale Sunrise," *CP*, p. 161). In effect, when Stevens' thought becomes abstract, so also does his color usage. Thus when he says "Green were the curls upon that head," refers to a "yellow afternoon," a "green mind," "red winter" or "red summer," we have "color like a thought that grows out of a mood" and are alerted by the abstraction to the underlying idea the poet is conveying.¹⁶

In addition to the Fauvist freedom of color choice, there are several other aspects of Fauve color usage and theory which are paralleled in Stevens. The prominent shifts of color in his poems, such as "ground, more blue than red, more red than green" or "the gold tree is blue," which many authors take to be Impressionist changes of light and atmosphere, are in reality, I believe, transpositions and metamorphoses.¹⁷ If so, they are akin to Matisse's esthetic, as expounded in his 1908 article "Notes of a Painter"

(though I have found no concrete evidence Stevens ever read it), where Matisse discusses the color transpositions he felt he had to make in order to maintain a satisfactory relationship between each color:

If upon a white canvas I jot down some sensations of blue, of green, of red—every new brush stroke diminishes the importance of the preceding ones. Suppose I set out to paint an interior: I have before me a cupboard; it gives me a sensation of bright red—and I put down a red which satisfies me; immediately a relation is established, between this red and the white of the canvas. If I put a green near the red, if I paint in a yellow floor, there must still be between this green and this yellow, and the white of the canvas a relation that will be satisfactory to me. But these several tones mutually weaken one another. It is necessary, therefore, that the various elements that I use be so balanced that they do not destroy one another. . . . I am forced to transpose until finally my picture may seem completely changed when, after successive modifications, the red has succeeded the green as the dominant color (in *Matisse on Art*, ed. Jack D. Flam [London: Phaidon, 1973], p. 37).

This is a procedure that seems to be illustrated literally by *Harmony in Red*, 1908-09 (State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad), formerly a *Harmony in Blue* and before that even, a *Harmony in Green*.¹⁸ Stevens has an equally striking instance of metamorphosis in a 1937 poem entitled "A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts," where by night, in the light of rabbit-imagination, the cat who by day was monumentally large, hostile, and red, with a green mind, becomes small as a bug in the grass, and green (p. 209).

To further link Fauve theory and practice, it was Matisse who said "a metre of green is greener than a centimetre of green," as may be observed in *The Dance*, 1909 (MOMA, New York); Derain likened these colors used at peak intensity to dynamite cartridges, an effect conveyed by his *Turning Road, L'Estaque*, 1906 (MFA, Houston); and Vlaminck wrote, "You see, you've got to paint with pure cobalts, pure vermillions, pure veronese." These are paint tube names; for the effect Vlaminck intends, one might look at *The Circus*, 1906 (Galerie Beyeler, Basel) and his *Gardener and Banks of the Seine* referred to earlier.¹⁹

Just as the Fauves tended to use large, flat areas of unmixed, unsubtle hues, straight from the tube, at peak intensity, Stevens' preferred colors are simple and basic, notably primary hues, which for Stevens (as for Vlaminck) include green. Hues he regards as secondary, which include brown as well as orange, for example,

The brown at the bottom of red
The orange far down in yellow
Are falsifications . . .
In a constant secondariness,

("The Green Plant," *CP*, p. 506)

are not often used, perhaps because anything not primary is indeed false to him. The next line, "A turning down toward finality," suggests that Stevens may have been aware of the composition of the color wheel, in which "watering down" a hue with its opposite progressively dilutes it, until finally, in the center of the circle, one reaches gray. On the other hand, though Stevens certainly has a fondness for contrasts of color, his contrasts are not, with one exception ("The visible, a zone of blue and orange vericolorings," from "Esthétique du Mal," p. 324), and that is not unequivocal, the intensification of color by means of the complementary color pairs of the color wheel favored by so many French artists from Delacroix on. The connotation of colors that are "off" the primary hue, such as "red-blue, red-purple, never quite red itself" ("Arcades of Philadelphia the Past," *CP*, p. 225) is also of something untrue or fake. Nor does Stevens use many true compound colors, descriptive adjectives for colors, values, or tints. Hyphenated color words which might at first appear descriptive, like "sea-green," often turn into something quite different in context, which in this case is "sea-green pomp" ("The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage," *CP*, p. 6). Most of his qualifying terms are non-descriptive modifiers, such as "purple fragrance," "lascive rose," and "licentious violet."²⁰ I found about one hundred of these distinctly odd modifiers throughout Stevens' oeuvre, whereas there are very few genuinely descriptive compound colors, shades, and tints. Throughout the *Collected Poems* there appear to me to be only about seventeen compound colors and shades which are used in a truly descriptive manner. If one adds the early poems in *Opus Posthumous* and the manuscript poems printed by Buttell (pp. 155 and 214), another half-dozen or so can be found, but in this context I do not feel it is legitimate to include juvenilia.

Stevens' total color nomenclature comprises only about fifty terms, which is in striking contrast to the sensory-descriptive basis of the color usage of the Romantic poets. Marian Mead (*Four Studies in Wordsworth* [Menasha, Wisconsin: Banta, 1929], pp. 264-73) found over 250 different color words for both Wordsworth and Keats; her list includes every conceivable tint and shade, as well as many exotic terms for simple colors, such as saffron and cerulean (Stevens uses neither of them), which adds much to the rich evocativeness of Romantic poetry. Furthermore, many of Stevens' color words are used only once or twice throughout the whole body of his poetry. And quite often these seldom-used terms are not exotics but color words in general use, such as maroon, tan, and olive. There are a few colors, like cerise and magenta, which appear in the first pages of *Opus Posthumous* and then are never used again. There are also a number of equivocal words, such as ebony, coral, or bone, where one remains in doubt whether it is a color or a thing being referred to, a deliberate ambiguity Stevens must have delighted in. When I made a quick list of colors Stevens seems never to have used, that list came to more than fifty terms and included many very common words, such as cream, beige, aqua, and navy. Surprisingly, given Stevens' interest in painting and his use of paint-

ing terms (such as “daub”), he almost never uses paint tube names for colors: no cadmium red or chrome yellow, no Veronese green or veridian, no cobalt or ultramarine blue. The only possible exceptions, vermilion and umber, are equivocal and could have another derivation.

The only colors Stevens uses with any real frequency (in addition to his four primaries, plus the neutrals: white, black, and gray) are purple (which often suggests an outworn or overripe pomp, as in “purple-plated past”), gold (which may possibly be a richer equivalent of yellow, as in “gold’s maternal warmth”) and pink, which is sometimes a candy-box color (in “Forces, the Will and the Weather,” which has repeated references to nougats, the sentence “A pink girl took a white dog walking” suggests a confection itself, the pastel tones equating with something not quite part of reality) but elsewhere becomes an incipient hue (as when Stevens describes a country as a “melon, pink if seen rightly and yet a possible red”).²¹

When Stevens does use tints or shades, they also have a special significance. They are literally shades, phantoms, shadows, or evasions, diluted hues that are less real even than secondaries and compound colors, as when lavender moonlight is equated with an evading metaphor (“Add This to Rhetoric,” *CP*, p. 198). Stevens also uses such phrases as “vanishing-vanished violet,” “heliotrope’s inconstant hue,” “Death in his chalk and violet robes,” or, in “What We See Is What We Think,” the “disintegration of afternoon,” the return to phantoms, is evoked with gray and violet: “Twelve and the first gray second after, a kind/ Of violet gray, a green violet, a thread to weave a shadow’s leg”; and finally, in “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,” the same idea is conveyed by the words “like an evening evoking the spectrum of violet.”²²

Not only does Stevens prefer blunt, unmodified hues to tints or shades, he has the same fondness for saturated color (color that seems to have reached the quintessence of the hue) that the Fauves do, which he attempts to convey through repetitions: “A green baked greener in the greenest sun”; “green’s green apogee”; “Be alive with its own seemings, seeming to be/ Like rubies reddened by rubies reddening”; “In the land of the lemon trees, yellow and yellow were/ Yellow-blue, yellow-green”; or “The lion roars at the enraging desert,/ Reddens the sand with his red-colored noise,/ Defies red emptiness to evolve his match.”²³ And both Stevens and the Fauve painters like to pile on these blatant bold colors in crude juxtapositions, as Matisse does in his 1905 paintings *Woman with a Hat* (Haas Collection, San Francisco) and *Window at Collioure* (Whitney Collection, New York) and *Girl Reading* of 1905-06 (MOMA, New York) and as Stevens does in “The Comedian As the Letter C,” where a “green toucan” and “raspberry tanagers” in “orange air” are followed by a welter of hues: green, purple, scarlet, gold, and, in one line, “yellow, blue and green and red” (pp. 30 and 32).²⁴ Incidentally, words like raspberry, scarlet, ruby, crimson, rouge, and vermilion are mostly synonyms for bright red, not shades; they are generally used as substitutes for the word red, often to increase the effect of inten-

sity. Stevens characterizes the color in "The Comedian" as "savage" (p. 31) and that of a poem from the 1940's, "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight," as "crude":

Say that it is a crude effect, black reds,
Pink yellows, orange whites, too much as they are
To be anything else in the sunlight of the room . . .

The "crude" effect aimed at here comes not only from strong colors but also from the paradoxical juxtapositions of unlikely combinations: "black reds,/ Pink yellows, orange whites." It may be argued that these words are used to suggest shadings in the roses, but here that interpretation is even less likely than with the hyphenated colors ("yellow-blue, yellow-green") in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." Note that Stevens does not say blackened or darkened reds, reds tinged with black, reds shading into black, or pinkish yellows. As the poem continues, one observes how Stevens equates crudity, the lack of nuances or subtle shadings in color, with his feelings about essential reality and metaphor, which he sees as an evasion of this basic reality:

Too much as they are to be changed by metaphor,
Too actual, things that in being real
Make any imaginings of them lesser things.
(*CP*, p. 430)

Throughout Stevens' career, the precise degree of blunt reality he wishes to suggest is conveyed by the bluntest hues. Perhaps color enters into his reality-metaphor equation because strong, pure, primary colors seemed most actual to him. In "The Motive for Metaphor" (1942) he suggests that poets turn to metaphor when they cannot stand

The weight of primary noon,
The A B C of being,
The ruddy temper, the hammer
Of red and blue. . . .
(*CP*, p. 288)

having been happy with the "half-colors of quarter things" or, as he puns in a later poem, "meta-men and para-things" ("The Bouquet," *CP*, p. 448). Stevens himself can never be happy with them. As he says in "Credences of Summer," one should

Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky
Without evasion by a single metaphor.
(*CP*, p. 373)

That essential reality lies behind mere superficial sensory appearances; hence the tendency toward color abstraction, as a guide in his ultimate search for "things as they are," a search which leads to the expression of such concepts as "the day was green" ("Blue Guitar," *passim* and p. 165), with its concentrated evocation of associations with the earth, with the reality of the world, as well as of a state of mind or a state of being, or the idea of green as an absolute (e.g., "The green fish pensive in green reeds is an absolute" ["Montrachet," p. 263]) because it is elemental, primary.

Stevens' attempt to free himself from description and metaphor is paralleled in much twentieth-century painting, beginning with the Fauves, but it is only in their coloristic legacy (especially outside France) that one finds anything that can be equated with his color symbolism. There is an obvious parallel with the German painter Franz Marc when that artist says:

Blue is the *male* principle, severe and spiritual. Yellow is the *female* principle, gentle, cheerful and sensual. Red is *matter*, brutal and heavy, the color that has to come into conflict with, and succumb to, the other two.²⁵

Yet there is a naive quality to the painter's primary colors, compared to the more complex interweaving of the poet's concepts. Ultimately, there is a natural source lying behind all color symbolism (the blue of the sky, the green of grass and trees, the yellow of the sun, the red of blood); it is the associations and interpretations of individuals that differ. Many writers, beginning with Hi Simons ("Wallace Stevens and Mallarmé," *Modern Philology*, 43 [1946], 235-259), have attempted to work out a precise specific system to explain Stevens' color symbolism, but the fact that they so often disagree (except perhaps for blue and green) reinforces the interwoven complexities of his thought and proves that it cannot be reduced to a mere system. Simons stresses Stevens' early connections with French Symbolist poetry, but Stevens emancipated himself from that and, other than a possible debt to Mallarmé's "azure" as the ideal (I only found azure three times in Stevens' poems, however, so it can hardly be considered a major color), both Stevens' favored color words and the uses he makes of them are diametrically opposed to the Symbolist esthetic where color is concerned, as expressed in Verlaine's "*L'Art Poétique*," in which the poet advocates using only nuances and shades, never hues: "*car nous voulons la Nuance encore, / Pas la Couleur, rien que la nuance!*"²⁶

The Russian-born painter Kandinsky, also a member of the Munich Blue Rider group, might be a better parallel in terms of richness and complexity, but Kandinsky does not have Stevens' bluntness, though he went through a Fauve phase in his coloristic development. Piet Mondrian's reduction of the complexities of existence to pure primary colors as well as primary forms is perhaps closer to Stevens' color abstraction, since for Mondrian these primaries subsume the most basic meanings and questions of existence, such as the fundamental polarities of life and death. And Stevens appears to have had a high opinion of Mondrian, to judge from his January

25, 1949, letter to Barbara Church (in *Letters*, p. 628), in which, speaking about an exhibition of Jean Arp, he says: "It is nonsense to speak of his integrity as an abstractionist in the same breath with which one speaks of Mondrian. Arp is a minor stylist, however agreeable. But for Mondrian, the abstract was the abstract." What is different is the fact that Mondrian was a dedicated Christian mystic and his perpendiculars also relate to the Christian symbol of the cross.²⁷ Nevertheless, there is a basic link, since primary color is a sign of Mondrian's essential philosophy, just as color is a sign of Stevens' philosophy. Therefore, even the term symbolism seems inadequate, in the final analysis, to describe the function of color in his philosophy. Just as color structure is an integral part of paintings by Matisse and Hofmann (clear-cut examples are Matisse's *The Green Stripe*, 1905 [State Museum of Art, Copenhagen] and Hofmann's *Yellow Burst*, 1956 [p.c., New York]), there are times when color seems to become an essential part of the construction of Stevens' poems, as in "The Man with the Blue Guitar," where the omnipresent motif of blue played against green takes on structural aspects.²⁸

The title of the last poem in Stevens' *Collected Poems*, "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself" (p. 534), points up the ultimate direction of his color. Though Stevens' color had a tendency towards abstraction from the start, there is a development beyond metaphor, which is never true reality, beyond symbol, where the color stands for something else, to a stage where the colors *are* the thing itself. As he said in one of his aphorisms: "The words must *be* the thing it represents; otherwise it is a symbol. It is a question of identity" ("Adagia," *OP*, p. 168). This use of color as an entity in itself is similar to Hofmann's idea that:

In pure painting we deal always with *created* color in the sense that jewels create color. A ruby is red—an emerald is green, a sapphire is blue, a topaz is yellow, etc., and they retain their color identity in every change of normal light-condition.²⁹

For Stevens too was fond of using ruby as red and emerald as green, as in "emerald cat" ("The Candle a Saint," *CP*, p. 223) or "ruby-water-worn/ Red-in-red repetitions" ("Notes," p. 400). And Hofmann has paintings with such titles as *Emerald Isle*, 1959 (S. C. Johnson & Son Collection), or *Smaragd Red and Germinating Yellow*, also 1959 (Cleveland Museum of Art). Stevens himself might have liked "smaragd," since it is an obsolete word for a green, precious stone, such as emerald.

Finally, Stevens' concept parallels the ideas presented in an exhibition entitled *Art of the Real*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1968, where the distinction between "realism" and what is actually *real*, the tangible concrete art object itself, is emphasized in E. C. Goossen's introductory essay for the catalogue. The aim of the artists involved "was not to *represent* something but to *make* something, something which had never existed in the world before" (p. 7). The American painter Frank Stella

insists:

My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen is there. It really is an object. Any painting is an object and . . . [one] finally has to face up to the objectness of whatever it is that he's doing. He is making a thing. . . . If the painting were lean enough, accurate enough, or right enough, you could just be able to look at it.³⁰

Another American Minimalist who creates his world rather than representing it is Ellsworth Kelly. Goossen has said of his painting: "The new work of art is very much like a chunk of nature, a rock, a tree, a cloud, and possesses much the same hermetic 'otherness' " (p. 11). And Stevens says:

The poem is the cry of the occasion,
Part of the res itself and not about it,
The poet speaks the poem as it is.

("An Ordinary Evening," p. 473)

Stella's and Kelly's monumentally scaled hieratic icons, like Stevens' poems, forcefully illustrate this point. Each has a preference for contrasts rather than nuances and an immediate impact on a broad, simple scale rather than delicate detail, which results in great carrying power, in an ability to retain a vivid impression of the abstract "image." Yet it is noteworthy that the painters' sources, like the poet's, lie in a distilled essence of their experience with nature. For instance, Kelly's *White Relief—Arch and its Shadow*, 1952-55, which appears totally abstract, is a distillation of form and void in the shadows cast by the Pont de la Tourelle in Paris.³¹ This is equally true of Stella's numerous series which relate to places, such as the New Hampshire series of 1966 or the Newfoundland series of 1969.³² It should also be noted that, in typical American fashion, these concept-oriented abstractionists commence with specifics, not generalities.

In this relationship with the natural world lies a part of the paradoxical interplay between art and reality of which Stevens was so conscious. Increasingly, he believed in the essential reality of art and linked poetry and painting together: this was the major message of his 1951 Museum of Modern Art lecture. "Thinking about poetry is the same thing as thinking about painting," he wrote in a June 22, 1948, letter to Barbara Church (in *Letters*, p. 601). For poetry, as for abstract painting, art is the content; yet there is this ultimate contact with sun and cloud and earth, and once again Stevens uses transpositions of natural color to help convey this paradox, in "The Man with the Blue Guitar," where the sun acquires the color of the earth.

Poetry is the subject of the poem,
From this the poem issues and

To this returns. Between the two,
Between issue and return, there is

An absence in reality,
Things as they are. Or so we say.

But are these separate? Is it
An absence for the poem, which acquires

Its true appearances there, sun's green,
Cloud's red, earth feeling, sky that thinks?

From these it takes. Perhaps it gives,
In the universal intercourse.

(CP, pp. 176-77)

Northern Illinois University

Notes

¹*Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1966); *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 1954), pp. 134 and 529 respectively. I have found about 27 art references in Stevens' poetry, with 15 direct references to a specific artist; this includes "Sunday Morning" (CP, p. 66, dated November, 1915) which to Robert Buttel (*Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967], p. 157) suggests a Matisse odalisque. The difficulty with that comparison is that the characteristic Matisse figures which this image resembles were not painted until the 1920's.

²In *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and Imagination* (New York: Vintage-Random, 1951), pp. 157-76.

³"School of Paris" is a very loose term used to refer to twentieth-century painters—French and otherwise—working much of the time in Paris, most but not all of them having a strong sense of form.

⁴For color reproductions of these paintings see Jean-Paul Crespelle, *The Fauces* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1962), pp. 20, 23, and 24 respectively.

⁵For a good account of the history and aims of the Fauves see: John Elderfield, *The "Wild Beasts": Fauvism and its Affinities* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976); for the most recent scholarly account see: Marcel Giry, *Le Fauvisme, ses origines, son evolution* (Newchâtel: Ides et Calendes, 1981), English ed., *Fauvism, Origins and Development*, trans. Helga Harrison (New York: Alpine Fine Arts, 1982); for Matisse, the indispensable book is still Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Matisse: His Art and His Public* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1951); a recent museum publication that is very useful is John Elderfield, *Matisse in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: MOMA, 1978). All of these books, except Barr, also have good quality color reproductions and are generally available.

⁶Buttel, p. 82. Fauve paintings in the Armory Show included the following Matisses: *The Young Sailor II*, 1906 (Bloch Collection, Chicago); *Blue Nude*, 1907 (Cone Collection, Baltimore Museum of Art); *Luxe II*, 1907 (MOMA, Paris); *Red Studio*, 1911 (MOMA, New York); *Goldfish and Sculpture*, 1911 (MOMA, New York); and *Nasturtiums and the Dance*, 1912 (Worcester, Massachusetts: Museum of Art). Also shown were one of Georges Braque's 1906 *Harbor of Antwerp* canvases; Georges Dufy's 1909 *Leopold Strasse, Munich*; several undated Manguins; and Vlaminck's *Rueil*, 1912 (Chicago Art Institute) and *Tower Bridge*, ca. 1910. Incidentally, Vassily Kandinsky's *Improvisation Number 27*, 1912 (Metropolitan Museum, New York), also has quite Fauve color, although of course he belongs to the Blue Rider group. For information on the Armory Show see Milton Brown, *Story of the Armory Show* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1963).

⁷For color plates see Elderfield, *Matisse*, pp. 87, 86, and 91, and H. Harvard Abrams, *History of Modern Art* (New York: Abrams, 1968), plates 37 and 34.

⁸"The Comedian As the Letter C," 1921-22, CP, p. 44; "Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers," CP, p. 246; "This Vast Inelegance," *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York: Knopf, 1957), p. 25; "The Man with the Blue Guitar," 1936-37, CP, p. 166; "Meditation Celestial," CP, p. 124, and "Esthétique du Mal," 1944, CP, p. 319; "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," CP, p. 400; "Blue Guitar," p. 177, "Phosphor Reading by His Own Light," CP, p. 267, and "Comedian," p. 31.

⁹There are, however, a few interesting suggestions, such as that presented by James Baird (*The Dome and the Rock* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968], p. 179), apparently developing an idea of Morse's, that Stevens' use of gray is based on Klee's concept, advanced during the time he was teaching at the Bauhaus, of gray as a non-dimensional central point.

¹⁰Ed. Sarah T. Weeks and Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr. (Andover, Massachusetts: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1948).

¹¹*Comparative Literature*, 11 (1959), 232-248, also in Michel Benamou, *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 1-24. He seems to have been regarded as gospel by nearly everyone since and is certainly to be praised for his earnest attempt to study and understand painting.

¹²A good color detail of the former may be found in Maurice Raynal et. al., *History of Modern Painting I: Baudelaire to Bonnard* (Geneva: Skira, 1949), p. 23, and a plate of the latter in Germain Bazin, *French Impressionists in the Louvre* (New York: Abrams, 1958), p. 175.

¹³Among numerous references to this particular poem, one might cite especially the article by Richard P. Adams, "Pure Poetry: Wallace Stevens' 'Sea Surface Full of Clouds,'" *Tulane Studies in English*, 21 (1974), 91-122, and Baird, p. 106.

¹⁴For color reproductions see Giry, plate 31, and Maurice Raynal, et. al., *History of Modern Painting II: Matisse, Munch, Rouault* (Geneva: Skira, 1950), p. 21.

¹⁵Seminar discussions, Columbus, Ohio, Winter Quarter, 1961; Ransom was a visiting professor at The Ohio State University that term.

¹⁶"Poem Written at Morning," *CP*, p. 219; "Yellow Afternoon," *CP*, p. 236; "A Rabbit As King of the Ghosts," *CP*, p. 209; "Chocorua to Its Neighbor," *CP*, p. 300, and "Description without Place," *CP*, p. 339; "The Novel," *CP*, p. 457; "Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers," p. 246; "Blue Guitar," p. 169.

¹⁷"Pieces," *CP*, p. 352; "Of the Surface of Things," *CP*, p. 57. For the Impressionist viewpoint on the latter, see Benamou, p. 234, and William Van O'Connor, *The Shaping Spirit* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1950), p. 100.

¹⁸Color plates of the *Harmony in Red* may be found in Crespelle, plate 4, in Arnason, plate 36, and in *Capolavori impressionisti e postimpressionisti dai musei sovietici*, the catalogue of an exhibition held at the Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza, Lugano, Switzerland, from June 14 to October 15, 1983, p. 87. The plates, however, do not reveal the evidence of the preceding green and blue stages, which are clearly visible at the edges of the canvas as it is currently framed. There is also photographic evidence of the transformations. See Barr, p. 344.

¹⁹Quoted by Bernard Myers, *Modern Art in the Making* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950), p. 253; Raynal II, p. 38; Georges Duthuit, *The Fauvist Painters*, The Documents of Modern Art Series (New York: Wittenborn, 1950), p. 28. For reproductions of *The Dance* see Elderfield, *Matisse*, p. 55; for the *Turning Road* see Elderfield, "Wild Beasts," p. 114; for *The Circus* also see Elderfield, "Wild Beasts," p. 57.

²⁰"The News and the Weather," *CP*, p. 265 and "Montrachet-le-Jardin," *CP*, p. 261. See also those examples quoted above.

²¹"Montrachet," p. 260; "Comedian," p. 32; *CP*, p. 228; "Notes," p. 393.

²²"The Owl in the Sarcophagus," *CP*, p. 433; "In a Bad Time," *CP*, p. 427; "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery," *CP*, p. 151; *CP*, p. 459; *CP*, p. 488.

²³"Notes," p. 393; "Credences of Summer," 1946, *CP*, p. 373; "Description," p. 346; "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," 1949, p. 486; and "Notes," p. 384.

²⁴Reproductions of these Matisse paintings may be found in Arnason, plates 26 and 25, and Elderfield, "Wild Beasts," pp. 26 and 27.

²⁵As quoted by George Heard Hamilton, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe, 1880 to 1940*, Pelican History of Art series (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967), p. 139. A famous example in Marc's painting is *Blue Horses*, 1911 (Walker Institute, Minneapolis).

²⁶*French Symbolist Poetry*, trans. C. F. MacIntyre (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), p. 34. George McFadden ("Probing for an Integration: Color Symbolism in Wallace Stevens," *Modern Philology*, 58 [1961], 186-93) discounts any extensive Mallarméan basis, but his own system, based largely on the Newtonian spectrum, does not seem to me to be well-founded (perhaps because it is based too much on a theory of color) and is certainly not adequately proven.

²⁷For Mondrian's ideas and examples of his paintings (such as *Composition with Red, Blue and Yellow*, 1930 [p.c., New York] see Michel Scuphor (pseudonym for Ferdinand Louis Berckelaers), *Piet Mondrian: Life and Work* (New York: Abrams, n.d.). The *Composition* is illustrated on p. 173.

²⁸For color plates of the Matisse see Raynal, II, p. 26, and Arnason, plate 27. For a color plate of the Hofmann see Sam Hunter, *Hans Hofmann* (New York: Abrams, 1963), plate 62; also, the two Hofmanns referred to later are reproduced in Hunter, on plates 105 and 116. Regarding the "Blue Guitar," though it is true Stevens said, in a July 1, 1953, letter to Renato Poggioli (in *Letters*, p. 786), that he did not have a specific Picasso painting in mind, it is scarcely credible that he should not have been thinking of the *Old Guitarist* of 1903, which has been in the Art Institute of Chicago since 1926 and is often reproduced, so that it is inconceivable that a man as conversant with modern painting as Stevens was should not at least have seen a reproduction of it, if not the original.

²⁹"The Color Problem in Pure Painting—Its Creative Origin," 1955, in catalogue of Hofmann exhibition, Kootz Gallery, New York, reprinted in Hunter, p. 48.

³⁰Questions to Stella and Judd: Interview by Bruce Glasner" 1964, ed. Lucy Lippard, in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 158.

³¹For a photograph see E. C. Goossen, *Ellsworth Kelly* (New York: MOMA, 1973), p. 51. Other examples include *Atlantic*, 1956, and *North River*, 1959, illustrated in Goossen, *Kelly*, pp. 56 and 69.

³²For Stella reproductions see Robert Rosenblum, *Frank Stella* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1971), pp. 43 and 51.

Poem as Process: Wallace Stevens' "Metamorphosis"

LAURENCE N. DE LOOZE

It is both poignantly ironic and curiously à propos that a cryptic little poem by Wallace Stevens should bear the grandiose Ovidian title of "Metamorphosis." Poignantly ironic because the title alone reveals a certain nostalgia for—and distance from—the integrated classical world. And curiously à propos because Stevens' unique treatment enacts as well as discusses the concept of metamorphosis. The metamorphoses have indeed been many which stretch from the Latin tradition of Ovid to the highly personal language of Stevens. Yet the poem is no mere documentation of historical or metaphysical transformations. In four succinct stanzas the loss of the old order is recorded, true, but in those same stanzas a transformation of a different order also takes place. We are witness to a metamorphosis which is thematic as much as linguistic. The poem enacts the transformation inherent in the process of perception; outer reality is interiorized and personalized. Imagination is the alchemical agent which transfigures, which metamorphosizes the world. And the flux of creativity reaffirms that Stevens truism that "permanence [is] composed of impermanence."¹

In the poem we are confronted first with the autumnal changes Stevens is fond of recording. Part of the relentless progression of time, autumn is particularly interesting because it performs the alchemy of changing life into death, of annihilating imposed order. And the metamorphosis has already begun. Yellow is disintegrating in the first line to "yillow." The old worms—the necessary agents of metamorphosis—are come out. The wind is bandying words and leaves about. The month has already begun to come apart, to pass away. The wind spells out "Sep - tem - ber. . . ." We are plunged *in medias res* as we must be if impermanence is the only constant and if the seasonal transformations are, in fact, endless.

October and November follow in similar fashion. It takes no great insight to notice that the months undergo a linguistic transformation that resembles the biological deterioration. As James Baird has noted, "the syllables break apart, pass into nonsense, and then into the limbo of nothingness," for reasons we shall consider shortly.² The life of summer is all but dead. "Only the skeleton is left; the robin, symbol of summer, has migrated to Venezuela."³

In the third stanza leaves fall. This stanza, the only one not associated with any particular month, contains in microcosm the metamorphosis of the whole poem (and of autumn). The "rude leaves fall." And "the rain falls." But when "The sky/ Falls and lies with the worms" there is surely cause for concern. The celestial amplification metamorphosizes the poem. Here is the thematic crux, the chain of resemblances that links autumn to a metaphysical transfiguration. The sky of the classical past has fallen and become food for worms. Or put another way, "a meaningful universe

where things happen according to expected patterns has been replaced by a surrealistic one, void of reason.⁴ This new winter is a nightmare. It has neither the sun of the summer nor the stars of the classical past to light one's way. In place of stars have been strung terrifying street lamps which provide no real illumination.⁵ Rather, they are immediately metamorphosed into images of death. They "have been hanged"; they dangle. The image is clearly one of death by strangulation. When we emerge from the metamorphosis of the third stanza, the colors and leaves and words that blew about at the beginning of the poem have become a row of dangling corpses. The "pretty quirk" worms have become sky-eating monsters (an etymological fidelity).⁶ And the intelligible seasonal changes have become terrifying, "illogical," and seemingly incoherent.

Thus far we have treated the poem as though themes and poetics were two separate issues. Although necessary to clear explication, this approach is unfair to a poet who announces quite clearly, "My first proposition is that the style of the poem and the poem itself are one."⁷ And again: "If a poem seems to require a hierophantic phrase, the phrase should pass."⁸ Not without a glance at the classical world, Stevens underscores the magical power of language and its inseparability from a poem's meaning. Thus our separation has been arbitrary and artificial and has done violence to our reading of the poem. Let us backtrack, then, and look more closely at style.

We notice immediately that the language is cryptic, highly personal, almost mystically coded. The poem opens with the language of a rite, an incantation repeated three times: "Yillow, yillow, yillow." We, as readers, are more than happy to assign logical meaning—yellow leaves dancing in the wind. The second stanza, too, contains its verse of hocus-pocus: "Make o, make o, make o." Again we are eager to supply an explanation. We assume some relationship (cause-effect?) between the instructions and the distorted October that follows immediately after. In stanza three we are duly metamorphosed once again, and by the time we emerge we feel justified in giving up our attempts at logical reduction. Language has become illogical, thus unintelligible. It has been transformed into something which contests consensus. "To and to and fro/ Fro" might reduce acceptably to "to and fro, to and fro," but the final line appears to contain only aural suggestions, half-realized (or half-revealed) glimpses of meaning. "Fro Niz - nil - imbo" hints at "frozen, nil, in limbo"—transfigured assessments of the wintry poetic landscape. Nevertheless, their link to the thematic thrust seems evident enough: autumn's culmination in death, the razing of the classical world, the portrayal of modern fragmentation, and so on. More interesting is to ask who is speaking. Or better: what is and from whence comes this voice that condescends to the worms in the first stanza and mumbles incoherently at the end?

Without attempting to assign any particular identity, I think we can safely say that the linguistic world order of shared speech and shared meanings disintegrates with the leaves of autumn. Stevens fulfills his first proposition admirably. The linguistic as well as the thematic emphasis is on con-

stant change. The voice finds expression through shared speech increasingly difficult. Individual perception demands idiosyncratic presentation. Thus the "hesitations of the text": the false attempts, the stutterings, the deformations. "Make o, make o, make o" embodies the process of perception and the painstaking attempts to articulate that perception. The line recreates the intense process of artistic creation, and that of anyone who tries to see the world in a new way. Not surprisingly, it leads to a personalized vision of the word (the concept?) October, a vision which includes a metathesized ending on the month—the French ending, in fact, recalling Stevens' various attempts to see reality anew through the French language. This foreignness reaches its climax in the fourth stanza. The essence of illogical dangling could not be conveyed better than by the simple metamorphosis of "to and fro" into "To and to and fro/ Fro." This is the "effective integration" made possible, according to Stevens, by the union of style and subject.⁹ Thus when we arrive at Niz - nil - imbo, we have in the decomposed, stuttered utterance one of the raw tools for reconstructing the logical sense, as well as a more highly charged impression of November than the normal appellation could ever create. In short, we are precisely at the same juncture as the poet when he sits down to write a poem.

In tracing the perceptual process of the speaker, then, from his disjunctive September to his transformed November, we also retrace the artistic process. We must descend into incoherency, then transform it into sense, make it intelligible to us, through the power of image. The process of death and decay becomes for us, as it is for Stevens on many occasions, a fertile process. Stevens' linguistic improvisations force us to see the world in a new way, as he must do each time he takes up the pen. The movement from September to Niz - nil - imbo is the metamorphosis of the *vécu* into art. The liberties with language are necessary both as catalysts and in order to express our world, to arrive at resemblance. As Stevens himself explains, "the style of the gods and the gods themselves are one." This sufficed for the Ovidian world. But Stevens' job is to "create a new style of a new bearing in a new reality."¹⁰ This demands a new language and radical change. "Metamorphosis" is a poetic manifesto of that language, self-conscious and polemical. For "what we are really considering here are the creations of modern art and modern literature."¹¹

"Metamorphosis," then, becomes a metaphor for poetic creation, for the transforming process of art. The world perceived, recreated in art, is the world metamorphosized. The world exists as a projection of the self—a fact which Stevens celebrates in his reappraisal of the Narcissus legend.¹² For the speaker of the metamorphosis poem, and for Stevens who wrote the poem, the confrontation of autumn and self creates something new. The similarity of the two words, metaphor and metamorphosis, in itself suggests such an equation. Still we should be hesitant to insist upon it were it not for Stevens who does so quite emphatically:

metaphor . . . is used as a symbol for the single aspect of poetry with

which we are now concerned—that is to say, the creation of resemblance by the imagination, even though metamorphosis might be a better word.¹³

I submit that “Metamorphosis” employs that “better word.” In the disintegration and reintegration—linguistic, chemical, seasonal—Stevens documents “the creation of resemblance by the imagination.” The fulcrum of the change is the metamorphosing chemistry of the third stanza that fuses falling leaves and falling skies. The poem moves from the wind’s aimless play with words to a November metaphorized and metamorphosed by the poet.

University of Toronto

Notes

¹Wallace Stevens, “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,” in *Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 472.

²James Baird, *The Dome and the Rock: Structure in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), p. 111.

³M. Bernetta Quinn, *The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), p. 58. Hereafter, *Tradition*.

⁴*Tradition*, p. 58.

⁵The image is by no means peculiar to Stevens. Consider, for example, a strikingly similar instance in the very different work, Georg Lukács’ *Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971), tr. Anna Bostock. The opening passage to his investigation of literary forms runs: “Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars” (p. 29). Against this paradise Lukács posits the postlapsarian, modern world in which the “starry firmament now shines only in the dark night of pure cognition, [and] it no longer lights any solitary wanderer’s path (for to be a man in the new world is to be solitary)” (p. 36).

⁶The word “worm” is, of course, descended from the Old English *wyrm* meaning “serpent” or “dragon.” In *Beowulf* this is the appellation repeatedly given to the dragon who flies through the skies.

⁷Wallace Stevens, “Two or Three Ideas,” in *Opus Posthumous* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 202. Hereafter, *OP*.

⁸*OP*, p. 205.

⁹*OP*, p. 204.

¹⁰*OP*, p. 209.

¹¹*OP*, p. 204.

¹²Wallace Stevens, “Three Academic Pieces,” in *The Necessary Angel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), pp. 79-80. Hereafter, *Angel*.

¹³*Angel*, p. 72.

Imaginative Origins: "Peter Quince at the Clavier" and Henry James

DANIEL MARK FOGEL

Stevens' choice of a buffoonish mechanical from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as persona in "Peter Quince at the Clavier" has been wisely appreciated. A. Walton Litz, for example, points out that the "ironic contrast between the bumbling Peter Quince and the delicate music of the clavier is both a graceful gesture of self-deprecation and a foreshadowing of the clash between Susanna and the elders," and, since "the dialectic of 'Peter Quince at the Clavier' is one of contrasts," Litz urges readers to "remember that Peter Quince and his fellow mechanical are the essential counterpart to the moonlit imagination of *Midsummer Night's Dream*."¹ But no one hitherto seems to have noticed the likelihood that Stevens developed his image of the Shakespearean figure improvising a music of feeling on the keyboard under the inspiration of a remarkably parallel trope in Henry James's Introduction to *The Tempest*, published in 1907 in Sidney Lee's edition of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*.²

We know that Stevens had a lifelong interest in Henry James, whose secularized religion of art struck a responsive chord in the poet. In two letters of 1909, Wallace Stevens reported to Elsie Moll that he had bought and read *Washington Square* and that, though it "was not specially good . . . yet it was balm to me to read and to read quickly." His remark that James's novel "was written almost thirty years ago, when Henry James was still H. J. Jr. and had tales to tell" implies, furthermore, considerable acquaintance with the novelist's work, early and late.³ Indeed, thirty-five years later, Stevens was sufficiently interested in the novels of Henry James's maturity to read F. O. Matthiessen's *Henry James: The Major Phase*. Stevens especially liked a sentence Matthiessen quotes from James's then still-unpublished *Notebooks*:

There is a precious sentence in Henry James, for whom everyday life was not much more than the mere business of living, but, all the same, he separated himself from it. The sentence is . . .

"To live *in* the world of creation—to get into it and stay in it—to frequent it and haunt it—to *think* intensely and fruitfully—to woo combinations and inspirations into being by a depth and continuity of attention and meditation—this is the only thing."⁴

This "precious sentence" of James's is remarkably similar in substance and tone to the novelist's Introduction to *The Tempest* that, as I will show, Stevens probably read early in the century.

Over five hundred volumes are listed in the published catalogues of books in Wallace Stevens' library, but several hundred other volumes were dispersed by booksellers before the catalogues were drawn up, and additional books that have remained in the Stevens family also do not appear on the library lists. Among those lost volumes, apparently, were the copy of *Washington Square* bought in 1909 and also, presumably, some—and probably all—of Shakespeare's works. For only a single Shakespeare play, *Hamlet*, is on the published lists, whereas Wallace Stevens' references to Shakespeare throughout his poetry cut across the whole Shakespeare canon.⁵ Early in 1909, just one week before his letter mentioning the purchase of *Washington Square*, Stevens wrote to Elsie, "I have been sketching plans for winter evenings—going so far as to think of skipping through all of Shakespeare." Stevens' project of Shakespearean reading may very likely have been undertaken in Sidney Lee's recently completed edition of the works.

In his *Tempest* Introduction, Henry James ponders the relations between Shakespeare the man, Shakespeare the artist, and Shakespeare's works, "a series of incalculable plunges . . . the great primary plunge, made once for all, of the man into the artist," and then "the successive plunges of the artist himself into Romeo and into Juliet, into Shylock, Hamlet, Macbeth" and so on. *The Tempest*, James writes, "seems to show us the artist consciously tasting of the first and rarest of his gifts, that of imaged creative Expression, the instant sense of some copious equivalent of thought for every grain of the grossness of reality; to show him as unresistingly aware, in the depths of his genius, that nothing like it had ever been known, or probably would ever be again known, on earth." A good deal of James's discussion expresses his puzzlement over Shakespeare's retirement: "How did the faculty so radiant there contrive, in such perfection, the arrest of its divine flight?" The bachelor Henry James seems unable to imagine Shakespeare's wanting to be with his grandchildren in Stratford, away from the one theatrical center in London. But James makes a great, though neglected, contribution to Shakespeare criticism in his view of Shakespeare's distinction from other writers. For others (including, by implication and in actual practice, Henry James), "life itself, in its appealing, overwhelming crudity, offers itself as the paste to be kneaded. Such a personage works in general in the very elements of experience; whereas we see Shakespeare working predominantly in the terms of expression, *all* in terms of the artist's specific vision and genius." Shakespeare is distinguished by his "endowment for Expression, expression as a primary force, a consuming, an independent passion, which was the greatest ever laid upon man." This, in Henry James's formulation on the topic, is "Shakespeare's power of constitutive speech," which, once seen, makes for the clearest possible recognition of the inseparability of style and meaning: "It is by his expression of it exactly as the expression stands that the particular thing is created, created as interesting, as beautiful, as strange, droll or terrible—as related, in short, to our understanding or our sensibility; in consequence of which we reduce it to naught when we

begin to talk of either of its presented parts as matters by themselves."

Shakespeare, then, in the words of James's "precious sentence" prized late in life by Wallace Stevens, lived "in the world of creation." Such views would have appealed to the young Stevens, as would the religious aura James imparts to his treatment of literary topics, in, for instance, imaging his subject in the *Tempest* Introduction "as a divinity in a temple." But the Jamesian trope upon which Stevens seized for "Peter Quince at the Clavier" is introduced in the following passage in which James stretches, "as I admit I do at least, for a still closer conception of the beautiful crisis" of Shakespeare's composition of *The Tempest*.

I find it pictured for me in some such presentment as that of a divine musician who, alone in his room, preludes or improvises at close of day. He sits at the harpsichord, by the open window, in the summer dusk; his hands wander over the keys. They stray far, for his motive, but at last he finds it and holds it; then he lets himself go, embroidering and refining: it is the thing for the hour and his mood. The neighbours may gather in the garden, the nightingale be hushed on the bough; it is none the less a private occasion, a concert of one, both performer and auditor, who plays for his own ear, his own hand, his own innermost sense, and for the bliss and capacity of his instrument.

A few pages later, James returns to the figure: "If I see him, at the last, over *The Tempest*, as the composer, at the harpsichord or violin, extemporising in the summer twilight, it is exactly that he is feeling there for tone and, by the same token, finding it—finding it—as *The Tempest*, beyond any register of ours, immortally gives it." And, still later, seeking to describe Shakespeare's retirement, James says, "The simplest way to put it, since I have likened him to the musician at the piano, is to say that he had decided upon the complete closing of his instrument, and that in fact he was to proceed to lock it with the sharp click that has reverberated through the ages," subjoining, a couple of sentences further on, a remark on "the impossibility of proving that the author of *The Tempest* did, after the date of that production, ever again press the spring of his fountain, ever again reach for the sacred key" [that is, of the locked piano].

Now the irony that Professor Litz sees in the incongruity of Stevens' making Peter Quince a musician is raised several orders of magnitude once we know that Stevens was replacing Henry James's conception of Shakespeare with one of the Bard's own comic and lowly dramatis personae. But, aside from that one transformation, Stevens stayed strikingly close to what I believe is the germ of the trope in James's essay. Both figures, James's Shakespeare and Stevens' Peter Quince, are seated at the same instrument. (James properly uses *harpsichord* and *piano* synonymously since the first is merely an early form of the second. Stevens' *clavier* is not a particular instrument; the term indicates either the keyboard of a musical instrument or refers to any stringed keyboard instrument, such as a clavichord, harp-

sichord, or piano.) Both figures are alone in their rooms, playing a music of feeling on their keyboards. As James describes Shakespeare, "his hands wander over the keys," straying "far, for his motive, but at last" finding "the thing for the hour and his mood." "His hands wander over the keys" is echoed in the opening of "Peter Quince at the Clavier":

Just as my fingers on these keys
Make music, so the selfsame sounds
On my spirit make a music, too.

Music is feeling, then, not sound . . .⁶

There is also a close relation between season, time of day, and locale in James's figure of Shakespeare composing and in Stevens' poem. Henry James sees Shakespeare playing in the "summer dusk" with an unheeded audience of neighbors who "may gather in the garden." Wallace Stevens writes of "Susanna's music" that "touched the bawdy strings" of the "red-eyed elders watching" while "Of a green evening, clear and warm, / She bathed in her still garden." James's restatement of his metaphor is replete with terms that resonate with Stevens' language in "Peter Quince"—here in a single James sentence, for instance, the words *composer*, *harpsichord*, *violin*, *summer twilight*, *feeling*, *tone*, and *immortally*: "If I see him, at the last, over *The Tempest*, as the composer, at the harpsichord or violin, extemporising in the summer twilight, it is exactly that he is feeling there for tone and, by the same token, finding it—finding it as *The Tempest*, beyond any register of ours, immortally gives it." James's "at the harpsichord or violin" provides a connection not only between the opening of "Peter Quince" and the *Tempest* Introduction but also between the Introduction and the ending of the poem:

Susanna's music touched the bawdy strings
Of those white elders; but, escaping,
Left only Death's ironic scraping.
Now in its immortality, it plays
On the clear viol of her memory,
And makes a constant sacrament of praise.

There may also be an echo of Henry James in the first stanza of Part II of "Peter Quince":

In the green water, clear and warm,
Susanna lay.
She searched
The touch of springs,
And found
Concealed imaginings.

She sighed,
For so much melody.

Susanna's inner music, which parallels Peter Quince's in the first stanza of the poem, is awakened when, having "searched/ The touch of springs," Susanna finds the key to "Concealed imaginings." Henry James had commented on "the impossibility of proving" that Shakespeare did, after *The Tempest*, "ever again press the spring of his fountain, ever again reach for the sacred key."

Aside from indicating a specific, significant, yet hitherto unnoticed source for the central trope in "Peter Quince at the Clavier," these remarks point toward what may be a neglected area of Stevens studies, the poet's use of immediate and late-Victorian predecessors in making the quantum jump from such mediocre poems of 1914 as "Phases" to the indubitable—but not yet fully Modernist—masterpieces of 1915. For example, in such technical matters as meter and the structure of rhyme and line, "Peter Quince" displays the influence of Matthew Arnold, Francis Thompson, and Coventry Patmore. Stevens' aphoristic phrasing in "Peter Quince," moreover, probably develops from his frank admiration of Arnold's aphorisms. Indeed, much of what we might call the constitutive speech of Stevens' first great poems is drawn from the literature of the preceding epoch, more so perhaps than from the literature of the Romantic age, though as a context for reading Stevens the Romantics have received more attention from critics.⁷ Just how much Stevens' use of the Victorians has been slighted is suggested by the astonishing failure of readers to remark in his "So gardens die, their meek breath scenting/ The cowl of winter, done repenting" a clear echo of Fitzgerald's "Come, fill the Cup, and in the fire of Spring/ Your Winter-garment of Repentance fling," lines from the seventh stanza of that favorite poem of the late Victorians, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.⁸

Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge

Notes

¹A. Walton Litz, *Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 43.

²Lee's edition of Shakespeare was published in England and America, 1906-1908. In America, two editions were published, one a limited Editor's Autograph Edition of 250 sets of forty volumes (New York: George D. Sproul), the other the Harper Edition of Shakespeare's Works in twenty volumes (New York: Harper & Brothers). Parenthetical citations in my text of James's Introduction to *The Tempest* are to Volume XVI of the Editor's Autograph Edition. Of the three published discussions of James's Introduction, two are very brief treatments: Leon Edel's in *Henry James: The Master, 1901-1916* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1972), pp. 147-49, and William T. Stafford's in "James Examines Shakespeare: Notes on the Nature of Genius," *PMLA*, 73 (1958), 123-28. The best and most substantial essay is Lauren T. Cowdery's "Henry James and the 'Transcendent Adventure': The Search for the Self in the Introduction to *The Tempest*," the *Henry James Review*, 3 (1982), 145-53.

³To Elsie Moll [January 13, 1909] and to Elsie Moll [January 17, 1909], *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), pp. 121, 122.

⁴To José Rodríguez Feo, June 20, 1945, *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, p. 506.

⁵See Milton J. Bates, "Stevens' Books at the Huntington: An Annotated Checklist," *The Wallace*

Stevens Journal, 2, iii-iv (1978), 45-61; 3, i-ii (1979), 15-33; and 3, iii-iv (1979), 70. Also helpful is Peter Brazeau, "Wallace Stevens at the University of Massachusetts: Checklist of an Archive," *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 2, i-ii (1978), 50-54. In addition to these checklists, I have examined booksellers' sale catalogues that include books owned by Stevens; these catalogues were made available to me through the kindness of my colleague, Professor Donald L. Stanford.

⁶To Elsie Moll [January 6, 1909], *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, p. 116.

⁷Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), pp. 89-90; following quotations of "Peter Quince at the Clavier" are from this edition. Stevens' poem was first published in 1915 in the journal *Quarto*.

⁸For exemplary, classic essays on Stevens and the Romantics, see J. V. Cunningham on Stevens and Wordsworth in "Tradition and Modernity: Wallace Stevens" in Cunningham's *Tradition and Poetic Structure: Essays in Literary History and Criticism* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1960) and Helen Hennessy Vendler on Stevens and Keats in "Stevens and Keats' 'To Autumn'" in *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration*, ed. Frank Doggett and Robert Buttel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

⁹At least this echo (and the failure of commentators to mention it) astonished me when it was pointed out by my father, Professor Ephim Fogel of Cornell University.

Wallace Stevens' Transforming Imagination

ELLWOOD JOHNSON

The relation between imagination and reality in the poetry of Wallace Stevens has generally defied concrete definition. As J. Hillis Miller has commented, "The critic can develop radically different notions of Stevens' aims as a poet . . . at times he is unequivocally committed to bare reality. At other times he repudiates reality and sings the praises of imagination. . . . It is impossible to find a single one-dimensional theory of poetry and life in Stevens."¹ As a result of this effort to find a "one-dimensional theory" in Stevens' philosophy, his interpreters have generally divided into two groups: what might be called the romantics, who emphasize Stevens' theory of imagination, and the naturalists, who emphasize the role of reality as an "alien" and determining influence on imagination, seeing Stevens as an agnostic attempting to find a value system in a real, rather than mythologized, world. As one example of the former, Frank Doggett's statement that Stevens' recurring notion is "the idea that there is no determinable object without a subject . . . and that the life of the world is the life of a consciousness,"² is basically true, but perhaps misleading. For Stevens it would be equally true, and possibly more pertinent, to say that there is no determinable subject without an object and that the life of a consciousness is the life of the world. In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," Stevens says, "It is not only that imagination adheres to reality, but also, that reality adheres to the imagination and that the interdependence is essential."³ In his essay, "About One of Marianne Moore's Poems," he reiterates H.D. Lewis' assertion that poetry must communicate "the sense that we can touch and feel a solid reality which does not wholly dissolve itself into the conceptions of our minds" (NA 96), adding, however, that the poet should be one, who, like Moore, "has the faculty of digesting the 'harde yron' of appearance." For Stevens there is an "alien" reality, pre-existent to human life, and undetermined by human consciousness, at the same time that there is a "felt" reality, one shaped into tangible experience by imagination.

Thus, Stevens' poetry evolves from a tension between a reality, which is, in itself, alien and chaotic, and the human spirit, which tries to contain the whole of reality in itself. In this essay, I intend to explore this paradoxical and ambivalent relationship between imagination and reality by categorizing four phenomenological levels of experience, or what one might describe as four general kinds of relationships between subject and object, and exemplifying them in discussions of passages from a variety of poems selected from the whole of Stevens' canon. By doing so, I hope to clarify what seems to me to have been the controlling idea, or vision, that motivated the writing of all of this poetry, which is that art, whether it is, as he called it, life lived as art, or painting or poetry as art, becomes when it approaches perfection a harmonious merging of imagination and reality. Stevens' poetry typically describes two aspects of reality: the knowable and

the unknowable. It also characterizes two general kinds of imagination: one that acts as a block to its own perception of things, and one that works effectively to bring ego and nature closer together. (In his essays, Stevens also suggests a further division of the second kind into the metaphysical and the aesthetic.) These four categories can, therefore, be labeled (1)*imagination*, which is the intuiting and synaesthetizing process of the spirit in shaping reality into experience, (2)*reason*, "imagination methodized," (3)*tangible reality*, which is the world in ourselves, and (4)*alien*, or sublime reality, the thing in itself.

Imagination

The best way to understand what Stevens intended with his term, *imagination*, is first to understand one line from "Peter Quince at the Clavier":

Music is feeling, then, not sound;
(CP 90)

The object of experience here is the vibration in the air, sound waves from Peter Quince's clavier, which stimulate the auditory sense of the subject, but are changed in the experience of the listening mind. This "music" in reality ("my fingers on these keys/ Make music") is something quite different from the music that one "hears" ("the self-same sounds/ On my spirit make a music, too"). In the spirit there is not an essential difference between different experiences of beauty. Seeing a beautiful object is "music," just as much as hearing. Furthermore each person experiences a different music; each person synaesthetizes and "imagines" a different reality.

The contingent ideas that every consciousness experiences a different reality and that particulars of reality are changed by context are subjects for a great number of Stevens' poems. These ideas are presented as a metaphysical paradox in "Metaphors of a Magnifico":

Twenty men crossing a bridge,
Into a village,
Are twenty men crossing twenty bridges,
Into twenty villages,
Or one man
Crossing a single bridge into a village.
(CP 19)

The experience of twenty men crossing a bridge is twenty different realities. Inversely, in "The Apostrophe to Vincentine" (CP 52-53), the poet sees a woman in three ways, as a heavenly ideal, as "green" reality and as a part of human society. As an ideal, she is "small and lean and nameless," but as "monotonous earth" becomes "illimitable spheres" of her, she becomes

truly "heavenly." There are as many realities as there are people experiencing them, yet, paradoxically, there is only one reality.

Imagination, for Stevens, then, is a very large term used to designate the transforming activities of the mind without which we could not experience reality except as a meaningless chaos of sense impressions. Imagination makes a "breach in reality" in order to experience it. This experience of reality, however, is a different act from that of creating objects out of imagination. As experience, imagination is metaphysics; as creation, it is art. Considered as metaphysics, Stevens says, the imagination is "the only clue to reality" we have. As a creative activity, imagination is "the power of the mind over the possibilities of things" and "the power of the mind over . . . reality." Further, "Imagination, as metaphysics leads us in one direction, and, as art, in another." In each case, however, the imagination must be understood as the transforming faculty of the mind that shapes reality into the illusions of it that we experience (NA 136-37).

In his essay, "Imagination as Value," Stevens tells us that imagination as metaphysics is more significant than its operation in relation to works of art. The use of imagination to "penetrate life" is something that we do all too unconsciously. Yet the life lived imaginatively can be a work of art in itself.

In spite of the prevalence of the imagination in life, it is probably true that the discussion of it in that relation is incomparably less frequent and less intelligent than the discussion of it in relation to arts and letters. The constant discussion of imagination and reality is largely a discussion not for the purposes of life but for the purposes of arts and letters. I suppose that the reason for this is that few people would turn to the imagination, knowingly, in life, while few people would turn to anything else, knowingly, in arts and letters. In life what is important is the truth as it is, while in arts and letters what is important is the truth as we see it. There is a real difference here even though people turn to the imagination without knowing it in life and to reality without knowing it in arts and letters. There are other possible variations of that theme but the theme itself is there. Again in life the function of the imagination is so varied that it is not well-defined as it is in arts and letters. In life one hesitates when one speaks of the value of the imagination. Its value in arts and letters is aesthetic. Most men's lives are thrust upon them. The existence of aesthetic value in lives that are forced on those that live them is an improbable sort of thing. There can be lives, nevertheless, which exist by the deliberate choice of those that live them.

(NA 147)

Even for the individual whose life is thrust upon him, imagination may be the means by which an oppressive quotidian is broken. The poem, "As You Leave the Room," offers an example of how this occurs and suggests a comparison between the use of the poetic imagination and the use of the

metaphysical imagination. The poet offers evidence that he is not merely a victim of the quotidian, a "skeleton" divorced from sensuous life, by referring to his imaginative achievements as a poet: they "are not what skeletons think about." In his momentary doubts about himself as a poet, "a disbeliever in reality/ A countryman of all the bones in the world," he has forgotten the present moment of the reality he is experiencing. He sees the snow then with new eyes as "Part of a major reality," and his appreciation of it gives him a sense of elevation; it has become something he can "touch, touch every way." Yet the snow, his reality, has not changed at all; only the metaphysical experience of it is different.

And yet nothing has been changed except what is
Unreal, as if nothing had been changed at all.

(OP 116)

The translation of reality into poetry and the appreciative experience of snow, or any object in reality, are seen as analogous, but different, uses of the imagination.

The imagination in its synaesthetizing function, according to Stevens, works as a unifying and universalizing force. The more one's imagination dominates reality, the more abstract or universal the world appears. The more reality dominates the imagination, the more particular the world appears. In its "metaphysical" purpose of penetrating into life, imagination seems a "connoisseur of chaos"; in its poetic function of reshaping and ordering life, it may provide an order that is not actually visible in the world, but which can become an awareness that helps the ordinary person in his understanding or "penetration" of life. The poet "gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it." Although the large purpose of his poetry is to bring ego and reality together as one, Stevens sees that poetry must sometimes be the product of an imagination opposed to reality: it can be "a violence from within that protects us from a violence without." In either case, however, there must be a "reality" to the imaginative "idea" (NA 31-36).

The distinction between the realizing purpose and the ordering purpose is suggested in "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together." There is a danger that a "pineapple," or any other object of reality, "put together" as a structure in the mind, may for the scientist or scholar become a series of disconnected facts, or for the poet, an irrelevant metaphor. The poet, in attempting to impose a "fiction," or pattern, on reality, runs the risk of isolating his poem from the things it is intended to illuminate.

He must say nothing of the fruit that is
Not true, nor think it, less. He must defy
The metaphor that murders metaphor.

(NA 84)

At the same time, he recognizes that the material object has a "human residence" in the imagination.

Thus it would be a mistake to assume that Stevens advocated a poetry whose major purpose is to restructure reality. Such a poetry fantasizes reality; it becomes escapism, which "applies where the poet is not attached to reality, where the imagination does not adhere to reality, which for my part, I regard as fundamental" (NA 31). Although all that we know of reality is in the self, reality must always be the source of "this invented world" of the imagination. In "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," he describes how the poet can "imagine" reality clearly.

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.

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

How clean the sun when seen in its idea,
Washed in the remotest cleanliness of a heaven
That has expelled us and our images . . .

(CP 380-81)

Once the poet has stripped his imagination of its own inventions—myths, value systems, conceptions of the divine—the imagination will conceive nature, the sun, not as Phoebe, its personification, but as itself. Although it must remain an image in the mind, it is also recognized as alien, "remote"; its very inconceivability is conceived in the mind. Once seen without its illusions, nature reveals its own mythic truths, its "fictive covering," the supreme fiction.

The synaesthetic function of imagination is sometimes the subject of a Stevens poem. In "Certain Phenomena of Sound" (CP 286-87), sounds are illusions with which we see. We hear in order to see; the mind synaesthetizes the imagery of sight and sound so that we see things we hear. The emptiness of a room is seen in its silence. The name Eulalia is a sight of a person. The traveler returned to tell his tale has a voice more envisioning than the redwoods he speaks of, "A sound producing the things that are spoken." His narrative is a music, "a place in which itself/ Is that which produces everything else." The experiences of the five senses reflect each other as images of consciousness.

Stevens' poetry is largely concerned with paradoxes resulting from the fact that we have no way of entirely separating the objective reality of existence from our consciousness of it. The world is both an illusion and real. There is, thus, a double-consciousness in his poetry like that of Emerson's of the co-existence of Spirit and Nature. Imagination recreates reality so

that we can perceive and experience it, but it lacks the permanence of the stuff it works up. Its symbol in Stevens' poetry is sometimes a "portal" through which the images of reality move and disappear. Reality produces desire in the spirit, and imagination over-responds by piling "new plums and pears on disregarded plate" (CP 69). The satiation of desires causes a void in which new desires must take form, as a season of heat and mosquitoes must create a desire for a season of cold, and vice versa. Death is the major stimulus to the imagination; without it there might be no desire, and thus no immortality of beauty. Imagination must follow the "sun," the cyclic movement of nature, in its efforts to create its own reality. Fantasy—imagination used as an escape from life—separates us from the "sun" and leaves us "never quite warm" and "remote" so that "the strings are cold on the blue guitar" (CP 168).

Reason

Stevens defines reason as "imagination methodized." Reason has its sources in imagination and in turn can become the cause of a kind of imagination out of balance with reality. In this latter retroactive function it becomes ideology and acts as an obstacle to the attainment of a normalizing balance between imagination and reality. In his essay, "Imagination as Value," Stevens says,

The truth seems to be that we live in concepts of the imagination before the reason has established them. If this is true, then reason is simply the methodizer of the imagination. It may be that the imagination is a miracle of logic . . .

(NA 152-53)

And in *Owl's Clover*, he tells us,

We have grown weary of the man that thinks.
He thinks and it is not true. The man below
Imagines and it is true, as if he thought
By imagining, anti-logician, quick
With a logic of transforming certitudes.

("Somber Figuration," OP 66)

Since reality itself is "irrational"—a chaos, a monadic anarchy, a "chiaroscuro"—it can best be understood through the irrational method of the poet: "The irrational searching the irrational" (OP 227). It should be perceived in the individuality of its particles, rather than for the logical connections between them. The scientist is effective in collecting information, but his method does not reveal particularity here and now. In his essay on Marianne Moore, Stevens says, "There is in reality an aspect of individuality at which every form of rational explanation stops short" (NA 93). Rea-

son, he suggests further, leads us to appraise poetry for "other than aesthetic reasons," mainly as a result of our "enthusiasm for moral or religious truth" (NA 98).

Like "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," "Anecdote of a Jar," and several other works of Stevens' early period, "Six Significant Landscapes" presents several different pictures of the way mind varies reality. Although the imagination should be rational and realistic in its perception of reality, the person who is merely rational has a confined view of reality. Reality as it is experienced is a "tangent of the self." The last section of the poem suggests this relation between reason and imagination.

Rationalists, wearing square hats,
Think, in square rooms,
Looking at the floor,
Looking at the ceiling,
They confine themselves
To right-angled triangles.

(CP 75)

Reason imposes an order on nature that is not actually existent in nature herself. This order may have pragmatic consequences in that it allows us to make use of nature, but "confines" our perception of the actuality of nature. In nature there are no straight lines, no one-dimensional geometry of squares, rectangles and triangles. These are creations of human reason. The essential form of nature is the circle, or ellipse; all things in nature curve.

If they tried rhomboids, cones, waving lines, ellipses--
As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon--
Rationalists would wear sombreros.

(CP 75)

In Stevens' poetry the form of the natural is always circular, elliptical or cyclical (waving lines); the form of the quotidian is linear and geometric. The imagination in perceiving reality also moves in circles, like the big bird following the sun in "Esthétique du Mal" (CP 318). One must be relatively "romantic," wear a round hat, in order to experience oneself in the composition of nature.

When these abstract systems take precedence in consciousness over reality, we are separated from ourselves. Such systems can become ideologies or myths. Belonging to the "air," they have no substance except in the mind. Like statues, they may be representations of human attitudes that have gone dead: "horses as they were in the sculptor's mind" (OP 46). Rationalists, according to Stevens, are apt to emphasize one idea to the exclusion of others, like Konstantinov in "Esthétique du Mal," whom Stevens describes as "the lunatic of one idea in a world of ideas." The narrower

one's perception of reality is, the more rational it is apt to appear: "Lakes are more reasonable than oceans." Hence, there is a peculiar lunacy in logic, which, if clung to, leads to the death of the imagination: "the worlds of logic in their great tombs." Konstantinov is not aware of the lake, much less the ocean (CP 324-25).

Tangible Reality

Tangible reality, for Stevens, was the aspect of the world that is knowable, but not in any static or permanent sense. It is a *process*, a motion in time, so in effect is "insolid" as we experience it. Its central symbol is the sun, origin of all energy, and the symbol of the cyclic movement of time. Widening circles and arcs are generally the descriptive forms of the tangible world, and green is its symbolic color.

The moonlight night in "Reality Is an Activity of the Most August Imagination" (OP 110) is typical of the way reality is experienced in Stevens' poetry. He lets us know immediately that it is tangible reality that he is experiencing, not a work of art; nor an illusion of imagination.

It was not a night blown at a glassworks in Vienna
Or Venice, motionless, gathering time and dust.

Rather, it was something more dynamic, stimulating to the imagination, happening in the becoming moment, "a grinding going round,/ Under the front of the westward evening star,/ . . . As things emerged and moved and were dissolved . . ." The world is continuously transformed as we experience it in the momentary present. Its "visible transformations" are like

An argentine abstraction approaching form
And suddenly denying itself away.

"Argentine," meaning silvery, both describes the moonlight and implies the mercurial character of the visible world that changes just when it seems to be assuming a permanence. As "an insolid billowing of the solid," it seems imaginary, but in its process, must be recognized as existent apart from imagination, "neither water nor air." The "most august imagination" then is reality itself which we experience in the self but nevertheless is alien and indifferent to us.

This sense of reality as a process that continuously approaches a state of perfection and permanence and then changes is objectified in the sixth poem of "Esthétique du Mal" (CP 318). Here the sun perfects each day, and then fails. Reality appears as a "desire after a further consummation." The sun is a clown and not a clown because it desires a further perfection of its perfection. Time is "his rejected years" in his search for more perfections which will be "cast away." Reality stimulates the desires of the human ego and imagination ("a big bird") whose "appetite/ Is as insatiable as the

sun's." The bird's appetite is also stimulated by "divinations of serene/ Indulgences out of all celestial sight." Because "The sun is the country wherever he is," the sun's world is always immense, "Still promises perfections cast away."

In Stevens' thought, the cycle of nature offers paradisaical promises to the imagination. There is a rapport between the "sun" and the "big bird" that feeds on it, that leads imagination on in search of "serene indulgences." At the same time there is a resistance to reality in the imagination that prefers its own creations to the perishable blisses of nature. "Sunday Morning" (CP 66-70) is structured on a tension between "the green freedom of a cockatoo" and "silent shadows and dreams," between "April's green" and "The golden underground." Stevens called it a poem about paganism; it envisions a religious state of mind in which imagination and reality (sky and earth) have attained rapport. "The sky will be much friendlier then than now . . . / Not this dividing and indifferent blue." In this poem, reality offers the only hope of paradise. The "green freedom" of nature is contrasted to the "ancient sacrifices" of church ritual, and "April's green" is proven more enduring than imaginary heavens where "rivers . . . seek for seas/ They never find." Because nature offers a balance between pain and pleasure, and between death and desire, it should be the source of all our faith.

This objective of uniting imagination with reality is realized in "The Sense of the Sleight-of-Hand Man" (CP 222). In this poem the wheel of nature survives the myths of imagination; "The fire eye in the clouds survives the gods." When man rejects outdated mythology (becomes ignorant), he may be able "to mate his life with life." Then the mind will become "fluent," able to flow with the constantly changing imagery of nature.

Alien Reality

In an essay on Stevens published in 1943, Yvor Winters described him as a poet who, "released from all the restraints of Christianity," turned to hedonism as a philosophical mode; his poetry is "the most perfect laboratory of hedonism to be found in literature." Winters changed his mind, however, after reading the essays and poetry published after 1943, deciding that Stevens was really a nominalist. When his essay was republished in 1959, he added a postscript to it to explain his change of mind.

The fundamental idea in Stevens' work would seem to be a kind of nominalism, the idea of a universe composed of meaningless and discrete particulars. . . . The hedonism which I discussed in this essay appears to have been an attempt to mitigate the cold horror of the nominalism. . . . The Imagination would seem to be the power which gives order to the reality which has no order . . .⁴

To call Stevens either a hedonist or a nominalist is to simplify him to the point of triviality, but at least, Winters, in this last note on him, recognized

that there is another dimension to Stevens' thought that has not generally been understood by his critics. This is the dimension, which is sometimes given the name Naturalism, or nominalism in the case of Yvor Winters, that accounts for an "alien" reality, nature that exists in its own unhuman mythology, beyond human imagination, beyond knowledge, and beyond pain. In a few of his poems, particularly those written towards the end of his life, Stevens attempted to reveal this existence as something apart from human imagination: things in themselves.

Vesuvius in the first poem of "Esthétique du Mal" (1944) is an earlier representation of nature as an alien existence. It trembles "in another ether," separated in time and space from the persona who writes letters and reads paragraphs on the sublime and contemplates pain painlessly as an abstraction. The Volcano trembles "As the body trembles at the end of life." When consciousness lapses, one no longer feels pain. "Pain is human"; it does not exist in alien nature.

Except for us, Vesuvius might consume
In solid fire the utmost earth and know
No pain

(CP 314)

This perspective of existence, alien to the imagination, is "sublime" because it is beyond pain and pleasure.

Nature in its absolute reality has nothing of the anthropocentric of human imagination in it. In "The Course of a Particular" (OP 96-97), Stevens withdraws imagination from the sounds of nature until the wind in the trees becomes something experienced in itself alone. "The leaves cry . . . concerning someone else." There is a "resistance involved" in separating the sound from oneself, but also the "exertion" of being "part of every thing" declines. "One feels the life of that which gives life as it is." Instead of the human spirit giving shape and life to reality, it is given by "that which gives life as it is," and thus is no longer "a cry of divine attention, / Nor the smoke-drift of puffed-out heroes, nor human cry." In the absence of imagination, in the mere experience of the thing itself, "the cry concerns no one at all." This is as close as the poet can get to the experience of the thing in itself, without concern, without will, and without knowledge.

Yvor Winters calls "The Course of a Particular" "one of the greatest poems in English" and says that it is about "the isolated man . . . confronted (at least by implication) with death." It is interesting that he saw this implication because there is, of course, nothing in the poem about death; it is about a movement of consciousness out of the universalizing realm of imagination into the particular existence of things in themselves. Nevertheless there can be no doubt that in Stevens' mind, especially in his later years, there was a connection between "mere being" and death. The previously mentioned analogy of Vesuvius and the human body after death reveals this relationship in Stevens' mind. It would seem then that, contrary

to most interpretations, death was not “nothingness” in Stevens’ mind, but “mere being,” a state of existence beyond knowledge and pain.

“Of Mere Being” (OP 117-18), written during the last year of Stevens’ life, shows an attraction to the “third world” rejected in “Esthétique du Mal.” *Mere being* here is existence in a dimension of reality beyond the reach of the senses and imagination. The palm stands “at the end of the mind, / Beyond the last thought” and “on the edge of space”: we can conceive of such a state of being, but not experience it. The bird sings “a foreign song”—he does not sing to us—and thus is “without human meaning, / Without human feeling.” This reality is not the “tangent of the self” pictured in so many other poems. Because it is not internal to human experience, it cannot give us pain or pleasure; the bird “is not the reason / That makes us happy or unhappy.” The colors, bronze, gold, and fire-fangled, suggest at once the perfection of this alien reality and its distance from human experience. Perhaps because he felt himself near death, Stevens was attracted by the idea of existence without consciousness.

In summary, Wallace Stevens’ poetry explores a spectrum of relationships between subject and object, from reality beyond consciousness to imagination divorced from reality. In order to reveal these relationships, he typically portrays four definable phenomenological terms of being, by means of which he can describe ways in which the human consciousness experiences, or relates to, reality. There is first the metaphysical imagination which transforms a world of sense-impressions to make it experienceable. Second there is the imagination that attempts to create order out of itself, mistakenly labeling this activity *reason*. Third there is the part of the world that is available to consciousness, the *tangible* reality, which offers us the stuff of our experience. And fourth there is the raw reality in itself, alien to experience, which because it is beyond pain is beyond knowledge, an experience that can only be described in the death of consciousness. From these portrayals of ways in which the imagination or consciousness transforms reality into experience, Stevens creates a vision of a sensibility freed from the quotidian, yet adhering to a dynamic materiality, and for whom, as he says in “Sunday Morning,” the sky (idealism/imagination) and the earth (material reality) “will be much friendlier than now.”⁵

Western Washington University

Notes

¹“Wallace Stevens’ Poetry of Being,” *Criticism*, 31 (March, 1964), p. 89.

²*Stevens’ Poetry of Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), p. 170.

³*The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1951), p. 33, hereinafter parenthetically cited as *NA*. Other sources are *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 1954), hereinafter cited as *CP*, and *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York: Knopf, 1957), hereinafter parenthetically cited as *OP*.

⁴Wallace Stevens, or the Hedonist’s Progress,” *On Modern Poets* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 34.

⁵The author is indebted to Douglas Park, Western Washington University, and Annie Dillard, Wesleyan University, for criticism and advice in the preparation of this article.

A Selection of Poems

R.H. DEUTSCH

from *A Moral Entertainment* (1943)

CHRISTMAS 1943

Within the ambush, murdered,
The corpse we remember lies.
Rustam wielded his scimitar.
No hideous error then;
He was the most beloved of men.

They stood beneath the Persian
Stars under billowing robes,
Figures of romance until
The blood ran in the sand
Of Sohrab, by his father's hand.

Against the universe devised
The legend of moral contract,
A favorite story told
At hearths to children's sleep,
In pain and blood will keep.

The eyes that closed upon it
Dreamt up in Western pride
The memorable Christmastide
Wrenched from the same abyss.
May love be found in this.

HIERONYMUS BOSCH

The procession of angels at the gate
The wheelwright's gate, the baker's gate
Elongates, tapers, disappears at my gate
Where smoulders the crust of Hell. See
There one angel goes with an infant
On his arm, all of a piece with beatitude,
And the child has a sweetheart in her smile.

Surely this glory must shine thru my fence!
My dank garden cannot absorb it all.
Yet you yourself may see the conspirators,
Those with teeth at the base of their spine

Raising shields like toadstools or umbrellas
Up over shrewd shoulders. Such
Is their pied and counterfeit protection.

Surely the massive exaltation of this march
Must stamp my fourflushers into dirt!
But they stand, though they take council
At tables, under lamps, in breakfast alcoves,
They stand, ferrying their exchanges
The same as before from shop to shop.
They still lie under the hedges making love.

They rot by system, rot with prudence,
Lost like animals in a fit of rankness.
The tender passion moving at the gate
Is gone, at last is gone, their eye is emptied
Of it, and on the retina a new skin formed.
The gate bulks thick again, the eternal
Shriek of Heaven now closed out.

PASSAGE

The shred of danger, the lubrication
Glandular and greasy that the men enjoy
Collapses the ocean—waves chopping wind,
Wind cutting sun, sunlight shattering . . .
Into an era crowded with feeling.
The picture is idea enhearsed, overdone,
Sealed with sauces the elements deploy.
For the men, however, sentiment is due

Who have kept shop on any street
Made an attempt and were respectable.
Fairness and animal decency instruct
In death they find a profitable retreat.
Let such a backdrop gleam as one by one
Paratroops from the cellar of the plane
They drop off, each momentarily
Glimpsing the painted sky he will attain.

Everything is here: the clouds
Are here, the resplendent summery stillness,
The ancient daylight, healthy, alive,
Where withholds the hound his baying,
While white insects clamour and contrive.
A day to die, to shut out of the memory
Overtones older than fear, than father,
Before the forest—the nocturnal drive.

KAFKA

The wires are endless and untraceable,
The call terrific in import.
Who is detailed to repair them?
What stranger with promises
To forestall accidents?

So you truly

Admit reliance on the invisible?
Someone you assure yourself can fix
The tangled targets should they lose
Each other and your ear hang
On a void, helpless.

The shifting goggles

Of your inquiry refuse to focus.
The lines are down. No questions.
Contact is lost and the bloodless phone
Trickles down your terror to the floor.

Whose was that ultimate retort?
What decision where and when
Implied you and your action?
Breathless you agreed, too fearful
Of ensuing pain to compromise,
Recalling that your interlocutor
Could not be seen but merely heard.

Heard. Now a storm is on and the wires
Are closed. You can't get thru.
There is no one on the lines
The bureau says.

Exactly as you supposed

Not even the urgent question posed.

SONG

I see the future spend
The maelstrom of event
In flesh and fructify—
An aged man whose dirt
And shabbiness increase
His unkempt love; oh here
The fallen angel lies
In bald licentiousness.

To the great god of clouds
Perpetually who knows
The rain-wet avenues,
And to the atomic god,
And last to One no less
Than at the Easter rose,
I pray for what I need—
A praising recklessness.

from *Everything I Told You Is True* (1975)

SUCCESS

I

In the beginning I brought the snow
While others shaped the snowman,
Sturdy, with holes for eyes.
In the ascendance of sun he melted,
White crystals of grief. I
Threw my shovel away at confirmation.

II

These things happened: I, bent
Underneath the Chicago El at noon
In the steel summer, sweat beads
Of grief, smoked cigars like infernos.
Twenty years passed. I planned
To make the process reversible.

III

At forty-five I found the shovel
And thrust it on you, plural. It
Carried snow in little white crystals
Of grief. I am triumphant. In the cold
I shape the snowman, and poke
Two holes, hurray, so he can see.

SIGNS

We knew the signs. We knew the ritual.
The entrails traced, the dancing and the chant,
Where water was, its best divining rod,
The weather's twinge forecast in arm or leg
Tea leaves that plotted lives, and what
The thunder said when it was on the left.
We made compulsive count and measurement
As well, and found a meaning every time.

The signs! A training through millennia
To find and mark out each significance:
The shining faces of the animals,
The sense of their dark commonality!
Moods, attitudes; all our experience
Enriched by science, by magic even more:
The rose for beauty, number nine for death,
While daisy petals told their tales of love.

And every piece of puzzle fit in place
A thousand ways, a thousand pictures made—
Layer after layer like lovely tile—
The rock of implication at the base
Building the warmth that cocooned every tribe.
Then changes came: The air divorced its life.
The drunken angels' jigsaw smashed,
To the floor, scattered, the pieces spread

Apart forever, and no binding force.
A vacuum now, there's no catastrophe
No news that's either good or bad,
Breath itself of no distinctive shade,
Possessions, passions, alike as truths or lies
In the neuter ambushes of chance.
Only the cold, as the frozen pieces seek
Each other through the tunnels of our eyes.

No large, no small, no hope and no despair
Great fish and tiny teacups and the end
Of Hiroshima—all fall away
Into the buzz of pure equality.
Only a luck of ignorance again
Can bring barbarians climbing over hills
To kiss with pride or kill with rage
Reading their rights in all the signs they see.

AS THE WORLD AGED

As the world aged, it contracted—
All of it shrank into my room.
Reminders of the cold outside,
Polka dots of snow, fly about
As in an overturned paperweight.
The world was once immense, multifarious,
Fluid; the hills fled the valleys,
Valleys fled the sea and the sea
Tried to cover it all. I remember
My first sunset under the sea.
Beneath the belljar, conditions of life
Were simulated in a famous experiment
At the University of Southern California.
The physicist's thumb lifted the edge
Of glass, and looked at me.

Outside outside is repetition;
Inside, pattern and possibility,
Slight, of change. Yes, the next blackbird,
I tell myself, may be a white one!
Above, the stars boast repetitively
And, beyond the stars, the night.
I send few messages, receive
None. As the room ages, it contracts.
I am it or I am inside it
Or it is inside me. This is a fact.

THE EXQUISITE NARCISSISM OF THE POET

Some things are no longer possible; my time
Spilled like sauerkraut water.

Not what you would expect. So many years
Of washing and ironing do not sooth the wrinkles.

Cooking, too. Tons of appetite telephone
The hospital. The tongue, depressed, says, "Aaahh."

Nevertheless the box remains. Above all,
The velvet-lined crypt where the mirror lies.

And lies incessantly. The surface of things
Licked for centuries still beckons.

It cries, "Come and get me." Yesterday,
An antique library good for 300 books.

The day before, an imitation Persian rug;
And what an error—to watch the mirror

Outside! The insistent image jerks
Like a drummer straddling rock.

And what an error—to remain inside,
Eye to eye, nostril to nostril, lips to lips.

AFTERNOON OF A GIRL

If cellos are boys and bass fiddles men,
what are those trumpets upright on the green?
Poets and painters, poets and painters
sitting on grass which is not grass;
it is five-generation lawn, English turf,
over which you glide in ghost.

Candy universe! The sweetness of your smile
is a concordance of the expected,
a redundancy among cellos, trumpets and English turf.

Now hear: precept and policy, permanent,
complete. The adult sun falls on the garden
like a rake. Rage, fragmentation, need.

But this is your afternoon, an afternoon
of romance; for you the hoary world tilts
toward ecstasy; your fan flutters
to the ground, ravished by trumpets and cellos.

Stone eyelids fix the image of your youth
like the sphinx, protecting, perpetuating . . .

The hoarseness of your laugh a little nun
hastens to hush, denying touch;
then touch only statuettes of yourself,
finicky figurines in gathering gardens
while eternal cellos wraithlike twine
white music round your endless arms.

ZOO POEM

I watched the lion pace, the zoo
Chuck-full of shambling crews. Gapes
Geniality puffed the morning like popcorn.

The morning, white and swollen, hung.

I watched the lion pace inside the sun,
Starve on the cellular suppuration of the crowd
Who dared and shared their blood with him,
Inarticulate, complete and bound.

Watched the eye around the gorgeous iris,
Imageless and flat, reflect the crowd,
The picture of the baby at the bars,
Yellow and chuckling before the great mane
Like nemesis hurled at the shabby screen
And broke it—free, free as a ton of air!

Against their faces bounced and then—
One upon the other leaned and emptiness
At center burst and filled the square.

THE LITTLE LAUGH

Thomas and Roethke; nobody else.
When one is taken, one goes.

I remember Morley as Oscar Wilde
At the curtain, in Paris, in New York
Laughed his huge, lonely, final laugh.

Thomas, Roethke, Berryman; nobody else.
When one is taken, one goes.

The demon at the window! He points.
He points at A. One sees B. He points
At B, and B is for blind.

Thomas, Roethke, Berryman, Crane, Jarrell
And nobody else. Kees and Plath.
When one is taken, two go.

I write a prose, a figment, a fiction,
Which writes me as it points—
First, B for blind, then A for absent.

When one is taken, all go.

THE DIVA

At thirteen years, she choirs the church
Eyeing the altar boys from cadenzas
That breast her confirmation dress like fire,
At seventeen, the solo! Authority
From the small chest shut her ears
To the comments of important guests.
But weekends heard the milkman's baritone.
And then, her Denver teacher happily died,
Kited her voice to Palermo where it improved.
Each day another notch of loveliness.
Each year, a mastering of voice and self.
Except for men. She chased romance like death.
Those big Italians, pride of the continent—
Such small concern, such vanity, such greed!
She sang across Europe, and Covent Garden last,
Meeting the cousin of the Prince of Wales.

At Glyndebourne, Lucifer himself arranged
Cosi Fan Tutte twice a day—all week.
She came back home with gravel in her throat,
And drank and joined the WACS to live,
And clowned as singer on the Spike Jones show.
Later on, voiced by age, she greyed and taught.
Yes, that's our famous teacher talking there,
The crevice-faced, cantankerous old girl
Amid the tenors, a tiara in her hair.

THE NEW WHORES

Sex, bony and neglected, hung in her closet
A lifetime, while Grandmother bullied the family
Until she was hooked offstage at ninety-four.
Her sons were dollars and her daughters dimes.
Not the brightest girl in town, my mother posed
To the rhythm of "The Indian Love Call" underneath
A cardboard moon I munched like peanuts.

What have Grandmother and Mother to do with
This new breed, pumpkin-seed rurals, down from the hills?
Unknown to embellishment, marshmallow cheeks
Blowing everywhere for the bucks, whose bitten nails
Set their lives against the cross like the hands of Jesus.
They come here, raw and shiny fifteen years old,
Full of corn whiskey, auto rides and promises.
"The Intermezzo" on the boardwalk.
I swear, on Grandmother's soul, I knew one
Whose name was "Neva." Everyone said it twice.
"Neva, Neva" forged checks and got away to Montana,
Where she would have married a candy butcher
If the trains ran across the land anymore.

EVERYTHING I TOLD YOU IS TRUE
for Bud Blank

Now you are hedged in a home in Scarsdale
And hump off to work, walking downhill
To the station for exercise, and you have
Two grown, no three grown daughters
Spinning new neighborhoods—Laura married,
Barbara a graduate, while Alice,
Comfortable still at home, but longing
Away, welcomes her father's boyhood friend.

Three of them! Why, they were not anywhere
At the time I told you everything
In our uncomfortable teens. Their names
Floated the air, ghostly articulations,
But the girls themselves—not anywhere.
I turned to the horizon, a mirror,
Turned and turned, then back to you,
And there they were—pink, brown, and laughing.

Can you believe it? Have they substance like us?
Did we once arrive as they arrived only
To depart as they are departing? We?
It's hard to believe there was time to clear
The way for them. And now they come, shining,
To visit us where we sit, mountainous,
Heavier than mortality, forever here.

IDENTITY

for "Dominick Guzman," an alias never used.

After the snapped-shut cover on the tailored box,
The mourners did not walk away to their automobiles,
The birds did not renew their singing,
And the sun did not glisten again through the drops.

I never woke, never recalled, never knew
That I had ever lived this life.
What good that I had ever lived at all
If I remembered nothing?

A time

Of time only, the outside sealed away
From the inside, while I was unused.
Not even aware of awareness. I remember
Nothing. Once, briefly, I was Dominick Guzman
And I remember nothing.

I was to be a walker of streets given to breathing,
Hurrying through the passages of time,
Wives, children, a thousand loves and dinners—
—I remember nothing. Not even the black
Cloud that gathered, finally, and did not break.

Tribute

R.H.Deutsch (1915-1983)

Robert Deutsch possessed a wonderful mixture of the serious and the comic. With him it was always difficult to tell which was in ascendance at a given moment. Going to the opera with Bob was a serious matter—one had to be on time way ahead of time, one had to compose oneself to listen attentively and reverently, one had to reserve drinks at the bar in advance of intermission so that one could relax quietly and prepare for the next act. However, leaving the opera house was a riot—one had to be up and away the moment the final curtain came down so as not to be trapped in traffic. Woe to the tardy one who might delay a moment for clapping or cheering—he or she was always subject to sarcasm or ridicule. Bob's discerning appreciation and discussion of what one had seen and heard always came later when one had safely escaped the crowd. So, opera-going with Bob ended up as a curious experience, exaltation mixed with hysteria, a serious and satisfying adventure and something of a riot.

Bob discussing literature always displayed the same characteristics. He had great zest and enthusiasm for certain writers and an ability to make acute observations, but in the middle of a serious discussion he was as likely as not to introduce with quiet irony a hilarious and somewhat indecent anecdote about one of his favorite writers. He loved to tell irreverent anecdotes and was good at it. But underneath the irreverence one always saw the serious regard Bob had for the writing and for the talent. This serious regard was particularly observable in discussion of Wallace Stevens. I returned to full-time teaching after a long absence in academic administration and, by accident, took over a course in modern poetry which Bob had meant to teach. When I told him of what, for me, was a relatively new enthusiasm for Stevens, he was delighted. Our visits together during the last few months of his life were largely spent in trading readings of favorite passages of Stevens. Bob never hesitated to put down what he regarded as error, mine or someone else's. He did this sternly, but with wit and grace. Serious discussions of Stevens usually ended with one of Bob's jokes and a generous offer of a duplicate copy of some recent critical work on Stevens. His enthusiasm for opera was matched by his enthusiasm for Stevens, an enthusiasm informed by intelligence and long critical practice.

Harry Finestone
California State University, Northridge

Bob Deutsch took the world of art very seriously indeed, but never himself. And he knew that the world was absurd and thus an occasion for laughter. His merriment was a great tonic that braced everyone who came near him, a bonhomie that was irrepressible and infectious. Two weeks before his death he phoned to tell me that he was dying. He said, "But don't be sorry. I'm living every day and every minute joyfully." Then, before he hung up, he said, "Did you hear the one about . . . ?"

Wallace Stevens and Robert Deutsch shared a great *joie de vivre* that took shape through language. In "Large Red Man Reading," Stevens talks about ghosts who yet relish the great "blue tabulae" of the scripts of physical life. With them, Bob's ear would be alert to "hear him [the poet] read from the poem of life, / Of the pans above the stove, the pots on the table, the tulips among them. / They were those that would have wept to step barefoot into reality." Bob, how full was the stride of your barefoot step into reality. Salut!

George S. Lensing
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Thank You For Everything

“the actual, the warm, the near”
 (“Esthétique du Mal,” V)

Time and circumstances did not grant me the pleasure of talking with Robert Deutsch except in brief encounters at various MLA meetings and at several of Marjorie Perloff’s fabulous California parties. Nevertheless, he was a presence in my life, his name frequently came up in telephone conversations, and when I glimpsed him across a room I wanted to rush over and give him a hug and a kiss (and usually did). I enjoyed his report of “life’s nonsense” and his comic telling of “the human tale,” which revealed his seriousness of purpose. I can’t trust my memory or my discretion sufficiently to repeat the charming stories about Bob and amusing messages from Bob relayed by third parties over the telephone, but I remembered a letter he wrote to Theodora Graham that Teddy read to me over the telephone several years ago, and I asked Teddy if she could find it. She had saved it and sent it to me with the comment, “It’s a gem”:

Theodora R. Graham, Editor
William Carlos Williams Review
The Pennsylvania State University
Middletown, Pennsylvania 17057

Dear Teddy:

I must confess that I am the last person in the world to ask about permissions fees.

We have never paid any. Our application to detail is desultory. A glance at our journal will uncover endless typos. Our magazine is put out by one man in defiance of every possible and every improbable obstacle. We are losing our office at the school. We have schlocky typesetters who refer to our articles as “stories.” We have a one-armed CPA who does half a job the result of which is that we just might lose our tax-exempt status. Please excuse me from your assignment. As John Berryman said about life, “Thank you for everything.”

Sincerely,

R.H. Deutsch, Professor

One can always reread Kafka or Thurber, but this letter is also a perfect parable or fable told in the casual high style that was one distinctive expression of Bob’s poetic gift. It’s the last sentence that made me laugh, and now makes me grieve that Bob Deutsch’s presence and affection and large imagination exist now only in our memories—one man in bittersweet defiance of every possible and every improbable obstacle.

Emily M. Wallace
Philadelphia

Since I knew my brother Robert longer (66 years) than any other living person, and (probably better than most), I feel qualified in saying that he was brilliant, complex, capable (sometimes irritating)—and as good a poet as John Berryman. Even more important, he was a wonderful brother to me.

He meant a great deal to many, both intimately and casually, and was responsible for inspiring and promoting higher standards for success in many a young student.

Janice R. Townsend
Atlanta, Georgia

I've just learned, belatedly, of Robert Deutsch's death. Although from the outset I had been at his invitation an advisor to *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, I did not meet him until an MLA meeting a couple of years ago. And our meeting was fleeting, for he was hovering in the background of the meeting, making sure that all went well. I have that sense of him as editor of the *WSJ*: one whose profession it was to make sure that all went well. I am, as we all must be, most grateful for that.

Roy Harvey Pearce
University of California, San Diego

Along with his many friends, I admired Robert Deutsch for his energy and enthusiasm and his warmth toward those of us lucky enough to share in any of his abounding interests. He always had a good story to tell and told it well. He loved music, art, and literature, and contributed in all these fields. And he was devoted to the poetry of Wallace Stevens. The class he showed in all his endeavors is reflected in *The Wallace Stevens Journal* and his leadership in the Wallace Stevens Society. He wanted the most outstanding talent available for the *Journal* and the meetings of the Society, and spent much of his own time and money in the pursuit of the best. For me, he is already sorely missed as a personal friend and colleague.

Ann Stanford
California State University, Northridge

A few years ago, some time after I had finally settled in California, I received a note from Bob Deutsch concerning his plans to establish *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, in conjunction at that time with W. T. Ford who had previously edited the *Wallace Stevens Newsletter* at Northwestern University. Bob asked me not only to contribute, but to become a consulting editor. Curiously, or perhaps it is just a phenomenon of living in Los Angeles, the two of us who lived a few miles apart did not meet personally until 1981, though we corresponded and talked by phone and exchanged wishes to have lunch, or to get together for a chat. But the *WSJ* project went ahead, with great success, and more to Bob's credit than to any of us who sporadically responded to his calls for advice or help or whatever.

That the project was a success, that it rose above the quality of most journals devoted to individual poets and the "societies" that form around them, is largely to Bob's credit. Not that he was an ideologue determined to canonize Wallace Stevens and endow himself with the credit. On the contrary, Bob Deutsch was the most self-effacing man in this regard I have ever known. It was his ecumenical approach to criticism that launched and sustained the *WSJ*. He would write to me that he was not a critic, but a poet, and that if he seemed perplexed at times by the newer critical strategies he saw crossing his desk in the form of essays which translated a more or less understandable Stevens into a cryptic poet or philosopher's stone, he knew that no discourse on the poet was expendable or expungeable. He only wanted it to be responsible. And where he felt himself not able to judge, he sought advice. And he took it generously and graciously. The proof is in the publication.

In his last correspondence with me, Bob responded to an essay of mine which was among the last proofs he attended for the journal. The essay, he said, engaged him, even when he found it somewhere outside those frames of discourse that he himself lived. And then he added the accustomed self-effacing remark that he was a poet rather than a critic, and not capable of working in the atmospheres of abstraction that such a discourse threw off. Only this time Bob sent along his recently published book of poems. It was a good book. He was (is) a fine poet. And he never needed to apologize for not being a critic. Though he was. If critics are the filters through which judgments eventually come. As poets are.

Joseph N. Riddel
University of California, Los Angeles

“Often when someone dies those left behind think to themselves, if only I could have one more day: I would use it so well - an hour, perhaps even a minute.”

That is Mark Helprin in his big novel of New York City, *Winter's Tale* (1983), page 652. The sentiment leaped out at me from the page, and made me think of Robert. Not because we had just been to his funeral, or because we were once both New Yorkers, and *Winter's Tale* is a fantastic Romance about that place, but because it expresses so well the futile wish of friends for their friends, either to remake the days and hours of the past, or to consummate them better, more thoughtfully, more truly, more . . . beautifully. Because when a friend dies, we are forcibly reminded that we have been thoughtless, ambiguous, and . . . clumsy. And we are reminded again that though we like to aim at perfection in our art, we tend to accept less than perfection, not to mention common, “first-draft” awkwardness in life. But . . . we know better, and we know that we *knew* better all along.

Robert Deutsch and I knew each other rather well in fact, over 20 years, though we were never close. I knew what he was thinking (that is, feeling), and he knew what I was feeling (that is, thinking). We would spend an hour or so over the phone, now and then, talking, literary talk, gossip, handing over judgments, raking up coals, getting a fix on what we were thinking about poetry, or poets. Bob never wasted words. He would call up and say, without so much as a “How are you?”, What do you think of X? and Y’s work? and we would ramble on, always laughing and marveling at the sheer nonsense and ineptitude of people and things. New Yorkers don’t waste time on nice strokes; for New Yorkers, the Good, the Beautiful, and the True can all take care of themselves, and don’t need our fussy ministrations. No, for us it was always necessary to settle a question, to resolve a doubt, to clear away cant and crap. Bob usually called, I felt, when he had begun to wonder about this or that or him or her, if he was hearing right and seeing right—I mean, he stood for no nonsense, and he wanted to know from me when he called if he was all alone in the world when he thought that X and Y were enjoying fame and fortune and happy criticism or puffery and had nothing to be proud of at all. Bob also liked to laugh at himself, and tell me the most fantastic stories about his wallowings in the stormy seas of his (and his friends’ and dependents’) lives. It was hard sometimes to tell whether he was narrating life or life garnished by his poetic humors, his wit, and his equivocal emotional states. Because, underneath it all, he was a mysterious man, someone who always launched the pre-emptive strike, because he was so sensitive that he already knew what one was thinking, what the others were thinking, what *you* were thinking. He was not a man for all seasons, though he was kind and diplomatic in the world perhaps, and generous too: no, for me Bob was a man for *our* reason(ing)s. We would both come out fighting, fair of course, though there was no beltline, and you could hit as low as you liked. In other words, it was something you had to be able to take, and since we both were, I suppose, ironists, skeptics, rational irrationalists, we always knew where we were at, so that our friendship was an amusing battle of words: there could be no winner, ever, because we broke

away only when we were out of breath. And finally, Bob was, although a wonderfully cruel tease, exceedingly sensitive, as we all know. I was honored when he asked me once to write an Introduction to a collection of his poems. And I was only a bit surprised when he asked me why I had said some hard things about what he was saying, as though he had been hurt by my candor. When I replied, he admitted that those things were true, those terrible things were there, in his poetry, of course; but . . . did they have to be made obvious to the world in general? that is, to its uncircumcised ears? Not everyone can read, after all, even readers of poetry . . . *especially* readers of poetry, did I not know that? In short, he said, Kessler, you bastard! And I said, Bob, someone's going to be able to read you, maybe a few people, and they will wonder why I was so blind! I have to say what I see, I said. And Bob laughed and said only, I know and you know: I *was* hoping it would suffice.

Anyway, though I am not sure Bob and I, were he here still with us, would *use* the day, the hour, the minute more of life, any better than we had always used our times with each other, what I shall miss is the kind of swift, deep, and mad current of communication that we knew, a current that ran between us at a level far beneath our words. That current was always on, too, even if a year and more went by when we hadn't talked; and we always began again at full force as soon as we were together. That is something one doesn't forget, or even regret now. No matter how hidden a person the inner Robert Deutsch was, he knew that I knew that we knew. And of course, over and beyond anything else in the whole world, we both dearly loved cigars.

Jascha Kessler

*Connoisseur of Chaos:
In Memoriam Robert Deutsch*

Shortly before I moved to Los Angeles in 1977, I received the first copy of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, ed. R. H. Deutsch. To my delight, the journal was published at Cal State, Northridge, and I decided that I wanted very much to meet the editor. As it turned out, the editor had also received his Ph.D. at my new home, USC, and so there was a double connection. Before long, Robert and I had made contact on the telephone and he invited me to lunch. So began a friendship with one of the wittiest, most brilliant, warmest, and just plain funniest people I have ever known.

Lunch or dinner with Robert was always a sparring match. He couldn't understand my predilection for Pound and Williams, much less Frank O'Hara. For my part, I couldn't understand his total and uncritical devotion to Stevens. At one point, as we were sitting in an outdoor garden restaurant in very bourgeois Brentwood (with most of the people at the neighboring tables talking about real estate or jogging), he became so incensed about my seeming lack of respect for the Great Master, that he opened the *Collected Poems* to Canto VII of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" and read in an impassioned voice:

To discover winter and know it well, to find,
Not to impose, not to have reasoned at all,
Out of nothing to have come on major weather,

It is possible, possible, possible. It must
Be possible.

"Have you ever," he said sternly, "heard any better poetry than that?" I wouldn't have dared to disagree. And then, in characteristic Robert Deutsch fashion, he immediately switched the subject and told me a very funny dirty joke. And then called over the waitress and quizzed her sternly on the method of grilling the steaks we were eating.

There are very few people with whom one has genuine literary conversations. Most of us are busy promoting our own hobbyhorses or indulging in the usual academic gossip (Who's where? Have you heard that X is doing Y?) to have serious discussions about the comparative merits of poets. Just a few months before Robert died, we were having another wonderful battle, this time about John Berryman, about whom I had just written a rather critical piece. Robert, who had known Berryman at Columbia, was as furious as he was polite. He arrived at my house, essay in hand, with a whole set of marginal notations. But when we began to discuss Berryman, he was remarkably willing to be convinced that maybe there was something to my case. Robert had the wonderful quality of really listening and really caring what the other person thought. This is why he had so many friends, why so many people genuinely loved him.

Robert was a true connoisseur of chaos, both the chaos outside himself and of the conflicts within. I know no one who had his ability to laugh at himself, to regard himself as an actor in a very amusing and also a very moving play. He truly knew, in Stevens' words, "How to live. What To Do." How very sad that he is no longer here to "do" it.

Marjorie Perloff
University of Southern California, Los Angeles

Robert Deutsch was a father to me, a brother, and a friend. As a comforting and encouraging teacher, he made some of the greatest contributions to my development. Never before have I lost a friend as close to me.

Robert leaves so many people with so much, and so quietly: the professor's last ditch attempt to exemplify proper transition.

Robert had a terrible habit of abruptly hanging up the phone without saying "goodbye." He would always leave you hanging. I have never said goodbye to Robert Deutsch, and I never will.

Clifford L. Werber

R.H. Deutsch was a creative and gifted individual who, through his characteristic self-effacement, often concealed his many talents. But they are to be found in the pages of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, in his poems, and in his selfless ability to encourage and help others bring out their best.

For the first five or six years of our relationship, I had known Bob mostly in his capacity as editor of the *Journal*. I was impressed by the first-rate quality of the publication. Only after becoming editor did I learn about the amount of time it took to secure such a finished product. I also learned how successful the *Journal* had become. Libraries around the world, from Oxford to Berlin, from South Africa to Japan, subscribed to it. Such a recognition of importance does not come without a great deal of work; but Bob never mentioned it.

Bob was also most generous in allowing others to share in editing the *Journal* or in organizing Stevens Society seminars at MLA. His goal was to advance the poetry of Wallace Stevens or to help the career of the individual, never himself. When he organized the centennial celebration on Stevens at MLA, which featured more than a dozen of the most prominent poets in America, he asked me to introduce them; although he did all the work, he didn't want to be in the limelight.

When I visited his home a couple of years ago, I was, frankly, dazzled by his creative side. I remember that he walked around the house singing Italian arias in a beautiful voice. I noticed in his study a newspaper clipping dating back to his Columbia University days: "Poetry Contest: First Prize, John Berryman; Second Prize, R.H. Deutsch." When I mentioned it to him, I could tell he was proud of that, very proud; but he never mentioned it to me.

The other night, as I looked through the pages of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, I was struck by the significance of his achievement. There are close to 150 articles, reviews, poems, often by leading Stevens scholars and well-known poets. I suddenly realized that in founding and editing *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, Bob Deutsch had done more than any one person in recent years to advance scholarship on the poetry of Wallace Stevens.

No, there is no saying farewell to Bob Deutsch. His testament lives in the pages of *The Wallace Stevens Journal*.

John N. Serio
Clarkson University

Reviews

Parts of a World: Wallace Stevens Remembered.

By Peter Brazeau. New York: Random House, 1983.

Before publication of *Parts of a World: Wallace Stevens Remembered*, we had the *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, and *Souvenirs and Prophecies*, by Holly Stevens, and *Poetry as Life* by Samuel French Morse, as biographical material. Recently *Wallace Stevens and Company* by Glen MacLeod has presented a study of Stevens' literary and artistic circle in New York during the years that preceded *Harmonium*. Through the years, scattered memories of Stevens have been published, among them Carl Van Vechten's "Rogue Elephant in Porcelain" and several memories of her father by Holly Stevens. All of these form a source from which a future comprehensive biography of Stevens must be composed.

This new book on the poet remembered is not only important as literary history but delightful to read in itself. It is admirably conceived and the connective elements written by Peter Brazeau, modest in tone, are instructive and significant. The immediate value of this book for those who admire the poetry is that it gives a vivid concept of the person of the poet away from the poems, living his daily life at home and with his business associates, and conversing with occasional intellectuals about his writing experience.

Parts of a World may bring to the reader's mind a rather poignant thought: that this great poet's reticence to have any aspect of his personal life publicized has been one of the very factors that created a continual wonder about him. The major factor, of course, has been the quality of his work, for as his poetry began to pervade the whole ambience of our critical literature, his reluctance to be known came to have a kind of fame of its own.

"It is the personal in the poet that is the origin of his poetry," Stevens answered to questions from the *Yale Literary Magazine*, in April of 1946. Yet no matter how closely a reader may have looked at the cherished work of Stevens, he has found only a few poems that could be surmised as recognizable glimpses of the man in the midst of his life. "Peter Quince at the Clavier" is suggestive of a young lover's lust delicately expressed. "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" contemplates the meaning of the diminished desire of middle age. These are removed from the personal by the distancing of his art. In "The Sun This March," there is the sound of immediacy in the plea, "Oh! Rabbi, rabbi, fend my soul for me/ And true savant of this dark nature be." This mood seems to be confirmed as his own by a March letter to Elsie, written in 1907, when he confided, "Every Spring I have a month or two of semi-blackness."

Even the apparently personal passages in the poetry may be taken as paradigmatic, as in the beautiful first section of "The Rock" when memories suggest that it seems "an illusion that we were ever alive":

The meeting at noon at the edge of the field seems like

An invention, an embrace between one desperate clod
And another in a fantastic consciousness,
In a queer assertion of humanity.

But poets, no matter how reticent, like other people are in daily association with those who converse with them, drive them here and there, accompany them to dinner, to the office, sweep their floors, or win a rare opportunity to talk to them about poetry. It is from the reportage of such persons as these that Brazeau has rescued memories of Stevens. This assemblage of impressions is arranged in a commonsensical division of three parts, according to the bent of the material toward the insurance man, the man of letters, and the family man.

The section on his business activities should correct those who refer to Stevens as an insurance writer or salesman. Everyone should know now that he was a lawyer specializing in the law of bonding, mostly with surety claims. In this field, he had no peer, according to many of his associates in The Hartford Insurance Company.

Stories of Stevens' relations with his business associates differ according to the personalities involved. There is a consistent picture of an impressive presence whose formal courtesy and reserve were blemished at times by caustic remarks. His reticence prevented any divulgences of the confessional mode, yet, to a research lawyer at the Hartford, he described his own rudeness on a semi-social occasion. The host inquired, "What do you think of my home?" Stevens replied, "My wife and I have tried very hard *not* to create this effect." A recounting of such incidents makes for a kind of merriment for the reader who is safely at a distance.

The variance between those who found him coldly apart and those who knew him as cordial and charming is explained by James Johnson Sweeney: "I think he was aloof until he found his way, found a sympathetic response." Stevens' sympathetic response is verified in many of these memories. For example, a young college sophomore who had to leave school and become a mailboy in the bond-claims department due to family misfortune received financial aid from Stevens' personal efforts, and help in the fundamentals of law from Stevens' explanations.

His business associates formed some part of Stevens' social life. A charming narrative of a night on the town is described by the Margaret of the line "You Jim and you Margaret and you singer of La Paloma" from "A Fish-Scale Sunrise." Stevens and the young couple, Margaret and Jim Powers, had danced the night away in New York. Stevens calls his poem a "souvenir" of his "distorted" state after the revelry. It reveals how simply for him the concrete experience expanded into a thought of mortality, and how for him the physical life of perception measured large as against the mind's view of time passing away.

When a few associates gave a stag party in honor of a retiring officer of The Hartford Company, "an accordion player played while we ate. Everybody seemed to get pretty liquored up as the evening wore on, and then the dancing began. All men. You never saw such a sight. Jansen dancing with Wallace Stevens, swinging him around the room to a Polish polka. Wallace Stevens would throw up one foot as he would twirl." At this time, Stevens was seventy years old.

Such conviviality was not indulged in at 118 Westerly Terrace, the beautiful home of Stevens after 1932. A case of wine had to be smuggled through a cellar window by Stevens, aided by one of the Hartford employees, so as to avoid the disapproval of Elsie. Since it is difficult to envision Stevens drinking the wine secretly in the cellar, common sense must create the view of this large meditative gourmand of a poet sipping wine amid the charm of his modern French paintings while he relished his wife's gourmet cooking.

It is easy to speculate that perhaps Stevens simply did not wish his assistant in this wine-smuggling plot to come through the house, for one of the mysteries of the life here was the lack of a welcome at the door. "I would like to ask you in but my wife won't let me," or "but my wife is not well," is representative of the sentiment expressed. Samuel French Morse hazarded, "He may have used her as an excuse to avoid doing what he really didn't want to do."

An invitation to go around the house and visit in the garden was given at the door at times to an unexpected caller. Here were Elsie's famously beautiful gardens. She was her own gardener and took what appeared to be hundreds of snapshots of her flowers before the winters destroyed them. Many of these pictures were of almost professional quality, say, for example, the closeup portrait of a single rose. These were shown to the present writers by Holly Stevens.

Stevens, too, loved flowers, and often enjoyed the garden's repose as he drank his evening orange juice and read the paper. Perhaps the rumored estrangement of two socially shy people, each too quick with the rude remark, the dominance of the

poet, famous and of utmost intellectual sophistication, crushing the less advantaged, once lovely unknown one, may be ameliorated by the knowledge that they both loved to read, that probably Elsie's undeveloped talent for playing the piano let them share some mutual pleasure in their records (many of these were of Chopin's music) and the testimony of Louis Martz that Stevens read his poetry to Elsie. He quotes Stevens, who was preparing to read from "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" at the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1949, the fortieth year of his marriage: "Now, I read every section as is my custom to my wife as I wrote it. She put her hands over her eyes and said 'They're not going to understand this.' "

Her good judgment is exemplified by the many essays on these stanzas and his other poetry written by literary critics who continually expound their meanings as his meanings. These writers will find valuable hints of Stevens' creative experiences throughout this volume. For example, Stevens was an artist who consciously absorbed "the happy accident" into his poems. From his friend, Judge Arthur Powell, a Southerner and talented phrasemaker, he picked up "the hen-cock that crows at midnight and lays no eggs;" the title, "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman," as well as "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery." He became fascinated by the Southern atmosphere, and once when he longed to go South away from the frigid winter, he wrote, "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters," a title indicative of the South.

Perhaps the most tantalizing statement by the poet occurs in the account of the composer, John Gruen, who, having invited Stevens to hear his song cycle based on "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," asked Stevens what his poetry was really all about. "He spoke more about the experience of how it is to make a poem," Gruen remembered. "He talked something about submersion, about words being submerged and rising out, that they seemed to have been hidden and revealed themselves. . . . He then put the word down, and that revelation was then forgotten. There was something rather mysterious about his writing the poetry." This had been preceded by Stevens' vagueness. "He told me that he didn't know what his poetry meant at times, that he really had to think hard as to what he meant by that image or that phrase or that word, even."

This is in contrast to Bernard Herringman's notes from an interview. Stevens "says his poems aren't obscure. He writes something he sees or has seen or known clearly. The main thing is to have it right for yourself. Nobody else ever sees it exactly the same anyway. You put it down as it is to you, and it's clear and sharp and simple." Stevens "tries to get closer and closer to a major statement of or about it—about Imagination and Reality."

The poet's own estimate of his role in poetry is given by José Rodríguez Feo, the young editor of the Cuban magazine, *Origenes*, whose letters delighted Stevens with phrases he could capture for his poems. With the courage given by too many drinks, he asked, "Now, I want you to tell me, frankly, do you think you're a great poet?" The resolution of the answer from Stevens was, "I don't know why I think I'm a great poet, but I'm beginning to write great poetry." This was probably about 1949. Rodríguez Feo reports that Stevens "didn't think a great deal of the philosophical poets." He continues, "But he was a philosophical poet, he played with ideas." And he adds a just reminder to the literary critics who have burdened the poetry with various serious philosophical structures: "What saves him from being an arid and boring poet is this fantasy vein, this playfulness, which, in a way, is the essence of poetry."

A few weeks before he died, Stevens inscribed a copy of *The Collected Poems*: "When I speak of the poem, or often when I speak of the poem, in this book, I mean not merely a literary form, but the brightest and most harmonious concept, or order, of life; and the references should be read with that in mind." This conception of a poem by Stevens is a fraction of the valuable whole of *Parts of a World*, a book which shows us how important an oral biography can be. Wallace Stevens remembered is still an enigma, for personality is always mysterious. But Peter Brazeau's industry and talent have salvaged and bestowed upon us all a gift of what we wanted and needed to know.

Advance on Chaos: The Sanctifying Imagination of Wallace Stevens.

By David M. La Guardia. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1983.

There are times when certain phrases and cadences in the poetry of Wallace Stevens make it obvious that an influence is at work and whether the source reflected is Wordsworth, Keats, Emerson, or Shakespeare, the effect seems so transparent that it would occur to all readers. But between these echoes and their discovered sources, there is nearly always an "unlettered blank" that makes difficult any demonstration of direct influence. Even in the poems of *Harmonium*, Stevens leaves little evidence of the voices of his fathers. He gives instead the impression of someone capable of walking across a field of freshly fallen snow and leaving no footprints. This places a special burden on those who would interpret Stevens' poems as continuations of poetic traditions. For, while a number of recent readings have linked Stevens forcefully to certain poetic father figures, none of these has been able to establish direct influence. It should not be surprising then that David La Guardia, in his new book *Advance on Chaos: The Sanctifying Imagination of Wallace Stevens*, eschews the desire to demonstrate direct influence even though he studies at some length the relations of Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James to Stevens' poetry. La Guardia sets up a series of suggestive parallels between the two earlier writers and Stevens. He proposes to compare Emerson and James to Stevens on such issues as "the function of language and metaphor, the subject-object dynamism, the centrality of poetic vision, and the primacy of fiction over truth" so that he can show "precise lines of influence in the American self" (p. ix).

Instead of searching for signs of "direct influence," La Guardia rephrases the question so that the issue is the degree to which Stevens was influenced by Emerson and James. This question would seem to have been answered each time Stevens' place in American poetry is assessed. However, judging from Stevens' position in anthologies of American poetry and his assigned role in the history of American poetry, "the precise lines of influence" that La Guardia wants to trace have not been very clearly delineated. The tendency of literary historians recently has been to try to distinguish Stevens from his brethren (Eliot, Pound, Williams, Frost) rather than connect him to those giants who preceded him. La Guardia's book will make a better answer available to future historians of American poetry. By concentrating on the role of the imagination and the concept of the self, he selects themes that open numerous possible parallels in the texts of Emerson, James, and Stevens.

La Guardia takes a further and, I think, crucial step in his study. Instead of besieging us with textual comparisons by way of demonstrating the presence of similar ideas in the writers, he shows how these "influences" affect the poems from *Harmonium* to "The Rock." In so doing, the author shows how interpretations of the central poems must change once certain Emersonian and Jamesian parallels have been established. La Guardia, then, has a larger purpose than merely finding sources for some of Stevens' ideas; he wants to show how those "precise lines of influence" that he uncovers between Emerson, James, and Stevens help one to understand Stevens' major poems. Assuming this double task, the author addresses not only the question of sources and affinities in Stevens' poems, but also the issue of Stevens' development as a poet and his mastery of the contradictory combination of Emersonian idealism and Jamesian pragmatism.

The result of La Guardia's investigation is an impressive compilation of relevant passages from Emerson and James, which, although they do not suffice to demonstrate direct influence, do show a dual direction in Stevens' poems that is clarified and heightened by the textual comparisons. The author's subsequent interpretations of the major poems follow the themes he has emphasized in his pursuit of Emerson and James. While it is not always clear to this reader that the intellectual

ammunition accumulated from these American thinkers is necessary for the interpretation of Stevens' poems (I think especially of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" and "Credences of Summer"), La Guardia's interpretations result in interesting and original readings of a number of Stevens' most important poems beginning with "The Comedian as the Letter C" and ending with "The Rock." Where he demonstrates the effects of the lines of influence that he seeks to unveil, La Guardia can be a careful and sensitive reader of Stevens' texts. In setting out to treat at least parts of every major poem, La Guardia presents an ambitious and complete argument concerning the nature and development of Stevens' poetry.

Toward the end of his study, La Guardia claims that Stevens "writes poetry as a religious act and proposes his poems as sacred replacements for sterile doctrinal creeds and theories" (p. 175). The reference here is to "The Rock" and to "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself." Although La Guardia tries to clarify his sense of how this new religious poetry functions in the late poems, his claim may equate poetry and the sacred in a way that Stevens would not have accepted. It may be that the poet's function is, as La Guardia writes, "to illumine reality within the fictive hymns that vitalize the self by renewing the world," but that does not suffice to make the poet either a mystic or a priest. His use of certain words like "holy," "sacred," and "religious" seems to conform neither to the context of his sources (James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*) nor to standard usage (Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* or Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*). On the other hand, there is much to learn from comparisons of religious experience and poetic experience. It is from such parallels that La Guardia can conclude that Stevens created "redeeming song" and in so doing aligned himself with the high tradition of Romantic poetry. In the modern world shared by Valéry, Rilke, Montale, Neruda, and Stevens, the single converging faith rests in the power of poetry. Yet none of these poets thought his words sacred.

For too many years, Stevens' debts and affinities to the central figures of the American literary tradition have been assumed in spite of the fact that persuasive studies of those connections have been rare. La Guardia's book makes a strong case for explaining some of those lines of influence. He presents a fresh view of Stevens' poems and a considerable argument for linking Emerson, James, and Stevens in the same world of thought. Stevens' concept of the self may be neither Emersonian nor Jamesian, but it will be difficult now to argue against their presence in the poems.

Thomas J. Hines
Kent State University

- Parker, Patricia A. "The Motive for Metaphor: Stevens and Derrida." *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (Fall 1983): 76-88.
- "Our Masters' (& Other) Voices: Poetry on Cassette." Review of *The Poets' Voices* (Harvard University Press). *The Antioch Review* 41 (Winter 1983): 109-113.
- Strobel, Shirley H. "Stevens' 'The Emperor of Ice Cream.'" *The Explicator* 41 (Summer 1983): 33-35.

DISSERTATIONS

- Green, David Leslie. "The Modernist American Landscape." Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1982.
- Strom, Martha Helen. "Wallace Stevens' Living Places: The Great Poem of the Earth." Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1983.

David P. Rosen
Temple University

On November 19, 1983, the day after the publication of Peter Brazeau's *Parts of a World: Wallace Stevens Remembered* (Random House), there was a cocktail party to celebrate the appearance of this oral biography, a few blocks from Wallace Stevens' Westerly Terrace home. Stevens would have recognized many familiar faces among the 115 invited guests who filled the Crystal Room at St. Joseph College in West Hartford, Connecticut, for the occasion. Among the *literati* were Samuel French Morse and Donald Engley, both of whom had been Stevens' frequent guests at the Canoe Club in the 1950s; Frederick Morgan, founding editor of *The Hudson Review*, in which some of Stevens' best late poems appeared; and Robert Buttell, sporting a jazzy bow-tie that had once belonged to Stevens. Members of the poet's family who came for the party, some from as far away as California, were his nieces Jane MacFarland Wilson, Mary Catharine Sesnick, and Joan Sesnick, and Stevens' daughter, Holly, who remarked on "liking this book even more than I had expected."

Reception for Peter Brazeau's *Parts of a World: Wallace Stevens Remembered*

Current Bibliography

1983

BOOKS

- Brazeau, Peter. *Parts of a World: Wallace Stevens Remembered: An Oral Biography*. New York: Random House, 1983.
- Coyle, Beverly. *A Thought to be Rehearsed: Aphorism in Wallace Stevens's Poetry*. Studies in Modern Literature, No. 9, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983.
- La Guardia, David M. *Advance on Chaos: The Sanctifying Imagination of Wallace Stevens*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983.
- MacLeod, Glen G. *Wallace Stevens and Company: The Harmonium Years, 1913-1923*. Studies in Modern Literature, No. 3. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983.
- Peterson, Margaret. *Wallace Stevens and the Idealist Tradition*. Studies in Modern Literature, No. 24. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983.
- Woodman, Leonora. *Stanza My Stone: Wallace Stevens and the Hermetic Tradition*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1983.

ARTICLES

- Ackerman, R. D. "Death and Fiction: Wallace Stevens' Mother of Beauty." *ELH* 50 (Summer 1983): 401-414.
- Ackerman, R. D. "Desire, Distance, Death: Stevens's Meditative Beginnings." *TSL* 25 (Winter 1983): 616-631.
- Bawer, Bruce. "Stevens, Lowell, Ulysses: Some Notes on Influences." *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (Spring 1983): 10-16.
- Beehler, Michael. "Stevens' Boundaries." *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (Fall 1983): 99-107.
- Buttel, Robert. Review of *Wallace Stevens and Company: The Harmonium Years, 1913-1923* by Glen MacLeod. *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (Fall 1983): 108-110.
- Giamo, Benedict. "On the Exquisite Plane of a Supreme Fiction." *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (Spring 1983): 36-45.
- Hirsch, Edward. Review of *Parts of a World: Wallace Stevens Remembered: An Oral Biography* by Peter Brazeau. *The Nation*, 31 December 1983, 7 January 1984, 701-703.
- Jarvis, Robin. Review of *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* by Harold Bloom and *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* by Harold Bloom. *Diacritics* (Fall 1983): 44-56.
- Karpinsky, Joanne B. "An Endless Meditation: A Reading of Wallace Stevens' Prefaces to the Dialogues of Paul Valéry." *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (Spring 1983): 30-35.
- Kinneavy, Gerald. "Stevens' 'The Indigo in the Grass.'" *The Explicator* 42 (Fall 1983): 41-42.
- Kronick, Joseph G. "Large White Man Reading: Stevens' Genealogy of the Giant." *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (Fall 1983): 89-98.
- Lavery, David L. "'The More than Rational Distortion' in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens." *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (Spring 1983): 3-9.
- Lombardi, Thomas F. "Wallace Stevens And The Haunts Of Unimportant Ghosts." *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (Spring 1983): 46-53.
- Marshall, M. T. "Crude Compoundings: Wallace Stevens' Prophecy of the Possible." *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (Spring 1983): 21-29.
- McCann, Janet. "Wallace Stevens' 'The Rock.'" *Concerning Poetry* 16 (Spring 1983): 45-56.
- Newman, Lea. "The Lightning Field and the Jar." *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 7 (Spring 1983): 17-20; reprinted from *The Mind's Eye*, vol. 7, no. 1. North Adams State College.

Wallace Stevens

A Celebration

Edited by

**Frank Doggett and
Robert Buttel**

"Centennial programs marking the anniversary of Wallace Stevens' birth have proliferated across the United States, but none, perhaps, will have a worthier aftermath than the selection of essays by authorities on this giant among American poets which Princeton University Press has brought out under the intelligent editorship of Frank Doggett and Robert Buttel. . . Readers of *Wallace Stevens, A Celebration* may well rejoice that for generations, the company of those mindful of 'supreme fiction' will find in its tributes . . . a record, as if in a cornerstone, of what Americans were finding in this magnificent poet one hundred years after his birth."

—*The Wallace Stevens Journal*

Contributors to this celebration of Wallace Stevens include: Louis Martz, Peter Brazeau, A. Walton Litz, Wilson E. Taylor, Holly Stevens, George Lensing, Richard Ellmann, Helen Vendler, Isabel MacCaffrey, Irvin Ehrenpreis, John Hollander, Frank Kermode, J. Hillis Miller, Roy Harvey Pearce, and Joseph N. Riddel.

\$22.50

A Readers' Subscription Book Club Selection

At bookstores or from

Princeton University Press
Princeton, New Jersey 08540

