The Wallace Stevens Journal

A Publication of The Wallace Stevens Society, Inc.
Volume 27 Number 2 Fall 2003

The Wallace Stevens Journal

Volume 27 **Number 2** **Fall 2003**

Contents

Cover
Botanist on Alp (No. 1)
Digital photomontage
Iain Jacobs

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

The subscription rate for individuals, both domestic and foreign, is $25 for one year or $45 for two years and includes membership in the Wallace Stevens Society. Rates for institutions are $34 per year domestic and $39 per year foreign. Back issues are available. Also available are volumes 1–25 on CD-ROM.

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

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

ISSN 0148-7132

Intentionality as Sensuality in *Harmonium*

CHARLES ALTIERI

IN COMPARING WALLACE STEVENS' early poetry in *Harmonium* with his later work, I will concentrate on innovative aspects that Stevens was later to reject.[1] These innovations establish a relation to philosophy drastically different from the efforts in his later work at explicitly thematizing what self-consciousness produces, and so they hold out the possibility of an avant-garde Stevens much less assimilable to humanist ideals than is the aging wisdom figure.[2] Exploring these differences provides what I hope are significant ways of attributing a distinctive philosophical heft to the opening poems of *Harmonium*, a sequence that I think brilliantly flaunts traditional expectations about lyric agency.

Let us work our way back to early Stevens from the highly self-conscious efforts at philosophical poetry we find in later works such as "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" or "Prologues to What Is Possible." Late Stevens offers a good deal of discursive meditation, but the poems do not comprise arguments. Nor are they in any sense impersonal constructions inviting distance from a socially contextualized speaker. Rather, philosophy depends on making the lyric agent transparent and representative in its capacities to make value coincide with fact:

> Only recently I spoke of certain poetic acts as subtilizing experience and varying appearance. . . . A force capable of bringing about fluctuations in reality in words free from mysticism is a force independent of one's desire to elevate it. It needs no elevation. It has only to be presented, as best one is able to present it. (*NA* viii)

Being a philosophical poet does not entail doing the work philosophers do. Poets do not propose and develop specific theses. Rather their emphasis is on pursuing the implications of their investments in "bringing about fluctuations in reality" with words. Poetry simultaneously manifests an ability to make visible the life of the mind in its most intimate exchanges with the world and to construct a way of speaking making it possible to identify with the energies of those acts of mind without imposing on the world anything mystical or mystified. The poet wants an intensified sense

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of what the name indicates, and his or her audience wants an intensified sense of our powers as users of such names.

Harmonium is a very different enterprise. It is a strange philosophical poet indeed who does not introduce a reference to an "I" until the volume's seventh poem and who treats everything putatively human as if it were merely a figure in some flattened and opaque quasi-allegory. Imagine William James or Josiah Royce or George Santayana, the major philosophers of Stevens' Harvard education, sanctioning a philosophical position in which there are no dramatic speaking situations or efforts at self-understanding until the volume arrives at the speaking presence who offers "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle." Here, when we do get drama, we find even more irony and distance than we did in the flattened allegories, perhaps because what had been experiments in impersonal distance now become renderings of how distant even personality can become from its own immediate needs and desires.

These contrasts with later Stevens require our asking why the younger poet was so insistently unyielding toward traditional modes of attaching persons to their reflective lives. The most ready answers take negative form since we can easily speculate on why these poems might refuse to provide certain kinds of satisfactions. It seems as if Stevens' desire to address modernity required his overtly rejecting even the desire to identify with the self-reflexive attitudes fostered by romanticism as ideals of poetic thinking. As André Salmon put it, the new emerging modernism in art "set apart the men who were beginning to look at themselves 'on every side at once' and thus learning to scorn themselves" (204). For the young Stevens the conventional meditative roles he would later assume would have seemed absurdly humanistic. The young poet would doubtless have admired the lush inventiveness of his later avatar. But all the subtlety of the later poems would not have compensated for the embarrassing coda to "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," the awkward abstraction of "Owl's Clover," and the somewhat mawkish idealizing of "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War." It would have seemed that the appeals of being able to assume the mantle of wisdom could not compensate for running the risk of preserving deeply ingrained cultural structures allowing humans to think well of themselves even as they blinded themselves to everything alien and alienating that confronts consciousness.

Irony offered one way of evading those structures, since it could deflate the identifications promised by philosophical meditation. But irony could not build on this scorn. An ambitious poetry would have to use these negatives as a means of establishing new modes of lyric reflection better attuned to those points at which self-disgust modulates into fictions worth exploring for the positive energies they make available. If the negative could make ideals flutter, lyric intensity might give new vitality to the shades and shadows created by that fluttering. This seems to me

one plausible framework for interpreting the sensualism usually attributed to *Harmonium*.

Stevens' resistance to idealization required his poetry to focus more intently than was customary on the very processes of taking in the sensuous information usually ignored by our conceptual habits. That orientation allowed one to pay attention to what makes the psyche flutter. Then one might encounter "gusty / Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights" (*CP* 67) that were too elemental for idealization; and one might be able to dwell without irritable reaching for ideals by which to interpret the compelling forces created by lyric rhythm and aural density. Such commitments might make poetry matter not because of how it pursues or celebrates belief but because of how it manages to hold off the temptation to impose belief on sensation and all that binding the imagination to sensation might elicit. Stevens might matter as a poet because he could exemplify what happens when poetry accepts the imperative that whatever art might claim for spirit has to be based on a radical commitment to the primacy of the senses. The very critique of mysticism that would shape his subsequent philosophical ambitions could in *Harmonium* be experienced as a demand to let the imagination pursue the pleasures of refusing to let philosophy control how sensation released imaginative energies. The opening section of *Harmonium* then has as its fundamental ambition the desire to map modes of investing in imaginative energies whose basic claim upon us is their resistance to inherited modes of idealization.

It is crucial that for Stevens this new orientation did not make him content with the rendering of heightened sensation—for many modernists the basic error of impressionism was its so confining artistic ambitions. He was not a straightforward materialist envisioning consciousness fulfilled if it could get free to represent only what the senses register about the world. Fascination with the senses helped him realize how difficult it is, and how exhilarating, to link these senses to the forces language brings to bear, especially when one's ambitions for poetry demand finding some way of continuing to honor the imaginative energies that typically go into self-idealization. Stevensian sensualism takes as its primary role forcing consciousness to recognize its own tenuous hold on states and processes for which it cannot successfully impose interpretations but also upon which it cannot stop imposing projections. As Stevens suggests by having his criticism of William Carlos Williams' anthropomorphism occur so early in this volume,[3] the best way to appreciate the senses is to attempt identifications with their resistance to the poets' metaphors.

Once we allow ourselves to participate in these apparently negative energies, we also enter a space where it makes sense to yield ourselves to forms of constructive energy that ride these sensual possibilities. As our heavenly labials are undone, we at least come to see what it might be like to be a giant. Perhaps there can be structures that fully engage the mind precisely because they yield to modes of linkage for which the mind has

no categories and no preset expectations. This is where poetry's lushness comes in. It provides a locus for those aspirations the psyche can pursue when it turns away from the need to provide imaginary representations of its desires. As those aspirations find possible satisfactions, the energies that go into identification can be rerouted, as can the desperate need to make sense of experience. Perhaps making as an extension of sense can replace making sense as a cognitive enterprise. As the psyche finds satisfactions that do not lead back to identifications as a meditative or lyric poet, it can become fascinated by something close to an inhumanity at the core of its investments in the flesh. When the opening poems in *Harmonium* turn to the romantic vision of the imagination approaching theophany, the most they allow themselves is an identification with the figure of an aesthete god observing the sacrificial labors undertaken by Ursula and her virgins:

> And He felt a subtle quiver,
> That was not heavenly love,
> Or pity. (*CP* 22)

Poetry's job is to build on this "not" so that we glimpse what skepticism can propose as a not entirely ironic transcendental belief. Then poem after poem confronts the corollary of this "not," the constant reminder that to be flesh is to be doomed to mortality. But a sharp awareness of this mortality also brings with it the challenge that we make that sensation itself the impetus for lyrical expansiveness.

It is tempting at this point to go directly to a reading of this opening sequence. But were we to do that, I fear we would have only a series of commentaries without a sufficient organizing thread. To establish that thread I want first to propose a general model for characterizing Stevens' early experiments, then to test the model in relation to the volume's opening sequence. We have seen that we cannot treat the poems as representative acts of a responsible reflective subject trying to express in language what gives significance to specific qualities of personal experience. These poems present an emphatic challenge to those cultural assumptions that tempt us to seek an organizing narrative or the corollary figure of an expressive agent exploring how its psyche adapts to a range of dramatic situations.

Although the poems share much with the ironic side of T. S. Eliot's enterprise, it cannot suffice to treat *Harmonium* as seeking Eliotic impersonality or as rendering ironically modulated dramatic speakers. We have to treat the poems as intensely immediate in their psychology, but immediate in strange ways for which we lack the appropriate vocabulary. Clearly we cannot pursue the expectation that finding relations among these poems will lead us to a richer understanding of the authorial agent whose efforts at self-understanding shape both the poems and their relations to each other. Although these poems are decidedly "about" the needs and

powers we can attribute to consciousness, they are just as decidedly not "about" a specific person struggling to make sense of his particular life history and present social situation.

Can we use a language of "aboutness" at all? Must we treat these poems as singular constructs, or can we see them as closely linked elements within a cogent and provocative experimental enterprise with its own way of giving a philosophical dimension to lyric agency? One possible response is to ask whether we can envision a version of agency that need not be connected directly to the presence of an expressive subject seeking to transform personal immediacy into representative forms of self-reflection. Perhaps we can do that if we make a somewhat artificial but useful sharp distinction between the kind of reading that locates expressivity in a speaker's intentions and one that is content to deal with the expressive force as an aspect of the mode of intentionality the poem constructs, without implying any needy and ultimately self-congratulatory presence underlying how the experience is formulated.

Harmonium's opening lyrics become experiments in foregrounding versions of intentionality that can stand in themselves as states of agency while refusing to allow the modes of recuperation we employ when we pursue intentions. An emphasis on intentionality may be able to show how poetry can subsume the person within the disposition of consciousness that it renders. We can then speak of the structure of the opening segment of the volume in terms of how each of these modelings of consciousness needs supplements and adjustments if the sequence as a whole is to respond to the sense of challenge Stevens saw in the need to make lyric poetry adequate to twentieth-century realities.

Now, however, I have to define intentionality in a way that enables us to preserve this sense of purposiveness without projecting on that purposiveness overt authorial intentions and expressive projects. I will seek the help of Richard Wollheim, a philosopher I find unfailingly clear and helpful in distinguishing various aspects of mental life. He defines intentionality as that aspect of a mental phenomenon that captures and preserves "not just what the thought is of, or its object, but how the thought presents its object" (35). When we attend to intentionality we cannot "be indifferent between saying . . . 'Tom would like the author of the pamphlet brought to trial' and 'Tom would like his brother brought to trial' " (35). Intentions have to be represented in the form of intentional rather than extensional statements. Their reference is opaque: we cannot take the statement to refer to all the objects that fit the asserted proposition, but only to the specific features within the proposition that are the sentence's actual thought content. (If Tom's brother were the author, then extensionally the statements would be identical but intentionally they are different because Tom was intending only the author and not thinking about his brother.)

When we turn to Stevens' early poetry as our topic, I think we need to preserve only the spirit of Wollheim's distinction. We can locate the source

of the opacity of reference not in what some person intends but in how a particular utterance evokes a particular relation to the world because of how it disposes the intending mind. "Intentionality" need refer only to that orientation of consciousness by which *a* situation becomes *this* situation for a particular point of view.[4] Then we can see that, although concerns for intention lead us to focus on what an agent might be trying to express, concerns for intentionality focus our attention on how consciousness is structured and affect explored in bringing about the sense of "this situation."

Correlatively, the emphasis on how situations are composed brings with it a complex set of questions about the projected satisfactions that elicit the particular orientation and the actual satisfactions that explain why it persists. With works of art, we have to ask why we might care as we engage a sensibility taking up a certain disposition toward the world. What kinds and qualities of affective investments become possible by virtue of occupying particular intentional positions? Then the volume as a whole can deal on a second-order level with how the range of intentional positions can be seen as weaving consciousness into the world and so enabling a particular range of possible identifications. The volume must provide the sense of context that we conventionally derive from projections about expressive intentions.

These links between intentional states and possible identifications are important in all aspects of life, but they seem to me especially pressing concerns for poets of Stevens' generation. For these poets seemed always forced to engage both the particular structure of lyric investments and the constant general pressure of justifying to themselves identifications staging themselves as genuinely modernist. Yet lyric has very little to recommend it as a means of responding to such cultural demands because it usually cannot rely on argument or analysis or even the elaboration of fantasy for its effectiveness. That is why those seeking its power may have had to do so in ways that evade the person and seek a direct manifestation of what lyric can produce.

Were poets to rely on narratives about how individual intentions were shaped, they would find it very difficult to avoid the dominant cultural order, an order that obviously reinforced on every level the very conventions that modernism wanted to unsettle and transform. Narrative accounts of selves were fundamental to that order: narrative sustained roles and identifications continuous with the dominant practices. But putting all one's reflective energies into the articulation of intentional states enabled one to treat lyrics as pure moments for engaging aspects of the world and of seeing how consciousness might be altered by its efforts to draw out what it could from such moments. On such a basis poets might be able to pursue identifications that could satisfy the psyche at its most intense level without subjecting it to conventional forms of life ill-suited to such intensities. Dominant culture has substantial interests in poets making the kinds

of simple identifications that find satisfaction simply in the fact that one is functioning as a poet and so demonstrating a certain kind of approved sensitivity. There might be a certain *frisson* possible within this marginal mode of production, but the *frisson* is part of the licensing by which society maintains its authority. Fully embracing modernity required pursuing quite different modes of identification, modes based not on the role of the "poet" but on the sense of embracing a task whose practical consequences had yet to be defined.

I have spent considerable time blithely making assertions as if I could be sure that everyone reads Stevens as I do, so that there is no need to provide evidence for my claims. Indeed I am not sure that evidence will persuade anyone not already leaning toward this kind of interpretation. But just for the aesthetics of it, it is worth now trying to indicate concretely how Stevens' opening poems are structured to establish the challenges to which I have persuaded myself these remarks are responding.

Is there a stranger opening poem to a volume of poetry than "Earthy Anecdote"? It seems that to enter this volume we have to be willing to place ourselves in this spare allegorical space, with all dramatic and personal details suppressed as irrelevant. We are offered neither a clear speaker nor a dramatic context. There is only a troublingly distanced perspective before which there unfolds an apparently timeless and very flat scenario. The poem seems both a revelation and a test—a revelation of a logic fundamental to the imagination and a test of what one might go on to see if one were willing to persist in the inhuman mode of seeing required by the poem. Whatever the bucks represent—probably chaotic reality—seems both dependent on and inevitably blocked by the unyielding resourcefulness of the firecat. The scene seems to allow for no hope of change or fulfillment. But its spareness allows consciousness to persist without lament or self-pity. In fact the poem seems to present a challenge to try on its disciplined mode of seeing so that one might shift from whining about powerlessness to being able to share a fascination with the firecat's ultimate self-absorption. Allegory itself then serves less to interpret the world than to facilitate a relation to it not available if we insist on decoding meanings. Allegory makes it possible to identify with the firecat's narcissistic repose because even if we do not know quite what it represents, we know that it stems from successful resistance to everything the bucks come to symbolize. In this case the quasi-allegory even justifies the distant, inhuman writerly presence that carries the intentional focus of the poem. How else might we position ourselves to heed those aspects of human life that are subjected to forces beyond our control?

The rest of the volume's opening sequence explores what becomes possible if consciousness pursues this fascination with strange perspectives. There is no drama of self-expression and there is no reach toward "profound" thematic resolutions. Yet these refusals are not without a sense of new permissions. The poems invite us to try out a form of participation

that has no clear ethical correlates and no obvious way of reaching beyond what the senses activate. Once "Earthy Anecdote" has defined the imagination's dilemma in relation to reality, it seems perfectly plausible to attempt directly addressing the soul in "Invective against Swans," if only in terms of its relation to whatever in us aligns us with the bland motions of ganders all too well adjusted to their realities. Then as soon as the soul makes its entrance, it seems that the volume has to find a way of addressing the body within the same reductive abstract perspective. But for Stevens, introducing the body also requires introducing gender differences. Thus the volume turns to four poems on different aspects of the feminine as a framing of the sensual world: "In the Carolinas," "The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage," "The Plot against the Giant," and "Infanta Marina." The last of these so thoroughly links body with the motions of mind and the uttering of subsiding sound that it enables the volume to introduce a speaking lyric "I," now accessible in "Domination of Black" as an elemental force, teased out by the play of sound, color, and motion.[5] Stevens' lyric poetry will eventually need the "I," but thanks to this sequence its "I" can be much more fully a matter of relations among the senses than romantic ambitions had allowed.

With "Domination of Black," two further expansions become possible. First, this "I" seems to bring together the abstract soul and the "feminine" body given substance by its ways of inhabiting flux. There seems to be no deep motive beyond the evocative power of the specific situation, and so no sense that the expressive agent must dig deeply within to call up a responding self. *Harmonium*'s first "I" is as elemental as its "soul" or its "bucks" seeking to escape the firecat. It is as intensely sensual as the sense of a pine tree sweetening the body. But here that sensuality occupies a threshold between what the colors and sounds make present and what they articulate as a cause of fear and memory. The present takes on intensity less because of sensual vividness than because of the sharpening of the second-order engagement produced by attention to what the scene withholds at its horizons. The fullness of sensual apprehension seems inseparable from some fundamental lack that the peacocks register because they are so deeply responsive to the contrast between the turning leaves and the immobile hemlocks.

Second, this reconciliation of abstract soul and "feminine" body is by no means a conventional one. Body and soul are living out a kind of bad marriage in which each haunts the other. No wonder then that it will take three more poems engaging these elements before a recognizable speaker emerges. "The Snow Man" tries an entirely different direction. Instead of dwelling on sensibility immersed in oppressive physical detail, this poem explores what power can be mustered by pursuing as abstract a version of intentionality as possible. We are asked to test the possibility of a quite different kind of sensuality located in the shaping force of the poem's single intricate sentence. Can syntax provide sensuality for something like pure

negation? Playful allegorical space and flattened detail become the instruments for a new synthetic power that is philosophical precisely because it refuses all imperatives for argument and for self-congratulation. Here poetry manages to shift from its newly found "I" to the composing of a "one" able to reflect directly on its constructive powers. In effect what had been the work of rhythm now takes on semantic force. We find in this capacious sentence a minimalist giant able to resist those "Heavenly labials in a world of gutturals" (*CP* 7) and therefore perhaps also able to confront directly the horror of death that accompanies fascination with the unknowable.

But poetry will not be confined to marmoreal structures, however elegant and capacious. The feminine returns, first through women rising from poverty to "Puissant speech," giving resonance to the endless "Insinuations of desire" (*CP* 11) in "The Ordinary Women." Then, with "The Load of Sugar-Cane," the feminine becomes as abstract and as elemental as the mind of winter. Where silent immobility had been, now there is a marvelous sense of the clausal and phrasal connectives in language bringing all of nature into conjunction with the sudden emergence of the boatman's red turban. All of nature seeks this possibility of the pure event of emergence.

In this context we are in a position to appreciate why, when "Le Monocle de mon Oncle" presents the volume's first contextualized human speaker, it has to be so wary and so intricate about how expression is possible. This speaker must offer itself as an expressive and purposive agent. But how can it do so with the volume's awareness of how mobile and insubstantial (or differently substantial) subjective agency is? Selves seem to arise unbidden. But the speaker persists in an effort to take responsibility for his situation, emboldened in large part by the pleasures of language that each version of the self affords the speaking. The "I" appears always on the verge of seeming a mere construct necessitated by his fear that without that projection he would have even less touch with his immediate situation, especially with the insistent "you" who must be addressed.

Here, then, the volume finds its way back to the miseries of traditional lyric cries, but now with a better sense of both the defensive and the self-reflexive resources that emerge when one can speak of one's tears as the expression of "some saltier well / Within me" (*CP* 13). The "I" has to recognize its bondage to elemental forces that require our turning ironically against our own lyrical impulses. But that turn itself opens significant lyric possibilities that hover around our awareness of the limits of the expressive ego. In producing a lyric "I" for the volume, "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" also establishes a mode of intentionality capable of dealing with the distances that emerge when we recognize how the "I" is not a site in which we can reside very comfortably: "I never knew / That fluttering things have so distinct a shade" (*CP* 18). It is not expressive meanings that are distinct but shades and shadows, the senses inseparable from the imaginative projections they implicate at their margins.

Why then would Stevens abandon this radical poetics? One possible reason is that he thought the emphasis on sensation and the related world of fluttering things simply could not sustain his ambitions to make a difference in how people viewed their lives. The final poems of *Harmonium* deliberately remind us of how limited a world this perspective allows, even as they brilliantly celebrate a form of speaking that is intimately linked with experience on the level of the sheerly visual metaphor and the syllable. Or it might be the case that Stevens needed a different set of possibilities for self-projection. Leading a life in which poetry had to be hidden may have required from within his isolation projections of something more grandiose than the ambitions to bring language and sensation into marvelously close contact. Whatever the case, it would be silly to lament the philosophical poet Stevens became. But it would be even sillier not to honor the quite different mode of philosophizing that makes *Harmonium* still perhaps the most innovative challenge in American poetry to conventional ways of thinking about lyric speech.

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Notes

[1] This essay was originally presented as part of the Wallace Stevens Society program on "Early versus Late Stevens" at the Modern Language Association Convention in New Orleans, La., on December 29, 2001.

[2] Although I had completed much of this argument before I read her book, I want to note a strange affinity between my praise of early Stevens and the praise of pre-war avant-garde Eliot in Marjorie Perloff's intriguing *21st-Century Modernism*.

[3] "Nuances of a Theme by Williams" remained the 12th poem out of the 75 poems of the 1923 edition of *Harmonium* and the 85 poems of the 1931 edition.

[4] All poems can be interpreted as modes of intentionality for which the work itself models the intention and dictates the conditions of opacity. But most poems link that orientation making a *this* of a *that* to a specific expressive agent-speaker, literal or ironic. Early Stevens emphatically denies that particular way of grounding consciousness and its investments.

[5] The particular speakers in "The Plot against the Giant" use the first person, but that speaking is not linked to the role of the maker or underlying intentional presence in the same way that it is in "Domination of Black."

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A Translator's Experience with the Transformations of Wallace Stevens' Poetry

BART EECKHOUT

I

THE QUESTION OF the extent to which Wallace Stevens' early poetry differs from his later work is, in many ways, a threadbare one.[1] This is a bone that has been picked for decades now and by some of the poet's most gifted critics. Already in the 1960s, Helen Vendler devoted a full, award-winning book, *On Extended Wings*, to the development of Stevens as a poet, painstakingly tracing his changing styles, his shifting "experiments in diction, in rhetoric, in syntax, in genre, in imagery, in voice, and in meter" (10). Two decades later, Eleanor Cook extended this project in yet another detailed study aimed at demonstrating the "change and development in Stevens' thinking and imagination as well as in his skills" (xii). From a more biographical and thematic point of view, Milton Bates in *Wallace Stevens: A Mythology of Self* identified the several personae that informed Stevens' poetry at various stages of his writing life, from the dandified clown and the masterful hero to figures resembling the poet's own parents and the God of his boyhood and youth. And did not James Longenbach manage to win us over when he argued, in *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things*, that Stevens' antidogmatism and elusiveness meant something different in the polarized artistic and political context of the 1930s than during the Cold War years, thereby warning us that what might seem like continuities on the page could really involve discontinuities at the level of the historic production of meaning?

This and so much more have all been explored at great length in the classic studies that today make up the canon of Stevens criticism. My first claim, then, is that one can answer the question of the differences between "early" and "late" Stevens very satisfactorily by distilling and summarizing all the relevant material from that canon. My second claim, equally trivial, is that answers to the question will depend to a large extent on the critic's topic and focus. The wealth of perspectives for addressing the question of early vs. late Stevens is at least as great as the wealth of perspectives offered by Stevens himself in his famously perspectivist poetry. That is why we can read critics such as George Lensing, making an argument

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for continuity in the poetry, and Charles Altieri, doing the same for discontinuity, without feeling that either of them is blatantly wrong—from each of their different perspectives, that is. Yes, Stevens is the author of an "endlessly elaborating" poetry (*CP* 486) where "One poem proves another and the whole" (*CP* 441), and his oeuvre reads like a gigantic web of linked texts, with themes, images, and topoi building threads that weave in and out of different poems written at sometimes great intervals. Stevens is surely the poetic inventor of the hypertext *avant la lettre*. And as Steven Monte reminds us, it adds to our appreciation and understanding of individual poems if we remain sensitive to the many ways in which other poems from the same oeuvre seem to comment upon them. But at its own specific level of abstraction, the story that Altieri brings has its own cogency, insofar as there are indeed marked differences between the poetical ambitions of *Harmonium* and those of later volumes, with their more philosophical and theoretical intentions.

Is there "far more continuity in Stevens' work than reinvention and redirection" (18), as George Lensing argues in his impressive recent study, *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons*? Certainly, there is more than enough continuity to organize a whole book on Stevens around the "dominant metaphor" of the four seasons. Stevens' poetry, early to late, is simply steeped in seasonal evocations. Likewise, Stevens continues to strike us as an exceptionally idiosyncratic and inimitable figure among modernist poets, somebody whose work is remarkably recognizable, some would even say limited in scope or monomaniacal. But if there seems to be abundance of continuity, this does not yet mean we can quantify or tabulate this impression until we arrive at a claim for more continuity than discontinuity. It all depends.

In my own case, for instance, it depends at least in part on what hat I am wearing: that of the critic or that of the translator. The critic wants to build extended arguments. Mostly, his preferred mode is to connect things. What better way to prove his mastery of this poet's oeuvre than by establishing all kinds of cross-references and continuities, certainly when we are talking ideas, themes, epistemology? Yet the translator often cannot be bothered with this periphrastic and synthetic level of sense-making. He is rather worried about the "cribled pears" (*CP* 219) appearing in "Poem Written at Morning." He doesn't even know how to pronounce the participial qualifier to these pears. Should he read it as "cribléd," an English past participle concocted on the basis of the French verb *cribler*, but with the accent dropped? (In this case, it would mean something like "composed of or decorated with minute punctures, as a surface of metal or wood, the ground of an engraving, or the like.") But why would the accent have been dropped? Critics can blithely ignore and sidestep the resulting obscurity and still pretend to understand the drift of the poem, as the desperate translator finds out when he consults index after index of books on the poet or, thanks to the wonderful new CD-ROM produced by

John N. Serio, does a quick search through twenty-five years of this journal and detects, to his surprise, that he is about to become the very first contributor to do as much as cite the one-of-a-kind pears in these pages.[2] Critics can even integrate the poem in their purring scenarios of preponderant continuity and treat the word as simply one more example of Stevens' fondness for a Gallic vocabulary, marshalling the poet's ever-handy epigram, "French and English constitute a single language" (*OP* 202). But to the poor translator this nonce word "cribled" still remains *very* discontinuous. And it does not help much, at this point, to recall Stevens' observation, in one of his letters, that he liked words to sound wrong, also in translation (*L* 340).

II

Certainly in the case of poetry, a translator seeks to be a writer's supreme aesthetic reader, retracing the poet's every imaginative step, patiently moving from word to word like a performing musician analyzing a score and teasing out all the text's sensuous, signifying, and expressive levels with an eye to letting them be heard again in a performance that is at once impersonally serving and inevitably personal. Over the past few years, I have translated more than a hundred of Stevens' shorter poems into my native language, Dutch. (As a Fleming from the northern half of Belgium I speak Flemish Dutch, which is merely a variant of Dutch the way American English is a variant of English. The spelling of words is even identical in the Netherlands and Flanders and is in both cases laid down by law.) Since I decided to collect these translations in chronological order for publication in book form, the exercise forced me to have a closer than usual look at the changes in subject matter, style, and form that mark this poet's oeuvre. It is the results of these observations along the way that I would like to present in what follows.[3] Because a translator is obsessed with details, my bias will be of necessity toward formal and aesthetic aspects and toward some of the smaller *dis*continuities that may help us differentiate between particular poems and particular periods.

This does not imply, however, that translating Stevens has not confirmed to me a great many of the *continuities* in his work, both in subject matter and style. To start with some of the more obvious thematic elements: from first to last Stevens is indeed a poet obsessed with the weather and the seasons, with the topos of the wind and of falling leaves, with modern reconsiderations of paradise and heaven, with the romantic dialectic of the imagination and reality. He is the most consistently heliocentric of all modern poets, writing about the sun over and over again in the most inventive of terms. He is also consistently a poet obsessed with places; references to particular New England locations, for example, recur from the "thin men of Haddam" (*CP* 93) who are enjoined to look at real blackbirds around them to the "transformations of summer night" experienced while driving "home from Cornwall to Hartford" (*OP* 135–36). One of Stevens'

lifelong poetic dogmas, as Helen Vendler has already noted, is that of "the shadowy, the ephemeral, the barely perceived, the iridescent" (*On Extended Wings* 35). He is of course a writer who from the very first made sure that his poetry resisted the intelligence almost successfully, and who devised ways of opposing traditional eschatological thinking, subverting the kneejerk expectations of logic and reason and evading easy forms of closure (see Cook 99). He is a thoroughly impersonal poet throughout, writing non-confessional poems of the second order that reflect upon and stage experience rather than express it, while his evasions are at the same time clearly shaped by what Vendler again has called "the disappointments of desire" (*Words Chosen Out of Desire* 4).

Yet here already things become a little more complex: although Stevens' obsession with desire is occasionally prefigured in *Harmonium* (the word itself and its derivatives appear some nine times in the volume), it becomes a much more consistent undertow in the post-*Harmonium* era. What is more, the desire staged in the early volume seems far less tormented than in the later works, thereby corroborating Altieri's claim that for much of the early volume Stevens actively "turn[ed] away from the need to provide imaginary representations of [the psyche's] desires" (166) and was rather engaged in devising alternatives to the meditative role of poetry.

Something similar applies to a thematic recurrence I had not personally stopped to consider before or could not remember reading much about. Until translating Stevens' poems, I had never noticed so clearly that they dwell obsessively on sleep and, less frequently, its failing counterpart, insomnia. (Thomas Walsh in his concordance gives eighty-six instances of the word "sleep" and forty instances of variants on the wordstem.) The theme is foreshadowed occasionally in *Harmonium*, in poems like "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" and "Anecdote of the Prince of Peacocks," but it becomes a steady undercurrent in later years and is at its strongest in *Transport to Summer*, where the insomniac Stevens is intimately linked to the poet of desire and a nostalgia for wholeness.

The list of thematic continuities is long—much longer, I am willing to grant, than with many other poets of similar stature and comparably long careers. Take, as a final example, Stevens' interest in the theme (not just the poetical practice) of metaphor. The four poems that parade the word "metaphor" in their titles are spread out over almost his entire writing life, thus again testifying to his ongoing interest, which is easily corroborated through further poems such as "Oak Leaves Are Hands" or "Man Carrying Thing" (see Cook 176). At the same time, however, and jumping ahead momentarily to some of the discontinuities in theme and style I am about to discuss, there is no way in which the four poems with "metaphor" in their titles could come from any period other than the one they are actually from. Who would not situate "Metaphors of a Magnifico," with its imagist overtones, irregular stanza form and line length, and early-modernist formulaic play, as belonging to *Harmonium*? Who would fail to place

"The Motive for Metaphor," with its more regular stanza form, its more resistant reasoning, more obscure referentiality, more ambiguous syntax, and its interest in theories of change, around the time of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction"? Who would not feel that "Thinking of a Relation between the Images of Metaphors," with its couplet form, barer language, and inspiration from Stevens' genealogical investigations, was written in the mid-forties? And who would mistake "Metaphor as Degeneration," with its interest in questions of being, of space and time, its images of death, and the near-imperviousness of its denotations, as part of anything else but *The Auroras of Autumn*? At least to me as a translator, this final poem belongs unmistakably to that most opaque of Stevens' volumes, where I must often admit defeat. In my irresponsibly associative mind, *The Auroras of Autumn* stands as the most Heideggerian of Stevens' volumes: the volume that revolves around notions of being and time and *poesis* and that, like the late Heidegger's writing, seems most abstrusely locked in the metaphysics of its own discourse, with a language that is almost technocratically twisted into personal, idiosyncratic shapes. In other words, I have not included "Metaphor as Degeneration" among my translations.

This brings me to some of the *discontinuities* in subject matter that become no less conspicuous to a translator organizing Stevens' poems in chronological order. Many of these thematic shifts in the course of Stevens' writing life are again well-documented. A quick impromptu quiz will make this instantly clear:

Q: When did Stevens write most of his poems mocking institutionalized religion?
A: During the 1910s and early 1920s.

Q: When did he write most of his erotic poems and, in Vendler's formulation, his "ribald" poetry of "boisterous devotion to the gaudy, the gusty, and the burly" (*On Extended Wings* 52)?
A: During the same era: the tens and early twenties.

Q: When were the Florida poems written?
A: During the 1920s and 1930s.

Q: Which is the volume in which he is most clearly obsessed with painting?
A: *Parts of a World*.

Q: During which decades do we find a recurrent interest in the political world, in "major man" and a modern recalibration of heroes?
A: The 1930s and 1940s.

Q: In what decade do we see a concern with evil or poems about genealogy and intergenerational relations?
A: The 1940s.

In other words: *of course* there were important thematic shifts during those forty years of writing, even in the case of a metapoetical poet who stayed notoriously put in Hartford and for many years "secreted" himself in his own kind of "cavern" (*OP* 288), as he noted upon receiving the National Book Award in 1955.

Again, many of these shifts have been analyzed before, but others still have the potential to come as a revelation. Most readers will be aware, for instance, that *Ideas of Order* is the volume that temporarily introduces an interest in "order"—a word that is nowhere to be found in all of *Harmonium*—and we know at least since Cook's analysis that it is a volume full of scenes of ending and beginning again, and especially of returning (117). But it was not until I gathered my translations that I noticed it is also the collection in which ghosts and spirits appear fully on the scene. More conspicuously, it is the volume in which a concern with music becomes predominant—much as a concern with painting would be at the heart of *Parts of a World*. Whether we are talking about the singing of nightingales and grackles in autumn, the wordless singing of the woman at Key West, the meaning of Mozart during the Great Depression, the momentary impotence of Brahms' music to offer solace to the poet, or the death of the waltz as a socially valid musical form, it is all to be found in *Ideas of Order*. In this sense, *The Man with the Blue Guitar* is clearly a direct continuation of this mid-thirties interest. It is probably no coincidence also that music becomes the primary artistic analogy at a time when Stevens actively seeks to define his own kind of *poésie pure*. It may be significant, furthermore, that music comes to play such a crucial role in a volume in which personal sadness and misery become major sources of inspiration. If Vendler, in *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire*, clearly had a point when she presented Stevens as more a poet of human misery than he is often made out to be, we should nevertheless observe that this is much more obviously the case of the post-*Harmonium* poet. There *are* a few testimonies to feelings of fear in the first volume, and there *is* some gesturing toward misery and sadness, but not yet a sense of real struggling with the self and with unhappiness—nothing on the order of "Anglais Mort à Florence" or the self-loathing expressed in the middle of "Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu." The hurting poet is one who by and large appears on the scene only after the long silent years that followed the publication of *Harmonium*.

How closely some poems from one and the same period may at times belong together—and thus be discontinuous from the rest—seems to me best illustrated when we move on to *Parts of a World* and look at the set of lyrics there that was originally published in the fall 1938 issue of the *Southern Review* under the title "Canonica." Surely, poems such as "Study of Two Pears," "Add This to Rhetoric," "The Man on the Dump," "On the Road Home," and "The Latest Freed Man" are intimately and intricately linked at countless levels and should be read as collectively as we tend to

do with the various sections of long poems such as "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" or "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." When we move on to *Transport to Summer*, next, we may again notice a shift from poems about painting to ones about music, but in an even more drastically reduced format than what we already found in *Ideas of Order*: more often than not the music has now been brought back to its barest form of sheer sound. *Transport to Summer*, as so many critics have noted, is the volume in which again and again Stevens sets out to define aspects of his poetical theory; it is his most metapoetical volume, in the short lyrics as much as in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction." But what struck me for the first time, after translating eighteen of its shorter lyrics, is that poem after poem also seems to test out answers to one implicit question: By what are humans principally constituted? The diversity of options pondered by separate lyrics is astonishing: Are we as human beings above all constituted by ideas, by words, by names, by metaphors, by things, by images, by desire, by sounds, by forms, by places, by space, by the knowledge of good and evil? For all of these individual perspectives there are separate poems, and in almost all cases Stevens' inclination is to find the answers insufficient.[4]

Not surprisingly, then, I also discovered a strong nostalgia for unity, centrality, and wholeness throughout *Transport to Summer* (after all, this is his most immediately war-time volume). The insistently plural and fragmented parts of a world of the previous collection become parts of a *whole* in this volume, and, instead of insisting on the parts, it is the whole rather that becomes the object of desire. This nostalgia and desire, in addition, are often found in a context of Stevens lucubrating; insomnia seems to be at its strongest in these poems. The longing for unity, centrality, and wholeness spills over a little into the next volume, *The Auroras of Autumn*, in poems such as "The Ultimate Poem Is Abstract," or else it is modulated into a nostalgia for the stopping of time ("This Solitude of Cataracts"), for certitude ("World without Peculiarity"), or for the stilling of the mind ("Saint John and the Back-Ache"). The psychic force of these nostalgias, however, seems to me to subside again by the time of *The Rock* and the very late poems, where there is a far greater sense of acceptance, fulfillment, arrival, sufficiency, and serenity.

III

So much for issues of continuous and discontinuous subject matter. Let me spend the rest of this essay in the realm of aesthetic and formal minutiae—that realm where every translator follows the Nabokovian injunction to "notice and fondle details" (1). As I have pointed out, many of the continuities and discontinuities, also at this level, already have been defined by Stevens' finest critics. So this may be the point to recall that we should not of course believe everything these critics have written, especially if they are claims of the more sweeping sort one rarely bothers to

check. Thus, when Vendler in *On Extended Wings* writes that "[o]ver and over in the *Collected Poems* [Stevens] closes poems with a question" (20), many of us will feel like nodding in supposed recognition, but I took the trouble to do a quick check with the more than a hundred poems I translated (most of them canonical) and found that only two and a half of them ended with questions: "Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu," "Angel Surrounded by Paysans," and, with a lot of goodwill, "The Man on the Dump," which really closes with "The the." The funny thing is that, if you come to think of it, you could even make the opposite claim: that Stevens is quite *wary* of finishing with questions (though there are indeed hundreds along the way). It may be worth recalling that "Esthétique du Mal" should technically end with a question mark, but that Stevens admitted he could not bring himself round to doing so (*L* 469).

Let me start my findings about form and style by emphasizing again some of the more striking *continuities* in this respect. Not the least of these is Stevens' delightful habit of coining unexpected, witty, and puzzling titles, which is no doubt a major reason for our sense of consistency and uniqueness of style and voice. No other table of contents manages to be as imaginatively and teasingly funny as Stevens'. For *dis*continuities at this level we immediately have to look at very small details such as the frequency of, and play with, prepositions in titles, which may be found throughout his writing life but with certain modifications. The format with "of" is considerably more frequent in *Harmonium* than in the later volumes—witness "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," "Domination of Black," "The Death of a Soldier," "Metaphors of a Magnifico," "Anecdote of the Jar," "Fabliau of Florida," "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," or "Anatomy of Monotony." Especially by the time of *Parts of a World*, we find there is greater variety in this play with prepositions. Likewise, we may note how all the "anecdotal" titles appear in *Harmonium*, from "Earthy Anecdote" to "Anecdote of Canna," "Anecdote of Men by the Thousand," "Anecdote of the Jar," and "Anecdote of the Prince of Peacocks"; several of these poems were in fact written in very short sequence.

As with titles, so with the invention of quirky, exotic, humorous names (which begins at least as early as Badroulbadour in "The Worms at Heaven's Gate") or the appearance of French or conspicuously Latinate words, which both mark Stevens' poetry throughout. It is only the far less important snippets of German that are restricted to one period: roughly the last decade of his life, when "Presence is *Kinder-Scenen*" (*CP* 436) and poems may be entitled "Lebensweisheitspielerei." Onomatopoetic, nonsensical, and purely musical coinages start to appear already with "Tum-ti-tum, / Ti-tum-tum-tum!" (*CP* 20) in "Ploughing on Sunday," and they constitute, needless to say, an existential nightmare to translators. For how does one handle a phrase like "thunder's rattapallax" (*CP* 78)? Should any overtones (like those of the verb "rattle") be kept or can the word simply be imported acoustically into a different language? What does one

do with the poet at the piano playing his 1930s "hoo-hoo-hoo," his "shoo-shoo-shoo," his "ric-a-nic" (*CP* 131)? What, in "The Bed of Old John Zeller," is the relation between "ting-tang" and "tossing" in the phrase "ting-tang tossing" (*CP* 327)? Here especially, a translator needs to determine, since "tossing" is an extant word and the counterpart to "ting-tang" must achieve a similar effect. I have turned it into "dring-drang draaien," with which I confess I am rather contented: the Dutch verb "draaien" in its intransitive use means "turning around" or "turning over" and may be used for somebody tossing in his bed, while the wordstems "dring" and "drang" both point to acts of pushing, pressing, and squeezing at the same time that they are in themselves sufficiently humorous words, especially in this alliterative combination. By contrast, let me also offer a funny example of the snags that may surface with onomatopoetic translations. When, in "Thinking of a Relation between the Images of Metaphors," the wood-dove's "coo becomes rou-coo, rou-coo" (*CP* 356), the problem with retaining the coo-sound in Dutch is that it happens to be a homonym of cow, and that, needless to say, is an animal we do not want to imagine sitting on the branches of trees, warbling to the Indians and the solitary fisherman below. It is all very well for onomatopoeias to pretend mimicking natural sounds, but nature is apparently able to undergo some bemusing transformations when we cross national borders.

There are still more formal and stylistic continuities: Stevens' proverbial syntax, with its continuously modifying and qualifying appositions and its sinuously meandering linearity, is again in evidence from at least "Domination of Black" onward. Indeed, the whole habit of composing potentially endless variations on a theme is at the heart of this poet's work, both ideologically and stylistically; it is the formal constriction that liberated this poet's creativity most clearly. The subdividing device that Stevens favored for these sets of variations, again throughout his writing life, was that of the simple roman numeral. In other words, he did not go in for a proliferation of teasing subtitles, much as he never engaged in "typographical queerness" (*L* 326) and just as for most of his career he preferred regular stanzas and roughly metrical lines of similar length.

That in some respects one cannot but lose certain effects from the original in translation becomes clear when we recall another of Stevens' lifelong habits: his unobtrusive allusions to, and echoes of, other writers within his poetic and literary canon. Translating Eliot and Pound is a lot easier in this respect: one simply retains the quotations, in whatever language they are given, and adds a footnote. Nobody can miss noticing these *Fremdkörper*, even if their presence may alienate readers and add to their resentment. But there is no way one could bring a Dutch-speaking reader to catch the intertextual dialogue between certain of Stevens' lines and those of Shakespeare, Whitman, Emerson, Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, or Williams. All these writers sound in the echo chamber of Stevens' poetry from first to last, but they are not in the cultural repertory of a poetry-loving Dutch-

man or Fleming, nor could echoes of their works be caught in a Dutch translation. (If at all, these writers would tend to be read in the original.) The only option in this case is to point to connections, ploddingly, in editorial footnotes, yet too many of these run the risk of intellectually dehydrating the reader. At best, a sizable group of educated Dutch-speaking readers might pick up the influence of Nietzsche on some of Stevens' texts, but Nietzsche may be a somewhat unfortunate instance in this respect, since his immediate impact, as B. J. Leggett in *Early Stevens: The Nietzschean Intertext* has demonstrated, is more apparent in the early poetry and thus fails to suggest something of the continuous quality of Stevens' intertextual dialogues.

This brings me, at last, to the nuts and bolts that are any translator's delight: the many small shifts Stevens' poetry underwent at the levels of form and style. Perhaps one needs to be a myopic translator to become at all concerned, for instance, with the story of dashes and suspension points, in particular how these are not distributed equally over Stevens' career. Rhetorically, dashes often figure the short-circuits of anacoluthon and I found that they are used for strong rhetorical effect only as of the mid-thirties, in poems such as "Autumn Refrain" and "Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz," which are not coincidentally two poems about breaking with the past and adapting to a new future. Something similar applies to the suspension points (which rhetorically figure aposiopesis). These develop a history of their own starting with the insomniac of "The Men That Are Falling": "Ah! Yes, desire . . ." (*CP* 187). Not surprisingly, *Parts of a World*, with its constant animosity toward integration and unity and its insistent fragmentation and partiality, is also the volume that is riddled with dashes and suspension points—disrupting, disconnecting, building stark caesuras. A typographic tactic that gets added in this volume is that of line breaks in unfinished lines, which break up the visual homogeneity of stanzas, most notably in "Poem Written at Morning." I should add that all of these disruptive techniques are carried over into the first poems that went into *Transport to Summer*, but then they quickly subside. Only the suspension points remained a relatively frequent device for the rest of Stevens' life.

Another formal element that many critics, in their enthusiastic rush toward ideas and historic contexts, understandably cannot be bothered with is that of stanza forms. Of course, we have Vendler again to fall back on; she was not ordained "Queen of Formalism" (204) by Frank Lentricchia for nothing. Except that we would do well to remember how addicted Vendler can be to eschatological representations of Stevens' career. Thus we should not be surprised to hear her say that it was not until 1942, with "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," that Stevens "settled on his final metrical form" (*On Extended Wings* 3), by which she means those very recognizable triadic stanzas or tercets that we associate with some of Stevens' long poetic sequences. However, this claim is not exactly borne out when

it comes to the shorter poems. *Transport to Summer*, to which "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" constitutes one of the earliest contributions, in fact contains an unusually high number of *couplet* poems. At one point, nine out of eleven chronologically consecutive poems I translated from this volume are in this form.[5] And the shorter lyrics in later volumes alternate among tercets, couplets, and sundry other forms, with tercets never reaching a fifty-percent majority. So much for a "final metrical form."[6]

The evolution in stanzaic form is in fact very interesting *before* the publication of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" as well. For it offers one of many reasons for dehomogenizing *Harmonium*. Putting the highly heterogeneous poems gathered under this treacherously harmonizing title back in chronological order reminds us that *Harmonium* is really several volumes in one—a point also made, and argued at greater length, by A. Walton Litz in his classic study, *Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens*. If we date the beginning of Stevens' modernist poetic writing career approximately in 1914, around the time when he read out "Cy Est Pourtraicte, Madame Ste Ursule, et Les Unze Mille Vierges" to the Arensberg circle, we must note how there is a clear evolution in terms of stanza shapes, line lengths, and meter. The post-Tennysonian pontifications of "Sunday Morning" may keep us from noticing that Stevens, in the early years of his career, is really very much a writer of irregular stanzas and of lines that are very uneven in length, though they are generally quite brief (including monosyllabic lines, to be found only at the earliest stage of *Harmonium*). The first short lyrics are composed in a kind of improvisational free verse that bears the mark of an early modernism defining itself in opposition to the conventions of form. It is only several years later, by the early 1920s, that regular stanzas take over, even if they are still of all sorts and range from two, three, four, five, and six, to eight or eleven lines. (To take a short jump ahead: *Ideas of Order*, as its title suggests, will bring order to this stanzaic chaos and opt preponderantly for three- and four-line stanzas, while the outspokenly pluralist *Parts of a World*, just as unsurprisingly, will explode such regularity again and return to a mixed bag of stanza types.) The shift toward formal regularity within *Harmonium* is enacted with a vengeance in "The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad," from 1921. All of a sudden we have a poem written in quatrains, rhyming ABBA, and using traditional meter. This renders the poem almost impossible to translate, especially when a strictly iambic pentameter line such as "I am too dumbly in my being pent" (*CP* 96) goes on to pun, within its very diction, on its own pentameter form—a pun for which I can find no equivalent in Dutch. Fortunately for translators, then, such extreme formal strictness never became the rule for Stevens, even if stanzaic regularity does mark several other poems from the same year, such as "The Snow Man" and its sonorous, metrically much stricter, companion piece, "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon."

The stanzaic evolution within *Harmonium* is paralleled, within a short interval, by a no less remarkable evolution in the handling of sound effects. With the one exception of "Peter Quince at the Clavier," Stevens' outré attempts at the most mannered euphuism and the most extravagant euphony take center stage quite late again, in the years 1922–24. Certainly for a translator, the style of this period has very little to do with the earlier world of "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," "Six Significant Landscapes," or "Valley Candle." The razzle-dazzle opening of "Bantams in Pine-Woods" (1922)—"Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan in caftan / Of tan with henna hackles, halt!" (*CP* 75)—or the famous refrain from "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" (1922)—"Let be be finale of seem. / The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream" (*CP* 64)—pose considerably greater challenges than the earliest poems. The success in translating especially Stevens' bursts of alliterative and assonantal play will depend to a large extent on the characteristics of one's target language. The fact that Dutch, like English, tends to carry initial stress makes at least the alliterations easily available. In the case of "Frogs Eat Butterflies. Snakes Eat Frogs. Hogs Eat Snakes. Men Eat Hogs," I believe I even managed to outdo Stevens in terms of alliterative and assonantal mellifluousness. (Check out the final stanza of my translation in the 25th anniversary issue of this journal.) But it proved much harder to do justice to the winking at will that is done "when widows wince" (*CP* 59) in "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman." If one's language does not have a similarly close pair as "wink" and "wince," and one cannot make the words alliterate, in addition, with most of the other surrounding words, while at the same time keeping the line sufficiently brief and snappy without resorting to redundant syllables, then one gets stuck. I call myself lucky that I determined to focus on the translation of brief lyrics for now, because evidently the pyrotechnics become even more demanding by the time of "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" (1924) and the rewriting, during the same period, of "From the Journal of Crispin" into the almost perversely virtuosic "The Comedian as the Letter C."

Let me finish this survey, though, with a few stylistic observations about the post-*Harmonium* volumes. What is probably most striking to a translator is the fact that Stevens' stylistic playfulness shifts there from principally musical and lexical levels to grammatical and syntactical levels. Increasingly, Stevens starts to play with grammatical items, foregrounding prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, articles, and auxiliaries. This is one level where translating him into a stucturally very different language is bound to shortchange the reader and I have often praised myself lucky that Dutch is a Germanic language just like English, allowing for close equivalents in most cases (even if Stevens' many gerunds and -ing participles can be a nightmare, since these are less common in Dutch; and even if, for historic reasons, there is no other language in which puns come so easily as in English).

Take the enhanced thematic focus on immediacy and presence in *Ideas of Order*: it is reflected grammatically in the increasing autonomization of the infinitive and of the -ing participle of verbs ("Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu" is all about this). Other examples of grammatical defamiliarization from the thirties are those of "the floweriest flowers dewed with the dewiest dew" in "The Man on the Dump," or this poem's famous concluding words, "The the" (*CP* 202–03). (We must pity Scandinavian translators, who can form definite articles only by adding suffixes to nouns and do not have a noun in sight here.) In *Transport to Summer*, Stevens adds to this repertory a resistant use of participial forms, leading to compact lines that can be particularly hard to translate, as when "Snow sparkles like eyesight *falling* to earth, / Like *seeing fallen* brightly away" (*CP* 294, emphasis added). Or we get tricky nouns such as "the deepnesses of space" (*CP* 336), where languages that do not have the same potential for creating nouns out of adjectives plus suffixes will automatically force a translator to opt for the banal equivalent of "the depths of space."

By the time of *The Auroras of Autumn*, the grammatical and lexical play becomes such that any one poem may contain a series of tough situations to handle. It may open, for instance, with Stevens egregiously parodying his own euphonious inclinations, as when he "hems the planet rose and haws it ripe, / And red, and right" (*CP* 429). When one thinks one has finally solved all this wordplay, one stumbles a couple of lines later into the tricky gerund (with its unusual plural form) of "an intellect / Of *windings* round and dodges to and fro," after which one needs to figure out what the polysemous word "pole" exactly refers to in "cloud-pole / Of communication" (*CP* 429–30), only to hope that one's own language allows one to show that the infinitive with which the poem ends intentionally drops its "to." If one's target language does not make the distinction between "to enjoy" and "enjoy" (and most languages do not), one is in trouble as a translator.[7] Although I think I managed to bring this particular poem off (it is called "The Ultimate Poem Is Abstract"), there are many instances in *The Auroras of Autumn* where I get completely stymied and even fail to grasp with some confidence what Stevens is actually doing on the page, let alone find equivalents for it.

Thankfully, the problems posed by the late short poems from *The Rock* and *Opus Posthumous* are much less stultifying again, though one still has to be lucky occasionally: I was able to retain some of the inconspicuous pun on "the river R" with which "An Old Man Asleep" ends simply because the letter "R" when pronounced in Dutch is a homonym of the muted, grammatical "there" that we use in sentences such as "there was a lot of light"—the equivalent of the German "es" in "es gab viel Licht." (I would even suggest that a German translation would change "the river R" into "der Strom S" to attain the same effect; "der Strom R"—let alone "der Fluss R"—would certainly be a mistake here, since this would be like making a pun on "the river He.") Grammatically, Stevens' very late poems

do share one remarkable characteristic, though: all of a sudden we find a preponderance of the indefinite article, often used in combination with qualitative nouns. These are poems that take satisfaction in registering "a warmth," "a light," "a power," "a knowledge," "a kind of solemnity," "a refreshment," "a clearness," "a perfection," "an activity," or "a crush of strength." Maybe somebody should write an article some day on the history of articles in Stevens.

The same could be said, finally, of Stevens' use of personal pronouns, which so strongly affects the way in which he strikes us as an "impersonal" poet. The majority of poems composed in the I-form appear in *Harmonium*, but as Altieri reminds us, these are anything but confessional poems. The "I" is rather a flippant observer trying on various cloaks for redefining the genre of lyric poetry. For emotional soul-searching Stevens waits till after *Harmonium* and then clearly discovers the protective shield of the third person singular in "Anglais Mort à Florence" and "The Men That Are Falling." From that period onward and right through to the end, we see a sharp rise in third-person poems that are not so much outwardly descriptive as inwardly expressive. By contrast, the use of apostrophes and the second person pronoun (whether singular or plural) is one whose frequency grows more slowly to become a regular device only as of *Parts of a World*. Even more slow is the rise of the "we" form: occurring only three times in *Harmonium* (and twice then with the purpose of debunking and disputing this collective "we"), it increases somewhat in *Ideas of Order* and *Parts of a World*, but becomes very dominant by the time of *Transport to Summer*, during the era Stevens felt most called upon to account for his work in terms of its collective value.

To wrap up this increasingly dizzying story: if it is true that Stevens' poetry is full of recurrent interests and gestures, leading to typically generalizing and universalizing claims about how "the whole of the soul . . . / As every man . . . will concede, / Still hankers after lions" or "after sovereign images" (as the speaker of "Lions in Sweden" portends), it is nevertheless a poetry that is simultaneously so restive, so original, and so prismatic as to dismiss, time and again, all the old habits of performing such a repetitive project and to strike out for endlessly novel ways of making it fresh:

> If the fault is with the lions, send them back
> To Monsieur Dufy's Hamburg whence they came.
> The vegetation still abounds with forms. (*CP* 125)

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Notes

[1] A shorter version of this essay was presented as part of the Wallace Stevens Society program on "Early versus Late Stevens" at the Modern Language Association Convention in New Orleans, La., on December 29, 2001. Special thanks to Maureen Kravec, who organized the session and who had to read my paper due to unforeseen circumstances that prevented me from attending.

[2] I should mention that, shortly before sending in the final version of this essay, I discovered one critic, Beverly Maeder, who does pursue the issue of the "cribled pears" (in her book, *Wallace Stevens' Experimental Language*). Maeder, too, takes Stevens to derive his nonce word from the French, commenting how at this particular point in the poem "[b]oth signifieds and signifiers become overfull. English no longer suffices. The pears are 'cribled'? This too is domesticated, of course, by the English past suffix, yet is still foreign: the French *cribler* (to grade fruit according to size; or to riddle with holes) has no English cognate in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The pears are high quality; the language is *recherché*. This is Stevens at his most epicurean" (67).

[3] I realize that inserting Stevens' long cycles of poems at their respective chronological junctures in my list of short poems could sometimes tilt the balance or even nature of some of my findings. Yet I have tried to be consistently aware of this in presenting my facts and have checked most of the claims I make against the long poems as well.

[4] The poems I am thinking of are, respectively, "The Bed of Old John Zeller," "Men Made Out of Words," "Certain Phenomena of Sound," "The Motive for Metaphor," "Man Carrying Thing," "So-And-So Reclining on Her Couch," "Chaos in Motion and Not in Motion," "The Creations of Sound," "The Good Man Has No Shape," "A Woman Sings a Song for a Soldier Come Home," "God Is Good. It Is a Beautiful Night," and "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters."

[5] The nine poems in couplets are "Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit," "Flyer's Fall," "Man Carrying Thing," "Men Made Out of Words," "Thinking of a Relation between the Images of Metaphors," "Chaos in Motion and Not in Motion," "The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm," "The Good Man Has No Shape," and "The Dove in the Belly."

[6] It should be remembered, though, that Vendler's focus in *On Extended Wings* is on the long poetic sequences and that several of these, such as "The Auroras of Autumn" and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," do follow the pattern set by "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction." It is only for the rest of Stevens' oeuvre that Vendler's claim, in its sweeping generality, appears to be too rash.

[7] In making this subtle distinction, I am following the reading of "The Ultimate Poem Is Abstract" proposed by William Bevis, who himself points to "the prestidigitation that Vendler first revealed: 'enjoy' *cannot* be parallel to either the infinitive 'to be,' or the adjective 'complete.' To be parallel, the form would have to be 'to enjoy,' or 'enjoying.' Instead, the declarative 'enjoy' gives the lie to 'and': there has been a hiatus, and in that hidden moment the wished-for state of mind has suddenly been accomplished" (103).

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Wallace Stevens and the Noh Tradition

RUTH M. HARRISON

It might be the candle of another being,
Ragged in unkempt perceptions, that stands
And meditates an image of itself,
Studies and shapes a tallowy image, swarmed
With slight, prismatic reeks not recollected,
A bubble without a wall on which to hang.
—Wallace Stevens, "As at a Theatre"

WALLACE STEVENS BEGAN began his career as a playwright under the influence of Japanese Noh by way of Ezra Pound's translations of and writings about the Noh that appeared in *Poetry* magazine in 1914 and 1915. The Asian influence is the clearest in Stevens' two plays *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* (1916) and *Carlos among the Candles* (1917), which resemble Pound's translation of the play *Nishikigi* by Zeami Motokiyo (1364–1443). Although critics have recognized an Asian influence on Stevens' poetry, his plays have been almost universally dismissed as failed experiments. A detailed comparison of Pound's translation of *Nishikigi* and Stevens' plays *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* and *Carlos among the Candles* sheds new light on the extensive influence of Pound's translations and notes, and it shows Stevens' plays, although experimental, as anything but failures.

It is clear from Stevens' letters and other writings that he had an early interest in things Asian, and in 1914 when his poetry was published in *Poetry* magazine, he was ready to enter apprenticeship as a playwright with Ezra Pound's publications in that magazine as his guide. As early as 1909, in letters to his wife, Stevens admits his fascination with the topics of Asian art and literature:

> I do not know if you feel as I do about a place so remote and unknown as China—the irreality of it. So much so, that the little realities of it seem wonderful and beyond belief. . . . [T]he Chinese have certain aspects of nature, of landscape, that have become traditional. —A list of those aspects would be as fascinating as those lists of "Pleasant Things" I used to send. Here is the list (upon my soul!)—

THE WALLACE STEVENS JOURNAL 27.2 (FALL 2003): 189–204.

> The Evening Bell from a Distant Temple
> Sunset Glow over a Fishing Village
> Fine Weather after Storm at a Lonely Mountain Town
> Homeward-bound Boats off a Distant Shore
> The Autumn Moon over Lake Tung-t'ing
> Wild Geese on a Sandy Plain
> Night Rain in Hsiao-Hsiang. (*L* 137–38)

In the same letter to Elsie ("My dear Rose-cap"), Stevens is enthusiastic about a specific poem by Wang-an-shih:

> And last of all in my package of strange things from the East, a little poem written centuries ago by Wang-an-shih:
>
> > "It is midnight; all is silent in the house; the water-clock has stopped. But I am unable to sleep because of the beauty of the trembling shapes of the spring-flowers, thrown by the moon upon the blind." (*L* 138)

Stevens makes clear his intent to learn about Asia: "It makes me wild to learn it all in a night" (*L* 138). In 1911, in another letter to his wife, Stevens writes of his interest in the colors of Asian art that seem to have found their way into his poetry:

> Walked down Fifth Avenue to Madison Square and, after lunch, went into the American Art Galleries, where, among other things, they are showing some Chinese and Japanese jades and porcelains. The sole object of interest for me in such things is their beauty. Cucumber-green, camellia-leaf-green, apple-green etc. moonlight, blue, etc. ox-blood, chicken-blood, cherry, peach-blow etc. etc. Oh! and mirror-black: that is so black and with such a glaze that you can see yourself in it. (*L* 169)

In a letter to Ronald Lane Latimer in 1935 many years later, Stevens directly acknowledges being influenced by Asian poetry: "Yes: I think that I have been influenced by Chinese and Japanese lyrics. But you ask whether I have ever 'tried deliberately to attain certain qualities.' That is quite possible" (*L* 291).

The timing of Stevens' plays and Pound's translations of Noh suggests the direct influence of Pound on Stevens' dramatic and poetic forms. Stevens had an opportunity to read Pound's translation of *Nishikigi*, a play in two acts by Motokiyo, as early as May 1914, when it appeared in *Poetry* magazine. Stevens' poetry was first published in *Poetry* magazine in 1914, so doubtless he read the work of other poets that was published in that

issue. The Pound-Fenollosa *Classic Noh Theatre of Japan* was first published in 1916. Pound's *Classical Drama of Japan* was published in *Quarterly Review* in October 1914, and his nearly fifty-page article, *Ernest Fenollosa's Work on the Japanese Noh,* appeared in *Drama* in May l915. Stevens had access to all of these publications before he wrote *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* in 1916 and *Carlos among the Candles* in 1917.

Although Stevens' play *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* had some initial encouragement and success, for the most part the reviews were negative. *Three Travelers* won a $100 prize for a one-act play in verse from *Poetry* magazine. Stevens wrote two additional plays at the request of the Wisconsin Players: *Carlos among the Candles*, a dramatic monologue, and *Bowl, Cat and Broomstick*. The Wisconsin Players produced *Carlos among the Candles* in New York in the fall of 1917. The two reviews that survive are harsh. The anonymous reviewer for *The New York Times* wrote, " 'Carlos among the Candles' is a baffling monologue by Wallace Stevens, intended neither for the stage nor the library" (27). Ralph Block in the *New York Tribune* complained that the play's purpose "appears to be to say something that has no meaning at all with all the bearing of significance, recalling what Alice said . . . about the sound and not the sense being the most important" (22). Although scheduled for a two-week run, *Carlos among the Candles* was taken off the program after the first night.

Stevens' plays have not been well received by the critics, but they have not been read in the context of the tradition that engenders understanding and appreciation of his goals in writing them. In April 1920, Harriet Monroe briefly comments on *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise*, in her essay on William Butler Yeats and the Noh. She states that Stevens' play is "modeled on the Noh drama of Japan."

> I had almost forgotten how beautiful this brief play is; even though I had read it twenty times, more or less. . . . But the "three travellers"—were they from Provincetown or China?—appearing with their candle in the dark wood and vesting themselves in gorgeous robes for the ritual of the sunrise, took me back to those "windless pavilions" of Mr. Stevens' magic country, and asserted with unimpeachable validity the high audacity of the poet's imagination. (37)

She does not detail how Stevens' experimental plays fit into this tradition. Monroe says that for her, at least, "the three travellers . . . had woven a spell which no later inadequacy could destroy" (37). She describes the play "as perfect as a Greek vase in its assertion of beauty" (37). She refers to the amateurish acting of the female lead and the awkwardness of the staging of the play.

James Baird dismisses the plays with the comment, "They provide evidence that Stevens was not a playwright" (207). He concludes his brief

treatment of the plays, "There is no drama" (207). John Enck is especially harsh in his judgment of the plays: "One may find them charmingly quaint, too delicate to qualify as closet drama, more like a peculiar display, perhaps a wreath composed of feathers worked into bunches so that they resemble flowers. To comprehend them asks tolerance of nearly all Stevens' idiosyncrasies" (30). Joan Richardson explains that although Stevens was influenced by Asian drama, he was not interested in the structure and dramatic effects of Oriental drama in the way that Yeats was (455). In general, most reviewers accept the belief that Stevens was only slightly influenced by Asian drama.

Earl Miner and Robert Buttel treat Stevens' use of the haiku form, but they ignore other Asian influences on his writings, and they see only traces of the French symbolists. Both of these critics rely on a letter that Stevens wrote to Miner in which Stevens expresses his interest in Japanese prints and Asian art. Stevens wrote that "he possessed six or so books of Japanese and Chinese poetry." Miner reports Stevens as saying "while he knew about haiku, he could not ever remember writing with them in mind, and professed a greater interest in Japanese prints and other Oriental art" (190). Buttel discusses *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise,* noting that Stevens' "use of chinoiserie" is similar to other "rococo details Stevens delighted in" (66). Frank Kermode briefly mentions *Carlos among the Candles* and *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* in connection with Noh theater: "The plays are interesting, though much of their period: 'a theatre without action or characters' derives from Symbolist theory and perhaps especially from Mallarmé, though the Japanese Nō was also enjoying a great vogue at the time" (7).

Hazel Durnell offers the most complete discussion of the Noh characteristics of *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise.* She summarizes Stevens' play and mentions the bare stage, the background of a tree, and the use of song and music. She finds *Three Travelers* "intellectual in content" and "meditative in spirit" (127). She speculates Stevens might have read the Noh play *Nishikigi* in *Poetry* magazine when his own first poem was published. She concludes her two-page analysis with the statement, "*Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* proves undeniably an influence of Japanese theatre, a much stronger influence than will appear in Stevens' poetry" (127–28). Durnell's treatment of *Three Travelers*, however, is brief and general. A. Walton Litz in *Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens* has the most thorough consideration of Stevens' early plays. Litz suggests the influence of Yeats's experimental theater on Stevens' plays; he mentions Pound's *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* in connection with Stevens (54–60).

The goals of the Noh plays and the goals of Stevens' dramas are not those of traditional Western drama. Stevens himself had written to his set designer, Bancel La Farge, that his "intention [was] not to produce a dramatic effect but to produce a poetic effect" (*L* 200). And he had written to Harriet Monroe, "A theatre without action or characters ought to be within

the range of human interests. . . . Why not?" (*L* 203) In his introduction to *The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan*, Ezra Pound states that the Noh play was produced on "a symbolic stage, a drama of masks—at least they have masks for spirits and gods and young women" (4). With no more than four or five masked actors, Noh drama was not built from a traditional plot or conflict. Pound contrasts Western and Japanese drama: "We do not find, as we find in Hamlet, a certain situation or problem set out and analysed" (11). In his essay on *Vorticism*, Pound sees Noh as a way to define Imagist poetry.

> I am often asked whether there can be a long imagiste or vorticist poem. The Japanese, who evolved the hokku, evolved also the Noh plays. In the best "Noh" the whole play may consist of one image. I mean it is gathered about one image. Its unity consists in one image, enforced by movement and music. (*Vorticism,* in Baechler 285 n)

Just as Stevens' early poetry is imagistic, so are his plays. In a 1916 letter to Harriet Monroe, Stevens explains his goal in writing *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise*: "What I tried to do was to create a poetic atmosphere with a minimum of narration" (*L* 194). Stevens evidently wanted to try his hand at a different form and test his belief that poetic content and dramatic form could enhance and reinforce each other. He further writes to Harriet Monroe, "I desire to have the play a play and not merely a poem, if possible" (*L* 194). This letter supports my view that Stevens was aware that he was writing in a tradition that was outside the conventions of Western drama.

Two of Stevens' plays—*Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* and *Carlos among the Candles*—closely resemble the Noh drama of Japan. The Asian influence is most evident in *Three Travelers* (1916), less so in *Carlos among the Candles* (1917), and only incidentally in *Bowl, Cat and Broomstick* (1917). The plays are tied to the Noh by topics of poetry, death, love, and tradition. They share images of glass, books, candles, shadows, trees, and the poet, as well as the brilliant colors of Asian art in costumes, sets, and poetic imagery.

Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise takes the ballad of the star-crossed lovers from *Nishikigi.* The Japanese play draws on the history and legend of Ono no Komachi, a beautiful woman poet whose poems are included in the *Kokinshu*. Komachi lived at the Heian court during the ninth century. Pound includes two fragments from the Komachi cycle in his collection. He refers to another play about Komachi, *Komachi at Sekidera,* by Zeami, in his Introduction to *The Classic Noh Theatre of Japan*.[1] It is not clear whether Pound ever translated this play. It is quite probable that he knew the play and the history and legends of Komachi, since he refers to *Sekidera Komachi* in his collection. "There is a tradition of a young actor who wished to learn Sekidera Komachi, the most secret and difficult of the three plays,

which alone are so secret that they were told and taught only by father to eldest son" (*Classic Noh* 31). It is unsure whether the play *Komachi at Sekidera* is a source for Stevens' *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise*; nonetheless, *Nishikigi*[2] and certain elements from *Stoba Komachi* and *Kayoi Komachi* and the ghost play *Tsunemasa*, all included in the Pound-Fenollosa collection, make it clear that Stevens' plays are best read against the backdrop of the traditional Japanese drama. By careful comparison of these plays we can see most clearly the inspiration Stevens drew from the genre. He wrote his plays, if not in direct imitation of certain aspects of these plays, at least with the conscious attempt to incorporate themes, stage devices, the poetry, and the Imagist effect of the ancient form of Japanese Noh.

There are distinct parallels between Zeami's *Nishikigi* and Stevens' *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise.* Both dramas include a night watch, unrequited love, and death. The action of both plays is resolved with a ritual celebrating the rising of the sun. The two plays have a similar setting. Stevens' play is set at the top of a mountain in a forest; *Nishikigi* is set near a hillside grave where the bodies of the lovers lie. Both plays have the traditional Noh backdrop of the pine forest. In Pound's introduction to the Pound-Fenollosa translations, Pound describes the traditional Noh stage: "the stage is visible from three sides. It is reached by a bridge which is divided into three sections by three real pine trees which are small and in pots. There is one scene painted on the background. It is a pine tree, the symbol of the unchanging" (*Classic Noh* 12). Stevens uses the Mount Penn setting with its pagoda for *Three Travelers.*[3] Both plays have approximately the same number of characters: *Nishikigi*, three and the chorus; *Three Travelers*, three and two attendants. Both dramas begin with a reference to the ritual Noh "journey convention." According to Pound, "A play very often represents some one going on a journey. The character walks along the bridge or about the stage, announces where he is and where he is going, and often explains the meaning of his symbolic gestures" (*Classic Noh* 12).

It is evident that the word *traveler* has a powerful emotive significance for the Noh. Translators of the Japanese texts as diverse as Marie Stopes and Joji Sakurai, Pound, Yeats, and Donald Keene choose it instead of a word such as *wanderer* or *voyager,* perhaps for its connotation of intentional movement from region to region. The members of the audience, travelers themselves, are invited to travel beyond the boundaries of their experience to a realm beyond death. Stevens places himself in this tradition of Noh translations and recreations by using the word *traveler* to refer to his Chinese characters.[4] In *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* the journey convention is explicit in the title of the play and implicit in the crossing of the stage by two Negroes:

> *When the curtain rises, the stage is dark. The limb of a tree creaks. A negro carrying a lantern passes along the road. . . . The negro comes through the bushes, raises his lantern and looks through the trees. . . .*

A second negro comes through the bushes to the right. He carries two large baskets. . . . (*OP* 149)

The ritualized and formal character of movement in Stevens' play is immediately observable. In *Nishikigi* the first few lines of the play describe the Priest's journey: "I, like any other priest that might want to know a little bit about each one of the provinces, may as well be walking up here along the much-travelled road" (*Classic Noh* 76). After their ritual journey, Stevens' Chinese travelers begin to assemble items that they take out of a basket for a formal tea ceremony.

In reading Stevens' notes to *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise*, the reader is struck immediately by his dramatis personae: "three Chinese, two negroes and a girl" (*OP* 149). Why does Stevens stipulate Chinese and Negro actors?[5] Since Noh actors often wore masks to symbolize their characters, perhaps Stevens anticipated that the Asian and African features would suggest symbolic, mask-like values to his audience and would both conceal or mask the Japanese source for his efforts at play writing and simultaneously reflect an Asian influence. Stevens achieves a kind of twenty-first century Fusion Art in combining an Asian play with African-American characters on an eastern Pennsylvania mountain topped with a pagoda. As in his poetry, he seems to be exploring the ground where the imagination and the exotic meet reality and the commonplace. In *Three Travelers*, the Negro characters are merely lantern bearers; it is the Chinese who carry on the discourse about poetry. The black variety of *okina* mask, according to Keene, "is less aristocratic in features . . . and is well suited to the comic Sambaso role" (*Nō and Bunraku* 93). The second Negro carries two large baskets and places them on the stage. "*One of the baskets contains costumes of silk, red, blue and green*" (*OP* 150), as Hazel Durnell notes. She also points out that the two Negroes who assist the Chinese in their change of costumes "correspond to the Property Man in Eastern theatre" (127). Both Anna from Stevens' play and Shosho from *Kayoi Komachi* wear violet-colored costumes.

The subject matter of both plays is death and poetry. In *Nishikigi*, the ghost lovers emerge from their graves at dusk; they tell their story, and at dawn they return to their graves. The Hero wonders about the power of his writings; the story of the couple's love has become a ballad. In Stevens' play, as the three Chinese wait for the sunrise, they too discuss the nature of poetry. They too have a song about the young lovers, *Mistress and Maid*. In both plays the characters discuss poetry throughout the night—while viewing stars and waiting for the sun.

Nishikigi and *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* use fragile objects of porcelain or glass to suggest the role of nature and art in human life. The porcelain water bottle in *Three Travelers* is a practical object of art. The Second Chinese supposes that the three travelers could be painted on the bottle as they are, as warriors or as dead men. If the travelers were painted as they

are, the hermit would wonder; if they were painted as warriors, the candle of the hermit would tremble in his hands; if they were painted as dead men, the emperor himself would forget the porcelain for the figures painted on it. A human life is fleeting, and death is constantly before us. Both plays tell us that, although art affects the way we see ourselves, humankind's real hope comes with the sunrise that promises a new day. Sara Ford in *Gertrude Stein and Wallace Stevens: The Performance of Modern Consciousness* explains, "The bottle in the play has another function, however, and that is to illustrate Stevens' notion that just as human imagination shapes the world of reality, so too does reality push back, challenging previous human perceptions" (76). The hope of humankind is represented in the vision that the sunrise paints on the objects that await its coming. Both the red porcelain water bottle from *Three Travelers* and the wine cup from *Nishikigi* reflect the crimson dawn sky. Ford explains that Stevens depicts human life "as a struggle of the necessarily imaginative renderings of reality against the pressure from reality that pushes ever against those conceptions" (76). *Nishkiigi* and *Three Travelers* capture the promise of the dawn as a reflection in glass.

In the Noh, legendary characters come to life before the travelers' eyes. Both *Three Travelers* and *Nishikigi* have a defined two-part structure. In both plays the characters discussed in Part I in ballad or song suddenly come to life and enter the play in Part II. In *Nishikigi*, the disguised lovers appear and talk to the priest; the chorus refers to the ballad of their tragic love story (*Classic Noh* 86). In Part II, the priest assumes the posture of sleep, and the masked lovers enter the play. In the dream of the priest and in the imagination of the audience/spectators, the lovers are finally married. In *Three Travelers* the "gentleman of the ballad" and Anna come to life and reenact the story of the ballad at the end of the play. "*As the bushes are pulled away, the figure of a girl, sitting half stupefied under the tree, suddenly becomes apparent*" (*OP* 159). For Anna and her Gentleman, there is no staged or imaged resolution; the only resolution is in sunrise.

> The candle of the sun
> Will shine soon
> On this hermit earth.
> It will shine soon
> Upon the trees,
> And find a new thing. . . . (*OP* 160–61)

Critics have misunderstood the formal language of Stevens' plays. Both Baird and Riddel are critical of *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise.* Baird finds the speeches in the play undramatic: "the genius of the dramatist, the power to realize a speech of other men, was not his; and nothing in the dramatic texts suggests that a continuing attention to the performing theater would have surmounted the deficiency" (207). Riddel criticizes the lack of dra-

matic tension in the play: "the mood of the play remains the poetry of its poetry, not the poetry of its drama, and therein it fails" (60). It is, however, characteristic of the Noh drama for the language to be stylized. The characters are rarely distinct and memorable in themselves. Keene writes, "Extremely few characters in No have an existence apart from the poetry which they speak" (*Twenty Plays* 12).

It is also characteristic of the Noh for speeches to lack any suggestion of dialogue between any two or more characters. In "A Stevens Play as Teaching Tool," J. M. Furniss has his students learn to distinguish among the three travelers of the Stevens play not by what the characters *say*, but by what they *do*. The First Chinese experiences the reality of the senses; the Second sees reality "through the lens of his scholarly maxims"; and the Third Chinese resists "the trap of single, certain reality" (208–11). Even though these distinctions can be made, the speeches of the characters often suggest a single thought shared by two people. Stevens' play is not notable for its character development. Although the travelers are distinguished by height, weight, and age, the character development of traditional drama was not a goal that Stevens had set for himself. In Stevens' play, as in the Japanese drama, the characters continue the poetry of each other's lines. In Zeami's *Nishikigi*, the Shite, or Hero, and the Chorus have an exchange that composes a poem.

Chorus
How glorious the sleeves of the dance,
That are like snow-whirls!

Shite
Tread out the dance.

Chorus
Tread out the dance and bring music.
This dance is for Nishikigi.

Shite
This dance is for the evening plays,
And for the weaving.

Chorus
For the tokens between lover and lover:
It is a reflecting in the wine-cup. (87)

The purpose of the speeches and the action of the Japanese play is to create a single, unified, poetic effect. Pound reminds us that Noh drama is not to be judged by the standard of Shakespeare, though we do find instances of characters' lines complementing each other to compose a poem as they do, for example, in *Romeo and Juliet*. In Stevens' play, the poetic lines of the Third Chinese are continued in the lines of the First Chinese:

Third Chinese
You have left your lantern behind you.
It shines, among the trees,
Like evening Venus in a cloud-top.

First Chinese
Or like a ripe strawberry
Among its leaves. (*OP* 155)

Earlier in *Three Travelers*, the same two characters seem to compose a poem with their exchange of words:

Third Chinese
There is a seclusion of porcelain
That humanity never invades.

First Chinese
Porcelain!

Third Chinese
It is like the seclusion of sunrise,
Before it shines on any house. (*OP* 151)

Just as the characters of the Noh were stylized and indistinguishable in their lines, so are Stevens' characters. He makes no attempt to approximate traditional Western characterization but follows the classic Japanese Noh convention of characters' sharing lines of poetry that make up the play.

Ritual music and dance are an important part of the Noh drama. Both *Nishikigi* and *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* incorporate music, dance, and song into their dramatic presentations. The beginning of a traditional Noh play is signaled offstage in a skeletal prelude by the sound of a flute. "The Nō flute has not the softly melodic quality of the European flute, but sounds shrill and sometimes harsh. Its notes at the start of a performance seem to come from another world" (Keene, *Nō and Bunraku* 19–20). The opening of *Three Travelers* is likewise introduced by a musical prelude, iconic in the ascetic absence of melodic detail. The curtain rises on a dark stage, and the limb of a tree creaks. The *drum* of pursuing feet is mentioned. The tree limb creaks twice more in the play, both times after the idea that " 'humanity had invaded its seclusion' " (*OP* 151). The weight of the dead body hanging from the creaking tree limb intrudes. Just as in the Japanese play, the boundaries between art and humanity and those between life and death seem to disappear at this ritualized, repeated sound. In *Nishikigi*, the chorus celebrates how "glorious the sleeves of the dance, / That are like snow-whirls!" (*Classic Noh* 87). As the Hero dances, dawn breaks and the ghosts "wither away" (*Classic Noh* 88). In the play *Komachi at Sekidera*, Zeami uses similar imagery to describe the dance.

Music plays and cups of wine go round.
The young dancer—look how gracefully
He twirls his sleeves, like snow
Swirling in the moonlight. (Keene, *Twenty Plays* 75)

In *Nishikigi*, "a sweet sound like katydids and crickets, / A thin sound like the Autumn" accompanies the weaving sounds, "Kiri / Hatari. / Cho. /Cho." And "Ari-aki" (*Classic Noh* 84, 87). In Stevens' play, there is no dance as such, but there is ritualized movement that suggests dance. One of the characters rises: "*He turns toward the light in the sky to the right, darkening the candle with his hands. . . .* [then] *indicat*[*es*] *the sunrise*" (*OP* 158). There is song in the play that is sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument:

First Chinese
I have a song
Called *Mistress and Maid*.
It is of no interest to hermits
Or emperors,
Yet it has a bearing;
For if we affect sunrise,
We affect all things.

Third Chinese
It is a pity it is of women.
Sing it. (*OP* 154)

Keene has referred to Noh plays as a " 'brocade' consisting of lovely bits and pieces of old poetry" (*Twenty Plays* 5). Both *Nishikigi* and *Three Travelers* incorporate bits of old poetry or religious references into the fabric of drama. In the Japanese play, the Chorus refers to an important Buddhist scripture. "We will show forth even now, / And though it be but in a dream, / Our form of repentance" (*Classic Noh* 85). In Stevens' play, the character called the Second Chinese reads from a book of maxims, " 'The court had known poverty and wretchedness; humanity had invaded its seclusion, with its suffering and its pity' " (*OP* 151). Later, the same character refers to "an illustration / Used by generations of hermits" (*OP* 151). Stevens' poetic drama is as richly textured with ritual movement, music, and poetry as is the Japanese dramatic form.

Both plays celebrate "with the most exquisite simplicity, the bittersweet delight of being alive. Childhood, maturity, extreme old age, the pleasure and pain of life, are immediately communicated" (Keene, *Twenty Plays* 66). This evaluation of *Komachi at Sekidera,* by Keene, is just as applicable to *Nishikigi* and to *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise.* Both plays share the backdrop of tragic young love. *Nishikigi*'s lovers come back for one night

to re-enact their courtship, and the lovers' reunion is celebrated with song and dance. In *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise,* we revisit the tragic outcome of a young love. Anna's suitor hangs himself in her sight. "Go. / Tell my father: / He is dead" (*OP* 159). The cycle of life through youth, young love, and the grim re-enactment of death is represented in both plays; both plays warn us to take life and love seriously since they are quickly gone.

Both plays are about the process of birth and death and rebirth, the eternal change and renewal of the universe. The start of a new day brings optimistic closure to both plays. *Nishikigi* ends with the betrothal of the ghost couple and the dawn. In *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise*, the awaited sun rises and highlights simultaneously the renewal of life in a new day, the love of the young girl, and the tragic suicide:

> Red is not only
> The color of blood,
> Or
> [*indicating the body*]
> Of a man's eyes,
> Or
> [*pointedly*]
> Of a girl's.
> And as the red of the sun
> Is one thing to me
> And one thing to another,
> So it is the green of one tree
> [*indicating*]
> And the green of another. . . . (*OP* 161)

For both Zeami and Stevens, poetry's primary importance is its illumination and transcendence of life and death, of love and the betrayal of love.

Carlos among the Candles shows some degree of Asian influence, especially in the use of candles and shadow imagery. In their 1912 translation of four Noh plays, Stopes and Sakurai, a source for Pound and Fenollosa, mention the importance of shadows of people to the Japanese.

> The *shadows* of people are much more real in Japan than here. The shadow pictures that are continually thrown on the white paper screens separating the rooms must fill a large place in the memory of one who has lived in Japan; and, too, it is often only the *feet* of a passing noiseless maiden that one can see through the openwork base of these screens while one lies on the quilts on the matted floors. (102 n)

In *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise*, "The hermit's candle would have thrown / Alarming shadows" (*OP* 157). The candles in *Carlos among the*

Candles cast many shadows. The shadows reflect shadow imagery from *Nishikigi.* The chorus in *Nishikigi* finds loneliness in the season of autumn. "The perpetual shadow is lonely, / The mountain shadow is lying alone" (81). Noh performances were held in daylight or at night by candlelight, and both *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* and *Carlos among the Candles* are night plays. The set lighting of *Three Travelers* initially comes from candles and lanterns; the play ends with dawn, while *Carlos among the Candles* ends with darkness.

The Japanese play *Nishikigi* concerns "charm-sticks" or "love-wands" left at a home for the purpose of courtship (*Classic Noh* 86). " '[N]ishikigi' is a wooden stick (about one foot long) which a man places at the gate of the woman's house whom he wishes to marry" (Tsukui 40). The subject matter of the play is the unrequited love of a man for a woman. After death, the two are united through the prayers of a priest (Tsukui 40). In Pound's translation, the ghost of the woman describes the cave of the man who has kept all his charm sticks. "We know the funeral cave of such a man, one who had watched out the thousand nights; a bright cave, for they buried him with all his wands. They have named it the 'Cave of the many charms' " (*Classic Noh* 80). Although Carlos is described as "*an eccentric pedant of about forty*" (*OP* 163), he lights candles, "charm-sticks" or "love-wands," to expel the darkness, to dissolve the solitude of grief. "Six candles burn like an adventure that has been completed" (*OP* 165). In *Nishikigi,* as in Stevens' play, darkness is cast out with light and fire:

> Strange, what seemed so very old a cave
> Is all glittering-bright within,
> Like the flicker of fire.
> . . . . . .
> And heaping up charm-sticks. (*Classic Noh* 83)

Attending a production of *Carlos among the Candles* could resemble the "listening to incense" parties held in eighth-century Japan (*Classic Noh* 3). "[P]eople tempered by the lights around them, affected by the lights around them . . . sensible that one more candle would turn this formative elegance into formative luxury" (*OP* 164–65). Litz believes *Carlos among the Candles* to be an instance of Stevens' self-parody. He says that the play "both act[s] out one of Stevens' profoundest themes and parod[ies] the preciosity of his early verse" (58). I agree with Litz and suggest that not only Carlos but also Anna from *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* are poetic incarnations of Stevens. Carlos is not an Asian name, nor is Anna, but we are accustomed to Stevens' use of this fusion of surprising names or titles from different cultures. "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" refers to the "tittivating" "Chinese" (*CP* 14), and "The Cuban Doctor" describes himself as one who "went to Egypt to escape / The Indian" (*CP* 64). Stevens uses his Asian forms for his own purposes and surprising effects, rather like the surprise of fusion

food or music—sushi with salsa or the Portuguese love songs of Cesaria Evora sung to the beat of African drums.

The staging of *Carlos among the Candles* also reflects colors of Asian art that so charmed Stevens. Anna describes herself as wearing purple and gold earrings. Stevens' stage directions stipulate that the walls and curtains over the window be dark reddish-purple with a dim pattern of antique gold. *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* ends with a reference to the rising sun, and *Carlos among the Candles* ends with Carlos' reference to the extinguishing of light. Anna must contemplate the dead body of her lover hanging on the tree limb and, as Carlos blows out another candle, he compares the extinguishing of light with pears in a leafless tree. "It is like eight pears in a nude tree, flaming in twilight . . . The extinguishing of light is like that. The season is sorrowful. The air is cold" (*OP* 166). Carlos could be referring to Anna's dead lover at the end of this play: "The spikes of his light bristle around the edge of the bulk. The spikes bristle among the clouds and behind them. There is a spot where he was bright in the sky . . . It remains fixed a little in the mind" (*OP* 167). Having exorcised the demons of grief and loneliness with the sympathetic magic of candle lighting and extinguishing, Carlos springs through the window.

Bowl, Cat and Broomstick shows only a little Asian influence. The set has rich colors of gold and violet; costumes are green and black; and the color red itself is discussed early in the play. The hairstyle of the young poet resembles a formal Japanese wig that is to be replaced by a shorter wig as the poet ages. Shadows are important and discussed. If the play is Asian at all, it is a synthesis of influences. The three plays show Stevens working with the Japanese Noh form and then distancing himself from it. Perhaps Stevens' ability to take a form and adapt it owes something to the influence of Pound.

Japanese Noh plays contain allusions to Chinese poetry and legend, and their authors expected that literati among the Japanese audience would understand and appreciate these coded references. Pound writes, "These plays, or eclogues, were made only for the few; for the nobles; for those trained to catch the allusion" (*Classic Noh* 4). He says elsewhere, "Our own art is so much an art of emphasis, and even of over-emphasis, that I would gladly persuade the reader to consider the possibilities of an absolutely *unemphasized* art, an art where the author trusts implicitly to his auditor's knowing what things are profound and important" ("Kakitsuhata," Baechler 165 n). Stevens must have been disappointed that literati who attended the production of his plays did not see that he was adapting the most avant-garde drama of his time.

It is possible that Stevens moved away from his first attempts at writing plays not because he realized that his efforts were failures, as Riddel suggests, but simply because his dramatic creations were an experiment. Stevens had established his ability to create plays whose dramatic tension is encapsulated in imagist poetry that unfolds as it is acted out on stage, a

fusion of Asian tradition and modernism. No one, however, has read his Noh dramas in the context that makes his intention clear. If a small edition including Stevens' three plays, along with "Ceremony" and a dramatic poem such as "Peter Quince at the Clavier," were available to readers and theater groups, his plays might be received more enthusiastically today than they were in 1917. His plays ought to be properly produced and performed for the right audience, on Stevens' home ground at the pagoda on Mount Penn, in a university theater program, or perhaps in conjunction with Noh dramas by other playwrights such as Yeats or a recreation from the Japanese by Pound.[6]

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Notes

[1] Zeami's play *Komachi at Sekidera* has many commonalities with *Nishikigi* and Stevens' *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise.* The earliest known translation of *Komachi at Sekidera* is 1970, by Keene.

[2] Nobuko Tsukui says that of the fifteen Noh plays translated by Pound, *Nishikigi* is the most thorough and complete translation of the original text.

[3] In a December 27, 1898, journal entry, Stevens describes a walk over Mount Penn from Stony Creek, "going through the trees to the Tower" (*L* 22). Using this hilltop in eastern Pennsylvania as the setting for *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise* was one of his first efforts at combining the real and the ideal and one of his first cross-cultural experiments.

[4] Stopes and Sakurai's translation of *Sumida Gawa* includes a Traveler in the *Dramatis Personae* (78). Pound's translation of *Nishikigi* refers to the Traveler (80). In Yeats's introduction to Pound and Fenollosa's collection, Yeats refers to the journeyman as a "*traveler* asking his way with many questions" (*Classic Noh* 160). Keene uses the word in his translations as well (*Twenty Plays* 85, 118, 181).

[5] Yeats describes the "sunburned" faces of the actors for his Noh: "There will be no scenery, for three musicians, whose seeming sun-burned faces will I hope suggest that they have wandered from village to village" (*Classic Noh* 151). The Negroes listed in Stevens' dramatis personae too had been wandering.

[6] *Bowl, Cat and Broomstick* was performed in New York City in July 1997. See the report on this performance in the "News and Comments" section of *The Wallace Stevens Journal.*

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Breaking Against the Waves of Silence: The Voice of Being in Wallace Stevens and William Bronk

DAVID CLIPPINGER

Bare night is best. Bare earth is best. Bare, bare,
Except for our own houses, huddled low
Beneath the arches and their spangled air,
Beneath the rhapsodies of fire and fire,
Where the voice that is in us makes a true response,
Where the voice that is great within us rises up,
As we stand gazing at the rounded moon.
—Wallace Stevens, "Evening Without Angels"

We commune with one another and the world.
Breath, bow and finger sing our true
responses. We elevate and offer up
the broken pieces chosen from our days.
—William Bronk, "Some Musicians Play Chamber Music for Us"

WILLIAM BRONK DISCOVERED the poetry of Wallace Stevens in 1946. That initial encounter sparked a profound and cataclysmic shift away from the model of Robert Frost, his mentor at Dartmouth College, and toward a poetry that integrated propositionality and musical phrasing. Bronk recognized Stevens as an innovator, wherein the poetry presents a unique conception of voice as a mode of presenting, structuring, and transforming ideational statements that poeticizes "Being." The impact of this poeticized and philosophized "voice" upon Bronk was both a way of saying things as well as a mode of interrogation implicit in the living process. Voice, in this sense, is not only how something is said but also the play of ideas, the sum of which amounts to no less than the life of the individual. In this regard, Stevens' voice marked the beginning of a fresh and profound poetics that would sustain Bronk throughout his writing life. The influential force of Stevens' voice upon Bronk was initially his "way of saying things." As Bronk explains in 1988,

THE WALLACE STEVENS JOURNAL 27.2 (FALL 2003): 205–224.

> I know that it was in 1946, 1945–46, when I was teaching at Union College that I began reading Stevens. Stevens was someone whose name I knew, and he was someone whom [Bronk's friend] Sam Morse read. . . . A new collection came out at that time, I think *Transport to Summer*. I'm not sure, maybe *Parts of a World*, but whatever it was, it was very well received, and I was reading praise of Stevens, and I thought, well, let's see what he's doing. And I was very taken with whatever that book was and went to the bookstore and ordered the earlier things. And that's when I started sounding like Stevens, I was so taken with his voice. (Foster 27–28)

An earlier interview between Bronk and Robert Bertholf confirms this narrative but elaborates more upon the impact of Stevens:

> I was so overwhelmed by Stevens to the extent that sometime after I had to stop reading him because I couldn't hear any other voice, or any other way of saying things other than Stevens' way. (14–15)

One need look no further than "Her Singing" in Bronk's 1956 collection of poetry, *Light and Dark*, for evidence of the deep impact of Stevens' "way of saying things." In fact, "Her Singing" reads like a condensed, sixteen-line version of Stevens' great "The Idea of Order at Key West," and the final stanza of "Her Singing" blatantly echoes Stevens:

> Her last notes turned again to meet the first,
> enclosing space whose entry hearing held
> since her first notes began. Whatever her words
> whatever that was she sang, speaking of change,
> the flight of time, of our mortality,
> the flowing turmoil of space in which we move,
> she said the moment shaped was more than these.
> Her singing took the flight and held it still. (*LS* 25)

Now a stanza from Stevens:

> It was her voice that made
> The sky acutest at its vanishing.
> She measured to the hour its solitude.
> She was the single artificer of the world
> In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
> Whatever self it had, became the self
> That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
> As we beheld her striding there alone,
> Knew that there never was a world for her
> Except the one she sang and, singing, made. (*CP* 129–30)

Both poems argue that the world is constructed or actualized by a singer gifted with the ability to amplify the world for others, but with one slight difference. The gift, in Bronk's rendition, freezes time, thereby marking the human space of a life lived. In Stevens, the world is spatial, mapped: the lights "portioned out the sea, / Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles, / Arranging, deepening, enchanting night" (*CP* 130). Despite the differing emphases upon temporality or spatiality, the resonances between the two poems are strong and have prompted John Taggart to remark that Bronk's stanzas "could have been a rejected companion stanza for the second; they are that close" (28). Certainly Bronk was aware of this overlap; he remarks to Robert Bertholf, "I was beginning simply to do imitations of Stevens. So I stopped reading him entirely. Not because I disliked him or had grown tired of him, but simply I didn't want just to be a Stevens imitator" (15).

Despite Bronk's conscious and clear desire to distance himself from Stevens, he admits that certain aspects of Stevens' poetry are vital to his thinking. "I liked the idea of ideas," Bronk remarks, "which I guess probably I ended up doing a little differently from the way Stevens does it" (Bertholf 16). In regard to the meta-commentary and meta-poetry of the "idea of ideas," both poets are drawn to the processes by which meaning is constructed, asserted, discovered, and their poetry often engages the dichotomy of the actual and the real—the explicit conflict between subject and object, mind and matter, imagination and reality. Within Stevens' worldview, a chasm separates the "real" and the "actual," the fundamental "difference between the and an" (*CP* 255). Bronk's writing echoes this same issue, which is the mainstay of his poetry and is articulated as a split between "a" world and "the" world (*LS* 32).

This split is fundamental to Bronk and manifests in numerous ways that overlap with Stevens. As Burt Kimmelman observes,

> The poetry of William Bronk has frequently been compared to that of Wallace Stevens. The comparison is inevitable: both poets strongly question the possibility of knowing the world in which they live; they doubt whether an empirically based reality is feasible, or whether such a reality can be known and represented through language. Their question arises from having perceived a world that seems to be, in essence, illusory; they both have the sense that there is such a thing as a real world, perhaps, but that reality lies beyond reach. Their respective answers to such a questioning of the phenomenal world are strikingly similar. ("Centrality in a Discrete Universe" 119)

At the core, Bronk and Stevens share a skeptical worldview, which their poetry articulates, albeit in different ways. Nevertheless, their poetry teeters precariously at the schism between "a" and "the" or form and formlessness. And both were aware that their poetry was predicated upon the

impossible task (to borrow a line from "The Auroras of Autumn") of "form gulping after formlessness" (*CP* 411).

In this light, these issues that dominate Stevens' poetry overlap with key elements of Bronk's reading of Thoreau in *The Brother in Elysium*, an extended study of Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, and Henry David Thoreau, which was begun in 1939. Stevens might be seen, in this regard, as another "brother"—a point that is supported by Bronk's 1982 essay "The Actual and the Real in Thoreau," which reads as much as a gloss on Stevens as an explication of Thoreau. The essay, with its emphasis upon the nexus of fiction, actuality, and reality—all of which are terms that resonate more strongly with Stevens than Thoreau—suggests explicit links between Thoreau and Stevens. For example, Bronk observes via Thoreau that "to the observer, the life lived is a kind of fiction. Actuality is a work of the imagination only" (*VSC* 221–22). The imagination constructs an "actuality" that serves as "a surrogate for reality" (*VSC* 221). This process mirrors Stevens' insistence that "There is nothing in life except what one thinks of it" (*OP* 188) and that "What it seems / It is and in such seeming all things are"(*CP* 339). Bronk deduces that "If the actual is a kind of fiction, a work of imagination only, then reality can never be made actual" (*VSC* 222). Via Thoreau, Bronk arrives at the fundamental split that resides at the heart of Stevens' poetry as well—the irreparable schism between the fictive and the real that emphasizes the inevitable failure of the mind and the role of fiction therein:

> There would still remain the never-resting mind,
> So that one would want to escape, come back
> To what had been so long composed.
> The imperfect is our paradise.
> Note that, in this bitterness, delight,
> Since the imperfect is so hot in us,
> Lies in flawed words and stubborn sounds. (*CP* 194)

Humanity is doomed to failure: all that is man-made is imperfect, flawed, and partial. Stevens continues the theme of inevitable failure Bronk recognized in Thoreau's conception of silence. Stevens' insistence upon "flawed words and stubborn sounds," though, offers a rejoinder to Thoreau's silence and the problem that silence poses for a poet. Bronk remarks in an interview that since a poem is music and words, he cannot abandon words without abandoning poetry. Ultimately, the influence of Stevens upon Bronk manifests itself not so much in terms of content, since those ideas owe their genesis not to Stevens but to Thoreau, but rather in terms of a poetics predicated upon the fluidity of the "idea of ideas" that happens in and by "flawed words and . . . sounds."

Although most critical attention on the relationship between Bronk and Stevens has concentrated upon the striking parallels in regard to language

and the issues of form and formlessness, fiction and the real, and the inherent limitations of language, the effect of Stevens' propositions of words and sounds has been addressed too briefly. Yet Bronk notes that he "like[s] very much" the "hardness of visual impression, oral impression" in Stevens (Bertholf 16). Moreover, Bronk returns again and again to the "oral impression" of music and voice in Stevens and reiterates that Stevens' ideas were less of a force upon his poetry:

> But I don't think there were any ideas [of Stevens] influencing me there, and as time went on, and as he wrote other things, I had no idea what he was doing. It was still a beautiful voice, but what the hell was he saying? (Foster 28)

The attraction to the voice and the distance from the ideas are addressed in greater length in a letter to Michael Cuddihy:

> "[T]he time came that I had to stop reading Stevens because I couldn't hear my own voice for listening constantly to his. I tell [this] story especially to young poets who begin to sound like me to advise them how to get rid of me. But my affinity was always with the voice not the ideas, whatever they may be. One of my friends complains that he has tried to talk to me about Stevens' ideas without success because I don't seem to have any sense of what they are." (qtd. in *The "Winter Mind,"* Kimmelman 26)

The break with Stevens occurs not at the ideational level of the argument, since Stevens and Bronk arrive at very different conclusions regarding fictionality. Stevens remarks that "The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly"(*OP* 189). Such a will to power leads Stevens to assert that "It is the belief and not the god that counts"(*OP* 188). Such a stance proposes the merging of the fictive and the real: "What it seems / It is and in such seeming all things are" (*CP* 339). Bronk ascribes no such power to the fictive: all truths are man-made and therefore cannot transcend their fictionality regardless of the force of belief. Although Bronk rejects (or misunderstands) the ideas and concepts that inform Stevens' poetry, the force of Stevens' voice is so vital that at times it has subsumed Bronk's own voice.

Despite Bronk's confessed wholesale break with Stevens, the issue of voice and its repercussions upon the "idea of ideas" remains central to Bronk's poetry, for Stevens' voice provided the most salient model for how to meld the "idea of ideas" with sounds and words as the dialectic of propositions. A poetic paradigm emerged via Stevens that would allow Bronk to enact Thoreau's philosophical critique. Such a poetics offered a

more liberating mode than the model of Robert Frost. For example, the force of the ideas of "The World as a Thieving Woman," from *My Father Photographed With Friends,* is clearly constrained by an awkward rhyme scheme. The poem, consequently, offers only a series of generalities that fail to render a visually and emotionally evocative perspective:

> The things I love you for
> are things you stole from me.
> You come at every door
> and take my surety.
> When you have stripped me bare,
> then you must take me too,
> that I get back a share
> by having you. (*LS* 11)

The gist of the poem rotates around themes of loss, uncertainty, and death, which are the mainstay in Bronk's more accomplished and later poems, but the "ABABACAC" rhyme scheme and the iambic trimeter limits the phrasing and ability to render that theme in concrete particulars. The phrasing of the metronome (in Ezra Pound's words) impacts not only how something can be said but what can be said as well. The difficulty is to find a poetic mode that does not limit the phrasing but also matches the rigor of the philosophical mind in motion without undue loss of linguistic musicality.

In contrast with most of the poems of *My Father Photographed With Friends*, Bronk's second book of poetry, *Light and Dark*, employs a looser poetic form. Whereas a poem such as "The Red at Sherman's Farm," from *Light and Dark*, like that of "The World as a Thieving Woman," also focuses upon the sense of loss that pervades the human landscape and consciousness, neither the quality of the poetry nor the content is detrimentally affected:

> The persistence of this color through all the colds
> and heats, long dries and wets, reminds
> us that spots and streaks of red on shards or bits
> of rock, are found from such old times
> they seem, suggesting blood, suggesting life,
> coeval with them: red is old, is old.
>
> Here, it is one thing and another. On this
> drab barn, these sheds, it acts
> as a transformer; but see what time has done
> to alter it, how the transformer is
> itself transformed. See how different
> it is against the snow or screened by green.

Or look, in those long seasons neither snow
nor green, which seem to last forever, how
many shades and values it can have,
or how it dries to powder, its vehicle now
all gone, until it has been for years and years
this hard, warm pigment which the wood ingrains.
(*LS* 28)

The poem traces the mind as it moves through specific details of the color red, and it is not constrained by a preconceived form—even though irregular and sporadic end rhymes in "snow," "how," and "now" punctuate the final stanza of the poem. When asked about the abandonment of rhyme, Bronk remarked, "Rhyme was something I wanted but wasn't good at and it was hurdles for what I wanted said so I gave it up in recognition ["recognition" written above "favor," which was scratched out] of other poetic devices" (Letter to David Clippinger, 24 October 1998).

Although these "other poetic devices" or their inspiration are not divulged, clearly the shift from a poetics founded upon conventional form to one predicated upon the concomitant elements of the flow of ideas and the sequence of phrasing occurs around Bronk's first "recognition" of Stevens as a poetic paradigm. That shift is depicted in a slightly different format in a poem from *The World, The Worldless*, which describes two seemingly disparate ways of perceiving and presenting the world, which can be read as a gloss on a more conventional poetic mode versus one that more closely resembles the method that Bronk would embrace. "The Beautiful Wall, Machu Picchu" reads:

Greek stones look as though they'd flowed
into molds of figures, fluting, leaf forms, scrolls,
a sensed and sensible world turned stony-hard
and durable, medusaed to hold and be true,
as figure carving holds an impress pressed
on the carver's eye by a visible form whose grace
and harmony his hand lays hold and holds.
This way of handling stone is to say of the world
it is workable, and yielding and full to the hand;
and their quarrying quarried a rich world.

Looking at the stones the Incas laid, abstract
austerities, unimitative stones,
so self-absorbed in their unmortared, close
accommodation, stone to different stone,
exactly interlocked, deep joined,
we see them say of the world there is nothing to say.
Who had to spend such easing care on stone
found grace inherent more as idea than in

the world, loved simple soundness in a just joint,
and the pieces together once though elsewhere apart.
(*LS* 41–42)

The Greek view mirrors a conception of personal and cosmic order, as described by Plato, who writes in *The Gorgias* that "geometric equality is of great importance among gods and men alike" (290). Such an assertion assumes that the universe in its entirety is ordered, geometric, measurable, and perfect; and that the artist, like a god, measures and renders such order, as in William Blake's "The Ancient of Days," with God depicted with a compass in hand designing the cosmos. In contrast, the Incan perspective, which seems more modern (or perhaps "postmodern" with its disparate "soundness"), accentuates an emptiness (as opposed to the Greek "fullness") and the *process* of construction. Although the Greek perspective valorizes a form based upon internal/external "grace / and harmony," the Incan stance is constructivist, laying one thing against another in an effort to create a "soundness" against the backdrop of silence and emptiness where there is "nothing to say." With its emphasis upon emptiness and its constructivist proclivity, Bronk's poem identified more strongly with the Incan worldview.

The essays constituting *The New World*, and especially "The Occupation of Space—Palenque," in which he carefully describes the site as "a seemingly casual accretion of semidetached units" (*VSC* 25), further amplify Bronk's affinity with the Incan methodology. The emphasis upon accretion unveils the value placed upon the process depicted in "The Beautiful Wall" of building not in order to manifest some imagined cosmic design but rather as a material means that mirrors and posits the act of living. That admiration would come into fruition as a poetic principle articulated in "Visionary":

Poems don't make by added post and beam
the whole barn or see the barn as built.
The most the poem can do is know within
itself, in certain joints, this fits with that.
(*Living Instead* 45)

Although this poem can be read as evidence of the influence of the Incan and Mayan architecture upon Bronk's thinking—an influence also beautifully rendered in the graceful essays of *The New World* (1973)—ultimately Bronk found the principle of accretion and accrual first in his reading of Wallace Stevens and his poetics founded upon the "simple soundness in a just joint, / and the pieces together once though elsewhere apart." Bronk's encounter with Stevens sparked a poetry that broke with conventional form and catalyzed a poetics that fused propositionality with a musicality of phrasing based upon the jazz-like refrain of repeated sounds, terms, and phrases as well as fractured and revitalized line enjambment.

As Kimmelman observes, "Like Frost before him, Stevens had been a way station in Bronk's journey toward a voice uniquely his own" (*The "Winter Mind"* 117). But as Bronk began to fuse together a poetics "uniquely his own," he never disavowed or retreated from the significance of Stevens' voice—not as mere mimicry but as a mode of interrogation based upon the play of propositions as both sounds *and* ideas.

In order to fully appreciate what Bronk gleans from Stevens, one must first examine the poetics of propositions at work in Stevens' poetry. The play of propositions and the repetition of phrases and words are the mainstays of Stevens' poetry as a whole, but "Crude Foyer" from *Transport to Summer* (1947) offers one of the most succinct examples of his poetics of propositionality. The poem opens with the maxim, "Thought is false happiness" and is punctuated with a colon, serving as an invitation to the dialectic play of ideas as well as the range of possibilities in the various terms—"thought," "false," "happiness," and "is" as a state of being. The opening assertion serves as a springboard for the poem, and the lines that follow trace the ideational flow:

> the idea
> That merely by thinking one can,
> Or may, penetrate, not may,
> But can, that one is sure to be able— (*CP* 305)

The repetition of "can" counter-balances the more uncertain verb "may" in order to posit the stability of the assertion—"that one is sure to be able." The flow of the first stanza culminates in the word "able," thereby emphasizing the thinking process. The first stanza traces the first byway streaming from the initial claim "Thought is false happiness." The stanza, though, avoids closure by refusing to name what thinking is able to "penetrate."

The question of penetration leads into the second stanza, which begins with the qualifying phrase that gestures back to "the idea" in the first stanza. Moreover, the repetition of lines beginning with "that" creates a cluster of phrases that share semantic and aural links with this "idea" that the poem pursues. The stanza reads:

> That there lies at the end of thought
> A foyer of the spirit in a landscape
> Of the mind, in which we sit
> And wear humanity's bleak crown . . .

The poem continues to unravel the idea of the idea, and the poem coheres through the accretion of qualifying phrases that modify central concepts as well as the repetition of sounds and words. The second and third stanzas repeat the phrase "in which we [sit; read; and sit and breathe]" as descriptors for the mind. These concepts are layered one upon another, and the momentum of the poem is an accrual of details and perspectives

that traces the mind's interrogation of the nature of "thought" and "truth" designated in the first line of the poem. The movement of the poem is a careful defining of terms, which is emphasized by the repetition of phrases, that seems to press toward a conclusion or a resolution. Yet each new phrase unveils the epiphany not of the truth but rather of the inability to arrive at truth ("humanity's bleak crown")—a condition that is presented as the primal state of human falseness that is

> An innocence of an absolute,
> False happiness, since we know that we use
> Only the eye as faculty, that the mind
> Is the eye, and that this landscape of the mind
>
> Is a landscape only of the eye; and that
> We are ignorant men incapable
> Of the least, minor, vital metaphor, content,
> At last, there, when it turns out to be here.
> (*CP* 305)

The poem builds momentum and force as it pursues the relationship of the image of reality (the thought generated by the mind's eye), the impenetrability of the real, and the "happiness" that is contingent upon those two terms. Ultimately, as the final seven lines of the poem reiterate, falsity dominates that relationship, and the recognition of that falsity is unhappiness. Therefore, the relationship of image and reality is not resolved by the poem; rather, the ideational motion brings the reader/seeker back to the present, this "here," from which the poem seems to have begun. Through this loop, the poem demonstrates its maxim "Thought is false happiness" by denying the possibility of a proposed "truth" that can escape human ignorance.

The poem's own fictionality is accentuated in the final three lines, and the "happiness" generated by the play of the poem—the force behind the twists and turns of its logic—offers a brief respite from the state of eternal "true" unhappiness. That is, the happiness of the poem is a response to the playful, self-conscious level of the language and phrasing. Michael Heller observes that this quality in Stevens makes his stance toward fictionality seem postmodern:

> If Stevens, who comes earlier, sometimes appears to be more our contemporary . . . , it may well be that he inaugurates (to use Derrida's term) a mode of writing which already sees the fictive nature of the philosophical, which takes this fiction for granted, which loves the *jouissance* of rubbing one philosophical idea against another, and is unrelentingly skeptical of philosophy's urge toward certainties. Stevens makes the rela-

tionship of language to the philosophical immediately critical and parodistic. (26)

Subsequently in the poem, the inability to assert a "minor, vital metaphor" occurs against a backdrop of playfulness, wherein the rhapsodic happiness of the poem's construction foregrounds the inherent falsity of the poem itself.

The sequence of the poem, therefore, proposes an internal logic that deconstructs itself. It proves its theorem "Thought is false happiness" through its logic and by demonstrating false happiness through the accrual of modifying phrases representing a mind meditating upon its own fictional constructs. The mind in motion as it strives "to make, to confect / The final elegance, not to console / Nor sanctify, but plainly to propound" (*CP* 389) is the subject of the poem; and that motion of ideas and propositions is accompanied by the musicality of the phrasing. In this sense, the "idea of ideas" is linked explicitly with the play of the mind and the sounds that emerge out of that interaction.

Proposing an idea only to dissolve the certainty of that idea via the play of the poem is not only central to Stevens' poetry but is also a common poetic maneuver in Bronk as well, which has not been overlooked by serious readers of Bronk's writing. Bertholf, for example, asks Bronk, "What about propositional poetry, entertaining ideas and then reversing the ideas before the poem is thru [*sic*]—a Stevens tactic?" Bronk responds, somewhat elusively, "I know I do it, but I'd forgotten that [Stevens] did. But its [*sic*] very possible I picked that up from him certainly not consciously but who knows how those things work" (16). In Bronk's "The River Through the Mangrove Swamp," for example, the dissolution of certainty moves from the eye/mind recognition of an "outside" reality—similar to the concluding stanza of "Crude Foyer"—to a position of extreme skepticism.

> Naturally, mountains and the ocean, yes, two
> as terminals though not visible.
> Nobody means to deny them, yet all that appears
> is the dead level drawn flat and slick as plate
> stretched beyond thinness to nothing: it is not there
> but divides the upper from the lower world, reflects
> from one to the other—which is which?
> . . . . . .
> Appearances.
> The boat rides on the reflecting level as we
> on appearances. Things are not what they seem.
> No, it is true, things are not what they seem,
> but how much the less, are what we say they are.
> (*LS* 98)

The poem interrogates the crossing of appearance and reality: although beginning with the assertion that the reality of the mountains and ocean is not to be denied, the poem moves steadily toward their disavowal, a denial not of their reality but of the human ability to comprehend and articulate that "realness." Like that of Stevens, the governing force of the poem is a mind consumed by its own falsity, and the play of the ideas is not mere nihilistic posturing but rather the sincere and earnest consideration of the relation of the human to the real. The accent of the poem falls upon fallibility and limitations of perspective and language, and as such the poem undermines its own assertions in the final line that calls into question not only the appearance of the world but also to an even greater extent the language that attempts to speak that appearance. Language is, therefore, a fiction depicting a fiction: reality twice removed. The poem, therefore, is undone by its own logic.

Both "Crude Foyer" and "The River Through the Mangrove Swamp" emphasize the fictionality of the poems via the assertion and sequence of propositional logic. Moreover, that logic unveils a self-reflexivity whereby the propositionality of the poem is a meta-commentary upon argumentation itself as well as the semantic implications of "the idea of ideas." As such, a heightened self-consciousness is interwoven into the fictionality and confessed artifice of the poem, which creates a moment of suspended closure, or what Barbara Hernstein Smith refers to as modern poetry's proclivity for hidden closure "whereby the poet will avoid the expressive qualities of strong closure while securing, in various ways, the reader's sense of the poem's integrity" (244). The anti-closure in Stevens and Bronk manifests as its own undoing, thereby bringing the poet and the reader back again to square one. J. Hillis Miller describes this process in Stevens as an unending circle:

> No sooner has the mind created a new fictive world than this "recent imagining of reality" becomes obsolete in its turn, and must be rejected. This rejection is the act of decreation, and returns man once more to unadorned reality. The cycle then begins again. . . . (150)

The poem "constantly generates itself out of its own annihilation, ending and beginning again indefatigably" (Miller 154).

Putting forth an assertion only to unravel that statement by the close of the poem (whereby the poem successfully deconstructs itself) is bodied forth by a string of qualifying phrases, which are sutured together by both the ideational flow as well as by the repetition of terms and key aspects of those propositions. The phrasing bears upon the layering of the ideas, and (to modify slightly Robert Creeley's maxim) the poetic form is an extension of the philosophical content. That is, the poem mirrors the mind's train of thought by rendering into itself the surge and return of ideas clus-

tered around a key concept that anchors the poem. "Thought is false happiness" in "Crude Foyer" serves as the anchor upon which the attention of the poem returns and expands, and the repetition of terms and phrases accentuates the return and beginning again of the mind as it explores this concept. The phrasing and the thought are inextricably woven in Stevens' poetics, whereby poetic speech "is more than an imitation for the ear" (*CP* 311); rather, "Poetry is a statement of a relation between a man and the world" (*OP* 197), and that statement is an extension of the life of the poet since "Life is a composite of the propositions about it" (*OP* 197). Life, proposition, and speech are the three vital facets of Stevens' poetics.

Bronk's conception of voice embodies the concomitant dimensions of propositions, sequence, and musicality. How these elements bear upon the force of the poem is the mark of Stevens' influence. "The Arts and Death: A Fugue for Sidney Cox," for example, mirrors Stevens' technique of focusing the interrogation of the poem around a key concept—death and the world, in this particular poem—which is coupled with a steady repetition of terms that generates a linguistic and sonic pattern that echoes the force of the mind in motion.

> No, it is in our terms,
> the terms themselves, which break apart, divide,
> discriminate, set chasms in that wide,
> unbroken experience of the senses which
> goes on and on, that radiation, inward and out,
> that consciousness which we divide, compare,
> compose, make things and persons of, make forms,
> make I and you. World, world, I am scared
> and waver in awe before the wilderness
> of raw consciousness, because it is all
> dark and formlessness: and it is real
> this passion that we feel for forms. But the forms
> are never real. Are not really there. Are not. (*LS* 27–28)

The repetition of "terms" in the first two lines, the phrases beginning with "which," the recurrence of "divide" in lines two and six, the stacking of the verb "make" in lines seven and eight, the four separate uses of the words "forms" or "formlessness," and the final line that repeats the sentence structure ending with "are never," "Are not," and "Are not" suture together the logic and music of the poem. As such, the poem is not only the trace of an expanding train of thought upon the linguistic possibilities of naming the "real" and unveiling true "form," but also a coda of repeating terms and phrases that accentuate the central ideational concepts of the interrogation. Words and sounds are thereby melded together, which reveals a poetic sequence based upon the contiguity of ideas and sounds fused into a poetics of propositionality.

Bronk's move toward a poetry of propositionality is marked by the first poem of *Light and Dark*, "Some Musicians Play Chamber Music For Us," which clearly delineates a poetics founded upon the dialectical play of ideas and the governing principle of propositionality:

> Well, that's a proposition well composed;
> the very justice of it states a demand
> for some response, a further phrase, its tone
> asking perhaps, or adding, or simply "yes." (*LS* 18)

The force of the proposition sparks (or elicits) a response, and the poem begins as a quest "to confirm if possible, to try / a variant statement in a different way, to define / in more than one direction" (18). The goal is the establishment of truth, which the variants seek to confirm. This process is "only this phrase, then this phrase, / though *therefore*, perhaps, or *furthermore*" (18). The qualification of terms, the partial conclusions, and the extension of the interrogation constitute the process of the poem, but also the process of critical reasoning that attempts to negotiate the relationship with the world. The final lines of the opening section of "Some Musicians Play Chamber Music For Us" suggest a deeper parallel with the internal logic that dictates the contours and texture of a Stevens poem:

> These incantations conjure the form of the world,
>
> ah, not known, not known, except by this,
> —and this; not ever finally known except
> as some response among all these responses, ah,
> that's a composition well, so well, proposed. (18)

Whereas the poem seems to move away from its initial claim via the gradual accretion of modifying statements that usurp its possibility through the chain of logic, the poem ultimately circles back upon itself, creating a loop of logic that is contained within its own propositionality. Despite the assertion of the futility of statement, the poem manages to propose, thereby eliding its own discursive logic.

Like "Crude Foyer," the reader is left with something more than a "composition . . . well proposed"; rather, the reader has moved through the nuances and shades of a mind interrogating its subject, yet the logic denies the conception that progress has been made. The poem's limitations are established and maintained from the beginning. Such limitations eschew the poem as a vehicle for epiphany. Something else is at work; the law to which the poem adheres is akin to Jacques Derrida's description of the trace of language as infinite movement within a finite field. Transcendence is impossible; failure is inevitable; but what remains is the possibility for movement.

In this regard, Stevens' poetics of phrasing and propositionality offered a partial response to an important conundrum that surfaced during Bronk's study of Thoreau in *The Brother in Elysium*: if language, ideas, and human-imposed forms are false ("fictions" in Stevens' parlance), why bother with language and ideas at all?

> [Thoreau] became more and more deeply and tragically aware that in spite of his earnest attempt to translate the silence into English, it would remain little better than a sealed book. He had known it would be so. His foreknowledge of failure prevented failure from turning him aside to some other problem. There was no other problem. But searching in the silence for his true identity, he sometimes drew a blank. (*VSC* 81)

If failure is inevitable and all forms are fictions, as Bronk's poems and prose argue, what role can poetry play? Bronk discovered a response to this conundrum in Stevens and in particular the issue raised by "Of Modern Poetry": "The poem of the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice" (*CP* 239). The conduit for this act is language, the *words*—regardless of their insufficiency and partiality—that convey and articulate some emotion as well as the play of ideas that renders the life and energy of the moment. Bronk is also quick to emphasize that "the poem happens in words" (Weinfield 40). As such, it is the "happening" that matters, the process of propositionality that parallels the flow of the world. As Bronk writes,

> The poem is momentary though it has not
> the same moment always. Changes occur
> and it changes with them. The moment is felt. (*LS* 202)

The poem must respond to the ebb and flow of time, that "unnamed flowing" that "flows nowhere, like a sea" (*CP* 533). The goal of finding what will suffice is in fact a non-goal—the rejection that experience and the poem will culminate in a transcendent epiphany. A poetry of propositionality therefore resists closure and false discoveries because, in Stevens' words,

> If ever the search for a tranquil belief should end,
> The future might stop emerging out of the past,
> Out of what is full of us; yet the search
> And the future emerging out of us seem to be one.
> (*CP* 151)

The search and the future converge and emerge out of the life of the individual. The human condition is explicitly linked with the perpetual search and the unfolding promise of the future. The poem and the life are anti-teleological; or, rather, should resist "ends" since those ends are false.

As Bronk writes, "Think: if I could believe in a world, I / could believe in an end" (*LS* 203). As such, this process not only mirrors the life process but is the conduit of living. Therefore, when Bronk remarks that in the poem "The moment is felt" (*LS* 203), he emphasizes that the explicit consciousness of language and poem illuminates the act of living—a consciousness that is normally overlooked or if realized is formulated in the past tense. The poem, founded upon propositionality and the flux of the world, not only accentuates the act of living, but also illuminates the processes that are usually operating invisibly below the surface of the conscious mind.

Poetry and living are inextricably woven in Bronk. In response to Paul Auster's remark, "So what you're saying is that you think of your life as an instrument for the writing of your poetry," Bronk elevates that relationship by insisting, "the instrument is keeping me alive so that I'm available for it" (Weinfield 36). Life and poetry coexist as contingent facets of the same subject: life continues in order to catalyze poetry; poetry testifies to and illuminates living. This duality is clearly emphasized by the titles of two of Bronk's books, *Life Supports*, his collected poems, and *Living Instead*, as well as in the titles of a number of poems.

Although Bronk insists that all that the human mind constructs is false, he places weight upon poetry as evidence of a life. "The Poems: All Concessions Made" reads:

> The poems (are they?) (such as they are), stay
> with me, or seem to. I turn away
> sometimes, pretending alone, to do something else.
> It is as though they wait—as if there.
> I find them there. . . .
> . . . . . .
> Coming back, (I do) I find them there.
> They are waiting for me. Well, we have to go on.
> For no reason except that we started once.
> That isn't a reason. It isn't reasonable.
> We concede so much. What don't we concede?
> I wish I had something; and the poems are there.
> (*LS* 170)

The poems confirm something of life, albeit a temporary confirmation, and foreground that "we have to go on" living, writing, and thinking. The propositions do not lead to an end.

Stevens also ascribes a potency to poetry despite its projected "false happiness." The poem has the potential to suspend disbelief (temporarily) and instill a sense of satisfaction and calmness. This point is beautifully rendered by the close of "The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm":

The quiet was part of the meaning, part of the mind:
The access of perfection to the page.

And the world was calm. The truth in a calm world,
In which there is no other meaning, itself

Is calm, itself is summer and night, itself
Is the reader leaning late and reading there. (*CP* 358–59)

Despite the falsity of language and the inadequacy of any statement concerning reality, a sense of calmness arises out of the poem—or rather a calmness emerges out of the poem via the voice that weaves these propositions together and enters the ear of the reader. The repetition of "calm," thereby, reiterates, reaffirms, and renders that state.

"Voice," in this light, extends beyond the *way* something is said. Voice is an assertion of being, not so much the articulation of a subject position as a process. As Michel de Certeau asserts, the voice is "a sign of the body that comes and speaks" (341). The voice signifies the processes of the body—its music and rhythms. Steven McCaffery offers a succinct distinction between these two ways of imagining voice in poetry:

> The twentieth century presents two distinct scenarios for the voice in poetry. One is primal identity, culturally empowered to define the property of person. This is a phenomenological voice that serves in its self-evidence as the unquestionable guarantee of presence—when heard and understood through its communication of intelligible sounds this voice is named conscience. The other scenario—renegade and heterological—requires the voice's primary drive to be persistently away from presence. This second is a thanatic voice triply destined to lines of flight and escape, to the expenditure of pulsional intensities, and to its own dispersal in sounds between body and language. (163)

Voice as an extension of life rejects stasis; and the poetic voice, as in Charles Olson's re-imagining of the relation of the body and the poem, must pulse with the life of the speaker: the head and the heart.

> The two halves [of the poetic line] are:
> the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE
> the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE (19)

Ideas and sounds are melded together with rhythms and phrases, whereby the poetic line is transformed into the score of the "living" person who speaks, and the voice is the trace of a living language and text. Such a poetics valorizes the aurality as a means of engaging the text. That is, the line is "aural" not "oral," a distinction that Charles Bernstein carefully describes:

> *Aurality precedes orality*, just as language precedes speech. Aurality is connected to the body—what the mouth and tongue and vocal chords enact—not the presence of the poet; it is proprioceptive, in Charles Olson's sense. The poetry reading enacts the poem not the poet; it materializes the text not the author; it performs the work not the one who composed it. (13)

Aurality is textual, which allows for the "false happiness" and "calmness" inscribed into sonic and semantic texture of the poem to be revisited, re-materialized, and re-enacted.

The voice/body is not synonymous with the assertion of subjectivity and an autonomous, stable "I," which is something that both Bronk and Stevens resist. Rather, the voice is a signifier par excellence that catalyzes again and again the trace and play of meanings. Despite the wavering positionality of the "I," the voice initiates the play of meaning by re-visiting the question of being. Subsequently, the fact that the poem retraces the same ground over and over again—a charge leveled against both Bronk and Stevens—is secondary to the act itself and its assertion of being. But as Joseph Conte maintains, such a stance allows for the form to be generative:

> [I]n these poems, the constant is a semantic value, the repetition of a concept initially *given*; the variant is lexical, "the way it goes about saying it." So, to oversimplify again: in these poems, *the significance remains the same, but the words used to express it change.* In these instances, we do not encounter a "content" contained in a box; rather, a *concept* exists which at once precedes and is enacted by the language of the poem. This concept is the invariant to which every turn in the language and structure in the poem refers. (216)

Despite the fact that a poem for Stevens and Bronk often begins with a proposition only to dissolve the ground of that proposition by the close of the poem, what matters are not the conclusion per se but the motion of the poem and the music of that motion.

The poem is, therefore, a temporary island surrounded by a sea of silence—an island that appears and is destroyed over and over. As Bronk writes, "Nothing is worth saying, nothing is worth doing except as a foil for the waves of silence to break against" (*VSC* 80). The waves of the poem are ultimately drowned by the waves of silence, but as Bronk explains,

> Silence is an asylum not because it enabled [Thoreau], in any sense, to stop living, but because it made it possible for him to continue to live and always come back for more in spite of disappointments and failures. (*VSC* 80)

Such a description of silence and the potentiality of sound applies as much to Stevens as it does to Thoreau, and, in this regard, Stevens' poetry can be seen as an extension as well as a rejoinder to the issues and dilemmas raised in Bronk's reading of Thoreau.

Bronk's admiration of the idea of ideas, the ultimate falsity of form and the drive of the poem to refresh the "life so that we share, / For a moment, the first idea" (*CP* 382), offered a paradigm for Bronk to pursue his poetry of ideas that was to return again and against the artificial finality of propositionality, the poem, and even personhood:

> From experience, each one of us had some knowledge, however fragmentary, of what it is to be a person; but what a person is is a question of such complexity as is shown in the complexity of the many possible answers, none of which seems final or complete. (*VSC* 221)

The response to all such questions is finally silence, and the poem, in raising the question again and again, breaks against the waves of silence in order to forge some concession of the possibility of a life—the "being"—behind the artifice.

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The Identity of the "Green Queen" in "Description Without Place"

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THE FIRST SECTION OF Wallace Stevens' "Description Without Place" is dominated by the figure of an anonymous "green queen":

> It was a queen that made it seem
> By the illustrious nothing of her name.
>
> Her green mind made the world around her green.
> The queen is an example . . . This green queen
>
> In the seeming of the summer of her sun
> By her own seeming made the summer change.
>
> In the golden vacancy she came, and comes,
> And seems to be on the saying of her name.
>
> Her time becomes again, as it became,
> The crown and week-day coronal of her fame. (*CP* 339)

These lines moved Helen Vendler to an exasperated response. Mocking Stevens with his own words, she declared: "If this is not the unspotted imbecile revery, it is not far from it" (219). Harold Bloom suggested, "The puzzle of the poem is why he wrote it" (239). When Stevens recited "Description Without Place" for the first time at Harvard on 27 June 1945 as part of the Phi Beta Kappa commencement ceremony, many members of the audience must have been baffled by what they heard. Even on the page in front of us, the text is challenging; we have the sense that these are the careful reflections of a poet on serious matters, beautifully expressed.[1] One aspect making the poem so difficult to understand is that it amalgamates issues of aesthetics, especially on the nature of the imagination, with politics, and above all the problem of representation.

These topics are hard to think together, but the conjunction has been unavoidable since the romantics. Did the poets' supreme skills of creativity entitle them to be leaders in other spheres of human life, to be leaders

THE WALLACE STEVENS JOURNAL 27.2 (FALL 2003): 225–239.

in public affairs? Percy Bysshe Shelley had asserted the claim on behalf of the poets that they had to be supreme:

> Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called in the earlier epochs of the world legislators or prophets: a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of the latest time. (513)

As he summed up in the celebrated sentence, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (535). However, gaining acknowledgment was not so straightforward in the American republic. Complicating matters, as Stevens rightly perceived, were the conditions of public life in a democracy, where the voice of the republic should be elected in order to be consistent with the political procedures of voluntary association—but there were no mechanisms for the election of poets.[2] Further undermining the possibility of self-appointed poet laureates in the twentieth century was the negative example of dictatorships that had suddenly interrupted a universal progress to world democracy. Instead of a spirit of free elections and honest representation, the world since the 1930s was dominated by the spread of totalitarianism. Against the demands of dictatorships, Stevens, speaking at Princeton in 1942, poised the figure of the poet who must be essentially free:

> No politician can command the imagination, directing it to do this or that. Stalin might grind his teeth the whole of a Russian winter and yet all the poets in the Soviets might remain silent the following spring. He might excite their imaginations by something he said or did. He would not command them. (*NA* 28)

Nor could the poet become some sort of leader or Führer: "What is his function? Certainly it is not to lead people out of the confusion in which they find themselves" (*NA* 29). Given these convictions, how could an American poet have a public voice? Even if Stevens might have decided to retreat into hermetic, private utterances, an occasion such as a Harvard commencement forced upon him some sort of public role: the audience of young graduates would expect Stevens to speak as a representative of an established order.

Alan Filreis has written a thorough account of the actual circumstances surrounding the invitation to Stevens to be the Phi Beta Kappa commencement poet (151–56). He has also elucidated some of the important allusions in the poem, notably to the figures of Nietzsche and Lenin (157–60).

But he was not able to offer much insight into the figure of the green queen who dominates the opening section of the poem. Making a virtue out of the limitation, he proposed reading the refusal to name the queen as a deliberate one:

> In this context of a world without context, great personages are not historical figures but random examples. The "green queen" of the first section is "*this* queen *or that*," a figure chosen casually, with a rhetorical informality that withstands historiographical exactitude. She remains unidentified. Paradoxically she has "the illustrious nothing of her name." (156)

But where is one to start looking for the source of the allusion? Is the green queen a legendary or a mythological or a fairy tale figure from the realm of the Grimm Brothers, as Vendler hints (220)?

One possible clue is that green signals two aspects of Elizabeth I of England: a synonym for the epithet *Virgin* Queen and a reminder that she was supposed to be the monarch of a green and pleasant land. As depicted in Spenser's "Aprill" eclogue from "The Shepheardes Calendar," Elizabeth, "the flowre of Virgins," was imagined as an invigorating center of the pastoral landscape: "See, where she sits vpon the grassie greene, / (O seemely sight)" (62).[3] On the face of it, the hypothesis that Stevens might have had Elizabeth I in mind appears far-fetched. Relatively little is known about Stevens and Elizabethan poetry, although there is evidence for his active interest, at least when he was young, in Sidney, Herrick, and Donne.[4] The unexpected surge of interest in the poetics of Donne and the "metaphysical poets" on the part of the modernists could not have passed Stevens by.[5] Literary critics whose work Stevens followed fairly closely participated in the ongoing discussions about the nature and implications of "metaphysical wit," including John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate.[6] Theodore Spencer, of whom more will be said below, was a specialist in Elzabethan literature.[7]

Reading Stevens' theoretical prose, one is struck by how almost offhand remarks reflect a deep involvement with Elizabethan writers, such as the comment "Anyone who has read a long poem day after day, as for example, *The Faerie Queene*, knows how the poem comes to possess the reader and how it naturalizes him in its own imagination and liberates him there" (*NA* 50). Further investigation is still needed into the whole complex of Stevens' assessment of the respective contributions of different literary eras, Elizabethan as well as romantic, on central problems of poetic composition. Here the aim will be the rather modest one of proposing a source that was a probable stimulus to Stevens' awareness of Elizabeth and her age just before he began working on "Description Without Place." Exploring this context sheds additional light on the politics of the

poem, its argument about representation, and its role in Stevens' claims for poetry.

In the very midst of the Second World War, two short books appeared on the intellectual and cultural background of sixteenth-century English literature. Theodore Spencer's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (1942) had been presented as lectures at the Lowell Institute of Boston in the same year. Quite independently, E. M. W. Tillyard published *The Elizabethan World Picture* in 1943.[8] From both sides of the Atlantic, then, there were affirmations of confidence in the enduring values of English literature, despite the turmoil of global war, by professors at the pinnacles of their respective national academic systems, with Spencer at Harvard and Tillyard at Jesus College, Cambridge. Both men could hardly avoid alluding to the contemporary conflicts, even if only tangentially. In a closing chapter, Spencer moved into some reflections on "Literature and the Nature of Man." He was critical of the age's lack of values—"Certain people, as we know too well, have found a sanction in the state, but the sanction they have found is evidently not the kind that demands the use of man's highest faculties" (220)—and suggested "Machiavelli has helped to produce what may be only the first of a series of Hitlers" (221). Tillyard concluded more obliquely but also related the evidence of the past to the present condition:

> Yet we shall err grievously if we do not take that seriousness into account or if we imagine that the Elizabethan habit of mind is done with once and for all. If we are sincere with ourselves we must know that we have that habit in our own bosoms somewhere, queer as it may seem. And, if we reflect on that habit, we may see that (in queerness though not in viciousness) it resembles certain trends of thought in central Europe, the ignoring of which by our scientifically minded intellectuals has helped not a little to bring the world into its present conflicts and distresses. (109)

The thrust of Tillyard's critique and how it relates to Stevens' concerns will be examined in more detail below. What is worth stressing is that these gestures to the war and to the challenge of how to understand the origins of totalitarianism come in the context of discussions of English literary history. The political comments by Spencer and by Tillyard might at some other time have been incongruous, but during the dark 1940s no topic could escape the shadow of the war. In this framework, it will not be so surprising to find Stevens taken by the possibility, perhaps even the necessity, of staking out his position vis-à-vis Spencer's and Tillyard's respective versions of cultural history when he turned to the problems of the meaning of the war and the course of world history in "Description Without Place."

Stevens knew Theodore Spencer. In a letter of 11 December 1936, he thanked him for the hospitality accorded when Stevens delivered the lecture on "The Irrational Element in Poetry" at Harvard (*L* 313). Spencer contributed a short assessment of Stevens' poetic achievement to a special issue of the *Harvard Advocate* in December 1940.[9] After Spencer's death, Stevens would lament that he had not come to know him better:

> While I never knew him well, I wish I had. We came from the same part of the world. We must have had much in common. And one is always desperately in need of the fellowship of one's own kind. I don't mean intellectual fellowship, but the fellowship of one's province: membership in a clique, the fellowship of the landsman and compatriot. (*L* 644)

This private sentiment, however, did not reflect anything of Stevens' sterner judgments about Spencer as a man of letters, more specifically about his poetic sensibility. When Henry Church had asked for names of potential lecturers at Princeton, Stevens had demurred at Spencer as a candidate. He praised the scholar as "a most agreeable person, urbane and civilized. He is also a good speaker. I wonder if he wouldn't be more or less literary and correct with references to the Elizabethan dramatists, and so on." However, for the large topic of "actuality," which Stevens described as "a terrifying subject," he felt Spencer inadequate: "I shouldn't think of Spencer as the right man to make a big thing of it" (*L* 411). By the time Stevens was invited to be the 1945 Phi Beta Kappa commencement poet, he would also have come to know that none other than Spencer had been selected in 1943 and had delivered a poem entitled "The Alumni." In Filreis' assessment: "The total effect of Spencer's Poem was to conjure a favorite new-nationalist image: every able, responsible Harvard man leaving the safeties of job and home for enlistment" (153). Although Spencer might have been an astute literary historian and critic, he was not a brilliant poet; "The Alumni" is at best prosaic and at worst bathetic. His lack of talent did not prevent Spencer from dealing with grand topics:

> We have all had the vision,
> That makes us men,
> Of some wise ordered plan
> In which each man's decision
> Of what is good for him
> Fits with concordant joy
> To what all others want;
> Where nothing extravagant,
> No blackening or alloy,
> Mars the gold diadem
> That crowns all our aspiring,

Till gaining and desiring
Are plentifully one
With no man left alone. ("The Alumni" 33)

One can only imagine Stevens' negative reaction to the clumsy handling of issues such as order, desire, and social harmony, issues that had been central to Stevens' own verse for decades.

Stevens' awareness of Tillyard is attested indirectly via a citation from a book review (Filreis 124). Raymond Mortimer had written a generally critical review of *The Elizabethan World Picture* on 8 May 1943 in the *New Statesman and Nation*. Stevens quoted from Mortimer in "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," his contribution on 11 August 1943 to the Entretiens de Pontigny held at Mount Holyoke College. Stevens used Mortimer as a foil, rather than as an authority:

> One needs hardly to be told that men more or less irrational are only more or less rational; so that it was not surprising to find Raymond Mortimer saying in the *New Statesman* that the "thoughts" of Shakespeare or Raleigh or Spenser were in fact only contemporary commonplaces and that it was a Victorian habit to praise poets as thinkers, since their "thoughts are usually borrowed or confused." But do we come away from Shakespeare with the sense that we have been reading contemporary commonplaces? (*NA* 56)

What Mortimer had actually written would have been even more irritating to Stevens, who sought nothing more ardently than the expression of original and clear thoughts in poetry. Mortimer's original sentence extended the critique of philosophic poets into the present: "This is important because some teachers of English literature still retain the Victorian habit of praising poets as 'thinkers,' though their 'thoughts' are usually borrowed or confused" (310). The whole of Mortimer's review is hostile to Tillyard, from the baseless claim that the book "is based chiefly on the results of recent American research" to the schoolmasterly instruction, "It is to be hoped that Dr. Tillyard in a future work may employ his industry in a more penetrating analysis of the Elizabethan mind, remembering that human beings are wonderfully capable of entertaining mutually contradictory beliefs." Without getting into details, every fair reader of Tillyard must reject Mortimer's comments as a petty, wilful misreading of a subtle synthetic essay by an eminent scholar. Stevens gets at least some revenge for the slight by quoting Mortimer in an essay that has as one of its aims "to equate poetry with philosophy, and to do this with an indication of the possibility that an advantage, in the long run, may lie with poetry" (*NA* 47–48).

Mortimer's reduction of Tillyard's theory of commonplaces would threaten to strip great poets of any intimations of the marvelous. Stevens immediately moves to set the record straight by invoking Shakespeare. Anyone who reads Tillyard's book to the end must concur with Stevens and must recognize where Stevens' sympathies were placed. One paragraph after citing Mortimer, Stevens declared, "It is the *mundo* of the imagination in which the imaginative man delights and not the gaunt world of the reason" (*NA* 57–58). Although not restricted to this instance, the phrase "*mundo* of the imagination" here takes on particular significance as a literal translation of Tillyard's reference to the "world picture," reflecting fundamental agreement between Stevens and Tillyard in their understanding of how the poetic imagination operates within the collective imagination of a community.

Although Spencer and Tillyard cover much of the same terrain, their respective styles and assumptions are quite different. For Spencer, the relationship between ideas and literary works is structured according to the positivistic model where the poets and writers produce works of art by consciously selecting from the sources available to them. The outline of the book already indicates the domination of such a model. The first three chapters present the intellectual and cultural background; the next four examine how Shakespeare used it. Untroubled yet by any campaign against the intentional fallacy, Spencer assumed a Shakespeare who picks and chooses as he assembles his writings, as the following examples show:

> If in *Love's Labour's Lost* Shakespeare uses the traditional view of man's nature in relation to the moral sphere, in *Romeo and Juliet* he does something similar, though not very seriously, with the traditional view of the relation between man and the heavens. (90)
>
> But Shakespeare does not rely merely on the violation of the conventional standards to give his picture of disruption, he uses another feature of the old story, the character of Thersites, to act as a reviling and denigrating chorus to the whole action. (113)
>
> In making a tragedy out of Giraldi Cinthio's story about an anonymous Moor (it had not even been translated into English), Shakespeare was entirely unhampered, or unassisted, by any previous dramatic treatment of the subject. (124)

There can be no doubting Spencer's erudition, but his assumption about how literary works emerge betrays its origins in positivism and its simplistic, mechanical model of literary production. Ultimately rooted in classical rhetoric and philology, that model posits an agent over on one side and a stock of tropes and topics on the other. Creativity then amounts to a

sort of assembling of parts according to pre-established purposes by someone who always already knows what the intended outcome of the creative process will be. "Shakespeare" is sundered from his background by his selecting, calculating consciousness.

By contrast, Tillyard today resembles a critic who has absorbed structuralist principles. Instead of the individual author's intentions, Tillyard is concerned with the presuppositions that shaped, sustained, and are revealed in Elizabethan discourse. Thus there are no sections in his book separating the background from the writers, only chapters on themes such as order, sin, the chain of being, and the system of correspondences (e.g., macrocosm/microcosm). Rather than lurking in the background, the ideas and images permeate the authors, the texts, and the audience. A longer passage demonstrates the difference from Spencer:

> [T]he conflicts of mature Shakespearean tragedy are those between the passions and reason. But Shakespeare animates these conflicts by stating with unique intensity the range of man's affinities whether with angel and beast or with the lovely or violent manifestations of inanimate nature; in other words by his living sense of man's key-position in the great chain of being. It is scarcely necessary to illustrate. *Hamlet* is largely animated by Shakespeare's consciousness of man's being in action like an angel in apprehension like a god, and yet capable of all baseness. (76)

Tillyard's model does not presume a differentiation of the Elizabethans from their worldview, as though it might be possible to have one without the other. This linking of a people with their mentality works on two levels. On one, the Elizabethans themselves could not choose to do other than inhabit their time and space. On the other, what we know about "Elizabethans" we know through them. Consequently the works of the time do not *reflect* an age but are imbued with it at the same time as they construct it. Therefore it becomes possible for Tillyard to suggest that individuals need not have been consciously aware of their own ideology in all of its dimensions, although they acted upon its premises:

> There are so few references to the Pauline scheme of redemption in the sonneteers and dramatists that this insistence on its being essential to the Elizabethan world picture might well be disputed. Yet this very scarcity is a sign of extreme familiarity, and even a single reference will be vast in its implications. (18–19)
>
> References to the elements in Elizabethan literature are very many and their imaginative function is to link the doings of

> men with the business of the cosmos, to show events not merely happening but happening in conjunction with so much else. The effect is usually cumulative and depends more on a habit of mind than on a few powerful appeals to the imagination. (64)

Within this context, Tillyard evidently meant with "commonplace" something other than a trivial reference to a familiar topos. Commonplaces are the unquestioned assumptions upon which culture relies for continuity and stability, what today might be termed the components of a *mentalité* (Hutton). Put into poetic vocabulary, the commonplaces are the elements of the imaginary order as well as of the ordered imagination.

Upon opening Tillyard's book, Stevens would immediately have recognized a kindred spirit, one able to resonate to the poetic qualities of literature. Tillyard wore his learning light and did not hesitate to let his prose be colored by the powerful passages of Elizabethan writing from which he was quoting. Commenting on Ulysses' oft-cited speech on order and degree in *Troilus and Cressida* (I.iii.78–137), Tillyard writes richly:

> The passage is at once cosmic and domestic. The sun, the king, primogeniture hang together; the war of the planets is echoed by the war of the elements and by civil war on earth; the homely brotherhoods or guilds in cities are found along with an oblique reference to creation out of the confusion of chaos. Here is a picture of immense and varied activity, constantly threatened with dissolution, and yet preserved from it by a superior unifying power. (10)

Clearly, the critic has not been deaf to the poetry, has been moved by what he has been reading, and has let the text influence the tone of the commentary. The difference with Spencer's dry paraphrase of the same passage is striking: "He first draws a parallel with the heavens, then with civil law, then with the four elements, then with natural and moral law, and finally with psychological law. Everything is inter-related and seen as part of the same scheme, obeying the same rules" (*Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* 21). It is easy to see why Stevens might have had reservations about proposing Spencer as a candidate for public lectures on poetry. The same qualities of urbanity and cool analysis that might make for an ideal academic would block a fully resonant interpretation.

In addition to his style, Stevens must have welcomed Tillyard's selection of the topics to discuss. The chapters on order, on the hierarchy of beings—especially the sober comments on angels—and those on the system of correspondences were all in agreement with Stevens' interests in neo-platonic and hermetic traditions. Tillyard took care to present the Elizabethan ideas, which he noted were much older than that era, sympatheti-

cally. At times the prose slips into a present tense suggesting that the ideas were still valid in the present:

> [M]any parts of creation cannot help figuring simultaneously as links in the chain and resemblances to something on another grade of creation. Thus a primate in one class of creation must be an important link in the chain as being closest to the class above it and must also correspond to a primate in another class. Suppose for instance that, impressed by its size and its leonine dignity, you called a St. Bernard the highest of the canines, you could think of it simultaneously as striving to become a lion and as corresponding in eminence to the diamond and the sun. (85)

Such an appeal to the active imagination, especially one yoking systemic rigor and fanciful comparisons, would have been quite amenable to Stevens. Indeed, one cannot read this passage and its imagery of the St. Bernard striving to become a lion, corresponding to the excellence of diamond, without being reminded of the processes of seeming and of potential seeming articulated in "Description Without Place." Less important than any possibility of influence, however, is the likelihood that in Tillyard's book Stevens found at least one scholar who had grasped the subtleties of the literary imagination in ways approximating his own.

Where Tillyard may have provided Stevens substantial assistance was with one of his most intractable problems, namely that of the relationship of the individual poet to an age. The issue in its modern formulation was at least as old as the eighteenth-century Querelle des anciens et des modernes, but had been given new urgency in the expectation that America should yield a great poet who could be the voice of democracy and proclaim the cultural superiority of the modern republic.[10] In Whitman's formulation from "Democratic Vistas":

> I say there must, for future and democratic purposes, appear poets, (dare I to say so?) of higher class even than any of those—poets not only possess'd of the religious fire and abandon of Isaiah, luxuriant in the epic talent of Homer, or for proud characters as in Shakspere, but consistent with the Hegelian formulas, and consistent with modern science. America needs, and the world needs, a class of bards who will, now and ever, so link and tally the rational physical being of man, with the ensembles of time and space, and with this vast and multiform show. (988)

But from where could the representative American poet speak? There was no center, no place, where "America" could be localized or located. Stevens was not a delegate from America to Harvard; at best he was an

American speaking to Americans, a Harvard-educated man addressing "the fellowship of one's province," to quote from his description of Theodore Spencer. A possible resolution of the dilemma came from Tillyard's account of the relationship between Queen Elizabeth and the Elizabethans.

Throughout *The Elizabethan World Picture* there is an enticing equivocation between the identity of the sovereign and the identity of the subjects. Were they Elizabethans because she was who she was, a queen who translated Boethius (3), or did she act and live according to their demands and expectations? Once the background/foreground model has been discarded in favor of one of mutual influence, the question dissolved. The ruler and the ruled coexist with each other:

> Somehow the Tudors had inserted themselves into the constitution of the medieval universe. They were part of the pattern and they made themselves indispensable. It was a serious matter not a mere fancy if an Elizabethan writer compared Elizabeth to the *primum mobile*, the master-sphere of the physical universe, and every activity within the realm to the varied motions of the other spheres governed to the last fraction by the influence of their container. (8)

Tillyard has transmitted the doctrine of correspondences from the Elizabethan worldview into his own account of the relationship between the monarch and the people. Thus phrases such as "the age of Elizabeth" and "the Elizabethan age" become synonymous, not least because the participants could not imagine their world any other way. In the final chapter, which has the evocative title "The Cosmic Dance," Tillyard quoted from Sir John Davies' "Orchestra" lines describing Elizabeth at the court. They are worth reproducing because of the influence they must have had on Stevens when he read them, an influence visible in the green queen of "Description Without Place":

> Her brighter dazzling beams of majesty
> Were laid aside, for she vouchsaf'd awhile
> With gracious cheerful and familiar eye
> Upon the revels of her court to smile;
> For so time's journeys she doth oft beguile.
> Like sight no mortal eye might elsewhere see,
> So full of state art and variety.
>
> For of her barons brave and ladies fair,
> Who, had they been elsewhere, most fair had been,
> Many an incomparable lovely pair
> With hand in hand were interlinked seen,
> Making fair honour to their sovereign queen.

Forward they pac'd and did their pace apply
To a most sweet and solemn melody. (105)

Tillyard commented that "presumably the sight of Queen Elizabeth as the central point of the court's dance-pattern 'in this our Golden Age' would have persuaded Penelope to lay aside her prejudice" (105–06). The motions of the court dance, literally and figuratively, reflect the movement of the planets " 'According to the music of the spheres' " (104). Taken together and in context, the quotations from Davies and Tillyard's comments provided Stevens with the material for the queen who "made it seem / By the illustrious nothing of her name," who came "In the golden vacancy" (*CP* 339). The apparent paradoxes of the seeming queen are nothing more, and nothing less, than the paradoxes caught in Tillyard's analysis of an Elizabethan age where Elizabeth was everywhere at once, left traces everywhere in her age, and is revealed by the patterns of those traces. It is a trick of language, but an unavoidable one, whereby Tillyard personifies the Elizabethan age: "the ordinary educated Elizabethan thought" (38), "the Elizabethan believed" (54), "the typical Elizabethan habit of mind" (58), and so on. Of course "Elizabethan" is shorthand for the complex workings of the cultural system, but it is simultaneously a sign of the monarch's omnipresence in thoughts and actions of her subjects. Hence the truth of Stevens' assertions in the second part of "Description Without Place" about the mutual influence of the queen and the age:

An age is a manner collected from a queen.
An age is green or red. An age believes

Or it denies. An age is solitude
Or a barricade against the singular man

By the incalculably plural. (*CP* 340)

Declaring "an age is a manner collected from a queen" asserts both the truism that historians organize their narratives around rulers (Augustus, Elizabeth, Victoria)[11] and the bolder thesis that such rulers did shape events profoundly. It is not always possible to separate the two moments, even for contemporary participants. Because they held a certain vision of Elizabeth I, her subjects acted correspondingly. As a green queen, a virgin queen, a faerie queen she inspired poets, courtiers, explorers, and herself. The phrase "Age of Elizabeth" appears to be a tautology only when it is taken out of a context, for in fact Elizabeth and her people formed themselves together and the distinction between them cannot be sustained except heuristically.

With the recovery of Tillyard's book as an intertext for "Description Without Place," it becomes feasible to explain what a queen is doing in a

poem written in the space and time of a republic. The representativeness of the queen has been radically democratized, much as Stevens saw in the reciprocity between Andrew Jackson and "Jacksonian America" a decisive transformation in the democratic order of the United States.[12] Once Elizabeth and the Elizabethans are conjoined in their cosmic dance, their relationship must be dialectical. Even without elections, they represent each other. The moment is politically dangerous, since the people could imagine a monarch of absolute power, torn out of the hierarchy of the chain of being and no longer responsible to others above or below. As Tillyard detected, even in the Elizabethan veneration of the court there are incipient desires for order and stability without mutability. So he cautioned: "If we are sincere with ourselves we must know that we have that habit in our own bosoms somewhere, queer as it may seem" (109). The power of the dictator derives from the exploitation of such longings. The possibility of Lenin becoming Leninism is, as Stevens continued in the poem, another version of the seeming of the queen.

To rephrase the argument into the American context, even a republic could elect a tyrant. There is nothing innate, no place beyond human language, when the authority must and would inevitably come to block the establishment of tyranny. Because the nature of government originates in the imaginations of the governed as well as in the minds of those who govern, people must take care about how they let power appear. In turn, arguments about the past, such as those about the relationship between Shakespeare and his age, can shape assumptions about the nature of literature, politics, and society, can reach from the sixteenth century into the twentieth. The ways in which Spencer imagined how Shakespeare wrote his plays and Tillyard imagined the Elizabethans viewing the world reverberated through their own worldviews and influenced their diagnoses of the global crisis. Spencer argued that "our age is trying to turn chaos into order" (ix); Tillyard cautioned that yearning for order could itself be suspect. Of the two, Stevens surely preferred the latter.

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Notes

[1] Among the more perspicacious comments on Stevens' argument about poetics in "Description Without Place" are those of Charles Altieri (40) and Anca Rosu (153–58). Dana Wilde discusses the poem in terms of modern physics (12–18).

[2] The history of the discussion on how and whether to elect or select poets can be approached through the question of poet laureates. The uniquely American constraints of a putative democratic republic of equals framed Stevens' reflections in 1940 when Henry Church broached the topic of establishing a "Chair of Poetry" at Princeton (*L* 376–78).

[3] Joseph Carroll points to the recurrence of "green" in Stevens' works (183–84), but does not offer any specific insights into the color's value in this poem.

[4] On Sidney, see "Imitation of Sidney," Lensing 77–78, *L* 31; on Herrick, Lensing 78, Riddel 156; on Donne, *L* 775.

[5] A central role in this development was played by T. S. Eliot, especially in his 1921 essays "The Metaphysical Poets" and "Andrew Marvell." For a brief account, with the reservations of the literary historian, see Leishman 90–106. Herz provides a lively survey of the reception of Donne in the twentieth century.

[6] Unger 10–16; Larson 92, 100, 148–49.

[7] See for example his "Donne and His Age"; and *Studies in Metaphysical Poetry: Two Essays and a Bibliography*. Although it was not published until after "Description Without Place" had been written, "The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney" indicates how alive the issues surrounding Elizabethan poetics still were in 1945.

[8] According to Tillyard in his preface, he received Spencer's book only when his own book was in type. He observed, "We have been writing, independently, of some of the same things, and I wish I could have made many references to this book" (ix). He does cite Spencer in note 8 (211). Matters may have been more complicated, however. According to Alan C. Purves, when Spencer studied at Cambridge "he came to know I. A. Richards and E. M. W. Tillyard, both of whose ideas influenced much of his work" (viii).

[9] "The Poetry of Wallace Stevens: An Evaluation." *Harvard Advocate* 127.3 (December 1940): 26; cited by Newcomb 123.

[10] On the importance of this ideal for American poetry, see Walker. His omission of Stevens is the exception that proves the rule quite nicely.

[11] Cf. Stevens' assertion in "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" that "The centuries have a way of being male" (*NA* 52), a valid claim when one considers the writing of history.

[12] The extent of Stevens' concern with the Jacksonian period is striking and deserves closer study. For some insights into the historical significance of Jackson for American political history, I am indebted to Marc Harris (Pennsylvania State University, Altoona).

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Stevens and Auden: Antimythological Meetings

LIESL M. OLSON

IN HIS PERSONAL COPY of Wallace Stevens' 1947 *Transport to Summer*, W. H. Auden jotted down the following poem, which he never published:[1]

Miss God on Mr. Stevens

O my dear, more heresy to muzzle
No sooner have we buried in peace
The flighty divinities of Greece,
Than up must pop the barbarian with
An antimythological myth,
Calling the sun the sun, his mind "Puzzle."[2]

The poet who "Call[s] the sun the sun" is of course the poet of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," the last poem in *Transport to Summer*. The opening stanzas of "Notes" command a young poet, an "ephebe," to rethink "The inconceivable idea of the sun":

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

There is a project for the sun. The sun
Must bear no name, gold flourisher, but be
In the difficulty of what it is to be. (*CP* 380–81)

Stevens asks us to erase our assumptions about what the sun represents, mythically and poetically, and to see the sun as if for the first time. But as Auden's playful jibe at Stevens suggests, Stevens' poetical "project" is itself myth-making: "An antimythological myth."

Although Auden's remarks about Stevens are few (as are Stevens' remarks about Auden), the relationship between these two poets is well worth considering given Auden's short poem about Stevens and the other unmistakable references that each poet makes about the other.[3] Their apprais-

THE WALLACE STEVENS JOURNAL 27.2 (FALL 2003): 240–254.

als of each other's work—and the way in which Auden's short poem makes its way into one of his most famous poems—raises issues central to both poets: the role of the imagination in poetry and in life, the civic and public demands placed upon the poet, and the relationship between poetry and historical conditions, or what Stevens calls "our actual world" (*L* 760). Essentially, Auden was suspicious of Stevens' inheritance of the romantic principles that he himself sought to reject. He questions Stevens' belief in the imagination's ability to create its own world—what Stevens calls the "poem of the mind" in "Of Modern Poetry" to describe the demands that poetry must satisfy (*CP* 239). According to Auden's poem, Stevens' sun exists only in the mind of the poet, an imagined and inaccessible "puzzle." Auden mistrusts—and even wants to "muzzle"—Stevens' notion that we must rid the sun of its mythical layers, its Apollonian name, only to create another myth of the mind in its place. "Miss God," a phrase that Auden started using in the 1940s (at the time of his conversion to the Anglican church), here points to a good-natured deity that is substantially different from Greece's "flighty divinities." Auden's "Miss God," making moral judgments of people on earth, ridicules romanticized myth-making.

Three drafts of the poem in Auden's journal reveal a few notable revisions. The phrase "flighty divinities of Greece" was first "polytheism of Ancient Greece," suggesting a more serious critique of a mythic, pagan religion that Stevens perhaps resurrects.[4] Moreover, the playful tone of the final version, with its puckish opening phrase "Oh my dear," differs from the earlier drafts. The first line of the poem initially read "There's always some heresy to muzzle," then "Dear oh dear, more heresy to muzzle," and finally "Oh my dear, more heresy to muzzle." Most significantly, Auden titles the poem "Art History" in the drafts, not "Miss God on Mr. Stevens." Ironic, the title "Art History" suggests a wry disapproval of Stevens' definition of art—of imagined paradigms untethered to a world outside of myth, untethered to actual history.

Particularly striking about the phrase "Miss God" in the poem's final title is Auden's projection of a mock-feminine or homosexual authority condemning the Stevensian poet. Richard Davenport-Hines notes that Auden's first use of the phrase "Miss God" occurs in "Last Words," a 1941 article for *Harper's Bazaar* quoting the deathbed comments of the famous and obscure. One of Auden's concluding quotations runs as follows:

> "Bert Savoy, the famous female impersonator, was watching a thunderstorm with some friends, '*There's Miss God at it again*,' he exclaimed and was instantly struck by lightning. . . ." (qtd. in Davenport-Hines 215)

The phrase "Miss God," as it is used here and in Auden's poem, conjures up the voice of a priggish *prima donna*—arbitrating both world events and poetics—who cannot bear her fragile powers being doubted or inter-

fered with. Granted, Auden's short poem is an occasional piece (that he probably never imagined Stevens would read), but why would Auden address Stevens, even obliquely, in a language so heavily encoded with homosexual overtones, something he rarely does in his own published poetry? Tracing Auden's later use of the poem, and his other references to Stevens, might allow us to see more clearly what Auden (perhaps unconsciously) had in mind.

Auden's poem about Stevens makes its way into "In Praise of Limestone," composed in May 1948, just over a year after Stevens' *Transport to Summer* was published. Valuing human imperfection, "In Praise of Limestone" considers the beauty of limestone faults in the Italian landscape and the frailty and flaws of the body. Marked by error and accident, our human condition is rooted in the limitations of the earth, not in the "infinite space" of imagined perfection. Poets who envision otherwise are "rebuke[d]" by the very materials of the land:

> The poet,
> Admired for his earnest habit of calling
> The sun the sun, his mind Puzzle, is made uneasy
> By these solid statues which so obviously doubt
> His antimythological myth; and these gamins,
> Pursuing the scientist down the tiled colonnade
> With such lively offers, rebuke his concern for Nature's
> Remotest aspects. . . . (*Selected Poems* 186)

"[S]olid statues," constructed from the same stone that the poet admires, exhibit humanity's ability to shape and control earth's terrain, to create classically ordered art here on earth. The direct path of the "tiled colonnade" meets the step of the scientist, who reinforces art's perfection with his knowledge of the human body and the natural world. But "gamins," neglected young boys roaming the town's streets, do not adhere to this ordered march, disrupting both classicism on earth and the Stevensian poet's mind myths. Unruly nature inevitably checks the "supreme fiction" of the poet's pure imagination.

On another level, the boys' "lively offers" suggest that Auden figures himself into his critique of poetical myth-making. Auden could easily be drawing from his own experience in describing the sexual teasing of the poet by "gamins," as Jonathan Fuller notes.[5] To read Auden foremost as a "gay poet" can certainly be reductive, but in this particular instance (as with his phrase "Miss God"), Auden interpolates a gay, male discourse into his critique of Stevens, as if he sees in Stevens something he fears in himself. Suggesting that "the poet" might do well to ditch his "mind Puzzle" for the offer of a more satisfying rendezvous, the poem consequently positions Auden as "the poet" in his poem—one who often had affairs with younger men. Identifying himself with Stevens, Auden

conflates two anxieties: a fear of the poetic imagination as the cause of political and ethical retreat, and feelings of guilt about his own homosexuality, sharpened by his religious conversion. Poetics and politics and (homo) sexuality all become blurred here as variations on what it means to be a poet, and a man.

Physically massive and masculine, stanch in his obligations to wife and daughter, and committed to a money-making (and markedly bourgeois) vocation other than poetry, Stevens seems an unlikely figure onto whom Auden loads his own anxieties, although of course we might reason that Stevens' very difference is the source of Auden's own self-scrutiny. Stevens' own feelings about the nature of writing poetry are as a result quite striking in the context of Auden's critique. Although Auden set himself on a career of poetry as a teenager (and was recognized as a prodigy), Stevens did not publish the poems eventually collected in *Harmonium* until he was thirty-five; moreover, as Frank Lentricchia has pointed out, Stevens associated poetry writing with a feminine kind of behavior (138). "There is something absurd about all this writing of verses," Stevens writes in a 1913 letter to his wife Elsie, "but the truth is, it elates and satisfies me to do it. It is an all-round exercise quite superior to ordinary reading. So that, you see, my habits are positively lady-like" (*L* 180). That Stevens could entitle one of his lectures "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet"—in earnest—testifies to his attempt to imagine poetic success as something suitable to his masculine, businesslike nature. For understandable reasons, Auden identifies Stevens as a poet and man radically unlike himself; correspondingly, Auden also distinguishes in Stevens' work a poetics to be resisted: celebrating the imagination's supreme power over the actual world.

How fair is Auden's assessment of Stevens' poetical project? How did Stevens respond to Auden's references to him? As a poem such as "Esthétique du Mal" (a poem included in *Transport to Summer*) suggests, Stevens also advocates the earthy imperfections of life on earth: "Pain is human," "Life is a bitter aspic" (*CP* 314, 322).[6] The necessary existence of humanity's evil impulses should only encourage our satisfaction with the substance of the earth, our ultimate pleasure: "The greatest poverty is not to live / In a physical world" (*CP* 325). Perhaps Stevens wanted to clarify his poetic credo in response to Auden when he picked up the phrase "antimythological myth" and used the phrase "antimythological poem" in a 1953 letter to Renato Poggioli. A scholar of Russian and comparative literature who was working on an Italian translation of some of Stevens' poems (what was to become *Mattino Domenicale ed Altre Poesie* [1954]), Poggioli often asked Stevens very direct questions about the meanings of some of his most elusive poems. The correspondence between poet and Italian translator offers some of the few instances of Stevens offering explanations of his work. In a June 3, 1953, letter, Stevens explains the possible difficulties inherent in translating "The Comedian as the Letter C":

> It may be a little difficult to translate *The Comedian as the Letter C*. The sounds of the letter C, both hard and soft, include other letters like K, X, etc. How would it be possible to translate a line like
>
> exchequering from piebald fiscs unkeyed,
>
> and preserve anything except the sense of the words? However, it is true that that poem has made its way without reference to the sounds of the letter C. There is another point about the poem to which I should like to call attention and that is that it is what may be called an *anti-mythological poem*. The central figure is an every-day man who lives a life without the slightest adventure except that he lives it in a poetic atmosphere as we all do. This point makes it necessary for a translator to try to reproduce the every-day plainness of the central figure and the plush, so to speak, of his stage. (*L* 778; italics mine)

To some extent, the older Stevens here rereads his younger work, recasting "The Comedian as the Letter C" in a light more conducive to his new emphasis on "plainness" (as in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," written in 1949) rather than on the riotous verbal extravagance that also unquestionably characterizes the poem. According to the older Stevens, Crispin the comedian lives a life rooted in everyday things, not in some mythological world of the imagination. The poem, as many have noted, is highly biographical: Crispin's great sea voyage and return home (material for an epic "myth") might be understood as a quest for poetic subject matter and a search for worldly satisfaction. A "poetic atmosphere" does not require that Crispin, or Stevens, remove himself from working in the world (for forty years as an insurance attorney), but rather allows him to be consciously committed to living in a practical, "actual," day-to-day reality. The poem chooses the quotidian in response to the lifelong question of how to live.

Stevens, like Auden, was quite aware that poetry has real limitations; Crispin realizes "The words of things entangle and confuse. / The plum survives its poems" (*CP* 41). As Frank Kermode has perceived, Stevens here implies that metaphor does not change reality; to ignore this fact is to falsify reality (35–36). "For poetry makes nothing happen" (*Selected Poems* 82), Auden famously wrote in "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," a sentiment that Stevens also expressed around the time that his *Selected Poems* was about to be published. In a letter to his friend Barbara Church, who was driving around Italy surveying the ruins of World War II, Stevens writes:

> There is going to be a *Selected Poems* published in London shortly. I returned the proofs yesterday. The book seemed rather slight and small to me—and unbelievably irrelevant to our ac-

> tual world. It may be that all poetry has seemed like that at all times and always will. The close approach to reality has always been the supreme difficulty of any art: the communication of actuality, as [poetics?], has been not only impossible, but has never appeared to be worth while because it loses identity as the event passes. Nothing in the world is deader than yesterday's political (or realistic) poetry. Nevertheless the desire to combine the two things, poetry and reality, is a constant desire. (*L* 760)

This letter to Barbara Church, as Filreis maintains, should be considered within the political context in which it was written: at the height of the 1952 presidential campaign when the positive political rhetoric of reconstruction dramatically contrasted with the accounts Barbara Church sent Stevens of the misery of postwar Europe (208, 231). Stevens never believed that his poetry could actually change the way that people (or politicians) behaved. Thus, poetic thought, Stevens suggests, should acknowledge the "actual world," but only in a way that the poems are not restricted to contemporary political meanings that lack enduring relevance.

Stevens questions "political (or realistic) poetry," what he also calls an "academic" approach to problems that he associates with Auden in another letter to Barbara Church about six months later. Here, Stevens explains why he must decline participation in a midweek "Symposium on Art and Morals" at Smith College (April 23–24, 1953) in which Auden participated:

> They asked me to come as a guest, which I declined because I don't want to be away from home over night. Auden, Allen Tate and Trilling one night, and Barzun, George Boas (of Johns Hopkins) and W. G. Constable (of the Boston Museum) the next. This would be of the very greatest interest. But will even exceptional men say anything exceptional on such a familiar subject in circumstances of such concentration? I wish I could have seen my way clear. Boas is a man of considerable value, who is obscured by his job. And all of these men, except Constable, are Academic figures. I wonder whether the academic analysis of the problem presented is really the right analysis—the right answer . . (*L* 772–73)

Stevens' meaning here is not entirely clear; despite his "greatest interest" in the symposium's participants, he objects to the "academic" nature of analysis, as if the problem of "art and morals" should be treated differently, perhaps aesthetically. In other instances, Stevens uses the term "academic" to refer to art that too obviously "teaches" a doctrine or espouses

a political ideology, as in his 1936 poem "Academic Discourse at Havana," in which he writes: "Politic man ordained / Imagination as the fateful sin" (*CP* 143). Similarly, several letters between Stevens and José Rodríguez Feo, a young Cuban poet and founder of the literary magazine *Orígenes*, concern the "academic nature" of Cuban and Mexican painters, who sometimes privilege pedagogical principles over the imagination. Rodríguez Feo first expresses his disgust "that [Mexican artists] Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros are all terribly overrated and are really now embarked upon an academic stage which reveals their decadence," marked by "bloody, screaming, cultural and nationalistic propaganda" (*Secretaries* 123). Stevens then responds to the paintings of the Cuban painter Mariano Rodríguez (of the *Orígines* group), on display in New York City in 1948: despite his fondness for Mariano's portrait of a pineapple (which Stevens hung in his room, and which partly inspired "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together"), Stevens thinks Mariano's more recent works are "lurid and rhetorical," much like the Mexican paintings that Rodríguez Feo dislikes (*Secretaries* 124). Stevens then adds: "Somehow Mexican painting seems to undertake to teach. This makes it academic in spirit even when it is not academic in manner, or so it seems" (*Secretaries* 125). Of course, Stevens' 1947 lecture at Harvard, "Three Academic Pieces," includes "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together"; the poem exemplifies "resemblance" at work, versus the academic examination of metaphor that begins the lecture (*NA* 71–89).

But "academic" may simply refer to the fact that most of the men listed as participants in the Smith symposium were associated with colleges and universities, including Auden, who was employed during various periods by the University of Michigan, Swarthmore College, Bennington College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, the New School for Social Research, and Oxford University. In contrast, when Archibald MacLeish invited Stevens to be the Charles Eliot Norton Professor at Harvard for the 1955–56 academic year, Stevens declined. Partly out of concern that a leave of absence from Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company would force the issue of retirement, Stevens explained in a letter to MacLeish that the foreseen difficulty of "taking up the routine of the office again" after an entire year away also influenced his decision not to accept the professorship (*L* 852–53). The routine of ordinary life deeply satisfied Stevens. The intellectual sphere of the academy never seemed solid footing enough for him, never the "rock" of work. And at a time when most poets made a requisite trip to Paris, Stevens never once traveled to Europe. He often mocked his proclivity for the local and the practical, for instance in an early letter to William Carlos Williams: "But oh la-la: my job is not now with poets from Paris. It is to keep the fire-place burning and the music-box churning and the wheels of the baby's chariot turning and that sort of thing" (*L* 246). Similarly, in one of his late (rather resigned) letters to Rodríguez Feo, Stevens writes:

> I have been working at the office, nothing else: complaining a little about it but content, after all, that I have that solid rock under my feet, and enjoying the routine without minding too much that I have to pay a respectable part of my income to the government in order that someone else representing the government may sit at the Cafe X at Aix or go to lectures at the Sorbonne. (*Secretaries* 198)

With a trace of self-mockery, Stevens values his productive (and recognizably dull) life at the office, and imagines that his work actually enables the European intellectual or the university scholar to pursue more leisurely philosophical matters. But as the last two stanzas from "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" emphasize, the academic quest for knowledge has its own limitations; "the Sorbonne" epitomizes a hubristic quest for order and control that experiences of the irrational and the blissful beautifully undermine:

> They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne.
> We shall return at twilight from the lecture
> Pleased that the irrational is rational,
>
> Until flicked by feeling, in a gildered street,
> I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo.
> You will have stopped revolving except in crystal.
> (*CP* 406–07)

"[F]licked by feeling," the poet celebrates "twilight" understandings, not academic abstractions. Stevens' coda to the poem, addressed to the "Soldier," perhaps fulfills Stevens' desire for a humanist ending (he thought of adding a fourth section called "It Must be Human"), although after the stunning image of a "green" and "fluent mundo . . . revolving except in crystal," the coda is arguably anti-climactic, an elegiac turn away from the forceful first person of the last stanzas and a mediocre attempt "to combine the two things, poetry and reality" (*L* 760).

Stevens perhaps shied away from any poetic relationship with Auden, whose ability to address the "reality" of wartime—the ethical and religious questions that emerged from the sufferings of World War II—characterize many of his best-known poems. Stevens may have resented Auden for doing what he himself could not naturally do: write successful political poetry. Most notably, Stevens revised his 1936 group of political poems, *Owl's Clover*, for inclusion in *The Man with the Blue Guitar and Other Poems* (1937), but subsequently did not include *Owl's Clover* in his *Collected Poems* (1954). Dissatisfied with how the poems grappled with art's relationship to contemporary issues, or "To What one reads in the papers," Stevens eventually called the poems "rather boring" (*L* 308). As many critics

have noted, the excessive rhetoric of the poems sabotages Stevens' attempt to defend poetry against the political and social pressures of the time. Auden's poetry—particularly poems like "Spain 1937," "In a Time of War" (1938), or "September 1, 1939"—stands as a testament to what Stevens did not do.

Accordingly, when Auden actually surfaces as a topic in Stevens' correspondence, Stevens assumes a certain protective distance from Auden's work. In one letter to Stevens, Rodríguez Feo notes Auden's 1947 lecture on "The Ironic Hero" at Harvard (which Rodríguez Feo presumably attended) and in another letter asks if Stevens has read *Partisan Review's* "symposium on Religion and the Intellectuals (Bosh!)," which included Auden as a contributor (*Secretaries* 98, 175).[7] Rodríguez Feo overtly solicits Stevens' opinion on Auden after he has finished reading Auden's *Age of Anxiety*:

> I finished *The Age of Anxiety* which made [me] very anxious as to the probable poetic course of Mr. Auden. I thought the little book a frightful bore. Why must all the old poets go in for sermons? It was a rather sad day when they all discovered Kierkegaard! Later I re-read some of Wordsworth's beautiful poems and found him much more palatable. (*Secretaries* 113)

Stevens' response to this letter assumes a posture of remarkable literary ignorance. He pretends never to read other poets' work so as not to inherit influences that critics might eagerly trace: "You are wrong, by the way, in thinking that I read a lot of poetry. I don't read a line. My state of mind about poetry makes me very susceptible and that is a danger in the sense that it would be so easy for me to pick up something unconsciously. In order not to run that danger I don't read other people's poetry at all" (*Secretaries* 114). Furthermore, Stevens explains the necessity of writing in an individual voice, without poetic "echoes":

> There seem to be very few people who read poetry at the finger tips, so to speak. This may be a surprise to you but I am afraid it is the truth. Most people read it listening for echoes because the echoes are familiar to them. They wade through it the way a boy wades through water, feeling with his toes for the bottom: the echoes are the bottom. This is something that I have learned to do from Yeats who was extremely persnickety about being himself. It is not so much that it is a way of being oneself as it is a way of defeating people who look only for echoes and influences. (*Secretaries* 114)

Paradoxically, Stevens admits to picking up the skill of "being himself" from another poet, Yeats. And as many have noticed, Stevens' knowledge

of other poets was deeper than he let on; for instance, while he sometimes feigned only a slight familiarity with Eliot's work, he nonetheless quotes Eliot in two of his essays ("Effects of Analogy," "A Poet That Matters") and many of his letters reveal a thorough understanding of Eliot's poetics.[8] Samuel French Morse, a younger poet and an early Stevens scholar, notes that Stevens' bookshelves at his home on Westerly Terrace were full of many books written by his contemporaries despite the fact that Stevens rarely wanted to talk about other poets.[9]

Auden was decidedly more open about his poetic influences and about what he thought of other poets' work. His assessment of Stevens emerges not only in "In Praise of Limestone," but also in his quadruple sestina "Kairos and Logos" (1941). As Edward Mendelson observes, the poem's title refers to Paul Tillich's *The Interpretation of History* (1936), in which the biblical concept of Kairos, or the fullness of time, is interpreted through the tasks demanded of Logos, or the kingdom of God, at a specific historical time (168). Mendelson suggests that the third sestina in "Kairos and Logos" offers a view of the world that probably belongs to Stevens, or a poet Auden envisions as "a late-romantic heir to Mallarmé" (169). The poem describes the ethical temptations faced by two different figures, a young girl and a poet, and implies that the temptations are one and the same: relying on the individual imagination as a creator of one's own world is akin to believing in childlike fairy tales. The poet of the third sestina essentially repeats the choices made by the child—or a young "miss"—in the second sestina. Thus, the Stevensian poet—as in "Miss God on Mr. Stevens"—is again reprimanded for his juvenile (and feminine) behavior.

In the second sestina of "Kairos and Logos," the child is led into the woods by the call of a unicorn, and here she imagines her own private universe:

> So, scampering like a sparrow through the forest,
> She piled up stones, pretending they were Home,
> Called the wild roses that she picked "My Garden,"
> Made any wind she chose the Naughty One,
> Talked to herself as to a doll, a child
> Whose mother-magic knew the Magic Word.
> (Auden, *Collected Poems* 239)

The inevitable responsibilities of growing up eventually destroy the young child's imaginary "mother-magic"; if she is really to create and name things then she must embrace her responsibilities to the created world rather than indulge in her isolation. But the third sestina suggests that an adult (like Stevens) can manage to live in a false reality of the imagination as well:

> He woke one morning and the verbal truth
> He went to bed with was no longer there;

The years of reading fell away; his eyes
Beheld the weights and contours of the earth.

One must be passive to conceive of the truth:
The bright and brutal surfaces of things
Awaited the decision of his eyes.
(Auden, *Collected Poems* 240)

Describing a poet whose creative power is essentially passive, Auden's diction—"bright and brutal surfaces of things"—calls to mind Stevens' early poems "Of the Surface of Things" and "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," both from *Harmonium*. In Stevens' "Of the Surface of Things," a poet sits in his room composing lines: "In my room, the world is beyond my understanding; / But when I walk I see that it consists of three or four hills and a cloud" (*CP* 57). In Auden's poem, the Stevensian poet passively regards what he sees; he no longer believes in language's ability to represent the world truthfully and is thus tempted to provide order based upon his own perception of things:

One notices, if one will trust one's eyes,
The shadow cast by language upon truth:
He saw his rôle as father to an earth
Whose speechless, separate, and ambiguous things
Married at his decision; he was there
To show a lucid passion for their fate.
(Auden, *Collected Poems* 240)

Preserving the child's "Magic Word," the poet pretends to be "father to an earth" rather than to be part of it. He yokes together heterogeneous things, never minding that his created world differs from what others might perceive. Inevitably, this poet will suffer from loneliness, seeing the world "with an exile's eyes" (*Collected Poems* 241). As Mendelson notes, this poet is "the type of an artist for whom the ethical vocabulary of personal and social relations has no meaning, whose narcissistic task is to discover the patterns created by his own mind, and whose fantasy leaves him . . . with no hope of escape from his self-condemned loneliness" (169–70).

The poem also might be read as a more overt expression of Auden's uneasiness with poetry's impotence. The poet does not actually "father" the earth: "instead of earth / His fatherless creation; instead of truth / The luckiest convention of his eyes" (*Collected Poems* 241). The poem projects an anxiety about being a "father" to a world of named objects (to write poetry) rather than being an actual father to a family. If we keep in mind Auden's sense of failure at not having a family of his own (or a meaningful heterosexual marriage), it again seems striking how Auden's critique of Stevens becomes a critique of himself.[10] The poem assesses both a poet-

ics that Auden wanted to avoid and a state of familial deficiency that Auden personally feared. Despite his "lucid passion," the poet in "Kairos and Logos" can only imagine a fantastic, whimsical world—a fate "To father dreams of talking oaks, of eyes / In walls, catastrophes, sins, poems, things / Whose possibilities excluded truth" (*Collected Poems* 240). This kind of poet, fathering only images, does not see the world honestly, but wants to imagine all "things" as if imbued with powers that he has bequeathed to them himself.

If Auden indeed had Stevens in mind when composing "Kairos and Logos," it seems fair to say that Stevens accepted Auden as a poet of importance perhaps more than Auden accepted Stevens. Although Stevens, to my knowledge, never offered a direct opinion of Auden (as he did, for instance, regarding both Eliot and Pound), his participation in the Bollingen Committee that awarded the prize to Auden in 1954 suggests an approval—if somewhat ambivalent—of Auden's work. Stevens never openly commented on the committee's choice, although there are several documents relating to the selection proceedings. In a January 15, 1954, letter to Richard Eberhart, a younger poet and academic, Stevens enthusiastically describes the experience of being on the committee; he enjoys the occasional experience of participating in literary events:

> The Bollingen Committee met last week-end in New Haven and I assume that you know that it chose Auden. I went down and had a remarkably good time. In Cambridge there used to be an old wheeze about Cambridge not really being a part of the United States. The same remark was made by someone in New Haven but Cambridge was changed to New Haven. Everyone left after dinner to go to hear the Eliot play and then came back after the theatre to talk about it. (*L* 813–14)

The Bollingen committee in 1953–54 consisted of Stevens (who won the award in 1949–50 after the Pound controversy the year before), Marianne Moore, Randall Jarrell, and Winfield Townley Scott. Stevens refers to this committee as "it," whereas in the next sentence he refers to himself—having a more than ordinary evening in New Haven—as "I." Syntactically, Stevens disassociates himself from the committee's praise for Auden; moreover, the awarding of the prize did not insure that the two poets would actually meet: the Bollingen Committee held no formal event for Auden; the prize money was awarded to Auden by Yale's University Librarian.[11] But an announcement of Auden's award, presumably written by the committee members, was released to the press and a carbon copy was eventually found in Stevens' own volume of Auden's *Poems* (1930), a fact that reveals Stevens' familiarity with at least Auden's early work as well as his attention to the honor given Auden.[12] The announcement reads as follows:

> The Committee of Award of the Bollingen Prize in Poetry of the Yale University Library awards the prize of 1953 to W. H. Auden. Mr. Auden is to us the poet. A tough thinker, he is a man who expresses himself acutely and with poetic vivacity. In his identity as an American he has become a permanent part of American poetry. The Committee is delighted to honor him.[13]

Emphasizing his American "identity," the announcement salutes and enlists Auden as a national poet, together with previous prizewinners such as Stevens.

Stevens and Auden each held the other poet in high regard, even if admiration was tinged with a critical distance from, or a troublesome self-identification with, the other's work. As "In Praise of Limestone" and "Kairos and Logos" reveal, Stevens was an important poet and figure for Auden. Stevens' poetry expounded a way of thinking and acting in the world that, to Auden, seemed both politically inadequate and poetically dishonest. As "Miss God on Mr. Stevens" reveals, Auden also conceives of Stevens as a slightly ridiculous poet in his self-made world of mind puzzles, someone less formidable than frustrating, largely because he aggravated Auden's own self-critique. Auden's portrait of Stevens essentially calls attention to Auden more than it actually compels us to reconsider Stevens' work, since many of the poems in *Transport to Summer* celebrate an earthly, physical, and flawed world, not escapes of the imagination. Characteristically private about personal and poetic matters, Stevens turned down many opportunities to meet other people, most likely missing any gathering that included Auden. Perhaps intimidated by Auden's success with poetry charged by politics, Stevens still would have enjoyed knowing Auden. The meeting between these two poets might not have been "actual," but it was certainly on both of their minds.

Columbia University

Notes

[1] A shortened version of this essay with the title "Wallace and Wystan: Antimythological Meetings," appeared in *The W. H. Auden Society Newsletter,* Number 23 (December 2002): 12–23. I would like to thank Edward Mendelson, Ann Mikkelson, and Nadia Herman Colburn for their helpful suggestions. I am also grateful to the Henry H. Huntington Library, the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, and the Library of Congress for permission to quote from unpublished material.

[2] The poem is under copyright by the Estate of W. H. Auden and is printed here with the permission of the Estate. Although Auden's copy of *Transport to Summer* has not been found, Alan Ansen—Auden's late amanuensis—reports that Auden's poem was written in a copy of the Stevens volume. Ansen's transcript of the poem is housed in the Berg Collection of the New York City Public Library, written on the bottom right-hand corner of a note amid letters from Auden to Ansen, with the label: "WHA in a copy of Transport to Summer." A variant of the poem also turns up in a July 10,

1947, letter from Auden to Ursula Niebuhr, in which Auden comments on his reading of *Transport to Summer*. The text of the poem, untitled and with some slight variations, follows this note: "Have been reading the latest Wallace Stevens, some of it is very good, but he provoked me to the following little snoot" (Library of Congress, Reinhold Niebuhr Papers, Box 34). (The date of the letter and text of the poem are misquoted in *Remembering Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. Ursula Niebuhr.) Three drafts of the poem, under the title "Art History," appear in Auden's notebook, Poems 1947[–49], also housed in the Berg Collection of the New York City Public Library, showing the poem in its various stages of composition. John Fuller, in his *W. H. Auden: A Commentary*, quotes the text of the poem from Auden's letter to Niebuhr.

[3] Despite the literary, geographic, and social proximity between the two poets in the 1940s and 1950s, they might never have met. Possibly they crossed paths in and around New York City, for instance in November 1953 when Stevens was the spokesperson for a committee that tried to raise funds for Dylan Thomas' widow after Thomas died. Auden, among many others, signed the appeal (Brazeau 57). Another likely meeting might have occurred on October 1, 1954, at a lunch that Knopf held when Stevens' *Collected Poems* was published. The guest list included Auden, although it is unclear whether he actually attended or if the two poets talked (Brazeau 196).

[4] The phrase "polytheism of Ancient" is crossed out in Auden's letter to Ursula Niebuhr as well, replaced with "flighty divinities of."

[5] Fuller refers to Robert Craft's anecdote of Auden himself pursued in Naples by a gang of "gamins" (408). See Craft's *Stravinsky: Chronicle of a Friendship 1948–1971,* 25.

[6] "Esthétique du Mal" was written at the request of John Crowe Ransom for his *Kenyon Review*. The poem, in part, responds to a letter to the editor from a soldier who lamented that the poetry in the *Kenyon Review* was "cut off from pain." Furthermore, canto III ("His firm stanzas hang like hives in hell") was based on the poems Jean Wahl sent to Stevens, written while Wahl was imprisoned at Drancy (Filreis, *Actual World* 130–37).

[7] "The Ironic Hero: Some Reflections on *Don Quixote*" was first published in *The Third Hour*, IV (1949): 43–50. "Religion and the Intellectuals, A Symposium: James Agee, Hannah Arendt, Newton Arvin, W. H. Auden, John Dewey, Robert Graves, Marianne Moore, I. A. Richards," *Partisan Review* 17, no. 2 (February 1950): 103–42.

[8] In "Effects of Analogy" (1948), Stevens discusses the role of a poet's personality and emotional sensibility in his choice of subject matter. Although Eliot's "disassociation of sensibility" is never mentioned (but obviously challenged), Stevens quotes Eliot's "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" as an example of musical poetry. In Stevens' review of Marianne Moore's *Selected Poems*, "A Poet That Matters" (1935), Stevens points to Eliot as the "most brilliant instance of the romantic" in the sense that he was defining "romantic" in this essay (*OP* 221). However, Stevens' earlier comments on reading "The Waste Land," in a November 11, 1922, letter, suggest a less favorable opinion of Eliot: "Eliot's poem is, of course, the rage. As poetry it is surely negligible. What it may be in other respects is a large subject on which one could talk for a month. If it is the supreme cry of despair it is Eliot's and not his generation's. Personally, I think it's a bore" (Filreis, "Stevens' Letters to Alice Corbin Henderson" 19). In a much later letter to William Van O'Connor, Stevens corrects a mistake in O'Connor's scholarly work on Stevens, and Stevens' comment reveals his obstinate desire to separate himself from contemporary poets despite obviously knowing their work: "I am quoted as saying that I knew [T. S.] Eliot only slightly and principally through correspondence. As a matter of fact, I don't know him at all and have had no correspondence whatever with him. . . . Eliot and I are dead opposites and I have been doing about everything that he would not be likely to do" (*L* 677).

[9] After Stevens' death, Samuel French Morse and Donald Engley were appointed to go through and appraise Stevens' library on Westerley Terrace. See Peter Brazeau's oral interview with Morse, June 29, 1976 (Huntington Library, HM 53727). Much of this interview is included in Brazeau's *Parts of a World.*

[10] Auden's 1935 marriage to Erika Mann, although not without emotional investment, was nonetheless brought about by her need for a British passport to escape from Nazi persecution.

[11] A January 11, 1954, letter to Auden from James Babb, Yale's University Librarian, congratulates him on the award and encloses a check for $1000. On a carbon copy of the typed letter (which was cc'd to Stevens), Babb has written in his own hand on the bottom: "Presented to him personally this AM" (Huntington Library, WAS 2597).

[12] Stevens kept the Bollingen announcement in his copy of Auden's *Poems* (1930) (Huntington Library 323688). The announcement was removed from the volume after the Stevens Papers and Library were acquired by the Huntington Library in 1975.

[13] Huntington Library, WAS 4037. The names of the committee members are also listed below the announcement.

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Poems

The Saved Man

Even in our time of the crumbling earth,
the undusted side-tables and sideways glances,
the myth of the saved man persists.

As always the saved man comes
from the dustier parts of the unending empire,
his feathers well-sprung, brighter, redder.

He sings an unusual song, his lamentations
bring tears to all and sundry. He won't shut up.

If pressed the saved man will drop down
and on all fours perform a wondrous dance.

Yet his backward glance is unrelenting:
the accusing past is the saved man.
He longs for a proper Roman funeral.

Raza Ali Hasan
Austin, Tex.

Makings of the Sun

You liked your freedom green, your harmony
Black. Discord, subtlety and despair, there
Already, cloaked in word-play, jollity
And jest, as blackbirds wear the sun's stark glare.
And then imagination took the fore,
The *Necessary Angel*, God, or some
Idea bright. Who ever could ignore
The sun that shows how dark you have become?
Debris of life and mind, your final stand—
The Rock. Unbroken long and sluggish lines . . .
Could I ask, is the oak leaf still a hand;
Is thought the single light that still refines?
There is no comfort here—the empty mind,
Where crystal trees are never trees we find.

Anton Vander Zee
East Palo Alto, Calif.

Another Reader Leaning Late

The house was restless and the world tossed in its truth.
The summer night battled the lamp-lit window as the reader sat reading her book.
Each word was pressed to resemble an expression other than itself or
mauled till it dangled off the ledge of a line.
Upper case *i*'s bristled,
active verbs tensed, while she watched
innocent *o*'s get sucked into her dog's deep-dreaming wheeze
and two capital *t*'s scalped by a low-flying jet.
She saw articles give in to a gust only to be smashed into smiling billboards.
Finer adjectives fell victim to thieves.
All the *l*'s collapsed under the weight of three 18-wheelers on an overpass two
blocks away. Memory and worry riddled the margins;
periods detonated like landmines.
Every third *m* hunched over in grief for a dead or dying child.
Some sentences lasted for twenty-five years.
She sighted an *x* just before it exploded; charred
rubble and carnage filled the next fourteen pages.
Armies of assertions in unintelligible alphabets burst their way into the text,
fighting hand-to-hand for the frozen turf amidst the blaring tick of the clock.
Footnotes whimpered and ran for cover. The house wasn't quiet;
the noise of the world impinged. The reader became her book,
and it weighed heavier and heavier in her hands.
The pages multiplied by the millions, but she
couldn't put the book down for all the clamor.
She had to access the meaning behind all the noise, the noise itself not
only summer and night but much most the imperfections of the world,
and she leaned and wanted to lean further still if she only knew which way,
and she could turn the page, but try as she might the covers would not close
because it had gotten so very very late.

And now the reader sat up and spoke out loud,
demanding definitions of the book's every word
in every language, but especially those in her native tongue.
She stretched her mind to imagine the birth of all words,
the first tongue to mold the shape of the first human utterance,
the first ear to recognize the first meaning of speech,
and she found she could decode the moth's suicidal strike
against the pane. Then an emphatic
I and Thou was what she said:
the conscious being of a thought,
its cavalier construction and its clash,
the truth in a noise-ravaged world in which
there is no other meaning, herself
the reader reading noise and making the noise
of her own imperfect truth as it
was spoken late in summer leaning there.

Carol Bardoff
Dallas, Tex.

The Idea of Order on Ormond Beach

Beauty is blinding—
it comes of a sudden,
a mansion on water,
delightful deceit.

Beauty is shameless—
it builds on one slowly
to water its palm trees
and widen its seat.

Beauty is freakish—
it follows our footsteps,
allowing our maddening
moods in the heat.

Beauty is starlit—
it comes like a child
who enters your chamber,
stones under her feet.

Sam Cherubin
Windsor, Conn.

Thirteen Ways of Knowing, or Wallace Stevens in Southeast Asia

1.
A vine winds its serpent coils of thought
Around the palm trunk of desire, but fastens
In the soil: a gesture of anticipation
For the day the tree will wither.

2.
The sea undulates in sable waves of thought
And tosses off crushed-albacore gleams
Of ideas into the mirror-sky above,
To be registered as stars distantly thinking.

3.
A field of luminescent green levitates lightly
Into a mountain pass, dissipating into azure:
The mind vanishing into the tendrils of an idea.

4.
The wind waves through green fields soaked in rice;
A thought oscillates as the mind changes.

5.
The subtle blush of dew across a cheek,
Bending to wet monsoon winds, opens up
A world of truth to fingers brushing
The hemline of the jaw. The color
Plays electric notes in the desiring palm.

6.
The mynah wraps a bending note around
A steel telephone pole, quavering with
The electricity of a thought, transmitted.

7.
The rain drones in particular fancies.
Lightning cracks the shell
The mind has constructed to protect
Itself from useful indecision.

8.
A black plume of smoke drifting from
Burning scrub into the swaying palms
Signals a ponderous query:
To know the true or burn the false?

9.
Into the slanting hill, a single palm
Leans, bending from the past of wind,
Dreaming of an upright future.

10.
There is the sound of rain pelting
Syncopated tenor rhythms on banana leaves
Bending with the weight of fallen water.
There is, as well, the mind deciding
Not to decide, in favor of a world
Infusing thought into its veins.

11.
There is no taste of green so full
As fibrous fields of rice stalks rising
In the mind on palettes of edible color.

12.
The white-light wash of mid-day sun
Blanks the world through eyes exposed
To the blindness of the daily mind.

13.
At dawn, the full coherence of black
Crumbles into colors sprinkling the world.
There is no splintered orange sun, no
Cutting line of sky-blue light, no gray-
Bleeding-purple mountain, without
This new awakening of the mind.

Ashby Kinch
Missoula, Mont.

Song for Father's Day

That would be waving and that would be crying. . . .
—"Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu"

Fathers in cars,
fathers in pickups,
fathers in blue Chevrolets.

My daughters wave
the peace sign I waved
when my father watched
in the rearview mirror.

He told us the bomb
would destroy the world.

And that would be waving
good-bye, good-bye.

I've never told my daughters about him.
They are too young now,
about the age when he left us,
devoted his life to the greater cause.

And that would be waving
good-bye.

I cannot tell them
how my father's smile
appears on my face
as I watch them wave
in the rearview mirror
when someone flashes
the peace sign back
now that he's waving
good-bye, good-bye.

And that would be waving
good-bye.

David Linebarger
Tahlequah, Okla.

Reviews

The Violence Within, The Violence Without: Wallace Stevens and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Poetics.
By Jacqueline Vaught Brogan. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003.

Jacqueline Vaught Brogan's new book, *The Violence Within, The Violence Without: Wallace Stevens and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Poetics*, is the latest in a recent line of books (those by James Longenbach, Eleanor Cook, Alan Filreis, and Angus Cleghorn particularly come to mind) seeking to reread Stevens and rescue him from the stereotypes that have unfortunately caricatured him as, at best, a politically distanced and aloof aesthete and, at worst, a racist, sexist, right-wing Republican. These books have made it safe to read and teach Wallace Stevens again by showing him to be particularly sensitive and responsive to the world around him. *The Violence Within, The Violence Without* is a significant and engaging contribution to this political and ethical rehabilitation of Stevens' reputation. In Brogan's argument, World War II—and the violence it both brought to and exposed in American society—constitutes the major turning point of Stevens' career, precipitating changes both in his poetics and in his perceptions of the world and of the female voice his early poetry sought to silence. Indeed, as Brogan sees it, the Stevens of the post-World War II years is a Stevens who has much to say to the contemporary world of politics and war and even, perhaps surprising for some, to the racial and gender struggles that continue to mark our times. Through Brogan's careful analyses, which embed his poetry within a historical context that has often been overlooked by even his best critics, Stevens' voice gains a political relevance and even a prophetic tenor to which we have not always paid close enough attention.

The key to Brogan's insights into Stevens lies in the fact that she takes seriously the line from "Description without Place," "It is a world of words to the end of it," and thinks through the political, poetic, and social consequences of the poet's increasingly profound sense of the constitutive power of language "in shaping the structures and experiences of our actual world," a power that includes, as the real and rhetorical violence of World War II convinces him, the "corollary power for destruction" (5). Brogan carefully traces the changes in Stevens' attitudes toward this linguistic power, beginning with his "initial aesthetic battle" (viii) with the objectivism of William Carlos Williams; continuing through the stages of Stevens' aesthetic resistance to the "pressure of reality" in the form of World War II; and concluding with an analysis of his mature "revolutionary poetics" that amounts to a "call for poetic responsibility in describing our future world" (viii), a responsibility *for* a future that will be shaped by the words we use to talk, think, and write about it. She thus argues that Stevens' concern for language—often displayed by critics as the principal piece of evidence indicting the poet as a politically irrelevant aesthete—instead forms the very foundation of a poetics demanding a responsiveness *to* the world that generates a responsibility *for* the world, and that his

power as a poet is to be found neither in some strictly inner realm of the aesthetic imagination (the New Critics' dream of poetic autonomy), nor in some strictly outer realm of world history (the dream of some of our more prosaic contemporary criticisms), but rather at the intersection of the two, where there is the "confluence and continuum of poetry and politics" (3). As Brogan nicely puts it, "both as a lawyer and as a poet . . . , Stevens well understood that words have power, that [for that reason alone] poetry is political, and that pushed to the extreme the 'theory / Of poetry' may actually be the 'theory of life' " (6). Hence for Brogan's Stevens, the step from poetics to politics is a short one indeed.

The book's eight chapters follow the twists and turns of that step, a trajectory that leads from "The Poems of Our Climate" through to the poems of *The Rock* and that results in the revolutionary poetics that emerges with the maturity of Stevens' post-World War II voice. Where that early poem is, for Brogan, mostly concerned to mock Williams' descriptive poetry, it nevertheless forms the basis for Stevens' later, more politically charged poetics by highlighting the "elusive, even allusive, relation of world, mind, and word" (16), and, when taken together with "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War," demonstrates "the degree to which Stevens recognized that words taken naively as fact are dangerous" (23). It is for Brogan the increasing weight of this recognition that precipitates the fundamental change in Stevens' aesthetics "from one responsive to the poetics of his time to one politically responsive to the actual world" (7), a change that pivots around the emotional, intellectual, and linguistic pressures he felt as a poet and citizen during World War II. Brogan argues in her fourth chapter, for example, that "as the war continued and expanded, it became increasingly difficult for Stevens to accept as valid or even as efficacious the kind of aesthetic resistance figured in the architectonics of 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' " (61). He thus writes the poems of *Transport to Summer*, and especially "Esthétique du Mal," out of a new understanding of evil and of the need for poetry to witness to the pain and atrocities of real war. Over time, however, even this refined sense of poetic witnessing gives way to a more revolutionary sense of poetry's mission in the world and to a "call for the poet to change the world through the 'spelling' of proper words," a call Brogan hears initially and most compellingly in "The Auroras of Autumn," in which she finds Stevens "advocating . . . a profound sense of the power of words to construct a better world" (91, 92).

This is the revolutionary Stevens to whom Brogan counsels us to pay close attention, for this is the Stevens who has much to tell us about our contemporary world. In her last three chapters she shows us a Stevens trying to cure himself of the infected language that has contributed to the violence, racism, and sexism of our times. She concludes, perhaps surprisingly, that "while Stevens would always suffer from a schism within himself, one that was ultimately derived from cultural biases against women . . . , he also came as close as it was possible for a person in his time and circumstances to 'curing' himself of the 'infection in the sentence' that the dominant, phallocentric structures in our culture inevitably breed" (99). Part of this cure involves the recovery of the feminine voice long suppressed by the failed rhetoric of the

"virile" poet, the discovery of this female figure within the male poet himself, and the annunciation (in "Description without Place") of a "new openness to the metaphorically feminine [that] Stevens could not possibly have intended at the beginning of this horrific, and emasculating, war" (115). And the cure starts with World War II's "violence without."

Filled with insightfully elaborated contextual information (Chapter 7 gives us a particularly intriguing reading of Wrightman Williams' drawings for "Esthétique du Mal"), *The Violence Within, The Violence Without* does an excellent job of showing us a Stevens struggling with the "violence without" and, in the process, developing a revolutionary poetics responsive to and responsible for a world that remains, to the end of it, a "world of words."

Michael Beehler
Montana State University

Word Sightings: Poetry and Visual Media in Stevens, Bishop, and O'Hara. By Sarah Riggs. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Sarah Riggs offers her admittedly "quirky" readings (xv) of Stevens, Bishop, and O'Hara as a contribution to what she calls "the emerging field of cultural poetry critique" (xviii). In fact, her approach to reading is poststructuralist; Barthes's concept of the "reality effect" is the ruling principle of analysis. Riggs faults deconstruction for confining poetry to a hermetic realm of language that made it impossible to trace connections between poetry and culture. Nevertheless, her attempt to defend Stevens against critics of his politics, such as Marjorie Perloff and Alan Filreis, backs Riggs into a deconstructionist *aporia*. Filreis, she claims, falls into a "referential trap" by assuming that there is such a thing as an "actual," historical world. "As I understand it," writes Riggs, "Stevens' evocations of history and the actual world are a ruse, and what he is most after is a highly complex and sublimated poetic critique of the idea of reality *tout court*" (6). If there is an actual world for Stevens, as Riggs understands him, it is the world of language objectified. The "word sightings" of Riggs's title are not sightings of the world through the medium of words, but rather sightings of words as the only world available for observation.

The cultural relevance of this way of using words, which Riggs holds to be distinctively poetic, is that it sets poetry in critical opposition to the dominance that visual media have acquired in modern culture through advances in technology. Visual media privilege the referent, especially as technological advance appears to increase the accuracy by which the referent—the thing seen—is reproduced. Meanwhile, technology transforms the act of seeing into a mechanical process. Objective image is severed from subjective feeling or imagination. As modern American poets, Stevens, Bishop, and O'Hara confront this crisis with special urgency because American culture has most fully embraced what Riggs calls (though without reference to Leo Marx) the "technological sublime" (42, 108). Within this context, Riggs attributes to Stevens, Bishop, and O'Hara the same goal as poets: "to empower their personal, alienated, emotive response to events—to draw subjective feelings more closely in line with external contexts" (xiv). However, Stevens employs a very different

strategy to achieve this goal than the strategies of the other two poets Riggs analyzes. Whether the difference is to be attributed to individual temperament or to the historical experience of the three successive generations that Riggs seeks to represent in her choice of poets, she does not entirely make clear. But she makes very clear her understanding of Stevens' difference from Bishop and O'Hara. Whereas they respond to the power of the image in modern culture by imitating that power in their poetry to a parodic, self-critical extreme, Stevens, over the course of his career, succeeds increasingly in extinguishing the power of the image, creating a space for an alternative "image-resistant language reality" (xiii).

Riggs organizes her discussion of each poet around a particular instrument of technology that she believes distinguishes a peculiar relationship to the visual image and its dominance in modern culture. For Bishop, the characteristic instrument is a device for magnifying or intensifying vision, variously exemplified in the camera obscura, stereoscope, microscope, telescope, or binoculars. For O'Hara, the characteristic device is the cinema, with its patented effects of "hyperrealism," from Vistavision to Technicolor. The emblem of technology that Riggs assigns to Stevens is one that we might not think of as "technological" at all: it is the postcard, which Riggs situates historically as an instance of "the commercialization of the still photograph" (51). It is not only the picture side of the postcard that interests Riggs, however. She gives some attention to the development of the convention that reserves one side of the postcard to text (address and message) and the other side to image, and this double-sidedness is the feature that becomes key to Riggs's analysis of Stevens' poetic practice. Stevens writes on the reverse of, through the negation of, the image, according to Riggs. Although this thesis helps to sharpen Riggs's focus in reading Stevens, it implies a view of technology that dissipates the historical specificity of her study. For Riggs, with Derrida's *The Post Card* in view (116 n 15), writing is as much a technology as is photography. Historicists of various persuasions have long since made the case that deconstruction renders texts ahistorical by dwelling on the nature of signifying practice as it has always been, literally since the beginning of history.

Although Riggs has done some archival work in examining the many postcards to and from Stevens that are now in the Stevens collection at the Huntington Library, she does not treat postcards as historical documents, as Alan Filreis does, for instance, in *Wallace Stevens and the Actual World*. Rather, Stevens' postcards and his comments on them elsewhere in his correspondence are for Riggs documents of desire, in particular the desire for an "actual world" that sets up the "referential trap" into which Riggs sees Filreis as falling. Stevens' response to postcards shows him looking into that same trap, according to Riggs, but his poetry shows him dancing around the trap, as if celebrating an awareness of it that simultaneously enables his, and his reader's, escape. Riggs evokes the experience of reading Stevens through minutely attentive and artfully playful analysis that will reward her readers, both for the quality of her observations and for the stimulus to undertake fresh readings on their own. Two poems that receive Riggs's extended attention and that occupy pivotal points in her argument are "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" and "Large

Red Man Reading." She enters the former by way of the line in section XXVIII about "Bergamo on a postcard, Rome after dark" (*CP* 486), and plays the darkening of Rome in the text against the illumination of Rome, so to speak, on a postcard sent to Stevens from Rome by Thomas McGreevy (reproduced by Riggs, 9–10). Entry to "Large Red Man Reading" is supplied by a postcard from Stevens' hometown of Reading (pun intended), Pennsylvania, sent to Stevens by John Zimmerman Harner. It shows the Mansion House hotel where, as Riggs puts it, "Stevens had spent a night, ghostlike, in the displacement of no longer having a home in Reading" (18), a displacement further achieved by the postcard itself, which preserves an image of the hotel after the building had been demolished.

The operation of displacement is, of course, key to the poststructuralist understanding of textuality and, by extension, of desire (see Mark Krupnick, *Displacement: Derrida and After*). It is rather surprising, therefore, to find Riggs emerging from her analysis of the "lack" addressed in "Large Red Man Reading" with a reference, not to Derrida or Lacan, but to Helen Vendler, claiming desire as "Stevens' great subject" (Riggs 24). If Riggs's dependence on poststructuralism will seem outmoded to some practitioners of contemporary cultural studies, her cultural critique will appear even more old-fashioned, grounded in the "despairing humanism" that Riggs hears Vendler defending in Stevens and that can be traced at least as far back as Matthew Arnold. Although this discovery increases uncertainty about Riggs's position, what it suggests about Stevens may yet prove valuable. Arnold's contention that poetry would preserve culture because "poetry attaches its emotion to the idea" rather than the historical fact certainly resonates in the conclusion of "Large Red Man Reading," that *poesis* "spoke the feeling for them, which was what they had lacked" (*CP* 424).

Terence Diggory
Skidmore College

The Modernist Response to Chinese Art: Pound, Moore, Stevens.
By Zhaoming Qian. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2003.

The impact of Chinese art, as disseminated by such prestigious colonizers of Eastern aesthetics as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the British Museum, has been so crucial to the evolution of twentieth-century American poetics that one wants to ask, why has a book such as Zhaoming Qian's *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art: Pound, Moore, Stevens* not appeared sooner? The fine black-and-white reproductions in the volume—as of dragons appearing and disappearing from ink clouds, long-necked porcelain vases, ink screen poems, and wooden carved objects, some from the poets' personal collections—suggest some reasons why. The allure of these art objects is surely not mono-generic, but lies in the supple sharing of material surfaces, spatial planes, dimensions, artistic gestures, and the very ink of both calligraphy and drawing. The harmoniously shared space of image and word lacks a Western equivalent, stemming as it does from a precious cultural difference. Difference, which

drew the modern poets to Chinese art, is also what has presented an obstacle to the critical readership of the poetry in the decades since.

Qian's objectives are multifold, and his efforts are not to forge a new kind of criticism through an intersection of Western methods with Eastern perspectives, but to establish the plural grounds of influence for Chinese art on the work of the three poets in question. This goal is impressively achieved through ample and meticulously researched biographical details, accounts of gallery and museum exhibitions in America and England, and summaries of Chinese spiritual and aesthetic traditions (one can use the book as a manual of sorts, with its fascinating accounts of Dao, Chan, and Confucian beliefs). Woven throughout are apt observations on particular poems as they arise from these contexts. Impediments to interart studies seem to be lifting finally where poetry is concerned, and Zhaoming Qian's book is a strong contribution in this direction.

For Pound, Moore, and Stevens, what were they after in their particular fascinations with Chinese aesthetics? "One of the arguments emphasized throughout," writes Qian, "is that a single modernist poet's appreciation of Chinese art is best understood in the broader context of modernist appreciation of Chinese aesthetic as a whole" (30). The book is refreshingly organized by thematic contexts, with sub-chapters on the individual poets. The first section introduces a broad context, looking at the dislocation of significant swaths of Chinese artistic heritage (gracefully but also honestly stated as such) into America and Britain. The poets were not initiators so much as players in a larger field of receptivity to Chinese art. Massive museum acquisitions and traveling exhibits, peaking in 1909 in London and rippling through New York and New England, coincided with the poets' leanings toward minimalism, abstracted colors and light, and, as Qian points out with respect to Stevens, an atmosphere akin to that of "The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm."

Deftly exploring Asian conceptions of beauty, Qian follows the poets and curators in not excluding Japanese or Korean art from the discussion, since they make no such strict divisions. A section of the book, "Picturing the Other," is devoted to ekphrastic contexts for the poetry—verbal representations in response to Chinese painting, and in Moore's case, an exhibition of Ming–Qing porcelain. Treating Stevens' "Six Significant Landscapes," Moore's "Nine Nectarines," and Pound's Seven Lakes Canto, Qian focuses on a point of clarity, a single point of sight, in Stevens' poem: "An old man sits / In the shadow of a pine tree / In China."

Western tensions and attractions between the arts, which the book approaches via classics of Western interart studies—as by W. J. T. Mitchell and Wendy Steiner—are not only not at issue in the art reproduced, but precisely find resolution, clarity, wholeness here. Surely tensions registered between the arts are ripples of deeper tensions embedded in Western experience. Citing Mitchell, Qian touches on the idea of the attraction to another art form as an attempt to overcome difference. Qian suggests that, for Stevens, the Southern Song landscape painting hanging in galleries was appealing because "it appeared to be the best means of expression for clarifying the otherness in his character" (109). The power to say the unsayable of the Dao or Chan is a power

the Chinese artist has that, Qian convincingly states, enables Stevens to build values less on " 'cause-effect events, assertion, anxiety' " and more on " 'consciousness, negation, serenity' " (110). For Stevens, Moore, and Pound each, the book gives interesting evidence, in detective-like fashion, of repeated museum and library visits, correspondence, and important relationships with specialists in Asian art, such as Pound's relation to Laurence Binyon ("BinBin"), curator and expert of Chinese art at the British Museum (whose writings Stevens also read). *The Modernist Response to Chinese Art* has many of the pleasures of a biography, with some of the accompanying exquisite boredom of delving into each applicable detail. The treatments of the poets' collecting instincts, such as the chapter on "Stevens as Art Collector"—chronicling the arrival of a Buddha-like woodcarving from Beijing and a pair of Hiroshige prints—are engaging and pleasurable. One's surprise does not wear off at how an austere poetics can derive and feed upon an intense pleasure in material acquisition.

Some of the tripartite mergings Qian elucidates are chronologically synchronized in striking ways, and this study highlights parallels between the often geographically separated poets. The interest in isolating color, almost to the point of abstraction, and assigning highly specific names to colors manifests itself in the work of Pound, Moore, and Stevens alike—with interesting similarities and differences. Each poet adapted a Chinese palette to words: Stevens on a 1909 New York visit to an exhibit of Chinese art, writing to Elsie of " 'deep lapis-lazuli and orange, and opaque / green, fawn-color, black, and gold' " (*L* 137; later to become part of the poem "Colors," *OP* 3–4); Moore expertly naming the "Chinese vermilion" of Chinese lanterns, walls, and brilliant bridal red; Pound's writing of "In a Station of the Metro." An unidentified fourteenth-century Chinese artist's *White Heron on a Snow-colored Willow* (Boston MFA), reproduced in the lucid chapter on Stevens and Chan Art, offers not a world apart, but a world eagerly absorbed—one that answers a longing for harmony within disjointed relations between parts of a world. Qian reads the winter scene through elements of Chan Art: the subjects appear natural, subtle/profound, free from attachment, tranquil, austere/sublime—and, interestingly—asymmetric. Qian admits that, yes, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" can be read with reference to haiku, but it can specifically be read with reference to Chan concepts, including the preference for irregular, odd numbers, and the fact that traditional Chinese art involved competitions in presenting shifting perspectives.

Interestingly, the predecessor to this book, Zhaoming Qian's first book, *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* (1995), isolates the Chinese influence to verbal representation. Qian is right to point to a gap the current book fills. But the filling in of one gap may merely signal that there are others nearby, not just of interart work, but also of intercultural work. And why not, at a moment when difference is so strongly marked as a danger zone? In following the poets into hazardous terrain, we see that the poems do not disappear, but become more clearly what they are: parts of the world.

Sarah Riggs
Paris, France

News and Comments

* * *

The year 2004 will mark both the 125th anniversary of Wallace Stevens' birth and the 50th of the publication of the *Collected Poems*. In commemoration, the University of Connecticut will host an international conference on April 8–10, 2004, "Celebrating Wallace Stevens: The Poet of Poets in Connecticut." Poets Mark Doty, Susan Howe, James Longenbach, J. D. McClatchy, and Ellen Bryant Voigt will discuss Stevens' influence on American poetry, and Voigt will be recognized as this year's Wallace Stevens Poet (sponsored by the Hartford Insurance Group). Other highlights include a keynote address by Helen Vendler, an afternoon "Wallace Stevens Walk," sessions featuring leading Stevens scholars, and a lecture on Stevens' family by Eugene Gaddis of the Wadsworth Atheneum. For further information, check the conference website, http://english.uconn.edu/wallacestevens2004, or contact Glen MacLeod, glen.macleod@uconn.edu.

* * *

Call for Papers: The American Literature Association annual conference will take place May 27–30, 2004, at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco in Embarcadero Center. The deadline for proposals is January 30, 2004. Send proposals to Alfred Bendixen, English Dept., California State University, Los Angeles, CA 90032-8110 (fax: 323.343.6470; e-mail: abendix@calstatela.edu). The conference website is www.americanliterature.org.

* * *

The 8th annual Wallace Stevens Birthday Bash took place on October 4, 2003, at the Hartford Public Library. Sponsored by the Hartford Friends and Enemies of Wallace Stevens and the Connecticut Center for the Book, the celebration featured Susan Howe speaking on "The Drowsy Motion of the River R: Some Poems in *The Rock*."

* * *

In Chicago, on July 17, 2003, the Aurea Ensemble and puppeteer Blair Thomas presented Ben Johnston's String Quartet "Amazing Grace," based on Stevens' poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." The event was sponsored by Sherwood Conservatory of Music and Blair Thomas & Co. The performance also included the release of *The Blackbird*, a book with CD by Blair Thomas, designed by Jason Greenberg and Art Works Design.

* * *

A conference at Mount Holyoke on November 6–8, 2003, entitled "Artists, Intellectuals, and World War II: The Pontigny Encounters at Mount Holyoke College, 1942–1944," discussed the week-long seminar held in August 1943, whose participants were Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, John Peale Bishop,

and Jean Wahl. For the seminar, Stevens wrote his lecture "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet." The keynote speaker for the 2003 symposium was Harvard philosopher Stanley Cavell.

* * *

Dean Rader reports that after seeing an article on Degas in ***mental_*** *floss*, a magazine popularizing interesting people and topics, he proposed doing an article on Stevens. This is the response he received:

> Thanks for the article idea. Believe it or not, there is an English professor at USC who is writing a piece on Ezra Pound that is structured just like the Degas piece we ran. The problem is, there was some debate amongst the staff as to whether or not Pound was well-known enough to run an article on him. You see, the people and artists we like to cover in the magazine—as well as the books we feature in our "The Book" column—are unquestionably recognizable. The idea is to draw people in who say, "Yeah, of course I know that name, but I can't really remember what I learned about him/her in school." I just don't think our readers are going to be that familiar with Wallace Stevens and I'm therefore turned off by the idea.
>
> That said, we always love to have professors write for the magazine, so I would love to hear any other submission ideas you have.

* * *

Wallace Stevens' personal art collection is being offered for sale as a group through Elliot's Books of Northford, Conn. The collection contains 32 works of art, some made famous by his poems (see display ad for more information). Stevens' rare books and letters have been on the antiquarian market over the past year. William Reese and Co. offered three Stevens titles: a first edition of *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* for $225 (catalog 218, November 2002); and, in catalog 224 (June 2003), a first edition of *Owl's Clover* (The Alcestis Press, 1936, copy #85 of 85 numbered copies printed on Strathmore all-rag paper, inscribed by J. Ronald Lane Latimer, priced at $9,500, and the 1995 edition of *Vassar Viewed Veraciously* (edited by Daniel H. Woodward for the Windhover Press), offered at $65. Michael Silverman of London listed in his March 10, 2003, catalog a November 19, 1951, typed letter signed from Stevens to Henry Leffert giving him the title of a paper. The letter was offered at £475. David J. Holmes Autographs listed in his catalog 79 (July 2003) a typed note signed for $875. Dated October 7, 1946, the note is from Stevens to George Wittenborn of Wittenborn and Co., a New York art book dealer and publisher, ordering "a copy of Alphabet and Image." Finally, a copy of *Parts of a World* (1942) was offered in September 2003 (catalog 128) by Ken Lopez Bookseller for $150.

Sara S. Hodson
The Huntington Library

The Wallace Stevens Society Program
MLA
December 27–30, 2003
San Diego

Brilliant Corners:
The Textures of Minute Particulars in Wallace Stevens

Session 572, Monday, December 29, 2003
1:45–3:00 p.m. Ford C, Manchester Grand Hyatt
Program arranged by the Wallace Stevens Society
Presiding: Joseph Duemer, Clarkson University

1. "Wallace Stevens's Defense of Poetry in 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,' " Jeannine Johnson, Harvard University
2. "Wallace Stevens and the World of Tea," Nico Israel, Hunter College
3. " 'A Little Hard to See': Wittgenstein, Stevens, and the Uses of Unclarity," Andrew L. Osborn, Whitman College
4. "Wallace and Wystan: Antimythological Meetings," Liesl Olson, Columbia University

Celebrating Wallace Stevens
The Poet of Poets in Connecticut
University of Connecticut, Storrs
April 8–10, 2004

The year 2004 marks the 125th anniversary of the birth of Wallace Stevens, as well as the 50th anniversary of the publication of his *Collected Poems*. On April 8–10, 2004, the University of Connecticut will host an international conference to commemorate these events. Join us in celebrating Stevens's life and poetry, examining his legacy and influence, and exploring the future of Stevens studies.

For further information, please contact

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Storrs, CT 06269-4025

charles.mahoney@uconn.edu or glen.macleod@uconn.edu

Visit our website
http://english.uconn.edu/wallacestevens2004

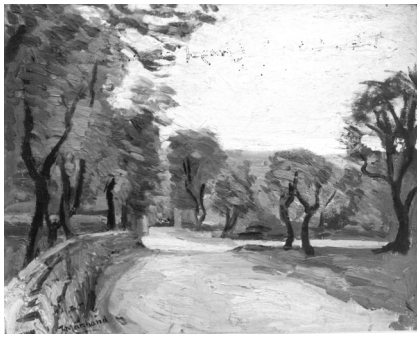
For Sale
Wallace Stevens' Personal Art Collection
∾ Sold Only as a Group ∾

The collection consists of thirty-two works of art that Stevens purchased starting in 1931, mostly through the Parisian book dealers Anatole and Paule Vidal.

Included are the still life by Tal Coat that inspired "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" and Jean Marchand's *Les Oliviers*, alluded to in "Connoisseur of Chaos."

The collection also contains a Georges Braque color lithograph *Nature morte III: Verre et fruit*, pulled by Braque himself, an oil painting by Camille Bombois, entitled *Le Loiret à Olivet*, a Kandinsky lithograph, a Renoir sketch, a pair of nineteenth-century miniature jade carvings of Pekingese dogs, a Chinese woodcarving, and an Oriental scroll depicting birds.

Still Life, Tal Coat



Les Oliviers, Jean Marchand

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