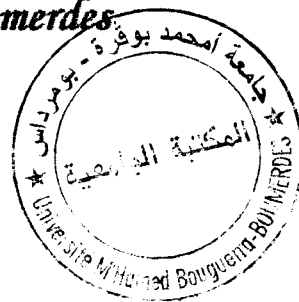


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POETRY AND SECULARISM

WALLACE STEVENS'S "SUPREME FICTION"

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Magister in English*

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this modest work to:

the memory of my grandfather Mouloud
the memory of my uncle Atmane
the memory of my aunt Tassaadit
the memory of my teacher Omar Charallah

GOD BLESS THEM

my dear grandmother Hadjila
my father Abdelkarim
my mother Fatiha
my uncle Abdelmadjid
my aunts: Samia and Djaouida
my dear brothers and sisters
all my friends.

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Abstract

Wallace Stevens offered poetry that he called the "supreme fiction" as a substitute for Christianity. The credibility of the "supreme fiction" as a subject of belief is conditioned by its adherence to reality: abstractness, change and pleasure. Our attempt in this dissertation is to look more closely to Stevens's "supreme fiction" by analyzing these conditions.

The first chapter consists of a historical glimpse of the loss of belief . It also deals with the different reactions of the modernists, including Stevens, to the sense of meaninglessness and aimlessness caused by the loss of belief.

In the second chapter, I discuss the idea that the credibility of the "supreme fiction" depends on its adherence to reality where it springs.

The third chapter is devoted to abstraction as a condition for the supremacy of the "supreme fiction". Abstraction means the rejection of classical myths, Christianity, Rationalism and Romanticism.

The fourth chapter deals with Stevens's notion of change. Change for Stevens is the power of the mind to transform reality. Change also means the ability of the poet to incessantly make new "supreme fiction".

The fifth chapter is an attempt to show whether the pleasure the "supreme fiction" can offer is to the detriment of its commitment.

In my conclusion I have tried to sum up the results of my investigation by insisting on the secular character of the "supreme fiction." I also insist on the fact that the "supreme fiction" is an attempt to cover reality with aesthetics to make it bearable rather than to escape it.

Introduction

Frederick Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God has moved secularism to the center of modern thinking. A world without religion, however, leads to a vacuum in moral and cultural life. The more people abandon their traditional beliefs the more they need to bestow meaning upon human life. For this reason, literature especially poetry has been elevated to the rank of religion to complete a task previously fulfilled by religion. The end of religion has, indeed, led many philosophers, artists, and psychologists of the beginning of the twentieth century to start a quest for a substitute for religion.

It is worth stressing that before the spread of the secular spirit in western culture, religion and literature, especially poetry, had been most of the time complementary. In this respect, Cleo Mc Nelly Kearns writes: "Often, literature had been a medium of critical support for such Judeo-Christian religious doctrines as creation, covenant, exile, incarnation and redemption, and a source of relative stability for various social orders based on their premises."¹ According to TS Eliot, this association between religion and literature happened "when society was moderately healthy."² Nonetheless the advance of science and technology since the mid nineteenth century has sown deep distrust in the traditional Christian beliefs. Secular and materialistic ideas have thus increasingly supplanted

¹ Cleo McNelly Kearns, "Religion, Literature, and Science in the work of T.S. Eliot", in The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot, ed, David Moody, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.77.

² Ibid.

the past religious beliefs, and literature has become a means to question and reject Christianity.

Stevens's poetry attempts to reconcile with the conditions of a contemporary secular life within the limits of what that life allows him to believe. In one of his early poem "The American Sublime", he thus asks: "How does one stand/ To behold the sublime/... how does one feel?"³ Stevens, unlike Eliot, does not evade or condemn the loss of spirituality of contemporary reality. In this context, Frank Kermode writes that "in an age of poetic myth-making, Stevens is almost alone in his respect for those facts, which seem in disconnexion, dead and spiritless."⁴ For example, the poems "The World of Meditation" and "The River of Rivers in Connecticut" suggest that the traditional myths or cultural tales become destructive routines because they challenge the dominant forces of history. Stevens thus opposed modernist efforts to renew Greek classics by disclosing, instead, their rhetorical violence.

It is in accepting modern life that Stevens, as Irving Howe puts it, moves beyond the "crisis of belief"⁵ which troubles his contemporaries to the question of how we shall live with or perhaps beyond it. Stevens rejects any attempt to rehabilitate the traditional beliefs. Instead he suggests the "supreme fiction" as a substitute. The "supreme fiction" is no less than the recognition of humanity, divorced from traditional beliefs which he views as "a noble falsification of the present based on the assumption of the past."⁶

³ Wallace Stevens, Poems by Wallace Stevens, (New York: Vintage books, 1959), p. 67.

⁴ Frank Kermode, Wallace Stevens, (London: Oliver and Boyd LTD, 1960), p. 92.

⁵ Irving Howe, quote in Ronald Sukenick, "Wallace Stevens, Musing the Obscure", <http://mtsu32.mtsu.edu:11072/Feigning/WSRG/musing/Theory.pdf>

⁶ "Wallace Stevens, Musing the Obscure", op.cit.

Though Stevens offers the "supreme fiction" as a substitute for traditional religion, he does not claim that its function is the creation of a systematic belief. He says in The Necessary Angel: "Poetry does not address itself to beliefs. Nor could it ever invent an ancient world full of figures that had been known and become endeared for its reader for centuries."⁷ The "supreme fiction" tries to find what is fresh and attractive in reality. For Stevens there is no absolute belief and a belief is credible only for a particular period, and Stevens is concerned with discovering a belief that is credible to the American present.

It follows from what I have said before that the credibility of the "supreme fiction" as an object of belief depends on its adherence to the real world. Its supremacy is conditioned by three main characteristics: abstraction, change and pleasure which the titles of the three sections of his long poem "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" suggest: " It Must Be Abstract," "It Must Change," and "It Must Give Pleasure."

It is my purpose in this thesis to go deeper into Stevens's " supreme fiction." To fulfill this task I will mostly make use of the close textual reading method developed by New Criticism. Rather than basing the interpretations of the poems quoted on historical contexts, the author's stated intentions, or the reader's response, we concentrate on the relationships within the text that give it its own distinctive character or form. My aim in adopting the close textual analysis which views the literary text as a self-contained object is to approach Stevens's poetry objectively.

⁷Stevens Wallace, The Necessary Angel, (New York: Vintage books, 1959), p.144.

This method which concentrates on "the words on the page"⁸ is applicable to Stevens who, as a modernist, belonged to "a new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representationalism, in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation toward style, technique and spatial form."⁹ Indeed Stevens believes that poetry is "as immanent in the mind of the poet, as the idea of God is immanent in the mind of the theologian."¹⁰ Stevens's detachment from the real world makes it inappropriate to use such literary theories as New Historicism and Marxist criticism which seek to see literary works in their political and historical context. These theories see history as a "struggle between antagonistic social forces."¹¹ This struggle is "present in every cultural artifact, every intellectual enterprise."¹² One critique of these theories is that they "seem to contain or imply views and beliefs, true or false, about the world."¹³ Consequently, the reader of poetry is often entrapped in "doctrinal adhesions,"¹⁴ which are "a fertile source of confusion and erratic judgment about poetry."¹⁵

⁸ I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism, quoted in Helen Vendler, "Wallace Stevens: Hypotheses and Contradictions", <http://www.representations.org/article.php?article=81.6>

⁹ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ed. Modernism : A Guide to European Literature : 1890-1930. (London : Penguin, 1991). p. 25.

¹⁰ Wallace Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens, quoted in John Adames, "Twentieth Century Literature", http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0403/is_1_43/ai_56750467/pg_2

¹¹ Warren Montag, quoted in William J. Burling, "Marxist Criticism: A Quick Start", <http://www.faculty.missouristate.edu/w/wjb692f/Marxist%20Studies%20materials/Marxist%20Theory%20Quick%20Start%20sheet.doc>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ I. A. Richards, "On the Chief Difficulties of Reading ", <http://www.cod.edu/people/faculty/fitchf/readlit/richards1.htm>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Moreover the close textual reading method enables us to interpret texts without reference to authorial intention. This is the opposite of psychoanalytic criticism which tends to psychoanalyze the individual author and literary works because for them the artist's mind is "urged on by instincts that are too clamorous."¹⁶ Literary works were read as fantasies that allowed authors to indulge in repressed wishes, to protect themselves from deep anxieties. The disadvantage of psychoanalytic criticism is that it reports on the author's original intention which is not pertinent to judge a work of art. In their influential essays, "The Intentional Fallacy," W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley efficiently remove the author from interpretive reading. The term intentional fallacy refers to the "confusion between the poem and its origins."¹⁷ My attempt, therefore, in this thesis is not a search of Stevens's original intentions, but rather an analysis of the meaning which the poem itself holds.

A further attraction of the close textual reading method for us is the avoidance of poetic interpretations based on the reader's response which reader-response criticism maintains. The reader-response critic Louise Rosenblatt sums up the reader-response concept by saying that "a poem is what the reader lives through under the guidance of the text and experiences as relevant to the text."¹⁸ This is what the New Critics Wimsatt and Beardsley call affective fallacy. The term affective fallacy refers to the

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, quoted in Ross Murfin and Supriya M. Ray, "Definition of Psychoanalytic Criticism", http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/virtualit/poetry/critical_define/crit_psycho.html

¹⁷ W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy and The Affective Fallacy", <http://www.brysons.net/academic/wimsattbeardsley.html>

¹⁸ Louise Rosenblatt, "Towards a Transactional Theory of Reading", quoted in Ross Murfin and Supriya M. Ray, "Definition of Reader-Response Criticism", http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/Virtualit/poetry/critical_define/crit_reader.html

"confusion between the poem and its results (what it is and what it does)"¹⁹
The affective fallacy therefore maintains that we should not be concerned with any personal or emotional investment when dealing with Stevens's poetry.

By removing the historical context, the author and the reader from the critical formula, the poem becomes "an all-at-onceness of meaning, in which every phonetic, syntactic, lexical and rhetorical element becomes significant."²⁰ From here we can say that the New Critics believe in the principle that form and content are inseparable. Mark Schorer explains this principle by saying:

modern criticism has shown that to speak of content as such is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it is only when we speak of the achieved content, the form, the work of art as a work of art, that we speak as critics. The difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique.²¹

Relying on the principle that one needs nothing but "the words on the page" in order to construct interpretation of a passage of literature, I will show how literary devices, such as metaphors, similes, images, or symbols and sound devices, such as alliteration, assonance, rhyme, consonance, euphony may affect the meaning. I shall also examine, when necessary, the meter in the same way to determine how the line breaks complement the meanings of the quoted lines.

In an attempt to shed more light on Stevens's "supreme fiction" as a secular substitute for traditional religion, I have divided this thesis into four chapters. The first chapter is a background to Stevens's "supreme fiction."

¹⁹ "The Intentional Fallacy and The Affective Fallacy", op.cit.

²⁰ Radu Surdulescu, "The New Criticism or Formalism with Human Face",
<http://www.unibuc.ro/eBooks/lls/RaduSurdulescu-FormStructuality/Capitolul%20II.htm>

²¹ Ibid.

The first part of this chapter looks at the different movements, such as rationalism, transcendentalism and naturalism, which contributed to the decline of religion after the Puritanism of the early settlers. It aims to see how Stevens is alike to and different from the legacy started by the Puritans and modified later by these movements. The second part shows how other modernists such as Eliot, Yeats and Joyce reacted to the loss of belief and the futility it provoked. Since Stevens belongs to the modernist movement, this part serves as a point of reference to see the specificity of Stevens's reaction towards the end of religion compared with that of other modernists.

In the second chapter, I will discuss the idea that the credibility of the "supreme fiction" depends on its adherence to reality. For Stevens the poet must not renounce the real world in favour of abstraction (the absence of reality) or the supernatural reality. Stevens, indeed, considers the real world as the raw clay that the poet transforms through his imagination into an infinite variety of imagined realities.

The third chapter is devoted to abstraction as a condition for the supremacy of the "supreme fiction". What Stevens means by abstraction is that the poet, in the process of transforming reality, must apprehend reality as an ignorant man without preconceptions. For Stevens going back to the past blurs the imagination. From here the poet must set his mind free from all that comes from the past such as classical myths, Christianity, Rationalism and Romanticism.

The fourth chapter deals with Stevens's notion of change. Change for Stevens is the power of the mind which allows the poet to make of reality a starting point from which to explore the imagination's fascination with resemblances. Moreover Change means also the ability of the poet to

incessantly make new "supreme fiction". Stevens believes that the external world is in a state of constant change. Since this external world represents the basis from which the "supreme fiction" springs, the "supreme fiction" must possess the infinite opportunity to constantly find new forms to correspond to this changing world.

The fifth chapter covers two ideas about the "supreme fiction": pleasure and commitment. First I will show that the pleasure referred to is not the traditional religious joy. It is rather the great marriage between imagination and reality which transforms the godless, chaotic and ugly bare reality into an ordered, embellished and vivid imagined reality. However this raises the important question about the commitment of the "supreme fiction" since the relationship the "supreme fiction" establishes between the imagination and reality does not exist in the world outside the mind. This prompted many hostile reactions against the irrelevance of "supreme fiction". Stanely Burnshaw²², Randall Jarrell²³ and Fredric Jameson²⁴ consider Stevens as a hedonist who retreats from reality. In retaliation, other critics such as Alan Filreis²⁵, Anca Rosu²⁶ and Jacqueline Vaught Brogan²⁷

²²In the summer of 1935, Stanely Burnshaw reviewed Stevens's Ideas of Orders in the "New Masses" and criticized Stevens indifference to what was going on in the world.

²³Writing in Partisan Review in 1950 in response to the publication of The Auroras of Autumn, Randall Jarrell criticized Stevens for his insufficient interest in the things of this world.

²⁴In his essay entitled "Wallace Stevens", Jameson Fredric argued that Stevens's poems are about nothing beyond themselves.

²⁵Alan Filreis, in Wallace Stevens and the Actual World, focused upon Stevens's political concerns between 1939 and 1955, particularly his response to the Second World War and the subsequent Cold War.

²⁶In his essay entitled "Noble Imagery: Wallace Stevens and Mesoamerican Mythology," Anca Rosu refutes the all-too-familiar image of Stevens as hedonist, and suggests a reading of Wallace Stevens in relation to Mesoamerican mythology. Rosu argues that Stevens's aim of using Mesoamerican mythology is to define America and being American.

²⁷Jacqueline Vaught Brogan's The Violence Within The Violence Without proposes a total political revision of the poet's commitments.

whose works offer careful contextual readings to Stevens's poetry to demonstrate that Stevens was very responsive to his time.

Before examining the different aspects of Stevens's "supreme fiction," as a secular substitute for religion, which constitute the core of the subject of this thesis, I think it is necessary in the first chapter to record the background of Stevens's "supreme fiction". Its aim is to understand the gradual shift from the religiosity of the early Puritans to the decline of religion in the twentieth century life and to examine the different reactions of the modernists, including Stevens, to the sense of meaninglessness and aimlessness caused by the loss of belief.

Chapter One

American Literature: Between Religion and Secularism

"In an age of disbelief," says Wallace Stevens, "it is for the poet to supply the satisfaction of belief in his measure and his style."²⁸ This quotation reveals the extent to which Stevens's age was an age characterized by the end of religion. The decline of spirituality produces a need for something else that can make human life meaningful. Stevens attempts through his "supreme fiction" to offer secular comfort to this "age of disbelief". For Stevens only poetry can "supply the satisfactions of belief." Stevens's attempt to give poetry the position of religion is an echo of Matthew Arnold's essay entitled "The Study of Poetry" in which he suggests that "religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry."²⁹ The decline of spirituality, therefore, does not upset Wallace Stevens. He, on the contrary, celebrates it since it would allow man to free his imagination from the ancient religious hindrances and to use it to make the "supreme fiction". Stevens says that "one of the visible movements of modern imagination is the movement away from the idea of God,"³⁰ and it is now the job of poetry "to take the place \ Of an empty heaven and its hymns."³¹

²⁸ Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, quoted in Louis L. Martz, "Wallace Stevens: The World as Meditation", in *Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed, Marie Barroff, (New York: Prentice Hall INC, 1962), p. 133.

²⁹ Matthew Arnold, "The Study of Poetry", <http://www.oberlin.edu/english/syllabi/fall03/388bf03.pdf>

³⁰ Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, quoted in Colin Falck, *American and British Verse In the Twentieth Century: The Poetry that Matters*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), p. 72.

³¹ Wallace Stevens, *Poems by Wallace Stevens*, (New York: Vintage books, 1959), p.75.

Stevens thus represents a major departure from previous beliefs which went back to the first Puritan settlers. For the Puritans, religion and literature especially poetry had been complementary while Stevens offers poetry as a substitute for Christianity.

This chapter which includes two parts is a record of the historical glimpse and the literary background of the end of religion. The first part deals with the different movements such as deism, transcendentalism and naturalism which contributed to the shift from the belief in God that characterized the Puritans to the belief in poetry, or "the supreme fiction", as offered by Wallace Stevens. The second part consists of reviewing how the Modernists, such as Yeats, Eliot, Joyce and Stevens reacted to the end of religion.

A- Literature and Religion Before the Twentieth Century

a- The Puritan Legacy: Literature as a Means of Reaching Toward God

The Puritan's understanding of themselves, God and poetry provided a legacy as the first Americans, defining values to be modified or changed. Indeed the first Puritan settlers believed in John Calvin's doctrine of election which made it possible to believe in the millenium or a one thousand year rule of saints in terms of physical reality. Cleaning up the English church was a prelude to the millenium, and many Puritans saw the overthrow of the monarchy in 1645 and the establishment of the Puritan Commonwealth to be the event signaling the millenium. The political and religious persecution that the radical Protestants later faced, however, led them to believe that the millenium would occur in America, not in Europe.

Following this religious spirit, the Puritans "poured their tremendous energies into nonfiction and pious genres"³², such as sermons and poetry which often included theology and religion. A good example of this is the famous sermon which John Winthrop, lawyer and leader of the 1630 migration of English Puritans to Massachusetts Bay Colony, delivered to settlers on their way to the new land on board of Arabella Boat. Inspired from the Bible, he mentioned the biblical phrase "a City upon a Hill": "for we must consider that wee shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us."³³ The Puritans also believed that their community was specially ordained by God, and breaking a covenant with God has dire results. In this respect John Winthrop said: " If we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world...." ³⁴

In addition to sermons, the Puritans wrote poetry which was mainly about their everyday lives and related it to their ideas about God and their relationship with Him. Edward Taylor's poem "Huswifery" illustrates the link between poetry, religion and everyday life. In the following lines, the poet compares his religious devotion to the art of spinning cloth, asking the Lord to make him His "spinning wheel":

Make me, O Lord, Thy spinning wheele compleate.
Thy holy word my distaff make for mee.
Make mine affections Thy swift flyers neat,
And make my soul Thy holy spool to be.

³² Kathryn VanSpanckeren, "Outline of the American Literature", <http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/oal/lit2.htm>

³³ John Winthrop, " A Modal of Christian Charity." [http://www.historytools.org/sources/winthrop-](http://www.historytools.org/sources/winthrop-This phrase has its origin in the Bible:)
This phrase has its origin in the Bible: " You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid"_(Matthew 5:14).

³⁴ Ibid.

My conversation make to be Thy reel,
And reel the yarn thereon spun of Thy wheele.³⁵

b- The Literature of Enlightenment: Applying Reason to Religion

However the coming of Enlightenment, following the scientific discoveries of the 1600s, altered Puritan beliefs but not religion. Enlightenment was "a movement marked by an emphasis on rationality rather than tradition, scientific inquiry instead of unquestioning religious dogma, and representative government in place of monarchy."³⁶ When people like Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin applied reason to religion they found it necessary to strip it of revelation and they ended up with Deism. Paine wrote regarding reason and religion:

It is only by the exercise of reason that man can discover God. Take away that reason, and he would be incapable of understanding anything; and, in this case, it would be just as consistent to read even the book called the Bible to a horse as to a man. How, then, is it that people pretend to reject reason?³⁷

In fact this Deist spirit did not mean the abandonment of the radical Protestant ideas that originally inspired the settlement of America. It rather gave a secular form to these religious ideas. Millenarianism was no longer the Puritan belief, but a belief in America as a place where the perfect government and perfect social organization would begin and spread itself across the globe.

This is evident in the works of such remarkable minds as Jonathan Edward and Benjamin Franklin who seemed "to sum up and realize the

³⁵ Edward Taylor, quoted in Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, ed, From Puritanism to Postmodernism : A History of American Literature, (London : Penguin. 1992.) ,p.25.

³⁶ "Outline of the American Literature", op.cit.

³⁷ Robert L. Johnson, "The Deist Roots of the United States of America", <http://www.deism.com/DeistAmerica.htm>

changes of the American thought and the variety within it."³⁸ In their different ways, these two thinkers revealed a transition from the American world of Puritan orthodoxy to the world of the Enlightenment. Jonathan Edward's writings aimed at adapting Puritanism with the principles of the Enlightenment. He attempted to establish a link between the scientific discoveries of his age with religion. In the following passage, Edward explains how the "invention of telescopes" leads to better understanding of Christianity:

The late invention of telescopes, whereby heavenly objects are brought to much nearer and made so much plainer to the sight an such wonderfull discoveries have been made in the heavens, is a type and forerunner of the great increase in the knowledge of heavenly thin that shall be in the approaching glorious times of Christian church. ³⁹

As a Quaker, Benjamin Franklin departed further from Puritanism. To his question: "what then is an American, this new man?"⁴⁰, Hector St. Jean Crèvecoeur answered: "the American is a new man, who act on new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions."⁴¹ Benjamin Franklin seemed the supreme example of this new American man. Franklin learned from John Locke and other Enlightenment writers to apply reason to his own life and to break with the past religious tradition when it threatened to correspond to his ideals. Yet he had the Puritan capacity for hard careful work, constant self- scrutiny, and the desire to better himself. Thus he remained always Puritan, but his Puritan conscience

³⁸ From Puritanism to Postmodernism : A History of American Literature, op.cit.,p.38.

³⁹ Jonathan Edward, quoted in, From Puritanism to Postmodernism : A History of American Literature, op.cit., p.41.

⁴⁰ Hector St. Jean Crèvecoeur, "Letters from an American Farmer", <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/CREV/letter03.html>

⁴¹Ibid.

reference to God is pantheistic which means that God is omnipresent in all objects and living creatures especially in man, as it echoed in the following lines:

Why should I wish to see God better
than this day ?
I see something of God each hour of
the twenty- four, and each moment then.
In the face of men and women I see⁴⁶

Whereas the Puritan God was a personal God and He communicated through the Bible, the transcendentalist truths came from their assumptions about the Over-soul and their intuitions about nature and themselves. As a result, transcendentalists often made references to themselves experiencing and learning from nature:

Over me soured the eternal sky,
Full of light and of deity;
Again I saw, again I heard,
The rolling river, the morning bird;--
Beauty through my senses stole;
I yielded myself to the perfect whole.⁴⁷

Unsurprisingly the transcendentalists questioned religious tradition, the church, or any other external authority. Emerson attacked lifeless preaching which comes out of the memory, and not out of the soul. Instead, Emerson favored a new religion in which the preacher must instead be a kind of poet, "a newborn bard of the Holy Ghost."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Francis Murphy, ed. *Walt Whitman : the complete poems*. (London : Penguin, 1984), p. 121.

⁴⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in Budden Tracy, " Puritanism: the People and the Religion and the Poetry"
"http://titan.ivu.edu/~wchapman/americanpoetryweb/puritanism.html"

⁴⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in David M. Robinson, "Emerson and Religion"
http://www.viterbo.edu/personalpages/faculty/GSmith/EmersonandReligion.htm

The transcendentalist philosophy which insists that individuals should reject the authority of Christianity and gain knowledge of God through intuition constitutes a major step toward the abandonment of Christianity. It is this philosophy which gave to modernist poets like Wallace Stevens optimism and faith in the power of imagination to make the only fiction which replaces traditional religions and which we can nowadays entertain.

d- Darwinism and Naturalism: Determinism as a Way to Atheism

Another important step towards the end of religion was the evolutionary theory professed in the philosopher and scientist Darwin's The Origin of Species. This theory stated that all species evolved from a few common ancestors by means of natural selection. This theory had a tremendous impact on religious thought since it disagrees with the Biblical account of the Creation and it diminishes the role of divine guidance in the universe.

The idea of natural selection was also applied to society by social Darwinists. According to them, individuals or groups must compete with one another to survive. Social Darwinism asserted that those best able to survive demonstrate their fitness by accumulating property, wealth, and social status. Poverty, according to this theory, proves an individual's or group's unfitness. The Darwinists stress on fact and matter led to the positivist spirit which studied human behaviour with "the same general rules as were seen to apply in the physical world."⁴⁹ The positivist universe consists of the whole "which is not an accumulation of self-willed

⁴⁹ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane ,ed, Modernism : A Guide to European Literature: 1890-1930 , (London : Penguin, 1991), p. 74.

individuals but an ordered organism ruled by general and definable laws and within which the chief and indisputable agency was reason."⁵⁰

Social Darwinism and Positivism encouraged the emergence of naturalism as a literature which concerned itself with the concrete, the palpable and the material. The principles of naturalism were first stated by the French author Emile Zola in The Experimental Novel. Zola stated that a writer or a poet should report reality as objectively as a laboratory scientist. For him what people do is determined by their heredity, environment, or both. Zola wrote in The Experimental Novel that the role of a novelist

consists in taking facts in nature, then in studying the mechanism of these facts, acting upon them, by the modification of the circumstances and surroundings, without deviating from the laws of nature. Finally, you possess knowledge of the man, scientific knowledge of him, in his individual and social relations.⁵¹

Thus people are trapped by forces such as money, sex or power, and the individual can make no moral choice. A good example of a naturalist novel is Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. The main theme of this novel is the determining impact of social and economic forces on the lives of individuals. As a literary naturalist, Crane was interested in depicting the social ills of his time, showing that despite an individual's best efforts, the forces of society will overcome Maggie, the central character of the novel, and determine her fate.

Naturalism as a literary expression of determinism denies religion as a motivating force in the world and instead perceives the universe as a machine. Whereas eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers had imagined

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Emile Zola, The Experimental Novel, quoted in Belle M. Sherman, "Extracts from Emile Zola, The Experimental Novel", <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst337/Zola-ExpNovel.htm>

the world as a machine, but as a perfect one, invented by God and tending toward progress and human betterment, the Naturalists imagined society as a blind machine, godless and out of control. A good example of the Naturalist depicting the loss of God is Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware.⁵² Frederic observed the growth of religious skepticism in the 1870s and 1880s fueled by Darwin's theories and other intellectual and religious movements and incorporated these influences in the characters of Dr. Ledsmar, Father Forbes, and Celia Madden, with disastrous results for his title character Theron Ware. Indeed Theron Ware's cultural crisis is partly the product of his exposure to the "bewildering world of wealth and beauty"⁵³ of Celia Madden. Inspired by Celia Madden's kiss, Theron Ware is corrupted by his dream of a future with Celia Madden and his lust for her wealth. In addition to Madden's wealth, Ware is also exposed to the religious pragmatic ideas of Father Forbes who tells him that "the church is always compromising"⁵⁴ between what is secular and what is religious. Another character who alters Theron Ware is Dr. Ledsmar, a Darwinian atheist, who introduces Ware to the writings of Renan. One of these is the story

of how a deeply devout young man, trained from his earliest boyhood for the sacred office, and desiring passionately nothing but to be worthy of it, came to a point where, at infinite cost of pain to himself and of anguish to those dearest to him, he had to declare that he could no longer believe at all in revealed religion.⁵⁵

⁵² The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896), describes the influence of controversial social and religious ideas on a rigid congregation of a small town named Octavius.

⁵³ Harold Frederic, The Damnation of Theron Ware.

da<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=the+damnation+of+theron+ware++&spell=1>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

These new ideas have altered Theron's understanding of religion without providing him with any basis on which to begin reconstructing his understanding of the world. As a result, Theron Ware is caught in confusion, doubt and loss of faith. All this is divulged by Theron Ware himself to Sister Soulsby at the end of the novel:

Was it all a sham, or does God take a good man and turn him into an out-and-out bad one, in just a few months, in the time that it takes an ear of corn to form and ripen and go off with the mildew? Or isn't there any God at all, but only men who live and die like animals? And that would explain my case, wouldn't it?⁵⁶

B- Twentieth Century: Strange Realities and Artistic Reactions

a- American Realities: Loss of Belief, Chaos and Violence

By the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, other theories, in addition to Darwinism, further eroded the aura of Christianity. Psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud probed the individual and collective human psyche to uncover the unconscious dreams and fears of humans or the primitive impulses of man. Karl Marx's theory of "dialectic" social change and his view of history as secular and materialistic were also in direct conflict with past religious beliefs. All these new ideas only reflect the fact that the dilemma of western civilization in the early 20th century was one of upholding traditional beliefs against the constant challenge of modern modes of thought and behavior. Accordingly, orthodox Christian beliefs came under severe threat.

⁵⁶Ibid.

This threat was aggravated through social and political changes. Industrialization and urbanization became even larger factors in American society as the nation moved further from its agricultural roots into a new existence as a large factory nation that lived by the products it produced rather than the food it grew. By 1920s major cities developed areas of slum condition. Machines of all sorts dominated the lives of ordinary people. The twentieth century was also an era of wars. The two World Wars broke out killing thousands of both military and civilian people with the help of a new technology which had seemed to be making life better. All of this had been predicted by Friedrich Nietzsche who saw modern life falling into an abyss. He prophetically warned of a new Age of Barbarism: "There will be wars such as have never happened on earth."⁵⁷ In addition to wars, communism with its atheist creed was another source of destruction which offered deluding promises to the blind masses. In this context Franz Kafka exclaims: "the buttresses of human existence are collapsing. Historical development is no longer determined by the individual but by the masses. We are shoved, rushed, swept away. We are the victims of history."⁵⁸

In such confused context, it seemed that all old beliefs were actually illusions. The confident view of history that things were progressively improving as science and rationality brought their social benefits looked false. Beatrice Webb once wrote that "by science alone.... all human misery would be ultimately swept away."⁵⁹ But the loss of God, the two world wars and the rise of communism were further evidence that history

⁵⁷ Os Guinness, "The striptease of Humanism", http://www.the-highway.com/humanism_guinness.html;geturl=d+highlightmatches+;term=os+guinness

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Beatrice Webb, quoted in Nicholas Drake, *The Poetry Of W.B. Yeats*, (London : Penguin , 1991), p. 73.

rather tended towards the apocalyptic conclusion imagined in TS Eliot's "The Waste Land" which man was about to face:

Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal.⁶⁰

The ordered, stable and inherently meaningful worldview of the nineteenth century could not, wrote T.S. Eliot, accord with "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."⁶¹ Even religion seemed under attack as the senselessness of wars seemed difficult to explain, as if one could imagine God had a plan that was inaccessible to humanity.

b- Modernism: Art As a Guard against the Meaningless Realities

One consequence of the skepticism with regard to science and religion is the rejection of absolutism. What is meant by the word 'absolutism' is the belief in God as the absolute and thus the affirmation of the existence of an absolute truth. This is clearly seen in the painting movement called Cubism. The Cubist painters like Picasso and Braque inherited representational techniques from the cinema and radically transformed painting's spatial conventions. They depicted objects from a multiplicity of perspectives on a single canvas. It was almost as if they had taken an object and smashed it to pieces, only to put it back together

⁶⁰ T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land", in American Poetry and Prose, ed, Norman Forster and Norman S. Grabo et al, (New York : Houghton Nifflin Company, 1970), p. 270.

⁶¹ TS Eliot, quoted in Coote Stephan , Penguin Critical Studies on T. S Eliot's TheWaste Land, (London : Penguin, 1985), p.28.

dimensionally askew. By adopting multiplicity of perspectives Cubism tried to break with the affirmation of an absolute point of reference in painting which articulated God as the absolute. According to Debra B. Bergoffen, the cubist multiplicity of perspectives has its origin in Nietzsche's rejection of the thrust of science, philosophy, and art in the Renaissance to "show the desire for the absolute."⁶² What Nietzsche sought to destroy when he declared that God was dead is absolute centers, whether defined as God or surrogates in Reason, for it reveals the repression of human values perpetrated by the desire for the absolute. Perspectivism "affirms the value of the human insofar as it insists that the particularity and multiplicity of the human condition is the source of meaning and value."⁶³

Furthermore, the end of religion and the spiritual vacuum it caused and the failure of science to bring happiness to the twentieth century man stimulated the modernists to offer art as a new religion. Yeats, for example, strove to make an individual religion. In his autobiography he wrote:

I had made a new religion, almost an infallible Church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians.⁶⁴

To accomplish that, Yeats found his vehicle in Irish mythology and the occult opposing scientific and industrialist culture. In this view he wrote, "Poetry in Ireland has always been mysteriously connected with

⁶² Bergoffen, Debra B. "Nietzsche's Madman: Perspectivism without Nihilism", <http://webpages.ursinus.edu/richter/bergoffen.html>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ William Butler Yeats, quoted in Michael Fleming, "Spiritual Renewal in the Life and Work of William Butler Yeats" http://www.dutchgirl.com/foxpaws/biographies/Myself_That_I_Remake/yeatssec3.html ml

magic."⁶⁵ One of the central tenets of the Yeatsian occult was the doctrine of reincarnation in accordance with Karmic law, as Madame Blavatsky had taught him. Between death and subsequent rebirth we return to the source of all life, all passion, and all knowledge:

But when. If the tale's true,
The Pestle of the moon
That pounds up all anew
Brings me to birth again
To find what once I had
And know what once I have known. . . .⁶⁶

Yet the modernists believed that one of the obstacles which may hinder their attempt to make a work of art which would replace religion was the failure of language to ever fully communicate meaning. "That's not it at all that's not what I meant at all"⁶⁷ laments Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock. From here we can say that the modernists agreed with the French Symbolists who believed that words cannot adequately express reality, thus, the artist must recreate reality through symbols to express what is seen or felt. The most important of these was Baudelaire especially his sonnet "Correspondences":

La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses parole ;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.⁶⁸

To compensate for the failure of language to convey meaning, the modernists believed that they had to use symbols that they drew from classical mythology. Moreover the myth could illuminate many aspects of

⁶⁵ William Butler Yeats, quoted in, *The Poetry Of W.B. Yeats* , op.cit.,p.13.

⁶⁶ William Butler Yeats, quoted in, "Spiritual Renewal in the Life and Work of William Butler Yeats". op.cit.

⁶⁷ TS Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock",
http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~wldciv/world_civ_reader/world_civ_reader_2/eliot.htmlprufrock

⁶⁸ Charles Baudelaire , quoted in, *The Poetry Of W.B. Yeats*, op.cit., p. 22.

modern life. Eliot described Joyce's use of it in Ulysses as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history".⁶⁹ In Ulysses, Joyce attempts to make Bloom's adventures parallel Ulysses's, the hero in Greek mythology. The action takes place in eighteen chapters spaced in a period of time starting at 8:00 a.m. on Thursday 16 June 1904, and ending in the early hours of June 17. The central parallel to Homer is that Bloom's wife Molly like Penelope in ancient Greek literature is being courted by a suitor, the dashing Blazes Boylan. In order to win her back, Bloom must negotiate twelve trials which represent his own Odyssey.

The Russian formalists, on the contrary, are profoundly skeptical of history, and they assert the necessity of always beginning anew. From this principle, the Russian formalists came with the process of defamiliarization as a condition to write a good work of art. Thus literariness, for them is a function of the process of defamiliarization. Defamiliarization is a feature of the diachronic system, inasmuch as it demands that other devices in the poetic text be transformed or pushed to the background to allow for the foregrounding of the dominant device. The function of the dominant in the service of literary evolution included the replacement of canonical forms and genres by new forms, which in turn would become canonized and, likewise, replaced by still newer forms as the prominent Russian formalist Shklovsky states it:

⁶⁹ T.S. Eliot, quoted in Coote Stephan, Penguin Critical Studies on T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 28.

The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.⁷⁰

c- Wallace Stevens's "Supreme Fiction" as a Substitute For Religion

Wallace Stevens, aware of the complexities of the nature of modern life and the perplexities of the intellectual scene, offers poetry as an alternative for traditional religion. This is suggested in his poem, "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman."⁷¹ In the opening lines of this poem, the title character is directly addressed by an unidentified narrator, who proposes poetry as the "supreme fiction". The narrator informs her that if she devotes herself to Christianity by taking the "the moral law" and practicing the Christian worship in "the nave " of the church, the heaven she will go is only a "haunted heaven":

POETRY is the supreme fiction, madame.
Take the moral law and make a nave of it
And from the nave build haunted heaven⁷²

Stevens's belief in leaving Christianity and proposing the "supreme fiction" as an alternative makes him among those modernists who started a quest for a re-structuring of literature and the experience of reality it represents. The "supreme fiction", thus, must not be separate from the reality where it works. In this context, Stevens says: "In poetry at least the

⁷⁰Victor Shklovsky, Art as Technique, Quote in, Dirk Thierbach, "Russian Formalism in 11 definitions"
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/k-zbinden/definitis.htm>

⁷¹"A High-Toned Old Christian Woman" is a poem in which the title character is directly addressed by an unidentified narrator, who argues against her adherence to a closed system of belief. The narrator proposes poetry as the "supreme fiction" rather than God

⁷²Poems by Wallace Stevens, , op.cit., p.26.

imagination must not detach itself from reality."⁷³ The idea of the adherence of the "supreme fiction" to the real world as a condition for its credibility is the subject of the following chapter.⁷⁴

⁷³Frank Kermode , Wallace Stevens, (London: Oliver and Boyd LTD , 1960). P 67.

Chapter Two

The "Supreme Fiction" and Reality

Stevens stresses that "the imagination is not a free agent. It is not a faculty that functions spontaneously without reference."⁷⁵ The reference is reality or the physical world where we live. Unlike traditional beliefs, including Christianity and ancient mythologies, which function in a supernatural world, the "supreme fiction" must concern itself with what is real since it is a result of it. Stevens writes, "the great poems of heaven and hell have been written and the great poem of earth remains to be written."⁷⁶ Thus Stevens's ambition is to write the "supreme fiction" which belongs to the physical world. However Stevens recognizes that this reality is chaotic and needs to be reshaped through the poet's imagination to make it bearable. The perception of chaos comes for Stevens when the imagination is overwhelmed by the "pressure of reality". What he means by "pressure of reality" is the loss of belief, wars, great depression and the rise of communism.

In this chapter which consists of two parts, I will look more closely at Stevens's view of the relation between the "supreme fiction" and reality. The focus in the first part will be on Stevens's acknowledgement of the importance of the physical reality in art. I will mention his rejection of the

⁷⁵ Wallace Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens, quoted in Ronald Sukenick, "Wallace Stevens : Musing the Obscure", <http://mtsu32.mtsu.edu:11072/Feigning/WSRG/musing/Theory.pdf>

⁷⁶ Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel, (New York: Vintage books, 1959), p. 142.

supernatural reality. In the second part I will examine Stevens's concept of "the pressure of reality" in its socio-cultural background because it will help us to understand how events, such as the loss of belief, wars, Great Depression and the leftist movement, created disorder and prompted Stevens reaction.

A- The "Supreme Fiction": A Poem of Reality

a- No Credible Fiction without Reality

Stevens's "supreme fiction" begins in the field in which it works: reality. By reality Stevens means "absolute fact"⁷⁷ or the "things as they are."⁷⁸ The central view of the "supreme fiction" is that if it is not quite reality, at least it grows out of reality. He qualifies his description of "absolute fact" as destitute of any imaginative aspect. In this context Stevens argues that "the more destitute it [reality] becomes the more it begins to be precious;"⁷⁹ reality beyond the imagination is the data with which the imagination works.

Thus the imagination has no source except from reality. "The Ordinary Woman"⁸⁰ emphasizes that imagination symbolized by "the guitars" springs from reality or, as Stevens calls it, "poverty":

Then from poverty they rose,
From dry catarrhs, and the guitars

⁷⁷ Ibid., p 60.

⁷⁸ Wallace Stevens, Poems by Wallace Stevens, (New York: Vintage books, 1959), p.73.

⁷⁹ The Necessary Angel . op.cit., p.60.

⁸⁰ "The Ordinary Women" is a poem where "ordinary women" rise from reality symbolized by catarrhs and flit to imagination suggested by the "dry guitar". The poem is remarkable for its satire of the appeals of the guitars since the guitar symbol of imagination denies the existence of reality.

They flitted
Through the palace wall. ⁸¹

Reality is thus the starting point for any activity of the mind. Stevens says:
"The real is only the base. But it is the base." ⁸²This is why "the imagination
loses its vitality as it ceases to adhere to what is real." ⁸³

The seventh section of "The Man with the Blue Guitar" ⁸⁴ affirms
that human "activities have to do with the sun, or reality." ⁸⁵ Otherwise "the
moon, or the imagination, is meaningless to the working world of reality." ⁸⁶
If we exclude reality from our work, the work will be meaningless in the
life lived in reality. Accordingly man behaves like "mechanical beetles"
caught in routine and deprived of imagination; as a result, they are "never
quite warm":

It is the sun that shares our work.
The moon shares nothing. It is a sea.
When shall I come to say of the sun,
It is a sea, it shares nothing;
The sun no longer shares our works
And the earth is alive with creeping men,
Mechanical beetles never quite warm? ⁸⁷

The imagination therefore is not as a "merciful good" which reduces the
pressure of reality:

⁸¹Wallace Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, ed. Holly Stevens, (New York: Vintage books, 1972), p. 77.

⁸²Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, quoted in, *Wallace Stevens : Musing the Obscure* ".op.cit.

⁸³The *Necessary Angel*, op.cit., p.7.

⁸⁴"The Man with the Blue Guitar" is a poem which deals with reality, imagination and their interrelations. The color blue represents imagination, and the man who plays this guitar attempts to produce a new reality through his imaginative constructions. The poet, as the guitarist, must eventually come close to achieving this balance.

⁸⁵ *Wallace Stevens : Musing the Obscure* ".op.cit.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷ *Poems by Wallace Stevens*, , op.cit., p.76.

And shall then stand in the sun, as now
I stand in the moon, and call it good,
The immaculate, the merciful good,
Detached from us, from thing as they as are
Not to be part of the sun?⁸⁸

Withdrawn from reality, the imagination is cold, and the guitar-player cannot approve of it:

To stand
Remote an call it merciful?
The strings are cold on the blue guitar.⁸⁹

The second section of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"⁹⁰ similarly affirms that the imagination loses its solidity when the imagined object does not belong to the physical world. This section supposes the "houses" to have no reality except as they are "composed of ourselves" in the mind. Since the houses seem to exist only in the operations of the mind, they would be without substance, "impalpable" and "transparent" in that they consist of no visible actual effects in which they are perceived:

Suppose these houses are composed of ourselves,
So that they become an impalpable town, full of
Impalpable bell, transparencies of sound,
Sounding in transparent dwellings of the self,
Impalpable habitations that seem to move
In the movement of the colors of the mind,⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" deals with the idea that the poem is a locus where reality and the mind meet and interfuse one another, with a result that is sometimes in favor of the one, sometimes the other. Sometimes we use the imagination to evade reality, and sometimes we seek "The poem of pure reality", according to our need.

⁹¹ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.331.

The objects of sight, the "far-fire flowing" and those of sound, "the bells" would come together in fluid and vague images of themselves. The words "flowing" and "dim-coned" suggest this vagueness:

The far- fire flowing and the dim-coned bells
Coming together in a sense in which we are poised,
Without regard to time or what we are,⁹²

Consequently the mind becomes uncertain in its transformations of even the clearest fact, such as "the clearest bells". Since the mind is the place where "sun" as symbol of reality and the imagination meet, and its contents include both the dictates of the spirit, and confused perceptions of the reality beyond the spirit:

Obscure in colors whether of the sun
Or mind, uncertain in the clearest bells,
The spirit's speeches, the indefinite,
Confused illuminations and sonorities
So much ourselves, we cannot tell apart
The idea and the bearer-being of the idea.⁹³

b- No Credible Fiction with Metaphysical Reality

If the absence of reality is not good for the imagination, the presence of the supernatural is no better. Stevens refutes the metaphysical reality, which does not belong to this physical world. In "In Evening without Angels,"⁹⁴ Stevens affirms that we must content ourselves with the natural world where we live and that we do not need the supernatural addition of unreal creatures such as angels hovering in the air paying their

⁹² Ibid., p.332.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ "Evening without Angels" deals with Stevens' belief that there is no reason for the poet to create a picture of the world with the supernatural additions.

heavenly music. The poet who must create our picture of the world should not try to create the music of the supernatural:

Air is air
Its vacancy glitters round us everywhere.
Its sounds are not angelic syllables
But our unfashioned spirits realized
More sharply in more furious selves.⁹⁵

"Air is air" suggests that there is no reality beyond it. The verb "glitters" means that though the air is empty, it is filled with light. This shows that emptiness of the air is desirable when the music we find is not that of angels, but our own. This music is the poetry in which we attempt to account for our own poorly realized and unfashioned human spirit.

The light of reality which creates the adornment of the seraphim as "coiffeur" and "jeweller" was not made for men, but for such metaphysical bodies as angels. Yet the metaphysical is only a production of men who were sad about their own mortality and who created angels from the light which illuminates reality. The "moon" associated with imagination made up the idea of the soul suggested by "attendant ghost" which would continue to leave after death and lead them back to "angels in heaven:"

And light
That fosters seraphim and is to them
Coiffeur of haloes, fecund jeweller-
Was the sun concoct for angels or for man
Sad men made angels of the sun, and of
The moon they made their own attendant ghost,
Which led them back to angels, after death.⁹⁶

c- Credible Fiction

⁹⁵ Poems by Wallace Stevens, . op.cit., pp.57-58.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.58.

To be credible, the poet must accept this bare reality and write the poetry that adheres to it:

Let this be clear that we are men of sun
And men of day and never of pointed night,
Men that repeat antiquest sound of air
In an accord of repetition. Yet,
If we repeat, it is because the wind
Encircling us, speaks always with our speech.⁹⁷

The poet makes the poetry that expresses our harmony, ("an accord") with the enduring manifestation of reality ("antiquest sounds of air"). This harmony is attained by repeating in our poems what we find in that reality. Though we repeat these manifestations of reality in our poems, they must begin with what is native to us and must be expressed in our language.

The pace of the evening with its "rest and silence"⁹⁸ is a transition to the slower tempo of the night. The night is the best time to confront reality because it is the time when there is little interference. The night and the earth are best when they are empty of the metaphysical, empty of everything but ourselves and what is familiar to us under the "arches" of the sky and its stars ("spangled air"):

Evening, when the measure skips a beat
And then another, one by one, and all
To a seething minor swiftly modulate.
Bare night is best. Bare earth is best. Bare, bare,
Except for our houses, huddle low
Beneath the arches and their spangled air,⁹⁹

The stars which "fire and fire" then seem to be making a rhapsodic music to which we respond aptly. The response is "a true response" with our own voice and with our own emotion since the music rises up "great within

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

us". This is the appropriate moment for us to use our imagination represented by the moon, as we compose our poems of bare reality rather than of the supernatural:

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.¹⁰⁰

The rejection of the metaphysical allows the poet to concern himself further with reality. In so doing the poet can better understand it and manipulate it. This idea is clearly conveyed in the first section of "Esthétique du Mal."¹⁰¹ In the opening lines of the poem the personage in Naples tries to make use of a treatise on the sublime in order to describe the eruptions of Vesuvius as a metaphor for pain:

He was at Naples writing letter home
An, between his letters, reading paragraphs
On the sublime. Vesuvius has grown for a month¹⁰²

But his description is not credible because what he describes does not come from his own experience. There is a glaring incongruity between the true nature of the volcano as a symbol of pain and the person who finds it pleasant:

..... It was pleasant to be sitting there
While the sultriest fulgurations, flickering,
Cast corners in the glass.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 58-59.

¹⁰¹ "Esthétique du Mal" is an attempt to discover an attitude in face of evils inherent in reality without the consolation of the supernatural belief

¹⁰² Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p. 115.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Indeed his description of a volcano is just a trick of fancy that does not adhere to reality. He can describe the sound because it is old descriptive phrases for it has already been invented:

..... He could describe
the terror of the sound because the sound
was ancient. He tried to remember the phrases: pain
Audible at noon pain torturing itself,
Pain killing pain on the very point of pain.¹⁰⁴

Pain is real only as it is registered on people's experience, but the personage's experience is attuned to the comforts in which he speculates. These comforts are suggested by "lunch", "roses" and "cool":

It was almost time for or lunch. Pain is human.
There were roses in the cool café¹⁰⁵

He is not willing to face the reality of pain, and prefers the falsification of the experience: "His book/ made sure of the most correct catastrophe."¹⁰⁶ In fact Vesuvius is indifferent to pain and would be ignorant to the advent of death since as it ignores " the cocks that crows us up/ To die."¹⁰⁷ Pain is not to be confounded with the metaphor of Vesuvius, but it is human experience.

Except for us, Vesuvius might consume
In solid fire the utmost earth and know
No pain .¹⁰⁸

It is this fact that is difficult to face and that the imagination must account for in the sublime in the lofty but credible agreement with reality that will enable people to better understand that reality:

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

This is a part of the sublime
From which we shrink. And yet, except for us,
The total past felt nothing when destroyed.¹⁰⁹

B- Reality Without Imagination

a- Bare Reality as Ugliness and Chaos

Despite his belief that the "supreme fiction" must start with the reality where the poet lives, Stevens is aware that reality is not always good to apprehend, especially when that reality is not embellished by the imagination. In "Gubbinal" the person to whom the speaker is speaking contents himself with bare reality. The speaker can only shrug at his companion's refusal to view the world reshaped by the imagination, saying:

Have it your way
... It is just as you say
... The world is ugly
And the people are sad.¹¹⁰

Moreover the world of the absolute fact or a reality apprehended without the projection of human imagination becomes chaotic. Thus we find ourselves in the position of "intelligent men/ at the center of the unintelligible"¹¹¹ and consequently alienated from this very reality where we live. The perception of chaos comes for Stevens when the imagination fails to impose order on reality. In "Comedian as a letter C,"¹¹² chaos is suggested by the sea which Crispin, the major character of this poem, has to face. Indeed Crispin aspires to write a more imaginative poetry of place

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 22

¹¹¹ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.360.

¹¹² "The Comedian as the Letter C," tells the story of a second-rate poet Crispin who on an ocean voyage, aspires to write a more imaginative poetry of place, marries, becomes a father, and has his poetic ambitions reduced.

with which he is acquainted. Accustomed to homely objects and landscape, Crispin had to master words which refer to objects with which he is familiar. Thus Crispin was a "lutenist of silent fleas, bellowing the noisy haw of the quite hum of things and lexicographer of mute nature."¹¹³ Now on an ocean voyage, Crispin cannot understand the inscrutable world of the sea. His identity as one who assertively inquires into the nature of reality and pronounces its meaning is dissolved in the sea. Consequently, he has no words to describe either himself or the reality of the sea that surrounds him. Because the meaning of the reality of the sea is beyond him, its music no longer follows the direction of his intelligence:

Ubiquitous concussion slap and sigh,
Polyphony beyond his baton's thrust¹¹⁴

Crispin is confronted with the veritable "ding an sich a reality"¹¹⁵ which he cannot understand onto which he cannot neither impose meaning nor project his imagination. This is the world without imagination. The sea salt paralyzed his spirit as if by frost and the dead encrustation of the ideas he held melt coldly as if in winter dissolving his older self:

The salt hung on his spirit like a frost
The dead brine melted in him like dew
Of winter, until nothing of himself
Remained.....¹¹⁶

But reality has for Crispin the nature and the impact of revelation when the imagination directs itself to reality:

The imagination, here could not evade
In poems of plums, the strictest austerity
Of one vast, subjugating, final tone.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Wallace Stevens : *Musing the Obscure*", op.cit.

¹¹⁴ *Poems by Wallace Stevens* , op.cit., p.31.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p 32.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

b-The Imagination and the Chaotic Twentieth Century Reality

The chaotic twentieth century reality with the loss of old beliefs and values, violence and poverty is like the sea in "The Comedian as a Letter C". Indeed we live in an era of disbelief where traditional beliefs are constantly challenged by new ideas. In this context Stevens says:

To see the gods dispelled in mid-air and dissolve like clouds is one of the great human experiences. It is not as if they had gone over the horizon to disappear for a time; nor as if they had been overcome by other gods of greater power and profounder knowledge. It is simply that they came to nothing.¹¹⁸

This shows that Wallace Stevens occupies something of a post-religious moment or what he calls the "age of disbelief". The stripping of the world from any divine aspect is the main theme of Stevens's poem entitled "How to Live. What to Do". In this poem, Stevens describes nature as a space without the religious presence of the "chorister" or the "priest". In so doing Stevens prevents Christianity from actually entering the scene in order to suggest a spiritless world:

There was neither voice nor crested image,
No chorister, nor priest. There was
Only the great height of the rock
And the two of them standing still to rest.¹¹⁹

The decline of spirituality, however, means that man is left in a thoroughly material world. This godless world "unsponsored" and "free" from any divinity is no longer believed to be ordered but chaotic:

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Wallace Stevens, quoted in Anca PEIU, "Wallace Stevens's Two or Three Ideas"
<http://www.unibuc.ro/eBooks/lls/AncaPeiu->

¹¹⁹ Wallace Stevens, quoted in McWilliams Jenna "Ahh, the Power of Negation",
<http://writing.colostate.edu/gallery/parataxis/mcwilliams.htm>

We live in an old chaos of the sun,
Or old dependency of day and night,
Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
Of that wide water, inescapable.¹²⁰

In addition, the loss of belief is a tragedy. In "Esthétique du Mal," Stevens even considers the death of Satan as a tragedy for the imagination because it destroyed the current myth of evil and its imaginative consequences which he describes as "blue phenomena":

The death of Satan was a tragedy
For the imagination. A capital
Negation negative destroyed him in his tenements
And, with him many blue phenomena.¹²¹

The plight of modern man is aggravated by the presence of the war which provides further destruction and nothingness. The war indeed becomes a permanent aspect in modern life. In "Dry Loaf," the war enters strongly the arena of the landscape. The result is that the beautiful elements of nature, such as "spring", "rocks" and "birds" will evaporate in the emergencies and alarms of war suggested by the last words of the poem "rolling, rolling, rolling:"

It was soldiers went marching over the rocks
And still the birds came, came in watery flocks,
Because it was spring and the birds had to come.
No doubt that the soldiers had to be marching
And that drums had to be rolling, rolling, rolling.¹²²

There is here the conflation of landscape with the army. The equation of birds and soldiers demonstrates a need to understand the action of armies against the panorama of the natural world. The eruption of the drums and

¹²⁰ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.8.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 120.

¹²² The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.162.

soldiers suggest that "spring", "the birds" and the "rocks" that we are left with are uncertain. Besides, the war is an evil causing death and destroys all that makes life worth living:

One year, death and war prevented the jasmine scent
And jasmine islands were bloody martyrdoms.¹²³

Wars have effects not only on the physical world, but also on the imagination. In the disorders which war causes, facts replace the imagination and fiction. Stevens emphasizes that the effects of wars, like the force of Crispin's sea, cannot be managed:

We are confronting, therefore, a set of events, not only beyond our power to tranquilize them in the mind, beyond our power to reduce them and metamorphoses them, but events that stir the emotions to violence, that engage us in what is direct and immediate and real, and events that involve the concepts and sanctions that are the order of our lives and may involve our very lives; and these events are occurring persistently, with increasing omen, in what may be called our presence.¹²⁴

Chaos is also provoked by economic collapse and particularly the Great Depression of the 1930s. This worldwide economic slump had significant effects on people since human suffering became a reality for millions. Many died of disease resulting from malnutrition. Thousands lost their homes because they could not pay their mortgages. By 1932, thousands of young people wandered through the country seeking food, clothing, shelter, and a job. In his earlier Harvard lecture entitled "The Irrational Element in Poetry," Stevens noted the impact of the Great Depression: "If I dropped into a gallery I found that I had no interest in what

¹²³ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.103.

¹²⁴ Sister M. Bernitta Quinn, "Metamorphosis in Wallace Stevens", in Wallace Stevens : A Collection of Critical Essays, ed, Marie Borroff (New York : Prentice Hall INC , 1962), p. 67.

I saw. The air was charged with anxieties and tensions."¹²⁵ For Stevens, the pressure of reality had been "constant and extreme" and "no one," he tells us "can have lived apart in a happy oblivion."¹²⁶ Thus, "we are preoccupied with events, even when we do not observe them closely we have a sense of upheaval. We feel threatened."¹²⁷

The effects of the Great Depression and in particular of the ravages of poverty are dealt with in "The Old Woman and the Statue" which represents a first fragment from his greater poem "Owl's Clover"¹²⁸ first published in 1935. In this poem the old woman who is a symbol of those who suffered during the Great Depression is set against the statue which is a symbol of art. The poem starts well since the statue makes its proper effects by imposing its light in the park:

So much the sculptor had foreseen: autumn,
The sky above the plaza widening
Before the horses, clouds of bronze imposed
On clouds of gold, and green engulfing bronze,
The marble leaping in storms of light.¹²⁹

What the statue had not expected was the old woman destitute of any financial support. Her union with the elements of the natural world and the artifacts of humanity suggested by the statue holds no meaning for her:

She was the tortured one
So destitute that nothing but herself

¹²⁵ Wallace Stevens, quoted in Anca PEIU, "After the final no: The World of Wallace Stevens"
<http://www.unibuc.ro/eBooks/Its/AncaPeiu->

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ "Owl's Clover" is often conceived as a riposte to Burnshaw who criticized Stevens apparent indifference to what was going on in the world. Stevens argues in this poem that the poet must escape reality and that his role is to sublimate it.

¹²⁹ Wallace Stevens, Collected Poems, quoted in Frank Kermode, Wallace Stevens, (London: Oliver and Boyd LTD, 1960), p. 64.

Remained, and nothing of herself except
A fear.....¹³⁰

The woman is the "poverty" in the wide sense Stevens gives to the word. Financial suffering is just one aspect. The other aspect is the victory of chaotic reality over the imagination. It is the failure of art in facing the terrible pressures of reality. The woman deprives the statue of form and nobility. The statue becomes a "mass of stone collapsed to mark hulk,"¹³¹ and under the woman's influence the formlessness of night becomes the sovereign shape. This old woman as an element of complete negation is without outside remedy. She conceives of no possibility for transformation. no movement: "looking at the place"¹³² where "each thing was motionless."¹³³ Only when she departs can space and time again take on the trappings of life:

Without her, evening, like a budding yew
Would soon be brilliant. . . .¹³⁴

One consequence of the Great Depression is that it stimulated many workers and those sympathetic with the plight of the laboring classes to turn to the writings of Karl Marx. Marx's ideas, which formed the basis of communist philosophy, advanced the notion that liberty and justice should exist for all, and not just for those who controlled the means of production. Such ideas became popular with writers and intellectuals but were often deemed un-American. Stevens was aware of the chaotic situation caused by

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.65.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² David Lavery "A Wallace Stevens Readers Guide"

"<http://mtsu32.mtsu.edu:11072/Feigning/WSRG/Stevens%20People.html>"

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?¹⁵⁰

Despite these similarities, Emerson and Stevens have different views of the divinity of the self. Emerson believes that the human and the divine selves could fuse together. He says: "I am nothing: I see all, the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God."¹⁵¹ Stevens, on the other hand, rejects the existence of divinity within ourselves. In "It Must Give Pleasure", Stevens, suggests that the divine we imagine is to be found within ourselves exclusively:

Am I that imagine this angel less satisfied?
Are the wings his, the lapis-haunted air?
Is it he or is it I that experience this?¹⁵²

But Stevens's quest in this canto to locate the source of divinity within the self ends by undoing its own fusion. The ending of this canto rejects the implications of divinity as an extension of self: "I have not but I am and I am, I am."¹⁵³

To attain the "first idea", the poet must guard himself against the past to avoid being vulnerable to it. According to Stevens the dependence on the past threatens the mind seeking to relate itself to the world of the present, and Stevens strives "to clear away all that intervenes between the perceiving mind and the world as presently perceived."¹⁵⁴ In "Dutch Graves

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.231.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Marie Barroff, "Wallace Stevens: The World and the Poet", in Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed, Marie Borroff (New York: Prentice Hall INC., 1962), p. 3.

in Bucks County," Stevens celebrates the natural march of the time as it represents a break from history that lets the mind free in agreement with the present:

Know that the past is not part of the present
.....
Freedom is like a man who kills himself
Each night, an incessant butcher.¹⁵⁵

The poet must even disassociate himself from his contemporaries in so far as they carry the past onto the present. In "Comedian as the Letter C," Stevens states that the poet's purpose is:

To rive away
The shadow of his follows from the skies
And, from their stale intelligence released,
To make a new intelligence prevail.¹⁵⁶

B- The Rejection of Traditional Beliefs:

a- The Rejection and Refutation of Classical Myth

To get rid of the past means also to get rid of classical myths. The poet has to clear away "the monuments ... that may be called the authorized version of cultural history [which] are an active threat to the mind seeking to relate itself to the world of the present."¹⁵⁷ In this context, Stevens writes in "The Pure Good of Theory," that "Malformed, the world was paradise malformed . . . / . . . the solar chariot is junk."¹⁵⁸ The poet has to get rid of the ancient sun-god which "may interpose itself between us and the sun, and

¹⁵⁵ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.236.

¹⁵⁶ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.38.

¹⁵⁷ Marie Barroff, "Wallace Stevens: The World and the Poet", in Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays, op.cit., p.3.

¹⁵⁸ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.267.

the names and legends of the constellation may similarly obscure the stars."¹⁵⁹ However beautiful, the myth of Phoebus¹⁶⁰ which belongs to the past is no longer credible in our present life:

Let purple Phoebus lie in umber harvest,
Let Phoebus slumber and die in autumn umber.
Phoebus is dead, ephebe.¹⁶¹

Stevens's rejection of myths does not prevent him from including them in his poetry but only to refute them. In this, we can say that Stevens is unlike other modernists such as TS Eliot and James Joyce, who use myth to express a vision. A striking example of a refuted myth in Stevens's poetry is that of the faithful Penelope¹⁶² in "The World as Meditation." In this poem, Stevens rewrites the myth and suggests an alternative to Penelope's trick of weaving, and undoing her funeral garment until her husband's return. This alternative is the power of the mind which enables Penelope to create an imagined Odysseus who offers her happiness while the actual Odysseus remains physically absent:

A form of fire approaches the cretonnes of Penelope,
Whose mere savage presence awakens the world in which she dwells.
She has composed, so long, a self with which to welcome him,
Companion to his self for her, which she imagined,
Two in a deep-founded sheltering, friend and dear friend.

¹⁵⁹ Marie Barroff, "Wallace Stevens: The World and the Poet", in Wallace Stevens: A collection of Critical Essays, op.cit., p.3.

¹⁶⁰ Phoebus, a mythical figure also known as Apollo, is the Latin god of music, prophecy, medicine, poetry, and archery, but he is most widely known as the sun-god or the god of light. In poetry, Phoebus traditionally represents the sun.

¹⁶¹ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., pp.207-208.

¹⁶² In Greek mythology, Penelope was the wife of Odysseus and a symbol of devotion and fidelity. She waited nineteen years for her husband to come home while Odysseus was fighting in the Trojan War. During that time, Penelope resisted numerous suitors, finally tricking them by saying she would choose a suitor when she had finished weaving her funeral garment. Each day she would weave, and each night she would undo what she had done that day. Thus Penelope never finished her task and held the suitors off until her husband's return.

But was it Ulysses? Or was it only the warmth of the sun
On her pillow? The thought kept beating in her like her heart.
The two kept beating together. It was only day.

It was Ulysses and it was not. Yet they had met,
Friend and dear friend and a planet's encouragement.
The barbarous strength within her would never fail. 163

The pressure of reality outside her mind suggested by "savage presence" has aroused her to the violent, ugly pressure of those outward suitors, but her "barbarous strength," symbol of the power of human imagination, enables her to constantly meditate her reunion with the man she constantly creates in her mind. This is the conception we find in The Necessary Angel where Stevens mentions a certain nobility of the mind that constitutes "a violence within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing against the pressure of reality."¹⁶⁴ It is the "violence without" or the chaotic twentieth century reality which exercises pressure on us, like the pressure exercised by Penelope's suitors on her, which triggers the "violence within" or the imagination to protect her from the pressure of reality.

b- Rejection of Christianity

Stevens equally refutes Christianity since "the death of one god is the death of all gods"¹⁶⁵ including the Christian God. "Sunday Morning"¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.164.

¹⁶⁴ Stevens Wallace. The Necessary Angel. (New York: Vintage books, 1959). p.66.

¹⁶⁵ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.207.

¹⁶⁶ "Sunday Morning" is a poem where Stevens contends that the natural world, however harsh and constraining it can be, is man's only source of certainty, even above religion.

is Stevens's most eloquent description of the moment when Christianity dissolves. It develops in the form of an argument between two voices: that of the woman, whose enjoyment of the pleasures of this world is marred by the awareness of death, and that of the narrator seeking to reassure her that the world is enough to satisfy her.

Stevens starts the poem by setting the woman in a secular comfort suggested by "peignoir", "coffee" and "oranges" which dispels the holiness of the hour that may remind the woman of Christ's "ancient sacrifice".

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.¹⁶⁷

Despite the secular setting and because of the religious hour, a Sunday morning, the woman feels the "encroachment" of the religious sensibility. Then she returns across the "wide water" to the crucifixion in ancient sacrifice with a nostalgia for a religious comfort as opposed to secular "complacencies":

She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
As a calm darkens among water-lights.
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
Seem things in some procession of the dead,
Winding across wide water, without sound.¹⁶⁸

At the same time, a series of rhetorical questions suggests that the supernatural divinity so feared by the woman is only an image that comes "in silent shadows and in dreams". The sun, fruit and beauty of this world provide enough compensation for the lost heaven:

¹⁶⁷ *Poems by Wallace Stevens*, op.cit., p.7.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.7.

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?¹⁶⁹

She, therefore, decides that instead of embracing such a cipher of a divinity, she should embrace her own divinity. That is that she should let herself be part of the nature that engendered her rather than to separate herself from it and redefine herself as something supernatural. Emotions, passion, moods, grievings and elations are not signs of divinity but are reacting earthly settings and natural elements, such as rain, falling snow, loneliness, blooming forests, and wet roads on autumn nights. The natural images are strong, and the various emotions they give use to constitute a description of the divinity. The meaning of the divinity in Stevens's poems has thus undergone a redefinition. This divinity is the natural world:

Divinity must live within herself:
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
All pleasures and all pains, remembering
The bough of summer and the winter branch.
These are the measure destined for her soul.¹⁷⁰

But the woman is not entirely willing to accept the argument. She puts forward a series of objections which the second voice attempts to combat by presenting arguments against each one of them. One of her objections is her wonder about the permanence of the earthly paradise:

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

She says, "I am content when wakened birds,
Before they fly, test the reality
Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;
But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields
Return no more, where, then, is paradise?" ¹⁷¹

The second voice answers that the woman's mind is equally unlimited. Her memory, which lasts longer than any heavenly pleasantries, is eternal and unbounded by the march of the seasons. Neither "old Chimera" nor "the enchanted islands", nor any other earthly or heavenly rest is as definite as the memory of April's green:

There is not any haunt of prophecy,
Nor any old chimera of the grave,
Neither the golden underground, nor isle
Melodious, where spirits gat them home,
Nor visionary south, nor cloudy palm
Remote on heaven's hill, that has endured
As April's green endures; or will endure
Like her remembrance of awakened birds,
Or her desire for June and evening, tipped
By the consummation of the swallow's wings. ¹⁷²

To her professing "the need of some imperishable bliss," ¹⁷³ she is answered that unchanging heaven in which the ripe fruit never falls would be boring: "Is there no change of death in paradise?" ¹⁷⁴ or "Does ripe fruit never fall?" ¹⁷⁵

Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams
And our desires..... ¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

Only change causes beauty. And change means beginnings and endings. Besides the cycle of ripening, fruition, and decay causes desire, which would not exist without the realization of transience. Death may strew "the leaves / Of sure obliteration on our paths,"¹⁷⁷ but it also "makes the willow shiver in the sun / For maidens"¹⁷⁸ and "causes boys to pile new plums and pears"¹⁷⁹ before the maidens who "taste / And stray impassioned in the littering leaves."¹⁸⁰ Death clears away the withering remnants of the old and, through desire, provides replacement and the new in a continuous cycle that is ultimately the cause of all beauty and all ugliness, all pleasure and all pain, that is of all life.

For Stevens even Christ symbolizes mortality. In the concluding stanza of "Sunday Morning", we hear a voice coming over the water and telling about an unresurrected Christ who no longer inspires us with the promise of eternal life:

The tomb in Palestine
Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay.¹⁸¹

c- Affirmation of the Supremacy of Man

What lies behind Stevens's rejection of mythology and Christianity is the affirmation of the supremacy of Man. For Stevens this movement in belief through history from the totally inhuman traditional mythological gods through the partly human Jesus to the fully human god is a natural evolution. The fourth stanza of "Sunday Morning" moves on to a kind of

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p.11.

abridged history of Western notions of the divine from the totally inhuman Jove¹⁸² through the partly human Jesus:

Jove in the clouds had his inhuman birth.
No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave
Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind.
He moved among us, as a muttering king,
Magnificent, would move among his hinds,
Until our blood, commingling, virginal,
With heaven, brought such requital to desire
The very hinds discerned it, in a star.¹⁸³

Here Jove is indirectly compared to Jesus. The mention of Jove's "inhuman birth" and the allusion to the star of Bethlehem in the eighth line of this stanza provide material that supports this comparison. These ideas also present a notion of religious progression over time. Jove is perceived as the primitive Jesus and we are confronted with the idea that people believed in Jove and the ideas of his "mythy mind" until human blood mixed with heaven and resulted in the birth of Jesus.

However the belief in Christianity, according to Stevens, is no longer credible in modern life. Man has to replace God. This shift in belief from Jesus, the half-human god, to the modern man, the fully human god, is suggested in many poems of Stevens. For example, "The Men that are falling" is taken as a confrontation of Christ ends in the poet's rejection of Christianity and the affirmation of the supremacy of man. In this poem, Stevens employs the persona of a sleeper awakening to a vision in the darkness:

..... This leaning on his bed
his leaning on his elbow, on his bed,

¹⁸² Jove is the English name for Jupiter. In Roman mythology, Jupiter is the supreme god of the universe. He is a god of sky and light, and he protects the state and its laws.

¹⁸³ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.8.

Staring at midnight, at the pillow that is black¹⁸⁴

Dominated by the fierce moonlight of the imagination, he finds the pillow on which he gazes "more than sodarium" and there confronts the tortured visage of a man who at once represents Christ and all other martyrs of an ideal cause:

The head of one of the men that are falling placed
Upon the pillow to repose and speak,
Speak and say the immaculate syllables
That he spoke only by doing what he did.
God and the angels, this was his desire
Whose head lies blurring here, for this he died.¹⁸⁵

The triumphs are man's rather than God's. The value of the human redemption Stevens attaches to this sacrifice belongs to this world not to the world of heaven or as Stevens puts it:

This death was his belief though death is a stone
This man loved earth, not heaven, enough to die.¹⁸⁶

Death in the shape of the stone is fixed within the physical order of which it is part beyond there is only the blank.

The rejection of the belief in mythologies and Christianity is due to their obsolescence as opposed to the freshness of the modern man with his power to make the "supreme fiction" an alternative to the lost traditional beliefs. In one of the adages, Stevens writes "God is in me or else is not at all."¹⁸⁷ Thus the existence of God according to Stevens depends on the

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p.72.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, quoted in Ralph J. Millis, Jr, "Wallace Stevens: The Image of the Rock", in *Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays*, op.cit., p.100.

existence of man. "Asides on the Oboe"¹⁸⁸ is a poem which deals with the development of Stevens's attitude toward the question of belief which can be summed up in the following lines:

It is a question now,
Of final belief. So, say that final belief
Must be in fiction. ¹⁸⁹

For Stevens the belief must be in fiction and not in the traditional religious beliefs. These traditional religious beliefs that Stevens reduces to a status of fiction cease to be credible in the modern life. The following lines from "Asides on the Oboe" include three different beliefs: Christianity, Greek and Roman gods and the metal heroes:

The obsolete fiction of the wide river in
An empty land; the gods that Boucher killed
And the metal heroes that time granulates. ¹⁹⁰

These lines explain that the traditional beliefs lose their force as objects of veneration. Christianity is associated with "the wide river in an empty land" which refers to the Jordan River. The Bible says Joshua led the Children of Israel over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Christ was baptized in the waters of the Jordan River by Saint John the Baptist. Another religion concerns the Greek and the Roman gods, and "the gods that Boucher killed" is an allusion to them. Boucher, the 18th century French painter, depicted mythological deities with a whimsy and playfulness that was true to the rococo style. Stevens mentions him "as having extinguished gods, likely interpreting Boucher's irreverence toward the deities as symbolic of

¹⁸⁸ "Aside on the Oboe" suggests that the final belief must be in fiction because the old beliefs are dead. The poem also states the poet, as the maker of fiction, must understand every thing in human rather than in religious terms

¹⁸⁹ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.102.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.7

his own desire to view the world as free of gods."¹⁹¹ The third type of deity is "the metal heroes, that time granulates". They are such ethical absolutes that Stevens satirizes in "Lions in Sweden":

Those sovereign of the soul
And savings banks, Fides, the sculptor's prize,
All eyes and size, and galled Justitia,
Trained to poise the tables of the Law,
Patientia Forever soothing wounds
And mighty Fortitudo, frantic bass.¹⁹²

Stevens believes that these inhuman gods are obsolete and must be replaced by man. In "Mystic Garden and Middling beast," Stevens is deeply involved in the idea of man whom he considers as the giver of order through the making of fiction. This man becomes the subject of his poetry. This man who is "happy rather than holy"¹⁹³ is not an angel or a god but a "son only of man and sun"¹⁹⁴ who is concerned with earth rather than heaven as a paradise:

With all his attributes no god but man
Of men whose heaven is in themselves,¹⁹⁵

The stress in the above lines is on the fact that the man who replaces God is stripped off from any divinity. But what distinguishes the central man from the traditional deities is newness and life:

The philosophers' man still walks in dew,

¹⁹¹ David Lavery, "A Wallace Stevens Readers Guide",
<http://mtsu32.mtsu.edu:11072/Feigning/WSRG/wsrg.html>

¹⁹² The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.99.

¹⁹³ Wallace Stevens, Collected Poems, quoted in Frank Kermode, Wallace Stevens, (London: Oliver and Boyd LTD, 1960), p. 71.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid..

Still by the sea-side mutters milky lines
Concerning an immaculate imagery.¹⁹⁶

The philosophers' man is the personification of the idea of Stevens's ideal man. The three images with which the philosopher's man is associated suggest his newness and purity to oppose him to other obsolete superstitious and religious fictions. He "still walks in dew" is therefore in the morning of his career. "Mutters milky lines" stresses his sweetness and freshness. "Immaculate imagery" conveys the idea of an inviolate conception of life. The "sea-side" is not a mere setting but it is a metaphor of life which reinforces the idea of man's life. Although he has no divine attributes, he shares the same creative power that characterizes god. Stevens says:

If you say on hautboy man is not enough
Can never stand as god, is ever wrong
In the end, however naked, tall, there is still
The impossible possible philosophers' man.¹⁹⁷

Hautboy is a synonym of oboe which is a musical instrument like many other musical instruments in which Stevens likens poetry and its source of poetry to imagination and music. The use of "naked" suggests that man is without superficial falsities and supernatural, and "tall" suggests his loftiness. The main ideas about the philosopher's man are introduced and other details are added. Thus "the impossible possible philosophers man" is:

The central man, the human globe, responsive
As a mirror with a voice, the man of glass,
Who in million diamonds sums us up.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.102.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

The ideal man is the one who is able to live by his imagination and will be the one who is able to illuminate like " a mirror with a voice". Central " is a metaphor for the essence of humanity as opposed to superficiality. The four images contained in these lines: " globe ", "mirror", "glass " and " diamonds " suggest bright light emitted, reflected or transmitted by the central man. An example of the ideal man to whom Stevens attribute these qualities is the poet who gives life to the "supreme fiction."

C- Rejection of Philosophical and Literary Tradition

a- Rejection of Rationalism

In addition to mythologies and Christianity modern poet has to disassociate himself from philosophy and literary tradition. For Stevens, indeed, the "first idea" is also endangered by the 18th century Rationalist tradition. This tradition valued reason and empirical observation as the only reliable source of information about the world and about human beings. Enlightenment largely shaped by John Locke's theory of the human mind and epistemology which holds that the mind is a non-distorting mirror to the outside world. It is like a blank sheet upon which experience inscribes ideas; passive to the outside world. Thus Poetry's only legitimate role is to depict reality as it is. This is what the English poet Pope affirms in the following lines:

True expression, like th' unchanging sun,
Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon,
It guilds all objects, but it alters none.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹Tom Furniss, "Romanticism", <http://homepages.strath.ac.uk/~chcs05/philosophynew/romanticism2.html>

Stevens rejects this model of relation between mind and the outside world. He claims that the human mind is capable of abstracting reality. The critic Louis L Martz states that "by abstract Stevens seems rather to imply a quality of being taken out, abstracted in the root sense, from that world we call the outer universe: something concrete taken out of this and taken onto the mind."²⁰⁰ What we take into the mind is abstract and it has no correspondence in the real world. Stevens states that "the fictive abstract is as immanent in the mind of the poet, as the idea of God is immanent in the mind of the theologian."²⁰¹

Stevens also rejects Locke's view that what is inside, like the imaginative thinking, that sensation triggers is suspect because it brings to us a false view of what is real. Locke's concrete dualism which makes the word idea stand indifferently for thing and thought exalts reason but not imagination. On the other hand, the poetic world of Wallace Stevens, or his *mundo*, as he likes to call it, lies as he puts it in The Necessary Angel beyond "the gaunt world of reason":

It is the *mundo* of the imagination in which the imaginative man delights and not the gaunt world of reason. The pleasure is the pleasure of powers that create a truth that cannot be arrived at by the reason alone, a truth that the poet recognizes by sensation.²⁰²

Stevens rejects this Lockean concrete understanding of dualism which satisfies only reason without imagination. According to Stevens, "the poet, in order to fulfill himself, must accomplish a poetry that satisfies both

²⁰⁰ Louis L. Martz, "Wallace Stevens: The World as Meditation", in Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays, op.cit., p.145.

²⁰¹ Wallace Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens, quoted in John Adames, Twentieth Century Literature, http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0403/is_1_43/ai_56750467/pg_2

²⁰² The Necessary Angel, op.cit., p.58.

the reason and the imagination. [. . .] Thus poetry, which we have been thinking of as at least the equal of philosophy, may be its superior"²⁰³

Stevens's rejection of rigid, emotionless, cold Rationalism is the main theme of the last stanza of "Six Significant landscapes."²⁰⁴ In this stanza the rigidly "square" "rationalists" dress, and live, and think in ways that are intellectually and personally confining:

Rationalists, wearing square hats,
Think, in square rooms,
Looking at the floor,
Looking at the ceiling.
They confine themselves
To right-angled triangles.
If they tried rhomboids,
Cones, waving lines, ellipses
As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon
Rationalists would wear sombreros.²⁰⁵

The rationalists confine themselves to the clear-cut and the indisputable. We observe the repetitive sharp square-ness of the rationalists' existence, along with the limitations on their field of vision. We are led to believe that the Rationalists lack imagination, even joy, in their lives. The poem goes further, suggesting that rationalists, if they tried other, less "squared" ways of being, again represented analogously by curved, less sharp, and softer geometric figures such as "rhomboids", "cones", "waving lines" and "ellipses," would "wear sombreros", the hats of dance, joy and mirth.

This Stevensian rejection of the rigidly rational makes of him a follower of the romantic poet William Blake. For Blake, man under the

²⁰³ Ibid., p.42.

²⁰⁴ "Six Significant landscapes" creates a tension between reality and imagination. The poet naturally sides with living in the imagination. In so doing the poet can supercede the divine. Unlike the poet, the rationalists are a small people confined to their reality.

²⁰⁵ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.17.

domination of reason is a creature who has lost his integral nature and has become a dead fragment in himself. In the following lines, he denounces Voltaire and Rousseau as the rationalists seeking to destroy man's capacity for imagination. The sand represents the dead particles separated by reason from the true unity of the human vision:

Mock on, Mock on Voltaire, Rousseau:
Mock on, Mock on: 'tis all in vain!
You throw the sand against the wind,
And the wind blows it back again.²⁰⁶

Like Stevens in "Six Significant landscapes", Blake uses in "The Tyger" geometry to reject rigid rationalism. In the following lines, he suggests the fearfulness of Rationalism suggested by the symmetrical frame of the tyger:

Tyger ! Tyger ! burning bright
In the forests of the night ,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?²⁰⁷

b- Rejection of Romanticism

This affinity between Stevens and the Romantics should not mislead us to believe that Stevens is a romantic poet. Blake is, indeed, a marginal figure in Romanticism. Stevens railed in his own way against the emotionally loaded romantic ideas. He struggled in his work to acknowledge the western world's romantic history while working to redefine his culture without the romantic tradition. In "Sailing After Lunch,"

²⁰⁶William Blake, "Mock on, Mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau", <http://www.abm-enterprises.net/mockon.html>

²⁰⁷Alfred Kazin , ed. The Portable Blake. (New York: Penguin Books, 1946). p.109.

Stevens addresses the question of how prevalent the romantic should be in literature:

The romantic should be here.
The romantic should be there.
It ought to be everywhere.
But the romantic must never remain.²⁰⁸

The above lines show Stevens' determination to get rid of Romanticism to make the world new by describing it in new terms. In "Man and Bottle", Stevens again explains the importance of getting rid of the symbolism that comes from Romanticism in an effort at making the world new:

The mind is the great poem of winter, the man,
Who, to find what will suffice,
Destroys romantic tenements
Of rose and ice
In the land of war.²⁰⁹

These lines are directed against nineteenth century romantic aesthetics. The romantic with its loaded concepts of "rose and ice" is compared to a shelter ("romantic tenements.") The word "ice" suggests that these tenements are useless to the thoughtful modern man, as they are first of all, as tenements, poor modes of shelter against winter. Being made of "rose" suggests that the tenements as buildings are also distractions, pulling the viewer's attention from the real issues, such as "war" that need to be addressed; that is, what is beneath or behind the tenements.

This romantic escapism from the real issues and its ecstatic relation with nature are the reasons for Stevens's comment that "the romantic is a

²⁰⁸ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.66.

²⁰⁹ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.173.

falsification."²¹⁰ Indeed Stevens rejects the tendency of the romantic to identify the ideal life of imagination with the whole life of reality whereas the life of imagination must transcend reality from which it gets its life. Stevens tells us that " the imagination is the liberty of the mind. The romantic is a failure to make of that liberty... The achievement of the romantic ...lies in minor wish-fulfillments and it is incapable of abstraction."²¹¹

c- The Defence of a Poetry Based on Discovery

Stevens thus denies the historical legacy in poetry. Unlike many other Modernists like Eliot, Stevens's modernism does not cling to the artistic achievements of the past. Eliot, for example, believes that the artists should consider literary tradition in new ways. For him " the past [is] altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."²¹² Eliot also admits that the artists, however original, must be understood and appreciated in relation to those who preceded them. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot declares: "You cannot value him [the artist] alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead." Eliot's modernist poetry often juxtaposes the literary past with the context of contemporary life to shed a fresh and illuminating light on both the past and the present. This is why his poetry is peppered with allusions to the Greeks, Shakespeare, the Metaphysicals, and more. Stevens on the contrary, is

²¹⁰ Wallace Stevens, quoted in Justin Quinn , "Nature and Ideology in Wallace Stevens"
<http://colloquium.upol.cz/coll00/quinn.htm> Justin

²¹¹ Wallace Stevens, quoted in C. Roland Wagner, " A central Poetry", in Wallace Stevens : A Collection of Critical Essays, op.cit., p.73.

²¹² TS Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", <http://F:/-T°/°20s-°/°20 Eliot °/°20on°/°20 literary°/°20tradition.htm>

profoundly skeptical of history. Stevens believes in the necessity of always beginning anew and in poetry based on discovery rather than imposition:

To discover. To discover an order as of
A season, to discover summer and know it.
To discover winter and know it well, to find.
Not to impose, not to have reasoned at all.
Out of nothing to have come on major weather.²¹³

To come upon "major weather," which is one of the "supreme fictions," is to perceive that reality is not only beyond the limits of any arbitrary system, but also that it exists as a form of potential for us to discover through experience.

Thus all imaginative activities starts from the primary efforts of abstraction. To create the new fiction we must first de-create the old one, and the reality of de-creation is a strong act of creation. In the next chapter I will discuss that Stevens's idea of abstraction is a form of potential for poetic creativity through which reality is endlessly re-imagined.

²¹³ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.230.

Chapter Four

Chapter Three: The "Supreme Fiction" as Change

For Stevens the "supreme fiction" is involved in the very instant of the poet's contact with reality, and it serves as the agent of a new reality born of the fusion of bare reality with the imagination. Thus the poetic notion of change consists of the poet's involvement in the real world "coupled with his ability to uncover resemblances among separate phenomena within it."²¹⁴ Stevens communicate these resemblances through a connotative language as a fresh vision of a vivid and an ordered world.

Yet Stevens's idea of change is not limited to the ability of the mind to transform reality, but change means also the power of the imagination to constantly create a new poetry. The world of which the poet is a part is in a state of constant change; as a result, the "supreme fiction" must constantly change to fit with this changing world. Moreover only the poetry that changes is beautiful, and without change poetry would be stagnant and obsolete. Therefore to keep the beauty of the "supreme fiction", the poet must always provide it with new styles

This chapter which includes two parts explores Stevens's notion of change. The first part deals with Stevens's belief in the power of the imagination to transform bare reality into an imagined one. It also examines how the imagination changes reality and bends its shape to a variety of perspectives. Lastly, it explores Stevens's idea that the poetic transformation is a process of resemblances or analogies that the poetical

²¹⁴ Alan Perlis, Wallace Stevens, A world of Transforming Shape, (New Jersey: Associated Universities Presses, Inc, 1976), p.15.

mind discovers. In the second part, I will discuss Stevens's emphasis that the poet must always strive to find a new poetry that coheres with the new reality. I will also stress that change in poetry is a matter of style. The style must cope with obsolescence one day and to avoid this the poet must always adopt an unfamiliar style. Lastly I will look more closely at devices of death images, circle imagery and seasonal metaphors which Stevens often associates with the idea of change.

A- From Bare Reality to Imagined Reality

a- The Imagination as a Transmuter of Reality

For Stevens the role of the poet is not to create a new reality. In fact an adequate fiction will not distort the nature of reality. In The Necessary Angel, he says that the imagination is like "light, it adds nothing but only allows us to see more."²¹⁵ Again he notes that "the imagination never brings anything to the world."²¹⁶ Yet the role of the poet is not to reflect bare reality, but to transform it. In "The Man with the Blue Guitar," the listeners complain to the artist about the "blue guitar" which does not represent the "green reality" as it is. The player explains to them that he can only produce a version of reality through the imaginative contractions:

The man bent over his guitar,
A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.

They said, " You have a blue guitar
You do not play things as they are. "

The man replied " Things as they are

²¹⁵ Stevens Wallace, The Necessary Angel, (New York: Vintage books, 1959), p.61.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p.59.

Are changed upon the blue guitar" ²¹⁷

Thus the poet has to transform reality through his imagination. This is what Stevens calls "nobility."²¹⁸ But what is that power that enables the poet to create nobility? In other words, what knowledge enables the poet to give meaning to the world? For Stevens, the life of the imagination starts with the poet's senses. He says:

A poet writes poetry because he is a poet; and he is not a poet because he is a poet but because of his personal sensibility. What gives a man his personal sensibility I don't know and it doesn't matter because no one knows.²¹⁹

In an attempt to create nobility, the sensibility of the poet is in a constant dialogue with the world. Unlike the rationalists who make no distinction between reality and thought, Stevens believes that with the poet reality undergoes a change when perceived by the senses. In "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight", Stevens explains the effects of the senses on reality:

Our sense of these things changes as they change,
Not as in metaphor, but in our sense
Of them. So sense exceeds all metaphors.
It exceeds the heavy changes of the light.²²⁰

The repetition of the word "change" emphasizes Stevens's belief that the role of the poet is not to describe reality as it is but to transform it through the power of his imagination.

²¹⁷ Wallace Stevens, Poems by Wallace Stevens, (New York: Vintage books, 1959), p.73.

²¹⁸ The Necessary Angel, op.cit., p.66.

²¹⁹ Wallace Stevens, quoted in Anca PEIU, "After the final no: The World of Wallace Stevens"
<http://www.unibuc.ro/eBooks/Its/AncaPeiu->

²²⁰ Wallace Stevens, quoted in Sister M Bernetta Quinn, "Metamorphosis in Wallace ", in Wallace Stevens : A Collection of Critical Essays ,ed, Marie Borroff (New York : Prentice Hall INC , 1962), p. 55.

To understand where reality is transformed, I believe it is profitable to look first at William James's "Essays in Radical Empiricism," a work that Stevens may well have been acquainted with, either in his readings of James or at Harvard. James rejected the "the concrete way of understanding the dualism [as] was fashioned by Locke when he made the word 'idea' stand indifferently for thing and thought."²²¹ For James an "object" or "idea" may exist inwardly in the mind as thought or outwardly outside the mind as thing. As thing, the experience is extended whereas as thought it occupies no space or place. From here James affirms that there is a self-contradiction "from which the radical dualism of thought and thing is the only truth that can save us." James affirms the differing relations in which the "objects" or "ideas" exist, inwardly or outwardly. From here it is possible to locate "appreciation" as a place where the dualism of in here/out there dissolves. It is the alchemical place of transformation where change is possible. It is neither "quite inner nor quite outer":

I refer here to appreciations, which form an ambiguous sphere of being, belonging with emotion on the one hand, and having objective 'value' on the other, yet seeming not quite inner nor quite outer, as if a diremption had begun but had not made itself complete.²²²

It is in the sphere of "appreciations" that the inspiration of the men makes the transformation of reality. Certainly we can add "nobility" to this list of "appreciations" and examine Stevens's discussion of "nobility." Stevens finds the act of the mind a state where "appreciations" create countless situations, which recreate the world. In his essay "The Figure of

²²¹ William James, "The Essays in Radical Empiricism",
http://spartan.ac.brocku.ca/~lward/James/James_1912/James_1912_01.html

²²² Ibid.

the Youth as a Virile Poet", Stevens speaks of the making of the poem through the portal of the "in here" and "out there" alchemy of the imagination:

It is not an artifice that the mind has added to human nature. The mind has added nothing to human nature. It is a violence from within that protects us from violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality.²²³

It is therefore in the "appreciations" that reality gets imaginatively reworked to create a new vision.

"Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" depicts this idea. In this poem, unlike "Gubbinal" where the speaker is not involved in any creative endeavor, the world comes from the speaker. In the opening lines of the poem, the speaker asks where seeing (ointment), hearing (hymns) and feeling (tide swept through me) are emanating from:

What was the ointment sprinkled on my beard?
What were the hymns that buzzed beside my ear?
What was the sea whose tide swept through me there?²²⁴

Answering himself, he states that these sensory impressions find objects only from his own self, and nothing through which he moves is outside him:

Out of my mind the golden ointment rained,
And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.
I was myself the compass of that sea.²²⁵

Since he is the "compass" of the sea, the movement of the sea has direction only in relation to him. Whatever hymns he hears are hymns he creates. The spattering of ointment on his beard is "a parody of the ceremony in which

²²³ The Necessary Angel, op.cit., p.66.

²²⁴ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.23.

²²⁵ Ibid.

God's elect is anointed with oil or ointment."²²⁶ Hoon becomes anointer of the world through his imagination. It is his reality, not simply an objective world that he looks out on and experiences. He or his imagination acts on the world and in the process becomes not only a part of it, but in fact its creator:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
Or heard or felt came not but from myself;
And there I found myself more truly and more strange.²²⁷

It is therefore in appreciation that Stevens's idea of the mind of winter is different from the empiricist view which states that the mind is passive to outside world, and that it is like a blank sheet upon which experience inscribes ideas. Stevens's "mind of winter" is the starting point of the poetic creativity through which reality is fully re-imagined as echoes in the last stanza of "A Primitive like an Orb":

That's it. The lover writes, the believer hears,
The poet mumbles and the painter sees,
Each one, his fated eccentricity,
As a part, but part, but tenacious particle,
Of the skeleton of the ether, the total
Of letters, prophecies, perceptions, clods
Of color, the giant of nothingness, each one
And the giant ever changing, living in change.²²⁸

This "giant of nothingness" is a personification of the "poetic intelligence". It is the "supreme fiction" with infinite potential. "Nothingness" is indeed generative of change. Like the "first idea," it allows for an endless reinvention of reality by "living in change". Therefore abstraction implies

²²⁶ Anthony Whiting, "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon", http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/s_z/stevens/hoon.htm

²²⁷ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.23.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 140

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²²⁷ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.23.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 140

interdependence, which is endless and continually changes, between reality and the imagination.

b- The Imagination and Multiple Perspectives

From the idea of the mind's ability of endless reinvention of reality, truth becomes, according to Stevens, a purely psychological phenomenon, a process of the living organism, and it is in this place that poetic inspiration takes place. In this context we can say that there is not a truth; there are as many truths as there are men "since no one sees the same as any one else does."²²⁹ For Stevens appreciation " is like flow of meaning with no speech/And of as many meanings as of men." ²³⁰

Truth as a psychological phenomenon and not as a metaphysical entity is the main theme of "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird". In this poem, Stevens argues not for "the truth" but for "truths". The poem consists of thirteen brief haiku-like²³¹ fragments in no discernible order. The blackbird marks its physical presence in each of these fragments and becomes a center of focus around which a brief scene is described briefly. He does this to make each stanza an explanation of a new perspective from which he perceives this blackbird. A particular passage, say

A man and a woman
Are one.

²²⁹ Sister M Bernetta Quinn, "Metamorphosis in Wallace Stevens", in Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays, op.cit., p.54.

²³⁰ Wallace Stevens, Collected Poems, quoted in Charles Altieri, "Stevens Ideas of Feeling: Towards an Exponential Poetics", <http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~altieri/manuscripts/STEVFEEL.html>

²³¹ The haiku, a Japanese form, is one of the shortest types of lyric poetry. In Japanese, the haiku consists of 17 syllables arranged in three lines. The first line has 5 syllables, the second 7, and the third 5.

A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.²³²

must be connected only through the presence of blackbirds with what comes
after:

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflection s
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.²³³

Neither style nor convention (stanza or line lengths, rhythm, etc.)
nor "theme" pulls these passages together into anything approaching
sustained and coherent thought or feeling. In order to give this sense of the
multiplicity of seeing, Stevens uses a cubist technique which is
perspectivism. Indeed the poem includes directly this technique of
perspectivism as a theme is in the ninth stanza:

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.²³⁴

This is a way of saying that the world contains not one sense but many.
Each sense of the blackbird defines an intelligible circle, the "meaning" of
which exists only until the blackbird crosses its horizon. In this view, we
can say the poem illustrates Nietzsche's idea that the world "has not one
sense behind it, but hundreds of senses,"²³⁵ and that "there are many kinds

²³² Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.12.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 13

²³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted in B.J. Leggett, "Early Stevens: The Nietzschean Intertext",
http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/s_z/stevens/blackbird.htm

of eyes...therefore there must be many kinds of truths."²³⁶ "Thirteen Ways" is built on the idea that each sense of the world is a new way of seeing, confined to its own unique perspective, and each has its origin in the perceiver. This idea has its parallel in the following quotation from Nietzsche's The Dawn of Day: "We measure the world by these horizons within which our senses confine each of us"; thus, "a concentric circle is drawn round every being."²³⁷ Accordingly the idea of the multiple truths the poem suggests assumes that one's current perspective is enlarged. This is what Stevens's poem "On the Road Home" asserts:

It was when I said,
 "There is no such thing as the truth.
 That the grapes seemed fatter,
 The fox ran out of his hole. . . ."²³⁸

The above lines accentuate Stevens's belief that maturity suggested by "grapes seemed fatter" and freedom conveyed by "the fox ran out of his hole" come only after man discovers that there is no absolute truth. This recalls Nietzsche's view that "plurality in interpretation is a sign of strength"²³⁹ because it does not rob the world of its "disquieting and enigmatical nature."²⁴⁰

c-Analogy and Connotative Language as a Way to Imagined Reality

We have previously said that the "supreme fiction" is the interplay between reality and imagination. It is worth adding that this poetic task is

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.64.

²³⁹ Friedrich, Nietzsche, The Dawn of Day, quoted in, "Early Stevens: The Nietzschean Intertext" op.cit.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

accomplished through what Stevens calls analogies or the similarities between things. Poetry through resemblance makes vivid the similarities between things and in so doing "enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it."²⁴¹ In terms of language these analogies find their outlet in metaphors or similes or any other different unit of poetic expression. In this context, Stevens defines the metaphor as "the creation of resemblance by imagination."²⁴² Therefore "Poetry is a transcendent analogue composed of particulars of reality."²⁴³

Thus the ultimate value of reality that we seek can only be known in analogy. The human search, then, is always for similarities between things that can help us to see the world. To illustrate the connection between analogy and the perception of reality, it is profitable to look at a poem by Wallace Stevens entitled "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself." In this poem Stevens creates the following situation: "the speaker hears a bird's cry in March and thinks of how the first bird heralds the returning flocks of birds; the bird is a chorister whose C preceded the choir."²⁴⁴ As the title of the poem announces, the poem wants the thing itself and not ideas about the thing, in other words, the objective reality of the bird's cry beyond the mind. And yet, while we can know there is some "thing" outside our mind, as the speaker knows he heard the bird, as we move toward that thing in consciousness we lose it:

²⁴¹ *The Necessary Angel*, op.cit., p.77.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p.72.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.130.

²⁴⁴ Robert Cording, "Finding the World's Fullness", <http://www.poems.com/essacord.htm>

That scrawny cry — It was
A chorister whose C preceded the choir.
It was part of the colossal sun,²⁴⁵

Here we encounter reality in all its colossal presence. There is however, the further recognition: that what we encounter is also an experience of what remains hidden. That colossal presence is experienced from within the limitations of the human mind. In the end, we can only know by analogy: "like / a new knowledge of reality":

Surrounded by its choral rings,
Still far away. It was like
A new knowledge of reality.²⁴⁶

The use of analogy, however, accentuates what Stevens's tries to annihilate, that is direct contact with reality. In this sense a poet has to adopt an indirect language to avoid a direct contact with reality. To explicit what he means by indirect language, Stevens frames, in "The Noble Rider," two approaches of language: the denotative language and the connotative language. While the empiricists took the tack of attempting knowledge of a verifiable reality by fashioning a purely denotative language, Stevens aimed for knowledge through connotative language. Stevens thus rejects Locke and Hume's desire for a cleansing of all figurative elements of language used in the pursuit of knowledge:

[A] language, considered semantically, evolves through a series of conflicts between the denotative and the connotative forces in words; between an asceticism tending to kill language by stripping words of all association and a hedonism tending to kill all language by dissipating their sense in a multiplicity of associations. These conflicts are nothing more than changes in the relation between the imagination and reality [. . .] The use of words in connotative senses

²⁴⁵ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.166.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

was denounced by Locke and Hobbes, who desired a mathematical plainness; in short, perspicuous words.²⁴⁷

The adoption of the connotative language can be noticed in the indirect way in which Stevens communicates: concrete images summon emotional and intellectual associations that cannot be precisely numbered or named. Colin Falk explains in his American and British Verse in The Twentieth Century that the poetic philosophy of Stevens "urges us toward immediacies of concrete experience,"²⁴⁸ and the reader is obliged to decode them for their intellectual meanings.²⁴⁹ It is this way of using language that makes the French scholar Renee Taupin say that Stevens was a "symbolist by reason of his evocatory art, his search for correspondences; for words which constitute images and words which reverberate with associations."²⁵⁰ Indeed, Stevens uses in his poetry concrete objects to convey abstract meanings. In "The Man with the Blue Guitar," the guitar is not a real guitar but stands for the transforming power of man's imagination. "The snowman" at first sight seems to be a poem experiencing winter weather, but there is an abstract idea at work which is to see things as they are without any humanly imposed meanings. The round shape of the jar in "The Anecdote of the Jar" is used to symbolize the ordering power of human imagination.

²⁴⁷ The Necessary Angel, op.cit., p.13.

²⁴⁸ Colin Falck, American and British Verse In the Twentieth Century : The Poetry that Matters, (Aldershot : Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), p. 72.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. ,p. 72

²⁵⁰ Renee Taupin , "L'influence". quoted in Frank Kermode, Wallace Stevens, (London Oliver and Boyd LTD , 1960), p.11.

C- The "Supreme Fiction" as a Poetry in Constant Change

a- A Changing Poetry for Changing Reality

Stevens's idea of change is not only the change wrought on reality by the imagination. It also consists of the poet's ability to make a new poetry. For him poetry, to be worth reading, must constantly change. The second section of the poem, "It Must Change," deals with the theme of the undesirability of stasis and the necessity of change. Images of budding sexuality, fecundity and fruition are juxtaposed with images of the worn-out, the withering and the decaying. "Italian girls"²⁵¹ with "jonquils in their hair"²⁵² are watched by an "old seraph,"²⁵³ at once an angel symbol of the worn-out Christian religion and a fossil shell. The narrator speaks of "the distaste we feel for this withered scene."²⁵⁴ These images recur through this section to emphasize Stevens's belief in an essential renewal and his rejection of all that is obsolete. The necessity of the cycle of change, is reaffirmed in the tenth canto:

The freshness of transformation is
The freshness of a world. It is our own,
It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves,
And that necessity and that presentation
Are rubbings of a glass in which we peer.²⁵⁵

All that does not change becomes obsolete. The Statue of General Du Puy is an illustration of a noble rider who does not change, and becomes rubbish in the end:

²⁵¹ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.215.

²⁵² Ibid.,p.216.

²⁵³ Ibid.,p.215.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.,p.216.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.,p.224.

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²⁵⁵ Ibid.,p.224.

Among our more vestigial states of mind.
Nothing had happened because nothing had changed.
Yet the General was rubbish in the end.²⁵⁶

The statue represents for Stevens the stagnant ideal left behind by dynamic history. The idea of nobility it embodies is no longer appropriate to the changed conditions for nobility in a new historical situation. As a symbol for belief, it has failed to resist the pressure of new reality and has become consequently incredible. In this respect, Stevens writes in The Necessary Angel: "It seems, nowadays, what it may very well not have seemed a few years ago, a little overpowering, a little magnificent"²⁵⁷

From here we can say that constant change in poetry is necessary because reality changes. Stevens believes that no faith is absolute, beliefs are credible for particular periods. As such the fiction is final for a moment in the sense that poetic truth is final since it brings about agreement with reality believed to be true for a time, that is, until a constant change of reality calls for a new imaginative adjustment. It is thus when finality in the conjunction of imagination and reality is brought about that a transformation takes place. Stevens wrote in a period in which the beliefs that once ordered reality have become unreliable, yet he is concerned with discovering beliefs that are credible in America present. In this context, Bonnie Costello points out that "our 'supreme fictions,' our metaphysical inventions, learn their changes less from autonomous compositional laws than from physical surroundings"²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 217.

²⁵⁷ The Necessary Angel, op.cit., p.9.

²⁵⁸ Costello, Bonnie, The Wallace Stevens Journal, quoted in Justin Quinn, "Nature and Ideology in Wallace Stevens" <http://colloquium.upol.cz/coll00/quinn.htm> Justin

In a world whose main aspect is change, poetry is a progressive metamorphosis of reality, and reality itself is an entity whose chief characteristic is flux. Man

Lives in a fluid not on solid rock.
The solid was an age, a period
With appropriate²⁵⁹

In "Of Modern Poetry,"²⁶⁰ Stevens contrasts the contemporary conceptions of poetry with the past ones. In the past, then, poetry expressed ideas common among a stable society, and the poet did not have to search for an adequate means of expression:

It has not always had
To find: the scene was set, it repeated what
Was in the script²⁶¹

In contrast to the unchanging nature of past poetry, modern poetry must be alive and changing. Poetry has to adapt so that it can meet people as they are in the present, in view of themselves and of their world. Poetry has to change with the times. It must evolve as culture evolves; otherwise, it would not belong to its contemporary culture or its people. Modern poetry must for example deal with war since the war has become a permanent aspect of modern life:

Then the theatre was changed
To something else. Its past was a souvenir
It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place
It has to face to face the man of the time and to meet

²⁵⁹ Wallace Stevens, quote in Ronald Sukenick, Wallace Stevens : Musing the Obscure"
<http://mtsu32.mtsu.edu:11072/Feigning/WSRG/musing/Theory.pdf>"

²⁶⁰ "Modern poetry" deals with what the modern poetry must be to confront the contemporary world. In this poem, Stevens states that modern poetry must be a poem of the mind, alive and changing.

²⁶¹ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.174.

The woman of the time. It has to think about war
And to find what will suffice²⁶²

Stevens believes that modern poetry must be active. It must not only change to fit the times, but also "construct a new stage." Rather than accepting and following the accepted mentality of its time as past poetry did, modern poetry must help to create its own intellectual atmosphere in an often turbulent world. The poetry like "an insatiable actor" cannot be satisfied:

.....It has
To construct a new stage. It has to be in that stage
And, like an insatiable actor, slowly and
With meditation, speak that in the ear
In the delicatest ear of the
mind, repeat,
Exactly, that which it wants to hear, at the sound
Of which, an invisible audience listens,
Not to the play, but to itself, as of two
Emotions becoming one.²⁶³

Stevens does not fail to stress here the complex interactions between poem and audience. The poem is like an "actor" who moves and changes. This actor repeats what he thinks the audience wants to hear. At the same time, however, the "invisible audience" listens to what it wants to hear. The audience listens to the poem, and feels the emotions created by the poem. Thus both the poem and the audience contribute to creating the emotions, the effect and the expression. The poem, then, is active and changing, because personal interpretations differ, causing the poem to differ between people that hear or read it.

²⁶²Ibid., pp.174-175.

²⁶³Ibid., p.175.

b- Change as Beauty

If fiction does not change, it will, like the traditional religions, die. Stevens considers both poetry and religion creations of the imagination. Thus the poets who created gods " were in fact, as we see them now, the clear giants of a vivid time, who in the style of their beings made the style of their Gods and the Gods Themselves One."²⁶⁴ Accordingly both poetry and religion stand for a certain style. The problem is that this style must become obsolete one day. It is the obsolescence of the style of the traditional myths and religion that makes them lose their divinity, and thus no one cares to fear them anymore nowadays:

When we think of Jove, while we take him for granted as the symbol of omnipotence, the ruler of mankind, we do not fear him. He does have a superhuman size, but at least not so superhuman as to amaze and intimidate us. He has a large head and a beard and is a relic, a relic that makes a kindly impression on us and reminds us of stories that we have heard about him. All the noble images of all the gods have been profound and most of them have been forgotten.²⁶⁵

Poetry, to be worth reading, must have a style in constant change. As an important element of the poetic style, language itself must change. If it embodies the perception of the past in fossilized form, it can hinder rather than further the vital activity of the mind. In the opening section of "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas," the speaker is oppressed by a sort of claustrophobia of words, a real landscape of the sea, sky, and mountains having been in effect papered by stock descriptive terms:

The sea is of so many written words; the sky

²⁶⁴ Wallace Stevens, quoted in, Anca PEIU, "Wallace Stevens's "Two or Three ideas""
<http://www.unibuc.ro/eBooks/Its/AncaPeiu-STEVEN/1.HTM>

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

Is blue, clear, cloudy, high, dark wide and round;
The mountains inscribe themselves upon the walls.²⁶⁶

Therefore the words we choose to express the world must constantly change
as noted in "The Man with the Blue Guitar":

Throw away the lights, the definitions,
And say of what you see in the dark
That it is this or that it is that,
But do not use the rotted names²⁶⁷

b- The Role of Defamiliarization

This search for change leads to Stevens's own creative standards which have a truly defamiliarizing effect, in a Shklovskyan sense of the term, on today's reader of his poetry. Stevens says: "As a man becomes familiar with his poetry, it becomes as obsolete for himself as for anyone else."²⁶⁸ The poet's plea for defamiliarization in his 1936 Harvard lecture echoes Victor Shklovsky's 1917 "Manifesto of the Formal Method" and the "ostranenje" concept in his celebrated essay "Art as Technique." Whereas Stevens refuses to adhere to any literary movement, and may have disliked the term defamiliarization, his plea for renewal, however, comes close enough to Shklovsky's consecrated term.

The image of the rock, often present in Stevens's poems, is a good example of Stevens's defamiliarization. The image of the rock never conveys the same meaning when repeated in Stevens's poetry; otherwise, it becomes obsolete and loses its literalness. The rock is a current symbol of

²⁶⁶ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.178.

²⁶⁷ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.89.

²⁶⁸ Wallace Stevens, quoted in, "After the final no: The World of Wallace Stevens ", op.cit.

the church. For Christians, it is associated with the origins of the church in Christ's delegation of spiritual authority to Peter. Peter's original name was Simon. Jesus gave him the name Peter, which means rock in Greek. Peter is sometimes called Simon Peter in the New Testament. In a passage from the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as saying to Peter:

And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.²⁶⁹

For Stevens, the religious image of the rock is obsolete. To avoid its obsolescence this biblical image is defamiliarized and used for secular purposes. The rock in the following lines is stripped of its religious characteristics suggested by the notable absence of "chorister" and the "priest":

There was neither voice nor crested image,
No chorister, nor priest. There was
Only the great height of rock²⁷⁰

Though the rock is without its religious attributes suggested by the absence of an association between ritual or clergy, its promise is still a secret and with no apparent secular alternative to the absence of religion.

The repetition of the image of the rock in "Credences of the Summer" illustrates well how Stevens changes meanings. In the following lines the rock represents reality as it is:

The rock cannot be broken. It is the truth.
It rises from land and sea and covers them.

²⁶⁹ (Matthew 16:18-19).

²⁷⁰ Wallace Stevens, quoted in Ralph J. Millis, Jr., "Wallace Stevens: The Image of the Rock", in Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays, op.cit., p.97.

It is a mountain half way green and then,²⁷¹

The rock represents the actual (green) world or the physical reality. Outside the imagination the rock is the only tangible form of assurance: it is the actual world from where poetry springs. However poetry is more than the representation of reality as it is. Stevens believes "the reality is the beginning not the end,"²⁷² and poetry is the interdependence of reality and imagination. For Stevens poetry is involved in the very instant of our contact with the real and factual and serves as the agent of a new reality born of fusion of the imagination and the real world. In the following lines, the image of the rock is associated with the power of imagination which transmutes bare facts into limitless prospects:

In this plenty, the poem makes meanings of rock,
Of such mixed motion and such imagery
That its barrenness becomes a thousand things
And so exists no more.²⁷³

c- The Circle Images and the Seasonal Cycle of Change

Stevens' concept of change is often associated with death images, circle images and season metaphors. "Death", says Stevens in "Sunday Morning," "is the mother of beauty"²⁷⁴ because only that which changes is beautiful, and death is the last form of change. Death clears away the withering remnants of the old and provides the replacement in the new in an eternal cycle. The eternity that Stevens means is the eternity of life and the imagination which should be kept alive through change. In Stevens's poetry

²⁷¹ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.133.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 166.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 108 .

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 8 .

eternity is often conveyed through the circle imagery. For example, in "Esthétique du Mal," the celebrants in the ceremony of the funeral surrounds the dead soldier forming a circle:

The shadows of his fellows ring him round
In the high night, the summer breathes for them
Its fragrance, a heavy somnolence, and for him,
For the soldier of time, it breathes a summer sleep...²⁷⁵

"His fellows ring him round" is an image "derived from the traditional imagery of circles and rings associated with the idea of self-containment and eternity"²⁷⁶. The circle, much like eternity with no defined beginning nor end, is universally known as "the symbol of eternity and never-ending existence."²⁷⁷ The symbolic meaning of the circle has been adopted by Christianity. Three entwined circles represent "the Trinity with its three eternal and unified members."²⁷⁸

Likewise imagination, to be eternal must also correspond to this cycle of change as the following lines suggest:

And in his mind the world revolves
The revolution through day and night,
Through wild spaces of other suns and moons
Round summer an angular winter and winds,
Are marched by other revolutions
In which the world goes round and round
In the crystal atmospheres of the mind,
Light's comedies, dark's tragedies,
Like things produced by a climate, the world
Goes round in the climates of the mind

²⁷⁵ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.119.

²⁷⁶ Wallace Stevens, quoted in Ralph J. Mills, "The image of the Rock", in Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays, op.cit., p.103.

²⁷⁷ "Christian Symbols A to Z", <http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/symbols/a-z.htm>

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

And bears it floraisons of imagery.²⁷⁹

The eternal aspect of the mind is here suggested again by the repetition of words conveying the idea of circularity, such as "revolve", "revolution" and "round". However the maintenance of the eternity of the human imagination is conditioned by the change it undergoes. This is conveyed by setting up a similarity between the change of the human imagination and the cycling seasons.

The seasons in Stevens's poetry, indeed, reflect not only the natural cycling but also the cyclical nature of the human imagination. In "Motive for Metaphor", the shrinking of human life is like autumn because we pass from ripeness to infertility. His death is as final as the death of the year in autumn:

You like it under the trees in autumn
Because everything is half-dead
The wind moves like a cripple among the leaves
And repeats words without meaning.²⁸⁰

Winter is the time of impoverishment since reality is seen as it is and it has no human meaning. This is caused by the lack of the activity of the mind to reshape reality. Reality has no human meaning, nor has a man; he is

.... the listener who listens in the snow
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.²⁸¹

The arrival of spring is the analogue of the mind producing poetry to clothe the gaudy reality:

²⁷⁹ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.391.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p.240.

²⁸¹ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.23.

In the same way, you were happy in spring,
With the half colors of quarter things,
The slightly brighter sky, the melting clouds,²⁸²

The summer is not only the season of the physical paradise, but also the full human satisfaction when imagination accounts for reality and makes it fully bearable to human beings:

It is the rock of summer, the extreme,
A mountain luminous half way in bloom
And then half way in the extremest light
Of sapphires flashing from the central sky.²⁸³

Therefore Stevens, unlike such contemporaries as TS Eliot and F. Scott Fitzgerald, believes in the possibility of change. The first section of Eliot's The Waste Land is about the sterility of modern civilization and the hope for renewal. The poem begins in April, which is traditionally a time of rebirth. By setting his poem in April, Eliot is similarly suggesting the possibility of change although he is typically pessimistic about this possibility.

APRIL is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.²⁸⁴

"Dead" and "dull" suggest the absence of life. The verbs in the present participle "breeding", "mixing" and "stirring" emphasize the difficulty of renewal.

²⁸² The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.240.

²⁸³ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.133.

²⁸⁴ Norman Forster and Norman S. Grabo et al, American Poetry and Prose, (New York : Houghton Nifflin Company, 1970), p. 257.

The Seasonal images are used to reflect the emptiness and the lack of spirituality in modern life. "Winter kept us warm" suggests the continuation of winter, the season of hibernation and inactivity. For Stevens winter is the time of impoverishment when the new imagining has not yet taken shape. "APRIL is the cruellest month" suggests that there is fear of the coming of spring the time of rebirth, which is in Stevens's poems the time of vigorous discovery and awakening of the possibilities of a new understanding of reality.

The circle imagery, which suggests the eternity of the human imagination in Stevens's poetry, is used in The Wasteland to convey a sense of routine, aimless action and the absence of renewal.

I do not find
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.²⁸⁵

The speaker cannot see the symbol of sacrifice and redemption, the "hanged man". All that she can see is people who turn round in a ring. But this circle image, unlike the one formed by the ring of man in "Esthétique du Mal," evokes the routine in the action and the viciousness of their circle.

Since death is the symbol of the renewal of the imagination, the ceremony of funeral in "Esthétique du Mal" is joyful. Contrary to this, there are many examples in The Waste Land where funeral is unpleasant:

White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 270.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 270..

Death prefigures here no resurrection and new life but rather annihilation. The meaninglessness of these anonymous dead is reinforced by the image of the rat playing with their bones.

The same meaninglessness of death can be found in the death of the son of God, Gatsby, in Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. Indeed Gatsby, like Jesus, dies for the sins of others. Thinking that Gatsby is responsible for the death of his wife, George Wilson shoots him. Myrtle Wilson, however, is killed in a car accident by Daisy Buchanan. Like the speaker in The Waste Land, who cannot see the hanged man symbol of sacrifice and redemption, most characters in The Great Gatsby lack interest in the death of Gatsby. Even Daisy, the object of Gatsby's dream, and for whom Gatsby dies does not send a message or flowers. Thus Gatsby's funeral had few attendees:

The minister glanced several times at his watch, so I took him aside and asked him to wait for half an hour. But it wasn't any use. Nobody came.²⁸⁷

Now the world after the death of Gatsby becomes like Eliot's haunted wasteland "distorted beyond my eyes' power of correction."²⁸⁸ As for Stevens, he suggests that this wasteland can be transformed through the imagination into a meaningful imagined reality. In the following chapter I will discuss the fact that what lies behind this poetic fusion between reality and the imagination is to make of the "supreme fiction" a source of pleasure or as Stevens puts it: "the purpose of poetry is to contribute to human happiness."²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, (London : Penguin Books, 1926), p. 181.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p.183.

²⁸⁹ Wallace Stevens, Opus Posthumous, quoted in, Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.116.

Chapter Five

The "Supreme Fiction" as Pleasure

Since the "supreme fiction" fulfills the conditions of existence and maturity, abstraction and change, it is supposed to have ripened enough to give pleasure. The pleasure that Stevens refers to is not religious, but that of perceiving reality in its imaginative substance. Through the imagination we see reality in pleasure and variety. It is important to extend the pleasure we find in the "supreme fiction" to include other meanings such as goodness, warmth and order.

But this pleasure the "supreme fiction" can offer us may be to the detriment of its commitment to the social, economic and political matters. Indeed many critics have attacked the "supreme fiction" for its irrelevance to what is going on the world. On the other hand, many other critics proposed a total political revision of the poet's commitment. Their aim is to reveal Stevens as a poet responsive to his times.

This chapter which includes two parts explores whether Stevens's attempt to make of the "supreme fiction" a source of pleasure precludes its commitment. In the first part, I will point at the fact that the pleasure Stevens refers to is the one that can be found when reality and the imagination meet. I will first concern myself with the pleasure of life and vividness that the imagination adds to a static and monotonous bare reality. Then I will move to other aspects of pleasure such as goodness, warmth and order with which the poet clothes the brutal cold and chaotic world. In the second part, I will examine how Stevens's search for pleasure prompted

controversial reactions of critics: critics who view Stevens' "supreme fiction" at odds with what happened around him and those who see it responsive to his time.

A- The "Supreme Fiction" as a Source of Pleasure

a- Pleasure as Vividness

Giving pleasure is the main theme of the third and the last section of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" entitled "It Must Give Pleasure." It is the pleasure that Stevens's "supreme fiction" gives to our minds, since "it helps people to live their lives."²⁹⁰ "It Must Give Pleasure," begins with a dismissal of Christianity. Stevens stresses that the pleasure "the supreme fiction" exalts is not the obsolete joy of heaven which he considers as a "facile exercise":

To sing jubilas at exact, accustomed times,
To be crested and wear the mane of a multitude
And so, as part, to exult with its great throat,
To speak of joy and to sing of it, borne on
The shoulders of joyous men, to feel the heart
That is the common, the bravest fundament,
This is a facile exercise.²⁹¹

Opposed to this is "the difficult rigor" of the poet who should free himself from the rational approach to "the image of what we see." This release from rationally ordered vision depends upon the interaction between reality and the imagination:

But the difficultest rigor is forthwith,

²⁹⁰ Stevens Wallace, The Necessary Angel. (New York: Vintage books, 1959), p. 36.

²⁹¹ Wallace Stevens, The Palm at the End of the Mind, ed., Holly Stevens, (New York: Vintage books, 1972), p. 224.

On the image of what we see, to catch from that
Irrational moment its unreasoning,
As when the sun comes rising, when the sea
Clears deeply, when the moon hangs on the wall
Of heaven-haven.²⁹²

It is the irrational moment or the "unreasoning" which gives delight by interweaving imagination with reality. In the second section, the waiting bride presented as "the blue woman"²⁹³ symbolizes the imagination. In the third section the groom of known as "the lasting visage"²⁹⁴ described as "red with the color of reality"²⁹⁵ symbolizes reality. In the fourth section of the poem the waiting bride and the groom appear respectively as "the maiden Bawda" and "a great captain" and their relation ends with a marriage:

There was a mystic marriage in Catawba,
At noon it was on the mid-day of the year
Between a great captain and the maiden Bawda.²⁹⁶

The pleasure one enjoys in the "supreme fiction" is the result of the marriage of reality and the imagination. It is the pleasure of the poetic knowledge acquired by means of the poetic truth that transcends the limits of scientific patterns of learning. Stevens says: "The pleasure is the pleasure of powers that create a truth that cannot be arrived at by the reason alone, a truth that the poet recognizes by sensation."²⁹⁷ It is the poet's sensation that offers us a manner in which the exercise of the imagination gives us the sense of a vivid and substantial reality beyond the mind:

²⁹² Ibid., p.225.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. p.226.

²⁹⁵ Harold Bloom, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction: A commentary", in Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed, Marie Barroff, (New York: Prentice Hall INC, 1962), p. 89.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p.27.

²⁹⁷ The Necessary Angel, op.cit., p.58.

If we say that the space [reality] is blank space, nowhere, without color, and that the objects, though solid, have no shadows and though static exert a mournful power, and, without elaborating this complete poverty if suddenly we hear a different and familiar description of the place.

This City now doth, like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning silent bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatre, and temples lie
Open Unto the fields and the sky
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air;²⁹⁸

In "Study of Two Pears," Stevens makes the difference between the confining scientific knowledge and the limitless poetic knowledge. The poem begins with the scientific terms for the two pears in question, "Opusculum paedagogum" and states that they are pears and "resemble nothing":

Opusculum paedagogum
The pears are not viol
Nudes or bottles
They resemble nothing else.²⁹⁹

The five passive sentences that follow describe the pears in terms of shape and primary colors. The pears have no action and nothing acts upon them:

They are yellow form
Composed of curves
Bulging toward the base
They are touched red.
They are not flat surfaces
Having curved outlines
They are round
Tapering toward the top³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁹⁹ Wallace Stevens, Poems by Wallace Stevens, (New York: Vintage books, 1959), p.94.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

The first change from this static description comes in a simple active verb "hangs" which forces the two pears to suddenly have an activity, and therefore a life within them:

A hard dry leaf hangs
From the stem.³⁰¹

Thus there is a dramatic shift in "Study of Two Pears" when the leaf hangs from the stem. It is followed with those innate colors suddenly coming to life. "The yellow " is no longer the color of description, but it becomes the subject of a transitive verb:

The yellow glistens
Glistens with various yellows,
Citrons, oranges and greens
Flowering over the skin.³⁰²

The flat affect of the painting has become alive through colors. Citrons and oranges, while colors, are also fruits, living fruits, as well as the use of greens as use of colors and names for various vegetables. This burst of life in colors is reinforced by the gerund phrase "flowering over the skin". At this stage in the poem we have moved from the scientific Latin names of the fruit through geometrical description to living colors created by the imagination.

Stevens's account of the imagination giving life to static objects can be found in many poems. For example, in "Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers", the bouquet, the subject of the poem, undergoes many changes: It becomes thunder, summer, the sides of peaches and pears. The abstracts blue and red become particulars. These colors and shapes stir the woman.

³⁰¹ Ibid., p. 95.

³⁰² Ibid.

She is conscious of the related changes, such as "the wind" into "birds" and "the clouds" into "braided girls":

It was like thunder took form upon
The piano, that time: the time when the crude
And jealous grandeur in the garden, like
The wind dissolving into birds,
Thee clouds becoming braided girls.....
Hoot, little owl within her, now
High blue became particular
In the leaf and bud and how the red,
Flicked into pieces, points of air,
Became- how the central, essential red
Escape in large abstraction, became,
First, summer, then a lesser time
Then the side of peaches, of dusty pears.

....The crude and jealous formlessness
Became the form and the fragrance things
Without clairvoyance, close to her.³⁰³

The same pleasure of the "supreme fiction" in which the imagination gives life to static object can be found in "New Haven." On an ordinary evening, the personae walking about "New Haven" regards certain chapels and school as transformed men. These men display in their new identities the secrets they hid while human:

It is as if
Men turning into things, as comedy,
Stood, dressed in antic symbols, to display
The truth about themselves having lost, as things,
That power to conceal they had as men...³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Wallace Stevens, quoted in Sister M. Bernitta Quinn, "Metamorphosis in Wallace Stevens", in Wallace Stevens : A Collection of Critical Essays, op.cit., pp. 55- 56.

³⁰⁴ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.335.

In "The Apostrophe to Vincentine", the static object is given not only life but also emotion and the ability to transform reality. The poem begins with the poets imagining Vincentine as small, nude nameless creature between single-colored earth and dark blue sky:

I figure you as nude between
Monotonous earth and dark blue sky.
It made you seem you small and lean
And nameless
Heavenly Vincentine³⁰⁵

Through the speaker's imagination, the sculpture, Vincentine, becomes more life-like, progressively gaining a name, warmth, clean girl in a whited green dress:

I saw you then, as warm as flesh,
Brunette,
But yet not to brunette,
As warm, as clean
Your dress was green,
Was white green
Green Vincentine³⁰⁶

In the third Stanza, she is allowed to walk and speak. She is also placed in a society or group of human others so that her voice can be heard:

In a group
Of human other
Volatile.
Yes: you came walking,
Vincentine
Yes: you came talking.³⁰⁷

When she approaches, talking, he adds her emotion to his conception of her color, movement, a voice, and feelings:

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p.38.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

And what I knew you felt
Came then.³⁰⁸

Then Vincentine changes from a tiny animal to a living woman. "She becomes the heavenly or platonic axis on which all creation turn."³⁰⁹ The monotonous earth metamorphoses into spheres without limits, and Vincentine has turned from the lean white animal to the opposite of animality- to "heavenly Vincentine":

Monotonous earth I saw become
Illimitable spheres of you,
And white animal, so lean,
Turned Vincentine
Turned heavenly Vincentine
And that white animal, so lean,
Turned heavenly, heavenly Vincentine.³¹⁰

According to Sister M Bernetta Quinn, Stevens has chosen his heroine's names for reasons of sense as well as of sound. The name Vincentine which means conquering serves not only as a rhyme for "between ", "lean ", "clean" and "green " but also signifies "the victory of consciousness over inanimate being."³¹¹

b- Pleasure as Goodness, Warmth and Form

Pleasure is also extended to include pleasant states such as goodness, warmth, and order. In " Final Soliloquy of the Interior

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Helen Vendler , Wallace Stevens Words Chosen out of Desire , (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press , 1959),p.16.
Ibid.

³¹⁰ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.38.

³¹¹ Sister M. Bernitta Quinn," Metamorphosis in Wallace Stevens ", in Wallace Stevens : A Collection of Critical Essays, op.cit., p.64.

Paramour,"³¹² Stevens emphasizes that the "supreme fiction" provides us with goodness:

Light the first light of evening, as in a room
In which we rest and, for small reason, think
The world imagined is the ultimate good
This is, therefore, the intensest rendezvous³¹³

In addition to goodness, the pleasure of the "supreme fiction" is extended to include "warmth." Stevens affirms that we need the warmth of "a single shawl" which means that the literal level of reality as such is pointless unless doubled and supported by the literary side of our experience of the world. Or to put it in the poet's word:

It is in that thought that we collect ourselves ,
Of all the indifferences, into one thing :
Within a single thing, a single shawl
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth ,
A light, a power, the miraculous influence.³¹⁴

The pleasure one enjoys in the "supreme fiction" further results from its ability to order the chaotic reality. Stevens says: " One writes poetry, then, in order to approach the good in what is harmonious and orderly."³¹⁵ "Anecdote of the Jar"³¹⁶ is a poem in which Stevens uses the jar as a symbol of the human mind ordering nature. Being placed on the top of a hill, the jar asserts its superiority over nature. But the jar imposes its

³¹² "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" is a poem in which the speaker as a lover of reality participates through his imagination identified with God to make an imagined world that Stevens describes as the ultimate good.

³¹³ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.64.

³¹⁴ Ibid., p.158.

³¹⁵ Wallace Stevens, quoted in, Anca PEIU, "Wallace Stevens 's Two or Three Ideas '"
<http://www.unibuc.ro/eBooks/Its/AncaPeiu->

³¹⁶ "Anecdote of the Jar" suggests that the imagination reshapes reality. The jar symbol of human imagination placed in a wilderness dominates the landscape and alters its character.

authority even more through the implied design of its own roundness on nature, which in itself lacks purpose or order:

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.³¹⁷

Accordingly, human circularity, civilizes "wilderness," not only the wild, that is, but chaos, nullity, meaninglessness, by providing it with a structure:

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.
It took dominion every where.³¹⁸

In "Anecdote of a Jar," stress is laid upon its artificiality to accentuate the crucial power of the human imagination. The human mind governs its antithesis, nature since "it took dominion everywhere", especially, in non-human place.

One of the devices that Stevens adopted in "Anecdote of the Jar" is the use of the technique of the readymade in the case of the jar which he borrowed from painting. "Anecdote of the Jar" illustrates the parallel between French painter Marcel Duchamp's ideas about the readymades and Stevens' poetry.³¹⁹ Indeed many of Duchamp's works were simply everyday objects that he gave titles to and exhibited as art. He called these works readymades.

³¹⁷ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.21.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Socha Soham, "Imagination and Reality: Wallace Stevens's Harmonium and the Visual Arts", <http://www.cwru.edu/artsci/engl/VSALM/mod/socha/stevandcuube.html>

B –The "Supreme Fiction" as a Pleasure and Commitment: The Possible Equation

a- Irrelevance to Reality

Stevens's attempt in making his "supreme fiction" a source of pleasure makes his poetry turn from social concern. In fact, like many other modernists he himself was a great believer in the work of art resisting the "pressure of reality." He acknowledges that a poet has no social or political obligations to report of the "pressure of reality." The attempt to cover reality with a "single shawl" to make it bearable puts his poetry at odds with what happens around him. According to Stevens, "no politician can command the imagination. 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."³²⁰

In this context, one may wonder what the poet's function is for Stevens. He answers:

Certainly it is not to lead people out of the confusion in which they find themselves. Nor is it, I think, to comfort them while they follow their leaders to and fro. I think that the function is to make his imagination become the light in the minds of other. His role, in short, is to help people to live their lives.³²¹

Thus Stevens rejects the requirement that the poet must write from a social view rather than from within his own imagination, by suggesting that the poet may have as his subject the community and other people by virtue of something internal to the poet. Stevens claimed that his concept of the "first

³²⁰ The Necessary Angel, op.cit., p.28.

³²¹ Wallace Stevens, quoted in, Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.78.

idea" in "Notes Toward a Supreme fiction" means simply the world stripped of "varnish and dirt". In this context Stevens says:

The genuine artist is never 'true to life'. He sees what is real but not as we are normally aware of it. We do not go storming through life like actors in a play. Art is never real life. The poet sees with a poignancy and penetration that is altogether unique. What matters is that the poet must be true to his art and not 'true to life', whether his art is simple or complex, violent or subdued.³²²

Stevens's belief in the necessity of the poet's detachment from reality makes him the opposite of poets of social protest like Carl Sandburg. Whereas Stevens is interested in aesthetics and is preoccupied with such themes as imagination, beliefs and poetry, Sandburg is concerned with social protest aiming at enforcing a social and political message by concrete contrast like the contrast between the slums and the wealthy homes. For example, Sandburg's "The Shovel Man" contrasts the economic and capitalist measure of man with a truer one. The "dago" works for

A dollar six bits a day
And a dark-eyed woman in the old country of dreams of him
For one of the world's ready men with a pair of fresh
Lip and kiss better than all the wild grapes that ever grew
In Tuscany.³²³

Stevens hardly mentions the common people, like the "dago", and his problems in his poems. In terms of style, all the poetic techniques that make Stevens a stylistic poet are absent in Sandburg's. The materials of

³²² Wallace Stevens, quoted in, "Wallace Stevens 's Two or Three Ideas " op.cit.

³²³ Carl Sandburg, quoted in , David Perkins, A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p.357.

Sandburg's poetry "like the facts, images, allusions are never recondite."³²⁴ His vocabulary, "is simple and seldom poetic or abstract, but with these limitations, it is flexibly ready to adapt to the subject."³²⁵

Another aspect of Stevens's "supreme fiction" is its elitism. Stevens is a poet who looks down on the ordinary man. To the question: "As a poet what distinguishes you, do you think, from an ordinary man?"³²⁶ Stevens replied, "Inability to see much point to the life of an ordinary man. The chances are the ordinary man himself sees very little point to it."³²⁷ Unlike the poet who is able to live by his imagination, the ordinary man is characterized by narrow-mindedness and lack of imagination. These mean "poverty" for Wallace Stevens. The protagonist of such instances has many a mask in Stevens' "supreme fiction." "Professor Eucalyptus" for example represents the lack of imagination because he cannot see beyond reality. He has "an eye that does not look / Beyond the object."³²⁸ Professor Eucalyptus' philosopher's point of view is the opposite of the poet's:

It is the philosopher's search
For an interior made exterior
And the poet's search for the same exterior made
Interior³²⁹

This view has been seen as a "form of late bourgeois aestheticism especially by Marxist critics like Lukacs who sees the characteristic, the

³²⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Wallace Stevens, "The World Imagined", http://www.lorenwebster.net/In_a_Dark_Time/category/poets/wallace-stevens/

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ The Palm at the End of the Mind, op.cit., p.339.

³²⁹ Ibid.,p.345.

truly self-realizing modern art as art as a species of realism."³³⁰ Stanley Burnshaw, a literary critic, inspired by the Marxist approach which states that all cultural artifacts are to be read as symbolic resolutions of real political and social contradictions, has criticized Stevens for irrelevance to political and social issues. He calls the poet "a man who, having lost his footing, now scrambles to stand up and keep his balance."³³¹ Another critic, Randall Jarrell, faulted Stevens for the "weakness, a terrible one for a poet, a steadily increasing one in Stevens, of thinking of particulars as primarily illustrations of general truths, or else as aesthetic, abstracted objects, simply there to be contemplated."³³² In the Partisan Review, Jarrell criticizes Stevens for "insufficient interest in the things of this world; Stevens's error is to view sensory life as an "illustration"³³³ of the mind's abstract processes. Jarrell, too, saw imagination as an agent of creative change, a faculty through which the familiar materials of human experience may be transformed into art, but he was reluctant to allow that transformation to proceed beyond the world of represented reality.

b- The "Supreme Fiction" as Committed Poetry

In retaliation to these hostile notices, many critics have attempted to propose political, economic social and cultural readings of Stevens's poetry. Their aim was to refute the all-too-familiar image of Stevens as aesthete and

³³⁰ - Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ed, Modernism : A Guide to European literature : 1890-1930, (London : Penguin, 1991),p .23

³³¹ Burnshaw Stanley, quoted in Frank Kermode, Wallace Stevens, (London Oliver and Boyd LTD , 1960), p. 65.

³³² Ned Balbo, "Wallace Stevens and Modern Art: From the Armory Show to Abstract Expressionism"http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0425/is_n1_v53/ai_15383263

³³³ Ibid.

to reveal him as a poet who was in fact deeply responsive to his times and "one of the most compelling and ethical poets of the twentieth century."³³⁴ Alain Filreis offers a political reading to Stevens's poetry and stresses his full and particular involvement with the political troubles of his times. A good example of this is Filreis's interpretation of Stevens's long poem entitled "Description without Place". Stevens offered this poem when he was asked to give a poem for the Phi Beta Kappa exercises at Harvard on the twenty-seventh of that month. Harvard's Phi Beta Kappa Poems before Stevens's had been explicitly topical and occasional, and they uniformly took as a subject the contemporary political theme, the American response to the war. Yet "Description without Place" had evidently nothing to say about the present situation and simply violated the tradition "by excluding topical references to the war but by making a theme of resisting referentiality itself."³³⁵ This is why, according to Feliris, "the audience that morning at the Fogg Museum caught none of the points in the long poem Stevens read to them."³³⁶

An example of the absence of referentiality is that most of the great personages in the poem 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 resists historiographical exactitude. She remains unidentified. Even the historical figures like John Calvin, Queen Anne, Friedrich Nietzsche and V. I. Lenin are removed from

³³⁴ Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, quoted in John Hulsey, "The Fugitive"
<http://www.bostonreview.net/BR29.2/hulsey.html>

³³⁵ Alan Filreis, "Description without a Sense of Place",
<http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88/of-modern-poetry.html>

³³⁶ Ibid.

their historical context to sites apparently unconnected with their historical significance:

Things are as they seemed to Calvin and to Anne
Of England, to Pablo Neruda in Ceylon,
To Nietzsche in Basel, to Lenin by a lake.³³⁷

Many critics for their part think that the poem has no historical meaning. Vendler sees that the poem's "rhetorical aim is a queerly one... enclosed in a kind of baby talk."³³⁸ Joseph Riddel takes it as "one of the most private of Stevens's poems" and "not likely to earn for [him] many admirers" for its "dangerous aridity."³³⁹ One recent critic, Michael Beehler, in an essay devoted to "Description without Place," examines a tendency to view a poem as "not refer[ring] to any system of meaning outside of itself" and as having "no referent beyond its own 'closed systems.'"³⁴⁰

Contrary to these critics, Alain Filreis has attempted to propose a political reading to "Description without Place". The critic Filreis sees for example the Nietzsche-Lenin canto as a parody of the Marxist critic Edmund Wilson's interest in prominent Marxist personalities. Describing Lenin's power in terms of Lenin's personality, Wilson said "the revolutionary movement, and history in general, is not only a product of reason and social conditions, but also of the peculiarities of the men [like Lenin] who led it."³⁴¹ Stevens decided to trivialize this radical thought by undoing entirely Lenin's effectiveness:

³³⁷Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

Lenin on a bench beside a lake disturbed
The swans. He was not the man for swans.
The slouch of his body and his look were not
In suavest keeping. The shoes, the clothes, the hat
Suited the decadence of those silences,
In which he sat. All chariots were drowned. The swans
Moved on the buried water where they lay.
Lenin took bread from his pocket, scattered it
The swans fled outward to remoter reaches,
As if they knew of distant beaches; and were
Dissolved. The distances of space and time
Were one and swans far off were swans to come.
The eye of Lenin kept the far-off shapes.
His mind raised up, down-drowned, the chariots.
And reaches, beaches, tomorrow's regions became
One thinking of apocalyptic legions.³⁴²

To strip Lenin of historical sense, meaning inevitably to deradicalize him, is clearly in itself an effort made within an historical context of postwar anticommunism. Lenin's relation to the distant beaches both described and epitomized a perilous world-absorbing view. For now it will be sufficient to note how the end of this passage pays some respect to Lenin's attempt, even in his reduced state, to control "the far-off shapes" and to transform a harmless, local poetic observation of receding swans into advancing, "apocalyptic legions." But the image of Lenin is not nearly so serious. This biographical Lenin, poorly dressed, exiled to Zurich, sitting on a bench by a lake, ruminating, not causing trouble, "disturbed" no more than the swans he sees. He is without effect, and feels rather out of place: "He was not the man for swans."

³⁴² Ibid.

The same ideological interpretation as suggested by Alan Filreis can be seen in Justin Quinn's essay, "Nature and Ideology in Wallace Stevens." In this essay, Quinn questions Jameson's claim that "Stevens's only content, from the earliest masterpieces of Harmonium all the way to the posthumous Rock, is landscape."³⁴³ For Jameson Stevens's landscapes are "laundered of their cultural and social semantics", and his poetry, designates nothing beyond itself:

In Stevens, nature is, however, nothing but a given, a ready-made occasion for speech—birds, wind, mountains, the sun, always ready to hand whenever poetic speech needs some kind of objective content for its own production.³⁴⁴

Jameson goes on to say that Stevens lacks "the visionary sense of many of the great nature poets, for whom the momentary epiphanies of place and object world are rare events, to be preserved over against the encroaching destruction of nature as well as the alienating features of city or man-made environment."³⁴⁵ But his comparison of Stevens with the great visionary nature poets who use nature to castigate civilization leads him to state that Stevens's poetry designates nothing beyond itself.

Justin Quinn sees that the nature poetry Stevens writes hardly "implies that Stevens uses landscape and the seasons merely as pretexts for a poetic utterance that has no true subject but itself."³⁴⁶ To justify his view that Stevens is continually concerned with the orientation of the individual and the community within the landscapes, he goes on to compare Stevens's

³⁴³ Jameson Fredric, "Wallace Stevens", quoted in Justin Quinn, "Nature and Ideology in Wallace Stevens" <http://colloquium.upol.cz/coll00/quinn.htm>

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

work with that of Robinson Jeffers, widely known as one of the foremost nature poets of the twentieth century. As an environmental poet Jeffers believes that his mission is to hymn the superiority of the natural world over the world that humanity is creating for itself in the forms of cities and towns and that could only end in apocalypse:

to feel
Greatly, and understand greatly, and express greatly, the
natural
Beauty, is the sole business of poetry.³⁴⁷

Jeffers considers that "civilization is a transient sickness". The poem "Carmel Point", ends with the idea that nature is a wise presence that is represented as waiting for the disappearance of humanity

It knows the people are a tide
That swells and in time will ebb, and all
Their works dissolve.³⁴⁸

Justin Quinn views Stevens as a poet who does not think that "civilization is a transient sickness", but on the contrary feels quite good about the whole human project. While Jeffers consoles himself with visions of the erasure of humanity from the earth, Stevens appreciates the work of the human imagination in its many different manifestations. Stevens criticizes the figure who uses landscape and weather to abscond from society. In "The Well Dressed Man", Stevens says:

Men and the affairs of men seldom concerned
This pundit of the weather, who never ceased
To think of man the abstraction, the comic sum.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Jeffers Robinson, The Selected Poetry of Robinson, quoted in, "Nature and Ideology in Wallace Stevens", op.cit.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Wallace Stevens, Collected Poems, quoted in, "Nature and Ideology in Wallace Stevens", op.cit.

Quinn quotes the lines above to show that the landscape, for Stevens, "does not provide the opportunity to withdraw from social and historical contingencies rather it is precisely when Stevens turns to landscape and the objects of nature that we should expect his acutest thoughts on history, politics and culture."³⁵⁰ Discussing a conversation between Serge and Konstantinov, two Russian revolutionaries, Stevens portrays the fanaticism of Konstantinov by the way he cannot perceive the landscape, the physical world that is surrounding him:

Victor Serge said, "I followed his argument
With the blank uneasiness which one might feel
In the presence of a logical lunatic."
He said it of Konstantinov. Revolution
Is the affair of logical lunatics [...]
Lakes are more reasonable than oceans. Hence,
A promenade amid the grandeurs of the mind,
By a lake, with clouds like lights among great tombs,
Gives one a blank uneasiness, as if
One might meet Konstantinov, who would interrupt
With his lunacy. He would not be aware of the lake.
He would be the lunatic of one idea
In a world of ideas, who would have all the people
Live, work, suffer and die in that idea
In a world of ideas. He would not be aware of the clouds,
Lighting the martyrs of logic with white fire.
His extreme of logic would be illogical.³⁵¹

Victor Serge was once a member of the Executive Committee of Communist International and Fyodor Vasilyevich Konstantinov a talentless philosopher and Communist fanatic. Here Konstantinov stands for an ideologue. According to Quinn, Stevens's arena for thinking about the ideological is the lake. The aim of this passage is to show that it is reasonable to expect that Konstantinov would not be able to maintain the

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Wallace Stevens, Stevens, Collected Poems, quoted in, "Nature and Ideology in Wallace Stevens" op.cit.

integrity of his idea when faced with the sea, but he should at least be able to look at a lake. However Konstantinov cannot, and he must suppress the lake from his perception. A better politics, better than that of Konstantinov and even of Serge, would show us "how to live in the hermeneutic flux of the physical world;"³⁵² rather than to deny and reject this physical world.

Likewise, Jacqueline Vaught Brogan proposes a political reading of some of Stevens's poems; moreover, she gives a new picture of Stevens as a committed poet. In her book entitled The Violence Within/The Violence Without, the mal of "Esthétique du Mal" allegorizes the "mal of war"³⁵³; the "blood" of "beau language without a drop of blood"³⁵⁴ is simply the "spilled blood"³⁵⁵ of battle. Here Stevens's poetry is politically committed since it is able to point toward specific historical events.

In his essay "Noble Imagery: Wallace Stevens and Mesoamerican Mythology," Anca Rosu views that Stevens borrowed his symbols from Mesoamerican myths and legends instead of Christian religion as a means of validating contemporary American culture. Stevens adopted a trend in American culture, "a trend that asserted American identity against the European disdain by invoking the grandeur of certain native civilizations."³⁵⁶ In this light, "Sunday Morning" can be read as a "way toward American self-definition through the examination of religious

³⁵² Justin Quinn, "Nature and Ideology in Wallace Stevens", op.cit.

³⁵³ Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, The Violence Within/The Violence Without, (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), p. 72

³⁵⁴ Wallace Stevens, Collected Poems, quoted in, The Violence Within/The Violence Without, op.cit., p.69.

³⁵⁵ Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, The Violence Within/The Violence Without, op.cit., p.69.

³⁵⁶ Anca Rosu " Noble Imagery: Wallace Stevens and Mesoamerican Mythology", <http://www.uni-saarland.de/fak4/fr43/connotations/rosu523.htm>

options."³⁵⁷ Once we accept that the "ring of men" in the seventh stanza may be performing an Aztec sacrifice, the whole poem appears as a search for the religion most appropriate to the American self. In many of his later poems, as in "The Comedian as the Letter C," Stevens insists that the "supreme fiction" should be related to its soil: "Man is the intelligence of his soil."³⁵⁸ The ancient religion of the native inhabitants of the region is thus a more natural choice for the woman in "Sunday Morning." This ancient religion which leads to the awareness of the unusual relationship of the American culture to its soil as opposed to the "tomb in Palestine"³⁵⁹ reappears in the ending stanza, followed by a description of nature, in order to indicate the cultural estrangement to be overcome for a genuine American identity.

As for Helen Vendler, she thinks that "Stevens is a genuinely misunderstood poet"³⁶⁰ by such critics as Yvor Winters who considers Stevens as a dandy and a hedonist. Vendler wonders "how it can be thought that the poet [Stevens] can be so often called "cold and cerebral" or "abstract" or "remote" or "finicky."³⁶¹ Vendler comes with a contextual reading of Stevens's poetry. Vendler reads "Domination of Black" in relation to what she calls the "question of magnitude,"³⁶² by which she means the degree of the individual's significance in relation to the universe. Stevens himself identified "Domination of Black" as devoid of ideas:

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.30.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., p 8.

³⁶⁰ Helen Vendler, Wallace Stevens Words Chosen out of Desire, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1959), p 32.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid., p.62.

I am sorry that a poem of this sort has to contain any ideas at all, because its sole purpose is to fill the mind with the images and sounds that it contains. A mind that examines such a poem for its prose contents gets absolutely nothing from it. You are supposed to get heavens full of the colors and full of sounds, and you are supposed to feel as you would feel if you actually got all this.³⁶³

Vendler affirms that the poem's speaker is concerned with human action, or rather the paralysis of action in the face of the overwhelming domination of darkness, death, and the implacable turning of the planets. The poem's only verb of purposeful movement is "striding."³⁶⁴ Two things stride in the poem, and two things precede the fear that pervades the poem's final tone: the color of the hemlock which is black against the twilight sky and the night which refers to blackness again. Striding is an intentional, forceful movement, but neither the speaker nor the peacock is capable of having the intention of striding. Thus, the poem places intentional action outside of cognizance and into color, or out of the speaker and into the scene. Against this action of colors, the two cognizant elements of the poem react in fear and the peacock cries. The turn of colors, like the planets in the black sky, has intention, against which the speaker, and peacock, can only cry out.

Stevens's interest in abstracting and transforming reality to make of the "supreme fiction" a source of pleasure does not remove Stevens's poetry from the social realities of his time. From here we can say that Stevens corresponds best to Shelly's definition of the poet: "[poets] are not only the authors of language and music, of dance and architecture, and

³⁶³ Wallace Stevens, Letters of Wallace Stevens, quoted in Elizabeth Hayes, "The Paradox of the Absolute: A Burkean Investigation", <http://www.cwru.edu/artsci/engl/VSALEM/mod/hayes/Paperpage.htm>

³⁶⁴ Poems by Wallace Stevens, op.cit., p.10.

statuary and painting; they are the institutors of laws and the founder of civil society."³⁶⁵ Stevens is the poet who believes that poetry is the "violence within" an aesthetic designed to resist the "violence without" under the form of social unrest and actual war. Stevens's poetry, aesthetics and politics intersect in a fascinating way.

³⁶⁵ Shelly "a Defence of Poetry", quoted in Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, The Violence Within The Violence Without, (Athens : The University of Georgia Press, 2003), p.4.

Conclusion

Wallace Stevens strove to make up for the lost belief in the faded ancient mythologies and Christianity by opening the gates to an Eden of poetry and inviting us to join him. This Eden of poetry is Stevens's "supreme fiction". The "supreme fiction" is an attempt to discover through its "proper words"³⁶⁶ a substitute for the worn-out Christianity and the long-dead old mythologies such as those of classical era that many of Stevens's poems, such as "Sunday Morning" and "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" describe. In this context, Stevens says: "In an age in which disbelief is so profoundly prevalent or, if not disbelief, indifference to the question of belief, poetry and painting, and the arts in general, are a compensation for what has been lost."³⁶⁷

Stevens's obsession is to rescue humanity from confusion, disorder ugliness of reality and to make of the same reality the "supreme fiction" in which imagination brings meaning to man's existence. However this could happen when human intelligence denies appeal to the supernatural. This is an unalienable condition to make the human existence not only enduring, but also credible. The "supreme fiction" as offered by Stevens does not revive or revise the old myths but attempts to replace them. It is based on a secular conception of man instead of a divine or metaphysical one. Thus the

³⁶⁶Wallace Stevens, The Palm at the End of the Mind, ed, Holly Stevens, (New York: Vintage books, 1972), p. 234.

³⁶⁷Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel, (New York: Vintage books, 1959), p.171.

human imagination is "the value of a way of thinking by which we project the idea of God into the idea of man."³⁶⁸

Stevens's "supreme fiction" offers the possibility of belief in a world in which the conditions and forms of beliefs are the product of the interaction of the imagination and reality. Stevens recognizes the strength of reality even of its evil on which creativeness must operate. Poetry is a kind of self-preservation in the face of reality. Poetry is an act of violence which the poet exercises over the world. Stevens believed that the "supreme fiction" must adhere to our reality though it contains evil. For him being "is living as and where we live."³⁶⁹ On the other hand, if the "supreme fiction" stops to adhere to what is real, like the noble horses of Plato, lose its vitality. Stevens says, "The reason why this particular figure [horses of Plato] has lost its vitality is that, in it, the imagination adhere to what is unreal."³⁷⁰

Stevens appealed to his imagination to give him, through poetry, a feeling of substantiality of that physical reality a something pleurably vivid, fresh, and various rather same insipid and without value. The pleasure is a pleasure of agreement with the radiant and the productive world in which we live. The pleasure the poet gives is not the obsolete joys of heavens, but "those revelation of reality, which proceeds from the more than rational apprehension of the physical world."³⁷¹ It is necessary to extend the sense of pleasure to include other meanings, such as health, or

³⁶⁸ Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Wallace Stevens and the Image of he Man", in Wallace Stevens : A Collection of Critical Essays, ed, Marie Borrof, (New York : Prentice Hall INC , 1962), p. 157.

³⁶⁹ Wallace Stevens, Poems by Wallace Stevens, (New York: Vintage books, 1959), p.125.

³⁷⁰ The Necessary Angel , op.cit., p.7.

³⁷¹ Frank Kermode , Wallace Stevens, (London: Oliver and Boyd LTD , 1960), p. 116.

whatever mitigates the "children of malheur." Stevens can regard language as the a god a savior in face of better reality:

Native of poverty, Children of malheur
The gaiety of language is our seigneur.³⁷²

Stevens shared with other modernists the belief in the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere. However aesthetic autonomy seems to be more complicated in Stevens than the term would at first suggest: the social order, outside the work of art, is already inside the poem, and what is inside is another form of the outside. In fact Stevens spent a good deal of his energy trying to understand the consequences of that breach between society and the work of art. There are moments in his writing when he is perfectly jubilant about the isolation of the poem: "Poetry is a purging of the world's poverty and change and evil and death. It is a present perfecting, a satisfaction in the irremediable poverty of life."³⁷³

However this raises the important question about the commitment of the "supreme fiction." It is important to note that Stevens relates to the things surrounding him in the world though in a very abstract manner. This is why the political significance of Stevens's work has become, increasingly, a matter for debate. In short, Stevens's political beliefs remain open to debate because he never gave them full, unequivocal, and public articulation. What is certain is that political and economic reality interested Stevens as a poet since it exerted a pressure on his imagination.

However Stevens's interest in style and abstraction is nothing like Oscar Wilde's decadent art. In his preface to The Picture Of Dorian Gray,

³⁷² Poems by Wallace Stevens , op.cit., p.122.

³⁷³ Wallace Stevens, quoted in Andrew Lakritz, " Wallace Stevens ", <http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins-guide-to-literary-theory/wallace-stevens.html>.

Wilde declared that "there is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all."³⁷⁴ Though Stevens's demand runs much higher than "art for art's sake," he believes in the craftsmanship in the poet's job of a maker of its gods and their poems. Stevens believes that the poet's mission is serious, spiritual and indeed sacred. It is the poet's role to actually create both gods and priests. As they would have no style without the poet, they would have no meaning.

Stevens's "supreme fiction" is an answer to those who question their religious faith yet still feel need for spiritual life. The "supreme fiction" suggests that old moral and religious certainties have faded, but the imagination can still respond to world and find its transcendental occasions. Thus Stevens is a poet of the modern imagination seeking to make the best of his belief that the twentieth-century philosophical poem can be constructed and that the crisis of the modern mind can be healed by poetic acts of perceptions and creative imagination.

³⁷⁴ Wallace Stevens, quote in , Anca PEIU "After the final no: The World of Wallace Stevens", <http://www.unibuc.ro/eBooks/11s/AncaPeiu-STEVENs/1.HTM>

Appendices

Appendix 1

Anecdote of the Jar

I placed a jar in Tennessee ,
And round it was, upon a hill .
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill .
The wilderness rose up to it ,
And sprawled around, no longer wild .
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.
It took dominion every where .
The jar was gray and bare .
It did not give of bird or bush ,
Like nothing else in Tennessee .

Appendix 2

The Comedian as the Letter C

I

The World without Imagination
Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil,
The sovereign ghost. As such, the Socrates
Of snails, musician of pears, principium
And lex. Sed quaeritur: is this same wig
Of things, this nincompated pedagogue,
Preceptor to the sea? Crispin at sea
Created, in his day, a touch of doubt.
An eye most apt in gelatines and jupes,
Berries of villages, a barber's eye,
An eye of land, of simple salad-beds,
Of honest quilts, the eye of Crispin, hung
On porpoises, instead of apricots,
And on silentious porpoises, whose snouts
Dibbled in waves that were mustachios,
Inscrutable hair in an inscrutable world.
One eats one paté, even of salt, quotha.
It was not so much the lost terrestrial,
The snug hibernal from that sea and salt,
That century of wind in a single puff.
What counted was mythology of self,
Blotched out beyond unblotching. Crispin,
The lutanist of fleas, the knave, thethane,
The ribboned stick, the bellowing breeches, cloak
Of China, cap of Spain, imperative haw
Of hum, inquisitorial botanist,
And general lexicographer of mute
And maidenly greenhorns, now beheld himself,
A skinny sailor peering in the sea-glass.
What word split up in clickering syllables
And storming under multitudinous tones
Was name for this short-shanks in all that brunt?
Crispin was washed away by magnitude.
The whole of life that still remained in him
Dwindled to one sound strumming in his ear,
Ubiquitous concussion, slap and sigh,
Polyphony beyond his baton's thrust.
Could Crispin stem verboseness in the sea,
The old age of a watery realist,

Triton, dissolved in shifting diaphanes
Of blue and green? A wordy, watery age
That whispered to the sun's compassion, made
A convocation, nightly, of the sea-stars,
And on the cropping foot-ways of the moon
Lay grovelling. Triton incomplicate with that
Which made him Triton, nothing left of him,
Except in faint, memorial gesturings,
That were like arms and shoulders in the waves,
Here, something in the rise and fall of wind
That seemed hallucinating horn, and here,
A sunken voice, both of remembering
And of forgetfulness, in alternate strain.
Just so an ancient Crispin was dissolved.
The valet in the tempest was annulled.
Bordeaux to Yucatan, Havana next,
And then to Carolina. Simple jaunt.
Crispin, merest minuscule in the gates,
Dejected his manner to the turbulence.
The salt hung on his spirit like a frost,
The dead brine melted in him like a dew
Of winter, until nothing of himself
Remained, except some starker, barer self
In a starker, barer world, in which the sun
Was not the sun because it never shone
With bland complaisance on pale parasols,
Beetled, in chapels, on the chaste bouquets.
Against his pipping sounds a trumpet cried
Celestial sneering boisterously. Crispin
Became an introspective voyager.
Here was the veritable ding an sich, at last,
Crispin confronting it, a vocable thing,
But with a speech belched out of hoary darks
Noway resembling his, a visible thing,
And excepting negligible Triton, free
From the unavoidable shadow of himself
That lay elsewhere around him. Severance
Was clear. The last distortion of romance
Forsook the insatiable egotist. The sea
Severs not only lands but also selves.
Here was no help before reality.
Crispin beheld and Crispin was made new.
The imagination, here, could not evade,
In poems of plums, the strict austerity
Of one vast, subjugating, final tone.
The drenching of stale lives no more fell down.

What was this gaudy, gusty panoply?
Out of what swift destruction did it spring?
It was caparison of mind and cloud
And something given to make whole among
The ruses that were shattered by the large.

II

Concerning the Thunderstorms of Yucatan
In Yucatan, the Maya sonneteers
Of the Caribbean amphitheatre,
In spite of hawk and falcon, green toucan
And jay, still to the night-bird made their plea,
As if raspberry tanagers in palms,
High up in orange air, were barbarous.
But Crispin was too destitute to find
In any commonplace the sought-for aid.
He was a man made vivid by the sea,
A man come out of luminous traversing,
Much trumpeted, made desperately clear,
Fresh from discoveries of tidal skies,
To whom oracular rockings gave no rest.
Into a savage color he went on.
How greatly had he grown in his demesne,
This auditor of insects! He that saw
The stride of vanishing autumn in a park
By way of decorous melancholy; he
That wrote his couplet yearly to the spring,
As dissertation of profound delight,
Stopping, on voyage, in a land of snakes,
Found his vicissitudes had much enlarged
His apprehension, made him intricate
In moody rucks, and difficult and strange
In all desires, his destitution's mark.
He was in this as other freemen are,
Sonorous nutshells rattling inwardly.
His violence was for aggrandizement
And not for stupor, such as music makes
For sleepers halfway waking. He perceived
That coolness for his heat came suddenly,
And only, in the fables that he scrawled
With his own quill, in its indigenous dew,
Of an aesthetic tough, diverse, untamed,
Incredible to prudes, the mint of dirt,
Green barbarism turning paradigm.
Crispin foresaw a curious promenade
Or, nobler, sensed an elemental fate,
And elemental potencies and pangs,

And beautiful barenesses as yet unseen,
Making the most of savagery of palms,
Of moonlight on the thick, cadaverous bloom
That yuccas breed, and of the panther's tread.
The fabulous and its intrinsic verse
Came like two spirits parlaying, adorned
In radiance from the Atlantic coign,
For Crispin and his quill to catechize.
But they came parlaying of such an earth,
So thick with sides and jagged lops of green,
So intertwined with serpent-kin encoiled
Among the purple tufts, the scarlet crowns,
Scenting the jungle in their refuges,
So streaked with yellow, blue and green and red
In beak and bud and fruity gobbet-skins,
That earth was like a jostling festival
Of seeds grown fat, too juicily opulent,
Expanding in the gold's maternal warmth.
So much for that. The affectionate emigrant found
A new reality in parrot-squawks.
Yet let that trifle pass. Now, as this odd
Discoverer walked through the harbor streets
Inspecting the cabildo, the façade
Of the cathedral, making notes, he heard
A rumbling, west of Mexico, it seemed,
Approaching like a gasconade of drums.
The white cabildo darkened, the façade,
As sullen as the sky, was swallowed up
In swift, successive shadows, dolefully.
The rumbling broadened as it fell. The wind,
Tempestuous clarion, with heavy cry,
Came bluntly thundering, more terrible
Than the revenge of music on bassoons.
Gesticulating lightning, mystical,
Made pallid flutter. Crispin, here, took flight.
An annotator has his scruples, too.
He knelt in the cathedral with the rest,
This connoisseur of elemental fate,
Aware of exquisite thought. The storm was one
Of many proclamations of the kind,
Proclaiming something harsher than he learned
From hearing signboards whimper in cold nights
Or seeing the midsummer artifice
Of heat upon his pane. This was the span
Of force, the quintessential fact, the note

Of Vulcan, that a valet seeks to own,
 The thing that makes him envious in phrase.
 And while the torrent on the roof still droned
 He felt the Andean breath. His mind was free
 And more than free, elate, intent, profound
 And studious of a self possessing him,
 That was not in him in the crusty town
 From which he sailed. Beyond him, westward, lay
 The mountainous ridges, purple balustrades,
 In which the thunder, lapsing in its clap,
 Let down gigantic quavers of its voice,
 For Crispin to vociferate again.
 III
 Approaching Carolina
 The book of moonlight is not written yet
 Nor half begun, but, when it is, leave room
 For Crispin, fagot in the lunar fire,
 Who, in the hubbub of his pilgrimage
 Through sweating changes, never could forget
 That wakefulness or meditating sleep,
 In which the sulky strophes willingly
 Bore up, in time, the somnolent, deep songs.
 Leave room, therefore, in that unwritten book
 For the legendary moonlight that once burned
 In Crispin's mind above a continent.
 America was always north to him,
 A northern west or western north, but north,
 And thereby polar, polar-purple, chilled
 And lank, rising and slumping from a sea
 Of hardy foam, receding flatly, spread
 In endless ledges, glittering, submerged
 And cold in a boreal mistiness of the moon.
 The spring came there in clinking pannicles
 Of half-dissolving frost, the summer came,
 If ever, whisked and wet, not ripening,
 Before the winter's vacancy returned.
 The myrtle, if the myrtle ever bloomed,
 Was like a glacial pink upon the air.
 The green palmettoes in crepuscular ice
 Clipped frigidly blue-black meridians,
 Morose chiaroscuro, gauntly drawn.
 How many poems he denied himself
 In his observant progress, lesser things
 Than the relentless contact he desired;
 How many sea-masks he ignored; what sounds
 He shut out from his tempering ear; what thoughts,

Like jades affecting the sequestered bride;
And what descants, he sent to banishment!
Perhaps the Arctic moonlight really gave
The liaison, the blissful liaison,
Between himself and his environment,
Which was, and is, chief motive, first delight,
For him, and not for him alone. It seemed
Elusive, faint, more mist than moon, perverse,
Wrong as a divagation to Peking,
To him that postulated as his theme
The vulgar, as his theme and hymn and flight,
A passionately niggling nightingale.
Moonlight was an evasion, or, if not,
A minor meeting, facile, delicate.
Thus he conceived his voyaging to be
An up and down between two elements,
A fluctuating between sun and moon,
A sally into gold and crimson forms,
As on this voyage, out of goblinry,
And then retirement like a turning back
And sinking down to the indulgences
That in the moonlight have their habitude.
But let these backward lapses, if they would,
Grind their seductions on him, Crispin knew
It was a flourishing tropic he required
For his refreshment, an abundant zone,
Prickly and obdurate, dense, harmonious
Yet with a harmony not rarefied
Nor fined for the inhibited instruments
Of over-civil stops. And thus he tossed
Between a Carolina of old time,
A little juvenile, an ancient whim,
And the visible, circumspect presentment drawn
From what he saw across his vessel's prow.
He came. The poetic hero without palms
Or jugglery, without regalia.
And as he came he saw that it was spring,
A time abhorrent to the nihilist
Or searcher for the fecund minimum.
The moonlight fiction disappeared. The spring,
Although contending featly in its veils,
Irised in dew and early fragrances,
Was gemmy marionette to him that sought
A sinewy nakedness. A river bore
The vessel inward. Tilting up his nose,
He inhaled the rancid rosin, burly smells

Of dampened lumber, emanations blown
From warehouse doors, the gustiness of ropes,
Decays of sacks, and all the arrant stinks
That helped him round his rude aesthetic out.
He savored rankness like a sensualist.
He marked the marshy ground around the dock,
The crawling railroad spur, the rotten fence,
Curriculum for the marvellous sophomore.
It purified. It made him see how much
Of what he saw he never saw at all.
He gripped more closely the essential prose
As being, in a world so falsified,
The one integrity for him, the one
Discovery still possible to make,
To which all poems were incident, unless
That prose should wear a poem's guise at last.

IV

The Idea of a Colony

Nota: his soil is man's intelligence.
That's better. That's worth crossing seas to find.
Crispin in one laconic phrase laid bare
His cloudy drift and planned a colony.
Exit the mental moonlight, exit lex,
Rex and principium, exit the whole
Shebang. Exeunt omnes. Here was prose
More exquisite than any tumbling verse:
A still new continent in which to dwell.
What was the purpose of his pilgrimage,
Whatever shape it took in Crispin's mind,
If not, when all is said, to drive away
The shadow of his fellows from the skies,
And, from their stale intelligence released,
To make a new intelligence prevail?
Hence the reverberations in the words
Of his first central hymns, the celebrants
Of rankest trivia, tests of the strength
Of his aesthetic, his philosophy,
The more invidious, the more desired.
The florist asking aid from cabbages,
The rich man going bare, the paladin
Afraid, the blind man as astronomer,
The appointed power unwielded from disdain.
His western voyage ended and began.
The torment of fastidious thought grew slack,
Another, still more bellicose, came on.
He, therefore, wrote his prolegomena,

And, being full of the caprice, inscribed
Commingle souvenirs and prophecies.
He made a singular collation. Thus:
The natives of the rain are rainy men.
Although they paint effulgent, azure lakes,
And April hillsides wooded white and pink,
Their azure has a cloudy edge, their white
And pink, the water bright that dogwood bears.
And in their music showering sounds intone.
On what strange froth does the gross Indian dote,
What Eden sapling gum, what honeyed gore,
What pulpy dram distilled of innocence,
That streaking gold should speak in him
Or bask within his images and words?
If these rude instances impeach themselves
By force of rudeness, let the principle
Be plain. For application Crispin strove,
Abhorring Turk as Esquimaux, the lute
As the marimba, the magnolia as rose.
Upon these premises propounding, he
Projected a colony that should extend
To the dusk of a whistling south below the south.
A comprehensive island hemisphere.
The man in Georgia waking among pines
Should be pine-spokesman. The responsive man,
Planting his pristine cores in Florida,
Should prick thereof, not on the psaltery,
But on the banjo's categorical gut,
Tuck tuck, while the flamingos flapped his bays.
Sepulchral señors, bibbing pale mescal,
Oblivious to the Aztec almanacs,
Should make the intricate Sierra scan.
And dark Brazilians in their cafés,
Musing immaculate, pampean dits,
Should scrawl a vigilant anthology,
To be their latest, lucent paramour.
These are the broadest instances. Crispin,
Progenitor of such extensive scope,
Was not indifferent to smart detail.
The melon should have apposite ritual,
Performed in verd apparel, and the peach,
When its black branches came to bud, belle day,
Should have an incantation. And again,
When piled on salvers its aroma steeped
The summer, it should have a sacrament

And celebration. Shrewd novitiates
 Should be the clerks of our experience.
 These bland excursions into time to come,
 Related in romance to backward flights,
 However prodigal, however proud,
 Contained in their afflatus the reproach
 That first drove Crispin to his wandering.
 He could not be content with counterfeit,
 With masquerade of thought, with hapless words
 That must belie the racking masquerade,
 With fictive flourishes that preordained
 His passion's permit, hang of coat, degree
 Of buttons, measure of his salt. Such trash
 Might help the blind, not him, serenely sly.
 It irked beyond his patience. Hence it was,
 Preferring text to gloss, he humbly served
 Grotesque apprenticeship to chance event,
 A clown, perhaps, but an aspiring clown.
 There is a monotonous babbling in our dreams
 That makes them our dependent heirs, the heirs
 Of dreamers buried in our sleep, and not
 The oncoming fantasies of better birth.
 The apprentice knew these dreamers. If he dreamed
 Their dreams, he did it in a gingerly way.
 All dreams are vexing. Let them be expunged.
 But let the rabbit run, the cock declaim.
 Trinket pasticcio, flaunting skyey sheets,
 With Crispin as the tiptoe cozenner?
 No, no: veracious page on page, exact.

V

A Nice Shady Home
 Crispin as hermit, pure and capable,
 Dwelt in the land. Perhaps if discontent
 Had kept him still the pricking realist,
 Choosing his element from droll confect
 Of was and is and shall or ought to be,
 Beyond Bordeaux, beyond Havana, far
 Beyond carked Yucatan, he might have come
 To colonize his polar planterdom
 And jig his chits upon a cloudy knee.
 But his emprise to that idea soon sped.
 Crispin dwelt in the land and dwelling there
 Slid from his continent by slow recess
 To things within his actual eye, alert
 To the difficulty of rebellious thought
 When the sky is blue. The blue infected will.

It may be that the yarrow in his fields
 Sealed pensive purple under its concern.
 But day by day, now this thing and now that
 Confined him, while it cosseted, condoned,
 Little by little, as if the suzerain soil
 Abashed him by carouse to humble yet
 Attach. It seemed haphazard denouement.
 He first, as realist, admitted that
 Whoever hunts a matinal continent
 May, after all, stop short before a plum
 And be content and still be realist.
 The words of things entangle and confuse.
 The plum survives its poems. It may hang
 In the sunshine placidly, colored by ground
 Obliquities of those who pass beneath,
 Harlequined and mazily dewed and mauved
 In bloom. Yet it survives in its own form,
 Beyond these changes, good, fat, guzzly fruit.
 So Crispin hasped on the surviving form,
 For him, of shall or ought to be in is.
 Was he to bray this in profoundest brass
 Arointing his dreams with fugal requiems?
 Was he to company vastest things defunct
 With a blubber of tom-toms harrowing the sky?
 Scrawl a tragedian's testament? Prolong
 His active force in an inactive dirge,
 Which, let the tall musicians call and call,
 Should merely call him dead? Pronounce amen
 Through choirs infolded to the outmost clouds?
 Because he built a cabin who once planned
 Loquacious columns by the ructive sea?
 Because he turned to salad-beds again?
 Jovial Crispin, in calamitous crape?
 Should he lay by the personal and make
 Of his own fate an instance of all fate?
 What is one man among so many men?
 What are so many men in such a world?
 Can one man think one thing and think it long?
 Can one man be one thing and be it long?
 The very man despising honest quilts
 Lies quilted to his poll in his despite.
 For realists, what is is what should be.
 And so it came, his cabin shuffled up,
 His trees were planted, his duenna brought
 Her prisms blonde and clapped her in his hands,
 The curtains flittered and the door was closed.

Crispin, magister of a single room,
Latched up the night. So deep a sound fell down
It was as if the solitude concealed
And covered him and his congenial sleep.
So deep a sound fell down it grew to be
A long soothsaying silence down and down.
The crickets beat their tambours in the wind,
Marching a motionless march, custodians.
In the presto of the morning, Crispin trod,
Each day, still curious, but in a round
Less prickly and much more condign than that
He once thought necessary. Like Candide,
Yeoman and grub, but with a fig in sight,
And cream for the fig and silver for the cream,
A blonde to tip the silver and to taste
The rapey gouts. Good star, how that to be
Annealed them in their cabin ribaldries!
Yet the quotidian saps philosophers
And men like Crispin like them in intent,
If not in will, to track the knaves of thought.
But the quotidian composed as his,
Of breakfast ribands, fruits laid in their leaves,
The tomtit and the cassia and the rose,
Although the rose was not the noble thorn
Of crinoline spread, but of a pining sweet,
Composed of evenings like cracked shutters flung
Upon the rumpling bottomness, and nights
In which those frail custodians watched,
Indifferent to the tepid summer cold,
While he poured out upon the lips of her
That lay beside him, the quotidian
Like this, saps like the sun, true fortuneer.
For all it takes it gives a humped return
Exchequering from piebald fisci unkeyed.

VI

And Daughters with Curls
Portentous enunciation, syllable
To blessed syllable affined, and sound
Bubbling felicity in cantilene,
Prolific and tormenting tenderness
Of music, as it comes to unison,
Forgather and bell boldly Crispin's last
Deduction. Thrum, with a proud douceur
His grand pronunciamento and devise.
The chits came for his jigging, bluet-eyed,
Hands without touch yet touching poignantly,

Leaving no room upon his cloudy knee,
 Prophetic joint, for its diviner young.
 The return to social nature, once begun,
 Anabasis or slump, ascent or chute,
 Involved him in midwifery so dense
 His cabin counted as phylactery,
 Then place of vexing palankeens, then haunt
 Of children nibbling at the sugared void,
 Infants yet eminently old, then dome
 And halidom for the unbraided femes,
 Green crammers of the green fruits of the world,
 Bidders and biders for its ecstasies,
 True daughters both of Crispin and his clay.
 All this with many mulctings of the man,
 Effective colonizer sharply stopped
 In the door-yard by his own capacious bloom.
 But that this bloom grown riper, showing nibs
 Of its eventual roundness, puerile tints
 Of spiced and weathery rouges, should complex
 The stopper to indulgent fatalist
 Was unforeseen. First Crispin smiled upon
 His goldenest demoiselle, inhabitant,
 She seemed, of a country of the capuchins,
 So delicately blushed, so humbly eyed,
 Attentive to a coronal of things
 Secret and singular. Second, upon
 A second similar counterpart, a maid
 Most sisterly to the first, not yet awake
 Excepting to the motherly footstep, but
 Marvelling sometimes at the shaken sleep.
 Then third, a thing still flaxen in the light,
 A creeper under jaunty leaves. And fourth,
 Mere blusteriness that gewgaws jollified,
 All din and gobble, blasphemously pink.
 A few years more and the vermeil capuchin
 Gave to the cabin, lordlier than it was,
 The dulcet omen fit for such a house.
 The second sister dallying was shy
 To fetch the one full-pinioned one himself
 Out of her botches, hot embosomer.
 The third one gaping at the orioles
 Lettered herself demurely as became
 A pearly poetess, peaked for rhapsody.
 The fourth, pent now, a digit curious.
 Four daughters in a world too intricate
 In the beginning, four blithe instruments

Of differing struts, four voices several
 In couch, four more personæ, intimate
 As buffo, yet divers, four mirrors blue
 That should be silver, four accustomed seeds
 Hinting incredible hues, four self-same lights
 That spread chromatics in hilarious dark,
 Four questioners and four sure answerers.
 Crispin concocted doctrine from the rout.
 The world, a turnip once so readily plucked,
 Sacked up and carried overseas, daubed out
 Of its ancient purple, pruned to the fertile main,
 And sown again by the stiffest realist,
 Came reproduced in purple, family font,
 The same insoluble lump. The fatalist
 Stepped in and dropped the chuckling down his craw,
 Without grace or grumble. Score this anecdote
 Invented for its pith, not doctrinal
 In form though in design, as Crispin willed,
 Disguised pronunciamento, summary,
 Autumn's compendium, strident in itself
 But muted, mused, and perfectly revolved
 In those portentous accents, syllables,
 And sounds of music coming to accord
 Upon his law, like their inherent sphere,
 Seraphic proclamations of the pure
 Delivered with a deluging onwardness.
 Or if the music sticks, if the anecdote
 Is false, if Crispin is a profitless
 Philosopher, beginning with green brag,
 Concluding fadedly, if as a man
 Prone to distemper he abates in taste,
 Fieble and fumbling, variable, obscure,
 Glozing his life with after-shining flicks,
 Illuminating, from a fancy gorged
 By apparition, plain and common things,
 Sequestering the fluster from the year,
 Making gulped potions from obstreperous drops,
 And so distorting, proving what he proves
 Is nothing, what can all this matter since
 The relation comes, benignly, to its end?
 So may the relation of each man be clipped.

Appendix 3

Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself

At the earliest ending of winter,
In March, a scrawny cry from outside
Seemed like a sound in his mind.

He knew that he heard it,
A bird's cry, at daylight or before,
In the early March wind.

The sun was rising at six,
No longer a battered panache above snow...
It would have been outside.

It was not from the vast ventriloquism
Of sleep's faded papier-mache...
The sun was coming from the outside.

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

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

Appendix 4

High-Toned Old Christian Woman

POETRY is the supreme fiction, madame.
Take the moral law and make a nave of it
And from the nave build haunted heaven. Thus,
The conscience is converted into palms,
Like windy citherns hankering for hymns.
We agree in principle. That's clear. But take
The opposing law and make a peristyle,
And from the peristyle project a masque
Beyond the planets. Thus, our bawdiness,
Unpurged by epitaph, indulged at last,
Is equally converted into palms,
Squiggling like saxophones. And palm for palm,
Madame, we are where we began. Allow,
Therefore, that in the planetary scene
Your disaffected flagellants, well-stuffed,
Smacking their muzzy bellies in parade,
Proud of such novelties of the sublime,
Such tink and tank and tunk-a-tunk-tunk,
May, merely may, madame, whip from themselves
A jovial hullabaloo among the spheres.
This will make widows wince. But fictive things
Wink as they will. Wink most when widows wince.

Appendix 5

Of Modern Poetry

The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It has not always had
To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
Was in the script.

Then the theatre was changed
To something else. Its past was a souvenir.

It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.
It has to face the men of the time and to meet
The women of the time. It has to think about war
And it has to find what will suffice. It has
To construct a new stage. It has to be on that stage,
And, like an insatiable actor, slowly and
With meditation, speak words that in the ear,
In the delicatest ear of the mind, repeat,
Exactly, that which it wants to hear, at the sound
Of which, an invisible audience listens,
Not to the play, but to itself, expressed
In an emotion as of two people, as of two
Emotions becoming one. The actor is
A metaphysician in the dark, twanging
An instrument, twanging a wiry string that gives
Sounds passing through sudden rightnesses, wholly
Containing the mind, below which it cannot descend,
Beyond which it has no will to rise.

It must
Be the finding of a satisfaction, and may
Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman
Combing. The poem of the act of the mind.

Appendix 6

The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;
And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter
Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,
~~Which is the sound of the land~~
~~Full of the same wind~~
That is blowing in the same bare place
For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
~~Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.~~

Appendix 7

Sunday Morning

1

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
As a calm darkens among water-lights.
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
Seem things in some procession of the dead,
Winding across wide water, without sound.
The day is like wide water, without sound.
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
Over the seas, to silent Palestine,
Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

2

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
~~Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?~~
~~Divinity must live within herself?~~
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
All pleasures and all pains, remembering
The bough of summer and the winter branch.
These are the measure destined for her soul.

3

Jove in the clouds had his inhuman birth.
No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave
Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind.
He moved among us, as a muttering king,
Magnificent, would move among his hinds,
Until our blood, commingling, virginal,
With heaven, brought such requital to desire
The very hinds discerned it, in a star.

Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
The blood of paradise? And shall the earth
Seem all of paradise that we shall know?
The sky will be much friendlier then than now,
A part of labor and a part of pain,
And next in glory to enduring love,
Not this dividing and indifferent blue.

4

She says, "I am content when wakened birds,
Before they fly, test the reality
Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;
But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields
Return no more, where, then, is paradise?"
There is not any haunt of prophecy,
Nor any old chimera of the grave,
Neither the golden underground, nor isle
Melodious, where spirits gat them home,
Nor visionary south, nor cloudy palm
Remote on heaven's hill, that has endured
As April's green endures; or will endure
Like her remembrance of awakened birds,
Or her desire for June and evening, tipped
By the consummation of the swallow's wings.

5

She says, "But in contentment I still feel
The need of some imperishable bliss."
Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams
And our desires. Although she strews the leaves
Of sure obliteration on our paths,
The path sick sorrow took, the many paths
Where triumph rang its brassy phrase, or love
Whispered a little out of tenderness,
She makes the willow shiver in the sun
For maidens who were wont to sit and gaze
Upon the grass, relinquished to their feet.
She causes boys to pile new plums and pears
On disregarded plate. The maidens taste
And stray impassioned in the littering leaves.

6

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores

That never touch with inarticulate pang?
Why set pear upon those river-banks
Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?
Alas, that they should wear our colors there,
The silken weavings of our afternoons,
And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!
Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
Within whose burning bosom we devise
Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.

7

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
Not as a god, but as a god might be,
Naked among them, like a savage source.
Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
The windy lake wherein their lord delights,
The trees, like serafin, and echoing hills,
That choir among themselves long afterward.
They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
Of men that perish and of summer morn.
And whence they came and whither they shall go
The dew upon their feet shall manifest.

8

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

Appendix 8

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

1

Among twenty snowy mountains
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird

2

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

3

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

4

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

5

I do not know which to prefer
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes.
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

6

Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

7

O thin men of Haddam,
Why to do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
of the women about you?

8

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved

In what I know.

9

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

10

At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

11

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

12

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

13

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

Appendix 9

The World as Meditation

It is Ulysses that approaches from the east,
The interminable adventurer? The trees are mended.
That winter is washed away. Someone is moving

On the horizon and lifting himself up above it.
A form of fire approaches the cretonnes of Penelope,
Whose mere savage presence awakens the world in which she dwells.

She has composed, so long, a self with which to welcome him,
Companion to his self for her, which she imagined,
Two in a deep-founded sheltering, friend and dear friend.

The trees had been mended, as an essential exercise
In an inhuman meditation, larger than her own.
No winds like dogs watched over her at night.

She wanted nothing he could not bring her by coming alone.
She wanted no fetchings. His arms would be her necklace
And her belt, the final fortune of their desire.

But was it Ulysses? Or was it only the warmth of the sun
On her pillow? The thought kept beating in her like her heart.
The two kept beating together. It was only day.

It was Ulysses and it was not. Yet they had met,
Friend and dear friend and a planet's encouragement.
The barbarous strength within her would never fail.

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

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بالبفوضى و الفقر و العنف، و عليه أن يحول هذا الواقع المر من خلال قصائده إلى واقع يمكن تحمله بفضل قوة تصوره.

و في الفصل الثالث تطرقنا إلى عنصر العقل باعتباره المحقق لهذه التركيبة بين الواقع و الخيال. فعلى العقل أن يكون مطهرا من كل رواسب الماضي. وعلى الشاعر أن يستخلص من الأسطورة الكلاسيكية (Classical Myth) و المسيحية (Christianity) و العقلانية و الرومانسية التي قد تضفي غموضا على العقل.

أما الفصل الرابع فيتضمن فكرة التغير التي يتبناها الشاعر في عملية الإبداع. و التي تحتوي على معنيين : المعنى الأول يتمثل في قدرة العقل على تحويل الواقع من عالم الحقيقة إلى عالم الخيال، ولا يتحقق هذا إلا بالاعتماد على اللغة الإيحائية. أما المعنى الثاني لفكرة التغير فيتمثل في القوة العقلية المبدعة و المتجددة للشاعر في القصيدة الشعرية وفقا للتحويلات الملموسة في الواقع، وهذا يعني أن القصيدة في تغير مستمر ما دام الواقع يخضع لسنة التغير المستمر.

و قد تم التركيز في الفصل الخامس على ضرورة تحقيق القصيدة الشعرية لعنصر المتعة لبلوغ درجة الخيال الأعلى لتعويض المتعة المفقودة و التي كانت تستمد من الدين. و للمتعة الشعرية عدة معاني كقوة التخيل في تحقيق الحيوية في أشياء ثابتة و تجسيد مبدأ الإحسان. غير أن هذه التركيبة بين الواقع و التصور تطرح إشكالا في ما يخص إمكانية تحقيق المتعة مع الحفاظ على التزام الخيال الأعلى بالواقع المحسوس. ففريق من النقاد أكد على هروب والاس ستيفنس من الواقع و فريقا آخر قام بقراءة ثانية لقصائده مؤكدا على التزامه بواقعه.

وفي الخاتمة حاولت تلخيص ما أسفر عنه البحث من نتائج و أردت أن أبين أن الشروط التي وضعها والاس ستيفنس لإيصال الشاعر إلى درجة الخيال الأعلى الذي اقترحه بديلا للدين تؤكد على إيمانه بعلمانية القصيدة الشعرية. كما حاولت أن أوضح أن هذه الشروط لا تفقد القصيدة التزامها بالواقع بل تضفي عليه الجانب الشعري و التصوري بتحويله إلى واقع محتمل.

إن ما يميز المجتمعات الغربية في القرن العشرين هو التخلي عن الدين مما أدى إلى وجود فراغ روحي و ثقافي. و قد تزامن هذا مع ظهور مذهب العصرية (Modernism) الذي حاول رواه معالجة هذه المشكلة فسنهم من دافع في أعماله الفنية عن فكرة الرجوع إلى الدين، و منهم من رأى في الفن بديلا علمانيا لاحتواء هذه المعضلة. ومن دعاة الرأي الثاني الشاعر الأمريكي والاس ستيفنس (Wallace Stevens) الذي اقترح فن الشعر حيث سماه "بالخيال الأعلى" (Supreme Fiction) كبديل للدين.

إن مصداقية الخيال الأعلى متوقفة على مدى انتمائه إلى الواقع و علويته تخضع لشروط ثلاث : التجريد، التغيير و المتعة. و قد حاولنا هذه الأطروحة أن تقوم بدراسة معمقة لهذه الشروط التي تؤكد على علمانية الخيال الأعلى. و لتحقيق هذا الغرض قمنا بتقسيم هذه الأطروحة إلى خمسة فصول.

حاولنا في الفصل الأول أن نعطي نبذة تاريخية للعلاقة بين الشعر و الدين في التقاليد الأدبية الأمريكية و ذلك للوصول إلى فهم التحول من فكرة الشعر المؤيد للدين كما نادى بها البيوريتانيون (Puritans) الأوائل إلى فكرة الشعر كبديل علماني للدين التي نادى بها والاس ستيفنس. و قد ركزنا على أن هذا التحول مر بعدة مراحل من البيوريتانية (Puritanism) إلى العقلية (Rationalism) إلى الترنسندتالية (Transcendentalism) ثم الواقعية (Realism) مؤكداً على أن الابتعاد عن الدين أصبح أكثر بروزاً في بداية القرن العشرين من المراحل السابقة. كما تطرقنا في هذا الفصل إلى ردود أفعال بعض أدياء المذهب العصرية لظاهرة التخلي عن الدين، و منهم والاس ستيفنس. و يفيدنا هذا الفصل في معرفة أوجه التشابه و أوجه الاختلاف بين والاس ستيفنس و سابقه من جهة و معاصريه من جهة أخرى في ما يخص علاقة الشعر بالدين.

في الفصل الثاني تم التركيز على أن مصداقية الإيمان بالخيال الأعلى تتوقف على مدى انتمائه للواقع الذي ينبثق منه. فتجريد الشعر من الواقع أو اللجوء إلى واقع ميتافيزيقي كالواقع اللاهوتي الديني يفقده صلابته و بتالي يفقده مصداقية كبديل للدين. فالشاعر ينطلق من الواقع الذي ينتمي إليه رغم أن هذا الواقع يتميز