

5-11-1995

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Metaphoric Negotiations of Reality and Imagination
in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens:
The Poet in an Existential Chiaroscuro

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Thesis in English Literature Completed in Fulfillment of Honors 3992

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May 11, 1995

This endlessly elaborating poem
Displays the theory of poetry,
As the life of poetry.

— “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven”

Life's nonsense pierces us with strange relation.

— “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction”

Wallace Stevens published his first major poems in a series of issues of *Poetry*, edited by Harriet Monroe (Edelstein 197), that appeared soon after the outbreak of the Great War in Europe. The poems in those issues reflected imagistically and thematically many concerns that were current not only to literature and other academic disciplines but to society as a whole. Predominantly nihilistic readings of Nietzsche cast most intellectual thought into a despair that made nineteenth-century optimism as dim as the faded metaphysical foundations that lost credibility with the War. With Nietzsche's pronouncements on the death of God and the monstrosity that man had become in the industrialized world, many poets were genuinely concerned with either lamenting these conditions or attempting a new affirmation out of them.

Stevens falls into the latter category. If God is dead, no matter, believes Stevens, for he writes in “Sunday Morning” that

Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfilment to our dreams
And our desires. (*Palm at the End of the Mind* 7)

“Sunday Morning,” published in *Poetry* in 1916, asserts on a rather confident level that the razing of huge metaphysical structures and faiths that had loomed at the core of the West for most of its life as a civilization actually proved a most advantageous and necessary event for the poet, and indeed for any person. As his poetry developed and matured, Stevens refined away the

tone of pronouncement and the naïve theological directness that characterize “Sunday Morning.” At the same time, he reworked the central insight that lies beneath the grandiose pronouncements of that poem, which he seems to overstate in order to place them in strong relief with the implicit backdrop of the Great War’s destruction: in the absence of the structures that once loomed over and infiltrated virtually every part of Western society, there is a space for a newer, more pertinent creation.

Stevens' verse is devoted to a construction, or perhaps an uncovering, of what he terms a supreme fiction. That phrase comes to represent a poetry that affirms the indelible connections between the thinking human being and his surroundings, between imagination and reality. In continuing the Kantian movement toward individual perception as means of knowing, and the Romantic turn toward the imagination, Stevens believes that within each of us lies the potential for that supreme fiction, and hence that within each of us lies the potential to see past the cultural death of God or gods—“For the death of one God is the death of all” (“Notes toward a Supreme Fiction”)—to the qualities ascribed to God that actually reside within us. As an affirmation of our position in a reality become chaotic and fear-inspiring—the Great War standing as the most potent and sobering harbinger to all of Western society—Stevens finds resemblance between our imagined concept of God and the reality of what the poet as maker accomplishes: both are creators of the world that we inhabit. The modern poet serves a different purpose from those of poets from previous times:

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. (“Of Modern Poetry,” 174)

In this new theatre, the poet is “a metaphysician in the dark,” finding sense between two sources of experience—imagination and reality. With differing emphases in several important poems, Stevens addresses separate parts of the resemblances between these two sources; sometimes concentrating on the imagination's images that often become just as real to us as external phenomena, as in “Domination of Black,” sometimes more on the reality or external phenomena that we experience, as in “The Sun This March,” Stevens works somewhat methodically toward an understanding of each of the component parts of our experience, finally reaching a conclusion in the later poems that casts both as equally necessary and, indeed, inseparable.

Because of this practical inseparability, I must distinguish some difference between reality and imagination as Stevens sees them. Primarily, they are necessarily inseparable, since imagination informs our perception of reality, and reality gives the imagination images to distort. More important, as Northrop Frye explains in “The Realistic Oriole,” “reality” in Stevens’ poetry designates both the physical and the mental world insofar as they remain untouched by active imagination.:

Stevens calls [nature] “reality,” by which he means, not simply the external physical world, but “things as they are,” the existential process that includes ordinary human life on the level of absorption in routine activity. . . . The revolution of consciousness against routine is the starting-point of all mental activity, and the centre of mental activity is imagination, the power of transforming reality into awareness of reality. Man can have no freedom except what begins in his own awareness of his condition. (239)

When “the scene was set,” suggestive of that “routine” against which Frye pits Stevens, the poet often disclaimed his individuality, substituting previously recounted myths or poetries—“it repeated what / was in the script”—in place of a personal voice, thereby placing the origin of the

poem outside himself. It may seem at first that the poet operates solely with the distortion of reality as distorting towards resemblances, but the poet must position himself between the two generators of phenomena; to compose, he must stand between reality and the imagination, participating equally in each.

Because Stevens frequently uses Plato's seminal image of the sun as the ultimate external truth to contrast with the darker processes of meditation, the poet positions himself in what I call an "existential chiaroscuro." There, the external and internal components of experience meet, creating the fine shading that the poet must articulate in his poetry. If the poet concentrates too much on the imaginative or meditative, then the resemblances will have no real meaning since the differences between the real and imagined objects become dubious. Likewise, neglecting imagination for the brighter, more visible but less potent reality is an "error of reason" (Frye 240) that leaves reality so distant from the poet's experience that he is unable to incorporate it successfully into his poems. Rather, the poet might best apprehend reality when there is ambiguity present, so that the imagination can react with more variations and therefore more freedom:

[When] normal things had yawned themselves away,
The nothingness was a nakedness, a point,

Beyond which fact could not progress as fact.
Thereon the learning of the man conceived
Once more night's pale illuminations, gold

Beneath, far underneath, the surface of
His eye, and audible in the mountain of
His ear, the very material of his mind. ("Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" 229)

Darkness or bareness often provides the best setting for apprehension of reality. In the absence of some reality-generated phenomena, the imagination can more readily assert its own creations

and then offer resemblances. The importance of this process is an affirmation of the poet's legitimacy in the vast and complicated reality in which he finds himself. In finding something like reality within himself, the poet can gain confidence in his place in reality. He may then conceive "night's pale illuminations" with the "very material of his mind."

Before reality and the imagination, the two primary sources of phenomena, may be compared or synthesized successfully in the poem, they must be placed as complete opposites. Reality should be presented with as little decoration as possible to emphasize the role of the imagination as an embellisher:

After the leaves have fallen, we return
To a plain sense of things. It is as if
We had come to an end of the imagination,
Inanimate in an inert savoir. ("The Plain Sense of Things" 382)

Immediately, the absence of imagination causes difficulty: "It is difficult to choose the adjective / For this blank cold, this sadness without cause." Reality without imagined constructs is "a fantastic effort [that] has failed." Imagination, then, the human element, brings meaning to the poem and to the world. Just as the West, in retrospect, seems to have required a step back from the metaphysical constructs that had perhaps become too separated from reality, the poet must imagine the absence of imagination in order to fully understand its meaningfulness. Reality laid bare is a depressing sight: "The greenhouse never so badly needed paint. / The chimney is fifty years old and slants to one side. / A fantastic effort has failed" (383). But from that fear of decay arises the imagination, rejuvenated by its sense of usefulness in providing a space, meaning, for the poet. Even as Stevens writes the lines, he gives the image a humorous, colloquial tone that suggests a homeowner, arms akimbo and shaking his head at disrepair, ready to act. From this conflict between harsh reality and lush imagination comes the strength of metaphor.

Perhaps due to a misdirection that Joseph Riddel argues exemplifies a middle period of Stevens' career (104-109), but more likely because Stevens realizes that he cannot possibly include the supreme fiction in one poem, Stevens devotes different poems to specialized explorations of reality and imagination. However, none of his poems completely ignores either of these parts of the universal. In separating the two and treating them to different degrees, Stevens acknowledges that difference between the two sources must be fully established before a harmony asserts itself in a resemblance. Stevens saw his work as a whole, almost going so far as to call his collected poems *The Whole of Harmonium* (Letters 834), after a derivation on his first book, *Harmonium*, which introduced all of these issues.

In a study of the interaction between reality and the imagination in Stevens' "whole of harmonium," the depth of Stevens' understanding of the two realms of experience and the poet's relationship with them become clear: he sees a reimagining of reality as a necessity for the continuation of a vital world, and his poetic career is a systematic undertaking of that new vision:

He is not here, the old sun,
As absent as if we were asleep.

.....
It is in this solitude, a syllable,
Out of gawky flutterings,

Intones its single emptiness,
The savagest hollow of winter-sound.

It is here, in this bad, that we reach
The last purity of the knowledge of good. ("No Possum, No Sop, No Taters" 247)

Stevens' verse sees the absence of the sun, the symbol of an older imagining of things that has lost its pertinence in its permanence, as an opportunity to explore reality laid bare, "primary

noon, // The vital, fatal, arrogant, dominant X” (“The Motive for Metaphor” 240). Stripping those paradigms from his perception of the world, Stevens begins with his “scrawny cry from outside” (“Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself” 387) and builds a new poetry from within his existential chiaroscuro. Even in the discovery of the “X,” which suggests a crossing or coming together, Stevens sees what his poetry must do; in drawing resemblances between reality and imagination, he creates a poetry that is both particular and universal, temporal and eternal.

Stevens’ conclusion, I believe, is very similar to Nietzsche’s assertion that Greek tragedy is a balance of opposite qualities of the plastic, Apollonian vision and the non-plastic, Dionysian participation in “primordial pain and pleasure,” the animating current flowing through all life. The Apollonian, which suggests a removal from reality in order to construct a static image outside of any influence, must be tempered with an enjoyment of the multiplicity of feelings that envelop the artist and therefore more fully resemble participation in reality. That mix of emotions involves the extremes of pleasure and anguish, which are felt simultaneously at the moment of art. The combination of these two perspectives gives the most powerful art as a comment on the individual’s place in reality and at the same time the impossibility of such an extraction. Nietzsche best describes the opposition in comparing dreams and drunkenness:

[F]irst, on the one hand, in the pictorial world of dreams, whose completeness is not dependent upon the intellectual attitude or the artistic culture of any single being; and, on the other hand, as drunken reality, which likewise does not heed to the single unit, but even seeks to destroy the individual and redeem him by a mystic feeling of oneness. (957)

The accomplishment of humankind lies in its ability to assimilate both. Nietzsche illuminates this process in Greek tragedy; Stevens exemplifies it in a different way in modern poetry.

Through the course of his career, his attention fluctuates between more Apollonian poetry and more Dionysian, finally settling on his place in the middle of the two.

For Stevens, metaphor as a creative act depends necessarily on both imagination and reality. Depicting resemblances among images generated by both, however, requires that an extreme duality between internal and external experience be lessened. Stevens asserts in “Three Academic Pieces” that the resemblances can occur “between two or more parts of reality, something real and imagined, . . . [or] between two imagined things” (NA 72). “Domination of Black” (1916), one of Stevens' earliest poems, for example, not only creates resemblances, it blurs the distinction between things real and imagined, forcing the reader to forego any premature assumptions about where each phenomenon originates

At night, by the fire,
The colors of the leaves,
Repeating themselves,
Turned in the room,
Like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind.
Yes: but the color of the heavy hemlocks
Came striding.
And I remembered the cry of the peacocks. (14)

Instead of using the objects (bushes, leaves, hemlocks, peacocks, and flames) expressly as the subjects of sentences, Stevens uses “colors” as the subjects, thereby displacing the origin of the phenomenon and concentrating directly on the poet's perception of it. This device serves to equalize phenomena generated by reality and the imagination and therefore emphasizes the participation of both in the creation of metaphor. “Domination of Black” is devoted to an illustration of how metaphor happens; the turning of the leaves resembles the troping process, itself becoming a metaphoric demonstration for the metaphoric process.

Stevens' emphasis on the perception of a phenomenon rather than its source suggests itself in that the speaker "remember[s] the cry of the peacocks," and the cry maintains equal prominence imagistically with the "real" phenomena happening outside the window. The poet's perception of resemblances is not confined to present, external things; indeed the memory holds a major place as legitimate present experience despite its being merely an image of a past event. Therein lies the vital connection that sparks the rest of the poem. His memory of the peacocks actually lives rather than being a still image. He "hear[s] them cry -- the peacocks. / Was it a cry against the twilight or against themselves . . . / Or was it a cry against the hemlocks?" The last question brings the peacocks' cry into the present action of the poem although the cry begins as a memory. The poet, then, can recall images and use them as present happenings. All things that the poet perceives as they happen continue to happen in his mind, and this ability allows the creation of metaphors outside of restrictive time barriers.

That polychronicity is only one aspect of a more general removal suggested in "Domination of Black." Stevens emphasizes that the metaphoric process must take place removed enough from immediate reality that the imagination can act freely. "Domination of Black" has the poet recalling some experiences while viewing others through his window, and it is this removal, due to the framing of the window view, that allows resemblances to come so easily. Especially important to this removal, considering the importance of perception of phenomena, is that the poem takes place at night, which allows the assumptions of the imagination to replace what would be apparent in daylight. That distance from normal reality invites the displacement of the colors from their objects, as the colors of the bushes, leaves, hemlocks, and tails are separate from the things themselves.

Such a displacement in extreme is impossible, however. The poet's removal from external reality is breached by the inevitable time constraint: death. The hemlocks, with their metonymic association with death, break the poet's isolated reverie. The contemplation has been completely positive for most of the first stanza, as indicated with "Yes," but the hemlocks disrupt that isolated positivity: "Yes: But the color of the heavy hemlocks / Came striding." Far from intruding as a destructive visitor, however, the presence of death allows the real beginning of significant metaphor. The hemlocks prompt the involvement of internal phenomena, the memory of the peacocks, and this process opens the possibility for the rest of the poem: "the color of the heavy hemlocks / Came striding. / And I remembered the cry of the peacocks." Metaphoric potential arises directly from tension, a juxtaposition between external and internal, fear and comfort. After the external phenomena evoke the memory, a rapport forms between internal experience and external, and the resemblances become clear:

The colors of their tails
 Were like the leaves themselves
 Turning in the wind,
 In the twilight wind.

 Was it a cry against the twilight
 Or against the leaves themselves
 Turning in the wind,
 Turning as the flames
 Turned in the fire,
 Turning as the tails of the peacocks
 Turned in the loud fire,
 Loud as the hemlocks
 Full of the cry of the peacocks?

In this passage, there is a synthesis of what happens outside the poet's room (the leaves), in his room (the fire), and in his mind (the peacocks). Through synesthesia, colors evoke sound and the qualities of all individual objects become blurred, so all of the separate experiences meld

together. With the repetition of the phrase “the cry of the peacocks,” the resemblance comes full circle, making the category -- the turning colors -- created in the first two stanzas complete.

Since metaphors result from the poet's understanding of a resemblance between things, a look at the qualities of each singular phenomenon is important. The “colors of the bushes / And of the fallen leaves” and “of the heavy hemlocks” have little to do with the cry of the peacock, but instead invoke the “colors of their tails.” The poet connects the leaves, the peacocks, and the fire through a repetition of motion. In the motion lies the importance of the metaphor. The repetition of “turning” and “turned” throughout the poem, but especially in the second stanza, emphasizes the motion's importance, and its most essential quality: repetition. This poem is constructed around repetitive figures of speech, especially anaphora. The importance of the metaphor in this poem lies mainly in its visualization of the process of creating metaphor. As Harold Bloom has noted, “to trope is to execute a ‘turning’” (376). The poem, then, is devoted to an example of how metaphor works, rather than simply to a particular metaphor. Stevens once insisted, “I am sorry that this poem has to contain any ideas at all, because its sole purpose is to fill the mind with the images and sounds that it contains” (*Letters* 251).

The result of metaphor created through resemblance, suggested in this poem, is that the resemblance drawn points to a higher level. The last stanza suggests a transcendental connection symbolized in the planets:

Out of the window,
I saw how the planets gathered
Like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind.

The planets in the last stanza differ from the other phenomena in that they are the subject, rather than the colors, of the clause in which the poet describes them. This return to the object itself

suggests that by drawing resemblances between perceived objects, a larger resemblance that might apply more broadly to the poet's existence appears. Such a realization, however, does not preclude any involvement with the phenomena that lead the poet to the metaphor. As soon as the planets are mentioned, the poet immediately qualifies them by saying that they resemble "the leaves themselves." Further, the addition of the larger scheme creates a more ominous feel to the earlier images: "I felt afraid." This line, and the perception of the peacock's cry as frightful leads some critics to see the process of "Domination of Black" as a frightening thing. Riddel insists that "the turning world, caught in the motion of the leaves (and through an ominous anaphora), enshrouds the poet in fear, and the refrain of the cry of the peacocks echoes . . . to catch a melancholic struggle of the self with its fate" (87). Quite to the contrary, the beauty of the turning, and especially the poet's ability to locate himself by connecting memory with external reality through resemblance, allows the poet to take himself out of isolation. Jarraway asserts that the speaker is "incapable" of keeping an ominous nature outside the window, that "night is particularly daunting" (29). The poet is incapable of complete isolation, but in that lies his ability to place himself; therefore night presents an opportunity for metaphor rather than an overpowering of the poet. He can order the chaos of night, establish a place even before "striding" death, with his internal reality, the memory of the peacocks.

"Domination of Black" refers to the poet's ability to stand against, or perhaps within, the night by reconciling the nature that "came striding" through the window to the poet's ability to stave off night with his fire and the memory of the peacocks' cry. I want to argue that "Domination of Black" is an affirmation of metaphor as an orientating device which allows a brighter confidence to emerge from "how the night came, / Came like the color of the heavy

hemlocks.” As such, the domination of black is an action taken by the poet. My reading differs fundamentally from the readings offered by Riddel and Jarraway, which see the poet as lost in a domination *by* black, expressing a futility under the weight of death that strides into the poet’s conscious. There is certainly a fear of death present, but the last line, a return to the poet’s memory, “And I remembered the cry of the peacocks,” serves as a remedy for the fear. As a refrain, the line returns the reader to the first stanza, and therein allows a repetition of the fusion between external and internal origins of perception, except now the trope applies to a higher level. The last stanza, as Bloom indicates, is a metalepsis of the original trope, but not a reversal, as he asserts (379). With the placement of the refrain as the last line, it seems that the poet’s “Domination of Black” rests in the poet’s ability to create a protective web as it were of resemblances.

“Domination of Black” allows us to watch the swirl of internal and external experience as Stevens wishes it to be seen, especially early in his writing: “You are supposed to get heavens full of colors and full of sounds, and you are supposed to feel as you would feel if you actually got all this” (*Letters* 251). In the “heavens full of colors,” which suggests the plastic or Apollonian arts, the peacocks’ cry—especially its association with music and the mortality in the external world—tends to lose some of its significance as the impetus for metaphor. The sounds recall the Dionysian arts, and the apparent conquest of them in “Domination of Black” seems successful, but just as Nietzsche saw a balance as important, “Domination” leans toward an isolated poet figure that cannot fully participate in reality.

After *Harmonium* (1923), Stevens did not publish any new poems for almost ten years. As Riddel points out, Stevens’ poetry after *Harmonium* seems to back down from the frequently

vibrant enthusiasm of the first book: "The landscape was different; the light of an earlier self was dimmed and shone upon a less opulent world" (104). The poet's confidence in the imagination is one of the things that dimmed. As William Carlos Williams and others argue (Riddel 105-106), Stevens' pessimism may dim some aspects of his poetry; it serves by contrast, however, to shed some light on others. Often, in Stevens' zealous ambiguity, the reader finds it difficult to untangle the internal from the external experience. This result would certainly please Stevens to some extent, but the resemblances drawn between internal and external are more easily identified and understood when the reader can keep them apart for enough time to study them individually. Some poems allow this activity more readily than others. "The Sun This March" (1930) gives us a more clear vision of Stevens' concept of truth by eliminating to some degree the imagination's assimilation of it. With the dimming of concentration on the imagination, the possibility of an external truth, and its role in metaphor, becomes more apparent.

The speaker of "The Sun This March" conceives himself as existing in a fallen state, very much like that in the Christian tradition, and he observes a potential metaphor for his previous enlightened state:

The exceeding brightness of the early sun
Makes me conceive how dark I have become,

And re-illuminates things that used to turn
To gold in broadest blue, and be a part

Of a turning spirit in an earlier self.
That, too, returns from out the winter air,

Like an hallucination come to daze
The corner of the eye. Our element,

Cold is our element and winter's air
Brings voices as of lions coming down.

Oh! Rabbi, rabbi, fend my soul for me
And true savant of this dark nature be. (92-93)

The poet, through the mere accumulation of ages, has moved from the “earlier self” and does not seem intent on regaining that earlier state, or he knows the impossibility of that task. The sun is not the truth, but only an emblem of it, so rather than returning things to their original splendor, it merely “re-illuminates;” it does not turn them back to gold. In no part of the poem does the poet imply that he might rise above the “dark I have become.” Indeed, neither the sun nor the “turning spirit in an earlier self” comes from anywhere other than “from out the winter’s air,” which is “our element.” Although the sun is not the truth itself, it certainly succeeds as a thing that facilitates a resemblance between real and imagined, and therefore gives the poet a metaphor for truth.

The poet in “The Sun This March” deliberately hesitates in insisting that the sun is necessarily truth or even a particularly successful vehicle for it. Naming the sun anything other than what it is would break an important precedent set in “Gubbinal” (1921). By using the sun as a vehicle in a metaphor, retaining the sun’s integrity as an externally real phenomenon, the poet does not distort the real sun for the reader. If he were giving it false properties, he may become the victim of scoldings similar to those in “Gubbinal”: “That strange flower, the sun, / Is just what you say. / Have it your way” (53). The tone suggests that something is missing in such naming as “That strange flower” and later “That tuft of jungle feathers, / That animal eye, / That savage of fire, / That seed,” and the result of such falsehoods is the refrain: “The world is ugly, / And the people are sad.” In obscuring the nature of the phenomenal thing by naming it so restrictively, the false poet as it were makes the world become ugly when compared to his fantastical vision. Because this approach does not draw resemblances between the real and

imagined experience, instead only applying imagined signifiers to the object the sun, this process fails to create metaphor and therein fails as a poetic process.

In "The Sun This March," Stevens uses similes to suggest the closeness between the sun and truth, but at the same time the indelible separation. "That, too," or "a turning spirit in an earlier self," is like "an hallucination come to daze / The corner of the eye." The experience is not a direct apprehension of truth since it happens "in the corner of the eye." It can only be inferred, and is as fleeting as an hallucination. Likewise, the winter air "Brings voices as of lions coming down," but the lions themselves, a common image for truth in Stevens that Bloom treats well (174), do not come down. With this metaphor for truth untouched by the mangling language of, for example, "Gubbinal," the reader gains a better understanding of how Stevens apprehends truth in reality. It is not inherent there, nor can it be reached completely. Just as we saw in "Domination of Black," the metaphor relies on an internal mechanism, like memory, to make the resemblance clear. In "Domination," it was the memory of the peacocks; in "The Sun This March" it is the contrast between "an earlier self" and "how dark I have become" that allows the external phenomenon to gain meaning.

Despite the similarity in how truth is depicted in "Domination of Black" and "The Sun This March," there occurs in the latter poem a stronger separation between external and internal phenomena. In "Domination," the external and internal are inextricably entwined, whereas the sun in the latter poem remains outside the poet. In the last stanza, the poet abandons any expectation of returning to an earlier self and redirects the poem into an apostrophe: "Oh! Rabbi, rabbi, fend my soul for me / And true savant of this dark nature be." Still a source of external truth, although more accessible than the sun, the rabbi resides with the poet in the fallen, wintry

element. Stevens viewed rabbis as experiential figures, devoted to a search for wisdom in the cold element where the poet finds himself. Joseph Kronick's discussion of the rabbi in Stevens' poems (124-126) suggests that the rabbi figure is very similar to the poet himself, mirroring the placement of the poet between external and internal experience. Indeed, in a letter that Kronick cites, Stevens wrote:

I am beginning to feel very much like a rabbi myself. . . . When I was a boy I was brought up to think that rabbis were men who spent most of their time getting wisdom. And I rather think that that is true. One doesn't feel the same way, for instance, about priests or about a Protestant pastor, who are almost exclusively religious figures. (Letters 751)

The rabbi is a more earthy figure, then, unlike the priest or pastor. The past epoch, in which, as we saw in "Of Modern Poetry," "the scene was set," becomes indelibly connected with leaders of a more metaphysically spiritual nature. In "Connoisseur of Chaos," for example, "bishop's books / resolved the world. We cannot go back to that" (167).

To relate the difference between the priest and the rabbi to "The Sun This March," the sun is the object of the priest's searching, and is therefore fruitless, and in fact dangerous, as in "Gubbinal," since the cold is now "our element." The rabbi has access to a closer truth that comes from "winter's air," that "brings voices as of lions coming down." There is no expectation here that the rabbi will enlighten the poet so much as to instruct him in the dark he has become. All the poet asks is that he might conceive some sense of the darkness, not direct his search to the Platonic sun as truth. The poet must be affected somehow by the sun's light or the rabbi's knowing, but does not become absorbed in them. Rather, the poet now stands between his image for external truth that he has constructed, the sun or the rabbi, and the darkness in which he resides. The effect is the existential chiaroscuro that helps to clarify the position the poet

occupies in “Domination of Black”; the conversation between elements of external and internal truths creates a space where the potential for resemblances is most accessible, and it is there, in the play between light and shadow, that the poet finds himself.

During this period of Stevens’ skepticism about the brightness of the imagination identified by Riddel, several other poems treat the sun as an image for a Platonic ideal of truth in which the poet once participated. Stevens seems, in this period, to have moved away from a dialectic suggested by R.D. Ackerman, whose study equates the sun with mirrors in Stevens’ poems as a self-reflexive duality. “The Brave Man” (95) and other poems from this period represent what Ackerman sees as the second stage of Stevens’ attempt to place the poet within nature:

In his early poetry, Stevens seeks first to situate the self within the contours of the natural world. But his means of access to this world is threatened by his growing recognition of a problematic of representation . . . that disarranges the boundary between the self and the privileged otherness of nature. Thus the second stage of Stevens’ endeavor is dominated by his attempt to ground his nature paradigm in a constellation of the sun as . . . the basis of singular human identity Instead of serving as a foundation for such selfhood, however, the sun itself comes to share in the specular interplay of the self’s unstable reflexivity. . . . (95)

Instead of creating a successful reflective device, “The Brave Man” has the sun personified, thereby separating it further from the internal. With this separation from the sun that Stevens began in “The Sun This March,” the poet moves closer to internal or meditative acts. As we saw in “Domination of Black,” the poet’s internal participation in creating metaphor occurs in meditation, whether with memory, as in the cry of the peacocks, or with a more synthesizing act. The sun in “The Brave Man” “comes up / From below and walks without meditation,” suggesting a lack of the tool that succeeds in “Domination of Black.” The poem precludes any possibility of participation in this light that Stevens suggests in “The Sun This March.”

In this isolation, Stevens reemphasizes another factor important in "Domination of Black": the fear that incites the meditative or metaphoric process. The parallel construction in "The Brave Man" actually cast fears more concisely as good, almost equating the two:

The good stars,
Pale helms and spiky spurs,
Run away.

Fears of my bed,
Fears of life and fears of death,
Run away. (95)

After such restrictive treatment of the external truth in "The Brave Man," Stevens returns to a more synthetic approach. He moves from treating the sun's dominance at sunrise to a more detailed exploration of the poet's position between and participating in the bright properties of the sun and the darker meditation of the rabbi. In identifying the rabbi as a figure similar to the poet, the opportunity for the poet to be "true savant of this dark nature" reemerges.

Appropriately, in this turn in concentration from external experience to the possibility of internal knowledge, Stevens employs a change to evening as well, echoing the involvement of darkness as an opportunity for meditation. In "A Fading of the Sun" (96), the connection between external and internal becomes more clear, and perhaps signals not only a return to the conversation as in "Domination of Black," but a new assertion about the poet's place: "The warm antiquity of self, / Everyone, grows suddenly cold." These lines echo the idea of man as fallen that Stevens utilizes in "The Sun This March." Stevens places "everyone" in an ambiguous syntax; one can read it as an appositive for the "warm antiquity of self," which recalls "an earlier self" (93), or as an apostrophe like "Oh! Rabbi, rabbi." In the second case, the poet now addresses "everyone" instead of a rabbi, as if the poet now has some of the wisdom, "a turning

spirit in an earlier self,” first attributed to the rabbi. Later in the poem a strengthening of this possibility appears, but in the first stanza, the people “cry and cry for help,” directing their pleas to the sun:

Who can think of the sun costuming clouds
 When all people are shaken
 Or of night endazzled, proud,
 When people awaken,
 And cry and cry for help?

The people perceive night as obscuring the truth of the external sun, thereby surrendering their potential for imagination or participation in that truth. They “cry and cry for help” to the exposing sun or external truth, which “walks without meditation” unlike the inner darkness of sleep.

These lines prompt the assertion that the “warm antiquity of self . . . grows suddenly cold.” Stevens suggests here that the self possesses a warmth that the people here mistakenly search for only in the sun. Such a reliance on external truth without being tempered with internal meditation leads to a chilling of external reality in general: “The tea is bad, bread sad.” It is these mistaken people, ignorant of the internal potential for truth, who are “the sad men” in “Evening Without Angels”: “Sad men made angels of the sun” because they could not realize “the earlier self” as in “The Sun This March” or what Stevens makes clear in “Evening,” that “we are men of sun.” The remedy Stevens suggests is a turn inward, a fading of the sun's, or external truth's, importance:

If joy shall be without a book
 It lies, themselves within themselves,
 If they will look
 Within themselves
 And cry and cry for help,

Within as the pillars of the sun,

Supports of night. The tea,
 The wine is good. The bread,
 The meat is sweet.
 And they will not die. (96)

A cry for help directed at the objective sun would violate the invective against falsely endowing objects with meaning that they do not possess except through metaphor. Stevens moves past this mistake with his apostrophe to the rabbi in "The Sun This March." "The warm antiquity of self" reilluminates, in a sense, the self that existed before the "dark I have become." Instead of merely understanding the truth better, the earlier self participated in it, and "pillars of the sun," the remnants of that understanding, still stand as "supports of night" just as the rabbi is the true savant in "The Sun This March." With the rabbi's or poet's knowing now "within themselves" as "pillars of the sun," the tea and bread are not only ameliorated, they are augmented with wine and meat in the last stanza, suggesting that a richer existence includes internalization of truth.

With the hubristic proclamation in "Evening Without Angels" that "we are men of sun," an internal means for accessing truth continues to reassert itself after several poems in which external truth dominates. With the absence of the sun that occurs at evening, the distraction that Ackerman attributes to the external sun is removed, allowing a meditation on the nature of the self without the "disarrange[d] . . . boundary line" (Ackerman 95) between the self and nature. The return inward allows the repetitions so important to "Domination of Black." Indeed, as if explaining the need for that domination, Stevens declares: "Let this be clear that we are men of sun / . . . Men that repeat antiquest sounds of air / In an accord of repetitions" (100). As in "Domination," however, both day and night, external and internal experience, are essential for metaphor. To accommodate this relationship, Stevens addresses the evening, descent of day into night, as a metaphor for withdrawing into meditation. This action necessarily involves "desire

for day” as well as “desire for rest, in that descending sea / Of dark.” What emerges is the clearest image available:

Bare night is best. Bare earth is best. Bare, bare,
 Except for our own houses, huddled low
 Beneath the arches and their spangled air,
 Beneath the rhapsodies of fire and fire,
 Where the voice that is in us makes a true response,
 Where the voice that is great within us rises up,
 As we stand gazing at the rounded moon. (101)

“Bare night is best,” where meditations draw resemblances between external and internal truth. The “sad men” remain wholly external in their orientation: they make the moon “their own attendant ghosts, / Which led them back to angels, after death.” Those who recognize the potential for truth within themselves see the moon as similar to the sun, as the sad men do, but find that “the voice that is in us” is closer to truth.

In their meditative houses, they have found successful resemblances between external truth—“the spangled air” and the “rhapsodies” that seem, in the repetition of “fire,” a reference to the revolving sun—and the internal voice. Echoing the progression of “Domination of Black,” the repetition of movement—of cycles of day and night, wakefulness and rest—allows a metaphor that applies to a higher object as the troping in “Domination of Black” applied to the planets. The “true response” comes as “we gaze at the rounded moon,” a muted shadow of the sun gazed upon at night. With this new interest in a “bare earth” rather than the stilted “coiffeur of haloes, fecund jeweller” created by the “sad men,” the fear of night created as “the moon they made their own attendant ghosts” dissipates. The moon still represents a bareness akin to death, but is now the phenomenon that, like the hemlocks in “Domination of Black,” prompts the metaphoric process; “Lunar Paraphrase” compares it to “the body of Jesus hang[ing] in a pallor, /

Humanly near.” In the bare landscape of “Evening without Angels,” death itself is more “humanly near.” As the “us” in the poem realize that the bareness juxtaposed with “our own houses” elicits “the voice that is great within us,” the moon, which is “the mother of pathos and pity” in “Lunar Paraphrase,” becomes a manageable image: “We stand gazing at the rounded moon.” As it is rounded, it seems more ordered, conceivable, and more acquiescent to the gaze, just as “the heavy hemlocks” become incorporated into the poet’s metaphor in “Domination of Black.” Frank Lentricchia sees Stevens’ imagination in a more isolationist mode: “Imagination makes space between us and chaos and thereby grants momentary release from sure engulfment, madness, and death” (100); but the imagination allows us to participate more in the chaos than Lentricchia suggests. Recognizing the internal greatness, the “great voice” which is the imagination, coincides with the coming of darkness, the necessity to confront fear and death, therefore returning the meditative contribution to metaphoric constructions. Rather than the imagination creating a space, which is Lentricchia’s construction, the imagination resides on one side of the space that the poet inhabits, which is simultaneously between and among the bright external phenomena and the dark internal meditation; that space is the existential chiaroscuro, like evening between day and night. The “pillars of the sun” within us seem brighter in contrast with the surrounding night, reemphasizing the bright fire that tempers, not ignores, the daunting night of “Domination of Black.” Perhaps an even more poignant reemphasis comes in “Re-statement of Romance”:

That night is only the background of our selves,
 Supremely true each to our separate selves,
 In the pale light that each upon the other throws. (110)

Perhaps the most comprehensive meditation on evening that Stevens gives us is the long poem “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven.” As “Evening without Angels” encourages us to find sun or truth within ourselves, “An Ordinary Evening” opens with this assertion, again echoing the identification of ourselves as houses beneath the external, constantly refiguring phenomena:

The eye's plain version is a thing apart,
The vulgate of experience. Of this,
A few words, an and yet, and yet, and yet --

As part of the never-ending meditation,
Part of the question that is a giant himself:
Of what is this house composed if not of the sun,

These houses, these difficult objects, dilapidate
Appearances of what appearances,
Words, lines, not meanings, not communications,

Dark things without a double, after all,
Unless a second giant kills the first --
A recent imagining of reality,

Much like a new resemblance of the sun,
Down-pouring, up-springing and inevitable,
A larger poem for a larger audience,

As if the crude collops come together as one,
A mythological form, a festival sphere,
A great bosom, beard and being, alive with age.

"Of what is this house composed" asks, what is the self, or the faculty of meditation that resides apart from external reality. As Stevens finds “pillars of the sun” in ourselves in “A Fading of the Sun,” here he sees a “recent imagining of reality, // Much like a new resemblance of the sun.” It is only “much like” a new resemblance, certainly not a mirror of it, so the assertion persists that the external sun, despite resemblances to what happens internally in meditation, lies separate. In

the imagining, one may find what was falsely ascribed to the sun in some previous poems, as in “Gubbinal” and the angels of the sad men in “Evening without Angels,” and what was successfully reached imagistically in “Domination of Black” in the metaleptic trope of the planets turning. In “An Ordinary Evening” Stevens calls it “A larger poem for a larger audience, . . . A mythological form.” In this, the larger poem, Stevens moves past the hubristic pronouncements in “Evening without Angels” to explore the relationship between internal and external truth in more depth. After using many poems to explore external truth separately and then to postulate about the potential for internal truth that the poet possesses, he makes what Steven Shaviro terms “the affirmative movement”: “Stevens’ later poetry . . . is no longer concerned with formal and linguistic innovation or with the familiar dualisms of subject and object and of the mind and external world” (192). While Stevens clearly still addresses many of these issues in “Ordinary Evening,” what Shaviro wishes to articulate is the coming together that Stevens announces in the first canto of “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven”: “As if the crude collops came together as one”; the collops, suggesting both external and internal phenomena as nourishing, become one, therein eliminating the dualistic structure lamented to an extent in “The Sun This March.” In Shaviro’s Derridean reading, this change is a breakdown of the dualistic structure that restricts most of Stevens’ earlier poetry: “The binary opposition of inside and outside, self and world, subject and object, imagination and reality, is only an effect produced within a larger economy of excess and defect” (199). The unification of these oppositions happens at evening, as the poet steps into the chiaroscuro between external and internal truth. The evening is an ordinary one, rather than unique, which suggests even more fully the importance of the “bare earth” in “Evening without Angels,” the obscurity that night provides in

“Domination of Black,” and the constant repetition that allows troping in the latter poem. In obscurity, resemblances are better drawn, and therefore “Obscure, in colors whether of the sun / Or mind, . . . / So much ourselves, we cannot tell apart / the idea and the bearer-being of the idea” (332). The “earlier self” that was supposedly lost in “The Sun This March” becomes elucidated in the resemblance between the sun and the mind. “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” explores this renewed relationship, and the metaphoric process becomes more clear with a combination of the imagism of “Domination of Black” and a new confidence in more abstract language that comes with the empowerment of the internal.

The metaphoric process for Stevens involves a constant repetition of becoming that makes the fertility of the process unsusceptible to the constraints of time, except for the finality of death, which, as we have seen especially in “Domination of Black,” provides impetus for the metaphoric process. As he writes in the first stanza of “An Ordinary Evening,” the most physical act of seeing, or “the eye’s plain version” constantly undergoes change when submitted to the imaginative seeing and the poetic process: “Of this, / A few words, an and yet, and yet, and yet -- // As part of the never-ending meditation.” In standing in an evening, the idea of death is closest, as it is with the striding hemlocks. Canto XXX announces that this poem comes after all the leaves of “Domination of Black” have fallen, leaving only the bareness, the closeness to death that allows the poet to fully face it: “The last leaf that is going to fall has fallen” (350); out of that tension comes the potential for a stronger, more secure metaphor. “The barrenness that appears,” Stevens writes here, “is an exposing.” Helen Vendler writes of this exposure: “Stevens deprives his poetry of all that flesh, the sun, the earth, and the moon can offer, and, himself a skeleton, examines the bare possibilities of a skeletal life” (269). Vendler suggests too much of a

biological bareness which she infers from Stevens' old age—he was 70 at the publication of the poem. This unfortunate change in tack from her normally lucid readings limits her response to the poem in several ways. Vendler neglects the very full meditations that such bareness, imposed by Stevens' imagination—"for the absence of the imagination had itself to be imagined" ("The Plain Sense of Things" 383)—allows from "Ordinary Evening" through most of his later poems. That imagined skeletal life is essential, however bleak, for the understanding of the self, and therefore the ability to articulate the origin of metaphor and the need to create it.

The first ten cantos of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" are devoted to peeling away the layers that the imagination imposes on bare reality. As "The Sun This March" attempts, a drastic separation between reality and the imagination must be imposed before either can be understood. "We seek // The poem of pure reality, untouched / By trope or deviation" in order to necessitate that separation. The tension out of which metaphor arises will not be a successful impetus for metaphor unless the juxtaposition makes clear both the differences and the resemblances. In Canto V, Stevens gives us an image of the split between the real and imagined that must be remedied to create a successful poem:

Why, then, inquire
Who has divided the world, what entrepreneur?
No man. The self, the chrysalis of all men

Became divided in the leisure of blue day
And more, in branchings after day. One part
Held fast tenaciously in common earth

And one from central earth to central sky
And in moonlit extensions of them in the mind
Searched out such majesty as it could find. (334)

In such a split, there is little possibility of a relationship between reality, “common earth,” and the imagination’s idealization of “such majesty as it could find” in the “central sky.” The result is something like the state of people in “Evening without Angels” who create angels to explain things in the “leisure of blue day” or the “routine” that Frye describes (239).

In “An Ordinary Evening,” Professor Eucalyptus attempts a remedy for these falsehoods:

The dry eucalyptus seeks god in the rainy cloud.
Professor Eucalyptus of New Haven seeks him
In New Haven with an eye that does not look

Beyond the object. He sits in his room, beside
The window, close to the ramshackle spout in which
The rain falls with a ramshackle sound. (339)

James Leonard equates Professor Eucalyptus with the lecturer who speaks “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction”; however, asserting that the lecturer’s teleological end is the sun as a metaphor for good (63-64), Leonard forgets that Stevens has moved beyond the sun as the end of the poet’s search and toward the poet himself. In this search, the sun must remain an objective presence apprehended by the poet. Like the rabbi in “Evening without Angels,” the professor seeks no angels in the sun, but only observation of the sun itself. Indeed, he concentrates on more banal objects in general to emphasize the “ordinary” objective of his perceptions; the imagery shifts here to accommodate the change: instead of the sun as the object of the search, it is rain, and not “a rainy cloud” but rain in the “ramshackle gutter.” As Kronick points out, “Stevens’ world is not a world for scholars, who are, after all, only students, too old to be ephebes and too young to be poets. The priestly robes of these youths must be cast off for the somber garb of the rabbi, who is no student but a teacher” (124). Like the speaker in “Domination of Black,” the professor sits by his window and looks out, but instead of such potentially lofty visions as the leaves,

hemlocks, and so on, he has “an eye that does not look beyond the object. He sits in his room, beside / The window, close to the ramshackle spout in which / The rain falls with a ramshackle sound.” The subjective influence must be kept away from reality for a moment, and in that moment the poet finds that reality is something to be desired in itself: “We fling ourselves, constantly longing, on this form [the real]. / We descend to the street and inhale a health of air / To our sepulchral hollows” (335). The colors that so fascinated the poet in “Domination of Black” are exposed as misleading; indeed the imagination’s distortions of reality are what seal itself off, creating “sepulchral hollows” that must be opened by returning from within the framing window onto the reality of the street.

In “the poem of pure reality,” the calm left after stepping away from the troping imagination, the rapport between reality and imagination becomes something that can be understood. In “Domination of Black,” the external reality portrayed as death in the hemlocks triggers the creative process because it originates outside of the poet’s cloistered imaginings; the cry of the peacocks, the creative voice, the cry against the violence of the outside world and simultaneously the cry of recognition of the violence also contained within the poet, allows the creation of the metaphor in that poem. However, the Apollonian static vision keeps the fear of death a little too distant, reality’s effect too distorted by the imagination’s renderings. Here, in “An Ordinary Evening,” that connection is stated more succinctly:

Our breath is like a desperate element
That we must calm, the origin of a mother tongue

With which to speak to her, the capable
In the midst of foreignness, the syllable
Of recognition, avowal, impassioned cry,

The cry that contains its converse in itself,
In which looks and feelings mingle . . . (336)

The looks and feelings that mingle recall Nietzsche's concept of the combination of the Apollonian and Dionysian arts to form a better expression: "the capable / In the midst of foreignness." What the poet experiences in this canto is the cry, not the remembered cry of peacocks, but the cry as creation of art from the realization that "it is only through the spirit of music [the foreign, the Dionysian] that we can understand the joy involved in the annihilation of the individual [the isolated, Apollonian poet]" (Nietzsche 1038). The annihilation of the individual allows him to participate in "the eternal life beyond all phenomena" (1038), which "Domination of Black" does not achieve. The old Apollonian religious forms are outworn and dead, leaving behind "sepulchral hollows" within us. Desire impels us to "fling ourselves" back into the Dionysian, here imaged as a "health of air." Immediately upon that reemersion, however, the need to order, to articulate the experience becomes apparent: "Our breath is like a desperate element which we must calm." The looks, the plastic arts that attempt a perfection in unity, must be coupled with feelings, or the Dionysian reveling in a more enveloping nature that is more like dynamic music—hence the "cry" that appears here, in "Domination of Black," and in several other pertinent poems.

The play between the Apollonian and Dionysian is a continual process, as Stevens articulates in the next canto: "We keep coming back and coming back / To the real: to the hotel instead of the hymns / That fall upon it out of the wind" (336). The repetition, the perpetual coming back, echoes the turning leaves in "Domination of Black," but the repetitions now make reference to something else. No longer is it the phenomena that continue, but the process of the mind: "[a]s that which was incredible becomes, / In misted contours, credible again" (335). As we have seen in "Evening without Angels" and in Canto II of "An Ordinary Evening in New

Haven,” houses beneath more natural phenomena come to represent the self; the hotel in Canto IX belongs in the same image pattern. Thus reality, which in most of the earlier poems remains an outside realm to be coded by the imagination, now refers to the poet’s self, the metaphoric process, at the same time. Having stripped the troping leaves from the poem, leaving bareness, Stevens has discovered an even more potent resolution to the split between internal and external realities: they seem to participate in the same sphere. “The poem of pure reality” becomes, then, both “straight to the word,” or the poet’s shaping of external phenomena, and “straight to the transfixing object” (336), or the external reality itself. In this new perspective, Stevens has worked beyond the separation between poet and external reality that was evident even in the fairly successful “Domination of Black.” As B.J. Leggett asserts about the *Harmonium* poems, “the lyric poet . . . is compelled to interpret Dionysian music in Apollonian pictures, and in so doing is preserved from the undifferentiated unity of perpetual becoming. If he is to ‘express the phenomenon of music in pictures,’ the poet ‘requires all the stirrings of passion.’ . . . His passion is subsumed under something timeless, both ancient and always in the process of becoming” (70). “Domination of Black,” as a representative poem from Stevens’ earlier period, suggests that while there is an interaction, there is not the full relationship that Leggett attributes to *Harmonium*.

“An Ordinary evening in New Haven” has the poet progressing past the imagism of “Domination of Black,” and past Professor Eucalyptus’ bare observations, to reach that quality that Stevens ascribed to the rabbi in his letters, participating not only in the “exclusively religious,” as the Christian priests seemed to do (*Letters* 751), and not in the dry gaze of the Professor, but simultaneously in both. With death originally providing impetus for the poetic act,

it seems necessary to complete a cycle of repetitions by coming back to death at the culmination of the connection between reality and imagination, when “the last leaf that is going to fall has fallen” (350):

It is fatal in the moon and empty there.
But here, allons. The enigmatical
Beauty of each beautiful enigma

Becomes amassed in a total double-thing.
We do not know what is real and what is not. (337)

In this new cooperation, the poet rests with less apprehension than he had before the heavy hemlocks. With death as an accepted part of both reality and the self, the poet has best negotiated the fearful with the delightful in his existential chiaroscuro. Once one conforms to the other, a faith is possible again that has been questioned since “Sunday Morning.” With the creative process understood as being within and without the poet simultaneously, however, the direction of faith has changed; rather than man being faithful to an outside force, Stevens identifies a “faithfulness of reality” (337) to the understanding that the poet has of it.

The images for this success mirror the successful combination of the Apollonian and Dionysian arts for Nietzsche:

[M]orning and evening are like promises kept,
So that the approaching sun and its arrival,
Its evening feast and the following festival,

This faithfulness of reality, this mode,
This tendance and venerable holding-in
Make gay the hallucinations in surfaces. (337)

The Apollonian sun, formerly a controlling source, and envied by the man whose element was cold in “The Sun This March,” now coincides with the poet’s imagination, so that the hallucinations, like the one that “come[s] to daze / The corner of the eye,” are “a part / Of a

turning spirit in an earlier self" (93). Likewise, the celebration of meditation in the darkness and music of "Domination of Black," the houses in "Evening without Angels," becomes a Dionysian "feast and . . . festival" here in "Ordinary Evening." That control comes about directly from the poet's reconsideration of his participation in reality and imagination simultaneously. Further, the poet addresses the inhabitants of this "enigmatical beauty." No longer the isolated bareness of the houses in "Evening without Angels," this poem happens in New Haven, a city, and the image of the imagination as houses becomes "an impalpable town" (331), whose citizens Stevens addresses with "allons" and urges to enjoy the "beautiful enigma." The poet returns from the isolation—the simulation of assimilation in "Domination of Black"—and can perceive how the rest of New Haven can participate in the same reviewing of reality that has filled his "sepulchral hollows," that quality that made sad men ma[k]e angels of the sun" (100).

Stevens uses much of the rest of "Ordinary Evening" to elucidate some of the changes that he has undergone since "Domination of Black." The window that framed the scene no longer succeeds as part of the artistry, even for Professor Eucalyptus. In stripping the colors that turn in "Domination" from reality, Stevens finds the relevance of reality in a refreshing walk outside the artistic, and I would argue Apollonian or static, isolation of "Domination." That isolation provides one part of a successful poem, but just as the chiaroscuro demands both light and dark, the poet must participate in reality as fully as he does in isolation: "It is looking out / Of the window and walking in the street and seeing, // As if the eyes were the present or part of it, / As if the ears heard any shocking sound, / As if life and death were ever physical" (342). Death, no longer contemplated through the filter of the poetic mind, which was the memory of the peacocks in "Domination of Black," becomes more immediate, and therefore an even

stronger force to which the poet must respond. Not until the poet participates in this exploration can he understand the importance, however dry, of the pent-up professor:

Professor Eucalyptus said, "The search
For reality is as momentous as
The search for God." It is the philosopher's search

For an interior made exterior
And the poet's search for the same exterior made
Interior: breathless things broodingly abreath

With the inhalations of original cold
And of original earliness. Yet the sense
Of cold and earliness is a daily sense,

Not the predicate of bright origin. (345)

The earlier self lamented by the poet in "The Sun This March" is not so far gone as Stevens suggests in that poem. The poet is the rabbi now, enlightened about "our element," (93) not one about which we might speculate as a past state. The instinct that the poet feels in "The Sun This March" was correct, that the "winter's air / Brings voices as of lions coming down," but the presence of that act is the important aspect of it now; it "is a daily sense, // Not the predicate of bright origin."

Even in this new clarification of the poet's place, that place's solidity is discounted. In being permanently between and among reality and imagination, the poet sees that "disembodiments // Still keep occurring" (346), and in that he sees the impossibility of separation which had to be discovered by attempting such a separation, an endeavor that Stevens explores in each of his poems. In Canto XXVIII of "Ordinary Evening," Stevens postulates: "If it should be true that reality exists / In the mind . . . // . . . it follows that / Real and unreal are two in one: New Haven / Before and after one arrives" (349). That eternity suggested in the last line

recalls the Dionysian, in which the poet participates. In Canto XXX of “Ordinary Evening,” that connection is made indelible. The window that separated the poet in “Domination” has been taken out completely with the return to unembellished reality:

The barrenness that appears is an exposing.

.....
It is a coming on and a coming forth.

The pines that were fans and fragrances emerge,
Stakes solidly in a gusty grappling with rocks.

The glass of the air becomes an element—

It was something imagined that has been washed away.

A clearness has returned. it stands restored.

It is not an empty clearness, a bottomless sight.

It is a visibility of thought,

In which a hundred eyes, in one mind, see at once. (350-351)

“The pines that were fans and fragrances,” or imposed descriptions of things like those of “Gubbinal” are washed away when the poet understands that the only frame he needs to see reality as the subject for art is the reality itself in its unaffected form, an “element.” Taking the poet’s individual, isolated perspective certainly does not take away the possibility for thought or imagination. As Stevens writes earlier in the poem, that dichotomy is a false one to apply in the first place: “we cannot tell apart the idea and the bearer-being of the idea” (332). Without that split, “hundreds of eyes, in one mind, see at once.” The poetic process, then, is a repetition of all thought in all people, the one character speaking in a clearer voice what the entire chorus articulates as well. Reality never is still enough for the poet’s static images to portray it successfully, so he must continually restate himself, but in doing so he once again repeats the changing quality of nature.

The last canto is devoted to a demonstration that, despite all of the criticism in poems like “Gubbinal” and “Evening without Angels,” the poet must continue to name things in new ways. As if Stevens suggests that, since nature is not stable, neither should the poet’s images be stable references to nature, the end of “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” returns to the same practices admonished before. The sun was “that savage of fire, / That seed” in “Gubbinal.” Here, “When day comes, fire-foams in the motions of the sea” (351), “These are the edgings and inchings of final form, / The swarming of activities of the formulae / Of statement, directly and indirectly getting at.” Stevens does not tell us where or what “at” is. Indeed, “It is not in the premise that reality / Is a solid. It may be a shade that transverses / A dust, a force that transverses a shade.” Renaming, then, must necessarily continue to occur because nature is involved in a perpetual becoming as well. Frank Doggett comments on this renaming as apposition: “That affect is given because in apposition the poet seems to deliberate about his original concept. He appears to reconsider it in another and another version” (146). It is not that the poet changes his view of the concept but that the concept continually changes.

Vendler’s suggestion that Stevens is a dry old poet in “Ordinary Evening” seems completely unfounded in this light. He seems to respond directly to her references to some lines as showing “the impotence of an old man’s desire” (280), or when she writes that “Stevens, . . . himself a skeleton, examines the bare possibilities of a skeletal life” (269), in his poem “As You Leave the Room”:

You speak. You say: Today’s character is not
A skeleton out of its cabinet. Nor am I.

.....
I wonder, have I lived a skeleton’s life,
As a disbeliever in reality,

A countryman of all the bones in the world?

Now, here, the snow that I had forgotten becomes

Part of a major reality, part of
An appreciation of a reality

And thus an elevation, as if I left
With something I could touch, touch every way. (395-96)

The major reality of which Stevens writes, which suggests in some part “our element” in “The Sun This March,” which was winter, is a reality that is both real and imagined: “Real and unreal are one” (349).

“An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” represents on the most comprehensive scale the movement Stevens makes throughout his poetic career. After the bold assumptions in “Domination of Black” that the poet can remain by his fire and withstand the striding of the heavy hemlocks, Stevens realizes that a further inquiry into both what is outside and inside that window is necessary to understand the resemblances that the poet draws in order to make the hemlocks acceptable. The memory of the peacocks as a sufficient resemblance no longer holds. The later poems, such as “Ordinary Evening,” serve to better place the poet, and therefore to bring more power to metaphor. “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven” aims “to purge oneself of anything false” (*Letters* 636), such as the separation of colors from objects in “Domination of Black.” While that poem is successful as a trope for metaphor, its importance fades as Stevens realizes that, contrary to Vendler’s reading, to embellish reality is to starve oneself from the source of poetry. Stevens anticipated that such an assertion might seem strange at first, both in the letter just cited, in which he also wrote: “It is not a question of grim reality but plain reality” (636), and in “As You Leave the Room.” The purpose of the direction of “Ordinary Evening” is not to strip the poet of his Apollonian qualities of depicting static images but rather to emphasize

that the Apollonian always must arise from and continue to recall the Dionysian combination of fear and ecstasy.

While this connection seems to take place in early poems like “Domination of Black,” in which the poet is subject to the effects of the hemlocks’ ominousness, he remains always behind that framing window, always protected from the real involvement in an understanding of mortality. The poet should be like the leaf in “The Course of a Particular”:

The leaves cry . . . One holds off and merely hears the cry.
It is a busy cry, concerning someone else.
And though one says that one is part of everything,

There is a conflict, there is a resistance involved;
And being part is an exertion that declines:
One feels the life of that which gives life as it is.

The leaves cry. It is not a cry of divine attention,
Nor the smoke-drift of puffed-out heroes, nor human cry.
It is the cry of leaves that do not transcend themselves,

In the absence of fantasia, without meaning more
Than they are in the final finding of the ear, in the thing
Itself, until, at last, the cry concerns no one at all. (367)

That single leaf’s silence is the source of what will become the artistic cry, the cry of the peacocks, the “scrawny cry” from “Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself” (387). The cry that is the poem, then, is like the cry that occurs in nature, but comes only from one of the “hundred eyes in one mind” (351).

The poet, then, becomes a creator of what has already been created; his imagination does what reality does on its own. What, then, becomes the importance of the poem? “One feels the life of that which gives life as it is.” The poet could not realize the meaning of the cry of all the leaves, which is “not a cry of divine attention, . . . nor human cry,” without first separating

himself from it. The poet's cry, as an individual perspective on the rest of the cry, makes meaning out of what otherwise "concerns no one at all." Vendler sees the cry of the leaves elsewhere in Stevens as that which the poet gathers together "in a single speaking voice the whole psychology of the self, the town" (277). That is the major reality, the elevation, that Stevens articulates in "As You Leave the Room," and the reality embodied in the city of New Haven, a particularly apt name. Such "an appreciation of a reality" gives meaning to the cry of all of the leaves which would otherwise come to mean nothing at all. Charles Berger sees this moment of recognition between poet and society as "the most subtle moment in Stevens' social psychology . . . when he predicts that the people will hear themselves 'muted' in that prophetic cry and that they will find that muting a comfort" (95). The poet, to find and communicate such meaning, composes his poetry in "hold[ing] off," or in the "venerable hold-in" that "make[s] gay the hallucinations in surfaces" (337), in separating himself from the major reality and the silence. He is not caught in the swirl of leaves that dominated "Domination of Black," nor in the isolated "darkness I have become" in "The Sun This March," and from there issues the cry that is the poem, the celebration of his separation and his simultaneous participation in reality.

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