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WALLACE STEVENS: AN ABSTRACTION BLOODED

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WALLACE STEVENS: AN ABSTRACTION BLOODED

by Suzanne Carter

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INTRODUCTION

Yardley Gruntworth could recite famous Shakespearean lines, reduce Moby Dick thematically into three simple declarative sentences and owned two personal copies of Rod McKuen. In short, he was the fast emerging intellect in the freshman class. One bleary afternoon as he poked about in an empty hallway (all required assignments completed and nothing else to do) he was confronted by an enterprising young professor who enticed him with a proposition. Cognizant of Yardley's needs, this "man-hero" produced a small, wrinkled book of poems out of the dark abyss of his satchel. It was entitled, Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction. Realizing he would have to provide incentive, as Yardley was a conglomerate result of mass education and poisoned thirst, the professor promised recompense that would far exceed initial work. Yardley, his mind gloating on gift grades, unlimited cuts and other rewards of equal importance, consented to present an oral discussion of Notes.

Three months later he inspected the poem. Armed with the wisdom of certain critical analyses, he tightened his breastplate (silver habit) and prepared for reading. "Begin ephebe by perceiving the idea. . ." ¹ Rattling through a colossal reserve of articles and accumulated notes, Yardley Gruntworth

pawed the pages for an explication of this initial statement. He harbored an increasing terror which drove him frantically through every index. Reeling next to Webster's Dictionary, he at least found "ephebe" and "idea" to have Latin derivations and the former's plural to be "ephebi." He reluctantly continued into the next two lines, feeling a bit disconcerted by this first experience.

But Yardley anticipated no real problem. After all, he was protected by an unchanging "blue is. . .for imagination,"² spring automatically means poetry, sun is equal to reality and giants are big people. He even had a color-season chart equivalent to all of Stevens' references:

yellow/white = reality = winter
 green = mixture = spring brown = almost death = autumn
 blue = imagination = summer

Ready to plug Notes into this simple formula, Yardley anticipated his final declaration: Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction is about the difference between imagination and reality! However, after five hours of intensive definitions, he realized he was losing the battle to the inconsistency of the enemy. Hoisting the white flag and forfeiting all ammunition, he closed the book.

That night, he writhed "in silence on [his] bed. . .[and] clutched the corner of the pillow"³ in his hand. Hissing through his inner chambers, "celestral ennui" became an obsession, an

. . . ennui of apartments
 That sends us back to the first idea, the quick
 Of this invention; and yet so poisonous

Are the ravishments of truth, so fatal to
 The truth itself, the first idea becomes
 The hermit in a poet's metaphors.⁴

It is for this "the poem springs."⁵

The apparent need to reduce, classify and assign position is the major cause of the numerous fallacies concerning Stevens' poetry. "Since many readers rely more than they are probably willing to admit on presuppositions, they find Stevens baffling, he confuses them for the really irrelevant reason that they cannot place him."⁶ It is as if, once arranged into an appointed niche, the Collected Poems will no longer be a threat. This denies the very essence of poetry, the continually changing images and ideas derived from words themselves.

The common assumption is of Stevens as a Romantic. Although the poetry exhibits a predominance of traits consistent with the romantic tradition, Stevens often proclaimed the romantics as evidence of "minor wish fulfillment"⁷ and was "as sensitive to the excesses of the imagination as he [was] to its virtues."⁸ He also questioned their lack of concern with ordinary life and naked reality.

Not only do the poet's essays and ideas defy permanent labelling, but his technique reveals impending danger in such attempts. The dialectical motion between opposites and the

final faith in the movement itself proves disruptive to mono-term application. "He is and is not an intellectual poet. . . He is romantic, but disconcertingly impersonal; a traditional poet yet experimental; an imagist, but also a symbolist of sorts; a lyrical and meditative poet who wears equally well the masks of clown and pedagogue."⁹

An extenuation of this organizational need is the constant critical attempt to reduce the poems into simple themes. Although this is an accurate impossibility with any poet, Stevens is particularly difficult. Many poems are variations, reflections and constant qualifications of basic ideas. Thus, a breakdown into general concepts becomes repetitious and lacks any real value. The poem must exist beyond its so-called theme. A study of Santayana would provide the reader with a majority of Stevens' ideas. However, it is the technique and manner which enfolds these thoughts that impels the reader to flush and swell with the "blooded abstraction."¹⁰

Assigning strict equivalents to the images is also a critical error. The obvious danger is that once an image or motif is designated to produce a particular idea, it loses its desired effect. Subsequent reading restricts the image from even slight deviation. Although Kermode presents one of the best introductions to Wallace Stevens, he too is guilty of this offense, as evidenced by Yardley Gruntworth.

It is essential that Stevens' poetry be seen in itself. Although the critics often provide valuable insights, they usually prove debilitating to the fresh, imaginative mind.

The poetry must stand on its own; therefore it follows that it should be the major source consulted in perception. The nature of this paper is to involve the reader in a selected sample of poems culminating in the discussion of Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction.

Although it is customary to introduce a topic with broad generalizations, the pattern seems trite, colorless and counterfeited, particularly in connection with Stevens. Therefore, not only the introduction, but the overall method of this paper is quite different from most surveys of The Collected Poems. Specific critical comment concerning other analyses may be found in the annotated bibliography. The intent of this paper, assuming a previous encounter with the poet, is to examine the poems technically and thematically. However, a broad vault from one poem to another or a step by step discussion of each volume and its general characteristics is wider in scope but limited in value. Therefore, a chronological selection of poems extending from Harmonium to The Auroras of Autumn is presented in an attempt to immerse the reader in the actual poetry and to suggest poetic development, including stylistic and tonal mutations. Once completely involved, the reader should feel an intrinsic motion anticipating its full blossom in Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction. "The movement of his Collected Poems is always toward the long poem, about which the separate minor pieces cluster providing the landscape of a mind rich in particulars but. . .moving toward composure."¹¹ Poems were

selected on the basis of particular techniques, basic ideas and images, and subjective preference. The discussion method in the shorter poems suggests techniques of critical analysis and proves more valuable in specifics than broad, empty generalizations. This form expands along with Notes, into a lengthy analysis. The selection of Notes as the focal point for this paper is justified in that it possesses manifold ideas and technical factors indigenous to the underlying current of the Collected Poems and that it has often been avoided due to its complex interactions and difficulty.

Strip the intellect of preconceived ideas and theories and allow yourself the exhilarating sensation of "perceiving. . . the first idea."¹² Although later study and research is definitely a worthwhile vehicle to various perspectives and sometimes deeper insight, the essence of the poem lies in the words themselves:

You must become an ignorant man again
And see the sun again with an ignorant eye
And see it clearly in the idea of it.¹³

CRITICAL ANALYSES

Note: Because of a seminar in modern poetry and various discussions, it is necessary to recognize underlying influence. However, though a different approach and method of discussion eliminates vast references, specific quotes or ideas are carefully documented.

The Snow Man

one → many:
intrinsic movement
common to majority
of poems.

(One) must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

"necessity of identifying
with reality" ①

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,

notice all the
"s" sounds, quietness
of snow.

The spruces rough in the distant glitter
necessary enjambement

Repetitious
anapestic
beat - tends
to allow
reader to
feel this
nothingness.

Of the January (sun) and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,

light imagery, very prevalent
in Stevens

build up of meter
with thought

In the / sound of a few leaves,

↑ weather, another
recurrent image.
Refer, also, to
Death of a Soldier
and the wind.

"death is absolute" -
↑ simply part of cycle.

leans toward imagistic
style - one long
sentence, image.

Which is the sound of the land

Full of the same wind

lining allows wind
to blow.

That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow, (which actually
makes no sound)

Masking
dissects "nothing"
into "no-thing"

And, nothing himself, (beholds) ←
position of word is meaning
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is

(Notice the lack of the article with the first "nothing") beholding the two poles. The listener is in between, but perceives the two poles.

The sense impressions (hear, see) impel
or spark thought.

The one → many movement merely suggested by
the first word develops fully in later poems.

Derrida notes the emphasis on "beholds".
suggesting the initial stage of self-awareness in
observing nature.

Kermode discusses the close similarity with
Death of a Soldier in rhythmic plotting and verbal
repetition. 5

The Ordinary Women

a guitar becomes a predominant image in later poems - extended into the overall music motif.

Then from their poverty they rose,
From dry catarrhs, and to guitars
They flitted
Through the palace walls.

Parallel stanza construction and internal rhyme.

almost identical sound, suggests extent of difference

They flung monotony behind,
Turned from their want, and, nonchalant,
They crowded
The nocturnal halls.

Opened spaces suggest movement

(night image)

like "blue woman"

The lacquered loges huddled there
Mumbled zay-zay and a-zay, a-zay.

violin sound, extends "loges" image

The moonlight
Puffed the girandoles.

↓ RAYS ↓

multiple meaning from candle stick to stoned earwig. Both fit, but give different implications.

And the cold dresses that they wore,
In the vapid haze of the window-bays,
Were tranquil

(still "z" sound -) same violin

notice the stationary verbs, compared with first stanzas.

As they leaned and looked
From the window-sills at the alphabets,
At beta b and gamma g,
To study
The canting curlicues

(lining) ↓

beta can be also the second star and of course gamma is the third letter in the Greek alphabet. This precipitates the origin (single) / multiple movement in Notes plus the "gibberish of the vulgate" idea?

not only fancy writing but slanting, like leaning women. Relates with "coiffures". Canting also implies trite phrases; cross tie with Religion.

The Ordinary Women (cont.)

Of heaven and of the heavenly script.

And there they read of marriage-bed.

← extended "canting"

Ti-lill-o!

lillibullero: Part of song in England
Ridiculing Irish Catholics. Derived
from lilli bulero - a arbitrary
formation.

And they read right long.

↳ implied pun

Both definitions carry
interesting implications.

The gaunt guitarists on the strings

Rumbled a-day and a-day, a-day.

} suggest encroachment of
daily reality which
rumbles, instead of mumbles.

The moonlight

Rose on the beachy floors.

↳
(interplay with
ocean and tides)

Rhymes with previous
"ZAY", but notice the
baser sound.

How explicit the coiffures became,

The diamond point, the sapphire point,

← becoming within
women's eyes.

light
refraction

The sequins

Of the civil fans!

↳ The rhyme is
now a boring repetition.
The picture has reached its
point; approaching polarity.
Innuendoes become explicit.

notice rhyme
implication

Insinuations of desire,

Puissant speech, alike in each,

Cried quittance

To the wickless halls.

← "as morning throws of
stale moonlight and
shabby / sleep" 8

obviously
light image
but also
wickedness @
which implies
the religion
and statuary,
but unreal
existence.

Then from their poverty they rose,

From dry guitars, and to catarrhs

They flitted

Through the {palace} walls.

← like moon,
suggests constant
cycle.

obvious contrast
of ordinary / palace.

Notice overall lining, forcing the
eye to move with the women.

A High-Toned Old Christian Woman

Instructive tone -

Poetry is the supreme fiction, madame.

(knaue) pun. considered hub or center.

Take the moral law and make a nave of it

frequented by ghosts, things of past.

And from the nave build haunted heaven. Thus,

Feeling of Construction

The conscience is converted into palms,

resembles guitar

Like windy citherns hankering for hymns.

implies loose desire, backward speech.

We agree in principle. That's clear. But take

Parallel development suggests morals in poetry, too!

The opposing law and make a peristyle,

And from the peristyle project a masque

not only a suggestion of mask, but also means dramatic composition, literary creation.

Beyond the planets. Thus, our bawdiness,

Unpurged by epitaph, indulged at last,

Is equally converted into palms,

compare vitality of this simile with previous.

Squiggling like saxophones. And palm for palm,

now Capitalized - suggests here as an idealist.

Madame, we are where we began. Allow,

again, equality

Therefore, that in the planetary scene

Your disaffected (flagellants) well-stuffed,

Sexual overtones, beginning with bawdiness, indulged..

eating or sexual indulgence

Smacking their muzzy bellied in (parade)

well rounded, "fat" sounds

Proud of such novelties of the sublime,

Such tink and tank and tunk-a-tunk-tunk,

like the roller in Emporer of Icecream

May, merely may, madame, whip from themselves

A jovial hullabaloo amoun the spheres.

(pain from whipping) implies

(within, not beyond)

This will make widows wince. But fictive things

Wink as they (will) Wink most when widows wince.

pun

tongue twister - connects fastness of twinkled wink.

Heavy alliteration, develops from concrete letters to wispy "w".

the flagellants can be "well stuffed" as indulged or as "high toned".

Thus, the parade suggests an erotic display or religious show.

The evidence is supportive of the first implication. Man must fulfill desires here on earth.

Extremely tight development and well related images.

The Emperor of Ice-Cream

Instructive tone

Call the roller of big cigars,

various implications including waves, bird's singing.

The muscular one, and bid him (whip)

"flaggelant"

In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.

Substance, not watery

parallel sentence construction

Let the wenches dawdle in such dress

sexual overtones

As they are (used) to wear, and let the boys

Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.

Let be be finale of seem.

Suggested movement

The only emperor is the emperor of (ice-cream).

religious shadow

related to "curds"

coldness of Snowman

implies pun-deal with religion to self-deny.

Take from the dresser of deal.

sexual implication

Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet

On which she embroidered fantails once - past tense. She was romantic.

like the fantail

And spread it so as to cover her face.

If her horny feet protrude, they come

opposite use of sheet, which in life allows head to protrude. Also, surely not the intended use.

To show how cold she is, and dumb.

no mouth, just feet

Let the lamp affix its beam.

echo of previous statement in identical position.

Refer to Notes, canto one, for long reference to light and sun as source.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

perishable, especially under lamp. If the only emperor is emperor of icecream, or of Snowman's nothingness, then there is no emp.

Social gathering -
therefore speaking
to others.

Tea At The Palaz Of Hoon

Hoon's palay which is
Palace in own
personal sense. (12)

Not less because in purple I descended
The western day through what you called
The loneliest air, not less was I myself.

Religious imagery -
man does not
ascend; descends.

↳ and "not less was I." - as a man etc.

What was the ointment ^{juxtaposed sounds} sprinkled on my beard? - imagery too heavy

What were the hymns that buzzed beside my ears?

What was the sea whose tide swept through me there?

Origin - Darwin: overall element

Out of my mind the golden ointment rained, (pur - reign)

And my ears made the blowing hymns they heard.

I was myself the compass of that sea:

the only emperor is "myself"

→ I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
senses + feeling

Or heard or felt came not but from myself;

And there I found myself more truly and more strange.

Compare
with
BANTAMS
IN PINEWOODS

self consciousness

Bewley and Riddel see
this as imagination at its
most forceful moment,
however the poem is
obvious and loosely
repetitious.

The significance is
the poet's growing awareness
of himself - culminating
with new vitality in Notes.

Six Significant Landscapes

I

An old man sits stationary

In the shadow of a pine tree inverted shadow - man should be under

weak lining

In China,

He sees larkspur,

Blue and white,

At the edge of the shadow,

Move in the wind.

His beard moves in the wind.

The pine trees move in the wind.

Thus water flows

Over weeds.

suggested sun, also affecting stationary tree and man under.

No metaphors - declarative sentence explanation

wind moves flowers, beard, pine. water flows over weeds.

II

The night is of the color

Of a woman's arm:

Night, the female,

Obscure,

Fragrant and supple,

Conceals herself.

A pool shines,

Like a bracelet

Shaken in a dance.

metaphor of night

like fat girl in Notes

water image

The elements may be related to one metaphor, but various Refractions of light. constant change.

III

I measure myself

Against a tall tree.

I find that I am much taller,

For I reach right up to the sun,

enjambement allows visible measurement

The initial 11 and second 9 lines balance in an even ten in canto three.

Six Significant Landscapes (cont.)

With my eye;

And I reach to the shore of the sea

With my ear.

Nevertheless, I dislike

The way the ants crawl

In and out of my shadow. (like he)

man's
imaginative
powers
juxtaposed
with
death.

} lining for
instrument used
is reduced, compared
to what it can
accomplish.

IV

When my dream was near the moon,

The white folds of its gown

Filled with yellow light.

The soles of its feet

Grew red.

Its hair filled

With certain blue crystallizations

From stars,

Not far off.

} sunlight which
reflects off of moon.



extenuation of
metaphorical lines,
retraction of
concrete, reality.



V

Not all the knives of the lamp-posts,

Nor the chisels of the long streets,

Nor the mallets of the domes

And high towers,

Can carve recurrent light

What one (star) can carve,

Shining through the grape-leaves.

man made
constructions

the fiction must
be discovered partly
in nature.

Six Significant Landscapes (cont.)

VI

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,

square lining with
 square hat

Cones, waving lines, ellipses--

moon, sun, spheres

As for example, the ellipse of the half-moon--

Rationalists would wear sombreros.

This carries multiple implications,
 which frees the poem from pure
 simplistic imagery. The sombreros
 can hide the sun as well as
 become a symbol for the acceptance of
 the Arabian's astronomy in Notes.
 The landscape supports further
 connotation of southern lushness,
 full fruits. Thus if the rationalists
 think in circles, they must be part
 of that landscape.

The imagism and style in
 this poem anticipates a superior poem:
Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

Bantams in Pine-Woods

literal reading

implies
chief in place
of finite
limitations

Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan in caftan

Relates to "let be be
fmate of seem"

OF tan with henna hackles, halt!

wide "a" sound
implies fatness

sound gives
gandy feeling

Damned universal cock, as if the sun

Was blackamoor to bear your blazing tail.

implication
of sun as
slave.

juxtaposition

Fat! Fat! Fat! Fat! I am the personal.

Your world] is you. I am [my world.

self-consciousness of
poet to his position
and surrounding world.

Iffucan imposes order
on world

tall / fat

You ten-foot poet among inchlings. Fat!

Begone! An inchling bristles in these pines,

Gandy, artificial
clothes of Iffucan
are opposite of
natural garb
of the inchling and
his pines.

(gather up strength)

(Bristles,) and points their Appalachian tangs,

And fears not portly Azcan nor his hoos.

uses the nature
and pries around
him.

Question of man's
relation to his environment
and natural world is
developed fully in
Comedian as the Letter C.

Chuspi and Iffucan
think "intelligence of soil" ¹³

Blessing is concerned
as to who is the villain-
Iffucan or the inchling ¹⁴
However, the question
is irrelevant as seen
in relation to the
Arabian, wood dove and
ocean of Notes. ¹⁵ They
are both concerned
in creation but the
extent and method is
different.

The northern pines
and sunny south tend
to accentuate difference.

The Death of a Soldier

Life contracts and death is expected,

Seasonal ANALOGY

As in a season of autumn.

SUGGESTS cycles

The soldier falls.

contracts

Obvious patterned lining, but effective in making the eye.

Soldier is not an emperor who imposes.

↑ voice falls in reading

He does not become a (three-days) personage,

Imposing his separation,

Religious significance

- lining suggests long personage.

Calling for pomp.

Death is absolute and without memorial,

As in a season of autumn, (Repetition)

(When the wind stops,)

both second repeats are changed slightly - one with a comma instead of a period and the other with "and" - suggesting continuance, but never complete dull

(When the wind stops and,) over the heavens,

The clouds go, nevertheless,

implies earthly paradise, no other heaven.

Repetition.

In their direction.

→ open directions

Brown's: Wallace Stevens refers to cardon of soldier's fall. Refer back to lining. Notice the simple sentence - no image to obscure basic idea.

Dance of the Macabre Mice

In the land of [turkeys] ^{echos cock of pine woods who makes world himself.} in turkey weather

base
"one"
originate
Reality

At the base of the statue, we go round and round. ^{cyclic movement,}

What a beautiful history, beautiful surprise!

^{Satire tone}

(Monsieur is on horseback. The horse is covered with

Pictorial,
"petrified
idea" 17

mice. — single element. dreaded object; tension in lining

(can't be named)

— need, desire for change

This dance has no name. It is a hungry dance.

We dance it (out) to the (tip) of (Monsieur's) sword,

Reading the (ordly) language of the inscription,

^{sounds lofty}

Religious image - Lord + religion are another statue

Which is like zithers and tambourines combined:

The [Founder of the State. / Whoever founded]

^{civil order}

^{juxtaposed ideas}

A state that was free, in the dead of winter, ^{snowman} from mice?

What a beautiful tableau tinted and towering,

^(imposing)

^(casting shadow)

^{↑ living - suggesting power}

The arm of bronze outstretched against all evil!

Suggests Statue of Liberty

^{come assumption of man}

Refer to General DuPuy of Notes, who ends in "rubbish"

[↑] moralistic judgement with Religious overtones which denies absolute dead wish.

leftover, also strained, freed. Refer to definition of a Harmonium.
Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz

~ Juxtaposition ~

The truth is that there comes a time
When we can mourn no more over music
That is so much motionless sound.

Allegation of soft-sounding, mushy "m" occurs in poem's initial lines

Straightforward fact

There comes a time when the waltz
Is no longer a mode of desire, a mode
Of revealing desire and is empty of shadows.

Foretells no supreme action - not only particular actions but the form itself becomes old.

reference to light

Too many waltzes have ended. And then
There's that mountain-minded Moon,
For whom desire was never that of the waltz,

lining

Moon representing opposite or at least different way to relate with the world.

Who found all form and order in solitude
For whom the shapes were never the figures of men.
Now, for him, his forms have vanished.

opposite shape of this forest, with preceding one.

There is order in neither sea nor sun.
The shapes have lost their glistening.
There are these sudden mobs of men,

no shape, no shadows

These sudden clouds of faces and arms,
An immense suppression, freed,
These voices crying without knowing for what,

"freed" is locked however, in grammatical structure.

(lining)

"It must give pleasure"
Except to be happy, without knowing how,
Imposing forms they cannot describe,
Requiring order beyond their speech.

Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz (cont.)

Too many waltzes have ended. Yet the shapes
For which the voices cry, these, too, may be
Modes of desire, modes of revealing desire.

Notice length of obscuration
after each line. Waltzes have ended"
Breaks down from excess wordage
to disbelief.

Too many waltzes--The epic of disbelief

opposite
"mode"
to a
waltz
sound

(Blares) oftener and soon, will soon be constant.

Some harmonious skeptic soon in a skeptical music

Will unite these figures of men and their shapes

Will glisten again with motion, the music

Will be motion and full of shadows.

"It must BE ABSTRACT"
(Sun image of Notes)

↑
"It must change"

Relatively simple, yet contains
important images of music and various
forms. Relates to "Harmonium" and
"Notes". Music and poetry interrelate.

The Glass of Water

Physical

That the glass would melt in heat,
That the water would freeze in cold,
Shows that this object is merely a state,
One of many, between two poles. So,
In the metaphysical, there are these poles.

} parallel construction,
of physical properties

Straight, flat
dictum

Meta-physical

Here in the centre stands the glass. Light
Is the lion that comes down to drink. There
And in that state, the glass is a pool.

Equal simili:
Light = lion
continued mathematical
dictum.

Metaphorical

(red imagery)
Ruddy are his eyes and ruddy are his claws
When light comes down to wet his frothy jaws
And in the water winding weeds move round.

Extended metaphor,
strong imagery.

And there and in another state--the refractions,
The metaphysica, the plastic parts of poems
Crash in the mind--But, fat Jocundus, worrying
About what stands (here) in the centre, not the glass,

} All these states
together



But in the centre of our lives, this time, this day,
It is a state, this spring among the politicians
Playing cards. In a village of the indigenes,
One would have still to discover. Among the dogs

(and dung,) *Living suggests the individual power of reality.*
One would continue to contend with one's ideas.

Word "c" sound
suggests struggle.

The poet has no social
or political obligations,
[they].. are part of the
pressure [of reality]
he must resist "18

Of Modern Poetry

(discovery)

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

} no thugness of the
repetition. No
change.

Then the theatre was changed

immaterial
AS to what
that something
is.

To something else. Its past was a souvenir.

(language of the
vulgate)

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

(difference in
verbs suggests
Stevens' different
concept of male
and female)

Analogy to
man thinking

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, (like previous words)

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

enjambment
supporting movement

(like a guitar)

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.

} each line
contains and
limits the
other (mind
in middle)

It must

not the
poles
themselves,
the act
of finding.
Supported
by declam
verbs

Be the finding of a satisfaction, and may

Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman

Combining. The poem of the act of the mind.

The set-off of the
middle section
emphasizes the
analogy - the
poet thinking.

The Motive For Metaphor

Dying

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.

*cyclic motion -
each necessary stage
gives pleasure because
of its necessity.*

*fake phrases,
old myth.*

Recreating

In the same way, you were happy in spring,

With the half colors of quarter-things,

The slightly brighter sky, the melting clouds,

The single bird, the obscure moon--

*(definite suggestion of seasonal
movement in four sections -
supports the position
between poles)*

The obscure moon lighting an obscure world
Of things that would never be quite expressed,
Where you yourself were never quite yourself
And did not want nor have to be,

(mere movement)

Desiring the exhilarations of changes:

The motive for metaphor, shrinking from

The weight of primary noon,

The A B C of being,

metaphor, language

reality, base

(red-lion)

The ruddy temper, the hammer

*parallel
juxtaposition*

Of red and blue, the hard sound--

Steel against intimation--the sharp flash,

The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X.

(light)

juxtaposition

*(cross, interrelation)
extension of ABC.*

*movement from cyclic to
poles - beginning, ending
alphabet.*

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

To Henry Church

And for what, except for you, do I feel love?
Do I press the extremest book of the wisest man
Close to me, hidden in me day and night?
In the uncertain light of single, certain truth,
Equal in living changingness to the light
In which I meet you, in which we sit at rest,
For a moment in the central of our being,
The vivid transparence that you bring is peace.

It Must Be Abstract

I

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

You must become an ignorant man again
And see the sun again with an ignorant eye
And see it clearly in the idea of it.

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

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

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Be Abstract (cont.)

The death of one god is the death of all.

Let purple Phoebus lie in umber harvest,

Let Phoebus slumber and die in autumn umber,

Phoebus is dead, ephebe. But Phoebus was

A name for something that never could be named.

There was a project for the sun and is.

There is a project for the sun. The sun

Must bear no name, gold flourisher, but be

In the difficulty of what it is to be.

II

It is the celestial ennui of apartments

That sends us back to the first idea, the quick

Of this invention; and yet so poisonous

Are the ravishments of truth, so fatal to

The truth itself, the first idea becomes

The hermit in a poet's metaphors,

Who comes and goes and comes and goes all day.

May there be an ennui of the first idea?

What else, prodigious scholar, should there be?

The monastic man is an artist. The philosopher

Appoints man's place in music, say, today.

But the priest desires. The philosopher desires.

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Be Abstract (cont.)

And not to have is the beginning of desire.

To have what is not is its ancient cycle.

It is desire at the end of winter, when

It observes the effortless weather turning blue

And sees the myosotis on its bush.

Being virile, it hears the calendar hymn.

It knows that what it has is what is not

And throws it away like a thing of another time,

As morning throws off stale moonlight and shabby

sleep.

III

The poem refreshes life so that we share,

For a moment, the first idea . . . It satisfies

Belief in an immaculate beginning

And sends us, winged by an unconscious will,

To an immaculate end. We move between these points:

From that ever-early candor to its late plural

And the candor of them is the strong exhilaration

Of what we feel from what we think, of thought

Beating in the heart, as if blood newly came,

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Be Abstract (cont.)

An elixir, an excitation, a pure power.

The poem, through candor, brings back a power again

That gives a candid kind to everything.

We say: At night an Arabian in my room,

With his damned hoobla-hoobla-hoobla-how,

Inscribes a primitive astronomy

Across the unscrawled fores the future casts

And throws his stars around the floor. By day

The wood-dove used to chant his hoobla-hoo

And still the grossest iridescence of ocean

Howls hoo and rises and howls hoo and falls.

Life's nonsense pierces us with strange relation.

IV

The first idea was not our own. Adam

In Eden was the father Descartes

And Eve made air the mirror of herself,

Of her sons and of her daughters. They found them-

selves

In heaven as in a glass; a second earth;

And in the earth itself they found a green--

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Be Abstract (cont.)

The inhabitants of a very varnished green.
But the first idea was not to shape the clouds
In imitation. The clouds preceded us

There was a muddy centre before we breathed.
There was a myth before the myth began,
Venerable and articulate and complete.

From this the poem springs: that we live in a place
That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves
And hard it is in spite of blazoned days.

We are the mimics. Clouds are pedagogues
The air is not a mirror but bare board,
Coulisse bright-dark, tragic chiaroscuro

And comic color of the rose, in which
Abysmal instruments make sounds like pips
Of the sweeping meanings that we add to them.

V

The lion roars at the enraging desert,
Reddens the sand with his red-colored noise,
Defies red emptiness to evolve his match,

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Be Abstract (cont.)

Master by foot and jaws and by the mane,
Most supple challenger. The elephant
Breaches the darkness of Ceylon with blares,

The glitter-goes on surfaces of tanks,
Shattering velvetest far-away. The bear,
The ponderous cinnamon, snarls in his mountain

At summer thunder and sleeps through winter snow.
But you, ephebe, look from your attic window,
Your mansard with a rented piano. You lie

In silence upon your bed. You clutch the corner
Of the pillow in your hand. You writhe and press
A bitter utterance from your writhing, dumb,

Yet voluble dumb violence. You look
Across the roofs as sigil and as ward
And in your centre mark them and are cowed . . .

These are the heroic children whom time breeds
Against the first idea--to lash the lion,
Caparison elephants, teach bears to juggle.

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Be Abstract (cont.)

VI

Not to be realized because not to
Be seen, not to be loved nor hated because
Not to be realized. Weather by Franz Hals,

Brushed up by brushy winds in brushy clouds,
Wetted by blue, colder for white. Not to
Be spoken to, without a roof, without

First fruits, without the virginal of birds,
The dark-blown ceinture loosened, not relinquished.
Gay is, gay was, the gay forsythia

And yellow, yellow thins the Northern blue.
Without a name and nothing to be desired,
If only imagined but imagined well.

My house has changed a little in the sun.
The fragrance of the magnolias comes close,
False flick, false form, but falseness close to kin.

It must be visible or invisible,
Invisible or visible or both:
A seeing and unseeing in the eye.

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Be Abstract (cont.)

The weather and the giant of the weather,
Say the weather, the mere weather, the mere air:
An abstraction blooded, as a man by thought.

VII

It feels good as it is without the giant,
A thinker of the first idea. Perhaps
The truth depends on a walk around a lake,

A composing as the body tires, a stop
To see hepatica, a stop to watch
A definition growing certain and

A wait within that certainty, a rest
In the swags of pine-trees bordering the lake.
Perhaps there are times of inherent excellence,

As when the cock crows on the left and all
Is well, incalculable balances,
At which a kind of Swiss perfection comes

And a familiar music of the machine
Sets up its Schwarmerei, not balances
That we achieve but balances that happen,

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Be Abstract (cont.)

As a man and woman meet and love forthwith.
Perhaps there are moments of awakening,
Extreme, fortuitous, personal, in which
We more than awaken, sit on the edge of sleep,
As on an elevation, and behold
The academies like structures in a mist.

VIII

Can we compose a castle-fortress-home,
Even with the help of Viollet-le-Duc,
And set the MacCullough there as major man?

The first idea is an imagined thing,
The pensive giant prone in violet space
May be the MacCullough, an expedient,

Logos and logic, crystal hypothesis,
Incipit and a form to speak the word
And every latent double in the word,

Beau linguist. But the MacCullough is MacCullough.
It does not follow that major man is man.
If MacCullough himself lay lounging by the sea,

Drowned in its washes, reading in the sound,
About the thinker of the first idea,
He might take habit, whether from wave or phrase,

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Be Abstract (cont.)

Or power of the wave, or deepened speech,
Or a leaner being, moving in on him,
Of greater aptitude and apprehension,

As if the waves at last were never broken,
As if the language suddenly, with ease,
Said things it had laboriously spoken.

IX

The romantic intoning, the declaimed clairvoyance
Are parts of apotheosis, appropriate
And of its nature, the idiom thereof.

They differ from reason's click-clack, its applied
Enflashings. But apotheosis is not
The origin of the major man. He comes,

Compact in invincible foils, from reason,
Lighted at midnight by the studious eye,
Swaddled in reverie, the object of

The hum of thoughts evaded in the mind,
Hidden from other thoughts, he that reposes
On a breast forever precious for that touch,

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Be Abstract (cont.)

For whom the good of April falls tenderly,
Falls down, the cock-birds calling at the time.
My dame, sing for this person accurate songs.

He is and may be but oh! he is, he is,
This foundling of the infected past, so bright,
So moving in the manner of his hand.

Yet look not at his colored eyes. Give him
No names. Dismiss him from your images.
The hot of him is purest in the heart.

X

The major abstraction is the idea of man
And major man is its exponent, abler
In the abstract than in his singular,

More fecund as principle than particle,
Happy fecundity, flor-abundant force,
In being more than an exception, part,

Though an heroic part, of the commonal.
The major abstraction is the commonal,
The inanimate, difficult visage. Who is it?

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Be Abstract (cont.)

What rabbi, grown furious with human wish,
What chieftain, walking by himself, crying
Most miserable, most victorious,

Does not see these separate figures one by one,
And yet see only one, in his old coat,
His slouching pantaloons, beyond the town,

Looking for what was, where it used to be?
Cloudless the morning. It is he. The man
In that old coat, those sagging pantaloons,

It is of him, ephebe, to make, to confect
The final elegance, not to console
Nor sanctify, but plainly to propound.

It Must Change

I

The old seraph, parcel-gilded, among violets
Inhaled the appointed odor, while the doves
Rose up like phantoms from chronologies.

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

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Change (cont.)

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

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

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

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

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

II

The President ordains the bee to be
Immortal. The President ordains. But does
The body lift its heavy wing, take up,

Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

It Must Change (cont.)

Again, an inexhaustible being, rise
Over the loftiest antagonist
To drone the green phrases of its juvenal?

Why should the bee recapture a lost blague,
Find a deep echo in a horn and buzz
The bottomless trophy, new hornsman after old?

The President has apples on the table
And barefoot servants round him, who adjust
The curtains to a metaphysical t

And the banners of the nation flutter, burst
On the flag-poles in a red-blue dazzle, whack
At the halyards. Why, then, when in golden fury

Spring vanishes the scraps of winter, why
Should there be a question of returning or
Of death in memory's dream? Is spring a sleep?

This warmth is for lovers at last accomplishing
Their love, this beginning, not resuming, this
Booming and booming of the new-come bee.

Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction

It Must Change (cont.)

III

The great statue of the General Du Puy
Rested immobile, though neighboring catafalques
Bore off the residents of its noble Place.

The right, uplifted foreleg of the horse
Suggested that, at the final funeral,
The music halted and the horse stood still.

On Sundays, lawyers in their promenades
Approached this strongly-heightened effigy
To study the past, and doctors, having bathed

Themselves with care, sought out the nerveless frame
Of a suspension, a permanence, so rigid
That it made the General a bit absurd,

Changed his true flesh to an inhuman bronze.
There never had been, never could be, such
A man. The lawyers disbelieved, the doctors

Said that as keen, illustrious ornament,
As a setting for geraniums, the General,
The very Place Du Puy, in fact, belonged

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

IV

Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
On one another, as a man depends
On a woman, day on night, the imagined

On the real. This is the origin of change,
Winter and spring, cold copulars, embrace
And forth the particulars of rapture come.

Music falls on the silence like a sense,
A passion that we feel, not understand.
Morning and afternoon are clasped together

And North and South are an intrinsic couple
And sun and rain a plural, like two lovers
That walk away as one in the greenest body.

In solitude the trumpets of solitude
Are not of another solitude resounding;
A little string speaks for a crowd of voices.

The partaker partakes of that which changes him.
The child that touches takes character from the thing,
The body, it touches. The captain and his men

Are one and the sailor and the sea are one.
Follow after, O my companion, my fellow, my self,
Sister and solace, brother and delight.

V

On a blue island in a sky-wide water
The wild orange trees continued to bloom and to bear,
Long after the planter's death. A few limes remained,

Where his house had fallen, three scraggy trees

weighted

With garbled green. These were the planter's turquoise
And his orange blotches, these were his zero green,

A green baked greener in the greenest sun.
These were his beaches, his sea-myrtles in
White sand, his patter of the long sea-slushes.

There was an island beyond him on which rested,
An island to the South, on which rested like
A mountain, a pineapple pungent as Cuban summer.

And là-bas, là-bas, the cool bananas grew,
Hung heavily on the great banana tree,
Which pierces clouds and bends on half the world.

He thought often of the land from which he came,
How that whole country was a melon, pink
If seen rightly and yet a possible red.

An unaffected man in a negative light
Could not have borne his labor nor have died
Sighing that he should leave the banjo's twang.

VI

Bethou me, said sparrow, to the crackled blade,
And you, and you, bethou me as you blow,
When in my coppice you behold me be.

Ah, kè! the bloody wren, the felon jay,
kè-kè, the jug-throated robin pouring out,
Bethou, bethou, bethou me in my glade.

There was such idiot minstrelsy in rain,
So many clappers going without bells,
That these bethous compose a heavenly gong.

One voice repeating, one tireless chorister,
The phrases of a single phrase, ke-ke,
A single text, granite monotony,

One sole face, like a photograph of fate,
Glass-blowers destiny, bloodless episcopus,
Eye without lid, mind without any dream--

These are of minstrels lacking minstrelsy,
Of an earth in which the first leaf is the tale
Of leaves, in which the sparrow is a bird

Of stone, that never changes. Bethou him, you
And you, bethou him and bethou. It is
A sound like any other. It will end.

VII

After a lustre of the moon, we say
WE have not the need of any paradise,
We have not the need of any seducing hymn.

It is true. Tonight the lilacs magnify
The easy passion, the ever-ready love
Of the lover that lies within us and we breathe

An odor evoking nothing, absolute.
We encounter in the dead middle of the night
The purple odor, the abundant bloom.

The lover sighs as for accessible bliss,
Which he can take within him on his breath,
Possess in his heart, conceal and nothing known.

For easy passion and ever-ready love
Are of our earthy birth and here and now
And where we live and everywhere we live,

As in the top-cloud of a May night-evening,
As in the courage of the ignorant man,
Who chants by book, in the heat of the scholar, who
writes

The book, hot for another accessible bliss:
The fluctuations of certainty, the change
Of degrees of perception in the scholar's dark.

VII

On her trip around the world, Nanzia Nunzio
Confronted Ozymandias. She went
Alone and like a vestal long prepared.

I am the spouse. She took her necklace off
And laid it in the sand. As I am, I am
The spouse. She opened her stone-studded belt.

I am the spouse, divested of bright gold,
The spouse beyond emerald or amethyst,
Beyond the burning body that I bear.

I am the woman stripped more nakedly
Than nakedness, standing before an inflexible
Order, saying I am the contemplated spouse.

Speak to me that, which spoken, will array me
In its own only precious ornament.
Set on me the spirit's diamond coronal.

Clothe me entire in the final filament,
So that I tremble with such love so known
And myself am precious for your perfecting.

Then Ozymandias said the spouse, the bride
Is never naked. A fictive covering
Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind.

IX

The poem goes from the poet's gibberish to
The gibberish of the vulgate and back again.
Does it move to and fro or is it of both

At once? Is it a luminous flittering
Or the concentration of a cloudy day?
Is there a poem that never reaches words

And one that chaffers the time away?
Is the poem both peculiar and general?
There's a meditation there, in which there seems

To be an evasion, a thing not apprehended or
Not apprehended well. Does the poet
Evade us, as in a senseless element?

Evade, this hot, dependent orator,
The spokesman at our bluntest barriers,
Exponent by a form of speech, the speaker

Of a speech only a little of the tongue?
It is the gibberish of the vulgate that he seeks.
He tries by a peculiar speech to speak

The peculiar potency of the general,
To compound the imagination's Latin with
The lingua franca et jocundissima.

A bench was his catalepsy, Theatre
Of Trope. He sat in the park. The water of
The lake was full of artificial things,

Like a page of music, like an upper air,
Like a momentary color, in which swans
Were seraphs, were saints, were changing essences.

The west wind was the music, the motion, the force
To which the swans curveted, a will to change,
A will to make iris frettings on the blank.

There was a will to change, a necessitous
And present way, a presentation, a kind
Of volatile world, too constant to be denied.

The eye of a vagabond in metaphor
That catches our own. The casual is not
Enough. 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.
Of these beginnings, gay and green, propose
The suitable amours. Time will write them down.

IT MUST GIVE PLEASURE

I

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. Jerome
Begot the tubas and the fire-wind strings,
The golden fingers picking dark-blue air:

For companies of voices moving there,
To find of sound the bleakest ancestor,
To find of light a music issuing

Whereon it falls in more than sensual mode.
But the difficultest rigor is forthwith,
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. These are not things transformed.
Yet we are shaken by them as if they were.
We reason about them with a later reason.

II

The blue woman, linked and lacquered, at her win-
dow
Did not desire that feathery argentines
Should be cold silver, neither that frothy clous
Should faam, be foamy waves, should move like
them,
Nor that the sexual blossoms should repose
Without their fierce addictions, nor that the heat
Of summer, growing fragrant in the night,
Should strengthen her abortive dreams and take
In sleep its natural form. It was enough
For her that she remembered: the argentines
Of spring come to their places in the grape leaves
To cool their ruddy pulses: the frothy clouds

Are nothing but frothy clouds; the frothy blooms
Waste without puberty; and afterward,
When the harmonious heat of August pines

Enters the room, it drowns and is the night.

It was enough for her that she remembered.

The blue woman looked and from her window

named

The corals of the dogwood, cold and clear,

Cold, coldly delineating, being real,

Clear and, except for the eye, without intrusion.

III

A lasting visage in a lasting bush,

A face of stone in an unending red,

Red-emerald, red-slitted-blue, a face of slate,

An ancient forehead hung with heavy hair,

The channel slots of rain, the red-rose-red

And weathered and the ruby-water-worn,

The vines around the throat, the shapeless lips,

The frown like serpents basking on the brow,

The spent feeling leaving nothing of itself,

Red-in-red repetitions never going
Away, a little rusty, a little rouged,
A little roughened and ruder, a crown

The eye could not escape, a red renown
Blowing itself upon the tedious ear.
An effulgence faded, dull cornelian

Too venerably used. That might have been.
It might and might have been. But as it was,
A dead shepherd brought tremendous chords from
hell

And bade the sheep carouse. Or so they said.
Children in love with them brought early flowers
And scattered them about, no two alike.

IV

We reason of these things with later reason
And we make of what we see, what we see clearly
And have seen, a place dependent on ourselves.

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.

This was their ceremonial hymn: Anon
We loved but would no marriage make. Anon
The one refused the other one to take,

Foreswore the sipping of the marriage wine.
Each must the other take not for his high,
His puissant front nor for her subtle sound,

The shoo-shoo-shoo of secret cymbals round.
Each must the other take as sign, short sign
To stop the whirlwind, balk the elements.

The great captain loved the ever-hill Catawba
And therefore married Bawda, whom he found there,
And Bawda loved the captain as she loved the sun.

They married well because the marriage-place
Was what they loved. It was neither heaven nor hell.
They were love's characters come face to face.

V

We drank Meursault, ate lobster Bombay with
mango

Chutney. Then the Canon Aspirin declaimed
Of his sister, in what a sensible ecstasy

She lived in her house. She had two daughters, one
Of four, and one of seven, whom she dressed
The way a painter of pauvred color paints.

But still she painted them, appropriate to
Their poverty, a gray-blue yellowed out
With ribbon, a rigid statement of them, white,

With Sunday pearls, her widow's gayety.
She his them under simple names. She held
Them closelier to her by rejecting dreams.

The words they spoke were voices that she heard.
She looked at them and saw them as they were
And what she felt fought off the barest phrase.

The Canon Aspirin, having said these things,
Reflected, humming an outline of a fugue
Of praise, a conjugation done by choirs.

Yet when her children slept, his sister herself
Demanded of sleep, in the excitements of silence
Only the unmuddled self of sleep, for them.

VI

When at long midnight the Canon came to sleep
And 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.

So that he was the ascending wings he saw
And moved on them in orbits' outer stars
Descending to the children's bed, on which

They lay. Forth then with huge pathetic force
Straight to the utmost crown of night he flew.
The nothingness was a nakedness, a point

Beyond which thought could not progress as thought.
He had to choose. But it was not a choice
Between excluding things. It was not a choice

Between, but of. He chose to include the things
That in each other are included, the whole,
The complicate, the amassing harmony.

VII

He imposes orders as he thinks of them,
As the fox and snake do. It is a brave affair.
Next he builds capitols and in their corridors,

Whiter than wax, sonorous, fame as it is,
He establishes statues of reasonable men,
Who surpassed the most literate ow, the most
erudite

Of elephants. But to impose is not
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,

It is possible, possible, possible. It must
Be possible. It must be that in time
The real will from its crude compoundings come,

Seeming, at first, a beast disgorged, unlike,
Warmed by a desperate milk. To find the real,
To be stripped of every fiction except one,

The fiction of an absolute--Angel,
Be silent in your luminous cloud and hear
The luminous melody of proper sound.

VIII

What am I to believe? If the angel in his cloud,
Serenely gazing at the violent abyss,
Plucks on his strings to pluck abysmal glory,

Leaps downward through evening's revelations, and
On his spredden wings needs nothing but deep
space,

Forgets the gold centre, the golden destiny,

Grows warm in the motionless motion of his flight,

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?

Is it I then that keep saying there is an hour

Filled with expressible bliss, in which I have

No need, am happy, forget need's golden hand,
Am satisfied without solacing majesty,
And if there is an hour there is a day,

There is a month, a year, there is a time
In which majesty is a mirror of the self:
I have not but I am and as I am, I am.

These external regions, what do we fill them with
Except reflections, the escapades of death,
Cinderella fulfilling herself beneath the roof?

IX

Whistle aloud, too weedy wren. I can
Do all that angels can. I enjoy like them,
Like men besides, like men in light secluded,

Enjoying angels. Whistle, forced bugler,
That bugles for the mate, nearby the nest,
Cock bugler, whistle and bugle and stop just short,

Red robin, stop in your preludes, practicing
Mere repetitions. These things at least comprise
An occupation, an exercise, a work,

A thing final in itself and, therefore, good:
One of the vast repetitions final in
Themselves and, therefore, good, the going round

And round and round, the merely going round,
Until merely going round is a final good,
The way wine comes at a table in a wood.

And we enjoy like men, the way a leaf
Above the table spins its constant spin,
So that we look at it with pleasure, look

At it spinning its eccentric measure. Perhaps,
The man-hero is not the exceptional monster,
But he that of repetition is most master.

X

Fat girl, terrestrial, my summer, my night,
How is it I find you in difference, see you there
In a moving contour, a change not quite completed?

You are familiar yet an aberration.
Civil, madam, I am, but underneath
A tree, this unprovoked sensation requires

That I should name you flatly, waste no words,
Check your evasions, hold you to yourself.
Even so when I think of you as strong or tired,

Bent over work, anxious, content, alone,
You remain the more than natural figure. You
Become the soft-footed phantom, the irrational

Distortion, however fragrant, however dear.
That's it: the more than rational distortion,
The fiction that results from feeling. Yes, that.

They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne.
We shall return at twilight from the lecture
Pleased that the irrational is rational,

Until flicked by feeling, in a gilded street,
I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo.
You will have stopped revolving except in crystal.

Soldier, there is a war between the mind
And sky, between thought and day and night. It is
For that the poet is always in the sun,

Patches the moon together in his room
To his Virgilian cadences, up down,
Up down. It is war that never ends.

Yet it depends on yours. The two are one.
They are a plural, a right and left, a pair,
Two parallels that meet if only in

The meeting of their shadows or that meet
In a book in a barrack, a letter from Malay.
But your war ends. And after it you return

With six meats and twelve wines or else without
To walk another room....Monsieur and comrade,
The soldier is poor without the poet's lines,

His petty syllabi, the sounds that stick,
Inevitably modulating, in the blood.
And war for war, each has its gallant kind.

CRITICAL DISCUSSION

Note: All outside references used in discussion are carefully documented, however passages from the poem, Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction, are marked with quotations but not included in the footnote listing.

There is no part of the world which is not
covered by the "blue" of the sky, and the
admirable for itself, and the world is
replete, abundant, and the world is
devotion to the service of the world is
the world of the world, and the world is
the world of the world, and the world is
possible in the world of the world, and
is a part of the world.

It is desirable and desirable, and
believed at the moment of the world, and
supreme fiction "The horse is covered with mice."*
There is no part of the world which is not
covered by the "blue" of the sky, and the
admirable for itself, and the world is
replete, abundant, and the world is
devotion to the service of the world is
the world of the world, and the world is
the world of the world, and the world is
possible in the world of the world, and
is a part of the world.

There is no such thing as a supreme fiction. All those moved by the 'blue bird in Aunt Jane's hair' who think it admirable for Stevens, as a relatively old man, to write a romantic, somewhat sentimental account of his entire life's devotion to the creation of a supreme fiction-- forget it. Unless, of course, you are willing to give up a little ground, file a few corners and admit that the only supreme fiction possible is the impression of a supreme fiction which actually is a myth of myths.

It is debatable and somewhat irrelevant, whether Stevens believed at the outset of Notes that there actually was a supreme fiction, per se. Although many are willing to concede that there can be no such earthly form, they resort to the Platonic Ideal, stating that, although Stevens did not believe we would ever see or give dimension to this myth, he believed that there was something beyond that corresponded to Good, Truth and the Supreme Fiction. However, a second and more lengthy espial of the poem will refute even this idea.

The word choice, 'Supreme Fiction', seems somewhat lamentable at this point. It implies something stationary and solely superior to all other fictions. However, this is exactly the effect Stevens desires. For the poem itself is, among other things, an affirmation of why there can be no single, complete supreme fiction.

The opening struggle to perceive the "inconceivable idea" includes the statement "a heaven that has expelled us

and our images." This is merely an echo of an earlier poem, Sunday Morning. The idea of self-denial and the Puritan ethic of saving and living for tomorrow lack any modern poetic meaning. God was a myth created out of need many years ago; however, it no longer applies. Therefore, our attempt to name and classify is debilitating. It resists change and stagnates our ever moving vitality. We attempt "a name for something that never could be named." Thus, how can we christen a "supreme fiction" without sentencing it to antiquity?

Even if we could agree on the Supreme Fiction Ideal, the "celestial ennui" would impel us to destroy all established myths and begin again. Fuchs states that for Stevens "poetry emerged as the strongest force in the world, capable of destroying fictions which appear obsolete."¹

The mere word 'supreme' implies something that transcends reality, possibly even human existence. However, Stevens immediately introduced the analogy of seasonal change and man's recurring desire for a new and vernal myth, suggesting that man and his environment are interrelated. At the "end of winter" one knows that what one has "is what is not and throws it away like a thing of another time." A supreme myth has no relevance here.

Not only does supreme fiction infer transcendence, but it implies something beyond human self-consciousness. However, though the fiction must be abstract, it must be an "abstraction blooded" -- given vitality and life. The fluctuating emotions

incited by artist and his created fictions are implied in canto nine: "The hot of him is purest in the heart." The development of the self-conscious man and his feelings are essential to the creation of a fiction and will be treated in greater detail in a following section.

One of the three basic premises of Notes is that the supreme fiction "must change." Fuchs states, "It is not the idea of a supreme fiction that Stevens rejects, but the old fictions which are no longer supreme."² He suggests that an old fiction must be rejected, because it lacks meaning and is actually not a fiction at all, just a remembrance of one. "The essence of poetry is change because poetry is the abstract figure in life, and life is change."³ The implication of a supreme fiction as something relatively static contradicts this idea. Again, we have the echo, "Spring vanishes the scraps of winter, why/ Should there be any question of returning or/ of death in memory's dream? Is spring a sleep?"

There is recurrent reference in Notes to the need for human experience and the changes that result: "The partaker partakes of that which changes him." Also, spontaneity and discovery are favored:

These are not things transformed
Yet we are shaken by them as if they were.
We reason about them with later reason.

If a supreme fiction existed, even as merely a supreme abstraction, it could not adhere to these characteristics. Notes states that seasonal change is not repetition: it is "beginning, not resuming." A supreme abstraction, in itself, once created, would inevitably grow obsolete.

The overall tone of Notes denies the idea that Stevens sat down and constructed the essential elements he felt necessary for the creation of a supreme fiction. Rather, it begins as an instruction developing into a self-revelation type movement. The early questions presented seem quite rhetorical: "May there be an ennui of the first idea? What else, prodigious scholar should there be?" However, we sense an honest dilemma when he asks, "How is it I find you in difference, see you there in a moving contour, a change not quite completed?" The previous canto emanates the same feeling when he observes and then resolves with a statement suggesting slight uncertainty: "Perhaps the man-hero is not the exceptional monster." Thus, we see the poet become involved in his own discoveries. When he practically vaults out of the tercet and announces, "That's it," we become intensely aware that he has made a sudden realization of his own. Therefore, it is futile to suggest that Stevens implies Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction to be a foundation for "Ten Ways to Construct the Paramount Myth."

The poet states, in the last tercet, that as a result of the Sorbonne meeting his "green, fluent mundo," suggesting a spring renewal and "living changingness," will revolve only in "crystal." This single tercet has had almost as many explanations as there are critics to explain. Stevens ingeniously employs ambiguous punctuation and chooses a word such as "crystal" which has multiple implications that, in reference

to the poem, are almost directly opposite. Bewley quotes Stevens as saying, "The imagination is the power of the mind over the possibilities of things; but if this constitutes a certain single characteristic, it is the source not of a single certain value but of as many values as reside in the possibilities of things."⁴

Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction is basically a statement of the need for changeable and pleasurable myths and a revelation of man's great capacities in his earthly paradise. It propounds nothing beyond. Quoting from Opus Posthumous, Kermode states, "The poet's 'revelations of reality', which are the new gods, change as reality changes; but they are 'items of ecstasy' here and now, not in a place loftier and more secluded."⁵ Therefore, Stevens asserts the need for myths, but not one supreme fiction above all others. He is concerned primarily with the process of creating and destroying, not a static thing or idea. "It is the belief and not the God that counts."⁶

Consequently, the theory of a myth of myths can apply only in the following manner. Stevens examined the constant need of humanity for a fiction, supplied previously by religion, today by art. The myth is valuable only "for a moment" in the "uncertain light of single, certain truth." He proposes constant creation and recreation of needed myths which must be abstract,

must change, and must give pleasure. "What makes the poet the potent figure that he is, or was, or ought to be, is that he creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it, and that he gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it."⁷

The idea of this constant need and therefore continual creation must be considered the underlying myth of movement or a myth of myths. However, it is not supreme. It is merely the basic human myth of a self-consciousness that demands harmony with the changing world and mutating mind.

"..the finding of a satisfaction.."

A major criticism of Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction and of Stevens' Collected Poems as a whole is that there is no development. Some critics feel Stevens intentionally confuses and digresses with no preconceived direction. Even Brown, discussing the first lines of Notes, implies amusement and no earnest meditation.¹ However, nothing could be further from the truth. Although Notes does not give a step by step progression to a final solution, tying it neatly with an overall theme and moral, there is a definite movement to the final revelation in the last canto.

Many readers tend to struggle with the dialectical movement within. Once started with a particular line of thinking, they are irritated and confused when an opposite idea is presented. However, Stevens was extremely concerned with harmony and action of opposites. Notes is an expression of the self-conscious man thinking, in which we see him move between poles, trying to achieve needed revelations or "strange relations."

Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction is a poem of motion as even the title implies. Referring to Stevens' statement, "Poetry is a pheasant disappearing in the brush,"² Hopper says, "The poem is neither the pheasant nor the disappearance of the pheasant: it is the movement itself, the pheasant disappearing, the mystery of the moment of becoming in lacunae between being and becoming, actuality and possibility, day and night, sun and moon, masculine and feminine, reality and imagination."³

This essence of motion cannot be given by mere meaning alone. To begin with canto one and chronologically reduce

each section to a few sentences of paraphrase is "facile exercise." Many of Stevens' ideas are not so revolutionary in themselves. One might read Santayana or philosophers before him to derive a general notion of Stevens' concept of nature and man. However, it is the technique he employs that makes his poetry so valuable. A reader is forced to not only give meaning to the various phrases, but also feel the relations and hear the sounds that rumble between the lines. Although Stevens was speaking of another poem, Fabliau of Florida, this statement is indicative of his passion in words: "It is not the sense of a poem of that kind that counts, because it does not really have a great deal of sense; it is the feeling of the words and the reaction and images that the words create."⁴

There are two basic methods employed in discussing Notes--either chronological summary or attempted proof of a stated hypothesis. However, simple summary verges on theme mongering. "The clearer the explanations, the falser they are likely to be."⁵ Conversely, discussion of the poem solely in the light of a particular theory obscures other essential elements and encourages use of outside information for support.

Because Notes consists of continual ramifications of certain basic ideas, discussion becomes repetitious when reduced to themes or paraphrase. Furthermore, to construct a pamphlet giving step by step directions for reading is an insult to intelligent readers. Thus, specific technical and thematic considerations are confined to a systematic discussion of "It Must be Abstract" in order to exhibit overall development

without becoming overly redundant. This is generally considered the most difficult and is subject to widely varied interpretations. The poems following this selection will be selected for analysis only if they exemplify a particular technique not already mentioned or an idea that causes contrasting interpretation.

After reading several initial lines in Notes, the reader realizes a fundamental difference from Harmonium. Although Stevens still shows a great propensity for active, robust words, he shades them quite heavily with calm, contemplative, and somewhat monochrome language. Canto One is entirely (except, perhaps, "voluminous master folded in his fire") composed of generally "straight" phrases. This relates effectively to a "heaven that has expelled us and our images" and the need to see the sun "clearly in the idea of it."

This first canto introduces many of the motifs already prevalent in previous poems. The concept of the "ignorant man" can be seen as early as Snow Man and as late as Man Carrying Thing. The sun, a predominate Stevenesque symbol, is perceived in "the idea of it." The motif of color, in this case purple and gold, is also common to Stevens' poetry. However, one must again be careful not to fall in the trap of assigning definite meaning, such as blue equals imagination. While this seems completely absurd, many critics fail to see the inconsistencies. However, within a single poem, a particular color may be found to have certain implications. Religious imagery, in this case, heaven, God and possibly Phoebus,

is one of the most well-known motifs in Stevens, probably as a result of the widely published Sunday Morning. Notes, again, projects heaven and Christianity as a worn-out myth--no longer relevant or meaningful.

Repetition and restatement tend to lull the reader into boredom, which leads perfectly into the "celestial ennui" of the second canto. We are aware of the answer before ever reading the question, "May there be an ennui of the first idea?" The first tercet is overloaded with the "i" sound so that by the time we read the second stanza, we feel the words running together. However, at this point it is interesting to interject a discovery made in examining the "i" sounds. Though a bit far fetched, Stevens coordinates the long "i" (idea) and short "i" (begin, perceiving, this, invention, conceivable) sound when he is consciously concerning himself with two opposite poles of "early candor" and "late plural." The use of "umber harvest", "slumber" and "autumn umber" is a definitely conscious attempt to lull the reader into repose, which relates to the particular lines and the overall movement of this first canto.

Despite the initial state of somnolence, Notes could have just as easily begun with the second canto in which the first six lines are among the best in the poem:

It is the celestial ennui of apartments
That sends us back to the first idea, the quick
Of this invention; and yet so poisonous

Are the ravishments of truth, so fatal to
The truth itself, the first idea becomes
The hermit in a poet's metaphors.

The pentameter breaks with "the quick" which jolts the reader's eye and defies recurrent ennui. The enjambment of "poisonous" and "are" creates the same effect. The second stanza's lining is also relevant to meaning--placing "hermit" at the beginning of the last line, surrounded by words.

Riddel refers to these lines with the somewhat trite statement, "Necessity is the mother of imagination."⁶ We are aware of the need to rid ourselves of "the ravishments of truth" and to see the "sun with an ignorant eye." However, it is implied that man also ascribes names and classification, assuming himself source of "this invented world." The line "who comes and goes and comes and goes all day" is not needed to give the feeling of movement already portrayed by lining and ideas.

The image of the monastic man and philosopher, though relevant to Stevens' concepts, is useful only as build-up to, "And not to have is the beginning of desire." This fourth tercet is repetitious and loosely constructed. Compare the bland reference to music with the "calendar hymn" of the sixth tercet. Although not exceptional, the latter allows us some reaction.

The opposite wording of the fifth stanza is an excellent mode for creating movement, particularly movement between two poles.

And not to have is the beginning of desire.
To have what is not is its ancient cycle.

Stevens is aware of sentence structure and grammar and frequently constructs arrangements which support meaning or ambiguity.

The previous lines, including the "celestial ennui" section could have carried this particular canto quite efficiently. However, Stevens' metaphorical impulses dictate that he give a type of example for his statement. At certain points, this technique works extremely well and lifts the poetry above merely well-stated philosophical ideas. But the tightly woven poetry of this canto is disseminated somewhat by the wordy and repetitious allusion to weather. The sentences are very straightforward, almost prose.

However, the image of winter (referring again to Snow Man), "myosotis," virility, the "calender hymn," and "shabby sleep" reinforce the cyclic movement and man's need for change. We are aware of the earth's cycles and its influence on man. The combination of "it" (a word having no real meaning, i.e. nothing) with colorful or at least concrete objects (winter, weather, bush, hymn, etc.) is a working technique beginning with, "To have what is not is its ancient cycle" and culminating in, "And throws it away. . ."

The distinguishing mark of the third canto is lining. We feel the jerking movement back and forth. One who scoffs method in lining could not have possibly grasped this poem. Through novelty, the poem allows us to share, for just a moment, the first idea (referring, of course, to canto one). It satisfies not only belief, but the need to believe.

The wide space after "immaculate beginning" is self-explanatory. However, examine the reinforcing technique of enjambment and word placement defying meaning:

. . .immaculate beginning

And send us, winged by an unconscious will,
To an immaculate end.

Of course the placement of "point" and "again" also are conscious attempts at exemplified meaning.

The cross reference of images becomes apparent with this canto. The obvious conjunction of "music," "hymn," and "winged" (referring to birds) and the relation of "immaculate beginning" to "winter" is characteristic of Stevens' style. Just as he is constantly re-evaluating and qualifying ideas, so, too, with his images. As the poem progresses, we receive a clearer picture of exactly what he refers to when he speaks of say, music. This is another sign of internal development.

Although many critics are completely baffled by the "scene" with the Arabian, wood-dove and ocean, it is extremely relevant for four reasons. The most obvious is the idea of these completely different entities chanting (referring again to music) variations of the same sound. Thus the basic "relation" between the three seems to be this one underlying factor, which might be part of "the central of our being." The revelation of this fact is an approach to perceiving the "first idea."

However, the Arabian, wood-dove and ocean are significant for more than simple difference. They represent three aspects of time. The Arabian predicts the future, the wood-dove "used to chang," and still the "ocean howls." This relation can be

viewed in yet another way. The Arabian, at night, is a product of one's imagination. The wood-dove is a part of reality, nature's environment. The ocean can be a combination of the two in that it was the initial breeder of all life and that it is referred to as the "grossest iridescence" which combines base reality with light, or man's illuminating powers--the power of the Arabian with his stars. "And still" suggests that the ocean has always been and always will be howling the basic sounds of our world.

The final significance of this section is the last line, "Life pierces us with strange relation." It is an extension of the "strong exhilaration/ of what we feel from what we think, of thought/ Beating in the heart." Man is totally involved in the world, completely self-conscious. The poem is a new beginning, allowing man the power to see the "candid" relation between his mind and the world.

The use of the words "hoobla-hoobla-hoobla-how" is reminiscent of earlier style. Stevens' intrigue with words includes making them up whenever possible. One thinks immediately of Bantams in Pine Woods: "fears not portly Azcan nor his hoos." The length of the Arabian's phrase compared to the wood-dove is indicative of their relative "suggestions." The imagination is dependent on metaphors and language. The wood-dove's chant is included in the Arabian's. The ocean, innuendo of the first basic idea, howls only a base "hoo." Thus, this first idea becomes the "hermit in a poet's metaphors," "hoobla--hoobla, hoobla, how."

Consequently, these lines are suggestive of even one more idea. The Arabian, a product of man's imagination, is the all-inclusive "abstract." He casts the future with stars, like the sun. However, his astronomy is "primitive." His chant includes the language and ideas of the present and the basic "center" of all time.

"Never suppose an inventing mind as source of this idea. . .this invented world," foreshadows the line, "The first idea was not our own." The importance of this particular poem is questionable. The first half, at least, repeats in a different, yet less effective manner, the ideas already presented. The only function evident is the overt religious imagery, sending the reader "winged by an unconscious will" to a consideration of religion, its reason for existence and its usefulness today.

The lining of the second tercet is indicative of a growing self-consciousness which will later be discussed in detail. "Selves" is placed entirely alone and "within" two lines, suggesting a search for the relation of man to the world by trying to stand completely apart. The parallel phrasing of:

The clouds preceded us
There was a muddy centre before we breathed.
There was a myth before the myth began.

is another characteristic of Stevens' style. The word "clouds," actually preceding, supports meaning.

The assertion of the need for poetry in a world "not our own" is heard early in Stevens. Riddel mentions To

The One of Fictive Music which ends:

Unreal, give back to us what once you gave
The imagination that we spurned and crave.

as a foreshadowing of this self-realization and attempted union with the earth.

Rhetoric in the first stanzas is elevated, like the clouds. Lining is interesting, too, in that the ending shape is first extended, restricted, then extended.

We are the mimics. Clouds are pedagogues.
The air is not a mirror but bare board,
Coulisse bright-dark, tragic chiaroscuro

And comic color of the rose, in which
Abysmal instruments make sounds like pips
Of the sweeping meanings that we add to them.

This suggests man's attempt in the abysmal depths of earth to mimic the elevated clouds in their conjunction with basic earthly air. Clouds, by being what they are, teach us how to give "sweeping meanings" to the "abysmal instruments." Air is a stage which Sukenick states is unconcerned with the ego.⁷ It, like the lines, contains all the opposites: "bright/dark;" "tragic/comic;" "chiaroscuro/color."

Man is compelled to interact with this world. Riddel states there are two kinds of first ideas, "the false kind that man creates to dominate and rule him. . .and the true kind (the everchanging ideas he creates because he needs to know beyond himself)."⁸

The poem has developed from the pure attempt to perceive the first idea because of ennui and needed renewal to a

realization of the cyclic movement of throwing off the old myth, attempting to see its "center," and creating a new myth from that "single certain truth." This leads directly into the fifth canto in which parallel development is seen at its best.

Here is a specific case in which an image cannot be seen in the context of preceding poetry. The lion, elephant and bear signify "brute consciousness."⁹ Each animal is related in similar reaction to his environment. The poet develops logically and easily until suddenly the sentence jumps an entire stanza: "You lie/ in silence on your bed." The reader can feel the silence of that gap in contrast to recent "Red-colored noise," "blaring" and "snarling." The tension is heightened as ephebe "clutches" the corner of the line, resisting further inspection. But the lines continue and the ephebe is forced to "press a bitter utterance" out of the intense strength derived from fear.

The alliteration and images of the lion as he "reddens the sand," the elephant as he "breaches the darkness. . . shattering velvetest far-away," and the bear, "ponderous cinnamon" snarling at "summer thunder" are among the most effective in the entire poem. Jerome states: "The syllables of the word should articulate for you with all the give and spring of a rattlesnake's jointed spine. Sniff the word for its sweat-and-leather smell. . .When you squeeze it does it squirt?. . .Does it sizzle to the touch like a hot iron? Watch it tickle yellowly through the air like a butterfly and then settle to pollinate a flower."¹⁰ Canto five approaches this type of perfection.

The cross ties between images are preponderant. The "rented piano" suggests music not entirely man's, and in his possession for only a specific length of time. It is, obviously, a continuance of the "abysmal instruments" and the "howling" in previous cantos. Colors and sounds are co-mingled to produce "red-colored noise" and "glitter goes on surfaces of tanks, shattering velvetest." The reader is reminded of "purple Phoebus," "gold flourisher," "blue weather," "hoobla hoo" and many other sense provoking images. The fact that the ephebe is "cowed" is significant in two ways: first, he is frightened into a state described by an animal's name; second, that animal is a domestic which has been dominated and controlled by man. This can be intertwined backward and forward within the poem. The lining builds from "surfaces of tanks" to "winter snow" and falls back again to "you lie," showing the "cowed" ephebe.

The final tercet extends from the assertion of canto four that "we live in a place that is not our own." The self-conscious man is continuing to find "strange relation." Man insists on domination, which is falsified, deceptive growth "against the first idea."

Dialectical movement is most evident in canto six. Negative statements describe attempted conception of the abstract. Positive statements describe the painting by Franz Hals, which is a concrete reality resulting from man's conception of his own world. Stevens refers to this poem as a "struggle with the inaccessability of the abstract."¹¹

The cycle, beginning and ending with "not to be realized" implies frustration. Thus, a turn to a concrete representation of the abstract is imminent. However, only two positive lines, and one finds oneself again reading what is not. Freedman states, though it seems somewhat obvious, that Stevens "saw objects simultaneously as they are and as they are not, through that which is given in perception and that which appears to lie beyond it."¹²

The poem builds through this continual movement to the assertion that the poet's house, his mind and his humanity, "has changed a little in the sun." It is a mingling of man and his environment which produces the desired "falseness close to kin."

The word reversal in two statements mentioned in another context, recurs with "visible or invisible," suggesting the total picture which the eye, observing from the bottom line, may discern. The abstract cannot exist of itself. It must be realized by man through his interaction with what is and what is not. "The merging of the abstract and mental with the concrete and sensual is perhaps the most characteristic quality of Stevens' style."¹³

The language of the following cantos drops into a less colorful, more neutral shade. The poet is in the peaceful act of discovering "balances that happen," philosophical relevations upon observing the world. The lining of the middle stanza in canto eight is an open display of such

balance. Despite other interesting lining and word placement, such as "edge of sleep" on the edge, and "a stop," canto seven is somewhat bland and repetitious. Line endings are generally weak and the poem is nothing more than a peaceful, self-explanatory work that can be handled only with trite phrases. Its only contribution to the poem, besides the concept of balances, is the foreshadowing of the tree in the final canto and Canon's realization awaking from sleep.

The rhetorical question of canto eight introduces the idea of major man. This is an extension of Stevens' previous images including the great man-hero, Fat Jocundus. "This, the human mind which creates the fictions by which reality comes to suffice, is Stevens' major man."¹⁴

MacCullough is an extension of man relating to his natural created environment, involved in both concrete and poetic experience. The poem is repetitious and unskillfully flabby. However, the sensed "inherent excellence" and the habit taken from either "wave or phrase" or both, is part of the growth culminating in canto nine--the essence of the "blooded abstraction."

Stevens conveys his feelings toward the romantics in the opening lines. The reference to the "romantic intoning" as an idiom intimates their obsession with dreams.¹⁵

Religious imagery runs rampant in this canto with "swaddled," "breast forever precious," "April," "foundling of the infected past," and "manner of his hand." Major man does not result from apotheosis but from reason intertwined

with feeling. The poem has evolved to this assertion from the first complete awareness of the need for harmony between man and his earth in the fourth canto. Canto seven suggests that reason or thought is not enough as we sit on the edge of the line and see the academies in slight distortion. Therefore, major man is a result of the rational and irrational. The religious imagery serves to remind the reader, however, of an old myth; one in which a man with a great imagination was made into a separate God. The final didactic statement warns us against repeating this fallacy. "For him the sovereign images must be created [continually] through the interaction of man's imagination and man's natural environment."¹⁶

The tone is heavily philosophical at this point. There is an attempt to build emotion culminating in the line, "he is and maybe but oh! he is, he is." However, it is a complete failure. The tension is not felt in the lines and there is little sense-provoking aspect in the words. The first description of major man "compact in invincible foils" dwindles into shallow, general language such as "the hum of thoughts evaded in the mind/ Hidden from other thoughts" and the previously quoted line. Although a poet is not compelled to use concrete, specific words continuously, his poetry may lack variety and "verbal density," as Jerome calls it; and combined with repetition, this tends to "drive ideas into the ground."¹⁷

The mathematical allusions in the first tercet are effective in building major man as a larger part of but not

separate from common man. Major man as exponent to the idea of man is merely indicative of how many times this idea may be multiplied by itself. This projects into the fecundity of the second stanza. It is necessary that man be seen as "more than an exception, part/ Though a heroic part, of the commonal."

The "numbers idea" continues into the image of all common men reduced to "one, in his old coat." The reader is reminded of "twenty men crossing a bridge" in Metaphors of a Magnifico. This general man with his metaphorical "old coat" does not realize that he is looking for what is not." The common man looking "beyond the town" has the extreme need for poetry, not mere human wish or the consolation of religion.

The poems included under It Must Change are basically straight forward and philosophical in tone. The poem concerning the statue is interesting in its development to a concluding line: "The very Place DuPuy, in fact, belonged/ Among our more vestigial states of mind." The reader, as a result of high language including "catafalques," "noble," and "promenades" might be willing to read this delicate statement without researching its exact meaning. However, Webster's Dictionary defines vestige (used in biology, which relates neatly with the doctor) as "a degenerate, atrophied, or rudimentary organ or part, more fully developed or functional in earlier stages of development of the individual." Notice, also, the capitalization of "the General" and "Place DuPuy" suggesting the Platonic philosophy of immortal ideals such as Truth and Beauty.

The line enjambments in canto four allow relief from the previous prose style. They obviously are reflective of meaning. The dependence of "the imagined/ on the real" is central to the entire poem and suggests the theme of the following canto. Thus, the origin of change comes from this interrelation. Juxtaposition of "day and night," "winter and spring," "music and silence" and so on, bombards the reader, forcing him to eventually see the opposites as "two lovers that walk away as one of the greenest body." This is the essence of the poem. The reader must become involved. "The partaker partakes of that which changes him." The change is "as it is known and experienced by a self, not change as an inherent law of nature."¹⁸

The development of It Must Give Pleasure is particularly concerned with the self-conscious man. It is relatively imagistic and suggestive of underlying meaning. This section actually accords more pleasure in reading than the previous two. Riddel states that the first two sections are abstracts to this third,¹⁹ which is reflective of the combination of thought and man, or the "abstraction blooded."

Brown takes a rare approach to Stevens and discusses the first canto in this section with concern for metrical count and rhythm. Jerome states that the use of an anapestic meter tends to imply looseness.²⁰ Thus, the predominate anapests of the first seven lines²¹ and the generally free flowing

rhythm tend to support meaning. The "common" sings forth the "gibberish of the vulgate." The parallel constructions are effective in building up speed which falls with the abrupt: "This is facile exercise."²²

The next six lines switch to a tighter iambic beat. Brown suggests this "tight lipped" style is related to the poetry of pagantry.²³ The sentence construction is an object inversion which may support this idea.

Brown reads the final lines as a combination of anapests and iambs, illustrative of the final stage in dialectical progression. It is constructed of previous parts and becomes a complete entity in itself. However, this is the most difficult as implied by the word "difficullest," which is the hardest word in the poem to pronounce.²⁴ Also included is a combination of parallel and inverted constructions, again resulting from the dialectical movement. This final section is characterized by a rhythm and meter conflict.

The last line, suggesting reason, is extremely flat and final. Thus, as Brown states, "The dialectical experienced is not like a rational dialectic. It is that irrational. . . experienced with feeling that is more rational than reason."²⁵ This section "captures the essential movement in the whole of Notes."²⁶

The dialectical motion and the concluding combination is openly stated in the sixth canto when Canon Aspirin is

forced to make the choice of "excluding things." "He chose to include the things/ That in each other are included, the whole,/ The complicate, the amassing harmony." This need for harmony is continually examined throughout the poem. Each particular entity can find the "necessary fiction" from effective interrelations, such as Canon's relative position to his realistic, minimal sister.

The final canto in Notes is probably the most widely discussed and creates diverse opinion concerning the entire poem itself. The punctuation, particularly commas, causes great ambiguity. Some of the words can be taken in quite opposite ways. However, as stated previously, this is Stevens' exact intent.

The image of "Fat Girl" in the first line implies a lush, somewhat over-extended world. The Stevenesque concepts of summer and night parallel this idea. However, the "living changingness" of the seasons, weather and many other factors tend to keep the fat girl in "moving contour." It is not mere repetition; it is always a "change not quite completed."

The tree is at once a sexual symbol, implying union and "fixity."²⁷ The impulsion to name and classify is seen in the very first canto of Notes. The intellect has a need to categorize, which ultimately falsifies reality. The fat girl in "moving contour" defies permanent and man-like statues. Thus, man has the compulsion to impose order upon her, not "to discover." The lining of the third tercet is indicative of

meaning, with the attempt to hold the fat girl between the two lines.

The juxtaposition of thoughts: strong/tired, anxious/content defies a single, rigid name. The only result of this attempt in classification is that the fat girl remains more than natural, as a combination of all states and conditions. The significance in these lines lies in the verbs. She remains the "more than natural figure," as a result of the attempted naming. Thus, she becomes, in the mind of the poet, the "soft-footed phantom." In other words, because she denies fixed contour and checked evasions, she becomes the metaphor of a phantom in the poet's mind. In this "moving contour," she has no single physical existence but is a combination or harmony of all.

This phantom is an irrational distortion of the image, fat girl. However, it is from this that the poet derives the final affirmation of the poem. "That's it: the more than rational distortion/ The fiction that results from feeling." Thus, the irrational becomes more than rational. Stevens insists that the harmony between the human consciousness and the world and its conception in the mind is the only true reality. Ciardi emphasizes Stevens' "refusal to be a salesman and platform stumper for his poems and rather more of his absolute insistence that imagination is more 'real' than reality."²⁸

The anticlimactic tercets following refer to all the "monastic men" and "philosophers" at their intellectual "academies":

They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne
 We shall return at twilight from the lecture
 Pleased that the irrational is rational,

Until flecked by feeling in a gilded street,
 I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo
 You will have stopped revolving except in crystal.

The difficulty is mainly with the one comma at the end of the first tercet. The conclusion depends on interpretation of that statement which overlaps in each section.

A delineation of lining tends to clarify the direction. Man's intellects at the academy (attempting to dominate and impose order) will someday satisfy themselves that they have reduced the irrational to the rational, "waste[d] no words." Man will return at twilight, a time for phantoms and the free imagination, contented with this logical deduction until suddenly "flicked by feeling." Basic reason and rationale deny feeling and emotion. The major man of canto nine in It Must Be Abstract comes from reason but is "purest in the heart."

The sudden flick of feeling insists that the poet call his "fluent mundo." As a result of the recent conclusion, he impulsively feels he can name his "fat girl." However, she "will have stopped revolving except in crystal."

Because of the negative connotation given to the results of the Sorbonne meeting, I read this last statement, also,

with a negative slant. The future tense suggests that the "mundo will have stopped revolving" only as a direct result of this "lecture." However, regardless of how one views the final statement, the word crystal has a conglomeration of opposite meanings in relation to the poem.

As a result of general development in the poem and the insistence on the harmony between human intellect and human emotions, I am convinced that the mundo is crystal is man's attempt to capture, artificialize and assign to "apartments" the "green [and] fluent mundo." Fiction "results from feeling;" and if, until this time, the Sorbonne men have not been "flicked by feeling" then either the old fictions or no fiction exists except a manmade, handcrafted synthetic. "In a world without change it is possible to be completely rational. Devoid of happiness and unhappiness, the only feeling one could have is to know, and though this might be bliss for angels, it would not be bliss for men whose irrationality is the sources of their deepest feelings."²⁸

It is unfortunate that Stevens chose to continue with an aftermath. The poem is almost a brief synopsis of Notes, including the tension of opposites, movement toward unity, religious imagery, blooded poetry and desire for harmony. Its significance lies in its relation to Notes' initial lines concluding, "The vivid transperence that you bring is peace." However, although it deserves merit as a separate poem, it detracts from the intense realization made in the preceding canto.

...and there I found myself more truly and more strange.*

...and there I found myself more truly and more strange.*

...and there I found myself more truly and more strange.*

...and there I found myself more truly and more strange.*

Ordinary man or ordinary critic feels a strong compulsion to inflict his particular order on the object of his perception. The critical arrangement of Stevens into the realist or romantic idealist "apartment" is reflective of this tendency. "But to impose is not to discover."

Freedman defines the essence of Romantic idealist as a "passive experiencer who takes in objects or sensations from the external world and remolds them into a more universal vision."¹ In contrast, he portrays the realistic observer as one who "sees the object as distinct from self, as something external with which the self must come to terms."² However, the dialectical movement between these two opposites results in the approaching synthesis of Stevens' self-conscious mind.

Stevens considered the pure romantic as one practicing "minor wish fulfillment" which he suggests relates to true imagination, as sentimentality relates to feeling."³ Conversely, the realist, by way of Freedman's definition, verges on an attempt to conquer the object or at least implies a confrontation with a somewhat opposing force. Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction reveals an artist who is conscious of his relative position among men and the natural environment. He does not try to force meaningless societal contraptions upon the natural order. Social reality is a "dull burden. . . bloodless, sexless, a function of the mechanized abstraction of modern industrial society, a rational catastrophe."⁴ He is, however, intent on

a participating discovery in the outside world effecting an acute awareness within himself. The resulting fictions based on the reality of earthly life infused with human emotions and imagination are the fruits of initial perception.

"Without self-consciousness there is no poetry, no need for the fiction which marries self with world."⁵ Consequently, the artist's desire for an exploration and final assertion of this essential ego is the underlying element from which Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction originates. However, it is not a poem containing didactic and unalterable conclusions, which would be entirely contrary to its basic assumptions. Rather, it pulsates with the candid projection of a human mind in the "act of finding what will suffice." The internal technique of using initial question and answer as a leaven for ensuing query defies critical reduction into thematic resolutions. The critics who side with either a reflective or energetic Stevens assert that his later poetry displays no sign of development but mere change from the earlier style. However, the development, as evidenced in Notes, "lies in neither his ideas as such, nor in basic stylistic changes, but in the inner life of a changing and aging sensibility."⁶

Like the realist, the artist perceives a reality totally independent of the "inverting mind." However, instead of attempting oppression and prevailing "against the first idea," the poet extols it as a necessary and vital source of the resulting fiction. Contained in these initial thoughts is

the first rhetorical question, "May there be an ennui of the first idea?" This serves as springboard for an examination of cyclic movement, which will be canvassed in a later section.

The use of the word "us" in "sends us back to the first idea" suggests the inclusion of ephebe, teacher, poet, and ordinary man together in the effort to perceive "the hermit is a poet's metaphors." Thus, the poet initially finds himself included with and similar to overall humanity. "Life's nonsense pierces us with strange relation" continues this awareness and incorporates yet another technique which parallels the question/answer construction. The placement and wording of this line implies unpremeditated revelation, as if the poet had haphazardly selected three separate examples in his experiential world and suddenly realized, along with the reader, their "strange relation."

Awareness of humanity's relative position resulting in proclamation of our universal plight is expressed in "we live in a place/ That is not our own, and much more, not ourselves." The poet is building an acute cognizance of the need for poetry. This is the seed for the creation of the man-hero, one who will be sensitive to the plain reality and changing desires of ordinary man and who will "confect/ the final elegance, not to console/ Nor sanctify, but plainly to propound." Thus, the poet has realized in his search for the first idea that it "was not our own" and that man, and not reality, is "mimic" or "mirror."

The analogy, in section two, of man's creative movement to seasonal nature foreshadows the parallel development of the beasts and "ephebe." The poet sees relation in the instinctual reactions of the animals and the human response bred against the first abstraction, thus deprived of the underlying necessity for poetic creation. Noticeable increase in the tension from "Roars--blares--snarls--and press[es] bitter utterance," results in the reader's sensation of being "cowed." The poet discovers association between the animals who react violently to their environmental realities and man who reacts to the conglomerate by imposing unnatural orders upon these same beasts.

Observing the obvious struggle between abstract theorizing and its representation in reality, the reader becomes aware of the synthesis of both elements in the mind. Even the lining in section six combines thoughts based on both the tangible and the abstract. This dialectical movement is supported in the Letters of Wallace Stevens: "The more exquisite the thing seen, the more exquisite the thing unseen."⁷ Consequently, the poet lays the initial foundation for the necessary myth. Unlike ordinary man who is unaware of his imitations and imposes himself upon the world, the poet, who because of his self-consciousness sees beyond observable reality, incorporates the "first idea" into his very existence. He is able to conceive a fiction that is abstract and yet extremely alive and implicitly involved in "the fragrance of magnolias": "an abstraction blooded." "Ordinary men impose orders according to their

desires, the poet discovers orders out of his desire, his love."⁸ Thus, the separately developing entity of poet emerges.

The creation of a major man, as mentioned earlier, becomes an actuality with "he that reposes on a breast forever precious for that touch." This constitutes the final severance of poet and the "man/ In that old coat. . .". However, it is of and for that man that the poet will create.

The ordinary men of "It Must Change" including the seraph, the President and General DuPuy (representing the minds that built him) are obsessed with permanence. Change, however, can only be perceived by the observer. In other words, the bee is merely "resuming" according to the seraph (who can imagine only old myths such as satyr) and the President (who believes in immortality); but to the poet and to us, who feel "distaste. . .for this withered scene," the bee is "beginning, not resuming." Consequently, the dialectic between opposites ultimately becomes important in that change is dependent on the kinetic interaction. "The partaker partakes of that which changes him." Contrasting the initial tone of mere suggestion, we again sense the development of thought in the concluding statements. The consciousness then drifts to the supporting example of the planter.

The consideration of change, the bombastic president, General DuPuy, and the antiquated seraph who resist such motion anticipates the idea of immortality. But the result

of the sparrow's cry (symbolic of stale religion) asserts an "earth in which the first leaf is the tale/ of leaves." Consequently, the poet propounds the constantly changing "accessible bliss." The devotion to an idea of immortality denies feeling and life: "We have not the need of any paradise." Our "immortality" is the constant "fictive covering/ [that] weaves always glistening from the heart and mind." The only constancy is the basic human need to perceive and harmonize with reality satisfied by the enduring capacity to create continuously changing myths.

The poet moves from this conclusion to the necessary focus on the man hero--one who creates these myths. One may read the ninth section in its "peculiar," taking the poetic language discussion literally, or in its "general," metaphorically relating it to the dialectical synthesis of two opposites--possibly the abstract and reality. The rhetorical question again reveals the mind moving from a flick of thought to a forming question resulting in a subsequent answer which will ignite yet another thought. The ultimate synthesis:

To compound the imagination's Latin with
The lingua franca et jocundissima.

suggests the experience of one object taking "character." The parallel grammatical structure and lining intensifies the sense of oneness from this combination.

Thus the conscious need of the poet has moved from an attempted perception of the first idea (recognition of its function in poetry and ultimate cause of man's need for poetry) to an analysis of the different reactions of animal, ordinary man and man hero revealed in relation to this first idea. Concluding that the man-hero incorporates both concrete and abstract, imagination and reality, the poet becomes an "exponent" of the "idea of man." The discovery of the artist who will create the myth ultimately allows reflection on the myth itself. The basic assumption of change is proven by disgustingly vapid scenes and exhilaration in the motion and continual transformation of opposites. Thus, man's accessible bliss is an earthly paradise and his immortality rests in the constant creation of fiction. Because the poet must "propound" the ordinary man and because the language must be a fusion of both, the contrasting entities of man-hero and man begin to harmonize once more.

The final section, "It Must Give Pleasure," focuses on the sensitivity and vitality of man. Old customs are no longer meaningful because they elicit no emotion. Religion, particularly, is based on an ideal above and beyond man's experience. The self denial of Canon Aspirin's sister and devotion to the "lasting visage" or the Angel negates the incessant change and pleasurable myth intrinsic to man's existence. "The puritanism . . . forbids response to things as they are--a morality which denies that earth is the place for beauty and for happiness."⁹ If we can make an earthly paradise ("accessible bliss") then "there will be no gulf between the human and divine."¹⁰ The

poet comes to this logic in the eighth section when he asks, "Am I that imagine this angel less satisfied?"

The poet's contemplations jump from the "accustomed jubilas" to "irrational moments" which lead into the "blue woman" who contrasts the "lasting visage" of section three. The "irrational moment" like the photographer's picture snatched, without measure, on the stimulus of sense, may be reasoned about "with a later reason." The marriage in Catawba is reflective of this assumption.

Resulting from the marriage and Canon Aspirin's inclusion of the "complicate, the amassing harmony," the poet shifts into questions of possible discovery of the abstract, the actual first idea. If the "real will from its crude compoundings come," it could be "stripped of every fiction [which Nanzia attempted] except one/ the fiction of an absolute. . ." The juxtaposition of this phrase with "Angel" impels the probing mind, however, to restrain the Angel image it has just created. The crux of the poet's self-consciousness is asserted in the resulting consideration. Questioning the capacity of man to experience fully the projected bliss, he concludes:

There is a month, a year, there is a time
In which majesty is a mirror of the self.
I have not but I am and as I am, I am.

Filling "these external regions. . .with reflections" of ourselves, we may deduce that the "origin of self-consciousness was the birth of the imagination."¹¹

The final awareness of his relation with the "fat girl" concludes, "for a moment," the act of self-discovery. The

earth still evades him and defies a completely rational explanation. However, the tone of the poem itself resists total rationality beginning affectionately with "my summer, my night" and continuing with thoughts "swaddled in revery." The attempts to consider her with a single label or in a particular condition evoke only opposite ideas. Thus, she is a "more than natural figure." The poet's mind takes the essence of what she is and metaphorically perceives her as a "soft footed phantom." The image is based in reality and yet is a distortion of that reality, resulting from man's conscious mind, incorporating the basic facts with rational thought and human sensitivity. The poet's recognition of his particular need for poetry is evidenced in the final impulse to reunite with his "fluent, mundo."

Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction reveals the self-consciousness of the poet and his discovered relationship with man, animals, earthly reality and abstract ideas. However, a poem of this sort cannot merely be "observed, it must be participated in."¹² Therefore, the suffusion of poet with reader and the throbbing motion between the lines result in a mutual "self-consciousness which paradoxically alienates us from the world and drives us back to it."¹³

The dialectical movement is the most outstanding and continuous characteristic of Stevens' style and philosophy. He was unconcerned with the poles themselves as evidenced by Canon Aspirin's choice:

. . .a point

Beyond which thought cannot progress as thought.
He had to choose. But it was not a choice
Between excluding things. It was not a choice

Between, but of.

Rather, the perpetual oscillation between the poles was the phenomena to which he addressed himself. The fallacy of critics who reduce his poetry to the simple relation between imagination and reality is the failure to discern the three-dimensional picture. A simple appraisal of the poem provides the awareness of opposing positions represented by: candor/plural; first idea/metaphors; winter/spring; mimics/pedagogues; animal/man; visible/invisible; major man/man; old/new; day/night; and numerous other images. Cemented in the flux between these terminal points is the self-consciousness of the poet and the reader. Therefore, it seems elementary, insulting and absurd to demote Stevens' wide poetic activity and superior technical accomplishments to a single theme. On the other hand, though aware of the many variations and relationships implied within Notes, some critics are confused with the overall idea of dialectical movement. They approach Notes with the title of the particular volume and other poems still ringing in their ears. Thus, they are confused when certain ideas and techniques seem to negate earlier seasonal and cyclic movement.

Although it may seem irrelevant whether Stevens saw the creative imagination as revolving around or moving between two opposing points, there is a significant difference. Stevens observed in the natural world a predisposition for cycles. He may have even considered a single human life as reflective of these stages--an innuendo suggested by the arrangement, titles, and general subject matter of specific volumes in Collected Poems. However, though the organic aspect of human life corresponds directly to natural patterns, the human consciousness and imagination is relatively independent of cycles. Within the seasonal movement, the poet finds himself either drifting toward or away from a particular pole. Although the typical reaction might be: "Well, winter is symbolic of reality," the valid reply is that unlike life which eventually terminates in death (thus attaining and ultimately constituting the poles themselves), the creating mind never actually arrives at the point of pure imagination or vice versa. The first is impossible even to conceive and the latter might be an earth, without any living organism. Thus, within the natural cyclic framework, the poet's consciousness moves between two poles. Stevens' analogy of creating a fiction and seasonal change applies as long as winter and summer are seen as unattainable ends and spring and autumn as variations of the relative positions between the two. It is significant that he perceives the biological properties of human life as cyclic and the development of the sensitive intellect on a shifting linear plane, exhibiting continual change, inherent motion,

and persistent "beginning, not resuming." The perfect circle in contrast to the volatile line constitutes another dialectic order.

One of the most obvious movements in Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction is revealed in the single/plural interplay. Merle E. Brwon discusses these dynamics in her article, "Concordia Discors in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens."¹ She examines the first section of Notes extracting the relevant images. In essence, the sun is the "ever early candor" which, as the first idea, becomes "the hermit in a poet's metaphors." The priest, monk and philosopher concentrate on oneness, but find no satisfaction.² The multiplicity of the three examples in section three and the derivation into oneness of sound are reflective of the underlying "candor" in relative instances of "late plural." This is an elaborated illustration of the initial "hermit!"

The principal importance of this number motif is suggested in section four. Ordinary man (Eve) attempts to become one with the world, but her method involves making "air the mirror of herself." As already mentioned, this imposition of human order is unnatural in "a place/ that is not our own and, much more, not ourselves." Therefore, there are two implications in this movement between singularity and plurality. The initial oneness is a manifestation of the first idea. However, man applies human accretions to this clear beginning which eventually weights and debilitates the power of the

primary candor. Subsequently, the multiple names and metaphors ascribed must be sloughed. This includes Stevens' concept of poverty (refer to Snow Man). It exists when one "knows that it has what is not" and continues until the myth is thrown "away like a thing of another time." This kinetic action between the first idea and subsequent "ravishments of truth" is reflected in Stevens' Letters. If you take the varnish and dirt of generations off a picture, you see it in its first idea." This essential cleansing is "not so much because they [metaphors] are new, and we are tired of the old, but because the old cease to convey a physical thing and become abstract counters." One of the best poverty images with cross references to other ideas is contained within Notes itself in the portrait of the man in "slouching pantaloons."

The techniques employed to convey intrinsic motion and awareness of opposite attraction are basically line enjambment, word selection, placement and juxtaposition. Word selection implying the sensation of numbers is subtly suggested by the word "notes" and openly asserted in the discussion of major man as an exponent to the "idea of man." Movement is most overt in stanza four which begins: "Two things of opposite nature seem to depend/ on one another."

Stevens believes that the union of opposites resulted in change, necessary to the creation and re-creation of essential

myths. The interaction between mind and world is the underlying factor in discovery of a self and creation of a fiction. Unlike ordinary man, the poet desires harmony with the environment and reality, not identical "oneness." The general search in the Collected Poems is in answer to this implicit desire. Even in Notes the poet is still trying to convince himself that there could possibly be a time in which one would "discover winter and know it well....out of nothing to have come on major weather." However, the dependence on man makes this impossible.

Man and his environment are inter-dependent in the final synthesis of the necessary fiction. Therefore, some type of harmony and not conquest or confrontation would be desirable. Hopper's definition of a harmonium: "a small keyboard organ in which the tones are produced by forcing air through metal reeds by means of bellows operated by pedals"⁵ is interesting in this respect. Stevens saw major man as the implementation of fictions through the combination of his experiences and discoveries in the outside world coupled with his internal sensitivity and perception. Thus, major man channels the air through the harmonium producing necessary music. The implications and overtones within the poem are manifold, the most obvious being the title itself. It is understandable that Stevens desired to call the Collected Poems the Whole of Harmonium.⁶

The continuing battle between critics as to what the crystal symbolizes and if there is such a thing as a supreme fiction will probably have substantial fuel as long as Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction is available. This was Stevens' ultimate premeditated technique. Each new reading should resound in previously obscured ideas and technical methods. The complete involvement of the reader's self-conscious mind should continually allow for the creation of new myths that will be abstract, will constantly change, and will give extreme pleasure. "Let us think about it and not say that our abstraction is this, that, or the other." ⁷ The attempt to classify and define, thus sentencing eventual stagnation, will surely asphyxiate the life and vitality of the poem itself.

FOOTNOTES

I. Introduction

- 1
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- 2
Frank Kermode, Wallace Stevens (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), p.44.
- 3
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- 4
Ibid., p.381.
- 5
Ibid., p.383.
- 6
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- 7
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- 8
Daniel Fuchs, The Comic Spirit of Wallace Stevens (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1963), p.106.
- 9
J.N. Riddel, The Clairvoyant Eye (Louisiana: LSU Press, 1965), p.11.
- 10
Stevens, Collected Poems, p.385.
- 11
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- 12
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- 13
Ibid., p.380.

FOOTNOTES (cont.)

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- 1
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- 2
Richard Macksey, "The Climate of Wallace Stevens," The Act of the Mind, ed. R.H. Pearce and J.H. Miller (Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p.20.
- 3
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- 4
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- 5
Kermode, p.32.
- 6
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- 7
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- 8
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- 9
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- 11
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FOOTNOTES (cont.)

13

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15

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16

M.E.Brown, Wallace Stevens: The Poem as Act (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), p.55.

17

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18

Kermode, p.87.

III. Critical Discussion

A. "The horse is covered with mice."

1

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2

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3

Blessing, p.116.

4

Marius Bewley, Masks and Mirrors (New York: Athenum, 1970), p.274.

5

Kermode, p.92.

FOOTNOTES (Cont.)

- 6
Wallace Stevens, Opus Posthumous, ed. Samuel Morse (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 162.
7.
Stevens, Necessary Angel, p. 31.
- B. "...the finding of an abstraction..."
- 1
Brown, Wallace Stevens, p. 122.
- 2
Stevens, Opus Posthumous, p. 177.
- 3
Stanley Hopper, "Wallace Stevens: The Sundry Comforts of the Sun," Four Ways of Modern Poetry, ed. Nathan Scott, Jr. (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1965), p. 17.
- 4
Stevens, Letters, p. 341.
- 5
Kermode, p. 111.
- 6
Riddel, p. 169.
- 7
Ronald Sukenick, Wallace Stevens: Musing the Obscure (New York: NYU Press, 1967), p. 140.
- 8
Riddel, p. 167.
- 9
Ibid., p. 172.

FOOTNOTES (Cont.)

- 10
Judson Jerome, Poetry: Premeditated Art (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968), p. 42.
- 11
Stevens, Letters, p. 434.
- 12
Ralph Freedman, "Wallace Stevens and R.M.Rilke: Two Versions of a Poetic," The Poet as Critic, ed. F.P.W.Mcdowell (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 64.
- 13
Robert Pack, Wallace Stevens: An Approach to his Poetry and Thought (New York: Gordian Press, 1968), p.194.
- 14
Kermode, p. 74.
- 15
Stevens, Necessary Angel, p. 138.
- 16
Fuchs, p. 65.
- 17
Jerome, p. 44.
- 18
Riddel, p. 176.
- 19
Ibid., p. 176.
- 20
Jerome. p. 81
- 21
Brown, Wallace Stevens, p. 128.
- 22
Ibid., p. 130.
- 23
Ibid.,p. 130.

FOOTNOTES (cont.)

24

Ibid., p. 129.

25

Ibid., p. 132.

26

Stevens, Letters, p. 444.

27

John Ciardi, "Absolute Music", Nation, 179(1954), p. 346.

28

Pack, p. 76.

C. "...and there I found myself more truly and more strange."

1

Freedman, p. 65.

2

Ibid., p. 65.

3

Ibid., p. 65.

4

Fuchs, 96.

5

Riddel, p. 171.

6

Ibid., p. 5.

7

Stevens, Letters, p. 444.

8

Brown, Wallace Stevens, p. 112.

9

Fuchs, p. 80.

10

Kermode, p. 42

FOOTNOTES (cont.)

11
Riddel, p. 171.

12
Brown, Wallace Stevens, p. 17.

13
Riddel, p. 184.

D. "...nothing that is not there and the nothing that is."

1
M.E. Brown, "Concordia Discors in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens,"

American Literature, 34 (1962), p. 247.

2
Ibid., p. 248.

3
Stevens, Letters, p. 427.

4
Fuchs, p. 26.

5
Hopper, p. 93.

6
Blessing, p. 142.

7
Stevens, Letters, p. 438.

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New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969.
- Stevens, Wallace. Letters of Wallace Stevens, ed. Holly Stevens.
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970.
- Stevens, Wallace. Opus Posthumous, ed. Samuel Morse. New York:
Alfred A. Knopf, 1957.
- Stevens, Wallace. The Necessary Angel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf,
1942.

A BRIEF ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF SECONDARY SOURCES

- Bewley, Marius. Masks and Mirrors. New York: Athenum, 1970.
Examines the romantic tradition and how it is exemplified
in Stevens. Stevens would object to this treatment, but
Bewley does raise a few significant points. Good for one who
is contemplating a study in the classification of Stevens.
- Bewley, Marius. "The Poetry of Wallace Stevens!" The Achievement
of Wallace Stevens, ed. Ashley Brown and R.S. Haller. New York:
J.P. Lippencott, 1962.
Points out the relation of Stevens' early and late poetry.
Particularly useful in discussion of Bantams in Pine Woods.

Blessing, Richard A. Wallace Stevens' Whole Harmonium.

New York: Syracuse University Press, 1970.

Considers Stevens' poems and volumes chronologically. More concerned with position and relationship. No deep discussion of individual poems, but continual cross reference to similar images and themes. Not recommended for in-depth study, but does bring major criticisms together for an overall viewing.

Brown, M.E. Wallace Stevens: The Poem as Act. Detroit:

Wayne State University Press, 1970.

One of the best and most recent books out on Stevens. Treats poetry with very few preconceived notions. Gives thoughtful analyses, particularly of long poems. Some excellent discussions of technique.

Brown, M.E. "Concordia Discors in the Poetry of Wallace

Stevens." American Literature, 34 (1962), 246-269.

Applies the thesis that Stevens believed in a need for exceptional man and ordinary man to live in harmony. Discusses Blue Guitar, Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction, and An Ordinary Evening in New Haven. Extremely well handled.

Buchwald, Emilie. "Wallace Stevens: The Delicatest Eye

of the Mind." American Quarterly, 14 (1962), 185-96.

Relates Stevens poetry to painting, as he did himself. Cites prose and poetry to support ideas. Particularly concerned with use of color.

Burney, William. Wallace Stevens. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968.

A simplistic exercise in paraphrasing; might be used for insight into surface direction of poems, but seems to lack insight.

Buttel, Robert. Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967.

Discussion of various poems given, but primarily biographical. Suggests influences and setting in which Stevens was creating. Limited worth for an understanding of the poetry.

Ciardi, John. "Absolute Music!" Nation, 179 (1954), 346-7.

Short, somewhat sketchy article. Brief mention of Bantams in Pine Woods.

Clough, W.O. "Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction." The Explicator, 28 (1969), 24.

Short discussion of a particular section of Notes, IIIIII. Not necessary for an understanding.

Doggett, Frank. Stevens' Poetry and Thought. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966.

Delves very deeply into Steven's ideas and philosophies, however tends to obscure technique and bog down the lively

essence of his poetry. Boring. Frequently misses the point.

Eder, Doris. "A Review of Criticism to Date." Twentieth Century Literature, 15 (1969), 3-18.

An outline of the major books and articles written on Stevens' poetry. Valuable as a reference point, including each work and what it contains.

Enck, John J. Wallace Stevens: Images and Judgments.

Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964.

Chronological glimpse of poems. Lacks any significant discussion of technique or style. Relatively poor in discussion of poems, trying to cover too many and tying together too neatly.

Freedman, Ralph. "Wallace Stevens and R.M. Rilke: Two Versions of a Poetic." The Poet as Critic, ed. F.P.W. McDowell, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967.

Examines Stevens as a philosophical poet. Attempts to construct the Stevensesque aesthetic. However, the short length of the study limits the depth reached.

Fuchs, Daniel. The Comic Spirit of Wallace Stevens. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1963.

Approaches the poet through the medium of irony and wit. Discusses Comedian as the Letter C in depth, but includes

many other supporting poems. Interesting and a definite must for a particular concept of style and tone.

Hammond, Mac. "On the Grammar of Wallace Stevens." The Act of the Mind, ed. R.H.Pearce and J.H.Miller. Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965.

Discussion of a particular poem in Man With the Blue Guitar. Concerned with the grammar, rhetoric and syntactical structure. Very specific.

Hoffman, F.J. The Twenties. New York: The Free Press, 1949.

A brief look at Stevens, discussing Sunday Morning and Comedian as the Letter C. Directed at Stevens' attempt to define the world and his place in it. Stevens is discussed along with Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams. Interesting, but not particularly significant.

Hopper, Stanley. "Wallace Stevens: The Sundry Comforts of the Sun." Four Ways of Modern Poetry, ed. Nathan Scott, Jr.

Virginia: John Knox Press, 1965.

A quick look at Stevens, examines themes, particularly. Might be useful for some extra tidbits of information; certainly not necessary.

Jarrell, Randall. The Third Book of Criticism. New York:

Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1941.

Helpful only for a study of the final poems in The Rock.
An extension of earlier Jarrell criticisms discussing
previous poems. Includes a list of the poems Jarrell feels
excel above the others.

Kermode, Frank. Wallace Stevens. London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960.

An excellent introduction to Stevens. Approaches a
simplistic explanation, but gives far deeper insight than
Pack's book. Good piece to consult immediately after
reading the Collected Poems.

Lensing, George. "Wallace Stevens and the State of Winter

Simplicity." The Southern Review, 7 (1971), 765-78.

Stevens' act of perception and the concept of the human
mind in conjunction with reality is discussed with selected
poems from the entire collection. The idea of nothingness
is fully explained, however article rests heavily on past
critical comment and is not essential to an in-depth study.

Lentricchia, Frank. The Gaity of Language. Berkeley: University

of California Press, 1968.

Overly interested in proving Stevens to be of naturalistic
rather than romantic origin. Discussion of poems that

seemingly fit this thesis. However, does give some basic ideas of French symbolist, Imagist and Romantic concepts.

Macksey, Richard A. "The Climates of Wallace Stevens."

The Act of the Mind, ed. R.H.Pearce and J.H.Miller.

Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965.

Examines very briefly the relationship of the changing environment and weather to the perceiving eye in Stevens' poetry. Discusses four poems in detail. Limited in scope, tends toward simplicity.

Martz, Louis. "Wallace Stevens: The World as Meditation."

Yale Review, 67 (1958), 517-36.

Examines some of the final poetry in The Rock and Auroras of Autumn. Concerned with the development of Stevens' thoughts. Philosophically based.

McMichael, James. "The Wallace Stevens' Vulgates." The Southern

Review, 7 (1971), 699-727.

Discussion of selected Harmonium poems, focusing on the dialectic movement between imagination (language, metaphor) and reality. McMichael states that later volumes "merely describe" the dialectic.

Moore, Marianne. "Well Moused Lion." The Achievement of Wallace Stevens, ed. Ashely Brown and Robert Haller. New York: J.P.Lippencott Co., 1962.

A very brief look at method in Stevens' poetry. Somewhat disorganized.

Pack, Robert. Wallace Stevens: An Approach to his Poetry and Thought. New York: Gordian Press, 1968.

Extremely simplistic, verging on formula criticism. However, some statements regarding a particular poem are important as basic root for expanded thought. Personal, almost conversational, style.

Riddel, J.N. The Clairvoyant Eye. Louisiana: LSU Press, 1965.

Embodies technique, meaning and overall philosophy. Directs discussion to long poems, about which small poems cluster. Well written. However, tends to obscure individual poems in the effort to produce a continuous whole. Concerned basically with Stevens' self-awareness.

Stern, H.J. Wallace Stevens: Art of Uncertainty. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1966.

Sets out to prove Stevens' philosophical bent, which is really nothin new. Attempts to examine Stevens under all his labels (hedonist, humanist, etc.). Although discussion of the poems is extremely limited and worthless to a conclusive study, the biographical slant adds something to a concept of Stevens as man.

Sukenick, Ronald. Wallace Stevens: Musing the Obscure.

New York: NYU Press, 1967.

An attempt to create a "guide" to Stevens poetry. Goes so far as to list "common" symbols and phrases, giving a one sentence explanation. Reader is to apply the explication of the foreign words to the poetry and it will all quickly become elucidated. Written from a psychological viewpoint. Almost complete paraphrase.

Vendler, Helen V. On Extended Wings. Massachusetts: Harvard

University Press, 1969.

Concerned basically with style, discussing the long poems. Deals with small details of poem, sometime to the exclusion of overall movement or any relevant meaning. Discusses rhetoric at length. Somewhat repetitious but useful as an introduction to a relatively opposite approach. Basically unconcerned with philosophies.

Vendler, Helen V. "Wallace Stevens: The False and True Sublime."

The Southern Review, 7 (1971), 683-99.

A scrutiny of conflicting ideas incorporated in Stevens' philosophy: the sublime and not sublime and the two forms of the sublime (the received and new). Particularly useful in consideration of the "crystal" in Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction.

Wells, H.W. Introduction to Wallace Stevens. Indiana:

Indiana University Press, 1964.

Approaches Stevens with uncluttered eye, rejects idea of classification. Includes technique and meaning in discussion. Helpful as a first foundation.

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Jerome, Judson. Poetry: Premeditated Art. Boston: Houghton

Mifflin Co., 1968.

Linenthal, Mark. Aspects of Poetry. Boston: Little, Brown

and Co., 1963.