

1973

## Reaffirmation in the Last Poems of Stevens and Yeats

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### Recommended Citation

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<https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-ch6a-cq63>

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REAFFIRMATION IN THE  
//  
LAST POEMS OF STEVENS AND YEATS

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A Thesis

Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of English  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by  
Gael Monie O'Brien

1973

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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REAFFIRMATION IN THE  
LAST POEMS OF STEVENS AND YEATS

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to compare the intensification of affirmation, the reaffirmation, expressed in Wallace Stevens's The Rock (1954) and William Butler Yeats's Last Poems (1940). Stevens, in The Rock, and Yeats, in Last Poems, confront reality directly and in these last poems, more completely than in either poet's earlier work, the effects of reduction are considered simultaneously with Stevens's and Yeats's respective desires for renewal.

Stevens sought to get to the base of thought in The Rock and Yeats attempted to reach the root of passion in Last Poems. Stevens achieved his intention through the "intensest rendezvous" which represented the fusion of imagination and reality. For Yeats, passionate intensity climaxed in the synthesis of tragedy and joy. The "intensest rendezvous" and "tragic joy" serve as the primary vehicles through which the nature of reaffirmation declares itself in the last poems.

The poems discussed in the first section of the paper were written in the respective decade prior to The Rock and Last Poems. These poems serve as a preliminary to the consideration of reaffirmation in the last poems. The poems selected from these antecedent periods deal with the process of stripping-away in order to face naked reality. Stevens's "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," "In a Bad Time," and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" and Yeats's "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop," and "Meru" will briefly be discussed.

Section two, the consideration of The Rock and Last Poems, treats the intensification of affirmation that occurs after the antecedent poems have dealt so comprehensively with reduction and stripping-away. In The Rock and Last Poems, the starkness of reality and human despair are both mitigated by the creative act. Stevens and Yeats, in their last poems, are renewed by the incessant energy of their imaginations and their continual reshaping of the self and their poetry.

Wallace Stevens and William Butler Yeats share the following quality: They were both poets of unaging spirit whose attitudes toward life in their last volumes of poems, Stevens's The Rock (1954) and Yeats's Last Poems (1940), demonstrated continual renewal.<sup>1</sup> The desire for renewal was made more poignant by the fact that The Rock and Last Poems were written while each poet was in his seventies and facing illness and death. The imminence of death distinguished Stevens's and Yeats's respective last volumes as both poets sought to come to closer grips with reality.

In The Rock and Last Poems, more intensely than in Stevens's and Yeats's earlier volumes, the self, without consolations, confronts the world as it is. Both poets come to terms with the nakedness of self, human isolation and impoverishment, and seek truth in a direct confrontation with stark reality. In their last poems, more completely than in their earlier books, the effects of reduction are considered simultaneously with the poets' desire for renewal; it is the spirit of reaffirmation that prevails in both last volumes.

The last poems of Stevens and Yeats, in their expression of reaffirmation, draw upon the poets' earlier attitudes of affirmation; however, in their final works, the intensification of affirmation represents a stronger, more complete and emphatic resolution of the antithesis between doubts and

beliefs--a resolution their earlier poetry was not equipped to make.

In spite of the impending threat of death present in The Rock and Last Poems, Stevens and Yeats express in their last poems an ecstatic will to create and to celebrate the life force embodied in the ever-renewing energy of their imaginations. The reaffirming of life is possible only after a confrontation with the destructive elements, as affirmation generally plays against the backdrop of a negation. When Stevens was sixty-one, in 1940, he wrote "The Well Dressed Man with a Beard"; the opening lines have relevance to Stevens's and Yeats's ultimate consideration of life and poetry:

After the final no there comes a yes  
And on that yes the future world depends.  
No was the night. Yes is this present sun.<sup>2</sup>

The "yes" resides in the power of the imagination, which is a liberating force. "Imagination is an energy of the intensest creative life," wrote Joseph Riddel, "which can free man not by giving him dominion over matter, but by sparing him from matter's dominion."<sup>3</sup> "Matter" refers here to physicality and man's mortality. Both poets celebrated the physical world, believing that the possibilities for paradise exist only on earth. However, as mutability governs earth, Stevens and Yeats had to come to terms with chaos, impermanence, and death.

There could be no one cure for all of life's anxieties, thus, throughout their poetry, Stevens and Yeats used the play of antithesis to find temporary resolutions in the

merger of opposites. Because each poet knew he was writing his final volume, the reconciliation in The Rock and Last Poems is more definitive and encompassing than in both poets' earlier works. The "intensest rendezvous" (CP, p. 524), in The Rock, representing centralness--the fusion of imagination and reality--and "tragic joy,"<sup>4</sup> in Last Poems, express the most elevating moments of synthesis that Stevens and Yeats accord to the human condition: This elevation is described by Stevens as the achievement of nobility, "that occasional ecstasy or ecstatic freedom of mind which is the poet's special privilege."<sup>5</sup> The "intensest rendezvous" and "tragic joy" serve as the primary vehicles through which the nature of affirmation declares itself in the last poems: an affirmation based on the acceptance of life's process and a strong desire to participate fully in the experience of living. Coming to terms with naked reality is the crux of this acceptance.

Stevens introduced the concept of "a mind of winter" (CP, p. 9) in an early poem, "The Snow Man" (1921). However, he does not comprehensively treat this winter vision until much later, in many of the poems written the decade prior to The Rock. While nakedness and the sense of reduction are not the only themes expressed in the works of this period, they are prevalent in many of the poems. For Yeats also, many poems written in the several years prior to Last Poems explore the process of stripping-down in order to confront reality. While no definitive patterns can be ascribed to the thought of Stevens and Yeats, it appears that a connection



exists between the expression of reduction, prevalent in many of the poems antecedent to the last volumes, and the intensification of renewal that is evident in their final poems. Therefore, several poems appropriate to the consideration of stripping-down, selected from this antecedent period, will be discussed before considering reaffirmation in the last poems: Stevens's "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (1942), "In a Bad Time" (1948), and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" (1949) and Yeats's "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" (1921), "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop" (1933), and "Meru" (1934). It is significant that by "Meru," written two years before his last poems were begun, Yeats acquired a mind of winter that closely parallels Stevens's.

I

The Rock and Last Poems culminate the late poetic development of Wallace Stevens and W. B. Yeats. The last twenty years of their respective lives, from their mid-fifties to their early seventies, represent both Stevens's and Yeats's greatest periods of literary achievements. The middle-age development of their poetry and the force of their later work serve as a strong point of comparison. Harold Bloom in Yeats writes about Yeats's period from 1900-1914:

Fourteen years of what should have been a poet's prime, roughly the years from thirty-five to near fifty, represent only about one-eighth of Yeats's

lyrical verse, though they may include rather more than a quarter of his mature life.... Except for Wallace Stevens who did not find himself, as a poet, until he was thirty-six, no important poet of this century shows so startlingly late a pattern of development. It may be no accident that these are the major poets in English, so far in this century.<sup>6</sup>

Between 1919, when Yeats was fifty-four, and his death in 1939, at seventy-three, he wrote the six major works of his career, which concluded with From a Full Moon in March (1935) and the posthumous Last Poems. From 1936, when Stevens fifty-seven, until his death nineteen years later Stevens published six major volumes, of which the last two were The Auroras of Autumn (1950) and The Rock (first published in The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens, 1954). [Stevens's poems will usually be considered in this paper before Yeats's because my thesis evolved out of the desire to consider reaffirmation in The Rock, using Yeats's Last Poems as a useful point of comparison.)

"Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" in Transport to Summer (1947) and "In a Bad Time" and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" in Auroras are not intended to summarize all Stevens's poems in the decade prior to The Rock; however, "Notes" and "Ordinary Evening," by virtue of their length and subject, address themselves to the kinds of reductions that enable man fully to realize himself and for this reason they best suit the purposes of this paper. The scope and complexity of these poems are considerable and, therefore, no attempt is made to discuss them in full, but only as they bring out ideas further developed in The Rock.

"Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" explores the characteristics of a supreme belief. In order to approach the supreme fiction, man must strip himself of anything false. Stevens wrote to Henry Church, to whom "Notes" is dedicated: "If you think about the world without its varnish and dirt, you are a thinker of the first idea."<sup>7</sup> The second stanza of section I, "It Must Be Abstract," establishes ignorance as the necessary requisite for perception: "You must become an ignorant man again/ And see the sun again with an ignorant eye...." (CP, p.380) Ignorance enables the beginning of the possibility for knowledge. The process of the poem concerns the ephebe's evolution into a thinker of the first idea, a central poet. The ephebe, a student of life and poetry, must purge perception.

The stripping-away of learned conceptions represents only one aspect of arriving at the first idea. Man must also accept his solitude in an empty heaven: "Phoebus is dead, but Phoebus was/ A name for something that could never be named." (CP, p.381) Man must accept the difficulty of being without false securities, or consolations: "...The sun/ Must bear no name, gold flourisher, but be/ In the difficulty of what it is to be." (CP, p.381)

In the last poem of "It Must Be Abstract," Stevens presents the man in the old coat and sagging pantaloons, "Looking for what was, where it used to be." (CP, p.389) The weather cloudless, man must accept the barren heaven, turning inward to find answers. The poem ends describing the man, while Stevens instructs:

It is of him, ephebe, to make, to confect  
 The final elegance, not to console  
 Nor sanctify, but plainly to propound. (CP,p.389)

The man represents human poverty: the isolation of man, his misery and total vulnerability to the thrust of reality. Stripped of false assurances, he can then approach truth. In this condition imagination flourishes: "Man's isolation allows him a royal poverty." wrote Daniel Fuchs, "From this isolation comes the imaginative vision."<sup>8</sup>

Out of his poverty, man confronts the self. Recognizing the barrenness of the self and the world, he reaches a better understanding of the world without consolations. Like the junk man in "The Man on the Dump" (1938) who rejects the trash to get at "The the," (CP,p.202) the solemn and more despairing beggar of "In a Bad Time" also cannot seek evasions, instead he

...gazes on calamity  
 And therefore he belongs to it, to bread  
 Hard found and water tasting of misery. (CP,p.426)

Spiritual poverty is as much a part of man's identity as is his ability to feel joy. Edward Kessler, in Images of Wallace Stevens, points out the similarity here to Yeats's view of man's gaining strength through this confrontation: "...man's greatest nobility results from his power to endure the barrenness, to survive the 'bad time' of his insatiable hunger for final answers."<sup>9</sup>

In poem VIII of the last section of "Notes," "It Must Give Pleasure," man determines his own role, becoming his own god: "I have not but I am and as I am, I am." (CP,p.405)

He has sought to find the real: "To be stripped of every fiction except one,/ The fiction of an absolute--Angel." (CP, p.404) He keeps his eye on the Angel of Reality while yet recognizing his own power. "The act of poetry," for Wallace Stevens, wrote Riddel, "is the act of getting at the central, not of the world but of the self, at the god unencumbered by false forms, at what it is to be."<sup>10</sup>

"An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" represents an attempt to achieve a central poem in which sight is purged to enable a fresh, clear vision, and the physical world is reduced and stripped so as to permit a rebirth. The thirty-one sections comprising the poem deal with the nature of reality as seen through the "eye's plain version," which extends the "first idea" and prepares for the perception expressed in the last poems.

"Ordinary Evening" extensively illustrates the conception of the ends and subsequent beginnings of the imagination being one. In the poem everything must be cleared away in order to see directly the new reality and to arrive at "the visibility of thought," (CP, p.488) a principle that both ends the poem and heralds the possibilities for new thought. Riddel, describing the effects of visual reductions, wrote:

As the sensuous world has disappeared, thought itself has become the poet's reality and the act of thinking his mode of belief. The process of meditation is...an act of self-creation--a freeing of the potential self into the actual movement of being. And so the poet localizes himself in New Haven on an ordinary night, discovers once again the uniqueness of himself at

this moment in this space and this time which precedes the inevitable future of nothing.<sup>11</sup>

The nothing represents being continually changing form.

The images of leaflessness, which pervade the poem, attempt to describe being: "In the area between is and was are leaves." (CP, p.474) and marks the transcendence of the imagination in which the barrenness exposed is neither despairing or an absence: "It is a coming on and a coming forth." (CP, p.487) The last two stanzas of poem XXX describe a clear winter vision and the poem ends:

It is not an empty clearness, a bottomless sight.  
It is a visibility of thought,  
In which hundreds of eyes in one mind, see at  
once. (CP, p.488)

The stripping-away in order to arrive at starkness enables the realization of the first idea; barrenness is necessary for re-creation. The "visibility of thought" occurs when imagination and reality merge. Robert Pack, discussing air, light, glass, and the winter cold, Stevens's symbols for nothingness, wrote:

The quality these images share is an apparent sparsity of physical presence. They are translucent and conducive to sight, and then to a fresh vision in the possibility of things.<sup>12</sup>

Helen Vendler argued that "Ordinary Evening" is one of Stevens's harshest experiments, setting a scene of such desolation, exhaustion, and despair that the poem cannot recover.<sup>13</sup> This argument can perhaps be answered by saying that the decreation in the poem is necessary for the possibilities of rebirth. The winter vision of the poem does not represent an ending. As Stevens wrote in "The Noble Rider":

It is one of the peculiarities of the imagination that it is always at the end of an era. What happens is that it is always attaching itself to a new reality and adhering to it. It is not that there is a new imagination but that there is a new reality. (NA,p.22)

Furthermore, Stevens wrote in an August 1950 letter when he had finished Auroras: "With this book off my mind I feel like a man coming out into the air." (L,p.690) The coming is most certainly "a coming on and a coming forth." The Rock will usher in a new level of reality in which, for Wallace Stevens, man reaches a new level of consciousness.

Stevens, in his poetry of the decade prior to The Rock, developed or extended many of his earlier ideas. However, in contrast to Stevens, Yeats, in his poetry antecedent to Last Poems, changes dramatically in some of his earlier perspectives--primarily, in his ability to face nakedness and truth. "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" is among the poems in The Tower (1928) expressing a bitterness and despair that is mitigated by Crazy Jane's delight in elemental abandonment in the poems of Words For Music Perhaps (1933) and is resolved by man's full acceptance of reality in "Meru" in From a Full Moon in March (1935).

The "Many ingenious lovely things" in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" are swallowed by "dragon-ridden" days, and nights sweating with terror. (CP,pp.204-5) No promises exist that can ensure peace or philosophies that can actually keep order. "In 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,' Bloom wrote, "Yeats walks naked and finds the dark grown luminous, understanding that he has nothing."<sup>14</sup> Yeats asks at the end of

the first section: "But is there any comfort to be found?/  
 Man is in love and loves what vanishes...." (CP,p.205)  
 Despair permeates the poem.

The solitary swan, a metaphor for the soul, in section III has despaired of everything. Both the swan, in stanza one, and man, in stanza two, poise for flight; however, contact with the "winds of winter" brings an uncontrollable rage "To end all things...." (CP,p.206) Thomas Parkinson, in W. B. Yeats: The Later Poetry, describes the swan in terms of Platonic symbolism, identifying it with human failure, " [which] in the midst of desolation offers only desolation."<sup>15</sup>

The swan's leap "into the desolate heaven" (CP,p.206) represents a confrontation with truth that man's soul must also experience. Bloom sees this leap as apocalyptic and interprets it as the poet's freedom: "it has the potential of raising the poet's solitary self-conscious [sic] to the pitch where imagination casts out all that is not itself...."<sup>16</sup> The poet must also leap into the desolate heaven, but this poem does not show the leap because the moment dissolves into despair: the poet is a victim of the blowing "winds of winter." (CP,p.206) "His own system does not save," Bloom wrote of Yeats, "cannot comfort, and returns upon itself in the poem's closing emblems of annunciation, peacock and cock, whose cries will herald more violence than even Yeats can bear to contemplate."<sup>17</sup>

The sexuality, independence, and fearlessness of Crazy Jane in Words for Music Perhaps, included in The Winding Stair and Other Poems, is a complete contrast to the mood of



despair and destruction in The Tower. John Unterecker wrote that the "grand design" of The Winding Stair represents a final commitment to life which marked Yeats's final direction.<sup>18</sup> The strong commitment to life, which was pursued in the last poems, was a realistic one. Walter Houghton, in his essay on the "Crazy Jane" poems, quotes Yeats's explanation of "Poems for Music" as praises of joyous life, "though in the best of them it is a dry bone upon the shore that sings the praises."<sup>19</sup>

In "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop," Jane's body, reduced by age, still exalts the physical, choosing "foul sty" over "heavenly mansions." (CP, p.254) Jane insists on her nakedness and strips herself of illusions. Embracing the foul she cries: "And fair needs foul." Her reconciliation with the physical world, abandoning herself to whatever pain and despair that might include, bears similarity in principle to the beggar in Stevens's "In a Bad Time" who recognizes his poverty. Jane's faith lies in earthly love; the foundation for love's mansion is earth's fertilizer.

J. Hillis Miller in Poets of Reality discusses Yeats's confrontation with earthly truth:

God forbids all access to his central fire, so man must like Crazy Jane spit in the face of the Bishop and choose demonically to go as far as possible from God....It is the choice of the way down: to will with all one's passion and strength, the eternal repetition of earthly existence with all its tragic suffering.<sup>20</sup>

Part of Yeats's stripping-away process included the rejection of stereotypes of Christian doctrine that had become meaningless.

Man actualizes his existence only by confronting bare reality, devoid of illusions about himself or God. "Meru," the last of "Supernatural Songs," and the final poem in the penultimate volume, utilizes the kind of stripping-away that Stevens employed in order to see freshly. The beginning of the poem counters the personal bitterness expressed in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," and, calmly with the cold eye that Yeats had sought to master,<sup>21</sup> considers the pattern of civilization and the perilous role of man and his works:

Civilization is hooped together brought  
Under a rule, under the semblance of peace  
By manifold illusion; but man's life is thought,  
And he, despite his terror, cannot cease  
Ravening through century after century,  
Ravening, raging, and uprooting that he may come  
Into the desolation of reality: (CP, p.287)

"Meru" prepares the way for the Yeatsian tragic hero. Edward Engelberg described the hero which grew out of the last poems: "What ennobled him finally was his passion, his ability to roam imaginatively, thereby turning wise in the very act of surrender to the practical world."<sup>22</sup> "Meru" ends with the snow beating down on the hermits' naked bodies. They know what Yeats, in the earlier poems, had not always been willing to accept: "The day brings round the night, that before dawn/  
His glory and his monuments are gone." (CP, p.287)

The winter desolation represents man's contact with bare reality, his freedom from illusions. It parallels Stevens's expression of starkness, and creates the possibility for man to perceive freshly. This perception brings Yeats and Stevens very close together. The dawn awaited, in the poem,

is in Bloom's words "...neither natural nor supernatural, but re-imagined as a rebirth of what Wallace Stevens would call the first idea, man stripped of illusions by the ravings of thought, the mind of winter."<sup>23</sup> Stevens wrote in "Adagia" a statement that applies to both poets:

The final belief is to be in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.  
(OP, p.163)

The poems written in the decade preceding Stevens's and Yeats's final poems prepare for the central integration that occurs in The Rock and Last Poems. Stevens established in "Notes" and "Ordinary Evening" the theory behind the first idea: in The Rock he gives it human fulfillment. The "intensest rendezvous" becomes man's noblest achievement. Yeats sought to find the root of passion: man's expression in a desolate world. By the end of From a Full Moon, he had achieved the distance necessary to describe the joy, as well as the tragedy, of man's heroic struggle. He wrote to Ethel Mannin in June 1935--six months before the first of his last poems, "Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad," appeared in print:

I want to plunge myself into impersonal poetry, to get rid of the bitterness, irritation and hatred my work in Ireland has brought into my soul. I want to make a last song, sweet and exultant....<sup>24</sup>

From the preceding, it has been shown that the process of stripping-away in the poems discussed was similar for both Stevens and Yeats. This process in the last poems, about to be considered, led to an intensification of affirmation which was also very similar in each poet.

## II

T. S. Eliot, in a tribute to Yeats after his death, made a statement that might also apply to Stevens. Eliot said:

For a man who is capable of experience finds himself in a different world in every decade of his life; as he sees it with different eyes, the material of his art is continually renewed.<sup>25</sup>

While Stevens and Yeats face impending death in their seventh decades, the emphasis of their respective last poems is on life, the vivid moments of self-realization. They renew themselves and their art through a reassertion of energy. For Stevens, the energy expresses itself by the continual acts of the mind. Riddel wrote of The Rock:

Everywhere in Stevens's late poetry is this very sense of continuous self-creation, the emphasis on the 'act' by which one not only sustains but perpetuates oneself, creating the world and the self simultaneously.<sup>26</sup>

Passion serves as the ennobling and releasing energy of Yeats's creativity, but passion described in terms of joy rather than unremitting suffering. "But where he throws his emphasis," wrote F. O. Matthiessen, "is not on the disaster that inevitably springs from conflict, nor on the tragic loss, but on the heroic act."<sup>27</sup>

The movement toward self-realization in Stevens's and Yeats's last poems represents an affirmative process. Ellmann discusses "affirmative capability" as a principle that both

satisfies the whole being and presents a vision of reality. "It is suited to a time," wrote Ellmann, "when man is not regarded as a fixed being with fixed habits, but as a being continuously adapting and readapting himself to the challenging conditions of his body and mind and of the outside world."<sup>28</sup>

"Affirmative capability" is strong in The Rock and Last Poems because Stevens and Yeats seek moments in which man can come to self-realization despite the conditions of modern reality.

The creative act represents a unifying and affirming principle for both poets. Stevens wrote in "The Sail of Ulysses" (1953-54)<sup>29</sup>: "The joy of meaning in design/ Wrenched out of chaos...." (OP, p.100) For Stevens, the mind's incessant need to impose order on chaos and the flux of reality expresses itself throughout the poetry, but increases in the last poems as he seeks to confront reality. Pearce, in The Continuity of American Poetry, discusses the change in Stevens's late poetry explaining that he abandons his "formal elegancies" of words and seeks to know reality directly.<sup>30</sup> As reality is in constant change, so then the self, in order to know the present moment, must sustain itself in continual acts of the mind. Riddel concludes his study of Stevens's last poems with the comment: "It is an enormous, almost a dreadful freedom that Stevens conceives for the man of imagination, but a freedom that comes only with an acceptance of the imperfect."<sup>31</sup>

Yeats's use of "creative joy" also has its origins in the acceptance of the imperfect. In "J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910), Yeats expresses an attitude

toward creation that he developed twenty-six years later in Last Poems. He writes:

There is in creative joy an acceptance of what life brings, because we have understood the beauty of what it brings, or a hatred for what it takes away, which arouses within us...an energy so noble, so powerful, that we laugh aloud and mock, in the terror or the sweetness of our exaltation, at death and oblivion.<sup>32</sup>

In Yeats's last poems, passion acts as a liberating agent in man's heroic struggle to create in a world of impermanence.

Morton Zabel, discussing the last volume, said of Yeats:

He provided an occasion for learning the meaning of the present moment in history...from the ordeal and truth of self-knowledge which every man must face, before he may claim a knowledge of humanity.<sup>33</sup>

Both The Rock and Last Poems express a profound need to find reality at its most elemental and genuine and thus, require the simplest language. Reduction of expression marks Last Poems. "To suit his subject matter," Ellmann writes, "Yeats pares his style too, down to the bone and writes simple ballads....It had taken him a lifetime to acquire that kind of simplicity."<sup>34</sup> Yeats's use of the ballad enabled stronger rhythm and a more relaxed flow in his "plain spoken word."<sup>35</sup> Doggett explains that Stevens began using a style of chastening and reduction in Auroras which was furthered in the last volume.<sup>36</sup> Morse, discussing the style of The Rock, wrote: "...the speech has become so 'authentic and fluent' that the poetry has reached that 'degree of perception' at which what is real and what is imagined are one."<sup>37</sup>

Stevens wrote the twenty-five poems included as The Rock, the final section of Collected Poems, between 1950 and

and 1954. The majority of the poems were written in 1951 and 1952. Only two poems included in the volume were written in 1953 and the volume ends with "Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself" (1954). Morse collects thirty additional poems in Opus Posthumous written during this period and until Stevens's death in 1955.

The self moves between two worlds in Stevens's last poems. The first poem in the volume, "An Old Man Asleep" (1952), begins: "The two worlds are asleep, are sleeping now." (CP, p.501) The self is on the threshold in the poems, moving between thought and the actual world and also between life and approaching death. As Yeats seeks to get to the root of passion, Stevens, in the last poems, wants to return to the origin of thought. Stevens asks in "The Irish Cliffs of Moher": "Who is my father in this world...?" (CP, p.501) He speaks of the parent before thought. The relationship of man to thought expresses itself in the image of the child within the self, a possibility for potential being. Riddel commented:

In the poems of The Rock and in several posthumously published poems, the figure of the child, 'asleep in its own life,' appears regularly as the image of the primal creative urge--a variation of the ephebe and the ignorant man, but now a purer abstraction of the mind itself.<sup>38</sup>

The "primal creative urge" renews man. As Stevens wrote at the end of "The Well Dressed Man with a Beard": "It can never be satisfied, the mind, never." (CP, p.247) The last poems are a testimony to that. "The more imminent death seemed to Stevens," William Burney wrote of The Rock, "the more his imagination meditated on images of rebirth or

awakening."<sup>39</sup>

"Long and Sluggish Lines" (1952) begins in the voice of old age and ends by heralding the "life of the poem of the mind" yet to begin. Stevens writes: "You were not born yet when the trees were crystal/ Nor are you now, in this wakefulness inside a sleep." (CP,p.522) The presence of sleep in the last poems is countered by moments of awakening, expressed by the light of the candle "tearing against the wick" (CP,p.509) in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" and the "savage presence" of fire in the mind of Penelope in "The World as Meditation."

Stevens's central concern does not lie with the illumination of character, but instead with the illuminations of thought and perceptions that shape the self. Stevens gives a description of self in "Looking Across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly" (1952):

What we know in what we see, what we feel in what  
We hear, what we are, beyond mystic disputation,  
In the tumult of integrations out of the sky.

And what we think, a breathing like the wind,  
A moving part of motion, a discovery, (CP,p.518)

Discovery, birth, and freshness permeate The Rock and the last poems in Opus Posthumous as a defense against the death, cold, and poverty that also touch many of the poems.

In "The Plain Sense of Things." (1952), perception, life, and humanity are reduced to the starkest conditions, extending the leaflessness in "Ordinary Evening." The "blank cold" threatens the end of life: "...It is as if/ We had come to an end of the imagination." (CP,p.502) And yet the life-



lessness is revived: "Yet the absence of the imagination had/  
Itself to be imagined." (CP,p.503) The mark of winter can be  
met by the fresh discoveries of the mind, a process that is  
prevalent throughout the last poems.

The escape from the cold is best achieved by the  
Ulysses figure in the poems. In "The World as Meditation,"  
he represents both the height of the imagination and reality.  
Penelope thus composes a "self with which to welcome him,"  
(CP,p.521) companion to his, but she is never done reshaping  
it because Ulysses never actually arrives. The solitary  
figure in his boat in "Prologues to What is Possible" (1952)  
suggests Ulysses. The poet asks: "What self, for example,  
did he contain that had not yet been loosed,/Snarling in him  
for discovery as his attentions spread." (CP,p.516) And  
Ulysses, in "The Sail of Ulysses" (1953-54), learns in his  
search for meanings: "Yet always there is another life,/ A  
life beyond this present knowing." (OP,p.101) In quest of  
the sibyl of knowledge, and of the self, Ulysses sails  
onward toward wholeness of being, seeking illuminations.

Stevens wrote in "Two Illustrations that the World is  
What You Make It" (1952) what appears to be the credo of the  
last poems:

He had said that everything possessed  
The power to transform itself, or else,

And what meant more, to be transformed. (CP,p.514)

Light imagery enables the transformations of the self and the  
world and, reflecting reality and the intensifications of  
imagination, it participates in the "intensest rendezvous"

occurring in many poems.

The sun represents the central light in the poems. Though weak in "Lebensweisheitspielerei" (1952), as the day turns to evening, the sun nonetheless radiates as a "new colored sun" in "St. Armorer's Church from the Outside" creating a fresh and exhilarating moment. Sun connotes reality and knowledge, and in "The Planet on the Table" (1953), sun and self become one (CP, p. 532). The light of the candle is another representation of light. In "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," "A Quiet Normal Life," and "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," the candle represents the heightened powers of the imagination. "The sun and candle," Kessler writes, "both create the world anew, both illuminate and quicken static form."<sup>40</sup>

Life that had been so vivid in Harmonium (1922) recovers from the reductions of Auroras and is reaffirmed in The Rock. However, the last poems especially celebrate human life, going beyond Harmonium's praise of the physical world. Riddel considers the poems of The Rock in two categories. He describes:

The passion for life, the sense of human presence in these last two poems, is the reward for discovering how far the mind can go, and thus the limits. There are two kinds of poems in The Rock: poems like the earlier ones, intent on pushing beyond symbol to the very rock of reality; and poems which elucidate the human limits within which this desire is to be realized and embrace these limits with humanity and dignity.<sup>41</sup>

"The Rock" (1950), title poem of the volume, represents a poem of Riddel's first category. The rock is the ultimate symbol of reality, representing permanence while yet

constantly being affected by the changes occurring around it. Kessler said of the symbol: "Vines, leaves, light, and the sea may alter its appearance, just as metaphor distinguishes fact, but it remains underneath the pure and immutable stone, unshaped by man...."<sup>42</sup> In an essay on poetry and painting (1951), Stevens expresses what seems to be the essential motivation behind "The Rock" and the entire book. He explained:

The extension of the mind beyond the range of the mind, the projection of reality beyond reality, the determination to cover the ground, whatever it may be, the determination not to be confined, the recapture of excitement and intensity of interest, the enlargement of the spirit at every time, in every way, these are the unities, the relations, to be summarized as paramount now.  
(NA, p.171)

Stevens began "Seventy Years Later," the first poem of "The Rock," recalling the illusions of his past. The seventy years that have passed, the "houses of mothers," and the "sounds of the guitar" (CP, p.525) have no present meaning. The first four stanzas of the poem create a cold and lifeless tone. The use of shadows accentuates the death-like quality: "Even our shadows, their shadows, no longer remain/ The lives these lived in the mind are at an end." However, the poem does not remain an elegy for past life because, in stanza six, the sun gives human warmth to the scene after two clouds embrace "In a queer assertion of humanity." "An illusion so desired," (CP, p.526) that a new fiction is born to mitigate the "cold." Out of what was emptiness and deadness, green leaves appear to cover the rock and lilacs bloom. These symbols of spring, implying a rebirth, occur as a result of



And so exists no more. (CP,p.527)

The incessant extensions of the mind alleviate the barrenness. The acts of the imagination give symbolic life to the rock. Man thus creates and re-creates himself and the act of the mind, which is to say the poem, calls into being his highest nature. The poem represents his faith.

In the last poem of "The Rock," "Forms of the Rock in a Night-Hymn," the poem begins with another resemblance: "The rock is the grey particular of man's life. (CP,p.528) The rock, representing being, is also "...the stern particular of the air,/ The mirror of the planets, one by one,/ But through man's eye...." (CP,p.528) "Through man's eye"-- through the acts of the mind--the rock becomes "the habitation of the whole." In so far as man can, he thus achieves the "cure," a unity of self. The rock of reality and the imaginative possibilities come together and create the sense of the ends of a circle being joined. The rock is:

The starting point of the human and the end,  
That in which space itself is contained, the gate  
To the enclosure, day, the things illumined

By day, night and that which night illumines....  
(CP,p.528)

This intensification creates the moment in which imagination and reality achieve unity. "He wants nothing less holy," wrote Fuchs of Stevens, "than the oneness of man and his world"<sup>45</sup>

"Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" (1952) also concerns itself with the sacred oneness, achieved here in the "highest candle," the "intensest rendezvous" of thought. (CP,p.524) The poem also illustrates the second of the cate-



power, is the illumination occurring within man. Kessler pointed out that the power for lighting darkness is internal.<sup>47</sup>

The poem's meaning culminates in the fifth stanza:

Within its vital boundary, in the mind.  
We say God and the imagination are one...  
How high the highest candle lights the dark.  
(CP, p.524)

"God is a symbol," wrote Stevens in "Adagia," "for something that can as well take other forms, as for example the form of high poetry." (OP, p.167) He also wrote that, "God is in me or else is not at all (does not exist)." (OP, p.172) Merger with the interior paramour enables man to actualize himself in a moment of intense expression. The intensity creates a supreme order, symbolized by the single shawl that tightly wraps man and muse, imagination and reality, or God and the self. The "highest candle" ignites the mind in a full expression of self.

The "highest candle" also illuminates man's vision, enabling the arrival at the "very center of consciousness." (NA, p.115) The "central mind" created in "Final Soliloquy" is produced by the fusion of imagination and reality:

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,  
We make a dwelling in the evening air,  
In which being there together is enough. (CP, p.524)

How satisfying is the "intensest rendezvous?" It is as close as man can come to expressing centralness, experiencing an "ecstatic freedom of the mind," which is man's nobility. (NA, p.35) The dwelling is in air, existing in a flash of recognition and having a quality very similar to the supreme

fiction--not ever to be realized completely, but to be known.

In "The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain" (1952), man reaches his human limits in a union with art. The poem represents a construction of being, as well as the composing of a poem, and a reconstruction of the objects of nature. The poem builds in a qualified construction of "would's" and "could's" up to a summit. The poet needed "A place to go in his own direction"; therefore, he "...recomposed the pines/  
Shifted the rocks and picked his way among the clouds,/ For the outlook that would be right." (CP, p.512)

The completion for which the poet yearns is the arrival at the rock enabling him to "Recognize his unique and solitary home." Pack described the significance of "home" in Stevens's poems as representing an intimacy and order, free from chaos.<sup>48</sup> In the poem, Stevens fulfills the desire he expressed throughout his career, to be at peace with his environment. The top of the mountain represents the pinnacle of vision, in which imagination and reality become one. This is the "view" toward which he edged. Whitebread explains that the poem represents the process of "Poetry as Self-discovery" in which "the desire to believe in the possibility of such an elevation" enables the reader to experience the momentary exhilaration of the poet in which the poem did take the place of the mountain.<sup>49</sup>

The rendezvous in "Madame La Fleuri" (1951) represents the ultimate relationship of self to nature--that of death. Stevens described death in the poem as a "bearded queen, wicked in her dead light." (CP, p.507) The poem expresses



man's vulnerability and the pain of having to relinquish life and return to earth. "Madame" elaborates the ideas expressed in "World Without Peculiarity" (1948), in Auroras, which said that man's death was the fulfillment of his humanity. (CP,p.453) However, in "Madame," Stevens is not above his subject and thus, does not treat death with the distance of abstract reference, as he did in the earlier poem.

Death in "Madame" expresses the human tragedy; we experience the effect and not just the philosophy of death. While Stevens is not refuting his statements in earlier poems that death satisfies the condition for desire, he expresses in "Madame" human grief--an exhaltation akin to Yeats's "creative joy." Death devours man's "crisp knowledge" and his life becomes "a page he had found in the handbook of heartbreak." (CP,p.507) While yet not renouncing the necessary process of life, the poet takes his place with humanity in the common grief that "...his mother should feed on him and what he saw." (CP,p.507)

"To an Old Philosopher in Rome" (1952) follows "Madame" in Stevens's placement of the poems in The Rock; this poem balances the sadness expressed in "Madame" by showing the glory possible at the moment before death. Morse said that "To an Old Philosopher" was Stevens's last act of homage to Santayana, whom he had known in college.<sup>50</sup> Although the poem was written a few months before Santayana's death, Stevens had long been an admirer of his. In "Imagination as Value," (1948), Stevens had used Santayana as an example of a man whose life was a "deliberate choice" of aesthetic value,

a conscious act of the imagination. (NA,p.147) "Stevens's belief that life could be made complete in itself," wrote Morse, "was strongly influenced by Santayana."<sup>51</sup>

Discussing the poem, Riddel commented: "In its triumph over loneliness and isolation, it becomes a most powerful metaphor for Stevens's belief in the redemptive powers of the secular imagination."<sup>52</sup> Santayana becomes the human embodiment of the "impossible possible philosopher's man," the "central man" of "Asides on the Oboe" (1940): "...the man of glass/ Who in a million diamonds sums us up." (CP,p.509) Santayana is flesh, not glass, described as the highest representative of man on the threshold of death:<sup>53</sup>

So we feel in this illumined large,  
The veritable small, so that each of us  
Behold himself in you and hears his voice  
In yours, master and commiserable man....(CP,p.509)

The poem concerns the fusion of two worlds, the internal and the external: "Yet living in two worlds, impenitent/ As to one, and, as to one, most penitent...." Stevens describes the material world of Santayana's room and from his window the "moving nuns" and the sounds of the outside world feed his imagination. He arrives at the "celestial possible," the height of human excellence, in his simple room, and reaches the most lucid possible vision. Santayana achieves in the poem the kind of perception that Stevens described in "Adagia": "Perhaps there is a degree of perception," Stevens wrote, "at which what is real and what is imagined are one: a state of clairvoyant observation, accessible or possibly accessible to the poet or, say, to the acutest poet." (OP,p.166)

Santayana's spiritual world intersects with reality. Riddel elaborates:

Just as Santayana's materialism binds him in love to the physical world, his imagination preserves him in detachment from its inherent chaos. Though he has denied transcendence, he has attained vision, and that after all is his most noble achievement: to transmute the tragedy of human imperfection into the dignity without which man is mere animal, to find 'the afflatus of ruin.'"<sup>54</sup>

Santayana arrives at a "total grandeur at the end" (CP, p.510) that grows out of misery and human need. The acts of the mind intensely hold onto the scene in the room, the particulars of this world. Randall Jarrell wrote that the poem enables us to feel what it means to be human: "the poem's composed, equable sorrow is a kind of celebration of our being, and a deeper sounding, satisfies more in us, than joy; we feel our natures realized...."<sup>55</sup> The satisfying moment of understanding represents a kind of joy that Yeats calls "creative joy."

In the poem, "The human end is the spirit's greatest reach" (CP, p.508) brings about the illumination and enlargement of Santayana's world and, most of all, his construction of himself. The poem ends:

...He stops upon this threshold,  
As if the design of all his words takes form  
And frame from thinking and is realized. (CP, p.511)

Stevens originally wanted to call The Rock, "Amber Umber" (L, p.830): "Amber" suggesting perhaps the word used to describe the illumination of Santayana's room in "To an Old Philosopher" (CP, p.510); "Umber" perhaps, as Morse suggests,<sup>56</sup> refers to the first poem in "Notes," describing the death of

Phoebus as necessary before man can be self-reliant.

(CP, p.380) There is a strong connection between "Notes" and The Rock. Stevens told Robert Pack in a 1954 letter that several years earlier he had considered adding a fourth section to "Notes"--"It Must Be Human": It is as if Stevens intended The Rock to take up this subject. It is interesting that Holly Stevens, in Letters, uses "It Must Be Human" as the final chapter heading for the letters of Stevens's final years.

In the poems of The Rock just discussed, the climactic human development is the "intensest rendezvous" which calls into being all that man is in "the extension of the mind beyond the range of the mind" for the "enlargement of the spirit at every time, in every way." (NA, p.171) By fresh acts of the mind, the opposites of death and rebirth, sorrow and ecstatic release, are in continual fusions. The imagination and reality merge in flashes of insight in the poems of The Rock, enabling perceptions as lucid as man can hope to experience.

From the recognition of human poverty and the inescapable presence of death, the self, in the last poems, is able to reaffirm life and come as close to self-realization as it is possible to do. The creative act renews man, intensifying self-expression; peace is possible in those moments when the self expresses itself as fully as it can. It is interesting to consider here Stevens's expression of peace and personal fulfillment in a July 1954 letter to Barbara Church, written two months before Collected Poems was published. "Curious--,"

Stevens admits, "the satisfaction of this sort of thing, as if one fulfilled one's self and, in a general sort of way, had done something important--important to one's self." (L, p.842)

Yeats, as well as Stevens, renewed the self through continuous acts of self-creation in the last poems. The mind in turbulence has the greatest potential for both creation and truth in Last Poems. Passion serves as the renewing energy.

Engelberg defined passion in Yeats's usage:

...a primordial feeling surging from the ancestral and ancient soil, the memory of myth and mythology; it is the liberating gesture of heroic sacrifice; it is finally also the intellectually wrought ideals of man himself, those principles for which he struggles and dies.<sup>57</sup>

Yeats was very influenced by Shakespeare's heroes and in the last poems uses them to express the "unity of being" that passion momentarily creates.<sup>58</sup> The personalities of Hamlet, Lear, Cordelia, and Ophelia permeate "Lapis Lazuli" (1936)<sup>59</sup>. Hamlet also appears in "The Statues" (1938) and Lear and Timon serve as the model for the old man in "An Acre of Grass" (1936).

Last Poems celebrates Yeats's incessant expression of energy.<sup>60</sup> The poems explore the ever-present vitality of the imagination, sexual vigor, and the rage of the spirit against injustices. Creative energy renews the poet. Art--poetry--like sexuality, represents a means of liberation. Yeats recognizes lust and rage as the two motivations behind his poems. (L, p.871) A very general picture of the poems can be derived from Miller's comment about the volume:

So Yeats praises battle, drunkenness, rage, brutality, laughter, madness, revelry, wanton destruc-

tion or waste, the experience of great loss or failure, the moment of death. In these man is most outside himself and can best receive the lightening bolt of revelation. They carry a man away from the rational world of distinctions and utility into the place where everything is present at once.<sup>61</sup>

Stevens and Yeats wrote approximately the same number of final poems--Stevens, fifty-five, and Yeats, fifty-seven. Last Poems (1940) actually represents the combination of two volumes: The thirty-five poems in New Poems (1938), including the poems from "The Gyres" (1937)<sup>62</sup> to "Are You Content?" (1936-38), and the nineteen poems published posthumously as Last Poems and Two Plays (1939), plus three poems published in On The Boiler (1939) constitute the poems in the last volume. Curtis Bradford found an intended order for Last Poems among Yeats's papers which changes the order that is given in Collected Poems and provides some interesting insights into possible readings of the poems. The poems were to begin with "Under Ben Bulben" (1938) and end with "Politics" (1938).<sup>63</sup> Bradford argues that placing "Under Ben Bulben" first, means that the nineteen poems are spoken from the tomb, a farewell to life and art.<sup>64</sup> And yet, never has a farewell been more energetic, full of life, or so conscious of the power of creation as the restorer of life.

The figure of the wild and passionate old man appears throughout Yeats's last poems. The old man in "An Acre of Grass" wants to remake himself into a tragic hero so that his perceptions will be of an intensity "That can pierce the clouds." (CP, p.299) He asks for "an old man's frenzy" in order to find truth. Despite old age, Yeats's sexuality and

love for the physical world enliven the old man in "The Wild Old Wicked Man" who refuses to renounce sin and willingly endures earthly suffering.

Yeats also praises the heroic ideals enabling the achievement of human excellence that had been forgotten in his generation. He celebrates political heroes and martyrs, like Parnell, Roger Casement, and O'Rahilly, men of undaunted courage and integrity. Yeats also praises, in "Beautiful Lofty Things" (1937), the courageous spirit of the "Olympians"--O'Leary, J. B. Yeats, O'Grady, Augusta Gregory, and Maude Gonne-- and their commitment and personal dignity: "A thing never known again." (CP, p.300) This praise of human nobility is akin to Stevens's admiration for Santayana. Yeats's models of excellence are perhaps part of the reason why he expresses such dissatisfaction with himself, continually driving himself onward in Last Poems, not content to rest with his achievements. "What Then?" (1936) and "Are You Content?" (?) serve as two motivating questions that move Yeats forward into new explorations.

Yeats's confrontation with death and the implications of tragic joy serve as a force of renewal. Denis Donoghue describes the final volume:

Last Poems are concerned to re-make the self and so win joy in the imminent presence of death; to go further: they seek to re-make death itself.... Hence, the emphasis, new in these last poems on tragedy--on the art form most preoccupied with man's response to his mortality.<sup>65</sup>

Of the poems discussed, "The Gyres," "Lapis Lazuli," and "Under Ben Bulbin" particularly address themselves to the

relationship of man to art and tragedy, and, thus, to man's relationship to tragic joy. "The Gyres" will be considered first because it represents the problems central to any consideration of affirmation in Last Poems.

One of the earliest poems included in New Poems, "The Gyres" opens the last volume. In the second stanza, the poet asks if it is possible to rejoice in the midst of tragedy: "What matter though numb nightmare ride on top, / And blood and mire the sensitive body stain?" (CP, p.291) In the first seven lines of the poem, reaffirmation does not seem a likely possibility. Everything of value is in the process of being destroyed--"beauty," "worth," and tradition are all bloodstained. The desolation of reality that Meru expressed prevails in this poem too. However, the last line of the first stanza introduces a tone not experienced in the earlier poems discussing the world's destruction. Yeats explains: "We that look on but laugh in tragic joy." (CP, p.291) That line heralds the heroic spirit which so attracted Yeats in the last years of his life. He wrote Dorothy Wellesley July 6, 1935:

'Bitter and gay,' that is the heroic mood. When there is despair, public or private, when settled order seems lost, people look for strength within or without. . . .The lasting expression of our time is. . . .in a sense of something steel-like and cold within the will, something passionate and cold. (L, p.837)

The laugh in "The Gyres" represents the bitter-gay combination; it embodies the heroic mood. Yeats wrote Ethel Mannin in 1937 that he no longer defended causes. His new philosophy was to, "Get out of the thing, look on with



sardonic laughter." (L,p.882) And yet, the laughter was mixed with pain. We sense Yeats's ambivalence in the poem. He is certainly not indifferent to the effects of modern reality; however, man cannot change the course of the "numb nightmare" ruining everything of value. He only destroys himself by wallowing in despair.

"What matter?" Yeats wrote in the third line of the second stanza, "Heave no sigh, let no tear drop." (CP,p.291) He counters the mood of despair with the word "Rejoice" at the end of the stanza. The self cannot achieve expression in the abyss of despair. Zwerdling points out that Yeats's last poems stress the necessity for man's conquering despair: "Despair itself is destructive and makes any kind of heroic achievement impossible. Under no circumstances then, must the visionary hero give way to it."<sup>66</sup> The ability to rejoice in the poem signifies the acceptance of the heroic challenge: to engage in a struggle knowing that one's defeat is inevitable, but nonetheless, to commit one's self to the battle.

There is a difference in critical opinion as to whether or not the poem expresses affirmative possibility. Harold Bloom, in Yeats, denies the affirmative value of the meaning of "Rejoice," in line sixteen of the poem, because he doubts if Yeats ever intends "tragic joy" to be taken seriously.<sup>67</sup> Bloom argues that the repetition of the phrase, "What matter?," in lines nine, eleven, fifteen, and eighteen, indicates "bondage to the idols of determinism" and does not signify artistic freedom.<sup>68</sup> J. Hillis Miller, representing an opposing view in Poets of Reality, sees the possibility for creative

freedom in the poem; he wrote:

With passionate intensity and with full awareness  
that his life is doomed to end tragically, man  
can affirm what is fated. . . . To will what is  
fated changes man from a passive tool of history  
to the creator of his own destiny.<sup>69</sup>

Fortunately, Yeats's several drafts of the poem are available in Bradford's Yeats At Work. The first line of the third stanza in the finished poem reads: "Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul, / What matter?"

(CP, p. 291) In draft III of the poem that line read: "Perfection of the work, the life the soul!"<sup>70</sup> The final version of the poem cancels the hopeful intention of "perfection." Bradford's examination of the drafts indicated that Yeats had originally begun the poem from a much happier perspective. He began by envisioning the time when the craftsman, noble, and saint would return; however, this perspective is not introduced until the end of the poem in the final draft.<sup>71</sup> The idea of the poem grew out of three lines which were written, according to draft evidence, before anything else:

Though all be broken, all may yet be whole  
Old Rocky face if you find the three  
That can perfect a world a life [a] soul<sup>72</sup>

The final draft of "The Gyres" is certainly a disturbing poem. The nightmarish aspects of modern reality cannot be brushed aside. However, man's only power in the face of it, is to defy it by rejoicing. The joy takes its character from both "creative joy," discussed earlier, and from the frenzied-exhilaration of the release from the struggle. "The Gyres" seen in the light of the earlier drafts, which are more positive, and viewed in the framework of the other

last poems--especially "Lapis Lazuli," which follows it-- indicates that the tension between tragedy and joy is intended to be a creative one. "The Gyres" prepares the way for man's leap "into the desolate heaven" (CP, p.206) which will be his heroic attempt to reaffirm himself.

The tragic view of life was a necessary part of Yeats's attitude in Last Poems. "From the apprehension of tragedy," wrote Derlick March in "The Artist and the Tragic Vision," "comes art with its transmutation of suffering into harmony."<sup>73</sup> Yeats discusses art on several levels in "Lapis Lazuli" (1936) and despite the chaos of modern reality, the poem ends in harmony.

Yeats uses stage imagery in stanza two of "Lapis Lazuli" in order to utilize the dramatic representations of tragedy in art. Hamlet, Lear, Cordelia, and Ophelia represent tormented characters suffering because of their intense passions which ennobled them. Passion enables the re-creation of the self. Engelberg writes about the significance of passion:

It is 'through passion' that the artist becomes aware of his inner conflicts, his 'buried selves' or masks. At first unknown to him, these other selves seem alien and intrusive but the ensuing conflict makes art.<sup>74</sup>

Shakespeare's characters are an excellent example of this kind of struggle with the self; they also represent the struggle and torment of the mind that created them. Peter Ure wrote that Hamlet and Lear are "gay" in line sixteen of stanza two, because "...being themselves artifacts they bear in themselves their own beauty and fulfillment, which though

tragic is essentially an acceptance of the conditions of life."<sup>75</sup> Man's acceptance of life grows out of suffering and ends in his deeper self-knowledge.

The climactic moment in the second stanza is the "Black out": "Black out; Heaven blazing into the head:/ Tragedy wrought to the utmost." (CP, p.292) Death represents the supreme tragic moment, extinction. However, the illumination suggested by the bolt of heaven "blazing into the head" mitigates the blackness. Truth, insight, or some vision comes to the tragic hero at the moment of death as the reward for his struggle and defeat.

The struggle and defeats of generations of civilization culminate in the last two lines of stanza three: "All things fall and are built again,/ And those who build them again are gay." (CP, p.292) The builders of civilization accept what life gives and what it takes away. The cycle of generations, pierced with horror, calls to mind "The Gyres"; however, man has no other environment within which to realize himself. Every age has its tragic heroes who sacrifice themselves or are sacrificed--Roger Casement and Parnell were such men. And every age has its builders whose creativity represents their gaiety. "To laugh at tragedy," wrote Frank Lentricchia, "or to make poems in the face of it, cannot defeat tragedy, but it can provide a momentary release."<sup>76</sup>

The poem affirms the process of art and the creator engaged in creating. The lazuli carving, in the fourth stanza, suggests man's nobility: the venerable men from the east, the bird, "A symbol of longevity," (CP, p.293) and the musical

instrument which when played by "accomplished fingers," transformed the scene by transfiguring the dread through the nobility of the creative act.

The chinamen seated on the mountain summit are symbolically above the tragedy. "In the final scene gaiety belongs to the wise," wrote Engelberg, "who are no longer of this world, the transfigured souls of the tragic heroes...."<sup>77</sup> Yeats's imagination participates completely in the fifth stanza when his imagination becomes the focus of the poem:

...and I  
 Delight to imagine them seated there;  
 There on the mountain and the sky,  
 On all the tragic scene they stare, (CP, p.293)

Yeats's fiction in this passage resembles Stevens's conception of a supreme fiction in that it embodies a supreme belief and, at that moment, represents the highest truth. The chinamen here and Santayana in "To an Old Philosopher" have transfigured dread. Yeats ends "Lapis Lazuli":

One asks for mournful melodies;  
 Accomplished fingers begin to play.  
 Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,  
 Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay. (CP, p.293)

The "mournful melodies" will play on, transfiguring dread through the ability to create.

The dancer in "Sweet Dancer" (1937) creates, as do the chinese musicians, a world apart through her absorption in her dance. She completely transfigures her personal anguish in the moment of her dance. She

Escaped from bitter youth,  
 Escaped out of her crowd,  
 Or out of her black cloud. (CP, p.294)

Unterecker points out that "sweet" suggests that the dancer has come "to the discovery of artistic form and through that discovery to ecstasy."<sup>78</sup> She arrives at a momentary synthesis, a wholeness of being. However, the same dancer--poet, Margot Ruddock<sup>79</sup>--in "A Crazy Girl" (1936) dances to the music of desperation: a soul "in division from itself," a thing "Heroically lost, heroically found." (CP, p.301)

The ecstatic moment that arises out of both dances originates in a passionate expression, one sweet, one desperate. Ellmann, discussing the miracle arising out of the most passionate experience, wrote of Yeats:

His poetry is full of miracles, for the miracle is the point at which reality and the dream meet. The miracles with which he deals are miracles of possession, sometimes sexual possession, sometimes divine or artistic possession. There is conflagration of the whole being; the god descends or man rises; matter is suddenly transmuted into spirit....<sup>80</sup>

Yeats's "miracle," which can also express the moments of tragic joy, represents a fusion that is, in Stevens's more modified expression, the "intensest rendezvous."

However, as splendid and frequent as the moments of merger are in Yeats, he describes the antithesis: man confronting the irrationality of experience. In these moments the possibilities for art are not always as satisfying. "Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad?" (1936) expresses the rage that experience brings to "Observant old men" who "knew it well." (CP, p.333) Here, chance governs life and, in line ten, starves the good and advances the bad. Yeats, bemoaning this injustice, ends the poem:

No single story would they find  
 Of an unbroken happy mind  
 A finish worthy of the start. (CP,p.333)

The "laugh at the dawn" in the last line of "High Talk" (1938), published in Last Poems and Two Plays, suggests again that man, as creative agent, frees himself from the confines of modern reality. (CP,p.331) The poem begins: "Processions that lack high stilts have nothing that catches the eye";and Yeats with his stilts stolen is temporarily forced to become a part of modern reality. He is a wild and intense part of it and assumes the image of a wild barnacle goose. "When dawn breaks loose," in the fourth line of the second stanza, the poet does also: "I through the terrible novelty of light, stalk on, stalk on;/Those great sea-horses bare their teeth and laugh at the dawn." (CP,p.331)

The laugh is enigmatic, but appears to express an exhilarating release, a wild defiance. The poet's wildness represents a means of self-protection, a way of coping with a violent world. The wildness also suggests the "wild old wicked man" who knew all men lived in suffering and chose to abate it in sexuality, not spirituality. (CP,p.309) The "observant old man" in "Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad?" (CP,p.333) is vulnerable to anger and fury and caught by despair;he does not mitigate reality by a creative act,or transform his anger with energy. The "terrible novelty of light" in "High Talk" does not cause the poet any apparent suffering: he stalks on--first a part of the goose's flight, he then appears to ride the waves with the sea-horses. To laugh at the dawn is both heroic and defiant.

The powerful life force of the poem is Yeats as Malachi Jack, "All metaphor, Malachi, stilts and all." (CP, p.331) Malachi may be a figure from Yeats's memory, but more likely the Irish Malachi Jack is a vivid and exuberant embodiment of his imagination. Bradford cites a letter that Yeats wrote to Dorothy Wellesley in 1936 as partial background for the poem. "These new men are goldsmiths," Yeats wrote, "working with a glass screwed into one eye, whereas we stride ahead of the crowd, its swordsmen, its jugglers, looking to right and left."<sup>81</sup> (L, p.853)

Bradford, while relating "High Talk" to "The Apparitions," the poem that came next in Yeats's sequence, wrote: "The artist on his stilts can stalk into eternity, but the artist is also a man, and man is troubled by dreams of his death. He needs the support of his friends and the deep joy of his full heart."<sup>82</sup> Yeats wrote in the last stanza of "The Apparitions":

When a man grows old his joy  
Grows more deep day after day,  
His empty heart is full at length,  
But he has need of all that strength  
Because of the increasing Night  
That opens her mystery and fright.  
Fifteen apparitions have I seen;  
The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger. (CP, p.332)

This represents a conscious effort to reaffirm life, to seek out the joy, to cultivate an attitude that attempts to fill oneself before the night's ultimate victory.

"Under Ben Bulbin" (1938) was completed five months before "Night" was to descend completely. The poem represents Yeats's last will and testament. The "horsemen,"



"Completeness of their passions won," open the poem, riding the "wintry dawn" around Ben Bulbin. (CP, p.341)

The heroic spirit asserts itself in section III as the result of the release from anger and passionate intensity. Man, "for an instant stands at ease,/ Laughs aloud, his heart at peace." (CP, p.342) The laugh is reminiscent of the laugh of heroic defiance at the dawn in "High Talk" and of the laugh of tragic joy in "The Gyres." Man must expect that some kind of "violence" will precede the accomplishment of fate. The release from intensity liberates man, enabling him, in line twelve of the poem, to both "know his work" and accomplish it. (CP, p.342)

The hope for Ireland, as well as the hope for man, has to do with the realization of the self through the perfection of the work, learning well the trade of art. Yeats's hopes for the fulfillment of man and art are embodied in the proud, noble, and cold-eyed horsemen of the epitaph who have reconciled the spirit of tragedy and gaiety. Suggesting the glittering, gay eyes of the chinamen in "Lapis Lazuli," the horseman casts "a cold eye/ On life, on death" and rides on. (CP, p.344)

The affirming, shaping spirit of the imagination was of central importance to both Yeats and Stevens. Yeats's "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (1937-38) and "Politics" (1938) will be considered as the final resolution of the expression of "tragic joy" in the last volume. Stevens's "Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself" (1954) and "July Mountain" (1955) bring the "intensest rendezvous" to its

final point in the last poems. Yeats's poems will be discussed first.

The ladder is gone in "The Circus Animals' Desertion," just as the stilts disappeared in "High Talk"--only now there is no irony. Yeats, in the process of seeking himself, encounters the impoverishment of self. He stands alone in the first section of the poem, feeling himself to be, in line three, a "broken man" and thus, he temporarily feels despair. Without the dramatic presences of Shakespeare's heroes, or crazed dancer, Margot Ruddock, and without the passionate drama of the self remade into "an old man's frenzy," (CP, p.229) one experiences yet another merger of human possibility in "Circus Animals'." In this poem, the focus is on the perhaps richer human drama of man's courageous will to survive. The poem concerns the question of man's knowledge about himself. Truth, for Yeats's dramatic hero, was possible, as in the case of Hamlet or Lear, at the moment of death. The insight could not help the character live his life; it only enabled him to experience fully his death. Something very different happens in "The Circus Animals' Desertion": the poet has to go on living.

In the third section of the poem, Yeats has the choice of accepting the challenge of finding new meanings or of remaining in despair. As was suggested in the discussion of "The Gyres," despair is not the heroic mood that Yeats pursued; it generally denies the possibilities for achievement. Yeats has to begin all over again; the mind will have to impose a significance on the "slut." He describes the base of reality

that he must return to:

A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,  
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,  
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut  
Who keeps the till. (CP, p.336)

Yeats's ladder is gone, and thus, he must begin the process of rebuilding out of "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart." (CP, p.336)

Bloom does not see the poem as affirmative. He insists that Yeats does not willingly choose the "foul rag-and-bone shop."<sup>83</sup> Certainly the dump is not appealing after "beautiful lofty things." In fact Yeats wants us to realize how unappealing the dump is and thus, appreciate the difficulty of trying to create out of it. The acceptance of the challenge is the poet's possible glory. If, as Yeats suggests in "Under Ben Bulben," the poet's task is to learn his trade and also attempt the "profane perfection of mankind" (CP, p.342) then, the return to heart is perhaps part of the process of learning and relearning required before man is able to reach new heights. Facing the "slut" requires an enormous amount of courage; however, Yeats's faith in life and art and his will to create enable him to go through the experience. He voices no doubts. Bloom, who throughout his appraisal of Last Poems concentrates on the violent, sour, and antihumanistic aspects of the later Yeats, says that in "Circus Animals'" Yeats speaks out of bitterness: a bitterness that Bloom somewhat modifies by adding that it possess<sup>es</sup> "aesthetic dignity."<sup>84</sup> There is more than just dignity in the poem: There is more than bitterness; there is self-realization.

Bloom does not allow for the growth out of the reduction.

In "The Circus Animals' Desertion," Yeats did not relinquish his hold on life. His selection of "Politics," written several months before his death, to end his projected Last Poems and Two Plays represents a final affirmation of life. In the poem, he turns to life and embraces it because it is all he has. (CP, p.337) He chooses the young girl, affairs of the heart, over affairs of state, because therein lies human possibility. He exalts love, but too old for the young girl now, he nonetheless knows where the heart of life lies. The poem represents a gay farewell to the process of life.

The heart of life for Stevens is within the process of the mind, a process heralding the continual coming on and coming forth of the imagination. "Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself," the last poem in The Rock and also the farewell poem in Collected Poems, affirms the life of the mind and the possibilities for the "intensest rendezvous." In typical Stevens fashion, he has tied the end and the beginning together. The poem invites endless speculation about what the "thing" of the title and the "it" of the poem might be.

The poem opens with the ending of winter and the cry that the poet hears in the second line comes from the outside; it could be spring, the cry of imagination, or of reality, or just of life itself, a point outside man. Stevens had written in "Ordinary Evening" that, "The poem is the cry of its occasion." (CP, p.473) The "scrawny cry," in "Not Ideas," "Seemed like a sound in his mind." (CP, p.534) Perhaps the

cry was in answer to the appetite of his own mind, as mind could never be satisfied. Riddel described the progression of knowledge in Stevens's poetry:

Harmonium, pretty clearly was present knowledge, and in the course of Stevens's growth and development there came the greater knowing. Not transcendental, this 'distant away' was on the contrary, a knowledge of what the self can create and hence what it is.<sup>85</sup>

Stevens was always an ephebe of knowledge, and ultimately the cry in the poem was an invitation to discovery.

In the second stanza he labels the cry more specifically: "A bird's cry, at daylight or before." Stevens mentions the "sun" three times in the poem. The image has several possible meanings in his poetry. He uses "sun" to suggest the illuminations of reality and as a symbol for man's possibilities in reality. He also links the sun with the imagination in its capacity to renew man. Stevens wrote in an April 1955 letter, four months before his death, about the effect of sun and spring creating, "the renewed force of the desire to live and to be a part of life." (L,p.879) Stevens announces in line ten, that the sun and the cry are connected; as he explains in line thirteen: "It was part of the colossal sun." (CP,p.534)

The sun in "Not Ideas" is surrounded by its choral rings, as if heralding a new era. The cry of the poem is part of the choir: "A chorister whose c preceded the choir." (CP,p534) The choir represents a simple and unpretentious celebration of being. Throughout the poem, Stevens has described the cry as "scrawny": However, the cry is only part

of the whole choir. Stevens ends the poem with the possibility for the cry's full performance:

Surrounded by its choral rings  
Still far away. It was like  
A new knowledge of reality. (CP,p.534)

The "new knowlege of reality" represents the source of man's renewal, a reality heightened and intensified by the interaction of imagination and reality. Stevens's poetry continually attaches itself to new realities (NA,p.22) and there will always be new realities to illuminate. "The imagination," Stevens explained, "is the power of the mind over the possibilities of things...it is the source not of a certain value but of as many values as reside in the possibilities of things." (NA,p.136)

One of Stevens's final poems, written a few months before his death, was "July Mountain" (1955). The poem illustrates well the process of creating for a poet whose mind could never be satisfied:

We live in a constellation  
Of patches and of pitches,  
Not in a single world,  
In things said well in music,  
On a piano, and in speech,  
As in a page of poetry--  
Thinkers without final thoughts  
In an always incipient cosmos,  
The way when we climb a mountain,  
Vermont throws itself together. (OP,pp.114-15)

Man is the maker, a thinker, forever composing and ordering the "incipient cosmos" by the acts of the mind. The process of climbing the mountain and constructing the poem become one, and both the process of life and the act of the poem are reaffirmed.

Stevens's and Yeats's approach to unity demanded different commitments from each poet. Samuel Morse said of Stevens's poetry:

And although his detachment from the 'foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart' may have denied his access to great passion and intensity in his work, it preserved that 'sane good sense' he identified with all that he regarded as truly civilized, and of which in its own way, his poetry became a superb example.<sup>86</sup>

Ultimately, unity was attained for each poet in his continual reshaping of both the self and the work. As Yeats expressed in a letter written two weeks before his death: "'Man can embody truth but he cannot know it.' I must embody it in the completion of my life." (L,p.922)

The desire to reaffirm life and overcome negations was the conscious effort of Stevens and Yeats in their final poems. The creative act continually renewed the spirit ever seeking to realize itself in a world that Stevens described as "a reality of decreation." (NA,p.175) Amos Wilder wrote of the difficulties inherent in the process of reaffirming life, art, and the self:

There is something peculiarly poignant and magnificent in the spectacle of men wringing art and celebration out of these nightmares, and saying 'Nevertheless,' in the midst of the distempers that afflict the spirit today, and which afflict particularly the most gifted and sensitive.<sup>87</sup>

For Wallace Stevens and William Butler Yeats, out of the "final no" there came a "yes."



## APPENDIX A

### YEATS'S LAST POEMS

Three sources are used to date the poems published as Last Poems in The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats, Definitive Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1972); A. Norman Jeffares, A Commentary on The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1968); The Variorum Edition of The Poems of W. B. Yeats, ed. Peter Allt and Russel Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1966); Allan Wade, The Bibliography of The Writings of W. B. Yeats (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1951). The poems are listed in the order of composition, in so far as known, or by the first date of publication, which is in parenthesis. The following abbreviations are used to indicate works of Yeats: NP (New Poems, 1938), LP (Last Poems and Two Plays, 1939), OTB (On The Boiler, 1939). The abbreviation of LM will be used to indicate The London Mercury, the periodical to which Yeats most frequently contributed. AB indicates A Broadside.

The poems in the text are cited by composition dates.

Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad	Jan. 1936( <u>OTB</u> ,1939)
A Crazyed Girl	May 1936( <u>Lemon Tree</u> ,1937)
The Lady's Second Love Song	July 1936( <u>NP</u> ,1938)
The Lady's Third Love Song	" "
Lapis Lazuli	" ( <u>LM</u> ,March 1938)
Three Bushes	" ( <u>LM</u> ,Jan. 1937)
The Gyres	July 1936-Jan.1937( <u>NP</u> , '38)
A Nativity	Aug.1936( <u>LM</u> ,Dec. 1938)
To A Friend (changed to To Dorothy Wellesley)	" ( <u>LM</u> ,Mar. 1938)
Come Gather Round Me Parnellites	Sept. 1936( <u>AB</u> ,1,Jan.'37)
The Spur	Oct. 1936( <u>LM</u> ,Mar. 1938)
Roger Casement	Oct.-Nov. 1936( <u>Irish Press</u> , Feb.1937)



The Ghost of Roger Casement	Oct. 1936( <u>NP</u> ,1938)
The Lady's First Song	Nov. 1936 "
The Chambermaid's First Song	" "
The Chambermaid's Second Song	" "
The Lover's Song	" "
An Acre of Grass	" ( <u>LM</u> ,Apr. 1938)
The Curse of Cromwell	Nov. 1936-Jan. 1937 ( <u>AB</u> ,8, Aug. 1937)
What Then?	1936( <u>The Erasmian</u> ,Apr. 1937)
The O'Rahilly	Jan.1937( <u>LM</u> ,Mar. 1938)
The Great Day	" "
Parnell	" "
What Was Lost	" "
Sweet Dancer	" ( <u>LM</u> ,Apr. 1938)
The Old Stone Cross	Apr.-June 1937( <u>Nation</u> , Mar. 1938)
A Model For The Laureate	July 1937 ( <u>NP</u> ,1938)
Those Images	Aug.1937( <u>LM</u> ,Mar. 1938)
Colonel Martin	" ( <u>AB</u> ,12,Dec. 1937)
The Pilgrim	" ( <u>AB</u> ,10,Oct. 1937)
The Municipal Gallery Revisited	Aug.-Sept. 1937( <u>A Speech &amp; Two Poems</u> ,1937)
Imitated From The Japanese	Nov.1936-Oct.1937( <u>NP</u> ,1938)
Long Legged Fly	Nov.1937-Apr.1938( <u>LM</u> , Mar. 1939)
The Circus Animals' Desertion	Nov.1937-Sept.1938( <u>LM</u> , Jan. 1939)
Beautiful Lofty Things	1937( <u>NP</u> ,1938)
A Bronze Head	1937-1938( <u>LM</u> ,Mar. 1939)
News For The Delphic Oracle	1938 "

The Apparations	Mar.-Apr.1938( <u>LM</u> ,Dec. 1938)
The Statues	Apr.1938( <u>LM</u> ,Mar. 1939)
The Statesman's Holiday	" ( <u>OTB</u> ,1939)
The Wild Old Wicked Man	? ( <u>LM</u> ,Apr. 1938)
Are You Content?	? "
A Drunken Man's Praise Of Sobriety	( <u>NP</u> ,1938)
The Spirit Medium	"
Politics	May 1938( <u>LM</u> ,Jan. 1939)
In Tara's Halls	June 1938( <u>LP</u> ,1939)
John Kinsella's Lament For Mrs. Mary Moore	July 1938( <u>LM</u> ,Dec. 1938)
Crazy Jane On The Mountain	" ( <u>OTB</u> ,1939)
High Talk	July-Aug.1938( <u>LM</u> ,Dec. 1938)
Hound's Voice	Summer 1938
The Man And The Echo	July 1938,rev. Oct.1938 ( <u>LM</u> ,Jan. 1939)
Under Ben Bulben	Sept.1938( <u>Irish Times</u> , Feb. 1939)
Three Marching Songs	Nov.1933-Feb.1934,rewrit. Dec.1938 ( <u>LP</u> ,1939)
A Stick Of Incense	1938( <u>LP</u> ,1939)
Three Songs To One Burden	( <u>Spectator</u> ,May 1939)
Cuchulain Comforted	Jan. 13 1939( <u>LP</u> ,1939)
The Black Tower	Jan. 21 1939 "

APPENDIX B

STEVENS'S THE ROCK AND FINAL POEMS

The most recent and comprehensive dating of Stevens's final poems is the checklist by Samuel French Morse in Wallace Stevens Checklist and Bibliography of Stevens Criticism by Samuel French Morse, Jackson R. Bryer and Joseph N. Riddel (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963). The appendix, "A Note On The Dates" in Opus Posthumous, ed. Samuel F. Morse (New York: Knopf, 1969) dates the poems not included in the Checklist. "The Rock" (1950) signals the beginning of what is considered in the paper as Stevens's last poetry: 1950 is used as the cut off date for the start of the last poems. The poems are listed in the order of publication date as it is generally the case, according to Morse, that the date of composition was very close to the poem's publication date. Exact composition dates have not been made available yet. Holly Stevens in the table of contents of The Palm at the End of the Mind (New York: Vintage, 1972) arranges the selected poems in chronological order according to manuscript and correspondence evidence; however, those dates do not vary significantly from the year of publication.

The poems published in Opus Posthumous, (OP), will be noted by an asterisk. The rest of the poems appear in The Rock, the final volume of The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1969).

*The Sick Man	( <u>Accent</u> , Spring 1950)
*As at a Theatre	( <u>Wake</u> , Summer 1950)
*The Desire to Make Love in a Pagoda	"
*Nuns Painting Water-Lilies	"
*The Role of the Idea in Poetry	"
*Americana	"
*The Souls of Women at Night	"
The Rock	( <u>Inventario</u> , Summer 1950) appeared in the U. S. ( <u>Trinity Review</u> , May 1954)

*A Discovery of Thought	( <u>Imagi</u> , Summer 1950)
*The Course of a Particular	( <u>Hudson Review</u> , Spring 1951)
Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour	"
Madame La Fleuri	( <u>Accent</u> , Autumn 1951)
A Quiet Normal Life	( <u>Voices</u> , Jan/Apr. 1952)
*How Now, O Brightener...	( <u>Shenandoah</u> , Spring 1952)
Long and Sluggish Lines	( <u>Origin</u> , Spring 1952)
Note on Moonlight	( <u>Shenandoah</u> , Autumn 1952)
St. Armorer's Church from the Outside	( <u>Poetry</u> , Oct. 1952)
To an Old Philosopher in Rome	( <u>Hudson Review</u> , Autumn 1952)
The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain	"
Vacancy in the Park	"
Two Illustrations That the World Is What You Make of It	"
Prologues to What Is Possible	"
Looking Across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly	"
Song of Fixed Accord	"
The World as Meditation	"
An Old Man Asleep	( <u>Nation</u> , Dec. 1952)
The Irish Cliffs of Moher	"
The Plain Sense of Things	"
One of the Inhabitants of the West	"
Lebensweisheitspielerei	"
The Hermitage at the Center	"
The Green Planet	"
The Planet on the Table	( <u>Accent</u> , Summer 1953)
The River of Rivers in Connecticut	( <u>Inventario</u> , Summer 1953)
Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself	( <u>Trinity Rev.</u> , May 1954)

- \*The Dove in Spring (Seven Arts, 21, 1954)
- \*Farewell Without a Guitar (New World Writing, 5, 1954)
- \*The Sail of Ulysses 1953-1954(OP, 1957)
- \*Presence of an External Master of Knowledge (Times Literary Supp., Sept. 17, 1954)
- \*A Child Asleep in Its Own Life "
- \*Two Letters (Vogue, Oct. 1954)
- \*Conversation with Three Women of New England (Accent, Autumn 1954)
- \*Dinner Bell in the Woods (Perspective, Autumn 1954)
- \*Reality Is an Activity of the Most August Imagination "
- \*Solitaire Under the Oaks (Sewanee Rev., Winter 1955)
- \*Local Objects "
- \*Artificial Populations "
- \*A Clear Day and No Memories "
- \*Banjo Boomer (Atlantic Monthly, Mar. 1955)
- \*July Mountain (Atlantic Monthly, Apr. 1955)
- \*The Region November (Zero, Spring 1956)
- \*On the Way to the Bus 1954(OP, 1957)
- \*As You Leave the Room 1947-1955? "
- \*Of Mere Being 1955? "
- \*A Mythology Reflects Its Region " "

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, this and all subsequent dating of Stevens's volumes of poetry, the individual poems, and the essays are taken from Samuel French Morse, "Wallace Stevens Checklist," in Wallace Stevens Checklist and Bibliography of Stevens Criticism by Samuel F. Morse, Jackson Bryer, and Joseph Riddel (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963), pp. 13-31.

Unless otherwise indicated, the dating of Yeats's poems, volumes and essays are taken from Allan Wade, A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats (London:Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), pp.17-208.

<sup>2</sup>Wallace Stevens, The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1954), p.247. All further references to the poems will be cited in the text: CP, Collected Poems and OP, Opus Posthumous, ed. Samuel F. Morse (New York:Knopf,1957).

<sup>3</sup>Joseph N. Riddel, The Clairvoyant Eye (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1965), p.41.

<sup>4</sup>William Butler Yeats, The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats, Definitive Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p.291. All further references to the poems will be given in the text: CP.

<sup>5</sup>Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel (New York: Random House, 1951), p.36. All further references will be given in the text: NA.

<sup>6</sup>Harold Bloom, Yeats (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 161-62.

<sup>7</sup>Letters of Wallace Stevens, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1966), p.427. All further references will be given in the text: L.

<sup>8</sup>Daniel Fuchs, The Comic Spirit of Wallace Stevens (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1963), p.179.

<sup>9</sup>Edward Kessler, Images of Wallace Stevens (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1972), pp.51-52.

<sup>10</sup>Riddel, p.165.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p.264.

## [Notes to pages 10-17]

- 1<sup>2</sup>Robert Pack, Wallace Stevens (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1958), p.123.
- 1<sup>3</sup>Helen Vendler, On Extended Wings (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969), p.269.
- 1<sup>4</sup>Bloom, p.356.
- 1<sup>5</sup>Thomas Parkinson, W. B. Yeats (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1964), pp.134-35.
- 1<sup>6</sup>Bloom, p.361.
- 1<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.362.
- 1<sup>8</sup>John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (New York: Farrar, Straus and Co., 1963), pp224-25.
- 1<sup>9</sup>Walter E. Houghton, "Yeats and Crazy Jane: The Hero in Old Age," in The Permanence of Yeats, ed. James Hall and Martin Steinmann (New York: Collier, 1961), p.336.
- 2<sup>0</sup>J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality (Cambridge: Belnap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), p.119.
- 2<sup>1</sup>We can refer to "The Fisherman (1916) as introducing the paradox of vision that Yeats sought to achieve. He ends the poem:
- '. . .Before I am Old  
I shall have written him one  
Poem maybe as cold  
And passionate as the dawn.' (CP, p.146)
- 2<sup>2</sup>Edward Engelberg, The Vast Design (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1964), p.165.
- 2<sup>3</sup>Bloom, pp.418-19.
- 2<sup>4</sup>The Letters of W. B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p.836. Hereafter, all references will be given in the text: L.
- 2<sup>5</sup>T. S. Eliot, "The Poetry of W. B. Yeats," in The Permanence of Yeats, p.301.
- 2<sup>6</sup>Riddel, p.272.
- 2<sup>7</sup>F. O. Matthiessen, "The Crooked Road," The Southern Review, 7, No.3 (Winter, 1964), 467.
- 2<sup>8</sup>Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), p.244.
- 2<sup>9</sup>See Appendix B for all dating of Stevens's The Rock.
- 3<sup>0</sup>Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry

## [Notes to pages 17-30]

(Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), p.382).

<sup>31</sup>Riddel, p. 278.

<sup>32</sup>William Butler Yeats, "J. M. Synge and the Ireland of His Time," in Essays and Introductions (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p.322.

<sup>33</sup>Morton Zabel, "Yeats: The Book and the Image," in The Permanence of Yeats, p. 325.

<sup>34</sup>Richard Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Masks (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1948), p.275.

<sup>35</sup>Ellmann, Identity of Yeats, p.200.

<sup>36</sup>Frank Doggett, "Wallace Stevens's Later Poetry," Journal of English Literary History, 25 (June 1958), 138.

<sup>37</sup>Samuel F. Morse, Wallace Stevens (New York: Pegasus, 1970), p.219.

<sup>38</sup>Riddel, p.277.

<sup>39</sup>William Burney, Wallace Stevens (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), p.164.

<sup>40</sup>Kessler, p.82.

<sup>41</sup>Riddel, p.230.

<sup>42</sup>Kessler, p.160.

<sup>43</sup>Miller, p.266.

<sup>44</sup>Riddel, p.249.

<sup>45</sup>Fuchs, p.91.

<sup>46</sup>Thomas Whitebread, "Wallace Stevens's 'Highest Candle,'" Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 4 (Winter 1963), 479.

<sup>47</sup>Kessler, p.85.

<sup>48</sup>Pack, p.62.

<sup>49</sup>Whitebread, p.468.

<sup>50</sup>Morse, Wallace Stevens, p.56.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p.122.

<sup>52</sup>Riddel, p. 252.

<sup>53</sup>It is significant to note here, Randall Jarrell's strong



## [Notes to pages 30-37]

praise for the glory of humanity present in The Rock because this was his central criticism of Stevens's middle poetry in "Reflections on Wallace Stevens," in Poetry and the Age (New York: Vintage, 1955), see pp. 127-34.

<sup>54</sup>Riddel, p.253.

<sup>55</sup>Randall Jarrell, "The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens," in The Achievement of Wallace Stevens, ed. Ashley Brown and Robert Haller (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1962), p.183.

<sup>56</sup>Morse, Wallace Stevens, p.215.

<sup>57</sup>Engelberg, p. 152.

<sup>58</sup>William Butler Yeats, The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p.174.

<sup>59</sup>See Appendix A for all dating of Yeats's Last Poems.

<sup>60</sup>Yeats had the Steinach rejuvenating operation in 1934. Ellman, in Man and the Masks, points out that Yeats's attitude toward his ailments was improved after the operation, p.276.

<sup>61</sup>Miller, p.128.

<sup>62</sup>Curtis Bradford, Yeats At Work (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1965), p.142. Bradford dates the poem more precisely than any other sources.

<sup>63</sup>Curtis Bradford, "Yeats's Last Poems Again," in The Dolmen Press Yeats Centenary Papers (Chester Springs: Dufour Editions, 1968), p.276.

<sup>64</sup>Bradford's "The Order of Yeats's Last Poems," Modern Language Notes, 76 (June 1961), 515-16 is reprinted as the appendix of "Yeats's Last Poems Again," pp.287-88. The order of the poems as designated by Yeats is the following: "Under Ben Bulben," "Three Songs to one Burden," "The Black Tower," "Cuchulain Comforted," "Three Marching Songs," "In Tara's Halls," "The Statues," "News for the Delphic Oracle," "The Long-legged Fly," "A Bronze Head," "A Stick of Incense," "Hound Voice," "John Kinsella's Lament," "High Talk," "The Apparitions," "A Nativity," "The Man and the Echo," "The Circus Animals' Desertion," and "Politics."

<sup>65</sup>Denis Donoghue, "The Last Poems," in An Honoured Guest, ed. Denis Donoghue and J. R. Mulryne (New York: St. Martins Press, 1966), p.134.

<sup>66</sup>Alex Zwerdling, "W. B. Yeats: Variations of the Visionary Quest," in Yeats, ed. John Unterecker (Engelwood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1963), p.92.

## [Notes to pages 37-51]

- 67 Bloom, p.435.
- 68 Ibid., p.436.
- 69 Miller, p.120.
- 70 Bradford, Yeats At Work, p.146.
- 71 Ibid., p.148.
- 72 Ibid..
- 73 Derlick Marsh, "The Artist and the Tragic Vision: Themes in the Late Poetry of W. B. Yeats," Queens Quarterly, 74, No. 1 (Spring 1967), 118.
- 74 Engelberg, p.172.
- 75 Peter Ure, Towards A Mythology (New York: Russel and Russel, 1967), p.75.
- 76 Frank Lentricchia, The Gaiety of Language (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1968), p.117.
- 77 Engelberg, p.171.
- 78 Unterecker, Reader's Guide, p.262.
- 79 Ibid..
- 80 Ellmann, Man and Masks, p.294.
- 81 Bradford, "Last Poems Again," p.273.
- 82 Ibid., p.274.
- 83 Bloom, pp.456-57.
- 84 Ibid., p.457.
- 85 Riddel, p.269.
- 86 Morse, Wallace Stevens, p.162.
- 87 Amos Niven Wilder, "Protestant Orientation in Contemporary Literature," in Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature, ed. Stanley R. Hopper (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p.245.

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