

FIGURES OF MIND
IN THE POETRY OF W.B. YEATS AND WALLACE STEVENS

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Abstract

This study examines representations of thinking and consciousness in the poetry of W.B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens. In discussing the processes of thinking in poetry, I have borrowed Ian Fletcher's term "noetics" which "names the field and the precise activity occurring when the poet introduces thought as a discriminable dimension of the form and meaning of the poem" (3-4). I have further sub-divided Fletcher's term into "noetics of form" and "noetics of figure" the first exploring the dominant modes of thinking which the poems imitate, the latter examining the images which are consistently used to represent consciousness and/or processes of thinking. In many ways, this study takes as its premise Stevens' theory of the poetic imagination as either "marginal" or "central." I explore this theory of poetry in relation to a noetics of form and figure in the poetry of the "marginal"-thinking Yeats and the "central"-thinking Stevens in order to consider the idea of consciousness as a container and of poetry as a process of containment. By understanding consciousness as a *container* of thinking, we come to see that human consciousness—and our ability to think metaphorically—virtually *creates* reality.

This thesis is divided into two sections, "The Noetics of Form" and "The Noetics of Figure". Each section contains two chapters each on the poetry of Yeats and Stevens respectively. In the first section, I argue that the poetry of both Yeats and Stevens imitates a meditative mode of thinking. In Chapter One I explore Yeats's poetry as a dialectical mode of meditation. For Yeats, the process of containment is repeatedly undermined or postponed through an imitation of internal argument. His dialogues imitate an ongoing process of differentiation—a splitting of the objective and the subjective modes of thinking—in a struggle to enact containment through a transcendence or reconciliation of opposing lines of thought. In Chapter Two, I illustrate how Stevens's meditative poetry often imitates a process of thinking which is less determined and more observational than Yeats's. While there is still an implicit split between subjective and objective thought in Stevens' poetry, he more often imitates modes of thinking which recognize the co-dependency of human consciousness and objective reality, resulting in the imagined objective.

Section II concerns the Noetics of Figure in the poetry of Yeats and Stevens, examining how their most dominant imagery represents a paradigm of human consciousness. In Chapter Three, I illustrate how Yeats's images suggest transcendence, a movement towards and beyond the margins of consciousness. I ground this discussion in Northrop Frye's view of images of ascent as being connected with an intensifying consciousness. Yeats's figures of mountains, trees, towers, and ladders represent consciousness, while his images of birds represent various forms of thinking within—and in an attempt to transcend—its limits. In Chapter Four, I look at Stevens's images of colour

and shape as major noetic figures. These figures represent a movement towards the centre of human consciousness, and a model of consciousness as an ever-expanding container of reality. In my concluding chapter, I look at two late poems from each of the poets in order to illustrate the contrasts and comparisons between these paradigms of human consciousness. Though both Yeats and Stevens are concerned with a creating and created consciousness, Stevens' noetics of figure provide us with a theory of poetry that is a theory of life, through which we come to see both poets as imitating a process of containment through the act of poetic composition.

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In Memoriam
Cornelia Maria Abma

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Mind

*Mind in its purest play is like some bat
That beats about in caverns all alone,
Contriving by a kind of senseless wit
Not to conclude against a wall of stone.*

*It has no need to falter or explore;
Darkly it knows what obstacles are there,
And so may weave and flitter, dip and soar
In perfect courses through the blackest air,*

*And has this simile a like perfection?
The mind is like a bat. Precisely. Save
That in the very happiest intellection
A graceful error may correct the cave.*

--Richard Wilbur

Introduction:

His Art is Happy, But Who Knows his Mind?

The romantic and post-romantic emphasis on the power of human consciousness has had a tremendous influence on modernist and, as Richard Wilbur's poem suggests, contemporary poetry. W.B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens are modernist poets anchored in, though often reacting to, the romantic tradition out of which they write. Their poetry reveals an intense and on-going fascination with the role of consciousness in perception and creativity.

Yeats's poetic subject is almost always the mind's relationship with or alienation from reality. Many of his poems represent an internal dialogue between modes of thinking, rehearsing a veritable drama of the mind which acts out the conflict between subjective and objective consciousness. Similarly, Stevens' poetry repeatedly explores the mind's relationship with reality, writing "The poem of the act of the mind" ("Of Modern Poetry," *CP* 28). As Ian Fletcher points out, "the mind and its process are literally everywhere in Stevens, the motif most frequently repeated throughout the canon" (272).

Both Yeats and Stevens are primarily lyric poets, writing about the self in relation to the world in which they live. As in the poetry of the romantics, human consciousness and its correspondence with the phenomena of nature is a recurring theme of interest.

Imagination and reality are-- for each poet in his own distinct way--separate yet co-dependant. Although both poets write poems which bear "Some lineament or character, /.../ Of the planet of which they were part" (*CP* 532), they do so by suggesting that, more than anything else, "man's life is thought" (*YP* 407).

Lyric poetry, by definition, concentrates on the self, and is, as Michael Hamburger points out, "more dependent on the unity of inner experience--that is, of the experiencing consciousness--than on that sequence of outer events" (59). With the exception perhaps of seventeenth-century poetry, no other literary movement produced as much lyrical poetry as did romanticism, with its emphasis on the self and the perceiving mind. With the advent of such intensely subjective thinkers as Nietzsche and Freud, how we think about ourselves and the world has been dramatically transformed.

Beginning most prominently with the romantic poets, the mind remains of central interest in the fields of philosophy, science, and literature. Abrams, in *Natural Supernaturalism*, argues that the romantic poets wrote about nature "only insofar as it is the occasion for the activity which defines man: thought, the process of intellection" (*SS* 528). Though the investigation into the mind and its processes is fairly recent, it has become an inexhaustible field of study. Beginning with the study of psychology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and moving into our current developments in cognitive science, the subject of the human mind and its various functions has been of primary interest. We are now so deeply involved in discussions and analyses of consciousness and cognition that it is often difficult to conceive how relatively new and

increasingly complex this subject truly is.

John Milton was one of the first pre-romantic poets to treat the process of thought as a subject worthy of high poetic treatment. Milton's *Paradise Lost* claims an attempt to "justify the ways of God to man," yet it does so by investigating the power of human consciousness, of *thinking*. The "hero" of Milton's epic, according to many romantic writers, was neither God nor Adam, but the free-thinking Satan. Blake's famous claim that Milton "was a true poet, and of the devil's party without knowing it" reveals a great deal about the romantics' conception of mind: Satan, unlike Adam, was a free thinker, who looked not to a given authority for guidance but to his own inward feelings and thoughts. Milton taught the romantics that "The mind is its own place, and of itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven" (254-55).

Explorations of the thinking mind have, indeed, become so dominant in modern and contemporary literature that Ian Fletcher proposes "the opening of a field of study, noetics, whose emphasis falls upon the *process* of thinking as an aspect of literary (or other) discourse" (9). Fletcher defines *noetics* as "a term arising from the Greek *nous*, mind, or *noiein*, to think," using the term *noetics* to name "the field and the precise activity occurring when the poet introduces thought as a discriminable dimension of the form and meaning of the poem" (3-4). Any study of the mind and thinking in literature, therefore, could be said to fall under the heading of noetics. To simplify, therefore, I have separated my study of noetics into two distinct categories: the noetics of form and the noetics of figure.

The noetics of form seeks to name the dominant mode of thinking represented by a particular poet. By the term 'form,' I refer not to the various verse forms such as the sonnet, villanelle, or sestina, but to the more general forms of poetic discourse, of *how* the poem imitates an act of human consciousness. By "modes of thinking," I refer to such distinctions such as 'analytical,' 'logical,' 'meditative,' 'intuitive,' and the like. Louis Martz introduced the idea of meditative poetry as a distinct genre in his essay, "Wallace Stevens: The World as Meditation" (1958) and it is this sense of poetry as "the act of the mind" that I employ here.

Both Yeats and Stevens write in the romantic tradition of meditative poetry, in which a speaking subject considers the relationship between consciousness and nature. Critics such as Joseph Carrol, Joseph Riddel, Harold Bloom, and Helen Vendler, have convincingly argued that Stevens and Yeats are essentially romantic poets, continuing an exploration of the relationship between reality and the imagination. Though the romantic tradition is, indeed, the origin of their meditative form, Yeats and Stevens approach the process of meditation in diverse ways. The critic Carol Christ offers a way of examining the romantic tradition in relation to Victorian poetics which points towards an important dichotomy in Yeats's poetry. In Chapter One, I examine how Yeats, as one of "the last romantics," is grounded in the romantic sensibility, yet--like the Victorians--is also suspicious of it. Carol Christ contends that, though the Victorians are concerned with the mind and its processes, they "react with varying degrees of discomfort to the Romantic conception of the imagination" (4). For the Victorians, a purely subjective reading of

nature--in which the limit between reality and consciousness is more or less erased--introduces a solipsistic and narrow view of reality. The largely Victorian form of the dramatic monologue responds to the meditative lyric of the romantics by suggesting that subjective readings of reality invite dangerous mis-readings. The irony of the dramatic monologue is effective only if read objectively. We learn from poets such as Tennyson and Browning that a purely subjective perception of reality is problematic. Yeats's response to these seemingly irreconcilable oppositions is to write a largely dialectical form of meditative poetry in which subjective and objective armies of consciousness clash. What results is a meditative form which seeks a reconciliation between opposing forms of thought.

For Stevens, on the other hand, thinking is not so much an argument with the self as it is a completely human act which shapes and defines our world. In this way, Stevens is perhaps a more direct descendent of the romantics. With such critics as Bloom, Riddel, Vendler, and Carrol, I place Stevens squarely in the romantic tradition. Stevens' sense of perception seems untroubled by the anxieties of Victorian influence. Rather than seeking to discipline the mind through meditative exercise, Stevens' poetry imitates the act of thinking as an act of creative consciousness. In Chapter Two, I expand on William Bevis's convincing argument that Stevens' meditative poetry reveals modes of thought remarkably similar to methods of Eastern meditation, even though--unlike Yeats--Stevens did not actively study or engage in disciplined meditative exercises. As an imitation of meditative thought, Stevens' poetry reveals that the world as we know it is created by, and

therefore inseparable from, human consciousness. Where Bevis and I part company, however, is in his distinction between “meditative knowledge” and “imaginative knowledge” (146). Meditation, I contend, is the prime form of Stevens’s noetics precisely *because* it is integral to a consciousness which creates its own sense of reality. Meditative knowledge, then, *is* imaginative knowledge, since meditation is both an active and passive mode of thinking.

The noetics of figure--which I discuss in Section II-- refers to various representations and models of both mind and thought. A ‘figure’-- as I use the term throughout this study-- refers to any image, be it symbolic or allegorical, which represents human consciousness and/or its functions. For example, the notion of the mind as a mirror which reflects nature--so prominent in eighteenth-century literature--tells us a great deal about the perceived relationship between the mind and the external world. As the models and figures of human consciousness change, they reflect changing attitudes concerning processes of thought as well as the mind’s relationship to reality and the self.

In Chapter Three, I undertake an examination of Yeats’s imagery as noetic figures, exploring how they relate to ideas of the mind and human consciousness. Much like the romantics, Yeats takes his figures of mind from the natural world of trees, caves, and birds. Yet he also suggests that the natural world is a *construct* of the creative consciousness by introducing artificial images of ascent such as towers and ladders. My reading of Yeats’s figures is largely informed by Northrop Frye’s discussion, in *Words with Power*, of images of ascent as being “connected with the intensifying of

consciousness” (*WP* 151).

Yeats’s references to thinking are largely prescriptive, suggesting how we *should* think. Stevens, on the other hand, is more interested in how we *do* think. In Chapter Four, I examine how Stevens uses both colour and shape as figures of human consciousness. Though many critics, such as McFaddon, Adams, Prasad, and Kessler, discuss how Stevens’s color symbolism is related to ideas about imagination and reality, they fail to fully appreciate how Stevens’s understanding of colour theory illuminates the full spectrum of his poetic vision.

Colour is, however, only part of Stevens’s grand figure of mind. The other is the container which is found, both implicitly and explicitly, throughout Stevens’s poetry. Where James Baird uses the metaphor of architecture to discuss the dome-like structure of mind upon the rock of reality, I use the metaphor of the container to examine Stevens’s idea of human consciousness as both the *alpha* and *omega* of reality. Using both colour and shape, Stevens presents a vision of human consciousness as a “crystallized pendentive” which reflects and refracts reality as it is contained within a created and creating consciousness.

In my concluding chapter, I look at two ‘death poems’ from each of the poets in order to provide an overview of the noetics of form and figure as it applies to poetic thinking in general. Through Stevens’ explicit ideas concerning the imagination and reality, we come to see individual poems, or metaphorical thought, as containers of consciousness or models of a new reality. Once we understand that our *sense* of reality--

the resemblance between subject and object--creates reality, we see how, as Stevens argues, a theory of poetry is, indeed, a theory of life. Metaphorical thinking--the thinking of poetry--offers the endless possibility of a new reality contained within the limits of a transcendent consciousness.

In his essay, "Effects of Analogy," Stevens presents two theories of the poetic imagination which concern all poets to a greater or lesser degree: the marginal and the central. The marginal poet, Stevens contends, "comes to feel that his imagination is not wholly his own but that it may be part of a much...more potent imagination," while the central poet sees the imagination "as a power within him to have such insights into reality as will make it possible for him to be sufficient as a poet at the very center of consciousness" (*NA* 115). In many ways, this thesis is an exploration of these two theories as they apply to the poetry of Yeats and Stevens.

Section I

The Noetics of Form

Chapter One:

Till Meditation Master All Its Parts

Louis Martz, in the final chapter of *The Poetry of Meditation*, introduces the "meditative poem" as a lyric form which is distinct from, though related to, the poetry of religious meditation. For Martz, a meditative poem "is a work that creates an interior drama of the mind; this dramatic action is usually (though not always) created by some form of self-address, in which the mind grasps firmly a problem or form or situation deliberately evoked by the memory, brings it forward toward the full light of consciousness, and concludes with a moment of illumination where the speaker's self has, for a time, found an answer to its conflicts" (*PM* 329).

Much of Yeats's poetry enacts--as Yeats claims poetry always should--an "argument with oneself" (*M* 331). Martz's definition perfectly expresses the idea of a meditative mind *actively* engaged with reality, bringing a problem or idea "toward the full light of consciousness." For Martz, meditation is a disciplined form of thinking in which the mind actively pursues a moment of illumination.

Meditative poetry has its roots, as Martz's study suggests, in the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century but the influence of the romantic poets' secular form of

meditative poetry is more evident in Yeats's early work. "[T]he romantic movement...is over," Yeats laments in an essay on Bishop Berkeley, "superseded by a new naturalism that leaves man helpless before the contents of his own mind" (*E&I* 405). Though he saw himself as one of the "last romantics" (*YP* 360), Yeats nevertheless questioned romantic idealism in his own poetry. The "new naturalism" of which Yeats complains points to division where the romantics sought unity between human consciousness and the natural world. For Yeats, "the romantic movement seems related to the idealist philosophy; the naturalistic movement, Stendhal's mirror dawdling down a lane" (*E&I* 404).

Though the philosophic tree of idealism has numerous branches, it has at its root the idea that there is no access to reality apart from what the mind provides us with. The naturalistic movement, on the other hand, generally assumes a world separate from, and therefore measurable by, human consciousness. As an aesthetic movement, the naturalists called for artists to represent not ideas about the world but the world itself, as if one held a mirror up to nature.

M. H. Abrams, in his essay, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," refers to the "descriptive-meditative-descriptive" form which dominates the poetry of the romantic tradition. In poems such as Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" the speaking subject describes a particular scene, subsequently meditates on its significance, and returns to a description of the scene newly perceived through a meditative state of mind. Though the poet's mind is turned to nature, it is equally--if not more significantly--turned inward to the processes of thought. Abrams uses the term

"descriptive-meditative-descriptive" as a corrective to G.M. Harper's term "conversation poems." Though the speaking subject is addressing his thoughts to an implied listener--a sister, spouse, or friend, for example--he is also looking inward, contemplating the world and his relationship with his surroundings: the meditation is, for Abrams, the central theme of the romantic lyric.

Consider, for example, the meditative section of Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp," where he meditates not only on the outward scene but on his own processes of thought:

And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
Whilst through my half-closed eye-lids I behold
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;
Full many a thought uncalled and undetained,
And many idle flitting phantasies,
Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
As wild and various as the random gales
That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!
And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps

Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
 At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

The state of mind which Coleridge's poem imitates is that of meditative reverie, in which thoughts are "uncalled and undetained," invited to come and go as they occur. The figure of the harp as an image of consciousness reinforces this passivity. Ideas are received, Coleridge implies, from an even larger consciousness which is seemingly beyond nature, "the Soul of each, and God of all." Rather than nature, Coleridge's true subject is the correspondence between human consciousness and this larger, abstract consciousness perceived through nature.

Meditation, for many romantics, concerns the mind's ability to access not the natural but the supernatural world. This form of meditation elevates the unconscious--revealed through passive reverie and dream--above that of conscious awareness. In Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," for example, the speaker seeks a "mood" in which "the heavy and the weary weight of this unintelligible world, / Is lightened":

--that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,--
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep

In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things. (113)

The subjective vision of nature--which reveals the more true "life of things"--is elevated above a more objective view of reality.

Yeats's meditative poetry has its origins in the "descriptive-meditative-descriptive" form of the romantic lyric and its evolution may be traced through his representations and discussions of the supernatural, especially as they relate to dream. Almost all of his early poetry--from *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889) to *The Shadowy Waters* (1906)--conveys an interest in the power of the unconscious mind and its connection with supernatural realms, while many of his early essays deal with the nature of dreams and the occult. Like the romantics before him, Yeats believed that the subjective realm of dream and vision was most suitable for poetic inspiration: "Everything that can be seen, touched, measured, explained, understood, argued over," Yeats claimed, "is to the imaginative artist nothing more than a means, for he belongs to the invisible life, and delivers its ever new and ancient revelation" (*E&I* 195). This belief in and allegiance to the "invisible life" attracted Yeats to the unconscious mind and its representation through powerful symbolic images. Yeats thought the symbol "the only possible expression of some invisible essence" (*E&I* 116) and, like the romantics, suggests that a state of reverie allows one to "receive

thoughts and images from beyond his own mind" (*E&I* 79).

William Bevis, in his study of Stevens and meditation, describes reverie as "void of fantasy or thought and accompanied by long, slow brain waves and some feeling of timelessness" (76). Reverie is often considered one of the most basic and accessible modes of meditative thinking. As a relaxed state where the mind freely wanders, it is associated with sense impressions and, as such, is especially useful for understanding the natural tendencies of one's thoughts. In Yeats's writings, this feeling of timelessness is described as a trance-like state where "thought wanders" and the thinker "forget[s] the things which move before the eyes" (*E&I* 150). Reverie is, for Yeats, a term often used to describe "trance, madness, or deep meditation" where "the soul moves among symbols and unfolds in symbols" (*E&I* 162). Through reverie, then, unconscious thoughts surface, while the conscious mind remains passive and watchful, or is entirely forgotten for a certain length of time.

Despite Yeats's discussion of meditation and trance throughout the early essays, the poetry of this period favours the term "dream" over "meditation" or even "reverie." In his earliest poetry, the ideal realm of symbols is often represented by dream imagery. Like reverie, however, dreams refer to a passive state where the conscious mind is relatively inactive, allowing the unconscious thoughts and visions to surface freely. In "To Ireland in the Coming Times" (*YP* 85-86), for example, Yeats writes:

My rhymes more than their rhyming tell

Of things discovered in the deep,
 Where only body's laid asleep.
 For the elemental creatures go
 About my table to and fro,
 That hurry from unmeasured mind. (ll. 20-25)

Likewise, in Book III of "The Wanderings of Oisín" (*YP* 24-35), Oisín chooses to live among "the Immortals, their dew dropping sleep" (*YP* 29), and is awakened to the sad reality of death and loss only when "the dreams of the islands were gone" (*YP* 32). The dream-world is a realm of escape, yet Yeats' description of it is so detailed and rich that the real world--"full of troubles / And... anxious in its sleep" ("The Stolen Child" *YP* 53)--remains largely unappealing. In "The Shadowy Waters," (*YP* 147-179), Forgael longs to give himself

...wholly to the dreams,
 And get into their world that to the sense
 Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly
 Among substantial things; for it is dreams
 That lift us to the flowing, changing world
 That the heart longs for....(*YP* 156)

Unconscious states are often given priority over a conscious awareness of reality. In "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" (YP 41), Yeats writes that "Of old the world on dreaming fed" but is now "Troubling the endless reverie." The happy shepherd, who tells his story to "Some twisted, echo-harbouring shell" (YP 41), dwells among "dreams" which transform his "fretful words" into "melodious guile" (YP 41). In contrast, the sad shepherd of the companion poem (YP 42) hears only the "inarticulate moan" of his own personal reality echoing within the empty shell:

And then the man whom Sorrow named his friend

Sought once again the shore, and found a shell,

And thought, *I will my heavy story tell*

Till my own words, re-echoing, shall send

Their sadness through a hollow, pearly heart;

And my own tale again for me shall sing,

And my own whispering words be comforting,

And lo! my ancient burden may depart.

Then he sang softly nigh the pearly rim;

But the sad dweller by the sea-ways lone

Changed all he sang to inarticulate moan

Among her wildering whirls, forgetting him. (YP 43)

Because the Sad Shepherd sings a song of himself rather than one of dreams, his song is swept away by the natural world.

Dreams are normally associated with sleep and ignorance, but for Yeats one is "dream-awakened" (*YP* 100) if aware of the significance of symbols. In the early essay, "Magic," he writes of symbols as having "the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half unconsciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist" (*E&I* 49). Yeats' interest in the emotional life is closely connected with his interest in the unconscious in that both may be concealed or dominated by the intellect. For Yeats, "we are lured to the threshold of sleep" by pattern, symbol, and music "without knowing that we have ever set our feet upon the steps of the horn of ivory" (*E&I* 160). If a work of art is written from a state of reverie, he suggests, it re-creates in the reader a similar state. Pattern, symbol, and music "prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake" (*E&I* 159).

Yeats's interest in the power of symbols--strongly related to his enduring interest in the occult--lasted throughout his entire career and culminated in the complex mythical system set down in *A Vision*. Though Yeats claimed that much of this system resulted from his wife's "automatic writing," Northrop Frye points out that Yeats also argued that *A Vision* represents "the emergence of the philosophy of [his] own poetry, the unconscious becoming conscious" (*FI* 251). Despite his continuing allegiance to the supernatural, however, Yeats's attitude towards largely unconscious states of meditative thought changed considerably.

In a letter to Katherine Tynan, written in 1888, Yeats complains that his early poetry is "almost all a flight into fairyland" rather than "the poetry of insight and knowledge" which he hopes "some day" to write (*L(K)* 54). Though Yeats associated his work with that of the romantics, he also questioned the wholly subjective view of nature their poetry implied. The more passive states of meditative reverie give way, in the later Yeats, to a form of meditation that attempts to reconcile two conflicting forms of thought: romantic idealism and Victorian realism, the subjective and the objective.

The Victorian lyric develops from the romantic lyric as a new form of meditative poetry. In *Victorian and Modern Poetics*, Carol Christ contends that poets such as Tennyson and Browning "react with varying degrees of discomfort to the Romantic conception of the imagination, but they are nonetheless concerned...with mental acts" (4). The dramatic monologue, like the romantic lyric, concerns itself with "what happens in their speakers' minds as they confront an event or experience and take their form from the play of that mind" (Christ 4). Like the romantic lyric, the Victorian monologue is a conversation poem, directed to an implied listener which, like the "descriptive-meditative-descriptive" form of the romantic lyric, enacts a subjective thinking process. Consider, for example, this passage from Browning's "Andrea del Sarto":

I, painting from myself and to myself,
 Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
 Or their praise either. Somebody remarks

Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
 His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
 Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
 Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
 Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
 Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-gray
 Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!

While ruminating about his art, del Sarto seems to speak his thoughts as they occur, embracing and rejecting ideas, making assertions which are implicitly contradicted--for, despite his claims, he obviously *is* affected by the opinions of others--and struggling to rationalize his implicit weakness as an artist. The *objective* reader is able to see through these rationalizations precisely because the *subjective* monologue is so freely expressed.

Where the romantic lyric sees introspective thinking as a means of understanding the mind's relationship to nature, the dramatic monologue sees introspection as primarily *self-deceptive*, and offers an ironic reading of subjectivity as its corrective. Browning's dramatic monologues evolved, in fact, out of his excessively introspective early work. The very form of the dramatic monologue requires an *objective* reading of the speaker's thinking-process. In Browning's "My Last Duchess," for example, the Duke of Ferrara's view of reality is expressed as dangerously self-involved and distorted. Though the fictional implied listener remains silent, the reader cannot help but critically judge the

speaker's monologue in his stead. In this way, the romantic conversation poem is transformed into a poem of implied debate. In poems such as "Bishop Blougram's Apology" and "Fra Lippo Lippi," the implied listeners' differing opinions are never voiced, but always assumed by the astute reader.

Yeats's poetry reveals a similar movement from imitating passive reverie and introspection to embodying more objective forms of meditation. The unconscious mind, formerly expressed through dream and passive imagery, becomes for Yeats not a means of escape or inspiration, but a source of self-examination and renewal. Once unconscious imagery becomes conscious thought, escape is no longer a credible option. In order to see introspection *objectively*, Yeats needed to consider more active modes of meditation.

Yeats's 1914 collection of poems, *Responsibilities*, opens with the epigraph "In dreams begin responsibility" (YP 194) and introduces a movement towards a more fully-realized meditative verse. The conscious mind, so often little more than a spectator or interpreter of the unconscious, begins playing a more active role in his work. The realm of dreams is now represented, not as a means of escape, but of creative responsibility. In the poem, "The Realists" (YP 222), for example, Yeats suggests that the "dragon-guarded land" of dream may be mere fantasy, but the dream's purpose is to "awake a hope to live / That had gone / With the dragons."

Yeats's development from a poet of passive reverie to one of objective meditation is best expressed through his poetic dialogues, beginning with "The Hour Before Dawn" (composed in 1913) through to "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1915), "A Dialogue of Self and

Soul" (1928) and "Vacillation" (1931). Unlike the dramatic monologue--which provides an ironic reading of subjective thought--Yeats's dialogues imitate both subjective *and* objective thought, thereby embodying a process of meditation which *actively*, and explicitly, checks the dangers of subjective thinking.

The central dialectical poem of *Responsibilities* is "The Hour Before Dawn" (YP 218-221) in which the desire for escape is revealed as ultimately irresponsible and life-denying. The wandering rogue, much like the early Yeats, is tempted by the escapism of the "lad with a beery face" who spends his time waiting for "the Last Day /.../...when Michael's trumpet cries / That flesh and bone may disappear." Weary of the harshness of the world, the poet-rogue desires, not to escape life itself, but certain aspects of it. Yeats suggests however--in true Nietzschean fashion--that to deny any aspect of life is to deny the whole of life:

'You cry aloud. O would 'twere spring
 Or that the wind would shift a point.
 And do not know that you would bring,
 If time were suppler in the joint,
 Neither the spring nor the south wind
 But the hour when you shall pass away
 And leave no smoking wick behind,
 For all life longs for the Last Day.

The sleeper suggests that an attempt to escape from reality awakens a desire for oblivion and forgetfulness of all worldly things. Unlike the figure of "The Stolen Child," the poet-rogue refuses to be lulled into a world of dreams and accuses the drunken sleeper of "rob[bing]...life of every pleasant thought / And every comfortable thing" (YP 221). In contrast to the early poetry concerning sleep and dreams, "The Hour Before Dawn" suggests that any form of escape is essentially life-denying. The poem ends with the dreamer awaiting Judgement "in a drunken sleep" while the poet-rogue "[gives] God thanks" for the beginning of another day. The central argument is not so much about religious belief--for both figures believe in and acknowledge the existence of God--but about how to think about lived experience. The central argument of "The Hour Before Dawn" marks the beginning of a dialectical phase of meditative poetry for Yeats, a phase in which two opposed modes of thinking--the subjective and the objective--engage in meditative argument.

The Yeatsian struggle between heart and head is a struggle between the subjective and objective modes of thought. In his essay "Poetry and Tradition," Yeats contends that "Life is not lived, if not lived for contemplation or excitement" (E&I 252). As a poet, Yeats was forced to dwell in the intellectual realm of language and meaning, even though he often longed to live a passionate and full life as well. These two desires represent a central struggle in Yeats's life and work: a struggle *between* his life and work: "I might have thrown poor words away," Yeats considers, "And been content to live" ("Words," YP 185).

Yeats's struggle to resolve such conflicts led him to a consideration of the relationship between mind and body. If he could not both live and write, he could at least write a living poetry where thought and action, head and heart, were in a relationship of dynamic creativity. He claimed to dislike purely intellectual poetry, preferring poetic thought "That springs from body and in body falls" (*YP* 336). In an essay written in 1916, he writes, "We only believe in those thoughts which have been conceived not in the brain but in the whole body" (*E&I* 235) and in "A Prayer for Old Age," he asks that "God guard [him] from those thoughts men think / In the mind alone" (*YP* 401). Rather than an "abstract reverie," which merely "stirs the brain...and needs that only" (*E&I* 292), Yeats sought a more "passionate reverie," represented through meditative dialogue. "Worn out with dreams" (*YP* 238), Yeats sought to "Bring the balloon of the mind / That bellies and drags in the wind / Into its narrow shed" (*YP* 258).

Much of Yeats's poetry represents his struggle to reconcile emotional desire with intellectual thought, but none so dramatically as his later dialogues. "Ego Dominus Tuus" (*YP* 264-266)--Yeats's dialectical poem of *The Wild Swans at Coole*--sets up a dialogue between Hic and Ille, with Hic representing the objective mode of thinking, and Ille arguing for the subjective. The poem opens with Hic admonishing Ille for indulging in fantasy and dream:

On the grey sand beside the shallow stream

Under your old wind-beaten tower, where still

A lamp burns on beside the open book
 That Michael Robartes left, you walk in the moon,
 And, though you have passed the best of life, still trace,
 Enthralled by the unconquerable delusion,
 Magical shapes. (*YP* 264)

In reply, Ille does not deny that the magical shapes which he pursues are delusional, but justifies them according to their value as poetic inspiration: "By the help of an image," he contends, "I call to my own opposite." This is precisely the action embodied in Yeats's meditative dialogues. By setting up the opposition between two forms of thought, Yeats struggles to see himself more wholly and completely. The "magical shapes" are assessed by an objective thinker, instead of being given free reign within a wholly unconscious state of mind. Rather than viewing poetry as a "flight into fairyland," Ille argues that

...those that love the world serve it in action,
 Grow rich, popular and full of influence,
 And should they paint or write, still it is action:
 The struggle of the fly in marmalade.
 The rhetorician would deceive his neighbours,
 The sentimentalist himself; while art
 Is but a vision of reality. (*YP* 265)

Poetry is here presented, not as an escape into the supernatural, but as a "vision of reality" which mediates between the supernatural and the natural, the anti-self and the self:

I call to the mysterious one who yet
 Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream
 And look most like me, being indeed my double,
 And prove of all imaginable things
 The most unlike, being my anti-self,
 And, standing by these characters, disclose
 All that I seek. (*YP* 266)

As Harold Bloom observes, "The anti-self, which leads the poet to...the possibility of his fuller self, leads also to an uncovering that promises release from time's burden" (183). In this way the poet has the best of both worlds: he seemingly transcends a world in which he fully lives because he relates to both self and anti-self. This opposition, however, is no longer between real and ideal, but between objective and subjective forms of thought, an opposition solely within the speaker's mind.

In much of the poetry written after "Ego Dominus Tuus," symbolic imagery, which previously emerges from the unconscious realm of dream and fantasy, springs from the thinking subject: "Caught in contemplation, the mind's eye" is "Fixed upon images that once were thought" ("The Phases of the Moon" *YP* 270). Hence, the poet or artist

becomes not an escapist or creator of illusion, but one who mediates between the ideal and real by creating images of both emotional and intellectual thought.

"The Double Vision of Michael Robartes"--the final poem of *The Wild Swans at Coole*--suggests that meditation is a means of mediation between opposing forms of thinking. The figure of the girl who dances between the Sphinx and the Buddha embodies a vision of art which is more fully realized in the later poetry. The Sphinx represents objective thought; the Buddha, subjective. But neither the Sphinx nor the Buddha is a complete figure in and of themselves. Only the dancing figure is able to mediate between them, uniting all three into a single vision:

In contemplation had those three so wrought
 Upon a moment, and so stretched it out
 That they, time overthrown,
 Were dead yet flesh and bone. (YP 277)

Meditative study, in which "eye and ear silence the mind," is no longer a mode of dream or trance, but one in which the "Mind moved yet *seemed* to stop" (YP 227, my emphasis). The mind is no longer represented as a passive observer, but as an active participant and creator of symbolic images.

Much of the poetry in *Responsibilities* (published in 1914) through to *The Winding Stair* (published in 1933) deals with this more creative form of meditation.

Dreams are transformed into conscious thoughts or desires which the poet must address as if he were addressing an opponent. In "Demon and Beast" (*YP* 293), for example, the two negative antithetical modes of intellectual hatred and subjective passion--"That crafty demon and that loud beast"--are silenced in a momentary vision of "aimless joy." In "The Tower" (*YP* 302-307), the soul no longer dwells among symbols, but is re-made by the creating self, "Compelling it to study / In a learned school" (*YP* 307). Most importantly, Yeats realizes that his antithetical modes of thought must finally be mastered by a "mind that.../...can stay / Wound in mind's pondering / As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound" (*YP* 340).

Despite his desire for a unifying mode of thought, his intellectual and emotional struggle continues. In Yeats's final completely dialectical poem, "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," two opposing modes of thought are again in argument with one another. But in this dialogue, unlike that of "Ego Dominus Tuus," the natural realm of the self is given an even more dominant role. Whereas the earlier Yeats had argued that "the soul moves among symbols and unfolds in symbols" (*E&I* 162), here he suggests that the self is better able to appreciate the symbols of the natural, rather than the supernatural, world. This poem, though certainly meditative in terms of process, could be read as a religious *anti*-meditation in that the Self--arguing against the Soul--refuses to embark on a religious death meditation. The Self, much like the sad shepherd of Yeats's earlier work, chooses instead to meditate on his personal life.

The Soul begins by advising the Self to consider the winding stair as a symbol of

life itself:

Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,
 Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,
 Upon the breathless starlit air,
 Upon the star that marks the hidden pole;
 Fix every wandering thought upon
 That quarter where all thought is done. (YP 348)

The Self, rather than responding to the Soul, chooses instead to meditate on "Sato's ancient blade.../...still like a looking-glass" (YP 349). Consider this image in relation to Yeats's earlier contention that "the naturalistic movement [seems related to] Stendhal's mirror dawdling down a lane" (*E&I* 404). The younger Yeats preferred the idealist philosophy of the romantics and its interest in platonic ideas of Reality as opposed to the naturalists' reflection of the natural world. But here the self proudly compares the symbolic sword to "a looking-glass" which reflects, not the ideal realm, but the natural. The sword and its cover of "flowering, silken, old embroidery" (YP 349) are "emblems of the day," as opposed to the tower, which is "Emblematical of the night."

The side which is given the "last word" is often considered the "winner" in a Yeatsian dialogue, but when we consider this form as meditative we come to see that both sides are equally important in comprehending the whole vision. "The Dialogue of Self and

Soul" culminates in an irreverent dismissal of Christian repentance, advocating that the Self has the power--once attributed to God --to "Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!" (YP 350). The Self's argument, largely reminiscent of the poet-rogue's position in "The Hour Before Dawn," advocates that one must be "content to live it all again / And yet again" (YP 350), rather than look toward the Christian promise of redemption and eternal life. The supernatural realm is still, of course, largely important to Yeats's thought--he had completed *A Vision* only three years before writing this poem--but an objective form of thinking has an equal place in such poems, keeping in check the sometimes solipsistic tendencies of pure subjectivity. Only in reaction to objective, intellectual thinking does the more subjective, emotional "self" make its case.

Both "Ego Dominus Tuus" and "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" imitate an increasingly intense conflict between objective and subjective modes of thought. The passive modes are related to the emotional, supernatural, or unconscious and they remain in opposition to the more active modes represented by the intellectual, existential, and conscious. Despite Yeats's call for a "thinking of the body," there remains a division of thought, dramatized within his dialectical poetry. As "Ego Dominus Tuus" and "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" suggest, however, there is an evolution towards integration within the self. This integration is most fully realized in Yeats's meditative, self-reflective poem, "Vacillation," completed in 1931.

Harold Bloom argues that "Vacillation" is "possessed by real poetic difficulty rather than the mere complications of much other Yeats" (393). Furthermore, in terms of

the process of thinking, this poem is one of Yeats's most integrated. Read in relation to modes of thought, the very term "vacillation" becomes not a movement of consciousness from one side to the other but an ultimate state of mind which incorporates and masters both the objective and subjective. As Bloom points out, "It is useful to know that Yeats considered calling the poem *Wisdom*, for 'vacillation' does become a kind of wisdom here. Speaking the whole body of his poetry" (394).

The poem is divided into eight distinct sections which can be read, consecutively, as the development of thinking within Yeats's poetry as a whole. As a meditative poem, it begins with a proposed subject of investigation and concludes with a resolution of the various themes considered throughout. The essential question within the poem is central to much of the dialectical poetry I have considered: "Between extremities / Man runs his course" (YP 365).

In November 1931, Yeats began writing the various sections of "Vacillation," but he did not complete them in the order of the finished poem. Section IV, which describes a meditative state of epiphany, was completed first:

My fiftieth year had come and gone,
 I sat, a solitary man,
 In a crowded London shop,
 An open book and empty cup
 On the marble table-top.

While on the shop and street I gazed
 My body of a sudden blazed;
 And twenty minutes more or less
 It seemed, so great my happiness,
 That I was blessed and could bless. (*YP* 366)

Like the self in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," the fifty-year-old poet-narrator experiences happiness¹ which is seemingly generated from the body, yet strangely self-empowering. In both poems, the self is given the power to bless and be blessed (*YP* 351). I point first to this section, not merely because Yeats completed it first, but to trace its connection with former dialogues and to emphasize the increasingly important role of lived experience. The poem seemingly begins with a philosophical question about the meaning of joy, but the actual *experience* of joy is of primary importance here. The opposition between unconscious and conscious, between emotion and intellect, becomes increasingly blurred as the individual experiences come under meditative investigation. But having said that, I should stress that the finished poem--rather than the order in which individual sections were composed-- best illustrates the development of meditation both in this poem and in

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The first printing of this poem had individual titles for each section. They were as follows: I, 'What is Joy'; II, 'The Burning Tree' (this included the stanza II & III of later printings); III (subsequently IV), 'Happiness'; IV (subsequently V), 'Conscience'; V (subsequently VI), 'Conquerors'; VI (subsequently VII), 'A Dialogue'; VII (subsequently VIII), 'Von Hügel.'

all of Yeats's poetry up to this point. After all, my interest lies in modes of thinking as expressed within the poetry itself and not its composition.

After introducing the subject of meditation, the second section introduces an image of opposition, "A tree...that from its topmost bough / Is half all glittering flame and half all green" (YP 365). An important element in this section is Attis' image which "hangs between that staring fury and the blind lush leaf," representing the possibility of integration and rebirth.² This image of integration, however, is followed in Section III by yet another opposition:

All women dote upon an idle man
 Although their children need a rich estate;
 No man has ever lived that had enough
 Of children's gratitude or woman's love.

This maxim presents a paradox where man is once more divided between two extremes: that of creating for the sake of posterity ("children's gratitude") or living for immediate gratification ("woman's love"). The first demands action, the second passivity. As we

2

In YP, A. Norman Jeffares notes that "Attis was a vegetation god in Greek legend; to prevent him marrying someone else Cybele, the earth mother, drove him to frenzy and he castrated himself. Yeats read Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890), I, 297-9, and *Attis, Adonis and Osiris*, 219-49, in which the effigy of Attis was hung on a sacred pine tree as an image of his coming to life again in the form of a tree" (YP 603).

have seen, the struggle between life and art, the seemingly active and passive, has been an increasingly important one throughout Yeats's poetry. In the last octave of Section III, a transformation occurs which can be compared with that of the previous dialogues:

No longer in Lethean foliage caught
 Begin the preparation for your death
 And from the fortieth winter by that thought
 Test every work of intellect or faith,
 And everything that your own hands have wrought,
 And call those works extravagance of breath
 That are not suited for such men as come
 Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb.

Rather than dwelling in the realm of dreams or "Lethean foliage," the poet vows to dwell in the realm of lived experience by examining his own life in relation to his past. As in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," he no longer looks to a supernatural realm for solace, but to his own individual life, being "content to live it all again" (*YP* 350) and "come / Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb" (*YP* 366). This brings us to the moment of epiphany, already described in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" in which the poet claims the ability to bless and be blessed, a power which is attributed to the self.

Thus far, "Vacillation" has presented a series of sections which represent various

modes of thinking explored in Yeats's own poetic career. Each time a specific opposition is resolved, another form surfaces. The opposition between dream and reality is transformed into that of objective and subjective thinking in "Ego Dominus Tuus." This opposition, once resolved, is then further developed into an opposition between self and anti-self. Subsequently, the self is yet further divided into soul and self in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul." At each transformation of opposites, however, we find the self becoming more and more integrated and thereby increasingly empowered. The epiphany of section IV, one might assume, is the moment of profound insight and wisdom through which all further opposition is resolved. As in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," the self is triumphant, having the power to bless and be blessed, to "measure...[and] forgive myself the lot" (*YP* 350). But unlike the Self of "A Dialogue," the poet-narrator of "Vacillation" is unable to "cast out remorse" (*YP* 350). In the subsequent section, he writes:

Although the summer sunlight gild
 Cloudy leafage of the sky,
 Or wintry moonlight sink the field
 In storm-scattered intricacy,
 I cannot look thereon,
 Responsibility so weighs me down.

Things said or done long years ago,

Or things I did not do or say
 But thought that I might say or do,
 Weigh me down, and not a day
 But something is recalled,
 My conscience or my vanity appalled. (*YP* 366)

At the thought of liberation, the mind is weighed down with responsibility just as it was when the poet sought escape through dream. Here, rather than escape into the ideal, the poet seeks images of the real ("summer sunlight" or "wintry moonlight"); yet even these images represent escape from active responsibility. The syntax imitates the confusion of going over and over the difficulty of past thought and action as he worries about "Things said or done" or "things [he] did not do or say / But thought that [he] might say or do."

The relationship between speech, action, and thought is of central concern.

Section VI, with its soothing Zen-like refrain of "Let all things pass away" (*YP* 367) seems to offer the most meditatively detached response to all the former vacillation. As a meditative stance, it seems the most satisfying. Tempting as it is, however, Yeats's continued emphasis on action and desire denies such detachment. Even here we can see that detachment is merely the opposite of remorse, offering yet one more vacillation. For Yeats, such a detached attitude is merely another form of escape and rationalization. If, indeed, "all things pass away," then responsibility would be rendered meaningless. Each section of "Vacillation" must be read not as a progression of thought, but as a response to

each previous thought, as in all Yeatsian dialectical poetry.

The penultimate section points back to the dialectical form of meditation, presenting a dialogue between the soul and the heart. This debate is reminiscent of the one between Self and Soul, except that the argument of the Self has now seemingly been taken over by the heart. But why the change? For Bloom, Yeats's choice suggests that "the dialectic is...between a sanctified and unsanctified imagination" (396); yet, when read in relation to opposing modes of thought, we infer another possibility. In the previous dialogue, soul and self were on opposing sides, as two distinct characters; in "Vacillation," however, the soul is opposed to the heart because each is a mode of thought within the unified mind of the self. This has always been the case, of course, but the poet-self has never fully acknowledged them as his own. The soul, again, warns the heart to "leave things that seem" (*YP* 367), while the heart contends that "things that seem" are the central themes of poetry. But, as we have seen, the subject of Yeats's poetry has not been "original sin" but the struggle between opposing modes of thought, or between thought and action. The answer lies not in choosing one mode of thinking over the other, but in admitting that this very opposition is the root of poetic inspiration. All opposition is derived from interior, rather than exterior vacillation: opposition is the very nature of poetic thinking for Yeats, an argument with oneself.

Appropriately, the poet-self speaks the final section of "Vacillation." One might conclude that the previous argument between the soul and the heart is here settled, with the poet representing the heart by choosing "Homer [as his] example and his unchristened

heart" (*YP* 368). Yet, the poet contends that even the "heart might find relief" through Christian faith. The opposition is not between soul and heart but between two modes of thought: the religious, mystical thinking of Von Hügel, and the more existential and mythical thought attributed to Homer. Both modes of thought are crucial to Yeats's poetry.

If the poet's choice is that of secular over religious thought, why invoke Scripture as a final word on the subject? The reference to the lion and honeycomb, from Judges 14: 5-18, suggests that oppositions are resolved, not by a choice between one and another form of thinking, but by an integration of both. Just as the lion (strength) consumes the honeycomb (sweetness), the poet "Accept[s] the miracles of the saints and honours sanctity," yet claims Homer and "his unchristened heart" as his example. Von Hügel, though dismissed, is done so "with blessings on [his] head." Oppositions are not so much resolved as subsumed within the mind of poet-self.

Yeats's poetry, then, reveals a progression from passive modes of thought, such as dream and reverie, to the more active modes of creative meditation, in which the mind self-consciously checks and re-creates the symbols and images which seemingly mediate between the real and ideal. Yeats's interest in the occult, as well as his acknowledgment of "Unknown Instructors" (*YP* 369), suggests that his belief in the ideal was never fully rejected; the development of thought within his poetry, however, reveals that objective forms of thought became more and more of an authority within his vision. Meditative thinking becomes a method of mastering opposing modes of thought through self-

examination and acceptance. As Louis Martz contends, "self-examination is not, properly speaking, meditation...but it is in many ways inseparably related to the art of meditation" (*PM* 118). Only through an examination of the mind's functions is Yeats able to master contradictions of thought. And this can only happen when consciousness itself, rather than dreams or even mythology, becomes the poetic subject.

Once the mind itself becomes an overt source of study in Yeats's poetry, memory becomes a recurrent mode of thought. After "Vacillation," meditative reflection dominates. The struggle between modes of thinking has been basically resolved, not by allowing one to dominate the other, but by linking them both within a central concept of consciousness. Once the creative self is understood as the mediating subject between the real and ideal, however, the weight of responsibility increases dramatically. Meditation becomes an evaluation of the self in relation to past action, or a consideration of "present experience in light of past experience" (Bevis 137).

The past, for the older Yeats, comes to represent the ideal realm to which he longs to escape. In "The Results of Thought" (*YP* 369), the tension between memory and reality remains largely unresolved. Yeats claims to have "straightened out / Ruin, wreck and wrack" by arriving at "so deep a thought" that the "wholesome strength" of those he loved is re-created in his imagination. Yet the images, whether real or imagined, "turn dull-eyed away" from him. Mere thought, it appears, is unable to alter the reality of old age. Images once connected with the ideal are now as "dull-eyed" as the real.

Such poems as "Remorse for Intemperate Speech" (*YP* 370) and "Stream and Sun

at Glendalough" (*YP* 370) further suggest that reflection is both a trying and rewarding exercise for the aging Yeats. Though he often repents of his "fanatic heart" ("Remorse for Intemperate Speech"), he is also aware that "Repentance keeps [his] heart impure" ("Stream and Sun at Glendalough"). The former opposition between two forms of thinking become, in the later reflective poetry, an opposition between repentance and forgiveness. Yeats longs to be seen as a "foolish, passionate man" ("A Prayer for Old Age," *YP* 401), yet he needs somehow to reconcile himself to moments of regret and remorse.

There is the suggestion of reconciliation in Yeats's phrase "tragic joy," introduced in such poems as "The Gyres" (*YP* 411) and "Lapis Lazuli" (*YP* 412). Tragic joy--an oxymoron reminiscent of the well-known "terrible beauty" of "Easter 1916" (*YP* 287)--is, however, merely one more failed attempt at reconciling opposing modes of thought. I would venture that even Yeats was well aware that a coupling of opposites within a single phrase does not, thereby, reconcile them.

"The Gyres" could be read as one of Yeats's coldest poems, in which the adage of "Let all things pass away" ("Vacillation") is taken to an almost inhuman extreme. Though "Irrational streams of blood are staining earth" and "blood and mire [stain] the sensitive body," the poet replies,

What matter? Heave no sigh, let no tear drop,

A greater, a more gracious time has gone;

For painted forms or boxes of make-up
 In ancient tombs I sighed, but not again;
 What matter? Out of cavern comes a voice,
 And all it knows is that one word, 'Rejoice!'

A similar sentiment is offered in "Lapis Lazuli," in which three Chinamen represent the possibility of "tragic joy" in the face of despair and ruin. Although "All things fall and are built again," Yeats claims that "those that build them again are gay" (*YP* 413). Note, however, that the Chinamen, though certainly content to look over--and thereby overlook --the tragic scene, are observers of the scene and, therefore, not creative:

...I

Delight to imagine them seated there;
 There on the mountain and the sky,
 On all the tragic scene they stare.
 One asks for mournful melodies;
 Accomplished fingers begin to play.
 Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
 Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.

We might be tempted to consider the "mournful melodies" as representing artistic vision,

but as Ille argues in "Ego Dominus Tuus," men must serve the world in action rather than song:

No, not sing,

For those that love the world serve it in action,

Grow rich, popular and full of influence,

And should they paint or write, still it is action.

Do these figures, therefore, suggest that we should play music while Rome burns? We should keep in mind that the three Chinamen have transcended tragedy as figures within a work of art: a created vision of reality. All the figures of "Lapis Lazuli" are, in fact, *fictional* figures:

All perform their tragic play,

There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,

That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;

Yet they, should the last scene be there,

The great stage curtain about to drop,

If worthy of their prominent part in the play,

Do not break up their lines to weep.

They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
 Gaiety transfiguring all that dread. (YP 412)

The past is redeemed, Yeats suggests, within the artistic vision of a creating consciousness. Or, in the words of Nietzsche: "Only as an aesthetic product can the world be justified to all eternity" (42). Although "Lapis Lazuli" is seemingly less inhuman and cold than "The Gyres," both poems argue for an aesthetic or idealized reading of life. Ultimately, this is not a reconciliation between the past and the present for Yeats, but simply one more possible way of thinking about this relationship. In fact, *thinking about* is precisely what the poems are doing. The fictional representation of thinking creatively is a way of working through ideas of objective reality.

In his introductory essay to *The Government of the Tongue*, Seamus Heaney addresses the idea of song as a betrayal of suffering, and comes to this conclusion:

The achievement of a poem, after all, is an experience of release. In that liberated moment, when the lyric discovers its buoyant completion and the timeless formal pleasure comes to fullness and exhaustion, something occurs which is equidistant from self-justification and self-obliteration. A plane is -- fleetingly -- established where the poet is intensified in his being and freed from his predicaments. (xxii)

For Heaney -- as for Yeats -- "poetry can be as potentially redemptive and possibly as illusory as love" (xxii). We should be wary of claiming that these two poems of Yeats offer a resolution of the opposition between life and art. Life *as* art is redeemed, the man *as* poetic persona is redeemed, but the living poet still continues to struggle with remorse and the weight of responsibility. Otherwise, Yeats's poetry would have come full circle, with an ascetic reading of life becoming no better than the early escape into dream and fantasy.

Detached forms of meditation such as reverie--largely related to Eastern religion--are represented by Yeats's early interest in dreams as a mode of escape from life. This thinking, as we have seen, is checked by the objective meditation in the dialogues. The actively meditating mind, Yeats suggests, is at the centre of poetic creativity. "Whenever I have been tempted to go to Japan, China, or India for my philosophy," Yeats contends, "Balzac has brought me back, reminded me of my preoccupation with the national, social, personal problems, convinced me that I cannot escape from our *Comedie humaine*" (E&I 448). The attitude of the "great lord of Chou" (YP 367) in "Vacillation," or of the Chinamen in "Lapis Lazuli" represents this form of escape which, although tempting, is never the final word for Yeats. The fictionalized poet, he argues elsewhere, "is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete" (E&I 509). And when the poet cries, "Myself must I remake" ("An Acre of Grass," YP 420), he does so in relation to a fictional, rather than a living, self. But this fictional self is not enough for the living, thinking, poet:

'The work is done,' grown old he thought,
 'According to my boyish plan;
 Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,
 Something to perfection brought';
But louder sang that ghost, 'What then?' (YP 420)

This ghost, rather than speaking from beyond the real, asks his question in terms of lived experience, to which Yeats's poetry continually returns. Hence, the opposition between two modes of thinking is never fully resolved within Yeats's poetry. Though his meditative dialogues reveal a development and integration of two distinct modes of thinking, these oppositions continually invite further oppositions. Poetry continues to be, for Yeats, an "argument with the self," whether such argument is revealed explicitly in his meditative dialogues, or implicitly through his later reflective meditations.

Yeats's early poetry suggests that a passive state of reverie often betrays a desire to escape from the natural world into that of the supernatural, to "forget the things which move before the eyes" (*E&I* 150). Not until his later poems, which imitate a more "passionate reverie," did Yeats represent a meditative mind actively engaged with itself and the actual world. If we define meditative thought, as Martz does, as a mode of thinking "deliberately directed toward the development of certain specific emotions" (14), then Yeats's poetry is, indeed, meditative. Yet the word *emotions*--suggesting as it does a lack of objective reasoning--is perhaps misleading. Yeats's poetry imitates, instead, a

mode of thinking deliberately directed toward the development of a *creative* consciousness, that which is wholly human, yet beyond the human, transcending the very consciousness out of which it is created.

Chapter Two:

The Meditations of a Central Mind

Much of Stevens' poetry, like that of Yeats, conforms to Martz's category of meditative poetry as a "drama of the mind" which enacts various thought-processes. Such critics as Joseph Riddel, Harold Bloom, and Helen Vendler have convincingly argued that Stevens, like Yeats, is essentially a romantic poet who repeatedly considers the relationship between reality and imagination in his meditative poems. Unlike the meditative poetry of Yeats, however, much of Stevens' poetry--as Bevis's extended study points out--enacts forms of meditation which correspond to such spiritual disciplines as Zen, Tao, and Yoga. Though Stevens' interest in Eastern meditation was far less overt than Yeats's, his poetry nevertheless enacts a similarly meditative sensibility.

If, as Stevens contends, "[t]here can be no poetry without the personality of the poet" (*NA* 46), then the personality of the poet is reflected in the poetry he or she writes. Yeats pursued an interest in Hinduism, Buddhism, and meditative consciousness by intellectually immersing himself in these subjects and by using them as inspiration for his writings. Bevis notes that the influence of "Theosophists, Pound, Noh plays, Tagore's poetry of 1912-1915, and a swelling flood of information in journals and books and from

friends" fuelled Yeats's interest (181). Because he continually sought to master his own impulses and weaknesses of thought, he developed a form of meditative poetry which enacts this internal struggle: a dialectic meditative poetry.

In Stevens' writings, perceptions of reality are of central interest. Rather than attempting to master his own thought-processes, however, Stevens delighted in them for their own sake. Though there is certainly a development in Stevens' poetry, this development is enacted through various stages of perception rather than through a logical argument. Where Yeats is *prescriptive* in his evaluations of how one *should* think, Stevens is *descriptive* in his observations of how one *does* think. Yeats continually sought to achieve a state of consciousness which seemingly came quite naturally to Stevens, while struggling to overcome a form of thinking which Stevens seems to have embraced as fully human and, therefore, necessarily creative.

What Yeats came to define as an escape from reality or mere flight into fancy, Stevens might define as important mental activity. In a letter to José Rodríguez Feo, Stevens offers this advice:

True, the desire to read is an insatiable desire and you must read.

Nevertheless, you must also think....Spend an hour or two a day even if in the beginning you are staggered by the confusion and aimlessness of your thoughts. (L 513)

Stevens' love of solitary long walks suggests that he often indulged in states of meditative reverie where thoughts wander without direction.

Meditative reverie is presented as a form of introspection in Stevens' early poetry where, rather than observing the natural world, the mind observes the process of thinking itself. So essential is the pursuit of aimless thought to Stevens that it is the subject of the first poem of his first volume of poetry, *Harmonium*:

Every time the bucks went clattering
Over Oklahoma
A firecat bristled in the way.

Wherever they went,
They went clattering,
Until they swerved
In a swift, circular line
To the right,
Because of the firecat.

Or until they swerved
In a swift, circular line
To the left,

Because of the firecat.

The bucks clattered.

The firecat went leaping,

To the right, to the left,

And

Bristled in the way.

Later, the firecat closed his bright eyes

And slept. ("Earthy Anecdote" CP 3)

This poem has baffled many of Stevens' readers, and the majority of his critics choose not to address it. Being the first poem of his *Collected Poems*, however, it serves as an invitation or introduction to the collection as a whole. Stevens wrote to the editor of the *Modern School* that "[t]here's a good deal of theory" behind this poem, but declined to explain further (L 204). According to Bates, "Earthy Anecdote" is "an emblem of one's own engagement with this kind of poem" in which "the discursive mind swerves left or right whenever it approaches the firecat" of the poem itself (152). For Bates, then, the bucks approximate the movement of the mind in relation to the act of reading. La Guardia, on the other hand, argues that "the perpetual chase of bucks and firecat (reality and imagination)" is a kind of allegory in which "the mind shifts with [reality] endlessly"

(42). In this case, the mind--or at least the imagination--is associated with the firecat. A purely noetic reading, however, would see both the bucks and the firecat as two distinct aspects of consciousness. Cook comes close to such a reading when she claims "Earthy Anecdote" as being "about the ordering of the energies of a state, or rather of one form of energy combatting another" (29). Where Cook uses the word "energy," I offer "thinking," with the State of Oklahoma referring to a particular state of mind. The aimless "clatter" of the bucks is re-directed by the firecat who continually "bristles" in the way, much as our own aimless thinking or internal chatter is often impeded by consciousness. When, and only when, the "bright eyes" of the firecat -- a figure of conscious *awareness* -- are closed, may the bucks freely clatter across the vast open plains of Oklahoma State, representing an open and uncluttered state of mind.

Many of Stevens' early poems enact passive modes of thinking as a way of more fully comprehending, rather than escaping, reality. In "Hibiscus on the Sleeping Shores" (CP 22), Stevens compares the mind to a moth which "roam[s], / Among the blooms beyond the open sand." The mind, in this mode of passive reverie, achieves a state in which eventually, though without discipline, it "shuts to the blather that the water made" and is elevated above the "noise and motion" of the sea to a more decorous world of the hibiscus, "flaming red / Dabbled with yellow pollen--red as red / As the flag above the old cafe." Once attracted to the beauty of the hibiscus flowers, the mind "roam[s] there all the stupid afternoon." Though the word "stupid" connotes a lack of cognitive activity, it also playfully suggests a mind in a passive, ignorant state, fully immersed in the beauty of the

flowers, and unconcerned with more disciplined forms of thinking.

This idea is further explored in "The Wind Shifts" (*CP* 83), where the aimless movement of the wind is compared to a corresponding movement within the mind:

This is how the wind shifts:

Like the thoughts of an old human,

Who still thinks eagerly

And despairingly.

The wind shifts like this:

Like a human without illusions,

Who still feels irrational things within her.

The wind shifts like this:

Like humans approaching proudly,

Like humans approaching angrily.

This is how the wind shifts:

Like a human, heavy and heavy,

Who does not care. (*CP* 83)

This poem, while pointing out the correspondence between the wind and the mind, actually *enacts* the thinking process it describes, shifting from one perspective to another. The thoughts here are *subjective* in the sense that they are highly *emotional*: The mind

thinks "eagerly," "despairingly," "proudly," and "angrily"; yet, the poem ends with a mode of thought which is empty of emotion, that "does not care," because the process of introspection has been passive, rather than active. The thinker has been merely observing his thoughts, rather than acting upon them or allowing them to act upon him.

In such meditations, the thinking process is given free reign, with no attempt to focus on a particular object or idea. Though the mind is free to roam "as a moth roams," or to think "eagerly" and then "despairingly" without concern for contradiction, Stevens suggests that this form of detached meditation may, in fact, lead to a more concentrated awareness of one's surroundings. Here consciousness is more fully attuned to visual and aural impressions. Thinking itself may be suspended in what becomes an almost unconscious act of complete observation or sensory awareness. Consider, for example, Stevens' journal entry of July 19, 1899:

Last evening I lay in a field on the other side of the creek...and watched the sunset. There was not a single cloud in the sky and the whole atmosphere was very clear, bringing all the hilly perspectives into splendid prominence. The horizon was blue, rimmed, in the East, with a light pink mistiness; in the West, with a warm yellowish red that gradually died into thin whiteness....Certainly it was very perfect, and listening to the birds twittering and singing at the Northern Edge of the field I almost envied them their ability to ease their hearts so

ravishingly at such a sight. (*L* 29)

Unlike Yeats, Stevens understands reverie as a heightened awareness of both reality and consciousness, rather than a form of escape from one or the other. As William Bevis notes in his study of Stevens and meditation, "one is not lost in fantasy or thought, blind to one's senses; on the contrary, there may be a vivid, thoughtless sense of present reality" (78).

The poem "Anecdote of Canna" (*CP* 55) considers this important difference between dream and reverie for Stevens. The central figure, X, first dreams of the canna which "fill the terrace of his capitol." Though he is sleeping, "his thought sleeps not," because he is not aware of *how* he is thinking. Though our thought-processes may be awake while we sleep, we have no conscious control over what we may imagine. Dogget, in *Poetry of Thought*, reads this poem as a meditation on the difference between thought and perception, claiming that "the speculative thinker...meditates or dreams his universals, his huge canna" but, once awake, is "unable to identify the universals of his thought (his dreams) with the actual phenomena, the real daylight canna" (160). Rather than meditating on the difference between thought and perception, however, I would argue that this poem meditates the difference between dream and reverie. "Thought that wakes / in sleep may never meet another thought / Or thing" because it is disconnected from reality. Dreams are random thoughts over which the thinking subject has no control because he is not in a conscious state. Though the *thoughts* are awake, the *thinker* sleeps. The firecat

of the mind, as it were, has closed its eyes and the bucks are free to clatter with nothing bristling in their way. Once awake, X "observes the canna with a *clinging* eye, / Observes and then continues to observe" (my emphasis). Unlike dream, reverie is a state of mind where thought *does* "meet another thought or thing." Though the actual thought-process is asleep, X's consciousness is fully awakened within the state of meditative reverie.

Although meditation is most commonly associated with a deep, serious mode of contemplation, it is equally important to understand meditative poetry as enacting thought for its own sake, or for the apprehension of a particular object. Stevens' poetry, unlike Yeats's, is often lighter in tone, more humorous and witty, yet it too displays a serious interest in the mind's functions. One of the meanings of the verb "meditate" is that of study. This definition of meditative observation is more readily associated with our common understanding of the term 'meditation.' Where reverie connotes passivity and lack of direction, 'study' connotes a more active process of thinking about a particular object. The mind, in an act of study, is directed toward a particular object in an effort to observe rather than evaluate. Furthermore, meditative study is most often associated with a sustained and thorough examination--which is why it is so often linked with various mental exercises in religious meditation--rather than a state of detached reverie.

In meditative study, the mind fully comprehends or measures an object or idea.³

3

The Latin adverb, *meditate*, can be translated as *thoughtfully*, *purposely*, and *thoroughly*. Its root is found in *metior* and *modus*, the first meaning 'to measure' and the second 'a standard of measurement.' Hence, to meditate, is to take the full measurement of a thing or idea, whether real or imagined, through the process of thinking.

In his poem, "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War" (CP 273-281), Stevens claims such forms of thought as "the works and pastimes / Of the highest self":

he studies the paper

On the wall, the lemons on the table.

This is his day. With nothing lost he

Arrives at the man-man as he wanted.

This is his night and meditation. (CP 280)

Meditation, here, involves careful observation of a perceived object. Stevens' use of enjambment after the word "paper" trips the reader in more ways than one: we assume that the paper being studied is a newspaper--the events of the world--until we are surprised by the subsequent line, which informs us that the paper is on the wall, as the lemons are on the table. The meditative act of study is not one of reading--as we might first assume--but of *looking*. In one of his early letters, Stevens remarks, "I...really read very much less of everything than most people. It is more interesting to sit round and look out of the window" (L 490). Though meditative study is a largely passive mode of thought, the association with 'reading' suggests that the receptive mind is learning through the act of looking.

Stevens' "Study of Two Pears" (CP 196) begins with the Latin phrase "Opusculum paedagogum," implying that a study of these objects will teach a little lesson. The poem

initially links thinking with an act of negation: "The pears are not viols, / Nudes or bottles. / They resemble nothing else." Once the observer has considered what the pears *are not*, he goes on to consider what they *are*. The poem creates a tone of detachment as the speaker struggles to study the pears as objectively as possible:

II

They are yellow forms
 Composed of curves
 Bulging toward the base.
 They are touched red.

III

They are not flat surfaces
 Having curved outlines.
 They are round
 Tapering toward the top.

Stevens' use of the present tense imitates the mental act of meditative study: the pears are observed and considered according to various elements such as form and colour. Though the thinking process is enacted here, it is enacted as a *passive* mode of thought. The tone is one of detachment, and the repetition of the passive construction--"They are"--

reinforces this passivity. The concentration here is not on the thinking process but on the mind's reading of the object, so that all ornamental rhetoric is pared down in favour of a detached, scientific tone. Stevens' concluding lines are rich in ambiguity, especially with respect to the line-break: "The pears are not seen / As the observer wills." This ambiguity has invited diverse interpretation from Stevens' critics. Costello argues that though "the pears are not seen as the observer wills..., it is only these willed images that *are* seen" (78). Pack reads this final line as suggesting that the speaker is "an independent power, a will, that cannot ultimately know, yet always can experience" (175), so that study becomes a subjective rather than an objective meditation. Such readings suggest that "[t]he pears are not seen" at all because the consciousness of the perceiving subject interferes with a purely objective reading: "The pears are not seen" *because* "the observer wills."

Donoghue claims, on the other hand, that "realism is endorsed" (227) here, because human will is unable to alter reality. Yet, these final lines may also be read as an affirmation of the mind's ability to see the pears abstractly--as colour, shape, form--without relation to any preconceived ideas at all. Hence, "the pears are not seen," *just as* "the observer wills." Rather than seeing the pears *as* pears, the meditative mind studies them with an "ignorant eye" (CP 380), seeing them according to their parts rather than as a whole. In other words, the pears are not seen as pears, but as *parts*. Altieri approaches such a view when he sees "[w]ords treated virtually as brush strokes [which] compose visual details of the 'study,' which in turn lead us to piece together a pear as if the object were freshly before us, seen for the first time" (98); yet the word "compose" implies a creative act which my

reading contradicts. The very act of the 'study' for the thinker--unlike that of the painter--is passive rather than active, though *willed* to such passivity or objectivity. The thinker is not composing a pear, nor is he deconstructing one: he is merely studying it as an abstraction.

Meditative study, however, does not always pursue an objective or abstract perception. The poem, "A Dish of Peaches in Russia" (*CP* 224), enacts meditative study as a subjective rather than objective mode of thought. The poem opens with an explicit affirmation of subjectivity: "With my whole body I taste these peaches, / I touch them and smell them." Twice the question, "Who speaks," is asked, reinforcing the idea of subjectivity. As Doggett points out, the reference to the self as an animal further reinforces a subjective experience, in which memory is "merged with the present personal consciousness" (149). Unlike "Study of Two Pears," this poem delights in the movement of thought as the speaker considers the object of study:

...The peaches are large and round,

Ah! and red; and they have peach fuzz, ah!

They are full of juice and the skin is soft.

They are full of colors of my village

And of fair weather, summer, dew, peace.

The room is quiet where they are.

The windows are open. The sunlight fills

The curtains. Even the drifting of the

curtains,

Slight as it is, disturbs me. I did not know

That such ferocities could tear

One self from another, as these peaches do.

For the Russian speaker, an objective meditative study of peaches is not possible because they conjure up "colors of [his] village" and he finds himself torn between the objective reality and the subjective desire which the peaches arouse in him. The self which identifies with the peaches is torn from the self which attempts to see them objectively, just as the exiled Russian is torn from his native country, from where he feels most at home. Cook reads "A Dish of Peaches in Russia" as "playing on the etymological paradox of animal-anima, a play against dualisms of body-soul, physical-metaphysical, outside-inside, past-present" (*PWW* 157). To that list I would add the dualism of passive and active forms of meditative study.

The act of *looking* is a recurrent subject of Stevens' work, especially in relation to

how things are seen. The poem, "Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers," (*CP* 246) imitates a meditative study whose theme is both the observing subject and the object of observation. Costello contends that this poem "narrates the interior space of the beholder" (79), yet the interior space also contains the beheld, the object of observation. The action, here, is attributed to the object of observation, rather than the perceiving subject:

It was as if thunder took form upon
 The piano, that time: the time when the crude
 And jealous grandeurs of sun and sky
 Scattered themselves in the garden, like
 The wind dissolving into birds,
 The clouds becoming braided girls.
 It was like the sea poured out again
 In the east wind beating the shutters at night.

These transformations of reality are the result of the woman's imagination, who sees reality "as if" it were actually changing. The reality changes as her perception does and the hoot of the "little owl" within her reminds us of her implicit part in this perception. As in "A Dish of Peaches in Russia," the question of *who* speaks--for what else would an owl hoot?--is of central importance. The objects of reality, when beheld by the consciousness of the woman, become entangled by her own memory and desire:

Hoot how the inhuman colors fell
 Into place beside her, where she was,
 Like human conciliations, more like
 A profounder reconciling, an act,
 An affirmation free from doubt.
 The crude and jealous formlessness
 Became the form and fragrance of things
 Without clairvoyance, close to her.

The woman looks at "inhuman colors" in an attempt to see as purely as possible, "[w]ithout clairvoyance," without seeing beyond, through, or outside of the object itself, in "[a]n affirmation free from doubt." These "inhuman colors" seemingly--let us not forget the "as if" in the opening line--"[fall] / Into place beside her," but the real action in this poem results from the thinking subject. They only *seem* to fall into place, when in actuality they are placed there by the observer's perception of them.

Another significant meaning of 'meditation' is *contemplation*, which is often used interchangeably when speaking of meditation. Contemplation, like reverie and study, is a term that need not be associated with any discipline of meditative practice or religious devotion. Stevens' interest in meditation has little to do with the mystical tradition of religious exercises or 'union' with God: he writes in a letter to Henry Church, "I loathe anything mystical" (L 428). Contemplation is a form of meditation which requires no

training or practice. As William Bevis notes, "*meditation* is now used in Asian studies and popular works for the most passive, thoughtless states sought by disciplined training.

Contemplation and *reflection* refer to more thoughtful and more ordinary conditions"

(13). Bevis' distinction is useful for differentiating between the detached modes of meditation and the more *thoughtful* ones. Where Bevis uses the word *meditation*, I would offer *reverie* and would classify *reflection* as an element of *contemplation* in that it refers to a study of the past, as idea, in relation to present experience.

Like study, contemplation requires more active direction of thought rather than the complete passivity common to meditative reverie. Yet, unlike meditative study, contemplation is more thoughtful than visual. In other words, the subject does not study something objectively according to its physical properties, as in "Study of Two Pears" or "A Dish of Peaches in Russia," but thinks about various aspects and associations concerning a particular idea, often prompted by a visual object or a philosophical premise. Although contemplation is similar to study, the intellectual and philosophical conclusions are stated more tentatively, as suppositions rather than absolute facts.

Stevens' "Poem Written at Morning" (CP 219) seems to represent a *study* of pineapples, but is more accurately a contemplation on metaphor resulting from a *past* experience of seeing. The speaker is *reflecting* or remembering an object which is no longer before him. He claims that "By metaphor you paint / A thing. Thus, the pineapple was a leather fruit" (my emphasis), and concludes that

The truth must be
 That you do not see, you experience, you feel,
 That the buxom eye brings merely its element
 To the total thing, a shapeless giant forced Upward.
 Green were the curls upon that head.

By moving through a contemplation on the act of seeing, rather than studying the object itself, the speaker realizes that "the buxom eye brings...its element / To the total thing" so that the object of vision is changed by the process of perception or, as Leonard and Wharton argue, "the mind gives shape" to the total thing, "be it morning or pineapple" (22). The final line--the actual painting of the pineapple through metaphor--underlines the idea that the object is seen according to human perception: the foliage is compared to curls that grow from the "head" of the pineapple itself.

Most of Stevens' contemplative meditations, unlike "Poem Written at Morning," are longer poems which imitate the process of thinking through an elaborate idea. Although they may be reflective, most of Stevens' contemplations attempt to imitate the cognitive processes as they occur in the speaker's mind. Bevis argues that these longer poems are the best examples of "a poetry of the mind in the act of finding, losing, looking, finding, and losing the sufficient....The wandering mind is observed, even indulged: the poem neither directs nor resists vacillations" (255). Bevis refers to a passive mode of thinking, such as reverie. Unlike the shorter poems of reverie, however, these poems

contemplate an idea thoroughly or, at the very least, to its logical limits. Northrop Frye calls them "long meditative theoretical poems" (*SM* 339), comparing them to the variation forms found in music.

Unlike Stevens' more disconnected variations--such as "Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery" or "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"--his prolonged contemplations have a coherent structure and unifying theme: "they are sequential and progressive forms" and "we feel at the end that they have...exhausted the theme, done what there is to be done with it" (Frye, *SM* 283). Such a structure is in keeping with the Latin root of meditation, *metior*, which means to measure thoroughly. These contemplative poems, more than the poems of reverie or study, offer extended examinations of particular ideas or concepts.

"Somebody Puts a Pineapple Together" (*NA* 83-89) is an elaborate contemplative meditation on reality and metaphor, dealing with the same object of contemplation (a pineapple) as "Poem Written at Morning." The poem is comprised of three sections, the first of which opens with the assertion that "he contemplates / A wholly artificial nature, in which / The profusion of metaphor has been increased." In other words, he contemplates, not the pineapple itself, but its metaphoric possibilities. Like the "green curls" of the humanized pineapple in "Poem Written at Morning," the "tufted emerald" of this pineapple is seen as the imagined reality of the perceiver, who is "the irreducible X / At the bottom of imagined artifice, / Its inhabitant and elect expositor." The pineapple is, then, "put together" by the consciousness of the perceiving mind:

He sees an object on a table, much like
 A jar of the shoots of an infant country, green

And bright, or like a venerable urn,
 Which, from the ash within it, fortifies
 A green that is the ash of what green is,

He sees it in this tangent of himself.
 And in this tangent it becomes a thing
 Of weight, on which the weightless rests: from which

The ephemeras of the tangent swarm, the chance
 Concourse of planetary originals,
 Yet, as it seems, of human residence.

The form of the pineapple, then, is an imagined form, inviting the possibility of more
 imagined forms, an increase in the possibility of metaphor.

Whereas the first section introduces the idea of contemplation as a process of
 imaginative creation, the second section acts as a kind of second thought, a clarification
 and elaboration of the first. Though the contemplated pineapple is a “wholly artificial
 nature,” he realizes that “He must say nothing of the fruit that is / Not true, nor think it,

less. He must defy / The metaphor that murders metaphor.” Stevens’ line break emphasizes the seeming contradiction in the power of metaphor. Consciousness is always anchored to the “truth” of the object, perceiving nothing that is not true about it. Yet, at the same time, one must “say nothing of the fruit *that is*.” In other words, human consciousness is *unable* to perceive anything of the supposed “real” fruit because subject and object are co-dependent. Human consciousness always perceives the “real” metaphorically precisely because consciousness is always a creating consciousness. To “defy the metaphor that murders metaphor” is to defy dead metaphors, those visions of reality which are stale and accepted as “true,” the pre-conceived idea of an objective reality (which is, of course, an imagined possibility):

He had not to be told

Of the incredible subjects of poetry.

He was willing they should remain incredible,

Because the incredible, also, has its truth,

Its tuft of emerald that is real, for all

Its invitation to false metaphor.

The incredible gave him purpose to believe.

For Stevens, the incredible, the *not true*, is the “tuft of emerald that is real ” -- again note the suggestive line-break -- “*for all*.” And it is also real, because of and despite (“for”) its invitation to false metaphor, the invitation to see the thing as it “really” is, as objective reality. The idea of objective reality, Stevens suggests, is a dead end. It does not give one “a purpose to believe” and is, therefore, destructive rather than creative.

The third and final section of “Somebody Puts a Pineapple Together” reads as a celebration of the discoveries made through the process of contemplative mediation. He begins by declaring “How thick this gobbet is with overlays, / The double fruit of boisterous epicures...” (NA 85). The contemplating subject realizes that human consciousness “Divest[s] reality / Of its propriety” and then goes on to present an elaborate -- though hardly exhaustive -- list of metaphors inspired by the pineapple’s form:

1. The hut stands by itself beneath the palms.
2. Out of their bottle the green genii come.
3. A vine has climbed the other side of the wall.
4. The sea is spouting upward out of rocks.
5. The symbol of feasts and of oblivion . . .
6. White sky, pink sun, trees on a distant peak.
7. These lozenges are nailed-up lattices.

8. The owl sits humped. It has a hundred eyes.

9. The coconut and cockerel in one.

10. This is how yesterday's volcano looks.

11. There is an island Palahude by name --

12. An uncivil shape like a gigantic haw.

Stevens assembles the form of the pineapple through a process of resemblance, creating metaphoric possibilities that culminate in "the planes that tilt hard revelations on / The eye, a geometric glitter, tiltings / As of sections collecting toward the greenest cone." This final vision of the pineapple -- a kind of cubist word-painting -- suggests that the creation of the object is wholly contained within the contemplating consciousness of the subject himself.

In one of Stevens' earliest meditative contemplations, "The Man with the Blue Guitar" (*CP* 165), the thinking process moves through various perspectives, ideas, questions, and possibilities on the theme of the imagination's relationship to reality. Although the thoughts centre around a particular theme, the poem enacts various cognitive advances and retreats, questions and considerations; hence the subject of the poem is as much about the process of contemplation as about the relationship between art and reality. One section is, in fact, a series of questions rather than answers:

Is this picture of Picasso's, this "hoard
Of destructions," a picture of ourselves,

Now, an image of our society?
Do I sit, deformed, a naked egg,

Catching at Good-bye, harvest moon,
Without seeing the harvest or the moon?

Things as they are have been destroyed.
Have I? Am I a man that is dead

At a table on which the food is cold?
Is my thought a memory, not alive?

Is the spot on the floor, there, wine or blood
And whichever it may be, is it mine?

At other points in the poem, certain conclusions only lead to further questions:

XXII

Poetry is the subject of the poem,

From this the poem issues and

To this returns. Between the two,

Between issue and return, there is

An absence in reality,

Things as they are. Or so we say.

But are these separate? Is it

An absence for the poem, which acquires

Its true appearances there, sun's green,

Cloud's red, earth feeling, sky that thinks?

Along with the questions, there are imitations of momentary longing:

III

Ah, but to play man number one,

To drive the dagger in his heart,

and moments of sudden insight:

XXXIII

That generation's dream, availed

In the mud, in Monday's dirty light,

That's it, the only dream they knew,

Time in its final block, not time

to come, a wrangling of two dreams.

All in all, such meditative contemplations rehearse the process of thinking meditatively, where "the mind lays by its trouble and considers" ("Credences of Summer," *CP* 372).

Stevens writes, in another poem of contemplation, that each of his many variations--"an and yet, and yet, and yet"--is an essential "part of the never-ending meditation" which is so central to his various modes of thinking ("An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," *CP* 465).

Stevens's longer contemplations are also extremely introspective, representing a mind in contemplation of its own processes. In "Comedian as the Letter C," Stevens tells us that Crispin is "an introspective voyager" whose "mind was free / And more than free,

elate, intent, profound / And studious of a self possessing him" (*CP* 33). In section XXVIII of "The Man with the Blue Guitar," the speaker considers not only what he thinks but *how* he thinks:

I am a native in this world
And think in it as a native thinks,

Gesu, not native of a mind
Thinking the thoughts I call my own,

Native, a native in the world
And like a native think in it.

.....

Here I inhale profounder strength
And as I am, I speak and move

And things are as I think they are
And say they are on the blue guitar. (*CP* 180)

Contemplation involves, then, not only a study of ideas but a study of how ideas occur, how the mind partly creates what it perceives. In other words, contemplation often examines the very idea of consciousness itself, imitating a state of meta-consciousness.

Stevens' natural tendency toward various forms of "ordinary" meditation, evident in his poetry and letters, led him to imitate certain states of consciousness which are similar to a more disciplined meditative practice, such as Zen Buddhism and other forms of Eastern religious meditation. Zen Buddhism is known in India and China, however, as "a way of liberation" rather than a particular religion or philosophy. Alan Watts notes, in *The Way of Zen* that "it is actually much more Chinese than Indian, and...has rooted itself deeply and most creatively in the culture of Japan" (3).

References to Eastern art and culture abound in Stevens' collection of journal entries and letters. At the age of twenty-six, for example, Stevens wrote in his journal that he had been indulging in "Reflections...on Japanese life" (L 85). He comments in a letter to Elsie Moll that it seems a "[c]urious thing, how little we know about Asia" (L 138) and, later, that "Ceylon [had] taken a strong hold on [his] imagination" (L 337). In a letter to Leonard C. van Geyzel--who lived in the Orient and frequently sent requested items--Stevens wrote: "I selected as my own the Buddha, which is so simple and explicit that I like to have it in my room" (L 328) and later asked Peter Lee--an ongoing correspondent and a translator of Chinese and Korean lyrics--to "bear the Buddha in mind" (L 337). Although there are no explicit references to Eastern meditation or spiritualism, as is so prevalent in Yeats's writings, Stevens' interest in the Orient remained strong throughout

his life. Stevens did not "study" Eastern meditation, nor try to master his mind's limitations as Yeats did. Rather, he saw in Eastern thought and art a reflection of his own mode of thinking, especially as it related to the creation of poetry. "For a poet to have even a second-hand contact with China," he claimed, was "a great matter" (*L* 229), and he reported that he had "been influenced by Chinese and Japanese lyrics" (*L* 291).

Stevens' natural disposition toward meditative modes of thought, taken together with his ongoing interest in the Orient, suggests the possibility of intellectual understanding--if not actual attainment--of advanced meditative states of consciousness. Alan Watts notes that "much of the difficulty and mystification which Zen presents to the Western student is the result of his unfamiliarity with Chinese ways of thinking" (8). Stevens' letters and journal entries suggest that he quite naturally thought in these 'ways' and repeatedly enacted such forms of thought in his poetry.

All of the various modes of meditation which Stevens' poetry imitates -- reverie, study, and contemplation -- can be related to important steps towards 'liberation' in Eastern meditation. The first step is reverie: the mode of thinking which is most passive and idle. The meditating subject neither directs nor inhibits the thoughts that may arise, nor does s/he pursue any particular thought. "The point" of such thinking, according to Watts, "is not to eliminate reflective thought but to eliminate 'blocking' in both action and thought, so that the response of the mind is always like a ball in a mountain stream" (150), or as Stevens would have it, like bucks clattering over Oklahoma without the firecat constantly bristling in the way. Reverie, for Stevens, directs the thoughts to "principium,

to meditation" where "One knows at last what to think about / And thinks about it without consciousness" ("Solitaire Under the Oaks," *OP* 111).

A state of reverie is, as we shall see, both the first and last stages in Buddhist meditation. Only a disciplined mind is able to think "without consciousness," that is, without being aware of the process of thinking itself. Meditative reverie or, in Zen terminology, *nien*, may be translated as "no-thought" or, better yet, "no second thought" (Watts 151). Such a state of consciousness is achieved only through repeated practice, by carefully studying *how* the mind functions. Perhaps the saying of Ch'ing-yuan--a famous Zen master--will help clarify the difference between "ordinary" reverie and an advanced state of meditative consciousness:

Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. When I arrived at the more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it's just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters again as waters.

(Watts 126)

Ch'ing-yuan's rather enigmatic statement implies that the study of Zen brings one back to a simple, though no longer naive, understanding of the world and one's place within it. He

suggests that his final point of 'rest' came after great disciplined meditation. Though he may have arrived where he began, he suggests that this is where he was headed all along: "In my end," as Eliot writes, "is my beginning," or as Yeats has it, one must return to the place "where all the ladders start" (*YP* 472). "Zen begins," Watts points out, "at the point where there is nothing further to seek, nothing to be gained" (125).

Meditative reverie leads to greater insights into the act of thinking itself, and such insights lead to a point where "One knows at last *what* to think about...without consciousness." Meditative study and contemplation are important steps toward the attainment of this thinking "without consciousness." First, one must study and contemplate the act of thinking, or consciousness, itself. Both the meditative modes of study and contemplation require active thought or cognitive awareness. The subject is no longer passive but actively looking and--as noted in my discussion of "A Dish of Peaches in Russia," and "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight"--*thinking* about the act of looking. Stevens, throughout his poetry and prose, imitates the act of thinking about thinking.

Buddhist psychology is much more concerned with perception than it is with knowledge. For this reason, the act of sitting quietly and looking, as well as contemplating this very process, is enlightening and one of the preliminary steps toward true meditative enlightenment. Through careful observation of the thinking process and the process of perception, one discovers that the relationship between reality and human consciousness is a slippery one indeed.

From a psychological point of view, we all carry within us a collection of past

impressions, desires, illusions, and experiences which influence *how* we see and think. As I pointed out in my reading of Stevens' "Dish of Peaches in Russia" and "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight," the perceiving subject projects his or her own experiences and desires onto the perceived object. But, even more importantly, where Buddhism goes beyond what is familiar in psychology is in asserting that some of the deep but mostly unexamined and unconscious assumptions that constitute the very foundations of our perception are inaccurate, and that, therefore, the entire range of experience to which they contribute is ill-founded and misguided.

Through the practice of meditative study and contemplation, the perceiving subject begins to realize--that is, to *make* real--his perception of the world. Rather than seeing the thing in itself, the observing subject sees symbols or ideas of things:

Obscure, in colors whether of the sun
 Or mind, uncertain in the clearest bells,
 ...

So much ourselves, we cannot tell apart
 The idea and the bearer-being of the idea.

("An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," *CP* 465)

According to Watts, Buddhists realize that "the power of thought enables us to construct

symbols of things apart from the things themselves" (119). Because an idea of reality is often much more comprehensible than reality itself, we tend to cling, tenaciously, to ideas of the world and the self, to the ideas of object and subject. What Zen meditation reveals, ultimately, is that this tendency is natural but false. Our tendency to "construct" the world is not, however, misguided as long as we are fully aware of its falseness. For example, the idea of a "self" is understood as a concept which is helpful and legitimate "if seen for what it is, but disastrous if identified with our real nature" (Watts 120).

Stevens' poetry often imitates various meditations on the relationship between consciousness and reality, seeking out "the veritable ding an sich" (*CP* 29) or "Not Ideas About The Thing but the Thing Itself" (*CP* 534). In "Martial Cadenza" (*CP* 237), he seeks

The present close, the present realized,
 Not the symbol but that for which the symbol stands,
 The vivid thing in air that never changes,
 Though the air change.

The language with which we *describe* reality is equally problematical. Crispin, during his introspective voyage, considers that

The words of things entangle and confuse,

The plum survives its poems. It may hang
 In the sunshine placidly, colored by ground
 Obliquities of those who pass beneath,

...

Yet it survives its own form,
 Beyond these changes, good, fat, guzzly fruit.
 So Crispin hasped on the surviving form
 From him, of shall or ought to be in is.
 ("Comedian as the Letter C," *CP* 41)

Crispin affirms that the plum "survives its poems"--the symbols we make of it--and seeks the "real" plum which is separate from the perceiving subject; but such a separation is only imagined rather than directly apprehended.

We can see, throughout Stevens' poetry, a constantly changing perspective between the self and reality. In "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" (*CP* 65), reality is seen, not as a thing in itself or "ding an sich," but as a construct:

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

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw

Or heard or felt came not but from myself.

Through the process of meditating on self and other, Stevens writes, "I found myself more truly and more strange" (*CP* 65). Likewise, the woman in "Idea of Order at Key West" is "the single artificer of the world / In which she sang" (*CP* 129). Throughout Stevens' poetry, the perceiving subject is at the centre of reality, creating, through the process of perception, the world in which he or she lives.

Stevens' "rage for order" seems to vacillate between a belief in the ordering "self" and a belief in the outer order of reality. Hence, in contrast to "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" and "The Idea of Order at Key West," there are poems in which he suggests the possibility of a complete separation of self and other, imagination and reality. In "Restatement of Romance" (*CP* 146), he contends that "The night knows nothing of the chants of night. / It is what it is as I am what I am" and thinks that "in perceiving this I best perceive myself." In "The Latest Freed Man" (*CP* 204) he finds "everything ...more real, himself / At the centre of reality, seeing it."

There are, furthermore, meditative contemplations in which reality is understood as being both inside and outside the perceiving self. In "Chororua to Its Neighbor" (*CP* 298), Stevens speaks of a "solitaria" which

Are the meditations of a central mind.

I hear the motions of the spirit and the sound

Of what is secret becomes, for me, a voice

That is my own voice speaking in my ear. ("Chocorua to its Neighbor" *CP* 298)

Stevens' varied meditations involve ongoing and often contradictory processes of thought.

Yet, in the discipline of Zen, contradictions are not only allowed, but actively invited. The eighth-century Zen master Hui-neng instructed his students this way:

If, in questioning, someone asks about being, answer with non-being.

If he asks about non-being, answer with being. If he asks about the

ordinary man, answer in terms of the sage. If he asks about the sage,

answer in terms of the ordinary man. By this method of opposites

mutually related there arises an understanding of the Middle Way.

(Watts 94)

Many contradictions and oppositions appear in Stevens' writings, both within the poems themselves or in the relationship between poems. Stevens often balances one poem with a poem of opposing ideas in his *Collected Poems*. For example, "Hibiscus on the Sleeping Shores" (*CP* 22-23) offers the possibility that the mind is able to "[s]hut to the blather that the water made," but is followed immediately by the poem, "Fabliau of Florida" which

asserts that "[t]here will never be an end / To this droning of the surf" (23). Likewise, the rhetorical question--"what spirit / Have I except it comes from the sun?"--which comes at the end of the poem "Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu" (*CP* 127-128) is countered by "The Idea of Order at Key West," where the question--"[w]hose spirit is this?"--is answered with the assertion that the singer "was the single artificer of the world / in which she sang" (*CP* 129).

Stevens' poetry imitates a process of thought which is always seeking fresh beginnings, re-thinking and re-evaluating given assumptions, even when such assumptions were previously accepted or even embraced. Frye claims that, for Stevens, "[t]he imagination in the sunlit world of reality is like food in hot weather: whatever is kept spoils" (*SM* 284). This is not to say, however, that Stevens does not *progress* in his various meditations. As he writes in a letter to Barbara Church, "every fresh beginning is a beginning over," yet "this steady application brings about a general moving forward" (*L* 639). The transition from passive meditative reverie to active meditative study and contemplation leads to a state of awareness similar to reverie, the "liberated" state previously described by the Zen master Ch'ing-yuan. After seeing that "mountains are not mountains" as a result of human perception, the mind is "at rest" and sees "mountains once again as mountains" (Watts, 126). Advanced stages of meditation require an awareness of the relationship between perceiver and perceived, self and other, an understanding--brought about through study and contemplation--that both self and other are, ultimately, fictions. The Zen master, Sokei-an Sasaki explains:

One day I wiped out all the notions from my mind. I gave up all desire.
 I discarded all the words with which I thought and stayed in quietude...
 and Ztt! I entered. I lost the boundary of my physical body....I had
 never known this world. I had believed that I was created but now I
 must change my opinion: I was never created, I was the cosmos; no
 individual Mr. Sasaki existed. (Watts 121)

In this state of consciousness, the boundary between perceiver and perceived is seemingly
 erased. One is not consciously thinking at all, just as in a state of reverie. Stevens' poem,
 "The Rabbit as King of the Ghosts" (*CP* 209), imitates this form of thinking, pointing out
 "[t]he difficulty to think at the end of day." The rabbit struggles to re-think the
 relationship between himself and the frightening reality of "the cat slopping its milk all
 day," and manages to reach a state of mind where "there is nothing to think of":

No matter. The grass is full

And full of yourself. The trees around are for you,

The whole of the wideness of night is for you,

A self that touches all the edges,

You become a self that fills the four corners of

night.

The self becomes the centre of reality when "there is nothing to think of" and the mind is filled with the present reality. Such meditative states of consciousness, however, are often described as an emptiness:

The mind herein attains simplicity.

There is no moon, on single, silvered leaf,

The body is no body to be seen,

But is an eye that studies its black lid.

("Stars at Tallapoosa," *CP* 71)

The perceiver sees neither self nor other, but has gained insight into the nature of seeing or thinking itself.

In the terminology of Zen Buddhism, this state of consciousness is referred to as both *suchness* and *nothingness* which, for all intents and purposes, mean much the same thing. The meditative study of opposites, so prevalent in the poetry of Stevens, has many similarities to the Chinese school of the Middle Way. Stevens' interest in perception leads him from an awareness of reality, enacted in his early reveries, to an examination of the relationship between reality and consciousness, enacted in his studies and contemplations. These meditative investigations reveal a co-dependence between consciousness and

reality, suggesting that "Nothing exists by itself" ("Les Plus Belles Pages" *CP* 244).

In more advanced states of meditative awareness--known as *za-zen*--the subject returns to reverie, to thinking without blocking. But more importantly, the subject is unconscious of thought and of the separation between consciousness and reality. The mind is not wandering, but is fixed in a state of absolute awareness:

The relevance of *za-zen* to Zen is obvious when it is remembered that Zen is seeing reality directly, in its "suchness." To see the world as it is concretely, undivided by categories and abstractions, one must certainly look at it with a mind which is not thinking--which is to say, forming symbols about it. (Watts 155)

Once the relationship between subject and object has been contemplated, the world of reality is apprehended as a world distinct from human perception. Stevens writes of this state of awareness in "Of Bright & Blue Birds & the Gala Sun" (*CP* 248):

Some things...are like this,
That instantly and in themselves they are gay

...

For a moment they are gay and are a part

Of an element, the exactest element for us,
In which we pronounce joy like a word of our own.

It is there, being imperfect, and with these things
And erudite in happiness, with nothing learned,
That we are joyously ourselves and we think

Without the labor of thought, in that element,
And we feel, in a way apart, for a moment, as if
There was a bright *scienza* outside of ourselves,

A gaiety that is being, not merely knowing,
The will to be and to be total in belief,
Provoking a laughter, an agreement, by surprise.

Like Yeats, Stevens advocates a “gaiety” of creative vision which seemingly marries imaginative vision with the *scienza* of reality. Through the discipline of meditation, we may reach a state of mind in which “we think / Without the labor of thought,” where self and reality become indistinct and are, therefore, essentially nothing.

“The world of ‘suchness,’” Watts explains “is void and empty because it teases the mind out of thought, dumbfounding the clatter of definition so that there is nothing left to

be said" (131). Nothingness, then, refers to the state of mind rather than the state of reality. Yet, as Watts goes on to explain, "when pressed, every attempt to catch hold of our world leaves us empty-handed" (131) so that reality becomes "nothing" as well.

This concept is often better understood with respect to things and their attributes rather than self and other, though it equally applies to both. It may be helpful to understand this concept in relation to the parts which, when put together, result in what we call a bicycle. When you take a bicycle apart, you have nothing left except those parts. There is no bicycle that 'has' a frame, wheels, handlebars, and the rest: 'bicycle' is simply a name for these parts when they are put together in a certain way. Similarly, "reality" is composed of various parts put together through human perception in a certain way, as Stevens' studies -- such as "Study of Two Pears"-- reveal. If the parts are co-dependent, it follows that reality is nothing. This co-dependence of consciousness and reality is most notably represented in "The Snow Man" where Stevens argues:

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

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think
 Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
 In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
 Full of the same wind
 That is blowing in the same bare place

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

To "have been cold a long time" is to have perceived without the categories of self and other, to have meditated on the idea that self and other do not exist independently at all. Hence, in such a state of meditative awareness, the "listener" does not "think / Of any misery in the sound of the wind," because he does not relate the scene to his own feelings or thoughts *about* it. As soon as both self and other are seen as they *are*, they are seen as *nothing*, precisely because it is impossible to see things as they are, separate from our perceptions of them. The listener, who is "nothing himself," "beholds, / Nothing that is not there," only the scene itself and not his impressions or ideas *about it*. Furthermore, because he has come to the realization that the object of perception does not exist without

the perceiver, that which *is* there is understood as "nothing" as well.

Francisco J. Varela, in *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, points out that this type of logic seems like nonsense to most readers:

surely it makes even less sense to assert that a nonexistent seer either sees or does not see a nonexistent sight at a nonexistent moment than to make these claims about an existent seer....[But the] point is not to say that things are nonexistent in an absolute way any more than to say that they are existent. Things are co-dependently originated; they are completely groundless. (223)

The 'nothingness' refers not to reality itself but to the possibility of perceiving reality beyond our ideas of it. In "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," Stevens explains that "The nothingness was a nakedness, a point / Beyond which thought could not progress as thought" (*CP* 403). As Narajuna, a second-century Indian philosopher writes in his *Stanzas of the Middle Way*, "Nothing is found that is not dependently arisen. For that reason, nothing is found that is not empty" (Kalupahana 18-19).

That the world is comprised of parts is a central assertion in Stevens' poetry and prose, as his fourth collection of poems--*Parts of a World*--suggests. Riddel points out that this volume "is a remarkable gallery of 'parts,' fragments of perceptions constituting the perceived world of the self" (*CE* 157). "Landscape with Boat" (*CP* 241-243) is one of

the most revealing examples, in which the meditative subject, whose "nature [it is] to suppose," wrongly supposes "a truth beyond all truths." What he fails to suppose, and what Stevens offers as a possibility, is

That he might be truth, himself, or part of it,
 That the things that he rejected might be part
 And the irregular turquoise, part, the perceptible blue
 Grown denser, part, the eye so touched, so played
 Upon by clouds, the ear so magnified
 By thunder, parts, and all these things together,
 Parts, and more things, parts.

Meditative study and contemplation reveal that "mountains are not mountains" because they are dependent on human consciousness. Consider the poem, "July Mountain":

We live in a constellation
 Of patches and pitches,
 Not in a single world,
 In things said well in music,
 On the piano, and in speech,
 And 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* 115)

If reality and consciousness are co-dependent, then it follows that they cannot exist independently or, at least, we have no way of knowing of this existence. The state of awareness which "The Snow Man" rehearses is one in which one understands the "nothingness" of reality, of a world without human consciousness. Until we have reached the top of the mountain, Vermont does not yet exist because we do not yet perceive it. "Vermont throws itself together" at the very moment of perception.

In section I of "Credences of Summer," Stevens considers the possibility of a state of mind beyond thought, where "[t]here is nothing more inscribed nor thought nor felt" (372) and calls for us to see reality without forming any ideas about it, to "see the very thing and nothing else":

Let's see it with the hottest fire of sight.
 Burn everything not part of it to ash.

Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky
 Without evasion by a single metaphor.

Look at it in its essential barrenness
 And say this, this is the centre that I seek.
 Fix it in an eternal foliage

And fill the foliage with arrested peace,
 Joy of such permanence, right ignorance
 Of change still possible. Exile desire
 For what is not. This is the barrenness
 Of the fertile thing that can attain no more.

The 'suchness' of reality which this poem considers is 'realized' in Stevens' "Of Mere Being" (*OP* 117) where arrested peace is imagined as a "gold-feathered bird" perched in the eternal foliage of the "palm at the end of the mind." Fletcher reads the "palm at the end of the mind" as "an icon of thought" (284); yet it is more accurately an icon of "no-thought," nothingness or suchness:

The palm at the end of the mind,
 Beyond the last thought, rises
 In the bronze distance,

 A gold-feathered bird

Sings in the palm, without human meaning,

Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason

That makes us happy or unhappy.

The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.

The wind moves slowly in the branches.

The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

The palm stands as the icon of "a point / Beyond which thought could not progress as thought" (*CP* 403), housing a bird which "sings...without human meaning, / Without human feeling." All the factors of human perception are erased and the 'suchness' of "mere being" is allowed to shine forth in its radiant plumage of "fire-fangled feathers." This representation of "no-thought" may seem to complicate our understanding of "nothingness" because it is so vivid and inviting. Yet meditation need not be equated, as it often is, with asceticism. For many meditative thinkers, especially a poet like Stevens, the act of meditation is closely associated with the power of the imagination. The "suchness" of the world is the necessary complement to its "nothingness," because they are, in fact, one and the same.

Rather than asserting Stevens' own distinction between reality and imagination, Bevis argues that the distinction is actually between meditation and imagination in *relation* to reality. In this way, "meditative knowledge is the opposite of imaginative knowledge" (146). For Bevis, meditation is the form of thinking which sees "things as they are" ("The Man with the Blue Guitar," *CP* 165), while imagination is one "which makes secret arrangements...in the mind" ("Description without Place," *CP* 341). According to my reading of Stevens' work, however, the very foundation of perception involves an interdependent relationship between "things as they are" and the "secret arrangements" we make of them. If, as Watts notes, "the perfection of Zen is to be perfectly and simply human" (162), then the imagination is not the opposite of meditation, but its *alpha* and *omega*. Stevens, in his *Adagia*, writes: "The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else" (*OP* 163).

In order to understand fully Stevens' ideas of imagination and reality, we must study closely how he uses the term "meditation" in his poetry. *Meditate* is both an intransitive and a transitive verb, and Stevens often uses the word 'meditate' in the sense of 'create,' or 'design,' especially in his later poetry.⁴ The first time *meditate* is used in this

4

In addition to my discussion, there are several other examples of the transitive use of the verb *meditate*:

Sunday song
 Comes from the beating of the locust's wings,
 That do not beat by pain, but calendar,
 Nor meditate the world as it goes round.
 ("Certain Phenomena of Sound," *CP* 286)

way is in "The Examination of the Hero in a Time of War" (*CP* 273), an extended meditation on Stevens' idea of major man, or the hero. In this poem, Stevens considers how one may "meditate the highest man" and moves through various contemplations on this idea. "The hero is not a person," Stevens insists, yet "[t]he common man is the common hero." What seems a contradiction becomes an assertion that the hero is an idea that may be created by anyone who is willing:

To grasp the hero, the eccentric
 On a horse, in a plane, at the piano--
 At the piano, scales, arpeggios
 And chords, the morning exercises,

By fortune, his gray ghost may meditate
 The spirits of all the impotent dead...
 ("Mountains Covered with Cats," *CP* 368)

In these unhappy he meditates a whole,
 The full of fortune and the full of fate,
 As if he lived all lives, that he might know.
 ("The Auroras of Autumn," *CP* 420)

The scholar is always distant in the space
 Around him and in that distance meditates
 Things still more distant...
 ("Recitation after Dinner," *OP* 86)

It might be the candle of another being,
 Ragged in unkempt perceptions, that stands
 And meditates an image of itself...
 ("As at a Theatre," *OP* 91)

The afternoon's reading, the night's reflection,

That's how to produce a virtuoso.

In Dogget's reading, "[t]he idea of man, of the hero, of God [are]... projections of self and examples of the spontaneous act of personification by which man continually interprets the world" (121). Yet the idea of major man is more than a mere projection of self; it is a creation of a greater self *designed* or *devised* by the meditating mind:

Unless we believe in the hero, what is there

To believe? Incisive what, the fellow

Of what good. Devise. Make him of mud,

For every day. In a civiler manner,

Devise, devise, and make him of winter's

Iciest core, a north star, central

In our oblivion, of summer's

Imagination, the golden rescue:

The bread and wine of the mind, permitted

In an ascetic room....

The imagination is, for Stevens, that which is most essentially *human* in an act of meditation, the bread and wine, body and blood of what appears to be an "ascetic" or

emptied mind. Although major man is "begotten at clear sources," he is the creation of "an abundant / Poet, as if he thought gladly, being / Compelled thereto by an innate music." The hero is "not an image" created out of intellect alone, but "a feeling as definition."

The meditating mind actively perceives in a double sense: it contemplates or studies and, therefore, must design or create. Meditation involves both of these activities because a meditative state of awareness is one in which the mind's decreation of reality demands a subsequent recreation: "As the reason destroys," Stevens asserts, "the poet must create" (*OP* 164). His poems of reverie imitate a mind attempting to perceive an objective reality, where both human consciousness and reality exist independently. His subsequent studies and contemplations examine the complex relationship between reality and consciousness, considering ideas about both objective reality and modes of thinking. Stevens' poetic thinking reveals the co-dependence of objective reality and human consciousness, which results in the essential nothingness of both. This, Bevis would argue, is the limit of meditation. But for Stevens, meditation is both reflective *and* creative. His later poetry returns us to a belief in the imagined objective.

Critics who place Stevens within the romantic tradition, such as Riddel, Bloom, and Vendler, argue that he is ultimately a poet of the creative imagination. Critics such as Pearce and Regueiro, on the other hand, argue that Stevens' later poetry scorns imagination in favour of the reality of "things themselves." Both "camps" are valid because Stevens' later poetry returns to *reality as idea*, as the possibility of a *new* reality.

The poet "must create his unreal out of what is real," Stevens argues (*NA* 58), but "a sense of reality keen enough to be in excess of the normal sense of reality creates a reality of its own" (*NA* 79).

The final poem of Stevens' *Collected Poems*, "Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself" (*CP* 534) returns us to objective reality. Yet this poem enacts the annunciation of a real born out of an unreal:

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

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

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

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

The sun was coming from outside.

That scrawny cry--it was

A chorister whose c preceded the choir.

It was part of the colossal sun,

Surrounded by its choral rings,

Still far away. It was like

A new knowledge of reality.

If "god and the imagination are one" (*CP* 524), then what Stevens seeks is not an objective reality by way of either meditation or imagination, but a 'supreme fiction' created through a meditative imagination which perceives "the exquisite...seen" and the "more exquisite unseen" simultaneously. This "exquisite unseen" is not, as in Yeats's poetry and thought, a realm beyond the world of experience or consciousness, but one brought about, or meditated, by the creative imagination. This world is not accessed through meditation but *created* by it. Though objective reality and human consciousness are co-dependent, they are parts of a world which the mind meditates, in all the varied senses of that word.

Section II:
The Noetics of Figure

Chapter Three:

Where all the Ladders Start

A noetics of form seeks to examine how a poet's particular style represents or imitates a particular form of thinking. Though both Yeats and Stevens may be classified as meditative poets writing within the romantic tradition, the form of their respective meditations is uniquely their own, often revealing individual temperaments, philosophies, or desires. Yeats' argument that great poetry results from "the division of a mind within itself" (*E&I* 321) is borne out in the dialectical form of his meditative verse. Stevens' belief, on the other hand, that a "poem is the cry of its occasion, / Part of the res itself and not about it" (*CP* 473), is represented by a poetry which imitates "the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice" (*CP* 239).

A study of the noetics of form, therefore, investigates how a poet's style imitates particular patterns of thought. A study of the noetics of figure, on the other hand, considers a poet's representations of the mind or consciousness. The subject of a noetics of figure, then, is not so much the mind's thinking processes--though these are, of course, implicit--but the perceived relationship between human consciousness and objective reality as revealed through a poet's choice of imagery.

The poetry of both Yeats and Stevens has its roots--as does much neo-romantic poetry-- in symbolism. I have briefly discussed Yeats's interest in symbols as they relate to modes of meditative reverie and the unconscious in Chapter One. Yeats's catalogue of both private and public symbols also, however, reveals a great deal about his view of human consciousness and its relationship to objective reality. Though symbolism represents an attempt to suggest the mysterious and elusive nature of various states of mind and feeling, it nevertheless reveals particular attitudes or ideas concerning human consciousness through the poet's choice of symbolic imagery.

In keeping with the romantic tradition, both Yeats and Stevens make use of imagery which is largely connected with nature. Their poetry is filled with images of trees, birds, streams, lakes, mountains, and animals, as well as references to various seasons and weather conditions. Though both poets use such figures symbolically, Yeats's natural imagery corresponds to a particular model of human consciousness in which intellectual growth is represented as an ascent through various levels of consciousness. Yeats does this in two distinct but complementary ways: an emphasis on images of ascension and a transition from natural to artificial figures of consciousness. Yeats's ultimate goal, however, is not merely to imagine the highest level of human consciousness, but to move outside its limits altogether. Though he embraces the world of experience and conflict, Yeats's choice of imagery often reveals a desire for a state of being or 'non-being' which is beyond human consciousness or experience. This ultimate state is represented by images of crossing borders or limits, and culminates in his dancing or spinning figures.

Yeats's most dominant natural images are of trees, mountains, and birds and his most dominant constructed images are of towers, stairs, and ladders. All of these figures suggest an upward movement from less-disciplined or unconscious forms of thought to a more fully-conscious, disciplined state of awareness. Frye writes of such figures in *Words with Power*, pointing out that "images of ascent are connected with the intensifying of consciousness, and images of descent with the reinforcing of it by other forms of awareness, such as fantasy or dream" (Frye, *WP* 151). Yeats uses such images of ascent and descent as figures of consciousness and its limits.

Mountains are perhaps the most obvious natural figures of ascent in Yeats's poetry. In "The Tower," he associates the "excited, passionate, fantastical / Imagination" of his youth with the act of "climb[ing] Ben Bulbin's back" (*YP* 302). The refrain of "Three Songs to the One Burden" has the "fierce horsemen"--representing supernatural beings⁵--riding "from mountain to mountain," and in "When You are Old," Yeats imagines Maud Gonne in her old age regretting the loss of the great "Love [which] fled / And paced upon the mountains overhead" (*YP* 76). "Lapis Lazuli" pictures the three Chinamen climbing a mountainside in order to reach a particular height of thought:

There, on the mountain and the sky,

On all the tragic scene they stare.

5

In "Under Ben Bulbin" Yeats writes of "those horsemen, by those women / Complexion and form prove superhuman" (*YP* 449).

One asks for mournful melodies;
 Accomplished fingers begin to play.
 Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
 Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay. (YP 413)

The wisdom of the Chinamen is that of the creative imagination which is able to accept tragedy because it promises the possibility of renewal: "All things fall and are built again, / And those that build them again are gay" (YP 413). Their ascent up the mountain is an ascent towards a state of creative consciousness, which overlooks destruction and delights in creative possibility.

Like mountains, trees are also recurring natural images in Yeats's poetry. There are over one hundred and thirty entries for the word "tree" in the Yeats *Concordance* (Parrish, 1963), and many of these images correspond to consciousness or forms of thinking. In "The Two Trees" (YP 83-84) for example, the opposing tree imagery suggests two levels or degrees of consciousness: one which looks inward and is, therefore, true to the self, the other which looks outward at the world of appearance. The higher level of consciousness is associated with the tree's "leafy head" while the lower one is described in terms of "[r]oots half-hidden under snows" and "broken branches." Richard Ellmann, in *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (1948), sees the trees as representing "the human mind, whose faculties, even the lowest, can work for good or ill" (76); yet Yeats makes a clear distinction between the two trees according to the relationship between true and false self-

consciousness. In both instances, the "beloved" turns towards the self. To reach a state of higher consciousness,⁶ however, she is advised to "gaze in [her] own heart" where grows the "holy tree" full of "trembling flowers" and "hidden root[s]." In the second stanza, she is cautioned to "Gaze no more in the bitter glass / The demons, with their subtle guile, / Lift up before us when they pass." Once more, the self is the subject of study but, rather than looking inward, this form of consciousness considers only physical appearance, the "glass of outer weariness." As in his essay, "The Thinking of the Body," Yeats condemns those who follow "some abstract reverie, which stirs the brain only and needs that only," and praises those who seek before the "looking-glass...thoughts that shape the lines of the body for beauty or animation" (*E&I* 292). Yeats does not condemn physical beauty or a delight in the self, but cautions that there must be a balance between a thinking of the body and a thinking of the mind. The mirror-image of the second tree is a reversed image, both of the self and of the tree. Unlike the original, the tree of the second stanza has roots which are only "half-hidden" and "broken branches" full of "blackened" leaves.⁷

6

Jeffares, in his notes to the *Collected Poems*, refers to the two trees as corresponding to the "Sephrotic tree of the Kabalah and the Tree of Knowledge, of Life, of Imagination" (*YP* 504). Regardless of the mythical source, it is clear that Yeats presents a tree which relates to images of ascent and images of descent, ruin, or fallen nature.

7

Yeats often represents fallen consciousness or feebleness of mind and body through figures of broken trees or branches. In "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner" (*YP* 81-82), for example, the old man laments that "[t]here's not a woman turns her face / Upon [the] broken tree" which he fears he has come to resemble. Similarly, Yeats compares himself in old age to a scarecrow, "[o]ld clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird" ("Among School Children, *YP* 325). In "The Lover Tells of the Rose in his Heart" (*YP* 90), Yeats

Figures of trees and birds are again offered in the poem "A Prayer for my Daughter" (*YP* 295), in which Yeats reminds us of the contrast between two distinct levels of conscious awareness. Again, the distinction is between a thinking which relies on intuitive understanding as opposed to one which is guided by outward appearance or shallow opinion. Though he hopes his daughter "[m]ay be...granted beauty," he prays for beauty which will not "make a stranger's eye distraught, / Or hers before a looking-glass." Rather than seeing outward appearance as "a sufficient end," Yeats hopes that his daughter will find "natural kindness" and "heart-revealing intimacy / that chooses right." Consciousness, here, is represented by the image of a tree, while thinking itself is represented by the figure of a bird:

May she become a flourishing hidden tree
 That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,
 And have no business but dispensing round
 Their magnanimities of sound,
 Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
 Nor but in merriment a quarrel.
 O may she live like some green laurel

contrasts "[a]ll things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and old," with the "rose in the deeps of [his] heart." In section V of "Meditations in Time of Civil War" (*YP* 311-312), the destructive thinking of "A brown Lieutenant and his men" is equated with "A pear tree broken by the storm."

Rooted in one dear perpetual place.

Yeats hopes his daughter will develop a "quiet nature" full of "radical innocence" that is not disturbed by the shallow opinions of those who do not look within themselves for wisdom:

If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

An intellectual hatred is the worst,
So let her think opinions are accursed.

For Yeats, a higher level of consciousness is achieved, not through intellectual pursuit but through quiet reflection and insight.

The type of thinking to which Yeats is most opposed is logical thinking which expresses itself in shallow opinions or which seeks argument for its own sake rather than in pursuit of beauty or truth. Conventional education is, for Yeats, limiting and misguided because one learns only "what others think" rather than how to think for oneself. In "Michael Robartes and the Dancer," he claims that "[o]pinion is not worth a rush," and advises serious thinkers to

Go pluck Athena by the hair;
 For what mere book can grant a knowledge
 With an impassioned gravity
 Appropriate to that beating breast,
 That vigorous thigh, that dreaming eye?
 And may the devil take the rest. (*YP* 282)

Yeats seems to give the beauty of women more importance than thought, but his emphasis on physical appearance is connected to his contention that thinking must be of the whole person, of both body and mind. To Katherine Tynan, Yeats writes:

What poor delusiveness is all this 'higher education of women,' Men
 have set up a great mill called examinations, to destroy the imagination.
 Why should women go through it, circumstance does not drive *them*?
 They come out with no repose, no peacefulness, their minds no longer
 quiet gardens full of secluded paths and umbrage-circled nooks, but loud
 as chaffering market places. (*L* 123)

Though Yeats's metaphorical use of women's beauty is problematical from a feminist perspective, this statement suggests that the mill of education destroys the ability of anyone to think independently. Individual thought, for Yeats, stems from the individual

body and is not superior to it. He strives for a balance between the body and the mind in which neither is superior to the other: "Did God in portioning wine and bread / Give man His thought or His mere body?" (*YP* 282).

As the references to "ravens of unresting thought" and "thoughts...like a linnet," suggest, Yeats's bird imagery often corresponds to particular ways of thinking. Images of birds figure so prominently in Yeats's poetry that they could be the subject of an entire thesis. Stephen Parrish, in his preface to *A Concordance to the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, states that "a full inventory of this Irish poet's birds overwhelms the mind" and he counts "for a beginning":

some 8 hawks, 21 owls, 6 bats, 2 kites, 6 falcons, 15 eagles, 8 ospreys,
and 5 king-fishers--all birds of prey--as well as 2 robins, 2 partridges,
2 gannets, 3 moorfowl, 10 herons, 12 curlew, 3 bitterns, 6 gulls, 2 sea-
gulls, 1 sea-mew, 10 doves, 1 ringdove, 4 pigeons, 1 crane, 2 nightingales,
5 sparrows, 4 parrots, 2 crows, 11 cocks, 4 hens, 13 peacocks, 1 daw,
2 rooks, 1 stare, 1 nightjar, 2 lapwings, 1 jay, 1 cormorant, 1 grouse,
2 ducks, 16 swans, 6 ravens, 2 woodpeckers, 2 flamingos, 4 linnets,
2 snipes, 4 peewits, 8 geese, 1 barnacle-goose, 1 turkey, and 6 cuckoos--
not to speak of the halcyon (3), the phoenix (8), or the bird that Grecian
goldsmiths make. (v-vi)

All these various species serve Yeats well. The more gentle birds, such as sparrows, doves, and linnets, are often linked with what we might call a *feminine* form of thought, associated for Yeats with women, love, or dream. In "The Sorrow of Love," we have the "brawling of a sparrow in the eaves" (YP 75). In "The Indian to His Love," the "burnished dove...moans and sighs a hundred days" (YP 49), while the sands in "A Poet to his Beloved" are described as "dove-grey" (YP 98). In "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," Yeats links a peaceful state of mind with an "evening full of the linnet's wings" (YP 74).

Complementing his gentle birds are the birds of prey. Images of hawks, eagles, and falcons often represent a *masculine* form of thought which is more disciplined and masterful. In the concluding section of *Meditations in Time of Civil War*, the image of "brazen hawks" is linked to those who are driven by hatred and vengeance rather than the stillness and sweetness of a quiet mind:

The cloud-pale unicorns, the eyes of aquamarine,
 The quivering half-closed eyelids, the rags of cloud or of lace,
 Or eyes that rage has brightened, arms it has made lean,
 Give place to an indifferent multitude, give place
 To brazen hawks. Nor self-delighting reverie,
 Nor hate of what's to come, nor pity for what's gone,
 Nothing but grip of claw, and the eye's complacency,
 The innumerable clanging wings that have put out the moon. (YP 313)

In "Man and the Echo," the final stanza introduces the image of a rabbit whose cry -- caused by "some hawk or owl.../ Dropping out of sky or rock" -- "distracts [the speaker's] thought" (*YP* 470). Again, the bird of prey disturbs rather than strengthens the mind. As birds of prey, hawks are naturally linked with a form of thinking which is cruel and heartless; yet they often appear in poems which celebrate a form of thinking which is masterful and keen, full of conviction and strength without being rigid and unbending.

In "The Hawk," for example, Yeats suggests that a disciplined form of thinking brings with it a certain freedom of mind, unfettered from the confines of accepted opinion. The poem is written in three stanzas, each one spoken by a different figure. The first fears individual creativity, choosing instead to think according to established or accepted standards:

'Call down the hawk from the air;
Let him be hooded or caged
Till the yellow eye has grown mild,
For larder and spit are bare,
The old cook enraged,
The scullion gone wild.' (*YP* 252)

The second stanza, spoken by the hawk itself, suggests that once the mind has experienced the exhilaration of freedom, it can no longer remain obedient to another's will:

I will not be clapped in a hood,
 Nor a cage, nor alight upon wrist,
 Now I have learnt to be proud
 Hovering over the wood
 In the broken mist
 Or tumbling cloud.' (*YP* 252)

The final stanza introduces the idea of the hawk as a figure of a creative consciousness. Yeats's attitude towards his own hawk-like mind, however, is troubled by the fact that he "sat dumbfounded before a knave" and only offered "A pretence of wit" to a friend. This final stanza implies that his own mind is not yet as free and spirited as he desires, and that he must study to make his mind equal to the grand symbol which represents it.

While the hawk often corresponds with distracted, cruel, or divided thought, the eagle is a bird of prey most often associated with masterful and creative thought. In "To a Wealthy Man who promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted Pictures," Yeats concludes by comparing patronage to "right twigs for an eagle's nest" (209) and in "Those Images," the eagle is associated with images that "constitute the wild" and "make the muses sing" (*YP* 437).

Considering that birds are images of a heightened form of thinking, it should not be surprising to find the image of a cave or cavern representing the mind engaged in less lofty pursuits. In "Those Images," Yeats writes:

What if I bade you leave
 The cavern of the mind?
 There's better exercise
 In the sunlight and wind. (YP 437)

The mind, represented as a dark cavern, contrasts with the "sunlight and wind" of the outside world. Although Yeats depends on the processes of the mind, he cautions that too much introspection can leave one out of touch with reality.

In his essay on the philosophy of Shelley's poetry, Yeats quotes from Shelley's fragment *On Life*, where the image of the cavern is used in a similar way: "The caverns of the mind are obscure and shadowy; or pervaded with a lustre, beautiful and bright indeed, but shining not beyond their portals" (*E&I* 85). This metaphor further recalls Plato's parable of the cave, in which the prisoners--representing ordinary thinkers--believe that mere shadows are reality. For Plato, the painful but necessary ascent to the sunlight represents the way towards philosophic knowledge. Though Yeats would probably deny that he seeks *philosophic* rather than *poetic* knowledge, he refers to "eagle thoughts" as having a "lidless eye which loves the sun," implying that such thinkers are able to look into the direct sunlight of the "real" without blinking. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, to find an eagle in the final stanza of "Those Images," in which Yeats urges the creative mind to

Find in middle air
 An eagle on the wing,
 Recognize the five
 That make the muses sing.

Rather than dwelling within the mind's cavern, Yeats suggests that the bodily senses--"the five / That make the muses sing"--are more important than pure intellect. In this way, Yeats' parable of the cave contrasts with Plato's in that true knowledge--poetic rather than philosophic--comes through the bodily senses rather than the mind alone. Though he might find Plato's parable useful as a poetic image, Yeats does not prize abstract thought above the sensual. Body and mind must remain in balance in order for a poetically creative thinking to take place.

Images of birds abound in Yeats's poems about Coole Park, a place which represents passion and creativity for Yeats. In the poem "Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation," he worries about the decline of Lady Gregory's estate and the imminent loss of "the lidless eye that loves the sun" (*YP* 190). As Jeffares points out, this line alludes to Blake's "King Edward the Third" where he mentions "The Eagle, that doth gaze upon the sun," implying that only the eagle's lidless eye is able to stare into the sun without blinking (commentary, *YP* 537). For Yeats, the house at Coole Park represents a house of creative imagination, where "sweet laughing eagle thoughts...grow" and "Where wings have memory of wings" (*YP* 190). Similarly, in "Coole Park, 1929," Yeats introduces

swallows as images of the great minds which have visited this house:

They came like swallows and like swallows went,
 And yet a woman's powerful character
 Could keep a swallow to its first intent;
 And half a dozen in formation there,
 That seemed to whirl upon a compass-point,
 Found certainty upon the dreaming air,
 The intellectual sweetness of those lines
 That cut through time or cross it withershins. (*YP* 358)

Like the swallows, these great minds are free to come and go as they please; yet the influence of Lady Gregory acts as a "compass-point" around which they continually circle. The seemingly erratic flight of the swallows, therefore, has a centre, so that they are free to pursue their individual flight patterns while simultaneously finding "certainty upon the dreaming air." It is an apt image of the creative mind in that swallows often appear directionless as they erratically dart and dip; yet, as Yeats points out, there is a hidden pattern to their apparent lack of direction: "Thoughts long knitted into a single thought, / A dance-like glory" (*YP* 358).

Swans recur often throughout Yeats's poetry as images of ascending consciousness, the most obvious examples being "The Wild Swans at Coole" and "Coole

and Ballylee, 1931" (*YP* 358). The first poem opens with an image of decay and age, introducing the "autumn beauty" of the trees and the dry woodland paths. The water of the lake "mirrors a still sky." Yet, upon the still waters drift the "nine-and-fifty swans" who had formerly been seen to "suddenly mount / And scatter wheeling in great broken rings / Upon their clamorous wings." The swans, though certainly complex symbols, are linked with the immortality of the creative imagination and the continual possibility of inspiration. They drift upon the water "unwearied still" and have "hearts [that] have not grown old." Though the swans may age and die like himself, Yeats represents them as images of thought which are capable of living beyond the borders of individual consciousness: "Passion or conquest, wander where they will, / Attend upon them still." The mystery and precariousness of artistic inspiration are best represented in the concluding lines where Yeats asks:

Among what rushes will they build,
 By what lake edge or pool
 Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
 To find they have flown away? (*YP* 233)

"Coole and Ballylee, 1931" has three central images --water, woods, and swan-- the first of which is explicitly related to the soul:

Under my window-ledge the waters race,
 Otters below and moor-hens on the top,
 Run for a mile undimmed in Heaven's face
 Then darkening through 'dark' Raftery's 'cellar' drop,
 Run underground, rise in a rocky place
 In Coole demesne, and there to finish up
 Spread to a lake and drop into a hole.
 What's water but the generated soul?

The river's flow, as an image of the soul--alternately running below and above ground--is "generated" in that it is reincarnated from life to death and back to life once more. Yet it is also "generated" in that the soul is *created* by the actions of the body and mind in an effort to liberate the self from conflict. The lake at Coole represents the liberation of the soul, where it arrives "to finish up, / Spread to a lake and drop into a hole" as if disappearing altogether.

The second stanza introduces the image of the wood, which "under a wintry sun" has become "all dry sticks" (*YP* 359), in which Yeats himself stands. The dry woods at the edge of the lake reflect his despair at the thought of losing that house from which he gained so much inspiration and encouragement: "For Nature's pulled her tragic buskin on / And all the rant's a mirror of my mood" (*YP* 359). Then comes the central image:

At sudden thunder of the mounting swan
 I turned about and looked where branches break
 The glittering reaches of the flooded lake.

Another emblem there! That stormy white
 But seems a concentration of the sky;
 And, like the soul, it sails into the sight
 And in the morning's gone, no man knows why;
 And is so lovely that it sets to right
 What knowledge or its lack had set awry,
 So arrogantly pure, a child might think
 It can be murdered with a spot of ink. (*YP* 359)

The "mounting swan," which rises up out of the lake and above the trees, breaks through the silence and sadness of the scene to become an image of creative inspiration which "sets to right / What knowledge or its lack had set awry." Though Yeats still laments the fact that he and his friends "were the last romantics," he ends this poem with an image of the swan, drifting upon the darkening waters of the lake, an image which suggests that the power of the creative imagination is able to transcend both time and place.

The image of the swan, as these poems suggest, most often corresponds with limits, either of time or space. In the third and final section of "The Tower" (*YP* 305-307),

Yeats declares, "[i]t is time that I wrote my will" and claims that "upstanding men" shall "inherit [his] pride":

Pride, like that of the morn,
 When the headlong light is loose,
 Or of that fabulous horn,
 Or that of the sudden shower
 When all streams are dry,
 Or that of the hour
 When the swan must fix his eye
 Upon a fading gleam,
 Float out upon a long
 Last reach of glittering stream
 And there sing his last song.

Yeats' "swan song" is one which does not mark absolute death but the creation of immortality: "being dead, we rise, / Dream and so create / Translunar Paradise" (*YP* 306).

Yeats suggests that the immortal soul is created by the imagination. At life's end, he declares, "Now shall I make my soul, / Compelling it to study in a learned school" so that death will seem no more than "a bird's sleepy cry / Among the deepening shades" (*YP* 307). In "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," he writes that "[s]ome moralist or

mythological poet / Compares the solitary soul to a swan; I am satisfied with that" (*YP* 316), and in "Leda and the Swan," the rape of Leda becomes an image of violent creativity, a union of the human and divine: "Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?" (*YP* 322).

As figures of thought, Yeats's birds represent how one *should* think in an effort to attain the highest possible state of creative imagination. For Yeats, creative thought must be true to the self, yet it must also attempt to master or discipline that self into achieving a higher state of consciousness. While images of linnets, sparrows, and doves suggest a form of thought which is attuned to emotion, birds of prey--such as the hawk and eagle--represent the need to discipline such emotional thought into a state of creative consciousness. Finally, through the figure of the swan, Yeats suggests that the creative imagination is capable of transcending time and space, breaking through the very limits of consciousness itself.

In his essay on magic, Yeats contends that "the borders of our minds are ever shifting, and...can flow into one another...and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy" (*E&I* 28). Whether this "single energy" is created or revealed, it represents in Yeats's poetry a desire to transcend the limits of consciousness. Frye speaks of such desire as "a kind of intellectual death-wish, to conceive of order in terms of finality, as something that keeps receding from experience until experience stops, when it becomes the mirage of an 'after-life'" (*FI* 241). Frye further contends that this cessation of experience is something on which "all hierophants, whether poets or priests, depend" (*FI*

241). Though Yeats often seems to favour the world of experience over that of thought, the hierophant in him repeatedly attempts to imitate a transcendence of experience through particular figures of consciousness.

In his essay, "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," Yeats quotes Shelley's statement that "Those who are subject to the state called reverie, feel as if their nature were resolved into the surrounding universe" and concludes that Shelley "must have expected to receive thoughts and images from beyond his own mind, just in so far as that mind transcended its preoccupation with particular time and place, for he believed inspiration a kind of death; and he could hardly have helped perceiving that an image that has transcended particular time and place becomes a symbol, passes beyond death, as it were, and becomes a living soul" (*E&I* 79-80). The figure of the swan, as a kind of Wordsworthian "living soul," seemingly perches on the border between consciousness and non-consciousness, between life and death itself.

Natural images of ascent, such as mountains, trees, and birds, suggest the various levels of consciousness and forms of thinking towards which Yeats' poetry intellectually strives. As natural images, they belong within the world of reality and experience. If we conceive of consciousness as a tree or a mountain, Yeats suggests, we are restricted by their natural limitations. Likewise, the figures of birds may imitate a natural progression of thinking from one level of consciousness to another, but as images derived from natural experience they are unable to transcend it. The image of the swan suggests the possibility of transcendence, but as a natural image it still refers to the world of experience.

Yeats addresses this problem in his later poetry by introducing images of consciousness which are created rather than natural. Figures of mountains and trees give way to man-made structures such as towers, winding stairs, and ladders, while images of birds are transformed into created figures which dwell outside nature.

The tower and its internal winding staircase are powerful symbols in Yeats's poetry from 1917--when he purchased Thoor Ballylee--onwards. Towers had already figured in his poetry before this date as figures of intellectual ascent, but they did not have as central a place as figures of consciousness. The poems of both *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair* are most centrally concerned with the limits of human consciousness and the possibility of the creative imagination in transcending these limits. As Unterecker points out, the "carefully-integrated imagery of the tower, tree, bird, and dancer" dominate both collections (171); yet the tree and the bird, as noetic figures, undergo an important transformation.

The two Byzantium poems, "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium"--when read in relation to one another--better clarify the relationship between images of nature and those of artifice and how they relate to Yeats's view of consciousness. The ancient city of Byzantium represents, for Yeats, a place where opposition between the artist and the people is reconciled. In *A Vision*, he writes:

I think that in early Byzantium, and maybe never before or since in
recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one,

that architect and artificers...spoke to the multitude and the few alike.

The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that of the vision of a whole people. (279-280)

Byzantium not only represents a place where oppositions are reconciled, but more importantly it stands as a mythic state beyond consciousness, where the artistic process is "impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design." The artist and the work of art are absorbed into one another, the creator and the created indistinguishable.

"Sailing to Byzantium" opens with a complaint about the world of experience:

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
-- Those dying generations -- at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unaging intellect. (*YP* 301)

The birds, rather than representing a heightened form of thinking, are linked with the "dying generations" of the sensual world. Yeats dismisses the interests of youth--those who are immersed in "Whatever is begotten, born, and dies"--in favour of the "Monuments of unaging intellect." One such monument is that of the tower itself. In section IV of "Meditation in Time of Civil War," for example, Yeats refers to the tower as "stones [which] remain [as a] monument" of all who "flourish and decline" (*YP* 311). In "Sailing to Byzantium," natural images such as those of "fish, flesh, or fowl" give way to images of artifice which represent the possibility of transcending the borders of the mind.

Bird imagery is transformed in the third stanza of the poem, where Yeats addresses the "sages":

Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
 And be the singing-masters of my soul.
 Consume my heart away; sick with desire
 And fastened to a dying animal
 It knows not what it is; and gather me
 Into the artifice of eternity. (*YP* 301)

The image of the sages, as Unterecker points out, is a "bird metaphor only modestly disguised" (173). Like the mythic Phoenix, the sages are urged to "Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre" and become "the singing-masters of [the] soul." The decay of the

body--that "dying animal"--is transcended by entering into "the artifice of eternity." Yeats does not mean, here, that eternity is artificial in a negative sense, but that it is a *wholly created* dimension, entered into through the creative imagination. Through the 'highest' form of thinking, one is taken out of the body and, therefore, no longer conscious of the self:

Once out of nature I shall never take
 My bodily form from any natural thing,
 But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
 Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
 To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
 Or set upon the golden bough to sing
 To lords and ladies of Byzantium
 Of what is past, or passing, or to come. (YP 302)

Once the mind transcends the natural world through artistic creativity, the body takes its form, not from nature, but from the conscious imitation of nature. The bird of "Sailing to Byzantium" is no natural bird--such as the eagle, hawk, or swan--"But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make / Of hammered gold and gold enamelling" (YP 302). Just as natural birds often represent a heightened form of thinking, the artificial bird of "Sailing to Byzantium" represents that which is beyond consciousness, an imitation of transcendence.

Furthermore, the natural image of the tree is transformed into a "golden bough," reinforcing the idea that consciousness itself--as the site of the imagination--is a created, rather than a natural, space. Reguiero claims that "the golden bird...is a symbol of an imagination that has lost its capacity to sing" (115); yet the golden bird not only sings here, but is able "to sing / ... / of what is past, or passing, or to come." As a figure of the creative imagination, the golden bird has gained the capacity to sing *beyond* the limits of time and, thereby, beyond the border of human consciousness itself.

The bird and tree imagery of "Sailing to Byzantium" is further clarified in "Byzantium." On April 16, 1930, T. Sturge Moore wrote to Yeats complaining that the fourth stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium" had disappointed him because the golden bird seemed "as much nature as a man's body, especially if it only sings like Homer and Shakespeare of what is past or passing or to come to Lords and Ladies." Yeats felt that the statement deserved consideration. On October 4, he responded by claiming that "Byzantium" originated from Moore's comments, which had shown Yeats "that the idea needed exposition" (Jeffares, *New Commentary* 294). "Byzantium"--when read in relation to "Sailing to Byzantium"--clarifies the distinction between the living and, therefore, complex processes of nature, and the death-in-life "artifice of eternity." The difference between the titles is also significant: the first implies a process, whereas the second concentrates on the arrival, the culmination of that process.

"Byzantium" (YP 363) opens with a reminder of what happens to images of the natural world once they are transformed by the creative imagination: "The unpurged

images of day recede" as

A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.

The images that have not been purged--and I think Yeats implies an artistic purgation here--simply recede into nothingness. The dome of darkness "disdains / All that man is" because Byzantium is the dwelling-place of eternal images, those images that have been transformed into art by the creative imagination:

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
May unwind the winding path;
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
Breathless mouths may summon;
I hail the superhuman;
I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

What is "out of nature" is a conscious imitation of nature. Because images of man exist beyond experience, they have mouths with "no moisture and no breath." In the third stanza, Yeats once again introduces the bird imagery of "Sailing to Byzantium," though here he distinguishes the created image from the natural:

Miracle, bird, or golden handiwork,
 More miracle than bird or handiwork,
 Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
 Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
 Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
 In glory of changeless metal
 Common bird or petal
 And all complexities of mire or blood.

The description of the bird as "more miracle than bird or handiwork" suggests that an image created within the imagination is also partly revealed, a transcendent image. Here Yeats offers a more abstract image than the golden bird of "Sailing to Byzantium." It is not something created with effort, but something which effortlessly comes into being: a miracle. And rather than singing of "What is past, or passing, or to come," this bird "scorn[s] aloud / In glory of changeless metal / Common bird or petal." The birds of "Byzantium," unlike those of Yeats's first Byzantium poem, sing *beyond* time rather than

of it. Because the images are artificial rather than natural, they are better able to represent a world beyond experience.

While forms of thinking and states of consciousness are represented by figures of ascent such as birds, trees, and towers, the actual process of transcendence often corresponds with figures of movement, such as the dancer or the spinning top. As Frye argues, "Images of music and...dance have always been inseparable from images of upper worlds" (Frye, *WP* 176). This is certainly true of Yeats's poetry, where transcendence of consciousness is equated with an ascent into an "upper world" or higher state which exceeds individual consciousness: the "single mind [or] single energy" which lies beyond "the borders of our mind" (*E&I* 28).

Dancing is often equated with a state of innocence or divine ignorance in Yeats's poetry. In "To A Child Dancing in the Wind" (*YP* 224), for example, the innocent child is told to "Dance there upon the shore" because she is too young to know "The fool's triumph" and "Love lost as soon as won" (224). Though the poem suggests naivety, the speaker's tone reveals an admiration and envy for the child's state of mind which has no need "to dread / The monstrous crying of the wind." Similarly, in "Sweet Dancer" (*YP* 414) and "A Crazy Girl" (*YP* 421), the dancing girls, though "crazy" are equated with "a beautiful lofty thing" (*YP* 421). The "sweet dancer" is thought to have "Escaped from bitter youth, / Escaped out of her crowd, / Or out of her black cloud" and is encouraged to "finish her dance" before being taken by the "strange men" who come to lead her away. Likewise, the "crazed girl improvising her music" and "dancing upon the shore" is said to

be "heroically lost, heroically found," suggesting that a loss of one state of consciousness invites the gain of another.

Images of dancing and spinning often represent not only innocence or a higher state of consciousness but also a divine union. In "The Cat and the Moon" (*YP* 273), wise Minnaloushe is said to dance in relation to the moon, its "nearest kin" which "[spins] round like a top," suggesting the union of cat and moon through the image of the dance: "When two close kindred meet, / What better than call a dance?"

Though Yeats's poetry suggests a desire to transcend experience, this transcendence is not so much an "intellectual death-wish," as Frye would have it, as a desire for an embodiment of experience within a higher state of consciousness. As I argued in the chapter on Yeats's imitations of meditation, the continual flux of experience is the material from which the poet creates "translunar paradise". Yet the moment of transcendence, of artistic contemplation, represents in Yeats a moment when experience is caught within a kind of stillness or stasis. In "Byzantium," for example, Yeats writes:

...all complexities of fury leave,
Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

The dance imagery--explicitly linked with a trance-like state of non-thought--represents the mind caught up in artistic contemplation. The complexities of experience do not end so much as become subsumed within the single energy or unity of being. Rather than dying *in* a dance, the complexities of fury die *into* a dance." The trance into which they die is an "agony" because the complexities are embodied rather than cancelled. The smithies, as creators, are able to "break the flood" and the "bitter furies of complexity" (YP 364) by embodying them within a creative state of consciousness, a state which is beyond lived experience yet wholly made up of it.

The image of the dancing figure is central to "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" (YP 276-278). The poem is written in three sections, the first two representing opposite phases of humankind, phase one and phase fifteen. Phase one is that of pure body while phase fifteen, its opposite, represents pure soul. Though human life cannot exist within either of these phases, phase fifteen is the more complete phase--towards which all beings progress--in that it is the attainment of subjective beauty. Those coming out of phase one are

Obedient to some hidden magical breath.

They do not even feel, so abstract are they,

So dead beyond our death,

Triumph that we obey.

There is no conflict at phase one because humans are no more than mere abstractions, having no place within the conflicting forces of life. This is not a positive moment of stasis because it represents absolute stillness, the cessation of conflict rather than its embodiment. Phase one, though the beginning of the cycle, is more often understood as the end because it is a phase of death. Phase fifteen, however, is a phase of transformation, of death-in-life. Here, Yeats introduces two images: the Sphinx, which represents the intellect, and the Buddha, which represents emotion. The Sphinx "lashe[s] her tail" and "Gaze[s] upon all things known, all things unknown / In triumph of intellect," while the Buddha's "eyeballs never [move], / Being fixed on all things loved / all things unloved" (*YP* 277). Between these opposites spins

...a girl at play

That, it may be, had danced her life away.

For now being dead it seemed

That she of dancing dreamed.

The dancing girl, spinning between intellect and emotion, represents a state of consciousness brought to perfection through the creative imagination. The idea that the girl "had outdanced thought" suggests that she is an image of a transcendent consciousness, a state of stasis; not the stasis of death, but of death-in-life:

Mind moved yet seemed to stop

As 'twere a spinning-top.

In contemplation had those three so wrought

Upon a moment, and so stretched it out

That they, time overthrown,

Were dead yet flesh and bone.

The image of the spinning-top, like that of the dancing girl, is suggestive of a mind in *seeming* stillness, spun into motion yet held up in a balanced equilibrium between intellect and emotion. In this way, opposites are not so much cancelled as brought into balance with one another: stillness in motion, a stable state of change. As Yeats suggests in the third section of the poem, humans are "caught between the pull / Of the dark moon and full" and must look to the creative imagination as a way of reconciling opposites. By arranging experience "in a song," the artist achieves a state of mind in which the often antagonistic pull between thought and desire is momentarily stilled.

The noetic figure of the winding-cloth of "All Soul's Night" (YP 340-343) is similar to the spinning top, except that the opposition which the mind must here balance is one between life and death itself. As Bloom argues, "*All Soul's Night*...celebrates the dead who in their lives were drunk with vision, as Yeats chooses...to see himself as being" (370). In order to enter into this visionary state of consciousness, Yeats calls for

...some mind that, if the cannon sound
 From every quarter of the world, can stay
 Wound in mind's pondering
 As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound.

The mind figured as a mummy, wound in the threads of thought, links the speaker to the dead about whom he speaks, and also links his mind to that of stasis or non-thought. In this way, he hopes to enter into the state of mind which the visionary friends have now achieved, while simultaneously preserving their lived experience within the "mummy-cloth" of consciousness. The speaker realizes that he must "drink from the whole wine" rather than "the wine-breath" which the ghosts are able to drink, yet he longs to enter into the state of stasis or non-thought in which "meditation master[s] all its parts" (*YP* 342). Once more, dance imagery is linked with this state of transcendent consciousness:

Such thought -- such thought have I that hold it tight
 Till meditation master all its parts,
 Nothing can stay my glance
 Until that glance run in the world's despite
 To where the damned have howled away their hearts,
 And where the blessed dance;
 Such thought, that in it bound

I need no other thing,
 Wound in mind's wandering
 As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound.

In an effort to preserve the actions of those who are now dead and enter into a state of "mummy truths," Yeats calls for a mind which--though connected to the world of living nature--is wound around the world of the dead. The living and the dead are united through, and embodied within, the process of the wandering mind.

The dancer, coming at the end of "Among School Children" (*YP* 323-325), becomes a noetic figure of unity between various aspects of human consciousness, including the intellectual and emotional, the past and present. The poem introduces various contrasting images, especially those of youth and age. The image of Maud Gonne as a "living child" with "colour upon cheek or hair" is immediately contrasted with her present image, described as "Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind / And took a mess of shadows for its meat" (*YP* 324). Yeats, himself, claims that he "Had pretty plumage once" but now has grown into "a comfortable kind of old scarecrow" (*YP* 324). Further contrasting images are introduced in the following stanzas, such as those of the nuns and mothers:

Both nuns and mothers worship images,
 But those the candles light are not as those

That animate a mother's reveries,
 But keep a marble or a bronze repose.
 And yet they too break hearts....

The contrast between the images that a mother might worship and those of a nun hints at a contrast between the living and the dead, the natural and the supernatural or divine.

Yeats, rather than elevating one above the other, however, claims that both images "break hearts" in that they inspire longing in those that gaze upon them and that both, perhaps, are capable of disappointing one's expectations. Furthermore, both are eternal in that they are images or "Presences, / That passion, piety or affection knows," and they become "mockers of man's enterprise" because, as images, they are "self-born," created by humankind. They are beyond the contradictions inherent in life, yet they also bring those contradictions into full focus. The final stanza, then, calls into question all opposition, suggesting, rather, that each defines, and thereby creates, the other:

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
 The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
 Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
 Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
 O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
 Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
 How can we know the dancer from the dance?

The dancer--that which creates the image--and the dance--the image itself--are one and same, being both created and creating. The dance is born of the dancer's movements, just as the "sixty-year-old smiling public man" is born of the young lover with "pretty plumage." They are one and the same and must be seen in harmony with, rather than in opposition to, one another. The dancer, then, represents Yeats's struggle to become an image rather than "the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast" (*E&I* 509). As noetic figures, the dancer and the dance represent the mind in a transcendent state of consciousness, where perceiver and perceived are one, the imagined and the real momentarily embodied in a divine union. This image of achieved ignorance suggests a point at which one no longer compares past and present or leaf and blossom, choosing instead to embody them within one complete vision.

Though they do not include spinning figures, both "Cuchulain Comforted" and "Long-Legged Fly" are poems which offer images of a transcendent consciousness. The bird imagery of "Cuchulain Comforted," represents a kind of border-crossing from the world of experience into that of transcendent consciousness, a union of the human and the divine. Borders often appear in Yeats's poems concerning transcendent consciousness. The dancing figures, for example, often spin on shorelines, representing the border

between reality and imagination or the natural and supernatural.⁸ The birds of "Cuchulain Comforted" are not man-made like those of "Sailing to Byzantium," but more like the abstract miracle spirits of "Byzantium." The Shrouds' ⁹ action of "thread[ing] the needles' eyes" is often associated with reincarnation in Yeats's poetry (Unterecker 292),¹⁰ and only by sewing his own Shroud is Cuchulain able to enter the final phase which precedes rebirth. Once Cuchulain has joined them, the Shrouds sing a song which has "nor human tunes or words" because "They had changed their throats and had the throats of birds" (*YP* 456). Cuchulain's comfort is found in an activity which stills the conflict between himself and his opposite, self and anti-self, as he is transformed into that which is beyond human

8

Yeats often refers to shorelines as borders between the natural and divine worlds. In an early version of "The Wanderings of Oisín," for example, Yeats refers to the "sea-world border" (*YV* 28, l 423c) and writes that "God shall come from the sea" (*YV* 28, 425). In "Fergus and the Druid," Fergus links the act of driving his chariot "In the white border of the murmuring sea" with "learn[ing] the dreaming wisdom" of the Druid. (*YP* 66-67). In "Ephemera," he refers to the "lone border of the lake" as representing the transition between the innocence of youthful love and the disillusioning wisdom of experience.

9

Shrouds are, according to the prose version of the poem given by Dorothy Wellesley, "the people who run away from the battles. Some of [whom] have been put to death as cowards, but others have hidden, and some even died without people knowing they were cowards" (*DWL* 193). I agree with Bloom that "The final group is not in Yeats's poem" (462). It would be misleading to assume that Cuchulain, just because he finds himself among the Shrouds, is himself a coward. Cuchulain's bravery is well-documented in the poems and the play which Yeats wrote on this theme. Rather than assuming that Cuchulain is a coward, I think that we can read this poem as another in which opposites--in this case, bravery and cowardice--are reconciled before being embodied within the cycle of death and rebirth (that of phase fifteen).

¹⁰ See "A Needle's Eye" and "Veronica's Napkin."

understanding. Like the "gold-feathered bird" which is perched in Stevens' "palm at the end of the mind," the bird Cuchulain becomes sings "Without human feeling, a foreign song" ("Of Mere Being" *OP* 117), emphasizing a longing for a transcendent realm of consciousness.

In "Long-legged Fly," Yeats introduces one of his most powerful noetic figures. The poem is divided into three separate stanzas, each with a recurring refrain, which explores three modes of creative thought: the political, the mythological, and the artistic. For each of the three characters--Caesar, Helen of Troy, and Michelangelo--the mind is described as moving "upon the silence" of contemplation as "a long-legged fly [moves] upon the stream" (*YP* 463). The water's surface, like the shoreline, represents a border between the lower and upper realms, or the natural and supernatural worlds. Yeats emphasizes the importance of isolation in creativity by placing each character away from outside influences: Caesar is alone in a tent, Helen is in a "lonely place," and Michael Angelo is in a chapel behind closed doors. In this way, the mind of each progresses along its individual path while still remaining connected to the world of experience, just as the fly--though barely disturbing the surface-- moves upon the surface of the stream's current. Stillness in motion is conveyed through this silent movement: Caesar's eyes are "fixed upon nothing," Helen "practise[s] a tinker shuffle" (a suggestion of dance imagery), and Michael Angelo makes "no more sound than the mice" as "His hand moves to and fro" in the act of creation. The stillness beyond consciousness is revealed in both the act of creating and the act of contemplating the created image. The state of detachment allows

the creative imagination to transcend consciousness. As Yeats considers in a late essay, "Does not one discover in the faces of Madonnas and holy women painted by Raphael or da Vinci...a condition of soul where all is still and finished, all experience wound up upon a bobbin?" (*E&I* 472). The creative act, for Yeats, culminates in that state of consciousness where "all experience is wound up upon a bobbin," recalling the image of the mummy cloth which contains the world of experience within the world of stasis or stillness.

Yeats's attitude towards human consciousness is often difficult to determine. As a meditative poet, he struggles to reconcile his poetic sensibilities with a desire for transcendence. Though he celebrates the world of experience as the fit subject-matter of poetry, he simultaneously betrays a longing for something beyond the world of experience. Stevens, in his essay, "Effects of Analogy," writes that "[t]he poet is constantly concerned with two theories":

One relates to the imagination as a power within him not so much to destroy reality at will as to put it to his own uses. He comes to feel that his imagination is not wholly his own but that it may be part of a much larger, much more potent imagination, which it is his affair to try to get at. For this reason, he...tries to live...on the verge of consciousness....

The second theory relates to the imagination as a power within him to have such insights into reality as will make it possible for him to be sufficient as a

poet at the very center of consciousness. (*NA* 115)

Though Yeats's poetic thinking certainly struggles between these two theories, it tends towards the former, towards "the verge of consciousness" rather than "the very center of consciousness." Though his noetic figures suggest that reality, or the world of experience, is central to the creative imagination, reality serves as a kind of temporary scaffolding upon which he ascends towards that "much larger, much more potent imagination" which transcends consciousness. In "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (*YP* 471-472), Yeats admits that the world of experience is central to the creative imagination:

Those masterful images because complete
 Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
 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.

The world of experience which remains at the centre of consciousness is a broken world, a world of refuse and rags. Unlike the triumphant embrace of experience revealed in such poems as "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" or "Vacillation," Yeats seemingly comes to despair at having to "lie down where all the ladders start." Because the creative

imagination is, in Yeats's poetry, represented as a means of ascending to the heights of consciousness and beyond the borders of the mind, he seems unable or unwilling to embrace fully the world of experience. Faced with the difficulty of finding new themes, he finds that once his "ladder's gone," he must be content with the world of experience, a world which he equates with "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart."

Chapter Four:

The Movement of the Colors of the Mind

For Yeats, thinking is directed toward stasis-in-motion or non-thought. His dialectical arguments seek a reconciliation between opposites, and his various figures of thought often represent distinct forms of thinking. The creative imagination is illustrated by bird imagery, which--as the figures suggest--is able to ascend to the very limits of consciousness, represented by figures of mountains and towers. Eventually, through this ascent of imaginative thinking, the mind is able to break through its limits and attain a state beyond thought, represented most notably by spinning figures or figures which cross a particular border: the dancer, the spinning top, the mummy-cloth, and the long-legged fly.

For Yeats, the mind's limits are best understood in relation to time. Through effort and deliberation, the creative imagination may eventually attain Unity of Being in which all opposition and conflict are resolved. His figures of mind concern *how* one must think in order to attain a state of non-thought. His birds, caves, and dancers are figures--not of the mind itself--but of the thinking process which may lead to a momentary yet illuminating cessation of thought.

Stevens' poetry, like that of Yeats, explores the limits of human consciousness. Rather than considering how one *should* think, however, his poetry explores what thinking

actually *is*. Where Yeats employs figures of ascent, Stevens uses more abstract figures of colour and shape to represent human consciousness, suggesting, as does the cognitive scientist John Searle, that "the human skull contains the brain with all of its intricacy, and consciousness with all its color and variety" (228).

Stevens' poetry is an extremely colourful poetry, not only with respect to syntax and form, but quite literally with respect to images of colour. There has been much written on the function of colour in Stevens' work,¹¹ and most critics agree that many of these colours correspond with various aspects of human consciousness and objective reality. When considering the metaphoric function of colour, however, it is important to examine not only how various colours function in relation to aspects of the mind or the world, but how they function *as* colours.

Stevens' life-long interest in visual art--especially in those artists who tend towards an abstract or non-representational vision of objective reality--suggests that he would have had at least a preliminary understanding of colour theory.¹² In the speech which Stevens

¹¹

See Edward Kessler's *Images of Wallace Stevens*, especially pp. 173-220, for an extensive study of colour imagery in Stevens.

¹²

In a 1947 letter to his art dealer, Paule Vidal, Stevens laments: "The truth is I have a taste for Braque and a purse for Bombois" (L 545). Stevens' interest in certain artists was largely connected to an admiration of colour and form. He claimed that he found in Braque's work "an ascetic quality about his color that is very much to my liking. Some of his greens and browns are almost disciplinary" (L 548). In the same letter, he writes that the work of Roland Oudot "is not particularly bright in color" and complains that "Chaubaud's color is not quite agreeable" (L 545).

delivered at the Museum of Modern Art--"The Relations Between Poetry and Painting"--he argued, in effect, that poets may learn about poetry by reading what painters write about painting. Furthermore, in a letter to Barbara Church, he writes: "Thinking about poetry is the same thing...as thinking about painting" (L 601). He was, as Michel Benamou claims, "a poet with a painter's eye" (232), and the various aspects of colour and form which were of interest to modern painters were also of interest to the modern poet. Colour, for the modernist painter, is often symbolic or abstract rather than realistic, corresponding less to objective reality than to the vision of the individual artist or the harmony of composition itself. Consider, for example, the titles of such modernist works as Picasso's "Nude Woman in a Red Armchair" or Matisse's "Odalisque with Green Sash," or "Harmony in Yellow." For these painters, colour provides an internal unity rather than a correspondence with something external to itself.

Colour functions similarly in the poetry of Stevens. Though often used descriptively--blue skies, green plants, purple plums--colours have symbolic overtones, both in relation to ideas and in relation to one another. Generally, Stevensian colours refer to various aspects of human consciousness, both intellectual and emotional. In contrast to these "colors of the mind," the non-colours of black and white represent what is beyond human consciousness and, hence, inaccessible to it. Because of this, objects or ideas which lack colour are often equated with emptiness, coldness, or death.

Stevens' poems "Domination of Black" (CP 8) and "The Snow Man" (CP 10)--which appear back to back in his *Collected Poems*--illustrate how these non-colours

function in relation to human consciousness. "Domination of Black" begins with an image of light and colour against the darkness of night:

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

Black is represented by the darkness of night and by the "color of the heavy hemlocks." As an image of darkness, the hemlocks further connote death in that they are poisonous plants. As the plant which poisoned Socrates--the 'first thinker' of western civilization--the hemlock represents not only death but perhaps the end of thinking. The bright colours of the peacock's tails, "like the leaves themselves" are envisioned as turning "in the twilight wind," repeating a pattern of change--and life--which continues throughout the poem:

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

The cry of the colourful peacocks, whether a cry against the twilight, the decaying leaves, or the hemlocks, represents a cry against death itself. Death, Stevens reminds us elsewhere, "is the mother of beauty" (*CP* 68), and the fear of death impels us to create a colourful cry against that darkness:

I saw how the night came,
Came striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks
I felt afraid.
And I remembered the cry of the peacocks.

White, as the other non-colour, represents not the death of human consciousness and, therefore, of creative potential, but the absence of consciousness itself. As an abstraction of colour, it represents, as Kessler points out, "the realm of pure platonic ideas" (186). Though Stevens never mentions the colour white in "The Snow Man," its juxtaposition with "Domination of Black" invites such a contrast. White is Stevens' coldest colour in that it represents absolute abstraction, untouched by human feeling. The white snow man has "a mind of winter" and is, therefore, able "to regard the frost and the boughs / Of the pine-trees crusted with snow" without thinking "Of any misery in the sound of the wind, / In the sound of a few leaves." Unlike the speaker in "Domination of Black," the inhuman snow man does not relate the cry he hears with a human cry. Because he is not a conscious being ("nothing himself") he is able to behold "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." The emptiness of the landscape is reflected in the emptiness of the perceiver just as the nothingness of the perceiver is reflected in the nothingness of the landscape. Without imaginative human consciousness, the snow man does not add anything to the scene, nor is he affected by the barren landscape itself.

There are many further references to black and white as colours of non-consciousness in Stevens' poetry. In "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," for example, dark shadows are compared to death "shrouds" which "made the petals black" (*CP* 100). Black is the central colour in "The Men that are Falling," a poem which concerns one who "loved earth, not heaven, enough to die" (*CP* 188). In "Thunder by the Musician," the savage figure of the butcher is imagined rising "in the black sun" (*CP* 220), and the image

of the bird in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," serves as a memento mori throughout.¹³ In "The Owl in the Sarcophagus," Stevens refers to "whiteness that is the ultimate intellect, / A diamond jubilation beyond the fire" (*CP* 431) and in "The Worms at Heaven's Gate," the dead Badroulbador is described as having a "white lid" (*CP* 49). These two images are united in Stevens' description of the "perfect cock" in "The Bird with the Coppery Keen Claws," whose "lids are white because his eyes are blind" and whose "pure intellect applies its laws" (*CP* 82). White is often used in relation to the coldness of statues and in "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War," the image of the central figure is compared to "a white abstraction" and a "blank emotion" (*CP* 276). By

¹³ Here are a few overt examples:

IX

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

IX

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

X

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

understanding the function of these two extremes of colour as representing a lack of consciousness, we are better able to comprehend "the colors of the mind" which dwell between them as images of human consciousness itself.

Of the three primary colours, yellow is the least-mentioned but most central of Stevens' palette. As the closest colour to white, it is, for Stevens, the "first color" of human consciousness ("Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight," *CP* 431). Though it is always associated with consciousness, it represents a clarity of thought or vision which is the root of imaginative vision. Most often, yellow is associated with intangibles such as "yellow air" (*CP* 57) and "yellow light" (*CP* 74). Both light and air, though invisible themselves, are the very foundations of visibility, that by which we are able to comprehend the world around us. Like the sun--an image with which it is often connected--yellow is an essential colour, primary to the acts of seeing and being itself. Because colour is a product of light, it cannot exist alone. It follows, then, that yellow and gold come to represent, for Stevens, the primary agents of perception that is light itself.

In his poem, "Yellow Afternoon" (*CP* 236), the colour yellow suffuses the entire poem so that being itself is associated with the colour of light:

It was in the earth only
 That he was at the bottom of things
 And of himself. There he could say
 Of this I am, this is the patriarch,

This it is that answers when I ask,
 This is the mute, the final sculpture
 Around which silence lies on silence.

Yellow is associated, in this poem, with the place where "he touches his being. There as he is / He is" (CP 237). Earth is the reference here, though yellow is the environment in which the earth is seen as itself. Similarly, in "Contrary Theses (II)," Stevens associates yellow with "the premise from which all things were conclusions" (CP 270). The "final refuge" or "abstract" which the central figure of the poem seeks is connected with the yellow locust leaves. In the final line of this poem, Stevens uses a pun to associate the idea of 'being' with the colour yellow by claiming that "the bees ['be 's] still sought the chrysanthemums' odor." The image of the chrysanthemum--from the Greek, meaning 'golden flower'--comes to represent the source or goal of being itself.

Yellow and gold are often associated with an imagined perfection which lies at the extreme of conscious thought: "It was like passing a boundary to dive / Into the sun-filled water" (CP 371). Like Yeats's golden bird of the Byzantium poems, Stevens' "gold-feathered bird" dwells "Beyond the last thought" ("Of Mere Being," OP 117-118). Unlike the abstraction of white, however, the colours yellow and gold represent an *imagined* abstraction, seen through the tinted lens of human consciousness. Through the process of de-creation, the poet is able to glimpse the first idea. This arrival, however, is fleeting and marks the beginning of creativity, "the fiction that results from feeling" (CP 406).

Consider, for example, the sixth section of "Esthetique du Mal":

The sun, in clownish yellow, but not a clown,
 Brings the day to perfection and then fails. He dwells
 In a consummate prime, yet still desires
 A further consummation....(*CP* 318)

As the sun's colour, yellow represents the foundation of seeing and being, "the country wherever he is" (*CP* 318).

Yellow and gold, as the colours of light, represent the contradiction inherent in human consciousness as it seeks an objective reality. It is the colour of seeming and being, of the imagined objective or objective reality as it is perceived by consciousness:

It is possible that to seem--it is to be,
 As the sun is something seeming and it is.

The sun is an example. What it seems
 It is and in such seeming all things are.

Thus things are like a seeming of the sun. (*CP* 339)

Yellow then, as the "first color," is linked with Stevens' "first idea":

Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea

Of this invention, this invented world,

The inconceivable idea of the sun.

You must become an ignorant man again

And see the sun again with an ignorant eye

And see it clearly in the idea of it. (*CP* 380-381)

The 'idea' of the sun is the 'first idea,' the primary agent of the creative imagination.

Though it is an imagined idea, Stevens cautions us not to "suppose an inventing mind as source / Of this idea nor for that mind compose / A voluminous master folded in his fire" (*CP* 381). The first idea is an imagined objective, the closest we can come to a perception of objective reality. Belief in the first idea makes an objective reality "possible, possible, possible. It must / Be possible. It must be that in time / The real will from its crude compoundings come..." (*CP* 404). Yellow and gold represent in various ways the closest we can come to "the real," where human consciousness is "stripped of every fiction except one, / The fiction of an absolute..." (*CP* 404). Unlike the 'absolute' represented by the non-colours of white or black, yellow represents the *fiction* of an absolute. Yellow, then, is the colour of reality or, at least, the closest we can come to a realization of reality from

a human perspective.

Of the three primary colours, blue recurs most often in Steven's poetry and is most obviously associated with the mind. Sometimes blue is overtly connected with a particular form of thought--"We hardened ourselves to live by bluest reason" (*CP* 124)--but most often it is merely associated with any act of consciousness. "The Man with the Blue Guitar" is Stevens' most sustained and obvious use of this colour. The blue guitar of the poem's title represents the transforming power of human consciousness as it affects objective reality:

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

The man replied, "Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar." (*CP* 165)

Yet, the "dividing and indifferent blue" (*CP* 68) of human consciousness is not so much imaginative as merely intellectual: The blue guitar "is a form" (*CP* 169), whose "strings are cold" (*CP* 168) and the player's "leaden twang / Is like the reason in a storm" (*CP* 169). Furthermore, blue is associated with the coldness of the moon rather than the heat of the sun--"blue and its deep inversions in the moon" (*CP* 309)--and, as Kessler points out, "with the northern cold in which the poet can be removed from the...physical world"

(197).

Blue represents a conscious separation from the world of nature and is, therefore, often associated with "empty heaven and its hymns" (*CP* 167). For example, the poem, "Blue Buildings in the Summer Air," concerns a pointless search for theological certainty:

Cotton Mather died when I was a boy. The books
 He read, all day, all night and all the nights,
 Had got him nowhere. There was always the doubt
 That made him preach the louder, long for a church
 In which his voice would roll its cadences,
 After the sermon, to quiet the mouse in the wall. (*CP* 216)

In "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" blue is twice associated with heaven (*CP* 100, ll. 6 & 24), and in "Botanist on Alp (No. 2)," the "bays of heaven, brighted, blued" are rejected in favour of "an earthier one" (*CP* 136). The sky, as distinct from the green earth, is also repeatedly described as blue ¹⁴ and, in Section XXII of "The Man with the Blue Guitar," is described as a "sky that thinks" (*CP* 177).

Whereas blue often alludes to the rather cold intellectual colour of consciousness,

¹⁴

See, for example, "Bouquet of Belle Savoir," *CP* 231, l.13; "Landscape with Boat," *CP* 241, l.13; "Debris of Life and Mind," *CP* 338, l.10; "Continual Conversations with a Silent Man," *CP* 359, l.5; "Credences of Summer," *CP* 378, l.1; "The Bouquet," *CP* 449, l.4; "What We See is What We Think," *CP* 459, l.12; "Five Grotesque Pieces," *OP* 74, l. 15.

red represents the emotional or passionate one, disconnected from reason and rational thought. Stevens often scorns pure abstraction, preferring instead "an abstraction blooded" by passion (*CP* 385). In "Disillusionment at Ten O' Clock," the one colourful character in an otherwise colourless world is the sailor who, "Drunk and asleep in his boots / Catches tigers / In red weather" (*CP* 66). Likewise, the "monstered moth" of "Hibiscus on the Sleeping Shores," is drawn to the flowers' "flaming red / Dabbled with yellow pollen--red as red" which is so intoxicating that the moth "roam[s] there all the stupid afternoon" (*CP* 22-23). In "Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers," the most prominent colour is the "central, essential red" which comes to represent ripeness in "the sides of peaches, [and] of dusky pears" (*CP* 246-247).

For Stevens, human emotion is integral to imaginative vision. In his poem, "Poetry is a Destructive Force," the lion--an image of the power of poetic vision--"tastes...blood" and embodies the idea of passionate emotion. In *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, a lion "roars at the enraging desert, / Reddens the sand with his red-colored noise" (*CP* 384). The opposition between red passion and the cold blue of intellect is, perhaps, best expressed in "Idiom of the Hero" (*CP* 200):

I heard two workers say, 'This chaos

Will soon be ended.'

This chaos will not be ended,

The red and the blue house blended,

Not ended, never and never ended,

The weak man mended,

The man that is poor at night

Attended

Like the man that is rich and right.

The great men will not be blended...

I am the poorest of all.

I know that I cannot be mended,

Out of the clouds, pomp of the air,

By which at least I am befriended.

The red and the blue houses represent the chaos within human consciousness. Like Yeats's struggle between the heart and the head, Steven's struggle between these opposites is often represented in his poetry. In this poem, the hero, or supreme poet, is the "poorest of all," the "weak man" who dwells in the red house of passion. The "man that is rich and

right," living by reason alone, is also one of "[t]he great men," but, unlike the hero, he is not "befriended" by the clouds, the "pomp of the air." In this poem, then, Stevens suggests that a purely rational approach is limited, whereas the irrational or emotional view of reality, though limited in its own way, makes one more at home in the world.

Though "Idiom of the Hero" suggests that various aspects of consciousness cannot be blended, Stevens often uses secondary colours to represent human consciousness in harmony with the emotional and rational self. Primary colours, in combination with one another, best represent the mind in relation to human desire and the actual world. For example, in the poem "Large Red Man Reading" (CP 423-425), the central figure reads "from the poem of life," or "the great blue tabulae" and colours it with his emotion. His listeners are inhuman "ghosts" who return to the world to hear him read. Yet, instead of an objective account, the "blue tabulae" become "purple tabulae" by virtue of the red man who reads them. When the two primary colours, red and blue, are mixed, purple results. This tainting of a rational or objective account of life is not a diminishment, for by taking on the "color" and "shape and the size of things as they are" the reader speaks "the *feeling* for them, which was what they had lacked" (emphasis mine). Exercises of the intellect do not interest Stevens as much as "the strong exhilaration / Of what we feel from what we think, of thought / Beating in the heart, as if blood newly came..." (CP 382).

The colour purple often represents such a blending of intellect (blue) and emotion (red) in Stevens' poetry. In "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," for example, the speaker begins by asserting, "Not less because in purple I descended / The western day..." (CP 65). A

view of the world which is coloured by intellect and emotion is one which clarifies both external and internal reality:

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

In "Floral Decorations for Bananas," the speaker calls for purple plums instead of the "blunt yellow" bananas which represent the "outdoor gloom" of reality, untouched by creative human consciousness. Rather than seeking objective reality--represented by the colour yellow--the speaker wishes to decorate it in the colours of a creating consciousness:

...deck the bananas in leaves
Plucked from the Carib trees,
Fibrous and dangling down,
Oozing cantankerous gum
Out of their purple maws,
Darting out of their purple craws
Their musky and tingling tongues. (*CP* 54)

Purple, the secondary colour of red and blue, is a purely human colour, untouched by objective reality. Though this colour often represents poetic vision, Stevens cautions us against losing sight of the yellow light of reality. Poetic vision, for Stevens, must be anchored in the actual world or, at least, our *ideas* of the actual world.

In "Of Hartford in a Purple Light," Stevens uses the colour purple to represent a weak or "feminine" vision rather than the "masculine" vision associated with the yellow sun:

...But, Master, there are
 Lights masculine and lights feminine,
 What is this purple, this parasol,

This stage-light of the Opera?
 It is like a region full of intonings.
 It is Hartford seen in a purple light.

A moment ago, light masculine,
 Working, with big hands, on the town,
 Arranged its heroic attitudes.

But now as in an amour of women

Purple sets purples round....(CP 227)

This purple, associated with the light of a melodramatic opera, is a "stage-light," a light of pure introspection and self-absorption, removed from the light of reality. In terms of the colour-wheel, purple is close to black, perhaps suggesting an underlying desire of some visionaries to escape from life itself.

In his detailed study of Stevensian imagery, Kessler argues that blue and green represent "the opposition of imagination and reality" (185). But to claim that green is the colour of reality is to ignore the most central tenet of Stevens' representation of human consciousness. Green, as the secondary combination of the primary colours, yellow and blue, represents not objective reality--which exceeds human consciousness--but *an imagined vision of reality*, the blue tint of human consciousness in contact with the yellow of the first idea. Only this combination creates a poetry of the earth, the "green,...fluent *mundo*," of imaginative vision (CP 407). This phrase, "fluent mundo," describes the world in which we dwell, a world comprised of ideas about reality rather than reality itself. "It is the *mundo* of the imagination in which the imaginative man delights," Stevens argues, "and not the gaunt world of reason" (NA 150).

Kessler bases his interpretation of the colour green on Stevens' "The Man with the Blue Guitar," which begins:

The man bent over his guitar,

A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.

They said, "You have a blue guitar,

You do not play things as they are."

The man replied, "Things as they are

Are changed upon the blue guitar."

For Kessler, this opening presents a clear "juxtaposition of reality's green with the blue of the imagination" (197). Yet he goes on to note that "the pervasive paradox of the poem is that the poet wishes to be detached from the physical and yet remain part of it...he cannot commit himself totally to either blue or green, to the imagination or to reality" (197).

Rather than presenting a paradox, however, Stevens illustrates the unifying colours of *blue* mind in combination with *yellow* reality by claiming that "the day was *green*":

Poetry is the subject of the poem,

From this the poem issues and

To this returns. Between the two

Between issue and return, there is

An absence in reality,

Things as they are....(*CP* 176-77)

These "[t]hings as they are / are changed upon the blue guitar," and made into green day, the result of "the universal intercourse" between reality and human consciousness.

Green is the colour most closely associated with nature, so it is not surprising that Stevens would choose it as the colour which best approximates the world in which we live, a world which is "half sun, half thinking of the sun" (*CP* 257), a blending of yellow and blue. As the colour of Stevens' mundo, green is pervasive, associated with both spring and summer, the seasons which suggest imaginative vision at its fullest.

In "Disillusionment of Ten O' Clock," Stevens associates the colour green with an imaginative vision which is anchored in reality. Instead of the ghostly "white night-gowns" which haunt the houses, Stevens calls for night-gowns which are "green, / Or purple with green rings, / Or green with yellow rings, / Or yellow with blue rings" (*CP* 66). Each one of these combinations have green in them, or would result in green if blended together, thereby suggesting an anchoring in the imagined objective. The colour red, however, is associated with a sailor who, oblivious to reality, is "[d]runk and asleep in his boots" (*CP* 66). Similarly, in Section XXIX of *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, Stevens writes that "In the land of the lemon trees, yellow and yellow were / Yellow-blue, yellow-green" (*CP* 486): the actual world is coloured by a creating human consciousness.

Though green is associated with the colour of reality as we perceive it, Stevens is

careful to point out that the mind's "fresh transfigurings of freshest blue" (*CP* 102) must continually cleanse and recreate our perceptions of the world. An act of the creative imagination "refreshes life so that we share / For a moment, the first idea...It satisfies / Belief in an immaculate beginning" (*CP* 382).

In "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," the green surface of the sea comes to represent the continuous interplay of imagination and reality, resulting in an ever-changing sea of imaginative vision. He begins by describing the sea as "[p]aradisaal green" (*CP* 99) which subsequently changes to "swimming green," "sham-like green," "uncertain green," "too-fluent green," "thinking green," and "a motley green" (*CP* 98-102). Our image of the world--"The yellow that was yesterday"--is cleansed of our ideas of it, "refreshed" until we see "[o]urselves, in the clearest green," a green which has at its base the yellow of the imagined objective: "well, call it green / We bathed in yellow green and yellow blue..." ("A Lot of People Bathing in a Stream," *CP* 371). Similarly, in "The Man on the Dump," the "very varnished green" (*CP* 383) of reality is rejected as trash:

The green smacks in the eye, the dew in the green
 Smacks like fresh water in a can, like the sea
 On a cocoanut--how many men have copied dew
 For buttons, how many women have covered themselves
 With dew, dew dresses, stones and chains of dew, heads
 Of the floweriest flowers dewed with the dewiest dew.

One grows to hate these things except on the dump. (*CP* 202)

The green dew, no longer fresh because it has become so pervasive, is rejected in favour of fresh shoots of green, represented by spring flowers:

Now, in the time of spring (azaleas, trilliums,
 Myrtle, viburnums, daffodils, blue phlox),
 Between that disgust and this, between the things
 That are on the dump (azaleas and so on)
 And those that will be (azaleas and so on)
 One feels the purifying change. One rejects
 The trash. (*CP* 202)

In "Late Hymn from the Myrrh-Mountain," Stevens laments that "[a]lready the green bird of summer has flown / Away" (*CP* 349) and the "shadow of an external world comes near" (*CP* 350). Though nothing endures as "April's green endures" (*CP* 68), Stevens reminds us that the green mundo of the imagination is always a *fluent* mundo in both senses of the word: an expression of human consciousness likened to speech and, subsequently, *flowing* and subject to change.

The very title of "Phosphor Reading By His Own Light" suggests that the world is not only coloured by the mind of its perceiver, but by human consciousness in general.

The poem begins by claiming that reading is "difficult" because "[t]he page is dark." Yet as soon as Phosphor "knows what it is that he expects," the page begins to change: "The greenness of night lies on the page and goes / Down deeply in the empty glass." Even when Phosphor attempts to look without expectation--"Look, realist, not knowing what you expect" (7)--the colour of his human consciousness "falls.../ Falls on and makes and gives, even a speech" (8-9). Phosphor's own consciousness, "that elemental parent, the green night" (11), casts the light by which he perceives reality. The "green night" colours everything, yet this light also emanates from Phosphor himself, from what he essentially *is*, just as the "fusky alphabet" precedes and is a part of language itself. Similarly, in "Repetitions of a Young Captain," we are reminded that "Green is the orator / Of our passionate height. He wears a tufted green, / And tosses green for those for whom green speaks" (*CP* 309).

Stevens stresses, throughout his poetry, that the world is always a human world, shaped by human consciousness, even when we attempt to reject the ideas that we have inherited. In "Postcard from the Volcano," he predicts that

Children picking up our bones
 Will never know that these were once
 As quick as foxes on the hill;
 ...
 And least will guess that with our bones

We left much more, left what still is

The look of things, left what we felt

At what we saw. (*CP* 159)

Though we might not know it consciously, we nevertheless perceive the world according to the "colours" which we both inherit and partly create. Stevens' phrase--"[t]he look of things"--is an interesting pun in that it is in looking at the world that we leave it with a certain "look" for those who follow, calling to mind T.S. Eliot's "roses [that] had the look of roses being looked at." In the preceding line, Stevens further suggests that being and seeming are identical with respect to human consciousness. Notice the line break: "We left much more, left what still is / the look of things..."(8-9). What is *is* the look of things.

The look of things refers, of course, to more than colour in Stevens' poetry. Just as a woman with a "green mind [makes] the world around her green (*CP* 339), "[r]ationalists, wearing square hats, / Think in square rooms" (*CP* 75). Spatial form, like colour, is the province of the painter. The post-impressionist and modernist painters who most interested Stevens emphasized internal composition not only through colour, but also through space and form. Painters like Cezanne, Picasso, and Braque often searched for the forms beneath the objects they painted, and delighted in juxtaposing incongruent forms in order to create new realities. For Stevens, colour is used as a metaphor of consciousness as it tints objective reality. Spatial metaphors, on the other hand, suggest

the possibility of encompassing reality by imaginative vision. Rather than merely looking at objective reality through the colours of consciousness, Stevens suggests that consciousness might actually *contain* it.

The most dominant spatial figure in Stevens' poetry is the container. Consider, for example, his "Anecdote of the Jar" (CP 76):

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

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

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

Many critics contend that this poem deals with the relationship between art and nature or imagination and reality.¹⁵ The jar--a wholly created object--is placed in a wilderness and, therefore, defines and transforms it. Yet, the relationship between the jar and the wilderness is not so much one of domination or transformation as of simple juxtaposition and resemblance. The jar, like human consciousness, finds itself at the centre of the actual world. When the round jar is placed upon a hill, the "slovenly wilderness" begins to mirror the shape of the container which is at its centre. The shaping influence is quietly reflected in the language of the poem: the wilderness, mirroring the image of the jar, commences to "surround" the hill and is "no longer wild" rising up to the container and sprawling "around" it. The jar is clearly the dominant agent here--"round upon the ground / And tall and of a port in air"--and the wilderness behaves in relation to it. The container takes dominion¹⁶ even though it adds nothing: "The jar was gray and bare. / It did not give of bird or bush, / Like nothing else in Tennessee." Even though the jar does not add anything but itself to the scene, the wilderness shapes itself according to its round image. This

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Edward Kessler, for example, writes: "We see the conflict or tension between images of human artifice (statuary) and the wilderness (the chaos of reality) most clearly in the 'Anecdote of the Jar'..."(*Images of Wallace Stevens*, 151). William Bevis contends that "the jar is a figure for the human imagination shaping the chaos of a slovenly, sprawling wilderness" (*Mind of Winter*, 268).

16

Stevens' use of the word "dominion" suggests a biblical reference to Genesis 2:26, further supporting a reading of the jar as a figure of human consciousness: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth [i.e everywhere]."

shaping influence of human consciousness is not, however, a *creative* act of the imagination. Consciousness, as a bare container, adds nothing; yet it, "like nothing else in Tennessee"--a phrase which connotes surprise and wonder--nevertheless affects objective reality. In other words, the "objective" seems to behave in relation to the consciousness that perceives it.

Stevens's poem, "The Indigo Glass in the Grass" (*OP* 22)--which he chose not to include in his collected poems--offers another container figure and, like "Anecdote of the Jar," considers the relationship between human consciousness and objective reality. Here is the entire poem:

Which is real?--

The bottle of indigo glass in the grass,

Or the bench with the pot of geraniums, the stained

mattress and the washed overalls drying in the sun?

Which of these truly contains the world?

Neither one, nor the two together.

This container figure set in the grass is juxtaposed with a group of seemingly insignificant objects, all of which are connected to the human world. The bench and geraniums, though taken from nature, have been transformed to serve human needs or desires. Likewise, the mattress and the overalls are wholly human artifacts. Of course, the indigo glass, too, is a

human artifact. The difference between these two groups, however, lies in the fact that, though the other elements are designed to carry or hold things, the glass is the more obvious container figure. Hence, when the question arises--"Which of these truly contains the world?"--we are inclined to think of the glass. The title of the poem further supports such a supposition since it makes the glass its main subject. Hence, the last line contradicts our expectations. If "[n]either one, nor the two together" contains the world, then why focus so much attention on the glass at all? Stevens does this, I believe, in order to illustrate how easily we can be misled by appearances. As a virtually transparent container, the glass offers a view of the natural world and tricks us into believing that that world is, therefore, viewed objectively. Though the glass offers a view of the grass which surrounds it, that grass--though certainly real--is separated by a clear border. The poem illustrates the idea that we are misled by the seeming transparency of human consciousness. Stevens is not denying the existence of an objective reality, but he repeatedly suggests that we can only *imagine* its existence. The glass's colour--associated, as I discussed earlier, with human intellect--reinforces the idea of an imagined objective. When viewed through the indigo glass of consciousness, the actual world is coloured by it.

Because of the very act of conscious perception itself, objective reality is always an *imagined* objective, reflecting the colour or shape of the perceiving consciousness.

Stevens' poem, "The Glass of Water" (CP 197)--published in his fourth collection--introduces another container figure. Unlike the jar and the indigo glass, however, this container is not empty nor "gray and bare," but filled with water. Furthermore, in contrast

to the indigo glass, this one is colourless. Stevens begins the poem by suggesting that both the container and its contents are mere states of being:

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

As an image of consciousness, the container and its contents represent various "states" of mind: water can freeze into a solid and glass can melt into a liquid. Furthermore, liquid can be transformed into gas when "Light / ... comes down to drink." Rather than suggesting that objective reality is coloured by consciousness, this poem suggests that the border between objective reality and human consciousness is difficult to distinguish:

...in the water the winding weeds move round.
 And there and in another state--the refractions,
 The *metaphysica*, the plastic parts of poems
 Crash in the mind.

Like the indigo glass, this glass of water is juxtaposed--though only implicitly--with an

image of nature. The grass or wilderness outside the glass container seems to swirl inside as "winding weeds". Again, the glass of water is at the centre so that all that surrounds it is reflected--and distorted--within. If we read the figure of the glass as a metaphor of consciousness, what it contains is not objective reality, but an *image* of the actual world, "the plastic parts of poems." Human consciousness reflects and refracts objective reality, thereby creating an imagined objective. Stevens is suggesting here that even though the border of the container is virtually invisible, it continues to separate inside from outside, human consciousness from objective reality. Furthermore, the objective reality, when reflected within the container of consciousness, is refracted and transformed. We do not get an objective view of the objective world, no matter how clearly we strive to perceive one.

Stevens extends his container figures to develop his idea of the supreme poet. This poet is, for Stevens, the "hero," "major man," or "impossible possible philosophers' man" who, as an abstraction, is so large that he contains all of reality and is, thereby, the master of it: "He is the transparence of the place in which / He is and in his poems we find peace" ("Asides on the Oboe," *CP* 250). As an imagined figure, the supreme poet is able to transcend place and become transparent. Yet, even this transparence--like that of the glass of water--has a shaping influence:

The philosophers' man alone still walks in dew,
Still by the sea-side mutters milky lines

Concerning an immaculate imagery.

If you say on the hautboy man is not enough,

Can never stand as god, is ever wrong

In the end, however naked, tall, there is still

The impossible possible philosophers' man,

The man who has had the time to think enough,

The central man, the human globe, responsive

As a mirror with a voice, the man of glass,

Who in a million diamonds sums us up.

In his idea of major man, Stevens enlarges the container figure: he describes him as "the human globe," "a mirror with a voice," "the man of glass" who is able to contain all possible realities--imagined objectives--within his consciousness. In the phrase, "sums us up," Stevens suggests that the major man is both a culmination of all human consciousness as well as the essence of being itself; for "sum" is the first-person singular of the Latin verb "esse" (to be). In this way, the major man or supreme poet is also connected with the conception of God who repeats the eternal "I am." The "immaculate imagery" that the major man mutters is pure and spotless because it is wholly imagined. Human beings cannot be perfect, but our creative imagination may provide us with abstract images of ourselves which we strive to embody. For Stevens, human consciousness creates a possible reality, even if it may never become an actuality. The creative imagination resides

in the realm of the hypothetical. This is an abstract realm which contains not only images of reality, but also images of our own human potential. We, then, are also contained within the abstract consciousness of the major man:

But we and the diamond globe at last were one.
 We had always been partly one. It was as we came
 To see him, that we were wholly one, as we heard
 Him chanting for those buried in their blood,
 In the jasmine haunted forests, that we knew
 The glass man, without external reference.

(“Asides on the Oboe,” *CP* 251).

The "glass man" is both inside and outside human consciousness, just as the glass of water represents a potential of various states, each able to contain or absorb the other. By imagining the "impossible possible philosophers' man," we enter into the idea of him and become a part of that idea. Once he is absorbed into our ideas of objective reality, into the ways in which we function in the world, we are able to "see him" and, thereby, become "wholly one" with him.

In his "Notes towards a Supreme Fiction," Stevens speaks of the hero as "the idea of man," and of "major man [as] its exponent, "abler / In the abstract than in his singular":

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

Though an heroic part, of the commonal. (*CP* 388)

The major man is, therefore, wholly human yet wholly abstract: a Christ-like figure, part human and part divine, who is created in the imagination, crucified into the abstract, and resurrected into the reality of human consciousness. I use the word "divine" tentatively here because Stevens's major man must be understood as a fully human god, projected by the poet's creative imagination.

In the poem, "The Examination of the Hero in a Time of War" (*CP* 273-281), Stevens stresses the idea that the hero is created out of human emotion, rather than being a cold abstraction that lies outside human potential:

It is not an image. It is a feeling.
 There is no image in the hero.
 There is a feeling as definition.
 How could there be an image, an outline,
 A design, a marble soiled by pigeons?
 The hero is a feeling, a man seen

As if the eye was an emotion,
 As if in seeing we saw our feeling
 In the object seen and saved that mystic
 Against the sight, the penetrating,
 Pure eye. Instead of allegory,
 We have and are the man, capable
 Of his brave quickenings, the human
 Accelerations that seem inhuman. (*CP* 278-279)

Though major man may "seem inhuman," it would be a mistake to conclude that he exceeds human limits. His form is ever-changing, unlike the fixed form of a statue or a changeless god because he is a summation of human desire. Again, the image of consciousness as a glass container becomes relevant:

A thousand crystals' chiming voices,
 Like the shiddow-shaddow of lights revolving
 To momentary ones, are blended,
 In hymns, through iridescent changes,
 Of the apprehending of the hero.
 These hymns are like a stubborn brightness
 Approaching in the dark approaches

Of time and place, becoming certain,
 The organic centre of responses,
 Naked of hindrance, a thousand crystals.
 To meditate the highest man, not
 The highest supposed in him and over,
 Creates, in the blissfuller perceptions,
 What unisons create in music. (*CP* 279-290)

Like the unifying harmony of numerous instruments in a single piece of music, each individual abstraction of the hero creates a composite figure.

Like the figure of the jar, the major man is all of human consciousness set against objective reality. Consciousness is made large, made abstract, able to contain all human beings within its giant form. Once the container of consciousness extends to include the abstract idea of human potential, its limits become increasingly expansive. It is as if--in thinking of the supreme poet--the container of consciousness expands so as to contain all that seemingly surrounds it.

In the poem, "Chocorua to its Neighbor" (*CP* 296), human consciousness is closely connected with the actual world. The speaking subject is a mountain addressing a neighbouring promontory about the idea of man. Chocorua begins by comparing the idea of man to the largeness of mountains:

To speak quietly at such a distance, to speak
 And to be heard is to be large in space,
 That, like your own, is large, hence to be part
 Of sky, of sea, large earth, large air. It is
 To perceive men without reference to their form.

The abstraction of humankind--that which exceeds individual form--knows no limits and is associated with speech. It is part of everything which surrounds it. Furthermore, Stevens suggests in the following stanza that the idea of man should not be confused with "armies" and "cities" who might represent a particular political position: "a war / Between cities," he argues, "is a gesticulation of forms, / ... not / One foot approaching, one uplifted arm." Though major man is, indeed, a "collective being" (*CP* 299), he is unified in a single image: "a shell of dark blue glass, or ice, / Or air collected in a deep essay, / Or light embodied, or almost..." (*CP* 297). As an intellectual abstraction, major man is merely "a shell of dark blue glass," not quite an embodiment of light. Yet the idea of him exceeds "the mind's own limits, like a tragic thing / Without existence, existing everywhere" (*CP* 298).

For Stevens, major man seemingly exceeds the limits of consciousness because he is an abstraction. Yet, this idea remains contained within human consciousness. The hero is unable to "say more than human things" (*CP* 300). Furthermore, because the hero speaks through creative consciousness, he "cannot say human things with more than

human voice" (*CP* 300). As an embodiment of human potential, the hero is able "To speak humanly from the height or from the depth / Of human things." This is, for Stevens, "acutest speech" (*CP* 300), speech which does not exceed the limits of consciousness but continually expands them.

In "Paisant Chronicle," Stevens describes the major man as a "character beyond / Reality, composed thereof". "They are / fictive man created out of men." Most importantly, "They are / Nothing in which it is not possible / to believe" (*CP* 335), because they correspond with our understanding of the imagined objective. Major man must be understood according to human limitations, limitations which, for Stevens, are always imagined possibilities. In other words, the idea of man--when understood in relation to the container metaphor--is an image which contains all that we might imagine of and for ourselves in relation to reality. As a god, he does not exceed us, but contains us. He is "a largeness lived and not conceived, a space / That is an instant nature, brilliantly" (*CP* 301). Hence, the limits between consciousness and reality are not dissolved--as in Yeats's vision --but revealed as completely illusory. The mind cannot conceive of something outside itself. All of objective reality, therefore, must be an imagined reality. Objective reality is not merely coloured or refracted, it is wholly contained within the ever "ghostlier demarcations" of consciousness.

That phrase--"ghostlier demarcations"--occurs in the final line of Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West" (*CP* 128-130), a poem worth reading in relation to container figures. Stevens is careful, at the beginning of this poem, to point out that objective reality

is not affected by consciousness: "The water never formed to mind or voice, / Like a body wholly body, fluttering / Its empty sleeves." Nor is it the singer's intention to alter or embody the sea, which is "merely a place by which she walked to sing." Stevens is also careful to point out that "[t]he song and water were not medleyed sound." The song, therefore, is not a mixture of human and natural sound:

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
 That rose, or even colored by many waves;
 If it was only the outer voice of sky
 And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
 However clear, it would have been deep air,
 The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
 Repeated in a summer without end
 And sound alone. But it was more than that,
 More even than her voice, and ours, among
 The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
 Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
 On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
 Of sky and sea.

The central question of the poem--which Stevens claims "we should ask...often"--is

"Whose spirit is this?" It might seem most logical to attribute this spirit to the woman since "[s]he was the single artificer of the world / in which she sang"; yet Stevens is careful to attribute a spirit to the sea as well. The "genius" of the sea mentioned in the opening line refers not to the sea's powers of thought but to the tutelary spirit of person or place. What we have then is a spiritual marriage.¹⁷ Though we often think of spirits as divine entities or souls, Stevens uses the figure here to refer to the vital principle of a thing, or its essence.¹⁸ This marriage is embodied in the woman's song, an imagined creation. In direct response to this song, the onlookers are able to glimpse the idea of order:

Why, when the singing ended and we turned

Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,

¹⁷

This idea of marriage between person and place occurs often in Stevens' poetry. For example, in "Life is Motion," Bonnie and Josie are said to be "celebrating the marriage / Of flesh and air" (*CP* 83). In "Notes Towards the Supreme Fiction," the characters of Catawba and Bawda "married well because the marriage-place / Was what they loved. It was neither heaven nor hell" (*CP* 401).

¹⁸

It is worth noting that the word "vital" appears often in Stevens' poetry, especially in relation to fixed or changeless forms which are scorned in favour of human, changing ones. See, for example, "The Poems of our Climate" (The evilly compounded, vital I," *CP* 193), "The Motive for Metaphor" ("The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X," *CP* 288), "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas" ("Thence come the final chants / Of the brooder seeking the acutest end of speech:....one line in which / the vital music formulates the words," *CP* 259), "The Auroras of Autumn" ("Contriving balance to contrive a whole, / The vital, the never-failing genius, / Fulfilling his meditations"). See also "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," where Stevens refers to the mind as a "vital boundary" (*CP* 524).

The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
 As the night descended, tilting in the air,
 Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
 Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
 Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

The container figure--comprised of the "glassy lights"--provides order to the scene by "master[ing] the night" and "portion[ing] out the sea"; yet that final line, much like the opening one, subtly suggests that this order is nevertheless anchored within an objective reality, just as the boats are anchored in the sea. The words "[a]rranging," "deepening," and "enchanting" could be read both as verbs referring to the action of the lights, and adjectives describing the power of the night. Hence, the container figure becomes obscure, referring to the glassy lights and to the night itself. Yet, that essential question--"Whose spirit is this?"--must be asked until the end. That which creates and contains the idea of order is the consciousness, not merely of the singing woman, but of the poem's speaker who orders "words of the sea, / Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred, / And of ourselves and of our origins, / In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds."

The container of consciousness is, for Stevens, as large as our ideas of reality, our imagined mundo, and any attempt to move beyond consciousness is futile. Yet, each attempt to move beyond the container of consciousness, to apprehend objective reality, serves to *expand* that container and to widen our perception of the world and our creative

position within that world. In "Looking Across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly" (CP 517-519), the central figure--Mr. Homburger--considers the possibility of a divine creator, or a reality outside the container of consciousness, a "slightly detestable *operandum*, free / From man's ghost, larger and yet a little like...." What he concludes, however, is that the imagined objective--"A transparency through which the swallow weaves"-- is

Too much like thinking to be less than thought,
Obscurest parent, obscurest patriarch,
A daily majesty of meditation,

That comes and goes in silences of its own.
We think, then, as the sun shines or does not.
We think as wind skitters on a pond in a field

Or we put mantles on our words because
The same wind, rising and rising, makes a sound
Like the last muting of winter as it ends.

The elements of nature are, for Stevens, "an affectation of mind" and consciousness itself a "glass aswarm with things going as far as they can." The actual world, all that we can

conceive, is contained within human consciousness.

Though these images of space, air, and weather seem to refer to an objective reality, exceeding human consciousness, Stevens suggests that they are actually "climates of the mind" (*OP* 102), bound within the container of consciousness: "The center that he sought was a state of mind, / Nothing more, like weather after it has cleared" (*OP* 112). The mind, for Stevens, is a "vital boundary" in which "we make a dwelling in the evening air" (*CP* 524).

Weather imagery often represents various moods, thoughts and ideas in Stevens' poetry. His references to "cloudy thoughts" (*CP* 135) or a "sky that thinks" (*CP* 177) suggest that consciousness is a container of thought as space is a container of weather. In his poem, "The Pleasures of Merely Circulating" (*CP* 149-150), Stevens compares consciousness to an enclosed space in which the clouds of thought circulate. Though "the clouds flew round and the clouds flew round / And the clouds flew round with the clouds," Stevens concludes that such repetition is the foundation of thought: "that things go round and again go round / Has rather a classical sound." In "The Wind Shifts," Stevens compares the movement of the wind to varying states of mind. The wind is first "[l]ike the thought of an old human / Who still thinks eagerly / And despairingly," then it shifts "like a human without illusions," then like one "who still feels irrational things," until it finally shifts like "one who does not care." The wind shifts, therefore, in accord with the consciousness which contains it. Rather than a shifting wind, Stevens presents us with a shifting perspective.

The search for objective reality is represented in many poems as a desire for "clear sources" (*CP* 277) or "imperceptible air" (*CP* 241). In "Landscape with Boat" (*CP* 241-243), for example, the central character seeks "the neutral centre" of reality by "brush[ing] away the thunder, then the clouds / Then the colossal illusion of heaven":

...He wanted imperceptible air.

He wanted to see. He wanted the eye to see
 And not be touched by blue. He wanted to know.
 A naked man who regarded himself in the glass
 Of air, who looked for the world beneath the blue,
 Without blue, without any turquoise tint or phase,
 Any azure under-side or after color.

In "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War," the hero has "thoughts begotten at clear sources, / Apparently in air" (*CP* 277). In "The Greenest Continent," the search for God is enacted in a mind that "[a]cquired transparence and beheld itself / And beheld the source from which transparence came" (*OP* 54). The "mere objectiveness of things" is compared, in "Note on Moonlight," to a "warm, wide, weatherless quietude" (*CP* 531) and in "A Clear Day and No Memories," Stevens equates intellectual clarity with a "mind...not part of the weather" in which "the air is clear of everything" (*OP* 113). Similarly, in section XXX of *An Ordinary Evening in New Haven*, Stevens compares the imaginative act of de-

creation with the end of autumn, when the "last leaf that is going to fall has fallen" (*CP* 487). Once again, "[t]he glass of air" is a figure of consciousness:

A clearness has returned. It stands restored.

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* 488)

If "[t]he first idea is an imagined thing" (*CP* 387), then human consciousness can be understood as a container of all space, transforming objective reality into an imagined objective. Since we do not have access to an exterior reality, "We must enter boldly that interior world" (*CP* 333). Rather than transcending the limits of consciousness, Stevens offers "a world that transcends the world and a life livable in that transcendence" (*NA* 130), a newly created reality. The mind, as "the main of things" is understood as "[t]he starting point of the human and the end, / That in which space itself is contained" ("The Rock," *CP* 528).

In the end, in the whole psychology, the self,

The town, the weather, in a casual litter,

Together, said the words of the world are the life of the world. (*CP* 473-474)

Because we can perceive the world only as a human world, from our own limited perspective, that world must be contained within human consciousness and our consciousness must continually expand to contain it. "What we see is not an external world," Stevens asserts, "but an image of it and hence an internal world" (*OP* 190).

Once we understand how colour and shape function in Stevens' poetry, we see how his later images of glass--especially those of crystals and diamonds--are derived from these figures of consciousness. Light, as we have seen, is linked with the colour of the first idea, that from which the imaginative poet creates his fluent mundo. As the yellow light of creativity shines through the blue prism of consciousness, we find "emerald becoming emeralds," (*CP* 243), a green world contained within "the crystal atmospheres of the mind" (*OP* 102).

In his posthumously-published poem, "The Sail of Ulysses" (*OP* 99-105), Stevens considers the idea of "the true creator," and suggests that the container of consciousness reflects and refracts both itself and the imagined objective:

Master of the world and of himself,
 He came to this by knowledge or
 Will come. His mind presents the world
 And in his mind the world revolves.
 The revolutions through day and night,
 Through wild spaces of other suns and moons,

Round summer and angular winter and winds,
 Are matched by other revolutions
 In which the world goes round and round
 In the crystal atmospheres of the mind....

Similarly, in the penultimate section of *Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction*, Stevens presents an image of the world contained by human consciousness:

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

Until flicked by feeling, in a gilded street,
 I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo.

You will have stopped revolving except in crystal. (CP 406-407)

The created world shall have become the actual world; imaginative vision, actual vision; the irrational, rational. The world, as a "conception sparkling in still obstinate thought" (CP 448), will be understood as a wholly created world, our *home*:

Come home, wind, he said as he climbed the stair--

Crystal on crystal until crystal clouds
Become an over-crystal out of ice,
Exhaling these creations of itself. (*CP* 352)

In his poem, "Holiday in Reality," Stevens suggests that reality is always an imagined place, contained within and created by consciousness: "After all," he argues, "to be real each had / To find for himself his earth, his sky, his sea / And the words for them and the colors that they possessed" (*CP* 312). We come to learn, through Stevens' figures of colour and form that the world we inhabit is largely a function of the conditions of consciousness, so that "where we live" is no longer a place but a state of mind, and fully understood as such. This is, for Stevens, why "the world imagined is the ultimate good" (*CP* 524). The "crystalline pendentives" (*CP* 100) of consciousness potentially contain a world which "takes form / And frame from thinking and is realized" (*CP* 511), that is, made *real*.

Conclusion:

As You Leave the Room

In an essay on Wallace Stevens, Northrop Frye contends that "discursive writing is not thinking, but a direct verbal imitation of thought" and that "any poem with an idea in it is a secondary-imitation of thought,...[dealing] with forms of thought rather than specific propositions" (*FI* 238-239). Throughout this study, I have argued that the poetry of Yeats and Stevens is most centrally concerned with forms of thinking and states of consciousness, in terms of both form and figure. As verbal imitations of thought, their poems become, so to speak, figurative minds *separate from* -- yet imitative of -- the human or "real" minds out of which they are created. We might even say that the *poems*, rather than the *poets*, are thinking, thereby creating and containing a separate "reality" through which to view the world: "Reality is not what it is," writes Stevens in one of his *Adagia*, "It consists of the many realities which it can be made into" (*OP* 178). If all we can know of the world is our perceptions of it, it follows that our perceptions of reality continually create newer and newer realities, or "fresh transfigurings of freshest blue".

As I have argued throughout this study, thinking is, for Yeats, a meditative discipline which must be continually improved. His idea of an anti-self, for example, is derived from his contention that poetry is an argument with oneself. This argument is

revealed most expressly in his dialogues, where objective and subjective selves confront each other in an effort to come to terms with a specific idea or way of thinking. There is, in other words, a continual splitting of selves in Yeats's poetry, an ever-widening meta-consciousness. Even in those poems which are not overtly dialectical, we discover a meta-consciousness emerging again and again. For Yeats, a creative act of consciousness is always *metaphorical*, a resemblance or identification between two distinct selves, the subjective and the objective.

In my discussion of "Vacillation," I stated that the dialogue between the heart and the soul was Yeats's last: after "Vacillation," the poetry becomes more concerned with memory. As Yeats comes to understand the thinking self as the mediator between opposites, the need for a dialectical structure of meditation lessens considerably. Yet other voices, such as the ghost of "What Then?," continue to haunt the poetry. These voices are, however, more overtly the voice of the poet talking to himself and listening to his own responses. They posit a past self in an implicit argument with a present self. In other words, the dialogues, once externalized through oppositions, become internalized in the creative consciousness of the speaker.

Though Yeats stopped writing overt dialogues, his later poetry still contains images of a split self or of the struggle to unify oppositions. His late poems, "Man and the Echo" and "The Circus Animals' Desertion" invite a reading, not only of Yeats's poetry, but of *all* poetry as a verbal imitation of thinking. Once we understand that poetry is a verbal imitation of thought, we see how the *poem as mind* is able to transcend the limits of

human consciousness.

"Man and the Echo" resembles Yeats's former dialogues in form; yet rather than presenting two opposing aspects of a single mind or self, it is a "dialogue" between a speaker and his own words. As in his poems about memory and loss, "Man and the Echo" imitates the mind in a present evaluation of past actions and, more importantly, in an evaluation of how acts of creative consciousness affect objective reality:

All that I have said and done,
Now that I am old and ill,
Turns into a question till
I lie awake night after night
And never get the answers right.
Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?
Did words of mine put too great strain
On that woman's reeling brain?
Could my spoken words have checked
That whereby a house lay wrecked?
And all seems evil until I
Sleepless would lie down and die.

ECHO

Lie down and die.

MAN

That were to shirk

The spiritual intellect's great work,

And shirk it in vain.

Yeats's fear that his writings have affected people in unintended ways is echoed within the poem's structure and content: the speaker hears his own words echoed back to him as a command to action. The echo is, in this way, a direct verbal imitation of the speaker's words just as Yeats's poetry is a verbal imitation of thought. The transformation of speech into echo results in a separate voice, a voice which speaks as an autonomous entity, able to command where a command was originally unintended or unseen. The echo belongs, then, neither to the speaker nor to the spoken word: it is a new "reality". In this way, "Man and the Echo" rehearses and highlights the imitation of thought which is the basis of all poetry. The poem, or poetic thinking--as an "echo" or imitation of thought--is separate from and, therefore, able to transcend human consciousness. As Yeats writes in an

introduction to his poetry,¹⁹ the man as poet "has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete" (*E&I* 509). The "poet" or intended thinker who thinks *within* the poem itself--the *poem* as thinker--transcends the world of experience, dwelling in the realm of pure idea.

As I argued in my discussion of his noetics of form, Yeats's desire to transcend experience creates difficulties because it contains within it a desire to escape the mind's limits, and thereby the world of experience or "reality". As "Man and the Echo" suggests, the *man*--unlike the echo--is unable to attain transcendence because the struggle of life calls him back to the world of experience:

O Rocky Voice,

Shall we in that great night rejoice?

What do we know but that we face

One another in this place?

But hush, for I have lost the theme,

Its joy or night seem but a dream;

Up there some hawk or owl has struck,

Dropping out of sky or rock,

A stricken rabbit is crying out,

19

This essay was written as the introduction to a complete edition of Yeats's work which was never produced (see *E&I* 509n).

And its cry distracts my thought.

The moment he considers crossing that border and seeing the ideal realm face to face, he is called back to the things of the world. The descent of the bird of prey into the world of experience is in keeping with Yeats's noetics of figure. Rather than ascending to the limits of thought, however, this bird drops abruptly into the world of experience. Though the poem ends in an image of descent, the "theme" which the man claims to have lost is not lost within the mind of the poem itself: a theme of a transcendent consciousness. Just as the echo moves beyond the limits of the voice which utters it, the poem--as a verbal imitation of thinking--transcends the all-too-human consciousness which creates it. "Man and the Echo" says one thing but does quite another: though the speaker within the poem claims that his theme is lost amid the flux of experience, the poem itself becomes a place where nothing is lost and a new vision is gained because "all's arranged in one clear view."

"The Circus Animals' Desertion" rehearses a similar transcendence, though unlike "Man and the Echo" the split between the speaker and the spoken word is less explicit. Like "Man and the Echo," "The Circus Animals' Desertion" is a poem through which Yeats looks back and "enumerate[s] old themes," questioning whether the art has succeeded where the life has failed. After recounting his own created dramatic characters and scenes, Yeats concludes that "the dream itself enchanted [him]" rather than the experience which inspired it:

Character isolated by a deed
 To engross the present and dominate memory.
 Players and painted stage took all my love,
 And not those things that they were emblems of.

Yeats raises the world of ideas or images above that of experience, suggesting once again that his art is capable of transcending the limits of consciousness. That "bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast" (*E&I* 509) becomes "complete" as a poetic image. The final stanza, then, reads as a confession of failure in that the speaker finds himself stranded within the world of experience, with all his ladders gone.

Both Bloom and Donoghue argue that the final stanza of "The Circus Animals' Desertion" is often misread as "an affirmation...of the heart's affections" (Bloom 456) or "a willing commitment to 'life,'" as opposed to 'art' (Donoghue 123). That it is not an affirmation is clear by the description of the heart as a "foul rag-and-bone shop": hardly an affirming image. And though I would agree that the stanza *does* present a commitment to life, it is hardly a willing one. Just as in "Man and the Echo," the final stanza of this poem returns to the world of experience, not by choice, but by necessity: Yeats, the man, "*must* lie down where all the ladders start" even though he longs to be among "those masterful images" which "grew in pure mind."

The readings which Bloom and Donoghue offer are barely more satisfactory than those they reject. Bloom contends that the poem reinforces Yeats's tendency to

"find...[the] sublime in the grotesque" (457), while Donoghue reads the final lines as "moral accountancy, balancing profit and loss" (124). In terms of a noetics of form and figure, however, the final stanza of "The Circus Animals' Desertion" points beyond such ideological considerations, and is instead a commentary on the possibility of transcendence through artistic creation or metaphorical thought. Yeats as *man* despairs at ever ascending to the heights of consciousness, even going so far as to claim that his "ladder's gone." In terms of a noetics of figure, the ladder's absence suggests that Yeats has given up his quest. Yet, within the poem itself--the verbal imitation of human consciousness--the ladder is not only present but has become one of "Those masterful images" grown in the "pure mind" of the poem itself.

As I argued in my discussion of Yeats's noetics of figure, the image-making activity of poetry is already an ascent through human consciousness. The transcendent potential is in the image-making activity which this poem rehearses. Our recognition of this--through our critical detachment as readers--momentarily liberates us from the rag-and-bone shop in which the *human* has no choice but to remain. The ladder which Yeats claims as absent is, of course, present within the poem itself through the movement from the "stilted boys" to the "sweepings of the street" (YP 472). The created images are the "masterful" ones which "grew" upwards as if ascending a ladder of consciousness. The relationship between 'high' and 'low' forms of thinking is clearly represented. The poem, or poetic thinking, *as* ladder offers the possibility of transcendence by creating a new reality through which to view the "foul rag-and-bone shop" of past experience. As in

"Lapis Lazuli," the *fictional* characters are the ones able to transcend human consciousness, ascending the mountain to overlook the "tragic scene" of experience where "All things fall and are built again" (*YP* 413). Transcendence is achieved, then, not in the mind of the poet but in the mind of the poem, that which is created by and remains separate from human consciousness itself.

Poetry as a form of transcendent thought is made even more explicit in Stevens' writings. He writes, in a letter to Leonard van Geyzel:

For a long time, I have felt the most intense interest in defining the place of poetry. It would be current cant to say the place of poetry in society, but I mean the place of poetry in thought..., and I certainly don't mean strict thought, but the special thinking of poetry, or, rather, the special manner of thinking in poetry...To sum it all up, for me the most important thing is to realize poetry....It is simply the desire to contain the world wholly within one's own perception of it. (*L* 501)

For Stevens, thinking in poetry is an act of expanded consciousness, where reality is contained within the mind of the poem. Once we enter into this container of consciousness--or poetic thinking--our vision of reality is refreshed, becoming a "new knowledge of reality" (*CP* 534). Poetry becomes, then, a *way of thinking*. This is why, for Stevens, "the theory of poetry is the theory of life" (*OP* 178), and why a "poetic view

of life is larger than any of its poems"... [and] "to recognize this is the beginning of the recognition of the poetic spirit" (*OP* 174).

"The World as Meditation" effectively rehearses this sort of expanded consciousness. The title itself suggests that the world is what we think of it, yet the thinking within the poem offers an even more profound recognition of this idea. Like Yeats's "Man and the Echo," Stevens' poem depicts a relationship between the creating consciousness and the created word or image. Instead of a man speaking to himself, however, Stevens gives us Penelope, the patient lover, awaiting Ulysses, that "interminable adventurer" who is--as Stevens writes in "The Sail of Ulysses"--"the discipline of his scope / Observed as an absolute, himself" (*OP* 101). Ulysses, as an "absolute," or Stevens' "first idea" or "major man," is the object of Penelope's continual meditation. He is, then, objective reality, that illusive world which we can only *imagine* lies just beyond the container of consciousness. As we know, objective reality is, for Stevens, impossible to behold because it is always coloured by and contained within human consciousness.

The poem suggests that Ulysses never arrives, so that Penelope's meditation becomes an act of creative consciousness, changing both herself ("She has composed, so long, a self with which to welcome him") and her view of reality ("The trees had been mended, as an essential exercise / In an inhuman meditation, larger than her own"). Much like Yeats' ladder, the image of Ulysses is made ever more present through its very absence. Though he never arrives, his imminent arrival is both a failure of transcendence

and a successful transcendent act itself:

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

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

The reality of Ulysses is, for Penelope, an imagined and transforming reality. Though he remains a fiction, her *belief* in him sustains and transforms her. As Stevens writes in "The Examination of the Hero," "unless we believe in the hero, what is there / to believe?" (*CP* 275). Through her meditative mantra--"Repeating his name with its patient syllables"--Penelope creates a meeting between "friend and dear friend," between creative consciousness and perceived reality: the imagined objective. Ulysses arrives by entering the container of Penelope's consciousness even though he is never present, never real. Both Penelope and Ulysses are re-created through the act of poetic meditation and made new. Like the "sun in clownish yellow" with which Ulysses is associated, Penelope's meditation "brings the day to perfection and then fails. [She] dwells / in a consummate prime, yet still desires / A further consummation" (*CP* 318). The mind, never satisfied,

continues to create the imagined objective, "un rêve permanent, qui ne s'arrête ni nuit ni jour."

Stevens' poem, "As You Leave the Room" invites an obvious comparison with Yeats's "The Circus Animals' Desertion." Both are 'death-poems' written late in the poets' lives and both consider the poet's work in relation to his life. Though the tone of Yeats's poem is despairing, we discover that it transcends its own failure through the "pure mind" of poetic thinking. The descent into the world of experience implies a failure of transcendence, yet the completed poem is evidence of success.

The tone of "As You Leave the Room," on the other hand, is not so much despairing as speculative. Rather than worrying about the effect of his poetry on objective reality or despairing over a loss of artistic creativity, Stevens takes stock of his creative acts. He begins with two simple sentences: "*You speak. You say.*" We might recall, here, the idea--examined in my discussion of meditation--that things are always co-dependently originated. The co-dependence of subject and object, speaker and spoken, is immediately addressed here. To speak *is* to say and to say is always to say *something*. As in Yeats's "Man and the Echo," words have the power to re-create reality, to contain and transform it. Or, as Stevens says elsewhere, "life is not free from its forms" (*OP* 170).

Like Yeats's "The Circus Animal's Desertion," Stevens's death poem refers to several past works: "That poem about the pineapple" ("Someone Puts A Pineapple Together"), "the one / About the mind as never satisfied" ("The Well-Dressed Man with A Beard"), "The one about the credible hero" ("Examination of the Hero in a Time of War")

and "the one / About Summer" ("Credences of Summer"). The common thread linking these poems is a celebration and affirmation of the fictive world and those who take part in its creation. Such things "are not what skeletons think about" in that they celebrate life--the fictive covering--rather than the bare bones of objective reality, the death of the imagination.

Like Yeats, Stevens wonders if his work has been misunderstood: "I wonder, have I lived a skeleton's life, / As a disbeliever in reality / A countryman of all the bones of the world?" To celebrate the imagined objective is, some might argue, to deny the real world. This is the very question a reader might ask of Stevens' work as a whole and of metaphorical thinking in general. Like Yeats, Stevens suggests that "players and painted stage took all [his] love / and not those things that they were emblems of." For if, as Stevens asserts, "Authors are actors [and] books are theatres" (*OP* 157), how can he also assert that "The ultimate value is reality" (*OP* 166)? How are the imagination and reality reconciled, finally, in Stevens' theory of poetry as a theory of life?

"As You Leave the Room" points us in the right direction by referring us back to Stevens' celebratory or "summer" poems, in which the world is coloured with the greenness of the imagined objective. Consider, for example, these lines from "Credences of Summer":

It is the natural tower of all the world,

The point of survey, green's green apogee,

But a tower more precious than the view beyond,
 A point of survey squatting like a throne,
 Axis of everything, green's apogee.

This Yeatsian tower represents the highest point of creative consciousness or the imagined objective, where, as Yeats would have it, "all's arranged in one clear view," or as Stevens argues, "the total artifice reveals itself / As the total reality" ("Someone Puts a Pineapple Together," *NA* 87). Rather than finding himself in the abundance of summer, however, Stevens--in "As You Leave the Room"--confronts "the snow [he] had forgotten," the cold reality of death. In opposition to summer, there is winter, a time when the rock is laid bare, a time to behold "reality": "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" (*CP* 10). As we discovered in our reading of "The Snow Man," the nothingness of "reality" is a world devoid of human consciousness. If reality is a room contained within the walls of human consciousness, death is that place outside this room, the true nothingness of objective reality. Death marks the end of the container of consciousness, the end of creativity, the end of transcendence: it is, so to speak, the final no.

Stevens's reference to "The Well Dressed Man with a Beard" reminds us, however, that "After the final no there comes a yes / And on that yes the future world depends" (*CP* 247). The snow of winter becomes a poetic conception, an image through which we expand the limits of consciousness:

Now, here, the snow I had forgotten becomes

Part of a major reality, part of

An appreciation of reality

And thus an elevation, as if I left

With something I could touch, touch every way.

Now, here, *in the mind of the poem*, the image transcends both the imagination and objective reality. "Metaphor," Stevens asserts elsewhere, "creates a new reality from which the original appears to be unreal" (*OP* 169). The final line of "As You Leave the Room" suggests that reality *is* changed through poetic thought: "nothing has been changed except what is / Unreal, as if nothing had been changed at all." What is unreal, is *made* unreal through metaphorical thinking. Hence, what was once unreal--existing in creative consciousness--is made real. The only reality we can know, then, is an imagined reality, that which takes form and frame from thinking and is realized.

"As You Leave the Room" presents ideas and images found throughout Stevens' poetry and prose, but perhaps the most vivid similarity is found in his essay "Effects of Analogy" (*NA* 107-130). The essay is far-reaching and, as is often the case in Stevens' prose, seemingly scattered in terms of a central subject. Yet Stevens was a deft essayist, often building his arguments metaphorically rather than logically.

As he moves from one example of analogy to another, Stevens subtly builds a kind

of tower or gyre of poetic consciousness. He begins by discussing Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as a crude form of analogy where "we are rather less engaged by the symbols than we are by what is symbolized" (NA 109). This is, of course, the opposite of Yeats's delight in the emblems rather than their source. Stevens next discusses La Fontaine's *Fables* as examples of work in which "[o]ur attention is on the symbol, which is interesting in itself" (NA 109). From this he moves on to discuss analogies or images "in which the nature of the image is analogous to the nature of the emotion from which it springs" (NA 111), referring to such images as poetic rather than prosaic. Stevens next discusses the importance of apposition in poetic thought, where "the object and its image become inseparable," describing such an effect as one of "consummation" (NA 114). After discussing analogy within the created works, Stevens turns to the personality of the creative consciousness as another "mode of analogy" where "the poet's sense of the world [is] the source of poetry" (NA 118). Stevens' essay moves from the general to the personal in order to illustrate that the personal *is* the general, that reality is always a *sense* of reality, a product of creative consciousness:

Take the case of a man for whom reality is enough, as, at the end of his life, he returns to it like a man returning from Nowhere to his village and to everything there that is tangible and visible, which he has come to cherish and wants to be near. He sees without images. But is he not seeing a clarified reality of his own? Does he

not dwell in an analogy?....[His] words have made a world that
transcends the world and a life livable in that transcendence. (NA 130)

"As You Leave the Room" likewise suggests that one moves, not between creative consciousness and reality, but between one reality and another, one *form* or *container* of consciousness to another, each clarifying and enriching the other. To leave the room of creative consciousness is to enter into a 'reality' clarified by a sense of the world. Let us consider the final lines again in light of this argument:

Now, here, the snow I had forgotten becomes

Part of a major reality, part of

An appreciation of a reality

And thus an elevation, as if I left

with something I could touch, touch every way.

And yet nothing has been changed except what is

Unreal, as if nothing had been changed at all.

Notice the line break in the final two lines: "Nothing has been changed except what is /

Unreal". Stevens' use of enjambment makes clear that what is (reality) *is* unreal (imagined), and when the unreal (imagination) is changed, *what is* (reality) is changed as well. When one's sense of the world changes, nothing changes except one's sense of the world. But that change affects the container of consciousness, creating a transformation and transcendence of our sense of reality and, therefore, it is only *as if* nothing had been changed at all. The term transcendence is misleading here because for Stevens, unlike Yeats, consciousness continually expands to include that which it imagines and creates. It is not so much a transcendence, then, as an expansion of consciousness.

Of the two theories of poetry Stevens mentions in "Effects of Analogy," Yeats tends toward the marginal, seeing human consciousness and objective reality as a dialectic. For Yeats, the creative consciousness is a *direction* of thinking which seeks to transcend the limits of human experience. In contrast to this linear view of poetic thought, Stevens sees human consciousness in terms of spatial metaphors and envisions an ever-expanding consciousness which contains the world it creates, and creates the world it contains, living inside its own constructs of the imagination and reality.

The poetry of both Yeats and Stevens is, therefore, centred in acts of consciousness and explorations of the mind's limits, and both see poetic thought as capable of offering new visions of reality. Through an examination of the noetics of form and figure, we find both poets creating a sense of reality which transcends or expands the limits of consciousness. Yeats's desire for transcendence, represented through his imagery of ascent, is ultimately realized within his representations of consciousness or poetic

thinking itself. Though Yeats explicitly despairs of having achieved transcendence, his poetry--as metaphorical consciousness--offers its endless possibility.

Stevens's arguments concerning metaphorical or poetic thought provide us with the language necessary to make explicit what is implicit in all poetry. His meditative poetry presents arguments and analogies similar to the philosophy of Zen, where the imagination and reality are understood as being co-dependent. His noetics of figure further explore these ideas through images of colour and shape. Through these images, we come to see both reality and consciousness as creative constructs, coloured and contained by one another. Once we understand consciousness as an act of imitation or, more aptly, metaphor, we come to see that poetic thinking creates and contains reality, expanding the limits of consciousness by offering a "new knowledge of reality." For Stevens, "a sense of reality keen enough to be in excess of the normal sense of reality creates a reality of its own" (*NA* 70). If we understand poetry as this keen sense of reality, we see how such imitations of thinking offer ever-expanding containers of consciousness, a way of moving, so to speak, from room to room in our continually renovated house of being.

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