The Context of Symbolism in Wallace Stevens's Poetry

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The Context of Symbolism in Wallace Stevens's Poetry

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Abbreviations

For Stevens

CP — *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954: rpt. 2000.

NA — *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination*. New York: Vintage Books, 1965.

LWS — *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, Ed. Holly Stevens. Berkeley: U of California P, 1966.

OP — *Opus Posthumous. Revised, Enlarged and Corrected Edition*. Ed. Milton J. Bates. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

For The English Translation of French Verse

AAFP — *The Anchor Anthology of French Poetry: From Nerval to Valery in English Translation*. Ed. Angel Flores. New York: Anchor Books, 2000.

PBFV — *The Penguin Book of French Verse Vol. 4: The Twentieth Century.* Ed. & Intro. Anthony Hartley. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959.

국문초록

독자들이 Stevens의 시를 읽을 때 느끼는 어려움은 그가 상징주의의 기법을 이용해서 시를 쓰고 있기 때문이라 말할 수 있다. 프랑스 상징주의 시에 나타나는 특성인 '암시성', '음악성' 그리고 단어들 사이의 상호연관 속에서 텍스트의 새로운 의미를 창출하는 '문맥적인 작시법(contextual writing)' 등이 그의 시의 특성들이라고 볼 때, 그가 프랑스 상징주의의 영향을 받았다는 것을 부정할 수 없다. 하지만 그를 단순히 상징주의 시인으로 분류하기에는 무리가 있다. 왜냐하면, 인식론적인 측면에서 Stevens는 프랑스 상징주의 시인들과 분명히 다르기 때문이다.

기법상으로는 상징주의의 영향이 있지만, 인식론적으로는 미국의 지적전통의 영향, 이 두 요소가 Stevens의 시세계를 구성하고 있다는 것이 본고의 핵심이다. 상징주의 시인들은 초월적 이상향을 상정하며 자신들이 그것에 도달할 수 없다는 사실 또한 인정한다. 그래서, 그들은 작품의 텍스트가 이상향의 세계를 다른 차원에서 구축해 놓은 것이며 그것을 상징적으로 보여주는 도구라 믿는다. 이런 수준에서 그들은 자신들의 시작활동과 정신활동을 일단 마무리한다.

하지만, Stevens는 시인이나 예술가에게는 성공적으로 세상의 본질이나 이상향을 재현하는 것이 중요한 것이 아니라, 그런 시도를

하는 과정 자체를 끊임없이 해 나가는 것이 더 중요하다고 설파한다. 설령 이상향이 존재한다 해도 우리는 그것을 파악할 수 없고, 예술이 세상의 이상향적 본질을 완벽히 재현한다 해도 끊임없이 변하는 세상의 속성상, 그 예술작품은 시간이 가면 낡은 허구가 변화하기 때문이라는 것이다. Stevens가 이런 주장을 내세우는 것은 변화와 계속성이라는 미국적 지적전통과 무관하지 않다.

제1장에서는 미국의 지적전통과 그것이 Stevens에게 어떤 양상으로 나타나는지 살펴본다. 미국의 정신은 '변화'와 '계속성'이라는 말로 나타낼 수 있다. 그 내용을 살펴보고 그것이 Stevens에게 일관된 맥으로 나타나고 있음을 증명한다. 제2장에서는 프랑스 상징주의 시의 대표적 특성들 세가지—암시성, 음악성, 문맥적 작시법—에 대해 논하며, Stevens의 시에서 그것들을 찾아본다.

제3장에서는 미국의 지적전통의 바탕 위에서 프랑스 상징주의의 영향이 결합된 것이 Stevens의 시세계라는 이 논문의 논지를 중심으로 해서 Stevens의 시와 프랑스 상징주의 시인들의 인식론적 차이점을 논한다. 제4장에서는 Stevens의 시세계를 잘 보여준다 할 수 있는 그의 "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"을 분석한다. 이 장시에서 그가 개진하고 있는 중요한 시 창작상의 문제들이 사실 미국의 지적전통에서 논해지는 문제들과 다르지 않음은 Stevens가 인식론적인 측면에서 미국적 토양에 깊이 뿌리박고 있음을 증명한다.

Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to show that the two important factors that define Wallace Stevens's poetry are the traditional American intellectual background and some major characteristics of French Symbolist poetry. The difficulty most readers feel on reading his poems might come from the fact that he used the writing method of the French Symbolist poets. In fact, the three representative features of the French Symbolist poetry, such as 'suggestiveness,' 'musicality,' and 'the contextual writing' surely show themselves in Stevens's poetry. We cannot, however, simply classify him as a symbolist poet, because his epistemology is different from that of the French Symbolist poets.

The French Symbolist poets believed that the text of their works was a means to show an ideal world symbolically. The ideal essence of reality, however, means nothing for Stevens. He thinks art cannot possibly grasp it for reality fluctuates incessantly. For this reason, Stevens claims that all the works of art describing the essence of the real world only remain nothing more than fiction. Moreover, this fiction always becomes old by the ever-changing

nature of reality. Thus, what is important for Stevens is not to find out the essence of reality but to enjoy the process of endlessly representing reality. This indicates that his mind is rooted in the American soil that cherishes the values of continuity and change.

Chapter One studies the American traditional intellectual background and its relation to Stevens. This line of thought starts from Emerson and goes through James and Whitman to Stevens. They claim that life is in transition. With relation to this idea, some of Stevens's poems will be discussed. In Chapter Two, we will explore some characteristics of French Symbolism and their appearance in Stevens's poems.

Chapter Three will focus on the epistemological difference between Stevens and the French Symbolist poets. This difference could define Stevens as a poet in the American tradition in spite of his similarities to the French Symbolist poets. Chapter Four will offer an analysis of Stevens's long poem, "Notes." In this poem, we can find the central statement of Stevens's poetics. The problems Stevens points out here are the same ones that are discussed in the American intellectual background. Through this process, we can get a chance to see his poetry clearly and newly.

Introduction

This dissertation claims that although the poetry of Wallace Stevens has a number of aspects in common with that of the French Symbolists, there exists such a fundamental difference between them since the reference to the Symbolist influence in his work fails to produce a satisfactory key to it; rather less often noted, it is Stevens's relation to the American tradition that in the end serves as a basis for a coherent reading of his work, and allows us to penetrate to the heart of his poetic identity.

On reading Wallace Stevens's poems, the first question most readers ask, whether they are Americans or not, is why he wrote poetry "in that way." By "in that way," they mean that he wrote poems in a very difficult way, so that many readers cannot understand what he tried to say in his poems, at least on a first reading. Besides the trouble readers usually have in interpreting his code-like texts, a curiosity regarding the way Stevens wrote always lingers in their minds. Why in the world did he write such difficult poetry?

Perhaps Harold Bloom's concept of "a strong poet" might

provide an answer to this question. The answer could be that Stevens really wanted to be a strong poet. According to Bloom, strong poets are in anxious conflict with their precursor poets, and they struggle to overcome the power of poems that their precursor poets wrote, who in turn struggled to overcome the poems their precursors wrote in order to establish their own originality. What Bloom calls "the strong poet's anxiety of influence" is the poet's "horror of finding himself to be only a copy or a replica."[1] Thus "every poet begins (however 'unconsciously') by rebelling more strongly against the fear of death than all other men and women do."[2] Usually Bloom's strong poets misread their precursors' texts on purpose to get over the anxiety. However, Stevens seems to have chosen a different way to be original. Stevens, it may be claimed, tried to invent a unique method for writing poetry, one belonging only to him, instead of intentional misreading of predecessors. Stevens's desire to be truly original can be said to lead his readers to a hard path.

This obliges us to raise questions about Stevens's unique method of writing poetry. Unfortunately, perhaps, the method that

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[1] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (London: Oxford UP, 1973), 80.
[2] Ibid., 10.

Stevens chose was not an exclusive one but close to that of the French Symbolists. A letter Stevens wrote in his later life is enough to suggest that. In that letter, he wrote "one uses French for the pleasure that it gives."(LWS, 792) Judging from Stevens's biographical facts, we can easily deduce that he underwent a French influence. He learned French literature in his Harvard days.[3] We might assume that Stevens was affected by the French Symbolists, either wittingly or unwittingly. Paradoxically and interestingly, then, his new and original way of writing poetry proves in fact to be one that shows the influence of other precursor poets.

However, Wallace Stevens is clearly not simply a Symbolist poet. Roy Harvey Pearce points out that Stevens's tendency to be a dandy and "a connoisseur of chaos," seemingly bereft of any affinity with the main tradition of American poetry has made critics "interpret him as a kind of post-post-*symboliste*."[4] Perhaps the reason why critics put this kind of tag on Wallace Stevens is

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[3] See, Wallace Stevens, *Souvenirs and Prophecies: The Young Wallace Stevens, ed. Holly Stevens* (N.Y: Knopf, 1977), 9. We can also find this fact in many of his letters.

[4] Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Continuity of American Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1961), 376.

that there are so many noticeable elements of French Symbolism in his poetry. Yet as affirmed above, he is not a Symbolist in the same sense as when we call certain French poet, “Symbolists.” Although his poetry contains many Symbolistic elements, Stevens has his own uniqueness differentiated from Symbolists in his thought, aesthetics and poetics. In fact, Stevens can be seen as a poet who picked up the French Symbolist methodology but turned his back on the epistemology of French Symbolism. His epistemology is rooted firmly in “American soil.”

I will discuss in detail what “American soil” means in the next chapter, but we can easily sense the meaning of this term, “American soil.” It implies the American psyche and includes the American intellectual tradition from Ralph Waldo Emerson through William James and Whitman to Stevens. Such representative American thinkers thought that all human lives are in transition. According to their opinions, in this transitional life we go through many transformations of self. We can acquire a more positive self through this transformational process. According to Emerson, during this process we relinquish the old traits that characterized our personality. We can call this moment that of our becoming

"nothing," if we use Emerson's terms. Emerson describes the change experienced in this moment:

> I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all.[5]

By going through this state, becoming "nothing to see all," we can renew and refine our selves in more positive ways. This process never reaches an end. William James also insists in many of his works that human life is filled with dynamic energies that provide a transition in life. Both Emerson and James emphasize the on-going operation of change in life. James especially seems to have this inclination in an extreme form. In my opinion, it is because he is a Pragmatist. Generally a Pragmatist has no interest in the existence of any ideal, transcendental world. In this respect, his position is somewhat different from that of Emerson. James insists that we must necessarily have more interest in events in this secular world than in a world of which we could not prove the existence. Therefore, we human beings should accept this life to fulfil it. Stevens's basic idea can be regarded as identical with this.

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[5] R. W. Emerson, "Nature," *Norton Anthology of American Literature* Vol. I 3rd, eds. Nina Baym et al. (N.Y: Norton: 1991), 905. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited with the abbreviation NAAL followed by page number.

To put too much emphasis on Stevens's Symbolistic aspects prevents us from considering his intellectual background within American tradition. Yet there immediately comes another question. Why then did Stevens adopt the French Symbolist methodology rather than that of his antecedent American poets? This is also closely related to his American traits.

In the American aesthetic thought based on the idea above, there is the premise that we cannot grasp reality. Thus all efforts to describe reality are bound to remain no more than metaphors. It is impossible for us to describe the actual world exactly. With relation to this point, Rorty's argument helps us to understand the American aesthetic idea. Rorty regards all human intellectual attempts to establish a rational system to provide a foundation for a community or to give a correct description of it as metaphors. We cannot grasp the essence of reality because reality fluctuates incessantly. In American aesthetic thinking, metaphors become hardened and old. Old, familiar metaphors should be replaced with new ones because old metaphors cannot contain the ever-changing reality. Finally reality leads to our "incessant creation"(NA, 73) of metaphors. Stevens shows his evident

inclination for metaphor. He says "The study of the activity of resemblance is an approach to the understanding poetry. Poetry is a satisfying of the desire for resemblance." (NA, 77) He uses the word "resemblance" here instead of "identity." For Stevens, nature's "prodigy is not identity but resemblance." Here we can conjecture that he thinks of his poetry as a metaphor to describe ungraspable reality. Naturally, his method could be to write poetry in metaphoric way. Stevens's need for the French Symbolist methodology arises at this point.

In using metaphor, according to M. H. Abrams's explanation[6], there are two kinds of ways. Generally, (explicit) metaphor is different from symbol in that it has a paired subject in the text. In this kind of metaphor we can easily understand what the tenor is by guessing the significance of the vehicle in a sentence.[7] Yet, in the case of implicit metaphor, the tenor is not identified but only suggested. Stevens seems to have had a strong inclination toward this latter way. The problem with this kind of use of metaphor is

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[6] See M. H. Abrams, *The Glossary of Literary Terms* (N.Y: Holt, Rinehart & Winston Inc., 1988), 65 &184-5.

[7] I. A. Richard explained two elements of metaphor. He put the name of tenor to the subject of metaphor, and vehicle to the metaphorical term. For a detailed discussion of metaphor, see the chapters 5 & 6 of I. A. Richard, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (N.Y: Oxford UP, 1936).

that readers can confuse it with symbols. In my opinion, this has led many readers to a misapprehension of Stevens as a poet mainly using symbols in his poems.

"Symbol" is a word or object that signifies something beyond itself. Poets usually use conventional symbols. Yet in Stevens's case, most readers or critics seem to think he employed personal symbols whose meanings he produced only for himself. He has often been said to utilize the association of things or events with a private and particular concept. Critics count this as one of the reasons why we have difficulty in interpreting his poems. However, Stevens mainly used implicit metaphor throughout the course of his poetic career, despite the many criticisms related to his colour or sound symbolism. Of course, a poet can use metaphors or symbols as the case might be. Yet my argument here is what we can call the basic strategy in writing poetry in Stevens's case is a metaphoric way. His poem, "Infanta Marina" is a good example to show this point clearly.

Her terrace was the sand
And the palms and the twilight.
She made of the motions of the wrist
The grandiose gestures

Of her thought.

The rumpling of the plumes
Of this creature of the evening
Came to be sleights of sails
Over the sea.

And thus she roamed
In the roaming of her fan,
Partaking of the sea,
And of the evening,
As they flowed around
And uttered their subsiding sound. (CP, 7-8)

On facing this poem, readers, as in the case of many other Stevens's poems, might feel they should solve an enigma.

At first, there comes the question of "who or what is Infanta Marina?" We cannot easily grasp the identity of "she" on a first superficial reading. Yet, judging from the content of this poem, she is not a human being because she has a plume and fan. Her fan is "roaming," and the rumpling of her plume became "sleights of sails." Sails are the same as her plume. Stevens wrote about this phrase in a letter to Renato Poggioli: "I mean the passing of a sail at a distance on the sea, in sight and out of sight, which is a very common thing on exceedingly bright days. The appearing and

disappearing are like sleights of hand or, say, sleights of sails" (LSW, 785) "Her terrace" where people can relax was "the sand/ And the palms and the twilight." This indicates that "she" was on a sandy beach where palm trees grow. What we can infer from her being on a beach when "she" does not move is that "she" is perhaps a yacht, a very expensive and luxurious one. Some words in this poem support this idea. This "infanta marina" made "The grandiose gestures/ of her thought" out "of the motions of her wrist." Wrist here is not the part of human arm, rather it is a wrist pin, a piston pin used to make power to move the boat. This luxurious yacht is followed by beautiful lines made on the surface of the water in the direction the steering man intended to go. This helmsman's decision in what way to go becomes "her thought." As long as someone does not tell us clearly whether it is true or not that "Infanta Marina" is a yacht, we naturally have difficulty in understanding the meaning of its title, or the content of this poem. Yet we can suppose it is a yacht, not anything else, from all the clues listed above. Thus, this poem is a good example of implicit metaphor in the name, "Infanta Marina."

Stevens evidently writes poetry in this way. He uses mainly

implicit metaphors. Here we can understand the reason why he needed the French Symbolist methodology to write poetry. The contextual characteristic of the French Symbolist poetry provides a good theoretical ground for interpreting Stevens's poems and grasping his metaphors. Seen in their contextual background, Stevens's poems can be interpreted in a valid and reasonable way that most of readers can accept. By contextual, I mean that the text is composed of words that generate new and different meanings other than literal ones in the organizational operation of the words. The French Symbolist poetry is a conspicuous example revealing this trait. Of course, most literary texts are contextual to some extent. However, in the case of difficult poetry such as Stevens's, the interpretation that focuses on its context is very helpful. After all, his poetry was written faithfully to this contextual method whether Stevens himself intended it or not. Therefore, we cannot help admitting that Stevens has an affinity with French Symbolist poetry in writing poetry although he mainly focused on metaphors, not symbols.

The contextual characteristic of the French Symbolist Poetry accompanies two other traits that are closely related to that

characteristic. The other two traits are suggestiveness and musicality. These three characteristics are significant because they are often found in Stevens's poetry. The French Symbolists did not want to express their feeling clearly through the text. They thought it important to make readers evoke the same ideas or emotions which they felt for the object in the poem. They did not describe nor define those ideas or emotions, but suggested them by evoking them in readers' minds by way of unexplained symbols. Chadwick claims that "Symbolist poetry inevitably has a certain built-in obscurity. Mallarmé is reputed to have said that he had banished the words 'as' and 'like' from his vocabulary."[8] Symbolists constructed their own worlds in the text, and their works remains as the constructed world. Chadwick points out there are two branches of French Symbolism:

> Symbolism can, then, be finally said to be an attempt to penetrate beyond reality to a world of ideas, either the ideas within the poet, including his emotions, or the Ideas in the Platonic sense that constitute a perfect supernatural world towards which man aspire.[9]

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[8] Charles Chadwick, *Symbolism* (London: Methuen, 1973), 2.
[9] Ibid., 6.

Stevens, whose intellectual background is rooted deeply in American soil, would naturally reject his any connection with “the Ideas in the Platonic sense,” but concerning “the ideas within the poet” he evidently had something in common with the French Symbolist poets.

The musical element in French Symbolist poetry is the quality that advocates and furthers the suggestiveness in it. This was due to the Wagner’s influence. To their ears, Wagner’s music was new. The French Symbolist poets hoped to echo their sensations and feelings into readers’ minds through their poetry as music does. Thus, they developed a writing method that put less emphasis on the meaning of words than on the sound and rhythm. A French Symbolist poet who has the attitude focused on this trait, such as Verlaine, usually makes no attempt to build up another world and simply enjoys communicating his emotions in some musical strokes that show something expressing his emotions. It is not difficult to find such a musical element in Stevens’s poetry, although he is different from such a French Symbolist poet as Verlaine. Stevens tried endlessly to make his own world in his poems to describe reality despite its fate of destruction in the

future because of its becoming an old metaphor.

As stated above, these three representative characteristics of the French Symbolist poetry are also found in Stevens's poetry. Yet it is not reasonable to classify Stevens too simply as a symbolist poet. Although he actually has these three characteristics, he has a different epistemology from that of the French Symbolists. Once he constructs his own world in the text, the French Symbolist poet views his constructed world as a static one. He usually thinks the text symbolizes the ideas or the world of ideas within him or beyond reality. In this case, the poem becomes an index eternally and fixedly pointing to that world in premise existing in another dimension of reality. This world does not fluctuate, but remains a fixed one. Therefore, the French Symbolist poet need not doubt about whether his description is correct or not. He only believes that his text, his constructed world, is enough to contain reality and the world beyond it. We can call this attitude that of stasis. For Stevens, however, reality always fluctuates, and we cannot even dream of grasping the essential forms on the other side of reality. Thus, Stevens's every effort to describe reality is destined to remain as metaphor. Every

metaphor is to be destroyed because if hardened and old it can no more contain this ever-changing reality. Therefore, Stevens feels a need to incessantly create as many metaphors as possible. Richard Rorty's discussion of every intellectual project explained as metaphors provides a good theoretical ground for Stevens's incessant creation of metaphor.[10] In this respect, Stevens is evidently different from the French Symbolist poets in his epistemology. We might call his attitude one of "dynasis."[11]

"Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Blackbird" has many points that illustrate the point discussed above. In this poem, Stevens uses the blackbird to represent the working of his mind. He compares the fixed mountains with the blackbird's eye:

> Among twenty snowy mountains,
> The only moving thing
> Was the eye of the blackbird. (CP, 92)

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[10] This will be discussed in the next chapter. With relation to this point, Rorty's book provides a good help to unfold the discussion of Stevens's metaphors. See, Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (N.Y: Cambridge UP, 1989).

[11] This word is a compound word consisted of "dyna-" and "-sis". According to *Random House Dictionary*, "dyna-" is a "combining form meaning 'power' used in the formation of compound words," and "-sis" is "a suffix appearing in loanwords from Greek, where it was used to form from verbs abstract nouns of action, process, state, condition, etc.: *thesis; aphesis*." In this dissertation, this word 'dynasis' is used to mean "the state of endless actions or endless processes." In meaning, 'dynasis' is opposed to the word 'stasis.'

"The eye" here is at once the blackbird's eye and Stevens's eye. We can recognize that the blackbird, the object of his observation, really acts as a kind of link connecting the speaker's mind to outside reality. In this case, of course, natural things become physical reality. The blackbird in stanza III "whirled in the autumn winds."(CP, 93) It is "a specific image that represent a general phenomenon," [12] and the movement of the blackbird is "the pantomime" that indicates reality fluctuates. Nevertheless, the "thin men of Haddam" in stanza VII "imagine golden birds" instead of seeing "how the blackbird/ walks around feet/ Of the women"(CP, 94) about them. The thin men's behaviours in imagining golden birds indicates their effort to grasp reality within their capacity. However, this effort is bound to be a failure, and they become foolish men. With the recognition of the impossibility of the full description of reality, in stanzas XI and XII, the speaker says that he will accept reality as it is, as it fluctuates and changes: "The river is moving./ The blackbird must be flying."(CP, 94) In the last stanza, there comes to the speaker the recognition that the attempt itself to describe or grasp reality is significant.

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[12] Ronald Sucknick, *Musing the Obscure* (N.Y: N.Y UP, 1967), 55.

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs. (CP, 95)

The blackbird "In the cedar-limbs" no longer moves. It tells us that the workings of the speaker's mind also come to a stop. Although the speaker in this poem realizes the sad human destiny never to grasp the ever-changing reality, the important point here is that there is no meaning in the world without change. Any world which the human being can grasp is naturally a dead world. Thus, Stevens advocates endless efforts for a full description that is bound to be left just a metaphor, to be destroyed in the future in this fluctuating and changing reality.

Even though a poet has some representative characteristics of a literary trend, we cannot easily stick the same label on him. Externally noticeable factors are not enough to identify a poet with any literary movement or trend because we cannot exclude the matter of his epistemology. For example, although we can recognize many traits of post-modernism[13] in Hawthorne's works,

[13] In his essay "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective," Ihab Hassan lists 11 traits

we would never call him a post-modernist. For Stevens, the same is true. The difference between Stevens and the French Symbolist poets in epistemology finally makes us regard him as an American poet, faithful to the intellectual background of the American tradition but with French Symbolist traits. Perhaps this might make him think of himself as a strong poet, meaning that he might really feel he was writing poetry in a very different way from his American contemporaries and predecessors in picking up the French Symbolist writing methodology, and yet feel a difference from the French Symbolist poets in that his epistemology is clearly not in their line. This difference might make Stevens think that he is original, free of influence of any precursor poets, even though he seems to have absorbed French Symbolist poetry unwittingly within an American background.

Critics have ignored these two dimensions of Stevens's poetics. In fact, they have mostly considered "imagination" and

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of Postmodernism: indeterminancy, fragmentation, decanonization, self-less-ness, unrepresentable, irony, hybidization, carnivalization, performance & participation, constructionism, and immanence. Of course, it is not too much to say that every work may have some of them. Many critics seemed to use this list in finding postmodern traits in a work. About Hassan's discussion of these Postmodernism traits see, Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1987), 168-173.

"reality" as the two poles between which readers can read his poems. They have also insisted that his essays on poetics should be read through these poles. It is true Stevens had much interest in the interaction between imagination and reality. Yet, in my opinion, the three axes of reality, imagination and their interaction are not enough to deal with Stevens's poetry. To interpret Stevens's poetry in the context of this very narrow scope will in the end not provide the whole picture of his poetic idea. Moreover, it seems impossible to deal with imagination and reality as isolated concepts. For Stevens, imagination is a human faculty allowing him to construct his own world in his mind. He said "If we live in the mind, we live with the imagination." (NA, 140) In other words, imagination is the power that makes it possible for us to create metaphors of the world in this transitional world. Thus in my opinion, the monotonous discussion about him saying what season symbolizes what state of imagination will never be helpful for understanding Stevens's poetry. Rather, a discussion that focuses on his aspect of endlessly writing poetry that comes from the fluctuating quality of reality and his American characteristic will provide a good analysis of Wallace Stevens's poetry.

Many critics, arguing the influence of the French Symbolism on Stevens's poetry, usually do not concentrate on his intellectual background within the American tradition. Rather they list common features between Stevens and the French Symbolist poets in poetic technique. Despite Stevens's own words denying the influence of French Symbolist poetry: "Mallárme never in the world meant as much to me as all that in any direct way. Perhaps I absorbed more than I thought. Mallárme was a good deal in the air when I was much younger," he has clear affinity with the French Symbolist poetry. Frank Kermode's comment surmises the assimilation of the influence of the French Symbolist in Stevens's poetry: "Since Harmonium is the work of the poet's mature years, we should not expect it to show much evidence of unassimilated influence."[14] Whether Stevens assimilated Symbolist influence or not is, however, not so important. We should only explore *how* it is placed into Stevens's poetry. The key title matter is that Kermode here insists that Stevens did not imitate French Symbolist poetry. We can infer from this that a parallel approach is not helpful. However, the problem with Kermode's opinion is

[14] Frank Kermode, *Wallace Stevens* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1960), 29.

that he seems to overlook the reason for the influence of the French Symbolist poetry in Stevens's poetry. When heterogeneous elements come into other areas or cultures, they thrive or settle with an adequately transformed appearance suited for these area or cultures if they are needed. In the case of literature, it is not greatly different. I have indicated and discussed the reason why Stevens needed the French Symbolist writing methodology. Yet, there is no reason given why Stevens needed the French Symbolism in Kermode's discussion. Affinity implies influence, and it is really so when we think Stevens has three representative traits of the French Symbolist poetry.

To prove the thesis of this dissertation, that Stevens is an American poet, rooted deeply in American soil, with Symbolist characteristics, I will explore how French Symbolist traits appear on the American background in Stevens's poetry. This approach still has some limitations for a full understanding of Stevens's poetry. One drawback of this dissertation is that it does not find the course of the assimilation of the French influence in Stevens's poetry. In fact, more emphasis is laid on the intellectual background in the American tradition, because these two elements

never seem to be assimilated and well harmonized. In the end it may have to be concluded that finding Symbolistic elements and exploring American intellectual background respectively are more easy and helpful. Moreover, in my opinion, Stevens could be said to be the entity beyond a simple synthesis of American traditional intellectual background and the techniques of the French Symbolist poets. The French Symbolist influence in the technical aspect and American traditional intellectual tradition in epistemological aspect respectively, without any process of assimilation, are combined into what Stevens's poetry is. Therefore, in discussing Stevens's French Symbolist traits, this dissertation does no more than identify common features between some of the French Symbolist poems and Stevens's poems. Nevertheless, this already has its value in broadening the critical horizon of a poet who has too often been discussed on the narrow scope of two axes, reality and imagination.

Chapter One will search for the intellectual background of the American tradition under the name of "American soil." In this chapter, the word 'dynasis' is used as expressing best the American values that most American people seem to cherish. This

dynasis will be dealt with in relation to the American intellectual tradition. Here we will explore the American intellectual tradition that started with R. W. Emerson through William James to Wallace Stevens. This intellectual position could be labelled Pragmatism. With relation to this idea, some of Stevens's poems will be interpreted as expressing this American intellectual tradition.

Chapter Two will examine the formation of French Symbolism and will list the common features between Stevens's poetry and French Symbolism. In strict terms, three representative traits of French Symbolism will be discussed, and it will be shown that these traits are found easily in many of Stevens's poems. For this, the French text of the French Symbolist poets' poems will be provided with English translations. In this chapter, I will try to discover the similarities between Stevens's poetry and the French Symbolist poetry.

Chapter Three will focus on the difference between Stevens and the French Symbolist poets. In this chapter, I will mainly deal with the difference in their epistemology. This chapter is important because many points I wish to highlight will be fully discussed. How this difference is revealed in the texts of

Stevens's poetry and the French Symbolist poetry is the central point in this chapter. Here I will use Stevens's poems and some French poems to compare these two kinds of poetry. Again, the French text will be provided with its English translations.

Chapter Four will offer an analysis of Stevens's long poem, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction." This poem is generally considered as one in which Stevens embodies his poetics. That kind of appreciation of this poem is justifiable to some extent, but it also provides much evidence that shows his intellectual background in the American tradition. If a poet's masterpiece shows his whole completed mentality, these "Notes" might be called Stevens's masterpiece. Thomas J. Hines says:

> At the end of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," Stevens proposes the fitting end to his meditation of an aesthetic of existence: the pleasure that comes from fulfilling the theory in the actual poetic experiences of the poems. After this point in Stevens's development, in the late poems of *Transport to Summer, The Auroras of Autumn*, and "The Rock," the poetry of Being will rarely develop in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction."[15]

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[15] Thomas J. Hines, *The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens: Phenomenological Parallels with Husserl and Heidegger* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1976), 212.

In this respect, “Notes” is the poem in which we find the core of Stevens’s poetics. Thus, I will conclude by discussing this poem because all essential matters for an understanding of Stevens are found in this poem. Of course, there are his later longer poems. Yet, in my opinion, they seem not to contain the essential aspects of Stevens’s poetry and poetics. I will focus on the American characteristics of this poem because we may already feel Stevens’s French Symbolist writing methodology enough in the previous chapters.

Chapter I: American Soil and Stevens

In spite of the obvious difficulty of defining the American psyche in one word, a word that comes into mind immediately is 'dynasis.' 'Dynasis' serves to suggest that the values American people seem to cherish most are "continuity and change."[16] 'Dynasis' is the term that can speak for these American values best. Dynasis here suggests that life consists not only of concrete static states but also of the moving processes that connect them. Life may look more positive when it is viewed as a process rather than as a concrete, static state. This means that living is a series of the transitions. Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to the dynamic processes because with them we can avoid the illusion that the understanding of concrete static states alone constructs our mentality. This is closely related to the way we look at art. Our relation to the world is not passive, and the

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[16] It may be impossible to define any country's national character in one word. However, though in a vague way, we can name the representative traits or values of one country differentiated from other countries. In fact, the assumption is based on the book called *American Values: Continuity and Changes* by Ralph H. Gabriel. In this book, the author with the method of case study practically lists the actual examples that show us what we can call the American traits. These features are coming from American values, and will be dealt with in depth relating Stevens's poetry in this chapter. About American traits or values, see Ralph H. Gabriel, *American Values: Continuity and Change* (Westport: Greenwood P, 1974).

practice of art is connected to the development of this relation, by which we bring truth into our reality. In this case, truth does not exist as the changeless absolute, but is begotten from within us. This idea might lie in the line that runs from Emerson to Stevens—of course, to Frost or Williams etc, too—under the name of the American 'dynasis.' The writings of Emerson, William James, Whitman, and Stevens can show us how we engender truth upon reality and with what purposes.

Stevens's poetry seems quite adequate as an example in which this American national character is embodied. Critics have tried to read Stevens in a very philosophical frame, and in a way the following discussion of mine cannot avoid that type of them. Yet to read Stevens's poetry in the axis of American 'dynasis' is enough to give us pleasure; it is as important as reading Stevens's poetry for its intellectual content. Stevens usually pricks his reader to be open to fluctuating movements in life, as in canto XXXII of "The Man with The Blue Guitar," one of Stevens's middle years' poems:

> Throw away the lights, the definitions,
> And say of what you see in the dark

That it is this or that it is that,
But do not use the rotted names.

How should you walk in that space and know
Nothing of the madness of space,
Nothing of its jocular procreations?
Throw the lights away. Nothing must stand

Between you and the shapes you take
When the crust of shape has been destroyed.

You as you are? You are yourself.
The blue guitar surprises you. (CP, 183)

When we define creation as the process of applying our imagination to reality, we can start creating on the basis of 'nothingness.' This is a negation of the self apparently revealed in the present. The starting point of writing poetry is, for Stevens, to go back to the emptiness of the self, the state of nothingness. Therefore, Stevens insists that if you want to be a poet, "you must become an ignorant man again."(CP, 380) The specific way for a poet to enter into the state of nothingness is not to "use rotten names." "Rotten names" here is surely used to mean other names such as established metaphors or symbols or myths. These fixed concepts are causes preventing human beings from encountering

things as they are. Therefore, “Nothing must stand // Between you and the shapes you take / when the crust of shape has been destroyed.” This nothing indicates the point of transition from “you” to “the shapes you take.” We might expect some positive self-transformation in the state of nothingness. The discovery of one’s true self cannot be perfectly done while we accept these “rotten names.” A poet should dispel the established myths to construct his own myth where his self acts as a center.

This reminds us of Emerson’s point in “The Poet.” He explains the moment when with the help of a new poet we escape from the state in which we remain dead to our world. At that moment we renew ourselves and reanimate the world. Emerson says, “We are like persons who come out of a cave or cellar into the open air. This is the effect on us of tropes, fables, oracles, and all poetic forms. Poets are thus liberating gods. Men have really got a new sense, and found within their world, another world, or nest of worlds; for, metamorphosis once seen, we divine that it does not stop.”[17] Men see a new world that is the same world as before in its appearance but that looks new with its old myths

[17] Emerson, “The Poet,” NAAL, 994.

destroyed. Emerson's poet here can be regarded as an agent that destroys old fixed metaphors or myths, "rotten names." Or his poet can be read as a symbol of the moment when we destroy our "rotten nams." This situation is found in the quotation above. The moment we destroy old myths is one of surprises. The "you" who is surprised becomes a more strange self than the familiar one for a moment. The "you," who might be either the readers of this poem or the men in Emerson's writing, go through the process of self-transformational rebirth despite the possibility that there remains partially some debris of the old familiar self: "You are yourself."

If we want to liberate ourselves from the oppression of familiar myths, we should be ready to admit and accept the future transformations of our lives and our world. Life in transition, in change, always depends on the process of this transformation. We can easily find this idea in the writings of R. W. Emerson, William James, and Wallace Stevens although it is disguised in other names. They use the term "truths" instead of "myths," but in the final analysis their discussion seems like the discussion above, destroying old familiar truths at the moment of transformation.

These writers seem to have a paradoxical idea that the moment of supreme truth is one when truths are destroyed. At this, the "jocular procreations" of self and world are revealed as very new. The new revelations, however, are not truths. They are only products of freshly devised fictions, an element in another new myth. The "Yourself" revealed here is not the final essence, but a part momentarily revealed in the process of transitions. This self has to go through a new process of another transition, endlessly taking new shapes.

Roy Harvey Pearce has analysed Stevens's poetry as part of the American Adamic background. He compares the process in which the poet makes his own myths with the way that Adam names everything in his own way in the new world. Pearce argues that in Stevens's poetry "the continuity of the most deeply rooted tradition of American poetry, what I have called its Adamic phase, reaches the point of no return."[18] The American Adamic poet is the poet who in a pure world has such a power of naming that the reader is obliged to accept his names. This situation is well suited to the case of American poets in a new continent, especially

[18] Pearce, *The Continuity of American Poetry*, 376.

Whitman. Pearce insists that Whitman's poems are full of their maker's domination, and thus they even look personal. Even the American Adamic poet in the modern world is not much concerned with who made him for what purposes. This poet no longer writes poetry with a transcendent hypothesis like his 19th century forebears. His concern is with what he himself can make. If there is a transcendental realm, it is only conceived in the image that this poet makes. That is, a poet makes his own reality in his mind. Thus, it is discovered "that the poet's sole ground of his being is himself, that his spirit is his sensibility, that his worship is his poetry."[19] Pearce seems to have borrowed R. B. W. Lewis's concept of the American Adam.

> The new habits to be engendered on the new American scene were suggested by the image of a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources. It was not surprising, in a Bible-reading generation, that

[19] Ibid., 377.

> the new hero (in praise or disapproval) was most easily identified with Adam before the Fall. … And he was the type of creator, the poet par excellece, creating language itself by naming the elements of scene about him. All this and more were contained in the image of the American as Adam.[20]

Finally Pearce thinks that Stevens's Adamic position is against the mythological tradition. The self liberated from the traditional cultures and the old myths gains its authority in its own myth.

Yet Pearce's argument gives us the impression that he is missing an important point. Reality here, the new world for the Adamic poet is pure, and it is subject to constant renewal and change. However, Pearce seems to judge that the process of the poet's making reality in his mind—naming his world—happens once for all. This results from the fact that he does not focus on the continuity of that process in life. He only emphasizes that Stevens wants to make his own myth, his own fiction opposed to traditional transcendental modes. This hypothesis is not well suited to the case of Stevens's poetry. Stevens rather suggests everywhere in his poetry that life is in a flux. The Adamic self

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[20] W. R. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1955), 5.

produced after the process of making reality in the poet's mind is in danger of becoming another myth if it becomes fixed. The real self-assurance only comes when we know that all the myths, including Adam's naming must be endlessly destroyed and renewed. Life in transition never stops at any fiction, and it constantly makes new fictions. This proves that Stevens's poetry could be well read in the framework of American 'dynasis', constant continuity and change.

Emerson said, "Life only avails, not the having lived. Power ceases in the instant of repose; it resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state; in the shooting of the gulf; in the darting to an aim. This one fact the world hates, that the soul *becomes*; for, that forever degrades the past; turns all riches to poverty; all reputation to a shame; confounds the saint with the rogue; shoves Jesus and Judas equally aside."[21] This means that the past and future are forgettable. Only the present is important when the human soul is in the transition of life. William James also put much value on these terms, life and transition. He claims that we feel life definitely in the transitions, and this indicates his

[21] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," NAAL, 965.

American predisposition, favouring 'dynasis' over stasis. This can be said to be the essence of the tradition of American writing. Emerson's God does not seem an absolute entity but only a figure of this 'dynasis'. In the "Spirit" chapter of his *Nature*, he regards this figure as an agent that makes us assured of our "inexhaustible power."

> Therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old. As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws, at his need, inexhaustible power. Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man?[22]

The "Supreme Being" here is this dynasis that makes us view reality in our own way, that is, create our own reality in our mind. In this case, nature is not built up, but projected from us. The energy for us to do this fills in the universe like "unfailing fountains." It dominates the universe. The reason Emerson put much emphasis on this creative energy is that he thought the dynamic transformations in life come from this energy. Thus for

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[22] Emerson, "Nature," NAAL, 926.

Emerson, everything is subject to these transformations. In this transformation human being experiences a casting off of old things—self, identity, ideas or knowledge, etc. His newly transformed self is the consequence of this experience. Our being is constructed by this kind of abandonment. The self where abandoned knowledge was accumulated becomes a vacant place at the very moment of this experience. Emptying of self is the ground on which paradoxically our newly transformational selves can be produced.

In this sense, Emerson's writing can be said to show the central idea of American literature:

> Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.[23]

The sentence "all mean egotism vanishes," means that the self abandons the habits and features that have characterized the "personality" of the man. Stripped of all the old habits and features, "I" becomes "a transparent eyeball." This "I" comes to be both

[23] Ibid., 905.

nothing and a transparent window showing everything through the body of itself. The scene Emerson describes here is one of transition. It is the movement from a past to a new state, and from the familiar to the unfamiliar. This transition happens “on the bare ground.” This “bare ground” is the new American landscape where the Adamic American poet is naming things in his own way.

We can here, though vaguely, infer from this that there might exist some American tradition that Emerson initiates. This tradition involves esteeming the bare ground, bareness. This bareness can be found under other names such as nothingness, ignorance, decreation etc. This bareness might be the same thing as the momentary emptied self divested of all former accumulated knowledge. With relation to this tradition, Stevens’s “The Snowman” is really a monumental poem for its dealing with nothingness, the bare ground:

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. (CP, 9-10)

Many critics, including J. Hillis Miller, discuss this poem as evoking the situation after human beings were deprived of their gods. What they put emphasis on seems not the impoverishment of the world where god has disappeared but the human self-awareness. Miller says, "God is dead, therefore I am. But I am nothing. I am nothing because I have nothing, nothing but awareness of the barrenness within and without."[24] The moment of self-awareness here is the abandonment of old myths, knowledge, habits and features discussed till now. There comes Stevens's seasonal symbolism of winter, and in Stevens's poetry winter is usually used to symbolize the sterile and barren human

[24] J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* (N.Y: Atheneum, 1974), 221.

situation in which imagination and fictions are gone like the summer leaves. For Stevens, imagination makes us continue to live our own lives in this barren land. Winter devoid of imagination is a very hard situation for human beings to go on with their lives. Therefore, Stevens's insistence that "one must have a mind of winter" seems very paradoxical, but only in a winter-like situation can one prepare to be in the process of transformation from the old self to a new one in the endlessly occurring transitional movements in life. To do this, one should stand on the bare ground of winter divested of all familiar myths or fictions. At this moment he experiences an emptying of the self. As a result, he can develop into nothing able to see all, and it is naturally the echo of Emerson's "nothing." Miller's account is not so far away from this:

> This nothing is an annihilating force which rejects everything fictitious. It wipes away each incipient reconstruction of the old harmony before it has had time to crystallize, and sees all "the integrations of the past" as a mere "Museo Olimpico"(CP, 342). The "nothing" is the resolute misery of the man who refuses to accept anything unreal as real and holds to the nothing within as that which destroys the blandishments of appearance. This rejection allows man to retain the nothing that *is*

there. For this reason "poetry is a destructive force."[25]

This "nothing himself" comes to have positive possibility to be developed into a new, though unfamiliar, refined self. We can feel it strongly in Stevens's use of the verbs. Harold Bloom points it out very clearly. He suggests that the verb "regard" at the start of the poem implies a passive watching, while the verb "behold" means "to gaze at or look upon, but with a touch of expressed amazement."[26] He says a few pages later that it includes the meaning of a "the more positive edge of astonishment or discovery."[27] To look around without any myths or fictions surely accompanies astonishment of the discovery of a possibility to become a developed new self. Moreover, "behold" can be divided into "be" and "hold." Of course, this "be" indicates being, existence in the world, but "hold" has more active meaning. It means that one takes everything into his bosom, and here that one embraces everything including "nothing" without any rejection. Thus, the snowman can behold, can embrace even "nothing."

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[25] Ibid., 221-222.
[26] Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977), 57.
[27] Ibid., 60.

Of these two kinds of nothingness, "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is," we need to discuss each one respectively here. Actually most critics, whether on purpose or not, usually avoid discussing what these two nothings specifically mean. Many a critic only focuses on the change of self-consciousness after the human beings has discovered himself orphaned and solitary. Although Bove's interpretation seems interesting, his discussion mainly deals with the change in human consciousness. Bove says "He sees 'Nothing that is not there . . .'; he can no longer impose human emotion, 'any misery,' on 'the sound of the wind,' Generally speaking, the poem has destroyed the pathetic fallacy. In fact, the nature of perception itself is changed."[28] Despite its original analysis Bove's comment here does not define what these nothings are, either. As stated before, the nothing in the last line of this poem indicates the state of the self emptied of all familiar myths or knowledge, "everything fictitious." Through this state the self becomes a new one containing more positive possibilities. Thus, these two nothings are the same in essence. The difference between them only lies in

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[28] Paul A. Bove, *Destructive Poetics: Heidegger and Modern American Poetry* (N.Y: Columbia UP, 1980), 190.

whether this nothing in my emptied self exists right now in this place or not. The Nothing that indicates the state of the self emptied of all the familiar myths can be nothing that is right now within my mind. As stated before, our life is in endless transition. We are supposed to go through the state of the emptied self many times in life. Being destined to experience nothings many times in our lives might be the evident truth which we human beings cannot reject. Therefore, “Nothing himself” becomes “Nothing that is” there right in the place. He embraces his self divested of old familiar fictitious things, “the nothing that is.” Stevens uses the article “the” in this phrase. Thus, “the nothing” here is meant to have a definitive meaning. This is not like the abstract concept “nothingness” that most critics like to assume in relation to this poem. The “Nothing that is not there,” of course, is the nothing to come. Although it is not present, the snowman should embrace this “Nothing that is not there” because this nothing is also a part of his self that will appear sometime in his life. “The Snowman” is a poem about the constant emptying of the self we experience between them in the continuous change of life as we become ignorant again only to discover new knowledge. The moment we

become nothing is one when we become ignorant as Stevens says: "You must become an ignorant man again."(CP, 380)

In fact, intelligence sometimes advocates egotism, and all the familiar knowledge, such as myths and fictions, may be the result of it. Thus, ignorance can be the way to avoid this danger, or to become the "nothing" discussed above. Stevens's position here seems similar to William James's thought in various ways. James saw the self against a background of ignorance. He criticizes all forms of rational philosophy because he thought they are useless. He thought that it deals with our experience in an ideal dimension. Therefore he says that the pragmatist, who is the ideal model of man for James, turns his back on all that is abstract, fixed and closed, and turns toward all that is concrete and adequate, such as facts and actions. This is in a sense a good way to be ignorant. By "ignorant" he means that man gets out of all the old, familiar myths, knowledge and fictions etc. James only wants us to be ignorant. This is because James, like Stevens, felt we are caught in the processes that go into the constant making and remaking of the self. James's writings seem to insist that our ideas are not truths, but products of experience. Thus, James wanted to

distinguish theoretical principles from the absolute truth. Of this attitude, James says, "The attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories,' supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequence, facts."[29] Under this comment there lies an idea that truth is not originally existent in this world from the beginning. Truth is dependent on human situations. In this respect, "Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest."[30] In Pragmatism, we need not ask about the possibility of proving the existence of God. Pragmatists only want to know what difference comes in our lives from whether we believe or not. Therefore, James's conception of truth is like this: "The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons."[31] This leads to the core of Pragmatism that insists on not waiting for the philosophical evidence for the rightness of your behaviour but acting according to your own will. This thesis might look too relativistic. However, it seems to speak for American individualism. Moreover, we can find the beginning

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[29] William James, "What Pragmatism Means," *Pragmatism and Four Essays from The Meaning of Truth*, ed. Ralph Barton Perry (N.Y: A Median Book, 1974), 47.
[30] Ibid., 46.
[31] Ibid., 59.

of this tradition in Emerson and in Stevens's thought:

> To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart, is true for all men,—that is genius. Speak your latent conviction and it shall be the universal sense; for always the inmost becomes the outmost,—and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgement.[32]

We need to know here what significance this individualism has. Judging from James's argument, an individual's experience is the result not of social mechanism, but of each individual's events. The individual's habits, temper and belief are the pragmatists' primary concern. Individualism is sometimes criticized on the ground that it makes man uninterested in social problems. In the case of Pragmatism[33], however, an individual becomes the central concept and the only source for dealing with social problems. In other words, the reason why an individual has interest in social problems is only a matter within the individual dimension, not

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[32] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," NAAL, 956.

[33] Pragmatism is a modern philosophy that expresses the American psyche well. Of course, Emerson is not classified as a pragmatist, but we cannot deny the fact that Emerson has so much influence on modern pragmatists. Therefore, I included him among the American representative thinkers. My point here, however, is not about the Pragmatism, therefore I chose the term "American soil." My major concern is to show how these thinkers' thoughts and aesthetics are embodied in Stevens's poetry.

treatable in the background of social structure. Finally, Pragmatism that may be said to express well the American intellectual tradition was developed from this individualism.

James will not admit the presence of any fixed absolute truth. He insists that men do not learn about the problem of true and false, good and evil from the transcendental order of the universe, but choose one or the other relatively in their situation when they try to solve their hardships. This idea might come from the American frontier because such Americans believed they could solve all the problems that their lives might bring about with their actions. They seem to have had a belief in the possibility of their getting new knowledge and thinking out the solutions in the course of dealing with their problems. The 'pragma' in "Pragmatism" signifies "action." Pragmatists think that truth is relativistic and partial, that it will never be absolute. Instead of the absolute truth, we can only get a temporary truth or conclusion that has to be thrown away if new evidence against it comes. This happens endlessly throughout our lives. Democracy can be said to come from this attitude. From a democratic point of view, no individual has the absolute truth, and he can only verify his hypothesis by

the available evidence. In this respect, pragmatic thought is far away from the Platonic tradition.

Stevens faithfully follows this pragmatic idea. This is the great difference from modernist contemporaries such as Eliot and Pound, and others. Truth exists in a fixed form in the Platonic Ideal world. However, Stevens, who is faithful to American thought, has no interest in the Ideal World. He also cherishes actions, that is, endlessly making new fictions that are then to be replaced with newer ones. For Eliot and Pound, the Ideal World left its shadow in their mind. They seem to have had some kind of nostalgia for this Ideal World. This can be proved by the way in which mythological structures underlie their representative works, *The Waste Land* and *Cantos*.[34] That they bear nostalgia for a mythical period when human beings and gods lived side by side indicates their desperate hope to validate the Platonic tradition that hardly attracts us in this modern period and is of no interest for Stevens.

Everything coming from human intelligence is, to borrow Stevens's term, fiction. Thus a human self that is surrounded by

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[34] There underlie the mythological structures in these two works. We can find the structure of "The quest for the holy grail" under the text of *The Waste Land*. When we read Cantos, we usually feel the speaker reminds us of Odysseus in *Odyssey*. The return home of Odysseus is placed under the text of *Cantos*.

hardened, familiar fictions, that is, old descriptions of the things around the self, should escape from them. This is the process of being nothing discussed above. After this process, the self is reborn as a new one, but this new self is also surrounded by new descriptions that will have to be destroyed at some time. For Stevens, truth is not a fixed thing, and it is not absolute but relative. Therefore, all knowledge and ideas that stand by the self are no more than fictions. Stevens, like the Pragmatists, claims that we must go forward because we need not be bothered about a truth of which we cannot prove the existence. Finally, transitions in life might be one of the reasons for the impossibility of our proving the existence of truth. Fictions constantly become hardened, fixed and old, so we must endlessly go through the process of divesting ourselves of them. Stevens's poem, "The Latest Freed Man" is a fine example dealing with this matter:

> Tired of the old descriptions of the world,
> The latest freed man rose at six and sat
> On the edge of his bed. He said,
> "I suppose there is
> A doctrine to this landscape. Yet, having just
> Escaped from the truth, the morning is color and mist,
> Which is enough: the moment's rain and sea,

> The moment's sun (the strong man vaguely seen),
> Overtaking the doctrine of this landscape. Of him
> And of his work, I am sure. He bathes in the mist
> Like a man without a doctrine. The light he gives—
> It is how he gives his light. It is how he shines,
> Rising upon the doctors in their beds
> And on their beds. . . ." (CP, 204-205)

This excerpt describes the moment of throwing old descriptions away. The "freed man" who is tired of them becomes nothing at this moment. For Stevens "Nothing" is, in other words, "being without description," but it appears new and fresh. This "freed man" supposes that "there is/ A doctrine," truth "to the landscape," the world. In his free state now, however, he acknowledges that truth is not a fixed, evident thing. It is temporary and momentary: Truth is like "the moment's rain and sea,/ The moment's sun." Therefore, human beings have to look at truth reflected upon doctors' thoughts as he looks at the sun shining "upon the doctors in their beds/ And on their beds. . . ." Truth is vague, and the human description of it is just fictions. Finally the word "freed" does not mean the essential state of freedom. It signifies just getting out of old descriptions. There seems some kind of significance in the title of this poem. This freed man should go

through a similar situation many times. Thus he will become the latest “freed man” many times, not just a “freed man” once. The word ‘latest’ suggests the inevitability of this fact in a man’s life. He will be the latest “freed man” every time he experiences it.

The annihilation of the older self is, in fact, for the service of the self. It is a defence of subjective thought against scientific objectivity. Stevens here put much emphasis on such transformations as the latest “freed man” experiences. It is impossible for us to find an authentic self, we can only find a different self, and this different self is brought about in poems in Stevens’s case. Of course, this transformation happens everywhere every time in this kind of transitional life, yet Stevens might want to embody this process of life in his poetry. Thus, when we follow the course of his poetry we can easily find such moments of transformation. This is because his poetry is the place where American thought appears evidently. Stevens wants to deal with a moment when one finds oneself for the first time, but does not want to see it as the last such moment, because the self, once established and familiar, is sure to be replaced by ever newer and more unfamiliar ones. That is to say, the process of transformation

is kept in motion by a constant dynamic process that transforms every end into another beginning. Every once-finished poem of Stevens, thus, will remain unfinished as another beginning: "Alpha continue to begin./ Omega is refreshed at every end."(CP, 469)

Many critics call Stevens's poetry the poetry of writing poems. This is right to some extent, but it would be better to say it is about life. As stated above, Stevens tries to shape the transitional process of life in his poetry during the whole course of his poetic career. Poetry is the place where he deals with all the problems connected with life. Of course, for Stevens, these problems naturally have a close relation to the self, his primary concern in human life. His poetry can be said to be the result of his trial to search out "the latest freed" self. Thus, how can we say this kind of poetry deals with poetics, not life? Surely Stevens deals with the problems of human life in his poetry. Perhaps, it is due to Stevens's recognition that all knowledge or myths are fictions, and even subject to change. These can be treated under the name of "old descriptions." Men have tried to describe reality. The world or earth, what we call outside reality, surrounds the self, but it changes all the time every day. Therefore, even if a

man tries to describe reality as exactly as possible, it is sure to lose its freshness as time goes by and becomes hardened despite his effort to describe it correctly. Stevens discusses the relation between these two concepts in his poem, “An Old Man Asleep”:

> The two worlds are asleep, are sleeping now.
> A dumb sense possesses them in a kind of solemnity.
>
> The self and the earth—your thoughts, your feelings,
> Your beliefs and disbeliefs, your whole peculiar plot;
>
> The redness of your reddish chestnut trees,
> The river motion, the drowsy motion of the river R.
>
> (CP, 501)

The self and the earth are two worlds. These two worlds stand respectively, but the human sense even in a dumb state as in sleep looks at these two worlds. The self is the basis of the individualism or pragmatic thought. Individual aspects like “your thoughts, your feeling,/ Your beliefs and disbeliefs, your whole peculiar plot” should be kept. Yet when it comes to the earthly matters, we just look at them from our own perspectives. Thus this poem is one that claims that “descriptions” are subjective. The earth here is a world you have constructed with your own

thoughts and ideas. “The redness of your reddish chestnut trees” is just your colour, not anyone else’s colour. The river’s motion is also viewed from the individual’s own point of view. The reason why the motion of the river looks drowsy is that you, who may be this sleeping old man, are asleep or drowsy, perhaps napping. This river with a capital R fluctuates like Reality.

In fact, Stevens often deals with this difficulty of describing reality in his poetry; so his poems seem to deal with aesthetic or poetic problems, not with life. However, this difficulty comes from the flexible transitional attributes of reality, the world and life. At this point there emerges a basic rule for Stevens, one that remains an important rule that Stevens would keep until his later periods. It is that what cannot be said literally can be said well in as many metaphors as possible. For Stevens, these metaphors are the descriptions mentioned above. Finally, Stevens’s primary concern seems metaphor, and this is also a reason to regard Stevens’s poetry as only dealing with poetic problems.

Now we need to explore Stevens’s aesthetics the other way round because that will suggest that his thought is rooted deeply in the American soil. Stevens’s writing about art in the

"Adagia"[35] shows his aesthetic attitude.

> The relation of art to life is of the first importance especially in a sceptical age since, in the absence of a belief in God, the mind turns to its own creations and examines them, not alone from the aesthetic point of view, but for what they reveal, for what they validate and invalidate, for the support that they give. (OP, 186)

On encountering this, readers might guess what Stevens's aesthetic disposition is. By focusing on the "relation of art to life," Stevens views his experience with regard to an aesthetic. He turns to his mind's "own creations" and away from the actual events and relations of his outside world. This might be due to the impossibility of exact description. Nevertheless, Stevens seems to suggest here that art or literature must be cherished and considered greatly because there is nothing like God in previous ages to make our lives meaningful, interesting except them, and there is nothing to connect us to the real world. As Stevens wrote of Imagination in "Imagination as Value": "It is part of our security. It enables us to live our own lives. We have it because we do not

[35] It is a collection of aphorism, which Stevens began in the middle 1930s writing in his notebooks.

have enough without it."(NA, 150) In this sense, art could be regarded as a link connecting the real world and the individual who lives in that world.

Judging from this, Stevens's aesthetic position is evidently rooted in American soil. He has a very similar aesthetic attitude to that of such representative American thinkers as R. W. Emerson, William James discussed before. His aesthetic attitude has developed from these thinkers. They usually have a tendency to re-describe[36] a human experience as an individual's specific moment. As stated before, their interest is only individual, not social structure. Their aesthetic attitude might be called a pragmatic one. They do not put much emphasis on the social mechanism that is currently regarded to have so much influence on the individual's thoughts, beliefs and life. However, one concern here is not to define what pragmatism is, but to find out what aspects or elements in this pragmatic aesthetics have any relation to American soil and how they are related to the poetry of

[36] The reason why I use the verb 're-describe' instead of 'describe' is that thinkers usually describe the world in another new way that is differentiated from the existing descriptions of the world. They always try to describe the world in a very original way that no other man did. As stated before, they endlessly make new metaphors. Thus I use this verb to emphasize their effort.

Wallace Stevens. Stevens did not see society as organizing human experience, either. He thought that only the individual can do it.

How did these American thinkers view the connecting link between art and the world? Among the representative modern pragmatists, Richard Rorty's thought might be enough to guide us. About the future of philosophy, Rorty insists that rational arguments should be avoided and new descriptive metaphors should be used for the dissolution of old philosophical dilemmas.[37] This can be considered as an implicit acknowledgement of the intellectual project as the invention of a brand-new metaphor. In this idea, there lies an analogy that redescription is to the world what the metaphoric texts are to objects. Like his precedent thinkers, Rorty reduces the question of truth to one that could be dealt with within the dimensions of the individual. Finally the universal problem of the impossibility of describing reality exactly in art seems more American in this intellectual background. According to this aesthetic position, those philosophers or thinkers can be treated as poets who try to exactly describe the

[37]About metaphoric redescription, see the "Introduction" to Rorty's *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982), and "The Contingency of Language," the 1st chapter of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 3-22.

actual world, only to fail. Philosophical acts become artful performances. Rorty hopes that "culture as a whole can be 'poeticized' rather than as the Enlightenment hope that it can be 'rationalized' or 'scientized'." [38] Although the ordinary philosophical dream has been the discovery of the grounds for community in a rational order, the culture mentioned above can hardly be placed into this kind of rational order. It is impossible to describe the society because we cannot find a solid ground for it in reality. We can find only a ground for metaphor. All efforts to describe this social structure or to establish an intellectual system leading toward this community naturally come to be nothing more than metaphors. This attitude is completely opposed to that of Plato who insisted on banishing poets from his republic for fear that they might bring about this consequence. Within this point of view, any such kind of activity is in a way an aesthetic performance. In this respect, human beliefs or values can be said to come not from the metaphysical order of the world, but from moments of invention. Thus, we can see "human history as the history of successive metaphors." [39] Poetic genius manages to

[38] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 53.
[39] Ibid., 20.

make a newness that throws away and replaces the fixed thoughts and beliefs of routine. As stated above, new descriptions, new metaphors can replace familiar ones despite their destruction in the future. Of course, any originally created metaphor can become stale and a cliché as time goes by. The world is overflowing with endlessly produced metaphors that will surely be replaced by new ones.

To borrow Rorty's discriminant terms, it is needful to distinguish useful metaphors from pointless ones. According to him, a pointless metaphor can hardly attract other people, and ends up under the name of "eccentricity."[40] Indeed, the successful poet is one who succeeds in imposing his idiosyncrasies on the public. Despite this attitude, however, the invention of new descriptions and perspectives can hardly aim at the general acceptance of them as the only truth. Rather their value lies in their ability to endlessly create newly invented metaphors to cover this unrepresentable actual world. Finally, this kind of aesthetic attitude naturally prefers further creation of metaphors to the adoption of a created metaphor. The poet cannot impose his

[40] See Ibid., 36-39.

metaphors on the world, but resists any oppressive imposition of other metaphors. The acts of poetic redescription are important as resisting moments against the hardened metaphor that already serves to describe the world and defines our fixed relation to it. Poetic description is a survival game among competing metaphoric descriptions of the world, and is not considered as a general phenomenon able to contain the whole actual world. Therefore, it is the poet's destiny to make as many metaphors as possible. Stevens's poem, "Metaphors of a Magnifico" is interesting with respect to this point:

> Twenty men crossing a bridge,
> Into a village
> Are twenty men crossing twenty bridges,
> Into twenty villages,
> Or one man
> Crossing a single bridge into a village.
>
> This is old song
> That will not declare itself . . . (CP, 19)

In the first sentence, one "bridge" turns into "twenty bridges," and one "village" changes into "twenty villages." Of course, Stevens does not write a fantasy story. Rather, here, he implies the nature

of metaphor. For each of twenty men, or twenty poets, a bridge does not look the same because they each look at the bridge in their own way, twenty ways. Thus, one "bridge" described in twenty ways looks like twenty bridges. In other words, one bridge or one village could get twenty appearances in poets' metaphors. Moreover, one bridge may be twenty bridges even for one man if he describes the bridge twenty times. Likewise men or poets spontaneously make metaphors. This bridge is also left as one bridge because for one man the village or the bridge is just one at that time. This phenomenon comes from the fact the world is full of metaphors.

We can also find this attitude in Emerson. In "The American Scholar,"[41] Emerson considers books as old metaphors:

> Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book, than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world,

[41] This is first published (1837) in the form of pamphlet with other name, and then republished in the name of "The American scholar" in his *Essays*. Here, Emerson speaks to all American college students and all others who dedicate themselves to thought.

of value, is the active soul.[42]

Emerson's comment here shows the American inclination in his thought. He won't accept the opinion of some book as the truth. He just admits the use of books in that they are able "to inspire" people. Books are the result of the effort by which founders or thinkers try to describe what the world is about. Without doubt, this description is destined to remain as metaphor. For this problem Emerson might not totally believe in books. Rather, his interest goes toward the practical aspects. In his thought books can be a means for other metaphors of the world. Without practical value, no book is of any use. In other words, what matters for Emerson is not the fixed value of books, but the readers' inspiration to experience their lives. To make souls "active" is important. Therefore, a book should not stand as a perfection or an end, but remain as a continuous becoming. If it remains such an end, there "arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation,—the act of thought,—is instantly transferred to the record. The poet chanting, was felt to be a divine man. Henceforth the chant is divine also.

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[42] Emerson, "The American Scholar," NAAL, 934.

The writer was a just and wise spirit. Henceforward it is settled, the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly, the book becomes noxious. The guide is a tyrant." [43] In the world of transition, fixed things including metaphor are always false.

Judging from this, we can easily guess what the most important value of art in this American soil is. Until now I have claimed that human knowledge is a kind of metaphor because we cannot contain and describe the world. We can just say what the world is about in metaphoric ways. Yet metaphor is a concept closely related to "art." So we can draw some artistic idea on the basis of American thought from the discussion up to this point. In this point of view, art should stimulate people to get more aesthetic experience, to go from old metaphors to new ones. This reminds us of Stevens's aesthetics. He related art to life. This means that the artist or poet is a part of the world, and any division between the artist or poet and the world alienates the artist or poet from his actual experience of reality, the world. In this respect, Stevens's imagination is a way to find another good

[43] Ibid.,

metaphor at the right time, in the right place. Naturally this process is incessant. We may evidently find the affinity between Emerson's explanation of the poet's imagination and Stevens's thought of the imagination:

> But the quality of the imagination is to flow, and not to freeze. The poet did not stop at the color, or the form, but read their meaning; neither may he rest in this meaning, but he makes the same objects exponents of his new thought. Here is the difference betwixt the poet and the mystic, that the last nails a symbol to one sense, which was a true sense for a moment, but soon becomes old and false. For all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead.[44]

The poet should produce new metaphors endlessly because imagination will never stop. Emerson emphasizes here the "fluxional" quality of symbols, language and imagination. For a mystic, a symbol is an end to indicate something else permanently, but for the poet, this symbol should not be left as the fixed index of something else. "Imagination is to flow," and the affinity of this thought with Stevens's is noticeable in Stevens's comment about

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[44] Emerson, "The Poet," NAAL, 996.

antiquity and nobility in “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words”:

> It is hard to think of a thing more out of time than nobility. Looked at plainly it seems false and dead and ugly. To look at it all makes us realize sharply that in our present, in the presence of our reality, the past looks false and is, therefore, dead and is, therefore, ugly; and we turn away from it as from something repulsive and particularly from the characteristic that it has a way of assuming: something that was noble in its day, grandeur that was, the rhetorical once. (NA, 35)

Finally Stevens, like Emerson, considers aesthetic experience including appreciation or creation as a process that should be constantly refined. Throughout this process, we experience innumerable times being “nothing” in life.

The reason why “Imagination is to flow” makes us deeply contemplate imagination, and we surely need to have interest in the function of imagination. Imagination plays a very important role in American aesthetic thought. Stevens thought imagination multiplies values, and this is the core of American aesthetic thought. He says that “The Imagination is the power of the mind over the possibilities of things; but if this constitutes a certain

single characteristic, it is the source not of a certain single value but of as many values as reside in the possibilities of things."(NA, 136) Here we can ask how imagination makes the multiplication of values. Of course, it is through constant metaphoric descriptions of reality. The mind cannot rest content with any single value, and thus it is impossible to think there is any end for incessant creation. About this point Stevens wrote:

> It would be merest improvisation to say of any image of the world, even though it was an image with which a vast accumulation of imaginations had been content, that it was the chief image. The imagination itself would not remain content with it nor allow us to do so. (NA, 152)

Reality changes constantly, and so the imagination cannot remain new in helping to cover the whole reality. Nobility which we feel in a new creation does not last perpetually. Nobility is not a fixed concept because any description or representation of the world destroys the active transitional process of our lives if fixed. In the external world, "nobility resolves itself into an enormous number of vibrations, movements, changes." (NA, 34) Clearly this idea is far from the Platonic tradition that regards nobility as the state found in stasis. To think that nobility consists in the 'dynasis' of

transition is American thought. What matters in American aesthetical thought is, as in general thought, not the image of nobility but the continual process, the active operation of the mind. Of course, the world is in transition as stated above. Yet why do we human beings always search for nobility? To adapt ourselves to reality well can be a good answer. The environment has been presumed to constrain our force. If we live with our force constrained, we cannot go on with our lives in this sterile world. For Stevens, the image of nobility is needed for exercising our resistant force toward that environment. Stevens wrote about the reason why we need it:

> It[Nobility] is a violence from within that protects us from a violent without. It is imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality. (NA, 36)

We can find that Emerson had a very similar attitude to Stevens's. Emerson wrote in "Fate" with relation to "pressing back against the pressure of reality": "If the Universe have these savage accidents, our atoms are as savage in resistance."[45] Finally creating nobility in this transitional world to resist the restraining

[45] Emerson, "Fate," NAAL, 1023.

power of this environment occupies the central place in American thought.

To explore Stevens's concept of metaphor might also be helpful for discussing in depth the basic idea in American aesthetic thought. Stevens's own discussion of metaphor in the first of his "Three Academic Pieces" offers a good way to understand his basic idea of metaphor. Like Emerson, Stevens searches for the ground of the "incessant creation" of metaphor in nature because it looks different every time for the constant fluctuation of nature. While things in nature seem to be repeating their appearances, things in nature actually change all the time. To ignore the idealistic aspects of things and only to focus on the changing real things can be called the representative trait in American aesthetic thought. Stevens thinks that for this reason there is the unstable relation between metaphor and world. This is the reason for incessant creation. His view of the cause of metaphor as the prodigy of nature indicates an important point:

> Nature is not mechanical to that extent for all its mornings and evenings, for all its inhabitants of China or India or Russia, for all its waves, or its leaves, or its hands. Its prodigy is not identity but resemblance and its

> universe of reproduction is not an assembly line but an incessant creation. Because this is so in nature, it is so in metaphor. (NA, 73)

The connotation underlying this sentence, “Its prodigy is not identity but resemblance” is that there comes a link from this metaphor between things in nature that deliver only the partial aspect of them. The word “identity” here can be thought to include the essence of things, but Stevens who is extremely far away from the Platonic tradition easily discards this word. Nature or reality changes all the time to such an extent we can never grasp its essential forms, so Stevens dares not use the word “identity.” Rather, he uses the word, “resemblance” because resemblance does not contain the whole essence of things but a single aspect of them. This makes us think Stevens thought that we could not grasp reality, or even that there is no essence in reality because nature fluctuates. This might be called the difference between Stevens and the French Symbolists. Although Stevens picked up the methodology of the French Symbolists in writing poetry, he seems to have little interest in the idealistic idea. While Stevens evidently stands in the American tradition far away from Platonic one, he is also different from Emerson about interest in a

transcendent realm. His poem, “Sunday Morning” is a good example to show us his reality-oriented inclination.[46] Stevens suggests to us that the ideal paradise is a dead world because there is no change:

> Is there no change of death in paradise?
> Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
> Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
> Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
> With rivers like our own that seek for seas
> They never find, the same receding shores
> That never touch with inarticulate pang?
> Why set the pear upon those river-banks
> Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?
> Alas, that they should wear our colors there,
> The silken weavings of our afternoons,
> And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!
> Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
> Within whose burning bosom we devise
> Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly. (CP, 69)

Paradise here is the place where there is no change. There “ripe fruit never” falls, and “boughs/ Hang always heavy in that perfect sky.” This place has no meaning for us because there is no cause for change such as human desire and fulfilment. In paradise

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[46] See, Sukenick 63-67.

without the flow of time and the change of death, “such an existence would be one of eternal ennui.”[47] Everything in this paradise remains fixed without any change. Fixed things are dead things, and we find no beauty in those dead things. Therefore, we should give up a lingering attachment to some the ideal world after death, and think of the ephemeral features of life as the most beautiful. Only in the world where death as the final phase of change dominates, can there be beauty. Thus, Stevens can confidently say that “Death is the mother of beauty.” To admit death as a hard fact makes us sing about the beauty of earth, and bring forth love and new lives. Stevens’s poem, “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” also concerns the topic. In this poem, Stevens seems to admit no existence of an ideal transcendental world, or the eternal, mystical world after our death:

> Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
> As they are used to wear, and let the boys
> Bring flowers in last month’s newspapers.
> Let be be finale of seem.
> The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. (CP, 64)

At a funeral, people should wear black suits and dresses, but here

[47] Sukenick, 66.

the speaker tells us to “let the wenches dawdle in such dress/ As they are used to wear.” Moreover, it’s very funny to see “the boys/ Bring flowers in last month’s newspapers,” not in a good wrapping paper.

There is no solemnity in this line. Stevens even seems to mock human solemn events related or associated with the human-made ideal, the mystic world after death. Yet the problem is that we can’t get the meaning in this difficult line “Let be be finale of seem” easily. Yet if we change the order of words a little, we can grasp its meaning. Put the word “seem” in the place of first “be,” and you can understand what Stevens had to say. While the word “seem” indicates the appearance of the actual world, “be” is the concept that includes the essence of things. The finale of “be” or being is “seem,” that is, the appearance in front of our eyes. This implies that Stevens has no attachment to the ideal world. “Seem” is all for him in this world where we cannot grasp the essence of it. In this respect, it is evident that “be” is beyond Stevens’s concern. Then what is the reason why “The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream?” Reality, the actual world changes as ice-cream melts as time flows. Stevens associates the transition of reality, the

actual world with the change of ice-cream melting moments. Thus, ice-cream becomes the symbol of reality full of transitions and changes. The emperor of ice-cream, who has the transitional trait of reality in the same way, can only be the emperor of reality.

Up to now, I have discussed the American aesthetic features under the name of American soil. We have found a few features that started from Emerson and run through James to Stevens. Of course, Rorty's discussion of metaphor has been a great help to develop the discussion about this American soil. Although it is relatively hard to name them each by each in a word, we can make some points clear by commenting upon them once more. That Stevens, like the representative American thinkers, usually adopted the hypothesis that the world of reality is in transition was the basic thesis in this chapter. In these transitions, human beings should go through many transformations of self, that include being nothing and coming into a new self. The recognition that transition dominates the world makes us think that we cannot grasp the reality or even that there is no essentially transcendental world beyond it. Thus, we can only describe reality in a metaphoric way. Yet there exists the tension between the old

metaphors and new ones. As reality fluctuates, even new descriptions, that is, metaphors become old as time flows. They cannot always contain this ever-changing reality, so we just go on making new metaphors endlessly. This identifies the American values of continuity and change. Stevens's course of writing poetry really fits well into this process. In the next chapter, I will explain the formation of French Symbolism and list the French Symbolist elements found in Stevens's poetry to prove its influence on him. This will help us understand how French Symbolist ideas combine with the background of American soil in Wallace Stevens's poetry.

Chapter II: The Influence of French Symbolism[48] on Stevens

As stated in the introduction, Stevens's poems are best read and interpreted when we read in a contextual way. Contextual reading is the way of reading that focuses only on the inside elements within the text. Critics try to find out the meaning of a text by exploring how the words in the text work and how they operate together. Since Stevens used implicit metaphor, contextual reading seems a suitable method to read Stevens. In fact, Stevens wrote poetry in a way well suited for contextual reading. Of course, every method of writing poetry to some extent can be adequate to the contextual reading. However, the poets who most strongly emphasized the contextual aspect of poetic language in poetry are the French Symbolist poets. In this respect,

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[48] Symbolism is generally regarded as an aesthetic movement in reaction against naturalism, an aesthetic movement in about 1870s that took a positivist and scientific attitude. This movement covered a wide range of cultural activities. In broader terms, symbolism can be thought of as a movement not only in literature but also in painting, etc. However, the term, "symbolism" here is confined to the literary movement, that we now call French Symbolism. There is a discrimination that needs to be made in the use of the terms related to the word, symbol. According to Engelberg, Symbolic, Symbolist and Symboliste are not synonymous words. The term "Symbolist" in this dissertation has similar meaning and use to the French word, "Symboliste," which was applied to Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and other French poets that we today call French Symbolist. About this distinction, see "the introduction" of an anthology, *The Symbolist Poem: The Development of the English Tradition*, ed. Edward Engelberg (N.Y: E. P. Dutton, 1967).

we might presume Stevens's relationship or affinity with the French Symbolist poets. In fact, some major characteristics of French Symbolism are found in Stevens's poetry. This is perhaps because Stevens felt some inclination toward the contextual aspect of poetic language. Therefore, in this chapter, I will survey major characteristics of French Symbolism and their appearance in Stevens's poems. Before studying the French Symbolist influence on Stevens and his difference from them, it is necessary to survey the historical development of the French Symbolist theories and ideas in France. This will also be helpful for understanding of Stevens's poetics. Especially Stevens's poetic language should be stressed because the solution of the difficulty in interpreting Stevens's poems wholly depends on whether we understand his contextual use of language. Actually his view of language is very similar to that of the French Symbolist poets.

The symbolist poets tend to avoid expressing precisely controlled thought through sentences because the conventional way of direct statement is not adequate to symbolists for expressing their ideas and sensations. Moreover, readers can never recognize this hidden meaning through a superficial reading

of the poem because this hidden world is completely recognized only by a grasp of the symbols in the poem. For this purpose, the function of the French Symbolist language is totally different from that of conventional language. Conventional language simply tells us about the exterior appearances of things, or seriously speaks of the essential meaning of things. The symbolist language rejects these two aspects of ordinary language, and makes the poem a new entity with its meaning contained within it.

Ordinary, everyday language is degraded by the unrefined usage in the society, and surely has no nuance of the delicacy that is needed to render their experiences. Nonetheless, the symbolist poets wished to express their experiences in an ideal form, free of this vulgar ordinary language because they had no other medium to get over this problem. They found a solution to this problem not in the medium, but in the mode of speaking. They chose indirect suggestion as their own solution, and as their peculiar way of expressing themselves. Symbolism, in the end, encouraged writers to express their ideas and feelings by indirect suggestion rather than by direct statement. Consequently the evocative power of words to express feelings, sensations and states of mind is taken

very seriously in French Symbolism. The French Symbolist poets regard naming an object as destroying poetic enjoyment. In this case, readers are forced to try to conjecture for themselves what a poet wants to convey to them in a very obscure text. "Symbolism can therefore be defined as the art of expressing ideas and emotions not by describing them directly, nor by defining them through overt comparisons with concrete images, but by suggesting what these ideas and emotions are, by re-creating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplained symbols."[49]

The search for other ways to avoid the toughness of this real world, for symbolists, was only possible through the medium of poetry. From the French Symbolist point of view, religion, mysticism or other forms of transcendental idealism cannot help anyone to perceive the essence beyond this world. Although the French Symbolists aim to go beyond the physical reality, they are obliged to start from it. The passage from the real world to the ideal one in the Symbolist poetry is expressed in a very obscure way different from Romantic poets. This results from a French

[49] Chadwick, 2-3.

Symbolist principle that suggestion as their speaking tactic needs a deliberate blurring of thoughts and sensations so that readers must continually keep an eye on the ideal meanings of symbols. The French Symbolist poets to some extent reached their goal by a transformation of the world in which we live. A single example which Chadwick gives in his book shows how this Symbolist tenet works in a real poem: "if the poet wants to present to the reader the ideal flower, he must not draw too clearly the specific image of a rose or a lily, but must confuse the two images so the essence of them both may be perceived."[50] The essence here is called "pure essence or pure notion(la notion pure)," by Mallarmé, and the creation of it is thought of as the purpose of poetry. This pure essence is completely devoid of any influence of concrete physical reality.

Many critics have recognized the relationship between the works of Wallace Stevens and French symbolist poetry. He is often considered the most complex of all American poets in his Symbolist affinities. Stevens's exposure to French symbolist poetry originates from his Harvard days. He seems to have

[50] Ibid., 4.

recognized the new tendencies in French poetry during that time. Judging from Stevens' poems published under a pseudonym during his college years, the earliest French Symbolist poet known to Stevens was Verlaine. Stevens expressed his admiration for him in a letter: "I like Verlaine—water colors, little statues, small thoughts." (LSW, 110) In this respect, there seems no doubt about the symbolist influence in Stevens' art. However, Stevens himself often doubted the claims of his dependence on the French symbolists. In his letter to Hi Simons, which is regarded as a reply to Simon's study, "Wallace Stevens and Mallarmé,"[51] Stevens suggested that his debt to French Symbolist poets was in the dimension of the unconscious.

> I have read something, more or less, of all of the French poets mentioned by you, but, if I have picked up anything from them, it has been unconsciously. It is always possible that, where a man's attitude coincides with your

[51] This essay by Hi Simons is acknowledged as a classical essay dealing with the question of French Influence on Wallace Stevens. Simons counts some likenesses between Mallarmé and Stevens. According to him, the most remarkable factor is their common use of color symbolism. The second likeness is their negative conceptions. Mallarme uses a paradox in which a negative is used to mean a positive. Stevens uses the concept of "nothingness" in a very similar way to Mallarmé's use of negative. Moreover, Simons tries to explain the evident Symbolist influences on Stevens. See, Hi Simons, "Wallace Stevens and Mallarmé" *Modern Philology 43* (1946 May): 235-259.

> attitude, or accentuates your own attitude, you get a great deal from him without any effort. This, in fact, is one of the things that makes literature possible. (LWS, 391)

Stevens himself seems to insist that his own relationship to the French symbolists is an affinity rather than an influence. However, "affinity facilitates influence."[52] In addition, Stevens seems to recognize that he may have taken up many of the elements of symbolist poetry. Therefore, there is no question that symbolist elements can be found throughout his works.

Stevens begins one of his characteristic poems "Man Carrying Thing" by saying that "The poem must resist the intelligence/ Almost successfully." (CP, 350) This poem is an exercise in theorizing about poetry. The central argument is that readers cannot but feel their lack of immediate comprehension until these doubtful elements accumulate. This poem is usually regarded as a dispute against interpretation, or against the endeavour to paraphrase poems. It seems to suggest that if the state of mind is to be favourable to the reading of texts, the reader should be content to remain in an indeterminate condition. In other

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[52] Haskell M. Block, "The Impact of French Symbolism on Modern American Poetry" *The Shaken Realist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1970) 201.

words, the reader has to be willing to prolong the moment of contemplation, and to resist the intellectual urge to interpret. Stevens in this poem apparently insists that too obvious and too easily comprehended notions are antithetical to the reader's pleasure. Legget's comment clearly shows us that the argument above is exactly Stevens's intention in this poem:

> The aim of the poem is ostensibly to illustrate its opening pronouncement through a two-part analogy: first, a concept of the poetic work figured as the unidentifiable man of the title, who on a winter evening carries something that also escapes identity, then the uncertain details of a poem seen as the first scattered flakes of snow that trouble our thoughts through a winter night.[53]

The thing that this man carries resists "The most necessitous sense." Therefore, readers should "Accept them, then,/ As secondary" parts of the obvious whole, like "uncertain particles/ Of the certain solid." (CP, 351) Readers should avoid immediately trying to comprehend a poem. They have to bear "thoughts all night, until/ The bright obvious stands motionless in cold." (CP,

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[53] B. J. Legget, *Wallace Stevens and Poetic Theory: Conceiving the Supreme Fiction* (Chapel Hill: UNC P, 1987) 110-11.

351)

Stevens first declared that he was opposed to close interpretation and paraphrase of poetry in 1928. This objection is developed in an amplified manner in a letter to Ronald Lane Latimer several years later: "I have the greatest dislike for explanations. As soon as people are perfectly sure of a poem they are just as likely as not to have no further interest in it; it loses whatever potency it had." (LWS, 294) His response to a questionnaire from Hi Simons early in 1940 was not different from this letter:

> A long time ago I made up my mind not to explain things, because most people have so little appreciation of poetry that once a poem has been explained it has been destroyed: that is to say, they are no longer able to seize the poem. (LWS, 346)

In another letter to Simons, Stevens talks of the reason he refuses to explain his poems. It is because "he noted that his explanations seemed 'a good deal more fixed' than he would have liked."[54] Furthermore, Stevens seems to have dwelled on the possibility of suitable interpretation. According to Stevens, "a poem is like a

[54] Ibid., 112.

man walking on the bank of a river, whose shadow is reflected in the water." (LWS, 354) If a poet explains his poem, he is "quite likely to do it either in terms of the man or in terms of the shadow." (LWS, 354) However, Stevens insists that a poem should be explained not in terms of one, but in terms of both. A "thing and its double always go together."(LSW,354) Stevens regards a poem as a man and his reflection. The appearance of the man is clear, but his reflection is hazy. When we apply this dichotomy to a poem, the figure of the man can be thought of as what is on the page. Naturally, the shadow of the man indicates what is obscure in a poem. If the man is the printed poem, his reflection can be said to represent the meaning or content of the poem. In the latter part of this poem, however, both man and things are cast into a "sort of twilight":

> A brune figure in winter evening resists
> Identity. The thing he carries resists
>
> The most necessitous sense. Accept them, then,
> As secondary (parts not quite perceived
>
> Of the obvious whole, uncertain particles
> Of the certain solid, the primary free from doubt, . . .
>
> (CP, 350-1)

The figure of the man is perceptible, but the secondary parts are not easily perceived by the spectator at first sight. The "spectator, from whose view the poem is given, is presented with an image resistant to the analysis that would produce identity and thereby destroy the contemplative moment." [55] Paraphrasing or interpretation is not a desirable thing for Stevens, since this mental activity comes from human effort to recognize things in a comprehensive way. However, Stevens who evidently has an inclination to the French Symbolists' suggestive mode of writing does not want his readers to be interrupted in their reflection. Once understood, a poem does not attract readers. Thus, he advises us to accept things we cannot understand just "As secondary," and "uncertain particles/ Of the certain solid, the primary." Stevens really hoped to extend our pleasure—perhaps we might hardly call it a pleasure—in reading poems.

In a poem like "The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage," the reader cannot easily specify the referent of the central image. For Stevens, however, that is not a problem, for as he says "there is a point at which intelligence destroys poetry." (LSW, 305) He

[55] Ibid., 116.

had evidently "learned from the French Symbolists to cultivate mystery and suggestiveness as dimensions of meaning." [56] According to Mallarmé, to "*name* an object is largely to destroy poetic enjoyment, which comes from gradual divination. The ideal is to *suggest* the object."[57] Following Mallarmé's prescription, this poem makes the reader realize that the nude is the spring. Spring starts her voyage, and it means that early spring is coming following the end of winter. In early spring, the world is barren. Thus, she wears little, close to nudity. In a barren world, her nudity surely gives people the feeling of paltriness, not richness. Therefore, she cannot but be discontent:

> She too is discontent
> And would have purple stuff upon her arms,
> Tired of the salty harbors,
> Eager for the brine and bellowing
> Of the high interiors of the sea. (CP, 5)

Because she is too paltry, she wants the "purple stuff" of summer "upon her arms." She is also "Tired of the salty harbors" of winter.

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[56] Milton J. Bates, *Wallace Stevens: A Mythology of Self* (Berkeley & L.A: U of California P, 1985) 138.

[57] "The Evolution of Literature," *Mallarme: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, trans. Bradford Cook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1956), 21.

Thus, she dreams of the richness of summer. Her wish that she can do everything to the extent that "she touches the clouds" shows it very well. However, that kind of wish is a meagre thing compared to the richness of summer.

> Yet this is meagre play
> In the scurry[58] and water-shine,
> As her heels foam—
> Not as when the goldener nude
> Of a later day (CP, 6)

Spring should give place to summer when she must go. Thus, at the moment when "the goldener nude" (CP, 6) of summer appears, she should exit. Picking out "an object and from it eliciting a state of soul by means of a series of 'decodings,' one finds an almost schematic example"[59] in Stevens's poems.

By contrast, in his poem, "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," readers can find out the subject immediately. The five sections comprising this poem describe atmospheric variations in the ocean, and delineate the changes of sky reflected in the surface of the

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[58] This word is written as "scrurry" in *Collected Poems*. Yet this is a misprint. Sukenick also says it is a misprint. "Scurry" is right. For an explanation of this poem, see Sukenick, 37.
[59] Bates, 139.

ocean. Here the mood of the ocean is just suggested, but readers feel different states of mind in each of these five sections. While the first section shows us a picture of innocence and serenity, the last section evokes the complicated state of mind in a noisy situation.

> Who, then, evolved the sea-blooms from the clouds
> Diffusing balm in that Pacific calm?
> *C'etait mon enfant, mon bijou, mon âme.* (CP, 99)
>
> . . .
>
> Of ocean, perfected in indolence.
> What pistache one, ingenious and droll
> Beheld the sovereign clouds as jugglery
>
> And the sea as turquoise-turbaned Sambo, neat
> At tossing saucers—cloudy-conjuring sea?
> *C'était mon esprit bâtard, l'ignominie*. (CP, 102)

The perceiving self in Section I is not easily and clearly identified. However, on a second reading we can see that an unspoiled jewel acts as a perceiving self. The self perceiving the circus in the above quote of Section V is of dubious pedigree, a *bâtard* rather than an *enfant*. Stevens did not want to further intellectualisation

because he thought it is unfavourable to pure poetry. He seemed to think that poems are made of words, not ideas, and he tried to select the words that lead the reader to feel the gap "between the ideas and things denoted literally."[60] "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" initiates a reader far from precise sense by means of its imagery. Few readers dare define what Stevens intended with the term "Chinese chocolate" (CP, 102) in Section V. The words are "used in a purely expressive sense and are meant to connote a big Chinese with a very small cup of chocolate: something incongruous." (LWS, 398) This extremely compressed image renders this phrase purely suggestive, something it shares with "porcelain chocolate," (CP, 100) "obese machine," (CP, 102) and other images in the poem. The repetitious rhythm of this poem suppresses the usual demand for orderly development on the readers' side. Furthermore, Stevens's colloquial French baffles and redirects the readers' ordinary quest for meaning. Therefore, the meaning is to be found not in translation, but in the felt mood resulting from the various elements of this poem, such as the sound of the words, the rhythm and so on.

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[60] Ibid., 141.

"Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Blackbird"[61] is not "a collection of epigrams or ideas, but of sensations" (LWS, 251) connected to blackbirds. Critics usually seem to regard the poem's thirteen stanzas as perspectives, "ways of looking at" the blackbird, but these stanzas seem to be arranged calculatedly. Each stanza seems to have its own state of mind. Stevens in his letter to Henry Church said the point of the twelfth stanza is "the compulsion frequently back of the things that we do" (LWS, 340), and the intention of the thirteenth stanza is "to convey despair."(LWS, 340) This last stanza brings forth another complex state of mind in which "fear mingles with fascination, delight with foreboding."[62]

XIII
It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs. (CP, 95)

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[61] Although I fully discussed this poem in the introduction in relation to American intellectual tradition, I deal with the poem here again. Sukenick's comment made me look at this poem in another direction. Surely, every poem has a room for various interpretation.
[62] Bates, 142.

Ronald Suckenick analysed this poem connecting it to the French Symbolist poets:

> [This] poem may be considered in the light of the tradition that descends from Baudelaire and particularly Mallarmé, in which there is a conscious division between the creative and communicative functions of language, and in which, therefore, the creative value of words depends on their suggestiveness, rather than on their strict sense, so that lack of specificity and the presence of obscurity become virtues.[63]

In this tradition, a poem becomes increasingly independent of a definite subject. This obscurity of a poem appeals to the imagination, not to the reasoning capacity. French Symbolists believed that if the language of a poem becomes less specific, it will have more suggestive power. This is the reason a reader should not try to determine the exact meaning of a poem, but know how to read it. A poem "must be explained not by being reduced to prose statement, but by being described as a poem."[64]

In reading "Domination of Black," we can use a simple analogy with "Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Blackbird." The peacocks are to the blackbird what hemlocks are to the cedar

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[63] Suckenick, 76-77.
[64] Ibid., 77.

trees. The speaker in this poem connects the peacocks' tails with pleasant things, such as fallen coloured leaves turning in the wind. The colour of the hemlocks is opposed to these pleasant things. The hemlocks' colour is itself that of night. The colour of blackness usually is not a problem, but the problem lies in the colour of blackness amplified to the dimensions of the universe. The leaves replace planets, and naturally one can easily think these hemlocks have their counterparts.

> I saw how the planets gathered
> Like the leaves themselves
> Turning in the wind. (CP, 9)

Hemlock's blackness could grow and engulf the whole universe to turn it into blackness. Naturally anyone can come to feel this kind of blackness is frightening. In the night, this blackness comes "striding like the colour of the heavy hemlocks." (CP, 9) Confronting such a threat, the speaker "felt afraid," (CP, 9) and identified himself with the peacocks. This poem is staged in the dimension of the universe, and it is characteristic of French Symbolist poetry. The universe consists of a complicated series of correspondences because everything is related to everything else.

In his poem, "Correspondances(Correspondences),"[65] Baudelaire said that a human being goes through a world full of things corresponding to other things, and he called that world "a forest of symbols." As Bates says: "Though Stevens' peacock is a bird of a different feather from the swan favoured by Baudelaire and Mallarmé, it affords the same touch of exoticism. Like the Symbolists, Stevens 'decoded' his symbol so as to divert the reader from his quest for discursive meaning."[66] Stevens himself commented on this poem in a letter:

> I am sorry that a poem of this sort has to contain any ideas at all, because its sole purpose is to fill the mind with the images & sounds that it contains. A mind that examines such a poem for its prose contents gets absolutely nothing from it. (LWS, 251)

According to French symbolist poets, aesthetic works are not made to be analysed but to be felt. Stevens's point of view related to the readers' perception of poetry that is revealed in this

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[65] Baudelaire's term, "correspondances" explains this point very well. Correspondances (Correspondences) are hidden echoes, recurrence, resemblance, linkages. Baudelaire's initial vision looked through to a mystical level of correspondences in reality itself. Later French Symbolist poets extended the vision to hidden echoes and linkage in literature and their own writings.

[66] Bates, 143.

quotation seems at least superficially to be the same as that of the French Symbolist. These French Symbolist writers express their ideas, and feelings by suggestion, as mentioned before. The evocative power of words makes readers feel the images in a poem and the feelings or sensations of the poet. The readers of the French Symbolist poetry are not forced to analyse and understand it immediately. This can be identified with "the suggestiveness" which was seen to be one of three characteristics of the French Symbolist poetry.

The French Symbolist poets cherished the musical elements of poetry because music possesses the quality of suggestiveness that they were looking for. One of the tenets of French Symbolism was the development of the musical suggestiveness of words through the equation between poetry and music. The French Symbolist poets eliminated everything from poetry except the musical elements, valued for their suggestiveness. "Words are at best but clumsy interpreters"[67]of their sensations and feelings, but music can reverberate an

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[67] Kathleen T. Butler, *A History of French Literature: Vol. II, The Nineteenth Century and After* (N.Y: Russel & Russel, 1966) 311.

emotion of the poet into the mind of the listener. “Music offered them the perfect analogy for the fleetingness and elusiveness of their poetic experiences.”[68] This tendency is due to the influence of Wagner, the musician. To their ears Wagner’s music had something new and conveyed a kind of excitement that they hoped to communicate through poetry. Despite the difficulties in achieving their goal, they regarded their wish as a great promise and a glorious task. Symbolists believed that they could do what Wagner had done, and that this should be done with words in poetry. This way of speech was “A kind of inarticulate unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the Infinite, and lets us for moments gaze into that!”[69]

Wagner’s notion that music is the supreme form of all the arts also caused symbolist poets to seek their poetical effect less in the meaning of words than in sound and rhythm. Their moods and feelings are expressed through the music of words and rhythm. For the French Symbolist poets, rhythm is an indispensable factor in suggesting their experiences and emotions. In versification,

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[68] Ibid., 54

[69] Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* , Reset & Reprinted. (London: Oxford UP, 1950) 109

therefore, symbolist poets often refused rigid conventions in favour of the fluidity of music. The type of poetry they invented, faithfully following their own thoughts, was called *vers libre* (free verse). Butler's explanation of the "free verse" show clearly how this type of poetry differs from the poetry of previous periods in prosody:

> With the same musical end in view, many symbolists abandoned the regular cadence of the twelve-syllable line and, making the strophe the element of their song, built it up of lines of unequal rhythm, the greater or lesser length of line being determined by the natural pauses for breath and by the swift or slow phrasing demanded by the emotion expressed. These two innovations in prosody, the substitution of assonance for rime and the rhythmic variety of the strophe, taken singly or together, constitute what is generally known as *vers libre*. The way had already been prepared by the romantics, who, with their free use of *enjambment*, had made the rhythmical sentence either longer or shorter than the line, and still more by Verlaine, who, by his free rime system and his unequal rhythms, carried out the suggestion offered.[70]

The term "free verse" has been defined variously as unmetered,

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[70] Butler, 313.

metered but unscannable, non-conventionally metered, partially or loosely metered, complexly metrical verse, and so forth. However, the most notable trait to define free verse is that in free verse, the cadence of common speech is generally substituted for regular metrics. Therefore, we can generally define free verse as rhymed or unrhymed verse made free of conventional and traditional limitations and restrictions in regard to metrical structure. Verlaine's poem, "*Art Poétique* (The Art of Poetry)" can be a good example to illustrate this:.

> De la musique avant toute chose
> Et pour cela préfère l'impair
> Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air
> Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou pose."
>
> Music must be paramount:
> Choose for this an Uneven Rhythm,
> More indefinite, more soluble in air,
> With nothing to press or bind. (AAFP, 99)

Many elements in Stevens's poetry recall French Symbolism, such as his vague evocations of landscape, his colour symbolism, and a movement toward a poetry of ambiguity and abstraction that was to become characteristic of his works. Yet the

most significant is his musicality. Wallace Stevens, like French Symbolist poets, makes use of alliteration, assonance, free rhymed lines, and irregular stanza forms that seem very like characteristics of *vers libre* (free verse), and his fine and precise rhythms in his lines makes us appreciate his talent as a craftsman. Richard Murphy says that Stevens "is the most musical poet of this century. Not only does he write poetry about music, but style is infected with cadences that attain the purity of music as nearly as we can conceive it in words."[71] In Murphy's opinion, Stevens "is not by any means in the native or the Whitman tradition of American poetry, which would make it naturally difficult for us to appreciate his outlook, or be sufficiently interested in his observation."[72] Murphy even says that "he is a symbolist."[73] Of course, his argument, especially on the musical aspect of Stevens's poetry, is worth notice, but his opinion about the American trait in Stevens might come from his ignorance of the American Adamic tradition or the Pragmatic American intellectual background. Moreover, as stated in the introduction, Stevens is

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[71] Richard Murphy, "The Music of Poetry," in *Wallace Stevens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Charles Doyle (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) 365.
[72] Ibid., 366.
[73] Ibid.,

not really a symbolist, despite the fact that he displays so many features of French Symbolism. As long as we cannot prove the similarity in the dimension of epistemology, we cannot categorize any poet into any literary trend. It may be a redundant repetition but Stevens chose only the methodology of the French Symbolist poets, not their epistemology.

Percy Hutchinson categorizes Stevens' poetry as what has been termed "pure poetry," "which should depend for its effectiveness on its rhythms and the tonal values of the words employed with as complete a dissociation from ideational content as may be humanly possible."[74] This definition of "pure poetry" suggests an analogy between music and poetry, and this clearly shows that the notion of "pure poetry" contains the influence of French Symbolism. Rhythms, vowels and consonants constitute the musical notes in Stevens' poetry. Stevens seems to regard poetry as music, like the French Symbolist poets. For him, poetry is not the expression of a particular people. Now we should take a brief glance at the way that a free verse style appears in his poetry.

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[74] Percy Hutchison, "Pure Poetry and Mr. Wallace Stevens," in *Wallace Stevens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Charles Doyle (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 88-89.

Stevens' poem "Peter Quince at the Clavier," can be regarded as a good example of musicality, with a beautiful melody rising from its words. This poem establishes an analogy between love and music by comparing the heart to an instrument.

Thinking of your blue-shadowed silk,
Is music. It is like the strain
Waked in the elders by Susanna.

Of a green evening, clear and warm,
She bathed in her still garden, while
The red-eyed elders watching, felt

The basses of their beings throb
In witching chords, and their thin blood
Pulse pizzicati of Hosanna. (CP, 90)

Colours in this poem are used, not to present things, but to convey feelings and sentiments. The atmosphere that these colours and sounds evoke hazily suggests the ephemeral traits of physical beauty.

Beauty is momentary in the mind—
The fitful tracing of a portal;

But in the flesh it is immortal. (CP, 91)

Appearance is all we can perceive, and the ideal behind appearance is not conveyed through words. We can perceive the ulterior meaning of permanent beauty only in the revelation of its actual presence on earth (*flesh*). Finally, permanent beauty depends on the earthly perishable things. Therefore, the sounds and music in the poem become the essence of a beauty that cannot be expressed in logical, linguistic order. Only the tune that shortly lingers in the mind and memory suggests ideal beauty, and this surely proves Stevens's affinity with the French Symbolist poets.

In 1921, two years before his *Harmonium* was published, Stevens wrote a letter to Ferdinand Reyher to explain his prosodic goal. In this letter, Stevens is overtly advocating free verse: "The fact is that notwithstanding the large amount of poetry that is written over here at the moment there is practically no aesthetic theory back of it. Why do you scorn free verse? Isn't it the only kind of verse now being written which has any aesthetic impulse back of it? Of course, there are miles and miles of it that do not come off. People don't understand the emotional purpose of rhythm any more than they understand the emotional purpose of

measure. I am not exclusively for free verse. But I am for it."[75] Stevens means, by mentioning free verse here, that he feels he should abandon regular verse, and he found a kind of new freedom from metronome-like rhythms. Stevens regards "the emotional purpose of rhythm" as more important than regularly putting stresses into the lines. The lines of "The Man with the Blue Guitar" might be regarded as evidence of Stevens's thought that meter wholly depends not on rules, but on the poet's ingenuity.

> Tom-tom, c'est moi. The blue guitar
> And I are one. The orchestra
>
> Fills the high hall with shuffling men
> High as the hall. The whirling noise
>
> Of a multitude dwindles, all said,
> To his breath that lies awake at night. (CP, 171)

Here we can sense that the poet's interior consciousness makes "a rhythm freed of set stresses and syllables per line."[76] The

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[75] Wallace Stevens, "Letters to Ferdinand Reyher." Ed. Holly Stevens. *The Hudson Review* 44 (1991) 390.
[76] George S. Lensing, " Stevens's Prosody" *Teaching Wallace Stevens: Practical Essays*. eds. John N. Serio & B. J. Leggett (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1994) 109.

blank verse of “Credences of Summer” indicates that his prosody is evolving in this direction.

> Now in midsummer come and all fools slaughtered
> And spring’s infuriations over and a long way
> To the first autumnal inhalations, young broods
> Are in the grass, the roses are heavy with a weight
> Of fragrance and the mind lays by its trouble. (CP, 372)

Furthermore, this poem is useful for explaining Stevens’s diversification of meters. The first line quoted above has five stresses with variation of meters, but the sequence of the last two lines heads for a pentameter. From this, we can infer that Stevens might have no need to count stresses. He seems to have thought that the rhythm of poetry should be natural. Stevens wrote many poems while concentrating during his walk from the office to his house on Westerly Terrace, and his “own movement gets into the movement of the poem.” (LWS, 844) This point might come from the Symbolist characteristic liking for free verse. Like French Symbolist poets, for Stevens rhythm offers indispensable elements in suggesting his experience and emotions.

Stevens’s poem, “Page from a Tale” contains a characteristic feature that can be discussed with relation to sound. The foreign-

language looking words in “Page from a Tale” are heard strangely by Hans and many readers. Hans hears the two different sounds, and he notices “the difference/ between loud water and loud wind, between that/ Which has no accurate syllables and that/ Which cries *so blau* and cries again *so lind*/ *Und so lau*” (CP, 421). “In a context in which water and wind are being described, *blau* suggests *blue* and *blow*. It also incorporates part of the word laud, which has been used twice earlier in the stanza. *Lind* looks and sounds like a conflation of *loud* and *wind*, and *lau* sounds like *loud* without its final *d*, or *blau*, without its initial *b*, or both.”[77] This poem can be discussed in the presence of sound-patterns such as the alliteration between water and wind, blau and blazed, or the assonance among loud, blau, and lau or the rhyme between lind and wind. Hans here is “a scholarly dwelling,” “the reclusive imagination contemplating the dawn of a new reality.”[78] At the end of winter, he is waiting for the breaking up of the ice that represents the clearing away of the outworn reality. This action happens at the moment of change, and this moment of change is

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[77] Marie Borroff, “Sound Symbolism as Drama in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens” *E.L.H* Vol. 48 (1981): 914.
[78] Ibid.,

the emergence of a new conception. In this case, a poet should find a new series of words to embody his new conception. In fact, he needs a new language in which the poem can be spoken. John Hollander's explanation leads us to think what new language is:

> His[Stevens's] poetry contains an encyclopedia of one kind of echo: that play of sound sounding like sense in verse, that game of rhythm and assonance and alliteration used as implicit copulas of predication, that has occupied English verse since Shakespeare. Frequently, these games will play upon logical confusion of use and mention, a marriage of meta-object and meta-language.[79]

The "logical confusion" rising from Stevens's word play shows his propensity to evade giving us any single "correct" meaning or interpretation. We may judge that for Stevens a new language is not needed for interpretation but for suggestiveness. The sound-patterns used in "Page from a Tale" could be said to be the characteristic of this new language for his purpose. This reminds us of the French Symbolists poets' innovations in prosody to constitute what we call '*vers libre*.'

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[79] John Hollander, "The Sound of Music of Music and Sound" *Wallace Stevens: Modern Critical Views*. Ed. & intro. Harold Bloom. (N.Y: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985), 146.

"Variations on a Summer Day" is considered as Stevens's attempt to paraphrase musical composition.

I
Say of the gulls that they are flying
In light blue air over dark blue sea.

II
A music more than a breath, but less
Than the wind, sub-music like sub-speech,
A repetition of unconscious things,
Letters of rock and water, words
Of the visible elements and of ours.

III
The rocks of the cliffs are the heads of dogs
That turn into fishes and leap
Into the sea. (CP, 232)

People perceive the world in their own fashion, like someone who "looks at the sea/ As one improvises, on the piano." (CP, 233) Therefore, their act "produces/ More nights, more days, more clouds, more worlds." (CP, 233) Not everything in the world is describable, and the "words for the dazzle/ Of mica, the dithering of grass,/ The Arachne integument of dead trees,/ Are the eye grown larger, more intense." (CP, 234) However, the perceived world should not always be considered an illusion. If a man

recognizes that the world perceived by his vision is not a reality as it is, he can notice the need to avoid his colouring of the outside world. Then, he can observe the world as the “profoundest shadows rolling.” (CP, 235) The world newly created out of his new vision also undergoes a kind of colouring, but it is a developed one. In this case, the man-boat is “neater than Naples” (CP, 235), and it comes from new appearance of the man-boat in his new perspective. We “could almost see the brass on her gleaming (CP, 235).” “And her mainmast tapered to nothing,/Without teetering a millimeter’s measure./ The beads on her rails seemed to grasp at transparence.” (CP, 236) This kind of musical organization allows Stevens to create an artistic experience in which the readers associate with a musical figure that enables them to overcome the linguistic barriers that separate form and content. The point is interesting because one characteristic of the French Symbolist poetry is the constructive imagination. For this constructive imagination, the opacity of language is a good way to get beyond the separation of form and content. Now I will deal with this trait starting by discussing its origin.

Poetry contains meaning in itself, and readers can find that meaning, which comes from the mutual penetration of mind and nature, through the language in which it is expressed. The meaning hidden behind the text of the poem acts as content, and the language that builds that poem functions as form. Form is worked out by the elaboration of language, and content is supplied by our ideas, associations and thoughts. However, in case of some kind of poetry, meaning in the poem can only be found in elements outside the poem, such as the objective world, or the poet's emotions. In such kind of poetry, poetic meaning cannot be found within a poem itself. In this case, the separation of form and content is inevitable. Moreover, here the contextual reading that focuses on getting the meaning from the context by exploring the words and their mutual operations in the text is impossible. A way of reading that is accepted as the most reasonable and analytic one is impossible in such kind of poetry. This is the representative characteristic of the language used in Romantic poetry. To sum up, the language in Romantic poetry, to use Krieger's expression, functions as "window."[80]

[80] Murray Krieger says that there are categorically three ways of language functioning in poetry. Among these three ways, according to Lentricchia, the first

Lentricchia points out that the separation of meaning and form in Romantic poetry might be the unavoidable result of Coleridge's distinction[81] between two kinds of imagination:

> Coleridge's conception of the secondary imagination implies that it is the source of form—the shaping of language—which imprinted on vision becomes for the reader a window to vision whose source is the primary

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one is closer to that of romantic poetry language than the others. Although Krieger wrote this book with other intention, we can find out three items in his categorization correspond to the attitude to look at the poetic language in some literary schools. For example, the first one have much in common with the Romantic perspective of the poetic language, and the second one seems to have some relevance to the Symbolist perspective of the poetic language. About the distinction, he says ". . , let me so oversimply questions about the language of poems as to say categorically that there are essentially three ways in which we can view this language as functioning: (1) as window to the world, (2) as an enclosed set of endlessly faceted mirrors ever multiplying its maze of reflections but finally shut up within itself, and (3) as this same set of mirrors that miraculously becomes window again after all." See, Murray Krieger, *A Window to Criticism: Shakespeare's Sonnets and Modern Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1964) 3.

[81] Coleridge offered his definitions of imagination in *Biographia Literaria*. According to Coleridge, there are two kinds of imagination, one is for our perception and the other for the creation of works of art. Coleridge called the former 'Primary Imagination," and the latter "Secondary Imagination." The distinction between primary and secondary imaginations was made by Coleridge, and he explains "The Primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation." See, S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions, I*, eds. James Engell & W. Jackson Bate (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) 304.

imagination.[82]

Lentricchia also suggests that the philosophical source of the need to take context seriously might be found "in Kant's notion of the autonomy or singularity of the aesthetic realm, which Coleridge did not accept,"[83] and questions Coleridge's use of the term "organic," saying that he doubts "that Coleridge would sympathize with the notion that a poem is organic in the literal sense. For him, poems must "mean," not "be"."[84]

When a Romantic poet refers to a flower, the essence of this flower has first to be grasped by the poet, and to be united with the poet's self. The romantic poets describe this experience in a clear way of speech. On the other hand, when a French Symbolist poet faces a flower, the description of the experience in a clear way is not his concern. Only the newly originated meaning evoked and gradually discovered through symbols within the context of the poem is important. He has no interest in a clear way of expression from the start, but is only interested in a play

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[82] Frank Lentricchia, *The Gaiety of Language: An Essay on the Radical Poetics of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens* (Berkeley & L.A: U of California P, 1968) 17.
[83] Ibid., 15.
[84] Ibid., 17-18.

bringing out hidden meanings from the symbols within the context of poem. In Romantic poetry the window-aspect of the language attracts our attention. We can call such a characteristic in the language of Romantic poetry the quality of transparency. For the Symbolists, the language of poetry functions as a mirror. Of course, this mirror also reflects the external world like a window, but it exists as its own enclosed self. In this mirror, the reflection of the external world multiplies itself into various transformed shapes. The reflections of things in the mirror can be seen as taller, smaller or bigger than they are. A mirror is shut up within itself, because the back of it is painted. It can only reflect, and cannot display anything. In this case, poets' attention is concentrated on the reflection in the mirror, not on the actual form of the reflection. The form and the meaning of poetry, therefore, cannot be divided for the French Symbolist poets. The language of the French Symbolist poetry does not display something, in other words, the meaning of the poem should be found not in the outside of the poem, but within it. The French Symbolist poets can be said to have sought the perfect unison of form and content in the context of language. We can call this mirror-aspect in the

language of Symbolistic poetry a quality of opacity as opposed to the quality of transparency in the language of Romantic poetry.

It is good that the meaning of a poem exists not outside of the poem, but in its inside, its medium. Its medium is, of course, the verbal medium, language. In this case, a union of form and content is required because even the slightest change of form can lead to a big change in the meaning of a poem. The role of language as a window, therefore, is necessarily rejected in the French Symbolist poetic theory. Language is here seen acting as a mirror, the back of which has been painted. The poem is in language that carries a quality of opacity. For the French Symbolists, the poetic object is the linguistic text itself. It is "a closed system of linguistic relations and a verbal universe."[85] The linguistic text, the poem, is a constructed reality; it does not contain its meaning mechanically depending on the connections of the words, but produces its meaning organically based on the interactions of its linguistic relations. The imagination that turns a linguistic text into an organic being is called, to borrow Lentricchia's term, "the constructive imagination."[86] This kind of

[85] Ibid., 30.
[86] About the reason of his use of the term, "the constructive imagination,"

literary imagination is bound to the medium, and makes poetic meaning, working only in the medium. Attention should be paid to the word "makes" in this sentence. The meaning is not found in the outer element of the poem, but is made within it. The distinction between form and content has disappeared, and the poem's "form—language—has become the systematic exploitation of all the inherent properties of language."[87] If the meaning of the poem is produced by the interactions of its inner linguistic elements within the workings of the imagination, the poem will become an organic entity. The view of a poem as a living organism might thus be regarded as an important motivation of the French Symbolist poets.

The French Symbolist poets, Mallarmé and Valéry can be thought of as the poets who established the Symbolist poetic theory and proposed to see the poem as an organic entity in a context of language without any extraneous reference. Mallarmé wanted to use every word as if it had just been newly invented.

Lentricchia says "I have chosen the word "constructive" to describe such a theory of imagination because the poem is literally a created entity, an utterly new thing in nature, itself organic." See, Lentricchia, 28.

[87] Joseph Chiari, *Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarme: A Growth of a Myth*, (N.Y: Gordian Press, 1970) 118.

Mallarmé called this kind of language "immaculate."[88] Immaculate language is language purified of every element of outside reference. The words in a poem seen as an organism are freed from any referential quality to the external world, and are regarded as entirely new. Valéry also emphasized the importance of the linguistic medium in poetry. His praise of one of Mallarmé's sonnets clearly indicates his admiration for the poetry of non-transparency.

> The brilliance of these crystalline constructions, so pure, and so perfectly finished in every part, fascinated me. They have not the transparency of glass, no doubt; but in that they somehow break habits of mind on their facets and on their concentrated structure, what is called their obscurity is only, in reality, their *refraction*.[89]

For this, the pragmatic as well as abstract functions of language must be absolutely denied. These functions remind us of the general two-fold use of language. Valéry refuses to resort to these functions of language, and assumes another function of

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[88] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, trans.& ed. Bradford Cook (Baltimore: Baltimore P, 1956) 15 op. ricit. Lentricchia, 36.

[89] Paul Valéry, *Selected Writings*, trans. Malcolm Cowley et. al (N.Y: A New Directions Book, 1950) 215.

language. The language of this function is called "pure"[90] language, and it purports to create a world severed from the external, practical reality. The poem composed of pure language contains its own meaning and acts as an independent reality. Valéry embodies his thought in his poem, "Les Pas (The Step)":

Tes pas, enfants de mon silence,
Saintement, lentement placés,
Vers le lit de ma vigilence
Procèdent muets et glacés.

Personne pure, ombre divine,
Qu'ils sons doux, tes pas retenus!
Dieux! . . . tous les dons que je devine
Viennent à moi sur ces pieds nus !

Si, de tes lèvres avancées
Tu prépares pour l'apaiser,
À l'habitant de mes pensées
La nourriture d'un baiser,

Ne hâte pas cet acte tendre,
Douceur d'être et de n'être pas,
Car j'ai vécu de vous attendre,
Et mon coeur n'était que vos pas.

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[90] Valéry, *The Art of Poetry*, trans. Denise Folliot, intro. T. S. Eliot (N.Y: Vintage Books, 1961) 173.

Your steps, children of my silence,
Sacredly and slowly placed,
Go dumb and icy
Towards my watchfulness's bed.
Pure being, divine shadow,
How sweet they are, your steps withheld!
Gods! . . . All the gifts I guess at
Come to me on those bare feet!

If, with your proffered lips,
In order to calm him, you prepare
The nourishment of a kiss
For the inhabitant of my thoughts,

Do not hasten that tender action,
The sweetness to be and not to be,
For I have lived to wait for you,
And my heart was but your steps. (PBFV, 51)

For a reader who sees this poem for the first time, it might seem to be a story about the poet who awaits his mistress. If the reader, however, reads this poem in such a way, he will be bewildered by many oblique phrases. Some lines such as "l'habitant de mes pens**é**es (the resident of my thought)", "enfants de mon silence (the children of my silence)" and "le lit de ma vigilance (the bed of my vigilance)" in this poem are perplexing enough to make readers wonder. Why is the speaker's bed "the bed of his

vigilance"? Who is "the resident of his thought", and why are his beloved's steps "the children of his silence"? Of course, Valéry used these phrases for a good reason. The steps here belong not to a mistress, but to poetry. Waiting for poetry is, for Valéry, like waiting for a mistress. "The steps are 'enfants de mon silence' because the new sense of creative power has been matured in a time of inactivity; 'le lit de ma vigilance' is the waiting expectant self who will receive the visitant; 'l'habitant de mes pensées' is the creative self which dwells among habitual thoughts."[91] The symbols in this poem bear a kind of persuasiveness in that they seem consistent and harmonious, and the phrases are situated in their rightful places. "The poem gives the mood of concentrated, confident, joyful expectation before creative activity begins."[92]

In this poem, Valéry is opposing the traditional notion of poetic inspiration. According to the traditional view, a poet is just a channel through which the poetic Muse speaks. Valéry does not agree with this view, and thinks that poetic process works in another way. Superficially no more than an account of a poet waiting for his mistress, this poem is to be read as describing the

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[91] C. M. Bowra, *The Heritage of Symbolism* (London: Macmillan, 1973) 31.
[92] Ibid.,

creative process of poetry writing. The language in this poem does not act as a window, but as a mirror. This poem does not reflect, and never even talks of a story. Out of this superficial story, a deep meaning is begotten. This poem constructs its own world with its language. A window displays things as they are, but a mirror can make the reflections of things bigger, taller or smaller than they are. This poem clearly exhibits the French Symbolist trait of rejecting the transparency of language. With the opacity of Symbolist language, another hidden meaning is generated out of the apparent content of the poem, This kind of language bears a meaning that is different from the one contained in the superficial content of the poem. The meaning and form of this poem are combined in the context of language.

Stevens's passion resembles the symbolists' preoccupation with construction, and this is the organization of the parts in harmony with the whole. The meanings of a text are achieved well when readers examine the operations of the words in the text in the case of difficult poetry. Writers also make new meanings different from the literal meanings of the words in the text only when they write their works in a very contextual way.

Constructive imagination is the imagination that can help to make this kind of contextual writing possible for writers. Thus, the constructive imagination is closely related to the contextual methodology to write poetry as mentioned in the introduction. This preoccupation is one of the dominant concerns for any writer, and especially important to the French Symbolists and Stevens as well. We can find Stevens's affirmation of a Symbolist theory of language in "Description without Place." In this poem, Stevens celebrates the role of language in "the making of the world," in the shaping and ordering of experience. "For Stevens, the exactness and rightness of language are essential elements of the absolute order"[93] of the poem:

> Thus the theory of description matters most.
> It is the theory of the word for those
>
> For whom the word is the making of the world,
> The buzzing world and lisping firmament.
>
> It is a world of words to the end of it.
> In which nothing solid is its solid self. (CP, 345)

If we describe reality in various ways according to various

[93] Block, 209.

theories of description, we finally have to choose only one medium for it. We should use words for description. Even in a poor description of reality, or a poor metaphor for it, we only see words that are full of it. Yet, the problem is how to put what words into what place. Therefore, the nature and the function of language are a central concern in Stevens's poetry. Stevens defines poetry as "the imagination manifesting itself in its domination of words." (NA. viii) He distinguishes the language of the press from the language of poetry, and it reminds us of Mallarmé's distinction between the poetic language and "l'universel reportage(the universal reporting)." Like the French Symbolist poets, Stevens thinks that "above everything else, poetry is words." (NA.32) A poet wins public recognition when he is considered to have gained absolute power over language. Therefore, precision and control in the choice and arrangement of words is crucially important for Stevens. Stevens possesses a love of the constructive power of poetic language in itself.

Stevens's constructive imagination derives from his recognition of reality. The main law that governs reality is the law of change. A poet tries to mitigate chaos by creating his own order

in reality with the operation of his mind, but he does not know, or seems not to know that this order is "a fabricated illusion of his desperate will."[94] As a result, the poem becomes a kind of escape from reality. For this, a poem always fails to cover the dictates of the unfixed reality as soon as the poem is created, and the imagination is forced to re-create a new poem suitable to the changing reality. In writing that "the theater was changed/ To something else. Its past was a souvenir," (CP, 239) Stevens recognized this very well. Therefore Stevens "wants a theatre of his own,"[95] but it is not the one "which will at least seem to offer a world of permanence or stasis."[96] Stevens surely wants to get his own theatre, but if he really wants one as Lentricchia said, Stevens would never say "theatre was changed/ To something else." Stevens already sensed the fluctuating quality of reality, and he thought a dreaming stasis is like desiring a dead world. Therefore, his theatre should be thought not in the dimension of mentality but in the dimension of language. Writing modern poetry is like constructing a "stage," a world of the poet's own. Modern

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[94] Lentricchia, 174.
[95] Ibid., 172.
[96] Ibid.,

poetry “has to construct a new stage.” (CP, 240) Stevens seems to have been assured of the role of the poet and his capacity with the imaginative faculty. For Stevens, a poet is a maker of a verbal universe. What Stevens was interested in was the maker and his aesthetic world, a verbal universe. Stevens’ poem, “The Anecdote of the Jar” is a good example to show this trait of his poetry, and this could be said to be characteristic of French Symbolism. This poem is first read as a poem about a jar placed on a hill in Tennessee.

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. (CP, 76)

When we first read this poem, we can perhaps easily catch what the poem superficially says. Hidden meanings underpinning the plain language, of course, do not appear with the first reading. Only careful examination of what the words suggest can make us find the hidden meanings that characterize the situation of the poem. The wilderness is slovenly, but this wilderness becomes ordered, losing its wild state after the placing of the jar. It is "no longer wild," and this phrase "must refer to the new composition of the scene, with the round jar in the center."[97] The jar here functions to bring order, and it is the symbol of order to bring it to reality. The jar "took dominion over everywhere" of Tennessee that can be regarded to mean reality. The jar, however, distorts reality in its dominance. Truly this jar is not able to grasp reality. "It did not give of bird or brush/ Like nothing else in Tennessee", in other words, finally this imagined order can make no change in reality. The order that the jar symbolizes in this poem is no more than an imagined order in the poet's mind. The imagination forces reality to receive its own order, but the imagination is not able to change or grasp reality because it only works within the poet's

[97] Charles Child Walcutt, "Interpreting Symbol," *College English* Vol. 14 (8) (May, 1953): 448.

mind, not within the actual reality. In this respect, the poem can be read fully through a contextual reading. The imagination, giving slovenly reality order finally could make a verbal entity. A simple poem seemingly about a jar put on a Tennessee hill at its first reading is actually about the workings of poet's mind imposing order on a sterile reality in his imagination. Lentricchia explains this possibility like this:

> The modern imagination and nature are not organically interpenetrative as they were in romantic faith, but rather, drastically incoherent: man not only lives in a world he never made, but in a world so different from himself than he can have no true intercourse with it. But the imaginative self, though not continuous with nature, yet imposes its constructs on the natural world by animating the inhuman reality in analogy.[98]

What Stevens wants to express in his poem "The Idea of Order at Key West" might be this constructive imagination. He seems clearly to want to exert the constructive imagination, to write a poems in a very contextual way. This poem is about the confrontation of the poetic imagination with reality, and the imagination's function within that reality. In the opening, a girl

[98] Lentricchia, 176.

“sang beyond the genius of the sea,” (CP, 128) but the “water never formed to mind or voice.” (CP, 128) For Stevens, reality has no order, and the reality and the imagination are separated. It is impossible for the poet to sing with the sea. The sea or the water is “wholly body.” (CP, 128) Therefore, her singing beyond the sea, that is, beyond the reality full of chaos may be considered to signify her neglect of the real. To abandon the real world, constructing the poet’s own world in the imagination, is a kind of escape for Stevens. The poetic self is not connected to the outside world, the constructive imagination never comes from reality; rather a poet’s will to bring order to the chaos of reality begets it. In this poem the girl sings what she hears, but the “song and water were not medleyed sound/ Even if what she sang was what she heard,/ Since what she sang was uttered word by word.” (CP, 128) What she hears and what she sings are not the same. “The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea/ Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.” (CP, 129) “The phrase ‘tragic-gestured’ is sadly ironic. Only the human can gesture tragically, and by making the sea do it Stevens poignantly reminds us how deep the need for

coherence goes."[99] Here Stevens raises a question, "Whose spirit is this?" (CP, 129), and we realize that it was the girl's spirit embodied in her song. However, we feel some irony from the next lines. This spirit is neither the dark voice of the sea, nor the outer voice of the sky. Furthermore, it is more "even than her voice, and ours, among/ The meaningless plungings of water and the wind." (CP, 129) Considering these lines, we find it difficult to get an idea of what Stevens means, but the next stanza suggests it relatively clearly:

> It was her voice that made
> The sky acutest at its vanishing.
> She measured to the hour its solitude.
> She was the single artificer of the world
> In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
> Whatever self it had, became the self
> That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we
> As we beheld her striding there alone,
> Knew that there never was a world for her
> Except the one she sang and, singing, made. (CP, 129-130)

The spirit was only her voice, but this voice symbolizes the imagination that constructs a verbal universe, which the outside

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[99] Ibid., 183.

reality has little relation to. The world she sang and ordered was not the real world of the sea. When the singing was over and they had turned toward the town, he asks Ramon Fernandez the reason why the lights in the harbor seemed to order the sea and the night as it fell. These arrange the seascape as the song had arranged it before. “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.” (CP, 130) Not only the poet’s imagination, but simple artifacts can order reality. It is our “rage for order” that, through the imagination, enchants reality. Although a “rage for order” does not warrant really imposing order onto the reality, a desperation to put order into reality can “bring man and his world once more into the harmonious relationship that the romantics often envisioned in their moments of high faith.”[100]

> Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
> The maker’s rage to order words of the sea,
> Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
> And of ourselves and of our origins,

[100] Ibid., 185.

In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds. (CP, 130)

The singer has imposed her imagination upon reality, but there has been nothing but the song. However, when the song is over, the sea and night are ordered and fixed. The fragrant portals here are dimly starred "until the words for them are found and added. And the same applies to ourselves and our origins, whatever they are."[101] Demarcation is needed naturally for demonstrable, real order, but the "ghostlier demarcations" here is for a spiritual ordering of mind. Finally, the ghost in the question above "is revealed as a wholly fanciful construct of the poetic self."[102] This poetic self fabricates a "rage for order," but this rage for order is blessed. Through this experience Stevens comes to know that it is not order but a "rage for order" portioned out the sea,/ Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles/ Arranging, deepening, enchanting night." (CP, 130) Because Stevens realizes that a poet can draw reality in a beautiful way as the lights do, he knows this rage for order in the poet is wonderful. The sea, the reality is not fully attractive for Stevens because he thought that it is not

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[101] Denis Donoghue, *Connoisseurs of Chaos: Ideas of Order in Modern American Poetry* (N.Y: Columbia UP, 1984) 190.
[102] Lentricchia, 186.

enough. Therefore, Stevens feels a need for the words of the sea, and for him "the greatest poem is the words of the sea."[103] The order of poetry is naturally a verbal one, constructed by imagination.

Now, we have surveyed the general characteristics of French Symbolism, including its preference for suggestiveness, musicality, and opacity of language, and realized that these elements are found in Wallace Stevens's poems. We have searched out the characteristics of French Symbolism in Stevens's poetry by interpreting some of his poems. As a result, we are convinced of his affinity with French Symbolism. However, despite the presence of these traits we cannot label him a symbolist poet. It is because Stevens evidently has a different position in his epistemology from that of French Symbolist poets. In Chapter III, we will discuss the epistemological and aesthetical difference between Stevens and the French Symbolist poets. We will explore this difference by viewing their poems in parallel, and by searching out the evidence of their epistemological difference in the texts.

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[103] Donohue, 191.

Chapter III: Synthesis—Stevens's Version of Symbolism

We have discussed two axes that can be said to consist of Stevens's poetics in the previous two chapters. They were the American traditional intellectual background and the influence of French Symbolism. Stevens's version of Symbolism can be defined as the synthesis of these two axes. Although many critics, such as Simons, Alfred Kreymborg, and Warren Lamsey,[104] have viewed Stevens in the French Symbolist tradition, other critics, such as Michel Benamou and Haskell M. Block,[105] seem to have a

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[104] Like Simons, these two critics points out the French Symbolist influence in Stevens's poetry. Evaluating Stevens as an "American reared on French Symbolism," Kreymborg insists that he is in the same line as Simons. He takes notice of Stevens's sensation, use of color and language. See, Alfred Kreymborg, *A History of American Poetry: Our Singing Strength* (N.Y: Tudor Publishing Co., 1934) 500-504. Warren Lamsey mainly argues that the common interest of the French Symbolists and Imagist is their imposing the order into their works. He, like Simons, finds Mallarmé's influence in the specific poems of Stevens. He also insists that Stevens's symbolic order is from the French Symbolist influence. This can best be seen in "The Idea of Order at Key West." See, Warren Lamsey, "Uses of the Visible: American Imagism, French Symbolism" *Comparative Literature Studies* 4 (1967): 177-191.

[105] Michel Benamou collected his essays on Stevens in a volume. This book is *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (1972). He takes notice of the affinities between Stevens and the French Symbolists. He concludes with defining Stevens as a combination of French and American Symboliste with symbolist heritage. To prove this, he develops his argument by comparing Stevens with each French Symbolist poet. See, Michel Benamou, *Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972). Haskel M. Block is quoted in the previous chapter. He surveys the general influence of French Symbolism on

tendency to think the relationship between Stevens and the French Symbolism is ambiguous. This tendency might come from the fact that Stevens is often seen as a combination of French Symbolism and American heritage. Surely Stevens's Symbolism appears itself in his poems sharing representative characteristics of French Symbolism. However, due to the difference in epistemology Stevens's Symbolism has some aspects that are evidently different from French Symbolism. Now we need to discuss how Stevens's version of Symbolism embodies itself in his poems. For this purpose, the discussion will proceed focusing on the difference between French Symbolism and Stevens. This difference might come from the difference in their epistemologies.

Stevens expresses thoughts similar to the French Symbolist ideas of the poet's ordering of experience when he suggests that wise men piece "the world together with wisdom,"(OP, 69) "poets with holy magic."(OP, 69) "Stevens and the Symbolist imagination are one, if by symbolist we mean central, and by imagination a horizon of basic images the center of which has shifted, since

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Modern American poetry with a good introduction and summary. He also takes an attention to poetic technique of French Symbolism.

ancient times, from god to man."[106] His affirmation of the French Symbolist theory of language brings to the fore the role of language in the making of the world. For Stevens, the exact and right use of language is a vital factor in the ordering of experience. However, the main difference between Stevens's thought and the aesthetics of the French Symbolist poets seems to come from a difference in the way that the two look at outside reality, that is, a difference of epistemology. In Symbolist theory the poet can perceive the ultimate essential meaning and express it to other people by way of poetry. This theory of Symbolism is justified in Baudelaire's "Correspondances"(Correspondences). Symbolist poetry could be said to aim at expressing the hidden noumenal meaning. This hidden ultimate world is the source of a beauty that exists beyond the real world of everyday life. Of course, French symbolists insist that this hidden, ultimate world is appreciated only by a grasp of symbols in their constructed world of literary works. Notwithstanding this attitude, French Symbolists are interested in something that is infinite and transcends this reality. We can find evidence of this fact in Mallarmé's "la notion pure"

[106] Benamou, xiii.

mentioned before. For French Symbolists, there exists a dichotomy between the outside reality and the ideal, infinite, noumenal meaning.

In Stevens's aesthetics, however, this kind of dichotomy is not presented. For Stevens, the outside reality "is something which is definitely there, beyond our perception and cognition."[107] In other words, Stevens's viewpoint of reality is different from that of the French Symbolist poets. Block insists on the agreement between Stevens and French Symbolists, but he seems to overlook this point.

> The large agreement between Stevens and the symbolists on the nature and function of poetry reflects their common rejection of a supernatural sanction of belief. As Stevens remarked in his notes entitled "Adagia," "God is a symbol for something that can as well take other forms, as, for example, the form of high poetry." The absence of belief in God and a concomitant scepticism, Stevens declares, forces the mind in on itself to examine its own creations. In this process, aesthetics may come to displace religion. For both Stevens and the symbolist poets, the recognition that the heavens are empty and that human life is finite and evanescent leads to the

[107] Du-Hyoung Kang, "Stasis Versus Continuity: Mallarmé and Wallace Stevens" *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 13 (Spring, 1989) 39.

> enlargement of poetry to the plane of a secular religion, as a glorification of both man and the cosmos in the face of a bleakly pessimistic and even nihilistic view of the human condition.[108]

The central reference for Stevens's poetry is reality, and he has a view of reality as metaphorical and correspondent. Stevens sets out the relationship between things and words as binding of both together thorough metaphors in his poetics, and this is very similar to the correspondent relationship in Symbolist poetics. Despite his similarity to the view of the relationship between words and things found in the French Symbolist "Correspondances(Correspondances)" and their common rejection [109] of the supernatural sanction of belief, Block's

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[108] Block, 212.

[109] Stevens's opinion on this point is well expressed in his book, *Opus Posthumous*: "To see the gods dispelled in mid-air and dissolve like clouds is one of the great human experiences. It is not as if they had gone over the horizon to disappear for a time; nor as if they had been overcome by other gods of greater power and profounder knowledge. It is simply that they came to nothing. Since we have always shared all things with them and have always had a part of their strength and, certainly, all of their knowledge, we shared likewise this experience of annihilation. It was their annihilation, not ours, and yet it left us feeling that in a measure we, too, had been annihilated. It left us feeling dispossessed and alone in a solitude, like children without parents, in a home that seemed deserted, in which the amical rooms and halls had taken on a look of hardness and emptiness. What was most extraordinary is that they left no mometoes behind, no thrones, no mystic rings, no texts either of the soil or of the soul. It was as if they had never inhabited the earth." (OP, 260)

comment above can hardly be justified. Although both Stevens and the French Symbolists realize the impossibility of reaching the ideal world alike, their attitudes in accepting this impossibility are not the same.

We can see exactly what the difference is between these two by comparing Stevens with representative French Symbolist poets one by one, and also we will have the chance to examine the difference between Stevens and other modernist poets under French Symbolist influence. The comparison of Mallarmé and Stevens will be a good starting point to look at the difference mentioned above. Mallarmé uses the word "azur(azure)" for the sky, and it symbolizes an ideal beauty. "The everlasting Azure's tranquil irony/ Depresses, like the flower indolently fair,/ The powerless poet."[110] This azure is inaccessible, but the poet endlessly longs for it. Finally he can not get over the depression, and is "haunted" forever by the beauty of the blue sky. In Mallarme's poem, "The Windows(Les Fenêtres)," the azure symbolizes an inaccessible freedom to a hospitalised patient. The zeal of the patient longing for the beauty of the sky(azure) is read

[110] Stephane Mallarmé, "L'Azur" Herbert Creekmore trans. *Selected Prose and Prose*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (N.Y: A New Direction Books, 1982) 15.

as that of poet, and the poet becomes torn between his desire for the sky and his inability to get out of everyday life. There remains only the poet's desperation:

> Mais, hélas! Ici-bas est maître: sa hantise
> Vient m'écoeurer parfois jusqu'en cet abri sûr,
> Et le vomissement impur de la Bêtise
> Me force à me boucher le nez devant l'azur.
>
> But oh! the World Below is lord: its spell
> Still nauseates me in this safe retreat,
> And the reeking spew of Stupidity compels
> Me to hold my nose before the azure sheet.[111]

Stevens also uses the colour "blue" in a very similar way to Mallarmé's use of "azur." For Stevens, however, only the earth seems "all of paradise that we shall know." (CP, 68) If there is no ideal beauty or world on the other side of this real world, the sky is "Not this dividing and indifferent blue." (CP, 68) In this point, Stevens is different from Mallarmé. Stevens's view of reality and the ideal world is considerably different from that of the French symbolists. Du-Hyoung Kang's opinion well explains this difference:

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[111] Ibid., 11.

> The blue sky is seen as a demarcation between earth and heaven, and like Mallarmé Stevens regards it as being invariably frigid and dispassionate. Yet even at this early age of his poetic career, Stevens' conception of the unity of heaven and earth signals the triumph of earth over heaven, or the absorption of heaven by earth. As Stevens reaches his mature period, he progresses beyond the simple dichotomy between the Ideal and the Real. He refuses to accept the notion that one can exist in the realm of the Ideal, a realm of absolute stasis.[112]

For Stevens, "The theory of poetry is the theory of life,"(OP, 202) and his poetry is rooted in the American Adamic poem. In this kind of Adamic poem, a poet imagines himself an Adam, and readers are bid to listen to this Adam's words and to accept his naming. Pearce explains what this Adamic tradition is in his discussion of Whitman's poetic world.

> Here (the passage is from the fifth section of Song of Myself) the world is described as it exists apart from the poet; yet he can name and collocate its potentially infinite aspects only so that he may discover and define his relationship to it. His objectivity is that of an impressionist, and so finally an aspect of his subjectivity. He may aspire to achieve some sort of identity with his world; yet his power of naming, describing, and

[112] Do-Hyung Kang, 40.

> collocating is such that a reader cannot but be overwhelmingly, even uncritically, aware of the single ego, the self, which generates it. The power is that of a lover who rather drives himself than is drawn to love the world. A Father Adam who bids men listen to him so that they might hear their proper names and so come alive—this is how Whitman images himself.[113]

For the poets who have this attitude toward the reality, reality itself is endlessly changed. Stevens aims at containing this change in his poetry, and therefore the dichotomy of the real world and the ideal one found in French Symbolist poetics does not matter to Stevens. His endless interpretations of reality with the projection of his imagination onto it as a continuous re-creational process prevented him from being frustrated like Mallarmé: "After the final no there comes a yes." (CP, 247)

> Reality is the beginning not the end,
> Naked Alpha, not the hierophant Omega,
> Of dense investitute, with luminous vassals.
>
> . . .
>
> But that's the difference: in the end and the way
> To the end. Alpha continues to begin.

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[113] Pearce, 167.

Omega is refreshed at every end. (CP, 469)

In most of his poems, Mallarmé shows the tragedy of the man who aspires to the ideal world but is frustrated by reality. The changeable flux of reality governs our world. Mallarmé can be said to resist this kind of changeability of human life, but he finally becomes aware of the futility of that resistance. Nevertheless, Mallarmé never gives up his fight, and continues to strive against the flux of reality. For Mallarmé, the result of this fight does not matter because this kind of resistance is the destiny of the poet. In the course of his own resistance, Mallarmé seeks to substitute a kind of literary ritual for religion as a way of compensating for the annihilation of God. In other words, he wants to restore a world exactly like the one before the banishment of God, though it will inevitably fail.

We can easily recognize that Stevens has a different point of view toward reality when we look at his words on the poet's function. According to his opinion, a poet "creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it and that he gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it." (NA, 31) Stevens thinks that each human being's

perception of reality is affected by his consciousness, and his point of view toward the reality is always determined by how our consciousness is involved at the moment of the perceiving. Therefore, there can be "no single mode of understanding common to everybody."[114] For both Stevens and French Symbolists alike, there seems to be a dichotomy between reality and the ideal world. The difference lies in what their ultimate center of interest is. While French Symbolists have a considerable strong interest in the ideal world, Stevens has as much interest in reality as the French Symbolists have in the ideal world. The Symbolist attempt to search for the unchanging essence existing on the other side of reality finally concludes in tragedy. Mallarmé struggles to reconcile the material world with the spiritual. On the other hand, Stevens' poetry could be defined by the omission of the spiritual. Many critics discuss Stevens's poetic world within the framework of the reconciliation of Reality and the Imagination. What we should take notice of here is that the Imagination in his poetics is not like the spiritual concept found in Mallarmé's poetics. It indicates an action of human consciousness. Stevens really has

[114] Du-Hyoung Kang, 50.

little interest in the ideal worlds and the spiritual.

The most noticeable among many features that connect Stevens to Mallarmé is “purity, pureness or the pure.” Discussion of this notion gives a strong feeling of the resemblance between the two poets. Stevens defines “purity” as a sense of novelty or vividness. Stevens’s comment on the purpose of poetry enables us to sense what he means by purity. Stevens says, “To give a sense of the freshness or vividness of life is a valid purpose for poetry. A didactic purpose justifies itself in the mind of the teacher; a philosophical purpose justifies itself in the mind of the philosopher. It is not that one purpose is as justifiable as another but that some purposes are pure, others impure. Seek those purposes that are purely the purposes of the pure poet.” (OP, 184) Stevens distinguishes these two purposes in depth. “One is the true subject and the other is the poetry of the subject. The difficulty of sticking to the true subject, when it is the poetry of the subject that is paramount in one’s mind, need only be mentioned to be understood. In a poet who makes the true subject paramount and who merely embellishes it, the subject is constant and the development orderly. If the poetry of the subject is paramount, the

true subject is not constant nor its development orderly." (OP, 227) The "pure poetry" that Stevens always had in mind is linked to this use of the word "pure." Stevens's "pure poetry" is "a term that has grown to be descriptive of poetry in which not the true subject but the poetry of the subject is paramount." (OP, 227)

However, the difference between Stevens and French Symbolist poets is likewise suggested by how each defines the word pure. "It is a contrast between feeling in purity in the world, and reaching purity out of this world."[115] In other words, the French Symbolists, especially Mallarme, add a metaphysical meaning to the word "pure." Mallarmé's imagination deals with a dual structure and a struggle between two factors. In his poems, earth and sky, light and dark, monster and hero are enemies. This struggle comes "From hostile soil and cloud (Du sol et de la hostiles)," [116] and the protagonist always despairs at the impossibility of reaching the metaphysical pure world. On the other hand, Stevens uses the word "pure" in a totally different context.

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[115] Benamou, 68.
[116] From "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe (The Tomb of Edgar Poe)" translated by Daisy Aldan (AAFP, 157)

I am one of you and being one of you
Is being and knowing what I am and know.

Yet I am the necessary angel of earth,
Since, in my sight, you see the earth again,

Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set, ...
(CP, 496-7)

As suggested by the excerpt above, for Stevens purity is the result of clear sight, freed from the "man-locked set" of religious ideas and mythological thoughts. For Mallarmé, the word "purity" contains implications of inaccessibility and of no-existence. In the French Symbolist frame of reference, an ordinary flower is assumed as a "pure" flower in the poet's imagination. The poet should show a picture of a world far from the physically visible world. It is the "orphic explication of the earth," and this phrase is Mallarmé's definition of poetry. Benamou's comment explains the reason Mallarmé's poetry always bears a gloomy atmosphere:

> An imagination such as Mallarmé's will not create a paradise of calm sensual presences, beautiful shapes and colors; it will decreate appearances, bring death to forestall death, thus master death, and save from decay a

"pure" world in the mind.[117]

Stevens could not have accepted this paradise, because Mallarmé's paradise is a kind of mental island separate from the real world. An evident boundary separates it from the secular earth. Purity operates as a means of separation in Mallarmé's poetics. "Divorce, not marriage, is the law of the poet's hygienic vision."[118] However, for Stevens, purity helps render possible the marriage between his mentality and the real world. He wanted his poetry to remove a barrier between the artist and the reality. The meaning conveyed by his use of the word "pure" is, so to speak, a "clean up(purification)" of the verbal medium. As mentioned above, purity is the result of cleansing sight of its "man-locked set" of religious ideas and mythological thoughts. In the Adamic tradition of American poetry, things come to be pure by the artist's eye. They are cleansed by the poets' eye or imagination. Stevens draws on a notion of "the first idea" to make clear the meaning of the word "pure." According to Stevens, this term "the first idea" is not a transcendental notion, and naturally far from Platonic

[117] Benamou., 71.
[118] Ibid.,72.

thinking. In a letter to Henry Church, Stevens clearly explains the notion of the first idea and what he means by the word "purity" with the use of pictorial illustration.

> Some one here wrote me the other day and wanted to know what I meant by a thinker of the first idea. If you take the varnish and dirt of generations off a picture, you see it in its first idea. If you think about the world without its varnish and dirt, you are a thinker of the first idea. (LWS, 462)

Stevens's notion of pure poetry might be expressed like this:

> The poem refreshes life so that we share,
> For a moment, the first idea . . . It satisfies
> Belief in an immaculate beginning (CP, 382)

The words of this poem are worth a close look. Life is refreshed, though only for a moment, by our getting the feeling of a new beginning. This new beginning can be felt like that of the outside world, but it is a new beginning of one's recognition of the real world. Stevens realized this point very well. Therefore, he uses the word "life," not "world." The outside world itself is not a fixed reality perceivable by human recognition, and what we really need

is a new sense of things outside in life. The moment we get this new sense of things is when we get the first idea. This moment satisfies our belief in "an immaculate beginning" of the world. Stevens's pure poetry is nothing other than the poetry that can make us look at the world with a new way of looking, endlessly. Since one's imagination always becomes worn-out by the constantly changing reality, poetry "constantly requires a new relation" (OP, 202) to this ever-changing reality. The word "pure" in this case is evidently different from Mallarmé's transcendental "pure."

Baudelaire can be another source of comparison in discussing the difference between Stevens and French Symbolism. Of course, there are also many similarities between the two poets, such as their common faith in imagination and an interest in the visual aspects of poetry. However, the differences rather than similarities attract our attention. Actually the difference between their ways of looking at the real world is as great as the difference between those of Mallarmé and Stevens. Baudelaire's "Correspondances(Correspondences)" gave a new standard and lesson to the poets of his days weary of the traditional poetry. In

this poem, Baudelaire expresses his poetics and some of his own poetic experiences. According to Baudelaire, the poet's role is to grasp the correspondent relationships of all the things in the world for his entrance into the transcendental realm.

> La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
> Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles:
> L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symbols
> Qui l'observant avec des regards familiers.
>
> Nature is a temple from whose living columns
> Commingling voices emerge at times;
> Here man wanders through forests of symbols
> Which seem to observe him with familiar eyes. (AAFP, 21)

The "temple" here is considered as a place where the spiritual and the material are intermingled. A poet should go through this temple to enter the world of ideal forms. "Commingling voices" are sounds coming from "forests," that is, sounds of nature. These sounds are heard by ordinary people no more than meaningless sounds, but heard familiar sounds for poets. These sounds are the "forests of symbols," and they act as a poet's means to enter the ideal world. The mystery or secret of nature is perceived not by the senses of ordinary people, but by the poet's imagination.

Nature offers us symbols, and a poet can correspond with nature. This means the mystery and secrets of nature are presented only by symbols. In other words, we approach the spiritual through the material. For Baudelaire, a poet can communicate with nature, and the phrase, “Here man wanders through forests of symbols. (L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symbols.)” (AAFP, 21) indicates that a poet has the ability to express the mystery of nature. Through these symbols, the poet can go into the ideal world where beauty is presented as its best form.

In this respect, we can guess that an important part of Baudelaire’s poetics can be considered as having transcendental aspects. Most of his poems evoke a feeling from the reader, but on the other side they contain a picture of paradise. Baudelaire’s poetry places a great emphasis on the transcendental aspect, and his efforts to go beyond reality into an ideal world are found in many poems. In “L’Invitation au Voyage” (The Invitation to the Voyage), the speaker calls his child and sister to dream of a paradise. This paradise he is looking for has no existence in this world, and the poet always tries to go there beyond reality with

the use of symbols.[119] There is a common theme found in the various images of the poem, and it is the theme of eternity and infinity especially in the refrain repeated three times.

> Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
> Luxe, calme et volupté.
>
> There, there is nothing else but grace and measures,
> Richness, quietness, and pleasure. (AAFP, 27)

The common factor that links Baudelaire with Stevens might be the function of the imagination. Of course, every poet has his own

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[119] In English Romantic poetry, we can also find the transcendental aspect, but Romantic poets are different from French Symbolist poets in that they don't usually use symbols. I borrowed the terms from Murray Krieger in relation to the functions of language. The language of Romantic poets functions a "window" because at first reading of the text we can perceive what the poet exactly means through the description of the objective world for the transparency(Lentricchia's term) of the window. In that case, the text clearly says that he aspire to the ideal world through the objective world. However, in the case of Symbolist poet's text, readers should always struggle to grasp what the symbols means. For Symbolist poets, the work itself exists as a world, and the text describing the objective world is always thought to be the world composed of symbols that generate new and different meanings from the literal ones in the organizational operation of the words. Murray Krieger calls this aspect of Symbolist language "mirror" function of the language. The Symbolist text reflects the objective world, but it does not show the objective real world as it is. In other words, there is no transparency in the Symbolist language. The world reflected in this mirror just exists as a world constructed of its own factors. This world is a reflection of the real world, but it is not the real world itself. In Symbolist poetics, their language always has the opacity(Lentricchia's term) in that the words in the text are symbols that always contain the meanings different from the literal ones.

imagination, but its function in Stevens and Baudelaire is very similar. The reason why Baudelaire searches for the ideal land is that he clearly saw the tragic darkness and sterility of reality, and he perhaps wanted to get out of it. Baudelaire obtains comfort from his imagination.

The function of Stevens's imagination is not much different from that of Baudelaire. For Stevens, the "poetic process is psychologically an escapist process." (NA, 30) He says that his "own remarks about resisting or evading the pressure of reality mean escapism, if analyzed." (NA, 30) Although Stevens uses the word "escapism" with "a pejorative sense (NA, 30)," his poetic process is a kind of struggling not to be defeated by reality. It is needless to say that his imagination plays an important part in this poetic process. His "imagination is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality." (NA, 36) Stevens's night is usually hostile. "The houses are haunted/ By white night-gowns./ None are green,/ Or purple with green rings,/ Or green with yellow rings,/ Or yellow with blue rings." (CP, 66) Here night symbolizes the sterile reality, and we need a kind of protection

from this reality. For both Stevens and Baudelaire, imagination protects us. However, the difference between these two poets depends on which will wholly admit the centrality of the human mind. Stevens's sense of imagination has its source on the plane of human existence. "The world imagined is the ultimate good." (CP, 524) Stevens does not need a transcendental God because "God and the imagination are one" (CP,524) for him. In other words, the covering of reality with man's imagination satisfies Stevens and gives him aesthetic pleasure. For Baudelaire, however, the ideal world existing on the other side of reality always bothers him. In Stevens's poetics, it does not matter whether he can go into the ideal world or not, he just enjoys endlessly covering reality with his imagination. On the other hand, Baudelaire always bears a desire to penetrate beyond reality to the ideal world. In this respect, some critics call Stevens a hedonist. At any rate, Stevens seems to master reality more successfully than Baudelaire. Despite its operation only in his consciousness, Stevens's imagination can change reality as the firecat changes the course of bucks:

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. (CP, 3)

The relationship between Paul Verlaine and Stevens might be slight, but their common use of sound to originate mood is notable. In "Verlaine's poetry, it is not the single word that sets in motion associations of images in the reader's mind, or stirs vague emotions, as does music; instead, the associations of special combinations of words, containing such recurrences of sounds as "Il pleure dans mon cœur, (Tears flow in my heart)" (AAFP, 92) sound in effect like music. They make music in the same way as the harmony of a series of musical sounds. Poetry becomes music through its appeal to the ear rather than in its inherent function or in its effect on mental associations."[120] Verlaine insisted that the rational elements in poetry be excluded and poetry appeal to

[120] Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal* (N.Y, N.Y UP, 1977) 64.

human emotions by musical expressions. Instead of saying what he felt, Verlaine makes us feel with endless transitions of impressions or emotions into senses. According to Verlaine, an indescribable, intimate communion between poets and readers is attained within the music of poetry. His poem, “Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit . . .”(The Sky above the Roof . . .) shows Verlaine’s feelings very well by its musical aspects and effects. He composed this poem while imprisoned.

Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit,
Si bleu, si calme!
Un arbre, par-dessus le toit,
Berce sa palme.

The sky above the roof
Is so blue, so calm!
A tree above the roof
Sway its fronds. (AAFP, 97)

The speaker describes the scene seen above the roof of the jail in the first stanza. Verlaine here makes an effect on the readers’ auditory sense by repeating the phrase “par-dessus le toit(above the roof).” Besides, this stanza seems to achieve an effect of musical repetition by the position of “si (so)” before two adjectives,

“bleu (blue)” and “calme (calm).”

La cloche dans le ciel qu’on voit
Doucement tinte.
Un oiseau sur l’arbre qu’on voit
Chante sa plainte.

Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, la vie est là,
Simple et tranquille.
Cette paisible rumeur-là
Vient de la ville.

—Qu’as fait, ô toi que voilà
Pleurant sans cesse,
Dis, qu’as-tu fait, toi que voilà
De ta jeunesse?

The bell in the sky we see
Softly chimes.
A bird in the tree we see
Sings its lament.

Dear God, dear God life is there,
Simple and still.
That peaceful murmur there
Comes from the town.

What have you done, you who are here
Weeping endlessly?
Oh, what have you done, you who are here,

With the days of your youth? (AAFP, 97-8)

The second stanza has a structural similarity with the first, but Verlaine mixes visual impressions with auditory ones. “La cloche, dans le ciel qu’on voit,/ Doucemnent tinte. (The bell in the sky we see/ Softly chimes.)” The soft rhythm of line “Doucement tinte (Softly chimes)” and its sound effect adequately express the sound of a bell ringing softly. The speaker’s crying twice in stanza 3, “mon Dieu (Dear God)” comes from his repentance for his past mistakes. The problematic line here is “la vie est là,/ Simple et tranquille. (life is there,/ Simple and still.)” The speaker shows his longing for freedom out of his jail in this line. Here everyone may feel a kind of human aspiration toward somewhere beyond the existential boundary. The speaker in jail hears the sounds of the outside, and these sounds are heard from the unroofed sky. He desires a free world with such contrast to his situation. His sad emotions burst out as his repentance “Pleurant sans cesse (Weeping endlessly)” and he asks himself in a manner of reproach, “qu’as-tu fait, toi que voilà,/ De ta jeunesse? (What have you done, you who are here,/ With the days of your youth?)” Indeed, for Verlaine, the transcendental aspect of Symbolism is mostly gone

from his work. He is different from Baudelaire in that he does not draw a picture of paradise. However, we can find some common quality with the other two French Symbolist poets discussed earlier in Verlaine's poem above. It is the aspiration toward somewhere beyond the boundary of his situation. The speaker in this poem aspires toward the outside, but being imprisoned it is impossible for him to get out. Of course, in this case the target of his aspiration exists in the plane of human existence. Nevertheless, his desire cannot be satisfied in his situation. In this respect, Verlaine is similar to Mallarmé and Baudelaire. The longing for an unattainable object seems a common factor of these poets.

Stevens surely has some similar aspects with Verlaine. At first for him, freedom means an escape from the rational. In Stevens's poetics, "The imagination is invariably described as the 'liberating' faculty, opposed to a deterministic world."[121] Stevens insists "The incessant desire for freedom in literature or in any of the arts is a desire for freedom in life. The desire is irrational. The result is the irrational searching the irrational, a conspicuously happy state of affairs, if you are so inclined." (OP,

[121] Peterson, 43.

231) Secondly, there is a common use of sound to create mood. Of course, this trait is a common characteristic with French Symbolist poets. However, Verlaine is usually regarded as the most melodious French Symbolist when we discuss the musicality of the French Symbolist poetry. Verlaine can be a good example to compare with other poets in the discussion of the musical element in poetry. Stevens, like Verlaine, makes a language that invites us to concentrate on its marvellous words. We gradually realize them with a kind of wonder, hearing a new language that nudges us into the music-like sound of words. In "music, the whole aesthetic effect comes from the manner in which one set of sounds alters our feeling of another."[122] Stevens's set of sounds alters our feelings and leads up to the discussion of music and poetry. Stevens surely did have the French Symbolist hope that all the arts could achieve the condition of music.

In spite of these common features in both Verlaine and Stevens, there exists an undeniable essential difference between them. It is also about the choice of the orientation toward the world of the plain senses or toward the world of ideal forms

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[122] James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983) 228.

discussed before. In section XXI of his poem, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," Stevens alludes to Verlaine. There comes an imaginary "black shepherd's isle" (CP, 480) in this section, and Stevens calls it "Cythère." Stevens seems to use this island as the place where Romanza[123] is made. This Cythère is also the title of a poem included in Verlaine's collected book of pastoral poems, *Fêtes galantes* (The Gallant Feast). Verlaine's Cythère, like Stevens's Cythère, is a kind of idealized idyllic locale where sensory enjoyment and imperishable love rule. Stevens's Cythère, however, has "another isle" (CP, 480) in the opposite direction. This another isle is makes "the alternate romanza/ Out of the surfaces," (CP, 480) and this romanza is connected with commonplace things. The "windows, the walls,/ The bricks grown brittle in time's poverty," (CP, 480) are included in this romanza. In this isle, "the senses give and nothing take." (CP, 480) Such a thought is clearly opposed to Verlaine's Cythère as an idealized idyllic locale. Although the two kinds of romanzas out of two isles seem like "a single voice in the boo-ha of wind," (CP, 481) Stevens seems to strongly say that all the idealized places that are

[123] "Romanza" is a term adapted from Italian word "romanzo." "Romanzo" is, in Italian, a romance or romantic fancy. (oed. 1)

represented as Cythère here should be opposed to reach another isle that indicates the desired "isolation/ at the centre, the object of the will." (CP, 480) The denial of "romanza" out of Cythère in favour of the world of plain things seems to be noticeable in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." It is Stevens's difference from Verlaine.

Paul Valéry also shared a dissatisfaction with reality common to most of the French Symbolist poets. However, he solved his problems in a way his master, Mallarmé never wanted and never attempted. Valéry has no struggle with the universe, no complaint about his situation in the world. Only his experiences continued to draw his attention, and to engage him into analysis of them. That is, he is very scientific. The result of his scientific character is a symbolical poetry that serves to give form to very personal experience. Valéry's poetry is considered as some of the most obscure poetry in French. To suggest rather than to state, to leave the meaning of his images obscure is his aim like other French Symbolist poets, but he has a unique original feature differentiated from them. For Valéry, the aim of poetry is not to convey the emotions or thoughts of a poet, but to create a harmonious world

where we sense the beauty in the reader's mind resulting from all the properties of language. Therefore, for Valéry, the poet is a constructor who creates the world of beauty using all the qualities of language such as sound, rhythm, image, symbol, comparison, etc. "What matters are the words and their rhythm, the image they provide, the associations they evoke, the experience which somehow they create."[124]

In *La Pythie* Valéry deals with the mysterious parts of the poetic creation. A character of this poem, the Pythian Priestess goes through the pangs of creation in a very difficult way. Despite her fearful appearance, she was invaded by external powers and lost her virginity by rape, but she is not the object of sympathy. Valéry presents her as a symbol of a poet's spiritual process. This poem might show the change of consciousness in a poet who dreamed his idealized world in his mind at first and then realized the worth of the balance between mind and reality. The Priestess feels ashamed because her silent intellectual world is disturbed by extraneous beings. She imagines an ideal world where she would be the Medusa's head that can turn everyone else to stone.

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[124] Bowra, 21.

Alors, par cette vagabonde
Morte, errante, et lune à jamais,
Soit l'eau des mers surprise, et l'onde
Astreinte à d'éternels sommets!
Que soient les humains faits statues,
Les coeurs figés, les âmes tues,
Et par les glaces de mon œil,
Puisse un people de leurs paroles
Durcir en un people d'idoles
Muet de sottise et d'orgueil!

Then by this vegabond,
Dead, wandering and perpetual moon,
Let the seas' water be surprised, and the
Wave compelled to eternal heights!
Let human beings be made statues,
Hears fixed, souls made silent
And, by the ice of my eye,
May a crowd of their words
Harden into a crowd of idols
Dumb with foolishness and pride! (PBFV, 55)

Her wish is no less than a denial of life. The changeless and fixed world is the world of death. It is not a solution to get her virginity back. We must take a close look at how her struggle progresses. Her struggle to recover her ideal that she was forced to give up is through her flesh. This reminds us of the fact that poets usually find material for poetry in their reality, not in their mind. This

struggle ends by bringing a kind of harmony to her.

Mes deux natures von't s'unir!

My two natures are about to join in one! (PBFV, 61)

The Priestess' two natures, the intellectual and the physical, are about to join. This might be her awareness of a necessary compatibility between her virginal thought and her physical passion, mind and reality. Valéry might want to insist that the balanced union of the body and the mind is an ideal state of a human being. Valéry did not remain in his own mind. He returned to reality and acknowledged that "the mind cannot remain turned in on itself but must accept the importance of the world of the senses."[125] Therefore, the last stanza awakens us to a new idea of language. Speech or poetry is an act that leads the individual to a closer connection with life and breaks down man's ultimate separation from reality.

Honneur des Hommes, Saint LANGAGE,
Discours prophétique et paré,
Belles chaînes en qui s'engage

[125] Chadwick, 48.

Le dieu la chair égaré,
Illumination, laregge!

Honour of man, holy LANGUAGE,
Prophetically adorned speech
Lovely chains put on
By the god strayed into flesh,
Vision, bounty! (PBFV, 63)

In Valéry, the transcendental aspect of Symbolism is almost gone. He is surely more interested in reality than the ideal. Valéry rejects the poetry of the transcendental sphere that is thought out in his mind, and cherishes the poetry that comes into relation with ordinary things. In this respect he is very similar to Wallace Stevens, as in many other respects too. Especially his creation of verbal order into a poem has been discussed before with relation to the symbolist element in Stevens's poetics.

Stevens's poem, "The Sunday Morning" touches a theme similar to that of *La Phythie*. In the world deprived of God, human beings come to feel an uneasy freedom with a great sense of loss. However, God's paradise is a fixed and dead world with no changes of life. This changeless paradise means nothing to us. Compared with this dull and stagnant world, our world seems

valuable. The value of our reality comes from death because it is the conclusion of all the changes in this real world. Everything in the world becomes not eternal but perishable by the domination of death. Therefore, death makes everything precious and valuable. Here Stevens emphasizes the beauty of perishable beings in a very paradoxical way.

There exists a gap between Valéry and Stevens in spite of their common orientation to reality, though. For Valéry, poetry is a battlefield for the quarrel between the ideal and the reality. Everything in this struggle happens inside himself. While Stevens thinks poetry is a playground for the endless interaction between mind and reality although he defines poetry as the substitute for religion. He said, "After one has abandoned a belief in god, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption." (OP, 185) According to Miller, actually all of Stevens's "work is an exploration of variable perspectives from which reality can be viewed by the imagination." [126] The most important part of Stevens's poetry is a struggle in the seemingly impossible task of reconciliation of the imagination and reality, of the mind and the

[126] Miller, 225.

outside real world. In this struggle the poet can achieve only momentary balance, and is helplessly caught in fluctuations between these two forces. “The imagination loses vitality as it ceases to adhere to what is real.”(NA, 6) “A great many of Stevens’ poems show an object or group of objects in aimless oscillation or circling movement. The space of the poem is filled with things which slip away and evade the observer’s grasp.”[127] Change is the law of life. In most of Stevens’s works we encounter the evidence that the law of reality is change. The imagination aims at a perfect understanding of the world, but it is possible only when there exists a complete combination of mind and reality. Mind seeks to grasp a reality, but it is changing endlessly. “Reality is not possessed initially, and the series of perspectives is an attempt to reach it, as a man might investigate the round bottle by seeing it from all sides.”[128]

With this difficulty Stevens shifts from the troublesome question of how the imagination covers reality to the pleasant one of how to enjoy this endless process. Stevens admits the metamorphosis of reality that makes it impossible for the

[127] Ibid., 226.
[128] Ibid., 236.

imagination to grasp it. In the end, the poetry made out of the imagination is no more than a fiction because it cannot represent the changeable whole reality. Stevens said, “The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.” (OP, 189)

> The bud of the apple is desire, the down-falling gold,
> The catbird’s gobble in the morning half-awake
>
> These are real only if I make them so. (CP, 313)

From this moment on, for Stevens, the complete integration of mind and reality does not matter, instead he advocates turning this process of making poetry into a game. In this respect, Stevens is apparently different from Valéry. Valéry endeavours to get the integration between mind and reality in his struggle. This is because Valéry believes that his acts of mind could represent reality. In this case, reality should remain fixed and graspable. If things in reality become graspable, the observer has the capacity to penetrate to their essence. In other words, Valéry already sets the world of essence, the transcendental ideal world on the other

side of reality in his thought. Of course, the transcendental aspects of French Symbolist poets are almost absent in him. However, this suggests that he got a kind of undeniable nostalgia toward the transcendental, ideal world. In Stevens's case, he even seems to mock this nostalgia. This point is also one of the differences between Stevens and other Modernist poets discussed earlier.

T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound had a viewpoint of the world deprived of God, or Truth similar to Stevens. Eliot and Stevens are similar in that their poetry is obscure and difficult, but different in their temperament and theme. Stevens encounters the desolateness of reality without the anxiety that Eliot feels in his own age. While Stevens tries to deal with all the existing problems with the power of imagination, Eliot approaches them through traditional religion and values.[129] Being opposite to Eliot's tradition, Stevens regards the world as a flux where the banishment of god is admitted. For Stevens, poetry leads to the

[129] For the discussion of this problem, William Van O'Conner's article, "Wallace Stevens: Imagined Reality" gives us so much help. He lists similarities and differences between two poets clearly. He discusses Stevens in the axis of imagination, and Eliot of tradition. See William Van O'Conner, "Wallace Stevens: Imagined Reality" *The Grotesque: An American Genre and Other Essays* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1962) 128-36.

awareness of reality in which change rules and a poet can become a creator-god. On the other hand, Eliot's tradition operates in his mind. The word "tradition" gives us a nuance related to the past. Eliot seems to miss the past when gods were not dispelled and lived with us harmoniously. His major work *The Waste Land*, despite its fragmentation, has a mythical structure of the quest of the holy grail as its sub-text. This proves that Eliot is a traditionalist, and he, like Valéry, also has the nostalgia about the traditional past that can be called the transcendental world instead.

The difference between these two poets in their way of looking at reality is also reflected in their acceptance of the French Symbolist poet, Jules Laforgue. As Laforgue who saw himself as a misfit in dull everyday life, Stevens also regarded himself. However, while "Laforgue could never escape his bored self, Stevens did, by writing poetry about the positive value of poetic imagination, so that his poetry had for him, and still has for us, the virtues of an antidote against boredom."[130] Laforgue could never get over the negation, but Stevens could find the affirmative remedy in imagination. Therefore, Stevens borrows only technical

[130] Benamou, 30.

elements such as colour mixing, the use of colour as symbolic, and the use of nonsense words from Laforgue. On the other hand, Eliot's characters are very similar to those of Laforgue. Especially J. Alfred Prufrock is a typical one. Stevens is a poet of gaiety and imagination while Laforgue is a poet of dark negation.

Pound also cherished and borrowed from the traditional poetry to contrast the poor present with the rich past. He, like Eliot, viewed the past as an important part of the poetic relationship.

> For three years, out of key with his time,
> He strove to resuscitate the dead art
> Of poetry; to maintain "the sublime"
> In the old sense. Wrong from the start— [131]

Moreover, in his representative work *The Cantos*, there exists a mythical structure of Odyssey in its sub-text like Eliot's *The Waste Land*. In the final analysis, Pound can be also thought of as a traditionalist like Eliot. Therefore, he naturally has nostalgia for the past when we could live harmoniously with gods. Stevens is different from these two poets, and we can call it a difference of

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[131] Ezra Pound, "Hugh-Selwyn Mauberly" *Modern Poems: An Introduction to Poetry*, Ellman, Ricahrd & Robert O'clair eds. (N.Y: Norton, 1976) 131.

epistemology. We might examine this epistemological difference in contrasting Stevens with any other modern poet. Stevens finds a delight in existence while no other modernist poet does.

Finally, Stevens differs from the French Symbolist poets and other Modernist poets in that he does not set existence on a transcendental plane or have any nostalgia about it. A crucial difference between Stevens and the Symbolists comes from his Americanism. His poetry is confined to this world while that of the French Symbolist poets is not. Stevens's Americanism might be the reason for his going beyond French influences. This aspect in Stevens's symbolism despite the French Symbolist influence must be discussed in relation to the American soil existing in him.

In this chapter, we have discussed Stevens's difference from French Symbolist poets. His difference is found especially in the dimension of epistemology. This epistemological difference naturally comes from his American trait discussed in the chapter I. Therefore, we could have the chance to clearly know the reason why Stevens is not tagged simply as a symbolist poet. Rather if we can call him a symbolist poet, we should admit that there exists Stevens's own Symbolism in his poetics. In this case, of course,

his version of Symbolism is the synthesis of French Symbolist traits and American psyche. In the next chapter, we will fully discuss Stevens's longer poem, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction." Because Stevens's core of his poetics as well as of his intellectual and aesthetic background of American tradition embodies itself very clearly and nicely in this poem, the discussion of it will be enough to prove the thesis of this dissertation that Stevens was the poet who was very faithful to American background with Symbolist features. This dissertation might be concluded with the discussion of this long poem.

Chapter IV: Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction

Stevens insisted that people should look at reality with their imagination, which adheres more closely to reality. In fact, Stevens tried not to be too far from reality while endeavouring to find a balance between imagination and reality. Even if human beings could not possibly grasp the whole essence of reality, he felt, they could get pleasure in the process of describing reality faithfully. The "Supreme Fiction" is the product resulting from this recognition. All kinds of human discoveries that the absolute-seeking men achieve are fictions for Stevens. As stated before, it is because the human intellectual systems or order cannot contain reality, which is always changing. All our definitions are destined to remain no more than metaphors, if we borrow Rorty's term. Thus, all human attempts at a full description of reality turn into metaphor, or "fictions" in Stevens's term. For Stevens, "the Supreme Fiction" is a poem that describes the ever-changing reality as exactly as possible. According to Stevens, ordinary poems are generally no more than fictions, but all kinds of poetry can be "the Supreme Fiction." This idea is paradoxical, like

Perils's comment: "if nothing is fixed, futility can be transformed into a realization of the world's infinite possibility to inspire poetical expression."[132] Here "a realization of the world's infinite possibility" indicates that the Supreme Fiction can be created when we retain a more flexible attitude.

"Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"[133] has been regarded as Stevens's discussion of his own poetics. However, it may be claimed that its significance lies in the way this poem clearly shows his debt to the intellectual background in the American tradition discussed in chapter I. Thus, the analysis and interpretation of this poem permit us to see the close link between this poem and Stevens's American intellectual traits. In this poem, there are not only many elements that show Stevens's American intellectual and aesthetic disposition; it also raises issues about reality and imagination.

"Notes" is composed of a prologue, ten cantos under each of the three subtitles, and an epilogue. In canto I of the first section, "It must be Abstract," the speaker tells the ephebe that he should

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[132] Alan Perils, *Wallace Stevens: A World of Transforming Shapes* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1976) 97.
[133] Further reference to this poem will be abbreviated as "Notes."

look at reality in ignorance without any preconceptions:

> 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)

The word "ignorant" here indicates the state without any kind of preconceptions and prejudices, and is opposed to the word "invented." Riddel says about this "ignorance":

> Ignorance, meaning not so much an escape from knowledge or a transcendence of it as the beginning of the right to know, is the starting point of the human, that moment when he is purely himself.[134]

With this ignorant eye, we can see the sun "clearly in the idea of it." Miller's comment will help us get the meaning of this phrase. He insists that:

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[134] Joseph N. Riddel, *The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens* (Baton Rouge: Lousiana State UP, 1965), 151.

> To perceive the sun, the poet must forget all about Phoebus and forget the very name of the sun. Nothing must come between him and the sun when he gives himself to the act of looking at it and seeing it in its being.[135]

Finally, "idea" here means "direct sense image."[136] To see things with an ignorant eye is to seize things directly regardless of their name or anything else, and is a way to get "the first idea." Stevens explains the first idea in his letter to Henry Church.

> If you take the varnish and dirt of generations off a picture, you see it in its first idea. If you think about the world without its varnish and dirt, you are a thinker of the first idea. (LSW, 426-427)

As its appearance becomes clear when we clean a painting, we can see a new and pure shape of things in nature after we shake off old ideas and preconceptions. Stevens suggests "abstraction" as a way to get "the first idea." Abstraction here has the same meaning as being "an ignorant man again." This is not constructing my own world replicated through my eyes in my way or getting

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[135] Miller, 248.
[136] Ibid.,

my own image of the world in my mind. Rather it is "the power to carry the image of the very thing alive and undistorted into the mind."[137] In this respect, the subtitle of Section I "It Must Be Abstract" also means that "the poet should abstract himself from the layers of interpretation which have piled up over the years on objects in the external world."[138] This process of abstraction is enough to remind us of the Emersonian "nothing." We have already discussed that the moment of "becoming nothing" is the moment when we throw away old habits, features and metaphors. In this moment, "all mean egotism vanishes," and we become "nothing" to see all. Stevens's abstraction is no other than becoming the Emersonian "nothing" in that Stevens cherishes throwing away or getting out of old preconceptions. This vividly shows Stevens's faithfulness to the American aesthetic thought discussed in Chapter I.

However, judging from the speaker's comment that "The first idea is an imagined thing," (CP, 387) the first idea seems to have no relation to the Kantian a priori conception. Although the ephebe gives the sun a new name of "gold flourisher," it is no more than

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[137] Ibid.,
[138] Ibid.,

to put another name on the sun. Giving a name to the sun can be thought of as the description of reality that finally ends up making another metaphor. In the end, all the human effort to contain things will remain a metaphor that is bound to be left as a failure as a full description of reality:

> . . . the first idea becomes
> The hermit in a poet's metaphors,
>
> Who comes and goes and comes and goes all day. (CP, 381)

Thus, the speaker grieves at the fact that the first idea is not his own, but soon he comes to know it does not belong to anyone:

> The first idea was not our own. Adam
> In Eden was the father of Descartes
> And Eve made air the mirror of herself,
>
> Of her sons and of her daughters. (CP, 383)

In the Christian myth, Adam was the first man to get the first idea in human history. For Stevens, however, Adam is the father of the philosopher Descartes, and "Descartes is used as a symbol of the reason." (LSW, 433) This implies that Stevens here points out that

the Christian idea regarding Adam as a pure man having the first idea is a fiction, derived from the reason of human beings. Moreover, Eve made her own fictional world "through egotism"[139] as she "made air the mirror of herself." In other words, she committed a fallacy in that she regards herself as the center of the world, and everything as reflections derived from herself. Human beings, their descendants, foolishly have tried to put this infinite universe into their own narrow order. Thus, they live in "a second earth" (CP, 383) that is invented by man's reason. Stevens questions our excessive faith in reason. For him, thinking out a mythical world is factitious, and is more so when that world is based on man's reason. Reality exists earlier than man. Thus, Stevens argues that man should realise his preconceptions or preconceived ideas are fictions arising out of his reason, and approach reality more closely by destroying these old myths. This is only possible when he experiences abstraction by the power of the imagination.

From Canto VII, Stevens shows the figure of major man. The "major man" is different from the ephebe who fragmentarily looks

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[139] Suzanne Juhasz, *Metaphor and the Poetry of Williams, Pound, and Stevens* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1974) 149.

at reality by only seeing a single aspect of things. This "major man" is "A thinker of the first idea," (CP, 49) and a "full-grown poet."[140] Pearce regards the "major man" as the poet who makes us able to affirm the final debris or crumbs of elegance innate in every creature in the world, even in useless creatures:

> The "major man" is the poet ("any man of imagination"), he who makes us know as the "final elegance" even that man whom our religionists and rulers see only as a poor bedraggled creature.[141]

With this kind of mind, man can create "the Supreme Fiction" that is as close a description of reality as possible. Stevens wrote in one of his letters, "I ought to believe in the essential imagination, but that has its difficulties. It is easier to believe in a thing created by the imagination." (LWS, 370) Since the "Supreme Fiction" is the primary concern of Stevens, being the "major man" can be considered as "a manifestation of that balance between imagination and reality out of which alone the supreme fiction can

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[140] Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate*, 190.
[141] Pearce, "Wallace Stevens: The Life of the Imagination," *Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Marie Borroff (Englewood Cliff, N. J: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963) 124.

be approached."[142] In Canto VIII, Stevens introduces a man named MacCollough, and shows how he becomes a "major man" by seemingly drowning in the sea and harmonizing the waves. Also in Canto IX, the "major man" is talked about, but Stevens here expresses scepticism while revealing the origin of this "major man":

> The romantic intoning, the declaimed clairvoyance
> Are parts of apotheosis, appropriate
> And of its nature, the idiom thereof.
>
> They differ from reason's click-clack, its applied
> Enflashings. But apotheosis is not
> The origin of the major man. He comes,
>
> Compact in invincible foils, from reason,
> Lighted at midnight by the studious eye,
> Swaddled in revery, . . . (CP, 387-388)

The "major man" came not from "apotheosis," but "from reason" "Compact in invincible foils." The rejection of "apotheosis" suggests Stevens's inclination to decline the mythical world. On the other hand, however, it is another contradiction to say that the

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[142] Lucy Beckett, *Wallace Stevens* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974) 144.

"major man" came from "reason." In this case, "As a product of the reason he is a hypothesis, and therefore exists as a possibility"[143] In fact, we should place the "major man" as "purest in the heart." (CP, 388) We should "Give him/ No names." (CP, 388) Therefore, the "major man" is also turned into another fiction, another metaphor, because human speculation about being the "major man" is also based on human reasoning. In Canto X, Stevens, who felt the limitation of human capacity in reasoning, suggests a desirable and suitable model of the "major man":

> It is he. The man
> In that old coat, those sagging pantaloons,
>
> It is of him, ephebe, to make, to confect
> The final elegance, not to console
> Nor sanctity, but plainly to propound. (CP, 389)

The final shape that the world deprived of God requires is the image of "The man/ In that old coat, those sagging pantaloons." To achieve "The final elegance," the ephebe is "plainly to propound" this man. Ephebe is "not to console/ Nor sanctify" this man "In that

[143] Suckenick, 144.

old coat, those sagging pantaloons." "The final elegance" shows up in the Supreme Fiction that a poet made with his imagination closer to reality than ever before on the basis of his acceptance of human limitation. Only at this moment, can the ephebe become the "major man" who is a "full-grown poet" although he must use his reason in the creation of "the Supreme Fiction." Finally, we can recognize that what Stevens has sought for as a substitute for God is poetry as "the Supreme Fiction."

In Section II, "It Must Change," Stevens comments on the ever-changing reality, and emphatically asserts that the Supreme Fiction should not remain stagnant to reflect this fluctuating reality well. In Canto I, he evokes a painting, depicting angels that are products of myths, doves, girls and so on. They have never left from their places in the picture. Thus, their place is the mythological world. Yet reality is a constantly changing place, different from this mythological world:

> Violets, doves, girls, bees and hyacinths
> Are inconstant, objects of inconstant cause
> In a universe of inconstancy. (CP, 389)

The mythological world in the picture is a fixed "universe of inconstancy," with no change and no passage of time. Reality, on the other hand, is endlessly changing, dominated by time. Here we can be assured of Stevens's intellectual link to the American background discussed before. Many representative American thinkers emphasize the transitions in life. Reality, the actual world, is where we feel this transition in person. Thus, "the Supreme Fiction" should also change according to this reality full of transitions. Stevens might already know he should not stop writing poetry so long as he is exposed to reality. A good poem, or the "Supreme Fiction" is one that can give us the fullest discussion of this transitional quality of reality or can discover "the temporal nature of Being, not by reference to some cultural cyclicity on the order of Yeats or Pound, but through its momentary, wandering interrogation. This 'endlessly elaborating poem,' as Stevens calls it, is able to work out the fullest implications of its subject by constantly exposing itself to change."[144] Yeats or Pound or Eliot always force us to think about the words or concepts that remind

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[144] Michael Davidson, "Wallace Stevens and Contemporary Poetics," *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism* ed. Albert Gelpi (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 146.

us of the transcendental or supernatural world, such as origin, center etc. In this case, not like Stevens, their poems could not be read as a fiction but a serious exploration to search for the transcendental realm that might make us feel depressed and desperate.

There appears "The great statue of the General Du Pay" in Canto III. This statue was set up for the remembrance of his life, but the statue having no contact with time becomes "rubbish in the end." (CP, 392) Stevens says, "Nothing had happened because nothing had changed." (CP, 392) In this respect, art away from the transitions in the world is actually defying reality. Thus poetry should not try to define the real world by being more than a fiction. Canto VIII explains why poetry should change, and is important to the extent that we can call this canto "an embodiment of one of his (Stevens's) most central ideas."[145]

> On her trip around the world, Nanzia Nunzio
> Confronted Ozymandias. She went
> Alone and like a vestal long-prepared.
>
> I am the spouse. She took her necklace off

[145] Beckett, 152.

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

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

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

. . .

Clothe me entire in the final filament,

. . .

Then Ozymandias said the spouse, the bride
Is never naked. A fictive covering
Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind. (CP, 396)

The woman here, "Nanzia Nunzio" indicates reality. Her last name Nunzio is similar to the Italian word "nuncio" that means the messenger. Thus, she comes to Ozymandias with a message. Ozymandias is a fiction that determines the concept of reality in its own way regardless of the core of reality.[146] Nanzia wants to meet Ozymandias with her naked body, "divested of" all the ornaments

[146] For an explanation about the content of this poem, see Suckenick, 150.

such as “bright gold,” “emerald or amethyst.” In other words, she hopes to confront Ozymandias not with the external appearance covered with fictions but with her essential figure. Yet, Ozymandias says “the bride/ Is never naked.” It is because her last name, “Nunzio” implies “her revealing nakedness discloses her status as a sign of something ‘beyond the burning body that I bear.’”[147] Ozymandias cannot help looking at Nunzia who always wears “A fictive covering” (CP, 396) that Ozymandias himself made. Rorty’s metaphor becomes this “fictive covering” in the case of these two lovers. Reality always exists as a form of fiction created by human beings in their mind.

Canto X discusses Stevens’s idea of the imagination and its operation and significance. Stevens seems to totally agree with Rorty’s opinion because he says that the world is a “Theatre/ Of Trope.” (CP, 397) Moreover, he tells us that reality becomes enriched by the addition of imagination to it when reality gets filled with various metaphors. Stevens concludes this section by saying that only when a poet’s imagination is endlessly renewed, can he enjoy the refined appearance of reality throughout his

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[147] Michael Beehler, *T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and Discourses of Difference* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1987) 57.

whole process of versification.

> . . . The freshness of transformation is
>
> The freshness of a world. It is our own,
> It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves, (CP, 398)

What kind of "transformation" is it? Perhaps it is the transformation of ourselves in the transition of life. The constant transformation of self brings freshness. This freshness is something we feel about the world and ourselves. The moment when we get out of old descriptions or metaphors is the moment when we can see reality in a new and different way. Of course, as stated before, this freshness is bound to grow old and hardened through the changing quality of reality. Thus, we should prepare new transformations endlessly.

The section III, "It Must Give Pleasure" discusses the pleasure we can get from the harmony of reality and imagination on the basis of his insistence that "poetic truth is an agreement with reality." (NA, 54) The union of imagination and reality is expressed as the marriage of "The great captain" and "Bawda" in Canto IV.

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

They married well because the marriage-place
Was what they loved. It was neither heaven nor hell.
They were love's characters come face to face. (CP, 401)

As Legget suggests, "Their union is a marriage of mind and place,"[148] this "great captain" represents imagination, and Bawda reality. They married "To stop the whirlwind, balk the elements," (CP, 401) that is, to avoid the external threats. Their marriage is the result of their equal love that does not require any loss of their identity on each side. This canto might be said to express "the pleasure of balances."[149] However, we need to notice that the great captain loved the place, "ever-hill Catawba" first, and "married Bawda, whom he found there." Catawba is the compound of "captain" and "Bawda," and it is "a place dependent on ourselves." (CP, 401) In fact, the great captain loved his own reflection of Bawda first. This represents the workings of the poet's mind in which he projects his imagination to make his

[148] Legget, 86.
[149] Riddel, 181.

affinity with it broader and then gets pleasure from union with reality. Yet, the narrower the distance between the poet and reality gets through the increase of the projections of his imagination, the fatter Bawda, who was originally gaunt, becomes. At this moment, the world becomes too much painted with his thoughts.

> Fat girl, terrestrial, my summer, my night,
> How is it I find you in difference, see you there
> In a moving contour, a change not quite complete?
>
> You are familiar yet an aberration. (CP, 406)

Man gets pleasure from an agreement with reality through poetry, but it is no more than "an aberration" in the end. Because reality is fluctuating, a poet has no choice but to write new poems endlessly. This is "the incessant creation." Thus, his ever-lasting and ever-elaborating poetry becomes "The metaphor that murders metaphor." (NA, 84) We have seen already how the world is a place where new metaphors are competing with old ones. It is undeniable that Stevens is deeply rooted in the American soil. Stevens, in section III, seems to put much emphasis on the

temporary pleasures felt sporadically in the process of creation. In this attitude, the final result of this process, or the question of the possibility of our full description of reality is not important. He wants to draw pleasure from the process itself. This position is very similar to William James's, as suggested before. For James, the absolute truth, the core of reality was not his primary concern. He was interested not in the existence of the absolute truth, but in our constant actions to get closer to it because the experiences we go through in the process make our life enriched.

Stevens finishes this long poem by attaching a coda to the end.

> Soldier, there is a war between the mind
> And sky, between thought and day and night. It is
> For that the poet is always in the sun,
>
> Patches the moon together in his room
> To his Virgilian cadences, up down,
> Up down. It is a war that never ends. (CP, 407)

Soldier here is the metaphor for a poet who makes efforts to create "the Supreme Fiction" in a balance between reality and imagination. The soldier's war is sure to terminate in the future,

but the poet's war is "a war that never ends." Thus, poetry, which desires to be the "Supreme Fiction," appears repeatedly with other new shapes because it is bound to grow old and be destroyed in the future. For this reason, Stevens finally advises us to take pleasure from the process of writing poetry and to view the activity of versification as the genuine purpose.

Through the discussion until now, we have come to realize that we can get "the first idea" through the "abstraction," and then can make "the Supreme Fiction" by endlessly renewing our imagination. However, the important point in Stevens's insistence is that we should find and feel pleasure while we are making supreme fictions. Stevens assumes the notion of the Supreme Fiction that can contain reality as closely as possible because we cannot possibly grasp reality, but poems should be written incessantly to get "the Supreme Fiction." In other words, the completed supreme fiction never exists in the world. This is also the reason Stevens uses the preposition "toward," not "on."[150] Thus, the title implies the rejection of completion and the emphasis on process, his preference of "becoming" to "being."

[150] See, Davidson, 147.

This might come from Stevens's American psyche, because many American people cherish their representative values of continuity and change. The mentality these two words can speak for dominates the whole poem. We have dealt only with "Notes" because Stevens does not put forth new issues different from the ones in "Notes" after it. That "Notes" is "the central statement of Stevens's poetic, and each of the later poems can be seen as a development of "the aesthetic of existence" that Stevens projects in this poem"[151] is the main reason for confining the discussion of his longer poems to this one. In this respect, we may conclude that there exist many traits of the American psyche in Stevens's poetry, and judge that the analysis of this poem in this direction is in a sense of some value. "Notes" must be seen as Stevens's best poetic accomplishment and the golden fruit of mental activities.

[151] Hines, 212.

Conclusion

Stevens's involvement with French Symbolism started early in his poetic career and remained until the end, staying fundamentally the same. In discussing his affinity with French Symbolism, we can find that Stevens wrote his poetry in the same contextual way that French Symbolists did, and this might have been one of the reasons why his readers have difficulty in reading his poems. While speculating on this subject, it has been shown that some representative characteristics of the French Symbolist poetry exist in Stevens's poetry and that these cause the particular difficulty mentioned above. Moreover, it seems that the answer to the question why he wrote his poetry in such a way would give a valid way to interpret Stevens's poetry other than the monotonous approach on the basis of reality and imagination that most of his critics including J. Hillis Miller and Louis R. Martz have selected. In fact, the approach based on the relation between reality and imagination consequently has narrowed the critical horizon of Stevens's poetry. Therefore some portion of this thesis has been devoted to an attempt to explore Stevens's affinity or

relationship with French Symbolism.

Despite his affinity with French Symbolist poets, however, it has been shown that it is not reasonable to classify Stevens as a symbolist poet. As mentioned before, although some elements of a literary trend clearly show up in a poet's works, we cannot categorize him into the trend as long as his epistemology is not the same as the poets of the trend. In Stevens's case, he is surely different from the French Symbolist poets in epistemological matters. Certainly the term "epistemological" contains a very wide range of mental activities for recognizing the world, including the aesthetic, or the intellectual recognitions.

Stevens, we have seen, is rather a poet who clearly displays his American intellectual and aesthetic traditional background throughout the course of his poetic career. Of course, this American trait is not well suited to French Symbolist poetics. Thus, the problem is to determine which of the two dominates Stevens's poetry. My conclusion is that the French Symbolist factors are no more than a tactic to write his poetry in an original way, while Stevens endlessly reveals his American feature in most of his poems. Finally, Stevens is a complicated poet who is faithful to

American traditional thought while carrying French Symbolist characteristics. His American trait could be expressed with this line: “In the sum of the parts, there are only the parts.” (CP, 204) Stevens never shows any belief in the principle or transcendental truth that comprehends or unifies these partially revealing reality. Thus, Stevens claims that we should believe fictions: “The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.” (OP, 189) Yet, among these fictions, Stevens advises us to search for “the Supreme Fiction” in this ever-changing reality. This “Supreme Fiction” faithfully transforms itself according to the changes in reality. Nevertheless, “The denouement has to be postponed . . .” (CP, 416) This means that we never achieve even this “Supreme Fiction” because reality always fluctuates. Therefore, Stevens insists that we should feel pleasure in the process of endlessly creating or making supreme fictions. This attitude puts much emphasis on the process itself regardless of the result, or validity of the actions. This is the basic characteristic of the American feature. With this basic idea, we have argued that Stevens is a

poet of American background with the French Symbolist features.

One of our principal findings is that there is the American intellectual and aesthetic tradition that started from Emerson through James to Stevens. Their basic premise is that life is in transition. Human beings endlessly experience self-transformations in this transitional life. Rather, men should go through these transformations in this reality because it fluctuates without any chance of grasping its essential shape. With this impossibility to grasp reality, we should go on and not be fixed. Many of Stevens's poems show this process of transformation very clearly. In relation to aesthetic matters, American thinking is not different. Rorty's figure of metaphor is very helpful to discuss this. The effort to grasp reality ends up being a metaphor in Rorty's view. Thus, even Stevens's poems become metaphor. A common characteristic for metaphor is that it is bound to grow old and be destroyed in the future. Because reality changes, the full description of it is impossible and no description will contain reality if it's old. Therefore, we should constantly make new descriptions of reality, and this is the same as Stevens's argument on the incessant creation of "the Supreme Fiction."

Another significant finding of this thesis is that there exist the characteristics of French Symbolism and they appear in the texts of Stevens's poems. Suggestiveness, musicality and contextual writing could be listed as major characteristics of French Symbolism. French Symbolists' liking for suggestiveness is because they wanted to evoke their emotions in the readers' mind in the same way they felt them. For this, they gave up the way of description. Musicality shows that French Symbolists cherish musical aspects in their poems. They wanted their poems to act as music conveys a musician's feelings to the audience. Indeed, the contextual writing is the direct motivation for this dissertation. This concept was often expressed using the term "the constructive imagination" borrowed from Lentricchia. The meaning of a text is achieved in a more valid and analytical way when we interpret the text in a contextual reading. This contextual reading is the way that fully explores the working of words in the text. This way is especially helpful for understanding difficult poems like Stevens's. We can realize that Stevens's poetry actually has this quality if we think Stevens wrote poetry on the basis of implicit metaphors.

Contrary to the similarities discussed above, there also exists the differences between Stevens and the French Symbolist poets. This discussion can be focused mainly on the epistemological difference. For French Symbolists, the constructed world in their works is eternal. It is not affected by changing reality and does not need to feel the transitions of life. For Stevens, however, his constructed world in his works is no more than a fiction that is to be discarded or destroyed in the future. While Stevens's poetry shows representative American values of continuity and change, French Symbolists' poetry possesses a static quality. By static it is meant that they seem to feel no need to go on writing incessantly, whether they really had this idea or not. At any rate, we could feel a great difference about this point, and this could be seen as a decisive proof that we cannot classify Stevens as a symbolist poet. Judging from the discussion above, it is more adequate for us to call Stevens a poet who is faithful to the American traditional thought to the end, while carrying French Symbolist traits only as a result of his choice of the French Symbolist mode of writing as his own writing mode.

On our way of proving this basic argument, we have seen

each discussion above appears chapter by chapter in this thesis. In Chapter I, we surveyed the American tradition by quoting Emerson's and James's major writings. We have found that Emerson, James and Stevens have the same basic idea on the world and life. They claim that life is in transition. On the aesthetic problem of describing reality, we discussed it with the help of Richard Rorty's figure of metaphor. In Chapter II, we explored the characteristics of French Symbolism and their appearance in Stevens's poems. These characteristics were discussed with some examples of the French Symbolist poems and the critical interpretations of Stevens's poems. As a result of this, we could find similarities between Stevens and French Symbolist.

Chapter III surveyed their differences, especially focusing on their epistemological ones. For this, we were provided with parallel comparisons between Stevens's poems and those of the French Symbolists. Here we found that the epistemological difference is the decisive factor that can classify a poet into a literary trend. Finally, the epistemological difference defined Stevens as a poet in the American tradition in spite of many of his similarities to French Symbolist. In Chapter IV, we analysed

Stevens's "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," and emphasized his American disposition again, to make sure that he is not a symbolist poet. This poem is evaluated as Stevens's central statement of his poetics. In studying this poem, we could find that the American psyche is also expressed in it. Therefore, we concluded that looking at Stevens within the American tradition is a good way to understand his poetry.

Of course, this dissertation has many limitations; the fact that the study of the French poetry is only done through English versions, not the original French text, is the biggest weakness. However, as stated before, despite these weaknesses if the discussion here extend the horizon of Stevens's poetry and open a possibility of new recognition toward Stevens's poetry, it is may be of value. This quotation from his poem, "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" might be regarded as expressing the hope that the discussions of this thesis will open a new possibility and reveal Stevens "again" in a new way: "I am the necessary angel of earth,/ Since, in my sight, you see the earth again." (CP, 496) In the end, the study of Stevens in relation to French Symbolism on the basis of the American traditional idea is meaningful and enlightening for

his poetry. Stevens's affinity with French Symbolism reveals much about his taste and preferences of complex mode of writing only adequate to the close contextual readings. Pleasure was aesthetically and mentally important for Stevens, and one of the most powerful sources of pleasure in his life and work might be the fact that he wrote his contextual poems within the basic idea of American tradition.

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