Vagabond in metaphor; Wallace Stevens' imagery

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"A VAGABOND IN METAPHOR"
Wallace Stevens' Imagery

by

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Approved:

Leslie A. Fields
Chairman of Board of Examiners

W.P. Clark
Dean, Graduate School
There was a will to change, a necessitous
And present way, a presentation, a kind
Of volatile world, too constant to be denied,

The eye of a vagabond in metaphor
That catches our own. The casual is not
Enough. The freshness of transformation is

The freshness of a world. It is our own,
It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves,
And that necessity and that presentation

Are rubbings of a glass in which we peer,
Of these beginnings, gay and green, propose
The suitable amours. Time will write them down.

"Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction,"
Transport to Summer, p.136.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE SUBJECT OF THE POEM.

Poetry is the subject of the poem,
From this the poem issues and
To this returns.
—The Man with the Blue Guitar.

Wallace Stevens was born in Reading, Pennsylvania, on October 2, 1879. He attended Harvard University and the New York law school, was admitted to the bar in 1904 and practiced law in New York City until 1916, when he became associated with the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company. His first professional poetry was published in 1914, when his "Phases" was printed in Poetry magazine. In 1916 Poetry printed his one-act verse play, Three Travellers Watch a Sunrise. Nine years later, after his poems had appeared in such magazines as Poetry, Dial, Literary Digest, and New Republic, he collected his verse in Harmonium, his first volume. There followed Ideas of Order in 1935, The


For further facts of publication of his books, see bibliography.

His work has not been without recognition. Recently he was awarded the 1949 Bollingen Prize for Poetry, an honor which includes a thousand dollars and the company of such recognized poets as Ezra Pound, 1948 winner. 2

Here we have the phenomenon of an esteemed poet whose first published verse did not appear until he was 35, and whose first book did not come out until he was 44. That this tardiness is not due to a difficulty of composition is apparent from the number of works which he published soon after his first.

Perhaps some explanation may be found in the subject matter of his poems. We must, of course, beware of over-emphasizing the possibly autobiographical nature of his poetry. Our primary concern will be the art and not the artist.

Man, says Wallace Stevens, lives in an imperfect world. The imperfection of this world forces him to postulate an ideal world; he creates "ideas of order" into which he fits the happenings of every day. The

young idealist lives chiefly in this realm of imagination, finding his ideals more real that the physical world around him.

But, as he grows, his ideas of order change. Confronted with the changing and mysterious demands of his body, he is forced to abandon his imaginary world and live completely in the world of the senses, of observation and experience. But that world, too, is imperfect. It grows old and dies. The aging philosopher finds himself no longer motivated by his body, "the old animal." 3

Yet he has learned something. First of all, his imaginative, sensuous life has left him with a child, who, he perceives, is going to undergo exactly the same cyclical experience that he has undergone. This changing of philosophy is constant; it preserves itself by reproducing itself in other men, "a wave, interminably flowing." 4 Furthermore, this need which man, the animal, feels, not only perpetuates itself, but drives man on to seek new solutions — new worlds.

Other bodies come,
Twining our phantasy and our device
To make the body covetous in desire
Of the still finer, more implacable chords. 5

4. "Peter Quince at the Clavier," Harmonium, p. 121.
and, in addition, the need which the old animal still feels, "the need of some imperishable bliss," is the source of art-creation, of philosophy itself.

For, to the middle-aged philosopher, there remains the knowledge of this constancy in change — a final idea of order, a final belief in the imagination, as well as an enduring love for this world, heightened by the transformation of love and by the increasing nearness of death. From his early life he has learned to postulate order with the imagination; from his adult life he has learned to value the physical world; finally, with the aid of both the imagination and the senses, he finds order and delight in his latest years.

This constant lack does not occur solely within the life of the individual.

If from the earth we came, it was an earth
That bore us as a part of all the things
It breeds and that was lower than it is.
Our nature is her nature. Hence it comes,
Since by our nature we grow old, earth grows
The same. We parallel the mother's death.

When the world was young, it met the problem of evil with great ideas of order: with Judaism, Christianity, and the Roman State. But man was of a lustful, violent people, increasingly fond of this earth; religion turned to Pro-

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testantism, the state to laissez faire; and the new science of experimental evidence began. Now the earthly faith of Emerson and Rousseau has burnt out.\(^7\) Twentieth century man finds himself trained to accept no more than he can see ("Politic man ordained Imagination as the fateful sin."\(^8\)); yet, now that his buoyant hope in this world has failed him, as any such exacting hope must fail in this perishing earth, he finds himself once more confronted with the evil of a world that dies, desperately in need of a new imaginative system of order to help him live his life.

Besides being torn between these paradoxical needs for imagination and fact, today's man finds himself equipped with a greatly impoverished language. Since he no longer has the a priori reasoning, the constant postulates of a young world, each idea of order which he now seeks must stake its claim in stronger language. Acting in competition with the commercial and political systems of order of advertising and propaganda ("The chronicle of affected homage that foxed so many books,"\(^9\)), a rapid series of philosophies all using the same old words has

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exhausted the most super- of his superlatives. This, then, is his present condition: A dying man in a dying world, whose language dies with him.

PART TWO: THE POET'S GIBBERISH

The poem goes from the poet's gibberish to The gibberish of the vulgate and back again. —"Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"

The problem of failing ideas of order is paralleled by the problem of the failing strength of our words.

The history of a figure of speech or the history of an idea, such as the idea of nobility, cannot be very different from the history of anything else . . . there have been incessant changes of response [to nobility, for example] . . . and our own diffidence is simply one more state of mind due to such a change. 10

Most contemporary writing, both prose and poetry, has met this difficulty by employing, as Hi Simons points out, 11 the metaphor rather than the simile, and the metaphor "not as an embellishment, but as a means of discourse."

When, through metaphor, the unexpressed meaning of a poem is conveyed via its unexpressed relationship to a concrete symbol, a poem can once again become a personal matter, a re-association of personal experiences, rather than a re-assembling of stock responses.

This ability of a metaphor to escape the poverty

of language is demonstrated in Wallace Stevens' "A Dish of Peaches in Russia."

With my whole body I taste these peaches, I touch them and smell them. Who speaks?

I absorb them as the Angevine Absorbs Anjou. I see them as a lover sees,

As a young lover sees the first buds of spring And as the black Spaniard plays his guitar.

Who speaks? But it must be that I, That animal, that Russian, that exile, for whom

The bells of the chapel pullulate sounds at Heart. The peaches are large and round,

Ah! and red; and they have peach fuzz, ah! They are full of juice and the skin is soft.

They are full of the colors of my village And of fair weather, summer, dew, peace.

The room is quiet where they are. The windows are open. The sunlight fills

The curtains. Even the drifting of the curtains, Slight as it is, disturbs me. I did not know

That such ferocities could tear One self from another, as these peaches do. 12

Stevens has used the metaphor of peaches because he is not interested in the system of thought for which they might stand. He is interested, rather, in the way a twentieth century Russian would regard any idea, whether it be curtains or the place of workingmen in a society.

The words, "workingmen in a society," are exhausted; their matrix of meaning is already set, so laden with emotional connotations that to put them into a poem which was only glancingly concerned with them would be to consign the whole poem to one of a standard set of reactions. Presumably we have few ideas about peaches on any but a simple response-level.

Two qualities of Wallace Stevens' metaphor make it especially valuable to a people who, weary of words and suspicious of the imagination, demand facts. First of all, he writes of his deepest fears, and laughs, as the twentieth century has learned to do. He writes of his hero, presumably himself, as "The Comedian," and his apologetic irony, his defensive understatement win a hearing from ears long closed to the commercial overstatement of our age. His audience gained, Stevens, laughing even at his own ideas, can teach the reader to laugh at his suspicion and his first unwillingness to listen.

It is but one more philosophic step to suggest that the deep fears do exist, and that the laughter is but a cover-up for something very real and very serious. Wallace Stevens

14. Hence his deliberately facetious titles, such as "The Monocle de mon Oncle," Harmonium, p. 16, which have greatly annoyed all serious-minded critics, such as Peter Viereck and Julian Symons. Cf., also, the tone of such a poem as "So-and-so Reclining on her Couch," Transport to Summer, p. 14.
helps the twentieth century good-humor man to say:

Here I am, my adversary, that
Confront you, hoo-ing the slick trombones,

Yet with a petty misery
At heart, a petty misery... 15

Then, with a somewhat Pagliaccian laugh, Stevens advises
the twentieth century man to go ahead and laugh, too.

Wear the breeches of a mask,
Coat half-flare and half-galleon;
Wear a helmet without reason,
Tufted, tilted, twirled, and twisted.
Start the singing in a voice
Rougher than a grinding shale.

Hang a feather by your eye,
God and look a little sly,
This must be the vent of pity,
Deeper than a truer ditty
Of the real that wrenches
Of the quick that's wry. 16

Second, he writes nearly always in understatement,
as in the poem, "Girl in a Nightgown," in which the
desperate bravado of a girl in a bombed city becomes
the brave despair of a terrified generation, but only by
metaphor abstracted from exceedingly casual statement.

15. The Man with the Blue Guitar, p. 13
Lights out. Shades up.
A look at the weather.
There has been a booming all the spring.
A refrain from the end of the boulevards.

This is the silence of night,
This is what could not be shaken,
Full of stars and the images of stars—
And that booming wintry and dull,

Like a tottering, a falling and an end,
Again and again, always there,
Massive drums and leaden trumpets,
Perceived by feeling instead of sense,

A revolution of things colliding
Phrases! But of fear and of fate.
The night should be warm and flutters' fortune
Should play in the trees when morning comes.

Once it was, the repose of night,
Was a place, strong place, in which to sleep.
It is shaken now. It will burst into flames, 17
Either now or tomorrow or the day after that.

Defensive understatement and self-ridicule, while
skilfully employed by Stevens, are not peculiar to him
alone. It is in a third quality of metaphor that he is
most distinctive.

All metaphors are, as we have seen, necessarily
ambiguous; yet a certain core of exact communication must
be assured poetry readers if a poem is to create any fresh
understanding whatsoever. In order to make sure that every
reader will reach the correct inference, insofar as his
background of experience enables him, contemporary writers

17. "Girl in a Nightgown," Parts of a World, p. 47
have classified and illuminated their necessary ambiguity as much as possible. Eliot, for instance, makes reference to already existing systems of thought; Pound employs literary allusions from other languages and other ages.\(^{18}\) The sometimes great effort of understanding or research required by these references is essential for the awakening of thought which would be unaroused by mere nouns and adjectives, all of them exhausted by over-use. The mind examines the metaphor, tries hypotheses, studies the references, and at last finds a hypothesis which grows and grows in meaning as the references are applied to it. The reader then experiences the sense of discovery which once resulted from communication by simple words or stated similes. Some such effort of the mind is necessary to stimulate the tension and relaxation of personal discovery of problems and solutions.

But Wallace Stevens does not employ any cultural-historical philosophical references to give regularity to his metaphorical meaning. Such references are part of what he is campaigning against in his "war against the murderous alphabet," and would reduce metaphors, in time, to the same exhaustion which has overtaken the statement and the simile. Instead, since he postulates a

\(^{18}\) R. P. Blackmur, "Examples of Wallace Stevens," The Double Agent, p. 99. The comparisons are Mr. Blackmur's.
constant similarity in the lives of men and the tempers of epochs — the constant imperfection of the world which maintains and temporarily heals itself — Wallace Stevens must employ a constant system of metaphor which perpetuates and explains its own meaning.

He has worked out a complex system of images in which certain constant symbols occur again and again to indicate restatements of one idea or component of one idea. Birds, for example, are the constant metaphor for people. Another constant metaphor is the curtains in "A Dish of Peaches in Russia." We need not give a name to the idea expressed by curtains, but merely observe how their constant use as a symbol gains a growing expressiveness through their changing contexts.

It comes about that the drifting of these curtains is full of long motions; as the ponderous deflations of distance; or as clouds inseparable from their afternoons; or the changing of light, the dropping of the silence, wide sleep and solitude of night, in which all motion is beyond us, as the firmament up-rising and down-falling, bare. The last largeness, bold to see.19

And again:

Is it bad to have come here
And to have found the bed empty?

One might have found tragic hair
Bitter eyes, hands hostile and cold.

There might have been the immense solitude
Of the wind on the curtains.

Pitiless verse? A few words tuned
And tuned and tuned and tuned.

It is good . . . The Bed is empty,
The curtains are stiff and prim and still. 20

We now have the states of mind of three men: a twentieth
century Russian, a twentieth century American, and a poet. The successive use of curtains in the Stevens
system of meaning removes any domestic overtones which
they might have and establishes them within our minds
as symbols of ideas. Each new use of curtains as a
metaphor brings additional thoughts to cluster with
those of the first metaphorical curtains, but never
can those thoughts belong to any system but that of
Stevens and the individual reader.

The symbols of birds, curtains, and wind are not
only constant symbols; they are, of necessity, since
they reappear so often, consistent in their relationship
to each other. For example, birds and wind:

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds,
It was a small part of the pantomime. 21

After the reader examines several of Wallace Stevens' poems, he begins to form the metaphor of birds in general,
of the color black in general, of autumn in general, and
of the wind in general. When he sees all four together,

21. "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," III, Harmonium,
p. 125.
he begins to understand a new idea of Mr. Stevens' --
and he has additional emotional connotations to add to
each of the four: birds, black, autumn and wind. The
more he reads, the more he understands.

Meanwhile, Mr. Stevens moves as carefully as J. S.
Back within the exact confines of his system of communi-
cation. Somewhere in the process the mastered giant
collapses, the tyranny of the language is broken, and
we understand each other.
CHAPTER TWO

THE METAPHOR OF SUN AND MOON

Wallace Stevens has been accused of being at best a hedonist and at worst a tired nominalist. His detractors believe that his sole consolations for man's continual disillusionment are the heightened perception and art-creation which the certainty of death and failure gives us. His philosophy of life has been construed as no more than advice to "cultivate the emotions as good in themselves."23

Nothing can more clearly disprove these accusations than an examination of his imagery. We have already noted that it constitutes an ordered and inter-related system of symbols. Now the most extensive symbolism in his poetry is that of color, with which men view all the world:

The color like a thought that grows
Out of a mood, the tragic robe
Of the actor...24

Although many object-symbols are also used by Stevens, they are selected not only for the specific meaning which they denote, but also for the emotional climate symbolized

22. Yvor Winters, "Wallace Stevens, or the Hedonist's Progress," Anatomy of Nonsense, pp 88-119
23. Ibid., p. 89.
24. The Man with the Blue Guitar, p. 11.
by their particular color. We discovered earlier that birds represent people. In Mr. Stevens' precisely ordered system of imagery, red birds represent sensuous people, white birds represent materially-minded people, pink birds represent fanciful people, and so on. The color red almost consistently symbolizes sensuousness; white, lack of imagination; and pink, fancy.

If it were true that Mr. Stevens is no more than a hedonist and a nominalist, that he considers moods and emotions as ends in themselves, to be cultivated because nothing else exists, then this color-imagery should be the heart and center of all his poetry.

Such is not the case. Even as the colors themselves are, despite their dependence upon human eyes and brains, the visible emanations of the sun, so Mr. Stevens believes that faulty human ideas of the world are our faulty conceptions of an absolute, Platonic reality. He employs several images for this central reality, but, as is to be expected, by far the most extensively used symbol is that of the sun.

Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky
Without evasion by a single metaphor,
Look at it in its essential barrenness
And say this, this, is the centre that I seek. 25

The central reality which man perceives "a little
and a little, suddenly, by means of a separate sense," is,
says Wallace Stevens, an ultimate truth of which man
constantly has intimations.

The rules that angels ride come slowly down
The blazing passes, from beyond the sun. 27

However, we have already noted that no philosophic idea
which he formulates can be maintained without destroying
itself because of its own inconsistencies, its own inexact-
ness.

It is never the thing but the version of the thing:
The day in its color. 28

The young man's ideas of order fail because of a lack of
sense-experience, and the mature man's ideas of order fail
because of his aging body and changing desires. So do all
men's systems of order fail, because of approaching death.

To represent the young man's failing idea of the
world Stevens accordingly speaks of the sun as seen by
overimaginative eyes:

Who can think of the sun costuming clouds
When all the people are shaken
Or of night, endazzled, proud,
Where people awaken
And cry and cry for help? 29

26. A Primitive Like an Orb, 11.
27. "Le Monocle de mon Oncle," Harmonium, p. 19
To represent the adult's failing idea of order, Stevens again employs the sun:

How it is September and the web is woven,
The web is woven and you have to wear it.

It is the mind that is woven, the mind that was jerked
And tufted in straggling thunder and shattered sun.

It is all that you are, the final dwarf of you. 30

No matter what a man's age, his system of values is going to fail him at some point; he will be forced to alter or abandon his favorite ideas of order.

The sun, in clownish yellow, but not a clown,
Brings the day to perfection and then fails. He dwells
In a consummate prime, yet still desires
A further consummation. 31

In other words, reality, seen as a system, but being more than a system, creates a good world for us, and then, because it is not completely comprehensible to us, fails to satisfy our longing for a rational and imperishable world.

This failure, although painful, is the source of our love for the world, and the motivation of our art creation.

Because the Platonic reality is such a fertile source of art and ideas, Stevens employs the sun, not merely as the

radiant source from which our imperfect schemes are
drawn, but in all its pagan imagery\textsuperscript{32} as the mother
of life and beauty.

He equates the sun with the "prismy blonde" whom
he marries in the semi-autobiographical "Comedian as the
Letter C.\textsuperscript{33} This triple parallelism becomes even more
evident when the couple's daughters are identified with
colors — and presumably, on a higher level of metaphor,
with philosophic systems of order.

The sun is "that savage of fire, that seed\textsuperscript{34}; it
is "Phoebus Apothicaire," of whom Stevens says "Blessed,
who is his nation's multitude?\textsuperscript{35}; it is, with summer, the
"drunken mother" who warbles early in the hilarious trees.\textsuperscript{36}
In a further projection, the sun becomes "a bright red
woman" who is the greatest gaiety which the aging world
possesses.

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. for example, the philosophy of Heracleitus.

\textsuperscript{33} Harmonium, p. 55.

\textsuperscript{34} "Gubbinal," Harmonium, p. 113.

\textsuperscript{35} "New England Verses," Harmonium, p. 140.

\textsuperscript{36} "Meditation Celestial and Terrestrial," Ideas of Order,
p. 12.
There is so little that is close and warm
It is as if we were never children.

Sit in the room. It is true in the moonlight
That it is as if we had never been young.

We ought not to be awake. It is from this
That a bright red woman will be rising

And, standing in violent golds, will brush her hair.
She will speak thoughtfully the words of a line.

She will think about them not quite able to sing.
Besides, when the sky is so blue, things sing themselves,

Even for her, already for her. She will listen
And feel that her color is a meditation,

The most gay and yet not so gay as it was.
Stay here. Speak of familiar things a while.

The Truth, the sun, though it grows cold, though it is "not so gay as it was," is the source of all our fresh apprehension of reality, when old ideas of order fail.

By this poem we are prepared for Stevens' solutions for the ills of the imagination. We must look for reality by being as children, by throwing out old philosophic systems and attempting to stay as free of them as possible.

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.

37. "Debris of Life and Mind," Transport to Summer, p. 66.
38. "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," Transport to Summer, p. 117
The fault is in us, for we do not see the sun clearly.

How can the world so old be so mad
That the people die?

If joy shall be without a book
It lies, themselves within themselves,
If they will look
Within themselves
And will not cry for help,

Within as pillars of the sun . . .

In the interim between glimpses of reality and
their attendant philosophies, men live in the realm of
pure fancy; their imaginations are not bound by any in-
tuitions of absolute truth. For the realm of created
truth, rather than intuitive truth, Wallace Stevens
employs the symbol of the moon. The world of fancy is
a world twice-removed from reality; the moon shines only
by the sun's reflection; it "follows the sun like a French
translation of a Russian poet." In contrast to the
healthy sureness of Platonic intuition, artificial art-
creation is always

Illusive, faint, mere mist than moon, perverse,
Wrong as a divagation to Peking,
. . . an evasion, or, if not,
A minor meeting, facile, delicate.

However, despite the fact that he considers the moon "the mother of pathos and pity," which he hates, Stevens deplores the state of mind which cannot recognize the moon for what it is, and accept the pleasure which fancy can give us.

Panic in the face of the moon -- round effendi
Or the phosphored sleep in which he walks abroad
Or the majolica dish heaped up with phosphored fruit
That he sends ahead, out of the goodness of his heart,
To anyone that comes -- panic because
The moon is no longer these nor anything
And nothing is left but comic ugliness
Or lustred nothingness.

Stevens would never deny this interdependence of reality and dreams, of sun and moon, of day and night.

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

Therefore, he accepts the fact that in the history of the world we have come again to a time of spiritual fancy, a time of moonlight.

Look round, brown moon, brown bird, as you rise to fly --

Now, again,
In your light, the head is speaking. It reads the book.
It becomes the scholar again, seeking celestial
Rendezvous ...

But as man, by lifetime and by epoch, has alternated
between fancy and intuition, between art-creation and myth,

44. "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," Transport to Summer, p. 130
45. "God is Good. It is a Beautiful Night," Transport to Summer, p. 3.
the world, paralleling man, is coming closer and closer to death, even as the sun is gradually being consumed in its own fire.

Out of the window,
I saw how the planets gathered
Like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind.
I saw how the night came,
Come striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks.
I felt afraid.48

With what kind of a belief can a man face death, either his or the world's?

The summer Sundays in the park, must be
A leaden ticking, circular in width.
How shall we face the edge of time?

Where shall we find more than derisive words?
When shall lush chorals spiral through our fire
And daunt that old assassin, heart's desire?49

Wallace Stevens answers his own cry with the faith of a man without fanciful illusion, who glories in the existence of a real and radiant, though dying, world.

God and all angels sing the world to sleep,
Now that the moon is rising in the heat

And crickets are loud again in the grass. The moon
Burns in the mind on lost remembrances.

He lies down and the night wind blows upon him here.
The bells grow longer. This is not sleep. This is desire.

Like an intenser instinct. What is it he desires?

God and all angels, this was his desire,
Whose head lies blurring here, for this he died.

This death was his belief, though death is a stone.
This man loved earth, not heaven, enough to die.48

47. "Owl's Clover," *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, p. 65.
48. "The Man that was Killing," *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, pp. 40-41.
CHAPTER THREE

EARLY COLOR IMAGERY: Harmonium and Three Travellers Watch a Sunrise

One of the significant components of the structure of reality . . . is . . . the resemblance between things. Take, for example, a beach extending as far as eye can reach bordered, on the one hand, by trees and, on the other, by the sea. The sky is cloudless and the sun is red. In what sense do the objects in this scene resemble each other? There is enough green in the sea to relate it to the palms. There is enough of the sky reflected in the water to create a resemblance, in some sense, between them. The sand is yellow between the green and the blue. In short, the light alone creates a unity not only in the recedings of distance, where differences become invisible, but also in the contacts of closer sight. So, too, sufficiently generalized, each man resembles all other men, each woman resembles all other women, this year resembles last year. The beginning of time will, no doubt, resemble the end of time. One world is said to resemble another.

—Three Academic Pieces, pp. 9-10,

According to Wallace Stevens, a true metaphor is neither identity nor imitation. That is to say, it is not to call a rose a rose, nor to call a rose by a manufactured name. Rather, it is to call a woman a rose, since in the nature of each lie such similarities and dissimilarities that comparison of the two affords us pleasure.

When, therefore, Stevens uses the symbol of the sun to stand for ultimate reality, he is not implying that the sun is a god, nor is he merely saying that truth is comforting, like the sun, but he says that the sun, both poetically and actually, has something to do with the Platonic unity of
the world. We have seen that he employs the sun in two senses: as a mother, and here the poetic or emotional resemblances of warmth and growth create pleasure; and as a source of all vision and sight, and here the logical actuality of light-energy creates pleasure.

From the logical resemblances of colors, logical because of their common source in light, comes his exact system of color-imagery. We have seen that each color represents a way of looking at the world. It both represents and is a way to see the world. If we take, for example, the color green as a metaphor, it will have a train of associations attached to it, which are not so much poetic, symbolic associations as logical associations resulting from the real, perceptible presence of green in the world. Because of the element of identity which the real and universal color of green gives to many objects, there has been built up a body of primary symbolism, simple 1:1 equations which exist in the actual world, in which resemblance is very close to identity. In this realm of metaphorical identity we can say that green equals growth. This is evident in the natural world; it is also very simply evident in metaphor. In addition, because green has a long history in the world, and because it has been applied as a 1:1 metaphor for so long, there is the
corroboration of many systems of thought which have employed this color for a metaphor. Therefore, we can have a kind of consensus of metaphoric imagery, basically consistent because basically grounded in metaphoric identity. It is in this realm of metaphor that we imply that green is growth. The color green stands alone, depending on the reader's knowledge of the first, "green equals growth," which in turn depends upon the actuality of living, growing green things in the world around us.

And, of course, the color, its effects, and its visibility depend upon the sun.

The essential poem

\[ \ldots \text{this essential gold} \]
\[ \ldots \text{begs the others, The light} \]
\[ \text{Of it is not a light apart, up-hill.} \]

The central poem is the poem of the whole,
The poem of the composition of the whole,
The composition of blue sea and of green,
Of blue light and of green, as lesser poems. 49

Or, as Plato says it:

Here are three beds: one existing in nature, which is made by God, as I think that we may say -- for no one else can be the maker?
No.
There is another which is the work of the carpenter?
Yes.
and the work of the painter is a third?
Yes. 50

It must follow, then, that if Wallace Stevens is to use the color green to represent a philosophy of man, it must be as a metaphor that has basis in this real world, and in the metaphorical or mythic accumulation of green-imagery that clusters about it. What philosophy of man can mean growth, life, strength, rebirth -- what but his own? Wallace Stevens, knowing that his philosophy is but an intimation of absolute reality, nevertheless believes that this turning toward "the sun" by means of the essential metaphor is the growth of perception, the life of the mind, the strength of sensation, the constant rebirth of truth. This finding of logical resemblances, this turning to the physical world is the philosophy symbolized by green.

However, we have seen that all philosophies die by the basic flaws which make them all metaphors rather than identities. When men lose faith in a philosophy rooted in the concrete world, there is left only a metaphoric residue in language and ritual, without a belief in the concrete identity of the philosophy with absolute reality. This is a time when all ideas come from artificially created systems, or from moonlight.

The symbol for the philosophy of artifice, of art-creation, is as artificial and abstract as the
philosophy itself. Stevens uses the color blue for this philosophic tone, partly aided by the abstract virtues of truth and honor assigned to it, partly aided by the abstract blue of the sky, color without a form.

Green is the symbol of the concrete world, of mythic (collectively historical) truth, of logical metaphor.

Blue is the symbol of the world of the imagination, of created, systematic truth, of emotional metaphor.

The earliest significant treatment of the antithesis of nature and imagination, of blue and green, is found in "Sunday Morning," published first in Poetry magazine in 1915. Green is already part of the stage setting of the natural, concrete world, but it has by no means attained the status of a symbol proper. The poem begins:

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.52

As the poem develops we see that the everyday setting of what is presumably the sumptuor is the equivalent of a world without mystical imaginings, an equation very well summed up in the words "green freedom." Once again this equation is restated:

There is not any haunt of prophecy,
Nor any old chimera of the grave,
Neither the golden underground nor isle
Melodious where spirits get them home,
Nor visionary south, nor cloudy palm
Remote on heaven's hill, that has endured
As April's green endures. 53

That takes care of the imagery of the color green

insofar as this poem is concerned. At no point does the
symbolism become more explicit than this simple association.

Furthermore, the palm tree, later a vehicle to introduce
the color green, is obviously in the other philosophic

camp in this particular poem. It is a "cloudy" palm.

As for the color blue, its symbolism is even more
remote. The contrary philosophic idea, that of the creative
imagination, is here equated with darkness rather than blue.

She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophes,
As a calm darkens among water-lights; 54

A slight suggestion of the future meaning of blue may
perhaps be seen in the following:

. . . And shall the earth
Seen all of paradise that we shall know?
The sky will seem much friendlier then than now,
A part of labor and a part of pain,
And next in glory to enduring love,
Not this dividing and indifferent blue. 55

53. Ibid., p. 91.
54. Ibid., p. 89.
55. Ibid., p. 91.
This is the only reference to blue; were it not for later poems Wallace Stevens could never have been extolled for his color symbolism. That blue is even less symbolic than green is understandable in this poem; for it is, philosophically speaking, a "green" poem -- one that celebrates man's humanistic philosophies and equates imagination with superstition.

In *Three Travellers Watch a Sunrise*, a one-act verse play which appeared in *Poetry* magazine the following year, there is no strict adherence to the formal color pattern which so dominates his later work. The symbol of a porcelain water-bottle is used to indicate poetic expression, a rigid form which is overlaid with varying colors according to man's conception of poetry. From this symbol comes a comparison of the bottle to the thoughts of the protected royal court:

What the court saw was always of the same color,
And well shaped,
And seen in a clear light.37

Color obviously has been employed as a metaphor for philosophic mood. The beginnings of Stevens' system are apparent.

57. *Fifty Contemporary One-Act Plays*, p. 496.
In the sea, Biscayne, there prinks
The young emerald, evening star,
Good light for drunkards, poets, widows,
And ladies soon to be married.

By this light the salty fishes
Arch in the sea like tree-branches,
Going in many directions
Up and down.

This light conducts
The thoughts of drunkards, the feelings
Of widows and trembling ladies,
The movements of fishes.

How pleasant an existence it is
That this emerald charms philosophers,
Until they become thoughtlessly willing
To bathe their hearts in later moonlight,

Knowing that they can bring back thought
In the night that is still to be silent,
Reflecting this thing and that,
Before they sleep!

It is better that, as scholars,
They should think hard in the dark cuffs
Of voluminous cloaks,
And shave their heads and bodies,

It might well be that their mistress
Is no gaunt fugitive phantom,
She might, after all, be a wanton,
Abundantly beautiful, eager,

Fecund,
From whose being by starlight, on sea-coast,
The innermost good of their seeking
Might come in the simplest of speech.

It is a good light, then, for those
That know the ultimate Plato,
Tranquillizing with this jewel
The torments of confusion.

60. Poetry, XV (October, 1919), 10-11. Harmonium, pp. 33-34.
And in "Banal Sojourn" we have one of Stevens' few celebrations of the abstract over the real. He explains how the blue smoothness of the evening recalls the smoothness of spring (and, metaphorically, of all times when some philosophic system has smoothed out the inconsistencies of life). The green and lusty Summer is too coarse (the real world is too complex) for the philosopher.

Two wooden tubs of blue hydrangeas stand at the foot of the stone steps.
The sky is a blue gum streaked with rose. The trees are black.
The crackles crack their threats of bone in the smooth air.
Moisture and heat have swollen the garden into a slum of bloom.
Fardie! Summer is like a fat beast, sleepy in mildew.
Our old bane, green and bloated, serene, who cries, "That bliss of stars, that princox of evening heav-en!" reminding of seasons,
When radiance came running down, slim through the barreness.
And so it is one damns that green shade at the bottom of the land.
For who can care at the wigs despoiling the Satan ear?
And who does not seek the sky unfuzzed, soaring to the princox?
One has a malady, here, a malady. One feels a malady.61

These three poems are good examples of three ways in which Wallace Stevens employs color imagery. In the first, the dream-women are swathed in blue; here the color is unnecessary and merely supplements the idea of dreams. In the second, the metaphoric equation is presented practically in

direct statement. In the third, a scene is presented; upon the metaphorical meaning of the colors hangs the chief weight of the metaphor of the entire poem. We shall see how the third method is employed with increasing frequency in Stevens' later poems.

"Sea Surface Full of Clouds," published in 1934, is as good an example as any of this "hovering" metaphor, taking moorings, in this case, from a strictly patterned form, carefully chosen word connotations, and the primary metaphors of the colors. Even if the reader had not built up any cumulative poetic metaphor from reading others of Stevens' poems, he could still admire the skill with which the primary, emotional meaning is presented. Thus, in 1935, R. P. Blackmur, writing without benefit of very many examples of Stevens' poetry, admires "Sea Surface," because in this poem "he wanted to present the tone, in the mind, of five different aspects of the sea." 63

However, much more exists in the poem. Although the dependence upon the color imagery is less a dependence upon the specific meanings of blue and green than upon color as mood, the colors, together with certain other standard images, enable the long-time Stevens reader to

realize this "hovering" meaning. Let us examine the third stanza of "Sea Surface,"
the third variation of a constant theme.

In that November off Tehuantepec,
The slopping of the sea grew still one night
And a pale silver patterned on the deck

And made one think of porcelain chocolate
And pied umbrellas. An uncertain green,
Finely-polished, held the transecat machine

Of ocean, as a prelude holds and holds.
Who, seeing silver petals of white blooms
Unfolding in the water, feeling sure

Of the milk within the saltiest spurge, heard, then,
The sea unfolding in the sunken clouds?
Oh! C'était mon extase et mon amour.

So deeply sunken were they that the shrouds,
The shrouding shadows, made the petals black
Until the rolling heaven made them blue,

A blue beyond the rainy hyacinth,
And smiting the crevasses of the leaves
Deluged the ocean with a sapphire blue.

"The slopping of the sea grew still" carries with it the meaning: The time of change ended, and a new idea of order arose. The quality of this era is indicated by "an uncertain green." This is not a time for primary meaning or for belief in man the animal. It is a time for "feeling sure of the milk within the saltiest spurge." It is a

64. N.B. This realization does not come as the result of painful decoding of each symbol. It is a total emotional response, exactly like that of the mind to a page of printed matter after the first, laborious letter-by-letter, word-by-word stage has been passed, and one can read well.
time for schemes and systems, like preludes. If the reader remembers the white and silver Elizabethans, if he recalls Sir Walter Raleigh's pilgrimage "Over the silver mountains" to "drink mine everlasting fill upon every milken hill," it is not because Wallace Stevens is depending upon Elizabethan imagery to illuminate his meaning, but because he believes that certain images are inextricably attached to certain ideas by a core of identity, in "so great a unity that it is bliss."

Very well, then; the time of order is described, but the essential reality (Oh! non extase et non amour), because of its discrepancy with any system of order, causes this system of order to fail and change: it "heard, then, the sea unfolding in the sunken clouds." And a time of poetic metaphor, or ideas without any basis in primary metaphor, results. The rolling heaven has made the petals blue, bluer even than they are, the blue of the imagination, "Beyond the rainy hyacinth."

Now let us examine the fifth stanza, the fifth variation.


In that November off Tahauntepec
Night stilled the slopping of the sea. The day
Came, bowing and voluble, upon the deck,
Good clown . . . One thought of Chinese chocolate
And large umbrellas. And a motley green
Followed the drift of the obese machine

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 bêtard, l'ignominie.

The sovereign clouds came clustering, The couch
Of loyal conjuration trumped. The wind
Of green blooms turning crisped the motley hue

To clearing opalescence. Then the sea
And heaven rolled as one and from the two
Came fresh transfigurations of freshest blue.

This is a time of mockery, of the same defensive under-
statement which we have seen Stevens himself use. The source
of ideas is seen, in such a time, as "mon esprit bêtard,
l'ignominie;" it is the "petty misery" of our time. But, and
"so great a change is constant," the constant discrepancy
asserts itself; "the couch of loyal conjuration trumped."
It is in a time of change, in the sea, that the sea-blooms
and the clouds, the imagination and the physical life, blue
and green, are united. And from such a time comes "clearing

---

67, "Owl's Clover," The Man with the Blue Guitar, p. 49.
opalescence," the best perception which mortal man can have, when the imagination and the responsive organism work together as one, and the most perfect art-creation results.

This poem is notable for its use of the sea-sky-sun trilogy (for it is the sun which illuminates color, and it is the changing sea which shines both green and blue). It is also one of the best and the most skillful examples of the "hovering" metaphor which Stevens used in "Banal Sojourn."

Before turning to the most important of the later poems in Harmonium, the reader should know something about "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle." In this poem the color green is present only by implication in the symbol of a tree. Since, however, this is a poem concerning the imaginative ideas of order of the aging philosopher, the old animal, it is not surprising that the color blue, imagination, is more clearly defined:

If men at forty will be painting lakes
The ephemeral blues must merge for them in one,
The basic slate, the universal hue.

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68. I can only date this poem approximately at 1923, the time of the first edition of Harmonium. Neither the 1923 edition nor all of the little magazines which first published Stevens' work were available to me. However, from the incompleteness of the color imagery in this poem, I would place its composition somewhere nearer the date of the first, rather than the second, edition.
Even though many of the colors have not yet attained a stable imagery, the poet's conscious use of color symbolism is clearly admitted in this poem:

A blue pigeon it is, that circles the blue sky,
On sidelong wing, around and round and round.
A white pigeon it is, that flutters to the ground,
Grown tired of flight. Like a dark rabbit, I
Observed, when young, the nature of mankind,
In lordly study. Every day, I found
Man proved a goblet in my mincing world,
Like a rose rabbit, later, I pursued,
And still pursue, the origin and course
Of love, but until now I never knew
That fluttering things have so distinct a shade.

Change of viewpoint, as symbolized by change of color, is imposed upon the constant symbol of birds as people to communicate wonder at the differing vision of ages and individuals.

It is in this poem that the color red is defined most sharply in the meaning which it later keeps. No longer is it the sun, which henceforth is symbolized by gold; but red now allies itself with good folklore and assumes the symbol of sex — not the evasive pink of the romanticist, but the warm life-blood-red which exists as a visible human emanation of the sun itself, even as green does in the natural world.
A red bird flies across the golden floor.
It is a red bird that seeks out his choir
Among the choirs of wind and wet and wing.
A torrent will fall from him when he finds,
Shall I uncrumple this much-crumpled thing?
I am a man of fortune greeting heirs;
For it has come that thus I greet the spring.
These choirs of welcome choir for me farewell,
No spring can follow past meridian.
Yet you persist with anecdotal bliss
To make believe a starry connaissance.

The old animal is no longer a "red" man because
"no spring can follow past meridian." Knowing this, when
he turns to ideas, and after he, as a "rose rabbi," has
pursued "the origin and course of love," he finally
abandons such a pursuit because he is aware that it is
not a complete philosophy, that this idea of order is
not the whole of existence.

The tops of fancy in their poems leave
Memorabilia of the mystic spouts,
Spontaneously watering their gritty soils.
I am a yeoman, as such fellows go.
I know no magic trees, no balmy boughs,
No silver-ruddy, gold-vernilion fruits.

Therefore, Wallace Stevens does not want all of his ideas
 tinged with that color. Rather, he turns to an implied
green.

But, after all, I know a tree that bears
A semblance to the thing I have in mind.
It stands gigantic, with a certain tip
To which all birds come sometime in their time.
But when they go that tip still tips the tree.
And this green constancy in change is the same faithful intimation of an absolute as "the basic slate, the universal hue."

These image-relationships are fairly clear within this poem, but they lack the precision of "Sea Surface Full of Clouds." Nowhere are the colors brought together as in

The wind of green blooms turning crisped the motley hue
To clearing opalescence. Then the sea
And heaven rolled as one and from the two
Came freshest transfigurations of freshest blue. 70

Furthermore, although in the second stanza the redbird image carries the whole weight of the idea, there are many instances of actually stated equations similar to that of "Colloquy with a Polish Aunt." Thus the statement, "I know no magic trees," etc., although it pretends to be within a story-metaphor, is really so little a part of the story that its imagery seems completely mechanical. Nor do the object-symbols within the poem support each other. Stevens has not decided, in this poem, whether people are the fruit of their own bloom, or whether they taste the fruits of life; nor has he decided whether people are fruits or birds. There is no steady narrative-line throughout the poem.

By contrast, both the metaphor and the "story" in

"The Comedian as the Letter C" are consistent. Although the poetically mechanical relationship of colors and ideas is frequently stated outright, the color is an integral part of the story; the story itself is what it means; it is an example, not a parable. The metaphor which the colors add is therefore the same meaning as the story; it merely serves to intensify the meaning and prove the truth of Stevens' words by the proof of analogy. Let us examine the poem and the burden of communication which the color metaphor bears, extensively, though lightly.

We are first introduced to the hero in his youth, in his salad days when he is green in judgment. He had "an eye of land, of simple salad-beds;" he was a "general lexicographer of mute and maidenly greenhorns." But he went to sea, away from land, and was forced to leave all his accustomed world and his accustomed ideas of order behind. His philosophical system was no longer secure; he was "dissolved in shifting diaphanes of blue and green ... until nothing of himself remained, except some starker, barer self in a starker, barer world." Then, when he was without the idea of order, "a trumpet cried celestial sneering boistrously." "Here was the veritable ding an

71. Harmonium, p. 37
72. These, and the following italics, are mine.
sick, at last . . . the strict austerity of one vest
cultivating, final tone. 73 He had glimpsed the essential
reality for a moment.

The philosophic voyager went on to examine the
world of emotions, the natural world of "hawk and falcon,
green toucan," and "into a savage color he went on" still
farther. He began to discover the pleasure of generalizing
upon his experiences, "green barbarian turning paradigm;
still seeking "beautiful barouges as yet unseen." And
then the magnitude, the terror of the reality which is
without pity and full of death, forced him to take refuge
in the realm of the immaterial; "he knelt in the cathedral
with the rest, . . . aware of exquisite thought." And,
although he knew "it was a flourishing tropic he required
for his refreshment," he conceived his voyaging to be an
up and down between two elements, "sun and moon; material
things and immaterial, green and blue.

He postulated now a new philosophy; "the natives
of the rain are rainy men. Although they paint effulgent,
azure lakes . . . their azure has a cloudy edge." In each
culture a man has his own point of view, his own philosophic
color. Therefore, each man can learn of other men. How-
ever, once more, Crispin, our hero, strove for the perfection

73. Because of preceding references to voiceless objects,
"tone" in this case probably means color rather than sound,
of his philosophy and tried, for himself, to see the world outside its color, to see things as they really were. He might have remained as a generalizing realist, except that the emotions and ideas of everyday demanded all his mind. This was "the difficulty of rebellious thought when the sky is blue. The blue, infected will," the mind which insisted on reducing life to a series of commonplaces. Crispin accepted this insistence, aware that a philosopher may deal with everyday things and still be aware of the essential reality; he "may, after all, stop short before a plum and still be realist . . . The plum survives its poesy. It may hang in the sunshine placidly, colored by ground obliquities of those who pass beneath . . . yet it survives in its own form, beyond these changes, good, fat, gusly fruit."

And so he "turned to salad beds again," having been driven by the sea into an intense awareness of reality upon which he imposed a philosophic system, only to have it fail and leave him once more within his minute patch of the everyday world. He was happy, with "a fig in sight, and cream for the fig and silver for the cream." (Here again is the milk and silver of a time without doubts.) He was involved in "the return to social nature," surrounded by
wife and daughters, "green crammers of the green fruits of the world." But that "this bloom green ripen, showing ribs of its eventual roundness, puerile tints of spiced and weathery roses, should compel the stopper to indulgent fatalist was unforeseen." He could no longer look at the world as a realist or as a romanticist because his daughters were neither totally unlike or totally like him. His daughters were "four mirrors blue that should be silver, four accustomed seeds hinting incredible hues, four self-same lights that spread chromatics in hilarious darks."

And, for the last time, "Crispin concocted doctrine from the rout. The world, a turnip once so readily plucked, sacked up and carried overseas, daubed out of its ancient purple, pruned to the fertile main, and sown again by the stiffest realist, came reproduced in purple, family font." So this was a voyage which each man had to make for himself; so every system of order, despite its failure in history, must begin afresh and fail again for every man.

There is the story, and there are the color-metaphors as essential parts of the story. This is a linkage of image and idea similar to that of "Resenculus et la Belle Stoile," in which the color metaphor is so closely allied to the story that it brings little additional meaning to that of
the simple statement; yet, without it, the story could not exist as a poem, for none of the third dimension of emotion and connotation would cushion simple statement and simple response.

We have now observed four levels of communication in Wallace Stevens' poetry.

#1. Simple statement. Trees are green. The grass is green. On this level of simple observation there is no common ground for any perceptions. Because no attempt is made to generalize or find resemblances, poetry written on this level is likely to pull in several directions, as in some of the less effective sections of "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle." On this level, simple statement creates the idea; any image is non-essential, as in "Colloquy with a Polish Aunt."

#2. Primary metaphor. Green is growth. On this level of metaphor the common appearance of many objects, their color for example, is abstracted to symbolize a common characteristic of these objects, a characteristic which, like growth, depends upon the color. These images are essential parts of their objects in the physical, as well as in the poetical world; their relationship is both a stated and an implicit part of every poem. "The Comedian
as the Letter C," and "Homunculus et la Belle Etoile," best represent this level of metaphor in Stevens' earlier works.

§3. Poetic, "hovering," metaphor. Green (is growth). This level demands an understanding of the first two. The color green by itself is left to imply the meaning of "growth," never actually stated in the poem. On this level, story and metaphor run parallel to each other, with no link between except the reader's knowledge that trees are green (and growing) and that the color green has therefore long been used in folklore to represent the quality of growth. "Panal Sojourn" and "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" are representative of the hovering metaphor.

§4. Wallace Stevens' metaphor. The abstract green. On this level Mr. Stevens relies upon the visible presence of green in the world, upon literary and folk use of green as a primary metaphor, and upon all his own earlier use of green as a poetic metaphor. The reader's response to the word should now be so immediately associated with the idea of growth, at least while he reads Mr. Stevens' poetry, that this response is equal to, if not greater than, his original conception of green as a visual color. This is what R. P. Blackmur meant when he said: "The strictly
visual form is in the background, merely indicated by the words; it is what the visual form gave off after it had been felt in the mind that concerned him." 74

Once this response is certain, Mr. Stevens is able to remove the color green from any visible context and use it as an abstract word, as in "green freedom." 75

Mr. Blackmur quotes "green freedom" as an example of Stevens' ability to make a poem vague at crucial spots of wear. Because the important noun "freedom" is not explicit, although the adjective is, says Mr. Blackmur, we receive a strongly visual picture which will never wear out, because it is vague at the heart. 76 What Mr. Blackmur did not then realize, although it is implicit in his earlier statement, was that the word "green" had become an abstraction, too.

Thus Wallace Stevens attempts to replace our worn-out generalizations with a new vocabulary of abstract words which will not die, because of their roots in perceptible reality. Because of the necessity of teaching the reader

74. R. P. Blackmur, "Examples of Wallace Stevens," Double Agent, p. 79.
75. "Sunday Morning," Harmonium, p. 89.
76. R. P. Blackmur, op. cit.
this vocabulary, there is little of this type of imagery in Stevens' early works.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRANSITION: **Ideas of Order, Parts of a World, The Man with the Blue Guitar.**

In reviewing *Transport to Summer*, Louis Hartz contended that *Harmonium* and *Transport to Summer* were good books, that *Ideas of Order* was transitional, and that *Parts of a World* and *The Man with the Blue Guitar* were failures. They missed Stevens' attempt to create a new style, a style admirably executed, he thinks, in *Transport to Summer*.80

Obviously Wallace Stevens' metaphors must change and grow. Let us see if all his poetic powers combine to make this change acceptable.

*Ideas of Order* is a book singularly lacking in color symbolism. Mr. Stevens does not change the symbolic meaning of color when he does refer to it; he describes a dying man (the twentieth century man?):

> He remembered the time when he stood alone  
> when to be and to delight seemed to be one,  
> before the colors deepened and grew small.81

But Mr. Stevens seems, in this book, to prefer to use the object symbol of a color, rather than the color itself, in

order to symbolize a quality. We should expect him to say, then that \textit{grass} implies growth, with the color connotation of green pushed into the background. And he does something very like that in "Academic Discourse at Havana,"\textsuperscript{82} when he speaks of the grand decadence of the perished swans. Swans, of course, are people. All birds are people. Ordinarily the swans' white color should be sufficient to mark them as people without \textit{any} system of order, but the tone is not set by the color white and its traditional blankness; the same meaning is reached by the stage-set statement: "Life is an old casino in a park," and the words "grand decadence."

And although in an example of color imagery, rare in this book, presented on the level of simple statement, Wallace Stevens says:

\begin{quote}
We should die except for Death
In his chalk and violet robes,
Not to die a parish death,\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

without the color imagery, and on the higher level of the "hovering" metaphor, he presents the same idea:

\begin{quote}
The children will be crying on the stair,
Half-way to bed, when the phrase will be spoken,
The starry volupuary will be born.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{82} Ideas of Order, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{83} "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery," Ideas of Order, p. 4
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 52.
The story here is still so tenuous as to spoil the effect of the metaphor. And in "A Fish-Scale Sunrise" there is this same vagueness of a story and setting which injured "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle."

Melodious skeletons, for all of last night's music today is today and the dancing is done.

Dew lies on the instruments of straw that you were playing,
The ruts in your empty road are red,
You Jim and you Margaret and you singer of La Paloma,
The cocks are crowing and crowing loud,
And although my mind perceives the force behind the moment,
The mind is smaller than the eye,
The sun rises green and blue in the fields and in the heavens,
The clouds foretell a swampy rain.

It is only in "Gray Stones and Gray Pigeons" that any kind of story is maintained to support the parallel metaphor. This poem gives hope that the change in method will be a success:

The archbishop is away. The church is gray.
He has left his robes folded in camphor
And, dressed in black, he walks
Among fireflies,
A dithery gold falls everywhere,
It wets the pigeons,
It goes and the birds go,
Turn dry,

Birds that never fly
Except when the bishop passes by,
Globed in today and tomorrow,
Dressed in his colored robes.

Parts of a World continues the attempt to create
goetry with direct statements and concrete symbols. There
is very little good meat in this book. It is hard to
evolve any pleasure from the remote and artificial re-
semblances engendered in such a poem as "Woman Looking
at a Vase of Flowers."

Boot, little owl within her, how
High blue became particular
In the leaf and bud and how the red,
Flicked into pieces, points of air,
Became -- how the central, essential red
Escaped its large abstraction, became,
First, summer, then a lesser time,
Then the sides of peaches, of dusky pears.
Boot how the inhuman colors fell
Into place beside her, where she was,
Like human conciliations, more like
A profounder reconciling, an act,
An affirmation free from doubt.

In some measure, the fault of the poetry is not merely
characterless statement such as that of these last few
lines; but it is also the absence of the peculiar singing
meter which so pleases the ear and which is a common
characteristic of Wallace Stevens' poetry. This meter
is not always absent in this book; for example:

86. Ibid., p. 32.
What more is there to love than I have loved?
And if there be nothing more, O bright, O bright,
The chick, the chidder-barn and grassy chives
And great moon, cricket-improsario,
And, hoy, the impopulous purple-plated past.
Hoy, hoy, the blue bulls kneeling down to rest.

Here we have a typical Wallace Stevens metaphor of blue bulls, made credible by their alliance with the purple of distance, the purple of rarity, the purple of times past.

This is good poetry; but on the whole Parts of a World emanates a self-conscious tone, something like the forced joviality of:

The sun is a corbeil of flowers the moon Blanche Places there, a bouquet. Ho-ho . . . the dump is full of images.

It is in the third transitional book, also condemned by Mr. Hartz, that the true transformation takes place; it is in The Man With the Blue Guitar that Wallace Stevens abandons all unnecessary verbiage and speaks to us in his own language, economical and strongly evocative. This book, and its more complex corollary, "Owl's Clover," are a triumph of the welding of metaphor and rhythm, rime and sense. For example:

Ah, but to play man number one,
To drive the dagger in his heart.

88. "“Montrachet le Jardin,” Parts of a World, p. 141.
To lay his brain upon the board
And pick the acrid colors out,

To nail his thought across the door,
Its wings spread wide to rain and snow,

To strike his living hi and ho.
To tick it, tock it, turn it true,

To bang it from a savage blue,
Jangling the metal of the strings . . .

The poem is quantitatively as light as a feather,
with the possible exception of "dagger in his heart," and
"wings spread wide to rain and snow;" yet in imagery it is
weighted like a barge. The already high-level image of
the poet as player with all its metaphoric aura of "savage
blue" is boosted another level as the player becomes a
wistful anatomist. The consistency of the poem, which
results from the constant hero, makes it one of the longest
lyrics I have ever read, and maintains a constant emotional
metaphor above the level of statement.

Similarly, in "Owl's Clover," the setting of park-
with-statue and a woman walking is constantly referred to
throughout the poem, giving the reader the ability to re-
ceive a completely unified emotional-intellectual idea from

90. The Lion with the Blue Guitar, p. 5.
This is Wallace Stevens' own imagery, no longer depending upon any information except itself.

That the usual color imagery undergirds this book is evident from the fact that the ancient mind-matter controversy is the subject of both long poems. In "Owl's Clover" we see that the European man, the mental man, had had a heaven, once; "dames of azure round an upper dome." The African man, the physical man, had no heaven on his "greenest" continent. And the symbolism of blue and green now attains an abstraction which makes the simple color-words powerful idea-evokers in themselves.

The statue stands
In hum-drum space, farewell, farewell, by day
The green, white, blue of the ballad-eye, by night
The mirror of other nights combined in one.

Poetry in our time is without the emotional coloring of any system of order.

If any of the books is a failure, it is Parts of a World, which places its abstract metaphors in story-settings without significance, and thereby loses half its emotional value. Ideas of Order, attempting little, cannot fail

91. "Owl's Clover," Man With the Blue Guitar, p. 50.
92. Ibid., p. 30.
93. Ibid., p. 71.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: Transport to Summer.

In Transport to Summer we find exactly the kind of imagery which might be expected: the color abstracted from its symbol and applied to apparently incongruous objects, but still maintaining its credibility by the visual reality of the color meanings. Furthermore, we have a new kind of high-level metaphor. Wallace Stevens, apparently feeling that his readers are now familiar enough with his object symbols, abstracts them from their native environments and places them in seemingly irrational juxtaposition, the juxtaposition of the unconscious, of surrealism. Yet, through the color imagery, the meaning becomes clear.

And if it be theatre for theatre
The powdered personae against the giants' rage,
Blue and its deep inversions in the moon

Against gold whipped reddened in big-shadowed black,
Her vague "Secrete me from reality,"
His "That reality secrete itself,"

The choice is made. Green is the orator
Of our passionate height. He wears a tufted green,
And tosses green for those for whom green speaks.

Secrete us in reality. 94

94. "Repetitions of a Young Captain," Transport to Summer, pp. 32-3.
And now we see that this could very well be Wallace Stevens' last book. For once again he has made a choice; he has declared for the green world. And although the poem "Esthétique du Mal," examines at length the problem of the failure of all philosophical systems, Stevens ends the poem in a paean of praise for the physical world, the green world.

The greatest poverty is not to live
In a physical world, to feel that one's desire
Is too difficult to tell from despair. Perhaps,
After death, the non-physical people, in paradise,
Itself non-physical, may, by chance, observe
The green corn gleaming and experience
The minor of what we feel. The adventurer
In humanity has not conceived of a race
Completely physical in a physical world,
The green corn gleams and the metaphysicals
Lie sprawling in majors of the August heat,
The round emotions, paradise unknown.

This is the thesis scrivened in delight, 96
The reverberating psalm, the right chorale.

And in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," liberally illustrated by images of yellow, blue, purple, green, and red, the ceaseless alternation between the two major philosophical camps,
blue and green, material and immaterial, is at last planned, if not actually accomplished.

We shall return at twilight from the lecture
Pleased that the irrational is rational,

Until flicked by feeling in a gilded street,

95. Transport to Summer, pp. 38-58.
I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo.  
You will have stopped revolving except in crystal.  

Wallace Stevens has, in five books, conceived of a 
philosophy and dared to call it by many a singing name, 
his green and fluent mundo, though knowing that to do so 
was to make it less perfect, less true for him. He built 
a world in crystal "to help people live their lives." 

97. "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," Transcendentalism, p. 147. 
This is the thesis scrivened in delight,
The reverberating psalm, the right chorale.
— "Esthetique du Mal."

*Transport to Summer*, p. 53.
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