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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

STEVENS' READING IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH AESTHETICS: CHARLES MAURON, THIERRY MAULNIER, ROGER CAILLOIS

A DISSERTATION

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BARBARA FARRIS GRAVES

Norman, Oklahoma

1975

STEVENS' READING IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH AESTHETICS:

CHARLES MAURON, THIERRY MAULNIER, ROGER CAILLOIS

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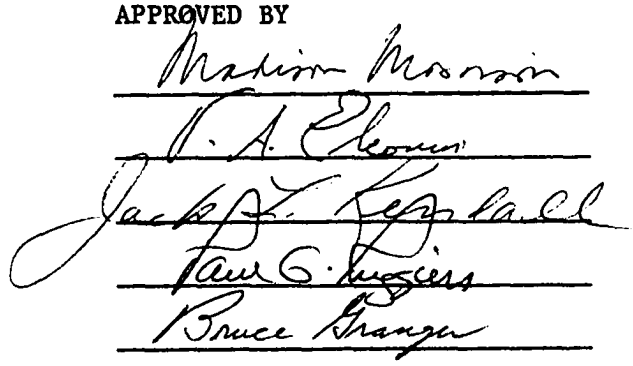

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations for the works of Wallace Stevens have been used throughout the text. Citations to the Letters of Wallace Stevens are to page numbers rather than to the letter numbers and so indicated. All citations are given in the text and to the following editions.

CP The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954. Rpt. 1969.

LWS Letters of Wallace Stevens. Ed. Holly Stevens. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966. Rpt. 1972.

NA The Necessary Angel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951. Rpt. Vintage-Knopf, n. d.

OP Opus Posthumous. Ed., with an introduction, by Samuel French Morse. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957. Rpt. 1969.

Palm The Palm at the End of the Mind. Ed. Holly Stevens. New York: Vintage-Knopf, 1972.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter

I. The Aesthetic of Contemplation in Stevens and Charles Mauron 13

II. Love and Logos in Stevens and Thierry Maulnier 62

III. The Elegiac Mood in Stevens and Roger Caillois 117

Notes 158

Appendix A 168

Appendix B 170

Works Cited 176

Introduction

> I suppose that if I ever go to Paris the first person I meet will be myself since I have been there in one way or another for so long.
>
> (LWS p. 665)

In 1935 Leonard Woolf published in London as part of the Hogarth essays series Charles Mauron's Aesthetics and Psychology, translated from the French by Roger Fry and Katherine John, in which Mauron proposed that we can explain both why we create works of art and why we find pleasure in art if we take the nature of the contemplative attitude as a starting point. In 1939 Gallimard published in Paris Thierry Maulnier's Introduction à la poésie française, an anthology of French poetry from the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries. The book contained a long introduction which claimed that poetry is a demiurgic activity which restores to language its supreme function of engendering the world. In 1944 in Buenos Aires and the following year in Paris Les Impostures de la poésie appeared, written by Roger Caillois, who argued that the most valuable and lasting works of art grow out of the tension between man's anguish at his mortality and the transience of his creations, and his innate need to control his emotional response to that knowledge. These seemingly unrelated books share several common features: each was written by a Frenchman, each sought to come to terms with important aesthetic issues of the twentieth century, each presented

a theory of the way poetry works, each attempted in its way to present a theory of pure art. And each found a place, shortly after its appearance, in the library of Wallace Stevens.[1]

The idea of France seems to have attracted the imagination of Wallace Stevens throughout his life. His journals and letters testify to the strength of his desire to visit Paris from the time he left college through to the late, regretful comment in a letter to his young friend Peter Lee, "I wanted all my life to go to Paris" (LWS p. 845). It was a desire that he was never to achieve. Yet his comments throughout his life suggest that he did manage to create for himself the imaginative experience of Paris. As he explained, "I am one of the many people around the world who live from time to time in a Paris that has never existed and that is composed of the things that other people, primarily Parisians themselves, have said about Paris. . . . it is a precious fiction" (LWS p. 773).

What he seems to have sought in the experience of France was an intellectual and cultural milieu in which to nourish and sharpen his poetry and poetics. Without ever actually visiting France, Stevens seems to have achieved a sense of that milieu in a number of ways. He subscribed to French periodicals and purchased French reviews. He established a relationship with a Paris book seller which made it easier for him to purchase books, magazines, newspapers, and made it possible for him to collect paintings by living French artists of minor reputation. He developed correspondences with people who lived part of each year in France and, through them, established connections with French writers and theorists. His letters testify to the importance that

materials he received from France had in his intellectual and imaginative life.

References in the letters suggest that Stevens surrounded himself with French periodicals. We can verify his subscriptions to Mésures, Labyrinthe, Figaro, and La Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française.[2] Other letters indicate his familiarity with such periodicals and reviews as Graphis, Quadrique, La Licorne, Samedi-Soir, Fontaine, L'Arche, Le Point, Le Portique, Revue de Paris, Revue des Deux Mondes, Nouvelles Littéraires, and Le Soleil Noir. He was acquainted with journals of French literature published in South America, such as Sur and Lettres Françaises. The letters also demonstrate his knowledge of several periodicals published in English which concentrated on French subjects, such as the Gazette des Beaux Arts, and French Studies. The above list includes magazines devoted to the visual arts as well as to French literature and culture. Although Stevens subscribed to many of these periodicals, he also acquired them in various other ways: some he purchased in New York book stores, some were sent to him by his correspondents, some appear to have been purchased for him by his Paris book sellers. Occasionally, they include references to himself and his own work. The Gazette des Lettres, for example, published a review of Transport to Summer, and he published some of his own work in View, a surrealist magazine edited in New York by Charles Henri Ford, whose contributors included André Breton, Max Ernst, Juan Míro, René Magritte--virtually all the leading French surrealists.[3]

At some point during the 1930's Stevens established a connection with Anatole Vidal, proprietor of the Librairie Coloniale in Paris.[4]

The connection was interrupted by World War II but resumed after the war with Vidal's daughter Paule. Through the Vidals he was able more easily to purchase French books and paintings and on occasion to have his books specially bound in leather.

Stevens' readings in French indicate the eclecticism of his interests. For example, he collected the works of Alain, the noted French philosopher, teacher, and essayist.[5] He read biographies, such as Bernard Groethuysen's Mythes et Portraits and Gisele d'Assailly's Avec les peintres de la réalité poétique. The letters mention several works by Henri Pourrat, including L'Exorciste: vie de Jean Françoise Gaschon p. m., Le Sage et son démon, and Contes de la Bûcheronne. His readings in Jean Paulhan included Lettre à messieurs and Causes célèbres. Letters in the 1940's indicate that he was rereading certain French poets he had admired during his youth, such as Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and Fargue. His library included several works by other major French poets: Valéry's Etat de la vertu, Lettres à quelques-uns, Charmes, Eupalinos, and L'Ame et la danse; Eluard's La Jarre peut-elle être plus belle que l'eau?; Saint-John Perse's Winds. He acquired travelogues, novels, and collections of letters, notably Cézanne's Correspondance. He had a copy of Drieu La Rochelle's Récit secret and was apparently familiar too with his poetry. His collection included Le Livre de demain by de Rochas, Le Journal de Jules Renard, and Les Cent nouvelles nouvelles, a rare edition which he presented to the Yale University Library in gratitude for having been awarded the Bollingen Prize (1950). Other readings include Les Vendeurs du Temple, by Marc Beigbeder, and Beucler's Vingt Ans avec Léon-Paul Fargue. It is difficult to overestimate the importance, to Stevens, of

having access to the sorts of books, reviews, and other materials that he was able to acquire through his connection with the Vidals. He wrote to Paule Vidal, "to have a foothold in a bookshop in Paris is one of my most treasured possessions" (LWS p. 773).

Stevens seems also to have derived a great deal of pleasure from collecting French paintings. His taste for the post-Impressionists has often been noted, along with his much-cited remark that he had a taste for Braque and a purse for Bombois.[6] His collection included paintings by Ceria, Brianchon, Henri Lebasque, Detthou, Oudot, Gromaire, Cavaillès, Bombois, Braque, and Tal Coat. On occasion he wrote catalog notes on painters he was interested in, including some in his own collection: Gromaire, Jean Lebasque, Dufy (see OP 286, 290, 292). His still life by Tal Coat inspired "Angel Surrounded by Paysans"; later he renamed one of his paintings by Cavaillès "Sea Surface Full of Clouds."[7]

His books, magazines, and paintings, then, provided a means of experiencing France imaginatively. Some of his friendships and correspondences furnished others. Stevens developed a long and close friendship with Henry Church, editor and co-founder with Jean Paulhan of Mésures, and Church's wife, Barbara. A wealthy American who lived in France, Church seems to have devoted much of his life to being a patron of the arts. After Church's death in 1947 Stevens continued a correspondence with Mrs. Church, who spent the winters in New York and lived the rest of the year in France. In tribute to their friendship Stevens dedicated "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" to Church; "The Owl in the Sarcophagus" seems to reflect his response to Church's death.[8]

The relationship began early in 1939 when Stevens agreed to Church's

request for permission to publish translations of some Harmonium poems in Mésures.[9] The Churches settled in Princeton, New Jersey, during the war. In 1940 Henry Church wrote to Stevens about the possibilities of publishing an American Mésures, and also about establishing some sort of foundation. Stevens offered the suggestion that he endow a Poetry Chair at Harvard. From their correspondence on this subject occasions for Stevens to lecture on poetry developed and, from the lectures, some of the essays in The Necessary Angel.[10]

Stevens' friendship with the Churches also brought him into closer contact with others in the French literary scene, including Jean Paulhan, the co-editor of Mésures,[11] and Jean Wahl, a French historian of philosophy who taught at Mount Holyoke during the war. Wahl's invitation to Stevens to give a paper at Les Entretiens de Pontigny, a conference held at Mount Holyoke in the summer of 1943, resulted in "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet."[12] Wahl quoted Stevens in one of his own papers; Stevens later acknowledged his debt to Wahl in "A Collect of Philosophy."[13]

The friendship with the Churches, then, seems to have provided Stevens with a channel to France. In addition to the kinds of personal contacts just described, Barbara Church sent him books, newspapers, and post cards depicting places in Europe, and photographs of her home and friends. Their correspondence gave Stevens many opportunities for expressing his thoughts on poetry and art in general, as well as providing him with a sense of life in France. The importance of the connection to Stevens' imaginative life can perhaps be characterized by a comment which he made to her in a letter: "to have no contact in Paris is like having no con-

tact anywhere" (LWS p. 722).

During his last winter (1954-1955) Stevens accepted an invitation to write an introduction to one of the volumes of the collected works of Paul Valéry.[14] In the process of his preparations he rediscovered, to his pleasure, a letter from Henry Church describing Church's own acquaintance with Valéry and remarked, "This sort of thing makes one's approach so much easier" (LWS p. 868). Despite intimations that his energies were beginning to falter Stevens completed his prefaces (to Eupalinos and L'Ame et la Danse) in March 1955, and they were published in 1956.[15]

Stevens' letters contain a number of comments indicating his attitudes toward specific French writers, occasionally in the form of recommendations to one or another of his young protegés. His remarks on such occasions provide suggestive glimpses into his world of French letters and imply something of what he might have found there. For example, in a letter to Peter Lee[16] Stevens recommended that he read Wladimir Weidlé and Maurice Blanchôt, but the terms in which he couched the recommendation seem almost equally important:

> The problems of Europe are not the problems of the whole Western world although the Europeans do all that they can to promote the idea that they are. A statement of those problems, particularly as they relate to Arts and Letters, is contained in Les Abeilles d'Aristée, a collection of essays published by Gallimard in Paris. The author is Wladimir Weidlé who is a frequent contributor to Nouvelle Revue Française under the name of W. Weidlé. . . . When I have time to read, I love Weidlé as much as I love Maurice Blanchot, another man of whom you ought to know. (LWS p. 879)

Elsewhere, Stevens' remarks on the more prominent modern French poets suggest that he felt certain affinities with them but that his attitudes toward their relationship remained somewhat ambivalent. He acknowledged that he knew something of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine,

Laforgue, and Valéry but said, "If there are any literary relations between my things and those of other writers they are unconscious" (LWS p. 290). On the other hand, he also said, "It is always possible that where a man's attitude coincides with your own attitude, or accentuates your own attitude, you get a great deal from him without any effort."[17] Stevens' often-noted antagonism to studies of influence may account for his reluctance to admit to specific knowledge in response to direct questions. It seems at least possible, however, that his comments on such occasions do express the relationship, as it appeared to him; that is, one of an affinity in poetic concerns.

Within this total interest in things French Stevens seems to have had a special interest in French aesthetic theory and in that particular French form, the récit. The works by Mauron and Caillois are of this type, as is the introduction in Maulnier's anthology. The differences in their approaches suggest something of the range in kinds of French aesthetic theory with which Stevens was acquainted. Mauron, the psychocritic, explores the psychological mechanism at work in the aesthetic experience. Maulnier, as literary historian, bases his aesthetic theories and judgments on his belief in the magical "verbe." Caillois, the sociologist who writes criticism, presents little in the way of a theory of his own, but attacks in passionately lyrical prose what he regards as misconceptions in the theories of others.

It would appear, then, that Stevens managed, in a variety of ways, to surround himself with French literature and culture, and it would seem also that he found in that milieu a contact with what seemed to him a rich and stimulating environment for poetic activity. We might recall,

at this point, Stevens' life-long fondness for the French language, his habit of using French words in his poetry, and his occasional use of French titles for his poems.[18]

Critical studies of the French contribution to Stevens' poetry and poetics have thus far concentrated on studies of early influences, such as Robert Buttel's The Making of Harmonium, which documents the influence of French painting and poetry on the development of Stevens' style;[19] comparisons of Stevens with a series of figures, such as Michel Benamou's studies of Stevens and Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Apollinaire, and Jules Laforgue; and the French contribution to the structure of Stevens' work as a whole, as in The Dome and the Rock, in which James Baird discusses certain French poetic structures which he describes as "adjacent" to Stevens' "grand design."[20]

Benamou's comparative studies of Stevens and the French began to appear in the late 1950's and have recently been collected in Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination.[21] He notes both the basic similarities between Stevens and the French Symbolists, and their essential differences. For example, he demonstrates that despite parallelisms of technique in Stevens and Laforgue, of imagery in Stevens and Baudelaire, of the quest for purity in Stevens and Mallarmé, there are important divergences in theme and thought.[22] Benamou's studies thus compare the structure of Stevens' poetic imagination with that of certain Symbolist and post-Symbolist poets; in tracing the developing structure of Stevens' imagination, however, he concludes that there is, finally, an "evolution . . . away from anything resembling Symbolism."[23]

Buttel's book traces Stevens' assimilation of various developments

in the English, native American, and French traditions, and demonstrates their effects on the development of Stevens' style in the years preceding the publication of Harmonium. Among French influences he notes particularly the tone of the French ironists, the poetic techniques of the Symbolists, the examples of Cubism and Impressionism, which, he says, offered Stevens the challenge to transform his own idiom and the suggestion of techniques for doing so.[24] Buttel, like Benamou, notes significant differences in Stevens and the French; his book demonstrates, however, in Stevens' early work an important French influence. His emphasis is not so much upon Stevens' imitation of French models as upon his assimilation and incorporation of various currents in French art and poetry.

Baird's express purpose is to trace the process by which Stevens developed the structure of a total design which unifies the complete body of his work. In so doing he demonstrates similarities between Stevens' work and that of French poets and painters, documents Stevens' practice of mingling French with English in his diction, and suggests that French style acted as a stimulus to Stevens' poetic imagination. He concludes that the major antecedents of Stevens' art lie in French poetry of the late-nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and that Stevens chose to identify his acts of the imagination with the French impulse toward the central poem.[25]

Virtually every book on Stevens touches in some way on the subject of his relation to the French, and a number of articles have treated this specific topic.[26] French critics too have seen in Stevens' work similarities to their own tradition. Alain Bosquet, for example, wrote at the time of Stevens' death that he should be viewed as the son of

Laforgue, nourished by the Symbolists, rather than as a descendant of the Anglo-Saxon tradition.[27]

Stevens acquired Charles Mauron's Aesthetics and Psychology, Thierry Maulnier's Introduction à la poésie française, and Roger Caillois' Les Impostures de la poésie during the decade between 1935 and 1945. I have chosen to focus on these three works as contexts for the later poetry for two principal reasons: (1) we can establish with some precision when he read these particular books and (2) they span what I believe to be an important period in the development of his poetry and poetics.[28]

During the years following 1935 Stevens entered a more intense phase in his poetic career; his writings reveal not only an increase in the production of poems but a growing interest in the theory of poetry. Between 1935 and 1942 he published four volumes of poems and "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction."[29] We might recall too that the correspondence with Church concerning the Poetry Chair began in 1940. The letters during the late thirties and early forties testify to Stevens' quest for a central poetry, the "supreme fiction," and a central poet, "major man."[30] The papers on aesthetic theory that were to be published in The Necessary Angel (1951) began during the early 1940's. Stevens' reading of Mauron, Maulnier, and Caillois thus coincides with a significant period in his own work.

The question of "influence" poses some difficulties when applied to a poet of Stevens' maturity during the late period of his work. On the other hand, to speak only of "affinities" tends to obscure an important contribution which Stevens' reading during his mature years makes to the

poetry of that period. Ultimately, the relation of Stevens' late poems to his reading during his last years may call into question our notion of the nature of influence, especially in the work of a mature writer. Perhaps, in a case such as this, we should speak not of <u>influence</u> but <u>confluence</u>, of a "flowing together" as opposed to a "flowing into." The remainder of this study examines the results of one such example of confluence.

Chapter I

The Aesthetic of Contemplation in Stevens and Charles Mauron

Among the books remaining in the Stevens library is a copy of the Hogarth Press edition of Charles Mauron's Aesthetics and Psychology, translated from the French by Roger Fry and Katherine John. The book contains a great deal of marginalia in Stevens' own hand, and Holly Stevens believes that her father received it shortly after its publication in 1935.[1] Charles Mauron, a chemist by profession, was head of the laboratory at the Technical Institute in Marseille in 1924-1925.[2] Forced to give up this post by eye trouble, which led to total blindness by 1940, he turned to a career as writer, critic, and translator and went on to earn doctorates from the University of Aix (1954) and the University of Paris (1963), eventually accepting positions as professor of psychocriticism at the University of Aix-Marseille in 1959 and visiting lecturer at Oxford, Cambridge, and other European universities. In addition, he served in the French Resistance during World War II, was mayor of St. Remy-de-Provence from 1945 to 1959, and was named Chevalier of the Legion of Honor (1951). He was awarded the Prix Mistral for Estudi Mistralen (1953) and the Prix Lemaitais-Larivière of the French Academy (1961). His writings include works on Mallarmé, Nerval, Van Gogh, and Racine, as well as works of aesthetics and psychocriticism. He trans-

lated works of E. M. Forster, T. E. Lawrence, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and also Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy. His first two books were published in English translation in the Hogarth essays series. Aesthetics and Psychology is the second of these.

In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," an essay read at Princeton and published by the University Press in 1942, Stevens summarizes briefly some of Mauron's assertions:

> I want to repeat for two reasons a number of observations made by Charles Mauron. The first reason is that these observations tell us what it is that a poet does to help people to live their lives and the second is that they prepare the way for a word concerning escapism. They are: that the artist transforms us into epicures; that he has to discover the possible work of art in the real world, then to extract it, when he does not himself compose it entirely; that he is un amoureux perpétuel of the world that he contemplates and thereby enriches; that art sets out to express the human soul; and finally that everything like a firm grasp of reality is eliminated from the aesthetic field. With these aphorisms in mind, how is it possible to condemn escapism? The poetic process is psychologically an escapist process. . . . My own remarks about resisting or evading the pressure of reality mean escapism, if analyzed. Escapism has a pejorative sense, which it cannot be supposed that I include in the sense in which I use the word. (NA 30-31)

Despite Stevens' obvious indebtedness to Mauron, there are nonetheless also important differences between Stevens' and Mauron's views. The passage just cited indicates some of their common concerns. For example, Stevens says that Mauron's observations "tell us what it is that a poet does to help people to live their lives," a concern that appears frequently in Stevens' prose and poetry in the 1940's. On the other hand, Mauron also believes that a firm grasp of reality is eliminated from the aesthetic field, whereas all the essays in The Necessary Angel stress that the imagination must "adhere to reality," a principle that Stevens says he considers "fundamental" (NA 31). He goes on to say that

"there is, in fact, a world of poetry indistinguishable from the world in which we live" (NA 31). We might note too that although Stevens cites Mauron's statement that "art sets out to express the human soul," he does not mention here Mauron's contention that, because of the necessity of detachment in the aesthetic attitude, art must address itself to the edges rather than to the center of the human soul. In contrast, Stevens' prose and poetry reveal his search for a central poet and a central poetry. Mauron regards art, finally, as a luxury; Stevens regards art as one of the sanctions of life.

Perhaps the best way of categorizing the essential difference between Stevens and Mauron would be to note that Mauron, as a scientist of aesthetics, seeks to establish the boundary line between life and art. Stevens, as an aesthetic theorist, sometimes addresses that same question. But Stevens is primarily a poet and, as a poet, he seeks to eliminate the boundary between life and art. This ultimately is the force behind Stevens' attempt to establish the belief that the creation of a supreme fiction is possible and to establish the belief that major man is possible. The means for accomplishing these ends is to be found in the total integration of self/other, imagination/reality, in the absolute creativity of poesis. Mauron wants to locate precisely what it is that makes the experience of art different from all the other experiences of life; Stevens wants a process of creativity that is so totally a part of life that the boundary between the artist and the common man dissolves and all life becomes a creative process.

Nevertheless, Stevens' reading of Mauron had an impact on his own work. He comments in letters during the late 1930's and 1940's on key

issues raised in Mauron's book. He refers specifically to Mauron in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," and Mauron's influence is also apparent in "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," "Effects of Analogy," and "Three Academic Pieces." As we shall see, certain poems Stevens was to write in the years following his reading of Mauron seem to have grown out of a process of testing Mauron's theories by realizing them in poetry. Thus Mauron's definition of the role of contemplation and his insistence on the importance of the artist's detachment provide a key to understanding the processes at work in poems such as "Study of Two Pears," "A Dish of Peaches in Russia," and "Connoisseur of Chaos." Other poems, such as "The Poems of Our Climate" and "Men Made out of Words," would seem to be a reaction against other views held by Mauron. Still others, such as "The World as Meditation" and "Solitaire under the Oaks," demonstrate both Stevens' affinities with Mauron and his essential disagreement. Finally, portions of some of the major long poems written in the 1940's affirm certain positions Mauron expressed and yet transcend the limits of his inquiry.

1

Mauron approaches aesthetics as a branch of psychology and believes that the aesthetician should address himself to the emotions aroused by the aesthetic experience. Only in this way, he believes, can the aesthetician ground his work in fact rather than hazy metaphysical speculation. That the aesthetic experience does exist, that it arouses emotions which we can analyze and classify, that such experiences and emotions are common to all men (though not necessarily engendered by the same works or

objects)--these are the facts on which the aesthetician can rely and upon which he can legitimately construct his theories.

He rejects the practice of aestheticians who model their aesthetics after ethics in order to "establish a standard of values, supposed to be absolute, which enable them to distribute blame and recompense with a serene conscience" (p. 7). He points out that such a practice leads to the acceptance of two "convenient but gratuitous hypotheses": (1) "that there exists a universal beauty" and (2) "that a moment's reflection should suffice to define it" (p. 7). From Mauron's point of view the task of the aesthetician is neither to establish a definition of absolute or universal Beauty nor to establish a list of rules on which to base value judgments. Rather, the aesthetician operates in the domain of the psychologist, by studying the emotion aroused by beauty as we study any other emotion. Mauron addresses himself therefore to the following question: "what does the need in certain men to create works of art and the pleasure of contemplating them in others correspond to?" (p. 9). His opening stance thus makes clear that his is to be an aesthetics of experience.

The amateur has a definite contribution to make to such an aesthetic, and in his use of the first person plural pronoun Mauron indicates that he includes himself in that category. As amateurs, he says, our role is to supply the psychologist with facts and also to inquire into our own reactions. We need not be concerned about our apparent contradictions; unanimity about what constitutes beauty is of no importance because there is no reason why we should all have the same pleasures (pp. 14-15). Thus the expressed aim of Mauron's study is not to add one more aesthetic

theory to the others but rather to furnish the psychologists with a document, with the "ordered exposition of certain personal pleasures" (p. 16).

In proposing a psychological approach to aesthetics, Mauron acknowledges his indebtedness to Roger Fry, who he says "passed his life in testing himself in contact with many very diverse works of art" and whose works are the starting point for Mauron's own reflections (pp. 16-17). According to Mauron, Fry attempts to isolate and define the "essential substance" of "pure art," an aesthetic emotion which differs from other emotions, a "kind of original kernal . . . not comparable with the other emotions which we commonly feel" (p. 18). Fry seeks to establish the boundary between the experiences of ordinary life and those of art, but rejects the psychoanalyst's belief that the work of art is "nothing more than one of those daydreams in which men seek (through the imagination, and in a more or less veiled and symbolic manner), the fulfillment of certain desires, either repressed, or denied satisfaction by the rigors of daily life" (p. 21). Fry objects that such a definition does nothing to explain the "mysterious emotion evoked by certain combinations of pure sound or form . . . which have no apparent connection with the satisfaction of our instincts" (p. 21); there is a difference, he maintains, between aesthetic pleasures and instinctive satisfactions. Eliminating from pure art all the pleasures man strives for in his daily life--sex, self-gratification, power, religious and moral authority--Fry believes that what remains is the pleasure of contemplating "systems of relations"; that is, combinations of colors, volumes, sounds, and spacings which have significance only in themselves and yet still seem remarkable (p. 19). Mauron notes that the "formula is abstract because

it aims at the utmost generalization, but what it describes remains in the domain of the senses" (p. 19). Mauron further notes that in attempting to explain why "systems of relations" generate pleasure, Fry tends to present art more and more as a purely intellectual pastime; as Fry himself says, "there is a pleasure in the recognition of order and inevitability in relations . . . [which] will come very near to the pleasure derived from the contemplation of intellectual constructions united by logical inevitability" (p. 23). Fry thus draws the boundary between life and art by placing the line between the intellectual and affective domains of human psychology.

Mauron notes the weaknesses both of the psychoanalyst's approach to art and of Fry's approach; the one relies too much on instinct and desire, the other too much on the intellect, whereas in actuality, he believes, the more an artist's mind is set on aesthetic pleasure the farther he gets from instinctive satisfaction. And yet Fry's approach does not explain how art, thus cut off from all sources of emotion, can retain so marked an emotional character (pp. 25-26). Fry himself recognized this dilemma and attempted to solve it by speculating that art somehow has access to something which underlies all the particular emotions of life. Thus, as Mauron notes, Fry places the essence of art at once in systems of relations utterly foreign to our animal life and at the same time in a subconscious deeper and presumably yet more animal than that of the psychoanalysts. Mauron objects moreover that Fry's theory does not really explain <u>why</u> certain works move us and others do not. He accepts Fry's belief that the aesthetic emotion differs from all other emotions but rejects any attempt to characterize the line between life and art as

that between intellect and feeling or instinct, or that between the ordinary experiences of life and dream (or daydream) experience. Mauron posits rather a boundary between two attitudes of mind, the active and the contemplative, which differ in that "[the active attitude] never ceases to think of a future more or less near at hand, whereas [the contemplative attitude] is absorbed in the present" (p. 29). Mauron thus retains Fry's hypothesis that aesthetic pleasure comes from contemplation but does not agree to limit the pleasure to the contemplation of "formal relations." The remainder of his study is an experiment with the hypothesis that we can introduce order into our aesthetic impressions and in some measure explain them by taking the contemplative attitude as a starting point.

Mauron goes on to clarify what he means by the difference between the "active attitude" and the "contemplative attitude" and the difference between an orientation toward the future and toward the present. Our usual response to outside stimuli demands a future orientation: what we are to <u>do</u> in response to the stimulus. Art, on the other hand, precisely prohibits us from making an active response: we look not to a future action but address ourselves instead to the feelings of the present moment (p. 31). One does not try to eat a painting of an apple nor make love to a beautiful statue nor actually leap up to march to a stirring tune--in fact, at the moment one does begin to march to a tune he has moved out of the domain of <u>aesthetic</u> response. Thus the aesthetic attitude is a "curious mixture of sensation and inhibition--the first depending on the second for its keenness, richness and duration" (p. 32). Mauron notes that we have similar experiences in ordinary life, moments when we

pause before a landscape, the face of a friend, or even linger over the taste of a mouthful of wine; at such moments, he believes, "we are all like artists, because instead of putting an end to the stimulus by a prompt reaction, we keep it in suspense" (p. 33). Mauron supports the psychological soundness of his analysis by pointing out that even in the realm of instinct we receive as much pleasure from the stimulus as from the satisfaction of desire (p. 35).

The aesthetic attitude differs, however, from the ordinary attitudes of life in that art asks us to pause rather than to act. The artist offers us something we can make no immediate use of; he asks us to look but not react. Thus he gives "possible pleasure every possible opportunity, since our mind is suspended just at the point where pleasure becomes manifest, between the stimulus and the response. Through our very immobility, the excitement is multiplied. . . . Thus we learn ourselves to be more profoundly and subtly sensitive than we had imagined. The artist transforms us, willy-nilly, into epicures" (p. 38).

In this contemplative attitude, artist and audience have a common meeting ground. There is no essential difference between the glance the creator makes us cast on his work and the glance he must have cast on the world around: "the artist contemplates the universe without any idea of making use of it . . . his eyes are so focused as to concentrate his whole attention on the present" (p. 39).

The contemplative focus has three effects, as Mauron sees it: first, an "increased sensitiveness." Mauron uses "sensitiveness" in the scientific sense, i. e., our ability to perceive differences. The artist's eye sees more details: "Difference, and therefore originality, is accen-

tuated. The aesthetic universe thus becomes at once richer and stranger" (p. 40). The second result is what Mauron calls the "multiplication of echoes." The work of art evokes innumerable fleeting associations; indeed, the "evocation of 'something else,' through a language of symbolic signs, is one of the powers of art, and of its favourite pastimes" (p. 42). Finally, the aesthetic attitude results in the "dissolution of the practical organization of reality, giving place to other possible organizations" (p. 42).

When one ceases to try to use the world, Mauron explains, his universe becomes richer; since the utilitarian organization of the world is of no interest to him, he sets himself to create a fresh organization (p. 44). When an artist contemplates landscape, for example, without any idea of making use of it, without any intention of making any usual active response to it, the landscape itself becomes, in his mind, a new and strange place, becomes forms and colors with strange affinities, becomes chaos. Yet even though physical activity is repressed, the mind continues working; hence the genesis of art, as the artist's mind composes what will afterward become the unity of the work (p. 43).

The artist's "sensitiveness" takes the form of the love of original beings. In his pursuit of novelty, of originality, the artist "frees himself from the demands of egoism; he not only submits to 'otherness' but desires it, since he gets his pleasure from it" (p. 49). The joy he takes in "contemplating something other than himself may in this way lead the artist to an almost absolute detachment" (p. 49). His attitude is one of amused acceptance of the world and its oddities. The detachment from self, the acceptance of otherness, the joy the artist takes in

contemplating the other is characteristic of the contemplative attitude. Mauron cites Auguste Bréal: "Il est un état où les hommes, les savants comme les ignorants, perçoivent des caractères uniques dans un être qui le distingue aussitôt de ses semblables; c'est l'état amoureux. L'artiste est un amoureux perpétuel" (p. 51). The great contemplatives, according to Mauron, contrive "to love in every manner possible the universe before their eyes"; they never tire of "contemplating those details which give the world a bold relief and a rich flavour" (p. 52), even though they may try to "reduce for the sake of a simple arrangement, the infinite complexity of the real" (p. 49).

By "detachment," then, Mauron seems to mean neither the absence of all emotional response nor the artist's detachment from reality but rather the artist's ability to love and to enjoy all the details of the world outside himself. He is detached from the demands of a practical or utilitarian orientation and from egocentrism, and it is precisely from this detachment, characteristic of the contemplative attitude, that the artist derives his emotional pleasure.

In attempting to explain what he means by "mental echoes," and to analyze the mechanism by which they operate and the pleasure which corresponds to them Mauron moves into the realm of an expressive theory of art. As a starting point he posits the following precept: "All works of art represent a transmission from the artist to the spectator, a transmission necessarily occurring through the medium of one of the senses--ear or eye" (p. 53).

Mauron defines "expressive art" as that which "through the medium of sound or colour, transmits what we call states of mind" (p. 55).

"Something other" (whatever in the human soul is not sensation or combination of sensations) and "states of mind" he claims can only be transmitted by means of "internal echoes" (or what he sometimes calls "mental echoes"), which link sensation with past impressions, awaken feelings, excite desires. For such a response, he feels, the term "association of ideas" seems too narrow. In any case, expressive art requires a language of symbols in order to transmit a state of mind or "something other" than sensations, and here the difficulty of communication from artist to audience arises, since the audience may not share the artist's associations with the symbols. Since every artist creates his own idiom according to his own peculiar "inward echoes," his chances of being understood are slight.

Mauron believes that this problem does not trouble the artist. He thinks rather that the artist's glance goes no further than his own creation, that he creates not because he wishes to communicate with his audience but rather because he must: since the artist has paused in his ordinary activities to contemplate the present he must use up his nervous energy in some other way. Thus the expressive artist does not really seek to be understood; he speaks for the pleasure of speaking. Nevertheless we, as audience, listen and understand at least in part. This "involuntary transmission" seems to Mauron "one of the greatest ironies of symbolic art" (pp. 58-59).

Another and potentially more troublesome complication arises from expressive art. The expressive artist must be doubleminded: he must observe his own inner landscape with the same contemplative detachment that he turns on the external world; one part of him seethes with echoes,

impulses, emotions, while the other must savor and appreciate, unmoved (p. 61). At this point Mauron's insistence on the necessity of contemplative detachment encounters difficulties, as he himself recognizes. If the artist becomes too involved in the emotion he loses the necessary detachment; yet if he does not let himself go to some extent, he loses the feeling and the very stuff of expressive art. Thus Mauron posits an unstable equilibrium in the artist between the actor and the looker-on. The perfect artist, Mauron believes, would admit all inward voices into his work until the moment he ceases to listen and begins to yield to their promptings--a difficult line to draw, as Mauron admits (pp. 63-64).

Since certain subjects and emotions imperil the equilibrium more than others--sex, religion, politics, the will to power, to name a few--Mauron's theories lead him to a position that he acknowledges is not entirely satisfactory: "Expressive art . . . flourishes most happily apart from or rather on the edge of the great eddies of the human soul" (p. 69). Whether the problem lies in his theory or in the nature of expressive art itself, Mauron accepts the conclusion to which his ideas have led him: "unless there is an extraordinary power of detachment in both artist and spectator, expressive art can only hope to remain art by evoking states of mind which are rather placid and already tinged with contemplation" (p. 71). Thus objects from the past (things of no practical use in our lives) and memories (a reality gone out of use) lend themselves admirably to aesthetic contemplation.

It would seem, then, that Mauron's category of "mental echoes" as one of the consequences of the contemplative attitude and as an explana-

tion for the mechanism of expressive art has led him to the unsatisfactory position that "pure art" must inevitably concern itself with the peripheral and the trivial. Such is not entirely the case, for he has noted that the great contemplative artists can manage that delicate if uneasy equilibrium between detachment and feeling even though he admits that the spectator often lacks such powers. Such a theory of art thus raises a challenge to the aesthetic and artistic powers of the audience, and the demands are admittedly great. Finally, this evocation of "something other," though a part of beauty, is not the only part: "there is another beauty which evokes nothing, and is content merely to be" (p. 74).

What Mauron means by this other beauty emerges from his discussion of the last consequence of the aesthetic attitude: the creation of new orders to replace the utilitarian order, now manifestly useless, since action is forbidden (p. 77). At this point in his discussion Mauron turns again to Roger Fry's discussion of "formal relations." Mauron seems to understand this term as meaning the relationship between a work's elements of design and chance, between order and chaos, in short, its structure.

At this point, Mauron asserts, the arts of painting and poetry differ from music. Since colors, forms and words are signs by which we regulate action and which form objects or opinions we make use of in practical life, they compose "the natural order of things. In the plastic arts, as in poetry, the zero from which the artist starts is not, as in music, pure chance, but a certain pre-existent organization of the world, which he will have to destroy in order to create new combinations"

(p. 79). And, since the destruction of the natural order of things generates a psychological protest, the writer or painter must usually "superimpose the aesthetic combination which interests him on an uninteresting 'natural' combination--pretend, while composing his work, to copy nature" (p. 79). The question then in relation to arts other than music is whether the work contains any aesthetic combination, whether the artist has created a new organization, superimposed on the natural order of things, or whether he has simply copied the natural order of things. The distinction Mauron draws between "composition" and "natural order" gives rise to two further questions: (1) what is an "aesthetic combination"? and (2) why do certain combinations give more pleasure than others?

A combination, says Mauron, is like a journey: "the combination is the intellectual track by which the mind passes from one to the other in a series of modifications clearly perceived, while everything else remains the same" (p. 83). The impression of continuity comes from the constant, the static. In practical life, the intellectual journey has a goal in the future. Since he has already established that art concerns itself only with the present, aesthetic combinations will necessarily differ from the intellectual combinations of ordinary life: "The aesthetic combination cannot be anything but a journey between two points in the present: that is, in fact, between two points in the work" (p. 84). We make that journey, Mauron says, through our ability to perceive analogies.

Mauron points out that the search for resemblances is an essential characteristic of the human mind: "In active life the human intellect

looks for resemblances because it wishes to foresee efficiently; in art this aim disappears, but the intellect still looks for analogies--that is its function--and now, it seems, for the pure pleasure of discovering them" (p. 91). Although human reason tends to emphasize the identity between phenomena, human sensibility focuses on perceiving differences, hence the compromise between logic and sensibility, whose equilibrium Mauron says constitutes intelligence. In fact, Mauron implies that it is precisely our ability to perceive differences and to perceive analogies that permits us to discover the order or unity in a work of art: "without analogies (and without differences perceived in relation to those analogies) there can be no rhythm, nor order, nor unity of any kind" (pp. 92-93). Thus Mauron's general formula for order: "Something changes, something remains constant. . . . [if] everything changes at once, such is . . . the mark of chaos" (p. 88). This formula would seem to be Mauron's interpretation of Fry's "systems of relations."

Our perception of variables in relation to a constant, Mauron says, is the means by which a musician organizes his composition, in the sequence of modifications perceived in relation to the constants of key and rhythm. The painter composes changes around constants in form, space and color. In poetry, the formula explains the workings of metaphor. Mauron cites Max Eastman's analysis of Blake's "Tyger, tyger, burning bright": "Something changes--the object considered--something remains constant--the brightness streaked with black, the bound, the suppleness. . The immobility of these elements has made possible the course of the metaphor. The poetic arabesque is formed by the mental leap thus accomplished" (pp. 84-85).

Not everything in art involves systems of relations, as Mauron points out. The artist is not a merciless logician, and every work will of necessity be a mixture of relations, chance, and the "natural order of things." It is not even particularly desirable, from Mauron's point of view, that the relations be easily discernible by the spectator, since his source of pleasure in organization stems not primarily from the organization itself but rather from his discovery of it: "aesthetic order is meant to be felt rather than analysed; the existence of a combination produces a vague and delightful impression of continuity and order" (p. 87). In fact, if aesthetic order is to become a source of pleasure, it must remain hidden in a sort of twilight where we may have the joy of discovering it. Part of the reason for our preference for systems or combinations not immediately apparent comes, Mauron believes, from our love of reality, which is infinitely complex, and our distaste for the predictable tedium and artificiality of the schematic.

Mauron bases his analysis of the pleasure of organization on his theory of contemplation. The contemplative attitude, with its characteristic detachment and its determinedly nonutilitarian focus is the means by which the artist perceives new systems of relations in reality, thereby composing the order in his work, and by which the spectator in turn discovers the unity or order in the work he is contemplating. As we have already noted, when the artist treats the future and the conduct required in it as negligible, he loses not only the advantages but also the limitations of practical organization. Landscape, for example, becomes chaos, but a chaos that reveals forms and colors with strange and perhaps new affinities. The same sort of experience takes place when a

spectator views a painting: "little by little, under the 'natural' meaning of the work . . . certain plastic insistences appear. . . . The curve of the hat repeats that of the arm, the angle of the fan brings out that of the bust" (pp. 94-95).

Mauron agrees with Mallarmé's statement that the only training for the imagination consists of looking at a picture for a long time, with a mind at once curious and empty; eventually we will discover the systems of relations, the time comes when we can no longer attribute the insistences to chance, and the idea of a combination is born. Mauron believes that such a moment, however fleeting, is accompanied by a flash of pure joy. This discovery of a new resemblance, Mauron states, is the only pleasure human reason has (p. 102). Yet resemblance and order are not always sources of pleasure; in ordinary life we may be indifferent to systems, may even find order tiresome. Thus the field of abstract logic is forbidden to the artist because there the resemblances are too apparent and the pleasure of discovery almost non-existent (p. 105). In order for a work to be aesthetically satisfying, it must appeal to more than human reason--aesthetic emotions are more complex than that.

Nevertheless, there is aesthetic pleasure in organization, for the artist takes pleasure in perceiving or creating systems of relations, in resemblances he establishes between "real, that is, infinitely complex things" (p. 99). The spectator takes pleasure in his discovery of those resemblances in the work the artist has composed. Mauron believes that the artist does not deem it necessary to link up resemblances systematically: "It is enough that the work should convey an impression, even though vague, of a reality richer in unforeseen correspondences than the

ordinary world," so that "our mind in turn may experience the joy of a multiple discovery" (p. 105).

In summary, Mauron has attempted to characterize the psychological mechanism set to work by certain qualities in a work of art and to describe the pleasure involved in the normal working of that mechanism. He has divided the mechanism into three parts and has characterized three distinct kinds of corresponding pleasures. "Sensibility" takes pleasure in perceiving differences; memories and instincts take pleasure in being supplied with motives for activity; reason takes pleasure in being given correspondences to distinguish. This complex of emotional pleasures makes up the aesthetic emotion, but for the pleasure to be aesthetic and by definition different from the pleasures of ordinary life requires the detachment of the contemplative attitude, which makes no active response but simply savors and enjoys. Such is the complex experience for the spectator, though the case for the artist is not precisely the same. He at least does make some active response in creating the work of art. Mauron does not claim that his system is necessarily the right one, but he is willing to assert finally that art appears to him "to seek everywhere the psychological conditions best suited to the growth of pleasures which may remain contemplative" (p. 106).

Certain themes in Mauron's discussion had already appeared in Stevens' poetry and in the letters. The title of his second volume of poems, Ideas of Order (1935), suggests reasons why a work that devotes so much discussion to the pleasures of organization might have found in Stevens a sympathetic reader. Comments from the letters of this period reinforce

this notion. In a letter to Ronald Lane Latimer in 1935 Stevens says, "I came across some such phrase as this: 'man's passionate disorder,' and I have since been very much interested in disorder. . . . I do very much have a dislike of disorder" (LWS p. 300). In a comment to Hi Simons explaining "The Pleasures of Merely Circulating" (1934) he remarks, "The spectacle of order is so vast that it resembles disorder; it resembles the fortuitous . . . . But for all the apparent fortuitousness of things, they hold together" (LWS p. 348). And in "The Idea of Order at Key West" (1934) we see the singer (a figure for the imagination) ordering and composing, not only her song but the reality of which she sings:

> And when she sang, the sea,
> Whatever self it had, became the self
> That was her song, for she was the maker.
> . . . . . .
> Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
> The maker's rage to order words of the sea
> (CP 129-130)

Another recurring motif in Stevens' letters of the period reveals his concern with the status of the poet in society:

> There is no reason why any poet should not have the status of the philosopher, nor why his poetry should not give up to the keenest minds and the most searching spirits something of what philosophy gives up and, in addition, the peculiar things that only poetry can give. . . . If poetry introduces order, and every competent poem introduces order, and if order means peace, even though that particular peace is an illusion, is it any less an illusion than a good many other things . . . ? Isn't a freshening of life a thing of consequence? It would be a great thing to change the status of a poet. (LWS pp. 292-293)

In a later letter he says of this period, "I began to feel that I was on the edge: that I wanted to get to the center" (LWS p. 352). It would seem that Stevens, at this point in his career, was considering some of the same questions about art that occurred to Mauron, but the signs are

clear that Stevens was finally to reach somewhat different conclusions.

2

Comments in Stevens' letters in the 1940's return to certain issues raised by Mauron's book. For example, Mauron points out the difficulty an artist encounters in communicating his own private "internal echoes" to his audience and goes on to say that the artist does not even wish to do so. Stevens says that "there is a kind of secrecy between the poet and his poem which, once violated, affects the integrity of the poet" (LWS p. 361). Mauron also notes that though the artist's glance goes no further than his own creation and that he does not really care whether he communicates, the spectator does understand, at least in part. Stevens remarks, "Sometimes, when I am writing a thing, it is complete in my own mind; I write it in my own way and don't care what happens. I don't mean to say that I am deliberately obscure, but I do mean to say that, when the thing has been put down and is complete to my own way of thinking, I let it go. After all, if the thing is really there, the reader gets it. He may not get it at once, but, if he is sufficiently interested, he invariably gets it" (LWS p. 403). Mauron believes that relations must remain hidden in a sort of twilight so that the spectator may have the pleasure of discovering them and that for this reason the field of abstract logic is forbidden to the artist because there the resemblances are too immediately apparent and do not yield the pleasure of discovery; Stevens believes that "poetry must limit itself in respect to intelligence. There is a point at which intelligence destroys poetry" (LWS p. 305). Yet he also states, "A man who wrote with the idea of

being deliberately obscure would be an imposter. But that is not the same thing as a man who allows a difficult thing to remain difficult because, if he explained it, it would, to his way of thinking, destroy it" (LWS p. 403).

Mauron believes that because the media for poetry and painting are forms which we are accustomed to use in governing our actions in ordinary life the poet and painter must superimpose their new organizations of reality on familiar organizations (he refers to this process as pretending to imitate the natural order of things). Stevens comments that "imagination has no source except in reality, and ceases to have any value when it departs from reality. Here is a fundamental principle about the imagination: It does not create except as it transforms. There is nothing that exists exclusively by reason of the imagination, or that does not exist in some form in reality. Thus, reality = the imagination, and the imagination = reality. Imagination gives, but gives in relation" (LWS p. 364).

Mauron insists on detachment as a necessary part of the contemplative attitude, but he seems to intend a variety of things by the term. He means primarily the artist's lack of regard for our usual future action orientation and for making any response to the situation other than an aesthetic response. The term also involves the amount of feeling the artist can admit into the situation, and it seems to mean too the artist's freedom, at least momentarily, from egotism. Finally, detachment seems to involve the artist's lack of concern about whether the spectator understands the complex of associations, feelings, and ideas the artist pours into the work of art. Several circumstances seem to indicate a

basic detachment in Stevens' own nature and in his attitude toward his poetry: his unwillingness to associate himself with a particular group, his apparently deep satisfaction in his business career, the fact that despite frequent expressions of his desire to visit France he never made that journey. (Perhaps he preferred the prolonged pleasure of the stimulus of the desire to visit France rather than its satisfaction.) He speaks of the necessity of getting life into poetry, but he does tend to avoid those subjects that Mauron cites as threats to aesthetic detachment: sex, politics, religion. Certainly many of his poems have that detached, contemplative tone, as we shall see, though at times the contemplative detachment gives way to a moment of near ecstasy, but of a poetic kind, as in the chant of "poesis, poesis" in "Large Red Man Reading."

Certain letters comment directly on detachment. In paraphrasing poem VII of "The Man with the Blue Guitar" Stevens says, "I have a sense of isolation in the presence of the moon as in the presence of the sea. . . . if I could experience the same sense in the presence of the sun, my imagination grows cold at the thought of such complete detachment" (LWS p. 362). At this point Stevens is attempting to explain some of his symbols; since the sun in his poems is nearly always a symbol of physical reality, he seems to be aware of the danger of becoming too detached in his relationships with reality. In another letter he associates detachment with the idea of the poem's purity: "If the purity of a poem is a question not of the detachment of the poem but of the detachment that it produces in the reader, it is obvious that the repetition of a theme and the long-drawn-out rhythm that results from the repetition are merely mechanisms"

(LWS p. 390). Stevens' choice of words here seems much like Mauron's, and the comment itself suggests that he has given some thought to the role of detachment in poetry.

Essays in The Necessary Angel treat issues central to Mauron's book and also reveal a similarity in the way each man approaches the construction of aesthetic theory. In "Effects of Analogy," for example, Stevens employs the same sort of inductive and psychological approach that we have seen in Mauron. He begins by presenting two "supreme" examples of analogy in literature, one drawn from English (Pilgrim's Progress), one from French (a fable of La Fontaine) and distinguishes the difference between the two: in Bunyan "we are rather less engaged by the symbols than we are by what is symbolized" while in La Fontaine "Our attention is on the symbol, which is interesting in itself" (NA 109). Next he distinguishes between the common meaning of the term in logic and the larger sense in which he is using it. In establishing this difference he outlines the scope of his investigation: "We are thinking of it as likeness, as resemblance between parallels and yet parallels that are parallels only in the imagination, and we are thinking of it in its relation to poetry. Finally we are thinking of it from the point of view of the effect it produces" (NA 110).

His strategy is thus much like the way Mauron establishes the terms of his investigation of the aesthetic experience and pursues the investigation itself in view of the effects the aesthetic attitude has on artist and spectator. Mauron, too, often begins his discussions with examples from one of the arts and uses them to get into his subject. Stevens' discussion pursues his subject, not unexpectedly for a poet, in terms of

analogy in literature and more specifically in terms of the medium for analogy in literature, that is, images. As he develops the subject he speaks primarily of emotional effects, a strategy similar to Mauron's investigation of the psychology of aesthetics. He displays too something of the same modesty of purpose that we have seen in Mauron: "This is not an anatomy of metaphor. Nor is it an attempt to do more than to single out a few of the effects of analogy" (NA 117).

In the process of the investigation he touches on certain points we have already noted in connection with Mauron--the destruction, for example, of the natural order so as to create new organizations of reality, and the question of marginal versus central poetry:

> One [theory of the imagination] relates to the imagination as a power within [the poet] not so much to destroy reality at will as to put it to his own uses. . . . This often results in poetry that is marginal, subliminal. . . . The second theory relates to the imagination as a power within him to have such insights into reality as will make it possible for him to be sufficient as a poet in the very center of consciousness. This results, or should result, in a central poetry." (NA 115)

"The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" discusses the relationships between poetry and philosophy, but the investigation leads Stevens to consider various definitions of poetry. He notes that though a totally satisfactory definition of poetry has not yet been established, "we are never at a loss to recognize poetry" (NA 44). We recall that Mauron does not seek to define beauty but maintains that we all experience pleasures which we recognize to be aesthetic responses. Throughout the paper Stevens speaks of poetry as a process; Mauron discusses the psychological processes at work in the aesthetic experience. The position at which Stevens finally arrives is similar to parts of Mauron's discussion of

the necessary connection between the artist's organizations and the organization of the natural world. Stevens presents an "improvised" definition of poetic truth: "an agreement with reality, brought about by the imagination of a man disposed to be strongly influenced by his imagination, which he believes, for a time, to be true, expressed in terms of his emotions" (NA 54).

In "Three Academic Pieces" Stevens treats the same issues that Mauron calls "systems of relations." The essay begins with a discussion of resemblances and relations or, more precisely, the resemblance between things in nature that constitutes a relation between them. Stevens provides an example of discovering relations in a landscape scene of trees, beach, sea and sky: "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" (NA 71). We recall Mauron's comments that a landscape contemplated becomes forms and colors and that systems of relations then appear. Resemblance, Stevens goes on to say, is a significant component of the structure of reality because it creates relations. He distinguishes, though, between relation in nature and in poetry:

> In nature, however, the relation is between two or more of the parts of reality. In metaphor (and this word is used as a symbol for the single aspect of poetry with which we are now concerned--that is to say, the creation of resemblance by the imagination, even though metamorphosis might be a better word)--in metaphor, the resemblance may be, first, between two or more parts of reality; second between something real and something imagined or, what is the same thing, between something imagined and something real as, for example, between music and whatever may be evoked by it; and, third, between two imagined things as when we say that God is good, since the statement involves a resemblance between two concepts, a concept of God and a concept of goodness. (NA 72)

Stevens, like Mauron, also distinguishes between resemblance and identity and between resemblance and imitation.

Stevens expands the function and role of resemblance beyond the way in which Mauron discusses systems of relations. Mauron seems to limit this category to that of formal relations; from Stevens' point of view resemblance is also the principle at work in what Mauron would call "internal echoes." His examples include what he calls private resemblances--"something in a locket, one's grandfather's high beaver hat, one's grandmother's hand-woven blankets"--but they also include what Mauron would call associations of thoughts, feelings, instincts, etc.:

> One may find intimations of immortality in an object on the mantelpiece; and these intimations are as real in the mind in which they occur as the mantelpiece itself. Even if they are only a part of an adult make-believe, the whole point is that the structure of reality because of the range of resemblances that it contains is measurably an adult make-believe. Perhaps the whole field of connotation is based on resemblance. Perhaps resemblance which seems to be related so closely to the imagination is related even more closely to the intelligence, of which perceptions of resemblance are effortless accelerations. (NA 75)

Mauron regards the discovery of relations as the primary activity of the intelligence; Stevens distinguishes, however, between the activity of the eye in discovering relations and that of the mind in creating them. The eye merely "sees," but the mind "begets."

For Stevens, the activity of begetting resemblance is a result of the desire for resemblance and this principle thus becomes the motive for art: "Poetry is a satisfying of the desire for resemblance. As the mere satisfying of a desire, it is pleasurable. But poetry if it did nothing but satisfy a desire would not rise above the level of many lesser things. Its singularity is that in the act of satisfying the desire

for resemblance it touches the sense of reality, it enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it" (NA 77).

Stevens further notes that the proliferation of resemblance extends an object to the point that it reaches the ambiguity that is a favorable condition for poetry: "The ambiguity that is so favorable to the poetic mind is precisely the ambiguity favorable to resemblance. In this ambiguity, the intensification of reality by resemblance increases realization and this increased realization is pleasurable" (NA 79). The increased realization might even be intense enough to "convert the real world . . . into an imagined world. In short, a sense of reality keen enough to be in excess of the normal sense of reality creates a reality of its own" (NA 79).

Though Mauron's theories seem to lie in the background of Stevens' comments in this essay, Stevens goes yet a step further than Mauron. He creates systems of relations among aspects of the poetic process that Mauron, in his discussion of the aesthetic process, regards as separate components of the aesthetic experience. For Stevens, the activity of begetting resemblances includes what Mauron describes as the process of "internal echoes" as well as what Mauron calls the "formal relations" within a work. Thus the activity, as Stevens sees it, is pleasurable to both the intellect and the emotions; and finally, the desire for resemblance is the answer, for Stevens, to that question which Mauron posed at the beginning of his work: "What does the need in certain men to create works of art and the pleasure of contemplating them in others correspond to?" (Mauron p. 9).

Though their views on the centrality of resemblances or relations

may differ, Stevens and Mauron reveal many points of similarity. Both devote a great deal of discussion to what gives pleasures in the aesthetic experience. Both distinguish between the pleasures of ordinary life and those of art, even though they see many similarities in the activities of ordinary life and those of art. Both seek to formulate a theory which will account for the emotional as well as the intellectual satisfactions of art. Both approach the subject by examining psychological processes (though Stevens does not speak of his approach in this way) and both proceed by an inductive, almost experimental method, presenting, exploring, testing hypotheses in relation to human experience rather than expounding an abstract theory. What is true of Stevens' method and principles in "Three Academic Pieces" is true of The Necessary Angel as a whole.

3

In certain poems included in Parts of a World (1942) we find evidence that Mauron's discussion may have stimulated Stevens' poetic imagination. Certain poems, as we shall see, seem nearly direct illustrations of some of Mauron's theories. For example, Mauron sees a parallel in the way the artist contemplates the universe and the way we sometimes pause in ordinary life to savor a particular momentary experience. That pause to enjoy the pleasures of contemplating the real seems much like the experience behind the following lines:

> I love the metal grapes,
> The rusty, battered shapes
> Of the pears and of the cheese

And the window's lemon light,
The very will of the nerves,
The crack across the pane,
The dirt along the sill.
(CP 211)

The lines call to mind Mauron's description of the artist as the perpetual lover of the real, and the metaphors demonstrate the process of discovering correspondences. We recall also Mauron's insistence that it is not necessary to apply value judgments in formulating aesthetic principles, and his description of the amateur's role, which is simply to catalog those things which give aesthetic pleasure. In this context the poem's title seems particularly appropriate: "Anything Is Beautiful If You Say It Is."

Other poems would seem to be a reaction against Mauron's theories. Mauron speculates that experiences and objects from the past are particularly well suited to aesthetic contemplation. Stevens explores the relationships between experiences and objects of the present and the past in "Arcades of Philadelphia the Past," but Stevens' attitude here does not coincide with that of Mauron:

Only the rich remember the past,
The strawberries once in the Apennines,
Philadelphia that the spiders ate.
. . . . . .
To see,
To hear, to touch, to taste, to smell, that's now,
That's this.
. . . . . .
The strawberries once in the Apennines . . .
They seem a little painted, now.
The mountains are scratched and used, clear fakes.
(CP 225-226)

The past seems, for Stevens, too far removed from present reality.

Still other poems seem to be a testing of Mauron's theories by

realizing them in poetry. Stevens' still-life poems demonstrate what happens when he turns the powers of the contemplative attitude on the "natural order of things." "Study of Two Pears" might be seen as an illustration of the stubborn resistance that the natural order presents to the creative imagination, almost a denial that the observer's mind can destroy reality in order to create a new, richer vision of correspondences. The observer perceives clearly all the appearance of the pears--their forms, colors, details. The mind goes on to perceive differences not immediately apparent, for example, in the subtle colors that make up the yellow:

> The yellow glistens.
> It glistens with various yellows,
> Citrons, oranges and greens
> Flowering over the skin.
> (CP 196-197)

At the beginning of the poem the pears "resemble nothing else" and the final statement asserts that "The pears are not seen / As the observer wills." A study of the reality of things? An assertion that the contemplating mind cannot compose that new reality? Not quite, for the poem reverberates with irony. In the first place, the poem's title suggests a still-life painting, so that we see not the things themselves, but an artist's presentation of the things. Within the poem sections II and III form a pattern of statement and antithesis, a subtle contradiction of what the poem might seem to be saying: "They are yellow forms" but "They are not flat surfaces / Having curved outlines." And of course the overriding irony is that the poet has made us see the pears as he wills, not as pears, but as a painter's representation of pears and moreover, not as a representation on a flat canvas but as bulging reality escaping the

confines of artistic imitation.

On the other hand "A Dish of Peaches in Russia" might be taken as an illustration of what happens when the contemplative mind focuses on reality, perceives all its sensual concreteness, and lets the "internal echoes," which the experience stimulates, rise to the surface:

> 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.
> (CP 224)

We can see the sense experience stimulating the mental echoes, can see the correspondences and analogies take shape. But again the question of irony arises, for the poem seems to have a playful tone, established by the extravagance of its mental arabesques (he sees peaches as a lover sees spring? as a Spaniard plays his guitar?), by the emphatic over-

statement of the peaches' physical qualities ("large and round, / Ah! and red; and they have peach fuzz, ah!"), and in the hyperbole of emotion in the final lines (the distance between the feelings we normally associate with peaches and the "ferocities" these peaches have generated).

In "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together," the second of "Three Academic Pieces" (NA 83-89), we see a more direct treatment of this topic. As a poem, but as a poem included in a lecture titled "Three Academic Pieces," it stands midway between Stevens the theorist and Stevens the poet. The poem begins by establishing the contemplative attitude:

> O juventes, O filii, he contemplates
> A wholly artificial nature, in which
> The profusion of metaphor has been increased.
> (NA 83)

Here the object to be contemplated is not simply part of the natural order of things but of "wholly artificial nature" which already contains a "profusion of metaphor"; yet

> He must say nothing of the fruit that is
> Not true, nor think it, less. He must defy
> The metaphor that murders metaphor.
> (NA 84)

When the power of that contemplation is turned on the pineapple, and the natural order of things is destroyed, analogies occur at once:

1. The hut stands by itself beneath the palms.
2. Out of their bottle the green genii come.
3. A vine has climbed the other side of the wall.

4. The sea is spouting upward out of rocks.
5. The symbol of feasts and of oblivion . . .
6. White sky, pink sun, trees on a distant peak.

7. These lozenges are nailed-up lattices.
8. The owl sits humped. It has a hundred eyes.
9. The coconut and cockerel in one.

10. This is how yesterday's volcano looks.
11. There is an island Palahude by name--
12. An uncivil shape like a gigantic haw.
. . . . . .
Apposites, to the slightest edge, of the whole
Undescribed composition of the sugar-cone,
Shiftings of an inchoate crystal tableau,

The momentary footings of a climb
Up the pineapple, a table Alp and yet
An Alp, a purple Southern mountain bisqued

With the molten mixings of related things,
Cat's taste possibly or possibly Danish lore,
The small luxuriations that portend

Universal delusions of universal grandeurs,
The slight incipiencies, of which the form,
At last, is the pineapple on the table or else

An object the sum of its complications, seen
And unseen. This is everybody's world.
Here the total artifice reveals itself

As the total reality.

(NA 86-87)

The comments that follow the metaphors, or more precisely the analogies the poet has created, make clear Stevens' attitude toward the reality that the artist's mind composes. It is new and strange and richer in unforeseen correspondences. It has grown out of the "infinite complexity of the real," but it is more than that, as the title itself implies--not simply a pineapple, not simply a study of a pineapple. Here the poet's imagination puts the pineapple together, creates it, reveals that the artifice is the reality.

Reading these three poems in the context of Mauron's discussion reveals more than simply another treatment of Stevens' imagination-reality complex. What we see in operation here is not simply a poet telling us about the relationships between imagination and reality but in fact show-

ing us the way the poet's mind operates. The process at work in the three poems clearly parallels the workings of the psychological mechanisms Mauron describes. "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together," with its proliferation of analogies, would seem, in fact, to demonstrate the effect of Stevens' thought about analogies.

The pleasures of organization take a slightly different turn in "Connoisseur of Chaos." Stevens begins his treatment of order and chaos in the playful tone of "A Dish of Peaches in Russia," but the opening lines also make clear that this poem is going to explore the subject in more philosophical depth; that is, not simply as a meditation which ends in the "mental arabesque" after the natural order has been destroyed and the poet has discovered (or created) the new systems of relations, but as an exploration of the relationships between order and disorder themselves:

I

A. A violent order is disorder; and
B. A great disorder is an order. These
Two things are one. (Pages of illustrations.)
(CP 215)

These opening lines are almost a parody of the way an aesthetician might proceed, and they parallel Mauron's practice of stating his hypotheses and following them, in fact, with pages of illustrations.

The playful approach continues in section II in its series of "if-then" constructions, which differ from the usual ambiguity of Stevens' hypothetical "if-then" in that each hypothetical "if" is followed by a parenthetical statement affirming the truth of the hypothesis:

If all the green of spring was blue, and it is;
If the flowers of South Africa were bright

> On the tables of Connecticut, and they are;
> If Englishmen lived without tea in Ceylon, and
> they do;
> And if it all went on in an orderly way,
> And it does; a law of inherent opposites,
> Of essential unity, is as pleasant as port,
> As pleasant as the brush-strokes of a bough,
> An upper, particular bough in, say, Marchand.
> (CP 215)

Stevens at this point seems to be having a great deal of fun in gathering his "pages of illustrations," and his conclusion about the pleasures of discovering the relations between chaos and order is presented lightly rather than pontifically--"as pleasant as port / As pleasant as the brush strokes of a bough"--but the discovery of a "law of inherent opposites / Of essential unity" is, after all, a serious matter.

In section III he begins to move away from the whimsical tone of the first two sections as systems of relations begin to take shape:

> And yet relation appears,
> A small relation expanding like the shade
> Of a cloud on sand, a shape on the side of a hill.
> (CP 215)

Momentarily in section IV it seems that the results of the contemplation have been disappointing:

> A. Well, an old order is a violent one.
> This proves nothing. Just one more truth, one more
> Element in the immense disorder of truths.
> (CP 216)

But a new possibility has in fact arisen from the meditation:

> But suppose the disorder of truths should ever come
> To an order, most Plantagenet, most fixed . . .
> A great disorder is an order. Now, A
> And B are not like statuary posed
> For a vista in the Louvre. They are things chalked
> On the sidewalk so that the pensive man may see.
> (CP 216)

What has happened, then, in the course of the meditation is that the hypothesis has now become a discovery, a discovery fraught with implications for the pensive man, the contemplative man. In the course of the poem the poet's mind has contemplated both order and chaos, and as the new systems of relations emerge they reveal a more significant relation, that between order and chaos themselves, not a relation posed and fixed ("not like statuary") but one posed, in the sense of "posited," so that the pensive man may use it as a springboard for further contemplation. The poem's final section then provides an illustration of what happens when the contemplative man goes on from the point the poem has reached; new organizations of reality outside the self occur:

> The pensive man . . . He sees that eagle float
> For which the intricate Alps are a single nest.
> (CP 216)

It seems to me that the final image is one that is meant to be felt; it is the poetic arabesque of which Mauron speaks. Yet it also yields itself to analysis in terms of the poem's themes and, when analyzed, yields a vision of ordering chaos (an enormous vista of landscape is composed into a simple shape, by means of the metaphor) which is both fixed, momentarily, and yet oddly fluid--the eagle does not settle but floats. The image thus places the discovery in a continuing present.

Stevens' use of the letters "A" and "B" in the poem also helps us see what Mauron means by the journey between two points in the present or, in art, between two points in the work. In addition, the playful tone of the poem has helped to maintain that aesthetic detachment which Mauron insists is the necessary corollary to the contemplative attitude. Moreover, the title has established that this is a situation we are to

savor and enjoy as connoisseurs, and of course the witty structure of the poem has contributed to that enjoyment. As connoisseurs of chaos artist and spectators have enjoyed the discovery of new relations. We have enjoyed the pleasures of individuality (the brush strokes on that "upper, particular bough in, say, Marchand"). The introduction of the exotic (South Africa, Ceylon, Marchand) has appealed to our taste for novelty, while the pairing of the exotic with the familiar (the flowers on the tables in Connecticut) has appealed to our need for resemblances. Thus through imagery, sentence patterns, and over-all structure, we have perceived differences in relation to analogies. We have seen the usual organization of reality transformed into a new organization through the transformation of landscape into a resemblance by means of a metaphor which links both tenor and vehicle in the eagle image. We have been rewarded with the pleasure of discovering, in the infinite complexity of the real (the intricate Alps), a "reality richer in unforeseen correspondences than the ordinary world." Mauron's analysis of aesthetic response could easily serve as a gloss to the poem.

"Chaos in Motion and Not in Motion," a later poem, addresses itself to the consequences of chaos without the discovery of order. Event follows event not as sequence but rather in an unconnected series:

> The rain is pouring down. It is July.
> There is lightning and the thickest thunder.
>
> It is a spectacle. Scene 10 becomes 11,
> In Series X, Act IV, et cetera.
>
> People fall out of windows, trees tumble down,
> Summer is changed to winter, the young grow old,
>
> The air is full of children, statues, roofs
> And snow. The theatre is spinning round,

> Colliding with deaf-mute churches and optical trains.
> The most massive sopranos are singing songs of scales.
> (CP 357)

What we have in this sequence of impressions is a scene of almost elemental chaos and dissolution. Even things that follow one another in an orderly sequence (winter and summer, old age and youth) are presented so as to produce an effect of disintegration rather than order. The sopranos' songs are merely scales, not a melody composed. The scene remains a scene, a spectacle, something looked at but not composed. It is indeed a situation in which everything changes at once--what Mauron calls the mark of chaos. The result, at least for the "turbulent schlemihl" of the poem, Ludwig Richter, is a loss of the "whole in which he was contained," a situation of "desire without an object of desire," a terrible mixture of "mind and violence and nothing felt" and the knowledge that "he has nothing more to think about." In the face of such total dissolution it would seem that the powers even of the contemplative mind are negated. But the poem does contain its points of resemblance. The internal state of Ludwig Richter is an analog of the external chaos, and the poet's mind has placed these analogies side by side for us to discover and has in fact linked them by the final simile, "like the wind that lashes everything at once." The chaos is in motion in the violence within the poem, yet it is not in motion because the poet has fixed it for us to contemplate.

"Add This to Rhetoric" implies that the artist does more than simply discover formal relations:

> In the way you speak
> You arrange, the thing is posed,
> What in nature merely grows.
> (CP 198)

What the artist adds may be only temporary--

> To-morrow when the sun
> For all your images,
> Comes up as the sun, bull fire,
> Your images will have left
> No shadow of themselves.
> (CP 198)

What is it then that we are to add to rhetoric? We are to add the strength of that bull fire sun, the force of the real, in order to add life to what would otherwise be merely intellectual, or an artificial figure. We are to add what comes from our sense of reality because "the sense creates the pose"; the sense is "the figure and not / An evading metaphor."

Yet once again irony undercuts the poem's seeming implication that the artist adds nothing lasting to what he discovers in reality, because the poet has added a figure in order to make his image of reality more real: even while the sun is supposedly coming up just as itself, the poet adds a metaphor. Moreover, there is an ironic ambiguity in the phrase "This is the figure"; the antecedents of the pronouns "it" and "this" include the figure of the poem itself, hence the metaphor that is the poem as a whole is not an "evading" metaphor but one which adds something to bare reality.

There is an ambiguity too in the way Stevens uses the word "sense," as a later poem, "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight," makes clear. The poet considers reality's resistance to the poet's composing powers; it may seem that real things are

> Too much as they are to be changed by metaphor,
> Too actual, things that in being real
> Make any imaginings of them seem lesser things.
> (CP 430)

But such a view is presented as hypothesis rather than conclusion (the poem begins "Say that . . .") and the poet quickly qualifies and corrects that view:

> And yet this effect is a consequence of the way
> We feel and, therefore, is not real, except
> In our sense of it . . .
>
> (CP 430)

It may be that our sense of things creates the pose, that what we add is not rhetoric but our feelings and impressions, which in turn constitute part of reality.

What links these last two poems to those discussed previously seems to be an attempt to come to grips with the role feeling plays in the contemplation of the natural order. Mauron, as we have noted, feels that to concentrate too much on systems of relations leads to an overly intellectual view of art and thus to a view of aesthetic emotion as a purely intellectual pleasure. He insists rather on a delicate equilibrium between thought and feeling, between the artist's detached contemplation of reality and his "internal echoes"--the feelings, instincts, and desires within the artist stimulated by the process of contemplation. It seems that Stevens too, in composing his poetic universe, believes in the necessity of adding feeling to the natural order of things and to the artist's compositions. The artist contemplates the natural order and destroys it in order to create a new order composed of both intellect and feelings, of analogies both seen and felt, or resemblances created by the artist, whose role is "to add."

Thus in "Poem Written at Morning" we are told on the one hand that

> By metaphor you paint
> A thing. Thus, the pineapple was a leather fruit,

> A fruit for pewter, thorned and palmed and blue,
> To be served by men of ice.
> The senses paint
> By metaphor. The juice was fragranter
> Than wettest cinnamon.
> (CP 219)

Yet "The truth must be / That you do not see, you experience, you feel" (CP 219). Simply to compose is not enough, as we see in "The Poems of Our Climate":

> Clear water in a brilliant bowl,
> Pink and white carnations. The light
> In the room more like a snowy air,
> Reflecting snow. A newly-fallen snow
> At the end of winter when afternoons return.
> Pink and white carnations--one desires
> So much more than that. The day itself
> Is simplified: a bowl of white,
> Cold, a cold porcelain, low and round,
> With nothing more than the carnations there.
> (CP 193)

The artist may reduce the complexity of the real to a simple arrangement, but "one desires / So much more than that." Even if the simplification stripped us of all our torments, freed us from the "evilly compounded, vital I," "one would need more." The "never-resting mind" would not long be satisfied with the vision of order, but would want to return to the turbulent chaos of reality--we might recall at this point that Mauron acknowledges our distaste for the schematic and our love for the infinite complexity of reality. The "never-resting mind" longs too for a reality which includes our feelings and our need to come to terms with the central concerns of the human soul. In "Men Made Out of Words" Stevens insists on the importance of precisely those things that Mauron says are inimical to contemplative art because they arouse such strong feelings. Stevens asks, "What should we be without the sexual myth, /

The human revery or poem of death?" and provides the answer: "Castratos of moon-mash--Life consists / Of propositions about life" (CP 355).

We have already noted that Mauron's discussion of "expressive" art leads him into the uncomfortable position that expressive art must, with rare exceptions, address itself to the edges rather than the center of the human soul. When he is willing to sum up the results of his inquiry in the statement that art seeks everywhere the psychological conditions best suited to the growth of pleasures which may remain contemplative, it seems to me that he reveals his willingness to leave art at the edges rather than at the center. Such a viewpoint is not one that Stevens' mature poetry espouses.

Certain poems indicate that Stevens finally found some of Mauron's theories too limited and too limiting for the kind of total poetic activity he sought during these years. (Exactly what he means by poesis and how it is achieved belong more properly to the concerns of a later chapter.) It becomes increasingly apparent that even though Mauron's theories form the basis for a number of poems, Stevens' ambitions for poetry as the "supreme fiction" take him beyond the limits Mauron had set. For example, in many of the late poems, Stevens is less the contemplative than the meditative artist. "Contemplation" and "meditation," though similar, are not precisely synonymous, even in ordinary usage, since "contemplation" means the act of looking at or thinking about something intently, while "meditation" denotes not only the act of deep and continuous thinking but carries the additional meaning of a solemn reflection on sacred matters as a devotional act. "The World as Meditation" reveals the difference. The poem's epigraph establishes meditation as the

essential exercise of the composer:

> J'ai passé trop de temps à travailler mon violon, à voyager. Mais l'exercice essentiel du compositeur--la méditation --rien ne l'a jamais suspendu en moi . . . Je vis un rêve permanent, qui ne s'arrête ni nuit ni jour.
>
> Georges Enesco
> (CP 520)

The poem is certainly more than a detached contemplation of the "natural order of things" unless in so profound a sense as to transform what we would ordinarily mean by such an expression. The touchstones from Mauron are present in the poem, but the poem defies this sort of analysis. We could, for example, without perhaps undue wrenching, view the poem as springing from the poet's contemplation of a sunrise, complete with the poet's internal echoes expressed in a symbolic language. The correspondences are not hidden in too dense a twilight to be discovered; we can line them up: the sun is Ulysses and the sun-Ulysses figure is a symbol for reality; Penelope is the poet or, more precisely, a symbol for the poet's imagination. She is a composer and is engaged in a meditation. The union of Ulysses and Penelope would be "the final fortune of their desire," but since Ulysses never arrives in the poem, she is in fact suspended at the moment of stimulus which Mauron claims gives more pleasure than the satisfaction of desire. Indeed, it is precisely the fact that Ulysses does not actually appear in the poem that keeps the meditation fixed in the present. But such an approach to this poem proves nowhere near as fruitful as it does, say, in the case of "Connoisseur of Chaos." The poem so far transcends what we have come to

understand as Mauron's view of contemplation that imposing that kind of analytic process on it results only in an absurd reductivity. In "The World as Meditation" Stevens achieves the kind of poesis of which he chants in "Large Red Man Reading."

"Solitaire under the Oaks" provides a more direct statement of Stevens' view of meditation as an activity of total consciousness, or rather as something more even than total consciousness, as a kind of pure continuous poetic activity:

> This is an escape
>
> To principium, to meditation.
> One knows at last what to think about
>
> And thinks about it without consciousness,
> Under the oak trees, completely released.
> (OP 111)

Finally, three major poems written in the decade of the 1940's will illustrate something of Mauron's continuing contribution to Stevens' poetic and the limits of that contribution. As a poem, "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" transcends the limits of Mauron's theorizing; as a statement of a poetic, it demonstrates the similarities, at least in part, between Stevens' poetic and Mauron's aesthetic. Mauron, as we have noted, intends neither a final definition of beauty nor a definitive statement regarding the process of the aesthetic experience. Stevens writes not a final definition of the supreme fiction, but notes toward it; as he says of the poem, "in projecting a supreme fiction, I cannot imagine anything more fatal than to state it definitely and incautiously (LWS p. 863).

The section titles touch on issues raised in Mauron's book. Stevens

says of the supreme fiction that "It Must Be Abstract." Mauron accepts Fry's formula for beauty, at least in part, and notes that it is "abstract because it aims at the utmost generalization" (p. 19). Stevens wants his formula to be abstract for precisely the same reason: the supreme fiction must be the central essence of the process of poesis, not a particular set of rules or definitions. Mauron's formula for order states that "something changes, something remains constant." Stevens' second precept for the supreme fiction is that "It Must Change," and the on-going process of creativity becomes the constant. Finally, Stevens says that "It Must Give Pleasure." Mauron so thoroughly accepts the necessity of pleasure in the aesthetic experience that he never even states that necessity--it is the donnée from which he starts.

Poem VII of "It Must Give Pleasure" demonstrates the seriousness with which Stevens regards the potentialities of the artist's contemplation of physical reality. Mauron, we recall, says that when the artist engages in contemplation he discovers, or composes, new systems of relations, new organizations of reality. Stevens explores the possibilities of what the artist may discover, and create, in reality:

> To discover an order as of
> A season, to discover summer and know it,
>
> To discover winter and know it well, to find,
> Not to impose, not to have reasoned at all,
> Out of nothing to have come on major weather,
>
> It is possible, possible, possible. It must
> Be possible.
>
> (CP 403-404)

This discovery leads in turn to the discovery of the possibility of the supreme fiction:

To find the real,
To be stripped of every fiction except one,

The fiction of an absolute--Angel,
Be silent in your luminous cloud and hear
The luminous melody of proper sound.
(CP 404)

But it is the poet's creation of the "luminous melody," the "proper sound," that makes the discovery possible.

Mauron's discussion of what happens to landscape when it is viewed in the contemplative attitude could very well serve as a gloss to "Description without Place." He says that when we look at a landscape as if it were of no practical use, the landscape dissolves into chaos. Then the artist discovers strange and new "systems of relations" and from these he composes "new organizations of reality." The process he has outlined is description without place. But as we shall see in exploring Stevens' relationships to the poetic of Thierry Maulnier, the logos concept embodied in this poem means much more than the artist's composition of formal relations.

Finally, in poem XII of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," we find both the fulfillment of beliefs Stevens has in common with Mauron and an illustration of the way Stevens transforms the early theorizing into his poetics of logos:

The poem is the cry of its occasion,
Part of the res itself and not about it.
The poet speaks the poem as it is,

Not as it was: part of the reverberation
Of a windy night as it is, when the marble statues
Are like newspapers blown by the wind. He speaks

By sight and insight as they are. There is no
Tomorrow for him. The wind will have passed by,
The statues will have gone back to be things about.

> The mobile and the immobile flickering
> In the area between is and was are leaves,
> Leaves burnished in autumnal burnished trees
>
> And leaves in whirlings in the gutters, whirlings
> Around and away, resembling the presence of
> thought,
> Resembling the presences of thoughts, as if
>
> In the end, in the whole psychology, the self,
> The town, the weather, in a casual litter,
> Together, said words of the world are the life of the
> world.
>
> (CP 473-474)

The parallels are clear. The chaos of the setting (the windy night, the marble statues "like newspapers blown by the wind") illustrates the dissolution of physical reality. Stevens' insistence that poetry is part of the here and now ("The poet speaks the poem as it is, / Not as it was" and "There is no / Tomorrow for him") is no less emphatic than Mauron's insistence that art is an experience firmly located in the present moment and not part of our usual future orientation. But Stevens not only contemplates the present physical reality; he locates the poem in the present physical reality: "The poem is the cry of its occasion, / Part of the res itself and not about it." And that final triptych transforms the very meaning of "psychology" into an integration of poet, audience, self, other, reality and art--a complex of voices united in speaking the logos: "words of the world are the life of the world."

It is apparent, then, that Stevens' reading of Mauron affected his poetry in a number of ways. We have seen that certain of Mauron's theories directly generated a number of poems, some testing and, in effect, validating parts of the theory, others becoming a corrective to parts of the theory. Stevens read Mauron at a time in his life when he was de-

voting a great deal of energy to sharpening his own theory of poetry. Mauron certainly contributed to that process. But Stevens' goal of poetry as the supreme fiction finally goes far beyond the limits of Mauron's inquiry into the psychology of aesthetics.

Chapter II

Love and Logos in Stevens and Thierry Maulnier

On March 2, 1945, Stevens wrote to his young Cuban friend, José Rodríguez Feo, "If you can find a copy of Thierry-Maulnier's INTRODUCTION TO FRENCH POETRY, published shortly before the war, by Gallimard, you will have as good an introduction to modern poetry as I know of. Specifically, it relates to French poetry, but it might just as well relate to all modern poetry" (LWS p. 490).[1] Thierry Maulnier, a pseudonym for Jacques Talagrand, is a journalist (for L'Action Française and Figaro), and a playwright (his plays include adaptations as well as original works). With François Mauriac he founded La Table Ronde. He has been awarded the Legion d'Honneur, the Grand Prix de Littérature de l'Academie Française (1959) and the Prix Pelman de la presse (1959).[2]

The terms of Stevens' recommendation to Rodríguez Feo make it important to know what in Maulnier's book would lead to his calling it, in effect, the best available introduction to modern poetry. His statement implies a basic agreement with the terms of Maulnier's aesthetic, and we shall see in the work of both men similar views of the purpose and function of poetry in general as well as of particular poetic issues, such as the concept of la poésie pure and the contribution of the surrealist movement to modern poetry. More importantly, Maulnier's concept of poetry as the magical "verbe" and a demiurgic activity is very much like Stevens' logos and supreme fiction. In particular poems we shall

see echoes not only of Maulnier's discussion of poetry but poems that seem to have come out of his discussion of the works of particular poets. What Stevens found in Maulnier was the same passionate commitment to poetry as his own, couched in much the same terms.

1

Maulnier's book consists of a three-part introduction and an anthology of French poetry. The first section presents a definition of poetry (he says that poetry is particularly resistant to definition because its essence is its ineffability); section two explores the relationships of French poetry to the French language, character, and culture (he argues that the relationship is slighter than that in the literature of any other country), and section three is a history of French literature from the middle ages to the early part of the twentieth century (he claims to be rewriting the history of French poetry in order to establish the rightful major writers, periods, and movements). The selection of poems illustrates the outlines of the history that he has presented. Though he proceeds along these general lines, the entire introduction thus becomes a definition of poetry and a presentation of Maulnier's own aesthetic and critical standards; his passion for the magical powers of language unites all three sections.

Maulnier begins his task with what amounts nearly to a manifesto of its impossibility:

> La poésie oppose aux définitions une résistance particulière, parce qu'elle se résigne mal à n'être qu'essence, et, possédant son existence la plus certaine au coeur même de l'ineffable, s'évanouit dans la clarté. De tous les objets auxquels s'applique la pensée, elle est le plus malaisé à saisir, et même à situer;

> elle se joue et fuit comme une eau vive aux doigts malhabiles de l'analyse. . . . Le seul véritable problème est de savoir pourquoi la poésie est présente dans dix syllabes de Scève ou dans quatre mots de Racine . . . la poésie étant cet autre pouvoir du langage, qui dépasse, par nature le pouvoir d'explication. (pp. 7-8)

In a similar manner he claims the manifest impossibility of isolating what is essentially French about French poetry, since the essence of the French poet is his individuality. Thus, "Une véritable introduction à la poésie française est une introduction à la ressemblance des particularités de chaque poète français" (p. 9). Despite the fact that France has given its poets the same world and the same words for naming that world each French poet, he says, is singular and incomparable and resembles other French poets only in his ability to be singular and incomparable (p. 9). An attempt to unite all French poets under the name of French is to be "condemned to define poetry by that which is the most external to it" (p. 10).[3] Likewise, one misses the essence of a particular poet in seeking what he has in common with others.

Maulnier sees a solution to this dilemma in considering the role of form in poetry. He speaks of the marvelous paradox that what is most individual in the work of each poet coincides with the purest and most durable forms of language; he sees the coexistence of "une élaboration prodigieusement intérieure avec une forme si admirablement communicable qu'elle reste communicable, par le nombre et par le chant, là même où la signification des mots s'évanouit" (p. 11). What Maulnier means by form is, however, more than the external appearance of a poem: "J'entends ici par forme non la seule organisation, en une harmonie exigeante, de ressources sonores du langage, mais un talisman verbal, une clé d'or ouvrant à chacun les trésors défendus de son propre uni-

vers, un moyen pour chaque auditeur d'accéder à son propre mystère" (p. 11). Thus the poet counterbalances what is personal and obscure in his poetry with the stability of his form, and Maulnier believes that the poet's intended meaning counts for less than form, which is communicable to all and which gives birth to the particular poem. The definition that he evolves from this belief results in the following view of poetry: "Pureté pleine de possibles, cristal où chaque homme vient comme Narcisse se pencher pour aimer une figure inconnue de soi-même, diamant nocturne où chacun vient allumer ses propres étoiles, le poème naît ainsi en chaque âme à une vie différente, et chaque âme naît en lui à sa propre vie" (p. 12).

Maulnier asserts that his "belle définition" avoids the usual scholarly problem of the distinction between "le fond" and "la forme" (p. 12); the question in the creative process is one neither of subject, nor form, nor of accord between subject and form, but solely one of language. He believes that at the moment of its inception in the creator's spirit, the work appears as form so profoundly that writing and revising only make the form become more itself. The form is thus not something imposed on the work, but something incarnate in its inception. There is no beauty in insignificant form, he believes, and likewise, the work is more charged with meaning in direct proportion to its style, "le travail du style n'étant rien que l'opération qui consiste à charger de sens le langage" (p. 12). From this stance, Maulnier attacks what he calls "l'absurdité du mythe pseudo-romantique" of spontaneous inspiration (p. 12).

The function of poetry, as Maulnier sees it, is "d'offrir au plus

solide du langage et au plus mystérieux du monde le lieu d'une miraculeuse coïncidence" (p. 13). Poetry is an art whose destiny is to use language to master that which by nature escapes language; the poet uses words not only to designate but also to evoke their incantatory correspondence to the world (p. 14).[4] In the hands of the poet, the grasp of language on the world is not only logical, but magical. These two attributes of language not only offer the poet potentialities for his art, but also form constraints within which he must operate. Poetic language appears only where "le verbe prend possession du monde au delà de la maigre puissance de signifier" (p. 15); to the extent that the poet sacrifices the magical powers of language to his power merely to signify and operates only in the logical universe or, conversely, sacrifices the usual powers of language to the magical "verbe" and operates only in the magical universe, he ceases to be a poet (p. 15).[5] Maulnier thus views the powers of poetic language both as firmly rooted in reality and magically capable of transforming reality, and he believes that the poet must make full use of both these powers.

Maulnier's conception of the relationships between language and reality ("verbe" and "monde") is not simply an attempt to avoid extremes and to seek a middle road; rather, he sees poetry as a "demiurgic" activity, "le combat même du cosmos et du verbe" (p. 15), and the means by which language recovers its true function: "l'acte de <u>désigner</u> apparaît dans sa majesté originelle, il appelle le monde à naître une nouvelle fois" (p. 26). He scorns both the poet who is satisfied simply to create rhythmic combinations of words which exhaust themselves in signification alone and the poet who employs language to create his own errant,

personal and obscure universe; both disregard the higher, demiurgic function of poetry. Maulnier agrees with Valéry's statement that poetic language is "langage à l'état naissant," which Maulnier says means that "le langage retrouve en [la poésie] sa virginité" (p. 26). He asserts that the poet not only names things, but in the naming engenders them: "Tu seras mer. Tu seras femme. Tu seras arbre" (p. 26).

It is clear then that Maulnier believes that poetry restores language to its supreme function; that is, poetry charges language with all its primary powers of signification in a way that goes beyond the function of merely designating things in the real world, beyond even the means of conceptualizing the real world, to a magical activity that in a sense calls the real world into existence. Maulnier sees this magical power as having enormous potentialities: since poetry's function is to evoke by its own means the ineffable part which is found in each named thing, "poetic acts seem the most efficacious means at our disposal for exploring that which in the universe resists explicit language" (p. 23).

Poetic language, Maulnier believes, is our means of knowing the world, but in a much more profound sense than in merely describing reality. Poetry, as an instrument of knowing, sees beyond the pale forms of the visible; it frees language of the suffocating walls of ordinary discourse. Hence Maulnier attacks what he calls one of the innumerable errors of common sense in opposing "poetry" to "reality": on the contrary, it is in its ordinary use that language conceals reality from us; poetry returns to language its profundity and enables us to glimpse realities that we ordinarily miss, so that poetry opens for us "au delà des mots les plus simples une transparence insondable et vertigineuse

de mer" (p. 23). Thus, even though poetry has an indefinable grasp on the world, its grasp is greater than it would have were language reduced to merely its intelligible quality.

From Maulnier's views on the relationships between poetry and reality come his beliefs on the proper role of reason in poetry. As we might expect from his position thus far Maulnier reveals his impatience with those who view poetry as opposed to reason and the poet as an irrational man: "L'irrationalité de la poésie, comme son irréalité, appartient à la mythologie la plus vulgaire" (p. 24). He believes on the contrary that poetry possesses a particularly high rational quality in precisely the same way that true reason must transcend common "rationality" and that true consciousness must transcend the narrow limits of "clear consciousness." Poetry in Maulnier's view is a superior form of reason, equal to tasks for which common reason does not suffice (p. 24).[6] In fact, poetic reason points out to ordinary reason its own inadequacies and its own inabilities to grasp the total substance of the universe. The poet, then, is the true realist, and poetry the most reasonable occupation in the world (p. 26).

When we consider Maulnier's remarks on language, on reason, and on "reality," his remarks on surrealism come as no great surprise. He says that the belief that poetic creation should be guided by ordinary reason is foolish, but that the belief that it should be guided by some indefinable irrationality is equally foolish; both views seek to confine poetry to what is external to its true essence. He accepts the surrealists' insistence that the proper domain of poetry is located in "le réel non 'rationalisé'," but considers it naive of them to believe that the

only means of escaping the impoverishment of the rational and ordinary world is to be found in "l'exercice de l'hallucination volontaire" (p. 17). He rejects the surrealists' belief that the dream is our "réservoir de réalité vierge" and considers it far more likely that dreams are simply the residue of "la vie consciente antérieure" (p. 17). He finally rejects the extremism of the surrealist aesthetic as simply too narrow and too reductive: there is no evidence that the rational activity of the spirit destroys the poetic substance in the reality to which it is applied, and the poet's resources lie not only in his night-time phantoms but equally in the solid, sensible universe of his waking activities. Moreover, "La croyance en une union homogène de la vie irrationnelle de l'esprit et de la réalité n'est plus, ni moins arbitraire que la croyance en l'union homogène de la réalité et de la raison" (p. 17). The weakness of surrealism, Maulnier states, is that it ignores all the rational that is present in the irrational and, more important, all the miraculous that exists in the rational.

Maulnier takes the critics of surrealism to task for attacking the movement for the wrong reasons, and he notes that the surrealists have not only taken advantage of such attacks but at times deliberately solicitied them. Thus those who attack surrealism on the grounds of common sense or for its obscurity reveal more of their own weaknesses than those of the surrealists or, as Maulnier puts it, the obscurity of some works is less in the books than in the minds of those who judge them (p. 18). Similarly, much of the surrealists' support comes from a reaction to the attacks on surrealism rather than from a true comprehension of the surrealist aesthetic. The problem, as Maulnier sees it, is

that both critics and advocates of surrealism have directed their remarks to the bizarre surface of the surrealist work rather than to the implications of the surrealist aesthetic. In fact, the seeming and artificial strangeness of the surrealist work has too often obscured the truly miraculous accomplishment of the surrealists in extending the domain of poetic creation. For this reason it is important to judge surrealism exactly, Maulnier believes, and to assess its true strengths and weaknesses.

The "common sense" objections to surrealism on the grounds of obscurity and of the appeal to the unconscious Maulnier easily dismisses: surrealist works are inevitably obscure because the surrealists are working in new or previously neglected areas and surrealists, like Freud, seek less to appeal to the unconscious than to transform the unconscious into the conscious (pp. 19-20). Here is the true contribution of surrealism: "Quoi qu'on pense du surréalisme, le domaine conquis et occupé par lui appartient désormais à l'activité poétique, et si un classicisme naissait demain, ce domaine s'y trouverait naturellement incorporé" (pp. 20-21). Maulnier believes that the true weaknesses of surrealism lie not in its external appearance, but in what he regards as too narrow a concept of poetry itself: "Le surréalisme a oublié que la matière propre dont dispose le poète n'est pas une <u>matière mentale</u>, mais une <u>matière verbale</u>" (p. 21).

The surrealists, then, in their zeal for their new method, have neglected the essential matter of poetry. Their works have failed to take advantage of the domain their aesthetic theories have occupied or, as Maulnier puts it, too often "le surréalisme semble avoir été une

méthode de connaissance ou d'investigation poétique plus qu'un instrument de création poétique" (p. 21). In fact, Maulnier charges the surrealists finally with a poetic practice that is imitative rather than creative. They have too often been content simply to record and faithfully present, or to employ a method to recreate, the disorder and incoherence of complex occurrences. The problem is that too often the surrealist has been content to present a description of a "surréalité" which is no more inherently poetic than a description of objective reality (p. 21).

In the remainder of section one Maulnier comments briefly on the more mundane aesthetic questions of poetic form and of the problem of obscurity for the reader. Since the poet's role is to call forth what the universe contains of the miraculous and since he has the power to transform the most ordinary into the most miraculous, he need not pay much heed to the demands of common sense for clarity--indeed, the poet naturally prefers the difficult. Still, Maulnier acknowledges that common sense never tires of objecting to obscurity in poetry and he as aesthetician is willing to confront that problem once again. Though he professes his agreement with Pontus de Tyart's claim that the poet does not write to be understood by the vulgar, he admits that certain poets in exercising a justified defiance of the vulgar do invest their works at times with arbitrary and unnecessary difficulty. The mission of poetry, he reminds such poets, is to make the most profound mystery spring from clarity; hermeticism on the contrary creates only artificial mysteries, when the true poetic mystery is born of poetry itself (p. 29). True poetry takes the reader on a journey from relative simplicity and

clarity toward the inexhaustible secrets of the universe; the poetry in hermeticism vanishes along with the obscurity. Alternately, the reader of the hermetic poem abandons the attempt to decipher it and simply allows himself to be carried along by the poem's music; thus "la hautaine prétention du poète hermétique aboutit en fin de compte au même résultat que les grands alignements d'insignifiances sonores de Musset ou de Hugo" (p. 30).

Maulnier addresses himself briefly to the psychological mechanism of the reader's response to the poem and, like Mauron, he explores this subject in relation to form in the poem. In this context, however, Maulnier comments on form both in terms of the poem's external apparatus and its subject matter. The poet plays simultaneously, he says, with the reader's sense of expectation and surprise. The poet ought to present his reader with surprise after surprise but, paradoxically, he must also prepare his reader to expect the unexpected (pp. 30-31). Since Maulnier believes that poetry employs language in a magical way, each word must present an explosion of the unexpected, unlike ordinary discourse, in which the spirit's expectation is exactly fulfilled by the word it encounters (p. 30). Yet the poet must employ his powers to the fullest in order to make us believe that the unexpected occurs in a chain of necessity, so that "chaque instant verbal doit exploser somptueusement dans la conscience, s'ouvrir en corolle de feu dans le vide d'une attente habilement organisée" (p. 31). How does the poet create for his readers the expectation of the unexpected, the sense of the miracle that occurs in a chain of necessity? Maulnier says through form: fixed form, regular patterns of sound and rhythm are the means by which

the poet invests his miraculous surprises with the quality of necessity (p. 31).

The poet who yields to the demands of form, then, who surrenders to the constraints of the exact mechanism of rhythm, gains by this surrender his ability to charge language with all its magical powers. The true poem, as opposed to the phrase or line that is merely poetic, exists only in the fusion of the expectation created by an exact mechanism and of a wholly unforeseen explosion into the realm of magical possibility, the fusion that makes up the demiurgic power of language in poetry.

In the second section of his introduction Maulnier turns to the relationships of French literature to the French language and culture. His position here might seem a bit odd to speakers of English conditioned to think of the French language as inherently more "musical" than their own; he claims on the contrary that "le langage français est de tous les langages le plus vide de mètres et de tonalités" (p. 34).[7] He claims that French in popular usage lacks the natural poetic qualities found in other languages as used by the folk. Elsewhere, he believes, popular language is charged with poetry and thus provides infinite resources for poetry. Not so in France: "One could believe that the words have less poetic power in the French language than in any other" (p. 35).

Maulnier further contrasts the situation of the French writer with that of the English and German writers. In England and Germany, he claims, the greatest writers of prose are also the greatest poets--he cites Shakespeare and Goethe as examples (p. 34). Such is not at all the case in France; nowhere in French literature do we find an analog,

he claims, of those marvelous passages in Shakespeare where prose explodes into poetry. Rather, in France, the greatest "prosateurs" are only exceptionally poets, the greatest poets only exceptionally "prosateurs" (p. 34). He admits that occasionally French poets have written faultless prose, but claims that in such cases the writer's poetry and prose have virtually nothing in common. He sees a clear split between the rational, elegant and rigorously analytic tradition in French prose and the magical intensity of French poetry, so much so that finally, "la poésie française a, dans le langage français, son domaine propre, elle ne se mêle point à la prose, elle ne lui dispute pas ses thèmes, elle ne lui prête pas son secours dans les grandes occasions, elle ne donne aucune aide à la prose, et elle n'en attend rien" (p. 35).

The same contrast holds true in the relationships of French poetry to the folk tradition or, more precisely, the near total absence of a relationship between French poetry and the folk tradition. English or German poetry, he claims, contains England or Germany; French poetry ignores France. German or English poetry comes from Germany or England; French poetry comes from poetry (p. 36). Whereas foreign poetry appears the very chant of its people, French poetry is separated entirely from the ordinary experience of the French people. Moreover, when French poetry attempts to draw on French culture and experience, it descends into the domain of bad literature (p. 36).

French poetry, as Maulnier sees it, is not descriptive, not nationalistic. As the language of French poetry gains nothing from any inherently poetic quality of the French language, so the concerns of French poetry gain virtually nothing from the French experience. What distin-

guishes French poetry from that of any other nation is that its tradition is literature ("la patrie de la poésie française est moins la France que la littérature"); its nature is to be essentially literary. French poetry draws only on subjects and feelings "already perfected and ennobled by a long cohabitation with literature" (p. 37). Thus the most direct French poets--Maulnier cites here Villon and Apollinaire--never condescend to pure and simple expression or description (p. 37). When French poetry becomes nationalistic, he claims, it draws not on the national tradition, Joan of Arc or Louis XIV, but on subjects from classical antiquity.

Maulnier sees the split between French poetry and France as profound and pervasive. His insistence on this point becomes increasingly emphatic: the inability of French poetry to give France a poetic figure is equalled only by the inability of France's houses, landscapes, and skies to engender poetry; France accomplishes the miracle of being one of the richest countries in the world in admirable scenery, in the legacy of diverse civilizations, in a history rich in potential subjects, and in possessing a literature abounding with great poets, and of being the only country never to have established the bonds between its historic, popular, legendary tradition and its poetic tradition (p. 38). There has never been an analog in French literature, he claims, to the Greek epic, to Spanish romance, to Elizabethan theater (it might be noted at this point that Maulnier virtually ignores the Chanson de Roland); there is "rien de plus étranger à la vie française qu'un poème français" (p. 39). The native country of French poetry extends from Judea to Castile, the national heroes of French poetry are Hector, Ajax, Prometheus,

Antigone, Cleopatra; French poets feel that in drawing on French history and landscape they fall into "l'artifice, l'anecdote et l'archéologie" (p. 45) but they freely appropriate anything from anywhere so long as it has its established place in "constellations de l'intellect" (p. 46). In short, "La patrie de la poésie française est dans trente siècles de poésie universelle" (p. 44).[8]

Maulnier believes that the near total separation of French poetry from the French experience has had the result that the French themselves tend to neglect their best poets and to bestow their favor on those Maulnier believes to be their worst poets: "il ne lit, il n'applaudit, il n'aime que ceux des poètes français qui viennent lui parler de lui dans un langage qu'il comprend, c'est-à-dire uniformément les plus mauvais" (pp. 40-41). Hence the French populace approves not Nerval but Delavigne, not Baudelaire but Béranger, not Rimbaud but Déroulède, not Valéry but Rostand, and "ce n'est pas bon signe, pour Hugo, qu'il faille le ranger dans la catégorie de ceux qui plaisent à la foule" (p. 41).[9]

Along with their reluctance to draw on French experience and history, French poets have a fastidious disdain, Maulnier claims, for certain themes in poetry. For example, he admits that French poets have on occasion written Christian poems, but he claims that they do so in order to purchase their right to write poems that are not Christian. He admits that some of France's most glorious poems have been Christian ones, but he maintains that by and large "la place du christianisme, dans la poésie française, est une place réservée" (p. 41). The problem is simply that Christianity is not literary enough. Maulnier acknowledges that Christianity has its place in French poetry, as obscenity has its place,

but he speaks of these two kinds of poetry as "l'enclos des priapées et l'enclos des prières" and regards both as somehow indecent (p. 42). Rather, French poets speak of the only gods guaranteed to be purely literary, that is, the pagan ones: "Le paganisme classique offre seul aux poètes français non seulement la sécurité d'une très ancienne consécration littéraire, mais encore sa dignité de religion morte, douée d'un adorable arbitraire, désormais incapable de toute autre existence que celle qui lui est conférée par la littérature elle-même" (p. 42).

What French poets demand, then, of images, settings, subjects, themes, is for them to have been somehow purified by a long association with literary tradition. One subject alone escapes this rigorous demand, a subject that Maulnier says society as much as possible passes over in silence: "C'est dans l'amour que la poésie française, c'est dans la poésie française que l'amour trouvent leur commune liberté et leur commune exaltation" (p. 47). In fact, Maulnier claims, "c'est à la sensualité seule que la poésie française ne demande point de préalable purification" (p. 47).

The essence of all Maulnier's remarks thus far in this section can be summed up in a few sentences: "La poésie française constitue la plus littéraire de toutes les activités littéraires, dans un pays où la littérature est l'objet d'un culte pour ainsi dire national" (p. 48); and "La poésie est donc en France moins la source première que l'extrême élaboration de la littérature,--et cela chez le peuple le plus littéraire du monde" (p. 49). The French, he asserts, consider literature the most serious of occupations and consider the instrument of literature, the French language, the most sacred part of their heritage. In marked

contrast to the usual French fear of seeming serious and to the French disdain for rules, in the case of literature and particularly in the case of grammatical correctness, the French are totally serious. They demand of their writers a total submission to literary rules and an absolute exactness and correctness in language.

All Maulnier's remarks in section two have been leading to his central concern in this section: the French passion for la poésie pure. What Maulnier means by this term is something more than a way of designating a particular movement at a particular time and certainly something entirely foreign to a concept of pure poetry as a poetry free from thought. What he means is a passion for absolute purity of essence, for what is purely and totally poetry. The demands for a very literary poetry are one manifestation of this passion, as is the love of pure austerity in language. Yet another manifestation is the French poets' love for rule-making, for theorizing, for manifestoes, in short, the French poets' continuing efforts to define poetry, their attempts to isolate the pure essence of poetry itself. Whether poets of successive generations seek absolute freedom or absolute adherence to rules, whether they seek poetry in absolute rationality or in total hallucination, all reveal the same quest, all seek to deliver poetry from every element foreign to poetry. Maulnier claims that there has been no generation of French poets which has not published some tract, proclamation, or manifesto of its poetic theory and doctrines (the Manifestes surréalistes are thus entirely within the central impulse of French poetic tradition), each claiming to present the true poetic (pp. 52-53). True then to his tradition, Maulnier attempts not only to purify poetry but to redefine the

term la poésie pure itself, and he begins by suggesting a more accurate term ("les propriétés purement poétiques du langage") to replace the one that has generated so much confusion (p. 55).

He points out the contradiction in terms in la poésie pure insofar as one means by that the possibility of isolating a pure poetic element from language: the attempt to isolate poetry from the atoms of language is as vain as the attempt to isolate electricity from the atoms of matter (p. 56). Rather, he claims, we can only define poetry as a particular power of language on things that it designates. The effort of French poetry toward la poésie pure is not therefore an effort to strip the poem of all content other than poetry, but to give to the poem "le pouvoir d'agir poétiquement sur la totalité de son contenu" (p. 56). The impulse toward la poésie pure is thus the effort to

> Rendre au langage usé des relations humaines sa fonction originelle et sacrée, refaire le verbe inutilitaire et inutilisable, dire le mot soleil, ou le mot fruit, ou le mot mort, non parce qu'il fait chaud, ou que l'on a faim de fruits, ou qu'il faut prendre garde à la mort, mais pour que l'âme ressente ces objets dans leur saisissante réalité, et non pas seulement selon les figures et les propriétés que nous pouvons voir, utiliser, ou craindre, mais aussi dans le mystère de leur substance, de leurs conséquences et de leurs sources cosmiques, introduire dans les mots non seulement tout ce que nous savons des choses, mais aussi tout ce que nous en ignorons, nommer un corps de femme de façon aussi efficace qu'il l'est pour l'amant de créer ce corps avec l'étreinte de son corps, pour le peintre avec la couleur, pour le dieu avec l'argile . . . (p. 57)

In keeping with his purpose of rewriting the history of French literature Maulnier opens his third section with a sweeping statement: "le premier grand siècle de la poésie française est aussi le plus grand" (p. 67). Though he immediately qualifies this claim (he admits that nothing from the sixteenth century surpasses Villon or Racine, but

maintains that its fertility has never been equalled), the tone of the opening statement typifies the tone of the entire section. Throughout, Maulnier moves freely back and forth between grand assertions and equally grand metaphors, selecting previously neglected poets or previously neglected works for the highest praise, singling out accepted poets and significant schools for scathing criticism, all for the express purpose of rendering justice.[10] For too long has French criticism failed to follow the lead of French poetry; the standards of judgment still date from a period when favor was awarded to works without originality, without seriousness, without grandeur, from a time when the task of literature was to treat simple themes and honored commonplaces elegantly and naturally (p. 68). Literature has sought new roles; it is time, he says, for the literary historian to do likewise. A deeper understanding of modern poetry, he believes, would allow us to perceive the true dimensions of earlier poetry, so that an aesthetic based on the poetry of, say, Mallarmé and Claudel would reveal to us the true wonders of the sixteenth century. What is most needed in literary criticism is that we cease to consider the formal clarity of certain works as the best guarantee of their value; we must return to French poetry its profundities (p. 69). As the modern poets have turned from the simple and elegant to the more secret and mysterious, so must the modern critic reevaluate the tradition of French poetry in terms of the modern aesthetic. Maulnier then proceeds to do exactly that.

As we follow the outlines of Maulnier's history we learn more about his aesthetic from his choices of poets and from the qualities that he praises in their works. For example, he claims that François Villon

(1431-?) gave birth to French poetry and that in his works we find its most authentic thematic and stylistic traditions; he describes Villon's style as "nude," his voice as the human voice in its purity, his themes as charging poetry with all the humanity of which poetry is capable (pp. 70-71). In the sixteenth century he praises the school of Maurice Scève (c. 1510-c. 1564), who he says ought to be considered the equal of France's greatest poets, for the reasons that his work is fully charged with humanity, that it is equally charged with cosmic preoccupations, and that he made poetic language the highest spiritual exercise of attempting to grasp the universal mystery. He says that Scève journeys into himself and returns to hurl language to the very borders of the cosmos (p. 74).

Such is the pattern in Maulnier's history. He praises Ronsard and Du Bellay, of the Pléiade, and D'Aubigné as other sixteenth-century giants, though he values Ronsard and Du Bellay for a complex of sensuality and innocence, adolescent vigor and great purity in language, sensual celebration of the body and profound thought, and D'Aubigné for his apocalyptic vision and his willingness to confront the abysses in the human spirit and the cosmos. Among sixteenth-century dramatists he lauds Garnier as a "French Elizabethan," laments his fate of being relegated to sterile classroom study as a historical figure, and laments also that Garnier's lyrics are virtually unknown. He values in Garnier his powers of poetic incantation and his truly demonic dialogues between man and the blackest and most formless powers of the universe (p. 87).

He claims that the seventeenth century has not only one period of glory but rather two summits of equal height, which he locates around

1630 and 1670. He cites the first peak as a period of incredible richness in all fields; the French language reaches a point of perfection which it will never surpass, French philosophy remolds the world, French painting challenges the supremacy of Italy. He says of the poets of this period: "Malherbe a jeté hors du temps quelques poèmes d'une substance si dense, si pure, si inaltérable, qu'il n'en est guère qui puissent être dits plus exactement immortels. Maynard, qui dépassa son maître, est regardé comme un poète mineur, alors qu'il plane et respire à l'aise à une altitude lyrique que Lamartine et Hugo ne songent même pas à atteindre. Corneille est plus grand que sa gloire" (p. 90). Only after three centuries of foolish criticism, Maulnier claims, are we beginning to recognize the true profundities, the true mysteries, the true accomplishment of these poets. Malherbe and Maynard, for example, he cites as the fathers of the only true French Romanticism (p. 91); they are "les premiers et peut-être les plus grands des poètes solaires, au matin d'un siècle solaire" (p. 92). He cites also the apotheosis of human power in Descartes and Corneille. The century culminates in Racine, who, he says, consummated so totally the resources of French poetry that he left it exhausted for a century and a half (p. 96).

Precisely because Racine left poetry in so exhausted a state, Maulnier believes, the French Romantics have been overvalued. They have profited by a comparison with the extreme sterility which preceded them, but their place will fade. With the exception of Gérard de Nerval the French Romantics, he claims, brought nothing new to poetry other than some rather timid innovations in form (p. 98). The nineteenth century gave birth, Maulnier believes, to an incredible number of adroit

versifiers but, after Nerval, to only two or three authentic poets: Baudelaire, but not for Les Fleurs du Mal; Rimbaud, who quickly runs through all the poetic possibilities and ends by shattering language itself, so that the only revolt left for him is that of silence; and Mallarmé, who probes and tortures words themselves so that he returns to poetry all the unfathomable and unrecognized powers imprisoned in language itself (pp. 99-101).

Maulnier concludes his history by designating the twentieth century, in the works of such writers as Gide, Proust, Bergson, Valéry, Péguy, Claudel, Apollinaire, as showing every sign of becoming a royal epoch in French poetry, the "printemps lumineux d'une nouvelle Renaissance" (p. 102).

In Maulnier's history of French poetry we can thus see the application of his aesthetic theories. He values poets who in their works demonstrate a passion for purity of language, who create poems out of a courageous confrontation both with themselves and their humanity and with the very mysteries of the cosmos, who charge their poetry with both light and darkness, and above all he values those who restore to language the magical, demiurgic power of "verbe" and who thus achieve the creation of what he calls pure poetry.

2

In one sense, everything Stevens ever wrote on the relationships between the imagination and reality bears a profound similarity to Maulnier's view of poetry as a demiurgic activity involving the very combat

of the cosmos and the word. In this sense the essays in The Necessary Angel have a great deal in common with Maulnier's book. The similarities reveal, however, more of a basic likeness in attitudes than any direct influence. For example, Maulnier aligns himself with those who assert that the poet does not address himself to the understanding of the vulgar. In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" Stevens says bluntly, "Time and time again it has been said that he [the poet] may not address himself to an élite. I think he may. There is not a poet whom we prize living today that does not address himself to an élite. The poet will continue to do this: to address himself to an élite even in a classless society . . . . all poets address themselves to someone and it is of the essence of that instinct . . . that it should be to an élite, not to a drab but to a woman with the hair of a pythoness" (NA 29). Maulnier views French poetry as the highest literary expression of a highly literary culture. In "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" Stevens remarks that "today poetry is literature more often than not," and the general context for the remarks makes it clear that he regards this not as an indication that poetry is losing its vitality but as evidence of a growing sophistication in our culture.

The two also have similar views on the role of reason in poetry or, rather, on the special kind of reason that poetry employs. Maulnier says, as we have noted, "On peut définir au contraire la poésie comme une raison supérieure, à laquelle la raison commune ne suffit pas" (p. 24) and speaks of the truly poetic reason which surpasses vulgar rationality. Stevens speaks of the contrast between the "mundo of the imagination" and the "gaunt world of reason" and notes that poetry "creates a

"truth that cannot be arrived at by the reason alone" (NA 58). Stevens' remarks occur in the context of a discussion of the way poetry produces an agreement with reality, of the way that a poet lives in a "radiant and productive atmosphere" in which "the pleasure that the poet has . . . is a pleasure of agreement with the radiant and productive world in which he lives" (NA 57). Maulnier's remark occurs in a passage which claims that the poetic process restores "les rapports du monde et de l'esprit dans leur proportions véritables" (p. 24).

We find the same sort of correspondence in the remarks Stevens and Maulnier make on language. Maulnier states that the poet names the objects and in naming them engenders them and that in doing so "il appelle le monde à naître une nouvelle fois" (p. 26). Stevens says, "A poet's words are of things that do not exist without the words" (NA 32) and that the poet "creates the world to which we turn incessantly" (NA 31). Stevens speaks too of our deepening need for words and of the way we search in words "for a finality, a perfection, an unalterable vibration, which it is only within the power of the acutest poet to give them" (NA 32); Maulnier speaks repeatedly of the superior powers with which the poet infuses language.

In "The Irrational Element in Poetry" Stevens' comments on the irrational, on surrealism, and on pure poetry have much in common with Maulnier's discussion of these subjects. There is no question of "influence" from Maulnier; Stevens read this paper at Harvard in December 1936 and it thus precedes Maulnier's book by nearly three years. Stevens' attitudes toward surrealism and toward pure poetry have generated some confusion. That he disapproved of surrealism and that his interest in

la poésie pure subsided after the _Harmonium_ period are widely held views. Michel Benamou refers to Stevens' "blind spot about Surrealism" but he notes that this did not keep Stevens from "seeking the same state of spiritual wholeness as these latter-day alchemists."[11] Admittedly Stevens' position on these two points is complex, but comparing his statements with those of Maulnier does much to clear up the confusion.

Evidence of Stevens' negative attitude toward surrealism is not hard to locate. In a letter to Ronald Lane Latimer in 1936, for example, he says, "Better fifty minutes of the Morgan Library than a cycle in the Surrealist Exhibition. The metaphysics of Aristotle embellished by a miniaturist who knew the meaning of the word embellishment knocks the metaphysics of Dali cold" (_LWS_ p. 315). (One might wonder whether Stevens' remarks here indicate a distaste for surrealism itself or an acute judgment about Dali.) His remarks on a section of _Owl's Clover_ perhaps indicate an idea of surrealism based on its surface techniques: "in the camera of the sub-conscious, things are not (may not be) what they are in consciousness. The locust may titter. The turtle may sob. Surrealism" (_LWS_ p. 375). In another letter he remarks, "the subconscious creates nothing. . . . If you think otherwise, 'discover' a new element and then create the life that it will generate of its own force. Dreams are hash" (_LWS_ p. 465). In the "Adagia" he states concisely what he thinks has been the failure of surrealism: "The essential fault of surrealism is that it invents without discovering. To make a clam play an accordion is to invent not to discover. The observation of the unconscious, so far as it can be observed, should reveal things of which we have previously been unconscious, not the familiar things of which we

have been conscious plus imagination" (OP 177). And in the opening of "The Irrational Element in Poetry" he speaks of the "din made by the surrealists and surrationalists" (OP 216). Yet later in this same essay he expressly excludes the surrealist poets from the category of those he calls the "charlatans of the irrational" and his final assessment of their accomplishment is very much like that of Maulnier:

> They are extraordinarily alive and that they make it possible for us to read poetry that seems filled with gaiety and youth, just when we were beginning to despair of gaiety and youth, is immensely to the good. One test of their dynamic quality, and, therefore, of their dynamic effect, is that they make other forms seem obsolete. They, in time, will be absorbed, with the result that what is now so concentrated, so inconsequential in the restrictions of a technique, so provincial, will give and take and become part of the process of give and take of which the growth of poetry consists. (OP 228)

Like Maulnier, Stevens demonstrates in this passage an understanding of the difference between the surrealist technique and its underlying aesthetic, and like Maulnier, he recognizes the importance and the potential of that aesthetic. Both men reject dream as the basis for poetry and both reject the surrealists' belief in the powers of automatic writing. Yet both recognize the vitality of the movement and its contribution to the field of poetry. When considered in the context of the entire lecture, Stevens' comment that "they make other forms seem obsolete" is not a tribute to the techniques of surrealist poetry but a recognition much like Maulnier's assertion that they have extended the domain of poetic creation. Maulnier's belief that "le domaine conquis et occupé par lui appartient désormais à l'activité poétique, et si un classicisme naissait demain, ce domaine s'y trouverait naturellement incorporé" (p. 21) indicates the same sort of attitude toward their contribution to poetry, and for much the same reasons, as Stevens' "They,

in time, will be absorbed . . . and become part of the process of give and take of which the growth of poetry consists." It is true that what Stevens says will happen Maulnier believes already has happened, but it should be noted that Maulnier projects an almost identical future for the surrealist aesthetic: "Le surréalisme ne représente . . . que la première phase d'une dialectique qui doit conduire à l'utiliser, c'est-à-dire à le surmonter" (p. 22), and his comment here refers precisely to the inadequacies of the surrealist technique in making full and correct use of their accomplishment.[12]

Since la poësie pure has meant such different things to each poetic movement that has sought it, or to each movement to which the term has been applied, determining Stevens' stance on this issue might seem a fruitless undertaking. Moreover, from various comments he made at various states in his career, it becomes clear that Stevens himself did not always mean the same thing by the term. For example, in a 1935 letter to Latimer he remarks that at the time of Harmonium he liked the "idea of images and images alone, or images and the music of verse together. I then believed in pure poetry, as it was called" (LWS p. 288). This comment would seem to incorporate the Symbolist and Imagist ideas of pure poetry, and it would seem to indicate that Stevens' interest in the concept was limited to the Harmonium period. In another letter to Latimer in 1935 Stevens says, "There must be pure poetry and there must be a certain amount of didactic poetry, or a certain amount of didacticism in poetry" (LWS pp. 302-303). At this point Stevens seems to distinguish between poetry in the service of something else and a poetry which is simply poetry.

But by the time of "The Irrational Element in Poetry," just a year after the remarks just cited, Stevens' concept of the term has changed. Now he addresses himself to the "question of meaning in poetry" (OP 221) and discusses the Abbé Brémond's views of the term.[13] Stevens says that Brémond "eliminated reason as the essential element in poetry" and designated as "pure poetry" that "in which the irrational element dominated" (OP 222). Stevens corrects this point of view by saying, "In spite of M. Brémond, pure poetry is a term that has grown to be descriptive of poetry in which not the true subject [for M. Brémond the true subject is God] but the poetry of the subject is paramount" (OP 222). What Stevens intends by this "looser and broader definition of pure poetry" is not precisely clear, but the remarks that follow give a clue: "When we find in poetry that which gives us a momentary existence on an exquisite plane, is it necessary to ask the meaning of the poem?" (OP 223). The two remarks would seem to indicate that, for Stevens, pure poetry remains something in which meaning is not paramount, but he obviously intends rather more than sound and color.

The letters in the years following this essay indicate that Stevens' concept of pure poetry continued to grow and develop. In 1939, for example, he affirms that "pure poetry is rather older and tougher than Marx and will remain so" (LWS p. 340). In 1940 he writes to Hi Simons (in reference to section XXII of "The Man with the Blue Guitar"), "Poetry is the spirit, as the poem is the body. Crudely stated, poetry is the imagination. But here poetry is used as the poetic, without the slightest pejorative innuendo. I have in mind pure poetry. The purpose of writing poetry is to attain pure poetry" (LWS pp. 363-364). And a few

weeks later, again to Simons, he writes: "The idea of pure poetry, essential imagination, as the highest objective of the poet, appears to be, at least potentially, as great as the idea of God, and, for that matter, greater, if the idea of God is only one of the things of the imagination" (LWS p. 369). It becomes obvious that, for Stevens, "pure poetry" has come to mean not some isolated essence of poetry, not some distinction between the surface quality of poetry and its meaning, but something he identifies with the imagination itself. Whatever he means by the term (and such poems as "Description without Place," "Asides on the Oboe," and "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" will help to clarify the question) he has reached a position much like that of Maulnier, who objected to seeing la poésie pure as an attempt to isolate from language a pure poetic element and claimed that rather than an effort to strip the poem of all content other than poetry, la poésie pure is an attempt to give to the poem "le pouvoir d'agir poétiquement sur la totalité de son contenu" (p. 56). Maulnier's position here is surely much like that of Stevens in claiming that pure poetry describes poetry in which the "poetry of the subject is paramount." Both men thus see la poésie pure as a term properly designating not a poetry stripped of all but its "essence," whatever that may be, but a poetry whose essence is to be as fully charged with significance as possible.

The comparison then of Stevens' prose with that of Maulnier reveals that the two thought much alike on the basic issues of poetry as they appeared at the time. "The Irrational Element in Poetry" reveals a mind much in tune with the stands Maulnier was to take. More important, the

high kind of poetry that Maulnier seeks to define--"le combat même du cosmos et du verbe"--is precisely the kind that Stevens was to write in the 1940's.

3

> The prologues are over. It is a question, now,
> Of final belief. So, say that final belief
> Must be in a fiction. It is time to choose.
> (CP 250)

The headnote to "Asides on the Oboe" (1940) might be taken as the quintessential statement of Stevens' poetic concerns in the years immediately following his reading of Maulnier. At the center of his poetry during the early 1940's lies his quest for a central poetry. The goal of that quest is not fixed but rather the ongoing process of total creativity--poesis. The search evolves the twin concepts of major man and the supreme fiction, but the figure of the woman forms an important part of the constellation of images and concerns that dominate the later poetry.

Despite the recurring themes, concerns, motifs, in the poetry from Harmonium to The Rock Stevens' imagination is not the sort that finds its home and rests there, nor the sort that finds a productive vein and settles down to work and rework it. He continues to read, to seek, to grow, to transform, to create. As we have seen in the likenesses of concepts from Mauron's book to poems and prose written ten years and more after his reading of the book, Stevens' poetic imagination is not fixed and impervious to outside influences even in his old age. It is not, however, a question of influence in the usual sense. Stevens is

not a young poet being shaped by what he reads, but a mature poet nourishing himself on his imaginative contact with what he considers a high and venerable literary culture, sometimes finding new ideas, sometimes refining convictions he already holds, sharpening poetic impulses already in progress.

The movement toward the central concerns had already begun when Stevens received Maulnier's book. What he found in Maulnier was not only the same passionate commitment to poetry as his own, but a concept of poetry very much like his own. The common concerns that we have seen in the prose of Stevens and Maulnier--the desire for a pure poetry and for a reality that is more than the simply physical and, above all, the magical power of language in engendering the world--all are as equally present and important in Stevens' poetry as in his prose. What we find in the relationships between Stevens' poetry and Maulnier's poetic is a case of an affinity of attitudes that Stevens says may result in a poet's acquiring a lot of things "unconsciously." To find evidence of those affinities and of those acquisitions, whether conscious or unconscious, we need only to look to the poems.

Thus in "Asides on the Oboe," for example, Stevens must surely have been influenced by Maulnier's "Tu seras mer. Tu seras femme. Tu seras arbre" (p. 26) in having the glass man cry "Thou art not August unless I make thee so" (CP 251). This cry represents exactly Maulnier's description of the way the poet not only names things, but in the naming engenders them. The correspondence of the French "tu" and the English "thou" emphasizes the source for the line. The glass man is major man, a complex figure whose origins undoubtedly include Stevens' alchemical impulses

of this period, but the figure surely stems at least in part from Maulnier's figure of both poet and reader discovering themselves in the crystal of the poem, so that through the glass man "We and the diamond globe at last were one" (CP 251).

The connections between Stevens and Maulnier in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" (completed in 1942, according to the letters: see LWS pp. 407-408) are pervasive and profound, ranging from similarities in language to the likeness of Stevens' logos to Maulnier's verbe. The poem as a whole is a masterful expression--creation is perhaps the better word--of what Maulnier calls the demiurgic power of language. It is both a poetic and the realization of that poetic.

The poem offers a wealth of approaches for comparing Stevens and Maulnier. For example, Stevens opens "It Must Be Abstract" with the imperative

> Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea
> Of this invention, this invented world,
> The inconceivable idea of the sun.
> (CP 380)

Maulnier, we recall, describes Malherbe and Maynard as "les premiers et peut-être les plus grands des poètes solaires, au matin d'un siècle solaire" and their poetry as a dance of "la victoire apolliniene" (p. 92). Their contemporary, Descartes, he describes as a "cavalier armé de lumière, Persée sauvant Dieu des ténèbres" (p. 92). Stevens says:

> Phoebus is dead, ephebe. But Phoebus was
> A name for something that never could be named.
> There was a project for the sun and is.
>
> There is a project for the sun. The sun
> Must bear no name, gold flourisher, but be
> In the difficulty of what it is to be.
> (CP 381)

Maulnier says of Malherbe and Maynard that their poems "s'élèvent, triomphent, expirent avec la majesté du jour" (p. 92). Stevens' poem begins as if with a sunrise and poem I of "It Must Give Pleasure" returns to this motif:

> to catch from that
>
> Irrational moment its unreasoning,
> As when the sun comes rising, when the sea
> Clears deeply . . .
>
> (CP 398)

Maulnier cites Maynard's announcement of his end:

> Et l'on verra bientôt naître du sein de l'onde
> La première clarté de mon dernier soleil

and comments, "Il ne songe à mourir que dans une dernière victoire du jour" (p. 92). Stevens' poem ends with a twilight scene:

> They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne.
> We shall return at twilight from the lecture
> Pleased that the irrational is rational,
>
> Until flicked by feeling, in a gildered street,
> I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo.
> You will have stopped revolving except in crystal.
>
> (CP 406-407)

The poem ends, then, with a visionary moment in a "gildered street." One visualizes a golden sunset, a crystal moment of victory. And the poem's epilogue begins

> 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
>
> (CP 407)

Certain other themes from Maulnier's history of French literature appear in the poem. Of Corneille he says, "Corneille est le dernier héros de cette ère héroïque où fut accompli l'un des plus grands efforts de l'homme, et des plus féconds, pour une plus complète possession du

monde. . . . les héros de Corneille s'affirment maîtres d'eux et maîtres du monde"; he says too that "cette apothéose du pur pouvoir humain offrait malheureusement à Corneille les tentations de la rhétorique, du 'romain,' du sublime" (p. 93). The idea of the hero pervades Stevens' writing in the early 1940's (Parts of a World ends with "An Examination of the Hero in Time of War") but his version of the hero, major man, differs from that of Corneille. Poem IX of "It Must Be Abstract" says that

> The romantic intoning, the declaimed clairvoyance
> Are parts of apotheosis, appropriate
> And of its nature, the idiom thereof.
>
> (CP 387)

But he goes on to say that "apotheosis is not / The origin of the major man" (CP 387). Stevens' major man is not the declaiming hero of Corneille, he is even at times the comedian in sagging pantaloons, but he is nevertheless a hero. Moreover, he is not one of Corneille's fanatical heroes who is willing to sacrifice everything and everyone to establish his mastery of himself: "The man-hero is not the exceptional monster" but perhaps "he that of repetition is most master" (CP 406). That is, he is master of his world in the way he enjoys its experiences, its recurring cycles, its "vast repetitions final in / Themselves and, therefore, good," the repetitions that are part of "the going round / And round and round, the merely going round" until "merely going round is a final good" (CP 405).

Another parallel between Maulnier and Stevens may be seen in Maulnier's discussion of the Pléiade (a group of sixteenth-century French poets which includes Du Bellay and Ronsard) and of Nerval. He says of

the Pléiade's use of mythology that it is "comme la projection du visible sans figure en figures invisibles" (p. 78) and of Nerval, "Ce poète fit du langage le magique instrument d'un commerce continuel entre . . . les choses et les esprits des choses" (p. 98) and that his poetry is "ce miroir où se reflète la part invisible du monde" (p. 99). The "projection du visible sans figure en figures invisibles" could very well serve as a gloss on what Stevens means by "It Must Be Abstract." The sensual concreteness of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" in its vivid images and colors, its subtle but insistent rhymes, and its dramatic characters indicates that Stevens does not intend by "abstract" the opposite of "concrete." The abstractness of the supreme fiction means its essence, the thing that must bear no name but must simply be, the principle and force of poesis rather than the created thing. Through the sensual and concrete elements in the poem and through the poetic theory he develops there Stevens does manage that paradox of the "visible sans figure" and the "figures invisibles." The poem does reflect the invisible part of the world. Thus, of the supreme fiction he says:

> It must be visible or invisible,
> Invisible or visible or both:
> A seeing and unseeing in the eye.
>
> The weather and the giant of the weather,
> Say the weather, the mere weather, the mere air:
> An abstraction blooded, as a man by thought.
> (CP 385)

And of major man:

> The major abstraction is the idea of man
> And major man is its exponent, abler
> In the abstract than in his singular,
>
> More fecund as principle than particle,
> Happy fecundity, flor-abundant force,

In being more than an exception, part,

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

The projection of the "visible sans figure en figures invisibles" could also serve as a gloss, incidentally, on Stevens' conception of the necessary angel, who proclaims:

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 496-497)

And asks:

Am I not,
Myself, only half of a figure of a sort,

A figure half seen, or seen for a moment, a man
Of the mind, an apparition apparelled in

Apparels of such lightest look that a turn
Of my shoulder and quickly, too quickly, I am gone?
(CP 497)

In a deep sense "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" may be viewed as a love poem, and it is in looking at the poem from this perspective that we discover the most significant relationships between Maulnier and Stevens. Maulnier notes the importance of actual love in the tradition of French poetry; he rejects the tendency to make of Scève's Délie a mere symbolic personification, for example, and reasserts her identity as a real woman whom Scève loved passionately. He notes too that the subject of love alone is exempt from the French demand for the purification of subjects by long association with the literary culture. With the possible exceptions of "Red Loves Kit" (OP 30-32) and "Two Letters" (OP 107-108), Stevens never writes a conventional love poem and in fact says,

somewhat stuffily, in one of the Necessary Angel lectures that "love is not a subject unless the writer of the song [or of the poem] is in love" (NA 121). Yet "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" is in many ways a love poem not too different in impulse from those Maulnier cites from the great French lyricists.

The poem begins with an address to a lover:

> And for what, except for you, do I feel love?
> Do I press the extremest book of the wisest man
> Close to me, hidden in my day and night?
> In the uncertain light of single, certain truth,
> Equal in living changingness to the light
> In which I meet you, in which we sit at rest,
> For a moment in the central of our being,
> The vivid transparence that you bring is peace.
> (CP 380)

The "you" addressed in this section is of course not an actual woman. Stevens is not like the French lyricists in this respect. But on one level the "you" is all the women in this poem as well as all the various female figures associated with the creative process throughout Stevens' poetry: the Paltry Nude, the singer at Key West, the Puella Parvula, the Interior Paramour and others. In Jungian terms, the "you" is the poet's anima, whom he clearly identifies with his poetic self, as in the figures just cited. Stevens transforms the anima figure into the various women of the poem, objectifying and metamorphosing her into such characters as Nanzia Nunzio, the maiden Bawda, the blue woman, and the fat girl of the poem's final section.

Yet the women in the poem are not merely projections of the poet's anima. Like the "you" of the poem's headnote, they are also figures for physical reality. We have already noted in Stevens' devotion to the reality of the objective world the similarity to Auguste Bréal's descrip-

tion of the artist as the perpetual lover ("l'amoureux perpétuel") of the real. Stevens accomplishes in this poem the marriage between himself and his world, between the subjective and the objective, between his poetic powers and the world on which they act, and we see in the women in the poem figures compounded both of his subjective imagination and objective reality, as we see in the marriage poems the union of the active, rational, masculine with the fertile, irrational feminine. It is, in short, a perfectly integrated poem and, on one level, may be taken as the integration of the poet with his world, though we might note that Stevens at the end of the poem projects this union as a future state, something that one day "will have happened" (CP 407).

The woman first appears in the poem as Eve, who "made air the mirror of herself, / Of her sons and of her daughters" (CP 383). The pun on "air," which is both the atmosphere we breathe (thus reality) and song (thus poetry) establishes the interchange and union between the subjective imagination and physical reality; the aural pun with "heir" combines the union of self and other and the new reality created of that union. Because "The first idea was not our own" and because "Adam / In Eden was the father of Descartes" the union here between Adam and Eve becomes the union between the masculine and rational and the feminine and imaginative, and this union becomes the genesis of the total reality "from [which] the poem springs" (CP 383).

The fulfillment of love motif continues in "It Must Change": "This warmth is for lovers at last accomplishing / Their love" (CP 391), and the language of love, intensely sensual, pervades this section. For example, poem IV sexualizes the integrations it contains:

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

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

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

And North and South are an intrinsic couple
And sun and rain a plural, like two lovers
That walk away as one in the greenest body.
(CP 392)

In poem VII the sensuality of the natural world intensifies--it might even be said to generate--the lovers' passion:

Tonight the lilacs magnify
The easy passion, the ever-ready love
Of the lover that lies within us
(CP 394)

The breath metaphor makes the poet's longing for the loving union of himself and his world seem both natural and possible:

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

For easy passion and ever-ready love
Are of our earthy birth and here and now
And where we live and everywhere we live
(CP 395)

In poem VIII the love motif culminates in a marriage poem, which merits quoting in its entirety:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then Ozymandias said the spouse, the bride
Is never naked. A fictive covering
Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind.
(CP 395-396)

For one who has read Maulnier certain resemblances stand out at once. The recurring theme in Maulnier's discussion of seventeenth-century French poets is the way in which they infuse their love poems with a poetic meditation that calls forth the creation of the world. This seems to me precisely the impulse that underlies "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction." What Maulnier calls the "fusion nuptiale de la connaissance et de la sensualité" in the work of Scève could easily describe the union of Ozymandias and Nanzia Nunzio, and the "fictive covering" which "weaves always glistening from the heart and mind" and the "spirit's diamond coronal" which she requests recall both the nuptial fusion of knowledge and sensuality and Scève's woman whose countenance is "ceint de toutes les étoiles" (p. 75). We might also recall Maulnier's description of Maynard and Malherbe's radiant women with "visages de feu" (p. 92). The nuptial fusions continue in "It Must Give Pleasure," where in poem IV the "mystic marriage" between the great captain and the maiden

Bawda signifies the union of man, mind, and logos with the bawdy earth, "love's characters come face to face" (CP 401). What distinguishes Stevens' love poem from those of the seventeenth-century French poets is that, according to Maulnier, the French poets ground their cosmic meditations on the love for an actual mistress, whereas Stevens' female figures are obviously more like what Maulnier describes as the "fantôme presque arbitraire de l'imagination" of Nerval, though the appropriateness of Stevens' embodying his poetic integrations in figures of the woman and marriage makes his choice of the woman by no means arbitrary.

What is most significant in the resemblances between Stevens' poem and Maulnier's discussion is the correspondence of their concepts of the demiurgic powers of poetic language, the magical "verbe" that engenders the world. "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" calls the world into existence. It opens with Stevens' declaration of love for that world and, in the process by which he develops his notes toward the supreme fiction, he calls that possible world to be born. Poem I of "It Must Be Abstract" opens with a deliberate echo of Genesis: "Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea / Of this invention, this invented world" (CP 380). The poet-creator in effect calls the sun to be born anew, not by naming it in the conventional sense--"Phoebus was / A name for something that never could be named" (CP 381)--but by speaking the words that call it forth in all its radiant glory of being, not the concrete, named thing, but the abstract reality which precedes it. The supreme fiction is not something the poet projects out of himself, because "the first idea was not our own" (CP 383), and

> There was a muddy centre before we breathed.
> There was a myth before the myth began,
> Venerable and articulate and complete.
>
> From this the poem springs . . .
>
> (CP 383)

Language is the key to the creation of the supreme fiction, "Logos and logic, crystal hypothesis," and to the possibility of major man, the "Beau linguist" who may draw his power from reality and from language: "He might take habit, whether from wave or phrase, / Or power of the wave, or deepened speech" so that it is "As if the language suddenly, with ease, / Said things it had laboriously spoken" (CP 387).

The creation of the possibility of major man, as much an abstraction and thus as indefinable as the supreme fiction itself--"Give him / No names. Dismiss him from your images" (CP 388)--calls forth the new reality toward which the poem strives. Thus "It Must Change" opens with the booming of bees, a pun on the new be-ing the poem is creating; it is a "beginning, not resuming, this / Booming and booming of the new-come bee" (CP 391). The intensity of sound in the bee passages through the repetition of the "bee" and "be" sounds, the rhymes of "resuming" and "booming," serves to emphasize that the new reality is the product of language; we recall Stevens' assertion that "above everything else, poetry is words; and that words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds" (NA 32). Nearly all the poems in "It Must Change" are intensely sensual, intensely rich in sound and color, which serves also to underscore the reality the poet is creating. The section swarms and resounds with life and sensuality; it is this part of the poem that contains the copulars we noted above and the Nanzia Nunzio poem, as well as the trop-

ical colors of the South Sea island poem (V) with its green, turquoise, orange, melon, pink and red, and the parliament of fowls poem (VI) with its bloody wren, felon jay, jug-throated robin, monotonous "ké-kē" and sparrow's insistent "Bethou, bethou, bethou me in my glade," so that the "bethous compose a heavenly gong" (CP 394). All the sounds come together in poem IX, where the poet tells us that he wants to speak to us and that

> It is the gibberish of the vulgate that he seeks.
> He tries by a peculiar speech to speak
>
> The peculiar potency of the general,
> To compound the imagination's Latin with
> The lingua franca et jocundissima.
> (CP 397)

The magical power of language marries the poet to reality, his poem to the world, his reader to the total poetic experience the poem creates. The poem does what Maulnier designates as the proper function of poetry: "offrir au plus solide du langage et au plus mystérieux du monde le lieu d'une miraculeuse coïncidence" (p. 13); the words do evoke a "correspondance incantatoire au monde" (p. 14). Stevens, as Maulnier believes the poet must do, infuses language with both sense and power. He becomes in this poem the "beau linguist" whose words engender the world in "It Must Be Abstract." His words create the necessity and the will for change in "It Must Change" as well as providing consolation for the death that is an inevitable part of change in the response to the monotonous death sound of "ké-kē" in poem VII: "It is / A sound like any other. It will end" (CP 394), and they provide the fictive covering for the bride. It is his words that give pleasure, not only in "It Must Give Pleasure" but in all the sensual richness of the total poem. And his words finally name the "fat girl, terrestrial" the green and "fluent mundo" and create the

possibility of that final crystal resolution. His poem is the essence of what Maulnier calls "le combat même du cosmos et du verbe" so that the epilogue's war theme comes inevitably from the ambitious undertaking of the poem.

In the three most intense love poems we see the richest realization of poetry as "une des formes les plus hautes de la dialectique humaine" (Maulnier p. 15). The marriage of Ozymandias and Nanzia Nunzio signifies the union of the poet's self and anima, of mind and body, thought and feeling, imagination and reality. The bride, as we have already noted, is both the poet's anima (thus a figure for the unconscious, and subjective) and the physical world (thus a figure for the objective), the earth mother archetype transformed by the power of poetic language to vestal bride. The poem's intense sensuality is heightened by the steadily increasing tempo of the words she speaks as she disrobes, her sentences becoming longer and more intense until the moment of consummation when the words are spoken which clothe her in the glistening fictive covering. In view of the poem's intense sexuality and the marriage consummation that it at least figuratively contains it is appropriate that Stevens' omission of the quotation marks for conversation and of at least one comma creates an ambiguity in the final triptych. Is it Ozymandias speaking, or the spouse?

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

Since the bride has been speaking up to this point, it is easy to read the statement as a continuation of her speech--"Then, Ozymandias," said

the spouse . . .--and thus receive the words as the completion of an instruction process that includes both concrete physical action and the words that create (or perhaps imply) a new physical reality. On the other hand, since the bride has been speaking, we are also psychologically prepared for the poem's other character to speak--Then Ozymandias said, "the spouse . . ."--and thus receive the words as his reply to the physical action he has witnessed and his response to her request that he clothe her. The ambiguity should not be resolved, but allowed to stand. To paraphrase Stevens elsewhere in the poem, it is not a choice between but of, not a choice to exclude but to include. The ambiguity is intentional and purposeful; it is totally appropriate at this moment of consummation and of total integrations that both the figures speak, as it were, with a single voice.

The next marriage poem, that of the "great captain and the maiden Bawda," begins with a reminder of the special kind of reason poetry employs or, as Maulnier expresses it, "une raison supérieure, à laquelle la raison commune ne suffit pas" (p. 24). Again, the poem merits quoting in its entirety:

> We reason of these things with later reason
> And we make of what we see, what we see clearly
> And have seen, a place dependent on ourselves.
>
> There was a mystic marriage in Catawba,
> At noon it was on the mid-day of the year
> Between a great captain and the maiden Bawda.
>
> This was their ceremonial hymn: Anon
> We loved but would no marriage make. Anon
> The one refused the other one to take,
>
> Foreswore the sipping of the marriage wine.
> Each must the other take not for his high,
> His puissant front nor for her subtle sound,

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

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

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

We have once again a poem that is very sensual, but in a different way from the poem of Ozymandias and Nanzia Nunzio. Richness of imagery (the sun-drenched setting, the characters, the marriage wine, the cymbals) and the consummation of a long-awaited union contribute to the sensual effect. But the richness of the poem's sounds, made up of both rhymes and intense cadences, intensifies the poem's sensuality. The meter begins to move toward iambic pentameter in the second stanza and becomes exact iambic pentameter for the three that follow, gradually eases in the penultimate one, which is roughly hexameter, and in the final stanza flows into a more conversational pace with extra feet and syllables.

The rhymes in the poem are incredibly rich. Stevens combines alliteration ("mystic marriage," "marriage make," "subtle sound," "secret cymbals," "captain . . . Catawba," "married . . . marriage-place," "heaven . . . hell," "characters . . . come"), consonance ("these things"), slant rhyme (Catawba--Bawda), exact end rhyme (sound--round, place--face), and rime riche (Anon--Anon). In stanza three he manages by playing line stops against syntactical stops to achieve two pairs of end rhymes in only three lines (Anon--Anon, make--take). Stevens' rhetoric becomes a subtle kind of internal rhyme and rime riche through its insistent repe-

titions: "We reason of these things with later reason" (epanalepsis), "what we see, what we see" (anadiplosis), "Each must the other take" (anaphora) in the fourth and fifth stanzas, the throbbing repetition of "loved" in the sixth and seventh. There is even a subtle kind of semantic "rhyme" in "noon" and "mid-day," enriched by the pun, because it is actually the "mid-day of the year." At the other extreme he achieves rhyme in repetition of pure sound nearly devoid of meaning in the "shoo-shoo-shoo."

The rich complexity of the poem's sounds is more than mere ornamentation; it forms an integral part of the poem's meaning. Language, which is both sound and sense, creates the symbolic marriage of word and world in the poem and it is thus totally appropriate that the poem's richness come primarily from words and sounds rather than color and visual images. The words in the poem point to its symbolic meaning: the captain and Bawda must take each other as "sign" and they are the "characters" of language as well as love. The captain is the word, Bawda is reality, yet they are both words and they are both the new reality that language engenders. The poet's word creates them and magically creates the nuptial fusion and integrations of the poem. The intense linguistic activity of the poem and the demiurgic process it embodies make the dual meaning of the French "verbe" (both "word" and the activity implicit in "verb") an even more accurate way of designating what happens in the poem than the Greek "logos." The poem might even be described as a figure for what Maulnier means by the "visible sans figure en figures invisibles."

The final poem of "It Must Give Pleasure" completes the marriage motif. The symbolic figures and personifications are no longer necessary;

the final marriage takes place between the poet and his world. He no longer needs to create characters but can speak directly and easily of the deep love which the total poem embodies. Reality no longer needs the guise of the burning golden bride or even the bawdy maiden; it is simply, almost colloquially, "Fat girl, terrestrial, my summer, my night" (CP 406). The poet and his magical poetic powers can appear once again as the direct "I" of the poem's headnote. The sense of fulfillment, however momentary, that the final poem expresses makes it perhaps the most sensual of all the nuptial poems:

> Fat girl, terrestrial, my summer, my night,
> How is it I find you in difference, see you there
> In a moving contour, a change not quite completed?
>
> You are familiar yet an aberration.
> Civil, madam, I am, but underneath
> A tree, this unprovoked sensation requires
>
> That I should name you flatly, waste no words,
> Check your evasions, hold you to yourself.
> Even so when I think of you as strong or tired,
>
> Bent over work, anxious, content, alone,
> You remain the more than natural figure. You
> Become the soft-footed phantom, the irrational
>
> Distortion, however fragrant, however dear.
> That's it: the more than rational distortion,
> The fiction that results from feeling. Yes, that.
>
> They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne.
> We shall return at twilight from the lecture
> Pleased that the irrational is rational,
>
> Until flicked by feeling, in a gildered street,
> I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo.
> You will have stopped revolving except in crystal.
> (CP 406-407)

With sure and concise control, Stevens brings together all the poem's themes in a final nuptial fusion. It Must Change: "a moving con-

tour, a change not quite completed"; It Must Be Abstract: "the more than natural figure," "the soft-footed phantom"; It Must Give Pleasure: "the fiction that results from feeling," "pleased that the irrational is rational." It seems too in the gently ironic references to the Sorbonne that he enjoys a moment's amusement at the expense of the French aestheticians; he has shown us the difference between constructing a theory of aesthetics and the totally successful embodiment of a poetic in a poem. No matter that the time when the green and fluent mundo "will have stopped revolving except in crystal" remains something that will one day happen; the poem presents "notes toward" a supreme fiction and it would be a contradiction of its poetic that the nuptial be concretely fixed and thus instantly part of the past and already beginning to die. In the visionary moment of its end we experience, with Stevens and through his poetic creation, the total pleasure of a never-ending consummation.

The poem is, as Maulnier says poetry must be, a "pureté pleine de possibles"; it does, as Maulnier says poetry must do, become the crystal which "naît ainsi en chaque âme à une vie différente, et chaque âme naît en lui à sa propre vie" (p. 12). The supreme fiction, chants Stevens, is "possible, possible, possible. It must / Be possible" (CP 404). Love and logos create the possibility of victory in "le combat même du cosmos et du verbe" and for this reason, the poem's epilogue becomes more than an attempt to relate Stevens' high concept of poetry to the brutal and inescapable reality of World War II which forms the backdrop for the poem's completion. The poet's combat with reality is the soldier's combat, and unlike the soldier's, the poet's never ends. But the

love that makes that final vision possible and that vision itself give birth to the vision of another possibility:

> How simply the fictive hero becomes the real;
> How gladly with proper words the soldier dies,
> If he must, or lives on the bread of faithful speech.
> (CP 408)

The logos concept is so absolutely central to the later Stevens that we can find over seventy-five poems in which it appears in the two volumes published in the 1940's and over 400 instances of words relating to sound, speech, language, words.[14] Stevens uses nearly every conceivable verb for the act of speaking or issuing sounds: say, speak, cry, howl, sing, declaim, whisper, mumble, call, chant, shout, murmur, ask, mouth, preach, talk, tell, blare, snarl, whistle, bugle, bid, hum, repeat, even the French "on-dit" and an Anglo-French neologism, "parl-parled." The figures would be even higher were we to include all the metaphors for speech (breathe and air appear frequently) and the characters who are themselves speaking, and the poems which clearly contain the poet's voice issuing imperatives. Stevens' poems of the 1940's shout forth the Word. The concept is of course central to "Description without Place" and Stevens states it directly there:

> canon central in itself,
> The thesis of the plentifullest John.
>
> 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)

It recurs in the last poems, identified also with the act of reading and writing as in "Large Red Man Reading":

> as he sat there reading, from out of the purple tabulae,
> The outlines of being and its expressings, the syllables of its law:
> Poesis, poesis, the literal characters, the vatic lines,
>
> Which in those ears and in those thin, those spended hearts,
> Took on color, took on shape and the size of things as they are
> And spoke the feeling for them, which was what they had lacked.
>
> (CP 424)

The woman of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" appears again and again, sometimes as that complex symbolic figure for the objective world and the poet's subjective imagination, sometimes as the bride figure. In "Poem with Rhythms,"

> The mind between this light or that and space,
> (This man in a room with an image of the world,
> That woman waiting for the man she loves,)
> Grows large against space:
>
> There the man sees the image clearly at last.
> There the woman receives her lover into her heart
> And weeps on his breast, though he never comes.
> (CP 245)

Stevens makes clear in this poem her purpose in his poetry:

> "This image, this love, I compose myself
> Of these. In these, I come forth outwardly.
> (CP 246)

Most often she is linked with the logos concept. She is the "green queen" in the opening section of "Description without Place," and in "Certain Phenomena of Sound" she appears as Eulalia ("fair in speech") and Semiramide the "dark-syllabled" who creates both herself and her white double through language:

> Then I, Semiramide, dark-syllabled,
> Contrasting our two names, considered speech.
> You were created of your name, the word
> Is that of which you were the personage.
> There is no life except in the word of it.
> I write Semiramide and in the script
> I am and have a being and play a part.
> You are that white Eulalia of the name.
>
> (CP 287)

In the late poems the woman is sometimes a terrifying figure associated with death, as in "Madame La Fleurie" where the vestal bride has become the crone:

> His grief is that his mother should feed on him, himself and
> what he saw,
> In that distant chamber, a bearded queen, wicked in her dead
> light.
>
> (CP 507)

Yet despite the deeply elegiac tone of The Auroras of Autumn (1950) and The Rock the woman appears as bride and beloved in these volumes as well. She can appear as a witty personification as the "Queen of Fact" who is the consort of the "Ruler of Reality" in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" or as a nearly figureless sexualization of reality in "The Woman in Sunshine":

> It is only that this warmth and movement are like
> The warmth and movement of a woman.
>
> It is not that there is any image in the air
> Nor the beginning nor end of a form:
>
> It is empty. But a woman in threadless gold
> Burns us with brushings of her dress
>
> And a dissociated abundance of being,
> More definite for what she is--
>
> Because she is disembodied,
> Bearing the odors of the summer fields,
>
> Confessing the taciturn and yet indifferent,
> Invisibly clear, the only love.
>
> (CP 445)

The woman in this amazingly sensual poem clearly grows out of the burning bride, Nanzia Nunzio, though she is so disembodied that she scarcely appears as a woman at all; and yet the mere suggestion of her presence transforms the poem into a sexual experience. Here might be almost a direct illustration of Maulnier's "visible sans figure en figures invisibles."

In poem VIII of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" the figure is almost completely invisible as a figure but the poem grows out of the same sort of feeling: "We fling ourselves, constantly longing, on this form" (CP 470). Here Stevens directly links language with love:

> Our breath is like a desperate element
> That we must calm, the origin of a mother tongue
>
> With which to speak to her, the capable
> In the midst of foreignness, the syllable
> Of recognition, avowal, impassioned cry.
> (CP 470-471)

The bridal couple reappear in "The World as Meditation." Their roles at first seem the reverse of their earlier appearances: the male figure, Ulysses, is associated with the sun and thus reality:

> A form of fire approaches the cretonnes of Penelope,
> Whose mere savage presence awakens the world in which
> she dwells.
> (CP 520)

The female figure, Penelope, is the composer and the namer and thus the poetic imagination:

> She has composed, so long, a self with which to welcome
> him,
> Companion to his self for her, which she imagined,
> Two in a deep-founded sheltering, friend and dear friend.
> (CP 521)

The necklace and belt images link this poem to the union of Ozymandias

and Nanzia Nunzio, though here Stevens makes the longed-for consummation take the place of any fictive coverings:

> She wanted nothing he could not bring her by coming
> alone.
> She wanted no fetchings. His arms would be her necklace
> And her belt, the final fortune of their desire.
> (CP 521)

Since the final lines of the poem associate Penelope with the earth, and since Ulysses never appears in the poem except in Penelope's imagination, the two figures each unite in themselves reality and the imagination. Their union does not occur in the poem and yet it has occurred in the poem, for the same reasons that the poet's union with the fluent mundo occurs only in his imagination in "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction." Yet it strikes me as significant that Stevens chooses mythic figures here who we know are already married. The poem becomes a totally integrated experience which presents a vision of a continuing nuptial fusion.

The woman speaks the logos in "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour." Her words unite logos and love in the central poem:

> We say God and the imagination are one . . .
> How high that highest candle lights the dark.
>
> Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
> We make a dwelling in the evening air,
> In which being there together is enough.
> (CP 524)

It should be noted that the nuptial fusion here is so complete that she speaks in a double voice; her use of the first person plural implies both the lover and the beloved.

Stevens did not have to have Maulnier's Introduction à la poésie française to write the magnificent poems of the forties and fifties.[15] The "supreme fiction" had appeared in Harmonium and the figure of the

woman plays an important role in his poetry from beginning to end. But in Maulnier's book he found much to nourish his aims for poetry and to sharpen his conception of poetry. It seems to me too that Maulnier's designation of Malherbe and Maynard as solar poets could well be applied to much of Stevens' poetry after 1939; Transport to Summer is suffused with the sunshine and harvest motifs Maulnier describes. We might note that "The World as Meditation" is also a solar poem. Maulnier says that Maynard dreamed of dying into a final day; the last poem in the Collected Poems begins with a cock heralding a sunrise:

> That scrawny cry--it was
> A chorister whose c preceded the choir.
> It was part of the colossal sun . . .
> (CP 534)

It might seem strange to say that Stevens is a love poet. Yet the figure of the beloved woman suffuses many of his most central poems. The woman in Stevens is much as Maulnier describes her in Scève, in Malherbe and Maynard, and in Nerval. She becomes the means by which the poet journeys into himself and outward again; she is the figure both for his most subjective creativity and the objective world, and even at times the figure for the fusion of those two worlds. She forms an integral part of the logos concept and becomes both the embodiment and the power of the magical "verbe."

Chapter III

The Elegiac Mood in Stevens and Roger Caillois

On March 19, 1945, Stevens wrote to thank José Rodríguez Feo for sending Roger Caillois' Les Impostures de la poésie.[1] His remarks indicate some familiarity with Caillois' work: "Caillois is rather a sonorous phraseur, and this makes him a kind of intellectual Pierre Loti.[2] On the other hand, some people think that he is merely dry. The book that you have sent me was one that I had intended to order, so that your kindness in sending it is particularly pat" (LWS p. 490).[3] Roger Caillois, born in Rheims in 1913 and educated at the Sorbonne and the Ecole Normale Supérieur, has had an active and prolific career as a writer. He founded the French Institute in Buenos Aires and has edited Lettres Françaises (1945-1948), Diogène (an international review of the philosophy of human sciences), and La Croix du Sud (a collection of Ibero-American authors, published by Gallimard). In addition to the Nouvelle Revue Française, he has contributed to Minotaure, View, and VVV, a surrealist magazine published in New York during World War II and edited by David Hare, with André Breton and Max Ernst as advisors. He has been a member of the jury of the Grand Prix Nationale des Lettres, the Prix des Critiques, and the Lecture de la Comédie Française. He is also a member of the Academie Française (1971), Officier Legion d'Honneur, and Commander of the Ordre du Mérite (1973). His books include works on myth,

art, poetry, and aesthetics.[4]

Letters written to Rodríguez Feo and Henry Church in the weeks following the gift of Caillois' book indicate that Stevens had decidedly mixed feelings about it. He expresses his disagreement with some of Caillois' opinions (notably on la poésie pure and the value of Parmenides as a poet), his annoyance with Caillois' method of argumentation (he says that Caillois makes up things that are untrue and then proves that they are untrue, and that he proves his points by lapsing into metaphor and parable), and his disapproval of the quality of Caillois' mind (not a first-class mind, or even a good mind). On the other hand, he calls the book a "perfect Niagara of poetic speech" and an "intelligent and sensitive discussion . . . of something that is of the greatest possible interest to me." (See LWS pp. 493-495, 592.)

Despite Stevens' negative remarks, it would be a mistake to assume that the book has little to offer to our understanding of Stevens. It is true that Caillois' poetic theory does not seem to have played the same kind of role in nourishing Stevens' poetic as those of Mauron and Maulnier had done. By the time Stevens read Caillois, his ideas on the primary issues of Caillois' discussion--surrealism, inspiration, pure poetry--had already been formed. On certain other issues, such as the question of form and subject, Caillois' book serves to illuminate Stevens' views by contrast rather than as source. And a comparison of Stevens' method as theorist with that of Caillois, in terms of Stevens' comments on Caillois as thinker and writer, demonstrates some of Stevens' strengths as prose theorist.

Points of similarity in the work of Caillois and Stevens do exist.

Caillois frames his discussion with two prose lyric meditations on man's response to death and the transience of his creations. The tone is like the elegiac mood of the late Stevens, the imagery much like the bare rock that signifies in the late Stevens both bare reality and the fact of his own impending death. The elegiac tone of the late poetry undoubtedly owes its existence to factors other than Stevens' reading of Caillois, but the "Niagara of poetic speech" seems to have furnished material for Stevens' poetic imagination.

1

Caillois' preface places his book squarely in the category of what Maulnier calls the central impulse in French poetry and poetics: the passion for writing manifestoes proclaiming the true poetic. Though he says modestly that he is presenting not a doctrine but only a series of reflections testifying to a direction of the spirit, Caillois nevertheless claims that his remarks will "donner l'idée d'une esthétique sévère" [p. 13]. Thus, even though he attacks the idea of pure poetry, Caillois, like so many of his predecessors, reveals his own desire for la poésie pure--the word "sévère" means "stern," "correct," and "pure." The preface also states the terms of Caillois' aesthetic: he values only art which manifests "une discipline pour l'intelligence, pour le coeur, pour l'âme enfin, pour ce tenace appétit de perfection et d'immortalité" [p. 14]. And finally, the opening sentence of Caillois' first chapter reveals something of his prejudices: "I always feel more disposed to fight poetry than to abandon myself to it" (p. 29).[5]

Despite Caillois' contributions to surrealist magazines, this book

reveals a basic hostility to the surrealist aesthetic. He does not view the unconscious as a source for poetic creation; its products "have no proper strength and are immediately swallowed up in the formlessness which engendered them" (p. 45). Their seeming brilliance is only an illusion: "tout ce qui brille est or et tout tesson étoile" (p. 45). Surrealists finally value "chaque bizarre assemblage de mots, pourvu qu'il soit inexplicable et que rien ne semble y aboutir ou en dépendre. Dès lors, l'arbitraire, la rareté, le mystère sont les mérites suprêmes. . . . Si le regard s'arrête, il dissout la féerie. . . . Et l'esprit dissipe ces oracles admirables, dès qu'il essaie de pénétrer leur sens ou de lier leurs messages" (p. 46). He claims that the surrealist aesthetic enslaves rather than liberates and mistakes the instruments of its power (intelligence, will, hard work) for hindrances to its liberty (p. 49). Finally, he attacks the surrealists' technique of automatic writing and their belief in dreams as the road to the unconscious.

It is apparent that Caillois falls into the category of those who Maulnier says address themselves to the bizarre surface of the surrealist work rather than to its underlying aesthetic. While Stevens' might share Caillois' distaste for the "uglier manifestations of the subconscious" (we recall his dislike for Dali), we have seen that his recognition of the surrealists' contribution to poetry reveals a far more sophisticated understanding of their aesthetic than Caillois exhibits. Stevens distinguishes between what he regards as a provincial technique and a genuine contribution to the domain of poetry.

Similarly, Caillois presents a far more limited concept of <u>la poésie pure</u> than does Stevens. He believes that the poet who attempts to iso-

late some sort of "perfect condensation of poetry" destroys what he intends to purify. All his remarks on this subject indicate that his concept of la poésie pure is limited to the idea of subtracting or extracting some pure poetic essence from words. He sees it as a poetry detached from subject matter and substance. He finally reduces the entire effort toward pure poetry to the status of the Cheshire Cat: "Certes, dans Alice le chat qui sourit disparâit en commençant par le queue: bientôt il ne reste plus que la tête, puis un sourire de chat qui s'évanouit en dernier, après avoir flotté un instant dans l'air, tout seul, sans chat. Voilà qui n'arrive qu'au pays des merveilles et de l'absurdité" (p. 80).

Stevens seems to have been especially annoyed by this particular passage; he says that Caillois "dismisses and vulgarizes the idea of pure poetry . . . by attenuating it and ridiculing it, using, for example the disappearing smile of the disappearing cat. But no one proposes to practice pure poetry. I think the feeling today . . . is for an abundant poetry, concerned with everything and everybody" (LWS p. 495). We have seen that Stevens' concept of pure poetry is expansive rather than reductive. Thus, when he says that no one proposes to practice pure poetry, he indicates not an agreement with Caillois but an impatience with his limited understanding of the term itself. The "abundant poetry" to which he refers is the poetry of logos, the poetry of the magical "verbe," that we have seen in comparing Stevens and Maulnier. Both Stevens and Maulnier, contrary to Caillois' viewpoint, regard la poésie pure not as a process of extraction or of stripping meaning and content from poetry, but as a demiurgic activity which consists, in Maulnier's words, of charging

language with as much power as is possible, or, in Stevens' words, of the kind of poetry in which it is the poetry of the subject that is paramount.

Caillois attempts to establish a reasonable position on the role of inspiration in poetry, but he reveals a continuing suspicion of inspiration and a preference for the products of intelligence, will, and hard work. Intelligence and conscious effort, he says, only administer richnesses that they are powerless to produce; they do not create (p. 59). On the other hand, inspiration's "gifts" appear only as the result of hard work and long attentiveness: "Partout le ciel n'aide que celui qui s'est beaucoup aidé et qui, comptant seulement sur ses propres forces, n'attendait rien d'un secours divin" (p. 60). He claims that inspiration can come into play only when the consciousness is distracted and the will relaxed, but he urges continual caution and perpetual wariness of any gifts that seem fortuitous.

Stevens' comments on the subject of inspiration at times sound very like Caillois. For example, in a letter to Thomas McGreevy (1948) he says, "The neologisms of talk in one's sleep or half-sleep are not nearly so worthwhile as the acceleration and definition of ideas when one lies awake early in the morning . . . . How often when one has been trying to say something in one's room during the evening and when one has not even been sure what it was that one wanted to say, things come to mind with all the force of acute concentration" (LWS p. 618). The remarks indicate something of Stevens' distrust of the products of the unconscious--he says elsewhere that the unconscious creates nothing (see LWS p. 505)--and the second statement seems much like Caillois' belief that at times

one must relax the will in order to achieve one's desired ends. Stevens goes on to note, "Of course that common enough experience is actually an episode of concentration, so that after a bit one comes to recognize not that it is exceptional, like a blandishment on the part of a fat and happy muse, but that it is an elevation available at will" (LWS p. 618).

In "The Relations between Poetry and Painting" Stevens says, "The point is that the poet does his job by virtue of an effort of the mind" and that, like the painter, he does so "not by inspiration, but by imagination or by the miraculous kind of reason that the imagination sometimes promotes" (NA 165). He goes on to note that the two arts have in common a "laborious element, which, when it is exercised, is not only a labor but a consummation as well" (NA 165). As examples he cites a passage from Proust and a painting by Jacques Villon, which he describes as "deliciae of the spirit as distinguished from delectationes of the senses . . . because one found in them the labor of calculation, the appetite for perfection" (NA 166). Caillois would probably not quarrel with this point, since he often reveals his preference for poetry which manifests an unceasing desire for what is perfect and lasting. The difference between Stevens and Caillois on the role of inspiration is that Stevens manages the stance of calm reasonableness that Caillois pursues but often fails to achieve.

Caillois reveals a basic conservatism in his ideas on form in poetry. He attacks modern poets who "abandonnaient alors métrique et prosodie, rime et césure. Leurs écrits, dans ces conditions, ne se distinguaient guère de la prose, ordinairement, que par une disposition typographique dont on ne voyait pas bien subsister la raison, par une

syntaxe monotone et relâchée, qui tendait à la simple énumération, enfin par une certaine incohérence de fond dont la vertu était discutable" (p. 30). Form for Caillois is obviously a matter of rhyme, meter and the appearance of the poem on the page. He implies that poets avoid traditional forms because they wish to evade the labor and discipline that such forms require.

On occasion, Stevens reveals something of the traditional attitudes toward form. For example, a jacket note by the publisher had indicated that unusual spacing in "The Man with the Blue Guitar" was an "experimental device" by which the poet wished "to indicate a desirable pause or emphasis," but Stevens wrote to Ronald Lane Latimer, "This is pure nonsense. I never said any such thing and have a horror of poetry pretending to be contemporaneous because of typographical queerness" (LWS p. 326). We might note that the poem is spaced normally in the Collected Poems. Similarly, in "The Relations between Poetry and Painting," Stevens attacks the kind of modern poetry in which the "exploitation of form involves nothing more than the use of small letters for capitals, eccentric line-endings, too little or too much punctuation and similar aberrations" (NA 168). It seems, however, that Stevens' remarks here arise not from a desire to limit poetry to traditional forms, but from his impatience with too limited a concept of poetry. As he explains, such eccentricities "have nothing to do with being alive. They have nothing to do with the conflict between the poet and that of which his poems are made" (NA 168).

In reply to a Partisan Review questionnaire in 1948[6] Stevens has left us the most definitive statement of his views on this subject. He

begins by stating, "Poetry is nothing if it is not experiment in language. . . . The poet records his experience as poet in subjects and words which are part of that experience. . . . Experiment in respect to subjects and words is the effort on his part to record the truth of that experience" (LWS p. 589). Stevens then links his views on language, experience, and truth to his concept of form: "So, too, experiment in form is one of the constants of the spirit. Much of what has been said about subjects and words applies to form" (LWS p. 590). He acknowledges that a more narrow concept of form exists: "There is, however, a usage with respect to form as if form in poetry was a derivative of plastic shape. The tendency to visualize form is illustrated by the way a reference to form becomes a reference to the appearance of the poem on the page as in the case of a poem in the shape of a pear, say, or a poem without any shape at all" (LWS p. 590). Stevens believes that this view of form misses the point: "Such trivialities show that the record of a man's experience in the modern world is not a derivative of plastic shape. . . . Poetic form in its proper sense is a question of what appears within the poem itself" (LWS p. 590). That last comment places Stevens in the camp of those who see "subject" and "form" as artificial distinctions (we might recall that Maulnier's definition of poetry explicitly avoids the scholarly distinctions between "fond" and "forme").

Stevens considers it important to clarify the relationships between form and subject so as to transcend such artificial distinctions, because he believes that "it is always form in its inimical senses that destroys poetry" (LWS p. 590). He explains his terms: "By inimical senses one means the trivialities. By appearance within the poem itself one means

the things created and existing there. The trivialities matter little today and most people concede that poetic form is not a question of literary mode" (LWS p. 590). These last comments establish several important points. First, it seems clear that Stevens would consider Caillois' insistence on form in the traditional sense of rhyme and meter to be concerned with trivialities. Moreover, he considers that the question of form in that narrow sense is no longer an issue. Even more important, he believes that an insistence on that sense of form is potentially harmful to poetry itself. Finally, his concept of form would seem to be a part of his concept of a poetry that is true to experience, of an abundant poetry, and ultimately, of pure poetry--the kind that, he says in this same letter, is a "theory of the world" and that "leads to a fresh conception of the world" (LWS p. 590). For Stevens, form may be a function of subjects and words, but we must always remember that, for Stevens, the concepts of subjects and words are ultimately absorbed into the concept of the Word.

Throughout his book, Caillois demonstrates his hostility to the concept of poetry that Stevens and Maulnier so obviously espouse. Language, for Caillois, is not the golden key to the ineffable; rather language serves to impose restraints and rules for poetic activity. Poetry is not magic, in his viewpoint, and he explicitly attacks those who "exposent leurs raisons dans un esprit religieux, parfois même avec un langage emprunté à la théologie" (p. 76). He ridicules specifically the idea that poetry is some indefinable essence; if it were, he says, there should be nothing lost in translating a poem from one language to another: "il ne devrait pas être malaisé de transposer d'un chiffre dans un autre

un message d'une si sublime origine qu'il ne convient proprement à aucun alphabet humain" (p. 78). The poet is not a seer, not a metaphysician, not a magician; he is simply "l'artisan du langage" (p. 82). Poetry is the act of extracting from words. Such concepts are a far cry from the belief that the poet charges language with all the power of which it is capable and the view of poetry as a force which, in the combat of the cosmos and the word, calls the world to be born anew. We have already seen which point of view Stevens espouses. For him, poetry is the "theory of the word for those / For whom the word is the making of the world" (CP 345).

2

Although Stevens expresses dissatisfaction with the stands that Caillois takes on particular issues, he disapproves even more of Caillois' method of presenting his argument. He points out that Caillois says things that are untrue and then proves them untrue, and that he evades direct thinking by lapsing into metaphor or parable. Stevens' attack on Caillois as thinker and theorist raises two interesting questions: (1) is his criticism accurate and justified? and (2) does Stevens follow in his own theoretical writing the ideal that he proposes?

The answer to the first question can be found simply by looking at Caillois' book. My own response is much like that of Stevens. Caillois frustrates and annoys his reader by forcing legitimate positions into extreme and ultimately absurd postures. One has difficulty discerning Caillois' position on any issue until one has waded through masses of hyperbolic argument. Such a method is, as Stevens says, provoking rather than provocative.

Caillois' discussion of the roles of the unconscious and the conscious in creating poetry offers a good example of his characteristic method of overstating theories in extreme terms. He reduces the poetics of the unconscious to an extreme statement based on only one technique, automatic writing:

> Celui-ci conseille de relayer les discours d'une sorte de démon interne, inconnu de soi-même et plus soi-même que ce qu'on connaît de soi: il faut laisser courir la main sans rien savoir de ce qu'elle écrit, l'obliger de repartir quand elle s'arrête, regarder enfin le résultat à la fois comme une oeuvre de génie et comme la révélation prodigieuse d'abîmes humains cachés à l'homme par sa propre conscience. Cette attitude extrême ne doit pas surprendre: c'est l'antique héritage de la pythie qu'on prétend recueillir. C'est la même voix qui montait des entrailles d'une vierge bouleversée, murmurait dans le feuillage de chênes divins, tombait des lèvres d'un ange pour un prophète agenouillé, dont on espère aujourd'hui qu'elle fasse surgir à la lumière les remous du fleuve tout animal de sang et de désirs qui roule au fond de chacun une lave ardente et sombre. (pp. 56-57)

He concludes with the comment, "How strange to imagine that one can achieve anything lasting or durable in this way!"

He turns the same sort of ridicule on those who believe that poetry is the product of conscious effort:

> l'écrivain, cette fois, ne compte obtenir que du calcul les effets qu'il recherche et veut devoir tout à son habileté. Il dédaigne des merveilles qu'il suppose fortuites pour des réussites clairement dues à la méditation. Son intelligence, toute occupée d'elle-même, ne découvre bientôt aucun objet digne de son exercice et la page blanche épouvante un auteur qui ne trouve rien d'assez abstrait à lui confier. (pp. 57-58)

Caillois follows this strategy throughout his work. He pushes theoretical stances to absurd extremes, and only occasionally does he propose an alternative theory. One finds oneself reluctantly agreeing that of course the theory under attack, as Caillois presents it, is untrue. Stevens' comment that he "says something that is untrue and then makes

a great point of proving that it is untrue" is perfectly accurate.

Stevens' remark that "he proves things, not by expressing reasons but by intimations to be derived from analogies" and that he evades direct thinking by "lapsing into metaphor" is equally valid. Caillois' treatment of the subject-form question provides a good illustration. He says, for example, that devotees of pure poetry view substance as the temptations of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil ("du Monde, de la Chair ou du Démon"). In answer to this question, he poses a set of rhetorical questions: "Ou exclura-t-on l'Iliade et l'Odyssée parce que l'anecdote y tient une large place? Racine et Baudelaire que le souci de la forme occupe avant tout autre? Dante occupé de théologie?" (p. 79). As readers, we find ourselves agreeing with his implication that of course a concept of purity that would cast such works out of the canon must be absurd, but we must also wonder whether Caillois' reduction of pure poetry to such absurdity is valid. In the final analysis he has only proved that his concept of la poésie pure is absurd, not necessarily that other concepts of it are.

In order to argue the transience (and by implication, the small value) of inspiration's gifts, Caillois constructs an extended metaphor:

> Les plus belles fleurs sont éphémères, merveilles que l'ardeur du soleil tire de la vase des marais et qu'elle pourrit bientôt. . . . La sévérité d'un style confère à leur structure mesurée la marque et la sûreté des oeuvres méthodiques de l'esprit. Sans doute les fleurs sévères où les rois trouvent le modèle de leurs sceptres, le lys, l'iris ou la solennelle tulipe, présentent autant d'objets que l'intelligence peut-être eût conçus et l'art exécutés, s'ils pouvaient animer les fruits de leurs plus abstraites démarches et à supposer qu'en ayant la puissance, ils n'aillent pas préférer délibérément de les préserver, en même temps que de la vie, d'une inévitable et lente corruption.
>
> Hélas, les corolles les plus géométriques ne doivent rien de plus à la méditation que les plus capricieuses et les plus chatoyantes. Elles ne sont pas moins passagères. (pp. 43-44)

He attacks those who express their theories in theological language, but in the penultimate paragraph of his own discussion he does precisely the same thing:

> Selon certaines religions, l'homme ne doit pas regarder comme son but principal et encore moins unique, la salut de son âme. Il doit appliquer sa volonté à d'autres fins, moins ambitieuses et moins intéressées. Et le salut lui est alors donné par surcroît. De même les moralistes affirment qu'il ne faut pas poursuivre la béatitude en elle-même, mais seulement comme une récompense accessoire qu'apporte avec elle la pratique de la vertu. J'imagine qu'il en va de même pour beaucoup d'autres biens et en particulier pour la poésie. Aux tentations terrestres dont on dit qu'il faut la garder, j'en ajouterai donc une autre, angélique, mais qui peut le mieux la perdre et qui consiste, l'ayant crue supérieure aux choses du monde, à vouloir l'en séparer pour lui donner plus d'éclat et de pureté qu'elle ne saurait avoir. (pp. 82-83)

The examples I have cited form the pattern of Caillois' argument. I am inclined to agree with Stevens that this is a man struggling against his own nature and that this work is not really the product of solid thinking. Apparently unaware of his own self-contradictions, Caillois heaps all manner of scorn and ridicule on pure poetry, but his determination to cleanse and purify poetry of all its impostures makes it clear that he too shares the French passion for <u>la poésie pure</u>.

Whether Stevens himself adheres to the standard he has set for good thinking and good prose is not quite so simple. For one thing, Stevens never published a complete formulation of his aesthetic in the form of prose theory. <u>The Necessary Angel</u> comes the closest to that sort of thing, but it is hardly fair to treat the work as a systematic poetic. It is composed of seven essays, but as Stevens notes in the introduction, "Except for the paper on one of Miss Moore's poems, they were written to be spoken and this affects their character" (<u>NA</u> vii). Moreover, the essays were composed over a number of years, from 1942 to 1951, and each

is colored by the nature of the occasion which engendered it. Stevens had resisted suggestions that they be published in book form (see LWS pp. 597-598), but agreed finally to Knopf's request in 1951; that he had recently been awarded the Bollingen Prize (1950) and the National Book Award (1951) for The Auroras of Autumn seems to have generated Knopf's desire to publish the prose and perhaps to have made Stevens more willing to do so. We have noted, however, that the essays grew out of Stevens' intense desire to contribute to the definition of poetry, and his agreeing to their publication finally seems to have come from his realization that these essays would likely be his only prose contribution to the task. (We should remember that, despite the vitality of his intellect and the unflagging energy of his creativity, Stevens in 1951 was past seventy years old and plagued with a number of health problems, including eye trouble. He was to die in 1955, a few months before his seventy-sixth birthday.) He says in the introduction that the "theory of poetry, as a subject of study, was something with respect to which I had nothing but the most ardent ambitions. It seemed to me to be one of the great subjects of study. . . . The few pages that follow are, now, alas! the only realization possible to me of those excited ambitions" (NA vii-viii).

Nevertheless, we can form an opinion of Stevens' method as theorist on the basis of the essays, and he seems to have been willing that they be treated in this way. He says also in the preface that "they are intended to be contributions to the theory of poetry" and that to an extent "they are a realization" of his ambition to make such a contribution (NA vii-viii).

The introduction to the book states the key points of his theory.

He says that he does not intend "one more Ars Poetica having to do, say, with the techniques of poetry and perhaps with its history. I mean poetry itself, the naked poem, the imagination manifesting itself in its domination of words" (NA viii). The key words here are not the "naked poem," at least not in the sense of the poem as the artifact on the page, but the activity of the imagination. Stevens reaffirms too his view of poetry as a demiurgic activity:

> Only recently I spoke of certain poetic acts as subtilizing experience and varying appearance: "The real is constantly being engulfed in the unreal. . . . [Poetry] is an illumination of a surface, the movement of a self in the rock." A force capable of bringing about fluctuations in reality in words free from mysticism is a force independent of one's desire to elevate it. It needs no elevation. It has only to be presented, as best one is able to present it. (NA viii)[7]

The concept of poetry he expresses here--elsewhere we have discussed it as poesis, as the combat of cosmos and word, as logos or verbe--must be taken into account in evaluating Stevens as poetic theorist. The view accounts for his distaste for an Ars Poetica and at times for a deliberate lack of specificity, which is by no means the same thing as vagueness or fuzzy thinking.

Stevens shares one trait in particular with the French aestheticians that he read; that is, an avowed modesty of purpose. Mauron, we recall, claims only to be experimenting with a hypothesis and specifically disclaims that his theories are to be taken as the only ones. Similarly, Maulnier cites the ineffability of poetry as its central attribute and hence disavows any intent to construct recipes and formulas. Caillois introduces his study with the same sort of implied modesty: "J'ose publier aujourd'hui un formulaire incomplet et provisoire sur un objet

éloigné de mes travaux habituels. Ce n'est pas une doctrine que je presente, mais une suite de réflexions et d'analyses qui ne sont pas trop reliées entre elles, encore qu'une progression certaine s'y puisse deviner" [p. 13]. Stevens' final introductory remarks reveal a mind-set similar to that of the French: "These are not pages of criticism nor of philosophy. Nor are they merely literary pages. They are pages that have to do with one of the enlargements of life. They are without pretence beyond my desire to add my own definition to poetry's many existing definitions" (NA viii). We should note, however, that though Stevens' description of his book may be modest, what he claims for poetry is not.

Stevens, like Caillois, often develops his argument with the support of metaphors and analogies. "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," for example, revolves around Plato's figure of the winged horses and charioteer, which represents the soul. Stevens uses the figure not, however, to evade the issues of his subject, but as a means for tracing the fortunes of the "idea of nobility," the "ideal of nobility as a characteristic of the imagination," the "relation between the imagination and reality," and the tendency of language to lean at times more toward the imagination, at times more toward reality. Stevens has the ability, too, to state things directly almost to the point of bluntness: "In this area of my subject I might be expected to speak of the social, that is to say sociological or political, obligation of the poet. He has none" (NA 27).

In "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," a lecture on the relation between poetry and philosophy, a somewhat puzzling figure of a "mystic muse," an "inexplicable sister of the Minotaur" appears several

times, and Stevens ranges in a somewhat casual way amid the works of many writers--William James, Bergson, Coleridge, Aristotle, Cézanne, to name a few. His argument can be difficult to follow. But Stevens has a way of interposing passages of succinct clarity:

> I have compared poetry and philosophy; I have made a point of the degree to which poetry is personal, both in its origin and in its end, and have spoken of the typical exhilaration that appears to be inseparable from genuine poetic activity; I have said that the general progress from the incredible to the credible was a progress in which poetry has participated; I have improvised a definition of poetic truth and have spoken of the integrity and peculiarity of the poetic character. Summed up, our position at the moment is that the poet must get rid of the hieratic in everything that concerns him and must move constantly in the direction of the credible. He must create his unreal out of what is real. (NA 58)

Both these essays preceded Stevens' reading of Caillois. The next two essays in The Necessary Angel, "Three Academic Pieces" (1947) and "Effects of Analogy" (1948), were composed in the years just after Les Impostures de la poésie. Stevens' criticism of Caillois' method forms an interesting backdrop to his own method in these two essays. "Three Academic Pieces," for example, begins with a clear and careful introduction of terms:

> The accuracy of accurate letters is an accuracy with respect to the structure of reality.
>
> Thus, if we desire to formulate an accurate theory of poetry, we find it necessary to examine the structure of reality, because reality is the central reference for poetry. By way of accomplishing this, suppose we examine one of the significant components of the structure of reality--that is to say, the resemblance between things. (NA 71)

He goes on then to define what he means by resemblance, to distinguish it from identity and imitation, to explain how it functions in metaphor, to illustrate what he calls "private resemblances." Then he discusses how all these function in poetry ("Poetry is a satisfying of the desire

for resemblance") and in turn how poetry's "proliferation of resemblances" acts on our sense of reality. This is the basic outline of the first academic piece.

The second and third are actual poems concerned with the issues the prose piece raises: "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together" illustrates the process by which the poetic imagination discovers and creates resemblances, and it comments on this activity as a poetic principle; "Of Ideal Time and Choice" pulls together themes of time, change, and death, and establishes a "center of resemblance" as a kind of philosophical principle related to a transcendent "center of ideal time" (NA 89). Stevens, like Caillois, uses poetry and metaphor to prove his points, but he does so in passages that are clearly poems and labelled as such.

Stevens employs both the prose and poetic forms of theorizing in this essay, but each conforms to the merits of its own particular genre: his prose piece reveals clear thinking and direct statement; his poetic pieces may prove by intimation and analogy, but certainly not by evasion. In keeping with one of the principles expressed in the prose piece, they reveal the "ambiguity that is so favorable to the poetic mind," which he says is "precisely the ambiguity favorable to resemblance" (NA 79). The essay is of a whole, not merely in the sense that Caillois' framing texts conform to the same principles underlying his work, but in an organic union of theory and realization of theory in poetry.

"Effects of Analogy" provides another example of Stevens' ability to state things clearly and directly. His method is inductive, but clear. He begins with examples of two distinct kinds of analogy and explains the difference. Sections two, three, and four introduce other

modes of analogy: as a term in logic, as a function of the poet's personality, as a function of the music of poetry. Section five begins with a summary of what he has said so far, then introduces a series of generalizations based on that data and, finally, concludes with a statement on the nature of poetry and reality, expressed in the terms he has developed: "Thus poetry becomes and is a transcendent analogue composed of the particulars of reality, created by the poet's sense of the world, that is to say, his attitude, as he intervenes and interposes the appearances of that sense" (NA 130).

It would seem, then, that Stevens is capable of writing prose that meets the critical standards that he applies to Caillois. It strikes me as significant that the two essays composed after his reading of Caillois are demonstrably clearer and more direct than the two that preceded his acquaintance with Les Impostures de la poésie.

One final area of confluence between Stevens and Caillois merits at least brief consideration. The book seems to have remained a source of irritation to Stevens far longer than we might have supposed (see LWS p. 592). It seems that something about it both attracted and repelled him. The answer lies, I believe, in certain themes to be found in the nature sketches which frame Caillois' discussion.

Caillois opens and closes his work with meditations on death and the effect man's awareness of his own inevitable annihilation has on his response to the world around him, and on his art. Stevens' poetry reveals a long-standing concern with the inevitable transience of art (the issue is central to Owl's Clover, particularly in the statue poems, and

reappears in many of the late poems). As early as "Sunday Morning" he had said that "death is the mother of beauty," and "The Snow Man," another Harmonium poem, creates a vision of nothingness and winter. But now, in the middle 1940's, Stevens is past sixty-five years old, and the question of death and of art's transience seem to have become far more personal. He is concerned with these problems not as abstractions but in terms of his own death and the possible transience of his own poetic creations. In addition to poetic issues, Caillois' book speaks to issues that are personal ones for Stevens. And the response seems to have come, as we might expect, in his poems.

3

Despite Stevens' dissatisfaction with Caillois as a thinker and as a writer of poetic theory, he seems to have found material to stimulate his own poetic imagination in Caillois' book. Caillois' discussions of theory of course represent too narrow a concept of poetry for the theory itself to stimulate poems in the way that Mauron's and Maulnier's works seem to have done. In addition to his attacks on the "impostures" of poetry, however, Caillois includes two sketches which he says are only impressions of nature but which he also says "répondent aux mêmes arrière-pensées morales que le reste de ce petit ouvrage" [p. 15]. The reader familiar with Stevens' poems in The Auroras of Autumn and The Rock will react to these passages with a sense of recognition. The problems of death and nothingness pervade Stevens' late poetry. Deeply elegiac in tone, the poems reveal his struggles with old age and death both on an intensely personal level and as philosophical problems. The mighty im-

agination confronts the growing awareness of its own impending annihilation, and the poems that grow out of this confrontation present a moving testimony to that imagination's triumph.

Caillois' two framing texts confront similar problems. They take the form of sketches that are intense descriptions of nature and at the same time are emotional responses to those descriptions. Finally they become philosophical statements on man's response to death, to his own emotions, to his relationship with the external world, and statements on the implications of those responses for the creation of art. Charged with metaphor and emotional outpourings, the sketches become a kind of prose-lyric meditation. One recognizes instantly that quality in Caillois' writing which led Stevens to refer to it as a "perfect Niagara of poetic speech" and to say that "he writes poetry that looks like prose."

The sections, titled "Les Arbres de Lapa"[8] and "La Plaine," precede and follow the chapters on theory. We have noted in Caillois' aesthetic his preference for art that is the product of will and control and also his implicit desire for pure art. Viewed in this light, his framing sketches do bear a resemblance to the principles underlying his work. "Les Arbres de Lapa" manifests a demand that man must control his emotional responses to the natural world, described here in terms that suggest a tropical jungle. "La Plaine" reiterates the necessity that he control his brute emotions and presents a scene that can scarcely be called a landscape of any kind. It is a scene of utter barrenness, of total bareness--absolutely level, bare dirt. Described in this way the sketches might seem unlikely sources for poetry, but Caillois' method of argument by metaphor, parable, and analogy is nowhere more evident than

in the framing texts. The "Niagara of poetic speech" becomes fertile ground for the poetic imagination.

The dominant theme of "Les Arbres de Lapa" is the way man sees every living thing as painfully like and unlike himself. This recognition in turn intensifies his sense not only of his own mortality but of the transience of his creations. Caillois claims that only in the vegetable kingdom ("le regne végétal") can man "admirer sans trop de détachement ou de sympathie cet étrange monde qui reçut le don de vivre dans son innocence entière, sans la sombre contre-partie ordinaire qui fait pressentir à toute vie, même la plus lente, qu'elle doit trouver un jour sa fin" (p. 20). Thus, what distinguishes man from the vegetation around him is his consciousness of the inevitability of death. Likewise, man's creations of beauty differ from nature's in that his come forth only at great cost, with great labor and with conscious intent, whereas the beauty of trees is a natural result that requires only the fullness of time for its appearance: "La simple durée suffit à ces structures sûres d'elles-mêmes dans la force comme dans la grâce, pour qu'elles confondent en leur croissance la vie et l'art. Publiant le miracle d'une beauté naturelle, d'un même mouvement, elles s'acquittent de vivre et deviennent chefs-d'oeuvre" (p. 21). Man, says Caillois, must suffer in order to obtain his least success, and sometimes despairs of ever producing anything as perfect as the effortless beauty he sees all around him. Precisely because of this profound difference, he projects his own emotions onto the "regne végétal," exaggerating resemblances, reading in twisted branches the forms of the damned.

Man too easily revels in his brute emotional nature, Caillois be-

lieves, and too easily views his suffering as the essence of his humanity, his expression of that suffering as the appropriate act of his species. Caillois also believes, however, that we have an innate need to control our emotions and our expressions of emotion; he speaks of a "mysterious discipline" that commands the calming of such "rude stirrings" (p. 24). Yet, according to Caillois, emotional turmoil has a positive value; the spirit's struggle with turbulent emotions results in a triumph of great peace and mastery, an entirely satisfying emotional state which would not have been possible without the painful chaos that spawned it. In art this tension results in a noble style which balances the violence of passions and the most stable energy (p. 24).

Thus the artist's vocation, according to Caillois, consists of governing the agitations of emotion, so that he takes as his model the superb order of a world which creates beauty almost as if in sport and for but a day, and so that he vanquishes the temptation to express the vicissitudes of a life forever vulgar. His task is to enchain the monsters within himself, but to do it in such a way that their force and power penetrate the mask which contains them.

"La Plaine" returns to the themes of "Les Arbres de Lapa." It opens with the reminder that nature's triumphs reinforce man's sense of his "destin dépouillé" and that the omnipresence of death reaffirms the notion (p. 87). As a cure for the spirit, Caillois creates a vision of the world totally opposite to the writhing abundance of the "regne végétal," a vision of bare and barren ground, "terre sans visage ni parure," a vision of "sol" that "n'offre rien à voir que lui-même, indivisible, homogène . . . comme l'Etre qu'imaginait Parménide" (p. 87). This vision

of reality, he says, preserves only the indispensable, the essence of the earth itself. Paradoxically, this utterly level barrenness is fecund soil for the spirit. The vista offers freedom: "Le vent, pour souffler, n'y trouve rien qui l'arrête (il est brusque et pince douloureusement la peau fine des tempes). Ni le regard, s'il veut courir et se perdre, rien qui le retienne ou l'intéresse" (p. 89). Yet it also demands discipline and strength: "Il faut à ce sol ascétique un homme au coeur dur, indomptable et sans attente: rien à recevoir et tant à donner, combien à imposer s'il est besoin, à faire partager de force" (p. 89). Thus the very demands of the ascetic soil offer both challenge and opportunity for the one strong enough to accept them.

The vision, Caillois believes, is profoundly satisfying. It takes man beyond himself, beyond the limits of his mortality and his fading creations. Man's confrontation with the possibility of nothingness fortifies and challenges him: "Il est bon d'affronter ainsi les dimensions démesurées de la terre. On se voudrait aussi grand et aussi nu monarque sans sujets d'un empire impérissable qu'on devine ne pouvoir fonder qu'en soi" (p. 90). From the confrontation and the struggle comes the possibility of contentment and completion: "comme dans la solitude souffle le vent de l'esprit, l'âme se réconforte, se trempe et se consacre dans les jouissances froides et déliées d'un orgueil qui, comme l'humilité, ne se satisfait bien que du néant" (p. 91).

Caillois' vision culminates in a moment of victory and repose: "Cependant, au centre, c'est toujours comme le sommet d'une imperceptible et douce colline, l'insensible courbure du globe. Que l'homme apprenne ici à se raidir, tout ce que la dignité compte de renoncements et que

pourtant il l'acquiert pour rien au prix de ce qu'elle vaut, car il n'a rien d'autre à gagner avant de mourir" (p. 91). The best creations, Caillois believes, come from a spirit nourished on such purity.

In the late poems Stevens employs tree images for a purpose much like that of Caillois. In "What We See Is What We Think," for example, Stevens associates trees with the inexorable passage of time and the inevitable disintegration that time brings. It is a poem of noon, the height of physical reality and the peak of mature fulfillment, but it is also a poem of the "first gray second after" and the inexorable descent toward evening, autumn, and death. At twelve the trees are "as green as ever they would be," but instantly the color begins to change to a "kind / Of violet gray, a green violet" (CP 459). This is a poem of the abyss, of the split between the self and the noncognitive world, and though the title implies a necessary connection, the poem's final line reverses that statement into a bleak denial: "what we think is never what we see" (CP 460). The similarity here between Stevens and Caillois lies in a similarity of tone and mood--an elegiac somberness--and the tree image may well be only coincidental.

Elsewhere, however, Stevens' language in certain poems establishes a connection of both tone and image. "Long and Sluggish Lines," for instance, projects its elegiac meditation on old age onto the natural landscape, endowing the trees with the speaker's feelings:

> The trees have a look as if they bore sad names
> And kept saying over and over one same, same thing,
>
> In a kind of uproar, because an opposite, a contradiction
> Has enraged them and made them want to talk it down.
> (CP 522)

"The River of Rivers in Connecticut" distinguishes the Connecticut River from the Styx and links it with the Heraclitean river of time and change, thus making the poem a meditation on mutability and death:

> There is a great river this side of Stygia,
> Before one comes to the first black cataracts
> And trees that lack the intelligence of trees.
> (CP 533)

In that last line we are minded of Caillois' unthinking trees, while the allusion to the Styx suggests the hell which he creates of trees.

"The Course of a Particular" suggests themes and images in Caillois:

> Today the leaves cry, hanging on branches swept by wind,
> Yet the nothingness of winter becomes a little less.
> It is still full of icy shades and shapen snow.
>
> The leaves cry . . . One holds off and merely hears the cry.
> It is a busy cry, concerning someone else.
> And though one says that one is part of everything,
>
> There is a conflict, there is a resistance involved;
> And being part is an exertion that declines:
> One feels the life of that which gives life as it is.
>
> The leaves cry. It is not a cry of divine attention,
> Nor the smoke-drift of puffed-out heroes, nor human cry.
> It is the cry of leaves that do not transcend themselves,
>
> In the absence of fantasia, without meaning more
> Than they are in the final finding of the ear, in the thing
> Itself, until, at last, the cry concerns no one at all.
> (OP 96-97)

The cry of the leaves comes to signify a sense of loss and grief so profound and timeless that it becomes almost impersonal and meaningless. The poem creates a total realization of the kind of anguish Caillois describes in "Les Arbres de Lapa." The association of winter, nothingness, and the crying of the leaves all evoke a somber mood and an awareness of death. The poet feels the sense of the abyss between himself and the otherness of things--he even emphasizes the split so as to dissociate

himself from what the leaves' cry implies ("One holds off and merely hears the cry. / It is a busy cry, concerning someone else"). Yet the attempt at dissociation is not entirely successful ("And though one says that one is part of everything, / There is a conflict, there is a resistance involved"). A certain ambiguity exists in the statement of conflict: does he seek to establish that he is part of the world not concerned with the crying of the leaves, or does the conflict mean that he is drawn into being part of the desolate winter scene? In either case, what remains is a sense of isolation, of separation from the world around him, be it the dying winter landscape, or the human world that is not concerned with it. The mood of the poem remains bleak, wintry, and alienated. The leaves' cry "is not a cry of divine attention," nor is it a "human cry." It becomes, finally, simply a desolate, on-going sound, so continuous and so inescapable that "at last, the cry concerns no one at all."

Read entirely as a natural image of winter bleakness the leaves' cry evokes a feeling of profound sorrow, so total and inescapable that it is almost numbing. The mood is bleak to the point of despair, the poem a powerful statement of annihilation bordering on nihilism, the poet and his reader almost as numbed and frozen as the landscape the poem presents. Caillois' writhing, twisted forms do not even approach the chilling effect that this winter landscape produces. The inevitability of change and death sweeps over all existence like the poem's winter wind.

The poem's tree image provides a purposeful ambiguity. Elsewhere in Stevens "leaves" can mean both trees and the pages of a book or, more specifically, the pages of his book, his poetry. The possibility of that sort of pun in "The Course of a Particular" does nothing to alter the

poem's effect. If the crying leaves are Stevens' own poems, then this poem calls into question the value of his poetic creation--or, for that matter, of any of man's creative efforts--in the face of the reality of change and death. Seen in this perspective the final line--"at last, the cry concerns no one at all"--becomes even more poignant. If the "leaves do not transcend themselves," then perhaps the great effort counts for nothing in the face of annihilation. We might recall, at this point, Caillois' belief that man's torment at the transience of his creations is a source of anguish as piercing as his awareness of his own mortality. The themes of loss, of doubt, of autumnal grief do not, of course, owe their origins to Caillois' book. At the time of the late poems Stevens was past seventy years old and certainly aware of age and death. But the confluence of theme, of the specific images employed, and of the emotional response involved would seem to point to Caillois' "Les Arbres de Lapa" as an important element in the poem's genesis.

The elegiac tone haunts The Auroras of Autumn and The Rock. The lush harvest motifs of Transport to Summer subside into an autumn setting, which in turn becomes a wintry world pierced at times by the aurora borealis. The tone of the late poems is not limited, however, to the bleak despair of age and death. Even in the very late poems the imagination can achieve its moments of victory in the combat of cosmos and word, as we have seen in the solar poems and those of the beloved woman. But the return to bare reality and the bare rock of his own death occurs frequently.

An image of a bronze man appears in some of the late poems on death, suggestive of Caillois' hero in the bronze mask who has mastered his

emotions. "This Solitude of Cataracts" associates the bronze man with an escape from mortality--

> Just to know how it would feel, released from destruction,
> To be a bronze man breathing under archaic lapis,
>
> Without the oscillations of planetary pass-pass,
> Breathing his bronzen breath at the azury centre of time.
> (CP 425)

The poet longs to know what it would be like to be free of the fateful knowledge of mortality ("Just to know how it would feel, released from destruction"). He longs for more, however, than freedom from the knowledge of mortality; he longs finally for freedom from mortality itself. Such a possibility does not exist, so that the figure of the bronze man recalls Caillois' hero with the bronze mask, his feelings flickering through.

Poem X of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" suggests almost a direct commentary on Caillois' vision of man tormented by transience; the man of bronze who is "imprisoned in change" would seem to refer to Caillois' figure:

> We say of the moon, it is haunted by the man
>
> Of bronze whose mind was made up and who, therefore, died.
> We are not men of bronze and we are not dead.
> His spirit is imprisoned in constant change.
>
> But ours is not imprisoned. It resides
> In a permanence composed of impermanence
> (CP 472)

Stevens' position here seems to imply not stoic control but rather a liberating acceptance.

The concluding section of "The Auroras of Autumn" turns precisely to that difference between man and the noncognitive world that Caillois

had discussed. Stevens revolves the various possibilities in the fates of human beings and the rest of the world.

> An unhappy people in a happy world--
> Read, rabbi, the phases of this difference.
> An unhappy people in an unhappy world--
>
> Here are too many mirrors for misery.
> A happy people in an unhappy world--
> It cannot be. There's nothing there to roll
>
> On the expressive tongue, the finding fang.
> A happy people in a happy world--
> Buffo! A ball, an opera, a bar.
>
> Turn back to where we were when we began:
> An unhappy people in a happy world.
> Now, solemnize the secretive syllables.
> (CP 420)

The word choice here of course exploits the ambiguity of the root "hap" in the sense of "fate" or "chance," but Stevens intends primarily the more common senses of "happy" and "unhappy" as well. In the context of the poem's insistent farewells and its acceptance of death, it seems natural to associate the difference between an "unhappy people" and a "happy world" with the awareness of death that distinguishes man from the rest of the world. Yet the poem concludes with an acceptance of that difference, so that the poet can still triumph and still create:

> In these unhappy he meditates a whole,
> The full of fortune and the full of fate,
> As if he lived all lives, that he might know,
>
> In hall harridan, not hushful paradise,
> To a haggling of wind and weather, by these lights
> Like a blaze of summer straw, in winter's nick.
> (CP 420-421)

The vision of autumnal reality and of the bare rock in fact nourishes Stevens' creativity precisely as Caillois' vision of the plain nourishes him. Certain poems would seem to have grown out of the same

kind of vision. "World without Peculiarity" resembles Caillois' "La Plaine"--his vision of the absolutely bare and barren plain is, in fact, a vision of a world without particulars, of a world without peculiarity. Stevens addresses himself in this poem precisely to the agonizing awareness of mortality that underlies Caillois' meditation on "Les Arbres de Lapa," and he seems to question the effectiveness of the ascetic vision of "La Plaine." In this poem Stevens faces the rock of his own death, and he struggles to affirm the ascetic vision. His cry against completeness, against the closed circle of death bursts forth:

> What good is it that the earth is justified,
> That it is complete, that it is an end,
> That in itself it is enough?
>
> (CP 453)

Yet the sense of alienation is only momentary. The sense of loss gives way to a vision of the earth as mother:

> It is the earth itself that is humanity . . .
> He is the inhuman son and she,
> She is the fateful mother, whom he does not know.
>
> (CP 454)

The recognition of the earth-mother provides solace for the "poverty of dirt," and the sense of separation dissolves into a moment of union:

> and, sometimes,
> He, too, is human and difference disappears
>
> And the poverty of dirt, the thing upon his breast,
> The hating woman, the meaningless place,
> Become a single being, sure and true.
>
> (CP 454)

That Stevens should achieve acceptance and repose by transforming the barren earth into the figure of the woman comes as no surprise. The "fateful mother," the "hating woman," who merges with the poet into a "single being" in the poem's final lines appears in such late poems as

"Madame La Fleurie," (the "bearded queen" who will feed on her dead son) and in other guises as well. As we have seen, the figure of the woman in Stevens' late poems assumes all the forms of the three-part female archetype. Caillois, too, associates his plain with woman; he says, for example, that the bare earth "accueille le mouvement comme la femme reçoit l'homme, tout au fond d'elle et celui-ci, au moment de l'amour" (p. 89).

Throughout the late poems Stevens demonstrates his ability to confront the nothingness Caillois portrays, and his imagination nourishes itself on that purity as fully as Caillois could have hoped. The late poems reveal, however, that one need not, as Caillois had supposed, be satisfied only with the vision of nothingness. In "Metaphor as Degeneration" a "man white as marble" sits "brooding sounds of the images of death," and a "man in black space" sits in nothingness "brooding sounds of river noises" (CP 444). But the poem becomes an affirmation of the poet's power; the river is being and the poem affirms that being includes both death and the imagination. In the face of the imagination's triumphant creativity, the poem asks, "How, then, is metaphor degeneration"?

"A Primitive Like an Orb" affirms the possibility of healing the tragic split between man and the noncognitive world. This is the "essential poem at the centre of things," the "essential gold" (CP 440). The central poem obliterates man's sense of alienation, so that the

> used-to earth and sky, and the tree
> And cloud, the used-to tree and used-to cloud,
> Lose the old uses that they made of them,
> And they: these men, and earth and sky, inform
> Each other . . .
>
> (CP 441)

It is no longer necessary that man feel a sense of separation nor that he project his own emotions onto unthinking and unfeeling objects. The two worlds are joined; the split is healed:

> It is
> As if the central poem became the world,
>
> And the world the central poem, each one the mate
> Of the other . . .
> . . . . . .
> denouncing separate selves, both one.
> The essential poem begets the others. The light
> Of it is not a light apart, up-hill.
>
> (CP 441)

Stevens can say that "The central poem is the poem of the whole, / The poem of the composition of the whole" (CP 442). Out of the strength of the vision that the central poem imparts he then can face the "giant of nothingness" (Caillois' "néant"). The image of the "giant on the horizon" signifies the annihilation that the imagination must confront but, ironically, it is the imagination which evolved the giant--"an abstraction given head." The poet, in his finite mortality, may grasp only a part of the whole, but it is nevertheless a part:

> That's it. The lover writes, the believer hears,
> The poet mumbles and the painter sees,
> Each one, his fated eccentricity,
> As a part, but part, but tenacious particle,
> Of the skeleton of the other, the total . . .
>
> (CP 443)

"A Primitive Like an Orb," with its soaring altitudes, its expanding horizons, its courageous--even optimistic--confrontation with nothingness presents the same sense of victory as Caillois' triumphant acceptance at the end of "La Plaine."

Caillois maintains that out of the tension between man's agony of emotion in the face of death and his innate need to control that emotion

comes the stuff for the most admirable creations of his art. Such conflicts underlie "Puella Parvula" and from the conflicts such art is generated. The poem both describes and creates the experience:

> Every thread of summer is at last unwoven.
> By one caterpillar is great Africa devoured
> And Gibralter is dissolved like spit in the wind.
>
> But over the wind, over the legends of its roaring,
> The elephant on the roof and its elephantine blaring,
> The bloody lion in the yard at night or ready to
> spring
>
> From the clouds in the midst of trembling trees
> Making a great gnashing, over the water wallows
> Of a vacant sea declaiming with wide throat,
>
> Over all these the mighty imagination triumphs
> Like a trumpet and says, in this season of memory,
> When the leaves fall like things mournful of the past,
>
> Keep quiet in the heart, O wild bitch. O mind
> Gone wild, be what he tells you to be: Puella.
> Write pax across the window pane. And then
>
> Be still. The summarium in excelsis begins . . .
> Flame, sound, fury composed . . . Hear what he
> says,
> The dauntless master, as he starts the human tale.
> (CP 456)

The images of destruction are more powerful than any Caillois creates, the emotional response as powerful and potentially as threatening as any he describes. But Stevens exercises precisely the discipline and control that Caillois deems necessary, and "over all these the mighty imagination triumphs." The brute emotions are metamorphosed into triumphant creativity as the power of poesis transforms the "wild bitch" into the "Puella." The vista the poem creates expands beyond that of Caillois' unending plain. The "dauntless master" does more than control--he creates.

Caillois creates a vision of a moment of victory and repose at the center: "Cependant, au centre, c'est toujours comme le sommet d'une imperceptible et douce colline, l'insensible courbure du globe." For Caillois the moment of victory comes from one's acceptance of the splendid purity of the bare plain. The man who achieves this state, he says, requires nothing more with which to confront death. The passage comes as the culmination of an expanding vision of the plain, no longer completely flat, but curving upward into the sky. Stevens, in "The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain," traces the same kind of struggle Caillois has described and achieves the same kind of acceptance with which Caillois concludes:

> There it was, word for word,
> The poem that took the place of a mountain.
>
> He breathed its oxygen,
> Even when the book lay turned in the dust of his table.
>
> It reminded him how he had needed
> A place to go to in his own direction,
>
> How he had recomposed the pines,
> Shifted the rocks and picked his way among clouds,
>
> For the outlook that would be right,
> Where he would be complete in an unexplained completion:
>
> The exact rock where his inexactnesses
> Would discover, at last, the view toward which they had
> edged,
>
> Where he could lie and, gazing down at the sea,
> Recognize his unique and solitary home.
>
> (CP 512)

The poem reminds us of the poet's struggles with the realities of life and death ("he had needed / A place to go to in his own direction") but its language affirms the victory of poetry in that struggle ("he had

recomposed the pines, / Shifted the rocks"). Stevens' moment of victory involves not simply the finding of a "douce colline" but the creation of a poem as real and as solid as a mountain. The place of sweet repose is not simply the reward of stoic acceptance, but a "unique and solitary home" that he himself has created through the demiurgic power of his poetry. Poetry creates the curve and the summit and thus makes possible the "unexplained" (perhaps even unexplainable) "completion." The purity that nourishes Stevens is not simply the ascetic vision of Caillois but his own expanded concept of la poésie pure.

In "The Rock" Stevens meditates on these various problems: his own death and the general question of death, what his own art has accomplished and the question of what any art can accomplish. The questions apply not only to Stevens but to all men and, appropriately, he uses the plural pronoun:

> It is an illusion that we were ever alive,
> Lived in the houses of mothers, arranged ourselves
> By our own motions in a freedom of air.
>
> Regard the freedom of seventy years ago.
> It is no longer air. The houses still stand,
> Though they are rigid in rigid emptiness.
>
> Even our shadows, their shadows, no longer re-
> main.
> The lives these lived in the mind are at an end.

But creation provides an answer and a solace, at least of sorts:

> The sounds of the guitar
>
> Were not and are not. Absurd. The words spoken
> Were not and are not. It is not to be believed.
> (CP 525)

The guitar reference clearly links these statements to Stevens' own poetry, and his belief in the power of logos rises to counter the despair

with which the poem began. The poem goes on to trace what the imagination has accomplished; it chronicles the history of Stevens' own poetic career, demonstrating that

> the green leaves came and covered the high
> rock,
> That the lilacs came and bloomed, like a blindness
> cleaned,
> Exclaiming bright sight, as it was satisfied,
>
> In a birth of sight. The blooming and the musk
> Were being alive, an incessant being alive,
> A particular of being, that gross universe.
>
> (CP 526)

The process unfolding recreates nature's incessant creativity but the ambiguity in "leaves" suggests the process of the poet's creativity as well. The leaves are both real leaves and the leaves of a book, of Stevens' book of poems.

Section two, "The Poem as Icon," establishes the links between earth, poetry, and the poet. The use of the first person plural pronoun continues, so that Stevens' cure here refers not only to himself and to his own work but to his reader as well:

> It is not enough to cover the rock with leaves.
> We must be cured of it by a cure of the ground
> Or a cure of ourselves, that is equal to a cure
>
> Of the ground, a cure beyond forgetfulness,
> And yet the leaves, if they broke into bud,
> If they broke into bloom, if they bore fruit,
>
> And if we ate the incipient colorings
> Of their fresh culls might be a cure of the ground.
> The fiction of the leaves is the icon
>
> Of the poem, the figuration of blessedness,
> And the icon is the man.
>
> (CP 526)

The conditional verbs and the hypothetical statements give way to more

positive assertions: "These leaves are the poem, the icon and the man. These are a cure of the ground and of ourselves" (CP 527). Yet this is more than a comforting illusion: "They are more than leaves that cover the barren rock" (CP 527).

Stevens, in confronting the vision of nothingness, does more than nourish himself on the purity of an ascetic vision. The answer he provides does more than project human emotions onto natural images, more than create illusions to hide the vision of "néant." The poem, as we might expect from a poet so committed to the demiurgic power of poetry, creates new possibilities as real as the barren plain:

> In this plenty, the poem makes meanings of the
> rock,
> Of such mixed motion and such imagery
> That its barrenness becomes a thousand things
>
> And so exists no more. This is the cure
> Of leaves and of the ground and of ourselves.
> His words are both the icon and the man.
> (CP 527)

"The Rock" comes to grips with the problems that Caillois struggles against, and Stevens achieves in it the repose at the center. Its final section, "Forms of the Rock in a Night-Hymn," fuses the barren vision and the cure of the ground that the poet has created, day and night, death and life and poetry. The rock is the "gray particular of man's life," but it is also the "stern particular of air," the "mirror of the planets," and the "habitation of the whole" (CP 528). It becomes both alpha and omega, the "starting point of the human and the end, / That in which space itself is contained" (CP 528).

The night hymn with which the poem ends far transcends Caillois' vision of the barren plain, and Stevens' repose at the center includes

more than the calm of victory and the satisfaction of a battle courageously fought. Certain very late poems fully accept the knowledge of death and transience, as we see in "The Planet on the Table":

> His self and the sun were one
> And his poems, although makings of his self,
> Were no less makings of the sun.
>
> It was not important that they survive.
> What mattered was that they should bear
> Some lineament or character,
>
> Some affluence, if only half-perceived,
> In the poverty of their words,
> Of the planet of which they were part.
> (CP 532-533)

Such lines reveal a poet who has found his answer to the question of the transience of art. One of the last poems Stevens wrote, "Of Mere Being," draws together all the questions that tormented Caillois, and that have tormented all men at all times. The tree, the bronze, the song, the undying question of man's happiness all reappear. No single line poses an answer, but the poem as a whole affirms the victory. It is a poem of total purity, and one of Stevens' greatest achievements of his vision of la poésie pure.

> The palm at the end of the mind,
> Beyond the last thought, rises
> In the bronze decor,
>
> A gold-feathered bird
> Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
> Without human feeling, a foreign song.
>
> You know then that it is not the reason
> That makes us happy or unhappy.
> The bird sings. Its feathers shine.
>
> The palm stands on the edge of space.
> The wind moves slowly in the branches.
> The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.
> (Palm 398)

Perhaps Caillois' final words could serve as sufficient commentary on what Stevens has achieved:

> Que l'homme apprenne ici à se raidir, tout ce que la dignité compte de renoncements et que pourtant il l'acquiert pour rien au prix de ce qu'elle vaut, car il n'a rien d'autre à gagner avant de mourir.

Notes

Introduction

[1] Charles Mauron's book remains in the Stevens library, in the possession of Stevens' daughter. In the course of a series of conversations in August 1974 Holly Stevens allowed me to see that the book contains a plenitude of pencilled marginalia in Stevens' hand. She believes that Stevens received the book shortly after its publication and would have read it at that time. (Stevens' summary of Mauron's position in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" derives from this book. See NA 30.) The extent of the marginalia suggests that Stevens devoted considerable thought to Mauron's theories.

During these same conversations Miss Stevens revealed that neither Maulnier's nor Caillois' book was then in her possession. She did, however, identify a bill from Anatole Vidal, Stevens' Paris book seller, dated July 12, 1939, for the Maulnier book. At that same time she showed me certain other books that had belonged to her father, as well as several paintings and graphics from his collection.

[2] During the conversations mentioned above Holly Stevens confirmed that Stevens had subscribed to the Nouvelle Revue Française, Licorne, and Merlin, adding that he "subscribed to just about every French little magazine available."

The letters establish his subscriptions to several of the others: a note indicates that he subscribed to Mésures from its inception in 1934 (LWS p. 338). Through Paule Vidal, his Paris book seller, he arranged for a subscription to Labyrinthe in 1946 (LWS p. 527), and he mentions having received several copies of Figaro at once (LWS p. 773). Though the first reference to the Nouvelle Revue Française occurs in 1953, it seems that his subscription began much earlier. In 1954 he said, "It is the best magazine in the world today" (LWS p. 817).

The other periodicals listed in this paragraph have been compiled from comments in the letters indicating that Stevens had particular issues in his possession.

[3] An interview with Stevens conducted by Charles Henri Ford appeared in the first issue of View, as well as "Materia Poetica," a collection of poetic maxims. See View 1, No. 1 (September 1940), 1, 3. Another group of "Materia Poetica" appeared in Series 2, No. 3 (October 1942), 28, and "Analysis of a Theme" in Series 5, No. 3 (October 1945), 5.

[4] See LWS p. 290n. The contact with Vidal meant much more to Stevens than a convenient means of acquiring French books and paintings.

In a late letter to Barbara Church he remarked, "I practically lived in France when old Mr. Vidal was alive because if I had asked him to procure from an obscure fromagerie in the country some of the cheese with raisins in it of which I read one time, he would have done it and that is almost what living in France or anywhere else amounts to" (LWS p. 610).

[5] During our conversations Holly Stevens allowed me to see his collection of works by Alain and remarked that Alain was the only writer Stevens collected systematically. All the other books listed here are mentioned in the letters, usually in the context of remarks indicating Stevens' general enjoyment in reading them, occasionally quoting a line or phrase that particularly appealed to him, sometimes expressing irritation with the style. For example, in a letter to Barbara Church, Stevens provided an answer to the question posed in Eluard's title, La Jarre peut-elle être plus belle que l'eau?: "Jamais du tout" (LWS p. 744).

I have not attempted a complete bibliography of all the French books listed in the letters but have focused on those he mentioned during the period with which my study is concerned; that is, approximately 1935 to 1955.

[6] See LWS pp. 545, 545n. Michel Benamou's Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination (Princeton, 1972), pp. 141-144 contains a note on Stevens' personal art collection, based on a previously unpublished essay by Françoise Marin. The sketch lists some of the paintings and briefly characterizes the work of some of the artists in Stevens' collection.

Stevens' letters provide more detailed information about some of the paintings, his method of collecting, and his response to the results. Though he chose his paintings unseen, based on his knowledge of other works by the artist and on Paule Vidal's judgments, his general instructions to her suggest something of what he sought in his collection: "something real but saturated with the feeling and the imagination of the artist," and "something that the artist himself regards as the best thing he has, provided we can afford it" (LWS p. 593).

[7] LWS p. 814n documents the renaming of the Cavailles painting. Stevens later commented that it seemed to have been "painted with melted candy" (LWS p. 830). Stevens first named the Tal Coat (original title, Still Life) "Angel Surrounded By Peasants" (LWS p. 650). He received the painting September 30, 1949; by October 13, 1949, he had completed "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" (LWS p. 650). Both paintings remain in the possession of Holly Stevens (See Note 1).

[8] See LWS p. 566.

[9] The poems ("Ploughing on Sunday," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," "Fabliau of Florida") appeared in Mésures, No. 3 (15 juillet 1939), 331-343. See LWS p. 338n.

[10] See LWS pp. 358, 378-378, 427-428, 446-447, 812. Stevens' letters to Church on the subject of the poetry chair include statements on his

theory of poetry and reveal the strength of his desire to make a contribution to the theory of poetry. He defined his own concept of the chair's scope and function in a memorandum which cited one of his own poems ("Asides on the Oboe") to illustrate what he meant by the subject-matter of poetry:

> What is intended is to study the theory of poetry in relation to what poetry has been and in relation to what it ought to be. Its literature is a part of it, and only a part of it. For this purpose, poetry means not the language of poetry but the thing itself, wherever it may be found. It does not mean verse any more than philosophy means prose. The subject-matter of poetry is the thing to be ascertained. Off-hand, the subject-matter is what comes to mind when one says of the month of August . . .
>
> "Thou art not August, unless I make thee so."
>
> (LWS p. 377)

[11] Stevens suggested Jean Paulhan as the sort of person to hold a Poetry Chair. Paulhan's writings include studies on language, rhetoric, and thought. His books, along with his activities connected with the Nouvelle Revue Française, established his reputation as critic and scholar. (See Littérature Française [Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1949], v. II, p. 450.)

[12] In NA, pp. 37-67. Stevens wrote to Church that he had agreed to deliver the paper because of his interest in the "status of poetry as something to teach." He seems particularly to have enjoyed reading to an audience mainly French. See LWS pp. 446-447, 453, 457.

[13] Jean Wahl, Poésie, pensée, perception (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, Editeurs, 1948), p. 25. The reference occurs in a chapter titled "La Poésie comme union des contraires," which first appeared in English in The Chimera, 2, No. 3 (Winter-Spring 1944), New York, titled "On Poetry."

[14] Stevens wrote to Barbara Church regarding the assignment, saying, "I want to know Valéry better and this is an opportunity to do so, even though, living at the center of the world, he is far beyond me in so many things" (LWS p. 855). His earlier remarks on Valéry reveal a certain ambiguity in his attitudes. In a letter to Ronald Lane Latimer (1935) he mentions having received a copy of Valéry's Etat de la Vertu. He says at that time, "If there are any literary relations between my things and those of other writers they are unconscious," but he says too that a "man like Valéry emerges from his books without a close reading" (LWS p. 290). He does, however, attempt to formulate the relation of his work to that of Valéry: "in order to avoid abstractness, in writing, I search out instinctively things that express the abstract and yet are not in themselves abstractions" (LWS p. 290). A. Walton Litz believes that Stevens' "Adagia" (OP 157-180) is modelled after Valéry's Tel Quel. See his Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 37.

[15] Paul Valéry, Dialogues, trans. William McCausland Stewart, with two prefaces by Wallace Stevens (New York: Pantheon [Bollingen Series XLV-4], 1956), pp. vii-xxviii. Reprinted in OP 268-286.

On April 26, 1955, an operation revealed that Stevens was suffering from terminal cancer; he died in August of that year.

[16] Peter Lee was a young Korean student at Yale. Their correspondence began in 1951 when Stevens commented on poems Lee had sent to him. The correspondence developed into a friendship which continued after Lee's return to Seoul and during his studies in Fribourg, Switzerland. Stevens continued to encourage Lee's attempts to publish his translations of ancient Korean poetry, which finally appeared in 1964. He took particular pleasure in Lee's stay in Fribourg and delighted in his visit to Paris (see LWS p. 845). In 1954 Stevens wrote, "I am no longer sure whether you are a Korean, a Swiss, a Frenchman, a Spaniard, or a combination of all of them. What a wonderful thing it is that a man as sensitive as you are should have an opportunity to get about to the extent that you do" (LWS pp. 856-857.

[17] See LWS p. 391. Stevens' remarks cited here come from his letters to Hi Simons, who had written to him asking about his knowledge of the poets listed. Simons subsequently wrote an article which identified seven instances of direct similarity in lines from poems by Mallarmé and Stevens and seven more general kinds of relationships, including tone, technique, color symbolism, etc. See "Wallace Stevens and Mallarmé," Modern Philology, 43 (May 1946), 235-259. Stevens later remarked that the article "made a very great deal out of little" (LWS p. 365). It is interesting to note, however, that the paper was published after Simons' death; the editors sent it to Stevens who, out of respect for Simons, agreed to its publication "just as it was, without changing a word." He continued, "Mallarmé never in the world meant as much to me as all that in any direct way. Perhaps I absorbed more than I thought. Mallarmé was a good deal in the air when I was much younger. . . . Verlaine meant a good deal more to me." He claimed never to have been a student of French poetry but only a youthful general reader (LWS p. 636). It seems likely, however, that Stevens had in his possession the Roger Fry translation of Mallarmé, Poems (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), with a commentary by Charles Mauron. He refers to Mauron's remark that a man may be characterized by his obsessions, which occurs in that preface, p. 14. See "The Irrational Element in Poetry" (OP 225).

[18] In 1902 Stevens purchased a four volume set of French lyric poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The books remain in the Stevens library; bibliographical information will be found in Holly Stevens' forthcoming book on her father's formative years. In 1909 he translated poems by du Bellay, Chenier, and Charles D'Orleans. See LWS pp. 150-151.

René Taupin, in his L'Influence du symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine (1910-1920) (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1929), pp. 275-276, cites a letter he had received from Stevens which said, "La légèreté, la grâce, le son et la couleur du français ont eu sur moi une

influence indéniable et une influence précieuse." Taupin goes on to assert: "Sa tradition est française."

[19] Robert Buttel, Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

[20] James Baird, The Dome and the Rock: Structure in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968).

[21] Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972). See Appendix A for the original appearances of the essays collected in this volume, which were composed over a period of more than ten years. Benamou tells us that only the last one ("Poetry and Alchemy") has undergone substantial revision. Thus, in Benamou's own work, we can see an evolution from studies of figures, to studies of the poetic imagination, to the psychosymbolic approach of the structuralist. His introduction to the collection affirms his structuralist stance: "I have hoped to reach, below surface resemblances and divergences of theme and style, to the common motives of the symbolic process" (p. xvii). "It is not," he adds, "the fact of influence but the meaning of affinity that matters" (p. xviii).

[22] Benamou says that the "single subject of Laforgue is his own ego," which he contrasts with Stevens' "quest of a poetic Self defeating the ego" (p. 28). Similarly, "There was an invincible negation in Laforgue's spirit, an invincible affirmation in Stevens'" (p. 30). He says that Stevens, more successfully than Baudelaire, can master the fears of night and death through the power of language (p. 62). In Mallarmé, he says, "purity" means absence, schism, inaccessibility, and non-being, whereas in Stevens, "purity is the result of cleared sight" and involves participation in this world (see pp. 68-72).

[23] Benamou, p. xxvii.

[24] Buttel documents specifically the impact of the "fêtes galantes" mode on details in Stevens' poetry, including the "Verlaine-like Pierrot-woman situation involving music." He notes, however, that Stevens' buoyant sense of the comic greatly qualifies his debt to the French ironists. Similarly, he says that Stevens learned from the Symbolists the "poetic means for imbuing . . . ideas and their attendant emotions with both mysterious depth and immediacy" but notes that Stevens' concept of paradise, unlike the Symbolists', would never include a rejection of this world. For discussion of the fêtes galantes mode see especially pp. 55-64; for the Symbolists, pp. 102-124; for French painters, pp. 148-168; for Baudelaire, Laforgue, and Corbiere, pp. 172-180.

[25] See especially pp. 42-55. Baird objects to studies of "influence" and prefers to discuss "affinities" or "adjacencies" of thought and structure. He cites similarities and differences in Stevens and Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Laforgue, and particularly Valéry. He considers Stevens' use of the French language perhaps more significant than similarities to

any one poet. He says that Stevens was intent on compounding a language of French and English used interchangeably, notes the appearance of French words in association with the central acts of the poetic imagination, and concludes, "the identification that Stevens chose to establish for his acts of the imagination must, in its primary character, be traced through his readings in French" (p. 45).

[26] Lucy Beckett, in Wallace Stevens (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974), casts a dissenting vote, claiming that the French influence on Stevens is overrated, as is his debt to French literature in general (p. 209). For a list of articles on Stevens and the French, see Appendix A.

[27] Alain Bosquet, "Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)," NNRF, NS 3 (October 1955), 777-779.

[28] Mauron's book appeared in 1935; Holly Stevens believes that her father received and read it at that time (see Note 1). A bill from Vidal establishes Stevens' purchase of Maulnier's book in July 1939 (see Note 1). His letters date his reading of Caillois' book in 1945. For a more complete survey of each man's career as a writer, see Appendix B, which consists of bibliographies arranged in chronological order of publication.

[29] Ideas of Order (1935), Owl's Clover (1936), The Man with the Blue Guitar (1937), Parts of a World (1942). Stevens had published no new volumes of poetry after the appearance of Harmonium in 1923 (with the exception of a revised and expanded edition of Harmonium in 1931). An enlarged edition of Ideas of Order appeared in 1936.

[30] The letters frequently mention Stevens' high concept of the imagination and poetry. This quotation is representative:

> The idea of pure poetry, essential imagination, as the objective of the poet, appears to be, at least potentially, as great as the idea of God, and, for that matter, greater, if the idea of God is only one of the things of the imagination. . . . If one no longer believes in God (as truth), it is not possible merely to disbelieve; it becomes necessary to believe in something else. . . . A good deal of my poetry recently has concerned an identity for that thing. (LWS pp. 369-370)

Chapter I

[1] During our conversations Holly Stevens showed me the book and paged through it to indicate that there are pencilled notations on most of its pages (see Note 1, "Introduction"). For an indication of Stevens' further acquaintance with Mauron's work, see also Note 17, "Introduction."

So far as I have been able to determine, Aesthetics and Psychology was published only in the English edition. Hereafter cited in the text.

[2] The sketch of Mauron's career is based on Contemporary Authors (Detroit: Gale Research Company), vol. 9-10, 1964, p. 324. This series publishes biographical and bibliographical data based on information furnished by the author. For a more complete bibliography of Mauron's work see Appendix B.

Chapter II

[1] The original title is Introduction à la poésie française (Paris: Fallimard, 1939). All citations in the text are to this edition.

The bill from Vidal referred to in Note 1, "Introduction," includes an additional charge for binding the book in leather. Holly Stevens remarked during the conversations described in that note that Stevens' having the book specially bound indicates that it was important to him.

It seems likely that he learned of the book from a review essay by Marcel Arland in the Nouvelle Revue Française, Series 1, 53 (1939), 302-306. The essay is generally complimentary; Arland describes the work as an ardent and very beautiful essay and praises Maulnier's definition of poetry, though he disagrees at times with Maulnier's judgments regarding particular poets.

[2] The International Who's Who (1973) provides this brief sketch of Maulnier's career. For a more complete bibliography of his work see Appendix B.

[3] All translations of Maulnier and Arland are mine.

[4] Arland approves Maulnier's definition. He says that though Maulnier's judgment might seem "unjust in regard to certain poets, it is not in regard to poetry, from which he marvelously extracts the essential character" (NRF 302) and goes on to note specifically Maulnier's claim that the nature of poetry is to use language to master that which by nature seems to escape language (NRF 303). He agrees that the "poet does not recount, he creates" (NRF 303).

[5] Arland again approves this claim and quotes Maulnier exactly on this point.

[6] Arland quotes extensively from this passage of Maulnier's essay (NRF 303n).

[7] Arland agrees. He describes French as "less rhythmic as well as less musical than others, more elaborate and more abstract than any other" and notes particularly its contrast in this respect to German, which he says appears to the French a "forest of magic" (NRF 303).

[8] Arland says nearly the same thing: "it is not a poetry of the instant, but of eternity. And one could say without too much error that it is a poetry of poetry" (NRF 304).

[9] Arland does not precisely agree with Maulnier at this point. He admits that the great manifestations of French poetry are not always the most popular, but he is willing to give some credit to Musset and Hugo and to accord more worth to the French Romantics in general than is Maulnier, noting that the "Romantic impurity . . . is perhaps no less necessary than classical rigor; it nourishes it, it permits it, and each reclaims

the other. It is to Musset and to Hugo that Thierry Maulnier owes his book" (NRF 305).

[10] Even though, as we have already noted, Arland sometimes disagrees with Maulnier's remarks on particular poets, he praises Maulnier's concept of poetry and concedes that his critical judgments are in accord with his aesthetic principles. Thus, while Arland finds it surprising that Maulnier doesn't make more of a case for poets of the middle ages, and would himself add Théophile to the seventeenth-century canon, he agrees completely with Maulnier's judgments of the poets whom Maulnier approves. He says that Maulnier presents his history with an "admirable and flaming intelligence" and that he does so in terms which are not "inappropriate to his purpose" (NRF 305).

His final assessment of Maulnier's book conveys high praise: he says that Maulnier's book defines the essential principles of poetry, marks the continuity of a high French line, and repairs injustices (NRF 306).

[11] Benamou, Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination, p. xvii.

[12] Where Stevens' poetry and poetics really stand in relation to surrealism deserves a study devoted entirely to that question. Benamou, in the work cited above, makes a convincing case for an alchemical reading of Stevens. I have only two reservations: (1) that the alchemical element is even more important in Stevens' poetry, particularly from about 1940 onward, than Benamou's structuralist reading indicates and (2) that the relationships between Stevens' accomplishment in poetry and the deepest tendencies in surrealism need a broader base than the alchemical elements in both.

[13] According to the Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, Abbé Brémond "claims a mystical value for pure poetry, which for him is allied with the primordial incantatory element in verse" (p. 682).

[14] The word counts are mine, and approximate. Thomas F. Walsh, Concordance to the Poetry of Wallace Stevens (University Park: Penn. State Univ. Press, 1963), cites over 200 lines containing the words "speak," "say," "said," "saying," "word," "words."

[15] Maulnier's anthology was certainly not Stevens' first introduction to the poets Maulnier discusses. Stevens' four volume set of sixteenth and seventeenth-century French lyrics (see Note 18, "Introduction") includes all the poets Maulnier discusses from this period in French literature.

Chapter III

[1] Citations to Les Impostures de la poésie in the text are to Gallimard's third edition, 1962. The book consists of a preface, a framing sketch ("Les Arbres de Lapa"), four chapters of aesthetic theory ("Situation de la poésie," "Pour une esthétique sévère," "L'Heritage de la Pythie," "Impostures de la poésie") and a final framing sketch ("La Plaine").

[2] Pierre Loti (1850-1923) was a French naval officer who acquired a considerable reputation for his novels, idealized romances, and travelogues. His style has been characterized as impressionistic, sensuous, and musical.

[3] Caillois was a frequent contributor to the Nouvelle Revue Française from the mid-1930's onward, and it is possible that Stevens had seen some of his work there. His work also appeared in View, a magazine with which Stevens was familiar (see Note 3, "Introduction"). Stevens apparently subscribed to Lettres françaises, a periodical that Caillois edited in South America (see LWS pp. 404, 418).

[4] The biographical sketch here is based on the International Who's Who (1973-1974) and William S. Rubin's Dada and Surrealist Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1968).

[5] All translations of Caillois are mine, unless otherwise noted.

[6] The remarks that follow appeared as part of "The State of American Writing, 1948: Seven Questions," Partisan Review, 15 (August 1948), 884-886.

[7] The remarks that Stevens quotes here are part of an address that he delivered at Bard College in 1948. See OP 239-241, section one of "Honors and Acts."

[8] Caillois does not explain the reference to Lapa, which is not a French name. The National Geographic Atlas lists only two places by that name, one in the remote northwestern part of Brazil, the other in the narrow southern section of Brazil not far from Argentina. Since Caillois was apparently living in South America at the time he wrote the book and since it was first published in Argentina, it seems reasonable to assume a reference to the town in southern Brazil. The trees he describes suggest a tropical setting.

Appendix A

This list is intended as an aid in locating articles treating Stevens' relation to the French tradition. Virtually every book on Stevens mentions this topic in some way, but the only books I have included here are those published in French. I have, however, included dissertations on this topic. I have not repeated either books or articles cited in my text and included in the bibliography of works cited.

Anon. "La Place du Wallace Stevens dans la poésie américaine." Critique, 20 (Paris, October 1964), 836-850.

Arvanon, Cyrill. Histoire littéraire des Etats-Unis. Paris: Hachette, 1953, p. 372.

Benamou, Michel. "Beyond Emerald or Amethyst--Wallace Stevens and the French Tradition." Dartmouth College Library Bulletin, NS 1 (December 1961), 60-66.

_____. "Jules Laforgue and Wallace Stevens." Romanic Review, 50 (April 1959), 107-117.

_____. "Le Prétendu 'symbolisme' de Wallace Stevens." Critique, 17 (Paris, December 1961), 1029-1045.

_____. "The Structure of Wallace Stevens' Imagination." Mundus Artium, 1 (Winter 1967), 73-84.

_____. "Le Thème du héros dans la poésie de Wallace Stevens." Etudes Anglaises, 12 (July-September 1959), 222-230.

_____. "Wallace Stevens and Apollinaire." Comparative Literature, 20 (Fall 1968), 289-300.

_____. "Wallace Stevens: Some Relations between Poetry and Painting." Comparative Literature, 11 (Winter 1959), 47-60.

_____. "Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination." Journal of English Literary History, 31 (March 1964), 35-63.

Block, Haskell M. "The Impact of French Symbolism on Modern American Poetry." in The Shaken Realist: Essays in Modern Literature in Honor of Frederick J. Hoffman. Ed. Melvin J. Friedman and John B. Vickery. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970, pp. 165-217.

Bosquet, Alain. "Deux poètes philosophes: Wallace Stevens et Conrad Aiken." La Table Ronde, No. 105 (September 1956), 129-131.

_____. "Tendance actuelles de la poésie américaine." L'Age Nouveau, No. 96 (March 1956), 66-70.

Brown, John. Panorama de la littérature contemporaine aux Etats-Unis. Paris: Gallimard, 1954, pp. 288-289.

Chamberlin, John Edward. "Wallace Stevens and the Aesthetics of Modern Art." Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, 1969. See DAI 32 (1972), 910-A.

Dune, Edmond. "La Place de Wallace Stevens dans la poésie américaine." Critique, 8 (Winter 1966), 836-850.

Gaughan, Gerald C. "Wallace Stevens and Stéphane Mallarmé: A Comparative Study in Poetic Theory." Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1966.

Hays, H. R. "Laforgue and Wallace Stevens." Romanic Review, 25 (July-September 1934), 242-248.

Hoffman, Frederick J. "Symbolisme and Modern Poetry in the United States." Comparative Literature Studies, 4 (1967), 193-199.

Morse, Samuel French. "'Lettres d'un Soldat.'" Dartmouth College Library Bulletin, NS 4 (December 1961), 44-50.

O'Connor, William Van. "Wallace Stevens: Impressionism in America." Revue des Langues Vivantes, 32 (January-February 1966), 66-77.

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Appendix B

The following lists include only book-length works. They do not include articles in periodicals, introductory notes to works by others, and the like. I have arranged the lists chronologically by year of publication, in order to suggest something of the development of each man's career as a writer and to indicate the place in his career of the works discussed in the text.

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