2. NEUROSIS OF WINTER

I long for solitude...the solitude of self. I want to know about myself, about my world...

(Letters 80)

...the mirage of this monologue...and the forced labor of this discourse without escape...

(Wilden 10; Écrits 41)

Villages grow into towns; towns grow into cities, cities grow into industrial capitals; industrial capitals unite into cyberworld... and the native keeps alienating within it. Even when a village population increases, a little too quickly during a particular period of time, because of the new settlers, the native finds that apart from the other natives he does not know all the people; he sees and feels that the newcomers, who now seem to form the majority, have formed their own society, different from the natives'; a strange feeling comes over him: he enters métoikos, feels apart within his own house as it were. And if he happens to be a poet, he creates a world of his own — in his poetry — a world alienated within a world. Does it stop there? Does it suffice? Did it for Eliot's Prufrock, for Pound's Mauberley, or for Mr. JS/07/M/378 of Auden? Hardly; for existence then always has the background of the sense, the sordid weight, of that alienation, since the radical otherness it develops has already become an inevitable part of the spirit, mind, and body of the native who thus keeps geronming. The question is, can he 'wait for the rain'? He can; there are two clear ways out of the situation: he may seek that otherness, have desire for it, learn to love it, and thus merge with it; or, he may choose to compete with it, be its equal or even be to it that which it was to him. The former, which is really a way in, is a rather meek submission, almost psychopathological, while the latter is the 'rain' itself that Eliot's protagonist awaits. One recalls, and distinguishes between, the neglected lot of Umuofia having sought refuge in the Church, in Achebe's novel, and Okonkwo, who follows the latter path.

Most of the poets writing in the first half of the twentieth century could have wished the latter way out suggested above, but their poetry suggests that they only
occasionally followed the first way, the way in, and that most of the time remained pent in their métoikos however, which was resentful yet inevitable. All this may be observed in the industrial and spiritual waste strewn through Eliot's poetry, lying therein as if on a sick-bed like the 'evening' in "Prufrock;" in the cultural waste in Sandberg's poetry; in Hart Crane's attempts at acclimatization of industrial complexities into life and poetry; in the wreckage of human civilization in different periods in Pound's Pisan Cantos; in Auden's numbered citizen, who remains a perfect gentleman on papers. Stevens too shared the predicament of these poets, but with a difference, in that he seeks a resolution of the two ways. He begins where the otherness has become inevitable, has penetrated into the depths of the psyche, and having acquired a speech of its own has started expressing itself and wielding authority. To use Wyndham Lewis’s comment made apropos of Eliot: if the earlier Eliot was "a figure entering the portals...of [a] Heartbreak House" (quoted in Chandran 11), Stevens began as a member of that 'House' (Stevens’ phrase for that is “the handbook of heartbreak” [CP 507]), and may be found either loving its strange coziness or trying to escape it and be its master as would befit the son within the Oedipal triad who, by his sheer desire of strength, overthrows and usurps the father’s authority. It is due to the want of such desire that the other poets of the métoikos seldom break or even create a breach in that 'House of Castration;' or, at least, it may be said that their desire never found the right path — with the possible exception of Eliot, perhaps. Those strange or suffocating coziness of and the assumption of authority in that 'House' are replaced in Stevens respectively with the symbols of 'winter' and 'summer,' emblematic of the polarity of psychical seasons or moods.

Stevens loved this summer; he celebrates it many poems. But the way he enjoys it seems a childlike (not childish) excitement; there, he is more than jubilant; it is almost like the jubilant mood of one who has just escaped the harshness of 'winter' and finds himself "in the company of the sun" (CP 371). And this is not without reason. Stevens had his own 'winter.' Therefore, in a sense, not only the early poetry, of Harmonium and Ideas of Order, but all of his poetry is the outcome of his mental winter. Thus, even almost at the end of his career and life, when Richard Wilbur sent him a postcard, quipping it with a comment by Gaston Bachelard, the Sorbonne philosopher and aesthetician, that the human imagination simply cannot cope with polar condition, Stevens wrote back something to the effect that “most art is created out of a condition of winter” (B 170; in the concerned letter, Stevens wrote, “The great part of the imaginative
life of people is both created and enjoyed in polar circumstances” ([Letters 740]). The artist’s creativity finds this condition conducive to itself because, perhaps, as Nietzsche’s Zarathustra said, “...all profound knowledge flows cold” (Nietzsche 105); in other words, the creation does not merely remain an enjoyable thing but it also facilitates knowledge. And Stevens was an intelligent and scholarly poet, always on the lookout for both joy or happiness and “a new knowledge” (CP 534); otherwise, the question of comparing his poetry with philosophical tradition, or of calling him (or even of rejecting him the status of) a philosophical poet, would not have been raised in the first place. If one wishes to call him a philosophical poet, one has to look for the new knowledge that might be there in his poetry. At the same time, however, one must not forget that he was a poet and not a philosopher; naturally, the knowledge that might be there in the poetry would not be given in a systematic way but in a poetic way — through the arcanity of experiences and the baroque-ness of the poetic language occulting the experiences still more.

There would hardly be a better beginning to a longer study of Stevens, therefore, than to explore the ‘winter’ experiences in him. In this respect the first thing that comes to mind is the difficult, harsh “The Snow Man” (CP 9-10), which is both an experience in winter and a ‘winter’ in experience. The poem continues to be an enigma chiefly because of the question of the speaker, and the ‘listener’ within the poem, and also because of the intriguing last line: “Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.” Most of the poem’s commentators recognize these difficult points in the poem. Some have offered their opinions on the question of the poem’s speaker and the ‘listener’ within it in order to arrive at an interpretation. Despite all these attempts, every critic of the poem knows inwardly that neither his interpretation nor anybody else’s is in any sense far better than others’. The question of a final word on the poem remains far away — after all, the desire to arrive at a final world itself keeps criticism alive and going. David Hesla is, however, the only critic (to my mind) who seems to have read the poem and the last line well enough to be close enough to have a final word on the poem. Yet, surprisingly, his interpretation tends to circumvent the question of the speaker and the ‘listener,’ which is extremely essential for the poem’s reading and for the poet as well. If and once they are properly identified, this poem, which has bothered so many for so long, would hopefully yield to a greater extent. Here is the poem:

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

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

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

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

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

Hesla rightly observes that "the crux of the poem lies in the relation of "and not to think" with what goes before" (249). Discarding the imperative or implicative readings of the poem he suggests that the poem's single sentence is inferential, and compares it with 'you must be crazy to believe a thing like that,' meaning, "From the fact that you believe a thing like that I infer that you do not have all your wits about you." Thus, his reading of the poem is, "...from the fact that someone does not or cannot think of any misery...it can be inferred that the person has a mind of winter" (250).

However, some problems immediately arise on reading this inferential reading. This poem does not refer to any single person; in fact, it denies specificity to both the speaker and the 'listener' that the inferential reading must grant so generously. The 'one' of the poem is impersonal; or better, it is an open space waiting to be filled up by any noun or pronoun — in the first person or second or third, irrespective of whether singular or plural. Thus, it is at once personal and impersonal. One uses this pronoun when what follows it goes beyond the stage of 'I' and then of 'you', and then of 'he' or 'she' or 'it', or even of 'they' or 'we', since all these pronouns are subject-specific and point to a particular person or persons. 'One', on the other hand, can take on the pronouns either
each in isolation or all at the same time. In short, this pronoun is used to generalize or to make applicable to each and all individuals what follows it. Hesla's reading is essentially with reference to either second or third person; it excludes the 'I', or the first person, even as his final comment makes it clear: "It is, the tone of a person bemused, even appalled, by the fact that there can be people who have so far forgotten their humanity as to be unmoved by a winter landscape" (251). It leaves out the one who is "bemused," the 'I', which the pronoun 'one' does not exclude; after all, one can be bemused by one's own strange behavior.

Another problem arises from Hesla's comment just quoted: it suggests that the "bemused, even appalled" is the speaker of the poem, and that the "people" represents the idolic 'snow man' of the title; but it shrewdly avoids the mention of the 'listener' within the poem. Hesla himself argues that the "Nothing that is not there" is 'the something that is' and "the nothing that is" is the "misery" (251). It is the 'listener' within the poem who "beholds" both "nothing that is not there" and "the nothing that is." That is, the 'listener' cannot avoid the pathetic fallacy. Going by Hesla's comment, it is the speaker of the poem who cannot avoid it, "bemused, even appalled" as he is by those who can or have avoided it. This creates a confusion regarding his understanding of the poem's speaker and the 'listener' in it. At best, one can see that he literally identifies them. However, it shocks the reader of the article, for Hesla has already commented early in the article that "In the case of Stevens' poem, had the speaker actually thought there was misery in the sound of the leaves and the wind he would have suffered from the weakness described by Ruskin" whereby the mind and body cannot "deal fully with what is before them or upon them" (245). The comment clearly suggests that the speaker of "Snow Man," in Hesla's view, is capable of avoiding the pathetic fallacy. Then the question is, why is the speaker "bemused" or "appalled" by those "people" who are able to avoid it? It is all the more surprising as to why at all did he bother to welcome, "Happily," Bloom's comment that "The voice speaking *The Snow Man*... urgently seeks to avoid any indulgence of the pathetic fallacy" (quoted in Hesla 245). For all his scholarly attempt at reading the poem he fails to either distinguish or even identify the speaker of the poem and the 'listener' in it. This is why he has carefully avoided any direct mention of the speaker or the 'listener' in that comment quoted at the end the previous paragraph.
This is not to suggest, however, that Hesla's inferential reading of the poem is wrong. It is, after all, the outcome of the insufficiency of the previous imperative or implicative readings. But, neither are the imperative or implicative readings wrong. In fact, all the readings, scholarly as they are, are correct. The only exception one might take to them is they do not provide legitimate solution to the problem of the speaker of and the 'listener' in the poem.

It seems imperative to first of all see how the imperative or implicative readings, which Hesla denies, are correct. He lists three formulations to achieve the imperative:

If one wants to...then one must...
In order to...one must...
One must...and then one will be...

Though the last of these approximates the language of the poem (Hesla 249), Hesla rejects it by showing its inability to accommodate the "one must" at all possible places:

One must have a mind of winter / To regard...
And [one must] have been cold a long time / To behold...
...; and [one must] not to think...

He then emphasizes the necessity of aligning the "not to think" with the other infinitives (which is certainly a right direction), but only to reject the following way of alignment.

[In order] to regard the frost...and
[In order] to behold the junipers...and
[In order] not to think of any misery...
One must have a mind of winter...
And [one must] have been cold a long time.

His objection, plainly stated, is "it is not what Stevens wrote" (249). That is to say, the 'In order' is the reader's imposition, and that Stevens did not want it to mean 'One must have a mind of winter and have been cold a long time in order to think of any misery'. And the reason for this, as Hesla would put forth, is Stevens' reading of William James, which might have allowed the poet to know or like the idea that "nature" is 'not wholly inert'. It works upon us — so that "a winter landscape may include the emotion of misery" (Hesla 248). Thus, if one has been cold a long time, one would naturally feel or
think of the misery that is in a winter landscape. To conclude, in order not to think of any misery in a winter landscape one cannot resort to be cold a long time.

Hesla then verifies whether Stevens had wanted to say that one must not think of any misery. He rejects the possibility on the ground that Stevens could have omitted the "to" in the "and not to think," thus enabling the "must" to be understood between "and" and "not think":

...; and [must] not think / of any misery...

or, Stevens could have made the "must" explicit by letting the "one" to be understood, thus:

...; and [one] must not think / of any misery...

What Stevens wanted to say is indeed important. For all our emphasis on practical criticism, it is simply impossible to dismiss the intentional pressure that gives rise to a work of art. For all the belief in 'the death of the author' that seeks to avoid any 'intentional fallacy,' the "dead author" does remain "a reader's fantasy of perfect mastery... A fantasy for the critic who would identify with such mastery as reader-writer...” (emphases mine; Gallop 182). The 'dead' author does remain alive in the reader's fantasy; it is the reader-critic's fantasy to achieve the same mastery as the author himself had (or, has). Gallop asserts that the author and / or what he wanted to say are very much the objects of desire in the reader's or the reader-critic's fantasy. She is correct because without that desire there would be no reader or reader-critic; thus, he is in the same position as that of the dreamer-son, in a dream Freud describes at the end of “Formulations on the Two Principles of the Mental Functioning” (see SE 12: 225-26), whose ruling passion is, says Lacan, "Rather than have him (the dead father) know (that he was dead), I'd die" (parentheses mine; Écrits 300). The dreamer-son, "who had...nursed his father through a long and painful mortal illness... had been obliged to wish for his father's death (as a release).” Thus, though he did not want the father to die, yet he secretly wished for it — this morally painful and unbearable wish was immediately repressed, which then returned in the form of a dream as a result of the sense of guilt; to overcome it, the son, Freud tells us, "repeatedly dreamt that his father was alive once more and that he was talking to him in his usual way” (SE 12: 225). The
same criminal desire is reflected in the reading practice that is in vogue today. With such a reader, the passion is “Rather than have the author say, I’d know /read;” with the reader-critic, the passion is ‘Rather than have the author say, I’d explain,” thus wishing the death of the author and desiring to occupy his place. Lacan glosses this further as “Being of non-being;” that is how the dreamer-son comes at the place of the dead father. This is how the reader-critic “comes on the scene” (Écrits 300), by coming at the place of the ‘dead’ author, by being the ‘being’ of ‘non-being’. Jane Gallop expresses a doubt that the kind of criticism that is in vogue today might be “a defense against something more threatening,” perhaps against “a fading author” (182). That ‘fading author’ could be interpreted as the ‘I’ — the traditional human subject with its supposed authority and centeredness — that Lacan subverts in the essay “Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious” (Écrits 292-325). The practical criticism’s shutting up the author, killing him, seems to be a defense against the subverting state of the critic’s ‘I,’ who therefore comes on the scene at the cost of the author’s death, thereby committing the fallacy of believing in the ‘self’ as a substance, a static entity. The chief reason for this is obviously the prominence to the intellect than to the desire which, in reality, resists the very purpose of the reader-critic’s desire to come at the place of the author: hence the enlarging rift between whether/what the author wanted to say and what the reader-critic believes he said. Stevens’ poetry might have used the wit and intellect as Eleanor Cook shows through his two works,10 but what it promotes is the human desire nevertheless. Because, the poet knew that the human subject was subverted, decentered, and that the traditional concept of the self as a united entity was an illusion. At the same time, he shows the awareness that the desire alone could hold the decentered subject together.

“The Snow Man” is a poem that does not explicitly lay the human subject before us, but it implicitly convinces us its ex-centric, decentered nature; to use Litz’s words, it “lays bare that irreducible reality upon which the poet builds his fictive structures” (100), though it is difficult to tell the fictive from the real. Stevens was a careful artist; he structured his poems paying meticulous attention to every detail. The single sentence of “The Snow Man” is intricate enough to give rise to multiple readings. Two major divisions to be noted among its readings are David Hesla’s inferential reading and the imperative or implicative readings of other critics like Miller, Keyser, Weston, and Cameron.11 It is worth while to see how the poem can be read unequivocally as bearing
an implicative or imperative meaning. This may be accomplished, with a little modification in a reading that Hesla rejects and in which he aligns all the infinitives in the poem, thus:

One must have a mind of winter / [In order] To regard...
And [one must] have been cold a long time / [In order] To Behold...
...; and [one must have been cold a long time] not [in order] to think...

Here, the last line does not say ‘One must have been...in order not to think,’ nor even ‘In order not to think...one must have been...’ It simply says, ‘One must have been cold a long time not in order to think of any misery.’ Hesla, however, would correctly point out that “it is not what Stevens wrote” (249). Indeed, it is not. But, instead of stopping there, it is necessary to see why he did not write the way suggested above. I did not put ‘one must have a mind of winter’ between the “and” and “not to think” because the last line of the poem’s second tercet runs into the third and joins the two tercets, enabling the relation of “and not to think” in the third tercet more properly with the second of the three segments,12 separated by the two semi-colons, that comprise the poem’s single sentence. Now, it is important to see why Stevens did not actually write ‘one must have been cold a long time’ between the “and” and “not to think.” First and foremost, it would have disturbed the already loose meter of the poem to a great extent by way of elongating line 6 or 7, or both. Or, worst, it would have required a quartet in place of the third tercet. Second, the poet felt the urgency of writing “not to think” immediately after the “and” since he realized that staying in cold a long time might inculcate into the mind the misery as an effect of the “the sound of the wind” and “the sound of a few leaves” because, as Hesla quotes from James, the “‘nature is not wholly inert.’ It works upon us” or because—as Stevens says in “Peter Quince at the Clavier” — “the...sounds / On my spirit make a music,” a music of “feeling” (CP 89-90); thus, the ‘sounds’ do not remain sound but acquire a personal emotional meaning. In “Snow Man” the ‘sounds’ of the winter landscape are essentially associated with the music that is the ‘misery.’ Hesla, too, makes the same point when he writes, “But misery is there and real, as the emotional meaning of the experience of this bleak winter landscape” (271), he would impute it to Stevens’ reading of William James though. Therefore, it was necessary to mention or
remind, even warn, that one must have been cold a long time only "I to behold..." and not "to think / Of any misery..."

I have deliberately changed the 'In order' of my earlier reading to 'only' in order to suggest the redundancy of the former. The latter is also redundant as is anything else. This is because the thought of misery comes in the poem like an after thought. Had it been the thought that consciously initiated the poem, the poet would certainly have used some expression like 'in order' or 'only' in the previous lines containing the imperatives. That the thought of 'misery' is like an after thought is also made explicit in the "and not to,...," written as if to add impromptu. This is where, perhaps, the poem's readers make a mistake; they make the thought of misery the most prominent thought in their explanation of the poem. It is, in a sense, a failure to distinguish the two instances of the conjunction 'and'; and this is surprising since most critics of the poem do realize that the meaning of this single sentence must be decided retroactively.

Yet, the way of reading it suggested above might incur an objection: if Stevens had wanted to relate the second and third tercets, he could have used a comma in place of the second semi-colon, after "Of the January sun." However, this would have been inappropriate for this reason: the first two segments are clearly distinct from the third; for they suggest the requirement of, or express a desire for, a positive and secure attitude whereas the third segment suggests the avoidance of a negative and insecure one, which begins with "and not to think." The semi-colon is appropriate to make the distinction. The "acute readers of poetry" would know from their experience that poets are the best users of the semi-colon (Hesla 241). In an attempt — to use Eliot's expression — to fix the poem in a formulated sentence-pattern, Hesla provides the following illustration that is supposed to mimic the poem's sentence.

One must have the fortitude of a brass monkey
To stand outside on a January night in Duluth;
And one must have the sensibility of a stone
To endure the bone-chilling wind coming off the lake;
And not to come indoors where it is warm and cozy.

The difference that Plato made between the so-called ideal world 'above' and the world in which we live is precisely what distinguishes Stevens' poem and Hesla's illustration; for the illustration is a false imitation that reverses the poem's dialectic. The last line of
the illustration marks the avoidance of something that is positive and secure; the 'warmth' and 'coziness' of 'indoor' stand in stark contrast with the "misery", "the sound of the wind", and "the sound of a few leaves" of the 'outdoors' in a winter mise-en-scene.

Another possible objection, pertinent to the reading suggested above, could be that if the first two segments suggest the requirement of a positive and secure attitude, and are thus similar, then the use of comma in place of the first semi-colon would have been a better option. Well, "one must have a mind of winter..." and "[one must] have been cold a long time..." are two totally different recommendations or thoughts. Besides, staying in cold for a long time may lead to the thoughts of "misery" that is there in the bleak winter mise-en-scene instead of having a mind of winter.

Thus, in more than one way the "and not to think" is related with "And have been cold a long time," i.e. with the second segment. The "One must" of the poem's first line or segment is, however, very much implicit in the "And have been cold a long time" of the second segment. Therefore, "and not to think" is also related with "One must have a mind of winter," or with the first segment or tercet, through that "One must." In short, though the three segments of the poem are distinct, yet they are related to each other. Their distinction and relation can be established in yet another way: if staying in cold a long time may induce the misery in the mind, then to have a mind of winter is to naturally have the misery in the mind, as it were — so that such a mind would automatically think of the misery. (This also clarifies why the first two segments, though apparently similar, are different). Therefore, the first and third segments may be read together, thus:

One must have a mind of winter / [Only] to regard...
...; and not to think / Of any misery...

As suggested before, the use of 'only' is not necessary. The chief reason for the redundancy of anything like 'in order' or 'only' is that the poem begins with the view to enjoy reality in its harshest form. However, the thought of misery that was perhaps lurking in the unconscious finally overwhelms, such that the whole poem seems pervaded by the thought. Not only that but it also envelops even the suggestions that seem to be solutions or recommendations with regard to enjoying the harsh reality. In a broader sense, therefore, the poem is the outcome of the desire to enjoy the wintry reality
of life, which may easily lead to misery instead of its enjoyment, and of the desire to suppress the thought of misery. It is remarkable of Stevens’ temperament that the desire for joy precedes the thought of misery, even though that “nothing that is” has the last word. And it is precisely because of the precedence of the enjoyment in the poet’s mind that any imposition by the reader-critic in the dialectic of the poem goes out of the context, or destroys the whole dialectic itself. In fact, the very question of that precedence arises only when the poem suddenly catches up the misery out of nothing. Had the thought of misery been paramount in the poet’s mind, the poem might have had a different beginning and/or the ‘and’ in “and not to think” could have given way to ‘but.’ The insertion of words or expressions like ‘if,’ ‘in order,’ or ‘only,’ making the poem’s sentence conditional, only rob it of the enjoyment it seeks even as it annihilates the urgency in the imperative tone of “and not to think.” The reader-critic’s intervention not only makes the poem very simple to read but it also reverses the very dialectic of its sentence. At this point in this discussion, one can see that although the reader must decide the meaning of the poem’s first two segments retroactively, with the illumination that the “and not to think” of the third segment offers, yet he must read the whole sentence as, and in the very order, given—without imposing anything on it. Ambiguous indeed; but “The ambiguity is so favorable to the poetic mind” (NA 79). What the critic must do, therefore, is to preserve the ambiguity rather than seek a finality of interpretation; only this approach would do justice to this poem. Therefore, the poem’s single sentence may be read in multiple ways. Apart from Hesla’s inferential reading—not his interpretation of the poem—the sentence of the poem needs at least two readings, or three, or possibly four—once with ‘only in order’ as shown below, then without the ‘only,’ and then with these impositions in mind but without altering the dialectic of the poem and without destroying the urgency in “and not to think,” and finally the reader is ready to read it as it is there before him. To formulate this:

One must have a mind of winter / [(only) in order] To regard... And (one must) have been cold a long time / [(only) in order] To behold. . .

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{one must have a mind of winter} \\
\text{AND/OR} \\
\text{not [in order] to think.}
\end{array}\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{one must have been cold a long time}
\end{array}\]
However, again, it must be emphasized that whatever is in the braces, though very much there, is paradoxically absolutely unnecessary.

If this is how the ambiguity of the poem could be resolved, then what about the preservation of the ambiguity discussed earlier? Well, language proficiency was not the poem's intention; the ambiguity that Stevens favors in this particular poem is not in the poem's sentence. What Vendler says is worth taking note of here; she believes that "Stevens' allusions, in his briefer poems are more often to content than to language" (Words Chosen 48). The ambiguity of the "Snow Man" must be found in its content; it is what the poem's single sentence reflects. The 'listener' within the poem is not simply someone who is there as a necessary part of linguistic communication. There is something more to him than that. After all, one cannot fail to question that if the 'listener' is so prominently mentioned, why the speaker be kept in hiding. And then, who is the man in the title? All the three are figures in question. Accordingly, critics have a difference of opinion regarding the identity of the speaker who dwells in darkness, of the 'listener' who is in gloom, and of the 'snow man' who is in the clarity of the title: Litz identifies the poet-speak with the 'snow man' (100); Cameron treats the 'one' of the first line as the speaker and distinguishes him from the 'listener' (584, 585); Bloom identifies the 'one' with the 'listener,' whom he identifies with the 'snow man' of the title (29); Macksey, in suggesting that the 'listener' refrains from committing the pathetic fallacy, identifies him with the 'one' (198).

It would be better to approach the problem beginning with the levels of experience. It has already been mentioned at the outset how the pronoun 'one' comes in use; it has a lot to do with levels of experience. One thinks of an experience at three levels: individual or personal (I), at the level of other individuals (second and third person pronouns), and at the level of each and all individuals, collectively (all pronouns including the 'I'). At the last level the experience attains universality since, of course, it repeats itself in time, space, and person. While relevant to an individual, this universality is also twice removed from the individual. Thus, the speaker must have seen misery in his earlier experience of a winter landscape. Removed at one from it, he knew that others see it, too. Removed at two, he realized its universality, and this objectification helped him to embark himself on finding a way out. Of course, all this happens in the unconscious, the reason why the thought of misery seems to hit from the back in the poem. What we read in the beginning is, therefore, the speaker's conscious discourse,
when he has started thinking consciously how to get rid of it. Grotesque as his solutions might seem, but he also prescribes them: “One must have a mind of winter...” and “...[one must] have been cold a long time...” It is a different question altogether whether he himself goes by these prescriptions; what is more important is to see that the ‘listener’ is helpless to accept them. Unlike the speaker, he is not able to objectify himself from the experience since he does “listen in the snow” the sound of “misery,” and does behold both the “Nothing that is not there” and the “nothing that is.” This is where Bloom’s comment may be happily welcomed and applied to the speaker as distinct from the ‘listener’: “The voice speaking The Snow Man,..., urgently seeks to avoid any indulgence of the pathetic fallacy” (54); Sharon Cameron echoes Bloom when she refers to the speaker as “a person not guilty of committing the pathetic fallacy” (585). Yet, this does not answer the question of the ‘listener’ to whom the speaker refers towards the close of the poem. If the “nothing that is” is the misery as Hesla says, then the obvious question is whether the ‘listener,’ who “beholds” it, indulges into the pathetic fallacy. If the nature is ‘not wholly inert,’ then the human mind is not at all inert since it functions; thus, the ‘listener’ is human and he does think of the misery. For him, “the land [is] / Full of the same wind / That is blowing in the same bare place;” the very repetition of ‘same,’ and the word ‘bare’ hint at the awakening of the thought of misery. To conclude the argument: from the speaker’s desire of avoiding the pathetic fallacy and from the inability of the ‘listener’ to avoid it, one might infer that the speaker and the listener are different, that they need not be identified.

Interestingly enough, Hesla does realize that “one of the important and tenacious themes of [Stevens’] poetry is that of the self and its world” (247). Had he thought a little more on that “its world” he might have come to see the two worlds — the external world in which the self finds itself and the inner world of the self. Although they are not mutually exclusive, Stevens was a poet for whom there was a greater abyss between them than that for any other poet, and which he strove to reduce. “The Snow Man” deals with both the worlds. The external world perceived by the self is the winter landscape, vividly described in the poem. But the inner world of the self goes very largely unnoticed since it is de-scribed. The poem gives enough clues for its discovery, though: the speaker’s attributes are that he speaks, regards, beholds, thinks, and more importantly seems to have a sort of control over these functions or, at least, has such a desire — this is explicit in the ‘must’ and the imperatives. The ‘listener,’ however, simply ‘listens’ and
'beholds' as if helplessly; he is unable not to listen or behold. Both are purely receptive functions; thus, he has no control over them. If we accept that "the nothing that is" is 'misery' since "Misery is nothing, no thing, not a thing in the sense that the trees and sun and leaves are things, available to seeing, and that the sound of the wind and leaves are things, available to hearing" (Hesla 251), then the 'listener' may also be treated on the same lines since he is "nothing himself;" he is nothing, no thing, not a thing available to seeing or hearing but, like the misery, very much there. The 'listener' may be distinguished from the speaker, whose ability to speak itself makes him available to hearing, makes him tangible.

Here is where Stevens and Lacan come close on the nature of the human subject, the 'I.' In the three poems, viz. "The Snow Man," "A Dish of Peaches in Russia" (CP 224), and "Of Modern Poetry" (CP 239-40), Stevens seems to have thought deeply on the nature of the human subject and resolved to divide it into the speaker and the listener, which are comparable to Lacan's je and moi, respectively. Though the poet and the psychoanalyst did not know each other's works, Booker points out that the poet was aware of the phenomenon of "hearing-oneself-speak": "my own voice speaking in my ear" (Booker 495; CP 298).

Lacan's moi is an "objectlike narcissistic subject" (ERS 1). Stevens' 'listener' in "The Snow Man" is also narcissistic in the sense that it is capable merely of receptive functions of listening and seeing. Likewise, observing the verb forms in the final stanza ("listens" and "beholds"), it is clearly treated as a third person, as an object almost, is referred to objectively at least. But it is not static like an object; the moi is "an Imaginary function," "a specular subject," "evanescent" (ERS 60, 61, 43). Lacan even goes so far as to ask, "...do you think,..., that the ego can be taken as a thing — I'd rather starve first!" (Écrits 131). This is why, Stevens refers to it as "nothing himself," it is not available to hearing or listening like a thing, but is perceived clearly at points of emotions and feelings. If "Lacan's picture of the moi is not easy to grasp" (ERS 42), neither is Stevens' delineation of the 'listener.' This is obvious from the fact that critics of Stevens have not paid serious attention to his 'listener' despite no less than three instances of his mention in the poetry.

Ragland-Sullivan glosses the two Lacanian subjects, the je and the moi, as "two modes of meaning fighting to occupy the same place" (43). In Stevens' poem, the winter landscape is "the same (bare) place," which the speaker and the 'listener' both try to cope
with and interpret, but in different ways. This is when the split in them becomes more prominent. The *je* can objectify itself from the experience since it can adhere to “cultural stipulations” (ERS 43). In other words, it recognizes the ways of the external world and bends accordingly, makes the necessary adjustments, conforms itself, hence can find ways out of adversities. But the *moi* is delimited in its response to the external world; it can “only experience itself in relation to external images and to the gaze of the others” (emphases mine; ERS 43). Such ‘experiencing itself’ of the *moi* speaks for its narcissistic tendencies, and also for the limitation of its potential to merely receptive functions. The *je* “seeks to ‘translate’ the *moi*” as well (ERS 43); thus we have the last eight and half lines in “The snow Man” where we read the *je* account of the *moi* response to the winter landscape. In this way, although the speaker of and the listener within the poem differ in their response to the external world, and thus are different, yet they belong to only one person; they are the composite parts of the same human subject.

Now, who is the man of the title, the ‘snow man’? He is one for whom there is no fight for meaning (as) between the *je* and *moi*, one whose *je* is powerful enough, as it were, to make his *moi* agreeable to itself. It is only such a man who will have the mind of winter that will not think of any misery despite staying in cold a long time. The speaker of the poem perhaps hopes that staying in the cold for long would finally make the *moi* (the ‘listener’) adhere to the stipulations of the external world, thus ending the war between them—so that there would be no thinking of misery. But the practical question is, can such a man exist? Will a man ever be the ‘snow man’? When? The poem does not provide any clues or answers in this regard. Fortunately, as Cameron has it, “there is no such thing as a man purged of misery and empty of illusion; there is no such thing as a man of snow” (585), suggesting that the ‘snow man’ of the title is an illusion, an imaginary construction, “something imagined” (NA 72), made into an object of desire. The conclusion, therefore: the ‘snow man’ does not exist. But neither does exist any man who is, as Cameron says, “empty of illusion.” So, after all is said, the ‘snow man’ exists—albeit as an illusion—in the fantasy of those who find themselves in a reality conducive to illusions. This also indicates that misery will always be there; or broadly speaking, there will be emotions and feelings. In brief, human beings will always be human, or will always have the ‘hue’ of ‘man’ and not of the ‘snow.’ In a sense, therefore, “The Snow Man” does not seek anything. It simply is a statement on — rather, of — human condition: Stevens merely presents the world without, the world within, and
the split in the world within along with the *je* speculations and the inevitability of the *moi* response to the world without.

As said before, Hesla's inferential reading could be proved correct; but it is possible only if the whole poem is considered as the *moi* speculation. It will then be as if the *moi* says, "From the fact that the *je* can think of the not thinking of any misery—it can be inferred that it has a mind of winter." It is only then that Hesla's final remark comes right, i.e. the *moi* is bemused, even appalled, by the fact the *je* seems to have forgotten its humanity as to be unmoved by a winter landscape. But then the question that arises is, is the *je* not moved? The fact that it can or has a desire to 'regard' and 'behold' proves that it moves. These verbs or functions suggest a contact with the external world; Lacan's *je* is the subject that is in immediate contact with the outside world, and it conforms to that world's stipulations. Thus, the *moi* has no reason to think this way about it. But, about whom then? This is the same as asking who the 'one' in the poem is. Is he the 'snow man' of the title who, supposedly, has a mind of winter? If yes, why is he referred to so obliquely? And if he has a mind of winter, he cannot possibly be a human being for there is no human being empty of illusions or without misery—inhuman, in short. In any case, this leads to equating the 'one' with the 'snow man,' as Bloom has done (59). But he quotes him with the 'listener' as well. If it were possible to equate them like this, why did Stevens toil at all to use different significations? He could have, in that case, straightaway started the poem with just about any singular personal pronoun and abided by it till the end of the poem. The heart of the matter is that the 'one' keeps substituting in its place the speaker of the poem, the 'listener' and the 'snow man,' thus complicating the poem's dialectic beyond hopes of satisfactory reading.

In fact, no amount of such investigation would suffice unless one sees the problem that Stevens poses. It is a problem that has no solution but one in which Stevens was indeed interested. Plainly stated, the problem is: who speaks? It interested Lacan, too. Both the poet and psychoanalyst problematized the question of the speaker. For a better understanding of the problem, it would be necessary to see Lacan's *Schema L* through which he delineates the human subject. He presented it in the 1954-55 seminar on "The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis" (see figure 1). Lacan tells us that there are two subjects, S and Other, "each provided with two objects, the ego or *moi* and the other" (*Écrits* 139). The *moi*, in fact, is both subject and an object of its own experiences, the other and the Other being the sources of the experiences. The
Other—with ‘O’ in the uppercase—indicates the unconscious, and the other—with ‘o’ in the lowercase—represents the outside world of actual objects and things with which the moi seeks to identify itself, and the S denotes the subject of speech, the je.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 1: Schema L*

Both S and the other are imaginarily related with the moi; yet, one can see from the diagram that the S is not directly related with it but through the agency of the other, hence the je is an other or an-other to the moi. The domain of the imaginary is represented by the broken lines, that of the unconscious by the solid lines. The broken lines originate at points where the unconscious and the conscious may be differentiated; their brokenness itself probably indicates “the unconscious acting indirectly” upon conscious activities and discourse (ERS 3). The relation between moi and other is part of both conscious and unconscious domains since it is the imaginary activity that is responsible for the other’s coming to be as the unconscious, which Lacan names the Other; thus, later, the other catalyzes the Other’s impact upon the moi (ERS 3). The Other, therefore, is of capital importance.

The other “has a very close relation to the ego, which can be superimposed on it.” But the Other is the aim of the subject’s speech; it is never achieved since he always attains the other “through reflection” (seminar II 244). This is what happens in “The Snow Man” and “A Dish of Peaches in Russia.” In the former, the ‘One’ who is supposed to have a mind of winter is aimed at, but it is the ‘listener’ as the other that is attained in the end; in the latter, the one who “speaks” despite the speaker of the poem is
sought, but what is achieved at the end are the "peaches" and "curtains" as "ferocities" that "tear / One self from another."

It has been said earlier that "The Snow Man" keeps the speaker in hiding. Even though the present analysis has so far assumed that the *je* is the speaker and the *moi* the 'listener,' yet such watertight distinction will not do. Because, as already seen, Hesla's inferential reading cannot be dismissed — precisely because he shows that the speaker and the 'listener' may not be distinguished — even though his final comment on the poem, already quoted, creates confusion. His inferential model for reading the poem leads us to believe that the *moi* speaks the whole poem, whereas the present analysis involves the *je* also into the act of speaking. This is a catch-22. It is difficult, in fact, impossible, to get out of it; what can be done at best is to change our very goal to knowing the nature of the whole imbroglio and thus to understand why we face this impossible situation. In order to achieve this goal, it would be worthwhile to make a tour de force, which is not really so, and see what light "A Dish of Peaches" can shed on the problem at hand.

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 very first couplet resists the intelligence: how can one possibly 'taste' anything with one's 'whole body' (the foregrounding of the "whole body" is unmistakable) when the function of each sense is peculiar to particular body parts? We learn that the "I," presumably the poem's speaker, has a body. If this "I," with a concrete
physical existence, is speaking, then why does he ask, out of context as it were, the question “Who speaks?” This question occurs immediately after the very first sentence spoken by the “I,” who has begun speaking the poem and is now interrupted, suddenly. This is interesting indeed: is the first sentence spoken by the answer to the ‘who’ of that question? And thus, then, is there someone else who is listening to what that ‘I’ says, and then asks the question? If it is the listener who asks that question, then he too speaks in the poem; thus, the poem’s reader is in for expecting some kind of dialogue that might take place at some stage. To his amazement there is no dialogue in the poem; to his confusion, the poet does not use quotation marks anywhere in the poem that began on a dramatic note. The reader wonders whether it is a dramatic monologue. After that surprising question in the poem’s second line, the ‘I’ resumes his speech, however. And the question appears in the seventh line again. But this time it is accompanied by a realization regarding the identity of the ‘who’ of “Who speaks?” The reader’s confusion is not resolved yet: who realizes? The speaker of the poem (if it is a dramatic monologue)? Or the listener-questioner?

As if to compound the matter, this realization is itself enigmatic: “But it must be that I...” Instead of a second or third person pronoun, there is the first person singular pronoun, suggesting that the ‘who’ of the question is the ‘I.’ In that case, who is the ‘I’ that began speaking the poem? The pronoun ‘that’ identifies yet distinguishes the following ‘I’ and the listener-questioner. Fortunately for the reader, there is a reference to two selves in the last line of the poem: “One self from another...;” and the penultimate line has a reference to tearing. The reader is now free to conclude that there are two selves involved in the poem’s dialectic. Yet, the problem of who speaks and who listens remains unanswered, since the listener speaks, too.

If it is assumed that there is only one speaker who speaks the whole poem, yet the fact that he encounters someone else’s speech even as he himself speaks cannot be ignored. The absence of quotation marks may be a good reason to believe that the poem is a monologue, but the answer to the speaker’s question of “Who speaks?” clearly points out to someone else (“that” in “that I”) as one who speaks, or even, as one who began speaking the poem. In any case, the reader finds himself in an inescapable labyrinth.

To approach the problem in a better way, fragmenting the poem’s first half into two parts might help, thus:
With my whole body I taste these peaches
I touch them and smell them...
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? 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part (a)</th>
<th>Part (b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With my whole body I taste these peaches I touch them and smell them... 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.</td>
<td>Who speaks? 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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The assumption is that part (a) is the speech in problem, and that part (b) is an inquiry into the speaker's identity, which is revealed in it. It is important to note the occurrence of the question in (b) immediately after one strain in (a). Apparently, both the parts seem to be spoken by different persons or speaking subjects. The questioner, in (b), realizes that the speaker of (a) is a part of himself ("that I"); the 'that,' however, indicates the distinction between the questioner in (b) and the speaker of (a). The questioner treats the speaker of (a) like a second or even third person even though he locates himself into the speaker. Lacan asks, "...where am I situated if not in the 'tu' [the familiar form of 'you'] from which I eye them?" (Écrits 299). Thus, the questioner, in realizing that the speaker of (a) is "that I," realizes that (a) is his own speech, too. It may also be noticed that his question is not answered by anybody else but by himself. Now, the question is, cannot the speaker of (a) hear that question? If not, why? Lacan would answer that the Other, the subject of the unconscious, speaks: "...[the] reply to the question, 'who is speaking?', when it is the subject of the unconscious that is at issue...cannot come from that subject [since] he does not know what he is saying, or even if he is speaking..." (Écrits 299). That is, the Other does not answer the question since he neither knows what he speaks nor whether he himself speaks. This is because he only speaks, or as Ragland-Sullivan says, "speaks all the time" (197). In short, it could be the Other who speaks the poem, which is punctuated by the listener's question and his answer to it.

Now, who could be the listener? The fact that he listens to the Other and maintains his objectivity from the Other should be enough to believe that he is the moi.
Lacan’s moi “is not the subject of the unconscious...” (ERS 3); instead, in the very act of listening to the Other, it “accepts itself as an object” of the Other’s speech (ERS 149). And, in accepting its own objectlike status with regard to the Other, it also objectifies the Other since it tries “to avoid seeing its origin of identity in the Other” (ERS 149). This is why the listener in the poem repeatedly uses the pronoun ‘that’: “that I, / That animal, that Russian, that exile...”

For all this discussion, however, it is again a categorization that has been rejected earlier; such watertight compartmentalization immediately vanishes, for even a casual glance at the lines in part(a) reveals that this is what is properly called the process of identification with the other, as Booker also observes (494). The “whole body” and of the “I” is involved in ‘tasting,’ ‘touching,’ ‘smelling,’ ‘absorbing,’ and ‘seeing’ the other (i.e. the peaches). That is, the body, the self and almost all senses are involved in the act. This is a movement that seeks to bridge the abyss between the ‘self’ and the other as the ‘self’ identifies, merges itself with the other. The moi being the narcissistic subject of identification tries to satisfy its narcissistic desires through identification with the other. In other words, one can certainly say that part(a) has to be moi speech. However, the moi is the “nonverbal agent of specularity and identifications” (ERS 43). Thus, one might impute the identification process in part(a) to the moi; but since it is “nonverbal,” the question is how to account for the perfect language that is available for reading. Well, as quoted a while ago, it is the je who seeks to “translate” the moi — obviously, into the particular language spoken by other men around. Besides, though the unconscious is structured like a language, as Lacan kept repeating (e.g. Écrits 234), the grammatical rules of a language spoken by men may not necessarily be applied to the Other’s messages.19 In brief, if the moi and the Other do not know the English language, it must be the je who is speaking the poem.

Thus, the problem of the speaker persists; the analyst cannot get over the inherent discontinuities of the speech in the poem. Yet, these discontinuities point to the unconscious and to the intrasubjective intersubjectivity — even as this intersubjectivity has the last line in the poem. The essential characteristic of the speech in the poem is that it shifts in the economy of intersubjectivity from one subject to another to yet another — all of whom belong to the “I,” or to only one person, rather to one “body” since the traditional concepts of the self, the subject, and the person are rendered invalid here.
Lacan took note of these observations and eventually introduced the concept of the ‘fading subject’:

It follows that the place of the ‘inter-said’ (inter-dit), which is the ‘intra-said’ (intra-dit) of a between-two-subjects, is the very place in which the transparency of the classical subject is divided and passes through the effects of ‘fading’...

(Écrits 299)

The very structure of “A Dish of Peaches” attests to “the structure of the [human] subject as discontinuity” (Écrits 299), owing to the ‘cuts’ or ‘interruptions’ in the poem-assignifying-chain. What can be said of the speaker of the poem at best is that it is the ‘fading subject’ that speaks it; this is the reason why there is a difficulty in identifying who speaks the poem, or why it is not possible to make a precise distinction among the je, moi, and the Other. The poem’s dialectic is interrupted and compounded by the Other, who speaks, rather only speaks, or as Ragland-Sullivan says, “speaks all the time” in the sense that it leaves nothing outside its domain and controls the je and moi discourses (see Écrits 163; see also ERS 3). The moi is better off as compared to the je, for it maintains its objectlike status or separate existence; however the je not only participates in both the unconscious and conscious systems but also “translates” the moi while adhering to the “cultural stipulations.” Thus, the je has to make tremendous amount of adjustments and therefore is — shall we say — inconstant. It is to this self which is projected in the outside world, owing to its inconstant nature, that a psychologist has referred to it as a “social chameleon” (Byrne in Baron & Byrne 168).

Perhaps, now the stage is prepared to go back to “The Snow Man” which is not as conspicuously discontinuous as “A Dish of Peaches.” But, this very less discontinuous nature of the former that, paradoxically, makes it more problematic. The reader has to discern the ‘fading effect’ that takes place as the poem progresses. It begins with a rigidity of outlook even in the adversity of the winter landscape. The ‘must’ that is explicit in line 1, becomes implicit in line 4, and by the time the poem reaches line 7 it becomes impossible to be sure that it exists there. It is here that the rigidity of outlook is felt to have melted; the cause is obviously the thought of ‘misery.’ The world without, once again, is seen as one normally sees it. And with the last stanza returns a sort of emotional illness, and inevitability. The poem’s progress is clear, then: from a fantasy or
illusion through a realization to reality; or to use psychoanalytic terminology, from aggressiveness through regression to frustration. In fact, one could say that the regression begins from the title and stops at the end of the poem. Lacan defines regression as "the actualization in the discourse of the phantasy relations reconstituted by an ego at each stage in the decomposition of its structure" (Wilden 14). The key words here are ‘phantasy relations’ and ‘decomposition,’ which mark the poem’s beginning (title included) and the rest of the poem’s gradually degenerating rhetoric. The psychoanalyst further adds that "in language [regression] manifests itself only by inflections, by turns of phrase, by ‘trebuchements si legiers’ that...cannot go beyond the artifice of ‘baby talk’ in the adult" (Wilden 14). The segments of “The Snow Man” are to be read with inflections owing to the “must,” the imperatives, and the suddenness of “and not to think;” and the poem’s first half resembles a fantastic “baby talk;” besides, there are two turns of phrase worth remembering: “mind of winter” and “nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.”

The ego, the *moi* of Lacan, is the locus of these phenomena. In a bid to identify with the other (here, the winter landscape) it creates the ‘Snow Man,’ a “monumental construct of [its] narcissism” (Wilden 9). However, it is unaware of the fact that in creating this imaginary construct it has also alienated its desire and placed into the ‘Snow Man.’ It then goes about seeking a satisfaction for that alienated desire: “One must have a mind of winter / To regard...” and “…[must] have been cold a long time / To behold...” But, Lacan warns, “the more [the alienated desire] is elaborated, the more profound the alienation from its *jouissance* becomes for the subject;” this breeds frustration, a “frustration by an object in which [the *moi’s*] desire is alienated” (Wilden 11). Thus, both poems end with what cannot be referred to by anything except frustration. In both the *moi* seeks something; to be the ‘snow man’ in one, and to know who speaks — and also to see itself in the Other (“that I”)—in the other. What will happen if it succeeds in achieving what it seeks? It will become the ‘snow man’ and will become one with the Other. However, it is nothing but a metaphorical death of the ‘self,’ for in Lacan’s thought the ‘self’ is merely an effect that the *moi* is responsible for creating. Thanks to the endings of the poems on a note of frustration for the *moi*, who thus is able to maintain its separate existence.

In his “Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” which is a revised version of the famous 1953 seminar at the Institutio di Psicologia della
Universita di Roma that is popularly called “Discourse de Rome,” Lacan suggests that aggressiveness follows frustration (see Wilden 11-12; *Écrits* 42); that is, frustration by an object in which the *moi*’s desire is alienated leads to aggressiveness; and further adds,

> The aggressiveness which the subject will experience at this point has nothing to do with animal aggressiveness of frustrated desire. Such a reference, which most people are content with, actually masks another [desire] which is less agreeable for each and all of us: the aggressiveness of the slave whose response to the frustration of his labor is a desire for death.

(parentheses mine; Wilden 12; *Écrits* 42)

Both Stevens poems begin with an elaboration of an alienated desire, hence with a sort of aggressiveness, which is followed by a gradual regression. This clearly implies that some kind of frustration must have caused that aggressiveness. Thus, in fact, one could conclude that it was the frustration that is revealed only at the ends that initiated both poems on a note of aggressiveness. If the aggressiveness of a subject reflects “a desire for death,” as is obvious from what Lacan says in the passage quoted above, then the desire to have a mind of winter, to know who speaks, i.e. to identify with the Other, is a desire for death. This is not a biological death, but metaphorical, since that identification, as such, brings the *moi* another-ness, its separate existence, to an end; with this must come the end of the sense of ‘self.’ The psychoanalyst further comments, “It is therefore readily conceivable how this aggressiveness may respond to any intervention which, by denouncing the imaginary intentions of the discourse, dismantles the object constructed by the subject to satisfy them” (Wilden 12; Ecrits 42). The ‘imaginary intentions’ in both poems are obvious: identification with the ‘snow man,’ and with that radically Other ‘I.’ the ‘intervention’ in “Snow Man” is caused by the thought of ‘misery,’ and by the ‘curtains’ and ‘peaches’ in “A Dish of Peaches”:

> 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.
The result is the 'dismantling' of the imaginary objects constructed: the 'Snow Man' vanishes, and the "Russian" self is not even mentioned in the bottom half of the concerned poem except perhaps obliquely in that unspecific "one self from another." Stevens does not directly say anything about how the aggressiveness responds at these 'interventions,' but frustration is very obvious after the points of intervention. At the point of 'intervention,' the subject's relation with the Other "is interrupted," the Other's presence is withdrawn, and "all sorts of variously intolerable phenomena of tearing apart, of pain, break out," leading to frustration (Seminar III 127). However, there is a consolation in the very frustration. It may be observed that it is the thought of 'misery' that brings the 'listener' into focus; and that the 'drifting of the curtains' separates one self from another. To be precise, it is the moi who is separated, brought into view; in fact, restored, for it is only through such intervention that the moi, with whom lies our sense of 'self,' regains its 'objectlike' status, it another-ness, restoring the 'self' by barring or deferring its 'desire for death.'

As the two poems are being compared, the 'Snow Man' and the Other have been juxtaposed in the preceding paragraph. The temptation to compare these two objects of desire is unavoidable. Scanning Lacan's views on the Other gives a hope that the comparison might yield fruit. Lacan refers to the Other as "the mechanical god" who "understands absolutely nothing about human needs" (ERS 197; Seminar III 127). The desire to have a mind of winter in order not to think of any misery is a desire to be (one with) the 'Snow Man,' who, supposedly, does not think of any misery since he has a mind of winter. Thus, it is possible to persist with the thought that the 'Snow Man' has no feelings or emotions, that he is purged of illusions and emotions and feelings. Does not sometimes our circumstance force us to think of god as having no emotions or feelings, inhuman? Witness Milton's "On His Blindness" — why Milton, Stevens too calls him a "Russian" and an "animal." Although Lacan emphasizes the Other as non-deceptive for a large part, in Seminar III, he does speak of its deceptive nature since it has its own subjectivity:

The hub of the function of speech is the subjectivity of the Other, that is to say, the fact that the Other is essentially he who is capable, like the subject, of convincing and lying...

(Seminar III 64)
Have not the ‘Snow Man’ and the answer to the question ‘who speaks?’ deceived the moi first by convincing it of their own presences and then suddenly tearing it apart from them, by promising and then repudiating what it sought to achieve—namely, an identification with the Other?

If — in fact, they do — the ‘Snow Man’ and the ‘Russian’ represent the Other, a comment by Safouan will justify Stevens’ poetic rendition of the whole imbroglio as observed in the two poems:

...The subject may take pleasure in the desire of the Other. He may respond to it, or believe he is responding to it, by minting his own signs, the gifts by virtue of which he may believe himself to be loved. But the analytic attitude is designed to suspend his certitudes on this subject, and the analyst’s interpretation, when the opportunity offers, is designed to show him what Lacan calls ‘vanity’ of his gifts, or in other words, their regressive character. To this extent, the analytic way is that which leads towards anxiety.23

Both Stevens poems are expressions of the desire of/for the Other in ‘signs’ that reveal a love of/for the Other. However, the poet has structured the poems in a way that manifests the regressive character of the ‘signs,’ the signs of the moi ‘certitude’ of the Other’s love for itself. And finally, as said before, the poems end on a note of frustration, alienation from the Other, that bred anxiety — so that they begin with the aggressiveness commensurate with that anxiety. Thus, one comes at a stage where the dilemma of whether to call Stevens a ‘patient’ or ‘analyst’ stands over the reader-critic.

One of the prominent features of the speech in these poems is the ‘fading effect,’ as noted before. Lacan, in order to bring this effect into a sort of definition that would be an answer (not the answer since the only certainty of answer to the question of the speaker is provided by the Other) to the question ‘who speaks?’, says that “the subject speaks to himself with his ego” (his emphases); that is, the subject speaks to himself and along with his ego. This is because “it’s the subject’s ego that normally speaks to another, and of the subject, the subject S in the third person” (seminar III 14); but, since the ego is non-verbal, it is the subject of speech, the je or S, that ‘translates’ and directs the ego’s discourse to another. Thus, it is that the je speaks to another with the ego.
Lacan often uses the word 'another' to refer to the ego because of its identity as dependent on the other, without which there is no ego. The ego's division into 'self' and 'another' is thus clear. This is how the ego ('self') speaks through the agency of the je or S to itself (as 'another'); or, the S speaks along with the ego-as-'self' to the ego-as-'another.' This is why the enigmatic formulation that "the subject speaks to himself with his ego."

In a psychotic case, as opposed to the neurotic, imaginary relations gain prominence and create problems in the simultaneity of discourse. Lacan refers to such imaginary relations as "certain elementary phenomena" and says that hallucinations are the most characteristic form of these phenomena. In such a case, the subject (S) is "completely identified...with [the] ego," so that the triptycity implicit in "the subject speaks to himself with his ego" changes to a duplicity, making it "the subject literally speaks with his ego" (seminar III 14), where the 'subject' represents the je and the ego-as-'self' as "completely identified," and the 'ego' represents ego-as-'another'. In "The Snow Man" the 'snow man' itself is the hallucination, but the poem does not seem to have identified the speaking subject with the ego owing to the fact that the ego is referred to in the third person, as "the listener," and not in the second person as is implied in "the subject literally speaks with his ego," which characterizes psychosis. The reason why the subject of "The Snow Man" cannot be called psychotic may be found in Lacan's comment; he says, "The moment the hallucination appears in the real, that is, accompanied by the sense of [the hallucination’s] reality,..., the subject literally speak with his ego, and it’s as if a third party, his lining, were speaking and commenting on his activity" (seminar III 14). The hallucination of the poem is not there in it but above, in the title; besides, the sense of reality the poem reflects is that of the external world, the other, and not that of the existence of the 'snow man,' the hallucination. And, as long as the other is there, existing to be 'regarded,' 'beholded,' or loved by the ego without excessive imaginary relation, and as long as it imparts 'misery' by frustrating that love, there is neurosis, not psychosis; indeed, reading the first six or six and a half lines of the poem do convince the reader of the subject's normalcy in comparison with clear psychosis. Of course, if one believes that the je of the subject in the poem is identified with his ego as-'self' (the 'listener') and that it speaks with the ego-as-'another' (the 'one'), and that — weather within or above the poem — the 'snow man' does exist as reality for the poem's subject, (and this is what Hesla's interpretation and his reading of
the poem suggest), then it may be proved to be a case of psychosis. From this viewpoint, it may be seen that the *je* + *ego-as-‘self* (or the ‘listener’) is commenting on the *ego-as-‘another* (or, the ‘one’) “as if a third party.” Lacan believed that in a case of psychosis, the subject becomes the object of the Other’s speech. In case of the poem’s subject what speaks to him is *je* + *ego-as-‘self*, which could be reformulated as *S* + *ego-as-‘self*, where the *S* represents both the *je* and the *Es*, i.e. the *je* and the Other. This is why it is possible to say that the poem may be an instance of psychosis. Thus, we have two conflicting interpretations. What we can do at the most owing to this ambiguity is to say that the subject of the poem is on the verge of psychosis. The same ambiguity can be observed in “A Dish of Peaches,” where the questioner is the *ego-as-‘self* and the “I”, as distinct from “that I”, could be the *S* + *ego-as-‘another*. The ambiguity of the answer to the question ‘who speaks?’ cannot be resolved satisfactorily. Both the poet and the psychoanalyst preserve it. Lacan thus says,

> The Other is...the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks to him who hears, that which is said by the one being already the reply, the other deciding to hear it whether the one has or has not spoken.

(Écrits 141)

From the point of view of literary criticism the author is the locus in which is constituted the critic’s ‘I’ who speaks to him who hears, that which is said by the one being already the reply, the other deciding to hear it whether the one has or has not spoken. In a beautiful use of the pronoun ‘one’ Lacan already makes it impossible to clearly see who the ‘one’ is—the *je* or the Other? Similarly, the reader of a work of literary art decides to hear as an other whether the ‘one’ has or has not spoken, where the ‘one’ could be himself-as-a-critic or the author of the work or both simultaneously.

Having realized the “dialogic relationship” that insists in the economy of the human subject (Booker 495), Stevens sees it imaginatively in the form of romance in “Re-statement of Romance” (*CP* 146), thereby abandoning the regressive character of the discourse that led to anxiety in the two poems discussed above. The term ‘romance’ has had varying meanings for literary generations. From Stevens’ point of view, its meaning may be aligned with that of Wordsworth for whom the mind of man was a favorite haunt, the main region of his song. But Stevens’ approach gives of the Coleridge
of *Biographia Literaria.* This is to suggest that although his predecessors had given the term a psychological touch Stevens extends the scope of its connotations, the reason why he calls it a ‘re-statement’:

The night knows nothing of the chants of night.
It is what it is as I am what I am:
And in perceiving this I best perceive myself

And you. Only we two may interchange
Each in the other what each has to give.
Only we two are one, not you and night,

Nor night and I, but you and I alone,
So much alone, so deeply by ourselves,
So far beyond the casual solitudes,

That night is only the background of our selves,
Supremely true each to its separate self,
In the pale light that each upon the other throws.

(*CP* 146)

For romance — as between lovers — to take place, two living organisms is a necessity (even if both of them belong to the inanimate world, they are treated as animate), and for it to flourish a non-congenial background is more conducive. Without such a background there would be no romance, perhaps, since it must depend upon ‘a thing of opposite nature’ just as “day [depends] on night” (*CP* 392). ‘Day’ is almost always ‘desire’ in Stevens (*CP* 167), but ‘night’ has several connotations. It is a threatening and consuming darkness in “Domination of Black” (*CP* 8-9) and “Valley Candle” (*CP* 51); it is “sleep” in *The Blue Guitar* (*CP* 167); it is ‘beautiful’ in “God Is Good. It Is a Beautiful Night” (*CP* 285), since the “brown moon” (i.e. the Other; for this interpretation, see the discussion of “Study of Images II” in section II of the next chapter) as God appeared in the ‘night’ as he does in *Chocorua to Its Neighbor* (*CP* 296-302). In “Re-statement,” however, it is neither as threatening nor as good, but is met with
a sort of indifference characteristic in a choice of one of two cogent things. In any case, What it signifies in Stevens is best expressed in “A Word with Jose Rodriguez-Feo.”

The Night

Makes everything grotesque. Is it because

Night is the nature of man’s interior world?

(CP 333)

Or, if it is a question, hence uncertain, there is a certainty about the night’s nature in “Prelude to Objects”: “night is the color of a self” (CP 194). If the ‘night’ is merely man’s interior world, then the question is how it can be conducive to the ‘romance’ of the ‘I’ and ‘you’ of the poem. In what way does it oppose that ‘romance’? Obviously, by being unaware of the ‘I’ and ‘you,’ as the poem’s first line suggests. The ignorance of the ‘night’ further suggests that the ‘romance,’ the commerce between ‘I’ and ‘you,’ is seen as knowledge. However, this knowledge, this life (“chants”) is enveloped by the ‘night,’ so that unless — to use the words of the Jose Rodriguez-Feo poem — one “enter[s] boldly that interior world” (CP 333), one will not have the knowledge it contains and conceals. The ‘I’ declares, “It is what it is as I am what I am,” thus confessing his ignorance of both the ‘night’ and himself. Emulating God’s answer to Moses, “I am that I am,” he elevates both to the level of the Judaeo-Christian God. The difference between the ‘that’ in God’s answer and the ‘what’ in the confession of the ‘I’ is crucial, however. God knew or knows the full meaning of ‘I am,’ whereas the question ‘what am I?’ exists in the poem’s line in — as Lacan would say — an “inverted form.”

The difference between the certainty in God’s answer to Moses and the uncertain assertion in Stevens’ line is suggestive of the lack of full knowledge of ‘what I am,’ of the human-ness of the ‘I,’ of the ‘bad time’ the human being is caught in: Stevens asks and answers in a late poem about the bearings of man,

What has he? What he has he has. But what?

(CP 426)
On the same lines, Stevens’ question in the inverted from seems to both ask and answer the question without really answering, thus:

What am I? What I am I am. But what?

At the time of writing “Re-statement,” Stevens could not be as assertive as he looks in “In a Bad Time.” Although in both, ‘I am what I am’ and ‘what I am I am,’ the question of ‘what am I?’ exists, yet the difference in the syntax of the two statements polarizes the meanings. The significative term, or the term of significance, changes the meaning altogether: ‘what I am’ and ‘I am,’ the significative terms with which both sentences attain meaning, if there is any, suggest that the latter, i.e. ‘What I am I am,’ is more emphatic for all its ‘poverty’ in comparison with the former. In the space during the gap of time between the two poems Stevens might have overcome to some extent the question of ‘what am I?’ so that in the late poem the question of ‘what have I?’ becomes prominent. But at the moment “his poverty” (CP 427) is of an answer to ‘what am I?’ But all the same, the “Re-statement” does assert that ‘I am’ and that the ‘night’ is. The ‘night’ is because the I is not God, for whom it is not since he does not have the problem of “What am I?” However, being human, Stevens has to search for an answer in this ‘night’ of ignorance.

What is heartening though is the perception of this very ignorance, which must be removed for the ‘I’ to be able to assert himself like God. Yet, the poet does not completely deracinate the ‘night,’ he merely reduces it to “background” in the final stanza. And this is no lesser achievement since the very distinction he is able to make between the ‘night’ and himself is sufficient, perhaps because it is the best that humans could do. It is the perception of this difference that enables the poet to best perceive his self, and he immediately begins to concentrate on the self. At the very thought of the self, and within the gap between the first two stanzas, he perceives yet another presence — of the ‘you.’ A progress in this introspection reveals an introretroactive presence of the ‘you.’

In “The Snow Man”, this presence was vaguely perceived or specified; in “A Dish of Peaches” it was recognized, but as “that I” and not as ‘you.’ These two poems were perhaps reluctant to accept the crass otherness of that presence because of which they could not establish a relationship with it. In “Re-statement,” however, the ‘I’
(presumably the poet) not only realizes its otherness but is also able to establish a relationship with that presence, which is the Other. This relationship, this commerce between 'I' and 'you,' is what Stevens calls 'romance.' Since this discussion involves the issues of (social?) relationship and the unconscious, one would do better to approach a passage in Lacan where he writes,

...[I]n establishing...the Oedipus Complex as the central motivation of the unconscious, [Freud] recognized this unconscious as the agency of the laws on which marriage alliances and kinship are based. This is why I can say to you now that the motives of the unconscious are limited — a point on which Freud was quite clear from the outset and never altered his view — to sexual desire. Indeed, it is essentially on sexual relations — by ordering them according to the laws of preferential marriage alliances and forbidden relations—that the first combinatorial for exchanges of women between nominal lineages is based, in order to develop in an exchange of gifts and in an exchange of master-words the fundamental commerce and concrete discourse on which human societies are based.

(Écrits 141-42)

Although the psychoanalyst here speaks of human societies and sexual desire as inextricably linked up, one has to approach the passage cautiously since he did not accept the theory of Oedipus Complex as Freud proposed it; for Lacan, it is a function set into motion as a result of the alienation from the mother and the introduction of what he calls the "third term" as the father or the phallus, and has nothing to do with sexual desire (see ERS 267-68). Thus, to read this passage in Lacanian spirit, one has to say that the loss of (the sense of) unity with the mother, this otherness, is what motivates the unconscious; this is what starts building the Other, the term that unites the sense of alienation and otherness and written also as m/ Other or as (m)Other. Human beings are thus, right from the birth, caught up in an eternal struggle to eradicate their alienation. But, since the birth itself and the subsequent imposition of language on the child ensure its entry into the symbolic order of language and culture, the human desire for the unity remains insatiable.

The meek, because inevitable, acceptance of the symbolic order leaves the struggle for that unity entirely on the psychic level, for even sexual relationship with the mother cannot take one back to the pre-natal state as unity. So when Lacan says that "the motives of the unconscious are limited...to sexual desire," one must not overlook how he
qualifies his comment: “This is why I can say to you now...;” the ‘now’ suggesting the temporality of the comment. It is, of course, true that sexual desire is one of the motives of the unconscious; yet, Lacan would impute it to something more fundamental—the lack of that mythy ‘unity.’ The struggle for the said unity is compensated by the struggle through the agency of the moi by making the world outside its alter ego (or, the other), the purpose of which is to attain that unity, also referred to as jouissance. This search for jouissance is indeed the hub of human relationships. But these extrose relationships are only one way of seeking that jouissance. Besides, apart from “Owl’s Clover,” which Stevens preferred not to include in the Collected Poems, the poet does not show keen interest in social issues. And it is probable that the external world may not be congenial always.

What if the world without does not conform to the moi desire of making it its alter ego? Or, to use Stevens’ language, what if the moi fails to make “air the mirror of [it]self”? if it cannot find itself in the outside world “as in a glass” (CP 383)? This is when one becomes introvert, since the only way that remains to seek jouissance is to look within. This is when the introse relationships develop, and are accentuated. There are many terms to refer to a person who thus becomes introvert or an “introspective voyager” (CP 29): schizophrenic, paranoiac, hysterical, neurotic, delusional, psychotic etc. Lovers of Stevens may not like the idea of calling him by any such name; however, it is impossible to reject outright that much of his poetry reveals various psychic phenomena observed in persons suffering from some mental disorder. The possibility of Stevens suffering from some mental disorder has already been verified in the chapter ‘Prolegomena,' but one needs to go deeper. Jahan Ramzani imputes the “morbid interests of Harmonium” to the three deaths in the Stevens family (570); referring to Freud he makes another but more important comment that “the melancholic mourner,” which the Stevens of Harmonium certainly is, “is more likely to grieve over an unconscious than a conscious loss” (569). Manqué or lack is Lacan’s word for such unconscious loss. This occurs when the ‘mirror’ of the outside world is shattered; the shock thereof penetrates the unconscious too. However, this lack develops not only morbid interests but gives rise to all kinds of interests in the hope of filling it (e.g. fetishism, voyeurism, day-dreaming, hallucinations etc.) or creates a complex of emotions and feelings akin to mistrust and phobias. No human being is an exception to these phenomena; it is only that in certain cases they are raised to a heightened level as compared to the so-called normal person,
and we call them patients. Thus, the variety of interests and the complex emotions and feelings — accentuated as they are — of *Harmonium* owes their impetus to some lack in the poet himself; they are, moreover, further pursued through the rest of the poetry. These things need not offend Stevens’ lovers since in spite of the early psychic abnormality he was a better psychoanalyst himself; if he did not recuperate himself, he came very close to doing so as his later poetry testifies. Abandoning the pathological introversion his poetry shows a positive movement towards finding what will suffice to make the outside world the mirror of his *moi*. If *Harmonium* reflects unhealthiness it is because Stevens had become “too rigidly attached either to reality or to unconscious processes” — this is how a practicing psychoanalyst accounts for the “unhealthy” state of the psyche (Feirstein 437). Stevens begins to create ‘health’ after *Harmonium*, with *The Blue Guitar*, to be more precise. It is no coincidence that the processes of creating ‘health’ begins with this poem; Feirstein points out that Susan Den’s model of ‘health’ is “the artist in the act of creation” (437). One would do well to recall the pose of Picasso’s guitarist, “bending over” his guitar “to improvise” (Patke 81), in the act of creation. In fact, Lacan emphasizes the reconstitution of the psychic patient’s imaginary order if he is to recover, and ‘the blue guitar’ in Stevens represents imagination—again, it is not a coincidence that the poet’s view of the imagination comes close to Lacan’s theory of the imaginary order.

When the relationship with the other, the outside world, is disturbed, the subject undergoes a mental upheaval, and is forced to look ‘within.’ Thus, the ‘you’ of “Restatement” cannot be found in the world without. It reminds one of the famous case of President Schreber in which both Freud and Lacan showed great interest (See Freud’s “Case of Paranoia” *SE* 12: 1-82; and Lacan’s Seminar III). Lacan locates Schreber’s crisis in his inability to become a father, in the lack in him of the signifier *being a father* (seminar III 293). It is indeed an effect created by his inability to find himself as part of the cultural exchange, i.e. copulation with a woman and becoming a father. Fortunately, Stevens did not have this problem. The signifier that seems to have been lost in him must be the Name-of-the-Father; this has to be imputed to the great disturbance that occurred in his family over his marriage with Elsie Moll. 1908 to 1912 was a period of crisis in the poet’s life, and his *Harmonium* was composed between 1912/3 and 1923. If the deaths of his father (1911) and mother (1912) and sister (1919) are responsible for the poet’s interest in death that *Harmonium* reflects then certainly there must be other things in the
volume that owe themselves to some other things that happened during that period of crisis; it is necessary to explore those things, for they kept fascinating Stevens throughout his life. If not all, most of the secrets of his poetry, thus, may be found in *Harmonium* years. It would be a mistake to say that he had no problem because he became “the most outstanding surety-claims man in the business” as Heard tells us; his success in the business could be looked upon as an attempt to answer the question ‘How to Live, What to Do?’ that he faced (*CP* 125). This question is one that leads to the question of ‘being,’ to the signifier ‘to be.’ His search for an answer to the question ‘what am I?’ is part of the question of ‘being.’

So far the what of Stevens’ problem has been discussed; the how of it remains to be explored:

Lacan says with reference to Schreber, who lacked the signifier *being a father*, “In order for procreation to have its full sense there must also be, in both sexes, an apprehension, a relation with the experience of death, which gives the term to procreate its full sense. Moreover, paternity and death are two signifiers that Freud links in relation to obsessionals” (seminar III 293). The same can be applied to almost any term or signifier precisely because death forms an opposition to everything that *is* and is symbolized by the human being. Thus, for ‘to live’ to have its full meaning one must have a relation with the experience of death. Schreber’s wife’s spontaneous abortions were his closest relation with death (Seminar III 308), and the three deaths in the Stevens family were the poet’s closest relation with it. One thus might feel that they knew the significance of what it is to be. However, by “an apprehension, a relation with the experience of death,” Lacan is merely suggesting a vague understanding of death. A closer relation with it — for example, the death of a loved one — is likely to strip one of even the vague understanding of it, for then one finds it very difficult to account for the death; one would not grieve much over the death of a loved one if one could account for it. This accounting is nothing but a symbolization of death, “an apprehension” of the signifier death, an understanding thereof. In other words, it is the loss of the meaning of the signifier death that makes one grieve so much as to let it penetrate one’s unconscious (repression) and dominate oneself from that seat. We know there were races who celebrated death because they accounted for it as an entry into a better world, or heaven, as a closeness with God. Even today, the concept of ‘fiadeen’ in Islam, meaning an entry into a happy world of Allah’s grace after one’s death in religious action, is respected by
the community; the recorded messages or communications retrieved from the pilots or persons involved in the destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Center bear out the proof. Accounting for death this way does alleviate the grief of death — not only for those who willingly involve themselves in these actions but also for their relatives. For them who fail to 'apprehend' and account for it, even the thought or mention of it can prove baneful, since for them death has become a signifier without meaning; more deaths around such a person would make this signifier more meaningless and thus grab him by the neck as it were and rule him or her that much more forcefully. Lacan puts it thus: "...the more the signifier signifies nothing, the more indestructible it is" (Seminar III 185). Stevens' interest in death, hence in 'being' and the 'self,' suggests that it was the recurrence of death in the family that gave rise to and sustained it.

What made him ask of himself 'What am I?' is a more important question here. This is where his father's death attains its full significance; it has to do with the Oedipus Complex in the poet. Although we do not have as much knowledge of Stevens' relationship with his mother as that with his father, yet some remembrances — and the poet's mention of the mother in his poetry — shed enough light on it and are useful. Mary Sesnick says that Stevens' mother, Margaretha Stevens, "...really doted on Wallace. He was rather sick as a young child; he was rather delicate. And that is why his mother doted so... He was the delicate one; I remember mamma saying that..." (B 264). This is suggestive of Wallace's attachment with his mother. Wagner has already discussed this attachment in his article as pathological. Stevens' situation here reminds of the relationship between Gertrude and her son Paul in D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers. But, Paul's father was a moron, the reason why the son remained attached to the mother until his own death. Stevens' case is different. His father was an impressive and respected person. He was very practical as his letters to Wallace indicate. He enjoyed a respectable social standing. Wallace respected him. Thus there was no question of the resolution of the Oedipus Complex. In fact, Wallace's love affair with Elsie is the sign of its resolution, because usually the son replaces the mother with another woman in resolving the Complex. And unfortunately, it is at this important stage of Wallace's life that his father 'butted in.' As long as Garrett was giving advices, everything was alright. It was at a time when the son was acceding to virility that the father started showing signs of resistance to Wallace's attachment with Elsie. In a letter of 17 November 1907, even though by merely suggesting indirectly, Garrett wrote Wallace about how useful it
is to marry a girl from a family having ‘useful’ connections (B 259). However, Elsie came from a poor family. Wallace could have foreseen at this point of time what was coming, could have anticipated the father’s resistance to his marriage with Elsie. The relationship between Garrett and Wallace has a lot of importance from psychoanalytic point of view. It is true that they had a quarrel in 1908 over Wallace’s proposed marriage with Elsie after which they never spoke with each other again; but this does not mean that they had rivalry between them — at least, the son did not look upon his estranged relationship with his father that way. It is true that Garrett was a sort of person who would impose himself on the important decisions of his sons’ lives, decisions regarding their career and marriage, but it was the father’s love, care, and concern for his sons. Yet, his opposition to Wallace’s marriage with the girl made Garrett-Wallace relationship look like “unilateral and monstrous” to the sensitive son (Seminar III 204). Garrett’s ‘intended aggressiveness’ was one of a ‘virile [...] man’ that ‘castrates’ — Lacan tells us a story of a woman whose permanent aggressiveness developed homosexual tendencies in her son (see Œuvres 10).

Reflecting on Lacan’s thoughts now give us a different view of Garrett’s character with respect to Wallace, suggesting how much imposing a person he was. His incessant suggestions, advices — at times bordering on warnings, were perhaps part of his authoritarianism to some extent. Wallace once wrote Jerald Hatfield, “I decided to be a lawyer the same way I decided to be a Presbyterian; the same way I decided to be a Democrat. My father was a lawyer, a Presbyterian and a Democrat.” (quoted in Rehder 7). This suggests that it was the ‘way’ shown by his father that Wallace took. Rehder further adds here, “Garrett Stevens had an analogous effects on his other sons as well;” however, the father’s influence on Wallace was comparatively greater, for apart from other things both were interested in reading and writing poetry as well. With regard to the influential father, Lacan says,

The father may well have had a certain mode of relation such that the son does indeed adopt a feminine position. We are all familiar with cases of these delinquent or psychotic sons who proliferate in the shadow of a paternal personality of exceptional character, one of these social monsters referred to as venerable. They are often marked by a style of radiance and success, but in a unilateral manner, in the register of unbridled ambition or authoritarianism, sometimes of talent, of
genius. They don’t necessarily have to be a genius, have merit, or be mediocre or nasty, it’s sufficient that this be unilateral and monstrous. It is certainly not by chance that a psychopathic personality subversion, in particular, is produced in such a situation.

(Seminar III 204)

The description of the ‘father’ in this passage, more or less, suits Garrett Stevens. However, Wallace did not look upon his father the way the psychoanalyst describes the ‘father’ here: had the poet looked upon his father as an authoritarian, as behaving in a unilateral and monstrous manner, as nasty — even though he indeed behaved in this very manner with Wallace — then “a relation of rivalry, aggressiveness, fear, etc” would have appeared in his mind, whereby the son could have turned a blind’s eye to the father; there would have developed a “specular confrontation” between them, resulting into “reciprocal exclusion” of each from the other’s imaginary plane (Seminar III 205). In reality, Stevens’ regret of what happened between them suggests that this was not the case; his father had the same respect in his mind throughout the rest of his life as it was before 1907: he could assert in 1943 that his father

...wasn’t a man given to pushing his way. He needed what all of us need, and what most of us don’t get: that is to say, discreet affection... he was incapable of lifting a hand to attract any of us, so that, while we loved him as it was natural to do so, we also were afraid of him, at least to the extent of holding off...

(Letters 454)

Lacan says, if the paternal personality or the father

...manifests himself simply in the order of strength and not in that of the pact, then a relation of rivalry, aggressiveness, fear, etc. appear. Insofar as the relationship remains on the imaginary, dual, and unlimited plane, it doesn’t possess the meaning of reciprocal exclusion that is included in specular confrontation, but possesses instead the other function, that of imaginary capture.

— Before quoting the rest of the passage, it may be pointed out that the “imaginary capture” refers to the subject’s imaginary capture by the paternal personality or the father
which “nevertheless gives the subject a fastening point and enables him to apprehend himself on the imaginary plane,” i.e. to see his own image with reference (not with ‘regard’ or ‘respect’) to the paternal personality (Seminar III 204). Thus, going back to the remaining part of the passage, Lacan continues with reference to the subject’s image of himself —

The image, on its own, initially adopts the sexualized function, without any need of an intermediary, an identification with the mother, or with anything else. The subject then adopts this intimidated position that we can observe in the fish or lizard. The imaginary relation alone is installed on a plane that has nothing typical about it and is dehumanizing because it doesn’t leave any place for the relation of reciprocal exclusion that enables the ego’s image to be founded on the orbit given by the model of the more complete other.

(Seminar III 205)

Since Garrett Stevens manifested himself in the order of his relation with the son and not in the order of strength (recall Garrett’s statement: “If you’re going to consider our home just a hotel, just a place to bring your laundry, you might as well not come at all” [emphases added; B 256]), there was no question of “specular confrontation” and “reciprocal exclusion” — at least from Wallace’s side; instead, the poet’s regretfulness about the quarrel indicates his “imaginary capture” by the father’s image. This could have led him to adopt “the sexualized function” with regard to the father’s image, possibly through “an identification with the mother” or with Elsie or more probably with both simultaneously; more probably so because Wallace’s desire for Elsie was yet to be legalized or to be brought into the symbolic order of culture, for the marriage was yet to take place. And since the son replaces the mother in his unconscious with another woman in resolving the Oedipus Complex more fully and legally by marrying, the lack of legalization in Wallace’s case about the time of the quarrel left the mother and Elsie virtually on the same plane and place in his unconscious, almost without any conflict between them in order for Elsie’s triumph that was necessary for the Complex’s resolution: the desire for the mother cannot be legalized by marrying her or otherwise; Wallace’s desire for Elsie, who had almost supplanted his mother, was threatened of non-legalization by the father’s resistance, thus leaving the replacement suspended
indefinitely. This is why Wagner is absolutely correct in observing that the “wife and the mother were joined in Stevens’ unconscious” (91).

The other side of the story, namely Stevens’ relationship with his father, deserves no less attention. They were certainly alienated from each other. From the son’s point of view, it was “dehumanizing.” Lacan further continues,

The alienation here is radical, it isn’t bound to a nihilating signified,..., but to a nihilation of the signifier. The subject will have to bear the weight of this real, primitive dispossession of the signifier and adopt compensation for it, at length, over the course of his life...

(Seminar III 205)

The signifier in question here is the Name-of-the-father (or that which it stands for, namely the phallus); Stevens suffered from his dispossession of it even as his poetry confirms. Lacan refers to this situation as “the impossibility” on the subject’s part “of assuming the realization of the signifier father at the symbolic level,” and adds,

What is [the subject] left with? He is left with an image the paternal function is reduced to. It is an image which isn’t inscribed in any triangular dialectic, but whose function as model, as specular alienation, nevertheless gives the subject a fastening point and enables him to apprehend himself on the imaginary plane.

(Seminar III 204)

Here, the psychoanalyst suggests that the ‘paternal function,’ the function of the father, no longer remains part of the Oedipal triad (“triangular dialectic”); but the father’s alienation from the triad leaves him meaningless on the subject’s imaginary plane, yet functioning as a pivot for the subject “to apprehend himself on the imaginary plane;” in other words, it is what enables the subject to ask himself, as Stevens did, ‘What am I?’ Lacan comments,

The situation may be sustained for a long time this way, psychotics can live compensated lives with apparently ordinary behavior considered to be normally virile, and then all of a sudden, God only knows why, become decompensated... A great disturbance of the internal discourse...comes about and the masked Other that is always in us appears lit up all of a sudden...

(Seminar III 205)
Stevens shows all these traits in his life and poetry. He did live a “compensated” life for a large part with intermittent ‘decompensations’ in which the Other “lit up all of a sudden” and at times even spoke to him; his poetry is studded with instances of this. His adopting a feminine position led him to the questions ‘What it is to be a man?’ or, what is the same, ‘What am I?’ In fact, what was missing in him was the signifier Name-of-the-Father; the basic question therefore was ‘What is the [Name-of-the-]father?’, which gave rise to a string of related questions quoted above, culminating into or leading to the question of ‘being’ itself. Lacan believed that neurotics ask themselves a question, which is concerned with the lack of the signifier, and that the question is addressed to the Other. “There is no question for a subject without another to whom he has addressed it;” and, Lacan further argues, “[It]’s also possible that the question asks itself first, that it is not the subject who has asked it” (Seminar III 202). This is what he calls “the appearance of the question raised by the lack of a signifier... [The question] manifests itself through fringe phenomena in which the set of signifiers is brought into play” (Seminar III 205). This set of signifiers is a string of related questions involving the concerned signifiers. These signifiers or questions are in fact “a relation of being, a fundamental signifier” (Seminar III 170).

The lack of a signifier is nothing but its repression into the unconscious. And, since the Name-of-the-father is responsible for subjectivity, for the subject’s sense that he is, its repression in Stevens led him to the question of being itself. When Lacan says that “the question asks itself first,” he means that it is from the field of the Other, where the signifier is repressed, that the question interpellates the subject (‘What are you?’), who then asks himself, “What am I?” in his attempt to (find an) answer (to) the question coming from the Other; but, says Lacan, the answer to the question cannot come from the Other, as is already discussed in this chapter. Thus, the Other is the other of speech (Seminar III 168), one who does not answer the subject’s question, thus giving of the mirage of a monologue. However, the Other speaks to the subject; in fact, it speaks all the time, and never stops talking to him, who listens. Therefore, in reality, it is at least a dialogue, even though the possibility of a trilogue, or even of a quadrillogue, is never out of question. Stevens’ mention of the ‘you’ or ‘he’ in many instances is a reference to the Other; that is why it has been difficult to see who the ‘you,’ for example in “Hymn from a Watermelon Pavillion” (CP 88-9) or “Re-statement” or in the epigraph to the Notes is,
or who the ‘he’ in “The Bird with the Coppery Keen Claws” (82-3) or Chocorua to Its Neighbor (CP 296-302) is. The discourse between the subject and the Other is one that “is essentially directed at something for which we have no other term than being” (Seminar III 138), for it is this discourse that sustains the subject at the level of ‘being;’ any failure in it threatens his sense of being, the reason why such subjects love their illness; this is what Freud said, and Lacan respected.

It is this discourse (“interchange”) that is romanticized in the “Re-statement.” The word ‘romance’ in the title of the Stevens poem is puzzling. However, the poet’s own question of ‘What am I?’ or ‘What it is to be a man?’ seem to solve the reader’s difficulty. When sexual identity, conferred upon the subject by the symbolic world around and cherished by the subject as part of his being, is threatened — and the poet’s case very much goes this way — the subject opposes it with all his being. This happens such that the subject undergoes, psychically, a change of sex — this is his mode of resistance — to protect his or her virility, for it is castration that he or she detests and protests. Insofar as realization of the Oedipus Complex is concerned, the subjects of both sexes have to go through identification with the father, “because the phallus [which they think is with the father] is a symbol to which there is no correspondent, no equivalent” (Seminar III 176). It is only at the time of the resolution of the Complex that their paths change: the male subject’s path does not change, but the female subject seeks to identify with the female sex, the (m)Other. But, when, after the successful resolution of the Oedipus Complex, the male subject becomes neurotic due to some ‘accident’ in his life, threatening his sexual identity, he gets identified with the female sex owing to the “intimidated position” that he adopts in order to protect his virility. The phallus is lost or repressed, and becomes the Other of his desire, because it is then “raised, elevated, in relation to [his ego, which is identified with the female sex];” Lacan further comments here,

We get the impression that it’s insofar as he hasn’t acquired or has lost this Other that he encounters the purely imaginary other, the fallen and meager other with whom he is not able to have any relations except relations of frustration — this other negates him, literally kills him. This other is that which is most radical in imaginary alienation.

(Seminar III 209)
This answers why Stevens behaved with people (the other), in general, in a strange manner; he was almost always suspicious of their intentions with respect to him. It also answers why the question of reality (as the other) became so important for him as to seek to make it bearable or even pleasant, and to see himself against it: “the lion in the lute / Before the lion locked in stone” (CP 175). Thus, Stevens’ position was one of a capture between the Other and the other:

...this capture by the double is correlative of the appearance of what can be called the permanent discourse that underlies the inscription of what takes the place over the course of the subject’s history and doubles all his acts.

(Seminar III 209)

Such discourse may be observed in a normal subject also; but, in the neurotic, the moi-Other dialectic gains more prominence, it becomes more articulate as compared to that in the normal subject and hinders the neurotic subject’s own speech. Stevens showed these symptoms in his speech. Elder Olson, a poet on the faculty at the University of Chicago, observes,

He didn’t argue. He meditated... He spoke in sentences, not in paragraphs. There was no such thing as a connected argument. What you had instead was a series of intuitive and highly perceptive remarks. When he got on a subject, he would talk with flashes of intuition. That was not a man who thought consecutively. You will find that to be the case with his essays from The Necessary Angel and Opus Posthumous. His real style was the “Adagia,” and that was very much his conversational way.”

(B 211)

Quoting Olson’s opinion, Wagner comments, “There was a strong component of primary process thinking in his secondary process discourse...probably symptomatic of neurosis or some developmental failure” (86). Here, one can make out the interruption in the poet’s speech; what must have been responsible for it was the ‘discourse of the Other’ that he had become fond of hearing. This ‘primary process thinking’ or the ‘discourse of the Other’ visibly perturbed him, for even as Olson observed, “He would hear
something, and you could see him thinking about it; you could practically hear him think about it.”

Thus, the ‘you’ of “Re-statement” is to be treated as masculine, as the “paternal imago” (Seminar III 209), as the Other “qua bearer of the [phallic] signifier” (Seminar III 194). This obviously means that the ‘I’ in the poem, who speaks it, is to be identified with the female sex that is the poet himself. Like President Schreber, Stevens positions himself in the poem as the woman of the ‘you,’ the Other (see Seminar III 77). Schreber’s repugnance to his adoption of feminine position toward his father replaced the latter with the Other, whom he refers to as God (Seminar III 89). Stevens’ strong rejection to his father’s wish that he should not marry Elsie suggests his repugnance to adopting a feminine position before the father. However, whereas Schreber’s father is replaced with God, Stevens’ is replaced with ‘you,’ the Other of speech. It is not a mistake, therefore, to see a romantic, even erotic, relationship between the ‘I’ and ‘you;’ it is nothing but the former’s attempt at getting an answer to the question ‘Am I?’ in the sense that there he is testifying to himself, and to the ‘you,’ through the relationship, that he is. The ‘you’ too speaks to the ‘I’ through what Lacan refers to as “procession of forms and emanations” (Seminar III 67). Thus, there is an exchange between the ‘I’ and ‘you’: “Only we two may interchange / Each in the other what each has to give;” “...the pale light that each upon the other throws.” Freud saw that such erotomaniac relationship exists in the paranoic and based it on the utterance — I love him and you love me. On the basis of the ways of negating the utterance — suggested by Freud himself as characterizing the ways of the subject’s delusion enabling to decide the precise variety of the paranoiac disorder (see SE 12: 62-65; Seminar III 41) — Lacan interprets Schreber’s erotic relationship with what Schreber believed to be God: I do not love him, I love God, and God loves me (Seminar III 89). The ‘him’ is the father; the God represents the paternal imago as raised, elevated to a vital form of grandeur. This is because the subject hates castration, the pivot of which is the father (thus, I do not love him); however, the subject has replaced the father and placed his affection into something more sublime, and hopes to obtain satisfaction from this “relation founded on a delusion of grandeur” (Seminar III 89) (thus, I love God).

In Stevens’ case, there is no need to replace the ‘you’ with God; retaining Freud’s ‘you,’ Lacan’s gloss can be read thus: I do not love him, I love you, and reciprocally — You love me. The ‘I’ is the subject who speaks these utterances; but since it is not easy to
clearly point out who or what part of the subject speaks, Lacan prefers to call him “an S with a question mark” (Seminar III 41). The ‘you,’ as said before, is the Other. The relation of the ‘I’ with ‘him’ is not clearly that of “reciprocal exclusion,” for ‘he’ does exist on the subject’s imaginary plane. Lacan seems to suggest that the ‘he’ in the utterance is the other, who is “always on the point of re-adopting the place of mastery in relation to [the subject]” (Seminar III 93), and that since this other cannot be reduced to “anything other than the notion of another subject” (Seminar III 101), it is clear that the ‘he’ is the father in the cases of both Schreber and Stevens. Lacan’s interpretation, therefore, involves his view of narcissism, which is unmistakably one of the poet’s favorite themes—as is explicit in “Of Modern Poetry” — as will be discussed later; he also gives due attention to the theme at the end of the prose of his essay, “Three Academic Pieces” (NA 79-80). Lacan explains narcissism with an illustration of the male stickleback’s behavior:

...when the male stickleback does not know what to do at the level of his relation with his counterpart of the same sex, when he does not know whether or not to attack, he takes to doing something that he does when he’s making love [i.e. to start madly glossing its wings as when trying to please a female and to start digging holes, both of which are essentially tied to erotic behavior].

(Seminar III 94-95)

The situation of the neurotic subject in his relation with the father is similar. The father is like the attacking male stickleback, i.e. the subject’s counterpart of the same sex, the other, who tries to re-adopt mastery over the subject, forcing him to defend himself; this defense is a “displacement of behavior” that consists of “erotic manifestation” (Seminar III 95, 94). While the other is thus necessary for the “erotic manifestation,” yet there is difference between the sticklebacks and human beings. The neurotic subject, even though he adopts a feminine position before the father, literally displaces his love onto someone more powerful than the father or the other, who negates him; it is the Other whom he loves, perhaps in the hope of survival or of negating the other (or the father). For all this the existence of the father is essential for the neurotic, and thus it is no wonder that Stevens’ father continued to exist on his imaginary plane: his regret for the
what happened between him and his father and the numerous instances of the father in his poetry make this sufficiently clear.

"Only we two are one" of "Re-statement" is the culminating point of the 'erotic manifestation;' yet both 'I' and 'you' retain their subjectivity, are therefore "supremely true each to its separate self," because the 'I' places a great deal of importance on his own specular image (he being essentially narcissistic), and because the Other keeps his own subjectivity (Seminar III 64), "retains an otherness such that he is a stranger" to the subject (Seminar III 274). However, the Other is "where the [neurotic] subject recognizes himself and gets himself recognized" (Seminar III 168), it is thus the Other of desire; this is the reason why the 'romance' between 'I' and 'you' is so precious to the 'I,' so much so that he does not care for the other, the diminuting and annihilating reality, which forms "only the background of [their] selves." The reality's ignorance of the "chants" of 'I' and 'you' is thus met with a reciprocal ignorance of it by the two, since the relationship between them is sufficient for the 'I':

"............. You and I, alone,
So much alone, so deeply by ourselves,
So far beyond the casual solitudes,
That night is only the background of our selves.

All the romance in life is essentially centered on narcissism. "Of Modern Poetry" (CP 239-40) promotes narcissism, which should not be confused with the commonly understood, narrow meaning of egotism even though the ego is at the heart of narcissism. Thus, because the 'I' appears too many times in the Romantic poets, especially in Wordsworth, it is a mistake to call them egotistic. Pearce and Miller seem to have realized the true meaning of narcissism in the Stevens poem and its centrality in human life to use its full text as epigraph to their anthology of essays on Stevens.

While Ann M. Gallagher is not sure whether the poet demonstrates "willingly or not" that one cannot leave the mind behind while describing the act of the mind (93), a closer reading would reveal how willingly he makes the point—so that the mind can separate itself from its act after having described it in order to look at it objectively and to find a narcissistic satisfaction out of it:
The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It has not always had

To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
Was in the script.

Then the theatre was changed
To something else. Its past was a souvenir.
It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.
It has to face the men of the time and to meet
The women of the time. It has to think about war
And it has to find what will suffice. It has
To construct a new stage. It has to be on that stage
And, like an insatiable actor, slowly and
With meditation, speak words that in the ear,
In the delicatest ear of the mind, repeat,
Exactly, that which it wants to hear, at the sound
Of which, an invisible audience listens,
Not to the play, but to itself, expressed
In an emotion as of two people, as of two
Emotions becoming one. The actor is
A metaphysician in the dark, twanging
An instrument, twanging a wiry string that gives
Sounds passing through sudden rightnesses, wholly
Containing the mind, below which it cannot descend,
Below which it has no will to rise.

It must

Be the finding of a satisfaction, and may
Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman
Combing. The poem of the act of the mind.

While the literary world is divided on the issue of approach to reading and writing, Stevens strikes a balance between the two opposing lines of thought on the issue, which has given rise to the chief dichotomy involved in the difference in approach, namely subjective and objective, which is what narcissism seeks to bridge, without complete success though and thus maintaining a sort of their equilibrium. As Miller
points out, such equilibrium is necessary, for if these opposing forces "were ever to coincide, the poem would disappear" (Poets of Reality 234); this 'poem' is "of the mind in the act."

Before actually coming to the theme of narcissism, it would be worth exploring the details that support it. To begin with, Stevens clarifies that all poetry is modern in its own time (by 'modern' he meant simply "of the present time" [OP 244]); the syntax 'has... always had' makes this explicit. It is only in the context of the present that the poetry of the past becomes a "souvenir." But the tradition of writing 'modern' poetry continues. Thus, 'modern poetry' is a continuum of presentnesses, which is implied in the grammatically incomplete first sentence of the poem. Without the expected form of to be, the sentence shirks any indication of time, but shows the continuity of the act of the mind through the gerund 'finding.' The second sentence speaks of the origin of 'modern poetry:' the mind has to 'find,' or it can 'repeat,' from the 'script' in order to give rise to it. The use of the words "find," "repeat," and "script" commands special attention. "Repeat," from the context in which the poet uses it in line 3, seems to suggest 'imitation' from the "script" with almost a Platonic sense of 'mimesis.' It also seems to have been used as distinct from — if not as opposed to — "find"; hence the possibility of the thought that 'finding' suggests the originality or inventive genius of the mind. This does not, however, relegate 'repeating.'

The word "script" may mean all the knowledge in the world, including both the known and unknown. It could also be considered analogous to Barthes' concept of the "already-written" or the 'general text' (S/Z 18-21, 82). His view is that the author cannot 'express' anything but can only mix the chains of discourse which constitute the 'general text,' and that "the writer contains an immense dictionary" of discourses which interweave in the text" (Selden 305); this "grouping of codes [or discourses], as they enter into the work, into the movement of the reading, constitute a braid (text, fabric, braid: the same thing)" (Barthes, S/Z 160) that we assign to the writer. Barthes’ interest was in decreasing the importance of the author and restoring the place of the reader. Stevens, too, shows keen interest in the activity of reading; besides, writing and reading are analogous respectively to speaking and listening, the functions with which the Stevens poem is deeply concerned. Being one of the first generation of critics who attempted to promote reading and post-structuralist tenets, one can understand the extreme of believing in the author's death that Barthes reaches. However, Stevens does
not underestimate the author-ity of the mind. Thus, if 'repeating from the script' is important to Stevens (and closer to Barthes' ideology), 'finding' is no less so. And yet, the post-structuralist critic must see that Stevens does not allow the mind any scope for invention as such: the mind can only 'find' or discover — obviously from what already exists, from, perhaps, what Barthes refers to as the "already-written." In fact, to Barthes' support, Stevens also uses 'find' in very much the same sense when he writes, "[The mind] has to think about war / And it has to find [from war] what will suffice" (parentheses mine); here, "war" is the "script," the 'already-written;' (notice that the word "script" also appears with reference to war in "Gigantomachia" (CP 289). Thus, "find" seems to belie the inventive genius of the mind. At the same time, though, Stevens preserves the originality of the mind ("Originality is an escape from repetition," Stevens wrote [OP 177]), since it alone is capable of giving the mind a measure of the satisfaction that it seeks. Stevens' use of the word 'find' approximates the Aristotelian sense of 'mimesis;' like Aristotle, Stevens gives due credit to the creative vision of the mind, thus to the subjective element in art: the lines just quoted suggest that the mind has to be selective in order to meet the criteria that what it finds must 'suffice' and that "It must / Be the finding of a satisfaction;" the mind's originality lies in selecting a particular part or aspect from out of the whole "script," for success or satisfaction depends on the selection. However, the selection alone will not suffice; merely 'finding' is not enough; or, subjectivity alone is not sufficient. The actual work of art is, in fact, a skillful 'repetition' of what the mind 'finds.' The conditional "slowly," "with meditation," "exactly," give greater scope to skill, to technique, to carefulness, hence to the objective approach to speaking or writing as opposed to the natural, emotional, narcissistic approach. Stevens, thus, demonstrates that both subjectivity and objectivity must unite in a 'modern' poem — must, owing to his repeated use of 'has to,' which is impartially applied to both "find" in line 10 and "speak" (as analogous to writing) in line 13 that is closely associated with "repeat" of line 14.

Let us now see how the poem uses its own terminology to lead to a narcissistic satisfaction. Speech or writing is the intermediary between 'finding' and 'repeating;' it is an act or a process by which 'finding' becomes 'repeating,' a process through which the 'finding' is objectified, made into a 'repetition' of the 'finding.' The author speaks or writes to objectify his 'finding.' There is a project involved in this objectification — that of narcissistic satisfaction. Those who 'find' but cannot speak or write it out properly
know how unfortunate or dissatisfied lot they are. In Lacan’s view, the human being is essentially fragmented and incomplete; he seeks the wholeness and completeness in and through the other, the world outside. This is what is at the heart of narcissism since, to use Lacan’s thought, there is no speech without the listening, no writing without the reading, no ‘finding’ without the ‘repeating,’ no subjectivity without the objectivity; just as ‘monologue’ is a ‘mirage’ in Lacan’s thought, so speech, writing, ‘finding,’ subjectivity are mirages without their counterparts. The moi needs the other for its own reflection, with which it identifies itself. However, danger awaits on either side of narcissism: if identification is accomplished to its fullest, the subject’s fate would be similar to what Narcissus faced in the end; and, if the other does not comply with the moi desire of making it its alter ego, the subject faces a sense of profound alienation. Similarly, if the moi speech or thought is not echoed, which it must hear, alienation will be the result. Lacan says that the subject will never be united with the other, that is, it will never be fully identified with the other as such; yet it is the illusion of identification that maintains the moi. The persistence of this illusion, as such, of the narcissistic satisfaction itself is the state of equilibrium. Hearing the echo of one’s speech from the other is part of narcissistic satisfaction; to this end, the other is essential. The work of art becomes the other for an artist or its connoisseur in which his speech, emotions, feelings are alienated and by which they are echoed, allowing the “finding of a satisfaction.” Stevens recognizes the importance of this echo. ‘Hearing oneself speak’ is very much at the heart of his poem. The moi speaks “words...that...repeat, / Exactly, that which it wants to hear.” Stevens is clever enough to evade any mention of the speaker, who is also the listener, though for convenience one could call him the moi; for, like Lacan, the poet too kept wondering about ‘who speaks?’ This is the reason why the ambiguity surrounding his use of the pronoun ‘it’ cannot be resolved: is it the ‘mind’ (in the act) that speaks or is it the ‘poem’ (of the act of the mind) as the other that speaks? Therefore, both the poet and psychoanalyst maintain the otherness of one’s own speech; rather, the half-otherness, since half of the total sense of speech convinces the subject that it is I who speaks. Yet, the fact that he hears the same speech suggests that the subject is the listener; thus, he himself becomes the ‘invisible audience,’ who “listens, / ...to [him]self.” This is how the (subjective) speech is received objectively. This is how the poet integrates subjectivity and objectivity, forming an essential dialectic that he considers the mark of ‘modern poetry.’
The human subject has no satisfaction unless his desires, thoughts, opinions are echoed by and as of the other. Why would he need the other to be its alter ego? Because, using Robert Frost’s words, Eden has sunk to grief (Collected Poems 272), because in “These days of [D]isinheriance” (CP 227) after the Fall man has been living “in a bad time” (CP 426) as Stevens puts it; thereafter he has had “his poverty” that “becomes his heart’s strong core —” (CP 427). This is a poetic rendering of what Lacan believes to be the inevitable incompleteness, the “native insufficiency” (Seminar III 95) in the human being which he refers to as “a certain dehiscence at the heart of the organism, a primordial Discord” (Écrits 4). The ego never attains to substantivity as a result, but always remains a specular agency, as dependent on the other, seeking that wholeness or substantivity by attempting to resolve “his discordance with his own reality” with the help of the other (Écrits 2). This is the importance of the other, of the primary identification as in the pre-mirror and mirror stages, or even of the secondary identifications in later life. For this reason, when Lacan says that the structure of all subjectivity is essentially bipolar (Écrits 10), that whatever maturity of subjectivity the subject attains — he says this in relation to the subject’s anticipation of the maturation of his power, which I think does not exclude the sense of subjectivity — is an anticipation “in a mirage,” “only as Gestalt, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form (i.e. the mirror-image and the process of identification in general) is certainly “more constituent than constituted,” he is hinting at the “native insufficiency.” The subject always attempts to meet this insufficiency, is always in search of “what will suffice,” which is always found in the other. This is why hearing oneself speak is such an important activity. It is not two people speaking, but as if two people are speaking. It gives a narcissistic echo of the subject’s emotion, “an emotion as of two people” as Stevens puts it in the poem; the words spoken or exchanged give a sense “as of two emotions becoming one,” as if the subject and the other, to whom he speaks or listens, are one, identified. This feeling, this sense of identification with the other being the moi’s ultimate goal, “below which it cannot descend, / Beyond which it has no will to rise.” The achievement of this goal lends the human subject a semblance of unity, a Oneness, which is one of the connotations of jouissance. It is certainly the “finding of a satisfaction;” the meaning of ‘satisfaction’ thus goes well beyond the ordinary meanings of enjoyment or pleasure.

Stevens was perhaps aware of the fact that the other, in which the moi seeks ‘what will suffice,’ could also be one with capital O, i.e. the Other. Like the stage ‘actor,’
who mediates between the author and the audience, the *moi* is merely an agency that fluctuates between the Other and the other. The first of the poem’s two sentences in which the ‘actor’ figures suggests that the “words” are the “script” from which he ‘repeats;’ in the second, however, he is presented as a metaphysician–musician, who has no score or ‘script’ before him from which he can ‘repeat.’ He is thus a sort of improviser reminiscent of the man with the blue guitar. His description as a “metaphysician in the dark” suggests his involvement in exploring the dark regions of the psyche since he is ‘in the dark,’ searching in the unconscious, of which he has no knowledge. In Lacan, the unconscious is the place of the real, which can be apprehended imaginarily. Stevens also believed that “imagination...[is] the only clue to reality” (*NA* 137). Thus, in order to approach and apprehend the unconscious or the real or the truth, the ‘actor’ must ‘twang’ his “instrument” (imaginary/ imagination), so that he may find that which will suffice. The object is not found as such, though; but it is found only in the form of the feeling that the “sounds” of his “instrument” are “passing through sudden rightnesses.” This is why and how those “sounds passing through sudden rightnesses” are “wholly / Containing the mind.”

What Stevens has done in the course of writing the mind in the act of finding what will suffice is that he has also written the act of the mind; the difference between the ‘in’ of the poem’s first line and the ‘of’ of the final line is deliberate, it is the difference between the subjective ‘finding’ (involvement) and the objective ‘repeating’ (separation); the ‘of’ here is much like the Latin *de*, “a term of separation from a thing in which the object is found, from which [the object] is derived” — St. Augustine explained the word *Ex* by *de* to one of his disciples (from Seminar I 253). This is more or less true of most of Stevens’ poetry, he could separate himself from what he wrote and look at it objectively as if to derive pleasure from it; at the same time, though, it was a test of his own writing, whether it was good enough. It is akin to a philosopher’s testing of his own hypotheses. This is one of the reasons why, although his writing is necessarily poetic, it releases philosophical energy.

Stevens’ desire for identification with the other is very much reflected in “Of modern Poetry;” in fact, it is reflected in many other poems also. He is not the only writer who shows the need of ‘hearing’ in the other the ‘echo’ of his own acts, but it is the intensity that sticks out in his case. In the poem just discussed, one cannot fail to notice that he does not make the external, real world the mirror of reflection; instead, he
makes his poem the other in order to seek that reflection or echo and derive the satisfaction of Oneness out of it. This is a clear indication of a discord with the world around, or the reality. “The subject’s relation to the world is a mirror relation” (Seminar III 87), that is to say, it is an imaginary relation. If that relation was at stake in the poet’s case, the problem was not with the reality but with the poet himself — with his imaginary domain. For that relation to be meaningful, it is therefore the imaginary that needs to be reordered. Is this why the Ideas of Order and The Man with the Blue Guitar follow the mostly pathological Harmonium? The next chapter discusses the poet’s views on the imaginary and its importance in human life; it is indeed its importance to him, for he was the sufferer.