4. Jouissance

...all happiness lies in one's self.

(Letters 81)

The highest pursuit is the pursuit of happiness on earth.

(OP 157)

What has already been touched upon in the first chapter may be discussed here in some detail, namely, how Stevens came to lose the signifier Name-of-the-Father. This signifier has crucial importance in the subject's accession to virility since it functions as the central reference point for the subject to discern that the (m)Other's desire goes beyond himself and the Name-of-the-Father, to the phallus. But when the Name-of-the-Father is problematized, or lost, i.e. repressed, as in the case of the Shakespearean hero Hamlet, the subject loses access to the phallus, to his own virility, and is implicated in what Lacan refers to as "the time of the Other" ("Desire" 17; in a family situation the Other would be the parental Other). Before discussing Stevens' situation with respect to this, however, it is necessary to see the theoretical implications.

The signifier Name-of-the-Father functions to introduce the child into the symbolic order of language and culture, thereby alienating it from the mother, who thus gets repressed, forming the child's unconsciousness, and becomes the Other. This is how the alienated subject comes to 'ex-ist,' which could be represented as

![Diagram](see Fink 58)
This, being simultaneous with the child’s entry into the symbolic order, may also be represented with a little change, thus:

(see Fink 109)

This subject does not ‘exist’ as such since his ‘being’ as his sense of Oneness or unity is lost, first at the very parting with the mother’s body at the time of birth and then by the father’s ‘No’ to his attachment with her. Yet, the subject’s alienation into the symbolic order is a necessary step for him to regain the lost unity and to accede to the sense of being. Thus, the symbolic order as an advent of the Name-of-the-Father intersects — rather, intervenes — with the (m)Other-child unity, with this real; or in other words, the Name-of-the-Father delimits the subject within the symbolic order; nevertheless, it is by virtue of this alienation brought about by the Name-of-the-Father that the subject will later be able to see the (m)Other’s desire, which is important for the subject’s ascent to be a desiring being. Hence it is that “by submitting to the [symbolic order], the child nevertheless gains something;” “the choice of [this] submission is necessary if one is to come to be...” (Fink 49).

As the child grows up, a sense that he is not the sole object of the parents’ desire, that, in fact, he is the result of each of the parents’ desire for the other, that he is not the cause but is “caused by the [parental] Other’s desire” settles in him (Fink 50). Hence his dependency on the parental Other. The child is thus subjugated by this Other’s desire. If submitting to the symbolic order is, in Lacan’s oxymoronic expression, a ‘forced choice,’ so is there this forced sense of the child’s subjugation to the parental Other’s desire. It is as if the child is left with no desire of his own. But desire, as such, is irrepressible. The subject will not come to ‘exist,’ or to be, unless he does something about his subjugation to the Other’s desire. In time, the subject further realizes that even each of the parents’ desire is not the other, that the desire of each goes beyond the other. This is the ‘further separation’ from the Other in which one might hear ‘frustration.’ One must not be misled
by thinking that this completes the subject's annihilation: on the contrary, this 'frustration' is the very milestone that the subject must arrive at if he is to come to be and thus be a desiring being himself, like the parents. From here on the subject tries to locate, approach, achieve the object of the (parental) Other's desire. This sets him on the path of his own desire, whereby he is permanently engaged in search of always 'something else' (Écrits 167), since desire is not namable. In this sense, "Le desire de l'homme, c'est le desire de l'Autre," "the desire of the man is the desire of the Other" (Écrits 312), where the second 'de' (or, 'of') is to be treated as the subjective genitive, making it possible to say, 'man's desire is the desire for the Other' or 'man's desire is the Other's desire.' The Other's desire is always for 'something else': this 'something' is precisely what is missing, lacking, and is unnamable. Without this lack there would be no desire; when the lack is filled by the (m)Other, or is thus named, man's desire is curtailed. Desire and lack thus coexist. The Other's lack realizes for the subject his own lack. What is it that lacks, is not?

Before coming to Lacan's reply to this question, it is worthwhile to see the role played by the desire here. On realizing that he is not the object of the Other's desire, the subject begins to look 'out' for, in Stevens' words, "what will suffice" (CP 239), so that he not only might satisfy the Other's desire but, by satisfying it, could also take credit for it, the sole aim of which is to attain an important rank in the Other's gaze; it is a desire for recognition by the Other. But, in this process the subject has resolved the impasse of his own desire caused by his subjugation to the Other's desire. He has, in this course, made the Other's desire (for the 'something else') his own. However, the object of the Other's desire eludes the subject, "goes beyond [him]," "is beyond [his] control" (Fink 59). This is the mainspring of the 'further separation.' What is it that the Other seeks? Or, as framed in the last paragraph, what is it that lacks? Or, what it is that eludes the desire? This quest gives rise to an imaginary — rather, phantasmatic — object, which in Lacan goes by the name of the object(a). Thus, the subject comes in relation with object(a). What this object is is difficult to see or say, to the real order as it belongs, and also because Lacan's numerous glosses of it throughout his work keep it in a kind of flux. However, Fink's reading is useful here:

Object a can be understood here as the remainder produced when that hypothetical [mOther-child] unity breaks down, as a last trace of the unity, a last reminder
thereof. By cleaving to that rem(a)inder, the split subject, though expelled from the
Other, can sustain the illusion of wholeness: by clinging to object a, the subject is
able to ignore his or her division. That is precisely what Lacan means by fantasy,
and he formalizes it with the matheme S ◊ a, which is to be read: the divided
subject in relation with object a. It is in the subject's complex relation to object a
(Lacan describes this as one of "envelopment-development-conjunction-disjunction") that he or she achieves a phantasmatic sense of wholeness,
completeness, fulfillment, and well-being.

(Fink 59-60)

The subject’s relation to object(a) is, in this sense, essentially mythical; that is, it is
imaginary, phanatasmatic and nostalgic of the past unity. This is one way of
understanding Freud's imbrication of the past tense in his "Wo Es war, soll Ich werden,"
("There where it was, it is my duty that I should come to being" [Écrits 129]),
where the Ich (ego/self/I) is to be understood as the subject as desirous of the wholeness it lacks.

The purpose of this deliberation was to arrive at an understanding of Wallace
Stevens' situation. Things were all right until 1907-1908, before the start of the tension
in the family over Wallace's marriage with Elsie. Wallace was a fit 'man' in the sense
that he was liable to be described as ∀x Φx, as Lacan would put it (see Figure 3 below);
that is, the whole of Wallace (∀x) fell under the phallic function (Φx). The phallic
function is asserted by the Name-of-the-Father. Wallace's life before 1907, as we know
it from the sources available, especially the correspondence between Wallace and
Garrett, bears witness to this. Also notice that this son of Garrett, like the other two, had
decided to be lawyer like his father. In short, Garrett served as a perfect delimiting
boundary, which the Name-of-the-Father or the phallus represents, for the sons.

However, Lacan also described 'men' with yet another relation: ∃x Φx, meaning,
there is some part of the subject (∃x), or of 'man', that denies the phallic function, or for
which the phallic function is foreclosed (Φx). The Name-of-the-Father, being the
delimiting boundary, is both part of the subject and part of the Other; it functions to
neutralize or alleviate the subject's desire of the (m)Other, ridding him or her of the
'jaws of the big crocodile' that is his (m)Other (quoted in Fink 56-7 from Seminar XXIV
129), which is shown as
In other words, the Name-of-the-Father, in representing the (m)Other's desire, saves the subject from being sucked up by the (m)Other's desire. The absence of this protection is precisely what is designated by the foreclosure of the phallic function in $\exists x \Phi x$. And yet, it is a necessary function, the function of foreclosure, but only for a very short time, in which the subject can establish his relation with object(a) and return into the protective circle. In the complete absence of the Name-of-the-Father, the subject fails to see that object(a) is the cause of desire and mistakes it for the (m)Other, and even the (m)Other's desire is centered upon the subject. In short, the Name-of-the-Father is a directive for the desire pent in the Oedipal triad, thus helping the subject resolve his Oedipus Complex.

If things were all right till 1907, that is, when the relation $\forall x \Phi x$ was applicable to Wallace, the analytic focus must now fall upon the other relation ($\exists x \Phi x$), thus enabling to see how and why the former relation was relegated into the background while conceding prominence to the latter. Here, I am obviously giving my own interpretation of the happening in the Stevens family insofar as Lacanian theory is applicable to them.

By not allowing Wallace to marry Elsie, what Garrett did was to make the delimiting boundary abnormally thicker. What can happen in the case where the subject, having already established his relation to object(a), having become a desiring being, suddenly finds himself implicated in the symbolic order, or in the time of the parental Other (i.e. traces a retrograde path to be pent within the Oedipal triad), without any avenue of 'escape' even for that short time which is necessary if the subject has to come in a relation with the object(a)? Either he remains so implicated or he revolts, with his desire, to overthrow the shackles of the symbolic that delimit him. Either way has abnormal effects on the subject, especially in the case of a sensitive subject, for even the natural resolution of the Complex is as smooth as imperceptible a process; therefore, in the former case the symbolic becomes the Other and in the latter it is the (m)Other that awaits him. Wallace, however, preferred the latter, revolted, and married Elsie. "[T]he
bad feeling was such that, after a quarrel in 1908, Wallace and his father never spoke to each other again,” writes Rehder (10). Overthrowing the shackles of the symbolic is to return to the pre-symbolic time, the time of the sense of unity with the (m)Other. Thus the situation is

\[
\text{W} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{(m) Other}
\]

Lacan says, “what characterizes the obsessional neurotic in particular is that he emphasizes the confrontation with” what he refers to as “the impossible as object of desire” (“Desire” 36). Lacan’s object(a) is the rem(a)inder of the (m)Other-child unity. It is also, to use Fink’s comment on ‘lost objects,’ the object that the subject refinds later “in the ‘outside’ world” and which “corresponds to [the subject's] memory of [the] experience of satisfaction once happened upon” (93).

Thus, the time of the (m)Other is not actually the pre-symbolic time, but an emphasis gained by that in the outside world and corresponding to the subject’s unconscious memory of the pre-symbolic or pre-Oedipal time or his unity with the (m)Other.⁶ If Ophelia is the object that Hamlet substitutes for the (m)Other,⁷ Elsie became that for Wallace.⁸ In both cases we find that it is when the impossibility — and this impossibility itself makes the object correspond to that impossible (m)Other-child unity — of reaching the object of desire has been reached that the subjects behave in a careless manner: while Wallace quarreled with the father, Hamlet comes out of the hiding, revealing the disobedience of the step father’s orders prohibiting his stay in Denmark. Thus, both overthrew the delimitation imposed upon them. All this happens in a normal subject as well, but for a brief moment only, and who then, i.e. upon returning
to the domain of that symbolic, cherishes the memory of this moment; but the neurotic subject is implicated in the moment until his neurosis is over.

Since all this is a play of desire, and since Lacan formalizes sexual structuration on the basis of desire, one cannot lose sight of the psychic restructuring of the subject with respect to the re-(rather, dis-)orientation of desire. While the normal subject returns to the symbolic order, the neurotic subject remains in 'the time of the other.' The crossing over of the delimiting boundary is nothing but the opening to the Other's desire. The expression 'Other's desire' (desire de l'Autre) is essentially ambiguous; from the normal subject's point of view it is the Other's desire for something else, and for the neurotic subject, it is the desire for the Other, or as Lacan says, “it is qua Other that he desires” (Écrits 312); thus, the same relation, $∃x \Phi x$, has different meaning for the normal and the neurotic subject. And this is the difference between the $α$ and $S(A)$ in the following schema that Lacan presented in Seminar XX, delineating the masculine and feminine structures.

![Figure 3: Formulae of Sexuation](image)

This is the representation of normal masculine and feminine structures. It can be used to show what changes take place when something similar to what happened in the case of Wallace happens, thus:
That is, the subject’s relation with object(a) is problematized, shown by the dotted line. His relation of non-foreclosure to the phallic function changes into that of foreclosure. In other words, the relation $\exists x \Phi x$ gains emphasis. This emphasis also means, ‘not for the whole of man does the phallic function exist.’ One can already see that this is an entry into the feminine structure, into $\forall x \Phi x$. The point of Lacan’s use of the negative ($\forall x$) here, instead of using $\exists x$, suggests that almost the whole, or at least a large part, denies the phallic function. This is what I mean by the emphasis gained by $\exists x \Phi x$. However, it must be remembered that even that part which denies the phallic function, that part which rejoices with $S(\Lambda)$ is effected by the phallus itself, i.e. by its absence, without which $\exists x \Phi x$ cannot gain emphasis. So it clearly means that there is now not some part of the subject for which the phallic function does not exist, or is foreclosed. In short, $\exists x \Phi x$; this, in spite of the subject. And, even if the subject escapes the symbolic phallus ($\Phi$), he is tied to the imaginary phallus ($\Phi$) since the (m)Other is incomplete insofar as she lacks the phallus; this, too, in spite of the subject.

Hence, the signifier $S(\Lambda)$ is both at once, the signifier of the desire for the Other and the signifier of the Other’s lack. Fink seems to be correct in denoting the signifier of the ‘first loss,’ of the loss of (m)Other-child unity, by $S(a)$, but it cannot, as he suggests, be equated with — rather, reduced to — the phallus ($\Phi$) since $S(a)$ also represents the (m)Other as phallic (see Fink 195n36); thus $S(a)$ is the signifier of both the ‘first loss’ ($S1$) and the phallus ($S2$). In my opinion, what his confusion necessitates is the distinction between the ‘first loss’ and the Other’s lack. The former clearly implicates only the subject, while the latter implicates the Other; the latter of course, indirectly
implicates the subject as well, but for the subject what matters most is the recovery of the ‘first loss,’ which will by itself denecessitate for the subject the fulfillment of the Other’s lack since S(A), now become S(a), i.e. the Other as the object of desire, is itself the subject’s jouissance. It must be remembered that the subject becomes aware of and seeks to fulfill the (m)Other’s lack only upon his entry into the symbolic order, which sets him on the path of becoming a desiring being himself whereas, in his ‘journey’ back to the pre-symbolic time, what matters is the (m)Other, not the (m)Other’s lack or incompleteness. At the end of this ‘journey’ the subject becomes one with the (m)Other, as if he exists in this real. It is interesting to note that the “subject in the real” is the result of the establishment of the link between S1 and S2. (Fink 72,77). The neurotic subject’s becoming one with the (m)Other therefore means that the link between S1 and S2 is already established, again, in spite of the subject as it were. This could be the reason why Lacan includes both S1 and S2 into one signifier, saying, “S1 and S2 are precisely what I designate by the divided A, which I make into a separate signifier, S(A)” (Quoted in Fink 195n36 from Seminar XXIV).10

Thus, what actually happens in the case of the neurotic is that the a in the lower half in the feminine structure succeeds to S(a); Or, the desire of the (m)Other’s lack or desire (since lack and desire coexist) is replaced by the desire for the (m)Other. Instead of S ◊ a, the relation S ◊ S(a) is established. The neurotic mistakes the (m)Other as having the phallus, does not see that she, too, is a lacking or desiring being; but, since the (m)Other is barred, divided, it is properly speaking the subject’s relation to this mOther, S ◊ S(A); this is the reason why the neurotic desire revolves around the (m)Other, precluding the possibility of becoming a desiring being oneself. And because this is essentially a refinding, it is displaced onto the ‘outside’ world, i.e. the actual (m)Other is replaced by an[y]-other woman the subject thinks he loves. Herein comes the role in Wallcaé’s life of Elsie as the S(A). One might think of all this as stretching things too far. But how, otherwise, are we going to vindicate the confessedly obsessive interest that Stevens shows in death through his poetry and letters? After all, the desire to be one with the (m)Other is the desire for that pre-natal state of unity, or even for the pre-pre-natal state, which is almost the desire of/for death. Stevens kept consuming himself in this desire for the (m)Other, and realized very late of the consumption and its root:

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

Mother, oh, Mother, is it you who will punish me?¹¹

(CP 507)

Simply stated, his unconscious ("that distant chamber") desire for the (m)Other had undesirable effect on him and his perception of the world around him ("what he saw") since the desire for the (m)Other-as-having-the-phallus (her description as "a bearded queen" is suggestive of her masculinity) is the death instinct itself.¹² Without such interpretation it is simply impossible to account for the energy exhibited in terms of the psyche (Seminar II 75) of a man who was properly speaking neither a philosopher nor a psychoanalyst. In all its honesty, his poetry is the manifestation of the experience — to use Lacan's words — "of a certain beyond of the inter-human reference, which is in all strictness the symbolic beyond" (Seminar II 76). This is why any study of his poetry with reference to his person must require an interpellation of Lacan's signifiers-in-the-real.

If Stevens rediscovered the S(A), it was at the cost of his relation to object(a), an indication of his restructuration as feminine. This is the reason of my insistence on treating the 'I' of "Re-statement" as feminine. Lacan insists that 'the woman does not exist;' it is because woman is closer to object(a) in comparison with man. And, since the relation with object(a) decides Lacan's view of 'existence,' of the sense that one is or is not, it raises the question of 'being.' It is not surprising, therefore, that Stevens often leads us to this question, which was his own question, as will be seen after a while.

Thus, what now becomes the focus of our attention is to see in Stevens' poetry 'the time of the Other' and what may be called 'the time of being.' First, 'the time of the Other.' There are many poems in Collected Poems in which we find the mention of the unconscious and the Other, though skulked under different names. It begins as early as on page 5 as Stevens' desire ("paltry nude") begins its 'journey' or "voyage" of the unconscious ("the high interiors of the sea"). Out of the obsession with or observations of the unconscious Stevens introduces new experiences, thus bringing them into the domain of language. These moments in his poetry bring into our grasp an-Other reality that is essentially alien and which gives his experience a certain sublimity, exoticness;
this is what is, in the poet’s own words, “French / Translation of a Russian poet” (CP 234), this is the Other as jouissance.

So, Stevens tells a Fernando that on a particular day his “mind roamed as a moth roams, / Among the blooms beyond the open sands” (CP 22). His mind thus went beyond what can be and is almost clearly perceived (the ‘yellow’ sand) to, what he calls in “The Paltry Nude,” the “high interiors of the sea,” eager as it was “for the brine and bellowing” of the sea (CP 5). And

...whatever noise the motion of the waves
Made on the sea-weeds and the covered stones
Disturbed not even the most idle ear.

The “noise” of the “sea waves” did not ‘disturb’ the “ear” (it did in “A Dish of Peaches,” prompting the question ‘Who speaks?’) because the mind is “Among the blooms” that are within the “waves,” is one with them. Once it thus became one with them, it did not remain the mind as moth but became the moth itself; in fact, by the effect of the partaking of the waves, became the ‘monstered moth.’

Then it was that that monstered moth
Which had lain folded against the blue
And the colored purple of the lazy sea

And which had drowsed along the bony shores,
Shut to the blather that the water made,

Before its monster-ation by the “sea waves,” by the movements within the deep interior of the psyche, the “mind” had been engulfed by the imaginary (Lacan’s méconnaissance); it had been sort of ‘nincompated’ by the “blue” and therefore had “lain folded” against this ‘pedagogue,’ this master as the unconscious. Therefore the sea, for the “mind,” was “lazy,” unmoving almost, or was “colored purple;” it was dominated by the “blue,” disallowing a clear perception of the ‘red,’ Stevens’ color for the real. The “mind” had been, thus, ‘drowsing’ since it was tied to the corporeal world (“bony
shores”), and was denied access to the “blather” within, to the Other reality. However, after its monster-ation, it

Rose up besprent and sought the flaming red

Dabbled with yellow pollen — red as red
As the flag above the old café —
And roamed there all the stupid afternoon.

The monster-ation was extremely energizing as the “mind” “sought,” in a flash as it were, the bright, fiery reality that was beyond the corporeality, and perceived it almost (because “dabbled”) clearly (the ‘red’ as ‘dabbled’ with the ‘yellow’ pollen) as it did the “open sand.” However, Stevens’ word is not ‘perceived’ but merely ‘sought.’ It would not be a great mistake if one hears it as ‘shot,’ for symbolization of the real is to introduce holes into it, to kill it. The power of the symbolization is that it also brings the real into the domain of the symbolic, into the domain of language and culture. The illustration is to be found in the poem itself: “flag.” What this symbol connotes is — it is difficult to see or say all that it refers to and represents — what it brings, as symbol, into the symbolic order, into use. Thus, though the poet says that the mind perceived “red as red,” yet he doubts that it can do so; hence immediately he qualifies “red as red” with “[as red] / As the flag above the old café,” thereby not only introducing a metaphor for the perception of the ‘real as real’ (“red as red”) but simultaneously moving away from the ‘real’ real. Yet, powerful poet as Stevens was, he adapts his tool for the real, fertilizes his language with the ‘pollen’ of this experience, by generating a powerful symbol for ‘the Other above man’ or for ‘the real above man’: “the flag above the old café,” which is comparable with “The aureole above the humming house” (CP 247). This is how he brings the “Hibiscus” on the “sleeping shores” where the mind ‘drowses’ along corporeality. It is difficult, however, to suggest what the word “there” in the final line means. Where exactly? In the real, with the Other? Or, on the “shores” to which the mind has brought the “Hibiscus”? Here, Stevens does not care much about the place. What matters is ‘the time of the Other.’ It was ‘afternoon’ when the poet’s mind was “at the bottom.../...of himself” (CP 236).
At times, the ‘afternoon’ succeeds to ‘moonlight’ and Stevens shows concern for the place as well. In fact, in “Anecdote of the Prince of Peacocks” (CP 57-8), he emphasizes the importance of the ‘moonlight’ since it allows him to ‘place’ the Other. Here, he meets the Other that he “sought” in the “Hibiscus” poem.

In the moonlight
I met berserk,
In the moonlight
On the bushy plain.

This opening sentence is not so simple as it looks. There is, besides the ambiguity of the ‘moonlight,’ the mention of the place (“bushy plain”) as time-bound (“moonlight”). The “bushy plain” is the consciousness; the ‘moonlight’ could mean ‘night,’ ‘sleep,’ or ‘dream,’ or even the imaginary since the ‘moon’ in Stevens often represents the imaginary. There is no problem if the ‘moonlight’ in this sentence means the imaginary; but, later the reference to ‘sleep’ and ‘dream’ raises and compounds the problem. There is a paradox: how can the consciousness and dream be integrated? Stevens’ reading of Freud could have been at the base of their integration. According to Freud, says Lacan, “the disturbing process,” which includes the dream, “...passes from the unconsciousness to the preconscious” and which “end[s] up at consciousness” (seminar II 139). M. Valabrega, one of the participants in Lacan’s Seminar II, calls this “a retrograde path...regression” (141). But even the imaginary, one of whose mainstay is the past (images recorded earlier), has the dimension of time. After all, what is the existence of the imaginary if not always a reference to the already happened? Otherwise, it would be impossible to distinguish it from perception; but even perception without the imaginary is inconceivable: “...the absence of imagination had itself to be imagined,” wrote Stevens (CP 503).

Thus, the uncontrollable (“Berserk”) is ‘met with’ by bringing it into the conscious. He was “sharp.../ As the sleepless!” since it keeps “humming while one sleeps” (CP 247). It is the ‘I’ of the poem that sleeps; it is we who sleep. Sleep, generally taken to be a loss of contact with reality, is in fact the time of access to an-Other reality. Sleep does not induce the unreal as dream but the real as real. This realization must have prompted the question that Stevens — does not ask but — ‘says:'
And "Why are you red
In this milky blue?"
I said.
"Why sun-colored
As if awake
In the middle of sleep?"

If the man awake (or awalk) in his sleep betrays his (psychic) reality to the world, so does the Other, this human real, betray himself to the sleeper. The question of dream led Freud to the unconscious manifestation. Why in dreams does the unconscious manifest itself so clearly? The 'Berserk' answers,

"You that wander,"
So he said,
"On the bushy plain,
Forget so soon.
But I set my traps
In the midst of dreams."

This should be one of the most difficult stanzas in Stevens. It cannot be explicated without recourse to Lacan, or what is the same, without a better reading of Freud. Since Lacan continues to prove to have read Freud better than most others — Stevens excepted if he had read Freud, which is never out of question — a recourse to Lacan is inevitable. In Lacan’s thought, the perception of the external world gains meaning with the help of the imaginary, thus constituting a meaningful world, which is the mark of the ego’s supposed mastery of the world, of the fulfillment of its desire for recognition. Once the external object becomes meaningful, once the desire for recognition is fulfilled, the desire renews, a search for a new object begins, and the previous object or the symbol may be forgotten — the word ‘forget’ is there in the poem. However, there are symbols which are perceived but do not gain, or are not given, or have lost through the forgetting, the meaning. Freud calls theses symbols the *Tagesreste*, the residues, which are “disinvested from the pint of view of desire. These are, within the dream, the stray forms which have become, for the subject, of minimal importance — and are emptied out for their meanings;” but these symbols are stored in the preconscious, “So this is a piece of
signifying material...be it phonematic, hieroglyphic, etc;” Lacan further says, “The desire which is conscious...nonetheless finds a means of expression through the alphabet, the phonematics of day-residues...” (Seminar I 245). The unconscious discourse “takes possession of these emptied out, available elements, the Tagesreste, and of everything in the preconscious order, which is made available by the smallest amount of...the subject’s fundamental need, which is to gain recognition. It is within this vacuum, within this hollow, with what thus becomes working materials, that the deep, secret discourse gains expression. We see it in dream...” (Seminar I 247). Thus, the unconscious, which is the discourse of the Other, ‘sets his trap,’ as Stevens says, “In the midst of dreams.” The phrase ‘to set trap’ is ambiguous. ‘Set,’ among all its meanings, means to ‘impose or present,’ and to ‘fix;’ ‘trap’ means a ‘trick or device to betray or to reveal a secret,’ and it also is slang for ‘mouth.’ The phrase, thus, has two meanings: that the Other imposes or presents his discourse (‘trap = mouth) in the dream, and that he fixes or determines his trick to betray (to) the subject or to reveal the secret to the subject in the dream. What secret, what kind of betrayal is involved here? Before coming to an answer to the question, it is necessary to see the why side of the question. Why reveal or betray the secret?

Lacan has a funny illustration for this why. In Seminar II, there is the mention of a lady Dubliner, typist (125-9). The story obviously dates from the time when the British rule was observed in Dublin. This lady, a subject of the British King, on realizing the disturbance in the maintenance of order in Dublin, is led to a very strange formulation — If the King of England is an idiot, then everything is permitted (Lacan’s emphasis). Lacan posits this hypothesis on the border of violation and observance of the law of His Britannic Majesty. And the law he finds here is that “any man who says that the King of England is an idiot will have his head cut off.” In other words, if someone violates the law his or her order of life is met with chaos; as long as one obeys the law there will be an order to one’s life. Lacan’s discussion leads to the Other as King or law and the subject of the law as the Lacanian subject, the human subject. Thus, he says, “not one of the subjects in this kingdom where idiocy reigns has a very solid head on his shoulders. That is expressed by a symptom” (129). The symptom betrays the lack of order within the psyche. Now, what could be at the base of his Majesty’s subject’s violation of the law? Undoubtedly, to deny the supremacy of the King and be the master himself of the world in which he lives. Is not this what the ego does, out of its need for recognition?
One of Lacan’s statements in this respect is important — it has already been quoted — he says that the “preconscious order...is made available by the smallest amount of...the subject’s fundamental need, which is to gain recognition” (Seminar I 247). What subject is he speaking of here? The ego or the Other? It could be any one or both at once. The ego tries to preserve or gain its mastery by engaging into a search for the truth, whereby it may come to a conclusion that the ‘King,’ i.e. the Other as law, is indeed idiot; and the Other comes down through the dream to the conscious — through this ‘retrograde path’ — to prove his untouchability, his mastery. It is interesting to see how the Other proves it. It is through the ‘navel of the dream,’ as Freud would say. The navel is that part or point in the dream which is absolutely incomprehensible, extremely obscure, belonging to the domain of the unknown. The ego has no clue to what this point is or even why it is there. This is the essence of the law, that it remains so. “It is the law in so far it is not understood” (Seminar II 129). The navel of the dream painfully cuts short the ego’s desire for recognition and mastery. It is the incomprehensibility of the navel of the dream that creates doubt in the subject. He cannot forget it, the ego cannot forget its failure, and it is within this failure of the ego, or within this idiocy of the law from the ego’s point of view, that the law asserts itself, that the Other proves its untouchability, His High-ness. There are other modes, like the slip of the tongue and jokes, through which the unconscious discourse manifests itself, but as Stevens’ Berserk says, “you that wander on the bushy plain, forget so soon.” In the waking state we tend to forget this interruption, but we do not forget it when it happens in the dreams. That is why the Berserk “set[s] [his] traps / In the midst of dreams.”

To come to the what side of the secret — in fact, it has already been answered in the preceding paragraph, but it may be extended a little further. The secret is nothing but the reality that the subject, the ego, has failed to recognize in the waking state. The reality is that the subject is not unified (“The subject is no one. It is decomposed, in pieces” [Seminar II 54]), that he is not by himself, that there is something or someone within and outside him who hears, speaks, and calls himself as ‘I.’ This realization reveals the intersubjective dimension or dialectic that is constitutive of the subject — in spite of itself. This revelation shatters the conscious complacency of the ego’s supposed wholeness (“the innocent air”). This disintegration is “the dread / of the bushy plain.”

I knew form this
That the blue ground
Was full of blocks
And blocking steel.
I knew the dread
Of the bushy plain,
And the beauty
Of the moonlight
Falling there,
Falling
As sleep falls
In the innocent air.

The dream was educative in so far as it yielded the knowledge that the landscape of the mind one (or, the poet-speaker) imagined ("the blue ground") was, in fact, "full of blocks;" that, in the way of one's knowing the whole of psyche, there were 'still' a lot of obstacles, which were "blocking steel." However, the poet-speaker does not seem to have a negative attitude towards the 'moonlight.' Although it has curtailed the ego's aspirations, he still finds it 'beautiful.' For one who celebrates 'death' as the 'mother of beauty' ("Sunday morning"), the loss of the ego's innocence has to be a revelation of 'beauty,' for this alienation from the meta-world provides an opportunity to create a paradise on the earth, in the reality that is closer compared to the metaphysical or metapsychological reality.

Due to the continual irruptions of the Other, Stevens is committed to thinking of it as part of the 'I.' Section XII of The Blue Guitar announces this with élan; "Tom-Tom, c'est moi." What follows this announcement is a comprehensive description of the human subject:

The Blue Guitar

And I are one. The orchestra

Fills the high hall with shuffling men
High as the hall. The whirling noise

Of a multitude dwindles, all said,
To his breath that lies awake at night.

I know that timid breathing. Where
Do I begin and end? And where,
As I strum the thing, do I pick up
That which momentously declares

Itself not to be I and yet
Must be. It could be nothing else.

The imaginary is responsible for the ego's sense of wholeness or oneness (as "I"). "In its most essential aspect, the ego is an imaginary function," says Lacan (Seminar II 36); this is, however, given from the ego's point of view: "The blue guitar / And I are one." But that is not all. The "orchestra" is not yet complete. This manque or lack is what creates the melody that rises and "Fills the high hall with shuffling men." The "shuffling men" are the audience to the "orchestra;" that they are 'shuffling' (due to some uneasiness or lack) goes to suggest that they desire something that would satisfy their desire, fill their lack. This audience, this other, this 'listener' is constitutive of the moi; this is what the "Snow Man," "A Dish of Peaches," and "Of Modern Poetry" show. In Lacan's words, which is a formula that he derived from Rimbaud, "I (moi) is an other" (Seminar II 7) or, "Thou art that" (Écrits 7), which Lee presumes he borrowed from the Chandogya Upanishad ("Tat-tvam-asī") (see Lee 217n54). In the very first few sections of The Blue Guitar we see that the guitarist sees his desire in his audience's desire, in the other's desire, which is present before the guitarist's play begins. From the point of view of Lacan's philosophy of psychoanalysis, this is a pre-condition of one's entry into the world. One can see the guitarist's pose, "bent over his guitar" like a "shearsman" (CP 165); does not the pose remind of the foetus? Patke's opinion that the guitarist is im-provising (breakage mine; 81) is enlightening; indeed, like the foetus, he lacks the foresight and is trying to foresee, i.e. to make his way into the world; the roots (in + pro + videre) from which 'improvise' is derived yields this meaning. But he has no means except his guitar to do so. It is the other that helps him make his way. It is not a coincidence that Stevens happened to have his guitarist pose like this, nor is it a coincidence that the other speaks first in the poem. It is the others' desire that is instrumental in shaping the guitarist's 'music.' In Lacan's view, one's desire is the other's desire. He also relates —
rather, integrates — the other into the unconscious. The unconscious, in his thought, is
“overflowing with other people’s desire,” is “full of the other people’s talk, other
people’s conversation, and other people’s goals, aspirations, and fantasies” (Fink 9-10).
And this is brought about by the imaginary. Hence it is that the ‘orchestra’ fills the
unconscious (“the high hall”) with the other (“shuffling men”), and since the
unconscious is made up, in a large part, by this other, these “shuffling men” are “high as
the hall” itself. Lacan’s Other, too, is a continuity between inside and outside. Ragland-
Sullivan writes, “...the Other is a continuity between consciousness and unconsciousness,
between identifications and language,” and adds Schneiderman’s comment apropos of
this: “Otherness is always and irreducibly outside the subject; it is fundamentally alien to
him. Insofar as the discourse of the Other agitates a singular subject, it forms the
Freudian unconscious” (see ERS 16). Interestingly, Ragland-Sullivan uses two notations
throughout her book, Other and Other(A), the former indicating that which is literally
outside the body of the subject and the latter suggesting the same as having ended up
inside him. Lacan often said that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other (e.g. see
Écrits 55, 172; Seminar III 112). All this is precisely what Stevens says as he writes that
the other’s “whirling noise...dwindles... / To his breath that lies awake at night;” ‘breath’
is speech. Stevens recognizes the Other’s discourse (“breathing”). He calls this discourse
‘timid’ as it shies at the presence of the other or at the other’s speech. Lacan has said that
we, the other, “talk to screen out the Other” (ERS 197); or, in other words, “the less we
speak, the more it speaks to us” (Seminar III 138).

In the question that Stevens asks himself (“Where do I begin and end?”), he is
trying to specify the ‘I,’ as if to fix the human subject within the Cartesian system. But
since the Other “declares / Itself not to be I,” or since it cannot be included or ‘found’
within the Cartesian scale but outside it, it evades any formulation of itself. Imagine as
one might, it retains its Otherness. Obviously, Stevens must go or have gone beyond
Descartes so as to be able to express the knowledge that the Other — even though it
keeps its Otherness — “must be ['I'],” since his experience suggests to him that “It could
be nothing else.”

What this section emphasizes as far as the imaginary is concerned is that the
formation of the Other and the knowledge of its existence, or what is the same, the
knowledge of one’s ex-istence, is the importance of the imaginary; that it is the
‘orchestra’ of the ‘blue guitar’ and the ‘I,’ who is the function of the ‘blue guitar,’ that

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“Fills the high hall;” that it is the functioning of the imaginary (“as I strum the thing”) that makes one realize the ‘I’-ness of the Other’s Otherness.

The Other’s politics, its deceptive nature, its supremacy, its truth, and its indispensability and inevitability led Stevens to ‘sketch’ it as ‘the ultimate politician:’

He is the final builder of the total building,
The final dreamer of the total dream,
Or will be. Building and dream are one.

There is a total building and there is
A total dream. There are words of this,
Words, in a storm, that beat around the shapes.

There is a storm much like the crying of the wind,
Words that come out of us like words within,
That have rankled for many lives and made no sound.

He can hear them, like people on the walls,
Running in the rises of common speech,
Crying as that speech falls as if to fail.

There is a building stands in a ruinous storm,
A dream interrupted out of the past,
From beside us, from where we have yet to live.

( CP 335-36)

The ‘building’ is the structure. The fact that the poet uses the expression ‘total building’ suggests that he does not mean it in the physical sense. He is incorporating in it the idea of ‘building’ too, unlike Plato. Yet, if by ‘dream’ he means the idea, he separates it, like Plato, from the ‘total building’ in the expression “total dream” in line 2. But, ultimately, he writes that the two are one. In spite of this conclusion, he must again admit, in the second stanza, the separate existence of the “total building” and the “total dream.” One can, of course, make the interpretation simpler by interpreting the word ‘total’ as ‘pure and simple,’ which would elicit the meaning of “total building” in its purely physical
entirety, and of "total dream" in its abstract, purely ideological entirety. However, in this case, the "total building" becomes inanimate. Insofar as Stevens, by the expression "total building," is referring to the human being, it is extremely difficult to conceive of it as inanimate.

If indeed Stevens is referring to the human being — and one can hardly think otherwise, for there is a hint in line 8: "words that come out of us" (emphasis added) — then, the 'dream' is the psychical structure. Also, it is impossible to even think of the psychical structure without any reference to the physical structure. So, "Building and dream are one." Even after stating their oneness, what is it that forces Stevens to again separate them in the second stanza? Why do we all feel, as we live our daily life, the otherness of our own psyche? This is the problematic of human existence, this gap between psyche and soma, each of which cannot be separated from the other, yet must be. One more gap is to be discerned, between the human being and the physical world around him. This world, the other, is extremely important from the point of view of the formation of the unconscious, rather, of the whole psyche. In the times before language, in the times before the Disobedience, man was one with his environment as "in the earth itself [he] found a green —" (CP 383), the 'heaven' was his 'glass' then. But now, the dash after "green" suggests, he cannot find the "green" in the "earth," the "green" evades him. This gap between him and the "green" is perhaps reflected in the gap between the psyche and the soma. The rise of language was simultaneous with this alienation. This is where literature began, including the Bible. 'Words' exist out of this separation. The rise of language bears simultaneity with man's separation from his environment. Our 'words' are essentially embedded "in a storm" of desire that seeks to bridge this gap between the "shapes," the structures that, once, were one. These 'words chosen out of the storm of desire' have desire at their base, hence they are inseparable from the storm of desire. Thus, the 'storm' appears "much like the crying of the wind" (emphasis added).

Literally inverting the first letter of the last word in the first line of stanza 3 gives 'mind.' "Crying of the wind," then, would not be far from suggesting 'craving of the mind.' What for does the mind crave? (This poem is peculiar in the sense that it requires a lot of reading between the lines, without which it seems impossible to make out its head and tail). The mind craves, as the next two lines of the stanza suggest, for the Other. There is certainly this meaning of the 'desire for the Other,' characteristic of the neurotic, who hears "Words that come out of [him] like words within." The "words within," the
speech of the Other, are what ‘rankle’ the neurotic’s life ‘without making any sound’ as such. The fourth stanza is in continuation with the thought in the preceding stanza in that it speaks of the Other’s activity in relation to him who hears its speech. The Other hears, too; it hears the neurotic’s “common speech.” In reality, the Other only speaks, speaks all the time, and therefore cannot listen; this problematizes the poet’s use of ‘he’ in line 10. That it listens is the fantasy of the neurotic, who is free to even imagine or doubt that the people in the photographs on walls may listen to his speech. The image of the “people on the walls” listening to the person’s speech is symptomatic of neurosis, (of Stevens’ own neurosis), whereby the speaking subject always suspects that someone is listening to him even though he has not spoken. This is observed in (or, by) the normal person also, but it gains emphasis in the neurotic. Lacan characterizes this phenomenon thus:

> The Other is, therefore, 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 spoken or has not spoken.

(Écrits 141)

This, along with the fact that the Other speaks, is referred to as its “Running in the rises of common speech;” Lacan calls it an “interruption” or “interpellation.” Freud has already suggested the unconscious discourse intervening in the form of jokes, witticism, and slips of tongue. The louder this discourse the greater the failure of the common speech, which suffers from its own suppression; similarly, the disappearance of the Other — which is the same as the disappearance of its speech — is equally frustrating for the neurotic: the discourse or speech of the Other is its function in which it reveals itself to the psychotic subject; Lacan says, “...this function is the only one that...maintains the [psychotic] subject at the level of discourse which threatens to fail him entirely and disappear” (Seminar III 205). This is precisely what is implied in “Crying as that speech falls as if to fail.” This is how the “building stands in a ruinous storm;” the ‘storm of the words’ of the Other is capable of unsettling, destroying, ‘rankling’ the life of the neurotic. The ‘storm’ of the ‘desire for the Other’ is indeed destructive. Since the Other is structured through the person’s past life, it interrupts “out of the past.” What it interrupts is a ‘dream,’ as Stevens prefers to write; the word could mean the subject’s complacent sense of unity, his happiness thereof. Though the Other is “beside us,”
though our past is our own and is as near to us as in the unconscious memory, the desire for (unity with) the Other is an impossibility, it is as impossible as to live our own past. The last line of the poem insinuates, painfully, the desire for the Other and the impossibility of attaining it ("where we have yet to live").

The poem lends the Other the qualities that are generally attributed to destiny, wielding control over human life. Hence, "He is the final builder of the total building, / The final dreamer of the total dream." It is 'he' who decides the fate of the 'building' and of the 'dream;' like a politician whose policies or decisions can make or destroy the structure of the nation, and who still manages to remain outside the ruins. As one might suspect, Stevens is not far from elevating the Other to the level of the God. The suspicion is not baseless; section XXI of The Blue Guitar is the proof. There, the substitute for all the gods is the Other as 'this self,' that is, the Other as 'I.' This was dreamt of the long before in Sunday Morning, one of whose projects is stated very clearly in "Divinity must live within herself." (CP 67). This is not an instance of egocentrism in the least. The ego is not the center of this divination, but the Other, which is continuous with the other — even in Sunday Morning:

Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?

(CP 67)

The thought of 'heaven,' of gods, was thus disinvested from our desire much before. Against this "ex-bar, /.../ With which we vested, once, the golden forms / And the damasked memory of the golden forms," Stevens is weighing the "in- bar," which he finds "Exquisite in [its] poverty," in its lack (CP 317). To quote Riddel, "The return of *God to the self is, as Nietzsche suggested in The Birth of Tragedy, the imperative reflex of "man stripped of myth, [who] stands famished among all his pasts and must dig frantically for roots" (152).

Stripped of all myths, Stevens finds the "final builder of the total building," "the final dreamer of the total dream" in the Other. If this is considered not to be so, he is certain that in time it "will be," This 'future' is made 'present' in section XXI of The
Blue Guitar: “As now called most high,” “Lord of the body,” “In an immenser heaven,” “lord of the land and lord / Of the men that live in the land, high lord.” And yet Stevens does not forget this lord’s relation with the world in which “the men live,” since he calls this god the “shadow of Chocorua.” In Stevens’ poetry as in Cézanne’s painting, the mountain figures as the highest form of the other, as the epitome of the real world around, as the immensest form of the environment. Or, one could say that the mountain in their works is the symbol of the external world, a symbol having supreme importance, since both artists had realized that — in Stevens’ words — “I am what is around me” (CP 86). Thus, the search of both the artists for ‘god’ is centered on the here and now, on the real world, since it is here that they find what Nietzsche calls man’s “roots.” The Other, being the ‘shadow’ of the real world around, i.e. of the other, may then be compared with the ‘holy ghost.’

Playing with the word ‘shadow,’ Stevens writes, “One’s self and the mountains of one’s land, / without shadows, without magnificence...” In section V of the poem, ‘shadow’ suggests the old or pre-existing ideals and (religious) beliefs; the “self” and the “mountains of one’s land,” of section XXI, are without such shadows, hence without any ‘magnificence’ thereof, and thus are secular in the strictest sense of the word. The non-real aspects of the old ideals are thus contrasted with the real aspects of the real world in which Stevens believes: “The flesh, the bone, the dirt, the stone,” these being precisely what religious belief treats as unworthy, undesirable. It is of “flesh” and “bone” that we are made, and it is “dirt” and “stone” among which we live; these are the quotidian ‘roots’ from which we spring.

Even the reality, the “dirt” and “stone” among which we live, is not all that comprehensible as in the thinking of the people who thought it to be so much as unworthy, as if they had understood it. Well, they might have understood it, but the past and the myth that sustained it have “passed like a circus” (CP 143). They are not useful in “the ruins of [the modern] society” (CP 153). Stevens, having realized that “there is / An absence in reality (CP 176), kept coming back to it “instead of the hymns / That fall upon it out of the wind” (CP 471). (This is very much like the uncanny attraction for a beautiful painting one sees as lacking in some respect than for an equally beautiful but technically perfect one. This is precisely what distinguishes, for example, Michelangelo or Vinci from Raphael.) The real kept evading him, though. If the real can be so unreal, what would its “shadow,” the Other, be like? Obviously, “less and less human” (CP
327); this is what Stevens finds fascinating about the Other. This is why he substitutes it for all the gods. The pagan gods were projections of the ‘in-bar’ into the ‘ex-bar’; their world was egocentric, more so than even the Cartesian world view. It is the people after the pagans, or the later pagans, or the people before the dawn of Christianity, who made it into the ‘ex-bar’ and vested their desire with it. One would be wrong to find fault with Christianity; it introduces the element of human-ity, in the form of Jesus, into this ‘ex-bar’; Christianity may be praised for ‘in-barring’ the ‘ex-bar’, though it retains the image of the ‘holy ghost,’ God’s unknowable, unfathomable aspect. This is not an attempt to defend the religion, but to get to the roots. In this sense — there is nothing shocking in saying this — Stevens is in line with Christianity, if not perfectly, at least by analogy. Whatever faults one would find with Christianity must be really with the additions that were made by different people through different ages and generations. There could be no better example of these unwarranted additions than in the Hindu mythology, which, with so many hands contributing to the original myths, especially in the period called ‘uttar vaidic kaal’ (post vedic period), now appears to be more false than true. The difference is clearly perceivable: in order to make people believe in god and Jesus, the ‘contributors’ made Christianity exceedingly human; and in order to make people revere (or fear?) god, they made Hindu mythology — with the respectable exception of a few things like the Bhagvat Geeta — exceedingly unreal, inhuman almost.

In so far as the Christian tradition in which Stevens was brought up, “The fault lies with an over-human god, / Who by sympathy has made himself a man / And is not to be distinguished” from man, because by ‘pitying us so much’ he ‘weakens our fate’ (CP 315). The weakening of our fate is ‘relieving us of woe,’ ending almost all evil and pain. Life, for Stevens, consists within the oppositions, since the continual play of balance and imbalance between “Two things of opposite natures” constitutes the ‘change’ and hence the desire that is essential to human life so as to relieve it of perpetual ennui (CP 392). Thus, our fate must be strong: for this, god must not be too human, like Jesus as we see him now. Yet Stevens will not prefer a totally inhuman god either, a god who is ‘speechless’ and ‘invisible’ (CP 262); hence a compromise is sought in “Montrachet le-Jardin” (CP 260-64) by hopefully introducing the element of “mercy” into the “divine orations of the go[ld]” enabling to “speak[...] of go[ld] in the voice of men” (CP 262); but this leads “to equate the root-man and the super-man” (CP 262). The poem does not relish much this possibility. So he comes down to root-man, to himself, who is capable
of dreaming “A little while of Terra Paradise” (CP 263), the other. And what he sees is that “the great cat / Leaps quickly from the fireside and is gone.” This ‘great cat’ is the Other whom he sees at midnight and whose “undeciphered murmuring” has come “close” to him (CP 261). This is the moment of the Other as jouissance since the Other, “the deliverer / Deliver[s] the prisoner by his words, / so that the skeleton in the moonlight sings, / sings of an heroic world beyond the cell” (CP 261).

Hence Stevens’ god, being neither over-human nor inhuman, is simply ‘less human.’ While the poem’s title, “Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit” (CP 327-8), grieves over the less human aspect of ‘god,’ the poem’s body justifies it. This is not only one more opposition that one can find in Stevens’ poetry, but it also marks the origin of desire.

The poem employs a repetition of “Let him...” and “he must...,” a rhetorical move depicting a wistfulness. There is something of what Campbell and Dolan call a ‘praeteritic antithesis’ (see Serio and Leggett 120). Although the poem seems to vindicate the less human-ness of the “god in the house,” the repetition of the above syntax praeteritically hints at the speaker’s anxiety over the less human character. Thus, the truth of the Other is revealed in the rhetorical move itself:

Let him move...silently...
Let him hang out his stars on the wall
He must dwell quietly.
He must be incapable of speaking, closed,...
Let him be one that will not hear us when we speak...

He moves silently; dwells quietly; shows his excellence or superior rank — that is, his alienness — by signs (‘stars’). Although the poet writes that ‘he must be incapable of speaking,’ he knows that ‘he’ speaks; it is only that ‘his’ speech cannot be hominized since ‘his’ speech is a ‘closed system’ in the sense in which ‘light,’ ‘color,’ ‘shape’ are closed systems, the reason why we cannot ‘touch’ them; we ‘touch’ them only through the emotion they produce in us. Stevens knows this, yet has an embittered feeling that the Other does not respond to our desire as other humans do. This feeling is expressed in the concerned line. Stevens is aggravated by the Other’s ‘coolness,’ by its real-ity or ‘existence’ in its ‘no-thing’-ness, by its unsociable quality (“stick”). The phrase ‘any stick of
the mass' is ambiguous: 'stick' also means a 'support;' 'mass' could mean 'people' or Steven could, from its meaning in physics, be referring to the unconscious. Thus, the Other is characterized as the 'unsociable' aspect of the unconscious, and as the support of the people — in the sense that because there is the Other's otherness that there is a 'desire for the Other,' which is expressed in the longing — "of which we are too distantly a part," as if Stevens desires to reduce the distance. The word 'mass' is also used earlier in line 14. "It is the human that demands his speech / From beasts or [what is almost the same] from the incommunicable mass;" i.e. from the other or from the unconscious. The unconscious as well as the outside reality cannot be 'addressed' in the full sense of the word, hence is 'incommunicable.' This is what is Lacan's real. The whole poem being a rendition of the Other as impossible — and this is what makes the very concept of 'god' — the word 'stick' could take on the meaning of 'fate,' the utterly unsociable or non-humanizable reality, yet controlling us, implicating us, thus, making us "too distantly a part of it. In this poem as in Lacan, the real is complete, full; it does not require human intervention. It is the human which desires that it respond ("demands his speech"), hence "It is the human that is the alien" (see ERS 93), craving to be united with the real, desiring to eradicate the distance between "where we live" (CP 326) and "where we have yet to live" (CP 336). This is a question of being or existence; the two phrases recall Lacan's notions of 'existence' and 'ex-sistence' (see note 37 to the chapter 'Apogee') and also the desire to be there where it was as sketched out in Freud's 'Wo Es war, soll Ich werden.'

All the poems discussed so far in this chapter reflect Stevens' glosses of the Other that are closely analogous with Lacan's glosses of it. The Collected Poems is full of references to it in various guises beginning from "Paltry Nude," which initiates the desire on the path of the Other, up to the final poem, "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself," which depicts the otherness, in relation to the subject, of the continuity between 'inside' and 'outside', where 'the Thing' that is referred to could easily be what Lacan calls 'the Freudian Thing' (Écrits 114) or the Other. However, it is important to also observe that while some poems, especially the first few poems, and notably the "Snow Man" and "Re-statement of Romance," show Stevens as a patient, the later poems, like "A Dish of Peaches," are mostly written in the spirit of the analyst. One can always have an objection to accept Stevens as analyst, owing to the fact that he could not wipe out his fascination for the Other. But that may be part of his memory of his earlier
Besides, fascination itself is what the ego psychologists call the ego's 'health.' Lacan, too, at one point, has the same thing to say: "Fascination is absolutely essential to the phenomenon of the constitution of the ego" (Seminar II 50) even though the fascination must be discouraged, in his view, for the desire to be remain normal. This, as opposed to the disintegration of the ego into several egos on encountering the ultimate real, is what Lacan refers to as a quod, a what-is-it? (Seminar II 178). That disintegration is observed in "Snow Man," but the later poems maintain the ego's 'health' as if it is the analyst analyzing himself as patient, thus commingling both the strange experience of the patient and the analysis thereof. After such poems, there are poems like "Sketch of the Ultimate Politician" that delineate the Other as an-Other to the human. In this way, it will not be totally out of context to say that Stevens sought to recuperate himself, though the fascinating quality of the earlier experiences are sensed to have been remembered from time to time — even in poems like "Sketch of the Ultimate Politician."

What our task is to see how exactly Stevens' recovery begins. This obviously means a freedom from the 'time of the Other' by allowing 'traversing of the fantasy' and becoming a desiring being oneself or assuming one's own 'being.' Thus, it is necessary to first see what this important stage, the 'traversing of the fantasy,' means in Lacan, since how one comes to 'be' is important from the analytic point of view.

Prior to the sense of being a 'self' or to the sense that one is, one is almost non-existent. To use Lacan's terms, before the establishment of the relation S\diamond a, one 'exists.' Later, the processes of alienation and separation take place. One more, an important, process that Lacan describes is what he calls la traversee du fantasme or the traversing of fantasy, the 'further separation' that is already referred to at the beginning of this chapter and which may be seen here in some detail. Before the traversing of fantasy, the subject is tied to the Other. Fink writes,

The castrated subject is a subject who has come to be within language. The "inadequately" or "insufficiently" castrated subject corresponds to a subject whose separation is not complete — in Lacan's terms from the early 1960s, a subject who "mistakes" the Other's demand (D) for the Other's desire (a) in fantasy (his or her fantasy corresponding to S\diamond D instead of S\diamond a). The subject who refuses to "sacrifice his or her castration to the Other's jouissance" (Écrits 323) is the subject
who has not undergone the further separation known as traversing fantasy; for
castration must be sacrificed, given up, or surrendered if subjectification of the
cause is to occur. The subject must renounce his or her more or less comfortable,
complacently miserable position as subjected by the Other — as castrated — in
order to take the Other’s desire as cause upon him or herself. The traversing of
fantasy thus involves a going beyond of castration and a utopian moment beyond
neurosis.

Now, Wallace was a ‘fully’ castrated subject (as opposed to what Fink refers to
as ‘inadequate’ or ‘insufficient’ castration), he had undergone the process of further
separation; in short, he was a normal subject before his father started to resist his access
to manhood. What happened when the quarrel between the father and the son took place
and the son broke his relationship with the father is precisely what is laid out within the
parenthesis in the above quotation. Wallace lost his relation to object(a), and mistook the
Other’s demand for the Other’s desire. It is interesting indeed to see what or who this
Other is in this particular case. The father as paternal Other is clearly one possibility:
Stevens knew too well that this Other was making a demand that he could not fulfill; in
this sense, he, in fact, renounced castration and went ahead with his decision of marrying
Elsie. This should naturally lead him to establish the relation $S \Diamond a$.

Let us pause here a moment to ask a question: is the ‘traversing of fantasy’
possible for a ‘fully’ castrated subject or for an ‘inadequately’ castrated subject? On the
one hand, castration — the subject’s entry into the symbolic order — is necessary if his
or her fantasy is to traverse, if he is to cross the barrier of the Other’s demand in order to
establish the relation with object(a); and on the other, as Fink says, castration must be
given up. It would seem as if there is a contradiction in Fink’s passage quoted above,
since ‘inadequately’ or ‘insufficiently’ castrated subject is almost the same as the subject
who has given up castration, for such a subject is closer to the real-as-(m)Other as
object(a). Fink is not wrong, however. Perhaps, to make the passage mean more a clause
could be added thus: “...castration must be sacrificed, given up, surrendered — for the
time that would be sufficient for the fantasy to traverse — if subjectification of the cause
is to occur.” This is because, after all, the ‘subjectification of the cause’ is a momentary
affair, though its effects are long lasting for the subject; and also because the subject
does return to the order that castrates him after the moment of ‘subjectification of the cause’ is over. The point is that it is from within castration that the subject, to use Fink’s expression, breaches through to the real (92), thereby abandoning castration for that moment. One more important point is to see when the subject is likely to renounce castration, for something radical must happen for the subject to switch over to the other extreme, to object(a). This ‘something radical’ is nothing but the subject’s sense of his own castration by the Other; he must feel sordidly burdened by it; castration must reach its peak, for the stronger the sense of this burden the better for ‘subjectification of the cause’ (by ‘peak’ and ‘stronger’ I do not suggest excessive castration, which leads to abnormality); these two opposites depend upon each other. This is what I take ‘fully’ castrated state of the subject to mean, which is a momentary affair.

Wallace’s castration by the paternal Other, — even, parental Other, since his mother cannot be altogether excluded from his father’s resistance to his marriage with Elsie — his sense of castration or its ‘fullness,’ and Wallace’s overthrowing it are all obvious. Yet it confounds our imagination as to how this period (1907-8) should be the prefatory to a great literary ‘career,’ the beginning of which shows a psycho-pathological character. Why is it that Wallace, instead of writing joyful songs, should write poems of a pathological character at the beginning of his career since by overthrowing his castration by the parental Other he must have established the relation S Ô a. To this end, there is little proof. But this should be no hindrance. Though we have no proof, it is not impossible to see that Wallace’s love has something to do with this. What is not obvious is the demand of his love for Elsie, without which Wallace would have either achieved object(a) or would have respected his father’s — rather, parents’ — demand thereby retaining his castration by the parental Other. But neither of these was to be. Wallace revolted against the father’s demand, but at the same time he was entering, fulfilling, tying himself to — despite himself — an Other the pivot of which was Elsie. Stevens’ situation is very much comparable to that of Hamlet in the sense that both were deprived of the phallic signifier and in both cases the beloved becomes for them the object of fantasy that “takes the place...of what the subject is — symbolically — deprived of,” i.e. of the phallus.19 What happened is that Wallace separated himself from the parental Other and got engaged with an-Other, mistaking the latter’s demand, that the marriage take place, to be the latter’s desire.
The idea here is that, in the neurotic’s fantasy, (S O D) instead of (S O a), the subject adopts as his or her ‘partner’ the Other’s demand — that is, something that is static, unchanging, ever revolving around the same thing (love) — instead of the Other’s desire, which is fundamentally in motion, ever seeking something else.

(Fink 187-6)

Wallace, unfortunately, remained in the ‘time of the Other’ even after revolting against the parental other’s demand. This is the reason why we see so many references to the Other throughout his *Collected Poems*.

Thus, unless the subject assimilates the Other’s desire for object(a), there is little chance that he will come to be; without that he or she remains suspended in the ‘time of the Other.’ In Stevens’ case, his father’s dominance, which reached its peak in 1907-8, suspended him thus. Although Garrett’s domination may be observed from his sons’ childhood on, they had no sense of it. For Wallace, it is only after the beginning of the tension regarding his marriage that the change or loss of his relation with object(a) took place. And even though he broke free from his castration, it was a specious freedom, since the relation S O D that was formed during the period of the tension did not change; for, Elsie too served as an Other, whose implicit demand that he reciprocate her love and marry her subjected him; in fact, he took the demand of Elsie for her desire. This remaining tied to the Other’s demand is what Fink means by ‘inadequate’ or ‘insufficient’ castration.

Chronologically speaking, the real as mother-child unity is cancelled out as a result of the child’s entry into the symbolic order. This is what constitutes alienation and separation from the (m)Other. The *Name-of-the-Father* plays a crucial role in these processes. However,

Some modicum or portion of that real connection [mother-child] is found in [the traversing of] fantasy (*ajouissance* after the letter [i.e. after the invasion of the child by the symbolic]), in the subject’s relation to the leftover or byproduct of symbolization...: object a.

This second order *jouissance* takes the place of the former “wholeness” or “completeness,” and fantasy — which stages this second order *jouissance* — takes the subject beyond his or her nothingness...and supplies the sense of being. It is thus
only through fantasy, made possible by separation, that the subject can procure him or herself some modicum of what Lacan calls “being.”

(Fink 60-61)

In adult life, some traumatic event can transport the subject to the pre-fantasy time, to what Lacan referred to in the seminar on Hamlet as the “time of the Other” ("Desire" 17). The quarrel between Stevens and his father was such traumatic event; it changed Stevens’ relations, including his relation to his being. He was thrown back to the phase of castration. But, because he had already come to be as a human subject by the time of the quarrel, it does not exactly mean that he was implicated in the mother-child dyad; it only means that he lost the sense of being, of ‘self,’ of his ‘wholeness’ or ‘completeness.’ In short, the relation SO a was problematized. This anticipates the loss of the Name-of-the-Father, this was further followed by the father’s death in 1911. If we denote the object(a) — which is both the object responsible for the subject’s sense of being and the signifier thereof in Lacan — as S1, and the Name-of-the-Father as S2, it could be realized that the loss of S2 strips S1 of any meaning at all. To illustrate the retroactive effect that S2 has over S1, Fink gives an example of a sentence: ‘By the time you get back, I will have already left.’ The departure of the ‘I’ is important here, but it is retroactively determined by the getting back of the ‘you,’ without which the departure of the ‘I’ has no meaning, no status of priority (Fink 64). This is shown as

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S1
 `- S2
` S
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The child’s unity with the mother, comparable to the subject’s being as object(a), is reduced to a signifier (S1) by the institution of the symbolic order (S2), the pivot of which is the Name-of-the-Father, and this precipitates the subject. If, after this, S2 disappears...what will happen? This is our concern. The subject’s status as subject or his sense of ‘self’ will be problematized. Unless S1 is brought in relation with (a relation of opposition or difference as between two signifiers) other signifier(s), the subject will not attain fuller subjectivity, the sense of the ‘self,’ which is the mark of his relation to his own being.
A little careful observation of Stevens’ poetry reveals that he has always used what he calls ‘reality’ as a signifier or signifiers that serve to lead to the apprehension of the real, to the sense of being, the jouissance. That is why there is a realization in him that the reality one sees around is not the end in itself; it is the beyond, where the being is and the sense of which it is capable of bringing, that ends the subject’s search of himself, of his being:

It is least what one ever sees.
It is only the way one feels, to say
Where my spirit is I am.

(CP 120)

It is to this essentially happy or comic end that the whole of Stevens’ work strives to reach. If Eliot’s motto was to be holy, that of Stevens was to be “Happy rather than holy” (CP 185; also see Narasimhaiah 83). Thus, while most of Stevens’ readers find his Comedian as the Letter C comic, even as a “comic debacle of Crispin,” their sense of the ‘comic’ falls utterly short of the essential comedy, which is the serious quest for the objective Crispin attains, that is deliberately masked. Stevens was not a poet who would indulge into the comic genre without serious reasons; poems like “A High-Toned Old Christian Woman,” “Of Heaven Considered as a Tomb” are proof in instance; even in his life he was reservedly serious. Most readers of the poem do not seem to see the serious intention of the poem. Daniel Fuchs even goes to the extent of calling it a mock heroic poem (32). Bloom is close to calling it a bad attempt by the poet: “One can even wonder if Stevens is attempting to write badly, though the sourness of human and poetic failure is so evident that any critic must hesitate before ascribing intentionality to some manifest poetic blots. These blots most palpably include Crispin’s four grotesque daughters” (82). Beneath all the “zany brood of disgruntlement” consisting of “burlesque, farce, satire, parody and travesty” (Patke 34), The Comedian’s search for a moncellement or “aggrandizement” remains masked. If “From the Journal of Crispin,” from which The Comedian was expanded, “is better able to incorporate the saintly inheritance in Crispin’s name” (Patke 25), it is because Stevens was serious about the theme; otherwise, he either would not have written the poem or at least would not have bothered to submit it in the competition in an “effort to capture [the prize]” (Letters 224). R. P.
Blackmur, however, understands this (see his “Examples of Wallace Stevens”); Vendler says he considers the poem’s subject as serious and the poem as “conveying a sort of heroism” (On Extended Wings 38). But one can see the seriouness of “The Journal” and the happiness of The Comedian. Even the former is full of comic element, but what needs be discerned is that Stevens, from the germ of the theme onwards, kept mitigating the degree of seriousness which reaches its height in its final form. It was deliberate. Stevens daubed The Comedian with almost everything that can evoke the reader’s mirth, and turned it into an anecdote so that it would amuse even those who could have derided the theme in face of the then ruling world-view as represented by The Waste land. However, the choice of “anecdote” instead of ‘fable’ for describing the story of Crispin suggests the poet’s desire for credibility and acceptance of the theme: it is not a fable because Stevens did not want it to be taken as ‘not based on fact;’ and, though anecdote does not entail a moral, this ‘anecdote’ is ex professo “invented for its pith” that one has to “score” (CP 45), i.e. either to ‘scold,’ or to ‘arrange music for’ and praise. Crispin’s anecdote may not be “doctrinal in form” — by ‘form’ Stevens usually meant ‘style,’ “a carrier of meaning” (Vendler, Words Chosen 52) — but it is so “in design” (CP 45).

Though the poem rejects any dependency “on...allusive strategy and on...structure of history” (Riddel 94), the past does provide a point of ‘departure’ in both literal and figurative senses of the word. Thus, the protagonist anticipates his ancient namesake St. Crispin; and the ‘nota’ at the beginning, “man is the intelligence of his soil” (CP 27), evokes a parallelism between the protagonist and Adam, who “In Eden was the father of Descartes” (CP 383); Adam was perhaps more ‘ego’-tistic than Descartes, who placed human ego at the center of things.21 However, the contingent reality that surrounds modern man is essentially inhuman. “It severs not only lands but also selves” (CP 30). Thus, the notion of the metaphysical centrality of man, the notion of man as the center on which the world without depends for understanding, is rejected. In Lacanian terms, which go further beyond, there is also a relationship of rivalry between the ego and reality as the other. Modern man is not Adam, hence is not at his “happiest Normal” (qtd. in Patke 28 from Poggioli 174), nor is he St. Crispin who could attain ‘sainthood’ through hardship. Even Adam could not hold his centrality to the world in which he walked, and succumbed to the Satanic outward pressure. Every post-Adamic man, therefore, is removed from the “C-Natural” (Letters 393),22 the once natural position of man as “the intelligence of his soil.” Just so, the protagonist of the poem, “an every-day
man” (Letters 778), must be severed from Adam; and from ‘sainthood’ too, for he cannot bring about a ‘miraculous’ change in his own circumstance. He, therefore, tends to be attached with the glories of humans from the past in several ways; his connection with the myth of the closeness of ancient man with God is the most important in this respect. Stevens breaks this attachment in a single line; “just so, an ancient Crispin was dissolved” (CP 29). The use of ‘an’ in relation to the protagonist’s name instead of ‘the’ in this line evokes the everyman (Stevens referred to him thus; see Letters 778), and the allusion to the saint in the word ‘ancient’ evokes his relation with God. However, Stevens was not a pessimist like Thomas Hardy; he felt the necessity of abandoning meek servility to the tempestuous reality. Hence “The valet in the tempest (is) annulled” (CP 29), thus annalized, too. The “dead brine,” the “dead encrustation of the ideas” of the poet thus dissolving (Sukenick 51), Crispin now stands alone: “some starker, barer self/ In a starker, barer world.” However, being human, he still needs “an imperishable bliss” (CP 68), as if from some present equivalent of the old God. So, “Against his pipping sounds” he hears a ‘trumpet’ crying “Celestial sneering boisterously” (CP 29). This brisk and decisive sound, this ‘crisp’ that is ‘in’-side, is what he must seek. This is why he becomes an “introspective voyager.” The present equivalent of God is inside himself. The crux of Stevens’ organization of the world is that god must be inherent in man, that “Divinity must live within [one]self” (CP 67). At this point begins Stevens’ odyssey — to which Miller calls the “recovery of [human] immanence” (“Wallace Stevens’ Poetry of Being” 161) — his search for the “mythology of self” that would be “Blotched out beyond unblotching” (CP 28), which is not without its psychological import. This is the central concern not only of The Comedian but also of Stevens’ poetic career, towards which most of his writings are incident.

Crispin’s Husserlian reduction to a “starker, barer self” (CP 29) allows a clear perception of his own real. The whole of the final passage of section I is a description of the unconscious, the here and now equivalent of God. On becoming an “introspective voyager,” Crispin stands confronting it, which is “the veritable ding an sich,” the ultimate real, the qoud, the what— is— it? as Lacan refers to the unconscious. It is “a vocable thing,” but its speech is “belched out of hoary darks” of the mind; it is “a visible thing,” but it is not “the unavoidable shadow” of Crispin. Crispin’s ‘shadow,’ described as something “That lay elsewhere around him” (CP 30), is not the Other but the other of Lacan, the external reality as Crispin’s alter ego that his ego as imaginary
function manipulates. This suggests the radical otherness of the unconscious in relation to oneself. This is precisely why "Severance / Was clear" between Crispin the "egotist" (moi) and his unconscious (the Other). Yet, the "romance" in the form of 'speech' does exist between the two, but it is a strange romance since it encourages the feeling of otherness in the ego instead of the sense of their oneness, thus "fors[aking] the insatiable ego[]." The reality Crispin confronts here is beyond his (ego's) control. The imaginary méconnaissance has finally given way to a perception (or an audition) of "the strict austerity / Of one vast, subjugating, final tone" of the unconscious. Yet this is a renewing experience for Crispin in that it is after all a new knowledge of reality. The renewing capacity of the experience is expressed as "The drenching of stale lives no more fell down;" the "stale lives," on receiving the dose ("drench") of this experience are revived — unlike the medicinal 'drench,' which may fail to do so. While Crispin is spellbound by this "gaudy, gusty panoply" of the unconscious, he wonders — rather, is wonder-fully sure — that it did spring from a "destruction," which could well mean the end of the Adamic (ego-centric) psychological order, in which there was no 'severance' or otherness. The unconscious reality is described as "caparison of wind and cloud," where the "wind" and "cloud" could be particulars of the external reality or of the inner reality. It is further glossed as "something given to make whole among / The ruses that were shattered by the large." The "large," like the 'deep,' connotes the sea of reality ('sea' is Stevens' word for reality); the "something" is a pronoun that replaces the "It" of the previous line, i.e. the unconscious. Hence, the "large" may not represent the inner reality since it would be an unnecessary repetition of the mention of the unconscious. But it can neither represent the external reality since the "ruses" (imaginary méconnaissance) are shattered by the revelation of the internal reality. The "large," in spite of the repetition, could therefore be a reference to the unconscious. Such solecism is possible when the writer is overwhelmed by what comes to his mind; Longinus would certainly excuse this. Besides, this interpretation befits Lacanian reading of the lines: the knowledge of the unconscious reality lends completeness to the imaginary perception of reality, it 'makes whole' in the sense that one (who is nothing but imaginary function), can tranquilize "with this jewel / The torments of confusion" (CP 27); and this "jewel," the unconscious or the Other, also 'makes hole' in the imaginary as it falters before the revelation of this inner reality (ERS 188). But all the same, the experience yields a new knowledge of reality and revives Crispin's spirits.
In section II, Crispin seeks to give expression, like a poet, to this new experience and the knowledge thereof. The unconscious and its discourse must be clarified:

The fabulous and its intrinsic verse
Came like two spirits parleying, adorned
In radiance from the Atlantic coign,
For Crispin and his quill to catechize

(CP 31)

But to bring the real into the domain of the symbolic is a difficult stage in the life of the artist, for his language must be adequate, must come to terms with it. Hence, Crispin tries in the spirit of an **avant-guardiste** various forms and techniques of expression, “rebelling against conventions, experimenting with poetic forms” (Simons 456). The “Maya sonneteers” are still making their pleas to the nightingale — the patron bird of the Romantic poets — overlooking the immediate present, the near: the “hawk and falcon, green toucan / And jay” (CP 30). But, the “sought-for aid” is not to be found in the outmoded. Crispin is a man whose experience of reality has made all his desires “difficult and strange” (CP 31), and who therefore cannot be content with the available aid. This is one of his destitutions because of which he is “rattling inwardly;” this is the cause of his “heat” that is well expressed by William Carlos Williams as he wrote about the years around the early 1920’s: “There was heat in us, a core and a drive that was gathering headway upon the theme of a rediscovery of a primary impetus, the elementary principle of art, in the local conditions...” (quoted in Martz 10). Well, Crispin has found that impetus, what he lacks is the mode of expression. He eventually realizes that the lack will not be fulfilled from the outside, that there is no ready-made help, and that, in fact, the

Coolness for his heat came suddenly,
And only in the fables that he scrawls
With his own quill, in its indigenous dew

(CP 31)

He finds that the satisfaction of his desire comes through his own indigenous language and style, which is rich “Of an aesthetic” that is “diverse” from the ones cherished by
the “prudes” walking under Eliotian influence and the movement of the object-ridden poetry. Crispin regards the promise of the newfound aesthetic since it has given him a new vision, “a curious promenade,” that will lead to those “beautiful barenesses” that are “as yet unseen” by anyone, and wherein lies the “elemental fate.” Crispin has only sensed this promise at this point of his “voyage.” However, he realizes that the unconscious speaks of a reality that keeps “Expanding in the gold’s maternal warmth,” in what would be Lacan’s real, which is productive (“maternal”) since one keeps interpreting it without full success, yet making the real world around more desirable, more beautiful, more opulent. Here, the poem’s reader is likely to be confused: if Stevens is speaking about the unconscious, how does he suddenly shift to the outside world? It is because the Other or the unconscious is the continuity between inside and outside.

With these ‘notes’ Crispin proceeds. However, he does not know that the “maternal” could be destructive. Lacan reveals the (m)Other’s threat in a shocking way:

Her desire is not something which you can bear easily, as if it were a matter of indifference to you. It always leads to problems. The mother is a big crocodile, and you find yourself in her mouth. You never know what may set her off suddenly, making those jaws clamp down. That is the mother’s desire.

Thus, Crispin experiences a harsher proclamation of the real in the form of the thunderstorm. So, the reality he desires is not all that gregarious; in fact, it is also fearsome,

Proclaiming something harsher than he learned
From hearing signboards whimper in cold nights
Or seeing the midsummer artifice
Of heat upon his pane

(CP 33)

From Lacanian viewpoint, the thunderstorm is the ‘master’ (or ‘master signifier’) and Crispin is the ‘slave.’ Lacan says that the first function of language is “imperative” (Fink 198); hence the master’s speech is ‘harsher proclamation.’ It is through speech that the master wields his authority, making the slave “envious in phrase,” in speech. But the
slave must obey him, must bend to his command; so does Crispin kneel in the cathedral. It may be noted that he does not kneel out of reverence for God but out of the threat of the harsh reality as master. And all the while the slave awaits his master’s death; but he does not know that he, by the master’s death, will come (psychologically) closer to death. Lacan asks, “What use does this waiting have for him? It is interposed between him and death” (Seminar I 286). What is happening in the poem is that the Thanatos principle has come into operation, that Crispin’s desire for the Other, to symbolize (“catechize”) it, is proving fatal. His desire is, therefore, aptly described in “This connoisseur of elemental fate.” He did not know that there is no jouissance in seeking the Other. Like every man, he desires to conquer death; like a slave, he desires to own the master’s power and speech: it is this “span / Of force, the quintessential fact, the note / of Vulcan, that the valet seeks to own,” seeks to symbolize (‘kill’) it. Fortunately, the ‘master’ does not die and thus Crispin remains away from his own death: in this ‘waiting’ period, just before the final part of section II begins, nothing of the sort happens; the thunderstorm is still heard “on the roof” of the cathedral. Nevertheless something has surely happened here. The ‘harsher proclamation’ has dwindled to ‘droning’. Has Crispin succeeded in ‘symbolizing’ the ‘master’ to some extent? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. But, like the adventurer (Odysseus? Columbus?) who has seen closely and faced and survived death, Crispin emerges, feeling “more than free, elate, intent, profound;” his limits have extended; he has gained in experience and knowledge. “The slave, in slaving away for the master, learns something: he or she comes to embody knowledge (knowledge as productive)” (Fink 131). For the adventurer, after the experience, death does not matter; he almost feels equal and opposite in relation to it. This is where the hysteric’s discourse comes into play: “the hysteric pushes the master...to the point where he or she can find the master’s knowledge lacking...and then goes on to disprove his or her theories” (Fink 134). Crispin does not go this far, but the germ is there, as it can be found even in the adventurer. Thus, it is “while” the torrent is still droning on the roof that Crispin feels the “Andean breath.” Both Cézanne and Stevens associate primal power and force with the mountain image. In feeling the Andean breath or the Andean anima — and if “music is feeling” in Stevens (CP 90), then feeling is becoming, even being — Crispin feels like or becomes the Andes, feels the mountain’s strength as his being or part of it. This is how he matches himself with the ‘thunderstorm’ and its ‘harsh proclamation,’ but only when it is in its lesser potential
form, with the ‘torrent’ and its ‘droning.’ Thus, though Crispin is not equal and opposite to the ‘thunderstorm’ in its most potential form, he has at least gained some knowledge of it. Indeed, there is a reference to his ‘learning’ from the other master signifiers “of the [lesser] kind” (parenthesis mine; CP 32), viz. the “signboards whimpering in cold nights” and the “midsummer artifice of heat.” Crispin has certainly learnt something from the ‘thunderstorm’ as well. His knowledge has transformed him. The “self” that has “possessed” him is nothing but the transformation that he has undergone here. However, the ‘thunderstorm’ has retained its mastery; death is still the master signifier against which Crispin butts up; the master signifier “puts an end to association...grinds the patient’s discourse to a halt” (Fink 135). This is why Crispin can think of ‘vociferating’ only after the ‘thunderstorm’ has subsided.

There is another dimension to this episode. It is not the cathedral where the ‘thunderstorm’ stalls and abates; it lets down the “gigantic quavers of its voice” “Beyond [Crispin].” While this may be interpreted as the perception of the ineffable, the primal, the absolute, yet it is still beyond Crispin’s understanding, or returns to what is beyond human comprehensibility, ‘beyond’ the subject’s objective, which is his search of the ‘pleasure principle;’ it may also be interpreted as the insufficiency of religious belief and faith since “Beyond him” could also mean beyond the place where Crispin is at the moment: the cathedral. It is not the Faith that helps him; it is the “Andean breath” which he feels that really helps him; it is his own transformation into a self “That was not in him in the crusty town / From which he sailed” that helps him. Was there no cathedral in that or any nearby town? There must have been; the word “crusty” suggests there must have been. When it did not help him there — and it is one of the reasons why he embarked on his ‘voyage’ — how could it help him here? He is a man who would neither borrow the “sought-for aid” nor see through someone else’s eye (the available religious perspective or faith); he would rather see across his own “vessel’s prow” (CP 35). Thus, whatever he would ‘vociferate’ hereafter would be indigenous, from his own experience, knowledge, and imagination. Hence the claim for a room for Crispin in “the book of moonlight.”

The justification for this claim obviously comes from the originality of his experience of the unconscious in which he hears its discourse, “In which the sulky strophes willingly / Bore up, in time, the somnolent, deep songs.” In the last passage of section II Stevens avoided a direct confrontation with religion; here in section III, he is
deliberately hiding Crispin’s experience as if religious. Aware of Crispin’s unique ambition (it might be Stevens’ own), he skulks his ‘voyage’ behind the name of ‘pilgrimage’ (CP 33, 37) lest it should raise the brows of the contemporary ‘prudes.’ For the same reason he also gives the impression that Crispin’s desire for the ultimate religious experience, which would be nothing short of a direct experience of or confrontation with God, has come true in “That wakefulness or meditating sleep,” which Crispin “never could forget;” this is why the mention of the “sulky strophes” boring up “deep songs” is juxtaposed with the “legendary moonlight that once burned / In Crispin’s mind above a continent” (CP 33- 4), where the “legendary moonlight” is to be taken as religious imagination or meditation that Crispin “once” seriously thought of. But the whole argument is rendered ambiguous by that “once” and “above a continent.” Does not he think of it any more? And, why that curious phrase “above a continent”? The indefinite article might set off speculations that the “legendary moonlight” is “above a[n]y continent.” In that case it is useless since, for Stevens, “Life is an affair of places” (OP 158). Hence, perhaps, the immediate mention of America in the very next line. And the rest of the passage describes America in a manner none too promising. But that is what must suffice; Stevens very much preferred to inhabit such a land. He portrays America in this way because he wanted himself to overcome “all the primitive difficulties of getting started” so as to create a “true mythology,” not only of the region, but also of the self as is stated in the poem’s first section, so that he would “breath in with every breath the joy of having [himself] been created by” what can be “endured and mastered” (OP 295). Thus, Crispin returns — has returned — from the “legendary moonlight...above a continent” to the continent that may comparatively be “invidious,” but for the same reason “more desired” (CP 37), and begins his “observant progress” toward the North.  

The “Arctic moonlight” replaces the “legendary moonlight,” and Crispin writes poems. The “legendary moonlight” could also be romantic imagination; but since Crispin no longer espouses it, he also denies its “lesser” creations. He abandons the “sounds,” “thoughts, / Like jades affecting the sequestered bride,” the “descants,” for all of them evoke the Romantic spirit. In denying ascribing the “lesser things” to Crispin Stevens is free to compare Crispin’s poetry with religious or mythological writings in the sense that great writing ignores lesser things since it aims at a “relentless contact” with an object of greater magnitude. Though neither religious nor mythological in the traditional senses
of the terms, Crispin's writing has for an object something which is no lesser than the object of great poetry. The 'contact' that he wants to or does establish is "Between himself and his environment" — both of which are real — not between two transcendental entities, or between a transcendental entity and a real entity, or a transcendental entity and the human being, as generally happens in the religious and mythological writings. This 'contact' is referred to as the "blissful liaison," which is the "chief motive" (and the 'chief motif') and the "first delight" (apropos of the 'first idea') of both Crispin and Stevens' enterprise. This "liaison" is "blissful" not only "for [Crispin or Stevens] alone" but also for each individual. Herein is the root of why Crispin will later abandon the project of the colony; there is no need of the colony if each individual can find the "chief motive" and the "first delight." From Lacanian perspective, the "blissful liaison" as the "chief motive" would be an identification between self and other, and the "first delight" would be the jouissance of the unity or wholeness of the self accomplished through that identification. Once this is accomplished, there would be no sense or feeling of otherness; 'colony' then would be unnecessary.

However, (Crispin) the 'prude' has his scruples about the new aesthetic of the renewed Crispin: "The more invidious, the more desired" (CP 37). It is more likely that the 'him' and 'his' in "to him that postulated as his theme / The vulgar" refer to two different persons, the 'his' being a reference to Crispin "made new" (CP 30). The 'him' could well be one of the "prudes" (CP 31), or could be Crispin as still caught in the past, for whom, thus, the renewed Crispin's creation would seem "Illusive, faint, more mist than moon, perverse, / Wrong as a divagation to Peking" (CP 34), and his imaginary enterprise would then be "an evasion, or, if not, / A minor meeting, facile, delicate." It is very much possible that both 'him' and 'his' are references to the renewed Crispin; in fact, the excised lines indicate his frustration brought about by the imaginary méconnaissance:

Crispin is avid for the strenuous strokes
That clang from a directer touch, the clear
Vibration rising from a daylight bell,
Minutely traceable to the latest reach.
Imagination soon exhausts itself
In artifice too tenuous to sustain
The vaporous moth upon its fickle wings.

(Quoted in Martz 38)

The subject’s (Crispin’s) desire for the Other (“The vaporous moth”) is clearly traced out in these lines. But, in so far as the imaginary is concerned, it is impossible to have a “directer touch” with the unconscious, the real (“ding an sich”) as opposed to the imaginary “artifice” that is “too tenuous.” This leads to “frustration,” which is “beautiful, perhaps, / To beauty’s exorcist” (Martz 38). What happens here in “The Journal” is that although imagination leads to ‘frustration,’ yet it is called ‘beautiful,’ and this itself makes tenuous the difference between imagination and desire, between the “moon” and “sun,” because, ‘frustration’ is an attribute of the desire, not of the imaginary. By excising these lines Stevens not only exorcized this fault but also preserved the imaginary’s facile-ity; and in showing Crispin’s awareness of this “evasion” and his dissatisfaction with the “moonlight,” he shows Crispin’s “frustration,” thus betraying his desire.

Thus, Crispin’s “voyaging” is a “fluctuating” between his desire for the real and his imaginary “indulgences,” or as Patke would say, between the solar and the lunar, or in Lacanian terms, between the real and the imaginary. Stevens also calls it a “sally into gold and crimson forms” and then a “retirement,” a “sinking down” into the “moonlight.” Here, Lacan’s gloss of the perception of the real as the effect on the perceiving subject (ERS 189) is what Stevens evokes through “goblinry.” But there is a religious connotation, too; the word might recall the holy ghost. In Esthetique du Mal Stevens refers to gods as “golden forms” (CP 317), which are the “gold and crimson forms” in this passage from The Comedian. Crispin’s “voyaging” is also described as his tossing between

a Carolina of old time,
A little juvenile, an ancient whim,
And the visible, circumspect presentment drawn
From what he saw across his own vessel’s prow

(CP 35)
‘Carolina’ might have its origin in ‘carol,’ a hymn associated with the Nativity; thus, the lines suggest that religion is an ancient whim that has not come to maturity (“A little juvenile”), un-real-izable as its goal is as opposed to the real that is “visible,” near, observable, and rewarding in one’s experience of it. Thus the real, in so far as it is religious, and the “moonlight,” whether it be legendary (religious or mythological imagination) or Romantic, both are part of the “stale intelligence” (CP 37). Crispin is determined to rid himself of them: “But let these backward lapses.../ Grind their seductions on him.” Though the danger of being caught in the “backward lapses” is still there, Crispin has realized that it is the solar, the real (“flourishing tropic”), which is “not rarefied / nor fined” for (or, by) all the ‘sophistry’ of the “over-civil” peers of civilization, that he requires; the real in its raw originality is what he requires for his refreshment.

Therefore, Crispin abandons the “moonlight fiction” (CP 36) that was dating him back to the past. This is his rebirth as a “poetic hero” (CP 35) whose “palm” is the “Arctic moonlight” that knows no palmist’s “jugglery” and whose “regalia” is not composed of stars but of the “rankest trivia.” Now has come the time to create something indigenous, without the danger of the shadows of the past. He knows that creativity, “spring” (CP 36), is difficult, but can be handled easily (“gemmy marionette”) by one who has the sleight-of-the-mind that seeks “sinewy nakedness.” Creativity is a search for an august reality. Therefore, Crispin savors “rankness” of the quotidian “like a sensualist.” It makes him see in the quotidian much that he had never seen before at all. It is a purifying experience since it has given him new vision and a new knowledge of the real world in which he walks, of the world that was “falsified” by the ‘prudes’ who either remonstrated with the world and went in search of ‘Shantih’ or thought that ‘so much’ of the external world ‘depends upon’ the perceiver for understanding. None of them ever allowed the introjection of the outside world into themselves; they either forsook it or forced themselves onto it. By allowing the “river” to bear the “vessel” “inward” (his becoming an “introspective voyager”), Crispin ‘sees’ something that the falsifiers could not: it is nothing but the “essential prose / As being.” Here, one might think of Lacan’s object(a). However, it is more probable that he sees the phallus here since, in Lacan’s thought, being as object(a) is not something that can ever be seen or said as such. The poet seems to be using ‘being’ in the sense of existence, in the sense of the feeling of being a ‘self’ as having a separate identity that the phallus is responsible
for; and, for the moment, Crispin does not approve of the change or lack of an identity as
will soon become clear. However, one should first see how Stevens has used the words
‘prose’ and ‘poem’: his lines suggest that if the ‘prose’ wears a ‘poem’s guise,’ then the
discovery of being will come to an end; that is, if this happens, one would discover the
being. Hence, by ‘prose’ and ‘poem’ Stevens seems to be speaking of the two levels of
experience, namely, objective and subjective, respectively representing the being on the
level of the object and on the level of the subject. In Lacan’s thought, the experience of
being is always subjective; what one sees on the level of the object is the phallus
(“Desire” 48). It is becoming the phallus oneself that is capable of yielding the sense of
being — this is their relation that Lacan pays attention to. Therefore, “the essential
prose / As being” is the phallus, and its becoming the subject’s own that is called its
wearing “a poem’s guise;” ‘poem,’ because the experience is intensely personal, and,
‘guise,’ because being, as such, is evasive; the subject shares only some modicum or
portion of it, momentarily, in his fantasy. Thus, he always tries to ‘grip’ — the word is
used by Stevens (CP 376), — the phallus, his question is whether “to have it or not to
have it” (“Desire” 48) or, what is the same, whether to embrace masculinity or
femininity, as opposed to the neurotic subject who is “a negative object” in the sense that
his “position...at the level of privation...is not to be it [the phallus]” (“Desire” 48-9). This
is the reason that did not allow Stevens, before this period about 1920, what is called ‘the
traversing of fantasy,’ thereby achieving the sense of being; he was at ‘the level of
privation’ in his Haronim years. It is clearly from this poem, or from this part of the
poem’s third section, onwards that Stevens’ poetry acquires a distinctive panache as
against the pathological and death-ridden character of the earlier poetry. It is from here
that the ‘recovery of immanence’ really begins.

On realizing the importance of the real world around, Crispin cannot but change
his earlier ‘nota’ to: “his soil is man’s intelligence” (CP 36). The world that is falsified
by the ‘prudes’ is for Crispin “still new continent in which to dwell” (CP 37). With this,
he is freed of the “whole / shebang” of the past. The exit of the past was necessary since
the purpose of his voyage is “To make a new intelligence prevail,” which lends primacy
to the “soil” as the pivot of human existence. But his notion of reality, of life, is not
without ‘men,’ and this is the trouble. Crispin, though aware of the sovereignty of the
‘soil,’ is still thinking of the world in terms of anthropocentrism, and who, in making the
‘collation,’ “The natives of the rain are rainy men,” indicates that the thought of ‘men’ is
unavoidable for him. He still seems a democratic minded European, even a socialist; hence, still caught up in the past. This is why he projects a colony. Though renewed, he is still with old dreams; capricious indeed. This is the reason why his prolegomena to the “new intelligence” is a commingling of “souvenirs and prophecies” both. Nevertheless, what is commendable about his conception is the necessity of a harmonious relationship that he envisions between the men of colony and the world they inhabit. The application of this concept anticipates a distrust of a change of identity; thus, he abhors “Turk as Esquimau, the lute / As the marimba, the magnolia as rose” (CP 38). He also does not approve of the lack of the awareness of identity. Both the instances, of the senors and Brazilians, illustrate these views. The senors are obviously Mexican-Spanish; they are oblivious to the local population of the Aztec and their life-style (“Aztec almanacs”), the reason why they are “sepulchral”: they have not yet accommodated themselves into the world they have inhabited as the Aztec have. And even when the dark Brazilians muse the music rooted in the world they inhabit, they are ignorant of its value to themselves, are not “vigilant” to it, are oblivious to its potency. Thus, both the senors and Brazilians are oblivious to their own reality. It is better that the former return to Spain and make a scan of the native Sierra, and the latter make of their music a revelation by de-scribing it (“should scrawl a vigilant anthology”) thus making it “Intenser than [their] actual life” (CP 344), or by that ‘intense music,’ making their actual life “intenser.” The senors are not happy as they lack desire for the world they have ‘colonized;’ the Brazilians perhaps lack the imagination, since they do not realize the importance of their “pampean dits” and hence are not inspired to “scrawl.” In both the cases, what is suppressed is the human potential; it remains immanent; its recovery is, therefore, important. This is the reason why Crispin will later give up the idea of ‘colony’ and embrace the ‘recovery of immanence’ as his object.

The ‘colony’ is essentially a dream at the end of a democratic or socialist line of thought. How blandly Crispin’s “cloudy drift” lured him into it! These thinkers think that ‘all men are equal,’ and are ultimately forced to practice the law of nature that ‘some men are more equal than others;’ they turn a blind eye to the fact that each is not equal, or is only more or less equal, to every other; this difference is very much the “text” of life; why do those thinkers “gloss” it otherwise unnecessarily (CP 39)? Every man has different nature and has to devise his own way of living; this is what, more or less, Stevens understood by ‘up-to-date capitalism’ (Letters 292). These “dreamers” cheat by
glossing the text of life; their dream remains a dream; their dream, however “proud” and “prodigal,” remains empty for all its promises. Crispin realizes this. He knows these “dreamers” and their “counterfeit” nature and the “masquerade of thought” therein, which Orwell exposes very subtly in his novel. He does not want to confine his desire like them. “Such trash / Might help the blind, not him.” Therefore, instead of depending upon dreams that depend on us, he prefers “apprenticeship to chance event.” Fatalistic as it may seem, it is a “Grotesque” line of thought; but it is true to life, for we do not preordain the future. This may make of him a “clown” — as most critics have made since they do not see that human life itself is, in Santayana’s words, “comic in its existence” (“Carnival” 45) — but what one can do at the most is to be an “aspiring clown,” as Crispin does, like Auden’s Icarus. The socialist or democratic cozeners defy the reality of human nature. Hence, “let the rabbit run, the cock declaim;” let the reality go unconfined, let the desire declaim itself; let life go on as it does, let things be as they are. Instead of flaunting “skyey sheets” of false thought and theory, Crispin therefore prefers “veracious page on page, exact” (CP 40) in order to stick to the true “text[ure]” of life.

In section V, Crispin has abandoned the project of a ‘colony.’ He has instead turned to ‘domesticity’: “slid from his continent by slow recess / To things within his actual eye” (emphases added). The movement from the outer to the inner effected by the desire is characteristic of the formation of the unconscious. Without (noticing) this movement, Crispin would be no different from the realist of the movement called Realism who forbids desire in spite of his desire. But Crispin sees the limitation of this realism: “The plum survives its poems” (CP 41). The so-called realist also knows this, hence he does think of what of the “plum” survives him or cannot be grasped. But he either foretells it (“shall be”) as if the present state of the ‘plum’ does not count, or is adamant about what it “ought to be.” Here, he still projects himself onto reality. So Crispin hasps on “the surviving form, / For him, of shall or ought to be in is.” The “For him” does give importance to the subject, unlike the so called realist; but, like the realist, it also suggests that it is only one man’s view or opinion, and not a stupid certainty. For Crispin, the “shall” or “ought to be” depart from the ‘surviving’ form, the realist fails to sing “in the face of the object,” which is very much in the “is;” he realizes that it is only that the subject is denied knowledge of it. The real cannot be grasped in its entirety. How can one grasp it more? Not without the desire for it, of course. Therefore, he concludes,
“what is is what should be;” the ‘should’ introduces the dimension of the subject’s desire in the perception of the real, it is not as stubborn as that “shall” or “ought to be.” It is true that the real can be perceived or described — though never fully, but a little better — only in terms of possibility. But even the possibility tends to go in two different directions: one that produces objective structures without human interventions as such, and the other that produces structures the very cause of whom is the human imagination or desire. If we consider Stevens’ remark seriously, that “The imagination is able to manipulate nature as by creating three legs and five arms but it is not able to create a totally new nature as, for instance, a new element with creatures indigenous thereto, their costumes and cuisines” (NA 74), then we can realize that these structures are not without human intervention, and that the objective structures erected by the so called realists are without human intervention — or, their theory of objectivity itself — is a falsus, a big lie, an illusion, unless we call the whole of the real as objective. Even Eliot was doubtful about a complete separation of the issues of subjectivity and objectivity. We have concrete examples at our disposal from the field where objectivity dominates: physics. Did not Archimedes apply his imagination to make his personal experience of the hydrostatic law the instance of all such phenomena, which had survived human perception until his discovery? Did not Newton’s experience of things falling on the earth proved a boon for later generations in the same way? Has not Stephen Hawking used his imagination, which he applied to what is known already, in order to (fore)see the end of Time? Can we call their revolutionary thoughts to have arisen without any subjective involvement? If yes, why could not the other people see these things? It was these scientists’ imagination, the roots of which are in the desire for the real, that ultimately succeeded in approaching the real; and we know to what extent and with what precision. The other people’s failure lies in their immanence remaining suppressed. Crispin is an ordinary man like those common people, but unlike them, he is an aspiring human being, like those scientists, wishing to be

The lion in the lute
Before the lion locked in stone.

(CP 175)
This is neither a digression nor a minor point in discussing the poem, for here one must observe a synthesis of the two ‘notas,’ “man is the intelligence of his soil” and “his soil is man’s intelligence,” a synthesis for which Cook is desperate and unnecessarily suggests that another set of three sections, devoted to the synthesis, would bring the poem a better denouement, so that Crispin’s career does not become what he calls “one long diminuendo” (“The Comedian as the Letter C” 192-93). One must notice that in Section V Crispin has arrived at a point where neither the man is the intelligence of his soil nor the soil is man’s intelligence: overcome by the reality, man does not remain its intelligence, but neither the reality has retained its sovereignty; instead, the reality has become “suzerain,” which ‘humbles’ but ‘attaches’ as well (CP 40). ‘Suzerain’ literally means someone controlling the other while granting the other internal autonomy. This is where Stevens allows that subjective element which is further implied in that ‘should’ discussed a moment ago. Subjectivity may be repugnant to the so-called realist, but it befits Stevensian realism, the aim of which is not to “stop short before a plum / And be content,” but to rise before it. Without such leonine rise the ‘should be’ part of “what is is what should be” has no meaning.

“But how to produce this leonine imagination?,” asks Cook (“The Comedian as the Letter C” 197), and the rest of the poem responds positively. Crispin’s questions in the second passage of section V are not all negatively answered. He seriously ponders these questions:

Should he lay by the personal and make
Of his own fate an instance of all fate?
What is one man among so many men?
What are so many men in such a world?
Can one man think one thing and think it long?
Can one man be one thing and be it long?

(CP 41)

Here he is seriously thinking whether it is possible to make himself an instance of all fate, like those scientists. He realizes that it is possible if he avoids the peculiarly personal, like the tragedians or great poets. In other words, he seeks to make the personal the universal. He searches within himself what is in each and every man that needs to be recovered or revived. And he does find it, as will be seen in the discussion of the final
section. This is why, despite his being a “prickling realist” (CP 40), he “Lies quilted to his poll;” ‘poll’ suggests both ‘head’ and ‘opinion’; thus he becomes a representative of the human race, his single head representing all people. By sticking to his opinion, he will represent the opinion of the whole humanity. He opines, “what is is what should be,” and introduces desire in the perception of the real. Once he has done this, once he has introduced desire in the perception of the real, his inner world is “shuffled up” (CP 42).

And the real gives in to him, but not fully. It can never be perceived fully; instead, it comes in the form of its representative, the “prismy blonde.” The word ‘prism’ is derived from Greek prisma, meaning a thing cut short, removed, or reduced by sawing. If ‘prismy’ also suggests “many meanings of domestic felicity” (Sukenick 58), then she represents all the subjective interpretations of the real as its reduced or removed versions, each revealing its different aspect. Sukenick too uses the expression with more or less the same meaning although he applies it only to the “blonde,” who breaks up the “one, vast, subjugating, final tone” of the reality’ (58). With these, Crispin ‘latches up’ (and latches onto) the “night,” which is “the nature of man’s interior world” (CP 333).

What happens in his mind is given next in the lines that are highly untranslatable, but Crispin experiences a “soothsaying silence;” oxymoronic as it may seem, it is that ‘shantih’ in which truth is revealed. Crispin, now, has no concern for the “custodians” of truth and their “motionless march;” he knows they do not and will not get anywhere. It is here that he becomes the “lion in the lute” as he becomes the “magister” of his “room,” of his inner world; it is a sign of the internal autonomy given by the “suzerain” reality.

This is a very important movement that the critical attention has preferred not to take note of despite Blackmur’s attempt; while Blackmur observed the decline in “the sovereignty” of the reality, others could “make nothing better of [Crispin’s] world” (74). Realism, objectivity, the then cherished literary or even philosophical views, and the absolute subjectivity of the earlier periods are combined here in an effort to comprehend the maximum of the real, and thus to effect self-upraisal. The need here is to elevate, qualitatively, the subjective view of the real, without which The Comedian would have been a complete failure as being without ambition. There is no denying that the ‘soil’ is man’s ‘intelligence;’ it might be true that in the unknown past man was the ‘intelligence’ of the ‘soil.’ What is true is that the ‘soil’ is still ‘man’s intelligence’ but that man has lost that ‘intelligence’ he once had. Crispin’s effort is directed not towards regaining that seat of ‘intelligence of his soil’ — that would be a false ideal — but towards becoming
equal to the 'soil,' towards closing, as much as possible, the abyss between the two
'notas.' To this end, what is essential is the recovery of human potential. Hence,
Crispin's 'lying quilted to his poll' and 'returning to salad-beds' is worthy of the cause.

Thus, it is 'morning.' Crispin's journey becomes 'treading in a round,' for it is
immaterial whether he is in Carolina or elsewhere when even the quotidian 'saps.' But
his new way of looking at the reality has made that 'walk' "less prickly and much more
condign" and "with a fig in sight." He owes all this to the newfound relationship with the
reality, which has become his "duenna." He realizes that the quotidian too survives its
'poems.' It 'saps' laymen and philosophers alike, "like the sun" (CP 43). It may be
suspected that 'sap' is used as both verb proper and noun made into verb; the former
usage suggesting that it exhausts as opposed to the latter meaning it invigorates, both like
the sun. That is why, "For all it takes it gives a humped return." Men like Crispin like the
philosophers' intention; the only problem is that they have no desire, no "will." The
sexual connotation in the "humped return" is useful in understanding the 'birth' of
Crispin's 'four daughters' in the next section and his enrichment ("Exchequering"): "All
this with many mulctings of the man" (CP 44), though. Here, one must see that the
reality that was 'man's intelligence,' first becomes "suzerain" and then "duenna," and
now his sexual partner, his equal. It is not, however, that the reality has succumbed;
rather, it is Crispin's upraisal that makes him feel equal to it.

Critics have not been able to agree amongst themselves on the significance of the
'four daughters.' They are neither the four seasons, nor literal daughters or progeny,
nor does each daughter stand for a century, each representing an age in the history of the
American imagination. Taking stock of all these views, Patke unnecessarily doubts "if
the poem can sustain this type of allegorical interpretation" simply because "such an
elaborate degree of continuous allegory is not discovered elsewhere in the poem" (30), a
view that supports a similar opinion earlier expressed by Cook ("The Comedian as the
Letter C" 203). Is not the whole poem an allegory? Is not Crispin himself an alter ego of
Stevens? Is not his 'voyage' allegorical? Is not the poem an allegorical hence disguised
pronunciamento of Stevens' situation and his attempt to define — to quote Martha
Storm — "his place in the American literary milieu" (259)? In his paper "Creative
Writing and Day-Dreaming," Freud says that such disguise is an artistic necessity since
the artist, being adult, is ashamed of revealing his 'day-dreams,' which therefore he can
impute onto the alter ego: "The writer softens the character of his egotistic day-dreams

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by altering and disguising it, and he bribes us by the purely formal — that is aesthetic — yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his fantasies” (SE IX: 153). In fact, the poem easily reminds of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, where Gulliver is the alter ego of the author’s own day-dreams and whose travels and travails both may be compared with Crispin’s enterprise. Crispin is a hero of a quest at the end of which he accomplishes something, like the hero of the traditional quest. Northrop Frye argues, “...the hero of a quest first of all goes “away”: that is, there must be some direction for his movement. Home, as Eliot says, is where one starts from. If the quest is successful, he normally returns home,..., the great model for this returning journey being of course the *Odyssey*” (213). Crispin certainly goes away from “Bordeaux to Yucatan, Havana next, / And then to Carolina” (CP 29); but the return journey is deliberately problematized by the poet: even though there is the mention of Crispin’s “Nice Shady Home” towards the end of his journey (CP 40), yet there is something more to the journey since ‘home’ is not the end of his quest, it is the ‘Daughters with Curls’ where his journey comes to an end. Since the voyage is not literal, as in non-allegorical romances, but “introspective,” the ‘home’ and ‘daughters with curls’ are allegorical; in short, the “anecdote” of Crispin is deliberately “disguised,” “muted, mused, and perfectly revolved” (CP 45).

Thus, both Crispin and his ‘daughters’ are allegorical figures. In fact, Stevens gives enough clues to decipher the significance of the ‘daughters.’ The five children of a 1919 poem, “Piano Practice at the Academy of Holy Angels” (OP 21-2), provide an added support. Patke notices the resemblance between the first four children and the four daughters of Crispin. It is also important to take note of the absence of Crispine of “Piano Practice” in *The Comedian*. Her absence is fulfilled by Crispin himself, whose liking for “tracking the knaves of thought” (CP 42), ‘discontent’ with the old masters’ “skyey sheets” (CP 40), and the desire for ‘veracity’ (CP 40), all match with Crispine’s description: “the blade, reddened by some touch, demanding the most from the phrases / Of the well-thumbed, infinite pages of her masters, who will seem old to her, requiting less and less her feeling” (OP 22). *Ex uno disce omnes*. Crispin’s four daughters’ description is analogous with the first four children of “Piano Practice:”

The first, “the blonde, whose eyes are not wholly straight, in a room of lustres, shed by turquoise falling” is the “goldenest demoiselle, / Attentive to the coronal of things / Secret and regular.” Her eyes are not wholly straight, she cannot see things as
they are, because “Things as they are / Are changed” when she looks at them (CP 165); and this change itself illumines the ‘room’ as it beautifies the ‘green.’ Also being a ‘demoiselle,’ an attendant maid, she focuses her attention on her master or mistress’s beauty (“coronal of things”) that is not seen by the physical eye (“secret”) but is unique (“singular”). She is imagination. The second, “Rosa, the muslin dreamer...disdaining the empty keys” is a “similar counterpart, a maid / Most sisterly to the first, not yet awake / Excepting to the motherly footstep, but / Marveling sometimes at the shaken steep.” She is a ‘dreamer,’ having less contact with the outside world or reality as compared to the imagination, but is ‘most sisterly’ to the imagination. She is desire; though not yet ‘awake’ (desire as unconscious), yet she is ‘awake’ to whatever feeds or satisfies her (the “motherly footstep;” does it suggest desire for the (m)Other?) since she hates lack (“empty keys”). Her marveling at the shaken sleep may be interpreted as conscious desire wondering at the unconscious desire’s fantasy (‘dream’). Her description in The Comedian as “dallying...shy / To fetch the one full-pinioned one himself / Out of her botches, hot embosomer” is also important here. Her ‘botches,’ patched or clumsily put together works, would be the dreams, which are like a rebus. What is not revealed in the dream is what Freud calls the navel of the dream; it is with, or in the field of, the Other. In this sense the Other is “full-pinioned,” where ‘pinioned’ means ‘restrained.’ The desire, thus, remains unfulfilled; this is the reason why Stevens refers to her as “dallying,” “shy.” Yet she seeks “to fetch” the Other all the same; hence, is “hot embosomer.” The third one is Jocunda, “the young infanta, / ...who will arrange the roses and rearrange, letting the leaves lie on the water-like lacquer,” who becomes “a thing still flaxen in the light, / A creeper under jaunty leaves.” She is inspiration. Poetic art, terse as it is, requires Aristotelian mimetic vision that allows to select and arrange only the necessary (“roses”) while discarding the unnecessary (“leaves”), under which the inspiration keeps creeping before elevating herself above them for “rhapsody” that makes her the “pearly poetess.” The fourth, the “confident one, Marie, the wearer of cheap stones, who will have grown still and restless” is “Mere blusteriness that gewgaws jollified, / All din and gobble, blasphemously pink.” She is pleasure and happiness. (‘Marie’ is close to ‘merry’). She is “Mere blusteriness,” because she cannot remain hidden; and is “blasphemously pink,” because she may bluster irrespective of the gravity of a given situation. “Cheap stones” will do, as she can be very undemanding most of the times. She soon becomes “still,” but also “restless,” since she is “a digit curious,” always
alert so as to bluster. She is “pent now” (CP 41), because Jocunda, inspiration, is at work as Stevens is in the midst of writing his poem; or, by the phrase, Stevens might have wanted to comment on his own life at the time: it was a time when Stevens might have started feeling uneasy at his reception as poet; not only he was not well received by readers but after the publication of the 1923 edition of Harmonium he also almost stopped writing until 1931.

Though “Of different struts,” these ‘daughters’ are yet “four selfsame lights / That spread chromatics in hilarious dark” of the mind. Each and every man is “accustomed” to them though their habitat, the mind, is “a world too intricate.” Apart from the subject or his person, they are “four more personae” living within him and “intimate” to him. They are “four questioners,” always on the lookout for what will suffice, and they themselves are “four sure answerers,” since “All of them...amend[] the airs they play to fulfill themselves” (OP 21).

This is the ‘rout’ of Crispin. Stevens might have used the word ‘rout’ as a variant of ‘root,’ a verb meaning ‘rummage,’ ‘discover,’ the verb is used as noun, though. Crispin, thus, has prepared a body of thought to be taught. This is why his “return to social nature” must not be underestimated (CP 143). The base of his discovery or doctrine is that the “world” (CP 45), i.e. the inner world, was “so readily plucked” in ancient — perhaps, Adamic — time; but, it is “darkened by time” (OP 21), and is alienated from us, “sacked up and carried overseas.” Crispin merely has it “daubed out / Of its ancient purple, pruned to the fertile main, / And sown it again.” He has merely recovered or “reproduced” it, but for that alone his value is much greater. The ‘prudes’ might think of his ‘reproduction’ as “The same insoluble lump,” as if he has done nothing special, because they have no idea that we have been alienated from our own “family.” However, Crispin is prepared to ram his humiliation by their slanderous remarks down his throat without “grace or grumble.” If gravity grips him here, it is not because he is defeated as is commonly thought, but because his work is finished. Now the narrator’s voice will be heard ever more clearly, and who, by the end of the poem, will not only completely separate himself from Crispin but will also be his critic, a qualified one, of course: Has Crispin concluded “fadedly”? Is what he proves nothing (CP 46)? Does he remain profitless in the end (CP 45-6)? The final two lines provide an answer, though not uncharacteristic of an ambiguity the source of which is Stevens’ ambitious swim against the contemporary literary current. Not confident of the
acceptance of his theme, he hands off Crispin's enterprise in the manner of a raconteur who comes to the end of his incredible story and, in answer to the objections with regard to its credibility, asks, "What can all this matter since / [his] relation" of the story "comes, benignly, to its end?", where 'relation' is 'telling' and the 'end' is the 'objective,' the 'purpose,' which was nothing but the entertainment of the hearers. However, 'relation' acquires the meaning of 'relationship' in the final line, so that it modifies 'the relation coming to its end' of the penultimate line to mean Crispin's relationship with the daughters, and (hence) with the world, achieving its objective, which was nothing but to establish the "blissful liaison, / Between himself and his environment" stated in section III, where he was uncertain, "fluctuating." This further allows to reinterpret the word "clipped" in the final line as 'achieved.' Indeed, the etymology of 'clip' suggests that it originally meant 'to draw tightly together.' Moreover, the final line's syntax indicates the manner of a blessing, a good wish; Stevens is, then, wishing for each man a harmonious relationship with the world within and the world without.

Apart from Blackmur, Patke, and Cook, who are not willing to show much of disapproval of Crispin's enterprise, many other critics wrongly interpret the poem as Crispin's comic debacle. It is not his amo(i)ndrissement or even amollissement, but amoncellement right from the beginning: "his violence was for aggrandizement" (CP 28). This he does through "his own capacious bloom" (CP 44), through what Miller would say the 'recovery' of his own 'immanence' ("Wallace Stevens' Poetry of Being" 161). It would be a mistake to believe that he is selfish in not thinking of others since he rejects the idea of a colony. As a condign poet, on the contrary, he recognizes his duty and returns to "social nature," involves himself in "Midwifery so dense" that his poetry serves as "phylactery" for others (CP 43). If this aspect is not emphasized more than one expects, it is because the individual and his spiritual growth were more important for Stevens in the sense in which they were for Mahatama Gandhi, who did not look upon people as masses but as individuals. The poet believed that "The mass is no greater than / The singular man of the mass" (CP 206); therefore, he even says, "Marx has ruined Nature" (CP 134). And what right, morally speaking, would Crispin have to teach others without his own spiritual growth? In this sense, he is both an everyman and an individual; ordinary as an everyman and exemplary as an individual, he shows the ordinary man a way to spiritual growth. If Crispin becomes an "indulgent fatalist" (CP...
44), it is because what counts in the individual’s growth is the upliftment of the *fatas*, the human faculties represented by the four daughters; one can easily establish the Italian connection of ‘fatalist,’ by tracing the root of ‘fate.’ The *fatas* were fairies in Italian medieval romance; they were worshippers of Demogorgon, who controlled them. There are many avatars of Demogorgon in English literature, but the one Stevens might have considered here is Shelley’s gloss of him as the eternal principle that ousts false gods, very much in line with Stevens’ thought: “What was the purpose of [Crispin’s] pilgrimage, / ... / If not...to drive away / The shadow of his fellows from the skies, / And, from their stale intelligence released, / To make a new intelligence prevail?” (*CP* 37). Crispin plays Demogorgon to the ‘four’ (not ‘three’ of Spenser) ‘vital’ (not ‘fatal’ as in Spenser) ‘sisters.’ He is Shelley’s Demogorgon, ousting the faith and beliefs of the past as they have become outdated and useless; but he is also, as a human being, his Prometheus, who achieves a mental equilibrium by resuscitating the human faculties or potential or immanence that matches “the difficult and unbending realities of actual life.”

However, Crispin’s relationship with the ‘daughters’ and the world, interior and exterior, is not the end; it is just the preliminary minutiae, the *prolego* with which to initiate the search for

> essential prose  
> As being, ............  
> The one integrity for him, the one  
> Discovery still possible to make,  
> To which all poems [are] incident

(*CP* 36)

Stevens-Crispin’s voyage — Stevens often uses the image of sailing to depict the mind’s movement, rather the psychic movements — is yet to reach that destination. Human life, from its origins, has been going through the same insipid circular movement of birth and death, through this “gorgeous wheel:”

> This heavy historical sail  
> Through the mustiest blue of the lake  
> In a really vertiginous boat  
> Is wholly the vapidest fake...
thus, rendering human existence altogether false. In Lacanian thought, too, the subject is simply a supposition, “never more than supposed” (Fink 204). This seems to correspond to Plato’s view of our world or to the concept of ‘Maya’ in Hindu philosophy, but Stevens will not partake of its hopelessly grim aspect; he will not bid his ‘boat’ the insipid to and fro movement in the portage formed by birth and death or to sink it in the deep waters of illusion. The subject as supposed in Lacan is the result of the subject’s entry into the symbolic order. Stevens imputes it to the “mustiest blue of the lake,” where, as often, ‘blue’ could be the imagination and ‘lake’ the consciousness. But the ‘mustiest,’ most stale, that qualifies ‘blue’ suggests a pre-established order, hence is very close to Lacan’s symbolic order into which the subject is “submerged,” “his or her only trace being a place-marker or place-holder in the symbolic order” (Fink 52). Perhaps, Stevens is thinking of what Lacan means by the knot between the imaginary and the symbolic orders.

However, the subject can — and this is what matters most in Stevens — in a propitious moment of desire, shed the web of the “mustiest blue,” allowing the ‘traversing of fantasy.’ Determined “Not to die a parish death” (CP 151), the desire helps to escape “the unconscionable treachery of fate” (CP 17) when it seeks to

Expunge all people and be a pupil
Of the gorgeous wheel and so to give
That slight transcendence to the dirty sail,
By light, the way one feels, sharp white,
And then rush brightly through the summer air

(CP 121)

The reference to “all people” might pose a difficulty, which nonetheless, can be overcome with Lacan. It may be noted that it is only after expunging “all people” that one can be a “pupil.” This implies a relation between the self and people. It is literally a reference to all people; the way they implicate the subject is very obvious in Lacan’s formulation of the Other as language. The subject’s very entry into the world sees him encrusted and encroached by other people insofar as they use language. The subject inevitably assimilates their activities, a ‘forced choice’ as it is, which is the essence of
the unconscious structuration. In short — Fink illustrates this with an example that includes an anecdote related with Albert Einstein — the unconscious is an inscription of “other people’s desires,” “...other people’s talk, other people’s conversations, and other people’s goals, aspirations, and fantasies” (Fink 9-10). Though the unconscious is not wholly this other’s (people’s) activities involving the use of language or means of communication, this other is very much one of its avatars; that is why Lacan inserts ‘also’ in his gloss, “the unconscious is also the discourse of the Other” (Seminar III 112).

What does Stevens seek by expunging all people or the Other? — to be a ‘pupil,’ certainly — but how can it make him a ‘pupil’? In fact, the poet seems to be playing with the word ‘pupil,’ which could mean: the ‘ephebe;’ that part of the eye which allows ‘light’ to enter into it; and, the center of the “gorgeous wheel.” Whether or not this wheel is one of birth and death or of Fate, Stevens looks forward to transcend its mundane routine with the concentration of the ephebe, since, perhaps, only the one who studies its motion can think of escaping it and partake of the cause as being. If by ‘pupil’ Stevens means that of the eye, combining it with ephebe vindicates the concentrated attention of the beholder, who must be all eye(s) to study the ‘wheel’s’ motion. In Stevens, the act of looking is a very important one, for it allows the beholder to be what is looked upon or to make the looked upon part of him; “The point of vision and desire are the same”, and this is caused by the lack that is felt “always” more actually on the point of vision, which also means the invigoration of desire, promising ever more the fulfillment, “an emptiness that would be filled” (CP 466-67). What is this fulfillment if not the ‘symbolization’ of what is looked upon?54 Thus, by becoming ‘all eye,’ the ephebe can ‘symbolize’ that wheel. Further, on the ‘symbolization’ of the wheel, the ephebe become all eye, or pupil of the eye, attains a centrality in relation to the wheel. Just as the pupil is to the eye, the ephebe is to the wheel. Hence, like the pupil of the eye, “By light,” he transcends the wheel, and by that, seeks “to give / That slight transcendence to the dirty sail” of life which would allow the lack to be fulfilled and partake of the real (“the summer air”). This is analogous to the ‘subjectification of cause.’ Stevens, however, does not forget the momentary nature of the ‘subjectification of cause;’ besides using the image of bright flashy light, he deliberately follows it with “And then,” signifying that the moment is over. But, after that, it is not darkness; instead, the subject cherishes the memory of that moment, allowing him to rush through the “summer air,” that moment serving as a ‘rem(a)inder’ of the sense of being.
Stevens celebrates this moment of jouissance in “Of Bright and Blue Birds and the Gala Sun” (CP 248). The opening stanza might shock the reader in its use of the word ‘thing:’

Some things, nino, some things are like this,
That instantly and in themselves they are gay
And you and I are such things...........

The very fact that Stevens refers to human beings as ‘things’ is surprising. It recalls the two outstanding instances of the word’s use in English literature; one is in Wordsworth’s “A Slumber” (136) and the other in Shakespeare’s Hamlet. In all these three cases, human beings are brought into a relation with the word ‘thing,’ enabling metaphysical speculations. In Wordsworth and Shakespeare, the instance of the word and death are closely juxtaposed. In Hamlet, however, the process of relating death and ‘thing’ takes a convoluted path: first, it is Polonius who (literally) dies, and everyone then refers to him (his corpse) as the ‘body.’ When in Act IV, sc. II Rosencrantz asks Hamlet the whereabouts of the ‘body,’ Hamlet strangely uses the word ‘body’ with such ambiguity that it means both the ‘body’ of Polonius and the ‘body’ of Claudius; rather, he shifts the context of the word and refers to Claudius alone, and by the same token brings about Claudius’s (metaphorical) death, which enables him to discern the ‘King.’ Without Claudius’s ‘death’ on Hamlet’s psychic plane, he would not have discerned the ‘King.’ When Lacan said “the letter kills,” he meant the process of symbolization, of signifierizing the real. Thus, the ‘metaphorical death’ of Claudius is nothing but Hamlet’s use of Claudius-as-signifier to see the ‘King.’ In saying that “The King is a thing—,” Hamlet tries to dialectize the ‘King.’ Here we come across the word ‘thing’ as an important material in the dialectization, for what awaits after its occurrence is a revelation of the meaning of the ‘King’ to Hamlet; this is what the cut in his speech suggests. But he fails in the attempt; he can only say “Of nothing,” since no meaning emerges, probably because of his being “at the level of privation” (“Desire” 48-9) even precludes the revelation of meaning. This is helpful to understand that it is immaterial whether Wordsworth’s ‘she’ dies a biological or metaphorical death. While ‘she’ may have actually died, there is no question of grief for Wordsworth’s ‘I’, absolutely no question of “human fears” or human feelings; this is precisely what is suggested by his
‘slumber.’ Geoffrey Hartman in vain makes him shed ‘tears’ (420-21) since in that case the ‘I’ should have seen the ‘nocturnal course,’ evoking human fears and feelings. In fact, the conflict or tension that is characteristic of poetry lies in the fact that ‘she’ has died but the ‘I’ does not accept it. On the contrary, the ‘I’ accounts for her lack of ‘motion,’ ‘force,’ ‘hearing,’ and ‘seeing’ by making her participate in what he calls “the earth’s diurnal course.” This may sound paradoxical, but this leaving the human behind in favor of the human beyond is precisely what happens with the ‘jar’ of Stevens as, after its triumph over ‘wilderness,’ it becomes god-like: “tall and of a part in air,” “gray and bare” (CP 76). The woman’s ‘body,’ which looks as if dead, thus allows him to see “the earth’s diurnal course.” It is a long-standing practice of literary and visual artists to associate the ‘diurnal’ with life or life giving and ‘nocturnal’ with death or life negating. For the ‘I,’ therefore, her dead body — rude as it may seem — is merely a signifier; it allows him to discern that which causes life eternally (“course,” derived from Latin currere, means ‘run’).

There would be a strong temptation to call “the earth’s diurnal course” Heidegger’s ‘Being,’ which is irrespective of whether humans exist or not. For all the speaker’s denial of fears and feelings, it is impossible for him to speak without any feeling; it is only that he is unable to name the feeling. After all, the poem is an emotional experience, hence there has to be the speaker’s subjective involvement. That is why it is his experience of the ‘cause,’ a moment of jouissance for him; it is her becoming a ‘thing,’ i.e. a signifier(S2), that leads the speaker to his jouissance, to his “slumber,” resulting from the dialectization of ‘death’(S1), resulting in his realization of the meaning of ‘death’ and acceding to the real that is the “diurnal course.”

Stevens, too, signifierizes human beings in reducing them to ‘things’ — But, unlike in Hamlet and “A slumber,” it is the speaker himself (“I”) who becomes a signifier and relates, in both sense of the word, his experience to other human beings (the “you”). It is only the signifier that allows reference to the real. The subject’s becoming a signifier is nothing but becoming a pure desirousness himself, his object or signified being object(a), which is the master signifier; and subjectivity precipitates, or the subject attains a greater degree of the sense of ‘self,’ when the primordial or the master signifier is brought in some relation with the other signifier or signifiers. The sense of ‘self’ will be greatest if the subject himself becomes the other (i.e. a binary) signifier(S2) and establishes for him or her a new position with respect to the master or primordial, i.e. the
unary, signifier(S1). Hamlet or the speaker of Wordsworth’s poem do not become themselves the S2; this is the reason, I suppose, why they do not strike as exultant a note as the speaker of Stevens’ “Of Bright & Blue Birds & the Gala Sun,” which refers to humans as things:

Some things, nino, some things are like this,
That instantly and in themselves they are gay
And you and I are such things, O most miserable ...

For a moment they are gay and are a part
Of an element, the exactest element for us,
In which we pronounce joy like a word of our own.

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

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

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

(CP 248)

The moment of transition from, or relation of desirousness, to “A gaiety that is being” is well caught here. It is also, Stevens implies, becoming part, as if, of another, what he calls, “element.” Though Stevens shifts from “an element” to “the exactest element,” it might be a mistake to equate this ‘element’ with Heidegger’s Being,” since its coming into existence is essentially a subjective experience. Comparing it with Lacan’s object(a), the primordial signifier: if the object is not there, even if as lost, there is no subject; or in the case of its repression or foreclosure, we speak of psychosis; and, if it is there, neither repressed nor foreclosed, we speak of ‘being’ or ‘subjectivity’ or the sense of ‘self,’ since the primordial signifier is the sine qua non of subjectivity (Fink 74). Obviously, one can speak of object(a) or of Stevens’ ‘element,’ if one is; that is to say, in Stevens’ words, it
is the exactest element, because we are. This is not to suggest that Stevens' view is anthropocentric; but, it is merely a reading between "an element" and "the exactest element for us," where, there is no mention of the subject when 'element' is preceded by the indefinite article, and the subject becomes indispensable ("for us") when 'element' is preceded by the definite article. In calling it 'element,' a separate entity "outside of ourselves," Stevens is clearly indicating the transportation of the subject which is equivalent to experiencing the traversing of the fundamental fantasy, whereby the subject experiences jouissance and is "joyously [himself]." The subject is able to experience all this precisely because he is "imperfect," like a signifier, which is not exactly the thing it represents.

The poem is surely a post facto account of the experience, a second reasoning of the moment of being. In that moment the speaker thought "Without the labor of thought;" while writing or speaking the poem, he might have thought hard; he might have thought hard even before that precious moment. Was he not himself when he thought hard, since it is in that moment that he feels 'joyously himself'? This could well falsify Descartes's gloss of cogito. Indeed, one observes, as Lacan does, the otherness of 'I'(ego) to that which 'thinks;' this 'I' cannot locate himself there where 'he' thinks; he is clearly not where 'he' thinks. The 'I,' real-ly speaking, is where he does not think. This is why Lacan says, "What one ought to say is: I am not, wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am wherever I don't think I am thinking" (Écrits 166). Stevens could well have realized the mutual exclusiveness and diametrical opposition of thinking and being that Lacan presented in his Seminar XIV and XV.56

![Figure 4: Thinking & Being](image-url)
Now, Stevens’ speaker, since he is speaking after the experience, *is* obviously not; he is speaking of that moment when he *was*. The task is to locate where he was, where he *was* “joyously *himself.*” In the figure above, the lower right-hand corner represents the unconscious thought that unfolds itself without warrant. In Lacan’s view of thought, true thinking takes place at the level of the unconscious. The conscious part of the subject has this illusion of its self-sufficiency and omnipotence, of its *being*, as shown in the upper left-hand corner; this is largely an imaginary function, hence the false sense of being is with the ego. It is false insofar as the unfolding of the unconscious discourse or thought shatters the self as ego. Thus, the subject is the split between the upper left-hand corner and the lower right-hand corner, or between the ego and the unconscious.

Lacan writes ‘I’ in the unshaded part of the unconscious (Fink 46). In doing so, he obviously suggests that this ‘I’ is the real subject. In the subject’s alienation within language, he is also alienated from this ‘I.’ The subject has the sense of being by virtue of the traversing of this ‘I,’ “only momentarily, as a sort of pulselike movement,” closer to the ego, i.e. “towards the lower left-hand corner” (Fink 46-47):

This is the moment when the ego ‘assumes’ this ‘I;’ it is “not so much an interruption as the assumption thereof, in the French sense of the term *assomption,*” that is the ego’s taking this ‘I’ upon itself, shown by the dotted line above. This is the moment of ‘transparency’ that Stevens describes at the beginning of *Notes*:

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

(CP 380)

The moment is over no sooner than it occurs. The ‘it’ is the Es of Freud’s “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden”. In the above passage it becomes ‘you,’ since the ego (Ich) is again left with the humdrum reality without. However, in that instant, the ego does not remain an object, but becomes the subject, attains a sense of being that it cherishes then on.

It must be pointed out that the real ‘I’ does not go across to where the ego is, i.e. at the upper left-hand corner; the ego merely experiences a vicinity of ‘being’ that soon fades, leaving it in the pangs of separation (“O most miserable...”) but refreshing the desire, nonetheless. This is why Lacan calls it both the object of desire and signifier, designating it with object(a). In Lacan, “a subject is that which one signifier represents to another signifier” (Fink 75; see also Seminar XX 50, 142); “a signifier represents a subject to another signifier,” “The subject is nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers, whether he knows which signifier he is the effect of or not. That effect — the subject — is the intermediary effect between what characterizes a signifier and another signifier” (Seminar XX 142, 50). Lacan’s view of the signifier, however, is not completely without the real. The real may exist “alongside” the letter or symbol or signifier; that is why, “part of psychoanalytic process” aspires to involve the analysand into putting “into words” the real, “that which has remained unsymbolized for him or her” (Fink 25). Thus, the unconscious meaning, when it (re)presents itself to the ego, is in the form of such a ‘potent’ signifier, which is represented as SI. But, the ego too can be viewed as such a signifier, because, chronologically speaking, it might have already come to be prior to the moment of the subject’s illness, i.e. the loss of S1. This also suggests that the desire for the recovery of the loss is very much there with the ego, which corresponds with the subject. Thus, while S1 is full of meaning, the ego lacks it; and it is this lack that makes him a binary or divided signifier; binary, because it is a structure based upon the play of presence and absence of meaning and / or being. Lacan’s concepts of the subject as a mark, as a sedimentation of meaning determined by
the retroactive effect of one signifier upon another, as metaphor's creative spark, as
signified, all go on to suggest that the ego or the subject that we speak of must be a
signifier, but devoid of meaning. Thus, the subject may be designated by S2. The
subject will have a greater subjectivity if S1 is brought in some relation with himself as
S2. This is precisely what happens in the figure in which the real subject of the
unconscious comes to be in an ephemeral pulse-like movement towards the lower left-
hand corner. This is how, when, and where, the relation of S1 and S2 is established,
which may be shown thus:

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S2
  ↓
  ↓
S1
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The precipitation of subjectivity, then would be represented as

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S
S1←→ S2
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Here, the subject is realized within the link between S1 and S2. This is what is called the
'subject in the real,' shown above the arrow. It is the moment of jouissance. It is in that
instant that the 'being' is realized and object(a) is constituted, and after this it results in a
lost object as the moment is over. The subject is again divided between meaning and
being. Fink (78) represents the division thus:

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S1←→ S2
meaning \( \frac{1}{b} \) a being
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The Ș represents the sedimentation of the subject as meaning, whereby S1 is given meaning as it is dialectized and object(a) is realized. However, the loss of this object as soon as it is realized, results into the loss of being or lost object (but its meaning is stored in the unconscious). This is why that wistful "O most miserable..."