5. RUBBINGS OF REALITY

Quel enfantillage. d'ailleurs. de croire a la réalité puisque nous portons chacun la
notre dans notre pensée et dans nos organs. Nos yeux, nos oreilles, notre odorat,
notre gout differents créent autant de verites qu'il y a homes sur la terre...

Guy de Maupassant (Quoted in Grant 51)

...everything which is imaginary, everything which is properly speaking illusory,
isn't for all that subjective.

(Seminar II 49)

"It is she that he wants, to look at directly"

(CP 232)

In so far as literary criticism is concerned, the thinking of ‘reality’ goes as far
back as at least to Plato. And the objectivity of what is ‘real’ has been cherished since its
origin in formal human thought. Different thinkers in different ages have tried to de-
scribe reality with different means and from different points of view. However, not only
no one of them has succeeded — success itself is an illusion here — in capturing it
among other ineffables, but it is also impossible for us to say or see that someone’s
description is better than someone else’s. There has always been the invariable feeling of
total evasion by this ‘reality.’ Yet, it is impossible for us to forget the thought of it. It
pervades and engages human imagination and life so forcefully that an objective
approach to it is utterly futile. This is precisely why reality is more a poetic subject than
a philosophic one. The subject of all great poetry is that which is of elusive ilk; of course,
the philosophic discourse too aims at the ineffable and the elusive, but the greatest
blunder it commits — and this is where it parts with poetry — is that it tries to tame it, to
systematize and formulate it instead of merely touching and feeling it in a chance event
that comes as it comes, and returning — inevitable as it is — from it with whatever
satisfaction the experience offers or the desire deserves.

While it is difficult or impossible to define and thus confine reality, it is no less
so to segregate it from the human. The so-called realist proposes to present what he sees
of and as the real with the minimalest of his intervention or comments. Minimalest, because he cannot put aside altogether the human faculties, emotions, feelings and senses. The early realists of the modern Realism were aware of this. But at the hands of people like Alain Robbe-Grillet, nature or reality is being de-humanized. While the idea of de-humanization of reality so as to depict it verbatim is intellectually sound, reading of such literature — a sample of which is presented in Robbe-Grillet — or even writing of it would be intolerable. The fact is that the physical eye is very much there, and it is human — in the sense that it responds to the human desire of survival: the eye, which is required to do nothing but see, nevertheless blinks or widens without conscious efforts, for example, to the changes in the intensity of light. In this sense, it is impossible to dehumanize the eye. To see the way Robbe-Grillet proposes and seeks is not simply dehumanization of reality but dehumanization of the human being as well. A dangerous proposition, obviously. Another problem of recording verbatim what the eye sees is that it can see more than one things at the same time. The spoken or written record of this activity would present those things one after another as opposed to the simultaneity of their visibility to the eye. This gap will never be bridged. On the other hand, if the eye’s automatic response to changes in the intensity of light is therefore called non-human, then the automatic responses of our senses and feelings to what the eye sees are non-human as well. Why not record them? In this way, the categories of human and non-human seem absurd, and everything then becomes real and we come where we had begun in our efforts at perceiving reality. The truth is that reality is independent of the human as such; it does not require its humanization or dehumanization; it is “complete / Without secret arrangements of it in the mind” (CP 341). It is we who desire to see it whether by humanizing or dehumanizing it. Insofar as this desire is there, it is a humanization of reality; it betrays the desire to “get into focus”: Stevens suggests that Nietzsche tried something akin to the radical dehumanists and says, “In [Nietzsche’s] mind one does not see the world more clearly;... The incessant job is to get into focus, not out of focus. Nietzsche is as perfect a means of getting out of focus as a little bit too much to drink” (Letters 431-2).

Despite the fact that seeing the reality is an “incessant job,” the ages cherish, surprisingly enough, the habit of priding over their respective view of the real. Stevens has no pretensions of this sort; one finds in him what may better be called his efforts at seeing reality. What he speaks of it may find its roots in the thoughts of other thinkers,
but all of it nevertheless comes from his own experience of reality. His views of the real
may not be fixed into one particular line of thought, for the real itself is a fluent mundo
that cannot be staged, is the “great cat” that “Leaps quickly from the fireside and is
gone” and cannot be caged (CP 264). This is the reason why he once wrote, “Realism” —
the ‘ism’ suggesting a kind of staging, formulation, or systematization of the real —
“is a corruption of reality” (OP 166). In other words, Realism does see the real the way it
wants or desires, be it any earliest Realist or the latest, or be it any humanizer of it or a
dehumanizer. In a way, Stevens does admit that the real is apart from the human as does
Lacan propose: “...the Real is on the inhuman or mechanical side...” (ERS 188). And yet,
Stevens was the one poet in an age in which Realism was on the verge of eliminating
human role in the perception of the real who boldly upheld Ernst Cassirer’s view that
“...imagination is the only clue to reality” (NA 136, 137, 139). There being no other
practical way of perceiving it, he asserted the human role in doing it. Here he comes
close to Lacan who believed that “saying or seeing the Real objectively was not
possible” (ERS 188), that the real is available only in one’s feeling of it or “is knowable
in its effects” (ERS 189). It is in this sense that Stevens’ language struggles, often
successfully, to convey the “knowledge of reality” (CP 534); and unless one elaborates
on the effects the real has created in Stevens’ poetry, it is a futile exercise to say or see
what he meant by ‘reality.’ Any discussion of Stevens’s conception of reality is therefore
trash unless it sees and elaborates upon the role of the imaginary, or of the human, in it.

Stevens writes in Notes:

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

(CP 392)

One must wonder whether the real does not depend upon the imaginary. In fact, Stevens
does say it clearly through the title of a poem: “Reality is the Activity of the Most
August Imagination” (OP 110), or in addressing parts of reality thus: “These are real
only if I make them so” (CP 313), where the “I” could be replaced by the ‘imaginary’ of
Lacan, or to quote Stevens out of context: “Thou art not august unless I make thee so”
(CP 251), thus asserting the principle of interdependency between the real and the imaginary, the two opposites. The real depends on the imaginary for coming into (our) being and for the significance it has for humans. The role of the imaginary is so crucial in the poet’s thought that he could not resist the temptation to almost deify it in a well-known and often anthologized “Anecdote of the Jar:”

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

(CP 76)

Here, the animal of reality is tamed by the ring-master of the imaginary, which then achieves a kind of godlike supremacy (“tall and of a port in air”) and indifference (“gray and bare”) in relation to the real world over which “It took dominion;” hence, the imaginary has nothing to do with the real world of “bird or bush.” Stevens might have segregated the imaginary from the real here in an ecstatic mood — one may even think of that deification as a reaction against Realism, to which reality was no less than god — but he was well aware that it was almost impossible, that the imaginary has to keep, to use his own words, ‘weaving its fictive covering’ around the illusive real (CP 396). If the imaginary has its origin in desire, it will never stop that ‘weaving’ since desire itself remains always insatiable. And the imaginary’s incessant contact with the real is essential for at least some understanding of both the interior and exterior world and for whatever satisfaction the experience can offer:
In my room, the world is beyond my understanding;
But when I walk I see that it consists of three or four
Hills and a cloud

(CP 57)

The “walk” and “see” here suggest the complex activity between the imaginary and the real.

The “three or four / Hills and a cloud” in the above lines is by no means full knowledge of the real, but the poet’s “walk” lets him “see” “the world.” Stevens deliberately avoids saying explicitly which world he speaks of, i.e. internal or external; by “the world” he probably refers to both the internal and the external worlds. That is to say, it is necessary to believe in both as real. The so-called Realist’s dislike for imagination speaks for his disbelief in imaginary perception of reality. It is the same as not believing in what goes on in one’s own “room;” this makes one’s position pretty precarious. As Stevens puts it,

Night nursed not him in whose dark mind
The clambering wings of birds of black revolved,
Making harsh torment of the solitude

(CP 77)

The Realist (“him”) is advised to drive out his doubts or disbelief (“birds of black”) regarding the inner reality — not merely in order to make him believe in the imagination but also to free him from the “torment of the solitude” so that he may feel the closeness of the real world around, since the truth of reality is seen only in the “moonlight”:

The disbeliever walked the moonlit place
.........................
Observing the moon-blotches on the walls.

The yellow rocked across the still facades,
Or else sat spinning on the pinnacles,
While he imagined humming sounds and sleep.

(CP 77)
The “disbeliever” then becomes a “walker in the moonlight,” which stops his disbelief and prevents his loneliness —

...each blank window of the building balked
His loneliness and what was in his mind:
.........................

The walker in the moonlight walked alone,
And in his heart his disbelief lay cold.
His broad-brimmed hat came close upon his eyes.”

(CP 77)

In his assertion of the role of the imaginary in the perception of reality and thus in one’s love of the actual world around, Stevens would rather be a child than a ‘square hatted rationalist’ (CP 75; NA 133). In fact, he believes that innocent belief in the imaginary is one of the foundations of civilization. He says it in a not so innocent stanza of “Palace of the Babies:”

If in a shimmering room the babies came,
Drawn close by dreams of fledging wing,
It was because night nursed them in its fold.

(CP 77)

Stevens obviously recognizes the importance of the narcissistic circuit constituted between the imaginary and the real world around, a very important “fold” of the “night” as ‘interior world.’ The above stanza has its resonance in Lacanian reflections on the imaginary. Each of the “babies” recognizes the otherness of the others (since they needed to be “drawn close”); this is essential to the moi, for without this recognition the O/other will cease to have anything to do with the moi, and this will result in an extremely complex psychosis. Thus, the real as O/other must be brought in contact with the imaginary, forming the moi-O/other circuit. It is because of this imaginary circuit, the moonlit “shimmering room,” that the “babies” are “drawn close” — though not perfectly identified with each other — and “nursed” by the “night.” This is the importance of Lacan’s theory of mirror-stage in the child. The import of the Stevens poem lies in the
contrast between the innocent belief in the imaginary world and the intellectual disbelief in it, for which the poet brings 'babies' and a 'disbeliever' together; they represent what may be called the innocent and the learned (as of a Realist) world views, respectively. The result is that the "babies" are "drawn close" while the "disbeliever" — from his disbelief, he must be a grown-up, learned human being — experiences "torment of the solitude." The 'disbeliever' thinks that the imaginary does not allow access to the real, and since the "imagination...is the only clue to reality" he has no access to it. To alter Stevens' wording a little, "there is no reality except what one imagines of it;"\(^6\) and since "The real is...the base" (OP 160), the disbeliever's failure to approach it makes his life a "solitude" full of "harsh torment."

The identification process, in the mirror-stage, builds up the moi, which has its supposed sense of self, and thus begins the child's interaction with the world. It begins, using Stevens' word, to 'walk' (CP 57), that is, to construct its own reality, to create an order in its pre-mirror stage chaos as existence. The moi's growing sense of reality and self is very much the essence of "The Idea of Order at Key West" (CP 128-30). The reality as "sea" and the imaginary as "she" both are supposed to be real: "The sea was not a mask. No more was she." The rest of the lines of the second stanza confirm that the poet is speaking of identification between the two. The sound of the sea and the voice of the singer have become one ("...what she sang was what she heard"), yet Stevens retains the difference in saying that "The song and water were not medleyed sound." He resolves the confusion of the sounds by maintaining their identification with and otherness to each other at the same time, thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{It may be that in all her phrases stirred} \\
\text{The grinding water and the gasping wind}
\end{align*}
\]

The two persons who are witness to the event nevertheless give an Aristotelian preference to the singer's song since they believe in her creativity to which the reality of the 'sea' merely provides an occasion:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{But it was she and not the sea we heard.} \\
\text{For she was the maker of the song she sang.}
\end{align*}
\]

213
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.

The two listeners wonder about the spirit behind the singer’s creative ability (“Whose spirit is this? we said...”). Although they seem to acknowledge the fact that “The real is the base,” yet they realize that it is “only the base” (OP 160). Thus, credit must not go to the real alone, since

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
That rose, or even colored by many waves;
If it was only the outer voice of sky
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
However clear, it would have been deep air,
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
Repeated in a summer without end
And sound alone.

The real alone would be monotonous thus, almost “a vacuum” (OP 168).7 The real has no meaning, is nothing unless anthropoeicized in the way of the imaginary. This is obviously against the basic tenets of Realism, but Stevens was fully convinced that “Things seen are [always] things as seen” (parentheses mine; OP 162). Therefore, it was not only the “outer voice” of reality they heard;

...It was more than that
More even than her voice, and ours, among
The meaningless plungings of water and the wind.

Nor was it solely the singer’s voice, but the sound of that voice was a conflation of both the human voice and the non-human sound of reality. It was the importance of her voice that the real became more significant than it was: “It was her voice that made / The sky acutest at its vanishing” (CP 129). Stevens then goes on to emphasize the human role in making the real more significant or “acutest:”

She was the single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker.

The listeners of the song realize that there is no world for a human being except the real that he covets and, out of that coveting, makes; the 'and,' also used by the poet in the lines referred to here, is very crucial to human existence since it indicates an acknowledgement of the importance of both the real and imaginary in the 'reality' that the human being inhabits, both physically and psychically. This is perfectly in accordance with Lacan's thoughts on what he calls the "humanized, symbolized" reality (Seminar I 87).

Though Stevens would not disagree with the view that the real does not need or depend on us, yet he sides more with the "maker" — perhaps not so much because he wanted to exalt the human role in the apperception of the real as because the Realists were forgetting the human side of it. In fact, he does concede that the real is independent of the human, has a 'self' of its own ("whatever self it had"), that it undergoes a change with human intervention, that finally we do not see things as they are, that things seen are things as seen; but he certainly does not want to lose sight of the human ability to 'make.' This resolution of the Platonic and Aristotelian views is essential to his conception of reality. This is why the speaker of the poem who is also one of the two listeners of the 'song' asks, what almost becomes a rhetorical question, of Ramon Fernandez, who is perhaps a Realist as he is still "pale" as opposed to the excited speaker, and answers it himself for Ramon that it is the "maker's rage for order" that masters the real ("night" and "sea") and makes it, as Stevens says earlier, "acutest" by way of "fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles, / Arranging, deepening, enchanting night" (C'130).

The "night" of the penultimate stanza could be better explained through the word 'unknown,' which captures much of Lacan's conception of the real that very much includes Stevens' "night" as "the nature of man's interior world" (CP 333), since the human mind — the psychoanalyst includes the unconscious in his real order — is real, too. The "night" 'descends' as the singing ends, suggesting that the time of the song or the song itself was like a light of day when one could 'see' things clearly. Now that the song has ended, there is only its memory in the minds of the listeners. But even the
memory is like the “glassy lights” that “mastered the night and portioned out the sea.” Though this interpretation takes the “night” and “sea” in Stevensian senses, as the ‘interior world’ and ‘reality’ respectively, Lacan’s thought is nevertheless useful. The “glassy lights” mastering the “night” is evocative of the effect of the song on the listener (recall that in Lacan the real is knowable in its effects; the song is real because of the reality it conveys and itself is), and the ‘portioning out the sea’ recalls Lacan’s gloss of the real that it is “without fissure” or gaps or divisions (Seminar II 97) but that the symbolic (the ‘song’ in the poem that is “uttered word by word”) introduces them into it (Fink 24, 182n3). By the introduction of the gaps or holes into the real Lacan means bringing part(s) of the real into the symbolic order, its ‘portioning out’ — to use Stevens’ expression. This suggests that the experience of Stevens’ listeners is a kind of breakthrough in the knowledge of the unknown or real. It does not mean full knowledge of it, but nonetheless they have been enabled to change the overall structure of the unknown, or of the real order of Lacan. Stevens did show an awareness that the real cannot be fully known except in parts and patches when he earlier wrote in *The Blue Guitar*,

> I cannot bring a world quite round,  
> Although I patch it as I can.

And “Men are a part of reality” for him (*OP* 215); because the human being is part of his conception of reality,⁹ he further adds,

> I sing a hero’s head, large eye  
> And bearded bronze, but not a man  

(*CP* 165)

What is more, he also shows in this section of the poem that any knowledge of the real, for all its incompleteness, is but a subjective affair. Lacan also asserts that all knowledge is paranoic in essence:

What I have called paranoic is shown, therefore, to correspond in its more or less archaic forms to certain critical moments that mark the history of man’s mental genesis, each representing a stage in objectifying identification.

(*Écrits* 17)
The phrase “objectifying identification” suggests that it is first of all the identification that is necessary for there to be a possibility of knowledge, which emerges as knowledge only upon a critical examination of that identification, therein objectifying it. And identification, in Lacan, is the result of the fundamental gap (béance) between the self and the outside world of objects (including other human subjects), or the other, brought on by the signifier. It is this gap, this “dumbfoundering abyss / Between us and the object” as Stevens calls it (CP 437), that is constitutive of “A new knowledge” (CP 534); he, therefore, attempts to fill the gap by ‘patching’:

Although I patch him as I can
[I] reach through him almost to man.
If to serenade almost to man
Is to miss, by that, things as they are,

Say that it is the serenade
Of a man that plays a blue guitar.

(CP 165)

This could be the reason why Ramon Fernandez is “pale” while the other listener of the same song looks aggrandized towards the end of “The Idea of Order.” Although thus we do not see things as they are, rather, because this is so, we have in us the desire to see them “exactly as they are” (CP 165). Desire is, therefore, an important aspect of Stevens’ reality. The audience of The Blue Guitar is not simply the audience, it is also the guitarist’s desire objectified. It is difficult, a futile exercise, to separate the voice of the audience from that of the guitarist. This is precisely why, as Patke correctly observes, the two voices become one or inseparable as the poem progresses and the quotation marks demarcating them vanish after the first few sections. Lacan justifies or complements Stevens here when we see him repeating in his Seminar I that “Desire is first grasped in the other,” that “The subject originally locates and recognizes desire through the intermediary, not only of his own image, but of the body of his fellow being” (147), that “desire...is seen solely in the other” (170), that “In the human subject, desire is realized in the other, by the other” (177). The ‘other’ here means everything that is outside of the subject and with which he identifies himself. Lacan writes, in relation to this alienation
of the desire, that “at first, before language” — i.e. before the subject’s entry into the symbolic order — “desire exists solely in the single plane of the imaginary relation of the specular stage, projected, alienated in the other” (Seminar I 170). The specular stage he refers to here covers the pre-mirror and mirror stages that are the result of what he calls man’s “prematurity at birth,” his “native insufficiency” (Seminar III 95). After the specular stage, the subject is said to have entered the symbolic order. “The subject inhabits the world of the symbol, that is to say a world of others who speak. That is why his desire is susceptible to the mediation of recognition” (Seminar I 171). Thus, desire “enters into the symbolic relation of I and you, in a relation of mutual recognition and transcendence” (Seminar I 177). In this sense, the audience before the guitarist may be taken to be literal audience, as physically present; but their desire is almost the same (see Seminar I 177n2). There is in the guitarist the desire for the real, it is clearly stated. However, what is also clarified or sensed by him is that it is never fully satisfied but only in a metonymic way as he can only “sing a hero’s head, large eye / And bearded bronze, but not a man” (emphases mine). Lacan has also emphasized the insatiability of desire.

In relation to the impossibility of fulfillment of the desire for the real, one could refer to the psychoanalyst’s gloss on it: “...the real is always in the background... It is, quite precisely, and quite properly speaking, excluded” (Seminar I 206). It is ‘excluded’ from the subject’s perception or from his attempts at symbolizing it. The guitarist of Stevens, when he seeks to ‘patch’ or ‘sing’ it, is but trying to symbolize it, but never succeeds in doing so to perfection since “the real, or what is perceived as such, is what resists symbolization absolutely” (Seminar I 66).

Thus, the clear distinction of the two voices, suggested by the presences and speeches of the audience and the guitarist respectively, is indicative of the fundamental gap between desire and its fulfillment. The gap, however, decreases with the blurring of the distinction between the two voices as the poem progresses. Yet, since the guitarist realizes the impossibility of satisfaction of his desire for the real, he mitigates it to perceive it “on the blue guitar” (CP 167). The difference between section III and VI is the difference between the stubborn attitude of the so-called Realist and the imaginative ways, respectively, in perceiving the real. Desire prefers the latter way since reason kills it. In fact, Stevens would rather keep the real not-fully-perceived, for he prefers the life of desire; thus, all his “words” are essentially “chosen out of [his] desire” (CP 441). The impossibility of satisfaction of the desire for the real and its merciless renewal finds a
resolution is section VI in the phrase "For a moment final" (CP 168). If it is impossible to place, as such, things as they are "beyond the compass of change," then the imaginary could itself become that place; there may come a moment in the life of the imaginary when things will seem to have revealed their final truth. This would be, of course, for a moment, like the moment when the thinking of art seems final in the otherwise, perpetuating, thinking of God. Indeed, the knowledge of ‘reality’ that Stevens sought comes, in his poetry, suddenly, in momentary flashes; it is so precisely because the imagination can never be equal to or compatible with reality:

I know my lazy, leaden twang
Is like the reason in a storm

(CP 169)

However, he also realizes that it is what “brings the storm to bear;” hence it is necessary to “twang it out.”

Even though Stevens kept eulogizing the imaginary, he was not unaware of the attendant méconnaissance principle: “Things as they are / Are changed upon the blue guitar;” and this reality is a deviation from what is real. The identification process inherent in these lines

Slowly the ivy on the stones
Become the stones. Women become

The cities, children become the fields

is false since there is a “discord” between the imaginary and the real:

It is the cord that falsifies.
The sea returns upon the men

The fields entrap the children, brick
Is a weed and all the flies are caught,

Wingless and withered, but living alive.
The discord merely magnifies.

Deeper within belly's dark
Of time, time grows upon the rock.

(CP 171)

The mismatch between the real as such and its imaginary perception is brought in the dimension of time and desire. Going by Stevens' secrecies of reference and reduction, the techniques commonly found in his poems as Vendler suggests, "the dove is Venus' dove" (Words Chosen 54); but while she associates it with love, it assumes the term 'desire' much better. The 'time' Stevens refers to is not so naïve or casual; it seems to anticipate the Fall myth when man failed to show "regard / To that first, foremost law" (CP 17). It does so in all its complexity since the 'rock' is not simply the symbol of the real but has a certain psychological dimension to it as will be seen in the discussion of The Rock. The loss of paradise, and the loss or 'exclusion' of the real in Lacanian sense, may be matched. The time that has passed after the Fall is the time by which we are away from the real. This is why if at all one wishes to categorize Stevens' conception of real-ity, it may be called psychological or, better, psychoanalytic realism. It is no wonder, then, to see section XI followed by one which cannot be understood better without recourse to Lacan.

In section XII of The Blue Guitar, as in the poems discussed in Chapter 2, the poet delineates the picture of the human subject. It presents the real of the human subject while acknowledging the debt of the other:

Tom-tom, c'est moi. The blue guitar
And I are one. The orchestra

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

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

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.

(CP 171)

The opening sentence of the section is an announcement of a definition of the ‘I’, the human subject. The very next sentence breaks it into two parts, “the blue guitar” and “I”. While it says that the two “are one,” yet there is that unmistakable “and” which separates the “blue guitar” from the one who speaks. Nevertheless, they come together and form an “orchestra;” orchestration, i.e. to arrange or combine harmoniously or for maximum effect, is to be expected. Since the one who speaks is a problem in both Stevens and Lacan, one could say, following Lacan, that here the moi speaks to himself with the je (see Seminar III 14). This completes one triangle of Lacan’s schema L, the one that may be called as forming the imaginary circuit of the intrasubjective intersubjectivity. However, it remains incomplete without the mediation of the other. In Lacan, the ego himself is the other just as other people are; but the other people or the “men” of line 3 of Stevens’ poem are also the other since the moi, the poem’s speaker, recognizes himself in the other men. It is at this point that Stevens’ description enters the other triangle, that of the unconscious, implicating the Other. Stevens once wrote, “When the mind is like a hall in which thought is like a voice speaking, the voice is always that of someone else” (OP 168). While his image of the ‘hall’ is helpful, his awareness of the otherness of one’s own thought or voice to oneself is no less so. The unconscious (“high hall”) is filled with “shuffling men;” their ‘shuffling’ that suggests their restlessness is indicative of their desire, which can never be completely satisfied. Their language and the desire expressed through it all goes “down on the right” (Seminar II 243) — this is how Lacan refers to the Other, who is placed at the lower right corner in his schema L; Stevens represents that ‘going down’ with the word ‘dwindle.’ This is how the other is assimilated into the unconscious; in fact, the unconscious is the discourse of the other in Lacan. The other triangle of Lacan’s schema or the unconscious or the symbolic circuit
completes here. The Other, the subject of the unconscious, is the one who “lies awake at	night,” and the knowledge of the ‘I’ of the existence of the Other (of his “timid
breathing”) within himself is an unsettling experience. Here begins the instance of
interpellation in Stevens: “Where / Do I begin and end?” is certainly a question that
shows that the ‘I’ does not know himself in his totality. The question could be taken
literally. But, on the other hand, and which is the correct way of interpreting the
question, the knowledge of the Other existence that is implicit in the question is a
warning to the moi that ‘you are not alone who is the ‘I’.’ The moi’s question is very
pertinent. The answer to the question may be phrased thus: the ‘I’ ‘begins’ at the other,
and ‘ends’ at the Other. In fact, the Other is a continuity between the human inside and
outside; there, thus, being no possibility of an ‘end,’ the question remains open-ended.
This is almost as if the moi has nothing to do with the real human subject; Lacan
therefore says, “...the unconscious is the unknown subject of the ego, that it is
misrecognized [méconnu] by the ego” (Seminar II 43). Out of the realization of its
precarious existence, it asks a question, ‘What am I?’, which is precisely what Stevens
more or less directly asks and seeks to answer for himself. The poet is certainly dealing
with the irrationality of the human subjectivity, within which the Other “declares,” from
time to time, “itself not to be I,” i.e. proclaims its Otherness radically. What else could it
be, then? “Nothing else” is Stevens’ answer. In fact, everything that comes in contact
with the human being (or subject) becomes, with varying degree, part of him, of his
reality, however apart it may be from him (or the subject).

Stevens was indeed interested in the irrationality of things in general and of the
human mind in particular. He acknowledged Freud in this regard since he gave “the
irrational a legitimacy that it never had before” (OP 219). Stevens’ glosses on the human
mind do irrupt irrationally and have that air about them, yet one sees a rational mind
behind the writing. He wrote, “What interests us is a particular process in the rational
mind which we recognize as irrational in the sense that it takes place unaccountably”
(OP 218). Of course, the irrational he speaks of here has nothing to do with particular
cases in the pathological sense. It is what all human beings experience with varying
degree of intensity. This is why what he depicts as irrational is almost always the reality
of the human mind. One feels that Stevens might have read Freud’s “The Uncanny” (SE
17: 217-52), owing to his sense of the irrational; especially, Freud’s explication of the
word heimlich (meaning ‘of the home,’ familiar, intimate) finally arrives at a point where
the word's meaning coincides with its antonym, *unheimlich* ('not of the home,' unfamiliar, estimate). Stevens' experiences of the unconscious manifestations are often expressed with this double sense as it declares itself not to belong to him yet precluding any other possibility. This is that intimately extimate, an-Other reality. This reality is revealed to the conscious ("simplified geography") of the self ("spirit") that says,

...there is an absolute grotesque.
There is a nature that is grotesque within
The boulevards of the generals. Why should
We say that it is man's interior world

Or seeing the spent, unconscious shapes of night,
Pretend they are shapes of another consciousness?
The grotesque is not a visitation. It is
Not apparition but appearance, part
Of that simplified geography, in which
The sun comes up like news from Africa.

*(CP 334)*

One of the aspects of the inner reality was articulated by one of the two French poets that Stevens mentions along with Freud in "The Irrational Element in Poetry" *(OP 216-29)*, Rimbaud, who wrote, "Je est un autre,' 'I is an other.' Lacan proves this "fleeting formula" as he calls it (seminar II 7). Stevens did realize the significance of this seemingly irrational statement. His "On the Road Home" *(CP 203-4)*, apart from other interests, depicts this drama of the human mind.

It was when I said,
"There is no such thing as the truth,"
That the grapes seemed fatter.
The fox ran out of his hole.

The use of Aesopian fablatura is not benign. There is that secrecy of reduction which needs unfolding. Aesop's fox comes out of the hole because he gets hungry as the sun begins to shine. The sun is thus the cause of the fox's desire. By implication, the poet's
beginning suggests that the sun — which is Stevens' symbol for the real — had been eclipsed, by “the truth” most possibly. However, it is when the ‘I’ abandons “the truth” that the real or the actual (“grapes”) gains significance and the desire finds its bearings (“seemed fatter”). Such instances are often found in his poetry since desire is an important aspect of his ‘reality.’ The last poem of the trilogy that includes “On the Road Home,” i.e. “The Latest Freed Man” (CP 204-5), also contains an illustration where desire and the real world as the other are juxtaposed.

The actual world around as the other is one of the themes that underlie the whole poem, as in “The Idea of order at key west” where the ‘sea’ is the other for the ‘she’ of the poem. However, the ‘you’ of “On the Road Home” is also an-other. And the identification process between the ‘I’ and the other is also there.

You ... you said,

“There are many truths,
But they are not parts of a truth.”

Then the tree, at night, began to change,

Smoking through green and smoking blue.

That the desire of the ‘I’ has found the right path is ascertained by the ‘you,’ a real human being as the other, whose speech accords with that of the ‘I.’ However, one must ask oneself as to what the dots are doing there, between “you” and “you said.” The speech of the ‘I’ certainly finds some hindrance there. Lacan says, “What is peculiar to the field of psychoanalysis is indeed the presupposition that the subject’s discourse normally unfolds...within the order of error...Our abortive actions are actions which succeed, those of our words which come to grief are words which own up” (Seminar I 265). What one senses in the dots is the abortive character of the speech of the ‘I.’ Why is the speech interrupted? As Lacan would answer it, it is the Other making its presence felt since, as he says, in so far as the subject’s speech “passes beyond the dual relationship” — i.e. beyond the relationship between moi and other — it “no longer encounters anything except the absolute Other, whom the subject does not know how to recognize,” and the subject “has to finally speak to the absolute Other from there where he is;” Thus, the ‘you’ in the poem could also be this Other, to whom the ‘I’ resumes
speaking “from there where his ego must have come to be” (Seminar II 270). It is in this sense also that the ‘I’ is on the road home, on the road to that “inner saint” (CP 185). What normally prevents the discourse between the ego and the Other is the resistance of the imaginary function of the ego; but when it vanishes, “the A[Other] and m[moi] can in some way come to an accord, communicated enough so that a certain isochronism is established between them, a certain simultaneous positivation...” (Seminar II 325). This is precisely what happens in the poem, and the feeling of the ‘I’ is one of paradisiacal, or of home coming, as may be observed in stanza 3 and stanza 6. This feeling immediately follows the speeches of the ‘I’ and ‘you’ as they strike accord.

A seeker of “the truth” is like a man who does not believe that “he might be truth, himself, or part of it” (CP 242). He rejects himself as ‘the truth’ and is alienated from that which constitutes him. One of his constituents being the actual world in which he lives, he is alienated from it too.

One of the most problematic groups of lines in Stevens is in stanza 5 of this poem:

“The idols have seen lots of poverty,
Snakes and gold and lice,
But not the truth”

(CP 204)

An attempt may be made to understand, to some extent, the line. Since Stevens has already used Aesop’s fable at the beginning of this poem, it is worthwhile to see that one of the OED entries under ‘snake’ says that it refers to the ingratitude or treachery displayed by the snake in yet another of Aesop’s fables, and that figuratively it means ‘suspicious circumstance or person.’ The OED also tells that ‘to see snakes’ is ‘to have delirium tremens,’ a state of mental confusion. If ‘snake’ is taken in isolation, the first nuance of the word ‘snake’ is better apprehended by the word ‘usurper;’ however, if taken as an object of the verb ‘see,’ which is used by the poet as well, recalls the phrase ‘to see snakes’ and suggests the mental confusion of the “idols,” of the seekers of “the truth,” perhaps resulting from their own way of thinking. This latter interpretation is also supported by their “poverty.” But the next two objects of the verb ‘see,’ i.e. “gold” and “lice,” do not support this interpretation. A better way of arriving at a conclusion may
allow to say that the reference to “words” in stanza 4 followed by the reference to “idols” in stanza 5 suggests that the latter are seekers of “the truth,” theological or otherwise, i.e. theosophers or philosophers, who have had to face “poverty.” If “snakes,” “gold,” and “lice” respectively suggest treacherous usurpers, material wealth, and parasites, then it may be said that the “idols” have seen people who usurped their thoughts and lived comfortable or rich life — in the material sense of ‘rich’ — albeit like parasites. In short, no one of them believed in one’s own self as ‘the truth.’ Thus, they never achieved, ironically enough, what they sought. The life of desire, or what is the same, of senses, on the other hand, (re)instates one’s self and one’s love for the actual world around, which he says “must be measured by eye” since, as he says elsewhere, “The point of vision and desire are the same” (CP 466).

Language, or philosophy of ‘the truth’ for that matter, fails to attain to it since, as symbolic, it is a function of castration; the attempt fails since tropes are but deviations. This is why Stevens rejects / th[at] trash” and, instead of taking into account the past in order to modify the present and project the future as in philosophy, prefers the carpe diem motive in order to see things as they are “now,” and “feels the purifying change” since “that’s what one wants to get near” (CP 202), i.e. to get near parts of the (symbolic) world, believing in their truth. So the eye, the world of senses, these representatives of desire, are summoned up to ‘measure’ the world. The poem, “On the Road Home,” thus must end with amassing sensuousness as it indeed does.

Stevens’ preference for the life of desire, as opposed to the life of knowledge (with its usual meaning), stems from his belief that desire alone provides a closer contact with ‘reality,’ and also a closeness toward it, even in its harshest proclamations. Of course, there is no desire or knowledge if there is no ignorance. In fact, ignorance ignites the desire to know. Lacan hails ignorance as a fundamental passion (Seminar I 271). But the knowledge Stevens seeks is that of the real, and what is more important is that he does it through senses and feelings as opposed to that which is obtained through speculation since what one senses or feels through their mediation is immediate and real, whereas what one merely speculates more often lacks that immediacy and real-ity. Thus,

It may be that the ignorant man, alone,
Has any chance to mate his life with the life
That is the sensual, pearly spouse, the life

226
That is fluent in even the wintriest bronze.

*(CP 222)*

Stevens' insistence on the immediate world around is a result of this desire to know one's world, the world in which one lives, for as he asks in a rhetorical question,

What is there here but weather, what spirit
Have I except it comes from the sun?

*(CP 128)*

The "here" is not benign; and the "there" is even more so, since one may make excuse and not take it as the dummy subject and say, what is out "there" is in "here." That is precisely what the lines propose to be accepted; hence the poet's interest in the physical reality and a sensuous contact with it, which almost borders on sensuality; this is obvious in some of his poems and very clear in his choice from Mario Rossi as an epigraph to "Evening without Angels:"

*the great interests of man: air
and light, the joy of having a
body, the voluptuousness of looking*

*(CP 136)*

A sensuous contact with the external reality is a hunger in Stevens that is never satisfied, and so he likes to practice in his poems

to turn
To the ever-jubilant weather, to sip
One's cup and never to say a word,
Or to sleep or just to lie there still,
Just to be there.......
The series of infinitives in the above passage speaks for the insatiability of that hunger. The cause of this insatiability is best expressed through the ill-matched conjunctives of the ‘as...so’ syntax of “Nomad Exquisite” that is indicative of the gap that exists between the real world around and oneself. There can be no better reason for not using the more acceptable ‘Just as...so’ syntax. The single sentence of the poem must be quoted to see how Stevens still manages to indicate the inevitability of the relationship between the beholder and the beheld.

As the immense dew if Florida
Brings forth
The big-finned palm
And green vine angering for life,

As the immense dew of Florida
Bring forth hymn and hymn
From the beholder
Beholding all these green sides
And gold sides of green sides,

And blessed mornings,
Meet for the eye of the young alligator,
And lightning colors
So, in me, come flinging
Forms, flames, and the flakes of flames.

(CP 95)

The ill-matched conjunctives of the syntax, however, do not prevent the intimacy of the relation between the external reality and the beholder, or between “Florida” and “me,” because of the poem’s impressionistic bonfusion of them. Besides, lines 5,6 and 7 indicate the influence of “Florida” on the ‘beholder.’ These effects provide the basis for an understanding of the debt of honor Stevens feels for reality as it ignites “Forms, Flames and the Flakes of Flames” of desire in him. This cause and effect is essential to what he refers to as the “composing of senses of the guitar” (CP 168), without which the human mind will perpetuate through a state of “unspotted imbecile reverie” (CP 172), or of “silence of a rat come out to see” (CP 503).
Though Stevens regarded the external reality highly as the shaping spirit, he did occasionally try to compete with it as in "Six Significant Landscapes:

I measure myself
Against a tall tree.
I find that I am much taller,
For I reach right up to the sun,
With my eyes;
And I reach to the shore of the sea
With my ear.

(CP 74)

The senses and the concomitant feelings may be responsible for such elevation of human being, but the Whitmanian wonder at one of the least significant aspects of reality like the leaf of grass was not baseless either; man may think of reaching higher forms of reality, but what about the fact that he has neither mastered its least significant forms nor has fully known them? Thus Stevens is not sure of his supposed superiority ("much taller") and notices or feels 'ants crawling' beneath:

Nevertheless, I dislike
The way the ants crawl
In and out of my shadow.

Where Whitman merely wondered at the leaf's ability to confound us, Stevens dislikes it out of the realization that even the most minor form of reality affects him, has a sort of control over his emotions and feelings; one doubts whether Stevens did not have in mind the informal 'to have ants in one's pants.'

Like the external reality, "the nature of man's interior world" as "night" also remains obscure for all our desire for it.

The night is of the color
Of a woman's arm:
Night, the female,
Obscure,
In landscape III, there was a little suspicion about the thought of man as the master of his world; but when he cannot even see clearly his interior world, how could he feel pride in that thought? The internal reality's obscurity does in fact sustain or facilitate one's desire for it, and finally the veil of obscurity lifts for a moment:

A pool shines
Like a bracelet
Shaken in a dance.

However, it is only a superficial aspect ("bracelet") of the "women's arm" that shines, not the arm itself. Stevens does not say this explicitly, yet goes a little further to speak of the effect on the consciousness ("pool"), of the momentary manifestation of internal reality; this is the beauty of landscape II. The first six lines of the landscape conceal an object of desire and desire itself, and the remaining three lines reveal "the response to desire" within the "rigid room" (CP 218).

In "Dezembrum," Stevens wrote, "The reason can give nothing at all / Like the response to desire" (CP 218) since the former believes in the objectivity of reality while desire, rather than making such false pretensions, subjectifies it, for that is the most natural phenomenon which enables one to feel at the centre of the world. There are many instances in Stevens where this feeling, of being at the center of reality or world, is found; in them, one may think of Stevens reverting to the ancient belief of 'man is the intelligence of his soil' that Crispin rejects and changes to 'the soil is man's intelligence.' However, proposition making was never the poet's aim; what he constantly strove towards was happiness, not towards any categorical belief as such. This is a central feature of his poetry. Hence,

It would be enough
If we were ever, just once, at the middle, fixed
In This Beautiful World Of Ours and not as now,
Helplessly at the edge, enough to be
Complete, because at the middle, if only in sense,
And in that enormous sense, merely enjoy.

(EP 430)

That “if only in sense” goes to show the importance of sense in Stevens’ poetry. In his thought it alone gives *jouïs-sense* and *jouissance*. By the former term Lacan meant the joy of meaning. The world seems meaningful and we enjoy living in it or feel at its center only in our sense.

Now, this may be a purely subjective stance, suggesting the extreme that “...the imaginative world is the only real world, after all” (*Letters* 252); but Stevens was clever enough to suggest elsewhere that if, ultimately, we do not see things as they are — which the effort of the whole of the school of Realism goes to prove — then

The truth must be
That you do not see, you experience, you feel,
That the buxom eye brings merely its element
To the total thing, a shapeless giant forced
Upward.

(EP 219)

This is how he returns to his major premise, that reality, in reality, is always a matter of a conflation of the objective and subjective realities, creating thereby what he calls here the “shapeless giant.” A direct access to the real being impossible,

The senses paint
*By metaphor.*

and,

*By metaphor you paint*

A thing.

(EP 219)
This is the result of what Lacan calls a *manque* (lack) in us, which is the mainspring of the eternal motive for our metaphorical condensation of the subjective and objective. For this reason, Stevens not only despised Realism but also philosophical and theological thinking in general for their “innocence of an absolute, / False happiness” (*CP* 305) and their emphasis on the otherness of happiness. “Crude Foyer” (*CP* 305) expresses the poet’s thought on this:

```
...... We know that we use
Only the eye as faculty, that the mind
Is the eye, and that this landscape of the mind

Is a landscape only of the eye; and that
We are ignorant men incapable
Of the least, minor, vital metaphor, content
At last, there, when it turns out to be here.
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(*CP* 305)

The first three stanzas of the poem sort of summarize Aristotelian, philosophical, and theological ways of thinking respectively; and they are rejected since: the Aristotelian view that we can know the phenomena of the universe merely by thinking, the philosophical tradition’s general belief that thinking finally opens up the door to “A foyer of the spirit,” and the theological “critique of paradise” that everything is the doing of god (“the work / Of a comedian”) — all think of the *thereness* of the real or truth, when in fact it is *here*. What is needed is, therefore, the capacity of creating metaphors by a conflation of the subjective and objective realities if one has to find true happiness. Stevens’ reality is thus composed of the actual things that

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Fall like rejuvenating rain,
Fall down through nakedness to nakedness,
To the auroral creature musing in the mind.
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(*CP* 263)

In “Crude Foyer,” Stevens echoes the Socratic experience that he has quoted from Valery’s *Eupalinos* in “Two Prefaces” (*OP* 268-86). Socrates said to Phaedrus,
It served no purpose, I fear, to seek this God, whom I have tried all my life to discover, by pursuing him through the realm of thought alone... The God that one so finds is but a word born of words, and returns to the word — But on the contrary, it is in acts, and in the combination of acts, that we ought to find the most immediate feeling of the presence of the divine...

(OP 269-70)

And why did Socrates, or does anybody else for that matter, desire this feeling if not in order to experience the jouissance of Lacan or the happiness of Stevens? Stevens and Lacan both have created a special place for themselves in their own fields out of their rigorous thinking on the relationship between the objective reality and the subjective reality, between one “nakedness” and the other. This is understood by most of the poet’s critics. And that relationship is nothing but an ‘act,’ to use Socrates’ word, that never stops — even when one is asleep as Lacan and Steven both would like to add owing to the unconscious irruptions as Other manifestations, since the Other is one’s object of desire in Lacan, and thus is an objective reality.

Happiness being the end that never ends, the sense of being at the middle of the world as in “The ultimate poem is Abstract” (CP 429-30) or at the center of reality as in “The Latest Freed Man” (CP 204-5) is cherished and craved to remain “the signal main” (CP 264). However, the moments of such “enormous sense” vanish (CP 430), and the desire returns afresh in its utter poverty. This leads Stevens to turn to writing analytical poetry of reality. One of the initiating poems among such analytical poems, if they might be called so, is “So-And-So Reclining on Her Couch” (CP 295-6) in which he examines reality, the invisible gestures it makes, and the perceiver-examiner poet’s view of the gestures.

The ‘she’ of the poem is reality. The process of her cognition is divided into three ‘projections,’ as Stevens calls them. In projection A, she is presented in her actuality as the eye falls on her.

She floats in air at the level of
The eye, completely anonymous,
Born, as she was, at twenty-one,

Without lineage or language, only

233
The curving of her hip, as motionless gesture,
Eyes dripping blue, so much to learn.

Simply and purely “at the level of / The eye” and “without lineage or language” and
“Born...at twenty-one” suggest looking at reality in its full form but without its having
entered into the symbolic order, yet unnamed as it is (“anonymous”); it is very much like
looking at an infant just born, in its pristinity, or, better perhaps, like looking at a young
maiden who has not yet ‘turned to dust’ her ‘quaint Honour.’ She has, however, a
potential to affect the perceiver; the “curving of her hip” and her “Eyes dripping blue”
are indicative of her potential. Though the perceiver seems unaffected as yet, there is a
suggestion that he might soon be. Her eyes remind of Lacan’s concept of ‘gaze’ that
affects the subject under it; her curving hip might make herself the object of the
perceiver’s desire. In its medical context, the word ‘dripping’ suggests something that
can be injected into the patient’s vein. By implication, the dripping of blue from her eyes
could well mean her capacity to induce the imaginary domain of the perceiver into
activity. If the poet has used the word ‘dripping’ with its medical nuance, then it is
obvious that he is set to examine reality as clinically as possible, with a view to
remaining unaffected by it. Hence the curving of hip as a “motionless gesture.”

But one wonders how long the clinical attitude will survive. Projection B seems
to evade that resolve as he muses on what he would call the ‘unreal’ of the real, or the
“infinite of the actual” (CP 451):

If just above her head there hung,
Suspended in air, the slightest crown
Of gothic prong and practick bright,

The suspension as in solid space,
The suspending hand withdrawn, would be
An invisible gesture.

The imaginary domain of the perceiver indeed seems to have been affected by the ‘drip,’
for there is no reason why he would even think of the crown suspended above her head
— and what is more — with “Gothic prong” and “practick bright.” This “invisible
gesture" is indeed the doing of the imaginary. However, he is still conscious of the fact that

To get at the thing
Without gestures is to get at it as
Idea.

It is, in other words, to get at the reality in its real. To see reality "without gestures" is also to see it without any existing preconceptions of it; it is not to see it as. This is something that Stevens also advises the 'ephebe' of Notes to do. However, he also recognizes, like Lacan, the difficulty or even impossibility of such a view of reality. Therefore, he immediately adds,

She floats in the contention, the flux

Between the thing as idea and
The idea as thing.

The actual, visible, felt or sensed reality and the idea or the real of it — the "contention" between these two projections is what makes it remain in "the difficulty of what it is to be" (CP 381). Even so, "She is half who made her." This may be "the final projection, C;" but, the C does not by any means suggest 'complete' or full description of reality, for the remaining half is to be completed by the beholder. Here comes in the role of desire, which functions to 'make' the other half of reality.

Despite Stevens' clinical assessment of reality — he seems to realize this — his three projections are nevertheless his attempts at an "arrangement" of it, and therefore contain his desire; "...no fact is a bare fact..." (OP 237). And desire being insatiable, he discards the role of the 'projector'-being, who is, ironically, himself. He realizes that, by way of the three projections, he has been the "Concealed creator" of reality; that they are his views of reality and not reality as such; that his attempts have found a language (which is merely a, and not the) to describe reality, and a lineage as well, since 'describing' is 'naming.' This is nothing but the symbolization of the real that was, was in the difficulty of to be. In the final stanza, Stevens is not merely referring to painting
and sculpture as such; by them he evokes our attempt to symbolize the real, as he has done through his language, and thus render it static.

The nature of desire is such that it seeks to symbolize the real and then gets dissatisfied with its statikos so as to renew itself and its search for that which has not been 'created' or symbolized. To be within this loop is the very nature of desire. Thus, Stevens bids "Good-bye" to its symbolic form, i.e. to "Mrs. Pappadopoulos," which being a name belongs to the symbolic order of language and culture. Nevertheless, she receives "thanks" for what she was and offered before she was symbolized by his desire and language.

"Apostrophe to Vincentine" (CP 52-3) is a poem that enacts the same cycle of desire, with a little variation — in that it speaks of the polyvalence of the real and its capacity to invigorate the physical world of facts.

I

I figured you as nude between
Monotonous earth and sky.
It made you seem so small and lean
And nameless,
Heavenly Vincentine.

Here, the real is assumed as existing in her essential nakedness between the subjective and the crass objective. Subjective in the sense that the 'earth' is the near, the visible, the humanized, and objective in the sense that the 'sky' is the far, the unknown, the non-humanized. Apart as such from the two, she is "nameless" and "heavenly" (not exactly from heaven, but as if from heaven). However, Stevens does not place her in the 'sky,' probably because he does not want to suggest that it is unknowable, nor does he want to give the impression that the real is altogether a subjective phenomenon — the reason why he places it apart from both 'sky' and 'earth.' Thus, saving it from both monotony and impossibility he feels its warmth and keeps his desire for it alive:

II

I saw you then, as warm as flesh,
Brunette,
But yet not too brunette,
As warm, as clean.
Your dress was green,
Green Vincentine.

The changes may be noted: the assumption of her existence turns into a kind of certainty as the ‘I’ ‘figures’ her, feels her. This makes her ‘brunette,’ which is Stevens’ color for reality as it comes in the domain of experience. Her ‘heavenly’-ness turns to ‘green’-ness. The increasing degree of personification speaks for an anthropomorphization of the real...however, it is not fully real-ized or humanized as yet ("yet not too brunette").

This growing real-ization by anthropomorphization makes her part of humanity, she begins to give of humanity:

III
Then you came walking,
In a group
Of human others,
Voluble.

Yes: you came walking,
Vincentine.
Yes: you came talking.

The emphatic speech of the speaker reveals his happiness over this hominization of the real. But in the process, ‘her’ ‘heavenly’-ness seems to have vanished altogether as no adjective precedes her mention here; she seems fully symbolized.

Yet, there is a sense of total evasion in the final section:

IV
And what I knew you felt
Came then.
Monotonous earth I saw become
Illimitable spheres of you,
And that white animal, so lean,
Turned Vincentine,
Turned heavenly Vincentine,
And that white animal, so lean,
Turned heavenly, heavenly Vincentine.

The first sentence of this section is extremely involuted. The feeling that the ‘you’ feels, if at all it does, exists only with the ‘I.’ The ‘you’ has been made a “human other;” it is an indication of an establishment of the narcissistic bond between the ‘I’ and ‘you.’ In an example of the child who beats another and comes complaining that ‘he beat me,’ Lacan sees imaginary transitivism; the child who beats the other identifies with the other child, thus making the other the ‘I’ and himself the ‘other,’ and speaks for and as the other. This identification is clearly perceptible in the Stevens poem: first he makes the real a “human other,” and then identifies himself with it (the word ‘came,’ repeated thrice, cannot be all that benign), and then speaks for it to himself as if the real-as-himself is speaking to himself-as-other. Thus, “what I knew you felt” is a message in an ‘inverted form,’ as Lacan would say. In reality, it is the ‘I’ who feels. And therefore the knowledge — the question of knowledge is certainly involved here even as Stevens uses the word “knew” — belongs within the domain of the other, of the ‘you’, or of the real. Hence, to read anew, it is “what I felt you knew,” which properly restores the feeling on the side of the ‘I’ and the knowledge on that of the ‘other.’ But, one cannot altogether dismiss the sharing of that knowledge by the ‘I,’ for otherwise the question of identification will remain unanswered. Besides, irrespective of whether we read “what I knew you felt” or “what I felt you knew,” there is an almost equation between the feeling and the knowledge, which is what the identification process is all about in the case of the poem’s speaker, or even in the case of the two children in Lacan’s example.

The remaining lines speak of the knowledge the ‘I’ shared or felt. The concrete, physical reality, which was “monotonous,” he saw transforming into plurality, and everything of it seemed to be a part, a ‘sphere’ of the real. ‘Sphere’ is a field of action, influence, or existence; the speaker thus sees that the real operates and exists very much here on the earth and in everything that is related to the earth. This is how the monotonous reality became charmmingly polytonous. Stevens says as much in an adage: “Reality is not what it is. It consists of the many realities which it can be made into” (OP 178); Juliet Mitchell, with reference to object-relations theory in Psychoanalysis, says,
"It is never only an actual object but also always the fantasies of it, that shape it as an internal image for the subject" (FS 3). As the OED tells us, formerly, 'sphere' also meant 'each of the revolving shells in which the heavenly bodies were set.' It was the importance of the real, of "that white animal," that the physical facts as reality came alive as if ensouled, animated. This is why the real again "Turned Vincentine," "Turned heavenly vincentine," "turned, heavenly, heavenly Vincentine;" in fact, the repetition of "heavenly" in the final line makes the 'heavenly'-ness of the real exceed in degree in comparison with that in the singular occurrence of the word in the first section. The real becomes even more "heavenly" at the end of the poem. Is it an apotheosis of the real?

The real, in remaining "heavenly," escapes perception thus. Stevens was acutely aware of the impossibility of confining it within the walls of perception, but he was never tired of seeking it though he became miserable that he could not "receive" her, except in "reflectons of her here, and then there;" "Bouquet of Belle Scavoir" (CP 231-32) depicts these very thoughts through the desire for her, the feeling of misery, and the sense of total evasion by her:

III
How often had he walked
Beneath summer and the sky
To receive her shadow into his mind...
Miserable that it was not she.

IV
The sky is too blue, the earth too wide.
The thought of her takes her away.
The form of her in something else
Is not enough.

V
The reflection of her here, and then there,
Is another shadow, another evasion,
Another denial. If she is everywhere,
She is nowhere, to him.
And yet, Stevens could foreground “It is she alone that matters. / She made it,” with which the poem begins. This shows that the mind may never be satisfied, but that the search for the real must or will never end, for ‘she’ is the maker — to reverse the argument of “Idea of Order at Key West.” The real as the object of desire brings but frustration, depriving its seeker of any possibility of the satisfaction of his desire. It is “frustration by an object in which his desire is alienated and which the more it is elaborated, the more profound the alienation from his jouissance becomes for the subject” (Écrits 242); “The thought of her takes her away,” as Stevens puts it.