6. APOGEE

And the wonder and mystery of art, as indeed of religion in the last resort, is the revelation of something “wholly other” by which the inexpressible loneliness of thinking is broken and enriched.

(\textit{OP 237})

...enough to realize

That the sense of being changes as we talk

(\textit{OP 109})

Stevens shared the predicament of those who suffer from the repression of the phallic signifier. And, like them, he shows an understanding of the significance of this all important signifier, for it is what is not that attains an unusual importance in man’s desire. This is the reason why he kept speaking of the signifier in various disguises; he often uses the terms “syllable” and “alphabet” to speak of it. The loss (repression) of the signifier is the loss of its meaning for the subject. Stevens rarely gives expression to the loss, and when he does so he does it obliquely: for example, he writes in “No Possom, No Sop, No Taters” (\textit{CP 293-4}),

\begin{quote}
It is deep January. The sky is hard.
The stalks are firmly rooted in ice.

It is in this solitude, a syllable,
Out of these gawky flitterings,

Intones its single emptiness,
The savagest hollow of winter-sound.
\end{quote}

\textit{(CP 294)}

The “syllable” emptied out of any meaning, this “fusky alphabet” (\textit{CP 267}), however, finds a direct expression in Stevens’ last volume; there the verse seems to sum up Stevens’ life-long loneliness and the struggle to end it, pent up in which he spent his life:

As he traveled alone, like a man lured on by a syllable without any meaning,
A syllable of which he felt, with an appointed sureness,
That it contained the meaning into which he wanted to enter,
A meaning which, as he entered it, would shatter the boat and leave the oarsmen quiet
As at a point of central arrival, an instant moment, much or little,
Removed from any shore, from any man or woman, and needing none.

(CP 516)

This chapter discusses Stevens’ attempt at the dialectization of this master signifier. It may be suggested here that he could have succeeded in his attempt to some extent since the later poetry shows his struggle to subjectify the cause of being and (the object of) desire, object(a), which is not possible without the dialectization of the phallic signifier. However, this does not necessarily mean that he finally recovered from his illness, for poems like *Chocorua to Its Neighbor* and to some extent *The Rock* shatter that assumption.

Among the poems discussed here, “Motive for Metaphor,” *Credences of Summer*, and *The Bouquet* seem to form a logical progression towards the subjectification of that radically lost cause; therefore, it would have been logical to discuss them in order. But, the assuming of that foreign cause cannot happen without dialectizing the phallus. And discussing those poems together would not only be assuming that Stevens did dialectize the phallus but also asserting the poet’s cure from the crisis. *Chocorua* and *The Rock*, also discussed here, undermine that possibility, for each appears in the *Collected Poems*, and also chronologically, only after what might seem to be a stage of recovery on Stevens’ part. Both reflect the pathological character of the desire for the (m)Other, precluding the possibility of an end to the poet’s crisis. This study, thus, must leave the question of his ‘cure’ open-ended. For this reason, and also to keep with the chronological order of the poems, the poems are discussed in the order in which they appear in the *Collected Poems*.

The phallus is the signifier responsible for the subject’s sense of being an individual, separate from the (m)Other. Thus, it is “the A B C of being.” It is also the support of the symbolic order in which alone the humans cherish the fantasy of their existence — or as Stevens puts it, “There is no life except in the word of it” (CP 287; emphasis mine), where “word” could mean either the symbolic order or the phallic signifier, which is a metaphoric substitution for the lost object(a) and thus the arch signifier thereof. This ultimate point de capiton, as Lacan refers to it, gives all other
signifiers their function as they seek a metaphorical condensation with it and serve as its metonyms. Therefore, it is "the motive for metaphor." Even after realizing this much, the poem that glosses the phallic signifier thus is not likely to be read well if the reader fails to grasp the clever use of the second person pronoun. Stevens could have easily used the impersonal 'one' as he did in "The Snow Man;" but since, as discussed in chapter 2, the pronoun 'one' does not exclude the 'I,' the pronoun 'you' is preferred as it preserves the ambiguity regarding the inclusion of the 'I.' Its use serves the poet to detach himself from the whole scene; this absolutely impersonal attitude allows him to state a universal truth; at the same time, though, it would not be wrong to believe that the pronoun and the universal truth must implicate the poet-speaker as well or, in other words, to say that it is colloquially used to designate 'everybody' or 'all.' However, the fact is that he includes himself into the scheme of things only later, in the third stanza, when he speaks of himself as "you yourself," where the second word clearly suggests that the first is singular. The question is, what to make of it?

You like it under the trees in autumn,
Because everything is half dead.
The wind moves like a cripple among the leaves
And repeats words without meaning.

In the same way, you were happy in spring,
With the half colors of quarter-things,
The slightly better sky, the melting clouds,
The single bird, the obscure moon—

The obscure moon lighting an obscure world
Of things that would never be quite expressed,

Where you yourself were never quite yourself
And did not want nor have to be,

Desiring the exhilarations of changes:
The motive for metaphor, shrinking from
The weight of primary noon,
The A B C of being

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One begins with the assumption that the poet-speaker is making a general statement as he begins with ‘you,’ the plural of the second person pronoun used mostly colloquially to propose something common to all. Obviously, one believes that it must include the poet-speaker as well, and thus that he too is in his ‘autumn.’ However, one cannot shake off the feeling that he may be outside everything and that the pronoun refers to all those who are in their ‘autumn.’ The same can be said about the pronoun’s use in “you were happy in spring” of the second stanza. Then, one also notices the queerness of the reasoning: “Because everything is half dead.” How can one like to see everything half dead? Is it because everything else is half dead, so that the ‘you’ may assert their being fully alive? Or, is it a consolation that it is not only the ‘you’ but everything that is heading toward death? The “half dead” surely evokes both full life and death. This kind of problematization of the position of the ‘you’ is not there in the second stanza though, since the ‘you’ were very much “with” those spring-time “half colors of quarter-things” (emphasis mine). In terms of human life, ‘autumn’ casts a glance at both ‘summer’ and ‘winter,’ whereas ‘spring’ enjoys its own state; at best, i.e. if “half colors” and “quarter-things” of the second stanza evoke ‘full colors’ and ‘full-things,’ then ‘spring’ looks forward to ‘summer;’ that is to say, the “quarter-things” of ‘spring’ look forward to assume ‘full colors’ of ‘summer.’ Stevens leaves little margin for the thought of ‘no colors’ or ‘no-things’ to creep in in using the preposition ‘with.’ In fact, the preposition also precludes even the thoughts of ‘full colors’ and ‘full-things;’ yet, that is where the poem leads in the third stanza, which gives of ‘summer.’ Unless this is understood, there is a great chance of mis- or half-understanding the import of the poem. Because in that case one is likely to render the first stanza useless and read the rest of the poem as one-piece, or better (worse, really), almost divide the poem into two separate poems if it were not for the “In the same way” at the beginning of the second stanza. One must see that it is the ‘summer’ that joins the first stanza with the rest of the poem.

From psychoanalytic point of view, ‘summer’ is when one attains to fuller subjectivity; the sense of being an individual, a separate self, is prominent then. In other words, it is during this period of life that one can be said to have fully (re)discovered the phallus; without this, one is not fully implicated into or subjected to the symbolic order and, like Hamlet, remains tied to the (m)Other. The discovery of the phallus, however, should not be misunderstood as an event; it is a process that begins with the introduction of the ‘third term,’ the Name-of-the-Father, who has it. It is after a successful inscription
of the phallic signifier (its ‘dialectization’) that the subject is said to have acquired his own desire, to have become a desiring being himself, even to have fully come to be in this world, i.e. what is referred to above as ‘fully alive.’ ‘Autumn,’ on the other hand, is when the subject becomes aware of ‘winter,’ i.e. of the impending death. But, at the same time, one’s memories of ‘summer’ are unforgettable; for, as Stevens puts it, “...you would give all of your last thirty years for one of your first thirty” (Stevens’ underlines; Letters 98). The point is, in his ‘autumn’ the subject is divided between his ‘summer’ and ‘winter,’ and this is the cause of the precarious position of the ‘you’ in the poem’s first stanza. Thus the phallus is both the support of man’s existence in the symbolic and the “scourge of unity” (ERS 292). While it is responsible for breaking the child’s sense of unity with the (m)Other, it becomes responsible for breaking the subject’s sense of self or being by inscribing him with the knowledge of himself as a ‘being towards death.’

Freud and Lacan both maintain that beyond the pleasure principle or beyond the phallus as signifier (Stevens’ ‘summer’) resides the death instinct. Lacan goes so far as to say that “jouissance is evil” (Seminar VII 184), since desire is insatiable and does want to cross the barrier of symbolic jouissance in order only to meet death. All the above discussion may be represented graphically, thus

![Figure 5: Aurora of Seasons](image-url)
The solid lines indicate actual development of life and the broken arrows show the imaginary relationship dynamics. Initially, one’s journey into this world begins with oneself as the object of parental desire. This desire, insofar as it is expressed in language, is symbolic; in other words, it is the discourse of the parental Other. This desire ensures one’s entry into the symbolic order even before one’s birth, even before the conception. It is this desire that one must make one’s own if one has to come to be as a human subject. However, for this the infant has to go through the Nom/Non-of-the-Father, i.e. through castration. Castration is a revelation, for it reveals to the subject what he does not have, or what the (m)Other desires. It is the phallus, which thus becomes the imaginary object of his desire. In his youth he is likely to attain this all important sense of having or being the phallus, though in reality it is only a sense and not a fact. What really happens here is that he only dialectizes the phallus-as-signifier. It is here that he gives up castration and can experience jouissance as a result of the ‘further separation’ from the (m)Other that is responsible for that sense of being.

‘Autumn’ is that period of life when one has already experienced the fullness of ‘summer,’ the jouissance of the phallus. This is to be viewed in terms of the loss that one seeks to recover from through forming imaginary relationship with the bygone ‘summer.’ And yet, at the same time, having had the experience of ‘summer,’ one’s desire seeks to go further beyond — to bring into view or vicinity what Lacan calls in seminar VII as the aim or site of desire. It is here that one dates one’s death, what Freud termed as the ‘beyond’ of the ‘pleasure principle.’ ‘Summer’ is beautiful indeed: it is in the ‘summer’ that one’s body is most beautiful and energetic — this is true even of the external nature. In a way, this is the limit. But the desire is merciless, for in ‘autumn’ it seeks to transcend the limit of phallic jouissance. To use Lacan’s words, whereas ‘summer’ or its beauty had a “blinding effect” on desire when one was full of youth (Seminar VII 281), now in ‘autumn’ the desire overcomes the effect and seeks to make visible the aim of desire; this is the ektos atas. Lacan uses the two terms, Ate and ektos atas, in Seminar VII in relation to jouissance; by the former he designates the human limit of symbolic jouissance, and by the latter he means a crossing over of that limit and virtually meeting with death as desire (262-3, 277, 280-3). The desire purging itself of the “blinding effect” of the beauty of ‘summer,’ of jouissance, is nothing but a dissatisfaction with the phallus-as-signifier and a search further beyond for the phallus-as-thing. It is nothing but an appointment with death. Lacan illustrates this in the
discussion on *Hamlet*. To return to the Stevens poem, this is how the subject is divided in his ‘autumn’ — between his ‘summer’ and ‘winter,’ between phallic *jouissance* and death; or in other words, between the phallus-as-signifier and the phallus-as-thing, which is the aim of desire and hence desiring which is the death instinct. One cannot be or have the phallus; any attempt at striking it is an *ektos atas*, a crossing of the human limit that one can only briefly cross and then meet with death.³

One is oneself in ‘summer,’ therefore the desire to be oneself properly belongs in one’s ‘spring’ and ‘autumn,’ when the lack of the phallus or of the sense of ‘self’ is observed. Thus one does not “want” or “have to be” oneself in ‘summer.’ It is necessary to see that Stevens is speaking of ‘summer’ in stanza three. The dash at the end of the second stanza makes the poem glide almost imperceptibly from ‘spring’ to ‘summer.’ This growth from childhood to mature youth, from the lack of the phallus to the sense of having it, is made possible by the imaginary relationship with the phallus, whereby it is symbolized. In repeating the expression “obscure moon,” at the end of stanza two and at the beginning of stanza three, the poet is emphasizing precisely this relationship that thus lights the “obscure world” of fantasy and *jouissance*. The poet-speaker has experienced that world and addresses himself as an other with respect to his own ‘summer-time’ persona in saying, “you yourself were never quite yourself.” It is only here that he includes himself and speaks to himself as an other. Stevens could have easily written the line without the first “yourself,” but he does not do so only in order to indicate that the ‘you’ in this line is different from that used in the first two stanzas. It is only now that the reader is allowed to retroactively determine the presence of the poet-speaker in the ‘you’ of the previous stanzas. Without that “yourself,” the poem would have throughout looked like a general statement of human condition without reference to any particular individual, since then the ‘you’ that immediately precedes it would have been rendered indistinguishable from its previous occurrences. But it was necessary for the poet-speaker to include himself as well; in fact, specifically so. The reasons for this will be discussed a little later.

In ‘summer,’ i.e. during the period when one cherishes the sense of having the phallus or being it, one enjoys what Lacan refers to as the phallic or symbolic *jouissance*. In an instance of this experience, the phallus as the master signifier(S1) is brought in relation with another signifier(S2), and the subject experiences a contact with the real.⁴ The S2 here may be an *object petit a*,⁵ an object from the actual world of direct
experience, which the subject desires but one which can only satisfy his need and not
desire, for his desire is always for something else that can never be seen or said. The
mirage of this ‘something else’ as object(a) behind the need-satisfying object lends it the
status of a signifier(S2). It is in this bridge-building between S1 and S2 that the subject
senses as if he has (re)discovered the original object of desire, object(a). This is a
moment of jouissance, no doubt; but it is the importance of S1, the phallic signifier, that
made it possible. Moreover, since object(a) is not an object as such but a signifier, the
subject — rather, ‘man’ as opposed to or distinct from ‘woman’ — experiences only the
jouissance of the signifiers, a “symbolic jouissance.” The role of language is nothing
but to symbolize, to make present something (that is absent or) in its absence. The basic
process through which it happens are “word to word connexion” (metonymy) and
substitution of “one word for another” (metaphor). The absent word has a metonymic
connection with the present word (or signifying chain), “which has taken the place of the
other (absent word)” (parentheses mine; Écrits 156-57). In other words, it is the absent
word or signifier that is responsible for the presence of the present word or signifier. The
phallus as signifier in Lacan is that absent signifier, which is responsible for the subject’s
discourse that is thus always metaphoric. This is why Stevens must refer to the phallus as
“the motive for metaphor.”

As suggested a moment ago, the subject can never establish a direct contact with
the cause or aim of his desire, that primally lost object(a), except in his sense; to
approach it directly is to go beyond the phallic signifier or beyond the limit of the
symbolic, which is the human limit; it is to approach the phallus as an actual object or
thing. Crossing this limit and approaching the real object of one’s desire must be a
moment of jouissance, but its intensity is such that it is unbearable for the subject. This
is the reason why it is also a death instinct, why “jouissance is evil.” Therefore, to be at
the level of the phallus as signifier or to be within this limit is called by the poet as
“shrinking from / The weight of the primary noon.” The “primary noon” may be the “A
B C of being,” the fundamental of being, but its “weight” is not what the subject can
bear. It is not clear whether the phallic signifier or object(a) is referred to as “primary
noon” and “A B C of being,” but the ambiguity is constructive nonetheless; for, the
subject owes his sense of self or being to the phallic signifier (S1) even though the being
as object(a) is always absent for him who shrinks from it, which has a metonymic
relationship with the chain constituted by S1 and S2, where the latter is the subject
himself as a signifier(S2). And this ambiguity is itself complementary to the subject's 'autumnal' division between his 'summer' and 'winter.' The final stanza, in continuation with this ambiguity and division, is therefore in the difficulty of describing the phallus as signifier and as object:

The ruddy temper, the hammer
Of red and blue, the hard sound —
Steel against intimation — the sharp flash,
The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X.

The "ruddy temper," "the hammer," "Steel," evoke the image of the erect phallus, "its flesh" (CP 375), i.e. the phallus as thing. Lacan has said that the phallus is perceived "only in sudden manifestations [dans des phanies], in a flash, by means of its reflection on the level of the object" ("Desire" 48); in this sense, Stevens' use of "hard sound" and "sharp flash" as if coming from some visible or audible thing or object is noteworthy. Yet, the poet does suggest the difficulty of apprehending it as he speaks of it as "Steel against intimation;" one cannot be intimate with it, cannot go closer to and have it. Thus, it is at once real and unreal (fantasmatic or imaginary) object: "Of red and blue." The poem's last line appropriately sums up the importance and fatality of the phallus; more importantly, its status as a master signifier without meaning is taken note of: like an algebraic variable having no meaning in itself, it is symbolized with an "X."

Going back to the question of the use of 'you': why the poet-speaker should postpone and at the same time must make his own inclusion in the 'you' is important — not only for himself but also for the reader of the poem. At first, it seems that the poet-speaker is hiding himself, prompting the question of why he does so. It is possible to attribute this to the poet's penchant for impersonality in his poetry; it would not be wrong to believe this argument, but if it were simply for that then he could have spared the first 'yourself' in the third line of stanza three. One would do well to recall what Vendler says:

[T]he emotional heart of a lyric by Stevens is likely to be found in the middle of the poem
since it is there that one finds the poem’s
point of origin in feeling, which, though it comes late in the poem, serves as the
center from which the other lines radiate.

(Words Chosen 44, 12)

The point is, for all the poet’s impersonal attitude in the poetry, his personal experience
or feeling is very much at the heart of a poem. Vendler is therefore correct in her
recommendation “to substitute ‘I’ whenever Stevens says ‘he’ or ‘she’” (Words Chosen
44). Here, she misses out on “you” and seems too radical in her recommendation since
she might not have thought of Stevens’ treatment of the other and the Other, both of
which retain their otherness and hence are often referred to in the poetry in the third
person singular; this seems more true of the Other than that of the other. Well, the
question is why Stevens should hide himself thus. Lacan’s comment on the neurotic’s
behavior is useful here:

[T]he neurotic has been subjected to the imaginary castration from the beginning; it
is the castration that sustains []his strong ego, so strong, one might say, that its
proper name is an inconvenience for it, since the neurotic is really Nameless

and that

...it is beneath this strong ego,..., that the neurotic hides the castration that he
denies...

(Écrits 323)

The “Nameless”-ness that Lacan refers to here is replaceable with ‘signifierless’ since
neuroses result from the repression of signifiers. Insofar our assumption is concerned, in
Stevens’ case it was the Name-of-the-Father or the phallus that was repressed. Lacan
could also be referring to the neurotic subject’s proper name: because the phallic
function is responsible for the subject’s sense of ‘self’ or his identity (which is usually
evoked by the ‘proper name’), its lack is suggestive of his “Nameless”-ness and thus of
imaginary castration. The ego becomes strong in the absence of phallic function since the
neurotic subject that one thus becomes hopes to hide his castration beneath his egotistic
attitude. This strong ego here functions as a protective cover whereby the subject hides his castration — successfully, one might add, for many people have spoken of Stevens’ egotistic attitude and generally imposing nature but never suspected of any problem in it. Whatever we know of the poet’s life, especially from Brazeau’s biography of him, his egotistic attitude stands out from the rest of his characteristic features. This has already been discussed in the chapter ‘Prolegomena.’

The obvious question that arises is why would the neurotic hide his castration, after all, instead of admitting and confessing it with a hope to recover? Lacan has an answer as well:

What the neurotic does not want, and what he strenuously refuses to do,..., is to sacrifice his castration to the *jouissance* of the Other by allowing it to serve that *jouissance*.

And, of course, he is not wrong, for although, at bottom, he feels himself to be what is most vain in existing, a want-of-being (*Un Manque-a-etre*) or a Too-much-of-it (*Un En-Trop*), why should he sacrifice his difference (anything but that) to the *jouissance* of an Other, which...does not exist...but if by chance it did exist, he would enjoy it... And that is what the neurotic does not want. For he imagines that the Other demands his castration.

(Écrits 323)

Stevens’ incisive, insulting sense of humor and his general downplaying of the persons in the field of literature are not only suggestive of his ego’s strength but they also point out his desire for annihilating any semblance of a chance that might become the source of *jouissance* for those persons, who were an Other to him.

The ‘Too-much-of-Being’ in Lacan’s passage is a reference to the hysterics, who experiences the *jouissance* of the Other himself since he situates himself beyond the phallus-as-signifier which is thus responsible for the ‘Too-much-of-Being.’ But the neurotic who places himself far short of the signifier in question, feels the want of being. In the former case, the *jouissance* is experienced by the hysterics himself whereas, in the latter, the neurotic has little of it but imagines the Other to be capable of experiencing it at the cost of his own castration. Where do we put Stevens, then? His aloofness from people, his uneasiness with or even hatred of the contemporary literary artists, or of his equals and superiors in general, his reluctance to give public speech, his avoiding talking
to and answering the questions of the audience after the talk — all these traits in his character point to the fact that he was strenuously avoiding the “sacrifice” of his “difference,” of his “castration;” he did not want the Others to enjoy his castration. One of the best examples of this is his insufferably abrupt response to Richard Bissell, who wanted to know about a case that Stevens had lost (B 21). Since he was heading the case, he must have imagined of others thinking of the loss in terms of his failure. Here, Stevens refused his boss any enjoyment of his own shortcoming or failure.

It is no wonder, then, that Stevens postpones his inclusion in the ‘you’ of the poem; by that he could hide himself. At the same time, though, he must include himself. However, when he does it is very important. His emphasis is literally on what he says in the line where he willingly brings himself in: “You yourself were never quite yourself.” Without getting fooled by his negation of his own self, the reader must see that the poet is, in fact, celebrating that sense of his ‘self” when he was in his ‘summer.’ It is the uniqueness or the ecstatic feeling of the sense of self that necessitates the negation; it is a figurative way of asserting the self. The lack of that sense is common in ‘spring’ and ‘autumn,’ which he is wont to and takes that to be his lot. He was very much a ‘normal’ person in his youth when he was still courting Elsie; this roughly is the period that the concerned line recalls. In that line, he reminds himself of the fact that he, too, once had the phallus. This fact cannot be told at the beginning of the poem, for that would make it too conspicuous, but more importantly it could give rise to a spate of questions such as ‘Has he lost it?’ ‘Does not he have it now?’ ‘Is he castrated?’ — questions that might give an opportunity to an Other to enjoy the poet’s “difference.” Lest this should happen, he must make less conspicuous even the fact that he did have ‘it’ once.

This is the “emotional heart” of the poem; it is from the nostalgia of the lost phallus that the other lines of the poem “radiate.” This nostalgic feeling for the lost “obscure world” of his ‘summer’ is what is necessary to be perceived in the poem’s third stanza.

However, this does not mean that Stevens showed no improvement insofar as his recovery was concerned. There are indications in his poetry that he may have rediscovered the phallic signifier. Referring to the change of his relationship with the reality could support this suspicion. The poetry of Harmonium days is full of the loss of reality, even of a reality-phobia of sorts at times. Poems like “Snow Man” (CP 9-10), “Domination of Black” (CP 8-9), “Valley Candle” (CP 51), are powerful expressions of
a potential threat of the reality principle, while poems like “From the Misery of Don Joost” (CP 46-7) offer a clear statement of his inability to cope with that loss: “I have finished my combat with the sun” (CP 46). However, the poetry from The Blue Guitar on shows some difference; especially, many poems of Ideas of Order and Parts of a World reflect a revival of the poet’s attempts to recover as they aim at creating an order out of his chaos. There he seems to have accepted the fact that “The imperfect is our paradise” (CP 194), which is suggestive of a riddance from the obsessive character of his interest in reality the seeds of which were found in Sunday Morning itself, in its moving away from the fear of or obsession with death. The relationship with reality is essentially imaginary, and it is the imaginary domain that needs to be reordered if a psychoanalytic patient is to recover; in this sense, The Blue Guitar is a very important poem. Without such reordering of the imaginary, a poem like “Study of Two Pears” (CP 196-7) — where Stevens studies both imagination and reality objectively, and suggests the impossibility of resisting the imagination’s intervention in reality perception and, at the same time, of perceiving things as they are — would not have been written. In fact, Stevens could reflect an/on enjoyment of reality as is obvious in many of his poems, of which “The Latest Freed Man” (CP 204-5) and “Of Bright & Blue Birds & the Gala Sun” (CP 248) easily stand out. Nevertheless, it is also true that there are other poems or verses even in Parts of a World that might be suspected to show the same old obsession with reality. Could it be that those poems or verses are merely recollections from the past experiences? Could his past experiences have provided food for later meditation for a poet like him, who was a keen observer of psychic phenomena? While believing that he never recovered would be an injustice to him, asserting his recovery would be a hasty judgment.

The later poetry of Stevens has something different in store, which it is difficult to believe as a sign of normative desire since it reflects too much of what he craved in the early poetry. Certain poems of Transport to Summer root this suspicion. Credences of Summer is important for two reasons: on the one hand it shows that stage of Stevens’ development when his quest for a desired relationship with reality seems to have attained its peak, a perfect relation, one might say; on the other hand, at the same time, it celebrates the enjoyment of reality with such an emphasis that one wonders whether he transcends the human limit of the enjoyment. It almost leads to the thought of his going beyond the limit of the phallus as signifier and reaching out for the ‘other’ kind of
enjoyment that goes by the name of Other jouissance in Lacan; there, he seems to hook himself onto the real, to virtually map himself onto the real order — this could well be the cause of the fantasmatically obscure projection of the “rock” in Credences. The other two poems discussed in this chapter, The Bouquet and The Rock seem to confirm the suspicion. Credences thus could be seen as a point in Stevens’ life where things might take a turn in a different direction.

The “Motive” is powerful enough to lead to speculations regarding Stevens’ regaining of the phallus, but in the end it remains an “X,” meaningless. This unfortunately throws him in the dyadic closure with the Other — perhaps ever more radically. Chocorua to Its Neighbor, placed seven pages after the “Motive,” is a forceful expression of that potentially dangerous closure. It is one of Stevens’ most polemical poems and the most neglected of his longer poems. While Bloom rates it along with Esthetique du Mal, Description without Place, and Credences of Summer, he reasons about the poem’s neglect that “it has Notes on the one side of it and the other three long poems of Transport to Summer coming after it” (222). This reasoning seems inadequate since the ever-intensifying quest for new findings in Stevens would not have left such a forceful poem wanting commentary. Rather, the neglect perhaps owes to the poem’s language and subject matter: the language, Bloom observes, is “less aphoristic,” as compared to Notes (222), and leaves little space for the critic to intrude; but, it is more difficult to figure out the subject matter of the poem. It is extremely necessary for any commentator of the poem to first have a clear idea of the poem’s central concern precisely because it presents a very sustained, integrated, and forceful argument through its twenty-six sections. Such argument, however less aphoristic, should in fact enhance the cause of commentary once the subject of the poem is identified. Without having a clear idea of what the poem is about, the total effect of the poem’s language is that it produces a “hovering effect” (Bloom 222), because one cannot shake off the feeling that the subject of the poem involves a certain degree of sublimity.

It is easy to see that Chocorua is the name of a mountain, but equally difficult is to see or say anything of the ‘neighbor.’ The role of mountain in Stevens owes greatly to Cézanne’s paintings, which reflect in the painter’s late period a singular important image of a particular mountain. Fred Robinson and Betty Buchsbaum have discussed the infiltrations of Cézanne’s mountain-art into Stevens’ poetry. Both painter and poet were interested in the mountain because of its standing as “an elemental force and
power...identified through the ages as a place of spiritual aspiration and metaphysical revelation” (Buchsbaum 311). For both it was the symbol of their quest for the ultimate reality. The ages might have looked upon the mountain as a place of spiritual aspiration and metaphysical revelation, but — if Cézanne does — Stevens hardly shows interest in a reality revealed through spiritual or metaphysical speculations. For the reality he sought has much to do with the actual world around us, with the world of concrete facts and our experiences of it. He sought “a contact with reality as it impinges on us from the outside, the sense that we can touch and feel the solid reality which does not wholly dissolve itself into the conceptions of our minds” (OP 236-37). Such a reality may be wholly, radically other, but it must be felt very concretely and not vaguely like, say, a glimpse of god in a religious fantasy, but comparable to it nevertheless. Cézanne, “an observant catholic,” often spoke “of his artistic vocation in religious terms” in the last decades of his life (Buchsbaum 307), but Stevens preferred not to do so. Rather, he thought that “The glory of god is the glory of the world” and sought “To find the spiritual in reality” (OP 178). To say that Chocorua leads to “the Emersonian realization...of a transcendental realm” (Bloom 224) seems an imposed anxiety of influence; it is to be heedless to Stevens’ rejection of Plato’s “asceticism,” which seeks “to draw ourselves away as much as possible from the unsubstantial fluctuating facts of the world about us and establish some communion with the objects which are apprehended by thought and not sense” (emphases added; OP 236), for the poet preferred the world of sense over that of thought. Sense establishes a communion with that which can be empirically known and realized, but thought does so with that which is purely conceptual and remains unrealized. This is the difference between Plato’s, or for that matter of Emerson’s, conceptual, transcendental, hence “decadent or barbarous” reality (OP 236) and Stevens’ empirical, sense-able reality. The point is, the mountain in Stevens, far from being a concept or becoming an image of spiritual aspiration, is real. And yet it becomes equally unreal in a poem like Chocorua through Stevens’ poetic act or treatment of it because he makes the mountain belong to some “another dimension not immediately calculable” (OP 239). It is this dimension that must be ‘calculated’ if one has to comment on this poem.

Stevens certainly looked upon the mountain as the most imposing of the world of actual objects. It is this very quality that, through the subliminal processes in the mind of the perceiver, makes the mountain enter in to the dimension of the non-real. There is
obviously involved an aspect of the perceiver’s individuality in this kind of transfiguration and sublimation of an object in the sense that the way a particular object affects him is unique to himself; he sees it in the tangent of himself and “not as we are normally aware of it,” and therefore, like the genuine artist he is never true to what he sees even though “what he sees is real” (OP 237). This is how Stevens came to designate the non-real seeming aspect of the real as “the unreal” of the real (e.g. see CP 272) or as “The infinite of the actual” (CP 451). The more imposing or interesting the object the more its engulfment into the ‘unreal.’ What Stevens means by ‘unreal’ is the polyvalence of the object as it plays with the mind. He was aware of this when he wrote, “Things seen are things as seen” (OP 162), that ‘as seen’ pointing precisely to that which is not seen with the physical eye, hence to the mind’s play and poetic act or treatment with respect to the object.

Stevens’ sense of reality is largely composed of his meditations on the unseen part of actual things which thus becomes “his inescapable and ever-present difficulty and inamorata” (OP 241), from which originates the dimension of the ‘unreal.’ Such ‘unreal’ of an object is, however, merely an individual’s perception, and therefore is never a complete description of the object. It is only a glimpse into what Lacan would call the real of the object under gaze. This is why even the actual is the poet’s “ever-present difficulty and inamorata,” for it retains its objectivity without ever fully giving itself in to the perceiver. However, it must be mentioned that both poet and psychoanalyst, while they affirm the objectivity of the real, maintain that saying or seeing the real objectively is not possible; Stevens compares the “activity of the unreal in reality” with “the activity of an hallucination in the mind” (OP 240), where the ‘hallucination’ — the ‘unreal,’ going by the comparison — is the doing of ‘the mind’ itself, which stands for the actual, the real in the comparison.

The mind is indeed real, like the outside world — veritable and existing. If the mountain is the most imposing of the outside reality, who or what can be its ‘neighbor’? Neighbors, from cultural standpoint, are those who are of similar social standing, are similar in some respect, identify with each other, share things between. Considering the force of the mountain image in Stevens and his deep interest in the unconscious, there is no better neighbor to the mountain than the Other of Lacan; for, the Other is the most imposing of the inside reality. The unconscious owes its existence to the outside world, including other human subjects and their language and culture. What the outside world is to the unconscious, or the ‘mountain’ is to the Other — i.e. the other is to the Other — is
precisely what is implicated by the title of this poem. It does not indicate a discourse as such of one mountain with another, but rather implies a relationship of the other to the Other. The whole poem is an apostrophe to the unconscious as the Other. This is suggested in section XX:

It is an eminence,
But of nothing, trash of sleep that will disappear
With the special things of night, little by little,
In day's constellation, and yet remain, yet be

He confesses its eminence; but, it is of no thing, not a thing, in that it is not available to the senses, and yet is very much there. The unconscious manifestations are experienced more clearly in the dream, but the dream is often not remembered very well and is forgotten as having no great significance in day-ly life; thus it is called the “trash of sleep” that disappears in day. Yet, the unconscious does in-sist, even though in disappearing it ‘ex-sists.’

However, the problem of the speaker remains, complex as it is. One might point to the line “Now, I, Chocorua, speak of this shadow...” from section XX, suggesting that the ‘I’ is Chocorua the mountain, who speaks of that ‘shadow.’ This is, in turn, suggesting that the ‘he’ who begins speaking in section X and continues till section XII is that ‘shadow.’ But, if this ‘shadow’ is so congenial as to speak to Chocorua in so clear a tongue, would it remain the object of desire, as it indeed remains throughout the poem, any more? This is an essential question with regard to Stevens’ poetics. In fact, if Chocorua as a mountain is the other, so is the ‘I’: Je est un autre; the ‘I’ who speaks is an other to himself who listens. Stevens has demonstrated this Lacanian observation in some poems discussed in chapter 2; “A Dish of Peaches in Russia,” in fact, dramatizes this experience. Thus, the ‘he’ who speaks in section X, XI and XII is the ‘I’ speaking as an other. Both ‘I’ and Chocorua the mountain are thus an other. It is in this way that they are comparable, not identical. This is very much the essence of identification between man and the outside world. Without this desire for the other, there would be no sense of alienation, hence no subjectivity, there would be no unconscious, no Other. To conclude the argument it is imperative to leave the question of the speaker open ended as Stevens
himself does in “A Dish of Peaches.” It would be in keeping with the poet’s poetics. When Stevens writes in *Chocorua*,

I hear the motion of the spirit and the sound
Of what is secret becomes, for me, a voice
That is my own voice speaking in my ear.

he is speaking of the otherness of one’s own speech, which becomes his own after he identifies his “voice” with “a voice.” This is in perfect accordance with Lacan’s thought on the matter. Therefore, the ‘I,’ the speaker of the poem, is not to be confused with the mountain, but should be considered as speaking with a sense of an otherness to himself; the speaker and Chocorua are identifiable insofar as both are in an otherness with respect to the speaking voice(s) in the poem. The poem is read better if considered as a discourse on otherness and the Other through which the poet seeks to “approach[...] the real, upon [his] mountain” (*CP* 259).

Indeed, the poem does begin on the note of an otherness (“such a distance”) that is mitigated through identification (“to speak / and to be heard”). The human subject’s quest for wholeness, or unity with outside world, is the cause of the identification process, which grounds that sense of unity. It is therefore, “to be part / Of sky, of sea, large earth, large air.” To see human beings through such psychoanalytic frame is “To perceive men without reference to their form” or body. The “swarming of number over number” and “gesticulation of forms” of section II are by no means a movement or progress in the direction of that ‘largeness’ (“not / one foot approaching, one uplifted arm”) “towards which [Stevens] had edged” (*CP* 512), since the ‘largeness’ he sought was that of an individual. That enlargement, in Stevens’ thought, would come only through the “desire of the Other” (*Écrits* 312). While the subjective genitive (‘of’) in this phrase of Lacan is suggestive of both the ‘desire for the Other’ and ‘desire for the Other’s desire,’ Stevens exhibits only the former aspect of it in *Chocorua*. It may be noted that even the identification with the outside world is marked with a sense of an otherness, of the ‘you,’ in section I. The very argument of the first sentence in the section hints not only at that otherness but also at the desire to be like the ‘you.’ It reflects a desire to be the ‘neighbor’ to the ‘you,’ a desire for identification with ‘him.’ It is the desire for the Other. The moment of confrontation with the Other is over and the present
tense of section I is replaced with the past tense from section III on, even as the ‘you’ of
section I changes to ‘he’ in section IV. The poem will now ruminate on and report the
experience of the unconscious manifestations that were observed “At the end of night
last night.”

Twilight and night are special times in Stevens because, he says,
“Psychologically, the obscurity of twilight and of night shuts out the clear outline of
visible things which is a thing that appeals to the intellect. The clear outline having been
obliterated, the emotions replace the intellect and

Lo! I behold an orb of silver brightly
Grow from the fringe of sunset, like a dream
From Thought’s severe infinitude —”

(Letters 170-1)

In these times, the “visible things” disappear and give way to the perception of invisible
things of the unconscious (“like a dream / From Thought’s severe infinitude”), which
may be primitive (like an “orb”) but are attractive nonetheless (“silver brightly”). Night
is the time when the unconscious manifestations can be observed with more clarity since
it is the time when “the guitar is asleep” (CP 47), which eliminates the possibility of
méconnaissance or mis(re)cognition; in Stevens’ words, “It is not possible for the
moon,” when we are asleep, “To blot this with its dove-winged blendings” (emphasis
added; CP 119). Besides, the Other “lies awake at night” (CP 171); he is like the
“thought [that] sleeps not” (CP 55). Thus, “bare night is best” when “the voice that is in
us makes a true response” (CP 138). However, Chocorua suggests the end of night as
more preferable. “Day is desire and night is sleep,” wrote Stevens in The Blue Guitar
(CP 167); it is not that there is no desire when one is sleeping in the night, but — it is a
common experience that dreams that come at the end of night are remembered with more
clarity — more vivid experience of the Other, as if in a state of conscious, was a
prerequisite for the poem. Thus, though “a true response” of the Other comes in “bare
night” (or in the unconscious state of the mind), Stevens prefers the transitional period
between ‘night’ and ‘day.’ It is in this “light congenial” that the other manifestations are
more prominently felt. The “prodigious shadow” of it “then came / In an elemental
freedom, sharp and cold;” ‘cold’ since its otherness did not become any the less however
sharply it came. “Elemental freedom” seems a very carefully chosen expression if “sharp” suggests ‘elemental’ (i.e. powerful) and “cold” informs of the Other’s ‘freedom’ from, or otherness with respect to, the perceiver. Having experienced this late in the night or very early in the morning, the feeling was remembered well: “The feeling of him was the feel of day.” The absence of article before ‘day’ might recall “Day is desire” (CP 167), so that “the feel of day” would be the sensation experienced as the desire awakened and came in some sort of contact with its object, the Other. The very next occurrence of ‘day,’ preceded by the indefinite article, is not figurative; the concerning line merely says that it was a day, not seen before, of a fulfillment of the desire in which merely “To see was to be.”

Section III through to section VI are largely a record of the first impression of the Other experience; from the middle of section III until the end of section VI is the first information report that describes the Other. As “the figure in / A poem for Liadoff,” it recalls the “Two tales of Liadoff” (CP 346). Besides being the name of a Russian composer as Bloom points out (224), “Liadoff” is an anagram for ‘laid-off,’ alluding to the Other’s otherness or aloofness, even as the Russian connection brings to mind the Other’s description as “that Russian, that exile” as “that I” (CP 224). The death of Liadoff, referred to in the first of the “Two tales of Liadoff,” is thus the vanishing of the Other from any perception. Stevens refers to such vanishing of it in section VIII of Chocorua, and then declares the other as “a tragic thing.” A very similar way of imputing the perceiver’s own feelings onto the perceived is found in the Liadoff poem as the speaker hears Liadoff’s “tragical,...haunted arpeggios” (CP 346). In fact, in both poems it is the speaker who is sad as the Other disappears beyond the reach of perception, it being the object of the perceiver’s desire. This kind of pampering himself only betrays the perceiver’s intense desire for the Other.

The Liadoff poem needs a word of explanation to clarify the role of the ‘townsmen.’ Besides being individuals, they are the symbolic universe in which one finds oneself, unconsciously assimilating and incorporating that world of symbols, which thus ends up inside of oneself and becomes the symbolic Other: “what they said.../ Was repeated by Liadoff in a narration / Of incredible colors...” (CP 347). Each of the townsmen, as an individual, has this Other inside him. The townsmen are thus doubly related with the speaker — as the other, and as the Other. Insofar as the first relation is concerned, they are identifiable with each other: “There was no difference between the
town / And him.” Even their desire is the same, “Both wanted the same thing.” As the Other, however, it “smothered” the speaker (this is ‘Castration’) until he felt an awakening of his own desire, “until / His being felt the need of soaring, the need / Of air...” These lines are indicative of a need for riddance from the ‘smothering,’ castrating experience. Lacan says something similar in relation to the mother’s desire, which by implication is applicable to the symbolic or any Other:

The mother’s role is her desire. That is of capital importance. Her desire is not something that 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.

So I tried to explain that there was something reassuring. I am telling you simple things – Indeed, I am improvising. There is a roller, made of stone, of course, which is potentially there at the level of the trap and which holds and jams it open. That is what we call the phallus. It is a roller which protects you, should the jaws suddenly close.

(quoted in Fink 56-7)

What the psychoanalyst is speaking of here is that the desire of the (m)Other is always smothering, and what saves or liberates the subject from it is his recognition that the phallus is, that it is not with the (m)Other, that it is the phallus that he must seek and not the (m)Other. The implications of this passage have already been discussed in chapter ‘Jouissance.’ “But then,” as the Liadoff poem suggests, the Other does not allow the subject’s release, or what is the same, the subject in the poem is very much pent in his desire for the Other; this trap is beautifully expressed in the expression “Oh beau caboose,” indicating the subject’s attraction towards the Other, who keeps his crocodile eye open, disguised under the guard-ian’s love but intending to ‘devour’ the subject. This is why, though the subject feels “the need of soaring... / Of air,” i.e. of freeing himself in order to be a desiring being himself, yet the poem ends with the speaker pent up in his desire for the symbolic Other as he seeks

His epi-tones, the colors of the ear,
The sounds that soon become a voluble speech —
Voluble but archaic and hard to hear.

*(CP 347)*

The first of the Liadoff poems seems enigmatic, almost mesmerizing for its "resplendent forms." The 'rocket' is a vehicle that does not specify its tenor but implies the subject's thought itself, and therefore is a vehicle in its common sense. "The town / Had crowded into the rocket and touched the fuse" *(CP 346).* The symbolic world's assimilation into his thought is suggested by the town's crowding into the (his) 'rocket.' The touching of the fuse implies an explosion that is referred to in the first stanza. The Latin *explodere,* from which derives the English 'explode,' means 'drive off the stage by clapping.' The town's driving off the stage or going backstage through the rocket implies its entry into the subject's unconscious. The poet also uses 'explode' with its common meaning by associating it with "ovation" and the 'touching of the fuse': the subject's thought, loaded with the 'town,' explodes "in an ovation" — the word 'ovation' also anticipates the 'clapping' implicit in *explodere* *(ex + plaudere)* — "of resplendent forms." Thus, the 'town' is both driven off into the unconscious and, estranged in this way, — the estrangement is signified by the townsmen's transformation into "large blue men / In pantaloons of fire and ... women hatched, / like molten citizens of vacuum"*'' — also becomes resplendent. The ovation of these townsmen is a sign of an acknowledgement, rather appreciation, of the symbolic world in which the speaking subject lives; it is the 'town' as the Other that receives an ovation from the subject, for it is he who elevates or sublimates it and sees its resplendence; it is he who received the 'town' into his 'rocket.'

The purpose of the poem's discussion was to show Stevens' desire for the Other, who soon vanishes — "ex, ex, and ex and out?" *(CP 347).* Section V of *Chocorua* portrays the Other through its ever fading contours, finally becoming imperceptible altogether:

He was a shell of dark blue glass, or ice,

*Or air collected in a deep essay,*

*Or light embodied, or almost, a flash*

On more than muscular shoulders, arms and chest,

*Blue's last transparence as it turned to black.*
In fact, both section V and VI attempt through their metonymic rhetorocity a real-ization of the Other as they seek to catch the moment of the Other between transparency and opacity, in that difficult light which marks the limit of the perceptive reach. In this difficulty, the Other was "fixed but for a slight / Illumination of movement as he breathed," or as 'he' became tangible. It was confessedly a "fusion" of the intangible and the "brooding mind." For all its intangibility and the difficulty of perception, or because of these, the vividness of the memory of that moment makes that "movement" of 'him' "the glitter." The Other existence is felt, and accepted; but as for the knowledge of it, there was none. Thus, what Stevens does in the rest of the poem is to see it in the tangent of himself or of his experience and feelings of the moment.

In alliance with the preceding two sections, section VII depicts the other's substantial non-substance-ness, and shows an awareness that it belongs to the unconscious ("fire from an underworld"); hence the reductive conspicuousness (fire "of less degree than flame and lesser shine"). As belonging to the unconscious, i.e. to the human, Stevens has attempted its personification in section V, attributing to it "shoulders, arms and chest" — even breathability in section VI (also in section VIII). However, "hard to perceive and harder still to touch" (XXIV), its limbs are "more than" what they seem; the Other is more than what is perceived of it, or of it as. The dilemma of whether to call it human or more than human is vented in the next section, thus: "He was not man yet he was nothing else." The problematic of this statement is also preserved in section XII of *The Blue Guitar* as it concludes that the Other keeps its otherness in declaring "itself not to be I" and "yet / Must be [I]" since "It could be nothing else" (CP 171). In fact, Stevens goes so far as to speak of its less humanness and savagery when he refers to it as "a god in the house" (CP 328); god is a tyrant in Stevens' conception, for gods rule us "by / Merest apprehension of their will" (CP 262).

Section XVI of *Chocorua* equates the Other with fate, as an irresistible power controlling us; the Other controls all our behavior, leaves nothing outside its domain (Écrits 163; ERS 3). The section further describes it as part "darkness," "part desire," and "part the sense / Of what men are." Like the metonymic revelation of god, it is perceived in parts while much of it remains unknown or in dark. Like the god of religious desire, it is the object of human desire. And just as the god is modeled partly on human attributes, the Other is partly "the sense / Of what men are." All the three glosses on it seem to form a parallelism with the trinity of the Holy Ghost, the Father, and the Son, respectively. The
Holy Ghost represents that part of God which remains unknown, and the Son signifies His humanity. The Father, in the parallelism suggested, represents man's desire. Lacan's concept of the phallus has its origin in the Name-of-the-Father, and both are what he refers to as the 'third term' responsible for the "emergence of desire itself" (*FS* 36), thus enabling the above comparison. Initially, the child in a family supposes that the father has the phallus that his mother desires, and therefore wants to have or be the phallus; thus the phallus becomes the object of the child's desire. Moreover, Lacan views the function of the father or phallus as the support of the symbolic order and equates it with law (*Écrits* 67). It is the father's 'No!' that alienates the child from the mother, who is both the child's desire and a 'crocodile' as seen a while ago. The law is what prevents one from one's fatal desire. All this may well be applied to the Christian law. The first law forbidding the first couple the eating of the apple should suggest that God had already made his exit,\(^\text{16}\) that the first couple was already dwelling in the symbolic order introduced by the law or God-as-Father. The function of the Name-of-the-Father is to effect the subject's entry into the symbolic order, thereby making him loose something that can only be 'named' thereafter, that can exist only as absence or a signifier.\(^\text{17}\) The phallus, Lacan says, "is the signifier of the very loss the subject undergoes due to the breaking into pieces brought on by the signifier" (Fink 102). The Father in trinity and the phallus in Lacan's thought are thus both the signifiers of the loss or lack of something unnamable, but which the religion names as god and Lacan variously calls it object(a) or 'being,' or even *das Ding*. What is lost therefore is in radical otherness to the subject and so is desired by him. The Other is Lacan's term for this also. As Lacan shows in the Schreber's case, the Other is the psychotic's god. Stevens' elevation of the Other as "A substitute for all the gods" may be recalled here (*CP* 176). Insofar as the Word is with God, insofar as the phallus is with or in the field of the Other, the God and the Other will be "part desire."

The Christian religious myth follows the path of human desire in the sense that it seeks that fullness of being which is primordially lost in man's alienation from God, very much like the alienation of an infant from the mother; both God and the mother thus become the Other of desire. The attempts at a recovery from the loss of God and that of the mother (or the phallus or object(a) or *das Ding...???) are therefore identical. What distinguishes the neurotic desire from a normalized desire is that the latter has recognized the Other as castrated, i.e. the Other as lacking or desiring, and thus is capable of going
beyond the Other for its satisfaction; while, the neurotic desire seeks its satisfaction in
the dyadic closure with the Other. The neurotic confuses "the Other's lack [i.e. desire]
with the other's demand... [T]he other's demand takes on the function of the object in the
neurotic's fantasy" (Fink 186n21). He takes the Other's demand, which is merely an
articulation in language of a need, as his command, thus hoping to retrieve what has been
lost through obeying that command; he believes that by obeying the command he might
win the Other. The desire to obey God's commandments may thus be looked upon as an
attempt at regaining Him. In this regard, Stevens' elevation of Other as "A substitute for
all the gods" (CP 76) or as "a god in the house" (CP 327), and the human desire to listen
to "his speech" (CP 328) or to seek "His epi-tones" (CP 347), which would be like
God's commandments, are indeed noteworthy. Lacan writes, "In fact, the image of the
ideal Father is a phantasy of the neurotic" (Écrits 321); what is the ideal Father if not the
real (in Lacanian sense) object of the (m)Other's desire? "The neurotic subject" who has
"already come into being, in some sense, in his or her truncated fantasy" (Fink 187)18 —
i.e. the subject who as a result of his separation from the (m)Other — knows that it is not
he or she but the father who has the phallus that is the object of the (m)Other's desire.
Thus, he tries to be the 'ideal' father, to be the father's better, or to have the phallus; in
this attempt to be the (m)other's desire he only articulates his own desire to have or be
the phallus because it is the (m)other's desire. Like the neurotic who articulates his
desire for the Other through the intermediary of the ideal (i.e. purely imaginary) Father,
the Christian religious desire too seeks God through the intermediary of Himself-as-the-
Father, which is what the Father in the trinity represents; the first law, forbidding the
eating of the apple already marks His paternal or phallic function, hence the exit of God-
as-Desire. It is necessary to distinguish God from God-as-Father since God is that Other
of religious desire who is sought through His phallic function, i.e. through His function
as law or through His symbolic function, which is present in that first law of obedience,
in the ten commandments, and even in the continuity of the church tradition of the Father
who brings the sinners to the symbolic order of the Christian law. The Christian religious
desire hopes to win God through obeying those commandments and laws. This is why
the distinction between God and the Father in the trinity is necessary. John Donne's plea
of "Batter my heart" laments the alienation from God, and expresses the desire to be
'ravished' or raped by Him (443). The metaphysical poet, there, hopes to regain God
through his castration by Him; for he indicates — through the desire to be 'ravished' —
that He has the phallus. Lee argues by referring to Freud, "...the young boy comes to realize that both ways of satisfying his oedipal desires will entail castration: to love his mother is to open himself up to the father’s castrating punishment, but to be the object of his father’s love (that is, to assume his mother’s position) requires his castration as well" (110). In short, the Other is invariably the object of neurotic desire; this is what is justified in Stevens’ expression “part desire” that he writes with reference to the Other.

Stevens further writes in section XVI, “The collective being knew / There were others like him safely under roof.” The lines indicate that by ‘collective’ Stevens means ‘universal,’ at the same time, the poet destroys the Other’s collectivity or universality in the second line in suggesting that each man has an Other “Under [his] roof.” Stevens is almost identifying the notion of ‘universality’ or ‘collectivity’ and ‘particularity’ or ‘individuality.’ Lacan does the same in eulogizing Hegel’s “insistence on the fundamental identity of the particular and the universal,” and further adds,

Let me simply say that this is what leads me to object to any reference to totality in the individual, since it is the subject who introduces division into the individual, as well as into the collectivity that is his equivalent. Psychoanalysis is properly that which reveals both the one and the other to be no more than mirages.

(Écrits 80; also qtd. in Lee 74)

While Stevens refers to the Other’s universality, totality, wholeness, he also splits it into particulars in saying “There were others like him.” The Other as language (l’Autre langage) is universal, total, independent, but it cannot be separated from a particular subject whose desire, invested with the particular environment around him, makes that language particular to himself. Or, as Lee writes in discussing this point in Lacan, when language as universal is conflated with the subject’s desire, “which, in so far as it is human, always aims ultimately at recognition by particular others” (75), thus disrupting its universality. Simply stated, man learns to desire from the others around him insofar as they express their desires through language, and these others and their desires change with respect to the place even though the language that is used for expression does not change so radically, with respect to the place, as the desire’s particularity or peculiarity can change it. In the following passage from Lacan, the expression “primary language” is used to suggest the conflation of desire and language; it is also important to see in the
passage that by referring to the language of symbols that analysis explores, Lacan is
certainly referring to the Other as language that the analysand speaks “unknown to
himself:”

In order to free the subject’s speech, we introduce him into the language of his
desire, that is to say, into the primary language in which, beyond what he tells us of
himself, he is already talking to us unknown to himself, and in the first place, in the
symbols of the symptom.

In the symbolism brought to light in analysis, it is certainly a question of a
language. This language,..., has the universal character of a language (langue), but,
at the same time, since it is the language that sizes desire at the very moment in
which it is humanized by making itself recognized, it is particular to the subject.

(Écrits 81; Lee 74-5)

In short, each human being has a particular language, which becomes peculiar to himself
through its combination with his desire, forming his Other “safely under [his] roof,” as
Stevens would add further. Hence, the images representing the Other in section XVII
come from different environments (‘captain,’ ‘cardinal,’ ‘the stone,’ ‘the effigy,’ ‘the
mother,’ ‘the music,’ ‘the name,’ ‘the scholar’), suggesting that the people living in
different environments would call the Other by a name peculiar to their respective
environment.

The Other’s complex nature that Lacan kept portraying throughout his work is
evoked by the “complicated hues” that are “fetched out of” the Other-as-“the human
mountain” (XVII). Its “hues,” its modes and aspects, are called “transfigurers,” for they
are conducive to the process of ‘enlargement,’ referred to in section I and X, of the one
who feels or is “diminished” (the word cannot but have a psychoanalytic connotation; it
perhaps refers to the excessive castration that Stevens underwent during 1908-11, and
probably kept undergoing it as he kept feeling guilty for his father’s death for a long time
after it). The “hues” of the Other are the “genii” in the sense in which they help out and
bring about a change in the lives of those who feel lost, helpless, frustrated, or
‘diminished’ in the Arabian nights; hence they are “Blue friends” in the form of
genielike “shadows.” In other words, the alienated neurotic desire finds satisfaction in
seeking the Other. The umbrageneous imagery dominating section XVIII, while it
creates a mysterious aureole about the Other, also conveys the consolatory feeling of
'comfort' that the neurotic desire seeks in the Other, a feeling of strength (com + fortis, strength) resulting from the neurotic subject's imaginary relationship of a confidante with it (the Other becomes a confider who speaks to the neurotic subject), for its secret speech — that the (neurotic) "human demands" (CP 328) — belongs only to the one, the neurotic subject, who listens to the Other's speech (conspirator = com + spirare, 'breath' hence 'speech'). And neither are the "things" it speaks nor its voice "more than human" since, as in Lacan, it is essentially a formulation derived from other human beings and their language. However, the poem evades answering whether it speaks of human things in human voice, but merely says that it speaks "humanly" and "from the height" or, what is the same, "from the depth / Of human things;" it is this unconscious, unknown dimension of its place and voice that makes its speech "acutest" (XIX). Whether at the 'height' or 'depth' of human things, the Other is the foundational structure of human psyche: "interior fons," and "fond" (XXI). The modern French word fond was written as fonz or fons in old French, meaning 'foundation;' in using both the archaic and modern spellings, the poet might be suggesting that this "common self" has been there since times immemorial as the basis of human mind. Although Stevens earlier evaded commenting upon the nature of the Other's speech, he now refers to it as "glubbal glub;" the second word of the expression is an inarticulate sound as such, and the first means 'A band, company, troop' (OED). In Lacan's thought, the Other or the unconscious is an 'ensemble' of "imagistic material — including many images that are phonetic" (ERS 13); he has often said that the unconscious is "structured like a language" (Écrits 234; Seminar III 11, 119, 166-67). These glosses may be recalled because Stevens is speaking of the Other as language at this point in the poem; he is perhaps suggesting that it is (also) an ensemble of inarticulate sounds, hence it is difficult to interpret its speech. All the same, he finally declares it "A human thing" (XX).

In section X, Stevens has already referred to the Other as "The silver-shapeless;" in section XXII, he calls it "cloud-casual" since it appears and disappears in his fantasy and, like a cloud, has no fixed shape. It is 'displaced' from the 'physical world,' hence perhaps it is called the "metaphysical metaphor;" metaphor, because it comes to reside inside oneself as a replacement, like a symbol, for that which is lost. For all its appearance and disappearance, or because of this, it insists ("will disappear / ..., little by little, / In day's constellation, and yet remain, yet be" [XX]), and therefore exists — rather "ex-sists." It thinks in one's unconscious ("thinking in my show"), it is thus the
‘snow man’ as Stevens named it in the 1921 poem, “Snow Man.” The fact of the Other’s existence can be ascertained “if the eye is quick enough,” for it soon vanishes into the mind’s limits. Its perception by the mind’s eye is a transfiguring, enlarging experience since “where / He is the air changes and grows fresh to breathe.” Just before this, Stevens wrote “where he was...,” suggesting its disappearance, and now he replaces the ‘was’ with ‘is’ in the very next line; in these two lines, the poet seems to exhibit the fetishistic desire of the human subject to inhabit that place. In fact, probably borrowing consciously from Freud or more probably realizing from his own experience, Stevens writes an absolutely Freudian bit in the fourth line of section XXII: “where he was, there is an enkindling.” Paralleling Freud’s “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden,” much celebrated by Lacan, Stevens depicts without doubt the Other as the place where the human subject is realized, as the place of the real (of the) human subject. The Cartesinan philosophy confuses the real place of the subject with the moi (ego); Lacan destroys the Cartesian notion systematically in “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious,” concluding thus:

i) ‘cogito ergo sum’ ubi cogito, ibi sum. 
(‘I think, therefore I am’ where I think, there I am)

ii) I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think.

iii) I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am where I do not think to think.

(see Ecrits 164-66)

It must be kept in mind here that in Lacan, the subject thinks in the unconscious; the thinking associated with the ego is a mirage, hypocrisy, a rejection of the “self’s radical ex-centricity to itself” (Ecrits 171). In the same essay, the psychoanalyst argues on Freud’s dictum, that

The end that Freud’s discovery proposes for man was defined by him at the apex of his thought in these moving terms: Wo Es war, soll Ich warden. I must come to the place where that was.

This goal is one of reintegration and harmony, I could even say of reconciliation.
The happening anticipated in Freud’s dictum is momentary, but it marks the sol(l) objective of man’s endeavor; the moment of Es is one of reintegration, harmony, reconciliation — note that Stevens has something similar to say of the feeling after that moment: “integration for integration” (XXIV) — of the alienated moi identity of man with his real ‘I,’ a moment of the subject’s overcoming his ex-centricity or ex-sistence with respect to his own real-ity, thereby allowing him to assumer himself or his existence, which stands apart from his everyday false sense of existence. What the Other jouissance implicates is precisely this ‘coming to be there where it was;’ it is at this point, of jouissance, that Lacan distinguishes the not-so-absolute categories of masculinity and femininity. The jouissance that a neurotic subject seeks is different from the phallic jouissance, which is made possible by a giving up of castration and is both the determining factor of masculinity and the limit of man’s jouissance. While women are capable of phallic jouissance, they also have the potential of going beyond it and experiencing another kind of jouissance called the Other jouissance, which may also be described as the hysteric’s jouissance. In women’s case, therefore, the phallus enjoys an inferior position as compared to the Other that is beyond and above it. Designating the phallic signifier as S1, Fink comments, “An endpoint for men, S1 serves as an open door for women” (107). In other words, the neurotic desire for the Other is mediated through the phallus as repressed (not as foreclosed as in psychosis). Insofar as Stevens’ poetry reflects the desire for the Other, it is neurotic, revealing feminine potential at the same time. Chocorua speaks of both kinds of jouissance as is discussed below.

The speaker’s desire for the Other is very obvious in the poem. The poet demonstrates it yet another way in declaring the Other as “Not father, but bare brother, megalfrere” in section XXI. Lacan’s concept of the phallus originates from the Name-of-the-Father, and both are treated as the support of the symbolic order. In the line quoted above, Stevens is distinguishing the Other from the phallus (“Not father”); more importantly, in referring to it as “bare brother, megalfrere,” he asserts a fraternal love for it. This is similar to Sophocles’ Antigone’s rejection of the pittance of Creon’s Law and her radical expression of love for her brother Polyneices. Antigone ignores or finds no satisfaction in Law (this is a repression of the phallus-as-Law), and thus crosses the limit of phallic (symbolic) jouissance, because she seeks the real that is her brother whom no law could replace and who has already crossed the law of the state and, having died, gone beyond the point of return. Polyneices thus becomes the Other of Antigone’s desire.
that she seeks at the cost of her own life. The Other as children and the husband could be replaced,

But with my parents hid away in death,
No brother, ever, could spring up for me.
Such was the law by which I honored you.

(quoted in Lee 127)

This is how Antigone stresses the uniqueness of her brother and laments. Stevens’ rejection of the status of the father and granting the status of the brother to the Other of his desire cannot be accounted for in a different way than comparing it with what Antigone does. The unknown law by which he honors the Other of his desire as “megalfrere” cannot be understood otherwise. However, he does not go as far as Antigone does. He does not forget his ex-centricity as a subject even though he undoubtedly seeks Other jouissance, the cause of his “enlargement,” as is obvious in section X:

The moments of enlargement overlook
The enlarging of the simplest soldier’s cry
In what I am, as he falls.

The question of ‘What am I?’ is, of course, indicative of the cut that language introduces into the individual, making him its subject; Stevens was aware of this when he wrote of language as “our seigneur” (CP 322). The “fall” the poet speaks of is the falling back from the ‘moment of enlargement,’ the Ate, the word that designates the limit of human existence as subject and even as an individual life. Antigone’s going ahead with her brother’s burial against Creon’s prohibition of it marks the ektos atas, her going beyond “the limit that human life can only briefly cross,” where “one can only spend a brief period of time” (Seminar VII 262-63). Though the speaker of Chocorua approaches this limit in placing his moi “where he was” (emphasis mine; XXII), yet at the same time he is able — to use Lacan’s playful allusion to Heidegger — to eat his Dasein, i.e. to digest his being in the world as a subject, to accept his ex-centricity “as he falls.” Thus falling back or returning from the Ate is also accepting castration, which binds the

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subject to the phallic signifier. This is how the Stevens poem oscillates between the symbolic and the real, between Lacanian conceptions of masculinity and femininity. The formulae of sexuation to be chosen from Lacan in order to situate Stevens’ speaker, presumably himself, which would accommodate the oscillations, are: $\exists x \Phi x$, indicating the potentiality of feminine structure and thus the desire for the Other, and $\exists x \tilde{\Phi} x$, suggesting the desire for the phallus. The former is from the category of ‘men’ while the latter is from that of ‘women,’ yet both belie the absoluteness of the respective categories. The two poles implied by the two formulae are also found in Stevens’ Collected Poems: “Re-statement of Romance” and “Motive for Metaphor,” the former poem evoking the feminine structural potential and the latter the masculine structural potential. This bipolarity seems to have been resolved in Chocorua by a holding onto both; however, it must be conceded that the poem fails to shake off its bent toward that which is designated with $\exists x \tilde{\Phi} x$ as it reflects the dominance of the desire for the Other.

The moment of “enkindling” caused by the subject’s momentary sojourn in the place “where he was” is associated with desire and its fulfillment in section XXIII; it is the moment of

\begin{quote}
...............a fulfilling of desire
A clearing, a detecting, a completing,
A largeness lived and not conceived, a space
That is an instant nature, brilliantly.
\end{quote}

It is, in Lacan’s words, the moment of “reintegra tion and harmony” or even “reconciliation” (Écrits 171); echoing the psychoanalyst, Stevens too speaks of “Integration for integration” (XXIV). This satisfaction of desire in fact marks the ‘fall’ from the Ate; it is merely a mirage of the satisfaction of desire without which, ironically, it would be impossible to make the return from that limit. The return is necessary, for otherwise the subject will not remain a subject but be transported into the field of the Other, where his life cannot last long; this is more dangerous than the subject’s position in the dyadic relationship with the Other. As has already been quoted, Lacan warns of this danger in Seminar XVII through the plummage in which the Other is represented as “a big crocodile:” he says, “You never know what may set [it] off suddenly, making those jaws clamp down” (qtd. in Fink 56). This ‘clamping’ is what is designated by ektos
atas, where one can live only a short while. This is where both Hamlet and Antigone go; there, they do not remain human subjects in that they assummer their desire, thus subverting their intrasubjective intersubjectivity, which is the basis of desire's eternalization. They allow, willingly, the 'jaws to clamp down' on themselves, or in other words, they do not give up Other jouissance.28 What makes the human subjects human is their alienation from the Other (see also FS 26). Ironically and tragically, they cannot fully assummer their desire, yet what makes them human is their alienation itself: as Stevens has it, “It is the human that is the alien” (CP 328; also see ERS 93). What sustains our status as subjects is our “giving up the ultimate in satisfaction” (Lee 141-42). In other words, even though complete satisfaction of desire is an illusion, it is what functions as the defense mechanism (Écrits 322) that saves us and supports our subjectivity, and even guarantees life. Quoting from Lacan, Lee therefore writes,

    Toward the end of “The Subversion of the Subject” Lacan characterizes desire as “a defense [défense], a prohibition [défense] against going beyond a certain limit in jouissance

and notes

    ...jouissance as marking that fundamental “beyond” that envelops the functioning of the human subject

and further — characterizing the double meaning implicit in the ambiguous ‘desire of the Other’ in relation to jouissance which is suggestive of the oscillation between masculine and feminine structures — adds that in the later work of Lacan,

    jouissance proper comes to be associated with women’s sexuality...while what is here contrasted with jouissance as plaisir becomes... the restricted notion of phallic jouissance, characteristic of men’s sexuality.

    (Lee 142)

Chocorua already suggests in clear terms that its speaker reconstitutes himself as a subject when he speaks of the cry of “what I am” against the moment of “enlargement” (X); this also implies the alienation from the Other, who is “what is secret” in him,
without which that question cannot exist. His barring from the Other may therefore be shown by Lacanian symbol for barred subject, §. Section XXIV, which follows the description of the moment of enlargement in the preceding section, also indicates the alienation as the speaker characterizes the Other as "fortellez;" he hears the Other's 'loud speech' (forte, loud + tell). Sections X and XI follow the same path of the moment of enlargement followed by the speaker's awareness of the Other's speech. Though the Other is "Hard to perceive and harder still to touch," i.e. is radically Other, the very fact that it speaks to the one who listens constitutes intersubjectivity that is essentially intrasubjective. The constitution of intersubjectivity within an individual makes him the subject, makes him a human subject. All this clearly implies the poem's speaker's giving up of "the undifferentiated, unlimited, excessive character of jouissance," which is "tamed by the subject's structure and replaced by the moderate satisfactions" (Lee 142). This is how, for all his desire for the Other, he relinquishes the Other jouissance and returns to the human limit.

Section XXV gives indication of the end of the poem as it circles back to the twilight imagery of section III, which properly is the beginning of the experience contained within the poem. Both the sections depict the real-ization of the Other as anOther as opposed to the speaker's near closure with it, epitomized in section XXII, towards which the other sections strive. The difference between section III and XXV, however, is that the former reflects the speaker's anxiety through the atmosphere created in it and through the prodigiousness, coldness, and the "elemental freedom" of the Other; while the latter seems to relieve him as the desinence of the section speaks of the speaker's "pleasure of his spirit" (paralleling Lacan's impossible 'jouissance of the Other'). If 'the desire of the man is the desire of the Other,' so the pleasure of the man is the pleasure of the Other; or, using Lacan's gloss on desire, 'the jouissance of man is the jouissance of the Other.' But again, one must not forget the ambiguity inherent in 'jouissance of the Other' introduced by the status of the 'of' as subjective genitive: 'Other as jouissance' and 'Other's Jouissance' are the possible variations. The former is what Lacan refers to as 'Other jouissance.' However, since the poem's speaker has already given up the 'Other jouissance' and returned to the limit of the phallic domain, the "pleasure of his spirit" is properly equated to the 'Other's jouissance' (thus, to be read as the "pleasure of [the Other's] spirit"). This reading already introduces a gap (béance) between the Other and its jouissance; in other words, the speaker of the poem
seems to have realized the Other itself as lacking, or desiring. This divides the Other into two parts as Fink shows (118), viz. the Other as signifier (A), i.e. barred like the human subject (S), and the object that it signifies (object[a]). The object(a) is the cause of the Other’s desire, and since man’s desire is the Other’s desire, the subject is brought in relation with that object (S ◐ a). This ‘further separation’ from the Other is crucial if the subject has to “achieve a greater degree of subjectivity” (Fink 187n21), thereby becoming a desiring being himself.

In this way the human subject is real-ized in its separation from the Other; this may seem paradoxical, but there is no human subject without its otherness in his or her relation to another; or, what is the same, the human subject will have no existence without its standing apart from or outside of what has come to be called as the Other. The final section of Chocorua is therefore a tribute to the Other. It is the Other that, in the first place, introduces the subject to desire through its “demandings,” i.e. the Other as language. It is “the companion of presences / Greater than mine;” this line very much suggests that there is no Other of an Other (qtd. in Lee 115 from Seminar VI) since, with respect to the subject, both the Other and its Other are equally ‘greater presences’ and thus are “companions.” In its division as signifier and object, one sees the presence of an object that is absent (object[a]); the absence of this object, in fact, brings in a play of substitute objects that help one accomplish jouissance, of one’s own, to a certain degree, and therefore they are extremely important (ab)/(pre)sences. Even if the subject subjectifies them, he does it in his imagination, for they remain in the field of the Other owing to their presence as real. The Other is thus their companion insofar as they maintain their Otherness with respect to the subject. However, this is very much how one real-izes oneself as a desiring subject; hence, the Other is the “rugged Roy” of “human realizings.”

The dyadic closure with the Other means a loss of the external reality. While much of Parts of a World relish on the happy liaison with the external reality, the Transport to Summer seems to enjoy both the inner and outer realities. In other words, Stevens keeps shifting, even tossing, between the two. Just released from the Other, the memories of the unconscious experiences are still fresh; and there is a desire to establish a contact with the external reality. The Credences of Summer brings both the interior and exterior worlds together. It may be looked upon as a struggle to escape from the dyadic closure of Chocorua.
The first section of Credences is obviously a description of the “midsummer;” in fact, of one’s “midsummer,” when “Spring’s indurations are over” and it is “a long way / To the first autumnal inhalations.” It is the mature youth when thoughts take deep roots and the mind becomes capable of serious meditation; in other words, the mind is very much assimilated into the symbolic order of language and culture as opposed to the purely imaginary indulgences (“fools”) and intense anxiety-ridden desire (“Spring’s infuriation’s”) of the childhood. Having acquired one’s own desire, the mind can “lay by its troubles” or lay its childhood anxiety by, which now exists merely as “fidgets of remembrance.” Something becomes a source of anxiety when one is at some distance from it and feels the lack of it. “Time” is real but its measurement in “day” and “Year” are its symbolization. However, “midsummer” is that period of life after castration complex when one touches the limit of the symbolic order and is closest to the real; this is what in Lacanian terms may be called as symbolization of the phallus. Here one lacks nothing, so to speak, since there is no distance between oneself and one’s desire; and distance is related with time, is directly proportional to time. Having touched the limit of time, now “there is nothing left of time” (the real as timeless). The fulfillment of desire asserts not only both time and timelessness but also the “imagination’s life,” for the imaginary has a correlation with lack.

Since the inscription of the phallic signifier marks the limit of the mind’s or desire’s reach, even thoughts and feelings will progress no further since, like the imaginary, they are the means of the fulfillment of desire, which comforts “the heart’s core.” The inscription of this signifier helps one get rid of what Stevens calls “false disasters.” The last three lines of the section depict the stages one invariably goes through during one’s growth from childhood to youth: the “fathers standing round” signify the principle of castration; the “Mothers touching, speaking, being near” suggest the desire of the mother; and the “lovers waiting in the soft dry grass” is the principle of imaginary identification with the other. These are “false disasters” since neither of them is the ultimate object of one’s desire (desire is always “desire for something else” [Écrits 167]), and also because they make one their dependent and resist one’s advancing towards that object which is the true desire. The true desire — which is also a disaster since, as the poet says in the next section, nothing more remains to attain and the life of
desire ends — must come when one has become self-sufficient, i.e. has acquired one’s own desire or has become a desiring being himself. Nassar almost says this as he reasons that “These are “false disasters” because one can surmount the sorrow of their loss [the loss of fathers, mothers, and lovers] through the imagination” (175); Lacanians would want to replace Nassar’s ‘imagination’ to ‘acquisition of their desire.’ This happens in the “midsummer.”

This is how the poet analyses ‘summer.’ However, what the analysis required was the mention of everything else except ‘summer’ itself. Why should one take so much of “physical” or “metaphysical” pains to describe or see it, and moreover, objectively and with undesirable regard to things other than the things of ‘summer’? Hence the resolution to see the ‘summer’ itself:

II

Stevens has been thinking about “the thing itself” since long; seeing it requires an intense subjective involvement so as to avoid “an altogether objective impression” (Letters 134). Seeing with intense subjective involvement is what the section refers to as to “see...with the hottest fire of sight.” It would accomplish the desired vision, and whatever is “not part of” the desired object will automatically be gotten rid of; it is that which is “not part of it” that hinders the sight.

However, the poet seems to be using the verb “see” in the sense of ‘describe’ since in the second stanza he suggests to “trace” without “metaphor.” In short, he is speaking of the symbolic order of language. But language, a construct of signifiers, is there as that which has metaphorically replaced the primordial phallic signifier. Therefore, to “see” or describe “Without evasion by a single metaphor” is to do it without language at all. However, even the phallic signifier is a metaphor by its very status as signifier, since any signifier comes into existence as a result of a lack, as a replacement for what is not. Thus, neither language nor the phallic signifier will suffice. The importance of the phallic signifier is that it has come into existence because of the lack of the ultimate object of one’s desire, object(a). The “gold sun” that the poet seeks to “trace” may therefore be equated with this object. It is the loss or lack of this object that gives desire its function; in this sense, one always cherishes the “desire / for what is
not.” Once this object is achieved, neither the desire will exist nor will that which has replaced it. In that case the desire itself will be “exiled,” and the object(a) will give rise to nothing else since everything else is a function or result of the lack of that object, which thus will exist in its “essential barrenness.” The “barrenness” in the second stanza is different from that in the third in that the former occurrence of the word clearly relates itself to the “gold sun” and the latter, from the context, seems to be related to the perceiving subject, who seeks to attain that object. Both object(a) and the subject are “fertile” things: the former creates by virtue of its very lack and the latter creates during his seeking of the object. The expression “that can attain no more” implies the subject, for the question of attaining properly belongs to him; indeed, there is nothing more that he seeks.

Attaining object(a) is a moment of jouissance, for “this is the center that [one] seek[s]” always. It must be preserved since it is only momentarily that one attains to it. In order to preserve it, though, its symbolization is necessary; hence “fix it in an eternal foliage.” The “foliage,” the language with or in which to symbolize it must give “arrested peace” and “joy of such permanence” that a possibility of change in the language or in the view of that object may be ignored, since what is important is to arrest “peace” and “joy” in that “foliage.” Once this is done, any change, even in the object, will not matter since happiness is the highest pursuit for Stevens (OP 157). This is what the poet proceeds to do in the next section.

III

As Hines says, the metaphors used to describe the object of desire “expand and change with each stanza” of this section (222). First it is described as “the natural tower,” then as the tower standing on the mountain, and then as “the old man standing on the tower” on the mountain. Each metaphor increasingly distances the object from the perceiver. Perhaps, this is to suggest that the original object of desire keeps receding, thus evading desire through substitution of surrogate objects between itself and the perceiving mind. However, where Frost would use stylistic devices to stop such unending loops as in “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (275) or in “The Pasture” (epigraph to his Collected Poems and the leading poem of his Complete
Poems), Stevens does it with humanization of things; for example, in “Landscape with Boat” (CP 241-3) the search for truth ends with the belief that oneself is the truth or that “all / things” that belong to the humanized reality are the truth (CP 242); the same could be said of “On the Road Home” (CP 203-4); similarly, the concept of ‘freedom’ in “The Latest Freed Man” (CP 204-5) is the importance of the humanization of the actual world around — such reality is what Lacan refers to as ‘human’ or ‘humanized’ or ‘symbolized’ reality (Seminar I 87), or others as ‘social’ reality — and the resulting sense of being. The humanization is what may be termed as symbolization through intense subjective involvement with a hope to “fix” the thing itself in the “foliage” of sense. This is what Stevens does in introducing the human element, the image of “the old man.” Yet, the repletion of images and metaphors in this section shows that “the immanence of metaphor is accepted as intrinsic to even the purest perception of the nakedness object” (Patke 161). There is, thus no object that is ‘naked’ for us. And when it is the question of object(a) one must suffice oneself merely with the sense of having attained or humanized it. This is only how one can map oneself on to the real. The “real” real thus resides beyond human reach; it is there that the “sun...inhales his proper air, and rests.” Stevens might well be playing with “sun”: read it as ‘son’ and his “sleepless”-ness becomes his desire; it is only in his desire that the son, the human child, “inhales his proper air” or can map himself on to the real and gratify his desire and “rest.”

Object(a) being the cause of human desire, there is nothing — not even life — without (the loss or lack of) it; it is therefore the “Axis of everything;” each demand, every need, and the desire of man is the function of its lack. Thus, it is the ultimate real (“green’s apogee”), the “final mountain.” Its description as “the refuge that the end creates” should easily recall the often-quoted line from Sunday Morning: “Death is the mother of beauty” (CP 68). It is death that gives rise to this object that one desires. Lacan has it too, but in a different way. He associates death and desire while emphasizing the role of beauty as a “blinding effect” on desire, which is essentially characterized as desire for death. It is this effect of beauty on desire that keeps death away; this is why Stevens’ use of the word “refuge” is remarkable.

The final stanza is very peculiar and difficult in the sense that there is no differentiation of man and object(a). While the “old man standing on the tower” is a metaphor for object(a), it also suggests man’s achievement of it. Insofar as the achievement exists only as sense, it is beauty, but, if it becomes a reality, it is death.

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Therefore, not surprisingly, there is the mention of the man’s age as “old,” when the “blinding effect” of ‘beauty’ fades and gives way to go beyond the human limit, as has already been discussed. This fading of the effect of beauty or symbolic jouissance that belongs in one’s ‘summer’ is what is probably suggested by the ‘absorbing’ of “the ruddy summer” by man’s “ancientness” or old age. Further, the reference to appeasement and fulfilling of age and the closure of feeling evoke death even as the desinence of the stanza and the section creates ‘the sense of an ending.’

IV

Attaining object(a), though in the sense only, is a momentary experience, but the subject cherishes the moment’s memory for a long time. The desire, though satiated during the moment, soon returns afresh and begins looking out for the same jouissance again, it is then that one’s interest in the actual world around increases, for the desire seeks that object in this world. In short, it is the mirage of object(a) that renders the status of object petit a to the things belonging to the actual world (see note 5 to this chapter). This status is the limit of this world. As Stevens writes with reference to a particular geographical area, the Oley valley in Pennsylvania, the valley in summertime is “One of the limits of reality.” Lacan’s real order includes the corporeal world as well. In this section of the poem, as in many instances in his poetry, Stevens brings corporeality ever closer to what may be called purely psychic reality, finds the spiritual in this reality (OP 178); this must result in a great satisfaction as corporeality gives of object(a). The “enigma” that this object is then exists very much around oneself and the “clairvoyant eye” of the imaginary does not need to be visionary (“distant”) since the scopic drive is gratified.

In Seminar XI, Lacan proposes that the drive helps the subject construct himself because, as Lee writes, “[T]he subject’s relation with the object(a), as well as with the particular symbolically approved substitute for this object(a), involves an activity by means of which the subject constitutes himself (se faire) in relation to possible other subjects” or objects (153), i.e. in relation to the other. In so far as the other satisfies the drive, it is the process of identification that is involved between the subject and the other; during this process “the fantasizing subject fades into an identity with those mysterious,
but real, *objects petit a*, the subject drifting in the drives apparently fades into an identity with the signifiers from the cultural field of the Other inscribed on his body...” (Lee 153). Even though such identification is purely imaginary, is not real, it is nevertheless constructive of the subject himself. Thus, when Stevens speaks of the satisfaction of the drive related with the eye in the first stanza, or of that related with the ear in the second stanza, he is speaking of an identification with the summertime Oley environment, which is the other, a “substitute for...object(a).” Lacan’s concept of the drive involves the fading (*aphanisis*) of the subject, whereby he “drifts” in the direction of the other. Upon the identification with the other, “Things stop in that direction,” the process of identification itself stops (“The direction stops”) and “we accept what is / As good.” This is the “utmost” that can happen in the subject’s relation with the other. However, it helps the subject construct himself, imaginarily; hence, says Lacan, “The activity of the drive is concentrated in this *making oneself*” (*qtd. in* Lee 152 from Seminar XI 195).

What is involved in this ‘making oneself,’ however, is also the signifierization of the subject, by the “symbolically approved” objects or signifiers from the symbolic world around. This is how he progressively keeps getting steeped into the symbolic order that he enjoys; this is the “gaiety of language” (CP 322). Stevens celebrates these happenings as “our fortune” and as “mingling of colors at a festival” — the former being an allusion to the making of the (human) subject(s), and the latter to his identification with and enjoyment of the symbolic world, evoked in the use of the word “festival.”

V

One keeps wondering what this section is about. The first six lines may be understood if the five sentences making them are read literally and in isolation; but what they convey together remains obscure until the next few lines are interpreted, which is no less difficult, so as to relate all these lines to form an idea of some coherent thinking that is behind them. The “one day,” “one woman,” and “one man” are the representatives of the other days, other women, and other men respectively in the sense that they give meaning to the rest of their kin or ‘enrich’ them. They are sort of epitomes or paradigms that take all other days, women, and men to replace them. At the same time, however, Stevens does not deny the importance of the other days, women, and men (“Or do the
other days enrich the one?”). This kind of possibility of substitution of one thing by another is very much characteristic of signifiers; it is precisely the function of metaphor (see Écrits 156-57). Thus, all of them are signifiers, for, like signifiers of a language, the single day, woman and man stand in distinction with the other days, women, and men. Yet, the poet does uphold the “one day,” “one woman,” and “one man” for their strength or majesticity or loftiness. In this sense, the poet’s attempt at approaching or apprehending the most potent signifier becomes manifest even as he ends the section with words of power. Thus, the “bristling soldier” seems to be the most powerful signifier: just as the other days, women, and men are represented by the “one day,” “one woman,” and “one man,” so these singularly important day, woman, and man must be represented by something else, which is this “bristling soldier.” Stevens does not say this explicitly, it requires a little explication. ‘Bristling,’ used as an adjective, is obviously derived from the verb ‘bristle,’ one of whose meanings is ‘to stand upright stiffly’ as if in anger or fear, which should easily bring to mind the image of the erect phallus. The description of this ‘soldier’ as “weather-foxed” suggests the comparatively dark color of the male sexual organ (‘to fox’ is ‘to discolor with brown color’). Stevens’ choice of words is extremely remarkable; thus, to perhaps avoid the sense of anger or fear that is in ‘bristle,’ he next uses the verb ‘loom.’ The phallus looming “In the sunshine” is the phallus looming de facto, as a thing; this clearly refers to the erect penis made visible even as the poet speaks of “its flesh.” In Lacan’s thought also the phallus enjoys this double status: as the most important primordial signifier, and he also refers to it as “a thing” in his seminar on Hamlet (“Desire” 46, 52). Explanation the phallus as the most primordial signifier or the ultimate point de capiton as he calls it, Lacan writes,

...all discourse is aligned along the several staves of a score.

There is in effect no signifying chain that does not have, as if attached to the punctuation of each of its units, a whole articulation of relevant contexts suspended “vertically” from that point.

(Écrits 154)

There may be different points de capiton functioning as “anchoring points” holding a particular discourse together, but the phallic signifier is always over and above them. If, for instance, we consider a three-staved score, and the other days, other women, and
other men as belonging to the lowest stave, then the “one day,” “one woman,” and “one man” will have to be placed on the middle stave; the phallic signifier would naturally take the uppermost stave. Stevens does not relate, directly, his “bristling soldier” with anything else in the section probably because the phallus is present, as repressed, behind or beyond every other signifier (see Lee 66-67); that is the reason why he even hides it by using the expression “bristling soldier” and avoids using any other word(s) that will directly articulate it as such. Without this linking or relation the whole section would be meaningless. Besides, there is a passage in Stevens that allows this interpretation and linking before quoting which it is necessary to go to Lacan again. In Lacan’s thought, the phallus is the signifier of lack (manque): he says that “the phallus...is the signifier of the very loss the subject undergoes due to the breaking into pieces brought on by the signifier,” i.e. due to his entry into the symbolic order (Fink 102). What is lost at the cost of this entry is the real that is variously named as being or object(a). The phallic signifier signifies this lack and thus mediates, for the subject, between the real and its lack in the subject. The passage from “Repetitions of a Young Captain” (CP 306-10) says these very things; the poet speaks of the “soldier” in terms of ‘real’ and ‘lack’ (manque):

A few words of what is real or may be

Or of glistening reference to what is real,
The universe that supplements the manqué,
The soldier seeking his point between the two,

The organic consolation, the complete,
Society of the spirit when it is
Alone. the half-arc hanging in mid-air

Composed, appropriate to the incomplete 35

(CP 309)

Stevens has already celebrated the entry into the symbolic order in section IV. This section, however, seems to seek what is lost as a result. The little satisfaction that is obtained is from the male sexual organ, for Stevens speaks of the phallus more as a thing than as a signifier (“its flesh, not fustian”). The above passage too celebrates the male sexual organ as “the organic consolation” for the lost real as object(a) or as that which
man has lost and the lack thereof, and as an "appropriate" substitute for the native incompleteness. The phallus is thus very appropriately described as "seeking his point between" the 'real' and the "manqué," allowing a "glistening reference to what is real." The difference between these two occurrences is probably that the passage from "Repetitions" tends to treating the phallus more as a signifier than thing, though in both poems one sees the confusion of it as a thing and signifier.

This physical form of the phallus, the phallus looming de facto, as thing or organ, is further called a "filial form," as if it is one's offspring from whom one expects gratification of one's own self or ego. Indeed, what is involved in filial duty if not that? Even if one of the filial duties is to take care of the parents in their old age, and though the parents have persons other than their own child to take their care in old age, yet the grief of not having their own child to look after them is impossible to resist for them. Expectancy from a "filial form," son or daughter, serves the jouissance of the parents' self or ego, for what is involved here is the greater degree of narcissistic satisfaction that one's own child offers. For Lacan, one's own body is a very important part of the ego or moi; in fact, the moi structuration begins with the sense of one's own body — even though it comes from the field of the other — which is constituted by other persons around the infant and its own mirror-image: "the ego is an imaginary product, a crystallization or sedimentation of images of an individual's own body and self-images reflected back to him or her by others" (Fink 84). In Lacanian thought, man's pleasure cannot go beyond this narcissistic gratification. For man, as apposed to woman, there is no jouissance of the body of the Other since even in the sexual act what man experiences is the jouissance of the phallus and not of the body of the partner in the act. The phallic jouissance being narcissistic, Lacan refers to man's jouissance as 'masturbatory,' for masturbation offers the joy of one's own body (see Seminar XX 81). In his view, "Phallic jouissance is the obstacle owing to which man does not come (n'arrive pas), I would say, to enjoy woman's body, precisely because what he enjoys is the jouissance of the organ" (Seminar XX 7). All this is precisely what is implied in Stevens' description of the phallus as organ ("its flesh") and "filial form." And, besides, the very idea of filial duty belongs to the symbolic order of culture; Lacan's gloss on the phallic jouissance as 'symbolic' or 'semiotic' may be recalled here.

The poet further describes the phallus as "one of the land's children, easily born." Perhaps, he is talking about the physical organ as belonging to all men, so that one's own
phallus is only "one of" theirs' and which one obtains by birth as a male child without struggle ("easily"). The punning 'borne' may also be heard in that "easily born." However, Stevens reminds that one can have it in "flesh," as an organ, since one cannot have the 'veiled' phallus, i.e. the imaginary phallus (-<I>): the "fustian" ('veiled') phallus shows itself at the most "on the level of the object" ("Desire" 48). Both the significance and absence of the phallus are conveyed by the word "fustian," which means something very impressive but empty. It could also be a reference to the phallus as a signifier: 'fustian' is generally used with reference to discourse, suggesting a 'talk that sounds impressive but is in fact empty.' Similarly, the phallic signifier is extremely important but it is a signifier without meaning. Unlike the phallus as organ that is "easily born," the phallic signifier ("fustian") is not so easily borne (i.e. symbolized, rather 'dialectized') by the subject, for it requires a process that begins after 'castration' and it consummates or comes to fruition in one's 'summer;' the subject has to go through the difficulties of 'castration' during this period. Besides, for one who loses this signifier after having 'dialectized' it, as in Stevens' case, it is difficult to regain it since the neurotic that he thus becomes does not give up his castration to regain it.

The "more than casual blue" is a reference to the unconscious. Therefore, it is not in the sense of memory ("without souvenir") that it contains the "years" and "hymns" and "people," which together represent the symbolic order. The phallus, being the "one" signifier whose very lack (its repression in the unconscious) gives the other signifiers any function, it enriches the symbolic order. Stevens says as much in the first few lines of this section. However, it is through the other signifiers that one ultimately comes to 'dialectize' this master signifier in one's 'summer.' Hence the question "Or do the other days enrich the one?" At the same time, the poet shrewdly isolates the phallus from the other signifiers: The "queen" is a metaphor for the phallic signifier on whose "charity" the rest of the signifiers depend; in this sense, the phallic signifier is "humble," yet — is it really so? "[I]s the queen humble as she seems to be...?" Surely, it is not so for the neurotic, whose discourse becomes problematic as the signifier is repressed into his unconscious. Hence Stevens' return to his initial stand: "The day enriches the year," the phallic signifier enriches the discourse — but not directly as such ("not as embellishment"), for it is not there in the discourse. Yet, "it displays its strength" when 'veiled' or repressed ("stripped of remembrance"). Thus, Stevens shows awareness of the status of the phallic signifier as the ultimate point de capiton.
VI

For all the attempts of Stevens' critics at describing the "rock" of this section, it has evaded their linguistic apparatus to a large extent. It is neither the "bare reality" of Sukenick (195), nor the "objective certainty" of Mills (Boroff 98; also see Riddel 220). Riddel comes closer to it, though, when he writes that it is "the physical transmuted in imagination and raised to a vital form..." (220); yet the wrong he does is to add after "vital form" the words "(metaphysical) of poetry," which is not necessary. But even that "vital form" keeps receding in the poem, so that any certainty of it is already questioned. One could say — and as The Rock makes it clear — that it is really the subjective uncertainty of an objective certainty. Difficult as it is to articulate the 'rock,' neither the critics nor their language is at fault. However, Riddel is at fault if he meant to align Stevens with the traditional Romantic poets, whom Stevens adversely criticizes in the very next section — perhaps deliberately. It is true that the imaginary works upon the actual objects around and the subject perceives their real, though metonymically. But Stevens is not concerned with the actual world here. It is true that the "rock," which is "the truth," "rises from" the actual reality (of "land and sea"), yet it is that aspect of it by which it "covers" the actual that is important to the poet, since here the reality around functions merely as a signifier. Just as, in Lacan, it is the signifier that is responsible for creating the possibility of there being a signified, so it is "from land and sea" that the 'rock' "rises." Lacan emphasized the role of the signifier in symbolizing the real, in bringing it into existence; yet he was aware of the fact that "language no doubt never completely transforms the real, never drains all of the real into the symbolic order; a residuum is always left" (Fink 26). This is the reason why Stevens must measure the 'rock' as "a mountain half way green," finding the other half "immeasurable." However, the "immeasurable half" is not exactly the impossible. It may not exist in the sense in which "land and sea," the actual or symbolized reality, exist; but it "ex-sists," i.e. stands outside or apart from or is extimate to the hominized world. Nevertheless, it 'begins to be' ("becomes") in one's sense, one becomes certain of its 'ex-sistence,' even though it remains invisible or untouchable like air.

Therefore, it is not something that is completely isolated and unknown or unknowable like "A hermit's truth," or is not forever a meaningless signifier ("symbol in hermitage"); it is not something belonging in the purely conceptual or 'ideal' reality of
Plato. Stevens goes so far as to assert that it exists since it becomes tangible: “It is the visible rock, the audible.” The utterly other becoming tangible easily recalls Lacan’s concept of “the traversing of fantasy.” The fantasized object is nothing but object(a) “that brought one into the world;” it is this utterly “foreign cause, that other desire” that traverses into one’s unconscious and thus “is internalized, in a sense, taken responsibility for, assumed..., subjectified, made ‘one’s own’” (Fink 62). This further separates the subject from the (m)Other and makes him a desiring being himself, enabling him to procure his being. Therefore the moment of the subjectification of the object(a) affords him “the vividest repose;” it is a moment of jouissance. All these are “Things certain sustaining us in certainty” of our being.

This happens to the subject in his ‘summer;’ thus, object(a) is described as “the rock of summer.” It is the last thing (“extreme”) that one may have, rather, desire to have. Yet, it would be a mistake to think that the subject symbolizes object(a) once and for all or completely, since “a residuum is always left” and which remains unsymbolized, “immeasurable” as Stevens says. This part or aspect of the ‘rock’ is desired in the section’s final stanza using the baroque metaphor of “the extremest light / of sapphires flashing from the central sky.” Owing to the difficulty — even impossibility — of symbolizing object(a) completely, or to this human poverty, object(a) becomes a signifier in Lacan’s work. This is what lacks in Hines’ otherwise adequate comparison between Stevens’ ‘rock’ and Heidegger’s ‘Being’ (227); for, Stevens’ ‘rock’ is more like Lacan’s object(a) as the poet does refer to its status as a signifier in comparing it with a “symbol in hermitage,” suggesting that it is not exactly an occulted hence meaningless signifier, but that it is a signifier (“symbol”) alright — having a definite (spiritual and almost incommunicable) meaning that might be revealed to the subject if he desires.

VII

Perhaps, the ‘hermit’ and ‘hermitage’ of section VI reminded Stevens of the “woods,” which recalled the romantic poets’ ‘compositions among nature.’ If, as Hines says, the last three lines of section VI “merit comparison with John’s apocalyptic vision in revelation” (228), the first eight lines of section VII muse on possibilities of ‘difference’ with reference to the demerits of the romantic tradition. Simply stated, the
problem with the romantic poets, in Stevens' view, was that their poetry was dominated either by themselves or by the nature (recall Wordsworth's extensive use of the 'I' on the one hand, and the domination of nature in general, as in the odes, on the other). Thus, Stevens accuses these poets that they were never face to face with the object they sang, that it was difficult for them "to sing in face / of the object." In this way, they either averted themselves, as in the odes, or else averted the object by being egotistic like Wordsworth. The result was that they sang of "summer in the common fields" in deep woods or sang of the particulars of deep woods in common fields (this easily recalls the word "recollected" in Wordsworth's definition of poetry). Even then, their object of desire was very commonplace, "an object that was near." Such an object is not really the object of desire, for desire must be made to move frantically. For the poetic energy to be fully released, it is extremely necessary to place the object (or desire the object that is) beyond the reach of desire. Such an object would be the phallus (-Φ) or object(a) that one can never really have, but may come face to face with, as Stevens did in the previous two sections. What happens in such a case is described in the remaining lines of this section, the description has baffled many readers of the poem though; thus Thomas L. Martin feels, "...no commentator...has ever done justice to the "thrice concentred self" of Credences of Summer" (47).

Three times the concentred self takes hold, three times
The thrice concentred self, having possessed

The object, grips it in savage scrutiny,
Once to make captive, once to subjugate
Or yield to subjugation, once to proclaim
The meaning of the capture, this hard prize.
Fully made, fully apparent, fully found.

(CP 376)

These lines should easily be the most enigmatic, most compressed, yet fullest statement of the central concern of Stevens' poetic practice. The expression "concentred self" is the key to a better understanding of the section. The most important question is why the poet would need to use the word 'concentred' before 'self.' It is worthwhile to
notice that the noun qualified by ‘concentric’ or ‘concentred’ must be in the plural form, for it is then only that the question of having the same center would arise. As discussed in the second chapter of the present study, the picture of the self emerging out of Stevens’ poems is essentially tripartite. Dictionaries do not list the word ‘concentred,’ they have only ‘concentric;’ despite the poet’s knowledge of the word ‘concentric’ (CP 319), his preference for the coinage obviously reflects his concern with the process or action of coming together of the selves. Many of Lacan’s readers identify the je in terms of the symbolic, the moi with the imaginary, and the Other with the real; the other and the Other both are constructions of the three orders, though. Although it is undesirable to make such distinction, yet analysis shows differences in the logic of the imaginary and the symbolic in perceiving the real: the logic of the imaginary is “identificatory, fusional,” and that of the symbolic involves “naming, coding, and legalizing” (ERS 131). Since all human effort is directed towards the real, the real is no less a part of the mind or self. This is how the three orders constitute the self, which is thus essentially plural; this could be the reason why Stevens uses the expression “three times,” evoking the three ‘logics’ of the three orders. The self is also singular in the sense that one experiences the unity of self in a moment of jouissance, when all the three orders or divisions of the self become indistinguishable. It could also be true that the center he speaks of implicitly is the object(a) — that Other desire that the subject seeks with his trivision, which includes his body (the real) as well (e.g. “With my whole body taste three peaches” [CP 224]). All this merely shows Stevens’ mature analytic ability. Thus, “three times” the “self takes hold” of “the object.” Firstly, it “grips it in savage scrutiny” to make it captive. Here, the role of the je in the “scrutiny” of the possessed object is understood; of course, the role of the moi cannot altogether be dismissed. This is perception pure and simple, or it could be equated with the process of introjection. Secondly, the self attempts to symbolize the object, or gets himself symbolized (aphanisis of the subject). The symbolization could be imaginary, as in the child’s imaginary symbolization of its own body parts as it looks its image into the mirror. Stevens’ word for symbolization is “subjugation;” the subject either ‘subjugates’ the object, or ‘fades’ under it (“yield to subjugation”), recalling the concept of ‘drive.’ Thirdly, the self is disengaged from the object, but the “capture” yields a “meaning” to the self. A momentary phenomenon, it could be the object’s capture by the self or the self’s capture by the object, but both are suggestive of the subject’s ‘precipitation’ as “meaning” as in the process of ‘dialectization’ of a master.
signifier. This is how the object becomes part of the humanized reality. However, looking at the pleasure it affords the subject in the stanza, that object could be the object(a); it, therefore, will not be fully real-ized but will yield some untranslatable “meaning” to him. Yet, this is the constitution of that original object, and its loss as well; even though the loss is inevitable, the subject cherishes its memory for a long time into his unconscious. There is obviously the sense of ‘being’ that is involved here, giving “meaning” to one’s existence, “this hard prize, / fully made, fully apparent, fully found.”

The ‘object’ that the poet speaks of here is not “an object that [is] near,” it is an object “which [the desire] could not find,” it is the object(a) that can never be found except in one’s sense of it. One’s (sense of) being face to face with it is a rarity, the “hard prize” indeed. The three stages of its perception and cognition match Lacan’s theory of cognition to a very great extent.

The next section is a sequel to the preceding section; it describes the momentary experience with object(a) as it survives in the unconscious as memory after its loss.

VIII

It is the morning of a new day. The preceding section may be described in terms of the self “at last accomplishing [its] love,” yet section VIII is not just resuming but a new “beginning” (CP 391).

It has already been discussed that the mirage of object(a), which is always already lost, nevertheless gives an object from the actual world the status of object petit a, which the subject therefore desires; and this makes the actual world around beautiful for him. Thus, the “trumpet of morning” is not merely “the visible announced” but also “the more / Than sharp, illustrious scene.” This ‘morning’ as object petit a is a “substitute” for the object(a), it is “the successor of [that] invisible.” Stevens is aware of this deception, perhaps, but faces it boldly, sings in the face of it. Therefore, although this “substitute” is merely “stratagems / Of the spirit,” yet it is the truth of human life that must be faced since one can never fully (re)discover object(a); “what is possible,” therefore, must “replace[] What is not.” As Lee, quoting from seminar XI, writes, “The real object,” i.e. object(a), “whose existence provides the support for the drive ‘is in fact simply the presence of a hollow, a void, which can be occupied, Freud tells us, by any object,’” and
further adds that “the drives are dependent for their real existence on the subject’s symbolic castration, which launches the search for substitutes for the object forever lost” (151). This is precisely what Stevens underlines in the first two stanzas of this section.

The final stanza, however, falls back on the division of the mind suggested in the previous section. Stevens shows an awareness that for all its divided (or ternary) nature, its “cry as clarion” or the insufficiency of its speech (“its dictions way”) is merely that of a single “personage in a multitude,” that it is a cry of a soldier, that it is a solo battle for the real. However, this realization is not a dwarfing of the mind or the subject, but in fact it makes the mind “venerable” since it still has an opportunity to perceive the “unreal,” even the ultimate (un)real. The “trumpet” might suggest all types of human discourse, including the poetic and the philosophical; the “trumpet of morning,” in this sense, would recall the morningtime discourse of the doctor of “Latest Freed Man” (CP 204-5), whose mind grows venerable in the real. One may hear a question in the second stanza of this section: must this actual world around take the place of the primordially lost real in our site and memory, if what is possible replaces what is not? The question is not answered, hence becomes a “resounding cry,” expressed as of “ten thousand tumblers tumbling down.” The mind’s cry, of “what I am” (CP 298), is the anguish at its internal fragmentation. But languishing under it is useless; one must yet ‘sing’ in the face of this fact. Instead of getting hopeless, it is better to accept the human inadequacy and have faith in the mind’s generative capacity, or “cure” (CP 526-7), which alone stands the chance of elevating oneself or one’s mind.

While sections VI, VII, and VIII have allusions to John’s apocalyptic vision in Revelations as Bertholf suggests and Hines seems to accept, or to the meditative technique of seventeenth century writers as Martz suggests (See Hines 228-32), yet one cannot overlook the possibility that using the allusion Stevens is only hiding forwarding his theory of cognition by matching it with the supreme religious discourse in order only to assert his theory surreptitiously, as Lacan often did. Perhaps, it is better to say that the supreme and incommunicable experience does not belong to the religious domain alone but also to the common, ordinary, secular world; that man’s mind can grow “venerable” even in the so called “unreal” (if Stevens is using the word to refer to the quotidian — this is how the ‘believers’ see the actual world around) world of secular beliefs. In this sense, Hines’ comment that “the ‘Credences’ are [not] religious. In fact, the reverse is the case, for Stevens’ concept of being is fully secular” is very much acceptable (232).
Section VII celebrates the sense of 'being;' it is the moment when one maps oneself onto the real or, in other words, the subject experiences having or being the phallus-as-object (-Φ), though in sense only. Except that moment, however, the phallus can only be seen as a 'flash' on the level of an object. The next section dwells on the necessity to remain within the limit of the phallic or symbolic jouissance.

IX

'Cock' being a slang term for the human phallus, Stevens is probably referring to the self as brightened by the 'cock' in "Cock bright." The expression will usually be expanded as 'bright as cock;' even then, the comparison of the self with the 'bright cock' should indicate the heightened sense of self owing to the phallic flash. It is to this elevated self that Stevens exhorts to contain itself through the imperative expressions (reminiscent of those in "The emperor of ice-cream" [CP 64]): "fly low," "stop on a bean pole," "let / Your brown breast redden," "watch the willow motionless." The obvious question is why the self should need to control itself. It may be pointed out that the exhortation is immediately followed by an image of death, and then by a reference to the "salacious weeds" grown by the "last year's garden." The garden is a place of enjoyment, or joy, or of 'repose' as Andrew Marvell would say (Gardner 255-8). The "last year's garden" seems to be an oblique reference to the jouissance experienced in sections V, VI, VII. 'Salacious,' meaning 'sexual,' recalls the symbolic or phallic jouissance contained in those sections (despite the seemings of object(a), especially in VII, man cannot exceed the limit of the symbolic jouissance; thus object(a) is also a symbol or signifier). The second word in the expression "salacious weeds" suggests dissatisfaction with or something undesirable in the phallic or symbolic jouissance. As discussed before in the study, man must remain within the bounds of the symbolic jouissance; but the poet's language points to the self's desire to transcend it, which means embracing death. This precisely seems to be the function of the death-image in the first stanza of this section. Stevens, therefore, rightly exhorts the self to "fly low," to "watch" death "with one eye." The phallus being the "scourge of unity" (ERS 292), the self is thus divided between the phallic jouissance and the jouissance beyond it — the Other jouissance. Due to this division, or due to the realization of the death associated with the Other jouissance, "A
complex of emotions falls apart" and the self returns to and remains within the limits of civility ("soft," "civil," "suave" "polished") or of the symbolic order; it thus "regards" the cycle of life and death, of joy and grief ("douceurs" and "tristesses"). The sense of "decay" is responsible for the poet's advice to the self to "stop on a bean pole," where the 'bean pole' is evocative of the image of the phallus, hence to be within the limits of the symbolic.

Yet, things are not rendered totally dissatisfying or hopeless, for the self may enjoy "Another complex of other emotions" and may experience the phallic jouissance again, which will satisfy the self with its roughness and unpolished nature, or with its 'salacity' that will not seem like 'weeds,' since it will not be the "last year's garden" but of the present moment. And then the self will rejoice again; it will, then, not be part of the false moi sense of self ("listener's own sense"), but real.

In this way, Stevens accepts man's limitations and yet is hopeful of experiencing more moments of jouissance in life. The key signifier in these experiences will be the phallus though, which is described as an "inhuman author" that writes the script of man's 'summer,' where the variety of joyous experiences play the characters.

X

The phallic signifier is not directly involved in the play, however; yet its existence like an author of a play cannot be overruled. The 'author' is not 'dead,' he "meditates" in isolation. (Here, Lacan's description of the phallic signifier as the ultimate point de capiton governing all human discourse while remaining outside it might be recalled). The existence of this 'author' is ascertained only imaginarily ("in blue meadows"). The 'characters' of human experiences being "mottled, in the moodiest costumes" speak for the metaphorical replacement of this 'author.' The author, like the unconscious, is the real place where the real play is played out; his characters, like the subject's splitting into many egos, are the function of the imaginary and are presented as belonging to the symbolic universe ("belted / And knotted, sashed and seamed"). Thus, they may not be as real as the 'author,' yet they are inevitably related with the real ("half pales of red, / Half pales of green"). Their nature is mixed as they are at once imaginary and real, they are "of blue and yellow, sky and sun," "red," and "green." At the same
time, they are very much part of the symbolic order of language and culture evoked in “belted / and knotted, sashed and seamed.” For all their mixed nature, these “characters” have their own identity and create a discourse of their own (“speak”), “speaking / Their parts as in a youthful happiness” since they have the freedom from the subject’s “sudden cry” (of “what am I”) and the “malice” thereof.

This is how Stevens presents a “completed scene,” where he dwells on the idea of a perfect relation with reality and the real of which happiness is the last credence, the “final found” (CP 527).

However, the moment of happiness does not last long, and Stevens would not be tired of searching for it. In fact, his desire would not be satiated in the humanized world of reality but would seek to achieve “The human end in the spirit’s greatest reach” (CP 508). Thus, towards the end of his poetic career he is seen to focus his attention more toward the unsymbolized, ultimate reality. To speak of such reality obviously required an invention of terms and images that would be central to a poem; Stevens has been doing it throughout his poetry, but the terms or images, or symbols, were not always central to the poems in which they appeared — except the symbol of ‘the blue guitar’ — as they are to the later poetry, or were not always as cogent as they are in the later poetry. These symbols actually evolve from those used earlier in the poetry: the ‘primitive,’ the ‘bouquet,’ the ‘rock’ are the major symbols in this respect.

As is true of any poet having a definite line of thought and a subject, one of the aspects of Stevens’ poetry is that certain images are employed recurrently and have certain fixed connotations, although, of course, the possibility of various nuances of a particular connotation is never to be ruled out. The image — rather metaphor — of flowers, as in “Last Looks at the Lilacs” (CP 48-9), “Bouquet of Belle Scavoir” (CP 231-2), “Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight” (CP 430-1), and The Bouquet (CP 448-53), represents reality — “the floridest reality” as Stevens would say (CP 366). In all these instances the poet depicts how reality escapes perception and retains its otherness. In this sense, Stevens’ sense of reality comes close to Lacan’s real order. However, in the last of the poems mentioned above, the ‘bouquet’ is treated in a different way as the poet both places it beyond the reach of desire and makes a vigorous attempt at its full perception and cognition. If the ‘chief connotations’ in the “meditations on pain and evil” of Esthétique du Mal (CP 313-26) are “Italian in character” (Patke 166), those in the meditations on the real of The Bouquet are French — in both the senses, that is, literally
and romantically. Stevens has always used 'French' in the sense of the 'romantic.' The first half of the first line of the poem puzzles the reader; the significance of the word 'medium' is not realized immediately unless one thinks of its Frenchness. In French, it belongs to the jargon of psychology and means 'psychic.' One has to look at the 'bouquet' from this vantage point.

I

Of medium nature, this farouche extreme
Is a drop of lightning in an inner world,
Suspended in temporary jauntiness.

The bouquet stands in a jar, as metaphor,
As lightning itself is, likewise, metaphor
Crowded with apparitions suddenly gone

And no less suddenly here again, a growth
Of the reality of the eye, an artifice,
Nothing much, a flitter that reflects itself.

Reality being “an activity of the...imagination” (OP 110), Stevens was compelled to look at it as of psychological, rather of psychoanalytic, nature (“Of Medium nature”). It is ‘shy,’ ‘timid,’ ‘unsociable’ in the sense that it ‘fiercely resists’ (“farouche”) perception. However, one keeps desiring its perception or knowledge, which comes suddenly, without notice, and illumines for a moment, like “lightning,” the “inner world” that thus experiences a temporary jouissance. This ‘sense’ of reality is immediately filtered through the grid of the imaginary. From “Anecdote of the Jar” (CP 76) we know Stevens uses the ‘jar’ to represent the imaginary. Thus, “The bouquet stands in a jar,” but what follows is puzzling: “as metaphor.” Metaphor is related with condensation and metonymy with displacement in Freud and Lacan. The ‘bouquet’ standing in “a jar” may seem its displacement from the outer into the inner. However, it is to be understood that the poet is doing two things at the same time: stressing by that line the objectivity or otherness of the ‘bouquet’ as it continues to stand in the actual jar (a physical object as container) even after illuminating the inner world, as well as suggesting that it immediately takes the attributes of the ‘jar’ (imaginary), effecting a condensation of the
real and the imaginary, thus standing in the mind( imaginary) as metaphor. Thus, it may seem that the line has nothing to do with displacement, hence with metonymy. However, taking both the possibilities into account is necessary since metonymy is essential for metaphor.\textsuperscript{45} In such metaphorization of the real, the imaginary functions as innocuously as the unconscious in the sense that there is no conscious or deliberate imagining involved. This ‘effect,’ this ‘sense’ of reality, is thus always “a consequence of the way / We feel” (CP 430), or imagine unconsciously, just as lightning is never sensed as such but as “crowded with apparitions.” This is only for a moment, but it can reappear in the conscious as soon and suddenly (“no less suddenly here again”); it is a kind of reflection of or on the conscious of the ‘sense’ of the real experienced just before, therefore is “an artifice / Nothing much.” Yet Stevens grants it the importance it deserves, for it helps “a growth” of the reality of the mind (“the eye,” or the ‘I’?).

II
One approaches, simply, the reality
Of the other eye. One enters, entering home
The place of meta-men and para-things.

And yet still men though meta-men, still things
Though para-things.

Or, is it that Stevens in section I refers to the mind as an “artifice”? As the mind is largely a construct of the effects the real has on it and the senses thereof, it is an artifice indeed; In fact, Stevens has referred to the mental space/constructions as ‘artifice’ in the Necessary Angel (see NA 83, 140, 141). This is true even of the unconscious; in fact, it is more true of the unconscious. Thus, in sensing the real that is without, one senses the unconscious itself, “a flitter that reflects itself.” This is how, one approaches, gets to know, “the reality / Of the other eye [or, I].” Notice here the otherness of that “eye.” In approaching it, one enters ‘home,’ an image that is often used by Stevens to suggest the inner world, the North of the mind. The lines could also be read as “One approaches, simply, the reality / Of the other I.” The other eye/I, i.e. the Other, is the place of “meta-men” and “para-things,” or simply, of the real. Stevens’ sense of “entering home” has much to do with Freud’s “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden.”
The very feeling contained in Stevens’ expression speaks for the moi’s coming to the place of the Es, the real subject of being. Even though the Es is in radical otherness to the moi-subject, it is still the subject of the same human being. Thus, for all their otherness, the “meta-men” and “para-things” are still “men” and “things” respectively. In other words, Stevens is emphasizing the fact that the real cannot be separated from the actual and the immediate. There are meta-men and para-things because there are men and things, just as there is Es because there is moi; however, one might say that meta-men/Es’s or para-things/real exist as absences. Accordingly thus, as will soon be seen, the poet emphasizes the importance of the actual world (“the bouquet,” “the duck” as actual objects) from time to time in this poem. It might be that Stevens felt that we have already lost the real through the Fall of the first couple, and that if we still feel related to it it is through the actual world of objects as signifiers of that which is lost. Should we feel alienated from even this physical world of ours, what would be our fate? This anxiety is betrayed in the following remark as it speaks of the narrowing sense of the world in which we live.

A generation ago we should have said that the imagination is an aspect of the conflict between man and nature. Today we are more likely to say that it is an aspect of the conflict between man and organized society. It is part of our security. It enables to live our lives.46

(NA 150)

The feeling of alienation increases as “time grows upon the [real]” (CP 171), increasing our sense of insecurity and jeopardizing the possibility of living. What is in our hands now is to at least re(dis)cover our relation with the nature and the other, i.e. the actual world around, even though the relation is that of conflict. The Other, being the place of all knowledge,47 knows the ‘world’ has changed.

The meta-men for whom

The world has turned to the several speeds of glass.

For whom no blue in the sky prevents them, as
They understand, and take on potency,
By growing clear, transparent magistrates,
Bearded with chains of blue-green glitterings
And wearing hats of angular flick and fleck.

Cold with an under impotency that they know,

Now that they know, because they know.

Stevens has used ‘turned’ for ‘changed’ in one of the adagia: “The degrees of metaphor. The absolute object slightly turned is a metaphor of the object” (OP 179). “Speeds of glass” easily reminds of shutter speeds of the camera used in still photography. The outer moves into the camera in a split second like the momentary “drop of lightning in [the] inner world” of section I. The speed of camera shutter indicates the sensitivity of the film. By “glass,” then, Stevens could be implying the imaginary. The phrase therefore seems to suggest the sensitivity of the imaginary. However, the use of ‘speed’ in plural form might suggest various attributes of the ‘glass,’ such as its ability to reflect, refract, and disperse the light or image. There is of course one more ‘speed’ of this ‘glass,’ namely its transparency (“The bouquet stands in a jar”), but it seems to be denied to the imaginary (the ‘bouquet’ stands there “as metaphor,” not as it is). This may be due to the ‘time,’ as the line quoted above from The Blue Guitar suggests. Yet, “no blue in the sky prevents” anything insofar as the meta-men are concerned; they take on potency from the fact that they see clearly enough and are thus “transparent magistrates,” they wield this authoritative position since they see without the obstruction of or obfuscation caused by the imaginary (“blue”). The meta-men are further described by using the phrase “bearded with...,” an ambiguous phrase. The next line has the verb ‘wear,’ which might retroactively suggest that ‘bearded’ is used as the noun transformed into verb; thus, the phrase could be taken to mean ‘adorned with.’ Another possibility is that it might have been used as a verb proper, implying thereby ‘to confront with.’ But, the meaning ‘adorned with’ goes well with ‘wearing’ of the next line. In this sense, the meta-men are covered over with “chains of blue-green glitterings” and “hats of angular flick and fleck.” The hats are of angular flick and fleck as opposed to the ‘square hats’ of the rationalists in the last of the “Six Significant Landscapes” (CP 75; NA 133). The “blue-green glitterings” might mean the perception of the real tinged with the imaginary intervention, however slight. This way, it is a denial of pure
perception of the real; if so, the phrase ‘bearded with’ might mean ‘confronted with.’ And it might be so since even what is called pure perception is merely an “effect” which is “a consequence of the way / We feel,” as Stevens argues in “Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight” (CP 430). In other words, both the “chains” and “hats” function to deny clear perception. The meta-men know this, know that this is the cause of their “under impotency.” And yet, if this is indeed the cause of their impotency, they must overcome it. Some lines that follow clarify how this is achieved by the meta-men.

...............One comes
To the things of medium nature, as meta-men
Behold them, not choses of Provence, growing

In glue, but things transfixed, transpierced and well
Perceived: the white seen smoothly argentine
And plated up, dense silver shine, in a land

Without a god, O silver sheen and shape,
And movement of emotion through the air,
True nothing, yet accosted self to self

The poet here strengthens the relation between man (“One”) and the Other, the ‘meta-man.’ It is not easy to see why Stevens does not use ‘meta-man’ instead of ‘meta-men.’ In section XVI of Chocorua to Its Neighbor, he refers to the Other in singular while at the same time stressing its plurality (“There were others like him safely under roof”). In fact, as said in the section’s discussion, he treats singularity and plurality, or particularity and universality, of the Other without differentiating between them. Here too one should avoid the mistake of taking ‘meta-men’ strictly as plural. In fact, one might argue here for the poet’s maturity. Even Lacan’s concept of the Other is polyvalent, e.g. as language, as the mother, as the phallus as the ultimate object of desire, as object(a), as das Ding — all these are the Other insofar as they retain their radical otherness in relation to the subject.

“Things of medium nature” and “chooses of Provence” are contrasted. While the latter belong to the physical world without, the former belong to the psychical world within; the latter ‘grow in glue’ — the phrase probably suggests the fixity of the actual things outside, the ‘reality’ as Lacan would say — in comparison with the things of
psychical nature (perceptions, images) which are flexible in the sense that they are more
susceptible to change. The poet is aware here of the fact that the real ("the white") is not
seen as such by the mind, but as changed, however slightly, by the feelings and
emotions. Yet, it is a pleasing spectacle of the real within the mind, of this "True
nothing." The feeling accompanying this spectacle — rather, mentacle — is that of joy
since it reduces the otherness of one’s self from oneself and brings the two closer; it is a
feeling of being, properly conveyed by Freud’s enigmatic “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden.”
In the above passage, the poet is speaking of how perception of the real is responsible for
the feeling of being. The "Movement of emotion through the air" marks the moi’s fading
since emotion is caused by the imaginary activity; the moi being the imaginary subject
that is literally moved — both spatially and emotionally — it fades. This fading or
disappearance (aphanisis) of the self and the accosting of self to self together recall
Freud’s statement quoted above. One of the two selves in Stevens’ line is the ‘Ich,’ the
moi of Lacan, and the other is the Es, the real subject that resides in the unconscious, the
‘meta-man’ as Stevens would call it. In fact, this poem has multiple resonances of
Lacanian concept of sublimation, which involves the function of the Triebe. It is the
Triebe or ‘drive’ that is responsible for the moi’s fading. “Sublimation,” Lacan says,
“involves a certain form of satisfaction of the Triebe” (Seminar VII 110). The object that
the poem sublimates is “the bouquet.”

Through the door one sees on the lake that the white duck swims
Away — and tells and tells the water tells
Of the image spreading behind it in idea.

The meta-men behold the idea as part
Of the image, behold it with exactness through beads
And dewy bearings of their light-locked beards.

Here, the poet describes how a thing from the physical world outside becomes a
thing of “medium nature” as meta-men behold the idea of that thing, spreading behind its
image. The “door” is a mode of perception, the “lake” signifies the mindscape, and the
“white duck” symbolizes the real object. One “sees” the real vanishing into the
mindscape, existing there merely as an idea and then is stored in the unconscious
memory; the dash after “Away” is crucial in interpreting this ‘swimming away’ of the
object. The seeing, here, is not simply seeing as the eye but also as the gaze (le regard), which in Lacan is one of the causes of desire functioning to fill the void in being. Lacan says, “In our relationships to things as constituted by the path of vision...something glides, passes, transmits itself from stage to stage, in order always to be in some degree eluded there — It is that which is called the regard” (ERS 44 from Seminar XI). This ‘something that glides’ is what Stevens describes some lines before as “silver sheen and shape.” Looking at something does not satisfy us, we always seek something more or something else there, something that is beyond the actual object seen; it is due to this that not only the subject but the object also fades (“swims / Away —”). The perception of that something eludes the consciousness, which is nonetheless aware of this elusion and therefore is able to tell “Of the image spreading behind it in idea” (emphases mine). The Other, who is behind it (the ‘meta-man’ of Stevens), however, is able to grasp ‘it’ as “part / Of the image.” Thus, the gaze which is “out there” is also “in here,” in the Other (see ERS 44). In a beautiful play on ‘tell,’ Stevens tells us that the object only “tells” (signifies), “tells the water” (informs or represents to the conscious), and that “the water tells / Of the image spreading behind it...” That “behind it” is ambiguous: behind the image or behind the conscious itself? The former informs of the mnemic trace left in the mind and the latter of the regard. Since both meanings apply simultaneously, both can be true of Stevens’ lines.

The standard definition of the gaze as “seeing oneself seen” is obviously not applicable here. However, the very awareness of the gaze of the meta-men speaks of the gaze. The image spreading behind it in idea is an illustration of what Lacan says: “What I look at is never what I wish to see” (Seminar XI 103). The “white duck” is not the object of desire in the poem, for that object is beyond it. Stevens therefore does not end the argument with the perception of the “white duck,” but with the ‘meta-men’ perceiving the idea behind it, with the gaze of the ‘meta-men.’ It is the gaze of the ‘meta-men’ that is important. Ragland-Sullivan comments, “...the regard has the power to activate within consciousness an awareness of unconscious motivation and intentionality” (94). The object of desire is therefore the gaze of the Other, a desire for recognition by the Other. Though Stevens does not speak of it directly, the primacy of the ‘meta-men beholding’ is very clear on this page in his Collected Poems. In fact, the whole poem is an experience in perception of the real, symbolized in ‘the bouquet.’
The green bouquet comes from the place of the duck.
It is centi-colored and mille-flored and ripe,
Of dulce atmosphere, the fore of lofty scenes

But not of romance, the bitterest vulgar do
And die.

The place of “the duck” is the place of the real, which is both outside and inside
the mind. The “green bouquet” comes from this complexity of place. Here, one senses
that the poet is distinguishing between the duck and the bouquet. The former suggests the
unmediated, pure corporeality while the latter suggests the ultimate, real object of desire;
in indicating the unity of their place, the poet is speaking of the otherness of that place in
relation to the subject’s place. The verb “comes” is not innocent; Stevens could easily
have used ‘belongs.’ While “comes from” gives the sense of ‘belongs to,’ it also suggests
literal coming of the bouquet, from the realm of the unknown to that of the known, the
reason why it is different from “the duck.” It is possible that the ‘bouquet’ does not
belong as such to the place of the duck even though it comes from that place since,
unlike the duck, it does not belong to the corporeality. This is why the duck does not
receive as lofty treatment as does the bouquet, which is described using French
terminology “for the pleasure it gives” (Letters 792). It is further called the “fore of lofty
scenes;” situating it at the front of “lofty scenes” in one’s mental experience thus
emphasizes its importance. But it has nothing to do with the ‘romantic’ that “belittles”
the imagination and the real (NA 138). Stevens here asserts the bouquet’s real-ity and
permanence as opposed to the ephem(e)ality (“vulgar do / And die”) of the romantic.
What follows is the picturesque illustration of the bouquet as “the fore of lofty scenes”:
The bouquet

stands on a table at a window
Of the land, on a checkered cover, red and white.

The checkered squares, the skeleton of repose,
Breathe slightly, slightly move or seem to move
Toward a consciousness of red and white as one,
A vibrancy of petals, fallen, that still cling
By trivial filaments to the thing intact:
The recognizable, medium, central whole —

If white is the color of pure reality without premeditation, red is the color of reality mediated by human meditations of it. The ‘white’ and ‘red’ form the “checkered cover” on which the bouquet is placed. All this is seen at a “window / Of the land,” not at a window of the house or room, the image Stevens often uses to signify the perceptive communication between the inside and the outside. There is no mention of the house; the window is “Of the land,” i.e. of the actual reality outside. Unlike in Frost’s “Tree at My window” (Collected Poems 318), here the bouquet is at the land’s window. The bouquet is on the other side of that window. This emphasizes the radical otherness of the bouquet, which is placed on the “checkered squares” formed by the ‘red’ and ‘white’, hence is above the ‘red’ and ‘white’ (recall “the fore of lofty scenes”). The pure and humanized realities form the background of which the bouquet is the “fore;” thus, it is sublimated.

The “checkered squares” of ‘red’ and ‘white’ form the concrete outlines (“skeleton”) of “repose.” The squares of ‘red’ and ‘white,’ however, become or seem to become animate, and lead to a consciousness blurring their distinction so that there is no difference between the meditated reality and the pure, unmeditated reality, between the humanized and the non-humanized reality. This is the effect of the “vibrancy of petals,” petals that have fallen from the bouquet. In other words, the meditated and non-meditated realities owe their ‘anima’ to the petals, to the bouquet. If the world seems beautiful and meaningful, it is because of “the bouquet.” The petals, though fallen, “still cling / By trivial filaments to the thing intact.” The bouquet being “the thing intact,” it is called the “central whole.” However, it is essentially of “medium” nature, hence is “recognizable” (but not real-izable, though).

Lacan has said that “There is no subject without...aphanisis [disappearance] of the subject,” and that “it is in this alienation, in this fundamental division, that the dialectic of the subject is established” (Seminar XI 221). It is this aphanisis or fading that is implied when Stevens speaks of “Toward a consciousness of red and white as one.” Here, the subject fades before the real, and this gives access to “the thing intact.” This relational, contingent structure of the subject is effected by the Triebe — the ‘drive’ as Lacanians translate Freud’s term; Lacan prefers this word owing to the possibility of
the punning ‘drift’ and ‘derive.’ ‘Drift’ speaks of the fading effect and ‘derive’ of the precipitation or establishment of the subject in that relational dynamics. There is no doubt that the alienated desire is the cause of the ‘drive,’ and since desire is always the ‘desire of the Other,’ the ‘drive,’ the means of the satisfaction of desire, functions always in relation to something apart from the body of the subject. The drive is associated with what are called ‘erotogenic zones,’ which are parts of the body from where, mythical as it may sound, has escaped that which the subject desires. These parts therefore are on the border between the subject’s body and the other; Lacan lists them: “lips, ‘the enclosure of the teeth’, the rim of the anus, the tip of the penis, the vagina, the slit formed by the eyelids, even the horn shaped aperture of the ear” (Écrits 314-15). Lacan calls these points as ‘the marks (traits) of a cut (coupure);’ the cut suggests the cutting off of the subject from his desire’s aim. Now, in Stevens, one sees the prominence of the scopic drive, the drive related with vision. The present poem is an exercise in the analysis of the scopic drive. The ‘bouquet’ is not an actual object as such, but it represents the desire’s aim. And it is achieved at the cost of the subject’s fading. Thus, the ‘bouquet’ may be regarded as object(a), the signifier of being — “the bouquet of being” as Stevens would describe it (OP 109).

Lacan’s term, object(a), has two sides to it. In one sense, it is that which is always already lost for the subject who spends all his life in rediscovering it, but can never fully and permanently achieve it; in another, the term also signifies those objects in the actual world around which give some measure of satisfaction of the subject’s desire but are essentially substitutes that come to replace the original object radically lost. Stevens’ ‘bouquet’ has little to do with the second meaning. It represents that object which the desire aims to attain; this is implied in the expressions that describe it as “the fore of lofty scenes” and as coming from “the place of the duck,” expressions that separate the ‘bouquet’ from the “lofty scenes” and the “duck.” Thus the ‘bouquet,’ like object(a), is rediscovered to some extent in the mind (as the “medium” thing) and is lost as soon:

So near detachment, the cover’s cornered squares,
And, when detached, so unimportantly gone,
So severed and so much forlorn debris.

Here the eye fastens intently to these lines
And crawls on them, as if feathers of the duck
Fell openly from the air to reappear

In other shapes, as if duck and tablecloth
And the eccentric twistings of the rapt bouquet
Exacted attention with attentive force.

The reality is composed of the actual world of objects (represented by the “tablecloth” that is concretely present; a “skeleton” reality), it also includes the pure reality (the “white duck”) and the ultimate real (“the bouquet”) that are unsymbolized. The word “Here” at the beginning of the middle stanza in the passage above is suggestive of the self’s detachment from the unsymbolized reality, which properly belongs in the field of the Other. The passage immediately follows the recognition of “the thing intact,” which is the “central whole.” The dash after “central whole” is suggestive of its loss as soon as it is recognized; the past tense and the present tense used respectively with reference to the reality and the “eye” are suggestive of the loss. The lines following the dash, just quoted above, betray the poignancy, frustration of the loss (“detachment”). In the first of these lines, the phrase “the cover’s cornered squares” seems out of place in the stanza, but it reveals the frustration resulting from the loss, and is aptly followed by aggressiveness (“attention with attentive force”). The ‘crawling’ of the “eye[?]{I?]” supports this interpretation. These feelings are equally powerfully expressed in a Wole Soyinka poem, “Telephone Conversation,” as the speaker’s attention is fastened to the objects around him when the landlady inquires about the color of his skin. The frustration, which is really his fading under the gaze of the landlady as the Other, seeks answers from the immediate objects around (‘crawling’ is Stevens’ word for this) as if they are what the desire seeks, or as if they will help overcome the feeling of loss and frustration, hoping that they might be the aim of desire in other shapes (objects petit a); and then there is the aggressiveness as the speaker begins to ‘show’ his color(s). The last tercet of the Stevens passage suggests that perhaps the fault lies with the perceiver who lacks the concentrated attention as a result of which the real escapes his grasp. Even here the ‘bouquet’ is separated from the ‘duck,’ pure reality, and the ‘tablecloth,’ a complex of humanized (‘red’) and non-humanized (pure, ‘white’) realities. It is ex-centric to both, its “e[x-]centric twistings” are more taxing and frustrating. If
these lines are marked with the sense of loss, they also mark at the same time the metonymic process of desire as the mind ("eye") clings to the outlines of the real, desiring at least the "feathers" to "reappear" albeit "in other shapes." These other shapes, these objects petit a, belong to the actual world around. Thus, the desire is oriented in the direction of the actual world in which one lives; the "attentive force" expects to watch the "eccentric twistings" of the 'bouquet' in this world's beautiful things and happenings like these:

A pack of cards is falling towards the floor.
The sun is secretly shining on a wall.
One remembers a woman standing in such dress.

Stevens' faith in the love for this beautiful world of ours owes a lot to his belief in its objects as having a link with "the thing intact."

III
The rose, the delphinium, the red, the blue,
Are questions of the looks they get. The bouquet,
Regarded by the meta-men, is quirked
And queered by lavishings of their will to see.

The things that form this variegated world are described as "questions of the looks they get;" the external world becomes meaningful, even beautiful, depending on how it is looked at. Comparing this with "importance of the trees outdoors,/ ... /...", as the way they looked" (CP 205): while the "Latest Freed Man" emphasizes the authority and influence of the external world, The Bouquet emphasizes the way the beholder beholds that world. Stevens' poetry maintains a perfect balance between the importance of both the outside and the inside, or fails to swerve it in favor of any one of them in particular. However, it often favors only one at a particular point in the poetry. The present poem, as opposed to the "Latest Freed Man," favors the looks of the beholder. Moreover, it is not only the question of beholding the outside world by man but also of 'regarding' the aim of desire by the meta-men. Stevens' meta-men are "still men" just as Lacan's Other is also other men. Thus, even if one feels here that by "meta-men" the poet could be
referring to the great minds of human civilizations that have tried to paint the ultimate object of human desire, it is more likely that he is speaking of the Other since what those sages have said has become part of our unconscious, for their enunciations is our pre-history. He says, the object of human desire is individuated ("quirked"), i.e. humanized or made part of human reality, and in this way estranged ("queered") from the real order by the desire for the Other's desire. Here, Stevens is in perfect accordance with Lacan in saying that the real is symbolized, made part of human reality, as it is severed from the real order by our desire and language. This is how the 'bouquet' becomes a symbol, a social reality. And yet, the 'bouquet' retains its sovereignty; it is not an ordinary (secondary or 'binary') signifier, but the signifier in the real (the 'master' or 'unary' signifier [for more information on the 'unary' signifiers see Lemaire 135-52]):

It stands a sovereign of souvenirs
Neither remembered nor forgotten, nor old,

Nor new, nor in the sense of memory.
It is a symbol, a sovereign of symbols
In its interpretations voluble,

Embellished by the quickness of sight,
When in a way of seeing seen, an extreme,
A sovereign, a souvenir, a sign,

Of today, of this morning, of this afternoon,
Not yesterday, nor tomorrow, an appanage
Of indolent summer not quite physical

And yet of summer, the pretty tones
Its colors make, the migratory daze,
The doubling second things, not mystical,

The infinite of the actual perceived,
A freedom revealed, a realization touched,
The real made more acute by an unreal.
It is a 'souvenir' but not in the sense of memory, because it is in the unconscious. It is neither old nor new, because it is both universal and particular, temporal and timeless, in the sense that it has been residing in the unconscious of each individual from times immemorial. It is the only symbol that remains uninterpreted despite all its interpretations, hence its sovereignty. An individual may perceive it "by the quickness of sight," but "in [the] way of seeing" he embellishes it, and so it is never seen as such, hence its manifold interpretations and sovereignty as symbol. Readers of the poem encounter enormous difficulties in interpreting this symbol of Stevens. However, some Lacanian thoughts on symbolism might help to some extent here. "Lacan found symbols initially in the outside world" (ERS 170), Stevens' 'bouquet,' too, comes from "the place of the duck," from the field of the other. Desire does not allow the symbol to continue to exist in its "here-and-how status of solipsistic presence" (ERS 171), hence its introjection ('quirking') and representation in language ("its interpretations voluble"). Once introjected the symbol transforms to an "inner representation" of it (ERS 170). The poet also speaks of 'quirking' and 'queering' of the 'bouquet' as the meta-men regard it; the 'queering' may suggest the "complex modifications that metaphor, metonymy, and arbitrary oppositions can impose" during the process of introjection (ERS 170). Stevens' expression for these modifications is "Embellished by the quicknesses of sight." Thus introjected, the symbol remains in the unconscious: though the poet refuses to call it a memory, he refers to the 'bouquet' as a "souvenir." However, his 'bouquet' is confessedly "a sovereign of symbols;" he emphasizes its originary and primary character. In this sense, he is occulting this symbol. In fact, the 'bouquet' remains the most occulted of Stevens' symbols as it goes uninterpreted to a large extent. It is interesting to see from a Lacanian point of view why the poet thought of it as the "sovereign of symbols." Lacan said that "[t]he primary character of symbols...brings them close to those numbers out of which all the others are composed, and if they therefore underlie all the semantemes of a language (langue), we shall be able to restore to speech its full value of evocation by a discreet search for their interferences, using as our guide a metaphor whose symbolic displacement will neutralize the secondary meanings of the terms that it associates" (Écrits 82). Here, Lacan emphasizes how the primary symbol underlies other (secondary) symbols and how the tracing of this symbol behind a particular speech or text gives that speech or text its full meaning; this, of course, is to be done by understanding the metaphoric way in which that symbol is displaced by the other.
symbols constituting the discourse. The 'bouquet' being the “sovereign of symbols” or
the symbol of symbols, is to be regarded as having such primary character. Such a
symbol is not present in the text or speech, but certainly governs it in a metonymic way.
Lacan's remark makes it clear that other (secondary) symbols come to replace the
primary symbol, which is thus interpreted, in a way, using them. In this process, relations
develop, multiply, and organize according to the “way of seeing,” to use the poet's
phrase. This is why Stevens speaks about the 'bouquet' in terms of other symbols: A
sovereign, a souvenir, a sign / Of today, of this morning, of this afternoon” (emphases
mine). However, these relationships exist or remain into existence only during the time
of organization; in other words, it is always a matter of the present (“today,” “this
morning,” “this afternoon”), not of the past or future (“Not yesterday, nor tomorrow”).

Lacan uses the word ‘symbol’ more in linguistic than literary sense (see ERS
170); therefore, it may, as Lacan often does, be replaced with ‘signifier.’ Stevens, here,
seems to be using the word in much the same way. Thus, speaking of primary symbols is
to speak of primary signifiers. These signifiers fix the meaning of a text or speech; their
role is one of “fastening together” the discourse (Seminar III 289). As an example, Lacan
shows ‘fear’ as the all powerful signifier which organizes or composes Racines’ Athalie
(see Seminar III 258-70). The term Lacan uses for such signifiers is point de capiton.
However, Stevens' 'bouquet' represents the most fundamental point de capiton or the
ultimate signifier, which may be said to be the anchoring point of all human discourse,
which replaces or represses that signifier in a metaphoric way. In other words, it is that
signifier which gives rise to all human discourse as if the human discourse is continually
engaged in interpreting and acceding to that signifier. In Lacan, the phallus is the
ultimate point de capiton. In this sense, Stevens' 'bouquet' may be likened with the
phallus; one should not forget here the etymological root of 'bouquet' — bois, meaning
'wood,' suggestive of the image of the erect penis. Indeed, much of Stevens' poetry as
his discourse can be shown as “suspended, 'vertically,' as it were, from that point”
(Écrits 154). Lacan's term 'phallus' has its origin in what he calls the Name-of-the-
Father, and in both the actual, biological father and the penis are not excluded. We know
that Stevens regretted what had happened between him and his father around the time of
his marriage. This sense of guilt he must have carried with him for a very long period of
time. Lacan links the sense of guilt with neuroses (see Seminar III 288), which is
concerned with the repression of certain signifiers from the subject’s conscious
discourse.

Thus, even if the ‘bouquet’ is treated as an object of desire before section III and
as the ultimate signifier in section III, it represents the phallus — both as a thing and as
the signifier. But, even the forever lost object(a) is both an object and a signifier,
precisely because it is always metaphorically replaced by surrogate objects; this is very
much like the phallic signifier’s replacement with all other signifiers. The ‘bouquet’ thus
may be likened with the lost object(a). At one point, the poet also calls it “the thing
intact,” which might make one think of das Ding, which is nothing but desire itself. In
fact, Lacan never clarifies the distinction between the phallus-as-imaginary, object(a),
and das Ding except perhaps in terms of the masculine and the feminine desires; Hamlet
and Antigone’s deaths cannot really be separated since both result from desiring what
cannot be had — call it the phallus(-Φ) or object(a) or das Ding. All of them are
‘intimately exterior’ or ‘extimate’ to the subject (seminar VII 139), who never tires of
attempting to rediscover them and, in this way, to graft himself onto the real, which the
castrating effect of the symbolic order has separated himself from.

Although it is not possible for the subject to rediscover the lost object, the
possibility of rediscovery — indeed the illusion of that possibility — keeps him going in
that direction. In this attempt he experiences certain moments that give him a satisfaction
of having found the object. During these moments he feels or is closer to the lost object.
This is the time of jouissance for the subject. Appropriately, Section III of the poem
celebrates this moment of jouissance in its last three stanzas. The experience of the
object restores one’s faith in the present, in the time and world in which one lives,
without any thought of ‘yesterday’ or ‘tomorrow.’ The moment is described as “an
appanage / Of indolent summer not quite physical.” The French word apanage is
wrongly spelt in the print here; it means privilege or monopoly or, to use Stevens’ word,
“sovereignty.” ‘Indolent summer’ would seem oxymoronic in the context of the
experience; however, one would do well to see the etymology of ‘indolent’: in (without)
+ dolere (pain), which is suggestive of a happy mood. ‘Summer’ is always associated
with happiness, strength, maturity and so on in literature; Stevens also uses it to represent
reality. “Summer not quite physical” should suggest psychical summer. It is useless to
paraphrase the lines of the poet here; it is more a matter of sensing the mood and the
effects of the experience in general. However, the last stanza has something that may be
explained. The first and the last lines of the stanza suggest how the (illusion of) rediscovery of the lost object makes the actual world more interesting. Lacan says, “The world of perception is represented by Freud as dependent on [the] fundamental hallucination” caused by the lost object “without which there would be no attention available” (Seminar VII 53). The objects and experiences of the actual world around have function only insofar as they reflect something of the lost object. This is what binds the world together for the subject; the organized world with its objects is sort of “a system of references” (Seminar VII 53) hallucinated due to the primordially lost object. In short, the world functions like a set of signifiers, the reason why the sense of its organization, like a signifying chain, is pleasurable; like a chain of signifiers, it offers the subject a meaning of the order of the subjective genitive. This is the “human way” of constituting one’s world, otherwise it would be a non-human world; an inhuman world, in fact. In order to keep one’s interest in this world, it is necessary for the subject to have the experience of this kind, described on so many occasions in Stevens’ poetry. Each time, it is described differently and with difficulty, where the language often struggles with syntax, fills with anacolutha, the sentences seem not to stop, the sense groups within which are extremely evocative and are properly ‘sense’ groups as such, almost each of which betrays the feeling of joy, when “A freedom [is] revealed, a realization touched.” Is not the poet here speaking of the subject’s freedom from the symbolic castration, which must be given up for him to realize himself, to map himself onto the real?

However, the poet seems to have a word to say here to other subjects — that this experience of realization is the privilege of a happy mental attitude (“an appange / Of indolent summer not quite physical”). From the examples taken from James Thompson and Walt Whitman, Stevens calls the latter “a strong man” (NA 119). Thompson’s lines present a bleak picture of the outside world as opposed to Whitman’s harmonious view of it. For Stevens, melancholy is weakness and happy attitude strength. The ‘bouquet’ of Stevens, then, is the privilege of a happy and positive attitude. What he puts with reference to an image is true of this ‘extimate’ symbol: “Every image is a restatement of the subject of the image in terms of an attitude” since one’s “sense of the world” depends upon the attitude (NA 128). The rediscovery of the original lost object, when perceived, brings the world ‘quite round’ through its representation in the symbolic order of language (“its interpretations voluble”) and by the imaginary relationship dynamics that gives rise to “the doubling second things.” These ‘interpretations’ and ‘doubles’ are
caused by the perception of the 'bouquet,' and help the subject organize the world in a meaningful way.

Stevens speaks of these “doubling second things” or para-things that the imaginary gives rise to in the next section.

IV
Perhaps, these colors, seen in insight, assume
In the eye a special hue of origin.
But if they do, they cast it widely round.

They cast deeply round a crystal crystal–white
And pallid bits, that tend to comply with blue,
A right red with its composites glutted full,

Like a monster that has everything and rests,
And yet is there, a presence in the way.

The “colors” referred to here point to the “colors” of “summer not quite physical” of the previous section. They exist in the mind and suggest the aspects of psychic reality. When “seen in insight,” they “assume,” take on, “a special hue of origin;” they give of “origin.” Since the origin of one’s psychic reality is that forever lost object (and also of one’s physical reality since that object was also the parental Other’s desire), they give something of it. But that is not all. They cast the “hue of origin” “widely round.” The “crystal-white / And pallid bits” represents that “special hue.” These are cast “round a crystal;” here the “crystal” represents the unmeditated, pure reality outside, which, thus ‘hallucinated’ by the lost object, tends to “comply with blue.” This is how the outside reality is humanized as it assumes the “red” color. Even so, the humanized reality too is not all that human since it is independent of the human and is complete and full (“its composites glutted full, / ... has everything...”). It is still “Like a monster that...rests,” is still “the lion locked in stone” (CP 175). If this reality does not need human intervention for its fullness, why is it “...there” as “a presence” in the way of humans who seek perfection and fullness for themselves? Why does it intervene us? Stevens’ “bitterness” on the “imperfection” “in us” is betrayed once again (CP 194).
They cast closely round the facture of the thing

Turned para-thing, the rudiments in the jar,
The stalk, the weed, the grassy flourishes,
The violent disclosure trimly leafed,

Lean larkspur and jagged fern and rusting rue
In a stubborn literacy, an intelligence,
The prismatic sombreness of a torrent’s wave.

The French word *facture* means invoice or list of goods, hence representation or image of the goods. The image of “the thing” in the mind is ‘colored;’ it does not stand in the mind in its original purity, thus stands there as transformed into a “para-thing.” This ‘coloration’ is represented by “The stalk, the weed, the grassy flourishes.” The concerned lines are to be read thus: “They cast closely round the facture of the thing / Turned para-thing... / The stalk, the weed, the grassy flourishes...;” in short, “The stalk, the weed, the grassy flourishes” is an object of the verb ‘cast.’ The “They” represents the ‘colors,’ i.e. aspects of the human mind. Here Stevens shows an awareness of the metaphoric deviation of the real as it takes on the ‘colors’ of human mind; this is how the “violent disclosure” of the real is “trimly leafed.” This has been suggested even in section I as he writes, “The bouquet stands in a jar, as metaphor.” Here, one might be tempted to compare Stevens’ thought with Lacan’s experiment of the vase and bouquet, which he called “The experiment of the inverted bouquet” (Seminar I 78), where the vase is real and the bouquet virtual. And yet, such inner representations of the real, such para-things, are very much fundamental to the mind or the imaginary (“rudiments in the jar”). This is because, these images of the real are “so central to the formation of the mind that without [them] there would be no human identity, no perceptual basis...” since they build up “a representational base to which all other representations refer” (ERS 143). However, Stevens is referring to the single image, that of the originally lost object or “the thing intact,” as he calls it. This image must be most fundamental. This is what Lacan indicates in Seminar VII when he speaks of the “fundamental hallucination” (53), which helps the subject relate the objects of the actual world and organize his world, or to use Stevens’ expression, his “sense of the world.” This is nothing but symbolization of the real; imaginary symbolism in fact, since the process of symbolization of the real
begins at the level of the imaginary: Frederick Jameson says that “much of what Lacan will designate as Imaginary is traditionally designated by expressions like symbol and symbolism” (352); he further describes the imaginary as “a kind of pre-verbal register whose logic is essentially visual” (emphasis mine; 353). However, the very meaning of symbolization is making a difference between the real or actual and its image in the mind. It is a kind of underdetermination of the real or actual object. Thus, while Stevens also symbolizes the “violent disclosure” linguistically (“larkspur,” “fern,” “rue”), he does not forget to qualify his description of the object with negative adjectives (“Lean,” “jagged,” “rusting”). Even so, the object, however underdetermined thus, exists in the mind in a state of “stubborn literacy,” as “an intelligence.” Its image in the mind, the symbol, insists, because, as a symbol, it is “an imaginary figure in which man’s truth is alienated,” and since any amount of “intellectual elaboration...cannot disalienate it” (A. Vergote in Jameson 351 from Rifflet-Lemaire), it is ‘man’s intelligence’ — to use words from Crispin’s *nota*. Yet the poet’s desire is to capture the object as it is, to map himself onto the real, not to symbolize and thus have it in a sort of degenerate form as the mind ‘colors’ it; however, since it is not possible, the “disclosure” of the object when the desire is intensest (“torrent’s wave”) is described in terms that betray a feeling of unhappiness, “prismatic somberness.” Yet, Stevens was a poet who accepted human limitations:

The rudiments in the jar, farced, finikin,
Are flatly there, unversed except to be,
Made difficult by salt fragrance, intricate.

They are not splashings in a penumbra. They stand.
They are. The bouquet is a part of a dithering:
Cloud’s gold, of a whole appearance that stands and is.

He, therefore, describes the images in the mind in ambiguous terms: “farced,” at first seems to suggest absurdity of the images of the real; however, as the past tense form of the verb ‘farce,’ it also suggests that they are ‘filled.’ The way the poet uses the word “finikin,” it seems to have been formed from the French *fini* and the English ‘kin’. The French *fini* is used in two senses — i) ‘accomplished’ or ‘well finished’ and ii) ‘finite’ or
limited.’ The English ‘kin’ is also used in two senses — i) as noun, it shows relation or similarity; and ii) as suffix, it is used to form diminutive nouns. Thus, the poet is simultaneously underdetermining the nature of the images and valuing them for their importance in human life: they may be absurd and meaningless in comparison with the real, but they are stuffed or filled with it, hence incorporate the real; they may fall far short of the real, yet they have a relation with or are similar to the real, for it is these images that are responsible for our (perception of) real-ity, hence must be looked upon as full, accomplished, complete. “Finikin” could also have been derived from the French fin, meaning ‘ultimate’ or ‘crux,’ and the English ‘kin.’ Even this points out the poet’s appreciation of the images. Whatever they may be, they do exist in the mind, they are positively there; they know nothing except “to be.” Their existence or ‘insistence,’ however, is made “difficult,” “intricate” by the touch of the real (“salt fragrance”). The ‘salt,’ perhaps because of its white color and crystalline nature, is one more image of the pure reality in Stevens although it is not taken note of as compared to other images or symbols for the real; e.g. images are described as “half-fishes of salt shine” in “study of Images II” (CP 464); and, in his elevation of the imaginary and the senses, he writes, “Let all the salt be gone” (CP 234). Stressing the authenticity of the existence of images, he further says that they are not unreal or ostentatious displays (“splashings”) in the mind or the imaginary domain (“penumbra”); they do not have momentary existence like a splash, instead “They stand. / They are.” In the next sentence, the “bouquet” is not a reference to the real ‘bouquet’ but to its image in the mind (“appearance”); the “dithering” points to the “violent disclosure” of the real of the bouquet. The images of it in the mind are part of the real. The final line read as a continuation of this, however, suggests that the ‘bouquet’ (the image? or the real? or both?) is part of the whole world of appearance, i.e. the world as perceived in images. In this sense, it is the arch image that ‘hallucinates’ the world of experience, as Lacan says. Stevens may be referring to the single experience of the disclosure of the ‘bouquet,’ though, and not to the whole world of experience.

The final section of the poem seems to be a picturesque presentation of a theme proposed in an adage: “Realism is a corruption of reality” (OP 166).

V

A car drives up. A soldier, an officer,
Steps out. He rings and knocks. The door is not locked.
He enters the room and calls. No one is there.

He bumps the table. The bouquet falls on its side.
He walks through the house, looks around him and then leaves.
The bouquet has slopped over the edge and lies on the floor.

Here, the poet might have had in mind the traditional realism that believed in reason and in objectivity. The ‘soldier’ in the section represents such a realist who drives the mechanical device of reason (“car”). He expects to find someone in the ‘house;’ his approach is very methodical and mannered, and baneful for that: even though “the door” of the imaginary “is not locked,” as part of his ‘mannerism’ he first “rings” and then “knocks” before entering. On entering the ‘house’ he calls in expectation of a response. This is very much a scientific way of approaching the truth through stages of verification. He receives no response whatever; hence the conclusion — “No one is there.” His soldier-like or scientist-like aggressiveness cannot be missed out. The table with the bouquet on it is a sure sign of an existence within the ‘house,’ but the reasoning, that if no one responds to his different calls then there is no one, prevents him from believing it. Thus, he destroys (“bumps”) the structure of reality within the ‘house,’ rejects it aggressively. His disbelief in this structure does not allow him to see that someone might be there, might show up if he is willing to wait or just to believe that someone must be residing in the ‘house.’ “He walks through the house” instead of waiting “there” by suspending his disbelief; he “looks round him” — like the square hatted rationalists who look “at the floor,” “at the ceiling,” and confine themselves to “right-angled triangles” (CP 75) — instead of looking within himself. Entirely convinced that no one is there, he leaves. Perhaps, he was looking to find the ‘meta-man’ within the ‘house.’ However, his mistake was his objective approach. The ‘meta-man,’ the Other of Lacan, belongs to the real order. Lacan believed that the real cannot be seen or said without subjective involvement. Stevens perhaps felt that the readers will not believe what he wrote in the first four sections; that they would ignore “the bouquet,” the ultimate truth of man, if they keep verifying the existence of the meta-men within objectively and aggressively and impatiently, like the ‘soldier.’ This is why the final section is written in such a manner that it does not look like an integral part of the poem.
except for the mention of the 'bouquet.' Through it, he suggests that the perception of the 'bouquet,' of the ultimate truth of human existence, is a matter of "balances that happen," and not of "balances / That we achieve" as does the soldier attempt to (CP 386).

There is another possibility of interpretation here. It is obvious that this section places more importance on the ‘someone who might be living in the house’ than on the bouquet. It is the meta-man, the Other, who is more important. This could be supported with Lacan's dictum that "the desire of man is the desire of the Other." That is, the agency of the Other is instrumental for the subject to have any desire at all. Without the role of the Other, the subject will have no desire, i.e. the phallus or object(a) or das Ding will not exist for him. He will ‘bump’ them like the soldier.

Although Stevens symbolized the ultimate object of desire with the ‘bouquet,’ yet it was finally granted the status of a signifier, of a substitute for that which is not, thereby shifting the object of desire further beyond. It is again as if he “Has lost the whole in which he was contained” and “Knows desire without an object of desire” (CP 358). But for a man who has embarked himself on “the spirit’s greatest reach” (CP 508), it is not possible to stop there in company with Ludwig Richter of “Chaos in Motion and Not in Motion” (CP 357-8). His desire therefore must go ahead in its search for the shifted aim. This is how the ‘bouquet’ succeeds to the ‘rock’ in the poem The Rock, where an attempt will be made to make the object and cause of desire ever more “Fully made, fully apparent, fully found” (CP 376). This is the reason that makes the poem belong to Stevens’ apogees; rather, The Rock enjoys the status of “green’s green apogee” (CP 373) in his opus.

Stevens has often used the symbols like ‘stone,’ ‘mountain,’ and ‘rock’ to evoke that which goes by the name of the real in Lacan. The psychoanalyst includes the unconscious and the Other into the real order; similarly, the poet has Chocorua, where the ‘Neighbor’ evokes Lacan’s Other as external as well as internal authority governing the human subject. Lacan’s difficult object(a) is the subject’s alienated being and the aim of his desire; Stevens’ ‘rock’ is the symbol, much as Lacan’s object(a), of that aim by real-izing which the subject ‘supposes’ to real-ize his being. Both object(a) and the ‘rock’ are thus the fantasmatic partner (“neighbor”) of the subject who desires. Because the ‘rock,’ like object(a), is of an essentially elusive ilk, most critics of the poem confess the difficulty of apprehending it with the exception of Miller, who approaches the
poem from the deconstructionist perspective. However, since the ‘rock’ is, strictly speaking, the thing of psychic experience, psychoanalytic approach would be of greater help.

*The Rock* could have been composed in late 1949, or at the most at the beginning of 1950. It was published in 1950. This completes seventy years of the poet’s life. And, as he seeks to “Regard the freedom of seventy years ago,” he is certainly evoking the infantile or even the pre-natal unity with the mother, that “whole in which he was contained” (*CP* 358); rather, the sense of that unity, the *jouissance* of Oneness or Wholeness. This is the time before the subject comes to be as barred (§). The pre-barred state is the “freedom” that Stevens exhorts to “regard.” But now, “Seventy years later,” “It is no longer air;” the poet is lamenting that this “air,” the “mere *jouie de vivre*” (*Letters* 793), is no more because one has long since been living as barred from the *jouissance* of that unity with the mother. Psychoanalytically speaking, that unity itself is the ‘being’ from which the subject is forever alienated. Therefore, “It is an illusion that we were alive;” the (sense of) ‘being’ having already vanished at the time of the parting with the mother, it is an illusion that we ever “Lived in the houses of mothers” and ever “arranged ourselves / By our own motions in a freedom of air.” The separation from the (m)Other is also an entry into the symbolic order; it is this symbolic Other that, after birth, limits and decides ‘our motions’ and thus ‘arranges’ us for ourselves. Even though the “houses” of mothers “still stand” as a rem(a)inder of that Oneness, they are now “rigid in rigid emptiness,” for they do not respond to our desire. This crass emptiness is the *manquè-e-etre* (the lack/want-of-being) in Lacan. This is how Stevens completes the ‘relation’ of the primordial traumatic moment of loss and laments.

This does not portend bleakness, however; on the contrary, it leads to the “assertion of humanity,” albeit “queer;” this is so since “To be human is to be subjected to a law which decentres and divides” (*FS* 26). It is one of the ironies in Stevens that deserves inclusion in Marjorie Perloff’s article. After seventy long years, the poet comes to the conclusion that the “shadows” were false. The word ‘shadows’ seems to enjoy many nuances in Stevens; *The Blue Guitar* uses it in the sense of ‘beliefs’ or ‘faiths’ (*CP* 167). It goes well with the word’s first occurrence in *The Rock*, but in the second instance, it comes close to mean ‘influences.’ Thus our faiths (“our shadows”) and the mothers and their ‘houses’ along with their influences (“their shadows”) “no longer remain.” Though ‘they’ were once very much part of the mind, ‘they’ have lost (much of
their') significance — perhaps owing to ‘their’ “rigid emptiness” referred to in the second stanza. It is almost as if “They never were.” If this is so, then what we did with our imagination and language in order to achieve ‘them’ was all (in) vain. Both the imaginary and symbolic exploits that we engaged ourselves into are therefore “Absurd,” and are “not to be believed.” This is because both have failed to attain to that for which they strove. In all this absurdity, however, there is one thing that the poet acknowledges: the desire. Desire is more satisfying, hence real, in comparison with the imaginary and symbolic exploits, for it “seems like / An invention, an embrace” that brings two “desperate” ‘clods’ into a unity, it unites two desiring human beings into a single “fantastic consciousness,” an ecstasy thereof reminiscent of Donne’s “Ecstasie” (99-102).

However, for the two ‘clods’ to unite, there must be some hypothesis shared equally by both. Without the equal belief in it, they will not be able to unite. In short, it is necessary that both must be desiring beings themselves; and for them to be so, it is a prerequisite that they be alienated from that hypothetical truth or certainty. Hypothesis is a matter of thought, which makes present that which is as absence, but also, insofar as Lacanalse is concerned, as that which once was. Freud says something similar in his Negation:

...thought has the ability to make present a second time something that was once perceived, by reproducing it in a representation, the outside object no longer having present. Thus the first and the foremost aim of reality testing is not to find an object in real perception corresponding to what is represented [in the mind], but to refind such an object — to convince oneself that it is still out there... [A]n essential precondition for reality testing is clearly that objects shall have been lost which formerly afforded real satisfaction.

(SE 19: 237-38; quoted with modified translation in Fink 93)

The “theorem” Stevens speaks of is a representation of something that is not present now, but there is a desire — “reality testing,” as Freud calls it — to refind it in order to prove the “theorem,” to prove that the object represented thereby still exists “out there.” And Stevens’ emphasis on desire and on two human beings and the “fantastic consciousness” are enough to suggest that it is object(a) as the lost mother-child unity
that is sought here, since both the ‘clods’ have lost it, which now exists only as an “assumption” for them. The sharing of this “assumption” lends them “a nature of the sun;” *The Comedian* states the nature of the sun as ‘sapping,’ which contains the notions of both giving and taking (*CP* 43). Here the poet is suggesting the importance of the mutual relationship as profitable to both; each of the “two figures” in their “embrace” affords the other happiness. However, who is the other ‘clod’ here? The wife/beloved or the mother? The poet seems to be confusing the desire as ‘further separation’ with the desire for the (m)Other.

Object(a) is always already lost, leaving a nothingness; but this nothingness functions as a signifier — thus giving rise to a possibility of there being a signified (“As if nothingness contained a métier”) — since it sends the subject in search of that which created it and which must be ‘assumed’ in its equivocal senses. The “nothing that is” of “The Snow Man” did not suggest of this possibility; it was written when Stevens was just introduced to the ‘nothing’ as a result of the signifier’s repression. It is only very late in life, after — and as a result of — his long struggle to overcome its repression, that one can see some meaning emerge for him from the ‘nothingness.’ It is like “a helping from the cold” that the “Snow Man” could not afford; it is “Like a meaning in nothingness” that his struggle has begun to yield (*CP* 438). In this sense, Stevens shows improvement as an individual and development as an artist. The very anticipation of there being such an object is heartening despite its being “an impermanence” in its otherwise “permanent cold” — its repression or foreclosure — that the poet himself experienced. This is the importance of that “illusion,” the desire for which is so strong that it gives rise to all kinds of interpretations and meanings that gloss this “high rock” with themselves, such that it is “covered” by them. Yet, they are no less important since their relation to the ‘rock’ is capable of providing a sufficient measure of satisfaction. This way of symbolizing the ‘rock’ in itself is therefore “like a blindness cleaned / Exclaiming bright sight,” as if the object of desire is itself refound. The original, lost object is thus replaced with its glosses, whose “blooming” and its sense in the mind is “being alive, an incessant being alive;” in fact, it is like “A particular of being [itself], that gross universe” (parentheses mine).

In this way, the first section comes very close to Lacan’s thought on desire and being as object(a), the cause of desire and being. At the beginning of the section it is presented as the “traumatic cause;” around the middle, it becomes a “reminder or
remainder of the hypothetical mother-child unity to which the subject clings in his fantasy of achieving a sense of wholeness, as the Other's desire, as the jouissance object;” towards the end of the section, it is glossed as the “foreign, fateful cause of the subject’s existence that he or she must become or subjectify;” and, throughout the section it is interpretable “in the context of Freud’s lost object, as the subject’s being, and as the product of the dialectization of a master signifier” (Fink 83). The “nothingness” is the master signifier in the section and is directly mentioned as such. Its dialectization is effected through bringing it into a relationship with other signifiers; this is suggested by the “theorem” or “assumption,” and also by the “another” clod as another human being, which could be a female as the object petit a as a signifier. In fact, the processes of both ‘dialectization’ and ‘metaphor’ are involved here; one might even say that both are the same, since there is a ‘condensation’ of the ‘clods’ resulting into a metaphorical spark of the realization of that “assumption.”

The experience the poem reproduces is essentially that of an individual, but it is also a collective or universal experience since all human beings experience it. This vindicates the poet’s use of the pronoun “we” (This way of assimilating other human beings into what Stevens deals with is common, the ‘meta-men’ instead of ‘meta-man’ in The Bouquet, or Stevens’ use of the pronoun ‘we’ in his prose and poetry in general are noteworthy in this context; perhaps it is part of his impersonality, or a desire to be accepted by the readers — a desire to identify with them). Therefore, though the second section, ‘The Poem as Icon,’ speaks in terms of “the man,” the ‘we’ of the first section and “the man” can be used interchangeably. Section two begins on the note of the desire’s insatiability: “It is not enough to cover the rock with leaves.” The ‘rock’ is man’s desire, but covering it is not sufficient; he must be “cured of it.” Each time Stevens uses the word ‘cure’ in the space of the next three lines, its connotation shifts. Man ails from the absence of the ‘rock,’ and he will be recovered by “a cure of the ground.” ‘Ground’ suggests earth, and Stevens has always used images pertaining to the earth in order to evoke the real. One is a patient — from psychoanalytic point of view — if there is a ‘loss of reality;’ one recovers, as Lacanian school believes, by mapping oneself onto the real. Thus, “cure of the ground” is indicative of the restoration of the real. Therefore, the poet equates it with a “cure of ourselves,” where ‘cure’ is recovery; but the phrase is not far from suggesting a reinstitution of the (sense of) ‘self;’ hence the necessity of equating “cure of the ground” and “cure of our[~]selves.” After all, the
restoration of reality itself is the mark of the patient's recovery since the restoration takes place in the mind and not outside it. This, then, is "a cure beyond forgetfulness;" here, the word 'cure' almost takes on the meaning of jouissance, "an imperishable bliss" (CP 68) or "joy of such permanence" (CP 373).

Likewise, the word 'leaves' is also used in two senses, which are mutually inclusive, though: as actual leaves of paper on which the poem's words take the place of the 'rock,' and as the by-creation in the form of fictions of the 'rock.' In any case, Stevens here is referring to the symbolic order of language and culture, which is productive in itself. Thus, if the leaves of the symbolic order "broke into bud" and "bloom," and "if they bore fruit," then their fresh "culls" might be helpful for the ailing human. We are subjects of the Other as symbolic; Stevens seems to believe in the restoration of reality through the symbolic order. Lacan, in fact, regards the entry into the symbolic order, i.e. castration, as a necessary pre-condition for such a 'cure.' This is how Stevens' emphasis on the final belief in a supreme fiction can be vindicated, since the fiction is inseparable from words or language. Therefore though the "fiction of leaves" covers over the 'rock,' yet it is "the blessedness" as the 'rock;' it is the "icon" in language of the central poem that the "clairvoyant men" of "Primitive Like an Orb" celebrate (CP 441). The 'leaves' and their fictions might be 'late plurals,' but they still give of the real that is evoked through the floral decorations ("pearled chaplet," "magnum wreath"), recalling the 'bouquet' poems. They are also the "snood" that enmesh and beautify the otherwise coarse real much as, in Miller's example, the blank page is hidden by the thin line one writes on it ("Stevens' Rock, II" 337). Stevens is also aware of the dimension of time: in bringing spring, summer, and autumn together, he evokes timelessness, the zero hour. As he says in The Blue Guitar, "Time grows upon the rock" (CP 171). The 'rock' itself is timeless, it is only our distancing from it that gives rise to time; the "leaves" and their fiction help annihilate or reduce this "dark / Of time" (CP 171) as they "copy...the sun," replicate or even re-create the real. Therefore, they are worthy of the poet's praise, which grants them the status of "the poem, the icon and the man." Since the poem's words are words chosen out of desire, they are immensely satisfying; since the fiction they create is the final belief, it is like the sacred image; and, since the words of the fiction are human creation, it is related with his life. Stevens says elsewhere, "To give a sense of the freshness or vividness of life is a valid purpose of poetry" (CP 157); therefore the "poem", the fiction of leaves, is the image

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("icon") of human life ("man"). These "leaves" are both "a cure of the ground and of ourselves," for psychoanalysis involves nothing else ("there is nothing else").

In saying that there is nothing else, Stevens is almost directly suggesting the permanent lack of the 'rock' or object(a), and also the human dependency on the "leaves" that (re)cover it. Thus, the "leaves" continue to "bud and bloom and bear fruit without change." In other words, man keeps approaching the 'rock' merely through this cycle of "leaves." This is why they are more important for us, more important that even the 'rock' itself: "They are more than leaves that cover the barren rock." Object(a) as the 'rock' is the cause of the subject's being; he is destined to approach it by renouncing his castration by the symbolic order, which is not merely signifiers and fictions but also that which helps the subject come face to face with his being; it is through the symbolic that he acquires desire and is able to dream of an object of desire. Therefore, even though the object(a) is not, what is important is the subject's renunciation of the symbolic castration; it is (t)his giving up castration that allows a precipitation of the self (or subject) through the emergence of the real subject of being ("bud the whitest [I]"), and thus also allows a clear perception of the fantasied object ("the pallidest sprout") and helps attain "new senses" as an enrichment of man's "sense" in general; it is what arouses desire that helps annihilate his distance from the 'rock.' The symbolic order is, therefore, what quickens the body and sets "the mind in root." Since it is from within the symbolic that the subject knocks, dashes, breaches through to the real, and since object(a) is not, the predicate that "there is nothing else" is justified. It is enough that one lives the life of desire ("love"), for desire bears fruit by annihilating "distances," thus yielding the "final found."

This is the moment of 'being,' which soon vanishes. The words of the poet interpret the experience; or the symbolic order comes into play. In other words, the 'rock' is glossed over and thus is brought into increasing signifierization through the language of "mixed [e]motion" and "imagery." During this process, however, the poem takes the place of the 'rock' that thus vanishes and "exists no more." Each word, as it were, each expression, cures the subject of the "inexactnesses" that stand between him and "the view towards which they had edged" (CP 512). Each gloss of the 'rock' is immensely satisfying and therefore important. In this way the 'rock' "becomes a thousand things" and does not exist as One or as the truth. This plenty of the symbolic order makes the symbolic universe of humanized reality more beautiful. The acceptance
of this plurality, as opposed to the eternal quest for the hypothetical absolute, is more valuable; this is the essence of the first stanza of "On the Road Home:"

It was when I said,
“There is no such thing as the truth,”

That the grapes seemed fatter.
The fox ran out of its whole.

(\textit{CP 203})

While "The Man on the Dump" (\textit{CP} 201-3) puts an end to the quest for that unending, eternal quest, "On the Road Home" celebrates the humanized or symbolic world. It is only when one accepts the debt of the symbolic that the real can be approached and appreciated. This alone imparts the feeling of homecoming in the otherwise permanent lack of the absolute truth, the One; the poet rejoices over what the symbolic can offer:

It was at this time, that the silence was largest
And longest, the night was roundest,
The fragrance of the autumn warmest,
Closest and strongest.

(\textit{CP 204})

In this way, the plural symbolic world that language represents attains significance, is rejuvenated. This is what the poet calls "the cure / Of leaves," which is instrumental to the 'cure' of the real ("ground") and "of ourselves." Therefore, the symbolic order of language as the poem is simultaneously both "icon" and "man," sacred and human.

Section III, 'Forms of the Rock in a Night-Hymn,' is the 'night's' hymn of the 'rock;' the 'night,' man's interior world (\textit{CP} 333), meditates and pays its tribute to the 'rock.' The 'rock' is called "the gray particular of man's life." The word "gray" recalls the jar that became "gray and bare" (\textit{CP} 76). In "Anecdote of the Jar," the jar owes its grayness and bareness to its deification ("tall and of a port in air"). Stevens' 'rock' is barren and gray, too; he is thus deifying it. Like the religious imagination of god as the maker of man, Stevens' 'rock' is "The stone from which man rises." In the penultimate stanza, Stevens writes, "It is the starting point of the human and the end." In Lacan's
thought, it is the cause of being and (the object of) desire. Man proceeds from the ‘rock,’ but where does he go? Just as the child’s sense of unity keeps vanishing, so does man’s ‘rise’ or ‘start’ from the ‘rock’ leads him away from it “to the bleaker depths of his descents....” The word ‘descent’ is ambiguously used here, perhaps deliberately so, since the ‘rock’ is both the ‘starting point’ and ‘end.’ The word does not only mean a ‘going down,’ ‘decline,’ or ‘fall,’ but, retroactively or diachronically, also ‘origin.’ Thus the ‘rising the step’ here means both going away from the ‘rock’ and becoming aware of the distance from it which the subject seeks to reduce. Hence, it is “Point A / In a perspective that begins again / At B.” Just as the “origin of the mango’s rind” and its end meet at the same place, the ‘rock’ is “the gate / To the enclosure.” However, the poet is not inadvertent to the fact that the time required for the journey along the mango’s rind, or spent between points A and B, changes the origin, or differentiates the origin and the end. The time goes with space, hence the thought of space between the two points.

The ‘rock’ is also glossed as “the stern particular of the air.” The ‘air’ being “mere joie de vivre” (Letters 793) is the “only friend” (CP 175); it symbolizes jouissance. The ‘gray’ color of the ‘rock’ is to be interpreted as its godlike indifference or sternness, its difficult aspect. It is not so kind as to be totally and completely available or knowable. This aspect is further called as evil, perhaps also corroborating Lacan who views jouissance as evil. It is the “mirror” of the “planets,” which represent the grand particulars of the physical world. Each particular of the physical world is viewed as a reflection of the ‘rock.’ Just as there would be no ego without the o/Other, the physical world is meaningless without the ‘rock,’ without this impossible desire. However, this sense exists in the human mind; therefore, “through man’s eye,” each particular ‘turquoises’ the ‘rock.’ Yet, its difficult aspect persists: “at odious evening” the real nature (“redness” as real, or as danger?) of it — which is, not to give in completely to human desire — “sticks fast to evil dreams.” To understand the bipolar nature of the ‘rock,’ one has to turn to Lacan who sees das Ding as both the aim of desire and desire of death, as jouissance object and death, as good and evil at the same time. The fact that one sees it but has not yet attained it informs of the half-risen desire (“half-risen day”); this state of desire therefore is, ironically and paradoxically, rightly called the “difficult rightness.” It might be noted that the poet ends the poem with an evocation of death (“vivid sleep”).
In fact, the references like “The stone from which he rises,..., / The step to the bleaker depths of his descents,” “point A / In a perspective that begins again / At B: the origin of the mango’s rind,” “The starting point of the human and the end,” “the gate / To the enclosure” — all of them are oxymoronic, paradoxical in their content, reflecting the bipolar nature of that foreign desire. Within those two poles “space itself is contained;” this suggests that everything is contained within the two poles, that nothing is excluded from that space. Thus, Stevens finally brings in the cosmic primary symbols available to man, of ‘day’ and ‘night’: the ‘rock’ is both “day” and “the things illumined / By day,” and “night and that which night illumines.” This is how the poem meditates upon the most interior world of man as the poet meditates upon the most fundamental of the human existence: it is thus a “Night’s hymn of the rock.” From its start to the end, the poem can be regarded as the “intensest rendezvous” (CP 524) with the truth of existence and being; it begins with man’s origin in the ‘house of the mother’ and ends with the “vivid sleep,” evoking birth and death respectively. The ‘rock’ contains both these ends and the space between as the life of desire.