4

Poetry and Painting

By metaphor you paint
A thing.
‘Poem Written at Morning’

In this chapter, I explore the relation between poetry and painting, to study the manner in which Stevens and Eliot utilize the theory of painting, in their struggle to find a suitable style to give expression to their perception of a multi-faceted reality. The medium used by both the poets is the same, that is, words; what is of more interest is to note how each evolves his own individual style as they construct worlds of meaning from intertextual associations.

Poetry influences paintings as much as painting influences poetry. Wallace Stevens in his perceptive essay, “The Relation Between Poetry and Painting” sees the relationship between the two arts as an analogy between the two different forms of poetry: “[T]he identity of poetry revealed as between poetry in words and poetry in paint.”1 Poetry according to Stevens, thus becomes a verbal painting, and painting a visual poem. Stevens argues:
No poet can have failed to recognize how often a detail, a propos or remark, in respect to painting, applies also to poetry. The truth is that there seems to exist a corpus of remarks, in respect to painting, most often the remarks of the painters themselves, which are as significant to poets as painters. All of these details, to the extent that they have meaning for poets as well as for painters, are specific instances of relations between poetry and painting.\(^2\)

Stevens feels that the poet is in rapport with the painter as they both produce artistic works “not by inspiration, but by imagination, or by the miraculous kind of reason that imagination sometimes promotes.”\(^3\) Both the poet and painter working with different mediums rely on the “reality” of their immediate experiences and structure it in their works through the workings of the imagination. A number of Stevens poems have been worked up from several points of view in the manner of a series of several quasi-Impressionistic pictures, apprehensions, or impressions of one subject, much in the manner of paintings.

‘The Domination of Black,’ is one such instance of a poem which draws on auditory and visual perceptions in the environment. Associations relate the images to each other each other through association; where the “color of the heavy hemlocks” that “Came striding,” reminded the poet of “the cry of the peacocks” (CPWS, 8). Even the title of the poem ‘Domination of Black’ sounds like one of the titles of an abstract painting by Piet Mondrian. In Stevens’s poem and an abstract painting by Mondrian like *Composition with Red,*
Yellow, and Blue, abstraction seems to bring through paints or words, the working of the mind, on canvas or paper. It is not just the mind of the poet or the painter that structures reality out of an imaginative process; the mind of the reader or viewer similarly acting upon the composition of colors and words, perceives the creative works in multiple ways. The play of colours and words in both the poem and painting "constitutes a schema that captures transpersonal or schematic dimensions of the psyche, allowing two emotions to become one." The last stanza of 'Domination of Black', is an apt example to illustrate how the operation of mind on reality seems to parallel forces in nature:

Out of the window,
I saw how the planets gathered
Like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind.
I saw how the night came,
Came striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks
I felt afraid.
And I remembered the cry of the peacocks. (CPWS, 9)

A number of other titles of Stevens's poems seem to be like the titles of paintings, for instance, 'Someone Puts a Pineapple Together', 'Study of Two Pears', The Glass of Water', 'Six Significant Landscapes', 'Landscape with Boat', 'Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers'.
In "The Function of Criticism" Eliot writes about the relationship between artists, when he declares: "A common inheritance and a common cause unite artists consciously or unconsciously. . . . Between the true artists of any time, there is, I believe, an unconscious community."5 The writers, painters and poets around the beginning of this century shared the same world view as they collaborated in their ongoing search for a style that would be most suitable to give expression to their view of the multi-faceted aspects of social reality. Juxtaposed with the views of Stevens and Eliot, regarding the relations between poetry and painting, Picasso's statement on the subject of an artist's interaction with the social reality written for Simon Tery and first published in Lettres francaises (Paris) March 24, 1945, cannot be but recalled:

What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has only his eyes if he's a painter, or ears if he's a poet, or even if he's a boxer just his muscle? On the contrary he's at the same time a political being constantly alive to heart-rending fiery or happy events, to which he responds in every way. How would it be possible to feel no interest in other people and by virtue of irony and indifference to detach yourself from the life they so copiously bring you? No, painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war and attack against the enemy.

From the above statements by the poets and a prominent painter, it therefore becomes quite obvious that there exists links between theme and philosophy,
and of style and technique regarding the method of expression as Picasso elsewhere stated that:

If the subjects I have wanted to express have suggested different ways of expression I have never hesitated to adopt them. . . . Different motives inevitably require different ways of expression. This does not imply either evolution or progress, but an adaptation of the idea one wants to express and the means to express it.6

Both the poets and the artists strove to present as immediate an apprehension to reality, as was possible, through the medium of words or paint. From this point of view, meaning became secondary to sensation. Eliot in his essay on Dante stresses the need to express ideas through “clear visual images” and says, “we do not need to know what the meaning is, but in our awareness of the image we must be aware that the meaning is there too.”7 Such responses to the values, philosophy, and the aesthetics of the visual arts form links between poetry and painting.

Earl Miner reads the influence of Japanese paintings in poems such as ‘Six Significant Landscapes’ and ‘Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird’, and ‘Study of Two Pears’ and ‘Variations on a Summer Day’:

The titles of these poems recall such series of Japanese prints as Hiroshige’s ‘Eight Views of Omi,’ Hokusai’s ‘Thirty-Six Views of Fuji,’ or Utamaro’s ‘Seasons.’ These poems are closest to the Imagist method and haiku technique. . . . The best example from among these poems of the highly pictorial method with haiku-like technique is ‘Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.’ The blackbird is the constant, objective reality which means
different things according to the mood and impressions of the observer. Several of the sections of the poem are most extraordinarily like Japanese in their method and in their use of natural imagery. Miller, in his observations, has neglected the Cubist technique which works equally effectively in Stevens’s poems. In ‘Study of Two Pears’, the title of which clearly invokes visual art, as in a Cubist painting the poem presents a multi-dimensional view to reality in its struggle to depict the apparent reality and to create an imaginative reality: “The pears are not seen / As the observer wills” (CPWS, 197). What the observer would like to perceive the pears as, is “viols, / Nudes or bottles” (CPWS, 196), through the imagination, but it is the “real” form and color that is more obvious. Costello suggests that the poem “testifies to the failure of language to represent adequately the allure of visual fact. . . . Without metaphor (without viols, nudes, or bottles) language is nothing, and yet metaphor implies an evasion, a removal from positive experience.” It appears that the interaction between painting and poetry is more through the imagination as colours, forms and words make an appeal to the imaginative instincts to structure a reality of a unique completion of vision.

In her article, “T. S. Eliot in the Postmodern Age”, Ashley Brown cites Francis Bacon who acknowledges the influence of T. S. Eliot’s poetry on his painting. Brown gives two examples of Bacon’s works that are directly related to Eliot’s poetry. Triptych Inspired by T. S. Eliot's Poem ‘Sweeney Agonistes’, which now hangs in Hirshorn Museum in Washington, dates from 1967. The
other painting which comes directly from Eliot is a late one simply called Painting (1978). Brown gives further details of this painting:

Although it is owned by a private collector in Monaco, it was shown in the great Bacon retrospective at the Tate Gallery in 1985. The catalogue for that exhibition contains a splendid reproduction. It depicts a nude male figure rearing back in order to turn the key in the door with his foot; perhaps his arms are truncated. On the floor of what might be a cell is a bloodied newspaper; reflected in a mirror is the back of an indifferent figure who could be a guard in uniform. Bacon volunteered information about the literary source of this painting to David Sylvester: “I think that came - I don’t know why I made it turn with the foot - it very much came from that poem of Eliot’s: ‘I have heard the key / Turn in the door once and once only . . . ’ You know . . It comes from The Waste Land. I don’t know why I have made it turn with the foot. But it did come from the poem.”

Another contemporary artist, Lucien Freud, has revealed that Eliot has been a source of inspiration. In conversations with the critic Robert Hughes, which Hughes incorporated in the catalogue for the exhibition of Bacon’s paintings at the Hirshorn Museum in the United States, Freud cites Eliot’s advice to himself in ‘Portrait of a Lady’ on how to get in the right mood for creating art:

And I must borrow every changing shape
To find expression . . . dance, dance,
Like a dancing bear,
Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape. (C P & P, 21)

This is not the way in which a literary critic would read these lines. One would likely say that the speaker in the poem, not Eliot, is seeking some escape
from the situation in a Boston drawing room. But the poem speaks to Freud in a different way, and one must respect it. As Robert Hughes says, his paintings “bypass decorum while fiercely preserving respect.”

Another painter is R. B. Kitaj whose *If Not, Not,* which dates from 1975-76, was directly inspired by *The Waste Land.* It hangs in the Scottish Gallery in Edinburgh. ‘What the Thunder said’ is the approximate setting for *If, Not, Not.* In this painting and several other late works, Kitaj seems to be moving towards mural, the large statement about experience, and in fact has been commissioned to paint a new mural for the new British Museum, as yet unbuilt. The subject is *The Waste Land.*

*Fragmented Images in Eliot’s Poetry*

In his essay “Modern Art Techniques in *The Waste Land*”, Jay Martin has drawn illuminating analogies from Eliot’s contemporaries in graphic arts - The Cubists, Dadaists, Futurists and Surrealists to explain the anomalous construction of *The Waste Land.* Martin illustrates vividly how fragments of reality are brought together into a new unity:

The fragmentation and reintegration observable in *The Waste Land* can be regarded as the same process as that used by the Cubists and Futurists,
springing from a similar intention, and having a comparable effect. The *Waste Land* sees history as a spiritual epic. Using its theme of the decline and renewal of faith as its center of relevance, it successfully combines fragments from the myth of Tiresias, the Grail legend, the theories of J. G. Frizzier and Jesse Wesson, Upanishads and many other sources, historical and fictional. In presenting such different personages as Tires, St. Augustine, and the young man carbuncular as characters in a single drama, Eliot diminishes - though he does not eliminate - our sense of their separateness. The process, an exercise in the unification of sensibility, consists of seeing the theme of the poem reflected in widely scattered instances, and using these to give a fuller sense of it than could be drawn from any single subject, no matter how exhaustively it might be treated. It creates that sense of circling about the model and seeing it from many different points of view that is characteristic of analytic Cubism.¹³

Martin also points out that many early paintings of Cubism present the appearance of a jungle of lines and shapes, all according to the principle of analytic Cubism derived from the model. Yet the model itself is nearly invisible and is discernible only as mutilated, shadowy shapes partly occluded by and partly made up of these fragments itself.

The principle of analytic Cubism appears to operate in *The Waste Land* too. The content of the poem derives its form from the "model" of the reality of the world after the First World War. The perception of the poet to the reality of that world is fragmented where science, sociology, religion and politics fail to provide a consistent metaphysical view of life. Yet there is a lurking awareness that at some point in the history of humankind, there was
present a coherent reality sustained by faith, order and love. It is the rhetorical device of ‘parataxis’ or the mass of quotations at the end of The Waste Land with its violent juxtaposition of desperate and broken elements which points to the deeper issues of the poem. The broken and fragmented remains of a coherent reality appear in the form of “a heap of broken images,” as incomprehensible quotations at the end of the poem, as also in the sudden changes in the scene of the poem that are juxtaposed without the obvious syntax of thought. In ‘The Burial of the Dead’ we move from pre-War Germany to the deserts, to Wagner’s opera-house at Bayreuth and on to London. These places like the broken images, were once a part of the pattern of myth and culture, which has now collapsed. The form of the poem becomes the content as the observer picks up the remains of a violent and sometimes confusingly juxtaposed coherence to structure a framework to understand the poem. By doing so the reader recognizes in its subject an identity familiar to his or her own experience, and then traces the means by which the subject has been translated into the idiom of painting or poem.

Modern art in this respect ceases to be an imitation of reality as the creative poet or painter presents to its audience or reader “a heap of broken images”, and seems to make an appeal to the poetics of imagination of each individual to structure reality according to each one’s perception to the work of art and the reality of the context in which the art is placed. The images may mean different things to different people - communicating on a different level
from that of Eliot's own words, and illuminating his meaning from a different direction. Thus we are invited to structure our own sense of reality as the poet sardonically declares:

Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show fear in a handful of dust. (C P & P, 61)

The technique used by Eliot in *The Waste Land* may also be viewed as counter-parts of a new technique invented by Braque and Picasso, which not only violated the traditional rule of their art but also seemed to conflict with the essential spirit of Cubist painting. The technique was known by *collage* or *papier colle* by the means of which actual objects began to be fastened on the canvas:

A device parallel to the collage operates in *The Waste Land* by taking non-symbolic elements borrowed from real life, such as the quotations, "Mrs. Porter and her daughter" and "London bridge is falling Down" and examples of flat objective realism like the aimless and trivial reminiscences of the character who identifies herself as "Marie" and the talk of the woman in "A Game of Chess", and putting them side by side with imagined people and
events, the poem insists both upon the distinction and relationship between
art and actuality. The quoted material and lines of mundane dialogue are
concrete instances of the spiritual condition which is the theme of the poem.
The effect of this technique is the same as the effect of collage in painting
where the real and imagined are made to support each other. The real,
bringing into the work, a powerful and unexpected authenticity, and the
imagined, serving to control the significance of the real elements by
interpreting them.  

The "real" in *The Waste Land* are also the ‘Notes’ supporting the poem which
are drawn from canonical world texts - from literature, music, religion, and
anthropology. They function in a manner similar to the bits of wallpaper or a
clipping from a newspaper whose columns and headlines are perfectly
readable, a piece of an old envelope that are fastened onto the canvas that
point to a very "real", maybe mundane world and also bridge the gap
between art and actuality.

The ‘Notes’ are mainly fragments of quotations drawn from "actual"
texts which have earned a presence in the actual world and are brought
together in a new context to support and authenticate the present. It is not just
the actual world that slices smoothly through intertextual boundaries of reality
and fiction but also "[s]piritual situations seem to wheel through time in Eliot’s
poems, much as the forms in a Cubist painting seem to wheel through space",
oberves Martin. Drawing parallel between Cubist painting and Eliot's poem,
Martin further writes, "In the Cubist painting, the laws of space are
suppressed, so that all parts of the model, even those normally out of sight,
can be brought actively into the design; similarly in *The Waste Land*, the laws of time are suppressed so that all of history and literature can be made available in the poem. In short, *The Waste Land* reconstitutes time in much the same way as Cubist painting reconstitutes space.⁴¹⁵ In *Mnemosyne*, Mario Praz has also, in fact, discussed analogies in the application of startlingly new techniques of perspective and point-of-view by the two artists - visual and literary. Praz observed that Eliot's customary device of incorporating quotations gathered from various sources may be considered to be the literary equivalent of the technique of "collage" whereby apparently discordant elements are gathered to create a complex unity within the framework of a canvas.⁴¹⁶

After World War I, the revolutionary energies which had produced Cubism and Futurism found their way into a new ‘-ism’ to counteract the negativism of the old one early in its career by painters. The term surrealiste was taken over from Guillanime Appolinaire who first defined it in a dictionary-like style as follows:

**Surrealism, n.** Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, whether verbally or in writing, or in any other way, the real process of ‘thought’. Thoughts, diction free from any control by the reason, independent of any aesthetic or moral pre-occupation.

ENCYL. Philos. Surrealism rests on a belief in superior reality of certain forms of association hitherto neglected in the omnipotence of in the disinterested play of thought. It tends definitely to destroy all other psychic
Andre Breton who formulated the Surrealist manifesto was influenced by the doctrines of psycho-analysis at the time of its writing. He had been introduced to the works of Freud as a student of medicine. Apart from the significance which psycho-analysis attached to dreams and hallucinations, the therapeutic technique suggested the use of word associations and induced day-dreams as possible methods of artistic creation. Also, around 1917, psychologists, Jung and Adler introduced the theory of the psychological nature of aesthetic creativity whereby the artist possess the power to universalize his mental process. Passages can be seen in The Waste Land which have the characteristic surrealistic atmosphere of ominous, yet inexplicable dream episodes. When in ‘The Burial of the Dead’, Stetson is asked:

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
‘Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?’

(C P & P, 63)

the surrealist quality speaks for itself. The passage in ‘What the Thunder said’ that begins:

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings.

(C P & P, 73)

shares the same surrealistic formula where the unrelated elements are welded together into a grotesque and enigmatic unity. Such phantasmogoric and outlandish images in its attempt to tear off the mask which reason puts on reality, enlists the powers of the subconscious, and captures a reality more
profound than that accessible to the senses. As Jay Martin writes, "The image of Stetson's garden since it yields a coherent allegorical meaning, has only a surface surrealism. But the verse paradox about the black haired woman with its bats with baby faces, inverted towers and voices singing out of empty wells, seems terrifyingly meaningful yet eludes final interpretation, thus achieving the true disquieting Surrealist quality. Similar terrifying visions are evoked visually in paintings like Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. There is an unnerving quality to the painting regarding life and death. A similar atmosphere pervades in many of Eliot's early poems which eludes any conclusive final interpretations. The lines in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock':

Though I have seen my head
(grown slightly bald) brought in
upon a platter,
I am no prophet - and here's no great matter. (C P & P, 15)

have a dream-like quality about them which goes beyond reality, beyond the visible appearance which is transformed by an intensified play of fantasy to a heightened and distorted actuality. A similar effect is achieved in the lines from 'Mr. Apollinx':

I looked for the head of Mr. Apollinx rolling under a chair
Or grinning over a screen
With seaweed in its hair. (C P & P, 31)
Here, behind the visible appearance of a thing, in this case Mr. Apollinax, lurks its caricature. Such an image seems to put into practice Salvador Dali’s ‘paranoia-critical’ method where the mind could put every known form of madness to work in the cause of poetry. The poet or the painter appears to be in delirium and act and thinks as if under the influence of a psychic disorder, while remaining fully aware of what is going on. The uncanny image of Mr. Apollinax, the poet not only presents a caricature of a man, but all actual things appear ghost-like and grotesque. The beginning of ‘Sweeney Among the Nightingale’ conveys the same delirious effect:

Apnech Sweeney spreads his knees
Letting his arms hang down to laugh,
The zebra stripes along his jaw
Swelling to maculate giraffe.

(C P & P, 56)

Like the surrealists, Eliot appeals directly to the emotions for an instinctive, spontaneous reaction. All the conventional notions of reality are turned upside down to express an idea. In fact it appears to be the tongue of “Sweeney” that is surrealistically depicted in Salvador Dali’s painting, The Persistence of Memory. It is one of Dali’s early works and the images are both intriguing and fascinating. In a flat deserted landscape, Dali has created the weird images of three watches which are draped like rubber or plasticine: one from a branch of a dead tree growing out of a platform; another with a fly on the glass, over the edge of the platform itself; and a third folded over what might be a distorted head on the ground. Glistening ants appear on the back
of an apparently normal watch turned face downwards. The limp watches like the image of “Apnech Sweeney”, are not only distorted, but make a fetish of the human form which appears in fragmented, phantasmoric images, in words and paint. A particular part of the human anatomy is usually highlighted. For example, in the case of Mr. Apollinax it is the head, as also the ‘laughing arms’ of Sweeney that are frozen in time and space, as are the tongues in Dali’s painting. They all appear as images captured in an instance in time. This idea is suggested by the title of the painting, *The Persistence of Memory*, suggesting perhaps that the subject was inspired by persistent visions and memories from the past or “engendered” from dreams.

An eerie, phantasmogoric atmosphere is successfully portrayed in the second section of 'The Hollow Men':

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In deaths dreams kingdom
These do not appear:
There, the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are in the wind singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star.  

(C P & P, 83 - 84)

However, I feel, that the effect of surrealism which creeps into Eliot's later "spiritual" poems, as in the beginning of the second part of 'Ash - Wednesday', is different from his early poetry in the sense that the sense of dementia is replaced by an attitude of calm acceptance. The demented phantasms in the poet's psyche purge themselves as reality feeds on the imagination, as it appears in the lines below:

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree
In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety
On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained
In the hollow round of my skull.  

(C P & P, 91)

Once again the surrealist effect reproduced in these lines is nothing more specific than it is at once dreamlike and sharply realistic, eerie and funny,
unaccountable yet impressively significant. The second section of ‘Ash Wednesday’ closes on the same phantasmogoric note:

Under a juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered and shining
We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other
Under a tree in the cool of the day, with the blessing of sand.
Forgetting themselves and each other. (C P & P, 92)

In the above lines the surrealist effect is like that of an image remembered from a dream; it embodies a profound emotional impression but its meaning remains elusive.

Like Dali, Eliot too adopted the surrealist technique of “double-image”, making it relevant to his poems. The double image was used most successfully by Dali, who though a late comer to surrealism, contributed to the movement a doctrine of “paranoia-critical activity” which recommended that
the artist must emulate the state of mind of the victim of paranoia, whose obsession leads him to articulate strange and secret values to everyday objects and events.\textsuperscript{19} In \textit{The City of Drawers}, Dali has incongruously fused the human form with inanimate objects, such as chair and drawers, to perhaps point out the human obsession with the world of material objects. Eliot appears to have mastered the surrealistic technique of paranoia. Paranoia is an interpretive disorder with a rational basis, which if skillfully mastered by a painter or poet, will allow him to reveal the double significance of things. The Surrealists view everyday objects directly but the "principle organization" in \textit{The Waste Land} requires a constant presence of an ambiguity since it treats its subjects by looking before and after rather than meditating directly on the event. Every episode, character and symbol is transformed under the pressure of its content into something else, so that it possesses two identities. Thus Mr. Eugenidies, because he is one-eyed, is also the merchant in the Tarot pack and because he is half-blind has a certain relationship with Tieresias. In the lines in 'The Burial of the Dead'

\begin{quote}
   A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
   I had not thought death and undone so many. \hfill (C \textit{P} \& \textit{P}, 62)
\end{quote}

ordinary twentieth century Londoners become a party of the lost souls Dante sees in the great plain within the gate of Inferno. And, in 'The Fire Sermon'

\begin{quote}
   While I was fishing in the dull canal
   On a winter evening round behind a gashouse
\end{quote}
the speaker who is both Ferdinand of *The Tempest* and the disabled Fisher King of the poem's central legend is imprisoned in a dreary modern industrial city. A line from Spenser’s ‘Prothalamion’, “Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song”, appears in the description of the filth and desolation of the modern Thames, so that the comparatively undefiled river of an earlier time is recalled and with it is expressed the contract between the base lovers of which the modern river is the scene, and the holy love celebrated in Spenser’s poem. Thus, the “reality” of the modern scene, structured around literary allusions and images drawn from an earlier age and transposed through time and space, denatures the reality of the given scene (as discussed in a previous chapter).

It now becomes increasingly clear the Eliot by relying heavily on borrowed techniques, allusions, quotes, etc. both from painting and literary texts of the world is not attempting to ‘show-off’ his intellectual prowess, but is making a conscious effort at “a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. “The progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.”*20* Eliot’s criticisms are reflected in his poetry and both poetry and criticism reflect the spirit of the modern world of the twentieth century. It was to such a resemblance that Stephen Spender was obviously referring to in his theory of
"a collective modern subconscious dreaming mind whose forever changing fantasies grotesquely transform the appearance of actual living" in The Struggle of the Modern.\textsuperscript{21} Spender's collective modern subconscious mind transforming actuality into grotesquerie is as potent in Eliot's poetry as it is in Dali's art.

The stylistic techniques of modern poetry were also influenced by the rationale of thinkers from various disciplines, such as, Freud, Planck, Bergson and Einstein. Their theories demonstrated that the view of reality yielded by common sense and surface reality was deceptive. The twentieth century artists, poets and painters, in search for a more thorough understanding of the psychic and material phenomena, strove to emulate the prevailing psychological, scientific and philosophical theories in their works. Thus, modern poetry like much of the prevailing scientific and philosophical theories, involved the revision of conventional ideas about such things as space, time and personality, the standards of evidence and relevance, and the force of intuitive and analogical thinking.

Eliot blended the new theories from various disciplines with the consciousness of the old tradition, and achieved an unprecedented completeness and penetration of vision. Just as Cubists reacting against the superficiality of Impressionism, sought greater completeness by stressing form and violence, Eliot reacting against the unsupported emotionalism of Tennyson and the Georgians sought it by employing history, irony, contrasts
and realism. The broad revolution of sensibility represented by experimental paintings takes within its folds literary artists such as T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens who fully participated in this artistic revolution through the experimental forms as practiced in poetry, drama and novels. Modernism thus prepares the way for experimental way to express the self, and the stylistic techniques, as practiced in modern poetry and painting drew attention to the power of images over imagination. In the present postmodernist, end-of-the millennium context, we are at liberty to structure our own personal reality from the fragments of images from everyday objects that are readily available to us within our own immediate surrounding. The attempts of the modernists to crumble the boundaries between kitsch and High Art has resulted in the innovations of method in the production of artists working in different artistic spheres (as the films, television, mass-media, music, photography, fashion-designing). This suggests that there is a relationship between them as one can draw striking analogies in the effects created by the artists in their production regardless of their artistic field of interest. Particularly with reference to poetry and painting, poets such as Eliot and Stevens utilize "poetry's privileged interpretive power," whereby, though the reader does not share in the act of beholding a painting, he/she can participate in the story of the beholder's consciousness. Bonnie Costello, however, makes a distinction between Eliot's and Stevens's approach to painting. According to Costello, Eliot used painting as a "focusing device," as "an image of the still moment,"
while "Stevens's poetry hardly resembles painting at all." "Stevens," says Costello, "does not abandon poetic genres for painterly ones... but borrows their associations." Despite such subtle distinctions what remains common to both the poets is the manner in which painterly allusions may be treated as artifacts in their works. Intertextuality here can be seen as a form of remembrance with affinities to scholarship and affinities to art forms. Thus modernist experimental techniques lead on to increasing experimentation in art form, in its search for a style in a highly individualistic sense.

The next segment explores Steven's affinity with experiments in the world of art; specifically the Surrealists techniques employed in creative works. Today, that is, in the end of the century context, experimentation in the creative sphere, has indeed led on to a kind of a "global" dilemma in the reaction to such experimental works of art that border on the bizarre; an issue I deal with in the next chapter.

**Surrealism and Wallace Stevens**

"The Irrational Element in Poetry" is the first of the essays in which Stevens made a conscious attempt to relate his poetic theory to the contemporary ideas. Written in 1936, this essay had been composed with surrealism in mind. Surrealism in America was at its peak during the 1936-37 art season in
New York. The Museum of Modern Arts much publicised exhibition 'Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,' opened on December 9, 1936. Harper's Bazaar in November 1936 heralded the exhibition by predicting that:

One sure thing, you aren't going to find a solitary place to hide from surrealism this winter. . . . Department stores have gone demented on the subject for their windows. Dress designers, advertising artists and photographers, short stories in the Saturday Evening Post, everywhere, surrealism.²⁴

It was this encounter with Surrealism that led to Stevens's choice of topic for the paper he delivered at Harvard on December 8, 1936, the evening before the opening of the Museum of Modern Art show. Part of this essay, "The Irrational Element in Poetry," was based on a review of 'The International Surrealist Exhibition' that had taken place in London that year. According to Glen MacLeod Peter Quennell's review of the exhibition in the New Statesman And Nation, "seems to have suggested to Stevens both the specific topic of 'the irrational element in poetry' and his general approach to it."²⁵ Though interested, Stevens was as yet uncertain of his own "aesthetic stance" at this point of time. MacLeod astutely points out about Stevens:

His starting point, like Quennell's, is surrealism and his basic approach is the same as Quennell's: to set surrealism in a broad context that will point out both its general value and its specific limitations. But unlike Quennell, Stevens is also concerned to place his own poetry in that broader context, and he is clearly determined to avoid being labelled a surrealist. So where Quennell speaks of the long tradition of "surrealism" in Western art . . .
Stevens substitutes the rather awkward phrase "the irrational element." The inadequacy of this phrase, which Stevens acknowledges in his first sentence, typifies the essay as a whole: it is "much too general to be servicable."\(^{26}\)

In fact, this particular essay represents Stevens's failed attempt to define his exact relation to surrealism. Though he did not succeed in prose to define his relation with a contemporary art form, he was more successful with poetry in resolving the issue. It was easier in poetry as surrealism sets poetry at the center of everything, and uses art to make poetry into something which could be seen and touched. Surrealist art avoided being literary by invoking poetry as the opposite of literature. It was supported by poets like Breton, Eluard and Aragon, who were well-informed collectors of art, and encouraged its technical innovations. The surrealists painters and sculptors were themselves poets. In there works, they were no "subjects" or "themes." The art of painting was conceived "as the science of juxtaposing colours in such a way that their actual image disappears and lets a poetic image emerge. . . . It is a matter of imagining images whose poetry restores to what is known that which is absolutely unknown and unknowable."\(^{27}\)

It was precisely by these principles and stimuli that Stevens hoped to resolve the troubling contradictions of our experience and to feel at harmony with the world around us. Moreover, by attempting to resolve the opposition between imagination and reality in his poetic theory and poetry, he was consciously embracing the basic tenets of Surrealism. In fact, Andre Breton considered this point fundamental to surrealist art theory, and so pertinent to
the world situation in 1942, that he called special attention to it in a lecture at Yale, in December of that year, entitled “The Situation of Surrealism Between the Wars”:

What I said in 1929, I believe now more than ever: “It is necessary to feel by all means, and to make known at all costs, the artificial character of the old antinomies . . . Everything leads us to believe that there exists a certain point of mind from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictory.” . . . For Surrealism - and I think this will be its glory someday - anything will have been considered good that could reduce these oppositions which have been presented as insurmountable.28

It was with the writing of 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' that Stevens managed to resolve his relationship with Surrealism. Inspiration for this came once again from the world of art. Around the time this poem was written, a few weeks later after the essay, the main attraction of the 1936-37 art season in addition to the MOMA art exhibition was the first major New York showing of Picasso. The New York Times reported that Picasso is "quite the kingpin of this surprise attack that has put so inescapable a Parisian stamp upon the first weeks of our present art season. You encounter him at almost every turn."29 Another key to Stevens's thinking about Picasso in that year is an article by Clive Bell, entitled simply "Picasso" in the New Statesman and Nation of May 30, 1936. Bell reports on the celebration of Picasso in Paris and the tremendous influence of the artist on the art scene where "all Paris
was talking of Picasso . . . and Cahiers d'art produced a special number, devoted to Picasso 1930-35, in which, for the first time, the public was given a sample of the painter's poetry."30 Picasso's poetry is the main feature of this issue, and it is this particular issue of Cahiers d'art which is the source of the quotation from Picasso that Stevens includes in 'The Man with the Blue Guitar':

Is this picture of Picasso's, this "hoard
Of destructions," a picture of ourselves,
Now, an image of our society? (CPWS, 173)

'The Man with the Blue Guitar' may also be discussed in terms of the aesthetic of cubism, as has been done by critics.31 The phrase "a hoard of destruction" does suggest the cubist elements of fragmentation and multiple perspectivism. Stevens had been familiar with cubism since the 1910s, but by the late 1920s it had ceased to be a vital movement, so it seems quite unlikely that Stevens would suddenly have been inspired by cubism in 1937. The term surrealism may be used accurately to describe the whole of 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' as it sets out to create new demands on reality with the expression of experience and signifies an approach to life that sets out to liberate the workings of the subconscious. The style of this poem is closely aligned to surrealism as both disrupt conscious thought processes by the use of irrationality and enigma and exploit the artistic possibilities of mind and matter, subject and object, imagination and reality.
According to Walter Benjamin, the language of surrealism is couched in terms of sound and image: "Language only seemed itself where sound and image, image and sound interpenetrated with automatic precision and such felicity that no chink was left for the penny-in-the-slot called 'meanings'. Image and language take precedence." Indeed, Stevens's poems are a constant flow of images which proceed in a series of seemingly disconnected short flights, each persisting for only a brief span of time like a "half-arc hanging in mid-air / Composed, appropriate to the incomplete" (CPWS, 309). His other long poems, 'Esthetique du Mal', or 'Notes towards a Supreme Fiction', or 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven', "keep close to the quality of life as it is," writes J. Hillis Miller, by proceeding "in a series of momentary crystallization or globulations of thought, followed by dissolution, and then re-conglomeration in another form. . . . Poetry is like a snowflake fluttering through the air and dissolving in the sea. It is radically bound to a time experienced as a sequence of present moments, each real and valid only as long it is present."

To be as true to life as possible, in his poems, Stevens portrays states of consciousness through seemingly unedited images which flash across the pages cinematically with neither start nor finish. The images in 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' are an example of the cinematic images that appear disconnected. Seemingly, the images appear to have no logical order and refuse to follow any formal pattern of a beginning, middle or end. As Stevens
declares: "One's grand flights, one's Sunday baths, / One's tootings at the 
weddings of the soul / Occur as they occur" (CPWS, 222). Walter Benjamin 
classifies surrealism more as an experience than a literary phenomenon:

This is not the place to give an exact definition of Surrealist experience. But 
anyone who has perceived that the writings of this circle are not literature but 
something else - demonstrations, watchwords, documents, bluffs, forgeries if 
you will, but at any rate not literature - will also know, for the same reason, 
that the writings are concerned literally with experiences, not with theories 
and still less with phantasms. And these experience are by no means limited 
to dreams, hours of hashish eating, or opium smoking. It is a cardinal error to 
believe that, of 'Surrealist experiences', we know only religious ecstasies or 
the ecstasies of drugs.34

Art, for the surrealists was an appropriate method to draw attention to the 
random experiences of life. Images in poetry and paint draw upon the 
randomness of such experiences to give significance to the random 
experiences. Thus, for the surrealist "art was not an end in itself, but a method 
of creating an awareness of all that is most precious, most secret and most 
surprising in life. They wanted to be neither craftsmen nor aesthetes; they 
wanted only to be 'inspired ones' and gamblers."35 Before surrealism became 
a concept of beauty which spread to all the plastic arts, it was a revolt against 
aesthetics in the name of total freedom of inspiration:

This revolt started in Paris in 1919, with the formation of the anti-literary 
review Litterature. The founders of Litterature were three young poets, Andre 
Breton, Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault, who were brought together
largely by their devotion to Guillaume Apollinaire, the poet who had died the year before. They came under the influence of the spontaneity of the poem-conversations of his stories, which he called 'philtres of fantasy', and of his quest for 'the new spirit' which he was nevertheless able to reconcile with his love for the curiosities of the past.36

It is in this context therefore, that it is important to understand Picasso's position in regard to surrealism and Stevens conception of him in 'The Man with the Blue Guitar'. Picasso was well represented in the Museum of Modern Art's 'Fantastic Art' show with thirteen works and the catalogue's capsule biography noted simply: "Surrealist period begins c.1925."37 In 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', the guitarist seems to be involved in an endeavour of blending the real with the ideal in the making of a "surrealist hero". According to MacLeod:

This thoroughly romantic conception of the artist as hero, sustained on the one hand by Picasso's unflagging creative energy, and on the other hand by Breton's confident theorizing, surely lies behind Stevens' idea of the hero in "The Man with the Blue Guitar." His guitarist is preoccupied with trying to create a hero who is both real and ideal, both Picasso himself (we might say) and Breton's heroic conception of him: "I sing a hero's head, large eye/ And bearded bronze, but not a man"(iii); "Ah! but to play man number one"(iii). . . . Thus, by identifying with Picasso in 'The Man with the Blue Guitar,' Stevens was, in effect, asserting his own superiority to the narrow restrictions of surrealism. He was adopting an aggressive stance toward surrealism, reversing the defensive posture that had weakened "The Irrational Element in Poetry." No longer would he worry about distinguishing his own practice from
that of the Surrealists. Instead, he would simply take upon himself the air of unquestioned preeminence for which Picasso was famous, in full confidence that any similarities between his own aesthetics and those of surrealism would only throw into relief the limitations of that movement.38

It is also worth noting that by identifying himself with Picasso, the leader of modern art, Stevens manages to bring into focus the poetry of the act of the mind, where imagination is brought into play as the borders between poet and artist, real and ideal, fiction and reality are effaced. Effacement of borders is a theme central to modern aesthetics - borders such as those between reality and imagination, art and non-art, fiction and reality. Surrealism and much contemporary art - Dada, Abstract Expressionism, Cubism sought to disturb the perceptions of the viewers by divorcing objects from their habitual context. Not only are the perceptions disturbed but the powers of the imagination are brought into play. For one thing in Stevens's poems like 'The Man with Blue Guitar', language is transformed into something both familiar and strange. Such poetry becomes a kind of a mindscape where the poet defines his voice and attitude. The result then is that the poem becomes "cerebral, urbane, playful and delights in disturbing all preconceived notions of the public"39 - all the qualities associated with Surrealism. For instance Stevens echoes Breton's very language when he brings up the same idea of "dream-engendered" objects in 'The Man with the Blue Guitar':

A dream (to call it a dream) in which

I can believe, in face of the object,
MacLeod attributes the atmosphere of 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' to André Breton's article in the same issue of Cahiers d'art entitled "Picasso poète". MacLeod also points out to the fact that Breton's purpose in writing this essay is to place Picasso in relation to his painting. Referring to an anecdote in Breton's article about a guitar, MacLeod feels that: "This anecdote is the donnéé, I think of Stevens's guitar image, and it suggests the specific ways in which 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' relates to Surrealism". He then proceeds to translate the relevant passage into English:

Several days ago I saw Picasso give, as a present to a woman who had just given birth, a miniature guitar; then, only after he had given it to her, he had the idea of writing a poem that he could pin on this guitar. At that instant, this is how he conceived of such a poem, before it had taken shape; the important thing is that his conception required the poem to be placed very precisely between what looked like a toy and what was the beginning of life.40

The image of the guitar in Stevens's poem and Picasso's guitar become symbols which celebrate the "incessant conjunction" between "things as they are" and "the blue guitar," between life and art, reality and imagination. Breton's special emphasis on seeing Picasso's poems in the particular place, where they are inscribed is the essence of Stevens's meditation in canto VI. In the following lines all the emphasis have been added.
A tune beyond us as we are,
Yet nothing changed by the blue guitar;

Ourselves in the tune as if in *space*,
Yet nothing changed, except the *place*

Of things as they are, and only the *place*
As you play them on the blue guitar,

*Placed* so, beyond the compass of change,
Perceived in a final atmosphere;

For a moment final, in the way
The thinking of the art seems final when

The thinking of god is smoky dew.
The tune in *space*. The blue guitar

Becomes the *place* of things as they are,
A composing of senses of the guitar. (CPWS, 167-8)

It is by giving a new *place* to a poem - wresting it out of its habitual context, where the poem is not intended to be read aloud or to be sung to the accompaniment of a guitar, it is, rather to be pinned to a guitar which is what makes Picasso's gesture rather surrealistic. The images in the poem allude to Picasso’s surrealistic gesture whereby a new *place* is given to the poem. The
pinning of a poem to a guitar displaces conventional notions of reality. The poem is wrested out of its habitual context and placed in a context where it is not intended to be read, or sung to the accompaniment of a guitar. MacLeod summarizing Breton's paradoxical meditation on the surrealist gesture alluded to in 'The Man with the Blue Guitar,' writes that:

Breton finds that Picasso's poem is only "potential" (and in fact is never written), it takes on the significance of a concrete object (by being pinned to the guitar). The actual, "concrete" guitar on the other hand, becomes an "ideal support for the poem taking on an emotional value."41

Breton's meditation on Picasso's guitar/poem and Stevens's imaginative structuring of an actual event and making it poetically significant, points to the fundamental relations to not only poetry but music too. It is after all, with the twanging of the guitar that:

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

The cities, children become the fields
And men in waves become the sea.

It is the chord that falsifies.
The sea returns upon the men,
The fields entrap the children, brick
Is a weed and all the flies are caught,
Wingless and withered, but living alive.
The discord merely magnifies.

Deeper within the belly's dark
Of time, time grows upon the rock. (CPWS, 171-2)

By putting everyday concepts into strange contexts, perceptions of the viewer are disturbed and brings into play the powers of the imagination. Such is the similarity between Marcel Duchamp’s ready-mades and the art form Stevens had put to his own use in ‘Anecdote of the Jar’. Both the poet and the painter desired to efface, as far as possible, the boundaries between art and the “real” objects in life. By doing so, the modern artists appear to absolve themselves of the charge of elitism which is often leveled at them. However, paradoxically, a certain sensibility is usually required to understand the logic of using old an shoe, bits of newspaper and even an ordinary, common-place urinal as works of art. It must be said though, that, modern art has played a major role in changing the perceptions of the people to the ordinary, everyday things, objects and events. Dwellers of urban places need not retire into the lap of nature, or arcadian rural surroundings to acquire poetic experience. Such experiences may be encountered walking downtown in the streets and bylanes of cities and even in the toilet, as part of the daily, necessary routines of life in general. Thus, the modernists to a large extent are responsible for the change in the ‘attitudes’ of the urban people to their mundane reality. A fresh perspective is given to ordinary, everyday things. As the borders
between art and kitsch dissolve, "new" forms of art take birth. The collage images find their following in "fusion" music and techniques derived from popular mediums such as the comic strip are transformed into visually powerful images in the works of a "postmodern" artist like Roy Lichtenstein's *Wham* (1963).

Modernists like Marcel Duchamp were to a large extent responsible for raising the status of ready-made objects. They fully explored and exploited the power of images on the human mind. One of Duchamp's famous was called *Fountain*, and it was entered in an exhibition in the Grand Central Palace on April 10, 1917. Duchamp entered this work pseudonymously. It was an ordinary porcelain urinal, placed on a pedestal and signed "R. Mutt." Duchamp gave it the title *Fountain*. The work was rejected but it raised the most fundamental aesthetic question - "What is art?" Duchamp's action also drew attention to the artist not as a craftsman, but as a
gifted perceiver whose choice of an object is seen as a creative act. In the creation of a ready-made, emphasis is thrown upon the object itself, placed in a strange environment and divorced from its practical function, so that it is viewed solely as a "thing" without relation to its use. Such an act allowed in Duchamp's own words to "reduce the idea of aesthetic consideration to the choice of the mind."42

It becomes increasingly obvious that the qualities of both Duchamp and New York Dada in 1910 and Surrealism are also characteristic of Stevens's poetry. As in art forms, so in poetry, the habitual expectations of the public are disturbed through a cerebral play of images. The other surrealistic quality of Stevens's poetry which is common to Eliot as well, is the idea of "dream-engendered" objects. The Surrealists turned to the irrational world of their unconscious and dreams to escape the monotony and frustrations of everyday life. Turning to an irrational world meant an effacement of all time barriers and moral judgments to combine disconnected dream experiences from the past, present and intervening psychological states. The Surrealists were concerned more with overlapping emotions than with overlapping forms. As Breton describes the function of the surrealist object in detail in his essay, "Crisis of the Object," published in Cahiers d'art in 1936:

In 1924... when I suggested that objects seen in dreams should be manufactured and put into circulation, I envisaged the assumption of concrete form by such objects. ... dream-engendered objects representing
pure desire in concrete form . . . the objectification of the very act of
dreaming, its transformation into reality.\textsuperscript{43}

Stevens shares with the Surrealists the fascination with the fundamental
interrelations between poetry and painting and uses images from paintings in
his poems to give an objective reality to "the very act of dreaming". By
alluding to Picasso's Minatour series in 'The Man with the Blue Guitar',
Steven focuses on the imaginative
use of violence in art. MacLeod
points out the manner in which
modernists like Picasso identified
with surrealism, so much so, that

\[\text{[In the famous etching,}\]
\[\text{Minotaumachia, reproduced in the}\]
\[\text{Picasso number of Cahiers d'art, the}\]
\[\text{minatour [is] an image of the artist}\]
\[\text{himself . . . The sexually charged}\]
\[\text{psychological complexity of this}\]
\[\text{etching suggests why the minotaur}\]
\[\text{was a figure dear to the Surrealists}\]
\[\text{generally . . . It is an image that}\]
\[\text{combines rational with irrational}\]
\[\text{forces, man with beast.}\textsuperscript{44}\]

Thus, the modernist shared a similar perception to the "reality" of their world
through the portrayal of such powerful images, an apt symbol of the times.
The conception of such an image was valued by the Surrealists and when Stevens speaks of wanting to "reduce the monster to / Myself" (CPWS, 175), it is clear that he is entertaining the surrealist idea of gaining power over the irrational by becoming the irrational:

That I may reduce the monster to
Myself, and then may be myself

In the face of the monster, be more than part
Of it, more than the monstrous player of

One of its monstrous lutes, not be
Alone, but reduce the monster and be,

Two things, the two together as one. (CPWS, 175)

Violence in poetic images was defended as a heroic response to the violence of modern life. Stevens in 1942, formulated a defense for violence in the artistic sphere: "It is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without." The third canto of 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' anticipates such a formulation as Stevens created a violent display that would have delighted a Surrealist like Giorgio De Chirico. The following lines, in fact, seem to capture the sinister mood in one of his paintings titled The Brain of the Child. The man in Chirico's painting along with the title, conveys a sense of a dangerous and threatening situation which appears in a dream-like image.
Ah, but to play man number one,
To drive the dagger in his heart,
To lay his brains upon the board
Its wings spread wide to rain and snow,
To nail his thought across the door
Its wings spread wide to rain and snow,
To strike his living hi and ho,
To tick it, tock it, turn it true,
To bang it from a savage blue
Jangling the metal of the strings.

(CPWS, 166)

In his later poems as well, such as, ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’, Stevens invokes the irrational aspects especially in the last section ‘It Must Give Pleasure.’ It is through the surrealist technique that Stevens endeavors to reduce the opposition between Imagination and Reality, as also recognising the dualities that exist in life and nature and their dependence on each other. It is precisely by identifying the irrational moments with surrealism that Stevens is able to reduce the oppositions between life and death, real and imaginary, past and future. In ‘Notes’ he recognises this fact:
Two things of opposite nature seem to depend
On one another, as a man depends
On a woman, day on night, the imagined
On the real. This is the origin of change.
Winter and spring, cold copulars, embrace
And forth the particulars of raptures come
Music falls on the silence like a sense,
A passion that we feel, not understand.
Morning and afternoon are clasped together
And North and South are an intrinsic couple
And sun and rain a plural, like two lovers
That walk away as one in the greatest body. (CPWS, 392)

Stevens, like Andre Breton’s conception of the surreal, strives for those “irrational moments” which are by definition utterly spontaneous. Stevens is opposed to deliberate contrivance of objects as revelation of the unconscious, and it is precisely on this score that he is dismissive of Salvador Dali who mechanically applied the surrealist art theory to bizarre juxtapositions and deliberately contrived to reveal the unconscious through such tactics. In the
But to impose is not
To discover. To discover an order as of
A season, to discover summer and to know it,
To discover winter and know it well, to find,
Not to impose, not to have reasoned at all,
Out of nothing, to have come on major weather,

It is possible, possible, possible. It must
Be possible.

According to MacLeod: "In making this crucial distinction, "to impose is not / To discover," Stevens was defining his central poetic aims in opposition to what he considered 'the essential fault of Surrealism'." Stevens makes his stance on Surrealism pretty clear in this passage from Opus Posthumous:

The essential fault of surrealism is that he invents without discovering. To make a clam play an accordion is to invent not to discover. The observation of the unconscious, so far as it can it can be observed, should reveal things of which we have previously been unconscious, not the familiar things of which we have been conscious plus imagination.

MacLeod also focusses on the close similarity between Breton's basic definition of surreality in the First Manifestation of Surrealism and Stevens's
paradoxical equation of "the real" with an absolute" in Canto VII of 'It Must Give Pleasure'. Reading this canto alongside Breton's definition of surreality in his Manifesto, MacLeod observes that: "This common search for an absolute truth led both Breton and Stevens to view aesthetic activity as equivalent to a mystical quest for the divine." Stevens's supreme fiction and Breton's surreal "transfiguring rays of grace" are both profoundly moving subjective experiences and are basically attempts to capture these irrational moments. They consciously attempt to systemize the working of the unconscious, and it is in this manner then, that Stevens's harmonious resolution of "Notes" in the concluding canto of 'It Must Give Pleasure', also relates closely to Surrealism:

They will get it straight one day at the Sorbonne.

We shall return at twilight from the lecture

Pleased that the irrational is rational,

Until flicked by feeling, in a gilded street,

I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo.

You will have stopped revolving except in a crystal.

(CPWS, 406-7)

It is through this "mundo of imagination" that Stevens attempts to express in rational terms an irrational experience, or on experience that is beyond the power of the reasoning mind. As Stevens writes in Necessary Angels:
It is the *mundo* of imagination in which the imaginative man delights and not the gaunt world of reason. The pleasure is the pleasures of powers that create a truth that cannot be arrived at by the reason alone, a truth that the poet recognizes by sensation.\(^49\)

On these very terms it is also the "mundo of imagination" which perceives the supreme fiction as forever fragmentary and elusive. It is the imagination however, that gathers up a number of fragmentary images creatively on canvas, paper or in a piece of sculpture to present different perspectives to reality. What images the artists select to project are of course, always subjective. Once these fragmentary images are gathered up imaginatively by the artist and put on public display, it is the audience's imagination which comes into play to determine the reality projected. In this respect reality does tend to become a "supreme fiction" and these modernist trends operating within the realm of creative fields such as poetry and paintings anticipate much postmodern thoughts which give primary importance to the fragmented, illusionary world of images as they begin to dominate the "reality" of the so-called "real world."

Thus, an analysis of Eliot's and Stevens's poetic images reveals the manner in which the poets manage to capture certain nuances that are virtual at the level of speech. Such images seem to invite the audience to actively engage in a "discourse" in the interpretation and understanding of their poetry. Discourse here may be defined as the "system of relations between parties engaged in communicative activity."\(^50\) Operating on such a level these
poems fixate what is said in a relatively permanent way in their struggle for meaning. In the interpretation, however, the permanent status is lost as fixation of any discourse becomes a text, open to many interpretations. Modernist approaches to reality refuses to abandon the struggle for meaning, yet poets like Stevens and Eliot leave their texts open-ended to express an autonomy and richness of meaning. Postmodernist perspectives on the other hand revel in the fragmentary and illusionary reality and understand it in "referential" terms. From such a perspective images presented to the viewer are in Derridean terms signs to be understood in relation and reference to another sign, but there is always an absence of an absolute signified. So a totalised system of absolute knowledge is denied. This appears to be the recurring theme common to both Eliot and Stevens as they structure reality out of the poetics of imagination and the "reality" of their structures is in relation to their cultural index - political, economic and social. Their poetry like much postmodern thought and art deals with urban concerns and their images are anything but neutral however aestheticised they may appear to be in their parodic self-reflexivity.
NOTES


2 Ibid., 160.

3 Ibid., 165.

4 Charles Altieri, Painterly Abstractions in Modernist American Poetry (New York, Cambridge Univ. Press) 34.

5 See Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (Great Britain: Faber and Faber, 1987) 68.


7 Kermode 209.


11 Ibid., 35-36.

12 Ibid.


14 Ibid., 92.

15 Ibid., 90.


18 Martin 94.

19 Ibid.


23 Ibid., 65-6.


26 Ibid., 24.


34 Benjamin 48-9.

35 Ibid., 8.

36 Ibid., 27.


38 Ibid., 65-6.

39 Ibid., 72.

40 Ibid., 68-9.

41 Ibid., 72.


43 MacLeod 72-3.

44 Ibid., 75.


48 MacLeod, "Surrealism and the Supreme Fiction," 36.

49 Stevens, *Necessary Angel*, 57-8.