

Chapter I

Basic Tenets of Modern American Poetry in the 1920s

Twentieth century was a time of huge industrial expansion in America, and many writers found the conditions for creating art unfavorable in a culture that was so focused on business and making money. The First World War had a tragic impact on aesthetic sensibility, especially among the young American writers or would-be writers who served in Europe, either as combatants or as members of the various ambulance corps. It imprinted itself across the writing of the 1920s and had much to do with the atmosphere of gloom and anxiety which haunted the period. For many American writers the war marked a cutoff point from the past and ultimate symbol for the dawn of modernity. In the new mood of nihilism and decadence the spirit of aesthetic revolt nevertheless survived despite the waning of political radicalism. Indeed political disarray and continuing acquisitive commercialism confirmed artists and writers in their suspicion that the national culture was puritanical, the repressive and indifferent to the arts and so they continued the revolt.

About social norms of this period, a new edition of *The Great Gatsby* published by Cambridge University Press writes in the chapter resource notes:

[...] a different manifestation of this post war mood was the preoccupation with living for the moment [...] and a disregard for the cultural standard of Europe which had previously dominated American thinking. (169)

Again talking about the characteristics of the age, Fitzgerald, in his novel *The Great Gatsby*, says: "[...] an age of excess" (10). Part of the struggle among modernist writers concerned the possibility or even desirability continuing to develop a specifically American poetic tradition. Many writers exiled themselves in cultures that

seemed more conducive to art, while others decided to stay and resist through their poetry. So, through the efforts of various writers, in the beginning of 20th century, American poetry followed different themes in the following years. During the period, so many poets engaged themselves with different subject matters in the poetry.

The era between the two World Wars, marked also by the trauma of the great economic depression beginning 1929, was that of the emergence of what is still known as modern literature, which in America reached an eminence rivaling that of the American Renaissance of the mid-nineteenth century. Many prominent American writers of the decade, following the end of World War first disillusioned by their war experiences and alienated by what they perceived as the crassness of American culture and its puritanical repressions, are often tagged as the lost generation.

The 1920s were the age when Puritanism was under attack, with the Protestant churches losing their dominant position. They were the age when the country ceased to be English and Scottish and when the children of later immigrants moved forward to take their place in the national life. It was the years when American culture became urban instead to rural and when New York set the social and intellectual standards for the country.

It was the age the American economy was ascending and life was easier than before. It was the age of automobiles which made the youngsters easy to throng to noisy parties and Jazz clubs. There was clear-cut break from traditional Victorian values and morals. Love transformed to sex and young girls got more freedom than was previously expected. Alcohol, though it was prohibited, took the position of national drink and money was easier to make.

In the early period of 1920s, American business flourished and there was boom in consumer spending amongst the upper and middle classes. This expressed

itself in tremendous self-confidence, even arrogance, and disregard for the cultural standards of Europe, which a type of music which not only reflects the crudeness and spontaneity of the period, but which is distinctly American.

The post-war American society was heading towards degeneration due to the crisis in traditionally established moral and social values. The war and its aftermath brought to full boil the simmering cultural restlessness of the post war years. The matter of love, kiss and sex were freely discussed not only among the friends and peers but among parents and guardians as well. Female sexuality was acknowledged more openly.

During the post world war era, the United States made a rapid progress in economy. The early effect of First World War upon the United States was much like that experienced during the period of French revolution and the Napoleonic wars. The war also introduced major changes in the lives of million of ordinary workers, farmers, blacks and women.

After the First World War, American literature reflected the swiftly changing economic, cultural and social conditions. An era of prosperity followed a brief period of post- war disillusionment. Then came nationalistic isolationism, social conservatism, and popular interest in any thing big, exciting, spectacular from crime waves to violent industrial strikes. This relatively prosperous era of superficial values, however, saw the development of the largest number of gifted writers in any decade of the twentieth century. For example Sinclair Lewis, whose realistic novels of social analysis satirized American life; Willa Cather, with her conservative, sincere, dignified portraiture of individual American characters; F. Scott Fitzgerald, who drew sharp picture of rebellious, maladjusted personalities; Willam Faulkner, dissector of the psychological peculiarities and disintegrating characters of individual and

families; Earnest Hemingway, realistic, skeptical, objective, deliberately tough in attitudes; John Dos Passos, strong critic of the capitalistic way of life.

The decade 1930 to 1939 witnessed a complete reversal in the social climate and creative scene: deep economic depression, rapid social reform, disillusion, pessimism, proletarian literature rose and then declined. American authors sought deeper, serious, lasting values.

The two World Wars brought into sharpest relief the widespread tension arising from a mixture of optimism and fear, loneliness and one-worldness. The writers seemed to be searching for something more fundamental than scientific or material progress and its concomitant commercialization of culture. During the Second World War, Hemingway, Steinbeck and journalists such as John Hersey and Ernie Pyle contributed excellent graphic reporting on the feeling and experiences of the common soldier at the front.

The post-war years have seen the continuance of uncertainty and tension, at home and abroad, stimulating and intensifying search for deeper values and basic ideals for the guidance of American life. A number of writers became expatriates and they lived out their lives abroad, but most of them came back to America in the 1930s. Earnest Hemingway's *The sun also rises* and Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the night* are novels that represent the mood and way of life of two groups of American expatriates. In "the radical 30s", the period of the great depression and of the economic and social reforms in the new deal inaugurated by president Franklin Delano Roosevelt, some authors joined radical political movements, and many others dealt in their literary works with pressing social issues of the time.

Much that is traditional still persists in modern poetry, but the new, revolutionary ways become more and more prominent, and it is clear that the future lies with them. Twentieth century poetry is a curious mixture of the traditional and the experimental of the old and the new. Moreover, modern poetry is poetry of revolt against tradition. It is confirmed that poetry is composed in greater output but with it poetry, to some extent, loses its intensity or quality as well. But it is not the case always. We cannot deny the fact that some of the modern poets are of outstanding excellence and the poems produced by them are of permanent and universal significance.

In comparison to poetry in the earlier 19th century, 20th century poetry became more individualistic as each poet writes according to his own mood or temper. There is other phenomenon too which is largely responsible to invite such mood in the poetry of this century. The tension due to the actual wars and threat of would-be wars made poets feel the world unfriendly. Depicting the scenario of 1920s or post-First World War situation, M.H. Abrams remarks:

The catastrophe of war had shaken faith in the moral basis, coherence and durability of western civilization and raised doubts about the adequacy of traditional literary modes to represent the harsh and dissonant realities of the post war world. (103)

The impact of ever advancing scientific speed brought new dawn to the poetry of 20th century. Increasingly, the poet turns away from the older romantic tradition of Emerson and others. The revolt is best exemplified in the poem of Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935) "The House on the Hill" where the house represents the New England and the Transcendentalism of Emerson and his followers. Once it was the

home of idealism and certainty. But the poem expresses the idea that Transcendentalists are all dead and gone away:

There is rain and decay
 In the house on the hill:
 They are all gone away,
 There is nothing more to say. (1-4)

This extract gives a clear cut glimpse of fading impression of the traditional values with the approach of new era. The impact of science in the poetry of this era is perceived by a famous poet of 1920s, T.S. Eliot, as, " [. . .] the heavy thud of bus, creaking of tram cars, the rattling noise of railway trains, the drone of an aeroplane, all these find their echo in modern poetry" (85). The squalor and dinginess of an industrial civilization are reflected everywhere in the works of poets like T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens and others.

After the Great War, poems appear in an ever increasing number on the destructive means of warfare. The imagery and vocabulary of the modern poet reflects the influence of science and scientific inventions. Realism in subject matter has led the modern poet to reject the highly ornate and artificial poetic style of the romantics in favor of a language which resembles closely the language of everyday life.

The new poetry is realistic and the poet's consciousness on the grim realities of life has shattered all illusions and romantic dreams. The tragedy of everyday life has induced in the poet a mood of disillusionment and so the poetry today is bitter. For example this disillusionment felt by the poets of this era is duly exemplified by T.S. Eliot in his poem "The Waste Land".

Poetry of 1920s has also been influenced by the techniques of music, sculpture, painting and other arts. The modern poet freely uses the vocabulary and

techniques of the other arts. However, it is the music which exercises the profoundest influence. The variations and repetitions in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" are like the movements of a symphony so much so that I.A. Richards calls his poetry as the music of ideas.

The use of slang and colloquialism has become common, the poetry of 1920s approximates more and more to those of common speech, the bonds of meter have been loosened and rules of rhyme or meter are not followed, stresses vary according to emotion and verse-rhythm is replaced by sense-rhythm. Under the influence of modern psychologists Sigmund Freud, Carl G. Jung and Bergson, the probing into, and the depiction of the sub-conscious and the unconscious, has become commonplace. Emphasis has shifted from the externals to the rendering of the soul or psyche.

The impact of various *-isms* that appeared from the very beginning of 20th century can be felt in the poetry of 1920s and 30s as well. Imagism, Surrealism, Impressionism, Dadaism are some of such innovations in the era. The imagists under the leadership of Ezra Pound aimed at clarity of expression through the use of hard, accurate and definite images to convey their ideas and emotions. The impressionists seek to convey the vague, fleeting sensations passing through their minds by the use of a novel imagery and metaphor. The surrealists try to express whatever passes in the subconscious, without any control or selection by the conscious. The innovations increase the complexity of modern poetry.

Besides the influence of science, religion, and mysticism, many other influences are at work on the modern poet. There has been profound interest in the poetry of seventeenth century poets like John Donne and others who were named chiefly as the "Metaphysical poets". John Donne's poems were published in the

greater abundance to mark a need of the revival of its poetic tradition in the time. The volumes of Donne's poetry were published in the wake of 1920s as well. Had T.S. Eliot not been there, the poetry of Donne's type would not have come in the consciousness of 20th century poets so early. T.S. Eliot took an interest in almost every feature of Donne's poetry and advocated that genuine poetry should be like Donne's. The concept of unified sensibility the fusion of thought and feeling and the idea of objective correlative are the products of Eliot's praise of metaphysical poetry. After Eliot, Donne has come to be seen as a model to imitation by 20th century poets.

This trend of revival largely lies in the interest of the poets who wanted to treat poetry for its own sake. What Eliot's mentor Ezra Pound admired in the poetry was the refined use of different images and symbols. The same rich use of different images and symbols marks the distinction of metaphysical poets as well.

During the 1920s American writers expressed their dissent from a materialist America by expatriation (as I have already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter) by engaging in experimental aesthetic adventure, by exploring new forms and joining in the excitement of surrealism and revolution of the word. The age is rich for its abundant production of poetry by the Black Poets under Harlem Renaissance. The Black American poets like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay etc. produced many experimental poems which enriched American poetry. In such poetry, they expressed their disillusionment and shattered dreams. To get their goal, poets break away themselves from the rules and regulations of traditional American poetry. The same kind of vein in poetry continued even after the 1920s.

Imagism and Symbolism in American Poetry

Around 1914, Ezra Pound and others, produced economic poems, mainly characterized by their use of a few, hard, clear images. Pound's two – line poem "In a

"Station of the Metro" is one of the finest examples of his poetic idea: The apparatus of these faces in the crowd/Petals on a wet, black bough (1-2).

The main idea behind the poem is that Pound wants to represent his impression of the scene. It is a terse poem; presenting just the scene and a poetic response and avoiding any comment or development of an argument. Pound insists both on direct realm of the thing and that every word must count. It is in free verse as if it is an untainted response. The major feature however is the juxtapositions of one impression with another so that the figurative image in the second line interacts with the observed image in the first. Imagist poems are as simple in structure as this: a hard, precise description of the scene, then a metaphoric comparison. Imagist techniques are a significant aspect of the work of Pound and much of Wallace Stevens'. Talking about the characteristics of an imagist poem M.H Abrams remarks as:

[. . .] abandoning conventional poetic materials and versification is free to choose any subject and to create its own rhythms, uses a common speech, and presents an image or vivid sensory description that is hard, clear and concentrated. (122)

As Abrams remarks, Imagism represents, in a part a reaction against the weakest sort of romantic poetry where the poet might indulge his or her imagination in a verbose expression of personal fantasies. It reveals a desire to get back to the object which is there in the world. The real significance of imagism, however is that it represents the start of modern poetry. In this regard again Abrams remarks:

Imagism was too restrictive to endure long as a concerted movement, but it served to inaugurate a distinctive feature of modernist poetry.

Almost every major poet from the 1920s through the middle of the

present century, it including W.B Yeats, T.S Eliot and Wallace Stevens, manifest some influence by the imagist experiments with the representation of precise, clear images that are juxtaposed without specifying their inter relations. (123)

As the poets in modern era found the one world fragmented into many pieces, they actually found techniques of expression, as indicated by imagists, very matching images as suitable. The deliberate small scale of an imagist poem suggests that reality can only be apprehended in isolated glimpses and then only indirectly through an image as opposed to any sort of logical analysis.

In addition, Imagism marks a new self – consciousness about poetry, an insistence that the methods of writing need reforming. A high degree of form as innovation is something that is characteristics of much modern literature often are stopped short at the surface, struck mainly by the experimental of difficult quality of the writing,. In Pound's poems we do not merely accept the poetical idea. We stop at the surface, asking why the poet is writing in this strange way. The kind of question such a poem implicitly asks how a poet can or should write about life, and unusual and difficult modern poetry often forces us to consider this sort of question. Such self consciousness is not just experiment for its own sake; on the contrary, the problems the poet is having in finding a technique adequate to describing the world force us to reconsider what reality is like.

Among the various innovations in the technique of twentieth century poetry a movement namely Symbolism marks the most influential one. Symbolism as a literary movement has come in the wake of a group of French poets of the mid-century of the late 19th century. Yet it flowered in the modernistic sway of early 20th century poets

that includes chiefly Wallace Stevens. The symbolists try to avoid sentimentality, rhetoric and such other elements.

The underlying philosophy of the symbolists was a conviction that transient objective world is not true reality. They believed that the inner reality could only be suggested; to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create-was their understanding about the symbol in the poetry.

Many American writers were influenced by the Symbolist Movement. In the Romantic period in America a symbolist procedure was prominent in the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville the prose of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau and poetic theory and practice of Edgar Allan Poe. Emerson says the perception of symbols enables man to see both poetic construction of things and the primary relation of mind to matter and that this same perception normally creates the whole apparatus of poetic expression. He is identifying poetry with symbolism, symbolism with a mode of perception and symbolic perception with the vision of a symbolic structure in the real world and of a symbolic relationship between nature and mind. In the same vein, writers like Melville, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, Arthur Miller etc. can be named as the writers influenced by Symbolist Movement. Thus, Symbolism and its study has been an important part of modern American literature.

Influence of Contemporary Poetic Milieu on Stevens

Among 20th century American poets, Wallace Stevens is one of the important and influential poets. Like many of his contemporaries, his work was strongly influenced by various innovations of his time. Like Earnest Hemingway and John Don Passos, he became disillusioned with post – war society and saw its values as artificial and corrupt. Such disillusionment and the effect of cultural degradation can

be seen in his poetry. His poetry, particularly at the start, seemed to be disassociated from the prosaic, the everyday. It made use of luxurious backgrounds, exotic place names, foreign words and phrases. The colour and texture of Stevens' settings were compared by critics with impressionistic paintings which may, in fact have had some influence upon them. His literary alliances, apparently, were also exotic with the French symbolists of late 19th century.

Wallace Steven's poetry, though posited a Romantic's belief in poetry, or more perceivably in the regenerative and redemptive act of imagination, he conceived his role as a poet as his contemporary William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore, both of whom were influenced by Pound's Imagism and he was different in the use of image to provoke the actual impressions.

The inclination of Wallace Stevens towards the Symbolism can be traced from the following abstract which as Ruland and Bradbury state:

Stevens began, in fact, as a Pterian Decadent and a dandy: the novelty of the poets radiant and productive atmosphere is the morality of the right sensation he once said the few student poems he published in the "Haward Advocate" drew for tone on the more flambuoyant symbolists like Verlaine and Laforgue and display what Samuel French Morse calls "an interest in the cosmic irony of the quotidian and a glance at the grotesque. (292)

The critics Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury documented above notation about Stevens after closely studying him. Stevens was much influenced by this symbolic movement that he took the titles of his some famous poems from French poetry. For eg. "Emperor of Ice Cream", "The Comedian as the Letter C", and, "The Man with the Blue Guitar", these titles came from the French poetry and French

paintings. In the fashion of symbolists, the poems are celebrations of the imagination in its secular sensual condition. The world of the imagination was presented as a carnival world drawing.

Though it has not been much discussed elsewhere about the relationship between T. S. Eliot and Stevens, they, being, contemporary quite resemble in the tradition of introducing symbols in their poetry. T.S. Eliot was also deeply influenced by the French Symbolism. T.S. Eliot's poetic mentor Ezra Pound was also influenced by this movement. Though Eliot was much influenced by Imagism, he was particularly interested in French symbolists like Baudelaire.

The interest to review the Metaphysical poetic tradition is awakened partly by experimental tradition of Donne and partly by the need to begin a new kind tradition in the poetic scenario of 20th century, Wallace Stevens uses the language which resounds Donne's language. The argumentative composition of poetry as in the example of his best poem "Sunday Morning" resembles largely with the Donne's tradition. The speaker in the "Sunday Morning" takes part in the discussion with women who longs for divine protection. The poem begins creating a dramatic situation as in the poetry of Donne. The abrupt beginning of John Donne's poetry can be felt in the poetry of Stevens as well. In the "Emperor of Ice-cream", the speaker says: Call the roller of big cigars (1). The same kind of beginning can be read in the poetry of Donne. The "Holy Sonnet 14" begins with: Batter my heart (1).

The juxtaposition of Stevens' poetry with that of the 17th century poet Donne exemplified how the former was impressed by experimental awareness of the latter. Besides, the trend of metaphysical poetry was interestingly revived during the 1920s. The same kind of quest in the poetry of Donne can be felt in the poetry of Stevens.

Certainly, it was an era of experimentation in poetic language which from the beginning of the century began.

Wallace Stevens attracted by the impersonal poetic tradition of Eliot followed the same kind of trend in his poetry as well. The dominant figure in modern poetry from the 1920s through the middle of the century, in part because of his status as a critic and philosopher was the poet T.S. Eliot. In his landmark essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), Eliot defined poetry as an escape from emotion and personality, a definition that subsequent British and American poets have embraced, argued with, and denounced, argued in such a vigorous fashion that it may be useful to consider it as a linchpin of modernism. True poetry according to the poet and critic John Crowe Ransom only wants to see the world to see it better. Poetry, he believed, is a superior form of knowledge which gives us the fullness of human experience, not just the facts and abstractions that suffice for knowledge in scientific age Ransom was the leading light of the fugitives, a group of southern Aggrandizes poets and critics formed at Vanderbilt University in the 1920s; who're distinctly at odds with northern industrialization and its glorification of science and editorial decisions he mapped a conservation course across the literary landscape; and in "The New criticism", he identified a style of criticism founded or lose reading of the text supersede from any consideration of the social political, or biographical context of its creation which held way in academic quarters for an entire generation.

Wallace Stevens' poetry too stands, on this same principle of impersonality. He, as a creator of his poems, has enabled himself to remain completely detached from the poem. He does not pour his subjective emotions in his poetry rather in order to achieve the universal quality he truly follows what Eliot remarks escape from emotion and personality. Marie Borroff remarks:

An important part of our impression of what are characteristics in any poet is our sense of a certain degree of distance between him, as he appears in his works and us as readers. In Stevens, we are made aware of a deliberate impersonality, a refusal to use the poem as a vehicle for the direct outpouring of emotion. (7)

The close reading of Stevens' poetry clearly proves what Borroff pointed out. Indeed, the quality of impersonality dominates Stevens' poetry. This impersonality impresses us not as the bloodlessness of a shallow temperament, but as a restraint the reserve of a man who will accept us as fellows in a communal intellectual enterprise but, has no interest in making us his confidants. The personal feeling of such a man is judged the deeper for the infrequency of their expression; in Stevens their expression is both rare and memorable.

It is this same restrained and profound tenderness that suffuses "To an old Philosopher". Stevens discovered a rich new vein of poetic material untapped by poets for whom the Eliotean doctrine of "Impersonality" is the finest technique to apply while creating poetry.

The 20th century began with the experiments in different same sorts of techniques. The experimental principal involved the break away from traditional imagery, punctuation, syntax and theme as well. Indeed any of the formal rules and elements of writing can be sent or disjointed to suit the purpose. Definitely, the influential movement of 1920s-stream of consciousness is also advocated in the poetry of 1920s which can be felt in the poetry of Stevens as well. The fragmented style of Eliot impressed Stevens as well. Wallace Stevens' first volume of collected poem *Harmonium* which contains the principal themes of Stevens' writing, has followed the same mood of writing of the era or the touch of modern experimental style.

Chapter II

Poetry as Supreme Fiction

The product of imagination, Stevens assumes, is the supreme fiction. He regards it as the higher form of imaginative creation. He uses the phrase "Supreme Fiction" for the first time in his short poem, "To a High Toned Christian Woman". He writes in the same poem, in the beginning while addressing a woman referred in the title of the poem as:

Poetry is the supreme fiction, Madam;
Take the moral law and make a nave of it.
And from the nave build haunted heaven. Thus,
The conscience is converted into palms. (1-4)

According to Stevens (the) poetry is the work of imagination, so is God. He believes in supreme fiction and supreme fiction is found in the power of imagination. It becomes the object of the poetry. For the poetry of a fiction, one must consider the meaning of a fiction. The addressee of the poem quoted above would have thought a fiction as something false or feigned, as in one sense it is, but the first meaning of fiction as one knows from its origin in Latin "finger" is something shaped, formed or imagined. To Stevens a fiction meant a work of art or significant form. Through such forms one encounters reality and presents it.

As the speaker of the poem, mentioned above, Stevens, and the woman (referred in the title), both agree with the idea that poetry is the creation of mind which can hold the position of religion. Stevens argues as religion is a fictive thing so is the poetry. Furthermore, according to the poetic principle of Stevens, poetry is informed by the reality, the change in the reality, therefore it has even higher place than the religion itself. In a sense it is a product that is supreme fiction.

According to Stevens there is no absolute or final way in which we can choose between a heaven conceived by Christian thought and a heaven conceived by an altogether opposite frame of mind. The opposite frame of mind is the secular way of thinking according to which heaven exists here on this earth, and not in some other world. The heaven built by the latter process gives real pleasure than we get from the heaven shaped by religion.

In several poems (of *Harmonium*), Stevens takes pleasure in mocking at religious orthodoxy. He, in such poems, dismisses Christian doctrine as a fiction and affirms the human need for fiction. Creating fiction is the essential gift of the human mind and believing those fictions which do not guarantee the pleasure in reality is the curse of human mind. So he argues to employ imagination to make a product that can give the pleasure as we seek. Addressing a woman in "Another Weeping Woman", he says:

Pour the unhappiness out
 from your too bitter heart,
 which grieving will not sweeten
 Poison grow in this dark
 it is in the water of tears
 its black blooms rise
 The magnificent cause of being,
 the imagination, the one reality
 in this imagined world
 Leaves you
 with him for whom no phantasy moves,
 and you are pierced by death. (118)

Stevens believed in the creative artifice of human imagination. As the poetry, a fictive product of human mind can satiate the people of post World War era. As remarked by Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury on Stevens' poems:

[...] display a quest that runs from the mood of 1905 decades to the preoccupation with the fictive that drew so many after the 2nd World War, a quest for what Stevens called the supreme fiction, in a post religious world where, he said, after one has abandoned a belief in God, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption. It was Stevens' sense of the imagination's restorative force. (296)

As a poet, Stevens regards poetry can heal the wounds of contemporary people. His life long conviction that poetry and poets must take the place of religion and priests to provide form and meaning for human life is implicitly working in all his poems. As observed by Marie Borroff:

The search for a truth acceptable in the present as equally impeded by the human craving for happiness, that habit of wishing which generates consoling falsehood and leads us to take refuge from the tragedy of reality in sentimentalism. The concept of beneficent providence and of a personal life after death have their origins in this weakness; the truth [...] we live in a island solitude unsponsored as expressed by Stevens in his poem Sunday Morning. (9)

As we see "Sunday Morning" advocates this kind of faith implicitly. The first task to establish the affirmation of such poetic regime, he tries to dismantle the established regime of religion as he does in his another short poem, "To a High Toned Christian Woman" as well. Since religion, in his view had failed to provide a

meaningful order, poetry would have to do so. This idea would receive extended treatment in works such as "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction".

Affirmation of Fictive World of Poetry

In an age of disbelief, it is for the poet to supply the satisfaction of belief, in his measure and in his style; Stevens remarked it as his quest for the settlement of aesthetic belief in the context of post World War situation. His quest began from the early phase of his writing and persisted till the end of his career. The powerful faith of Stevens resulted in the artistic faith of the poet in the world of poetry. As a poet he finds in the imaginative experience of the world only pain and terror, he posits evil as the source of imaginative reality. The same kind of experience can be held in the supreme fiction. So, as the belief which we express in our day to day life style can be pursued in the supreme fiction, we can have faith on it as Stevens advocates.

Earlier I've already mentioned that Stevens negates the hold of religion for holding the belief in the world of supreme fiction. To say that this poet is a naturalist rejecting the orthodox systems of Christianity or any other belief is not to say that a certain type of theology would be irrelevant here. It is true that from *Harmonium* onwards Stevens frequently treats supernatural religions with irony or otherwise indicates his disbelief in them. He sets his poetry in the regime of this world with an iconoclastic perspective. He rejects militant Puritanism. But in many poems of Stevens, he appears appreciating the creative aspects of Christianity in an aesthetic manner. Even in the fiction of religion Stevens sees the perfect blossom of human imagination. In "The Men that are Failing" from *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, he employs the persona of a sleeper awakening to a vision in the darkness of his catastrophic room, a metaphor for the mind. Dominated by the fierce moonlight of the imagination he finds the pillow on which he gazes more than "sudarium" and there

confronts the tortured visage of a man who at once represents Christ and all other martyrs of ideals. Christ is recognized here as the martyr of ideals. The human redemption is possible only through charms of this world. But the charms of human world must be confronted with the imaginative power of human mind as Stevens asserts.

It may very well be impossible as J.Hills Miller asserts in his *Poets of Reality*, "[. . .] to find a single systematic theory of poetry and life in Stevens" (259). Some of the prevailing critical views of Stevens' work characterize him as an atheist whose work affirms the firm dignity of the merely natural man. David Jarraway in his book "*Wallace Stevens and the Question of Belief*", writes about a Stevens figured as a proto deconstructionist, insisting on "[...] Stevens in insistence on dismantling the logocentric models of belief" (311). The focus of reading in these critics concentrates on how Stevens tended to deny the imposition of godly rules in favour of the rule the fiction of human imagination.

The final affirmation of Stevens in his short poem "Sunday Morning" is to create the new possibilities through the affirmation of death. It appeals a defense of what I've said earlier creation of human imagination. Michael Bryson in his article "*The Quest for the Fiction of An Absolute: The Mystic's movement from Ancient Sacrifice to supreme fiction in Wallace Stevens*" remarks regarding the death of traditional notion of God and religion as:

[. . .] Sunday Morning in the context of a later poem like Notes Toward a supreme Fiction suggests, I believe, a similar but more complicated answer. Sunday Morning appears in this context, as a brush fire a destruction that serves but as the prelude to a new creation, the death

that leads to new life, new possibilities... and the death God is the death of a particular idea of God. (30)

This leads us to accept the idea of Stevens as a poet; he always strived to celebrate the aesthetic value of art. Art or the poetry is the creation of human imagination. Human beings for the search of some bliss made the fiction of religion but such fictions are now in the process of being replaced. Human imagination sings the songs of human reality and takes them into the different realm. And the same fiction can replace the mode of earlier fiction. So to quote again Stevens saying in "To a High Toned Christian Woman" as "Poetry is the supreme fiction Madame" would be an appreciation of Stevens' aesthetic celebration.

On this affirmation of Stevens Harold Bloom makes remarks about "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" as:

The tentativeness of Stevens' title is neither humility nor irony for the poem is an attempt at a final belief in a fiction known to be a fiction, in the predicate that there is nothing else. The fiction is broadly poetry itself [. . .] The "Notes" move toward the creation of a fictive hero who quite simply became the real and thus bring to a climax the whole movement of poetry in the Romantic tradition. (77)

In the conception of Bloom, Stevens has deep reverence in the fictive musing of human imagination. "Notes" opens with eight lines of dedication, appropriately celebrating the relationship of loving friendship, for in the mutuality of such confrontation there appear all the characteristics of the supreme fiction. The love of friends, as a marriage of reality and the imagination depends upon an abstraction in Stevens' sense of that word and clearly is subject to the necessities of change and of pleasure that serve further to define Stevens version of the Romantic imagination.

For the poets like Stevens poetry is created out of the interweaving of pure imagination and bare reality. To attain this moral or artistic synthesis, a series of rejections is necessary. The most important of these is the rejection of traditional religion. This is constantly implied in Stevens though it is true that he rarely states his lack of belief without some ambiguity preferring no doubt to remain rather beyond rejection of a faith to which he extends considerable sympathy. Stevens writes of men momentarily metamorphosed into angels. But he does not believe in angels, necessary though they may be as symbols for the moral life. When he speaks of God as "this world's capital idea" (7) or declares that "God and imagination are one"(14) it seems evident that for Stevens God is a being whose essence does not involve his existence. And only a man who has surrendered all residual belief in religion could suppose that poetry and the arts are a genuine alternative to religion that they offer in their measure, a compensation for what has been lost.

Wallace Stevens maintained that the poet's role is to lead men out of their world into the world of the imagination, the supreme fiction, that escape is not evasion but entrance into a wider and richer sphere than the violent order which is our disorder. Stevens' matter and manner had relevance to one of his major concerns-concern about the loss from man's life of belief and direction. Stevens' first poems dealt chiefly with a nostalgic longing for beauty and perfection which are not to be found in the commonplaces of the workaday world with increasing frequency in his later poems, though, he has been interested in finding solutions to this tragic problem. The reconciliation between man and his environment, he has said repeatedly, may be achieved by a sensuous unity with nature or-more important-by the achievement of a poet's insight. For the power of the poet, he has explained, derives from the fact that

he creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing which we are unable to conceive of it.

According to Stevens a poet's aim also is to depict reality but a poet cannot help using his imagination while depicting reality. At the same time imagination itself depends upon reality because the imagination does not operate in a vacuum. Imagination is indispensable for the poet because, without imagination, the poet cannot create poetry which is the supreme fiction. And reality is indispensable to him because, in the last resort, reality is the raw material for the writing of poetry.

Wallace Stevens' perception of reality is something different than ours. He sees as there is no inherent order in the reality so it is the task of supreme fiction to create a kind of harmony there. In his short poem "Anecdote of the Jar", Jar symbolizes an art, a product of imagination and wilderness symbolizes nature which is reality. According to this poem, Jar seems to impose some kind of order upon the slovenly wilderness. This product of the artist's imagination possesses the capacity to organize a chaotic stage of affairs that is wilderness. In other words, Jar is necessary for wilderness or art is necessary for nature. It means imagination is necessary for reality. Art and nature need each other like the imagination and reality need each other.

Another poem namely "The Idea of order at Key West" also suggests the same thing. According to this poem, the woman's song which is the symbol of imagination imposes order upon the sea, the sky, the boat in the harbour which is the symbols of reality. Stevens is often more completely successful in his shorter poems as in the happily named "Holiday in Reality". For there, to express his conviction that the artist must always make a fresh and personal discovery he brings into play his lightness and ebullience.

After all, they knew that to be real each had
 To find for himself his earth, his sky, his sea
 And the words for them and the colours that they possessed
 It was impossible to breathe at Durand Ruel's. (4-7)

The sense of unexpected deadness that can overtake you in a gallery, that can make a museum and mausoleum akin, is what Stevens' develops in the second of the three propositions for his supreme fiction. He is at his best in those poems which embody his conviction that a work of art is a moment of stasis out of the movement equilibrium as difficult as it is delicate. The heaviness of spirit that can descend from the period pieces in Durand Ruel's is because nothing had happened because nothing had changed.

Stevens knows that a poem is not proposition, or, as he puts it in "Man Carrying Thing":

The poem must resist the intelligence, almost successfully. He conveys the value of change most compelling, not by direct statement, but by such devices as his wonderfully effective recurrent symbol of the endlessly fascinating movement of clouds. His greatest resource has always been in the gaiety of his language, in the way he employs also the nonsensical and the grotesque to break through the restrictions of the fixed and dry rational into what he calls the *lingua France et Jocundissima*. (Qtd. Matthiessen 71-74)

All of Stevens' later work has been written against the realization that we live in a time of violent disorder. The most profound challenge in his poems is his confidence that even in such a time even on the verge of ruin a man can recreate afresh his world out of the unfailing utilization of his inner resources. The value of the creative

imagination, of supreme fictions in their fullest abundance, lies in the extension, even to the point of grandeur, that add to our common lives.

Stevens' extreme originality keeps him apart from the general public and official recognition. Only a small group knew his genius or dimly felt greatness; and he pursued his indefatigable labour in relative obscurity. In his early years, he felt some influences; but in his mode of thinking, in his imagination, and in his artistic taste, all his main decisions are solely his own. He invented or recreated for himself all that he set his hands on. His drawings bear the stamp of a characteristic and immediate vision. His poetry deals in the subtlest kind of symbolism with a skill that cannot be matched. His mind works in open defiance of all the normal laws of logic, the language which he speaks, in the later part of his work, is sometimes unintelligible. His thought, powerfully creative and free from all common place forms, has shaken itself loose from the most necessary conventions. It moves and has its being on the extreme edge of the thinkable, or even beyond, just as his eager expression will cross the bounds of the inexpressible.

Stevens gives great importance to imagination, and makes no appeal to reason. According to him, imagination is important faculty in man. Reason, on the other hand, is the wild beast, the malignant spirit from which we must escape. It inhibits and kills the imagination. That is why; no rational approach can help us to understand Stevens' poetry. It is only through his imaginative faculty that a reader can construe the imaginative flights of Stevens. In the final sentence of "Imaginations as value", he writes that the chief problems of any artist, as any man, are the problems of the normal. But at the same time he also emphasizes the artist's needs, in order to solve (those problems) every thing that the imagination has to give. In "Necessary Angle", he explained his vision of poetry. For him, poetry was the voice of the imagination;

reality was not the object but the imagination perception of the object in all its relations. The poem, as the voice of imaginative insight, illuminates things through subtly ordered and toned ideas; so that the marriage of things and idea, man and circumstances is made visible. In the same book, he further said that the poet must be able to abstract himself and also to abstract reality, which he does by placing it in his imagination. The imagination is the only genius. It is intrepid and eager and the extreme of its achievement lies in abstraction.

In the poem "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet", he represents the poet as saying, "I am imagination in a leaden time and in a world that does not move for the weight of its own heaviness." After that he will console himself with the reflection that "We live in the mind", and if we do, "we live with the imagination" (140). In "The Noble Rider and the sound of words" he speaks of the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality, "a violence from within that protects us from a violence without". In this sense the work of the imagination is "a vital self assertion in a world in which nothing but the self remains, if that remains" (117). And again in this sense the imagination is the only force that defends us against the terror of reality. The powers of the imagination appear differently in different settings. The imagination is sometimes the inventive will, sometime the constructive will, very often the will to order, the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the apposite of chaos in chaos.

Stevens had his own vision and he lived in a world which was entirely his own. What he saw was something inexplicable in the ordinary words and phrases. It was therefore inevitable for him to arrange visible symbols of invisible realities that saw through his strange visions.

Chapter III

Stevens' Theory of Act of Imagination on Reality

Wallace Stevens' poetry as well as his theory of poetry is constantly informed by the relationship between reality and imagination. He concerns himself with the structure of reality; and with the way in which man knows his world and finally with the transfiguration of that world as imagination acts upon it.

A primary aspect of transfiguration of reality in Stevens is the effect of the senses on extra- mental reality. In this regard Brian Callahan remarks on Stevens' poetry as, "[. . .] for Wallace Stevens, reality is an abstraction with many perspectives possibilities" (59). The interpretation of Stevens' *The Necessary Angel* further intensifies his notion of reality. Again Brian Callahan remarks:

In the *Necessary Angel*, Stevens paraphrases Simone Weil's coinage of decreation as the change from created to uncreated or from created to nothingness. Stevens then defines modern reality as, 'reality of decreation, in which our revelations are not the revelations of belief, but the precious portents of our own powers. (750)

Stevens relates, through poetry, a destruction of traditional reality leading to a realization that the meaning of a poem is not truth, always recognizing that the poem is poet's perception of reality. This perception of reality is based on experience and poetic skill. His long poem "The Man with the Blue Guitar" allows him to change perspectives and create abstract realities. According to Stevens, no one sees quite the same rose as any one else does, there is, in fact, a sameness of perception. In "Somber Figuration", he remarks that reality is that about reality which impresses us. In "Bouquet of Roses" in sunlight Stevens phrases the process of change in reality as it appears in the different observer's eyes. The fundamental idea of Stevens is to

suggest that the reality as such is not a matter of fixed identity rather he perceives it as changing according to the perception. In his famous poem "Metaphors of Magnifico", he suggests there are many realities as the number of observers. About the relationship between poetry, the product of poets imagination is described by Stevens in his prose work *There Academic Pieces* as "[. . .] if we desire to formulate an accurate theory of poetry, we find it necessary to examine the structure of reality, because reality is the central reference for poetry" (2).

Much of the philosophical extract quoted above establishes Stevens' basic idea about poetry. He conceives resemblance between things as one of the structures of reality. The things in the real world are connected to each other by the means of resemblance. Resemblance between things binds them with each other. It is the base of appearance. According to Stevens' metaphor as a symbol for the single aspect of poetry creates resemblance which creates the relationship between one structure of reality and the production of imagination.

Stevens exhorts his readers to forsake the false happiness of this world. It is clearly quoted in above passages that Stevens' poetry is informed by the touch of reality. But reality in broader term as signifying chain gets transformed when it is struck by the imaginative blaze of poet's mind. Stevens through his own technique invites his readers to participate in a kind of secular asceticism where one can get an opportunity to be rejoiced by refined pleasures. These pleasures are accumulated from the celebration of the real world.

When imagination starts to act upon the reality, it reduces the poverty of real life. What I mean to say, Stevens is pre-occupied with the personal tragedies of daily lives. So in a very Keatsean aesthetic way Stevens advises his reader to regard the snow of winter one must have the mind of winter. To get final peace in the heart, we

must have the power of imagination. Because he understands whatever the people say knowing is satisfied by the wearing of imagination. Believing in the same principle, Stevens makes the woman of "Sunday Morning" believe in the world of imagination. The woman is exhorted to practice a complete identification of a complete self with the natural landscape in these seasonal changes. She is to experience passions not in rain but of rain, "moods" of winter will similarly be both occasioned and defined by watching the snow as it falls.

The relationship of poet's imaginative power and the real world can be further traced in the same above quoted poem "Sunday Morning". In a very sardonic mood, Stevens giggles at the permanent static world of heaven. He is very iconoclastic about the traditional unfruitful Christian dogmas. He gives priority to the real world because it follows the principle of changes. And according to him the change brings or adds beauty in the world. He says, "Death is the mother of beauty" (Sunday Morning). So the poetic imagination should deal with this aspect of real world. Man has never imagined nor can he imagine any heaven but his own perishing earth in which all things change and ultimately die. "Alas!" Stevens exclaims, addressing himself ironically to those who look toward the world to come and thus disregard the world around them. How unfortunate that the landscape of paradise will be only the insipid landscape of earth which some people despise? His question, "Do the boughs hang always in that perfect sky-unchanging?" (60) carries of further implication: such a paradise is not desirable-it would be tedious and oppressive. Reinforcing the same argument he begins his more famous poem "Notes Toward Supreme Fiction" with 'It must change'. So this is how Stevens' poetry is always focused with the real world. He writes the poetry about this world. He engages his characters in this world. The

poverty, the cultural degradation and other ups and downs of real life once touched by imagination get alright.

In the poem "The Man with the Blue Guitar" Stevens metaphorically provides the similarities and differences between musicians and poets. The Guitar serves as an instrument for the musician to relate themes. The instrument 'Blue Guitar' is conceptualized as an instrument of perception. The guitar does not express reality, but instead creates a new reality as a perception. In "Adagia", Stevens describes the relation of reality and imagination. He remarks as in the words of the critic Rajeev Patake in his book *The Long Poems of Wallace Stevens: An Interpretative Study* as, "[...]the imagination consumes and exhausts some element of reality" (21). The imagination is not reality, but they do share same qualities. The first section of "The Man with the Blue Guitar" articulates Stevens' pressures to recreate reality as "A tune beyond us, yet ourselves' and things exactly as they are." Clearly the listeners do not understand the duality of their own request, especially when Stevens but that his instrument loved only allow him to represent reality, not create reality. Amongst other things, the first section provides the metaphor for the music and poetry, as well as exposes the demands of realism on the musician/poet.

The critics find Stevens a poet resigned to sacrificing all else for the imagination. While, on other hand some critics believe Stevens is able to attain the real only through the sacrifice, the annihilation of the imagination. Stevens begins with a sense of the meaninglessness of the natural world, unless ordered or transformed by the imagination. Yet even in his poems of order he is aware of the inability of the imagination to approximate the thingness of reality. Since the temptation of the imagination is constantly to transform the world to create an intentional world separate from the real. This recognition is itself the beginning of

Stevens' affirmation toward the particular truth, the momentary experience and his rejection of the total reconstruction of reality provided by the imagination. In the end, Stevens decides the imagination, its ordering powers in an attempt to reach the chaotic particulars of the natural world. He finally sees that reality can be experienced only by limiting the imagination, by turning its transforming power not against reality but against itself. Rajeev Patake, a critique remarks about imagination as, "[. . .] it ceases being an end and becomes an instrument of experience, realign the being of the object in a transforming moment of awareness."(41). That by limiting itself, by denying the validity of its recreation of the world, the poem becomes not a description of reality but again in the words of Patake, "vehicle of experience". Reality which was feared to have been lost to poetry, has been gained, and the imagination, which was thought to rule supreme, has silenced itself. In short, Stevens has shifted the imagination from its grandiose work as creator and transformer to the more modest task of becoming an instrument for the experience of being. In the reading of Milton J Bates:

Stevens rejects the metaphorical world of resemblance and surrenders the imagination itself so that he may experience the chaotic natural world the imagination denies him. (75)

Unlike the critics Patake, Milton J. Bates, other critics follow the idea that Stevens looks for the imposition of supremacy of imagination over the reality. These critics' study attributes two important assumptions to Stevens' conception of imagination, one has to do with reality's imperviousness' to the imagination, the other with the sufficiency of the alienated imagination. Because Stevens argues that the thing itself is forever beyond the poetic imagination, the poet makes no pretense of faithfully describing objects as they exist in reality and his imaginary constructs neither content nor define the essence of objects themselves. The relationships that

Stevens' poetry establishes do not therefore exist in the world external to the imagination but are purely products of the mind. Moreover the unbridgeable separation of imagination and reality justifies the poet's impulse to transform the world willfully to the shape of the imaginary constructs. The acknowledgement that the real world is beyond reach is an occasion, finally, for celebration, which derives from the recognition that nothing is fixed, fulfilling can be transformed into a realization of the world's infinite possibility to inspire poetic expression.

In whatever way the critics deal with Stevens' poems, they agree with the fact about his poems that, there is a constant touch of reality and imagination. It is not the concern to show whether Stevens willfully acts to transform the "thingness" of the reality by the transformative power of imagination. The aim is to read Stevens as a poet engaged with the business of imagination and how it perceives the reality. The criticism about his notion of imagination and reality presented in earlier paragraph shows Stevens' sheer engagement in the world of imagination.

Roy Harvey Pearce, in his criticism, "Toward Degradation; Stevens and the Theory of poetry", published in 1980, states that Stevens' central concern in his poetry is the treatment of the problem of reality versus imagination. Pearce cites "Anecdote of the Jar", as an example of the period in Stevens' work when his poetry expressed an acceptance of the limits of the imagination that was the necessary condition of the exercise. He points out that Stevens believed the modern poets' responsibility was the wrestling with this problem of imagination and reality and that this becomes the theory of Stevens' poetry. Pearce states that the last four lines of "Anecdote of the Jar" demonstrate Stevens' processing of the acceptance of the limits of the imagination. In these lines the Jar is a symbol of the imagination. But critic Helen Vendler in her book published in 1984 *Wallace Stevens' Words Chosen out of Desire* writes, "[. . .]

"Anecdote of the Jar" cannot be fully understood unless it is compared to English Romantic poet John Keats' poem of 1819 "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (183). Vendler argues that the Keats' poem (which describes the perfection and timelessness of art, as contrasted to this world of change), celebrate Keats' English culture whereas Stevens' poem is "[. . .] about the poverty of the American scene and the consequent danger of the thingness in American Art"(45). She writes where Keats had London, the British museum and an Hellenic urn, whereas Stevens has Tennessee, a slovenly wilderness and a Jar. Vendler states that Stevens wanted to posit an American Jar on a new continent. She furthermore states that Keatsian confrontation between imagination and reality, Stevens also engages with the same battle.

About the war between the mind on imagination and sky or reality, Stevens remarks in his one of the long poems, Notes toward a Supreme Fiction, "[....] there is war between the mind and sky, between thought and day and night" (14).

One thing we can now surely say of the achievement of Stevens. He has written, over some thirty years, a whole and continuing poetry whose subject is the life of reality, the form and function of the imagination. In his later poems like *Transport to Summer* (1947), such subjects receive their broadest most complex treatment, yet remain essentially as they were in his first volume of poetry, *Harmonium*. Stevens was always preoccupied with a problem in the relation of the imagined to the real; in more general language of the world as known to the world as outside knowing. From beginning to end what has been basic is the predicament of the man who would know the basic formation of imagined world. We can say that treating of the relation of the imagined to the real - figured recently as the war between the mind and sky. Stevens is treating of our problem of belief. Unlike Eliot, he has refused to move out from our culture into another and to seek a solution for the

problem in the discovery of a usable form of belief. Rather he has relied entirely on his own sensibility; he has tried to create the object of belief rather than discover it. So he writes in "Esthetique du Mal" that the war between the mind and sky must be fought with what we have as and where we are. What we have is the imagining self and a reality which is not part of that self, but which for the sake of belief must somehow be made part of it. We can believe only in a reality so known, to sketch, Stevens's imagination began to act upon reality by looking directly at our experience of the reality in which we are bound.

The whole event of Stevens' poetic theory is observed by a famous critic Roy Harvey Pearce as:

What is central in the poems of *Harmonium* (1923) is an awareness of the texture of reality (in Stevens' sense of Ding on sich) as a factor at once for the enriching and for the limiting of experience. The driving concern of these poems is with the sensuously flowing aspect of reality as we come to know, to partake of, and thus to inform it and be informed by it. (71)

Thus the origin of poetry of our ideas of the world and of us is in our concrete past and present. The act of the poetic imagination is the source of human power over the world.

Certainly, what makes the thread of poetic principle in Stevens' poetry is indeed a kind of aestheticism but as he definitely insists the highest aestheticism. So it is clear that by means of the elegantly creative act, moral order in the world that men must make and suffer to make.

Wallace Stevens writes of mind forming hypothesis about reality in general about the ultimate truth or nature of things. He, as I said, earlier, took for granted that

we cannot know reality in itself. Whether we conceive of it as a colorless, featureless continuum like gray hare on a winter afternoon, a jostling festival of concrete particular identities, like a morning in June full of birdsong, we are in care of imagined world.

Whatever the concern of critics, the fundamental conception of Stevens' sense of imagination and reality constitutes philosophic meditation on his poetry. He dwells on the impossibility of credibly imagining any reality. Putting it another way, we might say that for Stevens (the) imagination creates, destroys and immediately creates another vision of reality. So this is how imagination acts upon the realities. Though, for Stevens as well, the reality transformed by the act of imagination does not guarantee the true nature of things "as they are" one thing is sure that he conceives the role of imagination as the source of order and divinity or goodness.

Section XXVI of "The Man with the Blue Guitar" focuses on his sense of imagination. The section begins with world washed in his imagination. The imagination takes the world and cleans it to allow for the give and take relationship described above. Stevens refuses the artistic effort to create a utopian picture in the imagination, "Sand heaped in the cloud, giant that fought/Against the murderous alphabet:/ The swarm of thoughts, the swarm of dreams/of inaccessible Utopia"(275-279). In this way, the value of Stevens' poems lies in the realization and acknowledgement of different perspectives and the acceptance of an evolving world.

The poems in *Ideas of order* (1935, 1936), the volume after the second edition of *Harmonium*, are for the most part written from the point of view of such one as the protagonist in "The Comedian as the Letter C": that as a man trying to understand this involvement in the war between reality and imagination. In these latter pieces Stevens is mainly concerned to demonstrate, largely in poems of situation, the

interpenetration of the one by the other. As poet he is, as he writes in "A Jacket Note", an "exponent of the imagination"(12) but as human being, he finds that he must hold the imagination to concrete reality. In "Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz" and "Botanist on Alp (Na.i)," for example, he treats the failure of the imagination to come alive. And then in "Farewell to Florida" "Lions in Sweden" and "Mozart, 1935" he treats the need to hold the imagination to reality, and so indicates how it may come alive. Most important, in "the Idea of Order at Key West" he treats the work of the imagination as it gives to our reality whereas order we can be sure resides therein. In this poem he writes of the woman who sings beside the sea:

It was her voice that made
 The Sky acutes at its vanishing.
 She was the single artificer of the world
 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
 Whatever self it had, became the self
 That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we
 As we beheld her striding there alone,
 Knew that there never was world for her
 Except the one she sang and , singing made.
 This is that "Blessed rage for order" by which we live. (142)

What one misses in the poems in *Ideas of Order*, for all their competencies, is movement towards consideration of the more general reality. There is, after all, a marked limitation to such poems of a descriptive dramatic mode, poems one of whose uses should be to make us face our own special human predicament. It is something to tell us that the predicament exists and to make us aware of its every menace but critical hindsight makes us sense that this was and is not enough. Stevens himself

comments generally on such a limitation in the poems in *The Man with the Blue Guitar* and *Parts of a World*. Particularly, he writes in "The Poems of Our Climate" (in *Parts of a World*) a brilliantly descriptive accounts of "clear water in a brilliant bowl,/Pink and white carnation". And then comments:

Say even that this completes simplicity
 Stripped one of all one's torments, concealed
 The evilly compounded, vital I
 And made it fresh in a world of whit,
 A world of clear water, brilliant edged,
 Still one would want more, one would need more,
 More than a world of white and snowy scents.
 There would still remain the never-resting mind,
 So that one would want to escape, come back
 To What had been so long composed.
 The imperfect is our paradise.
 Note that; in this bitterness, delight,
 Since the imperfect is so hot in us,
 Lies in flawed words and stubborn sounds. (45)

Poetry must be a means of grasping reality; but we must be aware of the process by which we grasp reality, however imperfectly: for in that process-which is the imaginative process-lies our humanity. What we need, in a phrase from "Of Modern Poetry" (also in *Parts of a World*), is "The poem of the act of the mind".

The greater part of the work in *The Man with the Blue Guitar* and *Parts of a World* consists of attempts to write such a poem. In the work in these volumes Stevens is concerned to get at the problem of reality and the imagination directly, not

through a dramatic situation. As a result he begins to develop, particularly in *Parts of a World*, a mode adequate to such a direct approach to his problem. This, as I have noted, is the dialectical mode which is to be fully developed in *Transport to Summer* (1947): still and forever mannered. Witty, and elegant – yet now discursive, centered on logical (and alogical) analysis; built out of a language which is as often abstract and nativist as it is richly concrete and exotic: with a syntactic and structural freedom which allows him to invent as he will, to explore the most general implications of his themes and still to return when he wishes to his local and particular starting point, which is, always, the sensitive individual trying to satisfy simultaneously the claims of reality and the imagination. The poet protagonist is now explicitly the philosopher, meditating abundantly and easily.

Yet the mode, and consequently the analysis, as developed in the poems in *The Man with the Blue Guitar* and in *Parts of a World* is not made to do its proper job. It comes too easily, too casually; it represents, perhaps, an attempt to explore, and thus forecasts the later poems. As Stevens indicates – in another jacket note- the title poem in *The Man with the Blue Guitar* consists simply of a series of notes on the incessant conjunctioning between things as they are and things imagined. This, for example, is the fifth in the series:

Do not speak to us of the greatness of poetry,
of the torches wisping in the underground,
Of the structure of vaults upon a point of light.
There are no shadows in the sun,
Day is desire and night is sleep.
There are no shadows anywhere.
The earth, for us is flat and bare.

There are no shadows. Poetry
 Exceeding music must take the place
 Of empty heaven and its hymns
 Ourselves in poetry must take their place
 Even in the chattering of your guitar. (60-71)

The last nine lines are simply turned against the first three; discursive statement cancels out concrete realization and demonstrates the need for a poetry of ourselves. This is the role of the man with the guitar, the role of the poet or as Stevens makes explicit in his jacket note or any man of imagination.

Likewise, in *Parts of a World* there is everywhere the tendency simply to assert the place of the imagination and to demand of the poet that he do his proper work and conjoin imagination and reality. Themes themselves of the earlier poems are restated and made to point explicitly to such a conclusion: "Sea Surface Full of Clouds", for example is in "Variations on a Summer Days", "Sunday Morning" is in "The Blue Building in the Summer Air", "Dezembrum", and "Bouquet of Belle Scavoir" and "The Idea of order at Key West" is in "The Woman that had more Babies than that". The sameness of so many of the poems, developing at worst into flatness and at best into rich repetition, derives from Stevens' recognition of a situation and of a need, the precise nature and full implication of which does not explore. "Landscape with Boat" and "Asides on the Oboe" point toward "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction": "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas" points toward "Esthetique du Mal". But in each case the conjoining of imagination and reality is limited in scope because it results in poetry of statements, not of analysis. Stevens does not move from recognition of a problem to an attempt to work out a solution. Stevens will say in "Asides on the Oboe":

The prologues are over. It is a question, now,
 of final belief. So, say that final belief
 must be in a fiction it is time choose. (14-18)

And he will show us clearly that whatever of our belief we have destroyed; we have not destroyed our belief in that:

Impossible possible philosopher's man,
 The man who has had the time to think enough,
 The central man, the human globe, responsive
 As a mirror with a voice, the man of glass,
 Who in a million diamonds sums us up. (21-26)

This is the man, whom our imagination enables us to discover without external reference at the central of the reality which we have made. This is the reality in which we must believe, the point at which the texture of experience is given final form by imagination. This is the point at which we discover, as Stevens says in a lecture delivered in 1947, "That poetry and reality are one, or should be" (Qtd., Borroff 76).

But we ask, if in this fragmented world we can finally discover and believe in ourselves, what does this discovery mean to us? What do we mean? Final belief demands, in short complete philosophic and imaginative awareness. And the triumph of the major points in *Transport to Summer*- to which the earlier poems are now literally a prologue-is the triumph of an elegantly individuated sensibility which has at last realized the possibilities of philosophic understanding and the moral imagination.

As the relationship between imagination and reality is always a central question in Stevens' poetry, we have to first know about it in his poems. In Stevens' own opinion, his deep and continuing concern with this subject distinguished him from all other poets. In a letter to friends he once wrote: "My reality imagination

complex is entirely my own even though I see it in others"(2). In his poetry, there is a tension between reality and imagination. The debate between imagination and reality in his poems is conducted with great resourcefulness, vigour and spontaneity on his part. There is some sort of magic about the relation between imagination and reality in his poems, so that his poetry acquires the quality of magic because of his reality-
imagination complex.

In the same way, many of the poems in *Harmonium*, we find a debate between the imagination and reality. In one of his essays, Stevens writes that the imagination is the power which enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, to perceive the opposites of chaos. We live, says Stevens, in concepts of the imagination, and it is our rational faculty which operates as the methodizer of the imagination. The exquisite definitions of the imagination may be beyond analysis while the conclusions of our rational faculty are calculations wholly within analysis. In other words the order created by the imagination may be higher order than even the human reason can create. The imagination is a higher faculty than reason though reason is very important. In some of Stevens' important poems, we see the imagination at work to impose an order on a chaotic state of affairs. The one outstanding poem from this point of view is "Anecdote of the Jar" in this poem:

I placed a jar in Tennessee
 And round it was, upon a hill.
 It made the slovenly wilderness
 Surround that hill.
 The wilderness rose up to it,
 And sprawled around, no longer wild.
 The jar was round upon the ground

And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.

The Jar was gray and bare.

It did not give of bird or bush.

Like nothing else in Tennessee. (141)

The theme of the poem is the interaction between the jar and the wilderness. A bare jar made by human hands and a symbol of the human imagination imposes order upon the chaotic wilderness of Tennessee when this jar is placed on the top of a hill in that wilderness. "Anecdote of the Jar" is one of Stevens' finest attempts at establishing the value of reality and imagination. The theme of this poem is closely connected with Stevens' reality-imagination complex. Here Stevens seems to have established the value of both reality and imagination.

As we said earlier, there is a conflict between imagination and reality in the poems of *Harmonium*. In the same way the poem "The Snow Man" suggests two possible responses to reality: one response is to declare that reality is nothing, to which the perceiver can only add himself; and the other response is to assert that reality is merely an extension of the perceiver's own feelings. If one looks at a wintry scene with snow all around us, one is bound to think of the existence of misery in human life. In order not to think of human misery in such a situation, one has to be men of snow, and not men of flesh and blood. One must have mind of winter which is imagination to see all this and not to think of any misery in the sound of the wind which, in Stevens' poems, represents reality. The argument of the poem is that one must be snow man, man of imagination, in order to perceive reality without thinking of any misery in it. As capable of becoming a snow man Stevens creates these poems

and those persons not to stage a philosophical debate, but to dramatize his own unresolved feelings about the nature of reality and how he perceives it.

Stevens attaches the greatest importance to the imagination. According to him, reality is vacuum and to fulfill the vacuum of reality, imagination is necessary or in other words imagination puts order in disorder that is nature or reality. Evidently, no poetry can be written without the imagination coming into operation. The imagination is indispensable not only to the poet but to any artist. But Stevens also recognizes the obstacles which lie in the way of the working of the human imagination. There is the false romanticism which hinders the proper working of the imagination. False romanticism creates an ideal world; a man loses contact with reality. A true poet's imagination may transcend reality, but it continues to draw its material from reality and it continues to derive its inspiration from reality. But the false romanticist's imagination creates an unreal world, or a world of escape from actual lives.

In "Sunday Morning", the lady is urged to shed her orthodox religious ideas which are based on false imagination and turn to the actual, visible world. This poem is a kind of debate between the claims of orthodox Christian religion which according to Stevens is false imagination and he claims of this earthly world which is reality. When the woman is in false imagination she becomes conscious with the help of reality. In other words, imagination is guided by reality. She learns that the earth and this world are more durable than any vision of paradise. She also knows that paradise is only an illusion, while this world in which we live has a certain reality. April's green, the birds' singing in the warm fields, the woman's desire for June and evening, and the swallow's wings have thus a greater reality than paradise.

Stevens would like these and other obstacles in the way of imagination to be removed and the full potential of the true imagination as against the false imagination

to be realized in poetry and in the other arts. Imagination is for Stevens the life and soul of poetry but imagination must function in collaboration with reality. Stevens' views on imagination remind us of Coleridge who believed in the shaping spirit of the imagination. But what is it that is shaped by imagination? Reality, of course is the answer.

Stevens clearly brings out the role of imagination in poetry in some of his poems. The basis for all imaginative writing is reality, but the treatment of reality in poetry must be imaginative. Thus, Stevens does not believe in a photographic reproduction of reality in poetry. He would not be satisfied with this strictly limited role of the imagination. Like the English romantic poets, Stevens would like to give to imagination a most substantial role. The poem "Peter Quince at the Clavier" shows the role of imagination for reality to be transformed. Here Peter Quince is a musician playing on a musical instrument known as the clavier which resembles a harmonium. The sounds of this instrument make music on the spirit of Peter Quince and so he draws the following inference from this experience. Peter Quince then goes on to express his desire for a woman called Susanna who is desired by the elders also. Finally, the music of Peter Quince and the music of Susanna's beauty lead to climax of the poem in the last line where the music becomes a hymn in praise of Susanna's purity. In this poem, Peter Quince's song represents imagination and this imagination works in the collaboration with reality which is represented by Susanna's physical beauty, water and wind. Peter Quince is actually a symbol just as the guitarist in the other poem is a symbol, of the poet who is a man of imagination.

This poem is concerned with the effect of music and of beauty on the human heart. Peter Quince speaks about the feeling nature of physical beauty and about the everlasting memories which beauty leaves behind after its decline and death.

Many of the poems in *Harmonium* have reality and imagination as their central fact. The debate between them can be seen in another poem called "Valley Candle." It is a short poem in which Stevens has given his views on reality and imagination through the symbols:

My candle burned alone in an immense valley.
Beams of the huge night converged upon it,
Until the wind blew.
Then beams of the huge night converged upon its image.
Until the wind below. (1-5)

In this poem the candle which gives light in huge night represents the imagination, while the wind which may hinder the beams of candle, represents the reality. This poem is about the imagination's attempt to compete reality.

In the poem, "The Bird with Coppery, Keen Claws", Stevens discusses all the things in a symbolic manner. The bird with the coppery, keen claws is a parrot which, according to Stevens, here, symbolizes the poetic imagination.

Above the forest of the parakeets.
A parakeet of parakeets prevails.
A pip of life amid a mort of tails. (10-14)

Here, a parakeet of parakeets symbolizes a poet. The imaginative poet or artist prevails over all other mortals; a parakeet of parakeets means a parrot that is distinguishable from other parrots by its superior appearance and qualities. The poet is superior kind of man who dominates not only ordinary human beings but also the poets who are less imaginative than he.

According to Stevens, in this poem, the poet is a kind of law giver. The law which he gives to the world is that the poetic imagination is a great force, and that it is

based on the rock of reality. The forest here means the world which provides us possibilities for the exercises of the poetic imagination. In other words forest represents reality which gives its materials to imagination. The tropical forest of this world provides a large scope to the poet for the exercise of this imagination. The great poet can move and stir others but he himself remains solid like a rock. He never ceases to shine brightly in the sun-pallor of his rock. The rock in Stevens' poetry symbolizes solid reality.

Changes are characteristics of life and the world. Ice-cream, in the poem "The Emperor of Ice-cream", symbolizes this change and flux; but ice-cream symbolizes also moments of firmness and stability in life. Richard Ellman argues that ice-cream symbolizes both death and life:

The emperor is more than his ice-cream empire; he is the force that inspires and makes it one [. . .] the force of being, understood as including life, death and the imagination which plays in this poem so gustily upon both. The emperor creates ice-cream, expresses himself through death and life, conceives of them as a unity and is immanent in both of them. (94-95)

In the poem, "The Idea of Order at Key West", it is the song of a woman which imposes order upon the untamable and formless sounds and noises of the sea. This poem expresses the idea that works of art or works of imagination exert a great influence on the way in which we view reality. A woman's song imposes a kind of order upon the disorder prevailing all around that woman and especially upon the meaningless sounds and noises of the waves of the sea which represents reality, on the shore of which she is singing. The listeners of the song find some kind of order descending upon the meaningless plunging of water and wind which are the symbols

of reality in Stevens' poems. Thus, the woman's song, which is a product of the artistic imagination, is instrumental in imparting some kind of meaning or organization to the environment which otherwise seemed to be meaningless, haphazard and incoherent. In the beginning the women's songs which is imaginative product is brought into a relationship with the sea which is reality.

The women's song in the poem symbolizes imagination. Her song, which she has herself made, is therefore a work of art. The poem thus becomes an exploration of the effect of art upon reality. The sea, the waves, the wind and the entire environment represent reality, while the song represents art which is symbol of imagination. The poem expresses the idea that art is capable of imposing order upon reality even if reality in a particular case happens to be confused or undisciplined or chaotic.

Thus, this regular interaction between the imagination and reality constitutes poetry for Wallace Stevens. Without reality there is nothing to perceive for imagination. Though the conjugation between reality and imagination as said by critics fails to last long, the poetic formation is due to it for Stevens because he believes that poetry has the structure of reality.

Chapter IV

Conclusion: Poetry: A Way to Explore the Nature of Poetry

Wallace Stevens devoted a number of his poems to an exposition of his concept of his poetry. This kind of exposition has been maintained in the different volumes of the poems published in the different times. Occupied with the notion of making poems a platform to discuss what a poem should deal with, and what a poet should deal with, Stevens requests the poet in his "Mozart 1935" to play the present. His request can be read:

Poet, be seated at the piano.
Play the present, its hoo-hoo-hoo,
Its shoo-shoo-shoo, its ric-a-nic
Its envious cachinnation.(1-4)
[. . .]We may return to Mozart
He was young, and we are old
The snow is falling
And the streets are full of cries.
Be seated thou. (26-30)

The word "thou" in the second stanza of the poem refers to the poet. In the poem, Stevens asks the poet to sing about the nature (snow falling) and the cries of streets. Certainly, it is a poem suggesting the subject matter for the poet. In the fourth stanza of the same poem, Stevens like a critic of his time addresses a poet:

Be thou the voice,
Not you, Be thou, be thou
The voice of angry fear,
The voice of this besieging pain. (16-19)

Thus, we can see the most engaging job of Stevens as a poet is to create poetry as mode of self-reflection. This kind of mode does not end here but appears in other poems as well.

Two of his longest poems were written on this subject. These two poems are: "The Man with the Blue Guitar" and "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction". A number of short poems also discuss the same subject. In the "Ultimate Poem is Abstract", Stevens discusses the role of imagination, at the same time recognizing the role of reality, in the writing of poetry. In this poem he emphasizes the need to be in the centre of both imagination and reality. A poem is a comment on reality and to make a comment of this kind the poet must be in the centre of reality though he must at the same time perceive the reality through his imagination.

The long poem, "The Man with the Blue Guitar" is the most important statement of Stevens' poetic theory. This poem is a product of the creative imagination. In "The Man with the Blue Guitar", the guitarist is the poet, and his guitar is blue because poetry is an instrument of the imagination. The colour blue in Stevens' work symbolizes imagination, while the colour red and green represent reality. This poem was the occasion for Stevens discovery that any statement of the relation of imagination and reality was statement of the nature of poetry, and that the poetic process reduplicates the process of the growth of the self so that in creating a poem is recreating or composing him. For him a poem was both a creation of the mind and an object in the world. The poem was itself a sign of reality imagination complex.

The theme of this poem is actuality and imaginative transformation of it. Reality and imagination are here depicted as contestants both of which are right. The contest between them reveals two aspects of art or poetry, one aspect from the poet's

point of view, and the other from the listener's point of view. The first section seems to be a debate between the player and the audience but this debate is internal.

Most of the critics call Stevens' *Harmonium*, first published volume of poetry that it contains statements on all the major themes to appear in his later books. *Harmonium* is a mature work, differing from the later volumes largely in manner rather than meaning. Throughout Stevens' poetry, whether early or late, one observes recurrent elements like celebration of the imagination and the power of human creativity and a continuing concern for the myth-making capabilities of poetry in a world of day defunct myths.

In *Ideas of Order* and *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, Stevens made a perceptible step toward austerity in statement of theme and in technique, although the themes were the same as those in *Harmonium*. Thus the title poem of the second volume which contains "Owl's Clover", "A Thought Revolved" and "The Men that are Falling" as well consist of a series of thirty three re-evaluations of the position of the artist and the meaning of art in a world of things as they are, a phrase equivalent to the ding and sich of the earlier. "The Comedian as the Letter C" however, instead of Crispin the comedian's symbolic journey representing the various philosophical metaphor poses an artist in a world of things as they are, the guitar player in the later poem plucks out various types of fictive music corresponding to varying definitions of poetry. Crispin moves from definition to definition in the course of his journey, the guitar player appears to pose all thirty-three variations of things as they are without an exact progression. As in "The Comedian as the Letter C", the guitar player is confronted by a world of fact and matter which he transmutes on, tries to transmute even though they are greatly changed by the player, the artist, the disciplined imagination, the passion for order on the blue guitar. That they are changed is known

just how they are changed and to what degree, becomes the central puzzle in a poem dealing at once with aesthetics, epistemology and something similar to Coleridge's poetic faith. The general calculation is the recognition of the importance of poetry as source of order and meaning in a world of dazzling, jumbled, apparently purposeless objectives; a world without clear meaning. Although it may be that, given the myth making importance of poetry in a mythless world, the poet cannot entirely succeed in making fact and matter meaningful. Still, Stevens persuades his readers to question now of final belief and to say that final belief must be in a fiction.

If men's ultimate beliefs have always been in some fiction or another, the crisis of faith today may be due to the fact that our traditional myths ceased to be credible. In a poem of *Harmonium*, Stevens states that human power of making myths must be at work so, he states as: "Fiction of the wide river in /An empty land; the gods that Boucher killed/ And the metal heroes that live granulates" (14-16) are all obsolete. The wide river in an empty land evokes vague religious associations, the Jordan, the river of light in Dante's paradise, a stream of spirit fructifying are otherwise desert world. Following the principle of reading each poem as in the context of author's work as a whole, we may recall here the struggle of 'the idea of God/ And the idea of Man' in his another short poem. The poem quoted above assumes a need to substitute some idea of man for the idea of God. The Gods that Boucher killed may be considered to refer to all the anthropomorphic mythologies so familiarized and rationalized since the eighteenth century as to lose their force as objects of veneration. And I think that the metal heroes that time granulates are such ethical absolutes as Stevens satirized in other poems. Stevens' belief in the world of poetry and poet is something like Wordsworthian and Emersonian who also believed in the fiction made by human imagination for the sake of their own.

The central question of Stevens' poetry is frequently raised as, how can the imagination (another word for poetry) fulfill man's craving for beauty?, too, informs us about the central concern of Stevens' poetry. Stevens' answers depending on the poems are plural, operating as logical alternatives. Thus, at times, no problem seems to arise at all, for the imagination may be the only thing which is real in an imagined world. This is the possibility or alternative which gives rise to section XXV of "Blue Guitar" wherein the hero flings and twirls the world. It is, however, only the possibility, the most playful and optimistic section, among thirty-three. Perhaps the simplest statement that can be made about "Blue Guitar" then is that the basis of the poem is poetry as it is of all of Stevens' work.

Stevens' 1935 volume, *Ideas of Order* contains no poems of the length of "Blue Guitar", but a number of excellent short meditative lyrics such as "Academic Discourse at Havana", "Evening without Angles" and "The Idea of Order at Key West", here, Stevens also asks questions leading to an investigation of poetry. Often the form of Stevens' poems becomes a question about the nature of imagination or reality followed by an answer or series of answers.

Stevens' succeeding volume, *Parts of a World* continues his examination of poetry as the titles of some of the poems therein indicate: "Poetry is a Destructive Force" or "The Poems of Our Climate". The admired, much cited poem "Connoisseur of Chaos" is contained in this volume. The connoisseur, the poet, Stevens and reader live perhaps, mostly in a world of disorder, rather than in the largely historical, now hard to come by world which, having the advantages of order has also the disadvantage of dogma..

In the same year as *Parts of World* appeared, a long difficult poem, "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction", therein, Stevens, in three sections defines the qualities,

such as a fiction must have, "It Must Be Abstract, "It Must Change" and "It Must Give Pleasure." These statements would be simple enough if Stevens were talking about poetry on a page. He is however, talking about poetry and fiction as reality, or poetry as the perception of reality, and consequently "supreme fiction" comes to mean several analogous products of imagination, the first idea of logos the created world the first man, the idea of man and by exterior, the imagination creation which takes place in a human mind. Hence the qualities which Stevens defines in his these sections are not so much qualities which a poem on a page must have as they are qualities which existence must, and does, have. In "Notes" too, appears the conflict which exists between fact and matter. This conflict explains why Stevens praising poetry, appears to say that poetry gets in one way.

Transport to Summer includes "Notes" and also "Esthetique du Mal" a poem similar to "The Comedian as the Letter C" in which a poet tries to reconcile a comfortable philosophy or esthetic with pain and the destructiveness symbolized by Mt. Vesuvius. This comfortable philosophy is akin to the romantic theory of the sublime and to the "Esthetique du Mal" nineteenth century style. We shrink from real pain, the real volcano, and the fact of death. The poet and the poem seek out an esthetique du mal which will not shrink or falter but arrive face to face with things as they are and fact and matter as they are finding a genuine aesthetic merely in living life as it is. All comfortable philosophies and panaceas Stevens counters with things as they are.

Three Academic Pieces containing "The Realm Resemblance", "Someone Puts a Pineapple" and "Of Ideal Time and Choice" deals as the title indicates almost didactically, but always playfully and elegantly, with the nature of poetry. These pieces were included in the later collection of prose and verse lecture essays. *The*

Necessary Angel wherein with a prose style very much like his poetry, Stevens continues to examine art, the subtitle reading, "Essays on Reality and the Imagination". His collection of poetry *The Auroras of Autumn*, too deals with problem of imagination and the reality. The solution, as elsewhere, tentative, conditional, ironic, is poetry. That is, ironically in imagined world poetry offers reality, offers the antidote to imagination to romance and illusion. Poetry, as conceived by Stevens creates the aestheticism pointing out the poetic conception of Stevens, David Walker in his book *The Transparent Lyric* remarks: [...] then reality is also the ultimate product of the imagination, and therefore poetry and reality are one the same dream or the same fact, whatever one may wish to call it(17).

In the following years after the publication of such poetry as well, Stevens continued his examinations of poetry. Stevens could write that life is composed of theories about life, and he might also have added that poetry consists of proposition about poetry. Thus Stevens no doubt sounds like the first section of "Notes" "It Must Be Abstract ". But while Stevens is abstract and does build poetry out of propositions that poetry rarely even if it has the dryness of prose philosophy, and is among the most exciting, original and as Northrop Frye might say essential verse of modern times.

Almost all successive publications of Stevens' volumes of poetry do contain the fragrance of his concern with the poetry in the poetry itself. *A History of American Literature*, by Ruland and Bradbury, evaluates the overall poetic tendency of Stevens:

[...]after the pantheistic marriage of human imagination with transcendental force in the outward universe had lost all discernible divine guarantee, fancy the imagination's ballyhoo was what was left

as the poet, seeking to enrich the world by uttering its things into being, sought delight and awareness in fictive construct. (293)

The book rightly examines the poetic mediation of Stevens' poetry. Therefore in the twenty second section of "The Man with the Blue Guitar", he evaluates the subject matter of his poetry on poetry itself. He goes on saying:

Poetry is the subject of the poem.

From this the poem issues and to this returns.

Between the two, Between issue and return". (71-73)

This kind of notion can be explored in his short poem; "Of Modern Poetry" in the poem, Stevens employs the symbols of the theatre, the stage and the actor to represent poetry and the poet. The world in which the poet lives and writes his poetry is regarded as a theatre. In this sense, the theatre stands for reality in which the imaginative poet lives and takes raw materials from reality for writing the poem. In this poem, the poet would be regarded as an actor. Stevens here attributes to poetry an important task. Poetry must suffice. In other words, poetry must meet the requirements of the contemporary circumstances. A poem must try to find the clue to the situations with society is faced and way to cope with those situations.

What Stevens is trying to say in metaphorical language is that the modern poet should establish a close contact with the men and women of his time and with the realities of the life around him. He should observe contemporary life and draw his material from it and not only the material but also the language. In such a situation Stevens expresses his views on the relation between reality and imagination. For writing poetry or any art of imagination, reality is necessary because the poet takes his material from reality. The main idea in this poem "Of Modern Poetry" is that the modern poet must endeavour to define present realities as well as he can and, in doing

so, must create a new reality. Imagination and reality were the two concepts which engaged Stevens' attention throughout his poetic career. Stevens then goes on to say that the modern poet's words are to appeal to the most sensitive and discriminating area of the mind, that the poet's audience is invisible, and that a poet seeks to bring about a unity of feeling. The play or the poem is not the thing; it is rather the deeper communication, the self communication which the poem makes possible. The poet's words establish a bond between himself and the audience, and this bond expresses what they, the audience, are. They hear themselves in terms of one emotion shared by two people or of two emotions becoming one.

In the tenth stanza of "Le Monocle De Oncle" a poem from *Harmonium*, we can see Stevens as a speaker of the poem in a role of poet and speaks:

I know no magic trees, no balmy boughs
 No silver-ruddy, gold vermillion fruits.
 But after all I know a tree that bears
 A semblance to the thing I have in my mind. (179-182)

The abstract of the poem quoted above establishes the idea that the poem is a kind of discussion for suggesting different roles and duties of the poet for Stevens. As discussed above, Stevens writes directly about poetry and its human function. In a manner reminiscent of Wordsworth, Stevens saw the poet as one with heightened powers, but one who like all ordinary people continually creates and discards cognitive depiction of the world, not in solitude but in solidarity with other men and women.

Poet is a centre of creative vision, cultural prophet, and a myth-maker for Wallace Stevens, if not exactly the oracular bard of the world. For him a poet is a central man in a Godless world, the ultimate Plato who inverts the master's plan by

creating the ideal out of the real. By calling poet an ultimate Plato, Stevens tries to assure that the subject matter of the poetry comes from the reality, a broad discussion of subject matter of poetry.

Though Stevens writes about different subject matters, one conclusion we can derive from his poems is that he recognizes the importance of poetry as a source for order and meaning. His poems are the product of his life long faith in the world of poetry. So to express the same aesthetic belief, he uses the poetry as a platform for the discussion of several functions of poems and poets. By writing about poetry in poems, he suggests that people living in the modern world see poetry as a response and a corrective to the malaise of the modern spirit. Through the overall examination of his several poems, I have come to the conclusion that there is a constant possibility of discussing poems within the poems themselves. Stevens has himself accepted the fact about his poetry saying that poetry is the subject matter of the poem. Thus the overall examination of Stevens' poetry allows one to declare him as one engaged in the formation of poetic theory in the poetry itself. Thus it's a kind of meta-poetry.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th ed. Delhi: Harcourt College, 2000.
- Bates, J. Milton. *Poetry and the Age*. New York: Vintage Books, 1963.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Poetry of Confrontation*. London: OUP, 1963.
- Borroff, Marie. "Wallace Stevens: The World and the Poet". *Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Marie Brroff. U.S.A.: Prentice Hall INC, 1963.
- Bryson, Michael. "The Quest for the Fiction of An Absolute: The Mystics Movement from Ancient Sacrifice to Supreme Fiction in Wallace Stevens". *The Hudson Review*, X (1957): 93-94.
- Callahan, Brian. *The Shaping Spirit: A Study of Wallace Stevens*. Chicago: Henry Regnry, 1950.
- Donne, John. "Holy Sonnet 14". *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Ed. Margaret Ferguson etal. 4th ed. New York: Norton, 1984.
- Eliot, T.S. *Selected Essays*. London: Faber, 1973.
- Ellman, Richard. "Wallace Stevens' Ice-cream" *Kenyon Review*, (1957): 94-95.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Ed. Ken Bush. New Delhi: Foundation Books, 1999.
- Jarraway, David. *Wallace Stevens and the Questions of Belief*. London: Red Wood Books, 1995.
- Mattiessen, F.O. *The Responsibilities of the Critics: Essays and Reviews*. Ed. Samuel

- French Morse. New York: OUP, 1952.
- Miller, J. Hills. *Poets of Reality*: Chicago, UCP, 1970.
- Pack, Robert. *Wallace Stevens: An Approach to His Poetry and Thought*. New Jersey:
Rutgers University Press, 1958.
- Patake, Rajeev. *The Long Poem of Wallace Stevens: An Interpretative Study*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1978.
- Pearce, Roy Harvey. "Toward Degradation: Stevens and the Theory of Poetry":
The Continuity of American Poetry. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Pound, Ezra. "In a Station of the Metro". *A Lume Spento*. London: Longman, 1908.
- Robinson, Edwin Arlington. "The House on the Hill". *Complete Poems*. New York:
Doubleday, 1886.
- Ruland, Richard and Malcolm Bradbury. *A History of American Literature: From Puritanism to Post Modernism*. New York: Penguin Books, 1992.
- Stevens, Wallace. *The Collected Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954.
...*The Necessary Angle: Essays on Reality and the Imagination*. New York:
Alfred
A. Knopf, 1951.
...*Opus Posthumous*. Ed. Samuel French Morse. New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1957.
... *Selected Letters of Wallace Stevens*. Willam Van. O'Connar ed. Chicago:
Henry

Regnary, 1950.

Vendler, Helen. *Wallace Stevens' Words Chosen out of Desire*. Cambridge: CUP, 1984.

Walker, David. *The Transparent Lyric*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967.