

TO RECONCILE THE PEOPLE AND THE STONES:
THE PROBLEM OF CONTACT IN THE WORK OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON,
HENRY DAVID THOREAU, WALLACE STEVENS, AND WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

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Roy Akira Miki

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APPROVAL

Name: Roy Akira Miki

Degree: Master of Arts

Title of Thesis: To Reconcile The People and the Stones: The Problem of Contact
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Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams

Examining Committee:

(Mr. R. Blaser)
Senior Supervisor

(Mr. R. Dunham)
Examining Committee

(Mr. A. Robertson)
Examining Committee

(Dr. Peter Quartermain)
External Examiner
(Associate Professor)
(Department of English, U.B.C.)
(Vancouver, B.C.)

Date Approved: August 27th, 1969

Abstract

Each of the writers in this study view the "problem of contact" in terms of man's separation from the elemental processes of the earth, the ground of his experience. Before men can make contact with the ground, they argue, each of them must give up all fixed forms of perception that categorize experience into pre-conceived moulds of thought. The problem, they say further, is both a moral and aesthetic issue. In other words, each man must experience the ground in his own particular life, but unless this experience is actualized in an art form it will remain amorphous and unintelligible.

With the exception of Stevens, these writers reject all fixed forms of perception, move behind these forms, and place the strongest emphasis upon the active process of experience. Further, and again with the exception of Stevens, they assert that only those forms that are organic extensions of experience can hold on to, concretize, and reveal the nature of the ground as it is experienced through the particulars of the world--and thereby "reconcile the people and the stones." Emerson finds this form in his notion of the correspondential symbol, Thoreau when he discovers that Walden is an organic work of art, and Williams in the "made poem." Although searching for the same source, unlike the others, Stevens accepts the validity of the epistemological puzzle--"how do we know that we know what we know?"--and consequently enters into a life-time preoccupation with the forms of perception rather than the content of his experience, never realizing that the question itself is another fixed form of perception. His involvement in the "subject-object" problem ironically distances him from the very "reality" he desires and seeks.

Divided into five sections, this study discusses each writer in the context of his own works. Section One introduces the problem through Williams' In the American Grain. Section Two argues the principle of metamorphosis as the basis of the correspondential symbol in Emerson's work. Section Three analyzes Thoreau's Walden as a representative work, the dramatization of one man's journey toward an elemental relation with the processes of the earth. Section Four, divided into two parts, turns to the poetry of Stevens, the first part dealing with the epistemological assumptions in the poetic world of the Collected Poems, and the second, The Rock, where Stevens discovers the necessary finality of his concerns. Section Five, also divided into two parts, concludes the study with an investigation of Williams' positive solution to the problem. The first part describes his "theory of the poem;" the second applies this theory to an analysis of Paterson V, a poem that is considered as a "field of action," the only "place" the mind can actively "reconcile the people and the stones."

Table of Contents

Section One: Introduction	
William Carlos Williams and the Problem of Contact	2
Section Two: Elemental Relations	
Metamorphosis as Vital Principle in Emerson	40
Section Three: A Representative Work	
A Search for the "True Clothing" of Experience: The Internal Drama of <u>Walden</u>	72
Section Four: An End of the Imagination	
Necessary Finality in the Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens	131
(i) The Poetic World of the <u>Collected Poems</u>	139
(ii) The Poems of <u>The Rock</u>	172
Section Five: To Make a Start . . .	
William Carlos Williams and "The Poem" as a "Plan for Action"	198
(i) The "Theory of the Poem" as Entrance	200
(ii) <u>Paterson V</u> : "The Poem" as a "Field of Action"	222
Section Six: Notes	253
Section Seven: Selected Bibliography	268

Section One:

Introduction

William Carlos Williams and the Problem of Contact

...The sun had entered his head in the color of sprays of flaming palm leaves. They had been walking for an hour or so after leaving the train. They were hot. She had chosen the place to rest and he had painted her resting, with interest in the place she had chosen.

It had been a lovely day in the air.--What pleasant women are these girls of ours! When they have worn clothes and take them off it is with an effect of having performed a small duty. They return to the sun with a gesture of accomplishment. --Here she lay in this spot today not like Diana or Aphrodite but with better proof than they of regard for the place she was in. She rested and he painted her.

It was the first of summer. Bare as was his mind of interest in anything save the fullness of his knowledge, into which her simple body entered as into the eye of the sun himself, so he painted her. So she came to America.

They saw birds with rusty breasts and called them robins. Thus, from the start, an America of which they could have had no inkling drove the first settlers upon their past. They retreated for warmth and reassurance to something previously familiar. But at a cost. For what they saw were not robins. They were thrushes only vaguely resembling the rosy, daintier English bird. Larger, stronger, and in the evening of a wilder, lovelier song, actually here was something the newcomers had never in their lives before encountered. Blur. Confusion.

A poet witnessing the chicory flower and realizing its virtues of form and color so constructs his praise of it as to borrow no particle from right or left. He gives his poem over to the flower and its plant themselves, that they may benefit by those cooling winds of the imagination which thus returned upon will refresh them at their task of saving the world. But what does it mean, remarked his friends?

Chosen from the large mass of Williams' writings, these three passages provide a context for the defensive statement of possibilities at the beginning of Spring and All (1923):

If anything of moment results--so much the better.
And so much the more likely will it be that no one
will want to see it.

There is a constant barrier between the reader
and his consciousness of immediate contact with the
world. If there is an ocean it is here.¹

Consciously and deliberately, Williams intends to discover and reveal an "immediate contact with the world." He is hesitant to assert openly, however, because he realizes that any success would be misunderstood by readers who lack this contact. Much later in his life, in Book I of Paterson, Williams again declares that "Divorce is/the sign of knowledge in our time" (P, 28), implying that real knowledge comes from a marriage with the fundamental realities of the earth.

(47)

The first quoted passage is from an article called "A Matisse" originally published by Williams in Contact, a magazine he and Robert McAlmon edited in the early twenties. The title itself is revealing: Contact I says that it is "interested in the writings of such individuals as are capable of putting a sense of contact...into their work,"² followed, in Contact IV, with a similar statement that "If Americans are to be blessed with important work it will be through intelligent, informed contact with the locality which alone can infuse it with reality."³

The quoted passage is therefore ironic: Two foreigners to America, a French girl and a French artist, unknowingly reveal the possibilities of a country where no man "has seen a woman naked and painted her as if he knew anything except that she was naked" (SE, 31), and where no woman "is naked except at night" (SE, 31). Through the particularity of their momentary experience, both have responded to the natural flow of things. Nakedly giving herself up to the situation, the French girl enters the natural world ("her curving torso and thighs were close upon the grass and violets" (SE, 30)), although she is still only "in that room on Fifth Ave." (SE, 30). The artist, reacting to his model concretely, paints her "with interest in the place she had chosen," and through his art, composes her into a revelation of the "place she was in." Williams is clear in pointing out ("...he painted her. So she came to America.") that she can come to America only when she is concretized in art. When she is, she becomes more relevant to this particular space and time than Diana and Aphrodite mainly because she assumes the form of a goddess herself--Diana and Aphrodite being revelations of the same life processes in the Classical world. Able to touch their immediate environment

sensually, these two foreigners reveal more of the essential American experience than the first settlers in the second quoted passage. They, in turn, denied contact with the basic realities of the earth and failed to experience the real America. Confronting a new continent whose "pressing reality demanded not only a tremendous bodily devotion but as well...a complete reconstruction of their most intimate cultural make-up, to accord with the new conditions" (SE, 134), they "retreated for warmth and reassurance to something previously familiar." They interpreted the New World according to forms of perception brought over from the Old. Their language not consonant with the new place, thrushes were erroneously called robins. America, concludes Williams, began in "Confusion." The condition the first settlers created still exists in the present world, as the third quoted passage indicates. From the "Prologue" to Kora in Hell (1920), it traces the movement of a poem. By relating to the particularity of the chicory flower, the poet can articulate the local in such a way that the flower can bring men into contact with their surroundings. Divorced from the processes of the earth, however, his contemporaries are understandably confused with such a poem: "But what does it mean, remarked his friends?"

We are back to the introductory statement of Spring and All: How can men who have not experienced an organic relation to the processes of the earth understand Williams' poetry? Williams' attack on critics should be seen in the light of this very problem. "There is a fundamental misapprehension," Williams once wrote in a letter,

in most opinions emanating from men who occupy teaching positions in the universities and who attempt to criticize new work, work created by

(6)

conditions with which they do not have an opportunity to come inexorably into contact. (SL, 127)

Although many of the issues involved in our discussion of Williams are contained in the three quoted passages, they are subsumed by an even larger concern: the problem of contact in contemporary America. In the American Grain, a work that introduces us to the ground of Williams' thought, focalizes this problem.

As Louis Martz has correctly pointed out, the book should not "be regarded primarily as 'history.'"⁴ Williams' interest in American history is always related to the presence of the past in the present. Through a series of essays on various historical subjects, he explores the American past to discover the kind of consciousness preventing contemporary Americans from relating to the source of their experience. Far from being haphazard structurally, the book is a conscious attempt to find the foundation for an authentic culture, and as we will see, for the function of the poem in that culture. A letter from Williams to Horace Gregory explains the personal basis of this study:

Of mixed ancestry, I felt from earliest childhood that America was the only home I could ever possibly call my own. I felt that it was expressly founded for me, personally, and that it must be my first business in life to possess it; that only in making it my own from the beginning to my own day, in detail, should I ever have a basis for knowing where I stood. (SL, 185)

This desire to possess the ground of the American experience in order to know where he stood leads Williams, and us, into the American grain, there to uncover the false sources, and discover the true.

Following some excerpts from Cotton Mather's Wonders of the Invisible World, the section called "Père Sebastien Rasles" makes us immediately aware that the past still exists in the present. We are in a twentieth century drawing-room in Paris, a "center of old-world culture" (IAG, 105), as Williams points out. Almost as quickly we move from the drawing-room to a discussion between Williams and Valéry Larbaud on the meaning of America. Like many Europeans, the curious wonder of the New World alone interests Larbaud, "not wishing so much to understand it as to taste, perhaps, its freshness--Its freshness!" (IAG, 108), says Williams. In the conversation Williams confesses that Americans are completely out of contact with the ground of their experience, the primal source from which their culture stems.⁵ His appraisal of contemporary America takes us directly into the heart of In the American Grain:

...It is an extraordinary phenomenon that Americans have lost the sense, being made up as we are, that what we are has its origin in what the nation in the past has been; that there is a source in America for everything we think or do; that morals affect the food and food the bone, and that, in fine, we have no conception at all of what is meant by moral, since we recognize no ground our own--and that this rudeness rests all upon the unstudied character of our beginnings; and that if we will not pay heed to our affairs, we are nothing but an unconscious porkyard and oilhole for those, more able, who will fasten themselves upon us....That unless everything that is, proclaim a ground on which it stand, it has no worth; and that what has been morally, aesthetically worth while in America has rested upon peculiar and discoverable ground. (IAG, 109)

This passage is central to an understanding of both the book and Williams' poetry: that what is called America is a direct result of man's relation to the fundamental processes of the earth, that most Americans do not

know the source of their experience, that direct contact with the ground of experience is a necessary starting point for an authentic culture, and what has been morally and aesthetically worthwhile in America has been a result of a direct contact with the ground.

By ground Williams refers to those primal elements or life forces inherent in the substance of the earth itself; that source capable of possessing the minds of men such as Columbus, De Soto, and Raleigh before the Puritans first landed in the New World. "Upon the orchidian beauty of the new world the old rushed inevitably" (IAG, 27), begins the section called "The Destruction of Tenochtitlan," the devastation of a city that concretized, by exemplifying, the relation of man to the primal elements of the earth:

Streets, public squares, markets, temples, palaces,
the city spread its dark life upon the earth of a
new world, rooted there, sensitive to its richest
beauty.... (IAG, 32)

Here [in their temples] it was that the tribe's
deep feeling for a reality that stems back into
the permanence of remote origins had its firm
hold. It was the earthward thrust of their logic;
blood and earth; the realization of their primal
and continuous identity with the ground itself,
where everything is fixed in darkness. (IAG, 33-34)

Tenochtitlan is the revelation of the ground on which it stands. Unlike categorical forms of knowledge, the "earthward thrust of their logic" penetrated that primal reality from which all life flows. In realizing their "primal and continuous identity with the ground itself," the members of the tribe were organically related to the life processes of the earth. With its deep "blood and earth" consciousness, the city was

another flower of the New World, one more manifestation of the mysterious, organic beauty that led Columbus to write, upon landing, "...I walked among the trees which was the most beautiful thing which I had ever seen" (IAG, 25). The ground attracted Columbus and made him a "straw in the play of the elemental giants" (IAG, 10). His consequent suffering at the hands of his own people makes him the first foreigner to be possessed by the inherent beauty of America: "With its archaic smile," Williams writes, "America found Columbus its first victim" (IAG, 10). In the section "De Soto and the New World," the ground appears in the form of "She," the mother-earth-goddess-flower. Upon his death, De Soto is "committed to the middle of the stream" (IAG, 58), returning to the elemental processes of the earth: "Down, down, this solitary sperm, down into the liquid, the formless, the insatiable belly of sleep" (IAG, 58). Finally, we have the example of Raleigh who wanted to become the ground of America by reproducing the "body of the Queen" (IAG, 61) in a visionary new land. The spirit of his unsuccessful search for an "America" is still being sought in Williams' time; America still needs a poet to articulate and reveal her beauty. "Sing, O Muse and say," writes Williams,

there is a spirit that is seeking through America
for Raleigh: in the earth, the air, the water, up
and down, for Raleigh, that lost man: seer who
failed, planter who never planted, poet whose
works are questioned, leader without command,
favorite deposed--but one who yet gave title for
his Queen, his England, to a coast he never saw
but grazed alone with genius. (IAG, 62)

America, however, can possess only those men who have responded to her vitality. "She" is powerful and weak in the same breath. In "De Soto

and the New World," "She" first asserts, "I am strong! I shall possess you" (IAG, 48), but quickly confesses, "Oh, but I lie. I am weak" (IAG, 49). Tenochtitlan's organic beauty was "so completely removed from those foreign contacts which harden and protect, that at the very breath of conquest it vanished" (IAG, 32). This same weakness made the Indians vulnerable to Ponce de Léon who mutilated and enslaved them, although, ironically, America got her revenge through the Indians who finally killed him. Besides inheriting the potentialities of its sources, the American present must therefore also bear Ponce de Léon's "orgy of blood" (IAG, 41). "We are the slaughterers," says Williams. "It is the tortured soul of our world" (IAG, 41). This corresponding power and weakness of America reveal both the possibility and actuality of a country blind to the very ground that could provide it with an organic wholeness. Here then is the background for the introduction of the Puritan to America.

"The Pilgrims were seed of Tudor England's lusty blossoming," begins Williams in the section "Voyage of the Mayflower," but "the flamboyant force of that zenith, spent, became in them hard and little" (IAG, 63). Right from the beginning, the Puritans--"if they were pure," says Williams, "it was more since they had nothing in them of fulfillment than because of positive virtues" (IAG, 63)--turned "their very emptiness" (IAG, 63) inside out on America. The vacuum in their minds made them look "black at the world" (IAG, 65) and prevented them from touching the new place. To combat the vast physicality of the wilderness, they worshipped a negative notion of "spirit." But to their own loss: "This stress of the spirit against the flesh has produced a race incapable of flower" (IAG, 66).

Williams, however, does not condemn them outrightly; he is aware that their survival necessitated an escape from the ground--"purity" being their strongest defense against the terrifying force of the New World:

They must have closed all the world out. It was the enormity of their task that enforced it. Having in themselves nothing of curiosity, no wonder, for the New World...they knew only to keep their eyes blinded, their tongues in orderly manner between their teeth, their ears stopped by the monotony of their hymns and their flesh covered in straight habits. (IAG, 112)

"And so they stressed the 'spirit,'" writes Williams, "--for what else could they do?" (IAG, 65), the situation being what it was. But they left the legacy of their perversion for future generations. Their "pale negative" (IAG, 66), the concept of the "soul" they imposed upon America, destroyed "the place of that which really they were destined to continue" (IAG, 66), the flower of the New World that they had to negate in order to survive. According to Williams, American history must be re-interpreted in this light. We must see the Puritans in a new and truer perspective. Locked in their narrow "doctrinaire religion" (IAG, 111), they categorized the local according to the "magnificent logic" (IAG, 113) of their beliefs. Their separation from the ground is revealed in their attitude to the Indian, consequently labelled as "an unformed Puritan" (IAG, 113), and in the "low condition of their words themselves, the bad spelling of their journal" (IAG, 66). By denying contact and divorcing themselves from the local, they established a mode of consciousness still prevalent in contemporary America. We can see the de-humanizing effect of their categorizations--"spirit" as opposed to "body" --in their perversion of "She" into a witch figure in the excerpts Williams quotes from Cotton Mather's Wonders of the Invisible World

(IAG, 81-104). Talking with Larbaud, Williams argues that the Puritan consciousness is the real immorality at the base of the American past; it is the locus of the problem still confronting present day America:

It is an immorality that IS America. Here it began. You see the cause. There was no ground to build on, with a ground all blossoming about them--under their noses. Their thesis is a possession of the incomplete --like senseless winds or waves or the fire itself. I wish to drag this thing out by itself to annihilate it....it must be done, you do not know America. There is a "puritanism"...that has survived to us from the past. It is an atrocious thing, a kind of mermaid with a corpse for tail. Or it remains, a bad breath in the room. This thing, strange, inhuman, powerful, is like a relic of some died out tribe whose practises were revolting. (IAG, 114-115)

Our resistance to the wilderness has been too strong. It has turned us anti-American, anti-literature. As a violent "puritanism" it breathes still. (IAG, 116)

The Puritans are the source of the problem of contact in contemporary American life; Williams has dragged this cause of divorce out by locating it in history: An "atrocious thing," it denies the ground of America and prevents Americans from actualizing their own nature. Seen in its true perspective, the kind of consciousness the Puritans forced on to the earth is, in fact, "anti-American." It is also the reason, as the example of Poe and Williams' own work will show us, why Americans are so "anti-literature."

Fortunately, there is also a source for an authentic America based on a fruitful contact with the processes of the earth. As the prototype of the genuine American, Père Sabastien Rasles is the true source from which America must be built.⁶ Living with the Indians, "touching them every day" (IAG, 120), "Rasles recognized the New World. It stands out

in all he says" (IAG, 130). Compared with the "dead ash" of the Puritans, his life is a "living flame" (IAG, 120). Through a vital contact with his locality, he experienced the processes of the earth. Although his example remains all but unknown in present day America, his biography still reveals the large possibility:

This is a moral source not reckoned with, peculiarly sensitive and daring in its close embrace of native things. His sensitive mind. For everything his fine sense, blossoming, thriving, opening, reviving--not shutting out--was tuned. He speaks of his struggles with their language, its peculiar beauties, "je ne sais quoi d'énergique," he cited its tempo, the form of its genius with gusto, with admiration, with generosity. Already the flower is turning up its petals. It is this to be moral: to be positive, to be peculiar, to be sure, generous, brave--to marry, to touch--to give because one has, not because one has nothing. And to give to him who has, who will join, who will make, who will fertilize, who will be like you yourself: to create, to hybridize, to crosspollenize,--not to sterilize, to draw back, to fear, to dry up, to rot. (IAG, 121)

The direct antithesis of the Puritan, Rasles accepted the ground; his life is the flowering of that marriage. In touch with "native things," he concretely exemplifies the authentic American experience.

Daniel Boone is another such source, "a great voluptuary born to the American settlements against the niggardliness of the damning puritanical tradition" (IAG, 130), as Williams writes in "The Discovery of Kentucky." Like Rasles, Boone gave himself up to the force of the wilderness, embracing the New World with "that wild logic, which in times past had mastered another wilderness and now, reascent, would master this, to prove it potent" (IAG, 137). While the Puritans "clung, one way or another, to the old" (IAG, 136), Boone's "wild logic" went beyond the "half logic" of abstracting the earth into categorical concepts that

cause fragmentation and divorce. More than the other settlers, he was the real American--"a lineal descendant of Columbus" (IAG, 137):

...because of a descent to the ground of his desire was Boone's life important and does it remain still loaded with power. (IAG, 136)

Filled with the wild beauty of the New World to overbrimming so long as he had what he desired, to bathe in, to explore always more deeply, to see, to feel, to touch--his instincts were contented. Sensing a limitless fortune which daring could make his own, he sought only with primal lust to grow close to it, to understand it and to be part of its mysterious movements--like an Indian. (IAG, 137)

There must be a new wedding. But he saw and only he saw the prototype of it all, the native savage. To Boone the Indian was his greatest master. Not for himself surely to be an Indian, though they eagerly sought to adopt him into their tribes, but the reverse: to be himself in a new world, Indianlike. If the land were to be possessed it must be as the Indian possessed it. Boone saw the truth of the Red Man, not an aberrant type, treacherous and anti-white to be feared and exterminated, but as a natural expression of the place, the Indian himself as "right," the flower of his world. (IAG, 137-138)

As the first passage indicates, contact with the processes of the earth is not some "ideal" process; rather, it is a return to the ground of human desire.⁷ In the "mysterious movements" of the New World's force, Boone discovered something primary to his own nature. He saw the necessity of touching both the earth and the Indian, the fullest concretization of the ground. The distinction made between Boone and the Indian, however, is important. Williams is not proposing that Americans should become Indians, but "Indianlike." He is not advocating a simple "primitivism" for its own sake, but the conscious adoption of the Indian's mode of consciousness, which allows an immediate relation to the ground

of human experience. When such writers as Williams, Emerson, and Thoreau argue the validity of "primal relations," they are not implying that men should become "primitives" opposed to civilization. Charles Olson, who in many ways continues the work of Williams, clarifies this matter in his "Letter to Elaine Feinstein." His comments bear a direct relation to our own discussion:

I mean of course not at all primitive in that stupid use of it as opposed to civilized. One means it now as 'primary,' as how one finds anything, pick it up as one does new--fresh/first.⁸

According to Olson, and this applies to Williams, the "primitive" is not opposed to civilization, but precedes it, being the elemental, primary, the "fresh/first" experiences of man's relation to the earth.⁹ Through the example of Boone, Williams is arguing that like the Indian Americans should also relate to the earth primally, and like the Indian, become a "natural expression of the place" in which they live.

Similarly, Williams is not attacking Puritanism as a phenomenon in itself--it was their "tough littleness" (IAG, 65), as he mentions, that made it possible for them to survive--but the kind of consciousness it introduced into America. At other times, as in "The American Background," an essay that should be read along with In the American Grain, he calls this same phenomenon "European," or in the same breath, the "Old" (SE, 134-161). Like the term "Puritanism," these two adjectives also describe the mode of perceiving and knowing that insists upon categorizing experience according to fixed forms. Williams' criticism of contemporary science is also an attack upon modes of perception that abstract men from the activity of their experience. Since both "Puritanism" and science

impose fixed forms on to experience, classifying experience according to fixed concepts, Williams sees them as connected enemies of his assertion that men must relate to the organic processes of the earth:

By the strength of religion alone, they surmounted all difficulties in which science has degraded us again today; all things they explain, with clarity and distinction. It is firm, it is solid, it holds the understanding in its true position, not beneath the surface of the facts, where it will drown, but up, fearlessly into a clear air, like science at its best, in a certain few minds. For our taste, it is perhaps a little grotesque, this explanation--but firm. (IAG, 110)

Approaching knowledge categorically, the understanding works with the surface of facts alone. Assuming that "knowledge" consists of a detached analysis of things, it obscures man's elemental relations and separates him from his world. To repeat the phrase already quoted from Paterson: "Divorce is/the sign of knowledge in our time." Categorical thinking, "the sign of knowledge in our time," abstracts man from his world and divorces him from the earth, a condition that poetry alone can heal. In a letter to Kenneth Burke, Williams distinguishes between philosophical and poetic knowledge:

The nascent instincts are the feelers into new territories
 ...Deductive reasoning is in the main useless to us today
 or if not useless at least secondary in value. (SL, 252)

Furthermore, "analysis is merely an adjunct" to the "universal activity of the mind" (SL, 252) as it relates to facts immediately and intimately. Deductive reasoning, characteristic of "Puritanism," science, and most forms of academic knowledge, is secondary because it begins in separation and gives man no essential knowledge of the source of things.

In "The American Background," the terms "Europe" and "Old" symbolize this "deductive" approach to experience. The American past, says Williams, embodies "two cultural elements ... battling for supremacy, one looking toward Europe, necessitous but retrograde in its tendency...and the other forward-looking but under a shadow from the first" (SE, 135). He delineates the terms of his argument with clear precision:

Throughout the present chapter, the terms native and borrowed, related and unrelated, primary and secondary, will be used interchangeably to designate these two opposed split-offs from the full cultural force, and occasionally, in the same vein, true and false. (SE, 135)

The adjectives "related," "primary," and "true" apply to such men as Rasles, Boone, Crockett, Houston, Jefferson, and Poe, men who "made contact with the intrinsic elements of an as yet unrealized material of which the new country was made" (SE, 140). In one way or another, all of these men had to contend with the "borrowed," "unrelated," "secondary," and "false" forces they found dominating their society. Their sensitivity to the real forces of America ironically made them "foreigners--in their own country" (SE, 141). Based on a negation of contact, America made "strangers" (SE, 140) out of those very men who could have built an authentic culture. As Williams writes:

They in themselves had achieved a culture, an adjustment to the conditions about them, which was of the first order, and which, at the same time, oddly cut them off from the others. (SE, 141)

The real American culture was so weak that it was easily destroyed by the imposition of the old. Men like Boone and Crockett, for instance, gave themselves up to their locality but could not cultivate their initial

response in language:

Such men had no way of making their realizations vocal. They themselves became part of the antagonistic wilderness against which the coastal settlements were battling. Their sadness alone survives. Many of them could hardly read. Their speech became crude. (SE, 141)

Even those, like Poe, Jefferson, and Whitman, who did articulate the real ground of America, did so at the cost of becoming strangers to their own society. Up to the present day, says Williams, "There has not yet appeared in the New World any one with sufficient strength for the open assertion" (IAG, 154-155) of the possible, authentic American culture. The "open assertion," for Williams, will be an art work, more specifically a poem, that concretizes, by containing and revealing, the authentic America. It will solve the problem of contact and "reconcile the people and the fontes." Although Williams' statement that no one has yet been able to make the "open assertion" is debatable, it does clarify the concern of such 19th century American writers as Whitman, Poe, Emerson, and Thoreau. Following them, not only Williams' Paterson, but Pound's Cantos, Crane's The Bridge, and more recently, Olson's Maximus Poems show how much this attempt to make a poetic "assertion" of America's possibilities is a part of the "American grain."

By returning to the American past, says Williams, we can affirm the successive failures of Houston, Poe, and Whitman. By relating to the ground themselves, they point the way to the creation of a true culture. "It is imperative that we sink" (IAG, 214): the descent that they experienced and could not assert is a necessary first step. And so Williams turns directly to the example of Poe, who made the descent and revealed "a new locality" (IAG, 216) in his writings. His work, according to

Williams, is important to contemporary America because it is "the first great burst through to expression of a re-awakened genius of place" (IAG, 216). Originally the conclusion of In the American Grain--"Abraham Lincoln" was added later with the advice of Williams' publisher (A, 236)--the section on Poe introduces the issue of the relation of art to the authentic American culture.

In an important passage from the section immediately preceding, appropriately called "Descent," Williams describes the "rooted" man, and arguing for the necessity of art, gives us the terms to understand the achievement of Poe:

He wants to have the feet of his understanding on the ground, his ground, the ground, the only ground that he knows, that which is under his feet. I speak of aesthetic satisfaction. This want, in America, can only be filled by knowledge, a poetic knowledge, of that ground. (IAG, 213)

Like Boone, Poe realized that the difficulty of the New World is "neither material nor political but one purely moral and aesthetic" (IAG, 136), the two important phases of the problem of contact. Men must touch the ground, but unless their experience is concretized in art, it cannot be actualized. To articulate the experience of contact, according to Williams, is to reveal that contact. As such, art constitutes essential human knowledge. Boone could not assert an authentic culture because he was unable, as mentioned previously, to make his "realizations vocal" (SE, 141). Poe, on the other hand, is of major importance to the study of American literature. He is the first American to assert the function of language, metaphor, and poetic form (the poem itself) as the only means to concretize the ground. "A new De Soto" (IAG, 220), he directs his criticism of

literature toward the annihilation of "the copied, the slavish, the false literature about him" (IAG, 223), refusing to copy, Williams says, "because he had the sense within him of a locality of his own, capable of cultivation" (IAG, 225). To Poe, "words were not hung by usage of associations" (IAG, 221), but "were figures" (IAG, 221). His mathematical concern over method is a struggle to find a poetic form capable of embodying the "hard, sardonic, truculent mass of the New World" (IAG, 225). He responded to the New World, gave himself up to its forces, touched the ground of his experience, and rejected what was not related to his locality: he turned his back on the "borrowed," "unrelated," "secondary," and "false" forms of perception that abstract men from their experience, "and faced inland, to originality, with the identical gesture of a Boone" (IAG, 226).

Yet his achievement goes all but unrecognized. Americans characterize him as "a Macabre genius, essentially lost upon the grotesque and the arabesque" (IAG, 219). They cannot understand him because they have not themselves touched the ground of their experience. The same kind of "puritanism" that makes them "anti-American" makes them "anti-literature." Avoiding contact with the ground, they refuse to accept any literature that reveals it--art becoming another form comparable to the "Indian." The bizarre aspects of Poe's writings are therefore the direct result of his contact with the American locale which, as Williams points out, "must appear eerie, even to himself, by force of terrific contrast" (IAG, 222) to an America so totally divorced from its ground.

The paradox of Poe centralizes the problem of the artist in contemporary America: by becoming a real American, he, and other/^slike him, remain unrecognized. "Americans have never recognized themselves," says Williams, and continues:

How can they? It is impossible until someone invent the original terms. As long as we are content to be called by somebody's else [sic] terms, we are incapable of being anything but our own dupes.

Thus Poe must suffer by his originality. Invent that which is new, even if it be made of pine from your own yard, and there's none to know what you have done. It is because there's no name. This is the cause of Poe's lack of recognition. He was American. He was the astounding, inconceivable growth of his locality. (IAG, 226)

Even in the opening pages of Williams' Spring and All we are made aware that the "original terms" to solve the problem of contact are lacking in contemporary America. Poe's example is still intensely present as Williams himself fights the "anti-literature" spirit pervading his world. Misunderstanding the basis of his poems, he argues, critics react negatively, calling them "the death of poetry," the "annihilation of life," "anti-poetry" (SA, 2). Their reaction is quite normal, in terms of Williams' assumptions, because they too, like the Puritans before them, treat experience in categorical terms and never see beyond the fixed forms they impose on the particularities of the world. He reverses their charges by saying, "I interpret it to say: 'You have robbed me. God, I am naked. What shall I do?'" (SA, 2): How can they possibly have the language to understand his poems when they themselves have never experienced a contact with the ground of their experience?

Before we can begin to discover the "terms," therefore, all forms that abstract men from the world must be destroyed. A large part of Spring and All is accordingly devoted to an attack on what Williams calls "crude symbolism" (SA, 20)--comparative similes and that "'evocation of the 'image' which served us for a time" (SA, 20)--those fixed forms of thought that are based on the assumption that the world is at our dis-

posal, there simply to embody "ideas" or to serve as convenient comparative examples of "ideas." Charles Olson's own concerns once again help us to define Williams' thought; read in terms of Williams' criticism of "crude symbolism," the following statement from his essay "Human Universe" is illuminating:

What it comes to is ourselves, that we do not find ways to hew to experience as it is, in our definition and expression of it, in other words, find ways to stay in the human universe, and not be led to partition reality at any point, in any way. For this is just what we do do, this is the real issue of what has been, and the process, as it now asserts itself, can be exposed. It is the function, comparison, or, its bigger name, symbology. These are the false faces, too much seen, which hide and keep from us the active intellectual states, metaphor and performance. All that comparison ever does is set up a series of reference points: to compare is to take one thing and try to understand it by marking its similarities to or differences from another thing. Right here is the trouble, that each thing is not so much like or different from another thing (these likenesses and differences are apparent) but that such an analysis only accomplishes a description, does not come to grips with what really matters: that a thing, any thing, impinges on us by a more important fact, its self-existence, without reference to any other thing, in short, the very character of it which calls our attention to it, which wants us to know more about it, its particularity.¹⁰

According to Olson, we live in a "human universe" because all experience is the inter-acting forces of self-existing things as they impinge on our consciousness "without reference to any other thing." Any mode of perception that cannot hold experience "as it is," removes us from the "life" of the world. Through similes and referential symbols we attempt to understand "one thing" by delineating "its similarities to or differences from another thing." By doing this, we approach the world with the same kind of consciousness as the Puritans in In the American Grain. Separated

from the "going-on" of experience, we are divorced from the "human universe" in which we belong. And when the force of experience is absent, as it is in "crude symbolism," we have nothing more than a simple copy, reflection, or description of objects. Williams' life-long criticism of similes is grounded on this awareness; that simple comparisons between objects, ideas, and emotions take us away from our involvement in the particularity of the world. The "internal fire" of a thing, he says in the "Notes in Dairy Form," that which makes it what it is, is "'like' nothing. Therefore the bastardy of the simile" (SE, 68). In an important passage from the "Prologue" to Kora in Hell, he argues further that the simile, even though stemming from a desire to know the world, causes more confusion than clarity:

...the coining of similes is a pastime of very low order, depending as it does upon a nearly vegetable coincidence. Much more keen is that power which discovers in things those inimitable particles of dissimilarity to all other things which are the peculiar perfections of the thing in question.

But this loose linking of one thing with another has effects of a destructive power little to be guessed at: all manner of things are thrown out of key so that it approaches the impossible to arrive at an understanding of anything. All is confusion, yet it comes from a hidden desire for the dance, a lust of the imagination, a will to accord two instruments in a duet. (SE, 16)

Figures, such as similes and images evoked to embody an emotion or idea, as in Eliot's notion of the objective correlative, are the "false faces" of experience, to repeat Olson's words. All comparisons begin from a reference point, as in representational art with its concern for perspective, and try to comprehend experience from a fixed position. The real facts or particulars of experience "are thrown out of key so that it

approaches the impossible to arrive at an understanding of anything." Rather than melting particulars into each other, says Williams, the artist should try to reveal those "inimitable particles of dissimilarity" in things, those qualities that distinguish them from other things.

Those "Traditionalists of Plagiarism" (SA, 15), possibly the main focal point of Williams' attack in Spring and All, whose attachment to "crude symbolism" leads them to view all art as nothing more than a copy of nature, a fiction removed from the world, are therefore essentially no different from the Puritans. Another face of the "European," "Old," "Puritan" mode of consciousness that insists upon approaching experience through categories, the "Traditionalists" also impose predetermined forms of perception on to their experience. In direct opposition to them, Williams outlines his plan for action:

What I put down of value will have this value: an escape from crude symbolism, the annihilation of strained associations, complicated ritualistic forms designed to separate the work from "reality" --such as rhyme, meter as meter and not as the essential of the work, one of its words. (SA, 22)¹¹

According to Williams, all categorical impositions, by distorting the nature of our relation to the world, separate us from reality, actually accomplish the opposite of what they set out to do. Making "nature an accessory to the particular theory he is following" (SA, 49), the "Traditionalists of Plagiarism," along with all men who approach experience with fixed forms of thought, live an "energy in vacuo," as Williams says in "To Have Done Nothing" (SA, 25-26).¹² Objects simply become a function of the mind. Enacting the kind of reductio ad absurdum inherent in this way of thinking, the poem is interesting as a movement in itself:

No that is not it
 nothing that I have done
 nothing
 I have done

is made up of
 nothing
 and the diphthong

ae

together with
 the first person
 singular
 indicative

of the auxiliary
 verb
 to have

everything
 I have done
 is the same

if to do
 is capable
 of an
 infinity of
 combinations

involving the
 moral
 physical
 and religious

codes

for everything
 and nothing
 are synonymous
 when

energy in vacuo
 has the power
 of confusion

which only to
 have done nothing
 can make perfect

Through syntactical gyrations the poem mocks the kind of logic that distances

men from the activity of the world. With all of its negatives--nothing that the poet has done is made up of nothing--the poem goes on to assert that "To Have Done Nothing" is the only way to move toward some-thing. Poems that reveal thought as it acts in the world will seem meaningless, especially if approached with fixed "moral/physical/and religious//codes." When we bring pre-determined systems of thought, those "codes" with which we think we give meaning to the world, we actually distort the particularity of things. Since these forms force objects into rigid moulds and so misshape the nature of experience, what we consider "everything" is really "nothing:" "energy in vacuo." Connected to no-thing ("no ideas but in things") the potential energy of our thought is imprisoned in the resulting vacuum of our minds, "which only to/have done nothing/can make perfect." If we can allow our minds to flow with the particularity of objects as they impinge on us as self-existing things, "without reference to any other thing," as Olson previously said, our knowledge would lose the "power/of confusion" and begin to clarify human experience. Williams offers this same advice in "The Avenue of Poplars" (SA, 81-82) where the poet ascends and descends a "canopy of leaves" simply because he accepts the activity of experience as it happens and moves with the physicality of his world:

I do not

seek a path
I am still with

Gypsy lips pressed
to my own--

It is the kiss
of leaves

pay a great price for their blindness. The particularity of night is no different from the particularity of day, each having its own unique qualities. Insisting on perceiving with fixed frame/^s of reference ("It is the classical mistake"), they lose contact with the source of their experience:

The day

All that enters in another person
all grass, all blackbirds flying
all azalea trees in flower
salt winds--

Sold to them knock blindly together
splitting their heads open

That is why boxing matches and
Chinese poems are the same--

Their misinterpretation of night divorcing them from the particulars of day, these men cannot handle the real facts of human experience: the day, "all that enters in another person," knocks "blindly together/ splitting their heads open." By serving as an aborted release of desire, "Boxing matches" ironically perform the same function as "Chinese poems," although the obvious qualitative difference between the two clarifies the human cost of divorce. When perceived precisely, without preconception, the "twist of the wind" contains no "meaning" but "dashes of cold rain:" particulars in a world of particulars. With this awareness Williams goes on to declare his independence from outworn associations that disassociate him from the world of things:

Black wind, I have poured my heart out
to you until I am sick of it--

Now I run my hand over you feeling

the play of your body--the quiver
of its strength--

No longer will he interpret the "Black wind" in terms of his own "subjective" feelings. Instead he gives himself over to the particularity of the wind as it exists in itself. He touches the "play" of its physicality, "the quiver/of its strength," and begins to experience its movement as it acts in the world. The last lines extend the lesson learned from the experience of the poem:

The grief of the bowmen of Shu
moves nearer--There is
an approach with difficulty from
the dead--the winter casing of grief

How easy to slip
into the old mode, how hard to
cling firmly to the advance--

Possibly the reference to the "bowmen of Shu" has its source in Ezra Pound's transcription of the "Song of the Bowmen of Shu" in the Cathay poems.¹³ The Bowmen are grief stricken, caught as they are between the desire to return home from battle and the awareness that the Mongols must be defeated if their country is to be safe. Perhaps Williams felt that his own battle with the "Traditionalists of Plagiarism" contained something of "The grief of the bowmen of Shu:" a foreigner in his own country, he also wants to return to the real America, but realizes that an authentic culture necessitates a destruction of all impositions. One line from Pound's transcription reads, "The enemy is swift, we must be careful," and could very well have been in Williams' mind as he argued his theory of the revelatory poem. His achievement in "The Black Wind," which is the achievement of Spring and All in general, is this movement

from the "old mode" into the new, the emergence of Kora from "the winter casing of grief" into the spring of a new consciousness. But the battle is still to be won: "how hard to/cling firmly to the advance."

As mentioned previously, Williams is not yearning for some kind of "ideal" visionary America: the problem of contact is both an aesthetic and a moral issue. The ground of America, Boone discovered, is the ground of human desire. Without contact America (or any other country) cannot flower into an authentic culture. Describing the consequences of "divorce" in the section "Jacataqua" from In the American Grain, Williams says that it is fear that makes Americans so obsessed with wealth, material things, and mechanical inventions. Fear that causes their abhorrence of sexuality. Fear that causes their lack of flowering women. "Never to allow touch," he writes. "What are we but poor doomed carcasses, any one of us? Why then all this fury, this multiplicity we push between ourselves and our desires?" (IAG, 178) A part of the energy of desire that could be released through a fruitful marriage with the processes of the earth, for instance, is drained off through America's attraction to "violence" (IAG, 177) both in the world and in entertainment:

Our breed knows no better than the coarse fibre
of football, the despair we have for touching,
the cheek, the breast--drives us to scream in
beaten frenzy at the great spectacle of violence
--or to applaud coldness and skill. (IAG, 180)

As we have already seen in "The Black Winds," divorce from the source of desire results in a "Beastly humanity" that values "Boxing matches" and "Chinese poems" equally. "At the Ball Game" (SA, 88-90) also brings

out this loss of humanity, but now in a "crowd at the ball game" that "is moved uniformly//by a spirit of uselessness." All lines of individuality disappear as the crowd-mob releases its desire through the vicarious excitement of the baseball game:

all the exciting detail
of the chase

and the escape, the error
the flash of genius--

all to no end save beauty
the eternal--

Unaware of the ground of their desire--"We are blind asses, with our whole history unread before us and helpless if we read it" (IAG, 179)-- the crowd does not know that the energy they are expending uselessly is the real potentiality of America. "Why it's the New World itself in the very blood and ghost of Dante's Vita Nuova," Williams once wrote in a letter, and added, "Blast them all if they can't see it" (SL, 141). In itself desire is the possibility for the creation of beauty. When it is not released fruitfully it becomes a dangerous force:

So in detail they, the crowd,
are beautiful

for this
to be warned against

saluted and defied--
It is alive, venomous

it smiles grimly
its words cut--

Desire has both a positive and negative side. When it leads to a flowering marriage with the ground of experience, as in the life of Rasles, it

should be "saluted," "defied" when aborted, as in the horrors of "the Inquisition," and the witch trials documented in the "Cotton Mather's Wonders of the Invisible World" section of In the American Grain. In this context Williams sees the crowd as the possible basis of an authentic culture:

It is beauty itself
that lives

day by day in them
idly--

This is
the power of their faces.

Ironically enough, the "venomous" crowd carries the power of beauty within it. Williams realizes the potentiality of the beauty that moves "day by day in them/idly:" The desire that has the possibility to blossom into beauty is natural to all men and so it lives "idly" in the crowd. Williams can see this natural force living in them as potentiality: "This is/the power of their faces." This dual nature of men is clarified even further in "Horned Purple" (SA, 71-72): in spite of their "vulgarity," boys, called "Dirty satyrs" by Williams, adorn "two horned lilac blossoms/in their caps" when the season moves them:

They have stolen them
broken the bushes apart
with a curse for the owner--

Lilacs--

They stand in the doorways
on the business streets with a sneer
on their faces

adorned with blossoms
Out of their sweet heads
dark kisses--rough faces

In their crudeness, "a sneer/on their faces," these boys are another example of "The pure products of America" that go "crazy" in the poem "To Elsie" (SA, 64-67), Williams' open condemnation of the moral devastation of America. The country is characterized by its "deaf-mutes," "thieves," "devil-may-care men," and "young slatterns" who wander about aimlessly trying to articulate their desire. With "imagination which have no//peasant traditions to give them/character," they react to their world "without/emotion/save numbed terror." Ignorant of their sources, they "cannot express" their world, except to reveal their divorced condition through the concretization of "some Elsie" who embodies the broken consciousness of America:

voluptuous water
expressing with broken

brain the truth about us--
her great
ungainly hips and flopping breasts

addressed to cheap
jewelry
and rich young men with fine eyes

With her "ungainly hips and flopping breasts," Elsie reveals the moral decay of a country that lacks the poetry to create a meaningful marriage with the "voluptuous" earth. In this desolate atmosphere the very processes of the earth that could provide a wholeness become "an excrement of some sky//and we degraded prisoners" of our own inability to touch the source of our desire. Not totally lost, however, the possibility for an authentic culture needs to be fought openly:

...the imagination strains
after deer

going by fields of goldenrod in

the stifling heat of September
Somehow
it seems to destroy us

It is only in isolate flecks that
something
is given off

No one
to witness
and adjust, no one to drive the car

"To Elsie" is one of Williams' more negative poems and serves to emphasize the desperation he feels throughout Spring and All--the lack of "poetic knowledge" of the ground inevitably results in an America of Elsie. It is not surprising, therefore, that he urgently advocates the destruction of the world in its opening pages. "Tomorrow," he writes, "we the people of the United States are going to Europe armed to kill every man, woman and child in the area west of the Carpathian Mountains (also east) sparing none....First we shall kill them and then they, us" (SA, 4). This giant "self inflicted holocaust" (SA, 6) will be carried out not in hate but for love. The value of human experience is involved: unless all of the old forms of perception are destroyed, along with all "crude symbolism," men will never be able to release their desire through the creation of an authentic culture, the "new" world that will replace the "old." Only with the break-down and destruction of old forms of order can men be freed to relate to the ground of their desire--and the imagination be allowed to carry out the execution of the old mode of consciousness:

The imagination, intoxicated by prohibitions, rises

to drunken heights to destroy the world. Let it
rage, let it kill. The imagination is supreme. (SA, 5)

Nothing should remain except "the lower vertebrates," says Williams, "the mollusks, insects and plants" (SA, 5-6). Only then can the world be made new. The corpse of a suicide victim thrown up on the shore of a lake becomes the possibility for renewal: "You seem a cathedral," says Williams, "celebrant of the spring which shivers for me among the long black trees" (SA, 8).

"It is spring," Williams continues, and qualifies, "That is to say, it is approaching THE BEGINNING" (SA, 10):

In that colossal surge toward the finite and the capable life has now arrived for the second time at that exact moment when in the ages past the destruction of the species Homo sapiens occurred [sic].

Now at last the process of miraculous verisimilitude, that grating copying which evolution has followed, repeating move for move every move that it made in the past--is approaching the end.

Suddenly it is at an end. THE WORLD IS NEW.

I

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast--a cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines--

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches--

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind--

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf
One by one objects are defined--
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance--Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted, they
grip down and begin to awaken (SA, 11-13)

The revolution that Williams proposes, however, is not an end result of man developing in time as much as it is a movement in consciousness that produces such an effect. When we allow our minds to open up to the source of our experience, we will always experience the life-processes of the earth as something altogether NEW, especially if we have never touched the ground before. "The birth of the imagination," Williams says in the "Prologue" to Kora in Hell, "is like waking from a nightmare" (SE, 18). Because each man must make contact with the elemental processes of the earth through his own particular experiences, the revelation of "spring and all" that it implies will always appear to result linearly. Williams' comment that "only the imagination is undeceived" (SA, 10) indicates that he is aware that beneath the particulars of every age "EVOLUTION HAS REPEATED ITSELF FROM THE BEGINNING" (SA, 8). Life is continuous and always has and will be revealed in the "eternal moment in which we alone live" (SA, 3) as long as we continue to touch the ground of our experience. "Spring and All," along with Spring and All, is therefore concerned with "beginnings"

--the way men must approach their experience in order to know something of their sources. As Williams himself moves through the terrain in the poem and watches the first signs of spring, he can note "the stark dignity of/entrance" only because he has responded to the processes of the earth. As his thought opens in terms of and through the first process of spring, he too, along with the objects of nature, begins to "grip down and begin to awaken."

Before we return to Williams in the last section of this study, we will explore how the problem of contact is treated in the works of two nineteenth century writers, Emerson and Thoreau, and one twentieth century poet, Wallace Stevens. Nearly a century before In the American Grain was published, Emerson opened his essay "Nature" with the now well-known question: "Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe?" In terms often very similar to Williams, Emerson attacks the "divorce" he sees in his contemporary world, and through his essays tries to make men aware of their elemental relation to the universe. After Emerson, we will move to a consideration of Walden as a representative work. Through its narrative world, Thoreau lives out the problem and learns how to act with the processes of nature, at the same time that he discovers that he has created a work of art that holds on to and reveals his experience. Returning to the twentieth century, we will then study this problem as it manifests itself in the poetic world

of Wallace Stevens' Collected Poems. Although Stevens was searching for the same source as Williams, Emerson, and Thoreau, unlike the others, he accepted the validity of the epistemological puzzle--"how do we know that we know what we know?"--and consequently entered into a life-time preoccupation with the forms of perception rather than the content of his experiences. As the final section of the Collected Poems, The Rock, indicates, his involvement in the "subject-object" problem ironically distanced him from that very reality he sought. In the final section, therefore, we will return to Williams and his proposal that "the poem" is the only form of knowledge capable of revealing the nature of the ground.

Section Two:

Elemental Relations

Metamorphosis as Vital Principle in Emerson

The nature of things is flowing, a metamorphosis.

'Let there be an entrance opened for me into realities; I have worn the fool's cap too long.'

Poetry, if perfected, is the only verity; is the speech of man after the real, and not after the apparent.

...nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim.

Once you saw phoenixes: they are gone; the world is not therefore disenchanted. The vessels on which you read sacred emblems turn out to be common pottery; but the sense of the pictures is sacred, and you may still read them transferred to the walls of the world.

Although we would be unjustified in saying that Emerson's thought is a direct result of the shift in consciousness provided by Romanticism, we should nevertheless be aware that his antagonism toward eighteenth century mechanistic thought is a part of a larger historical change in attitudes.¹ One critic of American literature, Richard P. Adams, for instance, has been especially concerned with the manifestation of European and English Romanticism in the America of the 1830's and 1840's. Many of his conclusions stem from Morse Peckham's short but informative essay, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," a study of the "specific historical movement in art and ideas which occurred in Europe and America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries."² In brief, Peckham asserts that the "shift in European thought was a shift from conceiving the cosmos as a static mechanism to conceiving it as a dynamic organicism."³ The Neo-Classic perception of the universe, best understood as a static machine, no longer explained the whole of contemporary human experience. This system collapsed in the late eighteenth century "of its

own internal inconsistencies," says Peckham, because

all its implications had been worked out; they stood forth in all their naked inconsistency. It became impossible to accept a theodicy based upon it. More and more, thinkers began searching for a new system of explaining the nature of reality and the duties of men.⁴

More interested in the product of this shift than its historical roots, Peckham uses the Romantic metaphor of the tree to explain the implications of dynamic organicism. Like a tree, the universe is alive and continually growing and changing organically. Each part of the universe is both unique and inter-related with every other part. Change is positive because composition and decomposition are both a part of the cosmos. In "Romanticism and the American Renaissance," Adams proposes that this same shift occurs in American literature, concretized specifically in Moby-Dick, Walden, and "Song of Myself," three works that deal with the rejection of static mechanism and acceptance of dynamic organicism. Within this context Adams concludes that American thought in the 1830's and 1840's, at least in generalities, is related to English and European Romanticism:

...the independent, self-sustaining American literature which arose during the middle years of the nineteenth century was not so much the result of American writers' rejection of European models and devotion to native themes as it was of their somewhat belated rejection of static mechanism and adoption of dynamic organicism, in which they were greatly aided and encouraged by the example of such Europeans as Goethe, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle.^{4a}

We do not have to look very far into Emerson work to realize that his

thought encompasses this organic view of the universe. In "Nature," for instance, he says that "Nature is not fixed but fluid," or in "Circles," that the "universe is fluid and volatile" in such a way that "permanence is but a word of degrees."⁵ In fact we might go so far as to say that Emerson's thought begins on the premise of dynamic organicism and moves from that point.⁶

Against this background, Emerson attacks not only "static mechanism," but all modes of knowledge that prevent man from actualizing his "original relation to the universe." More specifically, he criticizes the whole rational approach to human experience that sees materialism and idealism as the two exclusive diametrically opposed forms of knowledge. In the section "Montaigne; or, the Skeptic" from Representative Men, he discusses these two sides of the rational mind, "This head and this tail" (ECW, IV, 150) of thought, commenting that

Each man is born with a predisposition to one or the other of these sides of nature; and it will easily happen that men will be found devoted to one or the other. (ECW, IV, 150)

The materialist is concerned with "difference" (ECW, IV, 150), "facts and surfaces" (ECW, IV, 150), while the idealist, searching for "identity" (ECW, IV, 150), too conveniently disposes of substance. As a representative of the skeptical mind, Montaigne realizes that either side of the argument is limited by what it denies:

The abstractionist and the materialist thus mutually exasperating each other...there arises a third party to occupy the middle ground between these two, the skeptic, namely. (ECW, IV, 154-155)

Even though the skeptic sees the dilemma, he does not move beyond the problem to a ground that overcomes it. Rather than affirming a position that balances the two poles of thought, he accepts the unsolvable situation as the state of things. "I never affirm nor deny," he says. "I stand here to try the case" (ECW,IV,156). Wanting a solution that will subsume both materialism and idealism, Emerson criticizes the skeptic for his inability to resolve the conflict. "The philosophy we want," says Emerson, "is one of fluxions and mobility," and continues:

The Spartan and Stoic schemes are too stark and still for our occasion. A theory of Saint John, and of non-resistance, seems, on the other hand, too thin and aerial. We want some coat woven of elastic steel, stout as the first and limber as the second. We want a ship in these billows we inhabit. An angular, dogmatic house would be rent to chips and splinters in this storm of many elements. No, it must be tight, and fit to the form of man, to live at all; as a shell must dictate the architecture of a house founded on the sea. (ECW,IV,160)

For Emerson, therefore, materialism is too static ("stark and still") and idealism too abstract ("thin and aerial")--a philosophy that can account for the whole of human experience as it occurs in the world must be fluid and elastic as experience. "In this storm of many elements," life is a dynamic relation to the facts of experience, materialism and idealism are both too "dogmatic" to reveal the continuous activity of man in the cosmos.

The philosophy that Emerson proposes must therefore be an extension of experience, fitting the "form of man" in the same way "as a shell must dictate the architecture of a house founded on the sea." This philosophy is further clarified in the following important passage from "Nature"

where Emerson attacks mechanistic materialism specifically and exposes the limitations of the dominant mode of knowledge in his contemporary world:

At present, man applies to nature but half his force. He works on the world with his understanding alone. He lives in it and masters it by a penny-wisdom; and he that works most in it is but a half-man, and whilst his arms are strong and his digestion good, his mind is imbruted, and he is a selfish savage. His relation to nature, his power over it, is through the understanding, as by manure; the economic use of fire, wind, water, and the mariner's needle; steam, coal, chemical agriculture; the repairs of the human body by the dentist and the surgeon. This is such a resumption of power as if a banished king should buy his territories inch by inch, instead of vaulting at once into his throne. Meantime, in the thick of darkness, there are not wanting gleams of a better light--occasional examples of the action of man upon nature with his entire force--with reason as well as understanding. (ECW, I, 72)

Since the understanding can provide only a surface knowledge of things, it cannot give man any essential insights into his "original" or primal relation to the universe. By not going beyond the data of the senses, mechanistic materialism sees man as determined by the laws of cause and effect. The world contains no other reality than the face value of material things. Even though mechanistic materialism may develop strong arms and equally strong digestive systems, by concerning itself with man's bodily nature alone, it divorces him from the universe. The understanding used exclusively prevents man from completing his organic relation to the universe, a relation grounded in human desire. In "The Transcendentalist," Emerson argues that the Transcendentalist's criticism of society is not based on negation but on the fulfillment of man's real nature. "Their quarrel with every man they meet is not with his

kind," says Emerson, "but with his degrees. There is not enough of him-- that is the only fault" (ECW, I, 344). In Emerson's organic philosophy, "gleams of a better light--occasional examples of the action of man upon nature with his entire force," the intuitive processes of Reason will accomodate outmoded forms of knowledge by completing their one-sided view of reality.

In other words, the "new philosophy," as Emerson calls his position in "Experience" (ECW, III, 75), will also subsume the idealist's rejection of matter as a fact of experience. Although we might argue that Emerson is closer to idealism than to materialism, it is important to understand his modification of the notion that the material world is a shadow of ideas. Emerson refuses to deny substantiality to a world whose physical reality is so immediate. "I have no hostility to nature," he says,

but a child's love to it. I expand and live in
the warm day like corn and melons. Let us speak
her fair. I do not wish to fling stones at my
beautiful mother, nor soil my gentle nest.
(ECW, I, 59).

Experience exists in a physical world, and any mode of knowing that denies "the existence of matter" (ECW, I, 63), writes Emerson, "makes nature foreign to me, and does not account for that consanguinity which we acknowledge to it" (ECW, I, 63). Perhaps Emerson felt more sympathetic toward idealism because it at least recognizes a reality other than the physical. More correctly, however, Emerson saw the whole philosophical argument over the substantiality or ideality of nature as an endless circular question, a futile attempt of the rational mind to comprehend an organic universe that refuses to be classified according to logical

categories of thought. In place of the traditional problem of knowledge, he says:

I only wish to indicate the true position of nature in regard to man, wherein to establish man all right education tends; as the ground which to attain is the object of human life, that is, of man's connection with nature. (ECW, I, 59)

"The true position of nature in regard to man" and "man's connection with nature:" two phrases that centralize the concerns of Emerson's essays. He was aware that rational forms of knowledge could not reveal man's organic relation to the universe as that relation occurs in the activity of experience. As we have already seen in our discussion of Williams, this kind of thinking by way of categories begins in separation and ends in separation, thereby losing hold of those connections between man and nature that make up the fabric of human experience. Concerned basically with man's "original" or elemental relation to the life processes of the cosmos, Emerson therefore wants to find a process whereby the fluidity and dynamism of human experience can be revealed in all of its vitality--logical questions of the existence or non-existence of matter, then, being inconsequential to the reality of primal experiences:

In my utter impotence to test the authenticity of the report of my senses, to know whether the impressions they make on me correspond with outlying objects, what difference does it make, whether Orion is up there in heaven, or some god paints the image in the firmament of the soul? The relation of parts and the end of the whole remaining the same, what is the difference, whether land and sea interact, and worlds revolve and intermingle without number or end--deep yawning under deep, and galaxy balancing galaxy, through absolute space--or whether,

without relations of time and space, the same appearances are inscribed in the constant faith of man (*italics mine*)? (ECW, I, 47-48)

Realizing that this rational, philosophical question cannot be answered with any logical certainty, Emerson argues that in the activity of experience nature remains substantial, and as long as we remain in experience, "so long," he writes,

as the active powers predominate over the reflective, we resist with indignation any hint that nature is more short-lived or mutable than spirit. (ECW, I, 48-49)

Rather than accepting the validity of the traditional epistemological question, he moves back behind the question and places the strongest emphasis upon experience. Charles Feidelson Jr., in an extremely important work of criticism called Symbolism and American Literature, is therefore quite correct in asserting that Emerson solves the epistemological problems posed by materialism and idealism by subsuming these two modes of knowledge in the act of perceiving. He thereby disassociates himself from the historical problems of knowledge:

While the contemporary psychology texts invariably laid down the proposition that "all existence, as far as human knowledge extends, is either material, or immaterial; corporeal, or spiritual," in Emerson's rephrasing these alternatives become "two modes of thinking," which, since they are both natural, are possibly reconcilable.⁷

Emerson's "transformation of dualism into ways of thinking," says Feidelson, could solve the "inherited problem of method" by assuming a "realm where method and content were one."⁸ With Emerson, knowledge

changes from "objective certainty to organic experience" and the "internal transmutation of thoroughly realistic forms."⁹ Before we can appreciate the full implications of Emerson's notion of symbolic thought, a process that transmutes the objects of organic experience into language and gives man an immediate knowledge of his relation to the universe, we should, however, understand the nature of his vision of the cosmos and man's position in it.

Sheared of all its detail, the Emersonian universe consists of two basic elements: Unity and Variety. "Two cardinal facts lie forever at the base" of the world, he says in Representative Men, "the one and the two.--1. Unity, or Identity; and, 2. Variety," and he continues:

we unite all things by perceiving the law which pervades them; by perceiving the superficial differences and the profound resemblances.... this very perception of identity or oneness, recognizes the difference of things. Oneness and otherness. It is impossible to speak or to think without embracing both. (ECW, IV, 47-8)

According to Emerson, "otherness," the world of objects in nature, is a part of "oneness," the central identity of all things in a source. In terminology that could lead to all kinds of misunderstandings if not delineated clearly, Emerson is bringing out a process that can only be explained by the term metamorphosis. And the further we enter into Emerson's universe we find that beneath the surface of characteristic terms such as "spirit," "Reason," "Instinct," "Over-soul," "Nature," to list only a few, lies the vital principle of metamorphosis, quite possibly the root process of all aspects of Emerson's thought. In brief, metamorphosis, that process of changing from one state or condition to another,

explains precisely how "oneness and otherness" are related. "The nature of things is flowing," says Emerson, "a metamorphosis" (ECW,VIII,71). Although the manifold forms of nature are continually changing organically, there is nevertheless a primal source for all things. For Emerson, accordingly, all things are different and yet one because all things are the metamorphosis of the Unity at the base of nature. In terms of the principle of metamorphosis, Unity or Identity, "the law which pervades" all things, inheres in objects as a part of their physical nature--objects being concretization/^sof the source, we cannot perceive Unity except through Variety. In "Nature," an essay from the Second Series, Emerson calls this same source natura naturans:

the quick cause before which all forms flee as the driven snows; itself secret, its works driven before it in flocks and multitudes, (as the ancients represented nature by Proteus, a shepherd,) and in undescribable variety. It publishes itself in creatures.... (ECW,III,179)

Natura naturans, the "secret" cause and source of all things, is Protean because it only "publishes itself in creatures" of nature that are constantly changing forms. Unknowable except through a concrete form, the "undescribable variety" of all things contain it as a part of their physical nature. When we experience this metamorphosis in the process of nature, we enter the mystery of all creation, and "stand before the secret of the world," as Emerson says, "there where Being passes into Appearance and Unity into Variety" (ECW,III,14). For Emerson, therefore, "There is, at the surface, infinite variety of things; at the centre there is simplicity of cause" (ECW,II,14). Composing and decomposing, passing from one state into another, the physical manifestations of the source

of all things, nature "is a mutable cloud which is always and never the same" (ECW,II,13)--never the same because each object has its own particularity, always the same because all things are metamorphoses of the inherent Unity. Every object in nature has this dual quality. "Cause and effect are two sides of one face" (ECW,II,314). Potentially, every object can reveal this "law" of unity (ECW,VIII,9) through its concrete particularity--a point that will assume great importance in our discussion of the nature of symbolism. "The secret cords or laws," writes Emerson, "show their well-known virtue through every variety..." (ECW,VIII,5). Emerson attacks materialism precisely because it does not recognize a source for particulars; in "Experience" he calls it a "sty of sensualism" (ECW,III,54) where man lives in an illusory "chain of physical necessity" (ECW,III,54). In the metamorphic Emersonian universe, "Every thing is medial" (ECW,II,304). No material fact is final in itself. Variety is the physical manifestation of Unity.¹⁰

Like the objects of nature, man is himself a metamorphosis of the source, himself a concretization of the "secret" cause, the proposal put forth in "The Over-Soul:"

Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descending into us from we know not whence. The most exact calculator has no prescience that somewhat incalculable may not balk the very next moment. I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine. (ECW,II,268)

He describes this source metaphorically as the Over-Soul: "that Unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other..." (ECW,II,268):

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal One. (ECW,II,268)

Man also lives in Variety at the same time that the particulars of his life are grounded in Unity, "the eternal One." The most well-known of Emerson's terms, the metaphor "Over-Soul" is perhaps an unfortunate description of the source because it suggests, especially when taken literally, a cause that exists outside of and "over" the world. But it must be understood in the context of metamorphosis: as the "secret" cause inheres in the physicality of objects, so the Over-Soul inheres in the physicality of man's life. As the "secret of nature" (ECW,II,270), it refers to the process of Unity as it passes through man.¹¹ Elsewhere in the same essay that source is called the "Highest Law" (ECW,II,270), the "Supreme Mind" (ECW,II,276), the "common nature" synonymous with "God" (ECW,II,277), and the "Divine mind" (ECW,II,281). In "Intellect" he calls it the "holy ghost" (ECW,II,341), and in "History" the "universal mind" (ECW,II,3). Sometimes he even suggests that it is something akin to pure energy. In "Experience," for instance, he approaches it as the "power" opposed to "form" or Variety, and even more specifically in "Poetry and Imagination," sees it simply as a force behind all things:

...nothing stands still in Nature but death; that the creation is on wheels, in transit, always passing into something else, streaming into something higher; that matter is not what it appears;--that chemistry can blow it all into gas. Faraday, the most exact of natural philosophers, taught that when we should arrive at the monads, or primordial elements (the supposed little cubes or prisms of which

all matter was built up), we should not find cubes or prisms, or atoms, at all, but spherules of force (*italics mine*). (ECW,VIII,4)

Like "Unity," "natura naturans," and "Being," all of these terms are various attempts to explain what we might call the "energy of being" that is the source and cause of all things, man included.¹² It is this energy of being that is at the base of the metamorphic Emersonian universe, and which can only be known by its concretization in material fact.¹³

If "there is one mind common to all individual men," as Emerson says in "History," and "every man is an inlet to the same and to all the same" (ECW,II,3), each man contains the entire universe within him:

Of the universal mind each individual man is one more incarnation. All its properties consist in him. Each new fact in his private experience flashes a light on what great bodies of men have done, and the crises of his life refer to national crises. (ECW,II,4)

If we understand the "universal mind" as the energy of being, we can see how a man can enter the whole history of humanity by virtue of his particularity. All "private experience" in this context is one more metamorphosis of the ground of experience, one more particular incarnating the energy of being. Each man is potentially the whole of human experience past and present. And since he is, as Emerson says, "the whole encyclopaedia of facts" (ECW,II,3), he has the capacity to reveal the whole of human history "from individual experience" (ECW,II,4).¹⁴ When Emerson asserts that men must experience an "original relation to the universe," he is simply asking them to act with the energy of being that already exists within them. The principle of metamorphosis shows that man is not

isolated from his world. When he relates to the cosmos organically, he discovers that he has elemental affinities with the process of things:

His power consists in the multitude of his affinities, in the fact that his life is intertwined with the whole chain of organic and inorganic being. (ECW,II,36)

Through these organic relations, he centralizes the universe in his particular being:

A man is a centre for nature, running out threads of relation through every thing, fluid and solid, material and elemental. The earth rolls; every clod and stone comes to the meridian: so every organ, function, acid, crystal, grain of dust, has its relation to the brain. (ECW,IV,9)

According to Emerson, a ray of relation goes out from man to every object of nature, and as long as he denies the energy of being, he remains a "broken giant" (ECW,II,31)--a king banished from his rightful kingdom:

It is the universal nature which gives worth to particular men and things. Human life, as containing this, is mysterious and inviolable, and we hedge it round with penalties and laws. All laws derive hence their ultimate reason; all express more or less distinctly some command of this supreme, illimitable essence. (ECW,II,5-6)

By assuming that objects of nature are final in themselves, materialism acts on the cosmos with the categorical understanding alone, and fails to come into contact with the "universal nature" that subsumes all "particular men and things." It forces organic experience into preconceived rational categories that imprison, "with penalties and laws,"

the very source knowledge of which would enable men to complete their vision of the world.

For Emerson, the energy of being cannot be known through any imposed form of knowledge. Men must first experience their primal relation to the elemental processes of the cosmos. Emerson praises the Greeks because their world reveals this process. Significantly, he calls their world "the primeval world--the Fore-World" (ECW, II, 23)--like Williams he is completely aware that elemental experiences are not a regression to the primitive but a movement toward the primary, the first experiences of men. Making these qualifications, he describes the Greek state in a manner reminiscent of Williams' view of Tenochtitlan, another example of a culture organically related to the ground of human experience:

The Grecian state is the era of the bodily nature, the perfection of the senses,--of the spiritual nature unfolded in strict unity with the body.
(ECW, II, 24)

The costly charm of the ancient tragedy, and indeed of all the old literature, is that the persons speak simply--speak as persons who have great good sense without knowing it, before yet the reflective habit has become the predominant habit of the mind. Our admiration of the antique is not admiration of the old, but of the natural. The Greeks are not reflective, but perfect in their senses... *natural = primal*
(Italics mine). (ECW, II, 25)

The Greek world is organically related to the elemental process of things. The kind of imbalance that materialism and idealism impose on experience is absent from this world, a world in which the energy of being unfolds "in strict unity with the body." The "reflective habit" of the mind, in turn, introduces the rational mode of knowledge which leads to man's

separation from the universe. As opposed to categorical knowledge, the Greek experience is not "antique" but "natural" to man, the possibility of any culture that allows the energy of being to flow through it. By entering the Greek world and making it present to contemporary experience, says Emerson, he can once again feel his vital relation to the universe. Since the universe has not changed since the Greeks, the elemental relations they experienced still remain the fruitful possibility. "The Greek had, it seems, the same fellow-beings as I," says Emerson. "The sun and moon, water and fire, met his heart precisely as they meet mine" (ECW, II, 26).

For Emerson accordingly, the "reflective habit" of the mind is the "fool's cap" (ECW, IV, 20) that prevents man from relating to the ground of human desire. The universe does not change, but the mind of man does--rational categories distort his vision of the world by distorting the nature of human experience. "The ruin or the blank that we see when we look at nature," says Emerson, "is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent but opaque" (ECW, I, 73). Rational modes of knowledge prevent man from receiving the flow of things in the continuous activity of human experience--the opacity of things is an illusion created by the rational mind. According to Emerson, therefore, man's fall was not into a knowledge of evil, but into the "reflective" approach to experience. In "Experience," for instance, he writes:

It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped,
 the discovery we have made that we exist.
 That discovery is called the Fall of Man.
 Ever afterwards we suspect our instruments.
 We have learned that we do not see directly, Hegel

but mediately, and that we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses which we are, or computing the amount of their errors. Perhaps these subject--lenses have a creative power; perhaps there are no objects. Once we lived in what we saw; now, the rapaciousness of this new power, which threatens to absorb all things, engages us.
(ECW, III, 75-76)

When we know rationally that we exist, we begin to believe that the universe is separate from us. Feeling isolated from the world, we soon come to suspect both the knowledge we have and the methods we use to acquire it. Suspecting our "instruments," we attempt to come to terms with what appears to be an alien universe by setting up the epistemological puzzle: "how do we know that we know what we know?" The puzzle itself then becomes a prison mainly because it is a fiction of the mind, a rational construct imposed upon the activity of experience. But we nevertheless falsely begin to think that we can only see "mediately," that our methods of knowing forever keep us from a direct knowledge of objects outside of ourselves. As the classical epistemological questions rise like spectres to haunt our minds, we become "strangers in nature" (ECW, II, 340), the very world that holds the roots of our experience. Is the locus of reality in the self (the "subject-lenses")? Do objects have a material existence outside of our perception of them? Unknowingly we have set up a dualistic universe and completed our fall out of experience.¹⁵

"The rapaciousness of this new power, which threatens to absorb all things, engages us," says Emerson, realizing the enormous hold rational thought has on his contemporaries. Because men do not see beyond the epistemological problem, they no longer live in what they see. Emerson

is aware that the problem of knowledge does not exist in the cosmos. The energy of being is just as real now as it was in the world of the Greeks. Only our vision has changed. The "blank" that we see exists in our inability to relate to the elemental processes that surround us. Before rational thought, writes Emerson, quoting his "Orphic poet" (ECW,I,72), man "'was permeated and dissolved by spirit. He filled nature with his overflowing current'" (ECW,I,71). Materialism and idealism upset the balance: "'he no longer fills the veins and veinlets; he is shrunk to a drop'" (ECW,I,71). But if the mind is responsible for the divorce, this same mind can overcome rational thinking. Even in his fallen state, man sometimes "'starts in his slumber, and wonders at himself and his house, and muses strangely at the resemblance betwixt him and it'" (ECW,I,72)--"his house" being the whole material universe which provides the connection between himself and the ground of his experience. In these moments he senses an innate process within him capable of re-integrating himself with the cosmos:

'He perceives that if his law is still paramount, if still he have elemental power, if his word is sterling yet in nature, it is not conscious power, it is not inferior but superior to his will. It is instinct. (ECW,I,72)

"Elemental power:" as clear a description as any of the energy of being as it manifests itself in the particular life of a man. This power is superior to man's will because it also belongs to the elemental processes of the cosmos of which particular men are metamorphoses. And this same "elemental power," what Emerson here calls Instinct, is called Reason elsewhere. In "Nature," for instance, after stating the existence of a

"universal soul within or behind" man's life, he says, "This universal soul he calls Reason" (ECW,I,27). Describing this capacity in relation to the Understanding, Emerson argues that when "the eye of Reason" is added to the understanding, "to outline and surface are at once added grace and expression" (ECW,I,49-50); he clarifies further:

If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them. (ECW,I,50)

At other times this same process of seeing into the source of things is grounded in the Intellect: "We only open our senses, clear away as we can all obstruction from the fact, and suffer the intellect to see" (ECW,II,238). For Emerson, therefore, such terms as "Instinct," "Reason," and "Intellect" refer to the intuitive process of a mind that holds the same energy of being as the universe. "Trust the instinct to the end," exhorts Emerson, "though you can render no reason. It is vain to hurry it. By trusting it to the end, it shall ripen into truth and you shall know why you believe" (ECW,II,330). In the Emersonian universe, then, this "elemental power" is the very condition of all experience and consequently the ground of self-trust and self-reliance:

What is the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded? What is the nature and power of that science-baffling star, without parallax, without calculable elements, which shoots a ray of beauty even into trivial and impure actions, if the least mark of independence appear? The inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct. We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuition. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis

cannot go, all things find their common origin. For the sense of being which in calm hours rises, we know not how, in the soul, is not diverse from things, from space, from light, from time, from man, but one with them and proceeds obviously from the same source whence their life and being proceed. (ECW, II, 63-64)

The "aboriginal Self" is the ground of human experience, the source of things as manifest in man. It is this "deep force" that "proceeds obviously from the same source" as the rest of creation that allows every particular mind to act with the energy of being behind or within concrete facts of experience. "Spontaneity or Instinct," then, refers to both the capacity and process of experiencing the "common origin" of things; the "sense of being" perceived in things is a part of the energy of being that contains "their life and being." Since this "science-baffling star," the source of "primary wisdom," cannot be known rationally (it is "without calculable elements") it can only be actualized in experience. "How can we speak of the action of the mind under any divisions, as of its knowledge, of its ethics, of its works, and so forth," writes Emerson, "since it melts will into perception, knowledge into act" (ECW, II, 325).

Since all "primary" knowledge must reveal man's "original" or elemental relation to the processes of the universe, Emerson turns to a mode of thought that contains experience by being an extension of it. Once again the Greek world, precisely because it concretized its relation to the universe through its mythology, is important to Emerson. "The beautiful fables of the Greeks," he writes, "being proper creations of the imagination and not of the fancy, are universal verities" (ECW, II, 30).¹⁶ In "Nature," accordingly, Emerson says that the "Imagination may be defined to be the use which the Reason makes of the material World"

(ECW, I, 52). We have entered a very important part of the Emersonian universe. To Emerson "primary" or vital thought is the process of Reason as it relates to the facts of the universe. A miniature of the metamorphic universe, man publishes himself through his thought. "A deep insight," says Emerson, "will always, like Nature, ultimate its thought in a thing" (ECW, VIII, 17). As the energy of being passing through man, Reason comes to know the universe by metamorphosing objects to the level of language. In the Emersonian universe, therefore, language and thought are both symbolic, symbols being the metamorphosis of things into words that reveal the ground of human experience. According to Emerson, then, the Greek myths are truths ("universal verities") of human experience because they reveal the "universal nature" through metamorphic symbols.

As mentioned previously, every fact in the Emersonian universe has both its surface or secondary meaning and its primary or elemental meaning as a metamorphosis of the energy of being. When an object is metamorphosed into a symbol, therefore, every object is potentially a correspondential symbol capable of revealing the ground of experience. And Plato, who was aware of the energy of being—he called it, says Emerson, the "super-essential" (ECW, IV, 61) and the "Ineffable" (ECW, IV, 62)—still asserted that "things are knowable," if not rationally at least symbolically:

...being from one, things correspond. There is a scale; and the correspondence of heaven to earth, of matter to mind, of the part to the whole, is our guide. (ECW, IV, 61)

Since matter corresponds to mind, and each object ("part") corresponds to its source ("whole"), man can actualize his relation to the universe only

when he transmutes his experience into symbolic language. Nature, to Emerson, is a "temple whose walls are covered with emblems, pictures and commandments of the Deity" (ECW, III, 17)—every "appearance in nature can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture" (ECW, I, 26). Nature provides not only the method but the means to knowledge. ✓
 "Nature is the incarnation of a thought..." (ECW, III, 196), or put differently, "The world is mind precipitated..." (ECW, III, 196): particular facts of experience are the fabric of man's thought and the mind knows itself and the universe by first turning itself inside out. Since nature concretizes thought, it is the basis of the correspondential symbol:

Nature offers all her creatures to him [the poet] as a picture-language. Being used as a type, a second wonderful value appears in the object, far better than its old value.... Things admit of being used as symbols because nature is a symbol, in the whole, and in every part. (ECW, III, 13)

...nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim. (ECW, I, 87)

When the eye of Reason responds, every clearly perceived object metamorphosed into a symbol can reveal its correspondential meaning. The particulars or arcs of the circle are the only way of apprehending the whole circle or source of experience:

...Nature itself is a vast trope, and all particular natures are tropes. As the bird alights on the bough, then plunges into the air again,

so the thoughts of God pause but for a moment in any form. All thinking is analogizing, and it is the use of life to learn metonymy. The endless passing of one element into new forms, the incessant metamorphosis, explains the rank which the imagination holds in our catalogue of mental powers. The imagination is the reader of these forms. The poet accounts all productions and changes in Nature as the nouns of language, uses them representatively, too well pleased with their ulterior to value much their primary meaning. (ECW, VIII, 15)¹⁷

In a constantly changing cosmos--in the "incessant metamorphosis" of forms from the energy of being, things are continually composing and decomposing--the process of symbols is the only way of seeing through the forms of objects. By transmuting objects into revelatory symbols as those objects are actively experienced, the imagination sees through their material surface and uncovers the process of the cosmos, and its "endless passing of one element into new forms." To the poet, objects of nature are the "nouns of language" which he uses to read the meaning of human experience. And every object is a potential symbol; Emerson advocates the egalitarian eye. When perceived elementally and metamorphosed into a symbol, every thing can reveal the whole sense of creation. Men should therefore immerse themselves in experience:

Life is our dictionary. Years are well spent in country labors; in town; in the insight into trade and manufactures; in frank intercourse with many men and women; in science; in art; to the one end of mastering in all their facts a language by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions. (ECW, I, 98)¹⁸

Emerson advises the Scholar to "embrace the common" (ECW, I, 111), the familiar, and so reveal symbolically the "sublime presence of the highest

spiritual cause lurking, as always it does lurk, in these suburbs and extremities of nature" (ECW, I, 111).

Even though words such as "trope," "analogizing," "representatively," and "picture-language" suggest that symbols are both referential and photographically static, we should now realize that the very opposite is the case. For Emerson, symbols must never be fixed but continually fluid. Growing out of organic experience, they can only mean in terms of that experience. Rather than being referential, when used properly, they are a means to actualize experience. Distinguishing between the poet and the mystic, Emerson argues that the metamorphic symbol is not a simple one-to-one relation between the mind and nature:

Here is the difference betwixt the poet and the mystic, that the last nails a symbol to one sense, which was a true sense for a moment, but soon becomes old and false. For all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead. (ECW, III, 34)

The symbol is an organic extension of the active process of experiencing the cosmos. It concretizes the flux of momentary experience and reveals the presence of the energy of being. When a fixed "idea" is nailed to a symbol, it becomes an enclosed, static category ("homestead") as detrimental to experience as any rational framework of thought. Equated with a universal meaning in a one-to-one relation, it becomes "stark and solid," says Emerson, and is "nothing but an excess of the organ of language" (ECW, III, 35).

Even though Swedenborg recognized the correspondences between material and elemental facts, he unfortunately narrowed his symbols until they became merely representative of theological ideas. What could have

been "the poem of the world" in his philosophy was "defeated by the exclusively theologic direction which his inquiries took" (ECW,IV,120). By assigning a "theologic notion" to "each natural object" (ECW,IV,121), Swedenborg's mysticism became a fixed system of symbols reduced to the level of static signs. His categorization separated him from the continuous activity of the cosmos. "He has no sympathy" (ECW,IV,142), says Emerson. His "theological cramp" (ECW,IV,137) prevented him from receiving the energy of being in experience and "fatally narrowed his interpretation of nature" (ECW,IV,121). The constant metamorphoses of things demands that symbols be as fluid as experience:

The slippery Proteus is not so easily caught. In nature, each individual symbol plays innumerable parts, as each particle of matter circulates in turn through every system. The central identity enables any one symbol to express successively all the qualities and shades of real being. (ECW,IV,121)

When a symbol is an extension of the "original" relation, it reveals the "shades of real being," catches the "slippery Proteus," and raises experience to the level of poetic knowledge. As long as it remains a means rather than an end-in-itself--the process demands that new symbols be continually created--it is the only way of apprehending the ground of human experience.¹⁹ In an informative passage from Emerson's Angle of Vision, Sherman Paul explicitly states Emerson's divergence from the static symbolism of Swedenborg:

Not content to limit correspondences to a mechanical doctrine of symbol-making, Emerson appropriated the word and adjusted it to cover the metaphysical and psychological needs of relatedness in a universe of evolutionary flux. For him it was an instrument

of spiritual exploration, not of dogma. Emerson, in a way, viewed spiritual truth pragmatically, as something discovered in an activity, in process. His theory of the moment and therefore of symbolism recognized the fragmentary, perspective grasp of truth and the necessity of continually taking new positions and sights. For this reason he repudiated Swedenborg's application of correspondence as a static one-to-one relationship.²⁰

The completed process of generating correspondential symbols is therefore two-fold: first a man must relate to the energy of being by receiving concrete particulars in experience, and then metamorphose these objects into revelatory symbols. Symbolic thought, says Emerson in "The Poet,"

which expresses itself by what is called Imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being where and what it sees; by sharing the path or circuit of things through forms, and so making them translucent to others. (ECW, III, 26)

This two-fold process of the intellect Emerson designates as "intellect receptive" and "intellect constructive" (ECW, II, 334) in the essay called "Intellect." In order to perceive correspondences a man must place himself at the "axis of things" (ECW, I, 73) and allow the flow of his intellect full rein. When the eye sees only particulars, the world appears opaque. But when the energy of being is experienced through the particular, the same world suddenly becomes transparent. In one of Emerson's best-known passages from "Nature," this moment of revelation is described:

Standing on the bare ground--my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space--all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all:

the currents of the Universal Being circulate
through me; I am part or parcel of God. (ECW, I, 10)

Unless we understand this passage in the context of metamorphosis, we will miss Emerson's thought. Possibly the metaphor of the "transparent eyeball" suggests that Emerson is dissolving his whole being into some vague "Universal Being," a spiritual reality that transcends material things. In fact, however, he is "Standing on the bare ground," and receives the forms of nature in the activity of experience. Transparency is only achieved when he actually feels the energy of being, the "Universal Being," flow through him because of his receptivity to the particulars of experience. "All mean egotism vanishes" because he suddenly knows that all men as particular metamorphoses of their source carry the force of the cosmos within them. Being "where and what it sees," the intellect actually shares "the path or circuit of things through forms" or particulars of experience, and with poetic symbols makes the energy of being--"the divine aura which breathes through forms" (ECW, III, 26)--"translucid to others!"²¹

In a manner remarkably similar to Williams, Emerson sees the whole issue of symbolic thought not only as an aesthetic but a moral concern. And so the Poet, the true "Namer or Language-Maker" (ECW, II, 21), Emerson's representative man of symbolic thought, is a "liberating god" (ECW, III, 30) because he restores man's relation to the source of his experience. "This perception" of the source inherent in all things "has at once its moral sequence" (ECW, VIII, 39), says Emerson in "Poetry and Imagination," mainly because it is related to the completion of man's basic nature. Revelatory symbols restore man to a cosmos that is rightfully his:

If the imagination intoxicates the poet, it is not inactive in other men. The metamorphosis excites in the beholder an emotion of joy. The use of symbols has a certain power of emancipation and exhilaration for all men. We seem to be touched by a wand which makes us dance and run about happily, like children. We are like persons who come out of a cave or cellar into the open air. This is the effect on us of tropes, fables, oracles and all poetic forms. (ECW, III, 30)²²

Symbols have this power to "emancipate" because they free men to flow with the process of the cosmos. As both a process of symbols and a representative art form, poetry is therefore a way of bringing men into contact with the energy of being:

Poetry is the perpetual endeavor to express the spirit of the thing, to pass the brute body and search the life and reason which causes it to exist;--to see that the object is always flowing away, whilst the spirit or necessity which causes it subsists. (ECW, VIII, 17)

In the Emersonian cosmos, the poet is the "centred mind" (ECW, III, 19), living centrally at the "axis of things," through making the various multiplicity of facts transparent:

...the poet turns the world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession. For through that better perception he stands one step nearer to things, and sees the flowing or metamorphosis; perceives that thought is multiform; that within the form of every creature is a force impelling it to ascend into a higher form; and following with his eyes the life, uses the forms which express that life, and so his speech flows with the flowing of nature. (ECW, III, 20-21)²³

According to Emerson, therefore, the metamorphic symbol can reveal man's "original" relation to the cosmos. As another mode of thought,

distinct from rational thought, it can subsume the epistemological problems posed by materialism and idealism. Grounded in experience as it occurs in the particularity of the world, it is the basis of what Emerson calls the "new philosophy" that can overcome the problem of contact by solving the "logical" riddles of existence, and so allow his contemporaries to come out of their caves "into the open air." He once again affirms symbolic thought in the following passage from "History" which appropriately centralizes the whole force of his thought at the same time that it draws our discussion to a close:

Ah! brother, stop the ebb of thy soul,--ebbing downward into the forms into whose habits thou hast now for many years slid. As near and proper to us is also that old fable of the Sphinx, who was said to sit in the road-side and put riddles to every passenger. If the man could not answer, she swallowed him alive. If he could solve the riddle, the Sphinx was slain. What is our life but an endless flight of winged facts or events? In splendid variety these changes come, all putting questions to the human spirit. Those men who cannot answer by a superior wisdom these facts or questions of time, serve them. Facts encumber them, tyrannize over them, and make the men of routine, the men of sense, in whom a literal obedience to facts has extinguished every spark of that light by which man is truly man. But if the man is true to his better instincts or sentiments, and refuses the dominion of facts, as one that comes of a higher race; remains fast by the soul and sees the principle, then the facts fall aptly and supple into their places; they know their master, and the meanest of them glorifies him.
(ECW, II, 32-33)

According to Emerson, therefore, the problem of contact can be solved only when men experience an elemental relation to the cosmos and actualize that experience in correspondential symbols. Through poetic knowledge of the energy of being they can restore the balance upset by rational thought

and its categorization of the world into "materialism" and "idealism," and begin to see through the "endless flight of winged facts or events." Once they realize that facts are metamorphoses of the energy of being, and dynamic symbols, the metamorphoses of facts, they will recognize "the principle" appearing through all particular objects of creation--and thereby work out the riddle of the Sphinx that now prevents them from assuming their rightful position in the cosmos.

With Emerson's thought in mind, then, let us now turn to an examination of Thoreau's Walden, the dramatization of one man's journey toward "elemental relations."

Section Three:

A Representative Work

A Search for the "True Clothing" of Experience: The Internal Drama of

Walden

To set about living a true life is to go a journey to a distant country, gradually to find ourselves surrounded by new scenes and men; and as long as the old are around me, I know that I am not in any true sense living a new or better life. The outward is only the outside of that which is within. Men are not concealed under habits, but are revealed by them; they are their true clothes. I care not how curious a reason they may give for their abiding by them. Circumstances are not rigid and unyielding but our habits are rigid.

As Williams' In the American Grain has shown, the problem of contact in America contains a fundamental paradox: those who experience the source of America become strangers in their own country. Referring specifically to the work of Poe as an instance, Williams says, "Invent that which is new, even if it be made of pine from your own yard, and there's none to know what you have done."¹ Divorced from the ground, Americans cannot recognize what is an authentic revelation of their experience. Poe remains a foreigner to them, not because he rejected the world, but for being himself "the astounding, inconceivable growth of his locality."² Read in the context of Williams' analysis of the American past, the quoted passage gives us some indication of Thoreau's achievement in Walden. Aside from the historical fact that Thoreau left Concord to live at Walden Pond in 1845, his real journey takes place in the artistic world of Walden, the "distant country" that ironically turns out to be the authentic America. Concord is the foreign country, the "old"

scene with its "rigid" and "unyielding" patterns of experience. It is divorced from the "new scenes and men," the real America, because it is imprisoned in obsolete forms of knowing and perceiving. In the course of writing Walden, Thoreau uncovers the real source of Concord and undergoes a transformation that reconciles him to his world. Our exploration of his major work will concern itself with his search for the "true clothing" of experience.

Fortunately, criticism such as Sherman Paul's The Shores of America, and more recently, Charles R. Anderson's The Magic Circle of Walden, not to mention J. Lyndon Shanley's important analysis of the successive versions of Walden in The Making of Walden, has shown substantially that Walden is a work of art and must be read as such. In his intensive book-length study of Thoreau's major work, Anderson argues convincingly that it should be treated "as if it were a poem."³ "Why not try an entirely new approach," he says, "and read Walden as a poem--the transformation of a vision into words, designed so as to contain and reveal it?"⁴ Reviewing how it has been discussed in the past--Thoreau is a naturalist and Walden is his statement, or he is a critic of civilization and advocates a simple return to nature, or else Walden is a literal autobiography of his life at Walden Pond from 1845-1847--Anderson is quite correct in asserting that its chief value rests in its being a "created work of art."⁵

Our discussion of Walden begins from Anderson's premise, and an important statement by Richard Poirier in A World Elsewhere, a study of the place of style in American fiction. In his book Poirier proposes that the narrative world of a work of art has its own spatial and temporal boundaries that distinguish it from the historically rooted world it appears

to represent. Although his comments are directed toward works of fiction in general, they are useful for an understanding of Walden:

In literature environment is usually discussed in terms of place, or a social class, or a historical situation. This is a convenience too pleasant to give up. But it is only a convenience and it necessarily confuses what the books truly offer. As I use the word "environment," it means not the places named in a novel, like Chicago, let us say. Environment refers instead to the places filled in a book, filled with words that might indeed pretend to describe Chicago, but which in fact set a boundary on a wholly imaginary city in which the community of language shared by readers, characters, and author necessarily limits the possible shapes that action, persons, and language itself can assume. Nor does environment in a book mean, except in a most superficial sense, a time when events occur, be it 1966 or 1914. As I use the word "environment" with respect to a particular work, I mean the proportions of time that a writer feels he can give to some as against other kinds of events. In this sense, environment is really a derivative of such technical accomplishments as pacing and intensity, the weight of language at some points rather than at others.⁶

If the "environment" or "world" of a work of art, the space where the action occurs, can exist in the language of the work alone, as Poirier says, then the "world" of Walden Pond and Thoreau's life there are both enclosed in the language of Walden. Temporally also we should study Thoreau's account according to the "proportions of time" that he "feels he can give to some as against other kinds of events." Finally, if a work of art has its own space-time boundaries, we must distinguish between the historically rooted Thoreau and the "Thoreau" that lives in the artistic world of Walden. Anderson delineates this point clearly:

There was a real person named Henry David Thoreau, to be sure, who was born and died in Concord,

Massachusetts (1817-1862), who lived alone in the woods for two years at Walden Pond (1845-1847), and wrote an account of his experiences there which he later published (1854). But the flesh and blood man and the actual place are of interest to students of literature only as points from which to measure the author's imaginative projection--his mythical world of Walden and the fictive "I" who serves as both the narrator and the subject of that book.⁷

The fictive "Thoreau" of Walden is therefore confined to the artistic world in which he lives. Possibly Thoreau was aware of the boundaries of his narrative when he wrote that he would retain the "first person" because it is truer to experience:

In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always that first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience.⁸

By Thoreau's own admittance, everything we can know about the world of Walden is determined by his own language. We must see this world through his eyes. For this same reason, we can draw a further conclusion that Anderson ignores. As both the narrator and subject of the narrative, everything that Thoreau says is of necessity a revelation of his own state of consciousness. And as readers we can measure his statements, assuming that what and how a person speaks discloses as much about himself as the subject he is discussing, against the attitudes he holds toward them. When we do, as we will see, we find that the fictive "Thoreau" actually changes his stance as he writes his narrative. The Thoreau of "Conclusion" is a different person from the Thoreau of

"Economy." In the early parts of Walden, there is a dichotomy between his statement of intentions and the attitudes he holds toward those statements. This split is resolved only in the latter half of the narrative. Before we make any judgments on his attitudes, however, we should look briefly at his own stated reasons for leaving Concord and going to live at Walden Pond.⁹

"I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things," he says, and continues, "We think that is which appears to be" (65). Here then is his fundamental motive for going to Walden: by reducing the problems of living to the barest essentials, he will confront reality, those elemental forces of nature beneath the "surface of things."¹⁰ His contemporaries in Concord are divorced from their primal relation to the processes of nature mainly because their vision does not move beyond the surface appearances of things. Unable to distinguish between appearance and reality, they allow themselves to be controlled by a mechanistic society. "The tools of their tools" (25), such men are banished from their rightful thrones. "Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf," says Thoreau, "that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in" (2). Most of "Economy" is accordingly a criticism of the kind of material superfluities, "positive hinderances to the elevation of mankind" (9), that smother the "vital heat" (8) of human experience, and prevent men from contacting the source of their experience in nature. In Concord, those necessities of life (Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel) that should be secured only in order to "entertain the true problems of life with freedom" (8) have assumed

absolute authority. Abstracted from their primal relation to the processes of nature, Concordians live enslaved to out-worn traditions, conventions, and values. Fashion, for instance, "spins and weaves and cuts with full authority" (16); "the head monkey in Paris puts on a traveller's cap," says Thoreau, "and all the monkeys in America do the same" (17). Men lead lives of "quiet desperation" (5) because they are not aware of their elemental relation to nature. Their "games and amusements" (5) are aborted attempts to alleviate the "unconscious despair" (5) that results from divorce—a process that Williams sees still occurring in present day America. "They make shift to live merely by conformity, practically as their fathers did," says Thoreau, "and are in no sense the progenitors of a nobler race of men" (9). "There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers" (9). Even works of art, the very power to liberate them, reflect this servitude to past forms of experience:

The best works of art are the expression of man's struggle to free himself from this condition, but the effect of our art is merely to make this low state comfortable and that higher state to be forgotten. (25)

In choosing to live in external forms, they think that there "is no choice left" (5) to them, says Thoreau, never once realizing that "it is never too late to give up our prejudices" (5). It is always possible for men to relate to the processes of nature. The essential truths of life are not remote, "in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man" (65), but present in all times and places—more specifically in the here and now of organic experience. So that every man can be "'supplied with a new and pure flame'" (46), a

ritual burning of the past, analogous to the busk ceremonies of the Mucclasse Indians (46), is now necessary; all pre-conceived forms of perception must be cast off as the "snake casts its slough, and the caterpillar its wormy coat, by an internal industry and expansion" (15-16). Thoreau therefore proposes that men clear away all externalities and confront the primary facts of experience, reduce "the problem of perception," to use Sherman Paul's words, "to its simplest terms--man and nature:"¹¹

Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through church and state, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality, and say, This is, and no mistake; and then begin, having a point d'appui, below freshet and frost and fire, a place where you might found a wall or a state, or set a lamppost safely, or perhaps a gauge, not a Nilometer, but a Realometer, that future ages might know how deep a freshet of shams and appearances had gathered from time to time. (66)

Thoreau argues that our life should grow from the roots of our experience, what he calls elsewhere "Nature herself" (11), the capitalization denoting those elemental life forces that subsume the surface physical facts of things. Here is the point d'appui, the bed-rock of reality, that lies at the base of all man's forms, from his culture of cities to his poetry and philosophy, and finally to his religions. The real gauge of our lives, therefore, should be the "Realometer" that measures how close or how far away we are from our primal relation to the processes of nature. When men grow from the source of their experience, forms like clothes and

houses would be organic, not decorations imposed from without. "True clothing" would not only contain but reveal their organic relation to nature. Even "kings and queens who wear a suit but once, though made by some tailor or dressmaker to their majesties, cannot know the comfort of wearing a suit that fits" (14), says Thoreau, as long as they are divorced from nature. Shelters are another kind of clothing: "...let our houses first be lined with beauty, where they come in contact with our lives, like the tenement of the shellfish, and not overlaid with it" (27).¹²

We should be aware, however, that Thoreau, like Williams and Emerson, is not simply advocating a return to primitivism. "It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization," he comments, "if only to learn what are the gross necessities of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them" (7). A return to nature is not a rejection of civilization; rather, it is an attempt to recover what lies at the base of civilization. What we normally think of derogatively as the "primitive" life, Thoreau would call the "primary" life, that is, life lived according to first principles. Only when we encounter the processes of nature face-to-face can we replant our life organically, says Thoreau, in a passage comparing human growth to that of vegetation:

The soil, it appears, is suited to the seed, for it has sent its radicle downward, and it may now send its shoot upward also with confidence. Why has man rooted himself thus firmly in the earth, but that he may rise in the same proportion into the heavens above?--for the nobler plants are valued for the fruit they bear at last in the air and light.... (10)

Like seeds, we should root ourselves "firmly in the earth" in order that

we can "shoot upward...with confidence." The passage indicates quite clearly that Thoreau does not see nature as an end; "nobler plants," he says, "are valued for the fruit they bear." Nature is the means to come into contact with the primary or first elements of human experience. By moving to Walden Pond, therefore, Thoreau has one basic motive: to build his life from ground principles.

Praising his positive efforts to discover his relation to nature, most readers of Walden accept his reasons unquestioningly. Sympathetic with Thoreau's discontent with Concord and its values, they often fail to notice any discrepancy in his statements. And yet when we examine the tone of his argument, some inconsistencies become fairly apparent. He argues, for instance, that self-reform is the only way to reform society-- "If, then, we would indeed restore mankind by truly Indian, botanic, magnetic, or natural means, let us first be as simple and well as Nature ourselves..." (53)--and criticizes the factory system very much in the manner of the reformer he belittles:

I cannot believe that our factory system is the best mode by which men may get clothing. The condition of the operatives is becoming every day more like that of the English; and it cannot be wondered at, since, as far as I have heard or observed, the principle object is, not that mankind may be well and honestly clad, but unquestionably, that the corporations may be enriched. (17-18)

Paul Schwaber's "Thoreau's Development in Walden" is important for recognizing this dichotomy between statement and attitude in the early sections of Walden. His response to the tone of Thoreau's comments in "Economy" is informative:

...why so harsh a tone? Why so argumentative a rebellion? He seems to attack his neighbor's way of life and to defend his own at least as much as he celebrates it. Perhaps he is not so sure of himself as he would like to be....In the long first chapter of Walden, Thoreau breaks idols, teaches, and asserts, but to use his own distinction he sounds more like a professor than a philosopher.¹³

According to Schwaber, Thoreau is "more at peace with himself" at the end of the book; this moral development constitutes the central drama of Walden.¹⁴ His argument is limited, however, because he fails to distinguish between the "flesh and blood" Thoreau and the fictive "Thoreau" of Walden: the book is the historical Thoreau's "spiritual autobiography for the years 1845 to 1854" reflected in the moral development evident in the latter half of the drama.¹⁵ By placing the onus of development outside of the artistically enclosed world of Walden, Schwaber does not bring out Thoreau's changing aesthetic stance toward nature and his consequent moral growth as they both occur in the internal activity of the narrative. The real drama, contained in the actual texture of the language, takes place in the artistic world of Walden. Thoreau finds the source of the "true clothing" of his experience only when he learns how to respond to the processes of nature through the narrative world of Walden.

Once we stop praising Thoreau's statement of essentials in "Economy," we wonder why this introductory section is so inordinately long. If he has experienced the "spring of springs" (28), and from his comments he implies that he has, we wonder why he takes such pains to criticize a society that he has apparently rejected. Walden was to answer questions his neighbors asked him concerning his life in the woods. "I should not obtrude my affairs so much on the notice of my readers," he says at the

beginning of "Economy,"

if very particular inquiries had not been made
by my townsmen concerning my mode of life....
Some have asked what I got to eat; if I did
not feel lonesome; if I was not afraid; and the
like. (1)

Rather than answering directly, he devotes a large amount of space to a general criticism of society. Instead of describing the kind of shelter he built by the pond, for instance, he discusses, at surprisingly great lengths, the nature of shelters in general. As we examine this one argument of "Economy" closely, we discover an interesting intellectual process; the movement of the language shows that Thoreau is directing his statements more to himself than to the people of Concord. Only now is he working out his position.

First, he introduces his subject by locating the need for shelters in man's history: once man was "bare and out of doors" (18), but through necessity "some enterprising mortal crept into a hollow in a rock for shelter" (18). Every child repeats this part of man's history: "Every child begins the world again," says Thoreau, and "...plays house, as well as horse, having an instinct for it" (18). But civilized man has forgotten the "open air" (19). His premise constructed, Thoreau then goes on to distinguish the necessary shelter (using the Penobscot Indians as his example) from the superfluous shelter of the civilized man. His prose takes on the quality of a debate. First a conclusive statement is made:

I do not mean to insist here on the disadvantage
of hiring compared with owning, but it is evident
that the savage owns his shelter because it costs
so little, while the civilized man hires his
commonly because he cannot afford to own it; nor
can he, in the long run, any better afford to hire.
(20)

Then objections are raised and repudiated:

But, answers one, by merely paying this tax the poor civilized man secures an abode which is a palace compared with the savage's....But how happens it that he who is said to enjoy these things is so commonly a poor civilized man, while the savage, who has them not, is rich as a savage? (20)

Furthermore:

If it is asserted that civilization is a real advance in the condition of man,--and I think it is, though only the wise improve their advantages,--it must be shown that it has produced better dwellings without making them more costly.... (20)

This part of Thoreau's argument, and we can now see that it is structured as an argument, concludes with a rhetorical question that exposes the imprisoning effects of owning a house in a civilized society: "Would the savage have been wise to exchange his wigwam for a palace on these terms?" (21)

Now satisfied that the savage owns a much more valuable shelter than the civilized man, Thoreau proceeds to elaborate the consequences of man's desire to own a house. The desire is usually never realized in Concord; inquiring at the assessors, Thoreau says, he learned "that they cannot at once name a dozen in the town who own their farms free and clear" (21). Then, as his discussion becomes more generalized, he equates the poor condition of society with the desire to possess material comforts. The farmer, he says, who sets his traps in order to "catch comfort and independence," gets "his own leg into it" (22) because he, and others like him, are "all poor in respect to a thousand savage comforts, though surrounded by luxuries" (22). With Chapman's words, he introduces the moral

issue involved in this obsession to own property:

'The false society of men--
 --for earthly greatness
 All heavenly comforts rarefies to air.' (22)

The civilized man's pursuits, then, "are no worthier than the savage's" (23); his consumption of "gross necessities and comforts" (23) simply reflects his low moral condition. Materialism is the real cause of poverty in a society of abundance. "...I see in my daily walks," says Thoreau, "human beings living in sties" (23)--"the luxury of one class is counterbalanced by the indigence of another" (23). After another series of rhetorical questions--for example, "Shall we always study to obtain more of these things, and not sometimes to be content with less?" (24)--he moves toward an almost inevitable question-statement: "How, then, could I have a furnished house?" (24), answering himself with a moral assertion:

I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion. I would rather ride on earth in an ox cart with a free circulation, than go to heaven in the fancy car of an excursion train and breathe a malaria all the way. (25)

What began as a simple description of shelters has turned into a moral condemnation of materialism. With rhetorical questions, hypothetical objections, and answers, Thoreau's argument has drawn the inevitable conclusion: it is moral not to own property. He appears to be satisfied in proving that the "civilized man is [simply] a more experienced and wiser savage" (27). As much as we want to sympathize with Thoreau, we are constantly reminded that the whole argument is hypothetically constructed

and controlled by him. We wonder why he argues so vehemently, especially since he implies that he is quite free of Concord. From the structure of the argument we feel that he is benefiting more than we. No one is opposing him. We get the feeling that his position is directed more to himself than to the reader. When he discovers that it is unthinkable that he should buy a house, he is a different man from when he first began talking about shelters. This one unnecessarily lengthy part of "Economy" reveals that Thoreau is only now working out his values, making diversions from the narrative in order to validate his motives for going to the woods. "But to haste to my own experiment" (39), he says, almost appearing to be aware of his need to diverge.

In "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for," this same kind of intellectual process is operating as Thoreau plays what could be construed as a harmless, imaginative game of buying and selling. The following passages show the same kind of self-persuasion:

In imagination I have bought all the farms in succession, for all were to be bought, and I knew their price. I walked over each farmer's premises, tasted his wild apples, discoursed on husbandry with him, took his farm at his price, mortgaging it to him in my mind; even put a higher price on it,--took every thing but a deed to it,--took his word for his deed, for I dearly love to talk,--cultivated it, and him too to some extent, I trust, and withdrew when I had enjoyed it long enough, leaving him to carry it on. (54-55)

My imagination carried me so far that I even had the refusal of several farms,--the refusal was all I wanted,--but I never got my fingers burned by actual possession. (55)

With apparent freedom, Thoreau says that he can come and go at his own

leisure because he does not believe in the "premises" of ownership. On the surface these passages seem to be a controlled satire of a world to which he is immune. Yet the tone of Thoreau's comment suggest that this game of buying and selling, indirectly has a purgative function. Why, for instance, does he enjoy playing this kind of intellectual game? Why does he say that "the refusal was all I wanted?" If he is free, why does he have to act out this process of disowning himself? Once again we should look at Thoreau's refusal to own in the context of a hypothetically constructed debate in which he controls both sides of the argument. This kind of "game" playing is self-satisfying because it proves to himself that he is free of Concord and its materialism.

Although Thoreau exhorts us to "live free and uncommitted" (56), these two "arguments" intimate that his own freedom rests on less than sturdy ground. It is a negative freedom that results from exclusion--that is, his life in the woods seems to depend upon a rejection of Concord more than an affirmation of a wholly internal life. Even while he was in society he remained detached from all human activity:

...I went on...for a long time, I may say it without boasting, faithfully minding my business, till it became more and more evident that my townsmen would not after all admit me into the list of town officers, nor make my place a sinecure with a moderate allowance. My accounts, which I can swear to have kept faithfully, I have, indeed, never got audited, still less accepted, still less paid and settled. (12)

He is, however, careful in qualifying: "However, I have not set my heart on that" (12). But the inconsistency remains: he says that he did not have his "heart" set on a position in society; yet the fact that he kept

his "accounts" faithfully shows that he lived prepared to accept a position. We never find out exactly what Thoreau felt he had to offer society; his "accounts," he says, were never "audited." Unable to find his "rightful" employment, he thinks of himself as the Indian who wove baskets that no one wanted to buy:

I too had woven a kind of basket of a delicate texture, but I had not made it worth any one's while to buy them. Yet not the less, in my case, did I think it worth my while to weave them, and instead of studying how to make it worth men's while to buy my baskets, I studied rather how to avoid the necessity of selling them. (12)

With no possibility of ever being accepted in society, there is the large possibility that Thoreau's move to the woods was itself an act of "quiet desperation:"

Finding that my fellow-citizens were not likely to offer me any room in the court house, or any curacy or living any where else, but I must shift for myself, I turned my face more exclusively than ever to the woods, where I was better known. (12)

If we follow the language of Thoreau in the early parts of the narrative closely, we can detect a distaste for human society in the tone of his comments. He distrusts relations with other men, and tends to view all contact with men as a threat to his supposed freedom. The fishermen who came to Walden Pond, for instance, "soon retreated...and left 'the world to darkness and to me,'" he says, "and the black kernel of the night was never profaned by any human neighborhood" (italics mine) (88). The Hollowell farm attracts him because of its remoteness from human society:

The real attractions of the Hollowell farm, to me, were; its complete retirement, being about two miles from the village, half a mile from the nearest neighbor, and separated from the highway by a broad field; its bounding on the river, which the owner said protected it by its fogs from frosts in the spring, though that was nothing to me; the gray color and ruinous state of the house and barn, and the dilapidated fences, which put such an interval between me and the last occupant.... To enjoy these advantages I was ready to carry it on [that is, buy and fix up the farm]...and do all those things which had no other motive or excuse but that I might pay for it and be unmolested in my possession of it(*italics mine*). (56)

The italicized words seem to suggest that Thoreau sees human beings as threats to himself. He is interested in the isolated Hollowell farm precisely because he would like to avoid any contact with men. In fact, he categorizes the whole village into a composite, destructive force designed to molest any visitor. "Every traveller" to the village, he says, thinking of his own sojourns there, "had to run the gauntlet, and every man, woman, and child might get a lick at him" (113). His exaggeration carries an overtone of fear of being touched by people; only through his wits, he explains further, was he able to endure a passage through the village and "so escape(d) to the woods again" (*italics mine*)(113).

According to the tone of Thoreau's argument in the early parts of the narrative, he is far from having experienced a direct relation to nature when he leaves Concord to live at Walden Pond. Although he proposes that should men "feel the influence of the spring of springs arousing them, they would of necessity rise to a higher and more ethereal life" (28), he gives us no concrete evidence that he has achieved the "spring of springs" in his own experience. An often quoted (and often quickly glossed over) passage from "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for" helps us to understand

Thoreau's stance toward the physical world, and the consequent foundation from which he asserts his independence in the early parts of Walden:

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born. The intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way into the secret of things. I do not wish to be any more busy with my hands than is necessary. My head is hands and feet. I feel all my best faculties concentrated in it. My instinct tells me that my head is an organ for burrowing, as some creatures use their snout and fore-paws, and with it I would mine and burrow my way through these hills. I think that the richest vein is somewhere hereabouts; so by the divining rod and thin rising vapors I judge; and here I will begin to mine. (66)

All things pass away "but eternity remains:" Thoreau fishes in the stream of time, drinks its water, and says that there is a source beneath the surface appearances of things. He regrets that he is "not as wise as the day I was born" because then he enjoyed a direct relation to the underlying processes of nature. As he matured, his vision moved further and further away from eternity. No longer living in what he sees, he wants to recover his primal relation to eternity and once again experience an "original" relation to the processes of nature. The same mind that caused the separation can restore the balance. Like Emerson, Thoreau sees the intuitive process of the intellect as the force capable of penetrating the "sandy bottom" of the stream of time.¹⁶ As a "cleaver" that "rifts its way into the secret of things," it is the most powerful "divining rod" man possesses. With it Thoreau believes he can "fish in

the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars." All of these statements of intention, however, are directed toward the future. There is no indication that Thoreau have revealed "eternity" in his own experience. As he says, he would count the stars, but does not know "the first letter of the alphabet." Even though his instinct tells him that the intuitive intellect can penetrate the "secret of things," his experience of this process is yet to come. He thinks that the "richest vein is somewhere hereabouts;" only now does he begin "to mine" for the source of things. Furthermore, words such as "cleaver," "discerns," "rifts," and "burrowing" suggest that the intellect is a calculating capacity. These are words we would normally use to describe the analytical understanding. This apparent confusion may not have large implications at this point in the narrative, but as subsequent experiences force Thoreau to see that the intellect works not by "burrowing" but by receiving and transmuting things into revelatory symbols, it becomes extremely important.

Possibly the confusion results from the nature of Thoreau's belief in "eternity." His faith in a transcendental reality tends to be more a doctrine than an achieved experience. Even his description of his life in the woods reflects a somewhat easy acceptance of Transcendentalist theory:

Both place and time were changed, and I dwelt nearer to those parts of the universe and to those eras in history which had most attracted me. Where I lived was as far off as many a region viewed nightly by astronomers....If it were worth the while to settle in those parts near to the Pleiades or the Hyades... then I was really there, or at an equal remoteness from the life which I had left behind....Such was that part of creation where I squatted:--

'There was a shepherd that did live,
 And held his thoughts as high
 As were the mounts whereon his flocks
 Did hourly feed him by.' (59)

Claiming that he inhabits the universe, Thoreau gives us no indication that he has achieved transcendence. Interestingly enough, he relates his flight, and it does appear to be a flight, to the world he has rejected. Eternity is much better to live in than Concord: he visualizes himself as a mystic shepherd whose thoughts are continually elevated above all earthly concerns. But the very large space between Concord and eternity still remains. We find it difficult to believe his assertions because his worship of the universe moves more from belief to experience than from experience to belief. As a result, he tends to bring external forms of perception to his experience. In his reference to the world of the Greeks, for instance, he seems to impose rather than discover meaning in the particulars of his own world, a process that is apparent in his description of the mosquito's hum which he compares to Homer's poetry:

It was Homer's requiem; itself an Iliad and Odyssey
 in the air, singing its own wrath and wanderings.
 There was something cosmical about it. (60)

In this instance, the direction of Thoreau's perception is from a pre-conceived form to an experience, from "Homer's requiem" to the mosquito's hum, although he does seem to head for an experience, as the phrase "something cosmical" indicates. Although he may very well be a sincere believer in Transcendentalist theory in the early parts of the narrative, he still has not moved behind those forms of perceptions that he brings to his experience to a direct confrontation with the facts of nature. In a real sense, he has, to use his own metaphor, built a kind of castle in the air without

a solid experiential foundation to support it.

When we see him as a believer in Transcendentalism more through doctrine than experience, the sections "Reading" and "Sounds" become much more meaningful. "Reading" immediately follows the quoted passage on the intellect, and in large part is a praise of the intellect's capacity to reveal the essential truths of life. "For what are the classics," says Thoreau, "but the noblest recorded thoughts of man?" (68) Every authentic book is the fruit of the author's "original" relation to the cosmos: "The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind," writes Emerson in "The American Scholar," "and uttered it again. It came into him life; it went out from him truth" (ECW, I, 87).¹⁷ And so Thoreau says accordingly, "A written word is the choicest of relics....It is the work of art nearest to life itself" (69). Since books can liberate us, we should read creatively, "in the true spirit" (69), says Thoreau. The questions that puzzle men have been experienced by all wise men, and all have given answers according to their lives. If we can once learn to receive the "life" of all true books, says Thoreau, "we shall learn liberality" (73).

As statements of doctrine, Thoreau's comments on books and reading have validity. Yet when they are used to expire rather than inspire, books can be as imprisoning as any fixed concept. They should be approached, cautions Emerson, only "when the intervals of darkness come" (ECW, I, 91) and nature cannot be read directly. They are meaningless to men who have not experienced a direct relation to the forces of the universe--a position that Thoreau has not yet attained in Walden. When

we examine the tone of his comments closely, we find that he values books for their didactic qualities. The dull intellect, he says, has no "skill in extracting or inserting the moral" (71) from great books. At other times, his approach to reading sounds narrowly "academic:"

There is in this town, with a very few exceptions, no taste for the best or for very good books even in English literature, whose words all can read and spell. (71)

This same attitude possibly explains why he ends the chapter in the tone of a reformer:

We spend more on almost any article of bodily aliment or ailment than on our mental aliment. It is time we had uncommon schools, that we did not leave off our education when we begin to be men and women. It is time that villages were universities, and their elder inhabitants the fellows of universities, with leisure--if they are indeed so well off--to pursue liberal studies the rest of their lives. (73)

In "Sounds" he turns logically to the language of nature "which alone is copious and standard" (75). "What is a course of history, or philosophy, or poetry, no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life," he argues, "compared with the discipline of looking at what is to be seen?" (75) We should pay close attention to the particular facts of the natural world, Thoreau implies, as he sits in the "sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness" (75). In a meditative rapport with nature, one of its authentic inhabitants, Thoreau says that he grew "like corn in the night" (75). When we examine "Sounds" closely, however, we find that Thoreau is doing

nothing more than stating a sympathetic union with nature, while failing to show us that he has achieved this balance in experience. Looking up from his book, for instance, he watches a cattle-train pass and imagines a pastoral valley going by. Then he reminisces nostalgically: "So is your pastoral life whirled past and away" (82). Other passages also indicate that Thoreau lives, not in the present, but in some wished-for past. As the noise of the train recedes, he quickly assumes a mood of meditative reverie and reflects on his world:

Now that the cars are gone by and all the restless world with them, and the fishes in the pond no longer feel their rumbling, I am more alone than ever. For the rest of the afternoon, perhaps, my meditations are interrupted only by the faint rattle of a carriage or team along the distant highway. (83)

In his own world, away from the "restless world" of men, the sound of cows takes on a mythological significance:

At evening, the distant lowing of some cow in the horizon beyond the woods sounded sweet and melodious, and at first I would mistake it for the voices of certain minstrels by whom I was sometimes serenaded, who might be straying over hill and dale. (83)

We should take note of the words he uses to describe the cows: "sweet and melodious," "minstrels," "serenaded," and "straying over hill and dale." Not seeing "what is to be seen," Thoreau is imposing his subjectivity on to the particulars of nature and constructing an idyllic world elsewhere detached from all human activity. Even the owl's screech is given a decidedly "literary" quality: "Their dismal scream is truly Ben Jonsonian. Wise midnight hags!" (84) They are singing some melancholic lament:

"Oh-o-o-o-o that I never had been bor-r-r-r-n!" (84) Frogs become "the sturdy spirits of ancient winebibbers and wassailers, still unrepentant, trying to sing a catch in their Stygian lake" (85). This kind of description is hardly the language of a man intent on learning the particulars of nature. Rather, it reflects a nostalgic desire for some world out of an imagined past. "I have as it were," says Thoreau somewhat smugly in "Solitude," "my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself" (87). His solipsistic world of quiet, uninterrupted meditation, however, only appears to be a solution to the problems of the "restless world" beyond. The primary facts of experience have yet to be confronted.

As we have seen, two simultaneous movements are operating in the narrative of the early parts of Walden. According to Thoreau, he moved to Walden Pond to re-new his relation to nature. By examining the tone of his language, however, we have discovered that he does not see "what is to be seen," as he implies--his position of apparent independence is based upon a negation of Concord and not on any authentically experienced beliefs. He says that he left Concord to confront the essential facts of life deliberately, but his attitudes suggest that his move is also an act of "quiet desperation." His consequent acceptance of Transcendentalist theory as a mode of experiencing is as limited as the crass materialism of Concord. Both impose external forms of perceptions on to experience and prevent men from responding to the particulars of nature. We should be aware, however, that his decision to re-build his life at Walden Pond is a crucial step. Whether he understands the full implications of his actions or not, Thoreau has taken Emerson's advice to "Build therefore your own world" (ECW, I, 76): in "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for," he

says, "at a certain season of our life we are accustomed to consider every spot as the possible site of a house" (54). Even though he has built his world for the wrong reasons, once he is out in nature, he can, ironically, grow in terms of it. As Richard Poirier says in A World Elsewhere, building a house stimulates while it concretizes our connection to nature:

The building of a house is an extension and an expansion of the self, an act by which the self possesses an environment otherwise possessed by nature. By an act of building...it is possible to join forces with the powers of nature itself, to make its style your style.¹⁸

Building a world around Walden Pond, Thoreau cannot help but react to it. He implies as much as he talks about the relation of his cabin to himself:

With this more substantial shelter about me, I had made some progress toward settling in the world. This frame, so slightly clad, was a sort of crystallization around me, and reacted on the builder. (57).

This world, however, is not confined to the boundaries of his cabin, but includes the whole area around, the woods, animals, plants, and Walden Pond itself. In "The Bean-Field," "The Ponds," and "Baker Farm," Thoreau actually does begin to learn the real language of nature as he perceives the particulars of nature as objects in nature. The movement of his experience also changes direction. In his assumed Transcendentalist stance he envisioned himself inhabiting a remote sphere of the universe; now his thought moves downward into the processes of nature itself. Rather than trying to "transcend" the world, he now "descends" to the ground of his experience and moves through nature. Like Williams in

In the American Grain, Thoreau realizes that the descent is the only way of touching the source of himself and Concord, the only way of reconciling himself with the life processes of the earth. We should now turn to this movement in the latter half of Walden and trace the activity of Thoreau's experience as he responds to the "crystallization" around him and discovers the source of his "true clothing."

Thoreau's labors in "The Bean-Field" yield profits he could not have foreseen. "What was the meaning of this so steady and self-respecting, this small Herculean labor, I knew not" (103), he confesses. Still he came "to love" his rows of beans because they seemed to attach him "to the earth" (103-104). "But why should I raise them?" he questions, and answers, "only heaven knows" (104). Knowing beans, however, is a way to learn the particulars of nature. "I was determined to know beans" (108), he comments, half aware that this knowledge of the earth would probably serve him well one day: "some must work in fields if only for the sake of tropes and expression, to serve a parable-maker one day" (108)--a premonition of things to come. In "The Ponds" he continues to accumulate more facts as he "rambled still farther westward than I habitually dwell" (116), moving closer and closer to the world he has built. Nature's substantiality becomes more immediate. No longer being able to sustain his dreamy flight into "cosmological themes in other spheres" (117) as he had in "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for" and "Sounds," he is forced into recognizing nature's physicality while he fishes:

It was very queer, especially in dark nights...to feel this faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to Nature again. (117)

His new clarity of perception becomes apparent as he describes Walden Pond

with exacting particularity:

Viewed from a hill-top it reflects the color of the sky, but near at hand it is of a yellowish tint next the shore where you can see the sand, then a light green, which gradually deepens to a uniform dark green in the body of the pond. In some lights, viewed even from a hill-top, it is of a vivid green next the shore. (118)

As Thoreau perceives its symmetrical beauty, Walden Pond, for the first time, assumes a central importance in the narrative:

...Walden is a perfect forest mirror, set round with stones as precious to my eye as if fewer or rarer. Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth. Sky water. (126)

Even though Thoreau does not realize the ultimate implications of the Pond as a correspondential symbol of his own nature, he does sense its importance to himself: it is the "earth's eye," he says, "looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature" (125). For the present, he confines himself to an intense investigation of Walden's relation to surrounding ponds such as White Pond, Sandy Pond, Flints' Pond, and Goose Pond, but even more importantly, its relation to the earth and sky:

A field of water betrays the spirit that is in the air. It is continually receiving new life and motion from above. It is intermediate in its nature between land and sky. On land only the grass and trees wave, but the water itself is rippled by the wind. I see where the breeze dashes across it by the streaks or flakes of light. It is remarkable that we can look down on its surface. We shall, perhaps, look down thus on the surface of air at length, and mark where a still subtler spirit sweeps over it. (126-127)

All of Walden's physical characteristics, its purity and depth, betray that "subtler spirit" that "sweeps over it." A link between the earth and sky, it concretizes the life of nature--a fact that will become important as the narrative develops. In sharp contrast to Walden's legendary origins (122), Flints' Pond was named after an "unclean and stupid farmer" (131) who loved "the reflecting surface of a dollar" (131) more than the purity of his pond. He never really saw his pond because he was too busy appropriating its beauty for economic gain. The example of Flints' Pond helps Thoreau to delineate the true and false meaning of nature. Men do not respond to nature because of a blank in their own vision. After so many years of knowing Walden, he finds that it has maintained its purity. His eye-sight alone has been clouded by time and age:

...it is itself unchanged, the same water which my youthful eyes fell on; all the change is in me (*italics mine*). It has not acquired one permanent wrinkle after all its ripples. It is perennially young, and I may stand and see a swallow dip apparently to pick an insect from its surface as of yore. It struck me again to-night, as if I had not seen it almost daily for more than twenty years,--Why, here is Walden, the same woodland lake that I discovered so many years ago; where a forest was cut down last winter another is springing up by its shore as lustily as ever; the same thought is welling up to its surface that was then; it is the same liquid joy and happiness to itself and its Maker, ay, and it may be to me. (129)

This passage is important for showing the kind of changes Thoreau is undergoing as he learns more about Walden Pond. Because it moves with the rhythms of nature, it remains "perennially young." Over the years outward circumstances have changed, a forest has been felled, and yet it still contains its essential purity and depth. All the change has been

in Thoreau's mind. He now begins to see the task before him. A change in perception could remove the blank in his own vision and possibly restore the intimacy he once felt for Walden. With a new stance toward Walden, it might, in the future, become "God's Drop" (130), the medicinal means of marrying him to the processes of nature.

"Baker Farm" accordingly introduces a new element into the narrative. Now searching out what is not obvious in nature, Thoreau starts to feel an instinctive urge to participate in nature's processes:

...as I ran down the hill toward the reddening west
 ...from I know not what quarter, my Good Genius
 seemed to say,--Go fish and hunt far and wide day
 by day,--farther and wider....Let the noon find
 thee by other lakes, and the night overtake thee
 every where at home. There are no larger fields
 than these, no worthier games than may here be
 played. Grow wild according to thy nature, like
 these sedges and brakes, which will never become
 English hay. (138)

Instinct is his "Good Genius" that presses him to "fish and hunt" in nature, teaching him the physical facts of experience so well that he actually becomes a part of the things of nature: "Grow wild according to thy nature." For the first time Thoreau sees that man himself is a part of nature's processes. Growing "wild" is consonant with his "nature" because he, like the plants and animals around him, also has his roots in the earth. This passage leads into the beginning of "Higher Laws" when Thoreau is returning from a fishing excursion and is seized by an instinctual desire to devour a woodchuck, not for hunger but "savage delight" (140). "Once or twice," he says,

...while I lived at the pond, I found myself ranging
 the woods, like a half-starved hound, with a strange
 abandonment, seeking some kind of venison which I

might devour, and no morsel could have been too savage for me. (140)

This incident makes Thoreau starkly aware of his physical relation to nature, a fact he had never considered in his former Transcendentalist stance. Now he knows in experience that man has a dual nature:

I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. (140)

By experiencing the raw processes of nature in himself, he begins to understand the function of nature as a means and not an end-in-itself. Fishing and hunting are necessary stages in a man's growth, but they are only preliminary and must be recognized as such. A man "goes thither at first as a hunter and fisher," says Thoreau with this new knowledge,

until at last, if he has the seeds of a better life in him, he distinguishes his proper objects, as a poet or naturalist it may be, and leaves the gun and fish-pole behind. (141-142)

To complete his whole nature, Thoreau begins to see that he must purify his senses and align them with his intellect: to quote Emerson's words, "the sublime vision comes to the pure and simple soul in a clean and chaste body" (ECW, III, 28). If a man is to reveal his primal relation to nature in correspondential symbols and thereby liberate himself, he must control his senses to work in harmony with the intuitive power of the intellect:

Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships, after a style purely

his own, nor can he get off by hammering marble instead. We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones. Any nobleness begins at once to refine a man's features, any meanness or sensuality to imbrute them. (147)

As Thoreau's doctrinaire Transcendentalist stance breaks down, he modifies his rejection of materialism. He realizes now that man is both a physical creature, a fact he had previously ignored, and a builder of temples or artistic forms that both contain and reveal his connection with nature. He accepts materialism, not as an end, but a means to build a world organically related to earth processes--each man finding his own "temple" in his particular experience, "after a style purely his own." The intellect is the sculptor that works with the physical world to build a human world that restores the balance between man and nature. This whole process is concretized vividly in the example of John Farmer who has just come in from a "hard day's work," and bathing, sits down to "recreate his intellectual man" (147). In a passage that concludes "Higher Laws," he listens to the sound of a flute that "harmonized with his mood" (148):

...the notes of the flute came home to his ears out of a different sphere from that he worked in, and suggested work for certain faculties which slumbered in him. They gently did away with the street, and the village, and the state in which he lived. A voice said to him,--Why do you stay here and live this mean moiling life, when a glorious existence is possible for you? Those same stars twinkle over other fields than these. --But how to come out of this condition and actually migrate thither? All that he could think of was to practise some new austerity, to let his mind descend into his body and redeem it, and treat himself with ever increasing respect. (148)

Physical facts are the intellect's means to reveal man's primal relation to the processes of nature. Unlike "Poor John Field" who foolishly thinks he can "live by some derivative old country mode in this primitive new country" (139), John Farmer (a disguise for Thoreau) knows that there are other fields than the strictly material one in which he labors. Through John Farmer, Thoreau now sees his contemporaries as "broken giants," to use Emerson's phrase, who accept a "mean moiling life" when a "glorious existence" is still possible. To "migrate thither" into his rightful kingdom, he now knows that he must allow his intellect to "descend into his body and redeem it."

Some readers of Walden have puzzled over the humourous dialogue that opens "Brute Neighbors," the section immediately following "Higher Laws." The conversation between the Poet and Hermit appears to bear no direct relation to the main direction of the narrative. But read in terms of the changes Thoreau is presently undergoing, this pastoral drama points to a further development. With the new perspective that experience has brought him, Thoreau can smile at his former pretense of being a meditative Hermit living in the remote spheres of the galaxy. As a shallow Transcendentalist, the Hermit is a parody of Thoreau's stance to the world in the early parts of Walden. As the Poet leaves to catch some worms to go fishing, he tries to resume his meditative mood in a soliloquy that satirically echoes Thoreau in "Sounds:"

Let me see; where was I? Methinks I was nearly in this frame of mind; the world lay about at this angle. Shall I go to heaven or a-fishing? If I should soon bring this meditation to an end, would another so sweet occasion be likely to offer? I was as near being resolved into the essence of things as ever I was in my life. I fear my thoughts

will not come back to me. If it would do any good, I would whistle for them. When they make us an offer, is it wise to say, We will think of it? My thoughts have left no track, and I cannot find the path again. What was it I was thinking of? It was a very hazy day. I will just try these sentences of Con-fut-see; they may fetch that state about again. (149)

This Hermit who wonders "what the world is doing now" (148) as he lives isolated in the woods, debates whether he should go "to heaven or a-fishing," the one leading him out of nature and the other into nature. It is the Poet, Thoreau in the latter half of Walden, who lives in the world and fishes for belief in the activity of human experience. "It is the only trade I have learned," he tells the Hermit (149). So Thoreau laughs at this Hermit who wonders whether he should go fishing and leave his meditation on the "essence of things." Will another such occasion present itself? he asks himself. The monologue becomes ludicrous once we imagine the Hermit whistling for transcendental thoughts. He has even forgotten what he was thinking about. Even the empty ritual of quoting Confucius cannot restore the mood. So he simply takes a memo that "there never is but one opportunity of a kind" (149) and nonchalantly goes fishing with the Poet. As the Hermit merges into the Poet, Thoreau finally discards his assumed Transcendentalist stance completely and moves toward the arena of experience where true fishing can take place.

"Why do precisely these objects which we behold make a world?" (150) he asks himself in "Brute Neighbors," perceiving nature in terms of himself for the first time. Animals "are all beasts of burden," he says, "...made to carry some portion of our thoughts" (150). The eyes of the young partridge "suggest not merely the purity of infancy, but a wisdom

clarified by experience" (150)--an intimation of the kind of knowledge Thoreau seeks at Walden Pond. He describes a battle between ants and is reminded of man's hostility to man:

...I felt for the rest of that day as if I had had my feelings excited and harrowed by witnessing the struggle, the ferocity and carnage, of a human battle before my door. (154)

Prying into hidden crevices, he discovers the otter who "grows to be four feet long, as big as a small boy, perhaps without any human being getting a glimpse of him" (151). But it is the loon incident at the end of this section that draws together Thoreau's new attitude and relation to nature, and points to the final movement of Walden.

The loon appears in the fall to "moult and bathe in the pond" (155), says Thoreau, and we are once again reminded that he too came to the pond to moult and discover his true relation to nature. "...One very calm October afternoon," he hears the "wild laugh" of this strange bird that "had time and ability to visit the bottom of the pond in its deepest part" (156). In a playful game of wits--he pursues it only to miscalculate "the direction he would take" (156)--Thoreau attempts to catch this bird that challenges his intelligence as it surfaces and dives:

While he was thinking one thing in his brain, I was endeavoring to divine his thought in mine. It was a pretty game, played on the smooth surface of the pond, a man against a loon. Suddenly your adversary's checker disappears beneath the board, and the problem is to place yours nearest to where his will appear again. (156)

The game, however, has an underlying tone of seriousness as Thoreau senses that the loon has come out of nature bearing some kind of message. He

wonders why he has been chosen for this contest: "But why, after displaying so much cunning, did he invariably betray himself the moment he came up by that loud laugh?" (157) And yet each time he fails to find its position, the loon lets out a "demoniac laughter" (157) almost as if "he laughed in derision of my efforts," says Thoreau, "confident of his own resources" (157). Then the chase comes to a sudden climax as this strange bird lets out a howl "as if calling on the god of loons to aid him" (157):

...immediately there came a wind from the east and rippled the surface, and filled the whole air with misty rain, and I was impressed as if it were the prayer of the loon answered, and his god was angry with me; and I left him disappearing far away on the tumultuous surface. (157)

His conscious effort to calculate the loon's movements takes us back to the passage quoted from the conclusion of "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for." There he had stated that his intellect would be a cleaver rifting its way into the "secret of things" (66). The language that he used to describe this "divining rod" (66) then suggested a process akin to the analytical understanding; in his battle with the loon it is significant that he tries "to divine" the bird's thought. His consequent failure to calculate the loon's actions shows that this creature of nature cannot be caught so easily. It is exemplary in that it knows "his course as surely under water as on the surface" (156), navigating its movement according to the rhythms of nature. When it dives to the bottom of the pond, says Thoreau, "no wit could divine where in the deep pond, beneath the smooth surface, he might be speeding his way like a fish" (*italics mine*) (156). As a messenger, this same bird shows that the "secret of things" cannot be divined simply by burrowing through nature analytically.

As Thoreau stops chasing the bird, therefore, he stops trying to calculate his way through things, and begins to receive nature openly. With this incident, summer comes to an end.

The next three sections, "House-Warming," "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors," and "Winter Animals" trace Thoreau's life through autumn into winter. He enters a state of real solitude for the first time. "To go into solitude," Emerson writes in "Nature,"

a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. (ECW, I, 7)

Solitude is not simply the condition of being alone. For Emerson, and for Thoreau in Walden, it concerns the naked confrontation of the processes of nature. We go into solitude only when we shed all pre-conceived forms of perception and experience an "original" relation to elemental processes. Alone, we begin from primary experience and build our world from first principles. In "House-Warming," Thoreau builds a chimney, plasters his house, and begins to inhabit his cabin for the first time: "I now first began to inhabit my house...when I began to use it for warmth as well as shelter" (161). Turning more and more inward--"I withdrew yet farther into my shell, and endeavored to keep a bright fire both within my house and within my breast" (165)--a fire his only companion, he not only recalls "former inhabitants of these woods" (170), but establishes an intimacy with owls, foxes, squirrels, jays, chickadees, partridges, wild mice, and rabbits. Both his previous cynicism toward people and his detachment from human society disappear as he waits in vain for the "visitor who never comes" (179). No longer reacting to men as categorical members of a

composite society, he treats a young man whose family and farm have been destroyed in a fire with sympathy and compassion:

hearing a low moaning...I drew near in the dark, and discovered the only survivor of the family that I know, the heir of both its virtues and its vices....He gazed into the cellar from all sides and points of view by turns, always lying down to it, as if there was some treasure, which he remembered, concealed between the stones, where there was absolutely nothing but a heap of bricks and ashes. The house being gone, he looked at what there was left. He was soothed by the sympathy which my mere presence implied.... (173)

Although no transition is provided, somewhere between "Winter Animals" and "The Pond in Winter" Thoreau has clearly undergone a great change. His winter of solitude is followed by a transformational awakening in one of the most important climaxes of the drama of Walden:

After a still winter night I awoke with the impression that some question had been put to me, which I had been endeavoring in vain to answer in my sleep, as what--how--when--where? But there was dawning Nature, in whom all creatures live, looking in at my broad windows with serene and satisfied face, and no question on her lips. I awoke to an answered question, to Nature and daylight. The snow lying deep on the earth dotted with young pines, and the very slope of the hill on which my house is placed, seemed to say, Forward! Nature puts no question and answers none which we mortals ask. She has long ago taken her resolution. "O Prince, our eyes contemplate with admiration and transmit to the soul the wonderful and varied spectacle of this universe. The night veils without doubt a part of this glorious creation; but day comes to reveal to us this great work, which extends from earth even into the plains of the ether."

Then to my morning work. First I take an axe and pail and go in search of water, if that be not a dream. After a cold and snowy night it needed a divining rod to find it. Every winter the liquid and trembling surface of the pond, which was so

sensitive to every breath, and reflected every light and shadow, becomes solid to the depth of a foot or a foot and a half, so that it will support the heaviest teams, and perchance the snow covers it to an equal depth, and it is not to be distinguished from any level field. Like the marmots in the surrounding hills, it closes its eye-lids and becomes dormant for three months or more. Standing on the snow-covered plain, as if in a pasture amid the hills, I cut my way first through a foot of snow, and then a foot of ice, and open a window under my feet, where, kneeling to drink, I look down into the quiet parlor of the fishes, pervaded by a softened light as through a window of ground glass, with its bright sanded floor the same as in summer; there a perennial waveless serenity reigns as in the amber twilight sky, corresponding to the cool and even temperament of the inhabitants. Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads. (187)

It would help us to recall a passage from "The Village" where Thoreau had argued that we must lose ourselves to find our true relation to nature, not realizing then that this necessity also applied to himself:

...not till we are completely lost, or turned around,--for a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost,--do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of Nature. Every man has to learn the points of compass again as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or any abstraction. Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations. (114-115)

To lose the world, we must reject all pre-conceived modes of perceiving nature and be alone with the fundamental facts of our existence. All imposed forms of perception, what Thoreau calls a "sleep" or "abstraction," prevent us from appreciating the "vastness and strangeness" of creation. When we lose the world of abstracted forms, and relate to nature elemen-

(111)

tally, we learn the "points of compass again"--that is, discover our organic connection with all aspects of nature. Alone with the processes of nature, we experience "where we are and the infinite extent of our relations"--and realize ironically that the ground of our experience is potentially wherever we stand. The long, quoted passage should be seen as the immediate effect of both losing the world and making a descent to the ground of nature and human experience. The questions put to Thoreau in his "sleep"--life abstracted from the processes of nature--concerning the "what--how--when--where?" of human existence have no rational answers. Formerly Thoreau had been trying to burrow his way through the essential question^s/of life analytically, looking for logical answers to questions that can only be solved in experience. Awakening after a "still winter night," he learns that nature does not ask questions and demand answers, but simply is. When we experience an organic relation to nature, all questions and answers dissolve into the eternal Now--we are when we flow with the processes of nature. By relating to things through the receptive intellect, Thoreau has cleansed the mediate vision of night and now enters his rightful "daylight" home, "the wonderful and varied spectacle of this universe." Transformed, he begins his "morning work." No longer simply going through an empty morning-water ritual, he now takes his axe and pail and goes pragmatically "in search of water." Once again we encounter the image of the "divining rod." With his new stance toward nature, however, he now has no trouble cutting through snow and ice. Opening a window into the pond, he looks below the surface of Walden, and watches a "quiet parlor of the fishes" who move in the "waveless serenity" of the water. "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads," he

concludes, realizing that we can only know our relations by descending to the source of our experience, moving through, rather than over nature.

To actualize this "glorious creation" in his own experience, Thoreau discovers that he must descend to the ground of his desire, like those "wild men" (187) who come to fish at the pond. Comparable to the Indian in Williams' In the American Grain, they "instinctively follow other fashions and trust other authorities than their townsmen" (187). Unconsciously in contact with the processes of nature, these men are themselves objects of nature. "His life itself passes deeper in Nature than the studies of the naturalist penetrate," says Thoreau referring to one of these natural men, "himself a subject for the naturalist" (188). This man is so attuned to natural rhythms that he can find fish where we ordinarily could not; looking into his pail, says Thoreau, is like looking into a "summer pond, as if he kept summer locked up at home, or knew where she had retreated" (188). Both he and Williams' Indian are both revelations of nature: "Such a man has some right to fish, and I love to see Nature carried out in him" (188). But Thoreau, like Boone with the Indian, does not want to become one of these "wild men." Rather, he wants to assume, consciously and deliberately, their stance toward nature.

Those "fabulous fishes" (188), the pickeral of Walden, are a miniature of the metamorphic process in nature. "Like flowers and precious stones, as if they were the pearls, the animalized nuclei or crystals of the Walden water" (188), they concretize the essential element of Walden: "They, of course, are Walden all over and all through; are themselves small Waldens in the animal kingdom, Waldenses" (188-189). This same principle holds true for Walden itself which, in turn, is a metamorphosis

of nature. In our discussion of "The Ponds" we had noted how the pond, as the intermediary of earth and sky, held the life of nature in its concrete particularity. Now, in "The Pond in Winter," Thoreau begins to realize that it is a prototype of nature, a microcosmic container of the forces of creation. With this sense of Walden's ultimate significance, he decides to sound out the "long lost bottom of Walden" (189) deliberately. Since both he and Walden are rooted in nature, the pond is potentially a correspondential symbol capable of revealing his primal relations. Searching for its bottom, therefore, is a search for the source of his own experience. The two processes are synonymous. Most men believe the pond to be bottomless "without taking the trouble to sound it" (189). But it does have a bottom in spite of its being remarkably deep, 107 feet by Thoreau's measurement. The depth of the pond is revealing:

What if all ponds were shallow? Would it not react on the minds of men? I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol. (189)

Then measuring the two diameters of the pond, Thoreau finds to his amazement that it is perfectly symmetrical: "the line of greatest length intersected the line of greatest breadth exactly at the point of greatest depth" (191). Walden's harmonious order shows that everything in nature is ordered. The whole of nature, the circle of creation, to recall Emerson, can be known only through its particulars, or its angles of vision: Walden is one of those particulars, and Thoreau's exact perception, one of the angles of vision:

Now we know only a few laws, and our result is vitiated, not, of course, by any confusion or irregularity in Nature, but by our ignorance

of essential elements in the calculation....
 The particular laws are as our points of view,
 as, to the traveller, a mountain outline varies
 with every step, and it has an infinite number
 of profiles, though absolutely but one form. (192)

By extension, these same techniques of measuring can be applied to man:

...draw lines through the length and breadth of
 the aggregate of a man's particular daily be-
 haviors and waves of life into his coves and
 inlets, and where they intersect will be the
 height or depth of his character. (192)

In a passage to be quoted at length, Thoreau goes on to extend the cor-
 respondential symbol of the pond to include the process of man's thought,
 and prepares us for the final revelatory movement of "Spring:"

...there is a bar across the entrance of our every
 cove, or particular inclination; each is our harbor
 for a season, in which we are detained and partially
 landlocked. These inclinations are not whimsical
 usually, but their form, size, and direction are
 determined by the promontories of the shore, the
 ancient axes of elevation. When this bar is grad-
 ually increased by storms, tides, or currents, or
 there is a subsidence of the waters, so that it
 reaches to the surface, that which was at first
 but an inclination in the shore in which a thought
 was harbored becomes an individual lake, cut off
 from the ocean, wherein the thought secures its
 own conditions, changes, perhaps, from salt to
 fresh, becomes a sweet sea, dead sea, or a marsh.
 At the advent of each individual into this life,
 may we not suppose that such a bar has risen to
 the surface somewhere? It is true, we are such
 poor navigators that our thoughts, for the most
 part, stand off and on upon a harborless coast,
 are conversant only with the bights of the bays
 of poesy, or steer for the public ports of entry,
 and go into the dry docks of science, where they
 merely refit for this world, and no natural cur-
 rents concur to individualize them. (192-193)

Not only Walden Pond, but Thoreau is himself that "sweet sea." By breaking

off from all imposed forms of perception, his thought has become an "individual lake." It has secured "its own conditions" by particularizing itself in experience. He is now aware that it could just as easily have turned into a "dead sea, or a marsh" had he not learned how to navigate it according to "natural currents" that brought him into the harbor of his relation to nature. With this insight, he accomplishes his final transformation in "Spring" as he lives out his elemental relations and discovers, in experiential fact, the source of the "true clothing" of his life in the woods.

With the approach of spring and the warm rays of the sun, Walden begins to "boom" (199). Unlike other ponds, it "indicates better than any water hereabouts the absolute progress of the season, being least affected by transient changes of temperature" (197-198). As the temperature changes its surface, it thunders its new conditions. It is rooted in the processes of the earth: "...though I may perceive no difference in the weather," says Thoreau, "it does" (199), drawing a conclusion that anticipates his own position in the thaw to come:

Who would have suspected so large and cold and thick-skinned a thing to be so sensitive? Yet it has its law to which it thunders obedience when it should as surely as the buds expand in the spring. (199)

Now "looking at what is to be seen" (75), a stance he had not attained in "Sounds," Thoreau is "on the alert for the first sign of spring,

to hear the chance note of some arriving bird, or the striped squirrel's chirp, for his stores must be now nearly exhausted, or see the woodchuck venture out of his winter quarters. (199)

If Thoreau had previously proposed that he would allow his intellect to "descend into his body and redeem it" (148), he now actualizes his proposal in experience. We would miss the importance of "Spring" if we failed to recognize the movement of Thoreau as he himself transforms through experiencing the organic life processes of nature. A part of natural processes, he now concretizes his elemental relations as he is born into the world of spring. "Spring" is an achieved experience. This whole process begins as he watches the frost rising out of the ground of the "cut" on the railroad:

Few phenomena gave me more delight than to observe the forms which thawing sand and clay assume in flowing down the sides of a deep cut on the railroad through which I passed on my way to the village. (201)

As he details this activity, he begins to experience its movement:

Innumerable little streams overlap and interlace one with another, exhibiting a sort of hybrid product, which obeys half way the law of currents, and half way that of vegetation. As it flows it takes the forms of sappy leaves or vines, making heaps of pulpy sprays a foot or more in depth, and resembling, as you look down on them, the lacinated lobed and imbricated thalluses of some lichens; or you are reminded of coral, of leopards' paws or birds' feet, of brains or lungs or bowels, and excrements of all kinds. It is a truly grotesque vegetation, whose forms and color we see imitated in bronze, a sort of architectural foliage more ancient and typical than acanthus, chiccory, ivy, vine, or any vegetable leaves....When the flowing mass reaches the drain at the foot of the bank it spreads out flatter into strands, the separate streams losing their semi-cylindrical form and gradually becoming more flat and broad, running together as they are more moist, till they form an almost flat sand, still variously and beautifully shaded, but in which you can trace

the original forms of vegetation; till at length, in the water itself, they are converted into banks, like those formed off the mouths of rivers, and the forms of vegetation are lost in the ripple marks on the bottom.
(201-202)

This particular hillside re-enacts the original creation. As Thoreau stands in the midst of the thaw, the sand flowing "like lava" (201) down the slope reminds him of the elemental source of all things. He sees the beginning forms of vegetation, and anticipates the creation of natural objects. As such, this process precedes plants, animals, and men. Being the fluid source of creation, its "architectural foliage" is more "ancient and typical" than flowers and leaves. Even more important, however, is the way Thoreau sees into the hillside and reads its correspondential meaning. By standing before this particular hillside, participating in the movement of the sand in this particular spring, he experiences the origin of all created things. This "sand foliage" comes alive so quickly that he concludes:

...I am affected as if in a peculiar sense I stood in the laboratory of the Artist who made the world and me,--had come to where he was still at work, sporting on this bank, and with excess of energy strewing his fresh designs about. (202)

His experience makes him feel much closer to the "vitals of the globe" (202), the source that precedes and yet anticipates all created things, man included.

"You find thus in the very sands an anticipation of the vegetable leaf" (202), he says, as he realizes that all facts of nature are metamorphoses of the source. He agrees with Goethe that the leaf is the

fundamental unit of nature, every thing else being an extension of it: "No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, it so labors with the idea inwardly" (202). With some entymological variations of the word "lobe" (202), he extends the implications of this insight to include animals, realizing that all of creation is a constant metamorphosis, one part of nature continually passing into another and other parts. "The very globe continually transcends and translates itself," he concludes, "and becomes winged in its orbit" (202).

Returning to the streams of sand on the hillside, he begins to see human growth as itself a revelation of this same metamorphic principle in nature:

You see here perchance how blood vessels are formed. If you look closely you observe that first there pushes forward from the thawing mass a stream of softened sand with a drop-like point, like the ball of the finger, feeling its way slowly and blindly downward.... (202-203)

He traces the formation of arteries and envisions the structure of bones and the "fleshy fibre or cellular tissue" (203), concluding significantly: "What is man but a mass of thawing clay?" (203) Through the example of this one hillside, he has experienced the whole of nature up to and including man. "Thus it seemed that this one hillside illustrated the principle of all the operations of Nature," he concludes, and comments further:

The Maker of this earth but patented a leaf. What Champollion will decipher this hieroglyphic for us, that we may turn over a new leaf at last? (203)

He, of course, is that Champollion in "Spring." This first movement,

then, reaches a momentary balance with Thoreau discovering in experience that "there is nothing inorganic" (204). This spring thaw on the hillside has purged him of "winter fumes and indigestions" (203), making it possible for him to participate in the life processes of nature. "The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history," he comments, with the knowledge gained from his experience,

stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit,--not a fossil earth, but a living earth; compared with whose great central life all animal and vegetable life is merely parasitic. (204)

The processes of nature are the "great central life" of all things, the ground of plants, animals, and men, and the source of which they are the metamorphoses.

After winter's decomposition, Thoreau moves into the first signs of spring proper. He watches the "first tender signs of the infant year just peeping forth" (204) in the vegetation, listens to the red-squirrels "chuckling and chirruping" (205) under his house, and heralds "the first sparrow of spring" whose singing was "heard over the partially bare and moist fields...as if the last flakes of winter tinkled as they fell" (205). As spring actually arrives, the "grass flames up on the hillsides like a spring fire..."

as if the earth sent forth an inward heat to greet the returning sun; not yellow but green is the color of its flame;--the symbol of perpetual youth, the grass-blade, like a long green ribbon, streams from the sod into the summer, checked indeed by the frost, but anon pushing on again, lifting its spear of last year's hay with the fresh life below. (205)

Life and death, composition and decomposition, are both a part of the underlying process of nature. After each winter, spring follows to show that we live in a "living earth" that is constantly changing organically. As a correspondential symbol of the "inward heat" of nature, and by extension, of man, the "grass-blade" reveals the power of the "fresh life below" the surface of things. "So our human life but dies down to its root," says Thoreau, "and still puts forth its green blade to eternity" (205). Every thing in nature obeys this law of creation; life and death are a part of the natural cycle of the earth. When Thoreau sees the "vulture feeding on the carrion," or the dead carcass of a horse, he no longer despairs, but affirms the "inviolable health of Nature" that necessitates this situation.(210). When we see into the cyclical nature of creation, we can understand the "universal innocence" (210) of life and death processes, and participate in this natural movement.

After describing how "Walden is melting apace" (205), Thoreau then sums up his experience with a short but conclusive statement: "Walden was dead and is alive again" (206). We have moved with Thoreau from the first signs of thaw on the hillside to the birth and growth of grass. Opening in terms of the movement from winter to spring, Thoreau suddenly experiences a moment of revelation as he realizes that he too has been transformed from "storm and winter to serene and mild weather, from dark and sluggish hours to bright and elastic ones" (206). His own metamorphosis into a fruitful marriage with the processes of nature is the climax to an achieved experience:

Suddenly an influx of light filled my house, though the evening was at hand, and the clouds of winter still overhung it, and the eaves were dripping with

sleety rain. I looked out the window, and lo! where yesterday was cold gray ice there lay the transparent pond already calm and full of hope as in a summer evening, reflecting a summer evening sky in its bosom, though none was visible overhead, as if it had intelligence with some remote horizon. I heard a robin in the distance, the first I had heard for many a thousand years, methought, whose note I shall not forget for many a thousand more,--the same sweet and powerful song as of yore....I knew that it would not rain any more....As it grew darker, I was startled by the honking of geese flying low over the woods, like weary travellers getting in late from southern lakes, and indulging at last in unrestrained complaint and mutual consolation. Standing at my door, I could hear the rush of their wings; when, driving toward my house, they suddenly spied my light, and with hushed clamor wheeled and settled in the pond. So I came in, and shut the door, and passed my first spring night in the woods. (206)

Thoreau's achieved contact with the processes of nature have prepared him for this sudden "influx of light" that fills his cabin. The landscape of both Walden Pond and his mind is transformed into a "summer evening sky" even though "none was visible overhead." His marriage to the source of his experience alters the physical surface of things and makes the pond "transparent," almost as if it "had intelligence," he says, "with some remote horizon." As the invisible forces of creation reveal themselves in the particularity of his experience, Thoreau enters the thought of men in other ages and places: the robin's song, being a revelation of the source of all experience, is both ancient and contemporary, the possibility of all men, past, present, and future. "I knew that it would not rain any more," says Thoreau very calmly, now knowing that not only the pond but all things have a bottom that can be measured in experiential fact. The passage settles to a quiet conclusion as the geese "like weary travellers" find

a haven in the light surrounding Thoreau's cabin. Their movement reveals his own movement toward that "home" he had been searching for when he first came to live at Walden Pond. "So I came in," he states explicitly, "and shut the door, and passed my first spring night in the woods." He has found the ground from which the "true clothing" of his experience grows.

The rest of "Spring" amplifies Thoreau's new found freedom. Although each season has its own inherent beauty in the "equilibrium of Nature" (207), he now sees spring as "the creation of Cosmos out of Chaos and the realization of the Golden Age" (207)--a time when all men can come into contact with the root source of things and reconcile themselves with the ground of their experience. By seeing into the correspondential nature of Walden Pond, Thoreau now understands the "primitive nature of man" (208), and the alternate necessity for all human forms to be organically related to the processes of nature. When the intellect that creates these forms works in accordance with man's primitive nature, it can regain the "Golden Age." The kind of freedom possible for all men is caught in the image of the hawk that Thoreau sees "soaring like a ripple and tumbling a rod or two over and over" in the air (209). As he watches this bird dance in the air, the "undersides of its wings" gleaming "like the pearly inside of a shell," he follows the movement of its rhythmical flight, noting its self-reliance in the "fields of air" (209):

...mounting again and again with its strange chuckle, it repeated its free and beautiful fall, turning over and over like a kite, and then recovering from its lofty tumbling, as if it had never set its foot on terra firma. It appeared to have no companion in the universe,--sporting there alone,--and to need none but the morning and the ether with which it played. (209)

Like the hawk that was born in a "crevice of a crag" (209) and now flies free in the wind, Thoreau was born in his descent to the ground of nature and now is free to build his world from basic principles. But both of them are "like kites." They can fly only because they have grown from and are still tied to "terra firma." Just as the friction of air is necessary for flight--in a completely pure atmosphere it would be impossible--Thoreau now realizes that his liberation from out-moded forms of perception grows from his primal connection to nature. It is this kind of self-reliance that each man carries within him. Thoreau's particular example is an exemplification of the possibility open to all men. Like Williams and Emerson, Thoreau also recognizes that the problem of contact is both an aesthetic and a moral issue. Only when men relate to the processes of nature in their own particular experience can they build an authentic society. They hold the "Golden Age" within them--it is a continual possibility:

We should be blessed if we lived in the present always, and took advantage of every accident that befell us, like the grass which confesses the influence of the slightest dew that falls on it; and did not spend our time in atoning for the neglect of past opportunities, which we call doing our duty. We loiter in winter while it is already spring. In a pleasant spring morning all men's sins are forgiven....Through our own recovered innocence we discern the innocence of our neighbors. You may have known your neighbor yesterday for a thief, a drunkard, or a sensualist, and merely pitied or despised him, and despaired of the world; but the sun shines bright and warm this first spring morning, recreating the world, and you meet him at some serene work, and see how his exhausted and debauched veins expand with still joy and bless the new day, feel the spring influence with the innocence of infancy, and all his faults are forgotten. There is not only

an atmosphere of good will about him, but even a savor of holiness groping for expression, blindly and ineffectually perhaps, like a newborn instinct, and for a short hour the south hill-side echoes to no vulgar jest. (207-208)

Thoreau's own moral transformation is apparent in this passage. When he came to Walden Pond, he had been one of those despairers of the world. But through his experience, he has achieved the "spring of springs" and actualized his relation to nature. Now he sees this same possibility in his "neighbors," the people of Concord. He now approaches them with a different kind of message: "spring" is a state of mind and can be recovered in organic experience as his own life has shown. Now seeing the possibility within men as it gropes "for expression," he becomes aware of the "innocence of infancy" living blindly in their lives.

"Conclusion," therefore, is both a statement of actualities and possibilities. Having concretized his own primal relation to nature, Thoreau now turns to his contemporaries and invites them to accomplish the same in their own lives. "Explore thyself," he says (213): all men should be Columbuses, explorers of the "private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean" (212) of their experience. Their search will yield results because "there is a solid bottom everywhere" (219)--Thoreau now speaks from experience, having sounded out the bottom of Walden. No matter how thick the "bogs and quicksands of society" (219) smother man's relation to the processes of nature, he can still achieve the "spring of springs," as the fable of the "beautiful bug" (221) reveals:

Every one has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's

(22)

kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts,--from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the heat of an urn....Who knows what beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried for ages under many concentric layers of woodenness in the dead dry life of society...may unexpectedly come forth from amidst society's most trivial and handselled furniture, to enjoy its perfect summer life at last! (221)

Living beneath the "concentric layers of woodenness in the dead dry life of society" before settling at Walden Pond, Thoreau is that "beautiful bug" that has "come forth" from Concord's woodwork to achieve his "perfect summer life at last." In the introductory remarks to this study of Walden, we had noted how Thoreau's journey out of Concord seemed like a voyage to a foreign country. Having followed his development throughout the narrative, however, the process now becomes much clearer. Like Poe in Williams' In the American Grain, Thoreau has learned that the American society, of which Concord is a miniature version, is itself the foreign country. Abstracted from the processes of nature, living in the "mud and slush of opinion" (66), it remains divorced from the real source of America. By leaving Concord both literally and metaphorically, Thoreau has found the authentic roots of America. The source of both his and Concord's experience, he being a prototype of all men, exists beneath the abstractions of Concord. Going to Walden is therefore not a journey to a "distant country" but to the real America.

Only by discovering how to respond to nature could Thoreau uncover his elemental relation to natural processes. He had to learn how to acquire the "spring of springs." We have accordingly traced his growth

in terms of his narrative account of his experiences. His transformation has been accomplished in the very language of Walden. It is in the space-time world of his narrative that he has made his discoveries. In other words, and this point has only been implied throughout our exploration, Thoreau learns his relation to nature only in and through the artistic world of Walden. Only in this world does he change his stance toward experience and discover how to "live" in accordance with natural laws. What began as a simple account of life in the woods, by the end of the narrative, has become a work of art. Walden, as a finished product, both contains and reveals Thoreau's experience. If the processes of nature are the source of the "true clothing" of experience, Walden is that "true clothing," the organic form that concretizes one man's particular experience in nature. Its space-time world is not a "world elsewhere,"¹⁹ but the world itself hidden beneath the externalized forms of Concord. Perhaps Thoreau was aware of this metamorphosis of his experience into a work of art as he related the fable of the artist of Kouroo:

There was an artist in the city of Kouroo who was disposed to strive after perfection. One day it came into his mind to make a staff. Having considered that in an imperfect work time is an ingredient, but into a perfect work time does not enter, he said to himself, **It** shall be perfect in all respects, though I should do nothing else in my life. **He** proceeded instantly to the forest for wood, being resolved that it should not be made of unsuitable material; and as he searched for and rejected stick after stick, his friends gradually deserted him, for they grew old in their works and died, but he grew not older by a moment. His singleness of purpose and resolution, and his elevated piety, endowed him, without his knowledge, with perennial youth. As he made no compromise with Time, Time kept out of his way, and only sighed at a distance

because he could not overcome him. Before he had found a stock in all respects suitable the city of Kouroo was a hoary ruin, and he sat on one of its mounds to peel the stick. Before he had given it the proper shape the dynasty of the Candahars was at an end, and with the point of the stick he wrote the name of the last of that race in the sand, and then resumed his work. By the time he had smoothed and polished the staff Kalpa was no longer the pole-star; and ere he had put on the ferule and the head adorned with precious stones, Brahma had awoke and slumbered many times. **But why do I stay** to mention these things? When the finishing stroke was put to his work, it suddenly expanded before the eyes of the astonished artist into the fairest of all creations of Brahma. He had made a new system in making a staff, a world with full and fair proportions; in which, though the old cities and dynasties had passed away, fairer and more glorious ones had taken their places. And now he saw by the heap of shavings still fresh at his feet, that, for him and his work, the former lapse of time had been an illusion, and that no more time had elapsed than is required for a single scintillation from the brain of Brahma to fall on and inflame the tinder of a mortal brain. The material was pure, and his art was pure; how could the result be other than wonderful? (216-217)

As a work of art, Walden is that perfect "staff" hewn from the "pure" material of Thoreau's experience. Like the artist of Kouroo, he went to Walden Pond to find the authentic material with which to weave the "true clothing" of his experience, in the course of his stay learning what was "unsuitable." What better clothing is there than Walden itself? Williams had asserted that salvation is aesthetic: a true work of art reconciles "the people and the stones" because it concretizes and reveals human experience. Walden holds on to Thoreau's particular experience in all of its fluidity. Recording one man's journey to the roots of America, it is representative of the possibilities open to all men: in his own solitude,

Thoreau was able to make "a new system in making a staff, a world with full and fair proportions" capable of becoming a model for all men.

Because Walden, as an organic work of art, is grounded in the particular space and time of one man's experience, it is removed from the limitations of space and time. In the artistic world of the narrative, Thoreau's experience is perennially present. As long as men respond to its language and experience its drama, it will always remain contemporary.

With his beautiful wand, Walden, Thoreau decides to return to Concord. He enters the world of men to offer them the diadem that can reconcile them to the processes of nature and restore them to their rightful kingdom. He also realizes, however, that for himself one work of art is not an end. Walden is only one beginning of many beginnings. Had he stayed and made this "new system" a permanent mode of life, he would have fallen into as rigid a form as that which forced him to leave Concord in the first place. "It is remarkable," he says, "how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves" (213). Used as an end in itself, Walden would also become an empty form abstracted from experience. "Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live," says Thoreau, "and could not spare any more time for that one" (213). As life is a continuous series of experiences, Thoreau returns to Concord to find other "Waldens" to shape into revelatory "staffs" of art. If the material of his subsequent experiences is pure, and the art is pure, "how could the result be other than wonderful?"

Along with Emerson, Thoreau in Walden realizes that only those art forms that are organic extensions of experience can concretize and reveal

the active process of coming into contact with elemental processes. As we return to the twentieth century to investigate the poetry of Wallace Stevens, we should bear in mind the strong emphasis both of them place on experience, an area that moves behind (or before) such rational categories as "materialism" and "idealism." In his own lifetime search for a reality that subsumes all things, Stevens also rejects those pre-conceived forms of perception that distort the nature of the world. Rather than affirming experience, however, he attempts to get nearer to reality by engaging in those very problems of knowledge that Emerson warns us against. As the poetic world of the Collected Poems will show us, he entered the realm of epistemology and the "subject-object" problem it presents, attacking all empty forms while ironically accepting another--the epistemological question itself--equally as limiting.

Section Four:

An End of the Imagination

Necessary Finality in the Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens

He [the poet] finds that as between these two sources: the imagination and reality, the imagination is false, whatever else may be said of it, and reality is true; and being concerned that poetry should be a thing of vital and virile importance, he commits himself to reality, which then becomes his inescapable and ever-present difficulty and inamorata.

After the leaves have fallen, we return
To a plain sense of things. It is as if
We had come to an end of the imagination,
Inanimate in an inert savoir.

It is difficult even to choose the adjective
For this blank cold, this sadness without cause.
The great structure has become a minor house.
No turban walks across the lessened floors.

The greenhouse never so badly needed paint.
The chimney is fifty years old and slants to one side.
A fantastic effort has failed, a repetition
In a repetitiousness of men and flies.

Yet the absence of the imagination had
Itself to be imagined. The great pond,
The plain sense of it, without reflections, leaves,
Mud, water like dirty glass, expressing silence

Of a sort, silence of a rat come out to see,
The great pond and its waste of the lilies, all this
Had to be imagined as an inevitable knowledge,
Required, as a necessity requires. ("The Plain Sense of Things")

Possibly no other poet in the twentieth century has received as careful and sympathetic a critical treatment as Wallace Stevens. Yet, as late as 1964, Joseph N. Riddell, discussing the main lines of Stevens criticism in "The Contours of Stevens Criticism," could say that "the later Stevens remains an enigma of sorts."¹ His comment is still revealing. As if to follow Stevens' comment that "poetry is a process of the personality of the poet,"² critics have read through the Collected Poems (1954) with almost religious patience, through meticulous investigation of individual poems, trying to delineate that enigmatic personality. As we too enter Stevens' "Planet on the Table" (CP, 532) and explore the "fluent mundo" (CP, 407) of the Collected Poems, especially the final section The Rock (1954), we seem to find ourselves in a world of contradictions. Statement often conflicts with statement, Stevens often shifting ground, sometimes appearing to believe one thing, then blatantly denying that same belief. We almost turn with relief to J. Hillis Miller's assessment of Stevens criticism and the problems it entails:

It is impossible to find a single systematic theory of poetry and life in Stevens. If the poet swerves this way and that seeking fixity and escape from contradiction, the critic must find a way to account for this vacillation.³

Along with Miller, Riddell and Roy Harvey Pearce explore this vacillation by studying Stevens' position in The Rock, his final statement on the nature of poetry, the imagination, and their relation to reality. In general all three argue that the later Stevens becomes aware of major contradictions in his thought. In the poetic world of the Collected Poems, reality is both actualized and evaded by the same imaginative process. Even though their studies present three different portraits, they all assert that Stevens, confronted with the dichotomy inherent in his assumptions in The Rock, moves toward another kind of affirmation of the poetic process.⁴ By so doing, however, they tend to posit solutions to contradictions in Stevens' thought and extend it into realms in which he did not move. The poems of The Rock are anything but affirmative. After a lifetime search for a viable belief based on the poetic process, the later Stevens, as even the "Plain Sense of Things" indicates, realizes that his failure to do so has been and will always be inevitable.

"The Plain Sense of Things" seems autobiographical because of its sense of necessary finality: the leaves have fallen (for the final time?) and Stevens moves away from the "Credences of Summer" (CP, 372) to an autumnal awareness. As the seasons appear to assume their final cycle, he returns to the "plain sense of things." After the illusory construction of metaphors about, he now feels as if he "had come to an end of the imagination, / Inanimate in an inert savoir."⁵ The qualifying "as if" indicates that even a knowledge that the imagination can do nothing to change the

large fact of the wholly external and indifferent world is itself an imaginative act. After years of metaphors coming and going, creating and destroying in the rhythm of seasons, the uncontrollable and unknowable alien reality still remains: "It is difficult even to choose the adjective/ For this blank cold, this sadness without cause." Stevens' assertion in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" that "We see/Nothing beyond reality" (CP, 465) now becomes an impossibility. The "great structure" that poetry seemed to provide is only a "minor house" without any ultimate meaning. There is no possibility for any kind of belief: "No turban walks across the lessened floors." Years of imaginative activity have not changed a thing. Time has continued its necessary motion. The greenhouse needs paint. The fifty year old chimney now "slants to one side." The quotidian world continues its changeless inconstancy. "A fantastic effort has failed." In a colloquial sense, the word "fantastic" could simply refer to a momentous effort. Used more strictly, as Stevens consistently does, it, or its variant, usually refers to the process of the imagination. In "Anatomy of Monotony" (CP, 107), for instance, as men anthropomorphize the sun, others come "Twinning our phantasy and our device." "Phantasy" and "device," in this context, describe the distorting metaphoric process of the imagination. Elsewhere, in "The Course of a Particular" (OP, 96), Stevens contemplates leaves that have no human meaning and hypothetically perceives them "In the absence of fantasia," as things-in-themselves prior to metaphor. In another poem, "What We See is What We Think" (CP, 459), noon becomes the moment the mind passes into a metaphoric perception of things:

At twelve, the disintegration of afternoon
 Began, the return to phantomerei, if not
 To phantoms.

In the "Plain Sense of Things," then, the "fantastic effort" that has failed is Stevens' attempt to establish a belief through the metaphoric process of the imagination.

Before we can understand the full implications of the last two stanzas of the poem, however, one important point needs emphasis. In his letters and essays, Stevens often discusses the interdependence of the imagination and reality. Writing to Ronald Lane Latimer, for instance, he says that the various sections of "The Man with the Blue Guitar" (CP, 165-184) "deal with the relation or balance between imagined things and real things which ...is a constant source of trouble to me" (LWS, 316). He makes a similar statement in the essay "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words:"

It is not only that the imagination adheres to reality, but, also, that reality adheres to the imagination and that the interdependence is essential. (NA, 33)

Within the boundaries of these and other related comments, critics have explained his poetic world in the context of the Romantic synthesis of subject and object. Roy Harvey Pearce, for example, argues that Stevens' "concern for the subject-object problem is...continuous from that of his Romantic forebears."⁶ Although he has much in common with the Romantics, a too hasty comparison often excludes important differences. A close investigation of the Collected Poems indicates that his real desire was not so much to reconcile the subject-self with the object-reality but to separate them. In his later poetry especially, he discovers that perception is the necessary interdependence of the subject with the object.

(130)

He then wanted to separate them to know the object prior to the intervention of the subject. These objects-in-themselves, wholly external to the perceiving self, he called "reality." In "The Course of a Particular" (OP, 96), a poem that Samuel French Morse says "should have appeared in the final section of the Collected Poems" had Stevens not misplaced it (OP, xcii), this desire to distinguish reality from the self is clarified:

The leaves cry...One holds off and merely hears the cry.
It is a busy cry, concerning someone else.
And though one says that one is part of everything,

There is a conflict, there is a resistance involved;
And being part is an exertion that declines:
One feels the life of that which gives life as it is.

In this poem Stevens fights his desire to become a "part of everything." Because the crying of the leaves belongs to a reality outside of the human world, it concerns "someone else." "Being part" would therefore be "an exertion that declines." Were he not to resist the temptation to identify with the crying, he would not get a sense "of that which gives life as it is," that reality or things-in-themselves prior to the human metaphors about it.

In Stevens' Poetry of Thought, Frank Doggett is quite correct in arguing that Stevens usually looks upon "reality" as "an undetermined base on which a mind constructs its personal sense of the world."⁷ This reality "forces itself upon our consciousness and refuses to be managed and mastered," says Stevens in "On Poetic Truth," and argues further that poetry has "to mediate for us a reality not ourselves" (OP, 238). In another passage from this same essay he expands the terms of his discussion:

...poetry has to do with reality in that concrete
and individual aspect of it which the mind can

never tackle altogether on its own terms, with matter that is foreign and alien in a way in which abstract systems, ideas in which we detect an inherent pattern, a structure that belongs to the ideas themselves, can never be...its poetry's function...is precisely this contact with reality as it impinges on us from the outside, the sense that we can touch and feel a solid reality which does not wholly dissolve itself into the conceptions of our own minds. It is the individual and particular that does this. And the wonder and mystery of art, as indeed of religion in the last resort, is the revelation of something "wholly other" by which the inexpressible loneliness of thinking is broken and enriched. (OP, 236-237)

According to Stevens, reality is that "wholly other" that lives outside of the mind's perception of it. It is distinct from those "abstract systems" that the mind imposes upon things. Rational ideas, Stevens implies, are a structure of the mind and belong, not to reality, but to the mind. The function of poetry, on the other hand, "is precisely this contact with reality as it impinges on us from the outside." As a statement of intentions, this passage is fairly straightforward, and sounds surprisingly like Williams's desire to catch the movement of objects as they enlarge his consciousness.⁸ But Stevens was to go further, as the quoted passage at the beginning of this discussion indicates. He went on to believe that the imagination, the process through which poetry works, is as false as rational ideas, being of the same fictive order. This situation created impossible problems: If poetry is the only process capable of revealing reality, and it too is false, reality "then becomes his inescapable and ever-present difficulty and inamorata." How can he get at the "wholly other" object of his desire, when all he has at his disposal is the resources of his mind?

As we will see, this question led Stevens on a search for that "wholly other" some-thing he called reality, and ended in his own divorce from the very source he sought.

As the end of a voyage that failed, the last two stanzas of "The Plain Sense of Things" describe the necessary finality of Stevens' concerns. At the end of his life he discovers that since his notion of reality is itself a product of the imagination, his awareness of failure is inevitable knowledge: "Yet the absence of the imagination had/Itself to be imagined." Stevens can no longer move in any direction. According to his assumptions, if the imagination inevitably distorts reality, reality can only be grasped in the absence of the imagination. Yet the imagination is his only way of knowing anything about the world. The contradiction is impossible to resolve. There is nothing more to say or do. Even the process of hypothetically envisioning the world in the absence of the imagination is an imaginative act. The desolate image of the pond only indicates more emphatically how far away reality remains even in the "plainest" perception. According to Stevens, all "fantastic effort" is inevitably futile. "All this/Had to be imagined as an inevitable knowledge," he says, "Required, as a necessity requires."

To understand this final position Stevens reached in The Rock, we must enter and explore the poetic world that precedes this last section, study its assumptions and hypotheses and try to locate the source of his problem. We will find that his world has fairly well-defined epistemological boundaries. A discussion of naked epistemological concepts, however, is not meant to limit his poetry, but to understand its basic substance. Fortunately, or unfortunately, epistemology is the major concern of the Collected Poems.

The Poetic World of the Collected Poems.

"Sea Surface Full of Clouds" (CP, 98-102), from Stevens' first volume of poems, Harmonium (1923), proposes the kind of epistemological world characteristic of the Collected Poems. Regarding this poem Stevens writes: "I remember that when I wrote this particular poem I was doing a great deal of theorizing about poetry," and adds in his enigmatic way, "but actually I have not the faintest recollection of what theory prompted that particular poem" (LWS, 390). Theorizing, for Stevens, usually means a discussion of the imagination-reality relationship. Riddell is quite correct in describing the poem as "an epistemological exercise," a "revelation of the process of perception," each section developing "according to an inner law of perception," and each leading to a "momentary composure."⁹ In this epistemological drama there are three elements: the poet-subject-self-perceiver, the sea-object-thing-perceived, and the process of the imagination. Further, each section gives us one instance of the way the self relates to what it perceives. In section I, for instance, the poet "off Tehuantepec" in November reacts to the sea:

In that November off Tehuantepec,
 The slopping of the sea grew still one night
 And in the morning summer hued the deck
 And made one think of rosy chocolate
 And gilt umbrellas.

The perception recorded here is momentary, the potential number of perceptions being indeterminate. As the poet-self responds to the sea, the sea appears to grow still:

Paradisal green
Gave suavity to the perplexed machine
Of ocean, which like limpid water lay.

By ordering the sea in perception, the poet has apparently transformed what seemed chaotic and disorderly into something humanly meaningful, realizing at the same time that his imagination has been responsible for this semblance of universal harmony:

Who, then, in that ambrosial latitude
Out of the light evolved the moving blooms,

Who, then, evolved the sea-blooms from the clouds
Diffusing balm in that Pacific calm?
C'était mon enfant, mon bijou, mon âme.

The last two stanzas describe the final composure reached through the ordering process of the imagination:

The sea-clouds whitened far below the calm
And moved, as blooms move, in the swimming green
And in its watery radiance, while the hue

Of heaven in an antique reflection rolled
Round those flotillas. And sometimes the sea
Poured brilliant iris on the glistening blue.

In this first section, then, the imagination appears to have metamorphosed the sea into something humanly meaningful. Semblances of the old religious feeling of universal harmony are suggested by the sea-clouds floating over the "watery radiance" of the sea with heavenly colours shining in an "antique reflection" around them. There is obvious irony

implied in this somewhat easy harnessing of the "machine//Of ocean" which still exists as a foreboding reality behind the illusion of order. Section I, however, does introduce us to Stevens' attitude to the epistemological process of perception.

Even though it would be presumptuous to say that he was influenced by the philosophical writings of Kant, the Critique of Pure Reason does help us to find the terms to understand Stevens' poetic world, its assumptions and boundaries.¹⁰ In the "Transcendental Aesthetic" Kant argues that the perceiving mind is not simply a passive receptor of sensations, but an active ordering agent. Space and time, he says, "are two pure forms of sensible intuition," both belonging to the "subjective constitution of our mind."¹¹ According to Kant, space and time are the conditions of perception. Anything perceived involves the necessary interaction of the object existing outside the self and the self that provides the space-time context of the perception. Perception will therefore always be grounded in a particular time and space. When Kant proposes that space and time are forms of the mind, however, he is not implying that they have a formal, substantive existence in the mind. They are simply the necessary condition of the possibility of perception.

If we turn to section II with the perspective provided by Kant, we can begin to understand the space-time boundaries of the poet's perceptual field. Once again the time is November and he is "off Tehuantepec." His perceptual field is thus limited. Although the three elements (the poet, sea, and imagination) are involved in the drama, the newly formed perceptual world is different from section I--since space, time, and phenomena are constantly changing positions, the potential number of "worlds" is infinite. As the "sloping of the sea grew still one night,"

and "jelly yellow streaked the deck," the poet thinks of "chop-house chocolate/And sham umbrellas." Unlike the first section, he now reacts to the "machine//Of ocean" as if it were an illusive appearance for what "in sinister flatness lay." In both cases, however, and this is a constant underlying all of the sections, the mind-imagination has been responsible for the perceptual scene:

Who, then, beheld the rising of the clouds
That strode submerged in that malevolent sheen,

Who saw the mortal massives of the blooms
Of water moving on the water-floor?
C'était mon frère du ciel, ma vie, mon or.

If the imagination could instill the sea with a religious calm in section I, it can also conjure up a sense of its sinister terror. As the poet becomes aware of this aspect of perception, the scene begins to shift: "And the macabre of the water-glooms/In an enormous undulation fled." Realizing that his perceptual world is determined by his imagining self--the sea is, he discovers, only a sea--he can understand the nature of his fear of the external world.

Section II shows us that each section of "Sea Surfaces Full of Clouds" is a miniature world, a space-time continuum with clearly definable characteristics. In the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge clarifies this very process as he distinguishes between the primary and secondary imagination. The primary imagination, being the "living Power and prime Agent of all human perception,"¹² performs the same function as Kant's Sensibility.¹³ Agreeing with Kant that all knowing or perceiving "rests upon the coindidence of an object with a subject,"¹⁴ Coleridge introduces the secondary imagination, a higher plastic power that works through the same kind of

process as the primary imagination, differing only in degree and mode of operation:

The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet it struggles to idealize and unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.¹⁵

According to Coleridge, the secondary imagination extends the perceptions of the primary imagination, dissolving, diffusing or dissipating these perceptions with the intention of unifying them into a whole. Poems are unified "worlds" created by the secondary imagination through the perceptual data of the primary imagination. In "Three Academic Pieces," Stevens describes this process of unification through his notion of resemblances:

In metaphor (and this word is used as a symbol for the single aspect of poetry with which we are now concerned --that is to say, the creation of resemblance by the imagination, even though metamorphosis might be a better word)--in metaphor, the resemblances may be, first, between two or more parts of reality; second, between something real and something imagined...and, third, between two imagined things.... (NA, 72)

According to Stevens, metaphor has to do with these resemblances between things, either real or imagined. The "activity of the imagination" (NA, 72) is stimulated in terms of our sense of reality; in other words, the more we are sensitive to reality, the quicker we draw resemblances, thus making our sense of reality: "A sense of reality in excess of the normal sense of reality creates a reality of its own" (NA, 79). The

poet of "Sea Surfaces" thus looks at the sea but simultaneously thinks of rosy chocolate and gilt umbrellas. These imagined things compared to the real sea give the poet his sense of the sea. In Stevens' poetic world, resemblances that lead us to construct an "our-world," separate from the other "our-worlds" of other men, is part of the natural process of the imagination. It is in this context that Stevens refers to the nobility of the imagination as a "violence from within that protects us from a violence without. It is the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality" (NA, 36). To confront the pressure of reality, the mind draws resemblances, and in so doing, constructs a subjective (although objectively based) "world" within a world. Rather than distancing reality, Stevens says, this process "enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it" (NA, 77):

If resemblance is described as a partial similarity between two dissimilar things, it complements and reinforces that which the two dissimilar things have in common. It makes it brilliant. (NA, 77)¹⁶

This process of resemblances, for Stevens, is both the process of poetry and the way we come to know the world. We see the world around us through our eyes, but we do not have a sense of the world until the mind-imagination, he says, "begets in resemblance as the painter makes his representation; that is to say, as the painter makes his world within a world..." (NA, 76)--this "world" within a world called the Supreme Fiction.

Section III of "Sea Surfaces," therefore, is another in an endless number of perceptual fields. Still "off Tehuantepec," and still in the midst of the "sloping of the sea," the poet's perceptual "world" assumes a pattern different from the two previous sections as he begins

to understand the nature of the imaginative process:

And a pale silver patterned on the deck
 And made one think of porcelain chocolate
 And pied umbrellas. An uncertain green,
 Piano-polished, held the tranced machine
 Of ocean, as a prelude holds and holds.

This section gives us a clear example of the way the secondary imagination, as defined by Coleridge, constructs a world through resemblances. Now the poet is consciously aware of the process by which the "tranced machine" of the sea is controlled and made to yield to the imagination's plastic power: the silver on the deck is "patterned;" the chocolate is now "porcelain;" the "uncertain green" of the ocean is "Piano-polished;" the ocean is held suspended "as a prelude holds and holds." The language emphasizes the artificial nature of the capture. The various images of the sea, night, silver patterns on the deck, porcelain, chocolate, pianos, and umbrellas appear to coalesce and make a "world" in which the reality of the sea is metamorphosed into a momentary, although artificial, beauty:

So deeply sunken were they [the clouds] that the shrouds,
 The shrouding shadows, made the petals black
 Until the rolling heaven made them blue,
 A blue beyond the rainy hyacinth
 And smiting the crevasses of the leaves
 Deluged the ocean with a sapphire blue.

This atmosphere in which "sapphire blue" somehow eliminates the foreboding shrouds of shadows surrounding the clouds is the work of the imagination fusing the "imagined" and the "real" into a unified "world." A similar process is operating in section I of "Six Significant Land-

scapes" (CP, 73) where an old man sitting "In the shadow of a pine tree/
In China" seems to become the world, and the world seems to become him.
Outside of the action, the poet observes the formation of this particular
"world:"

He sees larkspur,
Blue and white,
At the edge of the shadow,
Move in the wind.
His beard moves in the wind.
The pine tree moves in the wind.
Thus water flows
Over weeds.

As the old man begins to perceive, ordinary causal relations appear to disappear: activity happens as if the objects act and re-act mutually. As he responds to the external world, he begins to create the space and time of his experience. His beard, therefore, moves in the wind as the pine moves in the wind--and so water flows over the weeds. In this particular space-time "world," all things appear to be necessary to each other. Water flows over weeds as if the weeds were necessary to the water's flow. To the old man in the poem, the world he has created through resemblances is unified and continuous. For the poet outside who understands the imaginative process, however, this "world" is only one landscape of many possible landscapes.

Although only indirectly implied up to this point, Stevens' poetic world contains a very large dilemma, precisely because of the dual nature of the imagination. Without its processes we could have no knowledge of reality--that is, the mind provides the space-time context of perception. According to Stevens' assumptions, we can know the world only through the "world" we construct through resemblances. "In the way

you speak/You arrange," he says in "Add This to Rhetoric" (CP, 198), "the thing is posed,/What in nature merely grows." In "Poem Written at Morning" (CP, 219) this kind of metaphoric perception is knowing: "By metaphor you paint/A thing." Whatever semblance of order that occurs in perception, as we have seen in "Six Significant Landscapes, I," is a result of the shaping process of the imagination. Since our human knowledge of the world arises from the imagination's response to reality, it seems logical to conclude, as Stevens does in "Description Without Place" (CP, 345), that the description of an object is knowledge about that object:

Thus the theory of description matters most.
It is the theory of the word for those

For whom the word is the making of the world,
The buzzing world and lisping firmament.

Within this context Stevens could assert that the "theory of description" is the perceptual process that actualizes the human experience of reality.

As he writes in the "Adagia:"

Poetry has to be something more than a conception
of the mind. It has to be a revelation of nature.
Conceptions are artificial. Perceptions are essential. (OP, 164)

If this "theory of description" were the whole of Stevens' stance toward perception, he would have had no further problems. But alternately he argued, and words such as "buzzing" and "lisping" from the quoted passage indicate his hesitation to assert the nobility of the imagination, that perception is always a distortion of reality. "It is easy to suppose," writes Stevens in an important passage from "The Figure of the

Youth as Virile Poet,"

that few people realize on that occasion, which comes to all of us, when we look at the blue sky for the first time, that is to say: not merely see it, but look at it and experience it and for the first time have a sense that we live in the center of a physical poetry, a geography that would be intolerable except for the non-geography that exists there--few people realize that they are looking at the world of their own thoughts and the world of their own feelings.
(NA, 65-66)

Clearly Stevens is distinguishing between touching the surface of things and experiencing the force of things-as-things, reality. This "geography," he says, would be intolerable if it were not for the "non-geography" that also exists in the landscape. This "non-geography" is the "world" that we construct in order to confront reality. During these experiences, few men realize that what they are seeing is not the "geography" but the world of their own thought/^sand feelings, separate from reality although based upon it. If we return to the title of "Sea Surfaces" momentarily, we can now see that each of the separate sections is a limited, subjectively defined space-time continuum. Because perception through resemblances always distances reality, the poet-perceiver is always confined to the surface of the sea--hence the irony behind each successive ordering of the sea. Behind each imaginatively constructed space-time world, the large fact of the sea-in-itself remains unchanged. The world apparently created out of metaphors is a fiction, a distortion of reality: "the more than rational distortion./The fiction that results from feeling" ("Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," CP, 406).

Stevens' notion of reality, as some-thing wholly external to human perception, stems from his primary assumption that the mind cannot know

anything other than what it constructs. From this notion that the mind is limited to appearances or seemings, arises the hypothesis, reality. In other words, if we assume that we live in a "world" abstracted from reality, we must posit as a necessity a reality that subsumes appearances. Kant calls this source of things, noumena: the Ding an sich or the thing-in-itself. Unlike Stevens, Kant argues that the concept of noumenon is only a hypothetical base, a logical necessity more than a proof of the existence of a reality beneath appearances:

Unless...we are to move constantly in a circle, the word appearance must be recognized as already indicating a relation to something, the immediate representation of which is, indeed, sensible, but which, even apart from the constitution of our sensibility (upon which the form of our intuition is grounded), must be something in itself, that is an object independent of sensibility.

There thus results the concept of noumenon.¹⁷

In Stevens' poetic world, reality cannot be known except through our sensibility; at the same time, we are limited to our sensibility. Our perceptions become "Descriptions Without Place" (CP, 339), space-time "worlds" confined to the surface of things. Reality then hypothetically becomes one of the possible fictions of perceptions. In other words, we sense the existence of a reality beneath appearances and continually try to move out of this "world" of seemings. For Stevens this desire is the "motive for metaphor" (CP, 288), the attempt to grasp "The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X" (CP, 288) of things.¹⁸

According to Stevens' assumptions, then, we live in a "world" separate from reality, what he calls "island solitude" in "Sunday Morning" (CP, 66). Our perceptions of the world, being distortions of things, are then without a "place:" "seeming is description without place,/The

spirit's universe" (CP, 343).

Description is
Composed of a sight indifferent to the eye.

It is an expectation, a desire,
A palm that rises up beyond the sea,

A little different from reality:
The difference that we make in what we see. (CP, 343-344)

Although "description" makes the object available to human experience,
this perception still

...is not
The thing described, nor false facsimile.

It is an artificial thing that exists,
In its own seeming, plainly visible. (CP, 344)

It is because our perceptions are "artificial things" that we are forced to live in a "Crude Foyer" (CP, 305) of the mind that "lies at the end of thought." Yet inside this foyer, assuming and desiring a reality beyond appearances, we seem to sense "An innocence of an absolute." But we are victims of a "false happiness," says Stevens,

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

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

Nevertheless, the desire to possess a landscape beyond the mind and the constant awareness that this desire cannot be fulfilled exist simultaneously in Stevens' world and help us to understand some of the dilemmas his poetry presents. In "The Man on the Dump" (CP, 201), for instance,

desire and actuality remain in an unresolved (or unresolvable) contradiction. Contemplating the metaphoric process, sitting on the dump with the dead metaphors of men, the poet realizes that all metaphors are potentially dead metaphors. He therefore rejects the images:

 between the things
That are on the dump (azaleas and so on)
And those that will be (azaleas and so on),
One feels the purifying change. One rejects
The trash.

Apparently liberated, he thinks that he perceives "As a man (not like an image of a man.)" And yet in spite of the clarity with which he perceives the moon rising "in the empty sky," he still cannot really affirm the vitality of his own metaphors:

 Could it after all
Be merely oneself, as superior as the ear
To a crow's voice? Did the nightingale torture the ear,
Pack the heart and scratch the mind?

But there are no answers; only the question: "Where was it one first heard of the truth? The the." The drama ends with the beginning, "The the"--things-in-themselves, noumena, that which exists as the ground of appearances, reality--and the constant shifting of metaphors trying but failing to concretize it.

"The the," reality, is therefore the primary locus of Stevens' thought, the hypothetical centre of his poetic world. Often in portraits of Stevens as the "Connoisseur of Chaos" (CP, 215), or "The Latest Freed Man" (CP, 204), the poet of the earthly paradise of "Sunday Morning" (CP, 66), we praise him for his acceptance of disorder and nearly completely neglect his desire to find some kind of absolute, a centre from

which a viable belief can be constructed. He confesses this concern quite explicitly in a letter to Sister Bernetta Quinn:

...I don't want to turn to stone under your very eyes by saying "This is the center that I seek and this alone." Your mind is too much like my own for it to seem to be an evasion on my part to say merely that I do seek a center and expect to go on seeking it. I don't say that I shall not find it or that I do not expect to find it. It is the great necessity even without specific identification. (LWS, 584)

Even though the poet of "Sunday Morning" says that "Death is the mother of beauty" (CP, 68), the woman (an alter ego of the poet?) still feels the "'need of some imperishable bliss'" (CP, 68). To emphasize the continual flux of the "perishing earth," the poet compares earth to a hypothetical heaven in stanza VI, asking if "there is no change of death in paradise" (CP, 69). On earth, he continues, rivers "seek for seas/They never find" (CP, 69); shores "never touch with inarticulate pang" (CP, 69). Beneath the apparent realization and acceptance of the impossibility of an absolute in this poem, there lies an urgent sense of an imperishable need for a centre, a point of stasis where the "malady of the quotidian" will cease its incessant meaningless repetitions. The celebration of a possible earthly paradise ("a ring of men/ Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn/ Their boisterous devotion to the sun" (CP, 69-70)) is an affirmation qualified by an indirect, desperate desire to find some means to account for the "Ambiguous undulations" (CP, 70) of the pigeons as they sink "Downward to darkness" (CP, 70).

Like Ludwig Richter in the poem "Chaos in Motion and Not in Motion" (CP, 357), Stevens experienced the disintegration of the old metaphors for explaining the universe and was left with the old desires. Knowing

"desire without an object of desire," he was, as is implied in "Sailing After Lunch" (CP, 120), "A most inappropriate man/In a most unpropitious place." "All mind and violence and nothing felt" (CP, 358), he became aware of the large chasm between desire and actuality:

The romantic should be here.
 The romantic should be there.
 It ought to be everywhere.
 But the romantic must never remain,

Mon Dieu, and must never again return. (CP, 120)

In Stevens' poetic world the "romantic" can never return now because no metaphor of the world can concretize his desire for a centre. As he says in "Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz" (CP, 121), "There comes a time when the waltz/Is no longer a mode of desire:" the old metaphors for actualizing man's desire are no longer relevant to the disorder of contemporary experience—

There is order in neither sea nor sun.
 The shapes have lost their glistening.
 There are these sudden mobs of men,

These sudden clouds of faces and arms,
 An immense suppression, freed,
 These voices crying without knowing for what.

Freed from the "immense suppression" of the old metaphors, men find themselves crying for some object of desire "without knowing for what."

Even if Stevens could say in "Poems in Our Climate" (CP, 193) that the world is simplified when perceived in its nakedness, "fresh in a world of white," he qualifies by adding, "one would want more, one would need more."

Professor Eucalyptus in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" says that "The search/For reality is as momentous as/The search for god!"

(CP, 481). We might re-word his statement and say that for Stevens the search for reality did become a search for some centre to replace the "search for god." In his poetic world reality is a locus for a knowledge of the source of things:

Where is that summer warm enough to walk
Among the lascivious poisons, clean of them,
And in what covert may we, naked, be
Beyond the knowledge of nakedness, as part
Of reality, beyond the knowledge of what
Is real, part of a land beyond the mind? (CP, 252)

This passage from "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Arts" poses the question that has a central importance in Stevens' world: Where, in the "lascivious poisons" of our own experiences in this quotidian world, can we find that reality "beyond the mind?" We should be aware, however, that nothing is stated in this passage, not even the existence of reality. In Stevens' world reality remains a hypothetical possibility and exists only as potentiality, not actuality. The "neutral centre" that he seeks in "Landscape with Boat" (CP, 241) is limited to the realm of possibility alone:

its place had to be supposed,
Itself had to be supposed, a thing supposed
In a place supposed, a thing that he reached
In a place that he reached, by rejecting what he saw
And denying what he heard.

Furthermore:

It was his nature to suppose,
To receive what others had supposed, without
Accepting. He received what he denied.
But as truth to be accepted, he supposed
A truth beyond all truths.

When the "lecturer/On This Beautiful World of Ours" in "The Ultimate Poem is Abstract" (CP, 429) offers comforting metaphors to argue the inherent order of the world, he only reveals the limitations of his metaphors. His answer is based on an accepted question. In a world stripped of preconceived order, Stevens implies, the question is the major question. In other words, does reality itself exist, and if so, how can we approach it? What is there to do but keep on asking questions:

It is an intellect
Of windings round and dodges to and fro,
Writhings in wrong obliques and distances,
Not an intellect in which we are fleet.

It is this kind of intellect, constantly trying to find reality by positing the possible rather than the actual, that characterizes Stevens in the Collected Poems. By "rejecting what he saw/And denying what he heard," he supposed "as truth to be accepted" a "truth beyond all truths:" reality as the possible source and end of all things.

These "windings" of his intellect as it attempts over and over to confront a possible reality reveal themselves in the language of Stevens' poems. Often they are a series of hypothetical situations leading to hypothetical conclusions, possibilities rather than actualities. In an important article called "The Qualified Assertions of Wallace Stevens," Helen Hennessy Vendler is quite correct in pointing out the qualifications in the language of Stevens' poems. Stevens, she argues, rarely asserts; rather, his tentative statements are hypothetical "interpretations of the world...interesting to entertain but of questionable solidity."¹⁹ By manipulating the language of his poems, he often moves from the probable to the possible to the actual, even within the space

of one stanza. Such is the case of "Description without Place, III," as Miss Vendler so precisely illustrates:

There might be, too, a change immenser than
A poet's metaphors in which being would

Come true, a point in the fire of music where
Dazzle yields to a clarity and we observe,

And observing is completing and we are content,
In a world that shrinks to an immediate whole,

That we do not need to understand, complete
Without secret arrangements of it in the mind. (CP, 341)

After setting up the possibility of observing reality, he moves toward the probability: "observing is completing and we are content/In a world that shrinks to an immediate whole." The stanza concludes with what appears to be an actual experience: "complete/Without secret arrangements of it in the mind." But this kind of movement can be misleading, says Miss Vendler, if we "tend to forget that these present tenses are shorthand for conditionals, that they depend on the principle verbs which are conditional."²⁰ The force of the argument in the quoted stanza is rooted in the qualification "might." Nothing is stated. Stevens' conclusions are still only hypotheses. Through modal auxiliaries such as may, might, must, could, should, and would, through questions ("Where was it one first heard of the truth? The the." (CP, 213)), through infinitives used as complements to imply a future not yet achieved ("I can build towers of my own/There to behold, there to proclaim" (CP, 263)), and through recourse to "seems," "if," and "as if," Stevens reveals that he is a poet, not of the actual, but of "what ought to be."²¹ Readers who accept his statements as actualities fail to understand the "supposing" nature of his intellect:

The constraint, the sadness, the attempts at self-conviction, the enforced nobility--all of these are missing from critical portraits of Stevens in the indicative mood.²²

Because of the "qualified assertions" in his language, Miss Vendler proposes that we see Stevens as a "normative or optative poet, forsaking the reportive tenses, present and past, in favor of all the shifting moods of desire."²³

The phrase "shifting moods of desire" is an accurate summation of many tendencies in the assumptions of Stevens' later poetry, especially "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," a focal point and end of those salient attitudes, beliefs, and doubts that immediately precede The Rock. In a letter commenting on the poem, Stevens confesses that his search for reality still exists as a vital possibility:

...here my interest is to try to get as close to the ordinary, the commonplace and the ugly as it is possible for a poet to get. It is not a question of grim reality but of plain reality. The object is of course to purge oneself of anything false. (LWS, 636)

To Stevens "plain reality" is the world prior to human metaphors about it. Although he views all perception as a distortion of reality, he still attempts, more through desire than anything, to find a possible way of apprehending reality. This desire is stated explicitly in section IX, the thematic centre of the poem:

We keep coming back and coming back
To the real: to the hotel instead of the hymns
That fall upon it out of the wind. We seek

The poem of pure reality, untouched
By trope or deviation, straight to the word,
Straight to the transfixing object, to the object

At the exacting point at which it is itself,
 Transfixing by being purely what it is,
 A view of New Haven, say, through the certain eye,

The eye made clear of uncertainty, with the sight
 Of simple seeing, without reflection. We seek
 Nothing beyond reality. (CP, 471)

Once again Stevens first sets up the possibility: the perception of reality, the object-in-itself ("the hotel instead of the hymns") is being sought. The "poem of pure reality," that is, the poem that can grasp what lies beyond or beneath the appearances of things, is therefore a desire and not an actuality. Although the poet in section i realizes that all perception is necessarily metaphorical ("The eye's plain version is a thing apart"), that his attempts to speak reality is an endless "and yet, and yet, and yet," a "never-ending meditation," he does not despair because the mere asking of questions and positing possibilities is a giant in itself. Up to the writing of this poem, however, although he knows that his perceptions are grounded in reality ("Of what is this house composed if not of the sun"), he has not been able to touch objects-in-themselves except through appearances or seemings:

These houses, these difficult objects, dilapidate
 Appearances of what appearances,
 Words, lines, not meanings, not communications,

Dark things without a double, after all (CP, 465)

--unless, of course, "a second giant kills the first." If he could become that second giant and write a poem of reality purely seen in "a recent imagining of reality," he could provide a new belief for men:

Much like a new resemblance of the sun,
 Down-pouring, up-springing and inevitable,
 A larger poem for a larger audience.

The thirty-one sections of the poem, therefore, move between this desire for a central belief based upon a pure contact with reality and the actuality of a world perceptually limited. The poet-Stevens moves within these poles and lives within a world of supposition, hypothesis, and possibility. The structure of the poem grows from this oscillating movement between desire and actuality, the tension climactically resolved when the poet, in the final section, posits one more possible way of approaching reality.²⁴

Section iii argues, or appears to at first glance, that since "the point of vision and desire are the same," desire is more stable than actuality. It would then follow that the desire for love, "The desire for its celestial ease in the heart, // Which nothing can frustrate," is more secure than actual love which is so changeable when possessed. But the logic is consistent only within its premises. Although vision and desire are the same, both do not necessarily relate to what is actual. In experiential fact, the poet discovers, desire in itself "cannot/Possess" anything. Here is the real crux, the real loss:

It is desire, set deep in the eye,
Behind all actual seeing, in the actual scene,
In the street, in a room, on a carpet or a wall,

Always in emptiness that would be filled.

Desire, and therefore vision, exists in a vacuum. Our "hero of midnight," the possible poet of reality, lives in a world that has not been concretized in experience.

Yet the desire exists making it impossible for men to accept the simple "plainness of plain things," as section iv points out. Faced with the blank plainness of things, men have a natural propensity to mythologize:

They only know a savage assuagement cries
 With a savage voice; and in that cry they hear
 Themselves transposed, muted and comforted

In a savage and subtle and simple harmony,
 A matching and mating of surprised accords,
 A responding to a diviner opposite.

Nature is humanized in this process ("lewd spring comes from winter's chastity") and death, the ultimate blank, is both distanced and explained away through comfortably humanized, metaphorical garments:

So, after summer, in the autumn air,
 Comes the cold volume of forgotten ghosts,

But soothingly, with pleasant instruments,
 So that this cold, a children's tale of ice,
 Seems like a sheen of heat romanticized.

"Seems" is the important qualifying word: behind or beneath the comforting illusions, "this cold," the unknown blankness of the universe, still lies hidden.

To most men, as section v clarifies, the metamorphosing process is not only quite natural, but almost inevitable, disillusion being their final illusion:

Reality as a thing seen by the mind,

Not that which is but that which is apprehended,
 A mirror, a lake of reflections in a room,
 A glassy ocean lying at the door,

A great town hanging pendent in a shade,
 An enormous nation happy in a style,
 Everything as unreal as real can be,

In the inexact eye.

Like those Danes in Denmark (CP, 411), men elude themselves into thinking

that the world they have constructed is a revelation of reality. But the poet knows that the eye, by nature, is inexact: to know anything men must be self-conscious, but self-consciousness separates them from reality. Not caused by any catastrophic fall, this separation is inherent in the very nature of the self that became "divided in the leisure of blue day." As Stevens says in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," "Adam/In Eden was the father of Descartes/And Eve made air the mirror of herself" (CP, 383). According to the poet-Stevens, self-consciousness divides the self against itself:

One part
 Held fast tenaciously in common earth

 And one from central earth to central sky
 And in moonlit extensions of them in the mind
 Searched out such majesty as it could find.

One part of the self wants to possess the physically actual, and the other, the actual reality that seems to subsume all appearances. The real problem still remains: How to bring actuality into line with desire?

To actualize desire in experiential fact, the poet, as a first premise, wants to avoid the illusions of the "impoverished architects" (the "hierophant Omega" of section vi who is compared to the "Naked Alpha") who only "appear to be/Much richer, more fecund, sportive and alive," in section vii, because they move about within the confines of their limited world: "The objects tingle and the spectator moves/With the objects." According to the poet, "Reality is the beginning not the end." Only through constant beginnings ("Alpha continues to begin") can he even hope to move toward "credible day again."

His own "Love of the real//Is soft," he says in section viii, and

thus reiterates his reason for searching "Nothing beyond reality." If he can destroy all dead metaphors he should hypothetically be able to approach a knowledge of reality. Since it is so easy to fall prey to perceiving things in terms of a former perception, his search for reality must consist of continual beginnings (x). Men who are imprisoned in dead metaphors do not see New Haven when they look at it, but something remembered in such a phrase as "the lion of Juda" (xi):

The fact takes up the
strength
Of the phrase. It contrives the self-same evocations
And Juda becomes New Haven or else must.

But the "Alpha" poet destroys these "profoundest forms" with "wafts of wakening."

His apparent freedom from imposed forms of perceiving, however, does not lead to an affirmation. He is still left with an unfulfilled desire for some kind of permanence:

Free from their majesty and yet in need
Of majesty, of an invincible clou,
A minimum of making in the mind,

A verity of the most veracious men,
The propounding of four seasons and twelve months.
The brilliancy at the central of the earth.

Although he can apparently perceive what is actual--"A view of New Haven, say, through the certain eye" (ix)--he still desires something more. The process of clearing away the old "majesty" of dead metaphors has opened up another possibility. As the "brilliancy at the central of the earth," reality becomes the hypothetical "verity" to complete his relation to the world.

As one possible way of apprehending reality, the poet, in section xii, argues that the process of poetry may be able to reveal a sense of that wholly other source of things. Because poetry is the process of perception, it "is the cry of its occasion,/Part of the res itself and not about it." Only in the immediate moment of perception, he implies, is reality not distorted by the imagination: "the reverberation/Of a windy night as it is." Living and experiencing in the continuous moment ("There is no/tomorrow for him"), the poet, as a representative "alpha" man, somehow apprehends reality in its essential purity:

The mobile and immobile flickering
 In the area between is and was are leaves,
 Leaves burnished in autumnal burnished trees

And leaves in whirlings in the gutters, whirlings
 Around and away, resembling the presence of
 thought,
 Resembling the presences of thought, as if,

In the end, in the whole psychology, the self,
 The town, the weather, in a casual litter,
 Together, said words of the world are the life of the
 world.

The activity of a poem moves in the area between is, the ground of reality, and was, metaphors about reality. Language-in the quoted passage words are whirling leaves-allows the hypothetical poet to sense an identification of his thought to the "presences of thought" in things. The qualifying "as if," however, indicates that he cannot assert the validity of this process. And so poetry only appears to reveal reality, its activity only "resembling the presence of thought." In the poet-Stevens' experience the words of the world do not really contain the life of the world, poetry only seeming to reveal a sense of reality.

Yet the "difficulty that we predicate" (xiii) the supposition that there must be a way of apprehending a wholly external reality, is still maintained by the poet in sections xiii, xiv, and xv. In xiv, for instance, Professor Eucalyptus of New Haven, unlike the "dry eucalyptus" who seeks God in a world beyond, looks for reality "In New Haven with an eye that does not look/Beyond the object." "He seeks/God in the object itself." For the time being he accepts the limitations of language: "It is a choice of the commodious adjective/For what he sees, it comes in the end to that." But he also hints that the process of speaking or describing reality--the word "tink-tonk" as talk about rain is not simply a substitute--is a preliminary to a clearer perception of reality in the future: "It is of the essence not yet well perceived." In section xv, therefore, he is still concerned with that possible reality subsuming all things:

The hibernal dark that hung
In primavera, the shadow of bare rock,

Becomes the rock of autumn, glittering,
Ponderable source of each imponderable,
The weight we lift with the finger of a dream,

The heaviness we lighten by light will,
By the hand of desire, faint, sensitive, the soft
Touch and trouble of the touch of the actual hand.

The hibernal or wintry darkness shadowing the spring, a time when the awareness of the "bare rock" beneath the surface of things is distanced by lush growth, becomes the glittering rock of autumn, a time when vegetation dies in brilliant colours. The transforming seasonal metaphors, however, are only appearances of shifting objects. They are the knowable or ponderable seemings of what is essentially imponderable or unknowable, the bare rock of reality sensed only a dark shadow--an image that will

assume a central importance in the final section of the Collected Poems, The Rock. He realizes that the metaphoric process is man's natural way of overcoming the alien quality of reality. We lift the weight of the "bare rock" with the "hand of desire," the force responsible for the apparent transformation of reality into something humanly knowable. Elsewhere Stevens says that "[poetry] is an illumination of a surface, the movement of a self in the rock" (NA, viii), therefore implying that metaphors are confined to the surface of reality. They forever remain metaphors about reality, as section xvii explains: "A blank underlies the trials of device,/The dominant blank, the unapproachable."

The very awareness of a sense of an unapproachable reality as a possible strength at a possible centre prevents the poet, in section xviii, from living in the continual moment alone:

It is the window that makes it difficult
To say good-by to the past and to live and to be
In the present state of things....

It is looking out
Of the window and walking in the street and seeing,

As if the eyes were the present or part of it,
As if the ears heard any shocking sound,
As if life and death were ever physical.

Self-consciousness is a kind of window or picture frame that makes the poet aware of his separation from the external world. Because of this dividing line between the self and reality, he can only hypothetically look out of the window and walk in the street--what appears to be an immediate perception of reality is a metaphor that exists only in the mind. Our seeing, hearing, living and dying are not really a part of the external world. The illusory transparency of the window--the imagination

allows us to imagine ourselves being a part of the world--is brought out clearly in the repetition of the qualifying "as if."

Understandably, then, the poet again returns to the illusory nature of perception in sections xix, xx, and xxi. In xix, for instance, the imagination distorts objects that come under its influence:

The moon rose in the mind and each thing there
Picked up its radial aspect in the night,
Prostrate below the singleness of its will.

That which was public green turned private gray.

Objects perceived and so drawn into the mind are shaped according to the will or desire of the "radial aspect" of the moon--in this particular instance, an image of the imagination. Although it now comes from the individual mind ("private gray"), in the past it was supplied by

...a personage,
A man who was the axis of his time,
An image that begot its infantines.

Through the same imaginative process that an individual constructs his "world," a whole nation can be formed around the image of a man who centralizes the space and time of an age. With this awareness the poet then considers the "radial aspect" of New Haven. Wondering about its first metaphoric perceptions, "the transcripts of it when it was blue," he tries to comprehend a hypothetically pure New Haven--theoretically the first imaginative transcripts would contain the essential New Haven. Yet he realizes that life in the original transcripts would still be a metaphorical room, a pure sphere cut off from the changing but necessary impure shapes of clouds in the external world:

In this chamber the pure sphere escapes the impure,

Because the thinker himself escapes. And yet
To have evaded clouds and men leaves him
A naked being with a naked will

And everything to make.

To live exclusively in a metaphoric world is to escape reality, the source the poet desires and wills; away from the real he would only "Inhabit the hypnosis of that sphere."

And yet: the sense of the "and yet" indicates how the poet-Stevens moves from one hypothesis toward its inevitable conclusion into another hypothesis, and so on, as he tries to locate and know reality: even if "he may not" evade his desire for reality, he would still be subject to the "will of necessity, the will of wills," "Romanza," as he says in xxi. In a somewhat circular manner we have returned to conclusions reached as early as section v. As the poet goes from section to section in "This endlessly elaborating poem" (xxviii), he sets up possibility after possibility as he tries to find a basis for some kind of affirmation. And so sections xxii to xxix continue in the same tentative manner and add nothing drastically new to the movement of the poem. Section xxii restates the necessity to search for reality, a process that is "as momentous as/The search for god." Section xxiii argues that metaphors ("Forms of farewell") inevitably distort even the most naked perceptions; section xxiv the possibility of perceiving reality purely; section xxv the permanency of the poetic process; section xxvi the sense of a living, though not perceived reality behind appearances; section xxvii the hypothetical "Ruler of Reality" who can go beyond the metaphors ("the regalia,/ The attributions") about reality; section xxviii a realization that the

metaphoric process ("the intricate evasions of as") that constructs "The heavens, the hells, the worlds, the longed-for lands" is a part of both poetry and life; section xxix another example of men interpreting a new world in terms of an already conceived, metaphoric space-time world.

Finally, after talking for twenty-nine sections on the imagination and its relation to reality, the poet-Stevens once again attempts to perceive the "plainness" of a world emptied of all human metaphors about it. We should read section xxx as a continuation of the first twenty-nine sections. Up to this point, the poet has been trying to approach a knowledge of reality by positing various hypothetical possibilities. The two major lines of argument present throughout the poem, however, contain a serious dilemma: if there must be a reality wholly external to the mind, and if the metaphors actualizing this reality inevitably distort it, then reality is both conceived and deceived by the same imaginative process, which, in turn, is the only power men possess for knowing the world. How then can the poet-Stevens ever know reality? Within the boundaries of his poetic world, no solution to this dilemma is possible. As we read what appears to be an affirmation in the last two sections, therefore, we should be aware of the very large qualifications they imply.

As the "silence of summer" is blown away by the winds of autumn, robins have disappeared and squirrels "Huddle together in the knowledge of squirrels." In Stevens' seasonal cycle, summer is the time when men construct metaphors around nature; in autumn they return to the "plain sense of things" and an awareness of a reality prior to the metaphors about it:

The barrenness that appears is an exposing.
It is not part of what is absent, a halt

For farewells, a sad hanging on for remembrances.

and

It is a coming on/a coming forth.

The pines that were fans and fragrances emerge,
Staked solidly in a gusty grappling with rocks.

The glass of the air becomes an element--

It was something imagined that has been washed away.

A clearness has returned. It stands restored.

It is not an empty clearness, a bottomless sight.

It is a visibility of thought,

In which hundreds of eyes, in one mind, see at once.

The poet says, and it is important for us to keep in mind that he argues rather than presents, that he returns to a sense of a reality underlying the "eye's plain version," the locus of the "never-ending meditation," the search for the ground of things that began in section i. In autumn he once again feels the essential nakedness of things wholly external to himself. When the metaphors of summer slide away, a reality indifferent to men still remains. At this time the pond no longer reflects the sky, which is to say that the earth no longer reflects himself. This "barrenness," however, is not a nostalgic look backward to what has been but "a coming on and a coming forth," a necessary stage in purging the mind of all distorting metaphors. The passing of summer is not a "halt/For farewell" but a movement toward a clearer perception of reality: "It was something imagined that has been washed away./A clearness has returned." This "plain" perception in which the earth apparently "stands restored," this "visibility of thought," is not an "empty clearness." Through it, the poet says, he can see reality as if "hundreds of eyes, in one mind, see at once."

As an argument, however, this section is more hypothetical than actual. If it were experientially true, Stevens would be contradicting

himself: he now tells us that he is in contact with reality when the previous sections argued the impossibility of doing so. If we see it as one more hypothetical possibility, it will be more consistent with the rest of the poem, at the same time that it will explain the qualified affirmation of the final section.

In substance, section xxxi repeats the argument of section xxviii: the search for reality through the process of poetry is the only meaningful way of approaching a knowledge of reality:

The less legible meanings of sounds, the little reds
 Not often realized, the lighter words
 In the heavy drum of speech, the inner men

Behind the outer shields, the sheets of music
 In the strokes of thunder, dead candles at the
 window
 When day comes, fire-foams in the motions of the
 sea,

Flickings from finikin to fine finikin
 And the general fidget from busts of Constantine
 To photographs of the late president, Mr. Blank,

These are the edgings and inchings of final form,
 The swarming activities of the formulae
 Of statement, directly and indirectly getting at....

According to the poet, the process of poetry provides the peripheral details that suggest (or evoke) something of the hidden quality of reality. These intimations of reality in the "less legible meanings of sounds," the "little reds" in the generality of colour, the nuances of meaning in the "heavy drum of speech," a sense of the inner personalities behind the masks of men, the bits and pieces of harmonious music in the "strokes of thunder," the reminder of night when daylight appears, and the feel of the sea through the movement of foam on waves--these "Flickings from finikin to fine finikin," constitute the process of art from the monumental

"busts of Constantine" to the nearly insignificant "photographs of the late president, Mr. Blank." Within the context of this argument, the "edgings and inchings of final form" belong to the poem that moves in the area between is and was, an area that neither gets at reality directly nor distorts it by embodying it in a "final form." As the "formulae of statement," the poet says, poetry can get at bits and pieces of reality. And yet we cannot help but think about section xxi where this same poet stated that men could not evade the "will of necessity," Romanza. Nor can we forget the statement in section x, "disillusion as the last illusion,/Reality as a thing seen by the mind." These negatives still hover in the background of the poet's apparent affirmation. They also go a long way toward clarifying the unstated qualifications of the last two stanzas:

Like an evening evoking the spectrum of violet,
 A philosopher practising scales on his piano,
 A woman writing a note and tearing it up.

It is not in the premise that reality
 Is a solid. It may be a shade that traverses
 A dust, a force that traverses a shade.

With the possible exception of the "spectrum of violet," the images presented as analogies for the "formulae/Of statement" are not only transitory but essentially empty activities. Never achieving a full composition, the philosopher only practises "scales on his piano." The woman only writes "a note," presumably for a complete letter, and tears it up. Both seek reality (the full composition and the complete letter) through an activity that does not lead them anywhere. Further, this apparent affirmation of the poetic process depends upon another hypothetical possibility: reality is not necessarily a "solid" behind or beneath things; it may be a "shade"

or a "force" that moves over or through things. It is important to note that the poet does not assert that reality is a "shade" or a "force." He simply says that it may be. Even in the last sentence of the poem we are still in the realm of hypothesis.

(ii) The Poems of The Rock

As we have already seen from our discussion of "The Plain Sense of Things," even the plainest perception is a distortion of reality. Not only in this poem, but in the poems of The Rock in general, reality is so finally distant because Stevens has no way of approaching a knowledge of it. "A fantastic effort" has failed as the poet in The Rock comes to "an end of the imagination." Despite the appearance of affirmation in the last two sections of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," therefore, reality is still as far away as it was in the opening lines of the poem. In this final section of the Collected Poems, the tone of Stevens' comments takes on an aura of finality. The poem "The Green Plant" (CP, 506) is one example:

The effete vocabulary of summer
 No longer says anything.
 The brown at the bottom of red
 The orange far down in yellow,

Are falsifications from a sun
 In a mirror, without heat,
 In a constant secondariness,
 A turning down toward finality.

Agreeing with Riddell that The Rock is "a carefully planned farewell,"²⁵ we watch as Stevens discovers that his talk about the metaphoric process has not brought reality any closer. The vocabulary of summer, "a shape that has passed," can no longer speak the language of reality in October. The once meaningful browns and oranges culled from the reds and yellows of summer are now seen as "falsifications from a sun" distanced because mirrored in perceptual forms. Because all perception is fictive in Stevens' poetic world, no matter how or what we see we remain "In a constant secondariness" from reality, the green plant that

...glares, as you look
 At the legend of the maroon and olive forest,
 Glares, outside of the legend, with the barbarous green
 Of the harsh reality of which it is part.

Reality stands outside of the "legend of the maroon and olive forest," the metaphoric space-time continuum of any form of perception. Remote from the poet's legends about reality, the green plant "glares" and makes reality appear harsh and alien.

This same kind of failure is recorded in "Madame La Fleurie" (CP, 507) where the "glass of the earth" is the metaphoric perception of the earth. Reality, in the form of a woman, devours this "crisp knowledge" because it is so removed from the poet's desire: "It was a language he spoke, because he must, yet did not know./It was a page he had found in the handbook of heartbreak." As in "The Green Plant," reality is the cause of the poet's grief. Recalling that Stevens regarded the activity of the

imagination as the "violence from within that protects us from a violence without," a force that presses "back against the pressure of reality" (NA, 36), we can understand the terror the poet feels as death, "the great weightings of/the end," approaches:

The black fugatos are strumming the blacknesses of black...
 The thick strings stutter the finial gutturals.
 He does not lie there remembering the blue-jay, say the jay.
 His grief is that his mother should feed on him, himself and
 what he saw,
 In that distant chamber, a bearded queen, wicked in her dead
 light.

As his life comes to an end, the poet-Stevens realizes that his search for a knowledge of reality is the result of the violent indifference of reality. After a lifetime of imaginative activity, it still remains in a "distant chamber." In this sense, his "mother" has fed on "himself and/what he saw." As a "bearded queen," the masculine quality revealing her harshness, she seems "wicked in her dead/light."²⁶

Our previous discussion of Stevens' concept of reality mentioned how he had looked upon it as a some-thing that subsumes appearances. This concept, however, depends upon prior epistemological assumptions. If we assume, as Stevens did, that all perception leads to a metaphorical space-time "world" separate from what is perceived, we are left with a logical hiatus. If we perceive only appearances because our vision is limited to the "subject," who provides the space and time of perception, there must of necessity exist a reality other than what we perceive. In an important passage from Stevens's Poetry of Thought, Frank Doggett explains how the kind of stance Stevens held toward perception leads to a notion of a possible reality as the base of all appearances:

...this place [reality] that is not our own becomes what it is only through the human conception of it. Remember that the real world is also "this invented world" and that it is composed in that it is conceived. The world in which we live then, is an alien world and at the same time has its only known existence in human realization. Here we have the paradox that has given rise to so many of the fictions of philosophy. One of these fictions is the idea of the possible. As possibility, reality would have a sort of existence apart from or anterior to existence, even if it is an existence that is no more than potential.²⁷

While Kant saw this notion of reality as a logical necessity, Stevens saw it as hypothetically actual.²⁸ Because it depends upon the assumption that perception is an "invented world," as the centre he seeks, it must always remain as possibility and hypothesis. He cannot move beyond the assumptions it contains--unless, of course, he rejects them altogether.²⁹

By engaging in the "subject-object" problem of knowledge, then, Stevens became more concerned with the forms of perception than with their content. Once he assumed that he was limited to a "subjective" space-time world, and thereby accepted the validity of the epistemological question ("how do we know that we know what we know?"), he began to mistrust the forms of his own perceptions. Through his continual talk about the forms of perception he became what Andrew E. Curry describes him as, a "poet of the epistemological puzzle."³⁰ Never realizing that the puzzle is itself a fictional construct of the mind, another form that distorts the nature of experience, he actually distanced himself from the very world he sought to reveal.³¹ Exactly where this transition to an inclusive concern with form occurs in Stevens' work is difficult to determine, although the change is apparent as early as "The Man with the Blue Guitar" (CP, 165-184). The poem opens in a style that was

to become characteristic of the later Stevens:

I

The man bent over his guitar,
A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.

They said, "You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are."

The man replied, "Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar."

And they said then, "But play, you must,
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,

A tune upon the blue guitar
Of things exactly as they are."

II

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

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

Although I patch him as I can
And reach through him almost to man.

If to serenade almost to man
Is to miss, by that, things as they are,

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

Although the poet accepts the impossibility of perceiving "things as they are" directly ("I patch it as I can"), Stevens himself was to attempt a solution to this problem the rest of his life.

Stevens once commented in a letter that "the desire to combine the two things, poetry and reality, is a constant desire" (LWS, 760). By accepting the validity of the epistemological puzzle, he constantly questioned his perceptions and often rejected the truth of his experiences, as he does in the second part of "Two Illustrations That the World

is What You Make of It" (CP, 514-515), "The World is Larger in Summer:"

He left half a shoulder and half a head
To recognize him in after time.

These marbles lay weathering in the grass
When the summer was over, when the change

Of summer and of the sun, the life
Of summer and of the sun, were gone.

He had said that everything possessed
The power to transform itself, or else,

And what meant more, to be transformed.
He discovered the colors of the moon

In a single spruce, when, suddenly,
The tree stood dazzling in the air

And blue broke on him from the sun,
A bullioned blue, a blue abulge,

Like daylight, with time's bellishings,
And sensuous summer stood full-height.

The master of the spruce, himself,
Became transformed. But his mastery

Left only the fragments found in the grass,
From his project, as finally magnified.

This section opens with an awareness that all forms, both of art and perception (in Stevens' world the two are synonymous), are meaningless immediately after they are constructed. In autumn, after "the life/Of summer and the sun," a time when men can believe in the truth of their perceptions, the forms of summer "lay weathering in the grass." Stevens' description of summer, however, does indicate that he felt the force of reality. Having given himself up to the sensual richness of the world, he became "transformed" as he experienced the vitality of nature. "The tree stood dazzling in the air," he says, "And blue broke on him from the sun." But as time passes, he sees "his mastery" as an illusion, the

"fragments found in the grass" a reminder that all forms eventually die. "Finally magnified," the forms constructed in summer when the world seemed larger show the poet that they ultimately distort the nature of reality. His experience of summer is finally an illusion that must be discarded.

A similar process occurs in "The Hermitage at the Center" (CP, 505) as the poet-Stevens responds to the noise of "The leaves on the macadam" and experiences the closeness of nature to what he desires. Assuming the form of a woman, the desired, "Sleek in a natural nakedness," lies on the soft grass and listens to the live chatter ("tintinnabula") of birds. Although he experiences the force of things, he nevertheless argues that there is a "Hermitage at the Center." He compares the movement of the desired to a fictional legend belonging not to the present but to a metaphorically dead past: "Like tales that were told the day before yesterday." As the desired listens to the birds "called up by more than the sun," he says that the "wind sways like a great thing tottering." Before the song of the birds can become a concretized revelatory agent of a reality underlying appearances ("Their intelligible twittering/For unintelligible thought"), everything is suddenly "dissolved and gone." In Stevens' poetic world, experience becomes a distorting metaphor so quickly that the two processes are synonymous:

And yet this end and this beginning are one,
 And one last look at the ducks is a look
 At lucent children round her in a ring.

Because the experience of and farewell to reality occur simultaneously, Stevens cannot accept the truth of his own perceptions. In section xviii of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" he had said that "the window" would

not allow him "To say good-by to the past and to live and to be/In the present state of things:" because self-consciousness leads to an awareness of change and death, he found that he could not live in the complete moment and accept the truth of his momentary experiences. His assumptions prevented him from ever singing a "Song of Fixed Accord" (CP, 519), as the dove in the poem of that title:

Rou-cou spoke the dove,
 Like the sooth lord of sorrow,
 Of sooth love and sorrow,
 And a hail-bow, hail-bow,
 To this morrow.

She lay upon the roof,
 A little wet of wing and woe,
 And she rou-ed there,
 Softly she piped among the suns
 And their ordinary glare,

The sun of five, the sun of six,
 Their ordinariness,
 And the ordinariness of seven,
 Which she accepted,
 Like a fixed heaven,

Not subject to change...
 Day's invisible beginner,
 The lord of love and of sooth sorrow,
 Lay on the roof
 And made much within her.

Unlike the poet, the dove accepts the momentary as a "fixed heaven;" unaware of change, her song, sung in the ordinariness of the sun, is still a "Fixed Accord." The crucial line "Not subject to change" suggests that the awareness of change makes the poet subject to it. In her "rou"-ing the bird is "Day's invisible beginner," and her song "made much within her"--a condition that the poet cannot achieve because the window of self-consciousness mediates his vision of the world. Possibly Stevens'

concern with change and death made it impossible for him to accept the metaphoric process as a revelation of the underlying force of things. His realization that all things change and pass, that a metaphor dies instantly after being born, seems to have forced him away from "things as they are." He implies as much in "The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain" (CP, 512), a possible sequel to "How to Live. What to do" (CP, 125-126), where two men in search of a central belief leave "the flame-freaked sun/To seek a sun of fuller fire:"

There was neither voice nor crested image,
 No chorister, nor priest. There was
 Only the height of the rock
 And the two of them standing still to rest.

There was the cold wind and the sound
 It made, away from the muck of the land
 That they had left, heroic sound
 Joyous and jubilant and sure.

Away from the "muck of the land," the place of the "crested image," the "chorister," and "priest," all elements that surround "the rock" with comforting metaphors, the two men feel cleansed as they stand before what appears to be naked and primary reality. In "The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain," Stevens confesses that the mountain of possible reality has been displaced by "The poem." And he lives on "the oxygen" of the poem rather than the mountain, even though the poem has turned into a dead metaphor: "Even when the book lay turned in the dust of his table." Stevens suggests that his desire for a centre, an absolute to solidify the constant change and death of things, has ironically led him away from "things as they are:"

It reminded him how he had needed
 A place to go to in his own direction,

How he had recomposed the pines,
Shifted the rocks and picked his way among clouds,

For the outlook that would be right,
Where he would be complete in an unexplained completion:

The exact rock where his inexactnesses
Would discover, at last, the view toward which they had edged,

Where he could lie and, gazing down at the sea,
Recognize his unique and solitary home.

Up to this point we have been accepting Stevens' notion of metaphor without bringing out how it too is limited by the epistemological assumptions he brings to his experience. We can understand his hesitation and inability to accept the validity of metaphors as facts of human experience by making a distinction between metaphors as decoration and revelation. The former is based upon the hypothesis that reality can never be known in and for itself; the latter, that metaphors, if dynamically related to the active process of experiencing, can reveal the nature of reality. Because Stevens looked upon metaphors as "fictions," they could be no more than decorations that cover the "rock of reality" without revealing it. In what appears to be a grandeur of metaphors in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" (CP, 508-511), the dying Santayana lies in Rome and tries to make death palatable:

It is a kind of total grandeur at the end
With every visible thing enlarged and yet
No more than a bed, a chair and moving nuns,
The immensest theatre, the pillared porch,
The book and candle in your ambered room,

Total grandeur of a total edifice,
Chosen by an inquisitor of structures
For himself. He stops upon this threshold,
As if the design of all his words takes form
And frame from thinking and is realized.

Santayana's room is "enlarged" by the metaphors surrounding him. "An inquisitor of structures" himself, he now chooses his own, almost seeming to construct the "total edifice" of a belief. But the important qualifying "As if" destroys the "Total grandeur" of his "world." "The design of his words" does not take "form/And frame from thinking" and is not "realized." His metaphors are finally only decorations, comforting illusions that make men think there is an order possible in the quotidian world.

In terms of Stevens' epistemological assumptions, therefore, metaphors do nothing but cover the rock of reality with fictive garments. Rather than moving outward into the world, they force men into a totally "subjective" world. In "Prologues to What is Possible" (CP, 515), probably more profitably read as a prologue to what is impossible, Stevens describes the "enclosure" that decorative metaphors construct. In section I, the voyage metaphor becomes an "ease of mind" of the poet who moves both metaphorically and hypothetically toward a clearer perception of that reality subsuming appearances:

He belonged to the far-foreign departure of his vessel and was
 part of it,
 Part of the speculum of fire on its prow, its symbol, whatever
 it was,
 Part of the glass-like sides on which it glided over the salt-
 stained water,
 As he travelled alone, like a man lured on by a syllable without
 any meaning.
 A syllable of which he felt, with an appointed sureness,
 That it contained the meaning into which he wanted to enter,
 A meaning which, as he entered it, would shatter the boat and
 leave the oarsmen quiet
 As at a point of central arrival, an instant moment, much or
 little,
 Removed from any shore, from any man or woman, and need-
 ing none.

We should note that in this journey the "point of central arrival" is only

a hypothetical possibility: the poet is lured on by a "syllable" that he feels will become a harbinger of meaning. Immediately after projecting the metaphor, he discusses the possibility further in section II. Then he introduces the qualifying assumption that prevents him from actualizing his hypothesis:

The metaphor stirred his fear. The object with which he was compared
Was beyond his recognizing. By this he knew that likeness of him extended
Only a little way, and not beyond, unless between himself
And things beyond resemblance there was this and that intended to be recognized,
The this and that in the enclosures of hypotheses
On which men speculated in summer when they were half asleep.

The metaphor stirs the poet's fear as he realizes that the voyage-object of possible identification "Was beyond his recognizing:" according to his perceptual framework, "likeness of/him extended/Only a little way." Identification ("things beyond resemblance") can therefore only exist within the realm of possibilities, "The this and that in the enclosures of hypotheses." We are back once again in the epistemological puzzle: since we inhabit a space-time continuum of our own perceptions, we are cut off from reality. Since we can only think about reality through conjectures, we live in a "world" of the mind, what the poet refers to as the "enclosures of hypothes^s." Divorced from contact with what is real, our "speculations" are confined to a realm in which we are "half asleep." Following directly after the qualifications of the first two stanzas of section II, the last stanza does not affirm the process of the imagination, but rather presents one more hypothesis:

What self, for example, did he contain that had not yet been

loosed,
 Snarling in him for discovery as his attentions spread,
 As if all his hereditary lights were suddenly increased
 By an access of color, a new and unobserved, slight dithering,
 The smallest lamp, which added its puissant flick, to which he
 gave
 A name and privilege over the ordinary of his commonplace--

A flick which added to what was real and its vocabulary,
 The way some first thing coming into Northern trees
 Adds to them the whole vocabulary of the South,
 The way the earliest single light in the evening sky, in spring,
 Creates a fresh universe out of nothingness by adding itself,
 The way a look or a touch reveals its unexpected magnitudes.

The imagination is the "puissant flick" that adds to "what was real and its vocabulary" through the process of resemblances. In so doing, it constructs metaphors that seem to make "a fresh universe out of nothingness" and almost appear to bring the wholeness and warmth of the South "into Northern trees." But in adding colours to things, the imagination, in Stevens' poetic world, works through decorative and not revelatory metaphors. Its flickering "lamp" only lights the surface of reality with human projections.

The central poem of the last section, "The Rock," helps us to tie all the apparent loose ends and contradictions together. Read in terms of the assumptions that underlie Stevens' poetic world, it gives us a fairly clear statement of the inevitable movement of his thought throughout the Collected Poems. The first section, "Seventy Years Later," looks backward, and in so doing, clarifies Stevens' final stance toward the world:

It is an illusion that we were ever alive,
 Lived in the houses of mothers, arranged ourselves
 By our own motions in a freedom of air.

Regard the freedom of seventy years ago.
 It is no longer air. The houses still stand,
 Though they are rigid in rigid emptiness.

Even our shadows, their shadows, no longer re-
main.

The lives these lived in the mind are at an end.
They never were...The sounds of the guitar

Were not and are not. Absurd. The words spoken
Were not and are not. It is not to be believed.

"We live in the mind," says Stevens in the "Adagia," meaning that we live in our metaphoric perceptions of a world external to ourselves. Logically, then, Stevens can state that his "life" has been an illusion, echoing the phrase "disillusion as the last illusion,/Reality as a thing seen by the mind" from "An Ordinary Evening." In his poetic world we cannot even be certain that "we were ever alive." Further, if our perceptions are illusory, all memories of the past were not and are not: "The lives these lived in the mind are at an end./They never were." Likewise, "The sounds of the guitar/Were not and are not;" the words that he had used to explain reality "Were not and are not." If Stevens confesses in "The Plain Sense of Things" (CP, 502) that "A fantastic effort has failed," he here says that the poems he has written are "Absurd" because they are so finally illusory.

Yet the humanization of nature, to Stevens, is a part of man's attempt to find some "absolute foyer" (OP, 112) where the indifference of reality will become humanly meaningful:

The meeting at noon at the edge of the field seems
like

An invention, an embrace between one desperate
clod

And another in a fantastic consciousness,
In a queer assertion of humanity:

A theorem proposed between the two--
Two figures in a nature of the sun,
In the sun's design of its own happiness,
As if nothingness contained a métier,
A vital assumption, an impermanence
In its permanent cold....

These lines bring out Stevens' inability to accept the truth of experience. The "meeting at noon at the edge of the field," the consummation of love for two people--but for Stevens probably the experienced marriage of the imagination of reality--seems like an invented construct resulting from the human necessity ("a queer assertion of humanity") to make reality meaningful through decorative metaphors ("a fantastic consciousness"). When men experience the warmth of the sun and feel part of natural processes, they propose theorems to justify the possibility that reality is not totally indifferent to human desire, and so live "As if nothingness contained a *métier*" (italics mine). Within this realm of hypothetical possibilities, they try to find a "vital assumption," some proposition to convince them that reality is not simply a "permanent cold." According to Stevens, therefore, the illusory process of metaphors results from the necessity men feel to counteract the indifference of a wholly external world:

...an illusion so desired

That the green leaves came and covered the high
 rock,
 That the lilacs came and bloomed, like a blindness
 cleaned,
 Exclaiming bright sight, as it was satisfied,

In a birth of sight. The blooming and the musk
 Were being alive, an incessant being alive,
 A particular of being, that gross universe.

The illusory "vital assumption" is so desired that men cover the barrenness of the rock with human metaphors, thereby appearing to restore a satisfying "bright sight" to their perceptions. Quite noticeably the tone of the last lines changes as Stevens seems to shift his position: the illusion moves away and he implies an assertion of a knowledge of being. But this apparent "birth of sight" is still qualified by the content of the

lines preceding. Stevens almost wants to accept the validity of his experiences and live immediately in "that gross universe" of his perceptions. The epistemological puzzle, however, hovers in the background and qualifies what might be construed as an affirmation of the poetic process.

Possibly aware of his attempt to accept experience, Stevens opens section II, "The Poem as Icon," with a statement about the metaphoric process of poetry:

It is not enough to cover the rock with leaves.
We must be cured of it by a cure of the ground
Or a cure of ourselves, that is equal to a cure

Of the ground, a cure beyond forgetfulness.

It is not enough simply "to cover the rock with leaves," says Stevens. We must go further and cure ourselves of the desire for covering the rock of reality with decorative metaphors, either by curing the "ground" of our perceptions or by curing ourselves, which could then lead to a "cure// Of the ground." This cure must be final, "beyond forgetfulness." No sooner making this statement of intention, Stevens once again shifts his stance:

And yet the leaves, if they broke into bud,
If they broke into bloom, if they bore fruit,

And if we ate the incipient colorings
Of their fresh culls might be a cure of the ground.

Now he says that if we were to participate in the fruition of illusory metaphors, those "leaves" that cover the rock, we would sense such an overwhelming completeness that the experience itself might be a "cure of the ground." The poem then begins to praise the metaphoric process of poetry:

The fiction of the leaves is the icon

Of the poem, the figuration of blessedness,
 And the icon is the man. The pearled chaplet of
 spring,
 The magnum wreath of summer, time's autumn
 snood

Its copy of the sun, these cover the rock.
 These leaves are the poem, the icon and the man.
 These are a cure of the ground and of ourselves,

In the predicate that there is nothing else. (italics mine)

The qualification in the final line of the quoted passage makes all the difference. In effect Stevens is saying that although all metaphors are illusory and we should try to "cure" ourselves of the desire for a humanized universe, we should accept them as the only possible "cure" available to us. As fictional as they are, decorative metaphors at least give men a semblance of wholeness, and as such, satisfy the "desire to be at the end of distances:"

The body quickened and the mind in root.
 They bloom as a man loves, as he lives in love.
 They bear their fruit so that the year is known,

As if its understanding was brown skin,
 The honey in its pulp, the final found,
 The plenty of the year and of the world.

Once again the qualifying "As if" indicates that Stevens is still aware that the "fiction of the leaves" is a desired illusion; although it appears to be a "figuration of blessedness," the metaphoric process is still finally a fiction, only a "copy of the sun," not a revelation of the sun itself. In line with the changes in stance that Stevens is undergoing almost unconsciously, section II concludes with an assertion that contradicts the opening lines:

In this plenty, the poem makes meanings of the
 rock,
 Of such mixed motion and such imagery
 That its barrenness becomes a thousand things

And so exists no more. This is the cure
 Of leaves and of the ground and of ourselves.
 His words are both the icon and the man.

What is largely unstated, however, is the fact that the "barrenness" of the rock still does exist. The "thousand things" that make "meanings of the/rock" are still only decorations of reality that do not reveal it. The appearance of "plenty," as well as the "cure," are only meaningful "In the predicate that there is nothing else."

This decorative aspect of the metaphoric process in Stevens' poetic world is clarified even further in the last section of the poem, "Forms of the Rock in a Night-Hymn." Once again, as is characteristic of Stevens, we are not presented with the actual "Forms of the Rock" but with discussion about the forms. The subject-matter of the last section concerns the nature of perceptual forms and their relation to reality:

The rock is the gray particular of man's life,
 The stone from which he rises, up--and--ho,
 The step to the bleaker depths of his descents...

The rock is the stern particular of the air,
 The mirror of the planets, one by one,
 But through man's eye, their silent rhapsodist,

Turquoise the rock, at odious evening bright
 With redness that sticks fast to evil dreams;
 The difficult rightness of half-risen day.

As "The stone from which he rises," the rock of reality is the source of men's perceptions of the world. In itself, as "the stern particular of the air," or "The mirror of the planets," it does not contain the humanized perceptions of it. But "through man's eye," the "silent rhapsodist,"

it takes on human meaning; as Stevens says in "One of the Inhabitants of the West" (CP, 503):

So much guilt lies buried
Beneath the innocence
of autumn days.

The guilt, in this context, is a human projection. Men make "meanings of the/rock" by painting it different colours, constructing their notions of heaven and hell, good and evil, around the projections of their own desires and fears: "at odious evening bright/With redness that sticks fast to evil dreams." The fragment, "The difficult rightness of half-risen day," can therefore be seen as another statement of the impossible stance that Stevens tried to maintain hypothetically. It concerns the perception of reality before it is distorted by human metaphors. In "What We See is What We Think" (CP, 459), noon becomes that point in the day when metaphors set in:

At twelve, the disintegration of afternoon
Began, the return to phantomerei, if not
To phantoms. Till then, it had been the other way.

Only in that hypothetical instant before noon, a time when the violet trees stood "as green as ever they would be," can reality be perceived as nakedly as possible. But in The Rock, and especially in the final lines of "The Rock," Stevens realizes that it is virtually impossible, at least within the confines of his poetic world, to experience this "difficult rightness." The "half-risen day" exists within that impossible space between experience and perception:

The rock is the habitation of the whole,
Its strength and measure, that which is near,

point A
 In a perspective that begins again
 At B: the origin of the mango's rind.

As the base of appearances, the rock is "point A" in a perception that begins for man at B. Although reality is the ground of all metaphors, it can never be known in itself: men inevitably perceive not the mango but the "mango's rind." Yet it is this unknowable source that they seek in order to find some knowledge of order and wholeness:

It is the rock where tranquil must adduce
 Its tranquil self, the main of things, the mind,

The starting point of the human and the end,
 That in which space itself is contained, the gate
 To the enclosure, day, the things illumined

By day, night and that which night illumines,
 Night and its midnight-minting fragrances,
 Night's hymn of the rock, as in a vivid sleep.

In Stevens' poetic world, since perception is "the gate/To the enclosure," we can never move outside of the "subjective" space and time "world" of our minds, "The starting point of the human and the end." In "Prologues to What is Possible," he had called the end result of this process "the enclosures of hypotheses." If we are enclosed in a solipsistic "world;" "Space itself is contained" in the mind. The same applies to our perceptions of the daily cycle: "the things illumined/By day" and that "which night illumines." Within this wholly "subjective" enclosure, the lamp of the imagination appears to illuminate things. The kind of light it sheds, however, only decorates the world without revealing it. The "midnight-minting fragrances" of the night are metaphoric decorations, and "Night's hymn of the rock" is sung "as in a vivid sleep." The sleep

is vivid only because the decorative metaphors make the barrenness of the seem to disappear. In "Long and Sluggish Lines" (CP, 522), Stevens calls this same process a "wakefulness inside a sleep." The sleep-dream image qualifies the kind of "hymn of the rock" he is describing. Because the decorative metaphors seem meaningful, we think that the world is illuminated. But our vision is limited to the makings of our own minds, and in that sense, is a part of a dream world distant from reality.

In "The Rock" and the poems of The Rock in general, therefore, Stevens found himself in the enclosure of his own metaphors. Realizing that perception is always a distortion of the world, he came to accept the decorative aspect of metaphors as the only kind of meaning available to him, "...a purpose, empty/Perhaps, absurd perhaps, but at least a purpose," as he says in "Note on Moonlight" (CP, 531). If a knowledge beyond the mind is denied to him, then, he has no other choice but to resign himself to his solipsistic situation, "In the predicate that there is nothing else." But the "predicate," and there is still a qualification behind Stevens' acceptance, implies that he nevertheless desires so much more. Even though he may say that the imaginative process, with all of its absurdities, is a "cure" of sorts, he still desires a "cure beyond forgetfulness," a "cure" that moves to the ground of his perceptions. This tension between desire and actuality explains the "unstated theme" (CP, 357) of such a poem as "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" (CP, 524), where Stevens appears to affirm the process of the imagination in spite of the "mere objectiveness of things" (CP, 531).

The title might be read as a summary statement of a poet who realizes that the "world" he inhabits is an imaginative construct. In the opening stanza, "the first light of evening," the process of the imagination, comes

on in a room and "for small reason" we think that "The world imagined is the ultimate good." What is largely unstated about the "small reason" is the fact that we have nothing else but a world of decorative metaphors. The apparent affirmation that the "world imagined is the ultimate good" carries with it an implied desire for much more. In the "enclosure" this kind of relation the imagination has with reality is "the intensest rendezvous" available to us. Knowing that we must forever remain an "Interior Paramour," and still desiring more, the poet-Stevens says that we should accept the illusory light of the imagination as the only kind of light we can possess:

It is in that thought that we collect ourselves,
Out of all the indifferences, into one thing:

Within a single thing, a single shawl
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a
 warmth,
A light, a power, the miraculous influence.

The metaphoric process is a "miraculous influence" only in the sense that it gives us what appears to be a semblance of wholeness and order, a shawl to wrap around us ("since we are poor") to protect us from the indifference of reality. Within the "enclosed" space-time "world" of our own perceptions, a desperate "world" because there is nothing else, we actually feel "the obscurity of an order, a whole/A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous." The qualifying, unspoken statements, however, are all brought out in the final two stanzas of the poem:

Within its vital boundary, in the mind.
We say God and the imagination are one...
How high the highest candle lights the dark.

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,

We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough.

The "obscurity of an order" exists only "Within its vital boundary, in the mind." We are still in the epistemological puzzle. His "world" seems "vital" only because the imagination lights up the world with human meaning; the "boundary," nevertheless, is a space limited to the mind. The equation of God and the imagination is therefore very tenuous. Frank Lentricchia, Jr. is quite helpful in pointing out that the distinction between saying straightforwardly that "God and the imagination are one" rather than qualifying the statement by saying "We say God and the imagination are one" is important for understanding what is not stated in the poem.³² Referring to the same process of the imagination in "St. Armorer's Church from the Outside" and there confessing, "Final for him, the acceptance of such prose" (CP, 530), Stevens hesitantly accepts the forms of his perception as the "ultimate good" only because his real desire for something more is finally so impossible to attain. The image of the "highest candle" immediately recalls us to an earlier poem, "Valley Candle" (CP, 51), from Harmonium:

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 blew.

In Stevens' poetic world, the light the imagination brings is ultimately illusory. In the last lines of the "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," the darkness is still ominously present. We almost feel as if Stevens forces an affirmation that has been continually undermined throughout

the poem: "being there together" in this "world imagined" is enough only because what is really desired, a knowledge of that reality wholly external to his perceptions of it, is denied him.

In the poem that closes the Collected Poems, "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself" (CP, 534), Stevens is so distant from the world that he has to convince himself that the bird's cry he hears is really coming from the outside: it is a "scrawny cry," he says, that "Seemed like a sound in his mind." Even though he feels the presence of the sun in this last poem, his epistemological assumptions still prevent him from experiencing it directly. By the end of the poem, it is "Still far away." Significantly enough, he says that his perception is "like/A new knowledge of reality," not that it is a new knowledge of reality. The distance between his perception and the world is still very real. As we enter Williams' world in the next and final section, we will become immediately aware of the absence of this distance. If Stevens sought to gain a knowledge of reality by engaging in the "subject-object" problem, Williams learned early in life that such categories only remove men from the activity of the world. Unlike Stevens, Williams moves back behind the problem and achieves an immediate contact with the concrete particulars of the world. Their different stances led to two different attitudes to poetic knowledge: While Stevens' concern with perception led him to see poetry as a fiction removed from reality, Williams' concern

with experience led him to affirm art, and more specifically poetry, as the only form of knowledge that can "reconcile the people and the stones." It is to this movement in Williams' thought that we shall now turn, concluding our study with a possible "plan for action" to solve the problem of contact, not through rational categories such as "subject" and "object," but through a poetic knowledge of the ground.

Section Five

To Make a Start . . .

William Carlos Williams and "The Poem" as a "Plan for Action"

The inevitable flux of the seeing eye toward measuring itself by the world it inhabits can only result in himself crushing humiliation unless the individual raise to some approximate co-extension with the universe. This is possible by aid of the imagination. Only through the agency of this force can a man feel himself moved largely with sympathetic pulses at work--

A work of the imagination which fails to release the senses in accordance with this major requisite-- the sympathies, the intelligence in its selective world, fails at the elucidation, the alleviation which is--

Be patient that I address you in a poem,
 there is no other
 fit medium.

The mind
 lives there. It is uncertain,
 can trick us and leave us
 agonized. But for resources
 what can equal it?
 There is nothing. We
 should be lost
 without its wings to
 fly off upon.

The mind is the cause of our distresses
 but of it we can build anew.
 Oh something more than
 it flies off to:
 a woman's world,
 of crossed sticks, stopping
 thought. A new world
 is only a new mind.
 And the mind and the poem
 are all apiece.

Ranging from Spring and All (1923) to The Desert Music and Other Poems (1954),¹ the two quoted passages give us some indication of the singularity of Williams' lifetime concerns: the power of "the poem" to reveal human experience. In the introductory section of this study, we had been interested basically in the problem of contact and only indirectly in Williams' positive solution to the problem, the main focus of this last section. When he argues that men must achieve a "co-extension with the universe," he is proposing that they should, like Columbus, De Soto, Rasles, Boone, Houston, Whitman, and Poe from In the American Grain, experience a contact with the ground.² The descent, however, must be followed by an ascent, the construction of "the poem" that will both concretize and reveal the nature of that ground. The hiatus left in the first quoted passage might therefore be filled with the word "art," and maybe more specifically, "the poem." The same mind that approaches the world with fixed forms of perception, what Williams calls "puritanism" in In the American Grain, can change its stance toward

the world and "build anew." Rather than building a static world of fixed categories, "a woman's world/of crossed sticks, stopping/thought," it will search for those forms that are an organic extension of man's experience of the ground. "A new world/is only a new mind," Williams says in the second quoted passage, adding further, "And the mind and the poem are all apiece." Unlike Stevens, Williams affirms "the poem" as the only form capable of housing the active process of experiencing the ground. To understand precisely how he thought it could become a "plan for action," therefore, we should enter his thought and explore the main lines of what he referred to as his "theory of the poem."³

(i) The "Theory of the Poem" as Entrance

Williams' well-known interest in the "local" is grounded in his attitude to the particular and its power to reveal the "universal" processes of the earth. When he argues for the significance of "place," he is not proposing that poets become naturalists describing the American scene in and for itself. Although he once said that "'simply physical and external realism' has an important place in America still" (SL, 146), his notion of the "local" is a completely different matter. Writing to Ezra Pound, for instance, he qualifies his position unmistakably:

For the luv of God snap out of it! I'm no more sentimental about "murika" than Li Po was about

China or Shakespeare about Yingland or any damned Frog about Paris. I know as well as you do that there's nothing sacred about any land. But I also know (as you do also) that there's no taboo effective against any land, and where I live is no more a "province" than I make it. (SL, 139-140)

Against localism for its own sake, Williams says that all authentic poetry must grow out of a "Spirit of place" (CEP, 395); each country (which includes all the poets of that country) must reveal its universal relation to the earth through its particular face, its physical and linguistic world:

From the shapes of men's lives imparted by the places where they have experience, good writing springs.... One has to learn what the meaning of the local is, for universal purposes. The local is the only thing that is universal. Vide Juan Gris, "The only way to resemble the classics is to have no part in what we do come of them but to have it our own." The classics is the local fully realized, words marked by a place. (SE, 132)

According to Williams, we should borrow nothing from the classics except the example they set in being themselves "the local fully realized." Even though man's primary relation to the processes of the earth is common to all places and time, he can only actualize this relation through the particularities of his world. "The flow must originate from the local to the general as a river to the sea..." writes Williams (SL, 225); Eliot's statement that "place is only place" is "The Fatal Blunder" because "the only thing that is universal is place."⁴ It is only because we live in one place that we can relate to men in other places and times. "We live in one place at a time," says Williams, "but far from being bound by it, only through it do we realize our freedom."⁵

His view of the "local," however, depends upon his very large view of the particular and its relation to the ground. He tells us in the

Autobiography that the face of the ground "is a particular face," and so

...is likely to appear under the most unlikely disguises. You cannot recognize it from past appearances--in fact it is always a new face.
(A, 362)

In Williams' poetic world, both men and objects are metamorphoses of the ground, a point Sister M. Bernetta Quinn makes in her discussion of Williams;⁶ it consequently cannot be known except as it appears in a "new face," the sensual reality of concrete particulars. Paterson says that he does not return "to the same/ground year by year" because "the ground has undergone/a subtle transformation, its identity altered" (P, 29). In actual fact, the ground in itself has remained the same; what has changed is the particular revelation of it.⁷ To gain a sense of the ground, therefore, Paterson has to learn how to respond to the particulars in his local world. As Williams says, commenting on Paterson, the "poet's business" is

not to talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particular to discover the universal. (A, 391)⁸

One of the head-notes to Paterson that reads, "by multiplication a reduction to one" (P, 10), means that only by experiencing the particulars that make up experience ("multiplication") can men get a sense of the ground ("one") they live on. Aside from its more overt attempt to find "the redeeming language" to marry men to the earth, Paterson is largely a study of those "faces" or particulars that metamorphose the ground, the lack of knowledge of which divorces men from the source of their experience and makes them into "automatons"

Who because they
 neither know their sources nor the sills of their
 disappointments walk outside their bodies aimlessly
 for the most part,
 locked and forgot in their desires--unroused. (P, 14)

As in "The Wanderer" (CEP, 3-12) and the section "De Soto and the New World" from In the American Grain (IAG, 45-58), the "She," the metamorphosis of the ground, appears throughout Paterson in a multiplicity of particular faces. In a later poem, "For Eleanor and Bill Monahan," Williams identifies the life processes of the ground as the "female principle of the world" (PB, 86), the rich maternal source of all things. And so in Book I of Paterson, he delineates the elemental character of the city-man Paterson by saying that the "low mountain" (P, 17) stretching against the city is both the counterpart and source of Paterson. Or more directly in Book II, he writes, "The scene's the Park/upon the rock,/ female to the city" (P, 57), the ground upon which Paterson "instructs his thoughts/(concretely)" (P, 57). All of the "feminine" elements of Paterson, which includes both men and women ("I confess/to being/half man and half/woman" (PB, 84), says Williams in "For Eleanor and Bill Monahan"), plants, animals, and even man-made objects, such as the glass from "an old bottle" in Book III (P, 142), carry the life force of the ground in their particularity. Through particulars such as this, men can make contact with the source of their experience and marry the "female principle of the world:"⁹

A man like a city and a woman like a flower
 --who are in love. Two women. Three women.
 Innumerable women, each like a flower.

But
 only one man--like a city. (P, 15)

Since each particular concretizes the processes of the earth, each is like a "woman" like a "flower" that a man, each in his particular experience, loves. "The first wife" of the African chief (P, 22-23), the "Two halfgrown girls hailing hallowed Easter" (P, 29), "the young colored woman" who desires a baby (P, 44), the pearl found in Notch Creek (P, 17), the enormous bass discovered and captured (P, 19-20), the beauty of the falls (P, 26)--all of these particulars in Book I are "A wonder! A wonder!" (P, 19) because each in its own concrete physicality discloses something of the nature of that ground it contains. This "flower within a flower," this "wonder" that escapes the categories of rational forms of knowledge (P, 33), is recognized by Williams throughout his work. As we have already seen in the first section, Columbus saw it as a "beautiful thing" that inhered in the American earth (IAG, 26). In Book III of Paterson it is the "Beautiful Thing" that Paterson wants to marry, in Book IV, "THE GIST or "the radiant gist'" (P, 218) that Curie found in uranium and that Paterson sees shining through the divorce in his world. Williams also sees it in his patients as they try to articulate their feelings, calling it in the Autobiography a "rare element" (A, 360) or a "rare presence" (A, 362). Or as he talks about the poem Paterson, he describes it as a "secret and sacred presence" (A, 390) that poets must try to reveal.

The process of experiencing this "secret and sacred presence," however, is not a static act of giving meaning to objects, but an active involvement in the movement of objects as self-existing things. In one isolated incident from Paterson, for instance, only when Paterson actually sees and so experiences the intrinsic movement of a branch can he get a sense of the importance of particulars:

--and watch, wrapt! one branch
of the tree at the fall's edge, one
mottled branch, withheld,
among the gyrate branches
of the waist-thick sycamore,
sway less, among the rest, separate, slowly
with giraffish awkwardness, slightly
on a long axis, so slightly
as hardly to be noticed, in itself the tempest: (P, 31-32)

As the branch separates from the "waist-thick sycamore" and assumes its own particularity, it withholds itself from the things around it. Being itself a concretion of the ground, it contains the "tempest," and as such, is similar to the "first wife" of the African chief; both reveal the "thick lightnings that stab at/the mystery of a man," each in its own "giraffish awkwardness" (P, 32). Only by this kind of active stance to the world ("watch, wrapt!") can Paterson begin to understand "whence/I draw my breath" (P, 33), the rich source that makes all things, man included, a "first wife/and a first beauty" (P, 33).

Unlike Stevens, who continually mistrusted his experiences, Williams continually asserts that experience is the only way of knowing the nature of the world. Williams, consequently, was never plagued by the epistemological problems Stevens' poetry contains. Whether the locus of reality exists in the "subject" or the "object" never became a dilemma for him because his notion of descent, a process whereby men actively experience the nature of the ground through a direct contact with the particulars that concretize it, moves back behind the logical problem of knowledge to an area where such categories do not apply. In an important letter to Marianne Moore, he explains her comment that his poems have an "inner security," and in doing so, clarifies exactly what he means when he proposes that men must achieve a "co-extension with the universe" and experience the particularity of objects as self-existing things:

It is something which occurred once when I was about twenty, a sudden resignation to existence, a despair --if you wish to call it that, but a despair which made everything a unity and at the same time a part of myself. I suppose it might be called a sort of nameless religious experience. I resigned, I gave up....I won't follow causes. I can't. The reason is that it seems so much more important to me that I am. Where shall one go? What shall one do? Things have no names for me and places have no significance. As a reward for this anonymity I feel as much a part of things as trees and stones. Heaven seems frankly impossible. I am damned as I succeed. I have no particular hope save to repair, to rescue, to complete. (SL, 147)¹⁰

Before we comment on this important passage, we might consider along with it a statement made by Charles Olson in his essay on "Projective Verse," parts of which Williams included in the Autobiography (A, 329-332). The following section, for some reason not quoted in the Autobiography, gives us the terms to approach an understanding of Williams' "sudden resignation to existence:"

What seems to me a more valid formulation $\sqrt{\text{than}}$ "objectivism" as opposed to "subjectivism" $\sqrt{\text{for}}$ present use is "objectism," a word to be taken to stand for the kind of relation of man to experience which a poet might state as the necessity of a line or a work to be as wood is, to be as clean as wood is as it issues from the hand of nature, to be as shaped as wood can be when a man has had his hand to it. Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages, the more likely to recognize himself as such the greater his advantages, particularly at that moment he achieves an humilitas sufficient to make him of use.¹¹

According to Olson, what we call "experience" is a continuous action, man, another particular object with the other particular objects, living in a "UNIVERSE of discourse."¹² Objectism (not objectivism, which assumes, along with subjectivism, that man is separate from his world) disposes of the notion of a "subject" accomodating the world to its fixed position. Once we overcome the "lyrical interference of the individual as ego," says Olson, we can begin to get a sense of experience as it occurs. In Williams' "sudden resignation to existence," a descent to the ground of his experience, he accomplishes a "co-extension with the universe" and experiences an "anonymity" that makes him feel a "part of things." But he does not melt into the world emphatically; each object still remains a separate unit distinct from all other separate units. When he says, therefore, that men should be moved by "sympathetic pulses," he is not advocating a simple identification, a loss of what we call the "self" into the flux of things. J. Hillis Miller is quite correct in pointing out that "there is no gradual approach of subject and object which leads to their merger in an ecstatic union" in Williams' poetry.¹³ In the "sudden resignation" recorded in the letter, all things, including man, remain separate units. As particular "objects" ourselves, then, we live in a world of particular "objects" and cannot be dissolved into things, just as things cannot be dissolved into ourselves. The despair that Williams feels is a prelude to a new consciousness of his world, a stance best described in Olson's term Objectism. By giving himself up to "existence," he knows for the first time that he is alive, a part of the movement of things in the activity of the world. Because "things have no names" and "places have no significance," he can, paradoxically, begin to touch the particularity of "trees and stones." The descent recorded in this letter

is similar to the experiences of Rasles, Boone, Houston, Whitman, and Poe. It also clarifies most of Williams' work from "The Wanderer" (1914) (CEP, 3-12), a baptism in the Passaic River by the goddess "She" (the metamorphosis of the life processes of the earth), his first "clear marriage" (CEP, 12) with the ground, to Kora in Hell (1920), a descent to the underground with Persephone, to Paterson IV (1951), "The Run to the Sea."¹⁴ In these moments of descent, experience simply is. There is no where to go, and nothing to do--nothing except repair, rescue, and complete, that is, order, articulate, and reveal that activity in poetry.

Assuming with Williams that particular objects concretize the ground, Olson's notion of Objectism then becomes the stance toward experience that allows us to touch things-as-things, gives us "The Right of Way" (SA, 47), to use Williams' own words, into the life of the world. What we call "life" or experience is a movement through a constantly changing activity of particular forces. The function of poetry, if it is to give value to experience, is to move in the world and hold on to these forces as they impinge on our consciousness. According to Williams, the imagination is "an actual force comparable to electricity or steam" (SA, 49), the force of nature acting through man. Poets, therefore, are not to place specific "...values on the word being used, according to presupposed measures," Williams argues in Spring and All,

but to write down that which happens at that time--

To perfect the ability to record at the moment when the consciousness is enlarged by the sympathies and the unity of understanding which the imagination gives, to practise skill in recording the force moving, then to know it, in the largeness of its proportions-- (SA, 48)

According to Williams, we can experience the nature of the ground only by flowing with the particulars that concretize it. We must therefore become involved in our experience as it occurs, imitate the processes of nature and "become the instrument of nature--the helpless instrument" (SE, 303), learning to write down "that which happens at that time." As Williams begins to re-enact his trip to a Mexican border town in "The Desert Music," for instance, he realizes that he cannot make his experiences "present" unless he himself becomes "nature-in action" (SE, 306):

--to place myself (in
my nature) beside nature

--to imitate
nature (for to copy nature would be a
shameful thing)

I lay myself down: (PB, 110)

Since experience is a constant "going-on," poetry must concretize that moment when the poet achieves a "co-extension with the universe" and his "consciousness is enlarged by the sympathies." The poem, "the unity of understanding which the imagination gives," is then both a record and a revelation of the "force moving" in experience. The short poem "The Right of Way" (SA, 47-48) should be read in this context:

In passing with my mind
on nothing in the world

but the right of way
I enjoy on the road by

virtue of the law--
I saw

an elderly man who
smiled and looked away

to the north past a house--
a woman in blue

who was laughing and
leaning forward to look up

into the man's half
averted face

and a boy of eight who was
looking at the middle of

the man's belly
at a watchchain--

The supreme importance
of this nameless spectacle

sped me by them
without a word--

Why bother where I went?
for I went spinning on the

four wheels of my car
along the wet road until

I saw a girl with one leg
over the rail of a balcony

Driving down an ordinary street with "nothing" on his mind, Williams flows with the movement of his experience. The pun on the "right of way" sign and "the law" suggests that his stance toward experience is "the law" that gives him a "right of way" into the activity of the world. Like Olson, Williams approaches experience with a concern for this "going-on:" the instants of man in the world, "figuring it out, and acting, so."¹⁵ As he moves from particular to particular, no "subject" interferes to shape the objects of his experience according to a fixed point of view. At the same time, each person in the poem experiences the inter-action of particular forces: the man smiling and looking to the north, the woman laughing and leaning forward to look into the man's face, and the boy

looking at the watchchain on the man's belly. This "nameless spectacle" is of "supreme importance" because it is all experience. For Williams, and for Olson, the concept of a "self" opposed to the "not-self" is a limiting categorization that abstracts man from the locus of his existence in the world: involved. By doing "nothing," then, Williams becomes a part of the activity of experience. "Why bother where I went?" he says, echoing his previous comment in the passage describing his "sudden resignation to existence," "What shall one do?" He finds that he can do nothing but continue driving, "spinning on the//four wheels of my car" until he sees "a girl with one leg/over the rail of a balcony," this new particular force stopping and holding him as he concludes the movement of the poem.

The stance that this poem implies, however, is subsumed by the large fact that it is a poem, experience ordered, held, and revealed. Although men must experience a sympathetic rapport with the particulars of their world, unless this experience is concretized in a poem, it will remain amorphous and unintelligible. "In the composition," says Williams in Spring and All,

the artist does exactly what every eye must do with life, fix the particular with the universality of his own personality--Taught by the largeness of his imagination to feel every form which he sees moving within himself, he must prove the truth of this by expression. (SA, 27)

In this context, "expression" refers to the "made poem," to use Williams' phrase from "The Desert Music" (PB, 110), that reveals experience and holds on to the particular. "When a man makes a poem," Williams writes in his "Author's Introduction" to The Wedge,

makes it, mind you, he takes words as he finds them interrelated about him and composes them--without distortion which would mar their exact significances --into an intense expression of his perceptions and ardors that they may constitute a revelation in the speech that he uses. (SE, 257)

Without the poem "The Right of Way," therefore, neither Williams nor the people in the poem, the man, woman, and boy, the girl with her leg thrown over the balcony, could have been revealed in the moment of experiencing. When Williams argues that authentic art is "experience dynamized into reality" (SA, 68) he means that experience, in itself, simply "happens" without order or plan--the particulars concretizing the ground are constantly changing and inter-acting with each other. Sister M. Bernetta Quinn's comment that "to write a poem is in itself to effect a metamorphosis" is meaningful in this context.¹⁶ If the descent is Williams' stance toward the world, the ascent is the "made poem" that metamorphoses the constant "going-on" of experience into an object of knowledge. "The objective is not to copy nature," Williams writes in the Autobiography, delineating his attitude to the "made poem" even more explicitly,

and never was, but to imitate nature, which involved active invention, the active work of the imaginationIt is NOT to hold the mirror up to nature that the artist performs his work. It is to make, out of the imagination, something not at all a copy of nature, but something quite different, a new thing, unlike any thing else in nature, a thing advanced and apart from it.

To imitate nature involves the verb to do. To copy is merely to reflect something already there, inertly....But by imitation we enlarge nature itself, we become nature or we discover in ourselves nature's active part. This is enticing to our minds, it enlarges the concept of art, dignifies it to a place not yet fully realized. (A, 241)

To Williams, therefore, the poem concretizes, by metamorphosing man's

movement through the world into an object of knowledge. Far from being mimetic, it has the "power TO ESCAPE ILLUSION and stand between man and nature as saints once stood between man and the sky" (SA, 38). The assumption that art is a copy of nature rests upon a false hypothesis: in experience men are not separate from their world. "There is only, illusion" in art," Williams argues, "where ignorance of the bystander confuses imagination and its works with cruder processes" (SA, 29). Itself a part of the force of nature, the imagination works in the world, directly and immediately. "Only through the imagination is the advance of intelligence possible," says Williams, "to keep beside growing understanding" (SA, 28). His well-known phrase "no ideas but in things" refers to this "universal activity of the mind" (SL, 252), the imagination working actively in the world. The kind of movement that Williams' "new mind" can accomplish is both discovered and clarified in the short poem "To Waken an Old Lady" (CEP, 200). Beginning with an abstraction, "Old age," the poem apparently begins to describe what old age is through an image, an objective correlative of the "idea." As Williams allows himself to follow the exact movement of the particulars, however, his thought participates in the activity and actually changes direction:

Old age is
 a flight of small
 cheeping birds
 skimming
 bare trees
 above a snow glaze.
 Gaining and failing
 they are buffeted
 by a dark wind--
 But what?
 On harsh weedstalks
 the flock has rested,
 the snow

is covered with broken
seedhusks
and the wind tempered
by a shrill
piping of plenty.

The first half of the poem, up to "But what?" is fairly clear. After saying "Old age is," Williams explains the abstraction through the image of weak, "cheeping birds" flying over "bare trees," and "buffeted/by a dark wind." As an objective correlative of "old age," the image of the birds' flight suggests the poverty and terror of old age. At the temporary break, "But what?" however, the movement of the poem changes. Now involved in the movement of the birds, as birds, and not as an objective correlative of the abstraction "old age," Williams follows them as they come to rest on "harsh weedstalks" where the snow is "covered with broken/seedhusks." But more importantly, as he changes his stance, the "cheeping birds" grow in stature. They rest on the weedstalks, no longer "buffeted" by an ominous "dark wind." In the snow the "seedhusks" reveal not poverty but fruition: the birds are comforted by the wind's "shrill/piping of plenty." The actual birds have transformed Williams' thought. The "idea" of old age, Williams discovers, lives in the particular movement of the birds--"no ideas but in things." Through the action of the poem, the birds-as-birds have shown Williams that old age is the fruition of the life process, a time to rest and assess the fruits of the seeds planted. As even this short poem shows, in Williams' poetic world, no "idea" is vital unless grounded in the particulars of the world.¹⁷

Adopting Einstein's "discoveries in the relativity of our measurements of physical matter" (SL, 332), Williams therefore sees experience as a constantly changing activity of "relative" forces.¹⁸ Poets must

learn how to flow with these forces and record their movements "without distortion," never attempting to shape things according to a fixed point of reference.¹⁹ "Measure" is Williams' word for describing the way "the poem" draws the particulars of the world together and "composes" (what he calls "active invention, the active work of the imagination" (A, 241) in the passage previously quoted) those particulars into a revelation of experience as it occurs. In a letter to John C. Thirlwall, Williams explains this process:

The first thing you learn when you begin to learn anything about this earth is that you are eternally barred save for the report of your senses from knowing anything about it. Measure serves for us as the key: we can measure between objects; therefore, we know that they exist. Poetry began with measure, it began with the dance, whose divisions we have all but forgotten but are still known as measures (*italics mine*). (SL, 331)

Through "measure" a poet can order the force of particulars as they impinge on his consciousness. Williams discovered in his "resignation to existence" that his main function as a poet is to reveal "existence" as it is. He praises Byron Vazakas because he "doesn't select his material" with the intention of shaping it into a pre-determined form. "What is there to select?" Williams adds, "It is."²⁰ Resigned to the "life" of the world, a poet can do nothing but "measure between objects" in such a way that his poems reveal something of his experience of the ground. When he succeeds in this kind of measuring, he begins to achieve that "dance" of the imagination that Williams calls "the poem"--which is therefore why

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

beside the white
chickens. (SA, 74)

The whole value of human experience depends upon the exact measuring of a particular "red wheel/barrow//glazed with rain/water" as it exists "re-related" to the particular "white/chickens" in the "made poem" that reveals them as experience.

By measuring the poet's relative movement through the world "the poem" then becomes an organic extension of the on-going flow of experience. From this basis, Williams attacks those out-moded forms (e.g. the sonnet) that shape experience according to pre-conceived patterns of fixed order. "I was early in life sick to my very pit with order that cuts off the crab's feelers to make it fit into the box," writes Williams (SE, 188). For the same reason he praises Whitman for breaking "through the deadness of copied forms" (SE, 218). Or in "Shoot it Jimmy" (SA, 63) he advises poets to "Get the rhythm//That sheet stuff/'s a lot a cheese." Only by giving up fixed forms that distort the activity of experience and learning how to measure their relative movement through the world can they begin to realize what it means to live in a particular time and place:

Without imagination life cannot go on, for we are
left staring at the empty casings where truth
lived yesterday while the creature itself has
escaped behind us. (SE, 213)

The "creature" referred to in Williams' statement is the ground as it appears through particulars, that "sacred presence" that a poet must concretize and reveal in his poems if he is to call himself a poet.

Williams' "theory of the poem," therefore, has very large implications.

As the only object of knowledge that can hold on to our experience of the ground, it is his answer to the problem of contact he sees in his world. But the theory itself, especially when discussed as boldly as Williams often did, may appear deceptively simple. In actual fact, the process of descending to the ground and ascending to "the poem" may be an enormously difficult task to achieve. One of Williams' major poems, "The Desert Music," has this difficulty as its substance: the poem is at once a concrete example of his "theory" and a conscious attempt on Williams' part to justify his function as a poet. The drama of the poem therefore moves on two levels, Williams-as-poet re-enacting past experiences and Williams-as-poet moving through the world trying to affirm his role as a poet.

A fairly lengthy but extremely important passage from the poem takes us immediately into its action at the same time that it helps us to draw many strands of our discussion together; proposing that the "made poem" is the only concretion that can give value to experience, Williams gives us the terms to approach a reading of the poem:

How shall we get said what must be said?

Only the poem.

Only the counted poem, to an exact measure:
to imitate, not to copy nature, not
to copy nature

not, prostrate, to copy nature
but a dance! to dance
two and two with him--
sequestered there asleep,
right end up!

A music
supersedes his composure, hallooing to us
across a great distance . . .

wakens the dance
 who blows upon his benumbed fingers!

Only the poem
 only the made poem, to get said what must
 be said, not to copy nature, sticks
 in our throats .

The law? The law gives us nothing
 but a corpse, wrapped in a dirty mantle.
 The law is based on murder and confinement,
 long delayed,
 but this, following the insensate music,
 is based on the dance:

an agony of self-realization
 bound into a whole
 by that which surrounds us .

I cannot escape

I cannot vomit it up

Only the poem!

Only the made poem, the verb calls it
 into being. (PB, 108-110)

The "dance" of the poem begins around the "form/propped motionless --on the bridge/between Juarez and El Paso" (PB, 108). Having the potentiality to reveal the nature of the ground, if Williams can learn to move with it, it is "Egg-shaped" (PB, 108) at the same time that it is shapeless. Although this form will later become an exemplification of poetic form, for the time being it remains one of the particulars of the world that Williams must dance with actively, "not, prostrate, to copy nature/ but a dance! to dance/two and two with him" (PB, 109). Only when he achieves the descent can he begin to hear the "music" of existence that each thing holds within its own concrete particularity. We should recall that when Williams experienced a "sudden resignation to existence," he discovered that he is alive, a part of the fabric of all living things.

In this experience he found that he could do nothing but record and attempt to reveal a sense of existence, the "what must/be said" in "The Desert Music." Unlike the law that works only with the surface of facts, the "made poem" is concerned with the "inexorable music" of life processes, the nature of which can be known only when the poet moves through the divorced world ("murder and confinement") and achieves the measured dance of "that which surrounds us" and will not leave us alone: "I cannot escape// I cannot vomit it up." Since he cannot do anything but make the poem which reveals the music of existence, he must continually resign himself to the activity of his world no matter how agonizing the process may sometimes be.

In "The Desert Music" Williams does manage to resign himself to the force of existence, in spite of the almost overwhelming divorce he sees in his world. In the early parts of the action, sensing the terror and violence latent in the Mexican border town, he finds himself unable to move with the particulars of that world. When some children approach him to beg for pennies, he pulls away for fear of contact:

. instinctively
 one has already drawn one's naked
 wrist away from those obscene fingers (PB, 112)

It is only later when he enters a small bar and moves with the dance of a stripper that he begins to re-discover a sense of the music that surrounds all things. This "worn-out trooper from/the States" (PB, 114) in her ability to hold on to "another tune" (PB, 115) while she performs in the "divorced" atmosphere of the bar, becomes an example of the possibilities open to Williams:

There is another music. The bright-colored candy
of her nakedness lifts her unexpectedly
to partake of its tune .

<p>the virgin of her mind greens and reds</p> <p>she becomes unaccountably virtuous way pretends it . (PB, 116)</p>	<p>Andromeda of those rocks, • those unearthly</p> <p>in her mockery of virtue though she in no</p>
---	---

Williams' experience in the bar leads him to question his authenticity
as a poet:

In the street it hit
me in the face as we started to walk again. Or
am I merely playing the poet? Do I merely invent
it out of whole cloth? I thought .

What in the form of an old whore in
a cheap Mexican joint in Juarez, her bare
can wagging crazily can be
so refreshing to me, raise to my ear
so sweet a tune, built of such slime? (PB, 116)

As he continues his journey with this question in mind, the "changeless,
endless/inescapable and insistent music" keeps forcing itself upon him,
even as he sits in a restaurant and chats about poetry with his friends.

Returning to the bridge, he suddenly realizes his function as a poet:

"What's that?/Oh, come on.//But what's that?//the music! the/music!"

(PB, 119) There in "the projecting angle of the bridge flange" sits this
same shapeless form; but now because he can act with it, he hears the
"music" that surrounds and protects it:

...shapeless or rather returned
to its original shape, armless, legless,
headless, packed like the pit of a fruit into
that obscure corner--or
a fish to swim against the stream--or
a child in the womb prepared to imitate life,

warding its life against
 a birth of awful promise. The music
 guards it, a mucus, a film that surrounds it,
 a benumbing ink that stains the
 sea of our minds--to hold us off--shed
 of a shape close as it can get to no shape,
 a music! a protecting music . (PB, 119-120)

The enclosure that Williams is describing (shapeless and yet returned to its original shape) refers not only to all particulars, which are themselves metamorphoses of the ground, but to "the poem" which must be another object of nature, "shed of a shape close as it can get to no shape." Like every other object in nature, protected by the "mucus" or "film" that surrounds it, the nearly shapeless form that gives it self-existence and so particularity and so life, "the poem" must act through nature and give order to experience. But it does not impose an empty form--rather the form, itself an active principle, must grow from the experience. Only in this way can man's experience of the ground be held, concretized, and revealed, and so saved from being lost in the "sea of our minds." The "made poem" is therefore a "protecting music," the only form that can give us a sense of existence. In this moment of revelation, Williams suddenly discovers his reason for being a poet: not only has he achieved the descent in the action of the poem, but he has accomplished, as a poet, the measured dance which is "the poem:"

I am a poet! I
 am. I am. I am a poet, I reaffirmed, ashamed (PB, 120)

As he re-affirms, the two movements of the poem, Williams-as-poet re-enacting his experience and Williams-as-poet searching for his justification to be a poet, come together as another "dance" of the imagination begins to form around his experience:

Now the music volleys through as in
 a lonely moment I hear it. Now it is all
 about me. The dance! The verb detaches itself
 seeking to become articulate . (PB, 120)

(ii) Paterson V: "The Poem" as a "Field of Action"

"The Desert Music" comes to a quiet close with Williams praising "the wonders of the brain that/hears that music" and its "skill sometimes to record it" (PB, 120). Through the action of the poem Williams has been able to rediscover and reassert that "theory of the poem" he had been developing as far back as in "The Wanderer." The measured dance that forms at the end as "The verb detaches itself/seeking to become articulate," not only closes the poem but brings us to the kind of movement Paterson V proposes, achieves, and sustains. In many ways this present assertion of the primacy of the mind's action allows for moves that Paterson makes in Book V that he could not fully actualize in Books I-IV. There, his inability to penetrate the divorce in the world continually prevented him from sustaining the measured dance of "the poem."²¹ In "The Desert Music," however, Williams proves that he can record the music of existence in spite of the stagnating "desert" of the world. Unlike Paterson in Books I-IV, he discovers that the fertility or infertility of the desert depends upon

the kind of mind a poet brings to his experience. "The mind always tries to break out of confinement," Williams tells John C. Thirlwall in a letter dated January 13, 1955:

It has tried every sort of interest which presents itself, even to a flight to the moon. But the only thing which will finally interest it must be its own intrinsic nature. In itself it must find devices which will permit it to survive--physical transportation to another planet will not help, for it will be the same mind which has not been relieved by movement. (SL, 330-331)

It is precisely this liberating movement of mind that Williams achieves in Paterson V, a poem that fully exemplifies what Williams means when he says that "the poem" can be a "plan for action," a way of reconciling "the people and the stones."²² The discoveries Williams made in "The Desert Music" are therefore a kind of prelude to his later accomplishment in this poem. Discussing the biographical background of the earlier poem, Sherman Paul goes so far as to argue that, written at a time when Williams' failing health made him lose some faith in the power of poetry to affirm life, it was the descent making the ascent of such a poem as Paterson V possible:

On the successful composition of this he staked his survival as a poet. Its success confirmed his faith in the resources of the self and in its renewal by art, and it made possible the resplendent creation of the last years of his life.²³

In our singular concern to get at the theoretical basis of Williams' poems, we have, however, described poetic form as an organic extension of experience without clarifying his investigations into structure that began in the early forties and continued until the end of his life, a period that includes Paterson I-IV, "The Desert Music," Paterson V, and his last major

poem, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower." Although he had always been interested in structure, only in the forties did he begin to search for a method that could hold and contain a much larger movement of thought than such poems as "The Right of Way," "To Waken an Old Lady," and "The Red Wheelbarrow." These short poems that we have already discussed are characteristic of Williams' earlier work in that they are written around a single event. "By 1941," says Linda Wagner, who discusses this development in the Poems of William Carlos Williams, "Williams had decided that specific structural techniques were essential..." if he was to draw larger elements of his world into his poems.²⁴ Possibly he felt that his battle over "the poem" as an organic extension of experience had more or less been won by this time; if his own poetry was to become a full-scale "plan for action" he had to make specific explorations into structure that would refine his poems and extend them into larger areas of thought. He implies as much in a letter written to Louis Martz in 1951:

We are through with the crude "fight" we have had to wage. Our position is now established, the approach must be more an inversion upon ourselves, we must now forget the external enemy, we must more question ourselves--a thing we didn't have time for formerly. (SL, 299)

As if to anticipate his later experiments, Williams wrote to Kay Boyle in 1932 describing what was then only a general outline of the kind of structural innovation he actualized in the forties and fifties:

There is, you see, in our minds the possibility of a technique which may be used. It must be large enough, free enough, elastic enough, new enough yet firm enough to hold the new well, without spilling. (SL, 133)

Sixteen years later, in 1948, giving a talk at the University of Washington, the first parts of Paterson behind him, Williams could be much more specific. "I propose sweeping changes from top to bottom of the poetic structure," he says in the lecture, arguing that it is time poets gave up all out-moded structural techniques that distort contemporary experience and begin considering "the poem" as a "field of action, at what pitch the battle is today and what may come of it" (SE, 280). Finally, in 1958, another ten years later, he published Paterson V and demonstrated, not in theory but in fact, that unless "the poem" becomes a "field of action" poets will not be able to give value to human experience. In Paterson V Williams accomplishes a structural mode "large enough, free enough, elastic enough, new enough yet firm enough to hold the new well, without spilling."

Along with these structural innovations, which we will return to shortly, Paterson V indicates that Williams also modified and extended other areas of his "theory of the poem." His search for a structural mode that could hold larger areas of human experience brought with it a much broader sense of the local-particular, along with a wider range of subject-matter and a more specific identification of the ground with the force of love in the world.

When Williams was concerned with the local-particular and its relation to "place" in the poems written before 1940, he was mainly interested in catching the movement of "objects" as they affected his consciousness. With Paterson I-IV, "The Desert Music," and Paterson V, he began to realize more fully than ever before that the local-particular is not necessarily confined to a specific geographical time and place but is simply one more fact in the whole range of human experience past and present. Possibly

the descent to memory he recorded in "The Descent" and published in both Paterson II and the Desert Music and Other Poems showed him that each time the mind acts in the world it brings to its experience and makes "present" the memory of past experiences. The world of memory therefore is also a part of the present and adds to experience as any other fact:

Memory is a kind
of accomplishment,
 a sort of renewal
 even
an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new places
 inhabited by hordes
 heretofore unrealized,
of new kinds—
 since their movements
 are toward new objectives
(even though formerly they were abandoned). (PB, 73)

Memory is an "accomplishment" precisely because it is not a return to the past. All past experiences made "present" are "new places" because they are placed in another context, and "their movements/are toward new objectives." In Paterson V, as Williams recalls friends he once knew, art works he once saw, and books he once read, he is actually opening areas of thought "heretofore unrealized." As he grew into old age he did not turn "to the realms of imagination and memory" and so "compensate" for his weakening physical strength, as Linda Wagner argues; rather he extended his earlier concerns into an area that would include the whole range of human experience, the "two worlds" he describes in "Shadows:"

one of which we share with the
rose in bloom
 and one,
by far the greater,
with the past,
the world of memory,

the silly world of history,
 the world
 of the imagination. (PB, 151)

Williams' descent into memory, therefore, is not simply a return to the past but a movement toward a realm of thought that both includes and extends the local-particular.

As Williams broadened his thought to include "the world/of the imagination" his subject-matter also changed. It appears as if his new concern with the whole of human experience allowed him to move further than his previous interest in "place" and its relation to the American culture could--at least in terms of writing a poem that gathers large areas of thought. By realizing that "place" is only one part of the whole world of human experience past and present, he can begin to live in the imaginative worlds of other artists and poets. And through the medium of his poems he can begin to gather together poets such as Sappho, Chaucer, and Allen Ginsberg, artists such as Klee, Gris, and Breughel, and writers such as Lorca, Gertrude Stein, and Soupault. After so many years of trying to delineate the "new," Williams discovers in Paterson V that a fifteenth century tapestry in a museum can teach him something about the structural possibilities of his own poems. Possibly he had this "new awakening" in mind when he confessed to Louis Martz that he had tended to ignore the achievements of the past to his own disadvantage:

We have been looking for too big, too spectacular
 a divergence from the old. The "new measure" is
 much more particular, much more related to the re-
 mote past than I, for one, believed. (SL, 299)

All of this new and wider content is brought into Paterson V to make up the "field of action" that the poem achieves. More important than this

content, therefore, is the way it is measured and made "present" in the poem. According to Williams, what a poet says is never as important as how he says it: structure, he argues in "The Poem as a Field of Action," "is precisely where we come into contact with reality" (SE, 283), adding further that "the only reality that we can know is MEASURE" (SE, 283). As we have already seen, measure is Williams' term for the process of ordering the action of experience into the dance of the imagination. As a "field of action," therefore, Paterson V is a kind of "place" where the "mind/lives" (PB, 75), a "world" through which it composes the facts of human experience into a revelation of themselves.

Discussing Byron Vazakas' work, Williams describes the kind of writing characteristic of Paterson V:

This combination of order with discovery, with exploration and revelation, the vigor of sensual stimulation, is of the essence of art. It brings relief. Nothing but invention, formal invention using always a new sensual facet for its recordings, can bring that relief...and pleasure.²⁶

By measuring the facts of experience in the act of writing the poem, Williams explores at the same time that he discovers and reveals something of the nature of the world. Working in the "field," the mind actually does its thinking within and through the various forces in the poem--each fact of experience being a particular force. "The poet does not...permit himself," says Williams in the Autobiography,

to go beyond the thought to be discovered in the context of that which he is dealing: no ideas but in things. The poet thinks with his poem, in that lies his thought, and that in itself is the profoundity. (A, 390-391)

Charles Olson calls this kind of writing "composition by field" in his essay on "Projective Verse."²⁷ In thinking by way of the measured dance of the poem, the "field of action" where various facts of experience interact, Williams encloses his experience and so manages to disclose the nature of the world--the two processes depending upon each other.²⁸

Criticism of this kind of poem can therefore be very difficult. If we approach Paterson V looking for a fixed structural form, for instance, the poem will probably appear to be meaningless. And if we were to look for meaning in the usual sense we would still be lost. Since the poem is an active process, more particularly a measured dance, the form of the poem is determined by the structure (the term Williams uses is "open formation" (SE, 212)), and whatever meaning it contains is subsumed by the large fact that it is a dance; and the dance, as an affirmation of the mind, justifies itself. As Williams says in his "Author's Introduction" to The Wedge:

It isn't what he [the poet] says that counts as a work of art, it's what he makes, with such intensity of perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity. (SE, 257)

One possible aid we might keep in mind as we read through Paterson V, therefore, is Williams' explanation of his use of the word "contrapuntally" (P, 278) at the end of the poem. The "beat" or action of the poem, he says, "goes according to the image."²⁹ This clue gives us a method for approaching a discussion of both Paterson V's content and structural form. If we can follow the movement of the imagery very closely and watch how various particulars are contrapuntally juxtaposed against each other, we may be able to get some sense of the poem's "field of action," the "in-

trinsic movement" that verifies "its authenticity." If we can explore its active landscape we will see further that Williams fuses content and structure so tightly that the two virtually justify each other and so prove the value of the poem.

Section I opens with Paterson as an old man returning to the old scenes, the opening lines catching the movement of his thought as it begins the dance of the poem:

In old age
 the mind
 casts off
 rebelliously
 an eagle
 from its crag³⁰

Paterson once again enters the particulars of his world--"the angle of a forehead/or far less/makes him remember..!"--"with a smile of recognition" because it is another spring and another time for the mind to touch the bare but concrete physicality of a world that has remained alive throughout the years:

It is early . . .
 the song of the fox sparrow
 reawakening the world
 of Paterson
 --its rocks and streams
 frail tho it is
 from their long winter sleep

His mind thrown off its crag rebelliously, he looks out of his window, "sees the birds still there" and is reassured by the life processes working through the world: "the rocks/the bare rocks/speak!" because he does not seek a belief that will remove him from contact with the physicality of things: "Not prophecy! NOT prophecy!/but the thing itself!"

After this initial process of moving into the activity of the world, the mind released to begin its movement, there follows the "first phase" of the many phases or "faces" of love as it is revealed in such particulars as birds, flowers, and women, all concretions that metamorphose the elemental processes of the ground, what Williams calls "the female principle of the world" (PB, 86). The landscape or "field" of the poem begins to grow as Paterson recalls Lorca's The Love of Don Perlimplin; at the same time he is reminded of man's perennial desire to possess love in all its purity:

the young girl
 no more than a child
 leads her aged bridegroom
 innocently enough
 to his downfall--

Already the image of Paterson begins to reverberate as we think of him as an old man being drawn to the world of spring and "the song of the fox-sparrow" as it reawakens his world. The same forces acting through the physical world move through Juliet, Beatrice, and the girl with "the wedding night's promiscuity" in her mind because she is determined "not to be left out of the party, as a moral gesture."

Through the reference to Lorca's play and its juxtaposition to Paterson's return to the world, Williams manages to set up the kind of relation men have to the "female principle" inherent in the ground. It is the force of love moving through the "young girl" that moves the "aged bridegroom" to desire her. In "The Orchestra" (PB, 80), where Williams describes the "assembled order" of a poem through the example of the orchestra, he is more specific about the ground that needs to be concretized:

Love is that common tone
 shall raise his fiery head
 and sound his note.

In Paterson V, love is the "tone" that all particulars hold in "common," each in its own concrete individuality. In spite of their inability to allow the force of love release through them, therefore, the "whore" and the "virgin" are two "faces" of the same ground:

The moral

proclaimed by the whorehouse
 could not be better proclaimed
 by the virgin, a price on her head,
 her maidenhead!

Following this statement, we are presented with two active images, one of the Unicorn and the other of Paterson, both placed directly against each other without comment:

The Unicorn

the white one-horned beast
 thrashes about
 root toot a toot!
 faceless among the stars
 calling
 for its own murder

Paterson, from the air

above the low range of its hills
 across the river
 on a rock-ridge
 has returned to the old scenes
 to witness

The image of the Unicorn came to Williams' attention in a visit to The Cloisters in New York where The Hunt of the Unicorn, a series of six Franco-Flemish (about 1500) tapestries and a fragment of another, are housed. Although no mention is made of the tapestries at this point in

the poem, Paterson's position on a "rock-ridge" suggests that he is overlooking the Hudson River from the hill upon which The Cloisters stand. Even more importantly, however, the two images are two more phases of the force of love in the world. Resigning himself to existence ("faceless among the stars"), the Unicorn thrashes about as he searches for a virgin to lead him to his "own murder," all according to his own nature.³¹ In this respect he becomes another face of the "aged bridegroom" in Lorca's play: both are led to their own downfall ("innocently enough") because of their weakness before the face of a virgin. The direct juxtaposition of the image of Paterson immediately connects him with both the Unicorn and the "aged bridegroom." A kind of "aged bridegroom" himself, Paterson returns to "the old scenes/to witness" and possibly touch the force of love through the particulars that metamorphose it. All of these men are active faces of the masculine counterpart to the feminine principle of the earth, making its appearance through the pure "virgin" and the impure but still revelatory "virgin-whore" complex stated previously. Without comment, Williams moves from these two images to a direct question and its answer, both of which draw the world of art into the "field of action:"

What has happened
 since Soupault gave him the novel
 the Dadaist novel
 to translate--
 The Last Nights of Paris.
 "What has happened to Paris
 since that time?
 and to myself"?

A WORLD OF ART
 THAT THROUGH THE YEARS HAS

SURVIVED!

--the museum became real
 The Cloisters--
 on its rock

casting its shadow--

"la réalité! la réalité!
la réa, la réa, la réalité!"

The "WORLD OF ART" is the only form that has survived time. The actual presence of Lorca's play and the memory of Soupault's novel proves to Williams that the world of the imagination has "SURVIVED!" in spite of the changes that have taken place in Paris and himself. This conclusion suddenly makes a museum containing five hundred year old art works come immediately alive--and leads Williams-Paterson to chant an affirmation of the absolute reality of art.

The image of the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries displayed in The Cloisters is possibly the most important thread running through the "world" of the poem. Unless we understand the various functions it assumes as either a part of the content or the form (or both at the same time), we will not be able to comprehend the way it keeps re-appearing to help Williams measure his experience. First, the tapestries are themselves a "measured" record of the force of love in the world, a "field" of active particulars "from frame to frame without perspective" (P, 274), as Williams says in section III. As such they exemplify the kind of movement that Williams is himself attempting to compose. Further, they are a living example, possibly more so than Lorca's play and Soupault's novel, if only because they are five hundred years old, of a "WORLD OF ART" that has managed to "SURVIVE" the passage of time. It is precisely because their world is an active field of particulars that they still reveal the nature of the ground of love so many years later. In their "world" all the various particulars, the "lady with the tail of her dress/on her arm" (P, 250), the "King" the enormous variety of flowers, even the action of "a rabbit's rump escaping/through the thicket" (P, 251) are all alive and

present because they are held and concretized through the measured dance of the artistic process. Finally, they are one of the particulars of Williams' "field." As such they are another fact of Williams' experience, along with the letters from friends, memories of art works experienced years before, memories of artists and their attempts to achieve a similar end, even all the elements of "divorce" in the world: in other words, as a part of the fabric of the poem, they too are made "present" in Williams' world. Possibly that is their final value. They can, even if five hundred years old, still become a part of the experience of men in the present age. As we trace their movement, therefore, we should be aware of the various functions they serve in helping Williams compose the measured dance of his "world."

After a letter from "Josie" that reveals the face of love through the warm friendship possible in a human community and the memories of flowers, the poem returns to the "virgin-whore" complex, juxtaposing against it an image of Audubon and his vision of the Unicorn:

The whore and the virgin, an identity:
 --through its disguises

thrash about--but will not succeed in breaking free :
 an identity
 Audubon (Au-du-bon), (the lost Dauphin)
 left the boat
 downstream
 below the falls of the Ohio at Louisville
 to follow
 a trail through the woods
 across three states
 northward of Kentucky . . .

He saw buffalo
 and more
 a horned beast among the trees
 in the moonlight
 following small birds
 the chickadee
 in a field crowded with small flowers

. . . its neck
 circled by a crown!
 from a regal tapestry of stars!
 lying wounded on his belly
 legs folded under him
 the bearded head held
 regally aloft .

If we can hold on to the movement of the images, we can get a sense of the active process that is going on in this poem as Williams measures particulars, one against the other. In this way, he too, as the tapestries have shown him, can compose a poem to reveal the nature of the ground. "Through its disguises," therefore, "The whore and the virgin" are both different faces of love, a point that had been implied earlier. Also thrashing about (an echo of the Unicorn thrashing about "faceless among the stars"), they do not succeed in "breaking free" because they have not released themselves to the ground. But the artist who can receive the life processes of the ground (which is precisely Williams' achievement in "The Desert Music") experiences the "identity" that subsumes both the "whore and the virgin." The immediate juxtapositioning of the image of Audubon, a 19th century American naturalist who travelled across America studying and painting birds (an echo of Paterson and the birds in the opening lines of the poem), reveals him as another particular face of the masculine force of art. Moving across "three states" searching for something lost (a contrapuntal reminder of both the Unicorn and Paterson's search for love), a kind of "lost Dauphin," he sees buffalo but "much more:" the image of "a horned beast among the trees" appears to him, once again linking him up with the Unicorn and Paterson who also returns to the "old scenes" to reawaken himself. His vision, we discover, comes from his ability to act with the "identity" of the ground; like the Unicorn, he too

is "following small birds/the chickadee." Yet the Unicorn, and it is important that we realize that Williams is not shaping his content to fit a pre-determined mould, is still a part of the tapestries, the seventh to be more exact. The beast in captivity with "its neck/circled by a crown," this tapestry depicts the consummation of his marriage with the virgin of love. Lying wounded but still heroic (his head is "held/regally aloft"), his power comes from his ability to be possessed by the face of love. Aware of this process of thinking and writing through the contrapuntal movement of active images, Williams raises a question that clarifies what is "happening" in the poem thus far:

What but indirection
will get to the end of the sphere?
Here
is not there,
and will never be.

In a poem as a "field of action," the active process of ordering the particulars of the poem into a measured dance is an end in itself-- the meaning of such a poem is the dance itself, the movement from image to image as facts are drawn into the "world" of the poem. The technique that Williams is using, therefore, can best be described as a process of "indirection." In other words, the individual facts of the poem are juxtaposed against each other without comment, presented directly without transitions. Like the tapestries, Williams' poem moves from detail to detail in such a way that the surface of his poem is flat and "without perspective" (P, 274). Only by writing in this kind of "field," says Williams, can he remain in the activity of a "present" world, the active "Here" that can never be a "there" as long as his thought remains in this

constantly moving "field:" "no ideas but in things."

After this comment on structural technique, more images are presented as the Unicorn is measured against both "the artist" and "Death," an element in the drama that has only been implied thus far:

	The Unicorn
has no match	
	or mate . the artist
	has no peer .
Death	
	has no peer:
wandering in the woods,	
	a field crowded with small flowers
in which the wounded beast lies down to rest .	

The images change context as we discover that "Death" also wanders "in the woods" where the "wounded beast" rests. Although the artist is the most capable person to concretize the force of love through his own particular experience (he has no "mate" in this sense), he is wounded in more ways than one. Possessed by the force of love, being mortal, he is ultimately at the mercy of death:

We shall not get to the bottom:
 death is a hole
 in which we are all buried
 Gentile and Jew.

And yet, although "The flower dies down/and rots away," Williams has the proof that art can survive the ravages of time, this knowledge preventing him from giving in to the fear of his own impending death:

...there is a hole
 in the bottom of the bag.

It is the imagination
 which cannot be fathomed.
 It is through this hole
 we escape . . .

Williams is not proposing that works of art become "places" into which we
 from a sense of death; quite the opposite, the imagination moves beyond
 death in the sense that it makes those "world" through which we can af-
 firm the force of love in the world. By making us aware of existence-in-
 itself, we have a power to confront our fear of dying:

So through art alone, male and female, a field of
 flowers, a tapestry, spring flowers unequaled
 in loveliness.

Through this hole
 at the bottom of the cavern
 of death, the imagination
 escapes intact.

. he bears a collar round his neck
 hid in the bristling hair.

"Male and female," the imagination and the force of love, what Williams
 later affirms in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," where he says that

If a man die
 it is because death
 has first
 possessed his imagination. (PB, 179)

As an artist and a "male" counterpart to the "female" earth, Paterson
 discovers that only through the active "field" of the poem, which is then
 a "field of/flowers, a tapestry," can he concretize and reveal the nature
 of love and so escape death "intact." Once again we should watch the move-
 ment of images, as the "field of flowers" recalls us to the Unicorn ta-
 pestrries and the "spring flowers unequaled/in loveliness" the letter from
 "Josie" that reminds Paterson that those flowers planted years before
 have been re-appearing every spring and are now bountifully thriving.
 Further, the quick flash to the Unicorn echoes past images while it informs

us how the artist overcomes death. In his physicality ("bristling"), the wounded beast wears a "collar round his neck," a concrete sign that he has triumphed only because he has been possessed by love, not death.

We are then directly presented with a letter from A.G. (Allen Ginsberg) to Williams thanking him for the introduction to Howl which is just about to be published. Although we should see the letter primarily as another fact in the "field" of the poem, its content significantly reveals another face of love. Ginsberg's poem itself is an open condemnation of a world which murders those very people who can liberate it from its perverted desires—its first line begins, "I have seen the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness...."³² He tells Williams in the letter that he will soon return to Paterson to "splash in the Passaic again only with a body so naked and happy City Hall will have to call out the Riot Squad." "City Hall" and its inability to "thrash" around in the physicality of the world (Ginsberg is a contrapuntal reappearance of the Unicorn image) is one more face of the "virgin-whore" complex, a life-denying force that works against the pure "virgin" of love. But the artist, Ginsberg also tells Williams, must move through the "desert" of the modern wasteland, incorporate it into his poems, and still affirm the feminine principle of the earth: "I mean to say Paterson is not a task like Milton going down to hell, it's a flower to the mind too." The letter appropriately ends with an invitation to read "THE ENCLOSED SUNFLOWER SUTRA," a poem that does in fact confront the devastating effects of "divorce" and still affirm the "Sunflower"³³ of the human spirit that can radiate the force of pure love. Ginsberg's own work, therefore, is one more proof of the validity of art:

--the virgin and the whore, which
 most endures? the world
 of the imagination most endures:

Pollock's blobs of paint squeezed out
 with design!

pure from the tube. Nothing else
 is real . . .

After a reference to the paintings of Pollock, another particular that explains Williams' techniques at the same time that it forms a part of the measured dance, Paterson turns directly to the reader and urges him to release himself to the movement of the world:

WALK in the world
 (you can't see anything
 from a car window, still less
 from a plane, or from the moon!?) Come
 off of it.)
 --a present, a "present"
 world, across three states (Ben Shahn saw it
 among its rails and wires,
 and noted it down) walked across three states
 for it . . .
 a secret world,
 a sphere, a snake with its tail in
 its mouth
 rolls backward into the past

Once again the movement of the images indicate the kind of action Williams is achieving in the poem. We began with Paterson "from the air" leaving the "rock-ridge" to return to the particulars of the world. This "natural" process of flowing with things is a kind of walking that Paterson had attempted in Book II. Unless we "WALK in the world," therefore, we will never get a sense of a "present, a 'present'/world:" the two different meanings of "present" tell us that being a part of the "present" or immediate world also opens the "presence" of the ground. The image of walking "across three states" recalls us to Audubon and his vision of the

Unicorn--Ben Shahn is then another face of the artist who can move through the "rails and wires" (a reminder of Ginsberg's letter), experience the force of love, and note "it down" in his art. The "secret world" is therefore the world of art that can hold, concretize, and reveal the ground through the particulars that contain it, even more specifically, the "field" that is now being constructed by Williams, as the repetition of the image of the sphere suggests: "What but indirection/will get us to the end of the sphere?" The world of the imagination is "a snake with its tail in/its mouth" because the "field of action" it presents it always "present," since the particulars it measures are always active. Only through art can men "roll backward into the past," and Williams is doing just that throughout the poem, and make the past perennially present, what Williams also accomplishes through the measured dance.

The images that complete the movement of section I. extend the "field" of the poem even further. More and more particulars are drawn into the dance as Williams continues to measure detail against detail. A letter from G.S. (Gary Snyder) describing the face of the pure "virgin" of love through the whores of a small Mexican town--" see a smooth faced girl against a door, all white . . . snow, the virgin, O bride"--and the almost obsessive desire men have to possess the force of love even in the midst of devastating divorce:

...making love to a whore is funny but it is not
 funny as her blood beneath flesh, her fingers fra-
 gile touch yours in rhythm not funny but heat and
 passion bright and white, brighter-white than lights
 of the whorehouses, than the gin fizz white, white
 and deep as birth, deeper than death (italics mine).

The letter is followed by the direct presentation of "A lady" and her

cousin "the King," taken from the tapestries, through indirection revealing that what G.S. discovers in the contemporary world is present in the fifteenth century, alive in a work of art: "cyclamen, columbine, if the art/with which these flowers have been/put down is to be trusted." This instance of a fruitful marriage with the ground is placed against a modern instance of divorce: losing her purity, G.B. "turned whore and got syphilis," one of the most frightening physical manifestations of the human cost involved. "...it was no joke as Gauguin found out," says Williams, "when his brains began to rot away." Although the physical deterioration can be controlled today, the mental "syphilis" that perverts the force of love is still dangerously present:

you'd think the brain
'd be grafted
on a better root

Section II resumes the movement begun in I as more facts of experience are measured into the dance of the poem. Williams' translation of Sappho's poem, for instance, is his attempt to "roll backward into the past" to retrieve it for the present: her own life and poetry are another example of the "male-female" relation involved in art. Other particulars enter the "field" as the images of section I reappear in different faces and different contexts, all still presented through "indirection," to use Williams' term. Ezra Pound's letter condemning usury as the root cause of "divorce" in the contemporary world reveals the "virgin-whore" complex on a national level. Despite his temporal distance from Sappho, both share the same ground; but more important^{ly}, both are made "present" in the poem. The same applies to the woman from Williams-Paterson's "local"

world, through her disguises becoming another face of Sappho. In her determination to be masculine this anonymous woman that Paterson sees only momentarily ("And she was gone!") still discloses her essential womanness, although the flowers "pinned flat to her/right//breast" are far from natural. Although lesbian, she nevertheless shows Paterson that the "virgin" of love lives within her. As a modern concretion of the Unicorn, therefore, he searches for her through the streets of Paterson: "...I have sought you/daily without success," he says, and if he manages to find her one day he will ask her a "thousand questions," but most importantly, "your NAME!"

The "search" itself is the active principle underlying the attempt of artists to achieve the movement of the measured dance. Mezz Mezzrow, Gertrude Stein, Paul Klee, Dürer, Leonardo, Bosch, Freud, Picasso, and Juan Gris, not to mention a "letter from a friend," apparently a fellow artist of Paterson, who has "slept like a baby" because one of his art pieces has been successful in catching the force of love in the world--all of these artists are trying to "imitate," to use Williams' own term, the process of nature in their own work:

Satyrs dance!
 all the deformities take wing
 Centaur
 leading to the rout of the vocables
 of Gertrude Stein--but
 you cannot be
 an artist
 by mere ineptitude
 The dream
 is in pursuit!

When asked about the image of the satyrs, Williams said that they "are understood as action, a dance," and added further, "I always think of the Indians there."³⁴ To Williams, as our discussion of In the American

Grain has shown, the "Indian" represents the kind of consciousness that acts with the movement of the ground through the particulars that concretize it. Directed to the process of art, then, the dance of the satyrs indicates that art must itself "imitate" the force of nature by re-enacting the artist's physical dance through the world. When he moves with the processes of nature, "all the deformities take wing" as he penetrates the "divorce" and experiences the "music" of existence that surrounds him, as Williams had done in "The Desert Music." In this activity, however, he does not simply assign "meaning" to facts, but actually draws the facts-as-facts into a "field of action," that "place" where the mind constantly searches for a sense of the ground: "The dream/is in pursuit." Explaining his poetics to an interviewer, therefore, Williams says that a poem "is a complete little universe," a "field" of particular forces that is complete unto itself--which is precisely why/^{he}states further that "in poetry, you're listening to two things

. . . you're listening to the sense, the common sense of what it says. But it says more. That is the difficulty.

The "more," of course, is the dance itself, the active movement of the poem as a "field of action," a "universe" where the mind breathes and encloses experience, and so discloses the nature of the world.

The measured dance the poem affirms, however, is not simply an aesthetic issue. The act of ordering experience into a revelation of itself gives men a sense of the ground of their desire, that pure "virgin" of love that sometimes breaks through the disguises of the world. Life therefore places a heavy responsibility on the artist. Even in the face of the often terrifying reality of "divorce" in the world, he must, as "the Jew/in the pit/

among his fellows," remain faithful to his art, sometimes comforting his friends even as they are being slaughtered:

he had not yet been hit
 but smiled
 comforting his companions .
 comforting
 his companions

As section III continues the measured dance, Williams-Paterson begins to understand the sacredness of his task as a poet. More intensely than in the previous two sections, he realizes that the process of measuring experience is a religious exercise involving the desire of all men in all times and places. In his devotion to love, Peter Breughel, as one instance of many possible instances, is a contemporary of Paterson. His painting of the Nativity shows him to be another face of the Unicorn, one more man possessed by the "virgin" of love. Through the particularities of his own world he was able to experience the metamorphosis of love through the womb of the earth, the birth of Christ through the womb of the Virgin. Aware of the "divorce"--his painting shows a group of "Armed men,/savagely armed men" completely bewildered as they look upon a scene beyond their comprehension--he managed to paint the invisible "music" of existence:

Peter Brueghel the artist saw it
 from the two sides: the
 imagination must be served--
 and he served dispassionately

Breughel's painting, therefore, becomes one more affirmation of "the imagination/and love," the "light" (PB, 180) that is a possible "plan for action" in the contemporary world. With the power of art as his "Deep

Religious Faith" (PB, 95), the aging Paterson, the passion of his youth gone, still manages to remain in the world, "living and writing/answering letters/and tending his flower/garden," at the same time "trying/to get the young/to foreshorten/their errors in the use of words...." Even as he approaches "death he is possessed by many poems." He still responds to the vitality of life processes and still feels the absolute presence of love in the world. Watching "A flight of birds" seeking out nests in the mating season, he is calmed by their presence. These actual birds, in turn, recall him to a "12th century" art work as all distance between past and present disappears in the action of the poem. Almost as quickly the image of the Unicorn reappears, only this time moving directly toward Paterson himself, re-entering the "field of action" to become absolutely "present" in the poem:

Now I come to the small flowers
 that cluster about the feet
 of my beloved

--the hunt of
 the Unicorn and
 the god of love
 of virgin birth

The mind is the demon
 drives us . well,
 would you prefer it to
 turn vegetable and

wear no beard?

--shall we speak of love
 seen only in a mirror
 --no replica?
 reflecting only her impalpable spirit?
 which is she whom I see
 and not touch her flesh?

The Unicorn roams the forest of all true
 lover's minds. They hunt it down. Bow wow! sing hey the
 green holly!

--every married man carries in his head
 the beloved and sacred image
 of a virgin
 whom he has whored .
 but the living fiction
 a tapestry
 silk and wool shot with silver threads
 a milk-white, one-horned beast
 I, Paterson, the King-self
 saw the lady
 through the rough woods...

In the action of this passage Paterson moves from his particular world and the "small flowers" surrounding the "feet/of my beloved." In the next instant he enters the "world" of the tapestries, then realizing that each man searches for the Unicorn in his own mind and wants to possess the "god of love/of virgin birth." Not until the mind manages to hold on to the force of love as it moves through the particulars of the world will it be able to rest: the search for a concrete revelation of love drives each man into "the hunt." But it is finally "the living fiction/a tapestry," the world of the imagination, that can give men a sense of the "beloved and sacred image" they seek.

When Williams first made a descent to the ground in "The Wanderer" he could not have foreseen the full implications of his experience. Now nearing the end of his life, he recalls that earlier poem and draws it into the "field" of the poem:

"the river has returned to its beginnings"
 and backward
 (and forward)
 it tortures itself within me
 until time has been washed finally under:
 and "I knew all (or enough
 it became me .

As "the river" returns "to its beginnings," Williams comes full circle in Paterson V. The descent he now discovers is not only to the ground of America but to the whole of human experience. When he affirms the "I, Paterson, the King-self," therefore, he once again asserts the value of the measured dance he has accomplished in his poem. Only because he has been able to enclose his particular experience in the active "world" of the poem, can he reveal something of the nature of love in the world. It is then the "I," the particularity of each man's experience as it occurs in the world, that reveals the universality of his life:

Paterson
 keep your pecker up
 whatever the detail!
 Anywhere is everywhere

Despite their temporal and spatial distance from Paterson, the tapestries are alive and "present" precisely/because the faces of love are there held in all of their concrete particularity, constantly inter-acting in the measured dance of their world. With this knowledge, Paterson actually enters their "field" and begins measuring its measured dance, drawing detail after detail into the "world" of his poem: "I have told you, this/is a fiction, pay attention." Only through this kind of measuring can he get a sense of the ground as it appears through the facts of human experience--which, in turn, is why

The measure intervenes, to measure is all we know,
 a choice among the measures . . .

 the measured dance
 "unless the scent of a rose
 startle us anew"

Equally laughable
 is to assume to know nothing, a

chess game
massively, "materially," compounded!

Yo ho! ta ho!

We know nothing and can know thing .
 but
the dance, to dance to a measure
contrapuntally,
 Satyrically, the tragic foot.

Without the measured dance, then, men cannot get a sense of the force of love as it moves in their world. The last line of the poem, however, indicates that Williams' affirmation of "the poem" as a "field of action" is no easy optimism. We must learn "to dance to a measure/contrapuntally,/Satyrically," not simply to revel in life, but to meet death directly. Williams' measure is satyric and "tragic" at the same time: only by knowing that we are really alive, which is exactly what "the poem" accomplishes, can we have a deep enough sense of life processes to talk against death. "I drag it out/and keep on talking/for I dare not stop" (PB, 154), says Williams in "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower." To stop talking would mean to stop affirming the force of love through the measured dance of the poem. When asked what follows the completed movement of Paterson V, Williams answered very simply: "Go on repeating it. At the end--the last part, the dance."³⁵ As an "open formation" (SE, 212), Paterson V is only one movement in a continuous series of movements that Williams must complete as long as he lives. "...Whatever my life has been," he once said in a letter, "it has been single in purpose, simple in design and constantly directed to the one end of discovery, if possible, of some purpose in being alive" (SL, 238). Williams, therefore, asserted the measured dance of "the poem" as the only way that men, along with the "wise men" in "The Gift" (PB, 61), could come

to the feet of "the god of love/of virgin birth," the rich ground that contains their desire and gives them a "purpose in being alive:"

What is death,
beside this?

Nothing. The wise men
came with gifts
and bowed down
to worship
this perfection. (PB, 62)

Conclusion

With Williams' assertion that "the poem" is the only "plan for action" to solve the problem of contact our study comes to an end. Like Emerson, and Thoreau in Walden, he also realized that men get a sense of the ground of their desire only when they give up all fixed forms of perception and begin to act with the particulars of their world. With the exception of Stevens, all three succeeded in moving back behind those forms of perception that impose categories on the world, thereby placing the strongest emphasis upon the active process of experience. They all realized, again with the exception of Stevens, whose epistemological preoccupations abstracted him from the world, that only those forms that are an organic extension of experience can hold on to, concretize, and reveal the nature of the ground. Emerson found his solution in the correspondential symbol, Thoreau in Walden as a work of art, and Williams in the "made poem."

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, each writer, as far

as possible, has been treated wholly within the context of his own work. The loose structure allowed for an intense investigation of each writer's particular concern with the ground. In this way, this study has tried, at least at this time, to avoid making larger generalizations that might have enclosed each of these writers into a less meaningful framework.

Notes

Section One

¹The following texts of Williams' work, each accompanied by its appropriate abbreviation for purposes of citation, are used in this discussion and the discussion of Williams in Section Five: The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (New York, 1967): A; The Collected Earlier Poems of William Carlos Williams (New York, 1951): CEP; The Collected Later Poems of William Carlos Williams (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1963):CLP; In the American Grain (New York, 1956): IAG; Kora in Hell: Improvisations (San Francisco, 1967): KH; Paterson (New York, 1963): P; Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems (New York, 1962): PB; The Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams (New York, 1954): SE; The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams, ed. John C. Thirlwall (New York, 1957): SL; Spring and All (Dijon, France, 1923): SA. The first four citations are from the following texts respectively: SE, 30; SE, 134; SE, 17; SA, 1.

²Contact, I-IV, 1920-1923, ed. William Carlos Williams and Robert McAlmon, p. 1.

³Contact, I-IV, p. 18.

⁴Louis L. Martz, "On the Road to Paterson," The Poem of the Mind (New York, 1966), p. 134. Aside from Martz's criticism of Williams, In the American Grain has been slow to be recognized as an important ground of Williams' thought. Vivienne Koch's William Carlos Williams (Norfolk, Connecticut, 1950) provides no more than a summary statement of its content; Linda Welshimer Wagner's The Poems of William Carlos Williams: A Critical Study (Middletown, 1963) only mentions it briefly; and Alan Ostrom's The Poetic World of William Carlos Williams does not recognize it at all. Walter Scott Peterson's book, An Approach to Paterson (New Haven, 1967), however, uses it as the basis of a study of Paterson. Also published recently, James Guimond's The Art of William Carlos Williams: A Discovery and Possession of America (Urbana, 1968) has it running throughout its study of Williams' thought.

⁵The term "contact," as it is used throughout this study, refers to the act of touching, not the surface of physical facts alone, but the life processes of the earth.

⁶The concept of an "ideal" America would have made Williams shudder. For him there is only a true and false one. In his article, "Doctor Williams' American Grain" (Tennessee Studies in Literature VIII, ed. Richard Beale Davis, pp. 1-16), Benjamin T. Spencer's analysis of the three Americas in In the American Grain--"a kind of Platonic idea of America historically expressed in the American dream; a covert America intuited by poets like Poe and Whitman; and finally an existential America, vulgar and recalcitrant in its temporal pursuits" (p. 6)--fails to bring out this important either/or aspect of Williams' view of America.

⁷See previous note.

⁸Charles Olson, Human Universe and Other Essays, ed. Donald Allen (New York, 1967), p. 96. Possibly my use of Charles Olson should be explained. Aside from the fact that Olson is indebted to Williams' explorations in poetics, his own works often clarify and define Williams' thought, and so help us to understand Williams' poetry. In the Poems of William Carlos Williams, Linda Wagner justifiably states that if the "terminology is lacking" to comprehend Williams' poems, "it must be invented" (p. 7). Since Olson's own concerns help us to find some of the "terminology" to understand Williams' poems, I have decided to quote from his work where appropriate. Rather than trying to explain Williams in out-moded categories, as A. Kingsley Weatherhead in The Edge of the Image (Seattle, Washington, 1967) has done, by attempting to read both Williams and Marianne Moore as advocates of Coleridgean "fancy" rather than "imagination," I have throughout this study approached Williams on his own terms.

⁹The misunderstanding of this term "primitivism" often shows up in criticism of Williams and other American poets. Joseph E. Slate, in an otherwise interesting article on the relation of Williams to Hart Crane in their use of history, is one instance. In "William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, and the 'Virtue of History'" (Texas Studies in Literature and Language, VI (Winter 1965), 486-511), he describes Williams' connection to Whitman in the following statement: "...Williams praises Whitman for making the descent, sinking down through an overlying false layer to the land itself by rejecting what ordinarily passes for culture to become a primitive. The spirit of Whitman's primitivism must be preserved by respecting the memory of his "barbaric yawp." But the yawp itself is part of history, a primitivistic attitude toward ideas and techniques which has no place in the age of Eliot" (p. 497). Slate continues: "Whitman's method is antiquated, but his spirit is as authentically American as that of the Indians, our first primitives who also knew nothing" (p. 497). Aside from making a highly debatable statement on Eliot, he fails to see that the elemental, primary, or "primitive," as Whitman, Crane, and Williams used the term, was not opposed to culture, but rather subsumed it in being prior.

¹⁰Charles Olson, Human Universe and Other Essays, pp. 5-6.

¹¹This statement is the basis for the last section of this study which will discuss Williams' "theory of the poem."

¹²The titles of the poems discussed from Spring and All are from the Collected Earlier Poems. I have adopted any changes, usually typographical, that Williams made for the later collection. Sometimes, as in the case of "is" for "his" in line 10 of "The Black Winds," the change is significant.

¹³Ezra Pound, Selected Poems of Ezra Pound (New York, 1957), pp. 49-50.

Section Two

¹Generally I agree with Rene Wellek's argument in Confrontations (New Jersey, 1965) that Emerson's relation to Coleridge and European Romanticism should be seen, not in terms of direct influence, but in terms of a common antagonism toward mechanistic philosophy. To quote Wellek: "Emerson...was looking among the Germans for support for his faith. He found it there, and that is why he praised them, though mostly from a distance. He was not interested in the processes of their thinking. He was merely interested in their results, which seemed to him a confirmation of a world-view which contradicted and refuted the materialism of the eighteenth century" (p. 210).

²Morse Peckham, "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," Romanticism: Points of View, ed. Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe (New Jersey, 1964), p. 212.

³Morse Peckham, p. 215.

⁴Morse Peckham, p. 216.

^{4a}Richard P. Adams, "Romanticism and the American Renaissance," American Literature, XXIII (1952), p. 432. Anyone interested in Adams' approach to American literature might consult the following articles written by him: "American Renaissance: An Epistemological Problem," Emerson Society Quarterly, No. 35, II (1964), pp. 2-7; "Emerson and the Organic Metaphor," Interpretations of American Literature, ed. Charles Feidelson, Jr. and Paul Brodtkorb, Jr. (New York, 1959), pp. 137-152; "Whitman: A Brief Re-evaluation," Tulane Studies in English, Vol. 5 (1955), pp. 111-149.

⁵All citations from Emerson's writings are from The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson, Centenary Edition, 12 Volumes (Boston, 1903) which is abbreviated as ECW and followed by the volume and page number. In consecutive order, the citations thus far are from ECW, VIII, 71, ECW, IV, 20, ECW, VIII, 20, ECW, I, 87, and ECW, IV, 34.

⁶The main direction of my study of Emerson is toward a clarification of some terms that have tended to distort the nature of his thought. When some of the barriers are removed, Emerson's historical and theoretical distance from Williams is not so large as sometimes supposed.

⁷Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago, 1953), pp. 115-116. In addition to Feidelson's very sophisticated discussion of symbolism, the following works on Emerson have helped toward clarifying his thought: Vivian C. Hopkins, Spires of Form: A Study of Emerson's Aesthetic Theory (New York, 1965), especially Chapter I called "The Creative Process;" Sherman Paul, Emerson's Angle of Vision (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), by far the most helpful work of criticism available on Emerson; Jonathan Bishop, Emerson on the Soul (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964).

⁸Charles Feidelson, Jr., p. 116.

⁹Charles Feidelson, Jr., p. 117.

¹⁰Metamorphosis is also a part of the process of nature within itself. Emerson affirms Goethe's notion that a leaf is the basic unit of botany, and that a part of any aspect of nature contains the whole: "Thus Goethe suggested the leading idea of modern botany, that a leaf or the eye of a leaf is the unit of botany, and that every part of a plant is only a transformed leaf to meet a new condition; and, by varying the conditions, a leaf may be converted into any other organ, and any other organ into a leaf. In like manner, in osteology, he assumed that one vertebra of the spine might be considered as the unity of the skeleton: the head was only the uttermost vertebrae transformed" (ECW, IV, 275).

¹¹In this respect I differ greatly from Bishop who sees the Over-Soul in terms of the Soul as the "ordering" mind: "Here is an opportunity to refine again on the definition of the Soul as mind," says Bishop after discussing the classifying activity of the scientific mind, and continues, "If the word 'classification' works for Emerson as a kind of eighteenth-century shorthand for those intellectual systems through which one organizes one's knowledge of the universe, the Oversoul is Emerson's peculiar nickname for any potential wielder of such a system. It is oneself in the act of knowing some state of affairs by way of a system; when we classify, we are the Oversoul" (Emerson on the Soul, pp. 56-57). Although I can sympathize with Bishop's attempt to clarify the meaning of the term, I think that he has limited the implications of it by ignoring the dependency of the mind itself on the Unity or source that subsumes the universe and all things (man included) in it.

¹²Emerson uses so many different terms to describe this "source," the ground of all things, that this notion of an "energy of being," a necessary critical tool under the circumstances, will help us in our discussion.

¹³As we begin to see through some of Emerson's terms, we find that the "energy of being" bears striking resemblances to Williams' concept of the ground in In the American Grain.

¹⁴Like Williams, Emerson was interested in making the past present to contemporary experience. Because each man is an incarnation of the "universal mind," all present experience contains past experience. In "History" Emerson writes: "All inquiry into antiquity, all curiosity respecting the Pyramids, the excavated cities, Stonehenge, the Ohio Circles, Mexico, Memphis--is the desire to do away with this wild, savage, and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place the Here and the Now" (ECW, II, 11).

¹⁵Compare this process to the poetry of Wallace Stevens as discussed in Section Four of this study.

¹⁶In "Poetry and Imagination," Emerson makes the following important distinction between imagination and fancy: "Imagination respects the cause. It is the vision of an inspired soul reading arguments and affirmations in all Nature of that which it is driven to say. But as soon as this soul

is released a little from its passion, and at leisure plays with the resemblances and types, for amusement, and not for its moral end, we call its action Fancy" (ECW, VIII, 28). Fancy, therefore, is concerned only with the surface of things, while the imagination sees into man's primal relation to the energy of being.

¹⁷For a fuller discussion of the arc and the circle, see the chapter "The Arc of the Circle" in Sherman Paul's Emerson's Angle of Vision (pp. 103-131).

¹⁸In the Reign of Wonder (Cambridge, 1965), Tony Tanner makes the following important statement on the implications of Emerson's interest in the particulars of experience: "...his influence helped to make available whole areas of contemporary American life which had hitherto been considered all but ineligible for serious treatment....He himself chooses the simplest of objects as carriers of sublime revelations. His prose often seems to create a still-life of the radiance of things seen. Emerson succeeded in vivifying the 'common, the familiar, the low': he dignified the details of 'the earnest experience of the common day'. He invokes a new respect for contingent, mundane particulars" (p. 39). It is in this notion of the universality of the particular that Emerson actually anticipates the work of Williams. See above Section Five.

¹⁹Within this context, Emerson argues that each culture and each age must define its "original" relation to the universe in symbols relevant to the present experience of that culture and age. Man lives in a particular time and place and can only participate in the history of humanity by finding a language consonant with his experience. "The test or measure of poetic genius is the power to read the poetry of affairs,--to fuse the circumstance of to-day," writes Emerson in terms that Williams would have approved, "not to fuse Scott's antique superstitions, or Shakespeare's, but to convert those of the nineteenth century and of the existing nations into universal symbols. 'Tis easy to repaint the mythology of the Greeks, or of the Catholic Church, the feudal castle, the crusade, the martyrdoms of mediaeval Europe; but to point out where the same creative force is now working in our own houses and public assemblies; to convert the vivid energies acting at this hour in New York and Chicago and San Francisco, into universal symbols, requires a subtile and commanding thought." (ECW, VIII, 34).

²⁰Sherman Paul, Emerson's Angle of Vision, p. 130.

²¹In this discussion of Emerson I have purposefully limited myself to the basis of the correspondential symbol in the metamorphic universe. The actual process of perceiving correspondential symbols is studied thoroughly by Hopkins, Paul, and Bishop in their work on Emerson.

²²cf. ECW, II, 311: "In common hours, society sits cold and statuesque. We all stand waiting, empty,--knowing, possibly, that we can be full, surrounded by mighty symbols which are not symbols to us, but prose and trivial toys. Then cometh the god which converts the statues into fiery men, and by a flash of his eye burns up the veil which shrouded all things,

and the meaning of the very furniture, of cup and saucer, of chair and clock and tester, is manifest. The facts which loomed so large in the fogs of yesterday,--property, climate, breeding, personal beauty and the like, have strangely changed their proportions. All that we reckoned settled shakes and rattles; and literature, cities, climates, religions, leave their foundations and dance before our eyes."

²³Like organic experience, the poet's speech should flow "with the flowing of nature." Although Emerson is not specifically interested in poetic structure as Williams, his notion of the metamorphic symbol implies that poetic form is an extension of experience. "Not imitation but creation is the aim" (ECW,II,351), he says in "Art"--a work of art should be another product of nature, another object in a world of objects: "It is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem--a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing" (ECW,III,9-10). Interestingly enough, Williams' "theory of the poem" is built around just such a statement. (See above Section Five)

Section Three

¹William Carlos Williams, In the American Grain, p. 226. See my discussion of In the American Grain in Section One of this study.

²William Carlos Williams, p. 226.

³Charles R. Anderson, The Magic Circle of Walden (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, 1968), p. vii.

⁴Charles R. Anderson, p. 14.

⁵Charles R. Anderson, p. 10.

⁶Richard Poirier, A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature (New York, 1966), pp. 13-14. In order to possess the natural part of America smothered by conventions, Poirier argues, American fiction writers reveal an attempt to build an artistic "world elsewhere" that will house their true selves. In doing so, they reject the existing biological, historical, social, political, and literary environment. The peculiarity of American literature, according to Poirier, is less a result of the environment in which the writer finds himself than the environment he struggles to create in order to sustain his hero. It is less a concern for criticizing the "real" world than a desire to displace it. The "world elsewhere" provides both an escape from an apparently oppressive world and an artistic time and place to house the writer's true self. Poirier includes Walden in his study. Although I found his approach to American fiction informative, my discussion of Walden moves in an opposite direction. I will attempt to illustrate that Walden is not a "world else-

where" but the world itself hidden beneath the abstractions of Concord, that the world of man's experience can only be known when it is concretized and revealed in an art form. The "world" of Walden is not an escape from Concord, but a discovery of its authentic roots.

⁷Charles R. Anderson, pp. 3-4.

⁸All subsequent citation from Walden is from Walden and Civil Disobedience, ed. Owen Thomas (New York, 1966). This passage is from page 1. The introductory passage from Thoreau's Journals is from Approaches to Walden, ed. Lauriat Lane, Jr. (San Francisco, 1964), p. 13.

⁹In this discussion the name "Thoreau" refers to that fictive narrator and subject who lives wholly in the artistic world of Walden.

¹⁰As in our discussions of Williams and Emerson, a distinction must be kept between material facts and those forces of nature beneath the "surface of things." As we have seen, both Williams and Emerson were concerned, not with nature itself, but the processes that subsume it. The same applies to Thoreau's sense of his term "Nature" in Walden.

¹¹Sherman Paul, The Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration (Urbana, 1958), p. 304.

¹²See my comment on Emerson's "organic philosophy" on pages 44-45 for a similar view of forms that are an organic extension of content rather than artificial impositions.

¹³Paul Schwaber, "Thoreau's Development in Walden," Criticism, Vol. V, No. 1 (Winter 1963), pp. 68-69.

¹⁴Paul Schwaber, p. 70.

¹⁵Paul Schwaber, p. 64.

¹⁶See below pages 58-60.

¹⁷See Section Two, note 5 for my citation procedure regarding Emerson's works.

¹⁸Richard Poirier, A World Elsewhere, p. 15.

¹⁹See my comments on Poirier in note 6.

Section Four

¹Joseph N. Riddell, "The Contours of Stevens Criticism," The Act of the Mind, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce and J. Hillis Miller (Baltimore, 1965), p. 244.

²Accompanied by the appropriate abbreviation, the following texts of Stevens will be used for citations in this discussion: The Necessary Angle: Essays on Reality and the Imagination (New York, 1951): NA; The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York, 1961): CP; Opus Posthumous (New York, 1957): OP. The first three quotations are from the following texts respectively: OP, 241; CP, 502; NA, 45.

³J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), p. 259.

⁴Although differing considerably in argument, their criticism indicates the kind of problems and complications Stevens' poetry presents. In Poets of Reality ("Wallace Stevens," 217-284), Miller says that Stevens moves toward the nothingness underlying all appearances as he becomes aware of the contradictions in his position. What seems to be a defeat, however, is "the supreme victory, for the nothing is not nothing. It is. It is being" (p. 279). Stevens' later poetry, according to Miller, is "a revelation of being" (p. 277). He explains Stevens' contradictions in the following statement: "The paradoxical appearance of being in the form of nothing cause the ambiguity of his poetry" (p. 279). Roy Harvey Pearce, seeing the problem in a somewhat different light, says that Stevens' attempt to achieve a dialectical compromise between the imagination and reality, the Romantic solution to the subject-object problem, failed because he tried to find a rational solution to a problem essentially unsolvable. In "The Last Lesson of the Master" (The Act of the Mind (Baltimore, 1965), pp. 121-142), Pearce writes: "Seeking after the cure was itself a kind of disease--an unnecessary complication" (p. 139). The later Stevens therefore discovers that reality should be approached intuitively and not analytically. Moving toward a new beginning, Stevens achieves a new "appreciation" of reality and so once again affirms the process of poetry: "In the seeking itself lay the source of support. The revelation in the last poems [Pearce's argument is based largely on a few posthumous poems] is flickering but sure" (p. 142). Finally, Riddell in the Clairvoyant Eye (Baton Rouge, 1965) says that the later Stevens accepts the epistemological impossibility of knowing reality and yet affirms the processes of the mind that make reality possible: "The act rather than the end of meditation becomes the mode of being for a poet come to the end of his quest for reality" (p. 247). Both Miller and Pearce see the later Stevens moving out of the world of the mind; according to Riddell, he discovers that the "ground of being is in his mind" (p. 250). Assuming that the three processes, that of writing a poem, of creating the world of the self, and of knowing reality are inextricably tied together, Riddell argues that reality, in the later poetry of Stevens, is contained in the space-time matrix of the mind (p. 250). Poetry is therefore "the form or forms by which we see reality, forms of our own making--icons in which is contained not the world but the world of the self. The icon or poem is the ultimate symbol for the marriage of mind and reality, self and world" (p. 249). Equating being and knowing, the later Stevens, according to Riddell, affirms the continuous creation of the world and the self in poetry: "to be in the act of the mind" (p. 273).

Interestingly enough, all three critics argue that the later Stevens becomes aware of major contradictions in his thought. Even though the

direction of their studies differ, they all say that he once again affirms the process of poetry in his later poetry. My own discussion attempts to show that he did not solve the problems inherent in his epistemological assumptions. His later poetry shows the necessary finality of the perceptual issues in the Collected Poems. His preoccupation with epistemology, rather than solving his perceptual problems, actually distanced him from the reality he sought.

In a more recent study of Stevens, James Baird argues that Stevens' poetry is a totally private world of a self that has nothing other than what it can create for itself. Called the Dome and the Rock, Baird's study sees Stevens' Collected Poems as a Grand Poem, a kind of Dome of the self built over the Rock of reality. Baird, however, limits his sense of reality to the surface of things. In doing so, he completely ignores Stevens' search for a ground outside of the self, which, in turn, is the basis of my study.

⁵I have adopted Stevens' attitude toward "metaphor." My subsequent distinction between "revelatory metaphor" and "decorative metaphor" will attempt to show how Stevens' notion is limited by the epistemological assumptions he brings to his experience.

⁶Roy Harvey Pearce, "The Last Lesson of the Master," p. 129.

⁷Frank Doggett, Stevens's Poetry of Thought (Baltimore, 1966), p. 200. Stevens' sense of "reality" as a base of perception bears striking similarities to the writers already discussed in this study. It became for him the source of all things, the centre of a possible belief. As that which subsumes objects, it is similar to Williams' notion of a "ground," to what I called Emerson's "energy of being," and to Thoreau's "Nature" in Walden. Williams, Emerson, and Thoreau, however, all realized that rational categories such as "subjective" and "objective" distanced a "reality" that could only be known through a direct experience of particulars.

⁸See above pp. 208 ff.

⁹Joseph N. Riddell, Clairvoyant Eye, p. 44.

¹⁰I think that an understanding of Kant can clarify both Stevens and many of the epistemological problems plaguing modern thought. With Kant the outlines are not so blurred by historical biases, and so the issues seem much clearer. Bella K. Milmed in Kant and Current Philosophical Issues (New York, 1961) goes so far as to claim that when the "essential Kantian structure is divested of its obsolete nonphilosophical background and restated in modern terms, many present philosophical and epistemological issues can be clarified" (p. 233). She adds: "A clarification of Kant in modern terms is at the same time a clarification of all his direct modern successors" (p. 233). Although Stevens could not be considered a "successor" to Kant, his involvement in modern epistemological problems can be understood in Kant's terms.

¹¹Immanuel Kant, Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (London, 1963), p. 67 and p. 68.

¹²Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria Volume I, ed. J. Shawcross (London, 1962), p. 202.

¹³Regarding Kant's influence on Coleridge, Rene Wellek in Immanuel Kant in England 1793-1838 (Princeton, 1931) makes the following statement: "the Kantian doctrine of the ideality of space and time is adopted: sensibility is defined as the 'recipient property of the soul, from the original constitution of which we perceive and imagine all things under the forms of space and time" (p. 107).

¹⁴Samuel Taylor Coleridge, p. 174.

¹⁵Samuel Taylor Coleridge, p. 202.

¹⁶Williams would call this description of "resemblances" a proposal for "crude symbolism" mainly because it ignores the particularity of things as self-existing objects. (See below pages 21-24)

¹⁷Immanuel Kant, pp. 269-270.

¹⁸Unlike Kant, Stevens saw the thing-in-itself as more than a logical necessity. He saw it as hypothetically actual, not realizing that the terms of its existence depend upon the assumption that we are limited to a world of appearances.

¹⁹Helen Hennessy Vendler, "The Qualified Assertions of Wallace Stevens," The Act of the Mind, p. 163. Miss Vendler's discussion is one of the best available on the particular problems of reading Stevens' poetry. Her study of his language has helped me to clarify some of his thought. My debt to her article should be obvious throughout this discussion.

²⁰Helen Hennessy Vendler, p. 165.

²¹Helen Hennessy Vendler, p. 168.

²²Helen Hennessy Vendler, p. 166.

²³Helen Hennessy Vendler, p. 168.

²⁴Both Riddell's discussion in the Clairvoyant Eye and Ronald Sukenick's in Wallace Stevens: Musing the Obscure (New York, 1967) have helped me in my initial inquiry into this poem.

²⁵Riddell, p. 243.

²⁶It is at this point that critics such as Miller, Pearce, and Riddell see Stevens moving beyond the epistemological dilemma in which he found himself. They all argue that he became aware of this contradiction--that reality is both actualized and distanced by the same imaginative process--in his thought and made adjustments to overcome the problem (see note 4 below). But the poems of The Rock show that Stevens never did solve these problems and never would in the terms he laid down for himself.

²⁷Frank Doggett, Stevens's Poetry of Thought, p. 110.

²⁸cf. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 272: "We are unable to comprehend how such noumena can be possible, and the domain that lies out beyond the sphere of appearances is for us empty. That is to say, we have an understanding which problematically extends further, but we have no intuition, through which objects outside the field of sensibility can be given...."

²⁹Interestingly enough, Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, without having the historical perspective to follow through on her now accurate intimation, senses this major problem in Stevens' thought. In The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry (New York, 1966), first published in 1955, she makes the following generalized statement: "Set against the imagination as shaping spirit is the desire of Stevens, expressed with equal vividness, to face things as they are. It may be that these two contradictory views are merely another instance of the opposites which fuse into a third and perfect singular--but on the other hand their incompatibility may constitute a crucial lack of clarity in his aesthetic....Subtle as Stevens's propositions are and admirable as is the intricacy with which he has devised them in over a quarter of a century, there appear to be basic difficulties in his position, which suggest that the center which he seeks is still in the future tense" (pp. 83-84).

³⁰Andrew E. Curry, "Wallace Stevens: Poet of the Epistemological Puzzle," Dust, 1 (Spring 1964), pp. 25-30.

³¹See below pages 56-57 for Emerson's attack on rational thought as the "Fall of Man."

³²Frank Lentricchia, Jr., "Wallace Stevens: The Ironic Eye," Yale Review, LVI (Spring 1967), pp. 336-353. Lentricchia makes the following informative conclusion about the qualification in this line of the poem: "...he did make the qualification, and in so doing generated an image in the poem of not a passionate humanist, but of the man who has had humanism thrust upon him and who knows too well the differences between what man creates and what God might have created" (p. 352).

Section Five

¹The citation procedure for Williams' work is explained in Section one, note 1. The first two passages are from SA, 26-27 and PB, 75-76.

²See my discussion of In the American Grain in Section one.

³In a statement that could very well be directed to all critics, Williams discusses his "role as a theorist:" "...I think that only by an understanding of my "theory of the poem" will you be able to reconcile my patent failures with whatever I have done that seems worthwhile" (SL, 286).

⁴William Carlos Williams, "The Fatal Blunder," Quarterly Review of Literature, II (1944), p. 125.

⁵William Carlos Williams, p. 126.

⁶Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, "William Carlos Williams: A Testament of Perpetual Change," The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry, pp. 89-106.

⁷This notion of the particular as a metamorphosis of the ground is an area of thought where Williams and Emerson meet. (See below pages 50-51)

⁸Williams' argument for the clear perception of things stems from his assumption that the life processes of the earth only appear to men through the "face" of the particular. "The true value is that peculiarity which gives an object a character by itself," he says in the "Prologue" to Kora in Hell, and adds further, "The associational or sentimental value is false" (SE, 11). In the poem "Good Night" (CEP, 145), therefore, he feels ready for bed because he has resisted the temptation to sentimentalize the clear particulars of his kitchen.

⁹For a discussion of the male-female principle in Williams' work, see James Guimond's The Art of William Carlos Williams, pp. 203-217.

¹⁰Compare Williams' "resignation to existence" to Emerson's "transparent eyeball" passage (see below pages 66-67) and Thoreau's passage on the necessity of losing the world in order to "learn the points of compass again" (see below pages 110-111).

¹¹Charles Olson, Human Universe and Other Essays, pp. 59-60.

¹²Charles Olson, p. 4.

¹³J. Hillis Miller, "Introduction," William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. J. Hillis Miller (New Jersey, 1966), p. 5. Miller's discussion of Williams in the Poets of Reality is a very helpful study of Williams' thought.

¹⁴I have not chosen to discuss this notion of "descent" thoroughly, at least as it appears in the different works of Williams, because I want to keep our attention on his "theory of the poem." It is, however, the subject of Richard A. Macksey's informative article "'A Certainty of Music': Williams' Changes" (William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 132-147). Although Macksey's description of Williams' poetic world tends to be too categorical, I sympathize with his proposal that we read Williams' poems in terms of a "triadic cosmology:" "He seems to locate the personality, as it finds life in the imagination, as flowing ceaselessly between the ground and the form which struggles from it. This mobile and vital force with which he identifies his existence is reminiscent of the Greek model for the deathless soul. While the quintessential soul or psyche exists in the living as semen or marrow, it survives the body in the chthonic form of the snake worshipped by the ancestor cults. It is this snake, or congealed semen, which can pass

from life to death, or, in coitus, from man to woman. The process of one of continuous deaths and births between polar oppositions" (p. 137). According to Macksey, the poem creates out of these "polar oppositions," and orders the world of experience: "The poem, which in its presentation and composition of the flux of particulars is a model of the initial possession, alone promises a momentary stay against the ceaseless cycle of change" (p. 133). Within this context, he then goes on to re-construct Williams' poetic biography in terms of a number of "rites of passage" (p. 139)--a progressive succession of descents and ascents, each new birth releasing a new freedom (pp. 139-140). Each "rite of passage" is a "rite of incorporation into a still more intimate relation between the poet and the particulars of his world" (p. 140). The following "rites of passage" are discussed: (a) "The Wanderer," (b) Kora in Hell and Spring and All, (c) In the American Grain, (d) The Wedge, and (e) "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower." Macksey's article, apparently a part of a longer essay on the "full evolution of Williams' work" (editor's note, p. 132), is an important contribution to Williams criticism.

¹⁵Charles Olson, p. 5.

¹⁶Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry, p. 9.

¹⁷For the same reason Williams says in "The Rose" (SA, 30-32) that the rose, as a conventional symbol of love, is "obsolete." Only when it is perceived in all of its particularity can it once again become an object of love: "It is at the edge of the/petal that love waits."

¹⁸cf. SL, 335-336: "When Einstein promulgated the theory of relativity he could not have foreseen its moral and intellectual implication. He could not have foreseen for a certainty its influence on the writing of poetry."

¹⁹Bringing out a disagreement with Stevens in the "Prologue" to Kora in Hell, Williams clarifies the different stances they brought to their experience. In a letter that is quoted, Stevens criticizes Williams' lack of a fixed point of reference and explains his own position: "...My idea is that in order to carry a thing to the extreme necessity to convey it one has to stick to it;...Given a fixed point of view, realistic, imagistic or what you will, everything adjusts itself to that point of view..." (SE, 12). Stevens, consequently, saw poetry as a process of shaping, while Williams saw it as a process of measuring.

²⁰William Carlos Williams, "Preface," Quarterly Review of Literature, II, No. 4 (1944), p. 348.

²¹For a discussion of this view of Paterson in Books I-IV, see especially Chapter seven of Guimond's The Art of William Carlos Williams. For similar approaches see the criticism of Dembo and Whitaker listed in the bibliography. Sherman Paul's recent study of Williams, The Music of Survival: A Biography of a Poem by William Carlos Williams (Urban, 1968), also shares, as a working principle, this view of Paterson.

²²Paterson V has not received the kind of critical attention it is due. In the first book-length study of Paterson ever to be published, Walter Scott Peterson regrettably does not discuss it separately; he argues that it seems "more a poem about, or a product of, the earlier books than an integral part of the epic itself" (An Approach to Paterson (New Haven, 1961), p. 11). Largely from the conclusions of Louis Martz's article, "The Unicorn in Paterson: William Carlos Williams" (William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 70-87), Peterson treats it as "at most a kind of coda to the poem..." (p. 11). Martz's article, although a very helpful introduction to the poem, fails to see the actual movement of thought that Williams accomplishes within it, approaching mistakenly as a kind of "epilogue or coda" (p. 71) to Paterson I-IV. Guimond and Wagner only give it brief treatment in their studies, and then more for its content than its structure. My own study of Paterson V, therefore, discusses it as first a separate poem, and second, an extension of Paterson I-IV. In this poem, Williams discovers and actualizes the "theory of the poem" that Paterson could not sustain in Books I-IV.

²³Sherman Paul, The Music of Survival, p. 22 .

²⁴Linda Wagner, The Poems of William Carlos Williams, p. 15.

²⁵Linda Wagner, pp. 129-130.

²⁶William Carlos Williams, "Preface," p. 348.

²⁷Charles Olson, p. 52.

²⁸I disagree flatly with the following statement by Roy Harvey Pearce in Continuity of American Poetry (New Jersey, 1965) arguing that Williams assumes a solipsistic position in Paterson V: "He has pushed his line /Pearce is discussing Paterson V/ to a point where it has become a means of treating persons and places solely as aspects of himself. The thing itself turns out to be Williams' thing and no one else's. The difference is between two meanings of 'thing itself': thing in itself; and thing in myself" (p. 238).

²⁹Stanley Koehler, "The Art of Poetry VI: William Carlos Williams," The Paris Review, VIII, No. 32 (Summer-Fall 1964), p. 131. This article, dated April, 1962, is an interview with Williams. He died on March 4, 1963.

³⁰Since Paterson V is nearly the exclusive concern of this discussion, I have decided to omit page numbers, unless necessary for clarity.

³¹James J. Rorimer, in The Cloisters: The Building and the Collection of Medieval Art (New York, 1951), a book published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, makes the following informative statement on the content of the Unicorn tapestries: "In the Middle Ages it was believed that the unicorn could be caught only by a virgin. It was related that this wild and unconquerable animal became tame when confronted by a maiden; he would lay his head in her lap and was thus easily taken by the hunter.

The story is told in various versions of the Physiologus, a zoological and botanical encyclopaedia popular in Europe from the fifth century on, and in the bestiaries based upon it. In these accounts the unicorn is a symbol of Christ, the virgin is the Virgin Mary, the huntsman is the angel Gabriel, and the story of the hunt is an allegory of the Incarnation. Beginning with Richard de Fournival's Bestiare d'amour in the thirteenth century, there was an increasing tendency to interpret the legend of the unicorn caught by a maiden as an allegory of courtly love" (P. 122).

³²Allen Ginsberg, Howl, Parts I and II, reprinted in The New American Poetry, ed. Donald M. Allen (New York, 1960), pp. 182-190.

³³"Sunflower Sutra," reprinted in The New American Poetry, pp. 179-181.

³⁴Stanley Koehler, "The Art of Poetry VI: William Carlos Williams," p. 131.

³⁵Stanley Koehler, p. 130.

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