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Life's nonsense pierces us with strange relation.
—Wallace Stevens, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"

IN HIS ABSTRACT of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" submitted to the Cummington Press on May 14, 1942, Wallace Stevens asserts that by "supreme fiction" he obviously means poetry (*L* 406–07). This postulation has justified the intimate association between the two in the work of a number of the poet's most engaged critics, such as Helen Vendler, Harold Bloom, and J. Hillis Miller.[1] The distinctively overdetermined, self-reflexive, and metapoetic language of "Notes" leads to the interpretation that the poem refers to itself, or to poetry in general, as a supreme fiction. This position is unsettled, however, by Stevens' own revision of the equivalence between the two in a letter to his friend Hi Simons in which, six months later, he explicitly denies that the two are interchangeable:

> Some odds and ends: I think I said in my last letter to you that the Supreme Fiction is not poetry, but I also said that I don't know what it is going to be. Let us think about it and not say that our abstraction is this, that or the other. (*L* 438)

This instance reveals Stevens' hesitation to apply a propositional logic to the definition of a supreme fiction, and, consequently, to present his neologism as an established essence. Apart from undermining the validity of the poet's earlier assertions and enhancing the indeterminacy of "Notes," this remark questions the concepts of presence, absence, equality, and precision implied by the verb "to be," which, as Joseph Riddel, J. Hillis Miller, and David Jarraway have all demonstrated, becomes one of the critical gestures of the poem. From Stevens' observation, it appears that the idea of a supreme fiction transformed during the composition of "Notes"; and as the title suggests, the poem is not *about* a supreme fiction but constitutes a movement *toward* one, and is, therefore, a work in progress, with an un-

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predictable outcome, in which poetic language, as a medium, will attempt to capture—or rather lure—a supreme fiction to take place.[2]

The concept of a supreme fiction thus does not preexist the composition of the poem, but is produced alongside the creation of "Notes." As Stevens points out in his correspondence, "the power of literature is that in describing the world it creates what it describes" (*L* 495). What Stevens observes about the relationship between literature and the world is also true about the relationship between "Notes" and the concept of a supreme fiction that it elaborates. Like any "creator of genius," Stevens "imagines the future and, by imagining it, creates it" (*L* 372). His determination that "a man's work should remain indefinite" (*L* 863) appears to be grounded on his awareness of the power of artistic concepts over the actuality of the world.

Despite its inconclusiveness and deferment, I suggest that Stevens' supreme fiction is not fictional or nonexistent, as Gregory Brazeal insightfully proposes based on the poet's rhetoric, but signifies the movement (or force) of ever-changing forms of belief, including that of modernist humanism.[3] Thus, the abstractness and questionable presence of a supreme fiction do not compromise its actuality but justify its incessant transformation. Like the Deleuzian "pure movement" or the Derridean "trace," the Stevensian supreme fiction can be envisioned as the condition for the possibility of ever-changing metaphysical or religious beliefs. In this mode of existence—not as an essence but as an ever-active force—Stevens' supreme fiction escapes any particular reincarnation of belief created by the collective human imagination. By recognizing the work of this active force, the modern imagination can identify itself as both dependent on and evasive of past beliefs, which can be seen as a reiteration of Stevens' paradox that in our modern condition we willingly abide by fictions. Leaving such concepts indeterminate may lead to perceiving the world as flexible and indeterminate, a "tournamonde," as Stevens calls it, which to him constitutes "an image of a world in which things revolve" (*L* 699). Assigning his supreme fiction to "the intricate evasions of as" (*CPP* 415), he claims that he "cannot imagine anything more fatal than to state it definitely and incautiously" (*L* 863).

The strategic move to leave the concept of a supreme fiction indefinite—as a conscious "enigma" (*L* 435)—does not only suggest an idea of the world in motion, it also promotes the creative process leading to a supreme fiction over the concreteness of the fiction. In this sense, the central aspiration of "Notes" is to convey the creative potential of poetry in the shaping of the outside world by enacting a new concept—that of a supreme fiction. I would like to demonstrate here that the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's understanding of the nature of concepts as philosophical fabrications is especially relevant to Stevens' creation and implementation of the concept of a supreme fiction. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest in *What Is Philosophy?*, "Concepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies. There is no heaven for concepts.

They must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator's signature" (5). Like Stevens, who intentionally eludes a definition for his supreme fiction, the two philosophers propose that concepts are nonpropositional: "The concept is not a proposition at all" (*Philosophy* 22). Indeed, the similarities between Stevens and the two thinkers expand as we realize that they share a particular understanding of the predicaments of contemporary life:

> We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. *We lack resistance to the present*. The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist . . . . It is not populist writers but the most aristocratic who lay claim to this future. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Philosophy* 108)

By virtue of his poetic elegance and philosophical abstraction, Stevens seems to lay claim to this future form of artistic expression, naturally and consciously, as he provides guidance to, and therefore shapes, the ephebe, or the poet of the future. A similar constellation of ideas about mass communication and the necessity to resist its influence appears in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," where he seems to resent the effect of the mass media on people: "We are close together in every way. We lie in bed and listen to a broadcast from Cairo, and so on. There is no distance. We are intimate with people we have never seen and, unhappily, they are intimate with us" (*CPP* 653). The overexposure to information of current political events, as Stevens implies, is part of the "pressure of reality . . . on the consciousness to the exclusion of any power of contemplation" (*CPP* 654). It is the task of poetry or the "individuals of extraordinary imagination" (*CPP* 656) to resist this pressure of reality. Throughout the essay, Stevens shows his concern for the future and concludes that it is the individual mind itself that should provide the "violence from within . . . pressing back against the pressure of reality" to help us live our lives (*CPP* 665).

Stevens' call for a poet of the future who can successfully resist the pressure of the realities of war and poverty resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's emphasized statement that "*We lack resistance to the present*." Like Stevens, they too attribute special significance to the professional writer for the creation of the future; and they too recognize the beginning of that future with the creation of new concepts. However, as the two philosophers claim, it is "The object of philosophy . . . to create concepts that are always new" (*Philosophy* 5), while it is the object of art and literature to create new affects or sensations: "Whether through words, colors, sounds, or stone, art is the language of sensations" (176). The French thinkers even propose a Stevensian touch to their examples of the affective nature of future poetry, addressing the "people to come" with "'Oh, people of old Catawba,'"[4] "'Oh, people of Yoknapatawpha'" (176).

Stevens' lifelong work, however, by which I mean both his poetry and prose, provides a challenge to that division between poetry and philosophy, since it is through his creative endeavors that Stevens establishes his new concept of a supreme fiction. Stevens directly approaches this problem in his correspondence with Barbara Church in July 1951 in relation to his lecture "A Collect of Philosophy" at the University of Chicago, whose subject he claims to be "the poetry of philosophy." "What I want to call attention to," he writes, "is the poetic nature of many philosophical conceptions" (*L* 722). In a follow-up letter, he offers a strikingly deconstructive reading of the work of Jean Wahl, who, like Deleuze and Guattari, tries to maintain the boundaries between philosophy and poetry:

> Jean Wahl poured himself out and, since he has a good deal to pour out, his letter is most helpful to me. However, like another correspondent, he answered somewhat on the relations between poetry and philosophy, which is not what I want. What I want is to take advantage of his endless reading of philosophy to identify instances of philosophic concepts not in the least intended to be poetic which are poetic in spite of themselves. (*L* 725)

I see Stevens' reading of Wahl's failure to sustain the purity of philosophical concepts as philosophical as a proleptic answer to Deleuze and Guattari's claim that philosophy creates concepts while art creates affects. In Deleuze and Guattari's writings themselves, however, the boundaries between philosophy and poetry are often blurred as the two thinkers claim that both art and philosophy are equally engaged in the creation of the future: "Art and philosophy converge at this point: the constitution of an earth and a people that are lacking as the correlate of creation" (*Philosophy* 108). In addition, unlike the hierarchical relationship between poetry and philosophy, implied sometimes in both Wahl's and Stevens' work, Deleuze and Guattari's work seems to forbid that power structure.

Discussing his idea of a supreme fiction as both a philosophical and a poetic idea, Stevens suggests in a letter to Hi Simons that the idea of "pure poetry" or the "essential imagination" is "the highest objective of the poet, [and] appears to be, at least potentially, as great as the idea of God" (*L* 369). In the same letter, Stevens confirms that "Logically" he "ought to believe in essential imagination, but that has its difficulties. It is easier to believe in a thing created by the imagination. A good deal of my poetry recently has concerned an identity for that thing" (*L* 370). This statement reveals the tension inherent in the concept of a supreme fiction: Stevens' stronger urge is to define it as the essential imagination (or pure poetry), but the only way to succeed to do so is to posit it as a thing created by the imagination whose concreteness as a thing is important only insofar as it carries some elusive trace of the ever impalpable "essential" imagination. Stevens' discourse on the "essential imagination" seems to undermine the

very idea that this imagination has a certain essence. The essence of a supreme fiction as a concrete entity, and even as a proper concept, is thus put under question the way Jacques Derrida has questioned his own notion of differance as a concept: differance is "neither a *word* nor a *concept*" (130). It is only as a Derridean "pseudo concept," then, that Stevens proceeds to suggest a number of "fictions" he calls supreme. On several occasions, Stevens points out that we live by fictions, some of which are "supreme." The poet is the "potent figure" who "creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it and . . . gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it" (*CPP* 662). One such supreme fiction is the idea of God, as it manifests itself generally in any religion, which Stevens calls a "supreme poetic idea" (*CPP* 674) and associates with the poetic ideas (maybe themselves supreme fictions) of heaven and hell, or truth.

A specific supreme fiction that Stevens proposes as a possible replacement of the traditional metaphysical ideas of transcendence and immanence is the idea of man, or the image of a "superman": "If we are to think of a supreme fiction, instead of creating it, as the Greeks did, for example, in the form of a mythology, we might choose to create it in the image of a man: an agreed-on superman" (*L* 789). Harold Bloom has proposed that the central figure of "Notes" is Canon Aspirin, "the High Romantic poet, Stevens' heroic precursor, whom Stevens hopes to surpass" (*Climate* 206). Bloom adds that the Canon Aspirin is the "Transcendentalist expansionist *in Stevens himself*, which is to say, he is Stevens aspiring most wildly and most freely" (208) to regain the faith in his own self and proclaim again, as he did in "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," "'I was myself the compass of that sea'" (qtd. on 214). While Helen Vendler believes that the humanistic aspirations of "Notes" are shortlived, as "the brief moment . . . of self-sustaining majesty collapses at once" (200), Bloom insists that "Notes" is an intermediary step to Stevens' cure of his own reductiveness (which culminated in "The Snow Man"), so that he can reach the "freedom to have a larger idea of what it is to be wholly human" (*Climate* 346). Thus, the idea of a supreme fiction for Bloom belongs to "an authentically rational humanism" (189) which posits the poet as the central figure of humanity, the image of man as a "major man."

This exultant humanism, celebrating the power of the poet over his poetic creations and his own mortality, however, appears at variance with other potent poetic ideas celebrated by Stevens. In his "Adagia," for instance, Stevens seems to return to his belief in the "essential imagination" by positing ambiguously that "Man is the imagination or rather the imagination is man" (*CPP* 914). In "Notes," offering two of the central humanist figures of his poetry—MacCullough and major man—he questions the human nature of such tropes: "Beau linguist. But the MacCullough is MacCullough. / It does not follow that major man is man" (*CPP* 334). Even in his correspondence, when Stevens explains that MacCullough is any man,

which has become one of the most famous passages to support the centrality of humanist ideas in Stevens, the poet writes that in fiction (or poetry) "there is an extension of man, the leaner being, . . . a possibly more than human human, a composite human" (*L* 434). This interpretation of the poetic idea of man as a "composite human" emphasizes the conceptual nature of "man" (or the figure of MacCullough) in poetry, which undermines the understanding of that figure simply as "any man." In his analysis of "Notes," Joseph Riddel shows that "The self is poetic invention, the production of an identity by a marking of its nonidentity" ("Metaphoric Staging" 328). And in his discussion of "The Rock," J. Hillis Miller, too, proposes that the "Self in the sense of individual personality is one of the major illusions dissolved by the poem" ("Stevens' Rock" 44). Stevens himself claims at times that "Poetry is not personal" (*CPP* 902).

I see the process of the dissolution of the idea of the self (or the idea of man) as inherent in Stevens' concept of the supreme fiction. In this sense, it is the idea of man as a supreme fiction that dissolves to give way to new expressions of a supreme fiction. By offering different examples of supreme fictions, Stevens demonstrates the changing nature of fictions that we live by—the "will to change" (*CPP* 344). Yet what appears to be essentially inherent in the idea of a supreme fiction is not only change but a certain necessity to believe, "a will to believe" (*L* 430):

> Say next to holiness is the will thereto,
> And next to love is the desire for love,
> The desire for its celestial ease in the heart . . . . (*CPP* 398)

The "will to believe," like the "will to change," as Stevens suggests in his letters, is impersonal or possibly "instinctive" (*L* 430). I find it hard to believe that by considering the impersonal "will to believe" as "instinctive," Stevens thinks of it as biologically or physiologically conditioned. Nothing in Stevens' poetry or prose implies such essentialism or determinism about human nature. What this statement does imply, though, is a connection with the poet's idea that we can intentionally forfeit belief: "If one no longer believes in God (as truth), it is not possible merely to disbelieve" (*L* 370). In yet another attempt to define his supreme fiction, he famously claims: "I say that one's final belief must be in a fiction. I think that the history of belief will show that it has always been in a fiction" (*L* 370). In examining the concept of a supreme fiction, then, Stevens takes account of old beliefs as fictions and assumes that inevitably there will be new ones in the future, because the "will to believe" has been so deeply imbedded in history that it has become synonymous with our survival or self-preservation. In this sense, I disagree with Brazeal when he argues that Stevens' concept of a supreme fiction is based on a "popular misreading" of William James's essay "The Will to Believe" (81). I disagree with his idea that Stevens deemed it possible to believe arbitrarily in anything we choose

to believe in. Instead, Stevens built on James's idea that our beliefs are socially conditioned, and that we are more likely to believe in truths that have been historically relevant to our culture (James 9). Any future beliefs, thus, would not be arbitrary, but conditioned by our past belief systems. Stevens, however, is not interested in predicting the future by delineating the specific supreme fictions that it may contain. He leaves this task to the "ephebe" or the poet of the future, the youth as a virile poet. His own task again is to trace the creative process leading to such concrete fictions and to delineate the conditions for their formation.

The most explicit formulation of Stevens' intention to trace the creation and metamorphosis of supreme fictions is to be found in his essay "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words"—written concurrently with "Notes"—where he examines the metamorphosis of the idea of nobility throughout its history.[5] He summarizes his project as an analysis of the history of the idea of nobility, claiming that "The history of a figure of speech or the history of an idea, such as the idea of nobility, cannot be very different from the history of anything else" (*CPP* 645). Stevens agrees with Vico that "the true history of the human race is a history of its progressive mental states," and maintains that in the history of Plato's figure of the noble rider, "there have been incessant changes of response; . . . our own diffidence [being] simply one more state of mind due to such a change" (*CPP* 645). As Stevens traces the specific changes in the idea of nobility since Plato—in the works of Verrocchio, Cervantes, Clark Mills, I. A. Richards, Coleridge, Hobbes, Kierkegaard, Bergson, and Freud among others—he attributes the change in the concept of nobility to variations in the relationship between reality and the imagination. His conclusion is that reality has increasingly gained predominance over the imagination throughout history, and he regrets that in his present day the imagination has been exceptionally reduced by the pressure of reality.

Stevens' appeal to the intellectual circles of his contemporaries is that they need to employ the power of their imaginations to resist the pressure of external reality, which is the reality of war and poverty. Since he defines nobility as "a characteristic of the imagination, and even as its symbol or alter ego" (*CPP* 646), and since he elsewhere expressed his urge to define "supreme fiction" as the "essential imagination," I find the idea of nobility to be synonymous with the idea of a supreme fiction. In "The Noble Rider," Stevens elaborates that "the imagination gives to everything that it touches a peculiarity, and it seems to me that the peculiarity of the imagination is nobility" (*CPP* 663–64). If the supreme fiction is about the "essential imagination," and if the "peculiarity" (or essence) of the imagination is nobility, it follows that nobility is also essential to the idea of a supreme fiction. Like in the case of the idea of a supreme fiction, Stevens shuns a definition of the idea of nobility; he says that "Nothing distorts itself and seeks disguise more quickly" than the idea of nobility, and he proposes to his listeners, "Let me show it to you unfixed" (*CPP* 664).

In his historical approach from "The Noble Rider," Stevens attempts to trace the conditions or forces that shape a supreme fiction (that of nobility in this case). Besides through the delicate balance between reality and the imagination, the idea of nobility is shaped by the geographical location of a place as defined by its social or cultural forces: as Stevens claims, "the imagination and society are inseparable" (*CPP* 660). In his poetry, too, Stevens suggests that the poet, like everyone else, is shaped by the geographical location of his birth, and by "The Poems of Our Climate." So, in "Anecdote of Men by the Thousand," "There are men of the East . . . / Who are the East" (*CPP* 41). In this sense, people partake of the imagination of their locality without experiencing the anxiety of influence, since the regional imagination cannot be traced back solely to one (or several) particular poetic source(s). Such regional imagination or sensibility is permeated by already existing affects and desires, which cannot be claimed or appropriated by a specific human subject. As Stevens explicitly claims in "Adagia," "Life is an affair of people not of places. But for me life is an affair of places and that is the trouble" (*CPP* 901).

In this sense, the individuality of the poet always emerges within a certain cultural milieu, which is inseparable from his original contribution to poetry and life. As Stevens suggests in "Effects of Analogy," "The measure of the poet is the measure of his sense of the world and of the extent to which it involves the sense of other people" (*CPP* 718). Or as William James proposes in "The Will to Believe," "Our faith is faith in some one else's faith, and in the greatest matters this is most the case. Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other,—what is it but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up?" (9). This Jamesian idea of "the will to believe" as socially and affectively conditioned is shared by Stevens and Deleuze-Guattari, as I will further demonstrate below.

The understanding of beliefs and concepts as geographically and historically embedded is to be found also in Deleuze and Guattari's definition of concepts. As they observe, "The concept is not object but territory. It does not have an Object but a territory. For that very reason it has a past form, a present form and, perhaps, a form to come" (*Philosophy* 101). The two philosophers demonstrate this territorial aspect of the nature of concepts with an example in the chapter from *What Is Philosophy?* entitled "Geophilosophy":

> The French are like landowners whose source of income is the cogito. They are always reterritorialized on consciousness. Germany, on the other hand, does not give up the absolute. . . .
> (104)

The inseparability between geography and philosophy suggested by the chapter title is reaffirmed by Deleuze and Guattari's statement that "a con-

cept is acquired by inhabiting, by pitching one's tent, by contracting a habit" (105). The idea as thus stated is not foreign to Stevens, even in his early poetry: in "The Comedian as the Letter C," recognizing that "man is the intelligence of his soil" (*CPP* 22), Crispin set out on a voyage to a "new continent in which to dwell" (29), which eventually shaped or "Confined" his mind (33).

Stevens' acute awareness of place as possessing a force that shapes the mind of its inhabitants, even that of the poetic genius himself, is central to his concept of a supreme fiction. In "The Noble Rider," he consistently uses the first person plural "we" for his most famous explanation of the theory behind his poetry: "By us and ourselves, I mean you and me; and yet not you and me as individuals but as representatives of a state of mind" (*CPP* 645). On August 28, 1940, two years before submitting "Notes" to the Cummington Press, Stevens observes that geographical locations create a shared state of mind for people who inhabit them. "It is assumed," he then writes, "that the South has its own consciousness, its own idea of God, its own imagination" (*L* 370). His understanding of place as a force that shapes the human mind is noticeable in poems like "Our Stars Come from Ireland," which posits "The Westwardness of Everything" and offers metaphors of the weather, the sea, the ocean, and the wind to figure a change of the "whole habit of the mind":

> These are the ashes of fiery weather,
> Of nights full of the green stars from Ireland,
> Wet out of the sea, and luminously wet,
> Like beautiful and abandoned refugees.
>
> The whole habit of the mind is changed by them,
> These Gaeled and fitful-fangled darknesses
> Made suddenly luminous, themselves a change,
> An east in their compelling westwardness,
> .....
> When the whole habit of the mind was changed,
> The ocean breathed out morning in one breath. (*CPP* 389–90)

The "westwardness of everything" suggests here the permeation of modern life with the metaphysical ideas brought up by Western metaphysics. Deleuze and Guattari's point that "*I* is a habit," since "We are all contemplations, and therefore habits" (*Philosophy* 105), complements this Stevensian idea of westwardness. "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," which among other of Stevens' later poems I consider as an extension of "Notes," suggests that in the present "the wind whimpers oldly of old age / In the western night" (*CPP* 407). The metaphysical ideas of the West are the force which still shapes its inhabitants. The recognition of this force in the formation of modernist ideas is the work of a new supreme fiction as Stevens

imagines it. His project of a supreme fiction, which in the context of his letter from August 28, 1940 resembles "pure poetry" (defined as "imagination, extended beyond local consciousness"), is intended to counter the conflicting regional ideas of God and become "an idea to be held in common by South, West, North and East" (*L* 370); it requires "A larger poem for a larger audience" (*CPP* 397).

For Stevens, originality and creativity have to do with an escape from past beliefs. As he claims in "Adagia," "Originality is an escape from repetition" (*CPP* 914). In this sense, his project of a supreme fiction is to escape traditional metaphysical thought by taking an account of it and, paradoxically, even re-enacting it in his poetry. David Jarraway envisions the supreme fiction as a "Supreme Absence," which is a creative principle "moving out from under the finite paradigms of presence structured by both the classic mimesis and romantic poiesis of bygone eras" (145). He acknowledges that Stevens paradoxically moves away from the tradition by engaging with it. As Jarraway puts it, "the process *turns* an apparently regressive transport back in time into a progressive movement forward and, like spiritual dearth, the Death of God, even Absence itself, becomes an ever-fecund source for a continuing hope and a renewable faith" (176). In this sense, I agree with Jarraway's observation that in Stevens' discourse there is a "shift from form to force" (183): "The question of belief, in fact, *becomes* the question of desire, the force of desire itself manifesting yet another aspect of the violent abyss" (189).

This force of desire appears to be the productive force behind all new beliefs and fictions. Any future supreme fiction will be the result of this desire to believe, which I see as manifested in Stevens' figure of "the will to believe," not as a biological instinct, but as an affect inherited by past generations. Stevens is aware of the grasp that philosophical heritage has on him, despite his resistance to it, and suggests that there is an affect transmitted by metaphysical ideas—a will to believe. Stevens seems to be consistent with James's formulation of this concept, since James too focuses on its affective aspect, witness the earlier quotation about how "Our belief in truth itself . . . [is] a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up" (*Will to Believe* 9). Stevens shares this desire with his contemporaries, who also face a residue of traditional metaphysical belief. His own pronounced interest in his genealogy, which intensified in 1942 (the year when he wrote "Notes"), relates to his theoretical contemplations on the historically imposed "will to believe." "The Bed of Old John Zeller," for example, a poem about Stevens' maternal grandfather, whose story the poet attempted to track (*L* 399), centers on a "habit of wishing" which is the inheritance that the poet receives from his grandfather: "This is the habit of wishing, as if one's grandfather lay / In one's heart and wished as he had always wished" (*CPP* 287). Stevens acknowledges this indirect and immaterial inheritance from a grandfather whom he had never really known, and realizes that "It is more difficult

to evade / That habit of wishing and to accept the structure / Of things as the structure of ideas" (*CPP* 287). Thus, in his own family history, the "habit of wishing" (a habitat of sorts?) is like the "will to believe" that is part of the "westwardness of everything."

Maybe it is in the light of the poem about old John Zeller that we can understand Stevens' simultaneous insistence on the power of poetic genius over reality and on the poet's lack of personality.[6] On the one hand, as I mentioned earlier, the poet is a "potent figure," since "he creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it and . . . gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it" (*CPP* 662). On the other hand, however, the poet is a representative of a shared state of mind. In "Effects of Analogy," Stevens seems to add the missing link to these potentially controversial images, claiming that the personality of the poet is his temperament or sense of the world (*CPP* 716). He adds that "a man's sense of the world dictates his subjects to him and that this sense is derived from his personality, his temperament, over which he has little control and possibly none, except superficially" (*CPP* 717). It is probably in relation to this idea of personality that Stevens makes a claim for poetry as impersonal. Yet, if the poet's temperament dictates his sense of the world, then his poetry is also produced mostly by the affective aspect of his personality, over which he has little or no control. His habit of wishing (or his will to believe) inherited from his predecessors, then, can also be regarded as one of the affective forces that shape both his personality and his poetry.

Thus, in outlining the creation of specific supreme fictions and their conditions for existence, Stevens suggests that they are not simply invented by a poetic genius, but are also formed by impersonal forces inhabiting the poet. The force of the metaphysical beliefs of a specific geographical/cultural location and the force of the poet's own temperament participate in the creative process. As he coins the concept of a supreme fiction, Stevens is aware of these two forces and contemplates them in his writing. The impersonal nature of the affect in both forces can be addressed again within Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical framework. As mentioned earlier, Deleuze and Guattari consider the creation of impersonal affects and sensations as the proper task of art and literature. "A great novelist," they write, "is above all an artist who invents unknown or unrecognized affects and brings them to light as the becoming of his characters" (*Philosophy* 174). In this sense,

> Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. They could be said to exist in the absence of man because man, as he is caught in stone, on the canvas, or by words, is himself a compound of percepts and affects. (*Philosophy* 164)[7]

In view of the impersonal "will to believe," an affect carried over by past metaphysical beliefs, Stevens may be said to search for the outlines of modern experience as a response to the past. This experience is conditioned by the affect attached to transcendental signifiers, such as truth, rationality, religion, or man. In "The Noble Rider," Stevens attributes "diffidence" to the modern response to nobility. In the same essay, he notes his contemporaries' obsession with objective truth: "We have been a little insane about the truth. We have had an obsession" (*CPP* 663). On other occasions, he observes that it is the disappearance of religious faith that characterizes modernity. Yet all of these manifestations of modern belief carry the affect of the past—"the will to believe." Even atheism, the denial of religious belief, is centered on belief, since it is its outright denial.

The idea of a supreme fiction, as expressed in "Notes," reveals the paradoxical nature of modern belief. In its reassessment of the past, the abstract voice of the ephebe, symbolic of the modernist imagination, faces the dissolution of the boundaries between history and modernity. Examining the linguistic expressions of being, "Notes" indicates a tension between past ("was") and present ("is") in which the idea of a supreme fiction operates as an evasive energy. The difficulty of modernist metaphysics arises from its simultaneous sustenance and rejection (decreation) of traditional beliefs. Stevens sums up the paradox of this condition in his well-known statement, "I thought that we had reached a point at which we could no longer really believe in anything unless we recognized that it was a fiction" (*L* 430). "Notes" offers another expression of the difficulty of this condition, as it traces the modern metaphysician's futile search for an original idea of the sun:

> But Phoebus was
> A name for something that never could be named.
> There was a project for the sun and is.
>
> There is a project for the sun. The sun
> Must bear no name, gold flourisher, but be
> In the difficulty of what it is to be. (*CPP* 329–30)

Referring to objects by their names suggests veiling them, inscribing them into frameworks of mythological worldviews (or "projects") and, consequently, failing to see them as they are—after all, "It is a world of words to the end of it" (*CPP* 301). The romantic urge for an infinitely distant historical point of "pure" (that is, unmythologized) perception is unsettled by the poem's reference to ancient celestial bodies already embraced in mythologies. In this sense, "Notes" suspends the possibility that the world can be seen in its first idea—"without its varnish and dirt." Stevens' well-known statement, "If you take the varnish and dirt of generations off

a picture, you see it in its first idea" (*L* 426–27), becomes the hermit in the poet's metaphor, because of its insurmountable conditionality.

Stevens' controversial idea that his contemporaries could no longer believe in anything unless they recognized it was a fiction alludes to the "as if" rationale of modern belief systems. Subsequently, "Notes" enacts a dynamics of interchange or substitution between the terms "fiction" (including "supreme fiction") and "reality," which paradoxically sustains the reality of outdated beliefs. As a result, the poet's endeavor demonstrates the potency of apparently rejected beliefs and their influence in the early twentieth century. It would be injudicious to label Phoebus, God, and transcendental metaphysics as fictions of the past for a number of reasons: first, because in the past they did constitute reality and truth; second, because some of them literally shape the worldview of some of Stevens' contemporaries; and third, because even those who believe that they were simply fictions of the past live with the powerful sense of emptiness these fictions have left. In addition, we can think of these fictions in the way Kant thought of "things-in-themselves": that is, we can think of them *as if* they existed or were real. The very fact that they are concepts or ideas that we can use for our theoretical contemplations allows them to partake in our experience of the world. From this perspective, such transcendental signifiers indicate a nonexistence or an absence that nevertheless has a tangible effect on modern experience. They figure a sense of loss of belief that has preserved the affective need or will to believe and will necessitate a new fiction. Stevens calls this new fiction "arbitrary" as he defines the objectives of "Notes": "I have . . . trifled with the idea of some arbitrary object of belief: some artificial subject for poetry, a source of poetry" (*L* 485).

This arbitrary future belief, however, is destined to carry the affective traces of the past. As Stevens proposes, "The future must bear within it every past, not least the pasts that have become submerged in the sub-conscious . . . . We fear because we remember" (*L* 373). The faith in objectivity, rationality, and earthly love—including the faith in humanism—largely featured in Stevens' poetry marks the space for that "new" fiction that appears as a counterpart to the "old" ones. It emerges as called upon by the old mythologies, since the affect associated with them is translated into its language. As a result, the referents for the modernist faith—earth, everyman, factuality, even imaginative poverty and nothingness—bear the trace of the affect related to Phoebus, God, and heaven. It is the very necessity to believe (the will to believe) that is transmitted as an affect from generation to generation. As Stevens points out, "If one no longer believes in God (as truth), it is not possible merely to disbelieve; it becomes necessary to believe in something else" (*L* 370). This formulation of the supreme fiction is reminiscent again of William James's formulation that, first, "religion offers itself as a *momentous* option. We are supposed to gain, even now, by our belief, and to lose by our non-belief, a certain vital good. Secondly, religion is a *forced* option, so far as the good goes. We cannot escape

the issue by remaining sceptical and waiting for more light" (*Will to Believe* 26). The signature of traditional metaphysics on the modernist sensibility contributes to the problematic of presence and absence as equivocal. Poetry, as Stevens imagines it, revitalizes the hesitation between "is," "was," and "will be," which marks the concept of a supreme fiction.

When "Notes" searches for the outlines of modern experience as a response to the past, it presents that experience as conditioned by the affect attached to transcendental signifiers, such as truth and rationality. The underlying affect in modernist experience is the desire for objective truth—about life and death, about reality and illusions, about heaven and earth—which has defined the Western tradition since Plato and Aristotle. Particular human subjects who are nurtured within such a collective consciousness are often unaware of the desires or affects that define their rationale of the world. Even the most rational attempt to renounce past superstitions and belief systems is doomed to failure because it is marked by the desire for objective truth, which has underlain the formation of all past superstitions and beliefs in the first place. Besides, to reject a belief by disbelieving it is impossible because as a negation of belief, disbelief is posited by a belief, and therefore is a "negative" belief. This dialectic logic of the interdependence of opposite entities, reminiscent of Hegelian dialectic, is foundational for Stevens' "Notes." To recall once more what Stevens asserts about this: "If one no longer believes in God (as truth), it is not possible merely to disbelieve; it becomes necessary to believe in something else" (*L* 370).

As an agent of affective transference between the past and the present, thus, "Notes" rejuvenates the power of old mythologies. Joseph Riddel calls it "the great text of . . . writing against the 'book'" ("Metaphoric Staging" 316), since the poem resents totalization. In Riddel's analysis, "'Notes' revolves, repeats, and parodies the 'fiction of an absolute' . . . , unveiling the ground of that fiction in the 'aberration' of metaphor" (324). He finds repetition of the "old scene" to be necessary for the continuous process of writing against the book: "the old scene (book of the sublime or theater of representation) was already itself a fiction of fiction, an aesthetic of some proper fall or 'mal,' and the new stage can only repeat the necessity of representation" (309). What remains constant in the repetitive cycle of history, and what is therefore repeated by the poem, is the "necessity of representation" or gravity of affect (or emotional investment) of metaphysical beliefs. This life-sustaining impulse, which we can identify with the supreme fiction, however, requires a concrete object of faith ("a thing created by the imagination"), rather than an abstraction ("essential imagination"). "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" addresses the metamorphosis of traditional beliefs into new ones, where new concrete signifiers of faith emerge from earlier ones: "The instinct for heaven had its counterpart: / The instinct for earth, for New Haven, for his room" (*CPP* 406). The desire for the terrestrial, the ordinary, the routine, as generally recognized among Stevens scholars, marks his poetic expression of modern reality

and imagination. The two mutually dependent instincts in the poem imply the reversal of the desire for the heavenly and celestial into the desire for the quotidian (or the "instinct for earth").

Often in his letters, Stevens contemplates the possibility that things proceed from their opposites.[8] What distinguishes the imagination of the poet's times is a "negative" belief: not the lack of belief, but a belief ensuing from the negation of celestial belief. Despite its apparent minimalism, this reversed belief, focused on the earth, the senses, and man, preserves the emotional load associated with the earlier "positive" beliefs, thus evidently disturbing the oppositional logic of positive and negative, celestial and terrestrial, heaven and earth. It is, again, in this wavering between heaven and earth, "positive" and "negative," that a new supreme fiction needs to take place. The structural reversal of belief that leaves the force of the emotional content undisturbed is portrayed by Stevens' preference for the ordinary city of New Haven. The irony of the name indicates that the celebration of the earth and the senses in the process of decreation has replaced the celestial beliefs. Therefore, the dedication to the earth and the search for truth in the ephemeral mark only a nominal or a linguistic change: "The search / For reality is as momentous as / The search for god" (*CPP* 410). The reversibility of the ideas of heaven and earth appears also in his correspondence, as Stevens proposes that "The trouble with the idea of heaven is that it is merely an idea of the earth" (*L* 464). In twentieth-century humanism and rationalism, however, the affect inherent in the religious idea of heaven reappears in the celebration of objective knowledge of man and the earth.

The search for objective truth in the material reality of New Haven, then, is as vigorous as the historical search for God. Having faced the impossibility of the "first" idea of the sun, the modernist metaphysician seeks reality in the sensual experiences of the physical world, the body being as precise a perceptor of the world as the mind used to be: "It feels good as it is without the giant, / . . . Perhaps / The truth depends on a walk around a lake" (*CPP* 333). In Part IV of "An Ordinary Evening," Stevens refers to the modern experience of the earth as "A responding to a diviner opposite" (*CPP* 399). While he maintains the "eye's plain version" (which Bloom sees as the central trope of the poem) as defining modernity ("Ordinary Evening" 65), it is not the objective perception of the world that he asserts, but rather a belief in objectivity. And, even in the presumed transparency of its "plain version," modern metaphysics again bears the trace of outdated beliefs; it is a "present colony of a colony / Of colonies":

> The town was a residuum,
>
> A neuter shedding shapes in an absolute.
> Yet the transcripts of it when it was blue remain;
> And the shapes that it took in feeling, the persons that

It became, the nameless, flitting characters—
These actors still walk in a twilight muttering lines. (*CPP* 409)

These lines suspend the obsession with the "eye's plain version" (the metaphor proposing transparency and objectivity), and therefore neutrality, of perception. The town "was a residuum," a hue of blue, an imprint of the blue guitar of the imagination, which has accompanied philosophical thought in the past. The realization of absolute certainty about New Haven is suspended by the idea that the eye's vision can never be plain, just as "the bride / Is never naked. A fictive covering / Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind" (*CPP* 342). The "transparencies of sound" and the "transparent dwellings of the self" are ironically like the visual elements we are blind to, because they are so deeply embedded in our desire or perception of the world—we see selectively depending on our investment with beliefs: "The point of vision and desire are the same" (*CPP* 397–98). Here again Stevens is consistent with James, as the latter claims that "the desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth's existence" (*Will to Believe* 24). For both thinkers, the desire for faith and truth, inherent in the traditional idea of God, persists in the modern denial of religion.

The apparent oppositional logic of the formation of the desire for reality, nevertheless, does not mark a significant change in human experience. It is a repetition of the past: the obsession with terrestrial beauty and scientific facts, as well as the experience of loss of spiritual values, could be a "fiction that results from feeling" (*CPP* 351). "It means the distaste we feel for this withered scene / Is that it has not changed enough. It remains, / It is a repetition" (*CPP* 337). The "distaste we feel for this withered scene" is a polar opposite generated by the feeling of comfort and fulfillment contained in the idea of divine presence. What makes the seemingly opposite existential feelings of "distaste" and satisfaction with the earthly scene similar is their shared affect. They participate in the formation of a modernist sensibility as an outcome of the transference of affect traditionally attached to transcendental signifiers into the signifiers central to contemporary life. What is preserved is the intensity of the affect whether in its positive charge or with a directly reversed negative charge. The negation of divine power, the search for an objective reality, and the appreciation of sensual experience are not indifferent activities; they carry the brand of affect and desire as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari.

In this sense, the preservation and repetition of affect through a chain of metaphysical value systems maintains the power of seemingly outdated beliefs. Paradoxically, religious faith and humanism exist in their absence. The declaration of the death of Phoebus ironically shows the moment as defined by a very palpable lack, a sort of present absence.[9] It is in this form of existence that configurations of the past sustain their significant effect on the present. Thus, the present is incessantly shaped as a response to the

past, and our subjectivity is necessarily pierced or "deterritorialized" by the impersonal affect of past beliefs.

Deleuze and Guattari believe "deterritorialization" to be one of the most sophisticated effects of art and literature—"a pure and intense sonorous material that is always connected to *its own abolition*—a deterritorialized musical sound, a cry that escapes signification, composition, song, words—a sonority that ruptures in order to break away from a chain that is still all too signifying" (*Kafka* 6). Minor literature, for example, as defined by the two philosophers, deterritorializes a major national literary tradition, as it provides an escape from the established literary norms when language aspires to become inhuman or superhuman—that is, when it is no longer meaningful, controllable, or recognizable. Deleuze and Guattari, however, do not restrict the act of deterritorialization to literature that belongs to minorities; in fact, what they call the becoming-other of literature can be found in the work of some of the most prominent writers from a particular "major" tradition. Thus, they trace the phenomenon in the works of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Harold Pinter, and Herman Melville, among others. What makes such works deterritorialized is their enactment of language as other than human: subhuman (animal) or superhuman (composite and abstract). Deleuze and Guattari point to Ahab's becoming-animal in his obsession with the white whale, as well as Moby Dick's becoming-supernatural. Examining passages from Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, the two thinkers similarly observe descriptions of the landscape that seem to be construed neither from the viewpoint of the author nor from that of any specific character, but rather from flows of perceptions that seem to pierce the characters from an outside realm. As a result, the perception of one character seems to traverse another character unproblematically, making it impossible for the reader to distinguish the proper perceiver of that perception (*Philosophy* 169–73).

Deleuze and Guattari insist that, just like cinema, literature has the tendency to destroy the border between the perceiver and the perceived. They distinguish between perceptions and percepts, and affections and affects. While perceptions and affections are experienced by concrete subjects, percepts and affects are composite, impersonal "*beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived":

> Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. (*Philosophy* 164)

"An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" points to a similar understanding of the compound abstract ideas that pierce the intellectual autonomy of the individual: "Confused illuminations and sonorities, / So much ourselves, we cannot tell apart / The idea and the bearer-being of the idea"

(*CPP* 398). The condition of being human, in Stevens' poetry, involves the constant exposure to outside forces, such as the "will to believe" (*L* 430), the "will to change" (*CPP* 343), and the "will of necessity" (*CPP* 410).[10] The penetration of the subject by these superhuman, nonsubjective forces or affects marks the impossibility of proper self-reflection by that subject and, thus, his lack of mastery over his thoughts. Caught in the repetitive movement of impersonal affect through the chain of history, the thinker becomes other than himself. In this sense, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the subject's incessant becoming and Stevens' idea of supreme fiction's existence as elusiveness may be considered exemplary of Keats's negative capability, because both thinkers are "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (370).

In "Notes Toward a Deleuzian Reading of *Transport to Summer*," Axel Nesme comments on the sense of becoming-inhuman or becoming-imperceptible in "Continual Conversation with a Silent Man," where the "'silent man' of the title suddenly acquires oddly inhuman characteristics and becomes the embodiment of the radically Other" (210). Unlike the phenomenological idea of intersubjectivity, which is posited in order to guarantee the existence of the other (primarily as a human being) outside the self-enclosed sphere of perception of each consciousness, becoming-imperceptible entails imagining oneself as subject to the innumerable varieties of perception—including animal, inanimate, and superhuman.[11] This condition opens up one's horizon of experience and generates new thoughts, affections, and perceptions. The only constant in this variable becoming-other-than-oneself, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is difference.[12] J. Hillis Miller has suggested, analogously, that "The poetry of flittering metamorphosis is the only poetry which is simultaneously true to both imagination and reality, and it is the only poetry which will catch being" ("Poetry of Being" 160). In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens*, John Serio reaffirms that the "vital center of poetry for Stevens is metamorphosis" (3); the poem is a process that produces an "alteration of feeling, perception, and sense of self" in which the reader participates (2). Undermining the outlook of a fixed character, creative expressions in art and literature constantly allow for impersonal affects and percepts to reconstitute the experiences of contemporary human beings.

Like nobility, the concept of a supreme fiction is not a fixed concept, but, as Stevens claims, it "resolves itself into an enormous number of vibrations, movements, changes. To fix it is to put an end to it" (*CPP* 664). And, just "as a wave is a force and not the water of which it is composed, which is never the same, so nobility [and its alter ego, the supreme fiction] is a force and not the manifestations of which it is composed, which are never the same" (*CPP* 665). In considering the concept of a supreme fiction, Stevens is not interested in the analysis of the specific manifestations of a supreme fiction—God, man, earth, truth, and so forth—but in its wave-

like nature throughout history. He often uses light as a metaphor for the imagination to imply its wavelike nature. In "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," he suggests that, "Like light, it [the intelligence of the imagination] adds nothing, except itself" (*CPP* 681). In his correspondence, too, Stevens claims that the imagination as part of the subconscious is like "a wave" which is "purely a force": "That we recognize it [the imagination] in the conscious is like recognizing a wave (purely a force) in the water of which what we call a wave is composed" (*L* 373). In his "Adagia," where he famously claims that "The world is a force, not a presence" (*CPP* 911), he also calls the imagination "one of the forces of nature" (*CPP* 909). His idea of the supreme fiction, then, as identified with the "essential imagination," also takes a strong account of the world or reality as a force. It is the external force of the present-day reality and belief systems (which in "The Noble Rider" Stevens calls Ananke, the name of the ancient Greek goddess of necessity borrowed from Freud's essay *The Future of an Illusion*) that the poetic imagination needs to resist with its creative force. Yet in their dialectic interaction these two forces are interdependent, and any future supreme fiction needs to be shaped by the understanding that appears as a response to the force of a particular reality.

I find the ending of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" to be especially significant for the interpretation of the supreme fiction (or the essential imagination) as a force: "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" (*CPP* 417). In taking account of reality as a force, the supreme fiction posits itself as a force as well, since it gives order to life, which Stevens at one point equates with "chaos" (*L* 367). The supreme fictions in this sense create the orders necessary for the survival of human beings. In the conclusion to "The Noble Rider," Stevens points out that "in the last analysis [it seems that the imagination has] something to do with our self-preservation; . . . [it] helps us to live our lives" (*CPP* 665). Deleuze and Guattari express a similar understanding of the role of the imagination as it expresses itself in art, science, and philosophy. They suggest that "What defines thought in its three great forms—art, science, and philosophy—is always confronting chaos, laying out a plane, throwing a plane over chaos" (*Philosophy* 197). Concepts, in both Stevens' and Deleuze and Guattari's understanding, are central to the act of confronting the chaotic nature of life; they give meaning to our existence. Yet, even though they carry the signature of their creators, they are also like "multiple waves, rising and falling" (*Philosophy* 36), which sustain their affect in history and influence each other. In this sense, they are "centers of vibrations, each in itself and every one in relation to all the others. This is why they all resonate rather than cohere or correspond with each other" (*Philosophy* 23). It is this impersonal nature of the affect transmitted by concepts throughout history that Stevens focuses on as he proposes the concept of a supreme fiction.

The inaccessibility of "Notes" can be partially attributed to the impersonality of its poetic voice. Based on the language of the poem, one cannot assume a circumscribable poetic persona that resembles a human subject. Granted that the voice is that of Stevens, signifying the major modern poet, the idea of the major poet itself is deterritorialized as that poet speaks in an unusually detached manner. The intensity of affect in the poem has more to do with abstract metaphysical thought than with individual consciousness. Chasing the invisible within the visible, the nonpresence within presence, the difference within equations is the inspiration of the ephebe or the modern poet. It is the pursuit of a phenomenon that can never be present, and consequently absent, since presence and absence apply to the logic of reversal or repetition—something of which the concept of a supreme fiction attempts to take account. This elusive phenomenon may be responsible for the effect of what Stevens calls "pure poetry" or what Deleuze and Guattari call "pure movement": "We never *actually* see a world of pure movement; we always see movement in relation to fixed terms. But a concept takes us from the actual and everyday world to the virtual possibilities of that world; our world is made up of movement" (Colebrook 36). Pure poetry, like pure movement, does not exist as a demonstrable essence, but as an effect created with the arrangement of traditional referential language. It is an effect that deterritorializes language, making it resonate with the uncertainty of "as," even as it creates orders or provides factual information.

While philosophy imposes its logic as an organizing principle of political and theological systems, poetry traces the emotional effect of such conceptually created realities on human beings. As it conveys the complementariness of philosophy and poetry, "An Ordinary Evening" complements "Notes," which, as I have tried to demonstrate, exhibits the movement between thought and feeling, ideas and affects. I have referred to those thoughts and feelings as impersonal only because they are not specific to the individuality of human beings, but are imposed on those beings by forces that gain momentum throughout history. The supreme fiction (as the "larger poem for a larger audience" [*CPP* 397]) can be identified with the force or energy that makes this historical movement possible; it provides the conditions for both repetition and change of traditional belief systems. As it addresses the modern condition, Stevens' "Notes" points to the repetitive tendency of the apparently radical faith in rationality, objectivity, and sensuality. Rather than being a counterpart to a faith in God, in heaven, and in spirituality, this "new" faith becomes a complement to the old ones. From this perspective, the faith in humanism and rationality does not provide a true alternative to the past. The reflection on these modern faiths, on the conditions for their existence, is the mark of a different approach to belief. It marks Stevens' arguably more postmodern account of faith as a product of past impersonal affect and the individual imagination, and as the creation or production of a belief (or a supreme

fiction) that is elusive. Both "Notes" and "An Ordinary Evening" experiment with language to relay a sense of the abstraction and elusiveness of the concept of a supreme fiction. Whenever Stevens, in these poems, posits a statement, it is only momentary, or under question, not because any proposition is by definition false, but because its opposite can be true as well. It is in this "amassing harmony" (*CPP* 348) of possible or virtual realities, like Borges' garden of forking paths, that one can experience what Deleuze calls the openness of life, and Stevens provisionally calls a supreme fiction.

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Notes

[1]See Vendler, *On Extended Wings*; Bloom, "Ordinary Evening"; and Miller, "Theoretical."

[2]In canto VII of the third part of "Notes," "It Must Give Pleasure," Stevens refers to the real as a being which needs to be lured to reveal itself, like a beast "Warmed by a desperate milk" (*CPP* 349).

[3]Brazeal calls the idea of a supreme fiction "fictive" (89) and suggests that, although Stevens implies in his title ("Notes") that the idea is possible, the supreme fiction is not actual: "There *can be* [a supreme fiction], though there *is* not" (93); it is "a mere possibility" (94).

[4]For Catawba, see Stevens' lines from the final part of "Notes": "There was a mystic marriage in Catawba, / . . . / Between a great captain and the maiden Bawda. / . . . / The great captain loved the ever-hill Catawba / And therefore married Bawda, whom he found there" (*CPP* 346–47).

[5]Since Stevens composed "Notes" as he was preparing for his lecture on the "Noble Rider," the two works have been shown to mutually elucidate and complement each other by various critics including Joseph Riddel (*Clairvoyant Eye* 175, 183), Joan Richardson (188–89) and, more recently, Ayon Roy (257).

[6]In "The Noble Rider," Stevens claims that "To say that [poetry] is a process of the personality of the poet does not mean that it involves the poet as subject. Aristotle said: 'The poet should say very little *in propria persona*'" (*CPP* 670).

[7]Deleuze and Guattari define "affects" as impersonal affections and "percepts" as impersonal perceptions. Both are created by art and literature. "Concepts," on the other hand, are impersonal thought formations, created by philosophy.

[8]In a letter to Hi Simons of August 27, 1940, Stevens writes, "When I was a boy I used to think that things progressed by contrasts, that there was a law of contrasts. But this was building the world out of blocks. Afterwards I came to think more of the energizing that comes from mere interplay, interaction. Thus, the various faculties of the mind co-exist and interact, and there is as much delight in this mere co-existence as a man and a woman find in each other's company. . . . Cross-reflections, modifications, counter-balances, complements, giving and taking are illimitable. They make things inter-dependent, and their inter-dependence sustains them and gives them pleasure" (*L* 368).

[9]In "The Nothing That Is: Wallace Stevens' Hegelian Affinities," Judith Butler examines Penelope's experience of Ulysses' absence in Stevens' poem "The World as Meditation." She classifies that experience as "present absence"—that is, because Penelope focuses herself intensely on Ulysses' absence, and delineates her everyday activities

around it, Ulysses has a very palpable presence in her life, a "presence in the form of absence" (273).

[10]The experience of change is central to Stevens' understanding of the work of the imagination: it becomes the motto of the second major section of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction." The metamorphosis of belief through the shapes of gods, Major Man, or MacCullough testifies to the necessity of change imposed by an abstract, inhuman, or superhuman force. The "will to change" is associated with the west wind, symbolic of the Western tradition, as a movement, force, or music claiming its temporary residence within the premises of cities like New Haven. "An Ordinary Evening," furthermore, denies the freedom of thought to the modern thinker; he is not free to choose his manner of thinking. He cannot avoid the abstract, all-pervasive "will of necessity," just as he cannot evade hearing the sound of the sea, or breathing the air he breathes. There are several possible referents to the "will of necessity" in Stevens: imagination (or reality) as the "necessary angel"; the inescapable repetition compulsion determining the force of the beginning of "Notes"; or the poet's urge to resist the pressure of reality. In each of these cases, necessity functions as a drive acting upon the individual, undermining his subjective power. It is an impersonal or disembodied will, which deterritorializes our understanding of thoughts and emotions as possessed by concrete animate beings. Poetry responds to these impulsive impersonal beliefs inhabiting human beings: the poem "satisfies / Belief in an immaculate beginning / And sends us, winged by an unconscious will, / To an immaculate end" (*CPP* 330–31).

[11]One of the most significant problems raised by Edmund Husserl in *The Crisis of European Sciences* concerns the perceiving subject's escape from solipsism: "We, the subjects, in our normal, unbroken, coherent life, know no goals which extend beyond this; indeed we have no idea that there could be others" (144). Husserl solves this problem by suggesting the establishment of intersubjectivity on the basis of empathy, analogy, and likeness to oneself (185).

[12]In *T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and the Discourses of Difference*, Michael Beehler resents the efforts of totalizing Stevens' work. He suggests that the employment of the discourses of poetry and quantum physics "marks the eternal return of irreducible difference and of what Stevens characterizes as a fundamental indeterminacy" (9).

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