PART I

TOWARD A NEW POETICS

CHAPTER I

MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

In "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," while discussing the nature of poetic truth, Stevens observes: "What concerns us in poetry is the belief of credible people in credible things" (NA, 53). Distinguishing between philosophic truth and poetic truth as "logical" and "empirical" respectively, he concludes that "poetic truth is an agreement with reality" (NA, 54). Having ceased to live exclusively and entirely in the world of the mind as the philosophers do, we turn to credible things, to the visible and tangible things of the world. Standing in the "radiant and productive" world in which we live, we examine,

> first one detail of the world, one particular, and then another, as we find them by chance, and observing many things that seem to be poetry without any intervention on our part, as, for example, the blue sky, and noting, in any case, that the imagination never brings anything into the world but that, on the contrary, like the personality of the poet in the act of creating, it is no more than a process, and desiring with all the power of our desire not to write falsely, do we not begin to think of the possibility that poetry is only reality, after all, and the poetic truth is a factual truth, seen, it may be, by those whose range in the perception of fact - that is, whose sensibility - is greater than our own? From that point of view, the truth that we experience when we are in agreement with reality is the truth of fact. (NA, 59)

While pointing toward the possibility of poetry's power to give us the particular reality, Stevens makes some seminal observations regarding poetry in this passage. Poetry, first of all, is about credible things. The creative act grounds itself in, and directs itself toward, the actual, tangible things of the world. Secondly, the creative act does not involve an intervention on the part of the poetic self. The self does not "bring anything;" it does not add or impose its conceptual meanings on things, thus reducing them to its own images. It does not evade things by imagining them as something less or more or other. As Stevens explains later in the essay, "it is important to believe that the visible is the equivalent of the invisible; and once we believe it, we have destroyed the imagination, the false conception of the imagination as some incalculable vates within us, unhappy Rodomontade" (NA, 61). In other words, the imagination that claims sovereignty over things and deprives them of their rich, concrete individuality by transforming them to its abstract, invisible images, must be destroyed.

The creative act, then, is seen as "no more than a process." The imagination is neither subject nor source, but a process that "like light ... adds nothing but itself" (NA, 61). It is like the light that plays around objects in the dark, even though we cannot place its source. The light itself is neither subject nor object but a process that brings to radiant

appearance, makes luminous, the hiddenness and opaqueness of things. The imagination, likewise, makes manifest the rich presence of things.

The imaginative act, moreover, is an act of perception of the visible by a man of exceptional sensibility. It involves an immensely intense experience of living things it encounters. It has the "power to possess the moment it perceives" (NA, 61). Poetry, Stevens says in the essay, is "the imagination of life. A poem is a particular of life thought of for so long that one's thought has become an inseparable part of it or a particular of life so intensely felt that the feeling has entered into it" (NA, 65). Poetry is an empathetic experience that moves outward to a celebration of the world. The poetic experience is one of 'living' or 'being' in the world rather than the one that arises from 'knowing' it.

Finally, Stevens emphasises, poetic truth is "the truth of fact," of the real, the credible. It is, however, not the truth of "bare fact" (NA, 60), but of fact revealed in its rich presence. The transformation brought about by the poetic act is not the transportation of the visible into the invisible, but the transformation into its true nature, into its truth. This is how familiar things, say, the blue sky, appear, in a creative experience unfamiliar as if we look at them "for the first time" (NA, 65). In the creative experience the familiar is revealed

in the fullness of its living presence and "for the first time (we) have a sense that we live in the centre of a physical poetry, a geography that would be intolerable except for the non-geography that exists there" (NA, 65). Poetry's function is to make us aware of the "non-geography" that resides in the geographical world so that we may inhabit it more truly and fully. Poetry is thus ultimately indistinguishable from the world in which we live and we realize that "the world of fact is the equivalent of the world of imagination" (NA, 61). This is the "intimidating thesis" (NA, 61) which Stevens' poetry and thinking on poetry set out to explore and elaborate.

As the passage in "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" illustrates, Stevens is moving toward a possibility where poetry and reality are one, where the creative activity is intimately connected with the active core of our existence. In its insistence on, and faith in, the imaginations's power to reveal and recover the real, factual existence in its rich presence, his poetry distinguishes itself from the earlier poetic tradition. For, as long as the human imagination is conceived of as a locus of all meaning and value and the world as an object for representation, the integration or coexistence of the two is impossible. Stevens' poetry thus calls into question the traditional notions of the imagination and reality and demands a radical restatement of these terms.

In order to grasp the full import of Stevens' conceptions

of the creative act and the world one is led to avail of the modalities available in the writings of the contemporary German thinker, Martin Heidegger. This is not a question of remoulding Stevens' poetry into a philosophical framework. But the significance and magnitude of Stevens' radical restating of the idea of poetry can be more truly comprehended in the context of a similarly revolutionary redefinition of human understanding and poetry presented by Heidegger. Heidegger's development of phenomenological hermeneutics points to a notion of interpretive thinking that is grounded in the historicity of the world and not in an isolated subjective consciousness. Heidegger stresses on the original sense of hermeneutics as that which "brings out the Being of beings" and not "in the manner of metaphysics, but such that Being itself will shine out."[1] Against the traditional methods of ratiocination, he introduces a new kind of interpretive understanding by which things disclose themselves to us in their being. He goes on to affirm that it is language that defines the hermeneutic relation. In other words, the disclosure of things is made possible only in and through words. Heidegger's inquiry thus provides a rich base for a new poetics in which saying and being, poetry and reality, are intimately bound up. It also serves as a paradigm to explain a similar relationship between poetry and reality that seems to exist in Stevens' poetry.

Critics on Stevens have often referred to the affinity between Stevens and Heidegger. Richard Macksey, in an early essay

on Stevens, refers to Heidegger's Being and Time, along with other phenomenological thinkers, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.[2] He notices in Stevens' poetry the idea of a pregiven world, of intentional consciousness and an importance of death. J. Hillis Miller, though he does not refer to Heidegger specifically in his essay on Stevens in Poets of Reality, finds in his poetry a distinct desire to return to earth and to write the poetry of being.[3] In fact, an earlier version of this essay was called "Wallace Stevens' Poetry of Being."[4] Gerald L. Bruns in a significant study on language in modern poetry situates Stevens as a representative 'orphic' poet of the Heideggerian, phenomenological idea of language whose poetic activity extends to the creation of the world.[5] Bruns thus places Stevens in opposition to the Symbolist/Modernist poets who conform to the formalist/structuralist idea of language and seek to create the literary work as a self-contained linguistic structure. Thomas Hines, in his book on Stevens focuses on the affinity between Stevens' later poetry and Heidegger's ontology. He shows how "Heidegger's concept of the difference between Being and beings provides a way of explaining Stevens' poems that describe the disclosure of Being as the center and source of both the mind and the world."[6] However, Hines pays little attention to Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics that makes possible the ontological disclosure.

Frank Kermode in a recent, illuminating essay on Stevens observes that the affinity between Stevens and Heidegger, which

is usually taken for granted, lies, in fact, deeper than merely on the level of comparison. He suggests that while Heidegger, thinking of "the essence of poetry, its disclosures of being and its relation with death" commented on Hölderlin's text, Stevens was "meditating these very problems, probing fortuitously, and commenting on his own text."[7] Kermode thus points to the striking similarity between the two contemporaries' way of thinking. The philosopher's ideas, then, can most fruitfully be used to illuminate the poet's affirmations. The critics on Stevens, though they refer to the phenomenological aspects of his poetry and his affinity with Heidegger, however, do not seem to have examined in detail the possibilities of a new poetics that Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics suggests. They somehow are led to assume an epistemological structure and a subject-object duality in Stevens' poetry and do not seem to have considered the possibility of a phenomenological/ontological base of his poetics.

Stevens' own knowledge of Heidegger was, of course, meagre. After all, his interest in philosophy was that of an amateur. But he seems to have got interested in Heidegger through the latter's exegesis of Hölderlin's poetry. Stevens wrote to his Paris book-seller in 1952 to send him a copy of Heidegger's essays on Hölderlin in French translation. But he would, he said, "rather have it in German than not have it at all" (L, 758). Stevens was, however, more curious to know about the philosopher. He wrote to his Korean friend Lee to tell him "about (Heidegger)

because it will help to make him real" (L, 839). He even asked Lee to find out whether the philosopher lectured in French or German (L, 846). This curiosity to know all about Heidegger and about what he had to say regarding poetry and the supreme poet, suggests, perhaps, the affinity Stevens is likely to have sensed between his poetry and Heidegger's thinking. Stevens may have, as Kermode surmises, even known Being and Time.[8] The main question that should engage us, however, is not that of ascertaining the fact or the extent of Stevens' direct knowledge of Heidegger, or of Heidegger's direct influence on Stevens' work, nor even so much of putting Stevens in Heidegger's philosophical framework, as that of underscoring the vibrant affinities in the two contemporaries' understanding of poetry and of the world, and what is more important, that of availing of Heidegger's tools in grasping the real import of Stevens' central affirmations. A brief discussion of Heidegger's few central ideas, his radical redefinition of human understanding, of self and world and of language and poetry, would, therefore, be helpful in elucidating and formulating Stevens' affirmations.

Basic Postulates of Heidegger's Thought

Fundamental Ontology

The central question of all of Heidegger's thinking is the question of being, the Seinfrage. For Heidegger, however, phenomenology is our only clue to the meaning of being.

According to him, a fundamental ontology is that in which being is shown to be inseparable from temporality. The affirmation that being manifests itself only in and through the concrete, tangible world constitutes the essence of Heidegger's thinking. Being and existence, however, have been treated as two separate entities by the Western metaphysical tradition that begins with Plato, and, through Descartes and Kant, reaches a culmination in Nietzche. The major task of thinking is, then, to 'overcome' Western metaphysics in order to retrieve the ontological beginning, not in the sense of absolute origin, but in the sense of recovering the primordial situation of man's being in the world, to return to an originary way of thinking of being as the pre-Socratic Greeks did.

Heidegger follows Husserl's call to return 'to things themselves', but he restates his definition of phenomenology in his etymological analysis of the two components of the word: 'phenomenon' and 'logos'. Accordingly, 'phenomenon' is derived from the Greek word 'phainesthai' (to show itself) and its roots, which signify that which comes to light from hiddenness, "that which shows itself in itself, manifest."[9] 'Logos' derives from 'legein' which means 'discourse' or speaking as showing. It is the "mode of making manifest in the sense of letting something be seen by pointing out,"[10] Logos is not then something like 'ground' or 'reason' or 'judgment' or 'concept'. Rather, it is a saying which shows something as it is, in its manifestness.

Its function is to bring a thing out of concealment into light, to disclose what a thing is. In thus defining 'logos' as letting something be seen as it is, Heidegger restores to "truth" a primordial meaning of 'aletheia' or that which gets unhidden. "The 'Being-true' of the 'logos' as 'aletheien' means that in 'legein' as 'apophainesthai' the entities of which one is talking must be taken out of their hiddenness; one must let them be seen as something unhidden ('alethes'); that is, they must be discovered."[11] The function of logos as speech, then, is to discover things as they are.

Heidegger thus defines 'phenomenology' as "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself."[12] What phenomenology lets us see is the being of entities. Thus phenomenology is our only access to ontology. To put it in another way, ontology must become phenomenology. Being is not timeless; it is not the essence 'behind' or 'beyond' appearance, a constant which stands eternal in the flux of time and change. For Heidegger, being is only in so far as it is itself temporal. As the title Being and Time declares, being and temporality are inseparable. As Steiner explains it, "The one makes no sense whatever without the other: There is no 'being' without 'Being'; and, without the 'beings' whose 'isness' it is, 'Being' would be an empty formulation."[13]

Heidegger's ontology is thus densely phenomenological. Being for him is not a transcendent located in any 'abstract'

beyond time. It is not an objective entity in itself. In fact, Heidegger describes being as 'das Nichts', or 'nothing'. This nothingness of being, however, is not a negativeness, a mere void or abstraction. It means that being itself is not, not in or of itself. But it makes manifest what is, what appears. Essentially self-concealing, it is un-concealed in the phenomena of the world. It is the hidden being that engenders the manifest, that permits things to appear, that gives them their concrete 'thereness'. It is this reinstating of being in time, in the facticity and historicity of existence that is central to Heidegger's vision. It is only within the 'horizon of time' that the primordial meaning of being and human existence can be had.

Destruction of Western Metaphysics

The notion of being as temporal calls for a radical revision of the entire Western metaphysical tradition since Plato that is founded on the exclusive separation of being and time, and which has thus forgotten being in the process of abstracting and idealizing it. The 'ontotheological' bias in Western thinking arrives, inherently, at the inference of the transcendent, eternal essence, as it attempts to locate truth in some abstract 'beyond'. Being is conceived as 'Idea', 'God', 'The Absolute Spirit', or 'The Unmoved Mover'. The tradition has thus grounded this meaning of being beyond what-is-as-such, that is, beyond the concrete processual realm of things as they are, of actuality. In thus

reifying being, it has relegated becoming to the realm of the apparent. This distinction between phenomenon and being runs through the entirety of Western thought. As the very word 'metaphysics', which means 'beyond nature', suggests, it is an attempt to transcend the phenomenal world, to abstract or spatialize time, to metamorphose temporality into a realm of immaculate ideation.

It is Plato who first conceived of the being of beings as residing in eternal immutable matrices of perfect form or 'Idea' and thus introduced the division between essence and existence for the entire idealist-metaphysical tradition. In his asceticism of rejecting the temporal world as mere appearance, Plato misses the dynamic experience of truth as unconcealment in light, of the rich mystery of existence and settles for a concept of truth as correspondence or 'correctness' of perception and assertion.

With Descartes, Western thinking takes another decisive turn. Descartes appears at the point in Western history after which the divine Word of the medieval dispensation becomes increasingly the aggressive logos of human subjectivity. It is this centrality of human subject that Descartes first posits and which reaches culmination in Nietzsche that Heidegger most strongly repudiates. For Descartes truth is determined and validated by certainty. Certainty in turn,

is located in the ego. The self becomes the centre of reality; it is seen as the ultimate reference point for the status of all that is seen. What is known is thus not seen ultimately as an ontologically independent entity presenting itself as it 'is', as disclosing and manifesting itself to us in its own power of being. Rather what is known is seen as an object which the conscious subject represents to itself. As Heidegger says in "The Age of the World View," "in the metaphysics of Descartes the existent was defined for the first time as objectivity of representation, and truth as certainty of representation."[14] The temporal existence thus takes the form of object before or in front of the observing subject. This objectification of existence means that the things themselves are uprooted from their temporal, primordial, context and are in fact seen as a whole at a distance as a "view" or a "picture" (not a picture of the world, but the whole world conceived as picture). This relationship of man as subject and the world as object interpreted as 'Bild', as view, finds its most formidable expression in man's claim to master existence as a whole. A highly egocentric, anthropomorphic humanism is born, if by humanism we designate "that philosophical interpretation of man which explains and evaluates the existent as a whole from the viewpoint of and in relation to man."[15]

This tradition of subjectivity initiated by Descartes which takes the human phenomenon as the ultimate referent

point, as the ground of a world that he himself projects or forms, is carried through in Kant in his notion of the transcendent self and its fusion with the objective world. In Hegel, subjectivity and subjective idealism culminate in a kind of absolute certainty. The nihilism of Nietzsche is the inevitable closing chapter of metaphysics, for, in spite of its proclamation of the death of Platonic values and the Kantian Absolute Reason, the will-to-power that Nietszche advocates is itself only a wildly exalted subjectivity. In the present day this wilful, arrogant, egocentric subjectivity expresses itself in man's frenzy for technological mastery. When man becomes the true centre and measure of all things, the existents lose their richness, their sacredness and mystery and are reduced to being relentlessly consumed by man. If man does not learn to somehow overcome this imperialist subjectivity, Heidegger warns, he is doomed. He must, therefore, return to the sources of existence, must recognize the sense of being, must preserve and experience the essential richness and inexhaustibility of the earth in an open responsiveness to things. Heidegger's summons to overcome metaphysics is, as Steiner has very rightly observed, "simultaneously, and quintessentially, a summons 'to the saving of the earth'. The two are indissoluble. It is in the very extremity of the modern crisis, in the very time of nihilistic mechanism, that hope lies ready."[16] The first task of thinking, then, is to 'overcome' the metaphysical tradition so that we may recover our originary belonging to the world.

Dasein

While criticizing the Cartesian 'cogito' which views the world as an object from a distance as a detached onlooker, Heidegger introduces a new concept of the self, Dasein, which is the 'there-being', or, 'being-in-the-world'. The self is not posited as pure and absolute perceiver, a fictive and abstract agent of cognition detached from common actual existence. The essence of man is not transposed from daily life as it is in all metaphysics since Plato. Dasein is 'to be there', in the concrete, actual, shared world. To be human is to be immersed, implanted, rooted in the world. The world is here and now and all around us. We are in it, totally. It is this embeddedness in the world that is suggested in the definition of Dasein as a being-in-the-world.

The world, then, is not an objective reality. It is the primordial world, the Lebenswelt, the 'life-world' of which Husserl speaks in The Crisis. The world, according to Husserl, does not exist as an entity, as an object or a set of objects set over against us, but a pregiven, preobjective world which is always there, which precedes us and is the ground of all our knowledge. The life-world is a universal field, "the spatio-temporal world of things as we experience them in our pre- and extra-scientific life... We have a world horizon as a horizon of possible thing-experience."[17] Husserl thus discovers and defines man who from all time has, as the horizon of all his

intentions, a world, the world.

But Heidegger's world is more absolute than Husserl's. If Husserl's cogito is still the transcendental self, Heidegger's Dasein constitutes itself in time. The world is the total determinant of its being-at-all. There is no dissociation between essential being and being here and now, between mind and body. Dasein is 'thrown' into the world, is totally immersed in the complete and enveloping presentness of the world. It is not, then, its own awareness that constructs the world. Its 'thrownness' rather suggests its responsibility, its circumspective 'care' or concern for 'there' or the world. This total restructuring of the self in terms of its temporality accounts for the radical reshaping of the whole way of its seeing the world. For, it is ultimately the world, and not the isolated subjectivity, which is seen as the locus and source of all understanding.

Dasein's temporality is made concrete by the overwhelming fact that all being is a being-towards-death. Death is not an 'event' that terminates life. Rather, its nearness and presentness makes Dasein aware of its finitude; its 'Angst' or anxiety makes Dasein conscious of its own potentiality, liberates it to strive towards authenticity and fulfilment. Far from being a negative experience to be dreaded, death makes Dasein plunge into existence with utmost urgency and responsibility.

Though Dasein is defined as being itself a being among

other things, it is privileged in that it alone is a being who questions being; he alone thinks being and speaks his thoughts, i.e., he questions being by means of language. This questioning alone makes significant what Heidergger calls 'Existenz'. Dasein is thus finally defined as "ontically distinctive in that it is ontological,"[18] In other words, "understanding of being is itself a definitive characteristic of Dasein's being."[19]

To ask the meaning of being is to enter the famous hermeneutic circle. The question is not an epistemological one. Being is not some unknown, abstract proposition to be understood by an epistemological subjectivity. What is important in the question is that it is ruled by the questioned — by the thing about which the question is asked. "Every inquiry is a seeking. Every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought... Any inquiry about something, has that which is asked about."[20] What is implied in the circularity of inquiry is that being is somehow already known in advance by Dasein. The very mode of questioning implies that Dasein has a prior awareness of what is to be sought. It is man's task then to discover being, which he by his very nature has in advance.

It is the temporal priority of Dasein that distinguishes it from the Cartesian cogito. We see that with Heidegger the Cartesian 'cogito ergo sum' - 'I think, therefore I am' - becomes fatuous, a mere anthropomorphic, rationalistic bravado. Rather,

as Steiner observes, reverse is the case: 'I am, therefore I think.'[21] Thinking, knowing or understanding, as a consequence, are modes of man's being, not a mental attribute or a power to be possessed. Understanding is a mode of being of Dasein as being-in-the world. Knowledge is not some mysterious leap from subject to object and back again. "The perceiving of what is known is not a process of returning with one's booty to the 'cabinet' of consciousness."[22] It is, on the contrary, a form of being-with, a concern-'Sorge' - with and inside the world, in man's total involvement with things he encounters. Dasein only discovers itself and being as it grasps reality. Understanding, in this sense, is existential and historical. When the self grasps something, it is not through an analytic, contemplative gaze but in the moment in which the thing suddenly emerges from hiddenness in the full functional context of the world. Understanding, in other words, is embedded in the world.

Hermeneutics

Interpretation or hermeneutics is rendering explicit of understanding. Hermeneutics also, then, like understanding is ultimately existential or phenomenological. Hermeneutics for Heidegger is not merely a technique of exegesis, a method of interpretation but the primary act of interpretation which first brings things from concealment. It involves the general problem of comprehension of the meaning of reality. "Interpretation functions as disclosure. In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which

is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation."[23] Understanding or interpretation then is not an act of observing a neutral object and assigning it a signification. Rather, it is entering into a 'lived' encounter or experience a thing in a totality of involvement, in 'circumspect concern' so that the thing is understood in its primordial significance, i.e., as it is. In interpreting,

> We are not simply designating something; but that which is designated is understood as that as which we are to take the thing in question. That which is disclosed in understanding — that which is understood — is already accessible in such a way that its 'as which' can be made to stand out explicitly. The 'as' makes up the structure of the explicitness of something that is understood. It constitutes the interpretation.[24]

Hermeneutics for Heidegger is thus grounded in the temporal being of existents. It is a process of discovering primordial temporality of being. Traditional hermeneutics looks at things objectively from the view point of the subject, and transforms them into synchronic signs or forms, emptied out of time. It "takes the form of suspending the temporal process, of transforming the time of experience into a pure sequence of "nows ... in which the ecstatical character of primordial temporality has been levelled off."[25] A more

open and originative phenomenological hermeneutics, on the other hand, grounds itself in existential intentionality which Heidegger defines as 'Sorge' or 'care' and discovers the being of things in a 'careful' or 'concernful' encounter of things. As Richard Palmer very pointedly defines it, "Hermeneutics in Heidegger, then, is a fundamental theory of how understanding emerges in human existence. His analysis weds hermeneutics to existential ontology and phenomenology, and points to a ground for hermeneutics not in human subjectivity but in the facticity of world and in the historicality of understanding."[26]

It must be noted that hermeneutics does not discover anything radically new as such. "Whenever something is interpreted as something," Heidegger writes, "the interpretation will be founded upon fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a pre-suppositionless apprehending of something presented to us."[27] This hermeneutic circle "is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing."[28] Heidegger's interpretation of the hermeneutic circle is again his affirmation of the existentiality of human understanding, and is, therefore, as William Spanos has explained "at the very heart of his version of the phenomenological return 'to the things themselves'."[29] Dasein understands being beforehand, not as a derived conceptual proposition, as finalized and

spatial totality, but only in a vague, dim way, as that which has been 'forgotten' or 'covered up'. This vague primordial understanding of being which belongs to "the essential constitution of Dasein itself"[30] moves through time with 'careful' concern and discovers that being resides in the temporal process itself, that what it means to be is being.

Authentic language, 'rede', which is saying or speaking, is also equiprimordial and temporal, for Dasein is grounded in language; language is Dasein's mode of being. Man is the being who speaks and this distinguishes him from other existents. Words and language are not wrappings in which things are given signification. We live, says Heidegger, by putting into words "the totality- significations of intelligibility ... To signification, words accrue."[31] Speech is not an acquisition of man with which he designates things which are already there. Rather, speech is grounded in the temporality of man, as a mode of man's being. It is an articulation of man's existential understanding and as such functions as an ontological disclosure. It is in speech that things first are understood as they are. It is in words and language that things first come into being and are. Words are thus the making of the world. Heidegger has already defined 'logos' as speech which retrieves a primordial understanding of 'truth' as unhiddenness or dis-closedness. Language, in other words, is not treated as an expression of isolated and autonomous consciousness that imposes meaning on already existing things, but a spontaneous, existential act that first brings

things into their true being. Words and world are thus simultaneous.

To sum up, Heidegger's expounding of phenomenological hermeneutics introduces a new, 'postmodern' notion of interpretative understanding or thinking which roots us back in human existence in a more originary and authentic way. It demands, first of all, a phenomenological reduction of all our metaphysical perspectives in which being and beings are separated and in which the subjective self overpowers the world. At the same time, it retrieves man's original status as being-in-the-world, retrieves the actual, primordial world into which man as Dasein finds himself thrown. Thirdly, because of his temporality, man loses his privileged status as a disinterested, detached observer of an objective world, and becomes concernful in his involvement with things. He is not the transcendent reified subject who gives meaning to things, but in abandoning his will-to-power over things he becomes open and responsive to being, in letting being show itself in beings, in letting things <u>be</u>. Finally, understanding, and speech are equiprimordial and radically temporal, i.e., they are not grounded in Logos, nor in the transcendent self. Rather they are his very mode of existing which make the ontological disclosure possible. Phenomenological hermeneutics, in thus grounding itself in temporality, retrieves a more primordial understanding of "truth" as dis-covery of the temporality of being, of things <u>as</u> they are.

Heidegger's analysis of hermeneutics as a comprehension of reality thus transcends the subject-object schema and defines interpretative thinking as disclosing and displaying our world in its true being. It has been widely influential in the fields of literary and philosophical thinking. Hans Georg Gadamer in his important work Truth and Method undertakes a fully developed exposition of implications of Heidegger's hermeneutics for aesthetics and text interpretation as well as other disciplines. For Gadamer the term 'hermeneutics' designates "the basic movement of human existence, made up of its finitude and historicity and hence includes the whole of its experience of the world."[32] The experience of the work of art "always fundamentally surpasses any subjective horizon of interpretation.... Understanding is never subjective behavior toward a given 'object', but.... belongs to the being of that which is understood."[33] The work of art, in other words, is not a thing in itself, outside history and time, but a constantly renewing reality in which we participate as we experience it. Heidegger's hermeneutics has also been taken up by Paul Ricoeur, with modifications, in his writings on language, especially in his recent work on metaphor[34] in which he develops a hermeneutics of metaphor as displaying the world, discovering the phenomenological/ontological reality, which it creates. In America several critics have seen in Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics an alternative to the formalist-structuralist methodology and even to the

deconstructionist thinking of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida and his followers. William Spanos, for instance, applies Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics to his theory of a postmodern, temporal literary hermeneutics as opposed to the modernist formalist/structuralist literary tradition and its spatial metaphysical approach.[35] The objection raised by the deconstructionist thinkers, especially, Derrida, is that Heidegger, in spite of his attempt to destroy the Western metaphysical tradition, falls into its trap in his plea to retrieve being. Heidegger's plea for a return to our origins, however, is not a plea to return to a transcendent logocentric source, but to the recovery of man's primordial being-in-the-world in which alone being can be discovered. Heidegger's emphasis thus seems to fall on the temporality of being and not on the transcendent Presence.

Heidegger's Views on Language and Art

After Being and Time Heidegger's thinking concentrates on two basic issues of the nature of truth and language. The analytic of Dasein gives way to the musings on the absolute primacy of language, on how being manifests itself in and through language. His later writings, however, mark no real 'kehre' or reversal as has been sometimes observed, but are a continuation of the central concerns of Being and Time. As Ricoeur has argued, "the rise of Dasein as self and the rise of language as speech or discourse (Parole) are one and the same problem."[36]

In the essays collected in On the Way to Language Heidegger focuses on the essential supremacy of language. For Heidegger, to be at all is to speak. If our existence did not include the power of language all existents would be closed to us. For it is only in language that being appears, enters into disclosure. There can be no language without being, no being without language. Hence the central affirmation that "the being of language becomes the language of being."[37] The essence of language, its being, is to give us the being of things. Language is the primordial saying, 'legein' which is also showing. "But this showing is in no way to be considered as signs in the usual sense of the word, that which is an instrument for a manner of designation of things but that it is a showing in the sense of bringing something to light... Saying is in no way the linguistic expression added to the phenomena after they have appeared -- rather, all radiant appearance and all fading away is grounded in the showing-saying."[38] Language as saying-showing is a historical act in which being comes into time and happens. Language conceived as such ceases to be an expression of an anthropocentric subjective self which uses language to assign names to things. Language is not a system of signs, rather in language man opens himself to the arrival of being. As Heidegger says, language is in its essence neither expression nor an activity of man. Rather, "language speaks."[39] Language, in short, is not an expression of the subjective self but an existential act in which being happens and is discovered.

In "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger postulates the primacy

of language: "Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home."[40] Language is an arrival or occurrence of being. It is thought and poetry that realize the presentness and integrity of 'Sein'. It is they which are the instrumentality and medium of the ontological 'letting-be'. Man is not the centre that determines being, but, it is being which, via language, discloses itself to and in man. Man is nothing more than the guardian, "the shepherd of being."[41] This is the only authentic in-dwellingness worth striving for in human existence. As Steiner explains, this function of man as guardian"renders fatuous the Cartesian centrality of the ego and the Sartrean scenario of individual existence as the source of freely chosen essence."[42] Man only <u>is</u> to the extent that he stands open to being. The essential stance of man is not that of arrogant absolute lawgiver but one of receiver in humility and expectation.

It is in "The Origin of the Work of Art," written in 1935, that the questions of truth, language and the dynamic experience of being in its hiddenness/unconcealment, the questions which were posed repeatedly in <u>Being and Time</u>, are dealt with most urgently and introduced in new terms that were to define the major emphasis of Heidegger's later writings. Heidegger defines the work of art as that in which truth happens or occurs. Truth is not seen in the sense of correctness, but in the original Greek sense of the word, as

"aletheia" or the unconcealedness of beings. In the work of art a thing emerges into the unconcealment of its being; a present, actual thing discloses itself in its presence. The art work opens up in its own way the being of beings. This opening up, i.e., this revealing, i.e., the truth of beings happens in the work. "In the art work, the truth of an entity has set itself to work."[43]

As an illustration, Heidegger meditates on Van Gogh's painting of an old worn-out pair of shoes. It is not the knowledge of some Platonic Form of such an object that is imitated or conveyed in the painting. Nor is it a mere reproduction of an actual object. It is only in and through the painting that the pair of shoes achieves its total being. The painting lets them be. It communicates to us the essential 'shoeness' in their living presence, the truth of being of shoes, which are at once familiar and infinitely new and strange.

Thus things come to be revealed in a work of art in their absolute, integral presence. In and through the work of art, Heidegger says, "the world worlds."[44] The work erects a world, it opens a space for beings to emerge; it lets beings come to their radiant appearance. "The world is not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar or unfamiliar things that are at hand... Neither is it a merely imagined framework added by our representation to the sum of

such given things.... World is never object that stands before us and can be seen."[45] Rather, the world is that familiar horizon within which human existence confidently moves and experiences the unconcealedness of things in the openness of being. It is in the world that things first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are.

But in setting up a world, the work also sets forth the earth. Earth is the self-concealing, self-secluding ground "that shelters everything that arises as such."[46] The self-seclusion of the earth is not however a "uniform, inflexible staying under cover, but unfolds itself in an inexhaustible variety of simple modes and shapes.[47] Earth is thus the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and, to that extent, sheltering and concealing. "Earth is that which comes forth and shelters. Earth, irreducibly spontaneous, is effortless and untiring. Upon the earth and in it, historical man grounds his dwelling in the world."[48]

World and earth are however not to be seen as opposite terms, suggesting form and matter. They are indivisible and occur simultaneously in the work of art. They are engaged in a vital strife. In the great work of art truth happens in the guise of the primordial struggle between 'clearance' and 'concealment'. It is perhaps in this dialectical reciprocity

of closure and radiance, of hiddenness and manifestation that the uniqueness of art lies. The mystery of earth or being is essentially self-concealing fof it cannot be externalized, cannot be extracted from things. But at the same time it is embodied in things, and, as such an embodiment it is, at the very same instant, a making manifest, a coming into being.

Art, then, is the opening of space in which things emerge in their being. It is a 'clearing', a 'Lichtung', a 'lighting' in which being declares itself. To create is to bring to light from hiddenness. The creative act is like the light which plays around objects in the dark in the wood even though we cannot place its source. The light itself is neither subject nor object. It is a process. Art not only brings to light the being but also preserves and guards its mystery. The original Greek word 'techne' retains this meaning of creative act for it signifies a bringing into being, a making palpable and luminous of that which is already inherent in 'phusis'. A genuine creative act is a 'calling forth' of beings while yet preserving and guarding their mystery, and not, what it has been since Plato, a mastery over knowledge and thus a devaluing of the mystery/nature. Art is real in this most vital sense that it brings forth things, it reveals beings and lets them come to radiant appearance and yet guards and conserves their essential mystery. It is this relationship between 'logos' and 'phusis', between poetry and reality, that

is central to Heidegger's meditation on language and poetry. Poetry is not an imitation of the real, as in the traditional aesthetics, it is the real.

Heidegger's thought opens up an area of poetics in which poetry and reality coexist in an abiding relationship. His notion of human self as a being-in-the-world, and not a detached, transcendent observer of the 'objective' world, his definition of the world in terms of its facticity, as existing prior to, and independent of, self and consequently, his idea of human understanding as a mode not of knowledge, but of being, bring about a radical revolution in human sensibility. Heidegger's insistence on the 'destruction' of the metaphysical tradition that is based on this binary antinomy of self and world makes possible a return to a situation that is prior to such dualism. Heidegger is thus able to conceive of understanding, language and poetry not as revelatory of the isolated subject but of the world in which the self is grounded. Language or poetry is thus an act of disclosure of our own world in its true being.

Stevens' poetry, as the next two chapters attempt to show, presents analogous views of self and world. Reality, as the next chapter argues, is not an 'objective' world in Stevens' poetry, but the spatio-temporal world that is ontologically prior to, and independent of, self. Our access to this world

is made possible through what Stevens calls, almost in the manner of Heidegger, "decreation" (NA, 175). Similarly, as the third chapter proposes to explain, self in Stevens in not the pure and transcendent subjectivity, but a self that is situated in the world. The creative act, consequently, leads to a fuller realization of the visible and tangible world, a disclosure of the rich mystery of concrete, temporal existence. In thus transcending the subject-object duality Stevens' poetry moves toward a new poetics that is capable of restoring and recovering our temporal existence.