CHAPTER III

POETRY AS DISCLOSURE

When all the conceptual and metaphorical encrustations that conceal the primordial world are decreated, poetry directs itself to disclose the world in all its rich presence. This requires, however, a complete reorientation of the self's way of perceiving the world. The poetic self is no longer conceived as a transcendent subjectivity but as a temporal self situated in the existential world, which participates in, and discovers, things in its immediate experience of them. As a consequence, the notion of the imagination changes. As this chapter argues, Stevens seems to reject the creative act, the metaphoric process that uproots things from their temporal/existential context by rendering them as pure, transcendent presence. He rather relocates the metaphoric force in its power to describe real things in their full potentiality and thus defines the function of the creative act as the ontological disclosure of things. The concept of fiction, likewise, does not mean the arbitrary mental constructs of the self that exist independent of the real world. Creative fiction, rather, makes possible a fuller realization of, and participation in,

real things. Creation and discovery thus become synonymous and the apparent contradiction between the inventive power of art and the revelation of human reality is seen to disappear. The ultimate experience that poetry yields is the one of the discovery of the presence of present things, of being in the temporal process itself. The supreme importance of poetry lies in that it is only in and through poetry that things manifest themselves as they are and thus come to exist in their full presence.

The Poetic Self

The decreation of the conceptual encrustations that cover the primordial reality involves also the rejection of the self that imposes its humanized conceptions on reality. The self is no longer conceived as transcendent subjectivity but in terms of its primordial belonging to the world. The primarily Cartesian notion of the self as essentially separate from the world and body and the ultimate source of truth is replaced by a sense of the self that is situated in the world. The notion of the poetic self thus changes radically. Its epistemological structure is replaced by an ontological one, for the focus shifts from the isolated consciousness or the pure, 'inner' self to the world to which the self comports itself. This accounts for a radical reshaping of the whole way of its seeing the world. Instead of transforming the rich, living flux of the tangible world into an inner, abstract

experience, the self moves out to an open-ended celebration of temporality.

As early as in Harmonium Stevens' poetry establishes the validity and the inevitability of the external world for the existence of the self. The self is not conceived as a transcendent subject that transmutes the existential space and time into an atemporal inner space. Rather it exists in sofar as it embodies the lived space. "I am what is around me," states "Theory" (CP, 86). "The Anecdote of Men by Thousand" (CP, 51-52) defines the soul as "composed / Of the external world:"

> There are men of the East, he said,
> Who are the East.
> There are men of a province
> Who are that province ....

The self does not compose the external world according to its images, rather, as a being-in-the-world it is totally immersed in the surrounding and is defined only in terms of its involvement with it. "The dress of a woman of Lhasa," the poem says, "in its place, / Is an invisible element of that place / Made visible." In his first major poem about poetry, "The Comedian as the Letter C," Stevens shows his misgivings about the self that claims to be "the sovereign ghost" (CP, 27), the abstract, transcendent subjectivity that wills its power over things. The absurdity and the incongruity of such a superior

claim is ridiculed and finally shattered by the vast expanses of the sea, the impersonal reality that crushes the vain egotism of the self. The experience that Crispin never realizes for himself, yet the poem nevertheless proposes, is that "the natives of the rain are rainy men" (CP, 37). The poem thus points to a new conception of the self that is defined in its ability to live in the surrounding existential world. Such men are "responsive" (CP, 38) to the external world and do not claim to be its masters.

In "The Man With the Blue Guitar," Stevens again "evolve(s) a man" (CP, 181) who is not "aloft, / Alone, lord of the land and lord / Of the men that live in the land, high lord" (CP, 176), not the transcendent, detached self which imposes its wilful meanings on things and views them as "one's shadow magnified." Stevens' supreme man is rather "a native in this world / And think(s) in it as a native thinks" (CP, 180). This is the man who is immersed in the world, is not an outsider, a disinterested observer of an objective world. He does not absorb the real world into the inner space of the mind:

> Gesu, not native of a mind
> Thinking the thoughts I call my own?
>
> Native, a native in the world
> And like a native think in it.

He derives strength from the roots of earth:

> Here I inhale profounder strength
> And as I am, I speak and move.... (CP, 180)

He is finally described as an "old fantoche" (CP, 181), the great, fantastic poet, whom we tend to think of as abstract and unreal, "Hanging his shawl upon the wind" (CP, 181), but whom we suddenly discover to be a normal, ordinary human being, an employee of "the Oxidia Electric Light and Power Company" (L, 791). He is thus not a mythical hero who resides on the Olympian heights, but a native of Oxidia.

This notion of the self that is a native in the world, that is situated in the familiar, accustomed, surrounding world recurs throughout Stevens' poetry. The impossible possible philosopher's man "is the transparence of the place in which / He is" (CP, 251), and he is "responsive / As a mirror with a voice" (CP, 250). It is the surrounding place that defines the self. "The sailor and the sea are one" (CP, 392); he has no identity outside the sea. In fact, the self exists and fulfils itself only in sofar as it inhabits the external world. The great captain and the maiden in Catawba married well "because the marriage-place / Was what they loved. It was neither heaven nor hell" (CP, 401) but the familiar earth.

Stevens' critique of the Cartesian subjectivity is expressed in categorical terms: "Never suppose an inventing mind as source" (CP, 381) of the first idea. The self is not the locus or source in which a divine truth is vested. The first idea is not a figment of the mind. The Cartesian notion of the

self as the centre of certitude from which alone the world receives its validity and meaning is rejected here. In fact, the Cartesian belief that the reality can be had in the reflections of the mind is described as fatuous. As Stevens put it, "The first idea was not our own. Adam / In Eden was the father of Descartes / And Eve made air the mirror of herself" (CP, 383). This is the traditional metaphysical imagination which, posited as the central subjective self views reality as "varnished" by its own conceptions. Rather, as the poem argues, "we live in a place / That is not our own." We are 'thrown' into this world that has always and already been there: "The clouds preceded us / There was a muddy centre before we breathed." The human situation that Stevens conceives of is thus analogous to Heidegger's Dasien's thrownness into the facticity of the world.

Stevens also considers, and finally discards, the notion of an extremely idealist self in the poems like "Landscape With Boat" (CP, 241-243), and "Mrs. Alfred Uruguay" (CP, 248-250). The "anti-master-man, floribund ascetic" of the former poem seeks to reach truth "by rejecting what he saw / And denying what he heard," assuming that the truth lay "Like a phantom, in an uncreated night." Similarly Mrs. Uruguay, in her search for a pure being rejects the tangible world behind. As Miller comments, Stevens considers in these poems, "the super-Cartesianism of Mallarme and Valéry, the idea that reality and selfhood are to be reached by a hyperbolic doubt which puts

in question everything tangible and individual for the sake of an imageless purity glimpsed behind."[1] As the poems suggest neither the ascetic nor Mrs. Uruguay can arrive at the truth because their "no and no made yes impossible" (CP, 249). What Stevens is rejecting in these poems is the notion of the abstract, transcendent self that is believed to be the ground of all knowledge.

When the notion of the self changes from an isolated and absolute subjectivity to a being in the world, its sense of the world changes radically. It is one that arises from 'being' or 'living' rather than one that comes from 'knowing'. It is "A gaiety that is being, not merely knowing" (CP, 248). Stevens' poetry from the beginning celebrates the "marriage / Of flesh and air" (CP, 83). Freed from the loneliness of abstract thinking the self turns to a celebration of the temporal world, of the "Ecstatic identities / Between one's self and the weather" (CP, 258). In a lived experience the self discovers the world in its inexhaustible fecundity, that is, not in its "ascetic" (CP, 241), idealistic perfection, but in its rich imperfections. This is its true delight. The self thus has an access to reality, not by abstract thinking, but by experiencing it in its full immediacy. It steps "barefoot into reality"(CP, 423), it feels and experiences actual tangible things in their physical presence and establishes a 'lived' contact with them.

Perception is a primary act through which the self, grounded in the surrounding world, gains an access to things. Perception, however, is not an operation of thought that sets up before the mind a picture or a representation of things. The perceiving self is an incarnate self that is immersed in an actual landscape. In the primordial perception, eye and mind, vision and thought, visible and invisible are inseparable, and reflection is never distinct from the act of seeing. In such a perception the self discovers things in their imperious unity, in their unsurpassable richness. "The Latest Freed Man" (CP, 204-205), for instance, who has escaped at last from "the old descriptions of the world," from the knowledge of the absolute "Truth" about it, finds it is enough to perceive things around him. And, suddenly, he finds that "It was everything being more real, himself / At the centre of reality, seeing it. / It was everything bulging and blazing and big in itself." The man is situated at the "centre," in the midst of things and does not observe them from a distance. In his lived encounter of things, they emerge before him in their radiant and full presence.

Perception, then, is an existential act, a total, lived experience of things. Sight is grounded primarily in the circumspective concern for things, in the total involvement with the things perceived. As Stevens puts it in "Poem Written at Morning" (CP, 219),

> The truth must be
> That you do not see, you experience, you feel,
> That the buxom eye brings merely its element
> To the total thing.

Perception is an experience of intensity in which the "total thing" is realized. It lets entities which are accessible to be encountered, unconcealedly in themselves. It is thus an act of ontological disclosure of things. In "The Red Fern" (CP, 365), Stevens says, "it is enough in life / To speak of what you see. But wait / Until sight wakens the sleepy eye / And pierces the physical fix of things." In an act of perception, sight and insight become inseparable.

The true poetic self is the one which rids itself of all its assumed superiority over things and, instead of subsuming the visible and tangible things into the interior realm, turns outward to a sympathetic participation of things. The observer in "The Snow Man" (CP, 9-10), is "nothing himself," that is, he does not claim his will-to-power over the landscape by projecting his own feelings or meanings on it. Rather, like Keats' poetic self, he has no identity, and is, therefore, able to empathize with the being of winter, his mind identified with "the mind of winter."

Stevens frequently uses the images of 'ignorance' and 'poverty' to describe the decreated self. Ephebe, in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" is asked to "become an ignorant man again" (CP, 380). He must, in other words, rid himself of his

arrogant, anthropomorphic stance of knowledgable mastery over things and return to a state of simplicity and innocence so that he may recover and discover things in their being. For, as another poem puts it, "It may be that the ignorant man, alone, / Has any chance to mate his life with life / That is the sensual, pearly spouse, the life / That is fluent in even the wintriest bronze" (CP, 222). Only when the self is shorn of its egocentric supremacy over things can it celebrate the embodied experience of living immediacy.

Poverty is another image of the self in its simplicity and purity. Poverty is not an image of destitution, but of the self that is rid of all its arrogant claims of superiority over reality. The self in its poverty is conceived not as the master of beings, but as Heidegger says, the shepherd of being. Its stance is one of humility and acquiescence so that it is able to exist in the nearness of being. When it is "naked of any illusion, in poverty, / In the exactest poverty" the self is able to receive "the deepest inhalation / (That) would come from that return to the subtle centre" (CP, 258) of being of things. Poverty thus becomes the "heart's strong core" (CP, 427), because "not to have is the beginning of desire" (CP, 382) to receive and experience the arrival of being in familiar things. Stevens' supreme image of such a self is that of Santayana, living in poverty in a convent in Rome. Santayana's poverty is that simplicity of the self, that always lives in the proximity of being.

The poetic self thus is not an absolute and transcendent subjectivity but a self that is situated in the world and exists in the close proximity of things. Stevens' meditations on the 'major man' are an elaboration, and celebration, of this self. His 'major man' does not fall within the definitions of the traditional humanistic image of man. He is conceived neither in the image of God, nor in the image of man as God. As Stevens explained in a letter, "the trouble with humanism is that man as God remains man" (L, 434), i.e., man remains central as God. In another letter he said that "major men .... are neither exponents of humanism nor Nietzschean shadows" (L, 485). In fact, Stevens' image of the major man provides a critique of the entire tradition which reifies the centrality and superiority of the subjectivity. "Apotheosis is not / The origin of the major man" (CP, 387). The major man is presented not as a god or a hero, but in his most normal, common, ordinary identity, as "MacCullough" (CP, 386), for instance, who is "any name, any man" (L, 434). He is finally presented as a Chaplinesque figure, approaching "in his old coat, / His slouching pantaloons" (CP, 389). In a way, he is "eccentric" (CP, 274), for he is not the arrogant anthropomorphic centre of the world, but the self, which in its capacity to live outside itself, lives in the nearness of things. He is thus truly a demystified, decentralized self. Stevens calls him "more than human human" (L, 434), precisely because he is less bound up with the self conceived as subjectivity.

The major man is finally described in his relationship with being: "The major abstraction is the idea of man" (CP, 388), i.e., the being of man. This abstraction which is his being, whose power and force are the origin of his existence, his singular, particular living, is not an independent, transcendent source, but a "part, / Though an heroic part, of the commonal" (CP, 388). Stevens' major man thus bears striking affinities with Heidegger's Dasein who is literally the "there of being," in whose existence being occurs, or, who 'ek-sists', 'stands out' into the 'truth of being'. In Stevens' later poetry the self becomes not only less demanding but more and more open to the mystery of being. The stance is one of childlike wonder and astonishment. Like Heidegger's poet, perhaps, Stevens' also listens to and receives, with awe and gratitude, the presence of being in the human universe.

The poetic self in Stevens, thus, is not a disinterested and detached transcendent self which transforms the mystery of existence into abstract, atemporal images, but a self which in abandoning its will-to-power over things, exists in the nearness of things. Grounded as it is in temporality, it is able to retrieve and disclose things in their rich presence. The creative act, consequently, is not directed to the construction of a private, transcendent world, independent of the existential world. Rather, it directs itself to, as does the singer in "The Idea of Order at Key West" (CP, 128-130), a fuller realization

of, a coming into being of, the world that is always, already there. The metaphoric process leads to the revelation of reality and creation and discovery coincide.

Hermeneutics of Metaphor

The problematic of metaphor is central to Stevens. For a poet like Stevens for whom "the theory of poetry" is "the life of poetry" (CP, 486), i.e., the writing of poetry is writing about the creative process, a consideration of metaphor as the vital creative act becomes essential and inevitable. Hence the recurrence of the term metaphor in Stevens' poetry and his meditation on it in his prose writing.

In his discerning discussion of Stevens' use of metaphor Miller has observed that there is "a curious ambiguity in Stevens' discussions of metaphor."[2] The ambiguity, however, does not arise, as Miller seems to suggest, from the use of metaphor as "a horizontal relation between the particulars of reality" and "a vertical metaphor in which the whole world is transformed into an expression of the poet's mind."[3] Rather, it lies, if at all, in Stevens' rejection of a certain kind of metaphoric process and his restatement of it at another level where it functions as ontological disclosure. On the one hand, Stevens seems to distrust metaphor as a mere trope, a sign, a symbol, that is an "evasion" (CP, 373) of reality, the imagination that accentuates the distance between words and things, between the creative experience and the actual world of things. What Stevens seems

to be rejecting is the poetic act that is grounded in the centrality of the self which ultimately attains its purity and repose in its own formal, transcendent, self-enclosed realm that exists independent of the temporal, historic world in which we live. At the same time, Stevens locates the metaphoric act in its power, through its transformations, to bring into being the existential world in its full presence, and thus make possible the ontological disclosures.

In an early poem in Harmonium, "Metaphors of a Magnifico" (CP, 19), Stevens points to the dangers inherent in using metaphor as a single, conceptual, abstract vision of the real. The picture of twenty men crossing a bridge in a village is evocative of something. If metaphor meant substitution of one thing for another, then the scene could be seen in innumerable ways, for instance, the twenty men as really one man, or, one bridge as really twenty bridges. But the mind's every attempt at giving a meaning to the scene is frustrated; the real scene is a process, a song "That will not declare itself....," something that cannot be pieced together in any fixed pattern of signification. Stevens perhaps is suggesting the inadequacy of an imagination which claims to exist in itself as all powerful, which creates its mental worlds of "twenty bridges," or, of symbolic "one man," which may rival the real world, and yet remain only mental constructs. Such an imaginative act cannot succeed ultimately in

making meaning of reality, because the real object eludes it. But, as Stevens seems to suggest, in giving up the effort to make meaning of the scene, one can, perhaps, participate more fully in the real scene. If he doubts the imagination's power to unify the scene in a fixed meaning, he delights in its power to perceive something of the real scene, "the boots of the men.../ The first white wall of the village...." The imagination cannot, and must not, the poem seems to say, evade the real by turning it into a mental construct. The creative act must direct itself to the discovery of the real.

Stevens repeatedly speaks of the limitation of the imagination that claims to be all superior in its creation of arbitrary mental constructs and to exist independently of the real world. In "Add This to Rhetoric" (CP, 198-199) he criticizes the rhetorician who, in the way he speaks and "arrange(s)" evades "What in nature merely grows." He evades things by removing them from their growing, temporal, actual existence into an atemporal, abstract "pose" of his structures and "images." The poem shows how fatuous such "images" are when seen in the light of the real:

> Tomorrow when the sun,
> For all your images,
> Comes up as the sun, bull fire,
> Your images will have left
> No shadow of themselves.

It is not the "evading metaphor," then, the poem seems to suggest, but our "sense," our experience of the thing in its immediacy

and existentiality, that gives us the real thing.

Stevens denounces the creative act that separates not only words from things but also the actual from the ideal, the visible from the invisible, the creative act that presupposes a metaphysical distinction between the existent and the transcendent. In "Credences of Summer" he writes:

> Postpone the anatomy of summer, as
> The physical pine, the metaphysical pine.
> Let's see the very thing and nothing else.
> Let's see it with the hottest fire of sight.
> Burn everything not part of it to ash.
>
> Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky
> Without evasion by a single metaphor. (CP, 373)

What is implied here is the rejection not only of the rhetorical speech but also of the ontology implicit in the rhetorical tradition which is based on the Western metaphysics that begins with Plato, in which the invisible is seen as distinct from the visible. Metaphor, accordingly, is seen as the transfer from the proper to the figurative, from "the physical pine" to "the metaphysical pine." It does not give us the "very thing" in its existential/ontological plenitude, but only in a spatial ideality of its image or form.

In another poem, "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight" (CP, 430-431), Stevens speaks of how the roses are "beyond the rhetorician's touch":

> Too much as they are to be changed by metaphor,
> Too actual, things that in being real
> Make any imaginings of them lesser things.

One recalls Mallarmé's search for the ultimate flower that is absent from all bouquets and one realizes towards what extreme opposites these two poets direct their poetic act: Mallarmé toward the ideality of art, Stevens towards its existentiality. In his last major poem, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," therefore, one finds Stevens concentrating all his poetic energy most desparately, in the search of

> The poem of pure reality, untouched
> By trope or deviation, straight to the word,
> Straight to the transfixing object, to the object
>
> At the exactest point at which it is itself... (CP, 471)

Stevens' critique of metaphor, it is clear, extends to the entire rhetorical tradition which, either as in its romantic / idealist phase, tends to distinguish between the actual and the transcendent or, as in its Symbolist/Formalist phase, tends to make the separation between art and the real total. In both these phases, the literary tradition reflects a radically metaphysical view-point which gives us not 'reality' nor 'world' but the inner structuring of the self that seeks to possess things in their unchanging essence. In rejecting the traditional aesthetic perspective Stevens' poetry moves beyond it in favour of a metaphoric process that makes possible our discovery and participation of real things. Though Stevens' poetry rejects

metaphor that comes in the way of the direct creative experience of immediate reality, it admits of, and introduces, metaphoric force in an essential sense, in its power to redescribe reality. Metaphorical discourse, one can argue, has an ontological function in Stevens in which the things are seen in their true being, in which the potentiality of existence appears, in Heidegger's language, as blossoming forth. "The Motive for Metaphor" (CP, 288) Stevens says, is that the creative act is rooted in change, in the ever-renewing reality producing "the exhilarations of changes," and not in the absolute, abstract, "arrogant, fatal, dominant X."

If one turns to the papers in The Necessary Angel, one finds Stevens focusing on metaphor to explain what exactly the creative act involves for him. In the first of the "Three Academic Pieces" Stevens talks of metaphor as "the creation of resemblance by the imagination" (NA, 72). The purpose of the paper is "to get at one of the principles that compose the theory of poetry. It comes to this, that poetry is a part of the structure of reality... that poetry and reality are one, or should be" (NA, 81). The creation of resemblance is seen, then, as showing in what way poetry and reality are one.

"The study of the activity of resemblance," the paper proposes, "is an approach to the understanding of poetry. Poetry is the satisfying of the desire for resemblance" (NA, 77).

Now, resemblance is an act of perception. One recalls Aristotle's saying that "to metaphorize well implies an intuitive perception of the similar in dissimilars."[4] The effect of resemblance is, Stevens says, that "it complements and reinforces that which the two things have in common" (NA, 77). Its effect, in other words, is not that of substitution or transference of one term for the other. Rather, a previously unnoticed proximity of the two terms is perceived despite their logical distance. This is how "the mind begets in resemblance" (NA, 76), that is, in a sudden insight, a new structure emerges, a previously unknown aspect of the thing observed is disclosed. It is indeed a "begetting," resemblance does have an inventive character. But the metaphoric transfer, the poetic resemblance, is an act of approximation, or, rather, of appropriation, of bringing close, or coming-into-their-own, of things. It is a new way of seeing that things are really like this. Metaphoric seeing is thus seeing <u>as</u>. It is not an isolated mental activity that manipulates a synthesis or an agreement, but an act that lets something be seen <u>as</u> something, that is, in its true being. It is in this way that an act of resemblance extends our sense of reality. "It touches the sense of reality, it enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it" (NA, 77).

The poem "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together" (NA, 83-87), the second of the "Three Academic Pieces," is both an extention

and an illustration of Stevens' belief that the metaphoric utterance, the creative act, "the total artifice" reveals the thing in its existential/ontological presence, the pineapple as "the greenest cone," in short, the object in its "total reality." The poem is an example of the statement made in the first essay of "Three Academic Pieces" that "the proliferation of resemblances extends an object" (NA, 78). The poem, in its effort to put the pineapple together, that is, to see it in its imperious unity, offers several analogies, the "casual exfoliations (which) are/of the tropic of resemblance.... Apposites." (NA, 86). These analogies extend and intensify, in their profusion, the sense of the pineapple and dis-close the "greenest cone." They, like Cézanne's "planes bestriding each other" (NA, 174), reveal the pineapple "distilled / In the prolific ellipsis that we know, / In the planes that tilt hard revelations on / The eye.... tiltings / As of sections collecting toward the greenest cone."

The poem cautions against "false metaphor," the empty mental construct, that misses the real, the "tuft of emerald that is real." The man who perceives the pineapple "must say nothing of the fruit that is / Not true, nor think it, less. He must defy / The metaphor that murders metaphor." The genuine creative transformation is one which would disclose the fruit in its "total reality," that is, the fruit with its "tuft of emerald" seen in its being. The creative act is thus not

divorced from reality. Though it is a "begetting," an "artifice," its creating is also bringing into being of the thing. This is how Stevens would like to see the paradox that

> The total artifice reveals itself
> As the total reality. (NA, 87)

The full implications of Stevens' penetration into the paradox that "artifice" and "reality" are one can be best understood with the help of a recent, illuminating study on the subject of metaphor by Paul Ricoeur.[5] Ricoeur shows the development in the concept of metaphor through various stages in the history of language - from the classical rhetoric through semantics and semiotics to hermeneutics. The hermeneutics of metaphor is concerned, Ricoeur argues, not with the form of metaphor as a word-focused figure of speech, nor even with the sense of metaphor as a founding of a new semantic pertinence, but with the reference of the metaphorical statement as the power to 'redescribe' reality. Hermeneutics, or, interpretation, first of all, addresses itself to the text as work and not to the sentence as in semantics. Metaphoricity, in other words, is a trait not only of lexis but of the poetic work as a whole. The task of hermeneutics, according to Ricoeur, is "to display the world to which (the work) refers."[6]

Ricoeur develops his argument in three stages. In the metaphorical discourse referential power is linked, first of all,

to the eclipse of ordinary reference. At the same time, poetic discourse faces reality by putting into play 'heuristic fiction' which redescribes reality. Finally, the poetic act organizes reality in a manner that makes manifest a way of being of things. Creation and manifestation are thus seen ultimately to be simultaneous.

Ricoeur takes up the structuralist argument that poetic discourse is divorced of any direct reference to reality. But he moves on to state that "the suspension of reference in the sense defined by the norms of descriptive discourse is the negative condition of the appearance of a more fundamental mode of reference whose explication is the task of interpretation."[7] It is true that the metaphoric discourse divests language of its didactic function of the sign, but then at the same time it opens up an access to reality in a more fundamental way, in the mode of 'heuristic fiction'. Ricoeur explains his point with the support of Max Black, who in his Models and Metaphors compares poetic metaphors with scientific models. According to Black, in scientific language, the model is essentially a heuristic instrument that seeks by means of fiction to break down an inadequate interpretation and to lay the way for a new, more adequate interpretation. The model, in other words, is an instrument of redescription. It consists in introducing a new language, like a dialect or idiom, in which the original is described without being constructed. "The heart of the matter",

says Black, "consists in talking in a certain way."[8]

Similarly, in poetic discourse, Ricoeur argues, metaphoricity consists in describing a less known domain - human reality - in the light of relationships within a fictitious but better known domain, that is, the poem. The metaphoric act enables us to 'see' human life 'as' that which it displays. The conjunction of fiction and redescription suggests that poetic discourse develops an experience of reality in which invention and discovery cease being opposed. In other words, poetry as creation and poetry as mimesis, join together in poetry as discovery.

What the metaphoric discourse discovers is not anything new. Rather it dis-closes reality in its phenomenological / ontological plenitude. The 'split' reference, the term Ricoeur uses to emphasise the negation of ordinary description, is directed against our conventional concept of reality (It is analogous to Stevens' 'decreation'). It upsets "customary categorizations, has the effect of logical disordering" for "it seems to mark the invasion of language by the antepredicative and pre-categorial, and to require a concept of truth other than the concept of truth-verification, the correlative of our ordinary concept of reality."[9]

The reality to which the metaphoric discourse refers is not, then, the objective reality. "Poetic discourse," says

Ricoeur, "brings to language a pre-objective world in which we find ourselves already rooted, but in which we also project our innermost possibilities. We must thus dismantle the reign of objects in order to let be, and allow to be uttered, our primordial belonging to a world which we inhabit, that is to say, which at once precedes us and receives the imprint of our works. In short, we must restore to the fine word invent its twofold sense of both discovery and creation."[10]

The paradox of the metaphorical utterance, which resides in the copula is — for metaphorical 'being as' means being and not being — is, finally, understood as laying bare the ontology implicit in the metaphorical discourse, a coming out into openness, an unconcealing, a becoming manifest of what was beforehand hidden as potentiality. Metaphoric discourse thus has an ontological function in which "the potentialityoof existence is seen as blossoming forth."[11]

It is this relationship between poetry and ontology that seems to reside at the heart of Stevens' meditations on metaphor. He is alive to the danger metaphor poses when it introduces concepts and patterns of signification, or, when it involves the risk of abstracting the external world to the self, of seeing it as the image of the self. In other words, Stevens denounces the creative act that denies an access to the real world. Having firmly rejected metaphor as a trope, as a symbolic expression, as

a structural device, in short, as a part of lexis, Stevens relocates the metaphoric force in its power to display or disclose the world that it brings into being. The "total artifice" is, thus, seen no longer as opposed, but as our only access, to "total reality." Stevens defines the three-fold activity of the imagination as "fully made, fully apparent, fully found" (CP, 376). What it creates, it perceives; what it perceives, it discovers.

Stevens' poetry, then, rules out any possibility of the poetic act existing in itself, independently of reality. Reality is the essential base of all creative activity and the function of poetry is seen to recover and restore the real world. "There is no such thing as a metaphor of a metaphor," Stevens says in one of the Adagia. "One does not progress through metaphors. Thus reality is the indispensable element of each metaphor" (OP, 179). What Stevens implies here is that metaphoricity does not involve creating endless, empty mental constructs in void. It would, perhaps, not be correct to say, as Riddel does in his deconstructionist reading of Stevens, that "every poem, as in Nietzsche's parable of the creation, is a metaphor of a metaphor, a remove of one plane from another.... a figure not of that reality that precedes the 'artifice'.... but the mark of every discontinuity that stands between any fiction and the 'represented' it erases."[12] As Stevens affirms in his gloss of a canto of "The Man With the Blue Guitar,"

"there is nothing that exists exclusively by reason of the imagination, or that does not exist in some form in reality" (L, 364). Stevens' poetics is based on this firm affirmation of the acceptance of extra-linguistic reality that precedes all imaginative activity and it directs the creative imagination to the disclosure of this reality.

Fiction: Poetic Transformation

Poetry or 'fiction' as it can be seen from the preceding discussion on metaphor, acquires a new meaning and a new significance for Stevens. Fiction is not a mental construct that has no roots in the external world, that creates its own world, and insists on its own intrinsic existence. It is not a way of establishing the mind's supremacy over the world, its will-to-power over things, of rivalling the real world by constructing its arbitrary subjective worlds. It is rather our only access to the existential world in the fulness of its presence. It is here that Stevens' poetry distinguishes itself from modern poetry and reveals its 'post-modernity'.

The direction of modern poetry can be defined in terms of the creation of an autotelic work of art, of a fictive construct of the imagination, that negates, or, replaces, the reality of the external world. Valéry, for instance, defines 'pure poetry' as "a fiction deduced from observation,"[13] "an artificial and ideal order,"[14] "a system of relations unconnected with the practical order."[15] For Valéry, and the Symbolist/Modernist

poets in general, the fictive realm of poetry not only parallels the existential world but gains precedence over it. The creative act thus locates itself in the interiorization of the exterior, in the spatiality of the created gestalt that transforms the actual and tangible into the atemporal and abstract realm of art. The ultimate experience that poetry yields is to be found, not in the celebration of the lived existence, but in the repose of the ideality of a purified form.

Poetry, or "the supreme fiction," for Stevens, on the other hand, directs itself to the discovery of the temporal world. The creation of fiction is the way to redescription, an act which ultimately unites creation and manifestation. As Ricoeur has shown, the metaphoric discourse, while preserving and developing the creative power of language, also preserves and develops the 'heuristic' power wielded by fiction. We have seen how Ricoeur justifies his concept of the fictional redescription with the affinity established by Max Black between the functioning of metaphors in poetic language and of models in scientific language. Black shows that the theoretical models in science are essentially a heuristic instrument that seeks, by means of fiction, to destroy the common, inadequate interpretation and to lead to a more adequate interpretation. Models are, however, not constructed, they are rather a way of describing the original without constructing it. Similarly, poetic imagination is not a mental construct that is projected on the already

familiar reality. Rather, its function is to reveal the aspects of reality, the familiar things which lie hidden and concealed, to dis-cover the mystery of existence, in the light of relationships within a fictitious realm.

Fiction thus creates a world, and in creating it, reveals it. The enigma of fiction, of the creative act, is, as Ricoeur says, "that it 'invents' in both senses of the word: what it creates it discovers; and what it finds, it invents."[16] It is thus at once faithful to human reality and an original creation. It is faithful to things as they are and it depicts them as higher than they are, in their "nobility" (NA, 35), as Stevens would say.

Such a point of view finds corroboration in seminal contemporary thinking. Hans Georg Gadamer, for instance, in Truth and Method, while developing a hermeneutics of a work of art, explains in a similar way how the creation of a work of art and the revelation of human reality coincide. While criticizing the aesthetic consciousness grounded in subjective self-centrality which uproots the work of art from its temporality and allows it to exist in its isolated autonomy from life, Gadamer observes: "In as much as we encounter the work of art in the world and a world in the individual work of art, this does not remain a strange universe into which we are magically transformed for a time. Rather, we learn to understand ourselves in

it, and that means that we preserve the discontinuity of the experience in the continuity of our existence."[17] Thus a world of art is not a world divorced from our own. In an encounter with a work of art we do not enter into a transcendent realm, outside time and history. We do not separate ourselves from the world, the 'nonaesthetic'. Rather we become more fully present as we see the common and familiar in their true being.

Gadamer defines the work of art as "transformation into structure," which gives it the character of a work, "of an 'ergon' and not only of 'energeia'."[18] But the transformation brought about by art is not simply transportation into another world outside time and space. Gadamer grants it an autonomy of structure so as not to permit of any strict comparison with reality, not to find in it copied similarities. The work of art is not an imitation of the world in the sense of copy or second version. "Transformation means," Gadamer says, "that something is suddenly and as a whole something else, that this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being, in comparison with which its earlier being is nothing.... The transformation into structure means that what existed previously no longer exists. But also that what now exists, what represents itself in the play of art, is what is lasting and true."[19] Transformation thus has an ontological character. "The world of a work of art.... is in fact a wholly transformed world. By means of it everyone recognizes that this is how things are."[20]

Recognition is an act in which the thing is grasped in its essence, when the 'known' enters into its true being and manifests itself as what it is. Representation of things in poetry thus "not only involves what is represented being there, but also that it has in this way come to exist more fully. Imitation and representation are not merely a second version, a copy, but a recognition of the essence." As Gadamer concludes, "the presentation of the essence, far from being a mere imitation, is necessarily revelatory."[21]

What Gadamer calls "structure" thus does involve transformation of things, or else poetry would be a mere copy of the world. But at the same time, this transformation is not a transgression, a transportation into a transcendent realm. Rather it leads to a fuller realization of our own world, of things as they are. As Stevens states the paradox: "These are not things transformed. / Yet we are shaken by them as if they were" (CP, 399). Or,

> The freshness of transformation is
> The freshness of a world. It is our own
> It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves. (CP, 397-398)

The imaginative transformation is the transformation of things into their being:

> a change immenser than
> A poet's metaphors in which being would
>
> Come true, a point in the fire of music where
> Dazzle yields to a clarity and we observe,
>
> And observing is completing and we are content,
> In a world that shrinks to an immediate whole,

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

Fiction is thus both an illusion and insperable from our life. It is an illusion because its transformation of the familiar into its true presence makes the familiar look unreal. When it comes to exist more fully in a creative act, its previous existence seems unreal. Poetry so intensifies our sense of things that it creates, as Stevens says, what amounts to "A new knowledge of reality" (CP, 534). Or, as he says in the Adagia, "Metaphor creates a new reality from which the original appears to be unreal" (OP, 169). In other words, "a sense of reality keen enough to be in excess of the normal sense of reality creates a reality of its own" (NA, 79). Stevens gives an example: "It is as if a man who lived indoors should go outdoors on a day of sympathetic weather. His realization of the weather would exceed that of a man who lives outdoors. It might, in fact, be intense enough to convert the real world about him into an imagined world" (NA, 79). Things thus do appear as if they are transformed, yet their transformation is towards their fuller existence, into their true being. Poetry thus is an act of dis-closure of things as they essentially are. As Stevens puts it,

Description is revelation. It is not
The thing described, nor false facsimile.

It is an artificial thing that exists,
In its own seeming, plainly visible,

Yet not too closely the double of our lives,
Intenser than any actual life can be. (CP, 344)

The poetic act is an act of revelation of things. It is, however not a mere second version, a "facsimile" of things. It is "an artificial thing," a fiction, that transforms the "actual" thing into their "intenser" presence. It is in this sense that invention and revelation, poetry and reality, cease to be opposites and become one.

Disclosure of Reality

Poetry is thus revelatory less of the isolated consciousness than of the presence of the world that precedes consciousness. As Heidegger defines hermeneutics, it brings out "the being of beings" in such a way "that being itself will shine out.... the presence of present beings, the two-fold of the two in virtue of their simple oneness."[22] Poetry is thus a process of dis-covering the primodial temporality of being. The ultimate experience that poetry yields is not to be had in the repose of pure transcendence, located in a space beyond time. The experience of truth or being that poetry offers does not lie in taking things out of their existential/temporal context and rendering them as pure and abstract images. Poetry rather retrieves a more primordial understanding of truth as dis-covery of the being of things in their temporality. Time is thus an essential condition of any experience of the spiritual. It is this retrieving of the spiritual in time, of what is itself invisible and hidden as manifesting itself in the visible, as part of existence that is central to Stevens' vision.

In the seminal poem "The Snow Man" (CP, 9-10), Stevens explains the paradox of being that is nothing in itself but manifests itself in what appears and is. The beholder beholds "the nothing that is" in the wintry landscape. He identifies with "the mind of winter" and experiences the being of winter in the particular things that he perceives, in "the pine-trees crusted with snow," and "the junipers shagged with ice." The experience of being is not to be found in a transcendent realm but in the actual, tangible things of the world. In "Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu" (CP, 127-128), while bidding farewell to angels and gods and all the other worldly experience of eternal bliss and fulfilment, the poet turns to "the ever-jubilant weather," for "What is there here but weather....?" In other words, the poem establishes that true spiritual joy lies in our immediate experience of physical reality.

In the poems in Parts of a World Stevens insists repeatedly on the need to return to the temporal world which alone can offer the experience of truth or being. As one poem says, "There is no such thing as the truth...There are many truths, / But they are not parts of a truth" (CP, 203), that is, truth is not an absolute idea, a transcendent logos, and the things of the world are not forms of an eternal idea. Rather there are as many truths as there are things in the world. Another poem shows the futility of "an anti-master man," the ascetic

who looks for truth "Like a phantom, in an uncreated night" because,

> He never supposed divine
> Things might not look divine, nor that if nothing
> Was divine then all things were, the world itself,
> And that if nothing was the truth, then all
> Things were the truth, the world itself was the truth. (CP 242)

Truth, essence or the central being is always experienced as it manifests itself in the things of the world, and hence the experience requires no clairvoyance. "The Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers" (CP, 246-247) experiences "how the central, essential red / Escaped its large abstraction, became, / First summer, then a lesser time, / Then the sides of peaches.... (how) / The crude and jealous formlessness / Became the form and the fragrance of things / Without clairvoyance, close to her." The abstraction or essence is experienced as it takes form in particular things.

It is perhaps in "Notes Toward à Supreme Fiction" that Stevens comes closest to defining poetry as an experience of potentiality blossoming forth in the ever renewing actuality of existence which man celebrates with wonderment and joy. The two strongest affirmations in the poem about poetry are that "it must be abstract" and that "it must change." The supreme fiction must be about the "first idea," about being, abstract because not visible in itself, but only immanent in visible things. But it must always be "abstraction blooded,"

"the giant of the weather" experienced in "the weather, the mere weather, / the mere air" (CP, 385). To see the world in its first idea is thus to see it in its "living changingness" (CP, 380). As the next section, "it must change" shows, time, or change, at its most essential is seen as always renewing itself, always beginning; the booming of bees in spring, for instance, which is not a "resuming," a mere cyclical repetition, but a "beginning.... this booming of the new-come bee" (CP, 391), an act of perpetual beginning and becoming. It is this experience of the continual rebirth of existence that is the source of the feeling of wonder and joy.

The poems of Auroras of Autumn and Stevens' last poems are profound meditations on how being finds its habitation and name in the things of the world. The poems move to seek

> The doubling second things, not mystical,
> The infinite of the actual perceived,
> A freedom revealed, a realization touched,
> The real made more acute by an unreal. (CP, 451)

They strive to experience what "A Primitive Like an Orb" (CP, 440-443) calls "the essential poem at the centre of things," the being that resides in the actual, tangible things. "It is and, it / Is not and, therefore, is." The paradox that being is not a thing in itself but is manifest in what is or what appears is once more revealed here. As the poem explains it, "It is / As if the central poem became the world, / And the

world the central poem." The giant "on the horizon," which is being, is seen as "ever changing, living in change." Stevens' belief in the existence of being in the world grows more profound:

> It is like a thing of ether that exists
> Almost as predicate. But it exists,
> It exists, it is visible, it is, it is. (CP, 418)

It exists, the poem says, in the "innocence of the earth" (CP, 418). The self enters into a dialogical relationship with it.

> as in images we awake,
> Within the very object that we seek
> Participants of its being. It is. We are. (CP, 463)

This desire to seek "God in the object itself" (CP, 475) culminates in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," Stevens' last major testament on the identity of poetry and reality. "It is a fresh spiritual that he defines / A thing on the side of a house, not deep in a cloud" (CP, 474). The poem is a concentrated effort at establishing that being cannot, and must not, be found in an atemporal transcendence, but in the familiar, intimate things of this temporal, historical world.

In his last poems Stevens seems to associate, like Heidegger, being with the mystery of the earth itself. Stevens' two powerful images of this mystery that is essentially self-concealing are the rock and the river. The rock, impenetrable

in itself, is only discovered when "its barrenness becomes a thousand things / And so exists no more" (CP, 527). Similarly in "The River of Rivers in Connecticut" (CP, 533), the being of the river, its "propelling force," is "not to be seen beneath the appearances," but in the radiant motion of the things themselves:

> The steeple at Farmington
> Stands glistening and Haddam shines and sways.

The flowing of the water of the river is "a gayety, / Flashing and flashing in the sun." The poet turns, with a sense of astonishment, awe and thankfulness, in his last poems, to " a whole appearance that stands and is" (CP, 452). He turns with wonder to the "mere being" of "the gold-feathered bird" that "sings in the palm" a strange, mysterious, "foreign song" (OP, 117).

Stevens' poetry thus seems to reflect a new understanding of time. When the divine, the transcendent, which tied man back to his beginning, his origin, is expunged, when man is finally cut off from his numinous roots, the words of poetry come to be simple words of the earth, of the truth of things, of their instantaneous blooming. The origin of poetry lies in the mere 'present' of things. The poem opens a space for things, as Heidegger would say, where things first come to exist, where they belong to each other. It lets them be. The creative experience is one which introduces the dimension of temporality.

"Martial Cadenza" (CP, 237-238), one of Stevens' finest poems, which illustrates how a creative act opens a space in which things come to exist, describes the perception of the evening star as it lights the world:

> It was like sudden time in a world without time,
> This world, this place, the street in which I was,
> Without time: as that which is not, has no time,
> Is not ....

The star itself

> Is time, apart from any past, apart
> From any future, the ever-living and being,
> The ever-breathing and moving, the constant fire,
> The present close, the present realized.

The creative experience is a realization of time, for things <u>are</u> only when they are in time. "That which has no time, is not." It is in the poem that things are seen in their truth as they acquire their temporality.

The supreme importance of poetry lies, then, in the fact that it gives us our world and things in it, in their truth, as they come to exist in it in their full being. Poetry roots us in this world and in a most authentic way helps "people to live their lives" (NA, 29). As Stevens says in "Description Without Place":

> Thus the theory of description matters most.
> It is the theory of the word for those
>
> For whom the word is the making of the world. (CP, 345)

It is the making of poetry that helps us to discover the world in

the fullness of its presence. It is the medium through which being appears, enters into disclosure. Poetry lets things be in their living presence, things which are at once familiar and infinitely strange and new.

Stevens thus establishes the supreme primacy of poetry, for without poetry we have no access to things in their presence. "A poet's words are of things that do not exist without the words" (NA, 32), he says in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words." Without the creative act things lie closed to us. It is through her "making" that the singer in "The Idea of Order at Key West" (CP, 128-130) finds the world that is already, always there, but, except for her song, does not exist for her. The poetic act does not create what it already has found, rather, its creating is an act of finding, of discovering things in their truth. Poetry, thus, is a spontaneous existential act, "cry of its occasion / Part of the res itself and not about it" (CP, 473). It is not <u>about</u> things but things themselves, for it is in poetry that things first come into being and are. In the work of art, as Heidegger says, "the world worlds,"[23] that is, the work of art opens a space for things to emerge; it lets them come to their radiant appearance. In the work of art the mystery of earth or being which is essentially self-concealing makes itself manifest, embodied in things. It is in this dialectical reciprocity of concealment and clearance that the uniqueness of art lies.

Poetry then is an opening of space in which things emerge in their full presence. It is what Heidegger calls a 'clearing', a 'lighting' in which being declares itself. To create is to bring to light from hiddenness. For Stevens also "the act of creating is no more than a process" (NA, 59). "Like light, it adds nothing but itself" (NA, 61). It is a "clearing," an "opening," a "happening," (CP, 483) in which being discloses itself. Poetry is thus real in the most primary sense; it brings forth things, lets them come to their radiant appearance. One recognizes the truth of Stevens' saying that "poetry is only reality" (NA, 59).