



Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi,
The Journal of Social Sciences Institute
Sayı/Issue:35 – Sayfa / Page: 35
ISSN: 1302-6879 VAN/TURKEY

Makale Bilgisi / Article Info
Geliş/Received:16.06.2017 Kabul/Accepted:18.08.2017

WALLACE STEVENS'İN ŞİİRİNİN BİR DEĞERLENDİRMESİ

AN ANALYSIS OF WALLACE STEVENS'S POETRY

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Öz

Wallace Stevens 1879 ve 1955 yılları arasında yaşamış Amerikalı modernist neo-Romantik bir şairdir. Stevens'in ilk olgun şiirleri 1914 yılında *Trend* ve *Poetry* adlı dergilerde yayımlanmıştır. Stevens zamanının en önde gelen Amerikalı modernist şairlerinden biri olarak değerlendirilir. Stevens bütün eserinde hayal gücü ve gerçeğin ilişkisini araştıran bir şairdir. Gerçekte onun şiiri hayal gücünün kuvvetini ve hayal gücünün bize sunulan gerçeği nasıl değiştirdiği üzerine odaklanır. İngiliz Romantik şairlerin aksine, Stevens tamamiyle kendine ait ayrı bir dünya yaratmaz. Şairin yaptığı okura hayal gücü ve gerçeğin birlikte işlendiği bir dünya sunmaktır. Hayal gücü-gerçek teması bütün şiiri boyunca görülür. Stevens'in şiiri görünüşe göre üstün imge kavramı hakkında bir fikir derlemesidir. Şiirinin tamamı yeni bir şiirsel dünya düzenini biçimlendirme çabasıdır. Şair üstün imgenin ilkelerini şiirinde örneklendirir. Stevens'in şiiri temel felsefi sorulara değinir. Stevens zaman zaman şiirinin aşırı teknik ve tematik karmaşıklığından dolayı zor bir şair olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Ancak, Stevens'in şiiri yeni bir ses ve görülmedik yeni bir deyiş ortaya çıkarmıştır. Stevens bütün şiirlerinde devamlı olarak şiirin en üstün imge olduğunu iddia eder. Stevens'in şiiri çok karmaşık estetik bir üsluba sahiptir. Diğer taraftan, Stevens bazan eski Hristiyan inançlarına saldırır, çünkü bazı insanlar kendi dinsel başarılarından dolayı gururlanırlar. Stevens bazı şiirlerinde hakikat olarak doğanın Hristiyanlığın yerine geçtiğini öne sürer.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Modernizm, şiir, teori, neo-romantisizm, hayal gücü.

Abstract

Wallace Stevens is an American modernist neo-Romantic poet who lived between 1879 and 1955. Stevens's first mature poems were published in *Trend* and *Poetry* in 1914. He is considered to be one of the most prominent American modernist poets of his times. Stevens is a poet who explores the relation between imagination and reality throughout his work. In fact, his entire poetry focuses on the power of imagination and how imagination changes reality as it is presented to us. Unlike the English Romantic poets, Stevens does not create a wholly aloof world of his own. What he does is that he presents the reader a world of imagination and reality wrought together. The imagination-reality theme is seen throughout his poetry. Stevens's poetry is apparently a collection of ideas about the concept of supreme fiction. It is a struggle to formulate a new poetic world order in its entirety. He exemplifies the tenets of supreme fiction. It deals with the basic philosophical questions. Stevens was considered to be a difficult poet sometimes because of extreme technical and thematic complexity of his poetry. However, his poetry introduced a new voice, and a refreshingly new idiom. Stevens constantly claims that poetry is the supreme fiction throughout his poetry. His poetry has a very complex aesthetic pattern. On the other hand, Stevens sometimes attacks the old Christian tenets because some people are proud of their own spiritual achievements. He comes out with the replacement of nature with Christianity as the essence in some of his poems.

Keywords: Modernism, poetry, theory, neo-romanticism, imagination.

An Analysis of Wallace Stevens's Poetry

Wallace Stevens was born in 1879 in Pennsylvania, and died of cancer in 1955 in Connecticut. Stevens attended Harvard University for three years and worked for the New York Herald Tribune. Then he won a degree at the New York Law School and practiced law in New York City. In 1916, he joined an insurance firm in Connecticut and became the president. He worked as an insurance lawyer. Stevens's first mature poems were published in *Trend* and *Poetry* in 1914. As an American modernist neo-Romantic poet, Stevens appears to be exploring the interaction of reality and what man can make of it in his mind in his entire work. The imagination-reality theme is seen throughout his poetry. Stevens was considered to be a difficult poet sometimes because of extreme technical and thematic complexity of his poetry. However, his poetry introduced a new voice, and a refreshingly new idiom. "The relation of art to life is of the first importance especially in a skeptical age since, in the absence of a belief in God, the mind turns to its own creations and examines them,

not alone from the aesthetic point of view, but for what they reveal, for what they validate and invalidate, for the support that they give” (Stevens 120). Stevens’s poetry includes all the complexities and contradictions of modern life. His poetry has a very complex aesthetic pattern. It deals with the present and common phase of reality. Some of the certain symbols figuring prominently in his poetry are *sun, moon, night, day, and blue*.

Stevens constantly claims that poetry is the supreme fiction throughout his poetry. In “A High-Toned Old Christian Woman,” he takes an old woman as an example to talk about the power of imagination and the contrast of old and new. In the poem, when he calls poetry “the supreme fiction,” he is simply stressing the supreme power of imagination which is expressed in images, patterns and myths. It is through imagination “that an idea is made flesh and bone” (Perlis 33). As it is clear from the following lines, the poem is a contrast of old and new;

Poetry is the supreme fiction, madame.
Take the moral law and make a nave of it
And from the nave build haunted heaven. Thus
The conscious is converted into palms,
Like windy citherns hankering for hymns. (Stevens 59).

The poet contrasts the moral fictions of religion and the new fictions of poetry in the poem. He talks about the formalities of Christianity, its old and weakening ideas. This particular poem is a good example of how tough and impolite humour is shown through writing. Stevens attacks the old Christian woman because she is proud of her own spiritual achievements. He ridicules the woman’s spiritual elevations and “her novelties of the sublime” (Prasad 50) as it is apparent from the following lines;

Therefore, that in the planetary scene
Your disaffected flagellants, well-stuffed,
Smacking their muzzy bellies in parade,
Proud of such novelties of the sublime,
Such tink and tank and tunk-a-tunk-tunk,
May, merely may, madame, whip from themselves
A jovial hullabaloo among the spheres. (Stevens 59)

In “The Emperor of Ice Cream,” the poet takes the concept of death as an inevitable aspect of living. The subject is the funeral arrangements of a dead woman. Here, he is actually treating death as something absolutely commonplace. The theme of death is treated in a light manner. The poem is supremely an ironic one. The first stanza

establishes a picture of exuberant life. The poet begins the poem by calling the king of pleasure when he says;

Call the roller of cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. (Stevens 64)

Here, he uses the images of pleasure. As a critic puts it, "the emperor of ice cream is both the king of pleasure and a comic figure" (Strobel 34). The poem is a juxtaposition of the serious and the light. It is an effective poem because it has a concrete imagery. What the poet is obviously trying to say is; "let the old phase of reality vanish away, because the new one is there to replace quietly" (Strobel 35). According to the poet, the woman is stupid because she spent so much time and effort on *seem* rather than *be*. Stevens continues to articulate;

Take from the dresser of deal
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.
Let the lamp affix its beam.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. (Stevens 64)

"Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" is another poem in which Stevens makes an exercise of free verse. Again mentions the power of imagination and how it influences people in their lives. This particular poem shows the comic spirit of Stevens. It is a discussion about what it feels like to live without imagination. He claims that men of rationality are dead because they are "the people who are not going to dream of baboons and periwinkles" (Stevens 66). As a critic puts it; "Only a few of us make use of this all-powerful imagination and are capable of perceiving reality in its abstraction. The poem actually argues about men without power of imagination" (Strobel 33). Stevens makes use of colours. In fact, this kind of usage intensifies the emotional implications. Actually, Stevens was very interested in various kinds of paintings, and he used to collect lots of them. In the poem, the images Stevens uses are colourful like the images of a painter as it is seen in the following lines;

The houses are haunted

By white night-gowns.
None are green,
Or purple with green rings,
Or green with yellow rings,
Or yellow with blue rings. (Stevens 66)

Stevens's "Sunday Morning" is a specific poem that shatters the tenets of Christianity essentially. The poem is a representative of Stevens's early style which is colourful and gaudy. There is the use of dramatic monologue in then poem. The poet asserts that a replacement of nature with Christianity is necessary as the essence of life. The poem opens with a conflict. It is a celebration of change. "Death is the mother of beauty" (Stevens 68). The woman in the poem is disturbed by her awareness of a "holy hush of ancient sacrifice" in which she cannot believe. She prefers sensuous pleasures to the old religious intoxications and enjoys the earthly blessings;

Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
As a calm darkens among water-lights. (Stevens 66-67)

This poem is also "about a woman meditating on the meaning of death. She struggles to break through the ugly realities to conceive a God and a paradise. Like everybody else in the world, she is bound up in time. The woman suggests that we must believe only in reality which flows with the time" (Doggett 40). One can easily feel the emotional tension when the woman's disgust against the existing moral orders is exposed in the lines below;

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven? (Stevens

67)

The poet also celebrates man with all his imperfections. He always prefers the world of man with its imperfections to the paradise that is unknown and unreal. The woman prefers the world of physical pleasures to the imaginary bliss of Christianity in which she has

ceased to believe. The demands of the body are no less sacred. She thinks deeply and plunges into reverie. Then she understands the human condition. She prefers the imperfections of the world;

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores
That never touch with inarticulate pang? (Stevens 69)

The poem clearly assails Christianity in plain terms. “The woman has no faith in the old religious order which has crumbled and perished” (Kravec 166). She is a woman having breakfast on a Sunday morning while she should be in the church. She enjoys the blessings of the earth and the physical beauties around her.

In “Anecdote of the Jar,” Stevens continues to celebrate the power imagination. He celebrates the ordering power of imagination. The poem defines Stevens’s hope for poetry. According to him, the wilderness of the modern world can be made to yield to modern man through poetry. The jar in the poem represents a work art, it is a human artifact. On the other hand, “the wilderness” represents reality and things as they are. The jar reflects the hill on which it stands, therefore it represents a work of art, but it is not nature since it is barren. The impression is not nature, but its reflection;

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill. (Stevens 76)

An opposition of human creativity and natural life is presented. “The poem once again explores the imagination-reality conflict through a contrast of images of human artifact and images of natural order. The poet tries to show the ordering power of mind in relation to the disorderly reality” (McCann 70). The wilderness is reality; it is things as they are. The jar is not simply an artifact. It suggests the imaginative creation and the ordering power of imagination. The jar, although unproductive, does affect or change the natural world by its very existence. Stevens indeed presents an opposition in the poem, but he does not choose a side. The poem is similar to Keats’s “Ode to A Grecian Urn” in which the poet strives to escape the human condition;

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground

And tall and of a port in air. (Stevens 76)

“Meditation Celestial & Terrestrial” is a poem in which the poet contrasts winter and summer. The bird songs celebrate the return of the creative season of the human spirit. “The poem illustrates nature as the great dissembler. In the bleak cold winter, people satisfy their need for summer with imaginings. As dissatisfied with things as they are, they project their images of what summer might be” (Pack 51). In the poem, reason and will are identified with winter and its “narrow sky” of limited human possibility. The singing bird is an image of unconscious creativity. The exuberance of summer, in other words, “the drunken or irrational mother” is celebrated. There is a contrast between winter; the blue reason and the green wilderness of summer;

The wild warblers are warbling in the jungle
Of life and spring and of the lustrous inundations,
Flood on flood, of our returning sun.

Day after day, throughout the winter,
We hardened ourselves to live by bluest reason
In a world of wind and frost,

And by will, unshaken and florid
In mornings of angular ice,
That passed beyond us through the narrow sky.

But what are radiant reason and radiant will
To warbling early in the hilarious trees
Of summer, the drunken mother? (Stevens 123-24)

In “The Idea of Order at Key West,” Stevens clearly explicates his notion of creative imagination. The poem is one of his important works in his entire canon. In this poem, he writes about strolling along the beach with a friend and discovering a girl singing to the ocean. The mysterious heroine is the voice of the poem. He declares that the girl has created order out of chaos by fashioning a sensible song from her observations of the swirling sea;

It was her voice that made
The sky acutest at its vanishing.
She measured to the hour its solitude.
She was the single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we
As we beheld her striding there alone,

Knew that there never was a world for her

Except the one she sang and, singing, made. (Stevens 129-30)

In the poem, “the sea stands for the physical universe and the reality of the world. The sea and the ocean together represent the physical universe in contrast to human consciousness. On the other hand, the singer is the symbol of the poet’s inventive faculty. The spirit of the singer is the soul and intellect of man” (Perlis 34). The girl sings as she walks beside the ocean. In the poem, one can notice the intellectual aspect of the heroic act and the act of localizing nature in the mind. The poet praises the virtues of the singer’s efforts. Reality is always the reality transformed by imagination on the phase of the mind. The last stanza also praises the merits of the girl’s endeavor. It exemplifies that the world exists for us as it does in our minds.

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker’s rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,

In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds. (Stevens 130)

“Poetry Is A Destructive Force” is a specific one in which Stevens continues to survey the power of feelings. Here, the word “poetry” actually indicates feelings. The poem shows the strength of poetry through creatures of primitive power such as ox, lion, dog and bear as the poem continues;

Corazon, stout dog,
Young ox, bow-legged bear,
He tastes its blood, not spit. (Stevens 192)

Stevens often deals with ferociousness in nature. The destructive element of nature is well imaged in this poem. The image of a lion with its all ferociousness appears. The poet stresses the destructive power of poetry rather than the destructive power of nature. The lion is like Blake’s tiger. In the poem, “it is more important to note the destructive power of poetry than it is to note the destructive power of the lion” (Pack 57).

“The Poems of Our Climate” is a symphony of colours for there are the images of colour, light and shade. The poet uses several colour images. The images he uses here constitute a symphony of colours. The poem shows a series of various colour images with added light and shade;

Clear water in a brilliant bowl,
Pink and white carnations. The light
In the room more like a snowy air,
Reflecting snow. A newly-fallen snow

At the end of winter when afternoons return.

As Prasad also claims, the poet thinks that “the only form of life should involve the flaws of man and nature” (54). This idea of the poet can be easily understood from the following lines;

There would still remain the never-resting mind,
So that one would want to escape, come back
To what had been so long composed.
The imperfect is our paradise.

Note that, in this bitterness, delight,
Since the imperfect is so hot in us,
Lies in flawed words and stubborn sounds. (Stevens 194)

“Notes Toward A Supreme Fiction” is considered to be Stevens’s greatest poem on the nature of poetry. It is apparently a collection of ideas about the concept of supreme fiction. It is a struggle to formulate a new poetic world order in its entirety. Stevens exemplifies the tenets of supreme fiction. It is an exploration for definition. It deals with the basic philosophical questions. Stevens rejects all notions of a fixed, stable reality because the external world is in a state of constant flux. The poem is comprised of a prologue, three substantial sections and an epilogue. In the prologue, Stevens implies that imagination is always the source and sustenance of love;

And for what, except for you, do I feel love?

Do I press the extremest book of the wisest man

Close to me, hidden in me day and night? (Stevens 380)

The first section, “It Must Be Abstract” establishes art as the new deity in a theologically deficient age. The poet declares that abstraction is necessary. He claims that to know a thing is to know it in the very idea of it. The truth of a thing can only be seen in abstraction. At the beginning, he addresses ephebe who is a young man or citizen undergoing physical or military training. The poem makes a general statement and develops it consistently. One should be ignorant and must see the truth of a thing through the power of imagination;

Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea

Of this invention, this invented world,

The inconceivable idea of the sun.

You must become an ignorant man again

And see the sun again with an ignorant eye

And see it clearly in the idea of it. (Stevens 380)

Since the poet believes in the idea of the flux no particular idea is fixed for him. He thinks that the world is as it is without the human

referent. In the poem, the poet also mentions Phoebus. Phoebus is the god of sun and reason. "The death of Phoebus introduces subjective reason. The fixed embodiment of sun, Phoebus, vanishes with imagination, and knowledge begins with what our senses tell us" (Kravec 166);

The death of one god is the death of all.
Let purple Phoebus lie in umber harvest,
Let Phoebus slumber and die in autumn umber,

Phoebus is dead, ephebe. But Phoebus was
A name for something that never could be named.
There was project for the sun and is. (Stevens 381)

In Stevens's idea, the truth of a thing can only be seen in abstraction free from all traditional confusion. The influence of Plato's theory of ideas is seen in this poem. Stevens thinks that "an idea is transformed through imagination or imaginative power whereas in Plato it is transformed through reason and intellect. Plato's ideas are fixed unlike those of Stevens" (Perlis 35). A man today can never grow as ignorant as the first man was. A reality can only be conceived imaginatively;

The first idea was not our own. Adam
In Eden was the father of Descartes
And Eve made air the mirror of herself,
Of her sons and of her daughters. They found them-
selves
In heaven as in a glass; a second earth;
And in the earth itself they found a green-

The inhabitants of a very varnished green. (Stevens 383)

In the lines above, Adam stands for the rational and Eve for the emotional. This Eve figure joins the two worlds; the one in the mind and the physical reality. The second section, "It Must Change" emphasizes change as one of the aspects which renews and sustains life. The poet's theory of change is emphasized. This section illustrates how a belief is only useful in its present context. A new phase of reality appears with the arrival of a new moment, and the earth moves in the cyclic order of creation. The never ending process of coming and going of things is demonstrated. The scenes of nature are repeated again and again. Things appear again and again as if they had never gone;

The bees came booming as if they had never gone,
As if hyacinths had never gone. We say
This changes and that changes. Thus the constant

Violets, doves, girls, bees and hyacinths
Are inconstant objects of inconstant cause
In a universe of inconstancy. (Stevens 389)

Hence poetry is supreme. It is supreme because the essence of poetry is change, and the essence of change is that it gives pleasure. The supreme fiction must be continually sought though it can never be reached. The cause of major change is the merging of oppositions such as imagination and reality. Stevens deals with particulars to enlarge general statements. He makes general theoretical statements when he writes that;

Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
On one another, as a man depends
On a woman, day on night, the imagined

On the real. This is the origin of change.
Winter and spring, cold copulars, embrace
And forth the particulars of rapture come.

Music falls on the silence like sense,
A passion that we feel, not understand.
Morning and afternoon are clasped together (Stevens 392)

In the third section, "It Must Give Pleasure," Stevens tells that poetry must always be a thing final in itself, and therefore, good. The woman mentioned in the section sees things as they are. It is a Sunday morning in April. The blue sky and the woman looking from a window at the phenomena of the earth are compared. It is evident that "she wants to look at the external world directly rather than by the means of subjective and interpretive vision of mind" (Strobel 34).

The blue woman, linked and lacquered, at her win-
dow

Did not desire that feathery argentines
Should be cold silver, neither that frothy clouds

Should foam, be foamy waves, should move like
them,

Nor that the sexual blossoms should repose
Without their fierce addictions, nor that the heat

Of summer, growing fragrant in the night,
Should strengthen her abortive dreams and take
In sleep its natural form. (Stevens 399)

The very last section of the poem has verses describing the poet's pursuit of a supreme fiction as a war that never ends. It is a war which can never be won. Stevens directs these verses to an imaginary warrior. The first two stanzas of the section may be "Stevens's most impressive description of his own sense of self" (Doggett 41). The poet brilliantly describes what it is like to be in search of a supreme fiction as he continues to argue that;

Soldier, there is a war between the mind
And sky, between thought and day and night. It is
For that the poet is always in the sun,

Patches the moon together in his room
To his Virgilian cadences, up down,
Up down. It is a war that never ends. (Stevens 407)

Stevens was seventy years old when he wrote "The Rock." It is actually a meditative poem. He describes a life from the perspective of an age. Since reality consists only of the living present even the memory of a moment past seems unreal. The poet argues that recalling past is inhuman because it is useless in the present context. He expresses the perplexed sense of loss. The youthful freedom seems to have been an illusion. It seems to have been a fiction. People seek the other perspective in art.

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

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

Even our shadows, their shadows, no longer re-
main.
The lives these lived in the mind are at an end.
They never were... (Stevens 525)

The rock is an extension of substance, the idea of world and the barrenness of reality. It is the dominant reality. The nature of reality and the human experience of reality are stressed in the poem. It is "the reality which engulfs everything in itself and this idea is expressed with geometrical sharpness. There is a sharply focused and precise imagery in the poem" (McCann 53).

The rock is the habitation of the whole,
Its strength and measure, that which is near,
 point A
In a perspective that begins again

At B: the origin of the mango's rind. (Stevens 528)

In "Theory," Stevens is trying to state what he has to say in plain words. There is a rhythm of prose in the poem. It is written in prosaic form and there are irregular lines. "The poet is trying to discover the relationship between himself and the world about him. An abstract concept is expressed in plain terms and given a concrete shape" (Kravec 167).

I am what is around me

Women understand this.
One is not duchess
A hundred yards from a carriage.
These, then are portraits:
A black vestibule;
A high bed sheltered by curtains.

These are merely instances. (Stevens 86-87)

In "Thirteen Ways of Looking at A Blackbird," the poet declares that the poem is a collection of sensations, not ideas. The word "blackbird" stands for reality. There are actually thirteen views of reality. The poet expresses the different ways of conceiving it. The whole landscape is viewed through the eye of the blackbird in the poem.

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird. (Stevens 92)

Stevens employs a painter's devices of light and shade in the poem. The poem shows that there are more extensive kinds of perceptions available through imagination. The poet tries to achieve "the unity of person and place because it is also the unity of imagination and reality" (Kravec 167).

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one. (Stevens 93)

In the following stanza, Stevens creates a word picture which is very powerful. The ever-shifting shadow of the blackbird is the ever-

changing shades of reality. The movement of the blackbird suggests the shifting moods of human mind. The bird is perceived in thirteen different ways.

Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the window
An indecipherable cause. (Stevens 93)

The theory of changing perspectives and the meaning of observation are emphasized in the poem. The natural image of the flow of things is seen in the following lines.

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying. (Stevens 94)

“Of Modern Poetry” is a clear and direct statement of Stevens’s definition of poetry and a search for “what will suffice.”

The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It has not always had
To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
Was in the script.

Then the theatre was changed

To something else. Its past was a souvenir. (Stevens 239)

The poet tries to give a basic definition of modern poetry. He also mentions conventions and says that there is a break with tradition. The new poetry must reflect the people and events of the contemporary world. The rest of the poem enlarges and explains the idea stated in the above lines. Stevens defines poetry as a medley of other arts and studies. He defines it in terms of theater, music and philosophy. According to the poet, a poet should simultaneously be an actor, metaphysician and musician;

The actor is

A metaphysician in the dark, twanging
An instrument, twanging a wiry string that gives
Sounds passing through sudden rightnesses, wholly
Containing the mind, below which it cannot descend,
Beyond which it has no will to rise.

It must

Be the finding of a satisfaction, and may
Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman
Combing. The poem of the act of the mind. (Stevens 240)

A poet must be dealing with “spiritual and aesthetic discoveries” (McCann 81). Stevens believes that a poem is the making of the poem, poem becoming. The possible subject matter of poetry is “the mind.”

“The Motive for Metaphor” is a contrast with the dead autumn and the spring. There is a series of images measuring the thought. The bleakness of autumn and the coming of spring are contrasted. Stevens claims that poetry must be as certain and absolute as the rightness of numbers.

In the same way, you were happy in spring,
With the half colors of quarter-things,
The slightly brighter sky, the melting clouds,
The single bird, the obscure moon- (Stevens 288)

“The images of weight, accuracy and sharpness impose an order upon reality. “The hammer of red and blue” signifies both imagination and reality” (Perlis 45).

The ruddy temper, then hammer
Of red and blue, the hard sound-
Steel against intimation-the sharp flash,
The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X. (Stevens 288)

“The Pure Good of Theory” is a meditative poem. It actually presents the mind-world problem. The poem begins with the problem of time and finiteness. An awareness of limitation is underlined in the poem. The word “horse” is a metaphor for time.

It is time that beats in the breast and it is time
That batters against the mind, silent and proud,
The mind that knows it is destroyed by time.

Time is a horse that runs in the heart, a horse
Without a rider on a road at night.

The mind sits listening and hears it pass. (Stevens 329)

People are invited to imagine against limitations. The “platonic person” in the poem is an imagined person. He is non-physical. Stevens points out the escapist Romantic Platonism in the poem. He employs “the images of great earth mother which make the platonic person’s mind colourless and thin. This platonic person is tortured by the question of what the senses mean and are” (Prasad 83).

A shadow in mid-earth...If we propose
A large-sculptured, platonic person, free from time,
And imagine for him the speech he cannot speak,

Then came Brazil to nourish the emaciated
Romantic with dreams of her avoirdupois, green

glade
Of serpents like z rivers simmering,

Green glade and holiday hotel and world
Of the future, in which the memory had gone
From everything, flying the flag of the nude, (Stevens 330)

The platonic person represents the questioning mind. He understands that happiness may not be found in bodily pleasures. The question of the alienation of the human from nature is also pointed out in the poem. There a rejection of old myths and escapism is considered as something inevitable. The poet explores the meaning of metaphor and states that our interpretations of the world are temporary. Reality itself is limitless and the particulars of a place are the source of our understanding. People's need to recreate reality is occasionally met.

Ill of a question like a malady,
Ill of a constant question in his thought,
Unhappy about the sense of happiness.

Was it that-a sense and beyond intelligence?
Could the future rest on a sense and be beyond
Intelligence? On what does the present rest?

Is not a variation but an end.
Yet to speak of the whole world as metaphor
Is still to stick to the contents of the mind.

And the desire to believe in a metaphor.
It is to stick to the nicer knowledge of
Belief, that what it believes in is not true.

Touched suddenly by the universal flare
For a moment, a moment in which we read and re-
peat

The eloquences of light's faculties. (Stevens 331-32-33)

In "The Ultimate Poem Is Abstract," the poet discusses the capturing of the flickering moment in all its immediacy. His imagination enables him to perceive the moment in its ever-changing colours. He strives to catch the moment. "The poet tries to catch the present existence of reality through the sequence of images and sees the nearness and separateness of mind and world" (Pack 72).

Is changed. It is not so blue as we thought. To be blue,

There must be no questions. It is an intellect
Of windings round and dodges to and fro,

Of communication. It would be enough
If we were ever, just once, at the middle, fixed
In This Beautiful World Of Ours and not as now

Helplessly at the edge, enough to be
Complete, because at the middle, if only in sense,
And in that enormous sense, merely joy. (Stevens 429-30)

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