CHAPTER VII

THE MAN WITH THE BLUE GUITAR : THE NATURE OF CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION

Having emphasized the need for decreation in the poems of Ideas of Order, Stevens turns, in the next major poem, "The Man With The Blue Guitar," to explore and explain the nature of the creative process itself, to understand how it transforms reality without changing it, how, in other words, poetry makes possible the ontological disclosure of reality. But before he arrived at his authentic speech and subject in "The Man With The Blue Guitar," Stevens wrote his polemical poem "Owl's Clover" (OP, 43-71), the poem incontrovertibly acclaimed by critics as Stevens' failure, and even disliked by Stevens himself for its overt rhetoric and, therefore, omitted from the Collected Poems. Occasioned perhaps by the current political and economic crisis and particularly by the Marxist critic Mr. Burnshaw's remarks that Stevens' poetry revealed a total lack of awareness of, and commitment to, the events of the time,[1] "Owl's Clover" became Stevens' 'defence of poetry' in a time of turmoil.

Though "Owl's Clover" deals with the nature and role of art in the time of depression and has a topical character, its

scope extends to a more general confrontation between poetry and reality, and their reconciliation. In the first poem "The Old Woman and the Statue" the two are juxtaposed and the statue with its aesthetic perfection is seen to have no relevance for the woman's destitute self. The statue stands for poetry that is untroubled by the suffering of the living. The poem is thus a critique of the imagination that fails to adhere to reality, or more precisely, to "a new reality" ("The Noble Rider." NA, 22). In the second poem, "Mr. Burnshaw and the Statue" the statue's significance varies a little as it stands for the imagination of the past that is not rooted in change. The poem is closest to the spirit of the poems of Ideas of Order in its insistence on the rejection of the statue which is "dead" and on the acceptance of change: "It is only enough / To live incessantly in change" (OP, 50). The imagination must ground itself in constant change and discover "an order of its own" (OP, 49) in the vast disorder of changing reality. The poem ends with the celebration of such a reconciliation of the imagination and reality, when the damsels, recalling the men in "Sunday Morning" who sing "their boisterous devotion to the sun" (CP, 70), dancebbare feet, touch and feel the grass, and sing of the immediate experience of the external world. The imagination so conceived is the real "base of every future" (OP, 63) as "A Duck for Dinner" illustrates. The statue, no longer a symbol of confrontation, becomes in this poem a symbol of reconciliation of the self with the world. It is

> The central of the composition, in which
> They live. They see and feel themselves, seeing
> And feeling the world in which they live. (OP, 64)

In the final poem, "Sombre Figurations," the statue is no longer seen as part of the sub-conscious, the "sub-man" (OP, 66), or as the imagination that does not partake of the real, but is finally restored to the normal world, "in hum-drum space" (OP, 71). "Owl's Clover," for all its noise and clatter of strange rhetoric thus turns out to be a true defence of a poetry that reconciles itself to the temporal world and which alone can bring order to reality, a more meaningful and joyous one than Mr. Burnshaw's political order.

"Owl's Clover," however, is an aberration in Stevens' ouvre. Fortunately, its failure precipitated Stevens' turning to a more profound and serene affirmation of poetry in "The Man With The Blue Guitar."

In "The Man With The Blue Guitar" (CP, 165-184) Stevens turns more directly and, more consciously, than before, to the central proposition of his poetry: "Poetry is the subject of the poem" (CP, 176). The cantos were written during the winter of 1936-1937, with a specific problem in mind, which, as Stevens defined it, was "to see the world about me both as I see it and as it is" (L, 316). They are, in other words, Stevens' meditation on how to reconcile the stable, concrete things we see and the fleeting way in which we see them.

Stevens took a great deal of trouble over their composition, as he confessed that the overt simplicity of his verse was the result of a laboured exercise: "Only the ones over which I take a great deal of trouble come through finally. This is contrary to my usual experience which is to allow a thing to fill me up and then express it in the most slap-dash way" (L, 316). The poem has none of the exuberance and rich variety of Harmonium. Yet the apparent lyrical simplicity of the strumming of the blue guitar, as Vendler has shown, is no less rhetorical and stylized.[2] It captures in the repetition of "things as they are" and "the blue guitar," with all their variations, the possible relationships between the two.

Stevens defined the scope of the poem in a letter to his Italian translator Renato Poggioli : "The intention of the Blue Guitar was to say a few things that I felt impelled to say, 1. about reality; 2. about the imagination; 3. their inter-relation; and 4. principally, my attitude toward each of these things. This is the general scope of the poem, which is confined to the area of poetry and makes no pretence of going beyond that area" (L, 788). The poem, in its thirty three cantos, shows the possibilities of the imagination existing in itself or overpowering reality, of reality existing untouched by the imagination or engulfing it in its own vastness and finally of their interdependence in which the two cease to be in conflict and become one.

The poem begins with a dramatic context unusual in Stevens. The central question is posed as an exchange between the poet and the audience. The poem, however, does not maintain the human context for very long and the listening audience is abandoned, unnoticed, quite at an early stage in canto VI, and the voice of the guitarist merges into a more general poetic voice, which in the end includes all men, as he envisions the world in which "we choose to play / The imagined pine, the imagined jay" (CP, 184). Perhaps from the beginning, in the image of the guitarist squatting like a shearsman, that is, in the image of the artist as not visibly distinguished from other men, the suggestion that the poet includes any man of imagination is implicit.

The first canto establishes the central proposition of the poem: the power of the blue guitar to depict things "exactly" as they are. Poetry does not depart from reality, and yet it transforms it. Things "Are changed upon the blue guitar" (CP, 165). The creative act is not mimetic, a mere reproduction of things. It is a making, a creating. But this making is not a construction that exists independently of things as they are. In fact, it is only in its creating that things reveal themselves as they really are, that is, in their existential as well as their essential nature: "A tune beyond us, yet ourselves, / A tune upon the blue guitar / Of things exactly as they are" (CP, 165). With the audience as a sounding

board, the first six cantos explore the nature of poetry in this context.

With the audience's demand that the guitarist play things as they are, the guitarist asserts in the second canto his own creative power which cannot merely describe actual things. What he plays may not appear to be a realistic representation of things. In fact, the creative act is never a naturalistic reproduction of reality. As Stevens said of this canto, "It is never possible for the artist to do more than approach 'almost to man'" (L, 789):

> I sing a hero's head, large eye
> And bearded bronze, but not a man,
>
> Although I patch him as I can
> And reach through him almost to man. (CP, 165)

In apparently deviating from or decreating reality the poet tries to sing it and fix it more fully. The next canto shows what it is to sing of "man number one" (CP, 166). To sing of man in what appears to be an abstraction, "a hero's head," is in fact to sing of him in all his liveliness, "without pose" (L, 783). The quick succession of infinitives in canto III which never forms a coherent statement suggests the elevated and impassioned desire of the guitarist to lay bare the essential man:

> To strike his living hi and ho,
> To tick it, tock it, turn it true,

To bang it from a savage blue,
Jangling the metal of the strings... (CP, 166)

As Stevens explained, "this means to express man in the liveliness of lively experience, without pose; and to tick it, tock it, etc., means to make an exact record of the liveliness of the occasion" (L, 783). From the quiet serenade of canto II the guitar moves on to make a joyous savage bang as it gives the man number one, the essential man in his existential liveliness, his being in his be-ing.

Isn't it life, then, what the blue guitar plays? The poet, in canto IV, seems to turn to the incredulous audience if they are not yet convinced. Life "picks its way on the blue guitar" (CP, 166), it expresses itself only in the buzzing of the guitar. Things come into being only in and through the imaginative act. It is rather naive and silly to suppose, as the next question - "A million people on one string?" (CP, 166) - seems to imply that reality is a common, 'objective' world uniform for everyone. That external world never becomes a world unless one experiences it imaginatively and thus brings it into being. As Stevens wrote of this canto, "reality changes into the imagination (under one's very eyes) as one experiences it by reason of one's feelings about it" (L, 793).

Canto V insists that poetry be rooted in this world, be of the earth, "flat and bare," and not of any other transcendent or imaginary world. It must no longer be the hymns of heaven.

"Do not speak to us of the greatness of poetry. /.... There are no shadows in our sun" (CP, 167). Like the poems in Ideas of Order, this poem rejects all those poetic imaginings that separate us from the things around us. Poetry must decreate or destroy the "shadows" that shroud the sun. The sun and the earth are bare and flat, divested of all the encrustations the self has laid upon them. Poetry must be of things here and now, it must be of our concrete, temporal existence.

Canto VI returns to the beginning and shows what it is to sing of actual, credible things. It modifies the proposition of the first canto that after all the transformations of the blue guitar are not really transformations, since they do not transport us into another world outside time but transform this very world so that we live in it 'poetically':

> A tune beyond us as we are,
> Yet nothing changed by the blue guitar;
>
> Ourselves in the tune as if in space,
> Yet nothing changed except the place;
>
> Of things as they are and only the place
> As you play them, on the blue guitar. (CP, 167)

We find ourselves, truly and really as we are, in and through the imaginative act. We discover ourselves, our world through it. Thus "the tune is space" (CP, 168), not the atemporal poetic space, but the existential, temporal space that the creative act opens up and establishes as the horizon of our being. The creative act never detaches itself from reality,

from things as they are. It does not turn them into something else, least of all into the mental constructions of a subjective self, but rather makes possible the external space in which we can be, in which things can be what they essentially are. As Heidegger would put it, it lets things be. It is both an act of creation and revelation. This is the point of the paradox "A tune beyond us as we are" (CP, 167). As Stevens said, "things imagined (the senses of the guitar) become things as they are" (L, 360). Poetry thus reveals things in their being which, therefore, appear "For a moment final" (CP, 168). Art triumphs over religion in this that it reveals the truth of things, not as religion does, in a "smoky dew" (CP, 168) in an unclear and obscure light of some remote, timeless origin, but clearly and vividly in their very existence.

The poem in the first six cantos seems to consider the nature of the creative act as it deals with things as they are. The creative process is inextricably involved with things as they are, with reality. It necessarily involves abstraction (II), if it is not to be a mere duplication of reality. Yet, this abstraction is not a separation from the things themselves into an atemporal space of art. It is an abstraction necessary to decreate our preconceptions of things so that it may in the end render them more truly as they are (III). The world comes into being only in and through the creative act (IV), which makes possible a space in which it acquires its being (VI). The

transformation brought about by poetry, thus, has an ontological character. Poetry transforms "things as they are,", i.e.,tangible, visible things into "things as they are," in their fuller existence, in their presence. It dis-covers the "as" structure of things, discovers things as they in truth are. The function of poetry is thus the existential/ontological disclosure of things.

The focus in canto VII shifts to the nature of reality. The voice of the poetic self, justifying his poetic act to a responding audience is replaced by a more general poetic voice as the guitarist expands his musings on the nature of reality and its relation to poetry. The canto expresses the apprehension of man existing apart from reality, detached from the life lived in reality, like the "Mechanical beetles never quite warm" (CP, 168). Such a state of mind, the self withdrawn from lived reality, leaves the imagination cold:

> It is the sun that shares our works.
> The moon shares nothing. It is a sea. (CP, 168)

Both the moon and the sea are "Detached from us, from things as they are" (CP, 168). As early as "The Comedian," Stevens had described moonlight as an evasion and the sea as an inhuman, inimical presence that left Crispin destitute, both failing to show Crispin his real self. The sun, on the other hand, grows into a powerful presence in the poems of Ideas of Order in whose

physical reality we grow and in whose light perceive and discover things. Stevens wrote of this canto: "I have a sense of isolation in the presence of the moon as in the sea. If I could experience the same sense in the presence of the sun, would I speak to the sun as I so often speak to the moon, calling it mercy and goodness? But if I could experience the same sense in the presence of the sun, my imagination grows cold at the thought of such complete detachment. I do not desire to exist apart from our works and the imagination does not desire to exist apart from our works" (L, 362). The consequence of his alienation from the lived reality would be chill or death. And the fear of such a deathly possibility is enacted in the repeated questions - "Shall I then stand in the sun... / ... and call it good / ... Detached from us, from things as they are? / Not to be part of the sun? To stand / Remote and call it merciful? / The strings are cold on the blue guitar" (CP, 168).

Canto IX makes a similar point that the imagination cannot exist in itself but depends on reality. In Stevens' words, "the imagination is not a free agent. It is not a faculty that functions spontaneously without references. In IX the reference is to environment" (L, 789). "The overcast blue" (CP, 169), the dull environment is not very propitious to the imagination. In fact, as canto VIII suggests, the imagination remains detached, "cold," where the whole landscape offers much potential for an imaginative response. What is suggested, perhaps, is

that the imagination does not need a propitious setting to be stirred. "On the other hand, in IX, the imagination being confronted with a kind of universal dullness, most unpropitious, the overcast everything, seizes on it and makes use of it, dominates it, takes its place, becomes the world in which we live" (L, 362-363). Both the guitar and the player are part of the world from which they are indistinguishable. In the overcast blue of the air "the blue guitar / Is a form, described but difficult" and the man "merely a shadow," the color of the air his "tragic robe" (CP, 169).

A possibility of the imagination existing in itself, untouched by reality is suggested in canto XIII. It is "content," "aflame" (CP, 172), and central in its own created world. As Stevens said, the poem "deals with the intensity of the imagination unmodified by contacts with reality, if such a thing is possible. Intensity becomes something incandescent... The poem has to do with pure imagination" (L, 785). Here the imagination relishes its copious expansions and diffusions with which it is fertile:

> Blue buds or pitchy blooms. Be content -
> Expansions, diffusions - content to be
>
> The unspotted imbecile revery,
> The heraldic center of the world
>
> Of blue, blue sleek with a hundred chins,
> The amorist Adjective aflame ... (CP, 172)

The imagination is the amorist adjectival namer that is fat

with its own creations and resembles a pasha with a hundred chins. The assonance of the last line imitates, as Vendler has suggested, the bravado of a young amorist. Poetry is here described as nothing more than an "imbecile revery" and the poet "a solipsist aesthete."[3] The canto, far from suggesting the supreme affirmation of the imagination as some critics have noted[4] seems to expose, if not ridicule, the self-sufficiency of the imagination that claims to exist without any contact with reality.

If the creative act cannot exist apart from the real world, the nature of their inter-relationship needs to be redefined. This is the subject of many cantos in "The Man with the Blue Guitar." Canto XI suggests one way of describing it. In a perfectly balanced verse, it first disapproves of the imaginative act merging itself in a universal monism and thus losing its identity, and then, of its being crushed by the domineering identity of the universe. The canto finally describes a state in which supreme balance occurs between the self and the world in which the self is able to 'live' in the world. First, there is a suggestion of a synthesis of men and the world:

> Slowly the ivy on the stones
> Becomes the stones. Women become
>
> The cities, children become the fields
> And men in waves become the sea.
>
> It is the chord that falsifies. (CP, 170-171)

The harmony is false because "the chord destroys its elements by uniting them in the chord. They then cease to exist separately" (L, 363). Then the reverse movement begins:

> The sea returns upon the men,
>
> The fields entrap the children ...
> The discord merely magnifies. (CP, 171)

As Stevens says, "discord exaggerates the separation between its elements" (L, 363), for men and children are engulfed and consumed by the world. This is the music of disintegration. The poem then ends with the possibility of a time when a supreme balance between the self and the world is achieved:

> Deeper within the belly's dark
> Of time, time grows upon the rock. (CP, 171)

It is the poetry of the time when the rock, Stevens' most powerful image of reality in the ultimate sense as something mysterious and impenetrable, will become "a thousand things" (CP, 527), that is, it will manifest itself in things that grow and live upon it. In other words its self-concealing being will be revealed in its temporal manifestations. The supreme task of poetry is to dis-cover this mutual belonging together of time and the rock, of be-ing and being, the visible and the invisible, the actual and the mysterious.

Canto XVIII also describes the ontological function of the imagination which through its transformation of familiar things dis-covers them in their true being. An imaginative act

involves a perception of reality so intense that the real appears to be unreal. This is the central idea that Stevens deals with repeatedly in his prose essays, (especially in "Three Academic Pieces"), and also in his later poetry. The imaginative experience seems unreal not because it is not of the real world, but because it exceeds our normal experience of the real world. In fact we dis-cover the real world, the things <u>as</u> they are only in such imaginative perception, for instance, as the poem describes, in the presence of the morning lights the cliffs are transformed into their true being. At such moments their rising from the sea seems unreal, the sea itself ceases to be real, and appears, as if, "a sea of ex" (CP, 175). Gadamer's explanation of the nature of creative transformation serves as a useful gloss on the canto. "Transformation means," Gadamer argues, "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 .... Thus the transformation into a structure means that what existed previously no longer exists. But also that what now exists ... is what is lasting and true."[5] The poetic transformation is thus "not simply transposition into another world," but "a transformation into the true."[6] It is thus both, what the canto calls "a dream" or an illusion and "a thing," a creation and a revelation, of things as they are. It is

A dream (to call it a dream) in which
I can believe, in face of the object,

A dream no longer a dream, a thing,
Of things as they are. (CP, 174)

The canto emphasizes the poet's apprehensiveness, or, rather, unwillingness, to call such creative experience a "dream." First the word is put in a paranthesis and later rejected more vehemently. An imaginative experience is ultimately of actual things, of their ontological revelation.

The perfect equilibrium between poetry and reality is the subject of canto XIX. For Stevens, as for Cézanne, the communication with nature or reality remains the most essential condition of a creative act. He is not satisfied to be a mere part of it, be "the monstruous player of/One of its monstrous lutes." As a poet, he must himself be nature, must appropriate it entirely to himself, he must, as he says,

reduce the monster and be

Two things, the two together as one,
And play of the monster and of myself,

Or better not of myself at all,
But of that as its intelligence,

Being the lion in the lute
Before the lion locked in stone. (CP, 175)

The defiant tone of the canto, expressed in the heavy repetitions of "monster" and "myself," insists on the equality of poetry and reality. The poet's song (lute) should itself be

leonine in the presence of the lion that is locked in stone (nature). The poet, in other words, must appropriate nature, must "be nature in the form of a man, with all the resources of nature" (L, 790). Poetry must not be merely about reality, it must not replace reality, rather it must be reality. What Stevens is saying here echoes similar remarks of Cézanne on the inextricable interdependence of art and nature. While distinguishing his own art from that of the classical artists, Cézanne told Emile Bernard, "they created pictures; we are attempting a piece of nature." The traditional artists thus "replaced reality by imagination and by abstraction which accompanies it." On the other hand, Cézanne insisted that "the artist must conform to (nature), this perfect work of art. Everything comes to us from nature; we exist through it; nothing else is worth remembering."[7] Similarly the canto insists that the poet exists in and through nature, that the self is the same as reality. "I want, as a man of the imagination," Stevens said, "to write poetry with all the power of a monster equal in strength to that of the monster about whom I write. I want man's imagination to be adequate in the face of reality" (L, 790). The poet must appropriate the power of nature so that nature can appropriate itself in his poetry.

Canto XXII, one of the best-known cantos of the poem, focuses on poetry's ontological discovery of things and establishes the inseparability of poetry and reality.

> Poetry is the subject of the poem,
> From this the poem issues and
>
> To this returns. Between the two,
> Between issue and return, there is
>
> An absence in reality,
> Things as they are. Or so we say.
>
> But are these separate? Is it
> An absence for the poem, which acquires
>
> Its true appearances there, sun's green,
> Cloud's red, earth feeling, sky that thinks?
>
> From these it takes. Perhaps it gives,
> In the universal intercourse. (CP, 176-177)

Stevens' comments on this poem serve as a manifesto of his entire poetry:

> Poetry is a passion, not a habit. This passion nourishes itself on reality. Imagination has no source except in reality, and ceases to have any value when it departs from reality. Here is a fundamental principle about the imagination: It does not create except as it transforms. <u>There is nothing that exists exclusively by reason of the imagination, or that does not exist in some form in reality</u>. Thus, reality = the imagination, and the imagination = reality. Imagination gives, but gives in relation. (L, 363-364. Emphasis added.)

The unequivocal statement with which the poem begins establishes the supremacy of poetry. Poetry is the true subject of all poems, from which they are born and to which they in the end return. The next statement, however, is not so unequivocal. The birth from and the return to poetry are opposed to "an absence in reality." In the space between "issue" and "return" poetry seems to disappear, by the poem's

"absence in reality," in its perception of reality. But "so we say" (emphasis added). This is what we think. Is poetry really ever absent in the face of things as they are? The phrase "or so we say" is significant. It demolishes the preceding argument that poetry is absent or separated from reality by exposing that argument as a mere presumption. In fact the poem "acquires/Its true appearances there," finds its poetry in reality, in the sun and the cloud and the earth and the sky as they reveal themselves more fully and more truly in the transformations of poetry. Poetry, for Stevens is, never separated from reality. It is not an isolated act of the subjective self that abstracts itself from the actual, real world. Its power lies in transforming that very world so as to discover it in ampler terms. Poetry lets things be; it reveals the presence of things present. Poetry and reality are thus one. We are also close to Heidegger's central proposition that "the being of language becomes the language of being."[8] Stevens has formulated the most essential truth about poetry in this canto. The next canto (XXIII) sums up, by way of "a few final solutions" and celebrates a "duet," in a rhythm serene, lofty and final that suggests equal appositions of "The imagined and the real, thought / And the truth, Dichtung and Wahrheit, all / Confusion solved" (CP, 177).

In "The Man with the Blue Guitar" Stevens also attempts

to "evolve a man" (CP, 181), a man who replaces the "pagan" (CP, 170) hero, who is a substitute for all gods, a native in this world, in short, a man of imagination, who will emerge later as "major man," living in Oxidia. As these cantos illustrate, Stevens conceives of the poetic self not as a pure and abstract cogito but as a self grounded in the temporal world.

In canto X, the "adversary," a "pagan in a varnished car" (CP, 170), the false hero with his cheap glory is addressed with hostility and derision by the man of true imagination:

> Here am I, my adversary, that
> Confront you, hoo-ing the slick trombones,
>
> Yet with a petty misery
> At heart, a petty misery,
>
> Ever the prelude to your end,
> The touch that topples men and rock. (CP, 170)

The poem that is primarily aimed at expressing contempt for, and rejection of, the false, traditional hero, ends on a positive, hopeful note, pronouncing faith in the man with the guitar, whose song, repeated in the heart of other men, can topple and replace the worthless.

Canto XXV celebrates the poet, the man of imagination, as 'hero,' as he joyfully dominates the world:

> He held the world upon his nose,
> And this-a-way he gave a fling.
>
> His robes and symbols, ai-yi-yi
> And that-a-way he twirled the thing. (CP, 178)

The poet here is the master of the world, balancing it, as it were, on his nose, revolving it to see it this way and that. As Stevens said of another poem, this canto sets out to establish that "the mind of one man, if strong enough, can become the master of all the life in the world" (L, 360). The spectacle of life changes through generations, but the poet is presented here as "an eternal observer" (L, 793). The language of the poem is primitive, verging on the comic, the rhythm tumbling and rolling as in a folk-song, and the poet is presented as a great personage with his robes and symbols, all uniting to create the image of this new hero who in his rude comic manner seems to mock at the serious ceremonious way of the traditional hero of canto X whom he replaces.

The man of imagination is more clearly defined in canto XXI, where he appears as "substitute for all the gods" (CP, 176). The self, which replaces gods is a bare self in a bare place. It is not the egocentric self that imposes itself as the lord of the land. Man as the "sovereign ghost" (CP, 27), as the intelligence of his soil, as the supreme law-giver and the ruler of his land had been discarded as early as "The Comedian." He is not "aloft, / Alone, lord of the land and lord / Of the men that live in the land, high lord" (CP, 176), not the detached, absolute subjective self that views the world as "one's shadow magnified" (CP, 176). There is nothing that

intervenes between this self and the world, least of all one's egocentric projections:

> One's self and the mountains of one's land,
>
> Without shadows, without magnificence,
> The flesh, the bone, the dirt, the stone. (CP, 176)

The four bare nouns of the last line reveal, with the force of finality, the elemental nakedness of the self and the world when stripped of all the false, subjective coverings or shadows.

There are cantos in "The Man with the Blue Guitar" in which the "demon that cannot be himself" is satirized, who "tours to shift the shifting scene" (CP, 180), that is, who tries to project his own formulations on ever-renewing reality. The canto ridicules the "Geographers and philosophers" (CP, 179) who traverse to map the sea, when, the sea is present in the sound of the north wind, in the falling snow, in the winter air. They are the demons who cannot let things be, but tour the world trying to map it, rearrange it, to put it in the framework of their conceptions, to impose order on it without heeding, paradoxically, to the order of the world itself which is always in the process of rearranging itself.

There are also men, like the employer and the employee in canto XXXI, who "contend,/Combat, compose their droll affair" (CP, 182), while the pheasant sleeps, spring sparkles, and the

cock-bird shrieks. These men-"As if a blunted player clutched / The nuances of the blue guitar" - are men without imagination, mere "posture of the nerves" (CP, 182), who have lost power to heed and respond to the world about them. The shriek of the cock, ironically, will only serve to awaken them to work, for, "Morning is not sun" (CP, 182) for them, they have no eyes or ears for the sights or sounds of things about them. A similar picture of man crushed by the pressures of reality is given in canto XV. The man here is a more tragic figure than the employer and the employee as he is aware of his disintegration and yet is unable to do anything about it. As he sits and broods, he sings a song that is a mere mechanical repetition of a stale perception. Despair and doubt surround this poem, a rather typical Eliotesque situation, rare in Stevens.

In a more affirmative mood in canto XXX, Stevens, "evolve(s) a man," (CP, 181) unlike Eliot, from the wasteland, from Oxidia a typical industrial suburb, stained and grim. He is the "old fantoche," the great, fantastic poet, whom we tend to think of as abstract and unreal, "Hanging his shawl upon the wind," a fantastic person, like an actor, who by his strutting seeks to increase his importance, but whom we suddenly discover to be an employee of "the Oxidia Electric Light and Power Company" (L, 791), an electric lineman with his eye "A-cock at the cross-piece on a pole / Supporting heavy cables..." In

other words, the old fantoche, the poet, originates in Oxidia, he is the man evolved in Oxidia and he finds his Olympia in Oxidia. He is no mythical hero residing on the Olympian heights, aloof and alone, but a very native of Oxidia who finds paradise in that dingy and banal suburban existence:

> Ecce, Oxidia is the seed
> Dropped out of this amber-ember pod,
>
> Oxidia is the soot of fire,
> Oxidia is Olympia. (CP, 182)

Oxidia is Olympia, "the only paradise must be here and now" (L, 789). The poetic self is thus not a transcendent observer of an 'objective' world, detached from common, actual existence. It is rather deeply entrenched in the existential world and as a being in the world, like Heidegger's Dasein, recovers and dis-covers Olympia in Oxidia, transcendence in actuality, being in temporality.

Stevens presents his supreme image of the self who is "a native in this world / And thinks in it as a native thinks" in canto XXVIII. This is the man in perfect agreement with reality, not a disinterested and detached observer or outsider like the philosophers or the employer and the employee. One recalls the central idea of Harmonium that the "soul... is composed / Of the outside world" (CP, 51), or the "natives of the rain are rainy men" (CP, 37). This man responds to the immediate real world about him, perceives it and embodies it

as he lives in it. He does not abstract 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. (CP, 180)

His soil is his intelligence, and he derives strength from his roots:

> Here I inhale profounder strength
> And as I am, I speak and move
>
> And things are as I think they are
> And say they are on the blue guitar. (CP, 180)

Like the singer in "The Idea of Order at Key West" (CP, 128-130), he is a supreme man of imagination who creates the world on his guitar and in creating, finds it so that he may dwell in it more truly and fully as a native.

The joy of the unmediated and immediate experience of the world is described in the penultimate canto (XXXII) of the poem. The self must strip itself of all the conceptions it has projected on the world, it must see nothing that is not there:

> Throw away the lights, the definitions,
> And say of what you see in the dark
> that
> That it is this or it is that,
> But do not use the rotted names. (CP, 183)
>
> The dark space must not be spotted with the search

light, nor must it be reduced to our narrow definitions of images and names of it. One must respond to its mystery while walking through it, experience and inhabit it and hail its "jocular procreations":

> How should you walk in that space and know
> Nothing of the madness of space,
>
> Nothing of its jocular procreations?
> Throw the lights away. Nothing must stand
>
> Between you and the shapes you take... (CP, 183)

Man's having a world means not putting it in a system of definitions, not mapping it into structures (which is what the geographers and philosophers do), in other words, not representing it in the mind, but man's intuitive apprehension of things. We must not attempt to decipher or dissect their mystery by reducing it to our definitions. Instead, we must inhabit the external space so that we may intuitively experience the shapes of things. It is in thus having a world that we truly become what we are:

> You as you are? You are yourself.
> The blue guitar surprises you. (CP, 183)

The last canto speaks of the dream of the time to come. It will be a dream of the "bread" and the "actual stone" or, what Stevens has already described in canto XVIII, "a thing, / Of things as they are" (CP, 174). It will be the poetry that will move beyond the last "generation's dream" (CP, 183), beyond

the traditional metaphysical, representational world and inhabit the actual, temporal world. It will be the poetry of our bread and bed, of life, of the business of living. And in the moments we choose to sing of it the dream will be ours.

In "The Man with the Blue Guitar" Stevens attempts to define the nature of creative transformation. The poetic transformation is not, as the poem suggests, a transportation of things into a transcendent realm outside time and space. Transformation rather has, as Gadmer has shown in Truth and Method, an ontological character. This is how Stevens explains the paradox stated at the beginning of the poem that the blue guitar transforms things without changing them into anything else. The poetic transformation is the realization of things in their fuller being. It is this relationship between poetry and reality that "The Man with the Blue Guitar" strives to establish. It is not, therefore, quite correct to see the poem as revealing the mind and the world engaged in an eternal confrontation. Vendler says, "in general, this poem, with its imagery of war or helplessness before an alien adversary, is a form of Stevens' gigantomachia, taking place in an element of antagonism.[9] In fact most poems suggest the inseparability of the two and the inadequacy of either of them existing by itself. The most effective instance is the almost choric repetition of the words "things as they are" and "blue guitar" throughout the poem, which has a tremendous incantatory

effect, as their sounds merge into one another and become almost indistinguishable. Stevens here moves beyond the dichotomy of poetry and reality to a stage in which one does not exist without the other. He speaks of this poetry in future terms, once in an oracular voice when "time grows upon the rock" (CP, 171) and then, in the last canto, in a more human voice when he envisions a world in which life will realize itself in poetry. This poetry is of the time to come, it is not what it has been so far, as it steps, most certainly, and most daringly, beyond the metaphysical, representational modern poetics into what may be called a post-representational, post-modern poetics in which mind and world, instead of confronting each other, may coexist in an abiding relationship.