

### **Introduction: Re-Visioning Stevens's Reality-Imagination Complex**

As all burgeoning Stevensians come to realize sooner rather than later, critically engaging the poetry of Wallace Stevens also necessitates critically engaging the vicissitudes of twentieth-century literary criticism, for something about Stevens's poetry—and debating just what constitutes this “something” has recently become fodder for increasingly self-reflexive critical discussion—lends itself quite remarkably to critical appropriation, to strong readings (in the Bloomian sense). When reading the complex history of twentieth-century literary criticism as itself a kind of fiction replete with recurring themes and interrelated dénouements, one becomes aware of a typical plot twist that seems to assert itself whenever Stevens's work enters into the story: innumerable critical schools and movements turn to Stevens's poetry not only because they find it ideally suited, as interpretable material, for a demonstration of the validity and persuasiveness of their respective critical procedures, but also because for them it comes positively or negatively to exemplify, as a kind of theoretical formulation in its own right, the basic tenets and assumptions that underlie their respective overarching hermeneutical modes. Hence New Critics find the self-sufficient beauty and imaginative possibility of form celebrated in poems such as “Peter Quince at the Clavier” or “Anecdote of the Jar” (Riddel 73), while phenomenologists locate a Husserlian *epoche* in Stevens's epistemological restlessness when faced with raw reality (Hines). Deconstructionists view Stevens as (de)constructing a *mise en abyme* that delights in the play of language and thereby emblematically enacts the mind finding what will suffice within a never-ending language game (Miller, “Cure”), while Heideggerians construe Stevens—the late Stevens, especially—as poetically cultivating a receptivity to pure Being or *Dasein* (Kermode; Hines; Miller, “Being”). Some critics (Marxists, and others) concerned primarily with historical and political critical narratives attribute Stevens's supposed

insulation from sociopolitical realities to a general political naïveté characteristic of all those (New Critics, for example) who would de-politicize and reify the imagination, while other politically minded critics, intent on reconciling political sensitivity with imaginative vitality, claim that Stevens *was*, after all, acutely aware of the contingencies of the sociopolitical world and committed to responding to them (Filreis; Altieri, *Art*). Finally, Helen Vendler and Harold Bloom (each a critical industry in her or his own right) see Stevens's poetry as an apotheosis of Romanticism that reveals either that in poetry all epistemological investigations are grounded in ever-recurring cycles of personal and metaphysical desire and despair (Vendler, *Wings, Words*), or that the deepest nature of the poetic imagination, no matter the particular dynamics of anxious intertextual influence that contribute to its manifestation in a given poet, is Gnostic, the imaginative spark of human divinity in a dark world (Bloom). The list could no doubt be expanded. Against the possible objection that a similar catalog could be assembled when plotting the critical fate of any major poet, it bears restating: what is unique to Stevens—as opposed to, say, Whitman or Dickinson or Eliot or Pound—is not that his work has been interpreted in vastly different and frequently contradictory ways, but that it is repeatedly called upon to authorize and underwrite differing theoretical assumptions about poetry and reality that serve as critical lenses through which the work of interpretation takes place.

Several possible explanations exist for why exactly the Stevensian corpus is prone to being co-opted in variegated ways for the purpose of poetic theorizing—Stevens's personal and syntactical reticence, his lack of overt affiliation or involvement with a particular critical school, the undeniably abstruse character of much of his poetry and all of his prose—but a sustained engagement with Stevens criticism reveals that it is primarily the malleability of the pesky imagination-reality dialectic, the pivot upon which the world of Stevens scholarship turns, that

allows Stevens's work to be a seemingly never-ending generative source for the promulgation of various supreme critical fictions. Critics who interpret Stevens's poetry in the context of the relationship between the imagination and reality are, of course, following Stevens's own lead, for in his prose work (the essays, letters, and journals) Stevens frequently refers to the interaction between imagination and reality, which he once termed his "reality-imagination complex" (*L* 792), as the central issue animating his poetry—*The Necessary Angel*, Stevens's effort to collect a number of his essays in one volume as a sustained, albeit a circuitous, contribution to poetic theory, is notably subtitled *Essays on Reality and the Imagination*. Nevertheless, Stevens's theoretical development of these two terms is sufficiently lacking in rigor, and the way the terms actually manifest themselves in the poetry is sufficiently ambiguous, to allow critics to follow Stevens's lead with ostensible fidelity to his assumptions while in practice turning to whichever philosophical mode of dealing with duality (epistemology) is most conducive to their own critical aims, and then importing these philosophical presuppositions into the poetry. Thus, in the name of elucidating the imagination-reality dialectic as it plays out in the Stevensian corpus, two critics may arrive at polar opposite conclusions.

B. J. Leggett succinctly demonstrates the potential for contradictory readings focused upon the imagination-reality interaction in Stevens by discussing two critical works published in the same year (1976)—Alan Perlis's *Wallace Stevens: A World of Transforming Shapes*, and Helen Regueiro's *The Limits of Imagination: Wordsworth, Yeats, and Stevens*—that end up on opposite sides, as it were, of the imagination-reality dualism. For Perlis, Stevens's recognition that reality per se is forever unavailable to imaginative apprehension leads to a celebration of the resulting freedom of human imaginative powers to make and remake ever-new fictions untroubled by an attempted fidelity to reality-as-it-is. For Regueiro, by contrast, Stevens's

engagement with the constructed products of the human imagination, which are problematically unfaithful to the thing-in-itself, leads to an effort to turn the imagination against itself so that, by clearing away imaginative fictions, the pre-imaginative particulars of reality—of being—can be momentarily experienced. In Leggett’s summation, “Perlis’s Stevens is a poet resigned to sacrificing all else for the imagination. Helen Regueiro’s Stevens, on the other hand, is able to attain the real only through the sacrifice, the annihilation, of the imagination” (4). Though Perlis and Regueiro disagree as to whether Stevens eventually favors embracing the imagination or reality, they agree that in Stevens’s poetic vision reality and imagination are in essence in competition with one another: duality is never overcome, so Stevens must pick sides. We will come back to the issue of whether or not an unbridgeable gap between imagination and reality actually characterizes Stevens’s understanding of these two terms, but for now the point is that two separate critics responding to one and the same dualistic notion of the imagination’s relationship to reality in Stevens can, with apparent support from the poetry, come to opposite conclusions as to which side of the duality Stevens favors.

Perlis and Regueiro can be taken as emblematic in that they represent the two opposing poles between which most Stevens criticism—and the larger theoretical claims about poetry and reality in general that it frequently supports—situates itself. When taking a broad view of the Stevensian critical landscape, one cannot fail to conclude that the overwhelming majority of Stevens criticism up until the 1970’s privileged the “imagination” side of the reality-imagination complex when seeking to locate Stevens within the parameters of a particular philosophical position. As Gyorgyi Voros writes, “the [main] thrust of Stevens criticism . . . has placed him in the idealist tradition with infusions from the French *symbolists*” (4). In other words, the majority of Stevens’s critics have agreed that Stevens champions the human imagination’s fictions over

and against a recalcitrant non-human reality that can never be known directly. Voros compellingly attributes the innumerable “idealist” readings of Stevens to the dominance, during the years that Stevens’s critical reputation was established, of initially New Critical and then post-structuralist critical discourses, both of which, despite their obvious differences from one another as well as the inherent variety of specific critical approaches characterizing each, strongly tend toward idealism—formal and linguistic, respectively. In the past few decades, a flourishing of new-historicist, Heideggerian, pragmatist, and other approaches to Stevens has issued in a reevaluation of the “reality” half of the imagination-reality dialectic. Part of this reevaluation clearly involves an attempt to redress the idealist imbalance in the critical literature.

As Alan Golding puts it,

[M]ost readers agree that Stevens’ poetry represents a lifelong meditation on the relation between imagination and reality, but his adherence to the “reality” side of that relation sometimes gets short shrift. We forget that all of those famous statements in which Stevens celebrates the imagination can be matched by statements in which he celebrates a literal, physical reality, the world before it is transformed by imagination. (124)

Regardless of critical fluctuations between idealist and realist evaluations of Stevens, the consistent critical focus upon the imagination-reality duality issues in an all-too-predictable critical plot, so much so that one often wishes to make a slight addition to Stevens’s observation in the *Adagia*: “Perhaps it is of more value to infuriate philosophers [and critics] than to go along with them” (*CPP* 906).

For critics, the immense appeal of the imagination-reality dialectic in Stevens no doubt results because such a dialectic can be construed as restating what, according to Simon Critchley, is “arguably the fundamental concern of philosophy, namely the relation between thought and things or mind and world, the concern that becomes, in the early modern period, the basic problem of epistemology” (4). If literary critics share one common goal, at least during the

second half of the twentieth century, it is to engage the philosophical tradition, and whether they choose to defend or deconstruct Western metaphysics (the latter activity actually being just as traditional, philosophically speaking, as the former), the basic problem of epistemology—how do we know what we know—is, to borrow from Stevens, the golden woman in their silver mirror. Little wonder, then, that critics tend to find reflected in Stevens's poetry their own favorite solutions (be they Kantian, Hegelian, Nietzschean, Jamesian, Derridean, and so on) to various epistemological puzzles, such as: Is the mind inside the world or is the world inside the mind? By what possible syntheses might the two touch one another, and can they ever completely merge? Is the entire distinction between mind and world merely a logical or linguistic convention that does not do justice to pre-thematic lived experience (and if so, does this not merely refigure the dichotomy as one between the mind, which makes artificial distinctions, and the mind-in-the-world, which does not?)? Is it possible to move beyond dualism in language when language seems to come into being precisely because of dualism? And so on. In sum, plotting the imagination-reality dichotomy in Stevens's poetry allows critics simultaneously to offer a reading of the Stevensian corpus and to position themselves vis-à-vis the Western philosophical tradition, a positioning that is obviously central to the larger philosophical claims of their own theorizing. Even Vendler, whose entire project in reading Stevens takes as its point of departure freeing the poet from the dry machinations of philosophical inquiry so that the centrality of deep emotion in the poetry can be recognized, is not so much moving away from epistemology as seeking to reveal that epistemological questioning is ultimately an emotional, even an erotic, endeavor (as an aside, it has not often been acknowledged that this Vendlerian move is fundamentally Nietzschean in that it attempts to do for Stevens's poetry what Nietzsche attempted to do for philosophy: demonstrate that beneath the surface of seemingly impersonal

formulations lurks the subjective confession of various emotional drives interacting with one another).

Vendler's influential attempt to move away from the kind of abstract philosophical reductionism predominant in Stevens scholarship at least since Frank Doggett's 1966 *Stevens' Poetry of Thought* has inspired recent scholars writing about Stevens both to conceive dialectical relationships—opulence/poverty, desire/despair, linguistic excess/spiritual asceticism, being/nothingness—that may better trace the specific emotional shades that the imagination-reality interaction actually takes in terms of the imagery, diction, and themes of the poetry, and to avoid substituting ready-made idealist or realist critical/philosophical positions for Stevens's multi-qualified and meta-figurative assertions. Along the way, a number of post-Vendlerian Stevens critics have begun to acknowledge what many attentive readers of Stevens have long sensed: for all of its undeniable perspicacity and breadth, the immense industry of Stevens criticism has never quite managed fully to do justice to the strange, radical nature of what Stevens means by and figures in the terms (and their variants) “imagination” and “reality.”

Take the following examples from the prose:

It comes to this, that poetry is a part of the structure of reality. If this has been demonstrated, it pretty much amounts to saying that the structure of poetry and the structure of reality are one or, in effect, that poetry and reality are one, or should be. This may be less thesis than hypothesis. (*CPP* 692)

Take the case of a man for whom reality is enough, as, at the end of his life, he returns to it like a man returning from Nowhere to his village and to everything there that is tangible and visible, which he has come to cherish and wants to be near. He sees without images. But is he not seeing a clarified reality of his own? Does he not dwell in an analogy? (*CPP* 722)

And having ceased to be metaphysicians, even though we have acquired something from them as from all men, and standing in the radiant and productive atmosphere, and examining first one detail of that world, one particular, and then another, as we find them by chance, and observing many things that seem to be poetry without any intervention on our part, as, for example, the blue sky, and noting, in any case, that the imagination never

brings anything into the world but that, on the contrary, like the personality of the poet in the act of creating, it is no more than a process, and desiring with all the power of our desire not to write falsely, do we not begin to think of the possibility that poetry is only reality, after all, and that poetic truth is a factual truth, seen, it may be, by those whose range in the perception of fact—that is, whose sensibility—is greater than our own? (*CPP* 679-680)

To read Stevens deeply is to come to “dwell in an analogy,” to enter a liminal space that is somehow both utterly real and thoroughly imaginative, to perceive the facts of the world in a higher range. When attempting to reconcile this at-times ineffably moving experience (an “insolid billowing of the solid”) of reading Stevens with the voluminous and frequently contradictory pronouncements of his critics, many readers undoubtedly feel inclined to agree with Harold Bloom when he asserts that Stevens “gave us a canon of poems themselves more advanced *as interpretation* than our criticism has gotten to be” (168). Despite all the philosophical systems used to account for it, Stevens’s poetry continually offers an enticing surfeit of significance that its critics cannot completely deduce. Let us say it: Stevens’s poetic vision, particularly as manifested in the late poetry, transcends the problem of dualism in an enigmatically beautiful and a beautifully enigmatic way that eludes traditional philosophical understanding. Simon Critchley, himself a philosopher, says as much when claiming that Stevens’s poetry recasts philosophy’s fundamental concern with epistemology “in a way that lets us cast it away. Stevens’s verse shows us a way of overcoming epistemology” (4). Specifically, Critchley argues that Stevens’s poetry affirms that “things merely are” (the title of Critchley’s book), though the sheer thingness of reality is best apprehended, somewhat paradoxically, when imaginatively perceived in a fresh way. Though Critchley’s readings of individual poems and prose passages are persuasive, his concomitant attempt to place Stevens’s “poetic epistemology” in a neo-Kantian, quasi-Heideggerian and Romantic philosophical context is not, and in the end his book further exemplifies the difficulty that critics face when attempting to use the terms and

concepts habitually employed in the main lines of thought of Western academic philosophy to talk about Stevens's complex merging of reality and imagination (to Critchley's credit, he readily acknowledges the supreme challenge of reading Stevens through the lens of the philosophical tradition).

The present study concerns itself with elucidating how exactly Stevens's late poetry transcends the division between imagination and reality, an investigation inseparable from the attempt to fashion a critical vocabulary that can persuasively articulate a non-dualistic perspective. The work of several critics provides a point of departure, specifically book-length studies by B. J. Leggett, Joseph Carroll, Barbara Fisher, Leonora Woodman, and Janet McCann. These critics have dared to go against the grain of most Stevens criticism by claiming that, though much of Stevens's earlier work can indeed be profitably read as oscillating between the yearning of the imagination and the pressure of reality, late Stevens (typically the Stevens of *The Auroras of Autumn* and, especially, *The Rock*, as well as the later poems published posthumously) picks up on and brings to completion a non-dualistic impulse present throughout all of the poetry by gnominically, yet movingly, affirming that human poetic powers are inseparable from liminal energies that animate the "real." As Fisher puts it, the late poetry "illustrates Stevens's quintessential fiction: the idea that metaphor, as such, constitutes not only the ever-renewing ground of language but the material and philosophic substance of being" (133). Though these critics pursue overtly different critical projects and reach not-always-commensurate conclusions, their work collectively suggests that the late poetry of Stevens inscribes processes of the imagination within the material world and thereby locates human subjectivity within a larger, not purely human process, "the drowsy motion of the river R" (*CPP* 427), as the opening poem of *The Rock* puts it. One comes away from their studies, which thus

far have occupied a marginal position in canonical Stevens criticism, contemplating the possibility that if in Stevens's early work the evocative effects of Stevensian poetics—the preternatural felicity with nuances of sound, rhythm, and diction—formally trope an insouciant celebration of human imaginative vivacity, in the late poetry these same effects enact the experience of a numinous presence at the heart of the intermediary realm where self and world, poet and reader, metaphor and mystery momentarily meet in “the intensest rendezvous” (*CPP* 444). In late Stevens, human awareness edges toward a threshold where real and imaginary “become one, a perspective, of which / Men are part both in the inch and in the mile” (*CPP* 432).

To provide analogues and/or sources for a simultaneously realist and idealist “perspective” in which, quite literally, the imagination *is* reality and reality *is* the imagination, Fisher turns to mystical strands of the Western philosophical and theological traditions and reads Stevens as a Dantesque poet complexly engaged with philosophical eros, while Carroll draws on the Romantic tradition and posits that Stevens's successful articulation of a supreme fiction entailed developing a uniquely Stevensian “new Romanticism”; Woodman reads Stevens as a poet directly influenced by esoteric hermeticism whose corpus consistently figures and enacts a spiritual alchemy in which inner (imaginative) and outer (physical) realities merge into a spiritual essence (manifesting in traditional hermetic iconography as the anthropos or the *prima materia*) that is both their source and *telos*, while McCann locates religious concerns at the very center of Stevens's poetry and traces a sacramental dimension throughout the corpus that shifts from overt metaphoricity in the earlier poetry to mystical faith in the later work. Leggett mines Stevens's idiosyncratic personal library—Schopenhauer, Charles Mauron, Focillon, and others—and proposes the existence in Stevens's late period of a realized supreme fiction (not just notes toward such a fiction) that construes reality to be the meditation of a cosmic imagination, a kind

of divinized aesthetic principle manifesting in both human creative activity and the inventive transformations of the natural world. Stevens's fiction that what is habitually taken to be reality is itself a fiction, a material form of artifice constructed by an inhuman imagination, is, for Leggett, not without inherent contradictions and difficulties that perhaps account for Stevens's attempts to obscure beneath qualifications and ambiguities the presence of such a daring fiction in his late poetry. Nevertheless, Leggett persuasively demonstrates that the fiction of a cosmic imagination ("of" can here be taken in a double sense, which is precisely one of the difficulties that Leggett associates with such a fiction) is both at times directly articulated in the late poetry, and continuously present in it as an implicit, taken-for-granted "intertext," an awareness of which enables more successful readings of many of the passages in the late poems that have most puzzled critics. In all cases, the work of these critics suggests that the late poetry of Stevens may have much in common with discourses that have been marginalized in Western Academe because of mystical, spiritual leanings seen as heterodox vis-à-vis more overtly politically-inflected historicist critical orthodoxies, and that perhaps the lack of critical attention to this dimension of Stevens's late phase has occluded critics' ability to come to terms with the late poetry.

Despite its compelling suggestiveness, the work of Leggett, Carroll, Fisher, McCann, and Woodman emblemizes the difficulty of locating a critical vocabulary with which to speak about the late Stevensian trope of tropes, the image of reality itself as an endlessly troping process that plays through the human imagination as both subject and object. How do theoretical justice to the idea of an *external* imagination that transcends the human but nevertheless appears to come to light only in a decidedly human imaginative act? To their credit, these critics recognize the presence in Stevens's late poetry of a conception of reality that eludes the

hermeneutical possibilities of contemporary scholarship, but their various attempts to articulate this Stevensian supreme fiction, while persuasive in the context of their respective studies, lack an overarching theoretical context that could more explicitly connect compelling readings of late Stevens with a polemical engagement with contemporary criticism itself. Put another way, their studies shy away from developing the *theoretical* implications of Stevens's late figurations, how late Stevens might "read" contemporary criticism, as it were.

In an attempt to free itself from "the old descriptions of the world" (*CPP* 187) of Stevens's poetry offered by the majority of his critics, those by now habitual doctrines constituting the landscape of Stevensian scholarship, the present study aims to follow the hints of some of Stevens's most eccentric critics while developing more fully than they have managed the far-reaching implications of Stevens's late understanding of the reality of imagination. For example, we must elucidate the adjectival sense of "cosmic" with greater specificity than Leggett achieves in his notion of a "cosmic imagination" central to Stevens's late poems; similarly, we must think through exactly what it means to conceive of metaphor as the "material and philosophic substance of being," in Fisher's phrase. Carroll understands some of Stevens's late figurations in the context of a "sentient principle" active both in the material world and in human thought (27). Although he identifies some precedence for this notion in the tradition of Romantic poetry, Carroll fails to consider analogous conceptions—philosophical, spiritual—of reality that might help us better understand both Stevens's "sentient principle" and the precise reasons for the frequent critical misapprehension of it. In contrast, Woodman and McCann too aggressively reduce Stevens's late sense of a *real* imagination to hermeticist and Christian doctrines, respectively. We shall thus be more specific than Carroll and more general than Woodman and McCann: Stevens's elusive notion of an animating principle at work in both

poetry and reality *does* share affinities with hermetic and Christian worldviews, but Stevens is not as enraptured by specific alchemical vessels and Christian rituals as Woodman and McCann would like us to believe.

An often-discussed line from Stevens's late poetry enables us to illustrate how the above critical concerns—in particular the mixture of suggestiveness and incompleteness present in the critics we shall most depend on—play out in the scholarly literature. “We say God and the imagination are one,” the speaker declares in “Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour” (*CPP* 444). This line, which can be construed as a thesis statement not only for this poem in particular but for the fundamental understanding of imagination exemplified in late Stevens in general, has most frequently been read as yet another Stevensian effort to elevate a strictly human imagination to God-like status, a recapitulation, as it were, of the early pronouncement in “Sunday Morning” that “Divinity must live within herself.” Denis Donoghue cogently exemplifies this dominant critical assumption about the line: “[T]he only way to heal the breach between God, nature, and man,” Donoghue writes, “is by becoming God and rearranging things according to your own ‘light.’ . . . Hence we say, God and the human imagination are one. The saint is the man of thought” (15). The critics we have been discussing—Leggett, Carroll, and company—overtly push against this predominant, idealist sense of a strictly human imagination in late Stevens, claiming instead that divinizing a purely human imagination runs directly counter to the impulse of Stevens's late poetry, which at least since the “inhuman author” of “Credences of Summer” (*CPP* 322) and the “imagination that sits enthroned” of “The Auroras of Autumn” (*CPP* 355) seeks to locate a more-than-human source for imaginative activity. The exact nature of a more-than-human imagination in Stevens remains difficult for these critics to articulate, however. Leggett, for example, accurately points out that the “supreme imagination” in late

Stevens is “neither God nor imagination as these are normally conceived” (5), but he fails to say anything at all about possible non-normative conceptions of God and imagination that might help us understand Stevens’s line. Predominant critical categories of thought seem incapable of thinking through the existence of a potential space conjoining the divine and the human, a space that would radically call into question the understanding of “reality” and “imagination.” In proposing that God and imagination are one, Stevens brings to light an intermediate perspective that would see imagination as not strictly human and reality as neither purely material nor purely transcendental. The reigning philosophical assumptions grounding literary-critical practice prohibit a complete and persuasive treatment of this late Stevensian perspective.

Unlike previous scholarship, this study will fully develop the intermediate perspective present in late Stevens by turning to a very old and yet startlingly contemporary notion of the soul as a this-worldly figurative *process* rather than an other-worldly metaphysical *substance*. Soul, in this fundamentally Neoplatonic perspective, presents a phenomenology of experience in between nature and the heavens, matter and mind: a realm of ineradicable longing in which human subjectivity comes to light as an activity that is not entirely human, in other words, not reducible to the dynamics of human biology and society. Though to speak about the soul in this way is to risk the academic disrespectability that comes with using a term associated with New Age bestsellerdom, we shall affirm, to borrow from Nietzsche, that “it is not at all necessary to get rid of ‘the soul’ . . . and thus to renounce one of the most ancient and venerable hypotheses” (210) just because the term has become co-opted by the self-help industry, or because—and this was Nietzsche’s point—it has become for many indistinguishable from Christian notions of the soul as individual, immortal, and otherworldly. One may sail between the Scylla of New Ageism and the Charybdis of Christian metaphysics and rediscover a notion of the soul as a continual

imaginative process in which the interrelationship between mind, metaphor, and world both establishes and dissolves the separate reality of these terms. Such a way of imagining the soul is precisely the daring fiction furtively embodied in Stevens's late work. The visionary mysticism of late Stevens—"something seen / In a mystic eye, no sign of life but life, / Itself, the presence of the intelligible / In that which is created as its symbol" (*CPP* 448)—is rooted in "The spirit [that] comes from the body of the world" (*CPP* 440), and this "spirit," Stevens's "necessary angel of earth" (*CPP* 423), is what Stevens names the rock, and what other thinkers name the soul.

It must be emphasized that the idea of the soul elaborated herein is not proposed as an overt source for Stevens's poetic vision, though the complex (and still not-fully traced) lines of poetic and philosophical influence in Stevens's work no doubt share much common ground with the theorists whose ideas about the soul are relied upon here, but rather offered as an analogue that can open up new interpretive possibilities. The sense of soul we shall develop will serve as a fruitful hermeneutical intertext<sup>1</sup> that can reveal previously obscured and inadequately interpreted aspects of Stevens's corpus. Specifically, the idea of soul will facilitate the ability to theorize a dimension of reality that cannot be entirely reduced to material, social, or linguistic processes, an intermediate space of imagination in which, as Stevens puts it, "the structure of poetry and the structure of reality are one" (*CPP* 692). This first principle of the soul, precisely in its untimeliness, allows criticism to do justice to the hard-to-pin-down Romantic sensibility that defines Stevens throughout his entire career and becomes paradoxically more reticent and

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<sup>1</sup> I am here referring to an "impure" version of intertextuality that, rather than uncovering texts that may have overtly influenced Stevens's work, simply proposes that a reader can profitably apply one "text" (understood broadly) to another as a hermeneutical tool that can help reveal previously obscured aspects of a text's significance. As Barbara Johnson claims, to read a text intertextually is to facilitate it becoming "differently energized, traversed by forces and desires that are invisible or unreadable to those who see it as an independent homogeneous message unit" (265).

radical, more strange and subtle, in the late poems. Contemporary Stevensians may be reluctant to admit this, but the likes of pre-Socratics, Neoplatonists, spiritual alchemists, Renaissance humanists and hermeticists, Viconians, Romantic poets, and depth psychologists—in other words, visionaries for whom the poetic activity of imagining the real connects one to the Mysteries by figuring and enacting what Philip Wheelwright calls, in distinction to a metaphysics, a metapoetics, “an ontology not so much of concepts as of poetic sensitivity” (20)—would be more at home traversing the terrain of Stevens’s late poetry than are most professional academic philosophers, precisely because such heterodox thinkers, participating in a kind of underground stream, as it were, informing the Western intellectual tradition, tend to imagine the reality of the soul in a way remarkably similar to how Stevens’s late poetry imagines the reality of the imagination. In reading Stevens, some critics have certainly relied upon a conception of reality that resembles the elusive terrain we shall name the soul, but such a critical fiction has had to remain implicit and undeveloped in an intellectual climate that a priori eliminates the possibility of taking the imagination seriously as a not entirely human process inseparable from the flux of the real. The soul, as a critical fiction, thus functions here as a way to make the implicit explicit—both the implicit Stevensian fiction playing out in the late poems, and the implicit theoretical suggestions offered by certain Stevens critics.

In developing the critical perspective of the soul, we will turn in particular to the work of James Hillman, whose post-Jungian archetypal psychology positions itself—and its notion of soul—in a complex line of intellectual descent that stretches back to Heraclitus and Plato and passes through the Italian humanists, Vico, the Romantics, and Freud and Jung, among others. Hillman speaks about the soul “as a primary metaphor, rather than defining soul substantively and attempting to derive its ontological status from empirical demonstration or theological

(metaphysical) argument” (*AP* 28). For Hillman, human subjectivity is lodged within a transpersonal realm of images, a middle “place” identified as psyche or soul (the two terms are synonymous) that is neither purely objective nor wholly subjective, neither reductively material nor transcendently spiritual, neither naturally universal nor culturally relative, but mediational vis-à-vis the various dualities characteristic of Western metaphysics. “The human being is set within the field of soul; soul is the metaphor that includes the human” (*AP* 26),<sup>2</sup> Hillman writes, and elsewhere elaborates: “It is as if consciousness rests upon a self-sustaining and imagining substrate—an inner place or deeper person or ongoing presence—that is simply there even when all our subjectivity, ego, and consciousness go into eclipse” (*RVP* xvi). Drawing on both Heraclitus and the mythological iconography of the underworld, Hillman conceives of the soul as a shadowy presence characterized by invisibility and hiddenness, a subtle sub-reality playing through the manifestly given and warranting the seemingly endless depths opened up by acts of imaginative discernment and aesthetic perception. For Hillman, the soul is less a “place” or a “thing” and more an inherently metaphorical substrate that makes possible the positing of all places and things, an adjectival and adverbial perspective opening up the space wherein first principles take shape.

“Metaphor” is key to Hillman’s thought, and the valences of the term clearly extend beyond a narrow linguistic sense—metaphor as a specific trope—and point toward an ontology that would make figuration central to the structure of reality. For Hillman, metaphor thus connotes an imaginative process that both establishes and transcends linguistic inventiveness, an autonomous activity of *poiesis*—of making and unmaking momentarily stable fictions and

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<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, Stevens asks, “Does he not dwell in an analogy?” (*CPP* 722). Stevens here imagines a hypothetical man who has returned to the tangible and visible aspects of reality and finds that the real is inseparable from an inherently poetic mode of vision and experience.

identities—at the center of both human life and the life of the world. Metaphorical activity *is* the soul, for Hillman, both in content and process:

[A]ll statements in psychology about soul are metaphors. In this way, soul-as-metaphor leads beyond the problem of “how to define soul” and encourages an account of the soul toward imagining itself rather than defining itself. Here metaphor serves a psychological function; it becomes an instrument of soul-making rather than a mere “figure of speech,” because it transposes the soul’s questioning about its nature to a mythopoesis of actual imagining, an ongoing psychological creation. (*AP* 30)

A notion of human figurative practice as leading to the apprehension of the invisible flux of animate reality—in other words, of imagination as the very soul of the world—has its roots in ancient sources (Homer, Plato) and reemerges in contemporary poetics in the attempt to connect the practice of figuration to a sense of the sacred. We shall have more to say about this in a moment. For now, though, the main point is that, by locating a figurative process at the heart of the real, Hillman’s notion of soul serves as one possible lens allowing us to perceive in new ways the fiction of reality operative in Stevens’s late work. Despite often being read as solipsistic attempts to craft final emblems of the enduring power of a purely human imagination, the late figurations of Stevens ineffably arise “out of the mist” (*CPP* 427) of a more-than-human figurative source: if they are solipsistic, it is because they enact what Hillman calls soul-making, the soul speaking about itself in a metaphorical speech that simultaneously elaborates and reflects the reality of its metaphorical nature. For Stevens as for Hillman, to speak about the soul—or, in other words, about the bedrock foundations of reality—is inevitably to speak about “the few things / For which a fresh name always occurred” (*CPP* 474). Reality must be troped because reality is forever turning: “The freshness of transformation is // The freshness of a world. It is our own, / It is ourselves” (*CPP* 344). This ever-transforming fluent mundo, so like the notion of the soul at the heart of Hillman’s depth psychology, is the subtle ground of Stevens’s late poetry. To intertwine metaphor and reality, as Hillman does, is to claim what in many of its

more difficult and frequently misread moments Stevens's later work (as well as some of the earlier poetry and the prose) suggests: metaphorical consciousness is not simply a human mental function overlaid upon a literal reality but an inherent quality of reality itself, an "essential poem at the center of things" (*CPP* 377).

In turning to a particular notion of the soul inspired especially by the work of Hillman, the present study will elucidate the nature of what I alternately call the reality of metaphor or the figurative real that grounds Stevens's late poetry—particularly Stevens's final volume, *The Rock*. Stevens's architectonic image of the rock functions as the guiding trope of the visionary impulse present in the late poems. Other crucial tropes include the "highest candle" (*CPP* 444), the "celestial possible" (*CPP* 433), the "body of the world" (*CPP* 440), and the "inhuman meditation" (*CPP* 442). Stevens's rock, however, incorporates these and serves as both a metonym for the earth, in all of its physical actuality (its "reality"), and a metaphor of metaphor itself (the "imagination"); in other words, the rock is an image wherein literal place and metaphorical *topos* merge.

One final quotation from Hillman is worth our attention here because it articulates a merging of imagination and reality that cogently speaks to the reality of metaphor that characterizes Stevens's late work. In fact, in this passage, Hillman overtly points to Stevens (albeit by slightly misquoting him) as a source for archetypal psychology! This admission has not been noticed much in the realm of depth psychology, and certainly not at all in the realm of Stevens studies. Hillman writes:

For archetypal psychology, "fantasy" and "reality" . . . are no longer opposed. . . . [F]antasy is never merely mentally subjective but is always being enacted and embodied. . . . [W]hatever is physically or literally "real" is always also a fantasy image. Thus the world of so-called hard factual reality is always also the display of a specifically shaped fantasy, as if to say, along with Wallace Stevens, the American philosopher-poet of

imagination on whom archetypal psychology often draws, there is always “a poem at the heart of things.” (*AP* 32-33)

Hillman goes on to quote Jung, who, Hillman claims, “stated the same idea” as Stevens. Jung writes:

[The] autonomous activity of the psyche, which can be explained neither as a reflex action to sensory stimuli nor as the executive organ of eternal ideas, is, like every vital process, a continually creative act. The psyche creates reality every day. The only expression I can use for this activity is *fantasy*. Fantasy is just as much feeling as thinking; as much intuition as sensation. (52)<sup>3</sup>

Hillman’s elaboration of the Jungian notion of the autonomous activity of the psyche or soul, a creative activity arising from the elusive, ostensible “nothingness” between matter and mind, and inseparable in some sense from the natural processes of the earth itself,<sup>4</sup> parallels Stevens’s “essential poem at the center of things” (*CPP* 377), the “métier” or “vital assumption” that generates the vegetation of Stevens’s “high rock” (*CPP* 445), and the “poem of life” that autonomously creates “The outlines of being and its expressings, the syllables of its law: / *Poesis, poesis*, the literal characters, the vatic lines” (*CPP* 365). Critics have long puzzled over the “nothingness” that appears throughout Stevens’s canon and paradoxically seems to figure an elusive form of “somethingness.” Reading Stevens through a Hillmanian lens will demonstrate that Stevens’s “nothingness” “takes form / And frame from thinking and is realized” (*CPP* 434), as it were, in the supreme figurations of the late poetry, figurations that can be amplified by turning to the analogous notion of the soul as a creative process deriving from the reality of the imagination.

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<sup>3</sup> For the sake of better contextualizing the Jung passage, I quote a bit more of it than Hillman actually does. Hillman significantly notes about the Jung passage that Jung takes the word “fantasy” “from poetic usage” (see Jung, 442).

<sup>4</sup> According to Jung, the world itself speaks through consciousness, for “at bottom the psyche is simply ‘world’” (Jung, *CW* 9, i, 173).

Hillman's mode of carrying on the tradition of depth psychology shares affinities with continental philosophies that have influenced a number of dominant critical procedures. In particular, Hillman consistently attempts to deconstruct settled discursive positions so as to reveal the play of fantasy at work in logical thought. "Depression," "hysteria," "abnormality," "development," "self," "paranoia"—these and many other constructs are methodically taken apart by Hillman until they reveal the hidden ore of their taken-for-granted assumptions, the invisible first principles giving birth, in the Nietzschean genealogical sense, to a felt sense of semantic persuasiveness. However, whereas dominant critical procedures privilege historical-cultural dynamics as the ultimate ground of discursive play and genealogical process, Hillman conceives of the movement of culture and history as itself secondary to imaginative processes that recur throughout and constitute history and culture. In other words, Hillman does not so much reject cultural materialism and relativism as reconceive of it, locating it in the context of an essentialism of the imagination. Such a move in effect reverses the direction of much contemporary thought. "Culture," "discourse," "ideology"—these gods currently ruling intellectual life are themselves overly essentialized constructs, Hillman's work suggests, literalizations of an imaginative process that can never be univocally reduced to the play of culture. From a Hillmanian perspective, Culture has merely become the contemporary container for imaginative speculation about the nature of the imagination.

One of the aims of the present project, on the level of theory, is to rehabilitate the relevance of Hillmanian depth psychology for contemporary literary studies by establishing both its kinship with and its difference from more widely employed hermeneutical strategies. With this goal in mind, the particular notion of the soul that is here proposed as a valuable interpretive lens through which to read late Stevens can be further contextualized—and on more firmly

established literary-critical ground—by examining American pragmatist assumptions about the soul as a figurative process based in a “poetics of transition” (to borrow Jonathan Levin’s phrase), assumptions traced by critics such as Richard Poirier, Jonathan Levin, and Joan Richardson in the work of Emerson (seen as proto-pragmatism), Williams James, George Santayana, and others, and in various literary texts of high modernism. This critical pragmatist plot, which, like Hillman’s work, construes figurative processes as the ground of being, has—helpfully for us—already been somewhat brought to bear by critics on the work of Stevens, revealing that for Stevens the reading and writing of poetry is an exercise in engaging the imaginative processes—human and cosmic at once—that are responsible for the myths and guiding fictions that allow humans to live their lives, myths and fictions that require continual recreation and reanimation to avoid the ennui that results when tropes are believed in too literally. As Levin, summarizing his pragmatism-based interpretation of “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,” writes:

The strangeness of a poem like “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction” is in the poet’s effort to imagine a supreme mythic ideal which is supreme only by virtue of its dramatically staged figurality. Stevens distinguishes between mythical forms and the imaginative processes that cultivate them. His first idea and supreme fiction become indistinguishable from the actual unfolding language of the poem. This accounts for what Stevens later describes as the inevitable “ennui” of the first idea, our impatience with it once it becomes formulated as a familiar, familiarizing idea. Before it is fixed in this way, the first idea is actualized *as* the poem itself, what is for Stevens an always elusive unfolding of language. This poetry makes the line between poem and world hard to draw because, as Stevens suggests later in the poem, its own “freshness of transformation is // The freshness of a world.” . . . Stevens blurs the line between poem and world because he so thoroughly identifies the vital energies of writing with the cosmic forces that circulate through the world. (1)

Such pragmatist interpretations of Stevens help clarify the way that, in Stevens’s work, poetic language imitates large-scale imaginative processes, and such interpretations are convincing especially because of the possible direct influence that the texts of Emerson, James, and

Santayana exerted on Stevens's work. However, it will be demonstrated that pragmatist critics resist developing the full implications of their claims regarding the intersection of what Levin calls the "vital energies of writing" and the "cosmic forces that circulate through the world." In line with contemporary critical trends, pragmatist critics avoid any hint of reifying notions such as "transition" or the "soul," and their gestures toward the cosmic dimension of figurative process thus float unstably within the critically safe confines of linguistic indeterminacy. While it may at times seem that Stevens shares the viewpoint of linguistic reductionism—"It is a world of words to the end of it" (*CPP* 301), as "Description Without Place" puts it—it will be seen that for Stevens poetic practice does not ultimately arise from a purely linguistic process but rather implicates a larger sense of imagination, one that connects poetic production with the natural flux of the world. Pragmatist critics suggest as much, but they back away from the implications of taking imagination seriously as a substantial reality intertwined with the processes of the natural world.

In order to move beyond the often taken-for-granted assumptions of contemporary critical orthodoxy, we will further contextualize Hillman's thought by examining in some detail various ancient ideas about the nature of soul. This endeavor will begin by looking into the modern scholarly engagement with ancient soul hypotheses, and it will quickly move into a more direct treatment of Homer, Plato, and Aristotle. Eventually, more marginal traditions of esoteric thought will be engaged as well. In the elusive tangles of ancient thought about the soul, we will find a warrant for imagining the soul as an inherently ambiguous and paradoxical realm or process existing beneath, and weaving through, human subjectivity. For the ancients, the soul is "the breath of life," a shadowy force of animation and understanding inseparable from the

generative tension existing between various dualities: nature and spirit, particularity and universality, life and death.

In construing the soul as the no-space space where mind and world, imagination and reality merge into a “third” possibility beyond duality while nevertheless never fully overcoming the dualistic tension that paradoxically connects them, we will not only propose a fruitful hermeneutical perspective through which to read the often invisible assumptions present in Stevens’s late work, but also address a particular fiction of lyric suggested by Stevens in his final phase. In a nutshell: if the notion of soul suggests that reality is inherently imaginative or metaphorical, then lyric speech becomes the fundamental speech of the soul, the breath of life itself shaped into words echoing the non-dual imbrication of mind and world. Developing this notion of lyric in relation to other critical fictions will be an implicit and at times explicit occupation in the pages that follow.

Here at the outset I must meet head-on a possible objection to any attempt to read Stevens through the lens of a particular intertext or critical fiction, such as, for example, an ancient (and modern) notion of the soul. Tim Morris, in his recent *Wallace Stevens: Poetry and Criticism*, sweepingly analyzes the history of Stevens criticism and argues that innumerable critics irresistibly import their own critical tropes into Stevens’s work as a way to stabilize the proliferation of indeterminacy between imagination and reality that, for Morris, characterizes Stevens’s poetics and makes it amenable to wide-ranging critical appropriation.<sup>5</sup> In what could be construed as a direct attack against the above claims regarding Stevens’s meta-tropic figurations, Morris writes:

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<sup>5</sup> In general terms, Morris agrees with what was claimed above about the imagination-reality dialectic being responsible for the immense critical appropriation of Stevens, though he differs in suggesting that the actual structure of Stevens’s poetry inevitably issues in interpretive aporias.

Doublings are also common: “Metaphor of metaphor,” “trope of trope.” Their appearance almost always signals a threat felt by the critic, consciousness of the need to capture proliferation within a syntactic boundary. For this reason, the appearance of a doubling tends to herald the appearance of a larger figure. Yet we should note that Stevens was explicit in his rejection of this strategy of gaining apparently higher purchase via a linguistic loop. (xxiv)

Morris’s paradigmatic example of a trope of tropes imposed upon Stevens’s texts by a critic as a way artificially to “solve” Stevens’s ambiguities is J. Hillis Miller’s image of a *mise en abyme*, first elaborated in his “Stevens’s Rock and Criticism as Cure,” an influential 1976 essay that helped usher in a period of dominance for deconstructive criticism within the American academy. For Morris, critical tropes such as *mise en abyme* exemplify criticism’s attempt at a mimesis of figurative undecidability that would locate criticism itself within a flamboyantly poetic mode: “Miller may still only gesture by figure toward some luminous negative, but he can do so with slightly more theatricality. With this tool, Stevens is neatly appropriated for a generation of readers who have, *a priori*, theorized proliferation and are more comfortable with its implications” (xx). What, then, keeps the present study from exemplifying the kind of egregious, albeit creative, appropriation of Stevens for the furtherance of critical fictions that Morris finds in the work of Miller and others? In other words, how is my use of a particular idea of the soul any different from Miller’s reliance on the meta-figurative notion of a *mise en abyme*? Am I not, too, merely using the supposed inherent interpretive proliferation that Stevens’s texts generate as a convenient point of departure to pursue my own critical agenda, making my interpretation itself a *mise en abyme* of prior critical appropriations of the poetry?

The notion of the soul-as-process is brought into the present work because it helps emphasize crucial assumptions about metaphor and reality suggested by Stevens’s late work, assumptions that indeed call into question Morris’s objections to the critical reliance upon figure as a means of interpretive supposition. To intertwine metaphor and reality, as Jung, Hillman, the

pragmatists, and Stevens do, is to claim that all human experience whatsoever is mediated by a metaphorical mode that is both the base of human consciousness and the liminal space wherein individual human subjectivity overruns itself and discovers its moorings in a mysterious *more*, as William James would put it. Thus, as Hillman and the pragmatists and Stevens (according to my argument) would all have it, figure does not follow after thought as a self-conscious tool of either poet or critic, but rather precedes all logic. As Stevens himself writes:

The truth seems to be that we live in concepts of the imagination before the reason has established them. If this is true, then reason is simply the methodizer of the imagination. It may be that the imagination is a miracle of logic and that its exquisite divinations are calculations beyond analysis, as the conclusions of the reason are calculations wholly within analysis. (*CPP* 738)

Such an understanding of the primacy of metaphor (“concepts of the imagination”) is certainly not foreign to Western thought, as even in Plato logical dialectic seems inevitably to exhaust itself and fly into a more primary realm of figurative mythic speech so as to point to the really real. Nevertheless, after decades of modern linguistic theory and deconstruction, and despite the efforts of theorists such as Paul Ricoeur, the idea of metaphor as a visionary mode of revelation rather than merely a linguistic medium of human semantic manipulation has fallen into disrepute. Whereas Morris is probably right, then, to point to the deconstructive criticism of Miller as an example of manipulative figurative imposition on the part of a critic, he is wrong to recommend that all critical tropes be abandoned in the analysis of Stevens’s poetry, for this poetry itself suggests that the reliance upon figures as a mode of understanding inevitably characterizes human thought, particularly the thought about human thought that Stevens’s late poetry provokes. To some extent, criticism *always* engages in the kind of doubling—metaphors of metaphor—that Morris so abjures, and in fact Morris’s own reliance on the Kantian-based notion of the Romantic sublime as a way to conceptualize Stevens’s gestures toward interpretive aporias

is precisely the kind of critical reliance upon a figure—here, the “sublime”—that Morris criticizes. In sum, then, my interpretive method is warranted by the poetry, which suggests that tropes take us as far as human understanding can go, including the human understanding of literary texts. The meta-trope of the soul imported into my analysis of Stevens is used not, as per Miller, to wrest Stevens’s poetry completely into the figural innovations of my own theorizing, but, precisely because it allows for a radical understanding of figuration itself, to provide a further avenue into what is most radical and thus far underappreciated about Stevens’s final figurations. The meta-trope of the soul, as the likes of Hillman and the pragmatists develop it, is a figure constantly on the move, for like Stevens’s angel of reality, the soul is evoked by “meanings said / By repetitions of half-meanings,” a fleeting entity that, if given the presence of voice, would avow that “quickly, too quickly, I am gone” (*CPP* 423). The figure of the soul helps make explicit how the overarching figure of the rock achieves, *pace* Morris, a resolution of endlessly proliferating aporias without at the same time settling into the encrustations of concretized metaphor.<sup>6</sup>

Before the close of this introductory chapter, we must turn more directly to some Stevens poems so as to locate within the Stevensian corpus the concerns we have outlined thus far. The

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<sup>6</sup> Note that I do not presume that my analysis of Stevens is the *only* way to bring out this quality of Stevens’s verse. In his Deleuzian reading of *Transport to Summer*, Axel Nesme comes to similar conclusions about Stevens’s engagement with metaphors of metaphor: “Although in ‘Man Carrying Thing’ Stevens allows for the possibility of an epiphanic moment when ‘The bright obvious stands motionless in cold’ (306), in ‘Thinking of a Relation’ . . . we do not actually witness the dove ‘alighting’ and growing ‘still’ in the fisherman’s—i.e., the poet’s as well as the reader’s—breast. As the dove resists capture, so the relation between the scattered images of metaphor(s) eludes designation. The dove growing still in the fisherman’s breast thus not only tropes metaphor itself. It also metaphorizes the very act of isolating the theme beneath the variations, the dove *per se* as opposed to the multiplicity of individual doves (hence the shift from the plural ‘wood-doves’ to the singular ‘dove’ in the poem’s first and last lines). It is a metaphor of metaphor and of its impossible grounding in an arch-signifier, which must remain a *would-dove* or, as we will see below, what Deleuze calls a ‘dark precursor’” (211).

non-dual merging of reality and imagination in a “third,” intermediary space in which consciousness and world, poetry and reality interpenetrate; and the benefit of reading this elusive terrain of the figurative real in the context of a particular notion of the soul—how exactly are these issues enacted and clarified in a concrete engagement with Stevens’s verbal art? To begin answering this question, we turn to “A Quiet Normal Life” (*CPP* 443-444) and “An Old Man Asleep” (*CPP* 427), two crucial poems in *The Rock*.

“A Quiet Normal Life,” in figuring an “actual candle” that “blazed with artifice,” presents readers with a riddling complexity that is much easier to evade than to face directly. Indeed, most Stevens critics have avoided saying very much about this poem, no doubt because plunging into its puzzling implications about imagination and reality necessitates a radical understanding of these two terms that does not fit with typical readings of Stevens. Rather than arising from a dualistic struggle between imagination and reality, “A Quiet Normal Life” concerns itself with a locale characterized by real artifice, a “place” of non-human, but nevertheless not transcendent, providence, which is at the same time intimately connected to some form of thought and feeling.

As do many of the poems in *The Rock*, “A Quiet Normal Life” thematically engages an ostensible form of poverty or nothingness, an apparent lack of imagination that nevertheless leads to an apprehension of imaginative activity. This dynamic is reinforced by the poem’s stylistic choices. The title itself overtly announces an apparent move away from the imaginative flights that often characterize Stevens’s earlier volumes. Compared to, say, “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” (*CPP* 50), “A Quiet Normal Life” exhibits a plain, simple style. However, beneath the poem’s veneer of plainness, as it were, there is a wonderful play of internal rhyme and other sound effects—to take one example, the reoccurrence of the long-*o* sound, which enacts what

Ezra Pound calls the “tone-leading of vowels”—that subtly charge the relatively straightforward diction and syntax with an undercurrent of energy, as if quiet normality inherently echoed with an inventive hum.

The argument of the opening of the poem is that, because of the frailty of the scene in which the “he” finds himself sitting and thinking, his “place” cannot be a product of his imagination. The bare reality of winter transcends the constructions of the human imagination:

His place, as he sat and as he thought, was not  
 In anything that he constructed, so frail,  
 So barely lit, so shadowed over and naught,

As, for example, a world in which, like snow,  
 He became an inhabitant, obedient  
 To gallant notions on the part of cold.

Note how the repetitive consonantal *t*-sounds in these two stanzas formally enact an insistent repetitiveness inseparable from the assertion that “His place” is defined by a quality of negation: the homonym rhyme closing the first and third lines (“not” and “naught”) most overtly enacts this effect, and the words “sat,” “thought,” “lit,” and “part” reinforce it, as do the echoing *ts* in the polysyllabic words “constructed,” “inhabitant,” and “obedient.” The “was not” enjambed at the end of line one momentarily establishes a complete claim that summarizes these early stanzas: “His place... was not[.]” The scene in which the human presence finds himself is one of shadowy nothingness, and because of this, the speaker asserts that the “he” does not construct it, but resides within it, as snow inhabits a world of cold. The second stanza contains a conceit that is easy to miss, but one essential to the poem as a whole: cold is not simply a quality of snow, or synonymous with it; rather, as Leggett has perceptively noticed, “[c]old is an entity capable of gallant notions, and snow is one of them. The speaker is like snow because he has the sense of being an inhabitant of the scene, not its creator, obedient to that which created it” (26). The

notion of some form of *external* creative agency, one not reducible to human invention, is thus subtly inserted into the poem in the second stanza. By the end of the second stanza, the “naught” of the third line is revealed, via a characteristic Stevensian “as,” to be not exactly nothingness, but the product of a gallant notion. Bare reality may transcend the constructive powers of the human imagination, but it manifests some other form of ideation or imagination.

The third and fourth stanzas continue to develop the “setting” of a quiet, normal life, a locale not constructed by the human mind but inseparable from the physical, seasonal immediacy of the external world—the present, physical actuality of the scene is reinforced by the short sentence that begins the third stanza (“It was here”), which contrasts with the long preceding sentence spread out over the entirety of the opening two stanzas. Interestingly, though, “gallant notions on the part of night,” which syntactically mirrors the preceding as-if example of gallant notions offered by the cold, constitutes some activity carried out by an external entity that nevertheless influences thought and feeling: night’s gallant notions “cut” “the oldest and the warmest heart,” and they are additionally syntactically associated with “the most tranquil thought” growing “peaked.” Whereas the earlier stanzas of the poem establish the place of a quiet, normal life as transcending human construction, these stanzas ambiguously imply that the converse is not the case: the activities of human consciousness *do* seem to be influenced by the gallant notions of some non-human source inseparable from the basic locus of human habitation. This implication is reinforced by an ambiguity of agency that characterizes many poems in *The Rock*. Although “thought” and “heart” certainly connote human realities, the definite article forestalls too univocally attributing the thoughts and feelings to the human presence in the poem (as we shall see below, “An Old Man Asleep” similarly confounds the ability to locate thought and feeling purely in a human context):

It was here. This was the setting and the time  
 Of year. Here in his house and in his room,  
 In his chair, the most tranquil thought grew peaked

And the oldest and the warmest heart was cut  
 By gallant notions on the part of night—”

Strikingly, the terms “peaked” and “cut” both contain positive and negative valences. To “peak” can denote either a waning or a culmination of vitality—the Shakespearean “dwindle, peak, and pine” is a well-known instance of the former—and to “cut,” in addition to its more common usages pertaining to a diminishment or a wounding, can also, as in the cutting of a diamond, refer to a process of doing away with the inessential, of shaping some raw material in a revelatory way. These intertwined connotations of both increase and diminishment consistently characterize the poems in *The Rock*, which often suggest a paradoxical increase of some form of vitality *in* the apparent diminishment of natural life. In “A Quiet Normal Life,” the complex intertwining of diminishment and increase plays out not only in the terms “peaked” and “cut” themselves, but in the larger context in which they appear, which joins together seemingly contrasting qualities and actions—by its very nature, a “tranquil thought” would seem to resist growing “peaked,” yet in the strange logic of the poem, tranquility burns with generative activity. The tranquil thoughts inseparable from quiet normality are eventually revealed *not* to be a ground of ultimate nothingness (“naught”) but of some form of blazing, of enlightenment, inseparable from the merging of actuality and artifice. Similarly, the “oldest and the warmest heart,” in its apparently sustaining vibrancy, would seem to forestall being “cut,” but something about the complex activity engaged in the poem, the thinking of gallant thoughts by an external entity, manages either to wound or to reveal (or both at once) a primordial locus of life and feeling.

These lines concerning peaking thoughts and hearts being cut represent the central action of the poem, a key to unlocking the significance of the poem's other activities—sitting and thinking, becoming an inhabitant, crickets babbling, an actual candle blazing with artifice. Nevertheless, they resist straightforward paraphrase. Stevens points to a mysterious form of simultaneous manifestation, culmination, and wounding. Tranquility of thought grown to its utmost, and a vulnerability of the deep heart's core, as it were, constitute the gallant notions that define the place of a quiet, normal life. The charged contraries of the poem—gallant and cold, tranquil and peaked, warm and cutting—open up the apprehension of a creative entity beyond the human, one that reveals itself precisely when the constructive powers of the purely human imagination recede into the background. A helpful way to read this more-than-human creative entity in late Stevens, I believe, is to view it in the context of the soul as an intermediary realm or process where actuality and artifice intersect. “It is as if consciousness rests upon a self-sustaining and imagining substrate—an inner place or deeper person or ongoing presence—that is simply there even when all our subjectivity, ego, and consciousness go into eclipse” (*RVP* xvi), Hillman writes, in lines already quoted. In Stevensian terms, a blaze of artifice burns within ostensible quiet and normality. Even when human constructions seem to be eclipsed, some form of constructive invention characterizes the plainest of settings and provides a ground for the processes of feeling and thinking.

The poem concludes:

Both late and alone, above the crickets' chords,  
 Babbling, each one, the uniqueness of its sound.  
 There was no fury in transcendent forms.  
 But his actual candle blazed with artifice.

These closing lines, like the poem as a whole, resist straightforward comprehension and reductive paraphrase. However, Stevens here aims to position the complex locale or mode of habitation the poem uncovers in some kind of intermediary space, above the babbling crickets, but below the fury of transcendent forms. A Neoplatonic-inflected notion of the soul helps to place this realm as one between nature—the ultimate site of intertwined uniformity (chords) and particularity (babbling uniqueness)—and the heavens. Such an intermediary space, which is eradicated in all forms of dualism, asserts the fundamental reality of artifice: as a realm of daimonic reality, soul in the Neoplatonic sense is both real (an “actual candle”) and composed of airy nothings. The soul’s real artifice is ultimately granted by recourse to a sense of the world itself, and the larger cosmos, as alive and inherently creative, an *anima mundi* that animates human subjectivity. In its syntactical and semantic ambiguity, “A Quiet Normal Life” maintains this paradox of an interpenetration between human thought and feeling and an external process that resembles thought and feeling. Thought and feeling (imagination), in discovering their apparent limits—perhaps this is one sense of “peaked”—discover their non-human ground. Stevens’s poem thereby exemplifies a *via negativa* common to many poems in *The Rock*: when the human imagination is seemingly eclipsed in the face of external reality, a larger imaginative entity or process reveals itself, and in doing so it retroactively affirms the vibrancy of the human imagination. After all, in some sense all the gallant thoughts circulating within “A Quiet Normal Life,” even though they are attributed to cold and night, are the thoughts of an old poet sitting in his chair: mind and world ambiguously merge in a daring act of meditative tranquility. Put another way, the nothingness, the cold, and the night in “A Quiet Normal Life” themselves make visible a light, an actual candle blazing with artifice that is inseparable from both the world and

the poem, whose intertwined processes constitute the fundamental space of human habitation in the world.

Two final points about the benefit of reading “A Quiet Normal Life” through the lens of a particular notion of the soul. First, Stevens interestingly characterizes transcendent forms as involving “fury,” which suggests a desperate effort to escape the babbling processes of nature. The candle in this poem, and its burning artifice, resists the furious impulse to transcend while nevertheless holding itself above the crickets’ chords, lighting an intermediary space of the figurative real. While this resistance to heavenly transcendence does not often overtly find expression in ancient Platonic and Neoplatonic sources, it does characterize later inflections of Platonism—fairly covertly in Italian humanists such as Ficino, but overtly in the depth psychology of Hillman, which goes to great lengths to distinguish the furious transcendence of the spirit from the burning intensities of the soul. Hillman’s tracing of a particularly this-worldly notion of soul will thus help us better read Stevens’s late efforts to apprehend the “celestial possible,” a seemingly spiritual or transcendent significance that nevertheless permeates the actual world.

Second, the revelatory activity that characterizes “A Quiet Normal Life” takes place “Both late and alone[.]” For the poems of *The Rock*, lateness characterizes both thematic and stylistic concerns: an old-age confrontation with human mortality and with final things, and a plain, seemingly diminished style (vis-à-vis the gaudy poetic gambits of youth) that would honor bare reality. The late poems seek an accord with the rock of the real that asserts itself with particular insistence when an individual human life apprehends a reduction of vitality and autonomy. In a word, *The Rock* is a volume shadowed by death, that inevitable terminus that confronts one both late and alone. As “A Quiet Normal Life” reveals, however, the shadows of

apparent nothingness are inseparable from a particular form of light, a process of imaginative activity figured by the poem as an actual candle burning with artifice. This commingling of an apparent reduction of natural vitality (whether associated with the human, the world, or both) and the increase of some form of reality and awareness has been difficult for criticism to grasp. The poems clearly do not simply lament the loss of human imaginative potency while acknowledging the intractability of the real, because, as “A Quiet Normal Life” insists, the real itself burns with imagination. Nevertheless, most critics continue to posit that some form of irresolvable conflict between a purely human imagination and a purely external reality establishes the poignancy of the final poems. To account more persuasively for *The Rock*’s engagement with a form of liveliness *in* death, a mode of vibrant awareness inseparable from death’s diminishment, we must go in what is actually a fairly obvious direction: down to the underworld. Hillman recognizes the fundamental interconnection between the ancient idea of an elusive *psyche* and the mythological topos of the underworld: Hades, as the realm of souls, is inseparable from the reality of soul. For Hillman, the “underworld” figures not a literal eschatological destination but instead a mindset, a perspective, that shadows life at each moment and establishes its unfathomable depths. The breath of life is finally inseparable from the shadowy reality of death. This notion of underworld, so central to Hillman’s sense of soul, will be developed more fully below and utilized as a way to make sense of the intermingling of life and death, inseparable from the merging of imagination and reality, characterizing Stevens’s engagement with the thoughts that come both late and alone.

A discussion of “An Old Man Asleep,” the opening poem of *The Rock*, will further indicate in a preliminary way just how Stevens’s late poetry evokes the experience of a liminal terrain positioned as an intermediary realm or process both separating and joining various

dualities.<sup>7</sup> In this compact, exquisitely constructed opening to the volume, the rhythm of the verse reinforces formally the main thematic drama of the poem: an apparent dichotomy—the “two worlds” of line one, further specified in line three to be the “self” and the “earth”—drowsily transforms into a mysterious unity both subjective and objective, human and worldly:

The two worlds are asleep, are sleeping, now.  
A dumb sense possesses them in a kind of solemnity.

The self and the earth—your thoughts, your feelings,  
Your beliefs and disbeliefs, your whole peculiar plot;

The redness of your reddish chestnut trees,  
The river motion, the drowsy motion of the river R.

Note how the initial caesura in line one enacts on the level of temporal sound the sense of a dichotomy between two remarkably similar but nevertheless distinct verbal entities, “are asleep” and “are sleeping,” while the second caesura literally creates a temporal space in which the collapsing of this dichotomy—rhythmic and verbal at once—can take place in the present “now” of the poem. Additionally, the movement from “asleep” to “sleeping,” from an adjective—a settled state—to a participle—a verb-form inflected with motion—evokes in this very first line of the poem a movement away from the logical clarity of duality toward an activity partaking of a different kind of logic, a dream-logic in which inner and outer realities merge. By the end of the poem, “The river motion, the drowsy motion of the river R,” a line that simultaneously concludes and tropes the poem in its entirety, has disrupted any settled state comfortable with resting in dichotomies like self and earth (imagination and reality), replacing it with a mysterious motion that, though at best fleetingly grasped only through the remnants of the previously secure dichotomy, manages to point to an elusive presence at the heart of being.

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<sup>7</sup> Note: my own reading of “An Old Man Asleep” owes much to B. J. Leggett’s analysis of the poem on pages 22-24 of his *Late Stevens: The Final Fiction*.

The most surprising moment in the poem, a poetic act encapsulating the disruption of habitual awareness that the poem achieves, is the sudden jump to the second-person mode of address after the dramatically appositive caesura brought about by the dash in the third line. With the “your,” all the more surprising because of the third-person orientation of the poem’s title, the poem and its readers overtly interpenetrate as readers are nudged out of the false conviction, reinforced by the sleepy dumb solemnity of the opening two-and-a-half lines, that they were witnessing the poem’s events from the outside as purely objective observers.<sup>8</sup> Though readers are directly plunged inside the poem by the second-person “your,” where precisely they locate themselves within the poem’s terms is a complex matter. It does not appear that readers can simply identify their presence in the poem with the “self,” for it is precisely the self *and* the earth that are (is) equated with the various nouns associated with the “your.” A further complication: the self and the earth, the two interpenetrating worlds whose sleeping constitutes the primary action of the poem, somehow issue in both the most seemingly personal, “subjective” aspects of readers’ waking lives—thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and disbeliefs—and the apparently “objective” reddish chestnut trees. Strikingly, since they are also modified by the adjective “your,” the chestnut trees appear to be an aspect of personal possession every bit as intimate as thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and disbeliefs. In short, the “your” is inserted into the poem in an in-motion verbal space that is neither subjective nor objective, but both. The word “plot,” as the final word of line four, vibrates with a double meaning and thereby condenses within a single word this complex motion of the poem’s merging worlds, for a plot can be a place where both the objective chestnut trees and the subjective thoughts, feelings, beliefs and disbeliefs are located. In other words, the plot—the story—of readers’ emotional and intellectual

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<sup>8</sup> As Eleanor Cook has pointed out, the poem’s title may echo the Rodgers and Hammerstein song “Old Man River” (*Word-Play* 297). If so, the title, by evoking a personified non-human reality, itself conflates the human and the non-human, or subjective and objective, realms.

lives is irretrievably punned with a plot of ineffable ground that is composed of *both* the self and the earth. As in “A Quiet Normal Life,” thoughts and feelings in “An Old Man Asleep” circulate in an ineffable ground wherein mind and world interpenetrate.

The two worlds, the self and the earth, the “your” and its interconnected plot of attributes, and the evocative rhythm of the poem that sets these entities in motion, all flow into the poem’s final line, which uses effects of sound to move beyond denotative logic altogether so as to evoke an elusive presence flowing through both mind and world. As Charles Altieri writes about this final line, “Here I have to admit that the distinction [between *river* motion and *drowsy* motion] is mostly on the level of sound, since the *ow* sound in ‘drowsy’ so picks up and extends the *o*’s in the line that it takes the line itself beyond description to an affirmation of peculiar presence” (166). The peculiar flowing presence of the final line, and indeed of the poem as a whole, is enigmatically contained in the poem’s closing gesture, the “R” that puns “are” and thereby equates the poem’s mysteriously flowing river with being itself, the river of life. In its total effect, the final line makes explicit the central transformation brought about by the poem. The difficulty readers face in imagining their own presence within the poem—are they inside the poem’s two worlds or are the two worlds inside of them, and how do they and the two worlds relate to the old man whose sleep apparently encompasses all of the entities named in the poem?—leads in the final line to the dawning possibility that the “your” may point simultaneously to the reader and to the river, the flowing mystery that both possesses and generates the various nouns of the poem. The river, like the “peculiar plot” of ground the poem also evokes, feels decidedly personal, even in its seemingly impersonal exteriority—when looking upstream, as it were, at the repeated appearances of “your,” it proves impossible not to feel personally implicated by such a term, even when it points to a chestnut tree or a river. The

Old Man River in this poem in effect reverses the direction of the poetic act of personification. Human thoughts and feelings are not so much overlaid on a physical reality as discovered in a liminal space wherein self and earth flow together. To engage the drowsy motion of this flow is to break through to the “recognition that the mind imagining is itself being imagined” (Hillman, “Responses” 265), the preeminent recognition that Hillman’s writings about the soul seek to foster.

To be more specific, now, about where we are headed: the first chapter, “A Stevensian Poetics of Soul-Making: The Reality of Metaphor in *The Rock*,” establishes an ongoing process of figurative speculation in Stevens’s late verse that exceeds the bounds of conventional critical theorizing, including the fundamental modernist heritage of interpretive strategies available to Stevens himself. In examining the *topos* of metaphor and the metaphor of *topos* in late Stevens, we will elucidate a Stevensian sense of the reality of metaphor, an intuition that human life in the world involves living in and by a process of *poiesis*. For late Stevens, poetry enacts a merging between reality and imagination, which calls into question the notion of a purely human imagination and implicates a macrocosmic process of non-human dimensions. In delving into how and why dominant critical trends misperceive the full implications of Stevens’s late sense of the figurative real, we are led to an apparently missing category within critical thought that is nevertheless occasionally overtly gestured toward: the soul.

The second chapter, “The Breath of Life: The Ancient and Venerable Hypothesis of the Soul,” develops in detail ancient speculation about the soul running through Homer, Plato, and Aristotle. For the ancient Greeks, the soul reveals itself indirectly as an elusive and paradoxical process or function intertwined with the fundamental vicissitudes of human desire. The soul, in

this ancient understanding, would seem to involve grappling with an inescapable tension attendant upon human mortality and imperfection, a tension playing out in an ineradicable negotiation with various dualities: sameness and difference, self and other, life and death, particularity and generality. The soul, as an inherently intermediate reality, functions as a “middle term” between these and other dualities, paradoxically connecting them by separating them. Ambiguously associated with both corporeal and incorporeal dimensions, the soul is an irreducible force of animation and awareness that exceeds the grasp of reason and in fact provokes and makes possible reason’s desirous enterprise of understanding. After examining the main lines of ancient thinking about the soul, we move to an intertwined esoteric body of thought that culminates in the archetypal psychology of James Hillman. Hillman’s thought resonates with many of the conclusions gathered from the Homer-Plato-Aristotle line, but he comes at the perennial puzzle of the soul from an essentially Romantic sensibility, one that privileges not rationality but imagination, the truth-value of myth and metaphor, dream, vision, and fantasy. In proposing a “poetic basis of mind” that connects imagination to an endlessly deep ground of more-than-human dimensions, Hillman locates his thought within the context of a Neoplatonic tradition that sees the soul as a cosmic reality fluctuating between matter and spirit, an intermediary realm or process in which person and world interpenetrate. Particularly because of its Romantic emphases, Hillman’s thought is elaborated as an ideal source for a critical perspective that can honor the full implications of Stevens’s late sense of a *real* imagination partaking of cosmic dimensions.

In the third chapter, “Toward a Soulful Nobility: Imagination and Reality in Stevens’s Supreme Fiction,” we take a sojourn from Stevens’s late poetry per se and investigate the principal dynamic that runs through Stevens’s entire corpus and provides the crucial contextual

starting point for the concerns, tensions, and strategies of the late poetry, namely Stevens's sense of a supreme fiction involving a dialectic between imagination and reality. To chart the course of the development of the imagination-reality dialectic in Stevens, we turn to his major prose essay, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," which essentially both recapitulates Stevens's more dualistic strategies of engaging the relationship between imagination and reality (as exemplified throughout his early and middle periods) and, particularly through its elusive notion of nobility, suggests an approach beyond duality that will be taken up in Stevens's late work. In "The Noble Rider," Stevens pushes the terms "imagination" and "reality" to their connotative limits, simultaneously conflating them with, and differentiating them from, one another, as well as intertwining them with related elucidations of "poetry" and "nobility." In his sense of nobility, Stevens moves toward a merging of reality and imagination by conceiving of an imagination larger than individual subjectivity and connected to humanity's "spiritual height and depth" (*CPP* 664): in an experience of Stevensian nobility, the truth of poetry becomes indistinguishable from the truth of reality. Hillman's sense of the soul is proposed as one possible analogue for further reading Stevens's articulations of nobility, one that is particularly apropos because, in Stevens's essay, nobility explicitly arises out of an engagement with a figure for the soul. "The Noble Rider" overtly takes shape by apparently moving away from the reality of the soul, but in fact the essay essentially re-visioned the soul as a "force," a quality or process that manifests in the interaction between imagination and reality and that comes to define Stevens's sense of nobility.

In chapter four, "Stevens's Amber UMBER Rock: An Underworld Realm of Waking Dream Vision," we begin more comprehensively reading late Stevens, particularly *The Rock*, in the context of a Hillmanian-inspired notion of soul, which is viewed certainly not as *the*

interpretive context for late Stevens, but as a particularly beneficial hermeneutical lens that can reveal many of the poetry's invisible assumptions and generative tensions. This chapter also involves making a sustained case for *The Rock* being a coherent, purposefully arranged and conceived volume. The thematic consistency of *The Rock* is read in the context of Hillman's sense of the underworld as the preeminent "place" of soul. For Hillman, the "underworld" is understood not as an eschatological destination but as a mindset, a perspective, a mode of experience. "Hades" is the metaphorical substructure that allows a particular aspect of reality to appear, to make itself available to human experience by arising from the liminal zone wherein the hidden intersects with the manifest. The subtle materiality figured throughout *The Rock*, which frequently involves a "turning down toward finality" (CPP 431) and an apparent loss of natural vitality, consistently issues in the influx of a vibrant reality of a different order. In the context of absence and diminishment, *The Rock* engages an invisible fullness of cosmic imagination that demonstrates the inherent *unreality* of reality, its status as a "likeness": the real is inseparable from a fundamental process of *poiesis*. The notion of the underworld allows a particularly beneficial way of reading this dimension of the volume. Additionally, the underworld phenomenology of the dream, a mode of vision that simultaneously animates and relativizes the will and reason, provides a helpful way of reading *The Rock*'s thematic and figurative engagement with a form of waking dream vision.

The fifth chapter, "*The Rock* and the *Anima Mundi*: Stevens's Planet on the Table," takes up the full implications of Stevens's gestures in his late poetry toward some form of *real* imagination that serves as a foundation not only of thought and awareness but of reality itself. Although critics typically read the seasons and, by extension, the physical world in Stevens's late poetry as a *merely* metaphorical means of engaging more abstract concerns, it is proposed in this

chapter that the actual transformations of the physical world constitute for Stevens a liminal “site” where literal and metaphorical dimensions merge in a reality of metaphor. Stevens’s late poetry implies that the actual physical world is an animated process of *poiesis*, and thus human poetic practice does not so much mirror the world in stable mimetic representations, but rather the inherently poetic quality of reality expresses itself in and through the human poem.

Stevens’s sense of the world as a cosmic body of imagination is read in the context of Hillman’s Neoplatonic notion of the *anima mundi*, which conceives of the physical world as itself a manifestation of soul. Hillman’s work again proves particularly helpful in clarifying this aspect of Stevens’s work—the move toward a kind of earth mysticism—because Hillman, like Stevens, approaches the notion of an animated, inherently imaginative physical reality with a certain reticence. Both Hillman and Stevens resist too univocally *materializing* the imagination. Even as Stevens’s poetry suggests that the earth itself may serve as a this-worldly metaphysical base to the notion of a cosmic form of imagination, it nevertheless maintains a fundamental tension between matter and spirit, and this tension can be persuasively associated with a conception of the soul as an intermediary realm or process that both connects and holds apart matter and spirit.

The sixth chapter, “Lyric Fictions and the ‘Celestial Possible’: Stevens’s Intermediary Reality of Imagination,” more explicitly takes up an implicit theme running through many of the chapters: the connection between Stevens’s late sense of the reality of imagination and a fundamental conception of lyric poetry that would view lyric as a voicing of an inherently intermediary figurative reality. This chapter comprehensively situates Stevens’s late cosmic imagination in the context of a Neoplatonic tripartite division between matter, soul, and spirit. In doing so, it additionally engages various fictions of lyric and proposes that a particular notion of soul haunts lyric theory—even, or perhaps especially, critical fictions that would seek to explain

away seemingly arcane notions of soul through various reductive strategies. This chapter ultimately demonstrates that theorizing lyric inescapably involves complex issues related to the nature of subjectivity, as well as related and frequently unarticulated assumptions about Romantic Imagination. Grappling with the roots of lyric requires engaging the perennial conundrums of the soul—how account for awareness and personhood, and for the generative longing and ambiguity out of which they arise? This chapter seeks to take up these questions in the context of Stevens's late verse, while simultaneously suggesting a particularly Stevensian fiction of lyric and situating it in relation to other critical fictions.

A final, concluding chapter, "Astonishment at Being: 'The Rock' as a Revelation of the Soulful Reality of Imagination," gathers together the themes from the preceding chapters in the context of a reading of the title poem of *The Rock*. "The Rock" figures an elusive terrain, which is simultaneously an outlook or a perspective, in which imagination and reality intersect in a no-space space between nothingness and being. As a meta-figurative meditation on the deepest nature of figuration, "The Rock" uncovers a cosmic dimension of imagination in which poetic process intersects with the natural growth of the physical world.