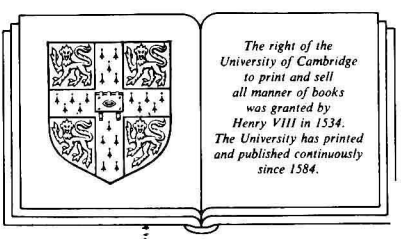
The dance of the intellect

Studies in the poetry of the Pound tradition

MARJORIE PERLOFF



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The dance of the intellect

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Preface

> The revolt against Victorianism meant to the young poet a revolt against irrelevant descriptions of nature, the scientific and moral discursiveness of *In Memoriam* . . . the political eloquence of Swinburne, the psychological curiosity of Browning, and the poetical diction of everybody. Poets said to one another over their black coffee–a recently imported fashion–'We must purify poetry of all that is not poetry', and by poetry they meant poetry as it had been written by Catullus, a great name at that time, by the Jacobean writers, by Verlaine, by Baudelaire. Poetry was a tradition like religion and liable to corruption, and it seemed that they could best restore it by writing lyrics technically perfect, their emotion pitched high, and as Pater offered instead of moral earnestness life lived as a 'pure gem-like flame' all accepted him for master.
>
> –W. B. Yeats, Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892–1935* (1936)[1]

Yeats' succinct and eloquent account of the ethos of his poetic generation ("The Tragic Generation" as he christened it) has an ironic import today, as our own *fin de siècle* approaches. For in an odd way, Yeats' characterization of poetry is still the popular one: poetry as the art that avoids "irrelevant descriptions," "scientific and moral discursiveness," and "psychological curiosity"; poetry as the language of feeling ("emotion pitched high"), written in verse that is, whether metrical or "free," "technically perfect"; poetry to be declaimed at readings in a special "poetry-reading" voice, "a tradition like religion and liable to corruption."

But, as Yeats puts it in the paragraph that follows the one quoted here, "Every light has its shadow, we tumble out of one pickle into another, the 'pure gem-like flame' was an insufficient motive" (p. ix). The very "impurities" denounced over black coffee by *les jeunes* of

Yeats' circle were to return, in startling new guise, in the second decade of the new century. Indeed, one of the great poetic memorials to the nineties was written by an American poet who was to make "scientific and moral discursiveness" and "much that is not poetry" seem newly poetic. I am thinking, of course, of Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and the stage it sets for the *The Cantos*. Yeats, who shared the Yellow Nineties' distrust – a distrust inherited by the early Modernists – of Victorian "rhetoric," had no use for Pound's encyclopedic poem, which was not only blatantly didactic in places but also seemed willfully disorganized. "Like other readers," Yeats says of *The Cantos,* "I discover at present merely exquisite or groteque fragments." And he wonders (p. xxiv), "Can impressions that are in part visual, in part metrical, be related like the notes of a symphony; has the author been carried beyond reason by a theoretical conception?"

Exquisite or grotesque fragments, impressions partly visual, partly metrical, a poetry governed by a theoretical conception – Yeats, who never wavered in his faith that "form must be full, sphere-like, single," could find no justification for the odd assortment of modes that he rightly perceived to characterize *The Cantos*. What is more curious: today, some fifty years later, Yeats' questions are still being posed at poetry conferences and in the little magazines. Is Williams' *Kora in Hell* a poem, given that it is written in prose? Is the visualization of the poetic text, as we find it in the minimal poems of Williams and Oppen, an aberration from "true" verse structure? Are texts like Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* and "portraits" to be classified as poetry or fiction or personal essay? Is Louis Zukofsky's *"A"* (a collage-text made up of countless interwoven fragments, part lyric, part documentary prose from newspapers and texbooks; part metered stanzas, part free verse) an important poem or merely a tedious and eccentric one? If "form must be full, sphere-like, single," what can we say of Ed Dorn's *Slinger,* a poetic narrative that is at once a parody Western, an exercise in Heideggerian thinking, and a compendium of drug argot, movies, and comic strips? If poetry depends upon the "power of emotional construction" (Yeats, p. xxviii), how are we to respond to the purposely "flat," seemingly emotionless poetic texts of John Cage or to the dispersal of the speaking subject, the unitary ego, which is at the heart of current L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E School poetics?

The essays in this book address themselves to these and related questions. All were written during the past four years and extend – as well as revise – certain ideas put forward in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (1981). In that book, my main concern was with the way meanings are articulated in twentieth-century poetry and with the di-

chotomy – in retrospect perhaps too neat – between Symbolist and anti-Symbolist modes of signification. Here, I am more interested in questions of structure, mode, and genre – specifically, the the increasingly important role played in twentieth-century poetry by the "impurities" scorned by Yeats and his contemporaries as inimical to the hard gem-like flame of the perfect lyric moment.

The essays are presented roughly in the order of writing: "Pound / Stevens: whose era?" was presented at the Pound Conference in Sheffield, England, in the spring of 1981; the essay on Language poetry was completed in the spring of 1984. But the order is not only chronological: when I came to put these essays together, I realized that they fell more or less naturally into three groups.

The first group deals with Pound's own poetics as that poetics relates to two of his great contemporaries, Stevens and Joyce, as well as to the visual artists with whom Pound had much more in common than is usually thought – the Italian Futurists. For Pound, I would posit, the art of *writing* came more and more to supplant the question of genre. "My one vol of prose," he wrote in 1929 to Joyce, who was trying to arrange for the publication of Pound's collected prose writings, "is no more a series of . . . vols than my cantos are a series of lyrics. . . . the components need the other components in one piece with them."[2] "Canto-structure," that is to say, came to refer to poetic writing in general – whether the text in question was an actual canto, a manifesto, a critical essay, or a personal letter.

The second group of essays deals with the more technical aspects of verse and prose – more particularly, with the way Williams' invention of a particular form of free verse is related to his "reading" of the visual art works of the avant-garde in the years of the Great War; and the ways in which George Oppen, in turn, revised and adapted the Williams model. From the free verse of Williams and Oppen it is a short step to what I call the "free prose" of a writer like Beckett, whose associative monologues have set a standard for a significant body of later poetry, for example, Ashbery's *Three Poems*.

In the last four essays, I take up broader issues as well as more recent developments. A consideration of the renewed interest in narrative in contemporary poetry, for example, in the poems of O'Hara and Ashbery and in Dorn's mock-epic *Slinger,* has led me to question the centrality of the neo-Romantic poem of intense subjectivity, what Harold Bloom calls the crisis-poem. In "Postmodernism and the Impasse of Lyric," I suggest that, belated as the crisis-poem – or, as I prefer to call it, the epiphany poem – may now be, this is not to say that *poetry* in the more traditional sense of verbal art employing some form of sound

recurrence may not be alive and well. For contemporary examples of such art, I turn, in the last two essays, to some texts by John Cage as well as to the young poets, male and female, who are loosely associated with the movement called L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry.

And here, we may witness a curious return. As odd and "unpoetic" as the work of such Language poets as Charles Bernstein or Lyn Hejinian or Ron Silliman may seem on a first reading, their "Poetic Diction" (one of Yeats' "impurities"), highly formalized sound patterning (alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, puns, echolalia, metrical runs), and their foregrounding of political themes recall, of all things, what Yeats dismissed as "the political eloquence of Swinburne." And beyond Swinburne, the calculated artifice of Wilde and the Yellow Nineties.

But of course our own *fin de siècle* is not theirs. The emphasis on sound structure and verbal play in contemporary poetry may recall the nineties, but it does not serve the incantatory purposes of a Swinburne or the emotive rhetoric of a Lionel Johnson. The Romantic and Modernist cult of personality has given way to what the new poets call "the dispersal of the speaking subject," the denial of the unitary, authoritative ego. Here the poets seem to be echoing contemporary theory, a situation hardly surprising given the increasing inextricability of "theory" and what we might call, on the analogy with visual art, conceptual poetry. Pound, whose presence is everywhere in this book, even in those essays not specifically devoted to him, had a term for this new strain in poetry. "Logopoeia," he called it: "the dance of the intellect among words."

NOTES

1 *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1982–1935*, chosen by W. B. Yeats (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. ix.

2 See *Pound/Joyce. The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce*, ed. and with a commentary by Forrest Read (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 244. The first ellipsis is Read's and is used routinely to eliminate a four-letter word.

Acknowledgments

The ten essays in this collection were published between 1981 and 1984. Most were written for specific occasions—a conference, a special issue of a journal, or a commission from an editor. Given these circumstances, there is inevitably some overlap: Christopher Clausen's discussion of lyric, for example, which provides the impetus for "Postmodernism and the Impasse of Lyric" (Chapter 8), is also cited at the end of "Between Verse and Prose: Beckett and the New Poetry" (Chapter 6). In the interest of maintaining the integrity of each essay, I have made no attempt to avoid such slight redundancies. Not every reader, after all, will want to read every essay, and so each is kept intact, with full documentation. I have made some minor corrections and added a number of references, but, on the whole, the essays are reprinted in their original form. I thank the copyright holders for permission to reprint.

Of the many editors and conference organizers who made these essays possible, I wish to give special thanks to the following, who raised important questions or offered valuable suggestions for change: Jonathan Brent, Ralph Cohen, Ihab Hassan, Burton Hatlen, Carroll Terrell, Arthur Vogelsang, and Robert von Hallberg. But my greatest debt is to Albert Gelpi, the editor of the Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture, who invited me to put the collection together and whose wise counsel and careful reading of the manuscript have been invaluable.

Sandra Stanley prepared the index.

"Pound/Stevens: whose era?" was delivered at the Pound Conference in Sheffield, England, in April 1981; it was published in *New Literary History* , 13, no. 3 (Spring 1982): 485–514.

"The portrait of the artist as collage-text: Pound's *Gaudier-Brzeska*

and the 'Italic' Texts of John Cage" was published in *American Poetry Review,* Special Supplement, 11, no. 3 (May–June 1982): 19–29.

" 'Letter, penstroke, paperspace': Pound and Joyce as co-Respondents' " was delivered at the Special Session on Pound and Joyce at the Modern Language Association in Los Angeles, December 1982; it was published in *American Poetry,* 1 (Spring 1984): 20–32, by McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, Jefferson, North Carolina.

" 'To Give a Design': Williams and the visualization of poetry" was published in *William Carlos Williams: Man and Poet* , ed. Carroll Terrell (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1983), pp. 159–186.

" 'The shape of the lines': Oppen and the metric of difference" was published in *George Oppen: Man and Poet,,* ed. Burton Hatlen (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1981), pp. 215–29.

"Between verse and prose: Beckett and the New Poetry" was delivered in shorter form at the Modern Language Association in New York, 1981; it was published in *Critical Inquiry,* 9, no.2 (1982): 415–33, © 1982 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved.

"From image to action: the return of story in postmodern poetry" was published in *Contemporary Literature,* special issue on Poetry of the Seventies, 23 (Fall 1982): 411–27, © 1982 by the Regents of the University of Wisconsin.

"Postmodernism and the impasse of lyric" was delivered in different form at the Postmodern Conference in Cerisy-la-Salle, France, summer 1983, and at the International Association of University Professors of English, Hamburg, Summer 1982. It was published in *Formations* , 1 (Fall 1984): 43–63, © 1984 by the Regents of the University of Wisconsin.

" 'Unimpededness and interpenetration': the poetic of John Cage" was published in *Triquarterly* (Special Section: John Cage Reader), 54 (Spring 1982): 76–88. The special section was reprinted as *A John Cage Reader,* ed. Peter Gena and Jonathan Brent (New York and London: C. F. Peters, 1982).

"The Word as Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry in the eighties" was published in *American Poetry Review,* 13 (May/June 1984): 15–22.

Contents

	Preface	*page* vii
	Acknowledgments	xi
1	Pound/Stevens: whose era?	1
2	The portrait of the artist as collage-text: Pound's *Gaudier-Brzeska* and the "italic" texts of John Cage	33
3	"Letter, penstroke, paperspace": Pound and Joyce as co-respondents	74
4	"To give a design": Williams and the visualization of poetry	88
5	"The shape of the lines": Oppen and the metric of difference	119
6	Between verse and prose: Beckett and the New Poetry	135
7	From image to action: the return of story in postmodern poetry	155
8	Postmodernism and the impasse of lyric	172
9	"Unimpededness and interpenetration": the poetic of John Cage	201
10	The Word as Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry in the eighties	215
	Index	239

1 Pound/Stevens: whose era?

On 26 October 1955 William Carlos Williams wrote to Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's, asking him if he would care to comment on the obituary essay he had just written on Wallace Stevens, then two months dead, for *Poetry* magazine. Pound replied:

> . . . as to yr / pal / Wally S / . . . . it wd / be highly
> improper for
> me to have opinions of yr / opinion of a bloke I haven't read
> and DOUBT like all hell
> that yu will be able to PURR-suade me to venture on
> with such a
> helluvalot I don't know and WANT to find out.[1]

If this sounds unnecessarily dismissive, compare it to Stevens's curiously similar response to Pound. In 1947 Theodore Weiss invited Stevens to write something for a special Pound issue of the fledgling *Quarterly Review of Literature*. Stevens replied curtly: "Nothing doing about Pound. I should have to saturate myself with the work and I have not the time."[2]

Time for you and time for me – it seems that neither Pound nor Stevens could allow for it. We, reading these two great Modernists in the late decades of the twentieth century, tend to ignore such mutual distrust, positing that *of course* Pound and Stevens are among the four or five great American poets of the century. Literary historians and anthologists continue to give them roughly equal time, thus following the practice established by the New Criticism in the forties and fifties: Randall Jarrell, R. P. Blackmur, Allen Tate, and such of their followers as William Van O'Connor, Babette Deutsch, and Sr. Bernetta Quinn wrote respectfully – if also quite critically – about both poets.[3] So, for

that matter, did the great counter-critic of this period, Yvor Winters.[4] Yet by the late sixties, the very real gap between Pound and Stevens – a gap that perhaps no inclusive definition of Modernism can quite close – had become apparent; the alliance posited by the critics but never by the poets themselves was falling apart. "The Pound Era," Hugh Kenner called the first half of our century, dismissing Stevens in 2 of his almost 600 pages as having created "an Edward Lear poetic pushed toward all limits." Kenner wrote: "The gods have never left us. Nothing we know the mind to have known has ever left us. Quickened by hints, the mind can know it again, and make it new. Romantic Time no longer thickens our sight, time receding, bearing visions away. Our books of cave paintings are the emblems of its abolition, perhaps the Pound Era's chief theme, and the literary consolidation of that theme stands as the era's achievement."[5] *The Pound Era* appeared in 1971; in *A Map of Misreading* (1975), Harold Bloom retorted: "Modernism in literature has not passed; rather, it has been exposed as never having been there. Gossip grows old and becomes myth; myth grows older and becomes dogma. Wyndham Lewis, Eliot and Pound gossiped with one another; the New Criticism aged them into a myth of Modernism; now the antiquarian Hugh Kenner has dogmatized this myth into the Pound Era, a canon of accepted titans. Pretenders to godhood Kenner roughly reduces to their mortality; the grand triumph of Kenner is his judgement that Wallace Stevens represented the culmination of the poetics of Edward Lear."[6] And in *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (1977), Bloom suggests that it is high time to call the period in question "the Age of Stevens (or shall we say the Stevens Era?)."[7]

This is neither an idle quarrel nor a narrow sectarian war between rival academics (e.g., Bloom, Hillis Miller, Helen Vendler, Frank Kermode in the Stevens camp; Kenner, Donald Davie, Guy Davenport, Christine Brooke-Rose among Poundians) who just happen to have different literary and political allegiances. The split goes deep, and its very existence raises what I take to be central questions about the meaning of Modernism – indeed about the meaning of poetry itself in current literary history and theory.

What prompts those who believe in the Stevens Era to ignore or dismiss Pound? In a recent study of Stevens, Lucy Beckett gives us a neatly reductive version of the anti-Pound myth. *The Cantos,* she argues, are a failure because Pound does not sufficiently resist what Stevens calls "the pressure of reality": "The fragments of [Pound's] own experience and of the civilizations, literatures and histories that have caught his attention remain a shifting heap of splinters. . . . Aware of technique only, not of the poet's responsibility to the disciplined use of language,

he is hardly aware at all of the poet's responsibility in respect of thought. . . . The problems of belief and value in a world without established systems of truth, the search for 'what will suffice', the poet's task envisaged by such as Arnold and Santayana, concern him very little. In this sense he is a most unmodern poet."[8] A "modern poet," it seems, is one who understands his responsibilities to "thought" rather than to "technique," and "thought" somehow has to do with the examination of "belief and value in a world without established systems of truth." Accordingly, "the *Cantos,* that colossal attempt to master reality with *persistence of method* rather than with *persistence of thought,* remains the saddest of modern defeats."[9]

Naively put as is this argument, Lucy Beckett's assumptions are quite in keeping with, say, Harold Bloom's repeated insistence that, in Emerson's words, "it is not meter but a meter-making argument that makes a poem." And not just any meter-making argument but especially one that entails the search for "what will suffice" in a world "without established systems of truth." "Pound's *Cantos,*" writes Geoffrey Hartman, "remain a nostalgic montage without unity, a picaresque of styles." By contrast, in Stevens "the music left in the wake of the gods' demise is a great poetry, though limited by its very power to console."[10] In a similar vein, Helen Vendler concludes her important book on Stevens by praising "the short late poems . . . those liquid lingerings in which the angel of reality transforms, for a moment, the bleak continuo of life's drone."[11] And Walton Litz observes: "Unlike Ezra Pound's *Cantos* . . . Stevens's final *mundo* is neither eccentric nor private. It is built upon the central reality of our age, the death of the gods and of the great coordinating mythologies, and in their place it offers the austere satisfactions of a 'self' dependent on the pure poetry of the physical world, a 'self' whose terrifying lack of belief is turned into a source of freedom. The final achievement of Wallace Stevens is a poetry of exclusions and denials which makes a sustaining fiction out of the search for irreducible reality."[12] Carried one step further, we get this formulation from Harold Bloom: "[Stevens's] major phase, from 1942 to his death in 1955, gave us a canon of poems themselves more advanced as *interpretation* than our criticism as yet has gotten to be."[13]

But Poundians have never claimed that their poet is great because his work constitutes an advanced form of "interpretation." Indeed, *poetry,* not to speak of *modern poetry,* is defined quite differently in discussions of Pound. Let me begin by comparing the ways critics have talked about two famous texts: Stevens's *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* (1942), specifically the Canon Aspirin poems (Pt. III, cantos 5–8), and Pound's Canto LXXXI (1945), specifically the first ninety-five

lines (see Appendix).[14] In confronting the Canon Aspirin with the Padre José Elizondo of the *Pisan Cantos,* we may come to a clearer sense of why the division between Pound and Stevens continues to haunt our own sense of Modernism.

II

Notes toward a Supreme Fiction is often called Stevens's greatest poem. Of Part III, "It Must Give Pleasure," Frank Kermode wrote in 1960: "These two hundred lines of verse seem to me to give continuously a higher delight than anything of comparable length written in this century." And more specifically, "The complex and majestic Canon Aspirin poems . . . raise the temperature of the whole work and justify not only the sober esctasies of the conclusion but the immense and beautiful claims for poetry made in III. viii: if the poet creates an angel (and he has just done so) is not his joy equal to the angel's?" Kermode now quotes the entire eighth canto ("What am I to believe? . . .") and concludes, "The power of this is great in isolation; in its context, as sequel to the previous poem, it is overwhelming . . . the whole work exists in a radiant and productive atmosphere, saying the words of the world that are the life of the world."[15]

"The words of the world that are the life of the world"—in his first major study of *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* in 1963, Harold Bloom echoes this judgment: "The Supreme Fiction . . . enters the poem in the exhilarating person of the Canon Aspirin, Stevens' finest invention. The Canon is the cure for our current headache of unreality. . . . In his activity the Canon first becomes the angel of reality, then is tempted too far in his benevolent impositions, and finally is surpassed by the poet himself, who discovers an order that his created angel could only impose."[16] The opening of canto 5 ("We drank Meursault, ate Lobster Bombay with mango / Chutney") is praised for its "deceptive inconsequence," deceptive because the poem's vision is "fiercely Romantic." Bloom goes on to explain the symbolism of this canto: the Canon's sister stands for "seeing the very thing itself and nothing else"; as such, her limited vision must be transcended, as it is in canto 6, whose "thesis" (Bloom's word) is "the Canon's quest toward an integration of all reality, fact and thought together." Further, "Section VII is the antithesis, presenting the Canon's surrender of his quest to the angelic impatience that imposes rather than discovers order. The synthesis is in Section VIII, which one does not hesitate to call Stevens's finest poem, where the poet's discovery of reality is both given and celebrated"(Borroff, p. 92).

The Canon's choice between reality and imagination in canto 6 is, according to Bloom, "heroic," because he ultimately refuses to "reject either order":

> He had to choose. But it was not a choice
> Between excluding things. It was not a choice
> Between, but of. He chose to include the things
> That in each other are included, the whole,
> The complicate, the amassing harmony.
>
> [*Notes*, Pt. III, canto 6]

This choice, says Bloom, is "Wordsworthian rather than Blakean, for it insists that the context of fact or nature can be harmonized with the more exuberant context of the poet's apocalyptic desires." Thus after the "extraordinary emotional progression" that leads the poet to the desperation of canto 7 ("It is possible, possible, possible. It must / Be possible"), Stevens "gives us his ultimate poem, the supreme achievement of post-Romanticism and the culmination of Coleridgean and Blakean poetic theory." The angel poem (canto 8) surpasses the *Prelude* in its courage "to cross into this desperately triumphant poetic humanism" (Borroff, p. 94).

When Bloom returns to *Notes* more than a decade later in his *Poems of Our Climate,* he reads the poem according to the revisionary ratios and the theory of crossings he has formulated in the interim, but his response to it remains essentially unchanged; indeed, he now goes further in relating the Canon Aspirin to "a high Romantic fallen angel, a morning star," and argues that "the name 'Aspirin' probably plays upon the archaic meaning of 'aspires,' the *anders-streben* of Pater's '*All art constantly aspires toward the condition of music,*' or the upward-rising of Blake's 'On what wings dare he aspire.' " Further, " 'Aspire' goes back to the Latin for 'breaking upon, desiring, favoring,' and . . . we can translate 'the Canon Aspirin' as the self-defining, self-describing human desire for a beyond, even if that beyond turns out to be an abyss" (p. 205).

Whether or not we agree with Bloom's interpretation of the Canon Aspirin poem is, I think, less important than what that interpretation tells us about Bloom's central assumptions about poetry. We might note, to begin with, that Bloom's value judgments – his use, for example, of such adjectives as "exhilarating," "moving," "strenuously heroic," "supreme," "splendid," and "extraordinarily emotional" – refer always to what the poet is saying rather than to how he says it. The poem's sound structure, for example, is treated as a mere irrelevancy, as is the syntax of Stevens's cantos and even, to a large extent, their

diction. Would it matter, say, if we substituted "poor" or "paler" for "pauvred" in Part V, canto 6? If "closelier" in line 12 of the same canto became "closer"? What is the effect of repeating "paint" three times in the lines, "The way a painter of pauvred colors paints. / But still she painted them"? Such questions are never raised because they have no real bearing on what Bloom takes to be the only question a Great Questioner should ask, namely, what is it that Stevens tells us in this poem? In the Coda to *Poems of Our Climate,* he says: "Why do we read one poet rather than another? We believe the lies we want to believe because they help us to survive. Similarly, we read (reread) the poems that keep our discourse with ourselves going. Strong poems strengthen us by teaching us *how to talk to ourselves,* rather than how to talk to others" (p. 387; italics are Bloom's). Which is to say that the greatness of Stevens's poetry is a function of the "desperately triumphant . . . humanism" that Bloom believes in. *Notes* teaches us "how to talk to ourselves," provided that we happen to share its sense of strenuous quest for the "Supreme Fiction."

There are two corollaries. First, Stevens's poetic truth is a "late plural of Romantic tradition" – a condition assumed to be the only proper one for modern poets. To call *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* Wordsworthian or Blakean or Keatsian is equivalent to calling the poem Good or True or Beautiful. Secondly, in its belatedness, *Notes* paradoxically betters Blake and Wordsworth and the Keats of *The Fall of Hyperion,* for it "cultivates the highly anti-apocalyptic virtue of patience."[17] We might restate Bloom's doctrine and its corollaries in the language of *Notes*: (1) It must be Romantic. (2) It must question Romantic premises. (3) It must be Visionary Humanist.

When we turn from Bloom's reading of Stevens to the powerful ones of, say, Hillis Miller or Helen Vendler, we find that, despite a number of conflicting interpretations (Vendler regards Part III, canto 7 of *Notes* as more pessimistic than does Bloom, referring to the "repetitive, accumulative and hysterical affirmations [that] mount in a crescendo conveying the fear which is their origin"),[18] the central assumptions remain essentially the same. When Miller traces Stevens's gradual evolution from metaphysical dualism and "representational thinking" to the recognition of the late poems that "man's spiritual height and depth are available here and now or nowhere," he is reading Stevens along Bloomian lines, although he is much less inclined than Bloom to attribute value to Stevens's particular truths.[19] Again, although Helen Vendler does pay close attention to the linguistic and syntactic strategies of *Notes,* her emphasis, like Bloom's, is on the poem's final refusal "to resolve theoretical difficulties," its "strenuous exploration of every possible escape from . . .