POETRY
AS
POSSIBILITY

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 1968

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
Master of Arts
in the Department
of
English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October, 1971
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Date Sept. 28, 1971
ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the concept of possibility in terms of an aesthetic theory applicable to poetry. The concept is widely used in different ways by different writers, but seldom dealt with analytically as is the intention here.

Chapter I deals first with the empirical concomitants of the concept and their relation to notions of convention and stylistic transgression in poetry. The argument then proceeds to examine the philosophical ramifications of these relations in terms of Whitehead's views on aesthetic integrations. In substantiating these views ontologically, a theory of poetry as a form of contemplative thought emerges.

Chapter II defines the ontological grounds of poetic possibility in a more rigorous manner utilizing distinctions basic to both the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and the theories of the so-called "structuralist" school. The relationship of poetry to "nature" and "culture" is of paramount importance in these speculations, and is defined in such a way as to reconcile processal and structural definitions of the poetic experience. The chapter resolves by relating the ontological ground of poetic possibility to notions of metaphor and ambiguity developed in the writings of Wallace Stevens and others.
Chapter III explores the notion of poetic ambiguity further in terms of a theory of imagination which draws upon the theories of Stevens, Coleridge, and Heidegger. The linguistic consequences of this theory of imagination are discussed in terms of a practical demonstration, an explication of William Carlos Williams' "Nantucket". In this way, the argument establishes the metalinguistic grounds for defining and analyzing poetry. The chapter concludes, relating the metalinguistic grounds of poetry, as defined, to the notion of poetic possibility previously developed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Poetry and Being</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I Poetry as Behavior</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II Poetic Deviation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III The Necessity of Convention and the Language of Reality</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV Poetry as a Demonology</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V Integration and the Problem of Truth and Beauty</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VI Poetry and the Poet's World</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VII Poetry as Ontology</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VIII Poetry as Fundamental Thought</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IX Poetry, Thought and Feeling, and Authenticity</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X Poetry and Contemplation</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Poetry as World and Earth</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I The Problem of Nature and Culture: Heidegger's Temple</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II The &quot;Riss&quot;</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III Heidegger, Olson, and the &quot;Open&quot;</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV Poetry as a &quot;Physis&quot;</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V Language and the &quot;World&quot;</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VI Poetry as History and Structure</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VII On Poetic Meaning</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>Poetry and Instrumental Conception</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>Van Gogh's Peasant Shoes</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Resemblance, Ambiguity, and the &quot;Rise&quot;</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER III WILLIAMS' "NANTUCKET AND THE ART OF AMBIGUITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>Some Notes on the Concept of Ambiguity</th>
<th>100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Stylistic Transgression and Ordinary Language</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Imagination and Decreation</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Williams' &quot;Nantucket&quot; and its Tradition</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>The New Reality of &quot;Nantucket&quot;</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>The Lyrical Ambiguity of &quot;Nantucket&quot;</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>Some Linguistic Concepts</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>A Conclusion</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 145 |
CHAPTER I

POETRY AND BEING

What is poetry? In this essay I seek a definition of poetry, realizing always that any definition that can be stated in a single sentence or even a single book is likely to be of limited use. The attempt at definition is, however, what is important in a poetic. Insofar as the attempt is productive of some degree of understanding, and insofar as that understanding evolves, a definition of poetry evolves. Thus, this essai speculatively seeks an evolution of meaning pertinent to a definition successful not so much as it is complete, but to the degree that it makes poetry more accessible to a critical appreciation of its problematic nature.

II Poetry As Behavior

Certain difficulties present themselves immediately in devising a poetic theory productive of any kind of useful understanding of poetry. There is evidence to suggest that it is impossible to devise a poetic theory which will encompass poetry per se; that is to say, poetry as a category of objects separate in a positivistic and empirical sense from our human experience of them. Peckham¹ suggests that

all forms of art, including poetry, are "disjunctive categories" whose component members do not share the same defining attributes. In other words, a poem is not a poem because it is characterized by attributes possessed by poems in general, but because someone places the poem in the category of poetry irrespective of its phenomenal character. How, for instance, can I distinguish a concrete poem from simple graphic art? If I hang a concrete poem in an art gallery many viewers would categorize it with visual art forms. Likewise, "found poems" are fragments of written discourse of any kind until read aloud at a poetry reading or designated as poetry in some similar way. If I am not told that free verse is poetry how do I know it is not prose when read aloud? Peckham argues persuasively that poems have little in common except their socially-derived designatum. The immediate difficulty in devising a poetic would seem to be that I must talk about the poetic experience as a **behavioral** event if I am to talk theoretically about poetry at all.

Now, whatever the validity of Peckham's argument, it is not mandatory for me to talk about poetry as a purely anthropological event; it is still possible to devise a poetic with a measure of aesthetic applicability. The positivistic and empirical approach provides me with only the preliminaries of poetic understanding. Moreover, it is not perhaps necessary to separate poetry as an artifact
from poetry as a particular form of experience if I take a subjectivist point-of-view and regard the two concepts as co-extensive within the human consciousness. Peckham's generalizations on the "New Critics" notwithstanding, few critical theories attempt to deal with poetry per se. I do not need to discard free verse, concrete poetry, or even "found poetry" as poetic forms to preserve the intrinsic autonomy and value of an art object as an art object. It is obvious that if man attributes unique qualities and values to an object as he seems to do in the act of artistic categorization, this act of attribution is dependent upon the particular structure of that artifact. If I display an ice-cube at a poetry reading and call it a poem, my categorization will not be accepted on a literal basis—whatever my critical reputation—simply because an ice-cube does not have the appropriate structure within the terms of that consensus of opinion which is aesthetic theory. An ice-cube does not have the verbal structure which seems to be expected universally of poetry. Similarly, the amount of literal meaning which we can attribute to a haiku can never be as great as the amount of literal meaning which we can attribute to Paradise Lost, if only because Paradise Lost is infinitely more complex in terms of semantic variables. While poetry

1 Peckham, pp. 125-129.
2 However much one might want to discard it.
may have no general defining attributes of its own, and no unique qualities which can function as sufficient criteria in themselves, its individual structures must still be consonant at a given time with the fixed, if sometimes inconsistent conventions of cultural behavior. Ultimately, as I will indicate in more detail later, the poem is not in any philosophical sense just an aspect of culture. The poetic critic must address himself to analysis and evaluation of both the poem as an empirical object, and the subjective conventions which influence our perception of the poem as though both subjects taken together formed a significant, and strictly aesthetic holism. Accordingly, the poetic experience is most important here rather than the poem-as-object or the poem-as-behavior. The latter are isolatable and quasi-scientific constructs which are logically very manageable, but limited.

II Poetic Deviation

To question the nature of poetry therefore is to question the nature of the poetic experience. And to deal with that question it is necessary to examine a particular instance of poetic experience. Consider the following poem by bp Nichol,
Structurally, the poem runs contrary to most of the rules of ordinary written discourse; it does not adhere to accepted conventions of spelling, punctuation, grammar, and perhaps even literal sense. Yet this poem is called a poem, and included in an anthology designed to introduce university students to the best of contemporary poetry. Peckham would probably note that the reader could easily mistake the poem for a typing exercise but for the fact that the poem has been designated a poem. In this case, the actual placement of the poem in an anthology does make a considerable difference to the reader's perception of it as a poem: it is his cue to begin playing the role of "poetry-perceiver"; and to attempt to attribute culturally-determined "poetic qualities" to the poem. If the structure of the poem is not consonant with those qualities which he seeks to attribute, then the reader may be inclined to dismiss the poem as a "bad" poem or even a "pseudo" poem. Likewise, if the structure of the poem is consonant


2 See Peckham, pp. 59-73.

3 Ibid.
with those qualities which he seeks to attribute, the reader can say that the poem is a "good" poem.

Role-playing therefore is a major factor in determining the way in which one orients oneself to the appreciation, analysis, and evaluation of the poem. Of course, role-behavior is a major way of expediting and limiting any act of perception, aesthetic or otherwise. What is important here is that the poetry-perceiver's role may be structured to realize to a greater or lesser extent the possibility for perception which the poem embodies, and the resultant overall value of the artistic experience possible in that situation.

The primary convention governing usual response to poetry is after all that a good poem should be original; that is to say, different in some way from all other poems. Since a poem cannot be both original and predictable in terms of conventionally-determined expectation, the prime condition of the poetic experience is that the poem should not permit the poetry-perceiver to respond in an entirely pre-determined manner. The conventional responses determined by role and the normative expectations of the reader must always be more or less blind to the possibilities predicated by the originality of individual poem. Only in this way, is the reader challenged to transcend the limits of role, and appreciate a poem fully. It is basic to say of the poetic experience that it is anomalous: it
is at once a conventional, socially-determinate experience, and an unconventional, individually-centred experience.

The poetic experience then is always deviant to the degree that it is innovative, and this deviancy is, within limits, the substance of a primary poetic convention which has been called "foregrounding". Of foregrounding, the linguist Geoffrey Leech writes,

It is a very general principle of artistic communication that a work of art in some way deviates from norms which we, as members of society, have learned to expect in the medium used... As a general rule, anyone who wishes to investigate the significance and value of a work of art must concentrate on the element of interest and surprise, rather than on the automatic pattern. Such deviations from linguistic or other socially accepted norms have been given the special name of "foregrounding" which evokes the analogy of a figure seen against a background. The artistic deviation sticks out from its background like a figure in the foreground of a visual field.

The application of this concept to poetry is obvious. The foregrounded figure is the linguistic deviation and the background is the language—the system taken for granted in any talk of "deviation". Just as the eye picks out the figure as the important and meaningful element in its field of vision, so the reader of poetry picks out the linguistic deviation...as the most arresting and significant part of the message.

Obviously, effective foregrounding pre-supposes a variety of norms against which artistic deviations may be recognized. In the case of bp Nichol's poem, normative expectations are created by the general way in which the poem is presented and act in concert with the prejudices of the poetry-perceiver.

to structure the poetic experience as a whole towards
the differentiation of certain deviant, but meaningful
patterns. The poem is presented as a poem in an anthology
of poetry: it has a title in the format of many poems; the
structure of the poem is verbal like that of all poetry; it
even seems to have a kind of line or verse structure like
most poetry. Nichol's poem, while unusual, is not complete­
ly atypical of poetry in general. The superficial structure
of the poem might even be said to emphasize the ordinary
reader's expectations vis-a-vis poetry. The poem, however,
definitely does not fulfil these expectations, for it
dispenses with grammar, syntax, and the semantic complex­
ity which characterize most poetry. "Blues" concerns it­
self with two words and their morphophonemic components,
re-ordering these components as though to emphasize the
most basic "autotelic" qualities of language.

Since the words with which Nichol deals also represent
concepts, the reader comes to perceive a certain discordancy
between the mute, unintelligible structure of the language,
and the idea which that structure nominally represents.
Most poetry, of course, tries to harmonize the autotelic
qualities of the language with the conceptual content of
the poem, but in this instance those qualities are em­
phasized at such a basic level that the literal meaning
of the poem is difficult to ascertain. While the poem de­
viates from normal poetic practice by restricting its own
linguistic base, it does involve meaningful pattern. The average reader is likely to expect of poetry, as he does of other forms of verbal expression, that something is to be communicated. In this case, the fragmentation of the words "love" and "evol" into their components simultaneously indicates the fragmentation of the concepts they signify and the rich possibilities of the letters themselves. By fragmenting the word "love", Nichol arrives at a word with opposite connotations: "evol". And vice versa, of course. "Evol" is of particular significance here, however, because it is phonetically not quite identical with the word "evil". Orthographically, "evol" would seem to be a synthetic word reminiscent of "evolve", that is, "development", or of the latin phrase "e(x) vol(a)" which means "out of hand". In short, the poem is just another treatment of the contingency of love. If love is "out of hand" it is both "evol" and "evil"; it has evolved negatively. If the love is requited, then it evolves positively, and "evil" is "out of hand". Since it is seldom possible to predict at a given moment in a love affair how it will develop, the poem reflects the ambiguity of an actual situation quite accurately.

The poem succeeds, if it can be said to do so, by deviating widely from our expectations of what poetry should be like, rather than by deviating from our expectations of what love ought to be like. Foregrounding is
perhaps the key to the so-called "uniqueness" of the poetic experience. Shakespeare's later verse is not great, for instance, because it imitates the order of iambic pentameter, but because it deviates from this phonic order in a pleasing way. In the poetic experience rules are made to be broken.

III The Necessity of Convention and the Language of Reality

If, of course, the poetic experience really requires rules made to be broken, the rules are quite as important as the act which breaks them. Self-evidently, foregrounding can only be effective when a certain basic proportion is preserved between the figure and the ground of basic poetic structure. Artistic communication depends upon the commonality of terms which artistic conventions imply, just as artistic vividness depends upon the innovative figurations which artistic deviations imply. For an artistic experience to be simultaneously understandable and interesting, artistic conventions and deviations must be simultaneously apparent. It must be clearly evident, as well, that any innovative artistic deviation which proves meaningful may become conventional and serve as the ground for further innovation.

Any artistic convention, poetic convention included, is only a preconception set up by a collective knowledge
of what deviations from linguistic and poetic usage have been successful—and therefore permissible—up to a given time. T.S. Eliot writes,

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead....The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted.

A convention may be primary insofar as it is fundamental in some way to the basic communicative context in functional terms, or secondary insofar as it is superadded to the basic communicative context artificially for stylistic reasons. To the extent that secondary conventions like rhyme and meter are artificial conventions, they are also deviations from pre-existing conventions governing the "natural" use of language. This anomaly does not spoil, however, the effectiveness of rhyme and meter in promoting foregrounding and enhancing the poetic experience. Eliot notes,

...the ghost of some simple metre should lurk behind the arras in even the "freest" verse; to advance menacingly as we doze, and withdraw as

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we rouse. Or, freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation.¹

It is true, of course, that some secondary conventions are seldom transgressed within the context of a single poetic experience. The convention according to which the beginning letter of each poetic verse is capitalized is a good example of such a convention. Such conventions function to effect foegrounding or poetic deviation by designating that the structure of which it is part is poetic, and therefore licenced to deviate from the ordinary norms of reader expectation. It is significant that the apparently disfunctional conventions of highly stylized verse like that of the "metaphysical" poets are usually balanced by the most surprising and innovative semantic structures—conceits, for instance, that may seem proportionately extreme to a modern sensibility. Conventions in poetry, even when apparently artificial and disfunctional, are often not the sign of a slavish conformity: they can be the instruments of a complex originality.

It is important in this respect to avoid confusing poetic conventions with linguistic and semantic paradigms in poetry generally. Poetic conventions like meter are obviously paradigmatic, but so are many of the deviations from these conventions—deviations which, as I have noted, may become conventional at a later time. The poetic experience tends to be characterized by what Peckham

¹ Eliot, "Reflections on 'Verse Libre'"; p. 85.
calls the "overdetermination" of its variables which, as I shall indicate in more detail later, can be used to create both conventional and unconventional paradigms of language and meaning.

The reader expects some kind of regularity in poetry, some system of correspondences not evident in mundane verbal events. At the most basic level, he expects poetic structures to be marked by a "measure", a manipulation of the basic phonemic units of stress, pitch, and juncture which produces a particular rhythmic order distinct from the order we tend to take for granted in ordinary speech. Insofar as this kind of manipulation is effected by the selection and unusual emphasis of certain linguistic structures, the essential content of the language may be said to be "overdetermined" beyond the needs of ordinary communication. Phonic overdetermination serves to individualize poetic language as an autonomous structure, and make it figurative against the ground of common discourse. Such linguistic patterning allows the reader the opportunity of escaping from the ordinary linguistic structures which form the context of, and tend

1 See Peckham, pp. 138-139.

to structure his ideas or associations.\textsuperscript{1} The poetic experience is not an ordinary experience governed by ordinary logic, and the "unnatural" morphophonemic paradigms created by phonic overdetermination emphasize this fact. The "New Critics" may overstate their case when they say that poetry embodies an absolutely unique meaning, and Pound's definition of literature,

\begin{quote}
Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree.\textsuperscript{2}
\end{quote}

may be a little too simplistic to be of use. One point is clear, however. Since in ordinary discourse paradigms of morphophonemic units functions to ensure communication, the selective and deviant (if sanctioned) use of these units indicates a special and individualized presentation of a meaning. There is a sense in which poetry is a dialect of the language which it nominally uses. The principle of overdetermination need not be restricted to the phonemic and morphemic levels of language; as a principle it is influential at all levels of linguistic usage. The poetic experience presents us with new paradigms of meaning which in fact create a new form of language: this is the end towards which all forms of poetic device work, and it is only in this end that the tension between convention and innovation in poetry can be resolved.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} Ezra Pound, A B C of Reading (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 36.
\end{itemize}
Now, if it does not structure my concept of reality, language is at least correlative with that concept to the extent that a change in one is likely to mean a change in the other. Insofar as the poetic experience alters language to produce new paradigms of expression, can it not alter as well my basic ontological orientation towards the world, and offer the possibility of new insight into human experience? While ontological re-orientation does not necessarily follow from linguistic innovation, its possibility remains as a valuable end.

Peckham suggests that poetry is designedly deviant to prevent the reader from becoming so orderly in his thought processes that his mind stagnates. And the poetic experience does seem to deviate from quotidian ways of understanding and perceiving reality. As I have indicated, poetry is a figurative act which deals with figurations of reality rather than that reality which presents itself as the actuality of day to day existence. Poetry is oriented towards appearance, and not what one usually thinks of as "reality"; it is always a fiction, and can never be what it represents although it can represent what can never be in actuality. The poetic experience is, as Susanne Langer

1 This conception obviously relates directly to the concern of American poets with the qualities of "American English", a distinctly "American poetry", and a radical (i.e., rooted and fundamental) "American culture". See, Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action", pp. 280-291.

2 Peckham, pp. 305-315.
would have it,\(^1\) is a *virtual* rather than an actual experience; in this respect it resembles madness and dreams, for its representations have no greater objective validity. It is true that Langer holds dream at least to be an *actual* experience, describing cinema as "virtual dream"\(^2\). In this sense, however, she is using the notion of actuality to designate the ground against which an appearance appears, not the ground against which a reality is realized. The distinction is important. It permits Langer to make such apparently paradoxical statements as,

Cinema is "like" dream in the mode of its presentation: it creates a *virtual* present, an order of direct apparition. That is the mode of dream.\(^3\)

How can dream be "virtual" and "actual" at the same time? The answer inheres in the two notions of actuality noted previously. *Any* virtual event can be actual in terms of another; where one virtual event contributes to the appearance of another, an actual *relation* exists which empirically validates its subjects. This validation, however, is relevant only in that relation and not to the larger scheme of relations which constitutes the actuality of day to day existence. All figurations therefore have a measure of actuality, but it is the actuality of realization, rather than ordinary reality. In the poetic experience the human


mind is absorbed in an experience that has structurally little to do with ordinary human existence; the reality of poetic existence is extra-ordinary. What appears to be is in terms of its presentation, and not necessarily in terms of the reader's expectations, for these expectations belong to a different mode of being.

IV Poetry as a Demonology

Sanskrit scholars may be correct when they classify poetry as a medium for a particular kind of transcendent experience. In a sense, not in the least metaphorical, it is proper to call the fullest poetic experience an instance of demonic possession. That most conservative of critics, Yvor Winters writes,

Professor X, as a sentimentalist, is inclined to speak of the magic of poetry; he uses the term magic in a figurative sense which he has probably never bothered to define. There is something supernatural about poetry, however, in a simple, literal and theological sense which Professor X in all likelihood has seldom considered. In poetry one mind acts directly upon

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1 Krishna Chaitanya writes as follows in Sanskrit Poetics (New York: Asia Publishing, 1965), p. 405: "...the distinction suggested between mystic and poetic experience...is considerably narrowed down. Just as mystic experience prevents itself from being a dessication of the senses and inoperancy of the spirit by maintaining the bond with the poetic richness of the world, poetic experience prevents the bond with the world from becoming a bondage; by moving near the mystic state, though not by an immersion in the self-oblivion of trance".

See also, S.K. De, Sanskrit Poetics as a Study of Aesthetic (Berkley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 69.
another, without regard to "natural" law, the law of chemistry or of physics. Furthermore, the action is not only an action by way of idea, but by way of emotion and moral attitude; it is both complex and elusive. Poetry is a medium by means of which one mind may to a greater or less extent take possession of another, almost in the sense in which possession is used in demonology.¹

Insofar as the poetic experience involves the mind's entering into the consciousness of another person to what Winters implies is a precarious degree of psychic immersion, the insights that mind will obtain depend largely upon the ability of the poet to create a suitable medium for insight. The importance of the atypicality of poetic figuration is that it cannot be appreciate from the standpoint of the ordinary roles which compose human consciousness: if I wish to truly appreciate a poem I must surrender myself to the will of the poet to that degree necessary to understand his particularized orientation towards the world, and the unique figurations which represent this orientation. Insofar as the reality of the poem transcends ordinary definitions of actuality, it is not of importance whether the poet's actual intentions correspond to my assumptions regarding them. For that matter it is not really important that the poet exists. To speak of the "poet's will" is only to speak of the demands which a poetic creation makes upon its reader. In this respect, the basic convention which

which sanctifies "poetic licence" and ordains "the willing suspension of disbelief" is most important because it allows the mind to make the fullest possible use of a medium for what is essentially a trans-subjective communication. The poet is thus free to work the fabric of the language to reveal even common realities with unexpected force.

The poem is a kind of demon. As Winters says, it is not subject to "natural" law. In this context it is illuminating to recall Plato's conception of demons or spirits. According to Plato, demons are spirits which mediate between the world of the gods (the ideal world) and the world of men (the natural world). The supreme demon is Eros, the life-force, who bears the essential truths of the ideal world to men, and returns with propitiations. In Plato's "Symposium" Diotima says of Eros,

He is a great spirit (daemon) and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal....He interprets between gods and men, conveying and taking across to the gods the prayers and sacrifices of men, and to men the commands of the gods and the benefits they return; he is the mediator who spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore by him the universe is bound together, and through him the arts of the prophet and priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms, and all prophecy and incantation find their way. For God mingles not with man; but through Love all the intercourse of gods with men, whether they be awake or asleep, is carried on. The wisdom which understands this is spiritual; all other wisdom...is mean and vulgar.1

Like poetry, Plato’s demon belongs to two worlds: "he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal". Winters seems to believe that poetry is a state in which the reader’s critical faculties must be alert, if he is not to be carried away into the nether world of madness:

...a demon, or a genius, may be almost totally deprived of being in large areas in which theoretically he ought to exist, and at the same time may have achieved an extraordinary degree of actuality in the regions in which he does exist; and when this happens, his persuasive power is enormous, and if we fail to understand his limitations he is one of the most dangerous forces in the universe.¹

The truths which poetry bears are like those which the demon bears from the gods to men: they are startling and seemingly transmundane, and being idiosyncratic within the context of this world may or may not be valuable in real terms. The important point here is that poetry, like madness, has the capacity for taking man beyond the limits of actuality. Indeed, in the "Phaedrus", Plato has Socrates equate poetic inspiration with madness:

...the madness of those who are possessed by the Muses...taking hold of a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy awakens lyrical and all other numbers; with these adorning the myriad actions of ancient heroes for the instruction of posterity. But he who, having no touch of the Muses’ madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art—he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted: the sane man disappears and is nowhere when he enters into rivalry with the madman?²

¹ Winters, p. 142.
² Plato, "Phaedrus", p. 171.
In madness ordinary normative and rational structures of mind lose operational validity so that the madman perceives in ways previously unknown what may be objectively a quite ordinary, quotidian reality.

Some theorists like Dabrowski and R.D. Laing suggest that madness is essentially an organic process for effecting great and fundamental integrations; that is to say, that it is a particular manifestation of a general creative process basic to the human being.¹ Laing writes,

We experience in different modes. We perceive external realities, we dream, imagine, have semi-conscious reveries. Some people have visions, hallucinations, experience faces transfigured, see auras, and so on. Most people most of the time experience themselves and others in one or other way that I shall call egoic. That is centrally or peripherally, they experience the world, and themselves in terms of a consistent identity, a me-here over against a you-there, within a framework of certain ground structures of space and time, shared with other members of their society.²

This "egoic" form of experience is obviously essential to the maintenance of quotidian reality, if it is not in fact constitutive of its actuality. Laing writes further,

This identity-anchored, space-and-time-bound experience has been studied philosophically by Kant, and later by the phenomenologists, e.g. Husserl, Merleau-Ponty. Its historical and ontological relativity should be fully realized by any contemporary student of the human scene. Its cultural, socio-economic relativity has become

² Laing, pp. 112-113.
a commonplace among anthropologists and a plat­
titude to the Marxists and neo-Marxists. And yet, with the consensual and interpersonal confirmation it offers, it gives us a sense of ontological sec­
urity, whose validity we experience as self-valid­
atig, although metaphysically-historically-onto­
logically-socio-economically-culturally we know its apparent absolute validity as an illusion.¹

Laing's conception of quotidian, that is, "egoic" reality is strangely Platonic rather than relativistic or phenomeno­
logical. His theory supposes a transcendental realm ac­
cessible through madness; every man (poetentially, to coin a phrase) his own demon. Whether or not such a realm exists is a moot point. In general, however, the actuality of the ordinary world does take second place to another form of reality in certain psychic situations. This virtual world, as Langer calls it, is both the world of madness and the world of the poetic, and involves significant, but not otherwise realizable integrations. I tend to believe that poetry provides a vicarious experience of a kind of madness which, if properly appreciated, provides the bene­
fits of the new integrations possible through insanity without the drawbacks involved in actually experiencing that state.

V Integration and the Problem of Truth and Beauty

The word "integration" is a problematic term. Stevens asserts that poetry provides its reader with a significant

¹ Laing, p. 113.
ordering of experience which can be said to be an integration
to the extent that it is effective:

The philosopher searches for an integration for
its own sake, as, for example, Plato's idea that
knowledge is recollection or that the soul is a
harmony; the poet searches for an integration
that shall be not so much sufficient in itself
as sufficient for some quality that it possesses,
such as its insight, its evocative power or its
appearance in the eye of the imagination. The
philosopher intends his integration to be fate-
ful; the poet intends his to be effective. 1

Stevens' sense of what constitutes poetic integration has
further meaning if understood within the context of Alfred
North Whitehead's concept of art as ultimate experiential
harmony. The end of art, the philosopher says, is both
Truth and Beauty, the two being defined as follows,

Beauty is the internal conformation of the var-
ious items of experience with each other, for
the production of maximum effectiveness. Beauty
thus concerns the inter-relations of the various
components of Reality, and also the inter-relations
of the various components of Appearance, and also
the relations of Appearance to Reality. . . . Truth
has a narrower meaning in two ways. First,
Truth in any important sense, merely concerns
the relations of Appearance to Reality. It is
the conformation of Appearance to Reality. But
in the second place the notion of 'conformation'
in the case of Truth is narrower than that in the
case of Beauty. For the truth relation requires
that the two relata have some factor in common. 2

In a truth relation Appearance conforms to Reality merely
in terms of some shared factor. Truth therefore involves

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1 Wallace Stevens, "A Collect of Philosophy", The
Age of Complexity, ed. H. Kohl (New York: New American

2 Alfred North Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas (New
the harmonization of subject and object in terms of identity, whereas Beauty involves the harmonization of both identical and non-identical entities, real and unreal, in terms of a far more complex system of relationships. Truth and Beauty are connected, for it would appear that Truth can be aspect of Beauty. Both Truth and Beauty involve integrations, but integrations of greater or lesser complexity. Consider Whitehead's discussion of Beauty as Appearance:

Appearance is beautiful when the qualitative objects which compose it are interwoven in patterned contrasts, so that the prehensions of the whole of its parts produces the fullest harmony of mutual support. By this it is meant, that in so far as the qualitative characters of the whole and the parts pass into the subjective forms of their prehensions, the whole heightens the feelings for the parts, and the parts heighten the feelings for the whole, and for each other. This is harmony of feeling; and with harmony of feeling its objective content is beautiful.¹

Beauty is a self-sufficient order, a holism which is perceived to reconcile the differences of the entities which comprise it. When Whitehead says that art "is purposeful adaption of Appearance to Reality"² he means that art makes the self-sufficient order of the Beauty of Appearance meaningful in terms of Reality. In other words, art establishes a truth-relation between Beauty, pattern without meaning within the larger context of the world itself, and Reality as that objective world inclusive of human significances. An artistic integration re-orders appearances in a paradigmatic way which can be connected relevantly to

¹ Whitehead, p. 344.
² Ibid.
to the experience of men in general. Obviously, an artistic integration necessarily involves reality as well as the virtuality of pure appearance: this is the conclusion reached earlier in examination of Susanne Langer's theories.

In the poem "Blues", for instance, bp Nichol breaks the words "love" and "evol" into their component structures—structures which are "appearances" in the strictest sense as having no significance in the context of human reality. The poet re-orders these appearances to create a new paradigm which presents in a new way an apprehendable (and rather common) meaning. It is incorrect therefore for me to say that the structure of the poem is without significance within the context of all human reality. Reality is known through paradigms, and insofar as this poem establishes a paradigm it establishes its own field of relation. Nichol's poem is art within the terms of Whitehead's definition because it purposefully adapts a pattern of appearances to the reality of human experience. Moreover, this poetic integration, like all poetic integration, is like the integration effected by madness: it is oriented towards reality in terms of a particular way of ordering the world rather than in terms of the world as a fixed reality itself.

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VI Poetry and the Poet's World

Winters would seem to have a particularly viable point when he says the reader must come to poetry with his critical faculties activated. Poetry may or may not be beneficial in a moral sense; its way of ordering human experience might imply good or evil values within a given moral system. Insofar as the poetic experience is one of possession, communion rather than merely communication, the reader must exercise some care. Winter's point is that poetry, however virtual, actualizes human values. No matter how transcendental an experience of poetry may be, it is always characterized by certain values, implicit or explicit. Within the context of the poem, the values of both reader and poet mingle, and these values, of course, determine the selectivity of the behavior which follows, even if that behavior is only exhibited in the reader's response to the poem. Winters writes,

The act of the poet I have described in a number of essays, and I have repeatedly called it an act of moral judgment. The act of moral judgment so considered is far more difficult, is a much fuller experience, than an act of classification: it is a full and definitive account of human experience.2


2 Winters, p. 74.
Insofar as poetry involves the conscious or unconscious (as in automatic) selection of various linguistic variables to produce an expressive pattern, it also involves real or attributable values. The linguistic variables involved in poetry are referentially attached to human experience, and insofar as this experience is incomplete without a moral dimension\(^1\), poetry always represents a particular evaluation of human experience. What poetry communicates is not just "beautiful truth", as Whitehead would have it, but a complete valuative orientation towards the world. If the poetic were a solipsistic experience, it could conceivably be amoral, for then the reader could infer what he liked to the poem including a total absence of values. However, even if from a subjectivist point-of-view, the only universal is the solipsim in which I exist, poetry is still that form of communion which permits me to experience another mind's solipsim, and a universal beyond myself.

In altering the reader's concept of the universe however momentarily the poetic experience also alters the base on which all moral values are founded. Such a claim might seem to be extravagant, but it is profitable to consider why it might be true. To the degree that every poem is individual—in some sense idiolectical as well as dialectical—the conceptual significance of a particular poem

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\(^1\) Winters, p. 73.
must be always somewhat vague, if not mysterious, the implications of the work extending beyond the limits of the poem as a structure, and beyond the limits of individual apprehension. This extra-referentiality of poetry is, of course, linked to the poet's role as language-maker. In terms of the reader, this extra-referentiality is a matter of connotation, convention, and association. The full content of a poetic experience, as of any experience ultimately, is elusive: the ultimate context of a poem's meaning involves the total co-extension of the consciousness of the poet and the reader. Could such co-extension be grasped in its entirety and communicated, a single interpretation would be possible for any given work. But such an event is clearly most unlikely.

By convention the reader tends to look for extra meaning in poetry, and this simple act of searching leads him to apply the unique order the poem in question represents according to its own principles: he can have no better guide. But the reader's acceptance of this order takes him beyond the literal limits of the poem as a form of conventional discourse. The poem becomes an "open field" as Charles Olson would have it.¹ In this sense the experience of the poem is an experience of a species of "world hypothesis" as Stephen Pepper calls it:

A world hypothesis, as we said earlier, differs from other empirical hypotheses only in its being unrestricted in its subject matter.¹

Now, the extensiveness of any world hypothesis for Pepper is a function of the "root metaphor" from which it is derived, and which is always central to its characteristic applications.² Both the poetic experience and the world hypothesis devolve from analogical relationships, that is, some synthetic rendering of relata which has a definite order, but indefinite, and therefore unrestricted scope. A poem thus becomes a philosophy in itself, although not "philosophy" in the ordinary sense of the word. As Wallace Stevens says,

If the philosopher's world is the present world plus thought, then the poet's world is the present world plus imagination.³

The difference between poetry and formal philosophy inheres in application. The poetic experience does not concern itself with the world per se, but with the world plus imagination—the world hypothetically ordered, this illusionary experience implying through its patterning of correspondencies a systematic way of perceiving a possible, as opposed to an actual world. This is not to say that poetry is merely fanciful. Stevens also writes,


3 Stevens, "A Collect of Philosophy", p. 266.
To call attention to ideas in which the reason and the imagination have been acting in concert is a way of saying that when they act in concert they are supreme.¹

A poem may not be a philosophy although it may imply one. According to Whitehead the reason deals with Truth as the simplest and most basic of all correspondencies possible, whereas the imagination deals with Beauty as a complex system of correspondency which may include truth². Thus, the imagination may be said to include the functions of reason. The poetic experience deals with a high order of truth, demonstrating it in terms of new imaginative paradigms rather than analyzing it in terms of conventionalized polemic or any empirical methodology.

VII Poetry as Ontology

The kind of integration with which the poetic experience deals, and the ends of that integration, can be clarified to some extent in terms of a statement by Martin Heidegger,

...we now understand poetry as the inaugural naming of the gods and of the essence of things. To "dwell poetically" means: to stand in the proximity of the essence of things. Existence is "poetical" in its fundamental aspect—which means at the same time: in so far as it is established (founded), it is not recompense, but a gift.

Poetry is not merely an ornament accompanying existence, not merely a temporary enthusiasm or

¹ Stevens, p. 267.
² Whitehead, pp. 343-348.
nothing but an interest and amusement. Poetry is the foundation which supports history, and therefore it is not a mere appearance of culture, and absolutely not the mere "expression" of a "culture soul". ¹

Heidegger considers poetry as more than an excrescence or mere "appearance" of culture. According to him, poetry is the essence of culture, or the ethos, mythos, and logos by which men approach the essence of things themselves and of existence as universal Being. Poetry may indeed be an aspect of culture as critics like Peckham are prone to conclude², but poetry is the aspect of culture which determines its ontological identity.

Poetry may not bring the gods into being, but it provides the means by which I understand them: it names and identifies them within the terms of myth. Likewise, poetry does not bring the essence of things into being in general, but brings me into a context in which I may perceive what is the essence of things in that primary act of discrimination and identification, the logos which predicates human values. In other words, poetry is a knowable and unknowable field of action, not only an expression of existential environment, but the environment itself, inner and outer. Even history is only the record of poetry as an act of mind.


² Although Peckham asserts the priority of poetic deviation to poetry, he is too concerned with explaining the manner in which poetry deviates from, and is assimilated by cultural norms to give its constitutive power due credit.
structuring the consciousness of man and his culture. In this sense, poetry is not so much the repository of values and archetypes which determine culture as the creator and source of cultural values and archetypes. As I stressed earlier, the poetic experience is innovative, if not culturally deviant. Heidegger's concept of poetry draws attention to the originality of the beauty and the truth, that is, to the unexpected pattern of correspondencies which is the end of poetic innovation and creation. The notion of poetic originality must be understood in terms of the root sense of the word; it is the rare and most fundamental nature of the poetic experience.

To accept Heidegger's conception of poetry is to accept the possibility of inherently poetic ideas. In "A Collect of Philosophy" Stevens speculates that such ideas exist, and cites the concept of infinity as a good example. He does not define the concept of the poetic idea analytically, but he does seem to imply that it represents some a priori condition of the Kantian and post-Kantian cosmos. Infinity, in the post-Kantian and Einsteinian cosmos is, for instance, an a priori condition of the most significant order, and embodies such a large concept that the mind can scarcely apprehend it, if it can apprehend it at all. Difficult as it may be to deal with such a

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1 Stevens, pp. 252-253.
priori's as infinity, they are fundamental to our existence, and are homologous with what Heidegger calls the "essence of things". Significantly, ultimate a priori's like infinity or God traditionally have lacked meaningful names: such conditions of existence are antecedent after all to language. The mind needs a context in which to apprehend anything. Since that context or ground must always be larger than that which the mind seeks to differentiate and understand, it is virtually impossible to understand an a priori like infinity because in the real terms of our spatial-temporal world there are no larger entities which might act as a ground. The poetic experience solves the problem by creating an unreal world which is not bound by the a priori order of the real world in any ordinary way. The poetic experience must be a universe in itself, for only then is it free to "name" the gods and the essence of things.

The fundamental ground of poetry is a fundamental conception of the universe, and insofar as the poem is its ground, it is this universe. Pepper's notion that art is largely qualitative in its function is explicable in terms of this view of poetry. The more fundamental a conception is the more synthetic it must be. To represent the fundamental conditions of human existence, poetry deals with the immediate conditions of life as they stand out from its infinite extensiveness in terms of their conditional origin. Since no concept of established significance

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1 See Pepper's Concept and Quality, pp. 3-5.
can represent the conditions prior and primary to its 
own existence, poetry expresses the fundamental conditions 
of existence by evoking the qualities by which its subjects 
are apprehendable, and by synthesizing these qualities into 
a form indicative of a larger conception. Inasmuch as 
this synthesis is unique, it embodies an a priori.

If poetry only communicates the sense by which things 
exist in their fundamental state, it is still primarily 
qualitative. While the poetic experience is tied to language 
as a system of conceptual signs, it transcends the limitations 
of the language through deviations of form. The combination 
of conceptually conventional and deviate form in a signifi- 
cant pattern can be used to create a holism which com- 
municates qualities or conditions of life not effectively 
rendered in ordinary discursive terms. If I accept the 
Whorfian Hypothesis\(^1\), and understand conventional discourse 
as structuring my world-view, my understanding of "reality", 
and even the processes of my reason, it must be clear 
that poetry allows me the possibility of transcending 
the limited cultural modes of thought which are a function 
of my linguistic blinders: poetry is language in transcendence 
of itself. Poetry is not mimetic in any sense. It deals 
with the possibilities of linguistic forms, not their act- 
uality, for it is concerned with the quality of their 
existence as much as it is concerned with the quality by 
which anything else exists. To be a universe, to express

\(^1\) See Whorf, pp. 58-69.
the reality of the world without being mimetic, a poem gives all things within its field of being a reality without quotidian actuality. Trees, rocks, God, infinity, metaphysical ideas—all are equal in this respect. As Heidegger would have it, poetry is "fundamental thinking" because it brings the reader close to the unapproachable reality of the elusive Kantian-thing-in-itself as he is ever likely to come.

VIII Poetry as Fundamental Thought

Poetry then is "fundamental thinking" communicated in the form of fundamental expression. In the poetic experience the reader transcends the limitations of his culturally determinant consciousness, transcending at the same time the subject-object dichotomy. Ultimately, the poetic experience transcends its own virtual nature. Insofar as a reader looks for those vivid inter-relationships which I have defined as the substance of beauty in poetry he is looking for a significant holism. And to the degree that he looks for that holism, he is also looking for the ultimate holism, in Heidegger's terms, the vast generality of Being, the infinite of existence in which all particularities find unity. The ultimate value of poetry lies

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in its ability to create such holisms as have not existed before; in figurative originality the largest generality may be made particular. The truth of poetry therefore comes to reside in its capacity for what Heidegger calls "disclosure". Consider the following,

Not only is it wrong to invoke Aristotle for the thesis that the genuine 'locus' of truth lies in the judgment; even in its content this thesis fails to recognize the structure of truth. Assertion is not the primary 'locus' of truth. On the contrary, whether as a mode in which uncoveredness is appropriated or as a way of Being-in-the-World, assertion is grounded in Dasein's uncovering, or rather in its disclosedness. The most primordial 'truth' is the 'locus' of assertion; it is the ontological condition for the possibility that assertions can be either true or false--that they may uncover or cover things up.¹

Heidegger defines human truth as disclosure, the simple act of differentiation. "Dasein", the consciousness of man, is built upon basic differentiations of the configuration of reality. This figurative truth precedes judgment or evaluation, and makes both these acts possible. As Heidegger argues in Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, the imagination is the source of truth, and the root of all other mental faculties including reason because it apprehends possible configurations, integrates and synthesizes the otherwise discordant elements of human experience into differentiable wholes.² Poetry, insofar as it presents the "world plus

¹ Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 269.
"imagination" is the ultimate "world hypothesis", for it imaginatively schematizes the world in the most basic, if individual terms on all levels of consciousness--conceptual and perceptual, intellectual and emotional.

The advantage of Heidegger's theory of imagination is, of course, that it allows the identification of any aspect of existence, whether intellectual or emotional, with truth to the degree that that aspect is particularized and disclosed. Reason, judgment, and intuition do not "disclose" truth; they are merely separate ways of formulating and applying the truths which the imagination supplies. The function of imagination is to particularize Being--i.e., the illimitable "what-is" within and without--in terms of fundamental figure-ground relationships, and this it does without regard for specialized functions of response at either end of the rational-emotive continuum. The imagination, for Heidegger, is neither more nor less than that faculty which mediates between the ontological and the ontic, the original and the derivative, forms in the world and formulations in the mind. On the one hand, the imagination is pure perception; on the other, the essence


of all conception. To maintain as Susanne Langer does in her early writings that "feelings have definite forms which become progressively articulated", and that this articulation is the essence of all art—including poetry is not an untrue statement, only an incomplete one. It would be just as true, and just as incomplete, to assert with Yvor Winters that a poem is "conceptual in origin, and...cannot escape from its origin". Stevens writes,

...in the excitement of bringing things about it is not easy to say whether one is thinking or feeling or doing both at the same time.

The poetic experience is an imaginative act within the scope of Heidegger's definition; hence, poetry articulates both feeling and thought at the same time. As poetic, rather than any other kind of functions, thought and feeling are separable only through a subsidiary act of mind.

IX Poetry, Thought and Feeling, and Authenticity

To reduce the functional essence of the poetic to "thought" of "feeling" or any combination of these two is an easy mistake to make, and one which points out the universalizing capacity of the imagination. A "pure" poem

2 Winters, pp. 73-74.
3 Stevens, p. 264.
could be a "pure" imaginative act in the sense that that act would exist by itself and for itself. But neither "pure" poetry nor "pure" acts of imagination exist. A peculiar property of the imagination is that its acts cannot exist by themselves, for part of their function is the generation of other kinds of apprehension such as "thought" and "feeling" as discrete processes of being. Since the imagination tends to appear as a quality attendant upon the formulations of the mind which it has initiated it is difficult to conceive of it by itself.

Now, the imagination is the organ of all relatedness and cannot be considered subservient to those formulations which have their origin in it. To "disclose" truth the imagination relates opposites to one another in terms of the basic-figure ground relationship: this, I have already noted. This relational process defines both the unity and the multiplicity of the world not only in the particular instances where it is manifestly apparent, but in the general case of all instances. In other words, the imagination not only discloses particular states of being, but the ontological condition in which man finds himself; that is, it discloses absolute Being in Heidegger's sense. A good poem, for instance, does not say to me only, "This is related to that in the sense of such a difference and such a similarity"; it also says, "This is the paradigm of the tension of difference and similarity by which all
things cohere in Being". Through imagination the form in which particularities relate expresses the ontological condition which is the ground for their existence. Thus, the imaginative quality of the poem is the measure of the authenticity with which that poem relates particularity and, what can only be considered to be an absolute Reality.

"Authenticity" in this sense has as little to do with a romantic notion of sincerity as "absolute Reality" (or its synonym, absolute Being) has to do with realism. Just as "absolute Reality" implies an ultimate existential ground which can include, without being spoiled by, the unreal or the irrational, "authenticity" refers to a specifically ontological truth-relation which is not necessarily sullied by insincerity or improper motives. Neither rational consistency nor emotive sincerity are of consequence in defining poetic "authenticity" insofar as they are applied to the process by which a given poem is created. The immediate fact of the poem is, as I have indicated, the condition primary to its existence; the process by which the poem is created is ancillary to that fact, and is not a proper ground for judgment. A logical, but not very sincere Augustan poem may be quite as imaginative, and therefore as "authentic" as a sincere, but not very logical Romantic poem. What counts in poetry is the quality of imagination by which a poem expresses intention, the relatedness of that intention to the whole in which it appears: the intention it-
self, even where it is known, is insignificant except as an aspect of poetic form.¹ Wallace Stevens writes pertinently,

To give a sense of the freshness or vividness of life is a valid purpose for poetry. A didactic purpose justifies itself in the mind of the teacher, a philosophical purpose justifies itself in the mind of the philosopher. It is not that one purpose is as justifiable as another but that some purposes are pure, others impure. Seek those purposes that are purely those of the pure poet.²

The quality by which the reader knows the imaginativeness of a poem is "a sense of the freshness or vividness of life". Ideally, the reader's relationship with the "real" world of ordinary life is re-substantiated and re-vitalized through the simultaneous revelation of a being (existent) and the Being (existence) against which it stands, and for which it stands. The attainment of this relation is the creation of the "supreme fiction"³, the supreme poetic "idea" so determinate in its form that it gives a framework in which the ordinarily indeterminate seems apprehendable.

"Authenticity" in the poem is the metaphysical justification of a significant physical perception as well as its essence --given, of course, that perception is of such power as to make distinctions of "thought" and "feeling" irrelevant as

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distinctions rather than formal elements.

X Poetry and Contemplation

The imagination for Heidegger is the juncture of man and the world, and, as previously indicated, mediates their interpenetration. Through imagination, and particularly through poetry man escapes solipsism, for to imagine he must give himself up to things. Passivity is not implied here, for this "giving up" of one's self, this "release-ment towards things"¹ is an act of the most difficult and strenuous kind:

Scientist: You speak without letup of a letting-be and give the impression that what is meant is a kind of passivity. All the same, I think I understand that it is in no way a matter of weakly allowing things to slide and drift along.

Scholar: Perhaps a higher acting is concealed in releasement than is found in all the actions within the world and in the machinations of mankind.²

The imagination discloses things-in-themselves. As man taps his imagination poetically he approaches these things in terms of the possibilities he sees in them for a new vision; he cannot see these things or their possibilities in terms of any banal preconception. To release himself, man cannot preconceive the situation in terms of the subject-object dichotomy, for if Being centres in man, it


² Ibid., p. 61.
does so in all other things equally. To self-consciously restrict oneself to a subjective role at the centre of an objective universe would be to deny, as it were, the ontological rights, if not the essence of all other existents. To think imaginatively is to accept the scholastic definition of absolute Being as the circle whose circumference is nowhere and whose centre is everywhere.¹ The essence of every thing is a fundamental relation to Being itself; disclosed, the thing-in-itself is always figuratively the centre of the universe. To think imaginatively is to meditate upon the way in which every thing is centred in the universe;² thus, to meditate upon Being itself as it engenders and expresses itself in particulars.

Good poetry then is very deceptive; it is not a game in our ordinary sense of the term; it is no trivial activity or sport, but a serious kind of play³ in which man is released from his subjective sense of himself as alienated from the real. The stake for which man plays is the authenticity of his own being.

Poetry looks like a game and yet it is not. A game does indeed bring men together, but in such a way that each forgets himself in the

2 Heidegger, Discourse on Thinking, pp. 50-57.
process. In poetry on the other hand, man is re-united on the foundation of his existence. There he comes to rest, not indeed to the seeming rest of inactivity and emptiness of thought, but to that infinite state of rest in which all powers and relations are active.¹

Laing, as I indicated, feels that man's usual sense of himself is "egoic", a limited and limiting form of subjectivism. For Heidegger this form of consciousness is a "forgetfulness" of human being as both subjective (in individual relation to Being) and objective (in general relation to other beings or things)? When man releases himself towards things through the use of the poetic imagination he regains contact with the real in the sense that he rediscovers an authentic relationship with the world. This state is the truest form of thinking, if thought can be taken in its most general sense as a total organismic response.³

The poem becomes the mode and opportunity for an experience similar to, and not less viable than any metaphysics. Stevens corroborates this when he writes,

...it is misleading to speak of the depth or distance at which their integrations are found, or of the level or position of the mind of feelings, if the fact is that they probe in different spheres, they move about by means of different motions. It may be said that the philosopher probes the sphere or spheres of perception and that he moves about therein like someone intent on making sure of every foot of the way. If the poet moves about in the same sphere

² See Heidegger's 'Discourse on Thinking', pp. 43-90.
³ cf. Langer, Mind, pp. 3-32.
or spheres, and occasionally he may, he is light-footed. He is intent on what he sees and hears and the sense of the certainty of the presences about him is as nothing to the presences themselves. ¹

Poetry and philosophy are different, but their interests can overlap. The essential difference is that poetry is not concerned with formulation, but form, not with any principle of verification of things, but with the things themselves. It is significant that Stevens uses the word "presence" to indicate the subject of poetry, for Being in Heidegger's scheme of things is also "presence". ²

All beings are "presences"; and the act of the imagination, "re-presentation". Insofar as this is the case, and insofar as man is "He who must affirm who he is" ³, poetry becomes one with any imaginative act by which man articulates the foundations of his existence. More than this, poetry is a supreme example of such articulation; it is the art of authentic language, and language, "the most dangerous of all possessions" ⁴, is "that event which disposes of the supreme possibility of human existence". ⁴ Poetry transcends logic, simply because it is at once the "supreme

⁴ Ibid., pp. 273-274, 276-277.
fiction" and an expression of an ultimate reality. As Stevens says, the poet is so intent upon the presence of things in the world that he does not stop to wonder how he is perceiving them: he is concerned with their possibility only. That which is real, and that from which the reader is continually alienated by the superficial subjectivism necessary perhaps to ordinary living, is his own natural perception of presences as things as poetic. That which appears freshly and vividly justifies itself qualitatively; it needs no external approval, no certification in terms of "empirical" or "objective" criteria of verifiability. "Let be be finale of seem"¹ is an appropriate poetic motto: the reality of a poem is all that participates in Being, either actual or possible within the scope of quotidian definitions.

I am speaking obviously of a poetic of transcendence, and it must be clear that such a poetic implies a duality of functions and structures in a given poem. The poem always deals with something other than it purports to deal with—and deals with it as a presence not disruptive of that initial purpose. In other words, the best poetry renders an experience in which we perceive some kind of "dual unity"², two things at once, the one clarifying the other, and forming

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¹ Stevens, "The Emperor of Ice-Cream", Poems by Wallace Stevens, p. 28.

with the other, one. This one, of course, is inevitably part of another dual unity, and thus the poem functions as a Whiteheadean matrix of relationships. The logic of these relationships proves itself in terms of its own organic and finally imaginative form according to the formula "Let be be finale of seem". Naturally enough, all poetry involves some kind of metaphor, even if this metaphor is only implied, for the essence of metaphor is dual-unity of a primary figurative relationship: which is to say that the imagination works metaphorically. Such a definition is general, if not truistic to be sure, but is so obvious as to be easily forgotten. The essence of poetic transcendence is always figurative. To ex-ist means to "stand out" (ex-sistere), and that which stands out does so only in terms of something else. The fundamental logic of existence is analogy. To transcend the ordinary dualisms which direct human life, poetry cannot afford to forget this simple ontological fact, and by its recognition of it, takes its reader demonically where most philosophers fear to tread.
In my first chapter I insisted that poetry constituted an objective reality which is in its own fashion a priori to the "practical" reality of everyday considerations and conceptions. However, I implied that this a priori reality could only be understood in terms of subjective experience; hence, could vary from person to person, and from time to time. I justified the apparent anomaly of this situation by defining a priori truth in Heidegger's terms as a figuration of pure Presence. In rejecting therefore the Aristotelian notion of truth as propositional correctness, I asserted that the primacy of a truth was function of the quality of its presentation. By defining such presentation in terms of imaginative expression, I further speculated that the objective is not to be understood except in the subjective, and vice versa insofar as each predicates the other ontologically. All truth relations, I said, are exactly that—in essence, relations, not discriminations following upon them. And inasmuch as this is the case one's experience of a priori truth is an experience of beauty, i.e., of the relational wholeness of the universe.

I have still not explained, however, the "daemonic" aspect of poetry, if indeed poetry can be conceived of in this way as capable of possessing the mind like madness or
dream. Missing from my analysis are dimension of poetic experience necessary to the proper explication of such a conception. What is the mechanism of poetic possession? What necessitates the convention which Coleridge called "willing suspension of disbelief"¹; and which John Keats in a more particularized sense called "negative capability"²?

I  The Problem of Nature and Culture: Heidegger's Temple

To more fully deal with the "demonic" in poetic experience I must first make a distinction between nature and culture as the functional poles of all human experience whether subjective or objective.

In making this distinction, however, I must stress that it is indeed functional, and therefore arbitrary at best. A simple general definition of the terms might be to say that culture is what man makes of the world whereas nature is that from which the world is made. But even this simple assertion is ambiguous since I can never be sure that man is making or being made by the world. This problem of definition notwithstanding, culture and nature are clearly

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the most significant poles of all human activities from the most elementary of tasks to the sublimest art. Inasmuch as the poetic experience is a fundamental, if demonic expression of the basic mode of human existence, one might reasonably expect that it presents a ubiquitous relationship of culture and nature in some way indicative of their basic meaning. While the poetic experience transcends ordinary experience, it occurs, at least initially, within its limits. The demonism of poetry therefore is likely to be pre-defined to some extent by whatever it is that constitutes the relations of culture and nature manifest in ordinary life. What is needed here is a precise and specific definition of culture and nature applying to their relations in both ordinary circumstances and the unique situation which is the end of poetic experience.

Such a definition is difficult, but not perhaps impossible. The clue to this definition is inherent in my first simple statement wherein I define nature and culture in terms of the "making" of a world. The notion derives from Heidegger's antimony of the "earth" (the natural "matter" of Being) and the "world" (the human "content" of Being) as it is expressed in his parable of the Greek temple:

A building, a Greek temple copies nothing. It simply stands there in the middle of the rock-cleft valley. The building encloses the figure of the god and, in this concealment, it lets it stand out in the holy precinct through the holy
portico. It is by means of the temple that the god is present in the temple. This presence of the god is itself the diffusion and delimitation of the precinct as a holy one. The temple and its precinct, however, do not soar off into the indefinite. It is the temple work that first fits together and at the same time assembles around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline take on for the human being the shape of his destiny. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people. From and in this world the nation first returns to itself for the fulfilment of its vocation.

Standing there, the building rests on the rocky ground. This resting of the work draws up out of the rock the mystery of its support, the unyielding and yet undirected. Standing there, the building withstands the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence. The luster and gleam of stone, glowing by grace of the sun, first makes manifest the light of the day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night. The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the weaving of the flowing sea, and its own repose brings out the latter's turmoil. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their contrasting shape and thus come to appear as that which they are. The Greeks early called this appearing and disappearing both itself and as a whole \( \phi \nu \varsigma [\text{physis}] \). It illuminates, also, that on which and in which man bases his dwelling. We call this ground the earth. This is not to be associated with the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere or even with the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that whence the arising of everything that arises, and indeed as such, returns to its security (zurückbirgt). In the things that arise, earth is present as the securing agent (das Bergende). Towering-up-within-itself the work discloses a world and keeps this world in a ruling position. World is not a mere collection of countable or uncountable, familiar or unfamiliar things that are merely present-at-hand. But also world is not a merely imagined framework added to the sum of such given things. World worlds (Welt weltet)
and is something that is to a greater degree than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be beheld. World is the ever un-objective realm that shelters us as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us exposed to being. Wherever the essential decisions of our history are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, mistaken and re-examined, there the world worlds. A stone is worldless. Plant and animal equally have no world; but they belong to the hidden pressure of the environment with which they fall. On the other hand the peasant woman has a world because she dwells in the openness of that which is.

The "earth" is not a "mass of matter", but the essence of all matter. It is not a static entity, but a condition for a particular state of being which approximates that state which I mean: when I use the word "nature"2, i.e., the primordial world. The "earth" therefore is not a specific thing; it is a quality of original and untransformed "thing-ness" which defines things as "given" rather than intelligibly determinate. "Nature" in this sense of "earth" is a source, but not the source of human meanings as such.3 In fact, "nature" conceals its meaning, for its fundamental function is a-human. Insofar as "nature-as-earth" is a-human, however, it is not susceptible to human control—or error—and forms a firm and secure ground for human being.

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3 Hereafter I shall use quotation marks to indicate the special sense in which the terms "nature", "culture", "world", and "earth" are being used.
The "earth" is mysterious, and cannot be anything but that. It little matters that natural science continually reveals the mysteries of nature; Heisenberg's principle applies: the act of observation irremediably changes what is observed. Hence, science cannot solve the fundamental mystery of "nature", it only gives particular aspects of "nature" a human content by transmuting them to human ends. Since "nature" is not a thing, it can give of itself endlessly without being discovered; it is a dependable mystery; it is the source of all creativeness even if it is not the source of all meanings. In this sense the symbol of "earth" is fundamentally appropriate; it implies what is given, ever diverse and inpenetrable. Yet, at the same time, it is that which supports all human endeavour, and through its resistance spurs man to greater effort. "Nature" in this context is pure actuality, the ground against which all human possibility must appear if it is to appear at all.

If the temple could not stand but for the physical and metaphysical presence of "nature" or "earth", this condition only has being as that "Towering-up-within-itself which discloses a world", and therefore is as dependent upon the temple as the temple is upon it.

The "world" in Heidegger's scheme is not a thing any more than the "earth" or "nature" is a thing. Like "earth" it is a condition for a particular state of being, a quality of "thingness", a sum greater than its parts. This "thingness"
which the "world" defines, however, is original, but not *given*; it is a transformation of the given. The "world" is "culture" insofar as it is what we make of the "earth-as-nature"; it is the import which man gives to the brute fact of existence, its "nature". It follows reasonably that no cultural thing owes its existence to the "world", but to the "earth". The temple stands upon the ground; it is made of the materials of the "earth", and cannot stand by itself. Insofar as the essence of the "world-as-culture" is pure content in a sense which I shall define more clearly later, the "world" gives to the objects which it claims essence rather than existence. In Heidegger's scheme the essence of a thing cannot be other than its human import determinate through cultural means.

What I call "culture" therefore is what is in the broadest sense discernable as the immediate significance of my existence. This "truth" need not be a propositional significance; it is any discrimination which establishes, or is part of an "open relational context"; that is, it is any discrimination which defines the world in terms of human possibilities. "Culture" is historical; it is a complex sequence of human decisions and human events, not a simple process of development. Heidegger's use of the word "openness" is of consequence here, for "culture" cannot be understood except as the endeavour of man to clear a living-space in the wilderness of primordial being; that is, man seeks
to make an extra-natural world in which the simple what-is, basic to both "world" and "earth" will be disclosed. "Culture" is "open" insofar as it provides a setting for a humanly viable understanding of our existence in the most basic way. And, insofar as our "culture" or "world" succeeds in this attempt, it is a source of a significant "truth". "Culture" is the "world which worlds" only because it reveals the truth of what-is; it is the construction of a consciousness of essences.

II The "Riss"

Any work of man, indeed man himself, is a consequence of the struggle and dependence of "world" and "earth", "culture" and "nature". To the extent that neither opposite exists solely as a thing, such things as man can discriminate belong to both realms simultaneously; each thing which he perceives, be it the temple itself or a blade of grass is revealed and hidden at the same time. This ambient process is the fundamental process of what I previously called "figuration"; every figure both reveals and hides its ground, and by the same token is revealed and hidden by that ground. "Truth", as Heidegger says, "is un-truth".¹ The "openness" of the "world" is delimited by the closed-

¹ "The Origin of the Art Work"; p. 679.
ness of the "earth" which it violates. Yet nothing could have essential being without this antagonism or "riess", that is, "rift-design":

World demands its determination and its measure and lets what is attain to the Open of its path. Earth aspires, bearing-towering, to keep itself closed and to entrust everything to its law. The conflict is not a rift (Riss) as the ripping open of a mere cleft; rather, it is the intimacy of opponents that belong to each other. The rift draws (reisst) the opponents together into the source of their unity out of the single ground. It is the ground-plan (Grundriss). It is an elevation (Auf-riss) that draws the basic features of the rising up of the lighting of what is. This rift does not let the opponents break apart; it brings the opposition of measure and limit into the single boundary (Umriss).

What I see as a thing, subjective or objective is defined by the interplay of both "culture" and "nature"; by my ability to measure the world, and by the world's capacity to limit that measuring. Hence,

The conflict that is brought into the rift and thus set back into the earth and thus established, is a figure (Gestalt). Createdness of the work means: establishment of truth in the figure. Figure is the structure in the shape of which the rift disposes itself. This ordered rift is the fitting of joining of truth. What is here called figure (Gestalt) is always to be thought in terms of the particular placing (Stellen) and framing or ordering (Gestell) as which the work is present.

When I said that the thing which is defined by the "riess" could be either subjective or objective, I meant exactly

2 Ibid., p. 689.
that: anything which presents itself to the mind is real to the degree that it is defined figuratively, and not to the degree that it is defined by actuality.

A purely subjective notion like the concept of a god may be as "natural" as a tree or a stone insofar as its resolution, as theirs, is dependent upon the opposition or "riss" of "nature" and "culture". Furthermore, it must be apparent that gestalt is not static, except as it exhibits the structure of a dynamic. The temple of which Heidegger speaks has form, but it is a form which is perceived processally as a "physis", a continuum of appearance and disappearance, revelation and concealment whose "final cause" is a discrete conception of the work itself, if not of the nature of man.

The obvious question at this point is: are all things equal in truth to the extent that they are defined in the manner described previously; that is, in terms of the "riss" of "world" and "earth"? The answer is clearly "yes", but this affirmation does not mean that any random thought or perception can embody a truth. On the contrary, the "riss" is only apparent in special circumstances according to exacting principles. Quotidian existence, Heidegger emphasizes, is means-oriented or "equipmental". To manipulate

1 See Nisbet, pp. 15-29.
things, "natural" or "cultural"; man must first divest them of their fundamental being, for to recognize that being would be to admit the insoluble "risp" which stands for the source of all the problems, as well as the pleasures of ordinary subsistence. Man must presume that success is always accessible through a proprietous choice of means, and hence he allows things character only insofar as they are useful to him.

It follows that he does not truly apprehend the thing-in-itself according to its incarnate manner of being, but only as the purpose which it represents. Driving a car, for instance, is a matter of automatic responses and these responses in turn depend upon forgetfulness of the distinctive and autonomous essence of the car itself as an object with possibilities of human intention. Characteristic of ordinary life is a tendency to limit consciousness in terms of particular tasks: thus, to proceed in ignorance of the "world" in which human purposes originate as well as the "earth" towards which these purposes are directed. I therefore tend to perceive intentions; not, as Husserl would have it, the "intentional arc".1 The mind encloses itself in an attribute of the being to which it belongs, comprehending ultimate reality as unreachable except in art, madness, and dream. "There, the mind is possessed irrationally and ap-

parently unreal by things embodying a truth which does not yield to ordinary conception.

The fact of the matter is not that the "truth" of art, madness, and dreams is irrational or unreal—not even that it is illogical—but that it belongs to a different sphere of being primary to the one in which a given man ordinarily exists. This realm is original being, the valley in which the temple stands in dynamic relation to its ground.

Heidegger writes,

The more isolatedly the work, established in the figure, stands in itself and the more purely it seems to dissolve all connections with human beings, the more simply does the thrust, that such a work is, move into the Open....the more simply does it transport us out of the realm of the ordinary. To go through this displacement means: to change one's customary relations to world and earth and thenceforth to inhibit all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to linger in the truth that is happening in the work. The restraint of this lingering first lets what is created be the work that is. This letting the work be a work we call the preserving (Bewahrung) of the work. It is only for such preservation that the work first yields itself in its createdness as actual, i.e. now: present in the manner of a work. As little as a work needs creators, so little can the created itself become an entity without preservers.  

Plato, as I noted, saw the poetic experience in terms of a demon mediating between the gods and men. In practice the demon mediates between the possibility and the actuality of human existence. Heidegger's symbol of the temple is appropriate in this respect, for while the temple is the

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precinct of the gods, i.e., of ideal or ultimate possibility, it is constructed from brute matter.

This balance of ultimates is an epiphany which dissolves man's connection with his ordinary mode of being. Truth "happens" in this work irrespective of ordinary predilections. The categories of thought by which the mind structures an ordinary reality no longer apply, and the perceiver of the work is constrained to accept or reject this "happening". If he accepts the "happening" as it is in itself, he must accept structures of reality which contradict those by which he understands himself. As Heidegger says, "this displacement means: to change one's customary relations to world and earth". "Culture" and "nature" are constituted anew insofar as the "riss" which is their interpenetration is allowed to be. To let the "riss" be the art work's appreciator must become a servant of it, a "preserver" in the same sense that the priests of the temple are preservers. He does not exist in this context for himself alone, although he exists by himself alone with the work. In Stevens' words, he must,

...realize in the same way in which an escape from all our limitations would make us realize that we are creatures, not a part, which is our everyday limitation, but of a whole for which, for the most part, we have as yet no language.

The "work" art is truly work, for to apprehend it, its

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1 "A Collect of Philosophy", p. 264.
appreciator must tend it. In struggling to make the work "work", the appreciator becomes part of the same "riss" which it expresses.

Thus, indirectly the appreciator of the work of art realizes his own being as primordial possibility, grounding it securely in his relation with the work. Insofar as the work is material, unlike madness or dreams, its "truth" has an authenticity and a substantiality which transcends the merely individual or subjective. In this sense, the aesthetic experience, while demonic, cannot be dismissed by quotidian conception: it is in all dimensions of existence because it asserts those conditions which predicate fundamental existence in general.

III Heidegger, Olson, and the "Open"

The multi-dimensional aspect of the art work's existence is, of course, not innate in the matter of the art work, but in the relationship by which the art work is understood as poetry. As Heidegger says,

All art, as the letting-happen of the advent of truth of what is, is, as such, essentially poetry (Dichtung).¹

What he means here by "poetry" is complex, for he uses the word both in its general sense as "creative language", i.e., all the significations of art, linguistic and non-linguistic.

¹ "The Origin of the Art Work", p. 693.
and in its more particularized sense as "essential language", i.e., all verse. His general concept of poetry is articulated as follows:

Poetry...is no aimless imagining of the arbitrary and no flight of mere ideation and imagination into the unreal. What poetry, as illuminating projection toward unconcealment, unfolds and casts ahead into the rift-design (riss) of the figure, is the Open that it lets happen, and indeed in such a way that now for the first time, in the midst of what is to light and sound. In our essence-vision of the essence of the work and its connection with the happening of the truth of what is, it becomes questionable whether the essence of poetry, and this means at the same time the essence of projection, can be adequately thought from the angle of imagination.¹

No contradiction is involved in Heidegger's last comment that it is questionable whether the essence of poetry "can be adequately thought from the angle of imagination". What Heidegger means is that the imagination must transcend itself if the essence of poetry is to be thought. The imagination is a necessary function of ordinary mental process wherein it works within prescribed limits. The work of art demands the imagination transcend these limits; the essence of poetry demands an act of imagination which is primary ontologically. Poetic imagination in this sense is equivalent to Coleridge's "primary imagination": it can be neither arbitrary nor fanciful,² for it deals with the primordial truth of what is.

¹ "The Origin of the Art Work", p. 694.
² See Biographia Literaria, p. 167.
The question of imaginative function will be clearer later. For the moment it is more pertinent to note the closeness of Heidegger's terms to those of Charles Olson. Both Heidegger and Olson insist that poetry must "project" an "open field" in which the truth of existence will "happen" spontaneously and, in that sense, originally. The correspondency between the theories of the two thinkers is indicative of matters fundamental to the concept of poetry in its several senses, and ought not to be ignored.

Now Olson writes, of poetry and the poet,

...it involves a series of new recognitions. From the moment he ventures into FIELD COMPOSITION—put himself in the open—he can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself. Thus he has to behave, and be, instant by instant, aware of several forces just now beginning to be examined.¹

The poet must

...find ways to stay in the human universe, and not be led to partition reality at any point, in any way.²

Olson writes specifically of a technique of poetry; his point of view is that of the practicing poet. Yet, his terms of reference are very general, and amount to a doctrine of existential knowledge. The point of "field composition" is to put the poet "in the open", "the open" being an "unpartitioned reality" like that which Heidegger's

² "Human Universe", p. 56.
aesthetic "preserver" encounters and maintains. The poet therefore is equivalent in the act of creation to the reader insofar as the essence of each role inheres in the work; as Heidegger says, "the nature of creation is determined by the nature of the work". Anomalous as it may seem, the actual work of art is an act of truth a priori to both creator and preserver, "no aimless imagining of the arbitrary and no flight of mere ideation into the unreal", but an "illuminating projection", a "series of new recognitions" of the formerly concealed real itself.

I believe in Truth! (Wahrheit) My sense is that beauty (Schönheit) better stay in the thing itself: das Ding....

writes Olson, revealing clearly his commitment to the concept of poetry as an ultimate revelation.

Olson cannot speak of the technique of poetry without referring the whole matter back to a general, if not metaphysical concept of the poetic. In this respect he concurs with Heidegger who cannot define the concept of metaphysical truth without particularizing the issue in terms of the poetic. All works of art are at a general level of being, poetically conceived truths if we understand poetry to mean in a broader sense than "creative language" or "essential language", the language of the imagination. As I stressed

2 "Letter to Elaine Feinsteing", p. 27.
earlier, the imagination is the faculty in which truth is formed although that truth needs to be formulated in language if it is to have a substantive meaning. Language in which the imagination operates in its purest form is, whatever its conventional definition, poetry: this is the general concept of poetry.

Both Heidegger and Olson, however, are constrained to define poetry in a more particularized way. Heidegger, as I noted, regards poetry in a particular sense as "essential language": this is implied in his comment that "it becomes questionable whether the essence of poetry...the essence of projection, can be adequately thought from the angle of imagination". "Projection" is the manner by which the imagination makes truth happen in the art work; it is the image in which the "riss" of "culture" and "nature" stands out. But the image finds its clearest definition and resolution in terms of the word.

Unable to leave poetry at a general level of definition, both Olson and Heidegger seeks its essence in the forms of language by which it is projected. Heidegger writes,

...poesy is only one mode of the lighting projection of truth, i.e., of poetic composition in the wider sense. Nevertheless, the linguistic work, the poem in the narrower sense, has a privileged position among the arts.1

1 "The Origin of the Art Work", p. 694.
Olson avoids connecting poetry with the other arts; he prefers instead to deal with its "primitive-abstract"\(^1\) connection with general truth. Heidegger, however, grants poetry, "poesy" in the narrower sense, status in relation to other arts. In establishing the relation he develops a theory of language:

To see this [the privileged position of poesy], only a correct concept of language is needed. On the usual view language is held to be a kind of communication. It serves for conversation and mutual understanding, generally for coming to agreement. But language is not only and not primarily audible and written expression of something to be communicated. It not only furthers the advancement of the overt and the covert as thus meant in words and statements, but language brings what is into the Open for the first time. Where there is no language as in the being of stone, plant, and animal, there is also no openness of what is and consequently no openness of that which is not and of the empty.\(^2\)

Language must always be for man the essence of imagination, for without it he cannot imagine as a man.

Hence, every defined image is also explicitly as in poetry, or implicitly as in the non-linguistic arts, a schema\(^3\). This version of the Whorfian Hypothesis is implied also in Olson's trifurcation of the image as "topos/typos/tropos"\(^4\). That is, every poetic image

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1 See his "Letter to Elaine Feinstein", pp. 27-30.
3 See Heidegger's Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, pp. 94-113.
4 "Letter to Elaine Feinstein", p. 29.
unifies a particularized figure (typos) with a more generalized ground (topos) and through this unification creates a metaphor (tropos) which is also an abstraction implying the schema of its self-conception. The concomitants of this notion are dealt with in "The Origin of the Art Work":

As language names what is for the first time, such naming first brings what is to word and to appearance. This naming nominates what is to its being from out of its being. Such speech (Sagen) is a projecting of lighting....Projecting is the release of a throw or a cast by which unconcealment directs (schickt) itself into what is as such. This projective announcement forthwith becomes a reununciation of all the obscure gloom in which what is wraps and withdraws itself. Projective speech is poetry; the saga of world and earth; the saga of the space of their conflict and therewith of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods....Actual language at any given moment is the happening of this speech, in which for a folk its world historically rises and the earth is preserved as that which is closed up. Projective speech is speech which in preparing the sayable simultaneously brings the unsayable into the world. In such saying, the concepts of an historical folk's essence, i.e., of its belonging to world-history, are performed for that folk....But since language is the happening in which for man at any time what is first discloses itself as being, poesy, or poetry in the narrower sense, is the most original form of poetry in the essential sense. Language is not poetry because it is primal poesy; rather, poesy makes its advent in language because language preserves the original essence of poetry.1

Poetry in the particular sense of "poesy" is not primal language; primal language is poetry in the general sense of projective speech. This distinction is highly important

1 Heidegger, p. 695.
here, for "poesy" must be understood as a language form, albeit the most original of such forms, which appears against and from out the body of actual language as the fundamental dynamic of ontological figuration. Between "poesy" and language the antagonism of "world" and "earth" manifests itself in the purest manner. Whereas language is a "world", it can also be an "earth". As the ground of all poetry it must conceal itself; only in rendering itself invisible through language can language make the reality of what is stand forth as primary rather than merely symbolic reality. Insofar as "poesy" or verse is the most fundamental form of figuration possible linguistically—and it cannot be denied it is the most self-concerned of linguistic forms—it presents and expresses the "rise" or rift-design in which "culture" and "nature" make what is called man. "Poesy", with its concern for linguistic innovation, reveals what is hidden in the ordinary modes of language by which one keeps the world and oneself at a technically advantageous remove.

Thus, of all art forms, "poesy" can claim a priority; in it, the ultimate or a priori conditions of our existence appear most essentially. All "poesy" which achieves the greatness which only generations, if not centuries of criticism, appreciation, and finally "preservation" can bestow, is the "saga of world and earth", the possibility and
actuality implied in these terms, and in man's sense of
the accessibility of the ideal: "the nearness and the
remoteness of the gods". Poetry in the most particularized
sense of the word is, as Heidegger says, the establishment
of human history in all its complexity by means of the word.

IV Poetry as a "Physis"

What the demonics of poetic experience establish are
clearly the total relationship of man, subjective and objec-
tive, individual and collective, with the opposing principles
constituting his peculiar condition as a conscious being.
The creation and "preservation" of this "open relational
context" is historical both in the sense of its viability
in all temporal dimensions, and in terms of its profound
influence on human destiny. In the poetic experience man
is constrained only to be free, and if he agrees to this
constraint, and if the work itself is agreeable to his
desire, he reconstitutes the world according to wholly
original categories of mind. Historically, the poetic
work is truly a "physis", a development of mind in which
either the germinative power of restoration or revolution
may abide. A poetic work transcends the logos of which
it is ostensibly a part, and it is thus, in the words of
Gaston Bachelard, "referable to a direct ontology".¹

¹ Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans.
The whole that is each poetic event transcends the historicity of its individual parts. Hence, while history and tradition supply the means by which poetry is composed, they do not pre-determine the end of that composition which stands out from the historical pattern to which it belongs. The reader cannot discover the history-founding attributes of a poem in the social context of which it is a specific product, in the traditions or conventions which it implicitly or explicitly uses, in the biography or putative psychology of its creator: these, and all similar approaches are points of departure for a discovery of what makes the work a unique event. History is a series of unique acts of mind, events (e-vent= ex-venere= to stand forth) in which human possibility stands forth.

Such events precede the actuality of social or personal revolutions or evolutions. As R.A. Nisbet has written,

Change is, however, not "natural", not normal, much less ubiquitous or constant. Fixity is. If we abandon metaphor and the constructed social systems to which metaphor is applied, and look at actual social behavior, in place and time, we find over and over that persistence in time is the far more common condition of things.1

What is amazing about mankind is that change, and therefore history occurs at all. The second fall of man is the quotidian, that world of routine, habit, and meaningless chit-chat in which man seeks the security which properly

1 Social Change and History, p. 270.
belongs to the "earth". In achieving this natural objective, man must forfeit dwelling in the world as a culturally conscious subject; he must forgo the humanizing influence of myth, mysticism, emotion, and creative thought. Naturally, no society, and no man could long exist in this state. The obvious corrective is original and originative thought, i.e., that which brings about the poetic events by which man finds his place between earth and sky, indwelling in the "world" and on the "earth". William Carlos Williams puts this proposition as follows,

...we are beginning to discover the truth that in great works of the imagination A CREATIVE FORCE IS SHOWN AT WORK MAKING OBJECTS WHICH ALONE COMPLETE SCIENCE AND ALLOW INTELLIGENCE TO SURVIVE...TO ESCAPE ILLUSION and stand between man and nature as saints once stood between man and sky—their reality in such work....

Poetry, as Sir Philip noted centuries ago, is not a lie; nor is it in any fundamental way, illusory. Its demonics represent new structures of truth, and accordingly those new principles of thinking by which man remains alive as man. If the poetic demon had a voice outside of poetry, he would probably say with Charles Olson,

As the dead prey upon us,
they are the dead in ourselves,
awake my sleeping one, I cry out to you,
disentangle the nets of being.

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3 "As the Dead Prey Upon Us", Twentieth Century Poetry and Poetics, p. 275.
V Language and "World"

My agreement with the preceding sentiment is obviously predicated by my acceptance of Heidegger's transcendental dualism of "world" and "earth", and his theory of language. Heidegger, however, is not a linguist, and does not deal with the problem of language as precisely as he might were he one. I must look elsewhere for a clearer exposition of the crucial issue of the actual way in which language functions as a transcendental agent: it is not enough to deal with the underlying conditions of its action.

The essence of poetry is, as I earlier suggested, determinate through linguistic *overdetermination*: the extraordinary synthesis of new linguistic structures from ordinary ones. If there is such a thing as a "linguistic universal", as mentalists like Noam Chomsky assert, then poetry can be said to have a universal essence, however alien its ethnic origin; however unusual its creative form. The existence of such a universal would connote the viability of universal concepts of both "humanity" and "nature" in their broadest senses. On the other hand, if linguistic universals do not exist then poetry, "humanity" and "nature" cannot have any fixed essences, and I must content myself with conditional definitions and relativistic interpretations. The basic problem with Heidegger's theory in this context is that his

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ontological bias precludes such ontic considerations. Both the essence and the existence of all matters devolve for him from the concept of cosmogonic Being, and thus are simultaneously universal and conditional within the sphere of that relationship. Heidegger's peculiar blending of neo-Platonic essentialism and Husserlian functionalism, while illuminating in so many respects, often leaves insoluble paradoxes.

Given that poetry as a particular language act presents and expresses the "risse" of "world" and "earth", i.e., the rift-design of "culture" and "nature", what are the structural constants which make this figuration significant? There is no doubt that the process by which this figuration appears is dynamic, but how does one devise a system of analysis which will allow an understanding of the mechanism of its particularity and internal logic? If I cannot discover such a system and the structural constants which predicate it, my definition of poetry must remain so general as to be hardly useful. Linguistic universals may or may not exist, but a degree of structural consistency is necessary to define at least the family resemblance by which the terms "language" and "poetry" can be construed as meaningful concepts.

That it is essential to have this kind of definition cannot be denied, for, as I have shown, the poetic experience cannot be initiated except in terms of an object
claiming recognition as poetry, and as such projecting certain conceptions of language and poetry which would facilitate that recognition. A conception of poetry is the ground against which the poetic experience appears as poetic; even though that experience may revise that conception, this revision cannot exceed certain limits without contravening the basic principle of gestalt, and upsetting the paradoxical synthesis of "world" and "earth" which informs that principle. Insofar as poetic experience is a transcendence—in this sense a priori to its components—it is, as Heidegger says, "the precinct of the gods:" a temple in which they, as the incarnations of an absent a priori truth, are held to be present. But how can I know the temple, and how is it constructed to be the temple sui generis, rather than a mere replication of other such monuments? Moreover, if I recognize the temple as the temple, how can I admit what I must also recognize: its resemblance to its heretical or inauthentic brothers?

To answer this question, let me begin by accepting for the moment the hypothesis which seems to be accepted in different ways by Whorf, Sapir, and Heidegger: that language structures conceptual reality. This hypothesis is used differently in each case, and is neatly reversible:

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this notwithstanding, language may be said to structure reality at least inasmuch as it is one of the primary mediating structures of cognition. It is not really to the point whether different languages mean uniquely different realities in respect to the logic of perceptual and conceptual process; what is to the point is that the structure of language imposes certain limits upon what can be understood through that language of the "world" or the "earth". Furthermore, this disjunction between one's understanding of the fact of the cosmos to which one belongs, and the actuality of that fact must always be apparent, for neither "world" nor "earth" are inert objects: they exist according to their own processes and continually put the lie to our preconceptions.

One could object that language is innately "natural", that it does embody certain "universals" which approximate the essential structure of the "natural" cosmos, and thereby make it accessible to human understanding. One could argue that the "cultural" aspects of the "cultural" cosmos evolve "naturally" according to "natural" law, and that the "cultural" cosmos is quite as knowable as that other. One could even argue that it is not important to know what lies beyond the limits of language, that language is, as it exists, adequate to all human needs. None of these arguments are of relevance here, however.
Language is as "cultural" as it is "natural"; neither quality is more important than the other. The only "universal" linguistic structure which stands up to any kind of intensive scrutiny is the subject-predicate relation which transformationalists take to be the common property of all languages and all logics.¹ This classically Kantian notion generates the theory of "kernel sentences", and the synthetic statements which can be formed from them. There is, however, no proof that the subject-predicate distinction is common to all languages. Whorf asserts the contrary in fact when he speaks of "polysynthetic" languages which do not seem to form sentences in this fashion at all.² If the transformationalist objects that the subject-predicate distinction exists in the "deep structure" of the language, he still may be criticized. As Wittgenstein so acutely points out in his critique of Freud, any analytic interpretation is an adduction to the issue at hand: its true relevance is to itself.³ Furthermore, as Kant makes clear, the subject-predicate distinction reveals as a "universal" only the nature of the human mind; therefore, it maintains rather than ameliorates the cognitive gap between the human, i.e., in the broadest sense the "cultural domain, and the world-in-itself which is in a similarly


² "Languages and Logic", pp. 236-237.

broad sense the "natural" domain. To say that this gap is not significant would be ridiculous. As Thomas Kuhn notes in his work on paradigm logic, all understandings of "nature" ultimately disintegrate: categorically all forms of cognitive paradigm are incomplete in their inception, and function usefully only in quite specific historical contexts. To accept the limitations of language upon our cognition, worse, to accept cognition as absolutely limited by language, would be to accept an unacceptable degree of cognitive stagnation.

The assertion that language structures reality becomes the assertion of a problem specific to the human being: that is, how do I attune linguistic reality, which is so fundamental to my "world"; to the reality of things-in-themselves which is the basis of the "earth"? Should my cognition of the "riss" become either that of a rift or of a design alone, then my sense of reality is as incorrect as it is partial.

VI Poetry as History and Structure

I return to my initial hypothesis that the poetic experience achieves its essential structure through deviation from linguistic norms. Man cannot attune linguistic reality to the reality of things without transcending the limits of ordinary language; that is, language as it has been conven-

1 See The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, pp. 91-115.
tionally used to that point in history. Every language structure can be said to have both a "cultural" and a "natural" aspect insofar as it is used; for the purposes of ordinary communication man attempts to harmonize these aspects by subordinating them to the purpose at hand. In short, he defers the reality, i.e., the contradictory presence of language as the juncture of "world" and "earth" by asserting that is only the means to an "equipmental" end. The forms by which he makes such assertions are the forms of historically defined grammar and usage. Poetry, insofar as it is reality, is free to transgress these forms.

Indeed, to define itself as a primary reality poetry must act in this way; by such transgression it shows the fundamental "rise" of the "cultural" and "natural" aspects which give language its flexibility and power. The a priori nature of this transgression is facilitated by the historical and traditional nature of poetry. Once poetic transgression occurs, a new paradigm of expression is created to be assimilated by the canons of poetic practice: once used, it is a usage. A poetic transgression deviates not only from the defined grammar and usage of ordinary speech, but from the history of all similarly successful transgressions. The poem "happens" as truth happens: the very fact that it stands forth as a transgression of ordinary and historical realities establishes its structural relation a posteriori to them, and their hidden ground in linguistic
form. On the other hand, the fact that the poem stands forth as a true event a priori to all others, and relative to them only in original terms, vitalizes and illuminates the ignored or forgotten essence of these realities.

All poetry therefore functions at two levels: the first, conventional, whatever formal innovations may be present; the second, metalinguistic1 or demonic, conventionality notwithstanding. The demonic defines poetry in the most absolute sense, but is contingent upon the conventional structures secondary to it. Just as worshippers need a temple to meet the gods without endangering the balance between the world of the sacred and the world of the profane, so poetry needs formal structures within whose precincts one may commune with the muse unperturbed by questions to do with the fixed, habitual, and instrumental reality of everyday cares. The spirit is most important to poetry.

The first functional level of poetry is the level of formal structure of system; the second, that of event, or process. But this separation is merely hypothetical. Structure and event in poetry cannot be temporally distinguished. Event in poetry is contingent upon formal structure as indeed formal structure is contingent upon event. Neither is the mechanical consequence of the other. Event and structure exist in figurative relationship to one another; thus the process by which one emerges into

one's perceptual field is the product of the other's existence. Burnham sets up a paradigm as follows,

...event and structure are in opposition, and therefore neither term precedes the other, event is always integral to structure as in

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{process} & \supseteq \text{event} \\
\text{system} & \supseteq \text{structure}
\end{align*}
\]

As a result, the temporal condition of a sign is always synchronic, reducing all processes and events to ideal points in time. Hence it follows that all signs resist history, functioning outside the passage of time. Signs representing historical events exist as incremental marks on a temporal line.1

While it is doubtful whether aesthetic signs really function "outside the passage of time"; it is true that an ideality of space and time is presupposed insofar as the work in question is a unique and a priori event. Yet, the structural basis of this event has itself a temporal and a historical basis. The conflict between the established reality represented by aesthetic structures, and the original reality created by their synthesis is, of course, a "riss". Established reality, the fixed history of human being in the broadest sense is in this respect "earth"; in being fixed and defined, it conceals "naturally" the "world" whose possibility is, ideally speaking, man's true "cultural" heritage. To the degree that man upsets the fixity of established structural relations, and the historical realities they signify, he realizes this possibility and a new "world".

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1 The Structure of Art, p. 21. The appearance of the "equation" here can be misleading. The symbol \(\supseteq\) means a relation of correspondency: simultaneous integration and differentiation, a "riss".
A new "world" means, of course, a new history. The originality of every work of art is always proof of the concealing, as well as the revealing nature of time. History, in this sense, is not the defined fact of what has happened, it is the omni-temporal relation of what happens now to what has happened and what will happen; thus, it is the e-vent (the standing-forth as assertion) of human possibility as actuality. Aesthetic signs resist history only in terms of a very limited concept of what constitutes history. The fact that the historical and temporal structures of a poem recede into the background as it emerges as a unique event of consciousness does not mean, as one might construe Burnham to mean, that a poem or other work of art is without historical content; only that one's predominantly historical sense of reality is being revised. It is the revision of, and not the resistance to history which is significant as anyone capable of distinguishing a dadaist from T.S. Eliot will understand.

The question which arises naturally is: can I understand a poetic experience as an event except as a structure? The answer is that events are apprehended subjectively and "understood", that is, fixed in some objective frame-of-reference structurally. Now, the structure of a poem can be conceived synchronically, in Burnham's terms, as "system", but it only "happens" as a process. What I am really deal-
ing with here is two notions of structure, both of which are applicable, although one is wider than the other. The first notion, which is Burnham's, is that of mechanical structure; the second, which is my own, and which includes the first, is that of organic structure. Any mechanical structure is a fixed system; it has an actuality which cannot change. If the system does change then the structure is negated as it was. Organic structures, on the other hand, have an actuality which develops in time through the negation and creation of mechanical structures which constitute its given identity at any moment in time. A baby, for instance, as it grows is an infinite series of mechanisms; yet, structurally it is only one organism. In poetry the mechanical level of structure inheres in its referentiality: the poem has a fixed set of signifiers. The organic level of structure, however, inheres in what might be called the poem's inferentiality, the possibility of its significances. The significance which a poem has is never constant; it changes from time to time, from person to person. Only the fact of its presentation remains constant. A poem is not like a baby it is true--it is not an organism, but a thing. But the essence of the poem as a work of art is defined organically in human experience: it happens.

One might suppose that the mechanical structure of a work of art is subservient to its organic structure. This,
however, is not so. Clearly, a work of art cannot exist without the actuality which it derives from its mechanism. And that actuality would be without significance or purpose, in human terms, without being, were it not for the possibility which the work derives from its organism. The basic mechanical structure of the work is "closed"; it is the "earth", the "natural" ground of the organic structure of the work which is "open" insofar as it is continually given. The organic structure of the work "opens" on a "world"; it is a "cultural" figuration whose significance is as extensive as its ground is secure. Both kinds of structure, the one apparently static; the other, kinetic together form a new and original synthesis of "nature" and "culture" in which, hopefully, rift and design balance one another to form a true "riss".

Generally speaking, all "natural" structures are defined functionally as dependent variables whereas "cultural" structures are constituted as independent variables. A phoneme therefore is usually a "natural" structure insofar as its existence is conditional upon the context of meaning of which it is a part. A morpheme is a "cultural" structure in relation to that phoneme insofar as it establishes its use. But the morpheme itself is a "natural" structure in terms of the syntactic and semantic structures which condition its meaning. Thus, every structure can be both "natural" and "cultural" at the same time, and can be se-
parately perceived as one or the other only in terms of a particular distinction of function. This situation is so even though the a perceiver of language tends to grant certain linguistic structures, and the conceptual distinctions which can be made in those structures' terms an automatic status, either "natural" or "cultural". That which seems fixed objectively or given subjectively may or may not be designated as "natural" or "cultural", but inevitably such designations are made.

VII On Poetic Meaning

The designation is not a question of fixity, givenness, "naturalness" or "culturalization" per se, but the degree to which the structure in question appears to have an innate meaning. Thus, phonemes generally seem to be inherently "natural" whereas morphemes seem to be inherently "cultural". Idiolectical expressions likewise are "natural" whereas dialectical expressions are "cultural". It is "natural" to think a woman is more "natural" than a man; that he is more "cultural" than she, insofar as the female seems dependent upon the male for identity to the degree that she is regarded to be inferior to him.* The fallacy of such labelling must be obvious.

Poetry is inherently ontological, and thus regards all presences as having meaning insofar as they are: there-

1 Burnham, p. 49.
2 Ibid., pp. 48-51.
fore it tends to remove them from the sphere of practicality. The poet, as I have noted,

...is intent upon what he sees and hears and the sense of the certainty of the presences about him is as nothing to the presences themselves.¹

Practical distinctions of "culture" and "nature" are concerned with "the certainty of the presences"; that is to say with their actuality, not with their possibility.

The poetic experience, however, is an exploration of presence—Heidegger would call it an exploration of the Being of human being. Hence, the poet is likely to define poetic meaning theoretically or in practice as Charles Olson does,

*that which exists through itself is what is called meaning.*²

This ontological sense of meaning frees the poetic experience from the ordinary constraints of established modes of distinguishing "world" and "earth", "culture" and "nature", for it takes the whole question of truth to a more primary level of thought. For the poet and for his reader "world" and "earth" exist apart only arbitrarily as the dynamic of forces which allows Being to emerge from Nothingness. The poet is not concerned with the appearance or the reality of a thing as man of practical affairs might be; he is

concerned with the thing existing through itself. He must, as I said earlier, let be, and this means let "be be finale of seem". As Heidegger puts it,

In the work...it is not a matter of the reproduction of a single entity present-at-hand at any given time, but rather of the reproduction of the universal essence of things.¹

What the poet seeks to do is to express the essential conflict of "world" and "earth" by which a presence is both actually and possibly, for it is this conflict which is the "universal essence of things". Insofar as the poet creates a poem which constitutes a meaning in this manner, he creates the most fundamental of truths.

VIII Poetry and Instrumental Conception

The obstacle to poetic creation and to the appreciation of the experience which it ought to inaugurate is the reader's tendency to take for granted the relation of "world" and "earth", thus to truly apprehend neither. This forgetfulness of the "riss" which constitutes the essence of things is quite necessary to efficacious activity. I have already noted that my ability to drive a car depends upon my ability to forget its essential being and make it subservient to my intentions. Poetry works by revealing the essential being of things, inverting the usual priorities of human action. The poetic experience, as I argued earlier, is a contemplative rather than an instrumental activity.

Whereas instrumental or "equipmental" activity conceals the "riss" by which things are present for man, contemplative activity reveals it in all its complexity, uniqueness, and emergent possibility.

In some sense, of course, contemplative activity is instrumental, for it renews and vivifies human conception of the world, but as it occurs it cannot but seem to be a demonic revelation. A possible paradigm for this experience might be,

- Instrumental Conception: The Concealed Relation of Nature and Culture
- Riss
- Aesthetic Conception: The Revealed Relation of Nature and Culture

Burnham, writing of Levi-Strauss says,

Art is simply another case of the conjunction of religion and magic, a language expressing the effects of both through its own internal logic. In Levi-Strauss' definition of magic, the naturalization of human actions could be expressed as "naturalization of the cultural"; humanization of natural laws is the "culturalization of the natural". It becomes evident... that all successful art integrates both effects as equally and fully as possible. The reason for... analyses, therefore, is to determine where and how this is done in each case. Whereas all signs are divided into cultural or natural terms, cultural terms culturalize their natural counterparts and natural terms naturalize the cultural. Where either does not clearly occur, the art may be culturized or naturalized on the ideological plane, or its structure may remain ambiguous, or it may not function as art at all.

Poetry is a grounding of the self in what is a priori to

the self: it cannot be in its inception a technical or pragmatic function. If poetry has function it is mythic, for it integrates, as Burnham indicates, the effects by which religion and magic subsist. This is not to say that poetry is religion or magic, although both may be poetic; it is only to say that poetry seeks the fullest possible apprehension of existence, a realization that "we are creatureless, not of a part, which is our everyday limitation, but of a whole for which, for the most part, we have as yet no language". Stevens says further that,

This sudden change of a lesser life for a greater one is like a change of winter for spring or any other transmutation of poetry.1

The realization which is the end of poetry is natural like the process of seasonal change insofar as it is a fundamental "transmutation" of existential conditions. To say that poetry is natural in this sense is to say, as Stevens says, that what we ordinarily think of as nature (as opposed to Heidegger's notion of "nature") is poetic. Poetic realizations are the ground which substantiates all other realizations, instrumental or otherwise. Religion and magic approach the conflict of "world" and "earth" from different directions; in the poetic experience one finds oneself at the centre of this conflict, rather than approaching it with hopes of reconciliation.

The poetic experience is demonic in this sense because

1 "A Collect of Philosophy"; p. 264.
it demands that its participants accept as "creatures of a whole" an ambiguity which religion and magic would resolve, and by this resolution, extirpate. The meaning of the poetic work exists through itself; it cannot be resolved in terms of a magical or religious ideology, for it modifies all existing ideologies by redefining the cultural ground from which they spring. To the degree that the poetic experience is imbued with the power of possession, it transforms the world in which man lives.

IX Van Gogh's Peasant Shoes

Such concepts are problematic to say the least. Heidegger clarifies the issues to an extent in a penetrating critique of a painting by van Gogh in which the painter depicts the essential being of a pair of peasant woman's shoes, without actually depicting their actual use.

Heidegger begins defining the way in which these shoes would ordinarily appear did they actually exist:

The peasant woman wears her shoes in the field. Here they are for the first time what they are. They are such all the more genuinely the less the peasant woman thinks about the shoes while she is at work, or sees them at all, or even takes any heed of them. She stands and walks in them. This is how shoes actually serve. It is in this process of equipment that we must actually encounter the character of equipment.1

The shoes are "equipment"; in everyday life they are only the extensions of human intention. The less the shoes'
owner is conscious of them as things other than her, the more comfortable they are, and the more successful her use of them seems. An everyday conception of shoes therefore conceals the actual being of the shoes. If, for instance, I adopt an everyday attitude towards the shoes which appear in van Gogh's painting so starkly depicted, I will find nothing of significance, for shoes by themselves usually mean nothing. Hence,

...as long as we only imagine a pair of shoes in general, or simply look at the empty, unused shoes as they stand there in the picture, we shall never discover what the equipmental being of equipment in truth is. In van Gogh's painting we cannot even tell where these shoes stand. There is nothing surrounding this pair of shoes in or to which they might belong, only an undefined space. There are not even clods from the soil of the field or the path through it sticking to them, which might at least hint at their employment. A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more.¹

At the basic structural level of the work of art I see only the bare fact of what is presented; I see a representation of shoes by themselves which does not indicate their use. I might conclude therefore that I do not really see the thing at all as shoes, for their use is an integral part of their being. What I see is a matrix of line and colour which resembles objects with which I have some experience without indicating their relevance to me: "a pair of peasant shoes and nothing more".

Something "happens" in van Gogh's painting, however. The painting is not merely a structural entity, a fixed

¹ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Art Work", pp. 662-663.
and static **gestalt**; it cannot be separated from the consciousness which apprehends it, and as such emerges as a dynamic **event**. Heidegger writes,

> From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stands forth. In the stiffly solid heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field, swept by a raw wind. On the leather there lies the dampness and saturation of the soil. Under the soles there slides the loneliness of the field path as the evening declines. In the shoes there vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening corn and its enigmatic self refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety about the certainty of bread, the wordless joy having once more withstood want, the trembling before the advent of death. The equipment belongs to the earth and is protected in the world of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment rises to its resting-in-self.¹

The facticity of the shoes, their "matter" suggests the use of the shoes, and this use further defines the "world" of the peasant woman. That is to say, while the shoes, as all objects belong to the "earth" in terms of essence, their existence is defined and sustained—"protected"—by the "world". The "ontic" characteristics of "earth" and "world", their "matter" and their "content", are not truly antithetical, for what Heidegger calls an "intimacy" devolves from their opposition:

> In setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is an instigating of the struggle. But this does not happen in order that the work should settle and put an end to the strife in an insipid

¹ "The Origin of the Art Work", p. 663.
agreement, but in order that the strife should remain a strife. Setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work accomplishes this struggle. The work-being of the work consists in the fighting of the battle between world and earth. It is because the strife arrives at its high-point in the form of simple intimacy that the unity of the work comes about in the fighting of the battle...The repose of the work that rests in itself thus has its essence in the intimacy of strife.¹

Heidegger's meaning here will be more apparent, if the terms "matter" and "content" can be more clearly distinguished. What I call "content" here corresponds to what Heidegger calls "form", and which he distinguishes from "matter" in the following way,

That which gives things their permanence and solidity but also at the same time is the source of their particular mode of sensuous pressure—the coloured, resonant, hard, massy—is the matter in things. In this analysis of the thing as matter...form is already co-posed. The fixity of a thing, its consistency lies in the fact that a matter stands together with a form. The thing is a formed matter. This interpretation of the thing appeals to the immediate aspect with which the thing solicits us by its appearance....In this synthesis of matter and form a thing-concept has finally been found that applies equally to things of nature and things of use.²

Heidegger's notion of "form" is Platonic and idealistic, although he asserts that forms originate in the world inclusive of the mind, rather than in the mind alone. "Matter" is the primordial fact of a thing as an immediate presence, actual but infinite in its possibility.³ "Form" or "content"

¹ "The Origin of the Art Work", p. 675.
² Ibid., p. 657.
is a realization of a set of possibilities innate in the "matter" of the thing, and as such co-extensive with it. The "content" of a thing then is the significance which one makes determinate in terms of that thing's brute substantiality. The art work has illimitable significance because it balances "matter"and "content" in such a way that no set of significances can exhaust the primordial possibility of the work which continually asserts itself. The "strife" of the work of art is therefore a function of an ontological reciprocity. The mechanism of this reciprocity is obviously that the art work presents the actuality of things as both equal and other to its perceiver's own; his apprehension of it as an object of no instrumental consequence is valuable only in terms of possible significances.

X  Resemblance, Ambiguity and the "Riss"

What "happens" in van Gogh's painting is that a "world" is set up and an "earth" set forth in an antimonious, but intimate relation. It is because the painting presents a semblance of shoes, rather than the actuality of the shoes that this relation is possible, for in dealing with resemblances, rather than exact reproduction, van Gogh binds the bare conception of shoes to a deeper human reality.

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The "proliferation of resemblance extends an object"¹ writes Stevens:

The point at which this process begins, or rather at which this growth begins, is the point at which ambiguity has been reached. The ambiguity that is so favourable to the poetic mind is precisely the ambiguity favourable to resemblance. In this ambiguity, the intensification of reality by resemblance increases realization....It is as if a man who lived indoors should go outdoors on a day of sympathetic weather. His realization of the weather would exceed that of a man who lives indoors. It might, in fact, be intense enough to convert the real world about him into an imagined world. In short, a sense of reality keen enough to be in excess of the normal sense of reality creates a reality of its own. Here what matters is that the intensification of the sense of reality creates a resemblance: that reality of its own is a reality.²

Van Gogh's shoes are not the real shoes; they are not presented as shoes. As Heidegger notes, they are "empty, unused" and stand in "an undefined space". The ambiguity which marks the resemblance of these shoes to real shoes, however, intensifies the perceiver's sense of the reality of shoes generally through contrast, for he is ordinarily oblivious of them. Moreover, since this resemblance is ambiguous it expresses a question which our everyday conception of shoes cannot answer, but which the imagination resolves by the creation of an imagined world with a reality of its own.

Suddenly, the perceiver is "outdoors" as a "creature

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¹ Wallace Stevens, "Three Academic Pieces", The Necessary Angel (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 78. All further prose quotations of Stevens' writings will be from this edition unless otherwise noted.

² Ibid., pp. 78-79.
of the whole" for which the painting is the only true language. As Stevens suggests, resemblance, the soul of metaphor, is what binds reality together, and one resemblance naturally begets another:

...as to the resemblance between things in nature, it should be observed that resemblance constitutes a relation between them since, in some sense, all things resemble each other. Take, for example, a beach extending as far as the eye can reach, bordered, on the one hand, by trees and, on the other, by the sea. The sky is cloudless and the sun is red. In what sense do the objects in this scene resemble each other? There is enough green in the sea to relate it to the palms. There is enough of the sky reflected in the water to create a resemblance in some sense, between them. The sand is yellow between the green and the blue. In short, the light alone creates a unity not only in the recedings of distance, where differences become invisible, but also in the contacts of closer sight. So, too, sufficiently generalized, each man resembles all other men, each woman resembles all other women, this year resembles last year. The beginning of time will, no doubt, resemble the end of time. One world is said to resemble another.

The moment Stevens looks upon his hypothetical vista for resemblances, he finds them, for resemblance is nothing less than that continuity of the cosmos which a man can apprehend through the effort of his imagination. The mental operation by which Heidegger finds the "toilsome tread of the worker" in the "dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes" involves the same activity of imagination except that the worker and the shoes belong to different

2 Ibid., pp. 71-72.
spheres of existence, the one present in the painting, the other unlike the objects which Stevens relates, present only in the mind.

Simple association is not the answer, for as Heidegger's critique of the painting indicates, a work of art is an imaginative whole, complete in itself. Van Gogh imbues the shoes with qualities and attributes which distinguish both the "world" and the "earth" of the peasant woman. The combination of these attributes in the simple image of the painting expresses the conditions which give rise to the unique being of the thing nominally represented. The ambiguity of the painting is an advantage. The worker and her world may not be in the painting, but then it is manifest that the shoes are not really there either. It may be a greater leap from the shoes to the peasant woman herself, but one must still begin with a leap; that is, with the operation by which one's imagination transforms a mass of colour and line into shoes.¹ The first leap facilitates all subsequent ones. Once I decide that the image is not merely a fortuitous combination of paints, I cannot but notice the stress which the painter puts on certain attributes appropriate to a particular reality. In reconstructing this reality in terms of the bare fact of the painting, I become possessed by it; the shoes are not represented for me, but re-presented in me. Only in this sense is the painting an event.

The painting of the shoes is a "riss". On the one hand, it is a "cultural" object utilizing various conventions; on the other, a "natural" one mysteriously different from all others. Insofar as its manner of depicting shoes resists categorization, I know it belongs to the "earth", and I look for the secrets which it conceals. The ambiguity of the work permits it to conceal and reveal at the same time insofar as I cannot be certain that the presences which it brings to my mind are meant to be construed, only that they are. The everyday conceptions which one employs as the structural co-ordinates of one's perception of the painting are simultaneously imbued with mystery and the clarity of pure Presence. Yet, pure Presence must take shape also in terms of such conceptions. The ambiguity of the shoes is the essential ambiguity of all resemblances by which the multiplicity of all things find unity. Such ambiguity is an imperative, perceptual and conceptual, for in revealing the way in which all things may be the same and yet different, it asserts the co-extension of the reader's consciousness with the painting without negating the autonomy of either.

This rather anomalous situation is not as impossible as it might first appear if one keeps in mind that great art has an ontologizing function, and need not respect the ordinary distinctions of identity and difference so necessary to practical action. Aesthetic contemplation is
not in any immediate sense practical; it is concerned with ends, and not with means. Van Gogh's painting is successful, at least for Heidegger, to the extent that it demonically possesses the mind, and creates for him an imaginative world with a reality of its own. The "earth" upon which this reality stands is the originality of the painting; the "world" into which it intrudes is the culturally ordered and constituted consciousness of the philosopher. Taken together, "earth" and "world" form a "riss" testifying to the integrity and plenitude of Being.

Such conceptions as the "riss" are not mystical; nor are they impractically abstract. Poetic meaning is "that which exists through itself": it is necessarily ontological and, in that sense, a priori. A poem, as I have indicated, cannot exist without both a reader and a creator: it cannot exist in a vacuum. The significance of a poem, moreover, is that it appropriates the reader's consciousness to its own ends and their structures. This appropriation is only possible to the extent that reader and poem relate on a primary and primordial basis, that of a priori being. The "dual-unity" which results is Heidegger's "riss", and actualizes what is called poetic meaning insofar as it, of all things, truly exists through itself, including as it does, both the "world" which the reader knows, and the "earth" unknowably incarnate in the originality of the poem. The synthesis which follows from a successful poetic experience
is naturally valued by both the individual and his his-
torical "world", for while it defines that conflict of
"nature" and "culture" so problematic to the human mind,
it also reveals the intimacy of their relation. Such a
sense of intimacy is essential to one's sense of existential
integrity whatever one does, wherever one is. And within
limits, societies give poetry license to explore the "riss"
of "earth" and "world" without being bound unnecessarily
by the conceptions current in those societies struggle
with nature in the narrower sense. Poetic meaning is
without significance unless it exists through itself, but
to exist through itself it must be granted both a demonic
freedom and the power to use it.

The "rift" and the "design" of poetic "riss" there-
fore act: both in terms of poetic reference (what the
reader actually sees signified in the poem) and in terms
of poetic inference (what he conceives to be the possible
significance of the poem). A "riss" is not a simple dicho-
tomy; it is a matrix of "earth-world" relations extending to
all aspects of the poetic experience, and unifying it with
the consciousness of the reader: this, at least, is its
demonic potential.
Heidegger's interpretation of van Gogh's painting depends upon his interpretation of the ambiguity of the painter's depiction of the peasant woman's shoes, the fact that the image which the painting presents only expresses resemblance. As I have indicated, both ambiguity and resemblance in this situation are a function of the way in which the painting brings essential, but ordinarily unnoticed qualities of the shoes into the foreground. The shoes are depicted starkly and one cannot but notice the "dampness and saturation of the soil" which lies upon the leather as evidence of the owner's intimate relation with nature in the narrower sense. Such details constitute a deviation from the usual conception of shoes as "equipment", but are justified in their transgression to the extent that they render the being of the shoes. The "risse" which they create as the shoe's being is the juncture of the "world" and "earth" to which we also belong. Thus, the perceiver finds himself possessed, for the being of the shoes can only be understood as his Being.

In poetry different structures of presentation function in terms of the same process. The "matter" of poetry as utterance is obviously very different from that from which van Gogh's painting is constructed. Yet, the same
principles of ambiguity and resemblance hold, in a similar fashion. My experience of a poem is an experience of the simultaneous differentiation of a "world" and "earth", at first nominally the poet's, and finally, if the poem is successful, mine by virtue of its possession of me. This differentiation of "world" and "earth" is also by its very nature an integration of one with the other, and of both with my consciousness of them.

I Some Notes on the Concept of Ambiguity

Before going further, however, I must digress to deal more specifically with that most troublesome of terms, "ambiguity". As Geoffrey Leech says, "The trouble with the word AMBIGUITY is that it is itself an instance of troublesome ambiguity". And,

In linguistics, it has generally been used in a narrow sense which we may represent as 'more than one meaning for the same piece of language'; whereas in literary studies it has often been used in an extremely broad sense popularized by Empson in his witty and influential book Seven Types of Ambiguity: 'any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language'. These two senses roughly correspond to the narrow and wide senses of meaning distinguished in 3.1.3. There I found it convenient to confine 'meaning' to the narrow sense of 'cognitive meaning', and to use 'significance' for the wider sense of 'all that is communicated by a piece of language'. Similarly, I shall here prefer to use 'ambiguity' in the linguist's sense, and to keep it distinct from 'multiple significance' (which is Empson's 'ambiguity').

Now, I have used the word "ambiguity" in Empson's sense, rather than that which Leech chooses, for taken in the former way the term is more inclusive. What Leech calls 'cognitive meaning' is denotative meaning, the literal fact of a linguistic representation, but, as noted in regard to Yvor Winters, denotation and connotation, the figurative content of any representation, can only be separated with difficulty. "Meaning" is "that which exists through itself": it constitutes, to use Leech's terminology, the "significance" of a piece of language, both denotative and connotative. In choosing this more inclusive sense of the term, I admit to a specific view of poetic language as a "riss" in which "matter" and "content" are as inseparably dependent as the poem and its reader.

Leech's distinctions are precise, but their application is primarily relevant to everyday language and conception. Leech himself says of poetic language,

Both ambiguity and the wider concept of multiple significance are manifestations of the MANY VALUED character of poetic language. If an ambiguity comes to our attention in some ordinary functional use of language, we generally consider it a distraction from the message and a defect of style. But if it occurs in a literary text, we tend to give the writer the benefit of the doubt, and assume that a peaceful co-existence of alternative meanings is intended. In much the same way, if two levels of symbolism can be simultaneously read into a poem, we are often inclined to accept both, as contributing to the richness of its significance.3


2 On Modern Poets, pp. 73-74.

The crux of the matter is that the reader expects poetic language to be "many valued"; i.e., he looks for those transgressions of the "ordinary functional use of language" which indicate that language is being used to re-present as well as to represent. The reader does not expect an "oblique meaning" in poetry as E.M.W. Tillyard suggests, he looks for an extended meaning or "significance" complete in the poem. Stevens asserts that poetry is the language of the whole; if one accepts this assertion, one must also accept that poetry contrives to extend the existent possibilities of ordinary, that is, of quotidian language beyond their usual limits.

In this sense, a successful poem is revolutionary, adding not only to poetic tradition, but reshaping cultural history. The ambiguity which the reader finds in poetry is not that of obliquity, it is the not wholly resolved possibility of language and mind in their most intense moment. This ambiguity is the ambiguity of the origins of the language which men use habitually from day to day, forgetful of the possibility which is its quintessence. Insofar as it seeks to be original, it seeks to be primordial, and insofar as it achieves this primordiality, the reality which it presents can only resemble that which has gone before.

What I mean when I say that poetry is "ambiguous" is that it deals in likeness¹, that it is inherently metaphorical.

Whether or not poetry uses metaphor in a conventional way is not of importance; even the barest of images may assert the figurative essence of existence, implying as van Gogh's portrait of shoes does, a hidden "world" and "earth". In this sense what an aesthetic object omits is often as significant as what it reproduces explicitly. Indeed, as I have indicated, an art work cannot reconcile "world" and "earth" through the rift-design or "riss" which it forms in conjunction with the observer's mind unless it-withholds as much as it sets forth. This is not to say that a poem must be incomprehensible, only that its relevancies and relationships should exceed the reader's ability to categorize and comprehend them. Shakespeare, as any Shakespearean critic knows, is not universal in the sense that he appeals to all men, but because the universe which is his canon transcends the capability of the individual mind, even of the cultural consciousness of an era. The mind cannot conceive the conditions by which it takes on its singular character, much less the singular character of the consciousness of a cultural era; but an art work in conjunction with a mind may express these conditions in a particular way.

Poetry, as Heidegger says, brings man into proximity with the essence of things, and in so doing brings things into being: "Poetry is the establishing of being by means of the word". ¹ Things and consciousness belong to opposite sides

¹ "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry", p. 281.
of the "rise" though they rise from the same ground: poetry brings them together, and thus reconciles us to the ground of existence, i.e., to the interminable possibility of all that actuality which is the extent of what we call both reality and unreality.

II Stylistic Transgression and Ordinary Language

The essence of what I earlier referred to as "poetic deviation", and of the "demonics" of the poem inheres in the expression of existential condition occurring in a poem through the presentation of unexpected possibilities of language use. The poetic is fundamentally a language act in the widest sense of both words; its point of departure is the linguistic history of a given culture. Of all arts poetry is the closest to the heart of the language which it uses. Insofar as language is a mode of conception, as well as a mode of perception; poetry is that art which deals in the widest variety of cognitive functions. The "matter" of painting and sculpture is primarily visual; that of music, auditory; that of dance, kinesthetic; but poetry fuses thought with evoked sensory perception of all kinds: the idea with the image. In this sense, the poetic is the most imaginative of experiences, for every image which it embodies carries with it a schema.¹ That is to say, no image can be evoked in language without a conceptual order, or more specifically, an ordering principle co-extensive with

¹ See Heidegger's Kant the Problem of Metaphysics, pp. 93-113.
its occurrence. Otherwise, the reader could not understand the image as an image. Every concept carries with it associated images as well as associated concepts. The concept which is the concomitant of the poetic image may be a general notion of an object, real or fictitious; it may be nothing more than a grammatical convention governing one's perception of linguistic gestalten, but it is of no significance by itself—just as the image, in fact, can be of no significance by itself without conceptual orientation.

Consider again, for instance, the poem "Blues":

```
 l  e
 o e
 love
 o evol
 love o
 evol
 e o
 e  l
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If the reader can ignore for the moment the word "love" and the neologism "evol", he has here nothing but disconnected sounds; that is, auditory images, seemingly without associated concepts. At least, he must conclude this, if he construes the word "image" to denote a simple perception without necessary content. The utterances are, however, presented in terms of a linguistic, albeit poetic convention; hence, they call forth principles of language, even though they do not utilize them. Indeed, the fact that these principles are not present, but only expressed in

\[1\] bp Nichol, Twentieth Century Poetry and Poetics, p. 414.
absentia, gives them a conceptual determinacy that they would not otherwise have. Such conceptual determinacy in turn evokes subsidiary conceptual possibilities to the extent that the significance or "content" of the poem must extend from its "matter".

Why are the ordinary principles of syntax and morphology not in evidence? The moment I ask this question, I not only focus upon the abstract principles of certain language functions, but on the relationship of each part of the poem to every other part, and on the hidden implications of each of these relationships. I must search for hidden semblances and resemblances. Linguistic deviation implies the general concept of deviation here. In a similar fashion concepts of limitation, simplicity, fragmentation, absence, integration, and resolution attach themselves to the central concepts of "love" and "evol". Even such a minimalist poem as "Blues" is in its own fashion a complete cognitive act. Insofar as it plays with the possibilities of language, it makes image and schema inseparable.

The importance of this unification cannot be stressed enough. In everyday language one solves the problems posed by deviant utterance by separating image and scheme, analyzing their relation, and re-uniting them in terms of one's pre-conceptions. In short, it is conventional to refer the problematic image-schema generated by a deviant utterance to a convention or conventions which will resolve it by depriving it of what brings it to one's attention in the first
place: its originality. The utterance is interpreted paraphrastically, subsumed by a secondary meaning, and its unusualness attributed to "error". Poetry, on the other hand, poses problems either unsolvable in this manner, or presumed to be unsolvable. Special convention such as those implied in the ubiquitous expressions "willing suspension of disbelief" and "poetic licence" help to keep poetry a problem.

Suppose that a drunk approaches me on the street corner and says, "Kin I haf a cuppakafe fer a dime?". I know that whatever request the drunk is making is expressed "incorrectly" in a number of ways. Therefore I must separate the fact or "matter" of what he says from the "content" which I infer; I must separate image and schema. Now, in this case there is a sense in which this separation is not valid: my tendency to interpret rather than accept the literal fact of the drunk's statement is consequent upon an initial conception inseparable from my primary conception of the utterance. That is, I could not act the way I do unless the image of the drunk's statement did not express the schema of linguistic deviation. The point is, however, that I find this deviation in a context which requires practical action, and not contemplation; I ignore the deviant nature of the utterance and focus instead on the problem of an appropriate response.

If I discovered the utterance in a book of poetry
as,

DRUNK:

Kin  I
haf a
cuppakafe
fer a
dime

I would react much differently. The ambiguity inherent in the grammatical and lexical discontinuity of the statement would be supplemented, albeit artificially, by a poetic ambiguity. Therefore I would tend to notice possibilities I would never have thought of in the first instance. The relation between "Kin" and "I" might have something to do with kinship. I might infer that "haf" means "half" as well as "have". Indeed, I could decide that the orthographic irregularity of the utterance implies some concept to do with the "speech of ordinary men". Along with the literal fact of request, the image of a drunken man begging, I would have to consider concepts of kinship, "halfness" or partiality in its several sense, and the "ordinary man". To consider these concepts would be to revise my notion of drunkenness in terms of new possibilities and to give the basic image a depth and complexity unwarranted by the first and actual instance of the drunk's solicitation.

Obviously, if I reacted in this way to a drunk in actuality, difficulties would arise, for the drunk would expect me to answer what he says as a communication, correct or incorrect; he would not expect me to use his words
as an occasion for contemplation. Without a doubt he would become belligerent if I did not act appropriately. In an actual situation where an utterance deviates from linguistic norms to the point of ambiguity one assumes, as Leech would have it, that there is "more than one cognitive meaning for the same piece of language", but only one appropriate meaning. There, I must separate image and schema by actualizing a single possibility of perception in terms of a ruling conception, however ambiguous the "matter" of that primary perception may be. "Yes, you may have a dime for a cup of coffee", I would say condescendingly, not perhaps realizing that the drunk really wanted an excuse to talk to someone, that he really wanted a sense of basic kinship with someone, anyone in fact who would make him feel less "partial", less ordinary and forgotten. Efficacious action, as opposed to contemplative action always requires that one separate from one's image of a situation all those possibilities of mind which do not seem of use in terms of a particular decision.

Readers naturally attempt to make this kind of separation in poetry, conventions notwithstanding. It is the measure of great poetry that paraphrase cannot replace the "original" without loss of "meaning"; that is to say, without annihilation of the poem's autonomous possibilities.

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If, for instance, there were a single complete explication of Donne's "The Canonization", the poem would become culturally irrelevant, for insofar as its fact would be subservient to a single conception a posteriori, it could no longer generate or "create" the problems which have endlessly puzzled and delighted scholars. To the extent that the poem then could be said to have lost its generative capacity, it would have lost its facticity: the brute fact of a thing is its "earth", its self-concealing possibility as a part of "nature". The poem would cease to be of interest except in a very circumscribed historical sense. Parity between perceptual possibility and conceptual determinancy in the poetic experience is of the utmost importance in appreciation of it.

The basic principle of such a parity is, I have said, foregrounded linguistic transgressions which draw attention to the linguistic "matter" of what the poet constructs in the semblance of a given reality; it is the fact that the poem is a resemblance, not a reproduction. The referential structure of a poem is always incomplete insofar as it deals in relations of resemblance, and not in relations of identity; what completion is to be found therein is to be found by means of inference. This quality of relationality, as I indicated earlier in discussing Whitehead's

aesthetic, is paramount to the notion of "beauty". It predi­
cicates those necessary inferences which make the poem more
than a conundrum, which make it an experience in which the
reader's imaginative intentions and associations are inte­
grated with those evident literally in the poetic object.
Dylan Thomas writes,

You can tear a poem apart to see what makes it
tick, and say to yourself, when the works are
laid out before you, the vowels, the consonants,
the rhymes and rhythms, 'Yes, this is it. This
is why the poem moves me so. It is because of
the craftsmanship.' But you're back again where
you began. You're back with the mystery of hav­
ing been moved by words. The best craftsmanship
always leaves holes and gaps in the works of the
poem, so that something that is not in the poem
can creep, crawl, flash, or thunder in. ¹

Very obviously, there are two ways of leaving such "holes
and gaps...that something that is not in the poem can creep,
crawl, flash, or thunder in". On the one hand, the poem
may omit significant linguistic variables, thus qualifying
the reader's expectations; on the other it may over-use
other variables to modify these expectations through am­
plification and complication. "Blues" is a good example
of a poem which functions in terms of linguistic omission;
Donne's "The Canonization", that which operates in terms of
linguistic excess. I need only present the first stanza
of the latter poem to show the difference plainly,

¹ Dylan Thomas, "Notes on the Art of Poetry", Modern
Poets on Poetry, ed. J. Scully (New York: Fontona Library,
For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsie, or my gout,
My five gray haires, or ruin'd fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your minde with Arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honour, or his grace,
Or the Kings reall, or his stamped face
Contemplate, what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.

Not only does Donne use all the resources of ordinary language, he utilizes principles of poetic language peculiar to his time. The manner in which Donne can synthesize conversational language and poetic convention is, of course, one of the most notable features of his poetry, and in this case is developed more completely in subsequent stanzas which, for the sake of brevity, I will not include. Let it suffice to note that Donne's poem has the particularity and emotive power of everyday speech despite its obvious use of a complicated prosody, puns, bathos, extended metaphor, and emblematic imagery. Paradoxically, however, the basic principle of the poem is much the same as that which operates in bp Nichol's "Blues" despite the latter's minimal craftsmanship. The over-use of linguistic variables produces the same ultimate result as their omission in successful poetry—that is, both produce a significant ambiguity demanding unusually complex inference. What Donne's "The Canonization" and Nichol's "Blues" share is linguistic overdetermination, to use Peckham's term. 2 Both poems select cox:


certain sets of variables for emphasis, and this selection constitutes a linguistic deviation generative of a new scheme of understanding. The overdetermination which the reader finds in "Blues" appears against a blank background; that, in "The Canonization", against a background of linguistic plenitude; but both poems have their own unique worth.

III  Imagination and Decreation

Wallace Stevens writes of the imagination,

...the imagination is the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos.1

For the imagination to operate it must have an "abnormal" situation, one sufficiently ambiguous that it cannot be resolved by other and subsidiary faculties of mind. Valery writes,

...language is no longer a transitive act, an expedient. On the contrary, it has its own value, which must remain intact in spite of the operations of the intellect on the given propositions. Poetic language must preserve itself and remain the same, not to be altered by the act of intelligence that finds or gives it a meaning.2

And,

...there must be...a necessary, or I should say "constitutional" contrast between the writer and the linguist. The latter is by definition an observer and an interpreter of statistics. The writer is quite the opposite: he is a deviation.

1  "Imagination as Value", p. 153.

a maker of deviations. This does not mean that all deviations are permitted to him; but is precisely his business and his ambition to find the deviations that enrich, that give the illusion of the power or the purity or the depth of language. In order to work through language, he works on language. On this material he exercises an artificial—that is, a deliberative, recognizable—effect....he must have a precise idea of the prevailing laws of language so as to use them for his personal ends and to accomplish the work of man, which is always to oppose nature by means of nature.

My definition of poetic meaning as "that which exists through itself" is implied in Valery's first statement wherein he speaks of permanent poetic language, its inalterability and autonomy. Valery's second statement follows naturally enough from the first, and relates to Stevens' notion of the imagination in an obvious way. The imagination, like Hesiod's Theogony, begins with chaos; it perceives in language inconsistency, irregularity, and flux. The imagination sees language as an "earth" in Heidegger's sense of the term; in attempting to give it "the illusion of the power or the purity or the depth of language", the poetic imagination seeks to make a "world" of words. Charles Olson seems to think in a similar way when he writes,

A work which would free much of the encumbrance upon man as himself a universe—not microorganism, microcosm—would start with Hesiod....What I am gesturing in, is a 'literature'...a theogony. As such—and not as it has sounded—it is the total placement of man and things among all possibilities of the universe.

If one were to argue the opposite to what I maintain in

1 Valery, pp. 171-172.

2 Charles Olson, Proprioception (San Francisco: Four Seasons, 1965), p. 16.
this context, that language is, according to my previous
definitions, consistent, regular, and orderly, one would
still have to conclude that the imagination seeks to en-
rich language in the way which Valery asserts it does.
To quote Stevens' famous paradox,

A. A violent order is a disorder; and
B. A great disorder is an order. These
Two things are one. (Pages of illustrations)\

To presume that language is a "world", as such, consistent,
regular, and orderly, is to make an implicit separation
between an ideal language and an actual one. Any concept
of the "ideal" in this context is to be understood as a
concept of cultural order, that is, a "world" concept.
Any concept of the actual on the other hand devolves from
a perception of "natural" fact, that is an "earth" percept.
If one wishes to argue that language is innately orderly,
one must deal with the appearance of disorder which con-
stitutes the actuality, or fact of language. Indeed, one
must begin with this problem, for where else can one find
the materials to construct a concept of linguistic order?
Hence, one begins with chaos whatever one's immediate under-
standing of, or orientation towards poetry.

What Stevens means when he says that the poetic ima-
gination "enables us to perceive the normal in the abnor-
mal" does not mean that poetry must speak unambiguously

1 "Connoisseur of Chaos", Poems by Wallace Stevens, p. 97.
with a perfectly consistent voice; to the contrary, poetry seeks order through disorder. In this way, poetic language is always deviant in two senses: it is deviant in one sense because it departs from the ideal by using "natural" means; in another, because it departs from the "natural" by seeking through "natural" means ideal ends. Herein is the "rise" of poetic thought, and here too, what Stevens calls the "reality of decreation".1

It is the quintessence of poetry that it does, as Valery puts it "oppose nature by means of nature". Stevens comments, using Simone Weil to present the problem in another way,

Simone Weil in _La Pesanteur et La Grace_ has a chapter on what she calls decreation. She says that decreation is making pass from the created to the uncreated, but that destruction is making pass from the created to nothingness. Modern reality is a reality of decreation, in which our revelations are not the revelations of belief, but the precious portents of our own powers. The greatest truth we could hope to discover, in whatever field we discovered it, is that man's truth is the final resolution of everything.2

In aesthetic terms the act of creation is the act by which one makes that which has not existed before. But creation depends upon an essential discrimination separating what has been created from what is yet uncreated. "We participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves," writes Weil, cryptically noting that our perception of the "uncreated" is attendant upon our ability to rid ourselves

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1 "The Relations Between Poetry and Painting", pp. 174-5.
2 Ibid.
of those structures of understanding by which existence becomes but the reflection of a limited and limiting pre-conception.\(^1\) Creation is an endless process. What I know of stability, I know either through: the "revelations of belief", unlikely in a desacrilized age, or through the "precious portents" of my own powers, as contradictory as that might seem to be in relation to the concept of "decreation".

The contradiction in terms here is fortunately more apparent than real: Stevens does not insist that modern reality, the "reality of decreation" is a revelation of the fact of one's powers, but it consists of a sign of concealed power. If man could define all his possibilities, he would have finished creating himself; he would have no further reason to be, and therefore no being. In Heidegger's terms, the "world" would have overcome the "earth". A poetic work "decreates" the actuality of human conceptions of power, possibility, and significance by creating the likenesses of an existence which could not have been anticipated: it throws existing beliefs into jeopardy, so that man may participate in, rather than pre-determine the "creation of the world". Where belief once functioned to communicate the essential mystery that is the ground of existence, acts of the imagination must now suffice, for, as Stevens says, "man's truth is the final resolution of everything".\(^2\)

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2 Weil writes, "We possess nothing in the world—a mere chance can strip us of everything—except the power to say 'I'." *Gravity and Grace*, p. 23.
In the imagination, as I have noted, subject and object interpenetrate; hence, the poetic act is not, as it might seem in view of Stevens' previous statement, solipsistic, but...

...the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages, the more likely he may be to achieve an humilitas sufficient to make him of use.

Olson's concept of poetic imagination errs in its extreme organismism: he simply does not give "cultural" factors their due. Man, as the truism goes, is a social animal; if, on the other hand, he is as much a creature of "nature" as any other object, on the other, every object of "nature" exists within his explicitly "cultural" perspective. What Stevens calls "man's truth" is both "cultural" and "natural", a "riss" of "world" and "earth". What distinguishes "nature" and "culture" in the poetic experience is their reciprocal relation, constitutive as it is of human being beyond the confines of simple personality. The demonism of the poem inheres in that principle as much as any other: that it relates man's "cultural" being to his "natural" being (and

1 Charles Olson, "Human Universe", pp. 24-25. It is interesting to compare the concepts of individualism and epistemological alienation variously represented by Olson, Stevens, R.D. Laing, and Winters—despite the obvious differences of their respective outlooks.
vice versa) in some basic manner which transcends his ordinary sense of this relation as constitutive of himself. The poem is, of course, the creation of someone, or (as with computer poetry) of some thing Other than us: the fullest comprehension of it can only be accomplished within its ontological frame-of-reference, not that by which the reader usually orients his actions. In this sense, by "willing suspension of disbelief" and the "precious portents" of his own powers, the reader is able to rid himself of the "lyrical interference of the individual as ego". By this act of "humilitas", he inaugurates a contemplative state without the aid of religious belief or magic: he "decreates" the self whose cognitive determinacy would obviate truly original aesthetic "happening". The poetic experience is therefore an act of self-transcendence.

IV Williams' "Nantucket" and its Tradition

To more fully explicate the manner in which the poem acts as the demonic agent of such a transcendence, consider William Carlos Williams' "Nantucket":

NANTUCKET

Flowers through the window
lavender and yellow

changed by white curtains--
smell of cleanliness--

Sunshine of late afternoon--
On the glass tray
A glass pitcher, the tumbler turned down, by which a key is lying--And the immaculate white bed. ¹

What is immediately striking about this poem is its ambiguity. It involves a simple description, but the reader cannot quite orient this description in terms of everyday spatial sense. Is the speaker inside the room or without? Is it legitimate to impute the existence of an observer here at all? How does the title of the poem relate to the rest of the poem; that is, why should it be called "Nantucket"? Is the poet writing impressionistically and imagistically, or does he imply meanings which would give his "images" the metaphorical force of symbols? To what degree can a reader impute to the poem conceptual intention? For that matter, is the poem really a poem, or is it a prosaic, and not very grammatical conundrum? These questions, and more, devolve naturally from the text of the poem, and define as they do, the "matter" of the poem, the brute fact of its apparent existence. If I do not answer some of these questions by inferring "content", the poem remains closed, enclosed in its own verbal complexity; it may exist through itself perhaps, but it hides the essence of that existence.

The ambiguity of the poem defines its "earth", and by the incompleteness of its referentiality moves one to infer

a "world" hidden but possible. The opacity of the poem is as much a function of the "earth" which interpenetrates human being to give human preconceptions their fixity and permanence of form, as it is of the "earth" of the poem itself, if indeed, one can make this kind of dichotomization. How does one explain what only resembles any pre-existent reality? To do so, one can only posit a new "world"; that is, an open reality which supercedes the actuality of everyday experience. The imagination, as Stevens says, "is the irrepressible revolutionist".

What is the "world" of "Nantucket"? The town of Nantucket from which the New England sailors ventured forth to fish and hunt whales is only present in the title; it, its harbour, the legends and stories which are the popular mythology of the place are hidden by the simple image of a room. I cannot see the few old sailors that remain as testimony of the time when Melville was inspired to write Moby-Dick. The old houses are torn down one by one; the cobblestones replaced by asphalt; and only the graveyards recall the zealousness that drove the Puritans to struggle with the elements:

...they stressed the "spirit"--for what else could they do?--and this spirit is an earthly pride which they, prideless, referred to heaven and the next world. And for this we praise them, instead of for the one thing in them that was valuable: their tough littleness and weight of many to carry through the cold; not their

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1 "Imagination as Value", p. 154.
brokeness but their projection of the great flower of which they were the seed.

The Pilgrims were mistaken not in what they did, because they went hard to work with their hands and heads, but in what they imagined for their warmth. It could not have been otherwise. But it is sordid that a rich world should follow apathetically after. It is they who must have invented the "soul", but the perversion for this emptiness, this dream, this pale negative to usurp the place of that which really they were destined to continue.

This stress of the spirit against the flesh has produced a race incapable of flower. Upon that part of the earth they occupied true spirit dies because of the Puritans, except through vigorous revolt. They are the bane, not the staff. Their religious zeal, mistaken for a thrust up toward the sun, was a strike in, in not toward germination but the confinements of a tomb.¹

It is tempting to interpret "Nantucket" as a parable of the Puritan sensibility. For Williams, the Puritans'sensibility blinded them to the possibilities of the land they colonized; they could not accept that which religion or reason could not fully assimilate. In this sense, the Puritans could not create, only exploit, for the source of all possibility in the New World was hidden from them; to recognize that possibility would have been to recognize the material fact, the "matter" of their existence as valid in itself, unredeemed by the "spirit".

There was not ground to build on, with a ground all blossoming about them—under their noses. Their thesis is a possession of the incomplete—like senseless winds or waves or the fire itself.²

² Ibid., p. 114.
Ahab embodies one aspect of the Puritan spirit in Williams' sense of it, for he seeks vengeance upon the White Whale, as much because of the arbitrary way it took his leg as because it just took it:

And then it was, that suddenly sweeping his sickle-shaped lower jaw beneath him, Moby-Dick had reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field....ever since that fatal encounter, Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more feel for that frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations.¹

The White Whale is mysterious, ambiguous, and unpredictable: it represents the self-concealing earth, and its conflict with the "world". Ahab seeks to conquer Moby-Dick, to destroy what he vaguely senses to be the ambience of his own existence. If he could recognize the whale for what he is, and accept this recognition he would not be the Puritan which he is, and he would not call Nantucket his home harbour.

This last point is most important, for Nantucket represents by its very nature a certain tradition:

Nantucket! Take out your map and look at it. See what a real corner of the world it occupies; how it stands there, away off shore, more lonely than the Eddystone lighthouse. Look at it—a mere hillock, and elbow of sand; all beach without a background. There is more sand there than you could use in twenty years as a substitute for blotting-paper. Some gamesome wights will tell you that they have to plant weeds there, they don't grow naturally; that they import Canada

thistles; that they have to send beyond seas for spile to stop a leak in an oil-cask; that pieces of wood in Nantucket are carried about like bits of the true cross in Rome; that people there plant toadstools before their houses to get under the shade in summer time; that one blade of grass makes an oasis...that they are so shut up, belted about, every way enclosed, surrounded, and made an utter island of by the ocean, that to their very chairs and tables small clams will sometimes be found adhering, as to the backs of sea-turtles.¹

Nantucket is a waste. It is as featureless and as bleak as what Williams conceives the Puritan imagination to be; it is a land which may be safely disregarded; it is "shut up, belted about, every way enclosed, surrounded": a circumscribed "world" where nothing is without the intervention of man. Nantucket is a "world" without a "earth"; it has, as Melville's narrator notes, no "background"; it is the tabula rasa of mind without imagination, a convenient base for action, but only a base. Nantucketers cannot live in Nantucket; they find their living, as with Ahab, the apotheosis of their existence, in conflict with the sea which surrounds the town. The Ahab-like Puritan sensibility will not accept its own "earth", but it is driven by its very "nature" to seek a substitute mystery:

They first caught crabs and quohogs in the sand; grown bolder, they waded out with nets for mackerel; more experienced, they pushed off in boats and captured cod; and at last, launching a navy of great ships on the sea, explored this watery world; put an incessant belt of circumnavigations around it; peeped in at Behring Straits; and in

¹ Moby-Dick, p. 77.
all seasons and all oceans declared everlasting war with the mightiest animated mass that has survived the Flood; most monstrous and most mountainous! That Himalayan, salt-sea mastodon, clothed with such portentousness of unconscious power, that his very panics are more to be dreaded than his most fearless and malicious assaults!

And thus have these naked Nantucketeers, these sea-hermits issuing from their ant-hill in the sea, overrun and conquered the watery world like so many Alexanders; parcelling out among them... oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland.... two-thirds of this terraqueous globe are Nantucketer's. For the sea is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires; other seamen having but a right of way through it. Merchant ships are but extension bridges; armed ones but floating forts; even privates and privateers, though following the sea as highwaymen the road, they but plunder other ships, other fragments of the land like themselves, without seeking to draw their living from the bottomless deep itself. The Nantucketer, he alone resides and riots on the sea; he alone, in Bible language, goes down to it in ships; to and fro ploughing it as his own special plantation. There is his home; there lies his business, which a Noah's flood would not interrupt, though it overwhelmed all the millions in China. He lives on the sea, as prairie cocks in the prairie; he hides among the waves, he climbs them as chamois hunters climb the Alps. For years he knows not the land; so that when he comes to it at last, it smells like another world, more strangely than the moon would to an Englishman. With the landless gull, that at sunset folds her wings and is rocked to sleep between billows; so, at nightfall, the Nantucketer, out of the sight of land, furls his sails, and lays him to his rest, while under his very pillow rush herds of walruses and whales.1

The Nantucketer's inability to accept his "earth" drives him to the sea, but he cannot escape what is the condition for all his acts, even that of non-acceptance and escape. His inability predicates a conflict of "earth" and "world" even

1 Melville, Moby-Dick, pp. 78-79.
more apparent than that which he seeks to avoid. The
sea in its vastness and depth is representative of the
formless possibility of the "earth" for that man who would
set his "world" irremediably against it. Nothing grows
from the sea, as from the soil; but much grows in it.
And it is this indwelling mystery¹ that the Nantucketer
cannot accept, but must tap. How appropriate is the Nan-
tucketer's relationship to the sea! It is the mystery
which his Puritan soul would negate, and yet it also em-
blemizes his existential groundlessness.

The word "Nantucket" then reflects a tradition itself
reflective of a historical relationship between "cultural"
man and the "natural" universe. Insofar as the title of
Williams' poem is "Nantucket" one might construe that such
concepts and associations as have just been dealt with are
in some way relevant to the essential "meaning" of the poem.
But clearly, while they cannot be ignored, they are not rele-
vant in an immediate sense

V The New Reality of "Nantucket"

Interesting as it might be to treat the poem as a
parable, it only resembles one. The word "Nantucket" with
all its historical and cultural connotations and associations

¹ Heidegger writes, "Never one truth alone;/ To receive
intact/ The coming forth of truth's nature/ In return for
boundless steadfastness:/ Imbed the thinking heart/ In the
humble patience/ Of unique high-minded/ And noble memories",
Discourse on Thinking, p. 82.
is a point of departure. The poem is not "about" the Puritan sensibility. The concept of "Puritan sensibility" is in fact one of those conceptions which the poetic experience "decreates" and transcends. In entitling the poem as he does, Williams establishes not only the place where the hypothetical room exists, but a cultural milieu whose traditions extend beyond the concepts which we use to hypothesize them. It is important to note the kind of place that "Nantucket" is, but the reader ought not to restrict the poem to this conception. If he supposes that the poem bespeaks the ambience of Puritan attitudes toward the sensual and sensuous world, his mortifying spirituality, his passion for order, and his consequent self-confinement and sterility, he would have a sensible interpretation of the poem, especially of the last lines, "And the/ immaculate white bed". This interpretation, however, would be little better than a highly conceptualized paraphrase with a certain historical and philosophical viability of its own. The poem not only refers to existing conceptions of the town Nantucket, it violates them.

After all, how does the poem begin?

Flowers through the window
lavender and yellow

The Nantucket of which Melville wrote was a "mere hillock, and elbow of sand; all beach without background". This Nantucket is initially characterized by flowers "lavender and yellow". Moreover, the ambiguity of Williams' language
is such that the reader cannot tell whether these flowers are inside or outside the room. If he accepts the hypothetical nature of this scene, its virtuality, and the literal fact of the language as referential structure, the flowers are not only both inside and outside the room, they are in the window pane which nominally mediates human perception of them. The couplet begins and ends with a plenum of floral colour. It is true that the order of the poem's syntax suggests a process of what might be called "floration": first, the flowers by themselves; then, the flowers in the window in media res; finally, the flowers transforming the rooms in terms of their chromatic essence, "lavender and yellow". This reading, however, supposes a direction of perception dependent upon the existence of an assumed observer inside the room looking out. The observer may be there, but not necessarily since it is just as reasonable to see the observer outside the room looking in at the flowers. As I shall indicate, this apparently impossible situation is a function of linguistic overdetermination. For the moment, let it suffice to note that the transformative power of the flowers is given primary relational significance without regard to the ordinary positional determinations by which one orients one's perceptions and conceptions. The reader cannot "place" himself unambiguously in the picture—he is "decreation"; the better, in Simone Weil's sense, to participate in a process of creation.
Such "decreation" has little to do with the historical and cultural complex represented by the place, Nantucket, except insofar as it also "decreates" the conventional view of Nantucket as it devolves from that complex. What this "decreation" does is define certain ontological priorities. First, the flowers cannot exist simultaneously in two places except through the superaddition of human consciousness. In ordinary perception, a thing always exists both in its place outside the body, and its image in the mind even though normal instrumental functioning demands that exterior presence be given priority. The first couplet of the poem therefore reproduces the actuality of the conditions by which a man perceives anything: "dual unity". But the consciousness which is created through this reproduction is one which is "rid of the lyrical interference of the ego", for it is co-extensive\(^1\) with that which occasions it, the physical fact of the room—as indeed that is co-extensive with it. This peculiar and problematic relation is remarked upon by the poet himself in another context:

> The inevitable flux of the seeing eye toward measuring itself by the world it inhabits can only result in himself crushing humiliation unless the individual can raise [sic] to some approximate co-extension with the universe. This is possible by aid of the imagination.\(^2\)

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2. "Spring and All", William Carlos Williams, pp. 16-17.
When I say that the reader is "decreated" by the poem, I mean that his preconceptions are nullified, and that the particularized "self" or "ego" which is the totality of these preconceptions gives place to what Coleridge called "the infinite I AM"¹, that is, the primordial possibility of human being as being. He must subordinate his individual and personal volition, its limited concerns and possibilities, to the will of the poem. Demoniacally, his consciousness of the poem is intimately his, but not his alone insofar as its source and action belongs to some Other. Hence, the reader becomes co-extensive with some Other and with the "universe" which it constitutes. The "decreation" which the poem accomplishes is a dissipation of "empirical" reality, of preconception and self-conception axiomatic to the existence of empirical observation.

At the risk of digression, I should recall Coleridge's comments on primary and secondary imagination, and the "infinite I AM":

The imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to

¹ Biographia Literaria, p. 167.
re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.\(^1\)

The "infinite I AM", as I have noted, corresponds to human being in all its possibility. The apprehension of such being is only possible when the act by which the "finite mind" is created is repeated or reproduced in the mind. Since the "primary imagination" corresponds to the "eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" which is human being, the reality of this act is nominally imaginative rather than empirical. As Sir Philip Sidney notes in his famous "Apology for Poetry"\(^2\), the poet does not pretend to be other than imaginative, and this, in the Coleridgean scheme, must be the strength of poetry. "Secondary imagination" is a process by which the "primary imagination" achieves its end in this sense, for it "dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates" those structures of mind and matter which would impose empirical standards of "truth" where they do not apply. The "secondary imagination" is that process by which the reader "wills not to will", that is, "lets things be" in Heidegger's sense;\(^3\) it initiates "willing suspension

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1 Biographia Literaria, p. 167.


3 See Heidegger's "Memorial Address" in Discourse on Thinking where the philosopher makes such comments as, "meditative thinking does not happen just by itself any more than does calculative thinking....it requires greater effort", pp. 46-47.
of disbelief", "decreating" the limiting power of the finite "I am".

The reader should not be surprised that "Nantucket" deviates in its very first lines both from his "cultural" preconceptions as to the place, and from his ordinary way of understanding in a more basic sense. The poem does not purport to be Nantucket; it purports first and foremost to be a poem; secondarily, it purports to present a semblance of the human reality of Nantucket.

What the poem "Nantucket" does is to recreate the conditions which give rise to all that is actual and possible in the place, Nantucket. The mode by which this new and particularized reality comes to being is a new "world". What the reader knows of "Nantucket" is historically given, a mixture of fact and legend which may or may not be true, but is inevitably "dead" unless the imagination can vitalize it. Williams writes,

We can begin by saying: No opinion can be trusted; even the facts may be nothing but a printer's error; but if a verdict be unanimous, it is sure to be the wrong one, a crude rush of the herd which has carried its object before it like a helpless condoning image. If we cannot make a man live when he is gone, it is boorish to imprison him dead within some narrow definition, when, were he in his shoes before us we could not do it. It's lies such history, and dangerous.1

History must "live" in the "cultural" extensions which are the end of art and poetry. This is the sense in which "Nantucket" succeeds, for it represents the historical

1 In the American Grain, pp. 189-90.
conditions of a particular "cultural" situation by constituting a present within the scope of human being.

Flowers through the window
lavender and yellow

are

changed by white curtains--
smell of cleanliness--

Sunshine of late afternoon--

The floral splendor of the flowers, the growing, spreading sensuosity of "nature" transforms the room, and is transformed by the room: "changed by white curtains". The room is lived in; it embodies an order specific to a man and a "world". What grows from the earth, or in a more metaphysical sense from the "earth", spills over into the miniscule "world" of the room. Here is a "riss"; a process of interlocking "natural" and "cultural" relations somehow fundamental to Nantucket as a place with an ongoing history. The whiteness of the curtains qualifies the colour of the flower, but in so doing reflects that colour. The clean smell of the room reflects the neatness of its owner, and his "natural" antagonism towards the chaos of the "earth"; "smell" of cleanliness thus qualifies sensual fecundity which is implicit in the image of the flowers. The phrase does more than this; in fact, it calls forth an attribute of the flowers not mentioned to this point: their fragrance.

The static order of the "world" opposes, but is interpenetrated by, the flux of sensation which is the "earth".
There can be no escape from this interpenetration, for what exists in the room exists in our perception according to "natural" laws. What the reader sees is illuminated by "Sunshine of late afternoon", a mellowing yellow light which changes the perceptions which it makes possible. This Nantucket is not the Nantucket of Melville, nor of the Puritans, but an outgrowth of the tradition they represent, a sensuously conceived particularity which seeks the universal basis, the ontological "truth" of the tradition itself.

The poem exemplifies what Williams means when he writes,

Being an artist I can produce, if I am able, universals of general applicability. If I succeed in keeping myself objective enough, sensual enough, I can produce the factors, the concretions of materials by which others shall understand and so be led to use—that they may the better see, touch, taste, enjoy—their own world differing as it may from mine. By mine, they, different, can be discovered to be the same as I, and thrown into contrast, will see the implications of a general enjoyment through me.

That—all my life I have striven to emphasize it—is what I meant by the universality of the local. From me where I stand to them where they stand in their here and now—where I cannot be—I do in spite of that arrive! through their work which complements my own, each sensually local.

This is the generosity also of art. It closes up the ranks of understanding. It shows the world at one with itself. And it is theoretical, as opposed to philosophy, most theoretical when it is down on the ground, most sensual, most real. Picking out a flower or a bird in detail that becomes an abstract term of enlightenment.¹

The town of Nantucket denotes a certain "world", a histor-

¹ "Against the Weather", Selected Essays, pp. 197-198.
ically fixed conception with given possibilities. The poem particularizes this conception in terms of a reality which adheres to conditions both basic to it and to the reader. This reality is the particularity of the poem which, in existing through itself is different from all else, and can find significance only in apparent relationships, that is, in possibilities, rather than actualities. The particularity of the poem therefore individualizes a "cultural" concept in two senses: first, it presents the historical concept in a particularized traditional way; secondly, it expresses the universality of that concept, its being. The reader need never have been in Nantucket to appreciate the general applicability of the poem therefore.

VII. The Lyrical Ambiguity of "Nantucket"

How does the poem conclude?

On the glass tray

A glass pitcher, the tumbler turned down, by which

a key is lying—And the immaculate white bed.

The imagery of the poem changes gradually as the poem progresses: it becomes more particularized and more and more objectively of a "world". From the flowers we move to a glass tray, a pitcher, "the tumbler/turned down", a key, and finally "the immaculate white bed". All of these ob-
jects are of human use. But they are not in use.

They stand in stark contradistinction to the fecundity and change of the outside world. They imply an order which exists for itself, and is without generative power. The relevance of such a conception to the "Puritan sensibility" is so obvious that it hardly admits to comment. The conception is not only relevant to this sensibility, however. After all, from whence did that sensibility spring but from the same human condition which everyone shares? The conception relates to the primordial conflict of "world" and "earth", i.e., the conflict of "culture" and "nature" in their broadest senses. The room is clearly not separate from "nature"; nor is its "world". All "cultural" orders in some sense exist for themselves, as does the perpetual creativeness of the "earth". The "immaculate white bed" signifies this self-contained order which is sterile and unproductive if not used. Only if the owner of the room were dead, could the order which is depicted remain as it is, the room locked against the outside world. Now, perhaps the owner is dead. Perhaps, he is a man whose preference for order exceeds his desire to experience the vitality which inheres in the flux of "nature". Perhaps, on the other hand, he is merely absent, like the absent god of Heidegger's temple. These things a reader cannot know. This ambiguity notwithstanding, "nature" and "culture", order and disorder, are locked in a peculiar intimacy.
If the owner is dead, then "nature" triumphs, not only in the sense that the man returns to the earth from which he springs, but in the sense that each of the objects which belong to him are suddenly deprived of their "cultural" use and concomitant significance. This is so whether the reader presumes the man actually or only spiritually dead. On the other hand, if the man is alive, the objects fulfil their "cultural" purpose which is the satisfaction of "natural" wants. In either case, "world" and "earth" meet and balance one another, representing that ontological tension fundamental to human being.

The ambiguity of the poem therefore is the ambiguity of depth. The poem enacts the primordial conflict and intimacy of "world" and "earth". Insofar as the experience of the poem is understood in this fashion it constitutes an authentic "riss", for to recognize such primordiality is to admit it as the basis of one's own being. The poem "happens", and in its happening adds to one's sense of "cultural" history and "natural" existence. The place, Nantucket, becomes more than its past history, more than legend, more than "Puritan sensibility", more than any notion of "cultural" milieu: the place becomes the reader's, as in some sense, he becomes its. To perceive the complexity of the poem, the multiplicity of its significations and associations is to become co-extensive with it in defiance of any singular concept of "truth". As Stevens says,
The truth seems to be that we live in concepts of the imagination before the reason has established them. If this is true, then the reason is simply the methodizer of the imagination.¹ "Nantucket" is not a poem which can be "methodized" by the reason to yield a single, logical interpretation which might be the basis for paraphrase. The only singularly consistent definition of its imaginative content is its form, the words upon the page as objects in relation to one another and to the subject who apprehends them.

VII Some Linguistic Concepts

If one examines the "matter" of the poem; that is the fact of its formal structure, it will be apparent, however, that it cannot be separated in any satisfactory way from the content which arises from it. The form of the poem is simultaneously presentational and expressive without yielding to the principles of ordinary inductive or deductive logic.¹ Logic, as many logicians have pointed out in concert with linguists like Whorf and Sapir,² is as much a function of linguistic structure as any other. Since English is an "analytic" language which functions in terms of sentences differentiating their subjects and predicates as separate structures of the same thought.³ "Nantucket" is deviant both linguistically and analytically, for it is a


"synthetic" or even "polysynthetic" utterance in line with Sapir's definitions of the terms,

An analytic language is one that either does not combine concepts into single words at all (Chinese) or does so economically (English, French). In an analytic language the sentence is always of prime importance, the word is of minor interest. In a synthetic language (Latin, Arabic, Finnish) the concepts cluster more thickly, the words are more richly chambered, but there is a tendency on the whole, to keep the range of concrete significance in the single word down to a moderate compass. A polysynthetic language, as its name implies, is more than ordinarily synthetic. The elaboration of the word is extreme. Concepts which we would never dream of treating in a subordinate fashion are symbolized by derivational affixes or "symbolic" changes in the radical element, while the more abstract notions, including the syntactic relations, may also be conveyed by the word. A polysynthetic language illustrates no principles that are not already exemplified in the more familiar synthetic languages. It is related to them very much as a synthetic language is related to our own analytic English. The three terms are purely quantitative—and relative, that is, a language may be "analytic" from one standpoint, "synthetic" from another. I believe the terms are more useful in defining certain drifts than as absolute counters. It is often illuminating to point out that a language has been becoming more and more analytic in the course of its history or that it shows signs of having crystallized from a simple analytic base into a highly synthetic form.¹

Given these definitions, it is interesting to note that in "Nantucket" the sentence is not of prime importance as it ought to be in an "analytic" statement. By convention, the poetic line is allowed to constitute an extra-grammatical

¹ Language, p. 127.
syntactic pattern of its own which inevitably throws extra emphasis on individual words. Moreover, since the poem consists of a series of elliptical, roughly parallel statements, its language is overdetermined to the extent that one must attribute predicative functions to otherwise nominative words, or accept the statements as incomplete, if not illogical. By convention again, poetic statement is construed as complete wherever possible. Consider Fenollosa's statement on the poetic nature of the Chinese ideograph:

A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snap-shots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract notion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things...  

Fenollosa's statement is perhaps truer of the nature of poetry than, as has been noted elsewhere, of the nature of the Chinese ideograph. The axiom "willing suspension of disbelief" adjures the reader to accept the poetic statement as materially complete; that is, as a synthetic or polysynthetic utterance. And indeed, in "Nantucket" this injunction makes considerable sense, for it is only in these terms, that the ontological underpinnings of the poem become apparent. The "flowers" flower; the "window" windows; "lavender" lavenders; "yellow" yellows. Each


word bears an implicit nominative and predicative relation to every other word, but especially those in proximity, and this makes it possible to impute the peculiar transformational quality of each image to every other, as in the first lines,

Flowers through the window
lavender and yellow
changed by white curtains—
smell of cleanliness—

where the reciprocal relation of each object to every other, and the interpenetration of each is particularized. The overdetermination of linguistic variables makes the poem "ambiguous" or paradoxical in the everyday sense of these terms, but by such means the poem takes on its multi-valued complexion, and asserts a legitimate demand for acceptance and acquiescent contemplation. In transgressing the limitations of ordinary language, and in practicing its licence to deviate from the ordinary principles of logic, grammaticality, and poetic convention, the poem "happens" as an original and originative language event, a whole thought, embedding what was previously the "world" in a new "earth" so that it is born anew.

VIII A Conclusion

I must reiterate Alfred North Whitehead's definition of the beauty of appearance,
Appearance is beautiful when the qualititative objects which compose it are interwoven in patterned contrasts, so that the prehensions of the whole of its parts produces the fullest harmony of mutual support. By this it is meant, that in so far as the qualitative characters of the whole and the parts pass into the subjective forms of their prehensions, the whole heightens the feelings for the parts, and the parts heighten the feelings of the whole, and for each other. This is harmony of feeling; and with harmony of feeling its objective content is beautiful.

The "patterned contrasts" which one perceives in "Nantucket" are not only perceptual, but conceptual. Moreover, it is clear that this "harmony of mutual support" which is the poem bears only a "family resemblance" to any other aesthetic, experiential, or linguistic object: it is unique, and therefore has autonomous reality. In the conformation of the components of its "appearance" to one another, and in their relationship to both the reality which they reflect and the reality which they embody, the poem achieves a breadth of significance which far surpasses the reader's expectations. This transcendence finally is the ultimate test, for the ability of a poem to continually amaze is the truest proof of its validity. In this sense only does the poem have archetypal significance: it does not reflect an archaic experience, nor an instinctual tendency. Jung writes,

The archetype is a tendency to form such representations of a motif--representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern.²

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1  Adventures of Ideas, p. 344.

The archetypal **power** of a poem does not inhere in its conformity to a motif, but in the originality which distinguishes it from all presumed pre-existent motifs or patterns. A great poem is not an imitation of an experience, however vital that experience might be, it is an expression of the essential conditions which initiated and initiate still such experience. In this sense, the great poem forces experience, the everyday conscious and unconscious life of the human being, to conform not to its own actuality, but to a primordial possibility.
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