IX

Sun, Moon, Day, Night, Music, and Rock

No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe.¹ Cassirer

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In one of his aphorisms, Stevens speaks of “the image without meaning and the image as meaning,” the word meaning here signifying symbolic import. For example, the word night is a possible symbol. “The heavy nights of drenching weather” illustrates a non-symbolic usage; and “the night / That lights and dims the stars,” a symbolic usage. Stevens turns at will from the customary usage of a word to a usage that in itself demands interpretation. A response to that demand will take into consideration not only the figurative significance of the context but also the recurrence of the image in close association with certain statements of idea.

The thought in a poem of Stevens is composed of an interchange of statement and symbolic imagery. The image fills out the statement, carries the implication that can never be

adequately expressed in expository form. "Wild Ducks, People and Distances," for example, opens with a statement of one of Stevens' recurring notions—the idea that there is no determinable object without a subject, that specific things need specific experiences, and that the life of the world is the life of a consciousness:

The life of the world depends on that he is
Alive, on that people are alive, on that
There is village and village of them, without regard
To that be-misted one and apart from her.

"That be-misted one" is nature personified as woman. Nature as reality apart from human experience must be expressed by a symbol; otherwise, it could not be expressed at all. She is obscured or "be-misted," inconceivable, because only an abstraction. Stevens' figurative representations of reality, like the rock or the woman; or of the cycle of being, as in the imagery of day and night or of the seasons; or of individual experience, like the musician with his instrument and his music, are an implicative language in themselves and supplement the accompanying statement of idea.

In the first section of "The Rock," the image of the rock, like that of "that be-misted one" of the former poem, embodies the idea of the unrealized natural world. If unrealized, it is like a nothingness and is without known existence. It must be conceived as a possibility or as a will-to-be. It is as though the possible has the desire to become actual in the particular vision of an individual being:

As if nothingness contained a métier,
A vital assumption, an impermanence
In its permanent cold, an illusion so desired

That the green leaves came and covered the high rock....

The "métier," the "assumption," the "impermanence," the "illusion"—all are terms to describe the individual subjective
life of the self; and the "nothingness," the "permanent cold," and the "high rock" are terms for the objectivity that enters light and life and existence only in an individual consciousness. As for the green leaves, these represent the living thoughts that grow in man's seasons and that cover the rock. In these experiences it is as though the ground of being attained its desire to be by means of the specific vision of an individual being.² The leaves and the blooms are examples of Stevens' frequent tree or floral or vegetation imagery to indicate that the creations of man's higher consciousness are a natural growth and to complement his symbolic use of the imagery of the seasons and of day and night.

Often Stevens uses the sun as an emblem of the fulfillment of the subject-object relationship. The image is that of reality realized, of the prime moment of experience in its continuing present. The sun of "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas" is an eye that continually regards the earth:

... Sun is
A monster-maker, an eye, only an eye,
A shapener of shapes for only the eye.

Many of Stevens' poems present the sun as realization of earth. In that realization, the earth, which is otherwise a "be-misted one" and a nothingness, becomes "the invented world." Then the subject is at one with the object, mind with experience, and by analogy, "the sun is the country wherever he is" ("Esthétique du Mal," VI).

The sun at noon implies the idea of a continuing present, and the rising sun and setting sun are seen from the viewpoint of an observer who is aware of process and of a coming and going in the flux of experience. In "The World as Meditation" the sun ("Is it Ulysses that approaches from

the east, / The interminable adventurer") is always approaching Penelope, who, in her own person, is a part of earth and representative of the content of experience in the subject-object relationship.  

Therefore, the sun is conceived from the point of view of oncoming experience. The sun "kept coming constantly so near" because the subject-object relationship is a separateness or distance between subject and object as well as a continual approach of subject toward object.

The sun is a symbol of being, and being is a realization as well as a reality. In the first poem of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" Stevens uses the image with a concurrent dual meaning; for the sun of this poem that exists in itself and whose existence has nothing to do with our embellishments, our names for it, must be "in the difficulty of what it is to be." By this description the sun is an instance of objective being, and by synecdoche it stands for the idea of the presence of the world. Since the world is also a human conception, the sun thus stands for both worlds, for the invented as well as the objective world, and that is Stevens' definition in imagery of the nature of being.

The symbolic import of the sun image pervades the imagery of day and night and the seasons. The sun that stands for the idea of objective being, by virtue of polarity, influences the import of Stevens' night imagery. Thus, night or darkness usually holds implications of non-being or pre-existence. The sun that exists always in its "consummate

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3 The poem is an example of Stevens' essentially ambiguous use of images: it is as if the sun were Ulysses and the earth were Penelope; yet, the two mythical characters retain their identity. Martz sees the figurative nature of the poem and reads it in terms of its human significance in "Wallace Stevens: The World as Meditation." The subject-object relationship also lies within the ambiguous field of reference of the poem as it does in so many of Stevens' later poems. It is the ultimate abstraction of the lover seeking the beloved, in this poem depicted from the point of view of the woman or of the longing of the object to be reached by the subject. In other poems lover desiring beloved may be abstracted as the mind seeking reality, with the mind as lover and reality as beloved.
prime" in "Esthétique du Mal," VI, at the same time is con­
tinually being devoured by night or non-being. Figuratively
the poem depicts sun as present being losing bloom and fruit
(phenomena). Night is an insatiable bird:

... A big bird pecks at him
For food. The big bird's bony appetite
Is as insatiable as the sun's. . . .

The sun's appetite is creative and the bird's, decreative.
Generally the poet associates being with day and non-being
with night. The bird feeding on the sun suggests the dark­
ness and the void that feeds on light and reality. The
ambiguous nature of the sun symbol is shared by the night
symbol; both represent man's interior world as well as his
cosmic environment. In this additional sense sun is a con­
sciousness continually creating experience, and the bird is
man's inner darkness or subconsciousness feeding upon the
rejected experiences, the blooms falling downward, "the
yellow bloom of the yellow fruit / Dropped down from
turquoise leaves."

The significance of the twin poems "The News and the
Weather" depends upon a similar set of associations. The
"news" of the first poem is the fresh appearance of things
newly given in experience. The world of the sun is news
because just seen, just become, and is always a newness like
all appearance. The weather of the second poem is the sense
of it all: the way the world seems in the feeling of it, the air,
the weather that conditions each instant. In this poem the
unconscious or interior creative dark is addressed as a tree, as
a woman, as Solange, probably meaning by that name earth
spirit. The interior darkness as the unconscious is the

4 "Solange" is the name by which he addresses this creative unconscious­
ness. The word may be formed from sol ange: literally, soil or earth angel.
It is a "nigger name," the poem says, and means by that a black name.
Several critics, Northrop Frye, in "The Realistic Oriole," for one, notice the
fact that Stevens uses nigger with a special non-racial significance.
nothingness out of which conscious experience emerges. It is man's black spirit: "A nigger tree and with a nigger name." Solange is a tree, like the self that Lady Lowzen represents, because the creative unconscious is rooted in the earth that is the body. The interior dark or blackness suggested by "nigger" is an aspect of the archetypal primal night, discussed later in this chapter.

The darkness of an unknown sea suggests the idea of non-being and pre-existence in "The Man with the Blue Guitar," XVIII, and the sunrise is compared to oncoming experience out of past experience:

... as daylight comes,

Like light in a mirroring of cliffs,
Rising upward from a sea of ex.

The cycle of day very often represents figuratively the cycle of being. The zenith of the sun connotes the fullness of existence: noon is the culmination, the absolute vertical of both sun and being, "straight up, an élan without harrowing," with "straight up" describing the physical sun and the "élan without harrowing" suggesting that being is at its peak. The poem from which this line is quoted, "What We See Is What We Think," describes noon as the instant of full being, the division between becoming and disintegration:

One imagined the violet trees but the trees stood green,
At twelve, as green as ever they would be.
The sky was blue beyond the vaultiest phrase.

The distinction between the living green and the first intrusion of deterioration, signified by the color of shadows, by violet and gray, is the distinction between creation and decreation:

Twelve and the first gray second after, a kind
Of violet gray, a green violet, a thread
To weave a shadow's leg or sleeve. . . .
Thus, the symbolic cycle of day is divided into two halves, and the first half represents that aspect of the process of being Stevens calls the "yes" in "The Well Dressed Man with a Beard": "yes is this present sun." With afternoon, implications of the "no" begin, and the enactment of the "no" occurs when present forms become forms entering the past and, rejected by the process of change, lose being, slide over "the western cataract," with the sun declining into night. But because things exist, in the poetry of Stevens, in terms of the flux of experience, the nature of being is nearly always seen as an event of simultaneous emergence, fulfillment, and disappearance; for process involves the coming and going of experience in each instant.

Stevens regards the progression of the seasons and alterations of day and night as illustrations of his sense of things continually emerging and existing and falling and vanishing. In spring, he knows the incompleteness of things; he senses possibility, and being seems a continual becoming. In autumn "everything is half dead"; desolate air and empty perspective surround things in their passage; he senses dilapidation, anticipates disintegration. Winter is a nothingness and summer, the consummation of being, the instant of present reality. According to "The Motive for Metaphor" the nature of the self is such that it cannot endure a permanent present of absolute reality that the peak of summer represents, for the self can only live in mutation. The poem argues that the self enjoys the exhilaration of change implicit in beginnings, in all the unaccomplished growth of spring, and that the self also likes the pathos of change implicit in deterioration and in the decrepitude of autumn. But the self shrinks from any absolute present of fact. In Stevens’ poem the flash of the present, which must be avoided in attention, is the moment of full and intolerable confrontation with reality:
The weight of primary noon,
The A B C of being . . .

The absolute present for Stevens (the peak of summer that is implied but never mentioned in this poem) is the present instant of full experience, when the self, composed as it is of thought and feeling, is in contact with the physical world and when, in the act of direct experience, matter touches mind in the tangent of “steel against intimation,” of physical reality against pure subjectivity. It is also the fatal moment, the instant of continual dying that is each instant of experience.

“Credences of Summer” describes the peak of summer as the moment of perfection of the present toward which all becoming tends, the present moment with everything behind and nothing of actual time beyond, the self poised in existence, surrounded by its images of love and desire that consummate its moment of realized life:

... these fathers standing round,
  These mothers touching, speaking, being near,
  These lovers waiting in the soft dry grass.

Another figure of this poem depicts the present as a summit of existence, and, when speaking of this peak of being, the poem describes it as a mountain. This is an image of the immense basis of physical reality supporting existence. On top of that mountain, looking from the tower of survey or the vantage point of the present, stands the sun in the figure of an old man. To indicate that he is not a real person but only an abstract symbol of the physical being of the world, that he does not scan experience, he is said to be one “who reads no book.”

The sun or day is identified with the consciousness that composes a daytime life in “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,” XXIII. It is the half of one’s existence that is made
up of thought, "the bodiless half." With a life that is half-day, half-night, the night is like "a long inevitable sound" that absorbs into itself and cancels the variety of consciousness; it is a sound in which all the separate selves merge into the one unconscioussness of sleep except for the occurrence of dreams with furtive desires and half-thoughts that are "disembodiments" like those of day. The night of sleep is a herald of the universal night, out of which being emerges and into which it descends, in accordance with this day-night symbolism. The maternal sound and the woman in black cassimere of this poem refer to a personification of night as the universal mother, from whom being comes.

2

In the ancient figure of primal night, Stevens embodies his notion of the unknowable ground of being. "Green is the night and out of madness woven" (from "The Candle a Saint") implies that the ground of being is meaningless (mad) and fecund (green) with possibility. Among the indefinite people of this poem—the sleepers, who are probably the poets, and the astronomers, whose imaginative insight is part of the irrational nature of being, part of its madness—is the visionary, who sees the image of night in the form of the abstract goddess Nox. "Moving and being," Stevens calls her, having in mind perhaps the Aristotelian idea that in movement being emerges. She is also the essential shadow or the basis of form created from darkness. "The image at its source," the poem adds, to show that all shape, all imagery, emerges out of this archetype of being:

The noble figure, the essential shadow,
Moving and being, the image at its source,
The abstract, the archaic queen. Green is the night.
There is also the personification of night as the parent in “Phosphor Reading by His Own Light” (“That elemental parent, the green night”) and as the nocturnal inhuman author of “Credences of Summer,” X, who meditates the characters that the actual life of summer and the present enact. Unpersonified, night in “The Man with the Blue Guitar,” XXXII, is both an environing and interior void, a darkness and a space in which all being moves and exists, joyous and procreant with all that is new and possible but irrational and without meaning in the human sense:

How should you walk in that space and know
Nothing of the madness of space,
Nothing of its jocular procreations?

A sense of blank abstraction behind appearance, an obscure or unknown sea, impending or encompassing cold, the image of the rock, even the force of the flux are versions of this same notion of a primal base of existence. The color black imparts this special significance to whatever it modifies. “Black water breaking into reality” is an image that represents actuality emerging out of the ground of being. This pervading idea of Stevens that associates latent being with darkness and present being with sunlight is also a characteristic figure of Santayana. In “The Realm of Matter” he writes that

... a phase of latency, silent but deeply real, often connects the phases of activity. Sleep and night are not nothing: in them substance most certainly endures, and even gathers strength, or unfolds its hidden coils.5

The primal darkness assumes an existence and emerges out of black non-being as a white or silver form in the poet’s imagery. Argentine is a favored word for the silver or

5 *Realms of Being*, p. 227.
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The glitter of life. The early poem "The Silver Plough-Boy" describes a primal blackness ("A black figure dances in a black field") that attains existence by becoming visible, by wrapping itself in a silver sheet. The span of life often is given by Stevens a gay, active quality: it is a holiday in reality, a bonfire in winter, a walk in the park, a festival. Here a life is a dance down a furrow in back of the crazy or irrational plow that defines the present moment of being. The conclusion is a charade of age and death and the return to non-being:

How soon the silver fades in the dust! How soon the black figure slips from the wrinkled sheet!
How softly the sheet falls to the ground!

The blackness of this poem is an ultimate as well as a primal blackness. In "The Jack-Rabbit" ultimate blackness is suggested by the buzzard and by the black man who warns the rabbit dancing on its world of sand bars. There is also the ultimate dark of "Valley Candle," the huge night converging its black beams upon a candle of being until the flux extinguishes that single life; then beams of the night converge upon the afterimage, memory and the effect of that life.

The tiny light of conception burning in universal night is the conscious part of self, and the rest is the subliminal, the unconscious, the black creative basis of mind that feeds the flame of conscious life. The consciousness, the flame, blazes with created or fictive conception ("his actual candle blazed with artifice" according to "A Quiet Normal Life"). The

* Jung refers to the alchemical image of "the spiritus niger who lies captive in the darkness of matter" and who "reverts to his original luminous state in the mystery of alchemical transmutation." Psyche and Symbol, p. 178.

* Santayana also sees consciousness as a gaiety: "In consciousness the psyche becomes festive, lyrical, rhetorical." Realms of Being, p. 349.
mind from which the flame of consciousness issues is itself a part of the primal dark. In “Mud Master” the basis of self, the stuff of the mind, is the blind procreant stuff out of which all impending experience is made. The poem speaks of the human mind as “blackest of pickanines” to imply that the mind is a part, even if only a small or infant part, of primal night. To define its import, the poem characterizes the mind as muddy, for mud, like clay, is an archetype of the idea of prime substance; for example, mud conceived thus recurs in Poem IV of “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,” in which Stevens says, “There was a muddy centre before we breathed.”

With this conception of the mind as mind (as functional, not as mere physical brain), with the idea of mind as the creative source of whatever experience impends, he addresses it as black man in “Nudity in the Colonies.” Each man, then, carries within him a bit of the creative potential, the night out of which experience emerges. “A Word with José Rodríguez-Feo” inquires if “night is the nature of man’s interior world,” and the last line of “Owl’s Clover” expresses the conclusion that night and the imagination are one.

Through their intricate system of connotations, Stevens’ symbols tend to form clusters of import. Just as sun and day compose a figurative complex of meaning, moon and night also are associated symbolically. If night is the primal creative source of all, moon is the creative imagination. Their creativity is spontaneous, irrational, independent of conscious human will: “The moon was always free from him, / As night was free from him.” Night is the irrational unmeaning ground of being; moon, the light within darkness, like an intelligence within the unconscious, a creative
light "whose shining is the intelligence of our sleep," as it is 
described in Part 2 of "Three Academic Pieces." It is the 
primal imagination of the natural creative source, inde­
pendent of the individual human imagination yet within it 
and infusing it.

In "Effects of Analogy" Stevens says, "The poet is con­
tantly concerned with two theories," two ideas of the nature 
of the imagination. According to the first idea the poet 
"comes to feel that his imagination is not wholly his own 
but that it may be part of a much larger, much more potent 
imagination, which it is his affair to try to get at." This is the 
creative source often symbolized by the moon and is very 
similar to Coleridge's primary imagination. The other theory, 
like the secondary imagination of Coleridge, has to do with 
the poet's own heuristic and intuitive imagination: "The 
second theory relates to the imagination as a power within 
him to have such insights into reality as will make it possible 
for him to be sufficient as a poet in the very center of 
consciousness." 

The distinction can be seen in Part 2 of "Three Academic 
Pieces," the essay-poem in The Necessary Angel. The moon 
here stands for the imagination of the first theory, and the 
word imagination itself stands for that of the second theory; 
this individual imagination is the "someone" of the title of 
the poem, "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together." The poem 
sets up pairings of sun and day, night and moon, human

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8 Obviously, Stevens is using Coleridge's idea of the primary and secondary 
imagination. "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 Imagina­
tion 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." Biographia Literaria, ed. 
Spirit, first indicated Coleridge as a source for Stevens' idea of the 
imagination.

9 NA, p. 115.
imagination and man, and creates out of them a sort of Hegelian formula: a thesis, antithesis, synthesis; in the synthesis occurs the sequence of consciousness or man’s "endless effigies":

It is as if there were three planets: the sun,
The moon and the imagination, or, say,

Day, night and man and his endless effigies.

In a number of poems, the moon is only the moon itself. The ordinary non-symbolic use of the word is sometimes confusing because of the dominant and, therefore, expected symbolic usage. The import of the symbol is never fixed and is always modified by the context in which it occurs. In "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," XIX, the moon represents the imagination that colors our personal apprehension of the world at a given time. It is a light that rises in the mind, and under its influence everything is seen as it is felt. This is the imagination that is the sense of the world for us and the dominant mood of the moment. Another figurative usage suggests the idea that our imaginings are given rather than self-conceived. Thus, the moon can represent for the poet the upwelling of feeling, imagery, language that a poet of a different age might have called "inspiration."

In one poem Stevens identifies the moon with the poet's archetypal singing bird and, like Keats or Shelley or Arnold, addresses his bird as though it were an embodiment of the idea of the outpouring of poetry. With a just sense of the ambiguity of the symbol, it is both imagined bird and real moon, and the conjunction of the two composes the idea of the creative source of poetry. The poem is a celebration of the moment of life transformed into song, and the feeling of the moment is expressed lightly in its title, "God Is Good. It Is a Beautiful Night."
Look round, brown moon, brown bird, as you rise to fly,
Look round at the head and zither
On the ground.

Look round you as you start to rise, brown moon,
At the book and shoe, the rotted rose
At the door.

This was the place to which you came last night,
Flew close to, flew to without rising away.
Now, again,

In your light, the head is speaking. It reads the book.
It becomes the scholar again, seeking celestial
Rendezvous,
Picking thin music on the rustiest string,
Squeezing the reddest fragrance from the stump
Of summer.

The venerable song falls from your fiery wings.
The song of the great space of your age pierces
The fresh night.

The head and zither of the poet are seen as from above and from there dwindle into objects. The door, the book, the shoe, and the rotted rose are other aspects of the view from above and hold possible symbolic value. It is in the light of the moon of the creative imagination that the head is speaking, that it reads from its book and sings its song, turning the poetry of life and experience into the poetry of language. The string he plucks is the rustiest string because this poem, this song of his, is being sung at the present or latest moment and, therefore, is played on the oldest instrument—the ancient instrument of all poets before him.

In the last stanza the moon, his bird, is also the true moon, and like song, its light falls through the great space of its distance and of its age, suffusing him with a sense of the eternal processes, the vast repetitions of nature. But the song is also
truly his own song, the song of a poet celebrating his wonder at the place where he finds himself at this moment. The poet sings of a bird or a moon that is the self-same moon for any of the succession of men or poets standing below in its light, a moon that with its imagined fiery wings will rise, the eternal phoenix again, each night for each poet.

4

In several accounts of universal motion and change, Stevens variously describes the "sound" of the flux. It is like the sound of friction, "a grinding going round" or "the grinding ric-rac," and in "How to Live. What to Do" it is the sound of the wind, "heroic sound / Joyous and jubilant and sure." The sound is a vanishing music in "The Man with the Blue Guitar," XXVI:

A mountainous music always seemed
To be falling and to be passing away.

The manifestation of the primal energy of process as sound—sound of motion, sound of wind, sound of water, sound of music—bears a resemblance to Schopenhauer's famous analogy in *The World as Will and Idea* of music as the principle of will in all things ("the in-itself of all phenomena, the will itself"). The link with Schopenhauer discloses itself in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," XXI, in which the sound becomes a musical form, the romanza, and the idea of universal will as in Schopenhauer is presented as the causal energy of existence—in Stevens' words "the will of necessity, the will of wills":

Romanza out of the black shepherd's isle,
Like the constant sound of the water of the sea
In the hearing of the shepherd and his black forms. . . .

10 P. 272.
Once Stevens' symbolic use of *black* and of *music* is grasped, the black shepherd can be seen as an orphic figure representing the primal creative base, the darkness out of which being emerges. He is a symbolic figure resembling Nox in "The Candle a Saint," and his romanza is the music of universal creative will.

The poem mentions two islands, that of the black shepherd and the island of individual consciousness:

Close to the senses there lies another isle
And there the senses give and nothing take. . . .

The black shepherd's isle is the universal creative source, and its romanza, its music, is the latency of experience emerging from the dark creative source of being. The other isle symbolizes the reflection of the world composed by sentience within each mind. A quotation in Vaihinger's *The Philosophy of 'As If'* concerning the import of this image in eighteenth century stories of shipwreck like *Robinson Crusoe* shows the common association of the island image with the idea of conception:

. . . the isolated basis of abstract and inwardly reflected thought is schematically clothed in the picture of a desert island in an immense ocean . . .

The poem characterizes the other island as the isolation at the center of the self that is, "the opposite of Cythère"; for conception, unlike the love that joins one with another, is a solitary and individual expression of the self and its single will:

The opposite of Cythère, an isolation
At the centre, the object of the will, this place,
The things around—the alternate romanza

The romanza out of the black shepherd's isle is that of uncreated, nonexistent and impending forms and events, and

\textsuperscript{11} P. 192.
the alternate romanza is that of the appearance of reality to the self. The two romanzas, the two voices, "are a single voice in the boo-ha of the wind," the poem concludes; for in the nonsense, the irrational sound of the eternal flux, the individual will is lost in the voice of universal will.

Music, in Stevens' figurative use of it, may represent the primal energy or will, but it may also stand for a personal experience of the world. It is one will insofar as he conceives of a universal unrealized base for reality; it is many wills of the world if conceived as realized separately in many individuals. "Continual Conversation with a Silent Man" speaks of the tumult of separate wills that realize the world each in its individual way along with the universal will that is their creative source: "the never-ending storm of will, / One will and many wills." The flux of reality, with its many versions within individual thoughts, is "the wind, / Of many meanings in the leaves," for leaves are thoughts in Stevens' frequent use of vegetal imagery.

In "Thunder by the Musician" the tumult of will is manifested as music and is a storm of wills out of which emerges the individual will, holding aloft its consciousness. The creative source of things is also their destroyer; thus, the musician or source of being is not only a composer but also a butcher. The poem is a depiction of the triumph of individual being in each moment with this violent personal will-to-be emerging out of the confusion of many possible forms of being. The thunder by the musician is the music of universal creative will:

Sure enough, moving, the thunder became men,
Ten thousand, men hewn and tumbling,
Mobs of ten thousand, clashing together,
This way and that.

12 Creator is also butcher in "Ghosts as Cocoons."
Slowly, one man, savager than the rest,
Rose up, tallest, in the black sun,
Stood up straight in the air, struck off
The clutch of the others.

The subjective being or self, one of the mobs of possible thousands, is this will-to-achieve-being that rises up in a black sun; black is the color of the primal base of being, and the image of the black sun symbolizes an impending reality. This individual will is strong in its intense personal actuality and tallest in the dominant present of its own single life. Its individual identity strikes off the clutch of others who try to hold it to them and deny that identity. By its violent subjectivity, it alone holds aloft the diamond, the one thing that is precious. The flashing egg-diamond is also a version of Stevens' image of the essence of a life as a flashing or glittering. And individual consciousness seems a unique possession to any self looking from its peak of subjective life, for it alone holds "the moment of light"; it is apex and height of life and peak of surveillance of all experience. There the self holds its individuality, according to the musician, the composer of events:

    And, according to the composer, this butcher,
    Held in his hand the suave egg-diamond
    That had flashed (like vicious music that ends
    In transparent accords).

The poet then considers his theme. It would have been better, he says, conceiving of the time in detachment, for the self to have been holding—what? In view of the indeterminable character of subjective being, he is unable to say what could have been better or even what it is that the self is holding. Even though the self expresses the violence of a will to live, though it shouts its self-assertion, the arm thrust

13 In Oriental texts diamond is a symbol of individuation accomplished. See Jung and Kerényi's *Essays on Mythology*, p. 17.
up is trembling. It is weak with the faintness of the passage of life. The welter of existence mixes the cries of the dead and the speech of the living, and the sky is full of bodies. This is the never-ending storm of will—the will to achieve individual being. The poem concludes that it might be better for a self (symbolized by its hands) to remain on a level of mere blind activity without achieving the diamond that stands for the height of consciousness, for self-awareness:

It would have been better for his hands
To be convulsed, to have remained the hands
Of one wilder than the rest (like music blunted,
Yet the sound of that).

The conflict out of which an individual being emerges into its height of consciousness is compared to "vicious music that ends / In transparent accords"; the lower grade of being lacking conscious will, to "music blunted / Yet the sound of that." Thus, in this poem Stevens associates both will and music with the irrational contradictions of being and the struggle to assert the individual self. Schopenhauer also finds the conflicts of musical elements analogous to the conflicts of individual wills that are a manifestation of universal will:

. . . there yet remains an unceasing conflict between those phenomena as individuals, which is visible at every grade, and makes the world a constant battlefield of all those manifestations of one and the same will, whose inner contradiction with itself becomes visible through it. In music also there is something corresponding to this.  

There is the personal will of an individual and all its details of momentary appetency summed up in its will-to-be. As in *The World As Will and Idea*, the will of the self is a part of the whole of will, the universal will of being. Stevens calls it "the will of necessity, the will of wills." The effect

\[14\] *Will and Idea*, p. 277.
of the will is manifested as movement and changing appearance\textsuperscript{15} and often figuratively presented as music. In “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction” the west wind on a pond is both an instance of will and a form of music: “The west wind was the music, the motion, the force” and “a will to change.” The image (following Stevens’ usual method with synecdoche) hovers between a factual meaning and a symbolic one by which a detail of the universal principle of being symbolizes that principle. The wind making its tiny frettings on the blank surface of a pond is both instance and symbol of the will creating and presenting the volatile world through change and movement; for “there was a will to change,” and that is the present and necessary way that being is achieved.

Music, running the scale of meaning between the ordinary sense of the word and its symbolic senses, is Stevens’ most pervasive figure. Like the air or tune played in “The Man with the Blue Guitar,”\textsuperscript{16} it symbolizes the world as it is for the musician: not things as they are but things as they seem to him. This significance for music is carried by several other images of the player with his instrument. The analogy is extended even to its logical conclusion, to an analogy between silence and nothingness. The nothingness of what has vanished into the past is figuratively defined as a silence in “The Green Plant”: “Silence is a shape that has passed.” There is also the conventional, non-symbolic sense of the

\textsuperscript{15} Santayana regards the force of universal will as a manifestation of the flux. See Realms of Being, pp. 377-78.

\textsuperscript{16} The brief twentieth poem of “The Man with the Blue Guitar” holds in the word \textit{air} a possible threefold pun. Air is first a part and instance of the reality that is the sustenance of life—the air, for instance, that we breathe into the empty hollow of the self. It is the space, too, in which we live and move. Finally, it is the tune of his guitar, the personal life he lives made up of the intimacy of individual experience. As the music is an expression of the musician’s individual sense of things, it is also the music of the individual will that is part of the in-itself of all things, part of the universal will that we conceive of as reality, the present existence of things. The air, then, is what we believe, as the poem hopes.
word, but silence is one image (if it can be called an image), one word, the connotations of which are always an echo of its meaning. For instance, the music played on its instrument by the figure on a tomb in "Burghers of Petty Death" is the blank final silence of non-being after total destruction—the music of nothingness:

... an imperium of quiet,

In which a wasted figure, with an instrument,

Propounds blank final music.

Although here the music is only silence, the figure playing an instrument is an image which, like that of "The Man with the Blue Guitar," represents the individual will and its individual sense of the world. Stevens repeats the image with many variations in many poems. In "Jumbo" a humorous version of the image is jumbo himself, a personification of the universal will of being in the role of the player with his instrument, as though the primal will were a windine that plays upon the phenomenal world, plucking the trees like strings:

The trees were plucked like iron bars
And jumbo, the loud general-large
Singsonged and singsonged, wildly free.

The wind singsonging and plucking the trees identifies the will with the flux. The will is creator of the forms of things emerging in phenomena, and jumbo is the transformer of the world. Since the will is also the in-itself of everything, he is himself transformed by his own transformations:

Who the transformer, himself transformed,
Whose single being, single form
Were their resemblances to ours?

17 Neumann on wind as a traditional image of the creative force quotes the Upanishads: "As the wind blows, everything grows." Origins and History, I, p. 22.
The one will—"single being, single form"—is also reflected in the multiplicity of individual wills and individual forms. Jumbo is "the secondary man" (with "secondary" having the sense it had for Locke), for he is also the basis of the appearance of things in an individual sensibility. As "ancestor of Narcissus," he is the source of individual will, of the ego, for universal will is particularized in the self that conceives or looks at itself. Santayana, in "The Realm of Matter," describes the self as Narcissus and as having emerged out of the depth of natural process. He speaks of the long vegetable and animal evolution that is the source of the human consciousness: "until one day, in the person of Narcissus, attention is arrested on the form which the self lends to all nature, or wears in its own eyes." 18

Stevens usually sets forth the idea of individual will in the figure of the musician creating in his music his individual sense of reality. An early version of this symbolic meaning for music occurs in "Peter Quince at the Clavier": "Music is feeling, then, not sound." Another musician is the singer representing any conceiving mind in "The Idea of Order at Key West," whose singing is the creation of the conceived world that is the human world. Both singer and guitarist project in song and on strings an intensely personal view of the scene of life. "Things as they are / Are changed upon the blue guitar," and for the singer or conceiving self "there never was a world for her / Except the one she sang and, singing, made." The singer walking by the sea creates her song from the sound of water (the will manifested in the flux of things). Her song is not a mere medley of human voice and phenomena. It is a creation of an individual will through the deliberate order of language in its utterance, word by word:

18 Realms of Being, p. 223.
The song and water were not medleyed sound
Even if what she sang was what she heard,
Since what she sang was uttered word by word.

Stevens in this great poem bases his symbolic use of the singer on an idea of the nature of song that can be understood in terms of Schopenhauer's statement of the nature of the lyric. Schopenhauer describes song as a combination of "desire"—the element of personal appetency in all intense experience—and an individual sensory response or "pure perception of the surrounding presented." A song, by this definition, is an expression of an intensely felt personal vision of the world. Schopenhauer says that for the singer or pure lyricist "the subjective disposition, the affection of the will, imparts its own hue to the perceived surrounding, and conversely, the surroundings communicate the reflex of their color to the will."¹⁹

The music of the singer is beyond the genius of inanimate matter, for it is the music or order imposed by the will of the individual consciousness, or, as the poet says in "To the One of Fictive Music," "the music summoned by the birth / That separates us from the wind and sea." This poem addresses itself to a personification of the human mind in its conceptual function. Stevens' personification here is recognizable the muse of the human imagination, with the word imagination taken in its broadest sense as the continual creation of the world in the human consciousness. The principle of music, Stevens says in "The Whole Man: Perspectives, Horizons," is more than an art, more than an addition to humanity, for it is "humanity itself, in other than human form."²⁰ Stevens' music symbol, with its special import suggesting the world apprehended in experience, approximates

¹⁹ Will and Idea, p. 261.
²⁰ OP, p. 233.
Schopenhauer’s remark that “we might, therefore, just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will.”\(^{21}\)

If the will of the individual becomes embodied in his conception of reality, the common will of men is adumbrated in their common vision of things. The first poem of “It Must Give Pleasure,” from “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,” carrying further this figure of will compared to music, sets forth the human vision of reality as choral or orchestral music. The merging of one voice or instrument in harmony with another points to the idea that the general human conception of the world is a harmony of one individual vision with that of another, all following an established conception as a chorus or orchestra follows a musical composition. Thus, the accustomed flow of consciousness is an established traditional vision of reality that is followed by all the individual minds in an accordance like that of a musical group. The joy of experience, according to the poem, is that of mingling one’s own conceptions with those of all men and singing in unison the notes that explore the range of human perceptions:

> For companies of voices moving there,
> To find of sound the bleakest ancestor,
> To find of light a music issuing

In this poetry sun and music are major symbols for being and the will to be, with night and silence carrying all the implications of the absence of sunlight and sound. The image of the player and instrument connotes the individual realization of things in a personal experience. This complex of symbols that makes all experience of the world embodied music and makes of the sun instance and evidence of reality is linked in a brilliant simile in “Montrachet-le-Jardin,” in which Stevens compares the sun in its rising and

\(^{21}\) *Will and Idea*, p. 274.
augmentation to one note repeated by a musician on one string, to the very absolute or essence of music:\(^2\)

The sun expands, like a repetition on
One string, an absolute, not varying
Toward an inaccessible, pure sound.

5

The idea of nothingness for Stevens is nearly always some version of the proposition that there can be no object without a subject. Many of the familiar poems have themes related to the same proposition. “The Snow Man,” for instance, is “nothing himself,” for he is not a subjectivity. “Wild Ducks, People and Distances,” to recall the opening of this chapter, also states that living reality depends on the presence of the living mind, “except for that be-misted one and apart from her,” except for unrealized objective reality that is only an assumption embodied in an image like the woman or the rock. The assumption, when expressed as the rock, is an image of the support of existence:

It is true that you live on this rock
And in it. It is wholly you.

“The priest of nothingness,” the philosopher, speaks these lines from “This as Including That” and after speaking he is gone, for “the iron settee is cold.” But there must be a living presence to realize the rock, the reality, even if it is only a fly crawling where a man might have leaned; therefore, the poem concludes, “A fly crawls on the balustrades.” In this poem it is just as Schopenhauer says: “And yet, the existence

\(^2\) For the image of the sun as sound, there is, for comparison, an interesting passage by Viollet-le-Duc: “But we cannot hear the sun rise; how, then, can a symphony create in the mind the same sensations which are produced by this daily phenomenon? Why do we say every day; this bit of music is ravishing brightness . . .” Discourses on Architecture, p. 12.
of this whole world remains ever dependent upon the first eye that opened, even if it were that of an insect." The title, "This as Including That," implies that the subject includes the object and that the rock is the content of the mind ("It is wholly you") as well as its support. Thus, the image, for all its simplicity, is able to convey more than one kind of meaning.

The image of the rock illustrates Stevens' strategy with symbols. The image is loose and shapeless but has specific sensory connotations. It stands for the most indefinable of words, for reality, and yet many of the poems that contain the symbol are, in effect, definitions of it. The poet gains in this way a variety of meaning by use of the same amorphous vehicle and indefinite import. The rock is obviously Stevens' most inclusive symbol, for held within the unity of this simple primary image is all that is actual and all that may be imagined, the particular that exists as well as the possible that may exist. "The rock is the habitation of the whole," as the poem entitled "The Rock" defines its dominant symbol. The image is obvious and readily available, for it is the archetypal image of belief in substance. The attributes that common experience associates with rock usually modify the image, as in Christian symbolism. Schopenhauer uses the rock to indicate enduring existence in the midst of the flux: "time is like an unceasing stream, and the present a rock on which the stream breaks itself, but does not carry away with it." Whitehead presents rock as an example of "the true and real things which endure" and sees in its shape "the abstract of things which recur." For Stevens the image has

23 Will and Idea, p. 45.
24 For a more extensive discussion of this image, see Ralph J. Mills, "Wallace Stevens: The Image of the Rock." Wallace Stevens, ed. Borroff. The perceptive essay is a basic document for the reader of Stevens.
26 Adventures of Ideas, p. 46.
many possibilities, for as is true of the word reality, the image of the rock comprises everything that exists. One of these possibilities is Schopenhauer's present being of reality. Speaking of the image with this significance in mind, Stevens in "Credences of Summer" calls it "the rock of summer" to describe the certainty of present existence, the brightness and assurance of direct perception, repose in the moment of life, and the security self finds in the actual:

> It is the visible rock, the audible,
> The brilliant mercy of a sure repose,
> On this present ground, the vividest repose,
> Things certain sustaining us in certainty.

This image is the vehicle of a subtle metaphor that expresses the notion of a permanent basis of existence that is impenetrable to thought and on which all forms and events subsist. The rock also is the truth, as "Credences of Summer" maintains, probably meaning by truth the whole of things, as in Santayana's definition:

> The truth properly means the sum of all true propositions, what omniscience would assert, the whole ideal system of qualities and relations which the world has exemplified or will exemplify.²⁷

In Poem XXVI of "The Man with the Blue Guitar," the rock is defined as the place where man is, the world that is resonant with human thoughts and feelings. Even though a place, it is a place conceived, perhaps only the location of mind, a permanence from which thought is continually falling away in the flux of experience:

> The world washed in his imagination,
> The world was a shore, whether sound or form
> Or light, the relic of farewells,
> Rock, of valedictory echoings,

²⁷ Realms of Being, p. 402.
To which his imagination returned,
From which it sped, a bar in space. . . .

“How to Live. What to Do” elaborates the idea of the image and anticipates its final development. The man and the woman of this poem climb the rock until they leave behind the fictions of their culture—choristers, priests, voices—and standing to rest, they have left only the height of the rock and the cold wind. The inference might be that from this bare perspective, this absolute, they could not know how to live or what to do.

“The Rock,” the last and most elaborate of the poems utilizing this image, presents it in three parts and from three viewpoints. In Part I the rock is a possible but unrealized fundament for conscious being, an abstraction like the idea of substance that in itself is a blank or nothingness. The fact that on this nothingness life has come to subsist suggests that human experience is like the fulfillment of a will to be, a desire that man’s conception may cover the blank rock with leaves and blooms. Part II develops this image of conscious life, “the body quickened and the mind in root,” in terms of vegetation and describes the rock as the base or ground of the impermanent in its round of seasons. The rock is a barreness below man’s thought, the very barrenness that is the material that he must conceive of and conceive with. The barrenness vanishes under the efflorescence of language and its flowering in thought. “They bud the whitest eye,” the poem says, thus indicating the blooming of consciousness; for here again, the vision and ego are identified: the eye and the I are one.

According to its title, “Forms of the Rock in a Night-Hymn,” Part III, lists aspects of the rock as though recounted in a music that issues from the primal source of being (“Night-Hymn”); therefore, all the imagery of this section can be considered as projected from man’s interior dark.
The compendium of things for which the rock is said to stand constitutes all the specifics of human experience. First, the rock is each of the specific details of each life from the emergence of the individual until his eventual terminal. "The rock is the habitation of the whole," the poem says in summation, and it lists air, stars, events, beginnings, endings, and the mind of man holding all of these things. Thus, the rock of this poem is the content of the mind, the object that is nothing without the subject, that, by its inclusion in the mind or subject, becomes the unity of the world.

The most ingenious poem on the rock is "That Which Cannot Be Fixed," the first of the twin poems called "Two Ve-sions of the Same Poem." "That which cannot be fixed" is the flux that is also the ground of being. In the complex figurative account of the poem, it is first a sea, and in the introductory lines that sea is identified as the rock, "insolid rock." The organic imagery of the poem expresses a sense of secret and living energy in the heart of a body floating in an unknown ocean whose pulsing tide represents the creation and decreation of process by which the more and more of all that comes into existence becomes the less and less of that which is dissolved in the past:

Only there is

A beating and a beating in the centre of
The sea, a strength that tumbles everywhere,
Like more and more becoming less and less. . . .

The central figure of the poem is that of the womb of nature and its fetus ("sleep deep, good eel"). The figure is given in the depiction of a body lying in the water of a sea in the center of which there is a beating and beating like that of a heart. The poem asks if nature, the cosmic mother of creation myths, holds man, "swollen / With thought through which it cannot see." What he cannot see is reality in itself, reality unrealized: the natural cosmic mother or the rock.