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# Wallace Stevens, Plato, and the Question of Poetic Truth

Wallace Stevens confronts Plato's rebuff of poetry head-on. In the first canto of 'The Auroras of Autumn', he is frustrated in his search for poetic transfiguration by 'Another image at the end of the cave'. He concludes, finally, that his endeavour amounts merely to 'form gulping after formlessness'.[1] This image brings together the analogy of the cave that Plato employs in the *Republic* – which casts what we perceive as misleading appearances – with Stevens' own anxiety over poetry's embodiment of truth: does verse form ever license insights that are not recondite abstractions, or, as Plato insists, does a rupture between appearance and reality leave poetic truth an ever elusive pursuit? These lines in Stevens' poem confirm for Helen Vendler the condition of the artist in whose heart and mind 'every formed object and image hungers for another object, another deceptive shadowy image in Plato's cave'.[2] And yet, Stevens strives to overcome this predicament. His writing discloses a direct engagement with Plato's philosophy in order to reassert the intrinsic value of poetry.

The ancient philosopher provides the foundational critique of poetry based upon his theory of forms, deferring the true essence of things to the Intelligible realm. Humanity is left bereft, in his view, of the cognitive access to these essences. Accordingly, all our artistic representations of what we perceive through sense impressions become reduced to inaccurate representations of the world. Stevens responds by developing a theory of poetry that is as philosophically serious as his poems are technically achieved. Plato's claims for the failings of poetry, which stem from his attraction to idealism, equip him with a helpful point of reference.[3] Plato's idealised forms are final; Stevens' abstractions often turn out not to be ends in themselves. They allow him to test out different hypotheses, like an actor donning successive masks. 'The Idea of Order at Key West' is a case in point, describing 'Whatever self' the sea

had ‘became the self | That was her song’. He then returns at the close of the poem to tactile and lyric particulars:

> The maker’s rage to order words of the sea,
> Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
> And of ourselves and of our origins,
> In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds. (*CPP*, 106)

These precise images are distinct from the more abstract lines that proceeded them, but they are made intelligible by the very process of meditation. Whereas Plato sees intellectual thought as a way of grasping at the fringes of fixed truths, the ‘truths’ that Stevens’ abstractions afford are often provisional. Such a conception of conditional insights and process stands in stark opposition to Plato. What I hope to demonstrate in this essay is that Stevens engages directly with Plato’s philosophy from the *Republic* in order to establish how poetry embodies meaningful insights. He brings into the service of his poetics a refashioning of Plato’s explanation of appearances and reality together with the philosopher’s condemnation of poetry as a medium of representation.

Plato’s lasting influence is both a philosophical and a poetic problem. ‘The idea that literature needs justifying is a very old one’, as Richard Brown notes, ‘the fourth-century BCE Greek philosopher Plato notoriously banished poets from his ideal republic because of his sense that poems as fictional imitations of reality were fundamentally delusive.’[4] It wasn’t until the late nineteenth-century, however, when Benjamin Jowett translated Plato’s texts, that English gained its first, reliable version of his philosophy. For Stevens, it is not only the case that Plato forwarded the original critique of poetry’s value, in response to which one defence of poetry after another has had to rise to the challenge. It was also a particular historical predicament, one which became concentrated in the 20th century as the value and use of literature became

increasingly under scrutiny, and philosophers such as Nietzsche began to question the suppositions of Platonic thought. It's not for no reason that Alfred Whitehead remarked towards the start of the century that the 'safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato'.[5]

Previous considerations of Plato and Stevens have, predominantly, involved passing references to the poet's repudiation or accommodation of Platonic ideas. Donald Sheehan, for instance, limits his focus to 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction', arguing that in 'refashioning Platonic causality, the speaker gives as much value to thing and sight as to idea and thought'.[6] Stevens' 'mundo' – a space of heightened perception – may well place emphasis on the value of our particular apprehensions, but these apprehensions are not static. Bobby Leggett has also examined the Platonic strands of thought in Stevens by way of Nietzsche, identifying a shared preoccupation in each writer's treatment of 'ideologies of art, truth, and illusion'. Leggett argues, as several scholars have, that 'Stevens' texts [. . .] similarly elevate fiction over truth or fact'.[7] He focuses, however, on the arguments of Stevens' early poems in which the division between 'truth' and 'fact', in Leggett's terms, isn't so partisan. For the most part, he overlooks how these philosophical elements inform, and are shaped by, Stevens' poetic practice.[8]

Concentrating on another of Stevens' meditative texts, Dan Disney uses the attitude to poetic form suggested in 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' as an exegesis of Plato, positing that poets create 'a different style of attaching thinking and language'.[9] But this insistence on getting back to Plato through Stevens coupled with a focus on matters of epistemology misinterprets how the poet distances himself from conceiving of the poet's knowledge as transcendent; in other words, Stevens is not simply substituting one set of final principles for another. Even outside anglophone scholarship, Alain Suberchicot claims 'dans les poèmes qui furent ses derniers, bien qu'indifférent aux questions de technique, [Stevens] fait un effort de

maîtrise littéraire, et se plaît à faire advenir un sublime poétique'.[10] To say that Stevens is 'unfeeling towards concerns of technique' couldn't be further from the truth. It is a crucial oversight of the achievements of Stevens' later style, which place technique at the centre of his philosophical stance as he embraces a multiplicity of perspectives.

These debates over Plato's rôle in Stevens' thinking continue to be of critical interest. Charles Altieri remarks that the poet 'praises Plato for defining the idea of the Idea'. Stevens, he continues, can suggest that 'Neoplatonic poetry shows what difference that definition can produce when shaping our accounts of desire' and, in turn, develops 'concepts like the Platonic notion of "participation"' without being incumbered by its Platonic origins. My intention is to build on Aliteri's suggestion that Stevens was not interested in 'writing poetry under the auspices of any commitments to particular bodies of philosophical work', and often 'modifies his guiding concerns'.[11] So while Edward Clarke detects in the poet's later writing strains of a 'Neoplatonist scholar caught in the evasions of language', what I hope to suggest is that these evasions are reengineered to reveal a restless 'inquisitor of structures' (*CPP*, 434).[12]

I begin by considering how Stevens interrogates Plato's philosophy in his letters and his poem 'The Pure Good of Theory'. In so doing, I intend to demonstrate that a direct interaction with Platonic thought constitutes a cornerstone of Stevens' attitude towards appearances and reality. This essay's second section explores how this philosophical stance informs the poet's notion of the 'mundo', recalibrating Plato's analogic vision of the cave to redeem poetry's apprehensions. Finally, I examine how Stevens' conception of poetry informs the impersonality of his later poetic practice. Paying close attention to the relationship between Stevens and Plato in these ways, this essay offers a reimagining of Stevens' philosophical considerations while casting new light on his poetic technique and the broader relations between verse and philosophy.

**‘A Sense and beyond intelligence’**

‘I could never possibly have any serious contact with philosophy’, writes Stevens in one letter, ‘because I have not the memory’.[13] Despite this admission, which might simply be put down to intellectual humility, his journals and letters tell a different story. A journal entry from July 1900 details Stevens’ earliest mention of Plato: ‘I am going to get a set of Lowell’s Plato as soon as I can afford it and use that as a sort of buoy.’[14] Light as his tone may be, his direct reference to the philosopher figures Plato as a marker against which Stevens may measure his own philosophical writings. His daughter would later recall how he held onto Benjamin Jowett’s two-volume edition of Plato’s *Dialogues*. She goes on to note that it’s a loss for scholars that the books were auctioned off after her father’s death, since the margins abounded with his annotations.[15] In another letter, Plato starts to become inextricably bound with Stevens’ mordant critique of the idea of ‘Truth’. In a letter to Elsie Moll, Stevens advises: ‘Don’t <u>care</u> about the Truth. There are other things in Life besides the Truth upon which everybody of any experience agrees, while no two people agree about the Truth. I’d rather see you going to church than know you were as wise as Plato and Haeckel rolled in one’.[16] His rejection of the pursuit of ‘Truth’ and the juxtaposition with Plato and Haeckel disclose a suspicion of extremes of idealism and materialism, while he acknowledges there is something universally shared in experience.

These early mentions of Plato in Stevens’ letters have a kind of certainty that reflects the more settled relationship between mind and world in his early verse. In *Harmonium* (1923), ‘Anecdote of the Jar’ envisages an easy triumph of the imagination over reality as the poet’s jar ‘took dominion everywhere’ (*CPP*, 61). It’s this metaphysical confidence that allows Stevens to brush off Plato in the first reference to him earlier in *Harmonium*: ‘It is a good light, then, for those | That know the ultimate Plato | Tranquillizing with this jewel | The torments of

confusion' (*CPP*, 21). These lines cast the philosopher as a pacifying force, allowing those who subscribe to his viewpoint to evade their 'torments of confusion' rather than finally putting them to rest. Whereas Stevens' earlier verse seems less anxious over the possibility that reality might sabotage the imagination, his later work engages with a more fraught relationship between the two. It's for this reason that Plato reappears in *Parts of a World* (1942), this time in a more extended meditation on the pressures of time and reality.

Scepticism toward Platonic truth underpins Stevens' poem 'The Pure Good of Theory', which refuses the claims to immoveable truth Plato and derivative systems of thought make. Even the title disrupts the elementary assertion of the Platonist. As Eleanor Cook has put it, the adjective 'complicates things, by raising the question of whether some theory is relatively good, while Theory is purely good'. Does the phrase imply, in a Platonic sense, that theory has an absolute quality of being good, or that this is 'some person's sense that theory can be a pure good'? [17] In a slightly different sense, does it suggest the 'pure good' that may come of theory – its product, in other words – rather than the theory being good in and of itself? In the sixth book of the *Republic*, Plato has this to say about the form of the good, which is a central tenet of his theory of the forms:

> Then what gives the truth to what is known and the ability to the knower, you must say, is the Form of the Good. As it is the cause of knowledge and truth, consider it an object of knowledge. [. . .] As for knowledge and truth, just as in the previous example it was right to think of light and sight as sunlike, but wrong to think of them as the sun, so in this instance it is right to think of both as 'goodlike' (ἀγαθοειδῆ) but wrong to think that either of them *is* the Good; the state of the Good should be valued much more highly.[18]

The 'form of the Good' is placed above and beyond our sensory capabilities that operate in the visible realm. Hypostatising what he refers to as the Intelligible realm of the forms – which

constitute the true essences of things humanity directly perceives – Plato relegates humanity to a visible realm wherein our sense impressions deny us cognitive access to the forms; and, therefore, the truth. But this passage complicates the 'Form of the Good'. As Plato explains, this form becomes a pre-requisite for apprehending the truths of other forms, giving 'the ability to the knower' of apprehending true forms. Like the sun that nurtures what it illuminates, the 'Form of the Good' is essential for the reification of other truths, being 'the cause of knowledge and truth': it invests what we perceive with their truth-like quality. Julia Annas summarises this idea: 'so the Good gives the objects of knowledge not just their knowability but their reality, though it is itself "beyond reality" (or "beyond being")'.[19] The 'Form of the Good' is, therefore, an absolute that is both transcendent and fixed, but it is also essential for any explanation of reality.

*Agathoeidē*s (ἀγαθοειδής) is a coined adjective – a term which remains a *hapax legomenon* in Ancient Greek literature. Its unique status invests the word with a sense that the form of the good may only be peripherally grasped in language: it exists both within and beyond the standard remit of Greek, and so wrenches the reader out of standard lexical categories and denotation, just as we must eject ourselves from our immediate responses to appearance and reality. A similar recourse to neologised language surfaces in Stevens' 'The Pure Good of Theory', which envisages an anxiety over 'time | That batters against the mind' (*CPP*, 289). Time, here, acts as a kind of artillery that takes aim at the fertile mind. A Yeatsian creative antagonist, time is not only restrictive but erosive; it wears down the poet's open-ended imaginative flights.

While Plato employs neologism to express what is "goodlike", Stevens refers to 'Time' as 'the enchantered space | In which the enchanted preludes have their place' (*CPP*, 290). 'Enchantered' is, as Cook notes, an 'invented past participle, as if what an enchanter does it to

enchanter'. She continues that 'the neologism keeps us aware of agency in any such magic, and colors the word "enchanted" in the next line'.[20] Seemingly Platonic 'enchanted preludes' are, indeed, qualified by the mystical quality of the previous line: the coined participle subordinates the transcendent sense that is semantically described to a verbal creation of the poet's own design. 'Enchantered' easily morphs into 'enchanted' through the slippage of two letters and a contraction of the vowel sound, attributing the word's ending an indensate finality. In framing the more ontologically secure 'enchanted preludes' with the more ephemeral 'enchantered space', Stevens calls into question the viability, and vitality, of these 'preludes'.

Making sense of reality, he suggests, is not to be found in hedging our bets on a future state. Stevens invests, instead, in the unfolding event of experience. This anti-teleological approach to meaning contrasts how philosophy tends to work towards a set of consistent principles, or the Platonic philosopher's search for a fixed locus of meaning that might explain the present. Even if Stevens isn't addressing Plato as one philosopher to another, these lines disclose a close engagement with the core principles of his philosophy. As a poet, Stevens is more interested in how verse thrives on the more bewildering and searching side of philosophy, while eschewing its need for concrete knowing. Poetry's structures are more than merely decorative; they are crucial to overcoming the strict dichotomies of Plato's thought.

This becomes clear later in 'The Pure Good of Theory', when Stevens challenges the Platonic person, who remains unaffected from the attrition of time. As one proposed solution to the mind's stress under the pressure of experience, this Platonic person affords a protection from deteriorating over time:

> If we propose
> A large-sculptured, platonic person, free from time,
> And imagine for him the speech he cannot speak,

> A form, then, protected from the battering, may
>
> Mature (*CPP*, 290)

Rhetorical posturing and propositional terminology are far from the kind of metaphorical language and sensuous material one would normally expect from poetry. Indeed, Grosvenor Powell casts the platonic person as one 'who perceives through static categories that cut him off from the world as organic process'.[21] Even as these lines describe a triumph over the effects of time, a different kind of timing works against them. Although the stresses of the lines assimilate themselves to feigned hexameters, there is a discernible tension between the cadences of natural speech and the emerging semblance of formal metrical patterns. The second line falters on the first syllable of 'sculptured', which would normally be stressed, but becomes necessarily diminished to accommodate an iambic rhythm. 'A form, then, protected' suffers the greatest acoustic disruption. Stevens' punctuation effects a *rallentando* and places a particular emphasis on 'then', limning an impression of apparent stability as a result of this bulwark against the attrition of time. Accent and ictus fail to align: slowed rhythm and punctuation then conspire to magnify a disparity between the natural stress of 'then', which strains to be heard, and the unstressed expectation of the feigned meter. The same tension arises in the second syllable of 'protected', which almost brings the line's centre to a halt through an accretion of accents within one word. Estranged from life's organic processes, the 'platonic person' also stands in the way of poetic process. Knowledge conceived of in a Platonic fashion impedes the aesthetic energies and contingencies of poetic form. Routine and the regulated thinking of doctrine break down as they come up against the irregular currents of life and verse.

'I had forgotten about the ultimate Plato and the torments of confusion', admits Stevens to Ronald Latimer.[22] He is referring to his own poem, 'Homunculus et la Belle Etoile', which

contrasts the search of philosophers for a 'later moonlight' with the discontinuities of experience that people embrace, released from the 'torments of confusion' under the star of Venus: 'This light conducts | The thoughts of drunkards, the feelings | Of widows and trembling ladies' (*CPP*, 20). The final stanzas of 'Description of a Platonic Person' are explicitly critical of Plato's grounding of reality beyond our rational perceptions:

> Was it that – a sense and beyond intelligence?
> Could the future rest on a sense and be beyond
> Intelligence? On what does the present rest?
>
> This platonic person discovered a soul in the world
> And studied it in his holiday hotel.
> He was a Jew from Europe or might have been. (*CPP*, 291)

The dash in the first line enacts a break in form and sense, registering the speaker's scepticism of Plato's 'form of the Good' that allows us a glimpse of reality from its intelligible realm – a position which is itself imperceptible. 'Was it that' becomes inflected retrospectively with resonances of incredulity, while the specificity of the demonstrative pronouns dissipates across the gap ahead of the awkwardly approximal phrase that means to qualify it.

If, as Donna Hildreth asks, the 'deferment of pleasure in this life is a suppression of our natural senses', a suppressions which causes suffering, then why should a future existence in 'a Platonic realm of perfection (or heaven) gratify the senses and overrule the intellect?'[23] Such a wariness plays out in the aural patterns of this poem. Enervated assonance in the first stanza and the sibilant cluster of 'rest on a sense' drain these propositions of any sonic integrity; anagrammatical alliteration, however, unifies on a linguistic level the final 'present rest', which invests the experience of the present with a redemptive unity. Faced with the continually

shifting immediacies of personal experience, and poetry's multiform textures, the absolute discovery of the 'platonic person' becomes wan by comparison.

Stevens not only rejects the intellectual validity of Plato's philosophy, he also disregards it based on a value judgement. As in his letter to Elsie Moll, in which he emphatically underlines 'Don't care about the Truth', Stevens writes in 'Fire-monsters in the Milky Brain':

> Yet to speak of the whole world as metaphor
> Is still to speak of the whole world as metaphor
>
> And the desire to believe in a metaphor.
> It is to stick to the nicer knowledge of
> Belief, that what it believes in is not true. (*CPP*, 291)

Plato's critique of appearances is turned back on itself. Dispensing with his philosophical jargon of intelligible realms and forms as they visibly exist, Stevens' speaker figures this idea of reality and appearance as between recognising the levels of a metaphor. This also plays upon Plato's liking for allegory such as his aforementioned comparison: 'it was right to think of light and sight as sunlike, but wrong to think of them as the sun'. If even Plato views the world in such terms, then the idea of a transcendent view of reality that rises above such apprehensions is void. For Stevens, metaphor is itself generative; for Plato, it causes ideas to degenerate.

In 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', Stevens declares that poetry 'is an interdependence of the imagination and reality as equals' (*CPP*, 659). 'An interdependence' of the two might sound like an outright rejection of the possibility of finding some real insight in poetry. But when he comes to articulate more fully the idea of poetry as 'the supreme fiction',

the status of reality is not wholly diminished.[24] Rather than rejecting Plato's insistence that we should value an hypostatised reality, one that remains unfiltered through our subjective perspectives, Stevens reconfigures the presentation of appearances and reality from the *Republic*, focusing on the cave episode. The next section argues that this dispute is helpful for understanding the different ends to which poet and philosopher are working.

**Mundo of the Imagination**

At the start of the *Republic*'s seventh book, we find Plato's well-known analogy that figures humanity's apprehension of the visible realm. Here, man's collective experience of the world consists entirely in his imprisonment within a cave:

> Imagine people as it were in an underground dwelling like a cave with a long wide entrance facing the light along the whole length of the cave. [. . .] Would you think at first that people in this situation have seen anything of themselves or each other except the shadows thrown by the fire onto the wall of the cave in front of them?

Given this predicament, Plato's Socrates concludes:

> Εἰ οὖν διαλέγεσθαι οἷοί τ' εἶεν πρὸς ἀλλήλους, οὐ ταῦτα ἡγῇ ἂν τὰ ὄντα αὐτοὺς ὀνομάζειν ἅπερ ὁρῷεν;
>
> (If they were able to talk to each other, wouldn't you think they would call what they saw real?) [25]

At first glance, this scene appears to be another allegorical depiction of humanity's limited sensory access to reality. Within the cave, shadows reflected on the wall from the mouth of the tunnel are presumed to be the true forms of those things from which they actually originate.

Appearances never become a viable substitute for that which humanity can never, objectively, perceive. A textual variant, however, permits the second clause to be translated as: "Don't you think that they would believe they were applying their words to those things that were right in front of them – those things which they could see".[26] Instead of these things perceived being ὄντα ("real"), denoting the forms, other editions provide παριόντα, which means "to be at hand",[27] and refers accordingly to the shadows. Although one manuscript reads νομίζειν, which means "to acknowledge" or "consider as", ὀνομάζειν – that is, "to name" or "specify" something – is the more frequent and viable variant.[28] This critically changes the meaning. No longer are those in the cave completely divorced from any interaction with the truth or the forms but, though they take the appearances that they perceive for the true essences of what they see, the words they use – even without the speakers knowing so – refer, in fact, to the forms of these appearances.

In his characteristically titled lecture, 'The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet', Stevens describes the '*mundo* of the imagination' – an account which incorporates a theory of poetry into a wider philosophical scheme of appearances and truth. Here, Stevens exchanges the limitations of the cave for the liberation of the *mundo*:

> And having ceased to be metaphysicians, even though we have acquired something from them as from all men, and standing in the radiant and productive atmosphere, and examining first one detail of that world, one particular, and then another, as we find them by chance, and observing many things that seem to be poetry without any intervention on our part, as, for example, the blue sky, and noting, in any case, that the imagination never brings anything into the world but that, on the contrary, like the personality of the poet in the act of creating, it is no more than a process, and desiring with all the power of our desire not to write falsely, do we not begin to think of the possibility that poetry is only reality, after all, and that poetic truth is a factual truth, seen, it may be, by those whose

> range in the perception of fact – that is, whose sensibility – is greater than our own? (*CPP*, 679-80)

Stevens' *mundo* hypostatises the things which we encounter within empirical reality. 'Far from being an anti-realist,' Simon Critchley writes, 'Stevens is attempting to write a poetry of reality, where imagination touches reality, transfiguring the reality that it touches'.[29] The poet's particular experiences of these radiances become as valued by the poet as a direct perception of reality beyond the *mundo* which he himself maintains. For this radiance is always tethered to the reality from which it emanates. Not through objective perceptions but 'through iridescent changes, | Of the apprehending of the hero', as Stevens puts it elsewhere, does one come to particular and irreducible accommodations with this reality (*CPP*, 279). His double possessive is as confounding as it is critical: these are not the 'iridescent changes *of the apprehending hero*', but seemingly a form of contemplation in which the self has been removed from the initial process of apprehension. In other words, the poem is not constantly referring and deferring to an experience or an event. Apprehensions in poetry are impersonal, Stevens suggests, and return to the very fabric of the iridescences it serves to embody: 'Part of the res itself and not about it' (*CPP*, 404).

This lecture's style is especially revealing not only about the kind of knowledge acquired of changes in nature but about the means to acquire it too. An assemblage of participial clauses, paratactically arranged, conceptually stack the writer's perceptions on top of each other as we arrive at them in the process of reading. They track a development from a state of bewilderment through sensory experience, to instinctive responses and rational analysis, then, finally, to a fuller understanding – even if this remains a private intuition. To step inside the *mundo* is to cross the boundary into form.

Is Stevens attempting to write a poetry that succeeds the tradition of Platonic thought: coming at the end of a tradition or rewriting it from the start? The second would be a bold move; and the striking technical correspondences between Stevens' prose and Plato's account of the cave are telling:

> ὁπότε τις λυθείη **καὶ** ἀναγκάζοιτο ἐξαίφνης ἀνίστασθαί τε **καὶ** περιάγειν τὸν αὐχένα **καὶ** βαδίζειν **καὶ** πρὸς τὸ φῶς ἀναβλέπειν [. . .] **νῦν δὲ** μᾶλλόν τι ἐγγυτέρω τοῦ ὄντος **καὶ** πρὸς μάλλον ὄντα τετραμμένος ὀρφότερον βλέποι, **καὶ** δὴ **καὶ** ἕκαστον τῶν παριόντων δεικνὺς αὐτῷ [. . .] οὐκ οἴει αὐτὸν ἀπορεῖν τε ἄν καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι τὰ τότε ὁρώμενα ἀληθέστερα ἢ τὰ νῦν δεικνύμενα;
>
> Whenever anyone was freed and suddenly made to stand up, look around, walk, and look up toward the light [. . .] but now he was a little closer to reality, and being turned, more toward real things, he would see more correctly and, moreover, if the person showing him all that was passing in front of him [. . .] Don't you think he would be at a loss and think that what he had seen before was more real than what was being shown to him now?[30]

Parataxis dominates the opening of each account, charging them with an intensity that drives the sentences toward an adversative phrase passages' midpoint.[31] Stevens' participial clauses mirror the subordinated infinitives in Plato.[32] Each writer hinges the argument of his text upon a meditative phrase at its centre – 'but, on the contrary' in Stevens, and νῦν δὲ ("but now") in Plato – which demarcates a sudden change in direction before each writer offers their thesis. Additionally, the passages' central movements involve a greater level of subordination, extending beyond a chronological sequencing of events, and start to foment links in sense between each image as a new mode of understanding is neared. And Stevens' closing question – 'do we not begin to think of the possibility that poetry is only reality' – reengineers Plato's 'what he had seen before was more real', an integral criticism of our treatment of what we

perceive as reality. This is not just a rhetorical facility: his stylistic emulation of *The Republic* reveals an endeavour to recode its conception of the poet's relation to truth starting with Plato's own philosophical conception of appearances and reality.

Several critics have been sceptical of the intellectual tenability of Stevens' argument, particularly because he dismisses the primacy of concrete truth in favour of 'the nicer knowledge of | Belief'. Paul Bové claims that, in Stevens' texts, '"empirical reality" is seen to be finally devoid of transcendent certitude; in the last measure, we are left with nothing but "fiction"'.[33] Similarly, John McDade asserts that because Stevens 'cannot find a way to secure the distinct status of the real, he is led to equate God, fiction and the imagination in ways that in the end undermine the possibility of the imaginative mind engaging truly with the real'.[34] While Plato may eschew the particularity of experience, Stevens embraces this as a natural extension of our process of perception. Similarly, Canto XVIII in 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' vitalises the radiances that the poet perceives as 'iridescences'. As I have been arguing, Stevens' engagement with Plato is part of a larger investigation into the limitations of propositional thinking, a mode of thought which philosophy usually relies upon. Truth claims that result from this kind of thinking, Stevens suggests, are not the only means to an end. It certainly isn't the end of poetry, nor the means by which poetry works. This section now considers how this reimagining of Plato's key consideration of appearances and reality opens up into further discussions in Stevens surrounding verse form.

If the local effects of Stevens' prose are capable of capturing the simultaneity of thought then poetry's formal structures are especially deft at keeping multiple strands of thought in play:

> The life and death of this carpenter depend
>
> On a fuchsia in a can – and iridescences

> Of petals that will never be realized,
>
> Things not yet true which he perceives through truth,
> Or thinks he does, as he perceives the present,
> Or thinks he does, a carpenter's iridescences (*CPP*, 408)

'Depend' treads a line between its general sense of reliance and its particular grammatical inflection activated by the prepositional phrase it appears in here. 'Realize' is also double-edged: while it primarily indicates that these 'iridescences' will never be a tangible part of reality, it is overshadowed by a subterranean meaning of imaginative creation. Stevens emphasises the direct access poets have to these 'iridescences'; his contention is that this recalibration of the interaction between poetic apprehensions of reality does, in fact, remain 'of this world's business' (*CPP*, 308). This model of apprehension bears a striking affinity to Wittgenstein's idea of 'Seeing as' in his *Philosophical Investigations*:

> 'Seeing as. . .' is not part of perception. And for that reason it is like seeing and again not like [. . .] since it is the description of a perception, it can also be called the expression of thought. – If you are looking at the object, you need not think of it; but if you are having the visual experience expressed by the exclamation, you are also *thinking* of what you see.[35]

Double-vision of this sort is not so much the eye playing tricks on us as it is simply how the mind works. All perception is to an extent imaginative transfiguration. To rephrase this in Stevensian terms, what the poet apprehends are the 'iridescences' reflected and refracted from the surface of reality; yet this does not mean that these apprehensions are no less meaningful than the real. 'Of' formulations contribute to a broader self-consciousness of surface and depth across Stevens' work. Take, for instance, his early poem 'Of the Surface of Things', which

displays in its typography a self-consciousness of being 'of the surface'. Its sequence of three numbered cantos, each punctuating an increasing impersonality, reveals a starker yet symbolic imagery that succeeds the initial direct perceptions (*CPP,* 45-6). Just as the individual cantos compose the surface of the text, the poem is also reflecting on how imaginative apprehensions are part of a shared collection of perspectives on reality.

Such a confidence in the poet's abilities of perception is pointedly at odds with Plato's critique of the poet's truth-telling. The philosopher raises the question whether an artist imitates things 'As they actually are, or as they appear to be? You see, you still have to make the distinction'.[36] There's an explicit clarification here that the focus of art was never to recreate the true essence of its subject, but its particular appearance. Since artists, in Plato's eyes, imitate the visible forms of their objects and these appearances are themselves divorced from reality, works of art are further distanced from objects in reality:

> "Well," I said, "so you're calling him who is three stages away from nature an imitator?"
>
> "That's absolutely right," he said.
>
> "Then the tragedian will be this too, if he's an imitator, being three stages away from the kind and the truth, along with all the other imitators?"[37]

Rather than moving one closer to a particular insight, poetry, it seems, puts us at an even further remove from that which it seeks to imitate. But there are several problems with Plato's thesis. Even if, as Jessica Moss notes, 'we grant that poetry is somehow analogous to painting and that both are forms of imitation whose products are 'at a third remove from the truth', why should this render poetry ethically harmful? After all, cannot something "third from the truth" be relevantly *similar* to the truth?'[38] Remember, by contrast, Stevens' closing proclamation from his lecture: 'poetic truth is a factual truth seen, it may be, by those whose range in the perception of fact – that is, whose sensibility – is greater than our own' (*CPP,* 680). Access to a greater

array of sensibilities licenses the poet a way of expressing more fully their particular apprehensions.

If the appearances one encounters in the 'mundo' are figured as meaningful, then Stevens picks up where Plato seemingly left off and argues that poetry is the most effective way of getting close to these irreducible truths. The peculiarities of poetic language grant the poet access to something like a pluralist approach to reality, which Stevens takes up as his own philosophical stance. This is 'not so much elevation as an incandescence of the intelligence': the mind's sublimation not its transcendence (*CPP*, 680). It's not quite, as Disney claims, 'a re-contextualizing via a higher form of knowing', but a broader and more acute form of apprehension.[39] Instead of distancing us from the truth, poetry, in Stevens' view, is as close as we can come to embodying apprehensions of reality. Distance is also crucial to the impersonal technique Stevens aspires to in his verse. 'Poetry is not a personal matter', he asserts in one of the *Adagia*, and this aesthetic principle in Stevens' mind allows the incandescent mind to embody the reality it apprehends and transfigures (*CPP*, 903). Impersonality, however, is not only a matter of perspective; it is also a question of style.

**Poetic Impersonality**

To be impersonal isn't necessarily to be unfeeling. It is all too easy to conflate impersonality with a sacrifice of the self; T.S. Eliot's dominant theory of impersonal poetry indeed casts the artist's progress as a 'continual self-sacrifice'.[40] His words, somewhat understandably, conjure images of negations constantly reinforced: in other words, so that the idea of an impersonal sensibility does not become simply paradoxical, it needs entail a final rejection of the poet's presence from his work. In the 19th century, poets and critics alike wrestled with this notion. 'By our best self', writes Matthew Arnold, 'we are united, impersonal, at harmony', contrasting

this with our 'everyday selves' which leave us 'separate, personal, at war'.[41] Accordingly, he finds in impersonality a mode of connection rather than one of estrangement. But close connections can become sometimes become overwhelming. Robert Leighton in his 1875 collection, *Reuben and Other Poems*, worries that 'We give ourselves much trouble lest to die | Should be to lose this conscious life and pass | Impersonally into earth and sky – | Lost in the general mass'.[42]

Tennyson too nurtures a qualified allegiance to the impersonal. While, like Leighton, he is wary of remerging in 'the general soul', he finds it of crucial importance for *In Memoriam* that '"I" is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking through him'.[43] Stevens, therefore, inherits a fraught debate over what might be at stake in the impersonal treatment of poetry but also of the self: to what extent impersonality moves us toward an Arnoldian 'best self', or a renewal of our perceptions of the world, 'like | A new knowledge of reality' in Stevens' own words (*CPP*, 452)? How does one conceive of the relationship between the self, word, and world when impersonality itself seems to instantiate a form of alienation? Although Stevens seems committed to his notion that 'The real is only the base. But it is the base', his tone betrays an uncertainty over whether it is possible to reimagine and revitalise the real (*CPP*, 917).

Recent critical studies such as Sharon Cameron's *Impersonality* and Rochelle Rives' *Modernist Impersonalities* have attended to the phenomenological and social intimations of this concept. 'Since it is undertaken by persons', Cameron notes, impersonality 'could only be contradictory by definition'; for Rives, it is 'a theory of engagement, enabling forms of connection that both radically challenge authority and simultaneously sustain it'.[44] Jack Baker meanwhile has argued astutely that the 'impersonal mode not only functions as a principle, but also works as a poetic practice in both Stevens and Ezra Pound; personal sentiment in their

work is not so much blotted out than it is deferred to imagined settings, enhancing the feeling concealed therein.[45] As I have been suggesting, Stevens' impersonality is intimately tangled up with his sense of the relationship between appearances and reality. This last section builds on Baker's line of inquiry, examining how the poet's impersonal mode shapes his response to Platonic idealism.

In the same lecture in which he describes the 'mundo', Stevens considers not the way in which impersonality is intwined with the poet's creative agency, but how it extends to the embodiment of apprehensions between poet and reality, suggesting that this is where the occasion of the poem takes place:

> To say that it [poetry] is a process of the personality of the poet does not mean that it involves the poet as subject. Aristotle said: "The poet should say very little *in propria persona*". Without stopping to discuss what might be discussed for so long, note that the principle so stated by Aristotle is cited in relation to the point that poetry is a process of the personality of the poet. This is the element, the force, that keeps poetry a living thing, the modernizing and ever-modern influence.
>
> (*CPP*, 670)

His distinction is instructive, drawing a contrast between the shaping intelligence of the poet and the poet as subject. For him, the work of art is not merely a transparent extension of the artist. Note the flicker of ambiguity in 'process of the personality of the poet'. Is that to say the personality of the poet itself undergoes some kind of transformation, or the process of transfiguration that is initiated by the poet's personality? And *in propria persona*? *Proprius* in its immediate sense means 'one's own', but it can also mean 'individual' or 'particular'. This is not only true to the extent that poets often adopt speakers. It might also be of particular significance for the impersonality of verse form more broadly in that it should find some

connection with universal truths instead of reinforcing personal revelations. Certainly, Stevens' collocation of 'element', 'force', and 'living thing' casts the 'process' of the poet's personality more as a shaping intelligence within a poem than one that has the final say about where the reader should end up.

Although a poem may generate insights which derive from the poet's apprehensions within the 'mundo', these insights may never be received untainted by a poet's time-bound circumstances. On the one hand, this is a positive refashioning of Plato's notion that the language the cave dwellers employ has innate within it insights into the forms and truth. At the same time, however, these truths are subject to the intrusions of the poet's own emotional history. They also become swept up in another kind of anxiety of influence: the vibrant particularities of a poem being reduced to a set of cultural and social influences. Stevens is acutely conscious of the way in which meaning may be led all too much by prior commitments. Differentiating between the ways in which philosophers and poets articulate the 'search | For reality', Canto XXII of 'An Ordinary Evening' suggests how poets or the ideal poet, perhaps, resists subduing the world to a preconceived idea of what it should be:

> It is the philosopher's search
>
> For an interior made exterior
> And the poet's search for the same exterior made
> Interior (*CPP*, 410)

Whereas philosophers allow projections of their interior thoughts and feelings to dictate the truthful qualities of an exterior reality, poets strive to give primacy to the exterior that informs their responses to it. If philosophers attempt to bend the world they perceive to a set of devised philosophical principles, Stevens develops a voice of an 'impersonal quality [. . .] which

habitually subdues the poet's own, time-bound, emotional experience' and better develops 'the relationship between mind and world'.[46] Assuming this impersonal voice, he preserves the apprehensions of a particular reality that is embodied in the poem. To make the world conform to a personal set of principles, aesthetic or philosophical, is a tall order. Reality doesn't work this way; Stevens is alive how reality is full of inconsistences, things left unfinished, unpredictable forks in the road. In spite of this, or even because of this, Stevens' poetry is also characterised by a conscious drive for things never to be quite over and done with.

'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction' reveals a joint preoccupation with the discovery of truths through language while cultivating a poetic mode that may facilitate this. As the poem opens, a dextrous sequencing of images allows former meanings of words which have long been forced underground to resurface:

> Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea
> Of this invention, this invented world,
> The inconceivable idea of the sun. (*CPP*, 329)

'Idea' is employed in the word's original sense, meaning 'look' or 'semblance', from the Greek *idein* (to see). But the poet's use of the word is inevitably warped, since the contemporary ear cannot rid itself of the word's current resonances. Bart Eeckhout mentions the play also on the Latin etymology of *inventio*, concluding that these semantic manipulations all amount to 'perceiving and conceiving, concrete materiality and abstraction' being 'entangled in the text to form an almost indivisible Gordian knot'.[47] Stevens' toying with the Latin etymology of *inventio* is more suggestive, I think. To the modern reader, the most immediate sense of 'invention' might concern fabrication and production, as opposed to discovery or the act of finding out. The Latin noun, however, refers specifically to the very faculty of discovering.

The poet's endeavour to revive the sensory associations of 'idea' conditions the sense of 'inconceivable' too. He draws out the supplanted etymological sense – that is, unable to be taken in or caught – instead of its cognitive force.[48] An unimaginable concept of the sun is amended to a more grounded notion of a sight that is currently in-visible, while the words themselves are recoded to their more rudimentary senses. Stevens is alert to how meanings of individual words have an intransigence which pulls against their inevitable transience, and so allows them to carry forward a sense of provisionalness that is encoded into the poem's title '*Notes Toward* a Supreme Fiction'. Whereas Plato sees the value of the Forms to lie in the fact that they are unchanging, perhaps the greatest strength of the 'supreme fiction' is that it is constantly teetering on the brink of offering 'A new knowledge of reality.'

Many of verse's formal structures are conditional and transitional. But Stevens employs them in such a way that allows his poetry to reflect self-consciously on its own contingency. Layers of rhetorical and thematic patterning emerge in the opening of 'Notes', which embed a tension between a world that is both determined and discovered ('Of this invention, this invented') within shifting notions of sensory perception and cognitive conception ('perceiving', 'inconceivable'). The chiastic structure bespeaks a desire to impose a patterned order on the destabilised meaning; it also situates an act of creation at the heart of every moment of perception. This opening to one of Stevens' most famous and extended poems discloses a desire for 'a return to first principles', as Baker puts it: 'in the articulation of these principles, language itself seems somehow purified, as crucial Stevensian terms [. . .] are gradually cleansed of unwanted associations'.[49] 'Notes' begins almost programmatically, implying that in order to successfully impart the embodied knowledge in verse, the poet must refine and crystallise the contingencies of language.

‘An Ordinary Evening’ draws together Stevens’ theory of apprehending reality with his crafting of an impersonal poetic mode:

> Reality as a thing seen by the mind,
>
> Not that which is but that which is apprehended,
> A mirror, a lake of reflections in a room,
> A glassy ocean lying at the door,
>
> A great town hanging pendent in a shade,
> An enormous nation happy in a style,
> Everything as unreal as real can be,
>
> In the inexquisite eye. (*CPP*, 399)

‘Reality as a thing seen by the mind’, ‘apprehended’ rather that ‘that which is’ perceived, acts as an analogue to Stevens’ portrayal of our engagement with reality in the ‘mundo’, while the pervasive imagery of reflection recalls the iridescences of the ‘fuchsia in a can’. And the sense of reality touched and transfigured by the poetic imagination is enacted in the formal patterning of these lines. In the second line, a characterising relative clause functions a safeguard against trite or gnomic abstraction, referring to precise views of reality in its syntax and sense. Quotidian sights are continually generalised through the anaphoric indefinite article, as if each line is a self-contained model of transfiguration.

These lines intersperse empirical glimpses with their metaphorical analogues: ‘A mirror, a lake of reflections in a room, | A glassy ocean lying at the door’. The first apposition, elliptically rendered, compresses the increasing imaginative treatment of each observation, which resists logical paraphrase and seems to contain an uncanny energy in its density.

Previous divisions between reality – before and after its apprehension – dissolve with the shimmering adjective 'glassy' as the poet fuses the symbolic cognate of the 'ocean' with the attribute of its origin as a 'mirror'. Juxtaposing nouns in this way, Stevens finds a way of rendering reality and transfigured sights grammatically indivisible, as a deft model of his poetic theory. 'Eye' catches the aural chime with 'style' just within earshot, a gentle and final reminder of the transfiguring agency of the poet which might precede or is coextensive with perception. These consolidating, final lines return to the interrelated concerns of Plato's deferred truths and shadows, and the reclaiming of verse style as a medium to articulate truth. A counter to Platonic doctrine, 'An Ordinary Evening' embraces the shadows of the cave – particular apprehensions which become meaningful and irreducible 'iridescences' in Stevens, and toward which insights latent within poetry move us ever closer as they are revealed.

In the gaps, shortcomings, and equivocations of Plato's philosophy, Stevens thinks through his perplexity with poetic truth. Refashioning *The Republic*'s claims about reality and what we perceive as meaningful truth, he constructs a philosophical hypothesis as a starting point to elaborate on the relationship between poetry and its embodiment of our apprehensions of truth. This involves not only a complete reworking of Platonism, giving credence to a sensory realm, but also responding to certain verbal and poetic concerns that Plato leaves underexplored. Indeed, the philosopher abandons his metaphysical critique of poetry as something that distances from the truth those who undergo its experience. The images of 'An Ordinary Evening', however, lead to Stevens' eventual realisation that reality need not be rendered in material terms:

> It is not in the premise that reality
> Is a solid. It may be a shade that traverses
> A dust, a force that traverses a shade. (*CPP*, 417)

'It *may* be a shade', so it might also be more than that too. 'It is not in *the* premise' also begs the question: what premise? Even as Stevens seems to be working up to a set of metaphysical principles for how poetic truth works, he quickly undermines himself. When he read a shorter version of the poem in November 1949 at the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, which included these lines, they would go on to provide the basis for the poem that would be published a year later.[50] That he decided to preserve their place at the end of his poem indicates that they not only round off his contemplation but were crucial in forming its beginning too. Although Stevens suggests there are perspectival truths, local and contingent, he is also drawn on by a desire, especially in his later poems, that these seriatim perspectives should eventually compose a singular truth of a different order – something more final, personal and intimate.

Stevens' last poems seem to tip the balance in imagination's favour. The poet's creative agency establishes its own enduring voice arraigned against the pressure of empirical reality. When Stevens describes 'the edgings and inchings of final form' at the end of 'An Ordinary Evening' (*CPP*, 417), he envisages the movement of his intelligence along the lines of an asymptote. As it nears its goal, his mind encounters a final resistance. Incompleteness here snags against the poet's earlier confidence in 'Notes' that the poem takes us from 'an immaculate beginning' to 'an immaculate end', and 'We move between these points' (*CPP*, 330-1). But incompleteness may not be poetry's undoing – an indeterminate middling – but a mark of strength, freeing poetic truth from a dependence on embodying a final form. It is instead an event that happens in the increasingly infinitesimal gap, a betweenity among these points of mind and world. Local insights might add up to 'A new knowledge of reality' but it is also one that depends on being a *renewed* knowledge of reality. The Platonic thinker craves finalised thoughts of the mind, but Stevens takes life's very incompleteness and recasts it as a strength of the imagination at work.

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[1] Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, eds. F. Kermode and J. Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1966), 355. All references to Stevens's poetry and prose are to this volume (*CPP*).

[2] Helen Vendler, *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 40.

[3] This foundational philosophical preoccupation of Stevens is explored extensively by Simon Critchley, *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 4: 'I think Stevens's poetry allows us to recast what is arguably the fundamental concern of philosophy, namely the relation between thought and things or mind and world, the concern that becomes, in the early modern period, the basic problem of epistemology'.

[4] Richard Danson Brown, 'Introduction to Part 1', *Aestheticism & Modernism: Debating Twentieth-Century Literature 1900-1960*, eds. Richard D Brown and Suman Gupta (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005): 3-18, 3.

[5] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, eds. David Griffin and Donald Sherburne (1929; repr. London: Macmillan, 1979), 39.

[6] Donald Sheehan, 'The Ultimate Plato: A Reading of Wallace Stevens' "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"', *The Forties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*, ed. W. French (Florida: Everett/Edwards, 1969): 165-177, 169.

[7] Bobby J. Leggett, *Early Stevens: The Nietzschean Intertext* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1992), 214; 216. See also Joseph Riddel's comparison of Stevens' rejection of Platonic ontology to 'Nietzsche's disentangling (and skewed reversal) of the Platonic structure of essence and image, and hence subject/object' in 'Metaphoric Staging: Stevens' Beginning Again of the 'End of the Book', *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration* (eds. R. Buttel and F. Doggett), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980: 308-338, 333.

[8] Cf. Daniel Tompsett, *Wallace Stevens and Pre-Socratic Philosophy: Metaphysics and the Play of Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2012). Focusing predominantly on the pertinence of pre-Socratic philosophy in Stevens' texts, Tompsett overlooks how Stevens' poetic technique influences or is influenced by these strands of thought, leading to reductive judgements as 'Ethics are not a part of Stevens' aesthetic' (176).

[9] Dan Disney, 'Towards a Poeticognosis: Re-reading Plato's *The Republic* via Wallace Stevens' "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"', *Contemporary Aesthetics* 6, no. 1 (2008) [accessed 06/02/2018].

[10] Alain Suberchicot, 'Maîtriser le Sublime: L'Aboutissement Esthétique de Wallace Stevens', *Études Anglaises* 49, no. 3 (1996): 295-307, 295: "in the poems which were to be his last, although unfeeling toward concerns of technique, [Stevens] strives for literary mastery, and delights in achieving a poetic sublime". Translations of the French are my own.

[11] Charles Altieri, *Wallace Stevens and the Demands of Modernity: Toward a Phenomenology of Value* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 5-6. Altieri builds on his discussion of '*participatory equivalence* established by the grammar of "as"' in a later article on Stevens' influence on Ashbery, where this 'modal equivalence defines the possibility of a shared world'; 'How John Ashbery Modified Stevens' Uses of "As"', *Poetry and Poetics after Wallace Stevens*, eds. Bart Eeckhout and Lisa Goldfarb (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017): 183-199: 188.

[12] Edward Clarke, *The Later Affluence of W. B. Yeats and Wallace* Stevens (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2012), 78.

[13] To Bernard Heringman, 3 May 1949, *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. H. Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1996), 636.

[14] 4 Jul. 1900, *Letters*, 42.

[15] Barbara Fisher, 'Introduction', *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 30, no. 2 (2006): 131-137, 131.

[16] 10 Mar. 1907, *Letters*, 96 (Stevens' underlining). In an intervening journal note, Stevens mentions Plato in passing: 'If I were to have my will I should live with many spirits [. . .] I should live with Mary Stuart, Marie Antoinette [. . .] Plato' (30 Apr. 1905, *Letters*, 82).

[17] Eleanor Cook, *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 320.

[18] Plato, *Republic*, eds. and trans. C. Emlyn-Jones and W. Preddy (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013), 508e-509a. All references to the Greek and translations are to this edition unless otherwise specified.

[19] Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 246.

[20] Cook, *Reader's Guide*, 191.

[21] Grosvenor Powell, 'Sturge Moore's "The Powers of the Air": Socrates and the Self-regarding Figure of Wallace Stevens', *The Modern Language Review* 88, no. 2 (1993): 283-296, 290.

[22] 24 Jan. 1936, *Letters*, 306.

[23] Donna Hildreth, 'Stevens's the Pure Good of Theory', *The Explicator* 60, no. 3 (2002): 151-53, 152. Powell ('Struge Moore's "The Powers of the Air"', 291) comes to a similar conclusion, stating the 'platonic person' has 'discovered a soul in the world, a static conception that does not change, but, when facing the future, he is disinherited and alienated, like a Jew from Europe.'

[24] Stevens first employs this phrase at the start of 'A High-Toned Old Christian Woman' (*CPP*, 47).

[25] Plato, *Republic*, 514a-b.

[26] This translation is my own.

[27] 'πάρειμι, *v.*', §A. II, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, eds. H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). Simon Slings cites this textual variant from *Laur*.80.7pc in his edition: *Platonis Rempublicam*, ed. S. R. Slings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 260.

[28] 'ὀνομάζω, *v.*', §A. 2, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1996. Emlyn-Jones and Preddy (*Republic*, 108) note the following MSS for this alternative: Parsinius Graecus 1807, 9th century A.D., with interlineal and marginal additions; Marcianus Graecus 185, coll. 576, ca. 12th century A.D.

[29] Critchley, *Things Merely Are*, 61.

[30] Plato, *Republic*, 515c-d. Emphasis is my own.

[31] Plato's profuse use of the coordinating conjunction (καὶ) is demonstrated in the Greek text.

[32] περιάγειν ("look around"); βαδίζειν ("walk"); ἀναβλέπειν ("look up").

[33] Paul Bové, *Destructive Poetics: Heidegger and Modern American Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 181. Cf. Joseph Riddel ('Metaphoric Staging', 335) writes that Stevens reduces 'the "thing itself" or "things as they are"' to 'a chain of fictions'.

[34] John McDade, 'Wallace Stevens on God, Imagination and Reality', *Poetry and the Religious Imagination: The Power of the Word*, eds. F. Bugliani Knox and D. Lonsdale (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015): 129-150, 145.

[35] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 197. Emphasis in original.

[36] Plato, *Republic*, 598a.

[37] Plato, *Republic*, 597e.

[38] Jessica Moss, 'What Is Imitative Poetry and Why Is It Bad?', *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 415-444, 416. Emphasis is Moss' own.

[39] Disney, 'Towards a Poeticognosis'.

[40] T.S. Eliot, *Selected Prose*, ed. and intro by Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975), 40.

[41] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. J. D. Wilson (1869; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 95.

[42] Robert Leighton, *Reuben and Other Poems* (1875; repr. Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992), 251.

[43] Alfred Tennyson quoted in, Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1897), I. 305.

[44] Sharon Cameron, *Impersonality: Seven Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 7; Rochelle Rives, *Modernist Impersonalities: Affect, Authority, and the Subject* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.

[45] Jack Baker, *The Impersonal Modes of Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens*, PhD Thesis, Durham University (2014), 2 *et passim*.

[46] Jack Baker, 'Wallace Stevens and the Question of "Final Belief"', *The Poetics of Faith*, University of York (2018), 4.

[47] Bart Eeckhout, 'Stevens and Philosophy', *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens*, ed. J. Serio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 103-117, 108-9.

[48] "concipio, *v.*" §1, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. Glare et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968). 'Inconceivable' descends from *concipere* which the *OLD* primarily defines as '(of things) To receive or draw into themselves, take in, absorb, catch'.

[49] Jack Baker, '"Music is feeling, then, not sound": Rhyme in the Development of Wallace Stevens', *The Cambridge Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (2016): 299-322, 322.

[50] This incipient version comprised cantos I, VI, IX, XI, XII, XVI, XXII, XXVIII, XXX, XXXI, XXIX. See *CPP*, 1004.