

# Geriatric Metaphors in Wallace Stevens's *The Rock*

Hiroyuki Koguchi

---

*The Rock* (published in 1954) is Wallace Stevens's last collection of poems, covering the span of four years from the last publication of *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950). He was seventy-four years old, and it was a year before he died. Looking over the past collections, one may expect that the last collection may contain the collective treasures of the poet's long poetic career and possibly his opening new grounds reflecting the final stage of his life and ideas about old age and death. Actually, what ideas did Stevens have concerning his old age? This essay attempts to examine his geriatric metaphors associated with the vision of death in his poetry. For the sake of investigation, some hypotheses are set up, which hopefully help clarify the question. The first hypothesis is that *The Rock* probably contains a number of poems which reveal the poet's ultimate ideas of old age. Second, Stevens converted to Catholicism on his deathbed in 1955, and his interest and concern in religion and death must be abundant in the collection. Third, Stevens is a poet of imagination, who spent his whole life on examining its meaning and work, and the ultimate outcome of his long search must be in the final collection. Thus, the following discussion will first focus on these hypotheses and attempt to clarify Stevens's vision of old age.

*The Rock* contains twenty-five poems; and, first, all of them will be classified thematically.<sup>1</sup> The classification will show whether Stevens is particularly concerned with the problem of old age. The short comments in the parentheses below are the summary of thematic content:

### Old Age

- “An Old Man Asleep” (affirming senility)
- “Lebensweisheitspielerei” (grandeur acquired in old age)
- “Vacancy in the Park” (vacancy in old life)
- “The Rock” (old age and the work of imagination)

### Death

- “Madam La Fleurie” (pessimistic end)

### Life in Variety

- “The Irish Cliffs of Moher” (the importance of heritage)
- “One of the Inhabitants of the West” (pastoral visions and guilt)
- “The Hermitage at the Center” (transcendent view)
- “To an Old Philosopher in Rome” (philosophical and poetical grandeur)
- “Song of Fixed Accord” (importance of love and sorrow)
- “Long and Sluggish Lines” (humorous touch of poetry)
- “St. Armorer's Church from the Outside” (Fusion of the past, present, and future)

### Imagination

- “The Plain Sense of Things” (acquirable imagination)
- “The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain” (refreshing power of poetry)
- “Prologue to What is Possible” (man and imagination)
- “The World as Meditation” (barbarous imagination)
- “A Quiet Normal Life” (affirmation of artifice)
- “Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour” (affirmation of the power of imagination)
- “Note on Moonlight” (Fecundity by imagination)
- “The Planet on the Table” (the meaning of creation)
- “The River of Rivers in Connecticut” (the ever-changing source of an entity)
- “Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself” (epistemological problem of poetic creation)

### Nature

- “Two Illustrations That the World Is What You Make of It” (two aspects of nature)
- “Looking Across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly” (relationship between nature and the human spirit)

Young Life

“The Green Plant” (growing force)

Of course, the above thematic divisions are arbitrary, as some common elements also appear in other poems. At any rate, the classification reveals the following interesting results. First, contrary to the hypothesis set at the beginning of this essay, *The Rock* has only a small number of poems which centrally deal with the problem of old age. Apparently, in *The Rock*, Stevens was not so much interested in geriatric matters than the aesthetic problems of imagination and poetry. Second, also contrary to the second hypothesis, the number of poems that deal with the themes of religion and death is unexpectedly few. Of course, though it is possible to say that one can detect the traces of religion and death in such a poem as “St. Armorer's Church from the Outside” and others, almost all of the poems focus on solving the mystery of human life. Third, as to the hypothesis of Stevens's continuous search of the meaning of the imagination, *The Rock* indeed contains many poems discussing the matter. Stevens never ceased to investigate the relationship between human life and the imagination till his death.

Then, what ideas did Stevens actually have about his old age? As stated above, there are not many poems in which he relates his ideas of old age, but some poems reveal unique ideas. The first poem to be discussed is “An Old Man Asleep.” *The Rock* begins with this short poem, and it presents Stevens's perception of old age. The poem shows some affirmation and possible fertility of old age:

The two worlds are sleep, are sleeping, now.

A dumb sense possesses them in a kind of solemnity.

The self and the earth—your thoughts, your feelings,

Your beliefs and disbeliefs, your whole peculiar plot,

The redness of your reddish chestnut trees,

The river motion, the drowsy motion of the river R. (427)

What is visualized is the scene of an old man taking a nap in an armchair on the veranda with the wind breezing softly from the chestnut trees, and a river far away is shining with the spring sunlight. The overall tone is calm and provides a sense of stability generated by the allusive fusion of man and nature. The nature, unless it is grasped in the old man's consciousness, does not exist. When the nature is recognized in the man's consciousness, it forms its world. In

this sense, when the man's consciousness is drowsy, the two worlds of inside and outside are drowsy, and at other times they are possessed "in a kind of solemnity." Why is there solemnity? Because they hold a unified independent relationship. "The self and the earth" fundamentally have the relationship of subject and object, yet Stevens suggests that the earth exists as it is, and that the mind also has its own world. And they are interrelated. The repetition of "your" indicates the autonomous independence of the world of the old man, and "your whole peculiar plot," for instance, reveals the unique domain singularly formed by the old man. The "plot" has the double meaning of a small piece of ground and the sequence of events, and the redness of chestnut trees is recognized as an individual growth. The flowing motion of a river is grasped as an eternal phenomenon, and it keeps its stable and unique individuality as a representation of nature. The river almost becomes symbolical, as it begins to assume the symbolical significance of eternity. Overall, "An Old Man Asleep" describes the interactive fusion between an old man's world and the outside world, while each world keeps its own independence.

Another poem which exhibits the theme of old age is "Lebensweisheitspielerei," a title which literally means "Worldly Wisdom's Game." This poem shows Stevens's vision of old age, and his vision finally leads, for example, to creating the masterpiece of "To an Old Philosopher in Rome." The structure of "Lebensweisheitspielerei" is three-line five stanzas, and it succinctly displays the stale condition of old age as well as the possibility of its discovering ultimate values. The poem begins with a depressive mood:

Weaker and weaker, the sunlight falls  
In the afternoon. The proud and the strong  
Have departed.

Those that are left are the unaccomplished,  
The finally human,  
Natives of a dwindled sphere.

Their indigence is an indigence  
That is an indigence of the light,  
A stellar pallor that hangs on the threads.

Little by little, the poverty  
Of autumnal space becomes  
A look, a few words spoken.

Each person completely touches us  
With what he is and as he is,  
In the stale grandeur of annihilation. (429-430)

The overall mood of the poem is a subdued one with an echo of commiseration toward the weak. When the time draws near the evening, the “proud and the strong” like the Nietzschean heroes disappear, and the weak and the “unaccomplished” are focused. The weak, who are the “Natives of a dwindled sphere,” are the “finally human,” meaning that the weak are more human-minded, and they can get what the “proud and the strong” cannot get. The weak are in poverty, and they are expressed as lacking light: “A stellar pallor that hangs on the threads.” This stellar pallor image reminds one of some associations. The threads may refer to those of fate which Atropos may cut, or they may be of a cobweb symbolizing man's tethered condition, or furthermore they may be of those of comets, implying the shortness of life. In any case, the life of the weak is in indigence, being fateful and miserable. Yet the last stanza reverses this man's fateful condition and seems to show some possibility of getting human dignity. Man may go through the annihilation of life, but he may have a chance to gain a true self. The road of perishment is miserable, but it can be also the way to attain a sort of human grandeur.

“Lebensweisheitspielerei,” indeed, reveals man's possibility when he is deprived of superficial decorations. In poverty, man's spirit begins to shine, and his genuine self is urged to reveal its truths. Poverty is conversely a way to fecundity.

The poem which also conjures up the sense of vacancy in the late career of a man is “Vacancy in the Park.” In this poem, the reverberations of the poems like “The Snow man” and “Anecdote of the Jar” may resound, yet the poem particularly focuses on the meaning of vacancy:

March . . . Someone has walked across the snow,  
Someone looking for he knows not what.

It is like a boat that has pulled away  
From a shore at night and disappeared.

It is like a guitar left on a table  
By a woman, who has forgotten it.

It is like the feeling of a man

Come back to see a certain house.

The four winds blow through the rustic arbor,  
Under its mattresses of vines. (434-435)

The time is March, and spring is near. Some human footprints are on the snow; and, according to the second line, someone was “looking for he knows not what.” This line implies that the footprints are strangely directed toward a blockade like trees or bushes and returned, or circularly left, or, though unlikely, disappeared halfway like the footprints of Lucy Gray on a snow bridge in Wordsworth's poem. The footprints on the snow furthermore conjures up an image of a boat which pulled away and disappeared from the shore at night. Some memories had disappeared and left some traces, which ebbed away in the sea of man's unconsciousness. Also, what was looked for is “like a guitar left on a table,” which is meant to resound with the notes of memory. And what was looked for is “like the feeling of a man” who has come” back to see a certain house.” The “certain house” is most likely his old house, and a feeling of nostalgia is enhanced there. What the disappeared boat, the forgotten guitar, and the revisited house imply is that something was lost, and the speaker of this poem asserts that what was lost is valuable. Growing to be an old man means losing something on the way.

The last two lines reveal a Stevensian symbol: the four winds indicate the winds of north, south, east, and west; that is to say, the tree (as a symbol of man) is blown by the hardship of time and nature. Also, the wind for Stevens has often a special meaning, as he says in another poem, “he thought within the thought / Of the wind. . . .” (436) And the tree is under the mattresses of vines, suggesting the double sense that it is to a degree safe from the weather like rains and that it has seen things tangled. That is what a man experiences in life. Overall, in “Vacancy in the Park” what was lost is conversely emphasized and comes to the front to be seen imaginatively. The value of what was lost is made clear and lights the old age.

Thus far, three poems concerning Stevens's sense of old age have been examined. “An Old Man Asleep” implies the old age's discovery of values related to human dignity, and “Lebensweisheitspielerei” reveals the process of enhancing the grandeur of old life. “Vacancy in the Park,” though it implies the tragic vision of old age, displays the solid vision of human values which the old age can attain. Altogether, the poems show Stevens's struggle for the ultimate human values of old life.

In *The Rock*, one of the great poems which reveals the grandeur of human imagination and dignity realizable at an old age is “To an Old Philosopher in Rome.” The poem reveals Stevens's interpretation of the profound spirituality of George Santayana. Santayana was a spiritual

mentor for Stevens since his Harvard days, and his influence upon Stevens is considered to be profound. The poem begins with a solemn mood:

On the threshold of heaven, the figures in the street  
Become the figures of heaven, the majestic movement  
Of men growing small in the distances of space,  
Singing, with smaller and still smaller sound,  
Unintelligible absolution and an end—

The threshold, Rome, and that more merciful Rome  
Beyond, the two alike in the make of the mind.  
It is as if in a human dignity  
Two parallels become one, a perspective, of which  
Men are part both in the inch and in the mile. (432)

Stevens looks on Rome in two senses: Rome as an actual city and a threshold to a spiritual world. Rome has the duality of two worlds, ordinary and spiritual; and, in that sense, “Men are part both in the inch and in the mile.” Seen by the spiritual eye, the things of this world begin to reveal novelty; and, ultimately, Stevens thinks that what Santayana has struggled to gain is the “human end in the spirit's greatest reach, / The extreme of the known in the presence of the extreme / Of the unknown.” The known and unknown worlds are interfused, and they echo with each other. The finite world is fused with the spiritual, a unison which enhances fecund and deep meanings. Stevens grasps an instance of the unison in the word of “circle,” which he thinks gives birth to “a portent” and “a moving transparence.” Rome is a multilayered city with the spiritual and the real with the background of long history: “The sources of happiness in the shape of Rome, / A shape within the ancient circles of shapes.” The things of this world are sublimated into the stage of the spiritual, as Stevens expresses the presence of a spiritual light beyond an actual light:

A light on the candle tearing against the wick  
To join a hovering excellence, to escape  
From fire and be part only of that of which

Fire is the symbol: the celestial possible. (433)

Stevens sees that Santayana's life has been dedicated to the discovery of this celestial light,

and as an exemplar of a spiritual explorer, the arduous efforts of Santayana's life are worthy of praise: "each of us / Beholds himself in you, and hears his voice / In yours . . . ." Like a torch, Santayana's great achievement continues to shed its light on us.

In Stevens's vision, Santayana dedicated his life to the two worlds, spiritual and real, and spent his life like a pilgrim seeking after the grandeur of the human values. The human grandeur, seen above in "Lebensweisheitspielerei," is more intensified and developed in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome." Stevens pays attention to the human grandeur which may be attainable even in misery:

Your dozing in the depths of wakefulness,  
In the warmth of your bed, at the edge of your chair, alive  
Yet living in two worlds, impenitent  
As to one, and, as to one, most penitent,  
Impatient of the grandeur that you need

In so much misery; and yet finding it  
Only in misery, the afflatus of ruin,  
Profound poetry of the poor and of the dead,  
As in the last drop of the deepest blood,  
As it falls from the heart and lies there to be seen

Even as the blood of an empire, it might be,  
For a citizen of heaven though still of Rome.  
It is poverty's speech that seeks us out the most.  
It is older than the oldest speech of Rome.  
This is the tragic accent of the scene. (433)

The stanzas imply that in misery can be found the human grandeur, and that only through annihilation can be revealed a divine inspiration. The ruin and death are, conversely, part of the source of profound poetry, and the blood of the heart becomes the basis of "the blood of an empire," like the blood of Jesus Christ which is shed for the salvation of the human beings. Stevens associates the painful effort of Santayana with that of Christ and builds up the image of the spiritual and emotional interaction of the two heroes. In poverty and misery, Santayana attained an ultimate spirituality, somewhat similar to Christ.

For Stevens, Santayana has edified the grand architecture of poetry and philosophy in strict



poverty and solitude, and he has made it possible by his poetic imagination:

It is a kind of total grandeur at the end,  
With every visible thing enlarged and yet  
No more than a bed, a chair and moving nuns,  
The immensest theatre, the pillared porch,  
The book and candle in your ambered room,

Total grandeur of a total edifice,  
Chosen by an inquisitor of structures  
For himself. He stops upon this threshold,  
As if the design of all his words takes form  
And frame from thinking and is realized. (434)

The trajectory of Santayana's struggle and effort to see the depth of the world is finally led to gaining "a kind of total grandeur."

As seen above, "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" is a sort of homage by Stevens toward Santayana's laborious struggle and his poetic and philosophical achievement. For Stevens, Santayana is a man who has attempted to relinquish the superficial physicality of the ordinary world in order to attain the grandeur of spirituality. Stevens perceives that, till his death, Santayana has endeavored to edify his spiritual world and that his old age was shining with poetic enlightenment.

As to old age, the next poem to be examined in *The Rock* is the title poem "The Rock." This poem consists of three parts, and the first part "Seventy Years Later," particularly, reveals Stevens's vision of the end of life. Stevens's conceptions of death and life intermingle in a sort of tragic mood:

It is an illusion that we were ever alive,  
Lived in the houses of mothers, arranged ourselves  
By our own motions in a freedom of air.

Regard the freedom of seventy years ago.  
It is no longer air. The houses still stand,  
Though they are rigid in rigid emptiness.

Even our shadows, their shadows, no longer remain.  
The lives these lived in the mind are at an end. (445)

One may say that this is a sort of poem which only an old man, who has spent a long life like seventy, can write. Looking over his long life, the speaker feels that his life was an illusion. He thinks that though he was born with a gift of freedom, his life became less and less free, and tangled in the servitude of human life; and now what barely remains in the old man's mind is the memories of close relatives. What he can see is a gloomy and desolate vision of old life:

They never were . . . The sounds of the guitar

Were not and are not. Absurd. The words spoken  
Were not and are not. It is not to be believed.  
The meeting at noon at the edge of the field seems like

An invention, an embrace between one desperate clod  
And another in a fantastic consciousness,  
In a queer assertion of humanity: (445)

What the poem shows is definitely an extremely tragic vision of life. The speaker feels that the joy of life (symbolized by the guitar) was not and is not present now, and the words exchanged by friends and families were not and are not present, either. They look absurd and are not worth to be believed, the speaker says. And the speaker thinks that even a love romance, surprisingly, is an "invention," being as "a queer assertion of humanity." Stevens examines what humanity may mean in man's life, and for him humanity is related to the natural growth of nature: "In the sun's design of its own happiness." What is needed is an illusion of happiness ("an illusion so desired"), which Stevens thinks should be the important element of life:

That the green leaves came and covered the high rock,  
That the lilacs came and bloomed, like a blindness cleaned,  
Exclaiming bright sight, as it was satisfied,

In a birth of sight. The blooming and the musk  
Were being alive, an incessant being alive,  
A particular of being, that gross universe. (445)

In Stevens's vision the base of life is desolate and solitary as a high rock, yet there is a chance that some refreshing sight may vivify the human life: for example, when the blooms and fragrance of the lilacs cover the rock, the rock (life) comes to have a particular existence however illusive it may be.

Overall, "Seventy Years Later" reveals Stevens's vision of old age, covering the long years of his life. The human life may be an illusion, but Stevens thinks that a vital illusion is necessary for a man, since it helps to create a fresh vision of life. The attainment of freshened visions becomes a sort of rebirth for human beings. In John Keats's "Hyperion," a similar idea is depicted, as the human power of aesthetic rebirth is emphasized:

We fall by course of Nature's law . . .  
 .....  
 A power more strong in beauty, born of us  
 And fated to excel us . . . . (228-229)

For Keats and Stevens, the imaginative power is perceived to be regenerative. Despite the desolate annihilation of man's fate, he may still be able to discover the imaginative creation of the world.

The part II, "The Poems as Icon," centrally examines the meaning of the existence of a rock, which is associated with the symbolical meaning of the cure of human world. The rock appears as the ruin of the past time, and it needs to be reborn. The key word is cure. The rock is the memorial symbol of the center of human passion and regeneration, and it fundamentally needs to be refreshed, and what is necessary for the cure is the eternal curing agents. The cure is symbolically brought by the leaves which cover the rock, and the leaves are, in Stevens's words, "the poem, the icon and the man." And these are "a cure of the ground and of ourselves." The regeneration of the rock is possible by the imaginative power of poetry, and the power should become the basis of human society.

The part III, "Forms of the Rock in a Night-Hymn," centrally treats with the forms of the rock. The rock transfigures itself and goes through some development: first, the rock is the "gray particular of man's life," which suggests the chaotic yet particular part of man's life. Second, the rock is the "stern particular of the air, / the mirror of the planets," being as a concrete entity to reactivate the universe. Third, the rock is the "habitation of the whole," being ubiquitous. It can generate an imaginative world as actual, and it can become the "origin of the mango's rind," meaning that it has an omnipresent power. When Marcel Proust built his grand imaginative

world in *A la recherché du temps perdu*, he picked up a piece of madeleine as a central image which was supposed to trigger recalling the memories of a protagonist's childhood. Likewise, the rock is the most fundamental basis of some restructure for Stevens. It is the basis of the world and transformative:

It is the rock where tranquil must adduce  
Its tranquil self, the main of things, the mind,

The starting point of the human and the end,  
That in which space itself is contained, the gate  
To the enclosure, day, the things illumined

By day, night and that which night illumines,  
Night and its midnight-minting fragrances,  
Night's hymn of the rock, as in a vivid sleep. (447)

The rock is an imaginative and actual reality which can include almost everything; and, therefore, it has the infinite fecundity of poetic possibility.

One of the poems in *The Rock* which also uses the image of the rock and illustrates its symbolical meanings is "The Irish Cliffs of Moher." In this poem, the concept of tradition is emphatically examined, and the matter of genealogy and heritage is viewed in connection with the passage of time. Geographically, the Cliffs of Moher is located at the southwestern edge of the Burren region in County Clare, Ireland. It is famous for its tremendous height from the sea and is often cited as one of the famous sightseeing spots. With the scene of the cliffs, Stevens projects his imagination into the past; and, from the viewpoint of genealogy, he creates a poetic vision extending beyond time and space:

Who is my father in this world, in this house,  
At the spirit's base?

My father's father, his father's father, his—  
Shadows like winds

Go back to a parent before thought, before speech,  
At the head of the past. (427)

He questions the spiritual base of his father and attempts to examine the content of his father's heritage. The first two lines indicate that Stevens tries to see his father in the point of spirituality. Spiritually speaking, the spirituality of his father is Stevens's concern, and his search is directed toward the beginning of his ancestors.

In Stevens's view, the cliffs of Moher seem to exist beyond time and space, and it is the image which he and his father share:

They go to the cliffs of Moher rising out of the mist,  
Above the real,

Rising out of present time and place, above  
The wet, green grass.

This is not landscape, full of the somnambulations  
Of poetry

And the sea. This is my father or, maybe,  
It is as he was,

A likeness, one of the race of fathers: earth  
And sea and air. (427)

The cliffs almost appear like a memorial object. And, it is “full of the somnambulations / of poetry / And the sea,” an image which suggests the cliff's various appearances by poetic changes. The cliff is like the group of his fathers, and from them Stevens feels that he has received an inheritance. Age surpassed, place interfused, the cliffs become the huge rock of everlasting symbol. Stevens refers to his heritage of spirituality from his ancestors, which he feels is ingrained in his nature: “A likeness, one of the race of fathers: earth / And sea and air.” “The Irish Cliffs of Moher” is a poem which recognizes the continuation of spiritual and poetic heritage.

In “The Irish Cliffs of Moher,” the idea of old age is assimilated into the wide temporal span of the heritage of fathers, and Stevens's poetic vision is focused on the transmittance of spirituality. It is the world which transcends death, and Stevens's poetic vision spans the long tradition and heritage of spirituality.

To conclude, this essay has attempted to examine Stevens's vision of old age in *The Rock*. For the examination, some hypotheses have been set up. The first hypothesis is that *the Rock*, being Stevens's last collection of poetry formed in his seventies, may strongly reflect his idea of old age. The result was, however, unexpectedly negative, and the subject of old age is not central in *The Rock*. The number of poems which deal with the matter of old age is limited, and the majority of poems is related with the problem of the relationship between reality and imagination. The second hypothesis is that *The Rock* may be loaded with the full images of death and religion. The result is again negative, as the images of death and religion are relatively few. Of course, it is possible to detect the images of death here and there, but it is not a central subject in the collection. The third hypothesis is that *The Rock* may reveal Stevens's final idea of the vision of imagination, and the answer is right. The collection shows Stevens's persistent and ultimate search for the meaning of the power of imagination.

In all, what is asserted in *the Rock* is that man grows old, yet he has the imaginative and poetic power to recreate his world at any time and in any place, and like old Santayana he may be able to attain the grandeur of life in the poetically refreshed world. Man can attain a sort of imaginative rebirth how old he may become. Stevens tries to follow the traces of Santayana till the final stage of his poetic career, and he succeeds in acquiring the grandeur of his poetic imagination. As T. S. Eliot says in "The Dry Salvage" in *Four Quartets*, "Old men ought to be explorers," Stevens has continued to search for the ultimate grandeur of his life till his death.

## Notes

1. My thematic reading of all the poems in *The Rock* is in the following. The opening poem of *The Rock* is "An Old Man Asleep." In Stevens's poems an old man often appears, but this poem is important, because it preludes other poems. It deals with the problem of old age and affirms its significance. The following poem "The Irish Cliffs of Moher" shows the importance of heritage and emphasizes the value of what should be transmitted. "The Plain Sense of Things" asserts that the imagination must be used for the old age, and "One of the Inhabitants of the West" shows pastoral visions of the old age, though a bit tainted with guilt. The next poem "Lebensweisheitspielerei" focuses on the brilliancy of old age attainable in poverty. "The Hermitage at the Center" exhibits the supreme imaginative point of view beyond the transience of our world. The next poem "The Green Plant" emphasizes the strength of the growing life of plant, which is way beyond the power of our imagination. And the following poem, "Madam La Fleurie," in a sense, is thematically opposite to the preceding poem, revealing the destined finality of human life going toward a miserable end. "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" is one of the pillar poems in *The Rock*, and it displays man's enormous

possibility in creating grand imaginative architectures. The next poem "Vacancy in the Park" conversely shows the presence of unfillable vacancy in the old life in a miserable touch. "The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain" describes the autonomy of poetic imagination, which affects the human life and refreshes the mind. The following poem "Two Illustrations That the World Is What You Make of It" reveals Stevens's study of the phases of nature, which is within and beyond human control. "Prologue to What is Possible" shows Stevens's persistent study of the interaction of man and imagination. "Looking Across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly" examines man's engagement with nature, and Stevens asserts that nature and the human spirit have their own separate manners of expression.

"Song of Fixed Accord" emphasizes that love and sorrow are the most important human emotions, and they need be harmonized. The next poem "The World as Meditation" deals with the power of imagination which has a barbarous force. And "Long and Sluggish Lines," with the subdued strength of imagination, reveals a composure in making a poem in a humorous way. It examines the inchoate process of creating a poem. "A Quiet Normal Life" affirms the value of artifice in lighting up the human life beyond its frailty, and the next poem "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" succinctly sums up Stevens's idea of the power of imagination: "God and the imagination are one" (444).

"The Rock," the centerpiece poem of the collection, reveals the firm, transient but solid, bases of the fusion of memory, imagination, and reality. The bases are everywhere, and the rock is the foundation of the whole world. "St. Armorer's Church from the Outside" displays the collateral presence of the past and present and the possible future of the church in ephemeral glimpses. Like T. S. Eliot's poem "East Coker," the poem reveals timeless revelations beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries. "Note on Moonlight," focusing on the moonlight, exhibits the fecundity of imaginative transfigures, and "The Planet on the Table" examines the relationship between the creator and the created, stressing the independent meaning of the created. "The River of Rivers in Connecticut" focuses on the changing images of the river and reveals the multiple images of an entity. And the last poem, "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself," treats the problem of epistemological stimuli connected with poetic reactions.

## References

- Eliot, T. S. *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1969.
- Keats, John. *The Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.
- Stevens, Wallace. *Collected Poetry and Prose*. New York: The Library of America, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Opus Posthumous*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Palm at the End of the Mind*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.