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## Constructing a New Stage: Wallace Stevens's War Poetry

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### I.

In Wallace Stevens's poetical works there is a genre which can be called 'war poetry.' Stevens was, to a great degree, interested in the contemporary events of the world, being conscious of imminent and actual wars. Actually, his youngest sister, Mary Katharine, died in France in 1919 while serving as a Red Cross volunteer during World War I, and he was greatly affected by the incident. Most of Stevens's war poems are collected in *Ideas of Order* (1936), *Parts of a World* (1942), and *Transport to Summer* (1947), which evince the shadow of the two major world wars. Marjorie Perloff, a major poetry critic, however, says in a recent interview with a Stevens scholar Edward Ragg in *The Wallace Stevens Journal* in spring 2018 that "I don't think he had anything interesting to say about war" ("Yeats" 15). Is Perloff's comment really valid? In fact, Stevens says in the poem, "Of Modern World Poetry," that "The poem of the mind . . . has to think about war / And it has to find what will suffice. It has / To construct a new stage" (218-19). For Stevens, war was not a minor problem, and it is possible to say that he tackled with the problem seriously.

In this essay, I will contend that Stevens's sense of war formed the central part of his poetic vision and without it he could not have attained the profound thinking of the meaning of imagination and reality. Concerning Stevens's sense of war, Edward Ragg says that "Stevens would never write the war poetry of Karl Shapiro, Randall Jarrell, or Keith Douglas, just as he refrained from the literary-political invective of Tate and the New Critics" (183-84). Stevens was free of artistic propaganda, and he was non-political. Actually, in *The Necessary Angel*, Stevens says that "I might be expected to speak of the social, that is to say sociological or political, obligation of the poet. He has none" (CPP 659). It is sure that a poet is urged to be neutral in political view, but James Longenbach perceives Stevens's pressure to write epic war poems, saying that "a generation of lyric poets had been pushed despite themselves to make an

epic statement” (105). Whether Stevens had a clear intention to write epic poetry is uncertain, but one may say that “Lettres d’un Soldat,” which is relatively a long war poem, may be called an epic poem.

## II.

Stevens wrote “Lettres d’un Soldat” by adapting the work that has the same title by a French soldier and artist named Eugène Emmanuel Lemerrier (1886-1915). The original work is a collection of letters by Lemerrier to his mother during August 1914-April 1915. Stevens’s poem may be called a sort of apprentice work, yet it reveals his original and poetic power. It consists of thirteen parts with epigraphs from Lemerrier’s letters to each part. Historically, the poem was first published in the journal *Poetry*, XII, in May 1918, and Stevens thus relates the process of its production to his wife in a letter on March 14, 1918:

I arrived here [Chicago] this morning. When I left Indianapolis last night, it was so hot that I could not stand any cover. To-day, on the other hand, it has been snowing here. [. . .] Late this afternoon I went up to *Poetry*’s office and saw Miss Monroe about my war-poems. We went over them together and weeded out the bad ones. They will be published bye and bye. (L218)

This part discloses that the poem was, in a sense, the collaboration of Stevens and Monroe. Later, Stevens included and published some parts of the poem in his *Harmonium* in 1931, and he had not a little attachment with them.<sup>1</sup> In the following, each part shall be examined briefly.

Part I reveals a soldier’s fateful acceptance of war as a natural event. Lemerrier’s view of the human condition in war is reinterpreted in Stevens, and Stevens depicts the dualistic conflict between the states of the original human mind and the refined mind affected by the lesson of Christian orthodoxy. “No introspective chaos,” Stevens writes and emphasizes the stability of a hero’s mind in a stronger way than Lemerrier does.

Part II beautifully describes the foreboding uprising of Venus in the brooding darkness of starry night. In Stevens’s terms, the night is symbolical of war, in which the starlight of “mysterious beauté” is visible. Lemerrier describes the majesty of the night and the beauty of Venus, while Stevens romantically depicts the feminine atmosphere of nature. Stevens’s depiction smacks of humanity more than Lemerrier’s.

Part III reveals the reverie of killing a mayor, whose illustration is part of the tragic representation of the violence of war. Stevens focuses on the desperation of a man, sensing love and beauty residing in violence, which Lemercier also thinks are associated with the reality of war. In Part IV, Lemercier's words imply the presence of universal wisdom, while Stevens regards it as having a sort of eternal power, which is possible to bend "a bayonet." Part V reveals Lemercier's finding of beauty in minute things, and Stevens emphasizes the presence of some divine will, which is represented in the beauty of nature and living animals. The mountain pallors are even "sensitive" and "conscientious" for Stevens. In Part VI, the essence of Lemercier's words refers to his confirmation in the existence of eternal justice. Also, as the subtitle of "The Surprises of the Superhuman" indicates, Stevens shows the Nietzschean idea of superman. In his idea, "Übermenschlichkeit" (Overhumanness) embodies eternal justice. The fact that Stevens uses the idea of superhuman reveals his tentative search for the eternal justice which can replace God.

In Part VII, Lemercier's epigraph depicts the beautiful transformation of nature by the moonlight; and for Stevens, as the subtitle "Lunar Paraphrase" shows, he sees that "The moon is the mother of pathos and pity." While Lemercier refers to the peace of the night, Stevens dismisses it and emphasizes the pathos and pity of the night. Lemercier's epigraph of Part VIII reveals his love to his mother. The mother is described having the extraordinary spirit: *Je sais que ma mère a atteint à cette liberté d'âme qui permet de contempler le spectacle universel* (I know that my mother reached this freedom of soul which made it possible to contemplate the universal spectacle). For Lemercier, she is an ideal figure; but for Stevens, he expects the presence of "another mother," who commands man's sacrifice. She is a "mightier mother," who appears almost like fate. Lemercier's epigraph of Part IX affirms his retention of conscience, and the facts of impersonal justice and destiny are revealed. Stevens's poem emphasizes Lemercier's interpretation of the impersonal will of the world and focuses on the tragic condition of the destiny of human beings. For Stevens, the creator of the world is a mechanical God, and human beings just endure their fates under his control.

In Part X, Lemercier's description of soldier's life is raucous with drinking and fight, and Stevens depicts it in a sort of drunkard's song. The babbling of a drunkard is noisy, yet somehow it sounds with pathos. Part XI portends the death of a soldier; in Lemercier's vision the death of man is a natural event. For Stevens, human death is "as in season of autumn," too; and he compares such death with that of Jesus Christ ("a three-days personage"). In Part XII, Lemercier's epigraph reveals the arrival of cranes in a storm which seems to bring some hope and relief. Stevens interprets this scene and shows the scene of a theater where a tragedy is staged. The bloody violence is a steady machine, yet the poem refrains from

depicting the details. Lastly, in Part XIII, Lemerrier's epigraph describes the harsh reality of death, and Stevens squarely tackles with the problem of death. Death is a reaper and a horse rider, and before it is depicted human weakness.

Thus, the thirteen parts of "Lettres d'un Soldat" have been reviewed briefly. Originally, Lemerrier, was a student studying paintings, and he was a poet. In the war, his aesthetic perception was undoubtedly sharpened and enhanced, and one can see his exquisite perception in discovering beauty in the night, the moon, and some living creatures. Though death was foreboding, he summoned courage and hoped for regeneration. There is no doubt that Stevens was moved by Lemerrier's artistic sense. Apparently, Stevens minutely studied Lemerrier's poetic world and positively borrowed some of his visions, and what is important is that he created his own visions. Stevens absorbed the essence of Lemerrier's work and endeavored to make his own poetry. Lemerrier described the raucous and crazy behaviors of soldiers, yet Stevens depicts the same situation as an intense realistic moment.

### III.

In five years, after the publication of *Harmonium* in 1931, Stevens received the annual *Nation* prize in 1936 for a war poem, titled "The Men That Are Falling." This poem was later included in the collection *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, which was published in 1937. In a letter Stevens says, "I did have the Spanish Republicans in mind when I wrote The Men that are Falling" (798), and he reveals his motive for writing the poem. But, interestingly, the poem does not contain any direct references to the Spanish war.

The poem begins with a *Hamlet*-like phrase, "God and all angels sing the world to sleep," and the moon appears, metamorphosing the earthly scenes and evoking burning memories. Calm and quiet, "The bells grow longer," which recall funeral sounds or heavenly bells. Sleep does not fall upon a man, but he realizes his own desire. The truth of his desire is unknown, but it is embedded in his life like "an intenser instinct." Compared with "Lettres d'un Soldat," "The Men That Are Falling" is more symbolic and moving. In fact, the poem reveals a gruesome picture of a man, whose alternative face stares on a pillow like a "sudarium," and Stevens says: "God and all angels, this was his desire, / Whose head lies blurring here, for this he died. / Taste of the blood upon his martyred lips, / O pensioners, O demagogues and paymen!" (174). A soldier is described as a martyr, and the sudarium, like the printed face of Jesus Christ, suggests the actuality of his life. The soldier's life is symbolized, and the sudarium addresses us with the certainty of an actual image.

The last line resounds with the piercing tone of Stevens's woeful cry. The soldier died for what he believed, and Stevens says: "Speak and say the immaculate syllables / That he spoke only by doing what he did" (174). The 'immaculate syllables' are the soldier's last words from the heart:

This death was his belief though death is a stone.  
This man loved earth, not heaven, enough to die.

The night wind blows upon the dreamer, bent  
Over words that are life's voluble utterance. (174)

The "life's voluble utterance" is contrasted with the silence of death, and the meaning of human life, Stevens perceives, lies in the verbal expression of the mind. Between life and death, the words suggest the subtle value of human existence.

After six years, Stevens again dealt with the theme of war and death in "Dry Loaf," which was published in 1942 in *Parts of a World*. In the poem the speaker recognizes that he lives in "a tragic land," perceiving the severe situation of men fleeing from war: "the dry men blown / Brown as the bread, thinking of birds / Flying from burning countries and brown sand shores." He sees what prods soldiers to war:

It was the battering of drums I heard  
It was hunger, it was the hungry that cried  
And the waves, the waves were soldiers moving,  
Marching and marching in a tragic time  
Below me, on the asphalt, under the trees.

It was soldiers went marching over the rocks  
And still the birds came, came in watery flocks,  
Because it was spring and the birds had to come.  
No doubt that soldiers had to be marching  
And that drums had to be rolling, rolling, rolling. (183-84)

For one thing, hunger is regarded as the hidden cause of war; for another, it is a fate for men. What Stevens implies in the poem is the inevitable fate of men's impulse, which, like the flow of a river, continues to come up as if it had its own will. In Stevens's vision, human life is

tragic, and it is controlled by some fate (“No doubt that soldiers had to be marching”). Soldiers march to the world of death, and it is a fact: doomed and absurd, yet inevitable. There is no hint of heroicness at the end.

As seen above, in “Lettres d’un Soldat,” “The Men That Are Falling,” and “Dry Loaf,” the matters of life and death are centrally described, and with them are layered together the situation of human fate, absurdity, and truth. These poems are relatively dark, and human beings are described as limited. How to deal with the human limitation and find any human possibility becomes the next great problem for Stevens. In “Examination of the Hero in a Time of War” in *Parts of a World*, Stevens tackles this problem. The poem consists of sixteen parts and focuses on the heroicness of a soldier. In Stevens’s vision, a soldier goes through brute force, cruelty, inhumanity, and death. Even when “Got” (a parody for God) is sought after, it is, in fact, a lethal weapon. In such situations, however, Stevens perceives that a soldier can transform himself and magnify his true nature. A common soldier can become a hero, a transformed person with an elevated personality:

It is not an image. It is a feeling.  
There is no image of the hero.  
There is a feeling as definition.  
How could there be an image, an outline,  
A design, a marble soiled by pigeons?  
The hero is a feeling, a man seen  
As if the eye was an emotion,  
As if in seeing we saw our feeling  
In the object seen and saved that mystic  
Against the sight, the penetrating,  
Pure eye. Instead of allegory,  
We have and are the man, capable  
Of his brave quickenings, the human  
Accelerations that seem inhuman. (248-49)

A hero is not a fable, and he is an existence that one can feel. The hero can be seen by the re-created vision. And he is the highest self, acting like a true man:

The highest man with nothing higher  
Than himself, his self, the self that embraces

The self of the hero, the solar single,  
Man-sun, man-moon, man-earth, man-ocean,  
Makes poems on the syllable *fā* or  
Jumps from the clouds or, from his window,  
Sees the petty gildings on February . . . (250)

The highest man can span over time and space, and he is a poetic hero, who can reimagine the order of the world. By describing the possibility of the birth of hero, Stevens envisions the recreation of the world.

Another poem which describes the heroicness of soldier is “Repetitions of a Young Captain” in *Transport to Summer*, which was first published in *Quarterly Review of Literature* 1 in the spring of 1944. The poem consists of six parts, and the part III displays Stevens’s vision of the possibility of human transformation in war:

Millions of major men against their like  
Make more than thunder’s rural rumbling. They make  
The giants that each one of them becomes  
In a calculated chaos: he that takes form  
From the others, being larger than he was,  
Accoutred in a little of the strength

That sweats the sun up on its morning way  
To giant red, sweats up a giant sense  
To the make-matter, matter-nothing mind,

Until this matter-makes in years of war. (271-72)

An individual soldier can have an enlarged sense of himself, and the giant sense of human enlargement leads to the sense of “matter-nothing mind.” The giant sense is real:

The giant sense remains  
A giant without a body. If, as giant,  
He shares a gigantic life, it is because  
The gigantic has a reality of its own. (271-72)

The giant image is very important in Stevens's poetry, because it forms the basic idea of his vision of the imaginative possibility. Like the Nietzschean idea of superhuman, the image of giant has an actual reality for Stevens:

A few words, a memorandum voluble  
Of the giant sense, the enormous harness  
And writhing wheels of this world's business,

The drivers in the wind-blows cracking whips,  
The pulling into the sky and the setting there  
Of the expanses that are mountainous rock and sea;

And beyond the days, beyond the slow-foot litters  
Of the nights, the actual, universal strength,  
Without a word of rhetoric—there it is. (273)

The giant sense is a reality, which is part of the human possibilities, and this vision is created by the amplification of poetic imagination. What Stevens discovers in war is the truth of human nature in a crisis, and he reaches the enlargement of human possibility. For Stevens, war impels human beings to face seriously the pressure of facts, and Stevens, as a poet, is urged to examine the reality of the facts:

Soldier, there is a war between the mind  
And sky, between thought and day and night. It is  
For that the poet is always in the sun,

Patches the moon together in his room  
To his Virgilian cadences, up down,  
Up down. It is a war that never ends.

.....  
The soldier is poor without the poet's lines,

His petty syllabi, the sounds that stick,  
Inevitably modulating, in the blood.



And war for war, each has its gallant kind.

How simply the fictive hero becomes the real;  
How gladly with proper words the soldier dies,  
If he must, or lives on the bread of faithful speech. (351-52)

A soldier's efforts are likened to the poet's struggle in making poetry, and life is only enlivened with the words of the poet. Only a poetic hero, a fighter for fresh words, can recreate the vision of a new world.

#### IV.

Thus, Stevens' idea of heroicness is accomplished by the creation of new words, which suggests that the world can be remade by the verbal change. The soldier hero can be a poetic creator, who can reveal the possibility of human beings. Stevens's vision of war is firmly related with that vision, and it is told in detail in the following note:

The immense poetry of war and the poetry of a work of the imagination are two different things. In the presence of the violent reality of war, consciousness takes the place of the imagination. And consciousness of an immense war is a consciousness of fact. If that is true, it follows that the poetry of war as a consciousness of the victories and defeats of nations, is a consciousness of fact, but of heroic fact, of fact on such a scale that the mere consciousness of it affects the scale of one's thinking and constitutes a participating in the heroic.

It has been easy to say in recent times that everything tends to become real, or, rather, that everything moves in the direction of reality, that is to say, in the direction of fact. We leave fact and come back to it, come back to what we wanted fact to be, not to what it was, not to what it has too often remained. The poetry of a work of the imagination constantly illustrates the fundamental and endless struggle with fact. It goes on everywhere, even in the periods that we call peace. But in war, the desire to move in the direction of fact as we want to be and to move quickly is overwhelming.

Nothing will appease this desire except a consciousness of fact as everyone is at least satisfied to have it be. (251)

What Stevens says is that war poetry and the ordinary imaginative poetry are different and

that in the brutal facts of war, consciousness is the only tool to grasp facts. When the facts are grasped by consciousness, they begin to assume heroicness. Imagination and consciousness are separate. In Stevens's idea, the consciousness needs to be fully motivated first so that the imagination can be activated on the facts. Stevens regards war poetry as conscious poetry.

What does the conscious poetry exactly mean? It means that the pressure of war is so strong that nothing but consciousness can describe the facts of war. Without the interruption of imagination, the facts need to be told and reveal the truth of war and human existence. Like W. C. Williams's idea of "contact," it is to wait until the things begin to talk, as they are staggered by the pressure of imaginative consciousness. In the first essay of *The Necessary Angel*, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," Stevens explains the two roles of poetry to "adhere to reality" and "to resist or evade" reality's pressure. In making war poems, consciousness is required first to adhere to reality, and as the consciousness grasps the reality, it begins to produce poetic truth. In the same essay, Stevens says, "Having identified poetic truth as the truth of fact, since fact includes poetic fact, that is to say: the indefinite number of actual things that are indistinguishable from objects of the imagination" (CPP 682).

## V.

One of the poems which vividly describes the poetic truth imbedded in facts is "A Woman Sings a Song for a Soldier Come Home" in *Transport to Summer*. It was first published in *Quarterly Review of Literature* 3 in the fall of 1946. The poem is effective in showing the wretchedness of war and the devastated mind of a soldier, who is apparently suffering from a sort of posttraumatic stress disorder. Like a living shadow, he does not seem to belong to the actual world. He has an inner wound, and the poem describes him bluntly as if his mind is shattered:

The clouds are over the village, the town,  
To which the walker speaks  
And tells of his wound,

Without a word to the people, unless  
One person should come by chance,  
This man or that

So much a part of the place, so little  
A person he knows, with whom he might  
Talk of the weather—

And let it go, with nothing lost,  
Just out of the village, at its edge,  
In the quiet there. (313)

The soldier is an outsider, being at the “edge” of the human world. The description of the poem is blunt, and the caesura in the third stanza tells the depth of the soldier’s wound. As to wounded war veterans, William Faulkner, for instance, depicts a soldier called Bayard Sartoris in *Sartoris* (1929), who also suffers from the wound of the mind. Stevens’s poem suggests that the matter of the inner wound was a relatively new problem.

Another poem which reveals Stevens’s conscious attempt to show the truth of the facts of war is Part VII of “Esthétique du Mal.” The poem describes the facts of a soldier’s death, which ultimately begin to assume some symbolic meanings:

How red the rose that is the soldier’s wound,  
The wounds of many soldiers, the wounds of all  
The soldiers that have fallen, red in blood,  
The soldier of time grown deathless in great size.

A mountain in which no ease is ever found,  
Unless indifference to deeper death  
Is ease, stands in the dark, a shadows’ hill,  
And there the soldier of time has deathless rest.

Concentric circles of shadows, motionless  
Of their own part, yet moving on the wind,  
Form mystical convolutions in the sleep  
Of time’s red soldier deathless on his bed.

The shadows of his fellows ring him round  
In the high night, the summer breathes for them  
Its fragrance, a heavy somnolence, and for him,

For the soldier of time, it breathes a summer sleep,

In which his wound is good because life was.

No part of him was ever part of death.

A woman smooths her forehead with her hand

And the soldier of time lies calm beneath that stroke. (281)

In this part, one can hear the echoes of Dante, Emerson, and Whitman. Stevens focuses on the death of a soldier, and he uses the trope of a red rose as his wound. And the group of dead soldiers form a Dantesque mountain of death, full of gruesome roses. The bloody wound of a red rose is symbolic, and Stevens uses it consciously to enhance the meaning of death to the level that it enters the mind as a vivid image. Soldiers lie in a symbolical mountain, and “there the soldier of time has deathless rest.” Like Emerson’s visionary circles, the “Concentric circles of shadows” refer to the spiritual images of fellow dead soldiers, who appear united sympathetically with the dying soldier. The dead continue to live as they would breathe summer fragrance like the living. And like Walt Whitman’s “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” the dead and the living are fused into a universal unity.

Ultimately, Stevens’s war poetry surpasses the problem of an individual soldier and spans the broad historical and geographical dimensions of human activities in war. Another poem which expresses the dimensions in a large scale is “Dutch Graves in Bucks County.” Concerning this poem, Alan Filreis relates the anecdote of its production: “Allan Tate asked Stevens to do him a favor by sending a poem to the new interim editor of the *Sewanee Review*, Andrew Lytle. The result is ‘Dutch Graves in Bucks County’” (117). The poem was published in the *Sewanee Review*, Vol. 51, No. 1 as the January-March issue of 1943. Its content does not deal directly with the facts of war, but it reveals the historical meanings of the Dutch people’s struggle for freedom. Alan Filreis sees in the poem a sort of nationalism, saying that “Stevens came as close as he would to the new nationalism” (119), but the vein of nationalism is not so explicit.

The poem is a sort of homage to those who have fallen in wars for the sake of independence and freedom. Stevens addresses the dead in a Baudelairean tone, “And you, my semblables, in sooty residence / Tap skeleton drums inaudibly.” The similar address is repeated eleven times through the poem, enforcing the spiritual unison between the speaker and the dead:

The flags are natures newly found.

Rifles grow sharper on the sight.

There is a rumble of autumnal marching,  
 From which no soft sleeve relieves us.  
 Fate is the present desperado. (259)

The past is evoked and relived as a reality. The past is included in the present, but Stevens does not forget the gap between the past and the present, and he says, "And you, my semblables, in the total / Of remembrance share nothing of ourselves." The burden of "Dutch Graves in Bucks County" is that Dutch soldiers dedicated their lives to building their own territory, fighting hopefully with the vision of freedom and dignity, and that their sacrifice and redemption should be memorialized:

Freedom is like a man who kills himself  
 Each night, an incessant butcher, whose knife  
 Grows sharp in blood. The armies kill themselves,  
 And in their blood an ancient evil dies—  
 The action of incorrigible tragedy. (260)

To obtain freedom needs sacrifice, and Stevens sees that the Dutch people have done that way. He concludes, "Time was not wasted in your temples. / No: nor divergence made too steep to follow down," and what is important is to memorialize the achievement of the past men.

In "Dutch Grave in Bucks County," the glory of the Dutch soldiers is described as an exemplar of the genuine struggle of human beings for freedom and independence. Their suffering and sacrifice are important human values, which would form the ideological foundations of a nation they endeavored to build. Indeed, the poem reveals the brilliant unity of Stevens's understanding of human heritage.

Likewise, "Extraordinary References" in *Transport to Summer* reveals the true human values which can be inherited by the human struggles in war. It describes, in a calm and peaceful tone, a mother tying a girl's hair ribbons. "*My Jacomyntje! Your great grand-father was an Indian fighter,*" the mother says, and the inherited values are told:

The cool sun of the Tulpehocken refers  
 To its barbed, barbarous rising and has peace.  
 These earlier dissipations of the blood

And brain, as the extraordinary references  
Of ordinary people, places, things,  
Compose us in a kind of eulogy. (320)

Tulpehocken is a parish in Pennsylvania where Stevens's maternal great-great-grandfather Franz Zeller lived. Stevens has a nostalgic feeling about the land which still records the history of man's sacrifice and proud dedication to the land. The land is, in a way, alive with the dead. The mother's words continue:

*My Jacomyntje! This first spring after the war,  
In which your father died, still breathes for him  
And breathes again for us a fragile breath.*

In the inherited garden, a second-hand  
Vertumnus creates an equilibrium.  
The child's three ribbons are in her plaited hair. (320)

The father's soul appears omnipresent, and it looks as if his soul would fly in the wind. The past is part of the present, forming a thick and profound spiritual world. The land looks as if it were an Eden, being fertile with the images of life and death. And Vertumnus's equilibrium suggests the universal process of the continuation of life and death. Vertumnus is a floral god in the Roman mythology, who takes control of life, growth, and death, and he is the symbol of the power of regenerative nature. In "Extraordinary References," the past is not dead, and the land reveals the fecundity of the past. The achievement of those who fought for the land needs to be praised, and their memories should continue to be transmitted. The child's three ribbons symbolize, like the old trinity of Christianity, the new trinity of land, life, and death. "Extraordinary References" is a short poem, but it shows a profound world, rich with universal values, intensely envisioning the human regeneration.

## VI.

As seen above, Stevens's war poetry shows multiple dimensions of human facts and visions. For Stevens, war poetry is the revision of human possibilities. As the poem "Man and Bottle" in *Parts of a World* suggests, the revision is attained through the balance between facts and imagination:

The mind is the great poem of winter, the man,  
Who, to find what will suffice,  
Destroys romantic tenements  
Of rose and ice

In the land of war. (218)

The revision is done in the war-like struggle between the facts and the imagination, and it is carried out by an imaginative heroic poet:

More than the man, it is  
A man with the fury of a race of men,  
A light at the centre of many lights,  
A man at the centre of men.

It has to content the reason concerning war,  
It has to persuade that war is part of itself,  
A manner of thinking, a mode  
Of destroying. . . (218)

The poet constantly energizes the process of destruction and construction to enhance his imaginative world. His process is a sort of exploration, like what Marllarmé has done in search of the verbal engine of the universe.

## VII.

To conclude, war poetry for Stevens suggests the central idea of his poetic vision in that it should deal with the reality of facts and the imagination. In his vision, war poetry connotes the possible revision of human values. As seen above, his war vision develops from the problem of an individual to that of men; in so doing, Stevens pays attention to the important human values that can be transcended from generation to generation. In "Dutch Graves in Bucks County" and "Extraordinary References," the human truths are celebrated with such eternal values as pride, dignity, sacrifice, dedication, hope, and love. For him, war poetry is the genre which focuses on such human values, and with them he aims to renew the world imaginatively.

For Stevens, war poetry suggests the recognition of important human values and the possibility of the regeneration of the world. As T. S. Eliot tried, in *The Waste Land*, to dissolve the old-fashioned world into the shards of facts, Stevens aggressively endeavored to depict the possible vision of the human world by reconstructing the modern world. And in his attempt, he succeeded in evincing a new stage.

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### Notes

1. According to the footnote of *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, the following separate poems from the original group were included: “The Surprises of the Superhuman” (CP, 98); “Negation” (CP, 97-98; “The Death of a Soldier,” which was in *Poetry* as “Life contracts and death is expected” (CP, 97); and “Lunar Paraphrase” (CP, 107), which Miss Monroe did not include.

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