WALLACE STEVENS' FLORIDA

A Thesis
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
California State College, Hayward

In partial fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in English

by
Loralee MacPike Sawyer
June 1970
WALLACE STEVENS' FLORIDA

by

Loralee MacPike Sawyer

Approved:  

[Signature]

Chairman

Date:  

May 22, 1970

[Signature]

Committee in Charge

[Signature]

May 22, 1970

[Signature]

May 25, 1970
WALLACE STEVENS’ FLORIDA

Life is an affair of people not of places. But for me life is an affair of places and that is the trouble.

Wallace Stevens
Adagia

Wallace Stevens sees as the main task of the poet the ordering of the chaos of nature into an imaginative reality consisting of the synthesis of viewer and object viewed. The poet seeks in the world an order which he cannot find; because no such intrinsic order exists, Stevens feels he must impose order upon the objects he encounters. But such an order can only be created, in Stevens’ view, through the use of the imagination. He says, "The imagination is the power of the mind over the possibility of things." (NA 136) It transforms, shapes and organizes objects and emotions into a comprehensive, consistent whole. Both this main poetic aim and Stevens’ major symbolism have long been critically established. However, many of his poems, both early and late, are obviously concerned with the tropics, and yet no consistent critical view exists of his attitude toward the tropics, especially Florida, where he spent a good deal of his time in the early decades of the twentieth century. This thesis explains Stevens’ geographical symbolism and shows how he uses the tropics as a metaphor for emotion. First, however,
I shall review the natural symbolism which occurs throughout his poetry.

The sea and the sun are two major natural forces which Stevens consistently utilizes as symbols of reality. The sea is chaotic because it is ruled only by the logic of nature. Man has no influence over it; physically, he can neither survive in it nor live long upon it. The sea's chaos acts as a destructive force in human life and presents a physical barrier beyond which man cannot pass. It also acts, in Stevens' view, as the ultimate reality which the poet's imagination must order. The tropical sea off Mexico in "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" (CP 98), for example, presents so many facets of itself to Stevens that all his perceptions are continually altered by its shifting surface. But for Stevens the sun is a symbol of reality as well. In "Sunday Morning" he says that "we live in an old chaos of the sun." We are "men of sun/ And men of day." (CP 137) Sunlight illuminates the objects of the world and makes them visible to man's eye. Its heat produces and nourishes life. Daytime -- sun time -- is a time of reality, inimical to the influence of the imagination; things viewed in full sunlight are seen in their most intensely real forms and are therefore difficult to imagine, i.e., order. The realities of sun and sea unite in "Hibiscus on the Sleeping Shores" (CP 22), a poem of the tropics where all action and thought are paralyzed by the red heat of the sun and the unintelligible droning of the surf.

Opposing the reality of sun and sea, Stevens uses the
moon as a symbol of imagination. Moonlight illuminates the natural world not with the harsh sunlight of reality but with the softening light of imagination. Moonlight transforms the natural into the ideal, as in "Two Figures in Dense Violet Night" (CP 85) where the moonlit night makes the chaotic sea sounds into a song; just so, for Stevens, does the imagination transform unordered chaos into an ordered and comprehensible poetic world. Stevens says in "The Comedian as the Letter C" (CP 27) that "the moonlight really gave/ The liaison, the blissful liaison,/ Between [the poet] and his environment."

This symbolic use of sun and moon is strengthened by Stevens' equation of red with reality and blue with imagination. The sunlight shows objects in the red of reality, while the moonlight illumines them with the blue of imagination. A good example of this is "Anecdote of the Prince of Peacocks" (CP 57), in which the narrator meets Berserk on the "bushy plain" of actual existence. It is a moonlit night, and the speaker seeks the fulfillment of imaginative ordering of actuality. Berserk, however, appears "red/ In this milky blue." His reality does not submit to the imagination. He remains "sun-colored,/ As if awake/ In the midst of sleep." Stevens seems to be saying here that although reality (red) and imagination (blue) are distinct and separate, the poet's job is to attempt to combine them. But he meets with obstacles such as Berserk who insist upon
their reality even amid moonlight, who remain red although everything else is transformed blue. This notion that those things which resist moonlight are "berserk" will be carried further in Stevens' Florida poems, where impenetrable reality frustrates the poet's search for order.

Two other colors Stevens consistently uses to represent states of existence are green and purple. Green symbolizes the life-force evident in the greenness of vegetation and the lushness of tropical foliage. Africa, in "Owl's Clover," is "The Greenest Continent." (OP 52) Green is the antithesis of conscious creativity. Purple, or violet, is "Stevens' usual symbolism for a lifeless and wholly unreal conceptual world, the work of the imagination at its decadent extreme."¹ Purple and green, representing opposite ends of the scale of operative imagination, are mutually exclusive and rarely occur together. As Stevens says in "What We See Is What We Think" (CP 459), "one imagined violet trees but the trees stood green."

Almost as a natural outgrowth of his sun-sea-moon symbolism, there appears throughout Stevens' poetry a corollary concern with seasons and climates. Much of his first volume of poetry, Harmonium, has a tropical setting, with both Florida and Yucatan as major locales. In "O Florida, Venereal Soil" Stevens, as poet, attempts to know

the objects which make up the Floridian landscape. In Yucatan, Crispin, "The Comedian as the Letter C," seeks to shape life. But, as I shall show, the nature of the animals and plants in both Florida and Yucatan makes either intellectual or imaginative knowledge of such tropical landscapes impossible; both Stevens and Crispin can do no more than feel the emotion generated by the land. The tropics are ruled by the sun, and both Florida and the Yucatan peninsula are largely surrounded by the sea; thus the forces of reality and chaos render the imagination impotent to shape the tropical landscape into an ordered world for the poet. Florida and Yucatan represent a primal life-force which comes into full flower in the African setting of one section of "Owl's Clover," a semi-political poem written by Stevens in the 1930's. In primitive Africa, Stevens finds the ultimate motive force of life, Fatal Ananke, the god of necessity. All life in Africa submits to the inexorable rule of Ananke, and art (represented by a marble statue) cannot coexist with such power. The similarities between Africa, Yucatan and Florida are so great that it becomes obvious all three locations represent for Stevens the primal life-force which can be neither thought nor imagined but which must be lived, felt, loved.

For Stevens, then, the tropics, as epitomized by Florida, coalesce sun and sea into an unknowable, unorderable landscape of green. But by 1936, in "Farewell to Florida" (CP 117), he finds that the mind of the poet cannot function in such a climate. Stevens feels that if the sun and the sea preclude
poetry, he must find a colder, more northerly climate whose weather will permit full scope to his imagination. If the heat and the sea rule out moonlight's influence, then perhaps, he thinks, cold and cloudy weather will allow restoration of the "shaping spirit of imagination." Florida's summer makes thought impossible; perhaps winter will "bring back thought." (CP 26) And so Stevens makes a metaphorical journey from Florida to the north. In "Farewell to Florida," the opening poem in Ideas of Order (published in 1936), his ship traverses the sea, carving an orderly path over its chaotic depths as the first step toward an ordered world. His poetic north is "leafless and lies in a wintry slime" (CP 118), but it is only this coldness, this alienation from the primitive life-force of Florida, which will let him "be free again." (CP 118) Stevens' metaphorical sojourn in the south has taught him to feel what life is; now he must separate himself from this life to try to understand and order it.

In "The Comedian as the Letter C," Crispin, a semi-autobiographical Stevens, must likewise leave Yucatan, which has also come to represent to him the preeminence of life over art. He sails to Carolina -- again, ordering the sea by his passage over it -- and sets up a farm where he, as farmer, controls the life which issues from the land. In "Owl's Clover" the most primal life-place, Africa, proves

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also totally inhospitable to the statue, which represents both art and the creativity of the artist. The absolute reality of "the greenest continent" is so comprehensive that any attempt at artistic ordering of it must necessarily fail. The statue is cold and northern; it was created in the cold north and made of dead marble, but Africa's heat and life destroy its ability to communicate. The statue, then, cannot have meaning in Africa; it can only communicate to the civilized West, of which it is a product.

It is to the north that Stevens must eventually turn. In the "wintry north" he can control the realities of the world sufficiently to order them into a poetic whole which corresponds to the world he wants to see. He discovers in the tropics that summer thoughts cannot be creative, so he must return to his "mind of winter" for the final development of his poetic.

The north alone, however, also proves to be insufficient for the full flowering of the imagination. The problem of climate becomes one with which Stevens struggles throughout his career; even as late as "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," published in Transport to Summer in 1947, he still hopes to find an ideal climate which combines summer and winter. It is only at the very end of his career, with the publication of the poems in The Rock in 1954, that he admits the necessity of embracing both summer and winter in an inconstant, changing seasonal pattern which can never be fully understood yet invests life with its meaning and vitality.
This thesis, then, will show how Stevens' ideas of the south, typified by Florida, develop and how he modifies these ideas in the course of his career in order to shape his poetic world.

I

Stevens establishes his idea of the tropics early in Harmonium, his first volume of poetry, published in 1923. "O Florida, Venereal Soil" is typical of his early attitude toward Florida, so I shall discuss it at some length to establish his basic views, which are echoed in sections of many of the other poems in Harmonium. I here quote it in full.

A few things for themselves,
Convolvulus and coral,
Buzzards and live-moss,
Tiestas from the keys,
A few things for themselves,
Florida, venereal soil,
Disclose to the lover.

The dreadful sundry of this world,
The Cuban, Polodowsky,
The Mexican women,
The negro undertaker
Killing time between corpses
Fishing for crayfish . . .
Virgin of boorish births,

Swiftly in the nights,
In the porches of Key West,
Behind the bougainvilleas,
After the guitar is asleep,
Lasciviously as the wind,
You come tormenting,
Insatiable,

When you might sit,
A scholar of darkness,
Sequestered over the sea,
Wearing a clear tiara
Of red and blue and red,
Sparkling, solitary, still,
In the high sea-shadow.
Donna, donna, dark,
Stooping in indigo gown
And cloudy constellations,
Conceal yourself or disclose
Fewest things to the lover --
A hand that bears a thick-leaved fruit,
A pungent bloom against your shade.  

(CP 47-48)

The poet asks that the living "things" of Florida be disclosed to him, the "lover." It is significant that each thing he selects is living. Stevens sees Florida as life, and the portions of her which he singles out as metaphors for that life are themselves living. He wants to know these things and through them to come to know the reality of Florida so that he can shape the tropics by his imagination into an ordered world. He finds, however, that these "things" will not or cannot reveal their reality to the imagination. There is a force, a power, which controls the poet's perception of the landscape; in "Nomad Exquisite" (CP 95), he calls this force "the immense dew of Florida" which "brings forth hymn and hymn/ From the beholder," making the poet a worshipper of the "immense dew" which is Florida. Florida must disclose her essence to him, through the individual things; the objects cannot reveal themselves to him. He wishes these things "for themselves," implying both for their own sakes, independent of the whole of which they are parts, and as themselves, revelatory of their absolute and unique characters. Also, because all things presumably exist to be known as well as merely to exist, the poet seeks to know them and thereby to fulfill the destiny of each object through his knowledge of it. Yet each of the objects he has named is partially unknowable because it exists
in Florida and can be approached only through the emotions, not through imaginatively formed relationships.

Each of the living items Stevens lists in "O Florida, Venereal Soil" serves to reinforce the metaphor of Florida as life. For example, convolvulus, Latin for "to entwine," is a vine family containing the morning glory, an outdoor tropical plant whose blooms of one day's duration close either at nightfall or sometimes just after midday, making the flower an ephemeral object observable only in sunlight and never by moonlight. The sun is stark reality, and to it only does the convolvulus flower reveal itself. It lives and is, but its essence cannot be imagined, nor can it be abstracted from the soil and heat of Florida and transplanted into the coldness of the north, where it would be unable to survive. The convolvulus lives and puts forth flowers and then dies before it can be brought under the influence of the imagination, under moonlight.

Coral is another object, living-dead, which does not yield to the influence of the imagination. It is a rocklike substance made from a conglomeration of hard-shelled sea creatures which reproduce and continue to grow upon the dying and dead remains of their ancestors, forming eventually large undersea columns (coral heads) or reefs which, although solid and permanent, are nonetheless living. It is life built upon death; it is the faceless, emotionless cycle of pure brute life completing its necessary destiny. The living organisms which form the top layer of the coral take their life from their antecedents, who die and form the base on
which the new life can grow. Life and death in the coral are so intertwined that it is impossible to know where one stops and the other begins; it is a mass which confounds analysis and knowledge and remains only itself; it has all of life and death for a reference yet no frame of reference smaller than that. Also, coral lives in the sea. It is an orderly growth, a thrust of life and meaning of a sort, out of the chaos of the ocean. It does not order the ocean, yet it contains an unknowable order of its own within the sea. It is alive within chaos; outside of the oceanic chaos it cannot exist. Its element is disorder and it represents order -- an irreconcilable paradox.

Buzzards, birds which represent solitude and predation, are, like the coral, analogous to both life and death, to the cycle of existence and the forces of necessity. Because of man's civilized state, because he has a soul and a brain and a moral sense, he cannot comprehend the forces which move the buzzard. While the buzzard as a paleontological object can be completely knowable, the buzzard-ness of the buzzard can never be approached and can yield to no metaphorical relationship with man. His wings give him the ability to escape the earth and become an inhabitant of the air, out of contact with all things human. He is a daytime bird and comes under the influence of the sun. He is thus doubly removed from man's knowledge of him.

Live-moss, or Spanish moss, can be seen draped from trees in the southern United States and in tropical America;
It adds, to garden pictures in the South, an extraordinarily weird and misty note, suggesting in the distance a dense fog. It has the interesting attribute of obscuring the objects surrounding it. The "dense fog" look of it places it in visual isolation and presents a situation where it has no frame of reference, nothing to relate to save the tree from which it depends. It becomes exclusively itself. In rendering its surroundings virtually invisible, the live-moss acts as the night, shutting off all else from view; the sun's reality cannot pierce it, but its night is a moonless one and hence unimaginable. It and the tree on which it hangs become the sole reality in a world which otherwise might as well not exist.

Tiestas are shore birds common to Mexico and the Gulf area and probably inhabiting Florida as well. Living as they do between the shore and the sea, they strike a balance between the possibility of order represented by the shore and the immutable disorder of the sea. They live, in addition, in a world man cannot inhabit; like buzzards they are of the air and are removed from man's ability to know them, and in addition they partake of the chaotic nature of the sea which is itself unknowable to man.

Like its vegetation, Florida's population is for Stevens varied:

The dreadful sundry of this world,
The Cuban, Polodowsky,
The Mexican women,
The negro undertaker

are dreadful because they are types which Stevens is not likely to encounter at his insurance office. Sundry they are indeed; then, as now, the southern Atlantic-coastal areas of Florida were a point of arrival for many immigrants, especially Latins, and something of a melting pot. People, unlike some landscapes, can only be considered in an I-Thou relationship if one wishes to begin to know and understand them. No man can force another man to be an object, and each man can insist upon recognition as a subject. However, one man-as-subject cannot be controlled by another man-as-subject. The poet's imagination can never create the essence of another person, and in this sense the poet can never "know" any other person. The people in Florida seem to Stevens to belong there, while he is merely a visitor; as inhabitants, they are part of Florida and in that sense become part of what is unknowable in Florida. The "virgin of boorish births" gives birth alike to the "few things for themselves" and the "dreadful sundry of this world."

These, then, are the objects which make up Stevens' Florida. They recur in other parts of Harmonium and, taken together, give a total picture of his idea of Florida. One of the earliest of his Florida poems is "Fabliau of Florida," in which he attempts to separate the landscape's individualities but finally discovers that they are in-separable.
Barque of phosphor
On the palmy beach,

Move outward into heaven,
Into the alabasters
And night blues.

Foam and cloud are one.
Sultry moon-monsters
Are dissolving.

Fill your black hull
With white moonlight.

There will never be an end
To this droning of the surf.  

(CP 23)

The "barque of phosphor" which he instructs to fill its
"black hull/ With white moonlight" can never be filled with
the moonlight of imagination because its blackness will
absorb all the light. Imagination cannot illumine the
Floridian barque but can only be absorbed by it and disappear
without a trace. Too, the barque, being phosphorescent,
gives off its own light which rivals the moon's illuminative
power. It can be known only in its own light (i.e., on its
own terms) and not in the light of imagination. Its phosphor-
escence is its own imagination and represents Florida
imagining herself and the poet as well. The impossibility
of realizing the desire for imaginative illumination or for
an ordered knowledge of Florida is shown in the final lines
of this poem. The chaos of the sea and the reality of the
tropical landscape cannot change and cannot yield either to
the mind or to the imagination; they will continue forever,
irreconcilable but eternally coexistent.

This same lack of definition can be seen in "Two Figures
in Dense Violet Night" (CP 85), where the one who must "be the voice of night and Florida in my ear" and "use dusky words and dusky images" says "that the palms are clear... Are clear and are obscure." Night without moonlight is like Florida, obscuring the objects of sight, the palms, yet presenting them clear in their uniqueness; the "dusky words and dusky images" do the same for the poet's concepts, rendering them both clear and obscured and presenting a paradox which the poet cannot reconcile.

"Nomad Exquisite" (CP 95) speaks of Florida as a nomad, a wanderer who finds no permanent home, just as the objects of Florida can find no permanent definition and relationship within the poet's mind.

As the immense dew of Florida
Brings forth
The big-finned palm
And green vine angering for life,

As the immense dew of Florida
Brings forth hymn and hymn
From the beholder,
Beholding all these green sides
And gold sides of green sides,

And blessed mornings,
Meet for the eye of the young alligator,
And lightning colors
So, in me, come flinging
Forms, flames, and the flakes of flames.

(CP 95)

The "big-finned palm" and "green vine angering for life" are two more of Stevens' unknowable objects of the Florida landscape. Both are alive, both endemic to the tropics, and both have a life of their own outside the thought and imagination of the poet. The life of the palm and the vine lies
in their greenness; the green of life underlies the levels of human thought and imagination and thus forms the basis for all existence. The green vine shows its "green sides" as it strives emotionally for primal life. Order this greenness the poet cannot. Even though he can create hymns to it, these hymns are not order but merely worship of the green anger for life which is the motive force of all Florida. The hymns are metaphors for the poems Stevens writes about Florida in Harmonium; he celebrates Florida but comes no closer to her impenetrable reality through them. When he submits to the "immense dew" and worships it, he has an almost hallucinatory experience of Florida as essentially becoming more and more fragmented and emotional, with the original forms, representing possible poems, breaking down into flames, or the experiences which generate the poems. Further, the flames themselves disintegrate into the flakes of flames. That the process is disintegrative rather than positively progressive indicates Stevens' inability to progress toward the order needed for a form to emerge. The flakes of flames are also highly emotional, representing a powerful burning love for Florida.

The objects in "Indian River" become indistinguishable from each other in the Florida wind:

The trade-wind jingles the rings in the nets around the racks by the docks on Indian River.
It is the same jingle of the water among the roots under the banks of the palmettoes,
It is the same jingle of the red-bird breasting the orange-trees out of the cedars.

The nets, the water and the red-bird all have the same jingle, that imparted to them by the trade-wind. They fuse into an
indistinct one-ness; the trade-wind obscures their individual attributes in the same way the live-moss obscures the surrounding foliage. The trade-wind blows unceasingly in one direction, from northeast to southwest, thus blowing always toward Florida from Europe and England. It brings new things, changes; yet it cannot change the Florida Stevens sees. Wind is transparent. The changes it brings can be seen clearly in the movement of the objects of the landscape, but the objects thus changed have no control over the changer (wind) any more than they could have control over an imaginative changer (the mind of the poet). Yet Florida resists both the wind's changes and the imagination's transformations and remains whole, singular, insular. What becomes most visible, then, is the wind itself, the lascivious wind of "O Florida, Venereal Soil" which is a torment to the poet and is insatiable in its appetite for his soul.

We have seen Florida as a metaphor for Nature, which cannot be controlled by the mind. Stevens also sees her as a woman. She is the "donna, dark" wearing the clothing of nature, the "indigo gown" of the night sky. In her capacity as a woman she is both something Stevens cannot ever know, as man traditionally cannot understand woman, and something he loves beyond reason. If "love is blind," then Stevens' love for Florida blinds him to her reality, and his emotions rule his intellect. He knows that he does not want this kind of relationship with Florida, but in his early poems he is powerless to break his emotional bonds with her.
Late in Harmonium, then, comes Stevens' admission of capitulation to the emotional response which Florida demands from him, although hints of the impossibility of any but an emotional response are evident in most of his other Florida poems, both early and late. The objects of the landscape are seen throughout Harmonium as examples of non-referents which individually communicate no knowledge but which, taken together, communicate only emotion to the viewer. This emotional demand seems to elicit a strange sickness:

One has a malady, here, a malady. One feels a malady. (CP 63)

The mind, unable to comprehend the totality of the things which make up Florida, becomes soporific and soon declines the attempt to order. This is a constantly recurring theme. In "Hibiscus on the Sleeping Shores" (CP 22), the moth of the mind, living alongside the chaotic ocean whose waves could make no noise which the ear could interpret, "Rose up besprent and sought the flaming red" of knowledge and reality and could find none; it was doomed to flit in search of something unfindable "all the stupid afternoon" while time itself is in a stupor. In "Anecdote of Canna" (CP 55) the observer, X, looks at the canna, a tropical lily-like flower, both in dream and in the daytime; he

Observe the canna with a clinging eye, Observe and then continue to observe.

One can but look; there is no way for X to fit meaning to his observations or to draw conclusions from the canna, any more than the poet can attempt to know the convolvulus or
the live-moss. This enervating effect of mere observation powerless to know can also be seen in "The Cuban Doctor" (CP 64), where the narrator feels threatened yet finds himself incapable of action because his feeling is emotion which cannot crystallize:

I knew my enemy was near -- I,
Drowsing in summer's sleepiest horn (CP 64)
much as the moth of the mind had drowsed in "Hibiscus on the Sleeping Shores."

Thus "Florida seen in its parts . . . becomes venereal to the lover."⁴ Stevens says of his own experience in Florida that he was "drowned in beauty."⁵ All of Florida becomes a chaotic sea which drowns the observer in the multitudinousness of its landscape. Just as the wind of the tropics is lascivious, so Florida herself is also wanton and lustful, lusting for the soul of her admirers and never satisfied merely to be known. She is also venereal in the sense of being associated with Venus, the evening star, as are all the tropics in Stevens' poetry. In "Homunculus Et La Belle Étoile" the poet speaks of the nighttime Florida under Venus' influence:

In the sea, Biscayne, there prinks
The young emerald, evening star,
Good light for drunkards, poets, widows,
And ladies soon to be married.


By this light the salty fishes
Arch in the sea like tree-branches,
Going in many directions
Up and down.

This light conducts
The thoughts of drunkards, the feelings
Of widows and trembling ladies,
The movements of fishes.

How pleasant an existence it is
That this emerald charms philosophers,
Until they become thoughtlessly willing
To bathe their hearts in later moonlight,

Knowing that they can bring back thought
In the night that is still to be silent,
Reflecting this thing and that,
Before they sleep!

It is better that, as scholars,
They should think hard in the dark cuffs
Of voluminous cloaks,
And shave their heads and bodies.

It might well be that their mistress
Is no gaunt fugitive phantom.
She might, after all, be a wanton,
Abundantly beautiful, eager,

Fecund,
From whose being by starlight, on sea-coast,
The innermost good of their seeking
Might come in the simplest of speech.

It is a good light, then, for those
That know the ultimate Plato,
Tranquillizing with this jewel
The torments of confusion.

(CP 25-27)

Venus shares with the sun none of the sun's power to illumine reality, and she shares with the moon only the faintest bit of white light thrown upon the nocturnal landscape. Through Venus one can neither know nor imagine but must only feel; and the poet, feeling intensely, also believes he must be able to abstract some idea or ideal from the objects which produce his feelings. In "Homunculus et La Belle Étoile"
"the young emerald, evening star" illumines the "salty fishes" of the Bay of Biscayne (located between the Florida Keys and Miami). It leads the poet to a reverie of the kind of life Florida might offer a Romantic poet. He sees that Venus charms even the philosophers away from their philosophies, promising them the mindless beauty of the present starlight and future moonlight while leading them to believe they can always recapture thought during the darkest parts of night. I think Stevens realizes even here, though, that "the night that is still to be silent," which can "bring back thought," must be sought elsewhere, in the northern climes which have none of the mystery and lustfulness of Florida, a mistress who becomes "a wanton." The thinker can never know Florida before he sleeps because she anesthetizes him so that his vision of her comes through half-closed eyelids. The evening star becomes a jewel tranquillizing "the torments of confusion" which represent the poet's frustration, not by calming the confusion itself but by deadening the viewer's cognitive senses and leaving him only physical sense receptors with which to perceive the scene. Without in any way resolving the confusion, Venus for the moment brings the poet to a temporary state of contentment while he is under her influence.

This, then, is Stevens' Florida. All its facets are conjoined in his typical Florida poem, "O Florida, Venereal Soil," in which she is the "virgin of boorish births," creating and spewing forth objects and people which must be felt, about whom knowledge can never be complete enough to
satisfy. The poet supplicates this Florida to come to him and give him knowledge; she comes, indeed, but not in the form he desires. She comes at night, on an island in the midst of the sea, behind the bougainvillea, after the music of the guitar has ended, in a form as enticing and ephemeral as the wind. Florida is unreal because she is unrealizable; thus her night appearance to the poet. She cannot really be seen at all. She is alone, an island fortress, isolated amid the chaos of the sea. According to Frank Kermode, one of Stevens' earliest critics, the sea's wide water is not something to be crossed, but the preserver of our 'island solitude,' our world broken off from the sun, light and dark as the sun dictates.

The ocean's chaos protects Florida from the poet's searching and transforming imagination. In the midst of the sea she is the plaything of destiny and is at the mercy of the perpetual reality of the sun. Her true flowers are like the bougainvillea flowers. The large, colorful "flowers" on the bougainvillea are not really flowers but bracts; hidden and obscured by the bracts' size and color, the true flowers lie within the bracts. They are tiny and pale but incredibly lovely. So Florida's true nature is obscured by the "things for themselves," just as the bougainvillea flowers are obscured by their bracts, beautiful in themselves yet not nearly so beautiful as the infinitesimal true flowers.

Florida is also soporific. The moth of the mind "drowsed

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along the bony shores;" the Cuban doctor is "drowsing in
summer's sleepiest horn;" "the guitar is asleep." The reality
of Florida is asleep in the mind and only the poet's words
can awaken it, yet the guitar, which alone could play the
music of poetry, is asleep as well. This suggests the
paradox that only the sleeping guitar can awaken the sleeping
guitar, that poetic knowledge of Florida is impossible because
the poet must know it before he can know it. The wind of
Florida is wanton and lustful, merging animate and inanimate
objects into a sameness -- the wind of "Indian River." She
torments the poet with the beauty of Florida and insatiably
forces him to feel, ever to feel, Florida itself.

Of course this is not what the poet wants. He wants to
apprehend Florida intellectually. She should be "a scholar
of darkness . . . wearing a clear tiara/ Of red and blue and
red." She should yield her essence to a scholarly seeking.
He wishes her to be crowned with the tiara of "To the One of
Fictive Music" (CP 87-88),"set with fatal stones" of the
imagination. Red and blue and red it should be; red reality
and blue imagination, and then again red reality, the predom-
inance of reality over imagination yet fused by imagination
into a crown, circular and never-ending, a circlet of perfect
shape and therefore perfect order. He fears Florida's and
the Keys' isolation amid the waters of the ocean, the sea of
chaos, and would see Florida "sequestered over the sea,"
sitting above it in a position where he could view it through
the clear night air in its entirety and, having the perfect
overview, order it and subdue the chaos of it. Unorderable reality surrounded by unordered chaos is the poet's greatest abhorrence; it is not surprising that he so desperately needs to find order in Florida and thereby come to know her. Thus his plea to her to "disclose to the lover" the objects which the lover sees -- "A hand that bears a thick-leaved fruit,/ A pungent bloom against your shade." Failing this, there is no course open to him save to ask her to conceal herself totally in "cloudy constellations" which obliterate both moonlight and starlight so that he will not be plagued with the need to know her.

I have spent a great deal of time developing Stevens' attitude toward Florida, as seen in the Harmonium poems, because Stevens himself wrote much about the tropics. But he did not limit his south to Florida, although the predominance of Florida poems makes it his representative southern location. Early in Harmonium and contemporaneous with some of his earlier Florida poems Stevens devotes his longest and most significant early poem to a tropical locale even further south than Florida but partaking of many of her attributes, especially the emotional ones. This is the Yucatan of "The Comedian as the Letter C" (CP 27) where Crispin, the comedian of the poem's title and a semi-autobiographical Stevens, arrives after his sea voyage from Bordeaux. Because this poem is a major one, I shall explain at some length its similarities with the Florida poems and also Yucatan's effect on Stevens' poetic counterpart, Crispin, whose response to
the tropics can be taken as suggestive of Stevens' own.

Yucatan is a peninsula in the Gulf of Mexico, encompassing parts of several Central American countries, principally Mexico. Its landscape is similar to that of Florida; Joseph Riddel notes that "there is only the slightest difference between Yucatan and Key West." Yucatan is tropical and contains exotic animals and plants which Crispin does not understand. There are "hawk and falcon, green toucan/ And jay," and "raspberry tanagers in palms,/ High up in orange air" (CP 30); the "savagery of palms,/ Of moonlight on the thick, cadaverous bloom/ That yuccas breed, and of the panther's tread." (CP 31) It is "an earth,/ So thick with sides and jagged lops of green,/ So intertwined with serpent-kin encoiled/ Among the purple tufts," "that earth was like a jostling festival/ Of seeds grown fat, too juicily opulent." (CP 32) The tropic wind blows in Yucatan, too; "the wind,/ Tempestuous clarion, with heavy cry,/ Came bluntly thundering." (CP 32) The objects which make up the Yucatan landscape are, like the objects of Florida, impenetrably real to Crispin. It is "the tropical world, fat vegetation, rank fabling" which, according to Riddel, "drives its inhabitants into withdrawal from experience" because the experience of it is too overwhelming and too inhuman to be comprehended.

7 Riddel, op. cit., p. 120.
8 Kermode, op. cit., p. 46.
9 Riddel, op. cit., p. 95.
The sun rules Yucatan as it does Florida; moonlight is inactive there. The dense jungle growth is a product of the intense heat and light of the sun. The vivid colors of the birds and fruits of Yucatan reflect the vivid red of the sun. Even the air, colored by the profound reality of the sun, is orange. The moon, while not active, is nonetheless present. While the sun illuminates the realities of the tropical landscape, the moon shows no imaginative aspects of that reality but only shines upon symbols of death. The "moonlight on the thick, cadaverous bloom/ That yuccas breed" is malign. Yuccas themselves do not belong in the Yucatan jungle; they are desert plants related to cacti, "bold, striking plants" with a "grotesquely branching trunk,\textsuperscript{10}" whose white flowers usually bloom only at night and give off a distinct fragrance. The moonlight cannot alter the white color of the yucca flowers, and the sun cannot reach them because they do not bloom during the day. The yucca is the direct opposite of Florida's convolvulus vine, which blooms only in the sunshine; yet neither plant will ever be knowable to the poet in its entirety, by both sun and moon. The "cadaverous bloom" of the yuccas is sinister, and it makes the moonlight which illuminates it sinister rather than imaginative.

It is significant that Crispin has arrived in Yucatan by sea. He has traversed the sea of chaos from Bordeaux (representing the foreign) to find this land which promises

\textsuperscript{10} Taylor, op. cit., p. 1322.
such richness and vigor but which he finally finds impenetrable. He hopes to make Yucatan his home, a place where he can understand the language of nature and reality, a universe into which he can fit and within which he can find meaning. But Yucatan "shows so rich and teeming a land that it proves as fruitless as the blank, mechanical ocean."\textsuperscript{11} The connection between Yucatan and the ocean is similar to that between Florida and the ocean -- both are largely surrounded by the unordered sea which transmits its chaos to the shores it washes. The disorder of the land is intensified by the restive, writhing madness of the sea.

Even more than Florida, Yucatan is ruled by the wind. A "tempestuous clarion," it calls to Crispin something he is unable to understand; the call, like the lascivious call of Florida's wind, unceasingly tempts him but never carries him to the point of knowledge. It represents, according to Riddel, "the illimitable sublime,"\textsuperscript{12} the language heard but not understood, the other life coexistent but impalpable. The transparent air of Florida becomes in Yucatan "orange air," colored by the reality of the sun. Everything viewed through the medium of orange air must be distorted; the orange air is a layer of reality cloaking the separate reality of those things seen through it. The entire landscape is colored by reality and so can never be seen clearly as itself. The air of Yucatan is home for many birds, more plentiful than in


\textsuperscript{12} Riddel, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 95.
Florida and of brighter hues than Florida's buzzards and tiestas. The "hawk and falcon, ... toucan/ And jay" and "raspberry tanagers" all live in the orange jungle air, twice removed from Crispin by the air's coloration and by their impenetrable bird essences. They are "barbarous" because they are both uncivilized and uncivilizable. The birds themselves also represent stark reality; Crispin finds "a new reality in parrot-squawks" but can neither understand the squawks nor assimilate their reality and so must "let that trifle pass" (CP 32) as he eventually must let all the individual trifles of possible knowledge of Yucatan pass. Another attempt at order fails.

Yucatan is "a land of snakes" (CP 31), "intertwined with serpent-kin encoiled" who symbolically prevent Crispin from knowing the land. Here Yucatan differs from Florida and becomes both more tropical and more enigmatic. The force of inscrutability, "form gulping after formlessness" (CP 411), lives in Yucatan and rules it. The serpents are intertwined with the land, and so the land can never be known unless the serpents are also known. In traditional Christian history the serpent is the force of subtle persuasion, evil prettily clothed, logic specious on a divine scale. It represents a duality of meaning which invariably confounds him who would know the basic truth. The snake is also an ancient archetype of the unconscious.\(^\text{13}\) It signifies a realm over which the

human consciousness can have no control, a level to which knowledge can never descend. The snake seems a symbol of Yucatan itself. It is the unconscious force of life surviving in the tropical jungle and embodying in its duality both Crispin's need to know and his inability to reach the final point of full knowledge of reality. Crispin must come to terms with the snake in that land of snakes; but the snake is so entwined with Yucatan's green foliage that Crispin cannot separate them and can never resolve the ambiguity of the snake.

Yucatan, like Florida, appears green with the greenness of the life-force. It is "an earth,/ So thick with sides and jagged lops of green,/ ... That earth was like a jostling festival/ Of seeds grown fat, too juicily opulent." (CP 32)
The colors of the animals and birds, the redness of the sun, the greenness of the foliage combine to make a land too earthly to be real. It is a festival, a riot, of color and sound and movement. It is "green barbarism turning paradigm" (CP 31), primal life becoming the pattern of living. Its force is such that it cannot be controlled but instead controls its would-be controller, itself setting the pattern of life and providing a model of unthinking life-force thrusting itself into the mind, the heart, the imagination of Crispin.

Crispin came to Yucatan to find a reality he could assimilate. He found instead what Riddel calls "a curious landscape, lush and overwhelming, yet with an incipient order all its own."14 This is the order of the "green barbarism,"

14Riddel, op. cit., p. 95.
the life-force into which the serpent entwines itself. It is, however, an order inaccessible to the poetic mind because of its basic nature. It is deeper and more primitive than imagination, more powerful than mere thought. It rivals the sea as the force over which the poet has the least control; yet at the same time the serpent and the sea complement each other, placing the poet in a position where he can neither advance nor retreat. He lives, Stevens says, "in the center of a physical poetry" (NA 65) but can create nothing out of the chaos presented by the sea behind him and the jungle before him. No fable of his creation can order Yucatan. Although

The fabulous and its intrinsic verse
Came, like two spirits parleying, adorned
In radiance, from the Atlantic . . .
For Crispin and his quill to catechize,

(CP 31)

this is precisely what Crispin is unable to do. The intrinsic verse, the intrinsic order of the fabulous land, will not yield to the extrinsic quill of the poet. According to John Enck, he

never could incorporate this teeming climate:
cleverer than its poets and more effete than its foliage. . . . The equatorial sun stirs wishes beyond [Crispin's] powers of attainment. 15

But should he turn to the sea, the Atlantic which brought him to Yucatan, Crispin would only find that "the sea/ Severs not only lands but also selves." (CP 30) Crispin has been cut off from the Bordeaux he left, and in Yucatan he finds that he has been severed from his poetic self by the sea. The many

15Enck, op. cit., p. 87.
parts of his self are dissociated by the chaos he finds in
the sea and, to a lesser extent, in the landscape, and some
parts of him (the tiller of the soil or the plucker of wild
fruit, for example) can function in Yucatan while other parts
are incapacitated. The sea can sever man's intellectual,
imaginative parts and render them inoperable. Any imagination
which functions in Yucatan does so only in harmony with the
sea:

The imagination, here, could not evade,
... the strict austerity
Of one vast, subjugating, final tone. (CP 30)

The ocean's final tone determines the song Crispin can sing,
and its authority is immutable.

Yucatan, then, seems very similar to Florida except for
its relative absence of people. Both have tropical plants
and animals which defy the intellect and imagination of the
poet. Both come under the hegemony of the sun; both exclude
the aegis of moonlight and transmute moonlight into a sterile,
sinister illumination which resists the imagination. The
major difference is in the people who inhabit the two regions.
Stevens' Florida is full of people, "the dreadful sundry of
this world." Both because they are foreigners and because
they are extrinsic to Stevens, he can never know them fully.
They continue to exist in their own right, remaining realities
in spite of his inability to know them. In Yucatan, however,
there is no other person than Crispin. Any civilizing
influence the people of Florida might exert over its landscape
is lacking in Yucatan. There the landscape and sea rule, and
intellect cannot penetrate. Yucatan is greener than Florida, and the serpent, rather than man, has colonized the land.

Stevens' concern with the geography of the south and its metaphorical relationship to poetry, then, is one of his major themes. In his first published volume of poetry he has devoted one major poem and many smaller ones to it. A third major tropical locale is dealt with in a poem written after the publication of *Harmonium* in 1923 but before the publication of his next volume, *Ideas of Order*, in 1936. This is "Owl's Clover," in which he describes Africa in part III, "The Greenest Continent." (OP 43) Africa is clearly an extension of the tropics as Stevens describes them in Florida and in Yucatan, and it shows the development of the emotional aspects of Florida to the point where emotion becomes the total possible response to the landscape and creativity and imagination cannot exist there. In this way "Owl's Clover" provides a transitional point between the early Florida poems in *Harmonium* and the later Stevens who first rejects Florida and then arrives at a final acceptance of seasonal change, and in this capacity it bears close scrutiny.

Africa is the greenest, the most sensual and the least imaginative of all continents. Stevens himself says, "It is a jungle in itself. As in the case of a jungle, everything that makes it up is pretty much of one color" (NA 26) -- green. It is a gigantic island, unexplored over much of its surface and unfamiliar to the American mind. In this way it
serves as the ultimate symbol of the remote and the strange.

Africa's flora resemble those both of Florida and of Yucatan. Like Yucatan, it has "elephantine palms" (OP 54), "deep grass" and the "evil-blossomed vine." (OP 55) It is "tumbling green,/ Intensified and grandiose." (OP 57) Its animals are the elephant, the serpent, the jaguar, the leopard, the lion, the wild bee.

Plants in Africa serve only to hide, to render the landscape obscure. The palms, as in Yucatan, hide birds and protect the coconut fruit. In Africa they are also "elephantine," huge and therefore forbidding to the poet. With dead fronds covering the trunk and live fronds shielding the coconut, the palm hides itself from the poet. The "deep grass" of the African plains also hides things. Animals can crouch unseen in it. It provides a trackless and undifferentiated sea to the eye, thus representing the chaos which the sea symbolizes for Stevens. The deep grass is also a metaphor for the unconscious as represented by sleep; the African animals hide in the grass

Even in sleep, deep in the grass of sleep,
Deep grass that totters under the weight of light.
(OP 54-55)

This recalls the moth who drowsed on the bony shores of Florida. In the tropics the landscape and the sun combine to produce a state of semi-consciousness in which the mind cannot operate. The imagination "totters" under the weight of the intense reality of Africa. The "evil-blossomed vine" is related to the convolvulus of "O Florida, Venereal Soil."
The blossoms of the African vine connote not only inscrutability but also malice; they defy an attainment of knowledge about them, like Yucatan's yuccas, and also threaten the seeker after such knowledge with the possibility of evil springing from the knowledge he wishes to find.

The fauna of Africa intensify the threatening aspect of the continent while failing to denote any regenerative power. Jaguars, leopards and lions are wild cats which menace man as much because of their cat-like stealth and cunning as because of their strength. The "wild bee" is a particularly interesting variation of the bees in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (CP 380). In the later poem the bees represent the regeneration of life amid constant change.

The bees came booming as if they had never gone,  
As if hyacinths had never gone. We say  
This changes and that changes. Thus the constant

Violets, doves, girls, bees and hyacinths  
Are inconstant objects of inconstant cause  
In a universe of inconstancy. . . .

The President ordains the bee to be Immortal. The President ordains. But does  
The body lift its heavy wing, take up,

Again, an inexhaustible being, rise  
Over the loftiest antagonist  
To drone the green phrases of its juvenal?

Why should the bee recapture a lost blague,  
Find a deep echo in a horn and buzz  
The bottomless trophy, new hornsman after old?  

(CP 389-391)

Each new life, each spring, is not a matter of a return to former life but is instead a new beginning in itself. As for each bee there is only one life, his life, which he lives without knowledge of the chain of life which produced
him and which he in turn will recreate, so for the poet the creations of the imagination are new, not merely recapitulations of a former poet's creations. It is a

... beginning, not resuming, this Booming and booming of the new-come bee.  

(CP 391)

The bee in Africa, however, is different from the bee of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" in that he is wild. Instead of signalling a new beginning, he only drones the same sensuousness which all of Africa echoes. In Africa one is only able

... to hear the wild bee drone, to feel The ecstasy of sense in a sensuous air.  

(OP 56)

Stevens seems to be saying that things never change in Africa. Africa has no real counterpart for the "new-come bee." Life there is merely the cycle of existence, and the wild bee finds the echo in the horn, the echo of life's continuity. Rather than a symbol of regeneration, he is an echo of an unchanging and mindless continuum.

The elephant, besides being a large and dangerous animal, is endemic to the tropics. The imagination cannot penetrate the reality of the elephant, for it is part of life and caught up in the process of existence. It interacts with the chaos of Africa but is never free from it. Even in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" the elephant is never more than a huge symbol of life itself. "The elephant/ Breaches the darkness of Ceylon with blares" (CP 384), but his blares are only sound and shed no light for the poet. Ceylon (and Africa) remain as dark as before.
The ultimate ruler of Africa "sits upon the serpent throne" (OP 55) but does not wear the crown of imagination. We encountered the serpent first in "The Comedian as the Letter C," where Stevens describes Yucatan as "a land of snakes," "intertwined with serpent-kin encoiled." In Africa the serpent is supreme over the vegetative greenness of the continent:

The serpent might become a god, quick-eyed, Rising from indolent coils.  

The serpent is given the power to rule; consequently the poet cannot order the serpent-god by means of either his intellect or his will. Opposed to this serpent is the marble statue of "Owl's Clover," an artifact of civilization created by the mind and art of the sculptor. The serpent opposes the statue's entry into Africa and contests its right as well as its ability to remain there and maintain its identity:

... If the statue rose,  
If once the statue were to rise ...  
Sleekly the serpent would draw himself across,  

negating the art of the statue and denying its ability to reorder the African landscape.

The serpent has several symbolic meanings to Western man, the most important being the Christian serpent of evil and the Jungian serpent of the unconscious. I think each layer of symbolism adds to the significance as well as the strangeness of this African ruler. In Jungian psychology the serpent is the archetype of the primordial instinct; it is the unconscious. As we shall see, the ultimate essence of Africa is
the unconscious. This unconsciousness pits itself against the
statue, which represents conscious form in its most artful guise.
In the context of the green African continent the serpent must
overcome the statue, and instinct must reign over art.

The serpent also has strong Biblical connotations in the
Christian culture within which Wallace Stevens writes. He
is Satan, the tempter in the Garden. He represents the force
of evil in the world. In a rough sense Stevens seems to be
considering Africa as an archetypical Garden of Eden in
which initially only creative, life-impulsive forces are at
work. The rich greenness of Africa represents the fullness of
creation in the Garden. The serpent can be present in such a
garden, of course, but his nature cannot become revealed until
there is also present in the garden an agent upon whom he can
act. In Africa the serpent is at home as merely the possi-
bility of a force. It is only when the statue appears that
the serpent can fully exercise his power. The statue is a
sort of Adam come to live in and order the primal Garden. It
can always, of course, physically remain in Africa; but when
the statue ceases to be just meaningless marble and becomes
instead a work of art and the representative of an artistic
consciousness, it in effect gains the "knowledge of good
and evil" which comes with the attempt to know and to order.
Once this attempt has been made, the statue's meaning is
pitted against the life-force represented by the serpent.
It is, of course, an unequal struggle, especially in Africa,
whose greenness and intense life demand the strictest
obedience of art to necessity. The symbolism of Africa as the Garden and the statue as an Adam figure is not perfect, of course; Stevens intended, I believe, only to hint at a connection. The poem is not an allegory; life is not a God to whom art (knowledge) must pay obeisance. The inescapable Biblical overtones which arise as a result of the use of the serpent as a symbol, however, cannot be overlooked. At the very least, the analogy gives the reader an idea of the cosmic nature of the problem which presents itself to Stevens when he comes face to face with the formless life of the tropics.

The ritual serpent dance climaxes the sensual rule of Africa; the serpent's throne is

. . . a throne raised up beyond
Men's bones, beyond their breaths, the black sublime,
Toward which, in the nights, the glittering serpents climb,
Dark-skinned and sinuous, winding upwardly,
Winding and waving, slowly, waving in air,
Darting envenomed eyes about, like fangs,
Hissing, across the silence, puissant sounds.
Death, only, sits upon the serpent throne:
Death, the herdsman of elephants,
To whom the jaguars cry and lions roar
Their petty dirges . . .

(OP 55)

This is an Africa which art and poetry can never penetrate, one in which not only man and his art but also the animals and the landscape must submit to the rule of pure sensuality as epitomized by the serpent writhing upon his throne.

There is an interesting absence of comment upon both sun and moon in Africa. Of course sunlight is necessary for the growth of the lush tropical vegetation, but Africa's sun
is only the basic light which has ever shone upon the geological world. "Africa, basking in antiquest sun" (OP 55), is surfeited with sun to an extent that renders mention of it almost unnecessary. It is obvious that "the sun and the sun-reek" (OP 59) have created this fertile, green, overwhelmingly alive place. But the moon seems to be entirely absent. The nights are moonless. It is almost as if the world could contain only a given quantity of light. Where both sunlight and moonlight prevail, each rules its portion of the time. In Florida, for example, the sun's strength attenuates the moon's influence somewhat; this attenuation is sharper in Yucatan, where the sun is stronger and more pervasive. Africa, however, is entirely ruled by the sun. Even at night the moonlight is excluded. For Stevens, of course, the exclusion of moonlight means the exclusion of imagination. In Florida the imagination could hope to operate under the moonlight, but in Africa there is no moonlight to make possible an imaginative construct of the world.

Africa, then, is intensely real and full of life. Reality forces itself into every corner of the continent and into the minds of its inhabitants. Africa literally reeks of sunshine. Stevens sums up Africa's totality by calling it "the greenest continent," green both with vegetation and with effulgent reality. In such a place, where imagination cannot penetrate, the only force can be the life-force.

Fatal Ananke is the common god,
Fateful Ananke is the final god. (OP 59)
Ananke is the Greek god of necessity, of things as they must be, and it is he who rules Africa and represents both the life-force and death. He exacts no worship, he accepts no sacrifice, he offers no salvation. He is instinct, necessity -- the life-force incarnate. He is the force which moves the serpent, the force which condenses Africa's essence into greenness. Ananke is "Sultan of African sultans" and wears a "starless crown." (OP 60) Unlike Florida's jeweled tiara of red and blue and red which attempts to combine reality and imagination, and unlike the "fatal stones" in the crown of "To The One of Fictive Music," Ananke's crown is devoid of light-giving stars. He has no imagination and can be illuminated by no imaginative power. Ananke is everything in Africa, and so his unimaginative life-force is the death-force as well, for Ananke and death are one. "Fatal Ananke is the common god" and "death, only, sits upon the serpent throne." Ananke encompasses the totality of Africa, both its life and its death; and yet in Africa death becomes not so much the opposite of life as a continuation of it, in nature if not in kind. The force which drives life is the same force which gives death its power. There can be no death without life; yet life's intensity comes from death's presence in the world.

Africa represents for Stevens, then, the ultimates of life and death and so can only be lived and felt, never known. In Africa the poet can imagine nothing and can create nothing, for there is no order for him to discover except for the primal instincts of life, which are inexplicable, not subject
to definition and differentiation and constriction by man.

Therefore, what can one do in Africa except to feel its reality, as the serpent does?

... Why think,

  Why feel the sun or, feeling, why feel more
  Than purple paste of fruit, to taste, or leaves
  Of purple flowers, to see?

(OP 58)

In Florida the poet fancies he can "bring back thought" when the spell of the Floridian night is dissipated by the emergence of moonlight; here he questions the very value of thought. Why should one make the effort to think, in this place where thought is annihilated by being? Even emotion is an insufficient response to Africa. Florida could be felt in all its variety, but Africa condenses feeling to an individual purple flower entwined at the heart of the greenest continent.

Stevens has penetrated as far as the poetic mind can go into the forces which move life. The large amount of space he devotes to a study of the tropics indicates the importance it holds for him. Florida and Yucatan are very similar, but Yucatan, being a bit further south, is more tropical, greener. The Africa of "Owl's Clover" is the final phase of Stevens' attempts to get to the heart of the tropical reality; it is the prototype of greenness and tropicality which he found earlier in both Yucatan and Florida. The similarities create an identity between them, while the differences show the progressive development of Stevens' attitude toward the tropics just previous to his "Farewell to Florida."
The similarities among these three tropical locales can be seen quite clearly in a comparison of the treatment given various animals, plants and people in them. Africa's palms, for example, are elephantine and forbidding, while in Yucatan they are savage, an adjective which has human as well as animal connotations. The palms in Florida are merely plants, such as "the big-finned palm" of "Nomad Exquisite" or the palms of "Two Figures in Dense Violet Night" which "are clear and are obscure." At their least significant they become the diminutive "palmettoes" of "Indian River." In contact with sun and sea along the "palmy beaches," they neither threaten nor promise but merely exist. Africa's "evil-blossomed vine," with its connotations of malice and threat, is in "O Florida, Venereal Soil" only a vegetative element in the landscape. At its most extreme it takes on human attributes as a "green vine angering for life."

The variation in animal life among Africa, Yucatan and Florida is surprisingly great. The animals of Africa are mostly large and wild -- the jaguar, the elephant -- but the most prominent is the serpent, which rules Africa with its unconscious intuition. The image of the serpent controls the nature of Africa, and the life-force which the serpent represents becomes the only possible order in Africa, an order which cannot be assimilated into the mind or re-ordered by the imagination but which must inexorably be felt and lived. The serpent is also present in Yucatan, which is "a
land of snakes." But in Yucatan the serpent does not reign as he does in Africa; and the other animals of Yucatan are very different from those of Africa, being largely birds of a colorful and strange nature but no longer as menacing as the animals of Africa. In Florida the serpent has totally disappeared from sight (although not from existence, as we shall see later) and is replaced by buzzards, tiestas and coral. There is no serpent god of necessity or fate visibly ruling over Florida as he ruled over Africa. The buzzards and tiestas are fairly common to a Floridian's experience, and coral is a purely passive "animal."

I feel the most important difference in Stevens' tropical locales is the absence or presence of people. In Africa there are no people connected with the land; all the characters in "The Greenest Continent" section of "Owl's Clover" are foreigners who come to colonize and civilize Africa. They form a veneer over the country but never penetrate into it; as a matter of fact, Stevens is careful to show their lack of penetration by separating the populated subsections of the poem from those which deal with the African landscape alone. Ananke is the sole inhabitant of Africa, but he rules as the life-force without being alive in any human sense himself. Into the realm of Ananke no human beings can venture. Although the god of necessity rules men as well as animals, men with their minds cannot penetrate to the subconscious level of worship which the animals, especially the serpent, attain. In Yucatan there is one human mind which attempts to order the landscape -- Crispin's. But since
he is the only one there, he must struggle with the life of Yucatan alone. It is only in Florida that we see a number of people participating to various degrees in the ordering process. Stevens is, of course, the principal orderer, but many others make the attempt at order or at least provide an incipient pattern by their presence. The narrator of "The Cuban Doctor" is aware of the danger lurking in Florida's summer although he is unable to do anything about it because he is lulled to sleep by the heat and rhythm of the land. The scholars of "Homunculus et La Belle Étoile" delude themselves with the belief that they can "bring back thought" when the tranquillity of Florida's night releases them from Venus' emotional spell. Although the order they seek is one which can never be attained, yet they have taken the first step toward order by postulating how to achieve it. In addition to these people, Florida has a native population which blends with the landscape. These are such people as

The Cuban, Polodowsky,
The Mexican women,
The negro undertaker

(CP 47)

who comprise "the dreadful sundry" which Stevens finds as hard to understand as the natural landscape.

Civilization, then, inheres in Florida. In Africa civilization is merely a veneer which never penetrates to the essence of greenness. In Yucatan an isolated spot of civilization in the form of Crispin can live and think, but it can never grow and flourish because the landscape forbids civilizing. Florida, however, can be invaded to a certain
extent by outside influences. Stevens seems to feel that "the dreadful sundry of this world" are somehow themselves a part of Florida; he, too, might be one with Florida, as they seem to him to be, if he could but get inside them, could know what they know.

Africa, Yucatan and Florida thus differ from one another in degree. Africa is the most primordial place, truly the greenest continent, where all things are felt and where emotion is the only handle for grasping the density of reality. As Stevens shows in "Owl's Clover," art (including, by implication, the art of poetry) cannot penetrate Africa and can at best only overlay the life of that continent. The instinctual life-force of Africa renders art impotent and in effect un-creates it by negating it so thoroughly. Human creation is impossible under Ananke's aegis. Art is the antithesis of mindlessness; when art and necessity collide, Stevens finds that art must yield.

Yucatan is a degree less unknowable than Africa. As a continent Africa is totally surrounded by ocean. Yucatan, a peninsula, maintains a tenuous connection with the land and therefore is not so strongly affected by the chaos of the oceans as is Africa. Too, it is physically nearer to what we shall discover to be Stevens' idea of a more amenable climate for the poet, that of the north. As art cannot survive in Africa, so it cannot survive in Yucatan. Crispin finds the Mexican atmosphere inimical to poetic shaping and finally must leave it for a more northern area which he hopes he will be better able to "catechize" (CP 31) than Yucatan.
Florida is the closest of the three to the north. It is more in contact with Western civilization than Africa or Yucatan. It has more possibility of order because many of its objects are ones which would be familiar to the poet. In a way Florida's obtuse disorder is more frustrating to the poet than the disorder of such a place as Africa, for he could expect to find Florida potentially orderable while he would accept Africa's disorder as natural. Therefore, although Africa is actually less orderable than Florida, it is not as discouraging to the poet because its lack of order is expected and therefore more easily acceptable. In the end it is unrealizable possibility which frustrates Stevens in the tropics of Florida.

Florida, Yucatan and Africa, then, all share a tropical essence, although there are definite points of difference among them which make it possible to distinguish one from another. Yet just as the statue failed in Africa and Crispin failed in Yucatan, so the poet fails in Florida and must seek another climate for the imagining of his art.

II

By the end of Harmonium Stevens finds it necessary to leave Florida. He has touched the objects which make up the Florida landscape and has tried to understand them through poetry. Many critics of Stevens have suggested, as does William Van O'Connor, that Florida represents "a land of the
imagination" 16 flooded by sun, energized by sea and bathed in the imaginative light of the moon and the evening star. But Stevens feels that the imagination can only operate in conjunction with a reality which it orders; divorced from this reality it becomes cloying. With no observed reality to order, it can be no more than a fanciful game. Florida, however, does present a reality for the imagination to order; Stevens spends, as we have seen, a great deal of time describing the realities of the tropics. If Florida were indeed the land where the imagination predominates, then how can one explain Stevens' imaginative impotence in the face of Florida's reality?

Both reality and imagination, I believe, are operative in Florida. Stevens cannot combine the two into an ordered landscape because the objects comprising Florida's reality will not submit to an imaginative shaping but obstinately retain their selfhood, denying the poet's attempt to know them. After many such attempts, Stevens finally comes to realize "the irony of seeking in a landscape what it cannot yield." 17 Florida's landscape can be approached neither as total reality nor as artifact. It cannot be imagined and ordered by the poet.

Before Stevens can go on to formulate his Ideas of Order, therefore, he must leave Florida. The first poem in Ideas

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17 Enck, op. cit., p. 57.
of Order is "Farewell to Florida" (CP 117), in which he takes his leave, both physically and emotionally, of the aesthetic southern landscape. He has worked himself free from his need, seen in the earlier poems, to order Florida and can finally leave her, unordered but unregretted.

Her mind had bound me round. The palms were hot
As if I lived in ashen ground,
   . . . in a sepulchral South,
Her South of pine and coral and coraline sea,
Her home, not mine, in the ever-freshened Keys,
Her days, her oceanic nights.

(CP 117)

He sees now that these things belong to Florida and can never belong to the poet. Once he has accepted this idea as the truth for him, he is able to

   . . . say
Farewell and to know that that land is forever gone
And that she will not follow in any word
Or look, nor ever again in thought, except
That I loved her once.

(CP 118)

Stevens can now accept the fact that he loved Florida. His feeling for her was one of pure emotion. When he felt the need to understand and imagine her he could not admit his love for her because that love was emotion without a base in knowledge. It was, in effect, an act of faith which would have negated his poetic aspirations to order his world sufficiently for himself. Now he is able to admit and accept his love for what it was and leave it behind as one would leave an untenable theory or an unrealizable hope.

And it is because of his acceptance of his love for Florida that he can now admit also to a hatred of the objects which so frustrated him earlier:
I hated the weathery yawl from which the pools
Disclosed the sea floor and the wilderness
Of waving weeds. I hated the vivid blooms
Curled over the shadowless hut, the rust and bones,
The trees like bones and the leaves half sand, half sun.

(CP 118)

The "few things for themselves" which he had begged Florida
to "disclose to the lover" are now the things he must reject
if he is to acknowledge and retain his love for Florida her-
self. And once he has admitted to himself the ambivalence
of his feelings toward Florida, the poet need no longer
remain there. The symbol of his disaffection from Florida
is an interesting one which we have met with before, both in
Africa and in Yucatan but not heretofore in Florida: the
serpent. The poet was always able to recognize the serpentine
nature of Africa and to admit that this nature made art
impossible; in Yucatan, too, Crispin could not achieve his
poetic ambitions partially because Yucatan was "a land of
snakes." But it is not until now that Stevens himself can
allow the serpent to enter the Florida which he loves. Until
now, he has been protecting that beloved landscape from the
inexorable control which he knows the serpent must exercise
over it should he once be allowed to enter. Then somewhere
between Harmonium and Ideas of Order, Stevens discovers the
serpent's existence in Florida. This discovery leads
directly to his departure:

Go on, high ship, since now, upon the shore,
The snake has left its skin upon the floor.

(CP 117)

and later,
... the waves make a refrain
Of this: that the snake has shed its skin upon
The floor.

(CP 117)

"The snake" -- Florida -- has "shed its skin" -- its illusion
of orderability. Stevens can see the primal life-force
which is Florida; he has discovered the serpent in Florida.
He here uses the snake shedding its skin also as symbolic
of the cycle of regenerative life. The old dies but the new
is born. The poet must escape from the serpent in Florida
and shed his own tropical illusions at the same time. It
is not a matter of choice but one of necessity if he is to
retain his poetic power and most fully realize the ordering
potential of his poetic spirit. This realization is pointed
toward at the end of Harmonium when, in "Indian River," the
narrator realizes that "there is no spring in Florida" (CP 112),
no changing of the seasons or of the mind; perpetual summer
makes the mind as drowsy as the moth along the bony shores.
This is a somnolence from which the poet can never awaken; to
remain alive he must seek the changing climate of a more
northern place. Thus we can see Stevens coming gradually
to the realization, voiced in "Farewell to Florida," that
the south can provide no poetic home for the mind. As Riddel
notes, however, Stevens,

working toward Crispin's discovery that 'his soil
is man's intelligence,' ... had first to sample
the ingredients of that soil, before he could make
it yield to his remaking. As early as Harmonium,
he seemed to know that he must leave the overwhelming
naturalness offered by worlds like Florida if he
were to preserve the distinctive humanity that
the imagination afforded.
Stevens cannot depart Florida without first having become a part of her. And he can never depart from her entirely, for what she has given him remains with him in all his perceptions. He merely makes a realignment of his poetic self to a more imaginable land by exchanging the southern landscape for the northern. He knows he is making an exchange which is not entirely favorable; the north has its disagreeable aspects, too, and he is very much aware of them.

My North is leafless and lies in a wintry slime
Both of men and clouds, a slime of men in crowds.
The men are moving as the water moves,
. . . shoving and slithering.

(CP 118)

But it is evident that he feels he must, nonetheless, go north.

Stevens chooses to make his metaphorical departure from Florida by sea. His voyage to his north is over water, as if by traversing the sea he can control it to some extent by making use of it to carry him to his destiny. From his ship the sea becomes mysterious yet somehow friendly as he finds

In the ever-freshened Keys,
. . . oceanic nights, calling
For music, for whisperings from the reefs.

(CP 117)

As the ship speeds northward Stevens' increasing distance from Florida permits him, as if he sat on a cloud, to see Florida "sequestered over the sea" as he had wished her to be in "O Florida, Venereal Soil." In his departure from and renunciation of Florida he begins to achieve the vision of her that he had so unsuccessfully sought in her midst. This changed aspect of the sea as he leaves Florida becomes
important later in his ordering of the experiences which he
gained from Florida. It is, in fact, the first ordering
Stevens himself actually achieves of the chaos of the ocean.
By his voyage over it he carves a path of order connecting
Florida with the north and establishing poetic continuity
at the same time as he winnows the infeasible tropical element
from his poetry. It is the first step toward the realiza-
tion of his own philosophy.

The analogy with Crispin is quite clear. Crispin was
unable to subdue Yucatan with his quill and so decided to
go where he would be able to cultivate things, plants as
well as ideas, in a climate which would permit him to control
what he cultivated, as Yucatan would not. He too voyaged by
ship to Carolina, paralleling Stevens' metaphorical sea exodus
from Florida. "What he saw across his vessel's prow" (CP 35)
leads Crispin to believe more strongly than ever as he
approaches Carolina that

Perhaps the Arctic moonlight really gave
The liaison, the blissful liaison,
Between himself and his environment.

(CP 34)

If this proves true then Crispin's voyage, far from being
either speculative or vain, is a necessity. Crispin wishes
to be a colonist and farmer, producing controlled vegetation
and an ordered community. Stevens' poetry is for him both
farm and colony, and the life emanating from his ordered
manipulation of reality is his "crop." Like Crispin, Stevens
must cultivate the imaginative aspects of those things which
he beholds, and in Florida it is impossible for him to do so.
The black hull of Florida absorbs all the imaginative moonlight falling on it and gives back no reflection of reality illuminated. In the north the moon and sun can jointly help the poet to perceive objects and to order them into a meaningful landscape for him. The north "of men and clouds," of "the violent mind/ That is their mind, these men, and that will bind/ Me round" (CP 118), is the place where he must seek his order now. At least the north is alive in a way the poet can understand, with men who are

... moving as the water moves,
This darkened water cloven by sullen swells
Against your sides, then shoving and slithering,
The darkness shattered, turbulent with foam.

(CP 118)

This active, teeming, violent north can be contrasted with the lethargy and, as Riddel calls it,

the incipient decay that Stevens came to discover in the ripeness of earthly paradise.19

If Stevens' departure from Florida can be compared to Crispin's trip from Yucatan as the departure of the poet from impenetrable tropical reality, then the departure of the statue in "Owl's Clover" from Africa is comparable to the departure of art from the Floridian atmosphere. Stevens knows from the beginning that the statue will be unable to conquer Africa, for he has already worked out his own idea of the south and has metaphorically tested it through Crispin's voyage from Yucatan before he wrote "Owl's Clover." Stevens' intellectual transplant of the statue into Africa is in effect

19Ibid., p. 71.
the testing of a hypothesis: can the northern artist imagine the tropics? "The horses are a part of a northern sky" (OP 54), and "the marble was imagined in the cold." (OP 56) Because it was created in the north, it is a part of the north and speaks to the "mind of winter" which created it.

... Could marble still
Be marble after the drenching reds, the dark
And drenching crimsons, or endure? It came
If not from winter, from a summer like
A winter's moon, in which the colors sprang
From snow, and would return again to snow,
As summer would return to weazened days.

(OP 57)

The crimsons and reds which comprise Africa's atmosphere almost literally make the statue's marble into something else. It becomes no longer the horses which the sculptor created; it becomes instead translated into redness and greenness by the serpent's act of drawing himself across it. The statue cannot order the African world through its own marble order, and eventually the only place it can function artistically is in the north which gave it birth. Neither artist nor art can remain beside Ananke, the "fatal god" of life. The snakes, the palms, the vines have driven the intruder from their midst. They will not yield their reality to the intelligence of the artist, and the artist, defeated, must retreat. So likewise does Crispin sail to Carolina and Stevens return to his wintry north. The landscape is not ordered by the mind. Crispin begins with the assumption that "man is the intelligence of his soil" (CP 27), indicating his belief that the mind controls what it sees. When he eventually must leave for Carolina, however, he comes to admit
that "his soil is man's intelligence" (CP 36); the mind is controlled by what is outside it.

It is evident, then, that not only Florida but Yucatan and Africa as well resist being shaped by art into a consistent poetic world such as Stevens desires. Yucatan's jungle expels Crispin; Ananke drives the statue from Africa. There is no place for the poet's necessary order in the tropics.

III

Because he does not inhabit either Africa or Yucatan, Stevens is able to acknowledge their tropical ascendancy over art and then leave them behind as he embarks upon Ideas of Order. After the publication of "Owl's Clover" Africa and Yucatan cease to appear in his poetry. Florida, however, is much closer to him personally. He frequently vacationed there and so often found himself surrounded by her "few things for themselves." Since he did return to Florida, his farewell to her was obviously metaphorical. Neither from her nor within her could he find the necessary consistency and order he felt he needed for the full development of his poetic, but there remained elements of Florida which he was able to use later in the creation of his aesthetic world.

It is only after leaving Florida that Stevens can find order there, and this order is not made from the materials of the south but is instead imposed upon them. The poet realizes that "there is order in neither sea nor sun" (CP 122) and that
any order must be imposed from without upon the sea and the sun. The first instance of such imposed order comes in "The Idea of Order at Key West" (CP 128), when the poet and companion(s) hear the voice of a girl singing. The order of her song imposes a human order upon the sea and so subdues it:

For she was the maker of the song she sang.
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.

(CP 129)

The sea is no longer the controlling factor. The girl is maker, or poet, of her song, and the force of her song's order quells for a moment the sea's supremacy. The fact that the song is sung by a human artificer makes the difference between true order and the specious order of nature's song:

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
That rose, or even colored by many waves;
If it was only the outer voice of sky
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
However clear, it would have been deep air,
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
Repeated in a summer without end
And sound alone.

(CP 129)

Florida is the "summer without end" made up of the "droning of the surf," the sound of the wind and the selfhood of all the "few things for themselves." None of these natural objects have the power of the poet, and so none of them can achieve an order like the order of the song Stevens hears.

... But it was more than that ... She was the single artificer of the world In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea, Whatever self it had, became the self That was her song, for she was the maker.

(CP 129)

Only a poet can create an order out of the realities of the world. The poem becomes the imaginative world, and the real
world at that moment must yield to the greater truth of the poem.

The singer is a reality in herself. She belongs neither to the sea nor to the land and partakes of none of the components of Florida which the earlier Stevens sought to understand. And, significantly, the order she creates brings on the night, the time of moonlight and imagination, in which the poet becomes the supreme artist.

... tell me...
Why, when the singing ended and we turned
Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
As the night descended, tilting in the air,
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

(CP 130)
The order and the nightfall occur simultaneously. The night is enchanted and arranged in a way the poet can perceive, and now he knows that order is possible. Stevens makes it very clear, however, that the order is significant only for the singer; although the poet can recognize it, it is not yet his order.

Previous to "The Idea of Order at Key West" Stevens had made several attempts to immerse himself in climate -- both wintry and summery -- in the vain hope that the fullness of summer or the depth of winter would bring him finally to a complete knowledge of them. He wishes to stop time long enough to come to a climatic knowledge, since he has already found that he will never be able to come to knowledge of the objects of Florida. In "The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad" (CP 96) the Collected Poems omits a stanza which adds depth not only to that poem but to an understanding of Stevens'
attitude toward the tropics. For the reader's convenience I will here quote the poem with the omitted stanza included:

The time of year has grown indifferent.
Mildew of summer and the deepening snow
Are both alike in the routine I know;
I am too dumbly in my being pent.

The wind attendant on the solstices
Blows on the shutters of the metropoles,
Stirring no poet in his sleep, and tolls
The grand ideas of the villages.

The malady of the quotidian ...
Perhaps if summer ever came to rest
And lengthened, deepened, comforted, caressed
Through days like oceans in obsidian

Horizons, full of night's midsummer blaze;
Perhaps, if winter once could penetrate
Through all its purples to the final slate,
Persisting bleakly in an icy haze;

One might in turn become less diffident,
Out of such mildew plucking neater mould
And spouting new orations of the cold.
One might. One might. But time will not relent. 20

This poem was published in Harmonium with the other Florida poems and therefore precedes Stevens' "Farewell to Florida." Frustrated by his inability to know the tropical landscape, he turns to the climate itself in search of a key to knowledge. Florida's summer is, it is true, perpetual in comparison to Stevens' New England summer, but it is apparent that the poet feels there is a lack of depth even in the Florida summer. He would have the ever-moving oceans and the shifting horizons they create turn to stone; "obsidian" is a glassy black volcanic rock which in its concave fractures looks very much like a black ocean wave somehow ossified. Or, failing this fixing of the sea's chaos, he would have the moonlight shine

20 The complete version appears in Yvor Winters. In Defense of Reason (Denver, 1937), p. 438. Omitted in the original were the four lines beginning, "Perhaps if summer ... ."
as brightly as sunshine -- "night's midsummer blaze" -- in the hope of illuminating Florida brightly enough to really see her while yet utilizing only the moonlight and with it the possibility of imagination. If this would happen, he says, the poet might be able to create an imaginative order out of what he sees, even though the perpetual summer has made everything rancid and mildewed. If he could settle upon the permanent meaning of just one thing and avoid the quotidian's daily changes, then he could create a static mold from which to pluck "neater mould" -- a satisfactory poetic -- out of the mildew in which he is presently encased. But as ever, Stevens is frustrated by time. "Time will not relent;" it continues despite the poet's most poignant desire to stop it, if only long enough to get something, anything, of substance from the summer.

This is true, too, of winter. In any discussion of the meaning of summer in Wallace Stevens' poetry it becomes necessary to discuss winter as well, for he saw the two as originally complementing each other and representing the two extremes of creativity. In "The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad" Stevens is willing to accept either continual summer or eternal winter in the hope that one of them will yield a permanence on which he can build. But while summer seems to be characterized by the predominance of sea and sun, representing chaos and reality, winter is purple, representing the imagination in its most decadent state. Full winter is the antithesis of summer's green. Underneath it there is a
"final slate," an absolute of reality which is the meaning and truth of everything. But this absolute is hidden beneath the purples of imagination operating upon its own creations, imagination which has broken away from the reality we see and is therefore unconnected to the lives men must live.

This is the purple which winter presents to the poet. He believes, or wishes to believe, that if he could only live long enough in winter he would be able to plumb the depths of the imagination's purples until he finds the "final slate" which he believes is beneath. Then he could spout "new orations of the cold" and would become "The Snow Man" (CP 9) whose "mind of winter" could finally behold "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." It might not be the ideal, but at least it would be a solid achievement of order, as Stevens' dashed hope of fully knowing Florida would also have been. This illustrates the main difference, I feel, between summer and winter for Stevens. Winter is composed of "the nothing that is," adding nothing to the reality which exists while at the same time seeing the single essence of reality as a united whole. Winter must penetrate imagination until it shows only reality; summer must somehow penetrate reality, as represented by Florida, until it finds the imagination of "night's midsummer blaze." Summer's realities encompass everything and distinguish nothing. Rather than penetrating winter's nothing, the tropical poet penetrates summer's multiplicity of things, and into his mind "come flinging/ Forms, flames, and the flakes of flames." (CP 95)

Each object divides and subdivides until the flames become
flakes of flames and diversify themselves into an eternal and undifferentiable universe of multiformity.

Neither winter nor summer can alone account for the fullness of existence; but Stevens has tried summer and found it wanting, so he quite naturally turns next to winter to try out its compatibility with the world seen as a whole, although this effort too is doomed to failure. His poetry becomes "the blue guitar" on which he has been trying to play "things as they are." But he finds that

... Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar.  
(CP 165)

The imagination cannot really recreate a reality.

I cannot bring a world quite round,
Although I patch it as I can.  
(CP 165)

By this point Stevens seems to have come round to the idealist way of looking at the world. Reality does exist, but because it must be apprehended through the medium of each person's perceptions there is no way to penetrate to the ultimate reality beneath the perceptions. The closest man can come to reality is his individual perception of it. 21 This being the case, neither summer nor winter will ever be able to "penetrate/
... to the final slate" (CP 96) because the final slate can never be revealed in its pure state to the poet's senses. The reader demands of poetry that it disclose the real meanings of nature and life, but Stevens seems to be saying in "The Man With the Blue Guitar" (CP 165) that this is patently impossible. In the depths of winter, when the

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21Peterson on cit. Stevens' idealist background is thoroughly documented in this work.
guitar strums "the blacknesses of black" (CP 507), the sun becomes ineffective, just as the moonlight in Florida is ineffective because it is absorbed by the barque of phosphor. Florida has too much reality; Stevens' depths of winter have too little. When imagination becomes the only occupant of the world, it must create upon itself, having no reality to transform. Reality untouched by imagination is too intensely emotional to be shaped into poetry. Imagination which does not touch reality, however, is equally useless as the base for poetry because nothing actual resides behind it. Thus it seems that by the time of the publication of "The Man With The Blue Guitar" in the volume of the same title, Stevens has come to realize that both Florida and the north -- both summer and winter -- are necessary for the creation of a "supreme fiction."

Seasons change, one following another in a rhythmic order which sustains and recreates life. Just so must the material of poetry progress. Winter is a time of cold, of death, when the spirit rests and regenerates itself. Spring is a time of change, bringing new growth and a promise of summer with its fullness. Summer is the culmination of the poetic year, when fruits ripen and the continuity of life is established. Autumn is again change, bringing relief from the effulgences of summer and pointing toward the regenerative cold of winter. As life goes, so poetry goes. In "The Man With the Blue Guitar" Stevens ponders over his change of stance:

It is the sun that shares our works.
The moon shares nothing. It is a sea.
When shall I come to say of the sun,
It is a sea; it shares nothing;

The sun no longer shares our works . . .

And shall I then stand in the sun, as now

I stand in the moon, and call it good,
The immaculate, the merciful good,

Detached from us, from things as they are?

(CP 168)

His poetic will be a continuous alternation between the two,
similar to Crispin's ultimate hope:

Thus he conceived his voyaging to be
An up and down between two elements,
A fluctuating between sun and moon,
A sally into gold and crimson forms,
As on this voyage, out of goblinry,
And then retirement like a turning back
And sinking down to the indulgences
That in the moonlight have their habitude.

(CP 35)

In this way he devises a world in which he is a native:

I am a native in this world
And think in it as a native thinks, . . .

And things are as I think they are
And say they are on the blue guitar.

(CP 180)

Stevens says he creates the reality of his own world: "It
is the poet's sense of the world that is the poet's world."
(NA 118) Within the cycle of life he chooses what he will imagine.

... we shall sleep by night.
We shall forget by day, except

The moments when we choose to play
The imagined pine, the imagined jay.

(CP 184)

And he goes on to imagine pines and jays. By accepting the
necessity for both summer and winter he has learned how to look at things with creative sight without becoming emotionally involved with them, as in Florida. In "The Red Fern" he speaks of the uniqueness of a real day:

The large-leaved day grows rapidly,
And opens in this familiar spot
Its unfamiliar, difficult fern,
Pushing and pushing red after red.

There are doubles of this fern in the clouds,
Less firm than the paternal flame,
Yet drenched with its identity,
Reflections and off-shoots, mimic-motes

And mist-mites, dangling seconds, grown
Beyond relation to the parent trunk:
The dazzling, bulging, brightest core,
The furiously burning father-fire . . .

Infant, it is enough in life
To speak of what you see. But wait
Until sight wakens the sleepy eye
And pierces the physical fix of things.

(CP 365)

The red fern is a metaphor for everything that is real. It is the clouds, the sun, the foliage. It comes from the sun, "drenched with its identity." The reality represented by the red fern includes everything, even the poems the poet writes about it. These "reflections and off-shoots, mimic-motes/ And mist-mites" are the poet's creations in response to and in imitation of the red fern of reality. Stevens here realizes poems can only be reflections, mimicking truth, but now "it is enough." This contrasts sharply with "Nomad Exquisite" (CP 95), in which he had earlier tried to create poems from Florida and found that he could only sing hymns of worship because his poetry regressed from form into
dissolution. Florida is a flame from the sun in the earlier poem; in the later poem the fern (the world) is the child of the sun. The difference lies in Stevens' acknowledgement of the nature of the world and his acceptance of it. In the early poem he cannot accept the alienation of the landscape from his mind. In the later poem he seems to stand aside from his red world. The poet no longer needs to know the essential nature of what he sees; "it is enough in life to speak" of it. But Stevens had to wait "until sight wakens the sleepy eye," the eye with which he saw Florida. Only the passage of time can "bring back thought" as it does here, piercing "the physical fix of things" and extracting meaning from the world the poet has created out of his perceptions of reality.

In "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight" in Auroras of Autumn (CP 430), Stevens goes still further to separate the absolute from the poetic. The roses are

Too actual, things that in being real
Make any imaginings of them lesser things.

Again the poet is just seeing them, without the need to know them, as he did the objects of Florida. They are absolute fact, yet he can now deal with them.

We have excluded absolute fact as an element of poetic truth. But this has been done arbitrarily and with a sense of absolute fact as fact destitute of any imaginative aspect whatever. Unhappily the more destitute it becomes the more it begins to be precious. We must limit ourselves to saying that there are so many things which, as they are, and without any intervention of the imagination, seem to be imaginative objects that it is no doubt true that absolute fact includes everything that the imagination includes.

(NA 60-61)
Yet the effect the roses have upon the poet is purely subjective, so

... this effect is a consequence of the way We feel and, therefore, is not real, except In our sense of it ... 

Our sense of these things changes and they change, Not as in metaphor, but in our sense Of them. So sense exceeds all metaphor. (CP 430-431)

The roses are so real that a poem of them would be a lesser thing than their reality; the poem would have to become its own reality. Neither the poet nor the objects of the world can be the subject of the poem. "Poetry is the subject of the poem,/ From this the poem issues and/ To this returns." (CP 176) This is true of "The Red Fern" as well. The nature of the world cannot be ascertained; the poet can only feel the world from within himself. The poem can express neither the world nor the mind of the poet, so it expresses itself. Stevens' voyage from Florida to the north, from summer to winter and then into the cycle of the seasons, is the voyage of the poet in search of the poem. In "Prologues to What Is Possible" (CP 515-517) a similar voyage is undertaken, and the voyager arrives at last at the rock which represents the world as a whole and as the subject of the poem. He is

... someone voyaging out of and beyond the familiar. He belonged to the far-foreign departure of his vessel and was part of it, ... And he traveled alone, like a man lured on by a syllable without any meaning. A syllable of which he felt, with an appointed sureness, That it contained the meaning into which he wanted to enter, A meaning which, as he entered it, would shatter the boat and leave the oarsmen quiet As at a point of central arrival, an instant moment, much or little,
Removed from any shore, from any man or woman, and needing none...

... that likeness of him extended

Only a little way, and not beyond, unless between himself
And things beyond resemblance there was this and that
intending to be recognized,
The this and that in the enclosures of hypotheses
On which men speculated in summer when they were half asleep.

What self, for example, did he contain that had not yet been loosed,

Snarling in him for discovery as his attentions spread,
As if all his hereditary lights were suddenly increased
By... the smallest lamp, which added its puissant flick, to which he gave

A name and privilege over the ordinary of his commonplace--

A flick which added to what was real and its vocabulary,
The way some first thing coming into Northern trees
Adds to them the whole vocabulary of the South,
The way the earliest single light in the evening sky,
in spring,
Creates a fresh universe out of nothingness by adding itself,
The way a look or a touch reveals its unexpected magnitudes.

(CP 515-517)

The vessel in which the voyager travels is Stevens' "high ship" of "Farewell to Florida." The syllable which lured
him on was the slow-dying belief that one could know the reality of the objects composing Florida, a belief which, if realized, would shatter the boat and obviate the need for further search. The "hypotheses/ On which men speculated in summer when they were half asleep" are Stevens' earlier conviction that reality could be had in Florida if he could but find it. The whole of the voyager's search is done while he is half asleep, under summer's sleepy influence. Half of him is in a dream state in which no reality exists. Then the voyager discovers in himself another self, another approach to meaning. It is a small realization -- the smallest lamp -- but it increases the total luminosity of his understanding.
both of self and of the syllable whose meaning he could not discern. That smallest lamp produces the combination of climates which Stevens has by this time effected; some "first thing," or primary perception, combines north and south and gives the poet the total vocabulary of both without denying either. Venus, "the earliest single light in the evening sky," can now be viewed, as it could not be in Florida, as a creative force whose light adds to the total world perceived by the poet and thus creates that world by its addition of itself. Venus does not tranquillize here. The poet does not need to calm his senses, for his senses are the speakers of the new total vocabulary of north and south. The poet and the world co-create the poem.

In "Prologues to What Is Possible" Stevens explores the limits to which poetry can extend itself. The poet in search of a vocabulary with which to create poems discovers how far he can go, although he is always conscious that his furthest extension of mind is but a prologue to the discovery of reality. Stevens himself has made this search, as we have seen, looking first in Florida and then in the north for a reality unlimited by the boundaries of human perception. That proved impossible; now Stevens begins to investigate what is possible, the poetic understanding of human perception itself, with all its limitations. The boundary between the possible and the impossible is tenuous at best, but it must be discovered or the poet will expend his energies upon things beyond the range of human achievement.
The voyager, representing Stevens, the poet, has come at last to "The Rock." The rock is a metaphor for the whole world, undivided yet still the subject of poetry.

The rock is the gray particular of man's life, . . .
The rock is the stern particular of the air, . . .
The rock is the habitation of the whole . . .
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.

(CP 528)

The rock is everything. The poet attempts "to cover the rock with leaves" (CP 526), to invest it with life and meaning. But he knows that these leaves are purely of his own creation, "an illusion so desired" that he creates them even where they do not really exist. "These leaves are the poem," and

. . . the poem makes meanings of the rock, Of such mixed motion and such imagery That its barrenness becomes and thousand things And so exists no more.

(CP 527)

The poet creates the beautiful and vital things of the world, basing them upon the "gray particular" of existence, the rock. This is Stevens' final synthesis. It is as close as he can get to intrinsic order.

Even at this point, however, Stevens cannot help but yearn again for the possibility of intrinsic order in what he perceives, an order he knows does not really exist. Convincing the reason is relatively easy, but it is much more difficult to master the emotional desire for an absolute. In
his most complete statement of his poetic aims, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (CP 380), Stevens seeks what he has already found to be impossible:

... But to impose is not
To discover. To discover an order as of
A season, to discover summer and know it,

To discover winter and know it well, to find,
Not to impose, not to have reasoned at all,
Out of nothing to have come on major weather,

It is possible, possible, possible. It must
Be possible.

(CP 403-404)

But of course it is not. The very emphasis Stevens gives the word "possible" indicates that he is trying to convince himself of something he knows cannot be true.

If "major weather" could be found then Stevens' world would immediately become static, known and ordered and absolute, and would obviate poetry. Could he invoke The Name of things, he would exercise magic control over them. If

I call you by name, my green, my fluent mundo,
You will have stopped revolving except in crystal.

(CP 407)

The intrinsic order he seeks would make everything vividly transparent and crystalline, but it would be a frozen order which, fully seen and stopped in action, would need no poetry and would permit none. The closer one gets to this frozen order the less vitality there is in the world, until finally we come to "The Green Plant" (CP 506), a vestige of Florida remaining even amid the bleak grayness of "The Rock." The poet's ordering reflects the natural order in
"major weather" which in turn reflects the reality itself:

The effete vocabulary of summer
No longer says anything.
The brown at the bottom of red
The orange far down in yellow,

Are falsifications from a sun
In a mirror, without heat,
In a constant secondariness,
A turning down toward finality.  

(CP 506)

Things become so mirrored, reflected as if in a fun house, that none of the images seen says anything any longer. Colors fade and deepen, and no original hues remain. The world has nearly stopped revolving

Except that a green plant glares, as you look
At the legend of the maroon and olive forest,
Glares, outside of the legend, with the barbarous green
Of the harsh reality of which it is part.  

(CP 506)

Only in a frozen world could a "maroon and olive forest" exist, for purple and green are antithetical. But if the world is frozen, then these permutations of the colors, darkened and dulled, represent a world without poetry, a "legend" uncreated by any artist but intrinsic to the structure of the crystal world.

This is the point beyond which neither intellect nor poetry can go. The world never becomes crystallized. It is always rescued by a green plant, Florida's "green vine angering for life" which brings back the reality and, with it, the need for the poet.
Quotations from Wallace Stevens' works are identified in the text of the thesis. These quotations come from three sources and will be identified as follows:


APPENDIX

OWL'S CLOVER

The Greenest Continent

I

Large-leaved and many-footed shadowing,  
What god rules over Africa, what shape,  
What avuncular cloud-man beamier than spears?

II

The heaven of Europe is empty, like a Schloss  
Abandoned because of taxes ... It was enough:  
It made up for everything, it was all selves  
Become rude robes among white candle light,  
Motions of air, robes moving in torrents of air,  
And through the torrents a jutting, jagged tower,  
A broken wall -- and it ceased to exist, became  
A Schloss, and empty Schlossbibliothek, the books  
For sale in Vienna and Zurich to people in Maine,  
Ontario, Canton. It was the way  
Things jutted up, the way the jagged stacks,  
The foul immovables, came through the clouds,  
Colossal blacks that leaped across the points  
Of Boucher pink, the sheens of Venetian gray.  
That's what did it. Everything did it at last.  
The binders did it with armorial books.  
And the cooks, the cooks, the bar-men and the maids,  
The churches and their long parades, Seville  
At Easter on a London screen, the seeds  
Of Vilmorin, Veerhaeren in his grave,  
The flute on the gramophone, the Daimlers that  
Dissolved the woods, war and the fatal farce  
Of war, the rust on the steeples, these jutted up,  
These streaked the mother-of-pearl, the lunar cress.  
Everything did.

III

There was a heaven once,  
But not that Salzburg of the skies. It was  
The spirit's episcopate, hallowed and high,  
To which the spirit ascended, to increase  
Itself, beyond the utmost increase came  
From youngest day or oldest night and far  
Beyond thought's regulation. There each man,  
Through long cloud-cloister-porches, walked alone,  
Noble within perfecting solitude,
Like a solitude of the sun, in which the mind
Acquired transparence and beheld itself
And beheld the source from which transparence came;
And there he heard the voices that were once
The confusion of men's voices, intricate
Made extricate by meanings, meanings made
Into a music never touched to sound.
There, too, he saw, since he must see, the domes
Of azure round an upper dome, brightest
Because it rose above them all, stippled
By waferings of stars, the joy of day
And its immaculate fire, the middle dome,
The temple of the altar where each man
Beheld the truth and knew it to be true.

IV

That was never the heaven of Africa, which had
No heaven, had death without a heaven, death
In a heaven of death. Beneath the heavy foils,
Beneath the spangling greens, a fear might placate
And the serpent might become a god, quick-eyed,
Rising from indolent coils. If the statue rose,
If once the statue were to rise, if it stood,
Thinly, among the elephantine palms,
Sleekly the serpent would draw himself across.
The horses are a part of a northern sky
Too starkly pallid for the jaguar's light,
In which he and the lion and the serpent hide
Even in sleep, deep in the grass of sleep,
Deep grass that totters under the weight of light.
There sleep and waking fill with jaguar-men
And lion-men and the flicking serpent-kin
In flowery nations, crashing and alert.
No god rules over Africa, no throne,
Single, of burly ivory, inched of gold,
Disposed upon the central of what we see,
That purges the wrack or makes the jungle shine,
As brilliant as mystic, as mystic as single, all
In one, except a throne raised up beyond
Men's bones, beyond their breaths, the black sublime,
Toward which, in the nights, the glittering serpents
climb,
Dark-skinned and sinuous, winding upwardly,
Winding and waving, slowly, waving in air,
Darting envenomed eyes about, like fangs,
Hissing, across the silence, puissant sounds.
Death, only, sits upon the serpent throne:
Death, the herdsman of elephants,
To whom the jaguars cry and lions roar
Their petty dirges of fallen forest-men,
Forever hunting or hunted, rushing through
Endless pursuit or endlessly pursued,
Until each tree, each evil-blossomed vine,
Each fretful fern drops down a fear like dew
And Africa, basking in antiquest sun,
Contains for its children not a gill of sweet.

V

Forth from their tabernacles once again
The angels come, armed, gloriously to slay
The black and ruin his sepulchral throne.
He quoi! Angels go pricking elephants?
Wings spread and whirling over jaguar-men?
Angels tiptoe upon the snowy cones
Of palmy peaks sighting machine-guns? These,
Seraphim of Europe? Pouring out of dawn,
Fresh from the sacred clarities, chanters
Of the pith of mind, cuirassiers against
The milkiest bowmen. This makes a new design,
Filleted angels over flapping ears,
Combatting bushmen for a patch of gourds,
Loosing black slaves to make black infantry,
Angels returning after war with belts
And beads and bangles of gold and trumpets raised,
Racking the world with clarion puffs. This must
Be merely a masquerade or else a rare
Tractatus, of military things, with plates,
Miraculously preserved, full fickle-fine,
Of an imagination flashed with irony
And by a hand of certitude to cut
The heavenly cocks, the bowmen, and the gourds,
The oracular trumpets round and roundly hooped,
In Leonardo's way, to magnify
Concentric bosh. To their tabernacles, then,
Remoter than Athos, the effulgent hordes
Return, affecting roseate aureoles,
To contemplate time's golden paladin
And purpose, to hear the wild bee drone, to feel
The ecstasy of sense in a sensuous air.

VI

But could the statue stand in Africa?
The marble was imagined in the cold.
Its edges were taken from tumultous wind
That beat out slimmest edges in the ear,
Made of the eye an insatiable intellect.
Its surfaces came from distant fire; and it
Was meant to stand, not in a tumbling green,
Intensified and grandiose, but among
The common-places of which it formed a part
And there, by feat extenuations, to make
A visible clear cap, a visible wreath
To men, to houses, streets and the squalid whole.
There it would be of the mode of common dreams,
A ring of horses rising from memory
Or rising in the appointments of desire,
The spirit's natural images, carriers,
The drafts of gay beginnings and bright ends,
Majestic bearers or solemn haulers trapped
In endless elegies. But in Africa
The memory moves on leopards' feet, desire
Appoints its florid messengers with wings
Wildly curveted, color-scarred, so beaked,
With tongues unclipped and throats so stuffed with thorns,
So clawed, so sopped with sun, that in these things
The message is half-borne. Could marble still
Be marble after the drenching reds, the dark
And drenching crimsons, or endure? It came
If not from winter, from a summer like
A winter's noon, in which the colors sprang
From snow, and would return again to snow,
As summer would return to weazened days.

VII

The diplomats of the cafes expound:
Fromage and coffee and cognac and no gods.
It was a mistake to paint the gods. The gold
Of constellations on the beachy air
Is difficult. It blights in the studios.
Magnificence most shiningly expressed
Is, after all, draped damask pampaluned,
Color and color brightening into one,
A majestic weavers' job, a summer's sweat.
It was a mistake to think of them. They have
No place in the sense of colonists, no place
In Africa. The serpent's throne is dust
At the unbeliever's touch. Cloud-cloisters blow
Out of the eye when the loud wind gathers up
And blows, with heaped-up shoulders loudly blows
And bares an earth that has no gods, and bares
The gods like marble figures fallen, left
In the streets. There will always be cafes and cards
And the obese proprietor, who has a son
In Capricorn. The statue has a form
That will always be and will be everywhere.
Why should it fail to stand? Victoria Platz,
To make its factories content, must have
A cavernous and a cruel past, tropic
Benitia, lapis Ville des Pins must soothe
The impoverished waste with dewy vibrancies
Of April here and May to come. Champagne
On a hot night and a long cigar and talk
About the weather and women and the way
Of things, why bother about the lack of stars?
The statue belongs to the cavernous past, belongs
To April here and May to come. Why think,
Why feel the sun or, feeling, why feel more
Than purple paste of fruit, to taste, or leaves
Of purple flowers, to see? The black will still
Be free to sing, if only a sorrowful song.

VIII

Fatai Ananke is the common god.
He looks upon the statue, where it is,
And the sun and the sun-reek piled and peaked above
The jostled ferns, where it might be, having eyes
Of the shape of eyes, like blunt intaglios,
And nothing more. He sees but not by sight.
He does not hear by sound. His spirit knows
Each look and each necessitous cry, as a god
Knows, knowing that he does not care, and knows,
Knowing and meaning that he cannot care.
He sees the angel in the nigger's mind
And hears the nigger's prayer in motets, belched
From pipes that swarm clerestory walls. The voice
In the jungle is a voice in Fontainebleau,
The long recessional at parish eves wails round
The cuckoo trees and the widow of Madrid
Weeps in Segovia. The beggar in Rome
Is the beggar in Bogota. The kraal
Chants a death that is a medieval death . . .
Fateful Ananke is the final god.
His hymn, his psalm, his cithern song of praise
Is the exile of the disinherited,
Life's foreigners, pale aliens of the mud,
Those whose Jerusalem is Glasgow-frost
Or Paris-rain. He thinks of the noble lives
Of the gods and, for him, a thousand litanies
Are like the perpetual verses in a poet's mind.
He is that obdurate ruler who ordains
For races, not for men, powerful beyond
A grace to nature, a changeless element.
His place is large and high, an ether flamed
By his presence, the seat of his ubiquitous will.
He, only, caused the statue to be made
And he shall fix the place where it will stand.
Be glory to this unmerciful pontifex,
Lord without any deviation, lord
And origin and resplendent end of law,
Sultan of African sultans, starless crown.

(EP 52-60)