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GENERATE THE TRIPARTITE STRUCTURE OF
"NOTES TOWARD A SUPREME FICTION"

by

VICKI PASKI-NASSER

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Vicki Paski-Nasser

ABSTRACT

In a dipolar universe the unrelenting metamorphosis of all positive states into their negatives, accounts for the three imperatives of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction": "It Must Be Abstract," "It Must Change" and "It Must Give Pleasure"—each of which necessarily follows the other in a cyclical series that remedies the unavoidable counterposition set into motion by every preceding subtitle's assertion in the sequence.

On another level, abstraction and change themselves may be seen as thesis and antithesis synthesized, for the moment at least, in the equanimity of pleasure, after the fashion of Kant's notion of aesthetic, intrapsychic harmony.
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I. "Opposites: The Origin of Change"

Wallace Stevens posits three prerequisites for the supreme fiction: "It Must Be Abstract," "It Must Change," and "It Must Give Pleasure"—in that order. This particular sequence, as I will explain, results from an action of opposites within each section, invariably leading us to the succeeding subtitles. For example, if it must be abstract, it is equally true that it must not be abstract, after the fashion of Kant's antinomies of Pure Reason, because abstraction must necessarily turn into its opposite, concretion. To remove this difficulty, it follows that "It Must Change," a maxim diametrically opposed to the first in that the former represents permanence, the latter flux. Thus, the action of opposites works on several levels, generating the dynamic of "Notes." As Stevens says,

Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
On one another, as a man depends
On a woman, day on night, the imagined
On the real. This is the origin of change,
Winter and spring, cold copulars, embrace
And forth the particulars of rapture come.

("Notes"."Change".IV.1-8)

A brief overview of the origins of change which are the origins of "Notes" follows.
Stevens' first heading dictates, "It Must Be Abstract," setting into motion the thesis that is necessary if we are to impose the order, unity, the intelligibility that we demand from our experience. There follows, however, the inexorable antithesis: "A violent order is disorder" (Stevens, "Connoisseur of Chaos", 1). Intransigence becomes unintelligible, even ludicrous, as exemplified by the silly statue of General Du Puy. Rigidity, like torpidity, is thoroughly senseless. Meaning is now meaningless. As Heraclitus observed, "The way up and the way down are one and the same" (von Oech, 84). Everything turns into its opposite.

The only antidote to this unpleasant transmutation is contained in Stevens' second imperative, "It Must Change." And so it must, if we are to free ourselves from the rigor mortis of unrelenting order. But no solution can suffice for long, as "all things are in flux" (Russell, 25). We are faced again with the resultant antithesis . . . freedom becomes bondage to disconcerting flux and the overwhelming, ever-widening chaos of perception. After the relief we feel from the excesses of a preestablished order, "It feels good as it is without the giant, / A thinker of the first idea" ("Notes"."Abstract".VII.1-2). Then comes the inevitable sense of powerlessness, the abject enslavement when reality has control. It is no longer our "Idea of Order at Key West" (Stevens).
What is the solution to such servility? "It Must Give Pleasure" so that we might at least experience the freedom, the exhilaration of our passive abandon to chaos, which is what change often appears to be, seeking for ourselves an "easy passion" ("Notes"."Change".VII.5), as in the nihilistic hedonism of Ecclesiastes and "The Rubáiyát."

But once again we have the antithesis, the unavoidable backlash. Pleasure becomes pain because desire, which is a precursor as well as an end-product of pleasure, must necessarily outstrip the objects of its satisfaction. Of equal importance, ineluctable pain ensues from our enjoyment of what we do not will.

The antidote? "It Must Be Abstract" so that we may impose our will, our order, our will to order on such a dissipated, profligate lifestyle. Thus the cycle begins again.

A. "It Must be Abstract"

The indefatigable will to order, though it finally incarcerates us in "the celestial ennui of apartments" ("Notes"."Abstract".II.1), must, at the outset at least, fervently seek the phenomenologist's nirvana—what Wallace Stevens calls "the first idea" ("Notes"."Abstract".II.2). We must "see the sun again with an ignorant eye / And see it clearly in the idea of it" ("Notes"."Abstract".I.5-6).

Like Kant's noumenal Ideals of Pure Reason, Hegel's Absolute, or the Buddhist's beatitude, this first idea transcends
all of our prefabricated categories, categories that were initially useful, but in the manner of the cliche, once a fresh and original figure of speech, an imaginative representation of the truth; our intellectual constructs all become dull and opaque. There is always the inevitable alienation from the creative source. "May there be an ennui of the first idea? / What else, prodigious scholar, should there be?" ("Notes"."Abstract".II.8-9). What began as the vanguard, becomes an isolated outpost: "The truth itself, the first idea becomes / The hermit in a poet's metaphors" ("Notes"."Abstract".II.5-6). Truth is finally hidden away from us like a recluse from society. Therefore, we must return to the first idea: The first idea is an imagined thing, / The pensive giant prone in violet space ("Notes"."Abstract".VII.4-5). It is "the big idea," the universal man (i.e., Purusa) freed from what has become the sequestering metaphor. In fact, the nebulous figure of the primal man appears quite often in Stevens' poetry. As Sheehan comments, he is the central man "'Who . . . sums us up.' Yet the myth is never articulated, never fully constructed, for Stevens' suspicion of its worth is not to be allayed" (33). It may not be so much Stevens' misgivings about the value of the myth, the supreme fiction, however, but rather the outright impossibility of its final articulation. "In the uncertain light of a single certain truth" ("Notes"."Church".4), we see that every thesis generates its
antithesis, insuring an incessant process, a constant becoming in lieu of being. (After all, creation is impossible in an actualized universe.) The very creative act itself must involve its opposite, destruction. To say as Picasso did that "Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction" (von Oech, 47), is to say with Stevens that "Death is the mother of Beauty" ("Sunday Morning".VI.13). In this respect it is fortunate that the inexhaustible first idea is resistant to our total and therefore static realization. Otherwise, we would be condemned to mental and physical inertia—much like what the bronze effigy of the General represents.

As in Plato's Myth of the Cave, Stevens searches out the archetype, this first idea that generates all of the artists' depictions. It is the ultimate, the purest distillation; ontologically speaking, we seek Being in the abstract (reminiscent of Heidegger's quest to rediscover primordial Being). We see that, "There is a project for the sun. The sun / Must bear no name, gold flourisher, but be / In the difficulty of what it is to be" ("Notes"."Abstract".I. 18-21). Being in the abstract must only be, which is to say, it must be nothing—"no thing," since thingness implies a boundary, an encroachment, an imposition of language defining (literally, "to limit") the indefinite, the undefinable. Existence is in the business of "being real, / Clear and, except for the eye without intrusion" ("Notes"."Pleasure".II. 20-21). We give "a name for something that never could
be named" ("Notes"."Abstract".I.17-18). Yet, we must name, calling the sun "gold flourisher"; it must be "some thing" or else it does not exist for us, returning instead into confusion. We call a cosmos out of chaos, as the Biblical God, or more precisely, The Word calls form out of formlessness, separating light from darkness, the earth from the waters.

When it comes to the first idea and its manifold representations, Stevens is right when he observes that, "We move between these points: / From that ever-early candor to its late plural" ("Notes"."Abstract".III.5-6); and that "the poem, through candor brings back a power again / That gives a candid kind to everything" ("Notes"."Abstract".III.11-12). We create new, authentic order from "the central of our being" ("Notes"."Church".7).

But such candor must cool—and as it does the images congeal, becoming dull and inelastic again. Moreover, when we abstract, that is, define, creating a "some thing" from the "no-thing-ness" of the whole, the Absolute, we reduce . . . we lift the images we create from their context forgetting that "the sailor and the sea are one" ("Notes"."Change".IV.19). In this way, imposing order is both "a seeing and unseeing in the eye" ("Notes"."Abstract".VI.18). We must always create "In the uncertain light of single certain truth" ("Notes"."Church".4). The more definite, the more true our concept is, the more it becomes reductionistic, and therefore false. This is yet another instance
of the marriage of opposites. "North and South are an intrinsic couple," as Stevens says ("Notes"."Change".IV.10).

There is the joy in the "immaculate beginning" ("Notes"."Abstract".III.3) that creates a kind of lovely new immaculate conception of the world. The first idea should somehow intuit the whole, "the complicate, the amassing harmony" ("Notes"."Pleasure".VI.21). Sometimes we seem to strike a perfect balance, momentarily at least, a living artistry where "An exotic perfume, half of the body, half / Of an obvious acid is sure what it intends / And the booming is blunt, not broken in subtleties" ("Notes"."Change".I.19-21). It is what we feel rather than what we think, since we reason "with a later reason" ("Notes"."Change".III.21). We must never forget, however, that it all is "rubbish in the end" ("Notes"."Pleasure".III.21); "The dump is full of images" as Stevens himself said (McNamara, 15). Yesterday's consoling, majestic order is today's monstrosity, as in "The great statue of the General Du Puy":

On Sundays, lawyers in their promenades
Approached this strongly-heightened effigy
To study the past, and doctors, having bathed
Themselves with care, sought out the nerveless frame
Of a suspension, a permanence, so rigid
That it made the General a bit absurd,
Changed his true flesh to an inhuman bronze
("Notes"."Change".III.1).

The old ideas that were the intelligence of their time no
longer make sense. Even the statuesque Atlas who upheld the entire world order has begun to look silly. The image of the past no longer commands us. It must change.

But before I discuss order's necessary metamorphosis into flux, I must examine Wallace Stevens' notion of the first idea in one more particular: his epistemological obsession with its source.

Although "Notes" refers to our intellectual orderings as "this invention, this invented world" ("Notes". "Abstract". I.2), we are quickly cautioned to "Never suppose an inventing mind as source / Of this idea" ("Notes"."Abstract". I.7). Like Kant, and many other travelers into the depths of self- hood, Stevens "recoiled" from the "abyss" of subjectivity (Heidegger, 166-176) where

The solid earth disappears and the whole atmosphere is subtilized not by the arrival of some venerable beam of light from an almost hypothetical star but by a breach of reality. What we see is not an external world but an image of it and hence an internal world. (Stevens quoted in McNamara, ed., 11)

Later in the same prose commentary Stevens speaks of the two sources of poetry, denigrating the latter, "the imagination is false, whatever may be said of it, and reality is true" (McNamara, ed., 12). It is a desperate defense against the insubstantiality, the chilling vapors of solipsism that the great philosophers have always felt. He pleads with
us that it is possible to discover the real rather than to create it only:

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. ("Notes"."Pleasure".VII.10-14)

We can be "stripped of every fiction except one ("Notes"."Pleasure".VII.18), he hopes--every fiction except "the fiction of an Absolute" ("Notes"."Pleasure".VII.19)--a term that he uses in much the same sense as does Hegel--as the ultimate unity, the resolution of all oppositions, all dialectics into the final synthesis. In Kantian epistemology this integrating function is undertaken by the Transcendental Imagination. For Stevens, the supreme fiction, the ultimate act of the imagination which weaves the "fictive covering" ("Notes"."Change".20), must finally suggest a solipsism that his purported naturalistic bias necessarily predicated on a dualistic conception of experience cannot fully counteract. A poem is "the act of the mind" ("Of Modern Poetry", 28). In the end it seems we always impose rather than discover.

The dichotomy of self and world is difficult enough to maintain for an introspective disposition; but even when we honestly believe in such a dualism, we find that it, like everything else turns into its opposite, leaving us
again with a virtual monism as disconcerting as the initial subjectivism. We find, much to our alarm, that a self-world split metamorphoses for all practical purposes into another, and perhaps more pathetic sort of aloneness. Instead of giving us a home, a real place to sustain and support us, some earth under our feet, the very act of separating ourselves from what is around us so that it can be independent of our consciousness of it, does just that--separate. The world no longer has anything to do with us. We face Camus's inhuman heart of things (Bartlett, ed., 882). Baird noticed just such an alienation in Stevens:

The solitariness of the individual bears upon us relentlessly in "Notes Toward and Supreme Fiction": "From this the poem springs: that we live in a place / That is not our own, and, much more, not ourselves / And hard it is in spite of blazoned days." (14)

The imagination does not reconcile us to what is, but separates us all the more. We see our myths, our poems, our intellectual constructs as narcissistic wish-fulfillments: These external regions, what do we fill them with / Except reflections, the escapades of death, / Cinderella fulfilling herself beneath the roofs?" ("Notes"."Pleasure".VIII.21).

As Baird comments,
These are the acts of modern man, modern man the poet, as Stevens sees him: living in the center of the unintelligible, he places his meanings
upon the gray rock of reality; he lives in his own hermitage; he writes his own inscription upon the rock, and then he reads it to himself. (15)

In their attempt to say something permanent and therefore true, our abstractions inevitably falsify reality, the way a biologist intending to stabilize life in a suspension of alcohol, renders it grotesque and un lifelike. Moreover, a move to maintain a self-world split by positing an independent source of the first idea, merely exacerbates our estrangement. The subject-object dichotomy fails to be synthesized either way. If we empower the subject to impose its order, we dissolve the world; while asserting an autonomous reality puts us at the mercy of an incomprehensible alien force. Finally, opposites are restless entities that cannot be reconciled by any of our static systems. Thus, it seems best that our decrees must change, thrusting us back upon the more genuine world of process.

B. "It Must Change"

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

Night-blue is an inconstant thing. The seraph
Is a satyr in Saturn, according to his thoughts.
It means the distaste we feel for this withered scene
Is that it has not changed enough. ("Notes"."Change". I.9-15)

What upholds the very cosmos, considering its cyclical structure, is inconstancy. As Lentricchia says,

Myths are static orders and suit well the tailor-made reality of the solipsist, but since Stevens does not really doubt the external world, he can write: "It is a wheel, the rays / Around the sun. The wheel survives the myths." The "permanent" worlds created by the imagination are necessary because they satisfy a basic human need for order, but not for long because they are fictions.

(158)

The purely fictive nature of the myths themselves, however, does not seem to be solely responsible for their ephemeral worth. It is not so much that we finally see through their pretense that disenchants us; rather, their demise lies in the initial impulse to create, to form, to fictionalize which is rooted in the transience of thought itself. Ironically, the intellect that imposes order and permanence necessarily creates the very change that it sets out to stabilize. The process of creation is predicated on the notion of change in that we must persistently and implacably fashion our cognitive contents into new mental products if we are to remain conscious. Permanence must be viewed as substrate for change since the imagination is best understood as a function, not a substance--just as our world is a world
of process not a collection of static objects. The mind exists as a synthesizer of multiplicity: if it ever ceases in this function, it ceases to exist as mind. Even the apparently passive reception of sensory information, as Kant and his intellectual heirs, the Gestalt psychologists noted, must be rooted in transformation, that is, change. As Lentricchia says of Stevens,

No matter which end of the dialectic he chooses to opt for in a particular poem, the very fact that he is aware of the dualistic nature of his experience will generate the conflict and tension of being caught in between. If the world of "Sunday Morning" is the ultimate good, then surely he ought to enjoy that world itself, not his idea of it, but he cannot get at the thing itself since it exists only in his apprehension. The poet, in apprehending the world, necessarily changes the world by enclosing it in his own subjectivity: "Things as they are / Are changed upon the blue guitar." (153)

The influence of Kant's "Copernican Revolution" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 14) that plunged humankind into a new kind of anthropocentricity, is evident here. Modern man, a prisoner of his own mind, may never experience the thing-in-itself, the sun "in the idea of it" ("Notes". "Abstract".1.6). He may only experience his experience.
Change is the essence of our consciousness--even the ground beneath our feet is a transformation of the intellect.

There was a will to change, a necessitous
And present way, a presentation, a kind
Of volatile world, too constant to be denied,

The eye of a vagabond in metaphor
That catches our own. The casual is not
Enough. The freshness of transformation is

The freshness of a world. It is our own,
It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves.

("Notes"."Change".X.12-19)

What was "the hermit in a poet's metaphors" in "It Must Be Abstract" (II.6) is now the "vagabond in metaphor" that catches our eye as we restlessly begin to free ourselves from the inevitable constriction of our former refuge.

We must change like Stevens' swans that "were seraphs, were saints, were changing essences" ("Notes"."Change".X.6). The very essences of ourselves, the abstractions, the creeds that define who we are must change also; although, as we will see, it is exactly this spontaneity, this liquidity of being that washes over us with the waters of chaos and personal dissolution. In the meantime, however, we escape the ossification of abstraction. What was order became ridiculous, incomprehensible disorder. As Guerreschi comments,

Whitman praises the "infinite glories of the past" and optimistically connects its beginnings to
the future. Fifty-five years later, Stevens severed Whitman's coaxial cable by bluntly rejecting the antiquated forms that contribute to the disorder of reality. (75)

We extricate ourselves then—but for what end? Liberated from the structures of the past, we have nothing. To paraphrase an old Janis Joplin song, freedom can be just another word for nothing left to lose. Ultimately, our freedom drifts into its opposite, the bondage of chaos. We look again for a mitigating influence.

C. "It Must Give Pleasure"

Stevens' blue woman is in a precarious position. Freedom from the dictates of lofty, fictive orders actually manacles the mind, rendering it a captive to external forces.

The blue woman, linked and lacquered at her window
Did not desire the feathery argentines
Should be cold silver, neither that frothy clouds

Should foam, be foamy waves, should move like them,
Nor that the sexual blossoms should repose
Without their fierce addictions, nor that the heat

Of summer, growing fragrant in the night,
Should strengthen her abortive dreams and take
In sleep its natural form. ("Notes"."Pleasure".II.1-9)
She must passively accept what is, as it is, without any "solacing majesty" ("Notes"."Pleasure".VII.14). This vulner-
ability gives us one choice only—to accept. But acceptance is only tolerable when life is pleasant for us. Therefore, we have the third remedy, "It Must Give Pleasure." When we exorcise the egocentric, pretentious abstraction from our utterances, we are cut adrift in the chaos, the "meaningless plungings of water and wind" ("Idea of Order", 30). The "changing essences" and "The fluctuations of certainty" ("Notes"."Change".VII.20) can be very disconcerting. Consequently, we make pleasure our reconciliation to the world beyond our control.

After a lustre of the moon, we say
We have not the need of any paradise,
We have not the need of any seducing hymn.

It is true. Tonight the lilacs magnify
The easy passion, the ever-ready love
Of the lover that lies within us and we breathe

An odor evoking nothing, absolute.
("Notes"."Change".VII.1-7)

We tell ourselves that we don't need our dogmas—we are perfectly happy without their imposing orders. Moreover, we are unconcerned with fleeting moments—we will just enjoy them as they come, "For easy passion and ever-ready love / Are of our earthly birth and here and now" ("Notes". "Change".VII.13-14). But again, we vainly hope for lasting success in our strategies, as "all things are in flux" according to Heraclitus (Russell, 25)—a flux generated
by the tension of opposites, which Stevens himself identifies as the origin of change ("Notes"."Change".IV.1-12). Our pleasure must turn to pain. Our facile passion becomes a psyche "sick with desire" (Yeats, "Sailing", 21). As above, when we "have not the need of any paradise," we have nothing, actually,

And not to have is the beginning of desire.
To have what is not is its ancient cycle.
It is desire at the end of winter, when

It observes the effortless weather turning blue
And sees the myosotis on its bush.
Being virile, it hears the calendar hymn.

It knows that what it has is what is not
And throws it away like a thing of another time,
As morning throws off stale moonlight and shabby sleep.
("Notes"."Abstract".II.15-23)

When we cast aside tiresome illusion, the "stale moonlight and shabby sleep," we must feel desire for what we now lack. Desire for us, however, can never be like "effortless weather turning blue." Instead, our longing is full of unresolved strife. As both the progenitor and the progeny of pleasure, desire must necessarily contend endlessly with satisfaction, which itself merely breeds more desire, until desire becomes insatiable. It is an "ancient cycle." As Stevens says elsewhere, "It can never be satisfied, the mind, never."
(Stevens, The Well Dressed Man With a Beard, 17) Thus, we are doomed to perpetual frustration, perpetual pain—a pain that leads us once again to the solutions of abstractions.

There is another sense in which we wish "to have what is not." Since our desires are antinomious, we yearn for change, a release from ennui; but the very nature of what we wish is what we do not wish—pain... for that is what change essentially is. Lentricchia notices such a conflict in Stevens:

in "Arrival at the Waldorf" poetry and the imagination are called wild rhapsodic fakes, northern substitutes for reality, evoked as "point-blank, green and actual Guatemala." But elsewhere, in "Gubbinal" for example, "The world is ugly / And the people are sad" because the lush, green world is also the inhuman world of process, the world of pain." (159)

If we create a pleasing myth for ourselves, a world without danger or chaos, we are unhappy because there is no adventure, no excitement. If we will permanance we are fettered; if we will transition we feel fear; if we feel fear, we must feel desire, which leads to a pleasure that inevitably turns to pain. Ceaseless dissatisfaction seems to be part of the human condition. Sartre was probably right when he said that Man is a "useless passion" (Sahakian, 357). The conflicted nature of desire uncovers a source of pain—whatever we will, we will what we do not will.
To immerse ourselves in pure pleasure, is to hope for experience pure and simple, or, in other words, to hope for easy enjoyment from something outside of ourselves—much like the passivity of addiction, with its "easy passion" ("Notes"."Change".VI.13) that never involves any genuine self-determination, or self-assertion. But just as we seek this free-falling ecstasy, we are rudely brought back to ourselves: we see our gratifications as the imaginary fulfillment of our desperate needs. Even when we plunge ourselves into the depths of pleasure like Stevens' angel, we cannot "forget need's golden hand" ("Notes"."Pleasure".VII.13) for long, since our enjoyment must always form a fantasy, the precursor of abstraction—and what is abstraction oftentimes "Except reflections, the escapades of death, / Cinderella fulfilling herself beneath the roof?" ("Notes"."Pleasure".20-21). Herein lies Stevens' suspicion of what passes for abstraction. Initially, the angel "Leaps downward through evening's revelation, and / On his spreaden wings, needs nothing but deep space" ("Notes"."Pleasure".VII.4-5). But what do these revelations reveal? Rather than lofty speculations pointing to something beyond themselves, "reflections," juxtaposed as it is to "mirror" in section VIII ("Notes"."Pleasure".16-23), suggests a narcissistic "Heresy of Self Love" (Zweig) "in which majesty is a mirror of the self" ("Notes"."Pleasure".VII.17). Thus, a fervent wish for personal comfort often plunges us into a self-involvement that can never become the abstraction necessary for
a supreme fiction (as will be discussed at length below). Stevens gives us a clue as to what he really means by "It Must Be Abstract" in the following passage:

The imagination is one of the great human powers. The romantic belittles it. The imagination is the liberty of the mind. The romantic is a failure to make use of that liberty. It is to the imagination what sentimentality is to feeling. It is a failure of the imagination precisely as sentimentality is a failure of feeling. The imagination is the only genius. It is intrepid and eager and the extreme of its achievements lies in abstraction. The achievement of the romantic, on the contrary, lies in minor wish fulfillments and is incapable of abstraction. (McNamara, 10)

Luckily, change infuses the "freshness of a world" ("Notes". "Change".X.16) into our abstractions, forcing us to connect to something greater than our personal desires, while the insatiable need for pleasure guarantees that "minor wish-fulfillments" will never do. Therefore, the three dictates of "Notes" insures us against any "failure of the imagination."

As all three subtitles in "Notes" are inextricably linked, it can be said that the tripartite structure of the poem functions as a system of checks and balances, much
as the three branches of our government do. When the intelligence of abstraction turns into incomprehensible rigidity, we balance such excess with the freshness of change. "It is desire at the end of winter" ("Notes"."Abstracts".II.15) that thaws our frozen conceptions. As the resulting flow overpowers us, however, we balance the disorientation with pleasure, as we just enjoy things as they are. But as the pain of powerlessness sets in because "we live in a place / That is not our own" ("Notes"."Abstract".IV.13-14), we make the world ours again by restructuring it with abstractions.

What has been described thus far is a necessarily sequential, cyclical movement from one subheading to the next, propelled by the interaction of opposites within each. What would yield an abiding supreme fiction, however, is the impossibly perfect balance, the simultaneity of all three: abstraction, change, and pleasure. We never achieve a final balance, though. Rather, it is the "complicate, the amassing harmony [my underline]" ("Notes"."Pleasure".VI.21), implying a perpetual becoming. We have notes that always move toward a supreme fiction, never the thing "final in itself" ("Notes"."Pleasure".IX.10). Any given metaphor, any given poem is always:

   One of the vast repetitions final in

   Themselves and, therefore, good, the going round
And round and round, the merely going round,
Until merely going round is a final good,
The way wine comes at a table in a wood.
("Notes"."Pleasure".IX.11-15)

To judge by Stevens' frequent use of the seasons as a para-
digm for change in "Notes" and elsewhere (Sheehan, 34-39),
repetition does not seem to be incremental, but cyclical.

II. "Pleasure: The Synthesis of Abstraction and Change"

If abstraction has its season until "It Must Change"—
and finally into pleasure, which must in turn revert to
abstraction; it is also true on another level that each
of our disposable approximations of the supreme fiction
(akin to Kant's concept of representation) is the product
of a genuine resolution of opposites. From my previous
discussion we can see that "It Must Change" is antithetical
to "It Must Be Abstract," thereby reflecting the thesis-
antithesis dynamic for which each of the three subtitles
is a solution. On this second stratum, however, there is
a synthesis of sorts—"It Must Give Pleasure." As in the
classic Hegelian dialectic, are abstraction and change the
extreme positions for which pleasure is the synthesis?
Abstraction, change and pleasure necessarily follow each
other as a logical sequence when they are broken down, that
is, analyzed versus synthesized. But as the attempted
transcendence, of the supreme fiction, does pleasure discover the occult unity of opposites the way a metaphor embodies the underlying resemblance of two apparently unrelated objects in a dualistic (and heretofore unresolved) universe?

That Stevens' supreme fiction must give pleasure and how that pleasure must function as the link between his notions of abstraction and change, can be understood in terms of Kant's oximoronic conception of art as "a purposeless purpose" (Critique of Judgment, 384). Just as "Life's nonsense pierces us with strange relation" ("Notes", "Abstract", III. 21), we will see that this paradoxical tension, analogous to the strife of change's freedom and abstraction's identity respectively in "Notes," resolves itself in something like Kant's pleasure of private sensation validating the aesthetic experience in a subjective universalism.

Kant wrote that "The beautiful is that which pleases universally without requiring a concept" (Judgment, 384). Therefore, Beauty is the form of the purposiveness of an object, so far as this is perceived in it without any representation of a purpose" (Judgment, 390). The antagonism of purpose to purposelessness in the work of art is tantamount to the opposition of Stevens' first two subtitles, where the supreme fiction must be the hermitage of abstraction while it changes as well, needing simultaneously a purposiveness (if it is to escape inanity), as well as Stevens' "vagabond" freedom, undetermined by anything so limiting as a concept. Perhaps this is what William Blake
had in mind when he wrote, "Improvement makes strait roads; but the crooked / roads without Improvement are roads of Genius" ("Proverbs of Hell", 101-102). A road by its very nature is purposeful; it is built to lead somewhere, after all. A very specific, determined purpose, however, is anathema to the artistic impulse. The purely pragmatic has no place in the working of genius. If our end is sufficiently defined—to reach point X, say, then we operate mechanically, reductionistically; whereas Stevens' "ignorant man" ("Notes"."Abstract".I.4) who foregoes such static impositions on experience in favor of the pleasure, the enrichment of the winding road, the "scenic route" that takes him out of his matter-of-fact way, is the one who begins to understand what a supreme fiction entails. It has intentions, but ones that cannot be clearly explicated . . . or else we have the rational rather than the imaginative.

Hazard Adams cites a fable by Valery that illustrates the purposeless purpose of the creative process:

I ask for a light from your cigarette. You give it to me. The language of my request has achieved its purpose. It is now dead. But a poem by its peculiar nature, never completes its existence in this sense, for it has no external purpose that can exhaust it. The difference . . . is like that between walking to a destination and dancing. (Adams, ed., 5)
The above passage, I believe, implies that pleasure synthesizes the fixed purpose of abstraction and the free purposelessness of movement. The purpose of art then, is inextricably linked to its purposelessness.

Kant wrote that

The judgment is called aesthetical just because its determining ground is not a concept, but the feeling (of internal sense) of that harmony in the play of the mental powers, so far as it can be felt in sensation. (Judgment, 387)

Pleasure, not cognition, (and certainly not change) is the unifying principle. Aesthetic objects are called aesthetic (from Gk. aisthetikos "of sense perception") precisely because their appreciation is based on "feeling," on the senses rather than the intellect. Moreover, since the creation and appreciation of the aesthetic derives from private sensation, then not only is the unifying ground subjective, but also that which is unified. Where there was only inner chaos, the poet creates the pleasure of inner harmony—in himself, and consequently in his reader as well. This is why "The soldier is poor without the poet's lines" ("Notes". "Pleasure".X.37). From the unconscious of the amorphous comes form, definition, understanding, and therefore genuine experience. As Stevens writes:

What makes the poet the potent figure that he is, or was, or ought to be, is that he creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without
knowing it and that he gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it. (Bartlett, ed., 767)

What satisfies satisfies because it integrates inner aspects of ourselves—the cognitive as well as our changing perception in space and time, so that the "thinker of the first idea" ("Notes"."Abstract".VII.2), abler in "principle than particle" ("Notes"."Abstract".X.4) is pleasingly reconciled in a subjective unity with the freedom of the inner vagabond for whom flux is the freshness of a world" ("Notes"."Change". X.15) that "Is the freshness of ourselves" ("Notes"."Change". X.16). Because the aesthetic experience is synthetic, it must involve cognition, though not as the integrating faculty. In this regard, Kant stated that

The excitement of both faculties (imagination and understanding) to indeterminate but yet, through the stimulus of the given sensation, harmonious activity, viz. that which belongs to cognition in general, is the sensation whose universal communicability is postulated by the judgment of taste. An objective relation can only be thought but yet, so far as it is subjective according to its conditions, can be felt in its effect on the mind; and, of a relation based on no concept (like the relation of the representative powers to a cognitive faculty in general), no
other consciousness is possible than that through the sensation of the effect, which consists in the more lively play of both mental powers (the imagination and the understanding) when animated by mutual agreement. (Judgment, 383)

The transcendental quality of art inheres in its integration of the static categories of rational thought with the free, metamorphosing world of perception—a subjective unity that can only be manifested by means of sensation, which is to say, pleasure. The freedom of sensory images would turn into the incoherence of ceaselessly shifting hypnogogic reveries, while the organizing properties of logical thought became an insufferable, imponderable rigidity—if it were not for pleasure's mitigation. In essence, it is the pleasure-pain dualism, or more exactly, pleasure's implacable metamorphosis into pain, its twin, that moderates each element of strife discussed earlier, energizing the dynamic tension of a supreme fiction. (Abstraction, or Kant's cognitive categories, are too restricted, while change is too chaotic to fulfill such a unifying function.) As the satisfying order of abstraction turns into the restless dissatisfaction with the resultant ossification, so the pleasure in the freedom of change transmutes into the pain of chaos. Hence, "It Must Give Pleasure" stands in special relation to "It Must Be Abstract" and "It Must Change," since it represents the pleasure-pain principle behind the movements
of the poem, a principle also operant in this last subtitle itself, seeing as the ensuing pain of what pleases propels us back upon "It Must Be Abstract."

That pleasure is the crux of the aesthetic experience is appropriate--especially as some of its etymology belies this harmonizing function. To please is "to pacify," "to appease," to create "agreement" and "mutual understanding" (Partridge). It is Heraclitus' agreement in opposition and Kant's aesthetic enjoyment derived from the synthesis of the faculties. In addition, it is "What makes the poet the potent figure that he is," because he teaches people "How to live their lives" (Bartlett, ed., 769), how to achieve the harmony that is his art. Kant called this function "subjective universality" (Judgment, 381), a function that allows for the validity of an aesthetic judgment, even though it is based on private sensation, on the ordering of subjective reality, rather than on a logical proposition. This is why, as Kant noted, we can never formulate a rule by which people are compelled to recognize the beautiful--they must always sense the harmony for themselves (Judgment, 383). For instance, if it is a sculpture in question, a man needs to see it with his own eyes, which suggests that satisfaction, that appreciation is dependent on subjective sensation. Yet, when he declares the sculpture beautiful, the man is convinced that he speaks universally (Judgment, 383). In fact, if an audience disagreed, he would probably dismiss them as heathen (Judgment, 382).
It should be noted that when we feel simple personal pleasure, rather than pleasure, "the complicate, the amassing harmony" ("Notes"."Pleasure".VI.21), what we have is not the beautiful or the poetic, but merely the pleasant. Pleasure as its own end depends entirely on sensation, whereas pleasure as aesthetic awareness must awaken every faculty of the mind, including its concepts, however indefinite (Judgment, 388). Consequently, the satisfaction in the work of art must be disinterested in its creation as well as its appraisal (Judgment, 379-381). This means that we must be objective in our subjectivity. Personal desire taints the true artistic impulse. Hence, the three sections of "Notes" furnish the standards for a legitimate supreme fiction, where our pleasure is the internal sensation of the great harmony of the faculty for abstraction with the vital influx of ever-changing perception. We see throughout how Stevens, ever-vigilant for subjectivity's pitfalls, constantly undercuts any self-serving desire masquerading as art: the doggeral of the thinkers "who teach bears to juggle" ("Notes"."Abstract".V.21), the narcissistic Adam and Eve ("Notes"."Abstract".IV.1-18), the self-aggrandizement of General Du Puy. If we are to fashion a fiction by which others can live their lives, something with significance beyond the personal, then we must get away from ourselves. As Stevens writes, "Perhaps / The truth depends on a walk around the lake" ("Notes"."Abstract".VII.2-3).
Intrigued by the spectator's pleasure in witnessing excruciating pain in the theatre's tragic hero, Aristotle theorized that it was the catharsis of pity and fear that accounted for this satisfaction; whereas, Kant and Wallace Stevens (the former outrightly, the latter obliquely) emphasized intrapsychic harmony as the basis of our aesthetic enjoyment in even art's most horrific depictions. The common denominator of both views is pleasure once-removed from self interest. In the first case it is the distance of the vicarious—in the second, an enjoyment cleansed of idiosyncrasies and vested interests. In this context Kant remarked:

For since it does not rest on any inclination of the subject (nor upon any other premeditated interest), but since the person who judges feels himself quite free as regards the satisfaction which he attaches to the object, he cannot find the ground of this satisfaction in any private conditions connected with his own subject and hence it must be regarded as grounded on what he can presuppose in every other person. (Judgment, 381)

We must escape a purely personal involvement, or else what we experience is not aesthetic, but something akin to addiction. We cannot be dependent on our artistic creations. The blue woman mentioned earlier illustrates this, as well
as the integrating, regulating function of pleasure. She
Did not desire that feathery argentines
Should be cold silver, neither that frothy clouds
Should foam, be foamy waves, should move like them,
Nor that the sexual blossoms should repose
Without their fierce addictions, nor that the heat
Of summer, growing fragrant in the night,
Should strengthen her abortive dreams and take
In sleep its natural form. It was enough
For her that she remembered; the argentines
Of spring come to their places in the grape leaves
To cool their ruddy pulses; the frothy clouds
Are nothing but frothy clouds; the frothy blooms
Waste without puberty; and afterward,
When the harmonious heat of August pines
Enters the room, it drowses and is the night.
It was enough for her that she remembered.
The blue woman looked and from her window named
The corals of the dogwood, cold and clear,
Cold, coldly delineating, being real,
Clear and, except for the eye, without intrusion.
Here is an example of the disinterested pleasure crucial
to the aesthetic. The woman does not desire; that is, she
does not superimpose the merely personal on what Fromm calls accidental symbols (130-131) on her experience. What dreams she has are "abortive." Instead, her disinterested interest in the connections, the uncontrived metaphors arise "naturally," that is, from human nature in general, from what can be presupposed in every other person. The three imperatives of Notes, "It Must Be Abstract," "It Must Change" and "It Must Give Pleasure," all harmonize, as will be discussed next, into the possibility of an authentic supreme fiction, a sort of subjective universalism. Therefore, "Notes" embodies a sort of "valid" artistic structure the way Kant's Critique of Pure Reason supports an epistemological one. In this case, however, it is abstraction and change balanced in pleasure's equanimity, an inner sense, the aisthetikos that sets the standard. We have seen the dipolar limitation of all three propositions about the supreme fiction: abstraction, change or pleasure can only go so far before their excess forces us to implement the other two imperatives. We strive for a balance because any excess produces pain. The harmony is always based on private sensation, which is to say, "It Must Give Pleasure."

In the aforementioned passage, the blue woman exemplifies the attempted pleasurable balance of the faculties. She "did not desire," implying an escape from the punishing enslavement of personal wishes when they are imposed on the larger world of process, a world which is indifferent
to our desires. Here is the initially painless side of pleasure, a stoic, accepting enjoyment without the intrusion of the ego's demands that are always doomed to frustration. "It was enough for her that she remembered"—but not for long, however, as this is eventually an intolerably painful state, when "we live in a place / That is not our own ("Notes"."Abstract".IV.13-14). Contentment turns to dissatisfaction. Therefore, we must regain our equanimity. Abandoning the personal desire that leads to frustration, releases us temporarily from pain—but then we feel like aliens in the world. This is why the blue woman must be abstract: she must name the "corals of the dogwood" to reestablish emotional equilibrium. It is an honest impulse initially, like Kant's subjective universalism, where we strive to integrate ourselves to the larger reality, naturally imposing an order that seems both spontaneous and necessary. Nonetheless, "the philosopher / Appoints man's place in music, say, today. / But the priest desires. The philosopher desires." The "corals of the dogwood" become too delineated. We must have more than our abstractions from reality can give us, we want the pleasure of living fully again. When we define, we exclude, setting ourselves up for "the beginning of desire" ("Notes"."Abstract".II.13). Abstraction becomes more artificial than artistic, but what is the solution? Stevens writes:

He had to choose. But it was not a choice

Between excluding things. It was not a choice
Between, but of. He chose to include the things
That in each other are included, The whole."

("Notes"."Pleasure".VI.17-20)

Poetic license notwithstanding, does it even make any sense
to say we ever choose without excluding? We may want it
all, and all at once, but the effect is the opposite we
intended. The blue woman illustrates this point when she
analogizes the "foamy waves" to the "frothy clouds." At
first there is a wonderful freedom from abstraction when
everything runs together all-inclusively—and it certainly
does in the above passage, where even the flowers become
"frothy blooms." The pleasing phantasmagoric fluidity of
life, the "changing essences" ("Abstract"."Change".X.6),
however, become synonymous with undifferentiated monotony,
until "the harmonious heat of August pines / Enters the
room, it drowses and is the night." A pleasing extinction
of the discriminating faculties balances the pain of chaos
and ends all conflict in a sort of nirvana principle where
all striving ceases. Though one way to resolve the tension
of opposites, it is not in keeping with the prevailing tone
of "Notes," which presents us with an endless repetition
of fictions resulting from the perpetual motion of oppo-
sitions. It's dynamic, dipolar reality will not permit
such entropic finality. But Stevens does toy with just
such a possibility in many of his other poems, as will be
discussed momentarily. It may be that "Notes" represents
his decision concerning these antinomious teleological possibilities: 1.) that the action of opposites will wind down, reaching lower and lower levels of resolution until all striving ceases in the utterly unconscious and inorganic or 2.) that the action of opposites will not lose force, but will continue to create new and different fictions.

The first possibility is echoed ominously in "Sunday Morning": "At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make / Ambiguous undulations as they sink, / Downward to darkness, on extended wings" (VIII.13-15). We find outright dread in "Domination of Black" where perceptions begin to blur as they do in the blue woman passage:

The colors of their tails
Were like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind,
In the twilight wind.
They swept over the room,
Just as they flew from the boughs of the hemlocks
Down to the ground.
I heard them cry--the peacocks
Was it a cry against the twilight
Or against the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind,
Turning as the flames
Turned in the fire,
Turning as the tails of the peacocks
Turned in the loud fire,
Loud as the hemlocks
Full of the cry of the peacocks?
Or was it a cry against the hemlocks?

Out of the window,
I saw how the planets gathered
Like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind.
I saw how the night came,
Came striding like the color off the heavy hemlocks.
I felt afraid.

And I remembered the cry of the peacocks. (11-36)

On the contrary, "Notes" sees no final resolution into darkness—no final resolution at all, although there is one desperate utterance: "It is possible, possible, possible. It must / Be possible. It must be that in time / The rest will from its crude compoundings come" ("Notes". "Pleasure". VII.15-18). But the rest of the poem, with its ceaseless action of opposites does not bear out this hope for a progression that ends in the static Ideal, a Hegelian Absolute. We have a circle, not an ascending spiral. In any case, we cannot have "A thing final in itself and, therefore, good" ("Notes"."Pleasure". IX.10), as we have also seen the opposing evil of finality in "It Must Be Abstract." What remains is the incessant action and reaction of opposites,
. . . vast repetitions final in
Themselves and, therefore good, the going round

And round and round, the merely going round,
Until merely going round is a final good.
("Notes"."Pleasure".IX.11-14)

III. "The Two Poles of the Metaphysical"

That the glass would melt in heat
That the water would freeze in cold
Shows that this object is merely a state,
One of many, between two poles. So,
In the metaphysical, there are these two poles.
(Stevens, "The Glass of Water", 1-5)

If "there are these two poles" in our experience, then we must always seek "the central of our being" ("Notes"."Church".7), where "The vivid transparence . . . is peace" ("Notes"."Church".8), where we find pacification, the pleasure of equanimity. Here oppositions do not cancel out one another. Instead, they paradoxically unite (as in the oxymoron, "vivid transparence") into a larger representation. This is "a mystic marriage . . . At noon . . . on the midday" ("Notes"."Pleasure".IV.4-5). There is balance, a perfect mitigation between two polar opposites where, "North and South are an intrinsic couple / And sun and rain a plural, like two lovers / That walk away as one in the green-
est body" ("Notes"."Change".IV.10-12). Dualism is always preserved, but in a larger context, the way that individuals in a marriage retain identity, though as part of a more comprehensive unit, a "greenest body." If the perpetual tension of opposites were ever resolved through a cessation of strife, we would not have peace and the harmony of beauty, but annihilation. Those who wish for the end of conflict, unwittingly wish for the end of the world, as Heraclitus noted of Homer:

Homer was wrong in saying, "Would that strife might perish from among gods and men!" He did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe, for if his prayer were heard, all things would pass away. (Russell, 24-25)

What is at odds with itself is what actually agrees, he further explained: "It is an attunement of opposite tensions, like that of the bow and lyre" (Russell, 24).

It was in a similar spirit that Niels Bohr said, "How wonderful that we have met with a paradox. Now we have some hope of making some progress" (von Oech, 83). When we confront a dichotomy—for example, in Kant's Anitnomies of Pure Reason—our imaginations are forced to conceive of a more comprehensive representation of the "metaphysical," as Stevens calls it in the passage above. Sheehan takes a related stance on the practical implications of oppositions when he interprets Stevens' use of metaphor as the epistemological product of dichotomy. The very act of knowing is
possible not in spite of, but precisely because of the dualistic nature of experience:

Behind Stevens' theory of metaphor lies a theory of knowledge that, like any epistemology, faces the question, How do we know? The epistemological problem becomes troublesome and difficult when it assumes a split between mind and matter. In his poetry, Stevens directly confronts this epistemological dualism; and his theory of metaphor is his solution of it. For Stevens, knowledge derives from the process of creating metaphor, which is, as noted above, the process of perceiving resemblances. Knowledge is not a transcendent position that unifies mind and matter into itself; instead, the act of knowing is the act of perceiving a resemblance that holds true for a time—for a season," Stevens might say. Mind and matter are thus antithetical worlds, but they do not negate one another; and insofar as the mind is capable of perceiving resemblances, and for as long as the mind resists identifying its processes with the fluctuations of matter, metaphor is possible and knowledge is the result.

For Stevens, then, metaphor is both the prelude to knowledge and the evasion of reality. Metaphor becomes the prelude to knowledge when it orders "things as they are" in their uniqueness and
isolation into meaningful relationships; it becomes the evasion of reality when these relationships are accepted as the complete and actual description of reality. To see the world only as smothered in a relationship, or to see it only as an assemblage of unique and isolated objects, is for Stevens not to know. But to see the world as both, through metaphor—to move continually between "The bough of summer and the winter branch" (CP, 67)—is to be capable of knowing. Thus Stevens' theory of metaphor is rooted in the epistemological dualism between mind and matter; and metaphor becomes knowledge not in spite of the dualism but because of it. (38-39)

Knowledge, then, depends upon the aesthetic balancing act between these two poles: abstraction ("smothered in relationship") and change ("an assemblage of unique and isolated objects"); whereby to know is to imagine in sensory images, and therefore to integrate through the functioning of pleasure, as was discussed above. Stevens' metaphor in its epistemological aspect can be thus compared to Kant's Transcendental Imagination, since both attempt to unify into higher and higher syntheses, the disparate elements of our experience. As Stevens puts it in "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," "We say God and the imagination are one . . . / How high that highest candle lights the dark" (14-15).
In the end, the reference is not to concepts but to images. Hence, the supreme epistemological position belongs to the imagination, the metaphor, the fiction. But as Sheehan observed, our knowledge via the metaphor never transcends the world of opposites. Again, this is both good and bad, as "We found, / If we found the central evil, the central good" (Stevens."Asides on the Oboe".III.4-5). On the positive side, our non-transcendence allows for the possibility of knowledge through the unifications of the metaphor. Heidegger saw that knowledge itself was the sign of our limitation:

The difference between infinite and finite intuition consists only in this, that the former in its immediate representation of the individual, that is, the singular and unique essent taken as a whole, first brings it into being, that is, effects its coming forth (origo). Absolute intuition would not be absolute if it depended on an essent already on hand in adaptation to which the object of intuition first became accessible. Divine cognition is that mode of representation which is the act of intuition as such. Seeing right through the essent in advance, such cognition intuits it immediately and has no need of thought. Thought as such, then is in itself the seal of finitude. Divine cognition is "intuition, for all its knowledge must be intuitive, and not
thought, which always involves limitations." (29-30)

Because we are finite, there is always a subject-object split that makes us "conscious of ______." Such self-awareness for obvious reasons becomes a central good for modern existential man. In other words, "The imperfect is our paradise" (Stevens. "The Poems of Our Climate".III.4). But we can also hear the alienating evil in "the cry of the leaves that do not transcend themselves" (Stevens, "The Course of a Particular", 12), until "the cry concerns no one at all" (15). Herein may lie another hint as to why our fictions are only persuasive for a time. Although it is laden with oximorons, i.e., "sensible ecstacy" ("Pleasure" V.3), "motionless motion" ("Pleasure".VIII.7), "inconceivable idea" ("Abstract".I.3) and "In the uncertain light of single, certain truth" ("Church".4); does "Notes" ever achieve an actual visualization of a higher truth, except in the sense of verbal juxtapositions rather than internally convincing images, genuine syntheses of dualisms? We know "that final belief / Must be in a fiction. It is time to choose" (Stevens, "Asides on the Oboe", 2-3). We choose, and as we know that we choose, we know that it is all a matter of volition and therefore ultimately arbitrary. Our metaphors, like all analogies, are based on points of comparison that are largely capricious. It all really depends on just where in the wilderness we decide to place the "jar in Tennessee" (Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar", 1). Even such
certain knowledge as our geometry "proofs" are always based on unprovable "givens" or "assumptions." As Freud observed, "Analogies prove nothing, that is quite true, but they can make one feel more at home" (Bartlett, 678). "Notes" understands that only "For a moment in the central of our being / The vivid transparence that you bring is peace" ("Church", 7-8). When we become acutely aware of the fictive nature of our assumptions, the comfort of finality, of a supreme fiction can never be ours. We move on and on restlessly. As Stevens laments in "Asides on the Oboe," "Did we/ Find peace? We found the sum of men" (III.3-4). All of our majesties are just

. . . a mirror of the self:
I have not but I am and as I am, I am.
These external regions, what do we fill them with
Except reflections, the escapades of death,
Cinderella fulfilling herself beneath the roof?
("Notes"."Pleasure".VIII.17-21)

This is the plight of the contemporary man who is fully aware of the subjectivity in experience. He must forever refuse dogmatic comforts, while wanting them all the more. Condemned to an incessant undercutting of all his assertions and desires, he creates in order to understand, only to be reviled by his panderings to his own wishes. As Lentricchia writes of Stevens' work in general:

Kenneth Burke's definition of the ironist "as essentially impure, even in the chemical sense
of purity," is here applicable. Burke's ironist "must deprecate his own 'enthusiasms, and distrust his own resentments," and Stevens measures up well because it is not essentially the Kantian idealism that invigorates his poems, but his "impurity," the curious doubleness and irresolution that are generated when he so severely undercuts his own desires. (150)

No external validation exists for our beliefs and desires, though we always behave as if it does. Indulgence in this behavior, even as we recognize the specious nature of the assumption on which it is based, is what gives us cause to ridicule ourselves. We know better, yet, we catch ourselves constantly presenting our fictions as if they were objective truths nonetheless. That we are naive enough to expect any intellectual insight to effect a change of heart, after the dubious underlying donée of psychoanalysis, is itself another cause for self-deprecation.
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