WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE MODERN POET ?

By

Dr. Bonnie Homsley

The question of the poet's role is a problem that thinkers from Plato and Aristotle down to the present moment have dealt with, and no one person has made the final statement. Though this essay is restricted insubject to contemporary British and American poets, it is vital to define the nature of poetry and the artist in general before proceeding with particular poets. The artist is a creative maker whose product is a work of art, which in turn creates the transscendental effect of beauty. The work of art is born in matter with form by an incarnated mind, with the mental conception of the poem as the germ or embryo. The finished product perfect only when the work is fully formed or born. Art must be viewed as an end in itself. All practical concerns such as providing knowledge or teaching morals are secondary. The primary function of poetry is to create beauty. Poetry must first be musical and should combine words and rhythm into a coherent order. Emotions and attitudes as expressed in images, symbols, figures of speech, and musical techniques such as prosody, onamatopoesia, and alliteration are central to the creation and total experience of poetry.

There have been thinkers as late as the Victorian era, such as John Ruskin, who thought poetry should serve ends other than creating beauty or communicatiog the mythos of a culture and age. In a sense, Rushkin's thought as expressed in his two essays «Art and the Moral Life» and «Art and Religion» is not far removed from Plato's conception of the artist and the function of art; for Plato distrusted both and thought art should serve useful purposes such as instructing, exhibiting patriotism, and instilling morals in citizens. Opposite Ruskin's views are those

of William Butler Yeats, whose works illustrate are as being elevated to being a kind of religion in itself, depending upon no established or organized religion. In addition to beauty and music as organic elements of poetry, Yeats perceived the mythos of the poeta's culture as equally important. From Homer to the present, poets have actively created the world linguistically according to their individual perception of their own age and culture. This is the proper role of the poet.

Communicating well with the reading audience is paramount if the poet's art is to live and survive. Therefore, poetic themes must be relevant, timely, and universally recognizable to the reading audience. In **The Broken Cistern,** Bonamy Dobreé suggests that if modern poets return to a use of themes that are of their reading audience.[1] In our time there appears to be a growing involvement among poets and readers with two modes of life: the psychological and the visionary. The total human psyche has become a central theme, including lessons of life, emotional shocks, passions, and spiritual crises. In America, this theme was central as early as the nineteenth century in the poems of Emily Diskinson and Walt Whitman and has continued well into twentieth century. As for the visionary mode, such poets as Yeats and Dyland Thomas have transformed mundane human experience into are mystical experience in which the glimmer of infinity is captured in somewhat esoteric language. Yeats possessed the rare gift of treating mundane and mystical experience equally well. Perhaps his long poem «A Vision» best illustrates the visionary mode among all his poems. Fairly early in his career Yeats saw the importance of relating to the reading public of his own time and place. In his essay of 1901 entitled «What is Popular Poetry?» he sought to analyze the thematic possibilities open to his generation of poets. Losing interest in merely describing material objects. Yeats turned to symbolism and was thus faced with the problem of creating a set of symbols relevant to Irish culture which would be coherent and discernible to his readers.[2]

For Yeats, expressing a personal myth was insufficient and he searched for a systematic mythology. Irish folklore, including ancient Celtic stories, fascinated him. What he derived most from

his native Ireland was the sense of historical continuity, which T. S. Eliot insisted the great poet mustdevelop. However, Yeats went far beyond local legends and treated the depths of the unconsciousness with a profound, intuitive understanding. It is this level of Yeats' poetry that makes him timeless and universal. There came a time when Yeats thought it the poet's business to understand the supernatural; he thought this could best be accomplished through art and sex as he puts it in «News for the Delphic Oracle.» His lyric poems «The Shepherd and the Goatherd » and « Easter 1916 » are tributes to Yeats' ability to deal with both earthly and metaphysical themes. Though believed the poet must discover the mythology rooted in the soil of his race, he sought analogies between his tradition and all other traditions.[3] Regardless of his race or nationality, the poet is «the vessel of the creative power of God.»[4]

The poet's business is also to perceive reality and translate the meaning in poetic terms. For instance, Yeats speaks of awareness in his early poems as «a whirling and a wandering fire» paralleling the whirling of atoms and molecules in the outer world. Yet he longed for fixity, for eternal beauty that is unchanging. Yeats sought this reality at the center of the rose, as expressed in his poem «Rose of All Roses,» but he could not find eternal beauty in any earthly thing.[5] Whereas Yeats the romantic sought for the reality of eternal beauty, contemporary American poets such as Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams sought to know and write about the reality of sheer existence, whether beautiful or ugly.

However, Yeats perceived that if the artist is to know reality and translate that knowledge into poetry, he must descend into the hell of his own unconsciousness not unlike Dante's descent at the beginning of the **Inferno.** And as Yeats put it, «What theme had Homer but original sin?»[6] The modern poet's role is in principle what it has always been: to enter into the experience of an imperfect and changing world and to draw meaning from that experience, expressing it in a work of art that is at once beautiful and musical as well. For Yeats, the entire universe was split against itself with a multitude of battles

going on perpetually. He saw all existence in terms of antinomies: love and hate, light and darkness, birth and death, fire and ice, and time and eternity. It is the tension of opposites that makes all existence possible: the transfer of energy from eternity to time, from God to man. Yeats expresses this transfer of energy and life from God to mankind in «Leda and the Swan» in which the disguised Zeus impregnates Leda. Opposites in the physical world are constantly changing, and any perfection lies in the complementation of all antinomies. Yeats presents the rhythm of life in the image of the danse to express this perfection:

> All men are dancers and their tread
> Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.[7]

Similarly as Blake, Yeats saw infinity in microscopic proportions, as contained in a drop of dew, in a needle's eye, and in a blade of grass, as did Whitman in «Song of Myself.» In his poems «Words for Music Perhaps» Yeats presents the universe as contained in the eye of God through the persona of Tom the lunatic:

> Whatever stands in fields or flood,
> Bird, beast, fish or man,
> Mare or stallion, cock or hen,
> Stands in God's unchanging eye
> In all the vigour of its blood;
> In that faith I live or die.[8]

In essence, all flux in nature becomes fixed in Gods absolute existence, according to Yeats.

Similarly as did Blake and Shelley, Yeats thought the poet should be a philosopher and prophet, expressing his understanding of existence and his prophecies in poetic form. Yeats prophesies the end of Western civilization in the great flood of wars, hatred, and violence in «The Adoration of the Magi.» In the long poem «A Vision» Yeats is both prophet and poet, expressing his views on God, time, and eternity. Yeats' themes, images, and views of the poet's role mark him as one of the last Romantics.

It was against Romanticism that Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot wrote in the early twentieth century. From T. E. Hulme's New

Age (1909) and Ezra Pound's writing on the new poetry and his poems in **Poetry** magazine, Imagism was born. There rules of the Imagist poets are as follows: (1) direct treatment of the «thing» observed; (2) to use no word not absolutely necessary; (3) to compose in sequence of the musical phrase. Among the Imagist poets Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, H. D., and Amy Lowell; the watchword was «Go in fear of abstraction.» One must use hard, precise, visual images.[9] Pound emphasized control of form and technique. To him the artist must master all known forms and systems of metrical verse before creating his own individual poetic forms; moreover, the poet's work must be evolutionary and extend over a lifetime.[10] Pound's greatest contribution was the creation and championship of **vers libre** in which quantitative verse dominates. In other words, the rhythm in a poem must correspond to the emotion expressed. In his **Pavanes and Divisions** of 1918, Pound states his credo in the three objectives quoted above: direct treatment of the thing observed in hard, precise images; the use of words sparingly; and the use of the musical phrase instead of a formula of syllabes per line.[11] To Pound the «image» is a visual picture presenting an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. The concrete image is always the adequate symbol, but the poet must use the precise term as Baudelaire suggested as far as Young was concerned.[12]

The new poetry of the early twentieth century had as its main goal to restore wit and cerebration to poetry. Their key poets from the Anglo-Saxon past were John Donne and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Though classified as a letter-day Romantic. Yeats began to use the hard, precise image in keeping with the Imagist technique in his later poems such as the Byzantium group and the Crazy Jane group. For Yeats the poet must create an individual art and must use words musically; moreover, the poet must rise above the ego and the politics of his time and must create a personally mingled with the mythology of his own race. Not too unlike Yeats, T. S. Eliot thought the poet must synthesize myth for an entire generation. Like Yeats, Eliot begins his poetic career philosophically in exclusion and deprivation and then progresses to inclusion of all time and space. Eliot's

later poetry affirms the infinite plenitude of experience as depicted in the «point of intersection of the timeless with time.» Eliot tried to recover the notion of God incarnated in the material universe: «The moment of Incarnation reconciles time and eternity, past and future, in an impossible union/Of spheres of existence.»[13] Eliot also thought the post must create an organically unified poem; that is, the words and music must support each other and work together as the dancer and the music ideally do. Whether it be poetic drama or a lyric poem, the work of art must have a thematic, emotional, and musical unity.[14]

Eliot learned from the Imagists though he was not satisfied altogether with their rules. For Eliot the poet is to explore experinece and to use language in order to build rich, complex patterns of meaning. In order to achieve such complex patterns, Eliot uses oblique references to Greek and Roman myth, Christianity and liturgy of the Anglican church, and Oriental pholosophy. His long poem «The Waste Land» (1922) was the manifesto of the new poetry, and Eliot drew from seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry and ninneteenth-century French symbolist techniques. «The Waste Land» is complex, allusive, and an amalgamation of Western and eastern myth. The only other comparable work is Pound's **Cantos,** at least during the first half of this century.

Eliot humanizes the external world. For him «nothing is real, except experience present in finite centres.»[15] There can be no effacement of the mind before the solid reality of objects for Eliot as there was for William Carlos Williams. Eliot's mirroring ego has swallowed up the world but is imprisoned. The persona «Prufrock» is paralyzed as a result of his subjectivizing everything. He is so trapped in his ego that he cannot communicate his vision to the lady and says, «That is not what I meant at all./That is not it, at all.»[16] Prufrock remains in his room unable to venture out because he is imprisoned within the circle of his own ego. In the Prufrock poems and «The Waste Land» each persona seems enclosed in his separate sphere, unable to break out to external things, to other people, to any objective time and space, or to God. It was Eliot's goal to find and impose order

and thereby free the ego through art: «For it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation....»[17] In his essay «The Function of Criticism» Eliot states that the artist must sacrifice his own ego in order to create universal poetry.[18] The poet must escape from feelings and emotions. It is not the poet's personality that is to be expressed, but rather poetry is a medium of the fusion of thought and language. Unlike Byron and D. H. Lawrence, Eliot did not think poetry should constitute the poet's emotional autobiography. Moreover, Eliot suggests in his essay «Tradition and the Individual Talent» that the poet through «great labour» must cultivate the historical sense of all the literature of the West. The poet's new work is an addition and modification of the order already existing among literary works of the past. It is also a sense of the universal and timeless that makes a writer conscious of his place in contemporary life.[19]

By contrast, in his collected poems of 1928 D. H. Lawrence wrote that his poems made up a personal biography but that «even the best poetry, when it is at all personal, needs the penumbra of its own time and place and circumstance to make it full and whole.»[20] Lawrence also had a philosophy of cosmic existence. In his collected volume of poems **Birds, Beasts and Flowers** of 1923, Lowrence celebrates the mystery of life:

....I am not the measure of creation.
This is beyond me, this fish.
His God stands outside my God.

And of his understanding of cosmic existence in **Shadows**, Lawrence wrote:

And if, in the changing phases of man's life
I fall in sickness and in misery
my wrists seem broken and my heart seems dead
and strentgth is gone, and my life
is only the leavings of a life:
....

then I must know that still
I am in the hands of the unknown God,
he is breaking me down to his own oblivion
to send me forth on a new morning, a new man.[21]

In opposition to the rational and traditional poetry as espoused by poets of the 1920's, W. H. Auden and the so-called surrealist poets in the 1930's wrote poems based on Freudian concepts. Their techniques consisted of automatic writing, a use of incongruous phrases, and a verse revolt against logic and traditional forms. Perception meant hallucination for them. To the Surrealists it was the poet's business to communicate messages from the dark unconsciousness, not to interpret them.[22] In search of new symbols Auden selected images from English public school life, from military maneuvers, mountain climbing, clinical observations and psychological vocabulary, and later folk ballads in America. In his poetic development Auden went from a psychological and economic diagnosis of the ills of his times to a more meditative concern with universal or achetypal images and situations, and finally to a more Christian point of view. His best lyrics are grave and quiet and present a simple emotional situation, such as «Lay Your Sleeping Head» and «At the Grave of Henry James.»[23] A follower of Auden, C. Day Lewis thought that «The poet's task is to recognize pattern wherever he sees it, and to build his perceptions into a poetic form which by its urgency and coherence will persuade us of their truth.» The poetic experience must be either emotionally or intellectually or both exciting and troubling to the reader in order to be real. To Lewis, «That is the pattern of poetry, the pattern which gives us pleasure because it satisfies the human yearning for order and for completeness.»[24]

By the end of the 1930's Allen Tate perceived that public or ordinary speech in America had become tainted or corrupted with mass feeling, so that many poets were obliged to invent private language. By contrast Shakespeare and Wordsworth utilized public speech and elevated it in their particular eras, and did not invent esoteric or private language in poetry. In the 1930's «the poetry of the mass language» was propagandistic, what

William Empson termed «patriotic poetry». But this was quite different from Yeats' «language of the people». Allen Tate suggested that the poet should not deal with problems which the scientist and sociologist can better deal with and express. From a linguistic viewpoint, Tate states that the tension of poetry is its complete meaning, denotation married with connotation. «We begin with the literal statement and by stages develop the complications of metaphor.»[25]

In his essay «The Music of Poetry» of 1942, T. S. Eliot reminds us that contemporary poetry must not vary too much from ordinary everyday language, whether the poet is writing poetry which is accentual or syllabic, rhymed or without rhyme, form or free, his verse must mirror the changing language of his own era. Also, music and language cannot really be separated from the meaning. Hence, it is up to the modern poet to weave an intricate and unified poem in which music, language, and associative meanings cohere as a whole.[26]

To Eliot each revolution in poetry is essentially a return to the ordinary language of the day. What Dryden did for English poetry in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had to be done again a century or so later, which is what William Wordsworth attempted as he announced in his «Preface to Lyrical Ballads» of 1798. The music of poetry must proceed out of the common speech of its time. Eliot particularly lauds Yeats' capturing the essence and beauty of Irish speech and folklore.[27] In nineteenth-century America Ralph Walddo Emerson insisted that American poets and writers has «listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe.» The poet must be a representative man of his own society; he must use appropriately words that are well established in his own language.

In «The Music of Poetry» Eliot stated further that the poet's task in any given age depends upon his personal constitution and his own age and its culture. As for the new poetry called **vers libre**, Eliot suggested there could never be a totally free verse. Only a bad poet would welcome free verse as a liberation from form. Free verse is a revolt against dead form in terms of contemporary times. Language imposes its own laws and dictates

its own speech rhythms and sound patterns. The modern poet should study music for the sense of thythm and also the sense of structure, as both Eliot and Pound suggested.[28]

Poetic knowledge may come in part through the tension of instinct and reason. It is both mythopoeic and personal; it is based on experience of life. The poem as a pattern of experience becomes truth for the reader who can recognize and identify with the complete experience presented. To participate in the poetic experience as either poet or reader is, as T. S. Eliot describes it in «Burnt Norton», to arrive.

> At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor
> fleshless;
>
> Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the
> dance is,
>
> But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity.
>
> Where past and future are gathered.[29]

The design should resonate with the divine stillness at the center of the sphere, as Eliot expresses it in «Burnt Norton» of **The Four Quartets:**

> Words, after speech, reach
> Into the silence. Only by the form, the patern,
> Can words or music reach.
> The stillness as a Chinese jar still
> Moves perpetually in the stillness.[30]

In this poem Eliot compares earthly existence to the Circle Line of the London underground in which people ride around in a circle. Like Wallace Stevens, but more subjectively, Eliot depicts the mobility and constant flux of existence. Eliot believed that emotion is essential to the creation of art and that the poet must find an «objective correlative» — that is, a situation or chain of events to serve as the formula for that particular emotion.[31] Eliot thought that the core of the selfhood is emotional, but the emotion of art is impersonal.

Eliot wrote some of his finest poetry, as late as the 1940's,

including **The Four Quartets.** During that decade followers of W. H. Auden continued to deal with Marxist political themes. Also, the poetry of Dylan Thomas and the so-called Bohemian poets marked a trend away from the cerebral poetry of Eliot and Pound. Poets such as Robert Craves dealt with mythology and symbols of the archetypes. However, the 1940's was not a decade of fruitful poetic creation, for the Second World War appears to have curtailed much poetic development. Surrealistic techniques survived with that of Dylan Thomas, though his pattern is more logical. He is, however, mystical in his celebration of love, and his themes are rooted in the Christian religion.[32] In comparison to the cerebral, hard image, and orderliness of T.S. Eliot, Thomas' poems seem wild and irresponsible. As John Donne was the genius of earlier decades, Blake became the model for poets of the 1950's and 1960's. This resurgence of mystical and introspective lyric verse was dominant, and an important article entitled «Post-War Romanticism in English» appeared in the March 1947 issue of **Poetry** magazine dealing extensively with this phenomenon. Dylan Thomas mystically «saw life as a continual process, ... unity out of diversity, the generations linked with one another and man linked with nature.»[33]

Thomas saw existence as a circle of evolving identities; for instance, the embryo as an initial movement towards death. It was not, however, until experiencing disillusionment that Dylan Thomas perceived unity in all life and time:

> Death is but a doorway to immortality,
> of life in a universal eternity.[34]

Among Thomas' major and continuous themes are pre-natal life, birth, growth, the relation of parent to child, relation of body and spirit, of life to death, the relation of human and animal to vegetable. In order to form these themes into a unified pattern, he utilizes words, myths, Biblical, Freudian, and holk images to construct such a total pattern. Yet Thomas had no lesson to teach, for he was more interested in evolving technique and style for his own individual vision. Perhaps his poem «Vision and Prayer» most adequately expresses his idea of humanity in a pantheistic sense.[35]

For Thomas the poet possesses the world through the physical senses, both mentally and emotionally. He contains the world : «Am I not all of you by the directed sea. Where bird and shell are babbling in my tower?»[36] Also, the poet like the external world is constantly undergoing change. The human being and the external world interpentrate in this constant flux. As Thomas expresses it, «The dream had changed. Where the women were was an avenue of trees. And the trees leant forward and interlaced their hands, turning into a black forest.»[37] Withdrawal from the world is imposible for the poet, as Dylan Thomas expresses it:

I cannot murder, like a fool,
Season and sunshine, grave and girl,
Nor can I smother the sweet waking. (CP., p. 75).

Yet the poet must sometimes rebel against some aspects of existence such a death, as did John Donne in his « Holy Sonnets.» In our time Thomas has similarly written:

And death shall have no dominion. (CP., p. 77).

Dry as a tomb, your coloured lids
Shall not be latched while magic glides
Sage on the earth and sky.... (CP., p. 12).

Through his imagination the poet can transform death into immortality, and yet he cannot negate the reality of death though he might rebel:

Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage, against the dying of the light. (CP., p. 128) 38.

Yet Thomas perceived that one must accept the totality of experience, including death. As Thomas put it in a letter to Henry Treece: «I do not want a poem of mine to be, nor can it be, a circular piece of experience placed nearly outside the living stream of time from which it came; a poem of mine is, or should be, a watertight section of the stream that is flowing all ways.»[39] The poet's duty is to celebrate mankind, to affirm the earth and one's total existence, is at last to affirm and rescue the self. There is no difference between the self and the outer creatd world. For Dylan Thomas the poem became an ark containing the self and

the entire universe:

My ark sings in the sun
At God speeded summer's end
And the flood flowers own. (CP., xviii).

Thomas expresses the feat of the poetic imagination in such
Thomas expresses the feat of the poetic imagination in such
later poems as « Over Sir John's Hill,» «Poem on his Birthday,» and «In Country Sleep ». He once said, «I am lots of people», and even Thomas' dialogues represent the opposing parts of one existence. To perceive the center of the self as «me myself» is to reveal the «exact middle of a living story». Finally, he thought there was no separation between subject and object. However, each event for Thomas remains separate and individual, as he indicates in the poem «A Prospect of the Sea». Through retrospection the past is made available to the conscious mind. In this poem the persona perceives all layers of civilization contained in the earth. This is not memory but perception, for all that is past is vivid to the senses as every mark on the earth's surface. The entire universe is as close to Thomas as his own body is to the inner self :

And I rose
In rainy autumn
And walked abroad in a shower of all my days.[40]

The autumn shower and the poet's memory are one and the same thing. Outer events and inner experience are one and the same.

Language is a living creating world, so Thomas thought. In his poems he builds a structure of words not altogether logical but with meaning intrinsically embedded. As he once said: « I thought it enough to leave an impression of sound and feeling and let the meaning seep in later. Of his language structure, he wrote: «My world is pyramid». Without words, mind and the universe would be split. Language unifies the mind and the world.[41] Thomas wrote to Henry Treece, his biographer: «What I like to do is to treat words as a craftsman does his wood or stone or what-have-you, to hew, carve, mould, coil, polish & plane

them into patterns, sequences, sculptures, figures of sound.»[42]

Dylan Thomas' concern with metaphysical and archetypal themes contrast sharply with W. H. Auden's concern with the major contemporary events of the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's. Such poems as «1st September 1939», «Dover 1937», «Christmas 1940», «Spain 1937», and tributes to literary figures illustrate the occasional nature of Auden's themes. Poets of the 1950's in America and England rejected the values of trying to change the world and to write propagandistic poems as Auden espoused. They also rejected the cult of the image, the archetypal symbol, and the recreation of mythology and the classical past. The new poets aimed at the average reader for their audience. In the 1956 anthology **New Lines** most of the poems were written by middle-class professionals and scholars. There was a new respect for the poet, and Kingsley Amis' **A Frame of Mind,** Thom Gunn's **The Less Deceived,** and John Wain's **Mixed Feelings** were among the more successful collections. The dominant tone of the poetry of the 1950's was quiet and reflective. The cerebral discipline and the hard, crystalline image that Eliot and Pound championed persisted despite the different themes and tone of meditation which poets of the 1950's used.

One of the most important poets to emerge in the 1950's was Wallace Stevens, who thought poetry should be concerned only with «the surface of things», unlike Dylan Thomas. Stevens' work is basically expressionistic poetry. There is no sense of any transcendent reality, for Stevens' kind of poetry deals with surface phenomenon only. He was for getting back to a primitive level of sensation where the color, shape, texture, and sound are more important than whether or not an object may be identified.[43] In his essay «Two or Three Ideas» of 1951, Stevens suggests that in an age of disbelief and lack of faith, the poet must create a new style and perceive a new reality. Style and theme must be one; neither can be separated, thought Stevens.[44]

For wllace Stevens a time of disbelief is also a time of truth-searching. However, this is not an easy task for there are many levels of reality through which the poet must pass.[45] The poet's job is to provide new ways of seeing reality and of speaking.

Stevens' volume of verse entitled **Harmonium** is a good example of this. The modern poet apprehends reality by his power to annihilate obsolete mental fictions and reach the untouched bedrock of reality. Through the rejection of old myths and values the poet reduces reality to its lowest terms, as Henry David Thoreau said he must do in **Walden.** Stevens presents reality in five different versions in his poem «Sea Surface Full of Clouds», with the resolution as marriage between the sea and the sky as analogous to that between the mind and the world.[16]

Yet language is not sufficient to grasp reality. The word is only the symbol, not the thing in itself. What Stevens seeks is expressed best in his poem «Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself.» Gradually, Stevens moved to a dismissal of metaphor and thought the poet must use the most direct language possible. In «The Comedian as the Letter C» Stevens explores the inner self and speaks through the persona:

> Crispin
> Became an introspective voyager.
> Here was the veritable ding an sich, at last,
> Crispin confronting it, a vocal thing.[17]

Yet the thing-in-itself is not easily identifier, for Stevens thought as did William Butler Yeats that all things are oscillating and whirling. Stevens expresses this idea clearly in his **Ideas of Order** poems and in «Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction»:

> Thus the constant
> Violets, doves, girls, bees and hyacinths
> Are inconstant objects of inconstant cause
> In a universe of inconstancy.[18]

For Stevens neither reality nor imagination exist separately, and existence is composed of the consciousness of some reality :

> I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
> Or heard of felt came not but from myself. . . .[19]

Through his poems Stevens has tirelessly attempted to explore the various perspectives from which reality can be apprehended by the imagination. Natural objects and poetic images

simple exist; they do not have to have meaning. As Stevens puts it in **Opus Posthumous,** «A poem need not have a meaning and like most things in nature often does not have.»[50]

Some contemporary poets have turned to the sciences for material, to public concerns and events. Some have turned to commonplace, mundane, daily events for material. Some have written of cities and towns that they know. For instance, William Carlos Williams in **Paterson** has written of Paterson, New Jersey, about the people and places there. In **Paterson** the man-city asks, «Why even speak of 'I'.... which interests me not at all.» Williams gives up the ego which means to give up dramas of interchange between subject and object. This is to place Williams far beyond romanticism. Unlike Wallace Stevens who at one time in his career thought words stood between the subject and the object, Williams thought words may join mankind to the physical world. This is what Williams terms «approximate co-extension with the universe» through the power of words.[51] Williams praised both Walt Withman and Marianne Moore for using audible words of common speech, for cleansing words of encrusted connotations. To use stark, bare, crystal clear words devoid of sludge is necessary, for Williams' aim is to make the word visible as a thing-in-itself and not to allow it to be encrusted by traditional associations.[52] He thought that poetry is «not mirror up to nature.»[53] Living language and the poet's exploring mind are contained in the metaphor of the flowing water of the Passaic River in **Paterson.** For Williams words are things; no separation exists, as he expressed it: «But can you not see, can you not taste, can you not smell, can you not hear, can you not touch — words?»[54]

For the past one hundred and fifty years poetry has assumed distance between man and nature and between man and God. With Wallace Stevens' later work and William Carlos Williams major poetry the trend has shifted. There is the disappearance of distinction between subject and object. In **Paterson** the poet both absorbs and is absorbed by the Passaic River,[55]

Williams, echoing Emerson's protest that American authors «have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe,» has recommended that the modern poet must descend, must go down

into hell to the root of things and begin to build anew. He cannot perpetuate the old forms. Williams' **Kora in Hell** has to do with the artist descending into hell in order to demolish the past and resurrect new life. Also, his **Spring and All** poems celebrate the rebirth of things after their destruction. In **Paterson** the return to the beginning which leads through destruction to rebirth is accomplished. The poet has mentally gone down into the Passaic River and has emerged renewed; hence Williams' use of the Jungian archetypes,[56] It is up to the poet to make the world today through his poetry:

> How to begin to find a shape — to begin to begin again,
> turning the inside out: to find one phrase that will
> lie married beside another for delight.[57]

Williams' poems depict movement, action, life being born, renewal. The Fourth Book of the **Paterson** epic ends with the poet rising from the river. The Fifth Book has to do with the poet possessing new space, becoming rooted, with all the world in his mind. The symbol to unity in the last book, Five, of **Paterson** is that of poetry as a dance, a world circle:

> We know nothing and can know nothing
> but
> the dance,. . . .[58]

In retrospect, poets such as T. S. Eliot thought that all symbols and images have existed from the beginning and deteriote with time, and that the only new thing to be created is the arrangement of them. On the other hand, Wallace Stevens perceived the imagination working on an independent object and raising it to the status of a symbol. Whereas Eliot saw deterioration and impoverishment in the possibilities for themes and images remaining for the young poet. William Carlos Williams saw inexhaustible richness and novelty in nature for the poet who was willing to be as clinical and objective as possible. Whereas Eliot saw nature from a subjective and ego-bound viewpoint, later poets such as Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Robert Creeley, and Louis Zukofsky looked upon nature as being infinite in material. For them it was enough to treat the thing-

in-itself on its own terms and in relation to other objects in the universe.

In the decades of the 1950's and 1960's rational verse has dominated. Poets have distructed the emotions and all expression of emotion must be tightly controlled. Emotions in art must be filtered through an analytical sensibility.[69] There is one aim common to all levels of poetry which is to reveal to the reader himself and to give him a sense of the unity of the world. To perceive himself as a whole being is what the reader gets from poetry. At the other end of the line, once the poet has published his poem, it is a living object and is separate from the poet.

FOOTNOTES

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3 — William Butler Yeats, **The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats** (New oYrk, 1953), p. 48.

4 — William Butler Yeats, **Essays and Introductions** (New York, 1961), p. 28.

5 — J. Hillis Miller, **Poets of Reality** (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press), 1966), p. 77.

6 — Miller, p. 84.

7 — William Butler Yeats, **The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats** (New oYrk, 1953), pp. 205-206.

8 — Yeats, **Collected Poems**, p. 264.

9 — David Daiches, **The Present Age: From 1920** (London: The Cresset Press, 1958), pp. 28-29.

10 — Charles Norman, ed., **Poets on Poetry** (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 328.

11 — Norman, p. 330.

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13 — Yeats, **Collected Poems**, p. 199.

14 — Miller, p. 163.

15 — Miller p. 138.

16 — T. S. Eliot, **Collected Poems: 1900-1962** (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 6.

17 — T. S. Eliot, **On Poetry and Poets** (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1957), p. 94.

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19 — Eliot, **Selected Essays,** p. 14.

20 — J. I. M. Stewart, **Eight Modern Writers** (London: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 587.

21 — Stewart, p. 592.

22 — G. B. Fraser, **The ModernW riter and His World** (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd, 1964), pp. 324-325.

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26 — Norman, p. 337.

27 — Norman, pp. 339-340.

28 — Norman, pp. 347-348.

29 — T. S. Eliot **Four Quartets** (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 9.

30 — Eliot, **Four Quartet,** p. 12.

31 — Miller, p. 150.

32 — Fraser pp. 334-335.

33 — Daiches, pp. 57-58.

34 — **Ibid.,** p. 59.

35 — **Ibid.,** p. 62.

36 — Dylan Thomas, **The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas** (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 54.

37 — Dylan Thomas, **A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog** (New York: New Directions, 1954), pp. 152-156.

38 — Thomas, **Collected Poems,** p. 128.

39 — Henry Treece, **Dylan Thomas; Dog Among the Fairies** (London : Lindsay Drummond, 1949), p. 48.