

sons, it refuses to equate a perspective with the position (whether actual or virtual) of a subject.

I must confess my perplexity regarding Murphy's quibbles about my use of terms such as "origin" and "presence." Murphy seems to take for granted the metaphysical authority of such concepts, an authority that I am trying to argue against. Is it really possible to separate "the imagining of [the poem] in the mind" from the act of "setting it on the page"? "Beginnings" are "irreconcilable" precisely because it is impossible to posit an "origin" at which the question of their unity, or lack of it, might even arise. Similarly, if a poem were a "presence," then neither writing nor reading, as dimensions of literary practice, could ever take place.

As for "The Idea of Order at Key West," the poem turns on the distinction between the "cry" of the ocean, nonsensical because it is "constant" (without variation or modulation), and the woman's song, significant because it is articulated ("uttered word by word"). Murphy is improperly reading the conclusion of the poem back into the first stanza. The poem narrates the process by which the song organizes, and thereby progressively effaces, the cry. It is this humanistic "rage for order" that Stevens rejects and criticizes in his later poetry—hence the uncanny return of the "cry" in "An Ordinary Evening" and in the final lyrics.

On more general issues, Murphy seems unaware that a major aspect of my essay is an attempt to differentiate my position from that of the deconstructionists. I am certainly not proposing an exhaustive classification in which "Western metaphysics" and Nietzsche are the only possible alternatives. But that Stevens's antihumanism is radically different from the mysticism of Jeffers or Snyder is ample justification for my not considering these writers in my essay. Of greater polemical import is my effort to liberate the reading of Stevens from the dreary and banal existential concerns ("self-doubt," "dissatisfied searching" before death, etc.) with which it has been saddled by far too many critics.

The problems raised by Ackerman's penetrating comments are far more serious. What metaphysical presuppositions underlie Ackerman's assumption that, since I refer to an instance of "unity" in Stevens's text, I *must* be buying into a metaphysics of totality and presence? To the contrary, my essay seeks to decenter Stevens's notion of the "whole" by tracing the way this term functions without special privilege in a heterogeneous general economy. Such a functioning is delineated quite precisely by my citation of Nietzsche, in which the critique of transcendence (that "there is nothing besides the whole") is rigorously linked to the affirmation that "the world does not form a unity either as sensorium or as 'spirit.'" To put this in contemporary critical terms, Foucauldian and Deleuzian mappings of multiple and historically variable fields of immanence (resisting any possibility of panoramic overview or dialectical subsumption) are far less traditionally "metaphysical"

than is Derrida's position of *differance* as a universal negative transcendental condition (a move that reinscribes, even as it denounces, the ahistoricism of Kant and Husserl). Stevens's affirmation of multiplicity, as I have described it, ruins Ackerman's attempt to enforce a rigid binary distinction between language and world. It is only by first accepting a metaphysical picture of language as a screen between us and an inaccessible reality that Ackerman can then misread my rejection of the linguistic model as a return to organicism or vitalism. If I do not find in Stevens what Ackerman calls "an ever-problematic multiplicity rooted in the doubleness of language itself," the reason is not that I have "studied the nostalgias" but that "doubleness" is as metaphysically suspect a notion as "unity" and Stevens's deracinated poetic practice is no more "rooted" in language than in anything else. Stevens's "endlessly elaborating poem" exceeds the logic of an ever-problematic meditation not because it claims to provide answers but because it stops asking the old metaphysical questions.

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"The Drowned Man of Esthwaite"

To the Editor:

It may help clarify a minor point in the discussion between Ashton Nichols and Susan J. Wolfson (100 [1985]: 234–36) if I observe that in *The Prelude* of 1850 the comma after "Rose" in 5.450 has no manuscript authority; it is presumably due to the editors or printers of that edition.

In Wolfson's original paper (99 [1984]: 928), the spelling "intrusted" (vs. "entrusted") is likewise that of the printed text only. Contrarily, the capital for "Valley" is the reading of all major manuscripts; "valley" is due to normalization of the text of 1805 by the Norton editors (see *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850* 511).

On the Esthwaite fields "shaped like ears" (99 [1984]: 920), readers might wish to consult Wordsworth's account in the *Oxford Prose Works* 2: 337.

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Reply:

I thank W. J. B. Owen for his information about the comma, the absence of which may be of greater consequence to Ashton Nichols than to me; but I'm grateful for the correction to the Norton text. I also