

A SENSE OF DIRECTION

WILLIAM SHAW

Copyright by
DOUGLAS FRANK WATSON
1980

A SENSE OF PLACE IN THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST,
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, AND WALLACE STEVENS

by

DOUGLAS FRANK WATSON, B.A., M.A.

A DISSERTATION

IN

ENGLISH

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of Texas Tech University in
Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Approved

Accepted

August, 1980

70
201
T3
1970
No. 81
Cop. 2

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful to Professor Warren Walker for his constant encouragement in the direction of this dissertation, to Professors Thomas Langford and Walter McDonald for their helpful suggestions, and to Professor Jeffrey Smitten for his assistance in locating and procuring background reading materials. Not least, I am deeply indebted to my wife, Kay, for clerical assistance, patience, and unwavering personal support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
CHAPTER	
I. A SENSE OF PLACE	1
II. ROBERT FROST: REGIONALISM AND ENCLOSURE	28
III. WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS: LOCALISM AND DISCLOSURE	95
IV. WALLACE STEVENS: ESSENTIALISM AND OSCILLATION	150
V. A SENSE OF PLACE REVIEWED	215
BIBLIOGRAPHY	226

CHAPTER I

A SENSE OF PLACE

A poet's sense of place is a significant aspect of his work. What is meant by a sense of place, how such a sense is achieved, and how it is revealed in the work of individual poets are matters for investigation here. In an essay entitled "Effects of Analogy," Wallace Stevens asserts that "the poet manifests his personality" in his "choice of subject" and that "the poet's subject . . . is his sense of the world."¹ W. H. Auden, in an essay on Robert Frost, makes a different but related claim: "What any poet has to say about man's status in nature . . . depends in part upon the landscape and climate he happens to live in. . . ." ² Writing in The Poetics of Space about the significance of poetic images, particularly those images of things which are spatial in nature, Gaston Bachelard says, "All great, simple images reveal a psychic state."³ Each of these three statements assumes a division between a poet's physical world and his perception of that world, but each also clearly indicates that the poet's perception or sense of his world directly affects the nature of his poems. Stevens seems to suggest a genetically predetermined

sense of the world which directs the focus of poetic attentions. Auden speaks of a topographical or climatological determinism but clearly indicates that such a sense of the world is recognizable in a poet's work. Bachelard assumes a psychic determinism by way of which a poet's images may mirror not only his sense of the world, but also his sense of himself in relation to that world; by "reverberation" of meaning,⁴ poetic images provide insight into a poet's sense of the world, his sense of place.

Indirectly from these opening remarks about a sense of place, two assertions of the present study emerge: (1) one poet's sense of place is not necessarily another's, and (2) a poet's sense of place (however it may be derived) manifests itself in recognizable and even predictable ways in his poems. The first assertion seems in little danger of serious challenge, for it is hardly more than an assertion of individuality applied to a specific area of human perception. Whether individual difference in regard to a poet's sense of place derives from genetic factors (as Stevens suggests), from environmental factors (as Auden suggests), from psychic factors (as Bachelard suggests), or from a combination of these, the fact of the difference seems widely agreed. The extent and form of the difference is, however, a matter for discussion; therefore, a part of the present study concentrates on how a poet's work reveals

his perception of his world and the process of his perceiving. In other words, it is concerned with a phenomenology of place.⁵

The second assertion, supported by each of the statements quoted in the opening paragraph, demands extensive demonstration, and so the bulk of the present study is concerned with the ways in which a poet manifests his sense of place in his poems. A key phrase in this regard is "function of place," for poetic function and its effects, more than physical authenticity of place (i.e., authenticity of geography, topography, climate, and so forth), reveal a poet's sense of place and determine the extent of place's significance in his poetry. "Function" denotes an occupation or activity in which place description or reference may be engaged, generally within a context of a larger, more complex structure of activities. If the complex structure is a poem (and the identification is not uncommon⁶), then "function of place" denotes the occupation or activity by which place affects the poem.

To understand "function" in this study, it will help to keep in mind a statement from Wolfgang Iser's The Act of Reading. Referring to the tendency of New Critics to analyze a literary work as a unified structure in which each element is engaged in a function, Iser says, "A function is not a meaning--it brings an effect, and this

effect cannot be measured by the same criteria as are used in evaluating the appearance of truth."⁷ He implies that to speak of function in a poem is to speak not of the truth of the poem but only of the activity as it affects the unity of the structure. For Iser, this is a negation of New Critical principles' sufficiency to describe the act of reading literature; but for this study, the statement may serve as a positive reminder to focus the discussion of place in particular poems on matters of function, use, or effect rather than on matters of authenticity or truth.

Thus, the focus here will be on how a poet uses place as setting, as subject, or as vehicle for figurative or symbolic expression rather than on whether or not the poet has accurately described the scene, city, state, or region which he either names or assumes to be identifiable in his poems. By so examining the functions of place and the patterns of repetition of such functions as they are employed by a particular poet in a group of poems, it should be possible to arrive inductively at a general conclusion about the poet's sense of place. And though a conclusion based on only a selection of poems must be tentative, it should, once formulated, help to guide a reader to an understanding of the poet's other poems in which place serves some function.

The poets chosen for study here are Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens. Each is a

modern American poet whose exposure to a range of physical places--at least in terms of residence or extended travel --is relatively narrow. Though not in the same ways, each is a poet of place, and chiefly of American place. Frost's rural New England regionalism is well known. So is Williams' New Jersey localism. Stevens is not so immediately identifiable as a poet whose poems are consistently local or regional; however, though he lived a more geographically constricted life than either of the other poets, he filled his poems with specific references to many places he either saw or read about. Neither accurate representation nor personal preference for their respective habitats, however, makes these poets interesting subjects for study here. Rather, they invite study because their poems suggest, in their employment of place, a range of functions and because the patterns of repetition of these functions suggest different patterns of perception of place and, thus, different senses of place. For example, it is less significant that Frost is a poet of Vermont and New Hampshire than that he is a poet who typically employs place in formal or conventional ways which establish or emphasize the enclosed, centripetal nature of his perception of place. It is less significant that Williams repeatedly describes scenes from Rutherford and Paterson than that he consistently uses such localization in his poems to suggest a disclosing, centrifugal perception of place and experience.

It is less significant that Stevens' poems lack a predictable regional or local identity than that their attention to place is a means of suggesting the poet's perception of experience as an oscillation between particular and general or specific and essential categories of awareness. All of these statements about the individual poets are sub-theses of the present study; they derive from the earlier, more general assertions about a poet's sense of place. Finally, the choice of Frost, Williams, and Stevens for study here is not meant to suggest that their poems are either unique or even technically superior to those of other poets in their employment of place. The principle of working from particular functions of place back toward an understanding of a poet's more general sense of place ought to work with any poet. Frost, Williams, and Stevens are complementary examples.

Three key terms related to place in the present study-- "sense," "perception," and "function"--are interrelated. "Sense" is used not in its restrictive meaning of physical sensation or observation, but in its more inclusive meaning of mental capacity for action or response, a capacity which may result from a combination of physical sensation and mental (though not necessarily conscious) integration of sensation.⁸ Here, the field for action or response is the poem; the poem is both the field where the poet expresses

his sense of place and the field where the critic may come to understand it. It is interesting that, in an earlier age, the word from which our word "sense" derives signified a journey or road, for one of the derivative assertions of the present study is that a poet's sense of place can be characterized by the sort of journey which his consciousness most typically takes in a poem. Specifically, a poem may map the journey of a poet's mind toward or away from enclosure or around a particular object, experience, or place. "Perception" and "function" have already been briefly discussed in regard to the two primary assertions of the present study. Perception is the awareness of various aspects of a place taken in through physical sensation as phenomena and interpreted in the light of experience.⁹ On such an awareness depends the function or occupation of place in a poem. Consideration of the functions of place in a poet's work should, therefore, help to understand his perception of place, and the interrelation of perception and function should suggest an even more general sense of place.

A sense of place implies awareness and understanding of the physical and the non-physical realities and structures of place. Geography, topography, and landscape are particular structures of physical place; the dimensions of each are spatial. A poet's perception of the spatial

dimensions of his physical world is one aspect of his sense of place. There is another aspect which is not so strictly physical in its dimensions. It, too, may be said to be spatial, but, here, "spatial" describes a relation of mental perceptions, an arrangement of ideas in a mental (and perhaps necessarily figurative) space. There is a tradition in literary criticism for speaking of such a mental space, and it will be explained shortly, but first some ways in which the dimensions of physical space may affect a poet's sense of place will be considered, as will some ways in which the physical structures of place may be discussed in individual poems.

Among the terms associated with functions of place are these which carry primarily physical denotations: "landscape," "climate," "geography," "topography," "region," and "space." Each term itself is non-specific, but its function in a poem is as a set of specific elements. For example, "landscape" denotes an expanse of natural, invented, or arranged scenery--the physical accouterments of a particular location. Physically, the landscape of a Frost poem like "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" may be said to include woods, snow, a frozen lake, a road, the sky, and so forth. The reader's understanding of the physical landscape of the poem derives from his arranging in his mind the image developed by the specific landscape elements in the poem.

A more complex task, but one of essentially the same sort, faces the reader of Wallace Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West," for he must arrange in his mind the radial image of lights reflecting on sea water and appearing to converge at the point where the poet stands. Such arrangement of a physical image in the mind of the reader is the simplest level on which landscape may function in the poem. Beyond, but still linked to the physical arrangement of the landscape, are the figurative and/or symbolic significations and associations of landscape (either of the entire scene or of its individual parts). At this higher level of suggestive meaning, images, especially those which recur in a poet's work, may begin to suggest the poet's psychic state, his environment, or his "sense of the world" depending on which source of that sense one chooses to assume.

Physical landscape can serve several functions. It can be a setting or backdrop for dramatic action in a narrative or dramatic poem. Used in this way, landscape is of secondary importance, but not necessarily dispensable. If it is appropriate to the action or character for which it is the backdrop, physical landscape can support or enhance the central figure or action. Frequently landscape serves such a function in the poems of Frost. If it does so less often in the work of Stevens and Williams, the

reason is partly that they wrote fewer dramatic-narrative poems; however, they both--Williams more often than Stevens --use physical landscape to make easily discernible the phenomenological perception of a central image.¹⁰

Physical landscape can also function as the subject of a poet's description, examination, or meditation. However, such landscapes are restricted neither to physical signification nor to actual correspondence to the poet's environment. Often they possess metaphoric, symbolic, or allegorical significance and grow from the imagination rather than from actual experience. The range of such landscapes includes such diverse scenes as the interior of a geode in Frost's "All Revelation," the skyline of Passaic in Williams' "The Men," and the changing surface of the sea off Tehuantepec in Stevens' "Sea Surface Full of Clouds." These examples should not suggest that each of the three poets studied here uses landscape as a subject with equal frequency or that they intend the same effects by such use (differences are attended to in later chapters). Landscape used as subject is likely to be found in the work of any poet, but the frequency and pattern of such use may help to reveal a poet's sense of place.

Much of what has been said about landscape and its functions as an element of place applies as well to topography and geography, though they denote slightly more

specialized types of spatial configuration. Their attention to surface features, and especially to the spatial relation of such features to each other, emphasizes an additional mapping function which place may serve in a poem. Most simply, the geographic function of place is to locate the action or image of a poem by naming a mapped or mappable location, as when Stevens says in "Anecdote of the Jar," "I placed a jar in Tennessee. . . ." ¹¹ A comparably simple topographic function is served by Frost's "I'm going out to clean the pasture spring" ¹² and "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood." ¹³ But as each of these place references suggests in the context of its respective poem, geography and topography may have significance beyond mere physical identification. Tennessee for Stevens is not merely the site where he sets down a jar; it is an essential wilderness, a state of chaos in which he intends to establish an artificial order. The pasture spring is more than a topographic feature; it is a symbol of Frost's poetic source. And the roads in the wood represent alternatives in an allegory of personal choice. In each example, topography and geography serve a function beyond physical setting; they become vehicles for the poet's vision, indicators of his sense of place. Functionally, it is only a short distance from these simple lines to the more complex structure of Williams' Paterson, in which, on one level of the poem,

Williams exploits the geographical and topographical structure of Paterson to suggest a symbolic conjunction of male and female in the shapes of figures cut by the path of the Passaic River and a nexus of intellectual and physical history in the image of the falls.

The predominant critical assumptions about Frost, Williams, and Stevens as poets of place derive from patterns of repetitive reference to physical topography and geography. The idea of Frost's rural New England regionalism stems largely from his frequent reference to the mountains, woods, clearings, pastures, paths, ponds, and streams that are some of the region's dominant physical features (and also to his extensive use of rural New England character types in his dramatic-narrative poems). The idea of Williams' localism stems from his repeated attention to physical detail of the New Jersey cities in or near which he lived. The idea that Stevens lacks a regional identity stems partly from the less predictable physical geography and topography of his poems. These assumptions seem to demonstrate that there is an inverse corollary to Stevens' statement about a poet's subject being his "sense of the world": a poet's geography and topography may determine the world's sense of him. But concern only for a consistency of physical location and physical features in a poet's work is largely superficial;

equally important is the non-physical sense of place from which the occupation of geography and topography in a poet's work derives.

"Climate" is another term related to functions of place. It refers most narrowly to the prevailing weather in a region or locale. In its broader, less physical meaning, it indicates any prevailing condition of a place. Often a landscape or central image in a poem is described within a context of specific climatological conditions which affect the reader's perception of the landscape or image. Shifts in such conditions are responsible for the multiple landscape descriptions of Stevens' "Sea Surface Full of Clouds." In Williams' "The Yachts," the "heavy blows" of wind and the "minute/brilliance of cloudless days" are conditions of climate which affect the image of the yachts.¹⁴ Sometimes a simple reference to a region or locale is intended to suggest climatological connotations. Such is the stuff of allusion, especially when climate is understood in its broader cultural, historical, or intellectual sense. Stevens' tendency to abstract the essential climate of a place and then to substitute particular geographical or topographical references for ideas associated with the climate of that place, as in the so-called Florida poems (discussed in Chapter IV), accounts for several critical studies that speak of the "climates" of Stevens' poetry.¹⁵

The term "region" connotes a more approximate geographic reference than does "place," and this approximateness is sometimes desirable in discussing the sense of place in a poet's work. Unfortunately, regionalism is often construed pejoratively in literary criticism to suggest a narrower orientation on the part of the poet than nationality or universality. Of the poets studied here, Frost is the one most often considered by critics to be regional in this sense. Frost is a regionalist, but as Chapter II of the present study attempts to demonstrate, he is not so much regional in the pejorative sense of possessing a limited vision or identity as has been often thought. Rather, he is regional in the functional sense of often allowing a general or approximate geographical placement to serve as the ground of a poem's action or image. The effects of such approximate placement, usually achieved through topographical and climatological rather than specific geographical references, are to free the image or action of a poem from a too-precise correspondence to an actual, specific place and to free the reader from a too-demanding familiarity with an actual, specific place without which the poem could not be grasped. Whether such approximate placement as is typical of Frost is deliberate or is merely the result of an underdeveloped poetic consciousness may not be answerable on the basis of a single poem, but

the frequent repetition of the regional function in Frost's poems suggests that it is probably deliberate. It is not, of course, a function which is limited to the poems of Frost, but his use of it is extensive, as may be seen by considering such different poems as "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "Spring Pools," and "The Death of the Hired Man."

Of the important terms relating to place, the most complex and problematic is "space." Its complexity is due in part to its relatively abstract denotation. Even physically, space tends to lack a precise visible form; often it suggests an absence of definable limits, and when this is the case, it seems opposed to place, which connotes a set of identifiable limits. But one can conceive of limited spaces--bound areas which may be identified as regions, countries, cities, or other such namable places. For example, the city limits of Boston enclose a space which is within the space enclosed by the borders of Massachusetts, and that state is within the space generally identified as New England. Whether limited or unlimited, a space is the physical dimension in which elements of landscape, topography, or geography are arranged; indeed, the limits of a space, to the extent that they may be assumed to exist, are defined by a perceiver's awareness of these elements in physical relation to each other and to

himself. The act of establishing such limits in a poem by progressively identifying elements within range of the poet's awareness is an act of enclosing or defining space.

In relation to physical space, Frost's "The Vantage Point" demonstrates such an enclosing act.

If tired of trees I seek again mankind,
 Well I know where to hie me--in the dawn,
 To a slope where the cattle keep the lawn.
 There amid lolling juniper reclined,
 Myself unseen, I see in white defined
 Far off the homes of men, and farther still,
 The graves of men on an opposing hill,
 Living or dead, whichever are to mind.

And if by noon I have too much of these,
 I have but to turn on my arm, and lo,
 The sunburned hillside sets my face aglow,
 My breathing shakes the bluet like a breeze,
 I smell the earth, I smell the bruised plant,
 I look into the crater of the ant.¹⁶

In the octave, the persona begins to name the elements within his vision. From beneath a "lolling juniper," he sees "Far off the homes of men, and farther still, / The graves of men on an opposing hill"; in the sestet, he turns his face to the "sunburned hillside," "shakes the bluet" with his breath, and "look[s] into the crater of the ant." Each of these perceptions helps to enclose the physical space of the poem. Certainly space exists beyond the farther hill and the ant's crater, but the hill and crater are the limits of the poet's physical awareness in the poem (a fuller discussion of this poem is found in Chapter II).

A much narrower physical space is defined by Williams' short imagistic piece entitled "Poem":

As the cat
 climbed over
 the top of

 the jamcloset
 first the right
 forefoot

 carefully
 then the hind
 stepped down

 into the pit of
 the empty
 flowerpot¹⁷

The key to the image is, of course, the step by step movement of the cat into the flowerpot, and the graceful movement of the lines mirrors the cat's light progression "over" and "down" and "into," but what happens in the course of the twelve brief lines is that Williams (or, more specifically, the movement of the cat) defines precisely the physical limits of the space in which the image of the poem exists. The poem does not deny space beyond jamcloset and flowerpot, but it carefully excludes it.

One more example of a poem's defining the limits of a space is Stevens' "Of Mere Being." This poem differs from the previous examples, however, in that it clearly suggests a translation of physical elements into a mental space:

The palm at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze distance,

A gold feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.¹⁸

The bird in the palm marks the "edge of space," but it is not simply the edge of physical space--the vanishing point of the poet's physical vision. Physically the space of the poem's image reaches from the poet to the palm, but Stevens equates "the edge of space" and "the end of the mind / Beyond the last thought." In so doing, he shows the reader a different sort of spatial dimension--the dimension of mental space. This mental space and the poem's physical space seem to become one in Stevens' simultaneous consciousness of the bird as both physical reality and idea.

To speak of mental space is to speak figuratively; the concept of mental space, like that of spatialized time, is a convenient way of visualizing and perhaps of quantifying a highly abstract quality. As has been stated already, there is a critical tradition for speaking of mental space in literature. Its most familiar expression in this country is Joseph Frank's 1945 essay, "Spatial Form in

Modern Literature,"¹⁹ but the tradition includes, as well, the work of Frank's disciples and detractors²⁰ and of several more independent critics like George Poulet, Gaston Bachelard, and Roland Bourneuf.²¹ Also, and more directly related to the work of poets considered in the present study, there are works with key spatial assumptions, such as those by J. Hillis Miller, Cary Nelson, Robert Edward Brown, Frank Lentriccia, Joseph Riddel, and Richard Poirier.²² The underlying assumption of Frank and other spatial form critics is that images and ideas in a work of literature can be spatially rather than temporally configured in the mind of a writer or a reader. Indeed, Frank's argument is that such spatial configuration is a central characteristic of modern literature. Not all of the studies mentioned above accept Frank's conclusion, but they do share his assumption that spatial form--the configuration of mental space--is a helpful way of talking about the organization of ideas and images in a literary work. The present study does not intend either to describe or to join the debate over spatial form as a characteristic of modern literature, but it is influenced by ideas of critics working in the tradition of spatial form criticism. Spatiality relates to two specific aspects of the present study: (1) the phenomenology of place (see note #5) and (2) the mapping of a poet's sense of place from the functions of place in particular poems.

The concept of mental space is particularly helpful in speaking of a poet's sense of place because it permits a physical mapping (albeit figurative) of the poet's perception and use of place. It permits a configuration of ideas that is not too much unlike a geographic and topographic configuration that includes cities, towns, roads, hills, and rivers. Figuratively, a poet may be said to stand and to move within the mental space of a poem. Thus, when a poem is understood as the field of action for a poet's sense of place, the poem may be seen to trace a deliberate journey in the poet's consciousness. For individual poets, such a journey assumes a characteristic path or shape. In regard to place, the typical paths of the journey in Frost's, Williams', and Stevens' poems are, respectively, centripetal, centrifugal, and oscillating. Correspondingly, the consciousnesses of these poets in regard to place may be said to tend toward acts of enclosing, opening, and exploring space. If the act of reading is thought of as a reader duplicating as nearly as he can the consciousness of the writer, then readers of Frost, Williams, and Stevens may find themselves carried along on such mental journeys in the act of reading their poems.

The diverse range of functions of place and the characteristic repetition of particular functions of place by individual poets, together with the acceptance of a mental

space in which the poet's consciousness may be said to move, make possible the mapping of a poet's sense of place. The mapping must take into account both the physical and mental aspects of place in a poet's work, but, figuratively mapped, a poet's sense of place should account for his perception of place and for the functions of place in his poems. Chapters II, III, and IV of the present study attempt tentative mappings of the individual senses of place revealed in the poems of Frost, Williams, and Stevens. Each chapter examines selected poems in order to demonstrate how functions of place grow out of perceptions of place, how those functions may affect the reader's understanding of the poems, and how the functions reveal the poet's sense of place. The individual mappings may seem attempts at drawing imaginary lines with real pencils, but that is the nature of figurative expression. Collectively, the maps should demonstrate the importance, the individuality, and the characteristic natures of the senses of place revealed in the poems of Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens.

Notes

¹Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), pp. 120-23.

²W. H. Auden, The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 345.

³Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 72.

⁴Bachelard, p. xii.

⁵Richard Schmitt, author of the entry "Phenomenology" in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1967), pp. 135-51, speaks of two distinct uses of the term "phenomenology": (1) a descriptive study of a given subject, and (2) a philosophical movement whose most vigorous proponent has been Edmund Husserl. In the present study, the first and more general meaning is intended, but there are some methodological and perceptual assumptions of the phenomenological school which are employed here (phenomenology is, according to Schmitt, less a set of doctrines than a method). Among these assumptions are (a) that perception involves more than mere sensory observation, (b) that phenomena (objects, scenes, and so forth) are essences which we understand intuitively (Schmitt speaks of "some extraordinary kind" of seeing), and (c) that conclusions derived phenomenologically are to be tested by their coherence and their productivity (they should be "self-validating" and useful). The phrase "phenomenology of place" stands for a perception of place which is neither purely sensory nor purely empirical; from such a perception of place derive a poet's uses of place--the functions of place in his poems.

⁶The New Critical approach to a poem assumes a conscious interweaving of ideas and images into such a complex structure. Ezra Pound assumes a similar structure when he speaks of an imagist poem as an intersection of emotion and intellect which provides an escape from time and space limitations (see Literary Essays of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 4.). To speak of a poem as a complex of activities is not necessarily to think of it as a machine which may be mechanically analyzed part by part; rather, it may merely indicate that an understanding of a poem demands attention to diverse yet simultaneous activities (rhyme, rhythm, imagery, theme, and so forth).

⁷Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 15-16.

⁸This seems to be in keeping with the assumption of phenomenologists (and many other contemporary philosophers as well) that there may not even exist "for us any sensory observations which are not interpreted or classified under general concepts." (Schmitt, p. 137).

⁹Because "perception" is used as a phenomenological term here, it is not to be construed as an empirical act or process. Rather it is largely intuitive. Stevens, Auden, and Bachelard might dispute over motives for such intuitive judgments, but they would agree that perception is not wholly objective or empirical. Instead of the phrase "in the light of experience," Husserl might use "according to previously bracketed phenomena."

¹⁰Phenomenological is used here in its most general sense--as description of a given subject matter as phenomenon.

¹¹Wallace Stevens, The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p. 76.

¹²Robert Frost, The Poetry of Robert Frost, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 1.

¹³Frost, p. 105.

¹⁴William Carlos Williams, The Collected Earlier Poems of William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions, 1938), p. 106.

¹⁵James Baird, The Dome and the Rock (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968); Richard A. Macksey, "The Climates of Wallace Stevens," in The Act of the Mind, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce and J. Hillis Miller (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), pp. 185-223; Harold Bloom, Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). These are only three of numerous studies which pay attention to the correspondence between climates and ideas in Stevens' poetry. While Baird considers the physical climate of the poems to be of considerable importance, both Macksey and Bloom tend to treat climate largely in terms of intellectual climate and personal-thematic concerns; in so doing, they slight a more inclusive association of place, climate, and idea in the poems.

¹⁶Frost, p. 17.

¹⁷Williams, p. 340.

¹⁸Stevens, Opus Posthumous (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), pp. 117-18. In The Palm at the End of the Mind, Holly Stevens prints the word "decor" in place of "distance" in line three.

¹⁹Frank's essay was first published in Sewanee Review, 53 (1945), 221-40, 433-56, 643-53. It has appeared elsewhere in abridged versions, but the most complete version is the one Frank expanded slightly for inclusion in his book The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 3-62.

²⁰Numerous critics have responded to the ideas in Frank's essay. Among the notable detractors have been G. Giovannini, "Method in the Study of Literature in its Relation to the Other Fine Arts." Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 8 (1950), 185-95; Philip Rahv, "The Myth and the Powerhouse," in Literature and the Sixth Sense (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), pp. 202-15; Walter Sutton, "The Literary Image and the Reader: A Consideration of the Theory of Spatial Form," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 16 (1957), 112-23; and Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). Giovannini objects on the basis of what he thinks is Frank's equation of literature with the fine arts, especially painting; he argues that literature cannot be criticized in the same terms. Rahv objects to what he thinks is an equation of spatial form with an underlying mythos for all works of modern literature; he assumes that when Frank speaks of the spatial imagination, he means the mythic imagination. Sutton argues that spatial form ignores the essential time-act of reading and that it thus claims a synchronous form for a diachronic art. Kermode seems to assume that Frank's theory endangers proper critical concern for the time sense and that to speak of spatial form is "time-defeating." Professor Frank answers these and other critics in "Spatial Form: An Answer to the Critics," Critical Inquiry, 4 (1977), 231-52, and in "Spatial Form: Some Further Reflections," Critical Inquiry, 5 (1978), 275-90. To understand the nature of Frank's remarks, especially in the latter article, it is helpful to see also Kermode's "A Reply to Joseph Frank," Critical Inquiry, 4 (1978), 579-88; there, Kermode extends his criticism of the adequacy of spatial form criticism.

Many critics have sided with Joseph Frank. To get some idea of the extent and nature of this support, it is helpful to look at either one of two bibliographies on spatial form or at an unpublished dissertation by Ronald Foust. One of the bibliographies is in Joseph Kestner's The Spatiality of the Novel (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978); the other is in a forthcoming book ("Spatial Form and Narrative") edited by Jeffrey Smitten for publication by the Cornell University Press. Both bibliographies indicate an extensive following of or correspondence to Frank's spatial form theory. That both include a significant representation of non-American criticism (much of it from France) suggests that the concept of spatial form has found a more congenial following among non-formalist critics than among the formalists who have dominated American criticism for the past few decades. That both include a majority of works which concern spatial form in fiction is partly due to the subject of the books in which they appear, but it is my belief that critics have applied spatial concepts more extensively to fiction than to poetry. Foust's "The Place of Spatial Form in Modern Literary Criticism" (Dissertation, University of Maryland, 1975) begins a historical survey of the development of the concept of spatial form; his essay in Professor Smitten's forthcoming book attempts to draw some connections between various extensions of the spatial form debate (myth criticism, existential phenomenology, and structuralism). Foust's essay is particularly interesting in its attempt to connect a phenomenology of physical space to a literary artist's consciousness of mental space and thus to spatial form in general.

²¹For a survey and interconnection of work by these and other related critics, see Jeffrey Smitten, "Approaches to the Spatiality of Narrative," Papers on Language and Literature, 14 (1978), 296-314. Among the key works of the critics whose names are mentioned above are these: Georges Poulet, Proustian Space, trans. by Elliot Coleman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space; Roland Bourneuf, "l'Organization de l'espace dans le roman," Etudes litteraires, 3 (1970), 77-94. The French dominance again suggests the more favorable hearing given spatial form criticism by foreign critics, especially the members of the so-called Geneva School. The present study shares with these works a willingness to speculate about correspondences between areas of experience and perception which lack clearly defined formal connections. An example is Bachelard's suggested correspondence between psychic states and images of space.

²²J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality (Boston: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966), especially the introductory chapter, "The Poetry of Reality," and the chapters on Stevens and Williams; "Introduction" to William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966). When Miller speaks in Poets of Reality of the modern poet's dilemma as being the necessity of moving beyond nihilism, he describes the task of necessary self-definition in spatial terms that are strikingly similar to those used in the present study. When Miller speaks of the "space" of a poem and when he speaks of tracing the "itineraries" of a poet's mental journeys beyond nihilism, he employs figurative expressions connecting physical to mental space. Such figurative connections are important to the present study, too, though it does not focus on the same concerns as Miller's book.

Cary Nelson, The Incarnate Word: Literature as Verbal Space (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1973). Nelson's study derives partly from his reading of Bachelard's The Poetics of Space, but he argues that different writers define different spatial shapes by means of their verbal styles rather than their imagery alone. His chapter on Williams considers the use of the flower and flowering in Williams' early poems to reflect the expanding verbal style of the poet.

Robert Edward Brown's unpublished dissertation, "Walk in the World: A Journey in the Space of William Carlos Williams' Paterson," offers a reading of Paterson as a poem organized on spatial principles that are both physical and mental.

Frank Lentricchia, Robert Frost: Modern Poetics and the Landscapes of Self (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1975). The author discusses Frost's poetry partially in terms of Bachelard's theory of spatial images. Lentricchia concentrates on the brook, the house, and the woods as key images in Frost's work.

Joseph Riddel, The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965); The Inverted Bell: Modernism and the Counterpoetics of William Carlos Williams (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974). These books are among the best studies of Stevens and Williams. Both books proceed from assumptions of spatial form, specifically the ability to configure ideas in a mental space. Riddel was the first critic to suggest reading Stevens in the light of Bachelard's theory (he does not do it himself); his book on Williams uses the work of a French myth critic, Roland Barthes, to help explain the nature of Williams' poetry in terms that recall those in Miller.

Richard Poirier, A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966); Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). The terms of the earlier book are not strictly spatial; rather, Poirier is concerned with the use of style by American writers to create an artificial environment in and by way of their works. The book on Frost does not claim connections to the tradition of spatial form criticism, but its attention to Frost's use of images of home seems akin to the theory of imagery found in Bachelard.

CHAPTER II

ROBERT FROST: REGIONALISM AND ENCLOSURE

To derive a sense of place from the poetry of Robert Frost, one must contend with the poet's reputation as a regionalist. Of statements and studies linking Frost with his "native" rural New England, there is no dearth. Indeed, it is difficult to think of another American poet with a national reputation who is so generally associated with a particular geographic region.¹ The identification is so strong that it is difficult to conceive of a critical study of Frost's poetry that completely ignores its regional elements. The reviewers of Frost's early volumes set the tone for later readers and students by speaking of the poet as farmer-poet or Yankee bard.² To them it seemed sufficient to assume the authenticity of Frost's country manners, the lived experiences that supposedly stood behind poems like "Mending Wall," and the real people upon which dramatic poems like "The Death of the Hired Man" or "Home Burial" must have been based. But the reviewers were not alone responsible for the association of poet and geographic region. Perceiving the popularity of the farmer-poet role, Frost himself himself seems to have embraced the Yankee

persona and flaunted it publicly. The role and readers' perception of the role began to feed each other, and soon poet, poetry, and place became generally accepted as various aspects of a single reality.³

His regional identity has been partly responsible for at least the nature, if not the intensity, of Frost's popular reputation. It has delayed and made more difficult an objective critical consideration of the poetry. Serious studies which have attempted to reveal in the poetry a more-than-regional consciousness have not always fallen on ears that were willing to listen, and critical and biographical statements either debunking or daring to contradict a comfortable regional image of the poet as gentle-but-tough farmer have met not only indifferent, but hostile receptions.⁴ However, if the response to a less regional and sometimes less flattered Frost has been somewhat chauvinistic, it has reminded the detractors how strongly Frost's readers perceive in the poet a sense of place and a sense of character.

The present study of Frost's poems does not intend to argue either for or against the regional authenticity which many readers presume and which some of the critics doubt. Instead, it attempts to demonstrate that there is to be found in Frost's poetry a sense of place which is regional not in its authenticity but in its approximateness

of reference. It argues that the dominant functions of place reference and description in Frost's poetry--as setting, as subject, and as vehicle for figurative, symbolic, or allegorical expression--reveal a preference for enclosed places which can be defined and defended. It also tries to show that Frost's perception of place is typically centripetal; in other words, the poems tend to define and enclose a limited space (to move inward) rather than to suggest a continuity of space which expands outward from an image of immediate place.

The importance of place and something of the nature of the function of place in Frost's poetry are suggested by the titles of separate volumes. North of Boston, Mountain Interval, New Hampshire, A Further Range, and In the Clearing suggest a region, a generalized landscape, or a perception or exploration of limited space. West-Running Brook, A Witness Tree, and Steeple Bush each names a topographical landmark by which a place is identified or ordered. Such approximate, topographical place references are characteristic of Frost, and, in this sense, he is a regionalist in regard to place. Rarely does he use specific place names, and when geographical references do appear in his poems, as in North of Boston or New Hampshire, they often signify something other than mere geography. For

example, the phrase "north of Boston" used as a title suggests the rural character of Frost's assumed New England culture; it signifies a cultural break between the upstate, rural, even backwoods New England that Frost knew and the much more sophisticated tidewater New England of Boston. In "New Hampshire," the title poem from the volume of the same name, Frost uses the geographic label to establish an arbitrary limit for the settings of diverse images, impressions, and historical events which fill the poem; again, the place name carries as strong a cultural as a geographic signification.

There is little reason to presume, because his references to place are approximate or regional, that Frost's attention to place is careless or imprecise. Actually, his use of topography is quite careful. His landscapes may not mirror actual scenes, detail by detail, but they are often structured and defined to support a dramatic or thematic principle of the poem in which they appear. The elements of landscape may actually embody, in their structure, a symbolic or allegorical conflict which is central to the poem, as in "The Road Not Taken" or "All Revelation." They may provide a complex backdrop for action, helping the reader to an awareness of the personal and thematic tensions acted out by characters in the dramatic-narrative poems like "Home Burial" and "The Death

of the Hired Man." They may reflect the mental attentions of the poet himself, as in "A Passing Glimpse" or "The Vantage Point." But in each of these functions, Frost's attentions to place are carefully defined within a limited space. Such enclosure is perhaps natural for a dramatic poet, for he would tend to see action contained within a frame of time and place. Whether the actor in a poem is a character created by the poet (either human or nonhuman), the poet as persona, or the consciousness of the poet, the action occurs within the enclosure of a "stage." It is often not a stage which can be located in an actual, particular Vermont village or on an actual, particular New Hampshire farm, but it is a stage which is carefully arranged topographically to support the physical or mental action of the poem in which it appears.

The specific consideration of this chapter progresses from those poems in which place primarily reflects the attentions of the poet himself, to those in which place primarily provides a backdrop for overtly dramatic action, to those in which place is itself the subject, and, in itself, embodies the central thematic conflict of the poem. This order is chosen so that the first group of poems can be used to demonstrate, early in the chapter, the enclosing tendencies of Frost's perception of place. The second group should demonstrate the use of such perceptions in conventional,

dramatic situations. The third group, and the direct focus on place as subject, should further demonstrate the enclosing, centripetal tendencies. Together, the poems and the discussions of them should provide the basis for a figurative map of Frost's sense of place as it is revealed in his poems.

"The Pasture" stands as the introduction to Frost's complete poems.⁵ It not only helps acclimate the reader to the rural setting so common in the poems; it also demonstrates some of the poet's most characteristic attentions to place: its place references are topographical, approximate, and enclosing.

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I shan't be gone long.--You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother. It's so young
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I shan't be gone long.--You come too.⁶

The key physical elements in the poem are the spring, the leaves, a little calf, and the calf's mother--all aspects of the generalized place identified as the pasture in the title of the poem. The scene is an approximate one; it makes no claim to any geographic specificity and, therefore, may be considered regional. The poem may seem at first to be not enclosing but freeing. After all, the speaker is "going out." But if the poem does speak of leaving the

enclosure (of a house, apparently) in order to go outside, there is little doubt in the mind of the poet-speaker where the action of the poem will end: it will end in coming back inside--"I shan't be gone long." And the pasture is open space only to the extent that its dimensions are greater than those of the house. It is, if the leaves can be taken as a physical hint, a clearing enclosed by woods. Even more significant than the physical enclosure, the consciousness of the poet-speaker seems to enclose the act of going out by defining so specifically the activities which will occupy the time away from the house; they are activities that speak not of freedom but of responsibility.

The landscape of the poem, though physically simple, embodies some of the thematic tensions which are important to the poem. "Out" clearly opposes an "in" from which the persona is emerging and from which he is coaxing the listener or reader. Though there is no detail from which to infer any specific nature of the inside, the tension of in and out and that of speaker's urging and listener's hesitancy reflect a tension between safety and relative risk, or what Richard Poirier calls "home" and "extravagance."⁷ Similar tensions are embodied in other elements of the poem's landscape. The spring is apparently in an open pasture, but the presence of leaves (which on another level may be poems, as the spring may be a poetic fount)

indicates a nearby and probably enclosing wood. The topographical tension of clearing and wood is to be found more apparent in other Frost poems; it is a tension which is historically authentic in the rural New England where Frost lived as an occasional farmer.⁸ The relation of cow and calf, though expressive of affection and even procreation, embodies a physical tension of the cow's licking and the calf's attempting to stand up to the mother's forceful attentions. The cow's instinctive cleaning of its tottering calf and the persona's deliberate cleaning of the spring (both cleanings are perhaps less tasks than amusements) link man and nature in the performance of similar acts. The presumption that the calf will be brought back in may suggest man's dominance over nature and also his provision of greater shelter, more thorough enclosure.

What is true about Frost's sense of place in "The Pasture" is true in numerous other poems as well. The place is rural; it is general rather than specific; it is topographically, not geographically arranged; its image is concrete; its function is a backdrop for action, though here the actions--cleaning the spring and fetching the calf that is being licked by its mother--are not highly dramatic. The pasture of the poem could be actual, but there is every reason to believe that Frost has invented it or has at least so chosen and arranged the topographical elements to create

a landscape that embodies the thematic tensions of the poem in which it appears. As usual in Frost, no understanding of the moral tensions embodied in the landscape is absolutely necessary for enjoyment of the poem, but they are present, and they grow from the physical tensions in the activities of nature, in the activities of man, and in the activities of the poetry which links man and nature. As the first poem in the collection of Frost's work, "The Pasture" provides a general placement--a region--for the poems which follow and an invitation to the reader to go "out" with the poet. The clearing, wood, house, and spring which are to appear again and again in other poems are introduced, and the reader is challenged to find in an apparently simple pastoral-dramatic poetry the richer meanings that reside in the nature of the places of the poems. Like the "going out" in which the reader is invited to participate in "The Pasture," the reader's going out with Frost into his poetic region is usually bound to bring him back inside, for in Frost's poems, consideration of physical places in nature usually leads to consideration of mental or moral spaces in man's consciousness. The poems tend, ultimately, toward the inside, toward an acceptance and understanding of enclosure, and they reveal a sense of place that may be labeled centripetal.

"The Pasture" demonstrates Frost's use of landscape as backdrop for action, albeit of little dramatic significance, but it is also one of several poems in the Frost canon which employs place to reflect the poet's consciousness of his relations to nature and to his fellow man. Among other such poems are "Revelation," "The Vantage Point," and "In Hardwood Groves." In each, Frost establishes the image of a persona not merely enclosed in a secure space, but closed away from nature and his fellow man; whether such separation is deliberate or inevitable is not certain from these poems, but the fact of the separation is certain. Each of the poems uses the element of place as a vehicle for defining the poet's enclosure and aloofness.

"Revelation," a short poem from A Boy's Will, holds a key to several of the aspects of Frost's poetics, including, perhaps, the sense of place. It is a poem about the mental and linguistic relation of poet, poem, and audience. Though concerned with the potential problem of a poet's intentional obscurity of expression, it is developed in terms of place.

We make ourselves a place apart
 Behind light words that tease and flout,
 But oh, the agitated heart
 Till someone really finds us out.

'Tis pity if the case require
 (Or so we say) that in the end
 We speak the literal to inspire
 The understanding of a friend.

But so with all, from babes that play
 At hide-and-seeK to God afar,
 So all who hide too well away
 Must speak and tell us where they are. (PRF, 19)

The poem makes little attempt to develop an image of physical place, and this is rare in a Frost poem. Mental space, which is usually left to be inferred, is here the setting for the poet's game of verbal "hide-and-seeK." When he speaks of "a place apart / Behind light words that tease and flout," Frost is identifying the position of the poet in that mental space. From there, the poet carries out his act of poetic indirection, his game of hide-and-seeK: teasing and hiding, preferring not to reveal himself (his meaning) directly to his audience, but "agitated" until discovered. His "place apart" is the poet's mental pivot point for his own inclusion or exclusion in the community of men. His success as a poet depends upon a delicate balance of self-enclosure and revelation. In physical terms, the poet must somehow be a part of his environment, yet separate from it. Phenomenologically speaking, he must be perceivable as a figure, yet be almost indistinguishable from the ground against which he is perceived. Poetically, he must speak the "light words" that are figurative, but their connection to the literal must be

perceivable; "'Tis pity" if he must "speak the literal" in order to be understood, for literal expression denies the essential game of poetry and admits the failure of communication by indirection.

In the final stanza, Frost argues the applicability of the principle to "all, from babes . . . to God afar." In a poem which is developed in terms of mental space, such a concluding argument seems an ultimate enclosure within a natural law of perception: to "hide too well" necessitates self-disclosure. Frost's lack of attention to physical images of place in "Revelation" is not typical, but his act of enclosing mental space within a general rule of perception is quite typical. The poem moves from the enclosure of "a place apart" for "ourselves" to the much broader dimensions of "so with all," but its space is always defined and, therefore, limited. Elsewhere, this is seen in terms which are more immediately physical.

In "The Vantage Point," a sonnet from A Boy's Will, images of place are used to mirror the investigations of the persona, whose consciousness can be easily assumed to be that of the poet. The landscape is general and presented largely in topographical terms; there is no specific geographical reference. The persona's shifting attentions to place may mirror shifts in his mood, but certainly they define the limits of his perception of physical place and

therefore trace an enclosing act in his consciousness. As in "The Pasture," the movement is from strict enclosure toward a relative openness, and then toward a final narrowing, a return to strict enclosure.

The initial situation of the persona is isolation in the woods. In physical terms, it could be the situation of the poet in "Revelation" who has hidden so well that he is unperceived by his fellow men. The persona in "The Vantage Point" does not admit that he actually leaves his extreme enclosure in the woods--the entire poem is bounded by the speculative phrase "If tired of trees" [my italics] --but the scenes and actions are described with sufficient vividness to be physically convincing.

If tired of trees I seek again mankind,
 Well I know where to hie me--in the dawn,
 To a slope where the cattle keep the lawn.
 There amid lolling juniper reclined,
 Myself unseen, I see in white defined
 Far off the homes of men, and farther still,
 The graves of men on an opposing hill,
 Living or dead, whichever are to mind. (PRF, 17)

The initial shift in position is neither so certain nor so great as it may appear at first. Not only does the "If" qualify the actuality of the shift; assuming the actuality, there is really little change in the situation of the persona, for once he reaches the clearing, he does not leave the woods completely. Rather, he remains unseen amid juniper trees and observes the world of man afar from a position of physical enclosure. But if his own physical

place is still narrowly enclosed, his "vantage point" allows him to define a broader landscape. About the vantage point itself, little physical detail is known: it is near a sloped clearing, there are "lolling junipers," and, perhaps, nearby cows. The vantage point is, however, the pivot for the poet's consciousness. It is a middle ground between the "trees" and "mankind," and it becomes, in the sestet, a middle ground between mankind and the world of the ant.

In the sonnet's octave, the movement of consciousness is outward; from woods to near the clearing and from there to homes and graves on "an opposing hill," the poem defines an expanding consciousness. Visually, the image of the village is of white figures standing out against a dark, probably dark green, background; no detail is apparent. But the persona's perception of the landscape is not static. It traces a shifting preoccupation of the persona which goes from "vagance" (as Poirier uses the term) to the security of homes and then to the constriction of the grave's enclosure. This progression from an image of freedom to one of security and then to one of death leads to the poem's turn of attention, and to the persona's physical turn away from the far off landscape and toward the nearer landscape of the immediate hillside:

And if by noon I have too much of these,
 I have but to turn on my arm, and lo,
 The sunburned hillside sets my face aglow.
 My breathing shakes the bluet like a breeze,
 I smell the earth, I smell the bruised plant,
 I look into the crater of the ant. (PRF, 17)

The point of vantage remains the same, but the direction of vision has changed, and, with it, the landscape perceived by the persona. Physically, the poet's position has changed very little, but the change in his consciousness--in his perceived relation to the earth--is great. The warm hillside sets his face aglow, and he becomes the sun for the miniature world he faces. His breath becomes the wind, and the earth and the bruised plant become objects of his olfactory sense. Here, the earth responds to his presence as it does not in the scene described in the octave of the poem, but the close look at an earthly community--the crater of the ant--is achieved at considerable sacrifice of breadth of vision. In physical terms, the crater of the ant is much more constricted than even the graves on the far-off hill; it is certainly less extensive than the distant village. The persona looks outward to a human community, down and inward to a nonhuman one; he participates in neither. The persona's vantage point is merely his place of investigation, a place apart where he stands to define the physical world that encloses him as it stretches from woods to village and graveyard, then back to ant crater. These are the landmarks of his physical world

and the emblems of his consciousness. Amid them, he is enclosed.

The elements of landscape in "The Vantage Point" symbolically represent worlds of isolation, community (human and nonhuman), and death, but Frost does not attempt to set up an either-or choice for the persona; it seems likely that he will return to his wooded isolation at day's end. In two other poems which develop similarly, Frost does project the action of the persona beyond mere perception of a landscape. The persona in "The Road Not Taken" is said to look down two roads as far as he could and then, realizing he "could not travel both / And be one traveller" (PRF, 105), to face a choice fraught with allegorical significance. In "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep," the people of the poem, looking at the ocean,

cannot look out far.
They cannot look in deep.
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep? (PRF, 301)

In both these poems, as in "The Vantage Point," an observer confronts the limitation of a surface impression. One persona looks into an ant crater; another looks down to where paths bend in the undergrowth; still another (a group) looks at the water. The vision of each is physically stopped by earth or foliage or water. These topographic elements enclose the viewers and limit their

perceptions. Still, the act of looking is important, especially if the personae are to be identified with the poet, for the act of looking is an act of definition--of self-definition in terms of place. Each persona establishes "a place apart" and, from that place, defines his relations to all that surrounds him.

Perhaps enclosure within a "place apart" is the sort of necessary displacement upon which the poet depends for the finely focused investigation and discovery which make possible his understanding of a more expansive world. Frost may suggest just this use of enclosure in the early poem "In Hardwood Groves":

The same leaves over and over again!
 They fall from giving shade above,
 To make one texture of faded brown
 And fit the earth like a leather glove.

Before the leaves can mount again
 To fill the trees with another shade,
 They must go down past things coming up.
 They must go down into the dark decayed.

They must be pierced by flowers and put
 Beneath the feet of dancing flowers.
 However it is in some other world
 I know that this is the way in ours. (PRF, 25-6)

The cycle of seasons recalled by the regionalized wooded scene is described as an alternation of an enclosing of earth by leaves and a piercing of leaves by flowers. This awareness of emerging flowers might lead to the perception of flowering as an opening, freeing activity, as it does in William Carlos Williams' poetry, but in Frost the

emphasis is on going "down into the dark decayed." The poet is not freed from enclosure; in the closing two lines, there is little doubt that the poet has established a boundary between "other world(s)" and "ours." As the "leather glove" of leaves encloses the earth, his perceptions of immediate experience enclose the poet's consciousness. The poem, which suggests both enclosing and piercing movements, concludes by moving inward to a world that is "ours" and by discounting the worlds outside. The poet's consciousness does not lead from particular perception to universal; instead, it proceeds from the cyclical implications of "over and over again" to the limited certainty of the here and now. The place of the poem is closed in, not opened up.

Two aspects of Frost's sense of place may be seen in another poem, "A Passing Glimpse." The situation in the poem is this: a poet, enclosed in a moving train, wants a closer look at flowers only glimpsed through a window; the poet-viewer wishes to name and thereby order or enclose the flowers and the experience of seeing them; he concludes by rationalizing that

Heaven gives its glimpses to those
Not in position to look too close. (PRF, 248)

The physical situation of the poet-viewer recalls the "place apart" seen in "The Vantage Point" and other poems.

The conclusion that a clearer perception may result from a less-than-precise focus may justify Frost's deliberate regionalism of place reference in his poetry. At odds are the scientific, up-close view and the poetic, distanced view. The poet seems to desire the first but to accept the latter as superior, though less precise.

The poems examined so far (except, perhaps, "The Pasture") are concerned with place primarily as it defines the consciousness of an observer-persona. These poems are not simply descriptions; neither are they meditations. The personae are poet-figures whose physical placement informs their relations to their world and to their readers. Thus, Frost turns place into a metaphor for the self of the poet.¹⁰ It is a use of place grounded in formal convention but ranging beyond the simple use of the convention; the effect is to establish not merely a narrative point of view but an emblematic description of the poet's consciousness.

With few exceptions, Frost's poems employ topographical references to place such as those seen in poems already examined. The comment of an early reviewer of Frost's work that the poems are marked by "vigorous landscapes sketched, or scooped out, with a bold, free hand"¹¹ seems right in two ways. "Scooped out" suggests the regional approximation of topography and location that is typical of Frost landscapes, and "free hand" implies a sense of

invention characteristic of those landscapes. Despite the commonness of the elements in his landscapes, the landscapes are not often precisely mimetic. It may be partially this regionalism regarding references to place that is responsible for the reader's complementary specification of images in his own mind, and this may in turn cause the reader to feel at ease and familiar in Frost's poetic countryside.¹² In effect, Frost's use of place demands little, but allows much, of the reader. Because his images of place are factually imprecise, the reader may simply choose to attend to action or character rather than to setting, or he may project his own specific details into the landscapes. The former response makes for easy reading; the latter gives the reader a particular stake in the perceived poem. Either response, or both together, may go far to explain the vested interest that makes Frost's general readers so uncritically supportive of his work. However, to talk about the dynamics of reading is not only to explain a particular response to Frost's poetry, but also to suggest something about the nature of the poetry itself.

The regional nature of Frost's sense of place may be demonstrated by considering the absence of specific geographical references in Frost's North of Boston. There seems little doubt that New England is the general setting

for the poems, but in the book's seventeen poems (including "The Pasture") there are only half a dozen references by name to specific towns (almost all in the same poem), one passing reference to the state of New Hampshire, one to Vermont (as a descriptive political term), and one to a mountain (by a name which turns out to be, apparently, fictitious). Almost without exception, the specific references are incidental to the action or meaning of the poems in which they appear. The regionalized location noted in the title of the book tells as much as or perhaps more than a reader needs to know in order to understand the geographical location of the poems; as has been noted already, its cultural signification is more important. But though Frost's attention to specific towns or states is very slight, it should not be assumed that place is insignificant in the generally dramatic poems in North of Boston. It has already been suggested that his establishment of a landscape against which to project the images of "The Pasture" apparently occurs with a keen awareness of the metaphoric and moral implications of scenic landmarks, and that the generalized landscapes he creates often embody a moral and physical tension. These characteristics seem also to apply to settings of the more dramatic poems which comprise the bulk of North of Boston. In those poems, the function of place as setting is the most important present consideration.

Frost's employment of place in several of the North of Boston poems is a direct result of the dramatic nature of those poems. Any dramatic poem requires a backdrop of time and place; both or either may be approximate, but neither can be eliminated. What is significant about Frost's employment of place in poems like "The Death of the Hired Man," "Home Burial," or "A Hundred Collars" is, then, not the fact of the employment but the form it takes--the function of place in each. Simply stated, the dramatic poet may choose to project his action against a factual or an imagined landscape. The specific, actual background can enrich the context of action by evoking particular images in the reader's mind. The regional, invented background can blur the specific context enough to make the action appear sharper in comparison. The latter technique has parallels in painting and photography. What usefulness a blurred background loses in allusive precision, it may gain in general suggestiveness and in allowing a clear perception of the foreground figure. This is what Frost achieves in "The Vantage Point" by noting the white figures of homes but not cluttering the visual background with identification of other buildings, roads, and so forth. Though it seems unlikely that Frost understood and consciously meant to employ this phenomenological principle of figure and ground, there is little doubt that the principle is active in several

of his dramatic poems. Because he rarely suggests a precise location for the action of the poems, the reader is freed to focus on idea, action, conversation, character, and tone. But if the context for these foreground elements is approximate, it is not haphazard. Frost clearly manages the placement of the action, often so as to embody in the setting a strong parallel to the human struggle of the poem's foreground. As will be demonstrated shortly, such metaphorization and (sometimes) moralization of the setting often supports the central struggle of a poem.

The establishment of a place of action occurs early in all forms of drama, so it is no surprise to find Frost establishing his settings early in his dramatic poems, usually in the initial verse paragraph. Such identification of setting provides a preliminary enclosure or frame for the action to follow. The opening lines of "The Death of the Hired Man" are exemplary in their establishment of place, as well as in their impulse to action:

Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table,
 Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,
 She ran on tiptoe down the darkened passage
 To meet him in the doorway with the news
 And put him on his guard. "Silas is back."
 She pushed him outward with her through the door
 And shut it after her. "Be kind," she said.
 She set them on the porch, then drew him down
 To sit beside her on the wooden step. (PRF, 34)

These lines establish the dramatic context. It is not difficult to imagine changing verb tenses so as to make of

them stage directions at the opening of a short play. The place of the poem is Mary and Warren's home, and three separate areas may be identified. There is the area where Silas sits by the stove, unseen in the poem except as described by Mary, who is sitting there "musing on the lamp-flame" as the poem opens. There is a "darkened passage" that leads to the outside doorway. Then, outside the doorway, there is the porch on which Mary and Warren sit to talk. Together these areas represent levels of enclosure within which the poem's "secret" resides. Each of the three spaces is identified as Mary's initial movement takes her from inside the house, through the passageway to meet Warren at the door, then out the door with him to where they sit on the porch steps to talk. There is no apparent movement from the porch until the final lines indicate that Warren has entered the house, gone to where Silas is dead in the chair, and returned to Mary's side on the porch.

Nothing is known about the style of the house except what the lamp, stove, and wooden steps may suggest. The porch probably faces hills to the west, and near it grow morning-glory vines that reach to the eaves of the house. Though it is impossible to locate the house on any actual map, Frost's attention to the arrangement of topographic landmarks permits some inferences about the layout of the farm. Still, the most important place distinction is the

simple inside-outside partitioning of the house. This division defines not only the physical relations of Silas and Warren and Mary, Mary's initial movement, and Warren's concluding movement; the inside-outside division is also the central figurative and thematic relation of Silas to Warren and Mary. The matter at issue in Mary and Warren's conversation is whether Silas will be included or excluded from their home. Ironically, Silas is inside the house, where Mary has brought him, and they are outside, where she has led them.

The layout of the farm reinforces the poem's dramatic conflict. The farm is "up from Rowe's" (PRF, 35), perhaps along a winding road on a hillside. There is a nearby barn, where Mary has found Silas "huddled against the barn door fast asleep" (PRF, 35). The farm contains a meadow and an upper pasture which apparently contains scattered trees or rocks. There is apparently a wood not too far away, and a trail leading into it from the pasture. These details are almost insignificant; they bear little direct relation to the action. However, Frost uses them to enrich the place of action and to subtly suggest an embodiment of the poem's human conflict in its setting.

As the inside-outside distinction of the house embodies the inclusion-exclusion question of the poem, so the arrangement of lower meadow, upper pasture, and nearby

woods suggests a tension of woods and clearing like the one in "The Pasture" (and in other poems as well). The apparent needs of the meadow to be ditched and of the upper pasture to be cleared are emblems of a struggle against declining strength. The meadow and pasture are signs of internal disorder, and they are counterpointed by an external order, "Rowes." Mary and Warren's farm is a separate, enclosed world.

Aside from its topographical elements, the scene includes the partial moon declining in the west. Perhaps it suggests the approaching death of Silas or the approach of death in general, but physically, the moon lights the action of Frost's little play, and when he covers it with the "little silver cloud" in the end, he may be dimming the light in acknowledgment of Silas' death. However, the "dim row" of Mary, cloud, and moon serves two other functions related to place in the poem. Physically, it defines another inside-outside relationship, with the cloud as barrier between Mary and the source of light; mentally it extends the multi-level consciousness in the poem beyond the enclosures of kitchen, doorway, farm, and region to a sort of celestial enclosure--the definition of a universe, albeit limited.

Frost's skillful use of place to support and even echo the dramatic action in "The Death of the Hired Man" demonstrates the dominant nature of his sense of place. Place

functions as the backdrop or frame for action. The setting is regional, approximate. The scene is developed largely in topographical terms. Frost's awareness of enclosure, of boundaries and limitations, turns the focus of the poem inward; thus, the sense may be said to be centripetal. These dominant characteristics are evident in other dramatic poems as well.

In "Home Burial," the inside-outside distinction is again central, but the subject and the physical setting of the poem are more notably interior. The poem concerns a man and wife whose communication with each other has broken down. The action occurs inside the house, though the view of the outside through a second floor window triggers the dramatic confrontation. The question of the poem is not whether or not to include an outsider, as in "The Death of the Hired Man," but whether or not the "home" can continue to enclose both the husband and wife after they become aware of their psychological distance from each other. In a sense, each is an outsider in the other's world.

Again, Frost establishes the significant placement of the poem in its opening lines:

He saw her from the bottom of the stairs
Before she saw him. She was starting down,
Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.
She took a doubtful step and then undid it

To raise herself and look again. He spoke
 Advancing toward her: "What is it you see
 From up there always?--for I want to know."
 She turned and sank on her skirts at that,
 And her face changed from terrified to dull. (PRF, 51)

Having climbed the stairs, the husband towers over his wife and looks out the window to discover the thing that so attracts her sight. What he sees is a family burial ground, framed by the window. Among the graves is a "child's mound," a landmark that recalls the recent loss of the couple's first child. When he speaks of the grave, Amy (the wife) responds,

"Don't, don't, don't,

don't," she cried
 She withdrew, shrinking from beneath his arm
 That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs.
 (PRF, 52)

There, at the door, she threatens to go "out of here" (PRF, 52).

These initial movements establish a range of place and a general course of action for the poem. The established relations of inside and outside, upstairs and downstairs, above and below, living and dead, and male and female, and also the barriers of windows, doors, and words, define the physical and mental space of the poem. The setting is again regional, but it is charged with significance beyond its physical arrangement. Amy's desire to escape is not only a desire to be outside of the house; she seeks an unrestrained expression of her grief; she seeks

separation from her husband, who would share the space of her grief. Though she wants a physical outside, she seeks a private enclosure of herself and her grief. Amy's perception of inside and outside is keen, as may be demonstrated by looking at the following passage from the poem. She speaks of having watched her husband as he dug the child's grave:

"I saw you from that very window there,
 Making the gravel leap and leap in air,
 Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly
 And roll back down the mound beside the hole.
 I thought, Who is that man? I didn't know you.
 And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs
 To look again, and still your spade kept lifting.
 Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice
 Out in the kitchen, and I don't know why,
 But I went near to see with my own eyes.
 You could sit there with the stains on your shoes
 Of the fresh earth from your baby's grave
 And talk about your everyday concerns.
 You had stood the spade up against the wall
 Outside there in the entry, for I saw it." (PRF, 53-54)

In effect, it is the husband's failure to enforce a separation of the places of life and death, outside and inside, that irritates her. He carries stains from the grave into the kitchen and speaks of everyday concerns in a context of grief.

Amy, on the other hand, is enclosed behind the window, behind the door, and away from the entryway where he has stood the shovel. Her enclosure is self-imposed, and when the husband attempts to invade it, she seeks escape and, thus, preservation of her self-imposed place apart. She

consciously tries to control the barriers that enclose her. She presumes an aloneness which is expressed in the statement that

"The nearest friends can go
With anyone to death, comes so far short
They might as well not try to go at all.
No, from the time when one is sick to death,
One is alone, and he dies more alone." (PRF, 54)

So when the husband pleads, "Let me into your grief," she cannot permit him in, and she, to prevent his intrusion, "must go-- / Somewhere out of this house" (PRF, 54-55). The door, the poem's key physical barrier and passage, opens wider, and she is gone. But this is not freeing action at all; her insistence on aloneness denies the mutually supportive enclosure of the home and the marriage and locks her in a cell of self-pity. The burial of the home seems certain, for, with Amy's flight, the "limits of home" are violated.¹³

Frost apparently recognizes the necessity of limits, and his attention to limits--to what has been called earlier a tension of outside and inside--is revealed not only in the subject presented dramatically in "Home Burial" but also in the place of the poem's action. The poem demonstrates again a careful arrangement of space so as to embody the central thematic struggle of the poem. The dramatic use of the setting also reflects the poetic tension of the work. The husband's need to climb the stairs to look

out the window at the grave before realizing his wife's preoccupation recalls the "pity" of the poet's having to speak "the literal" in "Revelation." Of course, Amy refuses to reveal herself until her husband does see. The movement of the couple up and down the stairs and the gradually opening door, not only recall the back and forth choric movement in Greek tragedy; they also imitate poetic rhythm and progression. The movement on the stairs between window and door--between confrontation and escape--spatializes the dramatic tension. Together, all of this apparent attention to place seems to demonstrate that Frost's sense of place, though regional, is quite keen, and that he used place with great effectiveness, even in conventional functions such as setting.

A third dramatic poem from North of Boston which demonstrates the use of place as setting is "A Hundred Collars." Unlike most of the poems in the book, and both of those just examined, "A Hundred Collars" does have an actual geographic setting. However, the poem's opening lines do not define the setting for the action; they introduce the key character, a professor. Part of the introduction names the town of his birth--Lancaster, New Hampshire--and explains his motive for returning there occasionally: to join his family for "a day or two" at "the old homestead" (PRF, 44). Lancaster is "a little town" (PRF, 44),

and the man, "a great scholar" (PRF, 44), is now a city dweller. The second verse paragraph defines the particular situation. Having started for Lancaster and missed a train, the man is laid over in Woodsville Junction, where he decides to spend the four-hour wait in the town's one hotel. There, in the room he must share with a stranger because the hotel is otherwise full, the central dramatic encounter of the poem occurs.

Why Frost chose to name Lancaster and Woodsville Junction is not certain; such specificity is not typical. Perhaps he merely intended to differentiate between them, and any names would have done as well. Perhaps the name Woodsville is intended to evoke a darkness comparable to that often associated with the woods in other poems,¹⁴ or perhaps the "-----ville Junction" is intended to suggest a diminutive of complexity, even from Lancaster. Whichever may be the case, it is the geographical relation of the place to the city of departure and to the small town of destination, and not the name itself, that is important to the thematic development of the poem. In one sense, the setting is a middle ground, a state of limbo for the professor, who is stranded there. In another sense, Woodsville Junction is a place of intersection, of trains and of persons. Both concepts--that of displacement (or limbo) and that of intersection--are thematically active in

the dramatic encounter of the poem. So is the principle of enclosure, physically and psychologically. The professor seeks the hotel because he wishes to avoid "sitting such an ordeal out" (PRF, 45) alone, yet he cowers from the human intersection that results when he chooses to share a stranger's hotel room.

The placement of the hotel and of the room within it are notable. There seems little doubt that the hotel is near the railroad tracks, for the town is spoken of as "a place of shrieks and wandering lamps / And cars that shock and rattle--and one hotel" (PRF, 45). Clearly, the hotel is established as the sole place of refuge from the chaos of the railroad. The room in the hotel is "up three flights of stairs / And down a narrow passage full of doors" (PRF, 45). This is not precisely a labyrinth, but it does suggest that the way to refuge is anything but straight and simple, and it emphasizes the room's physical enclosure.

Little is known about the room itself except that it contains two beds and a light. Such barrenness of detail, as noted earlier, allows a sharper focus on foreground action. Having established the situation and the encounter of the professor and Lafe, a traveling newspaper agent, Frost turns to their conversation. In effect, once they are enclosed together in one room, the action of the poem

becomes internal, both physically and figuratively. Lafe's natural casualness and openness is contrasted with the professor's assumed reserve. Lafe is willing to share what is his--not just his space, but his bottle of whiskey, and his outgrown collars, too--while the professor would prefer to maintain a recognized separation of spaces and lives. Spatially, the professor desires the maintenance of individual barriers; Lafe wants them down so that spaces can be shared. It is precisely this difference that causes Lafe to offer the gift of the collars and that causes the professor to reject it. The collars are physical enclosures, but the professor thinks of them as personal items, not to be shared or given to someone else. He rejects the idea of having his neck buttoned in someone else's space. What develops then, as the men converse in the room, is another key inside-outside distinction, not too different from those already examined in "The Death of the Hired Man" and "Home Burial." Eventually, Lafe leaves the room to the professor. He is not angered by his companion's reserve, but he recognizes his uneasiness, for Lafe knows "folks" and is, he says, entertained by them. But Lafe says also that he fears "scared people," and perhaps he perceives in the professor's manner a fear of human intersection that is threatening. As a result of Lafe's departure, the professor is left alone in the room,

far up and back in the hotel, as far away as possible from disclosure. As the poem concludes, his slight movement-- "The Doctor slid a little down the pillow" (PRF, 51)--is a movement even farther into the refuge of his private soace. It is a movement which emphasizes the tightening of the professor's enclosure, but it also illustrates clearly the centripetal consciousness of place in the poem. The professor's physical progression from city to Woodsville Junction, to hotel room, to bed, and finally down under the bed covers is a narrowing, enclosing movement, and it reflects the gradually constricting consciousness in the poem. A clearer dramatic expression of Frost's centripetal sense of place would be difficult to find.

Lafe, in his description of his "business," is concerned with inside and out. He likes "to find folks getting out in the spring" (PRF, 49). He measures their activity by its distance from the house--"near the house," "out further in the fields," "away in some back meadow" (PRF, 49). He knows that eventually "they all get driven in" (PRF, 49). But inside or out, the folks Lafe sees are fair game for his amusement, for as his horse is said to think, he is "sociable" (PRF, 49). He is at home wherever he is, and he goes "nowhere on purpose," but "happen[s] by" (PRF, 50). His mental space is an open one; the professor's is closed. Woodsville Junction is no dark or

middle space to Lafe, for he dwells in whatever place he finds himself, taking his bearings from the responses of other "folks." All places are the same to him so long as they are humanized. For the professor, Woodsville Junction is dark (it is no accident that at the end of the poem, he is left in the room alone, with the light out), and he must suffer through an agony of passage because he is so set on enforcing his own separation from his fellows.

This discussion of the poem's resolution is overly moralized, but intentionally so, because it illustrates the potential for employing place as a support for theme. The relation of place and theme is potentially rich in "A Hundred Collars," but just how much Frost intends the reader to assume of thematic resolution from the setting or the spatial constriction is not clear. What does seem clear is that in this poem, as in the two dramatic poems examined previously, the setting is carefully established, and that it does, if one wishes to see it, support or even embody the thematic conflict on which the dramatic action of the poem turns. To see this is to become more aware of Frost's dramatic narrative craft and to appreciate more fully the care with which some of the poems are constructed. It is also to understand more clearly Frost's sense of place expressed in the use of place as setting in his dramatic poems.

So far the attention to place used as setting has centered on longer dramatic conversation poems from North of Boston. It might focus elsewhere. "The Witch of Coos," "West-Running Brook," and "Two Look at Two" are only three of numerous poems from books after North of Boston that also employ settings supportive of the central thematic conflicts. And in the most formally dramatic of Frost's work, A Masque of Reason and A Masque of Mercy, setting is certainly more than incidental to the action. The Frost has set A Masque of Reason in "A fair oasis in the purest desert" (PRF, 473) may surprise readers expecting a rural New England scene, but this different topography still suggests the tensions of inside and out seen already in the relation of woods and clearing (and, after all, the desert landscape may be found in other poems¹⁵). The bookstore setting of A Masque of Mercy suggests a symbolic enclosure of human culture and knowledge, and the attention to the door (as in "Home Burial") again emphasizes an enclosure that reflects the drama's thematic development.¹⁶

Frost's use of place as setting for dramatic action is important in numerous shorter, less formally dramatic poems as well. "Out, Out--," "Brown's Descent," "The Runaway," and "Two Look at Two" are a few examples. In these, there is less dramatic development, thus less description of place. However, again the settings are clearly regional

(approximate) and largely topographical. Again, they reveal the sense of place that is typical in Frost's work.

In a number of Frost's other shorter poems, the key function of place is not as setting but as the subject, or central consideration of the poem. In such poems, place, usually as landscape, becomes the foreground figure from which the metaphorical, symbolical, and allegorical expressions of the poem derive their reference. Such poems often develop in a progression from an observer's (and reader's) perception of a physical image of place to his recognition of figurative meanings suggested by the image. They are not always purely meditative, and often they include action which is dramatically significant, but any action is likely to be a direct response to the place that is the subject of the poem; in other words, place is a foreground, not a background consideration.

The function of place in these poems, several of which are discussed below, is different from the functions in those poems discussed previously. The physical characteristics of the places and poet's presentation and apparent perception of them is not very different. Generally, Frost's sense of place is consistently regional, consistently topographic, consistently enclosing; the progression of his consciousness of place is consistently centripetal.

One of Frost's earliest poems to employ place as subject is "Rose Pogonias." Its opening section, which is not even a sentence, is as near to deliberate stage setting as can be found in Frost's poetry outside the masques:

A saturated meadow.
 Sun-shaped and jewel-small,
 A circle scarcely wider
 Than the trees around were tall;
 Where winds were quite excluded,
 And air was stifling sweet
 With breath of many flowers--
 A temple of the heat. (PRF, 13)

This definition of a ground (clearly an enclosed, limited one) against which to project a figure in action is, indeed, followed by the appearance of a persona, but the action is physically slight, and is a direct response to the nature of the place:

There we bowed us in the burning,
 As the sun's right worship is,
 To pick where none could miss them
 A thousand orchises;

. . .

We raised a simple prayer
 Before we left the spot,
 That in the general mowing
 That place might be forgot. (PRF, 13-14)

This is not a typical employment of place as setting for dramatic action. Frost has paid considerably more attention to the ground of action than to the action itself, and the place has become the central figure. "We bowed . . . To

pick . . . A thousand orchises [and] . . . raised a simple prayer" is all the poem's action. The attention is focused on the place, not as setting, but as subject. Physically interesting and extensively described, the small, enclosed meadow is not merely a supportive embodiment of the poem's tension; it is the central source of that tension. The shape, the topography, the climate, and the foliage of the place help to develop the sense of enclosure. The place is a chamber--"a temple of the heat"--cut off from other meadowland by trees; heat, moisture, sweetness, and color are enclosed in a highly restricted but overwhelmingly fecund landscape. The relation of images that fill and surround the meadow is highly suggestive. Both the circular meadow surrounded by tall trees and the spear-shaped grass mingling "confused" with flowers suggest an intrusion of male into female figures. The anatomical meaning of "orchises" and the metaphoric understanding of "mowing" extend the suggestion. The male sun's intrusion into the meadow is at least indirectly responsible for the "wings of color" that are observed by the personae. And the richness of "a thousand orchises" which will not even be missed evoke the poet's prayer that "the place might be forgotten," and thus preserved.¹⁷

Aside from the sexual implications of the landscape, "Rose Pogonias" provides a helpful example of Frost's sense

of place revealed in the employment of place as subject. The scene is enclosed, it is regional rather than specific, and it is topographically defined. Also, Frost's attention to place in the poem is centripetal. The first mention of the place--"A saturated meadow"--offers the broadest image. The designation of shape and the mention of enclosing trees narrows the consciousness of the landscape. The poet's bowing further restricts his sight to the grass and flowers. The prayer that "That place might be forgot" is a plea for an ultimate constriction of consciousness of the place. Clearly, the progression of consciousness is centripetal.

Such a celebration of the natural richness of landscape is perhaps never again so unrestrained in Frost's poetry as it is in "Rose Pogonias," but in a much later poem, "All Revelation," the poet uses a very different sort of landscape in a similar way to suggest a richness resulting from intrusion into a similarly enclosed and undiscovered space. This poem is "All Revelation." Its landscape is not at all physically extensive; the poem describes an imagined intrusion into a geode (typically quite small). However, the definition of the landscape and the meanings that derive from it are of great significance. The poem reveals an important relationship between perceiver (poet and/or reader) and the place perceived.

A head thrusts in as for the view,
 But where it is it thrusts in from
 Or what it is it thrusts into
 By that Cyb'laean avenue,
 And what can of its coming come,

And whither it will be withdrawn,
 And what take hence or leave behind,
 These things the mind has pondered on
 A moment and still asking gone.
 Strange apparition of the mind!

But the impervious geode
 Was entered, and its inner crust
 Of crystals with a ray cathode
 At every point and facet glowed
 In answer to the mental thrust.

Eyes seeking the response of eyes
 Bring out the stars, bring out the flowers,
 Thus concentrating earth and skies
 So none need be afraid of size.
 All revelation has been ours. (PRF, 332-33)

Having already paid so much attention to images of enclosure in this study, it should not be necessary to explain in great detail the principle of enclosure which is at work in the opening lines of this poem. The fact of intrusion--of thrusting in--is central: a head intrudes into an enclosure. Where the head comes from, what the nature of the enclosed space is, what can result from the intrusion, where the head will go when it exits, and what it will "take hence or leave behind"--these things are apparently of little consequence in the poem. The imagery of the opening stanzas is so highly sexual that, in one sense, all the questions surrounding the fact of entry may be answered in the minds of many readers. However, Frost's

attention is not wholly or even primarily directed to an act of sexual intercourse, but to the act of perceiving an enclosed space. This attention to perception of place raises some of the most basic questions of man's existence in the world--where did he come from? where will he go: what is the nature of his world? and, what is the significance of his living in the world?

As the poem turns from the very imprecise situation of its first two stanzas, it begins to develop a more precise physical image. The "impervious geode," which is said to have been entered, is typically a hollow, spheroidal rock whose inner walls are lined with crystals. Since geodes are typically quite small (rarely more than two or three inches in diameter), the interior "landscape" is not extensive, nor is actual physical, human entry possible; thus the intrusion is mental. The "mental thrust" is the key to understanding what Frost has to say about perception.

Having established the placement of images within a geode (clearly a figurative placement), Frost suggests the key relation of perceiver and landscape. The actual physical landscape consists of "crystals," point[s]," and "facet[s]," but the "eyes" of the viewer, which are actually the beams of the cathode ray, seek "the response of eyes." As a result, the "eyes" perceive not just crystals, but stars and flowers.¹⁸ The viewer figuratively

naturalizes or adapts his perception of the mysterious internal place to reflect his own physical "earth and skies." It is an act of poetic perception--of turning what is not known into what is known by an imaginative connection. The geode is thus rendered a microcosm; it is transformed by "the mental thrust" of human imagination.

If the sense of place which the present study associates with Frost is accurate, this act of poetic perception--of adapting a strange physical place to a familiar human environment--is an act of enclosure. Certainly it is an act of definition, or redefinition, of limits. Also, there is in this poem, an awareness of enclosure within enclosure, a relation applicable in both physical and mental spaces. Physically, the geode is an enclosure which is enclosed within the earth which is enclosed within a finite universe. Mentally, the perception of the geode is contained within perceptions of the other spaces and what is understood to be true of one is understood to be true of all--thus "none need be afraid of size." This is the principle which should allow a poet's consciousness of place to move from inside out as well as from outside in. In Frost's poetry, though, the typical movement, as in this poem, is inward or centripetal.

Frost's poems which employ place primarily as subject do not always seek precisely the same effects by their use

of place, but the poet's sense of place does reveal itself in ways which are quite consistent. It is helpful to consider a few specific poems to suggest the range of more particular functions and effects. The poems discussed below reveal such a range, and since they come from books published at different times, they also suggest a sustained concern of the poet for place as a poetic subject.

"The Black Cottage," from North of Boston, grows from a dramatic situation, but it uses place in a different way than the dramatic poems from that book which have been considered already. Instead of framing a dramatic encounter, the cottage of the title is a vehicle for the memories and wishes of one of the personae. In effect, description of place leads to meditation, with the cottage as the focal object.

In the poem, two men, passing along a country road after a rain shower, observe a cottage set back from the road among cherry trees and tall grass; they go closer and eventually look in at a window; one of the men, a minister, recalls the woman, now deceased, who lived in the cottage. All of this action is told in retrospect by the minister's companion. Several details about the appearance of the clapboard cottage establish a physical image. Its front is simple, "a door between two windows" (PRF, 55). The wooden door has been blackened by the shower. No one has lived in

the cottage for some time, and the path to it is now only "a vague parting in the grass / That led us to a weathered windowsill" (PRF, 55). Another of Frost's enclosures within enclosure is obvious in the relation of cottage to topography and foliage. The doorstep's boards are warping from the weather and from disuse. Inside, however, the furniture remains as it has been left by the sons of the woman who owned the cottage. The arrangement is not commemorative but practical; the sons "mean to come and summer here" (PRF, 55), but they haven't come. As the minister and his companion, the narrator, peer into the cottage, they see an image that directs the meditation spoken by the minister: "A buttoned hair-cloth lounge spread [ing] scrolling arms / Under a crayon portrait [of the woman's husband] on the wall" (PRF, 55). The interior scene recalls the woman's various relations to her husband, a soldier: the lounge may be altar, wailing wall, or symbol of support. Its "spread . . . arms," as they seem to undergird the portrait, symbolize the woman's strength and also the reverence she held for her husband and the ideals of the war in which he fought and died.

The minister is attracted to the idea of "how forsaken / A little cottage this has always been" (PRF, 56), and he speaks of "the world's having passed it by" (PRF, 56). Initially, these comments seem to relate to the isolation of

the woman, especially after her husband died in the war and her sons left home. She is recalled as a pillar of moral strength in her isolation, unchanging amid supposed "truths" that were "in and out of favor" (PRF, 58). As the meditation continues, the physical isolation of the cottage and the memory of the determined moral isolation of its former inhabitant combine to evoke a different landscape of isolation in the minister's mind. He describes his desired landscape in terms that recall Gaston Bachelard's argument that simple images reflect psychic states. The minister's desire for psychological isolation is clear from the scene he describes to his companion:

"I wish
 I could be monarch of a desert land
 I could devote and dedicate forever
 To the truths we keep coming back and back to.
 So desert it would have to be, so walled
 By mountain ranges half in summer snow,
 No one would covet it or think it worth
 The pains of conquering to force change on.
 Scattered oases where men dwelt, but mostly
 Sand dunes held loosely in tamarisk
 Blown over and over themselves in idleness.
 Sand grains should sugar in the natal dew
 The babe born to the desert, the sandstorm
 Retard mid-waste my cowering caravans--" (PRF, 58-59)

This is the desert that recurs in various poems in the Frost canon; it is the setting of the much later A Masque of Reason. Its sterility contrasts with the fecund images of "Rose Pogonias" and recalls images more often thought appropriate to the poems of T. S. Eliot than to those of Frost.¹⁹ But the image is actually not an unfamiliar one

in Frost's work. Here, and usually when the desert image occurs in a Frost poem (and in A Masque of Reason as well), it marks a psychological isolation which is not possible in real life, but which is imagined desirable by a persona who seems unable to deal comfortably with a more humanized landscape. Ironically, but perhaps not unusually, the persona who envisions the desert landscape here is a minister, a man whose task it is to deal with his fellowmen. When he wishes that sand grains should nourish "the babe born to the desert," he reveals the isolation to which he believes men are born and to which they should become accustomed. The desert kingdom enclosed by mountain ranges is a physically larger but no less isolated version of the kingdom of Amy in "Home Burial," or of the "great scholar" in "A Hundred Collars." It is a kingdom without human interaction or change. Its limits are recognizable and fixed and, it seems safe to say, subject in Frost's mind to the same destructive misanthropy seen in these other two poems.

Except for a final surprising movement, "The Black Cottage" ends with this image of desert enclosure and isolation which, for the minister, is of the essence of the cottage's own enclosure. As the extended meditation of the minister seems destined to draw more fully the details of the dream landscape which the immediate physical one

evokes, his attention is forced back to the immediate scene:

"There are bees in this wall." He struck the clap-boards,
 Fierce heads looked out; small bodies pivoted.
 We rose to go. Sunset blazed on the windows.
 (PRF, 59)

The tone of this final image of the cottage is almost violent. The striking of the boards, the "Fierce heads" looking out, and the pivoting of small bodies resemble acts of attack and threats of retaliation in war, and the blazing sun on the window panes stares savagely at the retreating personae.

As the central image of place in the poem, the black cottage demonstrates how enclosure can provide both security and threat of danger. The cottage itself is physically protected from view and perhaps from disturbances by the enclosing cherry trees. The contents of the cottage and the physical emblems of its past inhabitants are protected by the structure of the cottage itself. As the personae of the poem reach the cottage porch, it is initially a shared enclosure of security and memory of which they are conscious. However, as the poem progresses, and as the minister's meditation extends from a physical perception to a mental projection of enclosure, the tone of the poem grows more threatening. Enclosure is associated with isolation rather than security, danger rather than refuge.

As with ultimate enclosure in other Frost poems, the ultimate enclosures of "The Black Cottage" are associated with death. Inside the cottage, the limits of which the men do not penetrate, are the remnants of a life that is now dead; even within the cottage, the constricting levels of enclosure lead to the portrait of the dead husband, closed in the arms of the lounge. The ultimate mental enclosure of which the minister dreams is also associated with death, a death of the spirit. The desert surrounded by "mountain ranges half in summer snow" is a landscape whose permanence is achievable only in death. The final image of the cottage, its defending army at attention and its savage eyes blazing, indicates, perhaps, the truest nature of that enclosure, which is death.

Finally, it should be noted that Frost's use of place here seems consistent with what has been called his sense of place in other poems. The rural cottage is not far from a road, but where the road leads to or from is not mentioned. Such nonspecific location, along with the use of topographical rather than geographical references, demonstrates again the regional nature of Frost's sense of place. The attention to enclosure is central to the poem, both physically and mentally, and the progression of consciousness of place is dominantly centripetal. The fact of the narrator's telling the event after the fact demonstrates

that he is drawn inward to the experience and to the image of the cottage. And if the minister's association of desert landscape is an extension rather than a constriction of the image, his consciousness is finally brought back to a more constricted perception of place by the buzzing of the bees in the wall of the cottage.

Place as the subject of meditation is only one particular use of place as subject. Another is as a literal structure for allegorical or symbolic interpretation. A number of Frost's poems use place this way; among them are some of the best known poems in the Frost canon. One of these is "The Road Not Taken." A wood, two roads, undergrowth, grass, and leaves are the physical elements of the poem's landscape. They combine to form a structure on which depends the central event of the poem, a choosing between two alternative courses. The importance of place as the structure for the event is evidenced by the fact that the persona's memory is not so much of the event itself as of the place where it occurred. In effect, place and event are merged in a symbolic image of choice. The poem reaffirms assumptions about Frost's regional sense of place. The approximation of place allows the symbolic structure greater freedom than a specifically identified place would allow. But regionalism alone does not explain the poem's use of place. The symbolic experience of the

poem depends on the topographical structure of the landscape. To suggest that an equally effective symbolic choice of roads (the alternatives in the poem) could be made in a clearing, let alone in a desert landscape, is to ignore the physical limitation of sight that results from the landscape of woods and undergrowth. To present the act of choice in an urban setting would not only be atypical of Frost; it would overcomplicate the surface level perception of the symbolic experience and thus detract from the significance of it.

It may not be possible to say with certainty what particular values Frost intended the roads to represent. Perhaps the choice concerns vocation, social action, or a personal relationship; however, the particular values of the roads are not central to a correct reading of the poem. It is more important that the reader understand something of the nature of human perception and human choice. That the poet speaks of looking "down one road as far as I could / To where it bent in the undergrowth" (PRF, 105) indicates that he thinks a physical hint of what lies just ahead may affect his perception of alternatives and determine his choice (the scene recalls the persona in "The Vantage Point" as he looks "into the crater of the ant"). The physical vision is limited, however, and after accepting the simple fact that he "could not travel both [roads] /

And be one traveler" (PRF, 105), the poet makes his choice almost randomly.

A second significant aspect of the perception of the place is that the poet realizes he is enclosed by the limitation of his vision (physically by the trees and undergrowth). For Frost, this limitation is a fixed condition of human consciousness embodied in the poem's structure of place. Though "way leads on to way" (PRF, 105), the view ahead or back never becomes unrestricted.

The third important aspect of perception is concerned with looking back and the human tendency to rationalize and exaggerate remembered experiences. In "The Road Not Taken," the poet stands at a point in time between the event of choice and a supposed future explanation of the event; he projects a likely explanation:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I---
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference. (PRF, 105)

The projected explanation in this stanza clearly distorts the believable past tense account of the earlier stanzas of the poem. The distortion suggests a nonconforming courage in the poet that is not justified by the earlier account, and it assigns a greater significance to the choice than is justifiable with the actual event. These tendencies toward distortion are clearly seen in the

simplification of the symbolic image of place. The balance of options in the initial stanzas, with its attention to physical detail (color, time of day, and so forth) becomes the more regionalized "Two roads diverged in a wood" in the final stanza. The thoughtful consideration of the initial stanzas becomes act and consequence in stanza four.

Three different relations of poet to place can be identified in the poem. First, there is the persona in the woods in the act of choosing between two paths. Second, there is the different but unspecified place from which the persona addresses the reader in the present. Third, there is the "somewhere," still a different and farther removed place from which the persona will later retell the simplified account of the experience. The second and third places are actually expressions of time in terms of place. As the poet thinks of moving away from the place of the central event of choice, he realizes his own tendency to enclose the symbolic place of choice in his consciousness by giving artificial significance to both the event and its setting.

West-Running Brook (1928) includes an array of poems using place as subject. They vary both in their particular use of place and in their quality. The best employ place in a complex, symbolic way; the worst revert to a too-easy allegory perhaps explained by a combination of Frost's

retention of popular subject matter and his tendency toward didacticism (a tendency which shows itself earlier than this 1928 volume).

In "Spring Pools," a simple landscape is made an emblem of the natural law of struggle for survival. It is a typical Frost scene:

These pools that though in forests, still reflect
 The total sky almost without defect,
 And like the flowers beside them, chill and shiver,
 Will like the flowers beside them soon be gone,
 And yet not out by any brook or river,
 But up by roots to bring dark foliage on.

The trees that have it in their pent-up buds
 To darken nature and be summer woods---
 Let them think twice before they use their powers
 To blot out and drink up and sweep away
 These flowery waters and these watery flowers
 From snow that melted only yesterday. (PRF, 245)

Climate is an obvious factor in understanding the landscape, for the natural struggle for survival that governs the metamorphosis of the scene is made possible by the coming of spring and the melting of winter snow. The location is regional and defined topographically. The pools themselves are isolated, cut off from "any brook or river," and doomed to be soaked up by roots. The landscape may be defined as a limited space between trees that encloses pools and flowers. The metamorphosis from snow to pools of water to flowers and, finally, to trees is a movement toward both physical and moral darkness. The pools disappear--their water seeping into the ground--and so do the flowers that

depend on the water. Only the dark trees are deeply enough rooted to drink the water then. They "drink up" the flowers' water and shade out their light. Beauty gives way to strength, light to darkness. The vision of sky is twice obscured from the persona by the trees--once in their drinking up the reflecting pools and again in their spreading of dark branches that shade the ground. Both acts enforce and even further constrict the enclosed perception of the poem's landscape. The tightening of enclosure reflects the centripetal nature of Frost's sense of place. The early image of the pools reflecting the sky is quite open, but soon the water goes to "watery flowers" and then to "dark foliage." The gradual darkening of the scene marks the inward movement of the poet's consciousness.

In "Once by the Pacific," Frost uses topographical and climatological references to define a landscape which reflects, in the confrontation of its elements with each other, a natural struggle for dominance not too different from that seen in "Spring Pools."

The shattered water made a misty din.
Great waves looked over others coming in,
And thought of doing something to the shore
The water never did to land before.
The clouds were low and hairy in the skies,
Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes.
You could not tell, and yet it looked as if
The shore was lucky in being backed by cliff,
The cliff in being backed by continent;

It looked as if a night of dark intent
 Was coming, and not only a night, an age.
 Someone had better be prepared for rage.
 There would be more than ocean-water broken
 Before God's last Put out the Light was spoken.
 (PRF, 250)

The place is the shore of the Pacific; the tide is coming in. Why Frost names the Pacific in particular in the title is uncertain (the poem is otherwise typically regional); perhaps, the poem's progression toward an implied darkness requires a western setting, with its associations of sunset (physically) and death (symbolically). The elements of the physical landscape are topographical--ocean, clouds, shore, cliff, continent--but they are in mortal conflict. The clouds and waves threaten the land as they approach it, but the land fortress seems prepared for the assault. The tension between ocean and land is a natural one, but in this poem, it is given epic proportions. The place of the poem becomes the world, not just the shore, and the nature of the struggle transcends the physical and becomes a struggle of permanence and flux.

"A Brook in the City" demonstrates the use of place to symbolize a sociological-psychological phenomenon--the tension of rural-urban confrontation.²⁰ A rural landscape is seen chafing under its urban domination:

The farmhouse lingers, though averse to square
 With the new city street it has to wear
 A number in. But what about the brook
 That held the house in an elbow-crook? (PRF, 231)

The house is now mechanically placed by its address number, not by its relation to a humanized nature. The persona goes on to explain the city's power to dispose of rural elements:

The meadow grass could be cemented down

. . .

The apple trees be sent to hearthstone flame.
(PRF, 231)

The brook, too, has been driven under, diverted into a city sewer, "In fetid darkness still to live and run" (PRF, 231). What is suggested finally is the ability of the brook to survive its unnatural capture.

No one would know except for ancient maps
That such a brook ran water. But I wonder
If from its being kept forever under,
The thoughts may not have risen that so keep
This new-built city from both work and sleep.
(PRF, 231)

The city has effected only a cosmetic change. Its order may alter the course but cannot destroy the power of the brook's natural flow. The landscape of the poem is not merely sociological; it is psychological as well, and the brook which once flowed freely as the unrestricted expression of natural forces is now a subconscious disturbance of the order of cement and pavement. The suppressed brook's "thoughts" exert from below a natural force that troubles "both work and sleep." Its power is subverted, but not unfelt. As do so many Frost poems, "A Brook in the City"

offers an image of enclosure. Physically, the city has enclosed, or presumed to enclose, the brook. As is often the case, the defining of limits creates a tension of inside and out, and there is a struggle between elements, in this case, water and concrete. There is little doubt that the poet's sympathies lie with the brook in this poem; both wish to break out of the enclosure which the city's growth has defined. Likewise, there seems little doubt that the brook will continue to exert a force on the city, albeit a subtle, psychological one. However, it seems fairly certain that the city will continue to enclose the brook. Though Frost might wish the poem to end with a breaking out of diverted nature, he actually ends it by turning inward to himself and to the psychological power of the brook. The poem is, thus, centripetal.

In "Directive," one of Frost's best poems, the brook is again a source of continuing life and order amid an otherwise confused and diminished landscape. It is a poem of exploration, of pilgrimage to a place beyond time where may be found "your waters and your watering place" (PRF, 379). The poem's first movement is

Back out of all this now too much for us,
 Back in a time made simple by the loss
 Of detail [,] (PRF, 377)

but the movement is finally not so much back in time as it is into the imagination. The journey goes to

a house that is no more a house
 Upon a farm that is no more a farm
 And in a town that is no more a town. (PRF, 377)

Physically, the topography is rugged, "The chisel work of an enormous Glacier" (PRF, 377), but the land is generally covered by woods; they have "shaded out" the apple trees that once marked human habitation. Frost is not speaking of only a physical landscape here. A key to his imaginative engagement with place is found in the advice to

Make yourself up a cheering song of how
 Someone's road home from work this once was,
 Who may be just ahead of you on foot
 Or creaking with a buggy load of grain. (PRF, 378)

The "cheering song" is the activity of the poet, and his road is his imagination. The key to such exploration is to become "lost enough to find yourself" (PRF, 378); having done that, it is possible to "make yourself at home" (PRF, 378). The place which the poem describes is certainly as much mental as physical landscape. The playthings of the children are memories of innocence. The shrinking field and cellar illustrate the foreshortenings of consciousness. And the brook has the power to open up the consciousness; it is both "destination" and "destiny" (PRF, 378). The "drinking goblet like the Grail" (PRF, 379) is enchanted; stolen from the ruins of the children's "house of make-believe" (PRF, 378), it bears the drinker a return to innocence, an invitation to "Drink and be whole again beyond confusion" (PRF, 379).

Like the goblet, the landscape of "Directive" is visible only to those who believe in it, whose imagination allows them to see it. Despite numerous details of place that might be catalogued from the poem and some historical allusions that might explain the landscape's present condition, the place is finally in the mind, as Frost's best landscapes seem to be. Natural elements are present; indeed, they are vital. But they are arranged, simplified. They are invested with moral and dramatic tension suggested both by dynamic interplay of natural elements and by exertions against limits either naturally or artificially established.

In this discussion of Frost's use of place, it has been repeatedly demonstrated that the poet's perception of place is dominantly regional and topographical, and that his consciousness of place is enclosing and centripetal. These characteristics define his sense of place. The regional, topographic perception results in an approximate perception of place that allows the poet to emphasize either dramatic action or symbolic associations without restricting the reference of the poem to a specific geography. The poet's centripetal consciousness is typically revealed in either his own or his persona's attentions to increasingly narrow spaces or in the movement of his dramatic characters from broader, more open physical spaces to narrower, more

constricted physical spaces. The progression from the broad view of the village and graveyard to the narrow view of the ant crater in "The Vantage Point" is a memorable example of the first sort; the progression of the professor in "A Hundred Collars" from village to hotel to room to bed (finally, completely under the bed covers) is an example of the second sort. Barriers and enclosures need not be threatening when they are understood as providing security or refuge; so understood, they may provide a sense of freedom that is not possible without them. However, in Frost, enclosure typically implies limitation rather than refuge, and the characteristic centripetal tendency of the poet's consciousness (the poem's mental space) reveals a poetic vision of limited human understanding and achievement. Amy in "Home Burial" and the minister in "The Black Cottage" are but two of many figures in the poems whose lives are enclosed by such limitations of understanding.

The characteristics of Frost's sense of place are partially determined by the dramatic nature of much of his poetry and the dramatic necessity of a finite background for action. It may be partially determined by familiarity with a geographical region--rural New England--whose topography limits the range of physical vision and, thus, tends naturally to enclose spaces. Failures of communication and achievement in his personal life may have contributed to a

tendency to view the possibilities of human life as figuratively limited and centripetal rather than open and expanding. Whatever determines Frost's sense of place, its reflection in the poetry is quite consistent, and an awareness of it should be helpful in understanding individual poems.

Notes

¹Except perhaps for Thoreau with *Walden Pond* and Faulkner with *Mississippi* (associations perhaps even more misleading than Frost's with New England), it is difficult to think of another major American writer who is so thoroughly tied to a region as to permit the successful marketing of books or articles which do little more than use the poet's name and "life" as a springboard for photographic or artistic essays. Among the most recent of such pieces dealing with Frost is DeWitt Jones and David Bradley's Robert Frost: A Tribute to the Source (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), a book of photographs which claims some grounding in the poet's work, but which is clearly more the photographer's than the poet's vision of New England.

²Linda Wagner's Robert Frost: The Critical Reception (Philadelphia: Burt Franklin & Co., Inc., 1977) provides a generous sampling of early reviews. Among them are two which are notable, both for their writers and for their comments on Frost's relation to New England and farming. Ezra Pound's review of A Boy's Will, in Poetry, 2 (May 1913), 72-74, includes the comment that the volume "has the tang of the New Hampshire woods." F. S. Flint, also reviewing A Boy's Will, in Poetry and Drama, 1 (June 1913), 250, says, "Mr. Robert Frost's poetry is so much a part of his life that to tell his life would be to explain his poetry."

³John Kemp, Robert Frost and New England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 134 ff.

⁴Of the first sort, Richard Poirier's Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing is only one very recent example. Of the second sort, the responses to the 1959 remarks of Lionel Trilling and to the appearance of Lawrance Thompson's definitive biography (especially the second volume) demonstrate clearly the resistance to a revision of Frost's folksy farmer-poet image.

Specifically in regard to a reevaluation of Frost and the matter of place, three fairly recent works are particularly relevant to the present study. Poirier's book, perhaps the most important single critical study of the poet's work to date (except Thompson's biography), recognizes the importance of place in the poetry and opens critical consideration of the poetry to new perspectives. Poirier is especially concerned with a tension between desires for

confinement and freedom, or what he designates as "home" and "extravagance"; his choice of terms owes much to Thoreau, who used them in Walden. For Poirier, this is the central thematic tension in Frost's poetry, and it is to be found in numerous poems, often in terms of landscape, topography or elements of dramatic setting.

A more recent book is John Kemp's Robert Frost and New England. Kemp attempts to delineate the actual Robert Frost from the mythic one by identifying the authentic elements of New England which are to be found in the poems. Its central concern is whether or not Frost is an authentic New England regionalist, and he concludes that Frost's rural New England regionalism is neither uniform nor as widely employed in the poems as generally thought. He limits the number of poems in which this concept of regionalism is valid to about fifty, including nearly every poem in North of Boston, which he judges both the best and the most regionally authentic of Frost's volumes.

A third book, Frank Lentricchia's Robert Frost: Modern Poetics and the Landscapes of Self, does not always seem to know whether it is a philosophical, a psychological, or a formal study, but the intersection of perspectives helps to suggest new readings of the poems. Using Bachelard's The Poetics of Space as a touchstone, Lentricchia grounds his considerations of landscape in key images from Frost's poems--house, brook, and woods. He suggests that each image is an emblem of the poet's consciousness and that they function symbolically in landscapes which are more internal than external. This sounds very much like the present study's presumption that the poet's consciousness or sense of place reflects an awareness of both physical and mental space. And, in a conclusion that recalls the spatial form thesis of Joseph Frank in his essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," Lentricchia argues that Frost's attention to such spatial images proves him a central modern poet. Lentricchia's work is richly suggestive, and there is no mistaking the importance of the key images that the author examines, but the "central modern" thesis results in several misreadings of individual poems. Despite this problem, his work, and especially its attention to the phenomenological perception of structures of place, helps to inform the present study of Frost's uses of place.

⁵The poem first appeared as the introductory poem in North of Boston in 1914. Frost put it first in his collected editions of 1930 and 1939 and in his Complete Poems in 1949. It fills the same position in Edward Connery Lathem's edition

of the poetry, The Poetry of Robert Frost (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), the source of the poetry for this study.

⁶Lathem, The Poetry of Robert Frost, p. 1. Subsequent notations to Frost's poetry will be from this text, but will be cited by PRF and page number in the text of the chapter.

⁷Poirier, The Work of Knowing, p. 89. This explanation helps to explain Poirier's use of the term: ". . . extra-vagance and extravagance--I use the terms often interchangeably to mean both a physical or mental wandering or a verbal or rhetorical one--that always finds its way home. . . ."

⁸Kemp, pp. 64 ff.

⁹Poirier, p. 119. Poirier uses the term "cinematic" to describe Frost's genius of dramatic description in the first few lines of "The Fear" and in the opening of "Home Burial," but it seems an appropriate technical reference for many of Frost's place descriptions.

¹⁰It is just this transformation that is suggested by the title of Lentricchia's study of Frost's poetry.

¹¹O. W. Firkins, "Poets of the Day," The Nation, 101 (August 18, 1915), 228; reprinted in Linda Wagner, ed., Robert Frost: The Critical Reception, p. 8.

¹²This statement is based on an assumption that, at least for an active reader, any poem functions on both a specific and a general level. If the poet supplies the specific, the active reader will attempt to generalize the image or experience; if the poet supplies the general, the active reader will project the specific into it. If the poet provides both and demands that connections be made in a particular way, the active reader may reject the poem as too direct or too didactic. In one sense, this assumption is a dynamic extension into the act of reading of the principle of T. S. Eliot's conception of meaning and objective correlative.

¹³Poirier, p. 134.

¹⁴Lentricchia, pp. 87-100.

¹⁵The desert landscapes have received less attention from critics than the more typical New England landscapes, but the recurrence of the desert (e.g., in "The Black Cottage" and "Desert Places") may suggest that Frost's concern with place is not that of a simple regionalist; rather, he is concerned with the symbolic values of his landscapes, and, when the desert is needed to project the desired values, it will not be excluded because it is not thoroughly consistent with other New England settings.

¹⁶The enclosure in A Masque of Mercy is a place of symbolic consciousness not too different from similar settings in Samuel Beckett's Endgame or W. H. Auden's The Age of Anxiety.

¹⁷Actually, and from the testimony of several other poems ("Directive" and "The Last Mowing" among them), to forget the meadow is to give it up to trees, for the failure to maintain a clearing is consistently a prelude to a reversion of clearing to woods.

¹⁸A cathode ray shined on the crystals inside a geode does cause those crystals to assume a florescent glow and might make them take on a star-like appearance.

¹⁹Lentricchia, p. 80. Lentricchia compares the desert landscapes of Frost's poems with Eliot's wasteland image and suggests that their likeness helps to demonstrate Frost's modernity.

²⁰John Kemp argues for the historical accuracy of this phenomenon in the New England that Frost inhabited after coming from California, and the displacement of native New England farmers during the past few years is a sort of reenactment of the phenomenon.

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS: LOCALISM AND DISCLOSURE

It is not difficult to understand how a reader of William Carlos Williams who is familiar with only the poet's short, highly imagistic poems might presume that place is a matter of little importance to Williams. The immediacy of images like those in "The Red Wheelbarrow," "Young Sycamore," and "The Locust Tree in Flower," for example, makes them seem placeless. However, place is a matter of great importance to Williams, and it has become a matter of frequent concern for his critics. As Joseph Riddel argues very effectively in the introduction to The Inverted Bell, his "sense of place" is one of the "central terms of Williams' poetics."¹

Williams' sense of place is founded on an intensely vivid perception of the local which, instead of limiting or enclosing the immediate image, frees it from external or contextual references. In this way, it is related to his desire to achieve new poetic forms and, ultimately, a new language which would disclose rather than enclose the nature of reality. It was the failure to seek such a new form and the tendency to enclose rather than free the

consciousness that Williams objected to in T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land. Williams' statement about Eliot's poem in the Autobiography discloses key ideas related to his sense of place:

Critically Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of an escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art form itself--rooted in the locality which should give it fruit. [my italics] I knew at once that in certain ways I was most defeated.²

Williams' desire for a new art form and his persistent belief that the new art must grow from the familiar--the local--are at the heart of his poetry, and together they do much to explain the sense of place. His concern for the local often makes Williams appear to be a poet without reverence for traditional aesthetic tastes and formal discriminations. These tendencies led Wallace Stevens to call him "anti-poetic";³ they led recent Williams biographer Reed Whittlemore to speak of the poet's "aesthetic of the ugly."⁴ They help to account for the difficulty of defining a "body" of poems,⁵ since the search for forms "rooted in . . . locality" sometimes took Williams outside the bounds of formal poetry. Critic Philip Rahv has accused him of opting for a "phenomenology" instead of an objectively realizable form, both in his fiction and in his poetry.⁶ If Williams' tendencies toward localism, openness of form, and disclosure of immediate reality sometimes confound the

critics, they help to define his sense of place, a sense which is of primary concern in the following discussion of some of his poems.

By following the discussion of some of Frost's poems with a discussion of some of Williams', the present study hopes to emphasize the openness (of both form and consciousness) and the concern for immediate locale which typify Williams' poems. These characteristics are clear, however, even apart from the foil of Frost's enclosing, regional sense of place. Williams consciously worked against the tendency to enclose and thus to make artificial or inflexible the perceptions of reality. He balked at suggestions that poems should have their meanings locked up in histories or mythologies or formal structures; it is this, also, that he objected to in Eliot's The Waste Land. Instead, Williams repeatedly invoked the motto by which he is widely though inadequately known: "No ideas but in things!"⁷ By this he does not mean to endorse an exclusive materialism that opposes thought; instead he means to emphasize the need for localism, for knowing what is immediately at hand. Williams does not intend to advocate insularity. Quite the contrary is true. To him, being local is "being attached with integrity to actual experience."⁸ Remaining local may require ascending "to a plane of almost abstract design," "to writing . . . as an art in

itself,"⁹ but this is only a secondary responsibility; before such abstraction is achieved, "what actually impinges on the senses must be rendered as it appears, by use of which, only, and under which untouched, the significance has to be disclosed."¹⁰

In further understanding what Williams means by "local," the comments of Joseph Riddel are very helpful. He says that

Williams' insistence on a poetry of the "local" must be understood as something considerably more significant than mirroring the details of a particular geography. . . . His concern, he said [in a letter to Henry Wells], was to bring an "environment to expression," to reveal its social nexus. The social involves relation, communication, and thus place.¹¹

Riddel argues that Williams found his example of a truly local poet in Edgar Allan Poe, who sought not representation of place and experience, but a "true center"¹² from which a "new locality"¹³ may be explored and defined. This center was in no particular geographical place; it was in the consciousness of the poet. Riddel goes on to say that "The local for Williams is place qua locus, the 'acme point of white penetration' where discrete lines converge and connect scattered and remote points."¹⁴ This understanding of "local" demonstrates that Williams thinks of place as the point of intersection and interpenetration of ideas, words, interpretation, and historic events, as well as of

physical elements such as rivers, roads, and persons. Place, for Williams, exists in mental space as much as or more than in physical space.

Williams generally agreed with John Dewey that there is no universal except in the local.¹⁵ Writing about classical ideals--universals--in "The Basis of Faith in Art," he says that "the mind is merely enslaved by these ideals, these ideas, unless we can relate them, here, now, in our environment, to ourselves and our day. This requires invention. . . ." ¹⁶ Such invention marks Williams' poems; individually and collectively, the poems attend to the immediate consciousness of reality rather than to its mimetic or symbolic values. Figurative or symbolic uses of language are avoided as barriers to clear perception of place or object. If disclosure is the job of the poet, as Williams presumes it to be, then it follows that indirect expression is less open or freeing than expression which is direct and unfigured. As J. Hillis Miller explains, Williams does not intend to make a poem mirror reality; the poem is itself a reality, separate from the object or place that it examines.¹⁷ For Williams, the poem "focuses the world. It is practical and comprehensive and cannot be the accompaniment of other than an unfettered imagination. . . . To limit is to kill it."¹⁸

Poetry then depends on "an unfettered imagination," but as Williams explains in the opening prose section of Spring and All, the reader, as well as the poet, cannot easily maintain such unfetteredness:

There is a constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world. . . . the whole world is between: Yesterday, tomorrow, Europe, Asia, Africa--all things removed and impossible, the tower of the church at Seville, the Parthenon.¹⁹

Williams believed that "nearly all writing, up to the present [1923]" had helped to maintain this "barrier between sense and the vaporous fringe which distracts the attention from its agonized approaches to the moment" (Imaginations, 89). The result of such writing, he believed, was the creation of a beautiful but misleading illusion, an unauthentic place. His dedication is to

the imagination. . . . To refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live there is but a single force--the imagination. This [Spring and All] is its book. I myself invite you to read and to see. (Imaginations, 89)

This is a proclamation of disclosure--of self-disclosure and of world-disclosure. It announces the dominant progression of consciousness in Williams' poems, and it helps to define the poet's sense of place as local and disclosing. It is this sense which is demonstrated in the poems discussed below.

Williams' attention to the immediate has been allied with Ezra Pound's imagism and with Louis Zukofsky's objectivism. The first association could help to explain the recording of a seemingly isolated moment in a poem's image; the second could help to explain the poet's attention to things without recourse to their contextual frame. Both associations reinforce an assumption of J. Hillis Miller about Williams' poems: that there is a merging of subject and object in Williams' poetry.²⁰ In regard to place, this means that attention to a landscape, or more often to a particular element of a landscape, is so intensely localized that the perception of the element obscures or denies its context. There is no awareness of actual and perceived but only of the immediate perception of reality. Poet and world are one. Poem and place are one. The barrier between the reader and his consciousness is broken down. There occurs a translation of physical into mental space.

"The Wanderer," the opening poem in Williams' Collected Earlier Poems and a sort of advent poem for his mature poetic practice, demonstrates dramatically that the poet's attention to place combines physical and mental aspects and that the merger or interpenetration of poet-perceiver and world leads to disclosure. The poem's initial

section, "Advent," describes a denial of "the woods" that would enclose and fetter the poet's perception:

Even in the time when as yet
 I had no certain knowledge of her
 She sprang from the nest, a young crow,
 Whose first flight circled the forest.
 I know now how then she showed me
 Her mind, reaching out to the horizon,
 She close above the tree tops.
 I saw her eyes straining at the new distance
 And as the woods fell from her flying
 Likewise they fell from me as I followed
 So that I strongly guessed all that I must put from me
 To come through ready for the high courses.²¹

The movement of the young crow defines space and destroys enclosure with a flight that explores not just physical space but the space of "her mind" as well. The bird--the poet's imagination and, according to Thomas Whitaker, a sort of "grandmother muse"²²--leads the poet on a journey of discovery and disclosure. Section two, "Clarity," opens with the launching of the poet's own flight:

"Come!" cried my mind and by her might
 That was upon us we flew above the river
 Seeking her. . . . (CEP, 4)

The poet realizes that

For me one face is all the world!
 For I have seen her at last, this day,
 In whom age in age is united--
 . . .
 . . . It is she
 The mighty, recreating the whole world,
 This is the first day of wonders!
 (CEP, 4)

The phrase "one face is all the world" echoes Williams' belief that the local is the universal; this announcement of discovery--"I have seen her at last"--demonstrates Williams' realization that attention to the immediate is the key to "recreating the whole world."

The poet's flight carries him on to "Broadway"²³ and then "Out into the deserted streets of Paterson" (CEP, 6), where the bird reappears to him and urges him to "go on!" He goes "into the city, / Out again, baffled onto the mountain! / Back into the city!" (CEP, 6). In a catalog of images that recalls the poetry of Whitman, Williams names elements of the landscape. The landscape is not defined topographically or geographically so much as in terms of immediate visual images--of bread lines, of "flat skulls," of "ugly legs of the young girls," of "faces all knotted up like burls on oaks" (CEP, 7). His flight takes him into the "Jersey mountains" and over the Hackensack of his boyhood. Finally, the bird leads him "down the hill to the river / As on any usual day, any errand" (CEP, 10). The river is "the filthy Passaic" (CEP, 11), but the errand which brings the bird and poet to it is unusual; it is an errand of baptism, the baptism of the poet's consciousness in "that filthy river" (CEP, 11). The baptism dramatically enacts the interpenetration of poet and immediate world; by such interpenetration, disclosure is achieved.

Then she, leaping up with a fierce cry:
 "Enter, youth, into this bulk!
 Enter, river, into this young man!"
 Then the river began to enter my heart,
 Eddying back cool and limpid
 Into the crystal beginning of its days.
 But with the rebound it leaped forward:
 Muddy, then black and shrunken
 Till I felt the utter depth of its rottenness
 The vile breadth of its degradation
 And dropped down knowing this was me now.
 But she lifted me and the water took a new tide
 Again into the older experiences,
 And so, backward and forward,
 It tortured itself within me
 Until time had been washed finally under,
 And the river had found its level
 And its last motion had ceased
 And I knew all--it became me. (CEP, 12)

What occurs here is the dissolution of the poet's individual ego within the matter of his immediate, common, even "filthy" world; the mental is dissolved in the physical, the universal in the local.

The actual geography of the poem is the geography of Williams' life--Hackensack, Paterson, the Jersey mountains, the Passaic River. The physical scene shifts because the poem is a journey, a wandering. But the journey does not lead so much to a physical as to a mental destination. What is achieved is a metamorphosis of perception. The climactic event is an interpenetration--not an enclosure but a dissolution of poet and world into each other--and it makes possible what Williams calls, in the poem's final line, "the new wandering" (CEP, 12). The immediate place is disclosed as all places; the physical is disclosed as the

mental, the poetic imagination wanders amid the confluence, attending to the immediate or local, aware that it is in the place of the universal.

It is of little value to speak of Williams' use of physical place as dramatic setting, except to say that the backdrop for the act of perception recorded in his poems is the physical world that he actually inhabited. Even in a poem like "The Wanderer," a much more dramatic work than is typical of Williams, place is not employed as supportive physical backdrop as it is in Frost's North of Boston poems. Instead, place--the elements and images of the physical landscape and its associations in the poet's consciousness--is the locus of the poem: it is a reality to be perceived, penetrated, disclosed, expressed, focused.

After "The Wanderer," Williams' poetry became more and more concerned with an unfettered perception and consciousness of the immediate scene. As a result, many of his poems seem to be mere descriptions of objects, scenes, or single elements of place without regard for either a contextual frame for or a symbolic extension of the central object or image. In such poems, the object perceived is the physical place of the poem.

"The Red Wheelbarrow" from Spring and All and "Young Sycamore" are two of the most often discussed examples of Williams' imagistic poems. In both, the poet's consciousness

is so intensely focused on the objects of immediate attention that no context or frame for the images is perceivable. True, the wheelbarrow is "beside the white chickens" (Imaginations, 138), but where are they? The sycamore is "between the wet / pavement and the gutter" (CEP, 332), but of what significance is that? Both arrangements could easily be incidental. Certainly the arrangements are not intended as enclosures in the sense that Frost uses enclosure. Williams' consciousness is so sharply fixed on the wheelbarrow and the young sycamore that awareness of their backgrounds drops away. The poet defines the objects and places them by focusing attention on them; their place is in his consciousness. So with the reader of such poems; since the poem is itself only another object made with different materials than the wheelbarrow, it and its images exist only as the reader allows them to occupy a place in his consciousness. To avoid setting up barriers of the sort he mentions in the opening of Spring and All, the poet usually presents images without figurative interference. Only with the "hornlike" reference at the end of "Young Sycamore" does he even hint at anything beyond the immediately physical. The most significant effects of such presentation are to free the images from a physical setting and from barriers of allusory meaning and to disclose the object as itself and as a locus in the poet's mental

space; the attentions of both poet and reader are localized.

The poet does not disclose a precise meaning for the images in either "The Red Wheelbarrow" or "Young Sycamore." To do so would be to establish a barrier around the reader's perception. Instead, he prefaces the development of each image with a phrase that testifies to the urgency and importance of each: "so much depends," in "The Red Wheelbarrow," and "I must tell you," in "Young Sycamore." Precisely what depends and precisely why he must tell are left to speculative readers accustomed to grounding a poem's meaning outside the poem itself. For Williams, the importance and urgency are to be found in the sheer immediacy of the images and in the freedom that derives from such localized perception.

Williams further disparages enclosure, endorses immediacy, and expresses amazement at the wonder of things in themselves in a poem entitled "Pastoral":

The little sparrows
hop ingenuously
about the pavement
quarreling
with sharp voices
over those things
that interest them.
But we who are wiser
shut ourselves in
on either hand
and no one knows
whether we think good
or evil.

Meanwhile,
 the old man who goes about
 gathering dog-lime
 walks in the gutter
 without looking up
 and his tread
 is more majestic than
 that of the Episcopal minister
 approaching the pulpit
 of a Sunday.

These things
 astonish me beyond words. (CEP, 124)

The poem establishes two sets of contrasting images in very common, nonspecific settings, then responds to them in the final coda. The sparrows quarrel on the pavement without regard to anything outside their immediate interests. The old man walks the gutter with his head down, unconcerned with his appearance. In contrast, the "we who are wiser" (clearly an ironic reference) and "the Episcopal minister" do not act spontaneously; they are enclosed by thoughts of "good / or evil" and by the expectations of parishioners. The poet's response to his perception of these contrasts is an astonishment "beyond words"--one that does not attempt to enclose the meanings of the immediate images, though it does seem to express a preference for the freedom of hopping "ingenuously / about the pavement" and walking head down "in the gutter" rather than for the constriction of being "shut . . . in / on either hand" by morals or pews of moralistic church goers. For the reader, the images are left free of specific external references, free to be interpreted as wished, and the poem itself becomes the place in

mental space where all valid interpretations converge. The poem, not as representation of a physical reality but as a thing itself, is the locus of the poet's and the reader's consciousnesses. Figuratively, the poem is a place.

Observation--the act of vivid perception--is a quality that Williams found embodied in all that he considered great poetry. From this it follows that one of the chief functions of physical place in his own poetry is as the object of intense observation. The effect is that the poem becomes a mental place in which the physical place is explored. Williams speaks of the poet's need to observe in a prose section of The Descent of Winter:

. . . there's too often no observation in it, in poetry. It is a soft second light of dreaming. The sagas were not like that, they seem to have been made on the spot. . . . The good poetry is where the vividness comes up "true" like in prose but better. That's poetry. . . . poetry should strive for nothing else, this vividness alone, per se, for itself. The realization of this has its own internal fire that is "like" nothing. Therefore the bastardy of the simile. That thing, the vividness which is poetry by itself, makes the poem. There is no need to explain or compare. Make it and it is a poem. This is modern, not the saga. There are no saga--only trees now, animals, engines. There's that. (Imaginations, 247-48)

The "that" of which he writes is the immediate world, the proper place for observation, so it is not surprising that several of his poems seem to be records of immediate

observation of actual scenes in his world. Rarely do the poems make reference to that world by name.

As was noted in the opening remarks of this chapter, the immediacy of some images in the poems is so intense as to make precise geographic placement indeterminable and perhaps irrelevant. J. Hillis Miller's suggestion that Williams' images result from the merging of subjective and objective spaces into "a region of copresence"²⁴ helps to explain this placelessness in phenomenological terms; intense attention to physical place--locale--results in perception--sensational and imaginative--that joins physical and nonphysical aspects of the place in the locus of the image. Ultimately, the poem and the place in the poem exist in the consciousness of the poet and, perhaps, of the reader.

Does this indicate that place is, after all, not important to Williams' poetry? No, but it does mean that the terms for a discussion of Williams' sense of place must be different than those used in the previous discussion of Frost's sense of place. Frost is aware of place largely in its physical aspects. Place for him is landscape or scene or setting, described largely in topographical terms, and, as a result, his consciousness of place (even of figurative enclosure) is a more or less mimetic or symbolic representation of physical place. He uses place in what Williams

might call a representational manner. Williams himself conceives of place less representationally. His attention to the local or immediate is no more physical than mental, no more objective than subjective. His use of place is as subject, but because his understanding of place is as a locus of images and ideas, place is not a subject to be merely represented in physical terms (for Williams, such a treatment would be more prose than poetry). A place's dimensions are mental as well as physical, so place must be located in the mind.²⁵

In order to see a difference between place as locus and as representation, even within the canon of Williams' poetry, it is helpful to consider the difference in two versions of a poem entitled "The Locust Tree in Flower" (actually, they are different poems). Neither is geographically placed; both depend on an immediate perception of an image that is initially physical and natural, but they do not share equally the quality of local place discussed above. For easier comparison, the poems are presented here side by side.

Among
the leaves
bright

green
of wrist-thick
tree

Among
of
green

stiff
old
bright

and old
stiff broken
branch

broken
branch
come

ferncool
swaying
loosely strung--

white
sweet
May

come May
again
white blossom

again [.] (CEP, 93)

clusters
hide
to spill

their sweets
almost
unnoticed

down
and quickly
fall [.] (CEP, 94)

The longer version on the left is considerably more representational than the shorter version on the right. Its description renders an impressionistic and sensuous perception, but there is a careful attention to organization of physical detail on which the poem depends. The poem on the right does not seek representation, at least not physical representation. It discloses not the image, but the consciousness of the image. Its syntactical openness, its attention to prepositions (relating words), and its progression of sound values toward the purity of "white / sweet / May" combine to generate a mental energy that the longer version lacks. The shorter poem is freer to serve as a locus for the poetic consciousness, while the more precisely

physical longer version tends to enclose the consciousness by its representationalism. The shorter version is, in the terms of Williams' sense of place, a more open and thus more poetic place than the longer, more representational poem.

Before turning from this rather theoretical discussion of image or poem itself as place, it is appropriate to pursue the relation of verbal compression and openness to its limit. If compression leads to greater openness, and if openness--absolute disclosure--is desirable, might not a poem exist which consists of a single word, or of no words at all? Might not the total absence of words on a page--thus total white space--best achieve the freedom that Williams sought? Indeed, whiteness carries very positive connotations in numerous poems, as will be seen shortly, but such whiteness assumes its positive value as a field for contrasting images. Absolute whiteness, absolute blankness, and absolutely empty landscapes are not emblems of openness; they are chaotic spaces without points of reference. In order to focus one's observation of a place or object, an initial contrast of object and field, figure and ground, must be perceived.²⁶ An image in a poem does not have to be strictly representational to achieve the necessary focus, but there must be sufficient detail to allow recognition of the image itself before the imaginative perception of it

can project it beyond its physical characteristics. This is another way of saying that the achievement of a place in the mind, a locus of image and idea, depends upon first attending to the immediately physical aspects of place.

The attainment of whiteness by way of contrast may be seen in the poem "Queen Anne's Lace," where the true whitenesses of the "wild carrot" blossom and "Her body" depend on the loci of "a purple mole / at the center of each flower" and the "tiny purple blemish" that results from the touch of "his hand" on her body (CEP, 210). Having accepted a locus for spaces, either mental or physical, it is possible to conceive of a "whole field" of "white desire," but this openness or whiteness depends on the establishment of a locus, a point of reference. When Williams speaks of desiring "a new form . . . rooted in the locality which should give it fruit," it is just this locus-dependent openness that he means. The concept is at the heart of his sense of place and helps to explain how an image or a poem may be conceived of as a place.

In "The Widow's Lament in Springtime," Williams offers a highly subjective interpretation of a landscape. As the title suggests, the voice in the poem is that of a bereaved widow, and the time is spring; thus birth and death are opposed in the physical emblems of the landscape and the perception of them by the widow. The lament is a

disclosure of the widow's grief by way of her perception of the landscape.

Sorrow is my own yard
 where the new grass
 flames as it has flamed
 often before but not
 with the cold fire
 that closes round me this year.
 Thirtyfive years
 I lived with my husband.
 The plumbtree is white today
 with masses of flowers.
 Masses of flowers
 load the cherry branches
 and color some bushes
 yellow and some red
 but the grief in my heart
 is stronger than they
 for though they were my joy
 formerly, today I notice them
 and turned away forgetting.
 Today my son told me
 that in the meadows,
 at the edge of the heavy woods
 in the distance, he saw
 trees of white flowers.
 I feel that I would like
 to go there
 and fall into those flowers
 and sink into the marsh near them. (CEP, 223)

What the widow wishes for in the final lines of the poem--a physical interpenetration of self and world--is poetically achieved by the poem's merger of the subjective (the widow's grief) and the objective (the landscape). Physically, the scene is comprised of trees and flowers in blossom in a yard that is perhaps within sight of the "heavy woods." The elements of physical landscape are not carefully arranged in a framed landscape (although the woods may

suggest an enclosure of some sort). The reader is aware of them through the impressionistic consciousness of the bereaved widow for whom the grass and flowering trees of spring are reminders of her sorrow and loss. The vividness of her perception goes beyond physical description and makes a poem of her sorrow.

The widow's yard is said to flame with a cold, enclosing fire. Its previous flaming has apparently been with the renewing, freeing energy of spring's coming, but the present flames signal a realization of loss. The return of spring reminds the widow that her husband of thirty-five years is dead and will not return to her. Thus, the flames of spring indict and enclose her. The masses of white flowers on the plum tree serve a double purpose (it is no accident that Williams echoes the phrase "masses of flowers" in consecutive lines). The "masses" are not only proliferous; they are commemorative in an almost religious sense. The widow's awareness of yellow and red bushes recalls the intensity of her own grief. The bushes' flaming does not recall life for her; it leads to "forgetting." The news of "trees of white flowers" in the meadow near the heavy woods seems to spark the widow's desire. Her wish to go to those trees, to "fall into those flowers," and to "sink into the marsh near them" is a wish for complete dissolution of self into the earth which holds

her husband. Organically, the act points to renewal: the widow will flame in next year's flowers. Psychically, it is an escape from the threatening enclosure of a life which no longer holds joy for her; her dissolution would overcome a separation of self and world and allow her to become one with it.

It has been noted earlier that vivid perception "makes the poem." Thus, the widow's vivid perception of and references to the landscape around her makes a poem of her emotions. Such observation of place may result from finding oneself in a position of openness or vulnerability, or it may result from consciously opening oneself and one's senses to the immediate world. For Williams, it most often results from a conscious opening of the senses. Rod Townley has described the process of opening by which Williams thought that observation may lead to poetry:

[The poet's job is to] . . . open one's sensibilities to the world, and when the world presents one (as it will) with some unexpected and unexplainable perfection, to record only those details that most strike one. By learning this obedience, this self-abnegating submission to the wisdom of astonishment, a poet may write an occasional poem that "knows" and says more than he knows or could say in his own person.²⁷

This description helps to explain the events leading to the self-abnegation that occurs in "The Wanderer" and that is longed for in "The Widow's Lament in Springtime," and it may help to explain the poet's astonishment in "Pastoral." It

also helps to understand the expansion of consciousness that may occur by virtue of vivid perception of the local, for what Townley calls the "more than he knows or could say" is the centrifugal effect on the consciousness which results from disclosure of a local, immediate scene.

Vivid perception is closely akin, in Williams' poetics, to imagination. In a prose section of Spring and All, the poet writes of the distinction between prose and poetry; he identifies only the latter with imagination:

The form of prose is the accuracy of its subject matter . . . [but] the form of poetry is related to the movements of the imagination revealed in words[.] (Imaginations, 133)

Later, he refers to poetry as having to do "with the crystallization of the imagination" (Imaginations, 140).

There is a "cleavage" between prose and poetry, and

The cleavage goes through all phases of experience. It is the jump from prose to the process of imagination that is the next great leap of the intelligence--from the simulations of present experience to the facts of the imagination. (Imaginations, 133-34)

This leap is intended to allow the poet and reader "To enter a new world, and have there freedom of movement and newness" (Imaginations, 134). This new world is not a new physical place; in other words, the leap is not a geographical shift. Neither is it a particularly detailed and representational description of the present place. It is the immediate locale perceived vividly and imaginatively as a locus of mental and physical sensations. Though physical place

remains unchanged, the imagination makes possible an ultimately unbounded mental space--the "new world" or the field of "white desire"--disclosed through attention to the immediate locale. The dynamics of this disclosure are the keys to Williams' sense of place; perhaps more than any other single factor, they determine the function of place in his poems.

This process of perception of place can be seen in the short imagistic poem entitled "Nantucket." Only the title grounds the image in a specific geographical setting. The lines themselves provide a definition of the scene in the poet's consciousness:

Flowers through the window
lavender and yellow

changed by white curtains--
Smell of cleanliness--

Sunshine of late afternoon--
On the glass tray

a glass pitcher, the tumbler
turned down, by which

a key is lying--And the
immaculate white bed[.] (CEP, 348)

The images are physical and precise, but the progression of vision from flowers "lavender and yellow" to the "immaculate white bed" suggests a transformation of physical enclosure into unbounded mental space by way of attention to the immediate details of place. Of course, the poem may be read

as an impressionistic rendering of a Nantucket hotel room which Williams entered at some time, but, given what has been said already about Williams' sense of place, there is little reason to suppose that the poem is intended to be merely representational.

In Poets of Reality, J. Hillis Miller writes of a "covert radiance of beauty" which Williams perceives in physical objects.²⁸ This radiance can be felt in "Nantucket"; its energy not only brings the physical elements of the landscape into focus, but also projects them into a mental space the emblem of which is the "immaculate white bed." There is a transparent quality shared by the objects in the poem that suggests a transformation of physical into mental. The "lavender and yellow" of the flowers are made paler by the white curtains. "Cleanliness" and "sunshine" also suggest transparence, and the pitcher, tray, and tumbler are of glass. Only the key is opaque, but it marks a passage from transparence to immaculate whiteness. The radiance of the objects is no longer covert; the place is unlocked, disclosed by the poem.

The key is an emblem of disclosure in "Nantucket"; in "St. Francis Einstein of the Daffodils" disclosure assumes a more dramatic form. The physical place of the poem is a sort of nexus. Images of birth and death converge in an orchard in blossom. A recollection of birth in the

"Venus-remembering wavelets / rippling with laughter-- / freedom / for the daffodils!" is contrasted with that of death and decay in "Samos / dead and buried. Lesbia / a black cat in the freshturned / garden. All dead" (CEP, 379). The wind blows through the orchard of blossoming peach and pear trees, swaying the treetops and "shaking the flowers" (CEP, 380). It is not a gentle wind, but one of seemingly violent birth. The word "tearing" suggests the rending of a veil; "blowing four ways" (CEP, 380) may indicate that the orchard is a center, a nexus. Among the trees and flowers are apparently several decaying cats, victims of the "old negro / with white hair" (CEP, 380) who hides poisoned fish heads in the orchard. At the center of the place, and at the climax of the poem, comes the drama of disclosure. Birth and death proceeding about him, the winds "moving in," bringing moisture to the darkness,

The owner of the orchard
 lies in bed
 with open windows
 and throws off his covers
 one by one[.] (CEP, 380)

The dramatic image is of an act of flowering, of disclosure. Williams has created a setting for the unfolding of the owner's consciousness, but the place is not used merely as a setting. It is the emblematic world which the owner discloses to himself and, as poet, to the reader. The orchard is the locale, and the owner is gradually exposing himself to

its elements. Williams' narrowing down to the final image of the owner in his bed is a preparation for the expansion of consciousness that follows a stripping down, a throwing off of covers. By gradually constricting the consciousness of place to the bed, he concentrates attention on the disclosure and expansion in the final dramatic image.

The disclosures of "Nantucket" and "St. Francis Einstein of the Daffodils" depend on an understanding of Williams' sense of place in terms of mental space at least as much as in terms of physical space. If this difference in what is meant by place creates difficulties for readers of Williams, it should not obscure the importance of place in the poetry. As Sister Bernetta Quinn argues, the sense of place is vital to Williams:

Williams feels very keenly about place, a concept which anchors his philosophy of "no ideas but in things." He disagrees with Eliot's rather glib assertion in the Quartets that place is only place, and that what is actual is actual only for one place. On the contrary, he believes that only in some one place. On the contrary, he believes that only in some one place does the universal ever become actual, and therefore place is the only universal.²⁹

Sister Quinn is speaking of Williams' concept of localism; she does not specifically distinguish between the physical and mental aspects of place as Williams understood it, but in his "apologia" which she quotes from Quarterly Review of Literature, Williams certainly has both physical and mental aspects of place in mind:

We live only in one place at a time but far from being bound by it, only through it do we realize our freedom. Place then ceases to be a restriction, we do not have to abandon our familiar and known to achieve distinction but far from constricting ourselves, not searching for some release in some particular place, rather than in that place if we only make ourselves sufficiently aware of it, do join others in other places.³⁰

To be "sufficiently aware" of one's place is to perceive it vividly, with an imaginative eye, and thus to make of the place a poem--a poem of the local which embodies the universal.

Williams' belief that the local is the universal finds a corollary in the idea that one place is no better than another. This equality of value among physical places makes certain geographical and topographical references irrelevant and frees the poet to focus on the perception of immediate images. However, when poems do contain specific geographical references, especially foreign ones, these references often recall Williams' belief in the significance of the immediate, even when it is less widely known and appreciated than the foreign. Two brief examples from the early poems serve to illustrate this aspect of Williams' sense of place. The first is from the opening section of "January Morning"; the second is a poem entitled "The Men."

the domes of the Church of
the Paulist Fathers in Weehawken
against a smoky dawn--the heart stirred--
are beautiful as St. Peters
approached after years of anticipation. (CEP, 162)

Wherein is Moscow's dignity
 more than Passaic's dignity?
 A few men have added color better
 to the canvas, that's all.

The river is the same
 the bridges are the same
 there is the same to be discovered
 of the sun

Look how cold, steel grey
 run the waters of the Passaic
 The Church-of-the-Polaks'
 bulbous towers

kiss the sky just so sternly
 so dreamily
 as in Warsaw, as in Moscow--
 Violet smoke rises

from the mill chimneys--Only
 the men are different who see it
 draw it down in their minds
 or might be different[.] (CEP, 459)

The excerpt from "January Morning" is virtually self-explanatory. The lines are a sort of equation: the Church of the Paulist Fathers in Weehawken, New Jersey, equals St. Peter's in Rome. What makes the equation possible is the human element captured in the parenthetical phrase "the heart stirred." In other words, it is immediate human perception and human feeling that determines the significance of a place.

Virtually the same key--human perception--defines the relationship between Passaic and Moscow, Passaic and Warsaw, in "The Men." According to Williams, it is man's perception and recording of a place that accounts for its supposed

significance. Perhaps Moscow and Warsaw have had keener observers than Passaic has had, but the basic physical elements of the cities are the same. The poem's final line seems to doubt even the differences in the men who perceive and record the different cities. The closing doubt, expressed in a final line without terminal punctuation, points toward a possible reversal--an affirmation that the men are the same too. This affirmation would effect an ultimate transformation of the immediate into the universal, of Passaic into the locus of all places, of the poet-perceiver into all men.

Williams also suggests that the significance of a geographical region depends upon the quality of its perception and disclosure by men in his poem of tribute to Ford Madox Ford.

Is it any better in Heaven, my friend Ford,
 than you found it in Provence?

I don't think so for you made Provence a
 heaven by your praise of it
 to give a foretaste of what might be
 your joy in present circumstances.
 It was Heaven you were describing there
 transubstantiated from its narrowness
 To resemble the paths and gardens of a
 greater world where you now reside.
 But dear man, you have taken a major
 part of it from us.

Provence that you
 praised so well will never be the same
 Provence to us
 now you are gone.³¹

The connection of physical place to consciousness of place is clear; it is the consciousness where the real place is located. Thus, according to Williams, Provence was heaven because Ford conceived it as such. The physical region took on significance because of Ford's consciousness and disclosure of it; with his death, aspects of the place die too, for there is no longer the perceiver to know it as he did. As the poem's final section indicates, in its direct address to Provence, the death of the perceiver has altered the place itself, physically and mentally.

Provence! the fat assed Ford will never
 again strain the chairs of your cafes,
 pull and pare for his dish your sacred garlic,
 grunt and sweat and lick
 his lips. Gross as the world he has left to
 us he has become
 a part of that of which you were the known
 part, Provence, he loved so well. (CLP, 61)

If it is true that the significance of a place must depend on its representations, whether on canvas, in poetry, or merely "draw[n] . . . down in minds" of its perceivers, then Williams' major poem, Paterson, might be understood as partly intended to give such significance to the city of Paterson, New Jersey. Williams was not, of course, a chamber of commerce booster intending to put the northern New Jersey city on the reader's map of the state. Neither was Paterson intended to assume an extraordinary worldly significance which had been unrealized before Williams wrote

his poem. What Williams discloses is not primarily a set of details about the place; the poem is the fullness of the city in the poet's perception of it through lenses personal, historical, legendary, topographical, geographical, impressionistic, aesthetic, and mythological. The poem is not Williams' attempt to see the city as a particular embodiment of greater, broader ideas; that would require an enclosing, conforming consciousness of the city. Instead, the poem is his disclosure of the place itself in its multiple aspects, each immediate in the poet's consciousness; it is from disclosure of the immediate that the broader, more theoretical aspects of the place derive, and this process is expanding, freeing, centrifugal.

Of all of Williams' poems, Paterson is most ostensibly a poem of place. Also, because of its length and complexity, it is the work most often considered by critics to be the measure of Williams' stature as a modern or post-modern poet.³² Not only did the poem's progressive appearance in the separate sections from 1946 to 1958 call special attention to it (especially the originally unplanned Book Five published in 1958); reviewers and critics acclaimed and have continued to acclaim the poem to a greater degree than the poet's other work. One result of the poem's publication and acclaim has been to establish a connection between Williams and the geographical region of New Jersey near Paterson--to

put the poet on the map, so to speak. The earlier poetry had included few specific place references which contradicted the immediacy of the poet's actual habitat, but Paterson was a positive step toward identification of physical and poetic worlds. As with Frost's identification with rural New England, Williams' with Paterson is not consistently helpful in understanding the poetry itself. To suppose a simple identity of actual and poetic worlds is to deny the poet's shaping function, and such a denial is a major error in trying to understand the poet's roles as perceiver and recorder.

The present study intends no thorough analysis of Paterson, but it does attempt to examine selected portions of the poem in order to suggest how the long poem expresses the major characteristics of Williams' sense of place, seen already as a factor in the shorter, mostly earlier poems. Before looking directly at the poem, it is helpful to consider the choice of Paterson as the subject of the poem. Two extended comments from Williams help to understand, first, his use of a city as the unifying image for his major poem and, second, why he chose Paterson as the specific city for the poem. In the "Author's Note" that precedes the poem, he says

that a man in himself is a city, beginning, seeking, achieving and concluding his life in ways which the various aspects of a city may embody--if imaginatively

conceived--any city, all the details of which may be made to voice his most intimate convictions.
(P, v)

This assertion of man-city identity is followed by an outline of the projected process of development in the poem:

Part One introduces the elemental character of the place. The Second Part comprises the modern replicas. Three will seek a language to make them vocal, and Four, the river below the falls, will be reminiscent of episodes--all that one man may achieve in a lifetime. (P, v)

These sentences justify and project the thrust of a poem about a city as a man. But why Paterson? If the immediate is as important to Williams as has been already argued here, why not Rutherford, with which the poet-doctor was even more familiar? And if a recognizable, representative city was to be sought, why not nearby New York City? Williams gives most of the answers himself. Rutherford was apparently not considered a city; it was not sufficiently urban or varied for the poet's purpose.³³ New York was perhaps too widely known, too complex, though it was, Williams said years later, "near enough."³⁴ The most thorough discussion of his choice of a city is found in this extended passage from the Autobiography:

The first idea centering upon the poem, Paterson, came alive early: to find an image large enough to embody the whole knowable world about me. The longer I lived in my place, among the details of life, I realized that these isolated observations and experiences needed pulling together to gain "profundity." . . . New York City was far out of my perspective; I wanted, if I was to write in a

larger way than of the birds and flowers, to write about the people close about me: to know in detail, minutely what I was talking about. . . . I had no wish, nor did I have the opportunity to know New York in that way, and I felt no loss at that.

I thought of other places upon the Passaic River, but in the end, the city, Paterson, with its rich colonial history, upstream, where the water was less heavily polluted, won out. The falls, vocal, seasonally vociferous, associated with many of the ideas upon which our fiscal colonial policy shaped us through Alexander Hamilton, interested me profoundly and what has resulted therefrom. Even today a fruitful locale for study. I knew of these things. I had heard. I had taken part in some of the incidents that made up the place. . . .

I took the city as my "case" to work up, really to work it up. It called for a poetry such as I did not know, it was my duty to discover or make such a context of the thought. . . . [The intention was that] Paterson as Paterson would be discovered, perfect, perfect in the special sense of the poem. . . . [I]t would be as itself, locally, and so like every other place in the world.³⁵

Paterson, then, met the poet's chief criteria. It allowed his sense of place a most characteristic expression--it was local and it offered sufficient complexity to make rewarding the act of disclosure through vivid perception of the place in its diverse aspects, its locality.

The preface to Paterson announces the poem's quest for a new language that can unlock--disclose--the beauty of the place in the mind. The way of the quest is

To make a start
out of particulars
and make them general, rolling
up the sum. (P, 3)

The quest's beginning is also "assuredly / the end,"

Yet there is
 no return: rolling up out of chaos
 a nine months' wonder, the city
 the man, an identity--it can't be
 otherwise--an
 interpenetration, both ways. (P, 3)

These lines recall the new birth achieved in self-abnegation and interpenetration of the poet with the "filthy Passaic" in "The Wanderer." The quest for an understanding of the man-city Paterson is a quest for just such a new beginning. It is a quest not for a physical destination, but for a mental space in which man and city, poet and world, are one.

Book One, "The Delineaments of the Giants," which Williams called an introduction to "the elemental character of the place," opens with a physical, topographical identity of man and city. The figure of the male giant is drawn by the course of the Passaic River through the city. The giant is, according to Walter Scott Peterson's analysis, "the animating force of his world."³⁶

Paterson lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls
 its spent waters forming the outline of his back. He
 lies on his right side, head near the thunder
 of the waters filling his dreams! Eternally asleep,
 his dreams walk about the city where he persists
 incognito. Butterflies settle on his stone ear.
 Immortal he neither moves nor rouses and is seldom
 seen, though he breathes and the subtleties of his
 machinations
 drawing their substance from the noise of the pouring
 river
 animate a thousand automatons. Who because they
 neither know their sources nor the sills of their
 disappointments walk outside their bodies aimlessly
 for the most part
 locked and forgot in their desires--unroused. (P, 6)

The giant, sleeping, is apparently inseparable from the landscape and is specifically associated with the falls. Nestled beside him is the female giant, defined by the Valley of the Rocks and Garrett Mountain Park.

And there, against him, stretches the low mountain.
 The Park's her head, carved, above the Falls, by the
 quiet
 river; Colored crystals the secret of those rocks;
 farms and ponds, laurel and the temperate wild cactus,
 yellow flowered . . . facing him, his
 arm supporting her, by the Valley of the Rocks, asleep.
 Pearls at her ankles, her monstrous hair
 spangled with apple-blossoms is scattered about into
 the back country, waking their dreams--where the deer
 run
 and the wood-duck nests protecting his gallant plumage.
 (P, 8)

A study of the map of Paterson and vicinity included in George Zabriskie's "The Geography of Paterson" helps to visualize the physical image that is being projected by these delineations of male and female giants.³⁷ Nowhere in the poetry of Frost or of Stevens is there any physical identification of place and person so extreme as this. At least in the beginning of the poem, Williams is using place as the concrete embodiment of man, thus man-city. But it is a mistake to suppose that the poem is so simply dualistic throughout.

As Joel Conarro points out, this identity of man and landscape cannot be concretely sustained for long.³⁸ Soon Williams must begin to depend on a mental landscape, the definition of Paterson in a mental space. As the

following lines indicate, the thoughts of Mr. Paterson begin to define that space by their dispersal about the city:

Say it! No ideas but in things. Mr.
Paterson has gone away
to rest and write. Inside the bus one sees
his thoughts sitting and standing. His
thoughts alight and scatter-- (P, 9)

What replaces the physical image of city as man is a long series of thematically interconnected fragments of history, legend, description, and commentary, all related to Paterson and all viewed as immediate (or local) in the poet's consciousness. Among the fragments are these: the legend of Sam Patch, who leaped to his death in a river and was discovered only the following spring in an ice thaw;³⁹ the story of a Mrs. Cummings who, having come with her husband to see the setting in place of the bridge over the falls, fell from the bridge to her death; an anecdote of a "poor shoemaker" who discovered valuable pearls, including "the finest of its sort in the world today" (P, 9), in mussels collected from Notch Brook near Paterson; a description of "a monster in human form" (P, 10) once visited by General George Washington; and an account of Timothy B. Crane's building of a bridge over the falls, supposedly in order to foil a rival tavern keeper. In terms of place, the fragments provide an historic, cultural context for Paterson, the like of which is not to be found in the poetry

of either of the other poets studied here. The details which are presented are, of course, selective, but their proliferation and immediacy is striking.

Williams is able, by his presentation, to demonstrate that his objection to the poetics of Eliot's The Waste Land is not an objection to fragmentation per se but to the kind of fragmentation in which the pieces are knowable only when explained within their academic, hieratic contexts. Williams' complex of place is knowable without external reference, for the poem informs itself.⁴⁰ The fragments of the opening section not only provide an elemental physical definition of the city as man and of man as city; they project patterns of sound and imagery that reverberate throughout the remainder of the poem, making of the poem an environment for the discovery of a local language. Personae of the poem, like the male and female giants, Sam Patch and Mrs. Cummings, and even the mythological Corydon and Phyllis (in contemporary form) stand to each other in relations of balanced opposition and interpenetration, and they all reside in the physical-mental complex of place which is Paterson in the poem. As the poem grows, what occurs is a transformation of Paterson into Paterson. As Williams adds fragment to fragment, the mental space of the poem expands, making room for each new disclosure, which figuratively derives from the union of the

giants who lie asleep in the physical landscape, and which progressively pushes the reader's consciousness of the place centrifugally toward the "Any/Every Place" which Williams once envisioned as the title city of his poem.⁴¹

Book Two, "Sunday in the Park," is an account of a walk through Garrett Mountain Park, but it, like Book One, consists of a catalog of historic, lyric, and impressionistic fragments, each one immediate in Mr. Paterson's (and the poet's) consciousness. The opening lines of the section achieve several objectives. They reaffirm the poet's dedication to immediate perception. They appear to establish the physical setting for the action of the section, almost as Frost set the stage for his dramatic narratives in the opening lines. They also recall the quest or journey motif that is central to the poem as a whole.

Outside

outside myself

there is a world,

he rumbled, subject to my incursions

--a world

(to me) at rest,

which I approach

concretely--

The scene's the Park

Upon the rock,

female to the city

--upon whose body Paterson instructs his thoughts

(concretely)

--late spring,

a Sunday afternoon.

--and goes by the footpath to the cliff[.] (P, 43)

Since a detailed tracing of the Sunday afternoon walk in Garrett Mountain Park is not possible here, the present

derives a more abstract conception of interdependence of ascent and descent which is applicable beyond the physical realm. He expresses that conception in these lines:

The descent beckons
 as the ascent beckoned
 Memory is a kind
 Of accomplishment
 a sort of renewal
 even
 an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new
 places
 inhabited by hordes
 heretofore unrealized, . . . (P, 77)

The central place of concern in these lines is not the park but the mind. The memory opens up mental space to places (loci of perception) "heretofore unrealized." The memory's movement is not unlike the movement of the hawk and the imagination. In the act of soaring, a familiar region is seen and rereen in ascent and descent and back and forth, and with each passing over, more is discovered so that the consciousness of the region is expanded. Such a crossing and recrossing technique is used with themes and images in the poem's many fragments. As new places are opened up in mental space, the expansive soaring (related to the act of flowering seen in other poems) pushes the consciousness toward an unbounded perception, the locus of which is the immediate.

Book Three of Paterson is entitled "The Library."

William uses it to systematically disclose aspects of his

man-city's history. The physical library is not of great significance in the poem, but the concept of library is the locus of the historical consciousness. Williams' accounts of the city's devastations by tornado, fire, and flood are presented as they actually occurred, with only some minor changes. Of course, they are to be understood as devastations of man as well as of city. As all histories are, they are interpretive. Book Three also includes one description of place that is unique in American poetry; it is quite Joycean in its technique. The descriptive fragment is called "Substratum," and it consists largely of a well driller's record of thirty different depths (ranging from 65 feet to 2100 feet) and the geologic materials found at each recorded depth.⁴³ Though the fragment was borrowed from another source--an actual drilling record--it includes a concluding statement that seems appropriate to Williams' own sense of place: "The fact that the rock salt of England, and of some of the other salt mines of Europe, is found in rocks of the same age as this, raises the question whether it may not also be found here" (P, 139). It is the last clause--"whether it may not also be found here"--that reveals Williams' sense of place, for it suggests an equality of physical places, a universality of the local.

Book Four, "The Run to the Sea," contains some of the poem's more concrete descriptions of the city of Paterson. In the "idyl" of Corydon and Phyllis (a

contemporary pastoral, the scene much diminished by the shabbiness of the modern world), Corydon refers to the "primitive and permanent" rocks off Blackwell's Island:⁴⁴

the three rocks tapering off into the water
all that's left of the elemental, the primitive
in this environment. I call them my sheep. (P, 152)

Phyllis rejects the pastoral vision of the scene. In a letter, she writes:

[Corydon's] a nut, of the worst kind. Today she was telling me about some rocks in the river here she calls her three sheep. If they're sheep I'm the Queen of England. They're white all right but it's from the gulls that crap them up all day long. (P, 152)

Williams' juxtaposition of these descriptions demonstrates that physical detail does not necessarily determine one's perception of a place. The same rocks are seen differently by Corydon and Phyllis. As with Ford Madox Ford's vision of Provence as heaven, so with Corydon's vision of the rocks as her flock: imagination--vivid perception--transforms the physical grossness of the landscape into a more desirable and equally real mental landscape. Imagination creates a place in the mind.

A physical description of a past Paterson in the third section of Book Four seems nostalgic, not only in its description of activities and scenes no longer a part of the modern city, but also in its informal diction, its simple narrative progression, and its prosaic syntax. The section

is too long to reproduce complete here, but the passage below describing the area around the Godwin Tavern demonstrates its nature:

Branching trees and ample gardens gave the village streets a delightful charm and the narrow old-fashioned brick walls added a dignity to the shading trees. It was a fair resort for summer sojourners on their way to the Falls, the main object of interest. (P, 195)

Especially after the fragmented, multi-faceted discovery that comprises most of Paterson, this apparently self-sufficient, bucolic vision is appealing. However, it is not intended to represent in itself the appropriate definition of the place; it is merely another fragment, another petal of the unfolding poetic flower that is Paterson, another perspective on the local qua locus.

The final movement of Book Four, the supposed end of the quest (at least until the appearance of Book Five), comes after the poet has traced the river into Paterson, over the falls, and on to the sea from which it had come. The persona, declaring that "the sea is not our home" (P, 201) turns back inland. This ending may seem to contradict what has been called an expanding, centrifugal consciousness of place, for the final movement is clearly not outward, but perhaps it is only one more beginning, one more return to the locus before setting out again. The persona comes out of the sea, stretches out on the hot sand of the beach, gets up, and continues on:

Climbing the
bank, after a few tries, he picked
some beach plums from a low bush and
sampled one of them, spitting the seed out,
then headed inland, followed by the dog. (P, 203)

The spitting out of the plum seed may promise a new flowering to come. Indeed, the publication of Book Five in 1958 may represent just such a later attempt to turn back outward, to expand the mental space of Paterson.

Paterson, Book Five, was received as an anticlimax by many of Williams' flowers, yet it provides a final, reflective perspective on Williams' sense of place. Louis Martz recalls that the appearance of Paterson, Book Five, in 1958 dismayed many of Williams' readers, who thought the poem already properly finished, but that the poet justified the addition (and as many subsequent additions as there might eventually be) with this statement that appeared on the book's dust jacket:⁴⁵

I have come to understand not only that many changes have occurred in me and the world, but I have been forced to recognize that there can be no end to such a story I have envisioned with the terms which I laid down for myself. I had to take the world of Paterson into a new dimension if I wanted to give it imaginative validity. Yet I wanted to keep it whole, as it is to me.⁴⁶

This declaration of new dimensions in a familiar space is thoroughly characteristic of Williams. It reflects clearly his sense of place as it has been explained here. Starting with the local, the poet, by vivid perception, defines a

place in the consciousness, and with the continuing flight of the imagination (always starting from the locus) the space is expanded until the place in the mind is bounded only by man's ability to perceive and to maintain his roots in the local, the immediate. Book Five takes the mental space of Paterson into a mythic dimension by way of an analogy with the unicorn tapestries hanging in The Cloisters just across the East River from Paterson. But the mythos is not a completely new aspect of Paterson, for Williams' act of disclosure of the local as the universal possesses an implicit mythic dimension.

The sense of place revealed in Williams' poems may derive largely from his especially strong attraction to America and specifically to his native New Jersey environment at a time when his better known, more critically acclaimed contemporaries had forsaken their homeland for a European culture they found richer. Still, his localism is not a simple self-defense of his choice of habitat. In his prose as well as in his poetry, Williams is strongly pro-American; it is a rediscovery of America that is the announced purpose of In the American Grain, and it is a similar disclosure of his immediate locale that controls much of his poetry. To understand this vital sense of place as the locus of consciousness as well as physical place is to avoid the confusion that may result from the

poetry's apparent fragmentation and openness of form and its apparent attention only to surface impressions and images. The immediacy which may confuse can also, when understood as a key characteristic of his poetic vision, help to inform many individual poems and to make of his work an "epic" of place.⁴⁷

Notes

¹Joseph Riddel, The Inverted Bell: Modernism and the Counterpoetics of William Carlos Williams, pp. 23-4.

²William Carlos Williams. The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 174.

³Wallace Stevens, "Williams [Preface to Collected Poems, 1921-1931]," Opus Posthumous, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), pp. 254-57. Stevens does not mean the term to be disparaging, though numerous critics interpreted it that way. Instead, he speaks of the anti-poetic as a cure for sentimentality: "His [Williams'] passion for the anti-poetic is a blood passion and not a passion of the inkpot. The anti-poetic is his spirit's cure. He needs it as a naked man needs shelter or as an animal needs salt. To a man with a sentimental side the anti-poetic is that truth, that reality to which all of us are forever fleeing. . . . [A]s a phase of a man's spirit, as a source of salvation, now, in the midst of a baffled generation, as one looks out of the window at Rutherford or Passaic, or as one walks the streets of New York, the anti-poetic acquires an extraordinary potency, especially if one's nature possesses that side so attractive to the Furies."

⁴Reed Whittemore, William Carlos Williams: Poet from Jersey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), p. 14.

⁵Of the various statements explaining the difficulty of defining such a body of poetry, one of the simplest and clearest is found in the introduction to Rod Townley's The Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 15-21. As Townley points out, the absence of "masterpieces" by Williams is perfectly in line with the poet's own theory of composition, which was concerned with perception and involves little interference with instinctive poetic gesture. Williams' poetry is, thus, a multitude of fragments joined somatically like the leaves and branches of a tree, all possessing the organic code of the creator-poet.

⁶Philip Rahv, "Hard History," Partisan Review 4 (March 1938), 48-50. Rahv goes on to suggest a relation between Williams' "phenomenological principle" and his

"American mysticism"; he sees Williams as a poet dealing with a "psychic outline" of America. This last connection is similar to Gaston Bachelard's relation of images and psychic states in The Poetics of Space.

⁷Williams, Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 6. This is merely the first of many uses of the statement in the poem. Williams repeated it elsewhere as well. Later references in this chapter to Paterson will be noted in the text by P and page number in parentheses.

⁸Williams, Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 118.

⁹Williams, Selected Essays, p. 119.

¹⁰Williams, Selected Essays, p. 119.

¹¹Riddel, p. 22.

¹²Riddel, p. 22.

¹³Williams, In the American Grain (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1925), p. 216.

¹⁴Riddel, p. 24.

¹⁵Thomas R. Whitaker, William Carlos Williams (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 23. According to Whitaker, Williams often quoted the statement, "but neither as a hastily abstracted slogan nor as an indication of mere discipleship."

¹⁶Williams, Selected Essays, p. 179.

¹⁷J. Hillis Miller, ed., William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 10. Miller's introduction to this collection of critical essays, together with his article, "Williams' Spring and All and the Progress of Poetry," Daedalus, 99 (Spring 1970), 405-34, and his chapter on Williams in Poets of Reality, provides a most lucid discussion of the poet's formal and thematic intentions.

¹⁸Williams, Selected Essays, pp. 242-43.

¹⁹Williams, Imaginations, ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 88. Later references in this

chapter to Imaginations (which contains Kora in Hell, Spring and All, The Descent of Winter, The Great American Novel, and other prose) will be noted in the text by Imaginations and page number in parentheses.

²⁰Miller, William Carlos Williams, p. 5. Miller also takes up this idea in Poets of Reality (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1966), p. 288 ff. In the latter, Miller says that "In Williams' mature work, if something exists at all, it dwells in the only realm there is, a space both subjective and objective, a region of copresence in which anywhere is everywhere, and all times are one time."

²¹Williams, The Collected Earlier Poems of William Carlos Williams, p. 3. Later references in this chapter to The Collected Earlier Poems will be noted in the text by CEP and page number in parentheses.

²²Whitaker, p. 45.

²³There is some question as to whether the reference to Broadway is to the street in New York or to a major business street in Paterson, New Jersey.

²⁴Miller, Poets of Reality, p. 288.

²⁵It is this characteristic of Williams' sense of place that lends itself to such studies as Riddel's The Inverted Bell, Cary Nelson's The Incarnate Word, and Robert Edward Brown's "Walk in the World."

²⁶This is not necessarily a contradiction of Miller's idea of copresence of subjective and objective; rather it is an explanation of the act of perception which precedes the merging of subjective and objective senses of an image.

²⁷Townley, pp. 152-53.

²⁸Miller, Poets of Reality, p. 334.

²⁹Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry (New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), p. 91.

³⁰Williams, "The Fatal Blunder," Quarterly Review of Literature, 2 (1944), 126.

³¹Williams, The Collected Later Poems of William Carlos Williams, Revised Edition (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions,

1963), p. 60. Later references in this chapter to The Collected Later Poems will be noted in the text by CLP and page number in parentheses.

³²Among the major studies of the poem are these: (1) Louis Martz, "On the Road to Paterson," Poetry New York, (1951), 18-32, and "The Unicorn in Paterson: William Carlos Williams," Thought, 35 (1960), 537-54; both these essays are included (in slightly revised form and the second under a different title) in Martz's The Poem of the Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 125-161. Though not nearly so exhaustive in grounding the historical and geographical aspects of the poem as other subsequent works, Martz's essays remain a valuable introduction to a study of Paterson. (2) Walter Scott Peterson, An Approach to "Paterson" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Peterson wrote this first book length study of Paterson while an undergraduate at Yale. The book benefits from the direction of Professor Martz, Peterson's advisor. It considers only Books I-IV. (3) Joel Conarroe, William Carlos Williams' "Paterson": Language and Landscape (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970). Conarroe's study puts the poem in a context of other long poems and provides multiple readings of the poem with emphasis on varying themes and image patterns. It is a very helpful work. (4) Benjamin Sankey, A Companion to William Carlos Williams' "Paterson" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). This work attempts to explain references, allusions, and sources and thus to "demystify" the poem. Though it is helpful as a commentary on individual fragments, it does not reflect the tone of the overall work too well. (5) Margaret Glynne Lloyd's William Carlos Williams' "Paterson": A Critical Reappraisal (Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980). This most recent book length study of the poem attempts to set the work in a twentieth century literary context by arguing that it is intended as an "assault upon the hieratic tradition and as a reply to The Waste Land"; it also tries to attend to Williams' image of the city as it developed from the earlier poems; it also tries to view the poem in a broad context of the epic tradition. The book is helpful, but promises more than it delivers. (6) An unpublished work that has been helpful in the present study is Robert Edward Brown's 1970 dissertation, "Walk in the World: A Journey in the Space of William Carlos Williams' Paterson." It applies Bachelard's theory of spatial images to the poem. Brown's central concern is the poem's expression of an "interpenetration between the

self and the world" which creates the "verbal space" of the poem. (7) Though not a major study of the poem, George Zabriskie's "The Geography of Paterson," Perspective, 6 (1953), 201-16, is helpful in its description of the actual Paterson that Williams knew; by implication, it offers a guide to the authenticity of materials in the poem. (8) Among the many articles that have attempted to deal with Paterson, one of the best and most closely related to the present study is Sr. Bernetta Quinn's "Paterson: Landscape and Dream," Journal of Modern Literature, 1 (1971), 523-564. Besides offering a helpful explanation of Williams' special understanding of local place, Sr. Quinn also speaks of the poem as a collection of "landscape paintings, relief maps, even simple diagrams" (p. 534).

³³ John C. Thirlwall, "William Carlos Williams' Paterson," New Directions in Prose and Poetry 17 (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1961), p. 308.

³⁴ Stanley Koehler, "The Art of Poetry VI: William Carlos Williams," [an interview] Paris Review, 8 (1964), 110-51.

³⁵ Williams, Autobiography, pp. 391-92.

³⁶ Peterson, p. 19.

³⁷ Zabriskie, 205-07.

³⁸ Conarro, pp. 63-4.

³⁹ As Williams makes clear, Sam Patch did not die from his jump into the Passaic, but from one into the Genesee River; Patch did plunge into the Passaic, according to Williams, but he survived. What interests the poet most here is probably the legend of Patch as leaper.

⁴⁰ This should not obscure the fact that many sections of the poem are borrowed word for word from historical documents, actual letters to and from the poet, earlier poems, and various other written sources. Sankey is helpful in identifying many of these borrowings.

⁴¹ Vivienne Koch, William Carlos Williams (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1950), p. 116.

⁴² Zabriskie is the best source for such verification.

⁴³According to Sankey, the drilling record is quoted from Nelson's History of Paterson; Sankey notes that Williams added only the title of the fragment, p. 158.

⁴⁴Sankey, p. 174.

⁴⁵Martz, p. 155.

⁴⁶Williams, Paterson Five (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1958), dustjacket.

⁴⁷This final phrase is borrowed from John Ciardi's review of Paterson Five, "The Epic of a Place," Saturday Review of Literature, 11 October 1958, 37-39. The phrase is also suggested by the introduction to Lloyd's William Carlos Williams' "Paterson" and by Sister Quinn's essay in Journal of Modern Literature.

CHAPTER IV

WALLACE STEVENS: ESSENTIALISM AND OSCILLATION

In the two preceding chapters, two quite different senses of place have been considered. Chapter II has demonstrated that Robert Frost's poems tend to reveal place in physical terms which are largely topographical and approximate or regional, and that the dominant tendency of Frost's consciousness of place is a movement toward enclosure. Chapter III has demonstrated that William Carlos Williams' poems, despite the physically sensuous images which often dominate them, reveal a sense of place that is less strictly physical than Frost's. Williams' concern for the "local" is for a locus of thought which is rooted in immediacy, but which moves toward universalism and an unbounded mental space. Frost's tendencies are inward; Williams' are outward. Frost views man as enclosed within but separate from his world; Williams sees man attempting to interpenetrate the world in order to disclose or discover it fully.

The sense of place revealed in the poems of Wallace Stevens is different from either that of Frost or that of Williams. It is neither a regional nor a local sense,

though at times the poems reveal both highly physical and highly abstract consciousnesses of place. It is rare to find a poem in which the perception of place is merely physical, but, on the other hand, Stevens does not seem to be convinced, as was Williams, that any place equals every place. Stevens' sense of place is consistently neither enclosing nor disclosing; rather, the poems tend to reveal an oscillation of the poet's thought between poles of particularity and generality, physical sensation and figurative invention, partition and wholeness, concreteness and abstraction.¹ The oscillation is, on one hand, an expression of the playfulness of the poet's mind, but it has a serious purpose. It intends to define what Stevens called his "sense of the world,"² and it rejects both artificial limitation of perception to physical sensation and total freedom of figurative expression and expansion. In the poetry, the purpose of the oscillation is to construct a "supreme fiction"³ which integrates life's physical and mental aspects in a consummate structure or realized design. Ideally, the design encompasses all space, physical and mental, and can accommodate all experience. Stevens' desire for so all-encompassing a design is reflected in his ambitious titles and proposed titles for poetic works-- titles like "The Whole of Harmonium," "The Grand Poem-- Preliminary Minutiae," and "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction."⁴

The process of oscillation is a journey in search of wholeness, not a search for an ideal physical destination. The poems seem to demonstrate that it is in the process of oscillation where the poet's consciousness must properly dwell. The oscillation of the poet's thought defines the mental space of the poem. It is this mental space and the process by which it is defined that the present study attempts to reveal in its consideration of Stevens' sense of place in his poems.

In both his prose and his poetry, Stevens speaks of regional mythologies. The heart of his comments is that particular physical regions possess unique characteristics which are complex and multi-faceted, but which can be distilled to an essential character. This essence is revealed in the particular expressions of the region; thus, a reference to a particular geographic place in the poem is sometimes intended to carry a reference to the more abstract essence.⁵ Indeed, things and persons are often identified with places in Stevens' thought, but the identification is not physical, as in Williams' Paterson; it is essential.⁶ This essentialism may be seen in poems such as the so-called Florida poems, "The Countryman," or "A Mythology Reflects Its Region," discussed below. Stevens' characteristic essentialism is not simply an act of objective analysis, either qualitative or quantitative. The

poet's figurative invention may overlay a place or region with imaginative associations so that they become a part of the place, and the result is a legend or mythology of place which contains both physical and figurative perceptions of place. The combination is a fiction, but, for Stevens, it is nearer reality than either physical or figurative perceptions alone, for the mythology expresses the essence of the place.

In a prose piece on John Crowe Ransom, Stevens discusses this essential sense of place. He also says a good bit about the relation of poet to place, especially of a poet to his native region. What he says about the transformation of the physical particulars of life into legend may explain much of what happens not only in Ransom's poetry, or in Stevens' own, but in the poetry of any poet with strong ties to a "native" region:

What John Crowe Ransom does is to make a legend of reality. . . . One turns with something like ferocity toward a land that one loves, to which one is really and essentially native, to demand that it surrender, reveal, that in itself which one loves. . . . Mr. Ransom's poems are composed of Tennessee. . . . But it is as a legend. As he grew into an outsider without ceasing to be an insider, it was as if everything to which he was native took on a special quality, an exact identity, a microscopic reality, which, only for what it was, had a value because it was wholly free from his outsideness. This is what happens to things we love. He picked it up and took it with him. He drew a picture of it, many pictures of it, in his books. The greater the value he set on it, the dearer it became, the more closely he sought out its precise line and look, the more it became

a legend, the peculiar legend of things as they are when they are as we want them to be . . . , not as they are, but as we should like them to be.⁷

It is not only Ransom's poetry that is affected by the phenomenon described here. Indeed, several of the phrases seem quite apropos of Stevens' own poetry. When he speaks of Ransom's growing "into an outsider without ceasing to be an insider," he might be describing the inevitable abstraction which is part of his own relation, as poet, not just to place, but to any subject fit for poetry. The phrase recalls but does not carry the same meaning as Williams' idea of interpenetration;⁸ it suggests the complex, ever-developing perception that Stevens seeks in his poems. It is in the oscillation between the poles of insider-ness and outsider-ness that Stevens' poetic perception of place takes its most characteristic shape.

When Stevens speaks of Ransom's taking a "microscopic reality" and drawing "many pictures of it," he might be describing his own poetic response to reality as seen in poems like "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" or "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," but the phrase "many pictures" does not quite account for the complexity of Stevens' perception. It does not account for the fictive act of the poet's imagination or for changes in the physical object due to a passage of time. And even in so simple a relationship as that of the "many pictures," there is, in Stevens, an

ever-present "and yet" (CP, 465), an admission of a further figuration, an addition or variation or exception to the present perception of the place or object. Elsewhere, Stevens tried to explain this complication of the poet's relation to the particular reality:

The revelation of that particular reality or of that particular category of realities is like a series of paintings of some natural object affected, as the appearance of any natural object is affected, by the passage of time, and the changes that ensue, not least in the painter. (OP, 214)

He is speaking here of painters, but, as in his essay entitled "The Relations Between Poetry and Painting," it is primarily with the poet's similar situation that he is concerned.

When Stevens says of Ransom's Tennessee, "it became . . . a legend of things as they are when they are as we want them to be . . . , not as they are, but as we should like them to be," he might be describing his own sense of the world rather than Ransom's. The difference between things "as they are" and "as we should like them to be" is a difference between actual and ideal, between partition and wholeness, between immediate and universal. The oscillating process of perception characteristic of Stevens' poems makes the reader conscious of these differences and attempts to mediate between them. The result is a legend-- "things as they are when they are as we want them to be."

The legend of things is not merely the things themselves, and a legend of place is not merely the physical characteristics of the place; neither is it purely idealistic projection. The place or thing may be changed by the poet's figurative perception of it, but the mind cannot ultimately deny the physical actuality of it. Thus, the legend reveals the essential character, understood by means of an oscillating perception that ranges from the barrenness of purely physical sensation to the highly figurative inventions of the poet's imagination. It is this imaginative response to the bareness of physical sensation that Stevens calls "desire at the end of winter" in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (CP, 382).

As graphically as any of Stevens' poems, "The Man on the Dump" demonstrates the act of perception just described. The dump is not located geographically; it is a metaphor for the world, and its location is in the poet's mind. Thus, the poem's title is a metaphor for man in the world. The poem develops in terms of place and is a sort of landscape description. Nevertheless, its concern is not mere physical description but a more complex perception, specifically the effects of the imagination's figurative tendencies on perception. The poet's attentions oscillate between physical and figurative, and the poem develops a legend of the dump.

The poem opens with the imagination ascending:

"Day creeps down. The moon is creeping up" (CP, 201).

The elements of day and night are immediately and amusingly metaphorized: "The sun is a corbeil of flowers the moon Blanche / Places there, a bouquet. Ho-ho . . . The dump is full / Of images" (CP, 201). The poet has his initial laugh at the result of an imaginative transformation; he then turns to a playful consideration of some of the "images":

Days pass like papers from a press.
The bouquets come here in the papers. So the sun,
And so the moon, both come, and the janitor's poems
Of every day, the wrapper on the can of pears,
The cat in the paper-bag, the corset, the box
From Esthonia: the tiger chest, for tea. (CP, 201)

The metaphor of time as a printing press, joined to the literal relation of newspapers to bouquets (though the bouquets here are figurative), intensifies the transformation of day into night, reality into imagination. It is difficult to know whether the short catalogue of images is to be understood physically or otherwise. Is Stevens describing a real place or an imagined one? The juxtaposition of sun, moon, poems, wrapper, cat, corset and box suggests the diversity of the dump or world. Each one has its own symbolism, story, and associative meanings. The images are often rich and evoke exotic associations, but they are tentative, speculative. Stevens' images appear to

possess physical reality, but, set in a context where bouquets are both flowers and the sun, the particulars of the dump and the dump as a place are beyond purely physical perception.

As the poet concerns himself with details of place and situation, he confronts the artificial images projected by his imagination. His expression of what he feels and sees acknowledges both the physical and the metaphoric perceptions:

The freshness of morning, the blowing of day, one says
 That it puffs as Cornelius Nepos reads, it puffs
 More than, less than or it puffs like this or that.
 The green smacks in the eye, the dew in the green
 Smacks like fresh water in a can, like the sea
 On a cocoanut--how many men have copied dew
 For buttons, how many women have covered themselves
 With dew, dew dresses, stones and chains of dew, heads
 Of the floweriest flowers dewed with the dewiest dew.
 One grows to hate these things except on the dump
 (CP, 202)

In the "more than, less than . . . like this or that" lies the key to figurative comparison. The essence of freshness that is expressed by the dew is seen in forms still more artificial--buttons, dresses, and stones--until the superlative image of the essence is reached: "the floweriest flowers dewed with the dewiest dew."⁹

From this excessive figurative association, the poet turns back to a stripping down. The process of "like this or that" is an elimination process; the poet retains the likes and discards the unlikes, thus the dump. In the "time

of spring," there is a "purifying change" (CP, 202): the trash is rejected. The recognition that figurative perception is artificial frees the poet to confront the landscape in its physical simplicity:

Everything is shed; and the moon comes up as the moon
 (All its images are in the dump) and you see
 As a man (not like an image of a man),
 You see the moon rise in an empty sky. (CP, 202)

The man, "as a man," sees the moon, "as the moon[,] . . . rise in an empty sky." This is what Stevens elsewhere calls "the eye's plain version" (CP, 465). It is the pure, unfigured perception of reality in its particulars. In its simplification, it seems an almost absurd vision of the place. This vision, purified of figurative associations, is one of the polar visions; between this and the extreme of figuration--"dewiest dew"--the poet's perception oscillates. The plain version is rare, for perception of a place is usually overlaid with likes and unlikes which make the place a nexus for resemblances possessing the essence of the place.

The poem concludes with an image of the central figure (the poet) sitting on the dump, considering the questions of truth, reality, and belief which his perception of and response to life in the world, the dump:

One sits and beats an old tin can, lard pail.
 One beats and beats for that which one believes.
 That's what one wants to get near. Could it after all
 Be merely oneself, as superior as the ear
 To a crow's voice? Did the nightingale torture the ear,

Pack the heart and scratch the mind? And does the ear
 Solace itself in peevish birds? Is it peace,
 Is it philosopher's honeymoon, one finds
 On the dump? Is it to sit among mattresses of the dead,
 Bottles, pots, shoes, and grass and murmur aptest eve:
 Is it to hear the blatter of grackles and say
 Invisible priest; is it to eject, to pull
 The day to pieces and cry stanza my stone?
 Where was it one first heard of the Truth? The the.
 (CP, 203)

Stevens' affirmation of "The the" recalls Williams' statement in "The Descent of Winter": "There are no saga--only trees now, animals, engines. There's that."¹⁰ Both poets acknowledge the importance of particularity, but for Stevens, the particularity of the definite article identifies not a locus for observation so much as a pole between which and pure imagination the poet's perception oscillates. When, in "Esthetique du Mal," Stevens says that "The greatest poverty is not to live / In a physical world" (CP, 325), he is endorsing the necessity, even the primacy, of the physical world, but the nature of man requires that the physical world be altered by the imagination. As he says elsewhere, it is necessary that man "cover the rock [of physical reality] with leaves [of imaginative association]" (CP, 526). The two together, physical world and imagination, establish an essential relation by means of the poet's oscillating perception. The dump, then, is to be perceived in its essence or legend, which incorporates both physical sensation and figurative invention, both

trash and flowers. Neither alone is capable of expressing Stevens' sense of this place, or of any place.

"The Man on the Dump" demonstrates Stevens' use of place to demystify the process of perception. The poem is quite precise in its presentation of the physical scene, but it deliberately calls attention to the figurative perception too. More than as either a physical place or a figurative place alone, the dump is a symbolic site in which Stevens can demonstrate his sense of place as essence discovered in the oscillation of consciousness. The dump is a vehicle for a mental exploration. The situation of the man on the dump is the uncertain situation of man in the world. Caught between day and night, sun and moon, winter and summer, object and image, the man on the dump, like the poet, "beats for that which [he] believes," and hopes that the music of the lard pail is the truth, or near it. The dump, like the poet's consciousness, moves alternately between extremes of plainness and decorativeness, between trash and flowers. The essential place--the legend or mythology of the dump--contains both extremes, as well as the more normal in-between existences. Such complexity is what Stevens suggests when he speaks of Ransom's growing "into an outsider without ceasing to be an insider." Remaining an insider indicates, in this case, no alliance with Frost's sense of enclosure, nor is it a matter of

preferring the local to the foreign. To remain an insider, for Stevens, means to maintain a sense of the actual. In regard to place, it means retaining a clear sense of the physical scene while pursuing the imaginative.

That the essence of a place is not dependent solely on physical perception is argued in "Description Without Place." The title of the poem indicates a division between a place and man's consciousness of it. Indeed, the poem argues that an essential place is created out of its possible perceptions, not its physical elements: "It is possible that to seem--it is to be" (CP, 339). There are "seemings" that are actual and others that are potential. Together, they constitute "the affair / Of the possible" (CP, 324). This is the "legend" of which Stevens writes in the prose piece on Ransom.

It is not
The thing [or place] described, nor false facsimile.

It is an artificial thing that exists,
In its own seeming, . . . (CP, 344)

Elsewhere in the poem, Stevens speaks of this place derived from its seemings as "the spirit's universe" (CP, 343), a place in the mind. All that is not immediately, physically present is description without place, and the idea of place derives from the accumulation of such description, past, present, and future. In the term of the present study, description without place is essence without form, yet it

is obvious that essence is understandable only in the particular physical or figurative forms which it may possibly take. Therefore, there is an interdependence of essence and form, of idea and thing, of description and place.

Different forms of an essential place comprise the highly descriptive seascapes of "Sea Surface Full of Clouds." The poem, which derives from an actual experience on one of Stevens' rare journeys outside the United States,¹¹ consists of five sections. Each presents a visual image of the sea reflecting the sky; each image is highly figurative, yet developed in stanza forms that are quite rigidly maintained. Each section begins with the phrase "In that November off Tehuantepec" (CP, 98-101); chocolate and umbrellas and flowers are consistently used as figurative correlatives of the clouds; each section contains a sixteenth line in French with a consistent subject-verb combination, plus a complement appropriate to the tone or mood of the section: "C'etait mon-----" (CP, 99-102).

Each section presents an image of clouds that results from the poet's complex process of perception. The clouds in the sky are reflected in a changing sea surface mirror which takes its mood from the sky which it reflects; the images in the poet's mind are further changed by his

figurative associations with the physical images that he senses or presumes to be possible. In Stanza I, the sea has grown calm in the night, and as the sun comes up, it reveals "paradisal green" in an "ambrosial latitude"; the clouds are seablooms moving "in the swimming green / And its watery radiance"; the chocolate is "rosy" and the umbrellas are "gilt" (CP, 98-99). Stanza II departs from the calm beauty of Stanza I. The ocean is a "sham-like green" lying "in sinister flatness." The poet's thoughts are of "chop-house chocolate / And sham umbrellas" as he sees the clouds through the ocean's "malevolent sheen" (CP, 99-100). The sun comes up, the wind increases, and "blue heaven spread[s] / Its crystalline pendentives on the sea" (CP, 100). The clearing of the skies is described as an act of "enormous undulation" of the sea, carrying away "the macabre of the water-glooms" (CP, 100). Stanza III presents an image of the sea at night. The physical details are feminine. Silver, "porcelain chocolate" and "pied umbrellas" are connected in the mind of the poet (CP, 100). The ocean is "an uncertain green / Piano-polished," and the clouds are "silver petals of white blossoms / Unfolding in the water" (CP, 100), but they disappear with dawn. The sky grows blue and "deluge[s] the ocean with a sapphire blue" (CP, 101). In Stanza IV, the weather is first ominous,

then clearing. The "mallow morning" recalls "musky chocolate / And frail umbrellas" (CP, 101). The sea is a "dry machine"; the clouds are like "damasks that were shaken off / From the loosed girdles in the spangling musk" (CP, 101). The stormy "mouths of bellowing" cease, replaced by "bluest sea-clouds in the thinking green" (CP, 101) of the ocean. In Stanza V, the morning recalls "Chinese chocolate and large umbrellas" (CP, 102). The weather is changeable, and the poet's associations are circus-like: the day is a clown, the clouds are "jugglery," and the sea is "turquoise-turbaned Sambo, neat / At tossing saucers" (CP, 102). As the stanza concludes, the mood changes again. The sky clears; the sea and sky "rolled as one and from the two / Came fresh transfigurings of freshest blue" (CP, 102).

"Sea Surface Full of Clouds" seems, on one hand, to reflect Stevens' playfulness with images; the images of sea and sky, the figurative associations of chocolate and umbrellas, and even the lines in French seem to be a game of description played within a formal poetic structure. However, the poem is clarified by an understanding of Stevens' sense of place as essential and oscillating. Each stanza's seascape embodies a different mood, perhaps most directly revealed in the line of French in each stanza. Together the stanzas represent five visions of the same scene and demonstrate Stevens' preference for multiple

perspectives in description. The physical elements remain the same throughout, but the subjective, figurative associations of the perceiver create five different scenes. Also, it is characteristic of Stevens to shift the scenes, even within stanzas; it is a testimony to his belief in the essential motion of life, and it demonstrates the importance of subjective perception in determining the essential character of a place; in addition, the shifting of scenes suggests the poet's oscillation from physical to imaginative poles of perception. Together, the visions of clouds reflected on the sea surface begin to create a legend of the sea in "November off Tehuantepec."

Stevens is not likely to be accused of regionalism, either in the pejorative sense or in the sense used to describe Frost's sense of place in Chapter II. However, of the three poets considered in the present study, Stevens' life was the one most geographically constricted. This fact is surprising when one notes the multiplicity of particular place references in his poems and the exotic nature of many of those references. Most of his adult life was spent around Hartford, Connecticut, but his childhood in Pennsylvania, his years at Harvard, his years living in New York and his later visits there, and his various company travels, especially to Florida, during his

early association with Hartford Fire Insurance Company should not be discounted as influences on his references to place in his poems.

His geographical provinciality was only physical. Mentally, it was offset by three important factors. First, his keen attention to details of place made his exposure to even a limited geography yield rich rewards. Readers of his letters (especially those written to his wife between 1916 and 1923) know his attention to such physical details as flowers, trees, sunsets, soil types, and the like. The descriptions in "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" bear ample proof of his imaginative perception of a physical scene which he actually witnessed.¹² Second, the poet's wide reading and his relations with persons who traveled more extensively than he did provided sources of indirect exposure to the essential natures of many foreign places. Numerous exotic place references in his poems recall places from which he received gifts or greetings from traveling friends.¹³ Third, his concern for thought and his perception of place as essence freed him from a dependence on physical experience for understanding. It seems clear from the poems discussed below that Stevens' sense of essential place made him an active, self-conscious citizen of both the "physical world" and "the spirit's universe." His sense of place engages the dimensions of both; his consciousness

of place oscillates between them.

Many of the place references, especially in the early poems, derive from travels in the South on behalf of the insurance company. Most notable of his relations to such places is the poet's attraction to Florida. A look at the Florida relationship helps to understand Stevens' tendency to abstract essential qualities from particular places. Stevens visited Florida repeatedly and knew Miami, Key West, and other parts of the state. For a man who had grown up in the more severe climate of Pennsylvania and whose home was currently in Connecticut, Florida offered a paradisaical alternative. Its lush foliage and constant warmth were in sharp contrast to the world with which he was more familiar; it is no wonder that Florida began to assume importance in his mind and in his poems.

In one of his letters, Stevens makes a statement about the extent of his relationship with Florida, then includes a more general statement that may serve as a touchstone not only for a discussion of the Florida poems, but for all of his poems of place. After suggesting that all of his poems have actual backgrounds, he says, "I have been going to Florida for twenty years, and all of the Florida poems have actual backgrounds. The real world seen by an imaginative man may very well seem like an imaginative construction."¹⁴ This statement helps to explain why Stevens often seems to

abstract what he perceives to be the essential character of a place and then project that essence into a broader design of resemblances.

Florida, beyond its immediate attractions of temperate climate, exotic foliage, and opportunity for relaxation with friends, became for Stevens a polar opposition to the life of the North. He found the richness of Florida appealing, but, almost from the first exposure to the Floridian climate, he remained loyal to what he found the more realistic, more various North. Two excerpts from letters to his wife help to define Stevens' early attitude toward Florida. The first is from Miami, April 23, 1916:

Florida is not really amazing in itself but in what it becomes under cultivation. . . . Once a space has been given attention it turns into something extraordinary. But the ordinary jungle is not impressive. There are brilliant birds and strange things but they must be observed.¹⁵

The second letter, from Jacksonville, January 17, 1919, hints at a growing weariness with the everpresent summer that Florida came to represent:

Yesterday I was in Miami. After finishing I walked for several hours and in the evening, before train time, sat in the open-air at the park listening to a brass band concert. They have strawberries and corn on the cob etc. But, really, it sounds better than it is. Who wants corn on the cob all the time? And then the wind blows incessantly. It gives a kind of fever to one's blood. True, the experience is a heavenly change; but our rich variety of four seasons, our Exquisite Spring and long autumn give us a variety that the lotus-eaters of the South must pine for.

At Miami, on a bright, sunny day in mid-winter, the climate must be as fine as any in the world. . . . But I believe that I should enjoy, just as much, walking up Fifth Avenue, in the cold air of a late January afternoon. I always notice when the evenings at home first show signs of lengthening, as they do at the end of just such afternoons.¹⁶

These letters carry significance well beyond their comments on the Florida climate or Stevens' apparent preference for the changeableness of the North. They reflect the poet's processes of perception. When he writes, in the 1916 letter, "Once a space has been given attention it becomes something extraordinary," he might be speaking of mental attentions as well as agricultural, and the space might be the space of an idea as well as a piece of real estate. Thus considered, the application of consciousness and imagination to an idea makes the idea extraordinary. In the 1919 letter, Stevens' preference for variety is striking. His desire to be conscious of the gradual shadings of weather as season moves into season is more than a desire to avoid an eternal recurrence of the same, like that disparaged in "Sunday Morning."¹⁷ It is a declaration of keen attention to life's physical and mental gradations--an attention well suited to the previously discussed process of perception at work in Stevens' poems.

Stevens' Florida connection demonstrates his tendency to perceive an essential character of place, then to use

that "essentialized" place as a vehicle for the delineation of consciousness. This tendency may be seen in the poems discussed here. In "Fabliau of Florida," an early poem written after Stevens' initial fascination with Florida's lushness had diminished, Stevens depicts a potential voyage of the imagination.

Barque of phosphor
On the palmy beach,

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

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

Fill your black hull
With white moonlight.

There will never be an end
To this droning of the surf. (CP, 23)

Clearly, Florida as physical place is not central in this poem, but Stevens' Florida of the mind is. The landscape is in mental space. The poet invokes the imagination as ship to "Move outward . . . / . . . [and] Fill your black hull / With white moonlight." The voyage is endless, but without a point of reference, for "Foam and cloud are one" --thus there is no horizon. The poem's final line captures Stevens' essential understanding of Florida. The "droning of the surf" expresses the malady of eternal sameness, of what Stevens often called the "quotidian." There are no

differences, no demarcations, in the Florida landscape. This sameness is the essence of Florida, and Stevens wants his imagination to reject it for the contrasts of "alabasters / And night blues" and of the boat's "black hull [filled] / With white moonlight."

An even earlier poem entitled "Indian River" may express this sameness of Florida even more poetically than "Fabliau of Florida." Here, the use of recurring sounds echoes the hollow droning of the place that offers no renewal:

The trade-wind jingles the rings in the nets around
 the racks by the docks on Indian River.
 It is the same jingle of the water among the roots
 under the banks of the palmettoes,
 It is the same jingle of the red-bird breasting
 the orange-trees out of the cedars.
 Yet there is no spring in Florida, neither in
 boskage perdu, nor on the nunnery beaches.
 (CP, 112)

The "jingle" that is shared by trade-wind, nets, rings, water, and red-bird's song is the essence of Florida translated into sound. It ought to denote an announcement of change, but it does not, for "there is no spring in Florida." The renewal of spring is vital to the physical world's oscillation between bareness and lushness. As in "The Man on the Dump," it should bring a "purifying change." But in "Indian River," the landscape promises no such purification, and so the poem of the place condemns the sameness.

A slightly later poem is "O Florida, Venereal Soil." Again, it is the essence or spirit of Florida that is of concern, not the physical place. Stevens' attitude here is ambivalent, and the ambivalence is mirrored in the title's key descriptive word, "venereal," which may indicate either love--the inheritance of Venus--or an infection born of desire unrestrained. The poem is a mock petition to the "venereal" spirit to "Conceal yourself or disclose / Fewest things to the lover" (CP, 48). Apparently the "dreadful sundry" (CP, 47) has intruded upon the image of a "Sparkling, solitary, still" Florida (CP, 48), and the "Donna, donna, dark" has "come tormenting" (CP, 48) the presences which would violate the dominant quality of sameness. Florida's offering of "a thick-leaved fruit, / A pungent blossom against [her] shade" (CP, 48), may be Stevens' idea of the climate's quotidian, its attempt to level all things associated with the place.

"Farewell to Florida," which opens Stevens' second book, Ideas of Order (1936),¹⁸ is sometimes read as a cue for understanding the book as a departure from exotic and fecund imagery; it announces Stevens' rejection of allegiance to the essence of Florida (if, indeed, it could ever have been called an allegiance): "Her mind will never speak to me again. / I am free" (CP, 117). Critic Louis Martz has called the poem Stevens' renunciation of the

"world of vivid physical apprehension."¹⁹ Several lines in the poem recall the departure of Ulysses from the land of the lotus-eaters, a reference made by Stevens in the 1919 letter quoted above. Also, these lines may be read as a continuation of the voyage invoked in "Fabliau of Florida." The testimony to the stifling attraction of Florida reaffirms an allegiance to the more demanding North:

Her [Florida's] mind had bound me round. The palms
 were hot
 As if I lived in ashy ground, as if
 The leaves in which the wind kept up its sound
 From my North of cold whistled in a sepulchral South,
 Her South of pine and coral and coralline sea.
 Her home, not mine . . .

. . .

How content I shall be in the North to which I
 sail. . . . (CP, 117)

Stanza III, which itemizes the rejection, possesses elements of symbolic landscape:

I hated the weathery yawl from which the pools
 Disclosed the sea floor and the wilderness
 Of waving weeds. I hated the vivid blooms
 Curled over the shadowless hut, the rust and bones,
 The trees like bones and the leaves half sand, half sun.
 To stand here on the deck in the dark and say
 Farewell and to know that that land is forever gone
 And that she will not follow in any word
 Or look, nor ever again in thought, except
 That I loved her once . . . Farewell. Go on, high ship.
 (CP, 118)

Stevens is not rejecting Florida as physical place here so much as he is rejecting the essence of sameness, especially as it counterpoints the essence of the less vivid, more various North. In fact, Stevens may be rejecting political

isolationism and inattention to domestic crises of the Depression years; both problems were bred of a nonconcern essentially characteristic of the lotus-dominated landscape. Instead of vividness and warmth everywhere, Stevens embraces a very different scene:

My North is leafless and lies in a wintry slime
 Both of men and clouds, a slime of men in crowds.
 The men are moving as the water moves,
 This darkened water cloven by sullen swells
 Against your sides, then shoving and slithering,
 The darkness shattered, turbulent with foam.
 To be free again, to return to the violent mind
 That is their mind, these men, and that will bind
 Me round, carry me, misty deck, carry me
 To the cold, go on, high ship, go on, plunge on.
 (CP, 118)

It is easy enough to see the "slime of men in crowds" as bread lines in Northern cities, or the high ship as the American ship of state. But to trace the poetic passage from Florida to the North is also to understand Stevens' figurative shift from exotic richness to a stark consideration of the bare particulars of life. North and South may be respectively associated with bareness and lushness, with the literal and the figurative reflections of the literal, with rock and leaves covering the rock. Poetically, neither alone is sufficient; reality demands recognition of the rock, while man's aesthetic desires call for the leaves. Thus the consciousness must oscillate between the opposites, acknowledging both and incorporating them into the grand design mentioned above. The rejection of Florida

is based on its denial of bare reality, its presumption of lush sameness; though such leaves must cover the rock of reality, the leaves must be of the imagination and they must not deny the existence of the rock.

In these terms, Stevens returns, late in life, to the essence of place related in the Florida poems. The poem is "The Rock," and Stevens' method is to treat essences of bareness and lushness in figurative terms:

It is not enough to cover the rock with leaves.
We must be cured of it by a cure of the ground
Or a cure of ourselves, that is equal to a cure

Of the ground, a cure beyond forgetfulness. (CP, 526)

Stevens finds such a cure in the blooming and bearing of fruit, in the seasonal leafing and de-leafing of the plants that cover the rock. It is, organically, the seasonal cure of nature, but it is also a poetic cure, for the leaves are also poems which "bud and bloom and bear their fruit" (CP, 527), and

In this plenty [of imagination], the poem makes
meanings of the rock,
Of such mixed motion and such imagery
That its bareness becomes a thousand things

And so exists no more. This is the cure
Of the leaves and of the ground and of ourselves.
(CP, 527)

This discussion of Stevens and Florida demonstrates how his relation to a place could evolve from the fascination of initial encounter, to an abstraction of the essence of the place, to the use of its essential qualities in a

figurative sense that extends the place beyond its physical characteristics to a point in mental space. This evolution of a mythology of place in the poet's mind seems not to have occurred only in regard to Florida. In a prose statement which he wrote for the Voice of America during the last year of his life, Stevens expresses again this essential relation of poet and place:

The man who loves New England, and particularly the spare region of Connecticut, loves it precisely because of the spare colors, the thin light, the delicacy and slightness and beauty of the place. . . . Now, when all the primitive difficulties of getting started have been overcome, we live in the tradition which is the true mythology of the region and we breathe in with every breath the joy of having ourselves been created by what has been endured and mastered in the past. . . . What I have in mind in speaking of coming home to Connecticut was [sic] something deeper than nothing can ever change or remove. It is a question of coming home to the American self in the sort of place in which it was found. Going back to Connecticut is a return to an origin. And, as it happens, it is an origin which many men all over the world . . . share in common: an origin of hardihood, good faith and good will. (OP, 295-96)

It would be a mistake to assume that this prose piece merely affirms a geographical preference; it affirms the essence of spareness or "hardihood" that Stevens associates with the North. From what has been mentioned about the poet's understanding of life as motion, it may be that he prefers a physical world that oscillates between spareness and lushness, rocks and leaves. Florida cannot do this because its essence is that of eternal summer. The North is

more demanding, more stark, but reflects in its cycle of seasons the oscillation that Stevens found most nearly attuned to the act of poetic perception. The preference for the North is an endorsement of "the gray particular" (CP, 258) of man's life as the foundation on which imagination builds. It is amid such spareness that

the poem makes meanings of the rock,
Of such mixed motion and such imagery
That its barrenness becomes a thousand things

And so exists no more. This is the cure
Of leaves and of the ground and of ourselves. (CP, 527)

As in "The Man on the Dump," life consists first of "The the," then of identifying likes and unlikes, then of returning to "The the," and so forth. A consciousness that oscillates between "the" and "like the" achieves the "cure" of man's post-Romantic dilemma. Such perception does not return man to a world of the primitive where form and essence are indivisible, but it creates a "fiction" by which man may live.

The concept of a primitive identity of man and region is important to Stevens as an ideal. He deals with it in several poems. In a section of "The Comedian as the Letter C," he has his persona, Crispin, conceive of a world which has achieved this primitive identity of essence and form, place and expression of place. Crispin projects a colony in which

The man in Georgia waking among pines
 Should be pine-spokesman. The responsible man,
 Planting his pristine cores in Florida,
 Should prick thereof, not on the psaltery,
 But on the banjo's categorical gut,
 Tuck, tuck, while the flamingoes flapped his bays.
 Sepulchral señors, bibbling pale mescal,
 Oblivious to the Aztec almanacs,
 Should make the intricate Sierra scan.
 And dark Brazilians in their cafés,
 Musing immaculate, pampean dits,
 Should scrawl a vigilant anthology
 To be their latest, lucent paramour.
 These are the broadest instances. (CP, 38)

The joining of man and place in a primitive, essential
 unity is even more clearly expressed in a later poem
 entitled "The Countryman."

Swatara, Swatara, black river,
 Descending, out of the cap of midnight,
 Toward the cape at which
 You enter the swarthy sea,

Swatara, Swatara, heavy the hills
 Are, hanging above you, as you move,
 Move blackly and without crystal.
 A countryman walks beside you.

He broods of neither cap nor cape,
 But only of your swarthy motion,
 But always of the swarthy water,
 Of which Swatara is the breathing,

The name. He does not speak beside you.
 He is there because he wants to be
 And because being there in the heavy hills
 And along the moving of the water--

Being there is being in a place,
 As of a character everywhere,
 The place of a swarthy presence moving,
 Slowly, to the look of a swarthy name. (CP, 428-29)

The unity of name, color, topography, movement, and speech
 (or absence of it) rests in the essence of swarthiness. It

is a unity of physical and mental spaces not possible in Stevens' modern world, though the poet's attempt to create a supreme fiction is a striving to establish an icon of such unity. But for the primitive countryman, life is simpler: "Being there is being in a place." This is not "description without place" in which seeming attempts to achieve the status of being; in the region of the Swatara, seeming and being are one; in fact, there is no question of seeming because subject and object are the same.

That such a primitive unity is impossible in the modern world, Stevens seems certain throughout his poetry. It is the essential separation which is expressed in "Sunday Morning" and which is the rationale for writing "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" that dominates the present relation of man and world. In a very late poem, "A Mythology Reflects Its Region," Stevens admits the absence of unity between man and world, but goes on to describe how the image of such unity may almost achieve actuality:

A mythology reflects its region. Here
In Connecticut, we never lived in a time
When mythology was possible--But if we had--
That raises the question of the image's truth.
The image must be of the nature of its creator
It is the nature of its creator increased,
Heightened. It is he, anew, in a freshened youth
And it is he in the substance of his region,
Wood of his forests and stone out of his fields
Or from under his mountains. (OP, 118)

This sharing of essence by image and creator recalls the primitive world of a mythology in which man is expressed "in the substance of his region," and, for Stevens, the purpose of poetry is, above all, to establish such images, to create a supreme fiction in which belief is possible.

In "Six Significant Landscapes," he demonstrates the possibility of an image providing an essential connection of man and place. The first section of the poem develops an image of a place that Stevens could not have known directly; however, the authenticity of the physical scene is not as important as the essential unity of the image.

An old man sits
 In the shadow of a pine tree
 In China.
 He sees larkspur,
 Blue and white,
 At the edge of the shadow,
 Move in the wind.
 His beard moves in the wind.
 The pine tree moves in the wind.
 Thus water flows
 Over weeds. (CP, 73)

The lines suggest an intrinsic, essential motion in the world which is perceivable in each substance or element. The wind moves the larkspur, the man's beard, and the pine tree; the water flows with a shared motion. There is no dramatic action; there is merely the participation in the essence of the region. Man, flowers, trees, and weeds are equated in movement. The place functions as an emblem of an essence perceived by the poet. The antiquity of

China and the contrast of sun and shadow lend a primitive, eternal sense to the image. The old man and the tree seem to rest at the center of the world, providing it both a physical and a mental point of reference.

Such points of reference are important in many of Stevens' poems. Indeed, the act of ordering a disorderly or chaotic space, either physical or mental, is a vital step toward establishing the poet's desired fiction. This act of establishing order is seen as an expression of Stevens' sense of place in poems like "Earthy Anecdote," "Anecdote of the Jar," and "The Idea of Order at Key West."

In "Earthy Anecdote," the opening poem in Harmonium, an image of physical confrontation provides a key to the poet's concern for defining an order in a world of chaotic motion.

Every time the bucks went clattering
Over Oklahoma
A firecat bristled in the way.

Wherever they went,
They went clattering,

Until they swerved
In a swift, circular line
To the right,
Because of the firecat.

Or until they swerved
In a swift, circular line
To the left,
Because of the firecat.

The bucks clattered.
 The firecat went leaping
 To the right, to the left,
 And
 Bristled in the way.

Later, the firecat closed his bright eyes
 And slept. (CP, 3)

It is of little importance that a reader possess any physical sense of Oklahoma in order to understand the poem's general intent. The specific mention of the state may have carried connotations of wildness when the poem was first published in 1918, but the state is little more than an example, a vehicle for Stevens' principle of order.²⁰ Very simply, the clattering of the bucks is given order or direction by the firecat's confrontation. The firecat performs a primitive, instinctual act of creation, then rests, godlike.

Like Oklahoma in "Earthy Anecdote," Tennessee in "Anecdote of the Jar" is little more than a vehicle for the expression of an idea--and again it is the idea of order. This most familiar of Stevens' poems opposes the wilderness of Tennessee and the gray, smooth roundness of a jar placed on a hill. Essence opposes essence, and the manmade jar--an icon of sorts--brings order to the natural chaos that is Tennessee. The poem is a miniature image of a manmade fiction bringing order to a natural chaos. Stevens' use of place in the poem, as in "Earthy Anecdote," is characteristic.

He uses a specific place name to reference an essential quality. As with China in "Six Significant Landscapes" and Florida in the various Florida poems, there is little precise description that would locate a scene in the actual, physical world, as is possible in Williams' Pater-son. Despite the concreteness of the images in the poet's mind as he composed the poems, the effect of the place references is to suggest an essential quality more than a specific geographical location.

"The Idea of Order at Key West" is more precise in its physical location, but again it is not the actual place so much as its vehicular function that is central. Each of the landscape elements--sky, sea, and shore--is involved in the symbolic ordering of the poem, though the order which concerns the poet most is a mental order, not a physical one. The physical becomes, at most, emblematic of the mental. The poem is concerned with a poet's perception and with the relationship of idea and object, or subject and object, as it affects that perception. The poet is aware of a complex relation of subjects and objects in the singer's song and in his perception of the singer, her song, and the sea. The singer's song of the sea is "beyond the genius of the sea" (CP, 128). The singer is "a body wholly body" (CP, 128); so is the sea. Both

make "mimic motion" (CP, 128). Each issues a cry, that of the singer perhaps inspired by that of the sea; the poet understands both cries, though neither is his own. All of this is concerned with "like" and "unlike." The shared essences of motion and sound somehow link sea and singer in the poet's mind, though he continues to perceive their differences:

The song and water were not medleyed sound
 Even if what she sang was what she heard,
 Since what she sang was uttered word by word
 It may be that in all her phrases stirred
 The grinding water and the gasping wind;
 But it was she and not the sea we heard.

For she was the maker of the song she sang.
 The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
 Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
 (CP, 128-29)

In this denial of actual likeness of song and sea, Stevens reveals how much effect place may have on the perception of meaning. As he is clear to say, the singer's song may have no intentional relation to the sea at all; "Even if" discounts the likelihood of intentionality. Despite a perceived relation of sea and song, "it was she and not the sea we heard"; thus the relation is in the poet's mind, not in the physical world. The sea is "merely a place" where the singer chooses to sing. But the poet has perceived a likeness, and his perception is partly due to the proximity of singer and sea.

What the poet seeks is beyond the physical particulars; he seeks "the spirit"--the essence that is neither sea alone nor sound alone. He seeks the "more than that" which he hears

among
 The meaningless plungings of water and wind,
 Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
 On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
 Of sky and sea. (CP, 129)

All of this attention to enormous images of place only counterpoints the poet's attention to the singer's act of singing.

She was the single artificer of the world
 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
 Whatever self it had, became the self
 That was her song, for she was the maker. (CP, 129)

As in the case of other Stevens poems, an apparent concern for a physical place becomes a concern for the mental perception of the place. The poet's subject becomes the process of transforming place into poetry. Physical awareness of place is displaced as the subject of the poem. As with the singer, for whom "there never was a world . . . / Except the one she sang and, singing, made," so for the poet: physical place becomes negligible as he imposes on the landscape, by his perception of it, an essential but artificial order.

Such definition by perception as that expressed here recalls the final lines of "Tea at the Palace of Hoon,"

where the poet likewise creates his place out of himself by means of his perception:

I was myself the compass of that sea:

I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
Or heard or felt came not but from myself;
And there I found myself more truly and more strange.
(CP, 65)

The world of Hoon is clearly an imaginative one existing in mental space, but in "Ideas of Order at Key West," there is a more tangible physical image which serves as the vehicle for the poet's principle of creation by perception.

It is not difficult to describe the parts of the physical scene which the poet sees, but of more central concern to the poem is the ordering of space, both mental and physical, in the poet's mind. Of the physical scene, the poet says that

The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
As the night descended, tilting in the air,
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night. (CP, 130)

The physical image of lights reflected on the sea, converging radially at the point of the poet, is artificial. The lights do not send their light only toward the poet; his perception only makes it seem so. His perception of the lights thus orders and creates his world. Like the singer, he becomes a maker.

The rage for order finally expresses itself as a "rage to order words of the sea" (CP, 130), but this ordering of language is more complicated than the spatial ordering of the landscape. As the poet's consciousness oscillates between physical sensation and mental comprehension of the scene, a sort of transcendence is achieved. There is an absence of verbs; action is frozen and the poet seems to achieve a momentary vision of a primitive world of pure essence in which an essential language is possible:

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea.
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds. (CP, 130)

In the achievement of this vision, Stevens has again employed place as vehicle. As for Key West specifically, it is an example. It is the poet's idea at Key West that matters, and that is an idea of order which derives from an oscillating perception of the place in both its physical elements and in its figurative associations.²¹

In an earlier poem, "The Comedian as the Letter C," place references are often in terms of climate or flora, but despite the richly physical descriptions of scenes, the places are primarily significant for the essences they embody. Place is a vehicle for the poetic consciousness. As Hi Simons points out, the subject of "The Comedian . . ." is the relation of the poet to environment and the relation of

poetry to the life of an individual or a society.²² The poem recounts the voyage of Crispin, Stevens' comic valet-poet, from Bordeaux to Yucatan to the Carolinas; it also tells the effects of Crispin's settling into a "shady home" and raising a family. "The Comedian . . ." is a comic quest poem, and it ends with the general disillusionment of the poet-narrator, if not of Crispin, who finally accepts the stagnation of physical satisfaction rather than submit to the more demanding asceticism of poetic investigation. Place is of some symbolic importance in any quest poem, and "The Comedian . . ." is no exception, but it is the relation of poet to place around which the key question of the poem revolves.

Section I opens with this: "Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil" (CP, 27). Crispin's initial romantic assumption is that man orders his own world, whatever its reality may be. It is not long, however, before Crispin denies this romantic mythology of self and becomes "an introspective voyager" (CP, 29), and later, with the physical voyage almost ended, Crispin expresses the reverse of the original proposition: "Nota: his soil is man's intelligence. / That's better. That's worth crossing seas to find" (CP, 36). The discovery to which Crispin comes is a deterministic assertion of inherent essence to which man is born--an order provided by earth,

not by man. Crispin's "his soil is man's intelligence" is not, however, a satisfactory resolution to the romantic-realistic conflict of the poem; it is a vision too primitive for modern man to believe. Man can no longer so easily deny his responsibilities for the forms--orders--of his life. Thus, Crispin is no hero. Rather, he is overwhelmed by the poetic problem he sets out to solve, and he ends by accepting and rationalizing his failure--the physical comfort of familial relations and a nonhostile environment. He settles for the softer realities, excuses his failure by the general weakness of mankind, and embraces the "quotidian" which "saps philosophers / And men like Crispin" (CP, 42). Finally, he slips into fatalism. His quest ends for lack of desire. But lest the reader become smug about Crispin's failure, the poet-narrator closes the poem with a warning: "So may the relation of each man be clipped" (CP, 46).

As this brief summary of Crispin's mental quest indicates, it is thought and not geography that concerns Stevens most, but the key locations on the path of the quest are not randomly chosen. Bordeaux may represent simply the European world, or it may suggest Stevens' predisposition for French thought and literature. Perhaps it is the arranged-ness of Bordeaux (at least in Stevens' understanding of it) that allows the romantic assertion that begins the

poem. Yucatan is described in more physical detail than Bordeaux, but what is central to the Yucatan scene is the essence of sensuousness, seen in the colors of parrots and the lushness of fruit and vegetation:

That earth was like a jostling festival
Of seeds grown fat, too juicily opulent,
Expanding in the gold's maternal warmth. (CP, 32)

This fecundity appeals to Crispin, but he does not yield to it. For Stevens' purpose, Crispin must advance to the United States rather than remain outside it. In the poem, a thunderstorm calls Crispin to "something harsher,"

And while the torrent on the roof still droned
He felt the Andean breath. His mind was free
And more than free, elate, intent, profound
And studious of a self possessing him,
That was not in him in the dusty town
From which he sailed. (CP, 33)

Aware of this "self possessing him" which adds significance to his quest, a confident and ambitious Crispin sails from Yucatan toward the Carolinas and a vision of America that recalls Stevens' own preference for a seasonal climate:

America was always north to him,
A northern west or western north, but north,
And thereby polar, polar purple, chilled
And lank. . . .

. . .

The spring came there in clinking pannicles
Of half-dissolving frost, the summer came,
If ever, whisked and wet, not ripening,
Before the winter's vacancy returned. (CP, 34)

Crispin seems satisfied to have denied the merely sensuous attraction of Yucatan in order to seek a starker, barer climate. He is aware of the fluctuation of climate and flora that mark his progress, and he thinks of his travel in terms of oscillation--

An up and down between two elements,
 A fluctuating between sun and moon,
 A sally into gold and crimson forms,
 As on this voyage, out of goblinry,
 And then retirement like a turning back
 And sinking down to the indulgences
 That in the moonlight have their habitude. (CP, 35)

What evolves is a set of associations (of which place is one) grouped around the poles of realism and romanticism. In Crispin's conceiving, voyaging is a back and forth or up and down between these poles of reality and the imagination. This is the oscillation that has been seen already in Stevens' contrast of Florida and the North and in the seasonal changes that alternately cover and reveal the bare particulars of trash on the dump and the "gray particular of man's life" in "The Rock." Movement from place to place, from time to time, or from season to season serves as a vehicle for such mental oscillation as Crispin conceives; throughout Stevens' poetry, such movement seems to imply participation, both physical and mental, in the process of life as thought and of thought as life. His sense of place is regularly expressed in such movement of the consciousness.

Crispin fails to solve the puzzle of his poetic quest because, once in Carolina, he surrenders his dreams of whole vision and settles for an in-between existence rather than one which demands participation in sparer extremes of experience. Unwilling to pursue his dream of a colony to either of its polar extremes--realism or romanticism, North or South--Crispin devalues his physical and intellectual hardiness and settles for easy comfort:

. . . he built a cabin who once planned
Loquacious columns by the ructive sea [.] (CP, 41)

In the presto of the morning, Crispin trod,
Each day, still curious, but in a round
Less prickly and much more condign than that
He once thought necessary. (CP, 42)

The fertility of Crispin's Carolina colony and his achievement of physical satisfaction within such a colony dooms his poetic quest. Carolina itself is not cursed; it is a geographic middle ground. It stands not for the middle that Stevens later spoke of as an essentially appropriate and desirable centered-ness, but for a state of limbo that Stevens thought committed neither to North nor to South, to realism nor to romanticism. Crispin's quest is not concluded by achievement of the motion-in-stasis/stasis-in-motion that marks transcendence in some later Stevens poems. Crispin merely stops moving, and the absence of motion--imaginatively as well as physically--is his failure. Spatially, the interruption of the projected voyage results,

not accidentally, in the geographic inscription of an elongated letter c (Bordeaux to Yucatan to the Carolinas). This fact may suggest an alternate title for the poem: The Voyage of the Comedian as the Letter C. It may also suggest a partial cycle, a partial oscillation, or a partial vision. Understood in these ways, the letter c may be not only a key to the sound of the poem, as Stevens suggested,²³ but also a spatial configuration in which the shape of the journey emblemizes its incompleteness.

The essential motion that is a characteristic of Stevens' supreme fiction is implicit in "The Man with the Blue Guitar." Though the poem establishes no particular geographical setting for its drama of perception, several sections develop in terms of place. In one of these, the image of the poet as seal, holding the world on his nose and giving it a fling "this-a-way" and "that-a-way" (CP, 178), demonstrates how playful is the poet's consideration of the physical world. The poet's changing perceptions of the world reveal its dynamic aspect.

In Section XXVI, the physical world is seen as an object washed by the imagination; the act suggests the consciousness of the poet oscillating between physical and mental points in space:

The world washed in his imagination,
The world was a shore, . . .

. . .

To which his imagination returned,
From which it sped, a bar in space,

. . .

A mountainous music always seemed
To be falling and to be passing away. (CP, 179)

The essence of this world, and the essence of the poet's relation to it, is motion, and the characteristic motion is a sort of oscillation, toward and away from the "bar in space" which is the particular physical place of experience. The world as a figurative "shore" for the advance and retreat of man's imagination expresses Stevens' concern for place as alternately actual and imaginative. The shore is the "bar in space" that both divides and joins physical and mental spaces, actual and imaginative perceptions.

In Section XXVIII of "The Man with the Blue Guitar," the poet defines his world in terms that recall, once more, the concept of regional mythology. A geographical region is not specifically named; rather, the region is the world. Still, the relation of poet and place is a relation of shared essence. The poet has a sense of belonging in this world of motion-in-stasis/stasis-in-motion:

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

Gesu, not native of a mind
Thinking the thoughts I call my own.

Native, a native in the world
And like a native think in it.

It could not be a mind, the wave
 In which the watery grasses flow

And yet are fixed as a photograph,
 The wind in which the dead leaves blow.

Here I inhale profounder strength
 And as I am, I speak and move

And things are as I think they are
 And say they are on the blue guitar. (CP, 180)

The opening lines here recall Stevens' "The Snow Man," where the central figure needs to "have been cold a long time" to see the world of ice and snow as it must be seen if it is to be comprehended (CP, 10). The lines also recall the insider-ness of the poet that concerns Stevens in his remarks on John Crowe Ransom and Tennessee. But it may be the image of "the watery grasses," flowing yet fixed, or the idea of a photograph as a fixed image of a dynamic scene that most precisely expresses the poet's oscillating perception of the world. In these images lies the key to the process of projecting a world from a fixed point in space, of washing the world in the imagination. The oscillation between flow and fixity inscribes the path of the poet's consciousness, and, once such an order is defined in mental space, the world of the poet becomes a world of "things as they are when they are as we want them to be."

To perceive a place is to know it beyond what Stevens calls its "crust of shape" (CP, 183). This is to know the essence that underlies its physical form. A part of the

poet's role is to re-establish relations between forms which share an essence, thus bringing an order to a chaotic world of apparently dissimilar forms, or what Stevens calls the "madness of space" (CP, 183). The result is the definition of "profoundest forms" (CP, 473). It is this sort of form that Stevens seeks in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven."

"An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" seems an appropriate title for either a domestic comedy or a landscape poem, but in what Helen Vendler has called "the harshest of all his experiments,"²⁴ Stevens is concerned less with a particular city than with an essence that resides in a stripped-down, diminished life. The title is, according to Vendler,

polemic: Stevens chooses New Haven, not the country but a city and a city not even his own; and chooses evening, not only without the sun but without the moon; and not a significant Sunday evening . . . but an ordinary weekday one; and not an evening pale and possessed, but a cold autumn one monotonously affronted by rain.²⁵

The poem itself lacks any central narrative or geographic progression. It is a landscape poem, but Stevens' attention to the physical landscape of New Haven is only as a vehicle for a more abstract consideration of the nature of reality. The city is a physical ground for imaginative investigation, and its name may imply the poet's "never-ending meditation" which is the poem's real concern and from which its form derives.

It is quickly obvious that there is a kind of flickering of objective and subjective perceptions at work in regard to place in the poem, and that Stevens' idea of New Haven is more involved with the flickering or oscillating motion than with a definitive enclosure of either the objective or subjective perceptions. A landscape poem that begins by declaring, "The eye's plain version is a thing apart," must set its reader immediately searching for that from which the "plain version" is apart. When, only a few lines later, the reader confronts this--

Of what is this house composed if not of the sun,
 These houses, these difficult objects, dilapidate
 Appearances of what appearances,
 Words, lines, not meanings, not communications,
 (CP, 465)

--he must realize that the houses are not only those wood or brick structures which Stevens sees from his window in New Haven. They are poems as well, and they exist in mental as well as physical space.

Then, in lines which recall the poet's ability to create a world by his perception and demonstrate the subjective tendencies of Stevens' imagination, the poet describes the essential city:

Suppose these houses are composed of ourselves,
 So that they become an impalpable town, full of
 Impalpable bells, transparencies of sound,

Sounding in transparent dwellings of the self,
 Impalpable habitations that seem to move
 In the movement of colors of the mind. . . .

. . .

[They are] So much ourselves, we cannot tell apart
 The idea and the bearer-being of the idea. (CP, 466)

These houses are habitations of the mind. The scene exists in mental space. The inability to distinguish "idea" and "bearer-being of the idea" is not due to exactly the same phenomenon that was called in the previous chapter a merging of subjective and objective realities, though something near to that is suggested here. The identity of idea and form here is Stevens' perception of a landscape that has attained its primitive essential unity in the fiction of the poem. It is a mental landscape that arises from the spareness of the physical scene. As Stevens puts it, "The point of vision and desire are the same" (CP, 466), and desire exists in the emptiness of "the actual scene . . . in emptiness that would be filled" (CP, 467) by projections of the mind according to its inclination, its habitation. The landscape that results from the mind's desire is a fictive landscape, and it turns the poet-perceiver back once more toward "the eye's plain version":

We keep coming back and coming back
 To the real: to the hotel instead of the hymns
 That fall upon it out of the wind. We seek

The poem of pure reality, untouched
 By trope or deviation, straight to the word,
 Straight to the transfixing object, to the object

At the exactest point at which it is itself,
 Transfixing by being purely what it is,
 A view of New Haven, say, through the certain eye.
 (CP, 471)

Clearly, the search for "profoundest forms" is seen here as a journey of the poet's oscillating consciousness as it moves between physical and imaginative attentions to New Haven. Beginning with the physical, moving toward the imaginative, then returning again, "Alpha [reality] continues to begin. / Omega [imagination] is refreshed at every end" (CP, 469).

The spatial location of essence, as in the phrase "the exactest point at which [the place] is itself," recalls the idea of centered-ness mentioned already and found repeatedly in the later poems. Since place is not merely physical, the "view . . . through the certain eye" is insufficient to the extent that it is only physical. Stevens speaks of walking through "metaphysical streets of the physical town" and perceiving "profoundest forms" (CP, 472-73). This is the act of knowing the idea in the shape of the object, the essence in the form of the place. The achievement of a centered vision is an ideal, a fiction, and it is to be sought, though some aspects of the physical scene, such as "The tink-tonk / Of the rain in the spout," may remain "of the essence not yet well perceived" (CP, 475).

Several figures for New Haven emerge as the poem continues. It is a "colony of a colony / Of colonies" (CP, 479). It is "a residuum, / A neuter shedding shapes in an absolute" (CP, 479). It may be a thing, like all things, half-sun and half dark, half bodiless and half embodied. It may be real and unreal, both in one, as "New Haven / Before and after one arrives" (CP, 485-86), like the images of cities on post cards. Each of these figures results from Stevens' consideration of the nature of reality. They are vehicles for New Haven, but New Haven is a vehicle for Stevens' investigation of reality. His oscillating investigation of place leads to no definitive physical conclusion. Instead, there is this very tentative ending:

It is not in the premise that reality
Is a solid. It may be a shade that traverses
A dust, a force that traverses a shade. (CP, 489)

Though he points out physical landmarks of the city--churches, schools, the towers of Yale, and so forth--Stevens sees New Haven, as Harold Bloom points out, as a "visionary city," a place in the mind rather than on the map.²⁶ Stevens seeks the essence of an ordinary evening in a new heaven of the mind's own making, and he seeks it by means of an oscillation of perception.

Another visionary city appears in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," unquestionably one of Stevens' finest poems and one which yields, perhaps in a less discursive, more

meditative context than is typical of Stevens, a sense of place finely and sensuously perceived, yet projecting beyond the physical place to an ideal place in the mind. "To an Old Philosopher . . ." is a late poem. Stevens was seventy when he wrote it, and in the consideration of the situation surrounding the final days of his friend and teacher, Santayana,²⁷ there seems little doubt of his considering the decorum of his own approaching death. Stevens' sense of essential likeness, a partaking of the same essence by place and person, is a key to the poem. Stevens sees Rome not just as the actual place of Santayana's wait for death; it is also the perfect symbolic place for the fulfillment of the man he admires, suggesting as it does both ancient traditions and the celestial fulfillment. As the poem develops, the intermingling of the topical, the historic, and the prophetic associations of Rome yields a fulfillment as near perfection as any in Stevens. The final image of Santayana is of a fulfillment like that in the final line of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction": "You will have stopped revolving except in crystal" (CP, 407). That Stevens could achieve such a "realized" design in the image of Santayana at the moment of approaching death is largely possible because of the "eternal city" associations of Rome. But such associations, like the "eternal city" label itself, are figurative projections that carry both

poet and reader beyond the physical particulars of the place. Yet, as Stevens says in "The Man on the Dump," it is the particular, the "the," by which we may begin to perceive truth. It is the particular nature of Santayana's place of approaching death that yields the realization of his design. The immediate scene is one of simple grandeur:

It is a kind of total grandeur at the end,
With every visible thing enlarged and yet
No more than a bed, a chair and moving nuns,
The immensest theatre, the pillared porch,
The book and candle in your ambered room,

Total grandeur of a total edifice,
Chosen by an inquisitor of structures
For himself. (CP, 510-11)

Santayana in amber is an emblem of Stevens' world in crystal seen in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction"; each is a figure of constant motion-in-stasis/stasis-in-motion. The image, or "edifice" finds its "grandeur"--its "profoundest forms"--in its very simplicity, just as New Haven finds its imaginative richness in its physical spareness, of grandeur from simplicity is a vital expression of Stevens' sense of place as essence understood by means of an oscillation of consciousness.

It is almost paradoxical that Stevens might so effectively use as the central scene of the poem a place he had never seen, but in this near paradox may lie a key to Stevens' general poetic perception: it is not merely Rome, but the idea of Rome that is central. The idea or essence

of Rome for Stevens is the place's mediation between the historic and the prophetic, the actual and the imagined. That his perception of Rome ignores the various possible negative connotations of the city perhaps shows how his use of place as essence is a sort of manipulation of the physical into a vehicle that serves him in a particular poem. However, with Rome, as with Florida, Tennessee, Oklahoma, or New Haven, Stevens is probably not deluding himself as to the complexity of a place so much as using what he has distilled from his own experience--either direct or vicarious--as its essential quality. It is his essence of the place that matters; its authenticity is not a matter of debate.

The literal-figurative interplay in the poem suggests a mental oscillation between polarities of perception:

On the threshold of heaven, the figures in the street
 Become the figures of heaven, the majestic movement
 Of men growing small in the distances of space,

. . .

The threshold, Rome, and that more merciful Rome
 Beyond, the two alike in the make of the mind.
 It is as if in a human dignity
 Two parallels become one, a perspective, of which
 Men are part both in the inch and in the mile.
 (CP, 508)

This convergence of the two Romes into a unity of place-idea reveals

The human end in the spirit's greatest reach,
 The extreme of the known in the presence of the extreme
 Of the unknown. (CP, 508)

The particulars of sounds, smells, persons, and objects which comprise the scene are

The sources of happiness in the shape of Rome,
A shape within the ancient circles of shapes. . . .
(CP, 508-09)

Stevens is not satisfied to let the physical particulars exist in a merely physical context, nor will he allow Rome itself to be merely physically sensed. He speaks of "a portent," "a moving transference," "a hovering excellence" (CP, 509) that transcends the physical immediacy of the scene. The actual-physical longs for "the celestial possible" (CP, 509).

Santayana becomes the figure in which may be located the intersection of present and universal place, present and infinite time. He is "a citizen of heaven though still of Rome" (CP, 510); he is perceived as one of those "shapes within the ancient circles of shapes." The place where he lies is like the "shore" in "The Man with the Blue Guitar," and all of the elements of Rome find their nexus in him as he nears death:

The sounds drift in. The buildings are remembered.
The life of the city never lets go, nor do you
Ever want it to. It is part of the life in your room.
Its domes are the architecture of your bed. (CP, 510)

Then there is the conclusion--an image of frozen motion, of realized design, a meeting of all space in the place of Rome and of all time in the moment of Santayana's death:

He stops upon this threshold,
 As if the design of all his words takes form
 And frame from thinking and is realized. (CP, 511)

Such realization Stevens strove for in his poetry from the beginning. The desire for an image of wholeness, for a figure that embodies the actual and the imaginative, counterpointed by the admission of inevitable separation, makes necessary the oscillation of consciousness that characterizes Stevens' sense of place. Place is only one aspect of the supreme fiction of unity, and its most significant expression is the legend or mythology of place which Stevens understands to be the sharing of an essence by man and the elements of the place in which the man stands.

Man's act of sharing in the essence of a place is expressed in an early poem entitled "Theory"; in it, there is little doubt as to the importance of placement:

I am what is around me.

Women understand this.

One is not a duchess

A hundred yards from a carriage. (CP, 86)

Of course, these lines must be offset by lines from poems like "Tea at the Palace of Hoon" or "Description Without Place" which might argue that a carriage can be found wherever a duchess may imagine it. The legend or mythology of place--its essence--is, then, most clearly perceived as an interdependence of physical and imaginative perceptions and a movement of consciousness between them.

For Stevens, the mental space in which this oscillation occurs is the region of poetry. Ideally, such alternating consciousness overcomes the separation of object and idea, place and essence, and thought rests:

It would be enough
 If we were ever, just once, at the middle, fixed
 In This Beautiful World of Ours and not as now,
 Helpless at the edge, enough to be
 Complete, because at the middle, if only in sense,
 And in that enormous sense, merely enjoy. (CP, 430)

This spatial expression of understanding and satisfaction as centered-ness is also the key relation in a late poem often used as a touchstone for Stevens' "poetry of being."²⁸ The poem is entitled "Of Mere Being." It describes a scene "at the end of the mind, / Beyond the last thought" (OP, 117). The poet is at the center; the palm and its bird are "on the edge of space" (OP, 118). The scene merely is. But this is Stevens' ideal. In the physical world, such centered-ness is sought, but not ultimately achieved; thus the act of oscillation must continue. The oscillation produces a poetry, and, though only in its own fiction, the poetry takes the place of physical place, as in "The Poem That Took the Place of a Mountain":

There it was, word for word,
 The poem that took the place of a mountain.

He breathed its oxygen,
 Even when the book lay turned in the dust of his table.

It reminded him how he had needed
 A place to go to in his own direction,

How he had recomposed the pines,
Shifted the rocks and picked his way among clouds,

For the outlook that would be right
Where he would be complete in an unexplained
completion:

The exact rock where his inexactness
Would discover, at last, the view toward which they
had edged,

Where he could lie and, gazing down at the sea,
Recognize his unique and solitary home. (CP, 512)

From the oscillation of recomposing, shifting, and picking his way, the poet here attains "the view toward which [he] had edged" and is "complete in an unexplained completion." Thus, he recognizes his home, not in its physical landscape alone, or in its figurative images alone, but in its essence.

Stevens' poetic quest took him virtually everywhere in the mind, but to few places in the physical world; perhaps his satisfaction with ideas of places unseen and with unseen aspects of places seen best explains his lack of physical exploration, especially in his later years. The multiplicity of place references is a most surprising aspect of the sense of place revealed in his poems. However, there is a near singularity of function in the place references. Mappable primarily in a mental space defined by the activity of the poetic consciousness, the places in Stevens' poems are vehicles for his poetic investigation, essences given shape or name. Places in the poems are most

easily related to climates, especially in the figurative sense of climate. None of this should destroy the rich physical appeal of Stevens' images of place, or the centrality of his dependence on the physical world--"The the"--as the beginning point for perception, but it should suggest that the poet's sense of place involves much more than just the immediate, physical parts of his world.

Notes

¹Though it is not the immediate source of the term "oscillation" as it is used in the present study, J. Hillis Miller's essay on Stevens in Poets of Reality, pp. 225 ff., does speak of a "universal fluctuation" by which Stevens shows man attempting to impose order on things in his world. Miller speaks of things "curving through space . . . vibrating or oscillating." He argues that, for Stevens, life is motion and so it is appropriate for man's thought about life to be conceived of as in constant motion and flux.

²Stevens, The Necessary Angel, p. 120.

³Stevens, The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens, p. 380. Later references in this chapter to The Collected Poems will be by CP and page number in the text.

⁴Of these, the first two were Stevens' proposed titles for what was to be his first book of poems, Harmonium. "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" is his major long poem. Of these titles, at least the last two suggest the poet's occupation with the philosophical idea of the one and the many. It is an idea by which the poet investigates and explains the varying perceptions of a single place or thing.

⁵Miller, Poets of Reality, pp. 217-19. The sharing of an essential character by man and land may be, as Miller suggests, a corollary of Stevens' belief that man in his primitive state was essentially one with his world, but that man's recognition of self as distinct from world defined a separation (established a subject-object relation) between man and world. The poet's job in such a world is to attempt reconciliation by creating an elaborately designed fiction which permits belief, not in a god, but in the possibility of order as opposed to chaos.

⁶Sister Bernetta Quinn, The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry, pp. 62 ff. Sister Quinn speaks of the resemblances in Stevens' poems as partakers in a "fluidity of essence." (p. 75) The matter of resemblance is a matter of generalizing diverse forms into a central essence in which, ultimately, all things, persons, and places are alike. Poetry achieves such resemblance via its metaphor and its music. (p. 62 ff)

⁷Stevens, Opus Posthumous, pp. 259-60. Later references to this text in this chapter will be noted in the text by OP and page number in parentheses.

⁸Stevens never allows the identity of perceiver to be totally dissolved in the place, as does Williams; such self-abnegation is not a part of Stevens' poetics.

⁹Aside from the immediate meaning of "dew" in its metaphoric extravagance, Stevens probably meant to echo in the word the idea of "due"--not an extravagant image, but necessity, perhaps the necessity of metaphor.

¹⁰Williams, Imaginations, ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 248.

¹¹Letters of Wallace Stevens, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 241. Ms. Stevens reveals that, despite the November in the poem's opening line, the ship on which Stevens and his wife traveled sailed by Tehuantepec late in October. In a letter to Ronald Latimer several years after the composition of the poem, Stevens says that the experience of the poem "is not merely something that I have imagined." (p. 288) Though the poet, in that same letter, denies a fondness for reading travel books, he does not deny interest in travel itself, even though by 1935, when the letter was written, he had settled into a fairly routine life in Hartford. To see how rare Stevens' foreign travels were, it is helpful to look at a statement from James Baird's The Dome and the Rock, p. 232: "Stevens was twice in Cuba, once in Mexican waters, through the Canal to Tijuana. Early in his years in New York, there was a brief journey to British Columbia." Baird goes on to argue that the poet deliberately "declined Europe" because he believed that "an American artist must see his land in clarity." The argument is not very convincing. It seems at least as likely that Stevens' enforced provinciality resulted from a conservative Republican temperament or from a satisfaction with the ideas of foreign places which he could gather in ways other than travel.

¹²Letters, pp. 288-89.

¹³To appreciate the richness of Stevens' direct perceptions of place, it is helpful to go to the letters which the poet wrote to his wife while he was traveling for the Hartford-based insurance company. As for Stevens' reading,

there are few people for whom Emily Dickinson's "There is no frigate like a book" might be a more appropriate watchword, despite his denial of fondness for travel books. Not only did he read widely in authors both American and non-American; he also subscribed to numerous and varied periodicals, including some of foreign origin, like the French Cahiers d'Art in which he indulged an almost eccentric dedication to reading the French language; in addition, he relished gifts from abroad, be they of tea or papers or paintings, and he found in such curiosities clues to the nature of places he never visited himself. Of course, these vicarious perceptions of place probably led to some wrong conclusions about the nature of some places.

¹⁴Letters, p. 289.

¹⁵Letters, p. 193.

¹⁶Letters, p. 211.

¹⁷The sameness that Stevens rejected is expressed in these lines from "Sunday Morning":

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, . . . (CP, 69)

¹⁸Letters, p. 310n. Though the poem appeared first in the 1936 trade edition of Ideas of Order, it was not included in the 1935 limited edition published by the Alcestis Press.

¹⁹Louis Martz, "Wallace Stevens: The World as Meditation," Literature and Belief: The English Institute Essays for 1957, ed. M. H. Abrams (New York, 1958), pp. 139-65; the essay is reprinted in Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Marie Borroff (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 133-50.

²⁰When the poem first appeared in The Modern School, 5 (July 1918), 193, it was accompanied by an illustration by Walter Pach. Stevens' comment about the illustration in a letter to Carl Zigrosser (Letters, p. 209) is interesting for its implication about the concreteness of the poem's image in his own mind: "Walter Pach's illustration is just the opposite of my idea. I intended something quite concrete: actual animals, not original chaos. Still, it is quite nice as it is."

²¹Harold Bloom argues, in Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate, p. 104, that Stevens is still wavering between affirmation of "a transcendental poetic spirit" and the physical reality of "the veritable ocean." Though Bloom sees this as a lack of poetic certainty, it seems as likely to be merely an expression of the poet's consistent tendency to oscillate between a figurative and a physical consciousness of an image. Rather than disappearing from the later poetry, this oscillation becomes more pronounced as a conscious method of poetic investigation in poems like "The Man with the Blue Guitar," "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven."

²²Hi Simons, "'The Comedian as the Letter C': Its Sense and Significance," Southern Review, 5 (Winter 1940), 453-68. Stevens virtually canonized the Simons interpretation of the poem in a 1940 letter (Letters, pp. 350-52).

²³Letters, p. 351. Stevens writes to Simons, "It is true that the letter C is a cypher for Crispin, but using the cypher was meant to suggest something that nobody seems to have grasped. I can state it, perhaps, by changing the title to this: The Comedian as the Sounds of the Letter C. You know the old story about St. Francis wearing bells around his ankles so that, as he went about his business, the crickets and so on would get out of his way and not be tramped on. Now, as Crispin moves through the poem, the sounds of the letter C accompany him, as the sounds of the crickets, etc. must have accompanied St. Francis. I don't mean to say that there is an incessant din, but you ought not to be able to read very far in the poem without recognizing what I mean."

²⁴Helen Vendler, On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 269.

²⁵Vendler, pp. 269-70.

²⁶Bloom, p. 312.

²⁷Santayana was not Stevens' teacher in a formal sense, though he was at Harvard when Stevens arrived there; they visited, even exchanged poems, and what Stevens learned from the philosopher came from their conversations and from what he read of his books. For a thorough discussion of the relationship, the best source is Robert

Buttell's Wallace Stevens: The Making of "Harmonium"
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

²⁸The phrase "poetry of being" is most easily traceable to J. Hillis Miller's essay, "Wallace Stevens' Poetry of Being," in The Act of the Mind. The implications of the phrase underlie Thomas Hines' The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens: Phenomenological Parallels with Husserl and Heidegger (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1976). The extreme concern for "being" and "becoming" should be eventually traced into the works of Heidegger and/or Husserl, though, as Hines argues, they are not the actual origin of Stevens' idea of "being." Some of the most successful analyses of Stevens' poetry have been philosophical in their bias. In addition to those noted above, there are also Joseph Riddell's The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens and Richard A. Macksey's essay, "The Climates of Wallace Stevens," in The Act of the Mind. It is finally impossible to ignore the philosophical affinities of Stevens' poetry, but they are affinities more than direct connections. The philosophical content in his poems is reducible to a few basic questions: the question of the one and the many, the question of the actual and the apparent, and the question of the value of the examined life.

CHAPTER V

A SENSE OF PLACE REVIEWED

In a recent article entitled "Defining a Sense of Place," geographer Peirce Lewis concludes that

To have a sense of place . . . is as indispensable to the human experience as our basic urges for food, or for sex. . . . I do not think that one can survive as a humane creature on this earth without special attachments to special places.¹

Lewis is speaking about man generally and in a context of concern for personal attachments to specific geographical regions. His words, however, seem to ring true even in the context of the present study, where the "sense of place" has been more centrally related to the perception and use of place by poets in their poems. That each poet studied here, not as a poet but as a man, possessed a sense like that of which Lewis writes, there is little reason to doubt. The attractions of Frost, Williams, and Stevens to New England, New Jersey, and Connecticut, respectively, seem to bear this out. However, these attractions or attachments to particular geographical places have not been, in themselves, the concern of this study. Instead, the chapters have attempted to describe and demonstrate how each poet's sense of place, as a capacity for perception and use of

place, is revealed in his poems and how understanding this sense of place helps the reader to understand the poems themselves.

Poets differ in their perceptions of place and in the employment of place in their poems. This is clear from the examples of Frost, Williams, and Stevens. It is also clear that an individual poet tends to perceive and employ elements of place in characteristic and generally predictable ways. As to what determines a poet's sense of place, conclusions are less certain. The genetic, environmental, and psychic determinations suggested on the opening page of this study have been neither proved nor disproved. But whatever the causes of a poet's sense of place may be, the expressions of that sense are identifiable, and patterns of such expressions define the basic nature of the sense.

Of the key terms used to describe the senses of place in the poetry of Frost, Williams, and Stevens, three have applied especially to the perception of place, and three, especially to the progression of the poet's consciousness in his consideration of place. "Regional," "local," and "essential" have described the way in which Frost, Williams, and Stevens, respectively, perceive elements of place. Frost's perception is regional or approximate, and it is most characteristically expressed in topographical terms that support but do not geographically limit the meaning of

the poems. Williams' perception is local or immediate. His concentration on the impression made by a single image is often so intense that precise placement is obscured; at other times, geographical placement appears to be of vital importance. Still, these apparently contradictory tendencies are linked by his use of a particular physical place or image as the locus of his immediate, unfigured attentions. Stevens' perception is essential. He conceives of an ideal relation in which man and region are joined by a unifying essence. Though this unity is beyond full achievement, the poet's function is to help create a "fiction" of unity by way of conscious figuration or imaginative extension of the actual elements of place.

The terms which have been used to identify the progression of poetic consciousness in the three poets are "enclosure," "disclosure," and "oscillation." Though each may be conceived of as a purely physical movement, all are intended to suggest mental more than physical progressions. They are, thus, figurative and provide the keys to what was called in Chapter I the figurative mappings of poetic consciousness.

"Enclosure" identifies Frost's tendency to develop a place by naming its physical elements, thus establishing its limits in his mind. The term describes his characteristic centripetal progression of consciousness from wider to

narrower physical spaces, seen most clearly in poems like "The Vantage Point" and "Rose Pogonias." "Enclosure" also describes the tendency of central characters in Frost's dramatic poems to establish and maintain barriers, both physical and emotional, between themselves and other persons. Such emotional enclosure is seen in "A Hundred Collars" and "Home Burial"; the maintenance of physical barriers is seen in "Mending Wall." The enclosing consciousness of place reflects a more basic aspect of Frost's poetic vision: his naturalistic understanding of man and his world. To be dominantly conscious of place as enclosure is to understand man's situation as restrictive. In Frost's view, this restriction is due to the natural law of survival of the fittest and to the primacy of human self-protection. To investigate place, as in "The Black Cottage" or "All Revelation," is to confront a limited, enclosed space, and to wish for personal security is to desire an ideal enclosure, like that described by the minister in "The Black Cottage," or to wish to preserve a natural enclosure, as in "Rose Pogonias." Even though the poet seems to be fully aware of the stifling results of personal enclosure--as in "Home Burial" or "A Hundred Collars"--he tends to see it as a natural and necessary human response to the threat of natural destruction.

Williams' dominant progression of consciousness has been called an act of disclosure, but the disclosure usually is the final stage of a process that begins in awareness, proceeds to a detailed, restricted investigation intended to achieve a mystical interpenetration of poet and world, and then turns outward to a disclosure of immediate place as universal place. The central disclosure of Williams' poetry of place is that the local is the universal. If this is true, boundaries no longer exist and the poet's mind is free to explore the world in its immediacy. This progression toward openness and disclosure is clear in "The Wanderer" and Paterson; it is the key to likeness of places in "The Men" and "January Morning"; it underlies the attention to physical images in "Queen Anne's Lace" and "Nantucket." By intense attention to the immediate, Williams achieves a transformation or translation of immediate vision into an unlimited vision of place which suggests his optimistic vision of man and his world.

Oscillation is the characteristic motion of Stevens' consciousness. It is not an oscillation between this place and that one, but between this place as it is in its unfigured physical elements and this place in the imagination, overlaid with what he called "like" and "unlike"--the images of figurative invention. Stevens' consciousness does not proceed toward enclosure, though he is aware of limits, both

physical and mental. Neither does he proceed toward a disclosure which destroys all limits of space, though he may wish that such a disclosure were possible. Because he conceives of life as motion, his characteristic consciousness is of a motion of the mind between plain and decorative, physical and figurative, actual and imaginative images of place. The goal of such oscillating motion is to project a fiction of essential unity. The fiction may suggest the interpenetration of man and world described by Williams, but for Stevens, it remains an idea, not an accomplishment.

The differences in the ways the poets respond to place may be summed up by mapping their thoughts in a hypothetical situation. Finding himself in an unfamiliar and unnamed place, Frost would identify the topographical features and establish an awareness of arbitrary physical boundaries that could mark the limits of the place. Then, aware of those limits, he would proceed to investigate the natural drama of life within the boundaries. In the same situation, Williams would focus not on the apparent boundaries of the place, but on the immediate physical characteristics--especially flora and topography--and on his subjective responses to the physical sensations. By such close attention to the immediate, Williams would establish the place as a locus for thought, effectively denying the significance of any world other than the immediate one. Stevens, in the

same situation, would attend to physical characteristics--especially climate and flora--then begin to redefine the place in figurative terms. Having established the poles of physical and figurative perception, he would continue to alternate in his perception, accepting neither alone as the reality of the place, but allowing the fluctuating perception to yield a fiction or mythology of the place's essential nature.

Despite the apparently clear divisions that are suggested by aligning each poet with one term describing his perception of place and another describing the progression of his consciousness of place, the matter is, after all, not quite so simple. The terms identify dominant rather than uncompromising characteristics. The alignment is, to that extent, artificial--an example of what Stevens might call a necessary, or at least desirable, fiction. The attempt to identify dominant tendencies of the more pragmatic aspect of the sense of place, the function of place, is perhaps even more arbitrary.

Frost uses place dominantly either as setting for dramatic-narrative poetry or as subject for a sort of landscape meditation. These functions derive from the dramatic nature of much of his verse and from his predominantly physical (especially topographical) consideration of place. Occasionally, as in a poem like "Departmental" or "All

Revelation," place is significant beyond its physical elements or their simple symbolic values; place is more active as a vehicle for his thought in these poems than as a subject in itself or a setting for action. Still, it is in the dramatic poems of North of Boston and the landscape meditations like "Rose Pogonias" or "Spring Pools" that the more typical uses of place are found in Frost's poetry.

Williams' sense of place as locus of thought largely determines the most characteristic function of place in his poetry. Place functions as subject of the poem, or, in phenomenological terms, as the object which the subject (the poet) perceives. This use of place makes of a particular scene an immediate physical image in which may be located all of the poet's responses or associations related to the place. For Williams, these associations should not be figurative, though it is by an imaginative connection that they are linked. When Williams establishes the sense of place as locus, as he does most successfully in poems like "The Wanderer" and Paterson, place functions as more than either setting or simple subject for meditation or symbolic extension. It approaches what Sister Quinn calls an "agent" function;² still, the place does not surrender its physical immediacy so as to become a mere vehicle for the poet's thought. In musical terms that Williams liked (and which recall the relation to place associated in

Chapter I with French critic Gaston Bachelard), place is like a musical tone which the poet causes to reverberate throughout the poem. When the place functions successfully as the locus of immediate consciousness, it makes possible the vivid perception that Williams identifies with poetry, and it leads toward the act of interpenetration and disclosure described above.

Stevens' use of place is dominantly as vehicle for his poetic investigation of the nature of reality. Though his attentions to physical details of place are keen, his primary concern is for place as idea or essence. Investigation of place, in physical and figurative terms, is an investigation of thought, particularly of poetic thought. Thus, Tennessee in "Anecdote of the Jar," for example, is the place of the idea of wilderness, not merely a state stretching from North Carolina to the Mississippi River. New Haven is the place where the poet considers the relation of "the eye's plain version" to an imaginative perception of reality. Just so, the title of "The Poem that Took the Place of the Mountain" is a clear and direct expression of how the poet's mind might use place as a vehicle for its understanding and expression of something beyond place.

Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens have been examples. The more basic assertions of this study have been those of difference and sameness in

regard to any poet's sense of place: that each poet possesses a sense of place that is his own, and that each poet projects his sense of place in characteristic, identifiable patterns of perception and function. Conclusions regarding these assertions remain as tentative as the number of poets considered remains limited. However, the examples of Frost, Williams, and Stevens argue for the validity of the assertions, and they invite further investigation of the sense of place as a means to better understanding the work of any poet.

Notes

¹Peirce Lewis, "Defining a Sense of Place," The Southern Quarterly, 17 (1979), 29.

²Sr. Bernetta Quinn, "Paterson: Landscape and Dream," 531.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Auden, W. H. The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.
- Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
- Baird, James. The Dome and the Rock: Structure in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968.
- Benamou, Michel. Wallace Stevens and the Symbolist Imagination. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- Bloom, Harold. Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Borroff, Marie. Language and the Poet: Verbal Artistry in Frost, Stevens, and Moore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- , ed. Wallace Stevens: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.
- Breslin, James E. William Carlos Williams, an American Artist. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Brower, Reuben A. The Poetry of Robert Frost: Constellations of Intention. New York: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Brown, Robert Edward. "Walk in the World: A Journey in the Space of William Carlos Williams" Paterson. Diss. The University of Rochester 1970.
- Buttel, Robert. Wallace Stevens: The Making of "Harmonium". Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.
- Ciardi, John. "The Epic of a Place." Saturday Review of Literature, 11 Oct. 1958, pp. 37-39.

- Conarroe, Joel. William Carlos Williams' "Paterson": Language and Landscape. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970.
- Cook, Reginald L. The Dimensions of Robert Frost. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968.
- Cox, James M., ed. Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962.
- Dijkstra, Bram. The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- Doggett, Frank A. Stevens' Poetry of Thought. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966.
- , and Robert Buttel, ed. Wallace Stevens: A Celebration. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Edelstein, Jerome M. Wallace Stevens: A Descriptive Bibliography. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973.
- Ehrenpreis, Irving, ed. Wallace Stevens: A Critical Anthology. Hammondswothy, England: Penguin Books, 1972.
- Ferry, David. "The Diction of American Poetry." American Poetry. ed. Irwin Ehrenpreis. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965, pp. 135-53.
- Foust, Ronald. "The Place of Spatial Form in Modern Literary Criticism." Diss. University of Maryland 1975.
- Frank, Joseph. "Spatial Form: An Answer to the Critics." Critical Inquiry, 4 (1977), 231-52.
- . "Spatial Form: Some Further Reflections." Critical Inquiry, 5 (1978), 275-90.
- . The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963.

- Frost, Robert. The Poetry of Robert Frost. Ed. Edward Connery Lathem. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.
- . Robert Frost on Writing. Comp. Elaine Berry. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1973.
- . Selected Letters of Robert Frost. Ed. Lawrence Thompson. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.
- . Selected Prose of Robert Frost. Ed. Hyde Cox and Edward Connery Lathem. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.
- Frye, Northrop. "The Realistic Oriole: A Study of Wallace Stevens." Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963.
- Gerber, Philip L. Robert Frost. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966.
- Giovanni, G. "Method in the Study of Literature in its Relation to the Other Fine Arts." Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 8 (1950), 185-95.
- Greiner, Donald J. Robert Frost: The Poet and His Critics. Chicago: American Library Association, 1974.
- Guimond, James. The Art of William Carlos Williams: A Discovery and Possession of America. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968.
- Hines, Thomas J. The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens: Phenomenological Parallels with Husserl and Heidegger. Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1976.
- Iser, Wolfgang. The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- . The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
- Jones, DeWitt and David Bradley. Robert Frost: A Tribute to the Source. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979.

- Juhasz, Suzanne. Metaphor and the Poetry of Williams, Pound, and Stevens. Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1974.
- Kemp, John. Robert Frost and New England. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Kermode, Frank. "A Reply to Joseph Frank." Critical Inquiry, 4 (1978), 579-88.
- . The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- . Wallace Stevens. New York: Grove Press, 1960.
- Kessler, Edwin. Images of Wallace Stevens. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972.
- Kestner, Joseph. The Spatiality of the Novel. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978.
- Koch, Vivienne. William Carlos Williams. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1950.
- Koehler, Stanley. "The Art of Poetry VI: William Carlos Williams." Paris Review, 8 (1964), 110-51.
- Lathem, Edward Connery. A Concordance to the Poetry of Robert Frost. New York: Holt Information Services, 1971.
- Lentricchia, Frank. The Gaiety of Language: An Essay on the Radical Poetics of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.
- . Robert Frost: Modern Poetics and the Landscapes of Self. Durham: Duke University Press, 1975.
- . Robert Frost: A Bibliography. Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1976.
- Lewis, Peirce. "Defining a Sense of Place." The Southern Quarterly, 17 (1979), 24-46.
- Litz, A. Walton. Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

- Lloyd, Margaret Glynn. William Carlos Williams' "Paterson": A Critical Reappraisal. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980.
- Lowell, Amy. Tendencies in American Poetry. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1921.
- Luyster, Eugene J., O.S.F.S. "'The Local' in William Carlos Williams' Paterson, Books One to Five." DAI, 31 (1970), 2391A (Catholic University).
- Lynen, John F. The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964.
- Mariani, Paul L. William Carlos Williams: The Poet and His Critics. Chicago: American Library Association, 1975.
- Martz, Louis. The Poem of the Mind. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Mazzaro, Jerome, comp. Profile of William Carlos Williams. Columbus, Ohio: C. E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1971.
- , William Carlos Williams: The Later Poems. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973.
- Miller, J. Hillis. Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966.
- , ed. William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966.
- , "Williams' Spring and All and the Progress of Poetry." Daedalus, 99 (1970), 405-34.
- Morris, Adelaide Kirby. Wallace Stevens: Imagination and Faith. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Morrison, Kathleen. Robert Frost: A Pictorial Chronicle. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974.
- Morse, Samuel French. Wallace Stevens: Poetry as Life. New York: Pegasus, 1970.
- Nassar, Eugene Paul. Wallace Stevens: An Anatomy of Figuration. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965.

Nelson, Cary. The Incarnate Word: Literature as Verbal Space. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973.

-----". "Suffused-Encircling Shapes of Mind: Inhabited Space in Williams." Journal of Modern Literature, 1 (1971), 549-64.

Newdick, Robert S. Newdick's Season of Frost: An Interrupted Biography of Robert Frost. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976.

Nitchie, George W. Human Values in the Poetry of Robert Frost: A Study of the Poet's Convictions. Durham: Duke University Press, 1960.

Ostrom, Alan B. The Poetic World of William Carlos Williams. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966.

Pearce, Roy Harvey, and J. Hillis Miller, eds. The Act of the Mind: Essays on the Poetry of Wallace Stevens. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965.

Perlis, Alan. Wallace Stevens: A World of Transforming Shapes. Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1976.

Peterson, Walter Scott. An Approach to "Paterson". New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.

Poirier, Richard. A World Elsewhere. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

-----". Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Poulet, Georges. Proustian Space. Trans. Elliot Coleman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

Pound, Ezra. Literary Essays of Ezra Pound. Ed. T. S. Eliot. New York: New Directions, 1968.

Quinn, Sr. Bernetta. The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry. New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966.

-----". "Paterson: Landscape and Dream." Journal of Modern Literature, 1 (1971), 523-48.

- Rahv, Philip. "Hard History." Partisan Review, 4 (1938), 48-50.
- . Literature and the Sixth Sense. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969.
- Riddel, Joseph. The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965.
- . The Inverted Bell: Modernism and the Counterpoetics of William Carlos Williams. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974.
- Sankey, Benjamin. A Companion to William Carlos Williams' "Paterson". Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Schmitt, Richard. "Phenomenology." The Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Ed. Paul Edwards. New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1967. Volume 3, pp. 135-51.
- Simons, Hi. "'The Comedian as the Letter C': Its Sense and Significance." Southern Review, 5 (1940), 453-68.
- Smitten, Jeffrey. "Approaches to the Spatiality of Narrative." Papers on Language and Literature, 14 (1978), 296-314.
- Stevens, Holly B. Souvenirs and Prophecies: The Young Wallace Stevens. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.
- Stevens, Wallace. The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952.
- . Letters of Wallace Stevens. Ed. Holly Stevens. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966.
- . The Necessary Angel: Essays of Reality and the Imagination. New York: Vintage Books, 1951.
- . Opus Posthumous. Ed. Samuel French Morse. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957.
- . The Palm at the End of the Mind. Ed. Holly Stevens. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.

- Sukenick, Ronald. Wallace Stevens: Musing the Obscure.
New York: New York University Press, 1967.
- Sutton, Walter. "The Literary Image and the Reader: A Consideration of the Theory of Spatial Form." Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 16 (1957), 112-23.
- Sypher, Wylie. Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature.
New York: Vintage Books, 1960.
- Thirlwall, John C. "William Carlos Williams' Paterson: The Search for the Redeeming Language--A Personal Epic in Five Parts." New Directions in Prose and Poetry 17. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1961.
- Thompson, Lawrance R. Fire and Ice: The Art and Thought of Robert Frost. New York: Henry Holt, 1942.
- . Robert Frost: The Early Years, 1874-1915.
New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.
- . Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph, 1915-1938. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.
- , and R. H. Winnick. Robert Frost: The Later Years, 1938-1963. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.
- Townley, Rod. The Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams.
Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- Van Egmond, Peter. The Critical Reception of Robert Frost.
Boston: G. K. Hall, 1974.
- Vendler, Helen Hennessy. On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969.
- Wagner, Linda W. The Poems of William Carlos Williams: A Critical Study. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1964.
- . The Prose of William Carlos Williams.
Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1970.
- , ed. Robert Frost: The Critical Reception.
New York: Burt Franklin, 1977.

- Wallace, Emily Mitchell. A Bibliography of William Carlos Williams. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1968.
- Walsh, Thomas F. Concordance to the Poetry of Wallace Stevens. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1963.
- Weaver, Mike. William Carlos Williams: The American Background. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.
- Weimer, David. The City as Metaphor. New York: Random House, 1966.
- Weston, Susan B. Wallace Stevens: An Introduction to the Poetry. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.
- Whitaker, Thomas R. William Carlos Williams. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968.
- Whittemore, Reed. William Carlos Williams: Poet from Jersey. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975.
- Willard, Abbie F. Wallace Stevens: The Poet and His Critics. Chicago: American Library Association, 1978.
- Williams, William Carlos. The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams. New York: Random House, 1951.
- . The Collected Earlier Poems of William Carlos Williams. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1951.
- . The Collected Later Poems of William Carlos Williams. Revised edition. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1961.
- . "The Fatal Blunder." Quarterly Review of Literature, 2 (1944), 125-27.
- . Imaginations. Ed. Webster Schott. New York: New Directions, 1970.
- . In the American Grain. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1925.
- . I Wanted to Write a Poem. Comp. Edith Heal. Boston: Beacon Books, 1958.

- . Paterson. New York: New Directions, 1963.
- . Paterson Five. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1958.
- . Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams. New York: Random House, 1954.
- . Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams. Ed. John C. Thirlwall. New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957.
- Wyatt, David M. "Frost and the Grammar of Motion." The Southern Review, 16 (1980), 86-99.
- Zabriskie, George. "The Geography of Paterson." Perspective, 6 (1953), 201-16.