



T.C.
AKDENİZ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ



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ANALYSIS OF WALLACE STEVENS' POETRY VIA FIGURE-GROUND PERCEPTION

Department of English Language and Literature
Master's Thesis

Antalya, 2024



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Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Antalya, 2024

Akdeniz Üniversitesi
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Müdürlüğüne,

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Anabilim Dalı Yüksek Lisans Programı tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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Tez Başlığı: Transformation of Objects: Analysis of Wallace Stevens Poetry Through Figure-Ground Perspective

Onay : Yukarıdaki imzaların, adı geçen öğretim üyelerine ait olduğunu onaylarım.

Tez Savunma Tarihi: 27 Haziran 2024

Mezuniyet Tarihi : 01/08/2024

AKADEMİK BEYAN

Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak sunduğum “Analysis of Wallace Stevens’ Poetry via Figure-Ground Perception ” adlı bu çalışmanın, akademik kural ve etik değerlere uygun bir biçimde tarafımda yazıldığını, yararlandığım bütün eserlerin kaynakçada gösterildiğini ve çalışma içerisinde bu eserlere atıf yapıldığını belirtir; bunu şerefimle doğrularım.

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24/07/2024

TEZ ÇALIŞMASI ORJİNALLİK RAPORU BEYAN BELGESİ

Öğrenci Bilgileri	
Adı-Soyadı	Hiva RASHVANDHARANAKİ
Öğrenci Numarası	202252115501
Anabilim Dalı	İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı
Programı	Yüksek Lisans
Danışman Öğretim Üyesi Bilgileri	
Unvanı, Adı-Soyadı	Prof. Dr. Arda ARIKAN
Yüksek Lisans Tez Başlığı	Analysis of Wallace Stevens' Poetry via Figure-Ground Perception
Turnitin Bilgileri	
Ödev Numarası	2384009642
Rapor Tarihi	24 Temmuz 2024
Benzerlik Oranı	Alıntılar hariç: % 4 Alıntılar dahil: % 23
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE,	
Yukarıda bilgileri bulunan öğrenciye ait tez çalışmasının a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana Bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluşan toplam 70 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin olarak Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esaslarında belirlenen filtrelemeler uygulanarak yukarıdaki detayları verilen ve ekte sunulan rapor alınmıştır. Danışman tarafından uygun olan seçenek işaretlenmelidir: (X) Benzerlik oranları belirlenen limitleri aşmıyor ise: Yukarıda yer alan beyanın ve ekte sunulan Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporunun doğruluğunu onaylarım. () Benzerlik oranları belirlenen limitleri aşıyor, ancak tez/dönem projesi danışmanı intihal yapılmadığı kanısında ise: Yukarıda yer alan beyanın ve ekte sunulan Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporunun doğruluğunu onaylar ve Uygulama Esaslarında öngörülen yüzdelerle sınırlarının aşılmasına karşın, aşağıda belirtilen gerekçe ile intihal yapılmadığı kanısında olduğumu beyan ederim.	
Gerekçe:	
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SUMMARY

Wallace Stevens' expression is a complex poetic among American modernist authors. His use of various objects and unconventional word organization have raised questions about his philosophy and worldview. The broad interpretability of his poetry allows readers to perceive his works differently with each reading. This study applies cognitive poetics, using figure and ground theory-oriented with Gestalt psychology, to a selection of Stevens' works. This analysis examines the roles of foregrounded figures against different backgrounds and their transformative authority within the context of poems. Concerning the theory of things in his poetry, objects become transformative entities with a divine and poetic presence, suggesting a desperate pursuit of meaning.

Keywords: Wallace Stevens, cognitive poetics, figure and ground, thing theory, pursuit of meaning.

ÖZET**WALLACE STEVENS'IN ŞİİRLERİNİN ŞEKİL-ZEMİN ALGISI YOLUYLA BİR
İNCELEMESİ**

Wallace Stevens'in biçemi, Amerikan modernist yazarlar arasında karmaşık bir şiirsel nitelikte ön plana çıkmaktadır. Çeşitli nesnelerin kullanımı ve alışılmadık sözcük düzenlemeleri, onun felsefesi ve dünya görüşü hakkında süregelen tartışmalara başka bir boyut getirmiştir. Şiirlerinin geniş yorumlanabilirliği, okuyucuların eserlerini her okuyuşta farklı algılamalarına olanak tanır. Bu çalışma, Stevens'in seçme eserlerine Gestalt psikolojisi ve figür ve zemin kuramı üzerinden yaklaşarak bilişsel şiir kapsamında bir açıklama yapmaktadır. Bu açıklama, şiirlerde öne çıkan figürlerin farklı arka planlar bağlamındaki rollerini ve onların dönüştürücü gücünü önceler. Nesneler kuramından da alıntılar yapıldığı bu açıklamada, seçili şiirlerde verili nesnelerin dönüştürücü varlıklar olduğu gözlemlenir ki bu düzlemde şiirler ilahi bir anlam kazanır. Böylesi bir kazanım şairin şiirlerinde umutsuz bir anlam arayışında olduğunu da okuyucuya hissettirir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Wallace Stevens, bilişsel şiir, figür ve zemin, nesneler teorisi, anlam arayışı.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor, Prof. Dr. Arda ARIKAN, who guided me through this journey, showed me the ropes and allowed me to explore the fields I have been passionate about. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Özkan KIRMIZI and Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Galip ZORBA for their suggestions and constructive feedback during and after the defense meeting. In addition, I would like to thank my family and my sister-in-law, whose inspiration and support have been a constant source of strength. I also want to express my gratitude to my closest friends, whose encouragement and support allowed me to continue this journey. Furthermore, I am thankful to my colleagues with whom I collaborated, as their insights and discussions enriched the scope of this thesis. Lastly, I am indebted to my little nephew, whose presence brought joy and warmth to every step of this journey from the very beginning.

INTRODUCTION

Known for his object-based poems, Wallace Stevens' works are still being interpreted and analyzed due to their solid and metaphorical language. Stevens is the poet of reality who "stayed home and wrote his odd, increasingly abstract escapes from emotions" (McConnell, 1976: 162) in the frame of poetry. Poetry, however, was not Stevens' full-time occupation. He was also a lawyer, and his desk was filled with his writings and "piled with towers of insurance-law textbooks" (162). He spent much of his time in a small area in France, significantly impacting his writings. In Altieri's terms, his works are excellent examples of resistance to Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Romantic intellectual practices; imaginative and intensive works of his make him one of the most recognizable poets of the modernist era (2023: 156).

Stevens is the poet of everyday life. Philips (2008:1) sheds light on this aspect of Stevens' life by noting that ordinary patterns were vital to Stevens' life and art. In other words, the ordinary patterns Stevens played signaled the importance of the quotidian, which is characterized by repetition. However, as Philips further explained, Stevens sometimes attempted to escape this repetition without underestimating its importance. Quotidian, for him, is a response to the philosophical dualism of idealism and Empiricism. In other words, Stevens recognizes the interconnectedness of the everyday tangible world and the world of ideas and imagination. Thus, he tested both empirical and idealist worlds as a poet and attempted to find a balance between the two. The recognition of the sense of everyday mundane in his poetry means that particular attention must be given to the repetition in the analysis of his poetry. Unlike how it seems, the mode of ordinary is not merely the nature of Stevens' works but the nature of twentieth-century literature. As seen from his poem "The Man with the Blue Guitar" to "The Auroras of Autumn," Stevens' everyday poetics demonstrate how he attempts to showcase creative potential in primary and repetitive patterns. This notion in his philosophy also "celebrates the democratic life." His poetry portrays the "interdependence of imaginative freedom and realistic fact" and proves that these coexist (2008: 1-2).

Philips (2008: 3) further expounds on the fact that Stevens, in his poetry, is in a quest for "the inaccessible jewel" within the everyday mundane life. The analysis of his poetry highlights the mind-world dichotomy, that is, the distinction between the world of objects or reality vs the ideas. Critics have attempted to explain this notion but have fallen short of fully articulating how the mundane mode of life can reconcile both the "realistic submission of the comedian" and the romantic rebellion of someone with physical and emotional challenges. In this mode, the comedian represents a person who deals with the world and the romantic

represents one who deals with the mind and the inner world. Stevens' poetry suggests that repetition in life leads to creation. The cycles and habits in life offer "permanence composed of impermanence," signifying that, despite the repeated change, a sense of enduring stability is promised within the cycles of life. Stevens' approach to poetry, in Philips' words, enables the incredible to become credible, the imagination to become a fact, and the poet eventually becomes the owner of reality (3-5). To deepen our comprehension of Stevens, Philips expounds that Stevens' perception of the actual world is a "vulgate of experience," indicating that, for Stevens, the world is essentially a common language that every individual comprehends and perceives to varying degrees (5). In other words, language serves as the medium for making sense of the world. Stevens' poetry is an endeavor to align language with the truth. His quest is primarily a quest to find harmony between poetry and truth. Furthermore, Stevens naturalizes dreaming in his 'nightwork' or poetry and strives to integrate dreaming and imagination into everyday life. In this context, Stevens was greatly influenced by John Keats; however, his perspective on imagination differs from that of Keats: while Keats sees imagination as a "divine revelation," Stevens seeks to portray imagination as reality itself, an integral part of everyday life, accessible to ordinary people (7).

Hudson (1955) delves into the aesthetic aspect of Stevens' poetry alongside the challenges faced by poets in the 20th century. Hudson highlights that the modernist era was marked by chaos, and poetry needed to respond to this disillusioned state. As a result, this response involved the use of irony and the replacement of metaphorical language with simile. According to Hudson, irony was a convenient response to sentimentality. Hence, while many poets of his era focused on the war and were expatriates or in exile, Stevens chose to remain in America and, through his imagination, attempted to construct an emotionally satisfying world in his poetry. Stevens' approach to poetry was rather playful, offering a space where his readers could temporarily dwell. His poetry adheres to the concept of 'beyondness,' which means transcending sensory experiences, a theme common to Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism. Hudson also introduces the categories of Stevens' poems, which primarily include poems that grapple with the lower-case reality of existence and offer a tone of resignation and poems that explore exotic worlds. Stevens' work deals with the tension between these categories. In Hudson's words, a poet is required to constantly address this conflict between reality and the exotic world (1955: 135-138).

Stevens celebrates the mystery of life probably more than many other modernist poets. This is one of the key elements that allowed him to adapt to modernism's cultural needs.

As Altieri (2023) describes his works, “If our light determines what we see, we will have little sense of mystery and even less regard for the wonders that the senses bring when they mediate realities that are not pre-scripted” (156). In his collection of *Essays on Reality and the Imagination*, Stevens elucidates his perspective regarding the function of poetry and the role of a poet in this era (Stevens, 1951: 4). In his first essay, he regards poetry as a theory and a subject worthy of study. He holds poetry in high esteem for "poetry itself, the naked poem, the imagination manifesting itself in its domination of words" (5). To illustrate his point, he references Plato's 'Phaedrus' as an instance of rich language that lacks straightforward meaning. Stevens alludes to S. T. Coleridge's definition of such works as 'gorgeous nonsense.' By making this statement, he suggests that poetry's mission is not simply to convey a straightforward meaning; instead, its value is in the interplay between figurative language and words. In the context of Plato's work, Stevens also underscores that Plato's expression is not limited to conveying images; it attempts to evoke an emotional experience (3-5).

In another essay, Stevens delves into the relationship between works of art and their connection to imagination and reality, exploring how each work of art exhibits varying degrees of reality and imagination. He compares the statue of Andrew Jackson by Clark Mills to the statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni by Verrocchio. In these two works, the distinction between 'fancy' and 'imagination' is the central theme, another reference to Coleridge's poetic theory.

Fig 1. Clark Mills. (1852). *Andrew Jackson Statue*. New Orleans, USA.



Fig 2. Andrea del Verrocchio. (1480-1488) *Bartolomeo Colleoni*. Italy, Venice.



Colleoni's statue represents a noble style of the imagination, reflecting a solid adherence to artistic ideals and staying away from a simple representation of reality. In contrast, General Jackson's statue saluting ladies embodies reality and is thus considered 'fancy.' Through these examples, Stevens sheds light on the American preference for realism and easy satisfaction over imagination, which offers an insight into the American mindset (6-7). In his other essay, he delves into the factors contributing to the scarcity of imagination and the dominance of the 'pressure of reality' in literary fields and poetry. He characterizes the sign of imagination as the 'tendency to connotative' in language. However, Stevens argues that this tendency has diminished due to the lack of interaction between reality and imagination, which has resulted in the erosion of nobility in art. According to Stevens, one of the primary factors in the decline of imagination among artists and poets is the impact of wars. The pressure of reality and the uncertainty and alienation with the new world have shifted the role of art in human lives. Such pressures can ultimately shift eras. Therefore, it is not merely the altar of imagination that establishes a new artistic era but rather the new realities that artists must confront (12-22).

For this reason, Stevens' primary concern is the dichotomy of reality and imagination. In this context, it is explained that Stevens' poetic philosophy is primarily based on "things as they are" and "things imagined" (Heringman, 1949: 325). The realm of imagination in this context and within the scope of Stevens' poetry is found through the symbolism of "the moon, blue, the polar north, winter, music, poetry, and all art." The realm of reality is represented through the symbols of "the sun, yellow, the tropic south, summer, physical nature." Given this backdrop, the concept of 'supreme fiction,' as titled by Stevens, attempts to "encourage interpretation of a developing use of the concept as connected with the fusion or synthesis of his dichotomy" (326).

Bass (1991), on the other hand, explains how the interplay between reality and imagination reshapes the concept of 'nothingness' in Stevens' philosophy. Bass initiates his discussion with a review of Freudian psychoanalysis, underscoring its revolutionary impact on understanding the human mind. He contends that the 'snowman' in Stevens' poem "The Snowman" symbolizes the mere essence of nothingness. Bass emphasizes that the theme of nothingness is pivotal in Stevens' poetry, enabling him to transcend conventional metaphysics and engage in a metaphysical experience that surpasses dualism. Stevens' poetic philosophy strives to embrace a realm transcending traditional boundaries of existence. While Bass's analysis draws on Freudian theories, which notably explore sexual aspects within the poem and link 'nothingness' to the concept of castration, it significantly contributes to understanding Stevens' poetry, which establishes an intricate relationship between reality (existence) and nothingness (imagination). Stevens endeavors to illustrate a world empty of human emotions through the poem. Hence, 'nothingness' is not merely the absence of objects and reality; rather, it signifies a mental state detached from human subjectivity, allowing an unfiltered observation. This notion highlights Stevens' exploration of the presence and absence of objects, a fundamental concern that he aims to portray, reconstruct, or define (1991: 295-328).

The interpretation of nothingness in Stevens' poetry varies among scholars. For instance, J. Miller (1964) offers a different viewpoint by exploring the historical and cultural context. He sketches the evolution of human perception, suggesting an initial period marked by a unified cultural lens where divinity and supernatural elements were central. However, this unified worldview gradually crumbled over time, leading to the disappearance of gods and rendering the world barren. Miller argues that this "evaporation of gods, leaving a barren man in a barren land, is the basis of Stevens' poetry," sparking a profound shift in how humans comprehend existence. Objects lose their human significance, and as Miller states, "things appear to close themselves within themselves," or in other words, they become self-contained and static. Describing humans as "orphaned and dispossessed," Miller contends that "the moment of self-awareness in Stevens coincides with the moment of the death of the gods." This vanishing of the gods equates to nothingness, which prompts humans to grapple with the idea that 'they are nothing' (1964: 86-88). Miller further delves into Stevens' philosophy, emphasizing:

After the death of the gods and the discovery of nothingness, Stevens is left in a world made of two elements: subject and object, mind and matter, imagination and reality. Imagination is the inner nothingness, while reality is the barren external world with which imagination carries on its endless intercourse. Stevens' problem is reconciling the two. But such a reconciliation turns

out to be impossible. This way, and that vibrates his thoughts, seeking to absorb imagination by reality, to engulf reality in imagination, or to marry them in metaphor. Nothing will suffice, and Stevens is driven to search tirelessly for some escape from conflict (88-89).

In this context, it is apparent that Stevens grapples deeply with the tension between imagination and reality and the essence of existence itself. The paradox between reality and imagination forms a dynamic nature, and Stevens does not seek to resolve this paradox but instead seeks an oscillation between the two.

Gray's (2012) perspective on Stevens' philosophy focuses on the poet's imagination as he elucidates that the imaginative essence of Stevens' poetry is a "fictional embodiment of the kind of imaginative fiction that can at once recover the world about us, in all its plentitude and raise it to a higher power, a superior reality" (2012: 385). In other words, Stevens attempts to transform the current reality through the power of imagination or, in Gray's terms, create "a bridge between fact and miracle" (385). Stevens' poetry is a reinvention of the truth in the chaotic world of the 20th century, which is indicated in "The Man with The Blue Guitar" poem as it says, "inconstant objects of inconstant cause/In a universe of inconstancy." Therefore, Stevens employs objects as a means of this reinvention. The verbal world is offered through particular words and sounds, such as in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" or "Anecdote of A Jar," which is sufficient in itself and, as defined by Gray, "yet subject to alteration." It seems like Stevens thrives on finding the true essence of the world or, as he states, "[gets] rid of the paint to get at the world itself" (384). From another perspective, the subject matter for Stevens is two alternatives: the paradise proposed to us by the Christian faith and our version of earthly paradise, and what Stevens searches for is the earthly one. He offers a work of art that enables people to survive by escaping from traditional faiths and myths to this very reality, yet through the catalyst of imagination (Gray, 2012: 385). In Stevens' words, "greatest poems of heaven and hell have been written, and the greatest poem of earth remains to be written" (386). Although considered a metaphysical poet, Stevens' poetic world is on earth.

Imagination is emphasized in Stevens' works through various means, sometimes employing complex expressions. In "The Emperor of Ice-cream," Culbert and Violette (1960) analyze its multifaceted interpretations. Some see it as funeral instructions, while others perceive it as a work that explores the relationship between illusion and reality. They suggest the poem reflects Stevens' profound regard for death. While critiquing shallow living and a lack of imagination, according to Stevens' philosophy, it can be said that the poem calls for a more meaningful and imaginative existence. It appreciates the power of imagination, a sentiment viewed repeatedly in Stevens' essays and other works such as "Sunday Morning."

Stevens reveals that death is intertwined with beauty and desire in these works. Culbert and Violette also highlight that while the poem does not preach beliefs, Stevens holds strong views against hedonism and nihilism, viewing neither as the truth in appreciating life (1960: 38-47).

At this juncture, Stevens sees it as the poet's mission to articulate the essence of life. He regards the poet as someone entrusted with a significant mission. In his essay, he outlines the attributes of an ideal poet, emphasizing that the poet transcends being a mere dreamer. His definition of a poet is as follows:

He must have lived all of the last two thousand years and longer and instructed himself, as best he could, as he went along. He will have thought that Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton placed themselves in remote lands and remote ages, that their men and women were the dead-and, not the dead lying on the earth, but the dead still living in their remote lands and their remote ages, and living in the world or under it, or in the heavens-and he will wonder at those huge imaginations, in which what is remote becomes near, and what is dead lives with an intensity beyond any experience of life (Stevens, 1951: 23).

Once again, Stevens emphasizes the relationship between imagination and reality. He states that great poets of the past could make the distant and the dead come to life through works that unite the imagination and reality. Thus, he perceives the poet as a mediator whose mission is to honor life through a harmonious fusion between these notions. In addition, he asserts that the poet carries no “sociological or political obligation,” implying that there is no moral duty for poets (26). The primary focus of a poet should be to render their imagination accessible to all. However, this poetic process has a psychological aspect of escapism. This escape allows one to navigate the “pressure of reality.” Yet, a poet’s responsibility is not to evade reality negatively; instead, they are expected to infuse life, color, and depth into the mundane aspects or seemingly lifeless parts of life. The imagination serves not as an escape in a broad sense but as a means to transcend limitations (30).

Additionally, Stevens explores skepticism in philosophy and contemplates skepticism toward various philosophical ideas. He speaks of Bradley’s perspective, suggesting that the world is too vast for human understanding. As Bradley states, our attempts to grasp its problems and proposed solutions may be illusory (39-40). Following that, expanding on these notions, Stevens creates a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between poetry and philosophy:

To define poetry as an unofficial view of being places it in contrast with philosophy and, at the same time, establishes the relationship between the two. In philosophy, we attempt to approach truth through reason. Obviously, this is a statement of convenience. If we say that in poetry, we attempt to approach truth through the imagination, this, too, is a statement of convenience. We

must conceive poetry as at least equal to philosophy. If truth is the object of both and if any considerable number of people feel very skeptical of all philosophers, then, to be brief about it, a still more considerable number of people must feel very skeptical of all poets (41).

As stated above, both disciplines pursue the truth, yet skepticism towards poets might be more significant due to their subjective and imaginative nature.

Imagination plays a significant role in Stevens' poetry, which is evident in how objects embody imaginative power throughout his works. In this regard, Merivale (1965) presents two contrasting schools of thought in her analysis of Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar." Initially, she suggests that the jar is a positive force similar to John Keats' "Ode on A Grecian Urn," which brings order to chaos. Alternatively, also discussed by Winters, the jar is seen as a corrupting and opposing force, disrupting innocent beauty within nature (1965: 27). Merivale highlights that this portrayal aligns with Stevens' skeptical philosophy, emphasizing the paradox of order causing disorder in nature. The jar symbolizes how romanticized ideals stop individuals from confronting the genuine disorder outside their constructed worlds (28-29). Beyond these interpretations lies the impactful role of imagination reflected in objects. In Stevens' philosophy, imagination imbues objects with transformative value, adding depth and new layers of understanding to poetry. An object like a jar transcends its literal form and speaks of the paradox of order it represents.

Stevens' essays on imagination, alongside scholars' analyses, indicate that he was not merely a poet but also, in a sense, a philosopher. For him, poetry expresses life's essence, with every word carrying profound ideas. He is a poet of everyday life, incorporating simple objects as crucial elements in his work. While repetition and the mundane highlight his focus on reality, Stevens' primary concern remains the role of imagination in life, viewing it as a poet's mission to fuse these two elements. Given the significance of each word and object in his works, it is crucial to approach his poetry with a framework equipped with practical methods to uncover possible meanings within its layers. Hence, this thesis aims to conduct a comprehensive and systematic examination of a selection of Stevens' poems. The primary goal is to explore the relationship between figure and ground within these poems, decoding their significance through a multifaceted approach. The theory of figure and ground provides tools for identifying the figures against specific contexts and grounds. Recognition of the organization of figures and grounds throughout Stevens' poems helps better understand Stevens' vision, worldview, and, most importantly, his poetic style.

Arikan (2017) specifies that stylistic analysis can be processed in complementary ways. In the first, the researcher completes a systematic analysis of the poem “while interpreting the linguistic devices apparent in the text in an aesthetically aware manner so that specific meanings can be ascribed to the text's particularities,” while in the second, the focus is on “how this systematic language use differs from other language systems.” It is also suggested that regardless of which of these is followed, “a stylistic analysis must focus on the sounds as well as the utterances as components of a system that makes up a text” (1). Thus, this study employed a theoretical framework that problematized the relationship between the figure and the ground, as reflected in his poetry, to provide a more profound stylistic analysis of Stevens’ poetry. To achieve this, the analysis commences with identifying and scrutinizing the figure and ground components in nine poems in Stevens’ poetic record namely “Earthy Anecdote,” “Anecdote of A Jar,” “Anecdote of Men by A Thousand,” “Anecdote of Canna,” “The Anecdote of Price of Peacock,” “Thirteen Ways of Looking at A Blackbird,” “The Man with The Blue Guitar,” “The Emperor of Ice-cream,” and “The Snow Man.” The anecdote series was deliberately chosen among the selected poems due to their close connection to Stevens’ experiences. As for the other selected works, it is attempted to determine the poet's most debated and well-known works. Drawing from Talmy's methodology, the research aims to understand these components' spatial and semantic dimensions. Stockwell's (2002) cognitive poetics techniques delve deeper into how the interplay between figure and ground contributes to the poems' overall meaning and impact. The research then shifts focus to the figures described within the poems.

The study examines how the figures transcend their physical presence, becoming channels for transformative experiences that give insights into Stevens’ philosophy. Analyzing the transformation of these figures within the poems uncovers deeper layers of meaning. Ultimately, the research connects the poems to the broader context of Stevens’ philosophy and secular beliefs and its connection to the response to 20th-century modernism. It argues how these seemingly mundane and often overlooked objects encapsulate Stevens’ pursuit of a sense of divinity and how they become an example of a modernist poetic style. This linkage between objects and the poet's spiritual yearnings demonstrates the profound ability of literature and poetry to engage in significant philosophical quests.

CHAPTER ONE: GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY AND FIGURE AND GROUND THEORY

1.1. Gestalt Psychology

Gestalt psychology emerged in the 20th-century as a school of psychology, primarily emphasizing the holistic nature of human perception. In basic terms, Gestalt psychology attempts to elucidate that the mind perceives objects as complete entities rather than parts of collections. In this field, a discrete object has five principles to be recognized, which include the principle of proximity, the principle of similarity, the principle of closure, the principle of continuation, and the principle of functionality (Stockwell, 2002: 33). Furthermore, these principles find meaning when analyzed in visual fields. As Stockwell puts forth, humans tend to unify objects that are visually closer to each other, have mutual roles and functions, or follow one another. Consequently, these principles cover not only visual fields but also linguistic analyses. For instance, "the meaning of concepts does not reside wholly in the words used to express those concepts." Still, the cognitive models cued up by words also contribute to understanding a particular concept (33).

It is necessary to consider that the emergence of Gestalt psychology was not improbable in the 20th century. The profound shift from the end of the 19th-century through the beginning of the 20th century was a dramatic worldview change in Western literature, art, and science. The thinkers of the time, impacted by the world wars, sought to break away from traditions and produce something original and unique. As Beebe (1974) explains, the concept of avant-garde was associated with the mindset of modernists; this notion is linked to "a military term used to describe those soldiers who are first to attack" (Beebe, 1974: 1067). Therefore, breaking away from traditions was more of a necessity for confronting the new aspects of human life that could no longer adhere to traditional approaches to life. Gestalt psychology, at this point, provides a digestible framework that many modernist artists and writers attempted to challenge.

The principles of Gestalt theory led to the initial observations of the figure and ground notion. Stockwell (2002) states that the figure and the ground are the foundation for human perception. It is "clearly and literally an embodiment of this human condition" (15). The understanding of the figure-ground theory found its way into cognitive linguistics, which is the "study of the mind and brain" (Gibbons and Whitely, 2018:149). Additionally, the principles of cognitive linguistics are elucidated by Gibbons and Whitely as follows:

- “1. Language is dependent upon the cognitive mechanisms which are used in other areas of human experience: such as the way we perceive, categorise, and imagine/represent the world.
2. Human minds work in fundamentally similar ways because they possess these cognitive mechanisms.
3. An account of language should accord with what is generally known about the mind and brain in other scientific and psychological disciplines” (149).

The points mentioned earlier connect visual perceptions and the main principles of Gestalt psychology to the understanding of language and bridge these notions with 'stylistics,' which is "centrally concerned with the interactions between the language of a text and a reader of that text" (150). The early stylisticians who emerged around the same time in the early 20th century "wished to make literary inquiry more 'scientific' by basing it firmly on explicit observations about the formal linguistic features of the texts" (Nørgaard et al., 2010). Therefore, the psychology of perception, together with figure and ground theory, fits the main concerns of stylisticians and the primary purpose of stylistic analysis.

The psychology of perception is not limited to language but is also associated with cognitive poetics. Tsur (1992) was the first to introduce a novel approach to poetry and prosody, incorporating various disciplines such as Gestalt psychology, Formalism, New Criticism, and neuroscience or, in other words, introducing the term cognitive poetics to literary studies. In his terms, it is studying literature through “employing tools offered by cognitive science” (1992: 1). The term cognitive science covers numerous disciplines that study “human information processing,” such as psychology, psycholinguistics, or even artificial intelligence. These disciplines interact with the “acquisition, organization, and use of knowledge.” The main objective of this application is to make distinctions between various works of literature and illuminate them rather than using them as a tool for explaining cognitive theories. (2). In this context, Freeman (2014) explains poetics as follows:

Cognitive poetics combines the detailed analysis of linguistic choices and patterns in texts with a systematic consideration of the mental processes and representations involved in the interpretation process. Within cognitive poetics, literary reading is assumed to affect the same mental processes and representations generally involved in comprehension. However, special attention is paid to linguistic creativity and its interpretation since creativity is a central part of the literary experience (even though it is not an exclusively literary phenomenon) (Freeman, 2014:313).

To be more precise, one of the primary objectives of cognitive poetics is to pay attention to the "aesthetic effects of human creativity on human cognition" (314). In this regard, it is crucial to consider all art forms when approaching cognitive poetics in connecting literature to the arts. Along with believing that “arts are by-products of the human mind” (316), Freeman

provides an illustration of her analysis in this context, wherein she explores the subliminal processes through which a poem generates the experience of imagery, language, and prosody. In other words, the essence of cognitive poetics, as also explained by Tsur, lies in the fact that poetry employs cognitive processes with non-aesthetic functions to modify and deform our pre-existing knowledge. Russian Formalism labels this as violating the cognitive processes, which might delay or exploit our thinking pattern to create an aesthetic impact (1992: 4). Thus, poetry is an “organized violence” against how signify and signifier relation function. In Tsur’s terms, our response to poetry and the process of thinking is associated with a dual control of two different principles; one is the principles from cognitive sciences, and the other is that of aesthetics and theoretical poetics. In this context, he introduces the concept of ‘ordinary consciousness’, which is the conciseness that constructs our understanding of reality and is fed with our sensory information. This brings about the notion of ‘cognitive stability’, in which the received sensory information is organized clearly per objects and less detailed backgrounds (14-16).

1.2. Figure and Ground

A Danish psychologist, Rubin, initially proposed the fundamental concepts of figure and ground theory. Figure and ground theory is an analytical tool for cognitive poetics linked to brain studies and Gestalt psychology. According to this notion, things that command the most attention are considered the figures, while anything else apart from the figure is regarded as the ground (Gibbons & Whitely, 2018:150). As a rhetorical term, ‘figure’, from Latin figure, refers to different types of visual representations (descriptive expressions) (Murfin & Ray, 2003:165–167). When distinguishing the figure from the ground, the idea of ‘attention’ plays a pivotal role. Stockwell (2002:14) explores some crucial keywords to be considered while analyzing a text rather than a picture to understand the effect and the outcome of any figure and ground relation. Foregrounding, defamiliarization, and deviance are some of these keywords.

Foregrounding "refers to how certain aspects of a text can be made to stand out or appear prominent through forms of textual patterning" (Gibbons and Whitely, 2018:15). In other words, foregrounding is the crucial element for a text to have its ultimate impact on the reader. This element originated in the early works of Russian formalists, namely Shklovsky and Mukarovsky. Formalists, emphasizing the form of literary works, favored the art and the potential ways for its portrayal. For the formalists, "the purpose of all art is to force our attention to the very artfulness of things." this force for attention is constructed through defamiliarization.

This concept functions by undoing the familiarity of the actions and habits that we know, leading to an automatic and habitual kind of attention from the reader (Burke, 2014: 88). It is understood that the concept of defamiliarization possesses a close connection to foregrounding. While Havranek (1964: 10) explains foregrounding as "the use of devices of the language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon, as deprived of automatization, as deautomatized," Mukarovsky considers defamiliarization as the opposing pole to automatization, thus, in this scope, defamiliarization functions as a tool for foregrounding. On the opposite side of foregrounding, backgrounding occurs, which refers to "de-emphasizing certain concepts" (Huckin, 1997: 82). As an ultimate form, according to Huckin, backgrounding can be synonymous with omission or "leaving certain things completely out of the text" (82). To determine these omissions, the question of "what could the writer have said in the text?" can be asked (87). Defamiliarization, together with foregrounding, leads to a better grasp of literariness and, at the same time, provides a great way to create figures and grounds within a text.

While approaching foregrounding, two literary devices require consideration: parallelism or repetition of specific patterns and deviation or an unexpected breakaway from those patterns (Gibbons & Whiteley, 2018:19-20). Deviation occurs in two forms: external or internal. According to Burke, external deviation is a deviation in a text that deviates from norms set outside it to its context. In contrast, internal deviation violates "secondary norms, meaning those that the text itself has set" (2014:90). Internal deviation, therefore, is linked to parallelism and repetition. In other words, through these two devices, a pattern is constructed from which internal deviation breaks away. This occurrence shifts between the figure and the ground presented in the text. At times, close analysis of different structural repetition and parallelism, as well as the figures and grounds created by the author, makes it possible to discern the mind style of a character or the author (Gibbons and Whiteley, 2018:18). For this to take place, the author backgrounds or silences certain forms to foreground certain elements that highlight their or a character's way of thinking. This leads to the creation of the ground. In this context, Stockwell (2002:14) illustrates silences in Harold Pinter's plays, imagism in T.S. Eliot's poetry, and alliteration in Anglo-Saxon poems as some of the instances of foregrounding and creating literariness in a text.

Apart from the concepts above that explain the general way of creating the figure and ground in a text, at least one of the two criteria in the following key points must be met for a thing to be recognized as a figure:

it will be regarded as a self-contained object or feature in its own right, with well-defined edges separating it from the ground; it will be moving in relation to the static ground; it will precede the ground in time or space; it will be a part of the ground that has broken away, or emerges to become the figure; it will be more detailed, better focused, brighter, or more attractive than the rest of the field; it will be on top of, or in front of, or above, or larger than the rest of the field that is then the ground (15).

In this context, the characters in a text are figures that move against a different ground. In some other cases, the setting thematically turns into the ground, an example of which can be seen in *The Martian Chronicles* by Bradbury in which Mars, being the setting or the ground, turns into the figure. Regarding complex sentences, Talmy (1975) provides specific methods that make recognizing the spatial relation between the figure and the ground easier. He states that "the figure object is conceptually movable, whose path or site is conceived as a variable, the particular value of which is the salient issue." On the other hand, the ground is the "reference point" or the "stationary setting" of the figure's site and movement (1975:419). Talmy uses the standard mathematical equation form of $y=3x^2+1$ to clarify that the relation between the figure and the ground within a text is quite similar to the relation between the x and y ; y is, in fact, the figure-like variable, which is also dependent. On the other hand, the x is ground-like and serves as an independent element in a text, "which is grouped together with all operators and modifiers" (422). Talmy uses locative expressions to distinguish the relation between the figure and the ground. These expressions could be symmetric, as in 'next to,' or asymmetric, as in 'over/under' (420).

However, Talmy states that one may encounter more complex sentences and examples while doing a syntactic analysis regarding the figure and ground relation. In a sentence like "the performance went on for three hours," if 'performance' is assigned as the figure, 'three hours' is assigned as the ground. This demonstrates that the temporal site of the figure also matters, through which the variable of the figure "receives characterization with respect to a ground event" (423). In other words, this creates a temporal reference frame for the figure. In this respect, the concepts of figure and ground are similar to the notion of 'asserted' and 'presupposed,' meaning that they can be assigned to both objects and temporal events.

In another example, Talmy utilizes the following sentence:

"He exploded after he touched the button."

Assigning the button-touching event as the assigned ground, a 'fixed' element in the sentence, he assigns the figure interpretation to the explosion as an event. The notion of being fixed (as

for the button-touching act) and being salient (as for the explosion event) makes such interpretation easier. If the sentence is written as below:

“He exploded after he touched the button. “

The assigned figure and ground interpretations will not change. However, such inverse pairs will switch the tone to more comical or serious ones and may shift the focus from the figure to the ground or vice versa.

While Talmy's methodology is more systematic and technical, Stockwell has a more straightforward approach to distinguishing the figure and the ground. As mentioned earlier, he establishes specific criteria for the figure, and one or two of those need to be met for an object to be interpreted as the figure. He also defines figures as "entities that attract attention, and are therefore figures, are known as attractors." More than having a syntactic approach to a text, Stockwell relies on stylistic features. In this sense, he argues that for the readers to understand the figure and ground relation in the text, they are required to pay the most attention to the stylistics "and the way they might work to confer prominence on particular elements, and background others" (Gibbons and Whitely, 2018: 152). Nevertheless, Talmy's and Stockwell's methods must be considered when analyzing the relation between figures and ground in a text. Alongside that, more traditional features such as "the use of articles (definiteness), verbs (activeness), and noun phrases (largeness)," as well as "experiential features such as the progression of the act of reading (newness), the perception of particular properties (e.g., brightness, noisiness), and the relationship with a reader's sense of what is 'normal' (aesthetic distance from the norm)" are also some of the key concepts that are required to be considered in an analysis (153).

To elucidate how figure-ground theory operates with cognitive poetics, Stockwell (2002) analyzes Ted Hughes's poem titled "Elm" to enhance the understanding of figure-ground about other disciplines and linguistic features. He begins the cognitive poetic analysis by focusing on the first element that captures his attention. The initial attractor in this poem is the use of the personification device. Subsequently, he highlights the active verbs employed in the poem and contrasts them with the passivity of the object (stone) used in the poem. Therefore, it becomes apparent that the devices employed by the poet and the form of the verbs must be considered to identify the foregrounded figure in a poem. Later on, it is emphasized that several phrasal metaphors serve as the second attractors in the poem, functioning as a contrasting element that establishes the theme of reversal. Therefore, it can be understood that detecting attractors through stylistic devices can help expand the understanding of underlying themes within the poem.

Particular attention is paid to the lines' length and the sentences' syntactic organization. Once the attractors and the foregrounded elements in the poem have been clarified, it becomes simple to identify the ground against the foregrounded figure. In this regard, the figure is separated from the rest of the poem to perceive the ground more clearly. Following that, the prepositions used in the poem are analyzed. The repetition of the preposition 'into' in the poem contributes to creating an image schema. This enables us to identify the transformational elements that occur in the poem. In the final schema, the locative word 'against' helps clarify the ultimate message of the poem, which is the confrontation between nature and human industry. Stockwell highlights that this is one of many ways to interpret a poem. However, the interplay of the figure and the ground, deciphered through stylistic attractors and syntactic features in the poem, provides strong evidence for the conclusion and message (2002: 21-24).

Similarly, Gibbons and Whitely (2018: 157-159) offer an analysis centered on attention and atmosphere within the text. Consequently, special attention must be given to the devices utilized in the text. For instance, using personification is a fitting example of an attractor at the start of a text. Furthermore, the ground can be detected through the prepositional phrases. Their text analysis considers the time 'around six' on the ground. The contrast between the activeness and movement of certain elements and objects against the stability and stillness of others is also regarded as a means to identify the foregrounded aspects of the grounds. When focusing on auditory perception, sounds, and noises significantly distinguish the attractor elements or the figures. Finally, it is suggested that particular attention be paid to the patterns of attraction that occur throughout a text. Stylistic choices and devices deliberately influence the reader's perception and enable the discovery of various themes and underlying messages within a text.

1.3. Backgrounding

In addition to paying attention to foregrounded elements that serve as figures within a text, particular attention must be given to the background or the space against which the figure moves or stands. As mentioned earlier, "[c]losely related to framing is foregrounding (and its opposite, backgrounding). These terms "refer to the writer's emphasizing certain concepts (by giving them textual prominence) and de-emphasizing others" (Huckin, 1997: 91).

In this definition, backgrounding is 'omission,' and he further explains it as follows:

Omission is often the most potent aspect of textualization, because if the writer does not mention something, it often does not even enter the reader's mind and thus is not subjected to his or her scrutiny.

It is difficult to raise questions about something that is not even "there" (91).

This approach is closely related to the notion of 'presupposition' in which the author overlooks specific ideas (92). Through presupposition, authors can manipulate the readers or keep specific

points hidden within the text. Questioning the background elements is similar to clarifying the ground within a text. Identifying ground, along with the presence and organization of figures, can lead to understanding underlying aspects and ideas within a text.

Hence, concerning figure and ground theory as a methodology, this study employs a comprehensive and systematic examination of a selected number of Stevens' poems: "Earthy Anecdote," "Anecdote of A Jar," "Anecdote of Men by A Thousand," "Anecdote of Canna," "The Anecdote of Price of Peacock," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at A Blackbird," "The Man with The Blue Guitar," "The Emperor of Ice-cream," and "The Snow Man." The primary objective is to delve into the relationship between the figure and the ground within these poems, deciphering their significance using a multifaceted approach. To achieve this, the analysis begins with the identification and scrutiny of the figure and ground components within the poems. To expand this, the study draws inspiration from Leonard Talmy's method, which serves as a lens for understanding these components' spatial and semantic dimensions. Additionally, Stockwell's cognitive poetics techniques are employed, allowing for a deeper exploration of how the figure and ground interplay contribute to the overall meaning and impact of the poems. The research focuses on the figures mentioned or described within the poems. In addition, drawing upon Brown's (2001) well-known Thing Theory, the study delves into how these figures transcend their physical presence, emerging as a channel for transformative experiences. The transformation of these figures within the context of the poems is closely examined, uncovering layers of meaning within the poems. Ultimately, the research establishes a bridge to the context of the poems and the broader framework of Stevens' philosophy and beliefs. The argument demonstrates how these objects, mundane and often overlooked in terms of their significant presence, encapsulate Stevens' quest for a sense of divinity and later analyze Stevens' poetic style as a response to the dehumanized nature of the 20th century. This connection between the objects and the poet's spiritual yearnings is evidence of the transcendental power that literature and poetry have in channeling profound philosophical pursuits.

CHAPTER TWO: APPLICATION OF FIGURE AND GROUND THEORY ON A SELECTION OF WALLACE STEVENS' POEMS

In Stevens' poetry collections, the anecdote poems emerge as significant focal points for their titles. The rationale behind using the word 'anecdote' in the titles of these five works is debatable. The first aspect to consider is the origin of the word 'anecdote' itself. The Thesaurus dictionary defines the term anecdote as "a short account of a particular incident or event, especially of an interesting or amusing nature." It can also signify "a record of experience" or "reminiscence." As the word refers to "unpublished items" in Medieval Latin, an anecdote can unfold a story, narrate something, and sometimes demonstrate a moment of realization that is not published, not sensational, but ordinary and thus unimportant. That is something to be kept in the back of the mind while reading anecdote poems of Stevens; what sort of a moment of realization is indicated throughout each poem? Due to the poem's complex organization and symbolic figures' usage, deciphering this will require a reliable tool similar to the cognitive poetic approach and figure and ground theory. The Appendix includes the information on the data analysis given in a tabular fashion.

2.1. Earthy Anecdote

This thesis initiates its analysis with the anecdote series, beginning with the "Earthy Anecdote" from Stevens' *Harmonium* collection written in 1923. Employing Stockwell's (2002) cognitive poetics methodology and the figure and ground theory, the initial attractors within this poem are identified, particularly evident in the personification of bucks and catfire within the following lines:

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.
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 (Stevens, 1923/2015: 150).

The bucks' 'clattering,' 'swerving,' and the firecat's 'bristling,' 'leaping' signify a dynamic state for both the bucks and the firecat. Moreover, the paralleled phrases 'to the right' and 'to the left' establish a mirrored sequence, highlighting the firecat's influence on the bucks. Using onomatopoeic language, such as 'clattering,' mimics the sound of hooves on the ground, creating an auditory sensation in the reading experience. These stylistic devices serve as the initial attractors, leading to the interpretation that the buck and the firecat are the primary figures in the poem. The two figures indicate a juxtaposition of opposing forces: the Firecat can be said to embody intensity, energy, and passion, while the bucks, typically referring to male deer, symbolize adaptability in this context. The figure of the bucks adapts to the firecat's change of direction, positioning the firecat at a higher level of authority. It can be stated that the firecat actively changes the ground for the bucks, which is associated with a somewhat divine intervention of the firecat. The short sentence structure allows it to be considered an attractor, emphasizing the fragmented description and the clarity of the shift and transformation within the poem. As the title suggests, these figures lead to the dichotomy of earthy existence (bucks) and the divine force (firecat). In other words, Stevens positions the firecat as a tool for transition, a catalyst for change that prompts a shift in direction. Once the firecat and bucks are removed from the poem, practically a colossal area is seen, with a particular indication of Oklahoma, which serves as the ground of the poem; therefore, it appears that what Stevens pictures is not just two animals moving around in a specific place, but rather a more comprehensive observation of life.

The crucial question concerns the ground of Oklahoma, which serves as the ground for the firecat and the bucks. Despite being in the background, the mention of Oklahoma at the poem's start stands out significantly. Cook (2004: 182) explains that Stevens' usage of place names also highlights the history behind the place. In this context, Oklahoma is an Indian place name. Therefore, it "raises questions of fitness, origins, and complex relations between what came before us and our interventions of time and place" (182). Oklahoma, which represents uncertainty or, perhaps due to its reference to the vastness of American lands, emphasizes the theme of 'exploration.' Stevens poetically evokes an underlying depth or a call for further exploration for meaning. It is as if Stevens is deeply concerned with history, identity, and meaning, as Cook (184) mentions that there are almost "fifty American place-names in Stevens' poems. The greatest number proportionately occurs in *Harmonium*," as "there are loosely eighty non-American place-names" in this collection. Considering these, the two figure

against a vast ground as such seem divine. The dominant firecat can transform the buck's movement as if a divine figure is intervening in one's life.

2.2. Anecdote of A Jar

Another well-known and discussed example among Stevens' anecdotes is the "Anecdote of a Jar" from the same collection, *Harmonium*. It is probably one of the most debated poems in Stevens' body of work. Using an object such as a jar makes it a different reading experience for poetry readers. The poem is constructed in three main stanzas as follows:

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill. It
made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground And
tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere. The
jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee (Stevens, 1923/2015: 142).

In the initial reading, the line breaks, together with the repetition, function as significant attractors within the framework of Peter Stockwell's doctrine. The line breaks create moments of contemplation, directing attention to the description of the jar. The pauses following 'Tennessee' and 'round it was' make these sections stand out at the poem's beginning. In this specific example, it is not challenging to realize that the 'jar' is the main figure in the poem, as most descriptive adjectives, such as 'roundness' and 'tallness' or 'grayness,' are attributed to the jar. This leads to the creation of vivid imagery and a visual experience for the jar, making almost everything else a backdrop to this figure. In this context, the hill appears to be the ground. Nevertheless, the repetition of Tennessee, as well as the comma break that comes after it at the beginning of the poem, puts a strong emphasis on the ground of Tennessee. Similar to the usage of Oklahoma in the "Earthly Anecdote," the usage of Tennessee, another American state, is an indication, however, this time to nature. According to scholars, it refers to the order that the jar has brought to the wilderness and chaos akin to the Gracian Urn (Merivale, 1965: 27). Although

this poem is mainly analyzed in terms of human intervention in wild nature and the domain of civilization, what significantly might matter in this poem is the fact that a sort of transformative value is highlighted again. In other words, this brief narrative presents a significant event in which the power of transformation, a major one such as bringing order, is attributed to an object. In this sense, the jar holds a divine attribution: the ability to transform the land, or perhaps in a broader context, the earth. This resembles the transformative impact of the figure of the ‘firecat’ in the earlier anecdote. The jar, similarly, is more powerful than it is expected to be in the realm of Stevens’ poetry. In essence, due to being an anecdote, it is fair to consider that transformative attribution is a personal experience or perhaps a moment of realization to the poet.

2.3. Anecdote of Men by A Thousand

In the context of the poet’s personal experience, "Anecdote of Men by A Thousand" is a less-discussed poem among Stevens’ anecdote poems. Following the cognitive poetic methodology, the initial step involves identifying the attractors within the poem. The poem, with its considerably short line structure, is as follows:

The soul he said, is composed
Of the external world.
There are men of the East,
Who are the East.
There are men of a province
Who are that province.
There are men of a valley
Who are that valley.

The metaphor of the 'soul' composed of the external world is the primary attractor. This is followed by anaphora in the repeated phrase "there are men," emphasizing the presence of men and establishing them as figures. These men shift across different grounds, such as the east province and valley, revealing the significance of the east in the poem. The East, or the “external world,” is what creates these men. Later on, parallel sentence structure along with the auditory imagery in “As the crackle of toucans/ In place of toucans” highlights the toucan as another figure:

There are men whose words
Are as natural sounds
Of their places
As the crackle of toucans.
In the place of toucans.

The mandolines is the instrument
 Of a place.
 Are there mandolines of western mountains?
 Are there mandolines of northern moonlight?
 The dress of a woman of Lhasa,
 In its place,
 Is an invisible element of that place
 Made visible (Stevens, 1923:4).

The enigmatic refrained question structure in “Are there mandolins of western mountains? /Are there mandolins of northern moonlight?” presented through anaphora positions mandolins as figures against the backdrop of western mountains and moonlight. These two figures bear the weight of identity and culture, and Stevens employs them as powerful signifiers without relying on complex wording. The toucan and mandolin, in this context, hold a unique power similar to that of a god; they possess the ability to bestow an identity of a sort.

Lastly, the Lhasa dress can be seen as a figure. As Stockwell suggests, the figure needs to be regarded as a “self-contained object or feature in its own right, with well-defined edges separating it from the ground” (2004: 15). Therefore, the identified figures could include the soul, men, toucan, mandolin, and Lhasa. Given the eastern backdrop in the poem, Stevens appears to celebrate the East, which is the birthplace of divine beliefs, particularly Hinduism. Thus, it can be seen that the quest for divinity is evident in Stevens’ exploration, projecting divine values through objects like the mandolin, Lhasa, and toucan. In a broader sense, these objects possess the power to transform beyond their essence, symbolizing the identity of their very grounds and indicating a sense of belonging in Stevens’ poem. As the title implies, a man can belong to an idea in countless ways. In his moments of personal experience, Stevens regards objects and makes sense of abstract notions through their lens.

Although the poems are focused on a secular analysis and making sense of the world, or as he had suggested himself, they attempt to be the greatest works of the earth rather than the heavens; Stevens consistently seeks to transcend the mundane and explore deeper meanings. The power attributed to each object, including the ability to create, transform, and establish identity, reflects Stevens’ exploration of godly attributes within the secular framework. While not on a quest for God, Stevens seems to pursue godly features, emphasizing the power of objects through imagination—the invisible element within the poem. Once the objects are removed from the poem, what’s left is the East, valley province, and the mountains; practically a very broad area is depicted to narrate an anecdote.

2.4. Anecdote of Canna

This mysterious quality of the anecdote series is also seen in “Anecdote of Canna.” The poem appears as a metaphorical journey towards the greater. In the poem, the letter X stands out significantly beginning from the first stanza:

Huge are the canna in the dreams of X
the mighty thought, the mighty man.
They fill the terrace of his capitol.

Not only are the attributed features, such as being mighty to X, who happens to be a man, making it a foregrounded figure, but also the strange choice of the word X, and the appearance of this letter within a poem is a strong attracting quality. Along with the X, canna is depicted as ‘huge’ by the first lines “huge are the canna,” which foregrounds the figure of canna in the poem.

His thought sleeps not.
Yet thought that wakes
In sleep may never meet another thought
Or thing... Now day-break comes...
X promenades the dewy stones,
Observes the canna with a clinging eye,
Observes and then continues to observe (Stevens, 1923: 4).

In addition, in the next two stanzas, the figure of X appears as active as the action verbs are attributed to it. He “promenades” and “observes,” and Stevens emphasizes the act of observing through the repeated parallel structure in “observes the canna with a clinging eye/observes and then continues to observe.” The emphasis on observing X's part and ending the lines with the continuation of observance creates suspense and doubt about this act. Thus, the two figures, X and canna, are connected. Canna is a plant that has a vibrant color and quality, an initiator of flourishing ideas and thoughts in X's mind. Canna prompts an understanding or perhaps functions as a remedy to ‘the thought’ that “sleeps not.” Interestingly, thought is used in the singular form, leading to understanding that Stevens refers to a specific idea. This thought is canonized as it “never meets another thought.” At this point, canna becomes an influential figure that attempts to find the solution for a sort of distress that X deals with. The man observes and continues the intense observation of the canna, perhaps hoping for it to make a change. It can be interpreted that the figure of canna is expected to have transformative power. Against the ground of X's mind, canna is the figure that might be able to

find an answer to a thought. Canna connects X to a higher power, and therefore, it is a divine connector. In addition, X in mathematics is a variant, something with a changeable nature; it can be any person. In this regard, the anecdote can be a universal entity and an allegory of someone in quest of a Godly feature: the ability to find an answer to unwavering questions in the mind. Nevertheless, it is required to consider that this poem is an anecdote, and it is likely that X is the poet himself, struggling to overcome a certain distress.

2.5. The Anecdote of the Prince of Peacock

It is fair to consider “The Anecdote of the Prince of Peacock” one of Stevens’ most mystical works. Peacock, or perhaps the berserk, appears as the figure against various grounds:

In the moonlight
I met Berserk, In
the moonlight
On the bushy plain.
Oh, sharp he was
As the sleepless!

A similar figure-and-ground pattern can be found in “Anecdote of the Prince of Peacocks,” which depicts the encounter of Berserk on a moonlit grassy plain. Originally, according to the Thesaurus dictionary, the word Berserk is a synonym for wild, old, and frenzied (Roget, 1985). Berserk is awake, wild, and alert. What makes this poem a special work is the dreamy and somehow mystical depiction of the setting. The speaker, probably Stevens himself again, serves as a prophet enlightened by the mixture of beauty and dread in the plain. Mythopoeic genre as well as the allusion help with foregrounding Berserk. These indicate a link to images of Norse berserkers who are known for their ferocity (Vendler, 1984: 24).

And, “Why are you red
In this milky blue?”
I said.
“Why sun-colored,
As if awake
In the midst of sleep?”

“You that wander,”
So he said, On the
bushy plain, Forget
so soon.

But I set my traps
In the midst of dreams.

I knew from this
That the blue ground
Was full of blocks
And blocking steel.
I knew the dread
Of the bushy plain,
And the beauty
Of the moonlight
Falling there,
Falling
As sleep falls
In the innocent air (Stevens, 1923:55).

In the lines above, synesthesia is another device that describes Berserk as sharp and "red in this milky blue," which blends multiple sensory experiences and evokes a strong sense of imagery. The texture added to this description bolsters Berserk and makes it clear that Berserk is the figure against the ground of a plain. However, moonlight is another foregrounded element. The repeating phrase "in the moonlight" is an anaphorical device that enlarges it as a figure next to Berserk. Moonlight carries the weight of an object or a 'thing' that enlightens reality. It is beautiful and, by shedding light, makes it possible to observe the ground as it is. The poem is a mixture of experience and quite complex and mystical, blending the realm of dream and reality. The Berserk could be perhaps Stevens' mad side that can only meet him in dreams. Because the poem is an anecdote, it could also be interpreted as a personal dream experience that is somehow horrifying. The moon, however, is a significant figure in this realm. Its presence completes the overall picture of this meeting between the speaker and the Berserk and serves as an external light source. Moonlight transforms the experience of this mystical and horrifying meeting into something that bears an aesthetic weight. The moonlight is that recurring element in anecdotes analyzed to this point; it is a godly thing, an external and unreachable source, that allows seeing and comprehending. It makes it possible to know the dread yet never allows the dread to encapsulate the ground fully. The beauty resembles a divine one, for it is horrifying, too. The divinity of moonlight is similar to that of a firecat or canna. In essence, things are more than things in Stevens' poems. They are gates to what might be behind the quotidian or earth.

And while Stevens remains dedicated to a repeating ordinary, he certainly does search for the divine in every figure in his poem.

2.6. Thirteen Ways of Looking at A Blackbird

Apart from the anecdote series, the analysis of Stevens' well-known and argued poems demonstrates the same figure and ground pattern evident in the earlier works. For instance, in the reading of "Thirteen Ways of Looking at A Blackbird," Stevens' skill in projecting figures and ground through contrasting colors becomes quite clear. In the first stanza, he describes twenty snowy mountains and the moving eye of the blackbird:

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird

The movement of the blackbird makes it easy to imagine a foregrounded eye against the ground of white snowy mountains. The contrast of the color black against the whiteness of the hills functions as a primary attractor to the blackbird as the figure and the mountains as the ground. Later in the second stanza, the figure of a tree with three blackbirds appears and draws attention:

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

Interestingly, Stevens tends to use numbers to make the figures more tangible. Similarly, the countability of mountains in the first stanza raises questions about the background of the initial image. The white mountains are there to spotlight the figure. While being tremendous and rigid, they remain unseen when compared with the blackbird:

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime (Stevens, 1956: 139).

These lines suggest that it is possible to interpret that the blackbird is also a divine figure. It appears as a source of life. It "whirls the autumn winds," just a tiny part of the "pantomime" or a bigger show. This resembles a prophetic experience in looking at the blackbird; it is as divine as being the creator of man and woman. The blackbird is not seen as a simple bird, but it belongs to the realm of God, which is the realm of duality: being the man and not being that simultaneously. Being a woman and not being that:

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird

Are one.

In a sense, the divine figure of the blackbird resides in everything the speaker sees. The theme of divinity is somehow involved in the quotidian. In other words, the blackbird is the muse of the poet. It would evoke sharp cries or cause fear as one rides over. A rider in Connecticut, a river in the state of New England, mistakes the shadows of other objects with the blackbird:

I know noble accents.
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply (140).

Blackbird is influential even when it is out of the sight. It possesses a sort of dignity too. This attribution is bears resemblance to that of a God; even an old testament and fearful God. Some people experience the ecstasy while having close connection to God, and some fear, some may cry:

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.
The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

In the last stanza Stevens projects the figure of blackbird again as vivid as it was in the first stanza, against the whiteness of snow. However, it does not move and rather sits in the cedar limbs:

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.

The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs (141).

Presumably, the blackbird's presence and eye becomes ever-lasting through the ending of the poem against the same white ground. The figure dominates the space, even the background of twenty mountains; it has a dynamic nature, and while being small and almost invisible, it is everywhere and remains influential. Therefore, in a sense, a blackbird is 'some' thing of a kind beyond a mere bird. In this context, Stevens speaks of perceiving reality and channeling it to transcend reality. This indicates the distinction in the perception of the modernist mind of the world: the world is not merely seen as it is, but things represent the world. Things even represent God and its divine authority. Symbolically, the blackbird is always present, even if it stops flying, regardless of whether humans know it.

2.7. The Man with The Blue Guitar

In the same manner as this poem, "The Man with The Blue Guitar" is perhaps the one in which Stevens openly brings about the notion of 'things' clearly across its 33 cantos. The poem fundamentally compares the responsibilities of a poet with those of an artist. It resembles an invitation in some of the cantos; for instance, "in canto XXII, it is more like a call to revisit the contract: 'look at this thing you're reading __ what is it, and what does it do?'" (Deitz, 2017: 157). Stevens sees it as his responsibility to call for a reconsideration of what we see and impose a new vision on things. At this point, the guitar becomes a figure that manipulates reality. It possesses a sort of power similar to a jar in "Anecdote of the Jar." Stevens asserts that the artist (the poet) must initiate this transformation.

Patke (1985) describes several progressions within the poem that serve as 'indefinite improvisatory series' by stating that such series "lose their independent status as poems, and their masks and metaphors become stages in the continual play of metamorphosis which is the true life of Stevens' poetry" (241). In other words, metamorphosis or transformation is the mission of Stevens' poetic style. Parataxis is a device that makes understanding his long works quite complex. His long poems are less connected as a whole and independent of themselves. They are fragmented pieces of the reality that he attempts to represent. According to him, "sources of our present conception of reality, without asserting that they are the sole sources, and as supports of a kind of life, which it seems to be worth living, with their support, even if doing so is only a stage in the endless study of an existence, which is the heroic subject of all study" (751).

Callahan (2003), in his study of Stevens' long poems such as "The Man with the Blue Guitar," argues that Stevens "metaphorically provides the similarities and differences between musicians and poets." In this analysis, the guitar is the "instrument of perception." In other words, it is a catalyst that deconstructs reality and creates it again. Imagination is Stevens' bridge for this to happen. The metaphor for music and poetry serves as a way to manipulate this reality. Although Stevens is the poet of earthly matters, he finds it insufficient. He does not compose poems of heavens but looks for them in this very reality. He manipulates them, using what he is surrounded with, such as a blue guitar. He does not want to stand outside this new world, and in section VI, he addresses "topopoeia" or 'the art of constructing an image large enough to enclose its own imager' (Collins, 280)." This means that what the guitar does is too powerful and can encapsulate not only what Stevens perceives as an observant poet but also enclose him and influence him too (Callahan, 2003: para. 5)

Hence, the blue guitar is more than just an object. It carries strong imagery described through the color blue; its blueness contributes to its dream-like quality. In a sense, Stevens explains his intentions of manipulating reality through the blue guitar. In Canto II, he says:

I cannot bring a world quite round
Although I patch it as I can

The act of 'patching the world' seems equal to searching for meaning in it, finding the connections, and making sense of it. The pursuit of meaning seems to be an active theme in the earlier works, too. The notion of patching is repeated again in:

I sing to a hero's head, large eye
And bearded bronze, but not a man
Although I patch him as I can
And reach through him almost to a man.

Therefore, Stevens' primary reason for utilizing objects is to make sense of or 'patch' the world. Also, in canto III, he describes the condition of making sense of the world metaphorically, similar to experimenting:

Ah, but to play man number one,
To drive the dagger in his heart,
To lay his brain upon the board
And pick the acrid colors out,
To nail his thought across the door,
Its wings spread wide to rain and snow,
To strike his living hi and ho,
To tick it, tock it, turn it true,
To bang from it a savage blue,

Jangling the metal of the strings.

The figure of the brain is juxtaposed against the ground of a board. The alliteration of the 'b' sound contributes to the beating rhythm, creating a sense similar to experimenting or surgery, which helps perceive the figure and the ground swiftly. 'Banging from it a savage blue' or 'jangling the metal of strings' take us to the details of the experiment, the experiment of searching for something through the brain. Thus, Stevens' invitation is for all to be experimenters, akin to him, as meaning seekers who chase the beyond. In canto IV, he questions:

So that's life then: things as they are?

It picks its way on the blue blue guitar (Stevens, 1956: 755-770).

In this section, the blue guitar, the poem's principal figure, functions as a tool that helps to perceive life and the 'things' linked to it. The blue guitar accompanies the readers throughout all 33 cantos. At the end, "You as you are? You are yourself / The blue guitar surprises you," presents the guitar as a divine tool that helps the speaker in his quest and experiment. It is more than just an instrument; it is powerful, capable, and divine, or the very primary manipulating figure in the poem. Stevens' authoritative objects move against various grounds. They do not belong to a specific place, they are free, flying around the globe like the blackbird does, or dominating atmosphere in various fragments of the reality like the blue guitar.

2.8. Emperor of The Ice-cream"

Analysis of "Emperor of The Ice-cream" similar to the earlier analyses, offers a clear insight on how significant 'things' can be in Stevens' poetic style. The poem consists of two stanzas, bizarrely depicting a funeral. In the opening lines, to foreground the objects, Stevens attributes adjectives such as 'big' or the alliteration of the letter 'c' to project the crunchiness and the very presence of cups and curds:

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.

The poem is accordingly a preparation for a funeral wake service. The use of sweets is a traditional culture for many at funerals, and perhaps Stevens speaks of ice-cream to

refer to the cultures of places he has visited, such as Caribbean fests and funerals (Austin, 2014: para. 12). However, the question might be why ice-cream is chosen for the reference and why not any other sweet: according to C. Grey, the 'coldness' of ice-cream has a didactic lesson laying within. Grey state:

Stevens knows the corruptions of coldness as well as its beauties. Chief among them is the heartless selfishness, represented by the sweet sinister cold of 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream.' In the kitchen a cigar-rolling man whips 'concupiscent curds' of ice cream as the wenches come and go; in the adjoining bedroom, a dead woman lies in undignified discard, 'cold ... and dumb' under a sheet, her horny feet protruding. Both rooms teach the cynical wisdom that 'The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream': what you see is what you get; look out for Number One; enjoy the sweet cold before the bitter cold claims you (1990: 99-100).

Nevertheless, the presence of multiple objects seems to have a greater role than merely being a part of the scene in such a short poem. Along with the cups, curds, and cigar roles, the sheet, the newspaper, and even the ice cream itself are a synecdoche, representing a part of a whole, the circle of death and life. This automatically foregrounds these objects against the ground of the funeral. The whiteness of all these objects synchs with the coldness of the dead woman's body and the ice cream itself above all. Therefore, each one subtly leads to a strong imagery. However, through the end of the second stanza of the poem, the lines:

Let the lamp affix a beam

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

The juxtaposition of a lamp next to the cold and white objects makes it a dominant object comparably. It enlightens the scene and also shows how cold she is and dumb, which transforms the lamp into an object with a power similar to that of the moon in "Anecdote of the Prince of Peacock." The lamp is a means of vision; it contrasts with the rest of the figures and beams upon the ground. The lamp functions similarly to how the blackbird contrasts with the whiteness of the mountains in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Blackbird." In essence, it goes beyond its functionality. It is a 'thing' to contemplate about. As divine as the blackbird.

In the context of the transformative power of objects in this poem, it can also be interpreted that an object, such as the lamp, sheds light upon the theme of the ephemeral nature of life and the inevitability of death. That is to say, without the lamp there, it would not be possible to 'perceive' this properly. Lamp is a speaker who highlights why 'ice cream' is significant in the poem. Other objects at the poem's beginning, such as the roller of cigars and the kitchen cups with curds, create imagery of indulgence and sensory pleasure. Therefore, it is fair to consider categorizing the objects into two groups: the ones that represent the material life at the beginning and the ones that represent death and draw the curtains and help to see, such

as the ice-cream and the lamp or the sheet on the dead person's face:

Take from the dresser of deal,
 Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
 On which she embroidered fantails once
 And spread it so as to cover her face.
 If her horny feet protrude, they come
 To show how cold she is, and dumb (Stevens, 1923:21).

The transformation from life to death is evident at this point. The objects become the means of communication to the readers. Stylistically, repetition of the key phrase "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream" and "Let the lamp affix its beam," which emphasize the significance of the ice cream and the lamp. This repetition serves to foreground these objects as central to the poem's themes. The objects themselves create a vivid imagery and paint a clear picture of the funeral.

In terms of Stockwell's cognitive poetics methodology, the specific direct address in "Call the roller of big cigars" and imperative mood "Let the wenches dawdle," or "Take from the dresser" draw the attentions to the heavy atmosphere present in the funeral, which also creates a cold, desperate moment of realization of the truth. This in a way, bears resemblance with the anecdote series that might be demonstrating a personal experience.

According to Kamei (2003) this poem is likely to be written for Stevens' daughter as the poet finds death a common experience in life that requires to be taken easy. Hence, life can be resembled to the ice-cream that melts and finishes its existence, indicating ordinary people's delights. Nevertheless, the theme of mortality and the acceptance of death contrasts with the effort to attribute power and domination to objects. When in a state of acceptance, such effort is not expected to happen. Stevens seems to take death as a repeated motif and, in a sense, a personal concern repeated in his poems.

In a way, Stevens does not need God to tell him the truth about the essence of life; he is capable of communicating with the material objects to perceive that, yet it is fair to claim that this, being a secular approach to the philosophy of life, is pursuit of God of some sort. Each object becomes a thing that speaks of death. Objects are powerful; they can emphasize death with their very object-like presence. Stevens seems to look for a divine meaning in these objects. Something that speaks to you like God does or reminds you of death, like a prophet does. The objects become divine and significant. They're not just objects but things beyond that. He

does not look at things as they are, and this matters to him to a point that he composed man with a blue guitar.

2.9. The Snow Man

In the context of “Emperor of Ice-cream,” “The Snow Man” too bears the same cold and white theme. Various figures appear in the poem. Stevens uses natural figures quite a lot in this poem compared to other human-made objects analyzed in other poems. Each object is present there in the ground, and the observant or the listener is anyone, any human, or Stevens himself, desperate to hear something:

One must have a mind of winter
 To regard the frost and the boughs
 Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

 And have been cold a long time
 To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
 The spruces rough in the distant glitter

The poet desperately tries to perceive ‘something’ in nature, perhaps a divine thing. He observes and attempts to be as detached as possible. He sees junipers with ice, spruces that glitter, and pine trees covered with snow. However, they all seem white and cold. It is the same atmosphere in “Emperor of Ice-cream,” a cold and white situation similar to a funeral. In a sense, he looks for the light of the very same lamp in “The Emperor of the Ice-cream,” now in a covered snow landscape. He listens. However, he receives nothing:

Of the January sun; and not to think
 Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
 In the sound of a few leaves,

 Which is the sound of the land
 Full of the same wind
 That is blowing in the same bare place

 For the listener, who listens in the snow,
 And, nothing himself, beholds
 Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is (Stevens, 1923:66).

However, interestingly, he still hears misery in the wind. He tries to avoid it and addresses the readers or advice them not to listen to it. He chooses to be with the nothingness. Winter, with its barrenness and coldness, becomes a symbol of the human condition and the search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent universe. The desperate attempt to attribute

divinity and power for making a change to objects is very significant in the poem. To him this cold landscape is a mind style: The void, colorless, emptiness of the ground has a profound philosophical undertone. Although it seems like nothingness is an indication of a secular aspect of Stevens' poetic style, the poet looks for an answer. He avoids the "misery in the sound of the wind/In the sound of a few leaves, /Which is the sound of the land/Full of the same wind/That is blowing in the same bare place" and attempts to remain detached and perceive the nothingness of the ground instead. Therefore, the wind serves as a sensory experience. The frost and snow-crusts pine boughs, the junipers and spruces, are natural figures that evoke the sense of beauty, misery, or harshness of reality. However, what remains significant in the speaker's mind is the background ground, the white landscape of nothingness. The listener in the snow: a figure representing the detached observer, someone who listens to the natural world without imposing their own emotions or interpretations on it and tries to be as objective as possible. In other words, the listener in the snow chooses to see "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is," rather than seeing the very figures he foregrounded in the opening lines.

Hence, in simple words, speaker invites everyone regardless of who they are, as long as they are reading this poem, to follow his philosophy. Being the listeners, observers and yet, see the very void and barrenness of the reality too. The speaker invites us to see the pine boughs, trees, junipers, and spruces and even the sound of the wind, each speaking and representing something with their presence. Perhaps this is the underlying philosophy that completes the puzzle of all the figures the poet foregrounds.

CHAPTER THREE: DISCUSSION

The analyses of Stevens' poems demonstrate that objects play a crucial role in his poetic style, serving as the prominent figures when analyzed through the lens of figure and ground theory. However, these objects go beyond mere inanimate entities; they function as tools for transformation, influencing the poem's meaning and even impacting other figures within its scope. These objects possess divine features or refer to a sacred notion, elevating them to 'things' rather than ordinary objects. Objects and things can be interchangeable alongside their semantic complexities, which highlights that while objects captivate a poet's attention, things persist in the background because objects "circulate through our lives" as we look through them "to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture-above all, what they disclose about us, but we only catch a glimpse of things" (Brown, 2001: 3-4). Botting (1994) further simplifies Lacan's challenging ideas on language and reality. Lacan seems to encourage people to reconsider their understanding of language and what they perceive as 'real'. Botting expresses this notion as follows:

Encounters with the real itself, that is if there is a real "itself," or if those encounters were not always affected by the language in which the subject is necessarily constructed, would not be paradoxical since the real is just there, "there" not functioning as a demonstrative but representing the unrepresentable beyond of systems of reference, designation and signification. Quite simply, the real remains what is, an unspeakable is, an impossible, inexpressible, ineffable and undifferentiated space outside language (1994: 24).

His identification of the nuances between the real, which could be referred to as an object in this context, and what we understand of it inspired many questions and prompted numerous analyses regarding the 'things' often neglected in our surroundings. Brown underlines Lacan's definition that "the Thing is and it isn't. It exists, but in no phenomenal form" (2001: 6). This can be similar to how the real in psychoanalysis is more about its effects than its direct appearance. In simple terms, a thing is an object when it ceases being an object (or function the way it is expected to), therefore, it is and is not at the same time. In this regard, Brown describes Thing as followed:

We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the window gets filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relationship to the human

subject relationship to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. As they circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture - above all, what they disclose about us), but we only catch a glimpse of things (2001:4).

For a better grasp of the significance of objects and their shift to Things Baudrillard provides the following description:

we have always lived off the splendor of the subject and the poverty of the object. It is the subject that makes history, it's the subject that totalizes the world, whereas the object is shamed, obscene, passive. The object has been intelligible only as the "alienated, accursed part of the subject" the individual subject or collective subject, the subject of consciousness or the unconscious. The fate of the object has been claimed by no one (1990: 111).

In his description, history has always marginalized the importance of objects, and therefore, our understanding of the world lacks the presence of objects. These essential objects do not exist to serve, but they are a lens through which the world can be touched and comprehended. In this context, Brown argues that historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have, at times, turned away from the problem of matter and the object-thing relationship to focus more on the social life, sex, or evolution of things; by following things, the truth can be uncovered more unquestionably. In Brown's terms, this turning away is 'methodological fetishism.' In this method, rather than relying on predefined truth, shifting the focus to Things in motion and understanding their concreteness and historical circulation is required. This shift serves to understand how objects can create or change human subjects. (2001: 5-7). This notion emphasizes the importance of the material world and how it influences human ideologies.

Our imagination keeps resisting societal influences and the role of things. Declaring the extinction of the character of things and ceasing to respect them is a sign of modernity. In the 20th century, surrealism attempted to emphasize the object again by combining thought and objects, such as Salvador Dali's dream of a manuscript on a Rolls-Royce. In addition, historically, the Soviet Union attempted to change people's interactions with physical objects and create an active connection between humans and objects. Eventually, constructivist materialism recognized objects as the primary entity for reshaping the world (8-11).



Figure. Salvador Dali's Raining Rolls-Royce (Tripadvisor, 2011)

On account of the importance of objects, T.S. Eliot introduced the notion of 'object correlative.' In 1919. Initially, the object correlative was credited to explaining *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. In his discussion of this play, Eliot argues that "emotion in art is expressed in the form of an objective correlative," that is to say, "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion" in a way that by providing external facts sensory experience is terminated and "emotion is immediately evoked." The employment of this concept was a critical instrument to "determine the failure of *Hamlet* as a work of art" (Duffy, 1969: 108). In this context, the chain of object presence becomes essential to evoke a meaningful emotional impact and establish a connection to a piece of literature. Humans appear to possess a profound connection to objects as crucial instruments for comprehension beyond the limitations of perceptions. This significance was paid attention to by transcendentalist poets such as Emerson. Duffy highlights that Emerson "sought to get beneath the surface of the material world, to find something of the divine behind the material object," a concept that he names imposing order on the external world, which is only achieved through the imagination's ability to find resemblances (110). Later on, he links this notion to the will of God:

The world is emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind. The laws of mortal nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass.....This relationship between the mind and matter is fancied by some poets, but stands in the will of God, and so is free to be known by all men (110-111).

As mentioned above, attention to objects and things has roots quite earlier than the introduction to thing theory. On the subject of thingness, Brown (2001) notes that the concept of 'things' initially struck others as an outdated topic when he initially discussed it with friends and acquaintances. It was perceived as a theme more suited to the 1920s or even 1990s rather

than the 2000s. However, he emphasizes that the idea of 'thingness' is timeless, even in our contemporary era. Paradoxically, labeling 'things' as outdated reflects modernity, making it a fitting subject for scholarly examination. In this context, he articulates:

Given Heidegger's lecture on "Das Ding" in 1950 and Lacan's location of the Thing at and as the absent center of the real in 1959; given Frank O'Hara's declaration that "the eagerness of objects to / be what we are afraid to do / cannot help but move us" in 1951,⁴¹ Robert Rauschenberg's interruption of abstract expressionism, and the chosisme of the decade's nouveau roman, the postwar era looks like an era both overwhelmed by the proliferation of things and singularly attentive to them (13-14).

Later on, he contends the contrasting relationship between humans and objects. In this regard, we desire for things to proceed with the ideas and theories. However, they are likely to gain their significance after certain intellectual constructs are created, which he titles the 'belatedness of things' and scrutinizes as follows:

It is an object that helps to dramatize a basic disjunction, a human condition in which things inevitably seem too late-belated, in fact, because we want things to come before ideas, before theory, before the word, whereas they seem to persist in coming after: as the alternative to ideas, the limit to theory, victims of the word. If thinking the thing, to borrow Heidegger's phrase, feels like an exercise in belatedness, the feeling is provoked by our very capacity to imagine that thinking and thing-ness are distinct (16).

Brown attempted to set the spotlight on objects with the mind of a 2000s thinker. His theoretical framework allows a better understanding of our dynamic relationship with objects and things not only now but throughout history. The significance of objects turning into things is evident in history, cultural contexts, and psychoanalysis. Thing theory reflects on the anatomy of ideas and objects, which is a suitable framework for understanding works of literature by authors and poets such as Stevens in whom objects appear to be a recurring figure that is not only repeatedly utilized but also hold a divine position of transformation and demonstrating godly features, something that according to Brown, James names as "hyperpresence within the psychological, social, and political dynamics among modern human subjects" (2010: 187). Although this might be a deliberate choice by Stevens to apply a distinctive way of composing poetry on life as a modernist writer, who, like all other modernists, broke away from earlier conventions and allowed the mind, or the so-called psyche, to gallop in, it does indicate a significant notion in the minds of Americans and great thinkers of the 20th century. Objects seem to allow Stevens to "mediate (his) sense of (himself)" as well as his sense of others, including divine beliefs (187).

In this regard, it is crucial to explore modernism as a literary movement and a historical shift that significantly impacted the human mind. The ravages of two world wars and the reshaping of societies in the 20th century asked the question of divinity among thinkers and authors. As Timmerman puts it, "Wars and rumors of wars, love adorned and lovers scorned,

God's voice and the silent void—all seem cast under the grand umbrella" (2013:99).

Timmerman refers to Heavilin's (2013) analysis of man in search of meaning as follows:

the sense of meaninglessness that is the existential vacuum is first disturbed by a syncretic trio of creativity, love, and moral choice. Such actions or states of being resemble transcendent norms of meaningful life. It is, therefore, that behind meaning there must lie being (99-100).

In her analysis in the book *From a Tragic Optimism to an Existential Vacuum: The Search for Meaning and Presence of God in Modern Literature* Heavilin (2013) examines patterns of transcendent meaning, either stated or suggested, within that work of modernist authors. Her work is inspired by Victor Frankl's work *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he elucidates that humans attempt to discover meaning through creativity in any circumstance. She highlights that to him, meaning encompasses the ultimate being, God, or Being itself. The title of 'tragic optimism' and 'existential vacuum' are oxymoronic terms that originated from the same work. She acknowledges the presence of God and the evolution of perspectives on divinity over time in literature. It is clarified that throughout the history of literature, the figure of a present and caring God has transitioned to a non-existent and disinterested depiction, which reflects the societal shifts and the shift from outward exploration to inward examination among humans. (2013: xv-xvi) This might be a consequence of the evolution of psychology as a new science in the 20th century, too.

Following that, she exemplifies works such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which fundamentally attempted to justify the ways of God towards humanity, which was continued by an era of satire focused on social reform. Later, the Romantic movement attempted to turn this outward gaze inward, emphasizing individual subjective experience or, in her words, everything changed from Neoclassicism "then to an inward turn toward the self with the Romantics in the nineteenth." In this regard, she mentions Mary Shelley in whose work "God largely disappears from the Scene" and highlights the "shifting scientific and philosophical bent towards empirical verification of "truth" and a skeptical view of faith and mystery" (xvi). As a result, this perspective in romanticism continues in many modern and postmodern texts that depict a world where God's presence is diminished. Heavilin (2013) explains:

The transformation continues through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the form of a narcissistic self-obsession observable in both Modernist and Postmodernist texts. Literature has thus tended to move away from an upward contemplation on God, to an outward gaze at humanity, to an inward inspection of an isolated self that is severed from connections to the deity and to others (xvi).

In essence, from a figure looking for a way to humans, God begins to disappear from modernist and postmodernist texts. She refers to Erickson's book *The Absence of God in*

Modernist Literature to explain this absence in a better sense. In this book Erickson clarifies this notion as follows:

The title of my book, *The Absence of God in Modernist Literature*, is meant to signal something different from Miller's "disappearance of God" or Nietzsche's or Altizer's "death of God." If God has disappeared it implies that he was, and was perceivable in some way, and if God is dead it too suggests that he was, that he is no more, and that some action killed him. If, as I prefer, God is deemed absent, then it implies no necessary presence at any time, but only that there is an awareness of a lack of that presence. It is meant to resonate with the opposite of presence, but also the sense of something missing, reminiscent of Sartre's "God-shaped hole," and also the desire for a (potentially nonexistent) God (3).

The paradox of the absence of God in modernist works of literature, as Heavilin (2013) suggests, indicates an awareness that exists and continues to exist. Stevens' "Sunday Morning," in which a woman figure finds herself "lapsing into the thoughts of the Sabbath" signals an image from a Christian story. Although this figure cherishes her 'things' such as a mug of coffee, oranges, and chair, and stops searching for heaven, she "seeks to discover the divinity within herself, and attempts to measure all things from herself, the end result is "isolation" and "darkness" as the day draws to a close" (Heavilin, 2013: xvii). Stevens' poem "ends with no God, no light, and no connections to nature, others, or the self." In this sense, the thought of God remains, and the woman cannot escape the "meaning of the Sabbath, of God, and heaven" (xvii). This notion is also observed in his other poems, such as "The Snow Man" or "The Emperor of Ice-cream." The speaker of these poems depicts a white and cold ground, possibly empty of God's presence; however, against this very ground, he quests for God.

Heavilin (2013), once again, refers to Frankl's book and summarizes its main themes. Logotherapy was the first to be introduced, and it was developed by Frankl. 'Logos' or reason is the root of this word, and it fundamentally refers to a specific kind of existential analysis regarding understanding human behavior and searching for meaning in life (xvii). In basic terms, logotherapy is in contrast with pleasure-based Freudian and power-based Adlerian principles. Frankl scrutinizes this notion as follows:

I speak of a will to meaning in contrast to the pleasure principle (or, as we could also term it, the will to pleasure) on which Freudian psychoanalysis is centered, as well as in contrast to the will to power on which Adlerian psychology, using the term "striving for superiority," is focused (1959: 104).

Therefore, the will to search for meaning is the basis of human behavior in this context. Heavilin (2013) highlights that this theory was developed by Frankl due to his experiences as a prisoner in Auschwitz in World War II. In his objective studies, he found out some inmates “not only endured, but were able, on occasion, to transcend circumstances. Neither pleasure nor power was pertinent to their condition, for their lives had been reduced to the lowest human denominator” in fact, it was the “potential to discover some meaning for their miserable lives” that kept them continue (Heavilin, 2013: xviii). Consequently, Frankl describes the ‘existential vacuum’, which also becomes the title of the book, as this vacuum (meaninglessness) can be filled with “creativity, love, and moral choice—even when faced with suffering or death” (xviii).

Consequently, logotherapy emphasizes the human quest for meaning, making the presence of God a notion to be analyzed and studied, particularly in modernist and postmodernist literature. Logotherapy can be a fitting term for analyzing the recurring figures with transformational power in Stevens’ poetry. As Heavilin (2013) indicates, Stevens grapples with God’s presence and meaninglessness in his unique poetic way. This exploration appears not only in “Sunday Morning” but also in all his anecdote poems and many of his well-known works. His poetry reflects a longing for the presence of an ultimate being and the struggle to find meaning.

One of the factors in Heavilin’s (2013) analysis of Frankl’s approach is the notion of ‘tragic optimism’, which refers to the ability to find meaning even when there is no reason for hope. In Frankl’s terms, tragic optimism “means that one is, and remains, optimistic despite the “tragic triad,” even while experiencing “(1) pain; (2) guilt; and (3) death.” In other words, it is “Saying yes to life despite everything . . . presupposes that life is potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable” (139).

Parallel with Frankl’s existential analysis, W.B. Yeats writes of meaning and God. In his poetic prayer “A Prayer for My Son” and “A Prayer for My Daughter,” his trust in God is vividly depicted. He furthers this trust by drawing parallels between his life and biblical characters such as Mary and Joseph (Heavilin, 2013:2-3). Furthermore, he questions the divine’s involvement in tragic events and the suffering of humanity. In this way, he emphasizes the notion of a beneficent God when encountering human tragedy. He even criticizes modern realism and speaks of the role of accountability of God in works of art and the divine as the ‘source’ of inspiration in literature (4-5). In this essence, the inner conflict with personal autonomy and

divinity appears as a recurring notion among modernist writers, the reason of which is the essence of Modernism itself. 20th-century Modernism was marked by the tension of searching for the meaning, and as Eagleton puts it:

One reason why the twentieth century brooded on the meaning of existence more agonizedly than most epochs may be because it held human life so appallingly cheap. It was by far the bloodiest epoch on historical record, with millions of unnecessary deaths. If life is so drastically devalued in practice, one might well expect its meaning to be questioned in theory. But there is a more general issue here as well. It is typical of the modern era that what one might call the symbolic dimension of human life is pushed steadily to the margins (2007:35).

Eagleton's perception of meaning makes it possible to interpret why a modernist poet might seek meaning in various things and grapple with meaning attribution to this extent. The 20th century was marked by an evident devaluation of human life, which naturally prompted reflection on life's significance. Therefore, the modern era marginalized the symbolic dimension of human life, intensifying the obsession with the quest for meaning. This notion likely influenced poetic exploration. According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology (2018), existential dread is "a profound, deep-seated psychic or spiritual condition of insecurity and despair in relation to the human condition and the meaning of life." As a result, 'meaning' can be considered the principal reason for this fundamental dread.

The consequences of Existential Dread inevitably fueled modernism and its grand shift in Western worldview. Terror management theory, which was initially discussed by Becker, an anthropologist, in his book *The Denial of Death* in 1962, highlights that the "complexity afforded humans" the intellectual capacity "to be aware of their own existence and of the passage of time" (Routledge, 2019: 1-2). The downside of this awareness is explained as follows:

These intellectual proclivities, among others such as language, provided humans with a number of survival advantages in terms of anticipating future outcomes, planning, cooperating, and overcoming environmental challenges. Yet, these advanced abilities also came with a downside: the capacity to ponder one's own existence combined with the ability to think about the future made humans aware of their inevitable death (2).

This awareness leads humans to tackle with the knowledge of mortality and developing "a defensive psychological system geared to keeping thoughts and concerns about death away from consciousness to limit the potential for debilitating death anxiety" (2). The first way to manage this fear is through "large-scale cultural belief systems," which contain a "symbolic perception of reality" that enables humans to resume life and reduce the impacts of anxiety with "a sense of meaning, order, and permanence" (2). Apart from Becker (1973), numerous theorists and psychologists, namely Jeff Greenberg and Sheldon Solomon, have proposed and discussed the root and origin of terror management theory. In essence, TMT argues that the inevitability of the idea of death and its unpredictable nature leads to a conflict that results in certain instincts. The

dread stemming from this fundamental conflict may also overlap with escapism or other tendencies linked to the formation of meaning and value. The tendency towards attributing meaning is so profound that Statius Caecilius, in his book III of *Thebaid*, poetically utters, "Fear in the world first created the gods." Within the scope of Becker's book, it is stated that by illustrating themselves as meaningful beings, humans have been able to build cultural elements and stand out among other living beings. This is primarily rooted in their consciousness regarding the inevitability of death. The idea of an unexpected, random, and unknown moment of death leads to creating a means of coping with this fear. He argues that the more thoughts of death increase, the more our tendencies towards finding such meanings, even through religion for non-believers, increase (1973: 11-16).

According to TMT, the cultural meaning systems are based on "nonspecific, domain-general conceptions of the world as structured, characterized by simplicity, clarity, consistency, and coherence of parts." When individuals are reminded of their mortality, they seek a structured interpretation of their environment and search for meaning. It is observed that certain meaning-seeking terms, such as individualism, mass society, capitalism, dehumanization, fragmentation in language, and distorted realities, began to gain significance after World War II. These terms were reflected in the works of modernist writers and artists. Americans adopted a new way to organize and make sense of their world. Through capitalism, they put their world into a new order that conveys new meaning to them (Sarsılmaz & Yiğitler, 2015: 58). Studies can support the notion that the awareness of mortality and collective crisis can increase attraction to predictable behaviors and meaningful orders. In other words, less preference for chaotic and disordered concepts is seen. This awareness leads to a particular need for personal structure. In summary, these findings demonstrate that projecting structures and meanings to the world could be driven by crisis and certain fear towards mortality. Given this backdrop, it can be understood that Stevens adopts his own personal structure poetically to express his personal grapple with this crisis.

Apart from displaying the distinction between the reality and imagination, Stevens' poetry is the reflection of a passion for finding meaning and the divine. Foregrounding key objects and things is a recurring element in his works. The significance of the projection of these objects is recognizable through figure and ground theory. Objects such as jar in "Anecdote of the Jar" or the blue guitar in "Man with The Blue Guitar" possess a transformative power that can alternate the world. In fact, both the jar and the guitar cease functioning the way they are supposed to and instead, becomes a symbol for various ideas, imbuing new meanings into the world. In the same manner, the moon in "Anecdote of the Prince of Peacock" is not an extraterrestrial object, but an external source of light that eases the comprehension and sheds light upon the true essence of scenes and ideas depicted in the poem. This attribution makes moon a rather divine object, and

eye opener akin to God. The same is applicable for the presence of lamp in the funeral that enlightens the truth of the cold ground of the poem “The Emperor of the Ice-cream.” The firecat and the Canna are other 'things' that have stopped being and functioning as what they are and rather, accepted the godly attributions; while the firecat is the primal energy that animates the world, Canna is the catalyst for the quest of meaning. Lhasa dress and mandolin are other foregrounded objects in the anecdote series that carry the weight of the theme of identity. It can be affirmed that adopting objects as such is in fact Stevens’ poetic style; this style of object attribution is not by accident, rather, a way of seeing that is fair to be analyzed, particularly in the scope of modernist works.

In exploring the multifaceted relationship between the objects, meaning and God, Stevens’ poetry is a particular literary work within the framework of modernism. This relationship intersects across numerous disciplines, such as literary theory, psychology, and philosophy. Stevens’ poems offer a profound insight into how a modernist mind quests for meaning and the presence of God and how this tendency is linked to finding structures in the chaotic world to cope with the awareness of mortality. Projecting structure into the world indicates a deep-seated need to manage anxieties. Each divine attribution prompts us to reconsider the perception of reality and highlights Heavilin's (2013) discussion of existential vacuum. Stevens’ poems demonstrate his genius capacity, or to rephrase, the capacity of a modernist mind to find purpose and employ the mundane to reach the divine. As the dichotomy between autonomy and divinity has been a central concern among modernist writers, Stevens also confronts this paradoxical nature of existence. However, the divine intervention in his works is not as explicit as it is in W. B. Yeats poetry; it is more of a quest for meaning through recurring foregrounded object attributions. This quest sheds light upon the results of world's fragmentation and uncertain nature of 20th century; as the awareness of this fragmentation and inevitability of death increases, so does the quest for the beyond. Stevens explores human psyche and imagination, attempting to find a route to transcend the reality through the reality. He does not employ imagination to reach a fantasy, rather, employs it on the reality, to establish the order and structure he wants to transcend it.

Therefore, these objects (the moon, the jar, Canna, the Lhasa dress, the lamp, and the blue guitar...) evolve into things in the scope of Stevens’ poetry. As Bill Brown suggests, the dynamic relationship between humans and the material world constantly changes, which can offer a glimpse into history and human societies. Recurring objects exist out of their functionality in numerous of Stevens’ poems. This underscores how these objects shape the poet's mind, making it a meaning seeker amidst the uncertainties of his time. Stevens’ ability is “working with

the world to abstract something of value out of that world” (Richard Gray, 2012: 383) or, in other words, constructing meaning out of what seems meaningless by essence. This ability is perhaps developed as the result of an existential dread. This, however, is not limited to Stevens only; it is, in fact, a recurring motif among modernist authors, too. In his own way, Stevens responds to Plato’s criticism of the failing of poetry in terms of “deferring the true essence of things to the intelligible realm” and the fact that our representation and impression of the world is inaccurate and untrustworthy (Hart, 2023: 129). Hence, Stevens’ theory rejects the idealized forms of Plato and employs poetic abstractions to “test out different hypotheses, like an actor donning successive masks” (130). He tests everything, in our case, every object, to find the answer.

In one of Stevens’ poems titled "The Idea of Order at Key West," the following lines speak of such a modernist mind style. Such poetic diction tackles finding order and meaning while spilling out his philosophy of making sense of the truth:

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
(Stevens, 1956: 206).

While, these lines vividly reflect Stevens’ true view of poetry; to him, poetry is a tool for imposing order on chaos and exploring the mysteries of existence and mortality, such a poetic style becomes a response to the terror that dominated the 20th-century. Thus, the analysis of Stevens’ poetry indicates a clear tendency towards attributing divine features to objects as it recreates them through imagination.

To a certain extent, Stevens attempts to remain secular in his works; however, he seeks a Godly figure, or better stated, a sense of meaning in his works, which is evident in the attribution of divine qualities such as transformative powers to things. Firecat, with its power to lead the bucks; the jar, with its power to change the environment; and the blackbird, with its divine and almighty presence, are examples of how things can be perceived as figures of God in Stevens’ poetry. On the other hand, the desperate search for meaning becomes more apparent than ever in "The Snow Man" or "Anecdote of Canna," with the repeated emphasis on observing or the quality of being an observer in the world. In longer poems such as "The Man with the Blue Guitar," Stevens turns the blue guitar into a transformative authority that changes the essence of things as they are. This poetic style subtly responds to the essence of 20th-century modernism, interwoven with the reaction to humanity's devaluation, while emphasizing the profound significance of a poet's connection with materials. In this context, readers are questioned about where to seek the divine:

What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth (Stevens, 1956: 745).

Hence, things appear to be what Stevens clings to, finding refuge by recreating, observing, or seeing them as divine.



CONCLUSION

This thesis uses a distinct lens constructed by combining cognitive poetics and the figure and ground framework to understand Stevens' poetry as an example of modernist poetry. After introducing the origins of figure and ground theory and its roots in gestalt psychology, this study initially draws upon Stockwell's methodology to understand poetry in terms of foregrounded elements embedded within the context of the poems. The interplay of figure-ground theory in Stevens' poetry sheds light upon the specific style he tends to employ, which involves using objects that are powerful in transforming elements of the poem or holding a divine position. It is observed that Stevens' poetic craftsmanship is highly influenced by struggling with the idea of reality (or the mundane aspect of life) with the imagination. The literature review within the scope of this thesis explores how this perception has possibly led to evoking particular contemplations on existence and divinity. By delving into selected poems such as the anecdote series including "Earthly Anecdote," "Anecdote of a Jar," "Anecdote of Men by a Thousand," "Anecdote of Canna," and "Anecdote of the Prince of Peacocks," as well as several well-known poems like "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," "The Man with the Blue Guitar," "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," and "The Snow Man," the organization of objects as figures in

Stevens' poetry is analyzed in terms of the significance of his philosophy and style. While the moon and the lamp become the means of seeing the truth, things such as the blue guitar and the jar dominate their environment divinely and have the power to transform it. Living things such as a blackbird or juniper with ice, the spruces that glitter and pine trees become inactive, yet godly figures that sing the song of void and nothingness. In the account of this poetic perception, Stevens seems to organize the ground or the environment of his poems to comprehend his world.

Similar to Gestalt Psychology's emphasis on the holistic nature of our perception, which indicates that humans tend to perceive and organize their environment to embrace it as complete, Stevens' poems attempt to reach that state of completeness in their own way. Gestalt psychology was one of the constructions of the 20th century, displaying the influence of world wars on our meaning-making as we organize and interpret sensory information using context. Figure and ground theory within the framework of cognitive linguistics helps to see and recognize foregrounded objects. It, therefore, provides a tool to analyze objects within the context of poetry, as the content of this thesis exemplified.

The application of figure and ground theory to Stevens' works not only reveals how objects hold symbolic significance and transcend their physical presence but also reflects the

The broader philosophical stance adopted by Stevens. Various stylistic devices and cognitive poetics analysis indicate that objects, rather than mere symbols, are imbued with a tangible essence for Stevens. This study delves into thing theory alongside poetic analysis to comprehensively understand Stevens' philosophy as a modernist poet. Thing theory, as proposed by Brown, elucidates the significance of objects in human lives. It underscores that once an object loses its functionality, it evolves into a 'thing' that encapsulates aspects of the human experience. Such an analysis also articulates that the 'thingness' of figures in Stevens' poetry reveals an existential yearning and a propensity, exemplifying the poet's seeking of the divine. However, on the surface, secular themes and existential doubt seem to dominate his poems.

The findings of such a joint approach drawn from gestalt psychology, cognitive poetics, and thing theory highlight that attributing divine features to things is linked to existential dread. The exploration of the roots of existential dread within the scope of this study brings to light how humans tend to manage this terror as the very consciousness of mortality awakens a defensive mechanism that increases people's attention to the structures that make up the world. Even when the world is not accepted to be structured, trying to manage terror leads us to find clarity and consistency in every part of the world to find 'meaning and order' in every particle of it. Therefore, it is possible to track it in literature by exploring how order and structure find their way into 'things.'

Stevens' employment of objects as a means of philosophical inquiry reflects a broad theme in modernist literature: the impact of the diminishing presence of a benevolent God within the realm of human consciousness. Studies by scholars are reviewed to explore how God diminishes from works of literature yet remains as significant as before. In the case of Stevens, although he holds a secular stance in his poetry, the traces of the divine prove the opposite. Through the 'things' that Stevens uses, he projects a tension between autonomy and divinity, between the mundane and imaginative, and between nothingness and meaning. He establishes order and meaning through the notion of thingness to recreate the divine presence in the fragmented and dehumanized world. This reconsideration of the perception of reality is a way to confront existential uncertainties of the modern age, which marks one of the ways that Modernism departs all the other movements before it by heightening the emphasis on subjective human experience and consciousness over the environment.

In conclusion, objects elevated to the status of things guide us through the labyrinth of meaning and showcase how the relationship with the material world can be shaped and changed

in the modernist era. As seen in Stevens' poetry, materials no longer merely hold an aesthetic presence but become a gateway to seeing and interpreting a modernist mind's poetic style.

This thesis study has limitations, among which is the number of poets included in the study, which is the leading one. In addition to the selected, seemingly most personal and well-studied poems, his other poems can be analyzed regarding the organization of all figure and ground aspects. Apart from this, Stevens' position as an American modernist poet necessitates grasping his philosophical and artistic vision, which is beyond the scope of this study. Finally, apart from the theoretical lenses used in the study, other theories can provide new insights into Stevens' poetic diction.



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APPENDIX- Data Analysis

Title	Year of Publication	Stylistic Devices/Figures of Speech	Symbolic Interpretations
Earthy Anecdote	1923	Parallelism Onomatopoeia Parataxis	Parallelism, with phrases like 'to the right' and 'to the left,' highlights the firecat's influence on the bucks, creating a mirrored sequence. Onomatopoeia, such as 'clattering,' mimics the sound of hooves, adding an auditory dimension that draws readers into the scene. Parataxis emphasizes the fragmented and dynamic nature of the interactions, reinforcing the firecat's role as a transformative, divine force in the poem.
Anecdote of A Jar	1919	Repetition Imagery	Repetition and imagery are key to understanding the poem. Repetition emphasizes the 'jar' as the central figure, with its descriptors like 'roundness' and 'tallness' creating vivid imagery. The line breaks and pauses, particularly around 'Tennessee,' highlight the setting and bring focus to the jar's transformative power over the natural landscape. This use of repetition and imagery underscores the jar's symbolic role as a divine force imposing order on chaos.
Anecdote of Men by A Thousand	1923	Metaphor Anaphora Parallelism Repetition	The metaphor of the 'soul' composed of the external world is the primary attractor. Anaphora in the repeated phrase "there are men" emphasizes the presence of men as figures, shifting across different grounds like the east province and valley, highlighting the East's significance. Parallel sentence structure and auditory imagery, as seen in "As the crackle of toucans/In place of toucans," position the toucan as another significant figure. Repetition and anaphora in the enigmatic questions about mandolins further

			establish them as figures symbolizing identity and culture, projecting divine values and a sense of belonging in Stevens' poem.
Anecdote of Canna	1923	Metaphor Repetition Parallelism	The poem serves as a metaphorical journey with the letter X symbolizing a mighty man. The repetition of X, along with the depiction of canna as "huge," foregrounds these figures. The poem uses repeated parallel structures, to emphasize X's intense observation in addition to creation of suspense. The canna, with its vibrant qualities, metaphorically connects X to a higher power, suggesting a divine influence and potential for transformation.
The Anecdote of Prince of Peacock	1923	Allusion Synesthesia Anaphora	The use of allusion to Norse berserkers foregrounds the figure of Berserk, who appears wild and alert in a mystical setting. The anaphora of "in the moonlight" emphasizes the moonlight as a significant figure that illuminates and transforms the scene. Synesthesia blends sensory experiences, describing Berserk as "sharp" and "red in this milky blue," enhancing the vivid imagery. The moonlight, akin to a divine entity, bridges dream and reality, symbolizing beauty and dread, and aiding in the comprehension of the poem's mystical experience.
Thirteen Ways of Looking at A Blackbird	1923	Contrast Symbolism	Poet uses contrast and symbolism to emphasize the blackbird against snowy mountains, highlighting its divine presence. The blackbird's movement and the color contrast with the white snow make it a significant figure. He also uses numbers and vivid imagery to reinforce the blackbird as a symbol of divinity, presence, and influence, even when it is out of sight. This bird, symbolizing the divine, transcends reality, representing a godly presence in the mundane world.

The Man with The Blue Guitar.	1937	Parataxis Metaphor Alliteration	Poet utilizes parataxis, metaphor, and alliteration to explore the responsibilities of a poet and an artist. The poem's fragmented structure, using parataxis, mirrors the complex nature of reality and the process of transformation. Stevens' metaphor of the blue guitar represents the instrument of perception, manipulating and deconstructing reality. The alliteration in lines like "To bang from it a savage blue" and "jangling the metal of the strings" emphasizes the experimental and dynamic process of creating meaning. The blue guitar, with its dream-like quality, serves as a divine tool, guiding readers through the poem's 33 cantos and highlighting Stevens' manipulation of the world around him.
The Emperor of Ice-cream	1922	Alliteration Synecdoche Imagery Repetition	Stevens employs alliteration, synecdoche, imagery, and repetition to underscore the significance of objects. Alliteration, such as "Call the roller of big cigars," emphasizes sensory details, setting the stage for a funeral wake. Synecdoche is seen as objects like "cups" and "curds" represent the cycle of life and death, with the ice cream and sheet symbolizing transience. Imagery, including "last month's newspapers" and "horny feet" protruding from a sheet, vividly depicts mortality. Repetition of "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream" and "Let the lamp affix its beam" highlights key themes and objects. The lamp, juxtaposed against cold objects, symbolizes illumination and the inevitability of death, similar to the moon in "Anecdote of the Prince of Peacock" and the blackbird in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." Stevens transforms ordinary objects into profound symbols, communicating deeper truths about life and death, which highlights his quest for meaning.

The Snow Man	1921	Symbolism	Stevens uses natural figures like pine trees and junipers covered in snow to symbolize the cold and white theme, similar to "Emperor of Ice-Cream." These natural elements reflect the barrenness and beauty of winter, representing the human search for meaning in an indifferent universe. Readers perceive the essence of nothingness and the underlying philosophical emptiness of existence. Stevens invites readers to contemplate these natural symbols as representations of deeper truths about life and perception.
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