

MODERNISM AND THE POLITICS OF NATIVE EXILE: THE ELIOT – STEVENS CASE

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In view of the “melting pot” metaphor as an index of the modernist narrative, this paper aims at examining two diametrically opposite trends within modernism: the Eurocentric mode represented by T. S. Eliot and the tradition of Americanness represented by Wallace Stevens. In an attempt to redeem a declining Western culture and literature from provincialism, Eliot “crosses boundaries.” In so doing however, he also sets the bounds and definitions of modernism as a transatlantic cosmopolitan event. Conversely, Stevens undertakes to decolonize his native American cultural and literary heritage from its Western (English) past. His choice of “crossing no boundaries,” in turn, results in a private voice; it “crosses” (in the sense of “challenge”), that is, the modernist canon of cosmopolitanism. Yet, such a reading of the two poets in question – of Eliot as the “exile” and Stevens as the “native” artist – does not entirely avoid a contradiction from within. Texts such as the 1915 poems of Eliot or those following the *Harmonium* period of Stevens attest to an Americanness in the case of the former while also to a European backdrop without which much of the latter’s work cannot be read. The modernist polarity “Stevens/Eliot,” then, or the polarity “native/exile,” translates into the model “native exile” thus questioning both contentions of monoculturalism and transculturalism, respectively.



In his essay “American Literature and the American Language” T.S. Eliot remarks:

In the nineteenth century, Poe and Whitman stand out as solitary international figures... During the thirties the tide seemed to be turning the other way: the representative figure of that decade is W.H. Auden ... Now I do not know whether [he] is to be considered as an English or as an American poet: his career has been useful to me in providing me with an answer to the same question when asked about myself, for I can say: “whichever Auden is, I suppose I must be the other.”¹

Eliot’s rather unfortunate choice of the Whitman-exemplum does little to delimit the notion of “inter-nationalism” which he extends into a modernist coordinate. If anything, Whitman is cited as the archetypal advocate of an unprecedented Americanness. In Pound’s words, “[He] *is America*”;² indeed, the national voice of the vernacular whose “democratic vistas” rely on “the clear idea of a class of native authors, [and] literatures ... permeating the whole mass of American mentality...”³

Moreover, the transatlanticism Eliot adumbrates is in the excerpt above an index of inter-nationalism or trans-nationalism, both opposites of what he recurrently condemns as “provincialism”? If the passage quoted hints at a defense against the Eurocentric elitism this author is charged with by his American contemporaries, it also provides a disclaimer for this very defense.

Eliot’s eclectic “otherness,” however, gains perspective if juxtaposed to an “otherness,” voiced across the Atlantic within the context of a diametrically opposite tradition, i.e. that of the American scene. “Eliot and I are dead opposites and I have been doing about everything that he would not be likely to do” says Wallace Stevens; to add, four years later in a letter to Richard Eberhart, that his “denial” of any influence (or what Eliot might term “tradition”) is partly due to his having “purposely held off from reading highly mannered people like Eliot and Pound ...”⁴

A time of experimentation, discovery, and re-evaluation, moreover, a time of the rise of the metropolis⁵ as a crossroads of *avant-garde* modes in both the old and the new world, modernism readily submits to a criticism of taxonomy according to its representatives’ positioning themselves against the debris of a sterile modern world. Among them, the expatriate Eliot-Pound pair seems to enjoy the fame of a most obvious contribution to the modernist cultural and literary globality; while the Eliot-Yeats one successfully assumes the role of canonizing the taste for “tradition” with a bent towards the “individual talent” (though the area of appeal is an “indomitable Irishness” in one case, at least as far as the early years of Yeats’s poetic career are concerned, while being a cosmopolitan European culture in the other). The geographically, and otherwise, apposite (or opposite) Stevens-William Carlos Williams team, on the other hand, undertakes to salvage the rugged American landscape of a culture in the making precisely through a focus on the locality of the native scene. (The latter’s visual text, nonetheless, shares greater formal affinities with Pound, whereas the former works within what Pound, also, terms the “melopoeic” and the “logopoeic” mode.)

Within the confines of such a comparatist-contrastive chart of reading modernist poetry, no less representative of a modernist melting pot, is what Stevens, in the rather neglected remark of his, determines as an “opposition” between himself and Eliot.

A St. Louis, Missouri, “native,” though of a stock of “pioneers” who spent his summers in Massachusetts, Eliot translates the experience of “exile” into a modernist parameter for disowning locality as a symptom of cultural aridity. He “crosses” geographical, national, religious “boundaries” to remain, nonetheless, well within the boundaries of the cosmopolitan climate of his time. A happy expatriate now, Eliot can claim the right of inheriting a “common [European] patrimony of culture” and any of its literary traditions and sources he feels at liberty to choose (seventeenth century Metaphysical wit, Dante the “most European” and the “least provincial” of poets, [CC 134]). From the

vantage point of a successful exile, Eliot can safely launch his “definition of culture” as an attempt at saving God’s western world from “waste-lands” and “hollowmen” by the declining nationalism and isolationism as its anathema.

It is this inter-national, or trans-national, way to a cultural renaissance that Stevens vows to resist in and through his life and poetry. This poet’s heritage sides with the Emersonian call for a break from the “courtly muses of Europe” and the tradition of “self-reliance” and “self-culture.”⁶ Subtler and more ambiguous than his forefather, Emerson, commenting on ancestral England as “accumulat[ing] her liberals in America, [and] her conservatives at London” (*PE* 365), Stevens, too, speaks of a difference between a British and an American “sensibility”;⁷ a kind of difference which is to delineate a poetry-as-parody of imitating a foreign culture. What Eliot (and Pound) might have diagnosed as cause of modern cultural spiritlessness – the art of the banal and the quotidian – Stevens celebrates as his new form, matching an equally new and emergent America. No cross-cultural stronghold – the urban Paris or London of Pound and Eliot – peoples this poet’s work. Quite the contrary, the setting is frequently, at least during the *Harmonium* period, the slovenly South; in Stevens’s words, the “green barbarism” of the South (*SCP* 31).

“Another” view of the long overdue cultural and literary renaissance of the early twentieth century is the choice of “crossing *no* boundaries” for this poet. In so doing, however, Stevens does “cross” – in the sense of “transgress” – the “boundaries” which circumscribe modernism as a cosmopolitan and metropolitan movement. The European-centred strain in Eliot’s case, at best, declines into a dubious and idiosyncratic voice when it comes to Stevens’s modernism. Moreover, the self-reflexivity of his poetry further accentuates the individualist streak in Stevens and makes him a minority case among the canonized modern(ist) poetry of social awareness. His poetics of “personality,” as opposed to the Eliotic theory of “impersonality,” enhances the politics of an Emersonian self-or-national culture thus deviating from the modernist norm: the politics of an “inter” or “trans”-national culture. Hence the Stevens-Eliot opposition as designating the native/exile modernist paradigm.

In conventional terms, literary geography represents both a topological and a tropological network: the local rendered a universal, space a state of consciousness, etc. A reverse approach, i.e. geography as the “objective correlative” of Eliot’s “states of mind,” for example, also allows for this poet’s donning the European mantle. What matters is the urbane argument for “the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis [and] the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric ...” (*CC* 126) that Eliot inherits from Baudelaire; but there can be no such argument without an urban London. The “Unreal City,/Under the brown fog of a winter dawn” and of “a winter noon” of “The Burial of the Dead” and “The Fire Sermon,” respectively (*ECP* ll.60-61, 207-208), London, becomes even more “unreal” at the close of *The Waste Land*:

What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal.

(ECP II. 371-76, 77)

No metaphysical Byzantium – the Yeatsian way out of a “waste land” of the “young” (ECP I. 22, 63) – Eliot’s London is “unreal” because more than “real.” Anybody’s place-as-state of mind – a “heap of broken images” – London is the metropolis of a Baudelairean motley sordidness, the modernists’ deep concern and, at the same time, their avowed loyalty. So the shaping – or mis-shaping – of the metropolitan, literal and metaphorical, landscape continues; the *sight* of the London Bridge now becomes the *site* for a crumbling world. And the indeterminate “journey” of the modern “magi” must originate in the Thames and its journeying into the sea. Such is the inconclusive maze of modern man’s life: “I can connect/Nothing with nothing” (ECP II. 301-302, 74). The song, moreover – that mental fiction next to a physical reality such as the Thames waters – is still the creation of the “daughters of Thames.”

The American apposite parallel, as regards the conflict “art/nature,” “the artificially constructed/flux of reality,” in the name of the song-of-river (or sea) metaphor, is a central poem about a deliberately peripheral locale. Sung by the girl of “Key West,” this time, the song is still of the universal “veritable” ocean. Though seemingly “mastering” the night and “portioning out” the sea – and in this respect recalling, as most critics admit, the romantic analogue of the “solitary reaper,”⁸ this fictive creation in essence approximates to the labyrinthine modern reality “connecting nothing with nothing” that confronts Eliot. The Key West singer leaves Stevens with a “rage for order” – rather than “order” *per se* – and his poem “equivocal,”⁹ unable to say much about the “veritable” ocean in the end.

What, then, is the significance of difference in the “vehicle” of the song-metaphor – i.e. the difference between a song-of-Thames and the song-of-Key West – when the overall “tenor” is the mind’s inability to “order” changeable reality? Eliot’s waste land is the more-than-explicit “heap of broken images” and his poem *The Waste Land*, accordingly, a “heap” of separate poems; a modernist device, indeed, intending the effect of incoherence and alienation. In turn, Stevens’s “supreme fiction” of a fragmented world is in the form of “notes” (“Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction” [SCP 380]), thus invalidating the idea of continuity – in the Aristotelian sense – of a “story” with a beginning, middle and end. The difference between the two is in the way of response to – *via* their art – rather than of conception of a modern world of decay. Eliot’s Thames-song is also the “inexplicable splendour” of “Magnus Martyr” (ECP II. 264-65, 73) and, therefore, a text of biblical subtextual significance. On the

contrary, Stevens's song of the Key West attempts to undermine the influence of origins in art by "ordering" words of "anteriority" in "ghostlier demarcations."¹⁰

What of "Key West," though, especially since there is absolutely nothing by way of a recognizable geographical mark of this specific point in space? Any attempt at an answer further maps out the cultural connotations of the act of place-naming in poetry. Stevens's work, it seems, provides for more direct evidence towards a theory of poetics/politics of space. "The Idea of Order at Key West" might be characterized as "A Description without Place," the poem read by Stevens at the Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard in 1945. "[W]e live in the description of a place and not in the place itself" (L 494) – hence the "idea of," or "rage for," order rather than order *per se* – is Stevens's own justification for this misleading choice of his to read a dehistoricized poem on a specific occasion.

Stevens's predilection for such a nebulous abstraction at the expense of a distinctly American pragmatist – or perhaps imagist – concreteness, of course provokes a host of reactions. William Carlos Williams, for example, writes the poem "A Place (Any Place) to Transcend All Places." But this proposal for a double transcendence – a place to transcend Stevens's notion of place which, according to Williams transcends specificity – cannot have provided the perfect antitype to "A Description without Place." Stevens's rhetoric of "place" maintains the non-Hegelian sequence "physical/metaphysical": "we live in the center of a physical poetry, a geography that would be intolerable except for the non-geography that exists there..." (NA 65). At the same time a "non-geographical" point in space "dimly" announces a point in time: an American poet's declaration of independence from origins. As such it becomes an index of the American "reconstructive moment."¹¹ Place then – moreover, the paradoxical place of placelessness¹² – is a spatio-temporal structure in Stevens's poetics, the fascinating compound: topos and trope.

Likewise, the London-Thames physical compound becomes a cultural site, indeed, a fine "heap of broken images" which fulfils the conditions of modernism and satisfies the eclectic demands of modernist artists. Myth, ritual, literature, history, religion meet and/or clash in the "unreal" city of London in *The Waste Land*. Spenser, Milton, Webster, Middleton, Shakespeare, Goldsmith, Kyd, Ovid, Dante, Baudelaire, Verlaine, St. Augustine, the Buddha parade through this cultural panorama.

Such is the Eliotic legacy of abundance in allusiveness and erudition which, however, stifles certain "American" patrons of letters. *The Waste Land* is "the great catastrophe to *our* letters" for William Carlos Williams, while "so damned dead" for Hart Crane.¹³

It is to this writerly quality of a Eurocentric text that Stevens undertakes to juxtapose the readerly effect of his "American" text; one of the newness and freshness of an emptied tradition which evolves from a culture in an act of breaking from its past. Of his "Carolinas" he asks: "How is it that your aspic

nipples/For once vent honey?" – or, he addresses the more than frequent (in his poetry) Florida as "venereal soil." But Stevens, the *Harmonium* poet-as-hedonist in his sense of relating to the corporeal world, must also acquire a reductionist view. He must undo mediating past patterns of reading reality; hence the "snowman" and his beholding "the nothing that is" which seems to haunt Stevens's early regionalist streak.

The first poem of his first volume is one about "ordering" a state of nondescript ruggedness:

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
...
Because of the firecat.

("Earthy Anecdote," SCP 3)

This is a poem about shaping the meaninglessness and aimlessness of the bucks' "clattering" into a "circular line"; it is a poem about poetry as the neutral space where combating forces meet. But it is set in or against the background of a specific place: Oklahoma, turned into a "state" just eleven years before the poem was written.¹⁴ This is Stevens's "earthy anecdote," composed of a "nothing[ness] that is" so as to challenge erudition; it is the poem of a beginning, written at the threshold of his poetic career and derived from, as well as addressing, the "beginning" of a place and its culture.

The same "rage for order[ing]" a state of emptiness runs throughout this volume (throughout his poetry actually), an explicit instance of which is another "Oklahoma" case where:

Bonnie and Josie
Dressed in calico,
Danced around a stump.
They cried,
"Ohoyaho,
Ohoo" ...
Celebrating the marriage
Of flesh and air.

("Life is Motion," SCP 83)

The backdrop of a rugged locale represents one pole of the fundamental opposition that Stevens is to thrive on throughout his poetry: reality/ imagination. A nuance of the "nothing-that-is" paradox, the "dance/stump" – or the more celebrated "wilderness/jar" – symbolism is to fashion the politics of a

wary, life-long debate in Stevens: the Dionysian/the Apollonian, the uncontaminated/the cultured, nature/culture, early Oklahoma/a later New England, the American South/an American North.

Stevens's poetry, too, partakes of the modernist aesthetics (transatlantic or native) of contrast, ir-resolution and ir-regularity. But the linguistic contortion of a title such as "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" (*SCP* 64), for example, only fashions the contextual twist of the poem, i.e. the choice – or the parody of one – between the "room" of life and the "room" of death. Stevens's way towards – rather than out of – this contrast is "Let be be finale of seem." The (not unjustifiable) phenomenological reading of this line¹⁵ apart, the end is not at a remove from his overall task of redeeming art of stale signs of allusiveness and pastness. Stevens saves his poem of modern reality – a poem of "death" – from the kind of "deadness" of Eliot's *The Waste Land* which repels Hart Crane. Quite unlike the "fire sermon" of lust in that poem, what is purposely missing from Stevens's "kitchen" reality of concupiscence in his "Emperor of Ice-Cream" is a figure like Tiresias: a blind and sexless non-presence, a "ghostly demarcation" of a past which Stevens in "Farewell to Florida" declares dead ("the past is dead," *SCP* 117).

Yet, modernist polarities – American/European, native/exile – that much of the work of the poets in question and its criticism attest to, naturalizing claims such as "Whichever Auden is ... I must be the other" or "Eliot and I are dead opposites" sound, perhaps, too suspiciously convenient. Within this entangled web of boundaries and definitions lurks the snare of disruption of canonical moulds. Does the modernist text that Eliot and Stevens yield, indeed, mean what it says (or say what it means) as regards a transnational, or national, literature and culture?

For Pound – found guilty of the same Anti-American elitism – an "alteration on Mr. Eliot's passport" does not necessarily mean any "alteration" on the "essential Americanness of his work" (*SP* 133). Edmund Blunden, in turn, bans Eliot, the New Englander (along with Yeats, the Irishman) from the "boundaries" of the English tradition;¹⁶ while a trend in criticism speaks of the compound of a "New England, American and British" Eliot.¹⁷

Accordingly, a similar area of conflict – moreover, one from within – contests Stevens's stance towards his refusal to play by the golden modernist rule of crossing boundaries; it inverts, that is, the idea of allegiance to a native strain. Is no artist "ever simply himself?" is Stevens's rhetorical question and naive repudiation of that form of criticism which he defines as "dissecting" a work of art for "echoes, imitations, influences" (*L* 813). The pragmatic question, however, has to do with the validity of the claim for artistic autonomy and self-sufficiency which Stevens's, otherwise antiformalist, poetics refutes. There are enough of those "ghostly" though still "demarcations" of past and foreign influences in his work to upset such notions virtually leading to an essentialist view of monoculturalism.

A counterpart to the “native/exile” model of difference, then, in approaching the Stevens-Eliot case is the diffusionist “native exile” reading as registering relatedness between the self and the culturally “other.” In this respect, Eliot is a native *exile*; the American artist at home with British art but whose “sailing” to London cannot have eliminated glimpses of a native rootedness: “I am very well satisfied with having been born in St. Louis: in fact I think I was fortunate to have been born here, rather than in Boston, or New York, or London” (CC45).

Somewhat more convincing is Eliot’s claim to inheritance of an American – as New England – tradition. The lesser 1915 poems “The *Boston Evening Transcript*,” “Aunt Helen,” and “Cousin Nancy,” Bernard Bergonzi notes, are comparable to Pound’s social commentary of the *Lustra*.¹⁸ Eliot’s “Boston satires,”¹⁹ however, are specifically American entries to his work caricaturing a geographically specific contemporary scene: the lifelessness of the *Boston Evening Transcript* readers “sway[ing] in the wind like a field of ripe corn” (ECP 30); the contrived (Bostonian) gentility of a Miss Helen Slingsby, resident of a “small house near a fashionable square/Cared for by servants to the number of four” (ECP 31); or, the more locally–anchored “modernity” and Emersonian individualism of Miss Nancy Ellicott walking, of course, the “barren New England hills” (ECP 32).

A similar native – i.e. New England – vein runs through Eliot’s American “Landscapes” of the mid-thirties: “New Hampshire,” “Virginia,” “Cape Ann.” Within the meditative mode of “landscape” poetry and, at best, merely anticipating *The Four Quartets*, the lyrics are projections of the “state of mind” of a southerner with a New England conscience. The revitalization of life, encapsulated in the moment “[b]etween the blossom-and the fruit-time” of “New Hampshire” (ECP 152), or a locale such as the “Cape Ann” shore is to counter the disturbing state of mind (“Delay, decay. Living, living/Never moving” [ECP 153]) that the scenic detail of the Southern “red river” invokes in “Virginia.”

The “native exile” model, on the other hand, entails a reading of Stevens as the American artist who does not mind conceding a few European roots and analogues to his art. To understand a number of his poems as acts of stripping American art of Europeanism one must read them against the very backdrop they are to shatter. Whatever “Invective Against Swans” or “Anecdote of the Jar” are about, they are also about parodying the appropriation of the “Leda and the Swan” or “Ode on a Grecian Urn” intertexts. Stevens’s large-scale effort to decolonize his country’s art, indirectly, asserts its European source. Furthermore, his poetry seems to betray his whole-hearted refusal to abide by the modernist practice of crossing boundaries. Stevens “crosses” his own “boundaries” within the geography of his native art. The *Harmonium* poetry of the material word gives way to a poetry of the abstract idea in the volume *Ideas of Order*; the natural, nondescript American landscape of the South gives way to the intellectual “landscape” of a New England. A poet of the quotidian still, the later Stevens will continue with ordinariness of experience. Only, now, his

“ordinary evening” is quite extraordinary for the place of its occurrence is nothing like Oklahoma. Stevens’s interest in the poem “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,” he admits, “is to try to get as close to the ordinary, the commonplace and the ugly as it is possible for a poet to get. It is not a question of grim reality but of plain reality. The object is of course to purge oneself of anything false” (L 636). The ensuing question is whether Stevens does so “purge” himself of anything “false,” in the sense of “unreal,” in the poem. Quite the contrary, the poem evolves as a Stevensian “con-fusion”²⁰ proper of polar opposites: place/ placelessness, “real”/“unreal” (SCP483).

An “endless elaboration” on the “theory of poetry” and the “theory of life” (SCP 486), the poem is just another pact its author announces between himself and “reality.” New Haven, the “physical town” with its “metaphysical streets” (SCP 472), comprises a topography for Stevens’s poetics of disclosure and concealment. His is a “search” for “the poem of pure reality” meant to stumble, nonetheless, on his guide’s – Professor Eucalyptus²¹ – “metaphysics”:

... The search
For reality is as momentous as
The search for god.
(SCP481)

An abstracted place and delocalized reality, New Haven, Bloom contends, is “simply any city that is not home.”²² But it is Stevens’s home, or about what “home” is for a poet.²³ Though an Emersonian eye, the trajectory the poet follows is, after all, one of descent looking forward to the base it transcends:

We keep coming back and coming back
To the real: to the hotel instead of the hymns
That fall upon it out of the wind.
(SCP471)

The extract can metaleptically trace to Stevens’s haunting adage: “Life is an affair of people not of places. But for me life is an affair of places and that is the trouble” (OP 158).

What does this New Haven of the North then make of the early Stevens’s South (or Stevens’s early – in the sense of “undeveloped” – South)? The curious digression of the mariners’ fable in canto XXIX masterfully “con-fuses” the two: the Floridian “land of citrons” and the New England country of the “elm trees.”²⁴ What an idealized view of a homogenous “land” – “a southerly north, or northerly south”²⁵ – questioning the idea of boundaries! What an ingenious delusion, indeed, the narrator subjects his mariners to; one that almost approximates to the so-called “contact zone”²⁶ in recent culturalist discourse where binary oppositions – traveler/travelee, colonizer/colonized, metropolis/periphery, self/other – are lifted as too conventionally stagnant any longer.

The question, though, is whether Stevens himself suffers from the same “delusions” about the longed-for “southerly north” or “northerly south” that he transplants to his heroes. Or, does the text that his transatlantic “opposite” produce testify to the claims made in “Notes toward the Definition of Culture” concerning literature as matrix and index of a “trans-national” culture?

New England renders Stevens a mere traveller into the American South. It renders the South an exotic “other,” the virgin soil for exploration. “Lovely, dark and deep,” the southern natural wild is only a parenthesis, for Stevens has his “promises to keep” and “miles to go before [he] sleep[s].” He, temporarily – within the narrative space of just one volume of poetry – assimilates (or is assimilated by) his object. “Farewell to Florida” and all that it represents is Stevens’s “farewell” to any illusion sustaining a recognition of the self in the “other.” (“Her South of pine and coral and coraline sea,/Her home, not mine, ... [SCP 117]).

Across the Atlantic, now, Eliot cites the Anglo-American phenomenon of imagism (CC 58) as one example supportive of his view on a trans-national literature – or literature as trans-culturating praxis. Pound, of the same school for a global culture, cannot quite see Zola’s “‘one country: Europe, with Paris as its capital’ ” for his is the more ambitious “coalition of England, France and America”; a vision drastically reduced, however (even more so than Zola’s), to include just London and Paris as the “centre of the world” (SP 169-70). Eliot, likewise, claims he refuses to “draw any absolute line,” i.e. “between East and West, between Europe and Asia” only to (dis)qualify his statement just a line later: “There are, however certain common features in Europe, which make it possible to speak of a European culture.” No less indicative of an Eliotic elitism, contrary to the author’s vision of cultural boundlessness, is a type of evolutionist thinking which does not fail to include a distinction between “higher” and “lower” cultures (NDC 120-121).

The, otherwise harmless, process of trans-culturalism, in short, means retaining a few hyphens: the Anglo-American heritage of Eliot, the North-South Americanism of Stevens.²⁷ Crossing boundaries, means setting boundaries of sorts.

Eliot, the pilgrim of *The Four Quartets*, starts a circular journey from the place of origin in England, via a detour to Massachusetts in “Dry Salvages,” to return to the point of beginning. The open-endedness of this route to and fro “the river ... within us” and the “sea ... all about us” (ECP 205) recalls the route through a “waste land” where “nothing connects with nothing.” There is enough circularity in this journey, beginning with the Heraclitian fragment “The way upward and downward are one and the same”²⁸ of the epigraph to “Burnt Norton,” to compel the reader’s groping for abstraction:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
and time future contained in time past.

(ECP 189)

Eliot's entry "In my beginning is my end" (*ECP* 196) though, at the outset of "East Coker," provides for the locus of just as much literality. This is what Eliot does in this work, in his poetry generally, in his life: he ends where he begins, i.e. at the point of his "family" origin.

Conversely, Stevens's early voyager Crispin in the poem "The Comedian as the Letter C" follows an opposite route. His is a westward, linear journey away from origins and towards a new beginning. Stevens's anti-Eliotic poetics – and politics – dislodges the modernist symbolism proper of the Atlantic crossing to a level of mockery. The tour is now from Bordeaux to the Carolinas; it is the quest of Crispin-as-"introspective voyager" (*SCP* 29) for a new identity. Thus the narrator's opening "nota" – "man is the intelligence of his soil,/The sovereign ghost" (*SCP* 27) – reads into its opposite in the course of the journey: "his soil is man's intelligence./That's better. That's worth crossing seas to find" (*SCP* 36). Stevens has his traveler "sail" from the rationalist and idealist tradition of the old Europe and settle for a newly – devised realist and naturalist plan in America.²⁹ But the journey across continents and literatures consistently heads northward ("America was always north to him" [*CP* 34]). Crispin sails even from the Yucatan, and all its tropical enchantment, for "a nice shady home," marriage and family – his "idea of a colony" – in the Carolinas where as "hermit" he:

... dwelt in the land and dwelling there
Slid from his continent by slow recess
To things within his actual eye, ...

(*SCP* 40)

The even more "northerly" American pragmatism of Santayana and William James ("the plum survives its poems," [*SCP* 41]) is the finishing touch to a journey of that Emersonian "starker, barer *self* /In a starker, barer world" (*SCP* 29). Layer after layer, Crispin – and through him Stevens – "preferring text to gloss" (*SCP* 39) – unravels the knot of past origins only to realize that he cannot wholly do so. Hence Stevens's northward quest to New England in place of Eliot's eastward journey to "Old England."

The voyage towards, and away from, origins is to assume the civilizing mission of liberating America from provincialism and decolonizing its literature from an English past. But to decolonize is also to delimit a neo-colonialist strategic; the way to break from the old metropolis is to create a new one which, in turn, means the invention of a few more peripheries for the new centre to assert itself.

There is, in other words, a kind of hybrid³⁰ space where the conflicting directions of the voyage to and from America converge: "The literature of nineteenth century New England ... has its own particular *civilized* landscape and the ethos of a local society of English origin with its own distinct traits. It remains representative of New England, rather than of America ... " (*CC* 52).

The dividing lines Eliot draws this time adumbrate the idea of a homeland and a sense of national identity. Even Emerson admits that “[T]he American is only the continuation of the English genius”; independent, “self-reliant” though with “Saxon breasts” (*PE* 354; *The Norton* 966).

This America, blessed – or condemned – to be endlessly emerging from its past, sends her intellectual children off to “old” or New England in search of landscapes-as-tropes for re-viewing and re-newing the world. Makers indeed – innovators, discoverers, inventors and re-inventors of an old past and an equally old American South – they *are* omnipresent voices of literary and cultural authority.

Eliot, our great “modern classic”³¹ and classic modern as canonizer of a new taste for the old, forever a “New Englander in the South West, and a South Westerner in New England,”³² means to be nowhere specifically or locally; which is to say, he is everywhere. Stevens, the experimenter of a dramatic breakthrough in the poetry of the “commonplace” claims his place in the province of newness as “redeemer” from deadness and pastness. In the process, and while longing for an uncontaminated, exotically barbaric South, he does engage in an act of “plac[ing] a jar in Tennessee,” which though “gray and bare” “takes dominion everywhere.”

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NOTES

1. T. S. Eliot, *To Criticise the Critic and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp. 59-60. Subsequent references to this work are from here on cited in the text under the entry *CC*. Quotations from, and references to, Eliot’s *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962 rpt. of 1948 edition) are also hereafter cited in the text following the abbreviation *NDC*. Quotations from Eliot’s poetry are from *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), cited in the text as *ECP*.
2. Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, edited with an introduction by William Cookson (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 115. For any references to this work, the edition is from hereon cited in the text as *SP*.
3. Walt Whitman, “Democratic Vistas,” in *The Portable Whitman*, edited by Mark Van Doren, revised by Malcolm Cowley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 321.
4. Wallace Stevens, *Letters*, edited by Holly Stevens (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 677, 813, hereafter cited in the text as *L* for subsequent references. Quotations from, and references to, Stevens’s poetry and prose are from the following editions: *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and

Faber, 1987 rpt. of 1955 edition); *Opus Posthumous*, edited by Samuel French Morse (London: Faber and Faber, 1957); *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), from here on cited as *SCP*, *OP* and *NA*, respectively.

5. On the socio-historical circumstance resulting in the metropolis as a modernist coordinate, see Raymond Williams, "The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism," pp. 13-24, in *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art*, edited by Edward Timms and David Kelley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).
6. "The American Scholar," in *The Portable Emerson*, edited, and with an introduction, by Mark Van Doren (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978 rpt. of 1946 edition), from here on referred to as *PE* in the text. "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame ... We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds." (pp. 45-46). References to "Self Reliance," from *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, third edition, vol. 1 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1989 rpt. of 1979 edition), are hereafter cited in the text.
7. *OP* 176. "Nothing could be more inappropriate to American literature than its English source since the Americans are not British in sensibility."
8. Harold Bloom, *The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 44-45; George Bornstein, *Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 200; J. S. Leonard, C. E. Wharton, *The Fluent Mundo: Wallace Stevens and the Structure of Reality* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1988), p. 43.
9. Bloom, p. 104.
10. Bloom, p. 104. Reference to the critic's remark, at this point, is with emphasis on the word "ghostl[y]" rather than "demarcation"; i.e. on Stevens's attempt at rendering the past a "ghost" rather than at his inability to do so (for even as "ghostly," the past is still an "appearance" in the present, a point to be taken up later in this paper).
11. On the political overtones of a seemingly "depoliticized" poetry by Stevens, see Alan Filreis, *Wallace Stevens and the Actual World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 184.
12. Barbara M. Fisher, *Wallace Stevens: The Intensest Rendezvous* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990). The author's detailed exploration of the concept of "place" in Stevens's poetry includes a variety of facets: place as "psychic space" with "corporeal conditions," p. 107; as "poetic topos of the land-as-erotic body," p. 108; "a kind of literary region," p. 116; "a psychological terrain," p. 116. The general thesis,

however, revolves round Stevens's poetics of space as a poetics of conflict. While endorsing the overall trend towards ir-resolution in Stevens's poetry, I contend that the coordinates outlining the poet's idea of "place" are specifically delimited as "space" and "time."

13. Cited by Jay Martin, "T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations: A Collection of Critical Essays on The Waste Land*, edited by Jay Martin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 6.
14. Eleanor Cook, *Poetry, Word-Play, and Word-War in Wallace Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 30.
15. Edward Kessler, *Images of Wallace Stevens* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1972), p. 40.
16. Cited by George Williamson, *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot* ([London]: Thames and Hudson, 1988 rpt. of 1967 edition), p. 246.
17. Robert H. Canary, *The Poet and his Critics* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1982), p. 2.
18. Bernard Bergonzi, *T. S. Eliot* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), p. 49.
19. John T. Mayer, *T. S. Eliot's Silent Voices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 167. My interest in appropriating Mayer's characterization of these poems as "Boston satires" pertains to locale rather than genre, to the poems referring to "Boston" rather than being "satires."
20. Fisher, p. 110. Reference here is merely to the hyphenated term "con-fuse," rather than to the contrast in which it is used by the critic, by way of emphasizing the retention of opposites in Stevens's poetry.
21. Emphasis is on the connotations of the name Eucalyptus (eu-calyptus=well-covered) in cantos XIV, XV: "The dry eucalyptus seeks god in the rainy cloud./Professor Eucalyptus of New Haven seeks him/In New Haven with an eye that does not look/Beyond the object." "He preserves himself against the repugnant rain/By an instinct for a rainless land, the self/Of this self, ..."
22. Bloom, p. 306.
23. "Yet to return to these places would not be quite what I had in mind when I spoke of the coming home that gives one the feel of Connecticut. What I have in mind was something deeper that nothing can ever change or remove. It is a question of coming home to the American Self in the sort of place in which it was formed. Going back to Connecticut is a return to an origin." (OP296).
24. "When the mariners came to the land of the lemon trees, ... /They said, "We are back once more in the land of the elm trees, ..." (CP487).
25. Charles Berger, *Forms of Farewell: The Late Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 104-105.

Contrary to Berger's reading of the mariners' illusion of a "southerly north" or a "northerly south" as "insisting on the likeness between the earthly paradise and our native climate that Stevens always maintained" (p. 104), I hold that the poet distances himself from the illusion in question thus pointing to difference rather than "likeness."

26. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes, Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992). The author defines "contact zones" as those "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other ..." While she admits that such an enterprise unfolds often in "highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination," her overall study on travel writing focuses largely on a concealed (until recently) aspect of such "contact" between different cultures: that it is also the periphery determining the metropolis rather than only the other way round (pp. 4-6). My reference to the term "contact zone" in this paper, in turn, concerns Stevens, the New Englander, as a "traveler" to the South in an attempt to establish that the "contact" effected between the two areas is rather one-sided, i.e. from North to South, or from the metropolis to periphery, contrary to what this critic maintains.
27. "North and South are an intrinsic couple" ("Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," *SCP* 392).
28. The translation of the Heraclitan fragment is cited by Williamson, p. 208.
29. For an exhaustive account of Crispin's journey in "The Comedian as the Letter C," see Margaret Peterson, *Wallace Stevens and the Idealist Tradition* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), pp. 110-42.
30. On the notion of "hybridity," much in accordance with the rhetoric of transculturalism, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possession: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 119-51. My use of the term in the adjectival form aims at designating a specific place – New England – as a point of "meeting" of Eliot and Stevens as "opposites" rather than of individual oppositions, i.e. Eliot's Europe/America or Stevens's North/South.
31. Canary, p. 1.
32. Cited by Williamson, p. 245.

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Στόχος της εργασίας αυτής είναι η επισκόπηση δύο διαμετρικά αντίθετων τάσεων στο μοντερνισμό: του Ευρωκεντρικού και του Αμερικανοκεντρικού μοντέλου που αντιπροσωπεύουν οι ποιητές T. S. Eliot και Wallace Stevens, αντίστοιχα. Σε μια προσπάθεια να απαλλάξει την Δυτική πολιτισμική και λογοτεχνική κληρονομιά από το τοπικιστικό στοιχείο, ο Eliot «διασχίζει» (με την έννοια «υπερβαίνει») «σύνορα». Κίνηση που, παράλληλα, «ορίζει» τον μοντερνισμό ως υπερατλαντικό, κοσμοπολίτικο γεγονός. Αντίθετα, ο Stevens αποσκοπεί σε μια ανεξαρτικοποίηση του Αμερικανικού πολιτισμού και της λογοτεχνίας από το Δυτικό (Αγγλικό) παρελθόν τους. Η συγκεκριμένη θέση αντιστρατεύεται την επιλογή Eliot και καθιστά τον εν λόγω ποιητή μια ιδιωτική φωνή που υπονομεύει τον μοντερνιστικό κανόνα του διεθνισμού. Ωστόσο, κείμενα όπως τα ποιήματα του 1915 του Eliot μαρτυρούν έναν έντονο Αμερικανισμό, ενώ έργα που ακολουθούν την έκδοση *Harmonium* του Stevens αναδύονται μέσα από ένα Ευρωπαϊκό υπόβαθρο· ανατρέπουν, επομένως, το μοντερνιστικό δίπολο Eliot/Stevens και τους συνακόλουθους ισχυρισμούς που αφορούν σε μια διαπολιτισμική λογοτεχνία (πέρα από τα «σύνορα» της Δύσης), από τη μια, και σε μια αμιγώς μονοπολιτιστική λογοτεχνική παράδοση, από την άλλη.