CAXTONIAN

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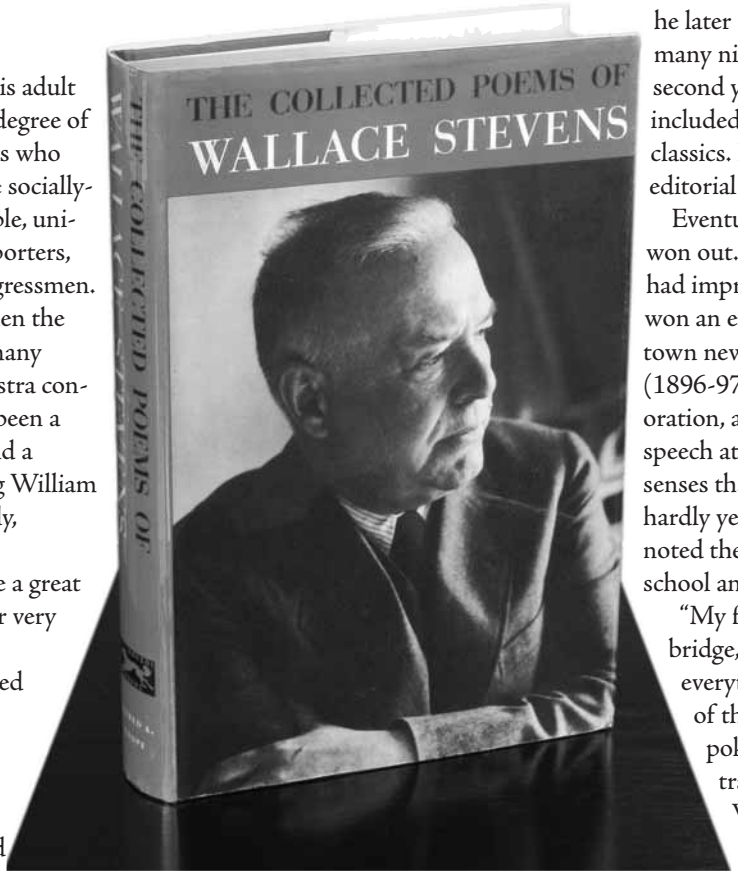
Collecting Wallace Stevens

R. Eden Martin



For someone who has spent his adult life practicing law, there is a degree of satisfaction in identifying lawyers who became successful in other, more socially-useful, lines of work—for example, university presidents, historians, reporters, sports announcers, or even Congressmen. The satisfaction is magnified when the field is in the arts. There aren't many lawyers who became great orchestra conductors or painters. There have been a few reasonably good novelists and a handful of fine poets—including William Cullen Bryant, and, more recently, Archibald MacLeish.

But at least one lawyer became a great poet. Wallace Stevens ranks at or very near the top of any list of 20th-century American poets, or indeed any list of poets writing in the English language. What is more remarkable is that Stevens spent his career as a lawyer and insurance company executive, engaged more-or-less full time in his professional and business work while writing his greatest poetry in his spare time.

Wallace Stevens was born October 2, 1879, in Reading, Pennsylvania. His father was a lawyer and his mother a schoolteacher, both from Pennsylvania Dutch or German families.[1]

Young Wallace received a solid educational foundation. He first attended a private kindergarten where he was taught French and German. Later, Wallace went to a good parochial school, one attached to the local Lutheran church.

Books and the rhythms of language were at the core of the Stevens family life. Wallace later recalled that everyone in the family would frequently be "in a different part of the house reading," and his father usually spent Sunday afternoons in the library.[2] One of his father's favorite books, Stevens remembered, was a volume of Burns' poetry. In addition, Stevens recalled that his mother read to the children from the Bible in the evenings, sang hymns, and accompanied herself on the piano.[3]

One might have expected young Wallace to be an exemplary student, but his initial performance was disappointing. When he was 13, he failed his first year (1892-93) at the Reading Boys' High School, and repeated the same class the following year. This might have been due partly to illnesses, but it could also have been due—as he later explained to a friend—to "too many nights out."[4] Wallace did better the second year—in a curriculum that included Latin, Greek, and the English classics. He also worked his way onto the editorial staff of the school newspaper.

Eventually Wallace's skills with language won out. By his junior year (1895-96), he had improved to third in his class; and he won an essay contest sponsored by the local town newspaper. During his last year (1896-97), he won an award for a school oration, and he later delivered another speech at the school graduation. Yet one senses that the high school years were hardly years of scholarly isolation. He later noted the difference between the Reading school and Harvard College:

> "My first year away from home, at Cambridge, made an enormous difference in everything." The boy who had been one of the "rowdies" in Reading, playing poker and football, "hop[ping] coal trains to ride up the Lebanon Valley—[and] steal[ling] pumpkins and so on—with a really tough crowd,"…now…joined the intellectually "tough crowd" at Harvard.[5]

Stevens entered Harvard College at the age of 18 in September 1897 under special arrangements allowing him to graduate after three years. During his first year, he earned A's in English rhetoric and composition, English literature, and French—with B's in constitutional government and law, European history, and German.[6] More important, he became acquainted with the popular teacher and poet George Santayana, who read and critiqued Wallace's sonnets.

One of Stevens' early poems was published in the Reading Boys' High School lit-

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WALLACE STEVENS, *from page 1*

erary magazine during the middle of his freshman year at Harvard. Entitled "Autumn," it was his first published piece.[7]

By the end of his freshman year, Wallace was planning a career in journalism, which he believed would be a good way to use his skills in writing to earn a living. When he returned to Reading in the spring of 1898, he found a summer job working at the Reading *Times*. This tension between the desire to write and the need to make a living was to continue throughout his life.

During his second year at Harvard (1898-99), Wallace took classes in English composition and literature, as well as French, German, European history, and economics. He received C's in the latter two courses. And he continued to write. His poems appeared in the November and December 1898 issues of the *Harvard Advocate*. He wrote others in his private journal, and then worked and re-worked the drafts.

His poem "Vita Mea" appeared in the December issue of the *Harvard Advocate*. The following spring—1899—*Harvard Lyrics* appeared, anthologizing (as the subtitle announced) "the best verse written by Harvard undergraduates within the last ten years." It included Stevens' "Vita Mea" (on p. 28), and represents Stevens' first appearance in any book. However, Stevens was not proud of it, and never included it in any of his later collections.

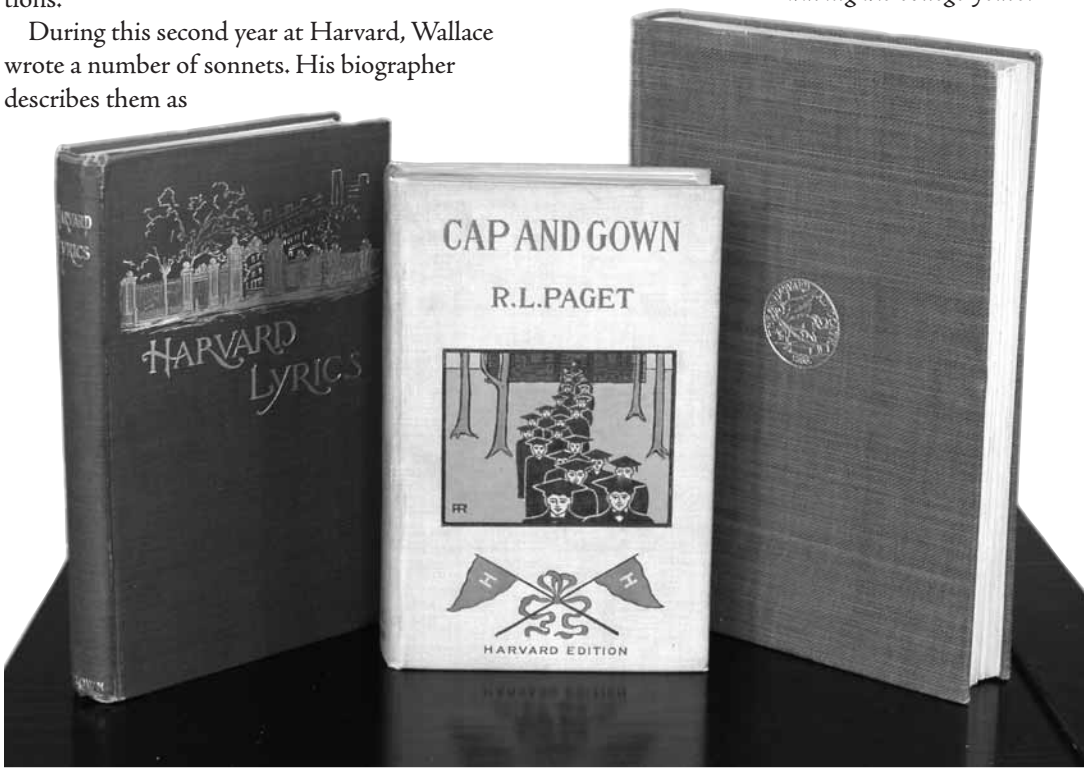
During this second year at Harvard, Wallace wrote a number of sonnets. His biographer describes them as "nothing remarkable," imitative of others, notably Shelley and Keats.[8] Wallace later explained that sometime in March 1899, Santayana invited him to "come and read some of my things to him. I read one of them in which the first line was 'Cathedrals are not built along the sea.'"[9] By this time, Wallace had been appointed to the staff of the *Harvard Advocate*. This helps explain the fact that several of his poems were published in the *Advocate* and also the *Harvard Monthly* during the spring of 1899.

The *Harvard Monthly* for March 1899[10] contained the first of these published sonnets:

> If we are leaves that fall upon the ground
> To lose our greenness in the quiet dust
> Of forest-depths; if we are flowers that must
> Lie torn and creased upon a bitter mound,
> No touch of sweetness in our ruins found;
> If we are weeds whom no one wise can trust
> To live an hour before we feel the gust
> Of Death, and by our side its last, keen sound;
> Then let a tremor through our briefness run,
> Wrapping it in with mad, sweet sorcery
> Of love; for in the fern I saw the sun
> Take fire against the dew; the lily white
> Was soft and deep at morn; the rosary
> Streamed forth a wild perfume into the light.

A couple of months later, the sonnet he had read to Santayana appeared in the same monthly

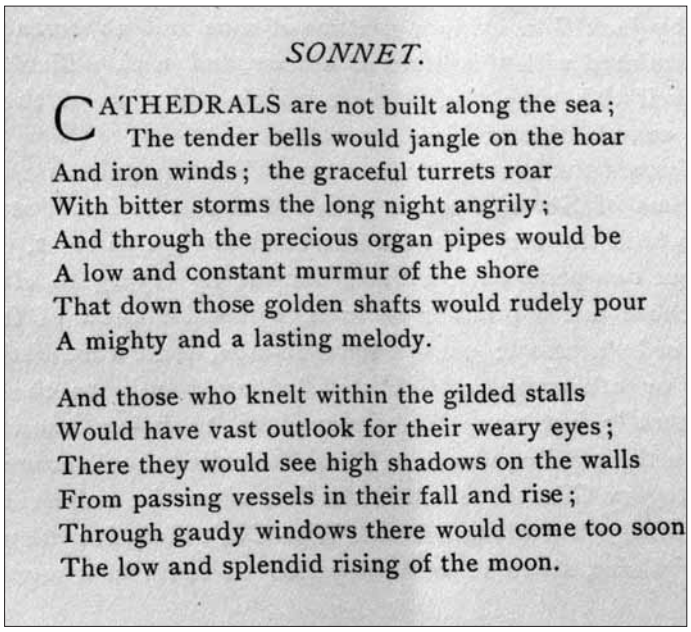
Three volumes in which Stevens' work appeared during his college years.



magazine. It was the ninth in a sequence of sonnets written in his personal journal between late February and mid-April 1899.[11] It is shown at right.

Unlike the March 1899 sonnet, Wallace let this one appear unsigned. (The bookseller who sold me this volume of the *Harvard Monthly* did not know that this poem was written by Stevens—nor did I until I later studied the Edelstein bibliography.)

During his final year at Harvard (1899-1900), Wallace's attitudes about life changed. His traditional religious beliefs were superseded by a kind of pantheism, and the style of his poems became more ironic and disrespectful. Also, his attitude toward his studies clearly became less serious. In the spring of this last year, he wrote: "Nine months have been wasted. In the autumn I got drunk almost every other night—and later, from March until May, and a good bit of May, I did nothing but loaf. . . ."[12]



SONNET.

CATHEDRALS are not built along the sea;
The tender bells would jangle on the hoar
And iron winds; the graceful turrets roar
With bitter storms the long night angrily;
And through the precious organ pipes would be
A low and constant murmur of the shore
That down those golden shafts would rudely pour
A mighty and a lasting melody.

And those who knelt within the gilded stalls
Would have vast outlook for their weary eyes;
There they would see high shadows on the walls
From passing vessels in their fall and rise;
Through gaudy windows there would come too soon
The low and splendid rising of the moon.

An early unsigned Stevens sonnet as it appeared in the Harvard Monthly.

One evening his drinking led to an incident that was either the occasion or the cause of his leaving Harvard. One of his friends at the time, Witter Bynner, told the story years later[13]:

> In the square at the time was a restaurant called Ramsden's or colloquially 'Rammy's' where not only undergraduates but a few of the faculty would eat midnight buckwheat cakes. The favorite waitress there was a witty Irish-woman who seemed to me in those days almost elderly—her face wrinkled always with smiles and her spirit and repartee highly appreciated by customers. One night [Wallace] had come in from Boston fairly lit and, announcing jovially that he was going to rape [Kitty], vaulted the counter, landing so heavily behind it that both of them fell to the floor. When she screamed with enjoyably dramatic terror, a member of the English Department who was present left his buckwheats and severely interfered. From him came a deplorable report to the college authorities which led to Stevens' expulsion. . . .

Whether Stevens was thrown out or simply quit, this episode marked the end of his career as a Harvard student. In his journal in early June 1900, he wrote that he intended to go to New York and try his hand at journalism. But to a close friend, he declared that he intended to become a poet.[14] Both statements were probably accurate.

Despite the bumpy ending, Stevens' Harvard years led to additional book publications of his verse. In 1903 the Paget firm published *Cap and Gown*, another collection of college verse. It cost $1.25 and contained one of Stevens' early sonnets, "There shines the morning star!"

Three years later, in October 1906, another student collection appeared, entitled *Verses From the Harvard Advocate*. It contained a more generous helping of early Stevens—seven poems, only one of which had appeared in the previous *Cap and Gown*.

As satisfying as it must have been to see his own work in book form, Stevens was later realistic about the quality of these early efforts. When his definitive *Collected Poems* appeared in 1954, none of the verses from these early student collections was included.

Financed by a loan from his father, Stevens arrived in New York on June 14, 1900. He needed to find a job, but first he had to find a place to live. Within a day or two, he took a room in a tenement neighborhood, describing it in his journal this way:

> The house where I am living in is a boarding-house kept by two unmarried French women. The elder, about thirty years of age, has a bosom a foot and a half thick. No wonder the French are amorous with such accommodation for lovers. The younger, about twenty-eight years of age, is of more moderate proportions. She had dark rings under her eyes. I have just slaughtered two bugs on a wall of my room. They were lice! Dinner next—wherever I can find it—with an aimless evening to follow.[15]

It took Wallace about two weeks to secure a position with the *New York Tribune*. His arrangement was that he would be paid according to the space he filled, and he soon managed to earn enough—$20-25 per week—that he did not have to rely on his father for living expenses. In the fall, the newspaper shifted him to a regular position, paying him a fixed salary of $15 per week, which was less than he had been making under the earlier arrangement, but also less risky.[16]

But the tension between Stevens' urge to write poetry and the need to earn a living remained. He found the newspaper writing dull, and from time to time he discussed with his father the possibility of giving up the newspaper job and spending his time writing poetry. His father advised him that earning a living came first.

By spring 1901, Stevens had had enough of the newspaper business. But, impressed by his father's advice that making a living was more important than his literary inclinations, Wallace entered the New York Law School. Many years later he wrote a friend that "...I deliberately gave up writing poetry because, much as I loved it, there were too many other things I wanted not to make an effort to have them.... I didn't like the idea of being bedeviled all the time about money and I didn't for a moment like the idea of poverty, so I went to work like anybody else

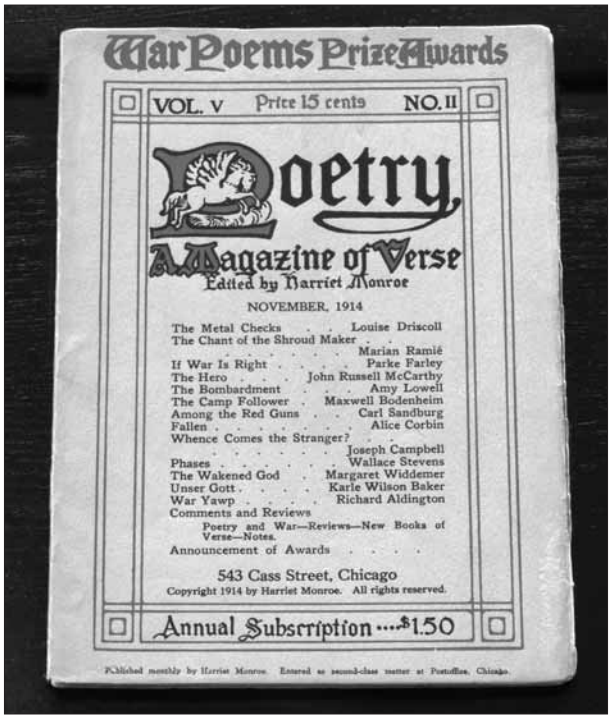
See ***WALLACE STEVENS****, page 4*

WALLACE STEVENS, *from page 3*

and kept at it for a good many years."[17]

We know little about his legal studies, other than that he kept at them. We do know that they did not bring him satisfaction or happiness. As he was commencing his second year in August 1902, he wrote in his diary, "Oh, Mon Dieu, how my spirits sink when I am alone here in my room! Tired of everything that is old, too poor to pay for what's new—tired of reading, tired of tobacco, tired of walking about town; and longing to have friends with me, or to be somewhere with them: nauseated by this terrible imprisonment."

Wallace spent the summer of 1902 working as a clerk—today we would call him a "summer associate"—in the law office of W.C. Peckham. He continued to work for Peckham until graduation from law school, June 1903. The Harvard College Class report stated in June 1903 that Wallace Stevens "is a Law Student; intends to practice in New York." (The same report noted that Robert Frost, who was in the same class but failed to graduate, "has not been heard from; his address is unknown."[18]) In spring 1904, after his clerkship with Peckham, Stevens was admitted to the New York bar.


War Poems Prize Awards

VOL. V Price 15 cents NO. II

Poetry

A Magazine of Verse

Edited by Harriet Monroe

NOVEMBER, 1914

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Although Stevens did not serve in World War I, he was included in the War Poems issue of Poetry *magazine.*

The year 1904 marked major events in the life of young Wallace Stevens. Most important, that summer he met Elsie Moll, an attractive 18-year-old young woman with almost no formal education from his hometown of Reading. She would later become Mrs. Wallace Stevens.

When Wallace returned to New York in the fall, he set up a law practice in partnership with a friend, Lyman Ward.

While establishing himself professionally and socially, Wallace continued to read—Horace, Heine, Tennyson, Shakespeare, the Greek poets, and French literary periodicals. He also made entries in his journal and wrote long letters to Elsie, who remained home in Reading. With only a small income, his entertainment consisted mostly of long walks in the country and in Central Park, and visits to art exhibitions and galleries. He composed poems for Elsie which he presented to her on her birthdays in 1908 and 1909. But he wrote no poems for publication. Between his last appearance in a Harvard literary magazine and the onset of the First World War, no poem of Stevens appeared in print—a long hiatus in the young life of one of the major poets of the 20th century.

Wallace's law practice with his friend Ward soon failed, and he passed through a series of unsuccessful positions before finding a job as a claims attorney with the American Bonding Company in January 1908. Being out of work was worse than being tied to the drudgery of a job.

Wallace and Elsie were married in September 1909. Wallace was then a few weeks shy of 30 years old.

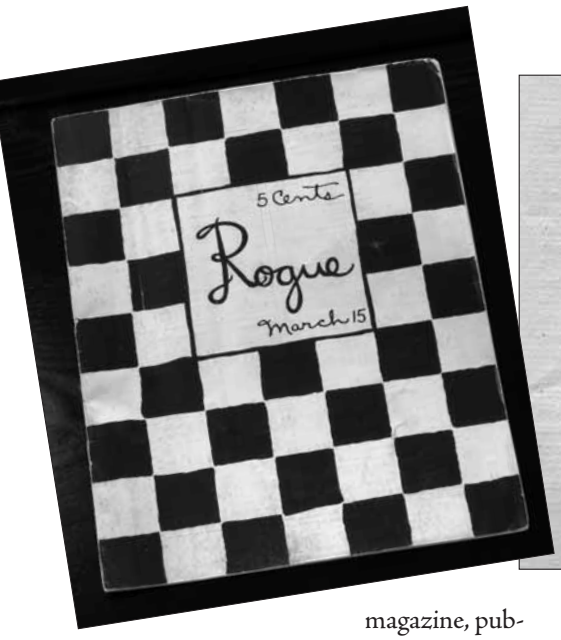
Causation in human affairs is complex and often undetectable. Something seems to have happened in Stevens' life in the months leading up to the First World War that changed his attitude about life and led him to begin writing poetry again with greater seriousness and intensity. Perhaps it was the great Armory Show of 1913 in New York.

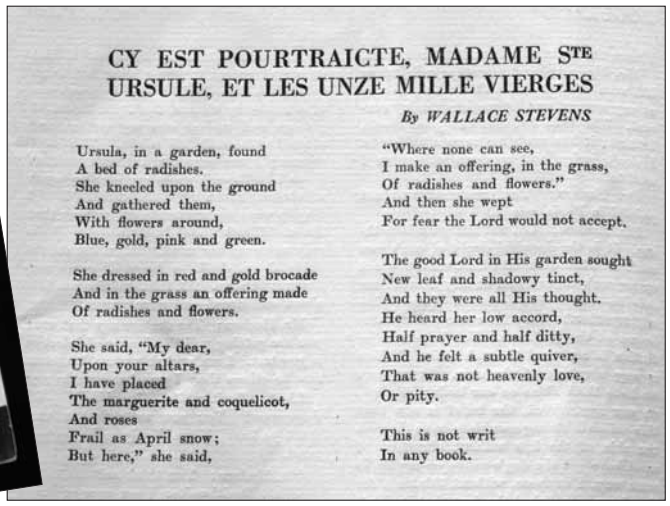
Stevens was acquainted with Walter Arensberg and his good friend Walter Pach, one of the organizers of the show. Known officially as The International Exhibition of Modern Art, the show was the first great exhibition of modernist art in America. It introduced Americans to works of such modern greats as Picasso and Cezanne, and challenged established views as to the purpose and function of art. There is little doubt that Stevens was much affected not only by this show but by the trends in modern art—in particular, the break from traditional forms of representing reality. Stevens' biographer suggests that these trends led to his use of techniques other than meter and rhyme, such as forced pauses, the incorporation of "irrational elements," and the dissolution of distinctions between subject and reader.[19]

In the fall of 1913 Stevens accepted an offer to become a vice-president of the Equitable Surety Company. Two years later he switched to the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, where he spent the rest of his career as an insurance executive.

More important, in the summer and fall of 1913, he started to write poetry again. In the September 1913 issue of *Trend*, a literary magazine edited by one of Wallace's old Harvard friends, appeared a group of his poems entitled "*Carnet de Voyage*." These included several poems that Wallace had earlier presented to his wife Elsie in her June "birthday books," so she thought they "belonged" to her, and was quite unhappy to see them in print.[20] Their daughter later wrote, "my mother…seemed to dislike the fact that his books were published…. She told me that he had published 'her poems'; that he had made public what was, in her mind, very private."[21]

The "*Carnet de Voyage*" poems represented a continuation of Wallace's earlier thought and style. But by the fall of 1914 he had begun to write in a new "modernist" style. The first public evidence of this approach consisted of several poems composed shortly after World War I began in August 1914. Stevens sent 11 of these poems to Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry*





CY EST POURTRAICTE, MADAME STE URSULE, ET LES UNZE MILLE VIERGES

By WALLACE STEVENS

Ursula, in a garden, found
A bed of radishes.
She kneeled upon the ground
And gathered them,
With flowers around,
Blue, gold, pink and green.

She dressed in red and gold brocade
And in the grass an offering made
Of radishes and flowers.

She said, "My dear,
Upon your altars,
I have placed
The marguerite and coquelicot,
And roses
Frail as April snow;
But here," she said,
"Where none can see,
I make an offering, in the grass,
Of radishes and flowers."
And then she wept
For fear the Lord would not accept.

The good Lord in His garden sought
New leaf and shadowy tinct,
And they were all His thought.
He heard her low accord,
Half prayer and half ditty,
And he felt a subtle quiver,
That was not heavenly love,
Or pity.

This is not writ
In any book.

One poem which didn't suit Harriet Monroe was fine with the Rogue.

magazine, published in Chicago. From these, Munroe selected four short pieces for inclusion in her "War Poems Prize Awards" issue of *Poetry*, November 1914.

We do not usually think of Stevens as a "war poet," at least not in the same sense as Owen, Rosenberg, Graves, Sassoon and others. He was never a soldier, so none of his work represents the battlefield realities depicted by the great English poets. But these short poems were clearly about the war—albeit imagined rather than seen. Here is the second of the four pieces included by Monroe in her November issue of *Poetry*:

> This was the salty taste of glory,
> That it was not
> Like Agamemnon's story.
> Only, an eyeball in the mud,
> And Hopkins,
> Flat and pale and gory!

Stevens' biographer notes that these "Phases" poems represented for him an even larger turning point than the beginning of the War: In these poems,

> Stevens' consciousness of leaving behind all that had ever been familiar, his awareness of death, his unrealized desire to have gone to Paris…all combined in a wholly new diction and rhythm.…

In her view, these images were the "first evidences of his mature style," and "marked the beginning of Stevens' career as a poet…"[22]

If 1914 marked the beginning of maturity, the year 1915 marked the breakthrough. Between late fall of 1914 and early spring of 1915, Stevens composed a number of his major poems, expressing new themes in his distinctive, ironic diction. He sent several of these (we do not know precisely which ones) to Harriet Monroe for possible publication in *Poetry*. She declined in a note that expressed both admiration and concern that she would be "blamed" if she printed them:

> I don't know when any poems have 'intrigued' me so much as these. They are recondite, erudite, provocatively obscure, with a kind of modern gargoyle grin in them.… I don't like them, and I'll be blamed if I print them, but their author will surely catch me the next time, if he will only uncurl and uncoil a little.…

The "gargoyle grin" was, of course, one of the features that made these poems "modern." One of these "provocatively obscure" rejected pieces was almost certainly the curiously-titled "*Cy Est Pourtraicte, Madame Ste Ursule, et Les Unze Mille Vierges*," which appeared in March 1915 in *Rogue* magazine, the editor of which had either fewer scruples or thicker skin than Miss Monroe. It appears above.

Stevens' biographer Richardson writes that in this poem Wallace was grappling with his "irrational" element—his sexuality—but used a supposedly female subject instead of himself to throw his readers "off the scent." The "bed of radishes…with flowers around" is supposed by the biographer to constitute "extraordinarily suggestive images.…"[23] Was this imagery in the subtle intent of the writer, or was it in the hyperactive imagination of the literary critic? As Casey Stengel reportedly once said, "Whom knows."

Another of the pieces probably rejected by Miss Monroe was "Peter Quince at the Clavier," one of Stevens' most often quoted. It first appeared in the literary magazine *Others*, edited by Alfred Kreymborg, in August 1915. A couple of months later it was collected in book form in the *Anthology of Magazine Verse* for 1915 (which also contained the first book appearance of Robert Frost's "Road Not Taken" and "Birches"). The poem obtained even broader exposure to the reading public when it was included, along with eight other Stevens poems, in Kreymborg's anthology, also entitled *Others*, published by Knopf in March 1916. Here is Part I:

> Just as my fingers on these keys
> Make music, so the self-same sounds
> On my spirit make a music, too.
> Music is feeling, then, not sound;
> And thus it is that what I feel,
> Here in this room, desiring you,
> Thinking of your blue-shadowed silk,
> Is music. It is like the strain
> Waked in the elders by Susanna;
> Of a green evening, clear and warm,
> She bathed in her still garden, while
> The red-eyed elders, watching, felt
> The basses of their beings throb
> In witching chords, and their thin blood
> Pulse pizzicati of Hosanna.

As often quoted as "Peter Quince" would become, an even more important contribution by Stevens to the 20th-century canon of American poetry was "Sunday Morning," written about the same time, probably in the early months of 1915. Richardson calls it "Stevens' most characteristically representative, praised, and explicated poem.…"[24] Part I commenced:

> Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
> Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
> And the green freedom of a cockatoo
> Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
> The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
> She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
> Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
> As a calm darkens among water-lights.

See ***WALLACE STEVENS****, page 6*

WALLACE STEVENS, *from page 5*

Here Wallace's subject appears to be his musing on death ("that old catastrophe") and his loss of Christian faith ("the holy hush of ancient sacrifice"). In this poem may be reflected the anxiety and pain which he had experienced at Harvard, as his belief in traditional religion slipped away. Stevens would write to a friend many years later that "Sunday Morning" was "simply an expression of paganism," though he added, "I do not think I was expressing paganism when I wrote it."[25]

Professor Robert Buttel, in *Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium*,[26] writes that "Sunday Morning" marks the "sudden leap from uncertainty to mastery." In it, Buttel concludes, "all is fused by certainty of theme and purpose, by the symbolic structure, by the tone, which balances pensiveness and celebration, and by the elevated rhetoric and subtle prosody."[27]

Harriet Monroe overcame her scruples and kept "Sunday Morning." Either she liked it so much she didn't want to see it appear somewhere else, or she believed she could make it less objectionable to her readers with some deft editing. Her particular concern was that it would be viewed as too open an attack on Christian beliefs. So she proposed to cut out Sections II, III, and VI. Stevens consented to the deletions, but requested that the remaining parts appear in this order: I, VIII, IV, V and VII (but numbered I through V).[28] The trimmed and reordered masterpiece appeared in the November issue of *Poetry*. For those who are curious about the stanzas which Monroe thought constituted too open a challenge to the Christian view of life, I've reproduced the omitted sections in the footnote.[29] They appear uncontroversial today.

By the beginning of 1916—although far from a household name in American poetry circles—Wallace Stevens was a recognized, emerging poet with a distinctive voice. He had been published in the leading American poetry magazine as well as a prominent anthology. At least two of his poems that appeared in 1915 would become classics of English verse.

His professional life also had become more secure. When his employer, the Equitable Company, failed in early 1916, Stevens moved over to the Hartford Company—at first to handle surety claims, and later to head the entire fidelity and surety claims department, a position he held until 1955. The move to the Hartford required that he move to Connecticut, but it secured his financial future. Although he missed New York, the trade-off was worth it.

During this period of professional resettling, Wallace continued to write. Seven of the poems appeared in the March 1916 issue of Kreymborg's *Others* magazine (as distinguished from the anthology of the same name). Stevens was also beginning to think of himself as a playwright. His one-act play in verse, entitled "Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise," won a prize of $100 from Monroe's *Poetry*, and appeared in the July 1916 issue of her magazine.

A second play, this time written in prose and entitled "Carlos Among the Candles," appeared in the December 1917 issue of *Poetry*. "Carlos" had a single performance on stage at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York. Fortunately for American poetry, it did not go well. The actor forgot three of the play's twelve pages; and the press reviews were mockingly hostile. This mortifying critical reaction to the play—combined with the favorable reviews of Stevens' poetry—may have been what turned him away from the theater. Whatever the cause, he never wrote another play. When his earlier play in verse, "Three Travelers," was produced in New York in 1920, it lasted only a single performance, which Stevens himself did not attend.[30]

By now, Stevens' work was being sought not only by Miss Monroe but by other literary journals as well. As the World War ground to and beyond its dreary ending, his poems appeared in issues of *Poetry*, *Others*, *The Little Review*, *The Measure*, and finally, in 1922, *The Dial*.

Because the accidents of collecting have led me into the field of World War I poetry, one of my favorite groups of Stevens' poems is the batch that appeared as "*Lettres d'un Soldat*," in *Poetry*, May 1918. The title as it appeared on the cover of *Poetry* was a bit more precise: "Poems on a French Soldier's Letters from the Front."

A major grouping of poems appeared under the title "Pecksniffiana" in *Poetry*, October 1919. Several of these dealt with scenes he encountered on business trips during 1918 and early 1919. "Exposition of the Contents of a Cab" was probably stimulated by the Chicago race riots in the summer of 1919.[31] This mini-collection won for Stevens the Helen Haire Levinson prize of $200, which was announced in *Poetry* a little over a year later.

Other important gatherings of Stevens' work followed shortly after. First appeared a group called "*Sur Ma Guzzla Gracile*," in *Poetry*.[32] It contained several of his best poems—including "The Doctor of Geneva" and "The Snow Man." And in July 1922, *The Dial* printed half a dozen—including "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman," and "The Emperor of Ice-Cream."

One of his most ambitious works was a long poem he began during the final months of 1921 and continued working on through 1922. Richardson writes that "The Comedian as the Letter C" was "the most formative experience of Stevens' poetic career." His hero is Crispin (named for St. Crispin, the patron of shoemakers), and the poem is not "facilely autobiographical," but forged in his experience and reflecting Stevens' "almost overpowering need to be heard above the din of voices that assaulted him from the past."[33] Buttel concludes that in "The Comedian" Stevens "recorded for us his poetic development"—which, he says, culminated in "glorious excesses."[34]

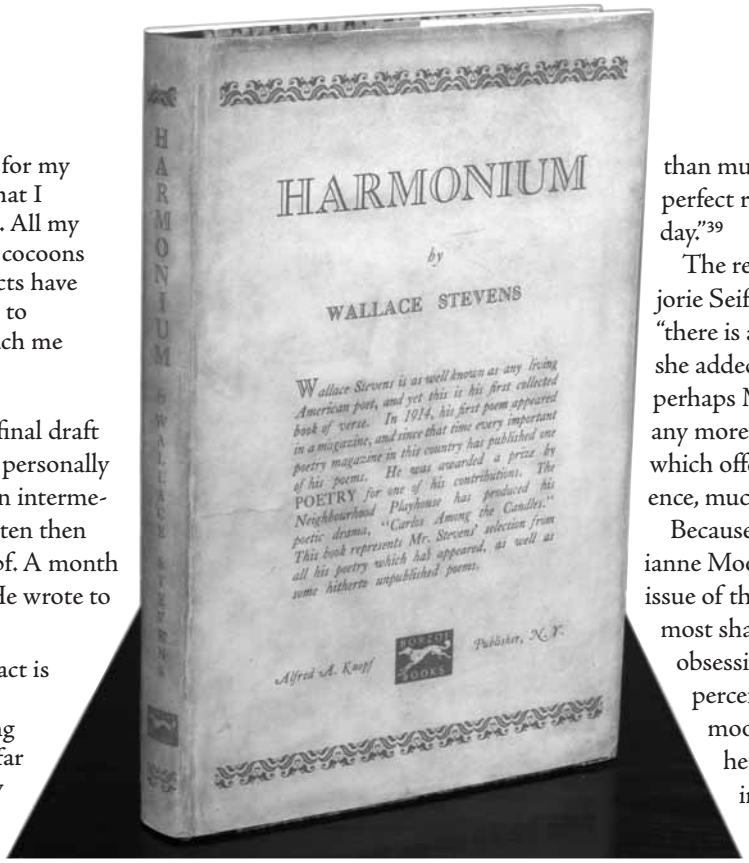
Stevens' friend Carl Van Vechten (newspaperman, later novelist, and photographer) wrote Wallace a letter on July 17, 1922, recommending that he consider publishing a collection of his poems in book form. Wallace responded that he was "frightfully uncertain about a book," but agreed to think about it.[35]

Over the next three months, Stevens selected the poems he wanted to include in the book. Most had previously been published in literary magazines, the principal exception being "The Comedian as the Letter C," which had not yet appeared anywhere. The process of picking the poems to include was complicated by Stevens' capacity for self-criticism. He wrote to Harriet Monroe on October 28, 1922:

> Gathering together the things for my book has been so depressing that I wonder at *Poetry*'s friendliness. All my earlier things seem like horrid cocoons from which later abortive insects have sprung. The book will amount to nothing, except that it may teach me something.[36]

Wallace apparently typed the final draft of the collection and delivered it personally to Van Vechten, who served as an intermediary or literary agent. Van Vechten then took the draft to Alfred A. Knopf. A month later, Stevens had his contract. He wrote to Monroe again in December:

> Knopf has my book, the contract is signed and that's done. I have omitted many things, exercising the most fastidious choice, so far as that was possible among my witherlings. To pick a crisp salad from the garbage of the past is no snap.…[37]



The author's first edition, first binding copy of Harmonium.

Stevens' reference to his own work as "garbage" was not false authorial modesty. Writing a few years later to a friend, he described his negative reaction to the first sight of his poetry in print:

> The reading of the proofs of the book gave me such a horror of it that I have hardly looked at it since it was published.[38]

Stevens initially decided to title the book "Harmonium," but then had second thoughts. In March 1923 he asked Knopf if "The Grand Poem: Preliminary Minutiae" would not be a better name. But a few days later, he reconsidered—and stuck with "Harmonium."

Harmonium was published by Knopf on September 7, 1923, at $2 per copy, in an edition of 1,500 copies. The book appeared in three different bindings: (1) paper covered boards in a pattern of blue, red, yellow, and white checks, and dark blue cloth spine; (2) paper-covered boards of gray, blue, white, orange and green stripes in an irregular pattern, with blue cloth spine, and (3) a remainder binding of blue cloth. The dust jacket for each of the three bindings was the same yellow jacket printed in red.

In August 1923 the initial group of 500 copies was bound in the first, checked pattern. These first-bound copies are the most desirable to collectors (though there are fewer copies bound in the second binding, a little over a year later). Also, because the book was published in the dust-jacket era of the 20th century, it is important to collectors to have a copy with a fine or near fine jacket. In this condition, the first edition, first binding is somewhat rare—or at least expensive. I have just checked Abebooks and find that no copies of the first edition, first binding are offered in the jacket. Copies lacking the jacket are listed at $5,500. (One of these jacket-less copies is described by the bookseller as "perhaps the most important book of poetry of the 20th century.")

The reviews of *Harmonium* were restrained, at best. Mark Van Doren, writing in the October 10 issue of *Nation*, wrote that the new book "places its author high among those wits of today who are also poets" (naming, in particular, Eliot, Pound and Williams); but he added that, "His wit…is tentative, perverse and superfine and it will never be popular. What public will care for a poet who strains every nerve every moment to be unlike anyone who ever wrote.…" Nevertheless, Van Doren concluded that some future monograph writer would likely "find him more durable, even with all his obscurity, than much of the perfect sense and the perfect rhyme that passes for poetry in his day."[39]

The review in *Poetry*, written by Marjorie Seiffert, dwelt on Stevens' obscurity: "there is a lot one never quite gets." And she added, "…one regretfully assumes that perhaps Mr. Stevens doesn't mean to be any more illuminating than life itself, which offers a glorious amount of experience, much of which teaches us nothing…"

Because she was herself a fine poet, Marianne Moore's review in the January 1924 issue of the *Dial* may have touched Stevens most sharply. She was struck by the obsession with death and violence she perceived in his work: "In the event of moonlight and a veil to be made gory, he would, one feels, be appropriate in this legitimately sensational act of a ferocious jungle animal."[40]

To make matters worse, *Harmonium* did not sell quickly. Stevens wrote to Harriet Monroe that his "royalties for the first half of 1924 amounted to $6.20." The second batch of press sheets was not bound until November 1924, when 215 copies were placed in the second binding. A couple of years later, in November 1926, another 715 were put in the third binding (which the bibliographer says were "bound for jobbing at a reduced rate").

Although it is getting ahead of the story slightly, a second edition of *Harmonium* was published by Knopf seven years later—in 1931. In this new edition, Stevens omitted three poems and added 14. The price was $2.50—only $.50 inflation in 7 years—and there were 1,500 copies. Many critics did not like the new edition any better than the earlier one. Percy Hutchinson, the poetry editor of *The New York Times*, summarized his views this way: "[U]npleasant as it is to record such a conclusion, the very remarkable work of Wallace Stevens cannot endure." Hutchinson regarded Stevens' work as so much sound, rhythm and rhyme—lacking substantive content. "From one end of the book to the other there is not an idea that can vitally affect the mind, there is not a word that can arouse emotion."

See ***WALLACE STEVENS****, page 8*

WALLACE STEVENS, *from page 7*

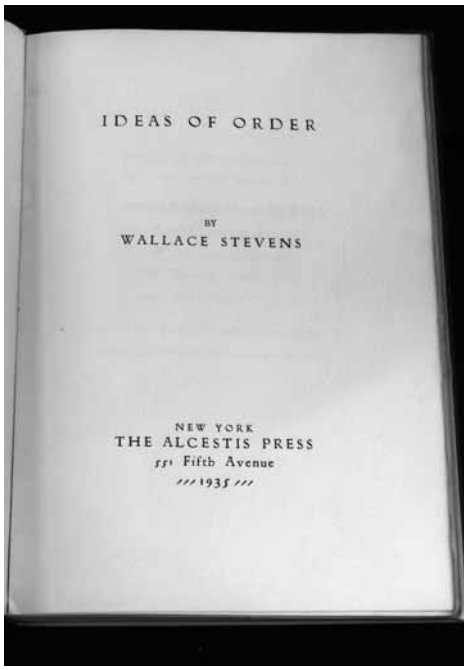
Harmonium does not seem to have had much impact on Stevens' pattern of living. He continued to work as an insurance lawyer and executive, albeit in Hartford rather than New York City. He and his wife raised their daughter, Holly (born in 1924), with only a little imposition on his work schedule. They regularly vacationed in Florida. And Wallace indulged his hobby of collecting fine editions of rare and well-printed books.[41]

He also continued to write. His biographer believed that the poems he wrote during the late 1920s emphasized new themes, such as sexuality and sovereignty over death, and were infused with less irony and greater abstractness.[42] He also shifted from the irregular forms of free verse to poems with more structure—for example, stanzas having the same number of lines. From 1931 to 1933, he wrote little. But beginning in 1933 he again found time to write, which led to the appearance of several of his most notable books.

In 1934 Ronald Lane Latimer, the editor of the poetry magazine *Alcestis*, wrote to Stevens proposing to publish a new collection of his poetry in a limited edition. Stevens agreed, subject to the need to obtain the consent of Knopf, who, under his contract to publish *Harmonium*, had the option to publish Stevens' next book. Knopf agreed to the publication by Alcestis, and Stevens picked out the poems to be included in the new volume. He was concerned that they might appear too "low and colorless," so he wrote a few new ones to add "gaiety and lightness"—to indulge his "instinct of joy."[43]

The Alcestis limited edition of *Ideas of Order* appeared in August 1935. No doubt Stevens' book-collecting hobby and his knowledge of fine press books affected his decision as to how and by whom he wanted this book to be published. Unfortunately, because of the limited number of copies, his decision turned out to be expensive for subsequent generations of book collectors.

Printed on fine paper and bound in ivory paper wrappers, only 165 copies of the first edition of *Ideas of Order* were prepared: (a) 20 were numbered I-XX and printed on Italian handmade paper for presentation,



Stevens' first flirtation with private press publication was this edition of Ideas of Order.

(b) 135 were numbered and printed on special rag paper for sale, and (c) 10 were marked "out of series" and used by Stevens as presentation copies. All were signed by the author. My copy is number 74 of the 135 which were sold. Stevens was quite pleased with the physical appearance of the book, even though he could not bring himself to read the poems again. He wrote to Latimer to thank him for the 10 presentation copies, saying "it strikes me, quite regardless of its contents, as being a very good job. Too bad that I can't read it. Of course, if I were to read any of these things again I should jump out of my skin." He also recognized that the publisher was unlikely to make any money on the book, and for that reason told him to forget about sending any money. "In fact, it would jolt me to think of royalties under the circumstances."[44]

After Latimer declined to publish a trade edition of the book, Stevens accepted Knopf's offer to publish it. He wrote Knopf on March 23, 1936, saying he agreed with Latimer's decision to take a pass in view of his "rather vague means of distributing it…" He added, "I am grateful to you for your attitude. Of course it must be true that you do not publish poetry with the idea of making any money on it except in an occasionally fortunate instance. My relations with you have always been most agreeable and naturally I am happy to have you ask me to go on with you."

Stevens added three new poems to the trade edition of *Ideas of Order*. Knopf's records show that 500 copies were bound in striped cloth for publication October 19, 1936, priced at $2 per copy. Additional copies appeared in second and third bindings of paper-covered boards a few years later.[45]

The reviews of *Ideas of Order* were generally favorable. Two of the better ones were Howard Baker's in the autumn 1935 *Southern Review*, and Marianne Moore's in the English *Criterion* of January 1936.

About a month after Moore's article appeared, Stevens interrupted his work to take one of his regular mid-winter trips to Florida with some of his male friends, leaving behind Elsie and their young daughter. As he wrote a friend, "I want to go down to the sea and the sun and to loaf, and that is all I want to do." Eating and drinking with his pals also had something to do with it.

On this particular trip, in late February 1936 he had a run-in with Ernest Hemingway. According to Hemingway's version, Stevens had "spoken badly" of Hemingway at a cocktail party. Both had been drinking. Hemingway confronted Stevens outside, and Stevens swung at him, missing. At that point, Hemingway knocked Stevens down several times. Stevens managed to land a punch, but in doing so, broke his right hand. He later made up with Hemingway, and they agreed not to talk about the incident—other than to say that Stevens had injured himself falling down a flight of stairs. This was apparently the story he used when he showed up in his Hartford office with a black eye and injured hand.[46]

By the time the limited edition of *Ideas of Order* appeared in November 1935, Stevens had already embarked on a new group of poems about statues. The first two were entitled "The Old Woman and the Statue," and the second "Mr. Burnshaw and the Statue." He continued to work on these well into 1936; but according to his biographer, he failed to achieve the same success as in his earlier work. "The rhythms, when not echoing earlier poems, were often stilted; images and references were not integrally

woven into the 'poetry of the subject.'… Something was missing."[47]

Stevens sent the new group of five longer poems to Latimer, the publisher of Alcestis Press, in May 1936 with a note suggesting that the title of the book should be "Aphorisms On Society." Latimer preferred "Owl's Clover," to which Stevens consented: "The point of this group in any case is to try to make poetry out of commonplaces: the day's news; and that surely is owl's clover."[48]

Owl's Clover appeared on November 5, 1936, in an even more limited edition than the preceding volume, 105 copies, all of which were bound in orange paper wrappers, and signed by Stevens. The first 20 (i-xx) were printed on Didot hand-made paper for presentation purposes. The remaining 85 were printed on special all-rag paper and numbered 1-85; these sold for $10—a hefty price in the middle of the Depression. Despite the low number and the $10 price tag, Stevens' bibliographer calls these 85 copies the "trade issue."

Stevens the book connoisseur was pleased with the new volume. He wrote Latimer, the publisher: "The book sets a standard. It is easy enough to accept a well-made book without realizing how much has gone into it. I hope that the reviewers do you justice."[49]

The reviewers may have liked the appearance of *Owl's Clover*, but they weren't wild about the poems. Part of the problem was that by late 1936 and early 1937, America was deep in the Depression, extremist forces at both ends of the spectrum were advocating revolutionary political or social change, and the Nazi threat to international stability was becoming more and more apparent. In such a turbulent intellectual environment, poems reflecting commonplace realities might well appear, as Stevens himself recognized, "rather boring."

Stevens' 1937 poems entitled "The Man with the Blue Guitar," according to his biographer Richardson, embodied more successfully the "noble accents and inescapable rhythms [of] his central theme: the function of the poet and of poetry in society." Richardson continues: Stevens "wanted to pave the way for an idealized future poet who could provide a common language, one so universal that it could form part of the basic vocabulary of the world."[50] He must have intended to suggest to his readers a comparison of his own work in the field of poetry with that of Picasso in the visual arts.

Harriet Monroe published the 13 poems comprising the original version of "The Man with the Blue Guitar" in *Poetry*, May 1937.[51] Knopf published the much-expanded book version a few months later, in early October 1937. Entitled *The Man with the Blue Guitar & other poems*, the book contained a new version of the lead poem, consisting of 33 parts—including the 13 published earlier in *Poetry*. The "other poems" included a revised and shortened version of those which had appeared in the prior volume, *Owl's Clover*, as well as "A Thought Revolved" and "The Men That Are Falling." Oddly, this new book contained no reference to the prior volume, though it contained revised versions of its contents. Priced at $2.00, 1000 copies were printed and bound in yellow cloth, and protected by a yellow dust jacket. The text of the jacket sought to explain Stevens' objective, explaining that the earlier poems in *Owl's Clover* set forth "what makes life intelligible and desirable in the midst of great change and great confusion." By contrast, the *Blue Guitar* poems dealt with "the incessant conjunctioning between things as they are and things imagined." The blue guitar was said to be "a symbol of the imagination." Stevens did not like the word "conjunctioning," which had been added by the book designer. He saw to it that the second printing of the jacket was amended to substitute the word "conjunctions."

During the five years following *The Man with the Blue Guitar and other poems*, Stevens' work appeared in many literary magazines in the United States and England. These were collected in his next book, *Parts of a World*. As his biographer notes, the poems written in this period "reflected concrete details of his everyday life…details from letters he wrote or received; reports of the news and weather; stray lines from popular songs…." His practice thus accorded with his theory that the subject of poetry is "extraordinary actuality," and the task of the poet is to "abstract" or draw off that reality.[52]

Parts of a World was published by Knopf in early September 1942, in a printing of 1000 copies. The book was bound in blue cloth, and was protected by an ivory dust jacket. It sold for $2.00. As with the prior book, there was no limited first edition.

But Stevens had not abandoned his taste for limited fine editions, nor was he inextricably tied to his friend Knopf. Beginning in 1942, Stevens initiated publication of three small books by the Cummington Press, located in Cummington, Massachusetts. The Cummington Press started as a school of the arts for painters, musicians, and writers, and became one of the most important fine presses in the United States. It published its first book (in limited edition) in 1939.

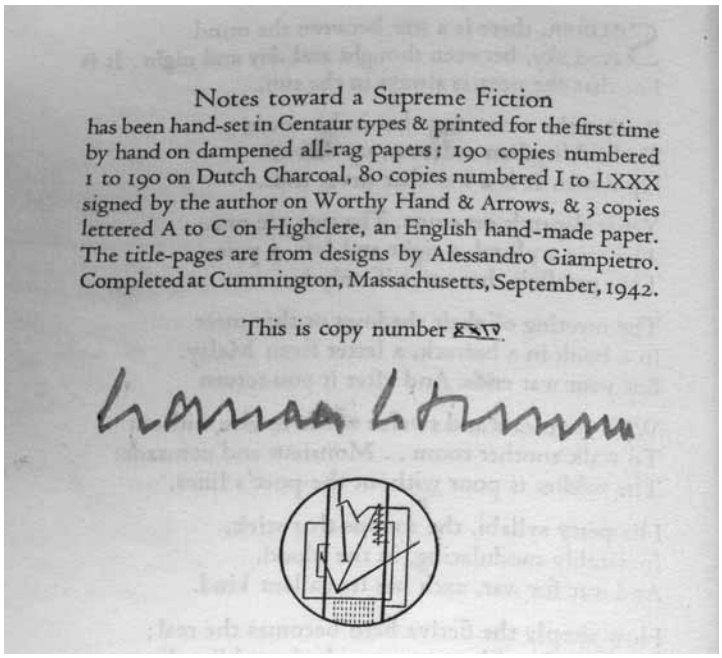
The first of Stevens' work to be printed by the Cummington Press was *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction*, 1942. Written during the first part of 1942, the three sections of the work—entitled "It Must be Abstract," "It Must Change," and "It Must Give Pleasure"—summarized Stevens' views as to the proper function of poetry. Elsewhere, he wrote a friend that, "in the long run poetry would be the supreme fiction; the essence of poetry is change and the essence of change is that it gives pleasure."[53]

Not surprisingly, Knopf was unhappy with Stevens' decision to have Cummington publish this work, at one point terming it a "betrayal." But Stevens stuck to his guns, arguing that such small fine-press editions could not hurt Knopf—and, indeed, might enhance the marketability of later general editions of his work.[54]

Cummington published *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* in two versions, both using the same hand-set type—an unsigned group of 190 copies (a significant limitation), and also a signed group of 80 copies (numbered I to LXXX). My copy is one of the signed group—marked "XXIV." Both versions were bound in white cloth. The unsigned group of 190 copies were sold for $3.00 each; the signed copies went for $4.50. (A second edition of the *Notes* was published by Cummington the following year in an edition of 330 copies. It sold for $2.00.)

Stevens was pleased not only with the appearance of the book but with its poetry.

See ***WALLACE STEVENS****, page 10*


Notes toward a Supreme Fiction
has been hand-set in Centaur types & printed for the first time by hand on dampened all-rag papers; 190 copies numbered 1 to 190 on Dutch Charcoal, 80 copies numbered I to LXXX signed by the author on Worthy Hand & Arrows, & 3 copies lettered A to C on Highclere, an English hand-made paper. The title-pages are from designs by Alessandro Giampietro. Completed at Cummington, Massachusetts, September, 1942.

This is copy number

Colophon of the Cummington Press Notes toward a Supreme Fiction.

WALLACE STEVENS, *from page 9*

Two years later, he wrote a friend that he felt the best work of his life had appeared in *Notes* and its predecessor, *Parts of a World*.[55]

By the spring of 1944, Stevens had become preoccupied with the subject of pain, stimulated in part by his reading of an article by his friend John Crowe Ransom, the poet and then-editor of the *Kenyon Review*. He decided to develop an "aesthetics" of pain in the form of poetry. By the end of July, his draft was complete. On July 28, 1944, he sent the group of 15 poems to Ransom, writing that the *Review* was free to use them "without any expectation of payment on my part."[56] His new poems, entitled "*Esthetique du Mal*," appeared in the *Kenyon Review* in the Autumn 1944 issue. It was to be one of the major works of his later career.

Stevens wanted the new collection to be preserved in fine book form, so he naturally turned again to the Cummington Press. The handsome volume appeared on November 6, 1945, in two forms: the unsigned version, which sold for $5.00, consisting of 300 copies on Italian paper; and the signed version consisting of 40 copies on wove Netherland paper, with colored drawings. Again, Stevens was delighted with the drawings and the general appearance of the book, and he waived any right to royalties. He even agreed, if necessary, personally to cover the costs of the bindings.[57] The book-arts community thought so highly of the volume that it was chosen by the American Institute of Graphic Arts as one of the 50 best examples of books in 1946. My copy is one of the unsigned version.

Not all of the recipients of *Esthetique du Mal* were pleased. Stevens had apparently not informed Alfred Knopf about the new Cummington Press publication in advance. Shortly after the book appeared, Knopf wrote with irritation:

> I do think I have a right to expect you to drop me a line informing me whenever you plan for someone else to publish a book by you, however slight it might be—even fifteen printed pages. The volume of your work has never been great and 'seven or eight sheets' mean much more in your case than so little might where another poet is concerned.[58]

Knopf's unhappiness did not dissuade Stevens from continuing to use the Cummington Press, which published the third and last of its volumes of Stevens' verse in 1947. Stevens had been asked in late 1946 to speak at Harvard in February 1947, and decided to deliver a three-part lecture including two poems. His biographer describes the lecture as an explicit *apologia pro vita sua*—a continuation of his justification and defense of poetry. His appearance at Harvard was evidently a success, as he reported being followed around "like Frank Sinatra."[59] The lecture and poems were published soon after in the *Partisan Review*, XIV, 3 (May-June 1947).

The head of Cummington Press, Harry Duncan, asked for the right to publish the lecture and poems—describing them as "an order of devotion." Stevens agreed, and this time arranged to get Knopf's clearance in advance. *Three Academic Pieces* saw the light of day in book form on December 8, 1947. Cummington published 246 copies, of which there were two unsigned issues and one signed issue. The first unsigned issue consisted of 102 copies in green paper-covered boards (numbered 1 through 102) on Worthy/Dacian paper, and sold for $5.00. The second unsigned issue consisted of 92 copies in blue boards on Beauvais/Arches paper (i to xcii), and also sold for $5.00. The third and signed issue was limited to 52 copies in tan boards (I to LII) and hand-colored. For a small book published in 1947, it was priced at the then-considerable amount of $12.50 per copy.

Duncan was understandably proud of the workmanship. He wrote to Stevens:

> [T]his is the best binding any book of ours has had—any edition, that is.... [The] meticulous and loving craftsmanship is something for which even the most sumptuous materials cannot substitute. And I should add too that [the] binding was twice as expensive as any we've had before.[60]

As Stevens passed his 67th birthday in the fall of 1946, he began thinking about publication of a volume for broader distribution that would include all of his work since *Parts of a World* (1942), including *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction*. He arranged for Knopf to publish it, and by mid-November 1946, he had reviewed and returned the page proofs to the printer. The new volume, *Transport to Summer,* was published by Knopf in March 1947, in a printing of 1,750 copies. It is a handsome book, in green boards with a light green jacket. This Knopf volume was priced at only $2.50, making it much more affordable than his previous work, the Cummington Press *Three Academic Pieces*.

Even though *Transport to Summer* did not have the refinements of the Cummington Press volumes, Stevens was very happy with it—calling it a "lollapalooza," and sending a presentation copy to the Knopf executive who handled his publications. The generosity of his note left the executive "gasping."[61]

Even better, the reviewers were enthusiastic. Stevens' biographer characterizes them as "almost without exception, full of

praise for the poet as a master in and of his time."[62]

With a sense that his remaining time was limited, Stevens continued to write at a steady pace, and his work appeared in a wide range of literary magazines. Stevens read his poem "A Primitive like an Orb" following his lecture at Yale in March 1948, and it was published as a pamphlet in June 1948 in an edition of 500 copies. The group of poems entitled "The Auroras of Autumn," among his most important, was published in the *Kenyon Review*.[63]

On November 4, 1949, shortly after his 70th birthday, Stevens read "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," at a meeting of the Connecticut Academy. He had earlier written to a friend that his purpose in this composition was "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 poem appeared in the reported "Transactions of The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences."[64]

Stevens' next collection, *The Auroras of Autumn*, was published by Knopf in September 1950. It contained the title poems (which had earlier appeared in the *Kenyon Review*) as well as "An Ordinary Evening…" and several others that had appeared in other magazines. Reflecting Stevens' reputation, the first edition (in blue cloth with a tasteful pink dust jacket) consisted of 3,000 copies, each selling for $3.00. Stevens was awarded the Bollingen Prize for 1949, a fact noted on the book jacket; and *Auroras* won him the National Book Award.

During 1949-1950 as *Auroras* was being completed, Stevens was thinking about the publication of a full collection of his work. He also worked during the spring of 1950 on "The Rock," a long three-section work, the first part of which was entitled "Seventy Years Later." A few lines can do no more than suggest the complexity and refinement of the work:

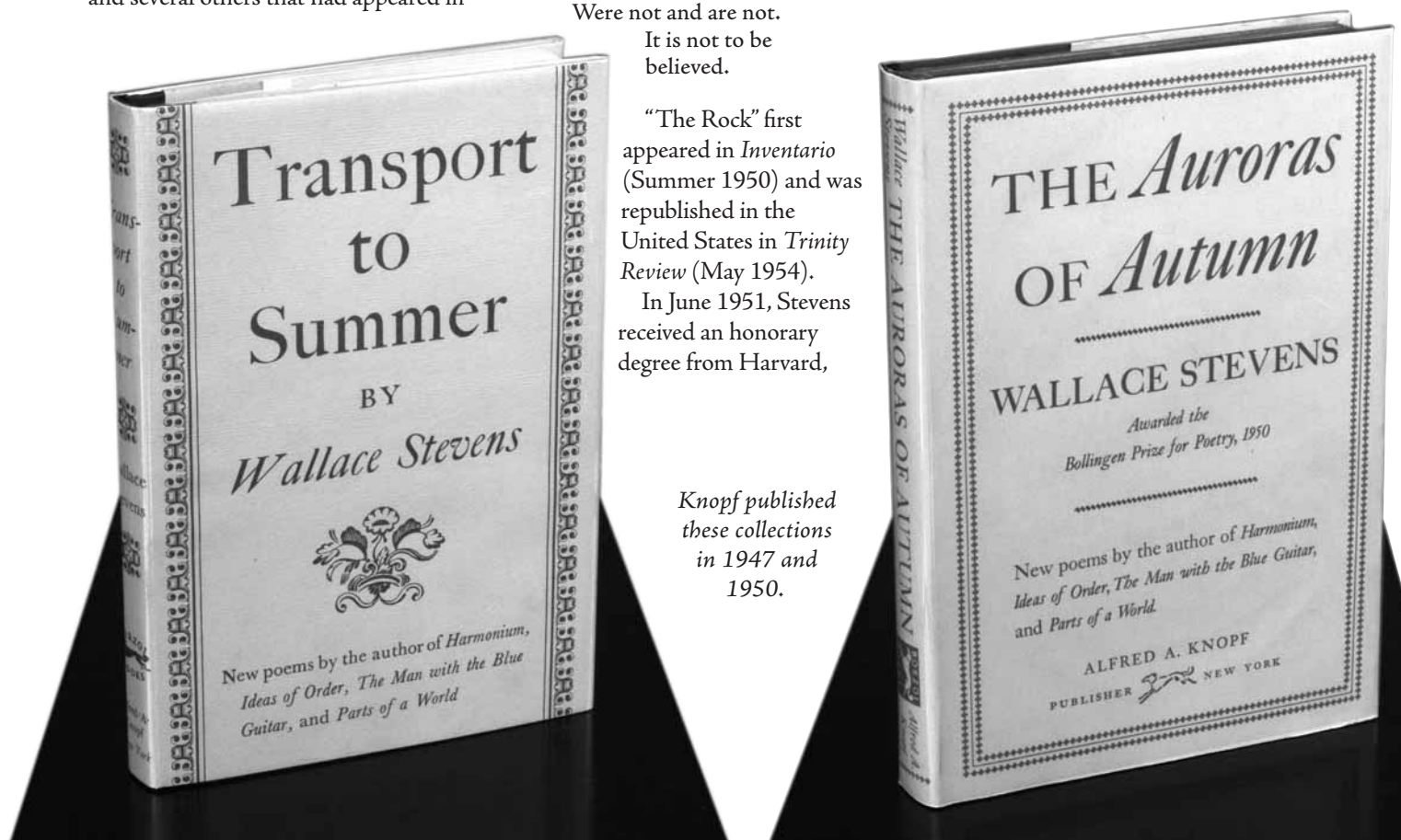
> It is an illusion that we were ever alive,
> Lived in the houses of mothers, arranged ourselves
> By our own motions in a freedom of air.
> Regard the freedom of seventy years ago.
> It is no longer air. The houses still stand,
> Though they are rigid in rigid emptiness.
> Even our shadows, their shadows, no longer remain.
> The lives these lived in the mind are at an end.
> They never were…The sounds of the guitar
> Were not and are not.
> Absurd. The words spoken
> Were not and are not.
> It is not to be believed.

"The Rock" first appeared in *Inventario* (Summer 1950) and was republished in the United States in *Trinity Review* (May 1954).

In June 1951, Stevens received an honorary degree from Harvard, which he had left without graduating 51 years earlier. He wrote to a friend that it was "the highest prize I can ever win."[65]

In late 1951 Stevens' friend Knopf authorized Faber and Faber in London to produce a "selection" of his work for English readers. Stevens initially hoped that Marianne Moore might make the selection for him. Finally, he picked the poems himself with a view that those included be "representative" of his work. But before the Faber volume appeared, Stevens learned that an unauthorized "selection" of his work, entitled *Selected Poems*, had been published in London in December 1952 by Fortune Press, controlled by one Dennis Williamson. When things were untangled, it appeared that Knopf had initially made a deal with Fortune Press but the deal had been cancelled. This unauthorized book was bound in black boards stamped in gold. Review copies were distributed, but the book itself was withdrawn before publication. Stevens had some difficulty obtaining a copy for himself, and wrote to a friend that, "There can be very few copies of this left because the publisher was required to destroy the whole edition except as copies had been distributed for review."[66]

See ***WALLACE STEVENS****, page 12*



Knopf published these collections in 1947 and 1950.

WALLACE STEVENS, *from page 11*

The number of these Fortune books on the market suggests that the publisher must have held back many copies. There is speculation in the trade that these appeared on the market in the 1970s. Timothy D`Arch Smith in his study "R.A. Caton and The Fortune Press" [1983] (p. 84) reports that Williamson did not destroy the books, as agreed, but instead placed the entire press run in a repository from which they were later leaked into the market.

The authorized Faber and Faber London edition of *Selected Poems*—containing different poems than the unauthorized Fortune version—was published February 6, 1953, in a printing of 2000 copies.

Meanwhile, Stevens continued to think about the possibility of a fuller collection. He wrote to Knopf in April 1954,

> I think that I should have difficulty in putting together another volume of poems, as much as I should prefer that to a collection. But I might as well face the fact. If, therefore, you are interested in a collected volume, it is all right with me.

He reminded Knopf that his 75th birthday would occur on October 2 of that year, 1954. At about the same time, he told a friend that if Knopf was going to get the book out by his birthday, "it ought to be started at once since it takes about six months to manufacture a book." He added that he would do whatever Knopf wanted, but would have preferred a selection to a collection: "[P]eople read selected poems but don't buy them. On the other hand, they buy collected poems but don't read them."[67]

The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens was published by Knopf on October 1, 1954, at $7.50, in a printing of 2,500 copies. It appeared one day before Stevens' 75th birthday. The final section consisted of "The Rock," which had not previously appeared in a book. The collection won Stevens an unprecedented second National Book Award in 1955.

Stevens continued to write but made fewer appearances and took fewer trips. In April 1955 he visited his doctor, complaining of stomach problems. Surgery disclosed that he had advanced stomach cancer.

In May Knopf wrote to tell him that he had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize. A month later, Knopf wrote with the news that *The Collected Poems* was already in its third printing.

Stevens continued to work part time at the Hartford, but the condition of his health soon deprived him of the ability to concentrate sufficiently to work or compose poetry. He died August 2, 1955.

On August 3, 1955, *The New York Times* carried Stevens' obituary. In it the writer quoted Stevens' response to critics who often suggested that they couldn't understand his poems. "When his poems sometimes seemed obscure, he explained: 'The poem must resist the intelligence—almost successfully.'"

§§

All photographs are of books in the author's collection, photographed by Robert McCamant.

NOTES

[1] For basic biographical information about Wallace Stevens, one must unfortunately rely on the only full-length modern biography: Joan Richardson's *Wallace Stevens: The Early Years 1879-1923* (New York, 1986), and *Wallace Stevens: The Later Years, 1923-1955* (New York, 1986). Equally useful and far more readable is Stevens' daughter's book about her father—Holly Stevens, *Souvenirs and Prophecies, The Young Wallace Stevens* (New York, 1977).

For information about Stevens' publications, the most useful sources have been J.M. Edelstein's *Wallace Stevens, A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburg, 1973), and Robert Buttel's *Wallace Stevens, The Making of Harmonium* (Princeton, 1967).

[2] Richardson, I, 43.
[3] *Id.*, p. 48-50.
[4] *Id.*, p. 53.
[5] *Id.*, 55-56.
[6] *Id.*, p. 59.
[7] *Id.*, p. 61.
[8] *Id.*, p. 77.
[9] Edelstein, p. 190.
[10] XXVIII, I, p. 31
[11] Edelstein, p. 190.
[12] Quoted in Richardson, I, p. 96.
[13] *Id.*, p. 98-99
[14] *Id.*, p. 98-99.
[15] *Id.*, I, 107.
[16] *Id.*, p. 135.
[17] Quoted in Richardson, II, p. 20.
[18] *Harvard College Class of 1901*, First Report, June 1903.
[19] Richardson, I, 400-414.
[20] *Id.*, p. 424.
[21] Holly Stevens, p. 190, 227.
[22] Richardson, I, 427-31.
[23] *Id.*, p. 432-33.
[24] *Id.*, p. 437.
[25] Richardson, II, p. 50.
[26] Princeton 1967
[27] Buttel, 240-241.
[28] Edelstein, p. 196.
[29] Richardson, I, 437.

The omitted stanzas:

II

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
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,
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?
Divinity must live within herself:
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
All pleasures and all pains, remembering
The bough of summer and the winter branch.
These are the measure destined for her soul.

III

Jove in the clouds had his inhuman birth.
No mother suckled him, no sweet land gave
Large-mannered motions to his mythy mind.
He moved among us, as a muttering king,
Magnificent, would move among his hinds,
Until our blood, commingling, virginal,
With heaven, brought such requital to desire
The very hinds discerned it, in a star.
Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
The blood of paradise? And shall the earth
Seem all of paradise that we shall know?
The sky will be much friendlier then than now,
A part of labor and a part of pain,
And next in glory to enduring love,
Not this dividing and indifferent blue.

VI

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores
That never touch with inarticulate pang?
Why set pear upon those river-banks
Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?
Alas, that they should wear our colors there,

See notes to **WALLACE STEVENS**, *page 13*

CAXTONIAN FOOTNOTES

Wynken de Worde

The just-arrived, handsome 2006 Caxton Club Directory [cunningly adapted from **Hayward Blake**'s ('60) original design by **Matthew Doherty** ('98)] reports that **Carol Prindle** ('03) has moved from the Chicago area to sunnier Santa Barbara, CA.

Prospective relocators include **Frank Piehl** ('85), who is leaving Naperville, IL for Munster, IN; **Charles Miner** ('87) is set to leave Lake Shore Drive for Naperville —but he is not buying Frank's home.

Leslie Hindman ('84) just auctioned a copy of Don Cleveland Norman's ('59) magnum opus, *500TH ANNIVERSARY PICTORIAL CENSUS OF THE GUTENBERG BIBLE*, in her March sale, but it went for a lower bid than the Club received for **Jim Donnelley**'s ('62) copy at the Club's 2004 Holiday Revels. Both copies were gavelled down by LHA employee Alyssa Quinlan—who has now attended enough meetings to be considered for membership. In the same LHA sale, Alyssa managed to sell for a good price the John Updike signed, limited edition title with the unmentionable name usually spelled with asterisks, which should amuse typophiles like **Bruce Beck** ('77) but maybe not **Martha Chiplis** ('00).

Fans of Chicago small presses could have easily afforded another book sold at the same March auction. It was *THE BASIA OF JOANNES SECUNDUS*, one of 365 copies, and designed by **Ralph Fletcher Seymour** (1902).

Kathryn De Graff ('82) presented an updated version of her Dickensian Christmas talk (which she presented at a Friday Luncheon in 2004) to the local Sherlock Holmes group, Hugo's Companions, in December, 2005, to kudos on both occasions. It is not-to-be-missed. But no.1 Sherlockian **Bob Mangler** ('88) did miss it, but he is back at home from the Wilmette nursing home where he has been working on a curious case.

Steve Masello ('97) was bird hunting several times in the past twelve months but, unlike Vice-President Cheney, Steve bagged only winged birds. **Michael Evanoff** ('92) has winged away from Chicago to Singapore, where I am pretty confident there is no bird hunting allowed, but perhaps his fellow Michigander, **Norman Jung** ('01) will let him hunt in his backyard. Like Norman, I prefer to hunt books! I also prefer **Peter Hunt** ('79) who actually visited some of the local rare book dealers during his Fall visit to see his daughter in Chicago.

Mystery bibliophile extraordinaire **Larry Solomon** ('94), lead a book discussion group at the Chicago Rare Book Center in Evanston on March 19th. The sleuths and cineophiles explored the long and the short of *THE THIN MAN* by former Pinkerton man Dashiell Hammett. Do not try to track down Dr. Solomon from the directory because he has moved back to Highland Park. **Florence Shay** ('85) has also moved her rare bookshop, Titles, Inc., after 25 years, to another location on Sheridan Rd., near Central, but still in Highland Park. The question is, did Solomon or Shay have to move more books? Inquiring minds want to know.

Mr. Bruce Kovner is not yet a true Caxtonian, but the financier, who founded and runs **Caxton Associates** in New York, is chairman of the Juilliard Conservatory as well as of the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative research group. He is also vice chairman of Lincoln Center. He has recently donated more than 100 important autographed musical manuscripts to Juilliard. The gift is so large that Juilliard is building a special room for the manuscripts, which were collected in the astonishingly short period of 11 years. "Mr. Kovner said he was most interested in collecting pieces by the great masters, and in manuscripts that showed their creative process. Hence, the focus on proofs with the corrections and emendations by composers, and with comments by conductors."

At least three Caxtonians are involved in the newly-created California Rare Book School. **Beverly Lynch** ('77) is founding Director of the new school, which will be a division of the Department of Information Studies at UCLA. Built on the model of the Rare Book School now at the University of Virginia, the new California school will be the only program in the western states for training professional rare book librarians. The five inaugural courses will take place in the summer of 2006. **Susan M. Allen** ('95), of the Getty Research Institute, and **Terry Belanger** ('04—and a newly-minted MacArthur Fellow), of the University of Virginia, will teach. Further information about the School can be obtained by contacting Claire Raffel, administrator, at craffel@ucla.edu.

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notes to **WALLACE STEVENS**, *from page 12*

The silken weavings of our afternoons,
And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!
Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
Within whose burning bosom we devise
Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.

[30] Richardson I, p. 507.
[31] *Id.*, 497.
[32] October 1921.
[33] Richardson, I, 513-15.
[34] Buttel, p. 247.
[35] Edelstein, p. 5.
[36] *Id.*, p. 5.
[37] *Id.*, p. 6.
[38] Richardson, II, p. 51.
[39] *Id.*, p. 27.
[40] *Id.*, p. 30-31.
[41] *Id.*, p. 47, 52.
[42] *Id.*, p. 63.
[43] *Id.*, p. 107.
[44] Edelstein *Bibliography*, p. 16-17.
[45] *Id.*, p. 20-21.
[46] Richardson, II, 124.
[47] *Id.*, p. 129.
[48] Letter to Latimer, quoted in Edelstein, p. 24-25.
[49] *Id.*, p. 24.
[50] Richardson, II, 133, 138.
[51] Vol. L, No. II
[52] Richardson, II, 151, 168, 185.
[53] Quoted in Richardson, II, 213.

See notes to **WALLACE STEVENS**, *page 14*

Book and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by John Blew

"Books About Books," the 2006 Exhibition of the Chicago Hand Bookbinders (featuring 26 examples of fine bookbinding), Northwestern University Library (Deering Library), 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston 847-491-7658 (from 4 April to 25 May 2006)

"One/Many: Western American Survey Photographs by William Bell and Timothy O'Sullivan" (large scale panoramic views from the "Great Surveys" of the western territories in the 1860s and 1870s, which have rarely been seen), Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 5550 S. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago 773-702-0200 (closes 7 May 2006)

Survey photographs at the Smart Museum

Timothy O'Sullivan, Snake River Canyon, Idaho, (view from above Shoshone Falls), 1874, Albumen print. Smart Museum of Art, Gift of the Smart Family Foundation.

"A variety of original documents illustrating the history of copyright and intellectual property" at the Newberry Library, 60 West Walton Street, Chicago 312-255-3691 (closes 22 April 2006)

"The Legacy of Virdung: Rare Books on Music From the Collection of Frederick R. Selch," at the Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, 1100 E. 57th Street, Chicago 773-702-8705 (closes 15 June 2006)

"Revolution and Invention - 24 Floral Masterpieces, 1801," a recently acquired portfolio of plates by Gerard van Spaendonck, the greatest flower painter of his era, at The Sterling Morton Library, The Morton Arboretum, 4100 Illinois Route 53, Lisle, IL 630-968-0074 (closes 15 July 2006)

"The Other Promised Land: Vacationing, Identity and the Jewish American Dream," Spertus Museum, 618 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago 312-322-1700 (closes 4 June 2006)

"Timuel D. Black, Jr.: Seven Decades in the Struggle for Human Rights" at the Woodson Regional Library of the Chicago Public Library, 9525 S. Halsted Street, Chicago 312-747-6900 (closes 31 July 2006)

Members who have information about current or forthcoming exhibitions that might be of interest to Caxtonians, please call or e-mail John Blew (312-807-4317, e-mail: jblew@bellboyd.com).

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notes to **WALLACE STEVENS**, *from page 13*

[54] *Id.*, p. 188.
[55] *Id.*, p. 235.
[56] *Id.*, p. 218.
[57] *Id.*, p. 63-64.
[58] Richardson, II, p. 264.
[59] *Id.*, p. 280-283.
[60] Duncan letter of December 8, 1947, quoted in Edelstein, p. 78.
[61] Richardson, II, p. 284.
[62] *Id.*, p. 289.
[63] Winter 1948
[64] December 1949, 161-172. Edelstein, p. 227.
[65] Richardson, II, p. 385.
[66] Edelstein, p. 97-100.
[67] *Id.*, p. 114.

Club Notes

Membership Report, February 2006

1) New members: We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

The Honorable Brian Barnett Duff, nominated by Ed Quattrocchi. A man of wide tastes, Duff has an extensive library including first editions of nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century works, many autographed by their authors. His collecting interests also include works on ethics and the history of the law. Brian Duff's nomination was seconded by Bill Mulliken.

Wendy Posner, nominated by Anthony Batko. She writes "My father was one of the founders of Bantam Books. I grew up in a house where each week every paperback published (from all publishers) arrived at our house on Fridays, causing me to become book obsessed at a very early age. All aspects of bringing a book to publication, doing a publishing deal, and the care and feeding of authors are in my blood." Her collecting interests include early paperbacks (40s - 50s), cookbooks and cuisine compendiums, baking, reference guides to porcelain marks, influential social work writings, and the history of jewelry. Wendy Posner's nomination was seconded by Alice Schreyer.

2) Fiscal year results to date. These additions bring to thirteen the number of new members elected since the beginning of the fiscal year (July 1, 2005). Several additional other candidates have been to recent meetings or have inquired regarding non-resident membership.

3) Directory. The Caxton Club Directory 2006, published last month, lists 304 members. This compares with 273 members in the previous directory. Current non-resident members, which number almost a quarter of the total, extend across twenty-four states, to Mexico, Great Britain, Germany, and China.

4) Recruitment: Our thanks for your support. Please continue inviting friends and acquaintances to upcoming Caxton activities. Membership information for prospective members is available at Caxton luncheons and dinners or can be obtained by calling Skip Landt, 773-604-4115.

—Skip Landt, Bill Mulliken

Caxtonians Collect: Mary Ann Johnson

Seventeenth in a series of interviews with members.

Interviewed by Kathryn R. J. Tutkus

"Chicago has a very complex and dramatic history. It has had so many different movements: women's movements, labor movements, and the development of various ethnic communities. The reason that I collect is because I am interested in this material. For me it's not so much about the artifact of a book. I am interested in the history of the city, what all these books represent. I think that's how most people start out, because they have an interest." Mary Ann Johnson is talking about how she got started collecting.

"I began thinking of myself as actually collecting Chicago books when I started working at the Jane Addams Hull-House at the University of Illinois. The first book that I bought, on what has turned out to be my subject interest, was Mayer and Wade's *Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis*. It's a classic. I remember when it came out—I was just fascinated by it. These two historians collected visual images of the city from the beginning up through 1969, when it was published. They traced the physical growth of Chicago mostly through photographs, largely from the Chicago Historical Society. I found it endlessly fascinating. This was the first book I bought and after that I started to buy older Chicago history books, ones that were out of print."

Johnson became a member of the Caxton Club in 2004 after meeting Charles Miner at Kenan Heise's book auction. "Kenan Heise is a retired journalist, historian, publisher, and huge Chicago history collector who operated a bookstore in Evanston. I've known him for years, way back when I started working at the University. Through the years I bought a number of books from him. When he closed his bookstore he had a large auction at the Leslie Hindman Gallery. They put out a catalog and there were a few books I wanted, one in particular. I ended up buying quite a lot of Chicago books. After the auction Charles Miner came to me and asked me if I had heard about the Caxton Club, which I had known about for years, and he suggested that I ought to become a member.

Her favorite things to read: "Right now I'm reading a lot about film, theory and history, because I'm studying documentary filmmaking. I've been taking classes at Chicago Filmmakers and the University of Chicago Graham Center. I'm learning production and editing." As President of Chicago Area Women's History Council she is particularly interested in documenting women who participated in the Second Wave of the Women's Movement in Chicago. "These women were activists and many didn't write about their work because they were too busy organizing. They are getting older now so I want to record their memories before it is too late. You can do amazing things today with digital equipment and software."

"I also try to keep up with new scholarship in Chicago history." All her books are in teak bookshelves together in two large rooms and she has catalogued them in a bibliographical computer program. Her general Chicago history books are alphabetized by author. She also has shelves full of women's history, mostly on individual Chicagoans, labor history, ethnic communities, Hull-House, social settlements, architecture, literature, Illinois, and reference books.

She says, "I had absolutely worn out my copy of *Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis*," so she purchased another. She has an Edith Abbot book, *Tenements of Chicago*, she used for research purposes when she was working on a history of the Near West Side neighborhood. "This was one of the first books I bought because it is so beautifully written—it really moved me. Abbot was a resident of Hull-House and also Dean of the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. She wrote about the city in the most interesting way—very vividly and personally. She wrote about her own neighbors near Hull-House and in the old Maxwell Street area, as well as many other parts of the city."

The book she went to the Kenan Heise auction to buy was *Tenement Conditions in Chicago* by Robert Hunter. "I had always wanted this book" she says "but it is hard to find. It is a report of housing conditions, based on a study by the City Homes Association and published in 1901. It, too, has great photographs." Robert Hunter went on to write the classic 1904 study *Poverty*.

"The most unusual book I have, a bookseller in Hyde Park brought to my attention. It's a 1908 book called *Twenty Years of Detective Work in the Wickedest City in the World* by Clifton R. Wooldridge, 'The World-Famous Criminologist and Detective.' Along with many interesting graphics and illustrations it contains Detective Clifton's 'Never-Fail System for detecting and outwitting all classes of grafters and swindlers.' A mighty handy thing to have!" she adds.

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Bookmarks...

Luncheon Program
April 14, 2006
Robert Cotner
"The Interpersonal Intelligence of Abraham Lincoln"

Robert Cotner has worn many hats: professor, author, poet, Caxton Centennial President and *Caxtonian* founder, editor, and "Musings" columnist from 1992 until 2004. Bob returns to Caxton consciousness with a rousing speech about one of the loves of his life: Abraham Lincoln.

Based on Howard Gardner's book on multiple intelligences (*Frames of Mind*, 1986), Bob will define and discuss 2 of these: intrapersonal intelligence and, (in more depth) interpersonal intelligence and the impact they had on our 16th President.

His presentation will include insights into how our least academically-prepared President was able to produce some of the greatest national literary documents ever written, and how, after his Cabinet appointments of brilliant arch-rivals who disdained his intelligence and abilities, Lincoln was able to dominate and mold these men into a team, a team who after his death had profound praise for him, as a leader and as a man.

A compelling afternoon.

Dinner Program
April 19, 2006
Ronald Gordon
"Joseph Blumenthal and the Spiral Press"

Ronald Gordon is the founder and proprietor of The Oliphant Press in New York, specializing in letterpress, offset and graphic design for a wide range of clients including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Astor Foundation and the Grolier Club. Ron was a student of printing and typography with Leonard Baskin at the Gehenna Press in Northampton, and Joseph Blumenthal of the Spiral Press in New York. He will present an illustrated talk about Blumenthal and the Spiral press. Blumenthal, for years "Robert Frost's printer," set the typographic style for the Frick Collection, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and other institutions. Ron's talk to Caxtonians will illuminate both Blumenthal's career and work, and also Ron's personal reminiscences of working with this great American typographer and print historian.

Plan a trip to Indiana in April

Disbound and Dispersed: The Leaf Book Considered opens on April 3 at the Lilly Library of the University of Indiana in Bloomington, and remains there until May 26.

Beyond April...

MAY LUNCHEON
On May 12th, Eden Martin, a frequent *Caxtonian* contributor, brings his literary expertise to the Friday luncheons. He will speak on one of England's most talented WWI poets, Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918), who was killed shortly before the war ended.

MAY DINNER
Angela Lemaire, artist, printmaker, wood engraver and writer—of Jedburgh, Scotland—talks on her work May 17. She pays particular heed to integrating illustration with text, and has built an international following of collectors with her work.

JUNE LUNCHEON
At the June 9th Friday luncheon internationally acclaimed author Audrey Niffenegger (*The Time Traveler's Wife*), returns to the Caxton Club to be interviewed by Caxtonian Marilyn Sward, Audrey's prototype for Clare, the time traveler's wife.

JUNE DINNER
A.M. Gibbs of Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, is known as a leading authority on George Bernard Shaw. His most recent book, *Bernard Shaw: A Life*, has been described as "biography as it should be." He speaks on June 21.

All luncheon and dinner meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of Chase Tower, Madison and Clark, Chicago. Luncheon: buffet opens at 11:30; program 12:30-1:30. Dinner meetings: spirits at 5 pm, dinner at 6 pm, lecture at 7:30 pm. For reservations call 312-255-3710 or email caxtonclub@newberry.org. Members and guests: Lunch $25, Dinner $45. Discount parking available for evening meetings, with a stamped ticket, at Standard Self-Park, 172 W. Madison. Call Steve Masello at 847-905-2247 if you need a ride or can offer one.