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Economy of Creativity in Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" and "Six Significant Landscapes"

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ABSTRACT

A man of business and poetry, Wallace Stevens is a peculiar master who combined a love of poetry and money in his life, overriding the gap between literature and economy, imagination and reality. Examining "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" and "Six Significant Landscapes" in the light of New Economic Criticism, we attempt to expound on the different rhetorical techniques and particular language and style Stevens has used to create an artistic product with economic value. We seek to explicate how Stevens's interest in money, power, prestige, and security as an insurance-poet man pertains to the accumulation of various types of capital – cultural, economic, social and symbolic in Bourdieu's sociological framework. Also examined is how Stevens borrows artistic devices/conventions – like light/shadow imagery, repetition and geometric shapes – from painting schools like impressionism, cubism and oriental paintings to ensure the exchange value of his poetry in the modernist marketplace. Furthermore, this interdisciplinary study explores the relationship between language and the economic system, focusing on Stevens's particular economy of language displayed in simple, short, declarative and ironic statements; the economy of imagery is present in precise and sharp images and haiku forms as it appears in imagism; and economy of space pictured in simple locations. The exchange between ideologies of the East and West also merits special attention.

Keywords: New Economic Criticism; Bourdieu's theorization of capital, value; art; language

WALLACE STEVENS AND ECONOMY

"'I have no life except in poetry'," writes Wallace Stevens, emphasizing the importance of poetry to "his sense of self" and the meaning of his life (qtd. in Sharpe, 2000, p.1). In addition to poetry, Stevens had a keen interest in "'money', 'power', 'prestige', 'security', or 'comfort'" – interests developed in his life as a poet and an insurance executive (Sharpe, 2000, p.1). He worked as the Vice-President of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company with a salary of $20000 until his death in 1955. It is said that he had "prodigious wealth" and was called a "funny money man" who made connections with millionaires (Sharpe, 2000, p.3). "Everything was in terms of dollar bills to Stevens" (Morse, qtd. in Sharpe, 2000, p.3). Interestingly, Stevens compares money to poetry:

"'Money is a kind of poetry'" (qtd. in Sharpe, 2000, p.3). He thinks that having a job and writing poetry create a fruitful combination: "It gives a man character as a poet … to have daily contact with a job" (qtd. in Tindall, 1966, p.5). Stevens is keen on bridging the gap between reality and imagination, art and life and the world of poetry and money, which impacts his manner and style of writing poetry (Tindall, 1966, p.6).

For Stevens, money counts as a measure of success. There are a number of studies on materialism in Stevense's poetry. For example, Charles Altieri (2018), analyzing Stevens's "Of Modern Poetry," elaborates on the relation between art and the New Materialism. Tony Sharpe (2000) has also written about the relationship between Stevens's financial state and his poetic career. In "Insurance" (2017), Jason Puskar investigates the impact of Stevens's profession as an insurance man on issues like change, death and loss in his poetry. In this article, we offer a different perspective though and contend that it would be rewarding to delve into the exchange between the cultural field (literature) and the economic field in Stevens's poetry. As case studies, we examine "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" and "Six Significant Landscapes" from *Harmonium*. Drawing on the New Economic Criticism, in this interdisciplinary study, we attempt to expound on different rhetorical techniques and particular language and style Stevens has used to manifest the interface between poetry and economy. The objective is to show how Stevens's interest in money, power, prestige, and security, as an insurance-poet man, correlates with the accumulation of various types of capital (cultural, economic, social and symbolic in Pierre Bourdieu's formulation) and how he borrows artistic styles from painting schools like impressionism, cubism and oriental paintings, to ensure the exchange value of his poetry on the modernist marketplace.

ARTS AND CREATIVE ECONOMY IN STEVENS'S POETRY

One of the basic ideas in New Economic Criticism is the similarity between economic and linguistic systems. In his structural linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure proposes that language signs are arbitrary and there is no natural relationship between the signifier and signified. Similarly, signs in an economic system like money, value and exchange are arbitrary and fictive (Osteen & Woodmansee, 1999, p.11). Moreover, Jean-Joseph (1999) argues that passing from language as a system of naming to language as a "system of differential values," in Saussurian parlance, parallels passing from a "representative money to a scriptural money in a system where the speculative and banking axis of currency exchange and financial operations is more important than the axis of commercial exchange (where money stands in for the commodity, and vice versa)" (p.102). The similarity between money and language arises from the fact that both have relational values:

> A coin is simply a piece of metal, … stamped with signs to give it symbolic meaning, to give it a value, a value that changes with the vicissitudes of its economic life, or, when no longer legal tender, with its life as a collectable.
>
> (Stupples, 2015, p.xiii)

Additionally, money has cultural and artistic value. Robert Dowd illustrates the point: "Crammed into each bill is a whole array of impressive letters, numbers, and symbols. Indeed it's a document of 'signs' to guide the seeker to an enduring faith in the system" (qtd. in Stupples, 2015, p.xvi). Money, then, could be studied as art, symbol and medium.

Art and money also have a lot in common. A painting is also an image painted on canvas, "a sign that gives it value, a value that changes with the vicissitudes of its aesthetic and symbolic

life, with its commodity value" (Stupples, 2015, p.xiii). On the market, money and art join each other in the exchange activity/trade between the artist/dealer and client/customer. Therefore, art has economic value in addition to cultural-aesthetic value. Peter Stupples notes:

> Art is capital. Art is an investment. Possessing art of value is a display of economic power, of the difference between the rich and poor, between those who buy labour and those who carry out the wishes of those commanding capital. Art is indeed a measure of status, of authority, of wealth, of abundantly disposable assets, of raw power.
>
> (2015, p.xiv)

Furthermore, with the emergence of copyright toward the end of the twentieth century in America, artistic and imaginative products obtained economic value (Howkins, 2007, p.6). When creativity produces ideas related to the economy, it shifts from abstract domains to economic ones, and a creative product becomes "an economic good or service" with economic value ready for circulation, exchange and consumption (Howkins, 2007, p.9). Creative products like literature and arts become, in Bourdieu's terms, a sort of capital defined as "all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation ..." (1977, p.178). Cultural goods and services like literary works are assessed based on their cultural value and economic value. While economic value encompasses market valuation, exchangeability, price, utility and demand on the market, cultural value consists of "aesthetic, social, [and] symbolic … value" (Throsby & Zednik, 2014, pp.83-4, 86). The aesthetic value in arts and literature depends on imagination (Stevens, 1951, p.147), which contributes to harmony and aesthetic appeal. Social value is related to cultural identity and "the role of culture in society," and symbolic value is related to the meanings that a work of art communicates (Throsby & Zednik, 2014, p.87). Arts, economy, and value are of principal importance in Stevens's poetry, which will be discussed below.

Stevens knows that "[l]iterature and economic discourses share a primary anxiety: the changing nature of value, whether aesthetic, cultural, or monetary" (Comyn, 2018, p.3). Regarding the capricious nature of the aesthetic value of poetry and the signifying role of style in poetry – the "poem is its style, … the style is the poet, …" (Stevens, qtd. in Tindall, 1966, pp.12-13) – Stevens defines new stylistic values for his poetry through creating a kind of negotiation between literature and art, which moves the reader from arts of space in painting to arts of time in poetry (Benamou, 1972, pp.11-12). Moreover, since modernism is "the intrinsic culture of market society" (Cooper, 2004, p.5), Stevens seems to play the role of *Homo economicus* or the Rational Economic Man whose "behaviour rooted in narcissistic self-interest, competition, and cold, scientific rationality will inevitably lead [him] to a promised land of optimal output, growth, and efficiency" (Feiner, 1999, p.166). Of course, it is not correct to judge Stevens merely according to his monetary concerns and ignore his humanity as Homo economicus engages in economic activities "due to social or emotional reasons because he 'has feelings, depth, and sensitivities'" (Feiner qtd. in Hasan & Pirnajmuddin, 2024, p.4). It is obvious that Stevens does not follow modernist poetic style and language mechanically because his manner of writing "captures the social registers of his poems and speaks to Stevens's cultural and economic conditions" (Finch, 2021, p.214). Stevens's writing manner is related to his prestige; as he states: "The prestige of the poet is part of the prestige of poetry. The prestige of poetry is essential to the prestige of the poet" (qtd. in Finch, 2021 p.215). One of the stylistic-thematic techniques in Stevens's poetry is bridging the gap between the logocentric world of literature and "'ocularcentrism' or 'scopophilia' where the practice of looking helps people understand the world and their surroundings" (Zeiny, 2017, p.75). Stevens's transparent vision is trained in the art galleries and museums of painting artefacts; his love of art

drives him to collect art, French works in particular, and subscribe to art journals and read and write about art (Costello, 2007, p.166). Stevens's connection with arts and artists brings him capital and distinction; as Pierre Bourdieu contends: "The manner of using symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence, constitutes one of the key markers of 'class' and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction" (1984, p.66). From a Bourdieusian perspective, collecting art and visiting galleries are cultural practices that display a person's economic capital, and Stevens adds to his social and cultural capital by communicating with other famous artists and writers. Thus, the experimental style and particular writing manner create distinction for Stevens and function like surplus value in his poetry. In other words, Stevens's name becomes a brand and signature, "a thumbprint guaranteeing the aura of the authentic" (Shell, 1999, p.58).

TYPES OF ECONOMY IN "THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLACKBIRD"

ECONOMY OF LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY

The interaction between modern literature and economics is manifest in both language and content: a literary work deals with the cultural, social and economic conditions of its time and encodes economic concepts in rhetorical figures and tropes. Stevens's taste in poetry demonstrates itself in his distinct use of verbal art language:

> Language is a kind of infinitely extendable, foldable fabric in Stevens, a form of social materiality that one can inhabit. The phrasal repetitions and syntactical plies, so characteristic of Stevens's serialised mode of writing, are indispensable to creating a sense of the extravagance, largesse, and stamina of language, which ideally functions as a sort of social 'intercessor.'
>
> (Finch, 2021, p.218)

Similar to the economic model by F. Rossi-Landi (qtd. in Osteen & Woodmansee, 1999, p.12), Stevens, as a consumer, treats language as capital and instrument. In this model, Marx's concepts of 'use value' and 'exchange value' are applied to language system as Rossi-Landi holds that economics "is the study of 'commodity-messages' …; conversely, linguistic use-value is equal to the 'message-content' of words or phrases, so that having a value is the same as having a meaning" (qtd. in Osteen & Woodmansee, 1999, p.12). To clarify the homology between language and money further, we could refer to metaphors by famous writers who have compared language to money: for example, Quintilian states that "one expends words as carefully as one spends money," and Ovid remarks that "words, like coins, are minted by public authority" (qtd. in Gray, 1999, p.82). Nietzsche also compares "current words to coins that have lost their impression due to overcirculation," and Saussure identifies "linguistic significance with monetary value" (qtd. in Gray, 1999, p.82). Language as a means of communication has use value, while in Stevens's poetry, language acquires exchange value through drawing on artistic techniques. In Stevens's poetry, "the meaning originates and is carried by the words themselves and is not invested in the referential value that words carry with respect to the world. The meaning of Stevens's poem is that it exists" (Pound, 2002, p.22). Yvor Winters also notices "poetic materialism" in Stevens's poetry and holds that "Stevens's 'gaiety of language' involved merely unconventional, if clever, choices of words combined with unusual patterns of sound and rhythm" (qtd. in Wilde, 1997, p.3). Therefore, language, words, in particular, become material and find economic value in Stevens's hands as a Homo economicus. Metaphorically speaking, Stevens spends words as carefully as possible, like spending money. Words, like money, have exchange value and symbolic capital for Stevens. In such poems, words become a means of exchange and possess value just to convey

visual images, and they become metaphors for ideas. Instead of using images and words that "have lost their impression due to overcirculation," Stevens mints new currency and images.

To enhance the exchange value of language – in addition to its use value – Stevens draws on various techniques as well exemplified in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird:" economy of imagery (as in Imagism), economy of language in haiku poems and economy of geometric fragmentation (as in cubism). Moreover, Stevens applies impressionistic concepts and techniques like the play of light and shadow, obscurity and sight, and objective vs. subjective perceptions of reality. Stevens uses words as carefully as money, and through thirteen minimalist and economical stanzas, he focuses on thirteen different images of a blackbird in various landscapes and sketches of interaction between the bird, speaker and natural world. The poem explores the cognitive function of the mind (imagination) of the speaker as a conscious perceiver. The first terse stanza starts with opposing images: black within white (visual imagery) and movement within motionlessness (movement imagery): "Among twenty snowy mountains, / The only moving thing / Was the eye of the blackbird" (lines 1-3). Applying Imagistic techniques like "precise diction, concrete imagery, and exactness of cadence and sound" (Buttel, 1967, p.126), blended with the haiku techniques like "objectivity, indirectness, and condensation" (Buttel, 1967, p.67) bring a peculiar kind of imagery and verbal economy – in terms of both frugality and exchange value– into this stanza. The speaker zooms in on the moving eyes of the blackbird while it is standing still in a snowy mountainous space. Stevens opens the poem with eye and sight – significant elements in impressionism – and, like Imagists, provides the reader with exact and bare minimal imagery – 'twenty snowy mountains' and 'eye of the blackbird' – to maintain the economy of imagery. As "images often seem to facilitate cross-cultural understanding," visual arts and genres which focus on visual images like haiku, the ideogram and Japonisme play important roles in East/West literary interaction and European painting schools like Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art (Bush, 2013, p.197). Hence, in this stanza, in addition to an exchange between language system/ poetry and visual art /painting, there is a very significant cross-cultural exchange between East and West: Japanese haiku and English Imagism. According to Bourdieu, the literary field, like the field of power, is hierarchised based on the amount and kinds of capital the agents possess and their struggle to transform or keep the relative value of different types of capital (1996, 215). Moreover, the literary field is not alienated from the logic of economy as the artist/writer is influenced by two principles:

> The *principle of external hierarchisation* in force in the temporally dominant regions of the field of power (and also in the economic field) – that is, according to the criterion of *temporal success* measured by indices of commercial success (such as print runs, the number of performances of plays, etc.) … – pre-eminence belongs to artists (etc.) who are known and recognised by the 'general public'. On the other hand, the *principle of internal hierarchisation*, that is, the degree of specific consecration, favours artists (etc.) who are known and recognised by their peers and only by them …
>
> (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 217)

Therefore, given the hierarchical nature of the modern literary field, Stevens has been involved in a struggle: to satisfy the demands of the literary market and to be prestigious enough to be recognized by his peers. Hence, his artistic creativity and knowledge of different artistic techniques like Imagism, haiku and cubism is indeed a measure of his symbolic status, cultural value, and probable economic success with publishers.

Reality, for Stevens, is the base of poetry, and it should be represented accurately. Finding "the resemblance between things," or metaphor, is a significant element in representing the accurate structure of reality (Stevens, 1951, pp.71-2). As Stevens asserts:

> [p]oetry is satisfying the desire for resemblance. As the mere satisfying of a desire, it is pleasurable … Its singularity is that in the act of satisfying the desire for resemblance, it touches the sense of reality, enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, and intensifies it.
>
> (1951, p.77)

The concept of 'desire' is loaded with economic implications. Under the capitalist system, a commodity finds a particular aura and obtains symbolic value in addition to use value. Advertised goods fabricate continuous and objectless desires, an endless feeling that one needs the goods for a better life (Schleifer, 2018, p.163). Similarly, Stevens desires more resemblances in his poetry to intensify the reality and symbolic value of his poetry. The speaker of "Thirteen Ways" accumulates different instances of resemblance to intensify the elusive reality of the blackbird: "I was of three minds, / Like a tree / In which there are three blackbirds" (lines 4-6). The second stanza shifts to the mind of the speaker, a signifying element in Stevens's poetry. When Stevens's metaphors move beyond connecting two real objects, "[t]he imagination intervenes and removes the boundaries of natural resemblance: private resemblances may intrude, as well as other mental overlays" (Galef, 1986, p.590). Stevens cares about "how an author might render investments in one's own states of mind: one does not describe the self, but one enacts it or carefully observes how it enacts itself" (Altieri, 2006, p.129). This is the time that the poet's mind acts like a filter, and images and resemblances pass through his mind/imagination. In the second stanza, the speaker moves from snowy mountains to another scene and compares himself to a tree with three blackbirds in its branches. As a rational economic man, Stevens enacts his mentality in "[t]he proliferation of resemblances," which "extends an object" (1951, p.78). In "Of Modern Poetry," Stevens also mentions the importance of the mind, as the poem begins with the responsibility of the modern poet: "The poem of the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice" (lines 1-2). He emphasizes how significant the poet's mind is in seeking what is sufficient for modern poetry. Making rational decisions in finding adequate rhetorical devices and subjects for poetry foregrounds Stevens's economic orientation.

Creating an exchange between two artistic genres of poetry and drama, Stevens extends the creative exuberance of the poem as creativity is demanded by the modernist literary market and is regarded as valuable. In the third stanza of "Thirteen Ways," the wintery scene switches to an autumnal windy stage with the blackbird acting like an actor in a pantomime: "The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds. / It was a small part of the pantomime" (lines 7-8). Theatrical scenes continue in the poem, and the poem goes on like a cubist collage, with miniature stages glued to each other. "Our extent in space (as well as in time) goes only as far as the blackbird goes –the blackbird is our 'line of vision' …, as it is our line of thought" (Vendler, 1969, p.77). The blackbird is the image/actor at the centre of all the resemblances and relations. On one stage, the blackbird is whirling and whistling. Then, the shadow of the blackbird moves behind 'the barbaric glass of the long window' to create an indecipherable mood in the obscurity of the murky glass, which shatters the illusion of a clear reality. The blackbird, on another stage, "Walks around the feet / Of the women" (lines 28-29). In the ninth stanza, the blackbird rises to waltz: “When the blackbird flew out of sight, / It marked the edge / Of one of many circles” (lines 35-37). The presence of the metaphor of poetry as theatre is felt in these stanzas, as hinted at in "Of Modern Poetry” too: “... It has / To construct a new stage. It has to be on that stage / And, like an insatiable actor…” (lines 10-12). Stevens contends that the theatre has changed, and modern poetry requires a new stage with contemporary figures and speech. He admits that new techniques are indispensable to enhance the value of modern poetry: "Modern poetry must not only do what it does, it must validate what it is doing, and it must do both things at the same time" (Hammer, 2017, p.102). This theatre-

poetry metaphor implies the exchange value of poetry and drama since, according to Heinzelman and Shell, "all metaphors are in a sense economic since the etymology of 'metaphor' contains within it the concept of transfer or exchange" (qtd. in Osteen & Woodmansee, 1999, p.18).

Eventually, the whistling, flying, and dancing blackbird comes to rest and stillness in the last stanza:

> It was evening all afternoon.
> It was snowing
> And it was going to snow.
> The blackbird sat
> In the cedar limbs.
>
> (lines 50-54)

The poem-painting reaches an ending with his last brush stroke. Stevens accumulates rich images like coins to add to the wealth of his poem. The poem plays with different forms of the natural scene and various forms of movement to create a cubist effect. Moreover, puzzling repetitions, either of words or ideas, also lend a kind of cubist tint to Stevens's poems. Cubism in literature is defined as a style marked by "'new syntax and punctuation, based on typographical dispersion,' … in order to create the ambiguity characteristic of visual poetry" (Brogan, 1991, p.5). In "Thirteen Ways," local objects and spatial features (painterly) turn into temporal events through language and verbal descriptions, and a visual-verbal tableau emerges – a temporal unfolding of spatial events (Vendler, 1984, p.7). Repetition of two inflexions of the verb 'snow' – "was snowing" and "was going to snow"– shows temporality (two different times of past continuous and unfulfilled future plans in the past). Stevens plays with numbers too: "twenty snowy mountains," "three minds," "A man and a woman and a blackbird," etc. Such repetitions delineate the cubist still life paintings, although Stevens has applied the technique to living and natural elements and abstract notions. Additionally, geometric shapes like a mountain/triangle, eye/globe, tree/cylinder, icicle/cone, and circle further contribute to a rendition of a still-life-cubist painting. Finally, it could be said that the blackbird has the role of the central symbolic signifier in the poem with no exact and discrete signified as scriptural /credit money with flowing signified. The blackbird symbolizes impressionism in literature too: it, similarly, "seeks generally to suggest atmosphere and mood; it subordinates plot, fixes moments, fragments form, and intensifies affective response; it fuses subject and object, finds truth in appearances, and evokes the dynamic feeling – the 'flow, energy, vibrancy'– of life itself" (Matz, 2003, p.14).

Stevens thus endeavors to satisfy his insatiable desire to create a new stage for modern poetry by constructing an exchange relationship between poetry and arts (impressionism, cubism, theatre) and East and West (haiku and Imagism). Although Stevens claims that he does not aim to create a verbal painting, "his emphasis on painting outside, from life, and capturing through techniques of brushwork and palette the fugitive effects of light, weather, and movement across the surface of a scene can be felt in many early Stevens poems" (Costello, 2007, p.167). Impression in literature is "the very instance of aesthetic representation" signaling the bridge between art and life, sense and reason (Matz, 2003, p.13). Such effects are possible through the power of imagination, which, in Stevens's poetry, accrues aesthetic-exchange value. Images possess surplus value, as in addition to creating visual pictures (use value in poetry), they blur the distinction between what is real and what is imaginary.

Another aspect of economy in Stevens's "Thirteen Ways" is related to the representation of space, which is a seminal issue in modern literature. Gaston Bachelard contends that an individual's identity and memory are constructed "in terms of spatiality rather than temporality"; therefore, "all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability" (qtd. in Rawashdeh & Zuraikat, 2018, p.49). "Thirteen Ways" merges various images of the blackbird in various climates and landscapes with the economy of location and space, and Stevens offers a minimum of description for the minimalist spaces in this poem. Daniel Fuchs asserts that, although a modern poet, Stevens seems to evade depicting "the negative apocalypse" and "the wasteland orthodoxy" fashioned by some poets like Pound and Eliot (1967, p.114). However, this view does not seem to be in keeping with what Stevens renders for spatial symbols here. The blackbird is continuously drifting from one location to another: 'twenty snowy mountains,' 'tree,' 'autumnal windy location,' 'icy and barbaric windows,' and finally 'a snowy evening.' All through the poem, the blackbird's flying, circling, and walking in various cold and minimalistic spaces communicates "a nihilistic understanding of homeness/non-homeness" (Rawashdeh & Zuraikat, 2018, p.48) of the location. Hence, the same modernist-wasteland feeling of not-belongingness and non-homeness is transferred to the reader. Only at the end, very ironically, does the blackbird sit "In the cedar-limbs" (line 54) and seem to have peace, yet the location is a snowy evening, communicating death and nothingness. Consequently, the economy of location in this poem ironically leads to a cynical and negative sensation, implying nothingness instead of abundance. The affective effect of the poem is almost similar to the ending of "The Snow Man," as Pirnajmuddin illustrates:

> The affective energies of the poem circulate within the poem and beyond it; we could literally feel cold musing on the wintry landscape so concretely imaged, and we could be overwhelmed by the abysmal prospect, so indelibly imagined, of having "a mind of winter."
>
> (2023, p. 26)

Even positive adjectives and phrases like 'beauty of inflexions,' 'golden birds,' 'noble accents', etc., cannot save the reader from the unfriendly feeling in the poem. This happens because beauty is juxtaposed to stronger awkward scenes like "The beauty of inflexions / Or the beauty of innuendoes" (lines 14-15) or "Even the bawds of euphony/ Would cry out sharply" (lines 40-41).

IMAGE ECONOMY AND THE EAST/WEST IDEOLOGY EXCHANGE IN "SIX SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPES"

"Six Significant Landscapes," another admired poem, encompasses six separate canvases that portray different scenes of visual imagery and form collage art with a pastiche effect. Bonnie Costello believes that the "'significance' here has more to do with design than with semantics. The poem plays with scale, with the relative value of substance and shadow, with geometric form and other visual elements of painterly experimentation" (2007, p.168). The first scene is set in China, giving an oriental sensation:

> An old man sits
> In the shadow of a pine tree
> In China.
>
> (lines 1-3)

A series of binary oppositions like movement/stillness, light/shadow, subject /object, real/imaginative, and the perceiver / perceived flow through this ekphrastic stanza. It is true that a verbal representation in ekphrastic poetry can offer a visual representation through description and invocation of an object, yet "it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do. Words can 'cite,' but never 'sight' their objects" (Mitchell, 1994, p.152). However, Stevens works differently; his verbal descriptions in ekphrastic poems are full of colours, repetitions, and movements so that the imagery becomes alive in front of the eyes of the reader, which helps him to imagine himself in the picture and experience imaginative pleasure. Stevens absorbs more capital and value into his poetry by incorporating creative techniques; "[w]hat he seeks to explore includes not only passage to the other genre (the visual) but also passage to the other age (the past) and the other culture (the Orient)" (Qian, 1997, p.123). According to Zhaoming Qian, Stevens draws on features of Chinese landscape painting:

> … by focus on a single point of sight ("An old man" gazing out forever at those gazing at him); by choice of subject of all that is most elemental in nature and in Chinese landscape painting ("a pine tree," "larkspur," "wind," "water," and "weeds"); by reliance on a few simple strokes of description (five simple sentences without subordinate clauses); and by an almost monochrome tonality of grey and blue and white …
>
> (1997, p.124)

This painting style belongs to the Chinese school of "the Southern Song (or Late Song) landscape painting", with which Stevens had become familiar through visiting such paintings in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (Qian, 1997, p.124). "Certainly, it can be shown that Stevens's work coincides with Buddhist notions involving nothingness, rejection of human desire/will, a correspondingly Buddhist attitude to "reality," even a penchant for abstraction" (Ragg, 2017, p.59). Nevertheless, Stevens's rational and economic consciousness cannot be completely driven to nothingness, and he cannot deny the economic benefit and cultural value this orientalism brings to him. Thus, Stevens's cultural capital is pictured in his art of poetry and expanded.

Stevens is careful about spending image/money not to waste any word or image, and he is aware of the fact that "money is the ultimate "commodity fetish," a dead, useless, banal object which, through a sort of secret conspiracy, we endow with almost magical powers" (Marx, qtd. in Haiven, 2015, p.64). Similarly, art is a form of mediation:

> We lionise and revere the artist as a unique creative genius, but, in reality, every artist is the product of the community, every artwork relies on an aesthetic and conceptual lineage, and every painting, installation, performance, or video relies upon an audience to give it meaning and value. Like money, art necessarily beguiles us into an almost spiritual belief in its otherworldly power, yet this power is really our own collective power reflected back to us in the singular aesthetic achievement of the artist.
>
> (Haiven, 2015, p.64)

In the same way that the Chinese painting in the first stanza "portrays a single impression: consciousness of the unity of all created things" (Qian, 1997, p.124), Stevens conveys some messages about the reality of his contemporary society: the unity of economic system and other superstructures like literature and arts in modern society of capitalist America. A rational economic man, Stevens knows well that both money and language are "symbols of relational values without fixed or inherent meaning" (Crosthwaite et al., 2022, p.4). A coin has value according to the effigy engraved on it, and similarly, a speech sound makes meaning because it is different from another speech sound. Crossing genre, age, and culture, Stevens adds cultural and exchange value to the use value of language by doing with words what paint does in painting. In other words, poets

"construct a 'visible language,' a form that combines sight and sound, picture and speech…" (Mitchell, 1994, p.114). Like coins, the images ease understanding of the ideas Stevens attempts to communicate.

The second stanza paints a romantic image of night personified as a woman in terms of color, smell, obscurity and movement: "The night is of the color / Of a woman's arm" (lines 12-13). Through this metaphor/personification, Stevens makes the reader see, touch, and smell the female night and dance with her in a shining pool – a unification of the observer/speaker and observed / nature. Ekphrasis in Stevens is not just an insensitive equivalent for the visual picture but applies sensuous-imaginative images and operates on all the mental faculties of the reader to create a romantic dream. Proceeding with a similar dreamy romantic aura, the speaker compares himself to a tree in the third stanza: "I measure myself / Against a tall tree" (lines 21-22). Here, language is at the service of vision and brings the image of a tall tree before the mind's eye of the reader. The image finds a kind of surrealistic ambience as the speaker's elastic body extends up and bends towards the sun and the seashore – he sees the sun and hears the sea. Although the speaker measures – using 'measure' instead of 'compare' displays Stevens's economic mentality as a Homo economicus – himself higher than the tree, in the last lines, the speaker and nature become one –"Nevertheless, I dislike / The way ants crawl / In and out of my shadow" (lines 28-30). The speaker is so absorbed into nature that the reader feels the metamorphosis of the speaker into a tree with a shadow in which ants crawl. In the fourth stanza, the sunny landscape of the third stanza backslides to the night of the second stanza with the moon personified as a woman who is wearing a white gown shining in yellow light: "When my dream was near the moon, / The white folds of its gown / Filled with yellow light" (lines 31-33). The female moon's feet are red, and her hair glitters with blue stars, which are compared to crystals. The female images of the night and the moon glitter with a 'shiny bracelet' and 'crystalline stars.'

In contrast to the serene and meditative Chinese Buddhism in the beginning, in the rest of the poem, Stevens ironically projects Western capitalist ideology which, in Marx's discourse, is metaphorically compared to the *camera obscura*: literally a 'dark room' where "exact replicas of the visible world" are projected in inverted and reversed shapes – "the images are shadows, insubstantial 'phantoms' projected in darkness" (Mitchell, 1986, p.162). Hence, for Marx, ideas resemble images or signs which fabricate "idols of the mind" (Mitchell, 1986, pp. 162-4). Ideology is in dialectical relation with a commodity, which functions as the idol of the marketplace and a tangible "object of superstition, fantasy, and obsessive behaviour" (Mitchell, 1986, p.162). This photographic metaphor crawls under the magical surface of the poem as the commodification of the night and the moon in terms of gold and crystal, which is a reversed shape of the natural serenity of the Chinese picture. Roland Barthes' view about signs in society is relevant here: "As soon as the sign is used in society, it becomes loaded with meanings, semanticized and refunctionalised" (Pirnajmuddin & Shahpoori Arani, 2013, p.37). Photography, as the sign of modern life with its visual culture, gives the impression of recording the exact reality, while Marx ironically confirms that "the camera was a leisure-class toy, a machine for producing new 'collector's items,' portraits of well-to-do burghers, … and that it was being produced by and for leisured gentlemen who could afford the luxury of 'floating philosophical visions'" (Mitchell, 1986, p.172). In Marx's terms, photography is refunctionalized as a commodified sign, which is produced and advertised on the market as an object of desire and a sign of value, social class and relationships (Schleifer, 2018, p.162). Therefore, photography supplies false understanding and reversed images of reality. The Chinese hopeful images are mediated through the active capitalist ideology of Stevens's consciousness and ironically conceal the absence of what they represent.

The fourth stanza does not communicate much movement imagery and displays a 'still moment,' as Murray Krieger explains: "The visual arts are a metaphor, not just for verbal representation of visual experience, but for the shaping of language into formal patterns that 'still' the movement of linguistic temporality into a spatial, formal array" (qtd. in Mitchell, 1994, pp.153-4). In the previous stanzas, the speaker communicates movement imagery by verbs like 'move' and 'flow' in the first stanza, 'shake' and 'dance' in the second stanza, 'reach' and 'crawl' in the third stanza. However, in the fourth stanza, the ekphrastic style captures a still moment. The speaker starts with the time adverb 'when' and says my dream 'was near the moon,' not moving toward the moon. He sees and imagines the silent and still state of the white and shiny moon despite the fact that Stevens's poetry is identified with change:

> The identity is in Stevens' concern with change. Impressionism shows the *passive* principle of change. The eye must be as candid as possible and merely relay the variations of light and colours. However, in Cubism, "more than changes of light" are involved. Imagination is the *active* principle which transforms and extends the object by multiplying resemblances.
>
> (Benamou, 1972, p.11)

Put differently, cubism is "an art of conceptual rather than perceptual realism"; as Picasso says, "I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them" (qtd. in Scobie, 1997, p.80). In this stanza, Stevens has combined elements of impressionism and cubism – still life painting of cubism and light and color of impressionist painters to ironize the colorful promises of the capitalist society which conceal the stasis and passivity under it.

This reevaluation and reconceptualization of the reality that Stevens's eyes see, and the play between light and shadow, darkness and color, carry on to the fifth stanza, when the eyes of the speaker turn to the still-life image of the city where through a series of geometric metaphors, Sevens brings the temporality of poetry and spatiality of painting together and reflects a cynical image and sensation of the city: 'the lamp-posts are knives,' 'the long streets are chisels,' and 'the domes and high towers are mallets.' Nothing man-made in the city compares with nature – 'a star' and 'grape leaves.' This stanza is ironically in contrast to the first one, which communicates "a sense of ease, leisure, and contentment, or… the Chan-Buddhist sense of 'the Alone'" (Qian, 1997, p.124), or highly ironically, in Western ideology, the 'Other.' This "modernist Orientalism represents a very distinct form of Western self-representation" (Bush, 2013, p.196). Eric Hayot (1999) points out that if a Western poet attempts to reproduce a poem similar to Chinese poetry, he is "taking something from genuine Chinese poetry," and yet he is "still participating in a Western invention of China…" (p.517). Accordingly, Stevens's reproduction of East / West exchange hinges upon "two competing trajectories: one, the self-identification of the West as rational and post-spiritual; and, two, the desire of the West to exist in a world replete with magic, mystery, and spiritual vitality" (Goto-Jones, 2014, p.1454). Economically speaking, the natural images function like coins with relative value; from the Eastern perspective, they delineate serene spirituality and hope, but from the Western standpoint, the *camera obscura* effect spotlights another ideology. Christopher Bush argues that "[w]hether in the fevered nightmares of Yellow Peril or the fervent dreams of various coming commercial and cultural fusions, 'the East' [is] not just a past to which one might escape, but an active force shaping the future in the present" (2013, p.201). And it is a future to which the West aspires.

In the final stanza, Stevens ironizes rationalists by setting them in the logic of geometry – square and right-angled triangles: "Rationalists, wearing square hats, / Think, in square rooms" (lines 47-48). Rationalists, in square hats which symbolize scholarly achievements, believe in the power of reason to discover and understand the existent truth. They confine themselves to a closed space and look at the surroundings from their own angle, so they think they have found the truth:

'right-angled triangles.' According to materialists, consciousness originates in the material condition and is constructed in society. Hence, reality is relative and is not obtained accurately through direct observation but is mediated through an ideology which is shadowy, illusory, and false. If rationalists change their surroundings – "If they tried rhomboids, / Cones, waving lines, ellipses" (lines 53-54) – they would come to another perception. If rationalists look at everything through a square lens, they would see right-angled shapes everywhere, but if they look through an oval lens, they would see some other different geometric shapes. Conveyed here is the importance of ideology and perspective in shaping reality and perception, and, finally, it is emphasized that the ekphrastic poems and photographic-visual art function like camera obscura reflecting reversed and shadowy images of reality. As Mitchell illustrates: "… the utopian figures of the image and its textual rendering as transparent windows onto reality are supplanted by the notion of the image as a deceitful illusion, a magical technique that threatens to fixate the poet and the listener" (1994, p.156).

CONCLUSION

Stevens's poetry is modern in terms of reconceptualizing and reintegrating topics and forms. As an insurance man who is concerned with money and business, he is well aware of the importance of the market in the modern and capitalist society of America. As an art collector, Stevens knows that art is capital, and possessing art signals his social class, cultural capital, and economic power. As a professional poet, he gets involved in the network system of production, publication, circulation and consumption of literary works, which become commodified as idols for the market. He borrows artistic techniques from different schools of visual arts, such as impressionism, cubism, Chinese painting, and drama, and such exchanges between poetry and art turn his poetry into a creative product with economic value on the market. Images, words and poetic techniques – like repetition, movement, fragmentation and multi-perspective representation – in his poetry are like coins minted to add to the surplus value of the language, which merely possesses use value in everyday conversations. Moreover, different types of economy are discernible in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" and "Six Significant Landscapes:" economy of language present in simple, short, declarative and ironic statements; economy of imagery present in precise and exact images and haiku forms; and economy of space pictured in simple locations.

Stevens's art inevitably reflects the dominant discourses of his time. In the same way that money facilitates commerce, Stevens supposes his distinct and artistic style and language must bring an intellectual and accurate understanding of the reality he represents. Nonetheless, ekphrastic poems and photographic-visual art function like camera obscura, reflecting reversed and shadowy images of reality. In other words, images turn into illusions to deceive the poet and listener. Yet, Stevens's dream of creating an image of his contemporary time and space is fulfilled – representing obscurity, relativism, fragmentation, monetary economy, and creative economy.

Stevens's name as a master poet to certify is fetishized; his style of writing turns him and his works into commodity with exchange value like coins. A keen interest in economy has paid very well in the case of Stevens as a businessman-poet.

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