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Utopian Imagination in Modernist Poetry: Passage from Transcendence to Language

Modernist Şiirde Ütopyacı Tahayyül: Aşkınlıktan Dile Geçiş

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Abstract

"Modernist literature" is a capacious term that designates both an epoch and a variety of political attitudes espoused or rejected by the authors grouped under this title. On the one hand, the widely used concepts of high and late modernism refer to the period approximately between 1900 and the 1960s, divided by World War II. On the other, they concern the politics of literary modernism discussed on the basis of how writers and poets relate to their own social-historical conditions and to the utopian vision of a radically different kind of individual and collective existence that aims to transcend the given modes of subjectivity and sociality. In this article, I have traced specifically the changing politics of modernist literature with respect to that utopian desire for transcendence which some theorists call the modernist absolute. Differing from much of the scholarship on the politics of modernist

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literature that privileges the novel genre, in the present study, I have focused on the poetry of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens. Through textual and theoretical analyses of "In the Seven Woods" and "A Collar-bone of a Hare" by Yeats and "Of Mere Being" by Stevens, I have demonstrated how the high modernist imagining of transcendence turns with late modernism into a theme or a motif that reveals the linguistic character of such visions and the ideological function of their utopianism. In my discussion, I have tried to show that Yeats, who is part of high modernist literature in terms of periodization, belongs to this category due to his political imagining that prioritizes transcendence. Furthermore, unlike Yeats, Stevens stands close, especially in his last poems, to the late modernist mindset that anticipates the politics of postmodern literature and the poststructuralist awareness of the role of language in constructing meaning and value.

Keywords: *W. B. Yeats, Wallace Stevens, modernist poetry, politics of modernism, utopian imagination*

Öz

"Modernist edebiyat" hem bir dönemi hem de bu başlık altında toplanan yazarların benimsedikleri veya reddettikleri çeşitli siyasal tutumları belirten son derece kapsamlı bir terimdir. Akademi içinde ve dışında yapılan araştırmalarda yaygın olarak kullanılan yüksek ve geç modernizm kavramları bir yandan II. Dünya Savaşı'nın iki kısma ayırdığı, aşağı yukarı 1900 ve 1960lar arasında kalan dönemi işaret eder. Bunlar diğer yandan da modernizmin siyasetine dair kavramlardır. Bu anlamda yazarların ve şairlerin kendi toplumsal-tarihsel koşullarına nasıl yaklaştıklarını, verili öznellik ve toplumsallık biçimlerini aşmaya yönelik radikal ölçüde farklı bir bireysel ve kolektif varoluşu arzulayan ütopyacı vizyonla nasıl bir ilişki kurduklarını ifade ederler. Bu makalede, özellikle bazı kuramcıların modernist mutlak olarak adlandırdıkları bu ütopyacı aşkınlık arzusu açısından modernist edebiyatın zamanla değişen siyasetinin izini sürdüm. Modernist edebiyatın siyaseti konusunu inceleyen ve bu çerçevede genellikle roman türüne ayrıcalıklı bir yer veren araştırmaların çoğundan farklı olarak mevcut çalışmada W. B. Yeats ve Wallace Stevens şiiri üzerinde durdum. Yeats'in "In the Seven Woods" ve "A Collar-bone of a Hare" başlıklı şiirleri ile Stevens'ın "Of Mere Being" adlı şiirinin metinsel ve kuramsal çözümlemeleri aracılığıyla, yüksek modernist aşkınlık tahayyülünün geç modernizmde, bu tür vizyonların dilsel karakterini ve sahip olduğu ütopyacı niteliğin ideolojik işlevini açığa çıkaran bir temaya veya motife dönüştüğünü ortaya koydum. Yürüttüğüm tartışmada, dönemsel olarak yüksek modernist edebiyat kapsamında yer alan Yeats'in aşkınlığı önceleyen siyasal tahayyülü açısından da bu kategoriye dâhil olduğunu öne sürdüm. Bunun yanı sıra Stevens'ın, özellikle son şiirlerinde, geç modernizmin dilin anlam ve değer kurucu rolüne dair postyapısalcı farkındalığı ve postmodern edebiyatın siyasetini haber veren düşünce tarzına yakın bir konumda yer aldığını göstermeyi amaçladım.

Anahtar sözcükler: *W. B. Yeats, Wallace Stevens, modernist şiir, modernizmin siyaseti, ütopyacı tahayyül*

The internal classification of modernist literature as high and late modernism is not only a matter of periodization that locates high modernist works roughly between 1900 and the end of World War II, and their late modernist successors in the 1950s and 1960s. It also concerns significant changes observed in the aesthetic commitments and political imaginings of modernist writers and poets who were active in those decades. (Anderson, 1984; Jameson, 1990; Harvey, 1990: 10-39) This article will discuss particularly the shifting politics of modernist literature with regard to the poetry of high and late modernism, and it will focus on W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens as representatives of these two moments respectively. The central argument of this study is that Yeats, between 1900 and 1921, the year *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* containing "The Second Coming" was published, attempts to transcend the temporal-spatial or social-historical determinants of his life, and that this poetic endeavor to transcend the given reality is often accompanied by a simultaneous formulation of a radically different mode of being, individual and collective alike. Yeats tries to enact or embody this vision through the poems he wrote in the indicated episode of his career. This very engagement with the transcendent in favor of a qualitatively different mode of existence is a significant aspect, among others, that gives Yeats' poetry its political thrust. This striving turns into a theme or a kind of content in Wallace Stevens' late poems, thereby losing much of its political and utopian élan. Stevens is conscious of the high modernist beckoning to transcendence, but for him, the works motivated by that desire are ultimately poetic constructs that are effective only so far as they remain indifferent to their own linguistic nature. The poems this article will examine to substantiate these points are Yeats' "In the Seven Woods" (1902) and "The Collar-bone of a Hare" (1919), and Stevens' "Of Mere Being" (1954).

"In the Seven Woods," the opening poem of the eponymous 1904 collection, is a rare poetic work since it has a profoundly poignant tone at the same time as it emits a strong feeling of "contentment" that the speaker announces to have attained through his forgetting of everything that hitherto troubled his mind. The Seven Woods was the general name for the woods at Coole Park where Lady Gregory's estate was located. Lady Gregory, a pioneer of Irish Literary Revival, was one of Yeats' most dedicated intellectual and financial supporters and was an inspiration for his cultural nationalism. Yeats spent many summers at Coole Park and had long, frequent, and meditative walks in these woods which he dubbed, quite tellingly, the Enchanted Woods. (McCready, 1997: 351) While there, Yeats found comfort and peace by distancing himself from

> The unavailing outcries and the old bitterness
> That empty the heart [and]
> Tara uprooted, and new commonness
> Upon the throne and crying about the streets (Yeats, 1989: 77, lines 4-7)

The poem opens with a scene of pastoral peacefulness and contentment with "the pigeons of the Seven Woods / [Making] their faint thunder, and the garden bees / [Humming] in the lime-tree flowers" (Yeats, 1989: 77, lines 1-3). The woods are so serene that the pigeons taking flight can create a small thunder and the hum of the bees can be heard distinctly. In these opening and the closing five lines (lines 10-14) which we will see below, "the poem

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shimmers with the energy of a natural world on the verge of some redemptive annunciation or birth." (Ross, 2009: 128) However, in between these two parts, there is what Helen Vendler (2007: 158) calls a "negative climax" that alludes to some real-life events that set the poem more firmly in its time, alongside its geographical setting. The referents of this negative climax in the middle section of the poem are explained as follows:

> What Coole has enabled [Yeats] temporarily to forget are the public events of the summer [1902] that had most agitated and disgusted him. There had been a renewal in June of archaeological excavations of the Hill of Tara by an Englishman in search of the lost Ark of the Covenant and Yeats had been involved in active protests against it. On 9 August the coronation of Edward VII (…) had taken place with due rejoicing by his loyalist Irish subjects. (…) The contrast could not be greater or more offensive between what Yeats called the "ignoble loyalties" of Irish people to this vulgar British monarch, and the desecration of Tara, seat of the ancient High Kings of Ireland. (Grene, 2008: 12-13)

These are the more immediate political referents and reactions communicated by "In the Seven Woods." The mentioned poignant tone, however, essentially derives from the speaker's seeming "unawareness" of the fact that his very writing of the experience of forgetting in the Enchanted Woods either turns it into an assertion or reduces it simply to a statement. Yet, it is this "unawareness" itself that testifies to Yeats' resolute engagement in the construction of a poetics of transcendence and in the imagining of a qualitatively different mode of being.

"In the Seven Woods" draws first and foremost the temporal limits of the oblivion that the speaker evokes, and it does this certainly through language and the act of articulation. In the poem, oblivion is located between the speaker's first hearing of the pigeons and the bees of the Seven Woods and his present contentment. In reality, though, it does not take place in the actuality but the (re)construction of this event, not in the living but the telling of this experience. Oblivion takes place in its very utterance in the second complete sentence of the poem which follows the speaker's entry into the Seven Woods. This sentence does not tell of the oblivious state itself but rather counts what was forgotten in that enchanted space in a descriptive manner: "I have forgot awhile / Tara uprooted, and new commonness / Upon the throne and crying about the streets / And hanging its paper flowers from post to post, / Because it is alone of all things happy" (Yeats, 1989: 77, lines 5-9). It is unmistakable in these lines that one cannot relate one's oblivious state without referring to what was or might have been lost in it. One cannot write about oblivion itself; pure oblivion is impossible insofar as one inserts it into language (and vice versa) precisely because language is the vehicle of memory and thinking, which are always restless to fill in the non-signified gaps of what they are imposed upon. Put differently, forgetting is possible, so is specifying its temporal limits, but telling it as mere oblivion, as a pure event, is not. It is due to this acknowledgment of the incomprehensibility of "mere being" (the being of any non-human thing) that Stevens dispenses with a voluntarist or impulsive kind of meaning-production towards the end of his poetic practice. One might see this will to signify as a key feature of high modernism, and Marjorie Howes (2006: 7) seems to make a similar point when she writes that "the comfort the speaker of 'In the Seven Woods' derives is all the more complete, because of (not despite) the fact that it is purely an exercise of the will."

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It is possible to read the third and last complete statement of "In the Seven Woods" in this light:

> I am contented, for I know that Quiet
> Wanders laughing and eating her wild heart
> Among pigeons and bees, while the Great Archer,
> Who but awaits His hour to shoot, still hangs
> A cloudy quiver over Pairc-na-lee. (Yeats, 1989: 77, lines 10-14)

According to Vendler (2007: 159), not only these lines but also the poem considered as a whole reveal "a persistent Yeatsian inner quarrel—his long-standing dispute between the pastoral and the apocalyptic." The apocalyptic figure supervening the pastoral episode is the Great Archer waiting the right time, in his own time to shoot, and Vendler reads these two episodes as an allegory. To be sure, images of the pigeons and their faint thunder together with the garden bees and their humming are recalled in these closing lines, but they are now overpowered by two striking entities, both of which seem to be representing several broader notions or ideas. Quiet for Vendler is a "Marvellian garden-personification" (2007: 159) and the anonymous Great Archer or executioner, which some commentators view as the constellation Sagittarius protecting Quiet (Ross, 2009: 129; Grene, 2008: 92), is a being of some apocalyptic vision. David A. Ross (2009: 129), too, writes that the speaker or the Yeats of "In the Seven Woods" moves from "contentment in nature (…) to the contentment of apocalyptic expectation." And David Holdeman (2006: 48) thinks that these lines satisfy the apocalyptic hopes that Yeats developed as a ferocious response to the kinds of corruption stated above, and it is "the intensity of this dejection [that] breaks open a new set of visions" on the poet's part.

But, what else could the figures of Quiet and the Archer be signifying in these lines? One may further argue about the allegorical character of these figures that the speaker's oblivion here transforms into Quiet as a pure event, and it is that elevation or sublimation which makes the speaker content in the present moment of the poem. In lines 10 and 11, Quiet is evoked as an entity existing in and of itself, "eating her wild heart," and wandering around the Seven Woods in ecstasy. It is surely personified, yet it is a distinct being that has its own, unique qualities which are self-containment, completeness, and self-sustenance. The speaker attributes these features to Quiet, but he unsurprisingly fails to represent it as it is. Even in that moment when he asserts his contentment, the speaker is out of oblivion; besides, he now only knows that Quiet is wandering among pigeons and bees, which means that the full potentiality and immediacy of experience, or rather, of the event itself have already been transformed into thought and utterance in the poem. In this connection, the apocalyptic Great Archer who hangs a cloudy quiver over the woods and awaits his hour to shoot can also be allegorical of language, memory, thought, and finally poetry, all trying to conquer the silence of pure event to overcome oblivion, thereby irreversibly marring the inexpressible immediacy of lived experience which has the power to lift one out of one's earthly coordinates. "Coole [is] for the poet a sacred space, entry point to a transcendent world whose qualities it mirrors," writes Grene (2008: 91), and likewise, Ross (2009: 128) states that the "woods have a (…) liminal

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quality in 'In the Seven Woods.' They are of the world and yet stand on the threshold of a world beyond." Nevertheless, the speaker or the poet seems to be "unaware" of the fact that this poem does threaten what he lived as a charmed moment and experience in the woods out of space and time, and out of the social context he was inserted in. Thanks to (not despite) his "unawareness" or "unquestioning" of the aspects of linguistic representation discussed above, Yeats can try to preserve his desire for transcendence embodied by Quiet in the poem. Also, in a paradoxical move, he attempts to capture and maintain here, in this world, the mode of being Quiet makes imaginable.

What Quiet, wandering in the Seven Woods, epitomizes or allegorizes becomes even clearer in Yeats' "The Collar-bone of a Hare" which is included in his 1919 collection *The Wild Swans at Coole*. It is once again the grace, peace, and comfort afforded by an autotelic and self-sustained mode of being that the speaker strives to attain, but to no avail. This time, the contentment that is promised by the abandonment of "the old bitter world" (Yeats, 1989: 137, line 13) and by the new desired land in "The Collar-bone of a Hare" is not undermined during the poem by the dynamics of linguistic representation. It is already non-existent as the first line shows; whatever is to follow in the first stanza, it is deferred by the poem's opening which puts conditionality in between: "Would I could cast a sail on the water / Where many a king has gone / And many a king's daughter, / And alight at the comely trees and the lawn, / The playing upon pipes and the dancing" (Yeats, 1989: 136, lines 1-5). One might see the statement "Would I could" as a sign of the relatively wiser poet who once tried to remain (and claimed to have remained) in his vision of a timeless, self-contained, and purposeless being, but who has now retreated to the boundary between the real and the dream, or into the real against which that utopian dreamland is envisioned in the first place. Likewise, "The Collar-bone of a Hare," opening with a similar vision, later retreats to the same boundary, and then enters into the disenchanting real (Ireland, but also the more general "old bitter world") through a no less disenchanting object connoting finitude and decay, which is the worn bone of a dead animal.

The first stanza of the poem presents the reader with a scene resembling the "populist paradise where beer-drinking, bagpipe-playing peasant mix with dancing queens and fighting warriors" that Holdeman (2006: 48) mentions in connection with another poem by Yeats called "The Happy Townland." With the second stanza, the tone shifts:

I would find by the edge of that water

The collar-bone of a hare

Worn thin by the lapping of water,

And pierce it through with a gimlet and stare

At the old bitter world where they marry in churches (Yeats, 1989: 136-7, lines 9-13)

It is hard to miss the social criticism in this stanza because the speaker, staring through the bone at the fallen world that he has left behind, breaks into a resentful laughter as he watches the people who continue to get married in churches. The land Yeats imagines is a realm where a thing is equal to itself and is contained in itself, whereas in that abandoned world things and emotions exist to realize purposes that are imposed on them by the outside world; therefore,

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the core of their being is displaced from them. This becomes evident with love or affection being exchanged in the churches of the old world to satisfy needs and expectations other than love or amorous attachment itself. Yet, in the imaginary land of "The Collar-bone of a Hare," one learns that "the best thing is [to] pay but a kiss for a kiss" (Yeats, 1989: 136, lines 6-8). A kiss signifies nothing other than a kiss in this utopian world; one exchanges a kiss with a kiss without resorting to another equivalent or mediator. To use terms from political economy, in this land, things bear only use-values since they do not have exchange-values that should be equalized by another medium through which can they relate to each other at all. In Yeats' poem, that external medium appears to be the ossified customs, institutionally sanctioned love, and cultural expectations promoting conformity and mediocrity. In the old world, love is not autotelic as it cannot find its reason for being in itself, it should rather be legitimated by some other logic alien to its own nature. This logic of determination and mediation is dictated to the spontaneous and self-caused being that Yeats desires and attributes, for instance, to the pure presence and event of Quiet in "In the Seven Woods."

Yeats' ultimate wish seems to be able to provide an affirmative answer to the question whether all being can have the same essence. The identity between nature, music, dance, kisses, and love in "The Collar-bone of a Hare," the unmediated and unalienated mode of being that the poem envisions, might also be read as a figuration of writing, *poesis*, and human activity as such, whose organicity is not lost or alienated because of modernity. Nonetheless, the question cited above cannot be answered positively as on the shore of that dreamland stands a little piece of death which stubbornly reveals the speaker's rootedness in this bitter world of ours. Both the desire for an unalienated being and human *praxis* finding its end in itself, and the inevitable failure to fulfill that desire through art and literature are part and parcel of the politics of high modernism, the modernist Absolute, its vision of a radically different social existence, and ultimately, of its recognition that art cannot remain only as art if it were to contribute to the creation of a new world. In *The Seeds of Time,* Fredric Jameson writes that the will of the great modernist works [is] to be something more than mere art and to transcend a merely decorative and culinary aesthetic, to reach the sphere of what is variously identified as the prophetic or the metaphysical, the visionary or the cosmic, that realm in which aesthetics and ethics, politics and philosophy, religion and pedagogy, all fold together into some supreme vocation. (1994: 80)

This supreme vocation with all its prophetic and visionary qualities seems to be present in the two poems we have examined so far. Elsewhere, Jameson (1991: 164) characterizes this elevated motivation of modernism as "a vision of a total social transformation which includes a return of art to some putative earlier wholeness." Indeed, what we observe in the first stanza of "The Collar-bone of a Hare" is one such depiction or imagining of an earlier wholeness imputed to the heroic ages of Ireland as well as to a utopian future one sails towards in determination to evacuate the corrupt present. But this imagining or desire unproblematized by Yeats does eventually fail, and it is a failure of whose inevitability Yeats seems to be or, better still, chooses to be "unaware." It is precisely this "unawareness," which one may well qualify as tactical, that illustrates both the utopian and the ideological character of the modernist Absolute, and we will return to this point in the end.

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In Wallace Stevens' "Of Mere Being" (1972: 398) posthumously published in 1954, readers encounter another desire for transcendence which is undercut by the speaker or the poet himself. "The greatest image of being at the threshold of death is (…) 'Of Mere Being,'" writes Frank Kermode, "a poem that is also (…) very late," he adds (1980: 272). This is probably the last poem Stevens wrote before he passed away, and it reflects his interest in a new kind of reality, a new kind of knowledge of the "thing itself" or of "mere being." The metaphor of the final threshold is also used by Charles Berger (2003: 138) when he writes about late Stevens that he "seems to be approaching a threshold beyond which his own exertions, his poems, are no longer necessary. Moving (…) into the region of 'life as it is,' Stevens puts exertion aside and allows himself to sense the given." What Berger names as "life as it is" evokes the realm that Stevens intuits and locates "Beyond the last thought [and] on the edge of space" in "Of Mere Being," (1972; 398, lines 2 and 10) Commentators usually read and try to make sense of the poem against this philosophical and biographical backdrop. Another way of reading this poem has been to place it on a scale of abstractness with respect to Stevens' poetic career and life, and according to this placement, *Opus Posthumous* containing the poems Stevens wrote in 1954 and 1955 come across "less accessible, more abstract, less personal" (Leggett, 2006: 74). It is these very qualities that another group of commentators then set out to analyze. However, it is arguable that "Of Mere Being" does not only mark in Stevens's poetic journey a significant moment of responding to the "philosophical call to the things themselves, characteristic of much of twentieth-century thought" (Ziarek, 2017: 234). Stated otherwise, it is not only an outcome of a shift of interest in Stevens' poetry, but it also marks on a broader level a shift in the politics of modernist literature as a whole.

"Of Mere Being" displays the speaker's somber "awareness" of the impossibility of transcending the real and of deploying imagination and poetry constitutively of a different reality. It should be stated in passing that the central point of distinction made in the present study between Yeats and Stevens is not one of "naivety" or "realism," but of attachment to an extra-artistic, social, and political vision such as the one outlined above. One may suggest that the inaccessibility commonly attributed to "Of Mere Being" results from that recognition of the speaker's and, as Edward Ragg (2017: 254) puts it, from the "imagination that detects pathos in its inability to transcend human limits, even as it tries." Stevens' imagination indeed wishes to transcend, but the speaker knows something; at this moment in the history of modernism, he is aware of the impossibility of achieving transcendence through language. This awareness might be the reason why that desire is not enacted at all; perhaps, the prior knowledge of futility has preempted the action. The poem, thus, does not experience the failure to move beyond the given but it anticipates and relates it; unlike Yeats' poems, "Of Mere Being" does not fail but thematizes the failure. After all, what more is there to do if the poet who wills to transcend "human meaning" and "human feeling" (Stevens, 1972: 398, lines 5-6) already knows that such an attempt is doomed from the outset, particularly if one wants to achieve it through the medium of poetry or language, which in turn must exist relative to human meaning and human feeling? Surely, thematization is one of the answers. There is not an outside, a utopian beyond, to the reality circumscribed by our linguistically determined horizon, and not even Stevens' most valorized vehicle, imagination, can be of much help in this regard.

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The space generated in "Of Mere Being" overlaps with the realm of social life, and what the poem tries to do is refigure the zone (both physical and cognitive) that it shares with human existence. In that sense, there is a certain folding or closure in the poem:

> The palm at the end of the mind,
> Beyond the last thought, rises
> In the bronze decor,
> (…)
> The palm stands on the edge of space.
> The wind moves slowly in the branches.
> The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down. (Stevens, 1972: 398, lines 1-3 and 10-12)

In the first and the last stanzas, the upward and downward movements of the palm tree and the feathers of the bird singing a song without human meaning and feeling suture two edges or planes; the domain of the mind (the cognitive) and the physical spaces that we are situated in (the territory of reality) are folded into each other. Therefore, what marks the territory of the real marks the territory of the poem as well—it opens with the palm that is at the end of the mind and ends with that same palm that stands on the edge of space. However, the palm tree is also said to be beyond the last though, but does this mean that it stands beyond the mind itself? Likewise, is the bird singing in the palm situated beyond the mind, too? One cannot be sure if they are beyond, thus outside the mind. As Stephan Holander (2008: 142) suggests, the locus of the tree evoked in the poem, "tangentially 'beyond' active thought but still in the mind, is defined in terms of stage artifice, a 'decor.'" It is a more plausible interpretation that while the tree and the bird are at the end of mind, they are still within its realm, and it is rather the case that there is a distance between the last human thought and where they stand—similarly, the palm in the last stanza stands on the edge of space, but it is not extra-spatial. If that is really the case, then why is the bird's song foreign and devoid of any human meaning and feeling?

Apparently, Stevens leads us to think that even if the bird is not beyond the mind, it must at least exist in an area of the mind where there is no thought, feeling, or a decipherable language. The way Simon Critchley (2005: 74) paraphrases "Of Mere Being" is a striking evidence of the interpretive quandary that the poem poses to the reader:

[A]t the end of the mind's imaginings, there is a palm and in the palm sits a bird that sings a foreign song that we do not understand. This song (…) is without human meaning and human feeling. Things merely *are:* the palm, the bird, its song, its feathers, the wind moving slowly in the branches. One can say no more.

It is possible to maintain, in tune with Critchley, that apart from the overlapping of the diegetic space of the poem with that of the mind, what makes one think that the failure to transcend the real is not experienced but thematized by Stevens is what the third stanza expresses: "You know then that it is not the reason / That makes us happy or unhappy. / The bird sings. Its feathers shine" (Stevens, 1972: 398, lines 7-9). Happiness and unhappiness are related to human thoughts and meanings, they are about the sense that we make of what we experience, and since there is no thought, feeling, or language attributable to the bird, there is no possibility of being happy or unhappy because of it. In its quasi-transcendent existence in the poem, the

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bird promises nothing (it simply is), and at this point, this is an a priori knowledge for Stevens. This knowledge, however, is not gained through the experience of the failure to conceive of what the bird might be singing and of what might be lying beyond the mind and the real. It is not shown by the poem itself but is told by the speaker that achieving transcendence is a mirage, or perhaps it is not even worthwhile, whereby the very desire for it is invalidated. This knowledge stops Stevens from grappling with mere being, at least on the level of poetic representation. At this moment, Yeats' recurrent imagining and articulation of the realms of a complete, self-contained, and self-generated being appear in stark contrast to Stevens' attitude which reveals a heightened awareness of the textuality of all that is conveyed through language, especially when the alleged experience of Quiet and those utopian modes of being allegorically modeled on it are concerned. Nevertheless, as Vendler (1984: 42) points out relating to the lines in which Stevens discredits reason's role in our happiness or unhappiness, the poet cannot push language aside completely as the "foreign song [of the bird] will always need to have human meaning and human feeling added to it by those fictions of intelligibility and desire we all project upon it."

The bird humming a tune without human meaning and feeling become the object of our desire provided that we wish to turn to things themselves, to being-in-itself, but this also means turning away from signification and risking silence because the being of the non-human world cannot be accessed through consciousness, regardless of its plenitude. On the other side, Yeats' desire for a radically different world, or for the full immediacy of the experience of a pure event that could enable one to transcend the reality of earthly existence motivates him to create the representation of his vision in verse. Insofar as Stevens knows that he is bound to fail in obtaining what Yeats insistently desires, he stays away from formulating such a being in positive terms. In *Opus Posthumous,* Stevens asserts that the "final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else, the exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and you believe in it willingly" (as cited in Lentricchia, 1983: 28). The split within literary modernism, or the break between the politics of high modernism and late modernism emerges at this very instance where the vision of an Absolute itself is registered as a construction or fiction from whose textuality nothing escapes, wherefore the transcendent utopian imagining of the modernists such as Yeats is turned into a motif or a subject-matter.

The selected poems that this study focuses on illustrate the changing politics and aesthetics of modernist literature. The divergent political commitments of high and late modernism have been analyzed on the basis of the prevalence of a certain kind of utopian imagining in these poems. Meanwhile, this analysis has engaged the question whether Yeats and Stevens use poetic language and form to enact the desire for transcending the given modes of human existence. I have tried to demonstrate that the will to transcendence is present both in Yeats and Stevens as modernist poets. They share the dissatisfaction with the dominant structures of subjectivity, sociality, and literary representation. Therefore, both poets envision a realm that resides outside the ordinary experiences of modernity. For Yeats, one can move beyond "commonness" only with the help of a total transformation that concerns the ways in which we act, think, and feel. To be sure, this transformation has a profound social and political dimension to it. In Stevens, however, transcendence emerges as analogous to mere being, and as he states in the title of another poem, it relates to "not ideas about the thing but the thing itself" (Stevens, 1971:

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534). Yet, the latter cannot be comprehended and expressed through language and imagination. After all, language refers mainly to its own meaning-production mechanisms and even "the absence of the imagination [has] itself to be imagined" (Stevens, 1971: 503, lines 13-14). This amounts to saying that there is nothing beyond language, and here seems to lie the reason why Stevens does not "attempt to build a world from poetry but to build poetry a place in the world" (Longenbach, 1991: 280) If the second half of this statement pertains to Stevens, the first half encapsulates Yeats' high modernist politics in literature.

Let us end this discussion by returning to the point that was made about the coexistence of utopia and ideology in Yeats' work, or in much of high modernist literature for that matter. Jameson (1994: 77) emphasizes that the utopian content of a specific work in the present should be considered in conjunction with its concurrent ideological content and function, and that is because "in a fallen or class society, the Utopian, and indeed everything else of value, must also and always simultaneously function as ideology." What I have characterized in this article as Yeats' "unquestioned" desire, or as his tactical "unawareness" of the inevitable failure of his utopianism, is connected to this very ideological quality. To the extent that he is outraged, committed, and striving for a radically new subjective and collective existence, Yeats must suspend the awareness of the textuality of his imagining, and his desire must remain unquestioned. In other words, he must ignore the fact that his contentment in "In the Seven Woods," for instance, is purely an exercise of the will. It is the demystification of that ideological aspect as one's willed and imaginary relationship to reality that Stevens carries out particularly in his late poems, and he does so by revealing an acute sense of the textual, discursive, and constructed nature of all that exists within the realm of human meaning and human feeling. Clearly, this is not only a sign of the late modernist sensibility, but it also signals the coming of poststructuralist or postmodern thought as such.

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