'We had always been partly one': Locating the Ecopoetics of Wallace Stevens

A thesis submitted for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy*

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Declaration of Original Authorship

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been

properly and fully acknowledged.

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September 2023

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my uncle, Dom Phillips, and his colleague and friend, Indigenous expert, Bruno Pereira. Dom and Bruno were killed in the Javari region of the Amazon in June 2022 while undertaking one of the final research trips for Dom's book, *How to Save the Amazon: Ask the People Who Know.* Dom's intention with this book was to aid the preservation and protection of the Amazon and its Indigenous communities by telling the story of the rainforest and those that live there. I will always be grateful for his dedication and courage to tell this story. I think of him every day.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Until recently, scholarship has struggled to situate Wallace Stevens within ecocritical discussions. This thesis seeks to re-examine Stevens's poetry in its engagement with what we now recognise as ecocritical methodologies, in order to suggest that our scholarly understanding of Stevens needs some reorientation. With a predominate focus on language, sound, and voice, I explore how Stevens's ecopoetics seek to expose and give agency to the voices of nonhuman entities across his work. Throughout, the thesis acknowledges previous critical grounding of Stevens's work and philosophy around the relationship between imagination and reality, whilst critiquing claims that this perspective is the only lens by which Stevens's work may be read. By analysing a range of Stevens's works, inclusive of poetry, prose, and letters, I show Stevens's ecological consciousness to be key to the genesis and development of a poetics that enables the more-than-human world to speak. Using a historical approach, I seek to locate his ecopoetics across key areas of influence upon his work: Romanticism, Modernism, and contemporary ecopoetics. From these readings, I align Stevens's ecopoetics to both first-wave and second-wave ecocriticism, using close reading of a selection of Stevens's work to clarify some of the key entanglements present within the field. As ecocriticism develops and broadens its focus, it is essential that the field calls for new perspectives on established texts. Ecocritical reformulations such as these allow scholarship to maintain currency within a changing world and invites new ways of understanding our current situation within the ecological crisis.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

The following bibliographical references have been shortened to the below:

CP   Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, The Corrected Edition, ed. by John N. Serio and Chris Beyers, 2nd edn. (New York: Vintage Books, 2015).

Letters Wallace Stevens, *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. by Holly Stevens (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996).

OP   Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous, Poems, Plays, Prose*, ed. by Milton J. Bates, revised, enlarged, and corrected edition (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1990).

NA   Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1951).

Introduction: Grounding

It is an artificial world. The rose
Of paper is the nature of its world.
The sea is so many written words; the sky
Is blue, clear, cloudy, high, dark, wide and round;
The mountains inscribe themselves upon the walls.
——Wallace Stevens, 'Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine
Ideas', *CP*, p. 268, ll. 8-12)

The work and words of Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) are saturated with ecological reference. From the 'Ambiguous undulations' of pigeons, 'wild warblers warbling in the jungle', forms of mountains, sea, and wind, to the 'ponderous cinnamon' snarling in 'his mountain', an array of earthly life is inscribed across Stevens's collections.[1] One who spent the majority of his adult working life as an insurance lawyer for the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, and writing poetry alongside, Stevens constantly turned to the more-than-human world throughout his lifetime. This orientation precipitates Stevens's attention and care towards his environment, and, as I will present throughout this study, demonstrates his proto-ecological consciousness regarding the interconnections and entanglements between beings.

Scholarship around Stevens is extensive, and he now comfortably sits as one of America's most canonical poets. Even so, as I will identify further in this introduction and my opening chapter, consideration of the ecological in Stevens's work and thought is relatively new. Previous scholarship from critics like Helen Vendler, Harold Bloom, Alan Filreis, and James Longenbach, to name a few, has done much to create a generative field of study since the 1960s and therefore cannot be disregarded in a study that may consider an alternative perspective. While Vendler and Bloom have respectively solidified a conception of Stevens in both British and American Romantic and Transcendental contexts, Longenbach and Filreis have both ensured that Stevens can be read in dialogue with real-world events. For example, Longenbach firmly advocates for readings of Stevens that consider his connections to reality, writing that 'Appreciated in the context of American political and intellectual history, Stevens emerges not only as a poet aware of events taking place around him but as a poet whose work was often inspired by them'.[2] In a similar way, while his text focuses less on Stevens's poetry, Filreis's historical *Wallace Stevens and the Actual*

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[1] Wallace Stevens, 'Sunday Morning', 'Meditation Celestial & Terrestrial', 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction', *CP*, p. 75, p. 131, p. 406.
[2] James Longenbach, 'Preface' in *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1991), v-viii, (p. v). ProQuest Ebook.

World (2016) contextualises Stevens across the war and post-war years of 1939-1955, reinforcing Stevens's real-world investment.

While the work of previous scholarship does not directly pertain to the ecological focus of this project, there are glimmers of Stevens's engagement with the ecological interactions of the world. An example of early ecological engagement in Stevens scholarship can be found in *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration* (1980). Published in the centennial year of Stevens's birth by Robert Buttel and Frank Doggett, the collection boasts essays from some of the key figureheads of Stevens criticism.[3] For example, Helen Vendler's essay, 'Stevens and Keats' '"To Autumn"', draws on the widely accepted notion of Stevens's Romantic inheritance. Indeed, Vendler's essay pays significant attention towards the natural world but predominately in relation to the poet's mind. Similarly, Irvin Ehrenpreis's, 'Strange Relation: Stevens's Nonsense' concludes that Stevens's use of nonsense language in his work is an expression of the sounds of the more-than-human world.[4] While Ehrenpreis's discussion of the speech of the more-than-human world is pertinent to the ideas expressed in this study, reduction of these voices to the context of nonsense perhaps subscribes to a more anthropocentric perspective. Even so, Wilson E. Taylor reflects in his essay, 'Of a Remembered Time', that, 'Surely Stevens' poetry will be a source of meaning and pleasure for future generations'.[5] It is my view that reading Stevens's poetry in an ecocritical context is key to ensure that his work may provide a source of meaning for future generations.

Wallace Stevens: Ecopoet?

Despite these earlier ecological glimmers within Stevens criticism, he is still not a poet considered to be proto-ecologically minded. However, alongside the emergence of ecocriticism in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, perspectives around Stevens are shifting.[6] Previous readings which have positioned his work within traditions of French Symbolism, metaphysical philosophy, and the realm of the imagination are being re-framed towards an earth-bound perspective. Bonnie Costello's 2003 text, *Shifting Ground: Reinventing Landscape in Modern American Poetry* is a valuable example of this turn.[7] In her study, Costello reads Stevens's attitude toward the world as 'kaleidoscopic', with landscape viewed as a 'work in progress, constantly adjusting in relation to

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[3] In line with the critical attention towards interiority in Stevens's work whereby the poetry takes precedence in the act of the mind, the collection provides many readings of the poems that perhaps diverge from my ecological focus, yet, across the collection, foundations of my readings of Stevens can be observed.

[4] Irvin Ehrenpreis, 'Strange Relation: Stevens's Nonsense' in *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration*, ed. by Robert Buttel and Frank Doggett (Princeton University Press, 1980), 219-234. ProQuest Ebook.

[5] Wilson E Taylor, 'Of a Remembered Time' in *Wallace Stevens: A Celebration*, ed. by Robert Buttel and Frank Doggett (Princeton University Press, 1980), 91-104 (p. 103). ProQuest Ebook.

[6] My first chapter will clarify my methodological approach in more detail regarding the particular ecocritical approach that this study will take.

[7] Bonnie Costello, *Shifting Ground: Reinventing Landscape in Modern American Poetry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003). ProQuest Ebook.

the fluency of thought and world.'[8] Stevens's evolving and revolving representations of the world resist the 'stagnating immobility of culture' in response to and in mediation of the 'flux we cannot frame', or in other words, the constant shifting of relations and interconnections demanded from the ecological systems upon the earth.[9]

Indeed, the notion of the unframeable flux is reflective of the mesmerising array of entanglements between objects, beings, and worlds which ecology has sought to comprehend. These entanglements both cooperate with and are resistant to human framing within the limits of our understanding. When attended to in a prolonged study such as this, the tension between human and nonhuman participants within the unframeable flux reveals an ongoing restlessness between the Cartesian need to frame and categorise entities within the revolving enmeshment of beings and the reality of things as they are. This need to frame and categorise problematises our language towards and perception of the objective ecological world conditioned by flux because, as Stevens writes to his then fiancé, Elsie Moll in 1907, 'Earth and the body and the spirit seem to change together.'[10] Insomuch, human corporeality and consciousness move and develop alongside the earth, which is, as my discussion of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy in my first chapter discloses, evidence of the porous *chiasm* or 'flesh of the world' within which beings are connected.[11] However, at times the earth evades or resists us, as revealed by Costello's ecocritical readings of Stevens's landscapes which exemplify the paradox that 'We 'control nature,' but it continually subverts and even inverts our intentions.'[12] In other words, we may place a 'jar in Tennessee' but the wilderness may always rise 'up to it'.[13] These are the tensions and collaborations between human and nonhuman that indicate Stevens's proto-ecological consciousness as a response to the constant shifting of the world and its inhabitants.

The paradox that humans control nature is not one subscribed to by Stevens. Indeed, Stevens's proto-ecological consciousness resonates with respect for the more-than-human world. An example of this respect is his appreciation of the pre-human world and that other beings and nonhuman entities existed before humanity. This is perhaps most prevalent in Stevens's 1942 poem, 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction'.[14] Harold Bloom has described the text as 'notoriously

[8] Costello, 'Stevens' Eccentricity' in *Shifting Ground*, 53-85 (p. 57).
[9] Bonnie Costello, 'Poetry and the Idea of Nature', *Daedlus*, Edition: 'On International Justice', MIT Press on behalf of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 132, (Winter 2003), 131-135 (p. 135) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20027831>, [accessed 26 February 2021]. Costello, *Shifting Ground*, p. 85.
[10] Wallace Stevens, (Entry 125, March 21, 1907) in *Letters*, p. 97.
[11] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. by Claude Lefort and trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 133.
[12] Costello, 'Amy Clampitt: Nomad Exquisite' in *Shifting Ground*, pp. 117-142 (p. 131).
[13] Wallace Stevens, 'Anecdote of the Jar', *CP*, p. 81, ll. 1, 81.
[14] The publication of 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction' with The Cummington Press was delayed due to the printing process that was dependent on the climate, which affected the temperature and humidity of the printing room. Even though Stevens and his contemporaries were not acutely aware of the inception of ecological crisis that

elusive', yet Stevens's understanding of the condition of the world is clear in this work.[15] In section IV of 'It Must Be Abstract', the speaker describes how:

> […] The clouds preceded us.
>
> There was a muddy centre before we breathed.
> There was a myth before the myth began,
> Venerable and articulate and complete.
>
> From this the poem springs: that we live in a place
> That is not our own, and, much more, not ourselves
> And hard it is in spite of blazoned days.[16]

The 'muddy centre' is the origin of the unframeable flux where nonhuman entities like clouds, water, trees, and wind came into being long before humans took breath and uttered speech. The subject of speech or words is hinted by the above lines which discuss the 'myth before the myth began, | Venerable and articulate and complete', indicating towards an articulation of the more-than-human world from a source other than human. Could it be that the more-than-human world told its own stories before human language spoke over them? Ultimately for the speaker of 'Notes', this pre-human articulation of the nonhuman world is where 'the poem springs' from, showing that poetry has the potential to access these myths of the 'muddy centre'. The lines end with the reminder that although our world is conditioned by language which may detract from the 'thing as it is', we all 'live in a place | That is not our own, and, much more, not ourselves'. In other words, the earth is not ours to claim nor use as a point of self-reflection, because the overall condition of the world is one of entangled fluctuations between multiple beings.

This thesis will build on Costello's readings of Stevens, as outlined above, applying them to a wide range of his work, including poetry, essays, lectures, letters, and journals, to rehabilitate long-standing scholarship which until recently has provided a limited insight into Stevens's ecological engagement.[17] By taking the action of 'locating' from my thesis title, this project will situate Stevens across key literary junctures which I argue are significant in the development of his ecopoetics and its relevance to the ecological crisis of the twenty-first century. Through the mediums of sound and textual sign, I seek to capture the dynamic tensions and collaborations in

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now conditions the twenty-first century, it is interesting to note that fluctuations in climate directly affected the production of Stevens's work. See: John Rylands Research Institute and Library, WST/1/2/1 2a; WST/1/3/1 3a; WST/ 1/10/1 10a; WST/1/11/1 11a.

[15] Harold Bloom, '8. Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction' in *Wallace Stevens. Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980), 167-218 (p. 168).

[16] Stevens, 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction', *CP*, 401-432, ll. 73-79.

[17] In selecting the poems to include within this study, I aim to showcase Stevens's ecopoetics across a range of his work, both those well commented on like 'The Idea of Order at Key West', 'The Snow Man', and 'Esthetique Du Mal', and those less widely studied, such as 'Of the Surface of Things', 'Less and Less Human O Savage Spirit', and 'July Mountain'. In doing so, the project will formulate a balanced, revisionist reading of Stevens's works, illustrating that his ecopoetics are a consistent and recurring theme throughout his career.

Stevens's language that ultimately look to find ways in which nonhuman voices may be attended to within human language, rather than remain silenced. Stevens's engagement with language and the creation of an ecologically sustainable poetics serves to provide some suggestions as to how poetry can aid the unknotting of the literary and linguistic entanglement within the current ecological crisis. Overall, I view Stevens in this thesis as one who is attentive towards his surroundings and who appreciates the multitudinous condition of the world where 'We had always been partly one'.[18]

Positioning Stevens

A pivotal reason for the importance of this study into Stevens's ecopoetics is his position as a poet of the early to mid-twentieth century; arguably an era where tensions and collaborations between humans and other beings irrevocably changed.[19] Humans began to be viewed as part of the subjective *and* objective world, as both observer *and* observed.[20] By the mid-century, social attitudes towards the entangled relationships between beings started to formulate, prompting increased attention towards the dynamic more-than-human world.

The period offered a glimpse into the potential of anthropogenic destruction in various guises. For example, through the First World War, and later, the Second, the rise of urbanisation due to rapid population increases, and intensive commercialisation and mass-production, to the invention of the Atomic Bomb. These events have ultimately led to the emergence of today's society and contributed to the ecological crisis.[21] Even so, despite a significant acknowledgement of the collaboration between beings and ecological systems during the early to mid-twentieth century, the period can be said to have been overlooked within ecocritical discourse. Ecocritical attention to this moment requires exploration of an expanse of varied and non-traditional ecological sites, enabling an understanding and tracing of current strands of proto-ecological thought as it has developed over the last one hundred to one hundred and fifty years.[22] While it is true that the spheres of intensive change during the twentieth century solidified the foundations for large scale

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[18] Wallace Stevens, 'Asides on the Oboe', *CP*, p. 268, l. 34.

[19] Various scientific explorations across the mid to late nineteenth century and early twentieth century prompted a re-evaluation of the 'human' as superior and separate from other species. Examples from quantum physics will be explored in Chapter Three.

[20] Carrie Rohman's *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) gives an astute interrogation of human and animal subjectivity in the context of Modernist writers like D.H Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, and Djuna Barnes amongst others.

[21] See Michael Rubenstein and Justin Neuman, 'Introduction: The New Modernist Studies, Environmentalism, and Ecocriticsm' in *Modernism and Its Environments* (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 1-24, (pp. 18-20).

[22] See Christina Alt's *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature*, Kelly Sultzbach's *Ecocriticism in the Modernist Imagination*, Alison Lacivita's *The Ecology of Finnegans Wake*, Jeffrey McCarthy's *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel, 1900-1930*, and Matthew Griffiths' *The New Poetics of Climate Change* for a selection of texts relating to Modernist engagement with ecocritical ideas.

ecological crisis, investigation into the development of a parallel proto-ecological consciousness during this time is warranted.

Even though Stevens's work is less-widely acknowledged for its proto-ecological formulations than other poets and writers of the time like Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, Gyorgyi Voros' *Notations of the Wild: Ecology in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (1997) signalled the first sustained study around Stevens's ecological consciousness and ecopoetics. Voros locates Stevens's ecological awakening to a camping trip taken in the summer of 1903 when Stevens was in his mid-twenties, contending that Stevens's ecopoetics are invested in rearticulating our relationship to nature.[23] Since Voros' text, Stevens's ecopoetics receives mention in passing across numerous studies. Notable examples include Jonathan Bate's *Song of the Earth* (2000), Costello's *Planets on Table*: *Poetry, Still Life and the Turning World* (2008), Scott Knickerbocker's *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, the Nature of Language* (2012) and *Modernism and its Environments* (2020). Indeed, Cary Wolfe's *Ecological Poetics, Or Wallace Stevens's Birds* (2020) reflects a notable progression from Voros' 1997 study, where Wolfe examines Stevens's ecopoetics to propagate a new theory of ecocriticsm based in systems biology. Wolfe's work highlights the flexibility of Stevens's ecopoetics where the work is now used to work through theoretical questions as opposed to earlier studies that predominately sought to highlight Stevens's relationship to 'Nature' and its effect on his poetics.

In 2021, the *New Wallace Stevens Studies* solidified the shift in Stevens studies towards emerging socio-political movements, including the ecological crisis, with chapters from Wolfe and Julia E. Daniel on ecopoetics and urban studies. Overall, this new collection of perspectives around Stevens engages with a presentation of a liberal figure invested in moving poetry into the beyond, past any perceived poetic finitude. Indeed, while these new readings of Stevens are certainly informed by shifts and developments in the current socio-political landscape, such fresh assessments of the poet and his poetics offer the potential to extend Stevens studies to wider realms of thought and, with it, a wider range of readers. This invitation to different viewpoints within Stevens scholarship is exciting, and, as this project will emphasise, essential to our understanding of our present moment in relation to the ecological crisis.

Creative Responses: Ecological Crisis in Art

These movements in Stevens studies are reflective of a larger unfolding in literary scholarship and the creative arts towards different applications by which the ecological crisis can be comprehended additional to data and scientific fact. Two notable examples that I believe acutely

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[23] As Voros writes, Stevens accompanied his friend and employer, W.G. Peckham to British Columbia for a six-week hunting trip in Kootenay River in the Canadian Rockies. See 'Chapter Two: The Westwardness of Everything. *Stevens's Ktaadn*' in *Notions of the Wild* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 37-63 (p. 38).

highlight the increasingly visible relationship between art and ecology are Luke Jerram's 'Gaia' installation and Elizabeth-Jane Burnett's 'Spring: An Inventory' poem. 'Gaia', taking the Ancient Greek name for earth is a spherical installation seven metres in diameter, depicting a view of the earth as seen from space. The installation has toured various locations across the United Kingdom, including Southwark Cathedral, where it remained throughout September and October 2022. Here it hung suspended in the nave between the late 19th century arches. Illuminated by blue floodlights, 'Gaia' revolves silently, accompanied by a specially made surround sound composition by BAFTA award winning composer Dan Jones. Jerram, who created the sculpture in partnership with the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), Bluedot festival, and the UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres, sought to evoke the overview effect in viewers. A term first used by Frank White in 1987 in relation to how astronauts can experience a feeling of awe and a profound awareness of the entangled and interconnected ontology of the planet, the overview effect can generate a renewed sense of responsibility or stewardship towards surroundings. By creating 'Gaia', Jerram looked to evoke that same change in attitude towards the earth in the general public by facilitating their response to the growing necessity of promoting ecological awareness and consciousness in the face of ecological crisis.

Along a similar vein in April 2021, in collaboration with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the National Trust published 'Spring, An Inventory' written by Elizabeth-Jane Burnett. The poem is another example of artistic engagement with the ecological crisis to induce a similar feeling in readers to the overview effect induced by Jerram's Gaia. Composed of various observations from 400 members of the public describing the arrival of Spring, the project aimed to call attention to the 'quiet but constant role' that nature played across daily life during the worldwide lockdowns imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic.[24] Ceila Richardson, Director of Communications at the National Trust commented on the appeal of the written form, suggesting that 'this is a data set of a different kind'. Words and sound rhythms provide an alternative insight into the entanglements of the earth, evoking a form of literary and rhythmic stewardship towards the world.

The poem takes the form of an inventory, which Burnett thought most appropriate to map and tally the recurring themes of numbers presented from the observations that tend towards a positive and joyful dataset of words heralding the arrival of Spring. Despite this somewhat systematic form, Burnett's words sing signs of hope, intimately connected to a closeness to the natural world:

> Forty-four trees in the waking woods,

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[24] Claire Hayhurst, 'Crowd-sourced poem captures the arrival of spring', *Independent*, 20th April 2021 <https://www.independent.ie/world-news/and-finally/crowd-sourced-poem-captures-the-arrival-of-spring-40338500.html> [accessed 7 November 2022].

> forty-one spilling gardens.
> Five cherry trees where the blackbirds stood,
> thirty-five joys through their gleaming broods,
> thirty-eight buds nectar-guarding
> in forty-four trees in the waking woods,
> in forty-one spilling gardens.[25]

By bringing together spaces of cultivated and uncultivated nature entangled through 'gleaming broods' and 'nectar-guarding' buds, the poem enacts attentive listening. Rhythm is key to the poem's progression through the various observations of Spring, with sonic repetition and alliteration supporting the inventory structure of the work to echo the sounds of an emerging depiction of seasonal change.

Where Jerram's 'Gaia' seeks to situate the observer outside of the object to induce a sense of ecological responsibility or stewardship, 'Spring: An Inventory' immerses the reader within the numerous and varied states of Spring to bring to attention through repeated sound patterns, the smaller and often under observed details of our shared environment. It is through these combinations of image, sound, and language that art, and particularly poetry, can be an affective *and* effective form to communicate what Stevens might call:

> The liaison, the blissful liaison
> Between himself and his environment,
> Which was, and is, chief motive, first delight.[26]

Ultimately, this 'blissful liaison' between beings is where Stevens's ecopoetics orbit.[27] However, in poetry, this liaison may only be reached through combinations of words and sounds, and this offers a dilemma for Stevens. While words and language are one of the ways in which humans are grounded within the world to comprehend understanding of our surroundings, language, as I will discuss in my first chapter, has the potential for negative action upon the environment.

In his 1942 Princeton University lecture, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', Stevens cites Gregory Bateson's theory of the semantic evolution of language whereby conflict between connotative and denotive forces in words leads to change. Stevens describes the differences between these two forces as:

> […] an asceticism tending to kill language by stripping words of all association and a hedonism tending to kill language by dissipating their sense in a multiplicity of

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[25] Extract from 'Spring: An Inventory', quoted in '"A surge of hope": public helps create poem celebrating coming of spring', Steven Morris, *Guardian*, 21st April 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/apr/21/public-helps-create-poem-celebrating-coming-of-spring-elizabeth-jane-burnett> [accessed 25 November 2022].

[26] Stevens, 'The Comedian as the Letter C', *CP*, 28-48, ll. 225-227.

[27] While it is important to note that during the twentieth century, 'environment' may have held a different meaning, I take Stevens's own definition from a letter to Ronald Lane Latimer, 21 November, 1935: 'Perhaps we are thinking of two different things with respect to environment. I infer, that for you, environment means men and women; but for me, it means my surroundings, not necessarily natural surroundings.' See: *Letters*, (Entry 330), p. 295.

associations. These conflicts are nothing more than changes in the relation between imagination and reality.[28]

Simply put, the denotive is language without meaning and the connotative is language overladen with meaning. Both applications enact violence upon the word through the human tendency towards extremes, therefore 'killing' language.[29] Stevens reveals what this violence upon language means for him in his naming of the relation of these differing forces upon words as imagination and reality. The killing of language occurs when language adheres too much to either imagination or reality or, when the 'precise equilibrium' between the two is altered.[30] As noted earlier, Stevens's theories of language, and therefore poetry, are entangled and reflect Stevens's attention to the relationship between the material and metaphysical properties of language. Indeed, it is the dynamism between these elements of language that Stevens grapples with throughout his career and bears significance in his attempt to give nonhuman beings voices throughout his work.

My first chapter will therefore address these entanglements of language within ecocritical discourse and poetry, leading to an investigation into claims that textual signs have gained precedence over the spoken word, to the detriment of our ecological world. Overall, this chapter seeks to lay the foundations of my subsequent readings of Stevens's proto-ecological consciousness in relation to language, sound, and poetry that I view as essential to locating his ecopoetics. Central to this location of Stevens's ecopoetics is the exploration into how Stevens's application of sound in language gives nonhuman beings voices. Indeed, Stevens dwells with the significance of sound in poetry in 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words'. In this essay, Stevens's emphasis on the importance of sound is clear, with his affirmation that 'Above everything else, poetry is words; and that words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds' (p. 32). The sounds of words operate in flux and perhaps it is in this flux of sound and language where relief from what Stevens calls the 'pressures of reality' can be found (p. 20). In essence, truth can be found in sound and this grounding and seeking of true expression is why we 'search for the sound' of words in the hope of finding 'a finality, a perfection, an unalterable vibration' (p. 32). As I will illustrate in my first chapter, perhaps this location of sound in relation to the search for truth of expression and feeling indicates a preference of sound over sign.

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[28] Wallace Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', *NA*, pp. 3-36 (p. 13). Henceforth, where a text or poem will be quoted from continuously in a section of this thesis, it will be referenced by in-text brackets.
[29] A useful example of the connotative forces in words is in 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction' where the speaker describes the '[…] comic color of the rose, in which | Abysmal instruments make sounds like pips | Of the sweeping meanings that we add to them.' The rose is 'comic' with the dissipation of its objective being rendered into a set of 'sweeping meanings' that detract from the thing itself. See: *CP*, p. 405, ll. 83-85.
[30] Stevens, 'The Noble Rider', *NA*, p. 9. Imagination and reality are the central and canonical themes that Stevens criticism has centred itself around since the 1960s. While an ecocritical approach requires consideration towards other, perhaps underexplored elements of Stevens's work, the poet's emphasis on imagination and reality cannot be cast aside.

This idea is accentuated by Stevens's inclusion of the phrase, 'unalterable vibration', which references the ever-present modulations of speech and the barest essence of sound that moves through all beings in the form of vibrations. The patterns and rhythms of sound in poetry parallel the sounds of the world, illuminating the ineffable interconnections between beings:

> The world lives as you live,
> Speaks as you speak, a creature that
> Repeats its vital words, yet balances
> The syllable of a syllable.[31]

The world here is animated as a 'creature' which underscores a central theme across both Stevens's ecopoetics and New Materialist philosophy. Both assert that entities conventionally understood to be both nonhuman and non-living, like water, wind, and mountains also hold an embodied and dynamic presence. As James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis' Gaia theory would speculate twenty years after Stevens's death that the earth is itself alive, Stevens's poetry acknowledges the agency of such terrestrial entities through their production of sound. Reaching beyond the ear into the 'syllable of a syllable', one may find voices and speech previously unheard, revealing these 'vital words' spoken by all entities and the earth itself. While the 'vital words' of the world remain to be found, however, the speaker of 'The Search for Sound Free from Motion' indicates that these may be found in a kernel deep within language and sound. By setting out my theoretical methodology in my first chapter, I seek to explore how it is possible to reach these elusive levels of listening. For Stevens, it is 'only within the power of the acutest poet' to reveal these vital sounds of words and deep feeling, signalling poetry's entanglement in the search for the truth of expression, which can be said to be the search for a language expressed and understood by all entities on earth.[32]

My second chapter begins my location of Stevens's ecopoetics in the context of Romantic poetry, arguing that one of the ways in which Stevens develops his ecopoetics is through adherence to organic form.[33] Through a close reading of 'The Idea of Order at Key West' (1936), I show how the poem, which I view as one of Stevens's most sonically evocative works, provides a useful starting point to explore the tensions and collaborations between sound and sign, 'she' and 'sea', or human and nonhuman. Continuing my theoretical methodology of New Materialism from Chapter One, my close reading reveals that the 'she' and the sea are both co-creators of their world with agency found in their communication of sound. While this chapter focuses predominately on Stevens's relationship to the Romantic poetic tradition in line with previous scholarship from Vendler and Harold Bloom, I also seek to show how Stevens as a twentieth century poet

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[31] Stevens, 'The Search for Sound Free from Motion' *CP*, p. 285, ll. 13-16.
[32] Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words' *NA*, p. 32.
[33] The Romantic period is equally significant in relation to ecocriticism, as it is here that initial scholarship was focused during the late 1990s and early 2000s, particularly with Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth*.

complicates and develops ideas inherited from Romantic poetics. While considering Stevens's Romantic inheritance, I further develop my ideas around the early elements of ecocriticism suggested in Chapter One to provide additional foundations to my location of Stevens's overall ecopoetic project.

Even though my second chapter focuses on Stevens's position in relation to Romantic notions of organic form, Stevens's position as a twentieth-century poet is pivotal in conducting an ecocritical reading of his work. To return to 'The Noble Rider' which was written in the midst of the Second World War, the sense of living on the precipice through an unstable historical moment, or as Stevens writes, 'on the edge of the world', is sharply captured (p. 8). The sounds of words are Stevens's remedy to the 'pressure of reality', which arises from a sense of living on the precipice during a time of intensive change. These pressures are explained as the 'pressure of an external event or events on the consciousness to the exclusion of any power of contemplation' (p. 20). Indeed, this description could aptly describe the ecological crisis or climate change.[34]

Stevens summarises our inability to comprehend phenomena in 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', explaining that 'our difficulty is not primarily with any detail. It is primarily with the whole' (p. 8). Human consciousness is such that comprehension of the entire whole, for example, the earth as it can be observed from space, or the multitude of connections between ourselves and other beings, is short-ranged. This short-sightedness has implications regarding how the earth has been and continues to be exploited and destroyed for human need, despite the now clear threat of the consequences of these actions upon us and the world. With this in mind, Stevens elaborates further on the conditions of the pressure of reality:

> there has been an extraordinary pressure of news […] news, at first, of the collapse of our system, or, call it, of life; then of news of a new world, but of a new world so uncertain that one did not know anything whatever of its nature, and does not know now, and could not tell whether it was to be all-English, all-German, all-Russian, all-Japanese, or all-American, and cannot tell now […]. (p. 20)

Evidently Stevens is discussing news generated from the Second World War. Uncertainty permeates the tone of this section, illustrating the effects of a global war that rendered the world unknowable in the double time of the present and future. Instability then sets the conditions for 'the end of one era in the history of the imagination and, if so, then great enough to bring about the beginning of another' by way of a new reality (p. 22).

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[34] There are parallels between Stevens's pressure of reality and Timothy Morton's concept of hyperobjects. Hyperobjects are 'things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans.' Both Stevens's pressure of reality and Morton's idea of the hyperobject involve the finite scale of human comprehension whereby an event or entity is too large to comprehend. See: Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p. 1.

Stevens's words hold a sense of timelessness and could aptly be used in relation to the ecological crisis of the twenty-first century. A comparison between his words with a recent statement from climate activist Greta Thunberg highlights a coincidence of thought. Eighty-one years later Thunberg discusses the juncture of crisis at which humanity finds itself in *The Climate Book* (2022). She urges that 'There is still time to undo our mistakes, to step back from the edge of the cliff and choose a new path, a sustainable path, a just path. A path which leads to a future for everyone.'[35] In these two statements that are spoken nearly one hundred years apart, Stevens considers the uncertain future or 'new world' which may be brought about by the 'collapse of our system'. Thunberg articulates this future where we remain living 'on the edge of the cliff' standing dangerously close to the precipice.

For Stevens, pondering the various effects of the pressures of reality and the possible futures these may create, poetry can provide a path towards a better way of life. Indeed, central to the location of his ecopoetics is the affirmation towards the end of 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words' that 'His [the poet's] role, in short, is to help people to live their lives' (p. 29). Stevens' poetics hinge upon a social focus where poetry is a means to enable readers to mediate their lives, which bears resonance to the aims of Burnett's poem and Jerram's Gaia installation. Both seek to create specific responses in viewers towards their subject matter: to encourage greater care and attention towards the Earth. Poetry may have the potential to create new stories to aid our lives and create more positive futures, and it is with this in mind that I move from Stevens's Romantic inheritance to his twentieth century influence.[36]

Chapter Three attends to the social focus of Stevens's ecopoetics by taking Stevens's position as a twentieth century poet as its historical focus. Where Chapter Two situates Stevens's ecopoetic development in the Romantic tradition, particularly ideas around organic form, Chapter Three extends a discussion of how concepts of human identity are destabilised in Stevens's later work through influences of quantum physics, which bears similarities with contemporary environmental philosophy. This chapter, with readings of the less anthologised, 'Less and Less Human O Savage Spirit' (1947), 'Montrachet-le-Jardin' (1942), and 'July Mountain' (1955), further construes Stevens's ecopoetics into the realms of New Materialism, where a quantum understanding of the world, which views the human as a creature rather than a superior being, enables the vocalisation

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[35] Greta Thunberg, '5.22. Hope is something you have to earn' in *The Climate Book* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2022), 421-422 (p. 422).

[36] Indeed, shifts in the pressures of reality between 1941 and 2022, from the Second World War to the ecological crisis, require new ways of knowing and new ways of being, and, as I focus in this study, new ways of listening. As Margaret Atwood aptly summarises: 'The planet is changing. We need creativity, ambition, and some powerful new stories to understand how we can change with it'. See: Ed Finn, 'An interview with Margaret Atwood', *Slate*, February 6th 2015 <https://slate.com/technology/2015/02/margaret-atwood-interview-the-author-speaks-on-hope-science-and-the-future.html> [accessed 17 June 2021].

of nonhuman voices. Where the period of the early to mid-twentieth century has often been viewed by ecocriticsm as a challenging space to conduct ecocritical enquiry, Stevens's engagement with quantum discovery suggests an alternative perspective whereby conjunctions between literature and science generate proto-ecological thought. Overall, I look to point to Stevens's awareness of the interconnected world, inclusive of nonhuman agents which also contribute to the creation of meaning.

The social relevance of poetry within a changing world is interconnected with the maker of the text. Chapter Four therefore reads Stevens in the context of the Late Modernist poet, Jorie Graham, to ascertain how Stevens's ecopoetics influence contemporary poetry, signalling the continued importance of relocating his work through an ecocritical perspective. This chapter will consider the shared resistance by Graham and Stevens to textual exegesis in relation to the processes driving the construction of their ecopoetics. The shared motif of the wind across Graham's 'Scarcely There' (2020), Stevens's 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' (1950) and 'Esthetique Du Mal' (1947), provides a starting point of reflection around the influence that Stevens's ecopoetics has had on Graham, who is now frequently labelled as an ecopoet. Tracing the provenance of these ecopoets is necessary to this study that looks to locate Stevens's ecopoetics because it provides a more complete image of Stevens's ecopoetic development, therefore allowing further connections to be made across ecological thought in poetry over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

These ideas in Chapter Four that evaluate Stevens's ecopoetic influence then move into thoughts and speculations around the future in my final chapter. Noted from his discussion of the pressure of reality in 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', Stevens was concerned particularly about the future relevance of poetry. Indeed, early in his career in his mid-twenties, Stevens wrote to his then fiancé, Elsie Moll, that 'I want to know about myself, about my world, about my future when the world is ended.'[37] It is here with the ending of the human world that my fifth chapter finds its beginning. The ecological crisis is many things, but most prominently, it is and has been an ending for many beings. Confirmation in 2020 that human mass exceeded all living biomass cemented the reality of the Anthropocene, which states that human action has significant effects upon the regulatory systems of the planet.[38] In addition to this unhappy marker, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species (ICUN), more than 42,100 species or 28% of all assessed species are currently threatened with

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[37] Stevens, (Entry 95, Letter excerpts 1904-05) in *Letters*, pp. 80-81.
[38] Over the course of writing this thesis, global temperature records have increased year upon year with 2023 predicted to be between 1.08 °C and 1.32°C; the tenth consecutive year that temperatures have reached at least 1°C above pre-industrial levels. See: Grahame Madge, '2023 set to be tenth consecutive year at 1°C or above', *The Met Office* <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2022/2023-global-temperature-forecast> [accessed 6 January 2023].

extinction.[39] Indeed, humans are not immune to the extreme effects of the ecological crisis and it is socio-economically disadvantaged and marginalised groups that suffer disproportionately.[40] As David Wallace Wells notes in his 2019 *The Uninhabitable Earth*, 'countries with lower GDPs will warm the most', signalling the dissonance of global effects that the ecological crisis enacts upon different groups.[41]

A study into the location of Stevens's ecopoetics therefore necessitates mediation of these future possibilities of ecological crisis. After establishing in Chapter Four that Stevens's ecopoetics hold precedence in contemporary poetry, using Greg Garrard's 2012 essay, 'Worlds Without Us: Some Types of Disanthropy' as a theoretical starting point, I consider how Stevens's ecopoetics contemplate the condition of imagining a world completely without people, which is termed by Garrard as 'disanthropy' or disanthropic imagining. With my central focus on how Stevens's ecopoetics enables the sounding of nonhuman voices, I first ground Stevens's disanthropic imagining through a close reading of his early 'Earthy Anecdote', the opening poem to *Harmonium* (1923). This establishment of the disanthropic conditions of Stevens's ecopoetics leads into my formulation that the three poems, 'The Snow Man' (1923), 'The Course of a Particular' (1954), and 'The Plain Sense of Things' (1954), enact a progression of Stevens's disanthropic thought, providing an interesting speculation on the voices and sounds present in a world without people. My conclusion then evaluates my readings and will propose where scholarship may lead following this location of Stevens's ecopoetics, emphasising to what end this location may be useful today in relation to the ecological crisis.

A note on terminology

While my first chapter provides the grounding for my definitions of terms such as language, the difference between text signs and poetic language, and poetry itself, throughout this thesis I refer to the 'human' and 'nonhuman' or 'more-than-human world' to distinguish between the group *Homo Sapiens*, who are largely believed to have brought about the current ecological crisis by creating the conditions appropriate for the Anthropocene, and other entities that exist upon the Earth. To avoid the burden of repetitive phrases on the reader of this study, I may use synonyms throughout the project. In relation to the term, 'nonhuman', I take Jane Bennett's notation that nonhuman bodies are 'actants' instead of 'objects', meaning that these entities have 'efficacy, can do things, [have] sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of

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[39] See ICUN website <https://www.iucnredlist.org/> [accessed 6 January 2023].

[40] See R. S. Walker, D. C. Kesler & K. R. Hill, 'Are Isolated Indigenous Populations Headed toward Extinction?' *PLoS One*, 11, 3, (March 2016) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4783021/> [accessed 6 January 2023].

[41] It is important to note that this is in exception of Australia. See: David Wallace Wells, 'Cascades' in *The Uninhabitable Earth* (London: Penguin, 2019), 1-37 (p. 24).

events.'[42] In this thesis, the voices and sounds of nonhuman entities are viewed as a branch of their efficacy. Indeed, this idea of the autonomy of nonhuman entities translates into Bennett's central argument around what she calls 'vital materiality', meaning the ability of an object or body to exist 'as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.'[43] In this study, the agency of more-than-human and non-living entities like the sea and the wind are shown to actively narrate themselves in Stevens's ecopoetics.

For the purposes of this project which aims to interrogate the applications of human language in the poetry of Wallace Stevens to give rise to the nonhuman voice, a distinction between the human and other beings must be made. Even so, as my third chapter indicates, humans are ultimately another group of creatures on the Earth and, especially considering ecological understanding from the last twenty-five years, may not be thought as separate from other beings. Along this line, I take Bennett's consideration of the porosity and fluctuation between the terms, 'human' and 'nonhuman', chiefly that 'of the very radical character of the (fractious) kinship between the human and the nonhuman.'[44] After all, as Stevens writes in his poem 'Asides from the Oboe' and from which this thesis is entitled, 'We had always been partly one'.[45]

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[42] Jane Bennett, 'The Force of Things' in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010), 1-19 (p. 10). ProQuest Ebook.
[43] Bennett, 'Preface' in *Vibrant Matter*, vii-xx (p. viii).
[44] Bennett, 'Vitality and Self Interest' in *Vibrant Matter*, 110-122 (p. 112).
[45] Stevens, 'Asides on the Oboe', *CP*, 266-268 (p. 268), l. 34.

Chapter One: Ecocritical Entanglements: Language, Poetry, and Sound

In this first chapter, I will ground my readings of Stevens as an ecopoet through an exploration into the entanglement of language within ecocritical discourse, and broader depictions of ecological crisis in recent discussion. To establish my methodology, I will first seek to frame the tension of language within ecocritical discourse itself. By using the seminal study, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), as my starting point, I will discuss the differences and impacts of an 'environing' and an 'eco' language. This will lead into a more detailed investigation into the tension between textual sign and spoken word, where arguments from Christopher Manes and David Abram will support my claim that textual signs have gained precedence over the spoken word, to the detriment of our ecological world. Through Louise Westling's useful explication of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ecophenomenology, I will ground Stevens's proto-ecological consciousness within the line of thought that generated material ecocriticism. In sections on language, poetry, and sound, I will explore the tension between the ecologically damaging effects of textual signs and the argument that human language is natural, organically occurring, and therefore enmeshed within the world.

I will break down these issues between the entanglements of language, poetry and sound to explore the connections across these topics and formulate a framework that shows how Stevens uses sound in his ecopoetics to open human language to ecocentrism. The discussion will include readings of Stevens's early poems, 'Of the Surface of Things' (1919), 'Anecdote of the Jar' (1919) and 'To the Roaring Wind' (1923), to show the diversity of readings made possible in the context of ecocriticism, and to explore the struggle experienced by the poet who is a communicator within the realms of words and sounds. Ultimately, I seek to show that throughout his poetic career, Stevens was turning towards a form of ecopoetics whereby the poet does not seek superiority over nature, but instead seeks to co-create a language that allows the more-than-human world to sound itself rather than remain silent.

Emergence of Ecocritical Entanglements

Our collective understanding of the current ecological crisis arose alongside the emergence and development of environmentalism as a popular movement in the 1960s, since which eco-centric ideas have held increasing prominence in contemporary thought.[1] With the threat of

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[1] The widely understood definition of 'environmentalism' is the motivation to preserve the natural world due to a concern for human induced ecological damage. For a detailed exploration into Environmentalism, see Greg Garrard, 'Chapter Two: Positions', in *Ecocriticism* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), 18-37 (pp. 21-23). ProQuest Ebook.

anthropogenic climate change becoming more widely understood in the broader context of human destruction upon the earth, environmentalists sought to influence political spheres and persuade governments to promote policies in the direction of earthly stewardship to ensure the protection of ecological communities and their environments. Movements in the arts followed, albeit slowly. Despite William Rueckert coining the term 'ecocriticism' in 1978 with his essay, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism', ecocritical literary studies only began to cohere in the late 1990s and early 2000s. By then, it had become apparent to environmentalists and ecocritics such as Cheryll Glotfelty, Christopher Manes, and Jonathan Bate that humanity was a lot 'further along the road to an uninhabitable earth'.[2] A significant question that this thesis asks through its investigation into the ecopoetics of Wallace Stevens is, if we are moving towards a place of uninhabitability, what function does literature have? Can literary studies help to create an alternate road, perhaps one towards an ecologically sustainable world? How can ecopoetics create or re-create a habitable earth?

Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* is one of the most significant texts in the ecocritical field. It has itself become a landmark in the chronology of ecocritical studies as the first text to provide a unified selection of ecocritical perspectives and methodologies. In the introduction to the text, Glotfelty explains that 'all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it'.[3] In ecocriticism, 'world' is not limited to the human centred societal sphere but encompasses 'the entire ecosphere'.[4] Ecocriticism therefore finds a focal point in the intersections between human and nonhuman relations, stretching over a vast array of cross-disciplinary knowledge. This overall aim of ecocriticism is correlative to Stevens's statement in 'The Irrational Element in Poetry' (1936), that one is 'possessed, along with everything else, by the earth and by men in their earthy implications.'[5] Contrary to Cartesian and anthropocentric notions of humans possessing the earth, for Stevens, the earth possesses the human, who must be attuned to the earth and the actions of humans upon it.

As an area of study that endeavours to consider the ecosphere in its totality, the adaptive responsiveness of ecocriticism is crucial. Lawrence Buell observes that 'environmental criticism is a project in motion', for it is informed by the urgency of the impact of ecological crisis.[6] As

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[2] Glen A. Love, 'Revaluing nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism' in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 225-240 (p. 225).
[3] Glotfelty, 'Introduction' in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, xv-xxxvii (p. xix).
[4] Ibid, p. xvii.
[5] Stevens, 'The Irrational Element in Poetry', *OP*, 224-233 (pp. 232-233).
[6] Lawrence Buell, 'Preface' in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (Blackwell: Malden, Mass. Oxford, 2005), vi-ix (p. ix).

Richard Kerridge notes, 'Ecocritical responsibility consists in accepting […] the existence of a large expert majority […] If the majority view changes, then the ecocritic has a responsibility to change accordingly'.[7] The various ecocritical responses generated around how we may re-think and move forward toward a more ecologically sustainable future have opened new branches of study and intersections between the humanities and sciences. Despite progression within the field, one of the ongoing entanglements around language and how the strengths and limitations of human communication can impact ecological thinking remains a key area of debate within ecocriticsm and its sub-fields, like ecopoetics and ecosemiotics.[8] This chapter will therefore critically examine some of the arguments put forward by ecocritics in relation to the subject of language, asking, how may literary ecocritics in particular be able to overcome the literary and linguistic entanglement at the base of the ecological crisis? Can poetry, as part of the literary entanglement of language and ecological crisis help unknot some of these questions?[9]

Language, with its strengths and limitations concerning the ability to communicate experiences of all beings, is a problematic topic across ecocritical discussion. The application of words and ambiguity of meaning is evident from the use of differing terminology within the ecocritical field itself. Across the field, critics disagree on the 'correct' name for scholarship, debating if terms like ecocriticism or environmental studies are more apt than other terms such as green studies, which some believe to be more appropriate for an earth-centred approach. Or, as Glotfelty notes in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, as the field draws heavily on scientific ecology, perhaps ecological literary studies might be a better fit?[10] Interestingly, Glotfelty cites a general scholarly preference for 'eco' over 'enviro' due to the anthropocentric connotations of the prefix 'enviro'.[11] Humans, she explains, perceive themselves as standing in the centre of the world, and are thus defined by everything that is not human.[12] The prefix 'enviro' offers a mode of reading that subscribes to the notion of human and nonhuman apartness, which is contrary to the aims of the field of study which seeks to instead challenge any distances or distinctions cemented by cultural anthropocentrism.

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[7] Richard Kerridge, 'Ecocriticism', *The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory*, 21. 1, (2013), 345-374 (p. 349), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ywcct/mbt018>.

[8] While some frameworks from ecosemiotics will be mentioned in passing, a more detailed investigation into the field can be found in the following texts: Jesper Hoffmeyer, *Signs of Meaning in the Universe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) and Jesper Hoffmeyer, *Biosemiotics: An Examination into the Signs of Life and the Life of Signs* (Scranton and London: Scranton University Press, 2008a).

[9] The term, 'entanglement', is understood in this thesis through the lens of both ecology and physics, whereby entities experience phenomena both passively and actively. In relation to the natural world, this application of entanglement has the consequence of understanding the world as a series of dynamic interactions between all beings and seeks to remove distinct categorisation.

[10] Glotfelty, p. xix.

[11] Glotfelty's preference for the prefix 'eco' reflects the interconnectivity of the world and better encompasses the multiplicities of communities, rather than a division of 'they' surround 'us' implied by 'enviro'. I will remain to use the term 'ecocriticism' relational to the field.

[12] Glotfelty, p. xx.

By subscribing to notions of a dwelling-focussed approach with 'eco', ecocriticsm offers the potential for previous readings to be re-framed in light of the ecological crisis, from an environing or anthropocentric sense to an ecological sense. Previous scholarship in studies of Stevens can be said to attend to Glotfelty's definition of anthropocentric 'environing'.[13] For example, Stevens's well-anthologised short poem, 'Anecdote of the Jar', has been read by critics who view the jar as a human object able to exert control over the nonhuman wilderness. Beverly Maeder illustrates how the jar sets off 'an ordering movement in the wilderness'.[14] Additionally, a reading by Bart Eeckhout and Gert Buelens considers how 'the jar's own roundness forces the wilderness to "surround" it and the jar's inactive objectivity effectively tames the wilderness', subscribing to Milton Bates's notion that Stevens engages 'with the late-nineteenth-century aestheticist claim that nature imitates art'.[15] These readings, while valuable contributions to work on Stevens, do not consider his proto-ecological consciousness and instead preference anthropocentric perspectives. Later in this chapter, I will return to 'The Anecdote of the Jar' to evaluate how more recent readings of the poem display the shift in studies of Stevens from environing to 'eco'.

The ongoing debate within ecocriticism surrounding the meanings of the terms 'eco' and 'enviro', or as Glotfelty usefully explicates, interconnected ecology and anthropocentricism, will frame this chapter's exploration into the issues of language in relation to human and nonhuman entities within ecocriticsm and Stevens's poetry. Discussion around the relationship between literature and the ecological crisis, and an evaluation of the arguments ascertaining the positions of poetry, language, and sound within the literary-ecological entanglement will be applied to Stevens's work. These explorations will show how on one hand Stevens enacts an awareness of the limitations of language in the environing sense with his poem 'Of the Surface of Things' and how on the other hand, he engages with the ecological potential of language to represent the worldly network of beings with a return to 'Anecdote of the Jar'. However, going forward, it is necessary to define the term ecological crisis as it will be used throughout this thesis, and also outline the various waves of ecocritical theory as they may be used in this project. These framings will allow the study to reveal how Stevens's ecopoetics move back and forth across the various modes of ecocritical thought.

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[13] Highlighting previous readings of Stevens in an ecocritical context is not to discount them.

[14] Beverly Maeder, 'Stevens and Linguistic Structure' in *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens*, ed. by John N. Serio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 149-63 (p. 156). Cambridge Ebook.

[15] Bart Eeckhout & Gert Buelens, 'Always a Potent and an Impotent Romantic: Stylistic Enactments of Desire in Henry James's The Ambassadors and Wallace Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar"', *Wallace Stevens Journal*, 34, (Spring 2010), 15-37 (p. 56) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44885221>, [accessed 25 May 2021]; Milton J. Bates, 'Burgher, Fop, and Clown' in *Wallace Stevens: A Mythology of Self* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 83-126 (p. 104).

Ecological Crisis

The pressing need for increased ecological engagement in literary studies has occurred in response to growing scientific knowledge around anthropogenic damage inflicted upon ecosystems, and the resultant consequences.[16] Even though during Stevens's lifetime, the dangers of anthropogenic ecological damage were not widely understood, in order to locate his ecopoetics, it is necessary to define the term, 'ecological crisis' as it will be used in this study. While climate change is one of the dominant issues that has been identified through science as a threat to all life, it is a part of the larger, umbrella impact of the ecological crisis. As Margaret Atwood acknowledged in a 2015 interview with Slate Magazine:

> I think calling it climate change is rather limiting. I would rather call it the everything change because when people think climate change, they think maybe it's going to rain more or something like that. It's much more extensive a change than that because when you change patterns of where it rains and how much and where it doesn't rain, you're also affecting just about everything.[17]

Atwood uses the term 'everything change' rather than 'climate change' to reflect the interconnected consequences of anthropogenic biotic change. Using the example of rainfall, Atwood creates the analogy of how one change in an ecosystem has an unlimited number of repercussions on a multiplicity of beings. Further, where climate change refers to alterations in weather patterns and systems and the consequences of these changes to life, ecological crisis better encompasses the network of biological communities that co-exist upon the earth, and, who are negatively affected by various human activities.[18] It is with an appreciation for these anthropocentric implications that throughout this consideration of ecocritical entanglement, there is a preference for the term 'ecological crisis' over others.[19]

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[16] Thirty years on, speculation around the reality of ecological crisis has solidified. Recent extreme weather events like fires, flooding, and heatwaves have been linked to human activity. Even the recent Covid-19 pandemic and concern for future increased incidences of transferred zoonotic disease have been connected to the unsustainable relationship that human beings currently foster with other biological communities. See: UNEP, 'Secretary General's Foreword' in *Global Environment Outlook GEO-6, Healthy Planet, Healthy People*, ed. By Paul Ekins, Joyeeta Gupta and Pierre Bioleau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) <https://www.unep.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-6> [accessed 18 March 2021], p. xxvi; and Adam Vaughn, 'How our abuse of nature makes pandemics like Covid-19 more likely', *New Scientist*, (3 March 2021), <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/bushfire-recovery/research-and-resources> [accessed 18 March 2021].

[17] Finn, 'An Interview with Margaret Atwood'.

[18] See: Met Office, 'What is Climate Change?', *The Met Office*, <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/climate-change/what-is-climate-change> [accessed 18 March 2021].

[19] A June 2021 report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) illustrated the necessity to work towards solutions that speak to both the climate and biodiversity crises, recognising that both events are caused and connected through a similar pattern of ecologically destructive anthropogenic behaviours. See: Pörtner, H.O. et al, 'IPBES-IPCC co-sponsored workshop report on biodiversity and climate change', Version 1, *IPBES and IPCC*, (2021), 4-26 (pp. 4-5) <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4920414>.

Debate surrounding the use of the term, crisis, and its effectiveness in discussions of anthropogenic ecological damage is ongoing.[20] In an interview with Sara Rigby for *Science Focus* magazine, social psychologist Dr Sander van der Linden attests to the use of 'crisis' in relation to the current ecological situation. Van der Linden comments that 'I think "climate crisis" signals an urgency. People don't like crises either, but people know that crises can be avoided and that they can be resolved.'[21] On the other hand, in the same interview, Dr Dann Mitchell, Met Office Joint Chair in Climate Hazards at the University of Bristol, maintained that for scientific purposes, the term crisis 'seems not quite right' but acknowledged that 'it is clear why it is being used, and frankly I don't think a word exists for exactly what type of emergency this is'. Clearly, debate is ongoing to locate the correct language to encompass the scale of ecological disaster that we now find ourselves, and it is possible, as Dr Mitchell claims, that a word simply does not exist within current human semiotics. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the term 'crisis' is suitable as it implies the sense of urgency described by Dr van der Linden, and also signals a possible turning point away from the road toward an uninhabitable earth.

Ecocritical Waves

Recognition of the limitations of language is not new, and the movement between particularly the first and second waves of ecocritical scholarship signifies an awareness of the implicit relationship between literature as a cultural phenomenon and the ecological crisis. Lawrence Buell offers a useful definition of the waves of ecocritical studies from his trilogy of ecocritical texts, that have become, along with *The Ecocriticsm Reader*, seminal works in the field.[22] Buell explains that first wave ecocriticism tends to hold a focus on a parity between environment and nature, where subsequently nature equals nurture. On the other hand, second wave ecocriticism looks deeper beyond an idealised vision of nature to locate the 'vestiges of nature within cities and/ or exposes crimes of eco-injustice'.[23] While it is important to note that these categories are nuanced,

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[20] Martin McQuillan explains that in relation to climate change, the concept of crisis gives the event a 'form and a certain calculability' and that labelling the event as a crisis, 'is to subject it to the temporality of "the crisis", namely that it will one day come to an end and a state of normativity will be restored'. While McQuillan suggests that the indication of an endpoint and a suggestion of normative restoration against the effects of ecological damage is reductive, I instead suggest that the implication of an endpoint to ecological crisis is a strength because it can encourage wider society to take action through the continuation of hope. See: Martin McQuillan, 'Notes Towards a Post-Carbon Philosophy' in *Telemorphosis:* Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1, ed. by Tom Cohen (Michigan: Open Humanities Press), 2012, 197–215 (p. 201) <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/ohp.10539563.0001.001>.

[21] Sara Rigby, 'Climate Change: Should we change the terminology?', *Science Focus Magazine*, 3 February 2020 <https://www.sciencefocus.com/news/climate-change-should-we-change-the-terminology/#:~:text=What%20other%20terms%20for%20climate,to%20the%20'climate%20crisis> [accessed 7 April 2021].

[22] While I use Buell's distinction, there are various offerings on the distinctions between ecocritical waves in other texts. For example, see, Hubert Zapf, 'Introduction' in *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, Volume Two, Ed. By Martin Middeke, Gabriele Rippl and Hubert Zapf (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 1-18 (pp. 5-6). ProQuest Ebook.

[23] Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis in the Literary Imagination*, p. 24.

Buell's distinction affirms that where first wave texts tend to look towards perceptually beautiful natural environments in seeking a restoration of forgotten connections to the earth, second wave texts are more likely to explore the implications of ecological crisis across a range of locations, recognising the interconnected effects between social inequality and ecological crisis. For example, Greg Garrard's assertion that William Wordsworth's applications of nature function as a catalyst for an anthropocentric spiritual revelation positions Romantic literature as first-wave. In other words, first wave texts tend towards a depiction of nonhuman phenomena as environmental in relation to the human rather than ecological.[24]

In response to this perceived cultural separation between human and nonhuman, recent studies in material ecocriticism and new materialism seek to emphasise the interconnection between all beings and the subsequent agency of material objects. French philosopher Bruno Latour's address towards the division between human and nature in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) produced the term, 'naturecultures' which has later been popularised by new materialist and eco-feminist critic Donna Haraway in her *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (2016).[25] On these interconnections, Haraway writes that:

> The world is a knot in motion. Biological and cultural determinism are both instances of misplaced concreteness-i.e., the mistake of, first, taking provisional and local category abstractions like 'nature' and 'culture' for the world and, second, mistaking potent consequences to be preexisting foundations.[26]

Rather than perpetuating the 'them' and 'us' distinction between nature and culture, Haraway notes that concrete distinctions between entities have been reduced to figurative abstractions that delineate human from 'other', or that which is not human. The human mistake is the attempt to capture with words the 'knot in motion' into such concrete categories. Instead, a nondualist approach better manifests the multiplicity of the world. Material ecocritic Stacy Alaimo builds on Haraway's argument and advocates for an ecological approach to the formulation of a language that collapses the categories of human and nonhuman or nature and culture:

> […] we need to mark the limits of our own ability to render the material world with language. Such a sense of limits does not pose nature as exterior to human language, but instead acts to ensure an awareness that the process of making meaning is an ongoing one, a process that includes nonhuman nature as a participant rather than as an object of inquiry.[27]

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[24] Complications of locating initial scholarship within Romantic literature will be explored in Chapter Two of this thesis, pp. 69-75.

[25] Bruno Latour, 'Relativism' in *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 91-127 (p. 7).

[26] Donna J. Haraway and Cary Wolfe, 'The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness' in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 91-198 (p. 98). ProQuest Ebook.

[27] Stacy Alaimo, 'Bodily Natures' in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 1-27, p. 42. ProQuest Ebook.

In poetry then, the task of the poet would not be to speak for the nonhuman but rather one that invites the nonhuman as a participant in the process of meaning making. As Greg Garrard explains, 'we shall need better, less anthropocentric, metaphors. That is the project, and the promise, of ecocriticism'.[28] Therefore, looking to texts that engage with decentring the 'human subject' as the 'expectant ground of all possible knowledge' and sole voice of all life can help formulate an understanding of how we reached the point of ecological crisis, and further, how we may re-frame our modes of communication.[29] Challenges to nineteenth-century notions that language demonstrates 'the excellence of humankind relative to all other species' and subsequently acknowledging more-than-human beings as participants rather than as 'object[s] of inquiry' will further our overall capability to comprehend what philosopher Timothy Morton calls ecological thought or 'the mesh'.[30] In terms of language, understanding 'the mesh' of communication is becoming increasingly a centre of debate with studies exposing the communicative systems of nonhuman beings.[31]

Entanglements of Language

As discussed, the enormity of the temporal and global scale of ecological crisis poses challenges for all scholarly disciplines when it comes to locating the correct words or language. It is undeniable, however, that terms such as 'crisis', incite the necessary sense of urgency and enable wider society to understand the severity of the situation and act against it. While scientific projects contribute to our knowledge, and provide evidence for this sense of urgency, it is equally essential to gain a deep understanding of how this point of ecological crisis has been reached in order to consciously move away from the point of crisis.

In the essay, 'Nature and Silence', Christopher Manes describes the uncomfortable assertion that literature and writing have directly influenced the current ecological crisis, predominately through the influence of Western theology and traditions of textual exegesis.[32] While language and writing have enabled human engagement with the world through storytelling and description, Manes' paper argues that this act of engagement has a central flaw. Shifts from spoken language to written texts paved the way for anthropocentric Western epistemological discourse and thinking,

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[28] Garrard, 'Futures: the Earth' in *Ecocriticism*, 181-201 (p. 205).

[29] Christopher Manes, 'Nature and Silence' in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 15-29 (p. 21).

[30] David Abram, 'The Flesh of Language' in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human-Word*, First Vintage Books edn. (New York: Random House, 1997), 52-62 (p. 54). Also see: Timothy Morton 'Thinking Big' in *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 20-58 (pp. 28-30).

[31] Mycobiologist Suzanne Simard and botanist Richard Karban have published widely on the ability of vegetal life to interpret and respond to messages from neighbouring organisms. See: Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree* (London: Penguin, 2022).

[32] Manes, 'Nature and Silence', pp. 15-29.

leading to the current divide between human and world or nature and culture. Western humanism, Manes explains, designated man as the 'sole subject and speaker' of the natural world and this cultural anthropocentrism resulted in the silencing of all nonhuman entities.[33] Manes cites ecophenomenologist David Abram, who stated that 'at one time, nature spoke; now texts do'.[34] Textual signs inscribed by humans aided the anthropocentric conception of the Western world. Over the course of centuries, voices inscribed by textual signs and literature replaced those of the nonhuman. It could be said that today, the voice from a book is more alive than the voice of the tree from which the book arose, and our uninhabitable earth is precisely so because, through writing, we have silenced that in which we live and those who we live alongside. Literary ecocriticism therefore faces the complex task of untangling a more ecologically sustainable way of writing the world singularly using the tools with which the world has predominately been silenced across history by Western languages.

Language is a complex entanglement and Abram cautions against attempts to define it, because 'the only medium with which we can define language is language itself'.[35] The definition of language is ineffable, and this suggests that to reach an understanding of language, alternative means must be used to define it. One perhaps extreme example offered by Manes in 'Nature and Silence' suggests that a potential solution to the issue of silencing nonhuman entities in Western language is to generate an entirely new language and begin rewriting the world.[36] However, as Stevens cautions, 'The loss of a language creates confusion or dumbness'.[37] While languages evolve and change, the complete generation of a new language to replace existing modes of communication is unrealistic, particularly given the little time that we now have to address existing attitudes towards the earth to mitigate the effects of ecological crisis. Perhaps a better directed solution regarding these issues of language is to direct attention more towards meaning. Indeed, as Stevens explains, 'a new meaning is the equivalent of a new word.'[38] Recent research in the fields of biosemiotics and ecosemiotics point towards such new inscriptions of meaning and can therefore help to contextualise language and explicate how the term will be discussed in this thesis. As noted by Wendy Wheeler, 'biosemiotics has developed in theoretical biology with its proposal that all life, not just human life and culture, is semiotic and interpretive'.[39] All beings create and

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[33] Ibid, p. 21.

[34] Ibid, p. 19.

[35] Abram, 'The Flesh of Language' in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human-Word*, 52-62 (p. 52).

[36] Manes, pp. 24-25.

[37] Stevens, 'Adagia', *OP. Plays, Poems, Prose,* p. 185.

[38] Ibid, p. 186.

[39] Wendy Wheeler, 'Chapter 4: Natural Play, Natural Metaphor, Natural Stories: Biosemiotic Realism' in *Material Ecocriticism*', ed. by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 67-79 (p. 69). ProQuest Ebook.

communicate meaning, either through sound, gesture, smell, or physical positioning. According to Wheeler, this assertion 'erases the false, sharp modern distinction between mind and body, nature and culture, and materialism and idealism'.[40] Language, a human concept of communication comprised of speech and writing, is part of this wider semiotic network.

Abram's theory aligns with these biosemiotic perspectives and seeks to destabilise anthropocentric associations of human languages by claiming that they are informed by 'the evocative shapes and patterns of the more-than-human terrain', as well as human bodily structures and communities.[41] Language is inseparable from what Abram calls the more-than-human, because all beings hold the potential for communication. Abram applies Maurice Merleau-Ponty's embodied phenomenology of experience to conclude that it is the 'dynamic, interconnected reality that provokes and sustains all our speaking, lending something of its structure to all our various languages.'[42] Therefore, Abram asserts that language is structured and functions similarly to ecological networks, connecting beings together. Even so, he maintains that spoken language, with its rhythms, textures and shapes, has become estranged from the more-than-human by way of the written sign.[43] It is through textual signs that language, and by extension, humans have lost connections to the more-than-human-world.

Louise Westling also advocates for Merleau-Ponty's ecophenomenology, arguing that his 'radical challenge to anthropocentric arrogance' restores 'us to our place in the community of animals and the wider biological community.'[44] Where Westling's study focuses predominately within the sphere of the perceived human-animal divide, rather than the entire scope of nonhuman entities, her work provides useful insight into issues surrounding language as identified by Abram. While there is not scope within this thesis for a complete analysis of Merleau-Ponty's ecophenomenology, I would like to dwell with some of his key notions as presented by Westling, which will aid the framing of Stevens's proto-ecological consciousness within New Materialism, and further the tensions identified between spoken and written language.

Merleau-Ponty's later work engaged with Jacob von Uexkull's *Umwelt* theory. In his lecture, 'The Concept of Nature II', Merleau-Ponty outlines connections between his own and von Uexkull's philosophy regarding the interconnected and dynamic participation of beings:

> Whether we are dealing with organisms or animal societies, we do not find things subject to a law of all or nothing, but rather dynamic, unstable equilibria […]. As a

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[40] Ibid, p. 69.
[41] Abram, p. 61.
[42] Ibid, p. 58.
[43] Ibid, pp. 86, 158.
[44] Louise Westling, *The Logos of the Living World: Merleau-Ponty, Animals, and Language* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p. 5.

result, one cannot conceive of the relations between species or between species and man in terms of a hierarchy.[45]

Indeed, Westling defines Merleau-Ponty's project in his later work, beginning with *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), as the 'redefinition of nature, not centred on humanity as the apex of creation as with Descartes, nor from Spinoza's division into God, man, and creatures, but instead as we have seen earlier, as 'a description of the man-animal *intertwining*'.[46] It is this intertwining of the man-animal which signalled Merleau-Ponty's philosophical engagement away from Cartesian and Newtonian determinism, and towards modern scientific notions which began to take root in the early to mid-twentieth century, of the entwined ecological whole of which humans are a part. Two significant features of Merleau-Ponty's ecophenomenology which contribute to his thoughts around the entanglement of Western languages and its ecological sustainability are the theory of the chiasm and that of the flesh of the world. During the 1950s, Merleau-Ponty developed the notion of the *chiasm*, taken from the Greek, *chiasmus*, meaning a diagonal cross, as in the letter 'X'. In Chapter Four of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty formulates his notion of the '*flesh* of things' or flesh of the world.[47] In summary, Merleau-Ponty's flesh of things idea suggests how each body exists in dialogue with the other bodies and the world itself. Insomuch, existence in the world is premeditated through a chiastic intertwining of sense perceptions. This entangled ontology is in constant dynamism with the flesh of the world which is, in Westling's words, 'the wild or brute being in which we are immersed'.[48]

Contrary to Abram, Merleau-Ponty's assertion of the chiasmic crossing of organic beings includes human language and the written sign. He explains that the task of the writer is:

> to produce a system of signs whose internal articulation reproduces the contours of experience; the reliefs and sweeping lines of these contours in turn generate a syntax in depth, a mode of composition and recital which breaks the mold of the world and everyday language and refashions it.[49]

This description of how written language transforms and translates experiences of the world in an act of composition and recital gives weight to Westling's reading of his view that the totality of 'Human language, literature, and the other arts' are 'the continuing efforts of our species to sing the world in call and response, carrying with them the past and anticipating the future.'[50] In other words, Merleau-Ponty looked for ways in which human language could be extended into an

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[45] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Concept of Nature II' in *Themes from the Lectures*, ed. John Wild (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 88-98 (p. 97).
[46] Westling, *Logos*, p. 6.
[47] Merleau-Ponty, 'The Intertwining - The Chiasm' in *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. John Wild (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130-155 (p. 133).
[48] Ibid, p. 27.
[49] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Problem of Speech' in *Themes*, 19-26 (p. 25).
[50] Ibid, p. 44.

'ontological description of language bubbling up from silence and reaching back into the Invisible to articulate meanings that are the lining and depth of the sensible world.'[51] Language therefore constitutes the flesh of things in its ability to weave forms of life and experience together. In Merleau-Ponty's words:

> We need only to take language too in the living or nascent state, with all its references, those behind it, which connect it to the mute things it interpellates, and those it sends before itself and which make up the world of things said […] Language is a life, is our life and the life of things.[52]

Language viewed in its full capacity of reaching across its references can therefore provide a more ecologically egalitarian mode of communication than our current anthropocentric language. By doing so, human culture, including language, allows the uncovering of the variety of voices of the planet. As Merleau-Ponty explains:

> There is a kinship between the being of the earth and that of my body (*Leib*) which it would not be exact for me to speak of as moving since my body is always at the same distance from me. This kinship extends to others, who appear to me as other bodies, to animals whom I understand as variants of my embodiment, and finally even to terrestrial bodies […].[53]

In essence, Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the kinship between his body and other bodies in the world can be likened to Buell's notion of the environmental unconscious which describes how humans have repressed and ignored such kinship.[54] For Abram, written signs, in particular those delineated from Western texts, bear significant responsibility for this repression, but Merleau-Ponty's ideas inscribe human texts as a key component to understanding the overall chiasmic intertwining of beings that create our ecosystems. In other words, language for Merleau-Ponty is, as Stevens writes in 'The Comedian as the Letter C' (1923), 'The liaison, the blissful liaison | Between himself and his environment, | Which was, and is, chief motive, first delight'.[55]

Written language or text signs are generally understood by contemporary linguistics as a 'code' or representation of the world. Language 'as text' removes the 'internal, nonarbitrary connections' to the world, allowing humans to easily separate language as written sign from language as speech.[56] As written language is 'conceived as an exclusively human property', textual signs are

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[51] Ibid, p. 117.

[52] Merleau-Ponty, 'Interrogation and Intuition' in *The Visible and the Invisible*, 105-129 (p. 125).

[53] Merleau-Ponty, 'Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology' in *Themes*, 113-123 (p. 122).

[54] Buell states that the environmental unconscious is 'the limiting condition of predictable, chronic perceptual underactivation in the bringing to awareness, and then to articulation, of all that is to be noticed and expressed'. See: Lawrence Buell, 'Introduction' in *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Writing in the US and Beyond* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1-30, p. 22. ProQuest Ebook.

[55] Stevens, 'The Comedian as the Letter C', *CP*, ll. 225-227, 29-48 (p. 37).

[56] Westling, *Logos of the Living World*, p. 54

further removed from the more-than-human world through anthropocentric ideologies. Kate Rigby adds more detail to these ideas, explaining that humans are so caught:

> in the world composed by the words that are forever running through our heads, passing out our mouths, into our ears, or being traced by our eyes or finger-tips, much of what we know viscerally, so to speak, does not make it into our field of awareness.[57]

Attendance to the textual sign detracts attention from other embodied semiotic modes like sound, which could aid our understanding towards other beings. However, Margaret Atwood commented in a 2015 interview that the biggest technology 'that we [humans] ever, ever invented was articulated language with built-out grammar. It is that which allows us to imagine things far in the future and things way back in the past'.[58] By taking the perspective of language as a technology, Atwood implies that it is possible for humans to use and alter language, predominately to imagine futures and pasts far beyond our comprehension. If it is possible to imagine deep-time, perhaps it is also possible to extend our semiotic comprehension beyond the textual sign to reveal, as Stevens writes in 'Credences of Summer' (1947), the 'Pure rhetoric of language without words.'[59]

Where Atwood uses the metaphor of technology to describe language, Scott Knickerbocker offers another perspective in his 2012 text, *Ecopoetry: The Language of Nature, The Nature of Language* (2012).[60] Knickerbocker explains that language is naturally occurring, and he also argues that first-wave ecocritical scholarship has rejected engagement with the ecological potential of textual language.[61] In response to first-wave ecocritical resistance to textuality, Knickerbocker argues that written language and its material properties are comparable to humans, 'distinct yet inseparable from the rest of nature.'[62] Through encompassing the spoken and written aspects of language, Knickerbocker claims that:

> Rather than confining us in a linguistic straitjacket, figurative language and thinking in general constitute our species's way of experiencing what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'flesh of the world,' the invisible layer of reality linking the perceiver and the perceived, the sentient and the sensible'.[63]

While Abram uses Merleau-Ponty's theorisations to outline the similarity of spoken language to the more-than-human, Knickerbocker expands these concepts to written text.[64] Timo Maran offers

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[57] Kate Rigby, 'Chapter 2: Earth's Poesy: Romantic Poetics, Natural Philosophy and Biosemiotics' in *The Handbook of Ecocriticsm and Cultural Ecology*, Handbooks of English and American Studies, Vol 2., ed. by Hubert Zapf (Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc., 2016), 45-64, p. 48. ProQuest Ebook.
[58] Finn, 'An Interview with Margaret Atwood'.
[59] Stevens, 'Credences of Summer', *CP*, 392-397 (p. 394), l. 54.
[60] Scott Knickerbocker, *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, The Nature of Language* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). ProQuest Ebook.
[61] Knickerbocker, p. 3.
[62] Ibid, p. 4.
[63] Ibid, p. 7.
[64] For Knickerbocker, it is the figurative qualities of human languages that enable our perception of experiencing the interconnected more-than-human world of which we are both distinct and part.

a similar argument, noting that while all living beings participate in forms of semiotic processes, humans have a unique 'semiotic competence as compared to that of other living organisms' through the abilities to write and read poetry, make calculations and predictions and generate systems to create technical mechanisms.[65] Evidently, as this section has illustrated, human development and use of language is a point of difference between beings. However, I argue that the problem arises when human semiotic modes are perceived as superior.

Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic ontology of being encompasses human language within what Jesper Hoffmeyer calls the semiosphere, which is the dimension that incorporates 'all forms of communication: sounds, smells, movements, colours, shapes, electrical fields, thermal radiation, waves of all kinds, chemical signals, touching, and so on. In short *signs* of life'.[66] From Hoffmeyer's perspective, human language is but one gesture of communication within the entangled ecological systems of the world, offering a perspective which reduces the anthropocentric position of human language. By viewing human language, both spoken and written, in this way, linguistic anthropocentrism can be lessened or even avoided. Literary forms are therefore powerful tools by which this new meaning of human communication can be explored, because, as Westling describes, 'Literature is the recorded creation of such culturally evolved meanings for humans, and it is one of our distinct ways of singing the world to each other.'[67] Westling's use of the term, 'singing' bears much resonance on this project, which investigates the sounds and rhythms of the more-than-human world within Stevens's work. Even so, it remains crucial to remember an ecocentric approach when attempting to open our words up to the world.

Evidently, there are convincing arguments that suggest human language may be viewed as a mode of communication embedded in a much wider semiotic system of interactions and responses. Kate Rigby's argument which describes the 'muddles that can arise from the slipperiness of verbal communication, especially in written form', suggests that issues with language are largely derived from the transition from sound into sign.[68] As shown by Maran and Knickerbocker, while language enables our experience and understanding of the nonhuman world, it can also disconnect beings, evident from Abram and Rigby's assertions. In the following section, I will mediate these debates around language to explore how language in poetry engages with the ecological potential of Wallace Stevens's ecopoetics. By taking Stevens's own definitions of poetry, I will outline how poetry is an appropriate form to facilitate the fluctuations between man and world. In addition, the

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[65] Timo Maran, 'Semiotization of Matter: A Hybrid Zone between Biosemiotics and Material Ecocriticism' in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 141-156 (p. 146). ProQuest Ebook.
[66] Jesper Hoffmeyer cited in Westling, *Logos of the Living World,* p. 111.
[67] Westling, *Logos of the Living World*, p. 125.
[68] Rigby, p. 49.

influence of Romantic poets, like Shelley and Wordsworth, upon Stevens will be used in this chapter to further explore the relationship between the figure of the poet and the language of poetry, and the consequences of the human poet's word upon the development of an ecological poetics.[69]

Entanglements of Poetry

Some questions that the previous discussion around language raises are also questions that Stevens grappled with throughout his life and in his poetry. How may we, as readers and writers, recognise and communicate nonhuman voices through an inherently anthropocentric communication system? Can the human voice ever be truly decentred within poetry, and if so, how? Fundamental to Stevens's proto-ecological thought is the potential for poetry to unknot some of these questions. Indeed, Westling notes that Merleau-Ponty believed the language of poetry to be the 'proper language for questioning' the situation of humans 'as dynamically engaged in an unfolding temporal reality', providing evidence for the ecological potential of poetry to bring balance between the voices of the beings of the world.[70]

As Westling observes, an anti-Cartesian sense of experience in literature 'creates new habits of thought and engagement with the natural world, teaches a profound sense of kinship and interdependence among living things, and reinserts us conceptually in the ecological matrix we have never actually left.'[71] It is the questioning nature of language within poetry which can open our understanding to these senses of kinship and interdependence with other beings, serving to dissipate the chasm between nature and culture. This particular relationship between poetry and language is what Stevens sought to achieve in the creation of his supreme fiction. As this thesis will explore, Stevens's overall project to invite the more-than-human world to speak through and within his poems was intimately connected to the very meaning of poetry itself. J. Hillis Miller's conclusion that all of Stevens's poems 'taken together form a single poem […] each drawn toward a goal which can never be named directly or embodied in any poem' reflects the way that poetry, for Stevens, is the way by which the poet can aim to reach beyond Cartesian epistemology and appreciate the human within a chiastic ontology of ecological networks.

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[69] While Chapter Two focuses on Stevens's Romantic ecopoetic inheritance, it is useful to explore the influence of the movement upon his ideas around language and poetic theory.

[70] Westling, *Logos of the Living World*, p. 17. Martin Heidegger, whose phenomenology is often aligned with Stevens's work, also shared this view. However, Heidegger's *Dasein* or theory of Being is described by Westling as 'only possible for humans' and 'results from a kind of self-consciousness made possible by language' (p. 17). Westling explains in detail how Heidegger's anthropocentric views render his inclusion within ecocritical discourse problematic. It is for these reasons that this thesis takes Merleau-Ponty's proto-ecological thought as a framework. Heidegger's insistence on the connection between human language and human superiority, and his anti-Darwin stance (see Westling, pp. 18-24) conflict with the central question of this thesis which asks how human anthropocentric thought be reduced in language, and poetry.

[71] Westling, *Logos of the Living World*, p. 41.

With Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in mind, to evaluate the possibility for voicing the nonhuman world through poetry it is necessary to identify Stevens's understanding of the form, and also how language functions within it. To do so, in this next section, I will turn to some of Stevens's commentary on the function and role of poetry. In the late and thematically shifting 1950 poem, 'A Primitive Like an Orb', the reader is told that the poem is 'the huge, high harmony that sounds | A little and a little, suddenly, | By means of a separate sense.'[72] These alliterative and melodic lines encapsulate for J. Hillis Miller a sense of how Stevens emphasises the 'evanescence of poetry' which, for Miller, means the binding of a poem to a time 'experienced as a sequence of present moments, each real and valid only so long as it is present.'[73] The poem therefore exists on a different level of experience prior to a reader's understanding of it. A poem is a segment of the present moment and continually comes into being each time it is invoked by speech, which is observed by Stevens in the lines that describe how 'The breath of an accelerando moves, | Captives the being, widens - and was there.'[74] The poem is therefore created anew during reading though the action of breath and voice, where sound vibrations form the words in speech. The speaker indicates this moment of poetic creation with a dash which serves to reflect the suspension of the moment between poem as breath and poem as speech. Insomuch, I suggest that Stevens viewed poetry as its own entity that contains its own sense of being. It is a form that is both visible and invisible, real and unreal; 'It is and it | is not and, therefore, is.'[75] Poetry might be akin to the 'obscurest as, the distant was' and cannot be easily defined.[76]

Following from this multifaceted examination of poetry, in a piece on his friend and contemporary, William Carlos Williams, Stevens usefully determines 'how often the essential poetry is the result of the conjunction of the unreal and the real, the sentimental and the anti-poetic, the constant interaction of two opposites.'[77] While the temptation may be to read this definition in the Cartesian sense of dualistic binaries, I suggest that Stevens conveys that poetry is a meeting of counterparts, or occupies the space in which fluctuations interact. Poetry is therefore ever changing in response to the 'life that is lived in the scene that it composes' rather than being centred around that 'collection of solid, static objects'.[78] Stevens recognises the importance of a poetics able to respond to the changing nature of the world and the dynamic network of beings within it.[79] These

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[72] Stevens, 'A Primitive Like an Orb', *CP*, 465-469, ll. 11-13.
[73] J. Hillis Miller, 'Wallace Stevens' Poetry of Being' in *Tropes, Parables, Performatives. Essays on Twentieth-Century Literature* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 33-49 (p. 37).
[74] Stevens, 'A Primitive Like an Orb', *CP*, ll. 15-16.
[75] Ibid, ll. 13-14.
[76] Ibid, l. 24.
[77] Stevens, 'Williams', *OP*, 213-214 (p. 214).
[78] Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', *NA*, (p. 25).
[79] Stevens maintains in 'Adagia' that 'Poetry is the statement of a relation between man and the world', suggestive of the way that poetry responds to the human relationship to the world. See: Stevens, 'Adagia', *OP*, 184-202 (p. 197).

relations between the human and the more-than-human world are ever-changing and ever-turning towards and away from one another, and the understanding and representation of these dynamic relations between human and nonhuman are as essential to Stevens's poetics as they are to contemporary ecocriticism.

Indeed, another significant element to Stevens's poetics noted in 'Adagia' (1934-1940) is that 'Poetry is a means of redemption.'[80] Stated twice in his collection of adages, the redemptive aspect of poetry as a 'purging of the world's poverty and change and evil and death' coheres with my understandings of Stevens's hopes for the potential of poetry to remedy the wrongs of humans and combat the negative aspects of reality.[81] Poetry as a redemptive force enables the 'possibility that within it there may yet be found a reality adequate to the profound necessities of life today or for that matter any day.'[82] Overall, the meeting of juxtapositions in poetry enables potential for a rethinking towards a better world, or reality.

Stevens explores the role of the poet and expands on his notion that the poet is key to the dynamism and redemptive elements of poetics in the 1936 essay, 'The Irrational Element in Poetry'. The definition of the 'irrational element in poetry' is, according to Stevens, 'the transaction between reality and the sensibility of the poet from which poetry springs.'[83] Stevens shows poetry to be a collaborative result between phenomena of the world and the poet's perception of these phenomena by using an anecdote of hearing a cat running over snow outside his window. Poetry is, as well as a way of responding to the world, a personal and subjective expression of a poet's perception. However, this widely acknowledged truth of poetry takes on a potentially greater ecological meaning for Stevens. These ideas connect to Stevens's understanding of the dynamism of the world and how, through the poet's perception, poetry 'would make us realise that we are creatures, not of a part, which is our everyday limitation, but of a whole for which, for the most part, we have as yet no language.'[84] Within the creative realm of poetry, the poet can open the understanding of their readers to the wider idea that humans are beings among beings. This then presents an acknowledgement of an enmeshed existence instead of a distanced understanding of human superiority over other beings.

As such, I argue that Stevens's theories of poetry are deeply interconnected with what I call his proto-ecological consciousness. Poetry is the supreme fiction that can provide humans with a gateway to the unreal and the invisible; the areas of reality that we have a tendency to overlook.

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[80] Ibid, p. 186, 188.
[81] Ibid, p. 193.
[82] Stevens, 'About One of Marianne Moore's Poems', *NA*, 93-104 (p. 102).
[83] Stevens, 'The Irrational Element in Poetry', *OP*, p. 224.
[84] Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', *OP*, 267-280 (p. 271).

Poetry is a neutralising force to the barrier of Timothy Clark's notion of scale effects, overcoming our everyday limitation of individualism to recognise our place in the wider ecosystem, or, as Stevens notes, 'the whole for which, for the most part, we have as yet no language'. Language is where Stevens's notions of poetic theory and his proto-ecological consciousness converge to create his ecopoetics, or his search to form a language of the whole and of the entangled relations of the more-than-human world.

Yet, the role of the poet is one that causes tension for Stevens in his seeking of a poetics that goes 'behind and beyond', pushing the boundaries of the 'familiar ether'.[85] While it is only through the poet that poetry can come or spring into being, the poet is deeply entangled in human perceptions and human language and therefore subject to human limitations. To counteract these limitations, the poet must actively resist anthropocentric tendencies to create a poetics 'possessed, […] by the earth and by men in their earthy implications'.[86] In an examination of 'Of the Surface of Things' later in this chapter, such resistance and struggle with anthropocentric thought can be observed within the language and rhythms of the text. Stevens's claim that 'There is, in short, an unwritten rhetoric that is always changing and to which the poet must always be turning' typifies his awareness of the poet's responsibility to be attentive towards nonhuman voices and understand that to do so, poets must be aware of the wider methods of communication and the 'unwritten' language of the nonhuman within the wider semiosphere (p. 231).

In relation to the role of the poet, Romantic poetic manifestos offer some insight into Stevens's conception of the relationship between poet and language.[87] William Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1802) outlines the poet as one 'endued with more' knowledge, sensibility and enthusiasm than other men.[88] For Wordsworth, it is this additional level of understanding that enables the poet to bind 'together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time'. In this ecologically problematic assertion, Wordsworth deifies the poet as in possession of a divine ability to be able to reconcile humanity and the earth, defying temporal and geographical boundaries in the process. Wordsworth's earlier conception of the poetic self informs the later and well-known Shelleyan perspective, where the poet is animalised as:

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[85] Stevens, 'The Irrational Element of Poetry', *OP*, 232.
[86] Ibid, pp. 232-233.
[87] The conceptions of poetics formulated by British Romantic and American Transcendentalist poets and writers are especially relevant to this project due to their great influence on Stevens's poetic theory. Chapter Two of this thesis expands on Stevens's mediation of this influence.
[88] William Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802)* <https://web.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/lbprose.html> [accessed 2 March 2023].

> a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why […].[89]

The poet-nightingale sings the enchanting song into the darkness, illuminating the minds of the listeners, moving them into feelings that transcend reason. Perhaps it is this capability of the poet that provokes their later naming as 'the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration' and 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world'. Clearly, both Wordsworth and Shelley view the poet as a superior being. Through the Shelleyan perspective however, the tension between the visible and invisible that is also present within Stevens's work is evoked alongside the notion of poet as a hierophant. Originating from Attica in Ancient Greece, 'hierophant' was the title given to the chief priest of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The conception of the poet-as-hierophant similarly undertakes this role of uncovering or making visible the fact that:

> The world lives as you live,
> Speaks as you speak, a creature that
> Repeats its vital words, yet balances
> The syllable of a syllable.[90]

Like the Wordsworthian poet, the Shelleyan poet, wields supreme power across the world. Time is their legislator. In other words, the poet interprets that which is not widely understood, rendering the invisible visible through their songs. As I will expand with my second chapter, this is the mode by which Stevens's singer in 'The Idea of Order at Key West' is labelled 'maker' and 'artificer' of the world and song, following the characterisation of the poet as divine creator.

To view the poet as a superior being is to subscribe to the environing sense of worldly comprehension discussed earlier in this chapter. This anthropocentric perspective is not one that promotes an ecologically sustainable understanding of the world because it shows preference for the human above other beings. On the other hand, Samuel Taylor Coleridge provides what I view as a more ecologically balanced approach to the function and meaning of poetry, particularly in relation to language. Even though Coleridge postulates that the 'distinctive character of a poem originates in the poetic genius itself', this distinctive character is entangled with various agents over which the poet has little control.[91] Coleridge further notes the language of man where 'The sound sun, or the figures s, u, n, are purely arbitrary modes of recalling the object' in comparison to the language of nature that is 'a subordinate Logos, that was in the

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[89] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry,* (Poetry Foundation, 2009) <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69388/a-defence-of-poetry> [accessed 2 March 2023].
[90] Stevens, 'The Search for Sound Free from Motion', *CP*, p. 285, ll. 13-16.
[91] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Definition of Poetry' in *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge, Second Volume (London: William Pickering, 1836), 7-11, (p. 10). Google Ebook.

beginning, and was with the thing it represented, and was the thing it represented.'[92] The language of man is a capricious method of representing an object, whereas the language of nature is 'the thing it represented'. Although nature is characterised as a 'subordinate Logos' in comparison to human language, clearly Coleridge believes that it is better able to recall the object to the imagination.[93]

To expand on the tensions established earlier between the spoken and textual methods of linguistic communication, poetry can then be defined as the creative arrangement of textual language in the form of artistic composition to express personal perception of the world, as delineated from Stevens's theorisations. Timo Maran describes poetry as a form of artistic modelling, 'which uses a number of codes to create a poetically organised and complex image'.[94] Where language exists as a mode of semiotic communication on a foundational level, poetry is a creative form constructed using the combination of text signs and an awareness of the sound produced by these signs. The importance of sound in poetry is more pronounced than in other literary genres, as I will go on to explain in the next section. Using both Stevens's and Susan Langer's theories on the alignment of poetry to music, I will further explore the tension between sound and sign in poetry. The meeting of these tensions between spoken and written language positions poetry as an experimental form with potential to address this tension between spoken and written language, and further, the entanglement between language and literature. Through uniting Abram, Knickerbocker, and Merleau-Ponty's positions, human language can be viewed as an inherently natural process. Poetry can direct the communicative potential of language either toward or away from nonhuman voices through its unique capture of both the sonic or musical, and textual qualities of language. It lies with the poet to locate the words for that which 'would never be quite expressed'.[95]

Entanglements of Sound

David Abram's lament that the written sign has eradicated the 'rhythms, textures and shapes' of spoken language reveals that the sonic element of poetry can be viewed as a potential opening by which human language may move closer to the more-than-human world.[96] As Coleridge reflects in his depiction of human language, the word 'sun' is first and foremost, 'The sound sun'.[97]

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[92] Coleridge, 'The Drama Generally and Public Taste' in *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 40-52 (pp. 50-51).
[93] While it can be argued that British Romantic poets perceived the poet as a superior being to nature, it is evident that Coleridge in particular points to the precise struggle concerning the arbitrary nature of human words, thus decentring the notion of the poet as a superior being.
[94] Maran, p. 147.
[95] Stevens, 'The Motive for Metaphor', *CP*, p. 304, l.10.
[96] Abram, pp. 86, 158.
[97] Coleridge, 'The Drama Generally and Public Taste' in *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 40-52 (pp. 50-51).

Stevens provides an expansion on this affirmation, noting that 'above everything else, poetry is words; and that words, above everything else, are in poetry, sounds.'[98] The foundational connection between words or language and evoked feeling in readers in poetry is achieved through sound. Prior to this claim in 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', Stevens further explains that:

> The deepening need for words to express our thoughts and feelings which, we are sure, are all the truth that we shall ever experience, having no illusions, makes us listen to words when we hear them, loving them and feeling them, makes us search for the sound of them, for a finality, a perfection, an unalterable vibration, which it is only within the power of the acutest poet to give them.

In language and words, we may find 'a finality, a perfection, an unalterable vibration'. Bart Eeckhout, who notes that Stevens was 'steeped' in the influence of Romantic and Symbolist traditions, observes in this passage a keen sense of musicality in Stevens's poetics. Indeed, he elucidates, the very language Stevens uses to describe the need for words to express deep feeling is 'in fact the language in which we usually talk about melodies and the effects achieved on them by the listener.'[99]

Stevens's language is therefore a musical language, alive with sounds and vibrations of speech that evoke what Abram calls the forgotten or ignored spoken word that brings us closer to the voices of the more-than-human. Eeckhout goes on to describe how Stevens's poetry is 'full of its own Bakhtinian heteroglossia' which is, he clarifies, a process of 'concocting a hybridized language that jumbles diction from incompatible registers and backgrounds […]'.[100] Stevens's engagement with language is Bakhtinian in the sense that language is viewed as an ongoing and evolving entity, which can be paralleled to Merleau-Ponty's conception of the dynamic and oscillating ecological engagement between beings. This perspective on language as a hybridised system of various levels enables Stevens his playfulness with words, and also sound.

Anca Rosu's 2017 text, *The Metaphysics of Sound in Wallace Stevens*, draws significant attention to the interplay between language and sound in Stevens's poetry.[101] Rosu's line of thought coheres with that of Abram regarding the differing effects and meaning imparted from oral and written language, noting that these two methods of human communication determine a 'whole different conception of the nature of reality and knowledge' (p. 2). The means of communication used by human beings have significant implications for how we observe and

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[98] Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', *NA*, p. 32.
[99] Bart Eeckhout, 'Wallace Stevens's Modernist Melodies', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Special Section: Literary Modernism and Melody, 55, 1, (Spring 2013), 53-71 (p. 60).
[100] Ibid, p. 58.
[101] For Rosu, using music and sound to read Stevens's application of language in his poetry is a methodology apt to work through the complexities of Stevens's words which at once 'unite' and 'fragment' meaning. See: Anca Rosu, 'Chapter One: Sound and Language' in *The Metaphysics of Sound in Wallace Stevens* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2017), 1-15 (p. 3).

engage with the world. In her text, Rosu seeks to establish a theory of language employed in readings of Stevens that embraces 'not only purely linguistic structures, but also the interaction between speakers that normally takes place in a social and cultural environment. Such interaction is also implied in the verbal gesture that we call a poem' (p. 11). Going further, Rosu analogises the resultant meaning of the verbal gesture of language in poetry with 'the meaning of music', as derived from patterns of sound in language (p. 2).

Reading Stevens in a framework of sound or music highlights the value of sonic meaning as opposed to viewing sound as a 'material carrier of meaning', and it is through this lens that Rosu argues we can view music or sound as another 'dimension' of language (p. 14). If sound is taken to be an alternative semiotic gesture, conventional and fixed notions of meaning within linguistic frameworks may be opened up to offer the possibility of new meanings, or as Rosu describes, for meaning to become 'undefined' (p. 13). Language encounters a doubling wherein it can hold multiple meanings, both semantic and sonic. This layering of meaning invites a form of active reading, through close attention to the sounds that the poem creates within the reader's ear.[102] Attention to the sonic qualities of a text invites attention towards the effect of the sign rather than 'the thing behind the sign', leading to a greater imaginative response to the poem. Stevens's ecopoetics follows this rubric of sound-sense, and Rosu confirms that sound for Stevens is a way of 'interacting with a certain conception of language as representation' rather than a mere formal device.[103] By including sound as a major element of his 'Bakhtinian heteroglossia', Stevens is able to alter the emotional responses of his readers to his words to create a new sense of meaning in language.

The creation of a new sense of meaning by an alteration of our attention towards the sounds of words circles back to my presentation of the implication of Western language as one of the contributing origins of the current ecological crisis proposed by Manes in his essay, 'Nature and Silence'. Where Manes suggests the generation of an entirely new language to resolve the silencing of nature within Western modes of communication, by taking sound-sense into deeper consideration, Western language systems may move closer to communicating Uexküll's *Umwelt* or Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic intertwining, exposing the 'mute meaning' of the world or environmental unconscious repressed through singular adherence to the written sign. Indeed, Stevens's adage explaining that 'a new meaning is the equivalent of a new word' can be elucidated considering the implications of Rosu's study that proclaims that Stevens's attention to sound

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[102] Rosu suggests that this search for meaning, beginning with the text itself rather than an external source, enables a reorientation of the reader, or listener, who seeks to 'respond to' rather than 'decode' the text, p. 13.
[103] Rosu, 'Chapter 2: Sound and Poetry', *Metaphysics of Sound*, 16-31 (p. 31).

within his work creates new meanings.[104] Appreciation of new senses of meaning invoked through sound can then be extended into advocacy for formal elements of poetics, such as metaphor, personification, assonance, and repetition, as methods to invite nonhuman agency of speech and voice rather than enact a denial. Knickerbocker advocates for this view and reflects on how these poetic techniques influence sound, providing an alternative way of experiencing the entanglement of beings in the world through language.[105]

Susanne Langer's *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (1953) also traces a path towards the alternative expression of meaning, but through sound in music. Pertinent to this thesis is Langer's establishment of music as a highly articulated form of expression of patterns and emotion. Art is a symbolic form of human feeling: '[…] feeling exists only in living organisms; and the logic of all symbols that can express feeling is the logic of organic processes.'[106] Indeed, Stevens draws heavily on music to describe the effects of poetry, as does Merleau-Ponty to describe the translation of experience across beings in the flesh of the world. For example, in 'The Effects of Analogy' (1948), Stevens comments that the 'music in poetry' has not yet come to an end.[107] By the 'music in poetry', Stevens refers to the rhythm and cadence. It is important to note Stevens's disambiguation between music in poetry in a Romantic sense and a Modern sense, because he views these as different forms. In the Romantic sense, music in poetry is identified as metrical poetry with 'regular rhyme schemes [...] All of the stanzas were alike in form. As a result of this, what with the repetitions of the beats of the lines, and the constant and recurring harmonious sounds, there actually was a music.' However, Stevens observes a change in Modern poetry from this rhythmic and metrical regularity, because 'Instead of a musician we have an orator whose speech sometimes resembles music. We have an eloquence and it is that eloquence that we call music every day, without having much cause to think about it.'[108] Overall, the experience of music for Stevens is one of narrative, 'like finding our way through the dark […] by an instinct' that follows the cadence of the sounds.[109] The result of this experience is union with the narrative created by sound, where 'we identify with the story' as if 'we had participated in what took place. It is exactly as if we had listened with complete sympathy to an emotional recital'. Here, it is

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[104] Ibid, p. 186.
[105] Knickerbocker's advocacy for formal poetic techniques as ecologically inviting refutes the temptation to shy away from the anthropocentric tendencies that these poetic techniques can imbue to describe the more-than-human world.
[106] Susanne Langer, 'The Musical Matrix' in *Feeling and Form* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 120-132 (p. 126).
[107] Stevens, 'Effects of Analogy', *NA*, p. 124.
[108] Stevens, 'Effects of Analogy', *NA*, 125, 126.
[109] Ibid, p. 126.

evident that 'Music is feeling then, not sound'.[110] Music in poetry therefore sparks emotion in the reader, enabling them access through sound, a deeper and instinctive meaning.

Langer builds on the physical effects of music on the individual, which relates to Stevens's claim that music is emotion. Langer cites music as a 'symbolic presentation of the highest organic response, the emotional life of human beings', presenting the connection between music and rhythm, which is the lynchpin of 'vital activity'.[111] Reminiscent of Stevens's description of the 'deepening need for words to express our thoughts and feelings' that 'makes us search for the sound of them, for a finality, a perfection, an unalterable vibration', the expression of human emotion through sound enables insight into what Langer calls the 'life of feeling', which is organised through rhythm. She describes breathing as the 'principle of rhythmic continuity' and the 'basis of that organic unity which gives permanence to living bodies', manifesting her argument that art is a symbolic and embodied expression of feeling.[112] For Langer, expression of feeling through art is equal to the expression of life through breath. Both are described as organic, rhythmic processes that hold meaning. Similarities can be made between Langer's philosophy on rhythm and Merleau-Ponty's flesh of the world theory, which can be summarised by Langer's assertion that 'The essence of all composition—tonal or atonal, vocal or instrumental, even purely percussive, if you will—is the semblance of organic movement, the illusion of an indivisible whole'.[113] Rhythmic composition, either in music or poetry, gestures towards the interconnected mesh of the world, where particularly poetic forms can highlight how rhythmic patterns in speech may be expressed.[114]

Where Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy, or what is now recognised as ecophenomenology, tends to reveal the entanglement or intertwined ecologies of all beings, Langer can only suggest the illusory or 'virtual' nature of artworks in relation to reality. Literature, including poetry, abstracts the events of life into the 'illusion of life' where the imagination translates reality into a virtual reality where one small event in a poem, for example, may unfold in great detail within the 'purely poetic reality' of words and imagination.[115] Through this translation of reality into words, poetry reaches into musicality to 'Deepen the feelings to inhuman depths' or turn us towards the unwritten rhetoric of the nonhuman world.[116] By branching into music, poetry that strongly

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[110] Stevens, 'Peter Quince at the Clavier', *CP*, 96-98 (p. 96), l. 4.
[111] Langer, 'The Musical Matrix' in *Feeling and Form*, p. 126.
[112] Indeed, the very way that animal life sustains itself through the repetitive nature of breathing is parallel to the rhythmic expression of sound in music to express feeling and create meaning. See: Langer, p. 127.
[113] Ibid, p. 126.
[114] The notion of organic form will be explored and developed in Chapter Two which builds on Stevens's ecopoetics in the context of Romanticism.
[115] Langer, 'Poiesis' in *Feeling and Form*, 208-235 (p. 217).
[116] Stevens, 'Parochial Theme', *CP*, 203-204 (p. 203), l. 10.

invokes sound has the potential to bridge the distance between humans and the more-than-human-world.

Speaking the Silence: Complications of Ecocritical Approaches to Language as 'Environing'

Ecocritics must also be attentive towards the 'unwritten rhetoric' of the world to challenge anthropocentric tendencies. However, anthropocentric discourse within ecocritical scholarship itself is present, gesturing to the complex and delicate position that language occupies for literary ecocritics. It is useful to here explore these instances to better understand the entanglement between literature and the ecological crisis. For example, in response to the issues of language presented by Manes and Abram earlier in the chapter, Romantic scholar and ecocritic, Jonathan Bate offers in his text, *The Song of the Earth*, a potential solution through the form of poetry.[117] Like Stevens, Bate positions poetry as a space with great potential to consider a more sustainable world. However, Bate comments that the role of poet in relation to ecological crisis is to 'speak the silence of the place'.[118] Bate's solution to the entanglement between language, literature and ecological crisis sits with the human figure of the poet who can use their art to speak for other beings. For Manes however, this issue of speaking for the more-than-human world is precisely the issue of anthropocentric language located in his essay.

While it is not impossible, but significantly difficult, for beings to communicate through a semiotics that is not their own, as Stevens reminds us: 'To say more than human things with human voice, | That cannot be; to say human things with more | Than human voice, that, also cannot be;', the 'acutest speech' is achieved by speaking 'humanly from the height or from the depth | Of human things'.[119] To speak humanly is to recognise that we are 'creatures, not of a part, […], but of a whole' or the entangled ontology put forward by Merleau-Ponty's ecophenomenology.[120] By invoking preference for the human to speak for the nonhuman, Bate perhaps overlooks the implication that speaking for nonhuman beings contributes to the cultural anthropocentricism that is at the root of the literary entanglement with the ecological crisis. The positioning of human poet at the centre of all beings, granting their voice superiority over others is distinctly anthropocentric in the mode of Glotfelty's description of the term 'environing'. Bate's argument could therefore be seen to fall short in drawing a distinction between poetry and language, and it is ambiguous from his wording if the poet's speech is in fact, poetry.

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[117] Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000).
[118] Bate, p. 151.
[119] Stevens, 'Chocorua to Its Neighbour', *CP*, 312-318 (p. 316), ll. 95-100.
[120] Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', *OP*, 267-280 (p. 271).

The poet, then, according to Bate, should use the linguistic arrangements of a poem to fill the silence of the voices of the place and its nonhuman inhabitants. While the oxymoronic concept of speaking silence is noted by Bate to be 'impossible', he asserts that William Wordsworth's repeated use of the prefix 'un' in 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' (1798) is as 'close as any poem has ever reached to such a speaking'.[121] Yet, a shortcoming of using negative prefixes is that the nonhuman voices are immediately silenced into a negative periphery. More-than-human entities are then conditioned by what they are not, or they are defined by being removed from human understanding and left to dwell in silence. By designating the poet and poetry as the speaker by which we may unknot and move toward a more sustainable use of language, Bate subscribes to the anthropocentricism cited by Manes that places man 'as the sole subject and speaker' of the nonhuman world, denying other beings agency to speak for themselves.[122]

Stevens's poem 'Of the Surface of Things' engages with this dilemma of language in the context of the poet speaking the silence of the place. The poem, first published in *Poetry* magazine in October 1919 as part of Stevens's group of poems titled 'Pecksniffiana' and later appearing in his first collection, *Harmonium*, has not been widely studied, and therefore, may not be the first text to think of when considering issues of language and ecocritical thinking.[123] Indeed, previous readings from critics Robert Buttel and Milton Bates have elucidated its context as a progression from reality to imagination.[124] In other words, as Bates puts it, the poem is viewed as the translation of 'its nominal subject into the realm of pure poetry', with pure poetry indicating the imagination.[125] Instead, my formulation of the poem, quoted below in its entirety, shows how Stevens demonstrates his proto-ecological consciousness through exposing how poetry can reveal new ways of looking.

I
In my room, the world is beyond my understanding;
But when I walk I see that it consists of three or four
hills and a cloud.

II
From my balcony, I survey the yellow air,
Reading where I have written,
"The spring is like a belle undressing."

III

[121] Ibid, p. 151.
[122] Manes, p. 21.
[123] Other poems included in the 1919 submission to *Poetry* include 'Fabliau of Florida', 'Ploughing on Sunday', and 'Anecdote of the Jar'. See Stevens, *Letters*, (Entry 232, 'To Harriet Monroe, August 1919'), p. 214.
[124] See: Robert Buttel, 'Chapter VIII: Noble Accents and Inescapable Rhythms' in *Wallace Stevens: The Making of Harmonium* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 203-230 (p. 207).
[125] Bates, p. 137.

The gold tree is blue.
The singer has pulled his cloak over his head.
The moon is in the folds of the cloak.[126]

The poem begins somewhat simply, with the speaker's statement describing that when inside, 'the world is beyond [my] understanding' yet walking outside enables them to 'see' the world (ll.1-2). The plain contrast between inside and outside predicates an expectation that physical interiority limits our understanding of the world. However, having experienced the actual world, the speaker then returns in the second stanza to an interior with the image of the 'belle' undressing. This interiorisation perhaps echoes Kate Rigby's assertion that humans are caught in the world of words and therefore miss or ignore other phenomena. The belle's 'undressing' reflects the emergence of the season of Spring, with the united imagery of emergent beauty (l. 6). Across the first and second stanza, the speaker of the poem demonstrates three experiences of the world. The first is simple and outlines the world as it is experienced from the room. Yet, movement in the second stanza out into the balcony precipitates a new understanding. The speaker begins to add texture to their experience, noting the 'yellow air' (l. 4). In turn, the movement from inside to outside changes the experience of the natural world which in turn provokes the speaker to translate their perception of the world into text, in essence, re-reading the world through language.

With the use of simile in line five, Stevens evokes musicality in the enchanting iambic line: '"The spring is like a belle undressing"' (l. 6). While it could be suggested that this simile equating the world to the 'belle undressing' reduces the world, concealing the it in the world of words, I suggest that this change in rhythm and form shows that Stevens was distinctly aware of how language can be used to depict the transformations of the world in text.[127] Indeed, the use of the comparative simile enacts the transition of one reality to another: from the image of the speaker looking outside their window to the imaginative depiction Spring. To build on this notion of transformation, the form of the poem changes in the fifth line, particularly by the quotation marks that at once create and accentuate the distinction between written word and physical object. This formal demarcation, aided by the change in rhythm is reflective of how human perception of the world also interrupts, and then perhaps overwrites or transforms, that which is already there.

The movement and contrast from free verse into the more regular metre of line five signifies a distinction between what the speaker has written and what exists. Bate claims that 'meter itself - a quiet but persistent music, a recurring cycle, a heartbeat - is an answering to nature's own rhythms,

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[126] Stevens, 'Of the Surface of Things', *CP*, 60-61.
[127] From the erotic feminisation of Spring equated to a beautiful girl undressing, the simile could be interpreted as a trope of the romanticisation and personification of nature. Read in this way, the poem plays into notions of nature as an exploitable resource, particularly under the male gaze.

an echoing of the song of the earth itself'.[128] Perhaps what is neglected in Bate's assertion is the question that if language is one of the original contributing factors of the ecological crisis, how can poetry, which is itself composed of language, be a mirror of the earth's natural rhythms? In Bate's view, the *scala natura* would be crowned by the poet, because they are in the best position to voice the nonhuman world through the natural rhythms of poetry. Yet what is also true is that poetry is a meeting of the natural rhythms of speech and the more abstracted textual sign.

Therefore, complications arise in Bate's statement. For example, in 'Of the Surface', the metre formally contains and controls the world, relegating it to human imagery, rather than speaking the song of the earth, which may best be offered in the initial experience presented of the 'three or four | hills and a cloud' (ll. 2-3). Taken this way, the poem is ironic because the speaker who desires to understand the world and relate it into text instead composes lines that transcribe the real into the figurative, therefore enacting the failings of one who attempts to speak for nonhuman phenomena, which find themselves reduced into the human construct of Spring. This becomes clearer with the somewhat disorientating third and final stanza which plays out in the realm of imagination. Where the second stanza began to introduce some more abstract descriptions of the world, like 'yellow' air, the final stanza evokes the world as fully transformed in the human imagination. While the imagery of the disguised singer stealing the moon seems to have little bearing on the trees and clouds of the first stanza, the motif of the tree connects the poem, highlighting that the distorting or transfiguring effects of language and human imagination upon the world. Indeed, where Buttel and Bates have both viewed this final stanza as the culmination of Stevens's emphasis of imagination over reality, I would suggest that these critics perhaps move too quickly beyond the natural in favour of Stevens's metaphysical provenance. Similar to Stevens's 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' (1923), 'Of the Surface of Things' provides readers with a sense of the consequences of looking again, and how language can suggest varying perceptions of a single experience of the surrounding world.[129]

This idea is emphasised with the speakers' self-reflexive statement in the second stanza, 'Reading where I have written', which indicates an awareness of the difference between language and experience in the construction of a poem. Overall, I view the text as an attempt to understand the entangled relation between poetry and world, and further, how poetry traces the delicate line between expressing the nonhuman world and failing to voice it in favour of an anthropocentric perspective. Therefore, I argue that Stevens demonstrates his proto-ecological consciousness to outline the potential and pitfalls of poetry in voicing the more-than-human world. He attempts to

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[128] Bate, p. 76.
[129] The title of the poem, 'Of the Surface', accentuates its concern towards of variated looking, noting that its primary concern is surface level perception, rather than an attempt to elucidate depth or truth.

avoid what Greg Garrard surmises about Wordsworth, who is 'on the whole, far more interested in the relationship of nonhuman nature to the human mind than he is in nature in and for itself'.[130] In 'Of the Surface of Things' the result of this is an exploration into the ways that a poet can arrange words and alter perception of the natural world. Instead of seeking to speak for other beings, Stevens instead dwells with the conflict experienced by the poet and how language can at once be used to create or destroy our relations to the more-than-human world.

Positioning Stevens within Entanglements of Poetry, Language, and Sound

In 'Nature and Silence', Manes ambitiously suggests that a new language should be created to 'leap away from the rhetoric of humanism that we speak today'.[131] He confirms that this new language may include a shift towards the 'ontological egalitarianism of Native American or other primal cultures' whose languages do not differentiate between human and nonhuman, and instead uphold the idea of an 'inspirited' world, which is a view also shared by David Abram. Inspirited worlds contain voices for all beings, including rocks, streams, and trees. Manes names this mode of thought 'wilderness thinking' and it is a perspective which can be traced back to how the concept of biological adaptation challenged the *scala natura* through scientifically denying human superiority over other participants in the world.[132] This form of 'wilderness thinking' can also be observed in nature writing by American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau through to the avant-garde post-modernist poetry of Gary Snyder. As a Modernist, Stevens can be roughly chronologically positioned between Thoreau and Snyder.

While there are many ways to situate Stevens, for the purposes of this thesis, he will be read as both a poet of the post-Thoreauvian American Romantic tradition and one who preceded and influenced those avant-garde American post-modernists whose linguistic experimentalism and ecological engagement in poetry began to come together in the form of environmentalist activism in response to the ecological crisis. Though Stevens is not typically considered a 'wild thinker', his position as an interlocuter between Romanticism, Transcendentalism, and post-modern poetic environmentalism offers the opportunity to read him in the context of these movements, as influenced and influencing. Furthermore, Stevens's complication of the American Romantic tradition allows him to move towards more ecologically engaged writing. His ecological engagement has perhaps been overlooked due to his chronological position within the often-perceived grey expanse of Modernism and the philosophical leanings of initial criticism of his work, which positioned his engagement with the 'actual world' as tenuous.[133]

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[130] Garrard, 'Pastoral' in *Ecocriticism*, 37-63 (p. 47).
[131] Manes, p. 25.
[132] Ibid, p. 22, 25.
[133] Alan Filreis, *Wallace Stevens and the Actual World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

At the start of this chapter, I showed how Stevens's 'Anecdote of the Jar' has generally been read in an 'environing' sense, with the jar or human object surrounded by the wilderness, exemplifying a clear divide between human and nonhuman. While these readings offer a perspective on the human and nonhuman relationship, ecocriticism can provide an alternative viewpoint, allowing a re-reading of the text as 'eco' rather than 'enviro'. Critics Michael Rubenstein and Justin Neuman suggest that an examination of 'the regional, mutually constitutive encounter between nature and culture: an act of making' more fully encompasses readings of both the jar and the wilderness as interdependent and entangled participants.[134] Stevens's language can attend to this reading of the poem as a 'constitutive encounter' of entangled ontologies rather than a singular reflection of a human-centred environment.

In noting the striking phrases that Stevens employs to describe the jar, such as 'tall and of a port in air', Rubenstein and Neuman curiously suggest the poem's syntax to be 'gnarled'.[135] To be 'gnarled' is 'to contort, twist, make knotted and rugged like an old tree', implying that Stevens's linguistic construction of the poem is organically embedded into the earth and knots and twists back upon itself and its surroundings.[136] The internal rhyme of 'round' and 'ground' linguistically and aurally situates the jar within the landscape and is suggestive of the emergence of an interconnected ecology where human and nonhuman co-create the world, rather than exist in dualistic opposition. Immediately, the constituent elements of the poem occupy a more equal space than those in 'Of the Surface of Things'.

The jar, which is 'round upon the ground' is also 'tall and of a port of air'. The metaphor of 'port' is suggestive of a harbour, yet the 'tall' height of the jar signifies the referent to 'port' as a gateway, which prefigures the 'Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,' in Stevens's later poem, 'Idea of Order at Key West' (ll. 54).[137] The jar can therefore be viewed as both grounded in the land and as a gateway for the intermingling of human and more-than-human-nature. The jar functions then, not as an imposition by humanity amongst a vast and sprawling landscape, or as Rubenstein and Neuman conclude, reduced by its essential bareness in comparison to the wilderness which 'gives', but instead a threshold through which the human and world respond to each other, initiating enmeshment and embodying ecological interrelation.[138] Through a 'gnarled'

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[134] Rubenstein and Neuman, 'Modernism in the Wilderness' in *Modernism and Its Environments*, 115-142 (p. 137).
[135] Rubenstein and Neuman, p. 137.
[136] 'Gnarled', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/79449?rskey=bQsNnE&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid> [accessed 12th March 2021].
[137] 'Port', in *The Oxford English Dictionary,* [online], <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/148090?rskey=UfLCE8&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid> [accessed 12th March 2021].
[138] Rubenstein and Neuman, p. 139.

and ambiguous use of language that knots and entangles meaning through syntax and sound, Stevens can stage the complex interrelations of human and nonhuman and provide a space within language to consider how poetry may be able to contribute to a more ecologically sustainable mode of communication.

Where in Stevens we may observe 'gnarled' syntax as a potential key to the barrier that language creates between human and nonhuman, Manes suggests that a regeneration of language posits a resolution in connecting literature to the origin of anthropocentric thought. Still, in both propositions, how would these 'new' forms of language encompass the nonhuman if humans had again devised them? In an age of waste and pollution caused through overproduction of materials, it seems at odds with an ecological perspective in mind to discard an entire form of communication. Instead, looking towards a re-framing of meaning within our existing language could be the compromise in a form of linguistic recycling. In this sense, ecocritics can ensure that we do not 'undo reason' but instead risk our sense of reason that has been solidified into anthropocentrism and grounded in Western humanism.[139] We may then become aware of the world in a new mode, similar to how Ralph Waldo Emerson describes the 'slight dislocations in nature' which we may understand as 'not fixed, but sliding'.[140] A consequence of such changed thinking is the bringing to attention towards the failings and limitations of how we have used and still use language in relation to nonhuman beings. This heightened awareness towards language may encourage a transition to a re-framing of language towards a more collaborative mode of communication that appreciates the chiastic and dynamic nature of the world.

'Vocalissimus': Who Speaks for Who?

Stevens ends his first collection, *Harmonium* (1923) with the short poem, 'To the Roaring Wind'. It is in this final poem that the speaker acknowledges the communicative abilities of nonhuman entities. The speaker addresses an unknown entity, presumed to be the 'Roaring Wind' of the title, demanding:

> What syllable are you seeking,
> Vocalissimus,
> In the distances of sleep?
> Speak it.[141]

The speaker at once asks the nonhuman to speak for itself and also wishes to know how can they, as human poet, understand the wind. The speaker throws this question to the wind, but in doing so

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[139] Manes, p. 25.
[140] Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Circles', in *Essays* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media Inc., 2021), 126-133 (p. 130). ProQuest Ebook Central.
[141] Stevens, 'To the Roaring Wind', *CP*, p. 121, ll. 1.

also refracts the question back to themself: how do I form the base units of linguistic signs into an all-encompassing language?

One of Stevens's traits as a poet is to use odd sounding words, or to make them up, and this playful language-making brings the sounds of words into the foreground of the poem. For example, 'Vocalissimus', sounds like a Latinate term and the play on 'vocalis' implies an invocation not just for the wind to speak, but a direct address to the wind to communicate to the speaker (ll. 2). A recognition that communication is one-way in favour of the human is evident from the speaker's unanswered call for the wind to speak its voice. A further ambiguity is felt in the phrase describing the 'distances of sleep' which implies a physical separation between the two participants in the poem (ll. 3). The evocation of sleep implies a state of unconsciousness, and we are reminded that sleep reduces our awareness of the physical world. Buell's theory of the environmental unconscious is useful here, as he describes how humans have ignored or distanced themselves from the natural world though a lack of attention. Human language therefore plays a key role in this distancing because language can centralise the human in favour over other forms of life.

A lack of attention towards nonhumans prevents the 'individual or collective' from 'coming to full consciousness at whatever level: observation, thought, articulation and so forth'.[142] Distance is physical ('observation'), mental ('thought') and communicative ('articulation'). A risk of being in a state of permanent environmental unconscious is that we remain isolated from nonhumans, never asking for the 'syllables that they seek'.[143] Yet, there is potential in the environmental unconscious to be a place from which we may awaken and begin to collapse the 'distances of sleep'. Potential lies in a 'residual capacity (of individual humans, authors, texts, readers, communities) to awake to fuller apprehension of physical environment and one's interdependence with it'.[144] In 'To the Roaring Wind', the idea of environmental unconscious is manifested in the phraseology of 'distances of sleep'.[145] Language or syllables have created a one-sided, environing communication system, within which poetry is implicit. Stevens closes *Harmonium* with an unanswered call to the nonhuman to speak, prefiguring discussion in his later works of how to mediate and break down the distances between human and nonhuman through a sound-focused ecopoetics.

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[142] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 22.
[143] Stevens, 'To the Roaring Wind', ll. 1.
[144] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, p. 22.
[145] Stevens, 'To the Roaring Wind', ll. 3.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Stevens reflects that he writes poetry to 'help people live their lives'.[146] His work had an intentional, social purpose, and when read as an ecopoet, Stevens's words and sounds offer fresh modes of thought in relation to how we hear the more-than-human world. As I have argued across this chapter, language and its implicit relation to the ecological crisis is one of the greatest challenges that ecocritics mediate, with some first wave ecocriticsm subscribing to that exact anthropocentric language that serves to silence nonhuman beings. Stevens understood these ecological limitations of Western language, and sought to display the interconnections of beings in the world through a poetics that 'would make us realise that we are creatures, not of a part, which is our everyday limitation, but of a whole for which, for the most part, we have as yet no language.'[147] The sounds of words provide Stevens with the basis upon which to begin to move beyond this everyday limitation of textual signs that subscribe to a Cartesian worldview of dualism and human superiority. Stevens's proto-ecological consciousness and resulting ecopoetics do not therefore follow a Heideggerian anthropocentric notion of *dasein* but instead follows Merleau-Ponty's ecophenomenology whereby all beings are connected in the flesh of the world. In the subsequent chapters and throughout this thesis, I will therefore read Stevens's poetic purpose as one that, as Buell describes, involves a process of ecological 'awakening— retrievals of physical environment from dormancy to salience— and of distortion, repression, forgetting, inattention'.[148] I view the project of Stevens's ecopoetics as one where the poet is not 'the guardian, the treasurer, the primary maker of language' but instead the co-creator of an enlivened language that invites the nonhuman to participate rather than remain silenced.[149]

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[146] Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and The Sound of Words', *NA*, p. 29.
[147] Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', *OP*, 267-280 (p. 271).
[148] Buell, *Endangered World*, p. 18.
[149] Bate, *Song of the Earth*, p. 272.

Chapter Two: Stevens and Organic Sound

Using Lawrence Buell's paradigm of the environmental unconscious, I have established that Stevens's ecopoetics are concerned with addressing the ecological awakening of that which is distorted, repressed, forgotten, and ignored due to socio-historical subscriptions to an anthropocentric, 'environing' language. By reading Stevens's work through an ecocritical lens, scholarship may begin to unpick the various entanglements between language, poetry and ecocriticsm which radiate from a perceived limitation of human language to allow nonhuman entities to speak for themselves. Indeed, through his ecopoetics, Stevens reforms and addresses the limitations of language to catalyse an understanding that humans are part of the wider biosphere, as 'creatures', rather than subscribing to Cartesian divisions and hierarchies between humans and nature.[1] I will develop these ideas in the second chapter of my thesis which will focus on locating Stevens's ecopoetic position in relation to Romanticism, a literary moment significant to both Stevens's development as a poet, and to the origins of ecocriticism.

To pick up a thread from Chapter One, the following discussion contains a continued evaluation of Romantic poetic theories, predominately concerning ideas around nature, poetic metre, and the concept of organic form. Indeed, the notion of the human as part of the interconnected whole, which is prevalent within Romantic poetry, forms a significant part of Stevens's inheritance as a poet of both the British and American Romantic traditions. For example, Stevens wrote to Ronald Lane Latimer in January 1938, stating that 'I write poetry in order to formulate my ideas and to relate myself to the world.'[2] In other words, Stevens used poetry to go beyond the surface of things, and it is this fascination with the interpolation between inner and outer worlds that places him within the tradition of the Romantics, but is also supplemented by his place as a twentieth century poet. Indeed, first wave ecocriticism turned towards Romantic texts as initial sources of study due to their emphasis on the notion of the interconnected whole and appreciation of natural forms. However, despite his strong connection to Romantic poetry, mention of Stevens's work within first wave ecocriticism is scarce, something this chapter examines in its early stages.

As well as the emphasis upon the role of the imagination in Stevens's inheritance of the Romantic tradition, critics generally agree that, like the Romantics, Stevens 'found solace and

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[1] As I discuss in the section, 'Entanglements of Poetry', poetry is therefore the supreme fiction because of its potential to incite changes in understanding that decentre the human position within the world and challenge these anthropocentric boundaries of language. See Chapter One of this thesis, pp. 15-21.
[2] Stevens, *Letters* ('Entry 339, 'To Ronald Lane Latimer'), pp. 305-306.

strength in the natural world'.[3] While an analysis of the entirety of Stevens's Romanticism is not within the scope of this thesis, in this chapter I will take Stevens's shared experience of solace from nature to explore how the concept of organic form is applied within his ecopoetics on the level of the word, line, and stanza.[4] My key areas of focus will be how human and nonhuman encounters interplay with each other through poetic form, language, and sound in Stevens's well-known poem, 'The Idea of Order at Key West'. While considering Helen Vendler's claim that Stevens is the 'dependent heir' of the Romantic tradition, I hope to show how he engaged with and developed Romantic ecopoetics, and suggest some of the complications that Stevens's Romantic ecopoetics offer the entanglement of language and sound through a new reading of one of his most famous works.[5]

Form and Thought: Stevens as the Modern Romantic

Stevens the Modernist poet and Stevens the Romantic poet are perhaps at odds when it comes to the subject of poetic form and metre. Free verse is positioned as the dominant form of the twentieth century, and Stevens is no exception to this generalisation.[6] T. E. Hulme's virulent dismissal of regular form is a strong example of Modernist disavowal of regular poetics, in favour of a looser mode.[7] He predicts that 'We are no longer concerned that stanzas shall be shaped and polished like gems, but rather that some vague mood shall be communicated.'[8] Frank Kermode expands on Hulme's opposition to regular form, explaining that Hulme's statements 'proclaimed a war against Romanticism'.[9] This war, Kermode notes, was political, philosophical and aesthetic; 'all Rousseauistic rubbish about personality, progress and freedom, all a denial of human limit and imperfection'.[10] Modern poetry in Hulme's view should be concerned with expressive rather than constrictive form, and ought to expose the limitations of the human rather than exhibiting an ideal image of mankind. Despite this intense hostility towards Romanticism, Kermode's analysis

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[3] George S. Lensing, 'Chapter 29: The Romantic and the Anti-Romantic in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens' in *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*, ed. by Alfred Bendixen and Stephen Burt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 650-699 (p. 652).

[4] Edward Ragg draws enlightening parallels between Stevens, Wordsworth and Coleridge regarding the development of Romantic and German Idealist philosophy into the phenomenological mode of thought in the twentieth century, including that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. See: 'Chapter Three: The 'in-visible' abstract: Stevens's idealism from Coleridge to Merleau-Ponty' in *Wallace Stevens and the Aesthetics of Abstraction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 78-107.

[5] Helen Vendler, 'The Pensive Man: The Pensive Style', in *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 13-37 (p. 13).

[6] Kevin Walzer, 'Wallace Stevens, Meter, and Natural Classicism', *CEA Critic*, 62, 2 (Winter/ Spring 2000), pp. 45-53 (p. 46) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44378315>, [accessed 7 April 2021].

[7] Regular form in this thesis is defined as equal and distinct stanzas, generally including elements of closed form, such as regular metrical rhythms and rhymes.

[8] T. E. Hulme, 'A Lecture on Modern Poetry', *Further Speculations*, ed. by Sam Hynes (University of Minnesota Press, 1955), pp. 67-77 (p.71). ProQuest Ebook.

[9] Frank Kermode, 'Part II: The Twentieth Century, T.E. Hulme' in *Romantic Image* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2001), pp. 142-163, p. 142. ProQuest Ebook.

[10] Ibid, p. 149.

ironically exposes that Hulme's thought has a legacy in Romantic theory, indicating a persistent thread of Romanticism within Modernist writing.

Kevin Waltzer agrees with this notion of a continuing Romantic thread in twentieth century poetics, commenting that it 'is a misreading of modernism's approach to poetic form, however, to identify modernist experimentation solely with free verse'. Waltzer's assertion relates directly to Stevens because what is often overlooked is his use of metrically regular and closed forms.[11] Stevens offers little guidance on his choice of form, explaining in a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson in 1937 that, 'I am rather inclined to disregard form so long as I am free and can express myself freely' and further, that 'A free form does not assure freedom. As a form, it is just one more form. So that it comes to this, I suppose, that I believe in freedom regardless of form.'[12] Acknowledging the emphasis of freedom within modern poetics, Stevens can be said to take Hulme's position, citing freedom over regularity. However, despite his dismissal of form in preference for poetic freedom, there is evidence in these extracts that Stevens is not wholly against the use of regular forms in his poetics. Reading closely, free form for Stevens is 'just one more form', and provided that freedom takes precedence over form, any form may be used.

Equally, as Walzer notes, the majority of Stevens's poems tend towards regular stanzas, leading to a consistency of form across his work which often contrasts with the openness and flux of his subjects.[13] Dennis Taylor agrees, concluding that while Stevens's metres are 'nearly invisible', he occupies a significant place in the 'transition from traditional to free verse' first beginning with traditional forms, and varying them in ways that 'must be carefully understood'.[14] Stevens's use of form and metre within his poetics therefore relates to his position as interlocuter between Romantic literary traditions, and modern and post-modern styles. I will further explore in the following section how Stevens's position between literary styles and forms may also apply to wider spaces, such as that between the human and nonhuman.

The lyric, often associated with the British Romantics, is an ideal place to explore the space between human and nonhuman, the sensual and intelligible, the space of poesies.[15] Romantic lyric subjects have traditionally been categorised in two focal areas by scholarship: the dramatisation or staging of the transcendence of the human self against or over the world, and how the human

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[11] Walzer, 'Wallace Stevens, Meter, and Natural Classicism', p. 46.

[12] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 366, 'To Norman Holmes Pearson, June 24, 1937')*, pp. 322-323.

[13] Walzer, 'Wallace Stevens, Meter, and Natural Classicism', p. 47.

[14] Taylor, 'The Apparitional Metres of Wallace Stevens', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, Special Issue: Stevens and Structures of Sound 15, 2 (1991), 209-228 (p. 209) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44885492>, [accessed 10 April 2021].

[15] William Keach, 'Chapter Eleven: Rethinking Romantic poetry and history: lyric resistance, lyric seduction' in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry*, ed. by James Chandler and Maureen N. McLane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 217-238 (p. 217). Cambridge Ebook.

self is made whole by coming into contact with the external world. These enactments are channelled through subjective meditations that revolve either around the poet, the speaker, or an 'I' who explores relations between poet, speaker and the world through 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' as noted by William Wordsworth in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1802).[16] Contributing to these ideas, Mutlu Konuk Blasing contends the centrality of language to lyric poetry, perhaps challenging traditional emphasis on emotional subjectivity. Blasing surmises that:

> We did not come with language; we have all had to learn it. To dismiss the materiality of language is to dismiss the emotionally charged history that made us who we are— subjects in language, which is the subject of the lyric.[17]

Encoded in Blasing's contribution to lyric understanding is the emotional and material elements of language, which at once bring the lyric into being and are also the focus of its subject. Here, the conventionally assumed 'I' so often positioned as the central speaker within a lyric poem is observed more as material sign rather than symbolic referent. Somewhat similarly, Jonathan Culler comments that the lyric form presents a 'textual surface' as opposed to a subjective 'interplay of forces that would form, act upon, and limit and subject'.[18] Like Blasing, Culler's position towards the lyric deviates from traditional assumptions of the poet's subjective interior experience or the fictionalised and detached speaker or 'I', and rather places greater emphasis on the rhetorical effect of lyrical poetry.

Stevens's lyrics modulate between conventional and more recent theorisations of the lyric, in part, due to the variations regarding form and metre within his work. Helen Vendler conceptualises Stevens's formal experimentations as a 'patient experimentation towards his own voice' and claims that it was only in his later phase in the 1940s that he reached something like a 'final metrical form'.[19] In Vendler's comment, Blasing's notion of language as the subject of the lyric is reflected in Stevens's search for his own voice through poetic form. Going further into metrical form, Dennis Taylor speaks of Stevens's metrical variations as 'ghosts' of traditional metrical forms, 'where the visual shapes have been pruned away from their traditional aural accompaniment.'[20] Stevens's metrical and formal experiments closely align with his poetic voice

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[16] Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802)* <https://web.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/lbprose.html> [accessed 2 March 2023].

[17] Mutlu Konuk Blasing, 'Introduction' in *Lyric Poetry, The Pain and Pleasure of Words* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 1-6 (p. 6). ProQuest Ebook.

[18] Jonathan Culler, 'Afterward' in *The Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations*, ed. by Marion Thain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 237-246, p. 243, ProQuest Ebook.

[19] Vendler, 'Introduction: The Two Poetries' in *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems*, pp. 1-12 (p. 3).

[20] Taylor, 'The Apparitional Metres of Wallace Stevens', p. 220.

and sense of self as a poet, finding his rhythm of word and world amongst the precedence of literary forms both past and emerging.

In a well-known comment to Katherine Frazier in 1942, Stevens describes his line as a 'pentameter line, but it runs over and under now and then.'[21] Even so, throughout Stevens's career, his lines do tend towards either a pentameter or a tetrameter. Donald Justice's insightful essay, 'The Free Verse Line in Stevens' attends to Stevens's metrical complexity.[22] For Justice, it is Stevens's mastery of traditional metrical forms that enabled the generation of his free verse, and he cites the English heroic line or unrhymed iambic pentameter as the line used by Stevens to fit his maturing and expanding purposes (p. 26). The line in Stevens is essential to the overall understanding of the work and Stevens's varying metres work to communicate and shape the ideas of the poem. Justice also notes that equal to the visual experience of Stevens's line is 'the sound of poetry which remains primary' (p. 15). Particularly interesting in Justice's discussion is his idea of the 'loosening line', where 'an anapaest takes the place of the basic iamb', which Justice also calls 'anapaestic stretching' (p. 29). Metrical variation and the addition of an extra syllable tends to lighten the line, yet in Stevens, this lightening is 'intermittent', meaning that the movement of the line can appear heavy. It is this stretching and variation of lines that lends the sense of irregularity to Stevens's verse, loosening the tune of the poem to avoid monotony and creating aural resonance. Even though he was dismissive of regularity within his work, it appears that Stevens's verse has a structural consciousness, with attention paid toward both sight and sound, with the effects of individual phonemes within the line contributing towards the overall comprehension of the poem.

Dennis Taylor ends his article with the conclusion that 'Stevens evokes an enormous metrical history', providing us with 'one of the legitimate theories of free verse meter'.[23] In this sense, within Stevens's work, modulations between metre and form serve to both evoke the traditional Romantic framework of regular and closed forms, and subvert elements of the lyric, such as the distinctive 'I' speaker. Even though, like Hulme, he dismissed poetic form, it is precisely through form that Stevens can reconceptualise his poetics, both establishing his inheritance of traditional poetics and solidifying his position as a modern Romantic poet. Returning to Justice's essay, it is clear that Stevens's careful attention to metrical composition in his work attends to something beyond what the eye can see.[24] Language is key within these modulations of form and metre, as it

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[21] Stevens, *Letters*, (Entry 441, 'To Katherine Frazier, May 19th, 1942'), pp. 407- 408.
[22] Donald Justice, 'The Free Verse Line in Stevens' in *Oblivion: On Writers and Writing* (Ashland: Oregon, Story Line Press, 1998), pp. 13-39 (p. 13).
[23] Taylor, 'The Apparitional Metres of Wallace Stevens', p. 227.
[24] Justice, 'Free Verse Line in Stevens', p. 15.

is the composition of language that forms the tune of the lyric poem. In this sense, language enables the form to take shape, but it is the poet who arranges, deepens and enchants the poem into being.

Romantic Organicism and Ecocritical Beginnings

Helen Vendler, alongside Harold Bloom, is one of Stevens's most well-renowned critics and has been a strong advocate for the claim that Stevens's poetic lineage originates with Romantic poets. Vendler's Stevens is a lonely one, in constant search for an unobtainable truth. Perhaps as a consequence of this loneliness, Vendler highlights the emotional importance of nature and seasonal patterns to Stevens, concluding that 'Spring warmed him into life; winter chilled him into despair'.[25] It is this attention to seasonal change alongside influences of 'philosophic materialism' that for Vendler, made Stevens into 'the most exquisite poet of seasonal change since Keats'. Using the poem of focus in this chapter, 'The Idea of Order at Key West', Vendler shows how Stevens's methodology of hypothesis and contradiction helps him to mediate the relation between 'lyric language' and nature.[26] Vendler's methodology to break the poem down to highlight particular linguistic features is useful to enable observation of the syntactic development of ideas, and as John Koethe notes, allows us to 'focus instead on the movements of the poems themselves, which are the movements of consciousness.'[27] Attention in Vendler's analysis towards the written sign enables a greater understanding of the tangible thought process at play within Stevens's work, deriving from high philosophical speculation. Even so, the emphasis on the written sign in Vendler's criticism removes attention away from the sonic qualities of the poem, which are key to the understanding of enabling nonhuman voices to be heard.

Despite critical focus on the written sign, Vendler places some emphasis on the sonic qualities of Stevens's work from his use of metre. Indeed, Dennis Taylor notes such emphasis, taking from Vendler's opening to *On Extended Wings. Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems* (1969), that Stevens's poems are 'metrical cries of their occasion, part of the res and not about it'.[28] The varying metres and forms of Stevens's work speak through the words, or 'cry' as part of the subject itself and are not external or in addition to language. Interestingly, Taylor and Vendler's understanding of Stevens's metrical quality speaks to Blasing's understanding of how the constituent elements of the lyric form at once bring the words into being which are simultaneously the subject of the lyric. It can then be suggested that Blasing's interpretation of the lyric is an organicist definition, with

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[25] Helen Vendler, 'Wallace Stevens: Hypotheses and Contradictions', *Representations*, 81, 1 (Winter 2003), 99-117 (p. 102) <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2003.81.1.99>. Stevens's loneliness in relation to seasonal change has also been noted by George Lensing.

[26] Ibid, p. 229.

[27] John L. Koethe, 'Helen Vendler's Stevens: A Poet of Language-Driven Meditations', *Wallace Stevens Journal*, 38, 2, (Fall 2014), pp. 151-152 (p. 152) <10.1353/wsj.2014.0029>.

[28] Dennis Taylor, 'Wallace Stevens's Apparitional Metres', (p. 225). For additional context, see Helen Vendler, *On Extended Wings. Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1969), pp. 1-13 (pp. 3-4).

the form and subject emerging from within the work itself. In this sense, Stevens's lyric form and use of metre is connected to the Romantic tradition, and indeed, Taylor discusses that 'Stevens is in the tradition of Emerson, of organic meter, meter-making argument'.[29] Connections between organic form or the artwork occurring naturally from within can be situated within American Transcendentalism. These ideas are located by scholars like Vendler, Taylor and Harold Bloom predominately in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, who both adopt Samuel Taylor Coleridge's metaphor of organic form and naturally occurring artwork.

Today, organicism within literature can be broadly defined as the notion in which the parts are connected or coordinated in the whole.[30] Organic form in poetry is the idea of the natural development of the artwork from within, paralleling the development of naturally occurring biological entities. In other words, organic form within an artwork positions the piece as having occurred from nature itself rather than from previous artworks. Coleridge is the largest advocate of organicist poetics amongst the British Romantics. In his essay, 'On Shakespeare as a Poet', Coleridge distinguishes between organic and mechanical form:

> The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material — as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form on the other hand is innate, it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward Form. Such is the Life, such is the form. Nature, the prime genial artist, inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms.[31]

Nature creates an unlimited array of naturally occurring forms. Organic forms oppose 'mechanic' forms, which are moulded and influenced by humans. Mechanic form arises when the natural properties of the entity are used unnaturally, resulting in a fixed and static artform. Natural form, on the other hand, is free-flowing and offers unlimited possibilities. Coleridge surmises that the exterior of the natural form 'is the physiognomy of the being within, — its true image reflected and thrown out from the concave mirror'. Natural or organic form is a representation of the subject. Following this idea, poetry and language are rooted in nature, and it is the aim of the poet to allow the artwork to take its own form rather than impose a pre-conceived mechanic form. In essence, the cultural entities of language and poetry are positioned as natural and organic if used in the correct way by the artist. Coleridge complicates perceived separations of nature and culture with

[29] Taylor, p. 225.
[30] 'Organicism' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online],
<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/132435?redirectedFrom=organicism#eid> [accessed 16 August 2021].
[31] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'On Shakespeare as a Poet', in *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, ed. Terence Hawkes (London: Penguin, 1969), 61-82 (p. 77).

his formulation of organicist poetics. Art, as part of material culture, is placed firmly as an emergent and organic natural form in his theorisations.

On the other hand, relating to metre, William Wordsworth comments in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* that it is 'injudicious' to write in metre because it can lessen the primary function of the poem, which he cites as pleasure. Metre can 'divest language in a certain degree of its reality' and subtract away from the actual reality or meaning of the poem. In other words, metre misleads the reader away from the reality of the language. Speaking of previous literary attitudes towards metre, Wordsworth argues that metre has divided poetic language from ordinary, everyday speech and can therefore only be used by poets. According to Wordsworth, use of metre is traditionally conceived as a symbol for poetic genius, regardless of poetic skill, and is entangled with notions of the poet's self. It is this entanglement of metre and the poet's identity that provokes Wordsworth to label metrical poetry as 'adulterated phraseology' that has 'perverted' the taste of men.[32] In Wordsworth's view, metre in poetry is distinctly mechanic as it cannot communicate effectively, manipulating language, reducing the reach of the poem and its effect on the reader.

However, returning to American Transcendentalism, Emerson's note towards metre expands on Coleridge's organicist conceptions of poetry:

> it is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem - a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit or a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own and adorns nature with a new thing.[33]

In opposition to Wordsworth, Emerson singles out 'metre-making argument' as the element of poetry that best aligns the form to the natural world. It is the rhythms and sounds of language within a poem that enable what Coleridge describes as the poem shaping and developing 'itself from within'.[34] Likewise, the often cited subject of first wave ecocriticism, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) by Henry David Thoreau describes poesies through a naturalist metaphor, describing that 'As naturally as the oak bears an acorn, and the vine a gourd, man bears a poem, either spoken or done.'[35] Thoreau emphasises the effortlessness of the poet's role in the poetic process, explaining that 'He performs his functions, and is so well that he needs such stimulus to sing only as plants to put forth leaves and blossoms'. Going further, Stanley Cavell asserts that 'Emerson's and Thoreau's relation to poetry is inherently their interest in their own

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[32] Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802)* <https://web.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/lbprose.html> [accessed 2 March 2023].

[33] Emerson, 'The Poet' in *Essays*, Second Series (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1889), pp. 9-40, p. 16. Google Ebook.

[34] Coleridge, 'On Shakespeare as a Poet', in *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, p. 77.

[35] Henry David Thoreau, 'Sunday' in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (Project Gutenberg, 2003), produced by Charles Franks, Carlo Traverso and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team. Project Gutenberg Ebook.

writing'.[36] He clarifies that 'what they are building is writing, that their writing is, as it realizes itself daily under their hands, sentence by shunning sentence, the accomplishment of inhabitation, the making of it happen, the poetry of it'. Poetry, for American Transcendentalists, is a process of natural growth or building, where poem and poet are organically bound to the earth and writing is equivalent to ecological processes. From this perspective, poetry can be viewed as a positive site to explore human and nonhuman interactions.

Broadening discussion into the wider project of Romanticism, it can be observed that within these conversations of organic form, nature or 'Nature' is presented as an idealised force, one that the poet must have particular affinity or attention towards in order to create their best work.[37] A central aim of British and American Romanticism was the re-enchantment with the natural world, due to a presumed distancing or divide brought to attention to major writers of the period through industrialisation. Interdependent connections between human and world were emphasized, opposing and reacting against rationalist separation of man and nature informed by Cartesian philosophy. In his essay, 'Nature' (1836), Emerson discusses the ways that nature is essential to human life:

> These enchantments are medicinal, they sober and heal us. These are plain pleasures, kindly and native to us. We come to our own, and make friends with matter, which the ambitious chatter of the schools would persuade us to despise. We never can part with it; the mind loves its old home: as water to our thirst, so is the rock, the ground, to our eyes, and hands, and feet. It is firm water: it is cold flame: what health, what affinity![38]

Unknown or yet to be understood wonders and mysteries of nature are crucial to human existence and development. Despite the apparent urges of society to 'persuade us to despise' our natural surroundings, human and world are bound. In nature we find health, solace, companionship and *oikos*, or home. In a similar vein, Thoreau elaborates on this essential connection to nature:

> We can never have enough of Nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and Titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander.[39]

Notions of freshness and the need to observe our limits transgressed by nonhuman beings is key to Romantic and Transcendentalist conceptions of nonhuman and human interconnection. Nature

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[36] Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden: An Expanded Edition* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 134. ProQuest Ebook.

[37] For a detailed discussion of the 'nature/ Nature' debate, see Timothy Morton's *Being Ecological* (London: Pelican, 2018).

[38] Emerson, 'Nature' in *Essays*, pp. 95-105 (p. 96).

[39] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* (Project Gutenberg, 1995), produced by Judith Boss and David Widger. Project Gutenberg Ebook.

is a source of artistic and spiritual inspiration, and a reminder of greater powers that provoke elevated feelings beyond what is on offer from modernity. Like any other organism in nature, humans partake in the interconnected whole, or earthly ecosystem. Recognition of our part in the organic structures of the world enabled spiritual renewal for the Romantics. Achieving transcendence through the spirit of nature elevated the individual's connection to perceived higher powers which had been reduced due to industrialisation. These are the 'enchantments' of nature that cannot be named, but can be explored in the imagination, enabling transcendence from everyday life into a mystical essence of the world. To achieve this, one must be attentive to the world about oneself and in tune with the more-than-human elements of life.

Considering the ideas and perceptions towards nature discussed above, it is unsurprising that ecocritical scholarship predominately originated within Romantic literature. In his study, *Romantic Ecology (Routledge Revivals): Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991), Bate develops the notion of the 'Romantic ecology', and how it:

> reverences the green earth because it recognizes that neither physically nor psychologically can we live without green things; it proclaims that there is 'one life' within us and abroad, that the earth is a single vast ecosystem which we destabilize at our peril. In sharp contrast to the so-called 'Romantic Ideology', the Romantic ecology has nothing to do with flight from the material world, from history and society - it is in fact an attempt to enable mankind the better to live in the material world by entering into harmony with the environment.[40]

Bate's advocacy for the Romantic period as a starting point for ecocritical study is grounded in the concept of 'one life' within a 'single vast ecosystem' or interconnected whole.[41] His argument in *Romantic Ecology* focuses on situating Wordsworth's pastoral poetry as distinctly ecological, positioning Romantic 'nature' poetry as Romantic 'ecopoetry'. Key to Bate's discussion surrounding the transformation of Romantic nature poetry into Romantic ecopoetry is language.[42] Bate claims that 'poetry is to be found not only in language but in nature; it is not only a means of verbal expression, it is also a means of emotional communication between man and the natural world.'[43] This distinctly organicist notion implies that language and nature support and generate

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[40] Jonathan Bate, '2. The Economy of Nature' in *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, Routledge Revivals (Oxford: Routledge, 1991), 36-61 (p. 40).

[41] Bate's emphasis on the interconnected whole is echoed by Ralph Pite who argues that Romantic attitudes towards the nonhuman are arranged so that 'equality overcomes the hierarchy which places humankind above nature.' See: Ralph Pite, 'Chapter 11: 'Founded on the Affections': A Romantic Ecology' in *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, ed. by John Parham (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), pp. 144-155 (p. 155). ProQuest Ebook.

[42] Bate is keen to emphasise the materiality of the Romantic ecology, and that within the interconnected whole, Romantic writers better enable the integration between material culture and nature. Ideas of interconnectivity between nature and culture within a singular ecosystem are useful when discussing Stevens's ecopoetic inheritance from the Romantic tradition because Stevens also tends towards interconnectivity within his work to question the materiality of language and the potential of poetry to enable the nonhuman to speak.

[43] Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 17.

poetry, which fulfils a subjective dialogue between human and nonhuman. In Romantic ecopoetry, Bate therefore claims that language is used to bring nature within poetry, as a translator of the nonhuman for the poet. In doing so, the poet fosters an emotional connection with the world, blurring the boundaries between nature and culture.

Despite Bate's advocacy for the Romantic ecology, first wave ecocriticism and particularly Romantic texts, are now approached with wariness by some ecocritics because of their predominant attention towards the 'green' elements of ecological experiences. As Louise Westling points out, 'most early ecocritics praised "nature writing", and promoted writers who attend to and extol the beauties of nonhuman spaces and creatures in an effort to turn cultural attention back to the wider living environment, from specifically, the human realm.'[44] Westling identifies that while the aim of early ecocritical texts looked to direct attention towards the nonhuman realm, these texts provide biased accounts of the nonhuman world, privileging ideas of beauty and unity and ignoring unconventional ecological spaces and experiences. Where Bate identifies the language of Romantic ecopoetics as essential in reforging lost connections to the world, Westling instead argues that the language of these poems only reveals part of what is a complex ecological story. Unresolved tensions between first and second wave criticism of Romantic ecopoetry show that the interactions between language, poetry, poet and world are significant in the discussions surrounding the overall project of ecocritical study as explored in Chapter One of this thesis. Stevens's poetics may help mediate between differing ecocritical waves. However, to understand how Stevens's poetics may be viewed as a mediating ground between different poles of ecocritical thought, I will first identify how Stevens understood and defined the 'romantic' and Romanticism.

Healing the 'wound of finitude': Stevens's Romanticism

In a letter to Ronald Lane Latimer discussing the publication of *Ideas of Order* (1936), Stevens highlights some ideas about the 'romantic'. Perhaps reflective of T. E. Hulme's position, noting that the modern attitude towards the romantic is less than warm, Stevens counters popular opinion with the conception that 'poetry is essentially romantic' and ends with the statement: 'I realize that a poem, like anything else, must make its own way'.[45] This metaphor of 'making its own way' recalls walking, or wandering. Both activities were integral to the composition process for Romantic figures like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Thoreau. Walking was also deeply important to Stevens, who composed pieces on daily walks across Hartford to his office. Indeed, he could cover over forty miles on weekend walks when he lived in New York.[46] Walking connects these

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[44] Louise Westling, 'Introduction' in *Environmental Tradition in English Literature*, 1-8 (p. 1).
[45] Stevens, *Letters*, ('Entry 312, March 12, 1935'), 276-277 (p. 277).
[46] For references to walking in Stevens' journals and letters, see Entry 380, pp. 333-334 and Entry 183, p. 177 in *Letters*.

poets because it was through physical movement that they were able to transform their experiences of the more-than-human world into poetry. Where the route emerges naturally from the walk, so the poem emerges from seen and felt experiences. A poem makes its own way like the poet on a walk, occurring organically from the interaction of movement and experience. It is this transformation of experience into poesies that is romantic for Stevens. Indeed, strands of organic form can be observed in Stevens's words. Genesis of the artwork comes from within, as the poem must 'make its own way' like anything else that is vital and real within the world.

In a piece on Marianne Moore entitled 'A Poet That Matters' (1935), Stevens gives further insight into his understanding of the romantic, or Romantic poetry and its tendency towards organic form. Romantic poetry is and must be 'living' to 'constitute the vital element in poetry'.[47] Romantic poetry is for Stevens, a mode of the 'most skilful expression of the genuine'.[48] In other words, it engages with the real, the vital, and the living truth of the world. Stevens even goes as far to say that if one is not a Romantic poet, 'one is not a poet at all'. Later, he notes that Romantic poetry is 'a process of cross-fertilization, an immense process, all arts considered, of hybridization'.[49] Romantic poetry then, while engaging primarily with the real, partakes in an artistic crossing between what is real and what is imagined. To do so opens poetry up to the possibility of creation and revivification of what is past and what is future, but ultimately, to the truth of reality. Using poetry in this way enables the poet and readers to view the world as a multiplicity of connections, systems and things.

While scholarship tends to place Stevens' affinity with Romanticism more towards the imagination, his musings in 'A Poet That Matters' suggest an interest in the real, more tangible elements of Romanticism. As he mentions in 'Adagia', 'the poet makes silk dresses out of worms'.[50] However, as there can be no silk dresses without the worms, there can be no imagination without reality, and the interplay between these entities form the basis of Stevens's developing ecopoetics. As early as 1902, when Stevens was twenty-three, a journal entry of September 4th outlines the influence of Romantic organic theory and proposes a tension between organicism and the imagination:

> To-day while thinking over organic laws etc. the idea of the German "Organismus" crept into my thoughts - and as I was lunching on Frankfurters + sauerkraut, I felt quite the philosopher. Wonderfully scientific + clear idea, this *organismus* one. Yes: and if I were a materialist I might value it. But only last night I was lamenting that the fairies were things of the past. The organismus is truck - give me the fairies,

[47] Stevens, 'A Poet That Matters', *OP,* pp. 220-221.
[48] Ibid, p. 220.
[49] Ibid, p. 221.
[50] Stevens, 'Adagia', *OP*, p. 184.

> the Cloud-Gatherer, the Prince of Peace, the Mirror of Virtue- and a pleasant road to think of them on, and a starry night to be with them.[51]

Stevens's denial of materialism is interesting considering that the materialist philosophy of George Santayana had a great influence upon Stevens. In the above extract a conflict between materialism and idealism can be observed, with Stevens deliberating between scientific theories of organism and supernatural beings. The reference to organic laws is particularly relevant to Stevens's application of organic form and development of Stevens's ecopoetics. Tobias Cheung outlines the etymological history of the term 'organism' and concludes that by the 1830s, the phrase 'individual organism' was well established in various research fields. [52] In light of Kantian whole-part idealism, German physiologist and anatomist Johannes Muller used 'Organismus' to define the 'germ as 'an 'unstructured' (*formloses*) 'potential whole' that develops into a Kantian whole-part unit.'[53] Muller's theory is most directly related to the contemporary understanding of the organism which constitutes a living thing that maintains an organised structure. More directly related to organic form and prior to Kantian emphasis on the micro-macrocosm, the whole-part role of the individual organism within nature is a seventeenth-century application of the term that gives increased focus on the role of organisation within a body.

Physical meaning of the term can also be traced in Medieval uses of the noun, 'organismus', linked to the Latin, *organizare*, meaning 'to play an instrument' or 'to sing in more than one voice'.[54] From here, Cheung traces the corporeal origins of the word and cites Leibniz's use of the words '*organisme* (only in singular and in French), *organismus* (in Latin) and *organisation* (in French) to characterize the divine mechanism of organic bodies'.[55] In Leibniz's view, the organism is a principle of order within nature, and Cheung notes that 'The parts of the world are "full of an organism" (*pleines d'organisme*), and not of plural organisms.'[56] When Wallace Stevens reflects that he was musing on 'organic laws', it can be readily assumed that his thought was focused around these discussions, which feed into the ideas around Romantic organic form. Even so, the latter half of his entry highlights an opposition in Stevens's thought. Stevens's disavowal of the *organismus* in preference for the 'fairies, the Cloud-Gatherer, the Prince of Peace, the Mirror of

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[51] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 64, 4th September 1902), p. 60.
[52] Tobias Cheung, 'From the Organism of a Body to the Body of an Organism: Occurrence and Meaning of the Word 'Organism' from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 39, 3, (September 2006), 319-339 (p. 335) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4028480>, [accessed 6 January 2021].
[53] Cheung, 'From the Organism of a Body to the Body of an Organism', p. 337.
[54] Cheung, p. 322.
[55] Cheung, p. 325.
[56] Cheung, p. 326.

Virtue' is reflective of the tension between scientific and imaginative strands of thought that can be traced back to Romantic figures and forwards into modernism, and Late Modernist poetry.[57]

As I have described, notions of organic form and the alignment between poetry and the natural world are ideas shared between British and American Romantic figures and Stevens. Despite these connections, ecocriticism, which located itself predominately within Romantic texts at its inception, has not largely engaged with the Romantic element of Stevens's work. This may be because, as Jonathan Bate has claimed, even though Stevens is an inheritor of the Romantic tradition, his emphasis on the imagination throughout his work has led to a misreading of the Romantic tradition to be made 'of imagination not nature.'[58] Challenging this reading of Stevens, as I have begun to formulate in my first chapter and will develop throughout this thesis, Stevens was as much a poet of reality as he was of the imagination. Stevens's attention towards the imagination was a direct influence of the Romantic tradition, as was his interest in the poetic interactions between imagination and the more-than-human world. To claim that Stevens is wholly a poet of the imagination is to only read half of Stevens.

While some Romantic ecopoetic ideas have since drawn criticism from second wave ecocritics, these themes provide the base for Stevens's ecopoetic inheritance and the foundations of ecocriticism as a study. Even though it can be acknowledged that the ecological spaces of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have long since transformed, Romantic meditations surrounding the understanding of the entanglements between humans and nature, and how humans operate within various ecosystems are still important questions that continue to be addressed in contemporary ecopoetry and scholarship. Despite the parallels outlined between Romantic ecopoetics and Stevens's ecopoetic inheritance from writers like Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, and Emerson, first wave ecocriticism largely failed to fully engage with Stevens's ecopoetics. A suggestion as to why this gap in scholarship exists may be related to Stevens's place as both a Romantic poet and a Modernist. His modern context complicates his romantic inheritance, essentially creating a new Romanticism more adept at responding to the pressures of reality.

Stevens was aware of and resistant to the romantic trajectory that his thought placed him within. In a letter of 21 July 1953, he writes that 'the past is my own and not something marked

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[57] While this thesis focuses on the Romantic context, it is important to note that the idealism and anti-materialist view of French Symbolism is also present in Stevens's invocation of fairies, the Cloud-Gatherer and the Mirror of Virtue. Dana Wilde makes a useful assessment of the dialogue between Stevens's Romantic and Symbolist contexts. According to Wilde, Stevens's 'gaiety of language' provides a superficial link to the Symbolist poets such as Mallarmé or Valéry due to the opacity it lends the poems, however, ultimately, Stevens's work can be comprehended, which lends a connection to the Romantic poets. See: 'Romantic and Symbolist Contexts in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 10, 1, (Spring 1986), 42-57 (pp. 42-43) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44879205> [accessed 6 October 2020].
[58] Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 7.

Coleridge, Wordsworth, etc. I know of no one who has been particularly important to me. My reality-imagination complex is entirely my own even though I see it in others'.[59] Whether deliberate or not, Stevens syntactically draws attention to his 'reality-imagination complex' which arguably sets his work apart from the Romantics. Indeed, the interconnectivity between the imagination and reality; the 'elusiveness and shifting allegiances' between them, and Stevens's investment in foregrounding reality as 'the base', is as George Lensing has commented, one of the ways in which Stevens is 'anti-romantic'.[60] Rather than sustaining an interest in a transcendental imagining of nature within his work, Stevens was more greatly concerned with the interpolation between imagination and reality, and how poetry can communicate the materiality of experience through words and sounds. In this sense, Stevens challenges the anti-materialism of Romantic poetry by emphasising a poetics that holds both material reality and subjective imagination on equal planes.

The oscillation between inner and outer and mind and world is Stevens's modern romanticism or as Lensing comments, how Stevens 'redefines' Romanticism in the twentieth century. Evidence of this redefinition or modern Romanticism can be observed in the short poem, 'Man and Bottle', where the speaker claims that:

> The poem lashes more fiercely than the wind,
> As the mind, to find what will suffice, destroys
> Romantic tenements of rose and ice.[61]

Using the familiar Romantic trope of calling to the wind, Stevens's inheritance of Romanticism places him on the same solitary quest of locating an interior or subjective experience of the world, as suggested through the internal rhyme of 'mind' and 'find'. Yet on this journey, the poem itself takes precedence and violently 'lashes' and 'destroys' the Romantic 'tenements of rose and ice'. Stevens's personal voice and feelings towards the Romantic tradition can be observed in the harsh and brutal language which perhaps unconsciously reflects his personal rebellion against the Romantic tradition that he is placed within. Stevens's modern Romantic poem moves outwards from the conventional dwellings of Romantic idealisations of nature, breaking down this comfortable dwelling to allow the poet to align exterior reality with personal, imaginative perceptions of the world. Even so, traditional Romantic conventions remain and Stevens's modern Romanticism is unable to completely shut the door, resulting in a constant circling on the periphery of 'what will suffice'.[62] Where the Romantics sought to close the gap between the sensual and the

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[59] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 875, 'July 21, 1953'), pp. 792-793 (p. 792).
[60] Lensing, 'The Romantic and the Anti-Romantic', pp. 658-659.
[61] Stevens, 'Man and Bottle', *CP*, pp. 253-254 (p. 253), ll. 18-20.
[62] Ibid. Stevens's lingering on the periphery between Romantic subjective idealisations of the nonhuman and an awareness of the importance of the base of reality can be traced through a line of influence to contemporary Late Modernist ecopoets, which will be commented on further in Chapter Four.

ideal, Stevens instead resists the Romantic compulsion to heal the painful 'wound of finitude' with his poetic language and instead resolved to occupy the gap between the 'sensual and the intelligible'.[63] This space is where Bonnie Costello locates Stevens's mediation of the unframeable flux and relates to what Scott Knickerbocker calls 'the space between the human and nonhuman where poetry occurs.'[64] It is from this conflicted space that Stevens's complicated Romantic ecopoetics evolves and develops, leading with the application of organic theory to create a work which emerges from itself, yet not always in a straightforward way. The following sections will evaluate Stevens's Romantic ecopoetic inheritance to observe how his organicist thought is present in 'The Idea of Order at Key West', asking whether the poem is successful in sounding the voice of the nonhuman.

'She sang beyond the genius of the sea': Anthropocentric Transcendentalism

Humans are drawn to the sea, perhaps because all organic life finds its biological roots in water. Despite this allure, for humans, marine spaces can be particularly hostile ecosystems where we can only be temporary inhabitants. In a journal entry from 24th August 1902, Stevens recognises the sea as an unwelcoming habitat and one where the human cannot take dominion everywhere:

> I am not at home by the sea; My fancy is not at all marine, so to speak; when I sit on the shore and listen to the waves they only suggest wind in treetops. A single coup d'oeil is enough to see all as a rule. The sea is loveliest far in the abstract when the imagination can feed upon the idea of it. The thing itself is dirty, wobbly and wet.[65]

In this entry, Stevens positions himself as earth-bound, so much so that the movement of waves is only suggestive of 'the sound of a few leaves'.[66] He claims that one needs only to glance fleetingly at the sea to take in the entirety of its being, and that the actuality of the sea is less than pleasant, being 'dirty, wobbly and wet.' Only in the imagination or 'fancy' is the sea at its 'loveliest far in the abstract'. Fluctuating between the thing as it is and the thing perceived, Stevens is unable to locate a stable idea of the sea.

One of Stevens's most widely read poems, 'The Idea of Order at Key West' is one of the key texts within his canon that enacts an encounter between the human and the nonhuman. The poem stages a meeting between a female figure on the shoreline and the sea, locating itself in the fringe between two different ecosystems and where known becomes unknown. Despite this, the periphery setting of the shoreline in 'Idea of Order' is often overlooked as a backdrop with critical analysis often directed instead towards the woman singing. It is through the female singer that

[63] Robert S. Lehman, 'Abstract Pleasures: Romanticism and Finitism in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens', *Modern Philology*, 111, 2, (November 2013), 308-328 (pp. 309, 315) <https://doi.org/10.1086/673308>.
[64] Knickerbocker, p. 12.
[65] Stevens, *Letters*, (Entry 63, 'From his Journal, August 24, 1902'), p. 58.
[66] Stevens, 'The Snow Man', *CP*, pp. 10-11 (p. 10), ll. 9.

some critics have made connections to the Romantic precedence of the poem. Angus Cleghorn, for example, comments how the poem 'addresses romantic potency by investigating its central source of inspiration, the muse'.[67] Wallace Martin also agrees with this connection, pointing out similarities between Stevens's singer of a song 'unintelligible to the poet' to Wordsworth's 'The Solitary Reaper' (1805).[68] Martin's connection between 'Idea of Order' and Wordsworth's poem is particularly interesting to this discussion, as he singles out the notion of a song that is heard but not completely understood. Developing Martin's notion of the song heard but not understood, I argue that 'Idea of Order' stages and enacts a central tension between two voices: that of the she and that of the sea. The speaker uses the poem to explore the balance between constraining these voices or urging them to shift towards, or transcend 'beyond', the limits of human communication. This shift ultimately enacts a poetics of erasure towards the written sign in favour of sound to expose the voice of the nonhuman sea. `

Victoria Shinbrot offers an insightful analysis into the geographical location of the poem. Taking note of the poem's focus on water, she argues that the sea with its 'fluid and free-flowing' quality shares with the poem's ability to connect 'itself to the world and isolate itself from it'.[69] The key parallel here is the simultaneous constriction and liberation shared by the sea and the poetic form. The poem, like the sea, repeatedly moves to and from its subject, mediating tension between the written sign and the sounds of the words. It is through this formal tension and fluctuation that Stevens is able to 'reformulate the traditional boundaries of the lyrical voice'.[70] Where a conventional lyric form enacts stable demarcations between the 'I' and the lyric subject, Shinbrot asserts that the lyric 'I' within the poem is destabilised into two roles as 'listener and singer' of the sea, the song of the woman and ultimately, the poem itself.[71] 'Idea of Order' does not solely express the subjectivity of the traditional lyric 'I' speaker, but instead extends itself outside of this range, intersecting the 'I' with the 'sea', a 'she' and a 'we' within a double tune of poem and song.[72] Essentially, what Stevens presents in the poem is a collection of voices that push and pull against each other within a lyrical framework, in a form of call and response. The intermingling of voices throughout the poem strongly lends the poem to Romantic organic form, where the sounds of the words across the text and its subjects emerge from one another, blurring

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[67] Angus Gleghorn, 'Questioning the Composition of Romance in Wallace Stevens's "The Idea of Order at Key West"', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 22, 1 (Spring 1998), 23-38 (p. 23) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44884498> [accessed 13 June 2021].
[68] Wallace Martin, 'She and/or the Sea in "The Idea of Order at Key West"', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 26, 1, (Spring 2002), pp. 88-98 (p. 89) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44884676> [accessed 24 July 2021].
[69] Victoria Shinbrot, 'The Lyric Element and the Prosaic World in "The Idea of Order at Key West"', 29, 2 (Fall 2005), 263-274 (p. 263) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44884961> [accessed 7 May 2021].
[70] Shinbrot, 'The Lyric Element and the Prosaic World', p. 263.
[71] Ibid, p. 264.
[72] Ibid, p. 265.

the boundaries between what is human language and what is not. This blurring of language boundaries speaks to Jesper Hoffmeyer's theory of the semiosphere, whereby human language is viewed as but one of the many gestures of communication within the entangled ecological systems of the world.[73]

Following this, the authority of the female singer in the poem is called into question in terms of how far her voice can assert human language over the language of the sea. On a similar level, human language in the form of the written sign is also precarious when standing in tension with the organic polyphonous sounds. Various voices contribute to the poem's inception in a form of lyric ecology, where one voice cannot be fully distinguished from the other. As Mccullouch notes, the poem operates 'Like snippets of overheard conversation, musical effects surface out of the swirl of sound, become coherent, and just as quickly disperse again into chaos.'[74] In other words, the poem functions like the sea itself, with swirling sound holding the constituent elements together to construct the whole.

The sounds of the words provide the framework from which the poem emerges due to the intensive use of alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. In Coleridgean terms, it can be said that the sound-sense of the poem synthesises the form, allowing it to organically take shape from the sounds of the words, syntax and rhythm. Mccollough cites the 'stylistic, formal, and argumentative differences and repetitions that often seem just beyond the poet's control' as what gives the poem its 'intensity', seeming to suggest that the formal elements of the poem, rhythms, metre, repetitions and syntax, have an agency of their own that lies outside of Stevens's control.[75] Indeed, the overall form of the stanzas appear unconstrained with loose, varying line lengths that build from seven lines, to thirteen lines in stanza five, and then recede to five as the poem ends. This undulating stanzaic form visually reflects the organic motion of the ebb and flow of the tide.

Tension between Stevens as a speaker and the functions of the poem are also commented on by Michael Schmidt who outlines the effect of listening to a 1954 recording of the poem. He describes how 'the scales fell from my ears. Each line seemed to be endowed (in a quite unmechanical way) not with one but two caesuras.' Stevens's natural speech pattern breaks 'the apparent tyranny of the driving iamb, creating a suspension or stillness, changing the nature of the emphasis and climax of the line.'[76] Schmidt notes tension between the poetic metre and Stevens's

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[73] See Chapter One, pp. 15-16.

[74] Aaron Mccollough, '"Desiring Production" in Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West"', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, Vol. 26. No. 1 (Spring 2002), 99-110 (p. 101) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44884677> [accessed 28 May 2021].

[75] Ibid, p. 99.

[76] Michael Schmidt, quoted in Tyler Hoffman, 'Wallace Stevens and the Spoken Word', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, Special Issue: Wallace Stevens and "The Less Legible Meanings of Sounds", 33, 1 (Spring 2009), 97-110 (p. 107) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44885190>, [accessed 3 June 2021].

natural speech rhythms, which are 'unmechanical', or organic. It is worth noting here that Stevens was not a comfortable speaker, and perhaps this double caesura in the line noted by Schmidt is a legacy of the poet's own discomfort when reading aloud. Even so, Schmidt's suggestion asserts the importance of the interaction between form, language, and sound within the poem, accentuating the tensions between written sign and spoken sound.

Donald Davie accurately writes that 'language can be an instrument of articulation, a way of establishing relations.'[77] Relations in 'Idea of Order' between the textual sign and the sound of the words fluctuate, and the interaction between different sounds re-formalises relations between human and nonhuman entities. This re-establishment of relations echoes one of my central questions in this study, asking if it is possible for the human voice to be decentred within language and literature to allow for wider semiotic communication with other beings. 'Idea of Order' gestures towards such a decentring through entanglements of sound and sign in the enacted meeting between singer, sea and speaker.

Returning to Schmidt's assertion that the iambic metre of the poem enacts 'tyranny' over the sound, the implication of the word 'tyranny' is reminiscent of Wordsworth's perspective that 'the distinction of metre is regular and uniform, and not like that which is produced by what is usually called poetic diction.'[78] Essentially, in this view, metre enforces regularity across the poem which is more constrained than the rhythm created by language, resulting in the entire composition losing gravity and substance. Consideration of Coleridge's organic theory provides an alternative perspective towards metre. Rather than enforcing tyranny upon the work, metre is one of the ways in which poetry reflects a living body in the 'connection of parts in and for a whole, so that each part is at once end and means.'[79] Instead of removing the reality of language away from the text, Coleridge notes that metre is 'the vehicle and involucrum of poetry—itself a fellow-growth from the same life,—even as the bark is to the tree'. I will now show how Stevens uses metre in the Coleridgean sense in 'Idea of Order', where the metre organically holds the poem together through sound and rhythm, grounding the poem while the speech unfolds.

Applying a Coleridgean perspective towards metre, it is apparent that the first line of the poem rhythmically sets the song in an incantatory framework with the iambs creating a regular rising and falling rhythm. This rhythm, like the waves of the sea, pulls readers through the poem. Where voices and sounds are entangled on a subjective level throughout the text, the regular iambic

[77] Donald Davie, 'Syntax as Unpoetical: T.E. Hulme' in *Articulate Energy: An Inquiry Into the Syntax of English Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), 1-13 (p. 3).
[78] Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1802)* <https://web.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/lbprose.html> [accessed 2 March 2023].
[79] Coleridge, 'On Shakespeare as a Poet', in *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, p. 76.

rhythm grounds the sounds. This grounding is particularly useful for readers when faced with the cryptic and aphoristic first line which evokes an uncertainty that permeates the poem as the song unfolds. Using this first line, Stevens provokes curiosity surrounding the mysterious relationship between human singer and nonhuman ocean. It is unclear what this relationship is, and I believe that the poem does not enlighten readers towards a clear definition of human and nonhuman relationships, instead offering an 'idea' or suggestion towards these ecological interactions. From the first line, readers are immediately faced with questions: What is the 'genius of the sea' and what lies beyond it? Indeed, what is the song sung by the singer?

Harold Bloom persuasively describes the poem as an 'impossible text to interpret' and suggests that the language of the poem may be at odds with its objectives.[80] While 'Idea of Order' offers many variable interpretations and perhaps does not have one clear objective, Bloom's assertion that the poem's language is in tension with the content speaks to a wider tension between sign and sound. Following this, Mccollough outlines how the poem requires a 'new analytical vocabulary' in line with the demanding and complex interaction of form, language, poet and speaker.[81] Perhaps a reading of this text that decentres the human voice can shed light towards Stevens's idea of order between the singer and the sea.

As with many of Stevens' works, general scholarly opinion is that the poem exemplifies the power of the imaginative and creative mind over reality, or the world. Both Bloom and Douglas Mao agree that the unidentified 'she' of the poem successfully transcends the *genius loci* of the sea at Key West, with the song taking precedence over the world or reality.[82] Celebration of human imagination or creative genius privileges the singer-poet as the unique conveyer of ultimate truth derived from their language making. Reflecting on discussions explored in Chapter One around uses of 'environment' and 'ecology', readings centred around the precedence of human song over the sound of the sea are implicitly anthropocentric in the belief that humans have the ability to impose order upon nature through textual signs.

Readers are introduced to the concept of going 'beyond' or the implied need for transcendence from the beginning of the poem. The first line, 'She sang beyond the genius of the sea', immediately appears to exemplify the transcendent power of human song over sea.[83] There is no struggle to get 'beyond' the sea with the song, and 'she' moves with sibilant ease over the sea, subscribing to Bloom and Mao's conclusion that the poem illustrates the transcendence of human

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[80] Bloom, p. 93.
[81] Mccollough, 'Desiring Production', p. 99.
[82] See Bloom, *Wallace Stevens, The Poems of Our Climate*, p. 96 and Douglas Mao, 'The Genius of the Sea: Coleridge's Ancient Mariner at Stevens's Key West', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 36, 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 75-98 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40755031> [accessed 21 June 2021].
[83] Wallace Stevens, 'The Idea of Order at Key West', *CP*, pp. 136-138, ll. 1.

voice over and beyond nature. Going further into the poem, confirmation of Bloom and Mao's assertion of human song over nature appears in lines such as 'it was she and not the sea that we heard' and the emphasis on the singer's position as creator, or 'maker' and 'single artificer', not just of the song, but of the world itself (ll. 37, 40). Perhaps most convincing towards Bloom and Mao's conclusion are the lines:

> And when she sang, the sea,
> Whatever self it had, became the self
> That was her song, for she was the maker. (ll. 38-40)

The success of the singer's song to transcend the 'genius' of the sea is so much that the sea itself appears to become the song, losing its identity within human language, supposedly eliminating the demarcation between human and nature to confirm the human song as the dominating force. To further support this conclusion, the singer is described as a 'maker' and an 'artificer', or as Harold Bloom notes, 'a language maker, rejoicing Stevens's intellect'.[84] A maker is one who shapes, forms, or moulds, and can be linked to the word 'poet' through the Ancient Greek root, *poētḗs*.[85] The description of 'artificer', however, implies a higher level of skill in craft, indicating a developed workmanship throughout the song. Both terms indicate a level of moulding or manipulation in the design and creation of a thing. Manipulation and design imply the poem as a form of stage upon which the singer's power as a language maker enacts an exposition of anthropocentric tendencies to privilege textual signs over sonic gestures of communication. However, while the singer can create a song using language, language can be manipulated or moulded. Stevens uses the form of the poem as a stage to explore how the human voice and written sign connects with the voice and the sounds of the sea, and how far the two may blend together. Read in this way, the poem becomes a lyrical polyphony, leading readers to question where the singer may be situated within the poem that declares her to be the 'single artificer' of the world.[86]

Dwelling on the singer's identity, following conventional Romantic lyric paradigms, it may be expected for the speaker or singer to assume the position of the lyric 'I', the authoritative voice of the poem. However, the characterisation of the singer refutes lyric authority, and, as I will later highlight, the singer's ambiguous position in the poem confirms the remodelling of the lyric form discussed by Shinbrot earlier in this chapter. The singer's identity is mutable, more like the flow of the sea than a human being. In terms of her physical characteristics, we only know that the singer is a 'she', and that she sings a song, presumably using words. As noted by Mccullouch, we

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[84] Bloom, p. 97.

[85] Thomas F. Bertonneau, 'What Figure Costs: Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West" (An Anthropoetics)', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 19, 1 (Spring 1995), 51-70 (p. 55) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44884377> [accessed 21 June 2021].

[86] Stevens, 'Idea of Order', ll. 37.

also know that she 'strides' and therefore presumably has legs, however, while 'Stevens clearly intends her to be a godlike figure' he 'gives little indication that she is created in humankind's image' due to the abstract adjectives used to describe her.[87] On a sonic level, the singer exists as 'the sound of the word "she"' which easily slides into the other sounds of sea and speaker in the poem.[88]

Mccullough points out that Stevens's singer has an element of divinity when read to be a representation of the poetic self or an abstracted lyric 'I'. Following this reading, Stevens takes precedence from Wordsworth and Shelley's arguably anthropocentric notions of poets as 'unknown legislators' of the world, signalling the human figure as the most important entity in the poem. Even so, Stevens's resistance to fully characterise the singer as identifiably human is significant and pertains more towards a notion of the singer or poet as only a part of the authoritative lyric 'I' that narrates the experiences of the world within the poem. The self of the singer is sliding and unclear because she is *only* part of the world in which she sings. While she creates the song and assimilates the sounds of the sea within her speech, this is also why 'there never was a world for her | Except the one she sang and singing, made.'[89] Here, it is evident that considering the singer as the all-encompassing divine 'I' who can narrate the world of reality in song is to disregard the other key speaker in the poem: the sea. The sea only loses its identity within the singer's song that is created through the human voice. The reality is different, because through the poem itself and the tension between sign and sound, readers are attuned to the fact that the most authoritative lyrical voice in the poem is not just that of the singer, but also that of the sea.

Here, Stevens calls into question the act of making or creating a poem, highlighting the sliding line between the poetic world and representations of reality and the 'things as they are'.[90] While the first line of the poem seems to confirm the ability of the human voice and creativity to go 'beyond' nature and transcend the genius of the world, the poem later resolves that this is only possible through occupying a solely imaginative world, that is, the world made through song. Through interrogating the singer's authority over the sea through the song, Stevens interrogates his own song and poetics, questioning the form of a poem as a site appropriate to enact the interaction of human and nonhuman voices.

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[87] Mccollough, 'Desiring Production', p. 106.
[88] Martin, 'She and/or Sea in "The Idea of Order at Key West"', p. 95.
[89] Stevens, 'Idea of Order', ll. 24-25.
[90] Stevens, 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', *CP*, pp. 175-195, ll. 5-6.

'A Body Wholly Body': The Fluttering Self of the Sea

Depictions of the nonhuman in 'Idea of Order' indicate a less than positive perspective towards nature, similar to the 'slovenly wilderness' in 'Anecdote of the Jar'. The sea is 'tragic-gestured', 'ever-hooded' and the water grinds to the 'gasping' of the wind which stirs its repetitive, mimic 'cry'.[91] While it can be argued that the metaphors of the tragic-gestured and hooded sea are anthropomorphic, the interesting syntax of these words point again towards the form of the sea and its embodied semiotic production through sound. 'Ever-hooded' refers to waves curling over themselves as they reach the shoreline, and points to the sequential 'tragic-gestured' repetitive movement of the water that causes the assonant 'constant cry' of the waves breaking. Use of 'tragic' and 'hooded' pertain to the fact that the sea is 'merely a place' by which the singer sings, perhaps also hinting that human perception of the sea as 'merely a place' is what is tragic, rather than the adjective being attached to the sea itself.

Initially, the sea appears defective in some unknown quality. As Harold Bloom notes, it is simultaneously 'an enormous presence' and a 'total absence'.[92] However, reading the singer in dialogue with the sea, we can further observe the lyrical polyphonous sounds of human and nonhuman that create the poem. The sea is at once present and absent, occupying a liminal and almost ghost-like space which is strongly evoked through the imagery suggested by the phrase 'Like a body wholly body, fluttering | Its empty sleeves'.[93] The description of the 'empty sleeves' places the nonhuman slightly out of reach for readers and calls its physical presence into question. The nonhuman becomes a mysterious unknown that we and the singer cannot engage with entirely within the material world. However, while Bloom's suggestion of the sea's simultaneous presence and absence seems to him to be a symptom of the ethos or transcendentalist Fate of the poem, an alternative reading reveals the sea to be more than a catalyst for the progression of Stevens' transcendentalist dialectic.

In the description of the sea's form, tensions between language and sound can be observed. For example, the metre anchors the sea's "body" and voice, but also struggles to contain it. Disyllabic words like 'body' and 'wholly' can be seen to enforce a regular iambic rhythm in the line to metrically establish the presence of the sea. Viewed iambically, this metrical presence is accompanied by repetition of the unstressed 'o' sound which grounds the line and draws particular

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[91] Stevens, 'Idea of Order', l. 16.
[92] Bloom, pp. 98-99.
[93] Stevens, 'Idea of Order', l. 3-4.

attention to the word 'body'. Despite the sea's empty sleeves, Stevens confirms its physical presence in the poem through metre and sound.[94]

The opposition between an objective understanding of a human body and the more abstract sense of form can be read into Stevens' simile that attempts to navigate the tension between the body that somehow flutters within empty sleeves. This odd image for Mcculloch signifies an anxiety felt by Stevens around the word 'body' which is 'highly charged with anthropomorphic associations'.[95] The sea is without a body, taking 'body' to mean 'the physical structure, including the bones, flesh, and organs, of a person or an animal.'[96] Yet where the sea has neither bones, or flesh or organs, like a poem, it has form. Mccullough views the description of the sea as grotesque, mindless and voiceless, and the repetition of 'body' in the line only serves to 'rein in the image's meaning' and harness control or order over the varying 'concepts conveyed by the term.'[97] However, the repetition of 'body' on a rhythmic level represents more than a search for control over linguistic disambiguation. Repetition of the unstressed 'o' and stressed 'y' sounds create aural smoothness of the line:

$$\cup \;/\; \cup \;/\quad \cup \;/\; \cup \;/\; /\; \cup \;/$$

Like a bo-dy who-lly bo-dy, flut-ter-ing (l. 5).

Donald Justice notes that the form of the sea echoes that of the poem in its metrical fluttering of accentual verse.[98] The subject of the line is more deeply concerned with the sounds produced by the words, than the actual meaning of the words themselves. Here, we see sound taking precedence over logic, which is important considering that early readings of Stevens tend more towards logic or poetic content over sound, or form. The sea's form is the key to the speaker's engagement with the voice of the sea because the sea's sound or voice is produced from its form. Notably, it is the sound of the sea with which the speaker is able to form the most identifiable connection. Tied up with its 'mimic motion', the sea makes 'constant cry, caused constantly a cry.'[99] Reflecting on Taylor's comment that Stevens's poems are 'metrical cries of their occasion', the hypnotic

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[94] It is important to highlight the ambiguity of reading Stevens's meters. While I read line three as an iambic rhythm, the syllabic stress on 'body' and 'wholly' could be read as a spondaic rhythm. This alternative reading does not alter the rhythmic emphasis placed on these words, whether read as iambic or spondaic.

[95] Mccollough, 'Desiring Production', p. 105.

[96] 'Body' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/20934?rskey=VjmjkZ&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> [accessed 16 August 2021].

[97] Mccollough, 'Desiring Production', p. 105.

[98] Justice, 'The Free Verse Line in Stevens', p. 33.

[99] Stevens, 'Idea of Order', l. 5.

consonance of the 'c' sound cuts through the words, with the cry that the line describes emerging from the repeated sound.[100]

Stevens's selection of the word 'mimic' is significant to the relation between the singer and the sea, and the wider discussion around Stevens's use of language to enable nonhuman entities to speak for themselves. Harold Bloom overlooks the significance of the word, noting that the sea has 'no motion but a mimic one', indicating preference for the sea's lack of autonomy in the face of human song or poetic self.[101] Essentially, in Bloom's reading, the sea's form and sound are reduced to mere imitation of the human song. However, I would like to suggest that the use of 'mimic' indicates a difference between sea and singer, which relates to the unreal nature or perception of the sea. In its noun form, 'mimic' means 'mime', or to act without words. The bodiless form of the sea communicates its repetitive 'inhuman' cry through wordless sound. Mime is also characterised by gesticulation or movement, and this movement can be observed in the rolling iambic rhythm throughout the poem where the rising and falling sounds of the words resembles the rise and fall of the sound of waves. Read in this way, the sea can be viewed as an active participant in the world, rather than as a mere catalyst for the production of the song. Therefore, it can be deduced that the sea has its own form of genius that while separate from the human, sits alongside the singer's voice, both working together to produce the lyric.

However, to add further uncertainty to the poem, while the argument tells us that the singer's song is unable to match the sounds of the sea and works on a level of dissonance rather than harmony, the poem itself attempts to embody the sounds of the nonhuman world. Harold Bloom comments that:

> A dark shadow of mimesis brushes by Stevens as he reluctantly concedes the grinding and gasping that stir in his own language, yet the stanza concludes strongly, affirming power and will as it tells us that it is Stevens and not the sea that we hear.[102]

Bloom suggests that Stevens's evocation of the grinding and gasping of nonhuman entities is reluctant and an attempt at mimesis. However, an alternative reading could suggest that while mimesis was not what Stevens sought to achieve in this poem, or indeed, any of his poems, his choice of paralleling the sounds of the sea and wind in his own language enables his song, the poem, to move closer towards nonhuman beings than the singer's song. One of the poem's most striking features is the prominent level of sibilance, alliteration and assonance, and rhyme which serve to resemble, not mimic, the sound of the veritable ocean. As Muccullough points out, 'Even as the poem argues that the sea is "merely a place" (line 17), that it is alien to the artist and

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[100] Taylor, 'Wallace Stevens's Apparitional Metres', p. 225.
[101] Bloom, pp. 98-99.
[102] Ibid, p. 99.

imagination, its imagery suggests that sea and artist are composed of the same stuff.'[103] To take this further, it is the sounds and the rhythms of the poem that most strongly suggest the equal origins of both song and sea. 'She' and 'sea' have a sibilant relationship, which is accentuated through similar iambic rhythms, such as:

$$\cup \; / \; \cup \; / \; \cup \; / \; \cup \; / \; \cup \; /$$

The sea was not a mask. No more was she. (l. 8)

Stevens carefully selects his words for their aural properties. In the line above, sibilance and iambic stress between 'sea' and 'she' rounds the line, giving a regular and closed form.[104] Elsewhere, the poem hints that the human and nonhuman are distinct from one another, but this line strongly indicates the idea that sea and she share similar material properties. Despite the caesura inviting a distinction between human and nonhuman, the sound-sense and lyricism of the iambs carries the reader through the words, sonically uniting 'she' and 'sea'. In this sense, Stevens uses language, in particular, the organic aural qualities of phonemes, to create a polyphonous poem where sound rather than sign enables the vocalisation of nonhuman beings.

The importance of sound in 'Idea of Order' extends into how the reader functions within the range of voices in the poem. When read aloud, the voice of the reader becomes the voice of the sea and the song. Where Bloom views this as affirmation of the power of the poet, what he overlooks is the presence of the sounds of the sea or the voice of the nonhuman within the words spoken by human reader. The use of 'gasping' is interesting given its meaning to open a mouth wide in a catching of breath. The bodiless sea has a mouth, in an anthropomorphic transformation that accentuates the voice of the sea and positions the sound it produces as its most distinctive feature. Yet, the gasping mouth of the sea is also the singing mouth of the singer and speaking mouth of the reader. While we are constantly reminded that song and sea are not intermingled with one another, it is evident that song, sea, and poem are connected through acts of sound, and the effort to communicate their individual voices.

In 'Three Academic Pieces' (1947), Stevens observes that 'The accuracy of accurate letters is an accuracy with respect to the structure of reality' and that one of the key elements of the structure of reality is the 'resemblance between things'.[105] In 'Idea of Order', the careful selection of letters can be observed as an attempt to resemble the structure of reality which is the resemblance between things. By offering a resemblance through his selection of words and adherence to their sound,

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[103] Mccullough, 'Desiring Production', p. 106.
[104] While I read this line in iambic rhythms, it is important to note that this line also can be read as a series of spondees, which also mark stress on the words 'she' and 'sea'.
[105] Stevens, 'Three Academic Pieces', *NA,* p. 71.

Stevens evokes the bodiless voice of the sea, and weaves it into his song, which is the poem. In 'satisfying the desire for resemblance' the poem 'enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it'.[106] Essentially, Stevens's sound-sense lyric evokes the words of 'our origins', the sound of the sea, which as Mccullouch reminds us, is the 'cradle of our existence'.[107] The poem itself is the stage of encounter between human and nonhuman, itself acting as an idea or suggestion of order between constituents of the world.

'But it was more than that': Transcendence into Surf through Sound

So far, I have explored how the singer and sea in 'Idea of Order at Key West' are united through the syntax and sound of the words, and that the interaction between the human and the nonhuman generates a polyphonous lyricism, that returns singer, speaker, poet, and reader to the biological origins of existence in the sea. The organic form of the poem, or 'metre-making argument' enables the voices of both human and nonhuman to swirl together within a lyric of dissonant, but organic sound. While the start of the poem introduces the need to go beyond or transcend nature, as the poem progresses it becomes apparent that while a clarification has been reached, it may not be of the initial transcendence suggested at the start of the poem.

To return to 'Three Academic Pieces', Stevens comments that in poetry 'the intensification of the sense of reality creates a resemblance: that reality of its own is a reality.'[108] The intensification of reality is the imagination, and it is the imagined world, albeit grounded in reality, that creates a new reality. The expression of the sea's voice both binds the singer and speaker to their watery origins, yet also provokes the speaker and reader to imagine a reality where humans can attend to the 'keener sounds' of the more than human world. To expand on this idea further, I would like to draw attention to the word 'genius' used to describe the sea in the first line of the poem. The Latin root of 'genius' refers to a 'guardian deity or spirit' or incarnation. When the speaker asks, 'Whose spirit is this' and later confirms that it is the unknown 'spirit that we sought', it is possible that etymological connection between 'genius' and 'spirit' could indicate that the spirit that is sought in the poem is actually that of the sea rather than of the singer. Stanza four, which is perhaps the most imaginative stanza in the poem, develops the idea of the spirit belonging more to the voice of the sea or the more-than-human world than to the human.

Gleghorn comments that the first four lines of stanza four advocate for nature as the spirit, which is a Romantic notion.[109] Commenting on the 'outgrown' uneven metres, Gleghorn notes

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[106] Ibid, p. 77.
[107] Muccullough, 'Desiring Production', p. 108.
[108] Stevens, 'Three Academic Pieces', p. 79.
[109] Gleghorn, 'Questioning the Composition of Romance', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 22, 1 (Spring 1998), 23- 38 (p. 28).

that the 'sound-sense' dominates the metre, and this is most remarkable in the line 'And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled.'[110] The 'claustrophobic sounds force the restrictive meter to require an extra syllable'. In other words, the sounds of the words force themselves out of the metrical pattern and into something larger than the form can contain. Despite this, the rhythm of the poem remains constant. Where the anchoring metre is disrupted, sound holds the poem together while the speakers' imagination forces the text to outgrow its metrical regularity. Interestingly, the next four lines somewhat lose the aural quality of the poem, instead relying more on repetition than alliteration or assonance to communicate that the spirit is more than the voices of the sea and the singer together. Metrical disruption in these lines seem to confirm that what we seek will remain unknown.

Stanza four is characterised by an uncertainty that is accentuated by the repeated subordinate clause, 'If it was only', in an attempt to locate the spirit that is sought by both speaker and poem.[111] Harold Bloom usefully comments that a 'voice rises up here, beyond the sea, beyond the singer, beyond Stevens' and that this voice 'is neither natural nor human, yet Stevens cannot tell us, or know himself what such a voice might be.'[112] However what is unacknowledged in Bloom's reading are Stevens's attempts to identify this unknown voice and explore the interplay between nonhuman and human voices. Use of synaesthesia complicates our understanding of the unknown voice or spirit sought by the speaker. The sea's voice is 'dark' and obscured from our understanding. The syntax of the below lines is strange and resists explanation or meaning:

> […] deep air,
> The heaving speech of air, summer sound
> Repeated in a summer without end
> And sound alone. (ll. 15-28)

The dark voice of the ocean becomes the deep air of the sky. The more-than-human world carries a weight within its voices that are at once 'sunken', 'heaving' and 'deep'. These words correlate with the notion of 'beyond', introduced in the first line, with the nonhuman voice penetrating into the depths of the earth, or in this case, sea and sky. Stanza four, which seeks to locate an unknown spirit, puts strong emphasis on the possibility of a voice reaching into the depths or beyond what is within the scope of the singer's song.

The additional connotations of the word 'spirit' are also significant. Definitions of 'spirit' from the Early Modern period and onward into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are more concerned with spirit as supernatural being or immaterial creature, or in a theological sense, as

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[110] Gleghorn, 'Questioning the Composition of Romance', p. 28.
[111] Stevens, 'Idea of Order', ll. 21, 23.
[112] Bloom, p. 101

nature or character. However, Medieval use of the term indicates more towards an 'animating or vital principle in man and animals, and the Latin root, *spiritus*, denotes a 'breathing' of respiration or the wind. Michael de Vaan suggests a relation between *spiritus* with the Proto Indo-European *(s)peis*, which is 'Possibly an onomatopoeic formulation imitating the sound of breathing.'[113] Returning to 'Idea of Order', the first line can be read as the singer singing beyond the spirit, which in stanza four, is revealed to be what is sought. If spirit means a 'breath' and the origins of the word lie in an onomatopoeic representation of the sounds of breath, the spirit that is being sought after in the poem is not just the voice of the sea or the sky, but their very breath and origin of life, which is reflective of the sound-image of the 'gasping' sea earlier in the poem. The speaker does not seek the 'outer voice' of the nonhuman, as this can only be interpreted as 'meaningless plungings'.[114] Instead, they seek the origin of the voice, the breath, which is also incidentally shared by humans. This is the thing that is 'more', that is indescribable and evades concrete representation in textual signs alone.

The speakers' imaginative speculations in stanza four circle around a truth that readers and the speaker may never know. The poem is an 'Idea of Order' because a reality or truth of order cannot be verbalised, only heard or felt. This concept pertains to an Emersonian notion that 'Permanence is a word of degrees. Every Thing is medial.'[115] In other words, everything is an idea of order, because actual order or permanence cannot exist in a world of fluctuations where everything exists in relation to each other. The broken iambic lines that connect stanzas four and five visually represents this concept through poetic form:

> On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
> Of sky and sea.
>   It was her voice that made
> The sky acutest at its vanishing. (ll. 32-35)

As noted previously in this chapter, Stevens's poems are mostly regular in form, and the indented lines between stanzas four and five are therefore of interest. Together, they form a complete iambic pentameter line, reading 'Of sky and sea. | It was her voice that made'. Here we can observe simultaneous cooperation and tension between human and more-than-human. Like the line earlier in the poem reading, 'The sea was not a mask. No more was she,' the visible demarcation between the lines, and the end stop between them indicates a barrier or a separation (ll. 8). However, the rhythm of the pentameter line pushes past this break, uniting the entities of sky, sea and singer. Likewise, sibilance of 'sky', 'sea' and 'voice' sonically unites the lines and enables the continuing

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[113] Michael de Vaan, 'Dictionary' in *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and other Italic Languages* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), 17-692 (p. 581). Google Ebook.
[114] Stevens, 'Idea of Order', l. 30.
[115] Emerson, 'Circles', in *Essays*, p. 127.

flow of the poem. Shinbrot concludes that the poem is ultimately about 'the creation of self through the temporal and fluid element of song.'[116] While it can be debated if the poem successfully achieves a creation of self, certainly a search for a self is enacted through the organic lyric form, and the vocalisations of many different entities.

For Bloom, the final stanzas of the poem qualify the power of the poetic self or mind over the sea in a 'Shelleyan rage to order'.[117] The power of the poet and human song recognises the power of the Romantic transubstantial vision, which leads the 'we' of the penultimate stanza to a freshened perspective.[118] While it can be maintained that the Romantic notion of a freshened sensory experience is affirmed in the final stanzas, rather than the root of this change being resultant of the human voice, I argue that the tension between the written sign and sonic qualities of language open up the voice of the sea. Through the sounds of the poem, the sea acquires a language of its own. Ultimately, the singer fails in locating the spirit of the more-than-human world, because 'there never was a world for her | Except the one she sang, and singing, made.'[119] The singer lives detached from reality and cannot move past the boundary of the poem or locate the spirit of the more-than-human because her genius is different to that of the sea. This difference is why the voices fail to completely harmonise, and instead operate on different pitches or tones from one another.

Focusing on the last stanza, Stevens seems to reach a point of clarification which appears to be more negative than positive. After the song ends, the speaker turns away from the sea and asks Ramon Fernandez why the artificial lights of the town master and portion out the sea in 'emblazoned zones and fiery poles' (ll. 50). The tone here is searching, almost desperate, echoing the 'maker's rage to order words of the sea' (ll. 53). The difference between the gentle 'she sang' at the start of the poem to 'rage' at the end accentuates the potential failure of the song to order the words of the sea. Fundamentally, this rage originates from the fact that the human attempt of ordering the spirit of the more-than-human through the song and language can only result in the idea of order, that is, the 'fixing' and 'arranging' enchantment of the night (ll. 51).

The words of the song are filled with fire and light in contrast to the words of the more-than-human that occupy the 'fragrant portals, dimly-starred', which are obscured from our understanding within the realm of textual signs. The final line of the poem leaves a reminder of the permeable boundary between beings with 'ghostlier demarcations', a reference back to the shoreline location and an echo of the invisible demarcation between stanzas four and five. It is in

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[116] Shinbrot, 'The Lyric Element', p. 268.
[117] Bloom, pp. 103-104.
[118] Ibid, p. 102.
[119] Stevens, 'Idea of Order', p. 138, ll. 42-43.

the final stanza where it becomes clear that Stevens's clarification is that the written sign is eroded in place of sound. Using the exemplifier, 'ghostlier', Stevens indicates that a line or boundary between two entities is now faded. While the two entities could be the singer and the sea, or more widely, human and nonhuman, I would like to suggest that Stevens is referring to sound and sign. The sounds of the last line are soft which contrasts to the hard 'c' sound in 'demarcations'. The hard 'c' sound draws attention to the word and plays on the sounds of 'marc' in 'demarcations' and 'mark', concerning text marks. The line therefore reflects of the action of writing. In the face of keener sounds, the textual shapes of the words fade away. What remains at the end of the poem is not the song that rages for order, but the more acute cry of the gasping ocean and outer voice of the sky. The poem emerges through these voices, pushing beyond the vernacular with the sounds of words anchored through metrical regularity. In this sense, the poem is a resemblance of reality rather than a mimetic representation. Words in 'Idea of Order' play a performative role within the stage of the poem, enacting a form of textual failure where sign cannot hold out against sound in allowing nonhuman entities to speak. Whether this failing is a human failing or a poetic one remains to be debated and it is this question that Stevens leaves readers.

Chapter Three: Wallace Stevens's Quantum Understanding of the World

In the previous chapter, I explored the influence of the Romantic theory of organicism and organic form upon Stevens's ecopoetics, concluding that these ideas aid the emergence of nonhuman voices through a precedence of sound over textual sign. By focusing my attention on organic form, I explored an important and overlooked aspect of Stevens's engagement with British and American Romantic poetics. Where the Romantics sought to close the gap between the sensual and the ideal, Stevens instead resists, and resolves to occupy the gap between the 'sensual and the intelligible' or what Leman calls the 'wound of finitude'.[1] My application of Coleridgean organic theory to 'The Idea of Order at Key West' evidenced an attempt towards erasure of the written sign in favour of poetic sound, resulting in the voice of the sea revealing its nonhuman genius. Indeed, as this next chapter will show, reading Stevens's ecopoetics in the context of the early twentieth century further displays this struggle to reconcile human language to nonhuman voices.[2]

Developments in quantum physics challenged widely accepted notions of human identity in the mid-twentieth century, and it is here that I begin this chapter which seeks to locate Stevens's ecopoetics in his contemporary moment of Modernism. Considering Chapter Two's establishment of Stevens's position in the conflicted space between the sensual and intelligible in a romantic context, I will extend this line of thought to reveal how his ecopoetics navigates anthropocentric perceptions and scientific evidence. Such scientific discovery in the early to mid-twentieth century began to point towards a reality of humanity as creaturely beings, and therefore, turning to the work of Serpil Opperman, I then connect quantum understanding with contemporary environmental philosophy, drawing parallels between the quantum and the ecological.

Stevens's poetry, which aims to help readers live their lives, sheds light on what Timothy Morton calls 'ecological awareness', which is to shake 'our faith in the anthropocentric idea that there is one scale to rule them all - the human one.'[3] My close readings of poems, 'Less and Less Human, O' Savage Sprit', 'Montrachet-le-Jardin', and 'July Mountain', will question how what we now recognise as ecopoetics enables Stevens to mediate and understand the changed understanding of 'human' during the early to mid-twentieth century. Read in context of Stevens's interest and knowledge of quantum developments, and particularly the work of Max Planck, the

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[1] Lehman, 'Abstract Pleasures: Romanticism and Finitism in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens', pp. 309, 315.

[2] I use the temporal framework of early-mid twentieth century (the timescale between 1920 - 1955) to clarify and disambiguate from the term 'Modernism'. While Stevens is undoubtedly a poet 'of' the Modernist period, his work as I have shown, bears elements of Romantic poetics that lie in tension with conditions of Modernism.

[3] Timothy Morton, *All Art is Ecological* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2021), p. 32.

interaction between language and sound in these underread poems reveal an understanding of the human as a hybrid being, rather than omnipotent individual, building on the porous boundaries between 'she' and 'sea' illustrated by my previous chapter.[4] To this end, this chapter will explore if Stevens's ecopoetics can provide new perspectives on what being human meant during the early to mid-twentieth century, and if so, how changing the perception of the human position in the world can aid the voicing of nonhuman beings in poetry during a period renowned for an increased disregard for the nonhuman world.[5]

Locating Ecological Thought in the Early to Mid-Twentieth Century

Developments in scientific understanding over the early to mid-twentieth century provides insight into the importance of ecological thought in Stevens's ecopoetics. Moving away from Enlightenment anthropocentrism, perceptions of humanity's place in the world began to oscillate between the positions of external and superior observer to a being integrated within ecological entanglements. Conceptualising humanity within this mesh as a creaturely being can be supported through exploration in quantum physics, which in turn is useful in terms of locating Stevens's ecopoetics. Recent studies in material ecocriticsm situate quantum physics alongside ecophilosophy because quantum conceptions of the world illuminate interconnections and entanglements on an atomic level.[6] Quantum physics in the mid-twentieth century contributed to a breakdown of existing concepts of human identity, and following the position of material ecocriticsm, ecological awareness emerged alongside this understanding of human entanglement with other beings. As Serpil Opperman summarises:

> Quantum mechanics gives an undeniable proof of a fundamental interconnectedness of the universe, which in turn compels us to revise our old conceptual frameworks of nature. In this respect, the ecocentric view becomes legitimated by the ontological interpretations of the quantum theory at large.[7]

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[4] Destabilising anthropocentric viewpoints by reading the human as a creature is coherent to Merleau-Ponty's theory of the chiasmic 'man-animal intertwining' as discussed in my first chapter.

[5] To this end of hope, this chapter will show that ecopoetic readings of his work allows a reanalysis of the somewhat clichéd critical perspective which views *Harmonium* as linguistically gaudy and joyful and the later work as linguistically gloomy.

[6] The Nobel Prize in Physics 2022 was awarded to Alain Aspect, John F. Clauser and Anton Zeilinger for demonstrating quantum entanglement where two or more particles are connected or entangled. In this state, the action of one particle can move through the other particles at various distances, affecting or even anticipating the other particles' action, proving interconnection on a sub-atomic level. The theory behind these experiments was grounded in early twentieth-century quantum physics. For further detail, see: 'Explorers of Quantum Entanglement Win 2022 Nobel Prize in Physics' <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/explorers-of-quantum-entanglement-win-2022-nobel-prize-in-physics1/> [accessed 21 November 2022].

[7] Serpil Opperman, 'Are We Really Interconnected? Ecophilosophy and Quantum Theory From a Postmodern Perspective', *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, 16, (2002), 51-64 (p. 57) <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/996214> [accessed 16 February 2021].

Opperman, a leading scholar in material ecocriticsm, provides an astute confirmation regarding the coherence between quantum physics and ecological thought.[8] Quantum understanding provided a shift from the Cartesian and Newtonian notion of the distanced human observer to an acknowledgement of humans as participants with the world.[9] This new notion of the world transformed Enlightenment conceptions of nature as a 'lifeless entity', and an 'exploitable resource' to notions of the world as an active and dynamic system, shattering the Newtonian concept of nature as a static object, therefore destabilising anthropocentric thought.[10] As I will show through my analysis of Stevens's ecopoetics later in the chapter, the cohesion between quantum physics and ecological thought generates an open source of possibility to reimagine anthropocentric frameworks and reconsider the human, not just in context to other beings but deeply immersed alongside them.

Even so, the literature of the early to mid-twentieth century has encountered resistance within ecocritical scholarship. For example, characterised by the upturning of established conventions, Modernist poetry's epithet of 'Make it new!' coined by Ezra Pound's Imagist movement has been read by ecocritics as an example of how early to mid-twentieth century literature perpetuates anti-ecological phenomena like consumerism and mass-production.[11] Michael Rubenstein and Justin Neuman claim that for many first-wave ecocritical scholars, the modern period and Modernist movement presented an 'environmental lost cause' because in it, early ecocritics saw 'a rejection of their own naturalist aesthetics and conservationist ethics.'[12] The period that saw the world's population double in the space of one hundred years, the emergence of the skyscraper, the proliferation of the automobile, and extensive electrification, in addition to extensive uses of unsustainable sources of energy providing power to these industries, undeniably suggests a landscape more grey than green. As Jeremy Diaper astutely comments, 'Upon initial investigation, then, the natural environment may well appear to be inconsequential in comparison with the energy of the city and the industrial and technological advancements which enlivened the modernist

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[8] For further discussion on the intersections between quantum physics and new materialism, see Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, 'Theorizing Material Ecocriticism: A Diptych', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, Oxford University Press, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Summer 2012), 448-475 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44087130> [accessed 29 June 2023].

[9] The destabilisation of empirical Cartesian understanding was also hastened by the decrease of Christian influence over the Western world following Darwin's evolutionary theory and events like the First World War. This move away from Western theological systems is significant, because, as Lynn White, Jr. notes in 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', 'Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen.' See: *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* pp. 3-14 (p. 9).

[10] Opperman, 'Are We Really Interconnected? Ecophilosophy and Quantum Theory From a Postmodern Perspective', (p. 53).

[11] Ezra Pound, *Make It New / essays by Ezra Pound* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1935).

[12] Rubenstein and Neuman, pp. 14, 3.

sensibility.'[13] Rubenstein, Neuman, and Diaper all point towards a general scholarly consensus of the early to mid-twentieth century as a period more urban and technologically orientated than proto-ecologically minded. Indeed, it is undeniable that urbanisation and technological developments provided generative spaces for new modes of artistic innovation and creativity. However, these conceptions do not allow for a study of the proto-ecological thought during the period which can illuminate trends and developments in current ecological thought of today.

To begin to situate Stevens's ecopoetics in the context of early to mid-twentieth century developments in quantum physics, it is useful to examine his ecological consciousness against that of his contemporaries. For example, Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry* Magazine and close friend of Stevens expressed significant and committed proto-ecological views which are suggestive of a wider proto-ecological consciousness across the early to mid-twentieth century American poetic scene. Further, Monroe's closeness to Stevens and his poetics can also further contextualise his ecopoetics.[14] In the following section, I will analyse sections from two short essays by Monroe that help to elucidate her proto-ecological consciousness. These will then be compared with notation from Stevens to illustrate the overarching contextual implications of locating his ecopoetics during a period so often thought to be lacking in ecological relevance.

In the September 1919 issue of *Poetry*, Monroe wrote a short piece entitled, 'Back to Nature'.[15] In this commentary Monroe takes a clear attitude towards the perils of modern life and its exclusion of nature. For Monroe, humans are 'degenerate occupants, of clothes and houses' and 'slaves to civilisation'.[16] Monroe is disdainful regarding how modern life lived within enclosures sets the human apart from nature. Perhaps a reflection of Romantic organic theory, she goes on to hint at humanity's biological origins in nature, and also notes that despite this strong connection, modern humans only return to the 'wilderness from which we [they] sprang' during temporary holidays taken in the summertime.[17] Like Stevens lamenting 'how utterly we have forsaken the Earth' in

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[13] Jeremy Diaper, 'Introduction: Modernism and the Environment', 16, 1, *Modernist Cultures*, (2021), pp. 1-11 (p. 2) <https://doi.org/10.3366/mod.2021.0317>.

[14] While I have focused my attention on Harriet Monroe, other notable Modernist poets who have also been retrospectively read as ecopoets or having a strong sense of ecological awareness are William Carlos Williams and Robert Frost. Both can be placed alongside Stevens in the tradition of Romantic organic poetics. See Enaiê Mairê Azambuja, 'Zen and the Art of Imagined Matter: The Material Ecopoetics of William Carlos Williams', *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 29, 1 (Spring 2022), pp. 117-136 <https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isab018> and Nick Selby, 'Ecopoetries in America' in *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry since 1945* ed. J. Ashton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 127-142 <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139032674.010>.

[15] Harriet Monroe, 'Back to Nature', *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, 14.6 (Sep., 1919), 328-330 <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=14&issue=6&page=38>, [accessed 6 May 2022].

[16] Ibid, p. 328, 329.

[17] Ibid, p. 328. Voros traces Stevens's passion for the natural world to his 1903 trip to British Columbia, citing that it 'forced him to rethink the relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world. Above all, it provided him with a lifetime supply of poetic images.' While the connection between the modern human and nature via an annual

1904, Monroe echoes his sentiment in 1919.[18] Notably, Monroe's concern regarding the degradation of humans that live isolated from nature extends into the state and progression of art. In a similar tone to the Romantic and Transcendentalist writers, nature for Monroe is a generative source of artistic and creative inspiration. Particularly coherent with Coleridge's organic theory, Monroe describes how new forms of great art 'must spring, come rather through a more direct appeal to more original sources through the immediate contact of our people with nature in her sacred and intimate reserves'.[19] Use of the active verb, 'spring', infers a vivacity to those artworks that directly connect their original source to natural forms. Further, Monroe acknowledges the particular dissonance between humans and nature in Western cultures, noting that these new forms of great art should take inspiration from Aboriginal or Aztec cultures rather than from 'derivations of pseudo-classic derivations' from the original Greek sources.

Here, Monroe locates an essential line of contemporary eco-philosophy which claims that ideologies and artistic works informed by Western philosophy significantly contributed to the perception of human separation from nature and perpetuation of anthropocentric discourse, leading to the ecological crisis. By arguing that these new art forms should locate themselves in cultures outside of Western ideologies indicates a cohesion of thought regarding the position of art within the natureculture debate between Monroe and contemporary critics like David Abram and Christopher Manes.[20] This alignment of philosophy is indicative that literary figures in the early to mid-twentieth century were concerned with the disparate relationship between humans and the more-than-human world, and further, how art may fit within this entangled ecological debate.

In a later article from 1922, Monroe asserts that:

> The artist cannot take nature ready-made --- he must re-create with his own imagination and re-inspire with his own breath. But nature is his source and starting-point, and back to nature he must go for truth and beauty in the large.[21]

Again, expressing similar thoughts to Coleridge's organic form, Monroe views nature as the beginning or 'source' of creativity and art. The distance between humans and nature therefore incites an urgency to evaluate the relationship between humans and world because without nature, the production of new art is at risk as the imagination has no inspiration to draw from. Due to her beliefs and views around human interaction with nature, critics now retrospectively view Monroe

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summer holiday is tenuous for Monroe, it seems that for Stevens, such a holiday shaped his perception of the world and deeply influenced his poetics. See: Gyorgyi Voros, 'The Westwardness of Everything': Stevens's Ktaadn' in *Notations of the Wild: Ecology in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*, pp. 37-63 (p. 38).

[18] Stevens, *Letters* ('Entry 89, From his Journal, April 18, 1904'), p. 73.

[19] Monroe, 'Back to Nature', p. 329.

[20] See Chapter One, pp. 32 - 41 for further detail on this topic.

[21] Harriet Monroe, 'Nature The Source', *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, 20.5 (Aug., 1922), 266-268 <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=20&issue=5&page=32>, [accessed 6 May 2022].

as an early ecological activist.[22] While Monroe is but one figure of the period, scholarship within the field of ecomodernism is uncovering further evidence of growing environmental concern amongst various writers of the time. However, it is important to note that omissions within the field remain, with studies largely focusing on canonical authors such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.[23]

Wallace Stevens occupies a transitory position within current ecomodernist scholarship. On one hand, Stevens is widely acknowledged for his affinity to the natural world. On the other hand, the impact of this affinity to the more-than-human world in an ecocritical sense has not been, as I have previously mentioned, widely explored. Like Monroe, Stevens lamented the separation between human and nature induced by modernity and pondered the position of art in relation to human irreverence towards nature, and, like Monroe, Stevens was a modern ecological thinker. In comparison to Monroe, however, while Stevens also follows similar Romantic and Transcendentalist notions of nature providing the source of artistic creativity, he perhaps goes beyond Monroe's proto-ecological consciousness.

Stevens famously surmises life as a troubling 'affair of places' rather than people.[24] His great interest in the physical world rather than the people within it is evidence that he viewed himself as a human being and poet specifically in relation to his wider surroundings rather than to other humans, which can be viewed as an ecologically inclusive worldview. A letter from 1935 further reveals Stevens's awareness in relation to the changing socio-environmental scene of the mid-twentieth century. Upon the meaning of the term, 'environment', Stevens writes to Latimer that, 'for you, environment means men and women; but for me, it means my surroundings, not necessarily natural surroundings.'[25] Stevens notices that in the modern age, environment must encompass all surroundings rather than preference a previously idealised 'Nature'. It can therefore be argued that Stevens's proto-ecological thought is more in line with contemporary eco-philosophy than that of Monroe, due to his acknowledgement of all that is to be 'noticed and expressed', rather than a singular notion of the world and concepts of nature.

As shown through the above comparisons of Monroe and Stevens's proto-ecological views, recent developments in ecomodernism have revealed that Modernist texts hold potential to be a highly productive area of ecocritical enquiry. As Rubenstein and Neuman state, there is a 'great deal more in modernist culture than ecocidal impulses' as delineated from movements like

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[22] Monroe was involved with the early conception of the Sierra Club, founded by environmental activist, John Muir. See Diaper, 'Introduction: Modernism and the Environment', p. 2.

[23] Ibid, p. 7.

[24] Stevens, 'Adagia', *OP*, p. 240.

[25] Stevens, *Letters*, (Entry 330, 'To Ronald Lane Latimer, November 21, 1935'), pp. 295.

Futurism.[26] The contemporary moment exists in dialogue with and in continuance of events and ideas established in the early to mid-twentieth century, and this dialogue between historical moments is one of the reasons why the period offers a significant opportunity for learning how and why current environmental issues have developed. Understanding of anthropogenic ecological damage developed rapidly over the course of the twentieth century and social understanding of the potential for anthropogenic ecological change and destruction in the face of rapid scientific and technological advancement paralleled this development. Literature also sought to respond to these scientific and technological developments, and a question that increasingly concerned Stevens throughout his career was the relevance of poetry in his ever-increasing technological and scientifically focused world.

Where knowledge of humanity's creaturely heritage emerged from the sciences, the twentieth century witnessed great demarcations between sciences and the arts, leaving poets to justify the relevance of their art. It is perhaps not surprising that literature of the twentieth century is characterised by intensive formal and linguistic experimentation and rebellion against prior modes of the long eighteenth century. In the January 1920 edition of *Poetry*, Monroe writes that:

> The poet is almost invariably unmathematical, unscientific. On that side his mind is a blank, and he easily assumes that the forces thus let loose in the world are not spiritual but material. The poet […] virtually monopolizes men's ears: what he says goes, because the scientist can merely build his truth-he cannot utter it. And may it not be true that by his blindness to "the soul of the machine", to the spiritual power inherent in its creation, the modern poet establishes a dissonance between the energy of our age and its art.[27]

In the tradition of Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Shelley, Monroe allows the poet a form of superior power because even though poets are not mathematical or scientific, they can 'monopolize men's ears' where the scientist cannot. Rather than data and fact, language and sound in poetry allows the poet to express ideas and feelings. In relation to technological developments in the modern age, the poet can establish a 'dissonance between the energy' of the age and the art it produces, perhaps to the end of reconciling the 'sensual and the intelligible' or 'wound of finitude'.[28] Monroe appears positive regarding the separation between the arts and the sciences because in her view, the poet can provide alternative perspectives to science and technology. She comments that through 'feeling to the very depths' and expression of the human soul, the poet may be the one to 'get in tune with his age'.[29] Interiority and direction towards emotions or the

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[26] Diaper, p. 4
[27] Harriet Monroe, 'Science and Art Again', *Poetry,* 15.4 (Jan., 1920), 204-211
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20572440>, [accessed 6 May 2022].
[28] Lehman, pp. 309, 315.
[29] Monroe, 'Science and Art Again II', p. 209.

'sensual', for Monroe, places the poet in a better position than the scientist to expel issues of the age.

While the sentiments of disharmony and fracture which tend to characterise the Modernist period are present in Monroe's language, it is clear that she believes poetry is a generative space of possibility because poets can reach through feeling and expression to move readers towards new understanding. As highlighted throughout this thesis, Stevens was also interested in the potential of poetry to move readers towards new knowledge and understanding. Indeed, the claim that the poet's function is 'to help people live their lives' outlines Stevens's compulsion to move readers.[30] But how did his poetry go about helping people in the twentieth century live their lives, and did it aid them to come to a better understanding of their position in the world? This next section will extend my argument to show that one aspect of Stevens's ecopoetics which looked to move readers to help them live their lives, contrary to Monroe, was to actively engage with scientific advancements of the modern age, particularly quantum physics.[31]

Mobius Loops of Quantum Physics, Ecology and Stevens's Ecopoetics

While the works of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams reflect an explicit scientific interest and the influence of their learning upon their poetics, Stevens's curiosity for science has been much less widely acknowledged. Pound's various conceptions of modernist poetics and call to make poetry 'new' required poets to 'consider the way of the scientists', aspiring to maintain literary relevance against rapid scientific and technological development.[32] Stevens, on the other hand, perhaps does not consider the way of the scientists, but instead looks for commonalities between poetry and science. This is a view shared by Rachel Eames, who identifies that 'the imaginative understanding of physics represented by [Max] Planck aligns with Stevens's own theories of the poetic imagination'.[33] Recognising these coherences then enables Stevens to interrogate the meaning of human identity through language and sound, forming a quantum or entangled notion of what it means to be 'human'.[34] Following my location of Stevens's proto-

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[30] Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', *NA*, p. 29.

[31] Max Delbrück, German-American astrophysicist recalled the Connecticut Academy of the Arts and Sciences where Stevens read out 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' which Delbrück claims was 'enjoyed by everybody, perhaps most by the scientists.' This points towards the relatability of Stevens' work across the arts and sciences. See: Max Delbrück, 'A Physicist's Renewed Look at Biology - Twenty Years Later', *Nobel Lecture*, December 10, 1969 <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/medicine/1969/delbruck/lecture/> [accessed 18 November 2022].

[32] Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 6

[33] Rachel Fountain Eames, 'Chapter Four: the quantum poetics of Wallace Stevens and Max Planck' in *Physics and the Modernist Avant Garde* (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 179-213, (p. 188). Eames's study inevitably touches on similar material regarding Stevens and quantum physics that I use in this chapter and provides detailed and valuable insight into the relationship between quantum physics and Stevens's poetics. While I take Stevens's interest in Max Planck and quantum theory along the ecological, Eames argues that Surrealism provided the means for Stevens to access quantum physics by means of viewing the world through a lens of abstraction. See: pp. 196-205.

[34] Subject demarcations were much looser during the early to mid-twentieth century and the lines between biology, physics, mathematics, and philosophy were unclear. For example, ecology was only established as an area of study

ecological consciousness in the context of his contemporary, Harriet Monroe, I will now move towards conceptualising how his ecological thought goes beyond that of Monroe's, through an active interest in physics.

The aim of this chapter is to show how changing perceptions of human identity aids the voicing of nonhuman beings in Stevens's ecopoetics during the twentieth century, which is fundamental to the overall location of Stevens's ecopoetics. Key to these evolving perceptions of humanity's collective identity in the world is the understanding of the symbiotic existence of human beings that pertains to our species' creaturely heritage. Contributing to these notions of hybrid ontology, Morton notes that, 'We humans contain nonhuman symbionts as part of the way in which we are human; […] We are not human all the way through. We and all other lifeforms exist in ambiguous space between rigid categories.'[35] Humanity lives amongst and alongside other beings and cannot be separated from its creaturely parts.[36] Significant to a quantum understanding of the world in the twentieth century is the disintegration of 'rigid categories' into what Morton calls 'ambiguous space', allowing for a greater openness of possible interpretations of human identity. To further illustrate the hybrid ontology of the human, Morton comments that:

> Things are exactly what they are, yet never how they appear, yet appearance is inseparable from being, so a thing is a twisted loop like a Mobius strip, in which the twist is everywhere, it has no starting or ending point.[37]

Using the metaphor of the Mobius strip, Morton explains how appearance and being are constantly connected but always distanced from one another.[38] The knowledge that appearance and reality are not one and the same is a knowledge also shared by Stevens, and is perhaps best illustrated in words from 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction' that invoke translucency: 'It must be visible or invisible, | Invisible or visible or both: | A seeing and unseeing in the eye' (p. 407, ll. 122-124). Within 'ambiguous space' or 'seeing and unseeing in the eye' generated through an openness to the potential of human identity, appearance of the human as a singular being can be examined through poetry. Taking an interdisciplinary approach in his poetics through his understanding that

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in the 1960s. Therefore, ecological thought prior to this can be found across a wide range of intersecting disciplines. In Stevens, for example, we can trace ecological thought through his interest in philosophy and physics, or metaphysics.

[35] Morton, *All Art is Ecological*, p. 23.

[36] As Nigel Clark comments, the human 'always embodies something of the other-than-human: traces of storms that have been weathered, stirrings of the earth that have been ridden out, poisons and infections that have been stomached. And the echo of events in the solar system and the wider cosmos.' See 'Ex-orbitant globality', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 22, (2005), 165-185 (p. 179) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276405057198> [accessed 19 September 2021].

[37] Ibid, pp. 26-27.

[38] The Mobius strip is a one-sided surface created by connecting the ends of a rectangular strip and twisting one of the ends so that the shape has one side.

poetry is not always found in poetry, Stevens conceptualises new notions of the hybrid, creaturely human being.

Noted by Dana Wilde, Stevens's interest in philosophical ideas relate to and are influenced by modern physics, particularly regarding relationships between the one and the whole.[39] While the extent of Stevens's knowledge of modern physics is unknown, Joan Richardson asserts that he kept up to date with scientific developments from the 1930s onwards.[40] For example, at the end of 'A Collect of Philosophy', Stevens notes that 'it is unexpected to have to recognize even in Planck the presence of the poet.'[41] Here, Stevens references Max Planck, the 'patriarch of all modern physicists' and founder of quantum theory. Planck's work, for Stevens, can be read as philosophy. In Stevens's mind, poetry and philosophy distinctly relate to each other, signalling to his interest in quantum theories. Stevens later cites a note from French critic Andre George from *Les Nouvelles Litteraires* on Planck's posthumously published *The Concept of Causality* at the end of 'A Collect of Philosophy' which perhaps best illustrates his interest in quantum theory:

> […] a universal principle like the rigorous casual bond between two successive events ought to be independent of man. It is a principle of cosmic importance, it ought to be an absolute. Now, Planck not only recognises that it is part of human aptitude to foresee events but to foresee them by means of science, "the provisional and changing creation of the human imagination." How then liberate the concept from such an anthropomorphic hypothesis? Only an intelligence external to man, "not constituting a part of nature", would be able to liberate it. This supra-natural intelligence would act through the deterministic panes... Planck thereupon concludes that the law of casualty is neither true nor false. It is a working hypothesis.

George's reading of Planck's theory recognises that the interaction of phenomena is not always anthropocentric, and casual bonds between events 'ought to be independent of man'. There are parallels between Planck's theory and Coleridge's organic form in the understanding that the interaction of phenomena occurs naturally from within a subject, rather than external to it. Secondly, George notes that Planck believed in the power of the imagination to enable humans to predict or 'foresee' events through science. It is this citing of the imagination that interests Stevens, as it is where he as a poet can form a connection with Planck, the physicist. Arguably the most interesting section of this note is the question of how to understand Planck's theory of causality *outside of* human intelligence. George implies that the only capable entity would be external and superior to both man and nature. Overall, a decentring of the human is present in this notion, and the will for an intelligence beyond the human to help understand phenomena is desired. Such ideas

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[39] Dana Wilde, 'Wallace Stevens, Modern Physics, and Wholeness', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 20, 1 (Spring 1996), 3-26 (p. 4) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44884407>, [accessed 17 April 2022].
[40] Joan Richardson, *Wallace Stevens: The Later Years, 1923-1955* (New York: William Morrow, 1988), p. 156.
[41] Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', *OP*, p. 280.

bring the concept of what it means to be human, and where humans stand amongst other beings into question.

Even though resistance to anthropocentrism is present in George's statement, there is also evidence that Planck and wider studies in quantum physics wished to supersede the natural world completely. For example, the term 'supra-natural' implies this deviation because the prefix, 'supra', a derivative of 'super' indicates above or beyond the natural. Perhaps the only way that quantum theory views the potential to liberate observations of the world to determine relationships of causality is to move beyond and away from all nature. However, when read in dialogue with Stevens, George's notation can also show that his use of the term, 'supra-natural', in relation to Planck's work, indicates a need for abstraction away from nature to *return* to a deeper understanding of it rather than complete removal.

Such a process of abstraction towards and away from nature can be observed in Stevens's 'Adagia', particularly the striking aphorism concluding that 'All of our ideas come from nature. Trees = umbrellas.'[42] The ontological progression of this mathematical phrase moves from abstract 'ideas' to the real nature of 'trees' and then expands back out again into the world of anthropogenic materialism: 'umbrellas'. Returning to Planck's statement, it is the intelligence 'not constituting a part of nature' that he believes can fully allow comprehensive meditation regarding the theory of causality, freeing it from human exclusivity. According to Stanley Goldberg, Planck's earlier work argued for the existence of three worlds.[43] These include worlds of 'sense perceptions, the inaccessible real world, and the physical world picture'. The physical world picture is the only world within the control of man as a conscious and 'purposeful creation of the human spirit'.[44] The physical world reveals the inaccessible real world and world of sense perceptions which lie outside the control of man. It is this twofold process of world revealing that de-anthropomorphises physics, which is reflective of Planck's desire to move 'beyond' what is natural, hence, George's term 'supra-natural'. Even so, this is not to say that Planck disregards the natural world. After all, the aim of physics is to explain natural phenomena in the simplest terms possible, and, like Stevens, Planck also searches for the mysterious connections between the real, 'intelligible' world of experience and the world of 'sensual' perception. Understanding that phenomena occur outside of experience but may only be clarified through anthropocentric and anthropomorphic terms was something that both the poet and the scientist questioned.

[42] Stevens, 'Adagia', *OP,* p. 189.
[43] Stanley Goldberg, 'Max Planck's Philosophy of Nature and His Elaboration of the Special Theory of Relativity', *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, 7 (1976), 125-60, (p. 151) <https://doi.org/10.2307/27757355>.
[44] Goldberg, p. 152.

There are direct connections between the way that quantum theory formulates interactions in the world and how environmental philosophy has developed. Predominately through the understanding of the space-time continuum and Einstein's special theory of relativity, '"The world thus appears as a complicated tissue of events in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and determine the texture of the whole"'.[45] Werner Heisenberg's words observe the interdisciplinary nature of theoretical science which Morton equates in literary terms, noting that the '[…] binary between moving and staying still - between a certain concept of *verb* and *noun*, or between a certain concept of *object* and *quality* - becomes impossible to sustain.'[46] Even objects that are as distant from one another as possible still interact on a quantum level. Therefore, the foundational principle of quantum theory where categories or binaries are made redundant also extends to language. Upon the Mobius Strip of being entities are always connected even if they appear distant. Similar perspectives can be found in Stevens's poetry, showing that he was influenced by the new paradigm of thought emerging from theoretical physics.

Wilde notes parallels between quantum theory and Stevens's thought. In quantum theory, 'reality is identified and ordered - or becomes real - either at the moment of measurement (according to Heisenberg) or at the moment the measured activity is realized in the experimenter's brain (according to John von Neumann).'[47] Despite discrepancies between Heisenberg and von Neumann regarding the moment of measurement, the connection between perceived reality in the consciousness of the observer is similar to Stevens's note in 'Adagia' that 'What we see in the mind is as real to us as what we see by the eye.'[48] Questions asked in theoretical physics and by Stevens concerning the parallels between reality and imagination seek to move closer to an understanding of, as Wilde succinctly writes, 'where we think we are, and where we actually are.'[49] Turning to ecological thought, such understanding of where humans are within the world versus where they think they are as a collective species is essential to wider understanding of anthropogenic impacts upon the world.

Wilde suggests that the concept of complementarity is one of the most interesting ideas from quantum theory to be found in Stevens's work, and it is particularly relevant regarding the proto-ecological nature of quantum physics.[50] Complementarity theory states that objects have specific pairs of complementary elements that cannot be measured at the same time. Visually, the theory of complementarity may be likened to a Mobius strip where two sides of the same object may

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[45] Werner Heisenberg, quoted in Opperman, 'Are We Really Interconnected? Ecophilosophy and Quantum Theory From a Postmodern Perspective', p. 56.
[46] Morton, *All Art is Ecological*, p. 92.
[47] Wilde, 'Wallace Stevens, Modern Physics, and Wholeness', 3-26 (p. 5).
[48] Stevens, 'Adagia', *OP*, p. 188.
[49] Wilde, p. 8.
[50] Ibid, p. 5.

never touch but remain in constant relation to one another. Dissonance between two or more elements of a single object is a key aspect of quantum physics where reality is comprised of interactions between related subjects and objects. The removal of dominant objectivity rooted in classical physics through the theoretical understanding of complementarity is also one of the ways in which Stevens engaged with quantum physics.[51] New modes of expression were required to further redevelop and clarify this new position of the human in relation to other entities. Monroe, as noted earlier, stated that poetry reaches into the depths of emotion, allowing articulation of the self. Stevens uses his ecopoetics as a space to rearticulate the human. Indeed, the relationship between sound and sign within a poem is one of complementarity, where both components share similar qualities but cannot be measured against one another. This relationship is also a useful method to express humanity's creaturely being. The sign as a human mode of communication is the only way that we can articulate our voices, and giving attention to sound and sign exposes a hopeful area of poetic potentiality to move towards an understanding of symbiotic human nature.

As Judith McDaniel notes in her 1974 article, 'Wallace Stevens and the Scientific Imagination', to 'describe or illuminate the universe is, after all, the greater task of not only the poet, but the philosopher and scientist also.'[52] Quantum theory and complementarity point towards an understanding that the parts of our universe operate in constant tandem. As Daniel accurately notes, it is the task of the humanities and sciences to illuminate the changing sense of the human position in the universe. Returning to Andre George's notation on Planck, that same sentiment of a united reformulation of expression is called for because it is apparent that bonds between 'successive events ought to be independent of man'.[53] George calls for a completely 'supra-natural intelligence' as the ultimate determining force able to liberate knowledge of the universe from human objective understanding. Even though such a lifeform is yet to be discovered either within or beyond the universe, the union of poetry and science, or quantum theory and Stevens's thought is the call for 'creative intelligence to bring its potential to bear on the world through language.'[54] Where language in 'The Idea of Order at Key West' submitted to the organic production of sound over sign, Stevens's application of physics to poetry perhaps asks the inverse. What can language offer towards the reformulation of the human position in the world considering scientific developments? How can poetry articulate the reality of complementarity between human and nonhuman existence?

[51] Ibid, p. 6.
[52] Judith McDaniel, 'Wallace Stevens and the Scientific Imagination', *Contemporary Literature*, 15, 2 (Spring, 1974), 221-237, (pp. 236-237) <https://doi.org/10.2307/1207430>.
[53] Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', *OP*, p. 280.
[54] Wilde, p. 19.

Lehman argues that unlike the Romantic poets, Stevens refuses to heal the 'wound of finitude' with his poetic language, and instead chose to occupy the flux between the 'sensual and the intelligible'.[55] Extending discussion from my previous chapter regarding this notion of the 'wound of finitude' and how it can be located as, what Knickerbocker names 'the space between the human and nonhuman where poetry occurs', the conflicted space between the sensual and intelligible can also be related to changing understanding during the mid-twentieth century regarding the position of the human within the world.[56] Placement of humans as entangled with other beings in the world deepens this wound of finitude because the reformulation of human as external observer to immersed subject alongside other beings deposes and resists the need for boundaries and limitations regarding what is human and what is not.

How then, does Stevens explore this modernist wound of finitude? How does his poetry view the human in light of quantum discoveries? What does it mean to be human in Stevens's poetry? All of these questions are relevant to today's ecological crisis, because a better understanding of how humans are part of the world rather than external to it provides a more positive outlook to form ecologically sustainable solutions for the future. While it is important to remember that Stevens and his contemporaries were not fully aware of the ecological crisis that was already brewing during the twentieth century, Stevens's forward-thinking ecopoetics in his later work exploring the 'wound of finitude' of human identity can be conceived as hopeful. His is a poetics that seeks to resituate the human as a creature, thereby giving rise to the nonhuman voices by destabilising singular conceptions of anthropocentric individualism. Stevens's ecopoetics uncover humanity's most inner environmental unconscious by exploring the place of the human within a framework of quantum knowledge, exposing the human to be a symbiotic creature, part of the whole rather than outside of it.

Searching for Creaturely Humans: Stevens's Ecomodernist Offering of Hope

The central discussion of this thesis is how Stevens's use of language enables the otherwise ignored or silenced nonhuman world to speak. By acknowledging the creaturely status of humans, Stevens aligns himself alongside quantum physicists who understand the world as a dynamic and interconnected space. This is precisely what John N. Serio finds engaging about Stevens's work, noting in the introduction to the *Selected Poems* (1954) that he finds Stevens's ability to extend the '"reality-imagination complex" beyond its human scope' to be one of Stevens's greatest achievements.[57] However, where can Stevens's extension beyond the human be found? Joseph Riddel believes it to be in Stevens's language, claiming that here 'we may be able to "find

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[55] Lehman, p. 315.
[56] Knickerbocker, p. 12.
[57] John N. Serio, 'Introduction' in *Selected Poems by Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 2009), xi-xxii (p. xvi).

ourselves", and it is this attention to an "intrinsic" space of abstraction that defines him against a generation of imagists and "objectivists"'.[58] In Stevens's language and his ecopoetics, humans can locate themselves in relation to the familiar pitches of language, but also come to recognise that there is the potential in human language to extend beyond Cartesian understanding of the human into post-Darwinian thought. Beginning with the poems, 'Montrachet-le-Jardin' and 'Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit', I will now show how Stevens's location of the human as a creature in his poems reveals a positive element to his later works through the exposure of more-than-human voices.

'Montrachet-le-Jardin' and 'Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit' illustrate Stevens's search for the human creature within a world of flux. Both poems are from Stevens's later career, the former, from *Parts of a World* (1942) and the latter from *Transport to Summer* (1947).[59] Cartesian notions of the human as separate from other beings is called into question in the texts, highlighting Stevens's concurrent thought with quantum physics. Both poems also indicate how poetry may be able to explore the 'wound of finitude', generated by scientific destabilisation of the human position within the interconnected universe. Therefore, in both works, Stevens moves towards what he calls 'cosmic poetry', which is a poetry that catalyses a realisation of the human integration amongst other beings, resulting in a poetics that is better able to articulate the porous boundaries between humans and the more-than-human world through language and sound.[60]

'Montrachet-le-Jardin', opens with the question: 'What more is there to love than I have loved?', signifying that the speaker has reached a form of finitude.[61] 'Less and Less Human O Savage Spirit' opens with a similar toned musing, asking:

> If there must be a god in the house, must be,
> Saying things in the rooms and on the stair,
>
> Let him move as the sunlight moves on the floor.[62]

While these openings are different, both hold comparable tones regarding a confirmation of thought and present an echo of religious themes. To begin with the indication that an ending has already been reached is an interesting notion. However, to reach a new beginning, an end must be

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[58] Joseph Riddel quoted in Johanna Skibsrud, 'An "Impossible Science": Wallace Stevens and the Ecstatic Mind', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, A Special Issue: Between Poetry and Philosophy, 45, 1 (March 2012), 71-87, (p. 81) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44029785>, [accessed 22 May 2022].

[59] I have chosen these poems because they have been given significantly less critical attention in previous studies of Stevens. This thesis seeks to offer a revised reading of Stevens's work and the detailed study of less widely anthologised poems is part of this aim.

[60] Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', *OP*, p. 271.

[61] Stevens, 'Montrachet-le-Jardin', *CP*, pp. 276-280, l. 1.

[62] Stevens, 'Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit', *CP*, pp. 344-345, ll. 1-3.

present, and as I will show, throughout the poems, Stevens has not reached a sense of finitude, but rather explores the wound between what is felt and what is known.

The title, 'Less and Less Human, O Savage Sprit' immediately signals a process of dehumanisation. Animalistic undertones from the term, 'savage', combined with the repeated reductionist, 'less' are clearly presenting a poem concerned with the meaning of being human, specifically, the human as a form of creature. The gods appear to be silent and 'incapable of speaking' and seem to dwell among humans in invisible realms of light or colour (l. 7). Denial of the significance and even further, existence, of institutionalised gods is a major theme in Stevens's work and can be traced through his collections from *Harmonium*.[63] Important to my discussion of Stevens's ecopoetics is how the poem mediates the future of the human in a world without higher deities. The removal of religion signifies a move away from Christian theology, which is notable given Manes' theorisation relating to the negative influence of religion upon the current ecological crisis.[64]

This move away from Western theology is enacted by the abrupt shift between lines ten and eleven, from gods to humans, emphasised by the shorter length of line eleven, which reads, 'It is the human that is the alien' (l. 11); confirming the dehumanisation indicated by the poem's title from this short, blunt, and aphoristic line. What might the speaker mean with this statement? The notion of an 'alien' indicates something out of place or outside of a familiar environment or dwelling. Rather than focus on the presence of supernatural deities, the speaker points outwards to an external position to the world. When thought of as human, and therefore apart from other beings, human *becomes* an alien because the supposed separation from other creatures imposes a demarcation between those entangled in the world as creatures and those that sit outside of these entanglements. The alienation of the human can be read as a commentary on ideologies which perpetuate the narrative of human superiority over other beings.

Human speech is entangled and implicated in the idea of human-as-alien. The speaker claims that it is:

> […] the human that demands his speech
> From beasts or from the incommunicable mass.
>
> If there must be a god in the house, let him be one
> That will not hear us when we speak: a coolness,
>
> A vermilioned nothingness, any stick of the mass
> Of which we are too distantly a part. (ll. 13-18)

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[63] By 'institutionalised' I refer to predominately Western ideologies and conceptions of God.

[64] Manes argues that Western theological traditions of textual exegesis and shifts from oral storytelling traditions to writing contributes to developments in Western anthropocentrism and the silencing of the more-than-human world. See Chapter One, p. 10 for further detail.

While the identity of the 'his' in line thirteen is ambiguous, if read as referring to the human, the poem yet again exemplifies distance between humans and other beings through voice. Humanity demands speech and language from other creatures, including those who cannot speak. To demand something is an exhibition of forceful authority, and therefore, these lines demonstrate how human language and speech can be used to exercise authority over other beings. In doing so, humanity does not always listen to those from whom these demands are made of.

This theme of listening builds through the poem which returns to the initial opening question, asking, if there must be a god in the house, 'let him be one | That will not hear us when we speak.' (ll. 15-16). In other words, if humans must look up to a superior deity, let it be silent and not *hear* us, which forms a parallelism with the lack of aural attentivity from the human to the mass of other beings. This reading is supported by the final lines of the poem which return again to this 'mass' of beings within the world, indicative of a cyclical lack of listening (l. 17). Similar to Stevens's words in 'A Collect of Philosophy', the speaker emphasises that humans are 'too distantly a part' from the 'stick of the mass' ('Less and Less Human', ll. 17-18). Arboreal imagery from 'stick' is reflective of the organic and dendritic connections between beings. However, humans are 'too distant' which accentuates their alien position. Combined with the claim that human speech is taken from other beings, and 'demanded' from them, the poem therefore calls for a shift in how language is used to address the aural relationships between entities in the world. It is the human alone, without gods, that has the power to reformulate where they sit and relate to other creatures, and how language can be used to listen to others. The poem therefore formulates a new doctrine for humans existing as creatures.

'Montrachet-le-Jardin' is often viewed as one of Stevens's elusive Second World War poems.[65] Like 'Less and Less Human', the poem calls for a reformulation of how to live and how to use language through an understanding of the human as a creature. Even so, despite its position within Stevens's canon as one of the bleaker war poems, critics such as Malcom Woodland have attested to the poem's optimism and idealism.[66] Picking up from Woodland's reading, I maintain that the poem carries an optimistic sentiment that humans can change their perspectives regarding their position within the world, particularly through language. The phrase, 'Man must be the hero of his world' could be viewed as anti-ecological in terms of anthropocentric thought where the

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[65] Edward Ragg remains ambiguous as to 'Montrachet's' place as a war poem, but he does mention that the 1942 publication of the poem in the *Partisan Review* alongside other works concerning war tends towards the editors' view of the poem as a symbolic war text. See: Edward Ragg, 'Love, Wine, Desire: Stevens' "Montrachet-Le-Jardin" and Shakespeare's "Cymbeline", *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 30, 2, Special Issue: Stevens' Erotic Poetics (Fall 2006), 183-209, (pp. 183-184) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44885002>, [accessed 16 April 2022].
[66] Malcom Woodland, '"Amen to the Feelings:" Wallace Stevens and the Politics of Emotion', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 29, 1, Special Conference Issue, Part 2: Celebrating Wallace Stevens: The Poet of Poets in Connecticut (Spring 2005), 91-97, (p. 91) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44885146>, [accessed 5 May 2022].

human is viewed as a saviour of the world. However, it can also be read in terms of an assumption of stewardship. It is within this sentiment that man can assume a more positive role towards other beings that Stevens locates a more hopeful perspective.

Like the god in 'Less and Less Human' which moves in the atomised moment 'as the sunlight moves on the floor', sound and language in 'Montrachet' appears quieter and more elusive ('Less and Less Human', ll. 1-3). The speaker searches for something more to love in a 'senseless syllable' or, in other words, something more to discover within the finitude of language ('Montrachet', l. 9). It is exciting that this 'beyond' seems to be present amongst the shadows of the mind because, in other words, while 'beyond' may elude direct identification, it is present within the self. While this could be an allusion to Freud's unconscious, the concept of the full truth of the world evading our understanding, it also adheres to Planck's theory of three worlds, where man can only observe the physical world.[67] What may allow language to move beyond the human into a more ecologically inclusive speech lies in the world of sense perceptions, or the *Umwelt*, and evidence of this can be found in the incantatory words 'sounds resembling sounds, efflorisant' ('Montrachet', l. 11). Visual rhyme comes to mind with 'sounds resembling sounds' while the French 'efforisant', meaning 'flourishing' implies the emergence of the something that moves in the shadows of the mind. Things at once resemble one another and lead to the emergence of other phenomena.

Where something elusive and mysterious lurks in the shadows, the human voice falters. The unnerving phrase describing 'players | Of aphonies, tuned in from zero' reminds readers of new beginnings. Whispered speech is the symbol of this new start in 'Montrachet', cohesive with the silent gods in 'Less and Less Human', which reminds readers of Stevens's note in 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words' that, 'above everything else, poetry is words; and that words, above everything else, are in poetry, sounds.'[68] The zero point of poetry is sound, regardless of pitch. In 'Montrachet', quiet sounds return readers to the origin point of language propelling them beyond and into the future through the interactions of various human characters in the poem.

The most prominent characters in 'Montrachet' are those of the hero, the prisoner and the skeleton. The tone in stanza seven is incantatory, and while, like 'Less and Less Human', gods are not present, elements of a religious or spiritual undertone remain, evoked with the repetition of 'amen' ('Montrachet', l. 19). The strange syntax of the lines adds to the prayer-like and incantatory tone:

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[67] The sense of 'beyond' existing within the self but unidentifiable or inexpressible also bears similarity to Buell's idea of the environmental unconscious.
[68] Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', *NA*, p. 32.

Amen to thought, our singular skeleton,
Salt-flicker, amen to our accustomed cell,
The moonlight in the cell, words on the wall.

To-night, night's undeciphered murmuring
Comes closest to the prisoner's ear, becomes a throat
The hand can touch, neither green bronze nor marble
(ll. 19-24).

What can the speaker mean with the words, 'our singular skeleton, | Salt-flicker, amen to our accustomed cell'? One interpretation is to accentuate the human connection to the earth. Stripping the human down to the bare bones reminds us of our earthly finitude, or 'our accustomed cell'. The ambiguous phrase, 'Salt-flicker', also plays into Stevens's presentation of human finitude. Salt is a compound upon which all life depends to survive and aided the development of human civilisation.[69] In essence, 'salt-flicker' is a metaphor for life. Stevens reduces the human down to salt and bones, which are physical elements that we share with other creatures to remind us of our interconnected origins. Syntactically, the words do not form a logical, coherent conclusion, however the semantic connections between the words reconcile an image of the human as an earthly creature. These semantic connections are reinforced through the sibilance across enjambed lines which unites the words and solidifies the imagery of humans enmeshed within the earth.

Readings of what it means to be human in 'Less and Less Savage' and 'Montrachet' have surmised that while humanity is comprised of and relies on the same compounds as other beings, the use of speech and language, particularly written text can place them as external 'aliens' amongst other beings. These readings of human placement in the world are arguably negative and pertain to the conclusion that Stevens's later work is more bleak than hopeful. However, as Edward Ragg reminds us, 'Montrachet' is ultimately a poem about love.[70] In addition to Ragg's conclusion, I suggest that the poem is concerned with how poetry can show love for the world and the nonhuman through exploration into how the creaturely nature of humans engenders a use of speech and language to access a new position within the world rather than being alienated from it.

The speaker calls for no fear towards 'brute clouds' or 'winter stop', and instead to allow the 'water-belly of ocean roar'. Here we are reminded of a young Stevens, who in a 1904 journal entry laments the earth's 'physical hugeness, its rough enormity'.[71] It seems that thirty-eight years later, the same concerns regarding the human tendency to fear the natural world's innate power, and subsequent forsaking of it are still present. Perhaps this is also why the speaker asks that readers

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[69] By using salt, humans were able to preserve food for longer; a factor that contributed to the development of the species.
[70] Ragg, 'Love, Wine, Desire: Stevens' 'Montrachet-Le-Jardin' and Shakespeare's 'Cymbeline'', p. 185.
[71] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 89, 'From his Journal, April 18, 1904'), p. 73.

not feel the 'x-malisons of other men' ('Montrachet', ll. 43-45). The call is for man to live immersed and integrated in the world, allowing the nonhuman to speak for themselves rather than demand speech from them, as in 'Less and Less Human'. Without appreciation of the creaturely existence of human beings, men are impure, as implied by the archaic word 'malisons' meaning cursed or accursed.[72]

Using the letter 'x' within a phrase or sentence is a technique regularly employed by Stevens and merits attention. Pictorially, 'x' forms the shape of a crossing, and as noted from discussion of Merleau-Ponty's chiastic ontology of the man-animal intertwining in Chapter One, 'x' holds particular significance within ecophenomenological discourse, representing the embrace between organism and environment.[73] Viewing 'x' in specific relation to the human may also remind readers of Leonardo Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, which depicts the ideal proportions of the human body in relation to the universe.[74] Placement of the man at the centre of these shapes outlines Da Vinci's perspective of the human in balance with the universe, in a pictorial microcosm. Even so, it cannot be ignored that the placement of the human at the centre relates to anthropocentric ideals and is reflective of Da Vinci's philosophy that 'man is the model of the world.'[75] Da Vinci's statement and Vitruvian Man seem to oppose Stevens's notion that all things are grounded in nature. Despite this difference, the philosophy of man as the model of the world coheres with the resounding statement in 'Montrachet' that 'Man must become the hero of his world (ll. 33). From both artworks, the placement of the human and the shape of 'x' bears direct relation to the way that we can perceive ourselves and how our perception of our place within the world has bearing upon our surroundings.

The shape of 'x' can also be viewed as a linguistic representation of complementarity theory where the two lines of 'x' represent shared properties that cannot be measured at the same time, or essentially function on different panes. The physical shape of the letter's complementarity also functions on a sonic level. The letter 'x' is a linguistic chameleon because it contains various sounds depending on its context, most commonly a 'k' or 's', notably both sibilant sounds. Perhaps because of its chiastic shape and different sonic production, the letter has become universally representative of unknowns and indeterminacy. Skibsud states that 'x' becomes 'blank' and an

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[72] 'Malisons' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/112958?rskey=B1UoeQ&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> [accessed 29 December 2021].
[73] See Chapter One, p. 12 for details.
[74] Standing in a t-pose within a square and a circle, the Vitruvian Man's limbs form an x shape. Symbolically, the circle is viewed as a symbol of vitality or divine life-force, whereas the square references the earth, with each corner representing one of the four elements.
[75] Leonardo Da Vinci, 'Thoughts on Life' in *Thoughts on Art and Life*, trans. Maurice Baring (Boston: The Merrymount Press, 1906), pp. 3-59 (p. 25). Project Gutenberg Ebook.

'abstraction' within the poem, but one where the potential for the reader to briefly experience 'the truth for me' exists within the ambiguity of the letter ('Montrachet', l. 49). Likewise, DeSales Harrison reflects upon Stevens's use of the letter 'x' in the poem, 'Motive for Metaphor', theorising that "'x' is not a site to be filled with any number of possible substitutions, but the site of a removal, a fundamental absence, by definition undecipherable, imageless, a '"never-rounding O"'.[76] As I will discuss later in this chapter, like the wind that is a 'never rounding O' in 'Montrachet', 'x', as Skibsud asserts, is characterised by what is not present within its meaning.

If the value of 'x' is taken to symbolise an unknown, the alignment to the malisons of the human can be connected to the human status of 'aliens' in 'Less and Less Human'. Humans and their internal curse, whatever this may be, are rendered unknowns, external to the world. The 'malisons' are located within the human, denoted from the ominous line with obvious religious undertones detailing 'The poison in the blood will have been purged.' ('Montrachet', l. 49). While the condemnation of the human race in the form of curses seems rather bleak, the use of the future conditional, 'will have', gives cause for hope. The speaker tells readers that man will be purged or cleansed of its malisons allowing movement towards the 'hero-land' in the future ('Montrachet', l. 46). Even so, how can this cleansing of the human take place? What significance does moving man towards a hero-land have for the nonhuman voice? As I will now show, the different forms of human presented in the poem allow a move towards a greater and a quantum understanding of the world.

The human characters of 'Montrachet' are entangled, but it is apparent that the hero delivers the prisoner, who stands for the mass of cursed men, from their moonlight cell through speech. Stanzas eight to eleven reveal that it is of the 'undeciphered murmuring' of voice, song and speech that enables the purging of the human to eventually move towards the hero-land (l. 22). An emphasis on the embodied production of sound and language is located in the progression from 'undeciphered murmuring', which becomes a tangible 'throat' that is flesh, not 'bronze or marble' (ll. 22-24). The murmuring becomes the vessel from which sound is produced, hinting again at a production of a sound prior to the formation of speech. The words are closer to song, with the incantatory and enchanting effects of the sounds of words noted in the description of the 'chant' emerging from the 'hero's being' (ll. 26-27). Here, readers are reminded that speech and language are naturally occurring in an echo of Coleridge's organic theory. Sounds emerge from all beings and it is this organic use of speech and language that delivers the prisoner from their cell:

> Delivering the prisoner by his words,
> So that the skeleton in the moonlight sings,

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[76] DeSales Harrison, *The End of the Mind: The Edge of the Intelligible in Hardy, Stevens, Larkin, Plath, and Glück* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 80. Google Ebook.

Sings of a heroic world beyond the cell;

No, not believing, but to make the cell
A hero's world in which he is the hero.
Man must become the hero of his world.

The salty skeleton must dance because
He must, in the aroma of summer nights,
Licentious violet and lascive rose,

Midsummer love and softest silences,
Weather of night creatures, whistling all day, too,
And echoing rhetorics more than our own (ll. 28-39).

The skeleton is connected with humanity's early origins, and indeed, the characterisation of 'salty' reflects the 'singular skeleton | Salt-flicker' from stanza seven. The skeleton revels in the aromas and sounds of the natural world denoted from imagery that calls to mind the carnivalesque atmosphere of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1600).

Where man must 'become the hero of his world' creating the world within the cell, he perhaps takes note from the skeleton who dances to the tune of 'rhetorics more than our own' ('Montrachet', ll. 33, 39). The sonic quality and trochaic rhythm of this line invokes the dance of the skeleton to the repeated and modulating 'e' and 'o' sounds. Indeed, these open vowells appear to reflect language in its earliest formation; sounds of what the speaker calls 'the earliest poems of the world' (l. 40.) Indeed, pre-modern civilisations appear to have been more at ease with their position *within* the world rather than superior to or outside of it, and therefore in this age, 'man is the hero' (l. 41.) In an earlier world, man is attentive towards the 'echoing rhetorics more than our own' which permeate the summer nights and days (l. 39). These rhetorics of other beings add to human language rather than take away from it, denoted from the exemplifier 'more than' (l. 39). Unlike the humans in 'Less and Less Savage' who demand their speech from other beings, in 'Montrachet', the speaker encourages readers to consider a time when human language and speech did not warrant demands from other beings and was more comfortably entangled with the voices of the nonhuman. Essentially, a pre-modern speech was more at ease within the quantum condition of the world or the rhythm of things within which the skeleton dances.

Part of the entanglement between human and nonhuman speech in 'Montrachet' is one that suggests the human as creature, rather than external observer. Moving on from the human as prisoner, skeleton or hero, the poem next introduces the 'naked man', the 'root-man' and the 'super-man' (ll. 56, 68). To reach the hero-land, the root-man and the super-man must be equated 'To project the naked man in a state of fact.' (ll. 67, 80). As ever with Stevens, the meaning of these lines is ambiguous. Even so, returning to the letter 'x' and its complementarity offers some

insight into the relationship between the root-man and the super-man. The root-man holds imagery of man as a tree, bound to the earth through vegetation in a reference back to the salty origins of life's 'salt-flicker' earlier in the poem. 'Root' also connotes stability and grounded origin. Perhaps the root-man is the first man and earth dweller. The super-man on the other hand bears immediate connection to Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, and indeed, lines fifty-eight to sixty-six align to Zarathustra's move away from Christianity to a grounded human ideal. However, Stevens's depiction of these two human forms, who appear connected like the sides of a Mobius strip, does not present an image of progression. Consider how the root-man is 'swarming, tortured by his mass' and how the super-man is 'friseured, possessing and possessed' ('Montrachet', ll. 68 - 69). Like the entrapped prisoner, neither appear to be in a positive situation and the chiastic structure of the lines relates the discomfort felt by both characters. The unpleasant imagery of the tortured and swarming root-man pre-empts lines in 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' which speak of 'A million people on one string' that are like 'a buzzing of flies in autumn air'.[77] Cohesion between these images suggests that Stevens' perception towards the increasing mass of humanity during the twentieth century was not positive because humans are likened to insects and compared to a pestilence.

The super-man on the other hand is 'friseured' ('Montrachet', l. 69). 'Friseured' is one of what Zachary Tavlin describes as Stevens's 'semilinguistic vocalizations', that indicate 'the untranscendable relationship between the transparency and opacity of language' which 'encircles the primitive dialectic of the ventilating imagination and reality's incessant pressure on the mind.'[78] Alternatively, Stevens's 'semilinguistic vocalizations' cohere to complementarity theory on levels of the different measures of understanding regarding what is linguistically clear and what requires additional knowledge or imagination. Stevens evokes the original derivative of the word, 'friser', which is to curl or frizz and also a potential play on the French, 'friseur', meaning 'hairdresser'. More notably however, 'friser' can also mean 'to buzz'. While this meaning requires etymological knowledge, it is possible that Stevens uses the French verb as a chiastic link to the imagery of the swarm around the root-man. The buzzing of the human echoes in the ear, enacting what Morton describes as 'a chiasmic crisscross between sounds emitted by my ear and pressure waves perturbing the ear's liquids from the outside.'[79]

Language blurs the boundaries between inside and outside. Sounds permeate the internal and external perception of the reader via invisible sound waves. Additionally, the semiotic associations

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[77] Stevens, 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', *CP*, ll. 33, 38.
[78] Zachary Tavlin, '"Spissant" Lyric: Stevens at the Limits of Speech and Song', *Wallace Stevens Journal*, 45, 2 (Fall 2021), 218-228, (pp. 219, 220) <10.1353/wsj.2021.0042>.
[79] Morton, *All Art is Ecological*, p. 93.

between 'root' as below and 'super' as above are negated in the crossing of meanings across the different words. Stevens plays with the transparencies and opacites of language to reflect how perceptions of humans as inferior or superior are false. We are 'creatures' of a 'whole' for which, I argue, Stevens was searching for the correct language.[80] It is only through such language that we may be able 'To project the naked man in a state of fact, | As acutest virtue, ascetic trove' ('Montrachet', ll. 80-81). Poetry may be the trove where such language may be discovered, which Stevens viewed as a source of hope.[81]

Returning to the first question of the poem, which asks, 'What more is there to love | Than I have loved?', 'Montrachet' may be read as a rationalisation of Christianity and wavering Christian values in the twentieth century (ll. 1). Ecocritically, this theme of religion is pertinent. In Chapter One, I referred to Christopher Manes' essay, 'Nature and Silence' which explains connections between written text and the current ecological crisis, predominately through the influence of Western theology.[82] Institutionalised religion greatly contributed to cultural anthropocentricism and the subsequent silencing of nonhuman entities through the written sign.[83] Stevens engages with these issues connecting institutionalised religion and cultural anthropocentricism in 'Montrachet', particularly with the invocation of buzzing swarms.[84] Could it be that 'Montrachet' depicts Stevens's modern perspective on original sin in relation to the associations of human language as poisoned and cursed? If so, what does he propose that humanity do to return to a purified communication? How might this affect our relationships with nonhuman beings and how might it enable them to speak?

The final stanzas of the poem point towards where humanity may be able to reach a purer form of communication which shows influence from quantum physics. There is a structural shift in the last section of the poem, marking the speakers' renouncement of 'Bastard chateaux and smokey demoiselles' to 'build towers' of their own, which are an allusion to the poetic imagination ('Montrachet', ll. 76-77). The subsequent itemisation of events illustrates the influence of quantum physics on Stevens's thought and how the theory of complementarity functions between sound and sign to reflect the interconnections of the patches and pitches of the world. Additionally, the turn towards imagination in pursuit of a purer form of being coheres with Planck's notation on

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[80] Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', *OP*, p. 271.
[81] 'Ascetic' has religious connotations, meaning severe self-discipline. In contrast to the skeleton revelling in 'licentious', pre-modern senses, the 'naked man' sits between the skeleton and the prisoner. In other words, to become the hero, man must locate balance between the modern and pre-modern.
[82] Manes, pp. 15-29.
[83] Ibid, p. 21.
[84] To add to this idea, the demonic figure of Beelzebub first depicted in the Old Testament is associated with swarms of flies, and indeed the name, 'Beelzebub' translates as the 'Lord of the flies'.

imagination, which gives the scientist the ability to 'foresee events'.[85] The following stanzas can therefore be read as a pointer towards how humans can experience the world through a connected, creaturely perspective. The act of itemisation is signified by the anaphora of 'Item: […]' ('Montrachet', ll. 82, 86, 89, 94). There is a need for structure here; for the world to throw itself together into an idea of order. Where categorisation may pertain to Cartesian styles of thinking, like Burnett's 'Arrival of Spring' mentioned in my Introduction, the poem defies any sense of dualism, with various moments layered and connected to each other:

> Item: The cocks crow and the birds cry and
> The sun expands, like a repetition on
> One string, an absolute, not varying
>
> Toward an inaccessible, pure sound.
> Item: The wind is never rounding O
> And, imageless, is itself the most,
>
> Mouthing its constant smatter throughout space.
> Item: The green fish pensive in green reeds
> Is an absolute. Item: The cataracts
>
> As facts fall like rejuvenating rain,
> Fall down through nakedness to nakedness,
> To the auroral creature musing in the mind.
>
> Item: Breathe, breathe upon the centre of
> The breath life's latest, thousand senses.
> But let this one sense be the single main. (ll. 82-96)

The first four lines of these stanzas clearly locate the quantum condition of the entangled world. While the birds cry, the 'sun expands, like a repetition on | One string, an absolute, not varying | Toward an inaccessible, pure sound' (ll. 82-85). Simultaneously occurring events from the cry of birds to the expansion of the sun illustrate the dynamism of the world and the reverberations of particle vibration in the transmission of sound. The speaker unites the smaller and momentary event of the crow and cry with the larger and more gradual expansion of the sun through the sound of 'one string'. Through the sounds of words, the speaker can unite the various events of the world which may operate on different scales on a single string, or within a poem. The action of unifying seemingly disparate events upon one string moves language towards 'an inaccessible, pure sound', or the sounds of a human language which will better immerse humanity within their creaturely origins (l. 85).

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[85] Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', *OP*, p. 280.

Moving onto the next itemisation, the speaker takes to the air, describing the 'imageless' wind that never rounds 'O' (ll. 86-87). As David Ben-Merre comments, 'Stevens will never give us the harmonic circle or the cyclical return to how things once were' due to his position as a modern romantic poet.[86] The wind can never form a round 'O' because the harmonic circle cannot be resolved within the modernist wound of finitude. The divine circle of Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* has been broken and events in the world cannot form a harmonic circle. Instead, the world operates within a series of 'patches and pitches', with phenomena occurring and interacting simultaneously. This dynamism is represented through personification of the wind in the next line where the wind is found to be 'Mouthing its constant smatter throughout space' ('Montrachet', l. 88). Semantic connections between the action of 'mouthing' and the letter 'O' infer the action of speech. Like the gods, the wind is invisible, yet can constantly be heard throughout space, where, like the birds and the sun that move towards a purer sound, the wind also does through its constant mouthing towards the shape of 'O'.

Emphasis on the embodied experience of the world is continued in the next lines which describes 'cataracts | As facts fall like rejuvenating rain' to the auroral creature 'musing in the mind' (ll. 90-93). The obvious sonic consonance between 'cataracts' and 'facts' refers to a movement towards pure and unattainable sound, with the sonic element of both words providing the primary connection between the cataracts and facts. The sonic pattern of the words reflects the imagery where consonance falls into alliteration, echoing how the cataracts fall like rain. The pathological meaning for 'cataracts' creates strange imagery and lifts the poem out of context, because cataracts cause blindness. The simile likening them to 'rejuvenating rain' is jarring and sits uneasily with the flowing rhythm of the lines. However, using the now obsolete or obscure meanings of cataracts creates a clearer picture. The earliest use of the word in English refers to the flood gates of heaven that keep back the rain.[87] Similar to the purging of poison from man's 'malisons' earlier in the poem, these lines convey a cleansing, accentuated by the words 'falling through nakedness to nakedness' (l. 92). The emphasis on nakedness evokes the biblical fall of mankind. Notably, the fall to nakedness is not the final destination. This place is instead reserved for the 'auroral creature musing in the mind' (l. 93). Mankind makes its descent through nakedness to arrive at a final form: the creature. The prefix 'auroral' connects this stanza to the imagery of the expanding sun and the wind that cannot round O, because auroras are natural light displays caused by solar wind. Man as auroral creature is semantically connected with the elemental

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[86] David Ben-Merre, 'Xs and Os: Chiasmus, Apostrophe, and the Lyric Subject in Stevens', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 45, 2 (Fall 2021), 199-217, (p. 209) <10.1353/wsj.2021.0041>.

[87] 'Cataracts', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/28766?rskey=NlC8Zi&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> [accessed 4 January 2021].

movements, or the four corners of the Vitruvian square. The 'naked man projected in fact' is in fact, not a man, but a creature that is in tune with the world. Man as creature can 'Breathe, breathe upon the centre of | The breath life's latest, thousand senses' (ll. 94-95). Readers are therefore returned to the rounding 'O', and the origin of speech and anthropogenic sound.[88]

The Patches and Pitches of Being: Stevens's Late Ecosophy

One of the aims of this chapter is to provide an alternative reading of Stevens's later works as hopeful, in consideration of the position of the human in relation to other beings on the level of language and sound. Stevens's later work can therefore be viewed as a move towards a reconciliation of his final stages of thought regarding the intersections and enmeshments of poetry, language, the human, and the world. While it would be inaccurate to claim that Stevens reaches a confirmation of thought towards the end of his career, as hinted at in 'Less and Less Human' and 'Montrachet', the poem 'July Mountain' offers a sense of hopeful assurance regarding Stevens's worldview as one of the final poems written before his death in 1955.

In a short, ten-line continuous stanza, the speaker conveys a feeling of belonging to the infinite. While a form of order is present in the final line describing Vermont throwing 'itself together', the need for order does not appear to be as urgent as in 'The Idea of Order at Key West' or the final stages of 'Montrachet'. Instead, the speaker in 'July Mountain' seems comfortable with the understanding that we live not in a world, but in a 'constellation | Of patches and pitches'. Abstracting the sense of world into the fragmented imagery of 'patches and pitches' presents sound as an important element in this space of associations, forming the place of habitation itself rather than the conventional image of world. Essentially, the speaker claims that we live in an arrangement of sounds which is always growing and emerging across the quantum imagery of the 'incipient cosmos'.

Where do humans fit within this environment of patches and pitches? Stevens's use of the plural pronoun, 'we' throughout the poem is indicative of a collective community of beings.[89] The place of the human within this dwelling space of patches and pitches is interwoven within the score of other beings that exist across, not just the world, but the universe. As George Lensing affirms, 'The world itself for Stevens, whether in war or peace, is otherwise endlessly dynamic'.[90] We do not live within 'a single world', we instead occupy space alongside a multiplicity of other lifeforms. Likewise, the human body is not inhabited by a single being. Morton astutely frames

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[88] Another example of where Stevens returns readers to a form of origin is his early poem, 'Sunday Morning', particularly the lines: 'Their chant shall be a chant of paradise, | Out of their blood, returning to the sky'. See: *CP*, pp. 71-75 (p. 74), ll. 96-97.
[89] Frequent occurrences of the collective pronoun, 'we', highlights a social focus in Stevens's later work.
[90] George Lensing, 'The Way of Nothingness' in *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2001), 112-131 (p. 124).

the situation of the world that is reflected in 'July Mountain' where he notes 'You are a fully embodied being who has never been separated from other biological beings both inside and outside your body, not for one second.'[91] The patches and pitches of the world are not only external ecosystems, but also internal. Each organism is made up of patches and pitches that form connected semiotic gestures of being.

Where 'Less and Less Human' and 'Montrachet' look to displaced gods and what remains after, 'July Mountain' moves completely towards the cosmic and quantum realm of the undiscovered universe. Stevens scales up his poetic world into these realms, reminding readers that they are part of an ever-increasing whole. Using the metaphor of a constellation instead of a world places emphasis towards the far-reaching outer realms of our universe, inviting readers to extend their conception of the world beyond that which they can see. The abstraction away from our earth-bound dwelling space displaces the notion of anthropocentric dominance and habitation upon the planet. Constellations are groups of stars, and the inclusion of planetary imagery invites the concept of a world outside of the earth. Like Planck, along with the speaker, readers must imagine the potential scales of 'beyond' the human. Consequently, in this scaled up dwelling space, the position of the human appears smaller in the face of infinite and dynamic space. While this reduction of the human could be negatively interpreted, it is important to note that the wider concept of a constellation is a group of entities sharing similar characteristics, in other words, denotive of unity and similarity. The cosmic metaphor of the constellation accentuates the notion of the human in infinite space alongside other beings as part of the constellation of patches and pitches rather than outside of it. Alternatively, this cosmic metaphor plays into complementarity theory, highlighting the various dynamic parts of the world existing alongside each other.

The analogy of infinite space is also represented in the imagery of Vermont throwing itself together from the top of a mountain. From an aerial perspective, where the details of the world are minimised, readers observe a more complete image of the world. The speaker implies that it is only from a distanced or ariel point that enables observation of the parts within the whole and reconcile the small into the large. In Vermont, comprehension of the entire space and how the parts of the world joined together can only be understood within an imaginative conception of Vermont. Viewing Vermont from above brings the comprehension of the space back to the real. This distanced point of observation allows the constituent parts of Vermont to throw themselves together and the patches and pitches of the space are arranged into the whole.

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[91] Morton, *All Art is Ecological*, p. 104.

The concept of throwing something together can also be related to the process of writing. The syntax of the first six lines indicates that the constellation of patches and pitches of where we live is located:

> In things said well in music,
> On the piano, and in speech,
> As in a page of poetry —.[92]

Relating the patches and pitches of our dwelling space to music, speech, and poetry, shows that humans exist primarily within a world of sound and words that throws itself together and emerges itself in patches and pitches of sound and language. Lensing advocates for these lines as a justification of the importance of poetry, noting the centrality of the poem itself, that 'changes the "pitches" of music into harmonious concord or into "things said well in music"'.[93] For Lensing, poetry provides an order and structure to the poem's disordered 'Babel of sounds'. Instead, I contend that the poem struggles to form a demarcation between music, speech and poetry, due to the comparative 'as' used in line six. All forms of sound contribute towards the emergence of the ever-expanding 'incipient cosmos' of which we are all part. As Vermont throws itself together, so does 'July Mountain', capturing the music and speech of the world and throwing them together within the poem. While the poem hints at Stevens's late conception of ideas around the human place in the world and poetry's ability to express how we are but part of a wider, interconnected whole, it is not a final offering. There cannot be final thinkers in an 'incipient cosmos', only notions of thought which expand and change in the untethered flux. In 'July Mountain', Stevens leaves readers not with a final thought, but an offering or suggestion of a new way of thinking about the position of the human within the wider universe.

The cosmic scales of 'July Mountain' pertain to Stevens's 1951 essay, 'A Collect of Philosophy'. To return to a key phrase referred to in Chapter One of this thesis, Stevens writes:

> A sense of the infinity of the world is a sense of something cosmic. It is cosmic poetry because it makes us realise that we are creatures, not of a part, which is our everyday limitation, but of a whole for which, for the most part, we have as yet no language.'[94]

To conceive of the world as part of an infinity in space and time is poetic because it forms the realisation that we as humans are but of a small part within a whole. What this whole is exactly remains ambiguous, pertaining to the concept in 'July Mountain' that there are no final thinkers within an incipient cosmos. Within the incipient cosmos, humans are creatures, like any other. Expanding on this line of thought, Stevens's use of creatures to describe humans immediately

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[92] Stevens, 'July Mountain', *OP*, p. 140, ll. 4-6.
[93] Lensing, 'Finding and Making' in *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons*, 316-330 (p. 322).
[94] Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', *OP*, p. 271.

places Stevens in the post-Darwinian line of thinking, where humans are not separate from other beings but closely related to them.

Man as creature removes ideas of anthropocentric superiority over other beings, which is a highly eco-conscious line of thought. Stevens's words speak to much later realisations concerning the human position in the world. J. S. Rowe writes that:

> Organisms are parts of the supra-organismic systems from which, bodily and animatedly, through long evolution of systems they came. Their roles, purposes, niches are to be found not so much by reference to others of their kind, or to related kinds, as by reference to the enveloping ecological systems of which they are parts.[95]

The infinity of the world to which Stevens speaks pertains to the enveloping ecological systems that Rowe speaks of. Both are reminders that the world extends beyond our conceptions. Further, Rowe's use of the term 'supra-organismic systems' relates to Andre George's notation of 'supra-natural intelligence'. Both believe that there is something beyond the world as we understand it, which coheres with notions of quantum physics. While Stevens is also greatly concerned with the specific notion of beyond when it comes to the place of the human in the world, evident from discussion in the previous chapter regarding 'Idea of Order', he seems relatively confident in his understanding. Humans are creatures, but this realisation has yet to become universal. We are limited by the belief that we are only a part of the world rather than a component of the whole. In other words, Stevens explains that our belief in anthropocentric systems and ideologies limits our understanding of the reality of the human position amongst the scale of ecosystems and the universe. As quantum physics indicates, rather than sitting outside or external to the patches and pitches of the world, the human-as-creature lives immersed as part of the patches and pitches of the universe.

Even though Stevens's assertion regarding the place of humans in the world appears relatively assertive from the speakers' tone of 'July Mountain', he still mediates and explores the ways in which humans can be defined. These reflections lead to additional discussion into how poetry can move readers further towards an understanding or revised perception of ourselves as creatures. In the poems studied in this chapter, I observe a Stevens who is, while certainly disheartened at the human effect on the world, still optimistic and hopeful that we can establish a more sustainable and equal ecological relationship with the more-than-human world. Further to this, I have shown that Stevens presents sound and language at the forefront of this emerging ecologically sustainable relationship and key to viewing the human as a fellow creature rather than a superior being. For a

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[95] J. S. Rowe, 'The Integration of Ecological Studies', *Functional Ecology*, 6, 1 (1992), 115-118 (p. 117) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2389779> [accessed 6 September 2022].

poet where 'Words are everything else in the world' and 'the loss of language creates confusion or dumbness', erasure of human language is not a solution to our distance to the natural world.[96] Instead, changing perceptions of the human and what it means to be a human within an ever-changing world is one of the ways in which Stevens shows that we can establish a more ecologically sustainable relationship with the world.

Stevens's modernist ecopoetics extends the organic poetics of his Romantic predecessors from poetic form and metre into wider conceptions regarding the human as an organic, creaturely being within the organic body of the poem. In the wound of finitude left by his Romantic forebears, Stevens establishes a quantum understanding of the world where, to use Rueckert's words, 'Everything is connected to everything else'.[97] Key to these ideas are developments in modern science, particularly physics, as I have discussed in this chapter. The shared concept of the something beyond the human compelled Stevens, as it did Max Planck, Heisenberg and Einstein. While poetry cannot necessarily reach an answer or definitive solution to the modern disparity between human and nature, Stevens's modernist ecopoetics explores this gulf and suggests alternatives. By returning to our origins as symbiotic creatures, we may be better placed to uncover these forgotten elements of our being within the environmental unconscious. Viewing ourselves as creatures opens our internal and external perceptions of the world to a higher pitch. As organic creatures, the sounds that we make, and by extension, our language, forms a relationship of complementarity alongside nonhuman sounds. While the wind may never round to 'O', examining the position of the human as creature allows us to hear these sounds more clearly.

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[96] Stevens, 'Adagia', *OP,* pp. 184-202 (pp. 199, 185).
[97] Rueckert, p. 108.

Chapter Four: 'Breathless things broodingly abreath': Hearing Stevens's Ecopoetics in Jorie Graham's Late Modernist Poetics

So far, I have located Stevens's ecopoetics and ecosophy across Romanticism and Modernism. I have shown that Stevens's own historical context and those that preceded him heavily influenced his ecopoetics. His ecopoetics are an infusion of both temporal moments, supporting claims to name him as a 'Romantic Modern' ecopoet. Viewed ecocritically, this label as a Romantic Modernist allows new perceptions of Stevens's work to emerge, from the importance of organic form in his poetics to the influence of technological and scientific knowledge upon his ecosophy and writing. Exploring the significance and function of sound in relation to written sign in Stevens's language reveals his use of poetry as a site to enable the nonhuman to speak, reflective of Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on the world's interconnected ontology. In this chapter my discussion of Stevens's ecosophy and ecopoetics will be extended into the contemporary by tracing connections between his work and that of the Late Modernist poet, Jorie Graham. My focus will be directed towards the notion of process, particularly in the writing of poetry, to examine the parallels between Stevens's and Graham's ecopoetics.

Not only is it necessary but is it also exciting to trace the ecopoetic influence of Stevens. By doing so, the cohesion of ecological thought surrounding his work can be better located. So far, this thesis has revealed that ecological concern, while heightened today, is not limited to the present moment. Elucidating connections between Stevens and contemporary poets increases overall understanding of Stevens's ecosophy and how his thought may have impacted existing ecopoetics, enabling a dialogue between his work and current ecological change. This dialogue further explicates the relevance and importance of Stevens's work and thought in the context of ecological crisis.

This chapter is not the first to draw connections between Stevens and Graham, whose meditative lyrics bear significant homage to Stevens's philosophical poetry.[1] My focus on Graham throughout this chapter is her most recent collection, *Runaway* (2020), in particular, the poem, 'Scarcely There'.[2] A close reading of this poem will be conducted alongside sections from Stevens's longer and later works, predominately 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' and 'Esthetique Du Mal'.[3] What I hope to show by reading these poems against each other is how

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[1] For a valuable and recent contribution to Modernist ecopoetics which situates Graham's work alongside that of Stevens, T.S. Eliot, David Jones, and Basil Bunting, see Matthew Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change: Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

[2] Jorie Graham, 'Scarcely There' in *Runaway* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2020), pp. 53-55.

[3] Stevens, 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' and 'Esthetique Du Mal', *CP*, pp. 491, 330.

Graham's experimental form and immediate concern with sound and language in relation to the notion of breath and its connection to wind, sit in dialogue with Stevens's organic form and interest in what lies beyond the human.[4] Ultimately, both poets display a clear sense of process with their use of form and language as the means of prompting their readers towards new modes of ecological thought and uncovering the environmental unconscious.

By reading Stevens through and against Graham, I will suggest how both poets make use of different forms to bring forward the nonhuman sound and voice of the wind. For both writers, I argue that this turn towards nonhuman sound is a form of unintentional ecological activism that serves to instruct and teach readers. Prior to focusing on the poems, I will initially dwell with some of Graham's words about her 'why' and 'how' of writing to locate her work within the context of environmentalism from which ecopoetics was solidified as a genre.[5] In doing so, I hope to reveal connections between Graham and Stevens's purposes for writing about the natural world, therefore, inviting a traceable sense of ecopoetic influence between them.

Late Modernism and Eco-activist Poetics

Graham can be read within the sphere of the Late Modernism.[6] The following section will examine Grahams's claim that she has a 'deep connection' to 'the sense of being a part of something larger than the human enterprise.'[7] Her statement bears much resemblance to Stevens's consistent fascination with the idea of going 'beyond' and pushing past the finitude of human language and thought to encapsulate a wider sphere of knowledge about the world and ourselves. Both poets capture what Bonnie Costello concludes about poetry's ability to 'make visible the difference words and images can make to how we apprehend the world'; a sentiment that can surmise the project of ecopoetics and ecocritical thought.[8] Poets who challenge and test the limits of language and writing in representing the multitude of beings may make visible the chiastic ontology of the world, igniting a greater sense of ecological consciousness in readers.

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[4] For further detail on Stevens's use of organic form in his ecopoetics, see Chapter Two, pp. 81-98 of this thesis.

[5] Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, environmentalism became a popular and powerful social movement. Part of the increased socio-political aspect of environmentalism was due to media attention towards various environmental disasters, and subsequent legislation to control and limit such events.

[6] Graham's breaking and remaking of the lyric form has earned her a place in the tradition of Hopkins, Whitman and Stevens by Helen Vendler, whereas Catherine Sona Karagueuzian compares the indeterminacy of her work to the Language writers (see: Christina Pugh, 'The Contemporary Mainstream Lyric' in *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry since 1945*, ed. Jennifer Ashton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 173-186 (p. 179) <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139032674.013>. Vendler and Sona Karagueuzian's placement of Graham reflects upon her investment in the modernist poetic project of breaking and reforming the limits of poetry to express the ineffable.

[7] Sharon Blackie, 'Interview with Jorie Graham', *Earthlines*, 1, 2, (2012) <http://joriegraham.com/earthlines-interview> [accessed 14 May 2022].

[8] Bonnie Costello, '"What to Make of a Diminished Thing": Modern Nature and Poetic Response', *American Literary History*, 10, 4 (Winter 1998), 569-605, (p. 574).

As discussed in Chapter One, ecocriticism began to cohere as a school of thought in the mid to late nineties and early twenty-first century. Even so, circulation of ecocritical discourse was present from the 1960s in parallel with the environmentalist movement. Ecopoetics was first defined as a contemporary genre with poets like Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and A.R. Ammons, who used their poetry to discuss the complicated and nuanced relationships between beings, and the anthropogenic effects upon the world like climate change and biodiversity loss. During this moment, ecopoetry became aligned with environmental activism, with the poet, similar to Romanticism, taking on the persona of spokesperson for the suffering and silenced natural world. Indeed, ecocriticism has celebrated poets who have followed the Romantic notion of idealised Nature.

However, as Costello points out, there are other American poets who are less celebrated within ecocriticsm who have 'recognized a new connection with nature based on superfluity, and in an aesthetics of entropy and transfiguration, as well as of nomadic movement and dispersal, replace the former spatial associations of nature as presence and permanence.'[9] Costello's words of dynamism; 'entropy', 'transfiguration', and 'dispersal' point towards the significance of flux within the general sphere of ecopoetics. Graham and Stevens engage with the flux of the world and can both be located in this category of less celebrated ecopoets because of the ways in which they engage new notions of the nonhuman within the space of poetry. While more widely acknowledged ecopoets actively use their work to speak and respond to political movements and eco-injustice, Graham and Stevens both resist categorisation. Instead, one of the connections between them is their understated activism in line with Mary Oliver's aphorism, 'Attention is the beginning of devotion.'[10] In many ways, Oliver's notion is echoed by Buell's theory of the environmental unconscious, which states that our distancing from the natural world through a lack of attention can be remedied by noticing and 'bringing to awareness, and then to articulation, of all that is to be noticed and expressed'.[11] Stevens and Graham direct their focus towards language and sound, bringing to attention the imbalance between human and nonhuman voices. Indeed, the importance of attention towards the natural world for Graham is felt corporeally, and through the intellect and spirit in what she calls 'showing up for sensation'.[12] Similar to how Merleau-Ponty's ecophenomenology emphasises the embodied connection to the world, Graham highlights that to feel the sensations of the world in poetry is to open oneself up to the textures of word and sound.[13]

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[9] Costello, '"What to Make of a Diminished Thing": Modern Nature and Poetic Response', p. 588.
[10] Mary Oliver, 'Upstream' in *Upstream: Selected Essays* (London: Penguin, 2016), 3-8 (p. 8).
[11] Buell, *Endangered World*, p. 22.
[12] Blackie, 'Interview with Jorie Graham'.
[13] For additional detail on Merleau-Ponty's ecophenomenology, see Chapter One, pp. 10-17.

The bringing to attention and articulation of that which is ignored is where Graham and Stevens's ecopoetics find one of many connections. Graham crystallises a major interest of ecopoetics to enlarge elements of the forgotten semiosphere into the term 'edge effect' which is the 'enriched life along an edge between biomes or habitats'.[14] The seashore location of Stevens's 'Idea of Order' springs to mind, or even the periphery between jar and wilderness in 'Anecdote of the Jar'. Expanding upon the significance of edge effect within ecopoetic practice, Graham establishes 'hybridity' or the 'in-between' as foundational. Like Stevens, modulation between interior consciousness and its engagement with the exterior world functions as the starting point for her ecopoetic process. Pausing in this in-between space enables ecopoetry to create opportunities for a deeper understanding of language and how poetry can be utilised as a space of ecological stewardship. Graham verbalises this modulation into a question of how ''eco' and 'poetics' interrogate and rethink one another'. Ecopoetics is a constant questioning of language and its potentiality to encompass the many voices of the many beings which inhabit the planet.

Graham and Stevens: Reluctant Ecopoets?

Contemporary ecopoetics are entangled with the political sphere, which can be problematic for some poets. Graham commented in an interview that the title of ecopoet is 'reductive' because she is 'writing poetry, not doing politics'. It is important to note the disambiguation between intentionally activist ecopoetics and unintentionally activist ecopoetics.[15] The latter is where Graham and Stevens sit, because ecological activism is not the primary aim of their poetry. As Graham explains, poetry is what she *does* and the political imprints follow. The emphasis on doing as an active verb affirms the importance of process in Graham's writing, which is timely, vivid and enlivened. Similar notions can also be observed in Stevens's work, which also pertain to his employment of organic form whereby the work emerges of its own accord as evidenced from a letter stating, 'I write poetry because I want to write it'.[16] Stevens and Graham are concerned with the writing of poetry or the doing of it. It is this process that is as important, if not more so than, the subject and final creation. Stevens's words that 'One's subject is always poetry, or should be' bears truth upon the intentions of both his and Graham's work.[17] Yet, within the subject and space of poetry, we find how, in the words of Stevens, both poets constantly formulate ideas which turn them towards the world.[18] Relations and formulations to and of the world are entangled within the

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[14] Blackie, 'Interview with Jorie Graham'.
[15] I use the phrase 'unintentional' to outline a difference between those poets who intentionally write politically directed work and those whose work is unintentionally activist. Both can be read in the vein of ecopoetic activism, but it is important to note where the intention lies.
[16] Stevens, *Letters*, (Entry 339, 'To Ronald Lane Latimer, January 10, 1936), p. 306.
[17] Ibid, (Entry 331, 'To Ronald Lane Latimer, November 26, 1935'), p. 297.
[18] Ibid, (Entry 339, 'To Ronald Lane Latimer, January 10, 1936'), p. 306.

poetic process, and it is within this entanglement that we can locate the unintentional ecopoetic activism in their writing.

Graham's statement that she feels 'an increasingly activist element associated with the writing of poetry - most especially with the use of the imagination […] at this juncture in our history' illustrates the convergence between the process of writing poetry and associations that the space of poetry holds.[19] Graham's words in the poem 'Sea Change' (2008) emphasises the uselessness of poetry in the face of ecological crisis. The speaker finds that:

> […] I, speaking in this wind today, out loud in it, to no one, am suddenly
> aware
> of having written my poems, I feel it in
> my useless
> hands […].[20]

The moment of completion is heavy with a sense of futility. Like the speaker in Stevens's 'To the Roaring Wind' who speaks to 'no one', the speaker in 'Sea Change' also casts their voice out to the ineffable more-than-human world. Creating poetry is intimately connected with the physical action of writing and speaking out into the wind. However, this embodied creativity of the speakers' hands is deemed 'useless'. The scene of absence and futility in speaking to the wind reduces the physical effort of writing poetry as merely 'Words, lines, not meanings, not communications' as Stevens writes in the opening stanza of 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' (ll. 3). This struggle between writing poetry for the 'doing' of it and achieving a socio-political resonance is a constant tension for poets. Both Graham and Stevens find themselves fluctuating between these poles in an attempt to maintain their roles as poets rather than socio-political commentators, but equally providing meanings and value to their words.

Contemporary poetry has become increasingly political in its communications, especially across ecopoetics. Narratives of ecological crisis have permeated society for the best part of twenty years and are set to increase as the urgency to prevent further lasting damage to the world becomes more pressing. Imagination is closely aligned with forms of poetic activism because it is through imagination that a poet can open a reader's mind towards new possibilities. For Graham, imagination functions to 'awaken readers to what is actually 'there'', comparable to the way in which Romantic poetry and Stevens's poetry engage with the oscillations between reality and imagination to expose new perspectives around what exists within the world.[21] As Stevens

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[19] Blackie, 'Interview with Jorie Graham'.
[20] Jorie Graham, 'Sea Change' in *Sea Change* (New York: Ecco, an imprint of Harper Collins, 2008), 3-5 (p. 5).
[21] Blackie, 'Interview with Jorie Graham'.

aphorises in the final section of 'Esthetique Du Mal', 'the greatest poverty is not to live | In a physical world' (ll. 325-326). Imagination draws the attention to the real, and the possibility that may come from reality.

As Graham reflects from her contemporary perspective, 'Everywhere people went they wrecked it.' […] 'Most of my poetry has spent its time trying to figure out what 'being' is - human 'being' and nonhuman 'being'. How do they go together. Can they'.[22] Imagination in poetry is about working through ambiguous states of being which exist in multitudes within the *Umwelt*. It is debatable if this question is purely a question for ecopoets or ecological practitioners or rather it applies to the entire human race, because by considering all beings in the world, the environmental unconscious may be uncovered to reveal heightened ecological awareness. Even so, is it possible for one movement or process to unite the entire human race in becoming more ecologically sustainable and responsible? The environmentalist movement has aimed, and still aims, to unite global forces against the ecological crisis. The following section of this chapter will evaluate this notion, and how Stevens and Graham's poetic aims relate to the environmentalist movement.

Environmentalist Ecopoetics

If *The Ecocriticsm Reader* is the landmark text of ecocritical scholarship, the landmark moment of environmentalist literature was the publication of American marine biologist Rachael Carston's *Silent Spring* (1962) which outlines the negative environmental effects of DDT, a potent insecticide used in American agriculture since World War II. In her 'ecological manifesto' Carson conveys the message of anthropogenic ecological damage and the subsequent socio-political consequences of these actions.[23] As Cheryl Lousley explains, *Silent Spring* tends to be:

> […] evoked within the humanities for its moral statements about the value of nature, or "the web of life." The achievement of *Silent Spring*, however, was its politicization of ecology: its demonstration that the study of ecological relationships had significance for public affairs.[24]

Rather than first wave ecocritical inclination to focus on the idealisation of interconnected ecological lives, Lousley views the legacy of Carson's text as a critique of the relationship between ecology and politics, and the call to society to re-evaluate this dynamic. Carson's question of 'how to make complex socio-ecological interactions socially visible as political concerns' marked a shift from previous environmental movements such as conservation and preservation, and increased

[22] Blackie, 'Interview with Jorie Graham'.
[23] Cheryl Lousley, 'Ecocriticsm and the Politics of Representation' in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. by Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-19 (p. 4).
[24] Lousley, p. 3.

awareness of the direct relationship between humans and nature. Despite *Silent Spring* contesting first wave ecocritical perspectives of our ability to safeguard and protect a green-scaped idyll of 'Nature', the text calls us to closely examine, more in line with Merleau-Ponty's interconnected ontology, the 'porous boundaries' between ourselves and the world, and how important these are in maintaining life across all species and beings.[25] Carson projects moral ecological understanding into the political sphere to make visible the ecological interactions that exist underneath modern life, within a collective environmental unconscious.

Where Romanticism is often critically tied to first wave ecocriticsm, environmentalism is frequently connected with second wave ecocritical discourse, particularly the ecojustice movement.[26] Reflecting from a contemporary standpoint on the early environmentalist poets, or first contemporary ecopoets, Gary Snyder is considered to have largely inaugurated the genre.[27] Snyder's poetry is environmentalist in the sense that it evokes a need, like Graham's more recent work, to call to attention that which has been forgotten or repressed. Together with his interstice between Eastern and Western ecological perspectives, Snyder's work takes on an explicitly political tenor from the standpoint of revolution and anarchy in *Earth House Hold* (1969), renouncing the damaging activities of Western capitalist culture and political regimes.[28] Despite his great insistence on the socio-political element of ecopoetics, like Stevens and Graham, Snyder maintains that sound is a fundamental aspect of his work. In his essay, 'The Yogin and the Philosopher', Snyder asks:

> If we are to treat the world (and ourselves) better, we must first ask, how can we know what the non-human realm is truly like? And second, if one gets a glimmer of an answer from there - how can it be translated, communicated, to the realm of mankind with its courts, congresses, and zoning laws? How do we listen? How do we speak?[29]

The environmentalism of Snyder's work is grounded in self-reflectiveness, akin to deep ecological thought, to reconsider our relationship with the nonhuman realm, specifically through the mediums of speech and hearing: 'How do we listen? How do we speak?'. Poetry becomes an eco-politically charged space where these notions of hearing, speaking and sociological reflection can take place, transgressing imposed human boundaries and borders, offering what Snyder describes as a

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[25] Ibid, p. 5.

[26] Taking a similar title to the seminal *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* published six years prior, a useful marker for the shift between first and second wave ecocriticism is the publication of *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*, ed. by Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2002).

[27] There are many other poets like W.S. Merwin, Robert Hass, Wendell Berry or Louise Gluck who are also considered prominent ecopoets of this same period.

[28] Gary Snyder, *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions, 1969).

[29] Gary Snyder, 'The Yogin and the Philosopher' in *Claims for Poetry*, ed. Donald Hall (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1974), 446-449 (p. 446).

'glimmer of an answer' toward understanding nonhuman entities. Returning to Graham's question of figuring out what ''being' is' in terms of humans and nonhumans, I suggest that while Snyder uses sociological frameworks to generate his ecopoetry, Graham and Stevens instead work through the same question predominately using imagination and sound.[30] Essentially, all of these poets who write about human and nonhuman relationships contribute to the environmentalist movement by, like Carson, exposing the porous and delicate ecological connections of the world more visible.

Yet even Graham cannot escape what she terms the 'increasingly activist' element that contemporary poetry holds in relation to the ecological crisis. As much as Stevens bluntly insisted in 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words' that the poet holds no 'sociological or political obligations', in the same essay he also expressed a need for the poet 'to help people live their lives' through making his 'imagination become the light in the minds of others.'[31] Poetry can be a social force, even if the poet resists the socio-political implications of their work. The next section will explore how Stevens and Graham use the sounds of the wind to shape their ecopoetics, both inviting it into human language and equally illustrating the finitude of language. I suggest that the forms of their work are shaped by the wind and therefore facilitate poetic activism. This activism sits in tension with both Stevens and Graham's resistance to scrutiny and keenness to maintain their positions first and foremost, as poets, whose words unintentionally stir readers into ecological awareness.

'The wild wind's almost': Wind as the carrier of words

Wind is a vital ecological entity that causes and affects a vast number of ecological processes.[32] For the purposes of this thesis, the movement of the wind and its qualities as a carrier of air and sound will shape my discussion of Stevens's ecopoetic influence in Jorie Graham's poem, 'Scarcely There'. Wind is a recurring theme throughout Graham's collection *Runaway*, featuring in 'I'm Reading Your Mind', 'My Skin Is', 'The Hiddenness of the World', and 'Whom Are You' amongst others.[33] Wind is also felt and heard throughout Stevens's opus, from the roaring wind in *Harmonium*, to the air swarming with metaphysical changes in 'Esthetique Du Mal'. It is felt in rain, in breath, and in the poetry itself, permeating through the lives of all organisms. Indeed, it is impossible to speak a poem without engaging with the matter of air and wind on an atomic level.[34]

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[30] Blackie, 'Interview with Jorie Graham'.
[31] Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', *NA*, pp. 27, 29.
[32] To name a few: Increasing the rate of water loss from organisms, forming habitats through displacement, destroying habitats through storms, and carrying water droplets in the formation of rain.
[33] Jorie Graham, *Runaway* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2020), pp. 8-9, 10-11, 63-65, 72-73.
[34] Gyorgyi Voros claims that wind is 'Stevens's wildest voice in Nature' (see *Notations of the Wild*, p. 39). Indeed, wind is a recurring trope in Stevens that is entangled with breath and speech.

Air is made up of particles, which, when hit by a sound wave, vibrate, and collide into one another. This movement of vibrations carries sound into the auditory systems of organisms. Wind affects the transmission of sound by wave refraction, changing the direction of sound waves. Different velocities of wind affect the pitch of sound depending on the location of the organism in relation to the sound wave. In essence, it is the wind that dictates which parts of the 'patches and pitches' of the world we hear. As well as transmitting sound, the wind is composed of air, without which, organisms would be unable to survive.[35] While it is not possible to see the wind or the air, it is possible to hear and feel its effects. Leaves flying in autumn, oppressive heat in summer, and howls and whistles during a storm are all examples of these effects of the movement of air which humans have named wind.

Dwelling with the etymological evolution of the word, 'wind', the Old English translation is 'air in motion'. This is derived from the Proto-Germanic *winda*, with both words sharing the Proto-Indo European root *we*, meaning 'to blow', indicating a strong connection to breath and breathing. In addition to this, the Middle English sense of the phrase 'long-winded' means 'breath in speaking'. Noted from Abram's work, breath in speech holds the dynamism of the wind, and these early understandings of the world are reflected in the roots of language, with the notion that if the earth is viewed as an animate body, the wind would be its breath. Likewise, if the beings in the world are, to use Merleau-Ponty's term, the 'flesh' of the world, the wind would perhaps be their breath.[36] While the sign holds the meaning of and represents these connections, the early conception of the word indicates a sonic resonance. Wind and breathing are both different forms of air in motion but share similar sounds, so it is no surprise that early conceptions of these sounds when translated into language resulted in overlapping meanings.

Movement of air and the sound of wind are common poetic subjects, particularly in Romantic poetry. Perhaps it is the holistic understanding of how humans are connected to the rest of the world through breath and the air that sustains life that draws a fascination towards wind from poets across history. Even Helen Vendler cites the importance of the wind in the introduction of *Soul Says: On Recent Poetry*. Quoting a line from D.H. Lawrence's 'Song of a Man Who has Come Through' (1914), picking up on the connection between the passing movement of a wind and the

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[35] Ecological crisis has compromised the life-giving capacity of air, with an increase of 124% in air pollution related deaths attributed to a 38% rise in air pollution between 1960 and 2009. See: Shaddick, G., Thomas, M.L., Mudu, P. *et al,* 'Half the world's population are exposed to increasing air pollution', *npj Clim Atmos Sci*, 3**,** 23, (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41612-020-0124-2>.

[36] Langer labels human breathing as the 'most perfect exhibit of physiological rhythm' which tends towards a 'rhythmic continuity' that is the basis of 'organic unity'. While Langer's discussion is generally anthropocentric in perspective, her notation of the connection between breathing, organic unity and rhythmic permanence lends additional gravity to my argument positioning the significance of elemental forces such as the wind in relation to a holistic understanding of what Merleau-Ponty would call the 'flesh of the world' that Stevens's ecopoetics uncovers through sound. See: Langer, 'The Musical Matrix' in *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art*, p. 127.

creative process: '"Not I, but the wind that blows through me." Writing, I am deaf and blind; then suddenly I wake to the radio, and to ground covered with snow.'[37] Lawrence's poem is founded upon the wind that 'blows through' the speaker which leads to a new string of creative thought. The presence of the wind in the poem is a synecdoche for the creative mind. Vendler uses these ideas to connect to her writing process where creativity occurs in a liminal state of consciousness. The self or 'I' is detached from the body, allowing for creativity to take place, similar to how Lawrence's speaker can progress their art once the wind has blown through. In this passage, Vendler emphasises the unseen and mystical connection between creative process and elements of the natural world, through the porosity of a human form. In other words, we are never fully ourselves.

Similarly, in his 1995 Nobel Prize Lecture, Seamus Heaney talks about the importance of wind in transmitting language and sound during the early years of his childhood in County Derry during the 1940s.[38] For Heaney, the wind is invigorated, 'alive and signalling', and communicative value is placed on the vibrations of the air.[39] Interconnection between beings is illustrated with the action of a wind 'stirring' in the trees and subsequently 'stirring an ariel wire' attached to the top of a chestnut tree. This stirring of the wind is traced through the wire into the wireless set, morphing into the voice of a BBC newsreader. Heaney describes how this voice could be heard 'behind and beyond every voice, the frantic, piercing signalling of morse code'. Where Vendler hints at connections between creative processes, the self and the elements, Heaney more specifically highlights the permeating ability of the wind in the transmission of language and sound. The wind 'signals' the radio waves and transforms 'behind and beyond' into the 'burbles and squeaks' of voice. Heaney dwells with this moment, taking the sounds of the wireless as the origin of his 'journey into the wideness of the world beyond', and into language, ultimately leading him to his position as poet and Nobel Prize winner. Wind therefore generates a chain of actions and interactions of language and sound, essentially, a semiotic catalyst that enables what Heaney calls the 'journey into the wideness of language'.[40] Going forward, I will take Vendler and Heaney's perceptions of the porosity of wind and its catalytic role in the conduct of language and sound to found my analysis of the dialogue between wind, poem, and nonhuman voice within Graham and Stevens's ecopoetics.

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[37] Helen Vendler, *Soul Says: On Recent Poetry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 7.

[38] Heaney held the Boylston Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University between 1984-1995 and was succeeded by Graham in 1999.

[39] Seamus Heaney, 'Crediting Poetry', 1995 Nobel Prize Lecture <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1995/heaney/lecture/> [accessed 11 April 2022].

[40] Ibid. Heaney's experience of the radio and his journey into the 'wideness of language' is also distinctly political, with the English voices on the BBC news representing the voices of English colonisers.

How the Wind Speaks through Graham and Stevens

Graham's 'Scarcely There' begins in *medias res*, plunging the reader into the moment immediately after the wind stops. The poem is filled with echoes where the dominant sense that gives way to knowledge is hearing. Amongst the echoes, the wind's voice permeates lines of prophecy, invoking a change precipitated by its ceasing:

> Where birdcalls cease, you hear the under-
> neath. *Try living again* day's long pitched syllable-ooze
> hums after the high winds stop & your final footprint lifts off & no matter
> how clean
> you want it to be
> nothing is ever going to be gone enough. Oh oak, show us up.
> Indecipherable-green surround us. Stilled leaf-chatter quiver up
> again, rustle the secret rule we'll never catch
> in time […]. (ll. 36-43)

Evoked from the 'final footprint' that will never be 'gone enough', Graham's poem speaks of the effects of anthropogenic ecological damage, that have, in this instance, gone so far that the wind, the most dynamic of nature's elements, has ceased. Along with it, birdsong and the 'secret rule' (l. 42) of the natural world that human beings have forced themselves out of knowing have dissipated into the 'next-on-world' (l. 76). This feeling of dissonance is encapsulated by the short phrase, 'Indecipherable-green' (l. 42). In other words, the 'secret rule' of the more-than-human world is unreadable (l. 43). However, the voices of the nonhuman world permeate its enigmatic form in 'rustle[s]' and 'quiver[s]' of 'Stilled leaf-chatter', tending towards our ability to decipher the more-than-human world through listening to its sounds (ll. 43, 42). This following section will therefore consider these elements of erasure alongside the tension of different voices within the poem in relation to the expression of nonhuman voice through human language and form.

From the title, the poem begins with the process of self-erasure, announcing that it itself is scarcely there. These words that hang over the poem and are referenced both directly and indirectly throughout signify the central theme of the entire collection, which is to run away. To be 'scarcely there' pertains to the sense of escape that *Runaway* suggests, where both presence and absence are caught in a liminal space between the words. The sense of in-between or lack of control conveyed by the title captures the mood of the end of a storm where the strength of the natural elements that are normally invisible and unheard are vividly uncovered, creating a poignant aftermath of quiet. In essence, Graham's poem flickers between these two positions and turns toward various possible scenarios. Like Stevens and perhaps even more so, Graham's poems resist singular quotation. It is challenging to separate the parts from the whole, and this is especially true of the poems in *Runaway*. Something of this resistance towards academic scrutiny in the tradition of New Criticism is invoked in Graham's overall poetic process to invest the reader in the moment of the

words and sounds. The wind is the gateway to this process and forms a starting point that enables Graham to move between and towards other forms of reference, such as history and time. The formlessness of the wind allows it the autonomy to attempt to form its own syntax and structure within the poem. It is this toying with the possibility of the wind's '*almost*' and the actuality of the wind's absence, which is never resolved in the poem, that facilitates Graham's bouncing between different points of reference and move to, from and beyond the poem's starting point of the wind.

After the wind stops, there is a transition and a pause between these two states of sound and silence. By plunging the reader into this moment of transition, Graham places them within a flux. This sense of in-between is emphasised by the lingering 'wind's wild *almost*, its approach and retreat, and how it kept on | circling as-if-trying, as if about-to-be, an almost speech' (ll. 2-3). This is a rich second line where readers bear witness to the voice of the wind in the alliterative, 'wind's wild *almost*', the italicisation hinting at the final whispers of the wind's speech which is both present on the page but absent in context.[41] The very state of the wind's voice lingers in the in-between, showcasing Graham's employment of ecopoetic edge effect. The wind seems to be trying to push beyond an invisible boundary. Like the poem itself, it approaches and retreats from the reader with the movement resembling the flux of the moment.

As in Stevens's 'Montrachet le Jardin', the wind in 'Scarcely There' cannot ever round 'O'. It circles in a constant state of incompleteness, 'as-if-trying, as if about-to-be, an almost speech' (l. 2). Toni Morrison speaks of writing language that works quietly for the reader who cannot hear anything. To do so, one 'has to work very carefully with what is *in between* the words. What is not said. Which is measure, which is rhythm, and so on', shaping readers' thoughts with what is not there. [42] Morrison's words bear resonance with Graham's poem. The sounds of the line circle like the wind, producing the voice of the wind that is almost there but cannot be written. The half rhyme between 'retreat' and 'speech' (ll. 2-3) hones an understanding of how the voice of the wind ultimately must retreat from knowledge, like that of the sea in Stevens's 'Idea of Order'. Between the particulars of wind, sea, and human ear, the moment of 'almost' struggles to confirm itself. The paradox lies with what is unsaid and silent. While the speaker seems to confirm the inability

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[41] I suggest that the typographical difference between standard font and italics marks the distinction between the voice of the speaker (standard) and the voice of the wind (italics). Charles Molesworth claims Graham's use of italicisation presents words as 'lexical objects instead of being used', essentially stripping them of value and meaning. While I agree that different visual presentation of these words can alter meaning, in a poem like 'Scarcely There', value and meaning are transformed as expressions of a nonhuman entity. See: Charles Molesworth, 'Jorie Graham: Living in the World', *Salmagundi*, 120, (Fall 1998), 276-283 (p. 276).

[42] Toni Morrison, 'The Art of Fiction', *The Paris Review*, 128, (Fall 1993) <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1888/the-art-of-fiction-no-134-toni-morrison> [accessed 30 May 2022].

of the wind to break into human understanding, what is unsaid about its 'almost' refuses to reveal how far the wind can be identified within human language.[43]

From the beginning of the poem, readers can imagine the voice of the wind, which ultimately, through the space of the text, confirms a form of understanding between the different voices through italicisation. The process of imagining the voice of the wind exposes what the speaker calls 'the freshness of what's | there' (ll. 11-12). Even so, this process takes time because enjambment leaves a space between the words on the page, allowing for the sense of the in-between space of imagination to materialise.[44] This process is similar to what the speaker in 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' describes as 'transparencies of sound | Sounding in transparent dwellings of the self, | Impalpable habitations that seem to move | In the movement of the colours of the mind' (ll. 23-24). The voice of the nonhuman locates itself within our internal habitations and the colours of our minds through the words and form of the poem, forming a bridge between our internal consciousness and external corporeality. As in 'Idea of Order', the voice of the nonhuman takes form through the breath of the reader when the poem is spoken aloud.

While the concept of the nonhuman voice taking form and revealing itself *through* the imagination and vocalisation of the human reader is a pleasant and fairly simple solution to the issue of human language silencing the nonhuman, it pertains more to first-wave ecocritical perspectives.[45] Essentially, the human reader ventriloquizes the nonhuman, which is different from allowing these silenced beings to speak for themselves. While the breath of the reader can allow the wind to 'speak' to some extent, we are reminded by the speaker of 'Scarcely There' that 'nothing holds' (l. 16) As explored in the previous chapter, interactions between matter are nebulous, dynamic and ever-changing. Where the statement that nothing holds appears pessimistic, when read ecocritically it is transformed into a simple statement of how the world works in terms of an interconnected and dynamic ontology. The wind permeates these interactions, ensuring that nothing holds, transporting matter and creating movement across the world as a 'Destroyer and preserver'.[46] This movement is described as:

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[43] Where Mane's argument referred to in my first chapter affirms the silencing of nonhuman beings, Graham's text appears to show a more nuanced picture, where the nonhuman entity is actively attempting to be heard through human language.

[44] Graham's enjambement is clever and serves to enact what the words say. Some good examples of this are lines 13-14, 36-37, 46-47 in 'Scarcely There'.

[45] See Chapter One, pp. 32-34 for additional discussion.

[46] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ode to the West Wind', (Poetry Foundation), ll. 14
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45134/ode-to-the-west-wind> [accessed 12 May 2022].

<div align="right">

Just the rattling of the going and
coming together of things, as if matter itself is trying
to find something true to
say - crazed investigation, tentative prophecy.
(ll. 16-19)

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The inverted syntax of the phrase comings and goings into 'going and | coming together' draws attention to the flux of the wind and world (ll. 16-17). By attaching the word 'together' to the phrase, the speaker invokes unity which creates imagery of community and an entire whole.[47] The unification implied by the speaker is the search for a voice from 'matter itself', like the speaker calling to the wind to speak Stevens's 'To the Roaring Wind' (l. 17). By gaining agency of their own voice, nonhumans can take ownership of their place within the community of beings in the world, with sound uniting the entities of the earth in a mutual understanding.

Exactly what the nonhuman is trying to communicate is ambiguous. The speaker tells of matter searching for something 'true to | say - crazed investigation, tentative prophecy' ('Scarcely There', ll. 18-19). The nonhuman voice has awareness of something beyond human comprehension. In Stevens's 'Things of August' (1950), the speaker describes 'A new text of the world | A scribble of fret and fear and fate', which bears some resemblance to the 'crazed' yet 'tentative' prophetic investigations in 'Scarcely There'.[48] Poetic scribblings of fear and prophecy invite new perspectives rather than presenting an idealised view. The speaker in 'Things of August' connects this new text to 'all the breathings | From the edge of night' (ll. 148-149). The inception of this new text relates to breathing, implying the active and embodied process of its creation. Through this active and embodied process, meanings of the new text 'are our own', which seems fortunate given the ominous and apocalyptic prediction that this new text is one 'that we shall be needing | To be the footing of noon, | The pillar of midnight.' (ll. 153-155). As the wind alerts us to the freshness of what lies before us, Stevens's speaker incites a similar theme of renewal and changed perspectives through the creation of new texts, actively realised through the breathing of words. Both poems use air in the forms of wind and breath as a gateway into a new process of meaning making, that 'comes from ourselves, neither from knowing | Nor not knowing, yet free from question' ('Scarcely There', ll. 156-157). Amongst the unease and flux of the in-between, new poetry composed alongside the movements of wind and breath is liberating, despite the finitude of language.[49]

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[47] Even so, the use of enjambement in a text justified to the right intensifies the struggle for this imagery of the whole, as the lines do not naturally follow on from one another.

[48] Stevens, 'Things of August', *CP*, 516-523, ll.144-145.

[49] In this sense, Manes' call to create a new language can be overcome by this new meaning making grounded in the movement of wind and breath.

Feelings of liberation are conveyed through the wind's declaration that there should be more of 'notion's | motions - more *more* the wind says, break grief, loosen possibility, let vague | hopes float, sink' (ll. 21-23). These words oscillate in rhythm, pulling and pushing the reader to test their ability to keep up with the wind's voice and train of thought, similar to the sea in 'Idea of Order'. The enjambed rhyme of 'notion's | motions' resists closure. It pushes the poem onwards through the list of orders from the wind to 'break grief, loosen possibility' and let hopes 'float, sink', and looks to resemble the sense of opening and moving forward through a sense of rupture (ll. 21-23). The wind instructs readers to open themselves to possibility and broaden their perspectives, allowing notions and ideas to move with freedom, like the wind itself. Even though the dynamic process of the wind translates into words in motion through the poem and through human language, reading cannot keep up with the wind's expression.

Breathlessness through the fast-paced and aphoristic style of the poem and the inability to keep pace with the wind is paralleled with the Modernist movement of Futurism. The poem appears to contradict itself, stating:

> …Gone
> all that acceleration, that shooting up & back, futurist, furious with naming and naming
> its one price.
> ('Scarcely There', ll. 14-16)

Even though the poem denies that acceleration is gone, the speed of the line is rapid, accentuated with the use of the ampersand in place of 'and', and the flurry of words connected by a chain of commas. One suggestion around this contradiction is that the enthusiasm for the dynamic technological future imagined by F.T. Marinetti is gone, but some dynamism still exists in language itself. F. T. Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) was one of many declarations of how to live in the early twentieth century. Marinetti's blazing and electrified language glorifies the roaring 'red-hot' bellied locomotives and the 'beauty of speed'.[50] Before widespread understanding of anthropogenic ecological damage, Marinetti seeks the 'tides of revolution' to turn towards electrification, capitalism and technological revolution. Marinetti's text summarises the resistance to Modernism felt by some first-wave ecocritics in its celebration of what may be called anti-ecological, namely the 'metallic waste' and 'celestial soot' of the modern age.[51] All this considered, as I discussed in my previous chapter, a closer look at Modernist texts reveals that even the most anti-ecological works contain undercurrents of the natural world. Even Marinetti

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[50] Filippo Tommaso *Marinetti*, 'Futurist Manifesto' in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, ed Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2013), pp. 249, 251
[51] Ibid, p. 251.

cannot escape connections to nature, and his manifesto is littered with animalistic metaphors which convey the frenzied power of technological automation and mechanics.[52]

The summary of the furious futurist 'naming and naming | its one price' ('Scarcely There', ll. 15-16) can be read as a commentary on the language used throughout Marinetti's manifesto. The aims of Futurism were various, and so pinning down its 'one price' is challenging. Tyrus Miller succinctly ties together a suggestion of Futurism's price, concluding that the:

> final synthesis and acme of all these Futurist aims - modernization, mass mobilization, liberation from tradition, technological innovation, and national self-assertion in Europe - they looked to militant politics and nationalist war, which they found united in Mussolini's Fascist vision.[53]

Graham's evocation of history through naming the Futurist movement and announcing its death due to its intensive need to name and preach its aims shows a self-destructive inclination of history, and how human moments tend to extinguish themselves. 'Scarcely There' captures the push and pull of history, showing how human movements and applications of rhetoric struggle to keep pace with time compared with the constant movement and sounds of wind.

Stevens expresses a similar understanding around the struggle of human language keeping pace with nonhuman voices. 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' is a meditative later poem included in Stevens's 1950 collection, *The Auroras of Autumn*, that constantly turns on the idea of the perception of the world and the language that we use to situate ourselves within these perceived ideas:

> The eye's plain version is a thing apart,
> The vulgate of experience. Of this,
> A few words, an and yet, and yet, and yet —
>
> As part of the never-ending meditation (ll. 1-4).

Tension between sight and sound enacts the need for an awareness of human embodied connection to the world to inform our 'vulgate of experience'. In the eighth stanza of the poem, the speaker describes this desperate need to be physically in touch with reality. We 'inhale a health of air | To our sepulchral hollows', reminding us of the balance between life and death; the gloomy imagery of 'sepulchral' balanced with the life-giving 'health of air' (ll. 128-129). The speaker makes a direct comparison between our breath and the wind with the simile, 'Our breath is like a desperate element | that we must calm' (ll. 134-135). The elemental properties of the wind are deeply rooted

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[52] It is this closer look and reframing of Modernist texts that has since come to light in the past ten years and has enabled a revaluation of previous conceptions of the relevance of Modernism and its literature to the current ecological situation.

[53] Tyrus Miller, 'Chapter 16 Futurism' in *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, ed. by David Bradshaw, and Kevin J. H. Dettmar (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2006), pp. 169-175, pp. 169-170. ProQuest Ebook.

within us, relaying a similar sentiment to that of the interconnected Mobius strip or Merleau-Ponty's chiastic ontology.

The next lines are syntactically challenging and the subject of each clause is ambiguous. The speaker informs readers that:

> Our breath is like a desperate element
> That we must calm, the origin of a mother tongue
> With which to speak to her, the capable
> In the midst of foreignness, the syllable
> Of recognition, avowal, impassioned cry […]. (ll. 134-138)

Connections between breath, origins of speech and language, and a female presence suggest a significant bond between vitality, language and speech and our interconnected world. Breath is the first stage of speech and essentially the origin of all speech and language. Without breath and without air, speech would be impossible. The core ambiguity centres around the words 'mother' and 'her'. Are these the same figures? Could the speaker be referencing Gaia, mother earth?[54] If so, it can be ascertained that the speaker seeks some form of communion with the real which can be read as mother earth, the base of reality. While the poem resists confirmation, the stanza begins with the desperate need to 'fling ourselves constantly longing on this form' which is also translated into 'Love of the real' (l. 127). After all, one of Stevens's most assertive aphorisms surmised that 'The most beautiful thing in the world, is of course, the world itself'.[55] Love for the real and for the earth, as this thesis has so far agued, was of paramount importance to Stevens's proto-ecological consciousness and the language that he chooses to depict it in his work..

The emphasis on wind, breath and speech is fascinating and reminiscent of Vendler's words that the poem is the 'cry of its occasion' (l. 201). The 'cry' is entangled in the poem with breath and speech and stirs the air into movement like wind. The perpetrator of the cry is ambiguous, because while humans cry, so can wind. Alternatively, if it is the poem that is read as the 'cry', the ambiguity towards the speakers' identification is unsurprising because it may be generated from the cry of human, wind, or both. Even so, the speaker notes the 'syllable of recognition', which implies that the poem can forge seemingly invisible connections between entities through language and speech (ll. 137-138). The idea of poetry as a special space to communicate knowledge, and the concept favoured by Bate of the poet as a specialist or superior being generating the correct language and sound has origins largely in Romanticism, and speaks to Shelley's claim that poets are the 'unacknowledged legislators of the world'.[56] Stevens and

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[54] See 'Anatomy of Monotony' and Le Monocle de Mon Oncle' for similar references where Stevens makes subtle references to earth as a female body. *CP*, p. 115, 14-19.

[55] Stevens, 'Adagia', *OP*, p. 93.

[56] Bysshe Shelly, *A Defence of Poetry,* (Poetry Foundation, 2009) <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69388/a-defence-of-poetry> [accessed 2 March 2023].

Graham have similar ideas, but I would suggest that rather than the root of poetry's greatness being the poet themselves, that Stevens and Graham tend towards the poem itself as the unique and supreme fiction by which the world may reveal itself.

Following from the concept of the poem itself as the space where invisible connections of the world are revealed, the tripartite phrase listing the 'recognition, avowal, impassioned cry' is the poem's self-declaration of its voice (l. 138). The spondaic 'cry' at the end of the line confirms the almost triumphant and jovial rhythm. The poem is crying its own declaration to the reader, asserting the place of language and sound alongside the desperate stirrings of the wind. Dwelling with this cry, the poem is multifaceted, containing 'its converse in itself' (l. 139). It is both itself and the opposite of itself, two halves of the same located within the whole, or as Costello explains, Stevens's mediation of the 'flux we cannot frame'.[57] This interconnected duality of the poem is reflected in the term, 'converse', which also means to have a conversation with another. The poem therefore contains two halves of a conversation: that of the human and that of the nonhuman. The poem, like the elemental wind, actively engages these voices. The final stanza of section VIII develops these ideas. While the poem does form a type of conversation, it is not solely spoken. The speaker asserts that 'looks and feelings mingle and are a part' but are:

> Not wholly spoken in a conversation between
> Two bodies disembodied in their talk,
> Too fragile, too immediate for any speech.
> (ll. 142-144)

The conversation of the poem occurs on many planes, with the spoken, physical, and emotional of significant interest to the speaker. What are these two bodies 'disembodied in their talk' that are reminiscent of the fractured body of the sea in 'Idea of Order'? Is it poem and reader? Poem and poet? Poem and the earth?

The speaker resists confirming an answer, speaking to the previous line which evokes the concept of questioning but never knowing, because a 'quick answer modifies a question', and meanings therefore escape us (l. 141). The sense of evading meaning solidifies when the speaker confirms that the conversation is 'too fragile, too immediate for any speech' (l. 144). The interconnected frameworks which tie our language and voices to the earth are delicate and require careful handling by the poem. While the poem may cry its affirmation that its language and sound hold true alongside the sounds of the world, the truth of what the poem can communicate is the emotions that language and sound produce. Readers then feel that they are speaking with and to the world through the poem. 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' enacts an origin phase where notions around the voices of the elements, humans and poems are in the process of establishment;

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[57] Costello, *Shifting Ground*, p. 85.

interconnected and multi-functioning. In 'Scarcely There', this knowledge seems to have been forgotten. Graham's work serves to reawaken this unconscious knowledge of the entanglements between human, wind and the generation of language and speech that Stevens spoke of seventy years previously.

Running Out of Breath: Formal and Linguistic Erosion

While Stevens actively resisted the term 'experimental' or 'abstract', Graham has pushed her work into the realms of poetic experimentalism, with *Runaway* an extension of her formal boundary pushing.[58] From the non-standard size of the text itself, to the unconventional right-hand typesetting of some poems, Graham challenges traditional poetic form, from the physical experience of her book through to the language and content of the poems themselves. Willard Spiegelman grounds Graham's career in her experimentalism, by 're-inventing poetic genres, by breaking down and then reforming boundaries.'[59] By doing so, Spiegelman notes that 'Graham has reimagined the very transactions between the poet's eye and the visible world'. For readers, this reimagination of relations between poet and world also translates into a recrafting of relations between reader and text, and ultimately, reader and world. Like Stevens, reading Graham challenges our notions of poetry and our perceptions of the limitations of poetry, whilst also serving to teach us to pay more attention to the often-forgotten particulars of the world, which distinctly relate to the overall proto-ecological purpose of ecopoetics. These final sections will look at the ending of Stevens's 'Esthetique Du Mal' against Graham's 'Scarcely There', with particular attention towards the notion of 'almost' in relation to the formation of the nonhuman voice in these texts. Overall, I seek to show how reading Graham's work against that of Stevens may inform and change perceptions of Stevens's work.

'Scarcely There' organically brings together various forms within itself, beginning with the wind. While wind is formless, it gives rise to other structures which have more distinct forms. In Graham's poem, these other forms include time, growth and history. Graham grounds her poem in a tempestuous element which gives rise to gusts of lines and words that form the shape of the poem. Therefore, the wind forms its own syntax and structure, allowing the poem to play with the possibility of the wind's 'almost' versus the actuality of the wind's absence. Giving rise to new forms indicates how the wind exhausts the form that it produces by giving up the space to other forms. As Spiegelman comments, Graham's poems 'move mysteriously, using - indeed, enacting

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[58] Graham's formal experimentalism took hold with *Sea Change* and has been key to the development of her more recent ecopoetic work in *Place, Fast*, and *Runaway*. In 2022, Graham released these four volumes under the collection title *[To] Last [Be] Human*, signalling a clear demarcation between her ecopoetic work to her earlier texts prior to *Sea Change*.
[59] Willard Spiegelman, 'Jorie Graham's "New Way of Looking"', 'Jorie Graham's "New Way of Looking"', *Salmagundi*, 120 (Fall, 1998), 244-275 (p. 244) https://www.jstor.org/stable/40549078, [accessed 27 June 2022].

- description as part of their quest for adequate form.'[60] This entwining of form and content further challenges reading, as the poem demands to be read as a whole, resisting dissection. In many ways, Graham's poetics can be aptly expressed as 'Description Without a Place' which enacts the flux of earthly entanglements.

The form of 'Scarcely There' unfolds out of the lines 'as if about-to-be, an almost speech' (l. 3). Indeed, Graham's fluctuating forms pertain to the sense of the poem shaping itself and finding its own key of speech. On the other hand, Stevens's aesthetic forms are conventional in comparison to Graham's. Frequently opting for regular stanza lengths, often of three or four lines, Stevens's texts are uniform and generally regular where Graham's twist and chop across the page. Commenting to Oscar Williams in March 1946, Stevens explains that in his manuscripts he leaves:

> broad spaces in short lines that follow long lines in order that the short lines will not look so short. This is merely something for the eye. […] What the printer should do is to separate the words or the letters in one or two words. This is simply a part of the normal job of making a page of poetry look decent. I say this because I don't want you to get the idea that I believe in queer punctuation.[61]

The extract highlights Stevens's adversity to 'queer punctuation', suggesting his preference for regularity and that he would likely not enjoy Graham's vertiginous poetics. Stevens's consciousness regarding the visual appearance of his poems on the page is widely known, particularly from the collection of letters between Stevens and The Cummington Press about 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction'. Yet, it is less widely appreciated that he was also conscious about the appearance of each line on the page.[62] It is in the unit of the line that I focus my next section, showing how the line interacts with visual form and language in 'Esthetique Du Mal' to give a sense of the poem's emerging 'almost speech'.

'Esthetique Du Mal' is arguably Stevens's most visually interesting poem, with Jeff Jaeckle commenting that the poem is one of Stevens's most 'technically achieved' works.[63] One of the longer and later pieces, the poem is a meditation upon the relation between poetry and pain, with the foundational argument described by Eleanor Cook 'that aesthetics is always in play when one

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[60] Ibid, p. 246.

[61] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 423, 'To Oscar Williams, March 4, 1941'), p. 387.

[62] Stevens was keen to notify The Cummington Press about the form of 'Notes', stating to Katherine Frazier that 'You might like to know of what it will consist, so that you can be thinking about its form: There will be 30 poems, each of seven verses, each verse of three lines. In short, there will be 21 lines of poetry on each page.' His meticulousness here indicates a distinct structure to Stevens's writing process. See: Manchester, The John Rylands Research Institute and Library, May 14th, 1942, WST/ 1/4/1 4a.

[63] Jaeckle further identifies the composition of the poem with its 15 sections comprising of varying lengths, alternating rhythms, inconsistent rhymes and fluctuating registers as what makes it a challenging read. See: Jeff Jaeckle, '"These Minutiae Mean More": Five Editions of Wallace Stevens' "Esthétique du Mal"', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 29, 2, (Fall 2005), 233-248 (p. 233) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44884959>, [accessed 12 March 2022].

writes poetry.'[64] In this section, I hope to add to this observation of Stevens's aesthetics and form in 'Esthetique'. Given the length of the poem and the scope of this chapter, I will concentrate attention towards the final section, XV, to highlight how the poem draws notable connections to the form and the emergence of an 'almost speech' modulated in the flux of possibility or 'as if'. Indeed, the poem initially locates itself upon the precipice of possibility or disaster in Naples, where 'The volcano trembled' (l. 11). The rumblings of Vesuvius frame the poem where the 'ancient' and terrible sound of the volcano's groans can be heard through the page (l. 8). Through the sound of the nonhuman volcano, the poem places itself upon a similar setting of uncertainty about apocalyptic change to 'Scarcely There' in the knowledge that 'Vesuvius might consume | In solid fire the utmost earth' (ll. 16-17). Such knowledge and anticipation of natural ecological disaster and destruction dictates a looser form to Stevens's other longer works, and one which reflects the shifting nature and flux of the world in the moment of intense change. Perhaps it is in this moment of apocalypse, when the wind stops and when the volcano erupts where readers can feel the 'scribble of fret and fear and fate' from which 'A new text of the world' may emerge ('Things of August', ll.145, 144).

For Stevens, however, a moment of precarity in the world provides another way of *being* in the world, or in other words, provides new possibility.[65] Such possibility is framed from the start of the work through more-than-human sound, implied from the obscure 'Warblings' that are:

> Too dark, too far, too much the accents of
> Afflicted sleep, too much the syllables
> That would form themselves, in time, and
> Communicate
> (ll. 24-27).

This sentiment of sound being 'too much' links to written text, hinting at a dissonance between sound and sign.[66] The indentation and justification of 'Communicate' is an interesting aesthetic choice for Stevens, and clearly indicates that communication is a central idea of the work. Here, it is useful to consider the process of writing that Stevens employed to construct 'Esthetique'.[67] In an interview with Edwin Honig, Stevens explains that to construct the poem, '[I] was writing on a

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[64] Eleanor Cook, 'Transport to Summer: Esthetique Du Mal' in *The Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 171-237 (p. 182).

[65] Despite the ominous rumble of apocalypse, Longenbach perceives Stevens's mode of writing 'after' in a positive light because of Stevens's tendency to 'convert the end into a beginning'. See: James Longenbach, 'The World After Poetry: Revelation in Late Stevens', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 23, 2, Special Issue: Approaching the Millennium Stevens and Apocalyptic Language (Fall 1999), 187-193 (p. 187) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44884561>, [accessed 27 July 2022].

[66] The semantic field of obscurity in Section II is consistent with Buell's notion of the environmental unconscious where nonhuman entities inhabit the forgotten realm of human thought or inhabit a place beyond our understanding.

[67] As noted by George Lensing, Stevens kept a holograph of the poem, 'written on legal-sized note-pads'. See: Lensing, 'After Harmonium', in *Wallace Stevens: A Poet's Growth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State), 119-157 (p. 139).

pad of paper, and the contents of each sheet became a separate stanza. Some had more lines than others - I didn't bother to count them up'.[68] Stevens is well-known for composing poetry around his work as an insurance lawyer, and the form of 'Esthetique' is shaped by the legal materials at hand.[69] Even though Stevens is fairly dismissive of the significance of this composition, it is curious that he is relaxed about the formal appearance of the lines and stanzas.[70] While a new page per stanza does not pertain to contemporary notions of ecological sustainability, the effect of this physical sectioning of the poem's parts impacts its reading.

The aesthetics of 'Esthetique' therefore invites speculation around Stevens's formal decisions, in relation to the communicative power of his poetry on both human and nonhuman panes. The use of a piece of paper per section gives rise to an image of the poem physically taking shape and form as the pages begin to stack up with each completed section. Further, imprints of the writing from the previous page on a fresh sheet are a reminder, in Graham's words that 'All things are mention of themselves' ('Scarcely There', ll. 44-45). Like the wind, the poem forms itself in the manner of a living system. Within each page, it is the syllables and sounds of the words which form the text, indicating how poetry attempts to express this 'almost speech' which in time may 'Communicate' with a greater reach of beings.

If the opening of the poem meditates on the possibility of sound and syllable uniting to express the 'almost speech' of the more-than-human world, the final canto dwells with the moment of emergence of a possible speech. The poem flickers between physical and non-physical worlds but does not rest peacefully in one state, despite a reminder of humankind's ontological grounding in reality through one of Stevens's most frequently quoted phrases: 'The greatest poverty is not to live | In a physical world' (ll. 325-326). Although maintaining a fairly regular visual form, syntactically, this final section evokes the shifting flux of the natural world set out in the earlier stages of the poem:

> [...]
> The minor of what we feel. The adventurer
> In humanity has not conceived of a race
> Completely physical in a physical world.
> The green corn gleams and the metaphysicals
> Lie sprawling in majors of the August heat,
> The rotund emotions, paradise unknown.

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[68] Edwin Honig, "Meeting Wallace Stevens", *Wallace Stevens Newsletter I*, (April 1970), p. 12, cited in Jaeckle '"These Minutiae Mean More"' (p. 236).

[69] See: James Longenbach's *The Plain Sense of Things* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) for one of the first texts to move away from reading Stevens in purely metaphysical terms, instead elucidating the deep connections between Stevens's poetry, his work and historical context.

[70] In many ways, Stevens's dismissal of the way that the poem was constructed is a resistance towards the tendency of academic scrutiny around poetics, which is similar to Graham's resistance towards ecological activism being read into her work.

> This is the thesis scrivened in delight,
> The reverberating psalm, the right chorale.
>
> One might have thought of sight, but who could think
> Of what it sees, for all the ill it sees? (ll. 331-340)

Stevens forces a caesura by breaking up the initial clause of the first line, 'The greatest poverty is not to live | In a physical world' (ll. 325-326). The words linger as the poem moves forward. A frequent use of commas throughout this section does not facilitate straightforward reading with the aphoristic phrases drawn out through caesura. Using the end of the line to break clauses invites readers into the next where they find themselves running slightly out of breath to reach the end of the clause. The lines do not seem long enough to contain their words and in this way, the poem enacts the sense of trying to keep up with the flux and change of the physical world, or in other words, enact the moment of an 'almost speech'.

The poem keeps to Stevens's preferred blank verse, which, characteristically, frequently runs over. Anapaestic substitutions of iambs particularly at the ends of the lines accentuate the sense of breathlessness throughout the poem. These metrical substitutions are more prevalent in the first part of XV where anapaests, trochees and the occasional pyrrhic foot occur in most of the lines. There are two instances of hypercatalexis, or a 'run-over' pentameter line. These hypercatalectic lines contribute to the sensation of breathlessness, suspending the rhythm of the line for a moment before the next begins. Notably, the second stanza is split into two sections of two and ten lines, which mirrors the total number of lines in the first stanza. The two lines in the middle of the section display a shift in the form of the stanza:

> This is the thesis scrivened in delight,
> The reverberating psalm, the right chorale. (ll. 337-338)

The meter of these lines, mixtures of iambs, a trochee, anapaests, and spondees, draws attention to the phrases 'reverberating psalm' and 'right chorale', with stress falling on the words 'psalm' and 'right' (l. 338). The push and pull of different metrical arrangements not only reflects natural speech patterns, but also emphasises the need and continuing search for the 'right chorale' (l. 338). Even though these lines exemplify different rhythms, there is balance in the final line provided by the repetition of 'the'. Indeed, the varied rhythms play into the notion of the self-forming syllables in the shadow of the rumbling volcano at the start of the poem and reflect different modes of poetic sound; one reflecting the natural flux of the world, that which is 'scrivened in delight' (l. 337) and the other representing a more measured process of repeating or 'reverberating' (l. 338). Overall, the final stanza begins in disarray, pulling and pushing readers through the lines, only to form a sense of resolution with the establishment of a balanced rhythm in the second stanza. While the

re-establishment of balance may indicate a resolution to the poem, the final lines accentuate tension between the process of writing the world and sensory experience of the poem.

The human ear is passive and 'found' by speech amongst all the 'evil sound' (l. 341) There is a disparity between the 'dark italics' (l. 342) and 'Speech' (l. 341) in the ear, which, much like in section II, cannot connect to the written sign:

> Speech found the ear, for all the evil sound,
> But the dark italics it could not propound.
> And out of what one sees and hears and out
> Of what one feels, who could have thought to make […]. (ll. 341-344)

However, the rhyming couplet of 'sound' and propound' evokes an assonant union between speech and sound. As with the section II, there is an obscurity between sound and sign. David Abram would ascertain that this obscurity is due to the finitude of language and its inability to fully comprehend the 'metaphysical changes' that operate across the world. In line with Abram's thought, the speaker of the poem declares that it is out of the senses of sight and hearing, and also emotion, by which we are able to make:

> So many selves, so many sensuous worlds
> As if the air, the mid-day air, was swarming
> With the metaphysical changes, that occur,
> Merely in living as and where we live. (ll. 345-348)

The last lines of the poem celebrate the invisible moments of being, equating the multiplicity of beings to a swarming of the mid-day air.[71] These potential selves emerge out of the real from the conjunction, 'as if', because, as Stevens frequently asserts throughout his career, 'Reality is the beginning not the end' (l. 91). It is through reality that possibility thrives. It is implied that within the air, imaginative possibilities of other selves and worlds are generated, similar to the ideology expressed in D. H. Lawrence's line, 'Not I, but the wind that blows through me'.[72] The wind returns, this time not roaring but 'swarming' in the 'mid-day air' with the 'metaphysical changes' (ll. 346-347) of the world, allowed to hang for a moment within the hypercatalectic line. The speaker works alongside the sound of wind, and the sibilance across the lines evokes this swarming of the mid-day air, inviting the reader to be carried into the imaginative 'as if' generated from the linguistic sound. While the poem leaves readers with positive images of the multitudes created through the imagination, the poem enacts an ontological grounding, reminding readers that they are 'merely [in] living as and where we live' (l. 348). These 'metaphysical changes' (l. 347) echoed in the fluctuating line lengths and rhythms are part of the swarming air and contribute the 'almost speech' which may reveal a new understanding of the world.

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[71] The multiplicity of selves and worlds also relates to Stevens's quantum understanding of the world discussed in chapter three of this thesis.
[72] D. H. Lawrence, 'Song of a Man Who has Come Through', quoted in Vendler, *Soul Says: On Recent Poetry*, p. 7.

But what happens if the air is unable to 'swarm' with metaphysical changes? What happens to form if the wind stops? Graham explores this potentiality in 'Scarcely There', using the absence of the wind as an opportunity to introduce new forms to the poem. The wind's 'almost' and the wind's absence are constant oscillations throughout the text, affecting the form and shape of the poem in 'hovering | inhalations' of breath. The moment that the wind ceases is explicitly detailed initially by the unconventional form of the poem:

> brocading the emptiness. Then suddenly
> all stills. It is near
> noon. No more
> spillage. No more gorgeous waste of effort. No more
> out-tossed reachings of green as if imagining some *out there* exists -
> hovering (ll. 25-29).

Following a series of sprawling lines, the sudden reduction in line length and resounding monometer slows the poem, evoking the sudden ceasing of the wind. Prior to the event, the words 'brocading the emptiness' (ll. 25) serve to foreshadow what is to come.[73] Brocade, a rich silk fabric often decorated with intricate raised designs, is transformed into a present participle in an attempt to fill the void of windless air with a falsified richness. Soon after, readers realise the attempt has failed and emptiness resounds because 'all stills' (ll. 26). Formally, the poem also stills at this moment, with reading and sound suspended due to the caesura. The right-hand alignment of the text also comes into play here, as the repetition of 'No more' in lines twenty-seven and twenty-eight further suspends the poem through the visual and sonic repetition of words. In essence, the lines themselves enact what the poem describes as 'spillage' (ll. 28). The ceasing of the wind effects a constriction or tightening upon the form, enabling what the speaker describes as 'hear[ing] fact' or, truth (ll. 33). This shift is clarified with the supposed banishment of the imagination, and the belief that 'some *out there* exists' in the 'out-tossed reachings of green' (ll. 29). The ceasing of the wind also ferments the effects of ecological crisis with the notion of a green reality ending violently and being tossed aside.

As well as catalysing changes upon the world, the lack of wind informs a change of pace in the poem. Things become 'finished forces', implying the removal of the wind heralding a sense of finitude (ll. 34). Indeed, this is true of the form of the poem which makes use of increased mid-line effect within and at the end of the lines following the end of the wind. Sounds, now having no medium, struggle to convey themselves. Instead, light now takes hold of the poem, ripping '*here* from *there*', revealing what the speaker describes as 'the under-neath' (ll. 36-37). The ending of the form of the wind peels back a layer of reality, exposing that 'nothing is ever going to be gone

enough' (ll. 40). Here, Graham transitions between the form of wind to history, with the ending of one uncovering the other. When the world stills, we realise that it cannot reset itself, and that our 'final footprint' will be ever present upon the earth (ll. 38). With this resounding thought heralding the emergence of the speaker's imagined, windless world, the poem takes on an air of desperation, evident from the lines appearing distinctly more uneven on the page, throwing out the rhythm of reading:

> […] But look,
> Keenly, adamantly,
> A road has appeared - a sense that something is *happening* striates
> The open air - there is a limping in the light, a tiny withdrawal of light from
> Light, which
> Makes a form
> In the gully - […]. (ll. 46-52)

Readers are faced with an intense onslaught of words, a form which demands attention, or keen and adamant reading in the moment for each line. The experience of reading the poem gives 'a sense that something is *happening*' and attention must be completely turned towards the work and its sounds and words (ll. 48). Through the form of the poem, and the process which lies underneath it, we are prompted to question the role and function of poetry. Graham comments on how her poetics works to suspend 'the intellect' and let the reader in 'through sound and image - to help the soul, so disorientated, of the reader, to find a reorientation.'[74] Essentially, her process works towards enabling the reader to feel and to reimagine. Graham achieves this with her 'vertiginous' form, which is 'full of simultaneous looking backwards and leaning forwards' induced by the varying line lengths. For Graham, this formal process is a lesson in how to embrace 'complexity' or 'turn away and give up in paralysis'. Graham's poetic form, then, may be a way into learning how to live alongside discomfort, chiefly the uncertainty and fear that knowledge of the ecological crisis brings. By moving through Graham's lines and embracing the many-layered rush of words, sounds and images, readers are better able to sit with these disconcerting forms that present themselves. In this sense, Graham's work serves to teach the reader how to live in the world, or at least turn themselves towards it, similar to Stevens's epithet that he writes to help others live their lives.

Writing the Underneath

The fluctuating form of 'Scarcely There' also places readers in the midst of an imagined effect of ecological crisis. Even if Graham wishes to avoid explicit eco-activism, ecological awareness is present in the 'under-neath' form of the poem and across the lines, forcing attention towards the

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[74] Blackie, 'Interview with Jorie Graham'.

movement of the words and sounds that describe the presence and absence of the wind.[75] The poem projects readers from the present into an imagined post-ecological crisis world without wind. The resulting disorientation, accentuated by the unfamiliar placement of the poem on the page and the uneven line lengths and rhythm serve to enact Buell's theory of the environmental unconscious. Through the experimentalist form, we place ourselves within our world, both real and imagined, which enables a consideration of forms that previously may have been forgotten or ignored.

It is in the final phases of the poem where underneath forms begin to surface, fully exposing the extent of our lack of attention to ecological forms. A form of optical evolution is hinted at through the description of 'a tiny withdrawal of light from | light, which | makes a form' (ll. 49-51). The transformation from one form of light to another marks another shift in the poem towards a rebirth, 'as if it is all going to begin again' (ll. 55). In a world without wind, forms are changing. This change is taking place 'without you', which I read as a direct address to the reader (ll. 55). Emphasis on 'you' through its position at the end of the line draws the reader into the world of the poem, but forces them to look outward and observe, or as the speaker describes, 'notice' the change, and the revealing of the underneath of perceived reality. Two almost syntactically parallel lines contemplate the place of 'you' within this changing world:

> Yes you were underneath history for this while,
> you were able to write the history of being underneath
> (ll. 60-61).

As the world changes, the past holds a sense of authority to write history. What does it mean to be 'underneath history'? (ll. 60) How does this differ from writing the 'history of underneath'? (ll. 61) To be underneath history perhaps indicates the everyday, the normal life of the individual in time. In essence, everyone stands under history. Individual roles underneath the unfolding ecological crisis may not make history in recorded forms, however, everyone living today cannot escape the historical moment of ecological crisis in which we live. Although used in various forms since the 1930s, the scientifically controversial 'Anthropocene' popularised in 2000 by Paul J. Crutzen is now recognised as the term used to describe the impact of human behaviours on the Earth that are significant as to herald a new geological epoch. It is possible that Graham is, either indirectly or not, pointing towards this new geological era, brought about through the human impact on the world.

If being underneath history is read as existing under the Anthropocene, writing the 'history of being underneath' references the documentation of this existence, which includes the ability to

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[75] To add to this point, Kirsten Hotelling Zona equates Graham's narrative as 'a quest that pulls us not inward but outward, into the web of connections from which our selves are spun.' See: Kirsten Hotelling Zona, 'Jorie Graham and American Poetry', *Contemporary Literature*, 46, 4 (2005), 667-687 (p. 676) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4489140>, [accessed 23 April 2022].

'disappear and make the rest appear' (ll. 62). The notion of appearing and disappearing is consistent throughout the poem and speaks to the presence and absence of the wind and the way that the lines shift in length to create a pattern of visual disappearance and reappearance over the pages. Further to this, the notion of presence and absence, disappearance and reappearance coheres with Buell's notion of the environmental unconscious, with those ecological entities in the world which have been forgotten and repressed by humans, and, chosen to either disappear or reappear depending upon human decisions to record their presence in history. It is these entities which take precedence at the end of the poem. The references to the 'fourth wall' and the 'page […] turning', bring a meta-poetical element to the final lines of the text, again alluding to that which is both present and absent (ll. 64, 66). The forgotten and repressed ecological beings wish for their place to be reinstated in 'floral and full of appearance', indicating that the fourth wall between humans and nonhumans will be broken in vivid and vital ways (ll. 63). While the instigator of this breaking is not named, we are informed by the wind that '*This is the way it is*' in the 'last of the summers' (ll. 72, 74). While it is debatable if the poem ever resolves the issue of flux, the final phase of the text undoubtedly attempts a resolution.

Drawing to a close in the 'last of the summers' (l. 74) the poem slows into its final lines, heralding the close of one moment and the beginning of another. Readers are prepared for this moment from the imagery of the 'New shoots in the parched field' (l. 69) and the subtle but significant observation from the animals, who 'lift their heads for an instant' (l. 68) as if registering a change in the air. This change is cemented with the text's final words:

> […] Day turns its windless
> Folio. You stay, it says. We pass here now into the next-on-world. You stay.
> (ll. 75-76)

Using the metaphor of a turning page, through an enjambed line, the poem hints at closure with the ending of the day turning on the windless world. The use of the term, 'folio', is again self-referential regarding writing and poetic process. Folio used in its earlier iteration to mean a leaf of paper or folded parchment is more readily associated with older texts or manuscripts. Graham reclaims this historical term to reframe our ecological history within her contemporary text. The placement of the term therefore indicates the beginning of a new windless history with the poem as the authoritative entity which has written the beginning of this moment. The authoritative final line solidifies this new beginning, separating the reader, or 'you' from the 'we'. The wind speaks for a final time, declaring that 'We pass here now into the next-on-world' and repeating twice that 'You stay' (ll. 76). The end of the wind has fractured a community, and therefore a new age and time is necessary. Those who have precipitated the ending of the wind must remain in the dying world, whereas those who have not appear to pass onwards into the next moment. What comes in

the 'next-on-world' is unknown. Perhaps Graham could be referencing a form of afterlife, however given the ecological context of *Runaway*, I suggest that the 'next-on-world' is a way of heralding the future of the earth post-ecological crisis and the poem is the means of conveying and documenting this new future.

The final phases of 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' move similarly to 'Scarcely There'. From the well-known lines declaring that the 'poem is the cry of its occasion | Part of the res itself and not about it' (ll. 201-202), Stevens formulates a relationship between his poetics and the real world. They are the reverberations of a windy night, which, 'Together, said words of the world are the life of the | world' (ll. 218-219). Stevens summarises his and Graham's ecopoetic project in canto XXII, where the speaker muses on a search for a 'possible possibleness' (l. 399). This sense of potential within poetry pushes back against an *a priori* analysis of poetics, similar to Stevens and Graham's wish to evade external scrutiny on their work. Across this canto, the speaker expresses a wish for renewal, much as Graham turns to the theme of recreation in the final stages of 'Scarcely There'. The poet searches for that:

> […] same exterior made
> Interior: breathless things broodingly abreath
> With the inhalations of original cold
> And of original earliness (ll. 386-389).

The poet looks to locate the communion between the web of connections in the world within the flesh of the world. Notably, the poem returns to the wind, locating the interior in 'breathless things broodingly abreath', indicated with the colon (l. 387). This alliterative and lengthy line causes breathlessness in the reader, in a similar way to 'Esthetique Du Mal' and 'Scarcely There'. Again, readers struggle to keep up with the poem's sounds, within a moment of 'after'. This sense of 'after' is built upon in the final two stanzas where the text delivers a cold and barren scene.

Like Graham's post-wind world, a change has occurred in New Haven. Even though animals are quiet, the 'wind has blown the silence of summer away' (l. 545). Despite the modulations between presence and absence of wind across Stevens and Graham's poems, the halting or coming of the wind signifies a change in both texts. The poem ends with sound, accentuating the connection between reality and the sounds of the world that go beyond the human, in other words, the 'less legible meanings of sounds, the little red | Not often realized, the lighter words | In the heavy drum of speech' (ll. 561-563). Again, we see human language displaced in favour of those incomprehensible tones of the nonhuman. Noting the use of the colour red, George McFadden ascribes Stevens's symbolism of the colour to connote the 'feebly real', and that red at once stands

for the 'dying or dead past' and also 'the protector and renewer of the past'.[76] McFadden's dualistic reading of the colour red in Stevens's work is significant because red is taken as mutable, or 'a total double thing' (ll. 166). Returning to the 'less legible meanings of sounds' (l. 561), the flash of red then serves to illustrate the entangled duality of human and nonhuman sound and voice in the world, where one is observed with more attention than the other.

In essence, then, the nonhuman sounds are those 'lighter words' not often grasped in the 'heavy drum of [human] speech' (l. 563). The poem, which is composed of a semantics of absence, allows Stevens to expose what he perceives to be the true nature of reality, which is fluctuation and oscillation. Characterised as a 'shade', 'dust' or 'force', reality cannot be indefinitely located in the realms of visible and the invisible worlds (ll. 577-578). As 'words of the world are the life of the | world' (218-219), it follows that sounds and languages, as part of reality, also flicker between forms. In this final stanza, it appears that the poem calls for an acceptance of this indeterminacy. The actualisation of supreme fiction then is the:

> [...] edgings and inchings of final form,
> The swarming activities of the formulae
> Of statement, directly and indirectly getting at (ll. 570-572).

Poetry can only capture the nature of the world through language, which is the 'formulae | Of statement' (l. 571-572). While less explicit than Graham's final claim heralding a 'next-on-world' ('Scarcely There', l. 76), Stevens evokes the function of poetry as one to expose the shades of reality though the less appreciated or 'legible' meanings of sound. In other words, the function of poetry is to sound the dark and distant warblings of the world 'That would form themselves, in time, and | Communicate' (ll. 25-27). Both poets use the modes of present and absent sound conveyed through language to enact what Graham describes as poetry being a language 'for talking about things that cannot really be "talked" about.'[77] The appreciation of that which is absent within human speech is the essence of poetry. Bringing this underappreciated and unacknowledged sense of the world to light, even through 'edgings and inchings' ensures that poetry is a useful form through which we may be able to locate and appreciate other forms of and in the world. Poetry uses language to place definitions in motion and enact processes in the world that have been labelled with words. Poetry attempts to revivify language. In Graham and Stevens, we observe this revivification through delicate and careful inflections of form and language which serve to place attention on the nonhuman world through particular emphasis on sound.

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[76] George McFadden, 'Probings for an Integration: Color Symbolism in Wallace Stevens', *Modern Philology*, The University of Chicago Press, Vol. 58, No. 3, (Feb. 1961), 186-93 (p. 189) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/434993>, [accessed 3 September 2022].
[77] Jorie Graham, 'Introduction' in *Earth Took of Earth: A Golden Eco Anthology*, ed. by Jorie Graham (New York: Ecco Press, 1996), pp. ix-ixi <https://www.joriegraham.com/prose_earth_took_of_earth> [accessed 6 May 2022].

The 'Possibleness' of Stevens's Ecopoetic Influence

Through this study of Stevens and Graham's work, in this chapter, I make a case for the importance of locating Stevens's ecopoetics alongside a contemporary poet. An important expansion of ecocritical studies is to open up the field to texts not previously considered 'ecological'. By reading Graham and Stevens alongside each other, where the former is a poet widely acknowledged as an ecopoet and the latter generally not so, connections can be made across their poetics that inform how the voices of the nonhuman are revealed within their texts. Connections between the works affirm the ecological relevance of Stevens's work in the contemporary moment. Returning to Stevens's notion of 'possibleness', I contend that both he and Graham view poetry as an unfathomable realm of possibility, where imagination can be an invaluable resource to invite readers into 'possibleness'. Through this keenness to invite new perspectives, both poets use their texts to uncover Buell's environmental unconscious signalling a turn towards a style of ecopoetics.

Chapter Five: Stevens's Disanthropic Prophecies: Sounding a World Without People

This project set out to locate the ecopoetics of Wallace Stevens, and over the course of the study I have illustrated strands of Stevens's ecopoetics across Romanticism, Modernism and the contemporary; three significant periods relating to his poetic development and the ecocritical field. My analysis of Stevens's work considering Buell's notion of the environmental unconscious has shown that Stevens uses language and sound to enable nonhuman entities locate a form of voice through poetry. With a consistent preference of sound over sign, Stevens looks to destabilise anthropocentric language to promote the nonhuman from silence. As my explorations have shown, this call to speech is not always through what humans would recognise as language but can be facilitated through sound patterns and poetic form.

My thesis has also highlighted the various consequences of Stevens' ecopoetics. Predominately, his proto-ecological work and thought encourages the development of his readers' ecological consciousness through a revaluation of where we sit within the world as part of what Timothy Morton calls 'the mesh' of beings or what Merleau-Ponty names the 'flesh of the world'. Stevens's poetry imparts the positive consequences of re-reading established poets through an ecocritical perspective by broadening the overall project of ecocriticism. In turn, my project has also sought to work through some of the entanglements within the ecocritical field relating to language and how the formation of language-as-text perhaps lies at the foundation of the current ecological crisis. Stevens's ecopoetics addresses this entanglement through experimenting with the finitude of language in poetry, seeking ways to call the nonhuman to speak and destabilise anthropocentric modes of communication.

This final chapter will extend the concept of anthropocentric destabilisation, looking to the future to consider how Stevens's ecopoetics mediate the concept of a world without humans, or human extinction. I will conclude my revisionist reading of Stevens's ecopoetics with an exploration into how the work may suggest a conception of our collective futures as a species and how this formulation may engender a re-enchantment with our world, leading to more sustainable ways of being.[1] Extinction has become a reality for some and a very real prospect for many over the last twenty years, gaining prominence within ecological discourse as the ecological crisis has made its way to the forefront of socio-political debate, and so, my first consideration will be

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[1] After all, Stevens wrote poetry 'to help people live their lives', and consequently, his ecopoetics can be read as a generative site for contemplating possible futures. See: Stevens, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words', *NA*, p. 29.

towards the significance of such an event in ecocritical studies.[2] I then will map Greg Garrard's concept of disanthropy to Stevens's thought and work, concentrating discussion around four poems: 'Earthy Anecdote', 'The Snow Man', 'The Course of a Particular', and 'The Plain Sense of Things'. I suggest that these poems exhibit Stevens's engagement with disanthropy across his career, depicting progressive disanthropic environments. Ultimately, I evaluate the consequences for human language in calling the nonhuman world to speak in these disanthropic spaces.[3]

Extinction, the Ecological Crisis, and the Arts

When asked what her one question about the future is, Margaret Atwood simply states 'Will there be people in a hundred years?'[4] Extinction Studies have gained precedence within the literary imagination and ecocriticsm over the last twenty years with confirmation that life on Earth is experiencing a new mass extinction event due to anthropogenic ecological damage.[5] As Alan Weisman simply states, 'We've ground some species so thoroughly into extinction that they, or their DNA, will likely never spring back.'[6] Due to human activity and strain upon the earth, any hopes of a Jurassic Park-like reincarnation are sadly simply not an option for 60% of the animal population.[7] Taking a less pessimistic view, in many ways, extinction is a natural phenomenon and part of evolutionary progression, with one species 'morphing into the next to meet changing conditions, another losing its niche to a more powerful competitor.'[8] However, what is decidedly unnatural are the rates at which nonhuman extinctions are taking place under the conditions of the Anthropocene.

Indeed, Anna Wienhues argues that the anthropogenic origin of this new mass extinction event is a call for its treatment within the ecocritical justice movement, commenting that 'Besides threatening the lives of nonhuman living beings, biodiversity loss is also a serious problem for

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[2] In August 2022, following a series of record-breaking heatwaves during July in Europe, climate scientists revealed that the 'risk of global societal collapse or human extinction has been 'dangerously underexplored'. Coined 'climate endgame', the catastrophic implications of ecological crisis included the mass extinction of humans. See: Damian Carrington, 'Climate endgame: risk of human extinction 'dangerously underexplored'', *Guardian*, 1 August 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/aug/01/climate-endgame-risk-human-extinction-scientists-global-heating-catastrophe> [accessed 5 August 2022].

[3] As throughout this project, my readings will be supported by Stevens's letters and notes from his essays and aphoristic collections to ensure a comprehensive reading of Stevens's thought is presented.

[4] Finn, 'An Interview with Margaret Atwood'.

[5] See: Gerado Ceballos, Rodolfo Dirzo, Paul R. Ehrlich, 'Biological annihilation via the ongoing sixth mass extinction signalled by vertebrate population losses and declines', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114, 30 (July 2017), 6089-6096 <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1704949114>.

[6] Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 6. Indeed, Stevens's short adage, 'All men are murderers' bears truth upon the realities of anthropogenic ecological damage. See: 'Adagia', *OP*, p. 194.

[7] Damian Carrington, 'Humanity has wiped out 60% of animal populations since 1970, report finds', *Guardian*, 30 October 2018, Online, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/30/humanity-wiped-out-animals-since-1970-major-report-finds> [accessed 21 July 2022].

[8] Weisman, p. 67.

humanity.'[9] As it is now understood, the multitudinous earth relies on interconnected networks to function. Removal of a species fractures this delicate web, making the effort of survival even more tenuous. Today, mass human extinction is a key concern due to the effects and extent of anthropogenic ecological damage.[10] It is important to note here the difference between types of human extinction events. As a result of colonisation, human groups, particularly those from Indigenous backgrounds, have been, and continue to be, made extinct. Ecological crisis amplifies these extinction events, because as conditions upon the earth become more extreme, those who lack the infrastructure or economic power to implement preventative measures or buy resources are more likely to experience displacement and eventually, extinction. In 2012, Jay Williams wrote that by 2050, many of humanity's oldest peoples will face extinction due to climate change.[11] Strikingly, even in 2012, Williams invokes a near future timescale in which groups of humans will be forever lost. What I will focus on in this chapter, however, is the consideration of a mass human extinction event on a much longer timescale. Even so, as John Leslie notes, 'Scenarios in which the human race ends fairly soon are easy to construct', the reality of this imagined future has become more plausible due to the impact of anthropogenic ecological crisis in the context of the Anthropocene.[12]

Significant questions for literary and ecocritical studies over the last twenty years have been concerned with the dramatic challenges that the Anthropocene poses to creative forms.[13] Mertens suggests that one such challenge is how to 'narrate' the inevitable traces of humanity upon the world that will outlive our species.[14] This narration of a world after humans requires an imagination that inscribes an 'anticipatory melancholic grief' for an event that has not yet happened. In order to combat this anticipatory grief, Mertens concludes that 'Most ecological elegies thus provide a consolation in the form of an imagined future "vision or referring eye" that will be there to interpret the traces that remain'.[15] The presence of this 'referring eye' in a post-human world, however, does not allow for a realistic imagining of a world without people, because

[9] Anna Wienhues, 'Chapter One: Introducing Ecological Justice' in *Ecological Justice and the Extinction Crisis Book: Giving Living Beings their Due* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), pp. 1-25 (p. 2) <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv16t671c.5>.

[10] While there remain various ways in which humans could become extinct aside from the ecological crisis (nuclear war, disease, asteroids, biological warfare) etc. these lie outside of the scope of this thesis.

[11] Jay Williams, 'The impact of climate change on indigenous people - the implications for the cultural, spiritual, economic and legal rights of indigenous people', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 16, 4 (May 2012), 648-688 (p. 648) <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2011.632135>.

[12] John Leslie, 'The Risk that Humans Will Soon Become Extinct', *Philosophy*, 85, 334 (October 2010), 447-463 (p. 447) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40926844>, [accessed 23 August 2022].

[13] Mahlu Mertens, 'Negating the Human, Narrating a World Without Us' in *Powerful Prose: How Textual Features Impact Readers*, ed. by R. L. Victoria Pöhls and Mariane Utudji (Verlag, Bielefeld, 2021), pp. 63-76 (p. 64) <10.1515/9783839458808>.

[14] Mertens, p. 64.

[15] Ibid, p. 65.

in this instance, there would not be a 'referring eye' present to interpret what may remain of the human species. Perhaps then, the greatest challenge to creative forms posed by the Anthropocene is the development of an imagination which looks to comprehend the totality of a world without people.

In a similar way to Mertens, Michael Richardson and Magdalena Zolkos elaborate on the notion of witnessing '*after* the human', offering various ways to imagine a post-human world.[16] For Richardson and Zolkos, 'testimony viewed from a post-humanist perspective' does not necessarily take place in a 'world devoid of humans'.[17] Again, resistance to a complete absence of people complicates our ability to imagine human extinction. Instead, Richardson and Zolkos offer an anthropocentric destabilisation of the human as the 'sole agent, author, and architect of witnessing, who displays unquestioned capacity for historical agency and exerts formative influence on "non-humans"'.[18] Another element of imagining 'after the human' is to consider the 'material traces that remain' in a post-human world.[19] These traces, which may also remain to be observed by Mertens's 'referring eye', include damaged buildings and ecological destruction following 'resource extraction'. Richardson and Zolkos conclude that a focus on the material remains of humanity generates a 'testimonial relation with things and places that have been shaped and changed by the presence of the human'. In other words, consideration of what humans may leave behind in light of the ecological crisis may encourage acknowledgement of how human action is changing the world in the present moment. Imagining 'after the human' holds potential for a reorientation of our current ecological consciousnesses. Consideration of the long-term effects of the Anthropocene breaks down temporal boundaries, and by looking forward into the future to our own ending, we reflect on our present state and potential of an alternative future.

Imagination is key to contemplating any form of future. For example, Kathryn Yusoff and Jennifer Gabrys conceive of the imagination in relation to climate change as a way of 'seeing, sensing, thinking, and dreaming the formation of knowledge, which creates the conditions for material interventions in and political sensibilities of the world'.[20] As a distinctly human cultural form, the imagination is entangled in the 'ontological formation of the human, constituted in relation to the environment or material world.'[21] Therefore, 'imagining the unimaginable' in

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[16] Michael Richardson & Magdalena Zolkos, 'Witnessing After the Human', *Angelaki*, 27, 2 (2022), 3-16 (p. 3) <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2022.2046355>.

[17] Richardson & Zolkos, p. 3.

[18] Ibid. Richardson and Zolkos' offering follows Buell's notion of the environmental unconscious, whereby we place humans and human interpretation in the background.

[19] Ibid, p. 4.

[20] Kathryn Yusoff & Jennifer Gabrys, 'Climate change and the imagination', *WIREs Clim Change*, 2 (2011), 516-534 (p. 516) <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.117>.

[21] Yusoff & Gabrys, p. 516.

relation to ecological crisis events opens up a 'generative space of unknowing' in attempts to conceive of what human futures may look like under the current condition of the Anthropocene.[22] Human extinction generally falls under the category of apocalypse, and it is here that Yusoff and Gabrys locate the central role of the imagination within contemporary environmentalism. Amongst contemplation of apocalypse, the imagination serves to 'counterweight' the 'actuality of the world' and how 'we might be otherwise'.[23] In other words, imagination in the arts points to a reorientation of our current relation with the world.

Evidently, mass human extinction and serious contemplation of apocalypse is a growing concern as the ecological crisis progresses. Imaginative and artistic spaces provide a framework of possibility to explore potential futures in the first instance, and then reorientate our relationship to the world because of such exploration into catastrophic events like human extinction. However, as the above discussion has highlighted, imagining a complete absence of human presence in the world is a challenge. I suggest that to completely comprehend the effects and consequences of the Anthropocene, it is useful and necessary to explore imaginings of a world completely without people. In 2012, Greg Garrard coined the term 'disanthropy' in his paper, 'Worlds Without Us: Some Types of Disanthropy', where he explores the implications of imagining a world without people, or mass human extinction.[24]

While Garrard's article explores various non-literary forms of disanthropic imaginings across film and documentary, I am particularly interested in his location of disanthropic thought in the early twentieth century, where 'for the first time writers began to imagine a world completely and finally *without* people.'[25] Locating disanthropy in literature is challenging due to what Garrard describes as 'The helpless allegiance of written genres to narrative voice and anthropomorphic characterization' (p. 43). Even so, I argue that it is not altogether impossible to locate disanthropic thought within literature. Garrard himself proves it possible by taking scenes from two Modernist texts, D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), to question the parameters of disanthropic thought. By asking if disanthropy has the potential to be 'compassionate', Garrard identifies 'a peculiar beauty in the disanthropic moment', ultimately bringing to light a new way of contextualising human extinction.

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[22] Ibid, p. 517.
[23] Ibid, p. 521.
[24] Greg Garrard, 'Worlds Without Us: Some Types of Disanthropy', *SubStance*, 41, 1 (2012), Issue 127: Globing the Earth: The New Ecologics of Nature, The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 40-60. Indeed, the term 'disanthropy' is applied by Garrard to describe this exact process of imagining total human absence.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23261102>, [accessed 19 October 2021].
[25] Garrard, 'Some Types of Disanthropy', p. 40.

Going further into Garrard's methodology, he locates the origin of disanthropic imagining in the resurged 'Christian apocalypticism' in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in America, and the discovery of '"deep time"' (p. 42). Garrard is keen to disambiguate disanthropy from apocalypse, noting that apocalyptic narratives tend to spare at least one human figure as witness to the destruction of life as they know it. Disanthropy, however, does not allow for witnesses. The imagining of human absence is evocative of deep time theories due to the destabilisation of our conception of time implicit within disanthropic imaginings. Even so, Garrard is keen to comment that the 'disanthropic imagination is often momentary or microcosmic' (p. 43). While the act of imagining human absence implies deep time thinking, the actual imagined moment is fleeting. This destabilising temporal element of disanthropy can be observed in Stevens's poems, forming an element of his engagement with disanthropic thought that I will explore later in this chapter.

The destabilising nature of disanthropy is significant because it parallels the ways in which comprehension of the ecological crisis can be as straightforward as challenging. Garrard characterises the imagining of a world without people as hesitating 'between being totally unimaginable, and too easily and glibly conceivable' (p. 44). Working through these simultaneously uncomfortable but easily imagined possibilities is part of the project of ecocritical thought, bringing ecocriticism closer to being an 'ethics of planetary representation, with both geographical and temporal axes' (p. 43). Observing the world devoid of humans, or alternatively the world as it is, 'when we are not looking', reveals it to be 'at once alluring and frighteningly indifferent' (p. 42). Extending study into disanthropy subsequently highlights this alluring and indifferent world, which works into Buell's notion of the environmental unconscious. Imagining what is there while we are not brings us back to the real world with stronger force.

Garrard's article takes direction from Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us* (2007), citing the book as 'The most impressive and thorough example of disanthropic representation' (p. 50). Weisman's study explores the full ecological implications of a situation where humans vanish. He asks readers to:

> Look around you, at today's world. Your house, your city. The surrounding land, the pavement underneath, and the soil hidden below that. Leave it all in place, but extract the human beings. Wipe us out, and see what's left. How would the rest of nature respond if it were suddenly relieved of the relentless pressures we heap on it and our fellow organisms?[26]

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[26] Weisman, p. 5.

Weisman activates our environmental unconscious and allows the world to come to the forefront of our thoughts through his exploration of human extinction. In doing so, Weisman addresses some of the dissonance between the perception of our individual realities and our ecological position in the world. Imagining a world without humans opens a portal of thought towards our ecological enmeshment within it. Viewed in this way, disanthropic thinking can be a positive methodology to consider potential human futures in the face of ecological crisis.

'Life is an affair of places, not people': Stevens's Aversion to the Human

Stevens's work, as this thesis has argued, was grounded in the real. In this next section, I will map the term 'disanthropy' onto Stevens's general mode of thought through a sample of his letter extracts to begin to formulate an idea of how Stevens's disanthropic inclinations informed his ecopoetics. Stevens was famously not a sociable man.[27] It is important here to cement the relationship between disanthropy and misanthropy, and Garrard supplies a useful note highlighting how he came to the term, citing that '"disanthropy" maintains a justly perilous proximity to "misanthropy"'.[28] Where misanthropy is generally understood as a hatred of mankind, disanthropy is less concerned with hatred towards humans but more invested in what the world looks like without them. Even so, to want to imagine a world without people perhaps requires a degree of misanthropy, which can be observed in Stevens's character.

As early as 1902, aged 23, Stevens wrote in disgust about some abandoned eggshells found during one of his long walks around the New York City landscape. His dissatisfaction towards the presence of other people in the woods is described with vehemency:

> But pooh! I discovered egg-shells - sure sign of a man + his wife + a child or two, loafing in my temple. How fine, though, was the mystery of everything except the damned egg-shells! […] I doubt if there is any keener delight in the world then, after being penned up for a week, to get into the woods on such a day- every pound of flesh vibrates with new strength every nerve seems to be drinking at some refreshing spring.[29]

Almost comically, Stevens expresses his distaste upon discovering what appears to be the leftover remnants of a family picnic. His outrage at the littering is perhaps because he sought solitude and revitalisation from the entrapment and mechanism of New York City, with which he had a fluctuating relationship. His physical connection to the natural world, explained in how his 'flesh vibrates with new strength' attests to his affinity to natural spaces and physical need to be present within them. Protective over his quiet space, he describes the woods as 'his temple', projecting that the family who had left their eggshells have trespassed. Stevens views this woodland area as

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[27] Disliking reading his work aloud and preferring vast walks around the New York hills to the bustling city in his younger years point to a form of introversion or shyness.
[28] Garrard, 'Some Types of Disanthropy', p. 59.
[29] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 67, 'From his journal, October, 1902'), p. 62.

his haven amongst the often-tyrannical metropole of New York. Even though the family have since departed, evidence of their presence lingers, and Stevens finds this particularly irksome.

Tracing further elements of Stevens's misanthropic moods, his descriptions of people can be equally unforgiving. In 1906, he talks about how he 'loathed every man [he] met' and how 'People look at one so intimately, so stupidly'.[30] Further in the entry, he asserts that 'One sees the most painful people, wherever one goes. Human qualities, on an average, are fearful subjects for contemplation'. Perhaps his most misanthropic moment comes in a letter to his then fiancé, Elsie Moll, in 1909. Stevens assuredly writes that man is 'a nuisance - a vulgarity, and it is impossible to see his dignity.[31] Reflecting on a journal entry of April 1904 where Stevens asserts that 'we have utterly forsaken the Earth', it could be that Stevens's misanthropy is connected to his love and attention towards the natural world, and subsequent frustration at the ways in which humans treat it.[32]

These journal entries and letters reflect a degree of misanthropy felt by Stevens at points of his life. However, how does his misanthropy relate and develop into disanthropic imagining? I would like to suggest that Stevens's first encounter with disanthropy was through the work of French landscape artist, Jean Charles Cazin. Stevens records his impression of 'Departure of Night' during his February 1906 trip to the American Art Gallery, remarking:

> [Cazin] had caught even in so small a painting the abandoned air of the world at that hour, that is abandoned of humans. If there had been a light in the house - it would have been quite different. One could have imagined the dewy air and the quiet.[33]

The appealing element of the picture for Stevens is the air of abandonment, and the disanthropic mood of the world 'abandoned by humans'. Stevens recognises the total absence that disanthropic imagining requires with his acknowledgement that even a light depicted in the house would have changed the tone of the painting due to the implication of human presence. Disanthropic imagining in the painting allows Stevens as a viewer to 'imagine the dewy air and the quiet', or in other words, the elements of the world that go largely unnoticed due to the presence of human life. We know that Stevens enjoyed being alone in nature, and it can be inferred from his encounter with the Cazin painting that disanthropic imagining was also appealing to him. During the earlier part of the twentieth century, it is not hard to understand why individuals may have contemplated the end of humanity due to the lasting destruction of the First World War, which revealed to the world the capacity for human destruction on a huge scale.

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[30] Ibid, (Entry 107, 'From his Journal, February 5, 1906'), p. 86.
[31] Ibid, (Entry 154, 'To Elsie Moll, May 3, 1909'), p. 141.
[32] Ibid, (Entry 89, 'From his Journal, April 18, 1904'), p. 73.
[33] Ibid, (Entry 110, 'From his Journal, February 27, 1906'), p. 88.

For Stevens though, I argue that these disanthropic imaginings were more greatly rooted in his frustration towards humans in their treatment of the world. In letter extracts from 1904-1905, Stevens expresses to Elsie, 'I want to know about myself, about my world, about my future when the world is ended'.[34] Forward thinking is also a significant element of Stevens's disanthropic imagining because he has a desire to understand what the future looks like when the world is ended. What Stevens means by this is ambiguous, however, when his disanthropic tendencies are considered, it is not a leap to believe that Stevens is referring to the ending of the world as it currently stands, with humans as the dominant species. These words highlight a curiosity and awareness in Stevens surrounding the future of the planet. As I will discuss in this chapter, his disanthropic poems are a space in which to explore the potential future of the world, and that of humanity.

Returning to Stevens's response to the Cazin painting, his appeal to the piece is grounded in the sense of quiet that a lack of human presence invites. Once again, sound is of great significance to Stevens's ecological consciousness, and he calls the sounds of human language into question when considering disanthropy. What role does language have in illustrating a world without humans? Can we sound a world without people through our words? How might this be explored through poetry?

Human Sounds and Human Noise: Language as Pollution

Garrard draws upon several examples of multimedia to construct his theory of disanthropic imagining. While all vary, a commonality between them is the absence of anthropogenic sound. Despite Alan Weisman's prediction that should all humans vanish, the world will bear traces of our ecological activities for centuries to come, one immediate effect of a world without humans would be the removal of almost all sources of noise pollution. A world without people would no longer function to the orchestra of engines, machines, radios, and human voices. In *The World Without Us,* Weisman describes nature's reclamation project upon the abandoned Constantia Hotel in Varosha, Cyprus. Since war between Turkish and Greek Cypriots in 1974, the eastern resort had been abandoned. In 1976, Allan Cavinder was asked to conduct electrical work on the building which was to reopen. He describes how 'silence pounded him' to the point that it, almost paradoxically, 'hurt his ears.'[35] Weisman describes Varosha's changed soundscape from noise to silence:

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[34] Ibid, (Entry 95, 'To Elsie Moll, Letter excerpts 1904-05'), p. 80.
[35] Weisman, p. 118.

> Now, no bands, just the incessant kneading of the sea that no longer soothed. The wind sighing through open windows became a whine. The cooing of pigeons grew deafening. The sheer absence of human voices bouncing off walls was unnerving.[36]

The emphasis in the passage is on natural sounds that would normally be considered by the human ear to be a relaxing respite from anthropogenic noise. However, for Allan Cavinder, the soothing sea is incessant, the wind whiney, and the birdsong too loud. The absence of human voices causes discomfort, rendering familiar surroundings alien. Cavinder's experience points to two key effects of anthropogenic noise. Firstly, human voices are part of the natural soundscape of the world. As creatures, we are part of the enmeshed ecological system and the sounds that we make from our bodies contribute to this system. Second, when allowed to be fully heard, natural sounds become oppressive, because we are deconditioned to attune ourselves to them and instead pay more attention to man-made noise. Disanthropic imagining has the potential to explore both of these effects. Across these following pages, I will outline the implications of noise pollution upon the world and explore where human language sits within the spectrum of anthropogenic noise.

The soundscapes of the world have changed because of the increasing volume of anthropogenic noise. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Canadian composer and theorist, R. Murray Schafer established the World Soundscape Project at Simon Fraser University in response to Vancouver's changing soundscape in the late twentieth century.[37] The project produced various outputs including recordings and publications. *The Music of the Environment* prophetically begins with the following:

> The soundscape of the world is changing. Modern man is begging to inhabit a world with an acoustical environment radically different from any he has hitherto known. These new sounds, which differ in quality and intensity from those of the past, have already alerted researchers to the dangers of the imperialistic spread of more and larger sounds into every corner of man's life.[38]

Schafer illustrates an early recognition of noise pollution and the damaging effects of the 'imperialistic spread' of noise on humans. While the focus here is on the negative effects of noise pollution on humans, in light of recent research, Schafer's notation can be extended to encompass all beings in the world that are impacted by anthropogenic noise and altered soundscapes.[39]

Peter Coates makes an important disambiguation between sound and noise, noting that 'Noise is to sound what stench is to smell […] something dissonant, unwanted, out of place, and

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[36] Ibid, p. 119.

[37] R. Murray Schafer, World Soundscape Project <https://www.sfu.ca/sonic-studio-webdav/WSP/index.html> [accessed 7 July 2022].

[38] R. Murray Schafer, 'The Music of the Environment', *The Music of the Environment* (UNESCO), (1973), pp. 3-35 (p. 3) <http://www.sfu.ca/sonic-studio-webdav/WSP_Doc/Booklets/MOTE.pdf> [accessed 7 July 2022].

[39] For more on how anthropogenic noise has altered ecological spaces, see Senzaki Masayuki, Kadoya Taku and Francis Clinton D., 'Direct and indirect effects of noise pollution alter biological communities in and near noise-exposed environments', *Proc. R. Soc.* 287, 1923 (2020) <http://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2020.0176>.

invasive.'[40] The negative characterisation of noise as distinctly unwelcome within our world's soundscape pertains to Schafer's parasitic metaphor of the 'imperialistic spread' of anthropogenic noise.[41] Indeed, Coates notes that the word 'noise' is derived from the Latin *nausea*, although some also attribute its grammatic origin to the Latin *noxia*, meaning hurt, injury or damage.[42] Nevertheless, both foundations ascertain noise as a harmful entity, posing a serious threat to ecological health and wellbeing.

If Schafer's claims are taken to be correct, all anthropogenic noise is damaging. However, do human sounds exist that do not threaten ecological structures? Coates asks if the human voice can be perceived as a natural sound rather than noise, pointing out that this depends upon the medium by which the voice is conveyed. As I have argued in my previous chapters, humans are creatures that are intrinsically enmeshed in the natural world. Therefore, human sound can be viewed as equal to birdsong or tidal waves. Is it this element of the human that can bring our language closer to more-than-human entities, thus allowing all beings of the world a voice? Coates seems optimistic about the potential for writers to 'evoke past soundscapes' and overcome the 'limitations of our earwitnessing'.[43] I would extend this perspective and suggest that one of the ways in which poetry may help us overcome our auditory limitations is by evoking the soundscape of a world without people. If written language is one of the originating factors of the dissonance between human and nature, emphasis towards the sounds of words may help to close this gap. In my subsequent close readings of Stevens's poems, I will reflect on Abram's statement that 'at one time, nature spoke; now texts do', considering if disanthropic imaginings can revitalise and reenchant our language with the sounds of the more-than-human world.[44]

'Earthy Anecdote': Stevens's First World Without the Human

Stevens begins his first collection, *Harmonium* (1922), with the short and twisting 'Earthy Anecdote'.[45] The poem makes a strong ecological statement which can be seen to frame the potential messages and meanings of the whole collection. Indeed, the choice of *Harmonium* as his title is of note to Stevens's overarching ecological poetics.[46] Stevens dabbled with naming the

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[40] Peter A. Coates, 'The Strange Stillness of the Past: Toward an Environmental History of Sound', *Environmental History,* 10, 4 (October, 2005), 636-665 (p. 643) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3986142> [accessed 11 August 2022].
[41] Schafer's description of the spread of anthropogenic noise brings to mind Thoreau's experience of the proximity of the Fitchburg Railroad, south of the pond. He describes how 'The whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and winter, sounding like the scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer's yard […]'. Here is an example of anthropogenic noise intersecting the natural world. See: Thoreau, *Walden* (Project Gutenberg, 1995), Project Gutenberg Ebook.
[42] Coates, 'The Strange Stillness of the Past: Toward an Environmental History of Sound', p. 644.
[43] Ibid, p. 658.
[44] Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, p. 19.
[45] Stevens, 'Earthy Anecdote', *CP*, p. 3.
[46] Opening poems tend to frame the collection and set up the themes or what is at stake for the poet within the work. If read ecocritically, the poem reveals that a potential stake for Stevens's opus is exploring the uninterrupted natural

collection, *The Grand Poem: Preliminary Minutiae*, a title which positions the poetry of preceding trifles as items of great importance. Instead, confirmed with a telegram to Alfred Knopf on 18th May, 1923, Stevens settled on *Harmonium*.[47] While connections to sound and music are implied from the etymological reference of the word to a nineteenth century form of reed organ, where sound is produced through the vibrations of air across thin metal strips, *harmonia* relates to the Greek goddess of harmony and concord. From both the abandoned and chosen titles, it is evident that Stevens wished to propose a documentation of the world and its sounds with his first collection. Opening with 'Earthy Anecdote' therefore situates Stevens's documentation of his whole, the *harmonium,* as an attendance of that in the world which is natural and nonhuman.

Even so, critics have resisted the ecological implications of the poem, which within its very title, places readers in the 'Earthy' space of the world, enmeshed within the tangible real. Hugh Smith asserts that the poem demonstrates how the 'poetic quality in man' lends 'order and significance to nature'.[48] Smith's statement calls back Romantic notions of the poet as prophet, pertaining to Jonathan Bate's characterisation of the poet as supreme ecological interpreter. Similar to my discussion of previous readings of 'Anecdote of the Jar', Smith's interpretation is grounded in an anthropocentric poetics with the indication that poetry about the earth or nonhuman beings function to allow the poet to exercise order and give meaning to the world. Nonhumans are objective entities with no subjective autonomy as beings. As my thesis has presented, Stevens had little to no interest in Cartesian binaries. His poetics were a means to explore the writing of the great poem of the earth and sought to achieve a language with which to express his ecological consciousness. This wish is best explicated in Stevens's discussion of the publication and editing of poems for *Harmonium.* For example, Stevens mentions to Harriet Monroe that reading his work for the collection caused him to 'wish rather desperately to keep on dabbling and to be as obscure as possible until I have perfected an authentic and fluent speech for myself.'[49] It is this authenticity of representation of the world in its harmonious and entangled whole that Stevens sought to capture in his work, which can be glimpsed in 'Earthy Anecdote'.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will concentrate my subsequent discussion on two elements of the poem. Firstly, I will attend to the significance of the lack of humans within the world of the poem, relating the content to Garrard's notion of disanthropy. I will then extend my disanthropic reading of the poem to the importance of sound within Stevens's ecopoetics to express the silenced

world. 'Earthy Anecdote' remained the opening poem to Stevens's *Collected Poems* in 1955, pointing towards a consistency in Stevens's choice to open his entire works with a poem of the earth.

[47] Stevens, *Letters* (Entries 261 and 262), pp. 237, 238.

[48] Hugh L. Smith, 'Stevens' Earthy Anecdote,' *Explicator*, 24, 4 (Dec. 1965), 58-59 (p. 58) <https://doi.org/10.1080/00144940.1965.11482570>.

[49] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 254 'To Harriet Monroe, October 28, 1922'), pp. 230-231 (p. 231).

voices of the nonhuman world. The poem presents to readers a world of predator-prey relations in Oklahoma, where a primeval and raw interaction between the bucks and the firecat plays out. This interaction directs the movement of the piece and in turn, how the poem demands to be read. In each stanza aside from the last, the poem tells a tale of obstruction, where the bucks are faced with the blockade of the firecat in their way, forcing them to alter their course. The bucks and the firecat are the only mammalian and living presences in the poem, left to play out their ecological interactions without human interruption.

The disanthropic world of 'Earthy Anecdote' is accentuated by the illustration designed to accompany the poem by Walter Patch, appearing in the July 1918 edition of *The Modern School*.[50] Patch chose to depict a simple prairie plains landscape with some undulating hills. Movement in this landscape is clearly shown by Patch's hatched sketch marks indicating different forms, light, and shadow. What is also clear in the sketch is the complete lack of life. Interestingly, Stevens was disappointed in the absence of living beings in the image, stating that Patch's illustration is 'quite the opposite of my idea. I intended something quite concrete: actual animals.'[51] What resonates from this statement is the significance of the living beings in the poem: the bucks and the firecat.

One question that surrounds the poem and likely will remain unresolved is that of the firecat. What does Stevens wish for readers to imagine when he introduces this creature? Critics have favoured symbolism or allegory pertaining to the human mind, commenting that the firecat is a stand-in for the imagination, with the interaction between the earthy buck, representative of how our minds shape and perceive reality.[52] Alternatively, the firecat is the poet, shaping the oscillations of the mind in relation to external reality. Both interpretations cohere with the philosophical criticism that encircled Stevens's work in the late twentieth century. However, Stevens himself places an obstruction to symbolic readings of the poem. As noted by Massimo Bacigalupo in 1997, Stevens writes to the editor of *The Modern School*, Carl Zigrosser, that there is 'no symbolism in the 'Earthy Anecdote'. There's a good deal of theory about it, however; but explanations spoil things.'[53] Elusive as ever regarding explanation of his work, Stevens merely reveals the lack of symbolism in the poem. Therefore, it is possible that the firecat could simply reference the tawny coat of a cougar.[54]

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[50] Massimo Bacigalupo, 'Wallace Stevens and the Firecat', *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 21, 1 (Spring 1997), 94-98, p. 95 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44884463>, [accessed 16 August 2022].

[51] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 224, 'To Carl Zigrosser, July 10, 1918) p. 209.

[52] An example reading of 'Earthy Anecdote' that relates to the human mind is Vendler's comment that the poem represents 'an enacting of the response of the mind's original inertia when it encounters new hypotheses and then contradictions of these very hypotheses'. See: Vendler, 'Wallace Stevens: Hypotheses and Contradictions' (p. 103).

[53] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 216, 'To Carl Zigrosser, 20 February 1918'), p. 204.

[54] Cougars or Mountain Lions were common in Oklahoma and elsewhere on the American Plains prior to European colonisation. By the 18th century, these cats were largely eradicated through shooting or lack of prey, due to human hunting of deer (the primary food source of the cougar). Sightings have been fleeting since. See: Oklahoma

If the poem offers no symbolic meaning, what can be made of it? Bonnie Costello's comment that Stevens viewed landscape as a 'work in progress, constantly adjusting in relation to the fluency of thought and world' may be helpful in unpicking the poem and untangling its disanthropic significance. Taking Costello's assertion that for Stevens, the world is a constantly moving and altering system, the movement of the bucks and the firecat can also be viewed as contingent parts of the ever-changing landscape of the poem. To add to this concept of Stevensian world-making, one short but telling phrase in *Adagia* simply states that 'The earth is not a building but a body.'[55] It may seem strange to imagine Stevens as a precursor to James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, however, the implication of the earth as a body pertains to Lovelock's notion of the complex synergistic and self-regulated systems that preserve life on earth.[56] Returning to 'Earthy Anecdote', the implication, therefore, is that the earth can maintain ecological relationships in the absence of humans, which can be seen as an example of hopeful disanthropy. The earth maintains itself without the presence of people.

Given that the poem offers us a glimpse of a world without people, as mentioned earlier, one of the most significant effects of a lack of human presence is in the soundscape of the world. Sound in 'Earthy Anecdote' is loud with the noises of the bucks and the firecat. The language used to convey these sounds is almost onomatopoeic which is one of the ways that Stevens uses human language to enable nonhuman entities to be heard. Onomatopoeic words tend to be associated with early language acquisition, where an infant will mimic the sounds that they hear in their environment. In this sense, onomatopoeic language is one of the ways that humans can express the sounds of the nonhuman world as authentically as possible. In the poem, we hear the bucks 'clattering' and swerving in 'swift' lines, and the firecat 'bristled' before them, 'leaping' to change their course (ll. 1, 7, 3, 4). These words are not traditionally onomatopoeic, like 'bang', 'crash', or 'sizzle', but the use of the present participles enlivens the sounds of the phonemes into onomatopoeia. In addition, the poem relies on alliteration and repetition to carve out the exchange between the bucks and the firecat. Both techniques lead to onomatopoeic resonance where the repetition of the sounds of the words comes to depict what the words are signifying, notably with the 'swerving' and 'swift' motion of the bucks. The repetition of lines across stanzas points to *harmonia* between predator and prey in a disanthropic landscape, with the soundscape of the world composed of only nonhuman beings.

Department Wildlife Conservation, 'Mountain Lion' <https://www.wildlifedepartment.com/wildlife/field-guide/mammals/mountain-lion> [accessed 21 July 2022].

[55] Stevens, 'Adagia', *OP*, p. 186.

[56] Lovelock and Margulis's Gaia hypothesis argues that the Earth functions on a system of self-regulated negative feedback loops precipitated through interactions between organisms and their inorganic surroundings which serve to regulate habitable conditions on Earth. See: James Lovelock, *Gaia*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

The cyclical structure of the poem, aided by the repetition of sounds, adds to the disanthropic atmosphere. The line lengths in the second to fourth stanzas are fairly even, in contrast to the first and fifth which both rely on longer lines. The overall effect of this visual form is one of ecological consistency. The presence of humans in this landscape becomes unimaginable, because the poem gives the impression that this interaction between the firecat and the bucks is one that is ancient and will long continue. Continuation of action beyond the poem is hinted at by the temporal indicators of 'Every time' and 'And slept' (l. 20). In many ways, this message of continuance from the poem is ecologically correct, whereby predators and prey have and always will enact such an exchange. It is only reading the poem in the context of ecological disaster under the Anthropocene that changes our perception of the repetitious nature of the ecological relationship depicted, because of our knowledge that anthropogenic activity has and will likely disrupt ancient ecological interactions.

'Earthy Anecdote' is a reminder of the real, and a nostalgic disanthropic imagining of an open American wilderness without peopled infrastructure. The predator-prey interaction reminds us of the foundational ecological interactions that humans are enmeshed. It is in these interactions that we observe the continuance of sustainable life. In *The World Without Us*, Alan Weisman notes that picturing the world before people is the basis of our understanding for how the world may evolve after us.[57] Weisman later supports this claim, with a statement from Edward O. Wilson on human extinction, noting that without people, '"[…] The world would mostly look as it did before humanity came along. Like a wilderness."'[58] Reflecting on Walter Patch's accompanying illustration to the poem, while it did not depict what Stevens was imagining, the poem's landscape is clear. Perhaps in a world without people, cougars will repopulate the wilderness of Oklahoma once more, and this 'Earthy Anecdote' will play out again. The sections that follow will seek to chart a progression of disanthropic thought in Stevens's later works, showing that it was a thematic consideration throughout his career, as I have established from my close reading of the first poem in Stevens's collected works.

Uncovering Sounds Underneath: Disanthropic Winters in 'The Snow Man' and 'The Course of a Particular'

George Lensing affirms that 'The Snow Man' and 'The Course of a Particular' are twin poems, despite the thirty-year time span between them.[59] Indeed, Lensing further claims that the similarity between the two works caused Stevens discomfort due to an awareness that the latter poem may be perceived as a rewriting of the earlier 'Snow Man' piece. While the obvious commonality

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[57] Weisman, p. 87.
[58] Ibid, p. 242.
[59] 'The Snow Man' was first published in *Poetry* Magazine in 1921 and 'The Course of a Particular' first appeared in *The Hudson Review* in 1951 when Stevens was seventy-three.

between both poems is winter, I suggest that the works primarily showcase Stevens's sustained interest in disanthropy across his lifetime and career, and that this interest has implications upon his ecopoetics. The next section will therefore identify disanthropic imagining in both poems, examining how language and sound function in these disanthropic landscapes to give the more-than-human world a voice. I conclude that rather than enacting a rewriting of 'The Snow Man', 'The Course of a Particular' instead provides a progression from the moment of disanthropic transformation observed in the earlier poem into a wholly disanthropic world in the second.

While the opening poem of *Harmonium* brings heat from the Oklahoma plains and the bristling of the firecat, Stevens's disanthropy glares through his winter poems. 'The Snow Man' is by far his most famous wintry scene, and one of the most anthologised poems of his entire body of work. The reasons for the poem's popularity vary, however the nebulous identity of the snow man and the cryptic final line of the 'nothing that is' continues to draw attention from critics and readers since its first appearance in *Poetry* in 1921 (ll. 15). Following direction from the poem, my discussion into the disanthropic world of 'The Snow Man' will begin with the figure of the snow man itself. Indeed, this wintry figure perhaps poses an issue for a disanthropic reading, as it could be viewed as a meta-man or allegory for Stevens himself. As disanthropic works imagine the total absence of people, does the figure of the snow man compromise such a reading?

Lensing's detailed reading of the poem in *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons* (2001) pivots around the 'crucial' first word of the work: 'One'.[60] It is Lensing's view that this 'One' is a 'human perceiver' and that this is the most important element of the poem given that 'everything that follows is a predication of that human presence.'[61] While indeed the 'One' could refer to a human being, it is important to consider that 'One' can also indicate 'thing' rather than the indefinite pronoun generally assumed to relate to a human being. If 'One' is taken to refer to the snow man rather than an external human perceiver, Lensing's notion of the poem is changed. The poem that follows establishes the presence of the snow man rather than a human being. Interestingly, Lensing's reading demonstrates our inherently anthropocentric identification through language, where the assumption is that the poem is pointing towards a distinct human presence. However, while the name, 'snow man', connotes a human presence, a snow man is rather more a likeness or mimesis of the human form than a person. To assume human presence within a poem that so clearly illustrates human absence is a consequence of the anthropocentric qualities of language. Even so, Lensing goes on to advocate for the *evolution* of the human 'One' into the snow man, essentially arguing that having a 'mind of winter' transforms human perceiver into snow man,

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[60] George Lensing, *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), p. 132.
[61] Lensing, *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons*, p. 132.

abolishing human presence by the end of the poem. As Lensing astutely summarises, the poem enacts a transformation of human presence to absence in 'the literal decreation of the original beholder'.[62] It is this sense of decreation which invites the poem into disanthropic thought and also points towards Stevens's consideration around what it means to be human.[63]

Focusing on the theme of decreation in the poem, readers observe a reduction of the human self into the 'nothing that is not there and the nothing that is' (ll. 15). Lensing characterises Henri Bergson's notion of nothingness with Stevens's use of the word as 'a reduction of the self that drives toward removal, cancellation, even annihilation'.[64] Lensing associates this absent self with Stevens's winter works, citing it as Stevens's way to 'suppress the life of subjectivity.'[65] What is meant by this suppression of subjectivity is the tension between the desire for 'nothingness' and an absence of human presence. The fact remains that this absence can only be speculated upon, especially when described with language, which with its very presence, indicates something of the human. This tension resurfaces in the final stanza of the poem:

> For the listener, who listens in the snow,
> And, nothing himself, beholds
> Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is (ll. 13-15).

Whether the 'listener, who listens in the snow' is the 'One' or the snow man of the title, or even the reader, remains ambiguous. Indeed, this 'listener' has undergone a reduction of their being into 'nothing himself', beholding both the 'Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is' (ll. 14-15). Dwelling with the relation between the verbs 'to listen' and 'to behold', the poem reveals a connection between observing and listening. To behold means not just to 'see' an entity but to comprehend it with concentrated attention. Indeed, the Old English derivative, *bihalden*, means to hold by, keep, observe, regard, look.[66] The biblical resonance of 'behold' which is often used in religious texts as a call attention towards an event, object or being in conjunction with the action of listening is therefore suggestive of a sense of devotion in the act of listening to and sitting with the nothing of the poem.

While the repetition of 'nothing' could relate to Bergson's notion that 'nothingness' indicates existence, the syntax of the line could support an alternative interpretation. The 'nothing that is not there' is a double negative that draws stark attention to the blankness of the winter scene and

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[62] Ibid, p. 136.

[63] Chapter Three of this study discusses Stevens's understanding of human identity and its intersections with his ecopoetics.

[64] Lensing, *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons*, p. 126. Bergson's 'The Idea of Nothing' from *Creative Evolution* (1907) suggests that nothingness is in fact a form of existence, in the mode of absence.

[65] Ibid, p. 127.

[66] 'Behold', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <www.oed.com/view/Entry/17232> [accessed 29 December 2022].

by extension, the absence of human presence. The self of the 'One' is the nothing that is not there *anymore* after having been 'cold for a long time' (ll. 7). The oxymoronic 'nothing that is' on the other hand is perhaps more challenging to perceive. What Stevens could be pointing towards is the meaning of nothing regarding value or significance. Therefore, the 'nothing that is' that is beheld by the listener who is also themselves, 'nothing', is the world that is left 'crusted' with snow and untouched by a human hand. The 'nothing that is' is the world itself, relegated to our collective environmental unconscious. The moment of disanthropic transformation from 'One' into snow man or listener uncovers this ecological mesh and brings it to the surface. The poem ends on presence and being, with the 'is', providing a contrast to the heavy sense of negation in the final stanza. Focusing on the elements of the poem that are present, I will now further discuss the winter setting of the poem, and the soundscape to explore how Stevens decentres the human voice in a disanthropic world, described with human words.

The turning to winter provides Stevens with an appropriate space where he can enact disanthropy. Lensing aligns the 'harshness and hostility' of winter to 'human survival' with the 'painful reduction of the self in the push toward nothingness'.[67] Perceptions of wintry landscapes, with the world blanketed in bright snow, give way to the notion of nothingness in the sense of an empty scene where familiar surroundings are changed. Winter enables readers to picture a world of nothing, where possibility and new life are promised. In terms of Stevens's disanthropy, winter is a catalyst for its imagining. Garrard's theory reflects that there is a 'particular beauty in the disanthropic moment.'[68] Indeed, the aesthetic qualities of the Cazin painting which Stevens so admired accentuate the air of human absence in the picture. Therefore, we can expect to observe in Stevens's winter poems elements of beauty which serve to accentuate a sense of disanthropy.[69]

Stevens's journals and letters provide a dizzying array of documentation of the overlooked natural world. Stevens frequently attended to the weather, climate, and plant life which he encountered both on solitary walks and during business trips while working as an insurance lawyer. One significant letter to Elsie which speaks to Stevens's winter poems is from January 17th, 1909. He describes a winter scene in almost exactly the same terms as in 'The Snow Man'. Each tree branch 'had its coating of ice and on the pines even every needle', and these ice-crusted

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[67] Lensing, *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons*, p. 131.
[68] Garrard, 'Some Kinds of Disanthropy', p. 41.
[69] Lensing describes the poem as a 'haunting evocation of beauty and peril'. These three words, 'haunting', beauty' and 'peril', aptly correspond to Garrard's description of Virginia Woolf's 'Time Passes' section in *To The Lighthouse* which is one of Garrard's examples of modernist disanthropy. Beauty of the natural world combined with an uncanny lack of human presence operates in both 'Time Passes' and 'The Snow Man' to bring to light the ecological aspects of the world which we frequently overlook. Without humans, these elements come to the forefront of our acknowledgement.

boughs were made to 'glitter' by the 'sun'.[70] Stevens notes that 'At a distance clumps of trees looked like winter clouds. And the wind made the trees jingle'. Later in the letter, Stevens complains about modern life, stating that 'We all cry for life. It is not to be found in railroading to an office and back.'[71] It is possible that Stevens drew direct inspiration for 'The Snow Man' from this particular winter experience. The poem cites the January sun which makes vegetation, specifically 'pines' glitter. Even the sonic experience of the jingling trees is translated into the 'sound of a few leaves'.[72] Taking into consideration Stevens's disdain for the demands of modernity causing us to live at a distance from nature, it is perhaps unsurprising that Stevens sought to create a disanthropic world through his poetry. In many ways, imagining a world without people through a poem creates a refuge away from the demands of modernity, allowing the world to simply exist on its own terms, without hindrance from humanity.

Moving into this disanthropic world, readers may find that depictions of the 'pine-trees crusted with snow', the 'junipers shagged with ice', and 'spruces rough in the distant glitter | Of the January sun' evoke the sublime (ll. 3, 5, 6). The bright imagery of this snowy season accentuates perception of a blank world and the beauty of the imagery draws readers into the glittering snowscape. The world has been recreated through the 'mind of winter'. Even so, this beautiful blank world is not, as Lensing asserts, without its perils. Stevens's use of the adjectives, 'crusted', 'shagged' and 'rough' introduce a tactile element to the experience of this disanthropic world that is sharp and uninviting. Even the plants and trees in this landscape shield themselves from human interaction. These juxtapositions between beauty and peril unfold the emotions evoked by disanthropy. Simultaneously, we marvel at the world without people, what it looks and feels like, and we also feel displaced. Through language, imagery and syntax, Stevens effectively enacts Garrard's notion of disanthropy by creating a landscape that is at once familiar and unsettling, beautiful, but unwelcoming.

Like Allan Cavinder's experience of revisiting the Constantia Hotel in Varosha in 1976, one of the most noticeable elements of the poem is the lack of distinct human sound. Nonhuman sounds prevail, becoming louder in a disanthropic world. Readers are told to consider this lack of human sound positively, to 'not think | Of any misery in the sound of the wind, | In the sound of a few leaves' (ll. 7-9). In a world without people, wind and leaves are dominant sounds. Indeed, through the sounds of the leaves, the sounds of the world come forth. Interconnection between nonhuman sounds is hinted at by:

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[70] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 144, 'To Elsie Moll, January 17, 1909'), pp. 121-123 (p. 121).
[71] Ibid, p. 122.
[72] Stevens, 'Snow Man', *CP*, ll. 7.

> […] the sound of a few leaves
>
> Which is the sound of the land
> Full of the same wind
> That is blowing in the same bare place […]. (ll. 9-12)

Over these four lines, sound from a small number of leaves is transferred via subordinate clauses into the sounds of the land, returning back to the wind that blows through the snowscape of the poem. As in 'Earthy Anecdote', alliteration and repetition operate on an onomatopoeic level, with sibilant 's' sounds ensuring that the nonhuman noises of the poem permeate through the lines. Utilising the sonic qualities of language, Stevens evokes the sounds of this disanthropic world.

The rhythm and cadence of the poem also accentuate the nonhuman sounds of this disanthropic scene. Relentlessly, the poem proceeds in one sentence across fifteen lines. Parataxis in the first stanza gives way to hypotaxis in subsequent stanzas, indicating an evolution of the formal structure of the poem, which perhaps parallels the evolution of the 'One' into 'snow man'. This structural evolution is significant because the layering of subordinate clauses, like 'Of the', 'Which is', 'That is', and 'For the', parallel an uncovering of sonic layers that lie underneath the human. This linguistic layering brings nonhuman sound to attention in a disanthropic world, where each element of the place is entangled into the other (ll. 7-13). Similar to 'July Mountain', the poem builds upon itself, indicating how the natural world may replenish itself in a world without people. Lensing makes an insightful observation, noting that the 'rhetoric of musical echo contradicts misery' (ll. 15). Despite the uncanny blankness of human absence, the poem's rhythms are, to an extent, musical, and push reading towards the final line. The gentle movement of the poem is largely constructed by Stevens's tetrameter line, which is more regular in the first stanza but varies more widely as the poem progresses. Stevens's line lengths fluctuate in the second, third and fourth stanzas with two longer and one shorter in varying orders. The overall effect of this line variation is to invite pause and elongate the work. The longest line of the poem is the final line, which, through what can be read in trochaic hexameter, sounds the poem out into the 'nothing that is' (ll. 15). Regular rhythm in this last line echoes the 'sound of a few leaves' which blow through the ending of the piece as the final sound in a world now fully transformed into a disanthropic space, (l. 9).

While Lensing concludes that 'The Course of a Particular' is a rewriting of 'The Snow Man', I suggest that the later poem picks up when the former left off, offering a sustained exploration into a wintry disanthropic world. While both works are similar in form, 'The Course of a Particular' offers greater abstraction and dwells more with sound than the aesthetic qualities of the

landscape.[73] Evidence to support this reading is found in the first line, which begins in *medias res*, plunging readers into a soundscape where 'The leaves cry'.[74] While Lensing comments that unlike 'The Snow Man', 'The Course of a Particular' does not 'lay out wintery beauty and austere pleasure', the cry is the same sound of the leaves that the listener beholds in 'The Snow Man'.[75] Indeed, as this thesis has identified, cries from the nonhuman world are a regular occurrence within Stevens's work, particularly in relation to non-living entities.[76]

A 'cry' is generally taken to be a wail or a shriek, as derived from the Latin *quiritare*. A cry is indistinct, and while it does not utilise language, holds a universal meaning of exclamation. Lensing views the cry as an 'invitation to pathetic fallacy' or a 'fantasia' that Stevens resists.[77] Indeed, it is true that the cry of the leaves is because of the wind, however, the cry also holds significance from a linguistic perspective. Throughout this thesis, the connections between sound, language and wind have been discussed as central to Stevens's ecopoetics, grounded within Vendler's words that the poem is the 'cry of its occasion'.[78] An equivalence between poetry and nature is pointed towards between the cry of the poem and the cry of leaves. Where Stevens questions the limitations of human language in 'A Collect of Philosophy', with the statement 'we have as yet no language' to describe the interconnected ecological mesh of which we are part, perhaps the cry is an intermediary between our current semiotics and a more ecologically inclusive communication system.[79] If so, it makes sense that the cry is a prominent sound in a disanthropic world, which in the absence of human noise, would otherwise be quiet aside from the non-linguistic sounds of the nonhuman world.

As readers enter the poem, the cry draws immediate attention. However, the readers are not the only listeners. What may have prompted Lensing's assertion that 'The Course of a Particular' is a rewriting of 'The Snow Man' is the recurrence of the 'One' who 'holds off and merely hears the cry' (ll. 1). As mentioned in discussion of 'The Snow Man', the assumption that the 'One' is an external human perceiver is an anthropocentric conclusion. If the poem is a continuance of 'The Snow Man', the external human perceiver has already undergone the Bergsonian decreation or reduction into the snow man or listener. Therefore, in 'The Course of a Particular', what remains

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[73] Lensing notes deep similarities in form between the two poems, asserting that 'placing the two poems side by side, one notes how little certain aspects of Stevens' style actually changed over the years.' See *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons*, p. 145.
[74] Stevens, 'The Course of a Particular', *CP*, p. 554, ll. 1.
[75] Lensing, *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons*, p. 145.
[76] Mentioned in this thesis, the cries of the gasping sea in 'The Idea of Order at Key West', cries of birds in 'Montrachet le Jardin', and the breath and wind in 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven'.
[77] Lensing, *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons*, p. 146.
[78] Vendler, 'Warton Lecture on English Poetry: Wallace Stevens: Hypothesis and Contradictions', p. 242.
[79] Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', *OP*, p. 271.

is 'One' thing, an entity with an ear that can hear the cry of the leaves. Leaving the impersonal pronoun to sit without a referent is uncomfortable. Who, or what, is this 'One'?

Arguably, the poem does not disclose an answer to the above question. Instead, this 'One' undergoes further reduction as the poem continues.[80] What remains at the end of the poem is a completely disanthropic world. The catalyst for this transformation is the cry, which isolates the 'One' away from its sound. It is a 'busy cry, concerning someone else' (ll. 2). The leaves exclude 'One' and are occupied with other beings or things. The poem builds on this exclusion of 'One' with the words:

> And though one says that one is part of everything,
>
> There is a conflict, there is a resistance involved;
> And being part is an exertion that declines:
> One feels the life of that which gives life as it is (ll. 3-7).

With the layering of subordinate clauses, the lines read very similarly to 'The Snow Man', but instead create an almost regretful tone. Readers know that the speaker is doubting the unity of the world from the subordinating conjunction 'And though' (ll. 3). This doubt is because being 'part' or joined to 'everything' involves 'conflict' and 'resistance' (ll. 3-4). However, this conflict is the flux of the world. Nothing remains in stasis, and therefore resistance is a natural part of ecological, or worldly interactions. Another instance of decreation occurs, where the speaker decides that 'being part is an exertion that declines' (ll. 5). The syntax of this clause is ambiguous and could either be read as the 'being part' as the subject of the clause which declines, or that the exertion is the subject of the clause, and it is the exertion expended resisting the 'being part' which declines.

The final line of the stanza distinctly parallels the final line of 'The Snow Man'. Picking up from the 'Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is' allows one to 'feel the life of that which gives life as it is'. These two lines are syntactically parallel, with the suggestion of cause and effect enacted across the line. The key words which link the lines are 'that' and 'is', suggesting an affirmation. In 'The Snow Man', the subject of the clause is 'nothing' whereas in 'The Course of A Particular', the focus is on 'life', which seems an odd progression when discussing disanthropic poetics. Taking into consideration the exclusion of 'One' from the cry and the decline in resistance of being part of everything, it seems that the poem is pointing towards an absence. The final line of the stanza goes beyond human absence and gestures towards the continuation of life in the world, or 'life as it is' (ll. 7).

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[80] This progression of decreation of the 'One' is similar to that of the 'One' to snow man in 'The Snow Man', indicating a thematic continuity of disanthropy in Stevens's work.

Where the final line of the second stanza is heavy with finality, the third stanza begins again, with the cry of the leaves:

> The leaves cry. It is not a cry of divine attention,
> Nor the smoke-drift of puffed-out heroes, nor human cry.
> It is the cry of the leaves that do not transcend themselves (ll. 12-14).

The short phrase, 'The leaves cry' is jarring after the gentle and weaving clauses of the previous stanza indicating that a change has occurred. This third stanza confirms human absence with the complete removal of the 'One' or listener, because the cry is not the cry of 'divine attention', the 'smoke-drift of puffed-out heroes, nor human cry' (ll. 8-9). As Lensing observes, 'The cry of these leaves conjures no human heroism nor human of any kind.'[81] Indeed, the reference to 'smoke-drift' recalls early forms of human communication via smoke signals, gesturing to a past and pre-modern time long since gone. Following Lensing's assertion of a lack of human heroism in the poem, the characterisation of the 'puffed-out heroes' invites imagery of peacocks in full display, which carries a mocking tone. The poem does not allow indulgence for human self-importance, pointing towards contempt to ancient human heroes. Instead, the text confirms the consistency of the sounds of the natural world where the leaves, 'do not transcend themselves' through their cry (ll. 10). Without 'puffed-out heroes', the sounds of the world can come into themselves, in the absence of 'fantasia' or human enforced meaning making (ll. 11). The disanthropic world allows nonhuman beings to find their voices.

Indeed, the poem seems to end on a note of relief, or as Lensing suggests, arrives 'at affirmation'.[82] The cry of the leaves mean no more 'Than they are in the final finding of the ear, in the thing | Itself, until, at last, the cry concerns no one at all' (ll. 14-15). By removing the human from the poem, Stevens removes any 'signification' of the cry and allows it to sound itself.[83] In other words, the cry is its own sound, much like the voice of the sea in 'Idea of Order'. Where the poem begins with the exclusion of the 'One' in favour of 'someone else', we find at the end of the piece that even the 'someone else' has been decreated into 'no one', paralleling the evolution of the 'One' into the snow man. Readers return to the 'nothing that is', which is revealed to be the non-transcendent cry of the leaves in a disanthropic world ('The Snow Man', ll. 15). The sound of the nonhuman can be 'Itself' on its own terms.

An Ending? Disanthropy in 'The Plain Sense of Things'

Written one year after 'The Course of a Particular', 'The Plain Sense of Things' first appeared in 1952 in *The Hudson Review*. Eleanor Cook, like many Stevens critics, reads the poem as a

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[81] Lensing, *Wallace Stevens and the Seasons*, p. 146.
[82] Ibid, p. 147.
[83] Ibid, p. 146.

meditation on the end of the imagination.[84] The fallen leaves and 'blank cold' of the poem are symbols for the loss of human creativity, in the absence of which we return to 'a plain sense of things.'[85] This frank phrase that gives the poem its title is the central focus of the work. The choice of the word 'plain' evokes a return to sincerity, or alternatively, the real. It is also suggestive of the language used in the poem, which, like that in 'The Snow Man' and 'The Course of a Particular', is generally stark and matter of fact. As with the two previous poems discussed in this chapter, there is a sense of decreation imparted through the semantics of the poem, with words like 'fallen', 'end', 'minor' and 'lessened' (ll. 1, 3, 7, 8). Where 'The Course of a Particular' dwells in the moment of recent disanthropy, 'The Plain Sense of Things' takes a different perspective, offering an imagining upon a moment where human absence has become the norm. In this final section, I will read 'The Plain Sense of Things' as the final stage of Stevens's disanthropic thought.[86] Through exploration into the setting of the poem, I suggest that 'The Plain Sense of Things' is one of the closest moments that Stevens comes to writing a post-apocalyptic narrative. Taking into consideration all three poems presented in this chapter, I will evaluate whether Stevens's disanthropic poetry implies a true sense of ending.

The overall critical agreement that the subject of the poem is the ending of the imagination is useful when considering the disanthropic thought behind the work. The ability to imagine has long been understood as a key difference between humans and other species. Therefore, if the ending of imagination has occurred, it follows that there is also an ending of human beings, as sources of imaginative creativity. Similar to Graham's 'Scarcely There' that begins after the wind has ceased, the poem begins in the moment 'After the leaves have fallen'. Readers find themselves in a changed world from 'The Course of a Particular', where the leaves were crying and hanging on the branches.[87] The preposition, 'After', imposes temporal framing, and allows the poem to assert a level of order from the start. The change in tense from 'have' to 'return' transitions the temporal location of the piece from past to present. By establishing these conditions, the poem is clear that it is only after the leaves have 'fallen' that we may 'return' to this 'plain sense of things' (ll. 1-2). In order to enact a return, an ending must occur.

Stevens's use of caesura foreshadows this sense of ending. The first two lines are written in trochaic pentameter, rhythmically settling the conditions established across flowing, enjambed lines, which impart a similar sense of gentle reading like the winding form of 'The Snow Man'.

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[84] Eleanor Cook, *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens*, 'The Plain Sense of Things', p. 280.
[85] Stevens, 'The Plain Sense of Things', *CP*, pp. 530-531, ll. 6, 2.
[86] Longenbach takes 'The Plain Sense of Things' as the title for his 1992 work which uses a historical approach to Stevens's poetics to address the belief that Stevens's life as a poet and insurance lawyer were separate.
[87] Comparing the titles of 'A Course of a Particular' and 'The Plain Sense of Things' indicates a progression towards affirmation from the possibility of various states with '*A* Course' to the more final, '*The* Plain Sense'.

However, the caesura in the second line signals a subtle disruption, halting the rhythmic flow. Where readers may wish to dwell with the ending of the sentence, Stevens implements the pushing cadence of the rhythm, which encourages onward reading. Tension is then established between poetic rhythm and structure, and additionally, to the implied sense of ending and forward motion of the poem.

The ending of the second line is almost unsatisfying, concluding with a notion of the simile to come. The dimeter of 'It is as if' allows a moment of imagination on the part of the reader to consider what the comparison to the falling leaves will be. To then move into the third line which compares the falling of the leaves to 'an end of the imagination' is slightly ironic. Even so, it is pertinent to note that this ending is simply 'an' ending, rather than 'the' ending. Stevens's decision to use a determiner which infers possibility rather than certainty is the first signal to readers that this particular ending of the imagination is but one pathway among many. Senses of possibility are echoed in the varying rhythm of the line:

$$\cup \quad / \quad / \quad / \quad \cup \quad / \quad \cup \quad / \quad \cup \quad / \quad \cup \quad / \quad \cup$$

We had | come to | an end | of the | im-ag | i-na| tion (ll. 3).

While the line is overall formed in an iambic rhythm, the second foot disrupts this with a spondee of 'come to', highlighting the harshness of realisation. Consisting of six feet, the line is an Alexandrine where the rhythm elongates towards the end-stop. This elongation has a softening effect on the ending of the line with the feminine ending of 'imagination' sonically enacting its own ending and fading away. Despite the bluntness of the spondee, overall, Stevens makes use of the pentameter rhythm to create a line that moves gently and steadily to slow the poem and allow readers to consider its meaning.

References to stasis in the fourth line to depict the imagination as 'Inanimate in an inert savoir' follow the stanza's clear emphasis on endings (ll. 4). The rhythm of the trochaic pentameter signals a 'return' to the motion of the first and second lines. The use of the synonyms, 'Inanimate' and 'inert' acts as a repetition of sound and meaning. Both adjectives connote stillness and powerlessness, in relation to the imagination and knowledge, or 'savoir'.[88] Most significant to this exploration into disanthropy is the literal meaning of 'Inanimate', which is to be lifeless. While the phrase 'an ending of the imagination' is distinctly ambiguous, the further description of the state of the imagination after the 'ending' is euphemistic for death (ll. 3). To support this reading,

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[88] Eleanor Cook notes that this line directly contradicts any notion of 'a plain sense' of language in the sonic repetitions in the line and use of the French, 'savoir', 'to know'. See: Cook, *A Readers Guide to Wallace Stevens*, 'The Plain Sense of Things', p. 280.

a note in 'Adagia' reads, 'In the world of words, the imagination is one of the forces of nature.'[89] The comparison between the death of the leaves and the ending of the imagination pertains to the aphorism, equating nature and the imagination. As discussed previously in this study, in the Anthropocene, humans are recognised as a geological force, or a 'force of nature'. If the imagination is a force of nature and a distinct human quality, this ending of the imagination can be read as an ending of human presence. From the first stanza of 'The Plain Sense of Things', Stevens subtly engages in a disanthropic ecopoetics, and foreshadows the 'silence' of a world without people (ll. 17). The ending of imagination implies and foreshadows the ending of humanity, which is distinctly disanthropic. The first two stanzas prepare readers for the desolation that is to come later in the poem, through depictions of neglected human structures.

It is through this imagery of abandoned structures that Stevens's disanthropy is fully explored. Like the crumbling house in Woolf's 'Time Passes' section of *To The Lighthouse* or even the empty house in the Cazin painting, the depictions of derelict human spaces in 'The Plain Sense of Things' makes a strong case for the disanthropic nature of the poem. The state of the human structures in the poem gives further poignance to the temporal setting, which is far in the future after humans have disappeared. Even so, we have not been gone so long that our imprint of infrastructure upon the world has been erased. Several objects are mentioned that show a lack of human presence or cultivation. However, the 'One' from 'The Snow Man' and 'The Course of a Particular' are very much absent from this 'blank' world (ll. 6).

Instead, what fills the space are dilapidated and unkempt buildings, which further accentuate the semantics and theme of decreation across Stevens's disanthropic ecopoems. The second stanza provides a good example of the struggle towards finding the language of 'nothing' where humans are not present:

> It is difficult to even choose the adjective
> For this blank cold, this sadness without cause.
> The great structure has become a minor house.
> No turban walks across the lessened floors (ll. 5-8).

The 'blank cold' and 'sadness without cause' perhaps reflects the frosty 'Snow Man' written thirty-one years prior. The speaker struggles to locate the words to describe the disanthropic scene where a once 'great structure has become a minor house' and 'No turban walks across the lessened floors' (ll. 7-8). Contrast between 'great', 'minor', and 'lessened' illustrates a regression (ll. 7-8). The choice to move from a 'structure' to a 'house' also exemplifies this decreation. However, when read with disanthropy in mind this imagery reflects how in a world without people,

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[89] Stevens, 'Adagia', *OP*, p. 196.

architecture and infrastructure cease their operational functions and instead become homes for the life that remains.

The final line of the stanza indicates the scale of the decreation of human spaces. Synecdoche of the 'turban' indicates, as Cook reads, the exotic.[90] The reference to the object of the 'turban' dehumanises its wearer which further accentuates the disanthropic world in the poem. This gesture opens the poem out further than American, or indeed, Western notions. Rather than limit disanthropy to one place, Stevens addresses the notion of scale and considers a more global outlook. This globalisation of the disanthropic moment is significant and leaves no disambiguation that people exist within this space. The poem goes on to describe additional human structures that also appear dilapidated and abandoned:

> The greenhouse never so badly needed paint.
> The chimney is fifty years old and slants to one side.
> A fantastic effort has failed, a repetition
> In a repetitiousness of men and flies (ll. 9-12).

With the image of the 'greenhouse' so 'badly' in need of paint, and the 'fifty' year old chimney which 'slants to one side', the third stanza takes a more intimate focus on smaller dwelling spaces (ll. 8-9). Rather than approaching the dilapidation of 'great structures', it is the domestic space that now crumbles in a world without people. Such range enables the poem to encapsulate the far-reaching absence of people across a world desperately in need of repair. All four lines are end-stopped, which acknowledges the sense of ending in the decreation of the human world. Rhythmically, the syllables range from ten to thirteen counts with a general presiding iambic metre slowly pushing the poem forwards, as in the first stanza. In lines seven and ten, a repetition of the extended pentameter line is employed, with feminine endings of 'house' and 'side' letting the words softy slip away. The matter-of-fact tone, aided by caesura and the overall rhythm allows for no drama regarding the absence of people. Instead, this new world is presented quietly.

The quiet depictions of uninhabited spaces end with the anti-prophetic lines, concluding that a 'fantastic effort has failed, a repetition | In a repetitiousness of men and flies' (ll. 10-11). Imparting a sense of regret, these lines echo apocalyptic narratives that mourn the ending of human civilisation. Aligning 'men and flies' continues the dehumanisation enforced by synecdoche in line seven (ll. 11). Equating humans to insects that are commonly treated as pests and often associated with death simultaneously reveals the multitudes of humanity, all the while using language which carries reference to 'an end'. Syntactically, the phrasing suggests two possibilities. Either the 'fantastic effort' which has failed is the 'repetition | In a repetitiousness' or the failed effort is repeating itself (ll. 10-11). I would be inclined to read the former. Thinking ecologically,

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[90] Cook, *A Readers Guide to Wallace Stevens*, 'The Plain Sense of Things', p. 280.

we can understand the evolution and advancement of the human species as a 'fantastic effort' (ll. 10). In a disanthropic world, evidently this effort to survive as a collective species fails. The 'repetition | In a repetitiousness of men and flies' evokes natural cycles of species evolution and extinction, because as discussed earlier in this chapter, extinction is a natural aspect of life (ll. 11). Both these lines rely heavily on repetition as a structural element to accentuate the meaning and imagery. In this instance, language and sound are used to speak silence itself, rather than bring nonhuman voices to the fore.

Returning to sound, rather than the cries of leaves that are found in 'The Snow Man' and 'The Course of a Particular', instead, silence is important in the final stages of 'The Plain Sense of Things'. Until the penultimate and final stanzas, the poem is generally devoid of life, which pertains to a disanthropic reading. However, stanza four arrives by 'The great pond', which, unlike the crumbling human structures, has maintained its eminence (ll. 14). It is here that readers again encounter the 'plain sense' of the title and first stanza, and it is revealed that central to the pond's greatness is the 'plain sense of it' (ll. 14). Not conventionally aesthetically pleasing, 'without reflections, leaves, | Mud, water like dirty glass', the pond is unassuming in its appearance (ll. 15-16). Yet, it is this exact element of frankness that the pond possesses which embodies a 'plain sense' or alternatively, a return to the real.

The pond resists interpretation or 'reflections' and instead, the material elements:

> […] express silence
> Of a sort, silence of a rat come out to see,
> The great pond and its waste of the lilies (ll. 16-18).

Stevens's familiar cryptic syntax which almost creates an oxymoron invites us to consider how silence can be expressed by a non-living natural entity. Indeed, even the speaker is not certain how this silence functions, noting that it is 'Of a sort' (ll. 17). There is a 'resistance' to interpretation of the pond's expression of silence, in the same way that it resists 'reflections'. Even so, the silence gives way to action, transforming into a 'silence of rat' coming out 'to see, | The great pond and its waste of the lilies' (ll. 17, 18). The rat and lilies are the first indications of life within this 'blank' world (ll. 6). With the rat, Stevens embeds notions of decay initiated with the imagery of 'men and flies' by including an animal best understood by humans as vermin.[91]

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[91] The imagery of the 'waste of the lilies' of the rat brings to mind T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' (1922). Where Eliot's rats are immersed in the conventional associations of vermin and remain part of the 'waste' of the world, rats in 'The Plain Sense of Things' occupy a more positive space in my reading. See T. S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land' in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, sixth edition (London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), pp. 1404-1417, ll. 115-116 and 187-195 for references to rats and decay.

Maud Ellmann establishes the connections between humans and rats, noting that this relationship dates 'back to the origins of human history'.[92] Ellmann conceptualises the rat as a threat to modernism 'because they come to stand for the resurgence of the undead past', threatening the progression to make things new, representing the 'return of the archaic in the futuristic'.[93] Perceptions of rats are largely negative, owing to competition between two highly prolific species. Associations with rats to disease, waste, and unhygienic spaces since early human civilisation has generated an antagonistic relationship between humans and rats. Ellmann points to this opposition between humans and rats and inverts it by suggesting that the reason for our intense unease towards rats is because they are our 'doubles', 'At once inhuman and all too human'.[94] Feeding off our waste and adapting to anthropogenically changed spaces, the modernist rat is an uncanny companion to the human.

Matthew Griffiths accounts for the waste-driven companionship between humans and rats, reading the presence of the rat in the ending of 'The Plain Sense of Things' against conventional understanding of the interdependent coalition of humans and rats. Griffiths affirms that the rat is a 'participant in organic rather than human processes', locating it as 'a locus between human conceptions of waste and the natural processes of which waste is a part.'[95] Griffiths' reading of the rat in terms of waste is more positive, situating its orientation to waste within natural cycles of decomposition rather than the general perception of the rat thriving upon anthropogenic waste and decay. Reorientating the rat towards organic waste enables an alternative way to view a creature often disregarded as vermin.[96]

What then, is the significance of the rat in terms of disanthropy? As noted by Ellmann and Griffiths' readings, rats and humans have an interdependent association, with the former thriving upon the large-scale waste production of the latter. In a world where humans are absent, how do rats who are contingent on human waste survive? Drawing on Griffiths' reading of the rat re-situated in the organic 'waste of the lilies', in a disanthropic world, the rat can adapt to a changed world where organic resources provide the foundations for their survival rather than rubbish. Woven into this adaptation is the 'silence' within which it takes place. Ellmann asserts that it is predominately how the species augurs 'the collapse of boundaries, especially the boundaries of

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[92] Maud Ellmann, 'Writing Like a Rat', *Critical Quarterly*, 46 (2004), 59-76, (p. 60) <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0011-1562.2004.00597.x>
[93] Ellmann, 'Writing Like a Rat', pp. 60-61.
[94] Ibid, p. 61.
[95] Matthew Griffiths, '"Rummaging behind the compost heap": decaying Romanticism in Wallace Stevens and Basil Bunting', *Green Letters*, 18, 1 (2014), 36-47 (p. 42) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2014.890528>.
[96] Griffiths, 'Rummaging behind the compost heap': decaying Romanticism in Wallace Stevens and Basil Bunting', p. 42.

meaning' which underlines the tension between modernism and rats.[97] Moving in the silence of a disanthropic world, the rat is therefore a synecdoche for the collapse of 'reflections' and human-imposed meaning upon the world. In a world without people, language has no place to ingrain symbolism. It is 'difficult even to choose the adjective' for a disanthropic world because, in a world without people, language loses its potency and silence becomes the modus operandi from which nonhuman voices and sounds begin to cry (ll. 5).

Indeed, the poem ends with the invocation that 'all this | Had to be imagined as an inevitable knowledge, | Required, as a necessity requires' (ll. 18-20). Ending with a demand to imagine 'all this' points to a demand to reorientate our perspectives and understanding of the world. As discussed previously in this section, the ending of the imagination is only 'an end' which leaves open the potential for other forms of imagination or thought to occur. The presence of the rat implies a collapse of meaning and boundaries within the silence of a disanthropic world which requires a renewed sense of imagination to picture and articulate. 'The Plain Sense of Things' suggests that to think disanthropically, we must reconsider our understanding of language and sound in relation to nonhuman entities. Removing people from the world also removes our systems of communication, and therefore a new imagination is required to envisage 'A new knowledge' of a *new* reality.[98]

Stevens's Disanthropy: A Re-Enchantment

This final chapter has sought to highlight how Stevens's disanthropic ecopoetics generates a reorientation of our relationship to the world, and our treatment of nonhuman beings. Throughout his life, Stevens engaged in disanthropic imagining, because, as he wrote to Elise, 'I want to know about myself, about my world, about my future when the world is ended'.[99] Invested in the entanglements between poetry, language and the world, Stevens used his poetry as a space to experiment with the potential of imagination. While imagining a world without people due to ecological crisis was not Stevens's primary reason for his disanthropic poetics, his proto-ecological consciousness and attention to the nonhuman world during a time of intense socio-ecological change provided a foundation for his disanthropic imaginations. Garrard's claim that the first instances of disanthropy are located in the early twentieth century is concurrent with the temporal starting point of the Anthropocene in the mid-twentieth century, where both terms indicate pressures upon the imagination to conceive of potential human futures in light of a changing world. Stevens allows space in his poetics to imagine the unimaginable. By doing so, he

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[97] Ellmann, 'Writing Like a Rat', p. 62.
[98] Stevens, 'Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself', *CP*, pp. 565-567 (p. 567), ll. 18.
[99] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 95, 'To Elsie Moll, Letter excerpts 1904-05'), pp. 80-81.

follows his project of calling the nonhuman world to speak, because a world without people provides an open soundscape for the expression of other voices and sounds.

Sounding the world through words is Stevens's greatest achievement and his greatest struggle. His lifelong contemplation of the limitations of human language, and particularly written text, are brought to the fore in his disanthropic poetics. How to articulate a world without people and without language is, undeniably, an almost inconceivable task. However, through imagination and exposure of the sound of the words, Stevens points towards how a world without people allows the nonhuman to sound themselves and finally be heard without human inscription of meaning.

Reading Stevens's poems as disanthropic solidifies his location as an ecopoet. One of the projects of ecopoetry is to bring to attention the silenced, repressed and ignored elements of the world that reside within our environmental unconsciousness. Consideration of the absence of people not only, as discussed, exposes the silence and the cry of the nonhuman world, but also confirms a distinct proto-ecological consciousness that is arguably ahead of his time. Stevens's imagination in relation to the natural world and humanity's potential future is growing in relevance to the contemporary moment as the ecological crisis reaches a tipping point. Through the progression of the 'One' into the snow man, presided by cries of leaves that transform into the 'silence' of the rat, human noises fade into the background. By exposing the previously unheard soundscapes of the nonhuman world, Stevens encourages readers to retune their ears and selves to the voices of the nonhuman and attend to a new sound of reality.

Conclusion: 'I cannot bring a world quite round | Although I patch it as I can': Stevens in the Orbit of Flux

Throughout this project I have argued that the work of Wallace Stevens can be read across ecocritical contexts to locate the development of his ecopoetics. In particular, I have demonstrated that Stevens's use of language and sound throughout his career reveals a call to the more-than-human world to speak. In light of early ecocritical scholarship from Christopher Manes and David Abram whose arguments indicate that the development of text signs enacted the silencing of the nonhuman world, my readings of Stevens's work display the tensions and collaborations between beings, enacted through an interplay between language and sound in poetry. This project has located Stevens's ecopoetics as a form with potential to provide suggestions around how poetry may aid the unknotting of the literary and linguistic entanglement within the current ecological crisis. Ultimately, Stevens's poetry can show readers 'A tune beyond us, yet ourselves', and encourage greater attention towards our collective environmental unconscious.[1]

By reading Stevens in the context of ecocriticsm, this project challenges prior expectations around his work and seeks to develop scholarship conducted by Gyorgyi Voros, Bonnie Costello, and Scott Knickerbocker that began to situate Stevens within the paradigm of ecopoetics. As I have emphasised throughout this work, reading Stevens through this lens is valuable because it primarily calls to attention the ways in which previous readings may have overlooked Stevens's ecological engagement with the world in preference for the more metaphysical elements of his poetics. Additionally, engaging with Stevens's ecopoetics through a prolonged study reveals new ways of looking at the world, and in particular, as emphasised within this thesis, new ways of listening. Indeed, Stevens's interplay between language and sound in relation to vocalising nonhuman voices in his work may help to revise the ways in which we view early twentieth century poetic engagement with the more-than-human world. These new perspectives on twentieth century ecological engagement may also bear resonance on how we then connect with and act towards our environments today.

Across each of my chapters, I have shown that Stevens's ecopoetics are influenced by a wide range of contexts, from Romantic organic theory to quantum physics. These foundations of his ecopoetic project then grounded my subsequent readings of his work, allowing for contextualisation between Stevens and Jorie Graham, and Stevens's possible conceptions of the future for humanity. These readings, invested in the contemporary and future resonance of

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[1] Stevens, 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', *CP*, l. 8.

Stevens's ecopoetics, allowed identification of the continuing relevance of Stevens's work during this moment of ecological crisis. Despite each of my chapters taking a different avenue of Stevens's work to explore, overall, each section contributes to my central idea which is that Stevens appreciated and valued the entangled relationships between beings, or as Merleau-Ponty theorises, the chiastic, ontological connections of the world. In other words, to use a phrase from Stevens's 'World Without Peculiarity', what this study has aimed to illuminate is that 'It is the earth itself that is humanity'.[2]

The selection of work analysed in this thesis ranges from the well-known and widely anthologised poems, like 'The Idea of Order at Key West', 'Esthetique Du Mal', and 'The Snow Man', to texts which I view as underread, such as 'Montrachet-le-Jardin', 'July Mountain', and extracts from Stevens's letters. The poems, essays, and letters were selected to show the consistency of proto-ecological views across Stevens's work and to build key ecological connections between poems that have not yet been elucidated. Another significant takeaway from these readings is a challenge to the notion that the late work of Stevens is often bleak and lacking in hope. What I have shown in my project is that Stevens's ecopoetics signify a sense of hope, not solely due to his proto-ecological consciousness, but also for the potential that his work holds for future ecocritical study.

Where this thesis begins with the question of 'locating' Stevens's ecopoetics, this project has also revealed that Stevens's ecological engagement has relevance across various literary contexts. Rather than inhabiting a central and static 'location', Stevens's ecopoetics develop from oscillations between Romantic and twentieth century poetics and his attitudes towards the world. Stevens's ecopoetics dwell between these two literary periods in what Robert Lehman describes as the 'wound of finitude', which is addressed in my second and third chapters. This sense of finitude is constantly challenged by Stevens, with the violence of Lehman's evocation of a 'wound' implicit of the struggle Stevens encounters in reconciling his poetics within these differing Romantic and Modern spheres. Taking an ecocritical perspective into account, what my readings illustrate is how the tensions and collaborations between the Romantic and the Modern enable Stevens to develop an ecopoetics that sits between what is now considered first and second wave ecocriticism. Stevens's ecopoetics at once embraces our environment as a sublime entity and revitalising to the human psyche, but his poetry extends this perspective to explore the scope of material connections between entities, and within language, considering scientific developments and changing socio-cultural ideas about human identity.

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[2] Stevens, 'World Without Peculiarity', *CP*, p. 479, l. 13.

Therefore, the location of Stevens's ecopoetics can be argued to be one that sits in flux, and as an interlocuter between the Romantic and the Modern. Read in this way, Stevens's work provides a useful means to interrogate the ongoing tensions between sound and sign in relation to the voices and speech of the more-than-human world. The claim made by Stevens in 'A Collect of Philosophy' that poetry 'would make us realise that we are creatures, not of a part, which is our everyday limitation, but of a whole for which, for the most part, we have as yet no language' speaks to his wider project that I view as central to his ecopoetics.[3] By dwelling in the flux between Romantic and Modern poetics and ecological perspectives, Stevens sought to overcome our 'everyday limitation' and move closer towards a poetics that reveals the language of the whole. Ultimately, it remains ambiguous whether Stevens achieved the language of the whole that his work so continuously circles. However, what I hope to have shown through my readings of his work is that Stevens's search for the articulation of the more-than-human world opened the possibility for subsequent poets, like Jorie Graham, Sarah de Leeuw, and Juliana Spahr, for example, to further explore the boundaries and porosity of human language.

While my thesis has questioned Stevens's ecopoetics in the context of various relevant historical and literary periods to situate his ecopoetic development and solidify the relevance of his work during the current ecological crisis, his work also has much scope for further ecocritical enquiry. For example, I have made sure to use material from the entire body of Stevens's opus, including his letters and journals to support my readings of his poems. However, the letters and journals remain a generative area of study in their own right for their detailed accounts of Stevens's experiences and thoughts regarding the changing environment of the twentieth century. Stevens's geographical location during his lifetime places him in a fascinating position to bear witness to the distinct changes of the twentieth century that are now widely acknowledged as significant contributing factors towards the current ecological crisis. For example, Stevens writes to Elsie in April 1918 from Knoxville which he was visiting for work. He notes 'I feel quite sure that I rather like Knoxville. […] The town is now about what Reading was twenty years or more ago.'[4] Indeed, Reading was not immune to the urbanisation and industrialisation of the twentieth century and experienced increasing population growth until the 1930s due to industry expansion, particularly of the automobile and motorcycle industries in the area.[5] These changes in the socio-economic and environmental landscape of his birth town are what Stevens describes to Elsie in his letter. Study into the ecological experiences of Stevens directed from the journals and letters would provide an

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[3] Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', *OP*, p. 271.
[4] Stevens, *Letters* (Entry 221, 'To his Wife, 28 April [1918]'), p. 207.
[5] The Duryea Power Company was established in Reading by Charles Duryea, a pioneer of the automobile in America. See: Don H. Berkebile, *The Project Gutenberg EBook of The 1893 Duryea Automobile In the Museum of History and Technology* (Project Gutenberg, September, 2009), p. 5. Project Gutenberg Ebook.

alternative perspective to studies such as Eeckhout and Goldfarb's *Wallace Stevens, New York, and Modernism* (2012) which contextualises Stevens within the city.

Another avenue of study that this thesis invites is where my fourth chapter seeks to build a context between Stevens's ecopoetics and that of contemporary poet, Jorie Graham. In addition to my aim of locating Stevens's ecopoetics, I have also shown that studies in Stevens's ecopoetics are conducive to various scales of ecocritical exploration, both on the level of Stevens as an individual poet and of wider spheres, including contemporary poets and his peers. This chapter provokes wider questions in relation to Stevens's ecopoetic influence, not just in Graham's work but of a broader range of contemporary ecopoets. While work in ecomodernist studies are, as I have considered in my third chapter, increasing, a detailed work on the ecopoetic influence of earlier twentieth century poets on ecopoetics today has yet to take form and could provide an exciting insight into the tracing of an ecopoetic lineage from the twentieth century to the present.

In *The Climate Book*, Greta Thunberg describes the ecological crisis as 'the biggest story in the world' that 'must be spoken as far and wide as our voices can carry, and much further still.'[6] Thunberg insists that the future of the world and all beings within it will be 'driven by how we choose to communicate this story.'[7] Following Thunberg's suggestion that communication and storytelling are key to progression away from the current moment of ecological crisis, this project has encapsulated one way in which the story of entanglements and connections may be explored. Indeed, the introduction of this study cited two examples of recent artworks that have been created to induce specific emotional responses in viewers and readers towards a sense of earthly stewardship, or as this thesis reads, to uncover our collective environmental unconscious. Jerram's 'Gaia' installation seeks to invoke the 'observer effect', and similarly, Burnett's 'Spring: An Inventory' aims to present the quiet details of familiar environments to readers in such a way to draw attention towards immediate and natural surroundings. Over the course of this thesis, Stevens's ecopoetics are shown to also reflect these aims of Jerram and Burnett. Through the organically emerging collaborative song of 'she' and 'sea' in 'The Idea of Order at Key West' to the cosmic poetry of Stevens's quantum understanding of the world, readers are invited to delve into the 'muddy centre' and inhabit the unframeable flux of tension and collaboration between human and nonhuman bodies and voices.[8] Likewise, these delicate enmeshments between beings are attended to on smaller scales in poems like 'Earthy Anecdote' or 'The Course of a Particular' in the same sense that Burnett's project looks to focus on specific details of a particular

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[6] Greta Thunberg, '1.9. This is the biggest story in the world' in *The Climate Book*, pp. 41-43 (p. 42).
[7] Ibid, p. 41.
[8] Stevens, 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction', *CP*, l. 74

environment. Insomuch, Stevens's ecopoetics function to communicate the story of the world and the different ecological interactions within it.

Concepts from Stevens's 1941 Princeton University lecture, 'The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words' have framed this thesis. Key to my understanding of Stevens's ecopoetics across each section of this project is a moment in the essay which notes that the poet should write to 'help people live their lives', which, when read alongside the notation from 'A Collect of Philosophy' citing poetry as a means to finding the language of the whole, pertains to the need for communication and articulation that Thunberg speaks of (p. 29). In essence, Stevens cites poetry as the supreme fiction by which readers can begin to live their lives in the knowledge of the dynamism and unframeable flux of the world (p. 271). In other words, Stevens's ecopoetics reawaken readers to the sense that:

> […] The odor
> Of earth penetrates more deeply than any word.
> There he touches his being. There as he is […].[9]

Within the earth we become fully ourselves. However, as I discussed in my first chapter, this sense of our earth-bound self has been largely forgotten and now exists in the periphery of our minds in what Buell has named the environmental unconscious. Yet, as Thunberg notes, it is through stories and communication that resolutions to the current ecological crisis will be found. In other words, to reflect on the words of Cecilia Richardson, Director of Communications at the National Trust, stories provide an alternative 'dataset' which encourages new understanding. Stevens understood that poetry is a generative space that holds the potential to challenge boundaries in relation to language and our ontological understanding. Indeed, one of the reasons that Stevens viewed poetry as the supreme fiction was precisely because of this possibility that it creates. Stevens's work orbits tensions and collaborations within language and sound that are produced by his movement towards articulation of the 'great poem of the earth', where, within the sonic quality of language and textured rhythms of poetry, the collaboration between human and more-than-human voices may be found.[10]

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[9] Stevens, 'Yellow Afternoon', *CP*, 251-252, ll. 20-23.
[10] Wallace Stevens, 'Imagination as Value', *NA*, pp. 131-156 (142).

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