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The Flood and Kant's Epistemology against Man's Alienation in Wallace Stevens' "The Comedian"

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Abstract

This article examines the connectedness between Wallace Stevens' idea of a balance between reality and the imagination in his poem "The Comedian as the Letter C" and Kant's idea that man's knowledge of the world is always mediated by mental representations. Aware that the decline of spirituality means that man is left alienated in a thoroughly material world, Stevens strives to rescue humanity from spiritual emptiness and to make out of the same reality poetry in which the imagination brings meaning to man's existence. In this poem, Stevens makes use of the motif of the flood as an intertextual response to Hegel's reading of the Greek and biblical stories of the flood that places Kant in the biblical tradition in which man's submission to God leads to his severance from his reality while the Greek story emphasizes the harmonious coexistence between man and nature. Owing to the nature of this study, this article relies on close reading, a technique advocated by the New Critics and Julia Kristiva's intertextuality that insists on the presence of elements of one text within another. This methodology highlights that the flood in "Comedian" is a vehicle through which Stevens rejects Hegel's anti-Kantianism and insists that Kant's epistemology is the most suitable philosophical paradigm to create a union between man and nature in a secular age. This union is possible if the poet is able to reach a balance between reality and the imagination.

Keywords: Alienation; flood; imagination; reality; reconciliation

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INTRODUCTION

Modernism was a cultural movement that emerged in response to the radically transformed world of the early twentieth century. During this era, the world experienced profound changes brought on by industrialization, new social theories, technological advancements, and two devastating world wars. These events challenged traditional views and reshaped how individuals perceived themselves and their place in the world. Scientific theories such as Darwin's evolution and heredity, Marx's material determinism, and Freud's theory of the unconscious undermined the long-held humanist belief that placed humans at the center of the universe. Instead, these theories revealed how human behavior and existence were influenced by forces beyond individual control. Social and political changes further complicated this landscape, with industrialization and urbanization pulling societies away from their agricultural foundations and toward industrial economies. The world wars, in particular, shattered the notion that human progress was inevitable, as new technologies meant to improve life were instead used for destruction. Even religion, a longstanding source of spiritual support, faced crises as many questioned the existence of a benevolent creator. This crisis of faith, alongside the rise of communism and global conflict, contributed to a sense of alienation in modern life.

The disorientation caused by these shifts led to a vacuum in moral and cultural life. As traditional beliefs were increasingly abandoned, people sought new ways to find meaning in their existence. In the early twentieth century, many thinkers grappled with how to overcome modern man's alienation from society and from himself. One such figure was the American modernist poet Wallace Stevens, whose work aimed to reconcile the secular conditions of contemporary life with the need for meaning. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Stevens did not advocate for a return to traditional beliefs or religious frameworks. Instead, he proposed poetry as a substitute for these fading belief systems. According to Stevens, poetry could provide a balance between imagination and reality, grounding itself in the tangible world rather than in myth or supernatural beliefs. This balance, as Tan (2022) suggests, allows individuals to fully engage with reality, bringing it into "presence." Stevens rejected romanticism's tendency toward solipsism, or the idea that reality is merely a product of the self's awareness. For him, poetry must begin with reality, making it distinct from classical mythology and Christianity, both of which rely on the supernatural. As Stevens famously said, "The great poems of heaven and hell have been written, and the great poem of the earth remains to be written" (Stevens, 1997, p. 730). By embracing the real world as the foundation of poetic creativity, Stevens argued that poetry could serve as a new form of meaning in a secular age.

Stevens also departed from rationalist traditions that placed reason as the sole arbiter of truth. He believed that imagination, rather than reason, was the poet's most vital tool in creating meaningful art. Unlike rational discourse, which seeks to impose human mastery over nature, Stevens' poetic philosophy embraced a more fluid and imaginative engagement with the world. Han (1997) notes that Stevens viewed poetry as requiring a "fictional intervention" in thinking, one that did not subordinate nature to human reasoning. This imaginative power, Stevens argued, should be harnessed by a mind free from past traditions—a blank slate, or *tabula rasa*, that allowed the poet to see the world afresh. Stevens referred to this as the perspective of the "ignorant man" with an "ignorant eye" (Stevens, 1997, p. 329). This approach was part of his broader project to create an authentic American aesthetic, one that broke free from European cultural influences. Alongside other American modernists like William Carlos Williams and Hart Crane, Stevens sought to define American identity in opposition to the internationalism of figures like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, who believed in a return to Classical cultures for cultural rejuvenation. For Stevens and his peers, reliance on European traditions was seen as escapism, a retreat from the challenges of contemporary American life. Critics like Joseph N. Riddel have positioned Stevens within this Americanist tradition, noting that his poetry has "American roots" (qtd. in Borroff, 1963, p. 30). Helene Vendler echoes this sentiment, arguing that Stevens' work is a rejection of European aestheticism, asserting that poetry must be "native to its region" (1987, p. 133).

However, Stevens' work did not emerge in isolation from global intellectual currents. His poetry engages in dialogue with other philosophical traditions, including those of non-American thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. This study highlights Stevens' interaction with these philosophers, particularly through a close reading of his poem *The Comedian as the Letter C*. In this poem, Stevens explores philosophical questions about the possibility of reconciling humanity with nature, using Kant's epistemology as a framework. The protagonist, Crispin, represents a European man struggling to adapt to the new American reality, symbolizing the immigrant's search for meaning in a disorienting new world. Crispin's skepticism about his European past reflects Stevens' broader critique of inherited traditions, as the

character embarks on a labyrinthine journey to find meaning in his American existence. Additionally, the poem engages with the motif of the flood, which Stevens uses to challenge Hegel's interpretation of Greek and biblical stories. In doing so, Stevens critiques Hegel's alignment of Kant with biblical tradition, which, in Hegel's view, deepened humanity's alienation from nature by placing human submission to God above harmonious coexistence with the natural world.

The novelty of this study lies in its examination of how Stevens' poetry serves as a philosophical debate on the reconciliation between man and nature, and how it engages with both American and European intellectual traditions. By placing Stevens' work in conversation with Kantian and Hegelian thought, this research highlights the ways in which his poetry seeks to address the alienation of modern man while offering a distinctly American response to the challenges of modernity. Through this exploration, the study underscores Stevens' innovation in using poetry as a secular tool for finding meaning in a fragmented world, breaking away from both religious traditions and European cultural legacies to create an American aesthetic rooted in reality and imagination.

RESEARCH METHOD AND CRITICAL FRAMING

The primary aim of this article is to explore Wallace Stevens' use of the flood motif as a means to engage with Immanuel Kant's epistemology and suggest a secular solution to modern man's alienation. Additionally, the article examines Stevens' rejection of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's criticisms of Kant's philosophy. By focusing on the philosophical underpinnings in Stevens' work, particularly his response to modernity's existential crises, this study aims to highlight how Stevens offers an alternative to traditional religious or metaphysical solutions. His approach suggests that through a Kantian framework, which emphasizes human reason and experience as the sources of understanding the world, Stevens offers a vision that addresses the alienation felt in the wake of the loss of faith and certainty in the modern era. The analysis also show how Stevens uses this philosophical grounding to critique Hegel's objections and propose a more human-centered, secular mode of reconciling with existence.

To achieve this aim, the study employs two key theoretical approaches: the close textual reading method developed by New Criticism and Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality. Close textual reading, as a technique championed by New Criticism, treats the literary text as an autonomous object, focusing exclusively on the internal elements that define its structure, form, and meaning. This method operates on the principle that the text contains everything necessary for its interpretation, emphasizing "the words on the page" as the foundation for understanding. By closely examining how literary devices such as metaphor, symbolism, and imagery contribute to the text's meaning, this approach provides a detailed, nuanced understanding of Stevens' use of the flood motif as a philosophical and poetic device.

In addition to the close textual analysis, the study incorporates Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, which allows for the exploration of how Stevens' work dialogues with other texts, both within and beyond his own literary tradition. Intertextuality, as coined by Kristeva, views all literary texts as inherently connected to others, functioning within a network of references, influences, and transformations. According to Kristeva, "each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). In this way, no text exists in isolation; rather, each text absorbs, reflects, and transforms other texts. She further asserts that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). This framework is particularly

relevant to Stevens' poetry, which interacts with philosophical texts such as those of Kant and Hegel, as well as literary traditions ranging from European romanticism to modernist innovations in America. Through this dual methodological approach, the study explores how Stevens' poetry does not emerge from a vacuum but rather exists in conversation with other texts, both philosophical and literary. By employing close textual reading, the analysis focuses on the internal mechanics of Stevens' poem, while intertextuality helps situate his work within broader philosophical and literary discourses. This combined approach enables a deeper understanding of how Stevens uses the motif of the flood to engage with Kantian ideas and refute Hegelian interpretations, while offering a secular, poetic resolution to the alienation faced by modern man.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hegel and the biblical and Greek stories of the flood

In 1799, Hegel wrote *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*, an essay in which he attempted to move beyond Kant. This essay begins with the stories of the flood, and with a contrast between Noah and Nimrod, and between them and the Greek Deucalion and Pyrrha. It concludes that both Noah and Nimrod represented pure negativity because they could only react to forces with forces. Accordingly, they remained submissive to a transcendent God and the hostility with nature could not be overcome. In contrast, the Greek couple restored the bond of family and bequeathed family reconciliation to the Greek nation. Then, Hegel considers Kant as a Jew due the "positivity" of his ethics.

The story of Noah and the flood is told in chapters 6–9 of the book of genesis. Due to human corruption, God decided to destroy all living things on the earth, except for Noah. God instructed Noah to build an Ark and to take two of every sort of animal into the ark, so that each species would be preserved through these two specimens. God released the rains that caused the Flood. Noah and his companions along with the animals had taken aboard the ark and were spared from the Flood and survived. However, every living thing outside the ark was destroyed in the Flood. When the ark eventually came to rest, Noah built an altar and made a sacrifice. Then God made a covenant with Noah that man would be allowed to eat every living thing but not its blood, and that God would never again destroy all life by a flood.

The story of Nimrod and the flood is mentioned in Genesis 10:8-11. Nimrod was the great-grandson of Noah through the line of Cush. Nimrod is described as the first of the mighty men to appear on the earth after the great flood. As the leader of the kingdom of Babel, Nimrod ordered the construction of the Tower of Babel to protect humanity against another flood. Since the reason for the first flood was humanity's wickedness and rebellion from which humanity refused to repent, God punished the Tower builders by confusion of languages: humans were divided into linguistic groups, unable to understand one another.

The Greek version of the biblical stories of the flood is the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha. In the Iron Age, the gods appeared and witnessed human impiety. In particular, Jupiter visited the house of the Lycaon, who treated Jupiter with the greatest disrespect, even trying to murder him in his sleep. Jupiter decided to punish humanity with a flood. Because of their piety, Deucalion and Pyrrha were saved from this deluge by building a chest. Then Neptune ordered Triton to blow on his shell and sound a retreat to the waters. Deucalion and Pyrrha found refuge in a temple. Inquiring how to renew the human race, they were ordered to cast behind them the bones of their mother. The couple correctly understood that "the mother" to be the earth Gaia, and they threw stones. Those thrown by Deucalion became men and those thrown by Pyrrha became women. They later became the parents of Hellen, the eponymous ancestor of the Greeks.

According to Hegel, Noah and Nimrod represent two different attempts to master the flood. To protect mankind from the ravages of water, Noah created a transcendent God. He "built the distracted world together again; his thought-produced ideal he turned into a [real] Being and then set everything else over against it, so that in this opposition realities were reduced to thoughts, i.e., to something mastered" (Hegel, 1948, p. 183). This transcendent God promised that no natural disaster was ever to destroy humankind. As a condition to God's mastery of nature, man was ordered to be obedient to his Command and to show subjection to God's law: "men were prohibited from eating the blood of animals because in it lay the life, the soul, of the animals" (Hegel, 1948, p. 1833). Thus, man was given the gift of dominating nature, in exchange for that he was himself dominated by God. In contrast to Noah, Nimrod did not seek God's protection. He rather devised a direct means to protect himself from God's wrath. Nimrod asked the survivors of the flood to build a tower to protect themselves from the flood. He did not entrust the responsibility of the survival of mankind to God. In his attempt to tame nature, Nimrod forced nature to obey him by opposing God. He thus "found a despotic Tyranny" (Hegel, 1948, p. 184). For Hegel, Noah and Nimrod's Judeo-Christian spirit is "a relation that is based on a conflict and enmity that is on the perpetuation of the cleavage and laceration between humans and nature" (Corti, and Schülein, 2022, p. 134).

In contrast to Noah who saved himself from the hostility of nature by subjecting himself to God, and Nimrod who tamed it himself, Deucalion and Pyrrha "presented the possibility of reconciliation because it eradicates the antagonism or rather eliminates the opposition between humans and nature" (Corti, and Schülein, 2022, p. 134). They did not attempt to tame the world in the manner of Noah and Nimrod who "made a peace of necessity with the foe" (Hegel, 1948, p. 184). The Greek couple rather, Hegel explains, "invited men once again to friendship with the world, to nature, made them forget their need and their hostility in joy and pleasure, made a peace of love, were the progenitors of more beautiful peoples, and made their age the mother of a newborn natural life which maintained its bloom of youth" (Hegel, 1948, p. 184). Deucalion and Pyrrha, thus, restored the ties of the family and made reconciliation with nature to their race to become a guiding principle of the Greeks.

Hegel's arguments against Kant's epistemological and moral system

According to Hegel, Kant's concept of ethics and the enlightenment notion of reason are new versions of Noah's and Nimrod's reactions to the flood. Yet, before examining Hegel's arguments for such a hostile attitude towards Kant, it is worth explaining the main ideas of Kant's epistemology and moral philosophy. It is from this philosophical underpinning of Kant's thoughts that Stevens borrows some formulae as a method to guard man against his alienation from reality and to suggest a possible reconciliation with it.

Kant's philosophical system is a break with traditional metaphysics which claimed to have knowledge of extra-sensory objects by using a pure concept of the understanding independently of the sensible conditions. His Transcendental Analytics had set out to demonstrate the existence of a priori forms and pure concepts of the understanding that preceded experience. Thus, the principles of nature are "in fact known by the human mind 'a priori' prior to all experiences" (Roecklein , 2019, p. 196). In metaphysics, the synthetic a priori propositions are not possible at all since there is non-sensory access to such metaphysical objects, as the soul, the world-whole, or God. These metaphysical objects which are of pure categories, "without formal conditions of sensibility, have merely transcendental signification, but have no transcendental use. For such use of the

pure categories is intrinsically impossible, because they lack all the conditions for any use of them (in judgments), viz., the formal conditions" (Kant, 1909, p. 312). They are subjective ideas that project the illusion of transcendent objects that Kant calls transcendental illusion which he distinguishes from empirical illusion. So empirical illusion concerns objects of experience while transcendental illusion concerns metaphysical objects that transcend experience caused by rules of reason "which influences principles whose use is not even designed for experience" (Kant, 1909, p. 348). Thus, for Kant, all knowledge is obtained in experience. It arises partly from the combination of the activity of objects upon the senses and "understanding's activity, by which it compares these presentations, connects or separates them, and thus processes the raw material of sense impressions into a cognition of objects that is called experience" (Kant, 1909, p. 218). The object perceived by the senses causes mental representation, and humans have no direct knowledge of things.

Kant believed that the pursuit of universal laws is absolutely central to both natural science and to human morality. Reason has a theoretical function related to science and a practical function which fulfils a moral function. Accordingly, he crafted the famous opposition between the realm of nature (phenomena) which are "objects and events as they can and do appear to us within space and time" (WestphaL, 2020, p. 165), and the realm of freedom (noumena) "which we cannot locate within space and time" (WestphaL, 2020, p. 165). Phenomena are the realm of things known empirically through the senses and can be formulated and analyzed according to the laws of natural science. Morality, on the other hand, resides in the realm of freedom, or noumena. Since morality cannot be empirically perceived, he grounds morality within the limits of reason alone. Morality should not be grounded by experience but a priori principle that Kant calls "Categorical Imperative" as opposed to the other principle "hypothetical imperatives". Hypothetical imperatives "are always constituted by a material purpose" (Hölzl, 2020, p. 4) while Categorical Imperative "are unconditional, since they are established through a (formal) abstraction process" (Hölzl, 2020, p. 4).

For Hegel, Kant who gave exaggerated importance to reason and denied human inclinations was the modern successor of the Jewish Noah and Nimrod who exercised their laws with "the most revolting and harshness tyranny (Hegel, 1948, p. 1848). Kant's denial of humanity by submitting it to the cold order of law and his insistence on morality as obedience to a set of rules designed to impose order and restraint on the passions became Hegel's objects of attack. Hegel saw in Kant's noumenal-phenomenal dualism the origin of modern man's alienation from both himself and nature. He is alienated from nature since nature as a thing in itself evades his knowledge. He is alienated from himself because he is required to fulfill absolute duty to categorical imperatives regardless of the consequences of his actions.

Stevens' refutation of Hegel's arguments against Kant

For Stevens, a world without gods is a world of chaos, and Hegel fails to see that the Greeks' view that the world granted to them by the gods is orderly and harmonious is a falsification of their reality since man lives in a state of perpetual chaos due to the absence of divinities. In fact, the Greeks believed that the universe was a cosmos where their gods maintained order and harmony while ruling the universe. Each god ruled a particular part of the universe. For example, "Zeus became God of the sky, Poseidon the ruler of the Sea, and Hades the king of the underworld" (Riya, 2021, p. 13). Stevens rather adheres to a modern belief that the world is chaotic. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a radical change occurred in the patterns and framework of European thought. In the wake of discoveries through the telescope and

Copernican theory, the notion of an ordered cosmos gave way to that of a universe infinite in both time and space, with significant and far-reaching consequences for human thought. John Donne in "An Anatomy of the World" expresses his anguish and his bewilderment caused by this breakdown of the traditional perception of divinely ordered cosmos, and the discovery of new astronomy which insisted that the universe is mostly beyond human understanding:

And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
The element of fire is quite put out,
The sun is lost, and th' earth, and no man's wit
Can well direct him where to look for it. (Donne, 2002, P. 177)

In "Comedian," the motif of the flood enables Stevens to reject Hegel's arguments that the biblical flood perpetuates the split between man and nature while the Greek flood restores their reconciliation. Stevens' argument lies in the fact that both biblical and Greek flood stories involve metaphysical powers and therefore rest mainly on supernatural foundations. It is the Greek gods that granted Deucalion and Pyrrha reconciliation with his world, and it is a transcendent God that punished Noah's and Nimrod's into submission. For Stevens, as a secular poet who attempts to live locally in "a world without heaven" (Stevens, 1997, p. 104) and to develop earthly poetics, these supernatural additions serve only to falsify realities. For this reason, Sebastian Gardner argues that Stevens struggles "to break cleanly with the past, and does not either recycle old mythologies, or attempt to model a new, personalized mythology on the old" (2012, p. 325). In "Comedian," the flood puts the quester Crispin in a situation where he finds himself questioning the validity of old supernatural mythologies and traditional religions. Crispin has first to purge himself of nonphysical influences before he comes face to face with the ultimate reality.

This secular view of reality provides a reason why Stevens' allusions to Classical gods in "Comedian" are without the expected punishing or warding forces. This is the case with his reference to Triton who is an important figure in the story of the flood of Deucalion and Pyrrha. As the one who sounded the conch that marked the flood's end, he represents the power of the sea and the divine power that harmonizes the world. In Stevens' poem, there is "nothing left of him" (Stevens, 1997, p. 23) that makes him such a meaningful deity:

Triton incomplicate with that
Which made him Triton, nothing left of him,
Except in faint, memorial gesturings,
That were like arms and shoulders in the waves,
Here, something in the rise and fall of wind
That seemed hallucinating horn, and here,
A sunken voice, both of remembering
And of forgetfulness, in alternate strain.
Just so an ancient Crispin was dissolved. (Stevens, 1997, p. 23)

If he does not dwell in forgetful power, Triton is in memory a weak being with futile gesterings "like arms and shoulders in the waves." Even his sound that once could trigger and stop floods is so faint that it becomes "hallucinating horn." Now Crispin realizes that Triton' sound is falsifying, and Triton is "dissolved in shifting" (Stevens, 1997, p. 23) back into the sea. This is all that is left in Triton, and by extension, of classical gods that Crispin once believed had made his life harmonious with the world. Crispin has to purge his existence of such obsolete deities so that he can start his journey toward a genuine reconciliation with his reality.

Like the Greek god, the Judeo-Christian God is weak because for Stevens "the death of one god is the death of all gods" (Stevens, 1997, p. 381). Like Triton, it is one of the remnants of old beliefs that still dwell in memories but have no place in the present world of Crispin. Accordingly, in the second section of the poem entitled "Concerning the Thunderstorms of Yucatan," Crispin sees at the façade of the cathedral only as an object of artistic curiosity. When the thunderstorm "Came bluntly" (Stevens, 1997, p. 26), he seeks refuge in the cathedral where he endures the storm. It is the heavy terrible noise of the thunderstorm, not the supernatural transcendent God as in the two stories of the biblical flood that makes Crispin in the cathedral terrified, simply because the Christian God does not exist. Even the Christian symbols of the signboard and pane are merely examples of the artifice of the past, lifeless and empty of meaning:

The storm was one
Of many proclamations of the kind,
Proclaiming something harsher than he learned
From hearing signboards whimper in cold nights
Or seeing the midsummer artifice
Of heat upon his pane. (Stevens, 1997, p. 26)

These lines forcefully remind the reader of Stevens' argument in "Sunday Morning," a poem that develops in the form of an interchange between two voices: that of the woman, whose enjoyment of the pleasures of this world is disturbed by the awareness of death, and that of the narrator seeking to reassure her that the world is enough to satisfy her. The narrator tries to convince the woman that the supernatural divinity so feared by the woman is only a metaphysical image that comes "in silent shadows and in dreams" (Stevens, 1997, p. 53). For Stevens, even Christ symbolizes mortality, and the poem concludes with a voice coming over the water and tells about an unresurrected Christ who no longer inspires modern man with the promise of eternal life:

The tomb in Palestine
Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay. ((Stevens, 1997, p. 53)

Likewise, in Crispins' world, there is no room for the supernatural addition of nonphysical creatures. For him, the world is "all of paradise that we shall know" (Stevens, 1997, p. 54). Accordingly, emptiness of the cathedral suggests that his experience is not a religious one, and the following lines reinforce the secularity of Crispin's quest:

The melon should have apposite ritual,
Performed in verd apparel, and the peach,
When its black branches came to bud, belle day,
Should have an incantation. And again,
When piled on salvers its aroma steeped
The summer, it should have a sacrament
And celebration. Shrewd novitiates
Should be the clerks of our experience. (Stevens, 1997, p. 31)

The words "ritual," "incantation," "sacrament," and "celebration," which evoke images of organized religion, are associated with things of daily experience such as "melon" and "peach" and imply that Crispin's goal is to inhabit the physical rather than the metaphysical world.

Sevens' secularity has a deep impact on his views of the world and by extension on Crispin's view of his reality. Due to the absence of supernatural powers to maintain order, the universe is chaotic rather than orderly. In the godless world, Crispin has given

up his old view that the world is orderly and begun to embrace a modern belief that it is chaotic. The opening motto of the poem, "man is the intelligence of his soil" (Stevens, 1997, p. 22) suggests that he has the imaginative power that makes him capable of coexisting with harmonious universe. As the "sovereign ghost" (Stevens, 1997, p. 22), he can discover its nature by discerning and formulating its laws and making it intelligible. Thus, he is

the Socrates
Of snails, musician of pears, principium
And lex. Sed quaeritur: is this same wig
Of things, this nincompated pedagogue,
Preceptor to the sea. (Stevens, 1997, p. 22)

Now Crispin is at home where he is accustomed to homely objects that he can control and order. The things that compose his world in his home include such ordinary objects as "berries of villages," "simple salad-beds," "honest quilts," and "apricots" (Stevens, 1997, p. 22).

However, a flood reminiscent of the one in the biblical and Greek stories serves to trigger in Crispin what Bonnie Costello calls a sense of "displacement" and to put him in a situation where he finds himself questioning his confident view that the world is harmonious. Now he is perplexed in the middle of the sea voyage. The sea that he cannot grasp is the place where his old conviction starts to dissolve. While the flood in the old narratives is a specific experience that serves to purify the old world of its sins, in Stevens' poem it is "inhuman and ahuman formal dynamics" (wolfe, 2020, p. 9) in which one experience leads to another experience, and all of them confirm the hostility of the godless universe.

Two other situations, in addition to the sea, are worth mentioning. After the experience of the sea, he reaches Yucatan where he is confronted with another natural phenomenon. As he passes through the streets of Yucatan, he is surprised by an approaching thunderstorm with a "heavy cry" (Stevens, 1997, p. 26) that "Came bluntly thundering, more terrible / Than the revenge of music on bassoons" (Stevens, 1997, p. 26). In the thunderstorm, he perceives the magnitude of an ultimate energy or "the span of force" (Stevens, 1997, p. 26) which is the quintessential fact of reality which is "the veritable ding an sich" (Stevens, 1997, p. 26), a German terms he borrows from Kant, meaning the thing in itself or a blank world without imagination. The other situation is more ecological than natural; it is the urban setting of Carolina with its polluted river exhaling disgusting smells in an industrial town:

A river bore
The vessel inward. Tilting up his nose,
He inhaled the rancid rosin, burly smells
Of dampened lumber, emanations blown
From warehouse doors, the gustiness of ropes,
Decays of sacks, and all the arrant stinks
That helped him round his rude aesthetic out. (Stevens, 1997, p. 29)

This polluted environment, which is not as attractive as the garden of Europe or the exotic landscape that Crispin experienced before, in addition to his adventures with the sea and the thunderstorm, makes him ready to face the reality. He has an encounter with a new reality whose matter is in flux and whose form is impossible to understand. From here, Crispin has learned that the world is no longer a cosmos.

Even the cold weather denies any reconciliation between Crispin and his environment and reminds him of the difficulty of confronting the visible world:

The spring came there in clinking pannicles
Of half-dissolving frost, the summer came,
If ever, whisked and wet, not ripening,
Before the winter's vacancy returned.
The myrtle, if the myrtle ever bloomed,
Was like a glacial pink upon the air.
The green palmettoes in crepuscular ice
Clipped frigidly blue-black meridians,
Morose chiaroscuro, gauntly drawn. (Stevens, 1997, p. 27)

Fading flowers are the only surviving vegetation in this an icy space. Thus, flowers such as "panicles," "myrtle," "palmettos," "meridians," and "chiaroscuro" hardly bloom. The spring is half frosty, the summer is wet and not ripening enough, and the glacial icy winter is almost everlasting.

Stevens' reconciliation between man and reality through Kantian philosophy

In the middle of this "veritable ding an sich," Crispin has to find a way to overcome the sense of his alienation from the world. He tries out two formulae, romantic and rationalist, to guard himself against hostile and alienating forces of nature before he reaches the best one which consists of a balance between reality and the imagination which places him within a broadly Kantian tradition. This adherence to Kantian philosophy gives Stevens an opportunity to refute Hegel's claim that Kant's philosophy is a version of Judaism that prohibits the advent of a happy life.

Crispin has, thus, to follow the Kantian way of apprehending reality. However, he first has to stop "fluctuating between sun and moon" (Stevens, 1997, p. 26), between reality and the imagination or rationalism and romanticism. This fluctuation tends to result in a divorce of the imagination from reality because one side dominates over the other. When Crispin adopts the romantic solipsistic understanding of the relationship between reality and the imagination where the imagination takes over reality, he finds himself cherishing the fallacious world of his imagination in which reality implicitly disappears. The supremacy of the imagination over reality ends up with a world of dreams and fantasies that denies reality. On the other hand, when Crispin adopts the rationalist world of the absolute facts or a reality apprehended without the projection of human imagination, this reality becomes chaotic. Thus, the poet finds himself in the position of "intelligent men / at the center of the unintelligible" (Stevens, 1997, p. 422) and consequently alienated from this reality.

Rejecting the romantic solipsistic attitudes toward reality caused by its usurpation by the imagination, Stevens stresses that "the imagination is not a free agent. It is not a faculty that functions without reference" (Stevens, 1997, p. 677). The reference is reality or the physical world. The second section of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" affirms that the imagination loses its solidity when the imagined object does not belong to the physical world. This section supposes the "houses" to have no reality except as they are "composed of ourselves" in the mind. If the houses existed only in the operations of the mind, they would be without substance, "impalpable" and "transparent":

Suppose these houses are composed of ourselves,
So that they become an impalpable town, full of
Impalpable bell, transparencies of sound,
Sounding in transparent dwellings of the self,
Impalpable habitations that seem to move
In the movement of the colors of the mind. (Stevens, 1997, p. 397)

Consequently, the mind becomes "uncertain," "indefinite," and "confused" in its transformation of even the clearest fact, such as "the clearest bells."

Like a romantic, Crispin finds himself in a similar situation when he instead of facing the harshness of the environment of real Carolina, he is tempted by an imaginative Carolina which might provide a "blissful liaison, / between himself and his environment" (Stevens, 1997, p. 28), but it seems unreal and fake: "It seemed Illusive, faint, more mist than moon, perverse, / Wrong as a divagation to Peking" (Stevens, 1997, p. 28). Though this kind of conception may seem attractive, it is not productive enough. The poet's mere imagination or "legendary moonlight" (Stevens, 1997, p. 27) succeeds only in distorting the visible world rather than confronting it.

Crispin's idea that reality is the substance that the imagination processes connects Stevens with Kant who offers the object represented in space outside the mind as the basis of human understanding. Accordingly, the commonplace objects of the world become a determining factor in Crispin's new vision of reality. The expression of this reality celebrates the "rankest trivia" with a better taste than things falsified by the stale imagination:

Hence the reverberations in the words
Of his first central hymns, the celebrants
Of rankest trivia, tests of the strength
Of his aesthetic, his philosophy,
The more invidious, the more desired. (Stevens, 1997, p. 30)

Crispin seems to understand his role at last. As a realist, he accepts the visible world and its infinite variety; he does not merely project on nature his own self-conscious roles. He will avoid the temptation to make Carolina "polar-purple" (Stevens, 1997, p. 27); he will look at things as they are and call them by their proper name: "Abhorring Turk as Esquimau, the lute / As the marimba, the magnolia as rose" (Stevens, 1997, p. 30).

It is "Upon these premises propounding" (Stevens, 1997, p. 30) that Crispin bases his art. He is a man of the imagination building upon reality. He becomes the spokesman for his environment whether from Georgia or from any other American place:

The man in Georgia waking among pines
Should be pine-spokesman. The responsive man,
Planting his pristine cores in Florida,
Should prick thereof, not on the psaltery,
But on the banjo's categorical gut. (Stevens, 1997, p. 31)

By accepting things that exist in reality, his art can be found "more exquisite than any tumbling verse" (Stevens, 1997, p. 29). The true modern man plays "not upon the psaltery" of traditional religion but on "banjo," the symbol of the imagination. It is now reality that strikes the imagination, and now his motto is no longer "man is the intelligence of his soil" but "his soil is man's intelligence" (Stevens, 1997, p. 27). Thus, he recognizes that his apprehension of reality has as its foundation the physical objects which come through the channels of sense: "He savored rankness like a sensualist" (Stevens, 1997, p. 29).

However, this understanding of reality associates him with the rationalists who argue that what is inside, like the imaginative thinking, that sensation triggers is suspect because it leads to a false view of what is real. For example, Locke's concrete dualism makes the word idea stand indifferently for thing, and thought exalt reason but not imagination. In contrast, Stevens believes that "it is the *mundo* of the imagination in which the imaginative man delights and not the gaunt world of reason. The pleasure is the pleasure of powers that create a truth that cannot be arrived at by the reason alone, a

truth that the poet recognizes by sensation" (Stevens, 1997, p. 679). Stevens refutes the rationalist tradition that values reason and empirical observation as the only reliable source of information about the world and about human beings. John Locke's theory of the human mind and epistemology holds that the mind is a non-distorting mirror to the outside world. Like a blank sheet upon which experience inscribes ideas, it is passive to the outside world. From here, poetry's only legitimate role is to depict reality as it is. To quote Alexander Pope:

True expression, like th' unchanging sun,
Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon,
It guilds all objects, but it alters none. (Pope, 2002, p. 15)

Stevens rejects this model of relation between the mind and the outside world. He claims that the human mind is capable of processing reality. His refutation of rigid, emotionless, cold Rationalism is the main theme of the last stanza of "Six Significant landscapes" that describes the confining way the rationalists dress, live, and think:

Rationalists, wearing square hats,
Think, in square rooms,
Looking at the floor,
Looking at the ceiling.
They confine themselves
To right-angled triangles.
If they tried rhomboids,
Cones, waving lines, ellipses
As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon
Rationalists would wear sombreros. (Stevens, 1997, p. 60)

The rationalists confine themselves to the clear-cut and the indisputable. Due to the limitations on their field of vision, they lack imagination, even joy, in their lives. if they tried other, less "squared" ways of being, again represented analogously by curved, less sharp, and softer geometric figures such as "rhomboids," "cones," "waving lines" and "ellipses," would "wear sombreros," the hats of dance, joy and mirth.

In "Comedian," Stevens, through Crispin, offers a Kantian epistemological refutation of the rationalist' rigid understanding of reality. Crispin cannot "be content and still be realist" because the mind in not a passive recipient of the external objects and the object in the mind is only an approximation of the object in reality:

And be content and still be realist.
The words of things entangle and confuse.
The plum survives its poems. It may hang
In the sunshine placidly, colored by ground
Obliquities of those who pass beneath,
Harlequined and mazily dewed and mauved
In bloom. Yet it survives in its own form,
Beyond these changes, good, fat, guzzly fruit. (Stevens, 1997, p. 33)

Thus, the plum survives its change in reality because the plum has its own existential integrity beyond the imagination about it. Yet, Stevens' view of reality brings him close to Kant who attributes to the mind an active role in constituting the features of experience.

Stevens rejects this Lockean concrete understanding of dualism that makes no distinction between reality and thought which satisfies only reason without the imagination. He instead aligns himself with Kant who argues that the mind receives

information of the physical world through senses, but in order to understand this information, these sensory perceptions must be processed by certain conditions inherent in the human mind. This Kantian idea has an echo in the following lines of "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight," in which Stevens explains the effects of the senses on reality:

Our sense of these things changes as they change,
Not as in metaphor, but in our sense
Of them. So sense exceeds all metaphors.
It exceeds the heavy changes of the light. (Stevens, 1997, p. 370)

The repetition of the word "change" emphasizes Stevens' belief that what is in the mind does not reflect reality as it is but transforms it, and the mind is not a passive recipient of the things perceived by the senses; it has to process them.

In "Comedian," Crispin's eye is a perceiving eye that gives the power to transform reality when combined with the imagination:

To things within his actual eye, alert
To the difficulty of rebellious thought
When the sky is blue. The blue infected will.
It may be that the yarrow in his fields
Sealed pensive purple under its concern.
…….
Abashed him by carouse to humble yet
Attach. It seemed haphazard denouement. (32)

The word "carouse" implies that the things that surround Crispin fluctuate and change. The white "yarrow in his fields" perceived by the senses looks "purple" in his mind thanks to the blue of the sky that comes to mean the blue of the imagination.

This Kantian epistemological paradigm that Stevens' embraces does not end up with split between man and nature, it rather enables man to order the chaotic world and to be in harmony with it. Stevens says, "One writes poetry, then, in order to approach the good in what is harmonious and orderly" (786). "Anecdote of the Jar" is a poem in which Stevens places the round jar as a symbol of the human imagination in the chaotic wilderness. The jar asserts its superiority and its authority even more through the implied design of its own roundness on the shapeless nature. Accordingly, human circularity civilizes the wild by providing it with a structure:

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.
It took dominion everywhere. (Stevens, 1997, p. 61)

The human mind governs its antithesis, nature, since "it took dominion everywhere" in the chaotic world.

By accepting to face reality as chaos rather than cosmos and by relying on the imagination without the metaphysical additions, Crispin reaches reconciliation with his reality. He becomes a bourgeois citizen who acquires property and makes plans to establish himself. Married to a "prismy blonde" (Stevens, 1997, p. 34), Crispin finds himself the "magister of a single room" (Stevens, 1997, p. 34). Each morning, he is "still curious" (Stevens, 1997, p. 34) about the meaning of things though less troublesome:

Yeoman and grub, but with a fig in sight,
And cream for the fig and silver for the cream,
A blonde to tip the silver and to taste
The rapey gouts. Good star, how that to be

Annealed them in their cabin ribaldries! (Stevens, 1997, p. 34)

Like Deucalion and Pyrrha, Crispin has to repopulate realistically his colony without the miracle of casting stones behind. He becomes a father of four "chits" or daughters in a natural and not supernatural sense. His daughters are from the actual world and not metaphysical "cloudy" world that Crispin has rejected throughout his journey:

The chits came for his jigging, bluet-eyed,
Hands without touch yet touching poignantly
Leaving no room upon his cloudy knee. (Stevens, 1997, p. 35)

The four daughters secure the poetic vitality by finding new structures to fit the changing reality. The circumstances of the external world are ever-changing and the mind of the four daughters must respond to produce an art in a harmonious union with the chaotic reality.

CONCLUSION

This study of Wallace Stevens, through the close textual reading method and Julia Kristiva's intertextuality, reveals that his poetry does not spring from a blank mind. Stevens finds in Kant's philosophy a formula to cure man from his alienation away from romantic solipsism, enlightenment rigid rationalism and Christian metaphysics. In "Comedian," Stevens uses the motif of the flood as a secular response to Hegel's reading of the Greek and biblical stories of the flood. For Hegel, the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha is a modal of reconciliation between man and reality while Noah's and the Nimrod's solution to the flood deepens man's separation from reality. Though Kant is, according to Hegel, a later version of Judaism, Kant's idea that only sensory perceptions can be trusted provides Stevens an argument to reject Hegel's reading of both the biblical and the Greek stories of the flood due to their metaphysical foundations. Stevens reformulates in his own terms Kant's epistemological system that an idea conforms to mind process into a balance between reality and the imagination that leads to a secular union between man and his world through a marriage between the imagination and reality without the metaphysical additions.

RECOMMENDATION

This article which has examined the problem of modern man's alienation and the possible way toward reconciliation from philosophical and poetic perspectives has two recommendations it seeks to make. The first is the need for other interdisciplinary approaches to deal with this problem. By examining this modern man's predicament from various disciplines, researchers can provide a more nuanced understanding of it and suggest various ways to overcome it. The second recommendation is a comparative analysis of the need for an assessment of the contemporary impact of technology on people. It will also deepen understanding of whether the use of technology such as the artificial intelligence relieves or deepens man's alienation from the world he inhabits.

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