

**STYLES AND PROCEDURES OF WALLACE STEVENS**

Aparna Singh,

Research Scholar, Dept. of English,
CMJ University, GS Rd, Jorabat, Meghalaya

Dr. Neelam Kumari,

Assistant Prof. & Head, Dept. of English,
Kisan (PG) College Simbhaoli, Hapur (UP).

ABSTRACT

Wallace Stevens by the current critical reckoning is an outstanding poets' poet and his influence is unmistakable in the world of international English poetry both as a thinker and as an innovator. He has demonstrated in his work how a philosophical idea becomes transmuted into poetry. As Nabokov said, Wallace Stevens shows how poetry by itself becomes the highest form of truth. Wallace Stevens maintained a unique personal temper which can be compared to that of existential thinkers. In the poetry of Wallace Stevens, the subject as a relation is stressed and the world's objectivity is left to itself intact almost in an existential context.

Key words: English poetry, existential thinkers

INTRODUCTION

The word existentialism may mean many things at a time. But in the context of Stevens, it has four important implications. They are: it is

1. a revolt against the academic hypothetical atmosphere in whatever form it is found in the context of the past, especially in poetry and matters concerning human knowledge;
2. an endeavour to enter below the surfaces of things in order to grasp new relations with the reality of nature of man and of the self of the poet himself;
3. an attempt at recovering the vitality through direct and honest aesthetic experience; and
4. a desperate attempt at expressing the deep-rooted frustration in the modern human situation in its atomistic and fragment condition.

Existentialism, according to Rollo May, "..... is the endeavour to understand man by cutting below the cleavage between subject and object which has bedeviled Western thought and science shortly after Renaissance". More than any other poet in American, Stevens showed a greater concern for this 'cleavage between subject and object', which in itself assures him a modest place amongst the existential thinkers. He realized the absurd state into which the human situation had fallen as an inevitable result of foreclosing the freedom or being from its fullness of experience. He readily consigned his entire thought and poetry to the existential manner of looking at the question of human knowledge and reveals ardent love of 'being - in the world'. He held human experience most high. "Experience, at least in the case of a poet of any scope", says Stevens, "is much broader than reality". (OP, 160). Therefore, in spite of the fact that "The physical world is a meaningless tonight, "Stevens stood for it because is no other...." (CP, 337).

It is, therefore, certain for Stevens that "Life cannot be based on a thesis, since by

nature, it is based on instinct. A thesis, however, is usually present and living.... (in) (In the Adagia dictum "in" is probably a misprint. It should be "is" in order to make Stevens' meaning clear) the struggle between thesis and instincts" (OP, 160). His poetry then can be considered as an existential revolt against the thesis on behalf of the instant experience of the self. All the significant analogical and tropological aspects of Stevens' poetry reflects his profound leanings on the existential manner of thinking. His firm conviction that the "cruelty of reality" is a phenomenal provider of "Limit situation" reveals Kierkegaardian influence through Jean Wahl. At the same time, his constant persuasion to cast off all the illusions of religion and God, brings him close to the atheistic existential thinkers like Nietzsche and Sartre.

Stevens wrote his poetry with a firm conviction that poetry"... is a new engagement with life" (NA, 240). This 'new engagement with life' formula at once reveals his novel attitude to the interacting objective reality and the subjective imagination, in the context of which man made 'reasons' should not interfere for Stevens. Even the slightest interference of reason is a positive limiting force of the imagination's freedom. Therefore, for Stevens, "..... reasons are the methodize of imagination". Again "..... reality", for Stevens, "is not the external scene but the life that is lived in it" (NA, 25). As this 'life that is lived with in' is always the product of imagination manifesting itself in its freedom, the entire worth of human experience remains in the choice.

All reality, for Stevens, is human reality; and the inevitable existential crisis arises in his poetry because of the uncontrollable movements of the interior phenomenon of human experience. He says:

To lose sensibility, to see what one sees,
 As if sight had not its own miraculous thrift,
 To hear only what one hears, one meaning alone.
 As if the paradise of meaning ceased
 To be paradise, it is this to be destitute.
 This is the sky divested of its fountains.
 Here in the west indifferent cricket's chant
 Through our indifferent crisis

(CP, 320-21)

The far-reaching effects of this 'indifferent crisis' 'here in the west' are felleable. The intensity of the tragic loss expressed in the loss of freedom to chose is highly mortifying to the experiencing self of Stevens.

According to Stevens nature ordains every thing to be a person in it. This personality is what it adds the qualities of novelty and uniqueness to human experience. It is inclusively available in the very temper; and its availability becomes self- evident in the process of becoming or Being-in-the-world. It maintains its prominent temper as a unique conscious capacity or force of transposing and commencing itself with other personalities, when they are available for interaction. In his "Whole Man: Perspectives and Horizons", Stevens says, "There is an inevitable rapport between all men who seek the truth and who hope, thereby, to be made free and to remain free". Death is sudden and unforeseeable terminator of all human personality and nothingness as the antipodes of thing itself, shares this quality of death.

Therefore, death and nothing have no personalities in them. Hence, they cannot transpose and commune themselves with things. But as the inevitable process of self and things they maintain their capacity to create 'dread' and 'fear' in man. *The Rock* (CP, 520) is the finest example of man facing death and nothingness.

Stevens' sceptical stand that "It is an artificial thing that exists. In its own seeming...." (CP, 433), is something that would put both Emerson and Coleridge, or for that matter any romantic thinker or poet, at a distance from Stevens. In the above context Stevens means to imply that a real thing exists in its being and not in its 'seeming'. Stevens' ultimate poem is not to be found in the assembled figures or figurations. It is feelingly traceable in "The poem of the mind in the act of finding what will suffice....." (CP, 239). Therefore, for Stevens, poem is an act, and thus a relation rather than an entity. "Poem" says Stevens, "is the statement of relation between a man and the world". (OP, 172). It is only in the philosophy of existentialists that 'truth' is in the relation, and not in the subject or in the object. As a relation its existence can be felt in its movement and force. Therefore, says Stevens, "The poem lashes more fiercely than the wind, as the mind, to find what will suffice....." (CP, 239). The way the poem functions and the manner in which the mind acts are the same. There is an eternal novelty in the self-evidencing experience of the mind and Existentialism is the development of the experience. "Existence precedes essence" is the chief tenet of existentialism common to all existentialists. All essences are brought by human interest and choice. But they are not "essences" so long they are not encountered by the individual personal experience, with a sense of uniqueness. The very act of encounter with individual experiences when expressed in poetry becomes "The act of the mind". (CP, 239). This is the way that existence literally precedes essence. Stevens pleads for precedence of existence. He says:

.....it has to be on that stage and, like and instable action, slowly and with meditation, weak words that in the ear, in the delicate tear of the mind, repeat. Exactly, that which it wants to hear, at the sound of which, and invisible audience listens, not to the play, but to itself, expressed in an emotion as of two people, s of two Emotions becoming one. (CP, 240)

On the existential plane or in the human context this can be called the process of insight experience into being-in-the-world. It is knowing the thing-itself and not noting about the thing. Therefore, in concluding the poem Stevens says:

It must

Be the finding of a satisfaction, and May

Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman

Combing. The poem is the act of the mind.

(CP,240).

Stevens expressionistically presents all opposite view points in order to arrive his on existential stands. Whether the "External reality has its own Beauty" or not, it is not at all the problem in the poetry of Stevens. He is consciously concerned with the problem as to how beauty becomes a certain property in the experience of the self. He resolves it in the existential manner. Frank Doggett rightly remarks:

Stevens's awareness of the separateness of the self and external reality can be seen as an instance of the familiar and much discussed malady of our day: Our sense of the

discontinuity of existence, the unpalatable core of the apple of skepticism. Perhaps every age has its malady that a major poet of that age should express, and, if we are lost in the 'confusions of intelligence' and isolation in the self, we should expect to find in Stevens' poem the focus of our time.

CONCLUSION

Wallace Stevens maintained a unique personal temper which can be compared to that of existential thinker. In the poetry of Wallace Stevens, the subject as a relation is stressed and the world's objectivity is left to itself intact. Every poem of Stevens is a new search for the novelty of experience. In his "July Mountain" Stevens denounce both imagination and reality. In Stevens' poetry both the things usually stand for subjective and objective counters of the traditional philosophy, and upholds the human sense of 'being-in-the-world' as a project in relation

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