


Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning"

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English 2130
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Biography

- Reading, Pennsylvania
- Harvard
- Lawyer 1904-1916
- Married Elsie Kachel (1909)
- Insurance man
- *Harmonium* (1923)
- *Ideas of Order* (1935), *Owl's Clover* (1936), *Man with the Blue Guitar* (1937), *Parts of a World* (1942), *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* (1942), *Esthetique du Mal* (1945), *Transport to Summer* (1947), *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950)
- *Collected Poems* (1954)

Terms

- ***Ding an Sich*: the thing in itself**
 - Stevens posits an objective reality exists (remember modernist ontology: what is real?)
- ***Dich an Sich*: the thing as it is**
 - It's desirable to see objective reality *as it is*, without illusions, biases or predispositions.
- **Poetry and *Ding an Sich*:**
 - Romantic: colored by the imagination.
 - Reordering of reality is willful act.
 - Poetry reshapes reality; it does not provide *dich an sich*
- **Apostrophe:** a form of direct address, often to emphasize a moral lesson.
- **Flaccid Designator:** a singular term that refers to one thing in one possible world and something else in at least one other possible world

A Meditation on Paradise

- Poem examines central paradox of “paradise”
 - The word “paradise” becomes a flaccid designator: its meaning shifts with the poem’s different possible contexts for it.
 - *Ding en sich*: “the thing in itself”
 - what are the characteristics of “paradise”?
 - *Dich en sich*: what makes “paradise” visible “as it is”?
- Poem relies on analogic binaries to construct the central paradox, AND then to fashion a glimpse of the *Dich en sich*: paradise as it is.
 - flight of imagination corresponds to birds’ flight
- Natural rhythm: iambic pentameter.
 - Emphasizes natural world as context for paradise.

“Sunday Morning”

- Dominant motif-play: water / blood
 - Still waters and “dominion” of blood (11-15)
 - Contrasts rain, “gusty” (24-30)
 - Contrast activity of life and stillness of death (stanza viii)
- Reality: Seeming and being (9-15)
 - Birds: “images” of birds (lines 3-5) and memories of birds (58) and actual birds (118-120).
 - Death / life: Thought “shadows” and “pungent fruit” of living experience (16-22).
 - “Death is the mother of beauty” (63-75)
 - Men as a “god might be” (stanza vii)
 - “heavenly fellowship / Of men that perish” (101-2).
