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PROGRAM WALLACE STEVENS
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MUSIC
TITLES:
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ARTHUR Vining Davis Foundation

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ANNOUNCER

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MUSIC

TITLES:
VOICES & VISIONS
READER

"Chaos in motion and not in motion. Oh, that this lashing wind were something more than the spirit of Ludwig Richter.

The rain is pouring down. It is July. There is lightning and thickest thunder. It is a spectacle. Scene ten becomes eleven in Series X, Act 4, etcetera.

People fall out of windows. trees tumble down. summer is changed to winter, the young grow old. The air is full of children, statues, roofs, and snow. The theater is spinning round, colliding with deaf-mute churches and optical trains. The most massive sopranos are singing songs of scales.

And Ludwig Richter, turbulent schlemiel, has lost the hole in which he was contained.
Knows desire without an object of desire, all
mind and violence and nothing felt. He knows
he has nothing more to think about; like the
wind that lashes everything at once."

MUSIC

TITLE:
WALLACE STEVENS
MAN MADE OUT OF WORDS

ANNOUNCER

Wallace Stevens died in Hartford, Connecticut,
in 1955. For the last thirty-nine years of
his life, the poet worked as a lawyer in the
Surety Bond claim department of the Hartford
Insurance Group. In 1934 he was promoted to
Vice President.

Stevens lived here, with his wife Elsie, and
their daughter Holly. From this house he
walked two miles to work. He often composed
poetry while he walking, and believed that his
own movement helped form the rhythm of the
poem.
For Stevens, this northern landscape formed one pole of his experience, and more importantly of his imagination. The opposite world was Florida, especially Key West. Each winter, he absorbed its tropical atmosphere on fishing trips he took with his male friends.

Stevens is America's great poet of the endless cycles of desire and despair. He writes of the mind's hunger for imaginative possibilities and of reality's stubborn resistance.

Today, there are only a few surviving neighbors and business associates who knew him. Those who knew him, saw in his disciplined public life only hints of his spiritual and emotional struggles. Stevens' inner life is revealed in his poetry.

LYNN BROWN, JR.

Well, if you leave out his personal life, he was a happy man.
FLORENCE BERKMAN

I used to see Wallace Stevens walking down the street, going to work. He lived a block away, he was a neighbor, and he used to walk to work every morning. And as I saw him pass my house every morning, I used to be so thrilled.

And then in the afternoon at four o'clock, he'd be coming back. And at four o'clock I'd be outdoors here, with the children of the neighborhood uh... playing games. And when I saw Wallace Stevens walk by this house, I would make the children stop and look at him. And I would say to them, You look at this man. He's a great poet, and don't you ever forget him.

JOHN LUKENS

I would say he was respected by our department. Perhaps a little bit feared.
uh... more in an awesome manner than anything else. But we got along well with him.

WALLACE STEVENS (RE-ENACTMENT)

"I try to draw a definite line between poetry and business. And I'm sure that most people here in Hartford know nothing about the poetry. And I'm equally sure that I don't want them to know. Because once they know, they don't seem to get over it. I mean that once they know, they never think of you as anything but a poet. And after all, one is inevitably much more complicated than that."

LYNN BROWN, JR.

I find it hard to give you any specific information as to uh... what he would say during the course of our conversations. But I do recall one time, when I got to know him a little better, that he called me in the office one day, and he says to me, Bernie, he said. Can you give me your idea of what imagination was?

I says, No, I don't have any idea. He said, Well, why don't you think about a couple of
days and come back, and we'll talk about it.
But he never brought the subject up again.
[LAUGHS] Very thankful, too.

TITLE:
OH FLORIDA, VENEREAL SOIL

READER

OH FLORIDA, VENEREAL SOIL; "A few things for
themselves, invuovulous [SIC] and coral,
buzzards and live moss, tiestas [SIC] from the
Keys. A few things for themselves, Florida,
venereal soil, disclose to the lover.

The dreadful sundry of this world, the Cuban
Colodovsky [SIC], the Mexican women, the Negro
undertaker killing the time between corpaeas
fishing for crayfish. Virgin of boorish
earths.

Swiftly in the nights, in the porches of Key
West, behind the bougainvillias, after the
guitar is asleep, lasciviously as the wind,
you come tormenting, insatiable; when you
might sit, a scholar of darkness, sequestered
over the sea, wearing a clear tiara of red and blue and red. Sparkling, solitary, still, in the high sea shadow.

Dawna. Dawna. dark. stooping in indigo gown and cloudy constellations; conceal yourself, or disclose fewest things to the lover. The hand that bears the thick-leaved fruit, a pungent bloom against your shade."

TITLE:
POETRY IS NOT PERSONAL.

TITLE:
MARK STRAND
POET

MARK STRAND

There's something intensely secretive about Stevens. One doesn't know. I... I don't... it's hard... the disclosures in Stevens are not of the most um... uh... are not of the primary sort. He never says. I am feeling bad today. It's not that way at all.

TITLE:
HAROLD BLOOM
SCHOLAR/CRITIC
HAROLD BLOOM

Stevens is a poet of the most profound subjectivity. He refuses to give any personal details about himself.

He refuses to give you a voluntary self-revelation of any kind. He deals with the appearances of things, the apparent appearances of things, as they play over him and as he plays over them. He deals with nuances.

He is, as he says, a poet of the weather; which he understood always as meaning what it means for all of it... the presence or absence of sun and the movement of the wind, which are very clearly of universal, human ___ or metaphors for states of the spirit, or conditions of the soul.

JAMES MERRILL

He's very interested in... in polar things.
He's... he's always stressing that... that opposites depend on one another; night and
day, sun and moon, man and woman. And I think. I think uh.. the.. the extremes of weather uh.. stand for him, as.. as.. as weather does in general.. uh.. as the extreme oscillations of.. of a mood, of.. of a temperament. And each landscape has.. has uh.. you know, it's.. it's own.. it's own flora, it's own palette. That there're.. there're infinite ways of.. of.. of dramatizing this.. this temperament. You.. you have.. you have your objective correlates spread out before you, once.. once you call on the.. on the imagery of.. of cold; or.. or of.. or of the tropics.

TITLE:
The Snow Man

READER

The Snow Man. "One must have a mind of winter to regard the frost and the boughs of the pine trees crusted with snow. And have been cold a long time to behold the junipers shagged with ice, the spruces rough, and the distant glitter of the January sun."
And not to think of any misery in the sound of the wind, in 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 for the listener who listens in the snow, and nothing himself, beholds nothing that is not there, and the nothing that is."

MARK STRAND

Well, for Stevens, the imagination was the great transformer of the world; it enabled his poems. And in that respect, the imagination for him wasn't any different from what it is for other poets.

A great deal of emphasis is put on it, because it's an enabling force, and it's extremely powerful; since without an imagination, or the imagination he would have no poems.

JAMES MERRILL

The imagination is.. is.. is a superb instrument, but it's also subversive, perhaps. Uh.. Just.. I mean if there is.. if there is no God, then there is no devil. But still,
these negative and positive forces are at
work, particularly in the human, in the human
mind, and in the human language. Now
language, language works against itself, ah...
as... as much... as much as for.

TITLE:
THE REAL IS ONLY THE BASE.
BUT IS IS THE BASE.

HELEN VENDLER

Stevens believed that the American landscape
was one of the great resources for the
American poet. He travelled more than most
Eastern poets did, partly because of his work
in the early years at the insurance company,
as a surety insurance man. He had to go and
check out the various claims that were made;
so that he travelled in Florida, he travelled
in Tennessee, he travelled in Alabama and saw
the American landscape as a constantly
changing and beautifully varied place. And
how to get all of North America down in verse.
when you're models are all English, is one of
his continuing projects.
He wrote about the obligation of poetry to respect and reflect its landscape as early as the _____ _____. His long, autobiographical early poem, where he says that "...the man in Georgia, waking among pines, should be pine spokesman. The response of man, planting his pristine cores, in Florida, should prick there off. Not on the sultry, but on banjos, categorical gut." So that each landscape had its own appropriate instrument. And its own appropriate poetry.

TITLE:
LIFE IS AN AFFAIR OF PEOPLE NOT OF PLACES.
BUT FOR ME LIFE IS AN AFFAIR OF PLACES AND THAT IS THE TROUBLE.

ANNOUNCER

The house, where Wallace Stevens was born, in 1879, still stands at 323 North Fifth Street, Reading, Pennsylvania. Today it bares a plaque stating the unadorned facts of Stevens life. Birth place of the internationally acclaimed poet. He attended Reading's High
School For Boys, Harvard College, and New York Law School. And combined successful careers as an insurance company executive and award winning poet. In 1955, the collected poems of Wallace Stevens won both the Pulitzer Prize, for poetry, and the National Book Award.

**MARK STRAND**

This is a life's works. But its not an autobiography. It would be very difficult, on the basis of reading the collected poems, to extrapolate a...life. And its not...an internal record, in any conventional way. It's a book of a lot of things that Stevens made up. But it is...the book that will represent him, for hereafter. I mean it is his world. It is the world, in which he lived.

**TITLE:**
**JOAN RICHARDSON**
**BIOGRAPHER**

Reading was important, to Stevens, for I think to primary reasons. One, in it he belonged to a family that had importance and it was a provincial American city. That was undergoing
the changes of urbanization, in the late industrial revolution, in America. And put him touch, exactly, with what was going on, in his time. And two, Reading was and is a place where you can walk out of the city, within minutes, and be in open countryside and farmland. Which, for Stevens, was the most important source, of his imagination.

WALLACE STEVENS (RE-ENACTMENT)

"What is the poet's subject. It is his sense of the world. The truth is that a man's sense of the world dictates his subjects to him. And that this sense is derived from his personality. His temperament. Over which he has little control and, possibly, none. Except superficially. It is not a literary problem. It is the problem of his mind. And nerves.

These sayings are another form of the saying that poets are born, not made. A poet writes of twilight, because he shrinks from noonday."
"It is an illusion, that we were ever alive.
Lived in the houses of mothers, arranged ourselves, by our own motions. In a freedom of air. Regard the freedom, of seventy years ago. It is no longer air. The houses still stand, though they are rigid. In rigid emptiness. Even our shadows, their shadows no longer remain."

WALLACE STEVENS (RE-ENACTMENT)
"When I was younger, I always used to think that I got my practical side from my father. And my imagination from my mother. She would play hymns, on Sunday evening and sing. I remember her studious touch, at the piano. Out of practice and her absorbed, detached way of singing. I remember how she always read a chapter, from the Bible, every night. To all of us. When we were ready for bed. Often, one or two of us fell asleep. She always maintained an active interest in the Bible and found there the solace she desired. She was, of course, disappointed. As we all are."
HELEN VENDLER

Well the disillusionment of youth to age.
take place differently, for different people.
It does seem, as one reads Stevens poems, that
the first imaginative vacancy was caused by
the lack of that religious upbringing. That
he had had in his youth. With all the
attendant literature. All of English
literature is based on the Kings James Bible.
And the aura of theological imagination, that
surrounds that.

JOAN RICHARDSON

Stevens came, to Harvard, at a moment when the
most important ideas being dealt with were
Netzhe's proclamation, after Darwin. That God
was dead. And, as Stevens put it late in his
life, the problem was, in William James's
phrase, "what to do with the will to believe.
onece there wasn't a God. In whom to believe."

HELEN VENDLER

When Stevens came to Harvard, he had already
published poems in his school journal, in high
school. So that we know he was already
thinking of being a poet, before he came here, to Harvard. He was taken up by George Santiana, who was teaching philosophy here. They exchanged sonnets. One of the earliest poems, of Stevens, was the poem he gave to Santiana. Saying that nature and religion were in conflict. The poem begins, "Cathedrals are not built beside the sea." And his argument, in the poem, is that the sea would distract everyone in the cathedral. From their prayers. Santiana gave him back a sonnet, in exchange, thereby, so to speak, commending Stevens on poetry.

WALLACE STEVENS (RE-ENACTMENT)

"I am conscious that when I leave Cambridge, I shall leave all the surroundings that I've ever lived in. I'm going to New York, I think. To try my hand at journalism."

JOAN RICHARDSON

When Stevens tried his hand at journalism in New York, following his father's advice, though he succeeded, financially, he was doing very well in filling space and getting paid
for it. What he couldn't handle was the
brutal reality that New York presented him.

Some of the stories he was sent out to cover,
simply, as other experiences in his life
bathed him in tears. Too often. He wasn't
Stephen Crane. Like he couldn't look at the
harsher facts of New York and just report on
them, with cool objectivity.

WALLACE STEVENS (RE-ENACTMENT)

"All New York, as I have seen it, is for sale.
And I think the parts I have seen, are the
parts that make New York what it is. It is
dominated by necessity. Everything has its
price. From vice to virtue."

JOAN RICHARDSON

Eventually Stevens left journalism, followed
his father's advice. Went to law school,
passed the bar. After a few failed attempts,
in various law offices and in setting up his
own practice, with a partner, he got himself a
job in an insurance company.
WALLACE STEVENS (RE-ENACTMENT)

"I'm in the black hole, again. Without knowing any of my neighbors. The very animal in me cries out for a lair. I want to see somebody, hear somebody speak to me. Look at somebody. Speak to somebody, in turn. I want companions. I want more than my work. And the nods of acquaintances, in this little room. I do not want my dreams, my castles, my hunts, my neublance'(sic), my great companies of good friends. Yet I dare not say what I do want. It is such a simple thing."

MUSIC

JOAN RICHARDSON

When Stevens went back to Reading, after finishing law school, and found this very beautiful young creature. Elsie, ma. It was very much seeing in her something of the country girl. That represented Reading's countryside. It was also that Elsic was unshaped. Both physically very beautiful, she had an untrained imagination and an untrained intellect. She's only finished first year, of
secondary school. Stevens could shape her, Pygmalion-like, into what he need her to be. And he begin then, again, writing poems himself. As June books to her, for her birthdays. He would compose twenty or twenty-five poems, and make them into a little book and present them to her each year on her birthday.

Twenty years later, many of these poems found themselves into his first volume, "HARMONIUM".

MUSIC

TITLE:
PETER QUINCE AT THE CLAVIER

READER

PETER QUINCE, AT THE CLAVIER. "Just as my fingers on, on these keys make music, so they the same self same sounds, on my stirrups make the music too. Music is feeling, then. Not sound. And thus it is that what I feel, here in this room. Desiring you. Thinking of your blue shadowed silk, is music. It is like the strain waked in the elders, by Suzanna. Of a green evening, clear and warm. She bathed in
her still garden, while the red-eyed elders
watching felt the bases of their being throb,
in witching cords. And their thin blood pulse
pitsi carte, of Hosanna."

JOAN RICHARDSON

After their marriage, Stevens brought Elsie
with him to New York. And installed her in
their Chelsey apartment. And she was, coming
from Reading and a life there, like a fish out
of water. Whereas he had a very rich life,
here, already. Moving with an artistic group
of people. And, in his business life as a
lawyer. And being, therefore, occupied most
of the time. She was alone. In an apartment,
without to her inner resources were not great
enough to sustain her, through the changes.
And he was not that attentive to how painful
those changes were, for her. So that in spite
of the great love, that he had for her, and
that he expressed to her through their
courtship, the reality of their marriage, and
their everyday life was very painful.
HELEN VENDLER

The second disillusion, for him, was the lack of faith in romantic attachment. He had made a very deep and prolonged romantic attachment, that turned into marriage. And then the marriage, as far as we can see, became cold or chilled. Perhaps most marriages do. But for him that was a sense of a deep mistake making capacity, in himself. That ones choices can be as variable too, as the weather.

JOAN RICHARDSON

After the move to Hartford, things really did not improve, in the marriage. In his house in Hartford, surrounded by beautiful objects. With his books, his periodicals. Eventually, for Stevens, as he makes very clear, in "MEN MADE OUT OF WORDS", it's propositions about life. That replace life.

TITLE:
MEN MADE OUT OF WORDS

READER

MEN MADE OUT OF WORDS. What should we be without the sexual myth, the human revery or poem of death. Cuatratos of moon mash. Life
consists of propositions about life. The human revery is a solitude, in which we compose these propositions. Torn by dreams, by the terrible incantations of defeats. And by the fear that defeats and dreams are one. The whole race is a poet. That writes down the eccentric propositions, of its fate."

JAMES MERRILL

Well, I do believe that...poetry could...be defined as a virtual life of...the emotions. And probably if your own domestic arrangements, I don't know that much about the Stevens household. But it seems as if a kind of stand still had been...arrived at. Between him and his wife, at any rate. And that he was still, no a very passionate man. At least imaginatively passionate. And...the energy that would have gone into...love letters. Or the...interchange of an early...the early years, of the marriage. Was...finally deflected. Probably rather quickly deflected. Into the imaginative energy, of his poems.
TITLE:
FROM: NOTES TOWARD A SUPREME FICTION
(POEM follows)

JAMES MERRILL

Stevens poetic project...I suppose it was to bring a., his readers into a consciousness of the, of their part in...divinity. Of a kind of divinity stripped of theological trappings. But to...understand that the way they saw things, the way they received the world. The way they, the way in short, their imaginations operated. Was of...ultimate interest. And could attain to...all kinds of splendor and refinement.

MUSIC

TITLE:
A. WALTER LITZ
SCHOLAR/CRITIC

A. WALTER LITZ

SUNDAY MORNING is really the first poem. I think, to begin from the premise, the God of an old mythology is dead. Where do we go from there. I take it that SUNDAY MORNING is about the satisfactions, of life in world without
any great coordinating mythology. The spontaneity and freedom that that position affords.

HELEN VENDLER

It's given is that the poet, in the persona of the woman. Who is the protagonist. Stays at home, on Sunday. Instead of going to church. She's convinced that Christianity is dead. She hears a voice coming across history, to her, saying the tomb in Palestine is not the porch of spirits lingering. It is the grave of Jesus. Where he lay.

A. WALTER LITZ

And by restoring Christ, to his role as a man, the Jesus who lived and died, it restores the reader. And one would suspect the woman of the poem, as well. To all the satisfactions of the physical earth.

HELEN VENDLER

And Stevens considers, in the poem, many sources of happiness. Sources of nature, sources of era, sources of moods and pleasures. And ends, in a sadder way, saying
that we live in isolation. But we also live in spontaneity.

If we don't have a providential God, directing our lives, neither do we have a judging God, deciding on our lives. Instead we live in island solitude. Un-sponsored, free.

READER

"Complacencies of the penior and late coffee and oranges, in a sunny chair. And the green freedom of a Cakatoo, upon a rug. Mingled dissipate the holy hush of ancient sacrifice. She dreams a little, as she feels the dark encroachment of that old catastrophe. As a calm darkens among water lights. The pungent oranges and bright green wings seeing things in some procession, of the dead. Winding across wide water, without sound. The day is like wide water, without sound. Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet, over the seas. To silent Palestine. Dominion of the blood and sepulcher."
She hears, upon that water without sound, a voice that cries. 'The tomb in Palestine is not the porch of spirits lingering. It is the grave of Jesus. Where he lay.' We live in an old chaos of the sun, or old dependency of day and night. Or islands solitude unsponsored, free of that wide water, Inescapable.

Deer walk upon our mountains. And the quail whistle about us their spontaneous cries. Sweet berries ripen, in the wilderness. And in the isolation, of the sky at evening, casual flocks of pigeons make ambiguous undulations. As they sink downward to darkness, on extended wings."

A. WALTER LITZ

One of the projects, of Stevens poetry, might be thought of as the search for a native American sublime. Not a sublime imported from Europe, and from European literature, but one based upon the local materials of the American landscape.
In this way, he is very much like his friend, and in the early days, almost collaborator, William Culles Williams. But with this difference. That Williams always wished to provide, in his poetry, the gritty details, Of American life. Often untransformed or at least transformed only by their context. Where as, more and more, as Stevens grew older, he resembled the romantic poets. In wishing to reform, in his imagination and present again, the local American scene.

JAMES MERRILL

I think that Stevens was the first American poet...to present himself, as an artist. Frost created a persona of a savvy Yankee who happened to have a way with words. Eliot showed himself as a pious Christian, a student of culture. Pound, perhaps, a student of history and economics and a lover of the provencal tradition. But Stevens, again and again, you feel that his primary concern is art.

A. WALTER LITZ

He had an intense interest in the visual arts.
He followed the movement, in American painting. From the Armory show, of 1913, to abstract expressionism, in the 1940's. And many of Stevens's poems, I think can be fruitfully compared with paintings. Some of them, in fact, are based upon actual paintings.

HELEN VENDLER

Stevens saw, in the paintings of both Paul Klee, who was his favorite painter, and Cezanne. The kind of work he wanted himself to do, as a modernist poet. Klee had imagined symbols. Klee is not a directly realistic painter. It is full of whimsical and fanciful and imaginative and humorous projections of his reality, in his paintings. The paintings are often enigmatic. Or full of riddles. And Stevens liked that, as well.

What Stevens liked in Cezanne, was the reduction, you might say, of the world to a few monumental objects. The apples next to the skulls. The single mountain. approached again and again, seen from close ups, seen
from far away. And that sense of the monumental air, that simple things take on when they become the focus of attention. in Cezanne, appealed to Stevens as well.

WALLACE STEVENS (RE-ENACTMENT)

"The paramount relation, between poetry and painting today, between modern man and modern art, is simply this. That in an age, in which disbelief is so profoundly prevalent, or if not disbelief, indifference to questions of belief, poetry and painting and the arts, in general, are, in their measure, a compensation for what has been lost."

MUSIC

NEWS CASTER

At the southern most point of the Florida Keys lies Key West, the only truly tropical city in the United States. When unemployment ran high due to the decline of the hand-made cigar industry, Key West and its citizens showed great resourcefulness. A plan was conceived to modernize the city into a tropical winter resort.
Today, Key West is a beehive of activity. Old dated houses such as these are being transformed by modernization and repaired into charming cottages...such as this. Handsome homes and scapulas retired by ship owners of clipper days take on new beauty under the paint brushes of local workers.

New buildings and stores spring up throughout the city. Men are working. Industry is coming to life. Business is awakening through this major modernization activity, which will give American tourists a tropical resort within the confines of their own land.

**TITLE:**

THE IDEA OF ORDER AT KEY WEST

A. WALTER LITZ

THE IDEA OF ORDER AT KEY WEST is in many ways a typical Stevens title. It balances out a grand claim toward abstraction or generality...the idea of...and a particular place, Key West...a place of course that Stevens knew from his annual visits. It's as if all of our
grand thoughts can only be validated in terms of one time and one particular place.

And in the poem, you have the classic situation of the poet addressing physical nature...the singing girl walking by the sea, trying to understand the relationship between words and physical reality.

**TITLE:**
VOICE OF WALLACE STEVENS

**WALLACE STEVENS**

"She sang...beyond the genius of the sea. The water never formed to mind her voice...like a body, holy body, fluttering its empty sleeves. And yet, its mimic motion made constant cry, caused constantly...a cry that was not ours, although we understood. Inhuman of the veritable ocean."

**HELEN VENDLER**

Stevens takes the uttermost point of the American landscape...a moment where the American soil meets the sea, and that shore where the human mind is poised, listening to
the non-articulated voice of the sea that has not yet formed to mind or voice. And trying to put mind together with nature. And that shore that the singer walks on is the shore that every poet walks on, listening to the sounds of the world and trying to articulate them into language.

WALLACE STEVENS

"The sea was not amass, nor more was she. The sun and water were not medlieled sound, even if what she sang was what she heard...since what she sang was uttered, word by word. It may be that in all her phrases stirred...the grinding water and the gasping wind. But it was she, and not the sea we heard."

A. WALTER LITZ

The young woman singing by the sea is the type of the poet. She's actually referred to later in the poem as the maker...the classic name for the poet. And as she tries to harmonize the sounds of the sea, she rehearses in effect different theories of the relationship between the poet and physical reality.
"She used the single artificer of the world in which she sang. And when she sang, the sea...whatever self it had...became the self that was her son...for she used the maker. And we, as we beheld her striding there alone, knew that there never was a world for her except the one that she sang. And singing...made...Ramon Fernandez tell me, if you know...why when the singing ended and returned toward town, tell why the grassy lights...the lights in the fishing boats that anchor there...as the night descending tilting in the air. Mastered the night and portioned out the sea...fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles...arranging, deepening, enchanting night."

HELEN VENDLER

Stevens is talking about the way the poet charts the world for us, just the way geographers chart the world by making up those imaginary lines like the equator and the longitude and latitude lines, and poles and zones like the temperate zone and the tropic
zone. None of those are real. You can't see those lines. You can't see the North Pole when you go there. There's nothing to see. But nonetheless, it's by latitude and longitude lines that we know and can give a position to where we are in the world.

And it's that that the poet does too. So that after you've heard the song of the girl and you're walking back home, suddenly the whole night seems to be charted, as by new lines of latitude and longitude. He turns from musing by himself to addressing another human being, saying..."Ramon Fernandez, tell me if you know...why when the singing ended, and we turned toward the town...tell why the glassy lights...the lights in the fishing boats that anchor there...as the night descended tilting in the air...mastered the night and portioned out the sea, fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles, arranging, deepening, enchanting night."

And to emblazoned zones and fiery poles so that
the world becomes intelligible instead of
being simply the random mass of sensation that
our senses receive... is what poetry as well as
philosophy as well as all organization of
nature into culture does with Stevens.

WALLACE STEVENS

"Oh blessed rage for order, pale a Ramon. The
makers raged toward the words of the sea.
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly starred.
And of ourselves and of our origins. In
ghostier demarcations. Keener sounds."

JAMES MERRILL

How do you deal with his obscurity? Well
in the same way that you might deal with
Mallarmé's obscurity. I can't make head or
tail of Mallarmé. And yet he someone I'll
continue to read him, until I die. And its a
matter of the, for one thing, the great beauty
of the wording. And also these enticements.
The equivalent of stained glass and incense,
if you like. The roles they play in the
bitter message, from the pulpit. Not that his
message is bitter, but it is rather lonely.
POETRY MUST RESIST THE
INTELLIGENCE ALMOST SUCCESSFULLY.

MARK STRAND

Difficult things are difficult, sometimes, to
talk about. It's hard... to be... absolutely
clear and concise, about matters that are very
ornate. And highly nuanced. We've developed,
in the United States, a dependency on
journalese. And so our tolerance for complex
sentences, elaborate diction is minimal. So
sure, someone reading Stevens, for the first
time, who has been reading novels, newspapers,
is going to be thrown. Is going to find them-
selves in no mans land. And find himself, in
a very abstract space, indeed. And why
shouldn't he. What's wrong with that. I
mean, after all, Stevens poetic space is a
projected space. It's an imagined world.

It's the place he's made of his experience. I
mean no poet, as a recorder of experience, in
which he hopes for a one to one relationship.
HELEN VENDLER

It's the reason why he thought imagination was so crucial. Because it is what thinks up culture. Everyone is engaged in it. Philosophers, poets, painters, the ordinary man or woman, who creates a house is thinking up a part of culture. We do it everyday. Everyone does it everyday, in making up the things they love, the people they love, the things they value. The politics they create. And he then decided that reality was, as it was imagined. Things seen, he said, are things as seen. And he also said that the imagination was the one reality, in this imagined world.

MUSIC

TITLE:
THE AURORAS OF AUTUMN

WALLACE STEVENS

"FAREWELL TO AN IDEA"  "A cabin stands, deserted, on a beach. It is white, it is by custom, according to an ancestral theme. Which of consequence of an infinite cost. Flowers against the wall are white. A little
dried. A kind of mark, reminding, trying to remind, of light that was different. Something else. Last year, or before. Not the why to an aging afternoon. Whether fresher or duller. Whether of Winter cloud or of Winter sky. From horizon to horizon.

The wind is blowing the sand, across the floor. Here the invisible is being white. Is being of the sullied of white. The accomplishment of an extremist, in an exercise.

The season changes. Cold wind chills the beach. Long lines of it grow longer. Emptier. The darkness gathers, though it does not fall. The whiteness grows less blue, on the wall. The man, who's walking, turns blankly on the sand. He observes how the north is always enlarging with change. With its frigid brilliances. Its blue red sweeps and gusts, of great impendings. It's polar green, the color of ice. And fire. And solitude."
HAROLD BLOOM

He enters as himself. I believe it is his only major poem. For which he allows himself to enter, in his proper person. As a kind of dramatic figure. A great beach scene, in the early cantors or sections, of the auroras of Autumn. He stares at the extraordinary display of the northern lights. The vitality. The color, the power of the aurora borealis is a terrible reproach, to his own waning vitality. Not just as an imagination, but as a potent male. Or aging human being. Or to his own terrible sense of, indeed, turning blankly on the sand.

Of being a visible or audible blank. Nothing more. And nothing less. And he gathers himself together. He tries to make the supreme effort, of his poetry, to reduce what he confronts to what he calls a first idea. Or new point of origin. And then to reimagine that idea. And take the reduction and re-imagination, together, and say. Look, this is
my poem. This is my act of creation. So he cries out, about the auroras. These glorious northern lights. He cries out. This is nothing. And the this is means the northern lights. This is nothing. Until, in a single man contained, nothing until this named thing. The Auroras. Nameless is and is destroyed. And suddenly he becomes wholly self referential and he's says, of himself. He opens the door of his house on flames. That is to say, you've made your supreme effort. You fling open the door, of your spirit. Of your whole being. Of everything you've taught yourself to write and be.

You fling it open and, at just that moment, the northern lights say, Alright, if you wish to defy us. Now you get our full flare. And flames suddenly light up. The whole sky is absolutely aflame. The _____ of one candle sees an arctic afogence (sic) flare, upon the frame of everything he is and he feels afraid.
That is to say, you make the supreme effort, of your own imagination and all the intensity and power and discipline genius, of your imagination. Only makes you more fearful. Rather than less fearful.

JAMES MERRILL

This is called "FINAL SOLILOQUIY OF THE INTERIOR PARAMOUR". "Like the first light, of evening. As in a room, in which we rest and for small reason think the world imagined, is the ultimate good. This is, therefore, the intensist rendezvous. It is in that thought, that we collect ourselves, out of all the indifferences, into one thing. Within a single thing. A single shawl wrapped tightly 'round us, since we are poor. A warmth, the light, a power, the miraculous influence.

Here now, we forget each other and ourselves. We feel the obscurity of an order. A whole. A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous. Within its vital boundary, in the mind. We say, God and the imagine are one.
How high that highest candle lights the dark.
Out of this same light, out of the central
mind, we make a dwelling in the evening air.
In which being there, together, is enough."

Sometimes I feel about this poem, the way
other people feel about the twenty third
psalm. I think it's so beautiful. And it's
so...comforting. In...it's...essential with-
drawing of comfort. Perhaps. But, again,
it's...the...what it stresses is...the tran-
scendence. Within ourselves, that we're all
responsible for. For the...keeping of our
imaginations new and tender and quick."

MARK STRAND

I don't know what I would call the last phase,
but a kind of realist. I think. Much more in
touch with the...fact of his age. And the
fact is the choices he's made. And much more.
and resigned, at the end, that he, the book,
the planet on the table is what he has made of
his life. Or what he has made of the world.
That has given his life over to art.
And it's one of the sad features, of the book.
I mean it's a rueful little. He wonders, have I lived. Was it worth it. I think, at the end of everyone's life, they take a look back and wonder did I make the right choice. Have I, in being a man, of. Have I been a man of bone, only. Not a man of flesh. That is a living man. 

MUSIC

TITLE:
THE PLANET ON THE TABLE

READER

"Ariel was glad he had written his poems.
They were of a remembered time. Or of something seen, that he liked. Other makings of the sun were waste and welter. And the ripe shrub writhed. His self and the sun were one. And his poems, although makings of his self, no were no less makings of the sun.

It was not important that they survive. What mattered was that they should bare some lini-
ment or character. Some affluence. If only
half perceived, in the poverty of their words.
Of the planet, of which they were part."

MUSIC

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END WALLACE STEVENS