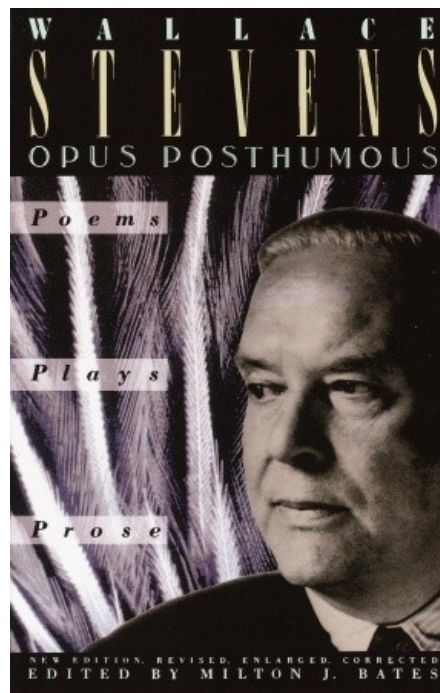




Opus Posthumous: Poems, Plays, Prose

Wallace Stevens

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When Opus Posthumous first appeared in 1957, it was an appropriate capstone to the career of one of the most important writers of the twentieth century. It included many poems missing from Stevens's Collected Poems, along with Stevens's characteristically inventive prose and pieces for the theater. Now Milton J. Bates, the author of the acclaimed Wallace Stevens: A Mythology of Self, has edited and revised Opus Posthumous to correct the previous edition's errors and to incorporate material that has come to light since original publication. A third of the poems and essays in this edition are new to the volume. The resulting book is an invaluable literary document whose language and insights are fresh, startling, and eloquent.

Opus Posthumous: Poems, Plays, Prose Details

Date : Published February 19th 1990 by Vintage (first published 1957)

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Author : Wallace Stevens

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Genre : Poetry, Plays, Drama, Anthologies, Collections

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Jimmy says

Poems in this book were published after his death. They were not included in other works. Here are a few I liked:

Blanche McCarthy

by Wallace Stevens

Look in the terrible mirror of the sky
And not in this dead glass, which can reflect
Only the surfaces - the bending arm,
The leaning shoulder and the searching eye.

Look in the terrible mirror of the sky.
Oh, bend against the invisible; and lean
To symbols of descending night; and search
The glare of revelations going by!

Look in the terrible mirror of the sky.
See how the absent moon waits in the glade
Of your dark self, and how the wings of stars,
Upward, from unimagined coverts, fly.

Of Mere Being

by Wallace Stevens

The palm at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze decor,

A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

My favorite part was a collection of his aphorisms. Here are some samples:

In poetry at least the imagination must not detach itself from reality.

All poetry is experimental poetry.

The poet must put the same degree of intentness into his poetry as, for example, the traveller into his adventure, the painter into his painting.

To read a poem should be an experience, like experiencing an act.

Money is a kind of poetry.

It is not every day that the world arranges itself in a poem.

One does not write for any reader except one.

Every man dies his own death.

A poet looks at the world somewhat as a man looks at a woman.

The world is the only thing fit to think about.

Poetry is the sum of its attributes.

Poetry is the scholar's art.

When one is young everything is physical; when one is old everything is psychic.

The tongue is an eye.

A poem is a pheasant.

Reality is a vacuum.

The body is the great poem.

The purpose of poetry is to contribute to man's happiness.

God is a postulate of the ego.

Literature is based not on life but on propositions about life, of which this is one.

God is in me or else is not at all (does not exist).

Loss of faith is growth.

Poetry is a search for the inexplicable.

Ignorance is one of the sources of poetry.

Poetry is a pheasant disappearing in the brush.

A poem need not have a meaning and like most things in nature often does not have.

Wallace Stevens called "The Emperor of Ice Cream" his favorite. It "wears a deliberately commonplace costume, and yet seems to me to contain something of the essential gaudiness of poetry; that is the reason why I like it."

When Stevens received the National Book Award for poetry in 1951, he heard some people complain if any of the writers were as good as Sir Walter Scott. But WS believed "It is not a question of comparative goodness." Modern poetry is always different.

WS: "Inability to see much point to the life of an ordinary man. The chances are an ordinary man himself sees very little point to it."

Much of the book was not interesting except for those who are interested in finding out all they can about the author, which is why I read it.

Phil says

This was actually my first experience with Stevens. I came by him from a poet friend of mine who admired him and given his being a contemporary with writers such as Crane, Pound, and Williams, I wanted to take a look; with this collection being the first one I came across at a used bookstore.

As far as this book goes, I found it a bit wanting. Some of the poems in this collection are real gems, but others seem purely academic and lacking vitality. As a poet though, I felt that his strongest piece was actually the play "Carlos among the Candles." As a scholar he also had some rather strong aphorisms in a time when such things are simply not written anymore. To speak of the poetry though, I would have to say that his style is very reminiscent of Apollinaire (which would justify my friend's fondness for Stevens given that Apollinaire is probably his (my friends) greatest influence in his own writing). The problem is, Apollinaire was only, in my opinion, marginally revolutionary in poetics. For his time it was and is incredible work and he is a poet whom I highly admire, but this style by Stevens' time had been far transcended. It's almost as if Stevens attempted to assimilate the American Whitman tradition with an early avant-garde writer (one also thinks of Nerval) in his own composition. Due to this the actual form becomes anticipated before the poem and only churns out one significant piece out of a dozen in which his vision matches the execution. That's not to say he didn't contribute to American letters, for he definitely deserves his place in the opus of American poets, but I don't attribute nearly as much esteem to him as I would someone like Hart Crane or even (despite my own reservations in admitting this) T.S. Eliot.

The worst part though, and which was what made me take this book down an extra star, was his essays. His personal one's are insightful, as well as the short pieces used as addendum to editions of other books. But his attempts at aesthetic theory were painful. It's almost as if he was particularly trying to "keep up" with Eliot and venture into things that he even admits in the essays themselves are out of his expertise. His modesty between the philosopher and the poet is digestible, but he only comes to these conclusion through hearsay. He references philosophies of art and phenomenology by quoting them out of books which merely summarize the aesthetic theories and so through his progression he completely diverges from the initial passion that inaugurated the work to a resignation of his own ill formed conception by concluding his work with simply agreeing with the one or two other critics he cites – all of whom rely primarily on Mallarmé and so really tells us nothing new about poetry for almost 100 years of advancement (almost to his discredit, given that this is his posthumous work and constitutes a reflection on his own ars poetica in a way that, for me, took some of the value away from his own works).

Regardless, as with any book, it is well worth the read. It is of value for its exemplifying Stevens' output,

while at the same time giving an almost biographical take on himself as a writer. For the generation of poets in which he belonged that inaugurated the “Death of the Author” one does get to see both author and reader, and so overall it works well for a meditation on the postmodern transformation of literature – with poetry being one of the only untarnished area (except for maybe in theatre and dance) of the arts in which one can still experience/feel the philosophical and social transformations of the literary world in which we now live.

caitlin says

simply awesome. i pick this book up and open it randomly whenever i need to reset my perspective on life. always works.

Steven Felicelli says

the play Carlos Among the Candles and the 'aphorisms' highlight this posthumous publication

Matthewsherling says

<http://cuttyspot.tumblr.com/post/3002...>
