

The New Criterion

Features

October 2009

The sovereign ghost of Wallace Stevens

by [William Logan](#)

On the poet's place in the American Pantheon & the new *Selected Poems*, edited by John N. Serio.

Wallace Stevens was not quite a teenager when Whitman died. Divided by some sixty years and the Civil War, these famous stay-at-homes were both elbowing representatives of a character peculiarly American. It was cunning for Whitman to pretend to be an American rough, though his rough edges were largely of his own making, and inspired of Stevens to conceal his poetic imagination beneath the wool suit of an expert in surety bonds. One life might be laid upon the affinities of the other: they shared the nonconforming education (Stevens a Harvard man, but a non-degree student); the late access to mature poetry (*Leaves of Grass* published at 36, *Harmonium* at 43); the belated recognition and almost bardic status; the vagueness about the private life (we are as mystified by the sexuality of the one as the other). These are the types and conditions of self-invention, the restlessness of an ...

William Logan will have a volume of early selected poems out in the spring.

[more from this author](#)

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 28 October 2009, on page 16

Copyright © 2012 The New Criterion | www.newcriterion.com

<http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/The-sovereign-ghost-of-Wallace-Stevens-4283>