

“Artificial Populations” (OP, p. 112)

“The center” in question here is a spiritual focus, a composing of the ego. The poem begins by defining it as a state of mind that has the clarity and composure of “weather after it has cleared.” The poem goes on to qualify that definition: the “center” is more than a static state of mind; it is a state of mind that sustains itself to create an ambiance, an imagery. It is like weather that has clarity and composure and sustains them, producing a climate which in turn produces a population appropriate to that climate (one that is “rosy,” happy in disposition in response to such weather.) Just as the climate produces its appropriate population (“artificial” both because it is a hypothesis of the imagination and something created), so also the central state of mind creates an imagery appropriate to itself which reconciles the mind with reality, and consequently heals its “sickness.” Angels imagined on steeples by a religious sensibility, or, in contrast, humanity seen mirrored in configurations of leaves, are appropriate projections of the mind as artificial populations are appropriate projections of the weather; the climate produces a population that is harmonious with it as the mind images a reality that is harmonious with the mind. The “faces in a summer night” are, perhaps, such images created in response to a season and a time fertile for the imagination. Finally, there are also populations (or kinds of imagery) that are appropriate to various kinds of weather (or states of mind), as well as kinds of imagery appropriate to dream (“late sleep”), and to enduring poetry (or any art resembling poetry for which “music” might stand).

“A Clear Day and No Memories” (OP, p. 113)

The experience described in “A Clear Day and No Memories” is one of composure without content, of composure through exclusion of content. There is no one in the mind’s

prospect who is involved in the struggles of life, “No soldiers in the scenery,” nor is the attention directed to memories of those from the past. The mind has withdrawn from reality, “the weather,” into itself. What surrounds one, “the air,” yields no perception other than its immateriality to the mind so withdrawn. To the mind so disconnected from it, the external world has no meaning. That world seems remote to the point where it seems that no one has any memory of it, nor any present connection with it, that one is absent from it. As the mind withdraws, what is beyond it becomes unreal, an unconvincing performance, an activity imperceptible to it, not a reality at all but a “sense,” a faculty of the mind. What is described, then, is a composed disengagement of the ego from its life in reality.

“As You Leave the Room” (OP, p. 116)

Samuel French Morse notes in his introduction to *Opus Posthumous* (p. xvii) that “As You Leave the Room” grew out of an earlier version called “First Warmth” (OP, p. 89), which dates from 1947. He says of the later poem that it “must be one of the very last poems he wrote.” Among the other additions to and modifications of the earlier poem, the addition of the contentious initial statement by a third person calls for more of an argument than is presented in the first version, and therefore allows the second to become more assertive, more of an apologia. The argument is carried on in a reflection as the first speaker leaves the room. He has said that he who dominates the contemporary scene, “Today’s character,” is not one separated from sensuous life, like a skeleton escaped from its death chamber. But, the argument goes, the writer’s poems (they seem identifiable poems of Stevens’) are about the concerns of life, not those of someone separated from life, “not what skeletons think about.” Is he one who, not accepting the realm of the real as “a disbeliever in reality,” has lived apart from reality as one dead to life, “A countryman of all the bones in the world?” Proof