She causes boys to pile new plums and pears
On disregarded plate. The maidens taste
And stray impassioned in the littering leaves.

The living maidens in their turn taste the fruit and, touched
by desire, "stray impassioned in the littering leaves" which are
the "leaves of sure obliteration" and in which they, nevertheless,
go seeking satisfaction of desire.

By way of illustrating change as the condition of fulfillment,
transitory mortality is compared with hypothetical paradise
(VI). If there were a state of existence like that of earth, but
without the change that death brings, there could be no
cycle of desire and fulfillment, no consummation, and such
an existence would be one of eternal ennui. Its characteristic
would be stasis rather than change. Death is the mother of
beauty then, because in the fire of her bosom which consumes,
is contained the principle of change which creates, as earthly
mothers create life. In death, therefore, we may figure ("de-
vise") a return to the creative principle in life ("earthly
mothers").

The argument, having established that earth is "all of para-
dise that we shall know," returns to the supposition raised in
section III (ll. 12–15) as to the consequence if this were
true. Granted that earth is the only possible equivalent of
paradise, the source of happiness for men would be the sense
of sharing a common fate of "men that perish," but who live
in that fellowship in harmony with the physical world as a
substitute for heaven. Section VII is a celebration of that
condition, in which a ring of men chant to the sun of the
particulars of the physical world, in an expression of their
harmony with it. Again in answer to section III, "Shall our
blood fail? Or shall it come to be? The blood of paradise?"
their chant is a "chant of paradise.⁄ Out of their blood, re-
turning to the sky," signifying harmonious union with the
physical world as if it were divine, just as "our blood, com-
mingling, virginal.⁄ With heaven," once united with divinity
in Christ. In the same way they chant to the sun, "Not as a
god, but as a god might be," the idea of divinity merged in
the reality of the physical world as a source of creation. The
men celebrate a transitory world, and know their kinship with
the "summer morn" that will pass away; and their destiny is
signified by the ephemeral dew on their feet: "Men do not
either come from any direction or disappear in any direction.
Life is as meaningless as dew" (Stevens, LWS, p. 250).

The woman hears, in that reverie or suspension of time and
space which began with the pacification and stillness of the
"wide water" in section I, the cry that Christ did not rise as
god, but was mortal and is dead (VIII). The poem con-
cludes therefore with a description of a secular world, a
"chaos" beyond rational order, "unsponsored, free" of the
supernatural dominion of Jesus, an island inescapably sepa-
rated by the "wide water" of time and space from the cru-
cifixion. As in section II, the only possible felicity lies in re-
sponse to the physical world. The poem ends with a notation
of the sensuous detail of that physical world which must take
the place of paradise. The last of these notations, the pigeons,
suggests a state of existence which, like that described in
the poem, is isolated from the supernatural ("isolation of the
sky"), and ambiguous in the meaning of its destiny as are the
undulations in the course of the pigeons as they sink to dark-
ness, but with wings extended, as if in knowing acquiescence
to that destiny.

"Bantams in Pine-Woods" (CP, p. 75)

This poem concerns a challenge flung from the personal
imagination to the world of reality. The imaginative world of
the individual is placed in opposition to the overbearing real-
ity of the universe. The universal reality is metaphorically
described as a "ten-foot poet," a universal imagination as
against the imagination of individuals ("inchlings"). Stevens
sometimes figures nature as a cosmic imagination within
which the individual imagination operates (for example, "The
World as Meditation," CP, p. 521, ll. 10–11). In this par-
cular case the individual imagination triumphs in imposing
its personal vision of the landscape, in giving point to the
pines and their smell ("tangs"; but "tangs" also itself means
points—thus also: "give point to their points"). But there is
a double pun in the name of "Ifuzan of Azcan": give me the
lie if you can and, in fact, as you can.

"To the One of Fictive Music"
(CP, p. 87)

The poem is addressed to the muse of poetry—she is of that
"sisterhood" of the muses who, though not alive, are alive to
the poet and to the imagination, hence "the living dead."
(Stevens, however, after glossing the One and the sisterhood
as the muses, makes it clear that he prefers not to specify
them except as they are specified in the poem—see LWS,
pp. 297–298.) It is she among the muses with whom the poet
feels most intimate, whose works seem most tangible ("clear-
est bloom"). Considered as source of the creative spirit ("mother") rather than companion ("sister", I. 1) she is chief
among the other muses; and she is the object of his warmest
transcendental love. But she is not distant, exotic ("cloudy
silver"), nor a femme fatale ("venom of renown"), but simple,
as she is close and clear.

The "birth" in stanza two is that of our human conscious-
ness, which separates us from nature while leaving us in it, 16
so that, seeing so much of ourselves in nature, it comes to
seem to us a large and coarse image of ourselves ("Cross effigy
and simulacrum"). The "music summoned" (stanza 2, l. 1)
by this birth is art, which attempts to bridge the separation
between man and nature (compare, "From this the poem
springs: that we live in a place/ That is not our own and,
much more, not ourselves," "Notes toward a Supreme Fic-
tion," It Must Be Abstract, IV). Coming thus out of our "im-
perfections," no art renders more perfection than poetry. The
muse is referred to as "rare" because of the rarity (fine, un-
usual) of such perfection, but "kinded" because the more
perfect the poem laboriously wrought, the more of ourselves,
of the "near," the familiar, will be in it. The more the poem,
as our bridge to nature, retains of ourselves, the closer it
brings our selves to nature.

For in this effort to bridge the gap between the self and
nature (stanza 3), men so desire to retain as much of their
selves as possible that that art is most intense for them which
makes a point of the familiar, what they know (l. 3), that
meditation on the obscure (Riddel, p. 68, notes the pun on
"musing" here) most acute which grasps, through poetry
("As in your name"), what is familiar and certain ("sure") in
that unmitigated ("arrant") nature we live in. Thus here the
muse is referred to in terms of the familiar detail of nature
which yields a poetry that most resembles our own lives.

Yet, though poetry can proclaim the familiar, we would
not like it to be too literal. In our art ("feigning") reality
should be endowed with the interest that the imagination
give it ("the strange unlike"), which provides it with the
saving difference from reality without the imagination. (As
in Wordsworth, the imagination is to be cast over the ordi-
nary, in order to present it to the mind in an unusual way.)
To this end the muse must also be the exotic femme fatale, as
well as familiar and simple. She must give us that element
of unreality, the imagination, which makes reality so alluring.

"Peter Quince at the Clavier"
(CP, p. 89)

Peter Quince is the stage manager of the rustic actors in
A Midsummer Night's Dream. He is perhaps à propos as the
speaker of the poem in that, as he daydreams at the key
board, he is in a sense the stage manager of the imagination.
The poem is a flight of imagination that takes place as Peter
Quince plays, and one should note the high frequency of
musical terms used. It is like a key board impromptu in which
each of the four sections resembles a "movement" whose
metrical tempo helps set its mood.

As the player strikes the keys of the clavier (1), so the