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 ("devise") a return to the creative principle in life ("earthly mothers").

The argument, having established that earth is "all of paradise 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, returning to the sky," signifying harmonious union with the physical world as if it were divine, just as "our blood, commingling, 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 revery 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 concludes therefore with a description of a secular world, a "chaos" beyond rational order, "unsponsored, free" of the supernatural dominion of Jesus, an island inescapably separated by the "wide water" of time and space from the crucifixion. As in section II, the only possible felicity lies in response 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 darkness, 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 reality 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 particular 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 "Iffucan 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 ("clearest bloom"). Considered as source of the creative spirit ("mother") rather than companion ("sister," l. 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"), not a femme fatale ("venom of renown"), but simple, as she is close and clear.

The "birth" in stanza two is that of our human consciousness, 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 ("Gross 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 Fiction," *It Must Be Abstract*, IV). Coming thus out of our "imperfections," no art renders more perfection than poetry. The muse is referred to as "rare" because of the rarity (fine, unusual) of such perfection, but "kindred" 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 can 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 ordinary, 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 day dreams 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 (I), so the