

merely notes the imaginative relation that has been created in the body of the poem.

The final section begins with the kind of parabolic utterance that has often served in place of direct formulation throughout the poem. The blue and the white pigeons are abstract qualities representing different states of mind. The dark and the rose rabbis are also such abstract qualities, but the moods they represent are more specific. The former is analytic and reductive, and is that of youth.<sup>4</sup>

. . . Every day, I found  
Man proved a gobbet in my mincing world.

This is contrasted with the attitude developed in the poem, which is the attitude of middle age—the attitude of “Mon Oncle” of the title, “my uncle’s point of view.” It represents a willingness merely to note the psychological facts of love, as the poem does, without reducing them through an analysis of their transitory nature. “Fluttering things” refers to the blue and the white pigeons which, as different aspects of love, represent the attitudes toward love distinguished in the poem: that of youth, which is participating, active, and that of middle age, which is more reflective. Lines eight to eleven are a notation of the attitude of the poem—that love appears to be different from these different perspectives.

### “The Comedian as the Letter C” (CP, p. 27)

“Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” represents an extreme at which didactic content is unusually limited; “The Comedian as the Letter C,” on the contrary, is an argument couched in narrative. It is a poem that proceeds by logical discourse, from proposition to proposition modified to proposition further modified. It sets forth doctrine just as does the *Essay on Man*, though in form it is not expository, but narrative and comic: “not doctrinal/ In form though in design”

(VI, l. 73). In kind the narrative is, like *The Prelude*,<sup>5</sup> literary biography, the history of a poet’s mind—though the mind of the poet in question is that of the fictive Crispin, Stevens’ invention and mask—and the action of the narrative is a voyage and quest for knowledge which deals, like Wordsworth’s poem, with the loss of the imagination and the conditions in which it may be revitalized.

The subject of the poem includes the relation of a poet to his art but is not fundamentally that. Crispin’s aim is not merely to achieve accurate description of reality in poetry, but, rather, through accurate description of reality to establish satisfactory rapport with it. That is the point of the colony Crispin projects after arriving at his “new intelligence” (IV, l. 15), in which the inhabitants are to be the harmonious articulations of their environment. Hence the crucial propositions of the poem (variations on the initial “man is the intelligence of his soil”) turn on man’s relation to his environment, not on that of the poet to his art. The narrative, although its hero is appropriately a poet, is basically concerned with the poet as a type of imaginative man, and thus the subject is not quite, as Hi Simons puts it, the relation of the poet to his environment.<sup>6</sup> The denouement may be a defeat of the poet but it represents a reconciliation of the imagination to the quotidian and, therefore, the poem has a happy ending: “what can all this matter since/ The relation comes, benignly, to its end?” (VI, ll. 95–96).

“The Comedian as the Letter C” is conceived as thoroughly comic. Crispin is the comedian, the comic personage of the action. As the letter c, “merest minuscule” (that is, lower case letter), as he is described in the poem, he is both an abstraction representing the comic point of view and an example of comic destiny. (Stevens has also made a point on three different occasions of the c sounds recurring throughout the poem, apparently as a kind of comic emblem for Crispin—see LWS, pp. 294, 351–52, 778). He is a valet from Bourdeaux whose name derives from the comic valet of seventeenth-century French drama, and he is associated with a long and various tradition of the figure of the harlequin.<sup>7</sup> As

valet he is servant, knave to reality (I, l. 22), trying to divine its order and submit to its will; as servant, fit to play the comic role, he becomes the dupe of reality. But if servant, he is also freeborn, or the thane (I, l. 22), an apprentice seeking "the quintessential fact, the note/ Of Vulcan, that a valet seeks to own" (II, ll. 84-85); if comic, he is also the comic innocent, "the marvelous sophomore" (III, l. 86), like the Candide to whom he is at one point compared (V, l. 73), who learns by dint of experience, and who has in fact set out to learn.

. . . Hence it was,  
Preferring text to gloss, he humbly served  
Grotesque apprenticeship to chance event,  
A clown, perhaps, but an aspiring clown. (IV, ll. 88-91)

He is both dupe and philosopher, trying to "track the knaves of thought" (V, l. 81), and instead getting caught in the very reality he is trying to comprehend. This irony, treated as comedy, provides the poem with its perspective toward Crispin and his adventures.

The diction, too, is steadfastly comic. It makes use of absurd comparisons, either too ignoble, such as the world as a turnip (VI, l. 65), or pronouncedly too august, as in "His grand pronunciamento and devise" (VI, l. 8). Latin is employed for the irony that its gravity can afford:

. . . exit lex,  
Rex and principium, exit the whole  
Shebang. . . . (IV, ll. 5-7)

Elegance is intentionally pushed to the brink of preciosity: "the peach/ When its black branches came to bud, belle day" (IV, ll. 69-70), so that it calls attention to itself and sets a tone of both elegance and self parody at once. There is also exaggerated inelegance, as in the plum described as, "good, fat, guzzly fruit" (V, l. 33); and abrupt flatness of statement as in,

. . . earth was like a jostling festival  
Of seeds grown fat, too juicily opulent,  
Expanding in the gold's maternal warmth.  
So much for that. . . . (II, ll. 55-58)

In general there are so many unusual words, even for Stevens, that the text abounds in eccentricity, incongruity, and its surface becomes grotesque. It is worth noting how all this comic machinery permits communication of a mass of doctrine as Crispin's intellectual odyssey proceeds through proposition, theory, and idea. It is a strategy used to communicate a body of abstract thought in an imaginative form by a poet who, as seen in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," maintains a distinction between the communicative and imaginative functions of language.

That reality is subject to man's interpretation, that man discerns and formulates its laws, renders it intelligible, and in so doing determines its nature, is the initial proposition of the poem. "Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil." It is a proposition, like all the propositions in the poem and like all of Crispin's phases of thought, introduced in order to be tested, modified, and rejected by Crispin's experience, as the poem proceeds from formulation to reformulation like a Platonic dialogue, to its resolution. The proposition is stated and elaborated, but on a level of metaphor so sustained that it is necessary to concentrate the attention on the connection between the abstractions of metaphor and the thematic progress of the subject. Man is "the sovereign ghost" because with his intelligence he rules over "his soil," the physical world, but also because as an intelligence merely, he is cut off from the physical world, disembodied. He is its Socrates and musician, inquiring into and expressing its nature, "principium and lex," its first cause and its law. The figures describing man so conceived are comic, undercutting, belittling, from the greater to the lesser: "Socrates of snails," "lutanist of fleas," "wig," for head of things, "nincompated pedagogue." Crispin, the example of the proposition, is by the manner of his description made ridiculous. As example, he is put to the

test of experience in a setting calculated to reduce him still further.

The eye of Crispin, accustomed to homely objects and a landscape ordered by man (I, ll. 8–15) cannot fathom the sea, “inscrutable world,” and is overwhelmed. Setting out to inquire after answers, he discovers that there are even fewer at sea than on land (“One eats one paté” no matter where; it is no different even at sea: “even of salt”). His identity as one who assertively and swaggeringly inquires into the nature of reality and pronounces its meanings (I, ll. 20–28) is dissolved in the sea (I, l. 52). He had been verbose: “lutanist” of silent fleas, “bellowing,” the noisy “haw” of the quiet hum of things, “lexicographer” of “mute” nature (since he is a botanist, “greenhorns” is a generalized image for plants, here especially young plants, “maidenly” neophytes). Now he has no words to describe either himself or the reality that surrounds him,

Ubiquitous concussion, slap and sigh,  
Polyphony beyond his baton's thrust.

because its meaning is beyond him, its music (as opposed to that of pears and fleas) no longer follows the direction of his intelligence (I, ll. 29–36). The sea outspeaks him, but whether whispering (I, l. 41), or bellowing (I, ll. 66, 70–71), it is speech he cannot understand. His “verboseness” is stemmed in the sea. “On the clopping foot-ways of the moon/ Lay grovelling,” refers to moonlight shining on the waves and is in description of the intangible Triton, who as an exhausted personification of the sea is a character without tangible identity, as the sea is without meaning. Crispin is confronted with “the veritable ding an sich,” a reality about which he cannot generalize, which is impervious to abstract thought, and onto which he can neither impose meanings nor project his own identity. It is that alien reality, utterly nonhuman, that is represented by the star in “Nuances of a Theme by Williams,” which Stevens adjuces,

. . . shine like bronze,  
that reflects neither my face nor any inner part  
of my being, shine like fire, that mirrors nothing.  
(CP, p. 18)

And it is that reality of “Metaphors of a Magnifico,” which keeps resisting abstract thought and finally resolves itself in its particular details:

The first white wall of the village . . .  
The fruit trees. . . (CP, 19)

This is the world, as the title of the section puts it, without imagination, and reality so seen has for Crispin the nature and impact of revelation: “Crispin beheld and Crispin was made new” (I, l. 80). The sea salt paralyzed his spirit as if by frost, and the dead encrustation of the ideas he held melted coldly as if in winter, dissolving his older self (I, ll. 58–61. “Beetled,” I, 65, suggests, perhaps, the sun casting highlights on the “bouquets.”) The sea has destroyed an evasive and egocentric distortion of reality by the imagination:

The imagination, here, could not evade,  
In poems of plums, the strict austerity  
Of one vast, subjugating, final tone. (I, ll. 81–83)

The imagination must not evade, but direct itself to reality so that it may be perceived without “stale” preconceptions about it. It is because Crispin's revelation enables him to do this that the sea's destruction also brings “something given to make whole among/ The ruses that were shattered by the large.” (I, ll. 88–89).

In section II through part of III Crispin tests and rejects various modes of expression to accommodate his revelation. He rejects the commonplace sentimental and its imagery: sonnets addressed to the nightingale, the couplet written yearly to the spring, “The stride of vanishing autumn in a

park/ By way of decorous melancholy" (II, ll. 1-20). Simons correctly describes this as "a period in which Crispin regarded himself an intellectual and aesthetic *avant-gardiste*, rebelling against conventions, experimenting with poetic forms, and testing, elaborating, and beginning to exploit a new conception of the relation of art to life."<sup>8</sup> Now a freeman without preconceptions, empty ("sonorous nutshell"), destitute of abstract ideas about reality, his enlarged apprehension requires an expression more inclusive of the particulars of reality. Crispin has passed from the civilized park to the savage jungle: Yucatan represents a new subject matter with which he is confronted, a barbaric nature untamed by the civilized mind, that demands articulation. He responds by writing fables of an aesthetic quality that is "tough," of "the mint of dirt" (II, l. 35), so that he can get down to the reality of earth, that "soil" of which, at the outset, he seemed the intelligence (II, ll. 21-43). But the jungles of Yucatan lead Crispin to a realism effective only because its subject matter is by nature exotic. So "the fabulous and its intrinsic verse" (II, l. 44), are rejected with a down to earth "So much for that" (II, l. 58). Next, in the thunderstorm, as once in the sea, Crispin has a second germinal insight. In face of the storm, instead of "making notes" (II, l. 63) on the cathedral, Crispin the "annotator" (II, l. 75) takes shelter in it; but his experience there is not a religious one. If in the "shifting diaphanes" of the sea, "Triton incomplicate with that/ Which made him Triton," he perceived a reality whose matter is in flux and whose form is inconceivable, so in the thunderstorm he perceives the magnitude of an ultimate energy, "the span of force," which is the quintessential fact of reality in his new vision of it (II, ll. 83-84). It is this fact he now desires to express in speech (II, ll. 85-86).

. . . the thunder, lapsing in its clap,  
Let down gigantic quavers of its voice,  
For Crispin to vociferate again. (II, ll. 94-96)

In section III Crispin rejects what the moonlight represents. What it represents can best be known by understanding

how the image is used rather than by ascribing to it an *a priori* and rigid significance.<sup>9</sup> Stevens' poems do not employ symbols in this way. As in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," the image acquires meaning only as it functions in specific contexts. The image becomes a symbol by the accretion of its contexts, either in a single poem or, occasionally, in the body of Stevens' work, and this determines where its meaning may be sought by the reader. It is not only pointless but wrong to try to assign constant meanings to many of the recurrent images in his poetry. In his use of colors, for example, with the usual exception of blue, meaning is peculiar to each evocation.<sup>10</sup> It requires only common sense to understand the quality indicated by "Catches tigers/ In red weather" in "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" (CP, p. 66). Moonlight, then, represents a kind of vision of reality—in this case Carolina—that is imaginative (III, ll. 6-8), but sparsely productive, almost sterile (III, ll. 19-27), attractive (III, 30-39), but unclear (III, ll. 18 and 40), and if not an evasion of reality, then "A minor meeting, facile, delicate" (III, ll. 45-46). This is that fanciful view of reality described in parts of "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." The moonlight thoughts, "Like jades affecting the sequestered bride" (III, l. 33), are like the "bawds of euphony" of that poem, and their fellow illegitimates of the imagination, the "pimps of pomp" (OP p. 19) and the "fops of fancy" (CP, p. 16)—illegitimate because they evade, rather than direct themselves to, reality. Crispin oscillates between this state and that of his Yucatan experience in which he seeks a vision which includes a reality that is coarse but productive and energetic, not tuned to a limited and over-refined sensibility. The fancy here is not swept aside but put in its place in a hierarchy of the imagination. Crispin is like those philosophers in "Homunculus et la Belle Etoile" who allow themselves to be charmed by the star of ideal and unattainable beauty until they bathe their hearts in moonlight, knowing they can bring back hard thought later. Crispin then confronts the real Carolina, not the legendary Carolina of his mind. This Carolina represents prosaic reality, as opposed to

the exotica of Yucatan. Seeking the "relentless contact" (III, l. 30) he desires with reality, he tries to get down to the "soil" in order to grasp the "essential prose" (III, l. 89) of the commonplace (III, ll. 67-94).

Section IV, following from Crispin's experience in the preceding section, reformulates the poem's initial proposition to read: "his soil is man's intelligence." "The essential prose," the commonplace particulars of a world formerly falsified (III, l. 90) by sentimental, fanciful, and stale impositions of the intelligence, now becomes the determining factor in Crispin's vision of reality. The esthetic expression of this vision, the music of this reality, celebrates the "rankest trivia" (IV, l. 18), the more unaccommodating to esthetic expression, the better a test for both his vision and his esthetic (IV, ll. 16-24). Instead of man determining the nature of reality as in section I, the particulars of his world determine man's nature: "The natives of the rain are rainy men" (IV, l. 32). Man, in turn, becomes the voice and expression of his environment: "The man in Georgia waking among pines/ Should be pine-spokesman" (IV, ll. 52-53). Like the dress of the woman of Lhasa in "Anecdote of Men by the Thousand," his words are "an invisible element of that place/ Made visible" (CP, p. 52). The inhabitants of Crispin's colony are to compose poems that are accurate expressions of their environment and so live in harmony with it. Secular clerics ("Shrewd novitiates") would mediate—as clerics do—between experience and the understanding and expression of it, ensuring in the harmony of such compositions a harmonious relation between man and his physical environment. This is the "application" (IV, l. 45) for which Crispin strives in his projected colony. Lines 46-47 mean that Crispin now prefers the practical to the far-fetched and to that which is beautiful but useless. Crispin seeks to fix revelation in law, to ritualize it, to socialize it (IV, ll. 68-75).

But Crispin finds that the formularization and institution-alization of his perception of reality promotes the falsification of it that started him on his voyage (IV, ll. 76-88; 76-80 may be paraphrased, "These utopian prophecies, related in their

romanticism to regressions to his original sentimentality, contained in their spirit the same falsification which prompted Crispin to undertake his voyage.") Thus he forgoes ritual for "chance event" (IV, l. 90). For the secular man there is no final revelation which fixes the order of reality and predetermines his response to it through law and ritual. There may be a series of revelations, but their structure can only be the structure of his experience, not of an idea that orders it. What is revealed is that the last revelation is no longer sufficient. "The poet must get rid of the hieratic in everything that concerns him and must move constantly in the direction of the credible" (NA, p. 58). Rather than fitting the flow of reality into a predetermined order, the idea of that order must be reconstructed to accommodate "chance event." Reality must be progressively reapprehended, always with the awareness that reality exists beyond one's perception of it. There is the implication here that all ideas about reality are illusory, and interfere with direct, intuitive apprehension of it. The dreams we would impose on reality are monotonous because they depend on our insistent desires ("dreamers buried in our sleep"); they are not imaginings which might be realized, to our advantage, in reality (IV, ll. 92-95). Crispin therefore directs his attention to the particulars of reality exclusive of any theories about them:

All dreams are vexing. Let them be expunged.

But let the rabbit run, the cock declaim. (IV, ll. 98-99)

Here Stevens writes of Crispin that he preferred "text to gloss" (IV, l. 89). Elsewhere he wrote, "What the eye beholds may be the text of life. It is, nevertheless, a text that we do not write" (NA, p. 76). Between these two statements Crispin fluctuates. Each idea he hits upon to account for his experience turns out, upon being tested by his experience, to falsify it, to change it into something it was not. But Crispin does not want to fob off a bungled token of a work ("Trinket pasticcio;" the latter word means a bungled work in Italian), fanciful and insignificant.<sup>11</sup> He keeps returning to the text of

his experience for an accurate account of it: "veracious page on page, exact" (IV, l. 102). But he is to discover that experience is a text that cannot be reproduced but only glossed, not recaptured but only reinterpreted.

Can one man think one thing and think it long?

Can one man be one thing and be it long? (V, ll. 53-54)

With these rhetorical questions, Crispin (section V), rationalizes the "haphazard denouement" of his quest. It is haphazard because the soil—now "suzerain" (V, l. 20)—which he had once believed he dominated, later sought to interpret, and to whose commonplace reality he now wishes to direct his thought, itself deflects his thought and saps his will to make formulations about it (V, ll. 10-22). The purple of his imaginative speculations is taken care of by the requirements of the immediate quotidian (V, ll. 16-17). The pleasure ("carouse") his "soil" now gives him shames him into forming an attachment for it even as he domesticates it (V, ll. 20-23). As realist Crispin settles for the text of experience rather than the gloss:

The words of things entangle and confuse.

The plum survives its poems. It may hang

In the sunshine placidly, colored by ground

Obliquities of those who pass beneath,

Harlequined and mazily dewed and mauved

In bloom. Yet it survives in its own form,

Beyond these changes, good, fat, guzzly fruit. (V, ll. 27-33)

Words are only an approximation of the object seen from one point of view or another, as the plum is seen obliquely from changing points of view on the ground. They do not capture the full sensuous reality of the object which, like the plum, survives in its own form its metamorphoses in poetry. Thus it is direct experience that is reliable, and words about it "entangle and confuse." This passage (ll. 22-33, to be exact), in which Yvor Winters sees the substitution of experience for poetry,<sup>12</sup> is rather a declaration of respect for the

integrity of sensory apprehension. It is not that poems are pointless in face of plums, but that plums have their own existential integrity beyond language about them. The passage Winters calls a farewell to poetry (V, ll. 36-47) is rather Crispin's abnegation of tragic bombast over abandonment of his grandiose pretensions to founding a colony ("loquacious columns") that would institutionalize his esthetic and epistemological discoveries. The waning of Crispin's colonizing impulse is due to the exhaustion of his will by the quotidian (V, ll. 1-22):

. . . the quotidian saps philosophers

And men like Crispin like them in intent,

If not in will, to track the knaves of thought. (V, ll. 79-81)

Crispin is no philosopher. He concludes that if ideas about experience are confusing, then he will surrender to experience itself, satisfying himself in its daily flow (V, ll. 70-74). It does not follow that Crispin renounces poetry for experience as Winters says; that is not the subject here. Crispin renounces his overly ambitious speculation and his grandiose esthetic stratagems in favor of the commonplace of the quotidian. He can therefore forget about what "shall or ought to be" and settle for what is; if he were to write poetry it would not be about the former but the latter, about his experience of the quotidian.

Crispin submits to a quotidian that is benign, offering as it does the normal domestic fulfillments (V, ll. 58-77), and it normalizes Crispin's defeat with the implication that man struggles unwittingly to be so defeated. This is the note of "Last Looks at the Lilacs" (CP, p. 48), in which the young man is derided for his carping suppression of desire:

. . . say how it comes that you see

Nothing but trash and that you no longer feel

Her body quivering in the Floréal

Toward the cool night and its fantastic star,

Prime paramour and belted paragon,

Well-booted, rugged, arrogantly male,  
 Patron and imager of the gold Don John,  
 Who will embrace her before summer comes.

"Poor buffo," doomed victim of the intrigue of flesh and spring contrived for his own hapless but happy denouement. He is in the same way as Crispin a comic character. This is the doom, to paraphrase a much later poem of Stevens', of intelligent men in an unintelligible world (CP, p. 495). If reality is always beyond the intelligence, then formulations based on experience of it which is always in the past can never remain adequate, must constantly be reformulated. One's experience of reality is limited ("What is one man among so many men?" V, l. 51), and always changing ("Can one man be one thing and be it long?" V, l. 54). A man cannot, therefore, "think one thing and think it long."

Crispin, then, submits to reality, no longer choosing "from droll confect/ Of was and is and shall or ought to be" (V, ll. 4-5). (V, ll. 55-56 should be read: "The man who despised homely quilts now, despite himself, lies covered in quilts up to his head," reading "head" for "poll." Compare I, l. 11.) His final formulation is, "what is is what should be" (V, l. 57). That "is" is benign, since Crispin's poem, as Crispin's world, is comic, but also because it is given as the normal condition of an unextraordinary man, "yeoman and grub" (V, l. 74), with the normal satisfactions, domestic, personal, unassuming. The "blonde" of V, line 60, is "prismy" because she will break up the "one, vast, subjugating, final tone" (I, l. 83) of reality into the many meanings of domestic felicity—the one "tone" becomes a variety of sounds and colors in the description of Crispin's daughters. (I suppose "rumpling bottomness" is a pun referring to the newlyweds as they rumple their sheets with their bottoms; the shutters are cracked because the interior scene is not disconnected from the mood of the summer evening outside from which the crickets of V, ll. 68-69 watch as "custodians" in V, l. 89.) Crispin's quotidian "saps" as life saps, giving in return. While what it gives may of course be more or less, the indication here is that in normal

conditions it pays out ("exchequering") more ("a humped return," with a sly sexual reference to "rumpling bottomness") from its treasures than it takes (V, ll. 93-95).

The grandiose announcement and description of Crispin's "last deduction," his daughters (section VI), is humorous in tone partly because of the joke played on Crispin by the quotidian and his own nature. Defeat is turned into rout, and Crispin, the voyager, the seeker, is stopped by that which is of his own creation. He is stopped finally by his own fertility, parallel to that of the quotidian described in the preceding section. His cabin was "phylactery" because it contained the text of his experience, now displacing his projected poetic texts (a phylactery contains texts from the Torah).<sup>18</sup> A "palankeen" is a litter for carrying someone; the "vexing palankeens" of VI, l. 17 are probably cribs. A "halidom" (VI, l. 20) is, in an archaic usage, a sanctuary. These lines are humorous in the high spirits of a happy hymn "bubbling felicity in cantilene" (melody, VI, l. 3), in celebration of Crispin's fertility. The defeat is a fulfillment. Crispin sought to discover a way of regarding reality without falsification, and on that epistemology to base an esthetic by which he might accurately sing of man's relation to reality. He found that reality impossible to apprehend except as it was immediately experienced, and so was forced to surrender to immediate experience: the quotidian, the family and return to social nature (VI, l. 13), and his daughters. Now, that harmonious relation with reality that he hoped to discover and to express in poetry is created beyond and despite Crispin's will and within his immediate experience through his daughters, "his grand pronunciamento and devise" (VI, l. 8). I see nothing to indicate that Crispin's daughters are "without doubt the seasons" (Kermode, p. 48): they are merely daughters, "four mirrors blue/ That should be silver" (VI, ll. 59-60), four mirrors of Crispin's self that stir his imagination instead of merely reflecting it. Nassar (p. 170) contends that the daughters are poems; rather, they are taking the place of poems. They have "stopped" (VI, l. 25) Crispin's ambitions, but with a greater complexity (VI, ll. 29-31) of imaginatively

stimulating experience than he would have expected. Riddel (p. 101) pertinently observes that "chits" can mean both sprouts and "vouchers for debts incurred"; thus, "the cost of living an every day life" (p. 100). The daughters represent, as consummation of his experience with reality, the harmony with it that he sought. They are the answers to his questions. Thus his tale of quest comes to its end,

. . . muted, mused, and perfectly revolved  
In those portentous accents, syllables,  
And sounds of music coming to accord  
Upon his lap. . . . (VI, ll. 77-80)

The end of his journey finds Crispin back in the same domestic scene where he began, and he is left confronting the world, the same "insoluble lump" (VI, l. 70), admitting as fatalist that the course of his experience, since it is beyond his intelligence, is beyond his control. He sought to see the world beyond imagination ("purple"), and finishes by confronting the world in terms of the consequences of the domestic imagination—his daughters. He has been a comic character, struggling clownishly to come to terms with a world which is as indifferent to his struggle as it is unchangeably benign. Since this is a comic poem, it must, for one thing, have a happy ending. Even "if the anecdote/ Is false" and its reasoning fruitless (VI, ll. 83-85), though Crispin only proves "what he proves/ Is nothing" (VI, ll. 94-95), "what can all this matter since / The relation comes, benignly, to its end?" (VI, ll. 95-96). Happiness is more important than the formulations by which we try to achieve it. (VI, l. 93 should be read: "making quick cures out of the unruliness of life." In the preceding line, "sequestering the fluster" means trying to remove the confusion.) The journey, nevertheless, has not been pointless. He has come to accord with that same world with which he had been in discord at the outset. It is not the world that has changed, it is Crispin who has become adjusted to it. But it is a new adjustment based on a reappréhension of his reality. Thus happily may each man's story end.

## "On the Manner of Addressing Clouds" (CP, p. 55)

The clouds are "grammarians" because they elicit speech from men as a grammarian, or philologist, might elicit meaning from a text. They submit meekly to their transitory nature, to their gloomy rendezvous with death ("mortal rendezvous"), and in so doing elicit from men that splendor of speech ("pomps"), that poetry whose power to exalt (a power which, like music, seems to affect the spirit rather than the ear), continues to sustain us. The clouds are "Gloomy" (l. 1): the utterances of the most pessimistic ("Funest," portending death or evil) thinkers and the feelings they evoke are elicited by the clouds, are "the speech of clouds." This speech of their march through the sky recurs as the random ("casual") recurrence of the clouds (keeping "the mortal rendezvous," l. 2) evokes such thought and feeling in their progress throughout the seasons, which are "stale" because they are repetitious, and "mysterious," ultimately, as part of our problematic universe. Such pessimistic utterances as that of the "Funest philosophers" are the poetry of appropriate ("meet") resignation to the nature of the world; this kind of poetry is "responsive" to that nature of which the clouds are part, it is this kind of poetry that provides us spiritual sustenance in face of that nature. This, therefore, is the kind of poetry the clouds should encourage and augment if, in the random, meaningless heavens ("drifting waste"), there is going to be any meaning, which is to say any human meaning, along with the meaningless ("mute bare") magnificence of the sun and moon.

## "Of Heaven Considered as a Tomb" (CP, p. 56)

How are we to interpret the dead: men who, since god himself is dead, walk in "the tomb of heaven"—the night sky which is merely sky—with the stars as their lanterns,<sup>14</sup> the