

heard? Does one find peace and perfection ("philosopher's honeymoon") on the dump, and, since one does not, would the mind create such an imperfect reality for itself? One does not, conscious of all the trash rejected by reality, utter more sentimental trash that will in turn be rejected ("*aptest eve*"). One does not try to project mysterious and euphonious nonsense ("*invisible priest*") onto reality in face of the unpleasant cries of the blackbirds ("blatter of grackles"). One does not "eject" the trash of stale images and "pull the day to pieces" to get at its reality while maintaining a precious estheticism ("*stanza my stone*"). How does one find one's way back to the place where one first heard about "the truth," here apposite with "The the," the predication of that which is, the particulars of reality itself.

"Connoisseur of Chaos" (CP, p. 215)

This poem makes use of a mock pedanticism which Stevens sometimes employs as a stratagem in his most logically discursive poems (compare, for example, "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas," CP, p. 252).

The poem begins with two paradoxical propositions. An order imposed on reality distorts it and thus is a "disorder" in that it denies the order of reality as it exists; on the other hand, "A great disorder" like the great disorder of reality, has an order inherent in itself, the order, simply, of that which is. The poem provides illustrations to the effect that the two initial propositions are actually different statements of the same idea.

The second section presents three seemingly paradoxical illustrations. The greenness of spring is blue, the color usually associated in Stevens with the imagination, because the burgeoning of spring stimulates the imagination, and it is also like a burgeoning of the imagination. This is followed by two apparent matters of fact which, in a parallel way, seem paradoxical. Since such paradoxes are merely verbal and in reality resolve into simple matters of fact—since, despite

their seeming self contradiction, or disorderliness, in life such things go on as a matter of routine, there must be, in reality, as opposed to the mind's impositions on it, a law by which opposites are dialectical and resolve into "essential unity." Such a law is pleasant to contemplate, esthetically pleasant in the same way as is a particular in a painting. (Jean Hippolyte Marchand, 1883–1941, was a painter, lithographer, and illustrator who did illustrations for books by Valéry, Claudel, and Jammes.)

The third section begins with the old religious rationale for such unity, but considered only as a dead option. Life and death were a "pretty contrast," esthetically pleasant, when they could be resolved in the idea of god and its corollary idea of immortality. But the facts of contemporary life are too difficult to be handled by a closed, rigid mentality ("squamous," covered with scales, sometimes with reference to a kind of armor and, also, part of the bone structure of the temple), especially such a rigid religious mentality as the "bishops" might exemplify. And yet, beyond the comprehending mind, relation between such opposites as life and death—that is, order—does make itself felt, ephemerally, ambiguously, but with expanding relevance.

Section four works variations on the initial propositions. An old order, like that of the "bishops' books," is an imposition on reality that distorts it. However, this, though true, is trivial, since it is just one fact among all the unrelated facts of which reality consists. B also returns to the initial proposition B. The facts of the weather, the seasons, comprise a great disorder. Should this disorder of the weather, the seasonal cycle, this natural disorder ever become fixed in a stable, powerful, old order ("Plantagenet"), it would be a violent order, and thus would be a disorder of reality as it is. This leads back to the initial statement of B: reality as it is in itself comprises an order; which in turn is to say that any imposition on that order of things as they are would be a violent order and therefore disorder, part of the great disorder which is an order. Thus A and B, as was stated at the outset, are one. These ideas are not meant for academic considera-

tion, like objects in a museum. They are meant for the thoughtful man in his everyday life ("chalked/ On the sidewalk") to help him resolve the problems of that life, such as the opposites, life and death, considered in nonreligious terms. The man who takes thought (section V) can see unity in the complexities of reality.

"The Sense of the Sleight-of-hand Man"
(*CP*, p. 222)

The felicitous spiritual events in one's life occur fortuitously ("Occur as they occur"). Felicitous events also occur fortuitously in nature, such as the chance composition of clouds, houses, and rhododendrons, or as the way the clouds change, shape and color as the wind contorts them in the sky. Nature is in this sense a sleight-of-hand man, bringing things about that one least expects. Who could have predicted the movement of the bluejay? In a parallel manner, the poet here improvises metaphors to describe nature: sun rays become spokes of a wheel. The reality of the sun, here captured in the improvised metaphor of the wheel, outlives man's myths about it—the myths die, but the sun keeps rolling around again; and, in another improvised metaphor for the sun, the "fire eye" outlives the gods men derive from it. The poet shifts by association with the word "eye" to another improvised metaphor. As with nature, so with the mind; the operation of the imagination is fortuitous and unpredictable—its metaphors, for the pink-eyed dove and pines that make wind sounds like cornets, the imaginary island, occur as they occur. It may be, therefore, that only "the ignorant man," whose mind works without preconception and without premeditation, thus in a way parallel to nature's operation, in a natural way—it may be that only a man with such a mind can apprehend nature in such a way as to become one with it, "to mate his life with life," that life of nature which is "sensual" and beyond the mind, therefore unavailable to systematic thought or intellectual preconception. (The realm

of nature is to be joined as a "pearly spouse," in a sensual marriage, not in theory.) The "life" of nature is, even in winter when most barren and static, "fluent" like the mind of the poet in this poem which flows from one improvised and unexpected image to another in order to capture it.

"Of Modern Poetry" (*CP*, p. 239)

Modern poetry concerns itself with the mind as the mind tries to discover belief that will enable it to confront the contemporary world.³⁴ Playing on the word "act" in the first line, the poem goes on to develop the metaphor of a play. When the world we know was based on stable tradition, the mind did not have to search for belief: since the culture was stable, one merely had to repeat what was known. But then the whole situation changed and the traditional past became nothing more than a memory, a memento of a time gone by ("souvenir"). Modern poetry cannot be of that dead past, but rather must be of the present, "living." It has to speak to the people of the present in their own language; it has to meet their needs; it has to consider such things as war, and discover how the mind can confront them. Since the historical environment, the "theatre," has changed, the imagination must find a new artistic vehicle to contain our modern experience, poetry must "construct a new stage" within the "theatre" of our environment. On that stage, in that art, poetry must be like an actor whose impulse to act can never be satisfied; here, however, the act is that of the mind as it continually meditates the words which are an exact expression of the mind, words which have the right sound to the "ear of the mind," and which compose, therefore, apt modern poetry. The "invisible audience" of contemporaries should, in fact, find such poetry so apt that it will seem, in listening to it, that it is listening to itself. In creating through his expression the perfect expression of his audience, the poet unites their feeling with his and the feelings of both become identical. The "actor" is the imagination, thinking