

cluding the mind, that from which the human starts, and to which it must come back. It includes space itself; it is, for the mind, the gate to the enclosure of reality; it is the exterior fact which day illumines, and the imaginative data which night encourages: the pleasurable creations of the imagination ("midnight-minting fragrances"), including such hymns in praise of the rock as this one, realized in an intense state of the imagination, as in a dream ("vivid sleep").

"The River of Rivers in Connecticut"
(CP, p. 533)

"The River of Rivers in Connecticut" develops Stevens' idea of the nature of existence. The title does not locate the river, so much as it indicates that it flows through Connecticut, as well as every place else. Rather, the river is "this side of Stygia," this side of obliteration. Stevens explained the description of the third line of the first stanza as follows: "This refers to the distortion of trees not growing in conditions natural to them and not to houses deprived of a setting of trees. The look of death is the look of the deprivation of something vital" (Poggioli, p. 185). The river, on the contrary, is vital: it does not flow mechanically to a destination, but rather it is its "mere flowing" that is desirable, "a gayety," that is itself an end. Therefore no ghost, or "shadow," walks on its banks, for it is the river of life, not of death. Like Styx, this river is "fateful": it is as impossible to escape the flow of existence as it is to escape death. No agency, like Charon, the "ferryman," is required to lead us into its current, since all things, including Charon if he existed, are by nature propelled by the current's force. The river is not an abstract essence of things, but consists of the tangible reality of common objects, such as "The steeple at Farmington," and the town of Haddam, which is described as if it were a fluent part of the "flashing" river ("shines and sways"). Hence, it is called "the third commonness with light and air," the common reality which the atmosphere of light and air contains. The

river is, furthermore, a "curriculum," or a running merely, without object or qualification; it is simply an energy, "a vigor"; it is, finally, not the idea of the river, but the localized manifestation of that idea as here in Connecticut, "a local abstraction," an abstraction that exists only in the concrete. Since it has no identity except in its local and concrete manifestations, it is "an unnamed flowing" which, however, contains in it space and the changes that occur therein, as with the seasons, and the mixture of knowledge and belief, or "folk-lore," that we derive through sensation. It is like a river which flows to no destination, as a sea flows into nothing else, because there is nothing else besides it.

"The Course of a Particular" (OP, p. 96)

"The Course of a Particular" has been called by Yvor Winters one of Stevens' "greatest poems—perhaps his greatest."⁵³ But he notes that whereas in the original appearance in *Hudson Review* (Vol. IV, No. 1, Spring, 1951) the next to last line read "final finding of the ear," in *Opus Posthumous*, as a result of a typographical error, "ear" was printed as "air." He concludes of the poem: "In its first appearance it is comprehensible and deeply moving. In its second appearance the conclusion evaporates into vague sentiment and a masterpiece is destroyed." Samuel French Morse has confirmed this correction as well grounded.⁵⁴ The "particular" in question is the sound of the wind in the leaves, and its "course" consists of the series of modifications in meaning that it undergoes in the mind of the observer who speaks the poem. Although it is a wintery day on which the leaves make a mournful sound, its emptiness is lessened by the shades and shapes of winter scenery. But as one listens to the cry of the leaves, without projecting one's feelings into their sound, or into the winter scene ("One holds off and merely hears the cry"), one becomes increasingly isolated from the landscape. It is no longer a question of whether the wintery scene seems more or less like nothingness, for it becomes progressively plainer as the

poem proceeds that the landscape exists apart from the ego, disconnected from the ego's feelings about it. Thus, though the sound of the leaves seems to indicate that it is part of a brisk activity ("It is a busy cry"), it is nevertheless a sound that concerns someone other than the listener. Though one may hold, or, at least, repeat the idea that the ego is involved in the rest of existence, it is difficult, listening to the sound of the leaves, to feel thus involved. It requires an increasing effort to project the concerns of the ego into this scene, to feel that one is part of it. Instead of a connection with the rest of existence, a sense of "being part," one feels the vitality of an irresistible given, "life as it is" without regard to the concerns of the ego. Since the cry of the leaves occurs without regard to the concerns of the ego, it signifies neither the presence of divinity communicating itself to man through nature ("divine attention"), nor an ephemeral evocation of a more than human ideal ("the smoke-drift of puffed-out heroes") read into the sound of the wind, nor any sound that can be construed in human terms. It is the cry of leaves that, without fantasy, cannot be interpreted as being anything other than what they are ("that do not transcend themselves"), that signify nothing beyond the sound they make ("the final finding of the ear"), beyond their physical reality ("the thing/ Itself"). Since the leaves signify nothing beyond their physical reality, their sound not only does not concern the listener, but has absolutely no meaning in human terms, and so "concerns no one at all." The poem, then, is about the discovery of an absolute reality beyond the mind. As one becomes isolated from the landscape, the landscape takes on increasingly the character of an indifferent, alien reality. The ego must be projected into reality for reality to be involved in its concerns, and as the ego recedes, both the nature of reality and its indifference become more evident.

"Reality Is an Activity of the Most August Imagination" (*OP*, p. 110)

"The Most August Imagination" is that of reality itself. The "big light of last Friday night" was that of the moon mentioned in the final line. The night was not one of a traditional and outworn artifice, such as might be seen in Vienna or Venice—it was not a traditional reality that has come to an end, static, like an artifact from a glassworks, but a reality strongly in process, on the forward edge of time, as the evening star marks the revolution of the earth. It has the strength of splendor and magnificence (not merely their appearance as in Vienna or Venice), a "glory" that is felt in the self ("a glittering in the veins") as the landscape emerges out of the darkness toward the car, moves through the field of vision, and dissolves behind, either in the distance, or in the change of the scenery, or into nothingness, as it passes from that immediate apprehension in the present by which we perceive existence itself. These "transformations" are "visible": it is reality itself, not the imagination, that creates these metamorphoses. Reality approaches, silvery in the light of the moon, at first not clearly discerned, and, as we are on the point of capturing its substance, dissolves away into nothingness. The landscape, reality, is something that surges toward us as we move through it, and recedes away from us—the "solid" is "insolid," a process rather than something static. "Reality Is an Activity" that, in its fluidity, resembles the fluidity of the imagination ("moonlight") in its metamorphoses. This fluidity ("lake") is composed not of water or air, but of reality itself.

"Solitaire under the Oaks" (*OP*, p. 111)

The only possible difficulty of the statement itself in this poem is in lines six and seven: "One knows at last what to think about// And thinks about it without consciousness." This, obviously, does not mean that one is unconscious of