

stimulating experience than he would have expected. Riddell (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

ghosts of our human comedy of life? Do they, within the cold of death, believe that they wander around and around the sky, freed from death, looking for the kind of heaven they had expected? Or does their death ("That burial"), confirmed by our experience ("pillared up each day") as being no more than the door and passage of the spirit to mere nonexistence, foretell to us at night, when we are inclined to worry about the nature of death, our own death: "the one abysmal night," when, with the extinction of our consciousness, we will no longer see the stars in the night sky? Make an outcry among these "dark comedians," who mimic, in death, the human comedy of life, call them for an answer from their cold heaven (Élysée) of the night sky, of the tomb. That they will not answer is our answer.

"The Emperor of Ice-Cream" (CP, p. 64)<sup>15</sup>

The muscular figure with whom the poem opens is a kind of pleasure master: he produces "big cigars"; he makes tempting food (whipping "concupiscent curds"—this is close enough poetic approximation of ice-cream churning to lead us to conclude that this is the "Emperor" himself); he is powerful ("muscular"); even the verse here, especially in line three, is given over to the pleasure of sound, to the fun of the alliteration which is, then, not merely gratuitous word play. The poem, in other words, begins by summoning up the king of pleasure. Moreover, the description of the women to be present suggests that they are ladies of pleasure—"the wenches dawdle." Here, however, a new note is introduced, that of the impoverished commonplace, even common: the women are not to dress up as for any special occasion; flowers are to be brought, but, with insistent casualness, they are to be wrapped in "last month's newspapers." (Stevens says of the words "concupiscent curds" that "they express the concupiscence of life, but, by contrast with the things in relation to them in the poem, they express or accentuate life's destitution"—LWS, p. 500.) Let us not try to make a special

occasion, let us not try to veil the ordinary quality of this event: let the seeming quality of things yield to the way they actually are ("Let be be finale of seem"). The only extraordinary thing in this occasion is to be pleasure, for pleasure is the only power we will recognize to govern us: "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream." Pleasure is the only force that has dominion over the commonplace.

In the second stanza pleasure is again juxtaposed with the common. From the cheap dresser ("deal" is a cheap kind of wood), in depressingly ill repair, take the sheet embroidered with fantail pigeons (LWS, p. 340) and cover her with that which she had once enjoyed decorating. Here we recognize that the occasion is a kind of wake, at which death, too, is treated as something commonplace, and at which only pleasure can give relief from that fatal commonplace to which we are all reduced. Thus the corpse is covered with the decorative sheet. If the feet stick out they only serve to affirm the common fact of physical death. There is no more to death than this, no separation of the soul, no supernatural myth. The lamp, with its ordinary light, confirms as with the seal of the commonplace this common fact. Our only resort from it is to pleasure.

"Sunday Morning" (CP, p. 66)

In "Sunday Morning" the poet conducts a meditation through the woman whose mind is the scene, so to speak, of the meditation, resolving the questions that she raises. Unlike Stevens' later meditative poems, however, this one presents a cohesive argument rather than a series of reflections. The blank verse and the diction have little of the extravagant virtuosity of "The Comedian as the Letter C" and "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" and, as a result, the poem is itself less idiosyncratic. The occasion of the poem is the hour for church. But the setting is one of sensual comfort, "complacencies of the peignoir," which dispels the holiness of the hour that ordinarily reminds of Christ's sacrifice. From the