

whose critical theory Stevens may have been familiar, though Stevens has insistently denied that he had the critic in mind.²² It is, in any case, a name appropriate to a Caribbean scene. After the singing stopped and they turned from the sea toward the town, the lights in the harbor, tilting on the masts of the fishing boats, seemed to order the sea and the night as it fell, giving them, as the song had given the seascape before, a particular emotional tone. The imagination, through the song the woman sang, has cast its spell on the scene (“enchanting”), “Arranging” it, making it responsive to the feelings (“deepening”). It is our “rage for order” (“Blessed” because it makes the world meaningful) which thus, through the imagination, enchants reality; it is that which impels the poet (“maker”) to compose poems of reality (“of the sea”), of the evanescent (“dimly starred”) entries into the kind of desirable experience of reality just described (“fragrant portals”), and of ourselves and our “origins” (in terms, probably, of tracing our human identity), in more spiritual definitions (“ghostlier demarcations”) and in more acute poetry (“keener sounds”).

“Evening without Angels” (*CP*, p. 136)²³

There is no reason for a picture of the world with the supernatural addition of angels hovering miraculously in midair, playing their heavenly music. Nor should the poet, who helps to create our picture of the world, conduct, help to create, this music of the eternal. “Air is air,” it has no reality beyond itself. It is empty, but filled with light (“glitters”); it is a desirable emptiness, the element in which we live. The music that we find there is not that of the angels, but our own: the poetry in which we attempt to define ourselves, a means to realize more acutely our own poorly realized (“unfashioned”) human spirit. Further, that light of reality which sustains the angels (“fosters,” also in the sense of sustaining something not of its own nature, fostering offspring not its own), and

which creates their adornments as “coiffeur” and “jeweller”—was it not made for men, rather than angels? The supernatural is an imaginative projection of the human. Men who were sad about their own mortality created angels from the light which illumines reality, and from their imagination (the “moon,” often, but not always, associated with the imagination in Stevens) made up the idea of the soul (“attendant ghosts”), which would continue living after death and lead them “back to angels” in heaven (in a kind of substitute return to that reality of the sunlight from which the angels were made.) But we are of the nature of the sun, of the real, and not of night, of the moon and the imagined meanings of night (“pointed” probably in the sense that night makes its own peculiar points, meanings). We make poetry that expresses our harmony (“an accord”) with the enduring manifestations of that reality (“antiquest sounds of air”) by repeating, in our poems, what we find in it. Yet, though we repeat those manifestations of reality in our poems, they are to begin with native to us, in our own language, are natural expressions of our selves. We are of the nature of the reality we imitate, and it is of ours. Its light, which encases us, crystallizes and forms our thoughts and desires which are then satisfied by reality itself: thus, “desire for day” is satisfied by dawn, for rest, by nightfall. The peace of evening (“rest and silence”) is a transition to the slower tempo of night and its emotion-filled (“seething”) minor key. This is the best time to confront reality, at night when there is little interference or distraction. The night, the earth are best bare of the supernatural, bare of everything but ourselves and what is familiar to us under the “arches” of the sky and its stars (“spangled air”). The stars (“fire and fire”) then seem to be making a rhapsodic music to which we respond aptly (“a true response”) with our own voice, our own emotion-filled music demanding expression (“great within us”). This is the appropriate moment for us to use our imagination, represented by the moon, as we compose our poems of bare reality rather than of the supernatural reality of angels.