

what one thinks about, but that one is unconscious of the act of thinking, because the thought itself is so absorbing. The poem says that when one is absorbed in a card game one forgets everything but the principles of the game, including one's surroundings, and even the cards themselves. In this state one escapes from fact to meditation, the contemplation of "pure principles." So absorbed in the contemplation of principle, one is "completely released" from the pressure which the facts of reality exert on the mind. This poem, then, represents a radical experience in meditation. It demonstrates a statement Stevens made about the function of poetry in one of his essays:

. . . how is it possible to condemn escapism? The poetic process is psychologically an escapist process. The chatter about escapism is, to my way of thinking, merely common cant. My own remarks about resisting or evading the pressure of reality mean escapism, if analyzed. (NA, p. 30.)

The point of the experience described in the poem is "release," and though it is achieved through contemplation of principle, the principle is unimportant so long as it is instrumental in bringing about this release. What is desired is a state of mind, a psychological equilibrium without any particular intellectual content, in which one is relieved of the pressures of reality. (Compare the beginning of the poem, "Artificial Poupations," *OP*, p. 112: "The center that he sought was a state of mind,/ Nothing more.")

"Local Objects" (*OP*, p. 111)

The word, "local" in "Local Objects" is used in the sense in which it is opposed to central. In this poem it is in contrast with "foyer" which, in French, means the hearth, the center of the home. Thus, the subject of the poem was a spirit without a center, or, better, without a central focus, a guiding idea or belief. Knowing this, he knows that things that can

be valued without reference to such a central ideal, "local objects," are more precious than things that must be so referred, the "objects of home" valuable with reference to the hearth as the center of the life lived there. Such "local objects" are the precious things in a world that has no "foyer," no central focus or belief, a world, furthermore, that since it has no such belief has no tradition ("remembered past") that is alive to the present ("a present past"), and that has no ideal on which the present may form the future ("a present future, hoped for in present hope"). In such a world valuable things occur at random, not by provenance of an order (compare "July Mountain," *OP*, p. 114); hence, they are not anywhere "present as a matter of course," and there are few that by nature belong to "that sphere," the world without central belief. These few things were to him the important things for which, since they were important, fresh names would suggest themselves as the older ones grew stale, as if by describing them he could catch them in final form ("make them") in order to preserve them. These things that are valuable in themselves include that which is discovered by insight, and unifications or harmonizations of the feelings. In other words, the intrinsically valuable things are fortuitous, since there is no ideal beyond the ego by which value may be inferred. They come without being sought, "of their own accord," because, though desirable, the ideal conditions of whose fulfillment they are reflections are unknown in the absence of a central focus, a belief: "he desired without knowing quite what." These insights and moods were the only manifestations of the ideal, "the classic, the beautiful," that he knew. They were that ideal state of mind, "that serene," that he had always been approaching as if it were an absolute ideal that could be established objectively, on the basis of the fact of reality, rather than on that of the imaginative or sentimental, or "romance." It is this "serene" that he has always desired, and that he now treats as the only possible ideal.