

beneath the foliage as a metaphor for reality is common in Stevens; see, for example, "The Rock" *CP*, p. 525.) This is reality seen without the imagination, or, rather, reality known so plainly that the knowledge seems absolute and the imagination cannot act upon it, an "inert savoir." In this state of mind the vital connection between the ego and reality has been lost. The imagination, which makes that connection, cannot vitalize or give value to reality; it cannot, in other words, incorporate it into the ego. Reality therefore seems empty, lifeless, a "blank cold." This experience has not been brought about merely by a change in reality, since, if it had been, the cause of its accompanying "sadness" would be clear. The seasonal change has stimulated, but has not determined, this state of mind which primarily concerns not the sadness of autumn, but the psychological fact of depression, which autumn has provoked. The sense of reality in this state of mind is described in images of fallen splendor, dilapidation, and futility. In them the "adjective" (l. 5) so difficult to choose has been found. The "absence of the imagination" has literally been imagined in the poem, and, captured in the poem, the "plain sense" of reality is no longer alienated from and inert to the ego. Again, nothing in reality has changed, but the state of mind has changed in describing reality in a certain way. The case is now put that it was necessary to grasp the plain sense of reality, which, though it is still described as a wasted scene, is now called "The great pond." This is reality "without reflections" of the ego, desolate, existing beyond the imagination, but which is the base to which the imagination must return, and which it must incorporate. It is the gap between the ego and this alien reality, which, driven by the anguish described in the first three stanzas, the imagination must span.

### "Looking across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly" (*CP*, p. 517)

The body of this poem is discounted as one of "the more irritating minor ideas/ Of Mr. Homburg" because it is put forth as a fantastic (see stanza 13) though interesting speculation, and not as a final formulation. (Mr. Homburg's speculation has been related to Emerson and the Transcendentalists by way of Concord, and his name, suggesting such puns as Hamburg-humbug, to that movement's German background.) The thought, developed through an analogy between the mind and nature, is that the world is itself "A pensive nature" (stanza 3), a meditation of which the mind is part, and that, conversely, the mind partakes of the "mechanical" (stanza 3) quality of nature, behaving like a natural process rather than an entity with volition (stanza 11). Variations of the same idea are developed elsewhere in the late poems in connection with Ulysses (see "The World as Meditation," *CP*, p. 520, ll. 10-11, "The Sail of Ulysses," *VI, OP*, p. 102, and the two poems which derive from the latter, "Presence of an External Master of Knowledge," *OP*, p. 105, and "A Child Asleep in its Own Life," *OP*, p. 106). In this poem the idea is developed from the observation that as the mind excludes objects from its consciousness, so does the sun alter the natural world through its daily changes of light or, possibly, through gradual seasonal change (stanza 2). Therefore, the operation of nature may be like the process of thought, the world may be of "A pensive nature," except that this process of thought would be independent of man's "ghost," or spirit, would not be the product of man's aspirations like his literature and his gods, would be "mechanical" and so without reference to aspiration or choice, and thus, indifferent to man, it would be "slightly detestable" (stanzas 3 and 4). It is in any case true that we live in a somewhat alien element beyond our formulations about it, in which we are not so much at home as we are in our formulations ("that which we do for ourselves"). Reality is no longer determined for us by our assertion of a human version of it ("one of

the masculine myths we used to make"); instead, reality has a spontaneous and formless character, like the flight of the swallow. It consists, for us, of what we assimilate in knowledge and feeling from the sensory data we receive; it is what we perceive spontaneously from without ("the tumult of integrations") as physical beings beyond the realm of mysticism; and it includes thought, which is described as a natural process partaking of the character of the total natural process, "A sharing of color and being part of it," a bodily function that is like a function of the weather, a movement within the general movement of creation, a realization ("discovery") sharing in its general realization, and a change sharing in its total change. This particular afternoon looks like a source of man's spirit (and so is "Obscurest parent, obscurest patriarch"), because it has the appearance of meditating in its own quiet and tranquility. Just as natural processes are like thought, so, conversely, is thought like a natural process. Like the changes of the sun or the wind, thought is a response to changes in the physical world, and our expressions of thought (stanza 12) reflect those changes. A fresh mind willing to consider possibilities in far-fetched ideas, "A new scholar replacing an older one," considers this speculation, "this fantasia," seriously. In it he looks for a description of the human spirit "that can be accounted for" rationally rather than through the mysteries of the supernatural or the metaphysical, and in Mr. Homburg's speculation he finds that the spirit can be accounted for as a manifestation of the natural world, as a part of it, and as a response to it. Crude physical laws result in the integration we call mind, which, since it is only an extreme consequence of those same crude laws, makes but a show of being qualitatively different from them, "an affectation of mind." The spirit is therefore a reflection of an excess or affectation of nature, a "mannerism," a reflection of the "blunt laws" of nature being carried to an extreme: "A glass aswarm with things going as far as they can." Thus, if one carries out the thought, the mind is entirely the consequence of nature, and therefore, though it

may be somewhat alienated from nature (stanzas 4 and 5), can never be completely so.

### "Long and Sluggish Lines" (CP, p. 522)

The poet's mood corresponds to the winter season. His feelings are sluggish, his sensibility is barren. In his old age he has seen the things in the landscape he observes so many times before that they seem without interest, meaningless. The trees seem sad, the sound they make in the wind seems monotonous. At this point an opposition is introduced into the poem that breaks through this monotony. The poet imagines the sound of the trees in the wind, their "uproar," as an attempt to talk down a contradiction. He speculates that this contradiction might be the yellow on the side of a house that introduces a note of gaiety into the sad, monotonous landscape; or perhaps it is the first embryonic signs of spring, spring's "pre-personae," nascent, effervescent, evanescent, and "issant," the French suffix *ing* (as in "florissant"), implying process: the "first fly" of the coming season, appearing like a comic infant (but "infanta," an infant who will grow up to be, in another season, a ruler, as in Spanish royalty) against the tragic backdrop of barren winter, the first blooming of an early spring flower ("forsythia"), the first signs of bloom in the still bare magnolia, a hint of belief in the mind of the poet, as if belief, like the burgeoning of spring, were part of an organic process occurring in response to a change in the environment. The poet apostrophizes himself as "Wanderer," because in winter's "pre-history," before such changes have occurred, his mind is aimless; the life of the season has not yet begun, and correspondingly, the poem, the response to the seasonal change which would give his mind direction, is still unborn. Thus the poet's feelings had not taken shape, had not yet been born during the winter "when the trees were crystal," and, like spring, he is only now beginning to stir, to awaken ("wakefulness inside a sleep").