

in order to remain present, it must destroy itself. The dead of the Dutch grave yard, whose "glory" when they were alive was that of "heaven in the wilderness" of Pennsylvania, are now insensate witnesses to the fact that the present brings a new ideal, "a new glory of new men."

One may not even die peacefully in the knowledge of having perfected an ideal that will endure; on the contrary, one is tormented by the idea that those living in a new present will "Avoid our stale perfections," using what is left of ours for their own ends, seeking their own perfections. For the stars of the present are not relevant to the dead imaginary beings ("chimeres"), but to the living present "of those alive." The living who people the present ("Under the arches, over the arches" of the sky), on the edge of future death ("autumnal horizon"), march through segments of a chaos which, since it is reality itself, is "more than an order"—toward an ideal that will be an expression of their particular generation, "a generation's centre." The fact that the dead can so subtly bear witness to the effects of time in sustaining a living present shows both that time was not wasted on the dead, and that the differences that time has wrought were not made too difficult for them to track down.

"No Possum, No Sop, No Taters"
(CP, p. 293)

As the title indicates, the poem presents a barren landscape. The sun is not only absent but seems as if it belonged to another realm all together. The scene is frozen, dead; "Bad" seems final because the scene is static, frozen, as if it will never change. Appropriately, therefore, the remnants of dead vegetation suggest images of impotence, incapability: "arms without hands," "trunks// Without legs," "without heads," heads whose tongues are incapable of expressing their anguish. As the stalks suggest the failure of speech, the snow suggests the failure of sight (in language that calls up the pertinent feeling of Nashe's "Brightness falls from the air").

Even the dead leaves "hop," as though lame or crippled. The sky, hard as if frozen, the stalks rooted in ice, emphasize the fixity of the scene. One single sound, composed of the stupid ("gawky"), inconsequential sounds in the landscape—the "savagest hollow" of the wind as it sweeps across the scene—expresses its monolithic barrenness. It is in a "bad" so extreme that we can know the "good" at its most absolute, stripped of all inessentials ("last purity"): that all things are destroyed, as in the cyclic death of the seasons in the present scene, that even the "bad" of this season will be destroyed by that cyclic change. In tone with the rest of the scene, the crow seems accustomed to stasis, he "looks rusty as he rises up." But the "malice in his eye" seems vivid, alive. He seems to represent the necessary destructive principle that motivates seasonal change, and therefore, in sympathy, "One joins him," but only "at a distance," out of caution and distaste.

"So-And-So Reclining on Her Couch"
(CP, p. 295)

This is one of Stevens' funnier poems. The poet describes himself in process of painting a figure with words, as though on canvas, to illustrate his idea. Thus the figure is both a functional "mechanism," and an "apparition," something that has suddenly materialized. It is a hypothesis: "Projection A." The figure is without context ("floats in air"), on a canvas, "at the level of/ The eye," without name, and without meaning except for the sensuous one expressed by "the curving of her hip." She is so freshly imagined that the paint is still wet, indicating her total innocence ("Eyes dripping blue"). If one placed above her head an old crown artfully painted into the picture ("practic," in an obsolete usage, means artful, a usage here suggested by the archaicized spelling), suspended as if in three dimensions by the artist, that suspension, apparently indicating a magical or miraculous phenomenon, would represent on the part of the artist a "gesture," an expression of meaning regarding the figure, "in-