

its personal vision of the landscape, in giving point to the pines and their smell ("tang"; but "tang" also itself means points—thus also: "give point to their points"). But there is a double pun in the name of "Iffucan of Azcan": give me the lie if-you-can and, in fact, as you can.

"To the One of Fictive Music" (CP, p. 87)

The poem is addressed to the muse of poetry—she is of that "sisterhood" of the muses who, though not alive, are alive to the poet and to the imagination, hence "the living dead." (Stevens, however, after glossing the One and the sisterhood as the muses, makes it clear that he prefers not to specify them except as they are specified in the poem—see *LWS*, pp. 297, 298.) It is she among the muses with whom the poet feels most intimate, whose works seem most tangible ("clear-est bloom"). Considered as source of the creative spirit ("mother") rather than companion ("sister," l. 1) she is chief among the other muses; and she is the object of his warmest transcendental love. But she is not distant, exotic ("cloudy silver"), not a femme fatale ("venom of renown"), but simple, as she is close and clear.

The "birth" in stanza two is that of our human consciousness, which separates us from nature while leaving us in it,¹⁶ so that, seeing so much of ourselves in nature, it comes to seem to us a large and coarse image of ourselves ("Gross effigy and simulacrum"). The "music summoned" (stanza 2, l. 1) by this birth is art, which attempts to bridge the separation between man and nature (compare, "From this the poem springs: that we live in a place/ That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves," "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," *It Must Be Abstract*, IV). Coming thus out of our "imperfections," no art renders more perfection than poetry. The muse is referred to as "rare" because of the rarity (fine, unusual) of such perfection, but "kindred" because the more perfect the poem laboriously wrought, the more of ourselves,

of the "near," the familiar, will be in it. The more the poem, as our bridge to nature, retains of ourselves, the closer it brings our selves to nature.

For in this effort to bridge the gap between the self and nature (stanza 3), men so desire to retain as much of their selves as possible that that art is most intense for them which makes a point of the familiar, what they know (l. 3), that meditation on the obscure (Riddel, p. 68, notes the pun on "musing" here) most acute which grasps, through poetry ("As in your name"), what is familiar and certain ("sure") in that unmitigated ("arrant") nature we live in. Thus here the muse is referred to in terms of the familiar detail of nature which yields a poetry that most resembles our own lives.

Yet, though poetry can proclaim the familiar, we would not like it to be too literal. In our art ("feigning") reality should be endowed with the interest that the imagination can give it ("the strange unlike"), which provides it with the saving difference from reality without the imagination. (As in Wordsworth, the imagination is to be cast over the ordinary, in order to present it to the mind in an unusual way.) To this end the muse must also be the exotic femme fatale, as well as familiar and simple. She must give us that element of unreality, the imagination, which makes reality so alluring.

"Peter Quince at the Clavier" (CP, p. 89)

Peter Quince is the stage manager of the rustic actors in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. He is perhaps à propos as the speaker of the poem in that, as he day dreams at the key board, he is in a sense the stage manager of the imagination. The poem is a flight of imagination that takes place as Peter Quince plays, and one should note the high frequency of musical terms used. It is like a key board impromptu in which each of the four sections resembles a "movement" whose metrical tempo helps set its mood.

As the player strikes the keys of the clavier (I), so the

sounds produced strike a music from his spirit. By logical extension, then, the music is essentially the feeling it produces; since music is feeling, the desire he feels for the woman of whom he is thinking is a kind of music. There follows a projection of this feeling into the story of Susanna, the story serving as an extended simile for the feeling. (The poem is in this respect a compliment to the woman, referred to in the second and third stanzas, desire for whom provokes the reflective reverie that follows.) This projection becomes a speculation on the nature of desire and the bodily beauty that is its object. Susanna awakened a similar music, or "strain" (tune, tension: desire) in the elders. Since their lust is, in terms of the poem, a kind of music, it is appropriately described in musical terms (note especially the triple meaning of "The basses of their beings"—"bass" as musical term or instrument, as depth, and as evil.)

The poem then gives a description of the music of Susanna's feelings (II). The warmth of the water, its sensuous "touch," brings forth in her the "melody" of sensual day dreams or fantasies ("concealed imaginings"). The cooler air as she stands on the bank is echoed by her "spent emotions." She feels, "among the leaves," a gentle residue, or nostalgia ("dew") for her amorous attachments of the past ("old devotions"). As she walks away she still trembles ("quaver," a trill or tremolo in music) with the emotions she has just felt. Then the breath of the elders suddenly deadens ("muted") the feelings which the night had evoked in her, and their intrusion is put in terms of the brash, brassy interruption of the cymbal and horns.

The "attendant Byzantines" (III) serve as a choral expression of feeling about the elders' accusation. They are silly ("simpering"), frightened. Their "refrain" (or possibly Susanna's) is weeping, like a willow in windy rain.

The mind's response to beauty comes and goes (IV); it is spasmodic, changeable, giving only the vaguest suggestion of access to beauty as it exists in the flesh ("The fitful tracing of a portal"). But "in the flesh" beauty never dies. The apparent paradox is immediately qualified and then resolved in

three metaphors. Though the body itself dies, bodily beauty lives on in new embodiments. In the same way evenings die: the "green" of their "going" is descriptively apt, but also indicates that it is a "going" that is perpetually renewed, just as a wave flowing through the sea at the same time both passes and continues. Gardens die under the "cowl of winter" (winter covering the landscape, and also, a monk's cowl, winter itself like a monk now finished with its seasonal repentance), but they die to be reborn in the spring. Maidens die in marriage, to be replaced by other maidens who will, in their turn, die a similar death (compare the maidens in "Sunday Morning," V, CP, p. 69). The lust that Susanna's beauty aroused in the elders' minds was momentary and left only the prospect of their mortality (the "white" elders; "Death's ironic scraping"—in the *Apocrypha*, after falsely accusing Susanna, they are put to death). But Susanna's beauty has become immortal. Her beauty, her "music," is reborn in memory of her, and serves to consecrate that memory in praise.

"Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (CP, p. 92)

"Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" is written in that kind of free verse whose line is defined by a natural pause in the speaking voice and a break in the sense. It consists of a series of statements in no particular order, each of which involves the figure of a blackbird or blackbirds.¹⁷ But the difficulty of the poem is not diminished from section to section by the figure of the blackbird itself, for it does not have any constant meaning. In this respect the title is possibly a little misleading. "Sea Surface Full of Clouds" (CP, p. 98) is in fact five ways of looking at a seascape, an exercise in impressionism, in which the sea, though changing, is a constant in the poem, the thing being described. The blackbird, on the contrary, acts in each section to bring out the meaning of the context in which it is involved. Its meaning depends on each context, just as the meaning of that context depends