ing sea—all these strokes of fine detail ("Flickings from finikin to fine finikin"), and the general effort to recreate them in art at whatever time and in whatever form, "from busts of Constantine/ To photographs of the late president," are approaches ("edgings and inchings") to the "final form" in which reality is successfully described through the formulation of art, which thus obliquely or immediately conceives reality. This tentative effort to conceive reality is like the evening manifesting itself through the colors of the extreme end of the spectrum only, like a philosopher trying to express himself through improvisations on the piano, or like a woman writing and destroying an approximation that does not quite capture her thought. It does not matter whether reality has any concrete substance or whether it is insubstantial. The important thing is to capture and express in the final form of art one's sense of that reality which is significant only as it is perceived by the mind.

"Angel Surrounded by Paysans" (*CP*, p. 496)

This poem apparently grew out of Stevens' contemplation of a painting he had bought, a still life by the French painter, Tal Coat, to which Stevens had given the name, "Angel Surrounded by Peasants." The "Angel" in the painting, according to Stevens, is a Venetian glass bowl, the "peasants," the terrines, bottles, and glasses that surround it (*LWS*, p. 650). Stevens writes that "the point of the poem is that there must be in the world about us things that solace us quite as fully as any heavenly visitation could" (*LWS*, p. 661).

The poem has the dramatic form of a biblical episode. One of the peasants has opened the door in welcome to an apparent visitor, but no visitor has presented himself. Then the angel appears for a moment and speaks. But in this case it is not one of heaven's angels, but the "angel of reality," who has none of the heavenly angel's accessories, the pale

wing, the apparel of gold, the trite halo. The stars do not follow him as attendants, but are part of that reality which he represents and knows. The angel is one of the peasants, in that he is of reality rather than of heaven, and this existence as part of the reality shared in common with the peasants is all that he is and knows. Yet, though he is no more and knows no more than the peasants, he is nevertheless "the necessary angel of earth." Man needs him, as a figuration of the imagination, through which one may see "the earth," reality, afresh once more, beyond the rigidified "set" of images, or mold, in which man himself has imprisoned it. Through him, in poetry, one may distinguish the tragic in man's relation to the earth, catching the fluidity of existence in fluid articulations, the words themselves part of the fluidity of existence ("watery words awash"), so that the meanings articulated are themselves composed of the fleeting suggestions of meanings which is the nature of the reality they interpret. The angel, as part of reality, is himself merely a suggestion of meaning ("only half of a figure of a sort"), only half perceived, or perceived only fleetingly, a projection of the mind, one who appears suddenly and elusively like a ghost, so nearly invisible that at the slightest change he disappears, "too quickly," because with him disappears the illumination of reality that he brings.

"The Plain Sense of Things" (*CP*, p. 502)

"The Plain Sense of Things" is sufficiently unambiguous until the fourth stanza, where the crucial statement in the poem occurs: "Yet the absence of the imagination had/ Itself to be imagined." What is the "necessity," mentioned in the last line of the poem, that must be involved in this statement if it is to be read as more than a trivial verbal paradox? "After the leaves have fallen," the poem begins—that is, in autumn or in an autumnal mood (possibly provoked by advancing age)—the bare constant of reality, the "plain sense of things," is evident. (The bare earth or rock

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 destestable" (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