

cluding the mind, that from which the human starts, and to which it must come back. It includes space itself; it is, for the mind, the gate to the enclosure of reality; it is the exterior fact which day illumines, and the imaginative data which night encourages: the pleasurable creations of the imagination ("midnight-minting fragrances"), including such hymns in praise of the rock as this one, realized in an intense state of the imagination, as in a dream ("vivid sleep").

"The River of Rivers in Connecticut"
(*CP*, p. 533)

"The River of Rivers in Connecticut" develops Stevens' idea of the nature of existence. The title does not locate the river, so much as it indicates that it flows through Connecticut, as well as every place else. Rather, the river is "this side of Stygia," this side of obliteration. Stevens explained the description of the third line of the first stanza as follows: "This refers to the distortion of trees not growing in conditions natural to them and not to houses deprived of a setting of trees. The look of death is the look of the deprivation of something vital" (Poggioli, p. 185). The river, on the contrary, is vital: it does not flow mechanically to a destination, but rather it is its "mere flowing" that is desirable, "a gayety," that is itself an end. Therefore no ghost, or "shadow," walks on its banks, for it is the river of life, not of death. Like Styx, this river is "fateful": it is as impossible to escape the flow of existence as it is to escape death. No agency, like Charon, the "ferryman," is required to lead us into its current, since all things, including Charon if he existed, are by nature propelled by the current's force. The river is not an abstract essence of things, but consists of the tangible reality of common objects, such as "The steeple at Farmington," and the town of Haddam, which is described as if it were a fluent part of the "flashing" river ("shines and sways"). Hence, it is called "the third commonness with light and air," the common reality which the atmosphere of light and air contains. The

river is, furthermore, a "curriculum," or a running merely, without object or qualification; it is simply an energy, "a vigor"; it is, finally, not the idea of the river, but the localized manifestation of that idea as here in Connecticut, "a local abstraction," an abstraction that exists only in the concrete. Since it has no identity except in its local and concrete manifestations, it is "an unnamed flowing" which, however, contains in it space and the changes that occur therein, as with the seasons, and the mixture of knowledge and belief, or "folk-lore," that we derive through sensation. It is like a river which flows to no destination, as a sea flows into nothing else, because there is nothing else besides it.

"The Course of a Particular" (*OP*, p. 96)

"The Course of a Particular" has been called by Yvor Winters one of Stevens' "greatest poems—perhaps his greatest."⁵³ But he notes that whereas in the original appearance in *Hudson Review* (Vol. IV, No. 1, Spring, 1951) the next to last line read "final finding of the ear," in *Opus Posthumous*, as a result of a typographical error, "ear" was printed as "air." He concludes of the poem: "In its first appearance it is comprehensible and deeply moving. In its second appearance the conclusion evaporates into vague sentiment and a masterpiece is destroyed." Samuel French Morse has confirmed this correction as well grounded.⁵⁴ The "particular" in question is the sound of the wind in the leaves, and its "course" consists of the series of modifications in meaning that it undergoes in the mind of the observer who speaks the poem. Although it is a wintery day on which the leaves make a mournful sound, its emptiness is lessened by the shades and shapes of winter scenery. But as one listens to the cry of the leaves, without projecting one's feelings into their sound, or into the winter scene ("One holds off and merely hears the cry"), one becomes increasingly isolated from the landscape. It is no longer a question of whether the wintery scene seems more or less like nothingness, for it becomes progressively plainer as the