

would have been overwhelmed by the simplest sensory contact with reality, would have taken intense pleasure in the most rudimentary sensation of it, as if this sensuous contact were the essence of life. The poet reads from his "purple" books ("purple": a deep blue, therefore deeply imaginative, also, perhaps, a blend of the reader's vivid life with his imagination) a description of existence and its articulations in poetry ("The outlines of being and its expressings"), whose syllables are its "law," in that by giving us the literal content of reality in its inspired ("vatic") lines, poetry enables us to realize reality in terms of feeling, brings us to reality through its feeling for it, as it brings the ghosts to life.

"This Solitude of Cataracts" (*CP*, p. 424)

His feelings about existence, the "flecked river" (flecked with the details of reality), existed in a continuum of change, as existence itself was a continuum of change (flowing "never the same way twice"). The river, since it is that of existence itself, flows everywhere at once, and therefore seems to stand still (compare "The River of Rivers in Connecticut," *CP*, p. 533: "The river that flows nowhere, like a sea"; also, "Metaphor as Degeneration," *CP*, p. 444.) Its surface manifests the details of reality which appear in it randomly, without order or set purpose, like wild ducks "Ruffling" the surface of a lake. These random details of reality disturb our projections of existence which are mirrored in it, our imaginings, our thoughts, and which, therefore, are "its common reflections" (the mirrorings of the New Hampshire mountain, Monadnock, in the lake, are like thoughts, "reflections"—see *LWS*, p. 823). There seems to be an unspoken apostrophe inherent in the concept of reality represented by this lacustrine scene, and which is articulated by what follows. So much of this already fluid existence consists of our "reflections" on it, so much is imaginary ("not real at all"),

that it seems doubly insubstantial. This provokes a desire for the opposite. He wanted the river to flow not in a continuum of change ("never the same way twice," l. 2), but in "the same way," and to keep on flowing in that one way. He wanted the scene to be static, the moon, unchanging, nailed in one place, as he walked under the buttonwoods (one imagines them, in this context, buttoned in place). He wanted to become static himself "In a permanent realization" of himself and of a reality in which there would not be any random detail like that of the wild ducks, in which there would not be any imaginary projections that, though unreal, are part of reality. He wanted to get the sense of a permanent reality, in which one would be released from the continual destruction of impermanence and, by implication, released from death as well. He would then be like a monument, indestructible, in an ambiance of unchanging stone ("lapis"), "archaic" because it has never changed, beyond the fluctuations of the planetary cycles ("pass-pass," also with the implication that such phenomena are illusory, unreal, from the French "passe-passe," prestidigitation—compare *LWS*, p. 823). He would then be non-human, breathing a "bronzon breath" at the "azury"—both heavenly and, by association with Stevens' use of blue as the color of the imagination, imagined—"centre of time," the hub of the wheel, the still point of time where time does not pass.

"Saint John and the Back-Ache" (*CP*, p. 436)

The poem is cast in the form of a dialogue which represents Saint John's reaction to the presence of a pain in his back. The mind is the most potent force in the world, because it alone can defend us against the difficulties of consciousness which it contains. This is suggested to Saint John by the Back-Ache because, in his consciousness of it, his first thought is that its pain is something that can be resolved in