poem proceeds that the landscape exists apart from the ego, disconnected from the ego's feelings about it. Thus, though the sound of the leaves seems to indicate that it is part of a brisk activity ("It is a busy cry"), it is nevertheless a sound that concerns someone other than the listener. Though one may hold, or, at least, repeat the idea that the ego is involved in the rest of existence, it is difficult, listening to the sound of the leaves, to feel thus involved. It requires an increasing effort to project the concerns of the ego into this scene, to feel that one is part of it. Instead of a connection with the rest of existence, a sense of "being part," one feels the vitality of an irresistible given, "life as it is" without regard to the concerns of the ego. Since the cry of the leaves occurs without regard to the concerns of the ego, it signifies neither the presence of divinity communicating itself to man through nature ("divine attention"), nor an ephemeral evocation of a more than human ideal ("the smoke-drift of puffed-out heroes") read into the sound of the wind, nor any sound that can be construed in human terms. It is the cry of leaves that, without fantasy, cannot be interpreted as being anything other than what they are ("that do not transcend themselves"), that signify nothing beyond the sound they make ("the final finding of the ear"), beyond their physical reality ("the thing/ Itself"). Since the leaves signify nothing beyond their physical reality, their sound not only does not concern the listener, but has absolutely no meaning in human terms, and so "concerns no one at all." The poem, then, is about the discovery of an absolute reality beyond the mind. As one becomes isolated from the landscape, the landscape takes on increasingly the character of an indifferent, alien reality. The ego must be projected into reality for reality to be involved in its concerns, and as the ego recedes, both the nature of reality and its indifference become more evident.

"Reality Is an Activity of the Most August Imagination" (*OP*, p. 110)

"The Most August Imagination" is that of reality itself. The "big light of last Friday night" was that of the moon mentioned in the final line. The night was not one of a traditional and outworn artifice, such as might be seen in Vienna or Venice—it was not a traditional reality that has come to an end, static, like an artifact from a glassworks, but a reality strongly in process, on the forward edge of time, as the evening star marks the revolution of the earth. It has the strength of splendor and magnificence (not merely their appearance as in Vienna or Venice), a "glory" that is felt in the self ("a glittering in the veins") as the landscape emerges out of the darkness toward the car, moves through the field of vision, and dissolves behind, either in the distance, or in the change of the scenery, or into nothingness, as it passes from that immediate apprehension in the present by which we perceive existence itself. These "transformations" are "visible": it is reality itself, not the imagination, that creates these metamorphoses. Reality approaches, silvery in the light of the moon, at first not clearly discerned, and, as we are on the point of capturing its substance, dissolves away into nothingness. The landscape, reality, is something that surges toward us as we move through it, and recedes away from us—the "solid" is "insolid," a process rather than something static. "Reality Is an Activity" that, in its fluidity, resembles the fluidity of the imagination ("moonlight") in its metamorphoses. This fluidity ("lake") is composed not of water or air, but of reality itself.

"Solitaire under the Oaks" (*OP*, p. 111)

The only possible difficulty of the statement itself in this poem is in lines six and seven: "One knows at last what to think about// And thinks about it without consciousness." This, obviously, does not mean that one is unconscious of

what one thinks about, but that one is unconscious of the act of thinking, because the thought itself is so absorbing. The poem says that when one is absorbed in a card game one forgets everything but the principles of the game, including one's surroundings, and even the cards themselves. In this state one escapes from fact to meditation, the contemplation of "pure principles." So absorbed in the contemplation of principle, one is "completely released" from the pressure which the facts of reality exert on the mind. This poem, then, represents a radical experience in meditation. It demonstrates a statement Stevens made about the function of poetry in one of his essays:

> . . . how is it possible to condemn escapism? The poetic process is psychologically an escapist process. The chatter about escapism is, to my way of thinking, merely common cant. My own remarks about resisting or evading the pressure of reality mean escapism, if analyzed. (*NA*, p. 30.)

The point of the experience described in the poem is "release," and though it is achieved through contemplation of principle, the principle is unimportant so long as it is instrumental in bringing about this release. What is desired is a state of mind, a psychological equilibrium without any particular intellectual content, in which one is relieved of the pressures of reality. (Compare the beginning of the poem, "Artificial Pouplations," *OP*, p. 112: "The center that he sought was a state of mind,/ Nothing more.")

"Local Objects" (*OP*, p. 111)

The word, "local" in "Local Objects" is used in the sense in which it is opposed to central. In this poem it is in contrast with "foyer" which, in French, means the hearth, the center of the home. Thus, the subject of the poem was a spirit without a center, or, better, without a central focus, a guiding idea or belief. Knowing this, he knows that things that can

be valued without reference to such a central ideal, "local objects," are more precious than things that must be so referred, the "objects of home" valuable with reference to the hearth as the center of the life lived there. Such "local objects" are the precious things in a world that has no "foyer," no central focus or belief, a world, furthermore, that since it has no such belief has no tradition ("remembered past") that is alive to the present ("a present past"), and that has no ideal on which the present may form the future ("a present future, hoped for in present hope"). In such a world valuable things occur at random, not by provenance of an order (compare "July Mountain," *OP*, p. 114); hence, they are not anywhere "present as a matter of course," and there are few that by nature belong to "that sphere," the world without central belief. These few things were to him the important things for which, since they were important, fresh names would suggest themselves as the older ones grew stale, as if by describing them he could catch them in final form ("make them") in order to preserve them. These things that are valuable in themselves include that which is discovered by insight, and unifications or harmonizations of the feelings. In other words, the intrinsically valuable things are fortuitous, since there is no ideal beyond the ego by which value may be inferred. They come without being sought, "of their own accord," because, though desirable, the ideal conditions of whose fulfillment they are reflections are unknown in the absence of a central focus, a belief: "he desired without knowing quite what." These insights and moods were the only manifestations of the ideal, "the classic, the beautiful," that he knew. They were that ideal state of mind, "that serene," that he had always been approaching as if it were an absolute ideal that could be established objectively, on the basis of the fact of reality, rather than on that of the imaginative or sentimental, or "romance." It is this "serene" that he has always desired, and that he now treats as the only possible ideal.