

Part VII pursues the argument. To satisfy the ego in such a relation with reality as is sketched in VI, is "as much belief as we may have." Such belief will resist our relativistic knowledge of the failure of past belief ("each past apocalypse"), will allow us to reject yearnings for more remote, exotic belief ("Ceylon"); it will satisfy the mind with its description of reality so that belief will require nothing further from reality, "the sea," which then becomes like a beauty to be enjoyed ("*la belle/ Aux crinolines*"); and thus there will be no "mad mountains" that do not seem to fit into the picture of the world that our belief gives us. It is not the nature of reality that matters, but what one believes about it. Stevens seems to speak of belief here in the sense that a fish believes in water; that is, as an ideal adjustment of the self to its environment, "one's element," in exhilarated unions, fortuitous "reunions," meditated "surrenders" of the self to the real. Belief through which we may in this way relate to reality, feeling oneself a part of that reality, is all the belief we need. If one were then suddenly transferred to another reality to which one were totally unadjusted, one would be overwhelmed by it, "Incapable of belief." And, on the contrary, the slightest perception of the reality to which one was adjusted would be sufficient, without any need of illusion, to orient the world around one's belief.

"We live in a camp" (part VIII), in that our life is an impermanent abode, and is like a concentration camp in which we are destined to die. Within this fact of impermanence the only "final peace" lies in what the feelings can make of our condition, in what remains to the heart, "the heart's residuum." So be it. But if the opposite were true, could we thus ratify the situation with an "amen"? If we lived in permanence, as in the permanence of life after death, the evil we experience would never die; we would be fated to outlive every mortal wound since we would be unable to die "a second death." The only ultimate end to evil, which is part of life, is death. Yet if there is no resolution to evil but only the escape of death, if "evil never ends," if after death we lie "in evil earth," then death is really not an escape from

evil—death, as a permanence, simply emphasizes the permanence of evil, for after death, we cannot die again. Neither immortality nor mortality, then, gives "final peace." Imaginative expressions ("chants," "stanzas") of belief are our resort, expressions that grow out of our feelings ("the heart's residuum") about our life. But how can we create such expressions ("How can/ We chant") in face of unending evil? Earth is not "evil earth"; rather, in the dissolution that occurs after death it "dissolves/ Its evil." If earth dissolves evil after death, it must dissolve it while we are alive. It is that dissolution of evil in life that is the motive for poetry; this is the "acutest end" of poetry. We must find in our feeling the poetry for a statement which can confront our experience, all we know ("Equal to memory"), a statement which, as in poetry, is "vital" because it is dictated by feeling. The final couplet is an example, giving the doomed soldiers as a metaphor for our fate, yet making the fate seem noble.

"Dutch Graves in Bucks County" (CP, p. 290)

This poem resembles a march of time in the on-going present of the living, counterpointed by the static past of the dead from which time continually breaks.

The horde of the living swarms through the poet's imagination, figured in the metaphor of an army in the sky. The wheels of their machines are unreal, therefore silent, too large for sound, since the army represents the imagined totality of the living. As the poet imagines them, he also imagines the dead in the grave yard, his "semblables" (fellow, counterpart, reminiscent of Baudelaire's "*Au Lecteur*"—Stevens' father was born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and was of Dutch descent; Stevens was German, or "Pennsylvania Dutch" on the maternal, Zeller, side. Stevens himself was a native not of Bucks, but of nearby Berks County. See Stevens' account of a visit to the old Zeller home and to a similar, but Pennsylvania Dutch, grave yard, NA, p. 99-102, apparently made

considerably after the poem's composition). They, skeletons residing in the darkness ("sooty") of the grave, tap out the beat of death which is the ultimate measure of life. The living are at large, "marching" through the on-going present of time, while the dead Dutch have as dominion only the "tiny darkness" of the grave. From the living's preparation for the conflict of life there is a sense of an expected pronouncement, one that will come out of the conflict itself, some rumor that will be expressive of the living ("expressive on-dit"), a "profession" of belief, a statement of self-definition. In contrast with this activity, the dead seem doubly dead, to have been buried in so unproductive a place.

The flags of the living, in contrast with "the old flag of Holland" in the grave (refrain 2), are symbols of new self-discovery. The living grow more acute in their aims as they live ("Rifles grow sharper on the sight"; less likely, the rifles become more sharply visible). Their marching is "autumnal" because like an army they march toward death, as autumn moves toward the seasonal death of winter. There is no comfort and no relief from this fate, since the latter, as a "desperado," one without hope, leaves no escape from death for those alive in the present. The dead, however, exist only as remains in the dead past of which they were part.

Though the call to the life struggle (drums and bugles) is strong, there is a force that is even stronger and that will make its claim with the power of an instinct. The dead know nothing of our instincts, since the total of their memory includes nothing which happened after their death. This instinct tells us that all life ends in death ("a merciless triumph"), that in death the evil of life ends (which is its "profounder logic") in peace that is more than temporary "refuge" because it is absolute and permanent; because death ends evil it is an instinctual end ("will") of all men when life, in its progress toward death, is exhausted. The dead, who know nothing of the present, know therefore that the past is not part of it: their end has been absolute ("Gaffer" is an old term of respect like "goodman"; "green" because of the grass which now, in a sense, clothes the venerable dead.) Others,

from earliest history ("early children," with the suggestion, also, of primitive innocence), and those who have come more lately and who have no sense of their destiny ("wanderers"), have struggled into existence like the sun slipping under the barbed fence of night at dawn, and year after year have always been defeated by death and lost in oblivion. While this has always been so, the dead know, since they know the finality of death, that the present is not continuous with the past of those others who came earlier, that their death cuts us off from their experience. The present does not consist of these old, "rusted armies"; the present is immediate and vital, composed of the struggle of the living to win their heritage in defiance of the past, in defiance of the wishes of the dead who have come before ("torn-up testaments"). The dead know that those who inherit them are not their children, have no connection with their selves, because they have been absolutely cut off from them by their death.

Who are these old "cronies" (derived from the Greek *chronios*, contemporary) who mutter to one another, unnatural people grown old and gaunt, wild ("haggard") in their fervor for past thought? Why are they so concerned with this dry, arid ("crackling") dialogue that is of the mind merely, academic, unconnected with our lives? The voices in such a dialogue speak timidly, inconsequentially ("pitter-patter") of old freedom, of every kind of freedom except freedom in the vital present, our own freedom. The old Dutch of Pennsylvania, by contrast, were not emotionless and timid, nor disconnected from their own lives. Freedom does not lie in concerning oneself with the past but in cutting oneself off from it, "Each night," incessantly, by destroying freedom which is no longer appropriate to the present, and which therefore can only be a kind of bondage. It is in its exercise of liberation from the past that freedom grows acute ("whose knife/Grows sharp in blood"). The armies of the living, in freeing the present from the past, must in effect free it from themselves, must "kill themselves," but in so doing release the present from a past no longer appropriate ("an ancient evil dies"). This is the "incorrigible tragedy" of the present, that

in order to remain present, it must destroy itself. The dead of the Dutch grave yard, whose "glory" when they were alive was that of "heaven in the wilderness" of Pennsylvania, are now insensate witnesses to the fact that the present brings a new ideal, "a new glory of new men."

One may not even die peacefully in the knowledge of having perfected an ideal that will endure; on the contrary, one is tormented by the idea that those living in a new present will "Avoid our stale perfections," using what is left of ours for their own ends, seeking their own perfections. For the stars of the present are not relevant to the dead imaginary beings ("chimeres"), but to the living present "of those alive." The living who people the present ("Under the arches, over the arches" of the sky), on the edge of future death ("autumnal horizon"), march through segments of a chaos which, since it is reality itself, is "more than an order"—toward an ideal that will be an expression of their particular generation, "a generation's centre." The fact that the dead can so subtly bear witness to the effects of time in sustaining a living present shows both that time was not wasted on the dead, and that the differences that time has wrought were not made too difficult for them to track down.

"No Possum, No Sop, No Taters"
(CP, p. 293)

As the title indicates, the poem presents a barren landscape. The sun is not only absent but seems as if it belonged to another realm all together. The scene is frozen, dead; "Bad" seems final because the scene is static, frozen, as if it will never change. Appropriately, therefore, the remnants of dead vegetation suggest images of impotence, incapability: "arms without hands," "trunks// Without legs," "without heads," heads whose tongues are incapable of expressing their anguish. As the stalks suggest the failure of speech, the snow suggests the failure of sight (in language that calls up the pertinent feeling of Nashe's "Brightness falls from the air").

Even the dead leaves "hop," as though lame or crippled. The sky, hard as if frozen, the stalks rooted in ice, emphasize the fixity of the scene. One single sound, composed of the stupid ("gawky"), inconsequential sounds in the landscape—the "savagest hollow" of the wind as it sweeps across the scene—expresses its monolithic barrenness. It is in a "bad" so extreme that we can know the "good" at its most absolute, stripped of all inessentials ("last purity"): that all things are destroyed, as in the cyclic death of the seasons in the present scene, that even the "bad" of this season will be destroyed by that cyclic change. In tone with the rest of the scene, the crow seems accustomed to stasis, he "looks rusty as he rises up." But the "malice in his eye" seems vivid, alive. He seems to represent the necessary destructive principle that motivates seasonal change, and therefore, in sympathy, "One joins him," but only "at a distance," out of caution and distaste.

"So-And-So Reclining on Her Couch"
(CP, p. 295)

This is one of Stevens' funnier poems. The poet describes himself in process of painting a figure with words, as though on canvas, to illustrate his idea. Thus the figure is both a functional "mechanism," and an "apparition," something that has suddenly materialized. It is a hypothesis: "Projection A." The figure is without context ("floats in air"), on a canvas, "at the level of/ The eye," without name, and without meaning except for the sensuous one expressed by "the curving of her hip." She is so freshly imagined that the paint is still wet, indicating her total innocence ("Eyes dripping blue"). If one placed above her head an old crown artfully painted into the picture ("practic," in an obsolete usage, means artful, a usage here suggested by the archaicized spelling), suspended as if in three dimensions by the artist, that suspension, apparently indicating a magical or miraculous phenomenon, would represent on the part of the artist a "gesture," an expression of meaning regarding the figure, "in-