

like a "metaphysician" in "the dark" of the mind, a metaphysician who transforms the content of his mind into the imaginative expression of poetry; he gives this content the "sudden rightness" of art which is a perfect expression of his mind, "wholly/ Containing" it at a level of aptness beneath which poetry cannot afford to sink and above which it has no need to rise. Poetry must in this way satisfy the mind in the poem, and in doing this the subject is a secondary consideration: it may be of any ordinary, everyday activity; essentially it will not be a poem about a given subject, but one that is concerned with the operation of the mind as it seeks to confront the circumstances of contemporary reality.

### "Asides on the Oboe" (CP, p. 250)

"The prologues are over," states the prologue to this poem. There must be an end to tentative formulations of belief; one must choose "final belief." This being so, the poet proposes "that final belief/ Must be in a fiction."

The first section begins by elaborating on why there is a need to choose "final belief." The old beliefs are dead: the ancient myth of the underworld is "obsolete" ("the wide river," Styx, separating life from death in the "empty land" populated only by shades); Boucher de Perthes, the nineteenth century archeologist, in investigating the prehistoric origins of man, killed the gods of our myths of genesis; our past beliefs, embodied in graven images, have been destroyed by time. We are left with the idea of the "philosophers' man," the ideal of the philosophers as one who understands everything, and understands in human rather than in religious terms. This mythic figure alone is still fresh and real to us ("walks in dew"); he meditates pure thoughts which are nourishment to us ("mutters milky lines"), the "imagery" of a myth pure of time's corruption ("immaculate") in which we can still believe. If one's image of man, as expressed in art (as in music on the oboe), describes man as inadequate, as unable to replace the dead gods, as imper-

fect however god-like ("naked, tall"), there still remains the tantalizing possibility ("impossible possible") of an ideal projection of man, "who has had the time to think enough" to understand and explain the human condition. He would be the man who would stand as the central ideal for all men, self-contained like a globe, in whom all men would be reflected and who, in the reflections he gave back would answer our questions about ourselves. Thus he is "the man of glass," who in his complex reflections, as "in a million diamonds," explains us to ourselves ("sums us up").

The philosophers' man (section II) is described as a "transparence" because, though not real, invisible, he makes things clear; that clarity, in which our questions are answered, pacifies us. He is the spirit of a place, its image, its imaginary projection ("the transparence of the place in which/ He is") and as such, he is that imaginative element of a thing which allows us to fully realize its nature. Thus the philosophers' man takes the season of later summer, nondescript, unspecific, like, presumably, a "peddler's pie," and gives it an imaginative identity, that of August. He specifies it with a particular image of August. He is "cold and numbered" because he is an abstraction, an imaginative projection, unreal, though with an effect on reality ("numbered," as if he were composed of numbers, like an abstract formula). Thus we are provoked to imagine romantic rendezvous, because August suggests itself to us as a season for love ("his cuckoos call").

The catastrophe of war (section III) prevented us from regarding the world as an essentially pleasant and peaceful place (jasmine scented; the poem was first published in 1940—jasmine is a tropical and semi-tropical plant, but "jasmine islands" probably do not refer to any particular battle grounds of World War II). If we did not then find peace through the philosophers' man, we found a true understanding of man, "the sum of men." If we saw life stripped of our illusions about it ("the central evil"), we at the same time saw life as it really is ("the central good"). Thus we accepted death without our old illusions ("without jasmine

crowns") that made it seem consolingly less evil than it actually is. Our image of man as seen through "the central man," the philosophers' man, was stripped of all illusions; therefore there was nothing that the philosophers' man "did not suffer"—and since he is nothing more than our imaginative projection of ourselves, his suffering is our suffering.

Our old illusions never returned, but instead we now accepted an image of man that mirrored the human, that was totally a reflection of man himself rather than an image partly derived from some myth of the super human. Thus as we united with an image that derived wholly from ourselves, we became "wholly one." It was in this image of man that we mourned for the dead, "those buried in their blood," those buried in the sole reality of their flesh and blood rather than in terms of a myth which makes a distinction between the body and a soul that outlives the body: this despite the fact that we were still haunted by nostalgia for our old illusions ("jasmine haunted"). We finally came to know the "glass man," the image of ourselves which is totally a reflection of ourselves rather than an image of ourselves derived from reference to something beyond the human. Thus the "glass man" is sufficient in himself as a reflection of humanity and needs no "external reference."

### "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas" (CP, p. 252)

Part I begins by making a comparison between the artificial and the natural, between the paper rose and the real rose. "That states the point"; that is, that establishes the subject at hand: the distinction between the artificial world of the mind and the real world of nature. As if in a lecture at an academy, the poet goes on to state that the world we know is an artificial one. Since what we know of the world we can know only through the mind, the rose we know is of the nature of the mind, or artificial. The sea to us is simply the words through which we conceive it, the sky is just a list of

words we use to describe it, the mountains are like paintings or descriptions of mountains. The real rose, natural reality, belongs, on the other hand, to those who do not perceive the world through the mind, who are naked to reality, innocent of any intervention of the intellect. (Compare "The Sense of the Sleight-of-hand Man," CP, p. 222: "It may be that the ignorant man, alone, / Has any chance to mate his life with life.") Such people would resemble Adam and Eve in their agreeable climate, naked in their "covert," in their sheltered refuge, innocent of their nakedness (clean of "the lascivious poisons"). In such a state of innocence we would not have knowledge of nakedness "as part/ Of reality," nor would we have knowledge of reality itself; rather, we would be beyond such knowledge—we would be united with reality, in fact part of it, "part of a land beyond the mind." But this is put as a mere rhetorical question. For the mind to bypass itself and accept reality beyond the mind, the "Rain," as such, would be "unbearable tyranny." Thus, in practice, we live in an artificial world. The "eye" of the sun reveals to us only imaginary things ("a monster-maker"), shapes that have merely visual reality as in a painting, "paper things." In our experience, the distinction between the artificial and the real, the "false and true," collapses: they "are one."

Part II takes up the argument of the last part of I, and elaborates on it. The eye believes that what it sees is real, and in that belief seems to unite with reality, participate in "communion" with it. But the mind (here the "spirit," probably from the French "esprit," which means both) knows that visual reality is artificial, and therefore "The spirit laughs." The speaker elaborates on this proposition in the mock pedantic tone Stevens sometimes uses for the discursive arguments in his poems (see, for example, "Connoisseur of Chaos," CP, p. 215), addressing "the Secretary for Porcelain" as one concerned with the artificial. Evil considered imaginatively ("made magic"), as for example in tragedy, an imaginary construct in which evil culminates in the "catastrophe," if the catastrophe is well made ("neatly glazed"), becomes elegant, esthetically pleasing (as the fruit presented