CHAPTER VI

IDEAS OF ORDER : THE PROCESS OF DECREATION

With Ideas of Order Stevens' poetry makes a second beginning. Published in 1935, more than a decade after the first publication of Harmonium, the poems in Ideas of Order appear less like a continuation of the Harmonium poems than a fresh beginning. Whatever may be the reasons for Stevens' not writing verse, the years of silence seem to be the years of inner maturing for him. For, at the beginning of this second, renewed phase of his writing, and Stevens was never to stop writing from now onwards, he seems to be gripped with the problem of defining the theory of poetry, which, as he would later say, is also "the theory of life" (CP, 486). In consciously and determinedly turning toward defining a poetry that would 'order' our life, Stevens was definitely departing from the poetry of Harmonium. And yet, this is in no way a rupture from his early poetry, as Harmonium did contain the beginnings of the poetry which Stevens was now more explicitly to define. In a letter to Ronald Lane Latimer, written in October, 1935, Stevens describes his own development:

> When Harmonium was in the making there was a time when I.... believed in pure poetry, as it was called.
>
> I still have a distinct liking for that sort of thing. But we live in a different time, and life means a good deal more to us now-a-days than literature does. In the period of which I have just spoken, I thought literature meant most. Moreover, I am not so sure that I don't think exactly the same thing now, but, unquestionably, I think at the same time that life is the essential part of literature. (L, 288)

The acceptance of life, of the real, actual world is a major concern of the poems of Ideas of Order. At the same time, the search for poetry that can give a sanction to life, that can introduce order into life becomes more acute and intense:

> We are not beginning to get out of the world what it will ultimately yield through poets.
>
> If poetry introduces order, and every competent poem introduces order, and if order means peace, even though that particular peace is an illusion, is it any less an illusion than a good many other things that everyone high and low now-a-days concedes to be no longer of any account? Isn't a freshening of life a thing of consequence? It would be a great thing to change the status of the poet. It may be that the conventional attitude toward poets is deserved by the existing race of poets. But then, it would be left-handed job in the course of creating a new world to create a new race of poets. (L, 293)

Poetry, in other words, has ultimately to do with "a freshening of life." It must not, therefore, seek to create an order independent of the life we live in this world but must discover an order in the world itself. As Stevens insisted, "one has to live and think in the actual world, and no other

will do" (L, 292). The predominant note of the poems in Ideas of Order, then, is the acceptance of the actual, commonplace world, and also the rejection of what is not real, what is not part of our physical living. "Farewell," or "adieu," is the presiding tone of the poems. However, it is not bidding farewell to the power of imagination or creativity itself but to, what Stevens calls the "false" (NA, 61) imagination that prevents our belonging to the concrete, temporal world. In Stevens' rejection of the world of Florida, or of Gods and angels, one finds his first distinct emphasis on the decreation of the encrustations laid upon reality by the imagination that is not rooted in temporality. To return to one's home in the North is "To be free again" (CP, 118). It is a liberating experience, for the self is finally able to recover "Bare earth" (CP, 137), stripped at last of all conceptual and metaphorical coverings. The order that poetry creates is an order that results from the self's embodied experience of this "bare," circumambient, physical reality, for instance, of the "Ever jubilant... weather" (CP, 128), Stevens' most powerful image of the immediate, enveloping, ever-changing reality. In Ideas of Order thus the poet sings the poem of "long celestial death" on the one hand, and, on the other hand, celebrates "An earthier one" (CP, 136) of air and light.

"Farewell to Florida" (CP, 117-118), the poem with which the collection opens, speaks of sailing home from a world which

has never been truly one's own. The parting from Florida is stated in words of finality: "The moon / Is at the mast-head and the past is dead. / Her mind will never speak to me again. / I am free." The speaker casts away the spirit of Florida as the snake casts away its skin, for the one based on the reality of the North and, therefore, his own. The rejection of Florida is expressed in an accentuated contrast between the changeless world of the South, "Her South of pine and coral and coraline sea, / Her home, not mine... / Her days, her oceanic nights..." and "my North," to sail to which is "to feel sure" of one's roots, one's belonging to one's world (emphasis added). The contrast between the enchanting lure of Florida and the autumnal slime of the North has been often interpreted by critics as symbolic of the contrast between jubilation and melancholia, imagination and reality. Vendler, for instance, finds in the autumnal atmosphere of the poems of Ideas of Order a "sense of death and fatal chill",[1] and a tone of "sadness and stoicism"[2]. Bloom, on the other hand, finds Florida as synonymous with imagination and bidding farewell to it, therefore, wrought with wild regret.[3] But, as the poem so emphatically says, the return to the North is "to be free again," it is an experience of liberation from the stifling bondage of the South. It is a return to life from the "sepulchral South." Florida can offer no real happiness in its changeless and timeless world. In fact, as Stevens wrote in a letter, "our rich variety of four seasons, our Exquisite Spring and long autumn give us a variety

that the lotus-eaters of the South must pine for" (L, 211). Living in Florida is living in oblivion of the rich and inexhaustible variety of temporal existence and escaping into an imaginary and unreal realm. Indeed, "there is no spring in Florida" (CP, 112) because, paradoxically, there is always spring there!

Bidding farewell to Florida thus is bidding farewell to the realm of timeless stasis, of aesthetic ideality which proves tortuous as it prevents the self from experiencing the exhilaration of the ever-renewing splendors of existence. The severance from that world must be, therefore, total and final: "The past is dead," "that land is forever gone / And ... she will not follow in any word / Or look, nor ever again in thought." Stevens said in another poem, "the sustenance of the wilderness / Does not sustain us in the metropoles" (CP, 142) as it did for the poet of "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey." Whereas for Wordsworth, the poetic self could recreate and recover through memory the moments of spiritual harmony with nature and thus escape the world of flux, for Stevens the poetic self must not only sever itself from those moments of experience of atemporality but must also accept and root itself in, the actual, temporal world. The poem, thus, insists on the total severance from the alien and the changeless and return to the present, real world where one can learn

to dwell poetically. The experience the poem conveys is one of tremendous freedom from the clutches of the unreal.

Stevens argues repeatedly in the poems of Ideas of Order that things are not symbols; they do not refer to anything beyond themselves, but are immediate, physical realities about us. It is wrong to project meanings on them that are extraneous to their individual existence, wrong to see them as symbols of states of the mind or some abstract ideality. Thus "weather," "eagle" or "sun" are not symbols but real presences. The mind must not, therefore, represent them in its own images and thus deprive them of their actual, independent existence. Rather it must move toward them in concernful intentionality and discover them in an intense embodied experience of them. The imagination, then, first of all, must destroy the habitual ways of seeing things which turn them into something else and abstract them from their living context. As Stevens insists rather violently in one stanza of "Like Decorations in Nigger Cemetary,"

> Choke every ghost with acted violence,
> Stamp down the phosphorescent toes, tear off
> The spittling tissues tight across the bones.
> The heavy bells are tolling rowdy-dow. (CP, 155)

Stevens' gloss on the stanza is equally categorical in tone: "Cast out the spirit that you have inherited for one of your own, for one based on reality. Thus, the bells are not ghostly, nor do they make phosphorescent sounds, so to speak. They are heavy and 'are tolling rowdy-dow'" (L, 349; Emphasis added).

The rejection or the decreation of the encrustations of images and conceptions of the self and the need to return to the "bare" physical reality is the major theme of many poems. "Lions in Sweden" (CP, 124-125) opens abruptly, with a pronounced disgust for the "majestic images" of lions. "No more phrases, Swenson: I was once / A hunter of those sovereigns of the soul.... / But these shall not adorn my souvenirs, / These lions, these majestic images." In "Some Friends from Pascagoula" (CP, 126-127) the speaker insists on looking at the eagle not as a symbolic image but as a "souvereign sight": "Tell me more of the eagle.... Tell me how he descended / Out of the morning sky.../Tell me again of the point / At which the flight began, / Say how his heavy wings, / Spread on the sun-bronzed air.... / Speak of the dazzling wings." Stevens has explained where the sovereign quality of the eagle lies: "This (poem) is neither merely descriptive nor symbolical. A man without existing conventions (beliefs, etc.) depends for ideas of a new and noble order on noble imagery" (L, 349). This poem is an attempt to give a specimen of a "noble imagery," in a commonplace occurrence. What seems to be mere description is, after all, a revelation. The creative act does not turn the visible, living eagle into a symbol of art, nor does it involve itself with the mere mimetic act of representing the actual bird. The noble imagery involves a perception in which the bird is more intensely realized and dis-covered in its true being.

"Evening Without Angels" (CP, 136-137) is the book's central "poem of long celestial death" (CP, 136):

> Air is air,
> Its vacancy glitters round us everywhere
> Its sounds are not angelic syllables
> But our unfashioned spirits realized
> More sharply in more furious selves.
>
> And light
> . . . . . .
> Was the sun concoct for angels or for men?
> . . . . . .
> Let this be clear that we are men of sun
> And men of day . . .

Air is not imbued with some divine spirit, it is a "bare," physical presence which must be more intensely realized. The destruction or rejection of all our anthropomorphic projections on reality is not a negative or reductive act. It is rather, as this poem suggests, our only way of recovering the primordial reality, "bare earth" and discovering it in its rich presence.

"Autumn Refrain" (CP, 160) speaks of the refusal to escape from the barrenness of the autumnal scene and its desolate refrain into the pseudo-romantic song of the nightingale, which is

> not a bird for me
> But the name of a bird and the name of a nameless air
> I have never - shall never hear.

Like Florida, the nightingale is an evasion. The heavy repetition of the negatives suggests the poet's need to be rid

of the false romantic. The poet, instead, like the snow man, "being and sitting still," while hearing nothing that is not there, hears the nothing that is, the stillness that "resides," in the "desolate sound."

While insisting on the rejection or suspension of all that comes in our way of experiencing "bare," real, immediate things, the poems of Ideas of Order also point to the way the imaginative act orders this real world. "Sailing After Lunch" (CP, 120-121), a poem that serves as "an abridgement of at least a temporary theory of poetry" (L, 277), attempts to define the poetic experience, what Stevens at the time called a "new romantic," or a "fresh romantic" (L, 279): "Without this new romantic, one gets nowhere; with it, the most casual things take on transcendence.... What one is always doing is keeping the romantic pure: eliminating from it what people speak of as the romantic" (L, 277). What Stevens means by the fresh romantic is, as the poem suggests, the imaginative apprehension of the immediate, commonplace, "casual" things and dis-covering them in their true being. The new or fresh romantic does not involve fleeing to Florida or evading the real in the song of the nightingale. Rather it is defined as the imagination grasping casual things and stating itself instantaneously in them. It is one's lived experience of things. As the poem puts it,

It is only the way one feels, to say
Where my spirit is I am,
To say the light wind worries the sail,
To say the water is swift today,

To expunge all people and be a pupil
Of the gorgeous wheel and so to give
That slight transcendence to the dirty sail,
By light, the way one feels, sharp white,
And then rush brightly through the summer air.

Reviewing the Selected Poems of Marianne Moore, soon after this poem was written, Stevens described her as a great poet who practised the fresh romantic, "the romantic that is genuine, that is living, the enriching poetic reality" (OP, 253). Stevens said, "the romantic.... meaning always the living and at the same time the imaginative... constitutes the vital element in poetry.... (It) does not mean bunyans and frangipani (Florida, or the nightingale in Stevens' case), ... It means in a time like our own of violent feelings, equally violent feelings and the most skilful expression of the genuine" (OP, 251-252). Stevens makes a crucial statement about poetry that it is "always the living and at the same time the imaginative." The poetic act does not exist independently of the living. Rather the imagination roots itself in the living and existing things. The order of equilibrium poetry ultimately achieves, is of dis-covering "transcendence" in the most casual, changing things, not behind or beyond them. The poetic act is an act of perception of immediate, visible things, not an act of pure subjectivity that abstracts itself from the rich vividness

of things. As the speaker in "A Fish-scale Sunrise" (CP, 160-161) says,

> although my mind perceives the force behind the moment
> The mind is smaller than the eye.
>
> The sun rises green and blue in the fields and in
> the heavens.

Perhaps the poem which best reveals Stevens' way of thinking is "How to Live. What to Do" (CP, 125-126). As the title suggests the poem celebrates the "heroic" and "joyous" experience that the truthful, authentic, imaginative 'living' is. It describes "the man and his companion" resting before the height of a rock and feeling a sense of exhilaration in its presence and in the cold wind blowing around. Their experience, as in "The Snow Man," (CP, 9-10), owes nothing to what is not there. The things are deprived of any extraneous images or feelings attached to them by the observers. The moon is not a noble object of nature, nor is it seen as a cipher for an enkindling imagination. It is one casual thing in a most casual world. Even the rock is described without any symbolic signification, as it is, "Massively rising high and bare":

> There was neither voice nor crested image,
> No chorister, nor priest. There was
> Only the great height of the rock
> And the two of them standing still to rest.
>
> There was the cold wind and the sound
> It made, away from the muck of the land
> That they had left, heroic sound
> Joyous and jubilant and sure.

How different is this experience from similar descriptions of the harmonious relationship between man and nature that one finds in Wordsworth! Whereas for the great romantic poet the external world is imbued with the divine spirit which unites the self with nature, and the poet sings as a priest of divine nature, for Stevens, it is deprived of any "voice" or "image." There is simply "the great height of the rock." And an imaginative act consists of discovering it as it is without imposing or cresting it with any self-image or symbolic or spiritual signification.

"Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu" (CP, 127-128) also describes "a world without heaven to follow" and hence the need "To be one's singular self.... to turn / To the ever-jubilant weather," that is, to turn to the immediate reality about us and to be able to enjoy it, for,

> there
> What is/here but weather, what spirit
> Have I except it comes from the sun?

Stevens' remarks on the poem are revealing: "The ever jubilant weather is not a symbol. We are physical beings in a physical world; the weather is one of the things that we enjoy, one of the unphilosophical realities. The state of the weather soon becomes a state of mind. There are many 'immediate' things in the world that we enjoy..." (L, 349). As Stevens' gloss makes it clear, it is not the state of mind that is assigned to

nature. One hears no sound of misery in leaves. The mind imposes nothing on the weather but participates in the immediate, ever-changing reality. Weather, as always with Stevens, is the most powerful physical presence that the self embodies in its temporality, in its changingness, alike in spring and autumn. It would be wrong to describe the change of season from spring to autumn as change from life to decay and death in Stevens. As "The Snow Man" with its "sound of a few leaves" (CP, 10), or, "How to Live. What to Do." with its "cold wind" blowing suggests, autumn or winter can be as jubilant as spring or summer.

Perhaps the last poem of "Like Decorations in Nigger Cemetary" best describes, in its perfect epigrammatic manner, how the order of the greatest kind can be achieved by inhabiting the external reality. Order is not a question of human solidarity. In its most creative and genuine nature it depends on man's ability to identify with the surrounding world, to "build" a dwelling in the snow:

> Union of the weakest develops strength
> Not wisdom. Can all men, together, avenge
> One of the leaves that have fallen in autumn?
> But the wise man avenges by building his city in snow.
> (CP, 158)

It is in this sense that "autumn beguiles the fatalist" (CP, 155). Autumn is not the season of physical depletion and death or spiritual despair and so the season fit only for the fatalist. It is in the acceptance of time, of which the falling of a leaf,

or death, is the most authentic image, in rooting himself in the temporal process and discovering actual, tangible things in his immediate encounter with them that man can achieve order.

"The Pleasures of Merely Circulating" (CP, 149-150) celebrates the order which is the joy of moving or circulating, of being part of the ever-changing rhythm of the external space:

> The garden flew round with the angel,
> The angel flew round with the clouds,
> And the clouds flew round and the clouds flew round
> And the clouds flew round with the clouds.

The dynamic movement in the vastness of space, expressed in the simple folk-song rhythmseems to mock at the futility of our inquiries about the mystery of life, to find if there is "any secret in skulls," or, whether the drums "Rumble anything" mysterious. The futility is conveyed in the contrast between the joyfully flowing rhythm of the first stanza and the short, abrupt lines of the second with its ominous questions. As the third stanza suggests things occur perhaps more casually than mysteriously. The birth of a child is not a mysterious, but a casual event, a matter of chance: "Mrs. Anderson's Swedish baby / Might well have been German or Spanish." What is really abiding and pleasurable, what "Has rather a classical sound," is the animating and animated experience of one's being able to enjoy the immediate external space that is always

in a dynamic change, the experience of "merely" circulating. "Merely" is a frequently repeated word in Ideas of Order. It points to the need of the self's being able to experience and enjoy the immediate physical world as it is, without giving it any significations. "Botanist On Alp (No.2)" (CP, 135-136) speaks of bidding farewell to the relics of the imagination, and celebrate "the earthier" poem of

> those crosses, glittering,
> And merely of their glittering,
> A mirror of a mere delight. (emphasis added)

It is finally the pleasures of "merely" circulating, or the crosses of the church "merely" glittering in the sun that suffice. The speaker wishes the philosopher "A Delightful Evening" (CP, 162), "and that's enough." (emphasis added) The philosopher need not grieve, brow in his palm, about "the twilight overfull / Of wormy metaphors:" he need not worry about finding hidden meanings in the evening landscape, but learn to enjoy it in its immediacy.

"The Idea of Order at Key West" (CP, 128-130) best illustrates how poetry brings order into the world, or, how through the creative act the external world comes into being. The poem is Stevens' most sustained attempt at describing what exactly is involved in a creative act and defining how poetry and reality are ultimately one. The poem describes a woman walking by the sea, singing, and through her song making possible a world in which she can live. What is more, and this is very significant, the poem's seascape includes the presence of two other people,

the speaker and his friend, Ramon Fernandez, who witness and share the woman's song as well as the world in which she sings. Their presence from the beginning of the poem, confirms the fact that her song takes place in, and orders, the world that is not her private world, but the external world, the common, shared reality. Her song is an occurring in the world.

The woman's song, in the first place, is not an act of integration with the spirit of nature in which she walks:

> She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
> The water never formed to mind or voice...

It is not the great romantic vision in which the imagination unites with the divine spirit or the "genius" that pervades external nature. The sea is simply out there, making its own motions, inscrutable, and like Heidegger's 'earth', perhaps self-concealing. It is "inhuman," that is, a reality beyond the mind or its projections, a reality wholly other:

> Its mimic motion
> Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
> That was not ours although we understood,
> Inhuman, of the veritable ocean. (CP, 128)

The sea, then, is not a "mask," not a projection of the self. It exists independently of the human self. Nor is the singer a "mask" of the sea, nor does she make the cry of the sea her own in imitating it. If her vision is not wholly romantic or subjective, neither is it merely mimetic or impressionistic in reproducing "The meaningless plungings of water and the wind."

The women's song is distinct from the sea's:

> The song and water were not medleyed sound
> Even if what she sang was what she heard,
> Since what she sang was uttered word by word.
> It may be that in all her phrases stirred
> The grinding water and the gasping wind;
> But it was she and not the sea we heard. (CP, 128-129)

Her song, then, is not a blurring of identities, either of her own or of the sea. As another poem in the volume speaks of the night, "It is what it is as I am what I am: / And in perceiving this I best perceive myself" ("Re-statement of Romance," CP, 146). It is not an act of the subjective consciousness which withdraws the thing into the inner self and thus deprives it of its identity in the external world. Nor does the self merge or dissolve itself in the greater identity of the world. The imaginative act is important and inevitable precisely because it lets both the world and the self be at all. It orders, as the poem says later, not only the external space but also the inner space, "ourselves and... our origins." In this sense, as the poem seems to suggest, the song is more not only than "the dark voice of the sea," but "More even than her voice," more than reality shaping the self or the self shaping reality.

Her singing is a 'making': "she was the maker" of the song she sang. She also makes a world: "She was the single artificer of the world / In which she sang." The world she makes is not, as the poem so far has made clear, the private, subjective world,

but the world that is already there, yet lies closed to her, except for her singing. Her rage is "to order words of the sea," to establish it as the horizon of her being which, without her words, would not become a world at all. The imaginative act makes possible an environing world that she can truly inhabit. In making a world, she finds it. Making and discovering, creation and revelation are thus simultaneous and indistinguishable.

It is her voice that lets the sea and the sky be, lets them come more fully into existence:

> It was her voice that made
> The sky acutest at its vanishing.
> She measured to the hour its solitude.
> She was the single artificer of the world
> In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
> Whatever self it had, became the self
> That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
> As we beheld her striding there alone,
> Knew that there never was a world for her
> Except the one she sang and, singing, made. (CP,129-130)

She would never have a world, the sea and the sky would never form a habitable world, a horizon for her existence, but for her powerful utterance. The sea and the sky which are always there, would be closed to her, would not exist for her, and she would be a worldless person, and hence not be at all, if through her creative act she did not bring them into being.

The poem, instead of closing here, rightly moves to the observers, who having shared her song now appropriate her

experience. As they turn toward the town, the glassy lights,

> The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there
> As the night descended, tilting in the air,
> Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
> Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
> Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

They also experience the external scene falling into the blessed order. Their experience confirms the fact that the world she makes is not private or subjective. It is the world which they all share, but which forms into a shape, comes into being, only through an imaginative act.

The poem contains Stevens' central meditation on the relationship between self and world, poetry and reality, words and the world. Poetry is a making, it is an artifice, a fiction. But the fictive world that poetry creates is not a subjective world independent of the shared, external world. Rather poetry makes possible for the external world to be a world. In a work of art, as Heidegger says in his cryptic way, "the world worlds."[4] It otherwise lies concealed or hidden. The making is thus a disclosure, for without the creative act there is no discovering of things as they in their essence are. This is the ultimate order poetry introduces into life, which is to make the world truly habitable for us and thus to help us live in the common, shared world. The humanism, towards which Stevens moves in his poetry, is not the one in which man as the

centre shapes or imposes order in the world, but one in which man finds his dwelling in discovering things in their true being and being responsive to the world around him. This is perhaps what Stevens thought of the order that poetry could bring, at the time of the political turmoil in general and the current Marxist theories of social revolution in particular. Stevens did not see, as his correspondents and reviewers, Barnshaw for instance,[5] feared, any contradiction between writing poetry and the social upheavals, since for him poetry had ultimately, perhaps solely, to do with "this actual, real world, and no other would do" (L, 292).

As the poems in the collection show, Stevens' poetry is neither descriptive nor symbolic, neither realistic nor reflective. It certainly moves beyond the traditional poetry which sought to divest itself of the concrete, temporal existence by representing it in the absolute subjectivity. Poetry is, for Stevens, rather a way of giving sanction to whatever exists, or lives. As he said in a letter, "everything depends on its sanction; and when its sanction is lost that is the end of it" (L, 347). A poem that beautifully illustrates this, "Gray Stones and Gray Pigeons" (CP, 140), describes a bishop walking among the fireflies, away from the church on a holiday. The poem plays on the presence and absence of the archbishop. In his absence the church is gray, and stands "in a fixed light." It is a rigid, static, spatial monument. On the other hand, his presence makes the birds come to life and flutter: "Birds that never fly / Except when the bishop passes by." Without the sanctifying presence of the imagination, the poem seems to

convey, things lie dead and nonexistent. The bishop's presence gives life to the church, fireflies and birds. The poem does not operate on a symbolic level but deals with the actual absence or presence of the bishop. The bishop does not give signification to already existing things, but things acquire their fuller existence only in and through his being. His presence, like the singer's song at Key West, thus makes possible the environing world to come into being, which otherwise lies shapeless and lifeless and hence meaningless.

The poems of Ideas of Order can best be described as Stevens' search for creating and discovering poetry in the actual, commonplace world. The predominant tone of the poems, is, however, of the rejection of whatever past beliefs and poetic conceptions we have inherited. The poet bids farewell to the stifling hyperaesthetia of Florida or the pseudo-romantic evasions of the nightingale. He rejects those sovereigns of the soul and the majestic images we give to lions or eagles and waves adieu to gods and angels. He, in short, sings the poem of "long celestial death" (CP, 136). The poems thus verge more on the negative approach. But what Stevens is negating is the whole old way of looking at things, in which the creative self detaches itself from the immediate, lived world by viewing things either as the projections of itself (lions, eagles), or of some divine presence, gods or angels. The poems

express a reiterated need to rid the self of this highly anthropomorphic attitude to reality, and to create, what Stevens at this stage called, a fresh romantic, that is, a poetry that is capable of displaying the world while creating it.

It is in the world of autumn and slime that these poems situate themselves, yet not with a sense either of melancholia or any heroic fortitude. Stevens' poetry knows no "odd morphology of regret" (CP, 154). Rather, as the short, epigrammatic verses of "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetary" (CP, 150-158) which are Stevens' reflection on autumn suggest, autumn is not a season of decay and death but, as always with Stevens, it represents decreated, "bare" reality, shorn of all the poetic and metaphysical coverings that hide and thus forget its mystery. His insistence on the return to bare, actual ordinary things is to find its most powerful expression in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" (CP, 465-489). The poetic act must ground itself in this preconceptional, primordial world. "Weather" or "air" and "sun" are the presiding presences of these poems. The imaginative act finds joy in its ability to experience these immediate physical realities. Order is the self's creation and discovery of the environing world, as "The Idea of Order at Key West" illustrates. This is the ultimate celebration poetry sings of: of the heroic sound of the cold wind, "joyous and jubilant and sure" (CP, 126), or of the "ever-jubilant weather" (CP, 128), or of "a mere delight"

(CP, 136) of the glittering of the crosses in the sun. As initial definitions of Stevens' theory of poetry, these poems show that Stevens, like Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics, insists on the decreation of the inherited poetic and metaphysical conceptions and, at the same time, points to the need of grounding poetry in the facticity of the world.