## CHAPTER VIII

## PARTS OF A WORLD : ACCEPTANCE OF THE TEMPORAL WORLD

If in "The Man with The Blue Guitar" the relationship of poetry and reality was seen from the point of view of poetry, with the man strumming his blue guitar in the focus engaged in the creative act that would reveal to him things exactly as they are, the poems in Parts of a World have reality, the world itself, its parts, in the centre and concern themselves with the imaginative response the world calls for. The poems were written between 1937 and 1942 and the book was published in 1942 at about the same time as the publication of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," a poem in which a perfect synthesis of the separate approaches of "The Man with The Blue Guitar" and Parts of a World is achieved.

The central concern of the poems of Parts of a World is the retrieval and discovery of the preconceptual, primordial world, the "land beyond the mind" (CP, 252). Reality is not an 'objective' world which the 'subjective' consciousness can represent in its images. Rather, like Husserl's Lebenswelt or Heidegger's world it is pregiven and precedes consciousness.

The creative act grounds itself in this world and discovers things in their living immediacy. It does not, in other words, direct itself to "the neutral centre, the ominous element" (CP, 242), to an abstract transcendence or a pure conception of the mind, but involves a lived experience, perception and realization of things. In such an experience the self discovers the world in its inexhaustible fecundity, that is to say, not in its "ascetic" (CP, 241) idealistic perfection, but in all its rich imperfections which is the self's true delight (CP, 194). The mind never tries to fix the truth, for "it can never be satisfied, the mind, never" (CP, 247), but grounds its belief in the "casual reunions" (CP, 258) of the self and the weather, the things of the changing, temporal world, knowing that there is "nothing more and that it is enough" (CP, 258).

Several poems in this collection express a pronounced distrust of a poetry which distorts the world and thus evades having to do with its essential mystery by conceiving of it in images, symbols or concepts. As "On the Road Home" (CP, 203-204) puts it in a rather logical argument, there is no such thing as the truth, or absolute truth, "There are many truths, / But they are not parts of a truth." The things we see are not parts of some ultimate, ideal, atemporal truth. Rather, truth is to be dis-covered in things themselves. Similarly, one single word is not the sum of so many words. It is not an isolated, abstract symbol, a concept of the mind that stands for so many things,

Language is rather temporal as in its 'saying' the self comes to have a world at all:

> Words are not forms of a single word.
> In the sum of the parts, there are only the parts.
> The world must be measured by eye.

Words have to do, then, with our perceiving, experiencing or having the world, not with abstracting it to one "single word" of the mind. The poem ends with the rejection of the "idols," or images which have never been able to reveal the truth about things. The travellers on their way home, on the other hand, experience a rich truth about the world as they live with full intensity, with the space around them growing "largest" and "roundest" and "warmest" and "strongest."

"Study of Two Pears" (CP, 196-197), with its repeated, unequivocal, negative statements expresses a strong disapproval of the imagination that falsifies things by transforming them into something else:

> The pears are not viols
> Nudes or bottles.
> They resemble nothing else.
>
> . . . . . .
> The pears are not seen
> As the observer wills.

The self must abandon its sovereign will to power over them. Like the jar in Tennesse, the pears resemble nothing else, they are not to be evaded by conceiving of them as something else.

Rather, they are to be seen as essentially they are. As in a Cézanne still-life, they appear, bulging at curves, in shades of glistening yellow, in their depth and fullness. The theme itself is deliberately reminiscent of Cézanne and his care for bringing out the hidden planes and physicality of things.

"The Man on the Dump" (CP, 201-203) expresses even more contemptuously the disgust for the imagination that falsifies things. Such images of things are trash and deserve to be thrown on the dump. The poem is a forceful plea for, and itself a very apt illustration of, the decreation of all our conceptions of things, so that we may see them as "the the," the actual, palpable things themselves.

The poem opens with the most ordinary description of sunset and the moon rising: "Day creeps down. The moon is creeping up." The deliberately unromantic use of the verb "creep," repeated twice, not only deprives the scene of exotic ornamentation, but seems to expose through juxtaposition any such ornamentation as derogatory. The poet would have none of the figurative description of things. The false romanticising of the sun as a bouquet placed on the horizon by the moon as a lady blanche is rejected on the dump and sneered at by the poet. "The dump is full/Of images," for all such falsifying images are thrown onto it. They are "janitor's poems," not a poet's, trash like any other trash that has been dumped. Even the freshness of the

morning does not remain what it is as one turns it into images: "one says .... that it puffs / More than, less than or it puffs like this or that." Even the "dew" loses its freshness when it is turned into pale imitations by men and women. One shows sheer contempt for such falsification of things: "One grows to hate these things except on the dump."

It is only when one rejects these images as trash that "One feels the purifying change" as at the moment when one sees things as they are, not as the past images of them, nor as the images they will acquire as we try to interpret or define them, but in a present moment:

> Now, in the time of spring (azaleas, trilliums,
> Myrtle, viburnums, daffodils, blue phlox).
> Between that disgust and this, between the things
> That are on the dump (azaleas and so on)
> And those that will be (azaleas and so on),
> One feels the purifying change. One rejects
> The trash.

This is the moment when one does not cover the moon with the images of one's own but decreates or destroys all false coverings, dis-covers the moon come up <u>as</u> the moon:

> That's the moment when the moon creeps up
> To the bubbling of bassoons....
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Everything is shed; and the moon comes up as the moon
> (All its images are on the dump) and you see
> As a man (not like an image of a man),
> You see the moon rise in the empty sky.

The sky is also "empty," it is "no longer a junk-shop" (CP, 218) as Stevens puts it in another poem, that is, not an image of a heaven full of angels. That is all junk, all its images are on the dump. It is only a bare, clean sky in which the moon comes up. This is the purifying and exhilarating experience when the moon is seen not in its images but as it really is at the particular moment in time of rising in the sky; and the man who sees it is not the sovereign subject, not "an image of a man," who represents the moon in an image but the decreated self that perceives the moon and in perceiving it realizes itself.

This is perhaps what one wants to believe in, this is the truth one wants to "get near." The man sits on the dump and continues to beat an old tin can so that he may arrive at some such truth. The last stanza is wholly made up of questions, all of them suggesting possible answers to the last one: "Where was it one first heard of the truth?" Certainly on the dump, perhaps, while rejecting all trash of images, in learning to be "merely oneself," as superior to all images, as the ear is superior to "a crow's voice," or a nightingale's song which would otherwise "torture the ear, / Pack the heart and scratch the mind," turn the heart into a junk-box stuffing it with its song. And does one really listen to the bird's song as a way of finding solace, as a sentimental, romantic, subjective comfort? Perhaps not, and the questions that follow imply a similar doubt about several ways of finding a belief, a truth, which are perhaps falsifying

and therefore inadequate:

> And does the ear
> Solace itself in peevish birds? Is it peace,
> Is it a philosopher's honeymoon, one finds
> On the dump? Is it to sit among mattresses of the dead,
> Bottles, pots, shoes and grass and murmur aptest eve:
> Is it to hear the blatter of grackles and say
> Invisible priest; is it to eject, to pull
> The day to pieces and cry stanza my stone?
> Where was it one heard of truth? The the. (CP, 203)

There are several possibilities suggested here. First is perhaps the least attractive way, of finding a private, sentimental comfort in the things we hear or see or experience. Then there is the philosopher's way of truth, for whom the things are a kind of bonanza from which to evolve great, eternal and, therefore, peace-giving concepts. Then perhaps there is a way of seeing things as nothing but objects, in a strictly realistic, positivistic, "aptest" manner. The other extreme is the romantic idealism, to see the transcendent spirit informing the things, to hear in the blatter of grackles a hymn of an invisible priest. One more possibility is to annihilate things totally, to tear the day to pieces, and then create one's own personal poetry, a modernist way, perhaps, to "cry stanza my stone."

All these ways lead one further away from the truth as they evade "the the," the things themselves. Perhaps one finds the truth not in any absolute transcendent form but in being "merely oneself," stripping oneself and the things of all false encrustations, being able to see the moon rise in the empty sky.

The famous final stanza of "The Man on the Dump" has evoked various responses from critics. Doggett, for instance, takes "the truth" as "the specific experience, the the, that certain instant of light that is this instance... the moment of light, the moment of consciousness, that unfolding event we call experience, including what we think and what we feel as well as what we see, is an infinitely complex realization of self and world."[1] Vendler, on the other hand, finds Stevens accepting his own self reduced as the dump: "Oneself is the dump out of which must be constructed apt eves, invisible priests, and stanzas."[2] Litz explains the stanza as rejecting "the evasions of the irreducible minimum, the the."[3] Bloom, while summing up these critics, defines "the the" as "not a specific experience or a present moment, not oneself in any anti-transcendental sense, and not a poetry of irreducible minimum" but as "any object whatsoever, outside the self, which is in the process of being taken up again into language."[4] Bloom finds the American High Romantic self, superior and transcendent, "perpetually at work, reconstructing itself"[5] beneath the reductive stance of this poem of ethos. For Riddel "the the" is the purity and ideality of art that is at odds with the dump of the world. Recalling perhaps Eliot's image of a 'heap of broken images' Riddel defines the poem as "a perfect clutter of images, of time's dump heap which thwarts desire: that is, the world of parts thwarts one's wish to get near to the "the" and yet one cannot know the "the" until he knows the world and what the imagination can make of it."[6] What one

finds common in these different interpretations is that the critics posit a subjective self and accept the subject-object dichotomy. They find the variance or tension between what Bloom calls the romantic self, or Doggett the reflective mind, or Ridell the abstraction of art on the one hand and the things of the world, the bare minimum, or a mere dump, the reductive reality to be recreated by the subjective imagination on the other. But the poem goes beyond the subject-object contrast in its very insistence on decreation of our subjective imagining of things. Decreation for Stevens is not a negative, reductive act, but a positive, creative act that enables us to recover things in their pre-subjective, pre-conceptual, primordial sense, that is, things as they are. The poetic act thus comprises the experience and discovery of these primordial, temporal things, of "parts" of the world, of actual, tangible things shorn of all the subjective encrustations laid on them, in other words, the realization of "the the." This is the central experience of the poems of Parts of a World.

The true imaginative act, then, does not turn the visible, temporal things of the world into abstract, atemporal images. The rejection of such a false way of seeing things is reiterated in a number of poems of Parts of a World. The star seen in the evening, for instance, is not a symbol but a real, vivid thing realized in one's perception of it:

> Not the symbol but that for which the symbol stands,
> The vivid thing in the air... (CP, 238)

To give images to things is to evade them, as "Add This to Rhetoric" (CP, 196-197) illustrates:

> In the way you speak
> You arrange, the thing is posed,
>
> What in nature merely grows.

This is "an evading metaphor" that takes us away from what in nature merely grows, from actual, tangible things. The sun with all its strength, destroys all such images:

> Tomorrow when the sun,
> For all your images,
> Comes up as the sun, bull fire,
> Your images will have left
> No shadow of themselves.

Stevens is here criticizing the idealist approach to reality which emphasizes that reality exists only in the mind and thus separates us from the substantial, fluctuating things of the world about us. Similarly, "The Latest Freed Man" (CP, 204-205), "Tired of the old descriptions of the world," who shares the strength of the sun, does not look for a "doctrine" in the landscape, and "having just / Escaped from the truth, the morning is colour and mist" for him "which is enough." It is the direct and immediate experience of the scene that really suffices for him, not an abstract, doctrinal truth about it. The lover in "Bouquet of Belle Scavoir" (CP, 231-232) is not content with the images of his lady. "The form of her in something else / Is not enough." "The reflection of her here, and then there, / Is

another shadow, another evasion, / Another denial. If she is everywhere, / She is nowhere to him..../It is she that he wants to look at directly, / Someone before him to see and to know."

Perhaps "Landscape With Boat" (CP, 241-243) presents the central concern of Parts of a World more explicitly and more effectively than other poems, namely, that truth is not an abstract, transcendent "phantom" located in some "uncreated" space, but a "part" of the world, experienced, in the concrete, temporal things of the world. "The anti-master-man, floribund ascetic," a Platonic idealist perhaps, in his search for an ultimate truth turns away from the things around him so that he may arrive at it:

> Nabob
> Of bones, he rejected, he denied, to arrive
> At the neutral centre, the ominous element,
> The single-colored, colorless, primitive.
> It was not as if the truth lay where he thought,
> Like a phantom, in an uncreated night.

The anti-master man, like the "no man" (CP, 255) in another poem is the opposite of the major man who is "himself" (CP, 255) who lives and sees and feels the things around him. The neutral centre that he seeks is a mere supposition of his mind, a hypothetical proposition, an unreal and therefore "ominous element" that leads him from one void to another. In his asceticism of rejecting the inexhaustible fecundity of the temporal world he ultimately misses, paradoxically, as the poem goes on to suggest, the truth of the rich mystery of the world:

> He never supposed
> That he might be truth, himself, or part of it,
> That the things that he rejected might be part
> And the irregular turquoise, part, the perceptible blue
> Grown denser, part ...
> ..... parts, and all these things together
> Parts, and more things, parts.

Truth is once again described here as residing in things. The meaning of truth is perhaps best defined, as Heidegger does, in its Greek sense as aletheia, as the unhiddenness or discovery of things. Truth in this sense means letting things appear as they really are, in their unconcealedness. When things appear thus they do so in their essence, their being and the perception of things in their being is indeed a "divine" experience. The ascetic, however, denies himself such a perception and thus deprives himself of the divine experience of the truth of things:

> He never supposed divine
> Things might not look divine, nor that if nothing
> Was divine then all things were, the world itself,
> And that if nothing was the truth, then all
> Things were the truth, the world itself was the truth.

He would never arrive at the truth, would continue to move from void to void, for he fails to realize that there is no "truth beyond all truths," there is no essence beyond the existents, that truth manifests itself only in temporality, in things themselves. If he would only "sit on a sofa on a balcony / Above the Mediterranean" and "watch the palms ... / A yellow wine and follow a steamer's track," if he would only observe the landscape with boat, he might be nearer the truth!

The poem thus states that poetic truth is not an atemporal abstraction but an experience of discovering things themselves, a perception of things actual and present in their presence. To see the poem, as Riddel does, as a quest for "the neutral centre" is to fail to see the unreality, the ominous intimations and the futility of the search that the poem suggests. Riddel sees the poem as a tension "between a longing for the 'the' and the significance of parts of the world, between desire for the pure and what is available to the eye."[7] The poem rather suggests that what is available to the eye is the only pure and the parts of the world the only "the" the only truth.

"Landscape with Boat" begins with discursive language and, rather intentionally, ends with a concrete description of the landscape. The change in language corresponds to the change in idea. Rejecting the logic of abstract truth the poem relocates the metaphoric act in the self's intense realization of the living immediacy of the landscape. Though the poem begins on a negative note, it ends with a rich positive expression. This deliberate juxtaposing of two languages is the juxtaposition of the idealist notion of truth as abstract and transcendental and the phenomenological notion of truth as revelation of being in temporality which for Stevens is the genuine poetic truth.

"Mrs. Alfred Uruguay" (CP, 248-250), also like the anti-master-man in "Landscape with Boat," denies herself the imaginative experience of this world, and in her quest of ideal,

transcendent truth ultimately annihilates herself: "Her no and no made yes impossible." In place of the plainly logical, discursive manner of "Landscape With Boat" the poem takes the form of a comic fable with the lady riding on her donkey, away from the world, up the hill. She is juxtaposed with the daimonic youth with "phosphorescent hair," equally outrageous, a "figure of capable imagination," on a horse, who creates out of the martyrs' bones the "ultimate elegance." At his passing the village comes to life. The poem is a fine balancing of the two figures. The lady claims to have "elegance," to be the chosen one on her quest of the absolute, but ironically, it is the youth who creates "elegance" in bringing the landscape into its radiant being.

"Connoisseur of Chaos" (CP, 215-216) presents the problem in a different way. The initial propositions that "A. A violent order is disorder; and / B. A great disorder is an order" offered as "Pages of illustrations" are perhaps a logician's conclusions; but as the poem succeeds in establishing, they satisfy and delight the connoisseurs as well. The great universal truths imposed by the mind upon the world to arrange it, order it, enframe it, are violent for they distort its essentially impenetrable mystery. On the other hand, the world itself, forever changing and arranging itself presents the truth or order, in what it is. "The squamous mind" may, with its theories, prove that the "opposite things partake of one," it may resolve the world with its formulas, but "the squirming facts" of the world

exceed the mind, which do make us see the relations beyond the conceptions of the mind: "A small relation expanding like the shade / Of a cloud on sand, a shape on the side of a hill." The connoisseur knows this; as he delights in the great disorder of the changing weather, he casually realises this disorder to be the essential order. He "sees that eagle float / For which the intricate Alps are a single nest." He sees, in other words, the order within the disorder itself. The "relation that appears" is important, is the heart of the matter. Order is not achieved through the conception of the mind but in the perception of relations:

The rejection of the "neutral," the abstract, the transcendent and the acceptance of the "imperfect," "common" "parts" of the world is thus the central experience of the poems of Parts of a World. The poems emphasize the fact that the creative act is grounded in temporality. "Martial Cadenza" (CP, 237-238), one of the most beautiful poems in the collection, illustrates this most successfully. The experience of the perception of the evening star does not transport one into an ideal, transcendent realm, into another "place," but it is the most intense realization of the present moment. The creative act, the poem seems to suggest, is an act of realization of the self and things in time:

> It was like sudden time in a world without time,
> This world, this place, the street in which I was,
> Without time: as that which is not has no time,
> Is not ....

In a creative experience things first come to be and exist. They acquire their truth only when they acquire temporality. To be at all in any real sense is to be in time, for "that which is not has no time, / Is not."

The experience of time that the star offers is, however, not historical time, past, present or future. The presence of the star, its light, as the third stanza declares, has nothing to do with the warring countries over which it shines; "It looked apart," it is indifferent to their historical context. It is rather the more real and immediate experience of time, of lived and existential time in which things truly come to be themselves that the evening star makes possible. The star thus

> Itself
> Is time, apart from any past, apart
> From any future, the ever-living and being,
> The ever-breathing and moving, the constant fire,
>
> The present close, the present realized,
> Not the symbol but that for which the symbol stands,
> The vivid thing in the air that never changes,
> Though the air change.

The star is not a symbol, a fixed, atemporal ideality, but the thing in its very being, in its essence, which can only be experienced in its vivid presentness. The being of a thing does not exist apart from its be-ing, the presence, apart from the thing present. It is this realization of 'presence' in things

'present' and existential that is the genuine creative experience. The creative self grounds itself in time, participates in things temporal and thus 'exists' more truly and fully. For the beholder the perception of the evening star is thus a return to the living immediacy of things, in which he "walked and talked / Again, and lived and was again, and breathed again / And moved again." In defining the creative experience as the coming into existence of being the poem looks forward to the central concern of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction."

There are several poems in Parts of a World that emphasize the significance of time and change. The opening poem, "The Parochial Theme" (CP, 191-192) sets the tone for the poems to follow. The picture of the "Ponies of Parisians shooting on the hill" on a cold autumn day is the picture of "health (that) is holy." Similarly "The spring will have a health of its own." The health of life depends on incessant change which is even "faster than the weather." Each moment is an agreement with reality. "The Poems of Our Climate" (CP, 193-194) continues the theme of "The Parochial Theme" that there is no experience that is complete final and perfect and hence abstracted from living existence. "The never-resting mind" is never satisfied with the perfect simplicity of an arrangement or a composition. Rather "The imperfect is our paradise." The mind delights in the ever-changing, ever-renewing things in their rich imperfections and

not in their transfixed, idealized perfections.

"Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers" (CP, 246-247) is another illustration of the creative experience that is grounded in the visible, temporal things. For the woman there is no need for "clairvoyance," to see the invisible beyond the visible. Rather the invisible, "the central, essential," the "large abstraction" breaks into the particular leaf and bud and fruit, the visible things around her. The poem admonishes the "little owl," the clairvoyant wisdom that seeks the neutral centre beyond the parts to see "how / High blue became particular / In the leaf and bud and how the central, essential red / Escaped its large abstraction, became, / First, summer, then a lesser time, / Then the sides of peaches, of dusky pears." This act of perception of the invisible in the visible is an act of faith, of affirmation:

> ... the inhuman colors fell
> Into place beside her, where she was,
> Like human conciliations, more like
> A profounder reconciling, an act,
> An affirmation free from doubt.
> The crude and jealous formlessness
> Became the form and the fragrance of things
> Without clairvoyance, close to her.

What is gained is more profound than the fake transcendence that is rejected.

Such acts of perception involve an immediate response to things. Stevens often uses the word "feeling" that is part of

perceiving. "There is a feeling as definition" of the hero. "The hero is a feeling, a man seen / As if the eye was an emotion, / As if in seeing we saw our feeling / In the object seen and saved that mystic / Against the sight, the penetrating, / Pure eye" (CP, 278-279). "The truth must be" says "Poem Written at Morning" (CP, 219) that "You do not see, you experience, you feel, / That the buxom eye brings merely its element / To the total thing, a shapeless giant forced / Upward." The creative perception which involves a total powerful response to things seen, is capable of discovering the thing in its totality, "the total thing," is able to force the shapeless giant upward, to bring into existence being, to bring into shape and form the shapeless. In the creative perception the formless, the large abstraction breaks into a form, with all its particulars: "Green were the curls upon that head." It is, then, in a metaphoric act that the total thing is discovered.

An important aspect of the poems of Parts of a World is their insistent concern with the problem of belief. "One beats and beats (on the dump) for that which one believes" (CP, 202). But "The never-resting mind" (CP, 194) is not content with a final, fixed belief in any ultimate, transcendent, abstract truth. "It can never be satisfied, the mind, never" (CP, 247). In this way the question of belief is also relocated, not in an atemporal, absolute ideality, but in the real and temporal world."The poem

of the mind" (CP, 239), therefore, involves an act of discovering being in beings themselves. Poetry is an act that gives us things in their phenomenological/ontological plenitude, the essence in existence. It is for this reason that we have the supreme need of poetry as it helps us to dis-cover the world, as it essentially is and thus truly live in it, which is what will really suffice. The poetry of the present is not what it has been in the past as "Of Modern Poetry" (CP, 239-240) tells us. "It has not always had / To find." The belief in a supreme ideality, either of nature, or of god, or of art made the poem of the mind mainly a mimetic, representational act: "The scene was set, it repeated what / Was in the script." But the poem of the present "has to be living... has to face the men of the time... ." It has to find what will suffice for the modern man; it has to be the poetry of the time. It speaks, through an actor, a man on the guitar, to an "invisible audience" who, in listening to the song, listen to themselves, realize themselves. The listener is also the creator as he discovers "sudden rightness." This is how poetry satisfied a need. It is "the finding of a satisfaction, and may / Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman / Combing. The poem of the act of the mind."

"Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas" (CP, 252-259) presents the problem of belief more directly. Though not very successful as a poem because of its discursive manner, the poem nonetheless collects together the major concerns of Parts of a World: the need to strip oneself of the false

"artificial" subjective preconceptions, to be "naked" and be "part of a land beyond the mind" (CP, 252) (I); acceptance of the actual suffering without evading it into illusory transformations (II); replacing the "old world" of belief in an unknown "X" by belief in the life of men as a spiritual good (III); the urge to be the "the," that is , oneself in seeing the "abstraction... breaking into reality" (CP, 255), in seeing and experiencing the abstract in the particular (IV); to find order in the disorder, "chaos" (V); and finally the focus on the question of belief:

> What
> One believes is what matters. Ecstatic identities
> Between one's self and the weather and the things
> Of the weather are the belief in one's element,
> The casual reunions, the long-pondered
> Surrenders, the repeated sayings that
> There is nothing more and that it is enough
> To believe in the weather and in the things and men
> Of the weather and in one's self, as part of that
> And nothing more. (CP, 258)

Once again, weather, the most powerful image of physical and immediate reality that is perpetually renewing itself, dominates the poem. The experience of this weather and "the things... of the weather," of the tangible environing things, of being part of them, that is the source of one's belief and joy. The poem also introduces, what is to be a central image in later poetry, the image of "poverty." It is only in poverty, when the self is "naked of any illusion," when the decreated self is finally rid of its arrogant, anthropomorphic will-to-power over things, that it is able to live in the intimacy of things and

participate in their being. The self then "surrenders" to weather, knowing that "There is nothing more" and experiences "the subtle centre," the being that resides in surrounding things.

It is this belief in weather, in everchanging reality, that leads the poem to its most serene mood of the final stanza. In accepting change, the poem accepts death as the most authentic form of change, which is to accept death as the mother of beauty and also as the mother of the innocence of earth.

The belief in poetry as helping us to discover the world and also ourselves finds its most affirmative expression in "Asides on the Oboe" (CP, 250-251):

> The prologues are over. It is a question, now,
> Of final belief. So, say that final belief
> Must be in a fiction. It is time to choose.

The poem presents the man of imagination, who replaces all the past heroes, mythological as well as historical, and in whose poems we discover more truly both the world and ourselves. He walks in "dew" and like the singer at Key West, sings by the sea-side "milky lines," sings anew and afresh in pristine purity. He is "naked" of illusions and falsities, rid of anthropocentric superiority over things and is "tall," majestic in his essential nakedness. He is

> The impossible possible philosophers' man,
> The man who has had the time to think enough,
> The central man, the human globe, responsive,
> As a mirror with a voice, the man of glass,
> Who in amillion diamonds sums us up.

He is a philosopher's man, a thinker - the poet and the thinker are one in Stevens as in Heidegger - a man who meditates and is profoundly concerned with what is fundamental and essential to man. He is the central man whose very being brings the world into existence, establishes its horizons, and thus provides also a place for us which we can truly inhabit. He is in this sense a human globe, and also a man of glass, bright and transparent, a source of illumination for us and is also like a mirror, in which we can see ourselves, and which would explain us to ourselves. He is not a man who lives detached and apart but a "responsive" man, responsive and concernful to the world and things around him.

The central man is "the transparence of the place in which / He is." Like the man with the blue guitar, he is "a native in the world" (CP, 180) in which he lives. In his poems, like the song of the woman at Key West, he brings the world into being: "Thou art not August unless I make thee so." Only in and through his poems August comes to be what it is. He thus creates the world in which he lives. His poems, however, do not create a private, subjective world, but make possible the world which is already there, but lies hidden or is nonexistent except for the imaginative act. His poems thus make it possible for us to discover the very world in which we live, which otherwise is concealed from us, and so "in his poems we find peace."

The final section of the poem turns to a more specific experience of war. "One year, death and war prevented the jasmine scent." The poem focuses on to the violent reality of war, and on the relation of poetry and war, or rather, what Stevens called, "the immense poetry of war."[8] In the presence of the violent reality of war, Stevens wrote, "consciousness takes the place of imagination.... the mere consciousness of (the fact of war) affects the scale of one's thinking and constitutes a participating in the heroic."[9] "How was it then with the central man? Did we / Find peace?" the poem raises the question, and finds an answer in the central man's being affected by the bare facts of war:

> We buried the fallen without jasmine crowns.
> There was nothing he did not suffer, no; nor we.

This is the immense poetry of war, which is different from, as Stevens says, the poetry of the work of imagination, for it involves not only an imaginative response to the world, but an awareness of fact to a degree of overwhelming effect of it on the consciousness. The suffering of the central man becomes our suffering as he enlarges our consciousness. It is then that "we and the diamond globe at last were one. / We had always been partly one. It was as we came / To see him, that we were wholly one." In becoming aware of fact, in participating in it, and in an endless struggle with it, we become aware of our humanity, our true and whole self which we share with the central man, we become him, we know him "without external reference."

The immense poetry of war is also the subject of "Examination of the Hero in the Time of War" (CP, 273-281), the poem in which Stevens defines his concept of the hero. The hero in the time of war is not the classic hero, but as poem V describes him, the common man as the common hero. He is the one who "Acts in reality, adds nothing / To what he does" (CP, 279). He is, in other words, the central man, the man of imagination, of enlarged consciousness of fact and moves in the direction of fact, not as it is, but as he wants it to be. The poem extends its scope as it examines various kinds of heroes of war who serve as contrasts or subordinates to the common, central hero. Stevens even indulges in various kinds of languages, over-rhetorical and ornamental, hypnotic and visionary, as he makes various attempts at evoking different kinds of hero. At first, in poem II, is presented the hero as god, the great deliverer: "The Got whome we serve is able to deliver / Us" (CP, 273). He appears like a conjuror, "Captain, the man of skill, the expert/ Leader, the creator of bursting color / And rainbow sortilege, the savage weapon / Against enemies..." (CP, 274). Poem VII describes the classic hero of war and the bourgeois hero of peace, both of whom are, for an experienced man, "things for public gardens, / ... men suited to public ferns." (CP, 276). In contrast, the common hero goes to his fate like a lover "Mumbling a secret, passionate message" (CP, 276) unlike the high declamation of the tragic and aristocratic hero.

There is also the hero of the common mass, who feeds on

the mass, whose "profane parade" is described in the comic and vulgar "hip, hip, hurrah" (CP, 278) of the common people. The other extreme is to exalt the hero "Beyond his circumstance, projected / Nigh, low, far, wide, against the distance, / ... Painted by mad-men ... enthroned on rainbows..." (CP, 277), a man of "dry descriptions," never real, a product of our "whimsy" (CP, 278). The hero is not even his "emblem" (CP, 277) representing, as it were, a typical figure of the hero who "seems / To stand taller than a person stands..... All his speeches / Are prodigies in longer phrases" (CP, 277).

Against this, the common hero is announced in simple, affirmative statements, in words of plain propounding: "The common man is the common hero" (CP, 275). He is "the extremest power / Living and being about us and being / Ours, like a familiar companion" (CP, 276). "It is a part of his conception / That he be not conceived, being real" (CP, 279). The hero is a native in the world in which he lives. He is the central man, the essential man, "the man-man":

> These are the works and pastimes
> Of the highest self: he studies the paper
> On the wall, the lemons on the table.
> This is his day. With nothing lost, he
> Arrives at the man-man as he wanted.
> This is his night and meditation. (CP, 280)

The contrast between the false hero and the true hero which has been presented throughout the poem in a similar contrast of speeches of violent extravagance and sober plainness, appears in

a perfect balance, of subject and speech, in the final stanza:

> Each false thing ends. The bouquet of summer
> Turns blue and on its empty table
> It is stale and the water is discolored.
> True autumn stands then in the doorway.
> After the hero, the familiar
> Man makes the hero artificial. (CP, 280)

But is it correct to call summer and the hero false and dismiss them and believe in autumn as "the veritable season" (CP, 280), the common man as the "veritable man" (CP, 281)? The question calls for a justification of the initial statements. Perhaps it is more correct to say that the summer as well as the "hero," "jangling the savagest diamonds and / Dressed in its azure-doubled crimsons" (CP, 281) in truly bearing their "heroic fortunes," (CP, 281) provide a striking contrast against which the veritable season, the veritable man, "the large, the solitary figure" (CP, 281) may rise and come to be.

This belief in the familiar man about us as the veritable man is part of the central experience of Parts of a World, which repeatedly insists that the world itself is the truth we know and experience. Parts of a World thus emphasizes an important aspect of Stevens' poetics, namely, that the poetry roots itself in the actual, existential world. Reality, these poems seem to suggest, can never be dissolved in the conceptions of the mind. It is "a land beyond the mind" (CP, 252). It is the pre-conceptual, primordial, spatio-temporal world and not a set of objects put at the disposal of the subjective self. The task

of poetry is to dis-cover this world in its inexhaustible plenitude, its rich imperfections, and not reduce it to the fixed images of the mind. Poetry, thus, transcends the subject-object schema, for the poetic self, instead of viewing the existents set against it as objects, grounds itself in the actual and temporal world, and in the responsive encounter with them, discovers them in their true being. More than any other books of Stevens, Parts of a World, is organized about this central idea which gives it a strict unity. If the book suffers, it is not because of the lack of purpose but because of the repetitiveness of the central idea. Nevertheless the poems of Parts of a World give intimations of things to come in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction": The perception of things in their being, in their "first idea": the manifestation of being in things that change and live, in temporality, the central idea of the book; belief in poetry's power to reveal the world in its rich fecundity and in the major man as the veritable hero. In "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," however, Stevens will no longer need to dump false heroes and false images, or to address himself to the academy of fine arts to refute their artificial world. The negative strain of these poems, and the language consequent to it will never appear again in the rich ambiance of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" which will achieve its centre in "the amassing harmony" (CP, 403) of imagination and fact, of poetry and reality.