CHAPTER II

THE POETRY OF THE EARTH

In "Imagination as Value," Stevens speaks of our time as the time in which "the great poems of heaven and hell have been written and the great poem of the earth remains to be written" (NA, 142). In an era deprived of the divine, of the other-worldly dimensions, poetry comes to acquire the dimensions of the earth. Poetry has no other source but the vast and familiar earth. As the poem "Yellow Afternoon" (CP, 236-237) puts it,

> It was in the earth only
> That he was at the bottom of things
> And of himself. There he could say
> Of this I am, this is the patriarch,
> This is what answers when I speak.
>
> . . . . . .
> Everything comes to him
> From the middle of his field. The odor
> Of earth penetrates more deeply than any word.
> There he touches his being. There as he is
> He is.

The poet thus roots himself, and finds his true being, in the earth and not in any 'beyond'. He is "the necessary angel of the earth" and helps us to "see the earth again" (CP, 496). He extols the glory which human eye can see. He fulfils his task of manifesting the visible,

actual things which are here and now. The instinct for heaven has "its counterpart: / The instinct for earth, for New Haven, for his room" (CP, 476). From heaven to earth to New Haven to his room, the poet finally focuses his attention on what is near and familiar.

The main urge of Stevens' poetry is, then, to return to earth, to see things as they are. Stevens aims his search at "the poem of pure reality, ... / Straight to the transfixing object, to the object / At the exactest point at which it is itself, / ... being purely what it is" (CP, 471). The poet must "see the very thing and nothing else" (CP, 373), he need "seek / Nothing beyond reality. Within it, / Everything" (CP, 471). Poetry must give us, as the title of the last poem of Collected Poems declares, "Not the Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself" (CP, 534), for, "there is nothing in the world greater than reality" (OP, 177). Poetry must be primarily and essentially about reality, it must be deeply rooted in the immediate, ordinary, visible things. As Stevens says in "Esthetique du Mal," "The greatest poverty is not to live / In a physical world" (CP, 325). The ultimate experience that poetry yields is to be located within this world and not in any transcendence, either of some divine Logos, or of the self. Stevens thus insists, like Heidegger, on the facticity of the world as the ultimate ground of all our experience.

In his essay on Stevens in Poets of Reality, J. Hillis Miller gives an eloquent account of how in Stevens' poetry the moment of the death of the gods coincides with the moment of turning to earth, how his poetry "brings about a sudden miraculous recovery of the vitality of earth."[1] With the disappearance of the gods Miller observes, "there are only two entities left ... man, and nature, subject and object. Nature is the physical world, visible, audible, tangible, present to all the senses, and man is consciousness."[2] It is true that man returns to earth when all transcendent dimensions are gone, but it is perhaps not correct to say, as Miller seems to suggest, that this situation necessarily leads to a confrontation between self and world, or subject and object. As Miller argues, "Stevens inherits the tradition of dualism coming down from Descartes ... mind confronting a matter which it makes into a mirror of itself."[3] Working within the perspective of 'critics of consciousness' that bases itself on the assumption of the irreducible priority and givenness of the self, Miller is led to conclude that Stevens' poetry represents "the unreconciled tension between self and world."[4] He, however, fails to see that the disappearance of the gods opens up a situation in which man turns to the wonders of the earth, to the mystery of the visible in an open responsiveness and sense of wonderment.

In fact, Stevens' poetry moves beyond the subject-object dualism. Things are never taken for granted; they are not mere

'objects', either to be reproduced or absorbed into consciousness by a dis-interested and detached viewing subject. They are entities within the world, at once familiar and infinitely strange, which are independent of, and prior to, human conceptions. Reality, Stevens says, is a "land beyond the mind" (CP, 252). All access to things is, then, found not within the subject-object schema, but upon the self's ability to immerse itself in the circumambient world and experience things in their living immediacy. Aware of the problematic of reality, "its range of meaning in thought," Stevens offered his own definition of it in "The Noble Rider and the Sounds of Words." Reality, says Stevens, "is not that external scene but the life that is lived in it. Reality is things as they are" (NA, 24,25). Reality is not a set of objects set over and against a viewing subjective self, but the primordial, temporal world in which the self is situated and through its encounters discovers things as they are.

The subject matter of poetry, then, is, as Stevens says, not the external scene, the 'objective' world, not that "'collection of solid, static objects extended in space'" (NA, 25). As he puts it in a later poem, "It is not in the premise that reality / Is a solid" (CP, 489). What is wrong with this rationalist view-point is that it does not give us things but objects. It does not give us things in their "most individual aspect" (NA, 93), i.e., in their individuality, their

inexhaustible richness, but only as isolated objects extended in empty space. In his review of one of Marianne Moore's poems, Stevens says, appropriating H.D. Lewis, that "An isolated fact, cut loose from the universe, has no significance for the poet. It derives its significance from the reality to which it belongs.... There is in reality an aspect of individuality at which every form of rational explanation stops short" (NA, 93). The rationalist/positivistic account of things, however exhaustive its information and knowledge of things, does not give us the experience of the integral reality of things, of things 'here and now', around us, of things in their 'lived' space. Things emerge as things only in their existential context. The rationalists view reality as a set of bare, separate objects placed in a void and thus miss reality in all its liveliness, its fecundity: "Rationalists wearing square hats, / Think in square rooms,/ ... They confine themselves / To right-angled triangles" (CP, 75). It is perhaps for this reason that Stevens is critical of realism. "Realism," he says in Adagia, "is a corruption of reality" (OP, 166).

Poetry, then, does not have to do with bare facts. It does not involve itself with a photographic reproduction or mere representation of external objects. Most "reproducers of life, even including the camera, really repudiate it" (OP, 176). The idea of poetry as imitation of nature is ruled out, for, "an imitation may be described as an identity manque. It is

artificial. It is not fortuitous as a true metaphor is .... It is lifeless" (NA, 73). If poetry were confined to mere imitation of bare objects, it would be deprived of its creativity, it would be "lifeless." If reality is the base, it still remains only a base, i.e., it leaves scope for the 'making' of poetry. The poetic is distinguished from the natural. The work of art is not a second version of things. Poetry is never "true to life" (OP, 237), but it exhibits affinities in the actual structure of objects by which their significance is deepened and enhanced. Photographic reality, therefore, must be broken up in order to reach "a unity rooted in the individuality of objects" (OP, 237). Poetry must divest itself of its function of direct description so that it may, at the level of creation, have the power to discover reality in its inexhaustible fecundity, in its phenomenological/ontological dimensions.

If reality is not a set of isolated facts or objects to be represented by the self, neither does it wholly exist in the mind. The actual and particular things are not to be dissolved into the abstract conceptions of the mind. This latter is the idealist approach to reality which emphasizes that reality exists only in the mind and cannot be understood in terms of things that appear and grow. It separates us from the substantial, fluctuating things of the world about us and establishes some communion with the objects which are apprehended by thought. In reifying the idea it relegates the actual, temporal things to the realm of the apparent, and thus takes for granted the central existential mystery.

Stevens' poetry repeatedly denounces the creative act that transforms the actual, fluctuating things into a realm of transcendent ideality. In an early poem, "Negation" (CP, 97-98), the creator is called "blind," and "too vague idealist" because he struggles "toward his harmonious whole, / Rejecting intermediate parts." Things must not be dissolved into the abstract images of the mind. In "Crude Foyer" (CP, 305), for instance, he says, "Thought is false happiness: the idea / ... That there lies ... / A foyer of the spirit in a landscape / Of the mind, ... / In which we sit and breathe / An innocence of an absolute, / False happiness...." It is false happiness because true happiness is to be found not "there" in the foyer of the spirit, but, as the poem says, it "turns out to be here," it is to be experienced here and now in the things around us, in what we see and hear. In poems like "Mrs. Alfred Uruguay" (CP, 248-250) and "Landscape With Boat" (CP, 241-243) Stevens criticizes the idealist view that reality is to be attained in its purity by rejecting the individual and temporal things. In the latter, "an anti-master man, floribund ascetic," Plato as philosopher perhaps, rejects everything tangible and actual to reach some anonymous transcendent power which he supposes to be the ground of all things. He moves from void to void in order to arrive "At the neutral centre, the ominous element, / The single-colored, colorless, primitive. / ... Like a phantom, in an uncreated night. / ... A truth beyond all truths." Paradoxically, he never arrives at the truth, for he never supposes that "all / Things were the truth, the world itself

was the truth." The ascetic in his dismissal of the individual and particular things of experience as of no importance in themselves, in distinguishing the idea from appearance, the transcendent from the actual, misses the essential richness and strangeness of visible and tangible things.

It is this existential reality, which can never be had in the conceptions of the mind, that is the true subject of poetry. Poetry has to do with reality in the concrete and individual aspect which the mind can never tackle altogether on its own terms. Reality, is, Stevens says, again quoting H.D. Lewis, a matter that is foreign and alien: "It is never familiar to us in the way in which Plato wished the conquests of the mind to be familiar.... (The function of poetry) is the contact with reality as it impinges upon us from outside, the sense that we can touch and feel a solid reality which does not wholly dissolve itself into the conceptions of our own minds" (NA, 96). It is ultimately an ontologically independent entity presenting itself as it 'is' which the mind can never master, but in an open responsiveness can only experience and discover.

Reality, then, is something "wholly other" (OP, 237), something alien and mysterious, something that exists 'in itself' and independent of the mind's conceptions. It is the pre-conceptual, pre-objective, primordial world, Husserl's 'life-world', or, Heidegger's world which is always 'there' and

is anterior to the subjective self. Stevens, like Heidegger, seems to be critical of the naivete of the Cartesian metaphysics that assumes the subjective self to be the centre, the real ground of all existents, and which sees the existents, only from the viewpoint of an inner relation to the self. The highly anthropocentric self does not let things exist in themselves but in its will-to-power over them turns them into objects put at its disposal. But, as Stevens says, reality is "not ourselves":

> The first idea was not our own, Adam
> In Eden was the father of Descartes
> And Eve made air the mirror of herself,...
>
> But the first idea was not to shape the clouds
> In imitation. The clouds preceded us.
>
> There was a muddy centre before we breathed.
> There was a myth before the myth began,
> Venerable and articulate and complete.
>
> From this the poem springs: that we live in a place
> That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves. (CP, 383)

Stevens' vision of the human situation resembles what Heidegger calls 'thrownness', our having been thrown into a world which is not of our own making, and which in its sheer givenness, in its sheer thereness, surrounds us. We may enjoy it; we may enact it; but we cannot conceive it, not because our intellect is inadequate but because existence is intrinsically strange and mysterious. He rejects the Cartesian view that reality is "the mirror" of the self. The world can never be had in our conceptions of it, the world which precedes us,

which is always there in the individuality of its things, "venerable, and articulate and complete." As Stevens' gloss on the poem explains, "the clouds are illustrative. Are they too imitations of ourselves? Or are they a part of what preceded us, part of the muddy center before we breathed, part of the physical myth before the human myth began?" (L, 444). The clouds are not the imitations of ourselves, not the mirror of a projecting self.

It is, then, this primordial reality which precedes our conceptions of it that is the source from which the poem springs. Stevens' poetry thus surpasses the subject-object dichotomy, because it does not view things as objects to be conceived by a subjective self. Things are what they are. They frustrate every attempt of reducing them to images. "The plum survives its poems" (CP, 41). The star shines alone, nakedly like fire "that mirrors nothing." It lends "no part to any humanity that suffuses / (It) in its own light" (CP, 18). The pears "resemble nothing else" (CP, 196). Things have their "freedom" and "supremacy" (CP, 315), their absolute independence over human mind. The moon, seen by the beholder, for instance,, is totally free of his projections: "The moon rose up as if it had escaped / His meditations. It evaded his mind. / It was part of a supremacy always / Above him. The moon was free from him" (CP, 314). Similarly, the roses are "too actual, things that in being real / Make any imaginings of them lesser things" (CP, 430). Things thus do not yield to the imposition of

imaginary orders. Rather, in the sheer facticity of their existence they preserve their individual strangeness and mystery.

In the last poem of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," reality is described as the "fat girl, terrestrial" seen "in a moving contour, a change not quite completed" (CP, 406), seen, that is, in its fecundity and richness, the individual and actual reality always renewing itself in change. It is "familiar and yet an aberration," something actual and near yet essentially strange and mysterious in its fulness. It is not seen through a "varnished green" (CP, 383) as it is by Eve and her sons who seek to have it in their conceptions of it, but as "green, ... fluent mundo" (CP, 407) in its ever-renewing splendors. This reality is beyond the reach of all those who try to reduce it to their conceptions, as the poem mockingly says, of those who busy themselves with making a meaning of it. They may"get it straight one day at the Sorbonne." Meanwhile, the poet discovers it in the simple, joyful and intimate belonging to it.

In his later poetry Stevens describes reality as a mystery that is essentially impenetrable. It is "The dominant blank. The unapproachable" (CP, 477). In "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," for instance, Stevens tries to come to terms with the inexplicableness of its sheer factuality which confronts us with a contingency so absolute that we find ourselves staring at the dark abyss. It cannot be brought to heel but evokes a stance of great astonishment.

Stevens' most powerful image of the primordial reality, of something wholly other, something strange and mysterious, is the rock. The rock is something essentially impenetrable, something that cannot be known in our imagined conceptions of it. In "Credences of Summer," Stevens says,

> The rock cannot be broken. It is the truth.
> It rises from land and sea and covers them.
>
> It is not
> A hermit's truth nor symbol in hermitage.
> It is the visible rock, the audible,
> The brilliant mercy of a sure repose,
> On this present ground, the vividest repose,
> Things certain sustaining us in certainty. (CP, 375)

The rock cannot be broken into the visible and the invisible, but can only be seen in its indivisible wholeness, the visible and the audible in its truth, in its being. It cannot be conceived in our "symbol" of it. To symbolize it is to "cover" its true being, to "forget" it, as the poem "The Rock" (CP, 525-528) suggests: "It is not enough to cover the rock with leaves. / We must be cured of it by a cure of the ground / Or a cure of ourselves, that is equal to a cure / Of the ground, a cure beyond forgetfulness" (CP, 526). The cure of the ground suggested in the poem is the revelation of something hidden as coming forth into unhiddenness, the barrenness of the rock becoming leaves and fruit and the world and its seasons and man's dwelling, in short, its barrenness becoming "a thousand things" and, therefore, existing no more.

The rock is Stevens' image of reality in its ultimate

sense, the mystery that hides itself in showing all that is to be shown. Stevens' rock is thus similar to Heidegger's 'earth'. Heidegger uses earth in the original sense of Greek 'physis' as being, that appropriates itself, comes into its own in its mutual belonging with beings. It is that ontological energy wherewith birds and flowers and all existents acquire their appearance. Reality in its final sense is this mutual belonging together of beings and being, visible and invisible, actual and mysterious. Reality is "things as they are" (NA, 25), things in their imperious unity, in their presence, in their mysterious plenitude.

The task of poetry is not to impose its images upon this reality, not to attempt to master or devour it in the conceptions of the arrogant egocentric self, but to preserve and discover things in the absolute individuality of their presence. "The wonder and mystery of art, "Stevens says in the passage he adopts from H.D. Lewis, "is the revelation of something 'wholly other' by which the inexpressible loneliness of thinking is broken and enriched" (OP, 237). Poetry is the revelation of things in the absolute individuality of their presence. Poetry has "to mediate for us a reality not ourselves. This is what the poet does. The supreme virtue here is humility, for the humble are they that move about the world with the love of real in their hearts" (OP, 238). The first task, then, that poetry sets itself to is the "decreation" of all our arrogant, egocentric conceptions

that cover up and conceal this primordial reality.

Decreation

In "The Relation Between Painting and Poetry," a paper read in New York at the Museum of Modern Art in 1951, Stevens describes modern reality as a reality of decreation, i.e., a reality recovered and discovered through decreation. He speaks of the central concern of the great modern painters like Cézanne or Klee to create a "new reality," which he says,

> is also the momentous world of poetry. Its instantaneities are the familiar intelligence of poets, although it has been the intelligence of another ambiance. Simone Weil in La Pesanteur et La Grace has a chapter on what she calls decreation. She says that decreation is making pass from the created to the uncreated, but that destruction is making pass from the created to nothingness. Modern reality is a reality of decreation, in which our revelations are not the revelations of belief, but the precious portents of our own powers (NA, 175).

Decreation, Stevens seems to suggest, is not a negative act, a return to nothingness, an absence either of the imagination or reality. Rather, it is an essential poetic act that retrieves for us the "uncreated" reality, shorn of all man's creations and constructions imposed upon it. Behind Stevens' remark that modern reality is "a reality of decreation" is his wish to return to the visible in its purity and primal simplicity, a desire to penetrate right to the root of things beneath

the imposed orders of humanity. Reality of decreation is modern reality, i.e., reality for man in modern times which have witnessed the failure of the gods, making the revelations of belief untenable. The supreme power of the imagination lies, then, in the revelation of reality in its originary plenitude when all our egocentric creations that cover it have been decreated.

The act of decreation is thus analogous to Heidegger's phenomenological destruction of the Western logocentric tradition. Heidegger's summons to overcome metaphysics is a plea for a return to the pre-conceptual, pre-subjective world in which the mystery of the existence is preserved intact. His hermeneutics demands a phenomenological reduction of the metaphysical perspective which separates the actual and the ideal, the visible and the invisible, and insists on a "return to things themselves," not, however, as in Hesserl, in the sense of a recovery of a logocentric origin, a pure and transcendent source, but of recovering man's original status as being-in-the world. Destruction, for Heidegger, is not a reductive act but, quintessentially and simultaneously, an act of retrieving existents in their wholeness. Similarly, for Stevens, decreation involves an act of destroying our habitual ways of perceiving reality so that it may be recovered in its original plenitude. It does not imply a return to a transcendent origin but to things themselves in their imperious unity. "Poetry is a destructive force" (CP, 192), a savage act that destroys all our conceptual as well as metaphorical encrustations that cover

the real, so that "the real will from its crude compoundings come" (CP, 404).

Stevens' poetry repeatedly and insistently urges a return to primordial reality through decreation. "The Snow Man" (CP, 9-10) demands that the observer should see "nothing that is not there," nothing that is extraneous to the things he beholds. He must not attribute his own subjective meanings or feelings to the landscape, must not think "of any misery in the sound of the wind." In fact, he must be "nothing himself," i.e., he must rid himself of the egotistical stance of will-to-power over things, of imbuing things with any subjective value, but through 'negative capability' enter into, and participate in, the being of winter, "have the mind of winter." Only then can he behold "the nothing that is there," the being which is nothing in itself but manifests itself in what appears, "the pine-trees crusted with snow," and "the junipers shagged with ice."

With Ideas of Order Stevens' insistence on the rejection of the past beliefs and inherited poetic conceptions becomes more pronounced. The rejection of hyper-aesthetic Florida, of the evasions of the nightingale, of gods and angels and of all the majestic images we give to things, emphasize the need to return to the actual, temporal world. The poems in Parts of a World insist on the destruction of the idealistic conception of reality which reduces its tangible and visible presence into abstract, atemporal images. "The Man on the Dump" (CP, 201-203)

is a violent plea for the decreation or destruction of the images that thus falsify things. It is only when one throws these images on the dump as trash that "one feels a purifying change." One is able to perceive the moon as it is, when

> 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 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, not an image of a heaven full of angels, but the actual, visible sky stripped of everything that would falsify it. This is the purifying experience when the moon is discovered as it really is at the particular moment of rising in the sky. In Stevens' later poetry the urge to strip the real of all coverings becomes more urgent. Stevens concentrates his poetic energy to get at "pure reality" (CP, 471). "The object is," as he explained in a letter, "of course to purge oneself of anything false" (L, 637). From "The Snow Man" to "The Rock" (CP, 525-528) with its insistence that one must not "cover the rock with leaves" (CP, 526), Stevens' poetry all through demands that one should decreate or destroy all one's received conceptions, metaphysical as well as aesthetic, regarding things so that one may have them in their integral wholeness.

Decreation is thus for Stevens an integral poetic act that reveals the opaqueness, the inexhaustible plenitude of the world by destroying all idealistic encrustations that conceal

it. It is not simply a negative or reductive act as some critics have observed. It does not imply a return to a bare, minimum reality which then is reimagined. It does not suggest a cycle of decreation and recreation as Roy Harvey Pearce observes in a recent essay on decreation in Stevens. He says that Stevens' method "when decreation is involved, is quite simply the method of reduction - or negation - as a way of thinking about the world. But what is reduced/negated is not the world, reality ... but rather the imagination itself. Such a reduction/negation is, however, only temporary, a way on to a further stage." "The intention," Pearce concludes, "is to bring oneself to admit that there <u>is</u> 'reality', and so to conceive of the imagination in all its potential freedom."[5] Pearce finds in Stevens' later poetry, not just this acceptance of a "reality," but what he calls the "dialectic"[6] of decreation and recreation in full play. But, in fact, for Stevens the act of decreation in no way implies an absence of the creative imagination and a simple and naive admittance of a "reality" that exists and awaits being recreated. It is a much more radical and rigorous act of destroying all that intervenes the self's immediate and unmediated experience of the primordial reality, most of all, the self's imaginings of it. Decreation for Stevens is a positive, central creative act, for it is our only access to things themselves.

If decreation does not involve a simple dialectic of the

abnegation of the imagination and the recreation of bare reality, nor is it a strategy of 'deconstruction' as Riddel seems to suggest. The act of decreation is not an endless act of displacing or deconstructing all previously constructed fictions. Following Derrida's distinction of the idea of 'book' as containing the idea of totality, of centre or subject, and the idea of 'text' as a place of heterogeneous and decentered signs, Riddel argues that Stevens abandons 'book' in favor of the 'text'. For Stevens, says Riddel, "writing destroys the nostalgia for a 'chief image' (NA, 151), a center, by exposing its fictionality. The 'chief image', like a 'first idea', is a belatedly produced fiction, an imaginary construct. It is neither original nor central but the mark of the imagination as nothing in itself, as a negation, a negating or revolutionary force."[7] Poetry is thus a play of negation or destruction that can never close. But for Stevens the creative act is inextricably connected with reality, not in the sense of transcendent signified as Riddel interpretes it, but in the sense of man's being-in-the-world, in the self's rootedness in the actual, temporal world that is prior to its creations. To conceive of it as a mere "nostalgia," or a "construct" that exists only within the text is indeed to misconceive of it. Decreation is not an endless displacing of reality, but primarily and essentially an act of getting at reality.

Stevens seems to have found in modern painting, especially in the works of Cézanne, a clear illustration of how

decreation as an artistic device works. Cézanne's paintings show, through apparent distortions and abstractions, his striving to capture things in their fullness. His geometrical forms, his "planes bestriding one another" (NA, 174) do not transform things into artistic structures. They are meant to suspend all our habitual ways of looking at things and at the same time shock us into discovering them in their originary unity. Cézanne's ellipsis, his perspectival distortions, contribute to the impression of an emerging order, of a thing in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes. Art is for him a process of expressing what exists, and through apparent distortions he is able to depict existence in all its richness and depth.

Though Stevens speaks of decreation in connection with painting, he elsewhere uses the term 'abstraction' to suggest a similar process of phenomenological reduction. Stevens uses 'abstraction', as Hillis Miller has observed, in an "unexpected"[8] way, for it does not imply, as it does for Valéry, for instance, an abstraction from the lived, actual reality, but, as it does for Cézanne, the suspension of all our received notions about reality. In "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" he speaks of the modern poet that his "own measure as a poet... is the measure of his power to abstract himself, and to withdraw with him into his abstractions the reality on which the lovers of truth insist. He must be able to abstract

himself and also abstract reality, which he does by placing it in his imagination" (NA, 23). As Miller explains, "to place reality in the imagination by abstracting it does not mean, however, twisting it into some unreal mental fiction. It means the power to carry the image of the very thing alive and undistorted into the mind."[9] The task of the imagination is not to wrest the objects of the external world out of their natural context, but to abstract the things themselves from all the false conceivings of them so that we may retrieve them in their pre-conceptual, primordial unity.

The first part of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" is called "It Must Be Abstract" (CP, 380). The supreme fiction must be abstract, it must involve an epoché or suspension of all our habits of thoughts that come in the way of our having things in their "first idea," i.e., in their being. To see the sun in its idea is to destroy all our conceptions about it. As Stevens explained, "if you take the varnish and dirt of generations off the picture, you see it in its first idea. If you think of the world without its varnish and dirt you are a thinker of the first idea" (L, 426-427). "The first step towards a supreme fiction would be," Stevens suggests, "to get rid of all existing fictions. A thing stands better in clear air than in soot" (L, 431). "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" begins with an address to ephebe, a young poet, calling upon him to decreate all his conceptions and perceive things afresh:

> Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea
> Of this invention, this invented world,
> The inconveivable idea of the sun.
>
> You must become an ignorant man again
> And see the sun again with an ignorant eye
> And see it clearly in the idea of it.
>
> Never suppose the inventing mind as source
> Of this idea.... (CP, 380-381)

Ephebe must be an ignorant man again, he must shake off all his knowledgable mastery over things, his arrogant anthropomorphic "inventions." Only when he gives up inventing things, fixing and enframing the sun according to his subjective interpretations of it, can he begin to discover the sun in its idea, can see the sun <u>as</u> it is, in its being, see it "clearly" and "clean," "without us and our images" (CP, 381).

Decreation or abstraction in Stevens, like Heidegger's phenomenological destruction of the Western metaphysics, is not merely a negative act, but essentially an act that takes us back to the source of existence and enables us to preserve and experience the essential richness and presence of things.