THE PORTRAYAL OF HUMANITY IN THE POEMS

OF JAMES STEPHENS

by

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A Thesis

submitted to the faculty of the

Department of English

in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Graduate College

University of Arizona

1942

Approved: ___________________________  August 11, 1942

Director of Thesis  Date
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is not very often given to a poet to obscure his own fame. James Stephens has done that. It is as a novelist that he is known primarily, if one can call The Creek of Gold and The Demy-Gods novels. These are delightful books, full of Stephens' inimitable charm, but they do distract popular attention from Stephens' place among contemporary poets.

His poems range in subject matter from practically nothing at all, a little measure of a bird's song, to profoundly philosophical poetry. But, as with his novels, his chief concern is with man in his various aspects, not usually man in general, however, but very definite individuals. His gallery shows an extremely catholic taste, ranging from a nice little boy to a cantankerous nasty old man, from innocently chattering adolescent girls to an old woman of the roads, to the gravely beautiful Deirdre, with lovers idyllic or vindictive.

There is almost as wide a variation in the forms that he employs. He is never absolutely formless. He may appear to be, at times, but there is always a certain structural element, seemingly very loose, but actually
adhering to a definite pattern of its own. Most of the poems are traditional in form, sonnets, couplets, well-made quatrains; even as rigid a form as the villanelle is used. Indeed, in the original verse forms that Stephens has developed and used there is much that recalls the traditional French forms, his use of refrain and repetition, and the delicate and intricate balance of the whole. There is more of rhythmic variation in each poem than of rhyming variation. The swing and power of vigorous lively speech are in his rhythms.

His diction is simple and direct. He does not hesitate to use colloquial expressions or the unorthodox words that spring delightfully and descriptively from nowhere in particular. The decorative fetters of poetic diction have nothing to do with this man. It is not that he is not bound by them; it is rather that he seems unaware of such a thing.

Stephens' most outstanding characteristic is his sympathy, a sympathy wide enough to include the snared rabbit and the lonely God. With this sympathy is coupled a shrewd knowledge of the queer and devious ways of man. Stephens is a Hogarth among poets, portraying his characters so that they immediately and strongly attract, even though their weaknesses are shown forth clearly.

He is at his best in his portraits of people, seeing
them with a measure of Chaucer's good-humored objectivity, tolerance, and whole-hearted enjoyment. To this is added a characteristic peculiarly his own, a fierce championship of the poor and the oppressed.

In this study only those poems of Stephens' which are directly about man have been included. This does not represent Stephens' work as a whole, but rather one aspect of it. The numerous other aspects have been omitted entirely. The majority of his lyrics, his philosophical poems, his poems about animals, the geometrical, abstract poems of his later books - all of these have been omitted.

The purpose of this study is to present James Stephens' portrayal of humanity, as it is found in his poems. The poems used are divided into five groups, those on children, on men, on women, on men-and-women, and on old people.

Any grouping in this fashion must be, to some extent, arbitrary and unsatisfactory, because of the inevitable over-lapping. The poem, "Geoffrey Keating," for example, will seem to belong in the chapter on men, in that on men-and-women, and in the chapter on old people; because the central theme in that poem is the attraction and conflict between the old man and the young girl the poem is included in the chapter on men-and-women.
The first of these chapters, the one on children, has the most satisfactory grouping. These poems could not belong to any other group. All but two are about the adventures of one particular small boy, Seumas Beg, or little James. They are a charming group, and make a valuable addition to literature about children.

The chapter on men is much wider in scope, and its grouping is less clearly defined. Some of the men are very real individuals, and others represent man in general. This chapter includes a group of singers, a profession which Stephens treats with cheerful irreverence as one that affords its devotees a scant living.

The chapter on women verges at places on the following chapter, that of men-and-women, but an attempt has been made to restrict the poems here to those in which the woman alone is the dominant figure.

The next chapter, that on men-and-women, is one of the most highly individualistic groups of poems, because of Stephens' remarkable attitude towards liberty in love.

The fifth of these chapters is the one on old people, mostly a bitter comment on the struggle of poor men and women when age has robbed them of their ability to support themselves.
The last chapter is a summary of the preceding chapters and a short general appreciation of James Stephens' poetry.
CHAPTER II

ON CHILDREN

Since the publication of Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, no poet can write of children, or rather, through the medium of a child, without some critic's discovery that there is a relationship between Mr. So-and-So's verses and those of Stevenson, just as a writer of couplets is made to nod acknowledgment to Pope. So a critic, Eugene Mason, trots out this common ancestor of all the poets of childhood, and says, in commenting on Stephens' *Rocky Road to Dublin*, "Stevenson's *Child's Garden of Verses* is laid under contribution." ¹

In one way this is true. Stevenson was the first to write many verses from the ordinary child's point of view. Too many of the poets saw the child from the occasional visitor's distance, as a washed, polite, miniature being, full of gentleness and grace. Wordsworth in particular is far from realistic, addressing a six-year-old boy as "thou faery voyager," and "blessed vision," ² when


². Wordsworth, "To Hartley Coleridge."
young Master Coleridge was an ordinary grubby bright little boy who had to be punished for disobedience. His little girls are worse — all shy, perfect little maidens full of Nature's truths, and horrible little prigs they would have been, if ever one existed.

Children were, in the poetry from Elizabethan times until fairly recently, with few exceptions, nothing but decorative accessories, heavenly fragments of innocence. One would think that the poets, as a group, were a childless lot who had never been children.

Stevenson gave a certain dignity of being to childhood. His child is a real little boy, a good child, who is occupied with a child's business, play. He is a very civilized child, with playmates and the usual quota of toys — blocks, a swing, ships, books.

James Stephens' little boy, Seumas Beg, or Little James, is a solitary child, an imaginative country boy. He is full of a normal child's interest in the adventurous and blood-curdling events that are so much more real to him than the ordinary prosaic world that actually surrounds him. The small boy is an atavistic being, gory at heart.

The poems about Seumas Beg seem to be of two types, the purely imaginative, and those that have a factual basis, albeit they, too, are highly colored by Seumas Beg's

The first of these, "A Visit from Abroad," is the weakest of the group, and yet it is vivid enough.

A VISIT FROM ABROAD

A speck went blowing up against the sky
As little as a leaf: then it drew near
And broadened, "It's a bird," said I,
And fetched my bow and arrows. It was queer!
It grew up from a speck into a blot,
And squatted past a cloud; then it flew down
All crumpl y, and wagged such a lot
I thought the thing would fall. -It was a brown
Old carpet where a man was sitting snug
Who, when he reached the ground, began to sew
A big hole in the middle of the rug,
And kept on peeping everywhere to know
Who might be coming - then he gave a twist
And flew away. . . I fired at him but missed.

It is the exactness of the detail that takes this verse, as well as the others, out of the realm of the child's fancy, and gives it an air of verisimilitude --- the speck "little as a leaf" growing larger as it comes closer, then the carpet itself, not an unbelievable magic carpet from the Arabian Nights, but an old brown carpet with a hole in the middle of it, a crumpl y rug that, in the air, "wagged such a lot I thought the thing would

3. James Stephens, The Rocky Road to Dublin
And the man, too, is no fairy-tale magician, no glittering prince. He sat there in the middle of the rug sewing up the hole that had grounded him, and while he did that he kept peering around to see who might be coming. Seumas Beg evidently didn't count, for he was there all along, shooting for valor's sake as the strange visitor left, with no particular desire to shoot him. After all, it was a strange bird that he had intended to shoot.

There are some extremely descriptive words in this sonnet. "Squattered" is almost as self-telling a word as "awkward" is. And "crumplly" and "maggled" are good, "crumplly" having in it that extra syllable that the Irish give to so many words — "crumpelly."

The child's vivid imagination is shown clearly in this poem, and the minute detail that is characteristic of a child. A child's observations are often occupied with details to the exclusion of more important, larger parts of the whole. Thus we find frequently in small children's drawings the human figure represented without a body, but furnished with fingers.

**THE CORAL ISLAND**

His arms were round a chest of oaken wood,
It was clamped with brass and iron studs, and seemed

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4. *The Rocky Road to Dublin*, p. 32.
An awful weight. After a while he stood
and I stole near to him. — His white eyes
gleamed
As he peeped secretly about; he laid
the oaken chest upon the ground, then drew
a great knife from his belt, and stuck the blade
into the ground and dug. The clay soon flew
in all directions underneath a tree.
And when the hole was deep he put the box
down there, and threw the clay back cunningly.
Stamping the ground quite flat; then like a fox
he crept among the trees... I went next day
to dig the treasure up, but I lost my way.

Now this is reminiscent of Robert Louis Stevenson,
but not of A Child’s Garden of Verses. It is Treasure Is-
land that this harks back to, for that man, with his wicked-
ly gleaming white eyes, and the knife stuck in his belt,
a knife big enough to dig with, could be no other kind of
creature than a pirate. And the chest, too, of "oaken
wood" clamped, of course, with "brass and iron studs"
might as well have been labelled "Pirate Treasure Chest."
as anyone who has even a nodding acquaintance with pirate
stories must know.

It is interesting to note that in almost all of
these poems of adventure there is some bloody weapon
mentioned. Little James knew his weapons, even as the
small boy today knows his, from army bombs to the savages’
poisoned darts. In the first poem, Scumas himself had the
weapon, a bow and arrow. In this poem the pirate has the
weapon, a great knife, undoubtedly broad-bladed and
viciously sharp, with dark stains of blood on it.
Scumas Beg possesses the child's natural caution, a caution that has nothing to do with what mothers consider dangerous. He asked the pirate no questions; he did not make himself known; and he did not try to dig up the chest that day. After all, that pirate might have been still lurking in the trees.

IN THE ORCHARD 5

There was a giant by the Orchard Wall
Peeping around on this side and on that,
And feeling in the trees: he was as tall
As the big maple tree, and twice as fat;
His beard was long, and bristly-black, and there
Were leaves and bits of grass stuck in his hair.

He held a great big club in his right hand,
And with the other felt in every tree
For something that he wanted. You could stand
Beside him and not reach up to his knee
So mighty big he was — I feared he would
Turn round, and trample down to where I stood.

I tried to get away, but, as I slid
Under a bush, he saw me, and he bent
Far down and said, "Where is the Princess hid?"
I pointed to a place, and off he went —
But while he searched I turned and simply flew
Round by the lilac bushes back to you.

Seumas Beg again displays his natural caution. He is no vainglorious hero; he is the wary warrior who does not take on unequal odds. Seumas has another trait in the last two poems that is common to many grown people as well as to children in general, a flair for self-terrifying imaginations. They enjoy, in a peculiar way, being "scared."

5. The Rocky Road to Dublin, p. 14.
that is, when they know they are going to be scared, whether the medium be a comic strip that would give the milder grown person cold shudders, a scalp-prickling game of hide-in-the-dark, or an imaginary pirate or giant.

The other group of Seumas Beg poems are those that would be sternly rebuked as "fibs," that is, those with a certain amount of truth in them, and a large amount of imagination. In these, as in the other Seumas Beg poems, Seumas is the hero, the central character —— "I saw it, I did it, it happened to me." The child's world is an egocentric world. Seumas Beg never says, "Once there was a pirate, and he did this or that." It is always something directly connected with himself.

WHAT THE SNAKE SAW 6.

A little girl and a big ugly man
Went down the road. The girl was crying
And asking to go home, but when she ran
He hit her on the head and sent her flying,
And called her a young imp, and said he'd break
Her neck unless she went with him, and then
He smacked her on the cheek. — I was a snake
At that time crawling through a robber's den,
And diamonds were sticking to my tongue —
(That's the best dodge), but when I saw the way
He beat the little girl I up and flung
A stone at him. My aim was bad that day
Because I hit the girl... and she did sing!
But he jumped round and cursed like anything.

This is Seumas Beg's account of what was probably

6. The Rocky Road to Dublin, p. 36.
a man and a disobedient daughter fussing along the road. She wanted to go home, he said no, and when she ran anyway, he cuffed her, threatened her, and then smacked her again. But Seumas Beg, as the Ali-Baba-like snake crawling along, saw a high story in it, tyranny and distress. So he "up and flung a stone at him" unfortunately missing the villain and hitting the damsels in distress.

Seumas Beg is not concerned with the girl's feelings at that point. He dismisses them briefly --- "and she did sing!" but it does make an impression on him when the man jumps around cursing, proving at least some solicitude for the girl.

Seumas' game is interesting, pretending to be a snake in a treasure cave. Equally characteristic of the imagining games of children is the suddenness with which he abandons the role of snake when something happens to change his interest.

THE APPLE TREE 7.

I was hiding in the crooked apple tree,
Scouting for Indians, when a man came!
I thought it was an Indian, for he
Was running like the wind — There was a flame
Of sunlight on his hand as he drew near,
And then I saw a knife gripped in his fist!

He panted, like a horse! His eyes were queer.

7. The Rocky Road to Dublin, p. 40.
Wide open, staring frightfully! And, hist!
His mouth stared open like another eye!
And all his hair was matted down with sweat!

I crouched among the leaves lest he should spy
Where I was hiding — So he did not get
His awful eyes on me; but, like the wind,
He fled, as if he heard some thing behind!

This description of a running man is one of the
best things in *The Rocky Road to Dublin*. One line alone
is unforgettable enough to give the poem place — "His
mouth stared open like another eye!" The whole picture of
the man gives a feeling of terror and tension, the "knife
gripped in his fist," the man himself panting like "a
horse," with great gasping for breath, his queer eyes,
"wide open, staring frightfully," his open mouth, and his
matted hair. These characteristics of terror impress the
boy vividly, but at the same time, he is entirely objec-
tive about it; there is no sympathy expressed for the
hunted man.

He saw all this from the apple tree where he had
gone to scout for Indians. Of course he was safe. Young
Seumas, even on the very edge of danger, is always safe,
because of his knowledge of dangerous things, pirates,
Indians, giants, and the caution that this knowledge gives
him. Seumas Beg is heroic to himself, not because of what
he does in the face of danger, but because dangerous things
come near him.
That was Seumas Beg's account of a man he saw running down the road. The next poem is probably about nothing more mysterious than a woman hunting for a lost child.


I was playing with my hoop along the road Just where the bushes are; when suddenly, I heard a shout. — I ran away and stowed Myself beneath a bush, and watched to see What made the noise, and then, around the bend, A woman came.

She was old! She was wrinkle-faced! She had big teeth! The end Of her red shawl caught on a bush and rolled Right off her, and her hair fell down. — Her face Was white, and awful, and her eyes looked sick, And she was talking queer.

"O God of Grace!"
Said she, "where is the child?" and flew back quick: The way she came, and screamed and shook her hands! . . . Maybe she was a witch from foreign lands!

Seumas Beg again, in the face of the unknown, and therefore probably dangerous, shows himself discreet. He dived for the bushes where he could watch without peril when he heard the shouting behind the turn of the road. The woman herself is described with photographic detail and excited emphasis. "She was old! She was wrinkle-faced! She had big teeth!" And the end of her red shawl caught on a bush, and her hair fell down, giving her a proper

8. The Rocky Road to Dublin, p. 30
witch-like look. If that had been all there was to the old woman's portrait, she would seem no realer than the man on the brown flying carpet, but the next five lines limn a woman in the agony of fear:

Her face
Was white, and awful, and her eyes looked sick.
And she was talking queer.

"O God of Grace!"
Said she, "Where is the child?" and flew back quick.
The way she came, and screamed and shook her hands!

And at the end of that Little James concludes, "Maybe she was a witch from foreign lands!" with true child-like detachment. Instead of wondering about the story in back of the strange old woman's appearance, he is concerned only with her actual advent. How to account for it? She may have been a witch. And that is the end of it, no faint-est wondering whether she found the child.

BEHIND THE HILL 9.

Behind the hill I met a man in green.
He asked me if my mother had gone out?
So I said yes. He said I should have seen
The castle where his soldiers sing and shout
From dawn to dark, and told me that he had
A crock of gold inside a hollow tree,
And I could have it. - I wanted money bad.
To buy a sword with, and I thought that he
Would keep his solemn word; so, off we went.

He said he had a pound hid in his crook.

And owned the castle too, and paid no rent
To anyone, and that you had to knock
Five hundred times. I said, -Who reckoned up?- And he said, -You insulting little pupil-

This sonnet shows very well the astonishing conception of reality that the child has, his credulity and incredulity both amazing the grown person watching him. See any modern little boy reading about, or listening to, the adventures of that Munchausen of the comic strips, Superman, and watch him unquestioningly take in the stories of the man whose skin repels bullets, who can spring into the air and stop airplanes in mid-flight. And then watch that same child carefully count out the sixteen jellybeans he has been given, to be sure that his little sister was not given more than he.

So, in this poem, Seumas Beg gravely accepted the man's tall tales of a castle full of riotous soldiers, and a crock of gold hidden in a hollow tree, and he went off with the man, because the man had given his "solemn word" that Little James should have the gold, and the boy wanted "money bad to buy a sword with" -the weapon motive cropping up again. But the man went a little too far when he told the boy that you had to knock "five hundred times" to get into the castle. Seumas Beg's immediate and natural question - "Who counted it?"- caught the man off guard. The man's reaction, naturally enough, was anger at the boy.
A man was sitting underneath a tree outside the village, and he asked me what name was on this place, and said that he was never here before. He told a lot of stories to me too. His nose was flat. I asked him how it happened, and he said The first mate of the Mary Ann done that with a marling-spike one day, but he was dead. And jolly good job too; and he'd have gone a long way to have killed him, and he had a gold ring in one ear; the other one "Was bit off by a crocodile, bedad." That's what he said. He taught me how to chew. He was a real nice man. He liked me too.

The sailor is described in the words of the poem, flat nose, missing ear, gold ring, and all, but the little Seumas is pictured even better, the small boy listening breathlessly and unquestioningly to the wild adventure stories told to him by this "real nice man." There were a lot of stories that he heard, but the two that stuck in the top of his mind were the two that had happened to the sailor himself, and accounted for his disfigured face. With true child-like lack of delicacy and reticence, little James had asked, "Why is your nose so flat?" and "What happened to your ear?" and the sailor had obligingly told yarns to explain these. One can feel the huge admiration the boy has for this exotic voyager. Then, joy of joys, comes that delightful initiation into manhood and equality.

"He taught me how to chew.... He liked me too." The last is stated calmly, as a right and proper thing: I liked him, and he liked me too.

Seumas Beg had his own ideas about theology, accepting God, angels, and devils as important and very concrete people. Seumas Beg could have looked out of his window and seen, as William Blake had, angels dancing in the tree, without any surprise. So, in this next poem, he sees an old vagabond with a bag on his back, in which something, probably a stolen hen, moves, as the Devil himself with a soul that he is carrying off.

The Devil's Bag

I saw the Devil walking down the lane Behind our house. — There was a heavy bag Strapped tightly on his shoulders, and the rain Sizzled when it hit him. He picked a rag Up from the ground and put it in his sack, And grinned and rubbed his hands. There was a thing Moving inside the bag upon his back — It must have been a soul! I saw it fling And twist about inside, and not a hole Or cranny for escape! Oh, it was sad! I cried, and shouted out, "Let out that soul!" But he turned round, and, sure, his face went mad, And twisted up and down, and he said "Hello!" And ran away... Oh, mammy! I'm not well.

Here Seumas actually stands up to an adversary, and, though the Devil turns away, Seumas runs home sick with fear, but still conscious of his valor in daring the Devil

11. The Rocky Road to Dublin, p. 19.
to save the poor soul. There's a beautiful description there, where he says, "the rain sizzled when it hit him," which certainly proved that he was the Devil. Then he "grinned and rubbed his hands," gloating over the thing in his sack, which naturally, since this was the Devil, must be a soul that he was carrying off to Hell. Seumas Beg felt pity, not because the soul was going to Hell, but because it was flinging and twisting about in the sack, "and not a hole or cranny for escape," the pity for a trapped hunted thing.

In the next poem Seumas Beg bargained with an angel.

MIDNIGHT 12.

And suddenly I wakened in a fright;
I thought I heard a movement in the room
But did not dare to look; I snuggled right
Down underneath the bedclothes - Then a boom,
And a tremendous voice said, "Sit up, lad,
And let me see your face." So up I sat.
Although I didn't want to - I was glad
I did though, for it was an angel that
Had called me, and he said, he'd come to know
Was I the boy who wouldn't say his prayers
Nor do his sums - and that I'd have to go
Straight down to hell because of such affairs:
I said I'd be converted, and do good
If he would let me off - He said he would.

Seumas Beg's fright was at the unknown that he was afraid to know. Once he found that it was an angel, he was

12. The Rocky Road to Dublin, p. 24.
glad that he had done as he was bidden, and sat up in bed, though he didn’t want to, and this was probably partly because he wasn’t at all sorry to see an angel, and calm enough to answer him, and partly because he was wondering what would have happened to him if he had not obeyed the angel promptly. His first impulse on feeling a strange presence in the room was the age-old ostrich instinct to ignore it and hope that it would go away.

Seumas Beg’s angel was a compound of magic, entering with a boom like a genie from the Arabian Nights, and a stern commonplace that harked back to parental warnings. He was certainly short and to the point. “He said, he’d come to know was I the boy who wouldn’t say his prayers nor do his sums— and that I’d have to go straight down to hell because of such affairs.” Little James promptly promised that he’d change his ways and do better “if he would let me off” and then adds, almost as an afterthought, “He said he would.” That promise of forgiveness was not nearly as important nor as impressive as the tremendous voice of the angel hauling him from under the covers. The conversion was probably short-lived.

Little James accepts the supernatural without amusement as readily as he endows the commonplace with extraordinary qualities.

There is another group of poems in The Rocky Road.
to Dublin which are much more like the Stevenson poems than are the Seumas Beg verses, in that the child is concerned with ordinary everyday things, and, like Stevenson's verse, these poems are reflective rather than active. Three of these are given here, "Breakfast Time," "When I Was Young," and "Day and Night." In the first one the young philosopher is rudely jogged.

**BREAKFAST TIME** 13.

The sun is always in the sky
Whenever I get out of bed,
And I often wonder why
It's never late. - My sister said
She did not know who did the trick,
And that she did not care a bit,
And I should eat my porridge quick.
. . . . I think its mother wakes it.

That is a simple little thing, quiet and reflective and slow moving in the beginning with a child's deliberate meditation, then the impatient sister's three and a half lines clipping along at the staccato of exasperation, and the questioning child's return into himself and his thoughts and his final satisfying answer with its judicial calmness.

**WHEN I WAS YOUNG** 14.

I will not know when I am dead
If sun or moon is overhead;
I'll stretch out flat without a sound

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Inside a box beneath the ground,
And never rise again to see
Branches lifting on a tree,
Nor hear the song the finches sing
In the spring.

I'll not, while sunny ages go,
Lift a hand or wag a toe;
But in a wooden box will be
Hidden for eternity
From sea and sun, from sight and sound,
From touch of people, voice of friend,
From all that makes my heart to bound
Denying such an end;
It is so strange - I wonder why
People die!

There are three lines in this poem that are not of childhood at all, but are part of an older person's reflections. These are the three in the second stanza:

From touch of people, voice of friend,
From all that makes my heart to bound
Denying such an end;

The child had evidently come into contact with death, not the death of someone close to him, for there is no sorrow in this poem, but with the realization of death, and its unawareness to all the things that seemed important to him. Then comes the old and never-answered question, "Why do people die?" There is no rebellion or even protest, nothing but the abstract wondering that children do.

The last of the three poems is a poem about a very small boy, and his division of time into two parts, the warm friendly day, and the frightening unfamiliar night.
DAY AND NIGHT 15.

When the bright eyes of the day
Open on the dusk to see
Mist and shadow fade away
And the sun shine merrily.
Then I leave my bed and run
Out to frolic in the sun.

Through the sunny hours I play
Where the stream is wandering,
Plucking daisies by the way;
And I laugh and dance and sing,
While the birds fly here and there
Singing on the sunny air.

When the night comes, cold and slow,
And the sad moon walks the sky,
When the whispering wind says "Boo,
Little boy!" and makes me cry,
By my mother I am led
Home again and put to bed.

This is a lyric of frail stuff, but attractive.
There is no attempt made to present this in the child's language; the child is too small for that. It is rather his feeling of joy and pleasure in the day and his meaningless fear at night that are presented.

If a literary ancestor is to be found for Seumas Beg, we will have to look all the way back to Shakespeare's Mamillius, in The Winter's Tale.

HERMIONE: Take the boy to you: he so troubles me,
'Tis past enduring.

FIRST LADY: Come, my gracious lord,
Shall I be your playfellow?

15. The Rocky Road to Dublin, p. 16.
HAMILLUS: No, I'll none of you.

FIRST LADY: Why, my sweet lord?

HAMILLUS: You'll kiss me hard and speak to me as if I were a baby still.

HERMIONE: Come, sir, now I am for you again: pray you, sit by us, and tell's a tale.

HAMILLUS: Merry or sad shall't be?

HERMIONE: As merry as you will.

HAMILLUS: A sad tale's best for winter; I have one of sprites and goblins.

HERMIONE: Let's have that, good sir, come on, sit down: come on, and do your best to fright me with your sprites; you're powerful at it.

HAMILLUS: There was a man -

HERMIONE: Nay, come, sit down; then on.

HAMILLUS: Dwelt by a churchyard: I will tell it softly; yond crickets shall not hear it.

HERMIONE: Come on, then, and give't me in mine ear. 16.

Earlier Leontes was reminded of his youth by his little son.

... Looking on the lines Of my boy's face, methoughts I did recoil twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreech'd.

In my green velvet coat, my dagger muzzled,
Lest it bite its master, and so prove,
As ornaments oft do, too dangerous:
How like, methought, I then was to this kernel,
This squash, this gentleman, mine honest friend,
Will you take eggs for money?
MAMILLIUS: No, my lord, I'll fight.

Mamillius is a happy sturdy boy, with a great imagination and a head full of goblin and ghost stories. Seumas Beg shares these interests, and adds to them. Both boys have an avid interest in weapons. Mamillius, like his father, with a "muzzled dagger," Seumas with whatever weapon, real or imaginary, that he could obtain.

Willem van Doorn, writing about The Adventures of Seumas Beg, the name of one section in The Rocky Road to Dublin, compares these poems with de la Mare's poems of childhood.

'Seumas Beg' will bear comparison with de la Mare's poems of childhood, and it must be remembered that at the time of their composition, the latter poet was by no means so much to the fore as he is now. It seems to me that Walter de la Mare's methods are more conscious than Stephens', and that he often gives us recapturings, willed recollections, whilst 'Seumas Mor' just uses the raw material that surges up spontaneously from the deeps of his memory. I do not think that any attentive reader, disregarding for a moment the self-assertion characteristic of Stephens, but virtually absent from de la Mare,

would mistake 'The Devil's Bag' for a work of the latter. 18.

William Lyon Phelps considers the Seumas Beg poems among Stephens' best.

The author of The Crook of Gold and The Demi-Gods appears again in The Adventures of Seumas Beg. In these charming poems we have that triple combination of realism, humour, and fantasy that gave so original a flavour to the novels. They make a valuable addition to child-poetry; for men, women, angels, fairies, God, and the Devil are treated with easy familiarity, in practical, definite, conversational language. These are the best fruits of his imagination in rime. 19.

James Stephens' portrait of a small boy is extremely realistic and lacking in sentimentality. There is no sadness in his contemplation of the child, but rather a tolerant, sympathetic humor. His child is full of the joy and excitement of living, eager for adventure of any type, and possessed of an exuberant imagination. He is interested in weapons; there is one mentioned in almost every poem — a bow and arrow, a great knife, a big club, a stone, another glinting knife, a sword, a marling-spike. He has the child's strange conception of reality that will accept an angel or the Devil as a figure concrete as the man next door. He


has that identification of the world with himself that is common to children, as well as to some adults, a primitive conception of Berkeley's theory. He has a large share of the child's curiosity.

Stephens says good-by to Seumas Beg in the sonnet that closes his first book, *Insurrections*.

**SLAN LEATH 20.**

*(To C.)*

And now, dear heart, the night is closing in;
The lamps are not yet ready, and the gloom
Of this sad winter evening, and the din
The wind makes in the street fills all the room.
You have listened to my stories - Seumas Beg
Has finished the adventures of his youth,
And no more hopes to find a buried keg
Stuffed to the lid with silver! He, in truth,
And all alas, grew up; but he had found
The path to truer romance, and with you
May easily seek wonders. We are bound
Out to the storm of things, and all is new.
Give me your hand, so, keeping close to me,
Shut tight your eyes, step forward... . .
Where are we?

So, like all real children, Seumas Beg grows up,
and leaves high adventure behind him.

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*Slan Leath* means the sound or whole half. *(From Macleod and Dewar's Dictionary of the Gaelic Language).*
CHAPTER III

ON MEN

It is difficult, in selecting poems for this chapter, to determine which are poems about men, and which are about man. The poems about one definite man are treated in the first half of the chapter; those that have a wider and more general scope are in the second half.

The first poem is a delightful portrait of a young man.

PEADAR OG GOES COURTING 1.

Now I am nicely dressed I'll go
Down to where the roses blow,
I'll pluck a fair and fragrant one
And make my mother pin it on;
Now she's laughing, so am I-
Oh the blueness of the sky!

Down the street, turn to the right,
Round the corner out of sight,
Pass the church and out of town-
Dust does show on boots of brown,
I'd better brush them while I can;
"Step out, Peadar, be a man!"

Here's a field and there's a stile,
Shall I jump it? wait a while,

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Peadar Og means Young Peter. Macleod and Dewar, Dictionary of the Gaelic Language.
Scale it gently, stretch my foot
Across the mud in that big rut
And I'm still clean - faith, I'm not!
Get some grass and rub the spot.

Dodge those nettles, here the stream
Bubbles onward with a gleam
Steely white, and black and grey,
Bending rushes on its way -
What's that moving? It's a rat
Washing his whiskers, isn't he fat?

Here the cow with the crumpled horn
Whisks her tail and looks forlorn,
She wants a milkmaid bad, I guess,
How her udders swell and press
Against her legs - and here's some sheep.
And there's the shepherd, fast asleep.

This is a sad and lonely field.
Thistles are all that it can yield,
I'll cross it quick, nor look behind,
There's nothing in it but the wind;
And if those bandy-legged trees
Could talk they'd only curse or sneeze.

A sour, unhappy, sloppy place -
That boot's loose! I'll tie the lace
So, and jump this little ditch.
... Her father's really very rich:
He'll be angry - there's a crow.
Solemn blackhead! off you go.

There a big, grey, ancient ass
Is snoozing quiet in the grass,
He hears me coming, starts to rise,
Wags his big ears at the flies.
... What'll I say when - there's a frog.
Go it, long-legs, jig, jig-jog.

He'll be angry, say - "Peep, peep.
Boy, you know not what you do."
Shakespeare rot and good advice.
Fat old duffer - those field mice
Have a good time playing round
Through the corn and underground.

But her mother is friends with mine.
She always asks us out to dine.
And dear Nora, curly head,
Loves me; so at least she said.
... Damn that ass's hee-haw -
Was that a rabbit's tail I saw?

This is the house, Lord, I'm afraid!
A man does suffer for a maid.
... How will I start? The graining's new
On the door - O pluck up, do.
Don't stand shivering there like that
... The knocker's funny - rat-tat-tat.

This is a sparkling description of a young Irishman's mind as he goes off to put the important question to his Nora's father. It has that glint of humor in all its fabric that is Stephens' trademark.

For the first part of his walk, Peadar is mostly concerned with his appearance. It is a strange thing to him to be walking across the fields in his best clothes, with a rose pinned on him. He sets off fairly bursting with happiness.

Now she's laughing, so am I -
O the blueness of the sky!

As soon as he is out of town he begins to worry a bit, first about the boots. Then there is a stile, which he does not jump, the way he usually would; after all, he has on his good clothes! He scales it carefully, as carefully steps over the muddy rut, stops to inspect himself, and cleans off the one spot.

He is very young, with a boy's alert eye for all animals: first, a rat washing his whiskers, then the cow that needed milking, later a crow at which he probably
shied a stone, an ass, field-mice, and the suggestion of a rabbit. Then, walking through the "sad and lonely field," he begins to worry about the coming ordeal. He tries to keep his mind off that, but with no success. His thoughts keep circling back to the father, who will be angry. He tries to comfort himself with the reflection that Nora's mother is friends with his mother, and Nora, "curly head," loves him. By this time the ass's bray has gotten on his nerves. He has come as far as the door, and stands there in a lather of timidity, noticing the graining on the door to postpone the last minute before he must face the father, commenting on the knocker. He finally plucks up courage and knocks at the door.

This young man is an attractive figure, with all the charm of an impulsive youth. His combined gaiety and trepidation, his resolute desire to keep himself from dreading the coming ordeal, and the way his mind keeps reverting to that ordeal, all rouse sympathy in the reader. Peadar is a very sympathetic character, and very human.

The next man, Tomas Cam, is a far cry from the eager and anxious Peadar. Tomas Cam means Crooked Tom in Gaelic, and the name suits him quite well.

Tomas Cam has a number of peculiar ambitions that he can't gratify.
WHY TOMAS CAM WAS GRUMPY 2.

If I were rich, what would I do?
I'd leave the horse just ready to shoe,
I'd leave the pail beside the cow,
I'd leave the furrow beneath the plough,
I'd leave the ducks tho' they should quack,
"Our eggs will be stolen before you're back;"
I'd buy a diamond brooch, a ring,
A golden chain which I would fling
Around her neck. . . Ah, what an itch,
If I were rich!

What would I do if I were wise?
I would not debate about the axles,
Nor would I try a book to write,
Or find the wrong in the tangled right,
I would not debate with learned men
Of how, and what, and why, and when;
I'd train my tongue to a linnet's song,
I'd learn the words that couldn't go wrong -
And then I'd say... And win the prize,
If I were wise!

But I'm not that nor t'other, I bow
My back to the work that's waiting now.
I'll shoe the horse that's standing ready,
I'll milk the cow if she'll be steady.
I'll follow the plough that turns the loan,
I'll watch the ducks don't lay from home.
And I'll curse, and curse, and curse again
Till the devil joins in with his big amen.
And none but he and I will wet
When the heart within me starts to rot,
To fester and churn its ugly brew -
... Where's my spade? I've work to do.

Tomas Cam is not what you would call the merry
peasant; if he had his way, he would do none of the chores
waiting for him. The things that he would do if he were
rich would fill any conscientious farmer with horror,
leaving the work just ready to do, the cow ready to be

2. The Hill of Vision, p. 60.
milked, the horse ready to shoe, the plough standing in
the field. He has other desires, too, a chain of gold, a
diamond brooch, and a ring for "her."

If he were wise, he would not bother about pedantic
things, or try to find "the wrong in the tangled right."
He'd be a singer:

-I'd train my tongue to a linnet's song,
I'd learn the words that couldn't go wrong -
And then I'd say... And win the prize,
If I were wise!

But alas! he is neither rich nor wise, so he must
do the work waiting for him, resenting it and cursing it
roundly. The words here are bitter enough, but there is
a suggestion of relish behind them, as if Tomas were
rather enjoying his mood. After all, he is grumpy, and
that connotes a disgruntled attitude, rather than a
rebellious one.

The next man is bitter; his complaint is much larger
in scope than is Tomas'. He has a grievance against all of
the world, and a great weariness of spirit.

WHAT THE TRAMP SAID 3.

Why should one live when living is a pain?
I have not seen a flower had any scent.

3. James Stephens, *Insurrections* (New York: Mac-
Her heard a bird sing once. The very rain
Seems dirty, and the clouds, all soiled and rent,
Till sullenly across the black old sky.
And all the weary stars go moping by,
They care not whither, sea, or mound, or plain,
All's one - and what one gets is never gain.

The sun scowled yesterday a weary while.
It used to beam. The moon last night was grim
With cynic gaze and frosty sullen smile.
And once I loved to gaze while from the rim
Of some great mountain she would look and gild
The rustling cornfield. Now she is filled
With bitterness and rancor sour as bile.
And blasts the world's surface every mile.

There is no more sunlight: All the weary world
Seems steeped in shadow, and forevermore
The heavy clouds will press till I am hurled
Back to the heart of things. O, it is sore
And sad and sorry to be living: let me die
And rest while all eternity lolls by,
Where the fierce winds of God are closely furled
Ten million miles away from this damned world.

The tramp is a completely disillusioned man, a man
who does not wish to live any longer because there is
nothing for which to live. He has lost the joy of living
entirely; flowers have no scent, the whole universe seems
shoddy and dirty and shadowed. He is akin to another of
Stephens' characters, the Philosopher in The Creek of
Gold, who decided to die because he had not learned any-
thing new that day. This tramp is the Philosopher without
humor; he, too, wants to die because there is nothing new
or good in the world, and he feels that it will never be
otherwise:

The heavy clouds will press till I am hurled
Back to the heart of things.
There is an indication here of Stephens' feeling of the haphazardly-governed state-of-things, an ambling, undirected movement. The tramp wishes to rest "while all eternity lolls by." That is perhaps the mainspring behind this whole bitter tirade, the purposelessness of everything, eternity lolling aimlessly by.

Stephens' men seem to be composed of two elements, joy and depression. Some, like Peadar Og, vacillate between the two. Others, like Tomas Cam and the tramp, seem to be composed of the latter element, with no joy in them. The next man, Mac Dhoul, is full of an impish joy. He is completely unimpressed by the universe and anything about it. He is impudence incarnate.

MAC Dhoul

I saw them all,
I could have laughed out loud
To see them at their capers;
That serious, solemn-footed, weighty crowd
Of angels, or say resurrected drapers:
Each with a thin flame swinging round his head,
With lilting wings and eyes of holy dread,
And curving ears strained for the great foot-fall,
And not a thought of sin—
I don't know how I kept the laughter in.

For I was there,
Unknown, un guessed at, snug,
In a rose tree's branchy spurt,
With two weeks' whisker blackening lug to lug,
With tattered breeks and only half a shirt,
Swollen fit to burst with laughter at the sight

Of those dull angels drooping left and right
Along the towering throne, each in a scare
To hear His foot advance
Huge from the cloud behind, all in a trance.

And suddenly,
As silent as a ghost,
I jumped out from the bush,
Went scooting through the glaring, nerveless host
All petrified, all gaping in a hush:
Came to the throne and, nimble as a rat,
Hopped up it, squatted close, and there I sat,
Squirming with laughter till I had to cry,
To see Him standing there
Frozen with all His angels in a stare!

He raised His hand,
His hand! 'Twas like a sky!
Gripped me in half a finger,
Flipped me round and sent me spinning high
Through the hot planets: faith, I didn't linger
To scratch myself, and then adown I sped
Scraping old moons and twisting heels and head
A chuckle in the void till . . here I stand
As naked as a crick,
I'll sing the Peeler and the Goat in half a tick.

This Mac Dhoul has scant regard for supernatural things. The angels he refers to very descriptively as "resurrected drapers," a beautiful thumbnail sketch of the lumpy-heavy-robed angels of the pictures of our youth. Mac Dhoul's comments on "that serious, solemn-footed, weighty crowd" are the comments of the bad boy of the neighborhood on the good little children who have no idea of fun.

His own appearance is contrasted with that of the angels, they
Each with a thin flame swinging round his head,
With lilting wings and eyes of holy dread,
And curved ears strained for the great footfall.

--- and he, as disreputable as any very earthy thing could well be:

With two weeks' whisker blackening lug to lug,
With tattered breeks and only half a shirt.

The sight of "those dull angels drooping left and right" filled him with impish laughter "fit to burst," but somehow he managed to keep that laughter in. Then, in the breathless awaiting of His coming, the audacious Mac Dhoul jumped out from his hiding place, "went scooting through the glaring, nerveless host" - not glaring in the sense of being angry, but, rather, glazed with astonishment - and actually hopped onto God's throne, and sat there "squirming with laughter till I had to cry" when he saw His frozen astonishment.

There is plain devilment in Mac Dhoul's description of the angels, and in his attitude towards them. But the other is a different matter; it is the hugest joke that he has played on God, but God's great power is acknowledged cheerfully, if audaciously.

He raised His hand,
His hand! 'Twas like a sky!
Gripped me in half a finger,
Flipped me round and sent me spinning high
Through the hot planets:
For all of that, Mac Dhoul is irrepressible, even as he flips through space:

Scraping old moons and twisting heels and head
A chuckle in the void.

That single phrase, "a chuckle in the void," is a short summary of Mac Dhoul's whole character, and of Stephens' gusty, lusty humor, with no malice in it, but a great heart-tickling exuberance.

This scamp finishes his wild adventures, undoubtedly for an audience at a pub somewhere, and then offers to sing a song for them, a disreputable one about a policeman and a goat. There is nothing incongruous to his mind about concluding his adventures in heaven with a doubtful song.

The next man is Tomas an Buile, or, as we would say, Crazy Tom. He, too, has had an intimate encounter with God, and he, too, tells his adventure in a pub. There the resemblance ends.

WHAT TOMAS AN BUILE SAID IN A PUB 5.

I saw God. Do you doubt it?
Do you dare to doubt it?
I saw the Almighty Man. His hand
Was resting on a mountain, and
He looked upon the World and all about it:
I saw Him plainer than I see you now,
You mustn't doubt it.

He was not satisfied;
His look was all dissatisfied.
His beard swung on a wind far out of sight
Behind the world's curve, and there was light
Most fearful from His forehead, and He sighed,
"That star went always wrong, and from the start
I was dissatisfied."

He lifted up His hand -
I say He heaved a dreadful hand
Over the spinning Earth, then I said, "Stay,
You must not strike it, God; I'm in the way;
And I will never move from where I stand."
He said, "Dear child, I feared that you were dead,
And stayed His hand."

This poem has received more attention from James
Stephens' critics than any other single poem. Mary Sturgeon
says of it:

Jack Robinson, though the dull smother that
he would call his imagination were fired by
plentiful beer, could ever have conceived of
"What Tomas an Buile Said in a Pub"; or could
have accompanied Mac Dhoul on his impish adven­ture
into heaven, to be twitched off God's throne
by a hand as large as a sky, and sent spinning
through the planets... You will find in him
the true Hibernian blend of grotesquerie and
grandeur, pure fantasy and shining vision. And
each of these things is here raised to a power
which makes it notable in itself, while all of
them may sometimes be found in astonishing com­bination in a single poem. In the book called
Insurrections, which is dated 1909, and appears
to represent Mr. Stephens' earliest efforts in
verse, there is the piece I have already named,
"What Tomas an Buile Said in a Pub". Already
we may see this complex quality at work. Tomas
is protesting that he saw God; and that God was
angry with the world.

... . . . . . . . . . .

You will see - a significant fact - that there
is no nonsense about a dream or a transcendant
waking apparition. In the opening lines Tomas
says, with anxious emphasis, that he saw the
'Almighty man' — and that is symbolical. It has
its relation to the mellow tenderness with
which the poem closes; but apart from that it
is a sign of the way in which the creative
energy always works in this poetry. It seizes
upon concrete stuff; and that is fused, hammered
and moulded into shapes so sharp and clear that
we feel we could actually touch them as they
spring up in our mental vision. This is not
peculiar to Mr. Stephens, of course. It would
seem to be common to every poet — though to be
sure they are not many — in whom sheer imagina­
tion, the first and last poetic gift, is pre­
eminent. Mr. Stephens has many other qualities,
which give his work depth, variety and signifi­
cance; but fine as they are, they take a second­
ary place beside this ardent, plastic power.

Willem van Doorn says:

James Stephens' Insurrections are not concerned
with the age-long feud between Gaeil and Sassen­
ach; they are of woman turning against man, of
humanitarian arraigning society, of old age
cursing its helplessness, of man quarrelling
with existence, and the established order of
things. It is characteristic that in the last­
mentioned kind of insurrection there is one
rebel who comes out victorious, and he is a
madman, Tomas an Buile, "Crazy Tom", boasting
in a pub of his victory.

Many of Stephens' critics have found a certain
affinity with Blake in much of Stephens' work. This poem
has characteristics that recall Blake. In both of these

6. Mary Sturgeon, Studies of Contemporary Poets

7. Willem van Doorn, "James Stephens, An Apprecia­
tion," English Studies, 8: 3, No. 1, 1926.
poets, the conception of God is an Old Testament conception, a bearded, immense, majestic figure. In Blake as in Stephens, the relationship is not between God and mankind, but between God and the lone man. In the man there is a certain confidence that can be traced back to the Psalmist, who, even when he knew his unworthiness, was sure of God's sustaining arm. The chief attribute of God is an awful tenderness. And through both poets there runs a core of clear elemental joy.

As for Tom himself, the nickname Crazy Tom seems to be more of a comment upon his listeners than on Tom himself. He is filled with this grave important thing; he is terribly anxious that the others hear his story and believe it, not because he wants their assuring credulence, but because what he has to say is so important. There is nothing of the boaster about him, that he has saved the world from God's despair, but rather a quiet assurance that of course, when God realized that he was still there, He could not destroy the world. The line between the vision and the hallucination is practically imperceptible at times.

Tom's joy is a calm sustained thing. In the next poem we have another madman, of a very different type. Mad Patsy is a creature of elemental joy, of happiness, pure and simple.
IN THE POPPY FIELD.

Mad Patsy said, he said to me,
That every morning he could see
An angel walking on the sky;
Across the sunny skies of morn
He threw great handfuls far and nigh
Of poppy seed among the corn;
And then, he said, the angels run
To see the poppies in the sun.

'A poppy is a devil weed,'
I said to him - he disagreed;
He said the devil had no hand
In spreading flowers tall and fair
Through corn and rye and meadow land,
And girth and barrow everywhere:
The devil has not any flower,
But only money in his power.

And then he stretched out in the sun
And rolled upon his back for fun:
He kicked his legs and roared for joy
Because the sun was shining down,
He said he was a little boy
And wouldn't work for any clown:
He ran and laughed behind a bee,
And danced for very ecstasy.

If this is madness, there is nothing very dreadful
in it. Patsy is the sort of man who would have been called,
in the kinder-tongued Middle Ages, "God's innocent."

Patsy is no realist; it does not matter to him
that poppies are a nuisance in a wheat-field. No flower,
says Patsy, could be a devil's weed; the devil had nothing
to do with flowers spreading in flaming beauty over the
countryside. The only thing the devil could have in his
power is money. Then Patsy tires of serious discussion.

8. The Hill of Vision, p. 28.
The last stanza shows Patsy as the complete antithesis of the man in "What the Tramp Said," with pure joy of being the predominant characteristic. Patsy doesn't care what happens; he is happy as any creature could be, and for good cause: not because of some unsure future, or changeable past, but just because "the sun was shining down." Patsy is as meaningless as a bird-song and as gay.

From the delightful and highly possible Patsy we turn to the terrified and shamed Adam, an Adam seen not with Milton's objective eye, but seen as a man filled with the fear of the hunted thing, crouching and hiding.


I thought I heard Him calling. Did you hear A sound, a little sound? My curious ear Is dinned with flying noises, and the tree Goes - whisper, whisper, whisper silently Till all its whispers spread into the ground, The shade is deep and He may pass us by. We are so very small, and His great eye, Stinted to starry majesties, may gaze Too wide to spy us hiding in the maze: Ah, misery! the sun has not yet gone And we are naked; He will look upon Our crouching shame, may make us stand upright Burning in terror - O, that it were night! He may not come... What? listen, listen, now - He is here! lie closer... Adam, where art thou?

This Adam is entirely sympathetic; there is nothing of the somewhat pedantic Adam of _Paradise Lost_ in him. That Adam always reminded me in some curious way of

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Robinson Crusoe. Perhaps it was the didactic mind that they shared. This Adam is fear personified, the fear of the man who knows that he has done wrong. All the breathlessness of fear, its too sharp perceptions, the cowering into as small a space as possible that is instinct with the hunted creature, are in this poem. The description of the noises around them as they strain their ears for His footstep is particularly good:

My curious ear
Is dinned with flying noises, and the tree
Goes - whisper, whisper, whisper silently
Till all its whispers spread into the sound
Of a dull roar.

He has a forlorn hope that, since God's eye is accustomed to such immensities, He may not see them as they crouch under the bushes, but the despairing note runs through the whole poem; he knows that they will be found out, even while he says in frantic self-deception, "He may not come." If it were dark, that the darkness would cover their nakedness, he could face God more easily. It is shame rather than guilt that troubles him. Fast on the breathless "listen, listen, now - He is here! Lie closer..." comes the stern calmness of God's voice, "Adam, where art thou?"

There are a number of poems about men in Reincarnations. Stephens' book of poems modelled on poems of early Irish writers, but they are not so much poems about the men themselves as about the Irishman's fierce love for
his country. Those taken from the doughty O'Bruadair have more of character study in them than have those of the other poets, O'Rahilly, Keating, or Raftery.

The first of O'Bruadair's here is full of that master's virulent ardor.

BLUE BLOOD 10.

We thought at first, this man is a king for sure, Or the branch of a mighty and ancient and famous lineage - That silly, sulky, illiterate, black-avised boor Who was hatched by foreign vulgarity under a hedge.

The good men of Clare were drinking his health in a flood, And gazing with me in awe at the princely lad, And asking each other from what bluest blueness of blood His daddy was squeezed, and the pa of the da of his dad?

We waited there, gaping and wondering, anxiously, Until he's stop eating and let the glad tidings out, And the slack-jawed booby proved to the hilt that he Was lout, son of lout, by old lout, and was da to a lout!

This has a strong nationalistic ring to it, showing a group of Irishmen engaged in their endless messianic search. There is no troublesome worry about consistency in this; the young man in question is "the princely lad."

the "branch of a mighty and ancient and famous lineage" until he speaks and discovers himself to the eager men. He may well, by his speech, have disclosed himself to be a "slack-jawed booby," and an absolute lout, but how could a "silly, sulky, illiterate, black-avised boor" ever appear to be princely? The disappointment and contempt of the men seem to have changed his outward aspect, as well as the inner man that they had hoped for.

O’Brudair is also the source for five poems about poets and singers. They are variations on two themes, and these two themes are presented in the two following poems.

**THE WEavers II.**

Many a time your father gave me aid
When I was down, and now I’m down again;
You mustn’t take it bad or be dismayed
Because I say, young folk should help old men
And ’tis their duty to do that: Amen!

I have no cows, no sheep, no cloak, no hat,
For those who used to give me things are dead
And my luck died with them: because of that
I won’t pay you a farthing, but, instead,
I’ll owe you till the dead rise from the dead.

A farthing! that’s not much, but, all the same,
I haven’t half a farthing, for that grand
Big idiot called Fortune rigged the game
And gave me nothing, while she filled the hand
Of every stingy devil in the land.

You weave, and I: you shirts, I weave instead
My careful verse - but you get paid at times!
The only rap I get is on my head:
But should it come again that men like rhymes
And pay for them, I’ll pay you for your shirt.

I will sing no more songs: the pride of my country I sang.
Through forty long years of good rhyme without any avail;
And no one cared even as much as the half of a hang.
For the song or the singer, so here is an end to the tale.

If a person should think I complain and have not got the cause,
Let him bring his eye here and take a good look at my hand.
Let him say of a goose-quill has calloused this poor pair of paws
Or the spade that I grip on and dig with out there on the land.

When the great ones were safe and renowned and were rooted and tough,
Though my mind went to them and took joy in the fortune of those,
And pride in their pride and their fame, they gave little enough,
Not as much as two boots for my feet, or an old suit of clothes.

I ask of the Craftsman that fashioned the fly and the bird,
Of the Champion whose passion will lift me from death in a time,
Of the Spirit that melts icy hearts with the wind of a word,
That my people be worthy, and get, better singing than mine.

I had hoped to live decent, when Ireland was quit of her care,
As a bailiff or steward perhaps in a house of degree,
But the end of my tale is, old brogues and old britches to wear,
So I'll sing no more songs for the men that care nothing for me.
Stephens says of his presentation of O’Brien’s poems:

In the case of David O’Brien .... one side only, and that the least, is shown, for a greater pen than mine would be necessary if that tornado of rage, eloquence, and humour were to be presented but the poems which I give might almost be taken as translations of one side of his terrific muse. 13.

Here is a poet without ladylike inhibitions. In the first poem the poet gets the shirt from the young weaver for two reasons: first, youngsters ought to help old men; it's their duty; secondly, we are both weavers, the main difference being that you sometimes get paid for your work (though not this time).

It is the same voice speaking in the second poem. There is no meek acceptance of adversity in this poet's heart, but bitterness and anger. He has given, he says, forty years of good singing, and no one cares even "as much as the half of a hang," so he is finished. He is not complaining without plenty of cause; he exhibits his calloused hands as proof of that. After all, a goose-quill doesn't wear callouses like that! It is actual hard labor that has done that to "this poor pair of paws." When the nobles, the great ones, had been in power, he had gloried in them. But, says he, all he ever got for his songs from

13. *Reincarnations*, p. 72, 73.
them was little enough - "Not as much as two boots for my feet, or an old suit of clothes."

But that does not turn him against his people so that he can dismiss it, saying, "Let them do without." In the fourth stanza, which achieves a loftiness and passion unique with O'Bruadair, he asks "that my people be worthy, and get, better singing than mine."

Then he goes back to his single-hearted complaint. He had hoped to have a secure and decent future as a bailiff or maybe a steward in a house of quality, but here he is, and "the end of the tale is - old brogues and old breeches to wear!" So he circles back to the statement with which this poem began, "I'll sing no more songs for the men who care nothing for me."

Stephens characterizes the poet of these two pieces in a sentence that shows Stephens' own joy in him:

But O'Bruadair lets out of him an unending rebellious bawl which would be the most desolating utterance ever made by man if it were not also the most gleeful. 14.

Poets have generally written about poetry and poets with a sense of awe and dedication. Not so Stephens. His poems about the singers are rueful laments about the

14. Reincarnations, p. 76.
difficulty of earning a living this precarious way, or full of exasperation at the perversity of his craft.

A TUNE UPON A REED 15.

I have a pipe of oaten straw,
I play upon it when I may,
And the music that I draw
Is as happy as the day.

It has seven holes, and I
Play upon it high and low;
I can make it laugh and cry,
I can make it banish woe.

Any tune you like to name
I will play it at the word,
Old or new is all the same,
I'm as ready as a bird.

Not one pipes so happily,
Not a piper can succeed
When I lean against a tree
Blowing gently on my reed.

II

But there is a tune, and though
I try to play it day and night,
Blowing high and blowing low,
I can never get it right.

I know the tune without a flaw,
And yet that tune I cannot play
On my pipe of oaten straw,
Though I practice night and day.

It seems to me I never will
Play again the happy air
Which I heard upon a hill
When the Shee were dancing there.

Little pipe! be good to me!
And play the tune I want to play,
Or I will smash you on a tree
And throw your wicked halves away.

These little songs have a joyful carefree quality about them, even the second that is made of the exasperation of not being able to express something that you know very well within yourself. This is a conception of poetry as a joyful natural thing; there is no awesome erudition, no consecrated pomposity. This singer is "ready as a bird" to sing, and he is enjoying himself immensely. There is an innocent self-glory; "no one pipes so happily," not another piper can succeed as he can, he can make his pipe "laugh and cry," he can make it "banish woe."

The second song shows the fly in the ointment. There is one song he cannot play. He knows it perfectly. It runs around in his head, but, practice as he may, he cannot play the tune that he heard "when the Shee were dancing." The last stanza is a voicing of man's atavistic impulse to punish inanimate things for their perversity. "If you don't play what I want you to, I'll break you and 'throw your wicked halves away.'"

In the next poem the poet finds himself in somewhat of a predicament.
THE MASTERTLESS MAN 16.

Now it is my turn to sing
In the service of the spring;
I must lift a note and call
Bird and beast to madrigal.

But on mountain, peak and shelf,
Over wood and plain and glade,
Spring is singing for herself,
She can do without my aid.

She can do without my aid!
So I need not sing to you:
Singing is my only trade!
What the deuce am I to do?

This is a slight thing, important only in that it shows Stephens' refusal to put the poet on a pedestal.

There is nothing of heaven-born inspiration here; singing is the poet's trade. The next poem shows him pursuing his trade, an unprofitable one.

THE MARKET 17.

A man came to me at the fair
And said, "If you've a poet's tongue
Tumble up and chant the air
That the stars of morning sung:

"I'll pay you, if you sing it nice,
A penny-piece." -I answered flat,
"Sixpence is the proper price
For a ballad such as that."

But he stared and wagged his head,
Growling as he passed along
"Sixpence! well, I'll see you dead
Before I pay that for a song."

I saw him buy three pints of stout
With the sixpence - dirty lout!

This poet is an exponent of the theory that the workman is worthy of his hire. A song like the one requested was worth sixpence; therefore, he should get sixpence for it. The man, on the other hand, went by a different theory, that no song was worth more than a penny. The three pints of beer was another matter; there he got full value for his money.

One of Stephens' critics, "a Time's Reviewer," as he modestly signs his article, has a great deal to say about this verse:

A very curious thing has happened to the peasant in poetry, and especially in Irish poetry. From being commonplace and homely, from being nearer to real life, he has become a creature utterly removed from real life, as far removed as the muses addressed by eighteenth-century poets. Mr. James Stephens, by the use of the simple language of everyday speech, sometimes avoids making his peasants unreal poetic fictions; and when he puts some idea sufficiently strange into the mouths of peasants speaking their everyday speech, the fusion between the new and familiar is complete and he writes poetry. But at times his peasants are simply muses or some other personification.

A man came to me at the fair
And said, "If you've a poet's tongue,
Tumble up and chant the air
That the stars of morning sung:

Here we see the peasant begin as a peasant and quite suddenly turn into a poetic abstraction. He turns into a peasant again at the end of the poem, it should be said, where he refuses
to pay the poet enough and spends the money which he might have given to him on three pints of stout. 

It must be the "air that the stars of morning sung" that is bothering the "Time's Reviewer." Yet that phrase, through its use in the church, is a familiar phrase to many a child, as well as to many a peasant. A man does not have to be even literate to have a great many essentially literary references as a part of his vocabulary. Not that that is very important, however. A poet has no need to be literal. As for the peasant in question being a poetic abstraction, he is quite a queer one, with his desire to get the very best for the smallest price, and his absolute conviction that three pints of stout are more to be desired than is the song the stars of morning sang.

Stephens' common men are not at all like Wordsworth's. Wordsworth believed in the essential nobility of the common man. Stephens knows well enough the weaknesses and frailties that mark the common man as well as his more affluent brother. It is the common man's lack of inhibitions that makes him a better subject.

The other poems in this chapter are not about one specific man, portraits in the sense that the preceding

poems were, but rather about some aspect of man in general, hate, pride, shame, fear, emotions that shape men to their final development.

HATE 19.

My enemy came nigh,
And I
Stared fiercely in his face.
My lips went writhing back in a grimace,
And stern I watched him with a narrow eye.
Then, as I turned away, my enemy,
That bitter heart and savage, said to me:
"Some day, when this is past,
When all the arrows that we have are cast,
We may ask one another why we hate,
And fail to find a story to relate.
It may seem to us then a mystery
That we could hate each other."
Thus said he,
And did not turn away,
Waiting to hear what I might have to say,
But I fled quickly, fearing if I stayed
I might have kissed him as I would a maid.

This poem is remarkable for its discernment of several of the distinctive qualities of hatred, its causelessness, the narrow gulf between hate and love, and the inclination of man to hug his hate to him and cherish it. The description of the hating man in the first four lines sounds like a description of any angry snarling animal, with the fierce stare, the lips writhing back, the narrow following eye. It is the enemy, not the hater himself, who says that someday they may wonder why they hated

each other. He waits tentatively for an answer to that. There is none. The hater must either relinquish his hatred or, to keep his hatred, flee. This man flees, hugging his hatred to him.

The titles of these poems are terse and to the point. The next is "Shame."

**SHAME 20.**

I was ashamed, I dared not lift my eyes, I could not bear to look upon the skies; What I had done! sure everybody knew! From everywhere hands pointed where I stood, And scornful eyes were piercing through and through The moody armor of my hardihood.

I heard their voices too, each word an asp That buzzed and stung me sudden as a flame: And all the world was jolting on my name, And now and then there came a wicked rasp Of laughter, jarring me to deeper shame.

And then I looked, but there was no one nigh, No eyes that stabbed like swords or glinted sly, No laughter glinting on the silent air: And then I found that I was all alone Facing my soul, and next I was aware That this mad mockery was all my own.

This is a strong portrayal of guilt. Willem van Doorn says of it:

And again the poet acknowledges mistakes. Doing wrong is bad, exaggerated feeling of self is bad.
too; both combined bring double punishment. He is ashamed, not daring to lift his eyes, thinking everybody has heard what he has done, seeing everywhere scornful glances, hearing on all sides malignant buzzing and sniggering. 21.

The man here is not suffering so much because of what he has done; it is the mockery of his fellows that he could not bear, the "eyes that stabbed like swords or glinted sly," the pointing fingers, the "wicked rasp of laughter." Then he finds out that he, like many others, has been making his own punishment.

"The Waste Places" is pure Blake. It is not an imitation of Blake, but Blake's voice speaks out in it.

THE WASTE PLACES 22.

As a naked man I go
Through the desert sore afraid,
Holding up my head, although
I am as frightened as a maid.

The couching lion there I saw
From barren rocks lift up his eye,
He parts the cactus with his paw,
He stares at me as I go by.

He would follow on my trace
If he knew I was afraid,
If he knew my hardy face
Hides the terrors of a maid.

In the night he rises, and
He stretches forth, he sniffs the air.


22. Songs from the Clay, p. 41.
He roars and leaps along the sand,
He creeps and watches everywhere.

His burning eyes, his eyes of bale
Through the darkness I can see;
He lashes fiercely with his tail,
He would love to spring at me.

I am the lion in his lair,
I am the fear that frightens me,
I am the desert of despair,
And the nights of agony.

Night or day, whate'er befal,
I must walk that desert land,
Until I can dare to call
The lion out to lick my hand.

II

As a naked man I tread
The gloomy forest, ring on ring,
Where the sun that's overhead
Cannot see what's happening.

There I go; the deepest shade,
The deepest silence pressing me,
And my heart is more afraid
Than a maiden's heart would be.

Every day I have to run
Underneath the demon tree,
Where the ancient wrong is done,
While I shrink in agony.

There the demon held a maid
In his arms, and as she, daft,
Screamed again in fear he laid
His lips upon her lips and laughed.

And she beckoned me to run,
And she called for help to me,
And the ancient wrong was done
Which is done eternally.

I am the maiden and the fear,
I am the sunless shade, the strife,
I the demon lips, the sneer
Showing under every life.

I must tread that gloomy way
Until I shall dare to run
And bear the demon with his prey  
From the forest to the sun.

This is as fine a representation of gripping reasonless fear as any other in English literature. It has the breathlessness of fear, the thin veneer of courage, worn for appearance's sake, the horrible sense of being on the very edge of danger. That the fear is a part of himself does not lessen its sharpness, and he knows that he must endure it until he dares to face it.

The next poem is one of the carping critic:

THE FUR COAT.  23.

I walked out in my Coat of Pride;  
I looked about on every side;  
And said the mountains should not be  
Just where they were, and that the sea  
Was out of place, and that the beech  
Should be an oak! And then, from each,  
I turned in dignity, as if  
They were not there! I sniffed a sniff;  
And climbed upon my sunny shelf;  
And sneezed a while; and scratched myself.

For some strange reason, Padraic Colum calls this poem the "exquisite dramatization of a cat's mentality." 24.

23. The Rocky Road to Dublin, p. 70.

The only justification for this is the title; the detached, criticizing attitude is as characteristic of a certain type of man as it is the feline creature.

The exceedingly pompous individual in the poem criticizes the arrangement of the world, and, since the details are not arranged to please him, turns back to his own sunny shelf, well out of the way of things. A trivial, static individual is limned by his final activities:

I sniffed a sniff;
And climbed upon my sunny shelf;
And sneezed a while; and scratched myself.

The Coat of Pride is well called The Fur Coat: that name suggests something bulky and enveloping, that shields its wearer from contact with his environment, and it also connotes a degree of wealth, and a sheltered individual. A poor man would not be so apt to be ordering the universe in this summary fashion.

The next poem is the song of an independent man.

INDEPENDENCE 25.
I grew single and sure,
And I will not endure
That my mind should be seen
By the sage or the boor.

25. Songs from the Clay, p. 38.
I will keep, if I can,  
From each brotherly man:  
The help of their hands  
Is no part of my plan.  
I will rise then, and go  
To the land of my foe;  
For his scowl is the sun  
That shall cause me to grow.

This lone wolf recognises the fact that his fullest development will come about through the stimulus of criticism. There in the land of his foe he will not have any helping hands to shake off. He refuses to be a part of anything; "I grew single and sure," and he will not let anyone, sage or boor, see the workings of his mind. He is a man with a strong purpose, but one born to beat his head against some stone wall or other.

The exuberance of Mad Patsy and Mac Dhoul breaks out again in this next little poem.


I shall reach up, I shall grow  
Till the high gods say —"Hello,  
Little brother, you must stop  
Ere our shoulders you o'erstep."

I shall grow up, I shall reach  
Till the little gods beseech  
—"Master, wait a little, do,  
We are running after you!"

I shall bulk and swell and scale  
Till the little gods shall quail,  
Running here and there to hide  
From the terror of my stride.

There is a bright buoyancy in this poem, expressed in its infectiously gleeful trimeters, the man swelling till the high gods tell him patronizingly to stop, "ere our shoulders you o'ertop." As he grows, they dwindle in size; in the second stanza they are no longer the high gods, but the little gods, trying in vain to keep up with him. And in the third stanza they run and hide from the terror of his hugeness. This rings through and through with a gleeful impishness.

The last poems in this chapter are "Said the Young-Young Man to the Old-Old Man," and its companion-piece, "Said the Old-Old Man to the Young-Young Man." The first group, the young-young man's poems, consist of six sonnets, all Shakespearean in form. The first of these is a longing backward look at his childhood before the days when he became disillusioned. The others are his comments on a bewildering world.

Said the young-young man to the old-old man:
I wish I had not grown to man's estate,
I wish I was a silly urchin still,
With bounding pulses and a heart elate
To meet whatever came of good or ill.

Of good or ill! not knowing what was good,
But groping to a better than I knew,
And guessing deeper than I understood,
And hoping truths that never could be true.

Of good or ill! when, so it often seems,
There is no good at all but only ill.
Alas, the sunny summer-time of dreams,
The dragons I had nerved my hand to kill,
The maidens I should rescue, and the queen
Whose champion long ago I would have been.

II

I wish I had a hand as big as God's
To smash creation into smithereens,
Till nothing but a heap of stones or clods
Remained of its ironic might-have-beens.

The weary ages that have drifted by,
The ages that have still to shirk and slink,
Have fashioned us the image of an eye,
And brains that weary when they try to think.

For all is as it was, and all will be
Experimental still in ages hence:
Poor eyes that ache because they cannot see!
Poor minds that strive without a recompense!
And after all the climbing climb we still
To find o'er every height a steeper hill.

III

I wished I was a saint not long ago,
But now I do not wish it any more:
Who'd be the ebb if he could be the flow
That bursts in thunder on the solid shore.

I'd be a wave impetuous as life
And not the skulking backwash that is death.
I would not lose a pang of heated strife
For all the comfort that the Preacher saith.

Straight beds of that oblivion! sodden sleep,
That dreams renunciations deeper still!
Renouncing only what they cannot keep
For trembling fingers and for flaccid will.

And yet the dreams of long ago had got
A colour my awakening forgot.

IV

I love rich venison and mellow wine:
To sprawl upon a meadow in the sun:
To swing a cane, and kiss a girl, and dine,
To break and mend and fashion things for fun.

I love to look at women as they pass:
I love to watch a valiant horse go by:
To hear a lark sing from the seedy grass:
To praise a friend and mock an enemy.

The glory of the sunlight and the day,
The loveliness when evening closes slow,
The clouds that droop away and far away
Just faintly tinged by day's last afterglow.

And yet I fear lest misery and grief
Like misers hide a joy beyond belief.

V

Perhaps you harken to a wiser muse!
The undersong of life rolling along
So deep, so scarcely audible, we lose
The tremble of that densely weighted song:

We who are toned to lighter melodies,
The bee that murmurs in the scented grass,
The sharper sweetness from the nested trees,
The winds that laugh and weep before they pass.

We well may miss that solemn monotone.
But ye can miss the nightingale in June!
For music that is cousin to a groan.
For agonies that writhe upon a tune!

Drear happiness! the limnet in the tree
Astounds your rhythms like a mockery.

VI

I wish that I were dead: I wish indeed
That I were dead and buried in the ground,
Deep down below the deepest rooted weed
And nothing left, not even one small mound

To show where I was lying. If I lay
Long-stretched and silent in that blank retreat,
I would not hear a sound of grave or gay,
Or even those shy, softly-stepping feet
That come and stand a while and go away.

I would be so alone, so quite alone,
And heedless as the dead can only be,
Not minding what was hidden or was known,
Or all the gropings of philosophy.

If I were dead—but still I could not die
While there were winds and clouds upon the sky.

Robert Shafer says of this series:

Other people may have just as vivid a realization of the spirit of youth as Mr. Stephens has, but if they do, they appear not to be able to give expression to it. In Said the Young-Young Man to the Old-Old Man I seem to perceive not so much the voice of Mr. Stephens as that of youth incarnate. Certainly the quality of insight there displayed is something more than merely unusual. 28.

This very young man is suffering from the moods of youth, seeing the world alternatingly as a world of great pleasures and as a stern heart-breaking place. In the first sonnet he longs for the old unconfused days when he was a "silly urchin" with his simple ideas of right and wrong. Now it seems to him that there is no good at all.

In the second sonnet he looks back over the ages of the world and sees that there has been no change, and there will not be. He longs, in youthful desperation, for a hand "as big as God's" to smash all of creation into smithereens, to end the pitiful progress of man, poor man that surmounts each obstacle only to find a larger one in front of him.

In the third sonnet he tells of an old ambition, a wish to be a saint, and repudiates it, as being the ebb of

life, a renunciation of life only because one is not strong enough to hold it. He wishes instead to be the surge of life. Yet even as he says it, he realizes that this ambition lacks the color of his old dreams.

In the fourth we have a small litany of delights, daily pleasures, till the last couplet, where he voices a fear that there may be a greater unknown joy behind misery and grief.

The fifth poem weighs one song against another, the stern deep "undersong of life" against the light frail melodies that make up the beauty of the earth. He finally declares for the lighter joyful song, saying of the sad deep song that the linnet in the tree "astounds your rhythms like a mockery."

The last sonnet is a fervent wish for death and its quiet desirable loneliness. Still, in the last couplet, in the middle of his melancholy, his joy of life wells up:

I could not die
While there were winds and clouds upon the sky.

Here is the easy turning from mood to mood that characterises youth. This young man is going through a common experience of the race, a form of mental growing pains.

The old man's advice to the young young man is both
tolerant and cynical.

SAID THE OLD-OLD MAN TO THE YOUNG-YOUNG MAN 29.

Listen well to what I say,  
These are the names of demons gray.  
Smiling-Lip, whose teeth are strong.  
Friendly-Hand, whose claws are long.  
Passionate-Eye, whose glare is fire.  
Kiss-of-Joy, who lives in mire.  
These are the names of demon foes  
Who taught the Devil all he knows.

The lips of desire smile to hide  
The teeth of fierce oppression inside.  
The hand that gives and gives alway  
Only waits a time to slay.  
The eyes that woo with a fiery stare  
Are the eyes that roam anywhere.  
The kiss that is quick, and mad, and sweet  
Rolls the gutter along the street.

Beware of lips when smiling bland,  
Beware the gifts in a friendly hand,  
Beware the passionate eyes that woo,  
The sweetest kiss is the kiss to rue;  
A laugh is a lie, and the truth a blow,  
- But you won't heed me whether or no.

This is the advice that age has given to youth ever  
since Adam told Cain to watch his step when he was with  
other people, and the old-old man knows well enough that  
the young-young man will not heed him. No man ever entirely  
trusts another's experiences; youth usually puts down  
words like these to the fact that the teller is old and he  
does not remember what it is like to be young. Still, no

29. The Hill of Vision, p. 73.
one can resist giving advice, even when he realizes that it will not be followed.

Stephens' men are a varied group, ranging in temperament from the madly joyful to the dour. He has no central theme, no great message that he is trying to convey through these men. He sees them as they are, regarding their frailties and peculiarities with a tender humorous tolerance. He makes no effort to moralize; he usually has no comment of his own to add at all. The men are just presented as they are seen, that being the end in itself.

Stephens sees men objectively, as a spectacle, albeit he is a sympathetic spectator. This sympathy is his chief characteristic, a sympathy that has no sentimentality in it. One has a feeling that he actually enjoys his Mac Dhoul, his Peadar Og, his Tomas an Buile.

Man as a noble creature does not seem to interest him. His men are caught as they are, with their very human faults and errors making them the more real. They are usually at one extreme of emotion or the other, joyful or depressed. None of them are contented, serene, or placid. All are full of some emotion, an intense joy that seems to spring from no particular source, the same sort of joy that makes the bird to sing, or a black gloom that makes the whole world seem dark. This can be laid to their race. A placid Irishman is a contradiction of terms, and Stephens' men
are Irish.

There are certain types used in these poems. They are all common men, with the exception of the carping individual of "The Fur Coat." They do not conform with the accepted pattern of life; they are rebels. Instead of sober industrious men, we find tramps and madmen, grumblers and adventurers, men who escape, in one way or another, from the humdrum everyday life. There is another type, too, the poet, a hard-working, poorly paid man. They have a characteristic in common, this motley crew. All of them are intensely alive and noticing. They feel strongly, and express their feelings even more strongly. They may be loving life, or they may be loathing it. But one thing is certain; they are never enduring it in stolid silence.
CHAPTER IV

ON WOMEN

Stephens' women range in type from the forlorn tinker woman nursing her babe to that great figure of Irish mythology, Deirdre. As to the critics' opinion of Stephens' competence in handling this subject, it is a matter of paying your money and taking your choice; they disagree. Robert Shafer says:

In his understanding of woman, however, he is again more than exceptional, even though when he is writing of Eve he does make her out to have been a surprisingly ontological person. 1.

Katherine Tynan says:

He knows more of men than of women; his insurgent wives and mistresses do not always ring true; perhaps he is too simply and wholly man to be at home amid the intricacies of the feminine mind. 2.

A good poet is not simply and wholly man; at the time that he is writing he is a part of everything under the sun, and perhaps a few things that never were. The ways


of the minds of some of Stephens' women are dark and winding, but the fact that they deviate from the norm surely does not make them untrue. There is a basic reality to be felt in each of these women, excepting, perhaps, the women in some of the translated poems, particularly those taken after Raftery. They are conventional outward portraits only. In his own poems Stephens penetrates past this fair face that masks so many of the women of literature. He says of that himself:

When I was young I used to think
That every eye peered through a chink,
And every man was hid behind
His own thick self where none could find.

That every woman in the street,
Looking fair and smiling sweet,
Was maybe hiding thoughts that were
Not quite so sweet, nor quite so fair.
As her kind smile and blossom face;
She hived in some forgotten place
Within herself and could not bear
That any man should see her there.

And though I'm older still I see
In every face a mystery.3.

The women of this chapter are arranged into two groups: the contemporary women are first, arranged roughly by age, and then the women of Gaelic mythology and older Irish poetry, including two who will always be timeless,

Deirdre and the nameless virulent piece of femininity in "Righteous Anger."

The first poem is not about a single woman, but a group of girls occupied with the affairs that are so very important to them.

WESTLAND ROW 4.

Every Sunday there's a throng
Of pretty girls who trot along
In a pious, breathless state
(They are nearly always late)
To the Chapel where they pray
For the sins of Saturday.

They have frocks of white and blue,
Yellow sashes they have too,
And red ribbons show each head
Tenderly is ringleted;
And the bell rings loud, and the Railway whistles urgently.

After Chapel they will go,
Walking delicately slow,
Telling still how Father John
Is so good to look upon,
And such other grave affairs
As they thought of during prayers.

There is tenderness as well as humor in Stephens' picture of the teen-age girls hurrying in "a pious, breathless state" to the Chapel to pray for their small misdoings. These are well-cared for, well-dressed girls at the silly age, that go walking along arm-in-arm in a

group, telling all their thoughts to one another in confidential little spurts, that Father John is so handsome,

And such other grave affairs
As they thought of during prayers.

The next is a young bride.

AFTERWARDS 5.

Maidenhood, maidenhood, whither art thou gone away from me? Never again will I come to thee, never again.

-Sappho.

Am I a bride?
I scarce can think it, I
Who yesterday was quick to blush and hide
Behind my mother's skirts, and often cried-
(Foolish to be so shy)
When strangers came and mother was not nigh.

Strange, I am wed!
Wife to be held and kissed!
And no one chides his head beside my head,
Nor cries, "Thou bad thing, fie!" but all instead
Smile blessingly, I wist
It is a wonder tale... yet something dear is missed.

No longer free.
Love's captive I am taken.
... Now whither art thou gone away from me
Dear maidenhood? "O, I am so far from thee.
And howso thou complain,
I nevermore may come to thee again."

This very young bride muses on the strange changes that marriage has brought to her; doing the same thing after marriage that had resulted in a scolding before now brings blessing smiles. She is quite happy, though she

5. The Hill of Vision, p. 95.
finds it difficult to believe that she is actually wed, but at the same time she has that faintly unhappy hollow feeling that comes with the taking of an irrevocable step, and the realization that what has been is definitely finished, and there is no returning. It has an air of gentle melancholy about it.

The next poem has Stephens' own vigor and force and unveiled emotion.

THE DANCER 6.

I will not dance;
I say I will not dance.
Your audience, pah, let them go home again,
Sleek ugly pigs. Am I to hop and prance
As long as they will pay
And posture for their eyes, and lay
My womanhood before them? Let them drain
Their porter pots and snuffle — I'll not stay.

For he is dead;
I tell you he is dead.
My God, did you not hear me say it
Twice already? I held his groaning head
In these remembering arms,
And cursed the charms
That could not stop his going. Must I bay it
Like a dog to you? Quit your alarms!

They shout and stamp?
Then, let them shout and stamp,
Those booted hogs and lechers— I'm away
To sit beside my dead. O God, you tramp
Upon me, too, and twine
More sorrows round me than are mine
With holy unconcern. . . Don't bar my way,
I'm going to my dead. . . Ah-h-h, stamping swine!

This is a poigniant study of a woman heavily laden with her grief, and resenting any thing that comes between that grief and her. Nothing in the world is important to her but that sorrow; by contrast the dancing seems not only trivial, but wrong. The audience that stamps and shouts for her are entirely callous to her grief; therefore they are hideous things, "booted hogs and lechers," "stamping swine," as she calls them on that last long-drawn, hating "ah-h-h." There is nothing of good in her dancing, her charms. They could not stop his going.

One must, perforce, feel a bit sorry for the unfortunate manager, who is, after all, trying to satisfy an audience that is very present, and already impatient. Then—off goes the Prima Danseuse, breathing her disgust and hatred of these paying customers.

There is a grim tight humor in this next poem.

MORA CRIONA

I have looked him round and looked him through,
Know everything that he will do
In such a case, and such a case;
When a frown comes on his face
I dream of it, and when a smile
I trace its sources in a while.

He can not do a thing but I
Peep and find the reason why:
Because I love him, and I seek,

Every evening of the week,
To peep behind his frowning eye
With little query, little pry,
And make him if a woman can
Happier than any man.

Yesterday he gripped her tight
And cut her throat - and serve her right!

Nora Criona is an aggravating woman. The first stanza tells of the woman's inner possessiveness, hugging every little act of his to her. That is normal and natural. Every woman is secretly convinced that she knows the man she loves like a book, but the wise woman says nothing of this inner gleeful secret that is the root of that tolerant complacent remark, "Men are like children," that is trotted out as great new wisdom by each maturing generation of women.

The second stanza tells of Nora Criona's nagging outer possessiveness, the sort that will not let the man possess himself in peace, the type of woman who wears a person out asking if he is sure he is comfortable. She interrupts his thoughts, his every act with the silly buzzing questions and prying words. She is smug and complacent, with her avowed ambition to

make him if a woman can
Happier than any man.

Finally this gnat-like aggravation drives the man to drastic action, the quick climax in the third little
stanza. Judgment is pronounced upon her in three short words --- "serve her right." And it undoubtedly does.

The next poem belongs, perhaps, in the chapter on Men-and-Women, but the woman in it is so much the major figure that the poem was included in this chapter.

LIGHT-O-LOVE 10.

But now, said she, I must away,
And if I tend another fire
In some man's house this you will say
-It is not that her love doth tire:
This is the price she has to pay,
For bread she gets no other way.
Still fainting for her heart's desire.

And so she went out from the door
While I sat quiet in my chair:
She ran back once, again, -no more...
I heard a footstep on the stair;
A lifted latch; one moment fleet
I heard the noises of the street,
Then silence booming everywhere!

There is a quiet resignation about this woman that fits her for a larger part. There is no bitterness about her words, yet the meaning behind them is bitter enough. It is poverty that is sending her out, not that her "love doth tire," but that this is "the price she has to pay for bread she gets no other way," a bitter thought indeed, yet expressed with gentleness and grave beauty.

Once she weakens and runs back. The man sits quietly

and numbly, hearing her go with a detached sharpness, the footstep on the stairs, the lifting of the latch, a moment of the noises of the street, then the great oppressing silence of loneliness.

The next is a remarkable poem of a mother and her child.

THE TINKER’S BRAT 11.

I saw a beggar woman bare
Her bosom to the winter air;
And into the tender nest
Of her famished mother-breast
She laid her child;
And him beguiled,
With crooning song into his rest.

With crooning song, and tender word,
About a little singing bird,
Who spread her wings about her brood,
And tore her bosom up for food,
And sang the while,
Them to beguile,
All in the forest’s solitude!

And, hearing this, I could not see
That she was clad in misery;
For in her heart there was a glow
Warmed her bare feet in the snow;
In her heart was hid a sun
Would warm a world for everyone!

This is one of the tenderest and most beautiful pictures of mother-love in poetry. There is nothing of sentimentality about it, or of the decorative mother-and child picture. The social criticism is there, but it

confines itself to the title that contrasts so jarringly with the serene little poem, and to a dim pervasive background. Katherine Tynan says of this poem:

I think, occasionally, Stephens means to be ugly. He almost attains it in two or three poems of men and women; but in spite of his first intention beauty breaks through the sheath of ugliness. The crudely-named Tinker's Brat, which promises a harsh realism, blossoms to a heavenly thing. 12.

This woman transcends her poverty. Hearing her, no one could think of her misery, but of the beauty of her love for her child. She is entirely selfless; her child is her immediate thought.

The next woman is a mother, too, but a far cry from the tinker's wife. She is the calmly decorative, Elizabethan mother in the poem, "The Cherry Tree."

THE CHERRY TREE 13.

Come from your bed, my drowsy gentleman!
And you, fair lady, rise and braid your hair,
And let the children wash, if wash they can;
If not, assist you them, and make them fair
As is the morning and the morning sky,
And every tree and bush and bird in air.

The sun climbed on the heights three hours ago,
He laughed above the hills and they were glad;


13. The Rocky Road to Dublin, p. 1.
With bubbled pearl he made the rivers flow
And laced their mists in silver, and he clad
The meads in fragrant pomp of green and gold,
And bade the world forget it had been sad.

So lift yourself, good sir! and you, sweet dame,
Unlash your evening eyes of pious grey;
Call on the children by each loved name,
And set them on the grass and let them play;
And play with them a while, and sing with them
Beneath the cherry bush a roundelay.

Stephens is a singer with many voices. Here is
Elizabethan formality and delicate precision, framed in
the iambic pentameters that suit its dignity.

The "fair lady" is a happy, sheltered individual;
her idyllic life is far different from the hard bare ex­
istence of the tinker's woman. One phrase gives her
vividness and distinction: "Unlash your evening eyes of
pious grey." There is something of the lady's tranquility
and calm loveliness in that line. Otherwise she is noth­
ing but a decorative picture.

In direct contrast to his handling of that poem
is "The Tale of Mad Brigid," a poem ranking with "What
Tomas an Buile Said in a Pub" in clarity, and strength,
and sweetness.

THE TALE OF MAD BRIGID 14.

And then
There rung a bell out of the evening air:

One big star fell
In a long golden flare through a great stillness,
And he was standing there.
There came a chillness creeping through me slow,
Nor could I know that it was truly he
Who stood beside, when, lo!
He smiled and I was made to know,
Nor hesitate because of his grave kingliness and state,
And steady eyes and brow immaculate.
But then the weight
Of his too sudden glory bowed me down
Slow to the ground.
I feared that he might frown without a sound,
Or speak in fire.
Then he said "sweet," and I was dumb;
I dared not come because of my desire;
And he went slow away,
And from the grey, cold evening came the tweet,
Sad to my heart, but infinitely sweet,
Of some late flying wren.

Here, as in "The Tinker's Brat," there is inestimable tenderness portrayed, but here it is the tenderness of God, so great that Brigid was overwhelmed and "dared not come because of my desire." God makes himself known to Mad Brigid, but not by words. He comes to her with the long golden flaring star, in the great silence of the evening. She senses who it is, but is not sure until he smiles at her. She is suddenly awed by this "sudden glory" and sinks to the ground. He calls to her, but she, because of her great desire, dares not come to him. He leaves her slowly. The last three lines evoke a quiet sad peace:

And from the grey, cold evening came the tweet,
Sad to my heart, but infinitely sweet,
Of some late flying wren.
wonderful moment before she is overcome by the glory of her vision, then the fearfulness of her own unworthiness, and, finally, the spent, quiet peace. She, like Tomas an Buile, is mad, in that they deviate widely from the human norm, but the madness of both is the madness of prophets and seers.

Eve is the subject of the next poem, a woman whom Shafer declares Stephens has made out to be a "surprisingly ontological person." 15.

**EVE 16.**

Long age in ages gray  
I was fashioned out of clay:  
Builted with the sun and moon,  
Kneaded to a holy tune;  
And there came to me a breath  
From the House of Life and Death.

Then the sun roared into fire,  
And the moon with swift desire  
Leaped among the starry throng  
Singing on her journey long;  
And I climbed up from the sod,  
Holding to the hand of God.

In a garden fair and wide,  
Looking down a mountain side,  
Prone I lay and felt the press  
Of Immensity's caress,  
There a space I lived and knew  
What the Power meant to do.


Till upon a day there came
Down to me a voice of flame,
"Thou the corner-stone of man,
Rise and set about my plan,
Nothing doubting, for a guide
I have quickened in thy side."

From the garden wide and fair,
From the pure and holy air,
Down the mountain-side I crept,
Stumbling often, ill-adept;
Feeling pangs of woeful bliss
Rounding from the primal kiss.

Then from out my straining side
Came the son who is my guide:
Him I nursed through faithful days,
Till I faltered at his gaze,
Staring boldly when he saw
I was woman, life and law.

Life and law and dear delight:
I the moon upon the night
All alluring: I the tree
Growing nuts of mystery:
I the tincture and the dew
That the apple reddens through.

I desirable and sweet:
I of fruitfulness complete:
I the promise and the threat
Which the gods may not forget:
I the weaver spinning blind
Destinies for humankind.

Lifting, lifting ever up
Till I reach the golden cup:
Groping down and ever down
Till I find the buried crown:
I the searcher sent to bring
Plumes for the Almighty's wing.

Weaving Life and Death I go:
Building what I do not know:
Planting though in sore distress
Gardens in the wilderness:
Palaces too big to scan
By the little eye of man.
Knowing surely this is true,
That the thing I have to do,
Has been ordered by the breath
From the House of Life and Death:
It no wind of chance or wide
Cloud of doubt may set aside.

Still the sun roars out in fire,
And the moon with pale desire
Keeps the path appointed her
In the starry theatre:
Sun and moon and I are true
To the work we have to do.

Eve is not an individual woman; she is Woman,
working on her part of the plan of the universe, doing
what she must, even though she can see no more of it than
her own small piece. She is "building what I do not know."
Eve's great consciousness of her purpose seems to have
come when her son, whom she had nursed "through faithful
day," was suddenly a man, and stared boldly at her,
discovering the woman, instead of the mother he had
taken for granted. Then she sees herself as Woman, the
"promise and threat" of the gods, fulfilling her appointed
work, as a part of the great plan, with the sun and the
moon.

If it were necessary to choose one single poem of
Stephens' as his finest, it would be this next poem,
"Deirdre," about the Irish Helen. And Helen has never
been praised in verse more lovely than this gravely
troubled loveliness.
DEIRDRE 17.

Do not let any woman read this verse;  
It is for men, and after them their sons  
And their son's sons.

The time comes when our hearts sink utterly;  
When we remember Deirdre and her tale,  
And that her lips are dust.

Once she did tread the earth: men took her hand;  
They looked into her eyes and said their say,  
And she replied to them.

More than a thousand years it is since she  
Was beautiful: she trod the waving grass;  
She saw the clouds.

A thousand years! The grass is still the same,  
The clouds as lovely as they were that time  
When Deirdre was alive.

But there has never been a woman born  
Who was so beautiful, not one so beautiful  
Of all the women born.

Let all men go apart and mourn together;  
No man can ever love her; not a man  
Can ever be her lover.

No man can bend before her: no man say -  
What could one say to her? There are no words  
That one could say to her!

Now she is but a story that is told  
Beside the fire! No man can ever be  
The friend of that poor queen.

There is something infinitely poignant about emo­
tions that lie too deep for facile wording. In this poem  
there is no word that cries, "Alas!" There is no wild  
lamentation, but a deep sorrow pulses through it.

17. James Stephens, Songs from the Clay (New York:  
The simplicity of the poem is its greatness. Stephens has used no exotic words, no strange rhythms, no rhymes, nothing but the barest of materials. And from it emerges this great poem of sorrow that the most beautiful woman that ever was born is dead, and men may never again know her. Deirdre has a life and a lovable character to her that Helen did not achieve. She is no mere figure of ancient beauty; Deirdre is a woman, a real woman.

Van Doren says of this poem:

Such a poem is effective in part because its author has not stood too much upon his dignity. He has not been conventionally and vaguely worshipful before his legendary queen, but has been simply, even painfully, impressed by her human beauty; he has been a man with all of man's complexes and varying motives, and that is the secret of Stephens' success in anything he has ever written. 18.

From Deirdre we turn to the women of the poems that Stephens has taken from Irish poets. Two of them, "Nancy Walsh" and "Faggy Mitchell," are typical of this whole group of verses, with one exception, "Righteous Anger."

NANCY WALSH 19.

I, without bite or sup,  
If thou wert fated for me,  
I would up  
And would go after thee  
Through mountains.

A thousand thanks from me  
To God have gone,  
Because I did not lose my senses to thee,  
Though it was hardly I escaped from thee,  
O Ringleted One!

PEGGY MITCHELL 20.

As lily grows up easily,  
To modest, gentle, dignity  
To sweet perfection,  
So grew she,  
As easily.

Or as the rose, that takes no care,  
Will open out on sunny air  
Bloom after bloom, fair after fair,  
Sweet after sweet,  
Just so did she,  
As carelessly.

She is our torment without end,  
She is our enemy and friend,  
Our joy, our woe;  
And she will send  
Madness or glee  
To you and me  
And endlessly.

These are slight portraits, the first one, especially, implying the woman's character rather than giving it. Nancy Walsh is like a heady drink; the man barely kept his

20. Ibid., p. 16.
Peggy Mitchell in her "sweet perfection" is "torment without end" to all men, not because of the teasing qualities we associate with that word torment, but because she is so desirable that she gives none of them a moment's peace, and sends them all, by her favor or disfavor, to madness or glee.

The last poem of this chapter is far enough from all poetic convention to jar the sedate reader coming upon it unaware.

RIGHTEOUS ANGER 21.

The lanky hank of a she in the inn over there
Nearly killed me for asking the loan of a glass of beer.
May the devil grip the whey-faced slut by the hair,
And beat bad manners out of her skin for a year.

That parboiled imp, with the hardest jaw you will see,
On virtue's path, and a voice that would rasp the dead,
Came roaring and raging the minute she looked at me,
And threw me out of the inn on the back of my head!

If I asked her master he'd give me a cask a day;
But she, with the beer at hand, not a gill would arrange!
May she marry a ghost and bear him a kitten, and may
The High King of Glory permit her to get the mange.

This could be after no other poet than that doughty rip-roaring David O'Bruadair, "that tornado of rage, eloquence.

and humor." Stephens himself has that gift of male-diction, as anyone who has read *The Crock of Gold* or *The Demi-Gods* will remember with relish.

This effective anathema makes the ordinary or garden variety of cursing seem monotonous and meaningless. The angry Englishman or American curses any person or object with the same three or four words, which have been used so often that they have no meaning; they are only expressions of rage, as a sob is an expression of grief.

Not so this capable pair, Stephens and O'Bruadair. The barmaid is completely annihilated; first, her appearance is commented upon; seldom has a more lurid description been given in fewer words. In the first stanza she is "that lanky hank of a she in the inn over there," a brief and telling description, and then,"the whey-faced slut." In the second stanza she is that "parboiled imp with the hardest jaw you will see on virtue's path, and a voice that would rasp the dead." And the future he plans for her staggers the imagination: first, the devil is invoked and invited to grasp her by the hair and "beat bad manners out of her skin for a year." Then ---

*May she marry a ghost and bear him a kitten, and may The High King of Glory permit her to get the mange.*

---

This angry man sees nothing peculiar about asking the High King of Glory for such a favor.

Stephens’ angry women are always lean. A fat woman remarks in The Crock of Gold on the fact that thin women are bad-tempered. Perhaps it is that the fat ones lack the necessary energy to come “roaring and raging” after the people who exasperate them.

For all its vehemence, this has a gleefulness to it; the poet is enjoying himself hugely.

In portraying women, as well as men, Stephens is at his best in poems about those of the lower classes. "Deirdre" is, of course, the great exception to this generalization. But, excepting that poem, his characterizations of ladies and well-bred young women lack the vigor and life that his other women do have. The mother of "The Tinker's Brat" is vastly superior to the mother in the poem, "The Cherry Tree." The barmaid in "Righteous Anger" stays in the mind long after Nancy Walsh and Peggy Mitchell have faded into a well-bred oblivion. The dancer, mad Brigid, and the woman in "Light-o-Love" are not ladies. Nora Crioma is probably lower middle class. The little bride could belong to almost any class, and the girls of "Westland Row," though they belong at least to a class that can care well for their own.
Love, heavenly love in the tinker woman's case, misguided love in the case of Nora Crioma, is the prime motive of four of the women of this chapter, the two mentioned above, and mad Brigid and the dancer. It is a religious, mystic love in Brigid's case, and a stern sorrowful love in the case of the dancer. The woman of "The Cherry Tree" moves in an aura of idyllic domesticity. The woman in "Light-o-Love" is impelled by both poverty and love.

The bride's chief sentiment is a mild nostalgic regret for what is gone. Eve's is a consciousness of her mission. The barmaid surges forth in indignation and wrathfulness. The young girls are interested only in their important, trivial secrets.

Three of Stephens' women are presented only as seen by someone else, with little to give the character of the women in the poems. Of these, one, "Deirdre," emerges in strange lovely reality, coming from the troubled words as a living woman, beautiful beyond telling. The other two, "Nancy Walsh" and "Peggy Mitchell," do not have the reality of Stephens' other women characters.

It is interesting to note that, except in some of the verses of Reincarnations, and, to a minor extent in "The Cherry Tree," Stephens makes no mention of that aspect of woman that poets usually touch upon first, her
appearance. It is what she does, what she is, that interests Stephens, rather than what she looks like.
CHAPTER V

ON MEN—AND—WOMEN

James Stephens' poems on the relationship of man to woman are written with a lively concern for the woman. Perhaps it is because he is the advocate of freedom in all things, because he is distressed by trapped animals or people bound by age, poverty, or tyranny, that this stormy rebellion against being possessed by another, being robbed of self, is so passionately expressed.

Two of the poems from *The Hill of Vision* give something of Stephens' fierce sympathy, the first for the woman, the second for man and woman, endlessly and needlessly contending.

WIND AND TREE 1.

TO X

"A woman is a branchy tree
And man a singing wind,
And from her branches carelessly
He takes what he can find:
Then man and wind go far away
While winter comes with loneliness,
With cold and rain and slow decay
On woman and on tree till they
Droop down unto the ground and be
A withered woman, a withered tree;

---

While wind and man woo undismayed
Another tree, another maid.

This is a song of desolation. The woman is a for-
saken thing, enjoyed for a while and left. Yet there is
no blame or anger directed at the man, anymore than there
is at the wind. It is their nature, and it is the state of
things as they are that is to blame, not the man or woman.
Stephens does not cry out, "For shame!" He says, quite
simply, "This is how it is."

MOUNT DERISION 2.

Deep within the spacious round
I saw a man and woman bound,
Middle to middle and knee to knee,
With a rusty iron chain,
Which when one or the other would flee
Drew them close together again:
This was on the Hill of Vision
Which the gods call Mount Derision.

There lay upon the ground a key
Which the couple did not see
Tho' with fury they were bowed;
And they struggled in the sun,
And each to the other shouted loud
An urgent business to be done
If the fruitful strife might cease
And they work together in peace.

Thought and Feeling, Brain and Heart,
These, which cannot work apart,
Were loving sister and kindly brother
Long ago till desire and strife
Chained the twain unto each other
As hated husband and hateful wife,
Who must suffer till they see
Love is crowned by liberty.

2. The Hill of Vision, p. 36.
That possessiveness, the desire to own all of a person, is the root of the strife between man and woman. Stephens would have "love ... crowned by liberty." Liberty is not the crowning result of love, but the end that makes love a truly great thing. It is of this love that still gives to each his or her own integrity that another poet, Michael Field, wrote:

There is no lack in it, and no defect;
It looks nor up nor down,
But loves from plenitude to plenitude,
With level eyes, as in the Trinity
God looks across and worships. 3.

In two poems, both from Insurrections, Stephens presents this idea of liberty in love, or, rather, loss of liberty.

THE REBEL 4.

I want to live, to grasp
With arms outspread, and feel
The thrill, the passion of my time,
To know the dream of every clime:
The goodness, badness, joy or weal,
All throbbing in my clasp.

I want to feel, to see,
To meet, to do, to know,
To live as deeply as I can,
To know the best or worst of man.


To meet the storm, the heat, the snow -
But you say "you love me".

You love me, how? you come
To hoard me up and hide
Whatever I may have of bloom
Within a narrow little room,
While sweet the world outside
Sings on, and I sit dumb.

You sob you love me - What,
Must I desert my soul
Because you wish to kiss my lips
In guarded, careful little sips,
Measuring out your stingy dole
Of love? I want a lot:

Much more than you can give
Or take. A year had seen
Us snapping, snarling, angry-eyed
Across a table three feet wide
And stellar space between
The places where we live.

You want a thing to cook,
To wash and scrub and smile,
To black your boots and brush your hat
And kiss you good-by on the mat,
Then darn your socks awhile,
Or on the butcher's book.

I must be I, not you,
That says the thing in brief.
I grew to this without your aid,
Can face the future unafraid,
Nor pine away with grief
Because I'm lonely. True,

It is I love you, yet
I must be I, e'en tho' I fling
Your love away and call it knavery,
I cannot love if love be slavery,
I hear the free wind rush and sing.
Must I live in a net?

I want my life, you'd joy
To murder me with love.
You'd hide me in a room, your fist
Upon my breast, and now I'm kissed
Or cuffed, or thrown off like a glove.
... Well, take me then, poor boy.
In this poem the woman is certain that the man will rob her of all selfness, and it is this that she cries out against. "Yes, you love me, but you want to hoard me up, to cut me away from life. You want a comfortable household institution, but I am myself, a whole person in myself, and I will not give that up!" She loves him, and says that she does, but she can do without him. There is an unhappy prediction in it — a couple snarling and snapping at each other across the table, with three feet of boards separating their physical bodies, and "stellar space between the places where we live," and a more dire forecast for herself, that she will be kissed, cuffed, or discarded, as his spirit moves him.

Then suddenly there is complete surrender. "Well, take me then, poor boy," a giving of pity, that he needed and wanted her, and then, following swiftly upon this, her awakening to passion — "O life, till this hour I've been dead." It is as if the whole long bitter tirade against the lover and love were a last long homesick look upon her own land before going to another place, then a sudden end to the nostalgic backward-looking, and
a plunge into the dreaded new country, only to find it a land of delight, at least temporarily.

The poem leaves one with a feeling, however, that the two are poorly matched, the woman spirited and fiery, the man a plodding complacent fellow, who would kiss her in "guarded little sips," measuring out his "stingy dole of love," a man who wanted a wife to keep house for him, a wife who would properly revere him as the master, and take kisses, cuffs, or desertion as part of her life. His only argument seems to have been, "I love you," and again, "I love you," but that was enough to turn rebellion to pity and to love.

The next poem is the stronger of the two. In it the woman has already married, surrendered, and then rebels. In the former poem the order was reversed: first came the stormy rebellion, and then the quick surrender.

THE RED-HAIRED MAN'S WIFE 5.

I have taken that vow -
And you were my friend
But yesterday - now
All that's at an end,
And you are my husband and claim me, and I must depend.

Yesterday I was free,
Now you, as I stand,
Walk over to me
And take hold of my hand.

5. Insurrections, p. 21.
You look at my lips, your eyes are too bold,
your smile is too bland.

My old name is lost,
My distinction of race:
How the line has been crossed,
Must I step to your pace?
Must I walk as you list, and obey, and smile
up in your face.

All the white and the red
Of my cheeks you have won;
All the hair of my head,
And my feet, tho' they run,
Are yours, and you own me and end me just as
I begun.

Must I bow when you speak,
Be silent and hear,
Inclining my cheek
And incredulous ear
To your voice, and command, and behest, hold
your lightest wish dear?

I am woman; but still
Am alive, and can feel
Every intimate thrill
That is woe or is weal.

I, aloof, and divided, apart, standing far,
can I kneel?

O, if kneeling were right,
I should kneel nor be sad,
And abase in your sight
All the pride that I had,
I should come to you, held to you, cling to
you, call to you, glad.

If not, I shall know,
I shall surely find out,
And your world will throw
In disaster and rout;
I am woman and glory and beauty, I mystery,
terror and doubt.

I am separate still,
I am I and not you;
And my mind and my will,
As in secret they grew,
Still are secret, unreached and untouched and
not subject to you.
This poem ends with the woman victorious. Perhaps she will have to submit in outward form, but her inner self is "secret, unreached, and untouched, and not subject to you."

There is something of the grave beauty of "Deirdre" in this. Perhaps the secret of that lies in the simplicity of the diction. The words are simple, the majority of them being monosyllables.

This woman of pride has found herself in one day transformed from the sought-after to the won. When she was wooed the man was not the master. It was not then that his eyes were too bold, or his smile too bland. She was, undoubtedly, more of an abstraction to him then than a real person; she was not just a woman, but Woman, and as such, kept her high place. But now that is over, and she belongs to him in her entirety. She is no longer a feeling to him, but a possession, and she finds herself in the intolerable position that the proud have always occupied when it becomes necessary for them to submit. She recounts her great loss, not only the obliteration of selfness at the present moment, but a wiping out of the past — "My old name is lost, my distinction of race" — and of her future, that now she must bow to his wishes, and listen for each command.

Then, after this bitter summing up of what has been
taken from her, she makes her declaration. She will soon know if this submission of herself to him is right. If it is, she will come to him, abase her pride, and be glad to do it. But if it is not right, she will know that quickly, and "your world will throw in disaster and rout," and she is the woman who could do it.

The last stanza is not so much defiance as calm triumph. "I am still myself, and the choice is still mine to make." There is a marked similarity between this last stanza and the first three lines of the seventh stanza of "The Rebel." In "The Red-Haired Man's Wife", she says, "I am separate still, I am I and not you." In "The Rebel," the woman declares, "I must be I, not you, that says the thing in brief." It continues, in "The Red-Haired Man's Wife," "My mind and my will, as in secret they grew, still are secret ... not subject to you." "The Rebel" has the same thought, less fully expressed: "I grew to this without your aid."

"The Rebel" is more a portrait of an individual than is "The Red-Haired Man's Wife." "The Red-Haired Man's Wife" is an embodied cry for freedom, a declaration of separateness. She is left on heroic heights at the end of the poem, with her challenging statement of freedom. The other woman, "The Rebel," submits. She is a less epic figure, but completely understandable, with her feeling
Mary Sturgeon writes of these poems:

There may also be found two studies of the idea of liberty in its more abstract nature. They both treat of the woman giving up her life into the hands of the man whom she marries. And in both there is brought out with ringing clarity the inalienable freedom of the human soul. Thus "The Red-Haired Man's Wife," musing upon the inexplicable changes that marriage has wrought for her—on her dependence, and on the apparent loss of her very identity, wins through to the light. 6.

In his other poems about men and women, Stephens has stayed fairly close to the conventional path, at least in his subject matter. His treatment of it is another thing. "The Sootherer," for instance, could be summed up the way we had to summarize poems in high school, by saying that "It is about a man trying to win a girl by flattery, and then, when she won't listen, telling her what he really thinks of her." To be sure, that does not cover nearly all the intricate pattern of this poem.

THE SOOTHERER 7.

O Little Joy, why do you run so fast
Waving behind you as you go away
Your tiny hand? You smiled at me and cast


A silver apple, asking me to play:
But when I ran to pick the apple up
You ran the other way.

Little One! White One! Shy Little Gay Sprite!
Do not turn your head across your shoulder
To mock at me; it is not right
That you should laugh at me, for I am older:
Throw me the silver apple once again,
You little scoorder.

I love you very dearly, yes I do;
I never saw a girl like you before
In any place. You are more sweetly new
Than a May moon: you are my store,
My secret and my treasure and the pulse
Of my heart's core.

Throw me the silver apple - I will run
And pick it up and give it you again:
Dear Heart! Sweet Laughter! -throw it then for fun
And not for me - if you will but remain!
... May, do not run; I'll stand thus far away
And not complain.

Never before - or only one or two:
I did not like them nearly half so well,
Nor half of half so well as I like you,
Throw me the silver apple and I'll tell
Their names, and what I used to say to them,
-The first was Nell.

Throw me the apple and I'll tell you more;
-She had a lovely face, but she was fat:
We clung together when the rain would pour
Under a tree or hedge, and often sat
Through long, still, sunny hours - Tell what
she said?
I'll not do that.

I really couldn't, no, it would be wrong
And utterly unfair, I will not say a word
Of any girl - your voice is like the song
I heard this morning from a soaring bird
... I'll whisper then if you come close to me,
- You've hardly stirred!

She said she loved me better than her life.
You need not laugh, she said so anyway,
And meant it too, and longed to be my wife:
She kissed me many times and wept to stay
Within my arms, and did not ever want
To go away.

But she was fat, I will admit that's true;
And so I hid when she came seeking me.
If she had been as beautiful as you...!
You are as slender as the growing tree,
And when you move the blood goes leaping through
The heart of me.

The other girl? Yes, she is very fair;
Her feet are lighter than the clouds on high,
And there is morn and noonday in her hair,
And mellow, sunny evenings in her eye,
And all day long she sings just like a lark
Up in the sky.

I say she did - she loved me very well,
And I loved her until, ah, woe is me!
Until today, when passing through the dell
I met yourself and now I cannot see
Her face at all, or any face but yours
In memory.

I ought to be ashamed? well, amn't I?
But that's no comfort when I'm in a trap:
I tell you I shall sit down here and die
Unless you stay - you do not care a rap. -
Ah, Little Sweetheart, do not run away,
... Have pity on a chap.

You'll go - then listen, you are just a pig,
A little wrinkled pig out of a sty;
Your legs are crooked and your nose is big,
You've got no calves, you have a silly eye,
I don't know why I stopped to talk to you,
I hope you'll die.

Now cry, go on, mew like a little cat,
And rub your eyes and stamp and tear your wig;
I see your ankles! listen, they are fat,
And so's your head, you're angled like a twig,
Your back's all baggy, and your clothes don't fit
And your feet are big!

She's gone, bedad, she legged it like a hare!
You'd think I had the itch, or had a face
Like a blue monkey on me - keeps me standing there
Not good enough to touch her...! back I'll race
And make it up with Breed, that's what I'll do,
... There is a flower that bloometh,
Tra la la la la la la...
Two of Stephens' critics, Mary Sturgeon and Robert Shafer, assume that "The Sootherer" is a boy. Miss Sturgeon says:

The word 'Sootherer' sounds like English; and indeed individuals of the species are not unknown in this country. But they, like the word, are native to the land of the born lover. Has anyone ever heard of a Saxon who could fit names like these to his sweetheart—Little Joy, Sweet Laugher, Shy Little Gay Sprite? or who could woo her with such a ripple of flattery—... But, on the other hand, no mere English boy could hope to match the glib rage of this disappointed youth.

And Mr. Shafer says:

In The Sootherer, again Mr. Stephens shows us in a wholly delightful way his comprehension of childhood. Things one would have sworn one had completely forgotten come trooping back over the avenue of years as if at a magic call—and indeed there have been moments when I have fancied that there must be something of magic in Mr. Stephens' method.

Now in the poem itself there is no evidence that the Sootherer is very young. He has certainly a great deal of technique, altogether too much for a young boy. I think it is an older man, a man with an eye for a pretty girl. Some evidence can be found for this in the poem.


In the first stanza the Sootherer says, in effect, "You started it. Now why are you running away?" The little coquette, greatly daring, has led him on, and then wants to run away, having, probably, somewhat of the same feeling that she would have had if she had lit a stick of dynamite for a prank. The mixture of fascination and wariness on the girl's part throughout the poem bespeaks an older man. The girl knew how to play the game herself, well enough that she would have had a youth wrapped around her finger, and she would have been quite sure of herself. Instead, he must coax her to stay — "Just throw it to me for fun... I'll stay way over here."

In the second stanza he tells her that he is older than she, and that therefore it is not right for her to mock at him. He knows his feminine psychology; when flattery will not induce her to stay, he promises to tell her about his other girls. The pet names, the easy flattery, have come, perhaps, too quickly. Artfully he puts in that he has never met a girl like her before, "or only one or two," and promises to tell her about them if she will stay.

Then come the descriptions of his other girls; Nell's epitaph is given in one line — "She had a lovely face, but she was fat." Abruptly and invitingly he draws a line. "Tell you what she said? I'll not do that." He adds that it would be unfair to any girl to tell a thing
like that of her, but he finally offers to do so, if she'll come closer. When she hears what Nell did say, that "she loved me better than her life," this new girl laughs, and he says indignantly, "You needn't laugh ... she meant it." But she was fat.

The girl recalls him to his Tale of Fair Women when he would be praising her instead, and he tells her of the other girl, that she is fair, that they loved one another until this very morning when he met this girl. She tells him that he should be ashamed of himself, and he, unrepentantly, says that he is, but he'll die if she doesn't stay with him. She is going, and he knows it. Once more he tries to hold her.

She is going anyway, so he salves his wounded feeling of superiority by two stanzas of the most remarkable demolition. Every single point that a girl could be proud of is touched upon scathingly. This Sootherer is almost inspired by his spitefulness, and sings a regular philippic:

You'll go - then listen, you are just a pig,
A little wrinkled pig out of a sty;
Your legs are crooked and your nose is big,
You've got no calves, you have a silly eye,
I don't know why I stopped to talk to you,
I hope you'll die.

Now ory, go on, mew like a little cat,
And rub your eyes and stamp and tear your wig;
I see your ankles! listen, they are fat,
And so's your back, you're angled like a twig,
You back's all baggy and your clothes don't fit
And your feet are big!

He does not bother with consistency; she has thin legs with no calves, in one breath, and fat ankles in the next. She's angled like a twig (a telling phrase), but at the same time, her back is baggy. Her nose is big, her eye is silly, that is, wall-eyed, her hair is like a wig, her clothes don't fit, and, crowning point, her feet are big. This is the same girl to whom he had said a few minutes earlier, "You are more sweetly new than a May moon," in words reminiscent of Thomas Moore's lovely lyric, "Young May Moon." It is small wonder that the poor girl "Legged it like a hare."

He mutters his own defense to himself, " -keeps me standing there, not good enough to touch her. . .!" Then there is another lightning-change of mood:

Back I'll race
And make it up with Breed, that's what I'll do.

And he strolls off singing, with never a thought of the girl to whom he had said, "I'll sit down and die if you don't stay with me."

This lover is far from conventional. The traditional lover sits down and pine when his love deserts him, or sings sorrowfully of the cruel mistress. This sturdier character rounds lustily on the girl. It is Stephens' own
gift of invective shown here, robust, personal, and unanswerable.

"The Rebel" and "The Red-Haired Man's Wife" were similar in subject; the next poem has the same general plot as had "The Sootherer."

THE BRUTE 10.

Still she said No and No,
And begged me loose her hand:
I let it go,
But gripped her dress instead:
I could not stand
For swimming of my head.

And then a sudden weakness came upon me
And my trembling knees
Went shaking to the ground,
Ah misery! She would not listen,
Stared at me and frowned.

I begged, implored...
All the love I'd stored
Came gasping in a net
Of tangled pleading,
Sigh and pant and fret,
And words disjointed,
Bitten through and bleeding.

But she went No and No and No again,
And No forever,
Spite of all endeavour;
Until like wintry rain
That pattering word whirléd on my maddened head
And froze me furious while she thought me dead.

But then with icy lips I cursed her there,
Eyes, nose and teeth and hair;
I damned her body, bones and blood — and then
She scuttled homewards like a frightened hen.

10. The Hill of Vision, p. 34.
"The Brute" has the same general subject as had "The Sootherer," but it lacks the latter's lightness, and all the emotions in "The Sootherer are intensified. The girl is not wary, but afraid. The man is not acting upon a whimsical attraction; he is impelled by powerful passions. It is not spite that prompts the final dénouement, but maddened despair. And there is no light-hearted turning to the next adventure; there could not be.

In "The Fossils," Stephens presents the age-old picture of a man pursuing a woman.

THE FOSSILS II.

And then she saw me creeping,
Saw and stood
Transfixed upon the fringes of the wood,
And straight went leaping.

Headlong down the pitch
Of the curved hill,
Over the ditch
And through the skirt of bushes by the rill
She pelted screaming,
Swerved from the water sideways with a twist
Just as I clutched and missed.

Flashed white beneath my hand and doubled back,
Swift as a twisting hare upon her track,
Hot for the hill again,
But all in vain.

Her hair swung far behind,
Straight as a stream balanced on the wind,
O, it was black, dipped
In the dregs of midnight with a spark
Caught from a star that smouldered in the dark.

It I gripped,
Drew for a moment tight.
Jerked with a victor's cry
Down in the grasses high
Her to the hot brown earth and threatened —daft
And then she laughed.

Whether this is meant to be an actual cave man
pursuing his mate, or a more modern man acting upon his
atavistic impulses is not important. It is a vivid and ex­
cited picture of the hunt, the hunter triumphantly bear­
ing down his quarry, and the woman's laugh that told that
the chase, such an exciting reality to him, had been a
game to her. That laugh made her the victor, not him, and
foolish indeed he must have felt.

Again Stephens' extremely pictorial qualities are
evident. The first stanza shows the woman frozen in her
place for a moment as any animal is that sees its enemy
suddenly. The second stanza is a mass of swift movement.
The word "pelted" is particularly vivid, connoting the
sound as well as the sight of the swift race. In the third
stanza there is something of the desirable woman herself,
the long black hair with the smouldering light in it, the
same hair by which he seized her and bore her down.

"The Girl I Left Behind Me" is the portrait of
two people, the girl, and the man who left her. Again
Stephens shows his ability to refrain from overdramatiz­
ing a situation.
THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND ME 12.

She watched the blaze,
And so I said the thing I'd come to say,
Pondered for days.

Her lips moved slow,
And the wide eye she flashed on me
Was sudden as a blow.

She turned again,
Her hands clasping her knees and did not speak:
She did not deign.

And I, poor gnome!
A chided our crawls to a hole to hide:
... I toddled home.

It is a dramatic picture given here, the man carefully prepared in his farewell speech, probably the "it would be better for both of us" type, postponing it to a more auspicious time again and again, fearing protestations. Then when he finally screws up his courage and says it, she gives him no words, no tears, only a "wide eye ... sudden as a blow," and then turns from him again, with the silence of scorn.

There is nothing for him to do or to say, nothing left but to slink home. Here the man has lost, completely and ignobly. In the next poem, "The Red-Haired Man," the man is also the loser.

12. The Hill of Vision, p. 64.
THE RED-HAIRED MAN 13.

But what is it that I have done to you:
  Why did you go away so suddenly:
Is it that I am ugly: is it true
  That I am very ugly: did you see
Me peeping like a satyr through a tree:
Was it my ugly face that frightened you?

Was it my ugly face, say, was it so:
  Was it my figure, tell me, am I lame:
Do I go hopping like a wounded crow
  Under a hedge: come, speak to me, my dame!
Or have you heard of me an evil fame:
Is that the reason why you had to go?

You had to go! Or did you go for fun,
  To see if I would come and search for you?
If it be thus, behold! the game is done,
  For I am seeking, calling, torn in two,
Lost and bewildered! what am I to do
To bring you back again, my hope, my sun!

My hope, my sun, my only thing of true:
  My promise and my treasure, my delight:
My inmost secret dream that no one knew:
  My sun that shines upon me in the night:
My moon that looks at me when day is bright:
What is it then, that I have done to you?

The immediate temptation here is to place this
poem as a companion piece to "The Red-Haired Man's Wife."
Apart from the titles and the strife between the man and
woman, there is nothing to identify this man as the hus-
band of the rebellious wife. This poem was published six
years later than the other, and the man in it is far from
demanding or possessive. Rather he questions anxiously,

"Is it because I'm ugly? Have you heard a bad report of me? What is it?" and throws all his pride to the winds. "If you've gone to see will I come after you, the game's over; I'll do anything."

The first stanza is pathetic; he is evidently an ugly man, much aware of his own ugliness, and knowing little about women in that respect. For few women, past adolescence, care much about the beauty or homeliness of their lovers. It is the man who writes poems to the beloved’s beauty; the woman rarely mentions the appearance of her lover in writing about him.

In the second stanza he asks again, "Was it my ugly face?" and then, "Was it my figure?" Evidently it was not, for he presents an absurd picture with that question, "Do I go hopping like a wounded crow under a hedge?" --- a picture that would not have been given if he were sensitive about a real deformity. There is no humbleness in that question; he is sure of himself there, ending it with an imperious "Come, speak to me, my dame!"

The third and fourth stanzas show the man in all of his bewildered submission, humbling himself absolutely to the woman he loves, whom he has somehow, unknowingly, displeased. He is a pathetic character, lost and woefully puzzled.
The next poem is a well-made villanelle.

TO BE CONTINUED 14.

I smiled at the angry maid.
And said that I did not care
Whether she went or stayed.

And she, going down the glade,
Thought, "Now he will fall to prayer."
I smiled at the angry maid.

Indeed, I was sore afraid;
But I said it was her affair
Whether she went or stayed.

About her a nimbus rayed
Where the sun made love to her hair.
I smiled at the angry maid.

And while, like a fool, I played,
I had not a smile to spare
Whether she went or stayed.

She in her youth arrayed!
I stolid and scant of hair!
I smiled at the angry maid
Whether she went or stayed.

Here the age of the man is definitely established:
"I stolid and scant of hair!" The angry maid is young, in
"her youth arrayed."

This is only the fragment of a story, a still picture taken from a moving picture. It is not only "To Be Continued," it is continued from a story already partially finished. Why is she angry? Of course a tolerant smile would increase her anger, but what had made her angry?

The man's tolerance and careful deliberation is a bold front for his own feeling. "Indeed, I was sore afraid." But still he repeats very wisely and inconsiderately, "It's up to you. Go or stay, I don't care." She was quite sure that he would call her back when she actually went down the glade, and she stopped or waited there to hear him call, but he smiled again and "said it was her affair." And there we leave this static little piece, he afraid that she will go, and she not wanting to go, but each wanting the other's pride to be the one to break.

The next poem, "Geoffrey Keating," is one of Stephens' translations from Reincarnations, one of the two poems in that collection which, according to Stephens' note at the conclusion of the book, are really translations instead of extremely free adaptations.

**GEOFFREY KEATING 15.**

O woman full of wiliness!
Although for love of me you pine,
Withhold your hand adventurous,
It holdeth nothing holding mine.

Look on my head, how it is grey!
My body's weakness doth appear;
My blood is chill and thin; my day
Is done, and there is nothing here.

Do not call me a foolish man,
Nor lean your lovely cheek to mine:

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O slender witch, our bodies can
Not mingle now, or any time.

So take your mouth from mine, your hand
From mine, ah, take your lips away!
Lest heat to will should ripen, and
All this be grave that had been gay.

It is this curl, a silken nest,
And this grey eye bright as the dew,
And this round, lovely, snow-white breast
That draws desire in search of you.

I would do all for you, meseems,
But this, tho' this were happiness!
I shall not mingle in your dreams,
O woman full of wiliness!

The old man is fascinated by this "slender witch," but refuses her; his "day is done." She has power to draw his desires to her — "this curl, a silken nest, this grey eye bright as dew, this round, lovely, snow-white breast," but he is too old.

Stephens has drawn his characters here with a remarkable delicacy; the old man, possessed with a desire that he does not intend to gratify, has not the slightest quality of the conventional lecherous old man; the girl is adventurous, and frankly offering herself to the old man, but she has a freshness, and a certain innocence.

The last two poems included in this chapter are more conventional love lyrics, both made of slight stuff, and yet unsurpassed in their serene simplicity.
THE COLUMBUS 16.

Come with me, under my coat,
And we will drink our fill
Of the milk of the white goat,
Or wine if it be thy will;
And we will talk until
Talk is a trouble, too,
Out on the side of a hill,
And nothing is left to do,
But an eye to look into an eye
And a hand in a hand to slip,
And a sigh to answer a sigh,
And a lip to find out a lip:
What if the night be black
And the air on the mountain chill,
Where the goat lies down in her track
And all but the fern is still!
Stay with me under my coat,
And we will drink our fill
Of the milk of the white goat
Out on the side of the hill.

THE DAISIES 17.

In the scented bud of the morning —O,
When the windy grass went rippling far,
I saw my dear one walking slow,
In the field where the daisies are.

We did not laugh and we did not speak
As we wandered happily to and fro;
I kissed my dear on either cheek,
In the bud of the morning —O.

A lark sang up from the breezy land,
A lark sang down from a cloud afar,
And she and I went hand in hand
In the field where the daisies are.

The second poem, "The Daisies," is an exquisite thing. It must look back to the Elizabethans for its lyrical


17. Songs from the Clay, p. 6.
simplicity, but its mood of very still happiness is Stephens' own. There is no past or future to this poem; it is a song of peaceful joy.

The other poem, "The Coolun," is a little pastoral song, not abstract and overromantic as pastorals are wont to be, but a song of simple pleasure. He offers her no "bed of roses, ... cap of flowers, ... gown made of the finest wool," as Marlowe's shepherd did to his love, but he has offered her everything that she would desire.

The relationships between the men and women of these poems run from the idyllic love of the last two gentle lyrics to the primitive passion of "The Brute" and "The Fossils." Through many of them runs an apprehension, in some stated definitely, in others more dimly felt, that love entails loss of liberty. The women in "The Rebel" and "The Red-Haired Man's Wife" blaze with this desire for freedom that has been taken from them by their surrender to love. "Mount Derision" presents the needlessness of the struggle, if only man and woman were content to let each other possess themselves in peace. "The Red-Haired Man" is undone by his love; all his pride and strength are gone.

The eternal and always slightly comical spectacle of the pursuing male is given in three poems, "The Sootherer," "The Brute," and "The Fossils." In two more the man is tacitly invited to pursue, but declines. These two
All in all, Stephens' sympathies in this everlasting struggle between the man and the woman are with the woman. Where she triumphs, she does so because of a spirit that can rise above apparent defeat, as did "The Girl I Left Behind Me." Where she loses, she does so with her eyes open to what she is giving up, surrendering because of her love for the man.
Age, to Stephens, is not synonymous with dignity, revered wisdom, serenity, or fullness of life; to be old is to be pitied. He writes of the poor old people, and he sums up his philosophy on that subject in one line from "To the Four Courts, Please:" "And the poor, when they're old, have little of peace."

The first four poems in this group are portraits. The first of them is from The Adventures of Seumas Beg:

**THE OLD MAN 1.**

An old man sat beneath a tree
   Alone;
So still was he
   That, if he had been carved in stone,
He could not be
   More quiet or more cold;
He was an ancient man
   More than
A thousand ages old.

This is an old man as seen by a child, a man so old and still that the child thought of a stone figure, so old that he seemed more than "a thousand ages old." There

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is an air of awe about this little verse. An immensity separates the two, the watching child and the man so old that he seems emptied of life.

The next poem, "Danny Murphy," is also about an old man seen by a child, but, unlike the first poem, it is a very particular old man, not just any very old man.

DANNY MURPHY

He was as old as old could be,  
His little eye could scarcely see,  
His mouth was sunken in between  
His nose and chin, and he was lean  
And twisted up and withered quite,  
So that he could not walk aright.

His pipe was always going out,  
And then he'd have to search about  
In all his pockets, and he'd say  
— 0, deary me! and, musha now!  
And then he'd light his pipe, and then  
He'd let it go clean out again.

He could not dance or jump or run,  
Or ever have a bit of fun  
Like me and Susan, when we shout  
And jump and throw ourselves about:  
But when he laughed then you could see  
He was as young as young could be.

The first stanza here is a photographic portrait of the old man, with his dim old small eyes, and the sunken toothless mouth that made his nose and chin seem sharper and bonier, and his lean gnarled body.

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The second stanza is the one that gives life to Danny Murphy, so that he becomes an individual instead of a conventional representation of an old man. Danny constantly lets his pipe go out, and then, in mild exasperation, has to search all his pockets for a match, "mowing" mildly fretful expressions the while. Then, when the pipe is finally lighted again, he forgets and lets it go out again.

In the last stanza, the child compares old Danny to themselves, saying that poor Danny couldn't have any fun shouting and jumping and generally throwing himself around the way he and Susan did. But he adds that "when he laughed, then you could see he was as young as young could be." Old Danny evidently had a good bit of the joy of life left in his old bones.

The misanthrope in the next poem is Danny Murphy's antithesis:

**OULD SNARLY GOD 3.**

There was a little fire in the grate
A fistful of red coal
Might warm a soul,
But scarce a body that had any weight -
Not mine, at any rate.

A glum old man was sitting by the fire,
With wrinkled brow,
Warming himself somehow,

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And mumbling low, this melancholy sire,
A singular desire.

If I were young again, said he, if I
Were only young again,
I'd laugh at pain:
I'd jeer at people groaning, and I'd try
To pinch them ere they'd die.

The young folk laugh and jump about and play,
And I am old,
And grey, and cold;
If I were only young again and they
Were old, and cold, and grey.

I'd pull them from the fire, I'd jeer and shout.
I'd say for fun,
Get up and run
And warm yourself, you lazy doddering lout,
Get up and run about.

The title itself is a thumbnail sketch of the old man. If James Stephens had written this in the United States today, the title would probably have been our own vernacular phrase that is a synonym for Quid Snarly Gob, and that is Old Sour Puss.

This old man is a Scrooge with a definite grievance. He does not like being old; he resents seeing the young folk playing and running around. So, as he hovers over his few red coals in the grate, so few that they "scarce warm a body that had any weight," he mumbles to himself his "singular desire." Willem van Doorn says of this:

'Insurrections' contains an unforgettable bit of realistic verse, in which an old and lonely man, inveighing against fate, comforts his cold and bitter heart by thinking
what he would do and say to a wizened and
doddering lout (like himself), if he became
young again. 4.

But Mr. van Doorn does not state all of the vim-
dictive desire. It is not only that he wants to be young
again; he wants the young people to be old, so that he
can torment them. It is not only "Let me be young,"
which is natural enough, but "Let them be old," so that
he may revenge himself upon them for being young while
he is old.

In "The Four Old Men" Stephens recognizes the
affinity that exists between childhood and old age.

THE FOUR OLD MEN 5.

In the Cafe where I sit
The four old men who look like bards
Are playing at a game of cards;
And they are enjoying it.

They are so eager at their play,
They shout together joyously,
They laugh with all their voices, they
Are like the little boys you see
Playing in your nursery.

But they'd be angry, they would rave
And swear and take it quite amiss,
If you walked across and gave
Each a penny and a kiss.

4. Willem van Doorn, "James Stephens. An Apprecia-
tion," English Studies, 8:5, No. 1, 1926

These venerable-looking old men are playing their
game with the same improportionate zest and joy that
little boys have in their games. But this is an outward
resemblance only. They would be quite angry if they were
treated as children.

This is a tender little verse, full of Stephens' gentle tolerant humor. It is the sort of humor that
smiles at someone's foibles instead of laughing at them.

The next five poems are more bitter. The first is
"To the Four Courts, Please," a poem often printed in
anthologies. This poem, "Deirdre," "What Tomas an Buile
Said in a Pub," "In the Poppy Field," and "The Snare"
are, by reason of their frequent inclusion in anthologies,
the best-known poems of Stephens'.

TO THE FOUR COURTS, PLEASE 6.

The driver rubbed at his netty chin
With a huge, loose forefinger, crooked and black,
And his wobbly, violet lips sucked in,
And puffed out again, and hung down slack:
One fang shone through his lop-sided smile,
In his little pouch the eye flickered years of
guile.

And the horse, poor beast, it was ribbed and
forked;
And its ears hung down, and its eyes were old,
And its knees were knuckly, and as we talked
It swung the stiff neck that could scarcely hold

6. Insurrections, p. 34.
Its big skinny head up — and then I stepped in,
And the driver climbed to his seat with a grin.

God help the horse and the driver too,
And the people and beasts who have never a friend,
For the driver easily might have been you,
And the horse be me by a different end.
And nobody knows how their days will cease
And the poor, when they're old, have little of peace.

Here again there is a faint Dickinsonian touch to
the old man. The old cabby, for all of Stephens' pity, seems
to have been fairly well satisfied with himself, perhaps
because he expected no better lot than was his. The two
men, the driver and his fare, had evidently been discussing
something — the destination, the price— while the old
forlorn horse stood swinging his stiff old neck. There is
nothing bitter or resentful about the driver; he smiled
during the conversation, a lopsided grin, and climbed up
to his seat with a grin.

The actual description of the man sounds like a
description of one of Hogarth's old men, with the wobbly
violet lips hanging, slack, the single fang showing in his
lopsided smile, the little pouched guileful eye, the net-
tly chin, even the huge loose forefinger, black and crooked.

The horse is a disconsolate specimen, victim of all
the infirmities that an aged horse could well have -- thin,
droopy, stiff, and spiritless, entirely worn-out. Stephens
links man and horse together in his pity:
God help the horse and the driver too,
And the people and beasts who have never a friend,
For the driver easily might have been you,
And the horse be me by a different end.

It is always interesting to find criticisms of the
same poem written by people of different temperaments. Mr.
Stephen Gwynn, writing of Stephens' genre poems in general,
and this one in particular, writes:

Too many of the ... poems show us only squalid
streets and the ragged bundles that move in
them; we are not moved to a tragic pity, and
there is no such thing as a tragic disgust. Dis­
gust is in its essence superficial: cowardice,
cruelty, sottishness, breed loathing, which is
a deep emotion; yet even so, can anyone think
of a poem's lasting which pictured singly and
by itself cowardice, cruelty, or sottishness?
It is one thing to show us a drunken, dirty,
ill-shaven, cunning cab-driver with his lean
out-worn horse, and then say, 'There, but for
the grace of God, go you or I'; it is another
to show us the clean soul capable of joy that
once inhabited man and beast. 7

Now that idea of a tragic pity, to which one is
moved by poetry, is an Aristotelian concept:

Pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune. There
remains . . . the character . . . of a man who
is not eminently good and just, yet whose
misfortune is brought about not by vice or
depravity, but by some error or frailty. 8

Living Age, 265: 488, May 21, 1910.

8. Aristotle's Poetics, from The Great Critics.
Edited by James Henry Smith and Edd Winfield
Parks (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1939),
pp. 40, 41.
This is part of the Aristotelian conception of tragedy. There is nothing of or pertaining to either the tragic or the epic in most of Stephens' poems, certainly not in this particular poem. And there is no need to require a poet who is essentially a lyric poet to conform to Aristotle's theories of tragedy. If Mr. Gwynn had a great urge to criticize Stephens' poems using Aristotle's Poetics as the measuring stick, he might at least have fitted the poems into a more appropriate category:

Comedy is, as we have said, an imitation of characters of a lower type—not, however, in the full sense of the word base, the Ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly.  

Mary Sturgeon writes of the same poem:

This poet is not a realist at all, of course—far from it. But he loves life and earth and homely words, he is very candid and revealing, and he has a sense of real values. His humanity, too, is deep and strong, and often supplies his verse with the material of actual existence, totally lacking factitious glamour. Thus we have "To the Four Courts, Please," in which the first stanza describes the deplorable state of an ancient cab-horse and his driver. Then—

God help the horse and the driver too,
And the people and beasts who have never a friend,
For the driver easily might have been you,
And the horse be me by a different end.

This humane temper is the more remarkable from being braced by a shrewd faculty of insight.

There is no sentimentality in it. 10.

The next poem is "Nothing at All," a poem as much a comment on God as on the old man.

NOTHING AT ALL 11.

There was a man was very old;
He sat beside a little fire,
And watched the flame begin to tire.

He held his hands out to the heat,
And in his voice was half a scold,
Informed Creation he was cold.

And very, very feeble, too;
He could not lift up from his seat
To reach the fuel at his feet.

"Perhaps," said he, "God does not know
That I am nearly frozen through;
He might not like it if He knew.

For an old man cannot stretch,
When his blood's too weak to flow,
Frozen sitting in the snow."

* * * * * * * * *

Poor old chattering, grumbling wight!
God will hardly come to fetch
Wood for such an ancient wretch.

But He will send you rain more cold,
To quench that little flickering light,
Just like this, and freeze you quite;
... . Men must die when they are old.

There is one very peculiar comment on this poem,

made by Robert Shafer. He says:

Mr. Stephens is usually, though not invariably, at his worst when dealing with age. What he says of old age seems at times to be so untrue as to be really comforting, at other times he appears to evade the question, and once or twice he becomes merely funny, as in "Nothing at All." It is difficult to see exactly what Mr. Shafer read into this poem, that he could say it is merely funny. It may be that he takes the last two stanzas for a teasing of the old man. But that is not at all consistent with Stephens' other poems on old men.

"Nothing at All" is, like many of Stephens' poems, objective in the first part of the poem, giving the description of the old man, an old tramp, hugging the fire and watching it die. He is too feeble to get up to reach the fuel. In his peevish little voice that is "half a scold" he informs Creation that he is cold. Then, having done that, it occurs to him that God wouldn't like it if He knew that the old man was sitting there freezing.

The second part of the poem is Stephens' own comment, with his particular blend of bitterness and tenderness; tenderness for the old "chattering grumbling wight," and bitterness for the scheme of things. There is nothing in this poem of comfort or solace for the poor when they are old.

The next poem, "Bessie Bobtail," is about an old woman, bewildered and clinging desperately to her faith in God's ultimate help.

**BESSIE BOBTAIL 13.**

As down the road she wambled slow
She had not got a place to go:
She had not got a place to fall
And rest herself - no place at all.
She stumped along and wagged her pate
And said a thing was desperate.

Her face was screwed and wrinkled tight
Just like a nut - and, left and right,
On either side she wagged her head
And said a thing, and what she said
Was desperate as any word
That ever yet a person heard.

I walked behind her for a while
And watched the people nudge and smile:
But ever as she went she said,
As left and right she swung her head,
"O, God He knows," and "God He knows."
And, surely God Almighty knows.

Stephens' characteristic use of iteration is well-illustrated in this poem. In the first stanza we have:

She had not got a place to go:
She had not got a place to fall
And rest herself - no place at all.
She stumped along and wagged her pate
And said a thing was desperate.

In the second stanza, wagged her head and said a thing are brought down from the first stanza, as well as the word desperate, and a new phrase, left and right is

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is introduced. This left and right is repeated in the third stanza, and the hopeless little refrain, God He knows, is repeated twice.

This repetition gives somewhat the same effect that one gets from watching a caged animal pacing its little cell, turning at the end, and padding back. There is something of the same helplessness and hopelessness. Padraic Colum's old woman of the roads is better off than is old Bessie Bobtail; she has at least a dream and a goal, but Bessie has nothing but blank despair. Here is Colum's poem:

AN OLD WOMAN OF THE ROADS

Oh, to have a little house!
To own the hearth and stool and all!
The heaped-up sod upon the fire,
The pile of turf against the wall!

To have a clock with weights and chains,
And pendulum swinging up and down!
A dresser filled with shining delph,
Speckled and white and blue and brown!

I could be busy all the day
Clearing and sweeping hearth and floor,
And fixing on their shelf again
My white and blue and speckled store!

I could be quiet there at night
Beside the fire and by myself,
Sure of a bed and loth to leave
The ticking clock and the shining delph!

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Ooh! but I'm weary of miss and dark,
And roads where there's never a house nor bush!
And tired I am of beg and read,
And the crying wind and the lonesome hush!

And I am praying to God on high,
And I am praying Him night and day,
For a little house — a house of my own —
Out of the wind's and the rain's way.

Bessie Bobtail does not have even that pitiful desire; hers is the inarticulate despair of those who expect nothing.

The last poem of this group sounds faintly autobiographical, though certainly at the age of twenty-seven (Stephens' age when Insurrections was published) he could not complain that he had sat away his life.

FIFTY POUNDS A YEAR AND A PENSION 15.

I can never see the sun walk in the dawn
On a lawn
Where the lark sang mad with rapture as he came
Robed in flame
Racing on to where the mountains' foreheads loom
Through the gloom.

Or notice him at evening give the sea
His last fee
Or his burnished, ruddy, golden, peaceful shine
Tread the green,
While the wood with long and longer shadow bends
As he wends.

And my lips will never blow an oaten pipe
Or the ripe
Glowing berries crush between them from the brake
Where they make

15. Insurrections, p. 31.
Such a picture that the gods might know delight
At the sight.

For I've sat my life away with pen and rule
On a stool,
Totting little lines of figures, and so will
Tho' the chill
And the langour of grey hairs upon my brow
Mocks me now.

And sometimes while I work I lift my eyes
To the skies,
To the foot or two of heaven which I trace
In the space
That a grimy window grudges to the spot
Where I tot.

And I ask the God who made me and the sun,
What I've done
To be buried in this dark and dreary cave
Like a grave,
While the world laughs in scorn now and then
At my pen.

Moving swiftly up and down the columned lines,
Lists of wines
And their prices, tho' the grape I never sip,
For my lip
I divorced from that enjoyment as from those
That I'd chose.

But I'll sit and work my utmost and not budge,
Tho' a grudge
Is ever growing in the bosom of a clod
Gainst the God
Who condemned him in his lifetime to grow fit
For the pit.

Stephen Gwynn falls into a fairly common error,
that of assuming that the poems a poet writes in the first
person are autobiographical. He says:

When Mr. Stephens tells us "What the Tramp Said"
he puts into verse the sullen groan of the out-
of-work, those who tramp because they must -
not when the weather tempts them. If he can
count himself free from that necessity, I gather
from his book that it is because he has the "Fifty Pounds a Year and a Pension" of which he writes also. But the price of that freedom is, it seems, a slavery.

... Mr. Stephens has shown by his volume that even along with drudgery (perhaps with intervals of not voluntary tramping) the making of a poet can go on. 16.

That is equivalent to saying that an actor cannot portray a character that he has not been himself; he cannot act like an old man if he is young; he cannot act the role of a carpenter if he has never been a carpenter. The poet, too, often portrays characters that are not his own; Browning is the first example that comes to mind. His dramatic monologues, with their wealth of different personalities - a coldly murderous jealous husband, an artist monk, a perfectionist - all are written in the first person.

According to Stephens himself, he went to work very early in a lawyer's office, "his parents fondly hoping that he would be admitted to the bar," 17. Of this work he says:

But it was not much work that I did. I thought in those days that maybe I'd be a poet. All day I used to sit and think about big words. By big words I mean fine high-sounding words like 'honor' and 'noble' and 'courage', and I spent most of my time scribbling them down. Yes, I think that is how I started to write. 18.

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18. Ibid.
This does not sound at all like the unhappy clerk in "Fifty Pounds a Year and a Pension." That is another creature entirely, an old man who can look back to years of monotonous drudgery, and forward to more of it. This caged life is far different from what he wants. He lifts his eyes from the everlasting figures to the little square that is all he can see of the outside world, and he rails upon his fate, fostering a grudge against the God who condemned him to spend his life destroying the best in himself.

All in all, old age is far from a promising time of life, according to Stephens. He has nothing in common with Rabbi Ben Ezra's gracious serene philosophy. Old age is a time of bitterness and want, an exaggeration of all the weaknesses and lacks in man's life. The only old person who does not seem bowed under his too heavy load is Danny Murphy, who keeps a merry spirit within him, even in the midst of the vagaries that old age plays on him.

Stephens' philosophy seems to be "Man must work, and work hard for what he needs. When he is old, he cannot work; therefore he must do without." He is filled with a fierce bitter pity for them, as he is for all who suffer from "fortune's sideways slips." 19.

CONCLUSION

It is the first instinct of man's orderly mind to classify and label all new elements. Critics pounce on the fresh-from-the-press poet, and proclaim him a romanticist, a realist, an Imagist, a mystic, a socialist, or any one of a long series of names. James Stephens defies such classification. He is all of these things, and a dozen more besides. He is an Irish poet, a protege of Æ's, but he is not of the Irish movement; he is a contemporary poet, but he fits into no contemporary grouping, though critics have tried to put him with one group or another, with widely varying results. Two of his critics, for example, tried to link him with John Davidson, because of the socialist elements behind many of the poems of these two poets. But Davidson lacks the exuberance and humor of Stephens, to say nothing of his simple out-spoken mysticism.

He is a paradox in his own work, a romanticist with a fierce indignant awareness of all down-trodden people, a realist with a feeling for the essentially sweet core in outward squalor, a mystic who gives his startling visions as straight-forwardly as if he were describing an apple on the counter, and an essentially serious poet with
a vivid sense of humor.

Another favorite device of the critics is to trace a poet's ancestry, to shout gleefully, "Here he is quite Spenserian in style! And there - that is surely an echo of Wordsworth!" In much the same way admiring relatives apportion out the new baby's nondescript features. The baby's physical makeup comes from his whole heritage, the whole genealogical tree, plus that small person's own individual peculiarities, which may be the determining factor, after all. The poet, too, since there is no such thing as an entirely unlearned poet, draws from an immense heritage, the poetry of the race, more or less directly. Still it is that peculiar poetic essence within himself that makes the final result.

James Stephens' poetry has been found by various critics to resemble that of Aeschylus, Milton, the author of the Book of Job, Tennyson, Bret Harte, Browning, de la Mare, Blake, Thompson, Hasefield, Dickens, Synge, Borrow, Wordsworth, Swinburne, Stevenson, and John Davidson.

Most of these poetic resemblances can be traced back to a resemblance in subject matter —— Milton, for example, is mentioned because of Stephens' three poems on the Creation and the Fall of Man; Stevenson and de la Mare are brought in because they and Stephens wrote about children. There may be a resemblance in meter or in verse
form. Some of the criticisms were based on a more general resemblance: the loftiness of conception in some of Stephens' philosophical poems inspired the analogy to Æschylus, Homer, and the author of the Book of Job.

Stephens himself owns an indebtedness to two poets, Browning and Blake. He says:

One day while I was waiting for somebody to come and take me out, I picked up a volume of Browning from the table. I read and read. I thought, "This stuff makes sense" and then I thought, "I can do this too." The next thing I read was Blake, and he drove me clean mad. I was like a man drunk. I began to write verse immediately.

Stephens shares with Blake that elemental joy of being and the calm acceptance of God as an actual being, real enough, in Blake's case, to be seen sitting in the tree outside his window, real enough, in Stephens' poems, to catch up the impious Mac Dhoul in a huge finger and hurl him through the skies. Both poets have also the same childlike freshness of vision and exactness of statement.

But Blake lacks the substantial rich earthy flavor that Stephens can attain, and that he does attain in many of his portraits of humanity. Part of this is Browning's, and part goes back through Browning to a common and greater

ancestor, Chaucer. Chaucer had that same shrewdness in sizing up the man, that same zestful joy of life, that same vigorous humor that bothered not about daintiness. Chaucer looked with impartiality upon the knight, the prioress, and the rogues in the pilgrimage, giving to each his full measure, and enjoying each to the full. So does Stephens with his characters, from Deirdre to the unnamed brawler in "Righteous Anger."

It is with the common man that Stephens' interest lies. This is not Wordsworth's common man, living close to nature and filled thereby with her nobility and beauty. Stephens' common men all live in a very real world, and they depend upon the companionship of their fellows. The poems about Tomas an Buile and Mac Dhoul, that are farthest removed from everyday life in their stories, are related in pubs, to ordinary men like themselves.

Unlike Wordsworth's men, they have no particular setting, except the general one of their country. Tomas an Buile or Mac Dhoul could be countrymen or townsmen, with equal felicity, but they could not be any other breed of men but Irishmen. It is that peculiar blend of grotesquery and vision, humor and pathos that marks the Irishman. This mixture is shown in their songs, songs of unbearable tenderness and sadness and beauty on one hand,
and rip-roaring audaciously irreverent ballads on the other hand. The somewhat bewildered observer was not far wrong when he finally came to the conclusion that "There is a devil and an angel in each Irishman, and God only knows which one it is going to be when the man opens his mouth to speak."

Stephens sees and enjoys this two-fold nature in his men. He gives it expression in vigorous, well-turned words that have, with the exception of a few of his lyrics, no element of poetic diction in them. It is everyday speech that he uses, but everyday speech that has been sharpened and fused to express the exact meaning with image-like clarity.

There is not much of pity in his portraits of men. They are, as a class, objectively presented, though one always feels that Stephens is sympathetic towards his characters. There is a certain gleefulness present in his portraits of men untrampled by fate, the men who are eternally impudent rebels against the scheme of things. Stephens' place is always on the side of the rebel, whether it be fate that he is defying, or man's lesser tyranny.

There are certain definite types in Stephens' men. They are all what one would call, in another country, the peasant type, though a cautious man would hesitate to call any Irishman that to his face. These are the common men,
then, the men who must work hard and long for their living, but they are men who are not willing to conform to the accepted standards and obligations of their class. They seek to escape from these hard necessities in one way or another. Some are idlers, some adventurers, vagabonds, ne'er-do-wells in general. The three who escape most effectively are three madmen, Tomás an Buíle, Mac Dhoul, and Mad Patsy.

Some, of course, do not fit into this class. The very human Peadar Og is an attractive youth with no thought in his head deeper than his fear of his girl's father, and the dread of the ordeal that awaits him in the interview with that father. Stephens has always great tolerance for youth, and an astonishingly clear insight into youth's devious ways and thoughts. This is well shown in "Said the Young-Young Man to the Old-Old Man," where the young fellow is alternatingly filled with a sense of the joys of this world, and its sorrows.

His children, or rather, his little boys, are charming lively inquiring adventurous youngsters, who face the world with an insouciant valor, in much the same way that a puppy will bound out at a Great Dane. Seumas Beg sees the world as a vast place of high adventure, full of giants, ladies in distress, and magic, and himself as the charmed knight.

The women in Stephens' poems are as varied as they
well can be. He departs from the common people in two of these poems. One of them is his loveliest poem, "Deirdre," a gravely troubled, beautiful poem, a lament for the beautiful, ill-starred queen of Irish story. The other is the somewhat stilted "The Cherry Tree," with its placid lady.

The other women in his poems are from the same class of people as are his men. They are, as a group, more ground down by their poverty than are the men. Stephens has more gentleness with them, and more pity. With the exception of the nameless virulent "lanky hank of a she" in "Righteous Anger," there is none of the impish gleefulness that is inherent in many of Stephens' poems on men. He sees rather the hard lot of the woman who must make her way in the midst of poverty. His "Tinker's Brat" is a moving and beautiful testimony of his attitude towards the women of the poor. They are endowed by their self-sacrificing love with a nobility that seeks nothing, asks for nothing, but endures much.

The women have most of Stephens' sympathy, too, in his poems on men-and-women. His vision of love as it ought to be is love "crowned by liberty," a love free on both sides, that will not tolerate the enslavement of one by another, even in the name of love. Most often it is the woman who either is sacrificed, or sacrifices herself
to love, and therefore it is for her that Stephens, with his great love of freedom in all things and for all things, has a fierce indignant pity. Once it is a man, "The Red-Haired Man," who has lost his all to love, his pride, his peace of mind, and he, too, is drawn as a pitiable character.

This aspect of the characters of men and women has its humorous side, too, in the spectacle, always slightly comical to those not involved, of the pursuing male and the fleeing female. There is no cause for pity here, and Stephens shows none. In the way of all flesh, his women, though they run, in accordance with the advice of all authorities, from Eve to Dorothy Dix, quite enjoy the chase, and are prepared to be caught, after a proper run.

From pity and humor, Stephens turns to a lyric serenity that shows love as a simple beautiful artless thing, ideal love as all lovers would express it, if they were able.

For old age Stephens has again the fierce rebellion that cannot look unmoved at the sight of men and women bowed and humiliated through no fault of their own. To be old is not be be dignified, stately, and revered. It is to do without, because one can no longer earn. It is
to be unwanted, and uncared for, and finally it is to die unnoticed and unwept. His old people are a nomad race, with no one to care for them or to call to them. It is as far removed from the joyous carefree time of childhood that Stephens has pictured as it could be. Man begins in joy and ends in grievous sorrow.

James Stephens is a rebel himself in his outlook on life, challenging the state of things that can permit the misery of poverty and age, challenging all smugness and conventional conformity, holding for the single individual against the whole world, natural or supernatural. His glee when a man escapes from these bonds, his angry sorrow when he sees someone enmeshed in them, both are part of this insurgent spirit that moves him.

It is foolish and unprofitable to predict a man's place in literature. But as long as poetry is read for sheer enjoyment, Stephens will have his readers and his lovers.