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The Celticism of James Stephens.

Sylvia Rody Mclaurin

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THE CELTICISM OF
JAMES STEPHENS

A Dissertation

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Louisiana State University and
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in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
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ABSTRACT

The myths and legends of Celtic Ireland contain numerous episodes of purest fantasy. Yet the serious study of these tales proves them a continuous illustration of the day-to-day life of the Celt as well as his times of celebration and of crisis. James Stephens, like other Irish writers, saw in these early tales material for his own writing. But unlike Yeats, Stephens turned to the saga material only after his reputation had been made in the modern mode. Stephens found in the sagas characters who, like their modern counterparts, were multidimensional and might be treated realistically, and in his portrayals he rejected the enervating influence adopted by a number of other writers of the Renaissance— the faddish mistiness of the Celtic Twilight. Rather, Stephens emended and slightly reorganized the original narratives to give proper motivation to the character action and inserted conversation and description that both universalized as well as individualized the heroic characters. Simultaneously, however, Stephens maintained the essence of the original by employing the peculiar humor and the tension of the fantasy-reality paradox inherent in many of the Irish sagas rather than the pseudo-heroic tone of many other redactions.
Save for an initial flurry of interest when things Celtic, and thus things mythic, were fashionable, critical attention to Stephens' heroic redactions has been negligible. That Stephens' work in Irish myth and legend deserves re-evaluation is demonstrable. A brief survey of Celtic civilization reveals Stephens' authenticity and an understanding of the Irish story-telling tradition which suggests that Stephens is following the narrative methods of the bards and shenachies. Moreover, in comparison to selected translations and versions by other Irish writers, the extent to which Stephens was faithful to the original and to which he was influenced by other redactions may be determined. And finally, an analysis of his male and female persona proves them to be heroic but believable figures that retain their original outlines made more vivid by Stephens' psychological interpretations.

With respect to capturing the essence of Celticism in his writings, Stephens may be considered equal, even superior, to Yeats, A. E., Synge, and other luminaries of the Irish Renaissance. Furthermore, because his works contain a constant thread of ontological curiosity, a presentation of life itself that pulls together the real and the fantastic in perfectly credible combination, Stephens' redactions demonstrate the value of mythic literature qua literature as well as its value as an ethnological record.
INTRODUCTION

As witnessed by the present upsurge of interest in fantasy literature, twentieth century man is evidently turning to the realm of the imagination for some alternative to the ubiquitous and overpowering presence of scientific rationalism. Yet many would tend to ignore fantasy, deeming it suitable only for children, as harmful escapism, or as a patently unintellectual genre because it is fundamentally nonsensical. Thus, any literature that embodies the unrealistic is subject to critical dismissal. Alwyn Rees examines this attitude:

There are some who would read the tales as if they were modern works of imaginative literature. They insist that they should be studied "as tales"—which usually means that they are studied in vacuo, as though they had no relation to life, while their original meaning is disdainfully left to the anthropologist.

There is a growing awareness of the deep significance of realities that cannot be fully reconciled with the categories of reason, or explained by history and science. The study of social anthropology and of the history of religions has brought home to many scholars that for countless ages men have found in these stories a support for their material and spiritual life.

Theories and emphases continue to vary, but it is true to say that increasing numbers of modern scholars, including many who are not given to making pronouncements on the ultimate nature of myths, are learning to treat tradition with respect and to realize that "wisdom did not begin with us."

The myths and legends of Celtic Ireland contain episodes of purest fantasy. Yet the serious study of these produces information far beyond the benefits of an entertaining story. They offer a continuous
illustration of the day-to-day life of the Celt as well as his times of celebration and of crises. The early Celtic society is discovered to be a synthesis of contradictions—agrarian yet dependent on cattle and cattle raids, not farming, rapacious yet bound by a clear-cut if personal code of honor, independent and resistent to any national unity yet differential, even loyal, to an enemy if he prove himself worthy of respect, and tribal yet ultimately controlled by a codified law adjudicated by patriarchal kings.

The enduring tradition of Celticism in Irish literature speaks to the reader of the very essence of the Irish spirit. From a native love of the tradition itself springs a concomitant delight in the perpetuation of this ancient pseudo-historical lore by means of the native storyteller who is all the more important since many of the ancient Irish manuscripts were lost in internal and external wars. The tradition is continued by the prolific Irish association of place and legend. Lacking the multiplicity of historical structures common to other European nations, Ireland preserves its history through the association of story with location that literally peoples such places with figures from the past. Through the retelling of legends and place-lore the mythological past becomes very much a part of the present.

The dating with the possible determination of the historicity of some of the saga episodes is fraught with obvious difficulties. Some of these tales, particularly those belonging to the Red Branch cycle, are believed to have come into being before the birth of Christ; others, such as those of the Fenian cycle, are thought to have originated about the third century A.D. Most of the stories have come
through the oral tradition and the oldest important version of the written sagas is the early twelfth century Book of the Dun Cow (Leabhar na h-U índre), though the oldest extant manuscript containing heroic matter is the eighth century Book of Druim Snechta. The manuscripts available, however, offer an older, more extensive literature than almost any other European nation and, with the Icelandic sagas, present a very early yet highly developed prose account of traditional literature.

James Stephens, like other Irish writers, saw in these early tales material for his own writing. But Stephens chose to render not only these tales but his modern stories as well with an infusion of the fantastic. Save for an initial flurry of interest when things Celtic, and thus things mythic, were dernier cri, critical attention to his works began an ever accelerating decline. Contributing to the lack of serious scholarly study of his writing was Stephens' own appearance and personality. Critics who reviewed his works would inevitably lard their accounts with references to his short stature, his large head, his mischievous eyes, his penchant for song and dance—in short, they made Stephens into one of his own leprechauns. The following account bears witness:

He is a small, gnome-like creature; a powerful, tiny elf, with a head whose shape is beautiful, and the loveliest brown eyes, full of laughter, irreverence and affection. Kindness and good humor...are the essence of James Stephens. The whole man is in his writings....His uncanny faculty...enables him to establish himself on the friendliest terms with dumb animals whose thoughts he can record with a whimsical tenderness. His soft brown eyes are lit at once by the highest intelligence and by that profound, inarticulate love, which one never sees unmoved.
in the eyes of the finer animals. This gnome, this elfin wit, the James Stephens of quips and
fancies that bubble into laughter, of sensitive emotions that soar into prose and poetry of fresh-
est beauty, is the James Stephens, above all who has a fine soul.  

Stephens also fomented such mythic accounts by refusing to give re-
liable facts about his life. Brandon Saul in his essay on Stephens
"Withdrawn in Gold" notes a few of these inaccuracies. Stephens
claims to have been born the same year as James Joyce, 1882, to have
married in 1917, to have moved to Paris in 1912, to have taken the
appointment to the National Gallery in 1916 or 1917 when in actuality
he was born in 1880, married in 1919 (though by common law in 1908),
moved to Paris in 1913, and accepted the National Gallery position
in 1915. Whether Stephens wished purposefully to keep his life a
mystery or he simply placed no premium on biographical accuracy is
not known. Either impression, however, is conducive to a portrait of
a substanceless fellow following some outlandish personal whim.

Stephen was "discovered" by A. E. (George Russell), who sponsored
his joining the circle of literary patriots of whom Yeats was the
acknowledged leader. There was a certain antagonism between the young
writer and the older members of the coterie who, like George Moore,
thought A. E. exaggerated Stephens' talents or, like Yeats, thought
A. E.'s sponsorship of Stephens to be purely "philanthropic." But
four years later with the publication and critical acclaim of The
Crock of Gold, Stephens became an acknowledged writer. Stephens' separateness published works ran to over forty volumes. In addition,
Stephens wrote a number of prefaces and critical essays. Of the

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book-length publications, excluding his poetry most of which is included in the Collected Poems, Stephens' most important works are his love story The Charwoman's Daughter (1912), a work sui generis and his most famous The Crock of Gold (1912), two volumes of short stories Here Are Ladies (1913) and Etched in Moonlight (1928), an adventure story The Demi-gods (1914), a report of the Easter Rebellion The Insurrection in Dublin (1916), and his three works based on ancient saga material Irish Fairy Tales (1920), Deirdre (1923), and In the Land of Youth (1924). Deirdre won the Tailteann prize for fiction the year of its publication.

Unlike Yeats, Stephens turned to the saga material only after his reputation had been made in the modern mode. Undoubtedly due to his connections with the Yeats circle Stephens saw in the ancient tales of Ireland the ethnic heart of a proud if suppressed culture. Like others of the Celtic Renaissance he was keenly interested in the reinstitution of Gaelic as the national language of Ireland. He learned to read Gaelic to a satisfactory degree though he never learned to speak it well. Having become friends with the Celtic scholar Osborn Bergin, Stephens was introduced to the extant manuscripts of the ancient sagas and poetry by him.

The political upheavals of the early 1900's must have seemed to Stephens, as to the other artists of the period, a rebirth of national spirit for which the accompanying blood and pain of parturition was expected though nonetheless traumatic. In a letter to Lady Augusta Gregory dated August 18, 1920, Stephens wrote, 'Bathing in the past, in the strange and beautiful was never so necessary as in these horrible
times." Stephens believed the Celtic stories, then, the worthy subject of literary endeavor for patriotic reasons. But, also, Stephens came to see their potential as a philosophic and artistic medium as well. His connection with the Irish theosophic circle and his thorough reading of Blake taught him to discover the occult motifs in the stories. In his saga redactions, as in his poetry, Stephens appears to celebrate one motif in particular—the life force, which in Saul's words is the basis of a philosophy "in consonance with the... doctrine of the basic unity of opposites and the obliterative fusing of transcendence. ... the compulsion and significance of contraries." Moreover, because even in the original sagas the main characters are multi-dimensional rather then singularly planned as is the usual characteristic of the heroic persona, Stephens found: in the sagas characters who like their modern counterparts might be treated realistically. And in his portrayals he rejected the enervating influence adopted by a number of other writers of the Renaissance, the faddish mistiness of the Celtic Twilight. As A. E. acclaims, Stephens "does know his men and his women. They are not the shadowy, Whistler-like decorative suggestions of humanity made by our poetic dramatists. They have entered like living creatures into his mind, and they break out there in an instant's unforgettable passion or agony...." But Stephens did not intend to lose sight of the antiquarianism of the tales in his redactions of them. He desired, as Birgit Bramsback notes, "to tell the stories in a new way without losing the atmosphere of the old tales."  

At first glance it would seem that Stephens was hardly breaking
new ground. Crofton Croker, William Carleton, Douglas Hyde, T. W. Rolleston, and many others had already published renderings of the stories. Lady Augusta Gregory had written her very well received Cuchulain of Muirthemne and Of Gods and Fighting Men, both containing redactions written in a faintly vernacular style. Eleanor Hull had compiled modified translations of stories pertinent to the Irish national hero Cuchulain. St. John O'Grady's Silva Gaedelica and Kuno Meyer and Alfred Knutt's two-volume The Voyage of Bran offered scholarly but thoroughly readable translations of both well-known and more obscure legends and myths. But Stephens wrote with a new perspective. One of the ways in which Stephens' redactions are atypical is in his characters. Stephens was concerned that literature have vitality, and vitality is best transmitted through characterization. Stephens resurrected his legendary heroes from the tumuli and cairns of saga literature rather than simply reintombing them in a more ornate crypt, or to use N. J. O'Conor's metaphor, he put flesh upon "the dry bones of scholarship." He accomplished this miracle through emending and organizing the original narratives to give proper motivation to the character action as well as to insert conversation and description that both universalized as well as individualized the heroic character. Another way in which Stephens' recensions differ from those before him is in his sense of humor. Though many of the contemporary redactions were close to the original versions and though some were even translations and, therefore, should have included all the elements of the tale, including the humor, nearly all were imbued with the stereotypic "heroic" tone. But to render the stories with fidelity to the original episodes is to
recognize the humor inherent in many of the Irish sagas. Stephens not only recognized the incongruities and comic human foibles but amplified them to give a new and yet more authentic mode to his redactions. Saul's comment on Stephen's poetry is equally applicable to his prose; Stephens' "originality of manner rather than of matter or metaphor" gives to his renderings of the old tales a uniqueness lacking in others. Stephens is nonplussed by the dignity usually attributed to heroic literature; he is in R. J. Loftus' word "irreverent" but one may not then "conclude that Stephens did not take his saga stories seriously. He believed that the Old Irish literature could have great importance for contemporary Ireland provided that it were reshaped so as to embody more effectively those human values which would be meaningful for modern man. . . . In Stephens' peculiar philosophy of life laughter is akin to joy and joy is akin to love and love is the idea toward which all men must strive."  

It would appear, then, that contrary to present critical opinion, Stephens' work in Irish myth and legend deserves re-evaluation. Towards this end the present study undertakes an examination of Stephens' saga redactions in three main ways. First, (Chapter One), by means of a brief survey of Celtic civilization it is possible to detect and evaluate Stephens' authenticity. Secondly (Chapter Two), Stephens' redactions are compared to selected translations and versions by other Irish writers to determine to some extent how faithful Stephens was to the available manuscript version as well as how much Stephens was influenced by other redactors. Moreover, Stephens' narrative technique is analyzed with regards to the Celtic bardsic tradition to illustrate in what ways
Stephens' versions are like those of the earlier shenachies or storytellers. Finally (Chapters Three and Four), Stephens' heroic characterizations of both men and women are examined for their relationship to the original figures in the saga versions. Such a comparison also reveals in what ways Stephens infuses these characters with realism.

At the height of his career James Stephens was considered the equal, if not the superior, of Yeats, A. E., Synge, and other luminaries of the Irish Renaissance. This initial critical acclaim was due in part to the skill, the humanistic credibility with which Stephens endowed those Celtic legends that were the genesis and undergirding of the Renaissance. As A. E. said of Stephens, "the Celtic imagination is leaving its Tirnanoges, its Idlathachs, its Many Colored Lands and impersonal moods and is coming down to earth intent on vigorous life and individual humanity." Throughout his works runs a constant thread of ontological curiosity, a presentation of life itself that pulls together the real and the fantastic in perfectly credible combination. It is this homogeneity of diversities that links Stephens and the primary theme of the Irish Renaissance--Celticism.

An Orthographical and Textual Note:

The briefest perusal of Irish literature and literary criticism reveals that Gaelic words have any number of spellings. Names, places, even the titles of manuscripts--none appear to have any set form. In this study some attempt has been made to standardize the spelling by adhering first to that spelling used by Stephens in his redactions.

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(with the exception of the terms Sidhe and Usna, which Stephens spelled Shi and Visneac)—thus, Connacht rather than the modern spelling Connaught. For terms not used in the redactions the spelling has been chosen on the basis of a scholarly work in the field—thus the Tuatha De Danann after the spelling found in Douglas Hyde's A Literary History of Ireland.

Where feasible, the English titles for tales and manuscripts have been used, followed by their Gaelic titles in parentheses.
INTRODUCTION—FOOTNOTES


5 Yeats revised his opinion of Stephens enough to give the presentation speech at the awarding of the Polignac Prize to Stephens for The Crock of Gold in 1913. Yeats also admired others of Stephens works. Yeats, speaking of In the Land of Youth is quoted by James Finneran in The Olympian and the Leprechaun: Stephens presents herein 'an image of Ireland that is so ancient and so modern that it must be true. There was no philosophy, nothing but instinct, and yet I felt that philosophy had gone to the making of it, that he had been able to add something that had fallen out of the legends during the intervening Christian centuries.'

6 Birgit Bramsbäch's checklist of Stephens material, the most complete presently available, contains over four hundred separate entries including manuscripts.


8 Saul, pp. 17-18.


12 Saul, p. 19.


14 A. E., p. 43.
CHAPTER ONE

CELTIC CULTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CELTIC LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS

Historical-Cultural Developments in the Celtic Ethos and Stephens' Use of Details of Celtic Life

Celt is a name given to the inhabitants of a rather large geographic region stretching from modern-day Switzerland on the east to Ireland on the west and bounded on the north and south by the North Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Occupying this territory independently from approximately 1500 B.C. to 70 B.C., the Celts were a semi-nomadic people with a surprisingly strong indigenous culture and somewhat unified by a language family. Indeed the name Celtic is technically a linguistic rather than a nationalistic term, popularized by such sixteenth and seventeenth century linguists as George Buchanan and Edward Lhuyd.¹

Due to the continuum of change on the continent both the Celtic language and culture were modified and in placed eradicated. But because of its extreme position on the fringe of the ancient world, Ireland retained Celticism in the purest form possible. Moreover, in the ancient Irish culture, language, art, institutions, and law the original Indo-European origins of Celticism are rather evident and thus provide a definite connection between the Irish culture and such other Indo-European cultures as that of India. Language, of course, offers the most convincing connection.² Also, some of the

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ancient Irish tales are strikingly similar to Oriental stories; the Irish Cuchulain's fight with his son Conleach and the Persian Sohrab's with his son Rustum are often cited examples.

The Celticism of Ireland, then, may be the vestiges of a relatively pure descent from a common Indo-European heritage, made possible by Ireland's isolation from the rest of Europe. Eleanor Hull follows J. G. Herder in the following explanation of this theory of cultural evolution:

Almost all nations have passed through stages of development running broadly along the same lines, and if we can reach by any means the conception of savage nations at similar points in their growth, we shall find certain parallel ideas common to a large number of them. Surrounded by much the same conditions of life, provided only with the same limited equipment of knowledge, intermixing little with nations more advanced than themselves, tribes and peoples, like children, start with a stock of ideas that is almost uniform all the world over. They have no accumulation of varied wisdom reaped from books or from intercourse with the outer world; they have only the maxims, often inaccurate and always meagre, learned by their forefathers in the school of practical experience. Thus, without any forcing of theory, we can discover in the early tales of all nations certain broad and simple guesses at the meaning of things, and certain shrewd analogies as to their nature which have a similarity to those of other nations at the same stage of intellectual advance.

Padraic Pearse touches upon this concept in his discussion of the folksongs of Ireland. The folktale and the folksong are two very elemental forms of literature. Particularly it is the folktale that is man's pictorial representation of his own ethos: "The folk-memory is, as everyone knows, wonderfully retentive and conservative. Yet we find that, while a folk-tale itself may be preserved for two

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thousand years—and preserved without any radical change in incidents or detail even to the very word-formulae and nonsense-ending—yet the origin and meaning of the tale have been forgotten. The "Celtic" culture of Ireland, then, may be the product of a primitive society evolving in the fashion predictable of all such societies that for some reason became arrested at one stage of its passage, strengthening that ethos into an identifiable cultural motif.

To suggest, however, that Irish literature was allowed to evolve free of any outside pressures whatsoever is, of course, not accurate. It is true that with the exception of the original migrations from the continent the early Celts in Ireland came rather late to important and influential contact with other European peoples. In fact, this contact was largely flowing in the opposite direction as Ireland's men of learning, having served both as an augmentative and as a repository source of learning during the Middle Ages, brought learning to kingdoms on the continent. However, Ireland did experience religious and cultural influences, particularly that of Christianity. James Carney insists in his introduction to Early Irish Literature that Irish literature is not "pure and uncontaminated," that Christianity and, therefore, the Greco-Latin civilization were an influence that took place before the writing of the "earliest literary monuments." There are no manuscript accounts that predate the introduction of Christianity in the sixth century. The presently available, and sizeable, body of ancient Irish literature has, of course, undergone the alterations of time and passage as well. But it must be pointed out that because of an indigenous code of literary fidelity less
alteration than might be expected of such ancient tales did, in fact, occur.

Wars and Invasions

Therefore, since foreign influences were few, it is particularly important to note their conditions and subsequent bearing on the development of Celtic culture. The earliest accounts of Irish history cite three waves of invaders in the centuries before Christ whose only documentation is in the myths and legends. The earliest inhabitants reputedly were the Formorians, a people pictured only vaguely as "unpleasant spirits." They were conquered by the Tuatha de Danann noted for their practice of magic. After holding Ireland for some two hundred years, the Tuatha De Danann were in turn conquered by the Milesians, the procreators of the modern-day Irish. It was the late sixth century Viking invasion which served to deter the development of the Irish Celtic culture. Yet though the growth of the indigenous culture was arrested, it was not eradicated. These conquerors were assimilated in a pattern that would serve for all would-be conquerors of Ireland. The invading culture would become a veneer that slowly merged with the resident culture whose resiliency and adaptability rendered the culture impervious to permanent and alien change.

It was Christianity that made the biggest impact on Celtic culture. Besides its moral values, Christianity offered the Celts two ideas that bridged the gap between themselves and continental civilizations—Latin learning and a central organization. A pagan nation, Ireland would logically have undergone the traumatic razing of the old gods to be replaced by the concept of one God. However, because of the
looseness of the native religion, which some scholars believe to have been without formal gods at all, the Christianization of Ireland was rather easily accomplished. Moreover, the Christian missionaries and monks exhibited a surprising tolerance for the old beliefs, relegating the ancient gods to the euhemerized role of "the mighty men which were of old, men of renown," and their tolerant attitude allowed the old pagan beliefs to continue albeit in covert form. While easing the assimilation of Christianity by the Celts, this practice complicated the ancient historical records, for it became a highly difficult and controversial task to separate the gods from the men. The pervasive influence of an underlying paganism is suggested by some critics to be the cause of extremism in Irish Christianity. In early Irish history Christianity was a gloss over myth which itself was but the surface of a deep and complex strain of magical beliefs. The ancient saga literature in its present form is fundamentally Celtic, but nevertheless detectable are the occasional elements from the amalgam of external influences.

In writing his redactions James Stephens was concerned first, of course, with the literary aspects of the sagas. His intentions were manifestly stylistic in that his treatment of the ancient sources was done with attention first to narrative quality and characterizations. But in the writing of the redactions Stephens infused not only the spirit of the Celtic past but a notable wealth of factual detail about Celtic life as well. Much of such detail may be found in the original and in those redactions by other writers who may have influenced Stephens. But even in his own emendatory passages Stephens is usually
following, consciously or unconsciously, verified accounts of the late Iron Age Celtic society of which the stories are told. His technique requires fuller explanation to be offered later in this study. However, even a brief examination of the more characteristic aspects of Celtic society reveals Stephens' fidelity to the facts.

Socio-Economic Patterns

The Irish Celts were part of the European Celtic peoples whose empire was at its height in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. In physical appearance these people were in contrast to the southern Europeans, such as the Romans, and obviously akin to the northern groups, for the noblemen among the Celts, those who might be expected to retain a sense of racial purity, were tall, fair, and muscular with blue eyes and blond hair. The lightness of the hair was amplified by a peculiar method of dressing the hair—limed stiff and drawn back from the face, stiff enough according to some Irish accounts to "impale apples falling from a tree." The women frequently wore their hair braided and ornamented. Dress for the Celts was colorful; tunics and cloaks (long for the women and shorter for the men), leather shoes and sandals, and often no headgear due to the importance of hairstyle. Jewelry, particularly gold, was worn by both sexes, the torc, possibly borrowed from Persia, usually worn by the men. Stephens takes typical Celtic dress into account in his description of Etaín in *In the Land of Youth*. She wears a purple cloak fringed with silver, a green dress with an embroidered hood, the bodice of which is adorned with golden breast-cups and silver clasps. Her hair is styled in plaited braids finished with beads. In this same story Midir dresses as befits his station.
when he comes to receive Etain in a golden tunic and a purple mantle. He wears a diadem of thin golden ear pieces connected by finely wrought metal—the mind reminiscent in shape of the alternate royal headgear—the cathbarr or helmet. The Celts were clean to the point of fastidiousness as regards their person. Particular attention was paid to the condition of the nails. Stephens picks up even this small detail in Deirdre. In her agitation over the coming of Conachúr, Lavarcham sends Deirdre back to complete her toilet more properly, particularly to attend to a spot under one of her nails. In "The Carl of the Drab Coat" much is made of the slovenly appearance of the Carl in contrast to the seemly appearance of the Fianna.

The Celtic culture in Ireland was what is termed the "La Tène" culture dating from about third century B.C., a culture that spread to Ireland from the area around the Marne. This La Tène culture was essentially a heroic society with well-crafted metal work, such as is evidenced in the swords and chariots of the period. The art of this period is primarily associated with the overlords of a warrior society presented in martial themes, symbols, and objects. In temperament these Celts were war-like and easily excitable but responsible and hospitable. Certainly in Stephens' rendering of "The Little Brawl at Allen" the sudden alternation of mood from joyous feasting to violent hostility is apparent. The Roman historian Strabo, among others, particularly notes their attribute of personal bravery, pointing out that the women equally with the men exhibited considerable courage. In this trait Stephens bases his characterizations of Maeve and of Nessa who exhibit amazing effectiveness in military and political
Celtic society was divided into communities called tuath, originally in reference to the people but later to the area itself. The original tuath was bounded by natural limitations such as landscape features. In Ireland the country was divided into five regions--the cuigi--which were subdivided into tuath. The people of each tuath were defined in a tripartite structure--the king, the nobles, the common people. The king was chosen from among the relations of a former ruler though not necessarily a son of the previous king. The king's functions were both governing and ritual. The majority of the nobles were warriors. The highest level of nobility was reserved, however, to the magicians, sages, druids. Stephens portrays the Celtic kings in a number of the stories. These characters are essentially hero figures more appropriately discussed later in this study. Here might be pointed out an important example of the druid class, the portrayal of Cathfa in Deirdre. At the opening of the story Cathfa calmly, almost matter of factly, predicts that Deirdre will bring troubles upon Ireland. He appears briefly as the husband of Nessa, precedent in his forcing Nessa to be his wife as Conachur, his son, would do to Maeve. He appears at the end of Deirdre. It is he alone who can prevent Naoise and Deirdre's escape. And Conachur, though singular and self-possessed throughout the novel, is here totally dependent on Cathfa who casts a spell upon the fugitives so that they can be captured. The extraordinary powers attributed to this class is made even more terrifying in the story of Etain as the druid Bresil Etarlain transforms the beautiful Etain into a fly.
Of the common people were the freemen—the farmers and certain craftsmen—and the unfree men—slaves and degraded families. There was also a special "grade" between the warriors and the farmers—the aes dána (men of skill) who were the special or highly skilled craftsmen. The evidence of this societal level as well as the fact of the "honour-price," the financial worth of freemen, testifies to the strength of individuality in the Celtic culture. Celtic society was interlaced with "the ties and duties of kinship." Yet Celtic social structure seemed feudal. The Celtic institution of clientage (celsine) required the céle, a commoner, to bear arms and give other services to his lord (fleith). The lord in turn gave goods and protection to the céle. Celsine differed radically from feudalism, however, in that the céle never lost his independence or the right of private ownership. Because the sagas themselves are aristocratic, Stephens portrays noblemen primarily; however, he does sketch commoners as well. In Lavarcham, Conachúr's captain of the militia, Déirdre's guard "Fat-face," Eochaid's soldiers, Stephens hints at a societal level peopled by characters of interest and individuality.

There was no provision in Celtic society to extend an individual's status and rights beyond the boundaries of his own túath, for there was no central administration of law; rather the law "rested on its own venerability, ritual potency, and popular acceptability," as C. E. Powell explains. Law reposed in the memories of "specialists" who were free to move about the country. Possibly connected with magician-sages or wise men, Celtic law was apparently not written down before the
seventh century A.D. The specialists, the bríthenn, assisted the
king in arbitration or acted as arbitrators themselves. Such arbi-
trations frequently took place at the king's assembly, the 6enach,
famous also as a time of the gathering of bards. At these assemblies
which took place during festivals at the palace or at the traditional
burying grounds of former kings, such actions as alliances, and war
declarations and the raising of armies were accomplished as well as
the establishments of clientships. At this time an overlord estab-
lished his control over lords less powerful. In his redaction of the
wooing of Etain, Stephens gives a delightful portrayal not only of
Celtic lawyers disputing but the 6enach as a whole. Here the celebra-
tion was the Tailltean Games, but the legal debates soon set the tone
for the other celebrants:

At the Fort of the Synod the law-makers were de-
liberating on such changes as were politic, and dis-
cussing recent events that could modify procedure, or
be considered as new, or overriding, precedents.
Their bards, who, for the sake of easy memory, had
"put a thread of rhyme about the laws," were in at-
tendance, and were considering the metrical surgery
that any change in the body of law made necessary.
The bards were in convention at the Well of
the Elf Mound discussing if all that could be
achieved by the Great Eight-Line Curved Verse
could not be as competently managed by the Little
Eight-Line Curved Verse, and whether the Great-
Curving Eight-Line Return Verse was a necessity or
an outrage: these holding that brevity, and those
that diversity, was the chief ornament of poetry.
"Where there is only room for brevity," quoth
a young bard, "there is no room for poetry."
A savage ancient confounded him.
"Where, sir, there is space for diversity
there is place and to spare for foolishness."
"A goat in a small plot," cried a pastoral
bard, "starvation follows."
"Ah!" cried another, who knew his animals, "a goat in a large plot--extended destruction!"

The debates continue and Stephens lightly satirizes scholars who take themselves too seriously. Beyond the discussions of chess, warfare, medicine, brewing, wizardry, were the entertainments:

If you went yonder, out on the Moor of Tara, you could see a red mouth hedged deeply with whiskers, and from among these a ballad is roared that will roast you to death in your own blushes, or reduce you to such a jelly of laughter that you cannot protect your purse or your hat from the skilful family of the singer.

Yonder, in the leathern cap, will fight three rounds with a wolf-hound, if the fee is made up:
"Nothing but teeth to be used, nobles, nothing but teeth."
He, with the bells in his ears, will eat three feet of a spear, and enjoy them.*

Within the community the social unit was the kin (fine). The term derbfine designated the relationship of "agnatic" descendents of a great-grandfather extended to the second cousins of the male line. The family unit included the wife, children, married sons' wives and children. In times of prosperity women apparently did hold property and rank and brought a designated percentage of the husband's wealth upon betrothal. Stephens' best example of a woman with property is Maeve. When she decided to leave Conachúr, she took an inventory of her property. She had livestock, vessels of precious metals, jewelry, chariots, embroidered fabrics, shawls of every color, head-dresses of all kinds, ornamented spears, shields and breastplates.

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There were quilts of silk and fur, cushions that delighted the head or the eye that rested on them. She had birdcages of ivory and crystal. Beds that had been chipped out of monster blocks of amethyst. Cups of carved ivory, each with a different gem set inside at the bottom so that it twinkled at you while you drank. Chess-boards of precious metals, and each man on the board had occupied the cunning artificer a long year of his age to fashion it... machinery for brewing and baking... dresses... like an untimely sunset for colour, and like a billow of the sea for exuberance.  

Children, moreover, were not altogether the responsibility of the parents but were tutored by "foster parents" paid for their work. The rationale behind such a practice seemed linked not only to the value of increasing the child's independence and self-reliance outside his own home, but also of strengthening the sense of extra-familial bonds. The practice of fosterage was essentially a social compliment to the fostering family. As Stephens indicates in his story of Bec-fola, Dermod as Ard-Rí had many foster sons, "princes from the Four Provinces, who were sent by their fathers as tokens of loyalty and affection..." And as the warm relationship between Dermod and Crimthann, his foster son indicates, the bond of fosterage was often as strong and sometimes stronger than blood relationship.

The Celtic tuath raised its own food and cattle. Otherwise, it was involved in crafts, trade, or pillage. In Ireland's third century La Tène culture the warrior-oriented society was concentrated on the acquisition of wealth, the chief pillage being cattle raiding. Ireland's most famous saga, the Tain Bo Cúilgine, is an account of such a raid. Even the festivals were pastoral, not agricultural.
Cattle raising was also an important occupation on the Continent, but it was particularly appropriate to Ireland's wet climate. It might also be noted that cattle-raising caused a dispersal of the population that precluded the establishment of a centralized government. Having no native coinage and using none save in foreign bartering, the Celts also instituted a system of barter based on the exchange in cattle (a practice of barter indigenous to the Indo-European peoples as a whole). For example, six heifers were equivalent to three milch cows or to a female slave (*cumal*). The term *cumal*, then, became the standard value term for estimating the value of anything.  

The Development of Celtic Literature

The Role of Bards and *Filid*

It may be surprising to note in a society such as that of the early Celts the high regard offered a non-utilitarian class, but such was attributed to the Celtic bards and *filid*. More than a form of entertainment, the bardic recitation was a composite of history, religion, and racial ideals in one of its most appealing forms.

The Celtic bardic tale had its roots in the Indo-European tale form which Myles Dillon describes as a "prose tale with verse dialogue the verse being fixed and unchanging, the prose left to the creative memory of the story teller." Sagas, then, are essentially prose with portions in verse. For example, in the story of Mac Datho's pig (*Scéla Mucc Meic Dathó*) champions speak to each other in verse, though the bulk of the story is told in prose. In the story of the Sons of Usna, the tale is prose though the druid prophecies and Deirdre's lamentation over the body of Naoise are in verse. Though this
form early evolved into the separate genres elsewhere, in Ireland the
original mixture of prose and poetry survived to the Middle Ages. 26

Though the bulk of ancient tales comes from manuscripts, the na-
native lore. The storyteller, the scelaige (in modern Irish sgealaigh-
or shenachie) was technically known as the fili who was a learned
poet and master of senchus (history) and dinnshencus (place-lore).

As Irish society began to change, the bard's position shifted from in-
tegral societal functionary to something of an accessory to the king's
retinue—a poet laureate trotted out on state occasions. After the
Norman conquest the bard was retained by the nobles in much the same
function. 27 The early tales reflect the lore of the upper classes
because the fili were both members of and were supported by this socie-
tal level. These tales might well have been recited at oenaiige (fairs)
where these and others of the arts were supported by kings. Like the
Anglo-Saxon scops the bards also recited at banquets and other gather-
ings of the nobles. In "The Little Brawl at Allen" Stephens portrays
the eminent poet Fergus True-Lips, whose skillful recitations of the
exploits of Finn and Goll bring forth the deluge of rewards that be-
gins the brawl. But he also is able to stop the fighting: "Then
Fergus True-Lips gathered about him all the poets of the Fianna, and
they surrounded the combatants. They began to chant and intone long,
heavy rhymes and incantation, until the rhythmic beating of their
voices covered even the noise of war, so that the men stopped hacking

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and hewing, and let their weapons drop from their hands.\textsuperscript{128} According to twelfth century manuscripts some three hundred and fifty tales were not only in existence but supposedly mastered by the bard or filli. Two hundred and fifty of these were known as prim-scela or main tales, one hundred as fo-scela or subsidiary tales.\textsuperscript{29} Since the bards proper associated themselves primarily with the nobility and the tales of the nobility, history observes that around 1640 the bards tended to disappear. Deposed from their elevated positions, they lost their classical techniques and concomitantly their rigidity, and they became poets of the people.\textsuperscript{30} After the "final destruction" of the indigenous culture by James I, it was the peasantry which became living receptacles of the Celtic tradition only partially preserved elsewhere in fragmentary manuscripts.

Extant manuscripts of the tales present considerable problems of accuracy inasmuch as they reflect the oral presentation rather than a coherent and systematic written version of the story. Gerard Murphy notes how in versions of the \textit{Táin} the tale "dissolves" into what appears to be notes on the story rather than a transcription of the oral presentation.\textsuperscript{31} Nor are the various manuscripts of certain tales consistent with each other. The most notable manuscripts of the \textit{Táin} are an Old Irish version in the \textbf{Book of the Dun Cow}, probably taken from oral transmission in the ninth century, and the Middle Irish version in the twelfth century \textbf{Book of Leinster (Leabhar Laigen)} that appears to be a literary composition based on a manuscript of the Old Irish version written about 1100. As might be expected, the Middle Irish version appears to be more unified and consistent, though the Old Irish version
is more natural and direct. Because the tales were bardic, one theory suggests that they were subject to the "poetic fancy" of each teller. Possibly, too, numbers of shorter extant manuscripts were outlines, memoria technica, for oral presentation, and thus present only the sketchiest rendition of the tale. Another theory postulates that these manuscripts are likely begun as faithful recordings of the storytelling, but that the imperfections and inconsistencies of the early manuscripts are due to the weariness of the recorder and stress on the reciter who is trying artificially to recreate a tale as he told it earlier at some gathering. Moreover, any manuscript version of the tale cannot hope thereby to capture the immediacy of the original oral version. As Gerard Murphy observes, "In the tale as originally told, not the opening, but some episode in the middle or end, would probably have most awakened our admiration. For it is the law of oral narration that the story improves as the appreciation of the audience begins to affect the narrator." Whereas the orally transmitted tale would be of greater length with more elaborate descriptive passages, the manuscript version opens with some elaboration and tends to trail off into a notational form. Certain marks of antiquity of the storyteller's art are "stereotyped descriptive passages or rhetorical 'runs'." These are usually introduced when beginning the tale or a well-known scene in the tale. In this and other characteristics such as "form, characters, and motifs" they are related to medieval Irish manuscripts.

Because of the antiquity of these tales, extant manuscripts, of course, are not the oldest form of the tales, not even necessarily of
the tales in their written form. The presently available manuscripts have undoubtedly been altered through foreign intercourse and Christian redaction by means of deliberate interpolation or suppression, scribal errors, the assimilation of foreign ideas or the desire to glorify characters through comparison with heroes of other cultures.39 Even the very popularity of these tales works for their alteration, for later cultural developments tended to have changed a tale, modernized it by stripping it of "its uncouth grandeur."40 These alterations are directly attributable to a change of fashion. Peculiarly, however, the older sagas kept their typical Celtic characteristics. The Red Branch cycle, containing among others the stories of Cuchulain, evidently retained many of its original elements. Hull terms the tales of the Red Branch saga so complete they could almost have been conceived by one mind. There is also a considerable uniformity of style with exceptions primarily again in the most popular parts, such as the story of Deirdre and the "Feast of Briccriu" (Fled Bricrend). In contrast is the Os-sianic cycle, the stories of Finn, which appears to have altered from the time of its conception. Its considerable diversity is attributable to the number of tales incorporated within it, some of which were originally independent of the main body of stories; unlike the Cuchulain stories, the Fenian cycle offers little opportunity for a unified saga because of a "diversity of style and tone."41 In general, however, the Fenian stories contain longer adjectival embellishments and redundancies and lack the succinctness and gravity, the dignity and purpose of the older sagas. Stephens' particular connections with the bardic tradition appears later in this study. It can be observed here, however, that
Stephens' redactions are, of course, much fuller than the manuscript versions as a general rule, for he conceives the finished work in the light of modern narrative, replete with continuity of episode and character development. But Stephens' writing is evidently more in the spirit of the earlier rather than the later manuscript versions, for Stephens accomplishes a bluntness, a balanced style, and if not a genuine "gravity" at least a recognition of the primitive instincts and universal human conditions informing the action of the sagas.

**Celtic Literary Characteristics**

Seldom does the student of Irish literature find concurrence on the subject of Celtic characteristics. Generally historians and literary analysts offer one or two characteristics, one naming some, others naming others. A comparison of enough lists, however, suggests a continuity of Celticism, a general consensus about Celtic influence. The most obvious Celtic legacy is subject matter. The myths and legends that continue to reappear rewritten in modern Irish literature will be treated elsewhere in this study. There is also, however, pervasive Celtic influence of a more subtle nature particularly in the themes and attitudes which constitute indigenous Irish writing.

One might well begin with Stoppford Brooke's introduction to T. W. Rolleston's early collection of Fenian tales in which Brooks lists the Celtic characteristics as intensity, love of wild nature, a desire for beauty, interest in humanity and character, savagery coupled with tenderness and fairy magic expressed in "strange imaginations that suddenly surprise and charm."1 To these he would add a deep love of Ireland, the mingling of the beauty of youth with the honor of ancientry. The

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natural artisan in the Celt is objectified in his love of color, a characteristic not found in early Germanic, English, or Scandanavian literature, and a love of music, particularly music that appears to arise from nature itself.  

Celtic legends reveal the Celt to be an idealist, one who luxuriates in the imagination and enjoys beauty. Yet his tales are not without humor. His humor often lies in a sense of the incongruous, subtle and devoid of the burlesque. This incongruity is, however, based on his belief in the fantastic. Irish humor is strangely dualistic. The Irish mind reflects the need for synthesis and reconciliation, leaning even more towards the wonderful than the real, indeed attributing to the imaginative a peculiar reality.

Blended with the humor is a strain of pathos which Matthew Arnold termed "titanic" melancholy: "The Celts with their vehement reaction against the despotism of fact, with their sensuous nature, their manifold striving, their adverse destiny, their immense calamities, the Celts are the prime authors of this view of piercing regret and passion." He compares the German Sehnsucht, a 'wistful, soft, tearful longing' to the Celtic "struggling, fierce, passionate" melancholy. However, later critics, among them N. J. O'Conor, take issue with Arnold, for non-conversant with Gaelic, Arnold based his comment on a reading of Macpherson's Ossian, which was not a translation, but a work only based on Gaelic tales. O'Conor argues, "Titanic melancholy is too strong a term to apply to the strain of pathos which is constantly sounded in Gaelic literature and at its loudest, increases to dignified fatalism. Anyone at all intimate with Irish people must have noticed the strong
tinge of fatalism in their natures which makes many of them happy-go-lucky; the Irish are conscious of their own insignificance when pitted against the great natural forces that move the world." The Celt is not morosely victimized by fate; rather he accepts fate and may be sad or wistful, but not morbid.

The Celt might be philosophically stoic about life's low points because of his capacity for belief relatively devoid of skepticism. John Eglinton remarks that "what distinguished the Celt was the vision--for it was nothing less--of another world interpenetrating this, seen at times with the bodily eyes and even journeyed into with the bodily feet." The Celt's trait of acceptance indicated the lack of a questioning mind; the Celt was not prone to debate, to weigh explanations for his experience or to downplay any aspect of life. Rather, his "visionary disposition" supported by his vivid imagination tended to get the better of his rational faculties.

This imaginative ability is characterized in the literature by the strength of the descriptive passages, particularly noticeable in two favorite narrative scenes, sea voyages and battles. In The Voyage of Bran one reads "Sea-horses glisten in summer/ As far as Bran has stretched his glance:/ Rivers pour forth a stream of honey. . . ./ The sheen of the main. . . / The white hue of the sea. . . . / Speckled salmon leap from the womb/ Of the white sea." Where in battle scenes many writers would write of the glory but not of the horror of war, the Celtic writer writes vigorously of both. Often these descriptions are a generic mixture of prose and poetry due to the imaginative yet realistic depictions. The imaginative and hence poetic quality of the prose is
enhanced in Celtic literature by "heaped" epithets and strings of adjectives. The latter are used most commonly for the alliterative effect notable in both Gaelic prose and Gaelic poetry since the language is rich in alliterative quality.\textsuperscript{52}

The imaginative aspects of Celtic literature are also infused by the Celtic love of nature and the concomitant belief that nature directly influenced the affairs of men. Most Gaelic similes are nature-connected. To the things of nature the Celts ascribed a spiritual quality, but they were not indwelled by a being; they were endowed with this half-life by gods or demons or the fairies, or their human observers transmitted to them some of their own passion. Rolleston explains the paradox implicit in this Celtic doctrine: "The Celtic nature is too fond of reality, too impatient of illusion, to believe in an actual living spirit in inanimate things."\textsuperscript{53} In another sense, however, all things were "gifted with life" for in the tales, especially those belonging to the Mythological cycle, all things are in some way possessed of an intrinsic being. Possibly these tales were not originally Celtic and perhaps there is in them a very early rendering of a mystic belief in a pervasive life force. A. E. also remarks on the Gaelic dwelling upon nature; "everywhere there was life, and as they saw so they felt."\textsuperscript{54} And this view was a mystical view, one which A. E. heightens to a national characteristic as the Celtic poets glean from the Ireland about them a literal Tirnanoge.\textsuperscript{55} The Irish use of nature involves the ability in O'Conor's words "to use figurative language in simile and metaphor more striking than would occur to men of almost any other race, a strange imaginative power that at times is
so strong as to become grotesque. Yet implicit in the striking language is a child-like quality, a kind of charming naivete. A. E. expresses it: "No literature ever had a more beautiful heart of childhood in it. The bards could hate no one consistently."

The Celtic sense of the divine was a peculiar one. The Celt could "sublimate" though he could not "transcend" his world. His religion was based almost exclusively on imagination, not thought. It might here be noted that the Celt humanized his "gods," since his religion was nebulous. The emphasis, therefore, was on man and the god-man duality possible. Moreover, the Celt believed in reincarnation. There is evidently a delight in life that does not necessitate the concept of reward in the hereafter, that allows for reincarnation as good rather than as bad, that emphasizes the human to be as good as the divine. The "supernatural infusion" appears to be the most important characteristic of Celtic literature. The Celt is dominated by his vision of the Otherworld and seeks, in O'Faolain's words, a "synthesis between dream and reality, aspiration and experience, a shrewd knowledge of the world and a strange reluctance to cope with it, and tending always to find the balance not in an intellectual synthesis but in the rhythm of a perpetual emotional oscillation."

The infusion of the supernatural was so pervasive that it appeared even in supposed historical works, for example the *Book of Invasions* (Leabhar Gabhala) from as late as the twelfth century. As O'Faolain remarks, early Irish history is a "palimpsest" overlaid with fictions, redactions, and emendations. The writers of the *Book of Invasions*
proposed three goals—to explain the variety of peoples present in Ireland, to give the country political unity by describing the upper classes as of "common Gaelic origin," and to make the gods of ancient Ireland into credible mortals. Not so overt and more germinal is the fantasy included by the makers of both the Red Branch and the Fenian cycles, who did believe in a world composed of spiritual beings, particularly in the existence of the old gods now living underground. Notably, the nearer to modern time the origin of the story, the closer the relationship between mortals and immortals. The world of the Sidhe, the old Tuatha De Danann living in another dimension, or beneath lakes, in duns, or across the sea, was very real to the Celt. The humanization of the Celtic gods was effected through an expansion of the imagination, an amplification required more in this way than if the gods had remained divine.

The Celtic personality evinced, then, veneration of the superior human with a concomitant recognition of the influence on man by nature; for this reason the Celt held to idealism and appreciation of the forces of the sublime, and he luxuriated in the imagination and enjoyed beauty. Though among early European peoples the Celt is not alone in these characteristics, he is alone in the particular combination and emphases of these aspects. In The Revival of Irish Literature Douglas Hyde notes the importance of an understanding of these characteristics for anyone who would understand and enjoy Irish literature: "Our ancient literature would be invaluable if for this reason alone, that it gives a new viewpoint and a new vista. Its importance is augmented in this, that its reckless sincerity stands the enduring evidence of
a long-vanquished stage of social and intellectual development, where the fiercer and finer powers, the softer and sterner emotions of an early mankind strive and commingle with dramatic effect. 60

Periods of Literature and Their Characteristics

Even discounting such patriotic claims as Padraic Pearse's that Irish literature is older, larger in number, and better than the literature of any other European country save Greece, the scholar does find in Irish literature a body of rather neglected original material. Allowing for parallels between certain common topics and even forms such as in the evident relationship between Norse and Irish sagas, the general isolation of Ireland produced a prose and poetry of a particularly indigenous strain.

The periods of Irish literature indicate natural change with the passage of time. The fourth through the sixteenth centuries in general is called the age of bards. From the fifth to the twelfth centuries the "ancient" style, a "severe, unadorned," simple style, prevailed. From the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries the "medieval" style, "ponderous, ornate," wordy sometimes bombastic, was characteristic. The seventeenth through the twentieth centuries is a period of decline and revival. Within all periods occurred examples of history, usually a compilation of facts interspersed with legend, biography, particularly hagiological lives, historic romance, and fiction. 61

N. J. O'Conor suggests a bit more detailed division for the periods of Irish literature. Dividing the periods rather conventionally into Old Irish (850-1000), Middle Irish (1100-1500), and Modern Irish (1550 on), he characterizes the periods according to the types of

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literature found in each one. The Old Irish period was marked by little extant literature, that which is available religious works, for example, the "Hymn of St. Patrick" also called "The Deer's Cry." The twelfth century, however, marked the rise of the epics, most notably the Red Branch and the Fenian cycles. During this period also was recorded the tales of the Mythological cycle representing the myth history of successive peoples. The Modern Period saw an end to Ireland's splendid isolation and the literature marked the inroads and influences of conquerors. The literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was more and more one of protest because of the English domination of Ireland and its subsequent "Anglicanization.

Plunged into obscurity or obliterated by imitation, the Celtic strain seemed lost until the late nineteenth century when such men as Thomas Davis, editor of a Dublin-based newspaper, made references to the literary heritage, Sir Samuel Ferguson retold the sagas, and James Clarence Mangan "translated" Gaelic poems into English. Though done without benefit of modern linguistic techniques, the work of these men, among others, began what would come to be called the Irish Literary Revival, most marked at the turn of the century. 62

The saga literature of the Middle Irish Period contains the largest repository of those pieces usually called Celtic. In his introduction to Knott and Murphy's Early Irish Literature James Carney offers feasible divisions for the study of this body of literature. He divides the sagas into five types: the mythological tales which include stories of Irish deities such as the Dagda and Angus Og, the Ultonian tales centering on Conachur and the Red Branch warriors, tales which were in
chronological time roughly synonymous with the first century A.D.,
the tales of Fionn and the Fianna coincidental with the reign of Cormac,
son of Art, about the third century A.D., the king tales recounting
Irish dynasties, and the tales of expeditions (echtral) to the Other-
world. The myth tales have been created largely by poets and story-
tellers; they are not very good indications of the religion of the day
but rather of the skillful imagination of the bards. The tales have
survived due to their narrative value. Though the tales have been
called exemplums, they very well could have been more celebrations of
a ethnic nature for the purpose of unification and entertainment. Murphy
sees in these tales reason for linkage to the Indo-European origin.
There are, for example, several incidences of a "Battle of Moytirra,"
sometimes fought between the Tuatha De Danann and the Firbolg or be-
tween the Tuatha De Danann and the Fomori. These, Murphy says, are
perhaps comparable to tales of the Olympians and the Titans. Even ele-
ments in the later Táin also suggest Indo-European beliefs such as the
Champion's light or light of valor around the head of a warrior, the
rising up of water to protect a favored group of warriors, and the
appearance of gods to help or oppose in battle. The "purity" of these
Celtic mythological themes Murphy attributes to the conservative Irish
tradition which preserves these themes in more primitive form than in
other Celtic literatures.

The Irish heroic cycle centering on the Red Branch warriors con-
tains the only literary accounts of Celtic warrior spirit in European
literature. The events of this cycle occur mainly in northern Ireland
near present-day Armagh, and centers on Emain Macha, the palace of King
Conachúr. Cuchulain is his chief warrior who defends Ulster from such attacks as that of Queen Maeve and the man of Connacht as recorded in the Táin Bó Cuilgne. Other stories of King Ailill and Queen Maeve, Deirdre, Macha, the Two Swineherds and others are also part of this cycle.

The Fionn tales are not regarded as important in the repertoire of the story teller until the first half of the twelfth century as witnessed by the inclusion of only two tales on the twelfth century fill repertoire lists. These two tales, "The Wooing of Ailbhe" (Tochmarc Ailhe) and "The Elopement of Grainne and Diarmuid" (Aithed Grainne re Diarmaid) were thought to be regarded as fill tales as early as the tenth century. Three more titles sometimes listed separately, "The Cave of Howth," "Fionn's Journey to the Cave of Dunmore," and "The Cave of Dunmore," are thought to be parts of each other and related to the two tales mentioned above. The Fionn stories are called collectively Fiannaígheat. One point of differentiation between the Red Branch and the Fenian cycles is in the locale of the story-telling; heroic tales were told primarily in the fortresses of the nobles; tales of the Fianna were told primarily by the peasantry. For this reason, the Fionn tales evolved a ballad literature of their own about the twelfth century so that by the sixteenth century Fionn was a more prominent character than Cuchulain or other older heroes. Therefore, while Cuchulain's fame was limited to Ireland, Fionn and Oisin and Oscar became known in all nations touched by Romanticism's new emphasis on the past. Most particularly in the British Isles an abrogated version of the Fenian cycle was known through James Macpherson's Ossian. Though not a translation as he claimed but
an invention, the names of the Fianna were so skilfully placed before the public that considerable interest was awakened in Celtic literature.

The Fenian cycle is set in the Leinster and Munster areas associated with Fionn mac Uail. The Fianna, whose name is not a derivative of Fionn but of the Gaelic word for multitude, were a kind of national guard partially supported by the people and partially through a royally dispensed salary. The main characters include Fionn, Oisín his son, his grandson Oscar, Dermot, Caoilte mac Rónan, Goll mac Morna, and Conan. The Fianna were reduced by King Cairbre in the Battle of Gabra and on this point appear to have genuine historicity. The cycle, however, pictures Oisín and Caoilte living on until the time of St. Patrick in the sixth century. The Fenian cycle is also linked in royal lineage with King Cormac mac Art, a verifiable king of Ireland.

These stories, like others, were preserved through the efforts of monastic orders. Eleanor Hull points out in her study of the Cuchulain tales the lack of enmity in the attitude of the monks towards the old tales. The monks, contrary to expectations, appeared to wish to preserve the old tales even to utilizing what values from them they could with their own Christian teachings. Legend recounts the episode of St. Ciaran writing down the Táin, which had inadvertently been lost, at the tomb of Fergus mac Roy. There are Mongan's and Ossian's conversations with St. Patrick and St. Patrick's summoning of Cuchulain before King Laegaire, and the "colloquy" between St. Patrick and Caoilte—all are set down without any pejoration, though of course with an emphasis on the Christian point of view. Evidently the monks desired to blend the old and the new cultures.
When in the twelfth centuries monastic reform caused the shift of attention away from sagas, the custody of the sagas and other articles of old Irish literature fell to the rising great Irish families. Moreover, when in the early monastic period there came a considerable European influence on the literature, the literature became the property of the people under which conditions it reverted to a more indigenous strain strangely amalgamating what James Carney calls "that curious society that was barbaric, aristocratic, cattle-stealing but which nevertheless could show at times a delicate and penetrating sensitivity even in a general milieu of raucousness and bombast." Therefore, the later Irish literature is actually more "primitive" than earlier literature. Carney notes further, "There is a general crudity of style, a slapstick humour and an insensitivity to the finer points of characterization: the elements that tended to control or soften such features are no longer so potent."

The Anglo-Norman invasion in 1175 ended the high kingship of Ireland and provincial kingships as well. These were replaced by petty lordships; as a result, Ireland was drawn closer to medieval Europe and, thereby, lost some of its uniqueness. The tales begin to be spawned or modified by the Romance influence of the Continent. While the folktales continued their popularity, the sagas showed the heavy influence of Continental modes; the Fenian cycle, for example, adapted easily to the new mode. As Knott and Murphy point out, "The kingly grandeur, the genuine picture of ancient barbarism and the unity of structure which mark so many Old Irish tales disappear in this period, and are replaced by a less grand tone, an unrealistic background, and a diffuse structure char-
acterized by the piling of incident on incident."\(^71\) Murphy notes in particular the difference in tone between the fourteenth century rendering of the "Death of the Children of Uisneach (\textit{Oldheadh Cloinne h\textsterling Uisneach}) with its "unrealistic beauty" and the eighth or ninth century "Exile of the Sons of Uisliu" (\textit{Longes Mac nUislienn}) with its "warrior realism."\(^72\) By the end of the fourteenth century tales were still almost wholly Irish; by the end of the fifteenth century with the autonomy of Anglo-Norman lords in Ireland and their mingling with Gaelic aristocracy, Anglo-Norman influence was strongly affecting Irish literature. By the first part of the sixteenth century there was evidence of considerable continental influence.\(^73\)

The Irish Romantic tales characteristically had a prevalence of magic and included the "piling up" of unbelievable incidents. In these respects they were very similar to wonder tales in folklore. As in folklore, the characters seemed a mere convenience for the plot; in the Romantic tales, however, they were better defined. The Romantic tales were most popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and were frequently geared to the peasant milieu, as evidenced by such details as the anonymous hero and the unsophisticated background. However, there is an inherent difference between the hero tale and the folktale of this period in the nature of the protagonist. In the one the undistinguished plot is the focus, but in the hero tale the background is more well-defined to support the portrayal of the chief character. Though such was the general rule, there were tales before the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries similar to the Irish Romantic tales with feasts, multiple incidents, the imposition of tasks, journeys abroad, magic

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islands, and elements of the folkloristic settings as the ancient saga of the adventures of Art, son of Conn, bears witness.

The reading aloud of tales probably occurred no earlier than the seventeenth century; the fifteenth century still wrote and used manuscripts in close touch with the storyteller. Knott and Murphy observe that "Early Modern tales recorded by such scribes seem to be closer in form to that which was really told than are the manuscript forms of tales of the Old and Middle Irish periods, when manuscripts were merely monastic and scribes were interested in the historic rather than the aesthetic value of the matter they recorded." Therefore, from the fifteenth century on manuscripts were important in the continuance of the Irish story-tradition. It is important to note, moreover, that "Whether oral or literary in their origin, however, we may be certain that all Irish tales and ballads, with the few exceptions...were intended primarily to be told or chanted rather than to be read." The Celtic Revival

Ireland's last "invasion," then, succeeded where others had failed; Irish culture, Celtic culture, was suppressed in favor of Anglo-Norman culture with the subsequent relagation of the indigenous literature to near oblivion. Thus by the nineteenth century Ireland was, for all practical purposes, English. As A. E. rather poetically put it, "We may come to realize that losing [the] Druid vision of a more shining world mingling with this, we have lost the vision of that life into the likeness of which it is the true labour of the spirit to transform this life." Ireland was struggling to maintain any identity against the well-organized infusion of English culture and was
laboring against a wide-spread pejoration of its indigenous culture promulgated often by its own people.

Into this atmosphere, however, in the latter nineteenth century there arose a movement to be known as the Celtic Revival. The Revival was essentially the renaissance of Gaelic writings, all the more intriguing for having been written in a language foreign to most scholars of the day. Moreover, this body of literature offered something analogous to but different from the Greco-Roman interest that had gripped the Continent and England and had the added advantage of being peculiarly native. When just before the turn of the century Douglas Hyde and others published translations of Gaelic poetry, the course of Irish literature was influenced in two ways—through the importance of Gaelic "song and story" and the renewed use of Gaelic as a viable language. The latter was implemented as the spearhead of renewed patriotic fervor, gaining impetus by the founding in 1893 of Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League. As Stephen Gwynn explains of Hyde, "Fixed in his mind was the belief that a nation without a distinctive language was like an army without uniform: even more, that without a distinctive language there could be no distinctive national existence." The recounting of efforts to convert all Ireland to the speech of its forefathers is a story to be told elsewhere; however, one unfortunate result of the language orientation was an overweening, formulaic jingoism that began to permeate the writing of the era. Typical are writings such as those found in the series of essays by Charles Duffy, George Sigerson, and Douglas Hyde. In their The Revival of Irish Literature Duffy's essay "What Irishmen May Do for Irish Literature" is the kind

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of patriotic writing so popularly identified with Irish literature in
general. Moreover, as evidenced by his essay the terms Celtic and
Irish erroneously came to be used interchangeably. Though his plea for
modern volumes written in Gaelic was intended to offset the paucity
of information the Irish knew of their own nation, the limited audience
for Gaelic writings seemed automatically to doom Irish literature to
esoterica.\(^79\) The real import of the Celtic Revival was in the use of
Celtic legends and motifs. The poetry of Moore and of Ferguson was
among the earliest literature of this period to implement Celtic themes.
The publication in 1889 of Yeats' "The Wanderings of Oisin" popularized
the use of Celtic material. Whether or not, as has been suggested, the
Revival proper "began" with Yeats, it certainly received its impetus
from him. His renderings of Celtic themes were heralded not only in
Ireland, but throughout the literary world, a popularity that made cer-
tain aspects of Celtic culture as familiar as Greco-Roman ones. With
Yeats Irish things suddenly became perfectly respectable subjects.
There then accrued a group of Irish writers, most of whom did not read
or speak Gaelic but were able, nevertheless, to implement Gaelic
themes and moods into their writings, writings good enough to catch the
attention of the world outside Ireland. The coterie was composed of
three circles which together made up the core of the Irish Academy. In
the center were Yeats, A. E., Synge, Lady Gregory, George Moore, Edward
Martyn, and Douglas Hyde. In the "second circle" were Padraic Colum,
James Stephens, John Eglinton (William Kirkpatrick Magee), Lord Dusany,
Stephen MacKenna, and Oliver St. John Gogarty. On the third level were
Lennox Robinson, Stephen Gwynn, Denis Gwynn, L. A. Strong, St. John Er-
vine, E. A. Boyd, Frank O'Connor, Susan Mitchell, Daniel Corkery, Darrell

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Figgis, A. E. Malone. The association lasted from the recognizable immediate beginnings of the Revival in the 1890's to about the middle of the 1920's, though the Revival itself continued until about the 1940's. Most of these writers came to treat the Irish myths in one form or another.

The Irish interest in folklore and myth was linked to the general European Romantic movement with its interest in antiquities and the supernatural. But unlike English and Continental Romantic literature which borrowed its myths from the Greco-Roman culture, Irish literature tended to use its own mythology. Hence, because the myth was indigenous, the Irish literature gained a "peculiar intensity."

According to Austin Clarke, another difference separating Irish and English poetic tradition was the Irish "mingling of landscape and lore...topographical excitement...the expression of a new emotional experience." The association of tales with place and the "topographical excitement" were no doubt part of the same ancient Irish cultural synthesis that produced that large body of ancient place-lore—the Dinnshenchas. The possibilities of unusual psychical motifs were amplified by the new strains of occultist beliefs which were themselves grounded in Celtic doctrines of rebirth and the Otherworld.

Much of the literature of present-day Ireland tends to use myths, if it uses them at all, as merely referential material. But the use of myth in the literature of the Celtic Renaissance evoked a purity and a profundity born of the historical and psychical associations of the tales. No longer simply "obscure country beliefs and superstitions,"
the myths were, then, a vehicle for transliterating the essence of
Irish mysticism. Whereas in England even as early as Shakespeare and
Signey, fairy folk were merely bits of imaginative fancy, in Ireland
they continued well into the twentieth century to be if not literal
natural forces then major cultural symbols, restored to former glory
by the writers of the Celtic resurgence. As Austin Clarke points out,
"In brooding over our surviving fairy lore, these new Irish poets
brought back imaginative feeling to a theme that had come to be re-
garded as merely playful. They had discovered, for good or bad, the
people of the Sidhe."
But herein lay a problem. What began as an
idealist effort to revitalize Irish culture became transmuted into
transient literary fashion. The idealism of the Celtic Renaissance
became to some merely a cause célèbre or worse a new coloration for
old themes. The Celtic Renaissance was nearly engulfed by the Celtic
Twilight, an introverted sub-movement that capitalized on saga motifs
and infused its writing with pseudo-Celtic characteristics. Clarke
explains the problem: "As a literary phase, a passing experience,
the twilight mood was fast becoming a vogue, so that soon all that is
vague, wistful and dreamful was assumed to be characteristic of the
Celtic race here and elsewhere."
Furthermore, the languor so implied
was in perfect accord with the new mode of ennui, the popular hallmark
of the sensationalist "decadence," the literary mode that had captured
the imagination of the current British and Continental writers. For-
tunately short-lived, the Celtic Twilight did serve, however, to further
popularize things Irish, and happily its more detrimental effects were
quickly outgrown by the better writers.
The Myths--Definition and Evolution and the Heroic Ideal

The vehicle for Celtic themes was in Ireland, as in other nations, the oral tradition in which originated the indigenous stories or sagas. The question immediately arises, of course, how much of these stories is myth and how much fact. A knotty problem at best due to the paucity of written records of these very earliest times, this difficulty does not prevent the sagas from providing several very important functions as regards credibility. By finding the legendary Troy Heinrich Schlie mann proved that ancient tales can have foundation in fact. Likewise, external evidence in archaeological finds and linguistic internal evidence suggest the general truth of the saga accounts of life in the late Bronze and early Iron Ages, particularly the veracity of accounts of customs, dress, housing and war and its accoutrements.

Theories of their authorship are also pertinent to their historicity. Though A. E. suggests that the "strange similitude [that] unites all the characters" implies a central author for the sagas, most scholars see a more diversified origin for the tales. Sean Ó Faolain discusses the whole question of the tales' being the composites of an epic. Proper epics are "tales from which the ultimate emergence was their human dignity rather than the adventitious dignity of semi-divinity or semi-historicity." Moreover, he maintains that a true epic is progress towards "intellectual freedom." To humanize gods into human heroes that are believable is movement toward this intellectual freedom. But to super-impose supernatural deeds or fictive claims to history is to go back from intellectual freedom. The Táin, he maintains, is epic material requiring the organizational powers
of a Homeric genius. It must be pointed out that, contrary to A. E. and O'Faolain, most critics propose multiple authorship for these tales. Moreover, with reference to the mythological tales of the Greeks as example, one can scarcely equate functional supernaturalism with intellectual stultification. On the contrary, supernaturalism is a natural adjunct of human imagination and curiosity, two of the primary tools of intellectual inquiry. But the issue raised here concerning the credibility of the legendary figures must be given some attention in order to explain what are very often realistic, humanistic details of characterization, the treatment that becomes a hallmark of Stephens' redactions.

The question of validity raises the question of euhemerization in the sagas. Though technically euhemerization is the deification of human beings, scholars in Irish literature tend to argue the process both ways including in the term the humanizing of deities. Different scholars have different theories concerning the nature of the characters in the sagas, particularly the earlier ones. One view is that these characters are members of the Irish pantheon, an extremely loose, rather unformed group, composed in large measure of personified manifestations of nature; in this respect the stories are essentially religious. Others hold that these characters are historical figures whose exploits have become mythologized through the passage of time and human imagination. Still others see them as gods who are being termed human to destroy whatever religious significance they might have. With regards to this latter theory, the euhemerization process becomes attributable to Christianity's desire to stamp out pagan beliefs; such is, of course, a very real possibility. Yet the modification worked both ways as the
Irish made up legends about Christian figures such as St. Patrick as they once did about Cuchulain and Fionn.

Irish saga traces the origin of heroes back to the legendary Tuatha De Danann; scholarly theories as to the exact nature of these people range from the concept that they are Irish gods and goddesses to the idea that they are an actual race of early inhabitants whose exploits have become mythologized. Whatever their origin, they have become in much Irish literature transmuted into the Sidhe, the special fairy folk of Ireland who could be as malevolent as they were beautiful. But it is the heroic characters themselves whose nature is most avidly questioned. Eleanor Hull, for example, quite dogmatically claims that the personages in the saga are not historical, rather that the heroic figures, scope, and purpose are mythological, "the offspring of poetic imagination," with only some connection to history by the occasional mention or appearance of an actual historical figure. In her detailed study of the Cuchulain tales she concludes that Cuchulain, the most famous of the Irish heroes, is a reincarnation, an avatar of Lugh, the Irish sun god. Though Sualtach is said to be his earthly father, there is ample evidence elsewhere, she points out, of a divine paternity in his supernatural attributes. As the child Setanta, Cuchulain is precociously strong and courageous, evidently endowed from birth with superhuman powers. In the grips of his "battle frenzy," for instance, his head faces backwards, his body forwards, his eyes shoot from the sockets, a smoking geyser of blood spurts from the top of his head, and his whole body is swelled in a paroxysm of rage. Hull also notes that the other Red Branch heroes claim to be the descendents of gods. In
her research Hull does determine historical evidence for certain characters in this saga: Conaire, who is cited as a friend of Cuchulain, Fadila Fathach, Congal Clariugnech, and most particularly Maeve, Queen of Connacht and the daughter of Euchaid Feidleach. According to Hull, Maeve was married three times, once to Conachur, and once to two different Ailills, one a prince of Connacht. She became transmuted into the Queen of the Sidhe, and was probably the Queen Mab of English literature. Some critics claim that Maeve was the goddess personification of the state to whom the king was "wed" on the basis of such points as that her name refers to the mead drunk at such "nuptials" and that her reputed promiscuousness was part of her attributes as a fertility figure. Gerard Murphy suggests the mythological origin of Fionn by citing the following arguments: first, in the tales of Fionn there are several incidences of parallels in nomenclature. Fionn means the Fair One, the same meaning as the god Lugh's name. As Lugh fights Balar, the one-eyed giant whose eye burned up whatever it looked on, so Fionn battles Aodh (Fire) nicknamed Goll, the one-eyed. He continues by noting the prevalence of place names throughout the Celtic world derivative of both Lugh and Fionn and at times derivative of both.

With the speculation concerning the mythological origins of the Irish sagas, there remains certain determination that the sagas have an historical origin. Foremost among the scholars of such persuasion is H. M. Chadwick who contends that the historical trappings of a tale may augment the possibility that the characters of such a story are also real, that if there were a literature of heroic themes, then a his-
to historical heroic age would have spawned it. Chadwick's monumental work in *The Heroic Age* and in *The Growth of Literature* offers elaborate proof of both factual and interpretative nature. Though not offering conclusive evidence, of course, that the heroic figures of these tales actually existed, these studies do make denial of such idea much more difficult. There exists no conclusive proof to support either side of the controversy. It is as possible that these figures began as human beings with superior gifts as they began as gods or as products of the human imagination. Murphy suggests that the side of the question chosen is related to the purpose of the scholar: "Mythologists, therefore, may well prefer . . . to insist on the mythical aspect of the Heroic cycle. The student of literature, on the other hand, will prefer . . . to insist on the realistic human treatment of its characters and the general historicity of the background against which they are depicted."90

It is the literature, of course, that is of concern here. Though the form of Irish heroic literature may vary from poetry of the quality found in the *Iliad* to prose ornamented with the speech poetry and rhetoric of the *Táin*, the heroic sagas have several notable characteristics. They provide an aristocratic world view; they recognize loyalty, prowess, and integrity of word as virtues; boasting, if it can be fulfilled, is acceptable; idealism is blended with realism; a human becomes a hero because of his "character and action: rather than through accident or magic; the gods are portrayed as inscrutable but "necessary"; war is conceived as the "profession of princes" usually without intrigue and shaped by noblesse oblige, it is straight-forward and decided by the personal bravery of the leaders. Their purpose is to illustrate the

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qualities of the individual hero put to the test; herein he must exhibit such heroic characteristics as loyalty, integrity, fearlessness against overwhelming odds, quick and courageous reaction to danger. 91

The tone of the sagas is that of the general nobility of its heroes. Eleanor Hull comments, for example, on the lack of "grossness of speech" or "licentiousness of thought" in the sagas. They have a "general purity of . . . tone and language." It is true that certain practices, even notations, seem "blemishes" but these "arise out of certain primitive habits and certain tribal regulations that, though repellent to modern ideas, were not so in the age in which they arose, or out of attempts to explain the great mysteries of life and change and renewal before which the savage mind has always bowed in instinctive awe; or out of a simpler and more naturalistic mode of expression than modern taste allows." 92 The sagas are pointedly lacking in humorous hyperbole or "grotesque buffoonery," at least particularly in the Red Branch cycle, though there is some instance in the later Fenian tales. But the heroic tales do contain humor existing in the witty exchanges between characters and lighter incidents and inventions which relieve the weightiness of the epic. Humor might also appear in connection with the macabre; Cuchulain dying is made to laugh by a raven which, stooping to drink the dying hero's blood, is caught in the wound. This tendency to be unmoved by one's own plight is typical of primitive heroism, and the laughter is an earmark of the peculiar Celtic ability to laugh both at danger and the grotesque. One of the most intense reactions against heroic literature is opposition to its "barbarism" and certainly in the literature of early Ireland, as in the graphic descriptions of Anglo-
Saxon literature, brutality is treated in a strangely casual manner. The Irish sagas, however, seldom illustrate brutality for its sake alone but present it simply as an integral part of the realism of the conditions portrayed as well as to heighten the heroic qualities of the participants who might still retain admirable traits in the face of slaughter and rampage. As Hull observes, barbarism did not mean a "corresponding barbarity of thought." Rather, there are continual instances of honor and chivalry exhibited in the tales: "The heroes are always gentlemen, their appeal is to noble motives; their chivalrous generosity to their enemies is only equalled by their devotion to their friends." The combat between Cuchulain and Ferdia illustrates this generosity carried to an "extraordinary" level. Yet with all these idealistic qualities the saga heroes retain a humanness, a casualness reminiscent of the guilelessness of childhood.

Notable in the sagas is the love element, the tender relationships of which the characters are capable. These love stories, some of the oldest in Europe, illustrate the nature of the Celtic woman not as the looming women of Scandinavia nor the fragile women of some European stories; rather they are in their own right both heroic and gentle, combining femininity with steely commitment to purpose and possessing the constitution to wield considerable influence.

The Irish heroic ideal, then, in A. E.'s terms is plainly divorced from the merely "gigantic." The "gigantic" is that present in the stories as fantasy or "extravagance" which should not be mistaken for heroism; for example, in Cuchulain's battle fury, he is not heroic, but when he is moved at the death of Ferdia, he is, for heroism "is
a quality of the soul and not of the body." Obviously A. E. is insisting, albeit in sentimental terms, that the hero has a grandeur of soul, not merely expanded human attributes. He is larger than the context of his story and is the embodiment of his nation's cultural identity as well as an entity in himself. It is in this quality of heroic literature, then, that "the nobler influences of art arise, not because heroes are the theme, but because of noble treatment and the intuition which perceives the inflexible working out of great moral laws."
CHAPTER ONE--FOOTNOTES

1 T. G. E. Powell, *The Celts* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958), p. 18. Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick in the initial chapter of *The Celtic Realms* point out that the term "Celt" may be a cognate of the Gothic term hildja meaning "to fight" and they cite Strabo's distinction of the term for the inhabitants of Gaul living above Marseilles as opposed to those farther north who term themselves Galatae. Caesar writes also that the inhabitants of Gaul called themselves Celtae.


3 In her work on the Cuchulain saga Eleanor Hull points out the connection between the celebrated Irish epic the Táin Bó Cuilgine and Indian mythology. The Táin centers on the raid led by Queen Maeve against Ulster to obtain the Donn bull to match her own Finnbennach. There bulls, according to Ms. Hull, bear a striking resemblance to the composite Indian bull Indra, and as in the Indian myths, she suggests that the struggle immortalized in the Táin is actually the mythological conflict between day and night. Dillon and Chadwick in *The Heroic Age* also offer a brief but interesting discussion of legal similarities between Irish and Indian cultures.

4 Eleanor Hull, ed., *The Cuchulain Saga in Irish Literature* (London: David Nutt, 1898), pp. lxvii-lxviii. Such a theory, plausible as it may seem, does not explain certain exceptions. For example, on this theory Hull bases her conclusion that due to his particular attributes Cuchulain was a sun god. But even granting that his characteristics are god-like, the question remains why was he not worshipped.

5 Pádraic Pearse, *Three Lectures on Gaelic Topics* (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1898), p. 35.


8 The *Book of Invasions*, one of the annals of popular but questionable accuracy, lists five or six invasions—(by Cesair), by Partholon, by Nemed, by the Fir Bolg, by the Tuatha De Danann, and by the Children of Mil. Perhaps more historically verifiable is a list proposed by T. F. O'Rahilly in his *Early Irish History and Mythology*, which is based on dialectical differences and archeological remains: the Priteni, the Bolgi or Belgae, the Laginian tribes, and the Goldels.


11Powell, p. 65. In the Red Branch cycle reference is made to the three colors of Cuchulain's hair, a coloration due perhaps to the dyeing effect caused by lime washing.


13Powell, pp. 85 and 98.

14Powell, p. 73.

15An interesting account of the múath system and a discussion of the "missing" fifth of ancient Irish politico-geographic division may be found in Chapter IX of T. F. O'Rahilly's Early Irish History and Mythology.

16viz. Byrne, Irish Kings, Chapters 1 and 2.

17Powell, pp. 75-77.

18Powell, pp. 77-78.


20Stephens, pp. 252-253.

21There were occasions of polygamy, though under such circumstance one wife held a superior position (cetmuinter). Stephens' stories give evidence of monogamy save in that of Etain.


24Powell, p. 102.

Dillon, pp. 13-14. The twelfth century Irish ballads may have been a development of the speech poems found in the prose sagas and place-lore tales for like these speeches the ballads are essentially dramatic lyrics told often in first and second person, seldom third person. Also influenced by the continental laid, the Irish laoidh are lyrical; some are on learned subjects, some are verse narrations, some are a mixture of forms and modes.

27 Stephen Gwynn, Irish Literature and Drama in the English Language: A Short History (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1936), p. 5. The bard technically was inferior to the Fillid. According to Douglas Hyde in A Literary History of Ireland (p. 486ff.), there were two main classes of bards each of which was divided into eight levels, each with particular meters to be appropriated by no other rank. The Fill were divided into seven grades, the highest level being that of the ollamh. Through twelve to twenty years of study he learned three hundred and fifty kinds of versification and two hundred and fifty prime stories and one hundred secondary stories.

28 Stephens, Irish Fairy Tales, pp. 187-188.

29 Gerard Murphy in his Saga and Myth in Ancient Ireland lists the following ancient tale categories: togla, destructions; tana, cattle-raids; tochmarca, woollings; catha, battles; yatha, caves (incidents in famous caves); imrama, voyages; aite, deaths; fessa, feasts; forbasa, sieges; echbral, adventures or journeys; altheda, elopements; airgne, slaughters; tomadmann, eruptions; sluagair, expeditions; tochomlada, immigrations; fisl or aislinge, visions; serca, love-tales.


31 Murphy, p. 31.

32 Murphy, p. 30.

33 Hull, p. xviii.

34 Murphy, p. 8.

35 Murphy, p. 10. Stephens comments in his review of James Cousins' The Wisdom of the West that when man turns to the printed word and ceases to rely on memory, wisdom becomes no longer internal but "only an intellectual curio which any person may tamper with or misuse as he pleases."

36 Murphy, p. 10.

38 Rees, p. 15.
39 Hull, p. xvii.
40 Hull, p. xxv.
42 Rolleston, p. xlii.
43 Pearse, pp. 52-53.
44 Pearse, p. 28.
47 Arnold, pp. 117-118.
49 Eglinton, p. 37. Eglinton points out that this vision is one reason Christianity was more easily accepted in Ireland. It "proclaimed the existence of the other world about which the Celt never doubted."
51 Stephens, Deirdre, p. 268.
52 Pearse, p. 21.
53 Rolleston, p. xxxvii.
55 A. E., p. 18.
57 A. E., p. 3. Stephens approaches this "naivete" in two ways. He is more than competent to see the world through a child's eyes. Only through a very real sense of understanding could he portray Deirdre's
adolescent confusion about her feelings of awakening ardor or Fionn's amusing sense of autonomy while he lives as a young boy with his druid women guardians. But Stephens also realizes that the direct statement, the acceptance of appearance are also unsophisticated and eminently natural.

58 O'Faolain, pp. 3-4.
59 O'Faolain, p. 11.
60 Duffy, et. al., pp. 110-111.
63 Knott and Murphy, p. 12.
64 Murphy, pp. 17-26.
65 Murphy, p. 26.
67 O'Connor, p. 35.
68 Hull, pp. xv-xvi.
69 Knott and Murphy, pp. 2-3.
70 Knott and Murphy, p. 3.
71 Knott and Murphy, p. 167.
72 Knott and Murphy, p. 168.
73 Knott and Murphy offer as example the poems of Ladhy Dall O hViginn with their references to Hercules, Daedalus, Troy, Mandeville's travels, King Arthur, and continental fables and exempla.
74 Knott and Murphy, p. 192.
75 Knott and Murphy, p. 193.
76 A. E., p. 6.
77 E. D. Snyder in his The Celtic Revival in English Literature offers an English view of the early Celtic Revival. In the opening chapters he demonstrates how the initial beginning of the Revival might be found as early as the late eighteenth century.
N. J. O'Conor suggests that it was the intricacies of Gaelic that discouraged Irish writers from using the old legends as subject and causing them to use subjects from contemporary life. The several translations available of a number of the saga stories, however, would preclude this difficulty. It is more probable that these writers saw little future in redactions alone or in the fanatical dwelling in the past practiced by certain advocates of the Revival. Stephens in his article "The Outlook for Literature" states with picturesque certainty that "Ireland will revisit her past with vast curiosity and reverence but she will not remain there long enough to eat a railway sandwich. She will return with her booty to the eternally present time of the eternally modern world."

Austin Clarke, Poetry in Modern Ireland (Dublin: Colm O Lochlainn, 1951), p. 8.

Clarke, p. 12.

Clarke, p. 15.

Clarke, pp. 18-19.


O'Faolain, p. 15. Stephens was himself of the opinion that a primitive genius of the culture, if not of an individual, was responsible for the sagas. In his Times article on myth Stephens points out "It is not easy to believe that the daring speculation, the vast generalization contained in myth have been forged by barbarously ignorant people, but if so, these latter are the degenerate descendents of greatly cultivated races whose wisdom died with them, or of which wisdom nothing is left but the rags and tatters."

Gerard Murphy, for example, defines euhemerization as the "conscious presentation as human beings of characters whom tradition still commonly regarded as divine."

viz. Hull, p. iv. It is a point, of course, that very human personages have made such claims spuriously throughout history. A claim, then, hardly constitutes proof.

It must be noted, however, that certain other scholars, most notably Nora Chadwick and Myles Dillon, believe Maeve to be fictional.

90 Murphy, pp. 41-42.
91 Murphy, p. 147.
92 Hull, p. xli.
93 Hull, p. xliii.
94 A. E., p. 10.
95 A. E., p. 11.
CHAPTER TWO

STEPHENS' NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

A number of critics label Stephens a gifted fictionalist. Some would go a step further to term him a fabulist whose whole purpose in writing redactions of Celtic myths was to construct a myth system for Ireland analogous to that of Greece and Rome. While his stories do flesh out figures in the Irish mythological past, his versions are obviously deficient in the formulaic religiosity common to classical myth. Moreover, Stephens himself makes too strong a claim to originality to propose other than artistic purposes for the writing of his works. As Augustine Martin proposes, "At no stage do we get the impression of an author writing to a programme or working to a preordained fictional formula. Each successive story is encountered as a particular and unique challenge to the shaping and transforming imagination." Stephens conceived of the writing of these stories as an original endeavor. In a letter to W. T. H. Howe in response to Howe's suggestion that he write a book of Irish fairy tales, he flatly stated, "I would, of course, have to entirely write them." And four months before the publication of Irish Fairy Tales he claimed in a letter to Sir Frederick Macmillan that the stories were not translations or retellings but originals. As is shown below, Stephens was not exactly truthful, for he did on occasion borrow heavily from renditions of the tales by other authors; but
In each is Stephens' own mark of genius in details rendered, tone, arrangement, inclusions and exclusions within the story line and, most important, in manner of characterization.

As illustrated above, Stephens made liberal references to elements of authentic Celtic life in his redactions. But the Celticism of Stephens' tales is born also of his utilization of bardic technique, that is Stephens' stories are informed by a Gaelic air produced by his attention to certain characteristics found in the original sagas and tales. N. J. O'Conor lists some of the more important characteristics of Gaelic tales. The narrative itself is usually complex and lacking a unified conceptualization. It is often characterized by terseness, striking detail, alliteration, and parallel structure. The mood of Gaelic literary works is frequently infused with a sense of dignified fatalism, a pathos. But O'Conor is quick to point out that this somberness is not the "melancholy" popularly attributed to the Celts often on the basis of Matthew Arnold's treatise, but rather a wistfulness, a cheerful acceptance of fate. However, to use another of Arnold's phrases, "natural magic" is abundantly present, that is, Gaelic literature seems to exist simultaneously and unpredictably in the realms of the natural and the supernatural. It is interesting here that O'Conor singles out James Stephens of the Irish writers for capturing the Gaelic spirit, especially in the following characteristics: short sentences, groups of vivid details, figurative language based on nature, sententiousness, "simple, dignified words."  

When in 1913 W. T. H. Howe proposed that he compose a book of fairy tales, Stephens set to work putting together such a volume with
considerable enthusiasm. But Stephens decided against directing the tales to a juvenile audience as Howe had originally suggested. Rather Stephens saw the tales in the light of the modern emphasis on psychological motivations and characterizations. By October of 1918 Stephens had sent James Pinker, his literary agent, "Mongan's Frenzy," "The Adventures of Nera," and "The Vision of Angus Og" and "The Beech Wood," all but the first of which would be included in the later volume *In the Land of Youth*. In a letter to Pinker in November, 1918, Stephens expressed his evident pride in the crafting of these tales; with his characteristic bravado Stephens wrote "the treatment in each case is so modern that modernity itself is put of date by it." Yet after penning the first fifty-six pages of *Irish Fairy Tales*, Stephens wrote Howe in October of 1920 that the work was equal to the best he had ever done and in a subsequent letter crowed over the new volume "It's the Goat's Toe!" It was the first tale, "The Story of Tuan Mac Cairill," of which he was most proud. In a letter to John Quinn in November of 1921 he proclaimed "Tuan" the best story he had written to date. And several months later to John Houston he expressed the same sentiments. It must be pointed out, however, that Stephens was wont to think whatever he had just finished was "the goat's toe," for upon its completion he proclaimed the story of Etain in *In the Land of Youth* his "best" and by 1924 Deirdre.

Out of his work with Irish legend Stephens began thinking seriously of writing a series of related works. By December of 1914, roughly a year after Howe's original proposal, Stephens set himself the goal of writing a comprehensive work "which would embody and define the national consciousness of Ireland." His first inclination was to do a contem-
porary work patterned after Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine*. But after writing *The Insurrection in Dublin* and *Green Branches*, inspired by the Easter Rebellion of 1916, Stephens found in the Irish past the inspiration for a more indigenous work. Reincarnations, published in April, 1918, was the first product of his new focus, being translations, or more exactly imitations or inventions, based on poems by the Gaelic poets Rafferty, O'Rahilly, O'Bruadair, and Ferriter. By October of 1920 he had published *Irish Fairy Tales*, in September, 1923, *Deirdre*, and in October, 1924, *In the Land of Youth*, though it was actually composed before *Deirdre*. By 1920 Stephens had already decided to compose a five-volume rendition of the *Táin Bó Cúilnge*. In a letter to Sir Frederick Macmillan in March of 1920 he wrote of the *Táin*, "It is a prose epic, possibly the most important in Europe. . . . Although the subject is of vast antiquity I am handling it in the most direct and modern fashion." In *In the Land of Youth* is composed of remscéla or prefatory tales to the Tain and *Deirdre* is also one of these, which explains the presence of Fergus mac Roy in Connacht. As Stephens explained to Macmillan, "each volume will be a complete story in itself and can be read by itself, but each will yet form an introduction to the volume which succeeds it. The action will cover a period of about seventy years in time and the whole extent of Ireland in area." The internal order of both *Deirdre* and *In the Land of Youth* is roughly chronological; the individual tales in *In the Land of Youth* are arranged, of course, in keeping with the overall framework involving Maeve, Aillill and Fergus, so that the appropriate tale is told that reveals certain of Maeve's characteristics at the most suitable time. But the order of *Irish Fairy Tales* is another
matter. In a letter to Sir Frederick Macmillan dated February, 1920, Stephens claims cryptically that the order of *Irish Fairy Tales* is as it should be for the stories form a "natural sequence." What exactly is the "natural sequence" is speculative. Stephens claims here that there is no story until "The Wooing of Becfola" in the order he gives that involves "passion or jealousy." Such is not true, however, for "The Birth of Bran," listed two stories earlier certainly turns on the jealousy of Uct Dealv, albeit with a humorous rather than the serious treatment accorded the other stories of passion in this volume. Nor does their origin appear to be the key to the order of the stories. "The Story of Tuan Mac Cairill" is logically the first story since it involves a return to the very earliest times in the Irish legendary past. But the next three stories are of the Fanian cycle followed by one of the Romantic *tochmarca* or wooings, followed by three more Fenian stories and one of the Romantic *echtraí* or adventure tales followed by the late Fenian story "Mongan's Frenzy." This last tale, like the first, involves reincarnation. The two earlier tales "The Birth of Bran" and "Oisín's Mother" relate thematically as they concern metamorphoses. This one motif and the general orientation of the tales to the Fenian saga are apparently the major unifying theses of the stories.

The Relationship Between Stephens' Redactions and Manuscript and Other Redacted Versions

Stephens, of course, was not the only Irish writer to see the interesting possibilities in writing redactions of the old tales. To determine with some degree of certainty exactly what in the tales was original with Stephens and what was borrowed, a much fuller collation

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study involving both manuscript and redacted versions is necessary. In this present study, however, a very perfunctory look at some possibly influential redactions and translations suggests to what extent Stephens' claims to originality are justified.

In his analysis of Stephens' works Augustine Martin identifies three main sources of Stephens; redactions of Gaelic tales: S. J. O'Grady's stories of Cuchulain, Lady Gregory's works *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* and *Gods and Fighting Men*, and P. W. Joyce's *Old Celtic Romances*. Stephens may have borrowed directly from Lady Gregory's volumes, but O'Grady's and Joyce's redactions apparently influenced Stephens in spirit rather than in subject, for none of their tales in those volumes appear in his works directly. Joyce claims to have written his "translations" in the style of the old shenachies. He proposed to follow the original in terms of plot but not in wording, a technique, of course, followed by Stephens, who evidently agreed with Joyce's observation that "a translation may either follow the very words, or reproduce the life and spirit of the original; but no translation can do both. If you render word for word, you lose the spirit; if you wish to give the spirit and manner, you must depart from the exact words, and frame your own phrases." Also available to Stephens were more scholarly works such as Eleanor Hull's *The Cuchullin Saga*, S. H. O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica*, and A. H. Leahy's *Heroic Romances of Ireland*. Another source, particularly for the stories of Tuan mac Cairéll and Mongan, is Kuno Meyer's translations in *The Voyage of Bran*. Stephens chose not only to redact these stories by retaining the color of their own Celtic spirit but also to retell them in terms of his own
personal yet indigenous Gaelic technique. The problem here is, of course, that save for identical wording such as is found in certain of the Gregory renditions, one cannot state categorically which version of the tale influenced Stephens directly, if any. There is always the chance that his acquaintance with the story comes orally out of his own background. Though he was acquainted with Gaelic, it is assumed that he relied on a translation or redaction as source of the tale and one may speculate among those available to him which one it was. What Stephens has done in almost every case is to amplify the story particularly with regards to character whichever the rendition on which he based his own work.

Martin identifies three ways in which Stephens' redactions vary from those noted above: his mystical treatment of vision, metamorphosis, re-incarnation and the afterlife; the cultivation of comic grotesquerie; the deliberate complexity of narrative structure, particularly in In the Land of Youth. Other critics too have noted ways in which Stephens differs from other writers. On the one hand, Benedict Kiely suggests that, unlike such writers as Padraic Colum, Stephens' characters are never "at ease" with reality. If by ill at ease he means naive and a bit passionate, he is entirely correct, for like mortals everywhere, Stephens' characters know themselves but slightly. And within their milieu where the unexpected is a daily occurrence, his characters seek, sometimes fruitlessly, stabilization in themselves. Hence, as Dorothy Hoare proposes, Stephens humanizes both mortals and immortals to counteract the blurring and emasculating effect the realms of reality and fantasy have on each other. Stephens' figures are somewhere "between
Colum's homely heroes... and O'Grady's dignified giants," that is, they are neither comfortable peasants nor rigid aristocrats. Hoare even goes so far as to say that Yeats himself is not as good with these legendary figures as Stephens. There is, she says, "a vital difference between his clear re-interpretation of the old matter and the romantic mirage which prevented the better poet in Yeats from such a direct response."18

A comparison of Stephens' versions with such previous works shows Stephens generally following the plot of the narratives. He may, however, differ significantly in emphasis or detail from the other redactions and in amplification, particularly through description and conversation, from the originals.

The first tale in *Irish Fairy Tales* concerns one Tuan mac Cairell who confesses to St. Finnian of Moville his dual genealogy; he is the son of Cairell, King of Ulster, who in efforts at historicity has been identified as an Ulidian king who died in 581 or 587; he is also one of the original settlers of Ireland with Partholon and has through metamorphoses experienced several existences including those of various animals. The manuscript version, found originally in the *Book of Invasions* is translated in Kuno Meyer's *The Voyage of Bran*. Here, as elsewhere, Stephens has followed nearly exactly the plot as given in Meyer as well as the general dignified tone, though he has added in particular an initial characterization of St. Finnian, designed no doubt to illustrate Stephens' attitude toward the clergy. Stephens' rendition was originally conceived as a separate story and had been printed initially in *The Irish Statesman* serially June 28 through July 12,
1919. A fuller rendition was incorporated into *Irish Fairy Tales.*

The next three stories are from the Fenian cycle: "The Boyhood of Fionn," "The Birth of Bran," and "Oisin's Mother," which may be found scattered through several ancient manuscripts. An examination of these same stories in Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* reveals that Stephens may have borrowed from the Gregory material. For example, in "The Boyhood of Fionn" the story line and some of the phraseology ("beautiful, long-haired Muirne") is strikingly similar or even identical to Lady Gregory's "The Coming of Finn," though Stephens makes some notable exceptions, for example, omitting Fionn's long poem. And other examples of differences here illustrate Stephens' command of his own details. In Gregory the robber Flacuil and the king's warrior Fiacha are two different men. For compression and added interest Stephens makes them the same man. Stephens, moreover, names Aillen's spear Birgha and though Fionn is told in Gregory that in order to avoid being put to sleep by Aillen's spell he should put the shaft of the spear to his forehead, in Stephens he is told to sniff it, a less dignified but more picturesque detail. "The Birth of Bran" in Gregory and in Stephens is the same plot with the primary difference that in Gregory Bran's capacity as a hunting dog is emphasized. Stephens, of course, makes much more of the character of Fergus Fionnlaith, thereby making the story much longer than in Gregory. The third Fenian story "Oisin's Mother," like the others, was probably influenced by Lady Gregory's version since again the story line and some of the phrases are very similar. One might note the following comparison:
In Lady Gregory's version:

And at the end he struck her with a hazel rod, and with that she was forced to follow him, and she looking back all the while at the child, and crying after him that any one would pity her. And he tried hard to follow after her, and made every attempt, and cried with grief and rage, but he had no power to move, and when he could hear his mother no more he fell on the grass and his wits went from him.²⁰

In Stephens' version:

. . . in the end he struck her with a hazel rod, so that she was forced to follow him when he went away. She was looking back at me all the time and she was crying so bitterly that any one would pity her. I tried to follow her also, but I could not move, and I cried after her too, with rage and grief, until I could see her no more and hear her no more. Then I fell on the grass, my senses went away from me. . . .

It is also notable that the order and titles of these three tales is the same. Interestingly enough here, however, Saeve's moving speech to Fionn upon their first meeting is the same as that Leahy gives to Etain in his version of the Tochmarc Etaine.²²

"The Wooing of Becfola," the original manuscript version in Egerton 1781, may be taken from Standish O'Grady's version in Silva Gademica.²³ Stephens does make some notable changes here, amplifying the characterizations of Dermod and Crimthann in the opening conversations and changing O'Grady's nebulous comment that Becfola and her maid "lost their way" to an amplified passage regarding a sojourn in Faery. "The Little Brawl at Allen" also may have come from O'Grady's volume of translations. Having apparently borrowed Richard Irvine Best's copy of
Silva Gadelica, Stephens in a letter to Best praises "The Little Brawl at Almhan" and speaks of plans to "tell that tale. . . . What a pair of demi-gods Fionn and Goll are. . . . I think when we have finished this 'Fairy book' we will have deserved well of Ireland."  

O'Grady's translation of the Additional Manuscript #18, 747—"The Little Brawl at Almhan"—begins accurately but dully with a catalogue of Fenian heroes; Stephens begins with the end of the controversy itself with a bit of tongue-in-cheek about the heroes, for Cairell and Conan, like two pugnacious little boys, with great difficulty restrain themselves from plunging again into a fray. Other changes, such as a defter handling of emotions in Goll's speech with Fionn, show Stephens aiming for greater depth of characterization. In "The Carl of the Drab Coat" Stephens again follows O'Grady closely in plot though with greater exaggeration and some shifting of detail for greater narrative effect. The style of the two writers here, too, is lively though O'Grady is more detailed and includes a number of Irish words to the complication though greater authenticity of the passage.

For "The Enchanted Cave of Cesh Corran" Stephens may have read the original story in either Lady Gregory or O'Grady inasmuch as the story is included by both. O'Grady's translation of Additional Manuscript #18,747 is more heroic than Stephens' since Stephens' is a more psychologically oriented rendition in which the "cowardice" of the Fianna is emphasized to the greater glory of Goll mac Morna. In O'Grady the focus is upon Fionn. In comparison to Lady Gregory's version, Stephens follows the original manuscript by giving not three but four daughters to Conaran. Stephens' description of the hags is, moreover, considerably
more detailed. Unlike Stephens, however, Lady Gregory includes the pertinent detail that Fergus True-Lips, the poet of the Fianna, is designated by Goll to be loosened from his bonds first.

The story "Becuma of the White Skin" is the "Adventure of Art, son of Conn" (Echtrae Airt Meic Cuinn) which Stephens has titled after the female antagonist of the story. The story is found only in the Book of Fermoy. Stephens follows the version given there closely though he rounds out the characterization which is somewhat garbled in the original, giving sound often psychologically oriented reasons for their behavior.

In writing "Mongan's Frenzy" Stephens put together several manuscript versions. The Tucait Baile Mongain is the source of the first of the story, how Mongan's wife, the Flame Lady, pressured him to tell her the story of himself and Duv Laca and how Mongan, his wife, and troop caught in a hailstorm found shelter in Faery. It is here in a somewhat inebriated state (hence the term "frenzy") that Mongan relates the story of his former life as Fionn. The "Frenzy" itself is the Compert Mongán ocus Serc Duibe-Lacha do Mongán from the Book of Fermoy. It is entirely possible that Stephens came in contact with the story in translation in Kuno Meyer's version in The Voyage of Bran. Stephens follows the plot closely although with expansions to amplify characterization. Notably, however, Stephens introduces the story as one told by Calride, a storyteller, to St. Finnian of Moville, a point that doesn't appear in the translation but one that does connect this final story in Irish Fairy Tales with the initial one about Tuan mac Cairell.

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In his In the Land of Youth Stephens may have been influenced by Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne, for herein may be found the adventure of Nera in her story "Cruachan" and Aengus' love debilitation in her "The Dream of Angus Og," though both stories appear elsewhere. In the former, though the plot is again almost exactly paralleled by Stephens' rendition, a few details are altered; for example, in Lady Gregory's version, unlike in Stephens', Nera's beloved in the Sidhe sends Nera to warn Maeve and Ailill of the forthcoming attack by the Sidhe. In Stephens she merely explains the difference between the mock-up of the attack witnessed by Nera and the actual attack to be carried out next Samhain. Nera is the one who feels he must leave Faery momentarily to warn the camp in Connacht. Likewise, in "The Dream of Angus Og" Lady Gregory amplifies the character of Caer whose abilities in enchantment include special powers to make herself a girl one year, a bird the next. Caer scarcely appears in Stephens save as the incomparably beautiful object of Angus' affections.

In Withdrawn in Gold Brandon Saul said of Stephen's story of Etain that "the unbelievable becomes the avidly believed." Certainly Stephens was challenged to make credible one of the most incredible stories of the Gaelic canon. It is a three-part story involving the transmutation of the lovely Etain from the esteemed wife of Midir and mistress of Angus Og to a fly which is blown across time and space to be swallowed by the wife of Etar and reborn as her daughter who marries the High King of Ireland and who is reclaimed by Midir in a wager made during a chess game. Stephens' personal liking for the story is evident in a letter he wrote to Stephen MacKenna in November, 1924. In reference to In the Land
of Youth he says, "the whole first half of my book is as God permitted it to be. I count it as part of the inescapable drudgery of the Tain, and I worked it to the very limits of my ability. But I pin myself all over with medals and I put cock feathers in my hat about the second part [the "Feast of Lughnasa" containing Maeve's narration of the Tochmarc Etaine]. There the story gripped me and, let who will say me nay, I gripped it, and made of it a great, a noble and wonderous tale." Versions of the story may be found in Egerton 1782, the Book of the Dun Cow (a fragmented version), the Yellow Book of Lecan, and the Book of Leinster. As with the other tales Stephens' greatest contribution to its redaction is amplification, here most notably in the first part of the story. Stephens recreates with considerable emphasis the psychology of the proverbial "woman scorned," produced by the quadrangular love affair of Midir, Etain, Angus Og, and Fuamnach.

In Heroic Romances of Ireland A. H. Leahy translates two versions of the tale; the Egerton 1872 manuscript is a shorter version and one which describes Midir kidnaping Etain and Eochaid taking her again by force to himself. The Book of the Dun Cow version includes the first part of the story involving Etain's and Fuamnach's rivalry, the famous chess games played ultimately for possession of Etain and Midir's trick of confusing Eochaid with many "Etains." Stephens follows this version in his redaction of the tale though here too he makes certain changes. For example, in Stephens, unlike in Leahy, Etain does not reveal or cannot reveal her origin since memories of her former existence lie deep within her subconscious. At the instigation of the first chess game Midir reveals his name in the Leahy translation, but in
Stephens he does not. Stephens evidently expects to amplify the relationship between Etain and Eochaid and to add increased suspense to the story line. In Leahy, Midir demands the right to kiss Etain as his stake, though evidently he intends thereby to gain access to her for the purpose of taking her away with him. In Stephens, Midir simply demands Etain herself. Though in Leahy, Eochaid marshalls his forces, there is no mention directly of how he plans to deploy them. In Stephens, however, Midir is to be trampled to death should he attempt to leave with Etain. The third part of the story concerning Etain's daughter found in Leahy is not included in Stephens. Stephens' changes here obviously reflect not only his sense of a unified and coherent tale but also his attempts to present a consistent portrayal of the characters involved.

Speaking of the strange tale at the very beginning of the Táin, the story of the two swineherds Fruic and Ruicht, Stephens wrote to Stephen MacKenna, "Personally and in especial, I detest those pigs but there they were, and I did my real best with them." If Stephens detested the story, he, nonetheless, devoted considerable pains to the rendering of it. The story appears in Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthmne as a very brief account of the swineherds' rivalry as background to the account of the two famous bulls of the Táin. Stephens more probably read the translation and discussion of the story by Alfred Nutt in volume two of Meyer's The Voyage of Bran as background for his rendering of the story. Stephens has formed a thoroughly humorous rendition, outlandish in its exaggeration yet perfectly suitable to later evidence of the transforming hatred of the Whitehorned Bull of Cruachan for the Brown Bull of Cuilgne.
Elements of the frame story in In the Land of Youth may have come from Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne. Moreover, Maevé's speech praising her own virtues and more particularly what she expects in a husband as well as the character of MacRoth, which Stephens uses in the opening chapters of Deirdre, may be found in Lady Gregory's story "The War for the Bull of Cuailgne."

The tragic story of Deirdre is one of Ireland's best known tales and it is, therefore, not surprising to find several very early versions of it as well as numerous later redactions. The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu (Longas mac n-Uislenh) is the earliest version. The later saga version is the Fate of the Children of Uisnech (Oiled Chloinne n-Uisnig). The older version appears in the Book of Leinster, the Book of Lecan and the Egerton 1782. The Glenn Masáín manuscript offers the later, the expanded medieval version, the more popularly known account. Stephens may have found translations in any number of sources and apparently implemented both major manuscript versions in his redaction.32 Stephens evidently favored, however, the Glenn Masáín version for its fuller detail and for its less savage ending.33 Patricia McFate has done a rather detailed study of the sources of Stephens' Deirdre. The opening scene in the house of Fémimid is from the Longes mac n-Uislenh. The material about Conachur's mother is from the Scela Conchobair Maic Nessa. That of Conachur's first wife, Clothru, is from Cath Boinde, his right of seigniory with Emer from the Tochmarc Emire, Cuchulain's exploits which which are discussed by Naoise and his brothers around the fire from Macgnimride Con Culainn, the Tochmarc Emire, and the Táin itself; the portrait of Emer from Fled Bricrenn; Connla's slaying and meeting
Cuchulain in Scotland from *Foglaím con Culain*. Stephens, of course, took these narrative bits and wove them together with amplifications to make *Deirdre* very much his own tale.

The manuscript versions of the tale show Conachur and Lavarcham together raising Deirdre; Stephens has Lavarcham alone responsible for her upbringing. In the *Longes mac n-Uislenn* version Deirdre expresses a desire to find a man with "hair like the raven, and a cheek like blood, and a body like snow." Lavarcham tells her that the man she just described was Naoise and she assists them to meet. Stephens has Deirdre to see Naoise by accident with Lavarcham doing all she can to prevent Deirdre's coming in contact with eligible young men. In Stephens, unlike in the original legend, Conachur wants to marry Deirdre only after he has seen her and after she has fallen in love with Naoise. Stephens, moreover, softens the relationship between the young lovers by the tenderness of Deirdre's coercion of Naoise rather than the passionate outbursts of the original legend. Two episodes in Deirdre are apparently wholly original: Stephens' elaboration on the lonely childhood of Deirdre and the fight scene at the Red Branch. In addition to these episodes are, of course, numerous emended details.

Stephens' awareness of the variant versions of the Deirdre story may have come from prior redactions: Ferguson's 1834 "Death of the Children of Usnach," P. W. Joyce's 1878 "Fate of the Sons of Usna," T. W. Rolleston's 1911 "Deirdre and the Sons of Usna," Lady Gregory's 1902 "Fate of the Sons of Usnach," even R. D. Joyce's 1876 iambic pentameter couplet rendering, which according to H. V. Fackler's prologomena to versions of "Deirdre" had considerable original material "character
creation," and "skill at delineating motives." Similarities with contemporary versions of the story show Stephens close in general plot, as might be expected, though often different in details and in spirit. Lady Gregory's version in Cuchulain of Muirthmne is rather different from Stephens' version in detail save at the point when Conachúr interviews the three heroes as to their attitude towards the exiles and towards him. Likewise, there are similarities in Deirdre's vision of the three birds, in Deirdre's second vision of Buinne's dissertation, and in the suggestion to go to Cuchulain for aid. The text of Douglas Hyde's version also indicates amplifications similar to Stephens: the orchard through which Deirdre walked, even her appearance as an infant when she won King Conachúr over the first time, and the sadness creeping over the young future queen prior to her marriage. Augustine Martin comments that Stephens was the only writer to make this story into a novel. It is Martin's opinion that Stephens has "thus modified and domesticated" the "primitive contour of the epic" to the "psychological and social motivations of the novel." Stephens' concentration on characters is exemplified as he allows the reader to watch Deirdre develop before his eyes.

It is important here to take note of the fact that comparisons which show similarities or identities between Stephens and previous versions do not necessarily indicate influence or copying. Most versions of the story rely on translations of the originals. Certain likeness of phraseology, plot structure, names, and even characterizations are quite likely to be apparent among various versions all based on the same original or redacted source. Only when certain ideas and phrases can be proved not in the original but in reliable translations of the
same can charges of copying be leveled. Stephens quite nimbly side­
steps this issue by adding his own amplifications to the original--
fleching out the narrative with his own imaginative and interpretative
extraneous material. His vivid imagination and evident understanding
of the original characterizations serve to make his renditions quite
unique.

Stephens' Use of Saga Conventions

Stephens' connection to saga material goes much deeper than uti­
лизация of the stories themselves. Stephens picks up on certain saga
conventions as well. For example, saga descriptions tended to be for­
mulaic. Dorothy Hoare suggests that the set descriptions indicated
that "these comparisons and images were once freshly used, and were
kept in a conservative fashion because they had been considered the
best, or the only way, to give a description."41 Stephens' formulaic
descriptions of beautiful women such as Etain and Deirdre, cited below,
illustrate his use of this convention. Hoare continues that the saga
seldom provided pictorial description but rather imbued the descriptive
passages with sensibility, "the individual touch of the thing seen or
felt personally, but also, curiously enough, without subjective refer­
ence."42 Stephens offers terms very close to this definition in such
phrases as in reference to a ship "its wide-wombed bottom" or in "cold­
minded, furious blooded king." But Stephens more often worked his
amplification of the story through expanded descriptive passages. The
passage was usually constructed for specific purposes. In "The Story
of Tuan Mac Cairill" Stephens describes a great storm, proposing thereby
the tremendous power of nature through which Tuan will be translated:
"At times a wave leaped howling under a ship, and with a buffet
dashed it into the air, and chased it upwards with thunder stroke on
stroke, and followed again, close as a chasing wolf, trying with
hammering on hammering to beat in the wide-wombed bottom and suck
out the frightened lives through one black gape. A wave fell on a
ship and sank it down with a thrust, stern as though a whole sky had
tumbled at it, and the barque did not cease to go down until it
crashed and sank in the sand at the bottom of the sea." The stark-
ness of this passage is immediately recognizable as Celtic though the
description is a bit fuller than might be found in an ancient manu-
script. Of greater simplicity and closeness to the original style is
this passage from "Oisin's Mother":

They came to the narrow place on the slope of the
mountain, and they saw the five great hounds in a
circle keeping off the other dogs, and in the mid-
dle of the ring a little boy was standing. He had
long, beautiful hair, and he was naked. He was not
daunted by the terrible combat and clamour of the
hounds. He did not look at the hounds, but he
stared like a young prince at Fionn and the champ-
ions as they rushed towards him scattering the
pack with the butts of their spears. When the
fight was over, Bran and Sceolan ran, whining to
the little boy and licked his hands.  

Stephens uses descriptive passages to presage future episodes in
his work, for example, this passage from Deirdre: "In ten seconds the
floor rugs had sailed from their anchorages and were lying some neatly
inside out and all in woeful askewness. The chairs left their military
formation; some stood seat to seat like couples preparing for a dance,
others in the woeful, slack isolation of those who stare after uncivil
partners that have fled. And in this wreckage of a woman's room
Conachur strode.\(^46\) Not only does this passage reflect Conachur's agi-
tation on finding himself in love again, but it bears symbolically on
the disruption of Ireland's harmonious tranquility which Conachur's
love for Deirdre will ultimately produce, and on an even more universal
scale the passage makes a basic statement about the natures of men and
women, the aggressive abruptness of the male, the retiring orderliness
of the female.

Irish saga also tended to rely on exaggeration as a conventional
mode of description. In "The Birth of Bran" Stephens says of Fergus
Fionnlaith, the converted dog hater, that he stayed "a year and a day"
in bed suffering grief for the loss of Tuiren's pups. In "Mongan's
Frenzy" Stephens' description of the hag and her animals is done with
broad strokes of the comically exaggerated grotesque. The hag--"one
of her eyes was set where her nose should be and there was an ear in
its place, and her nose itself was hanging out of her chin, and she had
whiskers round it." Her horse--"There was an old, knock-kneed, raw-
boned, one-eyed, little-winded, heavy-headed mare with her also. Every
time it put a front leg forward it shivered all over the rest of its
legs backwards, and when it put a hind leg forward it shivered all over
the rest of its legs frontwards, and it used to give a great whistle
through its nose when it was out of breath, and a big, thin hen was
sitting on its croup."\(^47\) Stephens takes the exaggeration already pre-
sent in some stories and expands them or makes them fit in with his
character development as in "The Little Brawl at Allen."

Stephens uses to advantage certain expressions that transmit both
the sense of Irishry and archaism. In the story of the cave at Cesh Corran, Stephens has Conaran make the statement "Fionn thinks he is safe. But who knows when the sky will fall." More than a simple superstitious statement, the warning was apparently an Irish expression dating back to the earliest records on the Celts. Other frequent epithets of warriors were sometimes used by Stephens with some tongue-in-cheek humor. Stephens has Ainnle refer teasingly to Ardan as a "pillar of war" and a "battle-torch of the Gael." In the 'Little Brawl at Allen' Stephens uses the same title here partially in bemusement, partially in accurate descriptions. Moreover, men in love from Fergus Fionnlaith with his hound to Eochaid with Etain call the beloved "my pulse," "my blossom of the branch," "my treasure." Stephens offers just enough of such expressions to yield ethnic flavor and to suggest the repeated conventional phraseology of the heroic saga form, but never so often as to become dull or merely repetitious. More than likely, such epithets are used as part of the humorous effect of a given passage.

Dorothy Hoare has noted that the older the saga, the simpler, the barer its style. Stephens follows this simplicity to some degree in his own style. Though it cannot be denied that his renditions do indeed have moments of complexity, the overall presentation is one of directness devoid of elevated diction or long sentences. A sample passage describing Fruic and Ruicht, the two swineherds, illustrates this directness: "They began to change shapes then, thinking that in another form they might have a better chance; but they were always equal. One bit and the other tore, and the tear was as bad as the bite. They harried each other out of this shape and into that. They fought as birds, and in
that shape they were known as Talon and Wing. Then they fought as sea-beasts and were called Shark and Whale. Then they became spectres called Shadow and Woe, and after that they were dragons. And in all these shapes they fought savagely.49

Some of Stephens' prose contains a rhythm reminiscent of the bardic, recitative style. From the story of Tuan Mac Cairill comes the sentence "Many a wound I got from men, many a sorrowful scar," and again the balance in the parallelism and the antithesis of "There was no creature so weak but it might hunt me; there was no creature so timid but it might outface me. And so I lived for two tens of years and two years, until I knew all that a beast surmises and had forgotten all that a man had known."50 Stephens' renditions also partake of the dignity usually attributed to the saga. But notably at times there underlies this tone another of humor; yet it is not exactly the "irreverence" of which he has been accused, but Stephens' literary ease of bearing, a comfortable demeanor that seems natural to the warm characterizations of saga personages that Stephens is attempting to create. In this vein one might note the conversation between the Dagda and Boann:

But Boann was not satisfied. "We must do something," she insisted. "Make a suggestion," said the Dagda. Boann then suggested that the Dagda should send visions to Angus...of all the beautiful women of Ireland itself. "It is a lengthy and cumbersome arrangement," quoth the Dagda. "Can you suggest a better one?" she asked. But he could not do so; and it was arranged that the experiment should be tried. "I must be in the room passing the visions before him" said the Dagda, "so that when he recognises his beloved we shall know which of them it is,
for the boy has become feather-brained, and
might forget which woman of the sequence was the
one he sought, and it would all have to be done
again."

"And I," said Boann, "will be present also,
for I should like to know which woman of the women
of Ireland could make anybody sick for lack of
her."

It would seem from the critics' point of view that redactions of
Irish legend fall neatly into two categories: realistic and romantic.
These terms, moreover, are linked with quality; realistic is "good";
romantic is "bad." Realistic is somehow faithful to the original Celtic;
romantic is later centuries' interpretation of the original and, there-
fore, less accurate and less faithful to the spirit of the tales. How-
ever, such careful delineations are rather inaccurate.

Patricia McFate in her detailed discussion of Stephens' Deirdre
evaluates the story as a romanticized version. She points to the scene
in which Deirdre coerces Naoise into taking her away with him. Naoise's
actions are treasonous, but McFate claims that here Stephens softens
the treasonous aspect by the tenderness of Deirdre's coercion, in con-
trast both to the passionate outbursts of the original legend and
Stephens' own earlier draft of the story. McFate assumes that Stephens
changed the copy to avoid all unpleasantness. But a reading of this
scene reveals that Naoise is indeed aware of his treason. Stephens indi-
cates in earlier passages that Naoise has no proper right to Deirdre.
Stephens comments that Naoise's "thought of Deirdre was also complicated
by the knowledge that she was his master's ward, and his personal
loyalty to Conachur was such that which belonged to the king." In this
scene Naoise makes plain that his loyalty to the king is heightened be-
yond that that a subject owes his king: "Conachr reared me like his own son," Naoise pleads with Deirdre not to entice him to go against his sense of right. "I sat in his lap: he buckled this sword on me with his own hand. He put his two palms on my shoulders when I won my weapons, and he kissed me three times on each cheek. I love and venerate him," Conachr is Naoise's uncle and, therefore, blood kin. And finally Naoise is profoundly endowed with the Celtic sense of personal honor, an honor that would forbid action against the code of the warrior; the spiriting away of Deirdre would be in essence cowardly. "We do not come of a race that runs away," Naoise reminds his brothers. Deirdre primes her argument by painting a lascivious picture of Conachr making love to her, fully aware of how such a picture would arouse Naoise's passions. But her argument is won only when she threatens to reveal to the king that Naoise has already made love to her. It is obvious, then, that Naoise's capitulation is finally not the prompting of blind passion, but a very realistic decision to take Deirdre and depart Ulster.

Stephens chooses not the Longes mac n-Uislen ending where after a year of mourning Deirdre flings herself from the chariot of Conachr and dies but the Oidheadh Chloomne Huisneach version where Deirdre sips the blood of the newly slain brothers and dies across their lifeless bodies. McFate calls Stephens' choice "romantic," that is more sentimental. It must be remembered, however, that Deirdre is neither a decisive heroine nor a stoic one. Stephens is true to his own characterization of Deirdre as a rather naive, sensual, passionate young woman who will not bear the balking of her own will. To linger after Naoise's
death, the victim of Conachur's treachery would make Deirdre pitiful rather than tragic. 56

Stephens' rendition, as Dorothy Hoare points out, is devoid of the 'glamor' attached to it by such writers as A. E., Yeats, and Synge. 57 Stephens appears to be willing to allow the story to speak out of its own simplicity with an angle, particularly to reveal the truth of characterization. So familiar with the whole cycle does Stephens appear to be that he can use other characters and incidents in the story to explain the main characters. Lavarcham reveals the complexity of Conachur; Conachur reveals the blind sense of loyalty of Fergus; and each of the characters in turn, even the secondary characters are delineated with credible and memorable characteristics. From Deirdre's description of the bawling captain of the guard to Stephens' description of MacRoth and his bold and crafty spying, the characters are pictured in realistic terms, not romantic ones. And all of this presentation is direct and simply rendered. 58 Hoare does admit that as regards Stephens' use of detail "there is no romanticising; if the Irish story gives the actualities of life and its crudities Stephens does not attempt to refine them." 59 Eochaid, for example, sends word to the captain of the guard that should Midir attempt to leave the palace with Etain, he should be killed not with weapons but by trampling. Eochaid challenges Midir to take Etain away--if he can: "A metallic whisper went through the great room as the soldiers present stiffened in their harness. The mind of every man of them fled sickeningly to his own boots, and the eye of every man looked horribly at the boots of his neighbour; and then, and again, they stared upon the stranger." 60

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The story of Etain as Stephens tells it has been criticized for having a modern interpretation and motivation to Etain's relationship with Ailill by emphasizing the love between Eochaid and Etain. Stephens' redaction has been termed unsuccessful because of the lack of balance between the supernatural and the so-called romantic aspects. Those who follow the Book of the Dun Cow version have some grounds for this criticism, as the relationship between Eochaid and Etain is most abrupt. But those who follow the Egerton 1872 version will find the groundwork for this relationship there. Ailill, for example, is glad that he got well and that his and Etain's tryst did not have to take place. Moreover, Eochaid explains to Etain that he wants her as his wife as long as she desires to be so. It is true, of course, that Stephens expanded the usual version of the story quite a bit, but it may be questioned whether or not he retained the flavor of the original in his expansion. Certainly to improve the original rendering with more careful handling of plot and characterization, to offer motives for actions, is logicality and not necessarily modernity.

The epic saga was given to metaphorical comparison. Such comparison served in a way to endow the thing described not only with its own properties but that of the referent as well. The result is a multi-level import and a binding together of otherwise disparate entities. This principle is likewise implemented by Stephens who renders these metaphors in a patently aphoristic style. A sampling of these "aphorisms" suggests the breadth of Stephens' comparisons: Tuan mac Cairill explains his physical appearance: "I saw that I was hairy and tufty and bristled as a savage boar; that I was lean as a stripped bush; that I was greyer
than a badger; withered and wrinkled like an empty sack; naked as a fish; wretched as a starving crow in winter; and on my fingers and toes there were great curving claws, so that I looked like nothing that was known, like nothing that was animal or divine."  

Deirdre's beauty is described:

When we endeavour to tell of these things words cannot stand the trial. It may be done by music, or by allusion, as the poets have always done, saying that this girl is like the moon, or like the Sky-Woman of the Dawn, when they would indicate a beauty beyond what we know; and that she is like a rose when they would tell of a gentle and proud sweetness; that her wrist is crisp and delicate like the delicate foam that mantles on a sunny tide. . . . that she walks as a cloud, or as a queen-woman of the sky, seen only in vision. . . . "

Stephens follows the convention of the saga in that his similes are primarily based on nature. One might compare this passage from the Egerton 1872 manuscript version of Etain: "Each of her two arms was as white as the snow of a single night, and each of her cheeks was as rosy as the foxglove. . . . Her eyes were as blue as a hyacinth. . . . White as the snow, or as the foam of the wave, was her side. . . . Her feet were slim, and as white as the ocean's foam. . . . Her eyebrows were of a bluish black, such as ye see upon the shell of a beetle." Given to more than comparison through simile, Stephens' style is heavily homiletic. The following shows the wide variety of his pronouncements:

From Irish Fairy Tales:

"It is by love alone that we understand anything."

"[Love is] a cordial for women, a disease for men. . . ."
"Deeds grow old in a day and are buried in a night. New memories come crowding on old ones, and one must learn to forget as well as to remember." 

From Deirdre:

"A tyrant is ultimately one who is striving for self-mastery by the wrong method."

"We assimilate knowledge less through our intellects than through our temperaments."

"First the imagination awakes, and then the senses, and lastly the will, when the urge of life is focussed."

From In the Land of Youth:

"Anything is possible to the person who intends to do that thing and will abide by the consequences."

"To lose fear is almost to have gained knowledge."

"Fear is the wisdom of ignorance; it is its safeguard also."

Stephens' aphoristic style may also be extended into longer "philosophic" passages. Such philosophical passages as follows are an example of Stephens' asides directed to his reader and it would almost seem to his characters:

A love-tormented woman grows sick and thin and angry. She looks like a wrinkled apple, sour to the eye and the taste, and her tongue is vinegar. The love-tormented man grows heavy, grows dull, grows diligent in doing nothing. . . .his hands are slack and he walks like a clod. . . .Calamities. . . .react differently on a man and on a woman. Energy is drained out of a man in the presence of an evil that he is unable to confront; but in the woman who is thus assailed a demonic energy is born; and she will not be at rest until the very ghost of hope is dead. Therefore, in
desperate events and hopeless courses, the advice of a woman is more to be sought and is better worth following than anything a man can devise.

[At age sixteen] the time has passed for prohibitions, and the time has not yet come when advice can be listened to except in the form of flattery. The young body is eager for experience, and will be satisfied with nothing less actual, so the older person must grant freedom of movement or be run to death by that untiring energy. For a while the younger will drink deeply, secretly, of her own will, and will then disengage for herself that which is serious and enduring from that which is merely pleasant and unprofitable. For all people who are not mentally lacking are sober-minded by instinct, and when the eager limbs have had their way the being looks inwardly, pining to exercise the mind and to equip itself for true existence.

It must be observed here that these extended passages, indeed the axiomatic statements are but rarely found in the older manuscripts and are rather here Stephens' own touch. But they do appear to be in keeping with the posture of the storyteller of shenachie, as explained below. As these interpolations occur in Stephens, it is as if he seeks to enjoin on the reader what he deems to be the message, the didactic purpose of the saga. The ancient tales of Ireland were told to all ages for the purpose of entertainment and instruction. It is as if Stephens fears modern man may derive the former without the latter. These philosophical passages also provide the means by which the reader can observe the framework of which a characterization is built. As in the case of Deridre above, this passage presages her adolescent restlessness leading to her affair with Naoise. And, moreover, the anonymity of the passages insists on their being applied universally.
One of the most striking of Stephens' techniques in handling these ancient tales is his use of humor. One usually associates with Gaelic legend a pervading sense of gloom, a melancholy that gives in to despair. Though, of course, not totally responsible, Matthew Arnold's popular assessment of the literature as melancholy certainly furthered this stereotype. But the truth of the matter is that Celtic legend not only had its moments of levity but often combined levity with tragedy and violence in a way somewhat foreign to modern tastes. In his book on humor Vivian Mercier has pointed out that the humor here interpreted in laughter is, after Samuel Beckett's term, "dianoetic--" that is "it involves, by its very mirthlessness, some identification with whoever is unhappy."69 Mercier points to the traditional Irish wake, full of songs and cheer and even practical jokes played upon the corpse as a vestige of a belief in the wake as a celebration of both death and life. The Irish, then, having a belief in the Otherworld saw death as a perfectly natural entrance into another life, hence the lack of la­crimal attitudes.70

In his prologomena to "Deirdre" H. V. Fackler criticizes Stephens for being "merry when no cause for merriment exists."71 Such is the accusation leveled against the ending of Deirdre. The druid Cathfa has cast a spell over the escaping sons of Usna. Naoise advances to Deirdre and tries to lift her above what seems to be a flood.

"We are lost," he said. "That magician--!"
"Keep on swimming," Ardan giggled. "There was never water here before, but the whole sea has ri­sen around our legs, and we may paddle to Uisneac."72
Conachór has appointed them to be executed by another nobleman as befits their rank:

"I shall be the first," said Ardan briskly. "I am first in every great deed," he explained to Conachór.
"Hark to him!" Ainnle laughed. "Respect your elders, young person, and the heads of your family."

It is certainly to be granted that Stephens may overdo the levity of this scene. To "giggle" under such circumstances is tantamount to insanity, not bravery. Yet perhaps Stephens' technique here may be defended on the basis of consistency. Throughout the novel Stephens has portrayed Naoise's brothers as irrepressible youths who under the most trying of circumstances have exhibited high spirits, relishing whatever experience is theirs. Their high spirits do not ring false even here for the Celtic hero traditionally met danger, even death, at the fore. Moreover, they are young and embued with the incredible optimism of that age. And finally, as is evidenced in the sagas themselves, the comic did exist side by side with the tragic, a juxtaposition patently uncomfortable only to the modern mind. So that what may strike the reader initially as poorly selected terms becomes on reflection to be a legitimate choice both in the light of tradition and in accordance with characterization. Stephens is adhering to primitive rather than modern psychological associations and sees the comedy in potential tragedy and acknowledges the same recoiling of the mind from tragedy to comedy that prompted Shakespeare to pen his famous scenes of comic relief in the midst of some of his most horrifying episodes. Such may be said of
scenes in Deirdre at the siege of the Red Branch. The desperate sallies of the exiles imprisoned in the Red Branch has begun. The building is strongly constructed, but the end is already inevitable, for a ram is being used against the doors. Conachur arrives in impatience and fear that even here Naoise might escape him. He inquires of the captain of his militia:

"Well, my soul?"
"We have begun, majesty."
"How is it going?"
"Excelledly," said the captain. "We have lost about forty men already."
Conachur stared at him.
"How did that happen?"
"It happened because of the king's royal decision to lodge these men in a fortress."
"You have five hundred men here!"
"When they are all killed," said the captain sourly, "we can call out another five hundred."

... The captain returned and stood by him.
"You put good doors in the Red Branch, majesty," he said cheerfully; "an hour of that ramming will begin to make them quiver."

It must be noted, however, that the captain is not making light of the situation. His remarks to Conachur are sarcastic, as is evidenced by Stephens' tag. Moreover, the captain recognizes the worth of the adversaries: "Which are our men and which are theirs?" said the captain. 'Ours don't know in this light which is friend and which is enemy. They know,' he said bitterly; 'but we are killing one another.' The situation is not humorous at all, though perfunctory reading of the captain's replies evokes a peculiar amusement.

Stephens interprets humor in a variety of ways. He sometimes allows the slapstick behavior of the characters involved to illustrate
the humorous in a serious situation. For example, when Fionn's guardians Lia Luachra and Bovmall discover that it is known that Fionn lives and where he is hidden, their frenzied movements are drawn reminiscent of an old-time film speeded up to double time: "The women... were mysterious and whispery. They chased Fionn into the house, and when they got him in they chased him out again. They chased each other around the house for another whisper. They calculated things by the shape of cloud, by lengths of shadows, by the flight of birds, by two flies racing on a flat stone, by throwing bones over their left shoulders..."76 The same type of movement occurs in Lavarcham's distracted behavior when Deirdre's elopement has been discovered, although here her profound confusion and the fact that the tragedy is not impending but has occurred cause the scene to be the less humorous of the two.

Perhaps the most striking of Stephens' humorous incidents occurs in his version of the Echrai Nera with the macabre conversation between Nera and the hanged man. In Stephens' version the condemned men are amazingly casual about their executions. One is yawning so he disarranged the noose. The other is thirsty. The captain assures him he has nothing to drink and the doomed man lightly answers, "It doesn't matter... It just struck me and I mentioned it." But it does matter, for later this same man announces to Nera that he is simply "too thirsty to die." Nera agrees to carry the man to water on his back, for though he is "not dead enough to be buried," he's "too dead to walk." Coming to a house, they knock and gain entrance where in comic terror the inhabitants flee the "stretched neck" and "fishy eye" of Nera's burden. After
the "semi-corpse" satisfies his thirst with three buckets of water,
Nera takes him back up the hill and rehangs him: "Do you feel any
better now, my darling?" Nera asks. "I feel splendid," the man replies.
"I'll be dead in a jiffey." The original version is a bit more seri-
ous in that the men of the house where the corpse drinks die. But
Stephens has captured and amplified the general tone of this first in-
cident. In both versions the reader is led to believe that a conversa-
tion with a corpse is perfectly natural. The amazing justaposition of
humor and death simply underscores the heroic ethic. No peril should
daunt the hero; as in the words of Stephens' hanged man, "Nothing is as
bad as they make it out." Moreover, one simply accepts his Doom when
it comes. The hanged man offers no resistance, no pleas for mercy. The
hanging is an expected culmination, only, he would die "comfortably."

In something of the same mode Stephens tells the story of the
"Little Brawl at Allen." The whole battle is done in mock seriousness,
and indeed it begins seriously enough with an affront to honor—Goll's
usurping the gift-giving privileges of Fionn. The tone is set in the
diminutive of the title and is carried through the understatement of
the description of the battle; it is "no place for a sick person to
be...not the corner which a slender-fingered woman would choose to
do up her hair." These phrases are Stephen's amplification of comments
in the original version. But in his own touches Stephens provokes
amusement by contrasts: "In a retired corner a gentleman stood in a
thoughtful attitude while he tried to pull out a tooth that had been
knocked loose. 'You can't fight,' he mumbled, 'with a loose shoe or a
loose tooth.' 'Hurry up with that tooth,' the man in front of him
grumbled, 'for I want to knock out another one.' Humorous under-
statement appears also in "The Enchanted Cave of Cesh Corran." Upon
first seeing the three sisters, Conan remarks to Fionn, "One could not
call them handsome. . . ." and Fionn replies, "One could, but it would
not be true." This exchange comes on the heels of the detailed and
horrible description Stephens has just given of their ugliness. The
humor here is also used to point up the bravery of the two men, a
bravery that will become non-existent before the story is over. Fionn
goes into the cave to see if the three women really were bewhiskered.
As the spell takes effect and the heroes drop to the ground, they are
quickly tied up by the three "harridans." "Those are whiskers," is
Fionn's only remark to Conan.

Another humorous incident allows a familiarizing look at these
life and times. In the story of Etain it is the end of the fair and
Eochaid is having the area cleared of people in preparation for his
confrontation with Midir. An officer is impatiently hurrying a hodge-
podge of people, carts, and animals along:

    Until Doom, this night and hell will not seem
different to me. Go gently, beeman: keep thy war-
riors in their fortress--"
    "Unhorn me those ten cows."
    "Heave me this wreck to the ditch."
    "Tie me a thistle to yon foal's tail."
    "Clout me that pig."
    "Gather me this hen off my helmet."
    "Loosen me this goat from between my legs."
    "Oh! hath any man a drink upon him!"

And finally humor may be used to reveal character. In "Mongan's
Frenzy" Fiachna Finn, king of Ulster, and his men are in battle when
their opponent sends venomous sheep to attack them. Unable to withstand these creatures, Finn and his men are forced to climb trees. Finn decides he must fight the sheep and under weak protest from his men begins to climb down from his tree. At this moment he sees a stranger approaching and he pulls himself back up on the branch where he sits "dangle-legged" in a most unkinglike pose. The stranger, who is Manannan mac Lir, is laughing at the "treed" soldiers.

"It is not nice of you to laugh at us," said Fiachna Finn.
"Who could help laughing at a king hundering on a branch and his army mooing around him like hens?" said the stranger.

Finn is obliged to accept Manannan's derision in return for his aid. In "The Carl of the Drab Coat" Stephens expands the character of Carl so that he becomes a truly memorable humorous figure. Carl has suggested that Cael start running the race without him since he wishes to get another hour's sleep. He awakes, eats the leftover boar from the night before, and puts the bones in the tail of his coat. "With a rattling of the boar's bones" he begins to run "in great two legged jumps," and "immense one-legged, mud-spattering hops" until he catches up with Cael who is running determinedly "with his fists up and his head back and his two legs flying in and out so vigorously that you could not see them. . ." "Trotting" along side Cael, Carl offers him some of his bones, But Cael snaps, "I would rather be hanged than gnaw on a bone that you have browsed." Though quickly Carl outdistances him, Cael catches up when Carl stops to pick and eat blackberries. Cael sarcastically points out that Carl has lost the tails
of his coat: "I could smell one of them and it wrapped around a little tree thirty miles back...and the other one was dishonouring a bush ten miles behind that." Carl, complaining that he has not eaten his fill of blackberries, nevertheless returns to retrieve the pieces of his coat. He catches up quickly with Cael, "who was running with his head down and his toes up." Carl gently taunts him, "If you won't try to run, my treasure...you will never get your tribute." And Carl "with an eye-blinding, continuous waggle and complexity of boots," quickly outdistances Cael again.\footnote{83} Likewise, in Stephens' version of "The Birth of Bran" the terrible hater of dogs Fergus Fionnlaith is nonetheless humourously portrayed. The disguised Uct Dealv has left Tuiren in the form of a hound with Fergus, expecting him to be cruel to the animal as was his wont. But Fergus, believing it to be Fionn's dog, determines to take special care of the animal in spite of his intense dislike for it. He instructs his servant to calm the shaking animal, but the dog snaps at the servant. Fergus is obliged to pick up the animal himself:

"If it has to be hugged," he said, "I'll hug it. I'd do more than that for Fionn."
He tucked and tightened the animal into his breast, and marched moodily up and down the room. The dog's nose lay along his breast under his chin, and as he gave it dutiful hugs, one hug to every five paces, the dog put out its tongue and licked him timidly under the chin.
"Stop," roared Fergus, "stop that for ever," and he grew very red in the face, and stared truculently down along his nose. A soft brown eye looked up at him and the shy tongue touched again on his chin.
"If it has to be kissed," said Fergus gloomily, "I'll kiss it. I'd do more than that for Fionn," he groaned.
He bent his head, shut his eyes, and brought
the dog's jaw against his lips. And at that the
dog gave little wiggles in his arms, and little
barks, and little licks, so that he could scarcely
hold her. . . .
"That dog likes me," he murmured in amazement.
"By my hand... I like that dog."

So evident is Stephens' love of the ridiculous that he has been ac­
cused of condensing saga material when it is not funny, reason, too,
why he provides only the first lines of Deirdre's laments. Such is
probably not the case. Much more credible reasons are to provide those
details which are coherent, for a sizeable amount of material in the
sagas appears to be extraneous or tangential to the main story line, and
to include that which is most supportive of the characterization. The
laments, for example, are beautiful, but they break the flow of the nar­
rative and Stephens is obviously dedicated to rapid narrative tempo. His
elimination of material is perfectly sound authorial technique with re­
gards to consistency of action and characterization. In the Echtrai
Nera the hanged man is harmless enough to Nera but unexplainably murders
the inhabitants of the house where he finds water. In the story of An­
gus' dream the material concerning the calf of the Donn and even Caer's
existence as a swan is of dubious value to the main thread of the story.
Stephens quite plainly chooses to make his redactions stories in the
Celtic spirit, not translations of the original.

It is obvious from even the most perfunctory reading of Stephens' redactions that he has designed the characterizations in his own inimi­
table fashion. While it is true that some of the characters in the redactions are of the same general nature as characters which Stephens
invented for his earlier works, the characterizations are completely feasible given the character outlines in the original sagas. Generally speaking, Stephens has rounded out these characters, embodying them with a genuineness, a humanness that adds immeasurably to their credibility. The heroic qualities of these characters are given below. Here it is pertinent to study Stephens' special effects with regards to the characterization.

Though not usually given to allusions, Stephens creates one scene in *Deirdre* that is reminiscent of the Temptation in the Garden of Eden. Deirdre has escaped the compound and by chance is drawn to the glow of a campfire and the sound of voices. She stands behind a tree, watching and listening to the three youths; Deirdre, Eve-like yet almost like the Tempter about to disrupt Paradise, watches Naoise and his brothers:

"Spendthrift they were as young gods; care-free as young animals; with minds untroubled because they need not work and bodies that were at ease because they were active, scorning the darkness in a gaiety that was delicious because it was thoughtless, and with a thoughtlessness that was lovely because it was young." Deirdre does step out into the circle of firelight and her step decisively altered the course of herself and the sons of Usna for all time. Here and as she tempts Naoise to run away with her she is thoughtless, self-centered, bent on gratification of her own will. But Stephens is careful in fidelity to the character to avoid suggestions of the traditional *femme fatale* figure. His astute handling of the seduction is accomplished with taste and a sense of verity in which the culpability for the irrevocable act appears to be neither on Deirdre nor Naoise but on Fate: "Had she really moved, or
was she impelled! . . . But in the moment that she moved panic seized
her as suddenly and overwhelmingly as a hawk swoops upon a mouse." She
seems to have no control over herself:

She lifted a hand to her breast so that her heart
might not be snatched away, but the hand went on
to her lips and covered them in terror lest they
should call. She turned with one swift and flying
gesture, but the foot that aimed for flight con-
tinued its motion, and the full circle held her
again facing the terror. For he had already risen
lithe as a cat and as noiseless, and in three
great strides he was standing beside her, standing
over her, encompassing her about, not now to be
retreated from or escaped from or eluded in any
way."

Naoise lays a heavy hand upon her arm and moves her back into the dark
recesses of the forest. But when Naoise stops their headlong rush "with
that feeling of tremendous discouragement wherein passion sinks back
upon itself, where desire ceases and nothing is instant but weariness,"
Deirdre herself renews the moment of passion for "the energy which had
drained from him flooded into her in one whirling stream, and when his
hand fell away hers took up the duty it relinquished." Stephens seems
to handle the problem of culpability here evenhandedly. Yet it would
appear that Deirdre by her very presence precipitates the action of the
scene. Though some critics contend that Naoise is a carefully delineated
character in his own right, in actuality he derives his being in
terms of Deirdre. Time and again it is Deirdre who is the compelling
force behind his actions. Even his brothers and the sons of Fergus are
a bit more clear cut, perhaps for being the more active, the more vocal.
Naoise is essentially a completely ethical person, slightly older than
the others, who makes his only independent gesture by insisting on the return to the Red Branch in spite of Deirdre's warning. Yet he has a touching adherence to honor. His love for Deirdre is profound, as evidenced in his final act to lift her above the druidical waters that seem to engulf them. He becomes, then, if ancillary in his own story, none-theless, a credible heroic figure.

Stephens' expertise in characterization is evidenced by the nuances with which he explicates a relationship. This technique is well illustrated in the several stories involving Fionn and Goll. Of opposing clans the two men are sworn enemies. But Fionn's willingness to confront the Sidhe prince Ailven mac Midna and his success in the encounter win him the captaincy of the Fianna, a position formerly held by Goll. Goll's reaction attests to the measure of the man for he submits with such grace that he retains all his stature in the gathering. Goll, evidently the older of the two, is called "mirthful." But this good humor glosses a determined spirit that is the foundation of his heroic mien. This dauntlessness is evidenced in his battle with Iarnach in "The En-chanted Cave of Cesh Corran." It also serves as the instigation of the riot at Allen, for Goll exemplifies an extravagance born of the ability to face down any situation including the wrath of Fionn himself. Here, too, Goll very frankly admits to Fionn that he killed Uail in Lochlann. Herein Stephens handles the tension between the two men with evocative detail: Fionn retorts, "It is an impertinence...to boast at this table that you killed my father." Goll replies, "By my hand, if Fionn were to treat me as his father did I would treat Fionn the way I treated Fionn's father." At this Fionn "closed his eyes and beat away the anger that was
rising within him." Fionn smiles "grimly" and reminds Goll that his men present outnumber Goll's men one hundred to one. Goll laughs, "So had your father." At this point warriors on each side begin to hurl insults and then punches and suddenly the feast has become a brawl. The exchange cited exemplifies the implicative method suitable to Stephens' purpose—to tell the story but to do so through acute interactions of personalities.

Stephens can construct a single phrase so well conceived that it encapsulates a character at once. At the banquet in Deirdre Emer, his wife and Laeg, his charioteer, are trying to dissuade Cuchulain from drinking any more mead. He resists their pleas until Emer complains, "You will want to fight the moon and stars as we go home." Cuchulain, realizing the truth of what she says, accedes. Likewise, Maeve's capacious ego is captured in her own statement. Maeve insists against Aillili's questioning that Angus Og was of a proper age to woo Etain. Fergus sides with her. Delightedly she turns in triumph to her husband, "You see, you see I am right again," and when the assemblage applauds her, she bows to them graciously and insists that the glasses of all be filled before she recommences the tale. In a conversation with Finegas, Fionn reveals his individuality. When Fionn asks what Finegas would do with all knowledge, he replies that only with all knowledge would he be able to answer the question. He asks Fionn what he would do. Fionn replies, "I would make a poem." Such a statement reveals Fionn's predilection toward the acquisition of wisdom.

The Irish sagas are generally of the nobility, not the common people; the characterization is, of course, backed up by the "larger more
blaring, and yet more stately tone" of the sagas. Stephens interprets this stately tone through the grandeur of action, the heroism of the character's achievements. One might note in this vein the adventures of Art in "Becuma of the White Skin," or the incredible metamorphoses of Tuan mac Cairill through centuries, or the bravado of Maeve in her encounter with Ethal Anbual. However, Stephens makes of these characters real human beings who are controlled by their passions and if they be larger than life by virtue of their accomplishments and abilities, their weaknesses loom equally large to balance the overall appearance. For example, in Conachur Stephens has offered such a figure. Conachur is a sensualist who finds in his seignorial rights the final estimation of his power as king. Thus, as he recounts to Lavarchem, he insisted on his sovereign privilege with Emer, the bride of Cuchulain. Conachur is sensitive to Cuchulain's jealousy; moreover, the value of the act lies more in its proof of Cuchulain's loyalty than in gratification of his pleasure. For these reasons he agrees not so much as to touch Emer as long as the rest of the court and the people know he slept with her. Cuchulain, however, insists that Fergus sleep with the pair as surety that the King's word is good. In the interplay of desire, appearance, privilege, and rights Stephens evolves a very human scene, furthering its impact even more through Conachur's ability with hindsight to make light of the whole incident, to recount humorously how crowded he was and what an uncomfortable night he spent between a girl who had albows like "live bodkins" and a "vast bullock" of a man.

Conachur, like all effective characters, is multi-dimensional. A
capable leader as proved by the kingdom's choosing him as their king instead of the rightful king Fergus, he is a good monarch who "could spend himself so endlessly for his realm." At his best, "not time nor thought could blunt the edge of his bodily or mental energy, so vast was it, and misfortune beat as unavailingy against him as the wind did against oaken Emania." But such is his external nature. This same largesse works against his peace of mind. Deirdre knows him: "Only I and Lavarcham know that terrible king. He is thoughtful. He is bitter and unforgiving, and his memories are rooted deep like the roots of a deep tree." It is precisely his unforgiving memory that brings about the tragedy. Conachúr in his exertion of his will has acquired two "victims" by the beginning of the story—Fergus, because he has spirited away the control of his kingdom, and Maeve, whom Conachur in retribution for her having killed his first wife raped before their marriage.

Conachúr is forced to see his vulnerability where women are concerned by Maeve's ability to win arguments with him and finally to get completely away from him with all her goods in tact. He is further humiliated by her refusal to honor his imploring messages to her to return. And worse, she appears irreplaceable for Conachúr "could not exist with a tame mate. . . . She satisfied cravings of his nature which he himself but dimly understood." Maeve's leaving has a corroding effect on Conachúr for to balk him is to erode his self-image. Her premeditated leavetaking sets the stage for the deterioration that sets in after Deirdre's loss.

Conachúr is locked in a pattern of sexual failure. Deirdre opens
with frustration through perfectly natural causes when he is denied his seigniorial rights with Felimid's wife because she is in childbirth. The opening chapters quickly reveal both the aforementioned departure of Maeve and a previous incident when he was denied seigniority with Cuchulain's wife Emer. Thus when he first sees Deirdre as a grown woman, his first impulse is quickly to satisfy his sexual urgings, a course of action Lavarcham precipitately squelches by refusing to allow his soon-to-be queen and her "babe" to be debauched. Thus when Deirdre runs away with Naoise, Conachúr is balked for the fourth time, a frequency which tends to account for the fearsomeness of his revenge. As Stephens comments, with his "temperament, his furious passions, his habit of command, and his endless cleverness, he [is capable of being] a very madman for jealousy" he is "cold-minded, furious-blooded."^100

The loss of Deirdre rested heavily upon Conachúr's very soul. Stephens pictures him: "Conachúr stood, alone, with his fists closed and his eyes closed; listening to the whispers that were an inch away and a hundred miles away, that were over him and under him and in him; listening to the blanching of his face and to the liquefying of his bones; listening in a rage of curiosity and woe. . . ."^101 And seven years later in response to Lavarcham's plea for help for the exiles against the king of Scotland, he replies, "Young men go wild at times, and it is not told of as it is. . . .It is savagery in the blood, and pain in the bone, and greed and despair in the mind. It is to be thirsty in the night and unslaked in the day. It is to carry memory like a thorn in the heart. It is to drip one's blood as one walks."^102

One more point concerning the characterization of Conachúr is his
great cleverness. Because this cleverness ran to diabolical strains, it prevented true greatness. He was near enough to greatness to have the love and trust even of his victims but "only the great escape slavery, and he was the slave to his ego and would be whipped." On this note Stephens introduces a most interesting facet of Conachúr's personality. Conachúr was emotionally masochistic. Though to all outward appearances after any disappointment he might function in his administrative capacity as if nothing had happened, in actuality he would brood upon slights and injuries almost to the point of madness: "It was to escape such a memory that he plunged into affairs and banquets and a whole roistering self-expenditure which would have devitalized any other man. He prolonged his day until it could not for very weariness be further extended, and then he went to bed. No: he went to Deirdre's bed where Naoise slept, and over which he hovered sleepless, though in sleep, and in a torment that poisoned the very sunlight when he awakened." This same masochistic tendency is evident in his feelings for Fergus. The wrong this time was committed by Conachúr with Fergus' mild-mannered acquiescence, but Conachúr is obviously bothered by guilt feelings: "He looked lovingly and mildly on Fergus because he hated Fergus and had wronged him so bitterly that he must wrong him yet more in justification." And he does so when he uses Fergus to bring Naoise and Deirdre back to him at the Red Branch so that he might exact his vengeance.

It is in the character of Conachúr that Stephens is at his best. More than simply the real focus of Deirdre, as some critics have assessed him, Conachúr may be also the most expertly drawn of all of Stephens'
saga characters.

Brandon Saul has termed Stephens a "fictionist destined to become a master at building up dramatic effect by releasing successive brief jets of elaboration until—paralleling the physical manner of a certain type of fireworks—a climax of incredible surprise flowers out on the darkness of the mind." In his descriptive fashion Saul is evaluating the effect of the detail with which Stephens infuses his characterizations. At a moment of high dramatic intensity, that moment when Lavarcham must tell Conachur of Deirdre's elopement, she simply but with shattering effect utters two words—"She's gone."

But while her words are stunning understatement, her actions are hyperbolic and yet perfectly adapted to the image of a devotedly methodical person whose most carefully laid plan has suddenly collapsed. Stephens describes her thus:

She was all a din and whirl and swirl, as though the winds that raged in gust and countercurrent through her brain were blowing her along. . . . Great sighs broke from her miserable heart; or she was so shattered by dry sobbings that it seemed her bones must part company with her flesh and with each other. . . . with her two hands gripped on her mouth she squeezed back a medley of screams, and listened, as in amazement, to the thin whinings that forced through the crooked spaces in her fingers."

Likewise, detail heightens the realism of Conachur's anticipation in the "little things" of marriage which he intends to share with Deirdre: "One day, O shy cluster of delight, you will sing to me: my harper shall listen to that when I can bear a companion, for I may grudge a sight or a sound of you even to the men of art. I shall see your hair done other-
wise, and this way again. I shall see you stir about me, this side
and that and backwards; a thousand harmonies of movement that I divine
and a thousand that I know nothing of." Detail also transmits
Stephens' own attitude toward his characters. In "The Wooing of Bec-
folæ" Stephens' prejudice against pompous piosity is evident in his des-
cription of the cleric who comes to accuse Becfolæ of transgressing
the Sabbath. He is a "lank-jawed, thin-browed" brother whose "fingers
of his right hand strangled and did to death the fingers of his left
hand." Stephens' detail also might be used simply to transmit the
pictorial quality of a certain scene. Stephens' evident feeling for
nature is evinced in the description of the sea in "Becuma of the White
Skin." Conn the Hundred Fighter has set sail in search of a remedy to
Ireland's plagues; a description of the boat in the clutches of a storm
vivifies the perils Conn faces: "Wild storms howled by him so that the
boat climbed painfully to the sky on a mile-high wave, balanced for a
tense moment on its level top, and sped down the glassy side as a stone
goes furiously from a sling." In his description of Nera's trek to
the hill of execution Stephens paints a pastiche of blacks:

He began to distinguish between the various
darknesses that lay about him, and was aware of
gradations among these dusks.
Here there was the black of ebony—it was a
boulder.
Here was a sketchy incomplete blackness—it
was a bush.
Beyond was not a blackness but a darkness,
and that was space.
Beneath him there was a velvet gloom, and
that was the ground.
And above there was a darkness, not to be
described, but to be thought of, as a movement,
and that was the sky.
Stephens' details of natural phenomenon may also be linked to the action of the plot even to the point of "cosmic sympathy." Evidence of this ability may be found in the description of the dawn just prior to the firing of the Red Branch:

Far to the east a livid gleam appeared. The darkness of a summer night, which is yet a twilight, was shorn of its soft beauty, and in the air there moved imperceptibly and voluminously a spectral apparition of dawn. A harsh, grey, iron-bound upper-world brooded on a chill and wrinkled earth. The king's eyes and the eyes of his captain scanned each other from colourless, bleak faces. There was no hue in their garments; their shields were dull as death; and their hands, each clutching a weapon, seemed like the knotted claws of goblins. A slow, sad exhalation came from the king's grey lips, like the plaint of some grim merman of the sea, rising away and alone amid the chop and shudder of his dismal waters."

Stephens follows the Celtic predilection for detailing particular scenes of battle. Stephens writes as would the Celtic writer with directness but no unnecessary vivifications of violence in the death of lollan in Deirdre. Conall Cearnach believes Flachra to be Conachur and him to be in mortal danger from lollan: "He burst his blue-green spear through the press and through the back of lollan." When he discovers his mistake, he is appalled: "'By my hand,' said Conall fiercely, 'I shall undo some of what I have done,' and with one side twist of the sword he lifted the head from Flachra." But for pure dramatic detail no scene in Stephens surpasses what Augustine Martin calls a "marvelous tour de force"—the defense of the Red Branch by Deirdre and the sons of Usna. Deirdre, Naoise, his two brothers Ardan and Ainnle, and the two sons of Fergus, Buinne and lollan, have been escorted to the Red Branch. The fortress
is secured by several heavy bronze doors and the party feels relatively
safe until a ram is thrust into one of the doors. Aware that not even
those doors can stand ramming indefinitely, Naoise decides that the
young warriors would essay out singly and in pairs at intervals and
through different doors. His plan is to inflict enough mayhem and
disruption to demoralize the attacking soldiers and halt the ramming.
The sorties are more than the exciting fare expected of a heroic tale,
for Stephens masterfully orchestrates the goings out and the comings
in with a breathless suspense that for the moment leaves the reader
almost forgetting that these efforts are doomed. The sorties are ac-
complished with such skill, daring, and high spirits, with such courage
and finesse that their escaping completely becomes a very real possi-
bility. But there are two developments on which Naoise had not planned,
Buinne's desertion and Cathfa's conjuration. After the first sortie
Buinne bitterly rails against Naoise for interfering in his own combat.
Buinne in his youthful pride will not tolerate help from anyone. His
disagreement with Naoise is the motivation for his abandonment of the
group in response to Conachúr's offer of land and position. Iollan,
Buinne's brother, however, goes out alone in single combat to recoup
the loss of his family's honor. His challenge is met by Fiachra, son
of Conachúr, but Iollan is killed by Conall Cearnach who believes Fiachra
to be Conachúr himself. The defenders now down to three, the fortress
is set to the torch and Naoise makes plans for their final escape. With
Deirdre and Ardan in the middle and Naoise at the head and Ainle at
the rear, the four dart out at the besiegers who fall back under the on-
slaught. In reply to Conachúr's frantic urgings, Cathfa casts a spell
and the four believe themselves to be caught by a flood. One might note the pace and surrealism of this passage: "Naoise dropped on one knee, rose again, leaped high in the air and dropped again on his knee. Deirdre fell to the ground and rose up gasping. Ardan rolled over on his back, tossed his shield away, and came slowly up again, beating the air with his hands. Ainnle went half way down, rose again, and continued his advance on tiptoe." Deirdre and the Sons of Usna are taken.

Stephens provides certain peculiarities of technique in dealing with the overall presentation of the stories. One interesting technique is his story within a story, or as Lloyd Frankenberg calls it a "nest of translucent boxes." In the story of Tuan mac Cairell this technique is abbreviated in that the determined assault by Finnian, the Abbot of Moville, on Tuan's paganism is merely the end pieces to the larger story of his metamorphoses. This style is amplified in "Mongan's Frenzy," where the plot is obviously more important than the characterization. Here lies a story within a story within a story. This same abbot is collecting stories. One Cairide tells him the story of "Mongan's Frenzy." The story opens as Mongan and his company retreat by accident into Faery to escape a hailstorm. Provided with a feast by his Sidhe hosts, Mongan agrees to tell a story, the story of his former life as Flonn and his romance with Duv Laca which his present wife Brotlarna had begged him to relate. In In the Land of Youth the technique serves as the framework for a longer work. Here the setting in Maeve's camp provides one continuing incident, the flirtation between Maeve and Fergus. The book opens with one incident that stems from the camp itself--Nera's adventures with the hanged man and his
subsequent sojourn in Faery. But the other stories are natural outgrowths of the banquet on Samhain Eve and the conversation there among the principles. On his return from Faery Nera warns Maeve of Ethal Anbual’s plans to attack next Samhain Eve. Maeve reminds Nera that she had sacked Anbual once before. The dream of Angus is offered in reply to Fergus’ questions concerning Maeve’s last encounter with the Sidhe of Cruachan for it is she who secured Caer for Angus. The story of the rival swineherds Fruic and Rucht, who were metamorphosed bulls which Maeve took with her out of Faery, is told by Bove to the Dagda at a banquet which comprised one episode of the "Dream of Angus." Maeve related the story of Etain to Fergus in the second half of the narrative. It comes as a response again to Fergus’ comments about fighting the Sidhe. Maeve boasts that she herself sacked the Sidhe of Connacht, as Eochaid Airem, her uncle, had sacked the Sidhe of Midir.

Another aspect of Stephens’ narrative technique is the pacing of the story by means of chapter length and by juxtaposition of scenes. For example, the opening chapters of Deirdre, giving as they do exposition and background are comparatively long, and more temperately paced. As the action builds and Deirdre approaches her fateful rendezvous with Naoise, the chapters get progressively shorter. Chapter Twelve is a very short scene between Lavarcham and Conachur in which carefully Lavarcham manipulates the king into coming to see Deirdre. Dropped between those chapters in which Deirdre’s longing for romance is expanding to fulfillment with rapidity, it serves to amplify the suspense. Concomitantly, Stephens’ syntax slows or accelerates the pace. Deirdre’s lassitude in Chapter Nine is accentuated by the length of sentence and
sonorous description of the moon. Chapter Twenty-four is fragmented,
explosive, as suits the hysteria of Lavarcham and the suppressed rage
of Conachur. Through Chapters Seven to Twenty Stephens sustains the
conversation with heavy irony in the sense that Fate is about to strike
primarily through Lavarcham's instinctive sense of urgency. Chapter
Thirteen, likewise, is brief—the agitation of Lavarcham is echoed in
the mind of the reader who knows that her sense of haste is well-
founded. The machinery of Fate is working and Lavarcham's "moment of
truth" is arriving.  

Stephens uses motifs both as unifying factors and for interest.
In the story of Etain the chess game played by Eochaid and Midir is
a climactic moment in the tale. But Stephens amplifies this incident
into a game motif, in essence the acting out of strategy that pervades
the story. Eochaid and Midir are locked in a contest from the moment
Midir first rediscovers Etain. Midir constructs a ploy in Ailill's
lovesickness to bring Etain to a secret rendezvous. And at this moment
he explains to Etain the truth of her past experiences in terms of a
game; her tryst with Ailill was a game; "all that is is only in a
game." When she will not come away with him of her own accord, he
executes a second strategy whereby he manuevers Eochaid into yielding
his queen a prize in a chess game and having forfeit his queen is
promptly "checkmated." Eochaid's subsequent marshalling of his sol-
diers to prevent Midir's claiming his prize is not according to the
"game's" rules and Midir simply turns himself and Etain into swans and
flies away.

Other motifs concern Stephens' fascination with the occult. In
an unpublished thesis James O'Brien discusses Stephens' theosophical beliefs. Stephens may have arrived at the connection between the occult, more particularly theosophy, and the sagas through James Cousins' book *The Wisdom of the West* which discussed this point. Stephens had, of course, read Madame Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*, but Stephens joined Stephen MacKenna in a search into the Irish past. According to O'Brien Faery is a construct of the theosophic tradition. Stephens' characters with the exception of Nera move freely in and out of the Otherworld. More importantly, with its connection with "higher principles" Stephens saw in Tir na n-Og a place where the restrictions of mortal life are removed somewhat, but where moral conduct is the norm. The land is technically governed by the imagination. In terms of theosophy Stephens' chief theme is, according to O'Brien, "freeing of the spirit or imagination from the bondage of the intellect and the law. . . ."

Stephens' interest in eastern religion and the embodiment of oriental philosophy was further evidenced in his review of Cousins' *The Wisdom of the West* in *The Irish Review* for 1912. Stephens agreed with Cousins that Irish myth tales were accounts of Oriental doctrines. Therefore, Stephens was most attracted to those stories connected with planes of being, reincarnation, and metamorphosis of the stories in *Irish Fairy Tales* three, "The Story of Tuan mac Cairill," "The Birth of Bran," and "Oisin's Mother," deal with metamorphosed characters. "Becuma of the White skin" contains a description of multiple planes of being and the juxtaposition of two dimensions of existence--the real world and that of the Sidhe--as does "The Enchanted Cave of Cesh Corran," "The Wooing of Becfola" and "Mongan's Frenzy." In *In the Land of Youth*
the tale of Fruic and Rucht and the story of Etain deal with both metamorphoses and with levels of existence. The story of Nera and Maeve's account of the sacking of the Sidhe express the concept of life in the Sidhe as opposed to life in the real world. And Deirdre, though recording no supernatural events, nonetheless contains passages reminiscent of occultist philosophy, for example the force of Deirdre's dream-will in Naoise's capitulation and her moon-instigated restlessness.

One of the most vivid accounts of metamorphosis is Stephens' treatment of the transmutation of Etain. Fuamnach mesmerizes Etain while Bresil Etarlain, the Druid, concentrates his will, forcing his trance into her mind. Fuamnach whispers to her to yield, to give in to the power now joining itself to her own will:

The lips that had suddenly tightened to a string were murmuring "Do not move," and those eyes that became blazing suns and sparkling pinpoint, that widened away in black caves, and came back in white emptiness, held her.

Agony ran in Etain's veins, and exstasy ran with it in her mind. She willed to be that which she was commanded. She became a will.

Green lightnings and red. Green soundless thunder. And a soundless roaring of red. . . . In-finite space was about her; swooning and infinite; infinite and giddy and swooning. . . . Before the eyes of Fuamnach her body blinked suddenly. It blew out like a blown-out flame. It disappeared.

In "Becuma of the White Skin" Stephens describes the many worlds of existence. Beginning with Earth, the next level was the world of the Sidhe, corresponding to clay, the Many-Colored land, corresponding to water, the Land of Wonder, corresponding to fire, and the Land of Promise,
its correspondence obviously to air, though Stephens claims not to know. In this description, interestingly enough, Stephens equates joy and good, evil and sorrow. This is an important key to Stephens' personal philosophy: "Joy and sorrow, or, in other words, good and evil, are not absent in their degree from any of the worlds, for wherever there is life there is action, and action is but the expression of one or other of these qualities." From Becuma is said to be an earth woman who, having become elevated to the Many-Colored Land, most strangely retains such earthly passion. Her fate to return to the earth and the accompanying denial of entrance to any part of the Sidhe suggests, says Stephens, that the Sidhe is controlled by the Many-Colored Land and the Earth by the Sidhe. These various levels would seem, then, to be inhabited by beings who reside in specific levels according to their degree of passion. There are incidences in Stephens, however, that construct the possibility of annihilation of the soul or perhaps the spark of life. Having gone through numerous reincarnations Fruic and Rucht fight each other as bulls and finally succeed in exterminating one another. An alternative punishment to banishment for Becuma is "dissolution by fire. . .a destruction too final for the mind to contemplate." And in the story of Fionn the slaughter of the young poets by Flacull mac Cona appears complete: "He did not leave one poeteen of them all. He put them out of the world and out of life, so that they stopped being, and no one could tell where they went or what had really happened to them." Another of the occultist themes in the stories has to do with desire itself or as it is termed in the adventures of Nera, wishing.
Stephens had remarked *in the Land of Youth* that will carried out wish; Maeve illustrates the force of the phenomenon: "Poets constitute wish," she emphasizes. "Magicians constitute will," Nera discovers the importance of wishing in his adventures among the Sidhe of Ethal Anbual. The destruction of Maeve's camp that he witnessed is explained to him as merely the product of wishing. But in Faery wishing is a technique whereby what one desires can be brought to fruition. So that what is Anbual's wish will become reality next Samhain Eve. Nera discovers "that what he had regarded as wishing was merely a lax wandering of the mind; a superficial fancying in which, although his sympathies were engaged, his mind or will was quiescent." There is an altruistic side to wishing; to wish for a thing that belongs to another means two wishes act against each other, leaving the wishers in a middle place of "torment." True wishing is wishing for what others can enjoy with one. The mystical accomplishment of the wish-will is that "a thing can be conceived and exercised in the mind, but when it has been so exercised in the mind that it really becomes real there, it then becomes real in every part of nature and in all the worlds where life is living."

The compulsion of wish-fulfillment is evident in *Deirdre*. As Bresil Etarlaïm leaned toward the unsuspecting Etain forcing his will into her mind, so Deirdre more innocently, of course, had a "direction" in her knowledge of Naoise and she "leaned there as ardently and unconsciously as a flower turns to the sun." Through her brooding on him, she sends unrest into his mind because to desire is to be incomplete and to be desirous is to make a man dependent on that which will satisfy desire; seeking continuously, consciously or subconsciously, he is drained.
of energy and self-sufficiency. Desire, then, creates vulnerability through dependence, obligating one to interaction with the rest of mankind. This obligation to interaction becomes a paradoxically simultaneous source of good and evil-doing. Stephens explains that the "sense of separateness is vanity, and is the bed of all wrong-doing. For we are not freedom, we are control, and we must submit to our own function ere we can exercise it. Even unconsciously we accept the rights of others to all that we have. . . ."

Some critics have objected to a mystical interpretation of the old sagas; to do so is to force a positive answer to the still debated question of their origin in eastern philosophy. There is in such interpretation the temptation "to forget the lively humanity lying at the basis of this curious fabric." It is Augustine Martin's contention that Stephens was essentially using mysticism and theosophy as a means for imposing an order on the old tales. Actually Stephens has taken what occultism does naturally appear in this saga material and has transcribed it into terms that would yield the greatest credibility to the tales. Stephens does not appear to be using the tales necessarily as a vehicle for expressing his own occultist views. He recognizes the eastern philosophy as a plausible explanation of some of the more unrealistic saga material. Under his deft hand the material is able to sustain the beauty of its unearthly quality and yet retain its position as plausible motivation for the characters. It is their revelation of the peculiarities of human behavior that has captured Stephens' attention, not their occultist possibilities.
The supernatural appears frequently in Stephens' redactions as commentary on the Sidhe. All of the stories save that of Tuan mac Cairell and Deirdre contain some information about the Tuatha De Danann. To compile the "facts" about Tir na n-Og one might simply examine Stephens' stories for information about the land, the characters, and what particularizing traits and properties are held by the Sidhe. As regards the land it is first of all a particular place. As in Nera's adventure entry may be gained only on Samhain Eve. However, other stories reveal protagonists who literally stumble into the world of the Sidhe almost as if it occupied another dimension, different yet parallel with our own. There is also a time difference; a day in Faery is like several minutes in the mortal world. In most of the stories the Sidhe are very tolerant of human foibles, but occasionally, as with Aillen mac Midna and the Fear Doirche and the hags of Cesh Coran, the Sidhe are perfectly capable of maleficence. The Sidhe are extremely powerful. In the scene in which Midir asks Eochaid to pay him his wager, the king's Champion comes forward and seeks to do combat with Midir, who simply clasps one hand on his shoulder and shoves him effortlessly to the ground. The Carl, in reality the ruler of the Sidhe of Rath Cruachan, easily outstrips Thessaly's fleetest, contrary to the expectations of the Fianna. In general, however, the important point is that the Sidhe in Stephens are nearly identical in person and culture to the human inhabitants, particularly the nobility at that time.

**Stephens as Shenachie**

Stephen Gwynn once said of Stephens that he "can become at will
one of the old story-makers, and can invent detail of his own with the same sort of picturesque exaggeration that was their delight. Stephens appears to be making up parts of the saga as he goes along. exactly like what a bard of mediaeval Ireland would have put into one of the traditional recitals, if he did not find it there." Whether or not Gwynn's assessment of Stephens is correct depends in large measure exactly how one considers the skills of the ancient bard.

The bard and the filli learned the sagas by rote memorization and according to Kenneth Jackson in his discussion of Irish traditions, the recitation of the sagas was not extemporaneous but exact. Dorothy Hoare notes in this same vein that the most important stories, those considered "first line," could be known by all fillid, whereas the "second line" or less important stories were known by only the chief fillid. Such might indicate the sanctity of form, the chief stories being so well known they were in no danger of being garbled. One might speculate that this insistence on formula and exactness might illustrate that the Celts considered these stories factual or possibly, like Biblical scriptures, instructional stories that were held to be sacred and thus unalterable.

The inheritors of the bards and fillid were the shenachies, the story-tellers who far from the court and banquet hall setting of the ancient poets kept these stories and others alive but not without their own emendations. To many critics, however, the terms are interchangeable. In Hoare's terms Stephens is a stylistic and conceptual descendant of the shenachies; he is "first and foremost a narrator, concerned with the concrete definite tale, and only secondarily concerned with
his particular reactions to it. The story is treated—for the first time in the Irish school—as an end in itself and not as a means to an end. He is able to grasp the situation as it would have been, and to make it re-live by his vivid presentation of it." On the other hand, Brandon Saul insists Stephens has "the audacity and imaginative exuberance" of the *film* combined with "artistic control" and "instinct for selectiveness." As noted above, the manuscripts of the sagas are, for the most part, more outline than the tale itself. Since obviously Stephens' renderings are expansions of the original tale, his connection with these manuscripts is more in the nature of a spiritual inheritance. To Stephens the story and the characters are of first importance. The tales in their manuscript form are not always coherent and continuous; Stephens has with the fictionist's aplomb organized the stories and characters so that to the modern eye they do appear coherent. Stephens has deleted, expanded, selected episodes as a good story-teller would do. Yet if a defect might be turned into a positive point, the discontinuity of such stories as "Mongan's Frenzy" and the whole of *In the Land of Youth* may be excused on grounds of authenticity, or at least fidelity, to the episodic peculiarities of ancient Irish narrative. Stephens is certainly a story-teller, not, as H. V. Fackler points out, "a moralist or an experimental novelist." But as Hoare explains, in the "pauses of the story" he is at liberty to give "his own reflections and philosophy, and by this "curious" technique Stephens illustrates "natural affinities by temperament with the matter he deals with."
Stephens' first credential was, of course, that he was an Irishman. It is unthinkable, certainly, that Stephens would have not had the opportunity to be familiar with at least some of the Irish tales told by the traditional story-tellers. He was after all of a people who treasured tradition. Even the language of his stories is, as Gwynn would point out, "such English as would be natural for an Irishman to use when telling a story." Stephens may use phraseology occasionally that seems a deliberate attempt at ethnic ambiguity, but his written versions retain all the picturesqueness, the immediacy, the authorial interpolations of an orally presented narrative. Contemporaries of Stephens noted his gift for oral recitation. Benedict Kiely says of Stephens' Deirdre that it is told 'with the blending of elaboration and breathless speed with which stories are told in the bright place between the fire and the wall'; even that which seems modern psychoanalytic presentation of character here is in keeping with the technique of the traditional story-teller.  

On the subject of Stephens' irreverence in the handling of even the most serious of the stories, it must be pointed out that Stephens' humor did not imply ridicule but rather it too is in the fashion of the expert narrator who was aware of the need to vary his pace, though anyone who reads Stephens is usually aware that the mixture of modes is also an extension of Stephens' own nature. Moreover, it should be noted, that as Chadwick observes, the 'dignified and fastidious tone' of much heroic literature is not present in the old Irish sagas with the possible exception of the Tochmarc Etain. Likewise, Stephens' grotesquerie too is traditional; in the saga Chadwick finds evidence of
"love of the grotesque and the fantastic and of rough horseplay."143

The sorties at the Red Branch, the death-mask faces of Fuamnach and Bresil Etarlaim, the horrible appearance of the four daughters of Conaran or the Hag at the Mill, the entire story of the brawl at Allen, the description of Carl of the Drab Coat—all illustrate Stephens' ability to shock without sickening, to juxtapose the dangerous and the humorous and to make the repulsive interesting and the supernatural believable.

Stephens writes in In the Land of Youth that teaching is sometimes the message of the story.144 Though it be so, such purpose becomes one with the narrative's other raison d'être—to stimulate the imagination and implement joy. Stephens has returned both purposefully and intuitively to a time when story-telling was an integral part of life and thus has offered tales imbued with the very sense of life itself. If, as Alwyn Rees insists, the art of story-telling does not depend upon the newness of the tale but the originality of the teller, then Stephens is measurably successful, causing what is old to appear quite original and augmenting the lessons of antiquity with an inimitable running commentary of his own observations about his fellow man at whatever time period he might have lived.
CHAPTER TWO—FOOTNOTES


3 Finneran, p. 253.


5 O'Connor, p. 189.

6 Finneran, pp. 240-241.

7 Finneran, pp. 255, 257.

8 Finneran, p. 297.

9 Finneran, p. 173.

10 Finneran, p. 173.

11 Finneran, p. 249.


13 Finneran, pp. 246-247.

14 Martin, p. 127.

15 P. W. Joyce, Old Celtic Romances (London: David Nutt, 1894), p. v

16 Martin, p. 127.


19 Robin Flower identifies this story with that of Fintan mac Bochra and presumes the protagonists to be identical.

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James Stephens, Irish Fairy Tales (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), p. 147. Subsequent references to this work will be abbreviated IFT.


Stephens in his Times article on myth makes reference to R. I. Best's translation of the story of Art, son of Conn.

Finneran, p. 241.


The source of Angus' dream is the Aislinge Aenguso of the Egerton 1782 manuscript. Nera's adventure is the Echtra Neraí in the Yellow Book of Lecan and the Egerton 1782 manuscript.

The motif of the dream girl who causes love sickness is popular in sagas. Myles Dillon in his Early Irish Literature cites the Echtra Conli, Echtra Cormaic, Imram Bran, Serglige con Culainn as examples, though the protagonist in each case is human, not divine.


Finneran, p. 318. Leahy discusses the variants in these manuscript versions. Leahy explains that the natural events in this tale may have taken place about 100 B.C., yet there are discrepancies in certain anachronistic persons cited as contemporaries of men who lived before them. Such suggests that the Etain story may have been part of a "short cycle of romance" originally separate from the Heroic Age cycles.

In the preface to his translation of the Tochmarc Etaine Leahy discusses the variants in these manuscript versions.

Finneran, p. 318.

The Leinster version of Deirdre includes Deirdre's lament which Stephens chose to omit except for the first line of her keen. The Leinster version is more personal than other versions and internal evidence suggests that the author was a woman.

The Longes mac n-Uislienn version ends when, after a year of mourning following the slaying of the sons of Usna, Deirdre flings herself from the chariot of Conachur and, striking her head on a stone, dies. The Oidheadh Chloinne hUisneach version ends with Deirdre's dying across the
bodies of the executed heroes.

34 Patricia McFate, James Stephens' Deirdre and Its Legendary Sources, "Eire-Ireland, 4 (Autumn, 1969), 89-90.


36 McFate, pp. 91-93.


39 viz. Martin, p. 141ff. For discussion of techniques of this novel.

40 Martin, p. 140.

41 Hoare, p. 16.

42 Hoare, p. 16.

43 IFT, p. 16.

44 IFT, p. 131.

45 IFT, p. 141.

46 IFT, p. 115.

47 IFT, p. 350.

48 Hoare, p. 17. This characteristic, as explained above, is perhaps due to the fact that the sagas in the form available today are in actuality notes for oral recitation, recitation that one might expect would be considerably more detailed and ornamented.

49 James Stephens, In the Land of Youth (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1-24), p. 109. Subsequent references to this work will be abbreviated ILY.

50 IFT, pp. 30, 14.

51 ILY, pp. 74-75.

52 McFate, p. 92.
James Stephens, *Deirdre* (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1923), p. 79. All subsequent references to this work will be abbreviated *Deirdre*.

Deirdre, p. 144.

Deirdre, p. 143.

Deirdre's actions here are related to her dream of the three ravens earlier in the story, the raven reputed to drink the blood of the newly slain on the battlefield.

Hoare, p. 133.

Hoare, p. 132.

Hoare, p. 138.

Ily, p. 302.

IFT, p. 15.

Deirdre, p. 70.

Leahy, p. 13.

IFT, pp. 103, 134, 145.

Deirdre, pp. 104, 53, 90.

Ily, pp. 152, 245, 245.

Ily, pp. 150-151.

Deirdre, pp. 61-62.


In his *Times* article on myth Stephens terms Irish mythological beliefs spawned from a cult of death "rather merry than otherwise." Though men are not gods, he continues, gods are dead men.

Fackler, p. 15.

Deirdre, p. 281.

Deirdre, p. 285.

Deirdre, p. 246.
In his "Essay in Cubes" Stephens suggests that as writers "we reproduce ourselves": they are our brothers and sisters not in consanguinity, but in the deepest sense that any relation is possible to living creatures."
105 Deirdre, pp. 5-6. Stephens is careful here to defend Fergus' passivity with regards to the throne by carefully delineating in what ways Conachúr is obviously better suited to the kingship than Fergus and to explain that Fergus is so enamoured of Nessa as to want to be with her alone.
Caesar in his accounts of Gaul claims that the reason for the Celts' great courage in battle and disregard for death was due to a belief in the immortality of the soul, here rebirth into another plane of existence. Douglas Hyde believes that the doctrine was thought to increase courage, but was not deliberate or ritualized. Stephens treats of moments of heroic courage but little; Art in the tale of Becuma is the best example. Stephens prefers less overt examples of human courage.

Stephens illustrates not the metempsychosis familiar in the works of James Joyce but metamorphosis.

Stephens explains this philosophy in his article "An Irish Prophecy"; "the job of a prophet is to formulate a desire, and if this desire is in line with the desires of man it must come true no matter what powers or vested interests are opposed to it or threatened by it."


The duties of the fiill are given in the *Leabhar Laignech* (The Book of Leinster). Viz. also Eugene O'Curry, *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*.

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Lloyd Frankenberg in his introduction to *James, Seumas, and Jacques* remarks that Stephens could write as well as he talked, that "even from the deepest, darkest silence of type, his words go straight to the ear."

CHAPTER THREE
THE CELTIC HERO FIGURE IN STEPHENS' REDACTIONS

The Irish saga (ursgeul) is essentially divided into three main types: the Mythological stories concerning primarily the lives of Celtic "divinities," especially the Tuatha De Danann; the Ultonian stories about the Red Branch warriors centering primarily on the epic the Táin Bó Cuilgne; the Fenian stories relating the exploits of Fionn mac Uail and the Fianna. Details of these cycles pertinent to their origins have been given earlier. Here it is of importance to recognize the important stories within each cycle and the representation of the heroic type as pictured in these tales.

Stephens has used material from all three cycles. From the Red Branch cycle comes Deirdre, one of the remscéla or prefatory tales to the central story of the cycle the Táin Bó Cuilgne, and the stories of Nera, Fruic and Rucht, and Maeve and Fergus in In the Land of Youth. From the Fenian cycle is "The Boyhood of Fionn," "Oisin's Mother," "The Birth of Bran," "The Little Brawl at Allen," "Carl of the Drab Coat," and possibly "Mongan's Frenzy" in Irish Fairy Tales. From the Mythological cycle Stephens has taken "The Story of Tuan mac Cairill." The other stories are part of the traditional heroic literature, though not of the cycles proper. Wherever the sagas are clear, Stephens has employed the facts and the spirit of the original. His alterations were made to
improve coherence and his emendations proposed to vivify. What he has accomplished is the celebration of a distant heroic mien often cast in a superfluous rigidity and celebrates it as credible actuality.

In dealing with the sagas Stephens had to portray the famous heroes as monumental yet personal figures. To do so necessitated an understanding of the demands and customs of the society in which they lived. H. M. Chadwick in *The Heroic Age* speaks of those characteristics common to most heroic societies. These include a 'weakening' of blood relationships and an increase of ties to the chieftain or king, the might of a kingship based on military effectiveness and reputation, a decided lack of sense of nationality, a religion involving the worship of anthropomorphic deities, a belief in the immortality of the soul and life after death in a particular land of reward. The heroic society was a fairly unrestrained society, the warriors in particular acknowledging no authority save that of their leader.¹

**Characteristics of the Saga Hero**

One of the chief values of the sagas, indeed, is the accuracy of their portrayal of the characteristics of the heroic society, the social position of the characters, episodes of heroic experience, adjuncts to heroic life, and social conventions.² Typical of the protagonist of an heroic story is his personal bravery. It is for the revelation of this quality that the main action evolves. For obvious reasons many of these episodes involve battle, particularly a man-to-man combat, and the hero's victory is inevitably marked not by group effort but by personal prowess. It is significant that in the more sophisticated sagas the hero's prowess includes not only physical strength and skill but also
intelligence, sapience, even craft. His courage is underscored by personal disregard for his own safety. His goal may ostensibly be wealth, with which notably he increases his reputation by generosity, but he is motivated above all by the love of personal glory, in Chadwick's words, "the love of adventure for its own sake." Almost child-like in his response, the hero maintains an enthusiasm for life, a lack of affectation, a philosophy of existence based on the phenomenal, a sense of the relationship between immediate causes and immediate effects, and an openness that separate him from his more civilized modern counterpart.

The sagas are aristocratic and, unlike in the Continental märchen, the heroes are almost never of common stock. The aristocrat traditionally freed from the simple pursuit of livelihood and the mundanities of existence is generally pictured in pursuit of higher ideals. The Irish hero, like others, holds one supreme desire—the acquisition of honor and fame. This desire is based on an extraordinarily sensitive personal pride and supplies the material out of which the characteristic violence of the Irish heroic tales is made. Any abrogation of this distinction is met with swift retaliation for in Kenneth Jackson's words, the Irish heroes "avenge any sort of insult with the greatest savagery." One need only note the excuse for the "little brawl" at Allen or Conachur's revenge on the Sons of Usna. But to balance these two principle aristocratic virtues of fierceness and courage was the hero's sense of decency and fair play. The hero apparently sensed quickly the point at which mercy becomes more appropriate than vindication and strategic retreat than pressing unfair advantage. Such is illustrated by the stories of Cuchulain in his sparing the Connacht charioteer and
his respect for the old Connacht warrior Etarcomaíl. Sensitive of his own honor, he is likewise sensitive to that of his equals as in Naoise's refusal to insult the sons of Fergus by implying that they were incapable of acting in their father's stead to provide surety for the exiles.

The same violent enthusiasm with which the heroes threw themselves into conflict extended into nearly every other aspect of their existence, particularly one of their favorite pastimes—feasting. A primary form of pleasure, the banquet gave ample opportunity for feats of drinking, bouts of verbal one-up-manship, and occasion to exhibit their ample generosity. The first two are obviously manifestations of the typical heroic desire for extending the reputation for prowess, yet even the latter gave rise to competition as one hero attempted to outdo another in munificence. According to the social doce, generosity, like courage and loyalty, was considered a "cardinal virtue." As generosity resulted essentially in service and a sense of mutuality, so arrogance, "the tendency of a powerful man, trusting in force majeure, to trample upon the rights of others," was considered a major vice. Yet a fine line sometimes divided heroic virtues from heroic vices. In "The Little Brawl at Allen," for example, generosity became the means to a contest between Fionn and Goll in which Goll's untoward gift-giving embarrasses Fionn; Goll exhibits arrogance, moreover, because it is Fionn's preogative as chief of the Fianna to be the greatest gift-giver. Likewise, in the saga of the Sons of Usna Conachur violates the surety of Fergus who had sworn to protect Deirdre and Naoise. It is for this flagrant arrogance that Fergus and other nobles leave the service of Conachur, not simply for his destruction of the Usna group.
Interestingly enough, the heroic demeanor preserved in the sagas has confirmation in the eye-witness accounts of Celtic heroic behavior. Kenneth Jackson has cited accounts by Diodorus and Strabo, writing of travels in the Celtic world before and during the Roman influence in these regions. The Celtic warriors were reported to be "mad on war, high-spirited and prompt to fight, and foolishly boastful." A single Celtic warrior customarily challenged an enemy to single combat and deprecated the opponent while boasting of his own courage. The Celts also frequently fought from chariots, exhibiting acrobatic abilities by balancing on the forepart of the rapidly moving vehicle and hurling spears and slashing with short swords. They would take heads as trophies with which they decorated their chariots. These same skulls might be emptied of tissue, the cerebral matter being mixed with lime, allowed to harden, and later thrown at the enemy; the skulls themselves were displayed and sometimes inlaid with gold and used as drinking cups. Contemporaries describe Celtic warriors with considerable awe. Their seeming abandon, utter dismissal of self-concern was in itself terrifying to their foes, though as proved by the Romans, the better organized troops may have the advantage over even the most recklessly courageous Celts. Yet there came to be attributed to the Celts a "battle frenzy," an externally evident rage that apparently became in descriptions a kind of physical alteration. Nowhere is this "battle frenzy" more apparent than in the saga descriptions of Cuchulain, who was said to swell to many times his size, to throw out light from his head, to contort his body so that he appeared to have twisted his torso completely to the reverse of the direction of his head. Celtic warriors captured by
Caesar boasted that they feared nothing but natural disaster; the Celt proverbially swore to stand his ground until "the earth split and the sky fell." This saying testifies not only to the innate courage of the warriors (some would say foolhardiness) but also provides a link between this courage and the religion of the Celts. No particular deity is invoked, yet there is probably more here than the normal primitive respect for the unpredictable powers of nature—the recognition by the Celts of the one aspect of human vulnerability unalterable through any sort of belief or conditioning. This admission is the ground on which the belief in such supernatural beings as the Sidhe is based; these beings, though essentially anthropomorphic, not only exhibit the wish fulfillment incumbent on dwellers in an imperfect world but also in their interactions with man can act without rational motivation, being occasionally oblivious to human suffering, like nature sometimes beneficent, sometimes maleficent.

Another characteristic of Celtic heroic demeanor is the institution of the geis, a kind of vow or self-imposed injunction. The hero usually proclaimed his own geis or bound another "under geis." The vow itself involved either a commitment to perform an act or to restrain from an act. Geis generally concerned the honor of the hero, yet it was at times a convention similar to totem; for example, Cuchulain was under geis never to eat the meat of a dog, his namesake. A geis may be circumstantial or related to fateful events, disastrous cause and effect relationships. Whatever its origin or nature, the violation of geasa inevitably led to dishonor and not infrequently to death. Geis may be viewed too as an outgrowth of a desire to stabilize relationships...
In an unpredictable world or to act as a lever for accomplishing one's will. Fergus, for example, vows to protect Naoise's party but is under geis not to refuse hospitality, such as that offered by Borach. The geis in this situation is more powerful than the surety, a fact no doubt known to Conachur in his machinations. In the face of all expediency Fergus is forced by his own honor to abandon the Usna party. Notably too of all the party only Deirdre and Naoise are at all distrustful of Fergus' surety, his guarantee of their safety in his name, because they alone are fully aware that loyalty may be broken. Yet Naoise is ultimately unwilling to follow his reason, determined to rely on custom instead. Ironically Naoise breaks his own geis in so doing for he is foresworn to return to Ireland only in the company of Fergus, Conall Cernach, or Cuchulain. The two geasa initiate a fatal series of errors born both of the cruel perversion of honor and the fateful pull between honor and duty.

The strong sense of honor was operative in the face of enmity as well. During the era of the sagas there was little political unity and often discord or even war between neighboring territories. Nowhere is this discord more apparent than that between the provinces of Ulster and Connacht. In spite of open warfare, however, there is in the one province considerable respect for the mettle of the other, born not of grudging admiration for victories achieved but for the heroic demeanor of the other. The heroes of the sagas were able to hold each other in deep friendship yet slaughter each other on the battlefield. Cuchulain and Ferdia, though friends from childhood, are on opposing sides in the Táin. But after each furiously fought encounter, they "threw away their weapons
from them... Each of them forthwith approached the other, and each put his arm around the other's neck and gave him three kisses." In Deirdre Stephens emphasizes the peculiar relationship between the two provinces at Conachúr's feast. In speaking of the Connacht warriors Emer says, "Their lies come from a good heart and a love of happiness, while our truths come grumph, grumph, grumph like the snarling of a badly trained dog," to which Fergus accedes; "No man can pray for a better enemy than a Connachtman... They come on where another would go back and when they go back it is either through pity or poetry."^10

Another characteristic of the heroic sagas was a strong concept of magic, a concept which is of an internal rather than external variety. There was first of all a ranking of those with magical powers: the "divine magicians"—those who specially protect the land and people—the druids and the fills. Due to the awe surrounding word spells the poet too was considered magical. Especially powerful was satiric recitation, the shame of which was feared by the Celt more than the weapon of a would-be assassin. Below these were the heroes who, though human and not divine, often had superhuman traits such as size, age, valor, or particular skills; above the magicians were the kings who had the actual work of protection which they did by "resisting the enemy." Their function was primarily in connection with the crops though in a general sense the well-being of the people in every sense was under their jurisdiction. As Anton Hamel points out, "If the king protects his country by a strict observance of rules prescribed by fate, their latent energy guards him in its turn."^11 Here, as in certain magical objects and even persons a "mystical security emanates."^12 Thus the king or chieftain

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adds another dimension to his traditional role as gift-giver as bound up within his very essence is the means to the security and prosperity of his people. Certainly in the story of Becuma of the White skin, for example, Conn is responsible for the ills of his land through his marriage to Becuma and by extension is solely responsible for the restitution of good, as evidenced by his solitary journey to find a sacrifice. If the king, then, is viewed as personally so essential to the well-being of the society, then the peculiar privileges incumbent on sovereign rights becomes more comprehensible. As in the portrait of Conachur who may demand the sexual favors of the wife of his story-teller or even of his champion Cuchulain, his people may be expected to surrender their dearest held privileges. Notably, however, like the hero, the king is usually a man deemed so worthy of respect that the surrendering of privilege appears a gift in exchange for those benefits rendered by the king.

The functional importance of heroes may be rendered also a kind of magic. Some scholars contend that the pagan Irish had no substantial belief in gods in the usual sense. Such a concept is supported by the lack of evidence of a concrete pantheon. What is to some scholars evidence of a definitive religion in the embryonic stage may in actuality be essentially a godless religion through which the Irish Celtic peoples coped with a world characterized by challenge and governed by a fate mitigated only temporarily by the most courageous and skillful. In such a world the hero emerges as a superior human who can both challenge and accept his fate, thereby becoming a god substitute. His chief role is, therefore, one of leadership and protection; the heroes are essentially
the "exemplary protectors of the land." Such may tend to explain, then, the emphasis on the hero in Celtic myth: Conn who must seek a perfect sacrifice to save his country, Fionn who seeks to oppose Cael who would ravage the land, Eochaid who would marry for his people, and ultimately Cuchulain who singlehandedly repels the forces of Connacht. The Celtic world was so filled with terrors unrelieved for the most part by benign supernatural intervention as in other pagan cultures that courage at times became essentially stoicism. As in Stephens' rendering of the story of Becuma, Art, who must face a battery of trials and monsters as horrifying or perhaps more so than those faced by the Greek heroes, explains his own courage in terms of simple practicality--there is so much to beware of that he will beware of nothing.

Another kind of magic is that of the relationship between the recitation of these tales and the term "Act of Truth." The Act of Truth presumes that the simple utterance of a true story or truth can work miracles. This term explains one reason for the careful preservation of the sagas. Traditionally speaking, there is a "power" to be acquired through knowledge which enables the person who knows events that have happened in a place to utilize their latent magical properties for himself. As Hamel explains, "The more traditions we possess and the better we preserve them, the stronger will our position be against natural and supernatural adversaries." This belief also has paradigmatic value; that is, to recite a true story on the eve or during a similar happening is to assure a similar outcome. Therefore, the recitation of the sagas to the young is, in effect, not only to offer a pattern for behavior but also an inherently magical act that will insure the protection of and
success of future generations. 18

These curious elements in the sagas as well as their antiquity and narrative quality have brought about their preservation as objects of interest. H. M. Chadwick postulates the following about the fascination of the sagas for the modern reader:

The hold which these poems have exercised on subsequent ages, in very different states of culture, is due not only to their artistic qualities but also in the absorbing interest of the situations which they depict. This interest arises very largely from the extraordinary freedom from restraint enjoyed by the characters in the gratification of their feelings and desires and from the tremendous and sudden vicissitudes of fortune to which they are exposed. The pictures presented to us are those of persons by no means ignorant of the civilised life, yet dominated by the pride and passions which spring from an entirely reckless individualism and untrained by experience to exercise moderation.

This "reckless individualism" is evidenced in their battles, their quotidian dealings with each other, their stories and art. But there is more than mere ethnic stylization at work here. The Iron Age Celts were still the people of nature. Having subdued nature enough to make themselves more comfortable than the savage, their lives more predictable than the barbarian, they yet retained an affection for nature that is in sharp contrast to aboriginal custom. The heroes were evidently imbued with the spirit of nature and moved by its manifestations. As A. E. notes, these are men in whom "comradeship with the earth" produces a "commingling of natures" that gives rise to a spirit that defies the gods and moves "eagle-like." 20 It is finally this heroic spirit that is paradoxically the common bond and the individual mark of the
figures of the sagas.

A distillation of this heroic spirit may be found in the *Book of Lismore* in the Fenian fragment known as the *Agallamh na Senorach* ("The Colloquy with the Ancients"). In it is recorded the supposed meeting between St. Patrick and the Fenians Caoilte and Oisin. Caoilte is converted by the Saint, but Patrick, far from insisting that Caoilte completely forewear his old pagan life, asks that Caoilte tell him the lore of each place they visit and has a scribe write down all that Caoilte tells him. One of St. Patrick's first questions concerns what manner of men were the men of old, having himself been struck by the size and dignity as well as the surprising longevity of Caoilte and Oisin. St. Patrick inquires, "Who or what was it that maintained you so in your life?" Caoilte simply explains, "Truth that was in our hearts, and strength in our arms, and fulfillment in our tongues."

Caoilte's definition provides here a useful framework for an examination of the Celtic heroic type in terms of Stephens' characters. If "truth" might be construed as spiritual characteristics, then here might be discussed the innocence, simplistic idealism, the sense of decency and fair play, the camaraderie, the keen loyalty with which the Celtic hero is imbued. Such characteristics are to be interpreted as a product of the heroes' close association with "nature" and their paradoxical view of life as both sacred and expendable. "Strength" here is, on the one hand, the typical bravery of the Celtic hero, the infamous brutality which, nevertheless, is coupled with a strange gentleness, a natural "chivalry," the recklessness of the warrior that is born of a dignified sense of fatalism. But here, also, is the intelligence of the hero whose
training involves not only physical but mental prowess as well; the hero is an individual known for wisdom, for sapience that may be channeled into craft. The combination of all these characteristics allows the hero "fulfillment," most typically illustrated in his powers of leadership and protection, his generosity to his followers. All these rest on the one all-encompassing focus of the heroic mind: the acquisition of fame. Not a simple and cheap bid for adulation, fame to the Celtic hero was the sine qua non for his hardships, the superhuman feats to which he drove himself, for to him fame was essentially the magnification of his name and thereby himself; it was the securing of his individuality against the almost inevitable anonymity produced by the passage of time. Fame was, therefore, immortality, life after death.

The Characteristics Interpreted Through Stephens' Male Persona

The opening story in Stephens' Irish Fairy Tales concerns Tuan mac Cairill, who, like Caoilte in the Colloquy, converses with a Christian. Pressed to conversion, Tuan reveals to Finnian, the Abbot of Moville, the fact that his lineage is dual; he is a descendant of Huredoc Redneck as is well known, but more important, he explains he is also the son of Starn, the son of Sera, and thus with Partholon at the initial settling of Ireland. Though Tuan becomes in this tale a personification of Irish history, there are in the rendition the pervasive notes of the Irish hero's kinship with nature. Having been the lone survivor of a plague that decimated Partholon and his followers, Tuan undergoes successive metamorphoses into various animals. Initially reverting to a half-wild yet still human state, Tuan begins assimilating animal appearance and behavior. When he can no longer function as a lone man
in the wilderness state, Tuan discovers he has become a deer: "And I felt...the beating of a new heart within me and...I arched my neck and braced my powerful limbs."23 Growing old as a deer, he is changed into a boar, "a wildcat for leaping, a giant for strength, a devil for ferocity."24 After he again grows old, he becomes a hawk and then a salmon. His strange multiple existence ends with his rebirth as the son of Cairill, King of Ulster, whose wife, having consumed the salmon, gives natural birth to him.

Significant is Tuan's open embrace of animal existence. Tuan remembers his life as a deer: "Loud and clear and sweet was the voice of the great stag. With what ease my lovely note went lilting. With what joy I heard the answering call. With what delight I bounded, bounded, bounded; light as a bird's plume, powerful as a storm, un-tiring as the sea."25

It is no accident that the progression of animal forms ends with that of the salmon. As will be noted later the salmon suggests the Salmon of Wisdom who endows him who consumes it with almost prophetic knowledge; the incidence here of the salmon would seem to suggest an intuitive understanding of existence, for as the fish of this tale Tuan himself comes to know the moment of death: "I was in air, and it was as though I were in fire. The air pressed on me like a fiery mountain. It beat on my scales and scorched them. It rushed down my throat and scalded me. It weighed on me and squeezed me, so that my eyes felt as though they must burst from my head, my head as though it would leap from my body, and my body as though it would swell and expand and fly in a thousand pieces."26

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In the Fionn tales there is a slightly different but nonetheless vital relationship between the hero and nature. From the beginning Fionn mac Uail is oriented to nature lore by reason of his warrior training as well as by virtue of his being hidden away as a child. Having been born after the Clan Morna's murder of his father, Fionn was given to the care of the two druidesses Bov Mall and Lia Luachra to assure his safety from his father's enemies. Secreted deep in the forests, Fionn learned the ways of the animals: "He learned to jump by chasing hares in a bumpy field. . . . in a while it did not matter to Fionn which way the hare jumped for he could jump that way too. . . . Fionn learned to swim until he could pop into the water like an otter and slide through it like an eel." That these "ways" were necessary to the Celtic warrior's mien is evident in later requirements for membership in the Fianna. The candidate was deemed worthy to become a member of Fionn's guard only when he proved his strength and agility: "Not a man of them was taken till his hair had been interwoven into braids on him and he started at a run through Ireland's woods; while they, seeking to wound him, followed in his wake, there having been between him and them but one forest bough by way of interval at first." If he were wounded, if his hair was disturbed, if he made noise as he ran, he was not accepted into the coterie; "unless that [at his full speed] he had both jumped a stick level with his brow, and stooped to pass under one even with his knee, he was not taken. Also unless without slackening his pace he could with his nail extract a thorn from his foot, he was not taken into Fianship. . . ."

Fionn viewed nature, however, as more than a testing ground, more even than a teacher of physical and mental agility and strength. Fionn,
himself, had a genuine affection for nature, a love tempered with respect for the sanctity of life. A master hunter for whom the killing of deer was a challenge pitting human against animal craft, Fionn felt a deeply rooted attachment for the creatures of nature, but particularly dogs. Fionn "delighted in dogs, and knew everything about them from the setting of the first little white tooth to the rocking of the last long yellow one. He knew the affections and antipathies which are proper in a dog; the degree of obedience to which dogs may be trained without losing their honourable qualities or becoming servile and suspicious; he knew the hopes that animate them, the apprehensions which tingle in their blood, and all that is to be demanded from, or forgiven in, a paw, an ear, a nose, an eye, or a tooth." 29 Fionn reputedly owned three hundred dogs. His affection was focused in these tales on his own two half-wild dogs Sceolan and Bran. "The Birth of Bran" is a tale regarding the supernatural birth of these dogs. When Uct Dealg, a Sidhe woman, was replaced in her human lover's affections by a mortal woman Tuiren, Uct Dealg transformed her into a hound which she gave to the care of Fergus Fionnliath, a known hater of dogs. Tuiren was returned to her natural form when Fionn interceded, but not before giving birth to Bran and Sceolan. 30

The concept of the metamorphosed human evident here appears also in the tale of Tuan mac Cairill discussed above, the story of Etain, and in another tale of the Fianna "Disin's Mother" in which Fionn's wife Saeve is transformed into a deer. This motif of metamorphoses illustrates the attitude of the Celt towards nature. Far from the worship of animals as gods, the Celt nevertheless venerated nature with a
mixture of a sense of common identity in the similarities of attributes and of a sense of synonymity of conditions of existence. This attitude lends itself readily, then, to a personification of animals. The child Deime (Fionn) observes the creatures in his forest seclusion: "Whistles and chirps; cooes and caws and croaks, would have grown familiar to him. And he could at last have told which brother of the great brotherhood was making the noise he heard at any moment. . . . A solemn-nosed, stern-eyed cow would amble and stamp in his wood to find a flyless shadow; or a strayed sheep would poke its gentle muzzle through leaves. . . . There would be flies to be watched, slender atoms in yellow gauze that flew, and filmy specks that flittered, and sturdy, thick-ribbed brutes that pounced like cats and bit like dogs and flew like lightning."\(^31\)

Given the Celtic hero's close kinship with nature, it is not surprising that his everyday existence was marked by practicality. Though closely linked to his own milieu, the hero was adaptable, self-sufficient and able to find security under unusual circumstances through his own resourcefulness. This resourcefulness is evident in the difficult situation in which Nera finds himself one Samhain. Braving the dangers of Samhain Eve, Nera returns to him camp only to find that the Sidhe are sacking it and killing all the inhabitants. Nera also discovers that he himself has become translated so that he is invisible to his own kind but not to the invaders. Without wasting his efforts on puzzling out the mystery or foolishly attempting to defend the already destroyed garrison, Nera simply joins the line of De Danann soldiers as they march back into the dun. Once there, it is apparent to Ethal Anbual, the king of the dun, that he is an imposter; but Anbual sends him to live
with a woman of the Sidhe to a life to which he quickly adapts. Anbual speaks:

"Now that you are here, I suppose you must stay here."

And Nera recognised in the word "must" a compulsion against which he was powerless; and in that moment he bade good-bye to the world he had left. . . .

He bade adieu to preoccupations which had been important, and were now remembered with trouble, as though they came to him from the other side of the grave. . . . All that was finished and done with, and there was no longer any meaning in such things.

He squared his shoulders, and drew into his lungs the breath of a new life, and he drew into his mind all the implications which were borne on that deep breath.

Practicality gives rise to stability and an ordering of life. The hero, like any ordinary man, conceives an ordered existence. He differs in terms of what plane this order lies along and how he handles the aberrations that inevitably occur. This desire for order was manifested in the heroic "code." Celtic heroes generally sought to live by a sense of decency, fair play, loyalty to one's king and to oneself.

Fionn, confident in his own abilities, agrees to defend the honor of the Ard-Rí against the awesome power of Ailén mac Midna. Goll mac Morna fights the three harridans of Conaran on behalf of the Fianna and even in his exhaustion fights and kills a fourth. Yet it may be observed on behalf of the credibility of characterization that heroes are not, to a man, always "heroic." In the two examples cited, other noble warriors are admittedly afraid to undertake combat with these supernatural beings.

There is more to these examples than might seem apparent at first glance. Fionn is not bound to the Ard-Rí when he undertakes to fight Ailén, and
without hesitation he demands the High King's surety, a promise of just reward, should Fionn be victorious. Goll, on the other hand, does fight for Fionn because he has sworn allegiance to him, but Goll fights on behalf of his own reputation as well.

That the concept of fair play might be superseded even by a hero is illustrated in the stories of Etain and of Deirdre. In both, a hero-king finds that another lays claim to the woman he loves. In both cases he carefully stacks the odds so that he may assure his own victory. When Eochaid realizes the disguised Midir has indeed returned to claim Etain as his prize for the ill-staked chess game, Eochaid orders all of his militia to the palace with orders to "march instantly upon him and trample him to death." Once he has lured Naoise and Deirdre back to Ireland, Conachur has them spend the night in the Red Branch. They are surrounded by Conachur's troops and forced to escape the torching of their hostel. Not satisfied with the odds, Conachur has Cathfa cast a spell upon the Sons of Usna; Naoise and his brothers are overwhelmed by the soldiers and executed. Part of Conachur's duplicity rests in the manipulation of geasa. Fergus, having pledged his surety for safe conduct to the Sons of Usna, is forced to follow his feast geis which according to Conachur's plan Borach presses upon him. Fergus is torn between the two obligations and Stephens portrays Fergus in the extremities of his dilemma: "Fergus became one purple mass from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet, and his face swelled so that the bystanders feared he would burst with the excess and violence of the rage. . . . But I cannot leave a feast," Fergus explained, "for that is my compact with the gods. One cannot break his geasa." But even the
**geis** does not necessarily prevent disastrous changes of heart. Fergus explains to Naoise that he sends the party on to the Red Branch under the surety after all, for the guarantee goes with his sons. But during the sorties at the Red Branch later, his son Buinne accepts Conachur's offer of a lordship and tract of land and he abandons Naoise and Deirdre. It would seem that the **geis** system, then, rather than a stabilizing agent in interpersonal relationships, created impasse by over-idealizing human nature and by omitting to recognize the inevitable quirks of fate.

Buinne's desertion is reprehensible and tradition holds that his tract of land has been barren to the present time. Though Buinne's action is "practical," it is, of course, roundly condemned. In contrast Naoise's sense of honor causes him to break his **geis**, to be accompanied by Fergus, so that against Deirdre's warning and his own better sense he doggedly marches on to his death: "We are here now," he says to Deirdre, "and no matter what awaits us we must go to meet it. You would not wish me to run away, Deirdreen?" Though it would seem here that honor is patently "impractical," it must be remembered that most heroic actions were based on the hero's complete understanding of his own power. Naoise obviously believes that even if they are caught in Conachúr's trap, they can escape. And it must also be remembered that he is correct save for the small but fatal oversight that Conachúr would use magic against them.

Another aspect of interpersonal relationships among the heroes was the sense of camaraderie which grows among men who have great respect for each other's abilities. The spirit of camaraderie may come about as the result of the initiation into an elite society as with the Fianna.
Upon passage of the initiation, which included tests of both mental and physical suitability, the warrior became a feinid, leaving his family and becoming eblain, without kindred; the Fianna became his new "family."

More often, however, the friendship was a matter of earning the respect of another through brave deeds. Illustrating a very special "affection" was the bond between Fionn and Goll based on admiration, though grudgingly given. Goll, it must be remembered was of the Clan Morna which had killed Fionn's father and had sought to kill Fionn. When Fionn appeared at the court of Conn, Goll mac Morna was the head of the Fianna. When Fionn proved his superior valor by destroying the redoubtable Al.len mac Midna of the Sidhe, a task from which all the other heroes at Tara shrunk, Goll with dignity surrendered the command of the Fianna to Fionn. Stephens describes his commitment:

"What is your demand?" said the Ard-Ri.
"The thing that it is right I should ask," said Fionn: "the command of the Fianna of Ireland."
"Make your choice," said Conn to Goll Mor; "you will leave Ireland, or you will place your hand in the hand of this champion and be his man."
Goll could do a thing that would be hard for another person, and he could do it so beautifully that he was not diminished by any action.
"Here is my hand," said Goll.
And he twinkled at the stern, young eyes that gazed on him as he made his submission.

The friendship between Goll and Fionn represents the peculiar paradox of similar relationships throughout Irish heroic literature.
Goll acknowledges Fionn his leader; yet Goll never surrenders his own individuality, nor does he give over completely his bid for the praise of others. He never allows himself to be eclipsed by the greater man.
The 'Little Brawl at Allen' occurs when Goll distributes open-handedly his Danish tribute treasures to the embarrassment of Fionn, whose gift-giving is not so magnanimous. Likewise at the Cave of Cesh Corran, Goll insists on fighting the fourth hag himself, ostensibly in the role of champion to his leader Fionn, yet accruing to himself greater glory for his skill and daring. Fionn rewards him with the hand of his daughter in marriage. Their relationship, then, was such that Fionn and Goll may depend on each other to fulfill responsibilities as allies and the frank respect accorded an equal.

Another type of bond of affection was that between a hero and his foster son. Under the principle of fosterage, boys were sent to noble families to be reared. The more foster sons a man had, the greater his reputation. But the tenderness felt in this relationship was in reality separate from the heroic desire to accrue fame. It appeared based on the very practical convention of passing on to the next generation the skills needed for the maintenance of the society. In the process of transmitting these skills and bits of fundamental knowledge, the foster father and foster son were often in each other's company, the young man learning, being guided by the wisdom of the father. Thus a love was established between them different in nowise save in fact of blood. Sagas document the young heroes sense of responsibility equally to his parents and to his foster parents. Maeve explains the strength of this bond:

"There is but one thing a man can love easier and more faithfully and more deeply than he loves a woman. . . . A man can love a man better than he loves a woman. That is, he can so love his son, his fosterling, or his scholar."

. . . .

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"It is so," mourned Fergus, thinking deeply of the absent Cuchulinn. . . He could twist me about his middle finger. He is my heart's pet," he growled.

Other examples of the affection of fosterage include Dermod and Crimthann and in the beginning Conachur for Naoise and his brothers.

The heroic characteristic considered most important in any culture is the hero's prowess. Physical strength, agility, beauty of form are combined with bravery and intelligence in the typical heroic demeanor. The Irish hero well fulfilled these criteria. The bravery of the major heroes is in ample evidence. It might manifest itself as great recklessness, though most often it appeared to be a natural outgrowth of careful preparation and a keen understanding of both one's own abilities and those of the opponent. The hero might be ruthless and savage in obliterating the enemy and taking bloody spoils; yet this same hero could be observed behaving with great tenderness and gentleness. There is evidence of a love of violence long considered a typical characteristic of Celtic peoples; but more often the hero engaged in violence through a determinant sense of duty born of a dignified belief in fatalism. With certain exceptions the Irish hero was apparently not an extremist. Rather, the very best of the heroic personalities seemed remarkably integrated. Stephens speaks of Fionn: "He was as fitted for loneliness as the crane is that haunts the solitudes and bleak wastes of the sea; for the man with a thought has a comrade and Fionn's mind worked as feathly as his body did." Moreover, the hero's bravery was usually exhibited at an early age. At age nineteen Naoise had already served two years as a full member of the Red Branch warriors. Stephens notes his
eminent courage: "He would move habitually where death urged about him at no greater distance than the length of a spear, and he would look upon death as being so instant a part of life, that he must woo the one as earnestly as he loved the other." His great skill and courage is nowhere more apparent than in the planning and execution of the sorties out of the Red Branch through which Naoise, his brothers, and the two sons of Fergus take on Conachur's army. Naoise plans for the younger men to dart among the enemy, killing as many men as possible and coming back through the doors of the Red Branch upon a signal. Then running through different doors at different times all five warriors wreak havoc among Conachur's soldiers preventing any efficacy with the battering ram. In illustration of their confidence in their own strength and skill, all of the young men banter and joke in seeming disregard of the fatal dangers immediately outside the doors of the Red Branch. The odds against the Sons of Usna are overwhelming, but given their natures and the skill of Stephens' narrative, the possibility of their success is perfectly credible.

Encounters with the supernatural required from the hero the greatest prowess. The young Art, son of Conn, is commanded by his stepmother Becuma to seek out Delvcaem, the daughter of Morgan. Venturing to an island in the Many-Colored Land, he is warned by Crede, the Truly Beautiful, what dangers lie ahead of him:

There is a wild dark ocean to be crossed. There is a dense wood where every thorn on every tree is sharp as a spear-point and is curved and clutching. There is a deep gulf to be gone through, ...a place of silence and terror, full of dumb, venomous monsters.
There is an immense oak forest—dark, dense, thorny, a place to be strayed in, a place to be utterly bewildered and lost in. There is a vast dark wilderness, and therein is a dark house, lonely and full of echoes, and in it there are seven gloomy hags, who are warned already of your coming and are waiting to plunge you in a bath of molten lead.

Art is properly sobered by the account, but he will in nowise listen to her pleas to remain in safety with her. "I am under bond," Art protests. "I have passed my word, and I would not forget Ireland or cut myself from it for all the kingdoms of the Many-Colored Land." Then Crede warns him of an even greater danger—Delvcaem's mother, Dog Head. Now the essence of Art's heroism is captured in his quiet mental note: "Indeed, . . . there is so much to beware of that I will beware of nothing. I will go about my business. . . . and I will let those beings and monsters and the people of the Dog Heads go about their business." What might be construed as naivete here is in actuality stoicism. The hero knew what might be changed and what might not. He simply accepted whatever irrevocably was, being perfectly willing, as a general rule, to pitch his efforts against it. This stoicism is part, of course, of the general heroic tendency to fatalism. Art's victory over his enemies illustrates this condition. Art wins over Dog Head ultimately because "her days were numbered, her star was out, and her time had come"; and against Morgan fate here too is the deciding factor; "when the wife's time has come, the husband is doomed. He is required elsewhere by his beloved, and Morgan went to join his queen in the world that comes after the Many-Colored Land." Though Art's bravery is nonetheless effectual, victory is still controlled by the inescapable dictates of fate.
Another example of bravery opens Stephens' *In the Land of Youth* with Nera's undertaking. It is a test not only of willingness to prove valor against great odds; in overcoming the supernatural the hero here is actually overcoming himself. Nera, accepting Aillil's challenge to tie a withy around the foot of a hanged man on Samhain Eve, is willing not only to accomplish the task but also to stand fast when the man miraculously speaks. Nera agrees to take the man on his back to secure water. Nera boasts to the hanged man, "there never was a man in the world before was asked to do the like; and there isn't a man in the world but myself would do it."\(^4\)\(^5\) This boast is a familiar attribute of the hero. In the previously cited incident Naoise is touted as one of the four "lights of the Gael." His brother Ainnle in his youthful enthusiasm boasts that he is as good a warrior as Cuchulain. In the tender story of Fionn's acquiring Saeve as his wife he vows to protect her from the Fear Doirche, the Dark Man of the Sidhe, with a heroic boast: "Where I am let him not come. ... I also have knowledge. I am Fionn, the son of Uail, the son of Baisne, a man among men and a god where the gods are."\(^4\)\(^6\) The boast served several functions in the heroic mien. It functioned to underscore the hero's sense of self-identity and individualism, to offer challenge to the enemy so that he might open the confrontation, to undermine the enemy's confidence, and finally to bolster the hero's own courage by a public recitation of his own virtues.

In his courage the Celtic hero was entirely capable of ruthlessness. The account of Cuchulain's ravages among the forces of Connacht bears ample testimony to personal savagery, as does Eochaid's murderous
intentions against Midir, Naoise's and Flonn's battle skills, Conachúr's obsessive pursuit and vindictive execution of the Sons of Usna. But these heroes are equally capable of great tenderness. Cuchulain coming upon a young charioteer of Connacht cutting chariot poles in the forest, not only spares him but helps him cut the poles as well. Eochaid speaks tenderly, almost plaintively, to Etain of his love for her. When Deirdre cries her fears to him, Naoise comforts her: "Little tender wife!" he smiled. "After all the dangers we have gone through you are frightened at last." Naoise "kissed and petted her, putting back the hair from her brow and framing her face in his hands."\(^47\) Fionn is decimated by the loss of Saeve, yet in finding Oisin loves the little boy deeply for her sake: "He put his hand into Fionn's and the Chief felt as if that little hand had been put into his heart. He lifted the lad to his great shoulder... Just as at one time he could not be parted from Saeve, so now he could not be separated from this boy. He had a thousand names for him, each one more tender than the last."\(^48\) Even the terrible Conachúr was as capable of great tenderness as of fierce passions. At his first meeting with Deirdre he falls immediately in love with her and yet he recognizes her awe of him: "Do not be fearful, 0 little twisted loop of the ringlets, for you are my beloved. You shall have no weariness or lack for ever, for I shall fold you in my affection as a hawk folds air within her wings."\(^49\)

The Celtic hero was an intelligent being and though given to the usual shortcomings of passion, nevertheless, dealt with the vicissitudes of life far better than the ordinary warrior. The heroic intelligence was of a peculiarly homogenous strain. It involved knowledge of external
derivation based on experience and training, knowledge gained through in-sati able curiosity within a personal code that forbade shrinking from the unknown. Stephens describes Fionn as adventurous, prudent except where himself was concerned. Moreover, he was a poet in the sense "man of science." This term is rather interesting here in that it appears to mean science in the sense of scientia, knowledge in general, not that pertinent only to perception of phenomenal reality. As the poet-man of science, "whatever was strange or unusual had an irresistible attraction for him... Such a soldier was he that, single-handed, he could take the Fianna out of any hole they got into, but such an in-veterate poet was he that all the Fianna together could scarcely retrieve him from the abysses into which he tumbled."50

The most remarkable aspect of Fionn's knowledge, however, is the magical explanation of its derivation. In his youth Fionn became the pupil of the poet Finegas who was encamped along the River Boyne, waiting to catch the Salmon of Knowledge, which when eaten would give its consumer all knowledge. The well-known story, however, explains that Finegas only catches the Salmon. As foretold, it is Fionn who is to eat it.51 Stephens downplays this manner of acquiring knowledge, however; Stephens points out in an aside, "We get wise by asking questions, and even if these are not answered, we get wise, for a well-packed question carries its answer on its back as a snail carries its shell."52 Fionn, then, rather derives his understanding by the simple technique of asking questions of Finegas: "Fionn's mind learned to jump in a bumpier field than that in which he had chased hares. And when he had asked his question, and given his own answer to it, Finegas
would take the matter up and make clear to him where the query was badly
formed or at what point the answer had begun to go astray, so that Fionn
came to understand by what successions a good question grows at last to
a good answer. 53

Later Fionn's intelligence coupled with his experience enables him
to overcome the fearsome Aillen mac Midna. Though aided indeed by
Flacuil mac Cona, who gives him the lord of the Sidhe's own spear, Fionn
utilizes his own understanding of both the powers of nature and of the
nature of men to overcome the great magician: "Darkness was not a thing
to terrify him, bred in the nightness of a wood and the very fosterling
of gloom; nor could the wind afflict his ear or his heart. There was no
note in its orchestra that he had not brooded on and become, which be-
coming is magic. . . .Listening in the dark to the bundle of noises
which make a noise he could disentangle them and assign a place and a
reason to each gradation of sound that formed the chorus. . . .Fear
cannot be where knowledge is, and Fionn was not fearful. 54 Inter-
estingly enough Stephens distinguishes here between magic and knowledge.
It is an incident fraught with magic. Aillen mac Midna is able to put
anyone to sleep by playing a magic tune on pipe and timpan, and he blows
a dart of fire out of his mouth to the destruction of all in its path.
Fionn resists his magic by breathing the emanations from Aillen's own
spear to force himself to be alert and by catching the fire in his man-
tle. But one notes Fionn's staying awake by means of the spear, so
crucial to the success of his venture, is the product of knowledge,
while the latter, the catching of the fire, is magic. Stephens points
out that "knowledge. . . is higher than magic and is more to be sought.
It is quite possible to see what is happening and yet not know what is forward, for while seeing is believing it does not follow that either seeing or believing is knowing.\textsuperscript{55}

In another of the stories in \textit{Irish Fairy Tales} Stephens recounts again the value of questions in the acquisition of knowledge. Dermod mac Ae and his foster son Crimthann often went hunting together and these excursions proved opportunity for Dermod to instruct Crimthann in princely ways. But as in the parallel situation in "Becuma of the White Skin," Dermod here allows proverbially his heart to rule his head. When Becfola refuses to give her name or origin, the king does not insist for he has been so overcome by her beauty that he is determined to woo her. He remarks to Crimthann, "We must always try to act wisely, and we should only insist on receiving answers to questions in which we are personally concerned. . . .The past is hers, . . .but the future is ours, and we shall only demand that which is pertinent to the future."\textsuperscript{56} Though the sentiment here is admirable, the statement is ironic for Dermod makes a grave mistake in not discovering who Becfola is.

That the Celtic hero's Intelligence and perception may be altered by his passion is made abundantly clear in Conachúr. Conachúr's adroitness as leader is evident in the very circumstances of his rule. The son of Nessa who persuaded her young second husband to give up his throne for a year to Conachúr, Conachúr is adroit enough not only to retain title to the throne, but through the accolades of the people in testimony to his wise rule also manages to retain the favor of Fergus himself. His happy rule is interrupted, however, by the dire prophecies concerning the birth of a baby girl Deirdre to the wife of his story-teller Felimid.
mac Dall. Refusing to slay the infant, rather he puts the child under his royal protection. In the course of events she grows into beautiful womanhood; Conachúr falls in love with her but before he can marry her, she flees with Naoise and his brothers to Scotland. It is at that point that his intelligence becomes craft. Conachúr designs a plan that will bring the exiles into the reach of his vengeance. Aware that Naoise is under geis not to return to Ireland unless in the company of Conall Cearnach, Cuchulain, or Fergus, Conachúr interviews all three men. Conall Cearnach and Cuchulain make it plain to the king that they would kill even the king himself should he interfere with any man under their protection. But Fergus admits that he could not kill the king under any circumstances. It is he that Conachúr sends to bring back the Sons of Usna and Deirdre. Stephens adds this element to the scene, that Borach, who is to implement Conachúr's plan to separate Fergus from his responsibilities is witness to Conachur's charge to Fergus: "Fergus, my friend, you shall go to Scotland and bring back to this court the three sons of Uisneac and the woman Deirdre. There shall be no delay about the execution of this duty. . . . The instant they set foot in Ireland you shall proceed here with them; and if, from any cause whatsoever, you cannot come yourself, you shall cause them to come to me without the delay of even one half-hour."57 As events transpire, of course, Borach, acting upon Conachúr's orders, holds Fergus to his geis never to refuse an invitation to a feast, and the fated group is sent on to Emain Macha under the ineffectual protection of Fergus' two sons Iollan and Buinne. Again Conachúr reveals his craft when he resists Lavarcham's invention that after her years of hardship Deirdre is worn and ugly. Conachúr
first sends Lavarcham to see Deirdre in the Red Branch. True to her plan
Lavarcham reports that Deirdre is "ruined . . . Her cheeks are hollow
and her eyes are red . . . she is thin and haggard, and she leaned by the
table as though all the weariness of the world were in her sides."\textsuperscript{58}
But Conachúr does not trust Lavarcham's report; realizing the maternal
affection she has for the girl, he surmises that she seeks to calm the
king's anger. He sends a guard whose father and brothers had been killed
by Naoise to report. The guard tells Conachúr, "She is red-lipped and
sweet-eyed and delicious. She is the loveliest woman that moves in the
world."\textsuperscript{59} Conachúr moves on the report to secure Deirdre again to him-
self by assaulting the Red Branch.

The craft incumbent upon intelligence is again evoked in the name
of passion in the story within \textit{In the Land of Youth} based on the \textit{Tochmarc
Etaine}. The story of how Etain, the wife of Midir of the Sidhe, became
reborn into the human world and how she became the wife of Eochaid Airem
is a well-known Irish tale. The story illustrates the role of craft and
bearing, the heroic demeanor, in the felling of an adversary. It is, in
essence, a story of complexities woven around heroic honor. In this
story the heroic demeanor is interpreted both in the mortal world and
in the world of the Sidhe.\textsuperscript{60} In keeping with the stature of the two op-
ponents the basis of the contests; intelligence and craft. As Stephens
notes, the two are worthy adversaries: "The High King of Ireland, by
breeding once, and once again by his great office, is twice a god, and
Midir could allow that technically no insult had been given or received.
He could, therefore, regard Eochaid without anger; and could contemplate
the relation between the High King and Etain without jealousy."\textsuperscript{61} Midir
is, nevertheless, embued with a sense of justice as well. Midir had fallen prey to the practice of seigniory in his world when he was obliged to surrender Etain to Angus, the son of the Dagda. He might well refuse, then, to share Etain with a mortal, even the High King of Ireland.

Stephens works, then, with a situation fraught with tension in which two colossi dispute together. Midir begins the contest by appealing to Etain's love in the guise of a mortally ill Ailill, brother of Eochaid. When she refuses to go away with him, Midir comes to Eochaid during the Tailltean Games and challenges him to a chess game. Eochaid is the Champion Chess Player of all Ireland. In the first match Eochaid wins, protesting his "ruin" to the end, by "talking to his fingers" and thereby distracting Midir. Upon demanding a revenge game, however, Midir acts churlishly, but he is unsuccessful in causing Eochaid to forget his game in anger. But in the reconciliation that follows, Midir does persuade Eochaid to drop his guard, and Midir wins the game, naming Etain as his stake. As in the story of Etain, the hero's encounters with the supernatural could require of him physical strength, intelligence, or both. Art's contest with the monstrous parents of Delvcaem is primarily a contest of wits: "It was a woeful combat, for there was no craft or sagacity unknown to her and . . . .what he could not effect by arms Morgan would endeavor by guile, so that while Art drove at him or parried a crafty blow, the shape of Morgan changed before his eyes and the monstrous king was having at him in another form and from another direction."62 The contest may be purely a physical fight as Goll's combat with the fourth daughter of Conaran: "It was hard to withstand the terrific blows of that mighty female for her sword played with the
quickness of lightening and smote like the heavy crashing of a storm.\textsuperscript{163} As verified by these accounts, mortal powers were severely challenged by those of the supernatural, yet the stories of these encounters turned more often than not on a sense of justice. With the exception of Fionn's loss of Saeve to the Dark Man of the Sidhe in "Oisin's Mother," the tales recounted by Stephens appear to underscore the concept that regardless of the odds the side having the greatest claim to truth triumphs. Thus Fionn overcomes the evil Aillen mac Midna, Uct Dely is rightfully placated by her mortal lover, and Etain returns from her mortal mate to Midir, her rightful husband.

If right was a hero's most powerful "ally," then bravery was the catalyst that brought right into play. But there are two ways in which a man may be brave—through a sense of unswerving dedication to the matter at hand, a commitment which causes him to ignore his own needs, and through a belief in a determinism or fatalism through which he expects harm and death to be inescapable at a given moment in his life. Though the Celtic hero partook of both concepts, his demeanor was more a product of the latter. Infused with the strong primitive sense of the inevitability of fate, the hero, nevertheless, counted it a part of his heroic responsibilities, his manhood, to face his fate head on. It was possible, then, for him to take an almost perverse delight in a version of existentialism in which he might at last control his own fate by refusing to be cowed by it. It is in this spirit that Stephens has Fionn philosophize with his men on what was the finest music in the world. Oisin's answer the cuckoo calling from the highest tree and Oscar's the 'ring of a spear on a shield' and the others--the call of a stag, hunting
hounds baying, a lark's song, "the laugh of a gleeful girl, or the whisper of a moved one"—all illustrate the heroic *joie de vivre*. But Fionn's answer is illustrative of the heroic spirit itself and the traditional love of life that infuses the Celtic tradition. It is, he says, "the music of what happens...that is the finest music in the world." Stephens notes that Fionn himself, "loved 'what happened,' and would not evade it by the swerve of a hair."64

Such an attitude does create a sense of stability. It is an acknowledgement that a man's fate is inescapable and more, that he is specially designated and equipped to make inevitable its course. This fatalistic motif is a constant thread woven throughout the heroic tales. Finegas tells Fionn beside the Boyne "you are entitled to all that you can take, but to no more than that. Take, so, with both hands."65 The relationship between Goll and Fionn illustrates heroic acceptance. As discussed above, Goll is able to give over gracefully the leadership of the Fianna when Fionn proves the more worthy by his slaying of Aillen mac Midna. The ending of "The Cave at Cesh Corran," however, illustrates the extremes and peculiarities of the relationship between these two heroes, a connection informed by a higher principle than personal accountability. Goll in this story acts as Fionn's champion, killing all four of the terrible hags who had imprisoned the Fianna. To reward him Fionn gives Goll his daughter to wife. Stephens notes that this moment of warm gratitude "did not prevent Goll from killing Fionn's brother Cairell later on, nor did it prevent Fionn from killing Goll later on again, and the last did not prevent Goll from rescuing Fionn out of hell when the Fianna-Finn were sent there under the new God. Nor is there any

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reason to complain or to be astonished at these things, for it is a mutual world we live in, a give-and-take world, and there is no great harm in it.66 There is, then, little room for sentimentality. Adherence to a strict order of things may appear to cause such predictability that those living in such a bond might find reason to give over any individuality. Such is not the case with the Celtic hero, however, for, as in Calvinistic predestination, a man may not know the future. He may believe himself fated but his continuance is a necessary part of acceptance and his acceptance becomes his own choice. Stephens illustrates such a philosophy in the story of Tuan mac Cairill. Having been metamorphosized into a stag, Tuan is growing old and less able to leap away from the wolves that chase him. They speak to him: "To-morrow...we will tear out your throat, and gnaw on your living haunch." But Tuan, though able to understand the inevitability of what the wolves boast, refuses merely to allow his fate to catch up to him. Instead he chooses to move towards death: "Then my soul rose to the height of Doom, and I intended all that might happen to me, and agreed to it. 'Tomorrow,' I said, 'I will go out among ye, and I will die.'"67

There is obviously an element of pride in the determination to meet fate head on. Conachur, of Stephen's Deirdre, gives ample evidence of such self-confidence. Styled as a king 'who did not like other men's advice,' he refuses to shrink from the prophecy that Deirdre will cause his kingdom much trouble. He sharply reproves Bricriu who suggests that the child be destroyed: "It is not soldierly, nor the act of a prince to evade fate...Therefore, all that can happen will happen, and we shall bear all that is to be borne."68 Later Conachur...
will attempt to take fate into his own hands by enticing Naoise and Deirdre back to Ireland where he might destroy them. And this very act, as in the classical tradition of tragedy, enables the prophecy to come true.

The outcome of heroic endeavor directly affected an individual's position in his society. The hero may be a retainer of his king as in the case of Naoise, Nera, Goll, Fionn, Cuchulain, or he may be a king having performed heroically in his youth and attaining the throne by blood perogative or acclamation as Conachúr, Eochaid, Conn. In either capacity as retainer or king the hero's powers were channeled into three outlets--protection, leadership, and generosity. As leader of the Fianna, Fionn acted in a dual capacity, as functionary of his king and yet in a kingly capacity himself. His early training, as described by Stephens, equipped him superbly to utilize warrior skills in defense of Ireland. Particularly through the instruction of Flacuil mac Cona, Fionn learns the sword, when to "slash" and when to "slice" and control of the fairy spear of Ail len mac Midna that had to be restrained to prevent its killing on its own. Throughout Stephens' recounting of the Fenian tales Fionn illustrates his mastery of woodlore and fighting techniques and wise observations. Yet as Anton Hamel suggests, Fionn is protector in more than these obvious ways. He is of the land itself and to know the land is to protect the land in almost a spiritual sense. This almost magical connection to the land becomes more obvious in the tale of Becuma. Conn is deemed a most successful Ard-Rí because corn was reaped in Ireland three times a year. But when he marries the malevolent Becuma, the land is struck by famine. Again Conn
of the Hundred Battles, having incurred the wrath of Ailén mac Midna, was himself safe from that mighty lord's power in Tara but would not see his land ravaged. Thus he seeks a champion to defend against the Sidhe chief and was willing to go himself had not Fionn volunteered. Stephens portrays the deep connection between the king and his land in Conachur's prenuptial euphoria: "A wave of frolic and daring would go from the king and thrill to the last hamlet in his kingdom; for although war is glorious, death is its ruler and companion; but from love life flows and everything that is lovely. . . . And as his heart rose thus, Conachúr knew that he was the life of his people, for he was king and lover, and that all swung about him as the world swings round the sun." 71

In a more practical but nonetheless symbolic sense, the king or heroic leader was also to be noted for open-handed remunerations to his followers. Like the celebrated gift-giving of the Anglo-Saxon, the generosity of the Celtic leader was considered the outward manifestation of the rapport between himself and his followers. Much more than payment for services rendered, gift-giving was an expression of affection, of appreciation, of approbation and was the concretization of the heroic quality of magnanimity. Gift-giving is evident in In the Land of Youth by means of the golden sword to be awarded to he who goes abroad on Samhain Eve. When Nera accomplishes the appointed task, Maeve insists on awarding him the sword herself for as Queen of Connacht she claims to be "the giver of gifts in this country." 72 Nowhere is it more important than in the story of "The Little Brawl at Allen" where it becomes a contest leading to considerable bloodshed, a fundamentally serious story in spite of the comic vein in which it is told. In re-
ponse to a poem-song of his accomplishments from Fergus Finnbheóil
(True-lips), poet of the Fianna, Fionn and his family give him valuable
gifts. Fergus then sings of Goll mac Morna and his clan and Goll gives
him out of his Danish tribute treasure twice as much as Fionn. In like
pattern through the evening Goll gives double Fionn's gifts. Questioned as to the matter of the tribute money, Goll tells a tale in which
he admits killing Fionn's father. Fionn suggests that Goll mind what
he says since he is outnumbered and with that challenge other members
of both sides begin to castigate one another and quickly to come to
blows. The brawl is stopped by the chanting of the poets, but not
until eleven hundred of Fionn's people and sixty-one under the auspices of Clan Morna had died. The judgement of the Ard-Ri on the combatants is to exonerate Goll since Clan Morna was attacked first. But Stephens insists the blame was not Fionn's but Goll's: "At that table
Goll should not have given greater gifts than his master and host did.
And it was not right of Goll to take by force the position of the
greatest gift-giver of the Fianna."73

The end of all heroic endeavors was the acquisition of personal
fame. The reward of immortality to be sung by the bards for genera-
tions after--such was the chief goal. To emphasize the traits held in
common by heroic figures would seem to deny individuality, but the
contrary is true. The Celtic hero must, of course, adhere to certain
customs, achieve certain ideals in order to be admitted into the pri-
ileged circle, in order to be termed a hero. But in Stephens these
heroes have a certain individuality in keeping with the accounts of
them in Celtic legend. In Stephens Fionn looms most prominently among

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the ancient heroes. His amazing love and knowledge of his dogs, his skill in hunting, his influence in Faery—all are part of his wisdom. Stephens explains that "Fionn, with all desires, had the lasting one, for he would go anywhere and forsake anything for wisdom." Fionn is termed, however, "impolitic" and "he remained impolitic to the of his days, for whatever he was able to do he would do, no matter who was offended thereat, and whatever he was not able to do he would do also." Fionn, then, was his own man.

In his martial ability, too, the hero showed his own style. Stephens allows even less major heroic figures such individuality. Ardan and Ainnle are young, eager for battle, but each is given his own fighting style. Another of the Red Branch warriors, Fergus, is characterized as somewhat slow to anger, patient, and good-natured, yet he has the respect of the younger warriors. Naoise says of him, "There are some things a fighter knows and can't teach even if he wants to. There are not tricks, they are what Conachur calls ways, and Fergus has 'ways' in combat, as if he had been born in a fight and would go to sleep in it if he wanted to." In his own prowess Fergus is generous, willing to teach the younger men, Cuchulain in particular, all that he knows of fighting.

The foundation of fame was, of course, the acquisition of and retention of honor. The degree to which the hero achieved and maintained his honor was the usual criterion for the longevity of his name in social memory. Honor may be preserved through strict adherence to one's gels. Though his honor is the downfall of the Sons of Usna, Fergus retains his honor because he obeyed his gels. In response to Becuma's
taunts, Art vows never to return to Ireland without Delvcaem and carries his geis to completion. But in spite of its powerful appeal, the geis itself did not compel the hero to be heroic; rather a basic and personal code of honor, the foundation on which the geis rested, was the motivation for heroic behavior. And this code of honor was the impetus to the acquisition of fame, the pleasure and duty of the traditional hero. In the opening story to In the Land of Youth Nera finds contentment in the dun of the Conacht Sidhe. But he is disturbed at last by the memory of the word Aillil had promised him for venturing to the scene of the hanging on Samhain Eve. So great is the lure of such fame he risks all his new-found happiness to venture back into the world of mortals to get it. "I shall return," Nera promises his mistress; "I could not now exist without you, but I must get the prize I won, or I shall never know happiness again." And in the last story of this volume Eochaid is faced with a far greater challenge. Having promised the disguised Midir any stake in a chess game, he is compelled by the crafty Sidhe prince to give over his wife. Stephens describes the horrible inner conflict between fulfilling his promise and the desire to keep his own wife. As Eochaid knows he is balked either way he chooses. To keep Etain, refusing to give her up, is to renege on his wager. To surrender Etain to Midir is to lose his rightful claim to her as her husband. Stephens describes his struggle: "A pang of revolt massed Eochaid's body with blood and fire... Midir's eyes sipped at the fountain of his pride, to drain his manhood."78

The heroic mien was a difficult if integral mode of being. It was based altogether on a sense of personal honor, a sense of personal pride

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born of adherence to the intangible pressures of a cultural pride, an awareness of self and personal skills and abilities, and above all a determination to gain immortality--these are the qualities of a Celtic hero. The sagas report the evidence of these mighty men of old; Stephens perpetuates their image, and the modern age understands ancestral antecedents of present culture with certain appreciation.
CHAPTER THREE--FOOTNOTES


5. Chadwick, Growth, p. 76.


7. Jackson, p. 36.

8. Eleanor Hull explains this frenzy in terms of exaggerated visual accounts. The twisted body she links to proverbial Irish expressions denoting great speed and energy; the swelling of the body may be a partial accounting for the fact that a small man as Cuchulain might inspire terror in his enemies; the light about Cuchulain's head might have been the reflection of his metal helmet, garb not too common to his age, and so forth. That he is atypical as a hero-god is evident in the fact that his powers seem typical of neither a man nor a god, yet partially belonging to both.


14. Of considerable psychological interest here is this response in view of the fact, unknown to Art, that these monsters were actually "chimeras" conjured up by his enemy Dog Head.


The veneration with which the Táin was held is more than a kind of reverence for its antiquity. It was believed that a hearing of the Táin brought a year's protection to the listener. Alwyn and Brinkley Rees in their Celtic Heritage, pages 20 ff., recount the storyteller's belief in the magical properties of such tales.

Chadwick, Heroic Age, p. 463.


The Colloquy marks the end of the Old and Middle Irish Tales and the beginning of the stories of the Modern Period. Knott and Murphy in Early Irish Literature suggest that unlike the other tales of the Early Modern Period, the Colloquy may have been written before it was told.


James Stephens, Irish Fairy Tales (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), p. 17. Subsequent references to this work will be abbreviated IFT.

IFT, p. 22.

IFT, p. 18.

IFT, p. 31. T. F. O'Rahilly in Early Irish History, pages 318-319, discusses the fact that polymorphic deities of the Otherworld could assume animal shapes such as the salmon. The story of Tuan is analogous to that of Fintan cam Bachra (the "white ancient"), said to be in Ireland before the Deluge and for 5500 years afterwards.

IFT, p. 47. One might note here the similarity to the young Arthur's training by Merlin in the British Arthurian legends.

O'Grady, p. 100.

IFT, p. 103.

The evidence that Tuiren was Fionn's aunt and that, therefore, these animals were his "cousins" might explain his feelings of kinship.

IFT, pp. 37-38.

IFT, pp. 28-29.
James Stephens, *In the Land of Youth* (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1924), p. 285. Subsequent references to this volume will be abbreviated ILY.

35 Deirdre, pp. 210-211.
36 IFT, p. 225.
37 IFT, p. 193.
38 IFT, p. 225.
40 IFT, p. 60.
41 Deirdre, p. 79.
42 IFT, pp. 276-277. As Maeve points out in *In the Land of Youth*, the overcoming of fear requires the highest courage and it is one that is certain to succeed (ILY, p. 152).

43 IFT, p. 278. One will note in Art's speech here three other elements of the heroic personality. The upholding of the geis, the tendency toward understatement, and the loyalty to one's home. Here, because Art is the son of the Ard-Rí, his home is all Ireland (not to be confused with the generalized patriotism of later centuries.).

44 IFT, p. 285.
45 ILY, p. 15.
46 IFT, p. 129.
48 IFT, pp. 142-143.
49 Deirdre, p. 122.
50 IFT, p. 224.

51 Fionn had accidentally come by the eating of the Salmon of Wisdom. Left by Finegas to tend the cooking fish, Fionn had but touched the cooking flesh and burning his thumb had put it in his mouth to cool it. From that time forward Fionn was able to put his thumb upon his tooth to be able to see into a problem or divine the future. Thomas O'Rahilly suggests that this aspect of the Fionn legend is a holdover from the pagan ritual of chewing raw meat as part of divina-
tion ceremonies. Other scholars suggest that perhaps Fionn chewed his nails while he cogitated upon a knotty problem. The e6 fis or Salmon of Wisdom was part of popular Irish incarnation schemes and figures in a number of stories.

52 IF T, p. 68.
53 IF T, p. 73.
54 IF T, pp. 91-92.
55 IF T, p. 89.
56 IF T, pp. 154-155.
57 IF T, p. 188.
58 Deirdre, pp. 232-233.
59 Deirdre, pp. 235.

60 A distinction should be noted between the lowest level of the supernatural world where the only difference between these beings and humans is an enhancement of attributes including lifespan and the upper levels where such human characteristics as passion is not possible.

61 ILY, p. 246.
63 IF T, p. 242.
64 IF T, pp. 65-66.
65 IF T, p. 71.
67 IF T, p. 61.
68 Deirdre, p. 8.
69 IF T, p. 66.
70 Hamel, p. 18.
71 Deirdre, p. 137.
72 IF T, p. 65.
73 IF T, p. 65.
74 IFT, p. 67.
75 IFT, p. 64.
76 Deirdre, p. 76.
77 ILY, p. 56.
78 ILY, p. 299.
The Celtic Woman

The legendary women of the Celts may be considered paradigms of the Celtic conceptualization of feminine roles and virtue. Though her term "goddess" is debatable nomenclature, Anne Ross makes a legitimate assumption that

the function of the goddess must, to a certain extent, reflect the function of the woman, and her most potent and striking characteristic. The emphasis laid on the various spheres over which the goddesses presided must, of course, vary according to the economic organisation and geographical situation of the different tribes but the spheres themselves must be universal. For example, there is no trace of a Celtic goddess of love, but all the goddesses share in having marked sexual characteristics, and no matter what their individual departments of influence sexuality and maternity are their fundamental concerns.

Ross is correct in pointing out that Celtic heroines never stray from their sexual identities, often utilizing their sex overtly or covertly to accomplish their aims. However, maternity is an important characteristic of only a portion of these figures. And one cannot omit to observe a whole host of monstrous females in whom sexuality is but incidental and serves only to heighten their repulsiveness by
subconscious comparison to the norm. One factor in Ross's statement is particularly notable here; the Celtic heroine may not be characterized by any one trait. Like real human beings, their personalities are complex, their behavior at once typical and yet unpredictable. Symbolic of this variability are the three women (goddesses or one goddess in three forms) Erui, Banba, and Gotla who both welcome and repel the invading sons of Mil. They appear as animal or bird figures as well as in human form.

Celtic society was deeply concerned with female powers. One might note how heroes would often take their mothers' names rather than their fathers, for example Conochur mac Nessa and Fergus mac Roy. Even the infamous Sidhe, the Tuatha De Danann, were literally "the people of the goddess Danu." Like their Scandanavian and Germanic counterparts, Celtic heroines might also be warlike. Possessed of legendary ruthlessness, these female warriors were, moreover, strategists. The most famous of the warrior women was Maeve, whose martial arts were so great she was capable of besting Ethal Anbual, Shide king of Connacht, not once but twice. In the supernatural realm also existed warrior women. Though generally haggish, as were the daughters of the Sidhe king Conaran, they might also be in another form altogether, as Morrigu, was a "goddess," who often metamorphosized herself appropriately into a raven. The warrior women were considered the worthy adversaries of the men. In the legend of Becuma, the lovely Delvcaem's mother is the fearsome Dog Head. It is she, not her husband, who is the most terror inspiring. Having overcome her in hand-to-hand combat, Art, son of Conn, is certain of
success in battle with her protean husband. Likewise, in "The Cave at Cesh Corran," larnach, like her sisters, is as skilled in individual combat as Goll mac Morna: "Goll then strode forward to the fight, and the hag moved against him with equal alacrity. In a moment the heavens rang to the clash of swords on bucklers. It was hard to withstand the terrific blows of that mighty female, for her sword played with the quickness of lightning and smote like the heavy crashing of a storm." One must also note that the female who presented herself as a warrior was treated as such as surely as her male counterpart. When the third hag here asks for her life, it is not through an appeal to Goll's chivalry, but his honor as a warrior. He gives her her life in return for the release of the Fianna from enchantment—a decision no different from one extended to a male warrior under the same circumstance.

In his rendition of the boyhood of Fionn, Stephens comments that "women know that fighting is a necessary art although men pretend there are others that are better." The Celtic woman, even if not actually bellicose, took a very realistic view of her own abilities in a battle, physical or mental. She was perfectly capable of combining romanticism and realism. Priding herself on her understanding of men, comprehending warfare to the extent of personal involvement was part of her comprehensive knowledge of the masculine mystique. The understanding of the masculine role in society is nowhere more keenly revealed than in Boa Mal's and Lia Luachra's training of Fionn. They trained him to run by chasing him around a tree with a thorn switch. With a switch in his hand, too, Fionn would try to catch his pursuers.
The women "pursued him with a savagery which he could not distinguish from hatred, and they swished him well whenever they got the chance. Fionn learned to run." And they taught him to swim by throwing him into the weir and hauling him out again. They taught him to be silent and learn from the creatures of the forest. In short they taught him to endure the hardships and to acquire the skills of the superior warrior.

In spite of similarities in powers and attitudes between the sexes, no Irish writer opts for a unisex attitude towards these heroic characters, and Stephens is no exception. He does not deny the obvious mutualities, yet he takes pains to offer sometimes pointed, sometimes subtle, comments of the psychological and sociological differences between men and women. Stephens evidently sees women as the more fortunate of the two sexes, not by the favor of fate but due to a powerful, almost mystical, ability to arrange their attitudes so that their intrinsic adaptability enables them to turn blows to advantage, obstacles to stepping stones; Irish women are fundamentally optimists and are so as a result of their firm belief in their own abilities to induce change as they see fit. It is in this vein that Stephens comments in the Land of Youth, "Now it is a curious thing that women awaken in the morning uncomely but gay, while men arise to the new day as though they were being reborn into unhappiness." And Stephens does not deny that their dispositions are augmented by affection—"all women in love are healthy." Stephens also suggests that a woman's orientation is the one most important factor in her sense of well-being (though his stories do not always bear this out). Stephens observes, "Sundered from her belongings, no woman is tranquil, her
heart is not truly at ease, however her mind may function.\footnote{17} Though here Stephens emphasizes the tranquility of domesticity, the heroic woman proves time and again her ability to make the best of whatever situation she finds herself in. From Deirdre in Scotland to Etain in the mortal world to Bov Mal and Lia Luachra in the depths of the forest—each is perfectly capable of making herself at home under the most grueling of circumstances. With rare exception, however, one factor is indispensable to a sense of utter well-being and completeness. The Celtic heroine must be connected in somewise with a man. She does not function in isolation from a member of the opposite sex.

In the section of In the Land of Youth entitled "The Feast of Samhain" occurs one of the few stories concerning acclaimed members of the ancient Irish pantheon. Angus Og, son of the Dagda, is pining away for the love of an unknown but exceptionally beautiful young woman. Despairing of his life, the Dagda conjures up visions of every woman in Ireland and has them pass before his son to determine the name of his beloved. It is to the credit of Irish womanhood that, according to Stephens, the process takes "a year and a day." And yet the mac an Og does not respond. The lovely wraith that torments him is not among them. The parade of lovelies offers, however, something of the scope of feminine pulchritude inherent in the Celtic culture. Its variety testifies to the acknowledgement of individualism. Stephens describes them thus and one might speculate as to the possible significance of the characteristics noted and their order:
"plump women...a well rounded woman overtops all others, for she can set the heart at ease and fill the mind with fancy....slender women...have a grace of movement that is infinitely satisfying; they curve and flow...thin maidens...are agile...deep is the appeal of their willowy youth!...golden-haired is the one colour for women: only with gold are they adequately crowned...yet...how winsome brown hair can be! What a shy sparkle lies in the braided tress, and how tenderly it finds the heart!...noble is the darkness piled above the dawn: majestic are the black-haired heroines; full of frolic and lovelessness are they of the fragrant locks...red-haired queens...warm the world; they are the true Honey of Delight.

Eyes looked upon Angus that were proud and radiant. Eyes that were meek as doves or soft as the glance of a doe. Sparkling and forward-looking eyes stared from the vision as an eagle stares hardily on the sun. Eyes that were languishing and appealing. Side-sliding eyes. Eyes that tantalised. Eyes that shone with mischief, or stared with stubborn pride. Eyes that promised and appealed and dared and cajoled; and eyes that were contented or indifferent or curious.

In keeping, however, with the general fairness of Celtic nobility, the most beautiful of heroines were generally described as light-haired. In somewhat conventional terms, convention being in perfect keeping with the style of the ancient sagas,, Stephens describes Etain:

Brighter than the flashing of gold and silver was the shining of her yellow hair. She wore it in two great golden plaits, and there were four locks in each plait, and at the end of each lock a precious bead was twinkling...Her snowy arms were out through the sleeve holes of her vest, and her hands long and delicate and agile, were raised to the great tresses. Her hands and arms were white as snow, and her brow as white again; and beneath this were two eyes of a deeper, a softer blue than Eochaid had ever imagined that he could see; and beneath again, two lips,
half opened in surprise, and red as the rowan berry...
the light of pride was on her brow; and to each cheek
there came, and went, and came again, a dimple of
delight."

Beauty of form was in itself a heroic quality, being the most ob-
vious aspect of distinction. What is even more important, however, is
that the heroine's attributes had more than an unsettling effect on men.
Her beauty alone was a power which was more than a match for the mighti-
est of heroes. The dream of Angus cited above is indicative of the power
of beauty. Angus' beloved Caer is described as she who "dazzled the eyes
as the sun does, and she filled the mind with delight and wonder, so
that the person who looked at her forgot to think, and could remember
nothing beyond that beauty."10 And even a god can be affected. In
Stephens' words Angus "forgot that this was but a vision; and he could
only remember to look and look again and to so concentrate his sight
that he could see not only with his eyes, but with every member of his
being, and with all the faculties of his mind."11 The effect of such
dazzling beauty on mortal men, even the Ard-Rí himself, is apparent in
the story of Etain also cited above. Eochaid finds himself so transfixed
by Etain's beauty that he decides at once to give over confirmed bach-
elorhood. Likewise, Conachur is so taken with Deirdre that he forgets
his age and dignity to become a young lover once again. Comachur murmurs
to himself as he recalls his meeting with Deirdre:

If the flight of the swallow could be imparted
by words, or the crisping of foam: if the breath
of the lily could be uttered, or the beauty of a
young tree on a sunny hill: then this Troubler
might be spoken of.... the sun paints glories
and wonders on the sky as he goes west in the evening, or at early morn with what noble tenderness he comes again: She is radiant and tender as the sun. . . . I am twenty years younger than I was an hour ago. I could leap like a young buck. . . . Poets shall sing more wisely in Eire because of this day. . . . for though me this land shall be possessed by power and beauty.

With rare exception, however, beauty is also the instigator of problems because it does cause the loss of reason and the influx of passions. Most of the legends recapitulated by Stephens have at their core the jealousy, intrigue, hostility, and despair incumbent on the attempts of a man to secure to himself the affections of a beautiful woman. The situation involving individual heroines is discussed later in this study. What is of interest here is more than the obvious attraction of physical beauty and man's age-old desire to possess that beauty. In these tales, as Stephens interprets them, a beautiful woman functions to fulfill the man's need to alleviate mundanity, the desire for a respite from hardship, the innate longing for the restoration of the life-wearied psyche. Moreover, beauty transforms, having the power to elevate the human condition. "Loveliness," says Stephens through Maeve, "is a gentleness of the body and of the emotion but beauty is a nobility of the mind."¹³ The ennobling power of beauty is evidenced in the mortal woman turned Sidhe who wins Nera's heart so completely he voluntarily abandons the mortal world. Unlike these myriad stories in which a mortal is tempted away from his world by a bona fide Sidhe woman, Nera's companion is, like him, entranced by the differences of life among the Sidhe. The completeness of such a life is fulfilled when each finds
a complementary companion. She is Nera's lover, but she is also his comforter, his teacher, a tender companion who is willing to sacrifice her own happiness and security that he might fulfill his own dreams. Out of the turmoil of external and interior battle she offers tranquility. She tells Nera: "Sunlight and the song of birds, good food and health, a contented mind and a good understanding. These hurt no one, and everyone is the better for possessing them, or for living among people who have them."¹⁴

Irish legend speaks not only of the beautiful but of the ugly as well. Ugliness naturally repelled as beauty attracted. Stephens with evident relish recounts the ugliness of Conaran's daughters in "The Cave at Cesh Corran":

Their hair was black as ink and tough as wire: it stuck up and poked out and hung down about their heads in bushes and spikes and tangles. Their eyes were bleary and red. Their mouths were black and twisted, and in each of these mouths there was a hedge of curved yellow fangs. They had long scraggy necks that could turn all the way round like the neck of a hen. Their arms were long and skinny and muscular, and at the end of each finger they had a spiked nail that was as hard as horn and as sharp as a briar. Their bodies were covered with a bristle of hair and fur and fluff, so that they looked like dogs in some parts and like cats in others, and in other parts again they looked like chickens. They had moustaches poking under their noses and wooly wads growing out of their ears, so that when you looked at them the first time you never wanted to look at them again, and if you had to look at them a second time you were likely to die of the sight.¹⁵

Like that of the beautiful woman, the description of the hag is somewhat formulaic, one hag scarcely deviating from another save in certain minor particulars. Their power is equal to the awesomeness of

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their appearance. Of Conaran's fourth daughter Stephens writes,

If the other three had been terrible to look on, this one was more terrible than the three together. She was clad in iron plate, and she had a wicked sword by her side and a knobby club in her hand.

Fionn . . . turned to his son.
"Oisín, my heart, kill me this honourable hag."

But for the only time in his life Oisín shrank from a combat.
"I cannot do it," he said, "I feel too weak."
Conan also refused, and so did Caelte mac Ronáin and mac Lugac, for there was no man there but was terrified by the sight of that mighty and valiant harridan.

One other factor of physical appearance in Celtic legend has to do with the traditional pairing of beauty and goodness, ugliness and evil. While as noted above these attributes do appear in tandem, there are ample instances when they do not—when beauty disguises viciousness and ugliness, gentleness. Both Becuma of the White Skin and Becfola are described as intrancingly beautiful women. Becuma had "long soft hair that was yellow as gold, and soft as the curling foam of the sea. Her eyes were wide and clear as water and were grey as a dove's breast. Her teeth were white as snow and of an evenness to marvel at. Her lips were thin and beautifully curved: red lips . . . red as winter berries and tempting as the fruits of summer."17 But Becuma is an adulteress and a Sidhe woman whose own people have exiled her for her infidelity. She brings ruin to Conn and Ireland and almost brings about the breaking of surety and the ritual sacrifice of a young boy. Becfola of unknown origin likewise is so beautiful as to catch the eye of King Dermod as she drives her chariot with the skill of a man. After her marriage to Dermod, Becfola

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persuades his foster-son Crimthann to run away with her and as promptly falls in love with Flann of the Sidhe. On the other hand, the story recounted in "Mongan's Frenzy" of the Hag of the Mill shows that ugliness might be linked to quiet gentleness. The Hag of the Mill is "bony. . . . with one foot that was too big for her. . . .and one foot that was too small for her. . . . One of her eyes was set where her nose should be and there was an ear in its place, and her nose itself was hanging out of her chin, and she had whiskers round it."¹⁸ She comes to speak with Mongan and mac an Dáv with touching humility: "This is a wonderful hour and a glorious minute. . . .for this is the first time in sixty years that any one wanted to talk to me. Talk on now. . . .and I'll listen to you if I can remember how to do it."¹⁹ That pulchritude is the hero's main requirement for a mate is amply illustrated here for in spite of her gentle ways the Hag is simply the vehicle for a practical joke, She is temporarily transformed into the image of Ivell of the Shining Cheeks long enough to be married to Branduv, King of Leinster, who when he discovers her true form rejects her.

Obviously, then, though beauty is the sine qua non for a fortuitous relationship between the sexes, it is not the only aspect of feminine nature celebrated in the sagas. Stephens' redactions are filled with aphoristic comments on the psychological attributes that are uniquely feminine. In Deirdre Stephens explains that a girl is "instinctively wise" in love and "will adventure herself in love without misgiving and without teaching."²⁰ If she surrenders herself so completely to the love relationship that the man with whom a woman is in love is her master, then all the more justifiable is her peculiar reaction to unrequited love.

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Stephens explains: "In the woman who is thus assailed a demoniac energy is born; and she will not be at rest until the very ghost of hope is dead. . .Women prefer their desire to any reason that can be imagined, and do not surrender while the ghost of a hope remains." Yet the woman also illustrates her adaptability in spite of her passionate nature. Maeve notes, "all women know. . .that when a woman ceases to love her husband she may yet not come to hate him. She may love something else instead—her children, her gear, herself." She, then, maintains a sense of stability in spite of waning passion. Nevertheless, "If, at that time, she falls in love with another man, then she can come to detest the husband who still adores her, and who cannot help doing so. . .for. . .while a man is not loveable in unfaithfulness, a woman is still more loveable and desirable when she is unfaithful than when she is not." As Augustine Martin has pointed out, the "drama of sexual jealousy" is a frequent theme in Stephens' work. With reference to this theme one must bear in mind the peculiar nature of the legendary Celtic woman. On the one hand, her passionate nature might surface in a domestic situation to reinforce her maternal instincts, as with Lavarcham who fiercely opposes the king in his initial attempt to compromise her young charge. On the other hand, her passion might be channeled into aggressive strategy as with Maeve who angrily matches wits with a king of the Sidhe and wins handily. Both of these women are here discharging their energies on behalf of another. But it is in her own behalf that the resilient mechanizations of the feminine mind are at their best and concomitantly most dangerous. The difficulties of the eternal triangle beset the Toomarc Etain as given in Stephens' *In the Land of Youth.*
The chief manipulator herein is Fuamnach, the first wife of Midir. Similar to the Biblical story of Leah, Rachel, and Jacob, here Fuamnach is unloved and Etain loved by Midir. But in a peculiar twist, Etain and Fuamnach both come to love Midir's foster son Angus, who is attracted to Etain only, and thus the stage is set for one of the strangest stories in Irish legend. In its first part, however, Fuamnach exemplifies the focal point in the drama; in effect rejected twice by two men she loved, she plots diabolically the removal of her competition. Intellect becomes the servant of passion as she plans her revenge. She persuades Midir to take her to the palace of Angus Og and once there she manages to acquire an audience alone with Etain. It is ironic that though she successfully removes Etain, her victory is short lived because Angus, finding Etain gone, kills her. Another example of sexual jealousy is the revenge Uct Dealv of the Sidhe seeks from Tuiren. Iollan Eachtach, an Ulster chief, once loved Uct Dealv but fell in love with and married Tuiren, the young aunt of Fionn. Uct Dealv in her rage changes herself into the form of Fionn's messenger. Securing a private audience with Tuiren, Uct Dealv turns her into a hound which she brings to a known hater of dogs, Fergus Fionnliath, for punishment.

**Types of Heroines in Stephens' Redactions**

The characteristics discussed hitherto may be found among a variety of Celtic heroines. Out of this variety may be categorized into three groups: the spouse-mother figures, the victims of fate, and the strategist-queens. One must not assume from the categorization that either Stephens or the Celtic storytellers have merely embroidered three basic figures to accomplish the various women of the myths. Each is
individualistic. But certain figures do have characteristics in common with others, a situation calling for such organization to avoid repetition as well as to point out salient characteristics of basic areas of the heroic woman's life.

The Spouse-Mother

The spouse-mother figure is usually markedly gentle, given to indirectness of speech which may disguise strategy in diplomacy. Her obvious bent is nuptial and maternal. Hers is a mature nature, regardless of her actual age, and her faithfulness is her hallmark.

One of the most touching of these figures is Saeve, wife of Fionn. The initial meeting between Saeve and Fionn marks the unworldliness of their coming relationship. Saeve had appeared to him during a hunt in the guise of a fawn and is spared because Fionn's dog Bran and Sceolan gamble about her rather than leaping to a kill. In the evening she reassumes her own form and appears to Fionn who is transfixed by her beauty. He marks her beauty to himself in dialectal epithets: "She is the Sky-woman of the Dawn... She is the light of the foam. She is white and odorous as an apple-blossom." She explains that she seeks Fionn's protection from the Fear Doirche, the Dark man of the Sidhe and that she is in love with a mortal. This meeting is strangely reserved, each subtly making known feelings: "If the man you desire is alive and unmarried," Fionn promises, "he shall marry you or he will answer to me for the refusal." "What man has authority over himself?" Saeve replies; "It is to yourself I gave my love." "This is good news," Fionn replies joyfully, "for the moment you came through the door I loved and desired you, and the thought that you wished for another man went into my heart.
Fionn's passion for Saeve is all-consuming: "His wife's voice was sweeter to Fionn than the singing of a lark. She filled him with wonder and surmise. There was magic in the tips of her fingers. Her thin palm ravished him. Her slender foot set his heart beating; and whatever way her head moved there came a new shape of beauty to her face. . . . she was always new."27 Her beauty has rendered all other things secondary to him. And Saeve returns his love in like manner and thereby unwittingly brings about the tragedy. Believing she sees Fionn returning from an encounter with the men of Lochlann, she spurns the warnings of the keep guards and runs to meet the figure. It is the Dark Man of the Sidhe who turns her back into a deer. When later Fionn comes upon a small boy in the woods, he discovers it to be his son by Saeve. The boy, Oisin, explains how he lived in a cave with a deer and was visited frequently by a dark man who at last compelled the deer to go with him. "She was looking back at me all the time and she was crying so bitterly that any one would pity her," Oisin remembers.

Three other figures in the spouse-mother mode appear in the story of the childhood of Fionn himself. Muirne, Fionn's own mother, is aware of the danger to her infant son from the Clan Morna, who had already killed Fionn's father Uail mac Baiscne. She places Fionn in the care of two druidesses and sends them to live deep in the woods. Muirne has little contact with her son until he is an adult. In one scene, however, Muirne illustrates that mother love finds ways around the most difficult of circumstances: "The beautiful, long-haired Muirne came to see him. . . secretly, for she feared the sons of Morna, and she paced through lonely
places in many counties before she reached the hut in the wood. . . . She took him in her arms and kissed him, and she sang a sleepy song until the small boy slept again. . . . But when he awakened she was gone." 27 Certainly to have one's child reared by others was not unusual among the Irish nobility, and Muirne's small contact with her son is explainable in regards to Morna's determination to eradicate the Clan Baiscne. But Stephens shows Muirne caught between mother love and love of her new husband, the king of Kerry. He suggests that her furtiveness may be due to Kerry's fear of the Clan Morna and that she sacrifices her relationship with Fionn in deference to him. 28 Such a note is particularly suitable to the peculiar coolness of Fionn's next meeting with his mother. Fionn has come incognito to the court of the king of Kerry and is impolitic enough to win seven games in a row playing chess against the king himself. The king discerns who he is and refuses to give him sanctuary because evidently he did not want to harbor a refugee from the Clan Morna. Faced with a choice between supporting her son or her lord, Muirne tacitly chooses the latter and offers Fionn no support. Stephens explains: Muirne. . . . must have loved her lord; or she may have been terrified in truth of the sons of Morna and for Fionn; but it is so also, that if a woman loves her second husband she can dislike all that reminds her of the first one." 29

If Fionn was then deprived of the nature of his real mother, he was ably reared by his two guardians Bov Mall and Lia Luachra. Cutting off themselves completely from their former life at court, the two women were devoted to the little boy, planning carefully each stage in his development. More than merely caring for Fionn's needs, they set themselves to raising him as befitted the son of Uail mac Baiscne by training him in
all the arts and skills expected of a Fenian warrior. Early in childhood they taught him to glean experience from the woods around him. Packaging his experiences to his readiness, they trained him to overcome difficulties by utilizing sometimes harsh methods for they realized that tenderness alone not build the requisite strength, stamina, and agility necessary to the Fenian code. For example, they taught Fionn to swim: "It was a leg and an arm gripped then; a swing for Fionn, and out and away with him; plop and flop for him; down into chill deep death for him, and up with a splutter; with a sob; with a grasp at everything that caught caught nothing; with a wild flurry; with a raging despair; with a bubble and snort as he was hauled again down, and down, and down, and found as suddenly that he had been hauled out. Fionn learned to swim until he could pop into the water like an otter and slide through it like an eel."  

The two women, moreover, excited his pride in his heritage by telling him often of the glorious exploits of his father. Their selfless devotion to the young boy was rewarded as Fionn accumulated the requisite skills of mind and body, with the instincts of the animals of the forests and yet the highest awareness of his heroic lineage and position.

One of the fullest exemplifications of this character type is Lavarcham, Deirdre's nurse. Lavarcham's original function at the court of Conachur is to be his bean-cainte or "conversation woman," in other words, a spy. She is able to ferret out for the king the subtleties of court relationships being of particular comfort to him while he is married to the clever and ruthless Maevé. Within the palace she is in complete control. Favored by the king, she uses her wily tongue to spur, or sooth, or manipulate him to her counsel.
Conachur remarks to her:

"If you had been a man I should have been afraid of you."
"How so, master?"
"Because you could have taken my kingdom whenever you wanted it."
"Indeed, master, I would not accept a kingdom if I got one as a present. There is too much responsibility and there is too much to do... if I had the bad luck to be a king, or a queen, I should never again know what a rest meant, as you, my dear master, do not know what it is to rest yourself."

She maneuvers him to her purpose with courage and finesse. She criticizes the King of Scotland and tells Conachur how his pursuit of Deirdre and the sons of Usna is adding to their hardship in exile. But Conachur rebukes her:

"The acts of a prince need a prince's criticism," said the king severely... Leave men to the things they know, and do you meddle with your own female business."
"Those children," said Lavarcham stubbornly, "are a woman's business, and his own subjects are a matter for a king."
"They are our kinsmen indeed," said Conachur thoughtfully, "and their troubles shall be looked into. We shall speak of this again after the banquet."

Kavarcham's eyes were shining:
"Yes, master," she crooned.

When Conachur decides to save the infant Deirdre's life, he gives her to Lavarcham to raise. Lavarcham loves the child as her own and unstintingly devotes her energies to complementing Deirdre's natural great beauty with understanding of the ways of her people. Lavarcham's instruction is indeed the only education Deirdre has since she

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is isolated, nutured in secret to lessen the chances of her fulfilling Cathfa's prophecy that she should cause great sorrow to Ulster. And the focus of Lavarcham's tutelage is knowledge of Conachur, for Lavarcham has determined that Deirdre should be the consort of the king. Given her previous reputation for expeditiousness, it is not surprising that she should be planning a union between the king and her ward. Though such an arrangement is fraught with possibilities for her own self-aggrandizement, Lavarcham's devotion to Deirdre is real, maternal, and all-encompassing. In a conversation with Conachur, who is angling to discover her loyalty to him, Lavarcham admits that if she loves the king, she also loves "her babe."

Her intention to marry Deirdre to King Conachur is informed obviously by the natural maternal desire to see her child well-off and secure. So it is that in order to make Deirdre indispensable to the king, Lavarcham instructs her in all the ways of Conachur: "She had many things to teach a young girl, and she withheld no knowledge that could benefit the little one whom her heart had soon adopted as its own babe. . . . Among the arts of which the tireless Lavarcham spoke there was one she taught and retaught to Deirdre, and that art was Conachur. Although she had never seen the king, yet the young girl knew him as a mother knows her baby. . . . She knew, as only Lavarcham did, why he did such a certain thing, and by what progressions this stated consummation, marvelled at by others, had been arrived at."³³

Ironically, it is Lavarcham's detailed instruction to Deirdre which in large measure brought about the tragedy that transpires. First,
Lavarcham has filled Deirdre's head so full of the heroic demeanor and exploits of Conachur that he seems to the girl an institution, a venerable larger-than-life figure of majesty. This impression is underscored by Lavarcham's detailed instructions of queenly deportment. She insists that by paying proper attention to protocol Deirdre appropriately acknowledge the heroes and notables at court. Yet, she must be cautious to pay no undue attention to any man lest the king be anxious. She is to conduct herself in the king's presence with a careful balance of youthful lightheartedness and gentle deference employing all the womanly arts to avoid even "a second's thoughtlessness."

Conachur is, as she has told Deirdre, "a great king, a great man, a royal hero... His equal is not in Eire." But with her woman's insight into masculine psyche and her long experience with court intrigue, Lavarcham also knows the man behind the hero, and she fully comprehends the impact that Deirdre's elopement has on him. Conachur is in late middle age, and his natural need of the affection and admiration of a desirable woman has three times been thwarted—by the untimely death of Clothru, by Maeve's imperious departure, and now by Deirdre's elopement. The latter is all the more serious for, unlike the others, Deirdre has chosen another man over Conachur and his rejection after his own commitment is a devastating humiliation. Lavarcham loves the king and would spare him the torment of remembering a relationship with Deirdre as it might have been. But because she loves her "babe" more, she risk everything to keep Conachur's revenge from encompassing the guilty lovers, and she labors to placate his wounded ego by manufacturing the most plausible of lies. When Conachur asks for
news of the exiles in Scotland, she tells him the truth embroidered with
details designed to make him feel paternal towards Deirdre. The king of
Scotland, she explains, hunts the exiles like animals. She paints a
dreary picture: "Everywhere they go they are hunted like foxes. They
live under the weather, crouching like wild creatures in the bracken of
a hill-side, of hiding in rocks and caves by a howling shore." She
explains that Scotland wants to kill the three men and take Deirdre to
himself. By pleading the plight of the four, she succeeds in arranging
for their return to Ulster. But because Lavarcham recognizes that Cona-
chúr still chafes under their defection and the loss of Deirdre, she
quickly seeks to convince the king that Deirdre has changed. She tells
Conachúr that Deirdre's homecoming fills her with "joy and grief"—grief
because of the certain change which Deirdre's hardships have wrought
upon her beauty: "The Deirdre we knew is dead, and some weather-wise,
weather-wasted woman will look at me with unknown eyes and say 'How
do you do,' I shall not know how to talk to her." She assures Conachúr
that after her many years of exile Deirdre would have lost her great
beauty and would now be unworthy of the love of a king: "Young girls
are beautiful while they are young, master, but in a few years they
look like any other person. . . . They get fat or they get thin. . . .
She is seven years older in time and twenty years older in hardship. .
. . I think, master, that she may be long, thin, tough woman. She will
be rheumatic."

When the exiles do return, she is uneasy. She knows Conachúr is
capable of violence and something in Conachúr's manner reveals that
he may be planning harm. Lavarcham goes from the king's presence
"listening as it were to her heart, to her instincts, to that monitor on whom we call when the times are momentous and doubtful and there is no other help but our own to be summoned." And when the king sends Laracham to the Red Branch to see how Deirdre looks, Lavarcham goes with great show of reluctance and ill-temper to see the child who, she claims, had severely "disappointed" her. When she returns she tries to distract Conachúr from any possible revenge by appealing to his sense of pity: "Her cheeks are hollow and her eyes are red... my heart was wrung when I looked on her wretchedness." Having warned the sons of Usna of the danger, she knows that if she can placate Conachúr for the night, by morning Fergus might have come and the other heroes loyal to Naoise might be alerted to his arrival so that Conachúr would not dare harm them, and to this end she sends messengers to Usna and to Fergus mac Roy though she realizes her treason in so doing.

As these figures have illustrated, devotion is the key term with regards to the spouse-mother figure. She is the legendary heroine who excels in giving of herself and bringing her skills to bear to the well-being of those she loves. No maudlin martyr figure, the spouse-mother is, however, in her own way sacrificed by her commitment to another, a victim of her own selflessness.

**The Victim of Fate**

The concept of the victim is more appropriate, however, to a second group of Celtic heroines, who might be termed the "victims of fate." These young women who seem inescapably destined to play a central role in a love tragedy are usually of unsurpassed beauty that causes the men who desire them to become inextricably meshed in a
fateful attachment.

As in all discussions of fate, the issue of personal culpability must be examined as well. Among these heroines are both those who fall in tragic terms through a *hamartia* and those who seem in pathetic terms purely the object of circumstances totally beyond their control. In Stephens two figures stand out as representatives of this group—Etain and Deirdre. The former is of two worlds, being at once both human and faery; the latter is all too human and as such actively brings about her own fateful end.

Etain's story is among the most complex in Celtic mythology. The wife of Midir, Sidhe king of Bri Leith, she is desired by Angus Og who in exercising his seignorial rights takes her away with him back to the palace of the Dagda. Complication arises, however, for Fuamnach, also the wife of Midir, loves Angus Og, too, and feels herself more worthy to become the mac an Og's paramour because she, unlike Etain, is unloved by Midir. And when she cannot comfort Midir for the loss of Etain, conditions at Bri Leith become unbearable for Fuamnach. She devises and executes a plan whereby with the help of the Druid Bresil Etarlaím she turns Etain into a tiny insect and blows her beyond the world of the Sidhe. Thus ends the first part of the tale. The second part begins as Etain in insect form is accidentally swallowed by the wife of Etar, lord of Iver Cichmaine and is reborn as a human infant. When she has grown to womanhood, she is seen by Eochaid Airem, the Ard-Rí, who, falling in love at first sight, makes her queen at Tara. Midir, who at last finds Etain, appears in the guise of Eochaid's sick brother Ailill, who is cured when Etain, the cause of his love
melancholy, promises to sleep with him. Midir in his anxiousness, however, removes his disguise too soon; Etain does not remember him and is frightened and runs away. Midir hits upon a second plan to recapture Etain, one by which he challenges Eochaid to a series of chess games, the final stake being Etain. Midir wins, and Eochaid, obliged by his honor to yield the prize, agrees but marshalls his forces with instructions to kill Midir if he should try to leave with Etain. Midir, however, awakens memory in Etain and clasping her to himself rises with her up through the roof of the king's throne room and escapes.

In the third part of the story, a part which Stephens does not recount, Eochaid forces Midir to return Etain, a pledge which wily Midir thoroughly fulfills by sending hundreds of "Etains." Eochaid, obligated to choose one, unwittingly chooses his and Etain's daughter. An infant born of the incestuous union is set out to die but is rescued in classical fashion by a peasant and reared to become like her mother and grandmother a symbol of fateful beauty in Ireland.

Etain's great beauty Stephens renders in a composite picture. The girl herself is, of course, peerless: Very fair with "great tresses" golden and shining, deep soft blue eyes, lips "red as the rowan berry." Her raiment and accessories accentuate her loveliness: "Beside her was a silver basin that had four golden birds perched upon it, and there were bright purple stones set in the rim of the basin. A purple cloak with long silver fringes was lying by her on the grass. Her dress was of green silk, and falling along behind was a long hood embroidered in gold. On each breast, just deep enough to hold them, there was a little cup of gold; and on each of her shoulders was a narrow silver clasp."
In Stephens' words, "The sun was shining upon her, and indeed. . . . she was shining back at the sun."40

According to Stephens' version, however, there is a strange passionless quality about Etain. At their first meeting Eochaid is trembling with emotion; Etain, like other Stephens heroines, is neither abashed nor excited in any proportion approaching that of her admirer. Etain but slowly warms to his confessions of love. But she is surprised to discover, in Stephens' understated explanation, "that she did not dislike hearing of these things" of love and even finds that she is becoming more and more curious about Eochaid's feelings. Etain returns his protestations of love and pet names but only when he initiates the exchange, evidently without any real or deep seated feelings herself. In a charming dialogue she ask him about his love for her "How do you love me?" she queries. "The young king drew a vast breath into his lungs, and then puffed it monstrously and helplessly abroad. 'Thus!' he said; and smote mightly on his bosom."41 Eochaid calls her "My Love! My Bird! My One Lamb!" terms of endearment which she returns in suit with gradually increasing understanding. This exchange becomes a kind of game, a kind of refrain with which they tease each other into an admission of love. It is, however, these very words which save Etain from capitulating to Midir when he, instead of Ailill, completes their tryst. Midir sings the death song of the Sidhe to her, but her head is full of the sound of Eochaid's voice to which she accedes, and for the first time understands the passion behind the words and finds her own heart responding in kind: "—My Branch! My Love! My Bird! My Lamb! . . . . My Dream and My Awakening! My Treasure and My Song I sing! My Love, My
Life, My Everything!42 When she tells Eochaid of the strange meeting, for the first time she initiates the dialogue:

There came a long silence between them.
"My Lamb!" said Etain timidly.
"My Dove!" said Eochaid.
"I love you," said Etain.
"Do you truly love me?" said Eochaid.
"I do, I do," she replied.
"In what way?" said Eochaid, and he was all intentness and anguish.

The queen drew a great breath into her lungs, and she breathed it deeply abroad.
"Thus," she said, and she beat mightily on her lovely bosom.
"...Indeed, you must not cry," said Eochaid, "Indeed, you will make me cry," he said.43

There is evidently some indication of the awakening of her passionate nature in her compassion for Ailill. But much of her determination to cure him is born of Eochaid's influence on her for he has taught her as Queen she is powerful. In reflecting of Ailill's condition she exclaims, "Whoever he yearns for I will surprise her name from him, and if she has to be dragged here in chains, here she shall come; and all that she can give shall be given or I will murder her. Ha!" she thought, and the very thunder and accent of Eochaid rang in her throat; "am I the Queen or am I not!"44 She will do with that tormenting woman as Eochaid would. When to her horror she discovers that that woman is herself, then she is committed to her purpose. That her dawning love for Eochaid is already making itself felt is, however, apparent in her inability to repeat to Ailill the pet expressions common to lovers, those such as Eochaid uses to her: "These were words that belonged elsewhere; that were sacred to one who was absent."45

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Etain's arrangement with Ailill, reminding one of Dorigen's plight in Chaucer's "Franklin's Tale," is fraught with complexity of feelings and honor. Etain is utterly faithful to Eochaid and paradoxically it is this faithfulness that places her in the compromising situation. Eochaid loves his brother dearly. The promise to cure him is a result of Etain's wish to make Eochaid happy again. Stephens is careful to indicate her complicity is free of any subversive affection for Ailill. Waiting for Ailill she does not say "He does not come;" rather she laments, "It is not done."46 Moreover, Etain's natural pride is bolstered by Eochaid's position and her share in its nobleness under­scores her determination to discern the cause of Ailill's sickness and to bring about a speedy recovery. It seems to her that Ailill's passion for her, vehement enough to cause him sickness to the point of death, has trapped the both of them into the commission of the most serious affront possible to Eochaid; yet she is persuaded that her part in the affair is something she must do for Eochaid's sake as well. However, by his unexplained absences it appears Ailill is dallying with her commitment. Yet, it is Ailill's peculiar behavior that helps to waken feeling in Etain. The rising anger she feels at his humilitating absence awakens feeling in general. The gamut of emotions of compassion, pride, fear, anger have indeed done what Midir claims--tormented her mind so that she might see a god--but the "god" she sees is the meaning of her relationship with Eochaid.

The first time she goes to the hut she is in terror of discovery and of the magnitude of her actions. The second time she goes to the hut, however, her mood is different. Her purpose now is informed
by the faintest question of her own irresistibility. Now she is eager to give herself to Ailill both to prove her attractiveness and because of her conviction that only she and only in this way might cure him. Stephens explains: "Her feet broke to a run. She must not be late. He might die if she were even one minute late." Yet she is also excited to test her own sensuality. And when again Ailill does not come, rather than the perplexed relief she felt after the first time he failed to keep their appointment, now she is incensed, moved to vengeful spitefulness that Ailill should dare to toy with the Queen, but more important the unparalleled Etain.

In her first encounter with Midir, Etain proves the strength of her own character. This Lord of the Sidhe reveals himself to her as her former husband and causes her for the moment to recollect fragments of her former life. But Etain puts her fingers into her ears and closes her eyes, refusing to be swayed by Midir's hypnotic song. Stephens allows the question to lie, however, whether Etain's resistance is due to imperfect recollection, to a sudden surge of loyalty to Eochaid, of possibly to the fact that Midir's determination to reclaim her is a challenge to her own sense of autonomy. Probably all of these things are true. But at their next meeting, inasmuch as Eochaid is compelled to surrender his claim to her, nothing stands in the way of her yielding to Midir. She succumbs to Midir's enchantments and is born away.

Deirdre's story has been told by many writers. In some versions she is the hare pursued by the hounds; in others a sensual temptress; in still others the young ideal, noble and fated. Stephens' Deirdre is
a composite of these images.

Deirdre's great beauty, already discussed, warrants many passages in the novel. She was "all that was beautiful... here gathered into one form, as in one true ray of the sun is all that is lovely of the sun." It is this beauty that is the fateful catalyst in the tragedy to be unfolded. Stephens explains the impact of this beauty; "We may tell of the abasement which comes on the heart when beauty is seen; the sadness which is sharper than every other sadness; the despair that overshadows us when the abashed will concedes that though it would overbear everything it cannot master this, and that here we renounce all claims; for beauty is beyond the best..." If beauty is the catalyst, the tragedy is, nonetheless, compounded by the temperaments of the principals.

Many versions of the Deirdre story are one-dimensional renderings of hate and desire, of passion-driven characters caught in an inescapable web of fate. Stephens does not omit to take note of the role of fate in this tale, but his redaction is a more credible version because he provides motivation for the principles. Deirdre's love of Naoise and rejection of Conachur are plausibly offered. Stephens begins the causal relationships with the awakening of desire in Deirdre. Her isolated existence, pleasant enough for a child, has become furiously frustrating to the adolescent. Naturally restless at her confinement she has periods of alternating listlessness and frenzied activity. She is at last awakened Laurentian fashion by the moon and having "submitted her destiny to the delicate sweet lady of the sky," she leaves her compound and finds Naoise and his brothers encamped in the woods.
Listening to their talking, she realizes that she has found that unnamed thing towards which she had been yearning. Deirdre has felt the first awakenings of her own sexual drive and no longer surrounded in the compound by only the old and impotent, she responds to the magnificent example of vigorous manhood before her--Naoise. In Stephens' words Deirdre "had begun to long for someone to whom she might submit her will and from whom she could receive the guidance and wisdom and refreshment which she divined to be in herself, but which she could not reach."50

The question of personal culpability and fate is very nicely synthesized at this point in the tale. Deirdre's flight to Naoise's camp is a matter of destiny--Stephens is very implicit on this point. But in this action Deirdre is possessed by a palpable will that had manifested itself early in childhood. Deirdre admits to Lavarcham that the guards do her bidding for she has quite charmed them into submission to her so that she might "drill" them, or have them tell her stories of the outside world. She tells of how the captain of the guard, "Fat-face" would not dare to cross her: "I should like to see Fat-face daring to tell anything about me," Deirdre pouts. "Why, the men would beat him if he told. I would get down off the wall and beat him myself,"51 Her restlessness becomes more focused in determined adolescent rebellion: "The unrest proper to her years grew as stealthily as her limbs, it was no longer unnoted. She had a direction and she leaned there as ardently and unconsciously as a flower turns to the sun."52 Knowing she is going against Lavarcham's directions, she is determined to slip away from the compound. At this
point she is unaware that Lavarcham is grooming her to be queen and that her new attitudes and actions are a potential affront to the majesty of the throne. But her innocence is short lived. Though compelled to action by her biological impulses, her will becomes a powerful tool of her impulses. Her imagination is pervaded by the image of Naoise. It is on him that all the energies of her mind become fixed so that her desires to be free of her old life and free to go to him and have him love her in return becomes a tangible moving force. Naoise too is caught up in the force of her will. Stephens explains, "This powerful brooding of desire is a magical act, and the object of it does not remain entirely unaffected; for even if no coherent message is dispatched, the unrest is shared in however diffused a form, and it may be that in sleep Naoise was no longer the master of his dreams."53

Lavarcham, noticing the subtle change in Deirdre, discovers that the girl has become a woman and, herself wise in the ways of her sex, she feels a sense of urgency in arranging a meeting and betrothal between Conochur and her ward. But Deirdre resists, seeking to be "an identity instead of a puppet to be pulled here and ordered there."54 With the awakening of her imagination, her sense, her will, she too is impelled by a strange sense of urgency, but one not boding the destruction of plans but the welcome fruition of them. Deirdre's intent, though secret, is so powerful that she cannot fathom that other intentions are at work. The sudden appearance of the king and the information that she is to become his wife shatters upon Deirdre's fevered mind with the impact of a meteor. Having given herself to Naoise, she is utterly dismayed to learn that she is to become
Conachúr's wife. The king in his seemingly unapproachable majesty fills her with awe, not love. And this realization on the very dawning of her awareness of what love is makes the thought of union with him unbearable. To Deirdre Conachúr becomes "as one who could have been father and grandfather to a hill... stern and aloof and almost incredible ancient, looming out from and overshadowing her infancy like a fairy tale." Having seen him in person her first impression is but amplified as he claims her as his wife: "Nothing but terror filled her heart at that prospect, for she could not see him in any terms of intimacy or affection. He was and would remain as remote as her childhood, and no mere nearness could make him present. And he would be as unaccountable as are the elements that smile today and rage tomorrow in hurricane. What woman could reckon his parts or his total? He was like some god that had come out of the hills to astonish and terrify." Conachúr spelled for her simply another version of her imprisonment—an attitude which Lavarcham reinforces by her well-meant but disturbing reiterations of the cautions and restraints which Deirdre must practice if she is to remain pleasing to the king. Ironically, too, it is Lavarcham herself who confirms Deirdre's desire to flee from this entrapment. Finding Deirdre more than timorous about her nuptials Lavarcham counsels, "No person can either hope of fear until they know actually that which is hopeful or frightful. All you need do is to accept what your heart approves of, and what your heart rejects you can throw away. There is everything to hope for and nothing to be afraid of." Such is precisely
Deirdre's thought; in her new found emotions she is determined to preserve her new sense of autonomy. Moreover, Deirdre looks upon her marriage to Conachur as a means of defrauding her of Naoise. Naoise is, in constrast to the king, "her equal in years and frolic...her beloved, her comrade, the very red of her heart, and her choice choice." If Conachur looms too large to be loved, Naoise is the ideal lover, a perfect match for the epitome of Ireland's ideal of femininity.

It is important to see Deirdre as a mulit-dimensional figure. Though of inexpressible beauty, she is not the fragile Romantic heroine. On the contrary, there is about Deirdre an aggressiveness. She even shows herself a capable combatant. Having already proved her courage by her escape from Lavarcham and elopement with Naoise, she endures with fortitude the exile in Scotland. When she and the others are trapped in the Red Branch, she too proves her worth as a warrior. Armed with a slingshot she takes deadly aim at the soldiers who appear at the windows. With a cool head and ready arm she helps to open and close the doors when the others go forth to fight. And when the five attempt one last sortie so that they might escape, she is at Naoise's back with a shield and spear with which she helps to resist Conachur's soldiers.

Deirdre's aggressiveness takes another form, too. She is a clever girl who instinctively knows how to accomplish her purpose through force or shrewd manueverings. Indicative of these qualities is her meeting with Naoise just prior to their elopement. Having confirmed herself in her desire for Naoise, she is a bit dismayed when Naoise returns to his former noble and self-effacing stand, born of an
awareness that Deirdre is after all the ward and now the betrothed of the
king. Realizing that in his present mood Naoise might best be reached by
indirection, she turns with mock helplessness to his brother Aínnle, who
might be depended upon for rashness. As expected, he suggests flight
and though Naoise balks at the cowardly appearance of running, the
idea has been planted. When Naoise reminds the others that Deirdre
would be running away from a kingdom, Deirdre confesses that she would
gladly give up being queen to run away with him. Naoise's reluctance
is understandable inasmuch as he is a noble, the nephew of Conáchur, and
beloved of Conáchur as a son. He is and always has been loyal to the
king. To steal away Conáchur's betrothed is fraught with ignominiousness. The three brothers protest that the king loves them. But Deir-
dre answers with terrible meaning that the king loves her, too, and
she pleases her fear of the king. She turns Naoise's words back again
on him. If Naoise was reared by Conáchur and sat on his lap, if Cona-
chúr fastened on Naoise's sword and kissed him, so Deirdre points out
insinuatingly she too "shall be reared by the son of Ness...shall
sit in his lap. He will not buckle a sword on me, but will unbuckle my
girdle with his own hands; he...will kiss me many times on each
cheek."59 When in anguish of jealousy Naoise still does not rise to the
bait, she angles her best lure. She threatens to reveal to Conáchur the
lovemaking between her and Naoise. Drained of opposition, Naoise
lays plans for their escape.

It is Deirdre's astute understanding of human nature that provides
the final irony, however, a competent, faithful, clever, and personable
wife to Naoise. Deirdre is also gifted with second sight. When Fergus
comes to bring the exiles home, Deirdre relates her dreams of foreboding to the young warriors and begs Naoise to stay in Scotland. When he is obdurate, she remains with him, not bearing to be parted from him even when she knows the inevitability of their end. She explains her knowledge of Conachúr that he is intensely proud and capable of vengeance, but Naoise will not listen. She tries again to dissuade Naoise when Fergus abandons them for the banquet given by Borach, but again her warnings are turned aside by his overweening sense of noblesse oblige and knowingly she follows to humiliation and death.

Deirdre's vital spark of life, her affirmative spirit, infuses her actions in spite of her knowledge, if not understanding, of her fate. Thus if all nature has conspired to bring the two lovers together and then to destroy them, it is the finest irony that in facing her fate, whether it be Naoise or death "the only word she need utter until she died was the word 'yes.'" In Stephens it is finally Deirdre's character and not her legendary beauty that makes her memorable.

The Strategist-Queen

A third grouping of Celtic heroines might be called the strategist-queens. Like other heroines they were noted for extraordinary beauty and desirability, but unlike these heroines they were formidable political tacticians, forceful women admirably suited to win both affairs of state and affairs of the heart. Unaccustomed to letting fate take its course, they became themselves active agents of fate, manipulating those around them to suit their own plans.

Some of these figures became aggressive as a result of peculiarities
of their own positions or as a reaction to a particular tragedy early in their lives. Nessa, the mother of Conachúr, is one of these. Nessa, the "ungentle," was formerly called Assa, the "gentle." A quiet, scholarly young woman, she forswore gentleness when she discovered that her tutors had been wantonly murdered. She became a warrior, but was yet still so beautiful a young woman that the druid Cathfa, who saw her bathing, trapped her into an agreement to marriage. After the birth of their son Conachúr, Nessa left Cathfa possibly because she discovered that Cathfa was responsible for the murder of her tutors. Conachúr now became the focus of her ambitions so that when young Fergus mac Roy, new king of Ulster, fell in love with her, she agreed to succumb to his importuning if he would allow her son Conachúr to rule Ulster as king for one year. Fergus, with all the naivete native to his personality, agreed. When the year was up, Fergus discovered that the court was so enamoured with the new king and his obvious monarchical abilities that he lost all his support. Good-naturedly he, too, supported Conachúr. Conachúr's abilities were indeed impressive, but his mother was also hard at work behind the scenes to insure support for her son by distributing great sums of money among the nobles. Moreover, she arranged a marriage between Conachúr and Clothru, the daughter of the Ard-Ri. Nessa proved herself capable, then, of knowing just when to drop her overt role as warrior to focus her energies on the covert action of furthering her son's and thereby her own, success.

In the peculiar story of "The Wooing of Becfola" is recounted a
tale of another strong-willed woman. Coming from unknown parts, Becfola in her chariot encountered Dermod, the Ard-Ri, and Crimthann, his foster son. In a delightful conversation revelatory both of the relationship between foster-parent and foster-son and of the characters of these respective men, Becfola was pronounced "a wonder of the world and an endless delight to the eye." But the lady herself was not impressed by majesty and showed quite as much independent spirit as they showed curiosity for she refused to answer their questions, even to tell them her name. As is the king's prerogative, Dermod expressed his wish to marry her, a statement to which she acceded. But her acquiescence notwithstanding, Becfola had fallen in love with Crimthann at first sight. And likewise Naoise, though Crimthann initially refused to presume upon the king's prerogative, Becfola's subversive protestations of affection capitulated his reserve and he agreed to meet her at Cluain da chaillech. She did not meet Crimthann, however, but having wandered into Tir na n-Og forgot Crimthann when she came upon a redoubtable young warrior named Flann. Becfola, like the men in the story, was a sensualist and she was attracted by physical beauty and masculine prowess. Becfola's resolute spirit enabled her to leave the king's side early that Sunday morning in spite of his prohibitions concerning Sunday travel. And this same resolution enabled her with great coolheadedness to escape a pack of wolves, find safety with Flann, return with quickly regained equanimity to Dermod's side, and with an unwavering sense of responsibility to herself alone accept her banishment. If Becfola seems peculiarly amoral, Stephens, nevertheless, paints her with a certain nobility for when the cleric accuses
her of dalliance in the land of the Sidhe, she does not deny it. Rather she replies truthfully in the affirmative and faces Dermod without flinching: "Go to that Flann," Dermod ordered. "He is waiting for me," said Becfola "with proud shame," "and the thought that he should wait wrings my heart." And she leaves Tara.

A more diabolical figure is Becuma. An inhabitant of the Many-Colored Land, she has offended the Sidhe because of her infidelity to her husband. Her sexual appetite being unsuitable to the inhabitants of that land, she is banished. As her coracle comes across the sea, she is seen by the newly widowed Conn the Hundred Fighter who is struck by her beauty, by her "shapely feet...long soft hair...eyes grey as a dove's breast." But Becuma, though strangely capable of intense passion, does not possess other human emotional faculties. She lacked in particular compassion or even a moral sense so that she brings discord and ills upon Ireland, her adopted country. Stephens cites her attitude: "The troubles which had fallen on Becuma did not leave her repentent, and the sweet lady began to do wrong as instantly and innocently as a flower begins to grow." Stephens suggests that Becuma was determined to exercise control over Ireland to make up for the sense of outrage she felt when she was compelled to accept her banishment. Though, like Becfola, she accepts her punishment with dignity, she is determined to recoup her wounded pride. Not only does she work evil upon the land, but she focuses her hatred particularly on Art, Conn's son. Stephens implies here that her hatred may have resulted from a deep-seated lack of confidence in her powers or possibly from a real but unrequited love for Art. Becuma determines to get

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the better of Art. Having already had him sent from Ireland for a year ostensibly to make her adjustment to being Conn's queen easier, Becuma now seeks a way to rid herself of him forever. She challenges him to a chess game which she allows him to win. In the return match, however, she is aided invisibly by her foster sister from the sidhe, who moves a chess piece when Art's eyes are diverted. Having won, Becuma demands that Art find Delvcaem, daughter of Morgan. She knows full well that Morgan will rid her of Art. The story from this point follows Art's adventures which end successfully when he overcomes Morgan and brings Delvcaem back to Ireland. Banished by Delvcaem who is more powerful than she, Becuma, speaking to no one, leaves Ireland. Imaginatively Stephens has her journey to "Sasana" where she becomes a queen and conducts a continuous war against the Holy Land. Her resourcefulness here is in keeping with the defiant reception of her original sentence. Stephens' account of her first banishment indicates an admiration of her independent spirit: "It is pleasant, however, notwithstanding her terrible crime and her woeful punishment, to think how courageous she was. When she was told her sentence, nay, her doom, she made no outcry, nor did she waste any time in sorrow. She went home and put on her nicest clothes." 67

There is an element, however, in the story which puts Becuma's actions in a more malificent light. As the king is considered the measurement of prosperity in the land, that is, as he prospers so it prospers, so Becuma's coming and marriage to the king have brought evil for she is an accursed woman. Conn's advisors trace the problem to her. But when Conn refuses to give her up, his advisors find

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another course of action. The solution given is a combination of pagan fertility sacrifice and Christian symbolism in the blood of innocence. It is determined that the evils will not depart from the land until the blood of the son of a sinless couple is mixed with the soil. Conn journeys to the farthest reaches and finds such a boy--Sedga, the son of Rigru and Daire. Peculiarly Conn lies to them that the boy is wanted merely to bathe in the waters of Ireland when in fact he is wanted for sacrifice. One may interpret his own duplicity to be the result of a love for Ireland that would admit of any course of action to preserve the land and its people, or more importantly, one may also conjecture that Conn's association with Becuma has taught him how he might be ruthless in his determined purpose. Certainly he needs the youth in order to keep Becuma and he is willing to permit the execution. In her attraction for Conn, Becuma has all the earmarks of the traditional femme fatale.

Such malvolence of other Sidhe women, however, was more usually unpremeditated. In Uct Dealv's case her disagreeable actions are born of her lover's unfaithfulness, her anger as excusable as it might be in a human counterpart. The difference lies in the extent of her powers. Uct Dealv appears in one of Stephens' most humorous stories, "The Birth of Bran," which opens with the marriage of the beautiful Tuiren, the young aunt of Fionn, to lollan Eachtach. But lolían had been a lover to Uct Dealv in Tir na n-Og. Like the proverbial "woman scorned," she seeks profound revenge on her rival. Through trickery she gains audience with Tuiren and changes her into a hound and leads her to the home of Fergus Fionnliath, who hated dogs and who, she might be
sure, would see that the hound's life was wretched and thus exact the revenge for her. Uct Dealv is viciously triumphant when she has Tuiren in her power. She delights in recounting to the trembling animal how Fergus will treat her: "He will throw stones at you. You have never had a stone thrown at you. Ah, bad girl! You do not know how a stone sounds as it nips the ear with a whirling buzz, nor how jagged and heavy it feels as it thumps against a skinny leg.... You shall dig up old bones stealthily at night, and chew them against famine. You shall whine and squeal at the moon, and shiver in the cold, and you will never take another girl's sweetheart again."\(^68\)

Forceful in her guise as Fionn's messenger she demands that Fergus take the dog. But her mistake is invoking his aid for Fionn. Loving the captain of the Fianna, he forces himself to tend the dog carefully and thereby becomes conversely a great fancier of dogs. Uct Dealv is not irremediably malicious, however, as long as she can have her own way when lollan comes to her to restore the girl to her human form, she exacts his pledge that he will become her lover once more: "If I save your head from Fionn... then your head will belong to me... And if your head is mine, the body that goes under it is mine...."\(^69\)

However, it is in the Ultonian stories that the best example of a powerful woman occurs—Queen Maeve of Connacht. Maeve is one of the most remarkable figures in Irish literature. Stephens has as his raw material a figure that is complex, unpredictable, half villain, half noble, but always fascinating. The earliest glimpse of Maeve reveals a blood relative to Shakespeare's Kate, in short, a vicious term-agent. In Deirdre, Conachur is married to her sister Clothru. When

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Clothru, who is expecting her first child, visits her father, the High King of Ireland, Maeve in a fury over a dispute kills her. Conachur, coming to exact either compensation or revenge, notes Maeve's great beauty as well as her willfulness and decides that inasmuch as she does not wish to marry him, it exactly suits his purpose to force her to do so.

Maeve is more than a match for the king, however. She tries first of all to gain control over him by frowardness. Particularly in her ability to win an argument she seeks to overpower Conachúr. Stephens describes her power with words: "An argument with Maeve was not lightly undertaken. It was likely to last a long time, in the first place; and in the second, she had so precipitate a manner of speech and so copious a command of words that the listener's mind quickly began to feel as if it were in a whirlpool, his head would fly round and round, and he must run away lest his brains burst out from his ears and he die giddily." But Conachúr could last, even thrive, under that "shrill tornado" and even knew how to goad her past the "very bounds of utterance" so that when from sheer exhaustion she fell silent, he could talk her into his own point of view. However, Maeve can and does win easily when Conachúr is troubled or otherwise unable to oppose her frenzy with superior calm. On just such an occasion Maeve forces an argument that is the first step in a plan to depart Ulster. Having determined she would not be forced into doing anything she did not wish to do, she has over quite some time carefully laid the groundwork for separating herself from Conachúr. Exactly why she could not remain as Conachúr's wife is apparent not only from the
fact that he forced her to marry him but also because Conachur had forced intimacy with him before their marriage and continued to do so now. And since she was "a lady to whom nothing in the world was so dear and instant as she was herself," she could not tolerate that any man should touch her without her permission. Moreover, Maeve had some very exacting requirements for a husband:

"My husband," she said, "must be free from cowardice, and free from avarice, and free from jealousy; for I am brave in battles and combats and it would be a discredit to my husband if I were braver than he. I am generous and a great giver of gifts, and it would be a disgrace to my husband if he were less generous than I am. And... it would not suit me at all if he were jealous, for I have never denied myself the man I took a fancy to, and I never shall whatever husband I have now or may have hereafter."  

Maeve must always be first, but in her marriage to Conachur he naturally and easily took superiority. Stephens makes clear here, too, Maeve's aggressiveness with regards to fate. Whatever may happen, Maeve creates opportunity for herself or turns the extant situation to her own advantage. So it is that when Conachur must visit Cairbre Niafar, King of Leinster, to solidify plans for an alliance, she chooses just that time to leave Ulster. As Stephens very carefully points out, it is not through fear but through expediency that Maeve chooses to depart the palace when Conachur is away: "Had it been merely a ques-
tion of getting comfortably away there would have been nothing in the prospect to exercise the queen. She would have mounted her chariot, and whether her husband was looking or not looking, she would have
driven wherever she wished to go: she would have driven over him if he had stood in her way, and through his army if that had been unavoidable. Maeve's courage is indisputable; she is not afraid of Conachur, or "of anything that lived." Her only problem is her determination to take all her countless possessions with her. And when Conachur returns, Maeve and everything she owned is gone. Maeve's courage is informed by pride. Maeve is as much warrior as she is woman. Like the men of her time, she is given to boasting, recounting to her own glory especially her exploits such as sacking the Sidhe of Anbual. And she needles Fergus with the fact that it was not "Leinster or Ulster or Munster that did this deed. It was my own kingdom--this Connacht; and my own self--this Maeve, your Queen, that did it." Maeve did indeed sack the Sidhe of Connacht, taking Ethal Anbual the king and other nobles prisoner and, what is more important, two bulls--The Whitehorn and The Brown Bull, later of Cuilgne and the object of the infamous Táin. Such was accomplished on behalf of the Dagda, who enlisted her aid in forcing Anbual to give up his daughter Caer to Angus.

In *In the Land of Youth* Stephens gives a fuller picture of Maeve through the indirection of interstices between the several long narratives in the volume. The picture that emerges shows Maeve both feminine and masculine. It is here one discovers that Maeve's beauty is significant in its own right. Bove, the wife of the Dagda Mor himself, tells those gathered to identify the most beautiful woman of Angus's dream that Maeve is "the noblest of the queens of the world, and she is the most beautiful woman under the sun." She is "tall and
well-rounded. . .long-faced and pale, and her hair shines like gold."  
Maeve is aware of her own beauty and does not tolerate easily talk of any other beautiful woman in her presence. When Nera returns from the Sidhe of Anbual with a description of his beloved, Maeve responds testily 'And there are some who think that I am sweet-cheeked and desirable. I also am honey-haired,'" 

But Maeve is strangely lacking in traditional feminine sentimentality. For example, though responsible for her demise, Maeve can think of her dead sister without regret, with perfect equanimity. With her deep masculine voice and her authoritarian attitudes, she controls those around her with firm and forthright leadership, with "patience and tenacity and. . .a clear, cool head." She takes full responsibility for her own actions moving forward in her plans without hesitation. Her masculinity is broached in an exchange among Ailill, Fergus, and herself. Ailill dares to interrupt her and question a detail of the story she is relating. And he agrees with Fergus that the story is being delivered in "a more manly fashion" than might be expected from a woman's recounting of the story. Maeve quickly retorts, "I am less of a female than you are. . . . I am a queen, and by that office I am a man. . . . I am a woman in my love affairs. . . . but. . . . in all that pertains to skill and hardihood and reason, I am a man." 

Her daring is evident in her dealings with the Sidhe. When Bove and the Dagda himself come in dazzling panoply to seek her aid in bringing Caer to Angus, she is less than awed. Though according the Dagda a place at her right hand, she returns his announcement of his name and position with no deference but by a parallel recitation of
her own. Moreover, ignoring the advice of her counselors, she agrees to journey into the Sidhe "for," said she, "I have never yet paid a visit to Faery, and as I am the ruler of Connacht I should like to see the ruler of the Shi of my country." To the worries of her counselors about possible recriminations for her interference, she receives the Dagda's sureties who yet warns her that though the Sidhe will not harm Connacht, repercussions may yet be felt there. But Maeve dismisses the Dagda's well-intentioned warning by reminding him that she herself would be her "own guarantor for all that may happen in Connacht or in Ireland." Maeve's imperiousness reduces even the powerful Ethan Anbual. He points out to the Dagda that though overcome, he did not by law have to give up his daughter. But Maeve interrupts the exchange: "I came to get this girl, and I shall not go away until I have got her. . . . It is an impertinence for any chit to refuse the embraces of a proper man like Angus. . . . let her wish or not wish, she must be given to me, for by my hand, I shall not leave without her, and the booty I have already seized is nothing to the plunder I shall presently take unless that girl is given to me." Maeve here is able to resolve the dispute, not only by her show of force but also through her keen understanding of human nature. When Anbual protests that Caer has told him she does not want to go with Angus, Maeve quickly informs him that "what a girl tells her father is seldom of any importance and is never true." And she accurately concludes that Caer herself sent her vision to Angus because she wanted the mac an Og to come to her.

Maeve has earlier boasted that she will take any man who pleases
her. Although she is legally married to Ailill, she makes good her boast. Her "suitors" run the gamut from Fergus, the muscular champion of Ulster, to the elderly but robust advisor to the Dagda, Fergne. The former endears himself initially through his appearance, but becomes even more favored by Maeve when he pays her compliments. Likewise, Fergne catches her attention when he comments loudly on her beauty and her wisdom. Maeve is not at all above flattery and is frankly attracted by the sensual, responding easily to the importunities of a man who suits her. And Ailill, her patient husband, lets her have her way. He is a "good" husband in Maeve's terms, for a good husband is one who is "afraid" of his wife. Ailill's toleration of Maeve's flirtation is either because he is extraordinarily good natured or more likely because he realizes that he can do nothing about it. In In the Land of Youth the primary object of Maeve's flirtation is Fergus mac Roy, who has come to Maeve's court after having turned his back on Conachur and his treacherous slaying of the sons of Usna. Fergus becomes the real audience before whom Maeve performs as she tells her stories. In the emendations to her narrative she is obliquely telling Fergus of his attraction for her: "Love," she explains to the assemblage, "is unsought, it is unasked, it is incurious, and wills but to fall and fall, and to cease never from falling." And this mutual attraction is evidenced in coy glances and the warm gaiety of her repeated compliment "Your are our treasure."

Charles Bowen in his article "Great-Bladdered Madb" discusses her sexual nature in conjunction with mythological overtones. She seeks
dominance, signifying the dominance of sexual desire on the human psyche. She is noted for her mead which she announces to the assemblage in Stephens' redaction was "made by myself from the honey gathered by my own bees in the flowers that grow about Cruachn."89 Mead is associated with sexual ardour.90

Maeve's love extends in a maternal fashion to her people as well, however. The astute and responsible leader of Connacht, she is known also for her capable management of her own house. So Stephens pictures her in the opening of In the Land of Youth. Here she is feeding her children honeyed nuts and overseeing the preparation of the Feast of Samhain. Known for her hospitality and copious board, throughout the telling of the tales she sees that the glasses are full. A maternal and possibly even an uxorious figure to her personal guards, she holds her guards to a fierce loyalty to her during her marriage to Conachúr: "She was herself their captain, and each man of them was devoted to her. She. . . .was good to them with untiring patience and skill. She was the mother of the force, but a wag called her the wife of the regiment."91

In Maeve Stephens has composed perhaps his most delightful, if not his most accurate, picture of Celtic womanhood. By virtue of their position in the sagas these portraits would tend to run to extremes. Nevertheless, each of these heroines bear striking resemblance not only to the woman of antiquity but to the modern woman as well. Stephens, at least, suggested such a connection through the continuity of his feminine characterizations in each of his major works.
CHAPTER FOUR—FOOTNOTES


2 That maternity is considered no cause for special privilege is illustrated in the story of the "goddess" Macha With the birth of her child eminent some Ultonian warriors compel her to run a footrace. She runs and wins but dies in the subsequent delivery of her child, cursing the men of Ulster with the debilitating pangs of childbirth as she expires.


4 IFT, p. 34.

5 James Stephens, *In the Land of Youth* (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1924), p. 101. Subsequent references to this work will be abbreviated ILY.

6 ILY, p. 91.

7 IFT, p. 167.

8 ILY, pp. 80-82.

9 ILY, pp. 190-191.

10 ILY, p. 112.

11 ILY, p. 68.

12 James Stephens, *Deirdre* (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1923), pp. 113-116. Subsequent references to this work will be abbreviated Deirdre.

13 ILY, p. 173.

14 ILY, p. 45.

15 IFT, pp. 228-229. Though usually the land of the Sidhe is described as peopled with very handsome men and women, the daughters of Conaran are a notable exception.

16 IFT, pp. 239-240.
It must be noted here, of course, that Maeve is speaking out in terms of her own personality. Given the general unfaithfulness, Maeve may be expected to justify her own affairs on the basis of feminine nature.


This scene has particular potence when one remembers Stephens himself was apparently abandoned by his mother at a young age.

Lavarcham is opposed in kind by MacRoth, Maeve's "herald" who performs like functions for his mistress, even surpassing Lavarcham in shrewness. And Lavarcham is limited in comparison to MacRoth. While he could spy "in a beehive" or "on the horns of the moon," she was "only a household spy... She could glean from the kitchen or the Sunny Chamber everything that was there; but she must have walls about her and work behind those." (Deirdre, p. 54).

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Deirdre's prophetic gifts, converting them to a kind of 'woman's intuition.' Obviously, he is bent on making Deirdre more credible. This passage, however, amplifies the almost supernatural hold she has on Naoise so that Deirdre becomes here, like Caer in Angus' dream, a powerful impetus even to wrong doing. A tally of Stephens' female characters suggests that women in his works tend to win out rather consistently over the men.
The fact that Becfola is driving from the west might indicate that she is from the Sidhe, but the fact that when she and her maid wander into it later in the story, they do not recognize where they are would indicate that she was of some other origin.

In this portion of the story and in other such interpretative statements Stephens is offering clarification of the several obscure or difficult passages in the original manuscript. One might compare Stephens version to Myles Dillon's translation in Early Irish Literature, p. 113 ff.

Maeve is beautiful, crafty, imperious, politic, forceful, generous, eminently capable, sensual, disdainful in short everything supposedly that might disquiet a man. It is evident, too, that the only possible consort for such a queen is a man who, while achieving a nobleness and emphatic masculinity in his own right, yet gives her free rein to do as she pleases. She finds such a man in Ailill, her husband as described in In the Land of Youth.

Under the Brehon Law a woman might take away her own possessions and a proportionate amount of the joint property in the dissolution of a marriage.
ILY, pp. 115-116. Maeve tells the stories here and Bove's comment is contained within one of the stories. Therefore, technically Maeve is testifying on her own behalf. Yet by this point in the story of Angus' dream the reader has quite forgotten Maeve and the framework of the story so that Bove's comment may be taken without critical expurgation.

ILY, p. 64.

ILY, p. 29.

ILY, p. 144.

ILY, p. 119.

ILY, p. 120.

ILY, p. 123.

ILY, p. 124-125.

ILY, p. 154. In the version of the Tain in the Book of Leinster Maeve has a conversation with Aílill which reveals her competitiveness. She abhors the thought that Aílill is richer than she, and her envy sparks the whole raid. Her white bull had of its own accord joined Aílill's herd. She, therefore, seeks the brown bull so that she might have a herd at least as good as Aílill's herd.

Maeve's sexual escapades are seen by some critics as an outgrowth of her origins as a goddess figure. Charles Bowen points to her as the goddess figure with whom the kings of Connacht and Tara ritually united. The 'wedding ceremony,' a fertility ritual, was called the Banais rigi of feis (woman-feast). This ritual came to be a seal upon the throne, the "marriage" that bestowed the right of kinship, hence Aílill's position as consort. With the ceremony came the ritual drink (some critics point to the linguistic connection of flath (sovereign) and laith (beer). Maeve's name (Medb) means "she who intoxicates" and is related to the term mead.

ILY, p. 140.

ILY, p. 5

Charles Bowen points out that in the original Táin Maeve's great bladder capacity is pointed out as evidence of her sexual prowess; likewise, Fergus is celebrated for being extraordinarily fertile and sexually endowed. Thus, the conjunction of the two together becomes a powerful fertility symbol.

Deirdre, p. 37.
CONCLUSION

Unlike many writers of other nations the Irish writer is encumbered by his national origin as a turtle is by its shell. It is the obvious, inescapable accoutrement by which he is stereotyped and it would turn all Irish authors into extremists whose love of their homeland supersedes all more universal artistic aspirations. It is for this reason that the Celticism of the writers of the Irish Renaissance, indeed of whatever literary period, threatened to stifle independent endeavor, for, as Eleanor Hull points out, patriotism is distinctly linked to the historic imagination: "It connects itself with certain events in the past history of our country... [that have] fostered a just pride in the deeds and epochs of their forefathers."\(^{1}\) In Ireland, due to the painful recollection of the injustices and denigrations of more recent history, the Irish reached back into the mythic past to find there inspiration for revitalizing the national identity, and the artists of Ireland were called upon to underscore this endeavor. To the best of these, however, the Irish past became not fact, not ideal, but symbol, and thus the people and stories of the ancient sagas became not history but in A. E.'s words "more potent than history" and more immediate.\(^{2}\)

To deal with these stories in any mode but their original spirit, then, is to obscure their ethos, to alter the Celticism. James Stephens retains the purity of the strain because his Celticism is elemental, endogenous, not applied, not cultivated, and not civilized. Obviously nothing but the original saga itself can be purely Celtic, and Stephens, as has been illustrated, alters the thread of the narrative
and amplifies the character portrayals. But Stephens is well aware, too, that his function is to render the tales as an artist, not as an historian. His goal is to offer the Celtic mode, not a direct translation.

In this effort Stephens, like other redactors, must have contended with the pervading problem of contradiction. The Celts were as complex as any other group of human beings; to peruse their literature is, in Benedict Kiely's words, to hear "one voice telling of beauty and another voice wailing of death, one voice shouting in joy and another voice creaking with bitterness." Thus, the simplification of Celticism into homogeneity is invalid. Moreover, to claim synonymity for the terms Irish and Celtic is inaccurate. Ireland has been peopled by Normans, Danes, Scots, and English with whom the Celtic strain was mingled so that like any other nation national purity exists only in the minds of the jingoists. This diversity of national origins explains, then, the contradictory assessment made of the average Irishman: he is "visionary, imaginative, meditative, grotesque, cruel, strong, romantic, spiritual, exact, logical, Oriental, sentimental, decadent, indecent, ironic, vacuous, dreamy, inept, irritable, jealous, self-conscious, suspicious." And the Celts themselves coming from their own multiple European backgrounds partook of similarly diverse characteristics.

The means to the identification of "Celtic" characteristics is primarily the extant manuscripts and externally written accounts of Celtic life. As has been illustrated above, of these numerous characteristics most appear in Stephens' redactions through one means or another. But the foremost characteristic is the juxtaposition of fantasy and reality in which the one becomes transmuted into the other.
It is not only in his redactions that Stephens masterfully handles this blend. The union of the real and the fantastic also informs the narratives of Stephens' earlier works *The Crock of Gold* and *The Demi-gods*. In the former Stephens has brought together a diversity of worlds. From the realm of science comes the Philosopher who deliberates behavioral psychology, from theosophy the three "Alembics" of whom the Thin Woman of Inis Magrath inquires her way, from myth and legend the Irish Sidhe and leprechauns and the Greek god Pan. All exist on the same plane as the laborer Meehawl MacMurrachu and his daughter Caitlin, who through this coexistence discover that joy is the primary life force.

The *Demi-gods* likewise blends the supernatural and the earthly as three angels find an itinerant tinker and his daughter and decide to accompany them as they travel the Irish countryside to enjoy for the moment the pleasures and sorrows of the human condition. Even *The Insurrection* in Dublin, though an eye-witness account of the Easter Rebellion, is infused, like his first novel *The Charwoman's Daughter*, with a kind of surrealism that makes the things he describes familiar yet changed somehow into something more potent, more symbolic than the ordinary objects one knows. Particularly is this peculiar semitone true of Stephens' characterizations. Kiely describes them as having "their being on the edge of something more tense and radiant, more full of movement than ordinary life. They are never gone completely into the country of the gods, never completely into the world of the fairy people. As a result they are never above human faults, never lost in statuesque and terrifyingly tranquil dreams."5

Perhaps it is his attitude that fantasy is as real as reality that
has been at least partially responsible for Stephens' loss of reputation. In his summary of reasons for the critical neglect of Stephens, Augustine Martin has suggested that Stephens' experimental method with time sequences, his less than "heroic" treatment of his saga characters, his refusal to distinguish the real and the unreal were the causes of his literary demise. But, as Martin points out, these same techniques have been implemented with critical acclaim by such Irish writers as James Joyce, Eimar O'Duffy, Austin Clarke, and Flann O'Brien. It would seem, then, that Stephens has pioneered techniques that do indeed succeed artistically. It is possible that if Irish fantasy has, as Robert Farren claims, "a cold, appalling common-sense," that Stephens has simply given back the twentieth century its own realism from a different perspective.

One common mistake in literary criticism is to confuse the writer and his writing. However, it is fortunate for his writing that Stephens' personality was ebullient. In this characteristic he shares with the ancient lyric poet an enthusiasm for life, a turning with an "equal vitality" to every aspect of daily existence. In this characteristic, however, Stephens has been accused of indiscrimination, of a lack of maturity and sophistication. Certainly, in his personal life Stephens had encountered sufficient tragedy to strip away any illusions he might have about the evenness of human existence. More important is the fact that Stephens could retain with enviable determination a personal world view that is almost child-like in its resilience. Rather than naivete, Stephens' orientation is a fundamental belief in perspective arranged by knowledge, an understanding that if joy is transient, then so is sorrow,
that if fate proffers catastrophe, it also proffers blessing. Stephens did not espouse Christianity altogether, but rather he comes in his personal ethic closer to stoicism, a stoicism tempered with commitment to wonder and delight in the mysteries of human life.

To re-evaluate Stephens is ultimately to re-evaluate the viability of fantasy--myth--the "fairy tale"--as legitimate literature. Aside from its ethnological value, the question remains is a fairy tale so simplistic and incredible as to render it artistically suitable only for children and unutterably naive adults. Robin Flower has said of the epics that their fantasy is not sentiment and mysticism. On the contrary, saga fantasy is a reflection of a peculiarity of the Irish mind. It is an Irish characteristic to distinguish quickly truth from humbug, but to delight in the one as quickly as the other, and to be as willing to suspend rationality as to acknowledge the ridiculous. The point is not one of distinction but one of choice. The Irishman may very well choose to adhere to the humbug simply because it gives him pleasure. As Flower complains, "Much indeed of the exaggeration in those tales so fiercely ridiculed by certain critics is the exuberance of a man who sees the fun of the thing, and would not for the world have his monstrosities taken at their face value."9

On the other hand, the Irish writer reputedly sees in the meeting of the fantastic and the material a reflection of the contraries of human life. Stephens indicates his impatience with "the purely empirical view of reality"; as in the Irish sagas where the natural and the supernatural intermingle, in his own work Stephens brings, in Martin's terms, the world of the myth into creative relation with the quotidian world of

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The value, then, of the so-called "fairy tale" far surpasses mere entertainment purposes. It even goes beyond value as a referential for cultural investigations. It offers finally a commentary on the workings of the human mind and the most deeply felt needs of the human spirit.

Stephens once wrote to John Quinn about his recently published *Irish Fairy Tales*: "It is really not a book of fairy stories in the modern understanding of that term. But, I think, they are fairy stories in the ancient and authentic meaning. I claim that this is the first time real fairy stories have got into modern print, and if the world likes them, there are plenty more where they came from." One can only hope that those stories that Stephens did not tell might one day be handled by a successor as competently, and one can be grateful for those Stephens selected to do himself.
CONCLUSION--FOOTNOTES


5 Kiely, p. 63.


10 Martin, p. 132.


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VITA

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