JESSE STUART: KENTUCKY'S CHRONICLER-POET

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ABSTRACT

Although Jesse Stuart has been writing for forty years, there has been relatively little scholarship devoted to his work. He has published five volumes of poetry and literally hundreds of single poems in journals and magazines of various kinds. This study was an attempt to get Stuart's poetry before the reader and to say something meaningful about it.

This dissertation attempted to establish some critical precedents for further study of Stuart's poetry. Three volumes of his poems were used extensively to demonstrate that there is a consistency in his work which is related to the development of his stories, novels, and biographical writings.

Stuart's literary theory rests on the Romantic assumption that poetry exists somewhere in nature, beyond words or language, and that it comes to the individual intuitively. He sees the poet as a highly sensitive medium through which the poetic experience is translated for the reader. The formula by which he claims to write is that there must be a particular incident in conjunction with a particular mood. Given this combination, the poem merely comes or happens.

In his poetry Stuart has attempted to define man's place in the universe. His ontological view, worked out in great detail, shows remarkable influence by Whitman and the Transcendentalists. He ultimately came to accept Whitman's ideas about influx and efflux, ideas in which there is no waste or death but rather only change.

Stuart's concept of the image has always been ambiguous. He sees the image as something wild in nature, something that cannot be captured and tamed. In practice, however, he has once again followed Whitman. He names objects, and he compiles lists of the names, creating a panoramic effect. Such a practice led him to develop a pictorial method much like that of Whitman. The things named are limited to Stuart's milieu, for he believes that poetry comes from a unique interreliance of man, nature, and thing. The result is that he paints pictures of his eastern Kentucky milieu and hangs them in a gallery to be viewed by his readers.

In spite of his insistence that poetry "just comes," Stuart has been more than a little concerned with craftsmanship. He early experimented with both traditional versification and free-verse prosody. In his mature work he brought the results of his experiments together and imposed techniques of the free-verse prosodist over a traditional sonnet form. The result was a form peculiarly his own. In his most successful work, he

adopted the parallel as foremost prosodic principle.

This dissertation did not attempt to defend Stuart as a major American poet. He obviously is not one. It did insist, nevertheless, that Stuart's poetry needs serious critical attention. Adverse criticism has not been the problem, but rather there remains a need for someone to look at the texts of the poems. There can be no criticism without that.

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For help in conducting this study, I first express my gratitude to Jesse Stuart himself. He and Mrs. Stuart have opened their home to my wife and me, and have engaged with us in long discussions about Mr. Stuart's work and the work of others. Because of his personal acquaintances with such people as Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Thomas Wolfe, and Edgar Lee Masters, Mr. Stuart has been an invaluable source of information about these and other writers from the Twenties to the present. Over the years Mr. Stuart has answered my endless questions. Correspondence has been generous and frequent. The debt can only be acknowledged; it can never be repaid.

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INTRODUCTION

This study is not an attempt to defend Stuart's poetry: that would be criticism of the worst sort. Nor does it pretend to be definitive: that would be pretentiousness of the worst sort. Heretofore there has been no concentrated effort to examine Stuart's poetry, and that there has not been is in itself justification for a study such as this.

When one weighs the advantages of being first against the obvious disadvantages, he finds that the scales want to balance. Being first is attractive, and perhaps so in the same way that cutting timber from a virgin forest is attractive. One works with pride, and often in an aura of mystery, because of the realization that virginity is precious. Countering the pride and mystery, however, there is always an element of doubt. There are no precedents or guidelines for one who is first; there is only the pull of responsible behavior. The critic who is first works in a quandary. He is drawn to the work being criticized, and at the same time remains obligated to establish reliable critical precedents for further study. He is like the man who cuts virgin timber in that he establishes patterns for those who follow him. Such patterns prevail because they are cut into the very identity of the forest, and they continue to be embedded there as long as the forest remains.

The job of criticizing Stuart's poetry is not entirely

identical to that of criticizing the work of a new poet. Only the criticism is new; the poetry dates back to the Twenties. In the Thirties there were sporadic endorsements, and they expressed some anticipation that Stuart would succeed as a poet. Mark Van Doren wrote about Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow: "It ought to be interesting, even to those who think they cannot read poetry. They can read Jesse Stuart, if they please, as autobiography, and find themselves in the company of a modern Robert Burns."¹ Donald Davidson wrote about Stuart: "There is nothing designing or pushing about him. I like him because he can write and still not be 'literary' in the silly modern sense. I still can't figure out how he managed to get an education and remain himself, quite unspoiled--but he did."² Even in the Thirties endorsements such as these were cautious. They had to be. Stuart was young, and he was a new poet. Critics have reputations to defend, and the wrong endorsement can be permanently damaging. The critic can always take up his task again when he is assured that his criticism is being accepted.

This study attempts to get as much of Stuart's poetry before the reader as possible. The task of the critic is

¹New York Herald Tribune Books, XII (June 12, 1934), 34. Quoted in Everetta Love Blair, Jesse Stuart: His Life and Works (Columbia, South Carolina, 1967), p. 27.

²Letter to Stringfellow Barr, June 3, 1933. Quoted in Lee Oly Ramey, "An Inquiry into the Life of Jesse Stuart as Related to His Literary Development and a Critical Study of His Works" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Ohio University, 1941), p. 68.

twofold: he must present the work being criticized and he must make meaningful observations about it. Criticism likely cannot go beyond that dual task. Getting Stuart's poetry before the reader is doubly important because it is seldom read or taught in colleges and universities. Many readers of this study will be encountering Stuart's poetry, even though they may be familiar with his prose, for the first time. Hopefully, such an encounter will lead to serious examination of the various texts of Stuart's poems. Criticism has to be based on the text; there is no other way.

This study makes extensive use of three of the five volumes of Stuart's poems. The last two volumes show little, if any, technical progress. Album of Destiny remains the high point in Stuart's career as a poet, and he has never accepted the adverse critical judgments that followed its publication. On the other hand, more damaging than any adverse critical judgments has been the need for judgments--the need for attention. Stuart, by the time of Album of Destiny, had become a successful prose writer, and that he had done so partially accounts for his declining reputation as a poet. This and other reasons for the decline are discussed in the text of the study.

Significantly, Stuart thinks of himself, first and foremost, as a poet. Chancellors who selected him for the 1960 Academy of American Poets Award were J. Donald Adams,

W. H. Auden, Witter Bynner, Henry Seidel Canby, Max Eastman, Robert Hillyer, Randall Jarrell, Marianne Moore, Robert Nathan, John G. Neihardt, Frederick A. Pottle, and John Hall Wheelock. Stuart told them, upon receiving the award, that he considers himself primarily to be a poet:

At the reception, Stuart spoke, with deep emotion, of his happiness in receiving the award, after the long hiatus in his poetic career when he has been known to the public chiefly as novelist, short story writer and educator. Though he has achieved recognition in each of those facets of his literary life, he is primarily a poet, he said.³

This statement simply repeats what Stuart has persistently maintained throughout his career as a writer.

Chapter I of this study primarily attempts two things. Based on the assumption that the reader knows little or nothing about Stuart, the first thing attempted is that of accounting for early influences that contributed to his becoming a poet. The second thing attempted is something of a chronology--an overview--in which the observations are necessarily biographical. Stuart is a chronicler-poet, and he does not exclude himself from the chronicle.

Chapter II presents Stuart's ontological view and traces the growth of that view to its fulfillment in Album of Destiny. The nature of Being and the mutability of all things have motivated Stuart to conduct his own investigations

³Everetta Love Blair, "Stuart Receives American Poets Award," Columbia (South Carolina) Record, December 13, 1961, p. 19A. Blair attended the reception and was present when Stuart addressed his distinguished audience.

into how man fits into the life of the universe. The record of his investigations sounds remarkably like Whitman's record in Leaves of Grass.

Chapter III is concerned with Stuart's very ambiguous concept of the image, a concept in which the image is something in nature, something beyond words and beyond language. Chapter IV concerns the nature and development of Stuart's imagery in actual practice. In either case Stuart once again appears to draw heavily upon Whitman, for whom the picture came to symbolize the ultimate in method.

Chapter V explores Stuart's search for form. It is primarily an investigation into his collection of juvenilia--Harvest of Youth. Such an investigation is essential because it establishes his early experiments as belonging to two separate traditions, and examines the early sonnets that he developed almost exclusively in his next two volumes. Chapter VI begins where Chapter V ends. It is a record of Stuart's growth as a craftsman. Chapter VI traces his reiterative devices through Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow and into Album of Destiny. In Album of Destiny he develops the parallel as chief prosodic technique. The influence of Whitman appears to be gigantic, but Stuart imposes his free-verse prosody upon the skeleton of an old and rigid verse form--the sonnet--and in doing so makes it peculiarly his own.

Finally, there is an appendix of unpublished materials. All of the materials are relevant to the study, and some of them are quoted in various places throughout the text.

Hopefully, the reader will find the materials a useful adjunct to the text--and by doing so will gain some personal insight into Stuart the man as well as develop some curiosity about Stuart the poet.

CHAPTER I

THE MAKING OF A POET: AN OVERVIEW

Jesse Stuart has published thirty-six books now, and he doesn't count Harvest of Youth, his first volume of verse. With two more books scheduled for publication, and several more in the making, he doesn't need to. He is, and has been for more than forty years, a very prolific writer. A recent bibliography¹ lists single publications for approximately two thousand poems, and several hundreds of short stories. With nine novels, eleven collections of short stories, five volumes of verse, and four major biographical books to his credit, Stuart is being read (or has been) in England, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Italy, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, West Pakistan, East Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Free China, Japan, Korea, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Brazil, and throughout much of South America.²

Stuart has traveled over much of the world as a goodwill ambassador for the Department of State. He has taught

¹Hensley C. Woodbridge, Jesse and Jane Stuart: A Bibliography (Murray, Kentucky, 1969), pp. 3-90. Mr. Woodbridge lists other Stuart bibliographies, but Woodbridge is Stuart's official bibliographer.

²Sister Mary Carmel Browning, Kentucky Authors: A History of Kentucky Literature (Evansville, Indiana, 1968), p. 73.

and lectured abroad, including a year at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. In 1937 he received a Guggenheim Fellowship in order that he might go to Scotland and study the origins of the literature, and the culture in general, of his Appalachian region. He has been awarded nine honorary doctor's degrees,³ some of which are from such institutions as Baylor and the University of Kentucky. The city of Greenup, Kentucky, has erected a monument in his honor, and Murray State University houses Stuartana in a suite of three rooms set aside especially for that purpose. Eastern Kentucky now has a Jesse Stuart High School, and prior to the recent death of David Brandenburg, founder of Harvest Press in Cincinnati, there was a magazine for Stuart "buffs."

The list of honors that have been bestowed upon Stuart is long and impressive, and one of the honors in which he has considerable pride is the five-thousand-dollar award given by the Academy of American Poets. As sixteenth recipient of the Academy of American Poets Award, he takes his place alongside some of the poets whom he has known and admired.

Stuart has been known primarily as a popular writer, and his reputation rests largely upon his prose. He has, nevertheless, produced a significant body of poetry which

³For these and other awards see the Appendix. Also see "Jesse Stuart: Awards and Honors" in Mary Washington Clarke, Jesse Stuart's Kentucky (New York, 1968), pp. vii-viii.

has received remarkably little critical attention. In spite of the fact that the tendency has been to dismiss him as relatively insignificant, we cannot dismiss him for being a regionalist (assuming that regionalism is bad, out of vogue, or both) any more than we can dismiss Faulkner for the same reason. Nor can we dismiss him for being autobiographical, any more than we can dismiss his good friend Thomas Wolfe for the same reason. We cannot dismiss him for being pastoral, any more than we can dismiss Robert Frost, another of his friends. His patriotism, his egotism, his virility, his humor, his preoccupation with death, and his undying optimism can all be found in the best writers of our time.

Although Stuart scholarship has been sparse, there are some very encouraging signs that it will not remain so. Woodbridge, in the "Preface to the Second Edition" of his bibliography, summarizes the situation:

The past eight years have seen a growing scholarly interest in the study of Stuart's life and works. This can be measured by the appearance of W-Hollow Harvest (1967-1968) edited by David and Phyllis Brandenburg, the doctoral dissertations of Eve Blair and Frank Leavell, an increased number of M.A. theses and the appearance between October 1967 and December 1968 of four book-length studies, those of Eve Blair, Lee Pennington, Mary Washington Clarke, and Ruel Foster.⁴

Of the four, Pennington's book is a study of symbolism in

⁴p. vii. Lee Oly Ramey says that he is currently doing research for a book-length study on Stuart. Letter to the writer, August 30, 1969. See the Appendix.

the novels; Blair's, a survey of Stuart's life and work; Clarke's, a fascinating study of folklore in Stuart's writing; and Foster's, recently published in the Twayne series, attempts to treat Stuart's novels, short stories, poetry, and give some account of various events in Stuart's life. Although the books and dissertations are all useful for the Stuart scholar, only Pennington has limited his study to Stuart's craft, or some aspect of it, in a single genre.

Ruel E. Foster, outside his book for Twayne, has shown great interest in Stuart's short stories and story-telling techniques. In one of his essays he exalts Stuart as master story-teller:

Jesse Stuart is a writing man. He is a genuine, original, marvelously fecund writing man, and the unduly fretful twentieth century does not quite know what to do with him. As a result, it has so far walked around him, shaken its head at him, and refused to talk about him because it could not quite comprehend him.⁵

Foster observes a number of things about Stuart's prose that are equally characteristic of his poetry--for example, that Stuart contemplates the life about him and then puts his contemplations into words, that Stuart is more interested in living than in writing, and that the bulk of what Stuart has written consists of projecting his eastern Kentucky milieu into a fictional world.

⁵"Jesse Stuart, Short Story Writer," Reality and Myth: Essays in American Literature, ed. William E. Walker and Robert L. Welker (Nashville, Tennessee, 1964), p. 145.

Equally characteristic of his poetry is his famous "talk-style," coming from the tall tale of the frontier. Like Hemingway, he has borrowed his short sentence from Mark Twain, and in the poetry sentence and line often correspond. In both poetry and prose, Foster observes, he is a master of dialect. Like his poetry, his prose is full of visual and auditory images--so much so that Foster says, "What Robert Frost is to the sound-posture of poetry, Jesse Stuart is to the sound-posture of fiction."⁶ In effect, he is a poet who writes in prose, partially because he is in a prose world--one that has increasingly had science on the brain. Regardless of the medium, he keeps his reader constantly absorbed in sounds, odors, and images of an outdoor world. "Stuart is," says Foster, "primarily a maker, a poet. He has a feeling for the life of things. He depicts things exactly and lets the universal shine through."⁷

Seldom has a writer absorbed his milieu so completely, and seldom has one been so completely absorbed by his milieu. Throughout his literary career Stuart has made numerous references to himself as "brother to the tree,"⁸ and the most vivid image the reader of Stuart comes away with is that of two human feet (without socks and shoes) buried two

⁶"Jesse Stuart, Short Story Writer," p. 157.

⁷Ibid., p. 159.

⁸Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow (New York, 1934), p. 126. Such references are scattered throughout Stuart's work. Further references to MWBTP included in text.

or three inches in yellow Kentucky clay. As the lineage in his Beyond Dark Hills indicates, he belongs to the "tall figures of earth":

Now here are the men of earth I am directly descended from--both sides are sturdy mountaineers. On the Stuart side are workers, fighters, heavy drinkers, and men of physical endurance. Among the Hiltons are lovers of flashy colors, book readers and people religiously solid as their hills...And now the old generations are sleeping upon the high Kentucky hills amid the primitive lands they cleared and close to the log houses they made....That was the day when tall figures of the earth were needed.⁹

John Bird, one-time editor of Saturday Evening Post and life-long friend of Stuart's, says that the W-Hollow writer came into the eighteenth century when he was born in 1907, and certainly not into the twentieth.¹⁰ The songs that were sung by Stuart's people, he says, were handed down by word of mouth. These people carried old ballads and tunes, stories, and detailed family histories in their memories. John Bird is not the only one to point out that Stuart is an anachronism. Foster considers Stuart's literature to be "a nostalgic evocation of a vanished past."¹¹ Dayton Kohler, in an article on Stuart and James Still,

⁹Beyond Dark Hills (New York, 1938), p. 25. In this early autobiographical book Stuart tells his own story, and tells it well. Because BDH is well done, the following pages contain a number of references to it. Further references to BDH included in the text.

¹⁰"My Friend Jesse Stuart," Saturday Evening Post, CCXXXII (July 25, 1959), 79.

¹¹"Jesse Stuart, Short Story Writer," p. 159.

agrees: "Everything he [Stuart] writes points back to an anonymous frontier story-teller."¹² Both writers, he continues, write the "western American dream" in the language of the people who lived that dream.

Isolation played its part in Stuart's early development as a poet. When he was fifteen, he went to Camp Knox (now Fort Knox) for a summer training program, and that was his first time to travel more than fifty miles from home (BDH, p. 52). As late as his enlistment in the U.S. Navy, after attending Lincoln Memorial and Vanderbilt, there was no road up W-Hollow. One had to walk it. He explains in Beyond Dark Hills how the family early moved from a one-room shack to a three-room shack, and finally to one with four rooms. When someone moved close enough for the chickens to mix with those of the neighbors, the Stuarts moved on. About the isolation he writes:

I myself remember the days when snow lay on the ground from November until March, and we children lived in a small landlocked world with no books, victrolas, or radios to amuse us. We didn't get a paper or a magazine and had to depend on our imaginations and what nature provided for our entertainment. (p. 33)

Within the isolated world of W-Hollow, the first and perhaps greatest influence on Stuart's becoming a poet was his father. In his biography of his father he tells of his father's intense love for the land, and of how his father

¹²"Jesse Stuart and James Still, Mountain Regionalists," College English, III (March, 1942), 525.

brought poetry out of the earth. His father, he says, was an uneducated "poet of the earth":

My father didn't have to travel over the country searching for something beautiful to see. He didn't have to go away to find beauty, for he found it everywhere around him....He found so many strange and beautiful things that I tried to rival him by making discoveries, too. I looked into the out-of-way and unexpected places to find the beautiful and the unusual.¹³

This early and serious looking into things led to a philosophy in which nature plays a trick on man. "The seasons came over and over again in the hills," he observed, "but people last only a short time" (BDH, p. 35). Elsewhere he tells how his sister Sophia, at the age of seven, explained death to him and illustrated by smashing a big black ant between two rocks.¹⁴ In God's Oddling he says of those early days of intense observation, "But even among these hills eternal in their great beauty of lilting green leaves in the wind--no one could stop time" (p. 8). Because "no one could stop time," one finds throughout Stuart's writing an Ecclesiastical lament for the brevity of life.

The second great personal influence on Stuart's becoming a poet was his mother. She came from the "bookish Hiltons," and she early encouraged her son to read, to

¹³God's Oddling (New York, 1960), pp. 38-39. Further references to GO included in the text.

¹⁴The Year of My Rebirth (New York, 1956), p. 198. Further references to YR included in the text.

dream, and--most of all--to dream of an education. Stuart considered his mother very artistic. When his father was ill, his mother wove baskets from wood and young Jesse peddled them around the countryside to keep the family going (BDH, p. 39). He also tells of how she would go into the fields and the woods looking for a wild flower that she particularly liked. When she found it, she sat for hours making the same kind of flower with quilt pieces (BDH, p. 52).

The third person to influence Stuart greatly never lived in W-Hollow and was far removed from him in time. When Stuart was a sophomore, and walking through the hills to and from school, his English teacher, Mrs. Robert Hattan, introduced him to the poetry of Robert Burns. In Burns he found a literary hero, and a farmer-poet with whom he could identify. Stuart's ancestors on his father's side came from Scotland. Six tall brothers came from the Firth of Forth and first settled in Virginia, later moving into Kentucky. Stuart idolized Burns: "I feasted on the poetry of Robert Burns.... And my prayer, if ever I prayed one then, was to write poetry that would endure like the poetry of Robert Burns" (BDH, p. 58). This was also the time he began to write. He took his old dog into the hills at night, and while the dog chased foxes into the early hours of the morning Stuart lay on the ground and wrote verse by lantern light.

The obsession with Burns cannot be overemphasized. In Beyond Dark Hills he tells of how he met Maria Sheen,

daughter of a Sandy River farmer. He vowed he would marry her when he met her at Plum Grove Schoolhouse, and his reading of Robert Burns made him think even more of marrying Maria:

I read where Robert Burns and Highland Mary dipped their hands under the water together, and held Bibles in their hands. This was a token of eternal engagement. Maria Sheen and I must go to Sandy and do the same thing under the shade of the birch trees.
(p. 104)

Kentucky, as he explains, was his land of Robert Burns. The Little Sandy River was the River Ayr. Maria was his Highland Mary, whom he imagined to be tall, strong, slender, and beautiful.

One would likely be tempted to dismiss Stuart's obsession with Burns as childhood fantasy were it not for his tribute to Burns in The Year of My Rebirth.¹⁵ There he tells again how Burns changed his life. He tells how, years after his discovering Burns, he went to Scotland, tracing Burns' movements wherever he could. At Burns' grave, near Dumfries, he paused to meditate, and to recall the inspiration that Burns had given him. As a gesture of humility and profound gratitude, Stuart placed a sprig of Kentucky goldenrod on the grave of his master. He had carried it all the way from his Kentucky hills for that very moment.

After high school, Stuart rebelled against his isolated existence. He was also disillusioned because he had

¹⁵Pp. 156-161. Also see the Appendix for a letter to the writer, August 19, 1969.

no money, and could not go to college. He left home and traveled with a carnival. Before he left, he burned his books. "Life can be put into a book," he observed, "but life cannot be taken from a book. The man that gets life must get down and put his hands on it. He must hide his face in the wet leaves of the earth" (BDH, p. 109). He blamed his reading of books for making him restless. Also, he was determined that James, his brother, would not be driven from the soil by books. Symbolically, Stuart's burning of his books was a grand gesture, a kind of ritual in which he would come out as the phoenix comes from its own ashes. He thought that, once and for all, he would be released from his demon, that he could say goodbye to poetry forever.

Nothing turned out quite the way Stuart planned it. By day he found the carnival exciting, a place "for love-making" (BDH, p. 116), but he couldn't shake the demon by night. In his tent, which he shared with a clown, he wrote poetry about the hills, about Maria Sheen, and about his dream of going to college. Many nights he simply could not sleep. He would go to bed determined not to get up, but inevitably he would get up and he often wrote all night. "I was not mastering poetry," he writes, "but it was mastering me. I just couldn't help writing poetry" (BDH, p. 117). A few lines from two of his sonnets for Maria illustrate very well what he was writing, and how it

was grounded in his early contemplation of detail that rivaled that of his father:

The raincrow croaked for a down-pour rain,
 The lizard roved the scaly bark for sun
 While Maria Sheen sat closer by my side.
 I do not know if water kissed the grain
 And if that lizard found his patch of sun,
 But I do know who said she'd be my bride.
 (BDH, p. 118)

The second example is especially interesting because it uses the old device of describing one's lady in terms of images from nature. For Stuart, the lady is both like and an integral part of nature:

Her skin is milkweed dark, her eyes sky-blue,
 Her teeth are blood-root white, her hair is black
 As thick rain-clouds...her lips are soft as new
 Bark peeled from a slippery-elm and her back
 Is straight as a horse weed upon the shore.
 (BDH, p. 118)

The job with the street carnival didn't last long, but Stuart, ever since his childhood days at Plum Grove School, had dreamed of going to Harvard. He knew nothing about Harvard, although he had heard that it was a school with a tradition. Without a job, and feeling deeply his old desire to go to college, he turned to exploring possible alternatives. His thoughts, he says, were about the sea. Broke and feeling dejected, he composed these lines:

HARVARD OR THE SEA

I have lived my youth in one unsettled state
 And months of barren earth is life too much for me.
 The glorious close will bring me Harvard or the sea.
 Nine months earth-prisoned! How can I bear to wait?
 Since I was twelve, I have been foot-free to the soil;
 Pocketless a dime, I've rambled through many a town
 When the winter moon and silver stars slanted down;

Bunked with toughs; did them a tremendous toil;
Met pals, forgot; stopped and took my school-life
stay.

Now within Harvard's halls there is one life for me.
Another life is on waste water's blue immensity
That will make me turn my back on home, forget the
day

My feet were bound to earth. Then great Seducer Sea,
Be last to pant and lick your wet lips over me.¹⁶

After the carnival job, Stuart went to Camp Knox.

While he was there, he went to Louisville and bought everything he could find on Edgar Allan Poe. He bought himself a volume of Burns and stole Carlyle's Essay on Burns from the post library because no one would sell it to him.¹⁷ When he left Camp Knox and took a job with Armco Steel in Ashland, he was reading religiously. The change was good. For the first time in his life he could afford to buy books.

The work at the mill was exhausting, but it didn't exhaust his demon. Every week he bought a new book of poetry, and he read it in his room at night. He read Rupert Brooke, Alan Seeger, Amy Lowell, Robert Frost, Sara Teasdale, Edna Millay, Edwin Markham, and many others. This was his first encounter, he says, with the new poetry, the poetry of his contemporaries and near-contemporaries. He read Sandburg

¹⁶BDH, p. 120. These and some of the lines on the following pages actually appeared in Harvest of Youth (1930) before the publication of Beyond Dark Hills (1938). The first draft of Beyond Dark Hills was written in 1932.

¹⁷The title here is as it appears in BDH, p. 125. The reference, however, may be to the essay in Thomas Carlyle, Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (Boston, 1869), I, 256-314. The essay was reprinted from Edinburgh Review, No. 96.

with mixed feelings. He loved Sandburg's poetry about the soil, but he was convinced that Sandburg had no business writing about steel. In a bitter diatribe in which he facetiously refers to Sandburg as "the singer of steel," he lashes out at the man who was later to become a very dear friend:

I am reading your books because I work in steel now. I know you have never worked in steel. If you have worked there, you had a snap. Carl Sandburg, you don't know anything about steel. You got your ideas from walking around the mills at night or talking to the Mayor of Gary, Indiana. Go on and write your excellent poems about the wheat fields and the sun-flowers in the wind and the great open spaces of the sundown west, but Carl Sandburg, lay off writing about steel. Don't disillusion people about the beauty of steel and about the steel birdman that drones and drones in the blue, blue sky. And whatever you do, quit singing about the beauty of steel.

(BDH, pp. 141-142)

One sees here a maxim that Stuart, after his Vanderbilt days, would state publicly, and would subscribe to in everything he wrote. There would be no objectivity for him, no aesthetic distance. The writer, he would insist, has to be an intimate part of what he writes.

While working at the mill, Stuart lived in a boarding house that had a reputation for being tough. He borrowed money from "Red Hot Mattie," the boarding-house prostitute, and he constantly pampered his demon. What he wrote was highly autobiographical, coming out of immediate experience. Working on the night shift, he composed these lines about sleep:

There are seconds in our lives that pass
 Us down like long dark alley ways of dreams.
 We drift like leaves on currentless streams
 Out beyond all time and whirling mass
 Of space. Softly we sink,... (BDH, p. 160)

After losing a fight to a steel-mill tough, he wrote "Batter Me Down, Life":

Batter me down, you who are strong, I plead.
 I who am weak, in the little ways I know
 Will learn to battle young and soon take heed.
 Batter me down, as rain beats grasses low!
 (BDH, p. 161)

He was more than ever obsessed with his dream of going to college, and even though it looked as if he would never be there, he wrote "Stanza on Leaving College" as part of the dream:

My room lights sink, outside the night winds moan;
 The hour approaches I strike the world alone.
 Then forget me not for I shall think of you,
 And this my last dear friends, adieu! adieu!
 (BDH, p. 152)

At least once, while he was at the boarding house, he became so disgusted that he burned his poems, but he started all over again. Finally, with thirty dollars in his pocket, he walked out of the steel mill, determined to go to college. "It was farewell to steel. Farewell," he says, "to the Cool Memories of Steel forever" (BDH, p. 170).

Stuart started hitchhiking across Kentucky in search of a college. He finally landed at Lincoln Memorial University in Tennessee. He lied to the dean because he didn't have any money (BDH, p. 177), and experience had taught him that one didn't get into college without it. Fortunately, he was admitted. While there, he exchanged

poems with Don West, a ministerial student. And for the first time in his life he met a writer, Harry Harrison Kroll. Kroll was Stuart's teacher, and Stuart writes of him in Beyond Dark Hills: "I worshiped the ground he walked on because he was a writer" (p. 218). Kroll encouraged Stuart to submit to magazines, and the feeling of success that came from submitting resulted in a deluge of approximately five hundred poems before he left Lincoln Memorial (BDH, p. 219).

Lincoln Memorial was a major landmark in Stuart's development as a poet. In the first place, he finally admitted to himself that he belonged to the hills, and that he could never stay away from them very long. "There is something good about the old country life that is passing," he writes. "It is the real sweetness of living down against the soil. And that life will never come again" (BDH, p. 200). Secondly, he finally accepted his demon: "The urge was part of me. It would not leave. I wanted to put things into words. Words were living things. Verse was living words combined to make a living body and a living force that would be felt" (BDH, p. 219). And third, he declared his literary independence. His verse, from high school until he left Lincoln Memorial, was full of obvious influences by a number of poets. Upon leaving, he wrote: "I didn't want to write like Robert Burns now. I wanted to write like myself. I wanted to be myself....I wanted to be different, not for the sake of being different but being different for something" (BDH, p. 229).

During the year following graduation from Lincoln Memorial, Stuart was a high school principal, but in 1931 he left his hills once again. As a poet, he was still unknown. He went to Vanderbilt, attracted by such names as Davidson, Wade, Curry, Warren, and Ransom. When he arrived, he met Don West again, and refused West's advice to enroll in the School of Religion (BDH, p. 283). He stayed, but had no money to buy books. He was too proud to borrow or to ask for help. Consequently, his exams made poor impressions on his teachers. He was in extreme poverty, living on eleven meals per week. Before each class, he filled his stomach with water to escape being embarrassed by the growling that resulted in laughter among the girls around him.¹⁸ But even while he was hungry, the demon drove him. "It was just in me to write poetry," he says, "and I did not suppress the desire. Poetry took me along. It made me its servant. I couldn't handle poetry....Poetry will tell you to let the term papers go to hell. It will make you lie to your teachers" (BDH, pp. 285-286). Feeling his dejection deeply once again, he wrote these lines:

¹⁸Frank Hartwell Leavell, "The Literary Career of Jesse Stuart" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1965), p. 58. Leavell tells of Stuart's battle with the stomach, but he adds (p. 67) that Donald Davidson, in an interview, personally told him of Stuart's poverty. Stuart's own account of the battle with his stomach is found in BDH, pp. 311-313.

The leafless tree in winter stands alone
 Dreaming of leafy days and sunny Spring
 When birds alighted in her boughs to sing.
 Now somewhere out by changing winds I'm blown,
 A yellow leaf to drift with time away
 The silver moments of my swift brief day.

(BDH, p. 290)

The Fugitives, for the most part, were either teaching or had gone elsewhere. The word agrarianism was in the air, but the closest thing Stuart could find to represent agrarianism around Vanderbilt was a few tomato plants in Donald Davidson's back yard.¹⁹ Davidson took an interest in Stuart, as did Robert Penn Warren, and Dr. Edwin Mims. Stuart also visited in the home of Sidney Hirsch. "Robert Frost had been there," he writes, "and G. K. Chesterton, Clarence Darrow, Edwin Markham, George Russell, Vachel Lindsay, and T. S. Eliot" (BDH, p. 323). He slipped his poems under Donald Davidson's door, and Davidson read them closely, making suggestions about revising. Davidson encouraged Stuart to submit to reputable journals and to return to his W-Hollow milieu where he could write about what he knew and loved.

In order to stay in school the last quarter, Stuart forged Don West's name to a note (BDH, p. 316). Later, he told his friend about it. Then Wesley Hall, where Stuart lived, was razed by fire, and with it went his manuscripts, clothes, and unfinished master's thesis. He went home without a degree, but he had become a poet. Before the summer ended he would have poetry accepted by American Mercury,

¹⁹Leavell, p. 62.

Poetry, and Virginia Quarterly Review. These publications would lead to a contract from E. P. Dutton and Company for Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, a mammoth collection of 703 sonnets and "near-sonnets."

Once he was home from Vanderbilt, he walked the hills for several days and made a new pact with nature. He bared his back to the sun, and again he followed the plow. At the end of the field, he stopped his mules for rest; and while they were resting, he wrote. He wrote on almost everything, and he wrote almost everywhere. He wrote on used envelopes, on paper bags, on tobacco pouches, and on poplar leaves. He used a twig to inscribe his poem on the leaf, and in the evening he took the leaf home where he could follow the impressions and copy the poem onto a piece of paper (BDH, pp. 338-339). In eleven months he had turned out at least sixty per cent of the 703 poems in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow.

Before he went to Vanderbilt, Stuart had his juvenilia, Harvest of Youth, printed privately. After Vanderbilt, however, he became ashamed of his slender volume of experimental verse. He didn't realize that the book had great value, that it showed the great range of his experiments, and that it showed something of the range of intense reading that began in the steel mill. In the poem "Silhouettes," for example, he tried to write like an Imagist:

Hard, clean
Chiseled profiles

Of black bodied trees
Swerving in the wind
At sundown.²⁰

In a number of poems he attempted a Sandburgian kind of free verse. One sees vestiges of Sandburgian verse, in spite of the awkward attempt to break the poem into paragraphs, in "Steel Gang":

Listen: we were dogging steel, somewhere,
Between Six Hickories and Maldraugh Hill...
Daring, stormy...we chewed tobacco and flapped
Broad-rimmed and dusky felt hats... (p. 38)

One can see Frost in "The Wind Has Ways," and John Donne in "Batter Me Down, Life." Also, Lee Oly Ramey has pointed out some of the influences of Rupert Brooke and the War Poets on Stuart.²¹

Influences are both obvious and numerous. One can also see them in Stuart's prose. In God's Oddling, for example, he has his father say to his Uncle Fonse, "It's good fences that we got between us that make us good neighbors" (p. 73). In describing a mountain funeral, he borrows some of T. S. Eliot's images of desolation: "The crows will fly over here. The wind will blow. The rats will make footprints on the logs and the wind and the rain will change the

²⁰ (Howe, Oklahoma, 1930), p. 32. HY was reprinted by the Council of Southern Mountains in 1964. It was apparently at that time that Hargis Westerfield's Foreword was added. The Foreword was reprinted by permission from "Harvest of Youth: Jesse Stuart's First Published Book," American Book Collector, XIII (February, 1963), 23-24. Further reference to HY included in the text.

²¹ See Ramey's thesis, pp. 117-118.

rat prints. They will smooth them over and the rats will make them again: and thus it happens in the waste land" (BDH, p. 250).

As an experiment in verse, Harvest of Youth is convincing. Somewhere in it Stuart tries most devices and techniques known to modern poetry. The third section, "Sonnets: Juvenilia," contains an impressive attempt to make the sonnet a usable form. Stuart varies the lines in his experimental sonnets from eight syllables to twelve. Occasionally, he uses varying line lengths within the same poem. He varies the meter, arranges lines into different units, and tries a number of rhyme schemes. He attempts about every imaginable innovation in his experimental sonnets.

Various people have questioned why Stuart would stubbornly persist in perpetuating a form so out of vogue, including the Imagist poet John Gould Fletcher.²² Sheer stubbornness is likely one answer, for Stuart was once told by a teacher that he couldn't write sonnets.²³ Other answers relate directly to the nature of his art. He found the form increasingly attractive for short "flights" of song. He also found that he could group sonnets into

²²"Kentucky Georgics," Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, XXXV (January, 1935), 219.

²³Ramey, p. 106. Stuart also tells of the incident in "Sandburg, My Hero," Lincoln Herald, LXX (Spring, 1968), 43.

sequences, letting each sonnet relate an incident, and thereby develop a narrative. In recent correspondence he has commented about his attempts to use the sonnet: "I had no influence on expanding the sonnet to 16 lines. It was more convenient. I also had another idea about the sonnet which I didn't use, but may use later--ten lines in what is called the octave and eight in the sextet. Make it the octet. This makes the sonnet a better form, less cramped, more flexible."²⁴ There is certainly precedent enough for trying to make the sonnet form usable. A list would have to include such names as Spenser, Shakespeare, Meredith, and Hopkins.

One cannot accuse Stuart, in Frostian terms, of "playing tennis with the net down." By the time of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, he had done his homework, and he had done it well. During the summer following his return from Vanderbilt, he stopped his plow one day and said to his brother James:

I'm going to write poetry to suit myself from now on. I'm in a different University. I don't have teachers to tell me this is good or that is good. From now on I'm going to be myself and write to suit myself and the way I damn well please. I've failed all my life and I can't do any worse than I have done. (BDH, p. 338)

The way he "damn well" pleased, of course, led to Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, followed by Album of Destiny, Kentucky Is My Land, and Hold April.

²⁴Letter to the writer, July 26, 1969. See the Appendix. It was after Harvest of Youth that he varied the lines in any one sonnet from thirteen to seventeen.

Anyone who attempts to assess Stuart's value as a poet will have to look closely at Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. Many of the questions that are asked about his craft are answered there--and some of them in the first two or three poems of the collection. In the first sonnet, he presents himself, the subject of his song, the nature of his song, and the source of his song:

I am a farmer singing at the plow
 And as I take my time to plow along
 A steep Kentucky hill, I sing my song--
 A one-horse farmer singing at the plow!
 I do not sing the songs you love to hear;
 My basket songs are woven from the words
 Of corn and crickets, trees and men and birds.
 I sing the strains I know and love to sing.
 And I can sing my lays like singing corn,
 And flute them like a fluting gray corn-bird;
 And I can pipe them like a hunter's horn--
 All of my life these are the songs I've heard.
 And these crude strains no critic can call art,
 Yours very respectfully, Jesse Stuart.²⁵

In the second sonnet he expresses his hope for immortality:

There may be some to love his rustic art
 And keep his futile tunes in brain and heart
 When he is quiet and sleeps beneath the clay
 And has no thought of his past yesterday. (p. 3)

In the third sonnet he repeats that people are essential to

²⁵p.3. The sonnets in MWBTP are numbered with two complete poems appearing on each page. There are a few captions such as "Voice" or "Grass Speaks." In the Plum Grove sonnets names are captions, but here too the sonnets are usually numbered. Because of the arrangement of two numbered sonnets per page, there seems to be no reason for a double reference--to both the number and the page. Double references will be made only in those cases where there might otherwise be confusion for the reader. One should also know what to expect of Stuart's punctuation. The dashes here are characteristic of Stuart, as are the ellipsis marks in the lines previously quoted from "Steel Gang."

his list of themes:

I speak of men that live in my lifetime,
And I speak of the men of yesterday.
I do not care to know if this is art--
These common words born in a common heart. (p. 4)

Stuart's early but profound philosophy--based on a cycle of seasons in which Nature renews herself each spring--supplied him with the organizational pattern for Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. He has written much about resurrection and renewal, as might be surmised from such a title as The Year of My Rebirth. In that book he says, "The man who has never planted a seed in the ground would be the first to doubt the story of the resurrection" (p. 84).

During the journey beyond his dark hills, he documented the events of his life, punctuated them, with poems. When he returned, as indicated in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, he continued to document. For forty years he has been writing his chronicle of W-Hollow. Each new book that he publishes, whether poetry or prose, is merely a new chapter in the same chronicle. There is no beginning, and there is no end. It simply goes on. Stuart reminds one very much of Ezra Pound, adding a new canto to his already large collection. Once it is there it appears as though it has always been there, or at least it appears as though it should have been.

Fairly recently, Mr. Stuart has repeated some old observations about his own craft, and these cannot be ignored. He has said, for example, that it is impossible for him to

belong to any clique, school, or literary movement. He has also explained that there is a story behind each of his poems. "My writing," he says, "is a cataloging of present-day events my friends and I have lived."²⁶ For him, the happy combination resulting in poetry is one of mood and incident. Without either, he contends, he cannot write.

A list of critics who have said praiseworthy things about his work must include such names as Mark Van Doren, Louis Untermeyer, Edgar Lee Masters, Malcolm Cowley, John Gould Fletcher, and the late Robert Hillyer. On the other hand, a list of those who have damned him is equally as impressive. Common criticisms are that he writes too much, that he writes too much about himself, that he writes too much in the same key or on the same level, and that he ignores poetic niceties as well as the people who expound them. The criticisms are obviously just if one disregards what he has said about his own work.

Stuart's Blue Dreamers, the westering pioneers who conquered the wilderness, are buried in Plum Grove Cemetery, and he often walks across the hills to visit them there. Like the seed a man plants in the soil, they have reproduced themselves in every son and daughter, and it is their story that Stuart writes. The chronicle continues, and as each recorded incident disappears into the whole, W-Hollow

²⁶"Autobiographical Reminiscence," University of Kansas City Review, XXVII (October, 1960), 59.

remains what Stuart has often referred to as "the last carbon copy" of a former day when "tall men of the earth" were needed.²⁷

²⁷"America's Last Carbon Copy," Saturday Review, XXXX (December 28, 1957), 5-7. Stuart discusses here, as elsewhere, the danger that progress poses to an old way of life.

CHAPTER II

"THE WAY OF ALL FLESH": AN ONTOLOGICAL VIEW

One who attempts to appreciate Jesse Stuart's poetry finds himself, time after time, returning to Beyond Dark Hills. As chronicler Stuart produces art that is inextricably bound up with his life, and Beyond Dark Hills is a seedbed, an early outpouring of themes and ideas that are picked up and developed in later volumes of poetry and prose. Beyond Dark Hills contains both poetry and prose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing of it are interesting in themselves.

Stuart himself tells something of the circumstances. At Vanderbilt, he says, he could not write a passing term paper: "When I started to write a term paper I would write a poem" (BDH, p. 315). Dr. Edwin Mims assigned a term paper, and Stuart was determined to write one. The paper was to be about eighteen pages long, and there were only a few days in which to write it. Concerned over not having written a successful paper before, Stuart set out to impress his teacher. When he had finished, there were 322 closely-written pages: "When I handed Dr. Mims my term paper-- 'Beyond Dark Hills,' I called it--he sucked his pipe harder than I ever saw him suck it before" (BDH, p. 319). Stuart was both pleased and worried. He was pleased because he was convinced that he had done something well; he was worried

because he knew that he could hardly expect Dr. Mims to read such a long paper. Dr. Mims, a bit perplexed by the whole matter, read Stuart's paper closely. He told Stuart: "I have been teaching school for forty years and I have never read anything so crudely written and yet beautiful, tremendous, and powerful as that term paper you have written" (BDH, p. 320). Various people, including Lee Oly Ramey, have checked details with Dr. Mims concerning Stuart's term paper, only to be referred by Dr. Mims to the story as Stuart tells it: "There is not much more to say than what Stuart says in his Beyond Dark Hills. He tells the story rather accurately. That was, of course, the most remarkable term paper I ever got from a student."¹ Donald Davidson, the following summer, went to Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury, Vermont. He took Stuart's paper and showed it to Theodore Morrison of Atlantic Monthly. Morrison interested Little-Brown Publishing Company, but Little-Brown never published the paper. Several years later Stuart requested that his paper be returned. He then sent it to John Macrae at Dutton Publishing Company. It was finally published by Dutton in 1938, approximately six years after it was written.

Beyond Dark Hills, among numerous other things, contains preliminary observations, of a philosophical kind,

¹Letter to Ramey, December 2, 1939. Quoted in Ramey's thesis, p. 189.

about nature, God, man, death, and time. Nowhere is there a coherent theory about these things; nor is there such a coherent theory either in Harvest of Youth (1930) or in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow (1934). Rather, one must pick up scattered observations in the early autobiography and trace their development through the latter two books to find that there is a coherent theory about the nature of Being in Album of Destiny (1944). Lee Pennington traces Stuart's philosophy of Being throughout the novels. He refers to it as Stuart's vision of life, and says that it is to be found in all of Stuart's works after Harvest of Youth.²

Stuart's ontological view does not have its origin in Harvest of Youth, although Stuart first began to publish it there. It has its origin in a number of childhood experiences and observations. In Beyond Dark Hills he asks a question that has always perplexed him: "Does his ā man'ss environment make him or does his blood tell?" (p. 26) As early as April, 1918, the blood-environment issue was a pressing one. Having just completed high school, he

²The Dark Hills of Jesse Stuart (Cincinnati, 1967), p. 5. In a recent letter to the writer (August 30, 1969), Ramey expresses doubt about Pennington's conclusions concerning Stuart's "vision." Leavell, on the other hand, has made some observations about Stuart's journal, The Year of My Rebirth, that would make Pennington's study potentially valid. With The Year of My Rebirth, Leavell says, the critics for the first time began to see the organic unity in Stuart's works, a thematic unity found in the recovery theme. See Leavell's dissertation, p. 215.

symbolically rejected influences by both environment and blood: "I had broken a path for myself through the snow. I would not step in my father's broken path. I had said that I would not live among the hills forever and die among them and go back to the dust of the hills" (BDH, p. 69).

Stuart was young when the family moved from Cedar Riffles, and the years there seem to have impressed him strangely. The scenes, he says, made him love loneliness: "These were sounds and sights of beauty but they were things of loneliness" (BDH, p. 30). The loneliness was intense, and Stuart could not escape it: "There are pictures of those snowy hills lodged in the album of my brain" (BDH, p. 31). The Stuarts moved to a newly-purchased fifty-acre farm, but it too was desolate, a place of loneliness. Stuart writes, "There is something to it that leaves an image on the album of the brain and, like the yellow flame of an old lamp, it flickers often but will not go out" (BDH, p. 46). The "image on the album of the brain," the image that produces the loneliness, apparently never goes out for Stuart. When he visited New York, he found it a lonely place. When he traveled in Europe, he found that it too was a place of loneliness.

Loneliness in childhood, loneliness and isolation, led to serious contemplation about nature, man, death, time, and God. On one occasion his mother tried to explain the omnipotence and omnipresence of God. She told him that God

could ride on clouds and could do everything. His reaction consisted of an intense desire to be God: "If I could only be God! I wanted to be God" (BDH, p. 73). He explains that he caught birds to defy God (BDH, p. 73), and admits that there is no escaping God as reality: "I had come to know my first lesson about God....There was no getting away from a man that rode the clouds and saw through a tree" (BDH, p. 74). The hill way was that one was either "right" with God or he wasn't. Stuart writes, "When I got right with God I would go out on the hilltop. I would put my face down against the wet oak leaves on the ground. I would get rid of the wheelbarrow load of sins I had done" (BDH, p. 75). The face in the wet leaves is a symbolic rejection of the way of his people, a way that called for looking up and crying out to God.

An early preoccupation with religion is evident in Stuart's returning to the subject time and again, and his detailed descriptions of spring revival meetings contain some of his best prose. He says that he saw the hypocrisy in it all when he caught Preacher Baker and a young woman in the grass along W-Hollow Creek (BDH, p. 77). He saw the social value of great spring revivals and baptizings, but he denounced it all as useless: "I am one of them....Though I stand not against it, I can never join my flesh and blood in their worship. I see no use in it all" (BDH, p. 95).

Besides the early traumatic experiences concerning

God and religion, there were experiences involving death. There was also the problem of the devil, the problem of evil. The deaths of Stuart's brothers had no little effect on the boy. He relates vividly the movement of the funeral train across the fields, ending at his grandfather's farm. The Stuarts, at that time, owned no land on which to bury his brothers, and his mother insisted that they be buried on land owned by the family. Stuart writes, "After I had seen my brothers hauled to my grandfather's farm, I was afraid of Death. He was an evil thing to me" (BDH, p. 95). As a thing of evil, death was constantly associated with the devil in the boy's mind. The devil was always described vividly in mountain revival meetings as the father of hell-fire and brimstone. Young Stuart must have had a very impressive idea of what the devil looked like. He wrote of his grandfather: "I was afraid of him. He was twice as large as my father and had a great long beard....If I had met Grandpa at night I would have thought he was the Devil" (BDH, p. 17).

As the face down against the wet leaves would indicate, Stuart found his God in nature. Frank Leavell observes that Stuart never discusses theological issues. Rather, he says that Stuart's works show him to be "deeply aware of the presence of God revealed in nature about him."³ Leavell accepts a single quotation from Beyond Dark Hills--

³"The Literary Career of Jesse Stuart," p. 18.

"When I think of God, I think of the evening sky in Kentucky" (p. 72)--as a significant summary of Stuart's religion. The God-in-nature mystique, however, is only the beginning of a complex scheme of Being in nature. Stuart's thinking on the matter at the time is adequately summarized in these lines, added to the original manuscript and appearing on the last page of Beyond Dark Hills:

If youth were just an endless flowing river
 Born in the world of springtime not to fade;
 Youth with its season blossoming forever,
 A glorious river young in spring parade!
 If youth's strong mansions of quick devilish dust
 Would not disintegrate into decay
 Only because that Time has said they must,
 And who is Time to blow youth's breath away!
 And who is he to fling snow in the hair
 And blotch the temples with his downy flakes;
 A sneak you cannot fight and fight him fair;
 Because, Time in the end will get the breaks.
 Oh, Youth, forever we must race with Time
 For we must quickly bloom in our short season;
 One time to work and play and spin a rhyme,
 For Time will crumble us without a reason! (p. 399)

There is one final observation in Beyond Dark Hills that should not be overlooked, and that is Stuart's discovery of Walt Whitman. Whitman's "grass of graves" becomes important in Stuart's working out a philosophy of Being. "Wasn't Uncle Rank right," he asks, "when he said the fluffy green hair of April would hide all scars?" (BDH, p. 398) The discovery of Whitman cannot be overestimated, as indicated by the 479-line poem called "Whispering Grass" that Stuart took to Donald Davidson about the same time he took his 322-page term paper to Dr. Mims (BDH, p. 320)

After Beyond Dark Hills one sees Whitman in almost

everything Stuart writes. Most obvious in Harvest of Youth is "Lilac Elegy." As Stuart has indicated though, the poems in Harvest of Youth were written in high school and college, and many therefore precede the term paper for Dr. Mims. By the time of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, Stuart was relying heavily on Whitman, and reviewers have often referred to the two writers as belonging together. Henry Christman writes, for example, that Stuart is one of the "few Whitmans, daring to break down accepted forms and create a new poetry."⁴ John Duffy writes, "The weakness of Whitman is here--endless palaver."⁵ Everetta Love Blair discusses Randall Stewart's critical opinion that Stuart and Thomas Wolfe "should be considered as writing under the influence of Whitman."⁶ Other critics and reviewers have found reasons for relating the two, and Dr. Mims, Stuart's old teacher, has said, "We think inevitably of Whitman's Leaves of Grass."⁷

⁴Henry Christman, review in Knickerbocker Press, October 4, 1934. The review is contained, along with thousands of other items of incomplete data, in Stuart's scrapbooks, which are housed in the library at Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky. This review is found in Scrapbook #2, p. 13.

⁵John Duffy, review in Commonweal, XL (October 13, 1944), 169. Also found in Scrapbook #15, p. 10.

⁶Jesse Stuart: His Life and Works, p. xxi.

⁷Edwin Mims, review in Nashville paper. Name of paper and date not given. Found in Scrapbook #2, p. 22. Attempts to relate Stuart's work to Whitman's are numerous, but most amount to general remarks such as that made by Dr. Mims and are for the most part limited to reviews. In spite of this, Whitman's influence has been more than a passing acquaintance and deserves to be worked out in some detail.

Stuart was attracted to Whitman for a number of reasons. Whitman was a rebel, and Stuart too was out of the main stream. Whitman's loneliness was in many ways like Stuart's, but most of all Whitman had articulated in Leaves of Grass what Stuart found for himself in his life among the hills. The significance of Whitman came slowly to Stuart, but by the time of Album of Destiny he had gone beyond a mere examination of Whitman's poetry. He had found a philosophy that was complementary to his own. One can hold Stuart's Album of Destiny up to Whitman's "Song of Myself" and observe numerous parallels.

Although Album of Destiny contains Stuart's full and coherent statement about the nature of Being, Harvest of Youth and Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow are important in tracing his development toward that statement. In Harvest of Youth, the God-in-the-sky from Stuart's childhood has become God-in-nature, a free God:

I found him in the spring sap
In a March sapling tree;
I found him in the winter wind,
Blowing wildly and free. (p. 19)

On the other hand, Harvest of Youth is confusing because the poet has not made up his mind. "The Winner" is an early quatrain:

Against his will he ran a race with Death.
His muscles were taut drawn in every limb.
His team mates saw him falter...lose his breath...
They sought to cheer when Death romped by him.
(p. 24)

The lines are rough, and can hardly be considered accomplished poetry, but they state something of the dilemma that Stuart saw as characterizing life. The attitude of defeat expressed in the race with death also occurs in "Black April":

Only God
 Could beat Flint Sycamore
 When he played his last trump:
 In the loam he battled for bread. (p. 33)

As a player in the card game, Flint Sycamore loses. As a farmer of the soil, he loses. His race with death takes on a new perspective. It becomes a contest with God. The bitterness in the poem, a consequence of having to be the loser, is obvious, especially in this allusion to the Last Supper:

Twelve men
 Are sitting at a picnic table
 White clothed
 With rarest food,
 Life is a pleasure they say,
 And God is kind. (p. 36)

Flint Sycamore's struggle is intense, even though he is the loser. The ending of "Black April" is also bitter, but it suggests a way out of forever being the loser in the game of cards. Flint Sycamore has been a daring man, bringing life from the earth. In the end, life comes from Flint Sycamore: "April life from the bosom/ Of Flint Sycamore" (p. 37).

The futility of "Black April" occurs in many of the

poems in Harvest of Youth. Pennington has observed, "Nearly every poem in Harvest of Youth is concerned with death in some degree."⁸ Many of the poems end in death and defeat; others find a way to surpass them. "To Muddy Waters" symbolically conquers death, or at least defies it: "Like some deep singer in the voiceless you fling/ Futility to wind and march and sing and sing" (p. 54). "Initial-Scarred Trees" is a poem about the possibility of immortality. It dwells on the transience of man's life, but it also asks:

What about the past,
The dreams and ashes of the past--
What about it anyway? (p. 38)

"My City" is also about transience, but it affirms that something remains:

We came back to be
A father's father's father,
And a mother's mother's mother
To blood unborn. (p. 44)

Other poems in Harvest of Youth concern themselves for what comes out of death. In "Louise" the "youthful bloom/ Is crushed to dust," but the poet continues, "Earth prides you with her elements of wind and rain" (p. 56). In "Mountain Funeral" the dead man is immortalized in his blooming apple trees, in his ax, in his plow, and in his field of clover (p. 22).

Still other poems symbolically develop the theme of immortality. In "Undulated Seasons" the "turbulent young blood" of the woman becomes "March tree sap" (p. 28). This

⁸The Dark Hills of Jesse Stuart, p. 5.

symbolic identification is carried farther in "She Ventured Far from God," which is a poem about a girl "once steeped in muted corridors of sin" (p. 80). Her sins are those of hot blood, and she is like "a drooping willow stung by winter rain." When spring comes, like the willow she is revived. The spring revival contradicts conventional attitudes among hill people about the nature of sin. The young woman is revived by nature, not by God. In "Margaret" Stuart's symbolic woman saunters off into "Spring's snowy rows of apple trees" (p. 52). "Knowing that beauty is all that really pays," Margaret belongs to the natural world, where there is no problem of sin. The problem of sin, nevertheless, remains very much with the poet and is posed in the form of an alternative in "Scars":

With Life's pitcher broken at the fountain
Spilling sweet wine of youth to Mother Earth,
Will we forget that sin...or remember
The demon walking by our side from birth? (p. 80)

"Fugative" /sic/ indicates which of the alternatives the poet will eventually accept:

He sleeps a fugative /sic/...and let him be...
He sleeps...he bothers not his own proud kin...
He lies beneath his black-jack saplin tree
Where knotty roots and moles are prying in. (p. 78)

In so far as it goes, Harvest of Youth is an important phase of probing and thinking that Stuart expands in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. In Harvest of Youth man and God recognizably become parts of the natural world. "With Life's pitcher broken at the fountain," the water, "sweet wine of youth,"

comes out of the ground and flows back into the ground. It is with this concept of man as belonging to the natural cycle that Stuart continues to pursue his theory of Being in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow.

Because Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow was written hurriedly, it purports to do little more than record the poet's moods. The over-all plan was to capture moods in the four seasons of the year. There seems, furthermore, no particular reason for placing any one poem where it now appears. The moods simply came, and Stuart wrote, quickly and freely, not paying great attention to matters of form. This "spontaneous overflow," a contrast to conscious artistry, may have been helpful to the growth of his theory of Being. The theory, at least initially, also had to be unforced and natural. It had to come as subconscious process, and certainly not as some form of intellectual decision. As subconscious process, the working out of the theory would be primarily a matter of poetry and secondarily a matter of philosophy.

On an Easter Sunday the poet visited Plum Grove Cemetery. He had in mind a series of poems about the dead. His idea was to put himself in the place of the dead and record their observations. This brought sharp criticism from reviewers and critics, for it was remarkably like what Masters had done in his Spoon River Anthology. Stuart has always denied any conscious influence, and has recently written:

If he /Masters/ influenced me, as reviews of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow pointed out, the influence would have to have been subconscious. I must have read parts or all of Spoon River Anthology and other poems by Masters. I know I certainly didn't lean toward him. He had written a very mean book about Abraham Lincoln--only Allen Tate had praised then. I knew Masters wasn't for me. So I do not remember any influence.⁹

Whether Masters was a formidable influence on Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow likely makes little difference now. What does make a difference is that the dead people would speak through the poet about life, death, and the nature of Being.

Once Stuart had decided that the dead could speak, and that they would be listened to, he also decided that verisimilitude would require that they be spoken about. This allowed him one of the most useful devices in the Plum Grove section, and was a big step in the growth of his theory. He decided that he would use the grass, Whitman's "whispering grass," and that he would let the wind and the seasons have voices of their own.

That the poet visited the cemetery on Easter Sunday is symbolically significant. The importance of a resurrection "of sorts" was in his mind, and would become an integral part of his theory of Being. Easter Sunday is important to the Christian world, but the Sunday on which the poet visited the cemetery was in April. The symbolical significance of the month of April should be clear enough. One finds it in the first few lines of Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.

⁹Letter to the writer, August 25, 1969. See the Appendix.

For T. S. Eliot it is the "cruellest month," and for Stuart it is the month of "resurrected spring." The resurrection is not necessarily a Christian one, a supernatural one. On the contrary, it is a natural one, and is readily observable through the grass.

In the two sections of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow that precede the Plum Grove section, scattered poems are concerned with death, time, and decay as belonging to nature. There are the usual observations about the dead: "How silent the countless billions who have died./ They cannot speak to tell us where they lie" (p. 124). There are the usual expressions of fear: "I am afraid the curtain will be drawn/ And leave me to return to grass and stone" (p. 37). Death symbolically becomes night, and life is presented as a journey. Man is "one journeying into the night" along a "dirty-ribbon road" which is covered by fallen leaves and brush and grass (p. 127). Mountain men who cannot read and write already know something of darkness. In that respect they are "children of the night" (p. 201), but their being illiterate does not lessen their love for life: "And there beside the singing Sandy River/ I cried: 'Life, why can't you go on forever!'" (p. 196). There are also questions and expressions about possibilities in death: "If there is new life in the womb of night,/ I am ready for to meet you, Death, and fight" (p. 193).

Time also becomes important in poems scattered throughout Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. There is a preoccupation

with the past that sounds remarkably like Whitman. In "Song of Myself" Whitman writes, "The past is the push of you, me, all, precisely the same,/ And what is yet untried and afterword is for you, me, all, precisely the same."¹⁰ Stuart writes, "the past is the past," but in the same poem he says, "Your age is not--but we're established facts" (p. 137). The facts, the objects, exist in time, but time apparently exists outside the facts. The facts or objects exist in space, but the poet adds, "The past goes somewhere--never coming back,/ Part of the past is sleeping on the hill" (p. 98).

Contemplation about the uncertainty of facts leads to a further cry of futility:

Facts are most uncertain, for even stone
Disintegrates into positive decay
And a breath of wind could blow the dust away.
There is futility in everything.
And the thing most beautiful soonest goes--
Beauty of flesh, white fragrance of the rose,
The colored feathers on a rooster's wing.
And when we turn to look upon the past
We find few chosen words are things that last. (p. 124)

One of the necessary realities found in such passages is that of positive decay. All facts decay, but decay is not an end in and of itself. When Kate Dills and her lover were shot, "Their mingled blood ran there under the moon/ And sank to roots of grass among their hills" (p. 93). The blood of a

¹⁰ Complete Poetry and Prose (New York, 1948), I, 105. This is the Deathbed Edition and contains Malcolm Cowley's famous Introduction.

dog, likewise, runs "in a stream on dead leaves down the hill" (p. 153). The blood flows back into the earth where grass and flowers grow.

The possibility of oneness with nature is found in various places through Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. The poet says,

Nature improved upon has been destroyed.
Let us go naked, wild, like beasts again!
Let us go nameless strangers to the void. (p. 155)

The lines sound Whitmanesque: "I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd,/ I stand and look at them long and long."¹¹ Whitman's placidity does not exist in Stuart's lines. Whitman accepts animals as animals, but for Stuart they are beasts. The tension is there, as though the poet were suggesting an alternative that were not wholly acceptable. But whether he accepts or not, he recognizes that it is possible for life, in nature, to come out of decay. He knows, he says, "a place where the wild pansies grow/ Among dry chips of cow dung" (p. 111). Moreover, the persona in sonnet number 289 expresses a oneness with nature that is almost convincing:

I shall feel wet oak leaves close to my skin
And I shall smell these dead leaves after rains.
The winter of this life is setting in--
I do love oak-leaves' coffee-colored stains.
My body will be stained from head to toes
And I shall have the oak roots through my skull,
And fern roots through my lips and eyes and nose.
Each summer I shall wear loose green in full.

¹¹ Complete Poetry and Prose, I, 88.

I think I shall be able to discern
 You and the rain through hard eyes of the trees,
 And I shall hold with fingers of the fern
 The nourishment there is in my dead leaves.
 And I shall taste the oak leaves and the rain.
 I shall not feel the oak roots groove my brain.
 (p. 149)

The lines are about as naturalistic as one could expect, but whether they are finally convincing or not depends on whether the final line is a denial of consciousness. Either way, Stuart has come close, perhaps succeeded, in placing man in nature in such a way that he loses identity as he is fed upon by oak trees and ferns. Significant to the theory of Being is the question of whether he is ultimately used up, that is, consumed and destroyed by the oaks and ferns, or whether, as indestructible force, he is either transformed or transferred into oaks and ferns.¹²

The voices of the dead in the Plum Grove section primarily tell stories about life, very much in the way that Masters' dead people do in Spoon River Anthology. The poet, in the meantime, becomes increasingly significant as a voice. In the first two sections of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, he remains relatively outside the poetry and lets his characters speak freely. In the Plum Grove section he conducts a running dialogue with his Whispering Grass. In the final section, the poet is either dead or presumes himself dead. In this section, "Preface for after Death," he speaks

¹²For an interesting comparison see Whitman's "This Compost," Complete Poetry and Prose, I, 330.

as Jesse Stuart the poet, from the grave. This final section is directed or addressed to Donald Davidson, Stuart's old teacher, and consists primarily of poems of farewell along with a number of poems recording events from the poet's life and work. He takes his place among the Blue Dreamers at Plum Grove Cemetery, and as far as his theory of Being is concerned, a few lines from the last two poems adequately summarize the contribution of the section. For his old teacher Stuart figuratively summarizes his own life on earth:

A white oak leaf the early frost has curled
Is my experience, Donald Davidson,
When I think of myself in the past world. (p. 361)

The last poem in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow begins with death and decay:

"Lie still," the fern has said, "there is a reason."
Muscles are lifeless in a body dead--
A body dead and corn sprung from its bosom. (p. 361)

In the poem the body is claimed by oak limbs, clover, briars, and warm clay. Again there is the naturalistic process at work. The poem ends with an expression of doubt about the possibility of a Christian resurrection: "Now if there is a Resurrection Day,/ I shall be one that's taken by surprise" (p. 361).

As indicated earlier, one of Stuart's accomplishments toward developing his ontological view lies in his introducing the Whispering Grass into the Plum Grove section. The grass is both impersonal and universal. As Whitman says in "Song of Myself," "This is the grass that grows wherever the

land is and the water is,/ This is the common air that bathes the globe."¹³ The grass has a voice, but it also functions in other ways. Stuart's dead people speak: "The strength of us is in each sweet grass stem;/ The strength of us is in each leaf and flower" (p. 264). In Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow Stuart is willing to accept Whitman's idea of efflux only in a very limited way. The grass may "transpire from the breasts of young men,"¹⁴ but Stuart seems to stop there. He says nothing about influx, and he has far to go before he can say with Whitman that nothing collapses. Rather, he holds to his childhood observation: "People last only a short time. Nature plays a trick on them. She stays young forever" (BDH, p. 35). At the end of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, people remain "no more than dog tracks in the mud" (p. 265).

Album of Destiny was Stuart's third book of poetry. Coming ten years after Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, it was to be his masterpiece. In spite of the fact that Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow gave Stuart an identity as a writer, criticisms of it fell heavily upon his ears. Listening to the critics' accusations that his book was too long, uneven, diffuse, and artless, Stuart was determined to do something about them. He would take his time, he thought, and produce

¹³Complete Poetry and Prose, I, 77.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 67.

a collection of poems that would please the critics. The idea for such a collection had come to him in 1932, two years before Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow.¹⁵ As early as a year after publication of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow Stuart wrote that Album of Destiny was to have a definite plan, and he explained the plan in some detail.¹⁶ He worked on his plan from 1932 until 1943, a definite contrast to the eleven months he had spent on Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. Unwilling finally to rely on his own judgment, he was helped by Louise Townsend Nicholls, poet and editor for E. P. Dutton, and by William Rose Benet, brother to Stephen Vincent Benet.¹⁷ He was working against strange odds. A. E. (George W. Russell) had called Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow the greatest book of verse since Leaves of Grass,¹⁸ but as Stuart pointed out, critical consensus was that he had exhausted himself. "I have held their remarks in mind," he writes, "for ten years."¹⁹ He knew, without doubt, that Album of Destiny had

¹⁵Stuart, "Autobiographical Reminiscence," p. 61.

¹⁶"Album of Destiny," Literary America, II (July, 1935), 490.

¹⁷Letter to the writer, September 11, 1969. See the Appendix.

¹⁸Letter to Dr. Edwin Mims, December 2, 1939. Quoted in Ramey, p. 72.

¹⁹"When Not to Take Advice," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVIII (February 17, 1945), 11.

to be convincing. His reputation as a poet was on the line. Frank Leavell says that a survey of reviews shows that Stuart's poetry, by the time of Album of Destiny, had steadily declined in the eyes of the critics;²⁰ and although Leavell dismisses the reason as a matter of conjecture, it appears to be quite clear. Between Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow and Album of Destiny there were two collections of short stories--Head O' W-Hollow and Men of the Mountains. Only a year before the publication of Album of Destiny, and four years after his first novel, Trees of Heaven, Stuart published a very successful novel, Taps for Private Tussie. This novel was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, and also won the Thomas Jefferson Southern Award.²¹ For many people, Stuart's reputation as a writer was, and still is, identified with that novel. The inescapable fact is that Stuart had been re-evaluated by the critics, and that they had found him to be a better novelist and story writer than he was a poet. Stuart knew this while he was preparing Album of Destiny. That what he considered to be his best book of poetry followed so closely the publication of a successful novel was perhaps unfortunate for a man who thought himself to be a poet.

Unwilling to accept the critics' opinions twelve

²⁰"The Literary Career of Jesse Stuart," p. 219.

²¹See Woodbridge, p. xv. Also see the Appendix.

years after Album of Destiny was published, Stuart tried to defend his book in an article. The defense ends with some rationalizing about why the book failed to impress the critics. Much of the reason, he contends, was that the war had produced a great paper shortage, resulting in limited space for reviews. Unwilling to relent in his opinion, he cites Robert Hillyer's praise of the book as evidence of its success.²² His "whole panorama of life," he concludes, impressed only a few reviewers, and his "strong, healthy brain-child grew weary shortly after birth."²³

As Stuart explains, the idea for Album of Destiny came to him while he was turning through an old family album of yellowing photographs. The photographs, he says, moved him deeply. As he leafed through the album, he was impressed by the way time had changed everyone whose pictures were before him. This, he says, was the idea for his book. He would take these people, begin with photographs of them in the springtime of their lives, and write portraits of them in verse. The lives he would divide into four parts to correspond to the seasons of the year, and he would show what happened in the spring, summer, fall, and winter of existence. This is essentially what he did. He used fifty people, and

²² "Why I Think Album Is My Best," Prairie Schooner, XXX (Spring, 1956), 36.

²³ Ibid.

the names for all of them came from within Greenup County, Kentucky. He took them from newspapers and tombstones. He wrote four portraits for every one that was finally published, and sometimes he wrote as many as ten to get the right one. He wrote them while traveling in Europe, and in at least forty different states in this country. He did more than 2000 portraits, and finally published 423.²⁴

Ruel Foster, in his book for Twayne, makes some interesting comments about both Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow and Album of Destiny. Death, he says, is the central theme of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. There is a constant awareness, he adds, that death conquers all. He is quite right when he says that Stuart is not coy about man's going back to earth, back to a naturalistic end.²⁵ On the other hand, Foster is willing to dismiss Album of Destiny as being too self-conscious, as a failure in modulating in different keys of emotion, and as a "fundamental failure in diction."²⁶ Except for the charge of being overly self-conscious, the criticisms are about the same as those leveled against Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow ten years earlier. They, therefore, likely do not explain the success of the one book or the failure of the other. Foster, as the reviewers and critics

²⁴"Why I Think Album Is My Best," p. 34.

²⁵Jesse Stuart (New York, 1968), p. 61.

²⁶Ibid., p. 67.

did when Album of Destiny was published, is comparing successes and failures in different genres. He says, for example, that Stuart can use idiom well in the short story but not so well in the poem.²⁷ What such an evaluation may mean, considering that Foster's primary interest is in prose, is that he fails to view Album of Destiny as the working out of an impasse (the finality of death) with which Stuart ended Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow.

Frank Leavell considers Album of Destiny the most unjustifiably neglected book Stuart has written--"possibly his best book in any genre."²⁸ Leavell says that it is more polished and has greater structural unity than most, if not all, other books written by Stuart. The structural unity, Leavell explains, is achieved through a system of symbols. Stuart agrees with Leavell:

I used in the prelude to this book certain symbols. I used the grass, wind, turtle, terrapin, poisonous and non-poisonous snake, water-dog and lizard. I used each for a certain symbol. I tried to portray the whole. In the epilogue when I closed this span of living, I returned to these symbols to make the whole complete.²⁹

The individual symbols, although they are not always as distinctive for the reader as they apparently are for Stuart, do serve collectively to "make the whole complete." Stuart

²⁷Jesse Stuart, p. 67.

²⁸"The Literary Career of Jesse Stuart," p. 208.

²⁹"Why I Think Album Is My Best," p. 34.

finds a way out of the impasse by going back to the evolutionary beginnings of life, and by projecting into the future.

John and Kathaleen Sutton are Stuart's central characters. Their "little world" is a miniature of the "big world," and they are Everyman. About them Stuart says, "I did another album of their resurrected spring. I portrayed their children to show how life passed from one generation to the next generation that had given it life."³⁰ In Album of Destiny Stuart adjusts his vision. For the first time he can see far beyond death and decay.

In the first poem the voice is that of the Whispering Grass, who sees John Sutton and his wife Kathaleen through "April eyes of my green liquid stems!"³¹ They are a fair couple, reports the Whispering Grass, who are much in love with each other and with life. Once John and Kathaleen have been introduced, the Whispering Grass next introduces the saurians. Then people and reptiles are brought together in the same portrait:

Fair Kathaleen and John who laugh and sing
Will give to me their portion for my petals.
Even, slow shell-protected terrapin
Shall give my fibers strength, bone for my stems;
I nurture everything but blowing wind,
The lamps of Heaven and earth's buried dreams. (p. 17)

³⁰"Why I Think Album Is My Best," p. 34.

³¹Album of Destiny (New York, 1944), p. 17. Further references to AD included in the text.

One learns that the saurians have battled each other from time immemorial, and that they, rather than having destroyed each other, have only changed or evolved. As saurians they have always been, but as individuals they will join John and Kathaleen in the "liquid stems of grass." As in Whitman the leaf or stem of grass becomes a symbol of the insignificant which is as "big as any." It symbolizes deathless equality, and becomes a key to the enigma of Divine Reality:

The smallest sprout shows there really is no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life,
and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses.³²

John Sutton knows, although there is a "knit of identity" and a "breed of life," that the "living mass moves on" (p. 32).

Pantheism alone is not a sufficient explanation for what Stuart does in Album of Destiny. As indicated in the first poem, the grass nurtures everything except the "blowing wind," the "lamps of Heaven," and "earth's buried dreams" (p. 17). Stuart's Whispering Wind does not pass through the "liquid stems of grass." Rather, it symbolically connects or relates mortal existence to something eternal:

The Hand that cut the varied flakes of snow
And Brain that gave the Sun its living heat
Were Hand and Brain that made me force, I know--
His own immortal plaything at His feet
To guide the destiny of life about Him. (p. 22)

For Whitman there is the existent or living self, and there

³² Complete Poetry and Prose, I, 67.

is the Transcendent--form, union, plan, and eternal life.³³ They are distinguished by the "moment" and "eternity." For Stuart there is the "golden minute" and "destiny." He has Cief Didway say, "My friend, our span of life's a golden minute" (p. 133). Destiny is the flow, the ebb from before and after the golden minute, and into the future. Trueman Abdon describes it: "But all creation is a mystery,/ This flow of life on earth's eternal stream" (p. 133). As Shan Powderjay explains, destiny is big: "As high as walls of blowing wind,/ And as to depths, I know there is no end" (p. 164). Stuart also emphasizes elsewhere that there is no end to destiny. Robert Diesel speaks of these "minute things between us and the sun" (p. 142), and Certis Sutton compares the tracks or paths of snakes to the furrows or trails made by human beings. These furrows are in turn compared to the trails of stars across the sky (p. 211).

Certis Sutton, crawling upon his belly "like a snake," and watching "one of these stars" from the tall weeds, is important to Stuart's scheme of Being. In the trail of the star across the sky he sees his own trail or furrow across the face of the earth. He sees, in effect, that there is plan, pattern. The three trails--those of snake, man, and star--correspond. For Whitman there are "outlines."³⁴ For

³³Complete Poetry and Prose, I, 67.

³⁴Ibid., p. 113.

Stuart there are "patterns": "Come Love, let us resign ourselves to patterns/ We did not make; patterns we do not choose" (p. 127). John elsewhere says to his wife Kathaleen, "If I had made the plan, life would not change" (p. 167).

As the moment relates to eternity, the part must relate to the whole. V. K. Chari, in his assessment of Whitman, says that the problem of the poet-mystic is to construct a cosmos out of this "multifarious mad chaos," and thereby achieve inner and outer unity. He quotes from the Upanishads: "The Whole is all That. The Whole is all This. The Whole is born out of the Whole. When the Whole is absorbed into the Whole the Whole remains."³⁵ There is only the "Whole" being absorbed into the "Whole," emphasizing that there are no degrees of importance in the Divine Plan. For Whitman, "There are but parts, any thing is but a part."³⁶ For Stuart, whether he is what Chari calls a poet-mystic or not, there are but "parts" that make the "whole." Certis Sutton asks his mother, "Can you feel yourself a part of it,/ A part of milkweed bloom and sawbriar blossom?" (p. 212). For Stuart the part-whole relationship becomes a matter of distinguishing, not a matter of discriminating. The part-whole relationship is important for still another reason.

³⁵Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 5.1. Quoted in Whitman in the Light of Vedantic Mysticism (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1964), p. 54.

³⁶Complete Poetry and Prose, I, 108.

One who distinguishes between and among part and whole, moment and destiny, and chaos and order, must first recognize intimate inter-relationships. The living human being, as part and moment, because of these limitations, cannot see the whole. His is therefore a world of chaos; at least it appears to be. Order and destiny are infinite--outside both time and space.

Chari says that the Whitman of "Song of Myself" is the "child who became part of the objects and of whom the objects became a part."³⁷ The mystical center of experience, he says, is the self. Stuart's scorpion comments on self-hood:

My Lady Scorpion picked up dust of us
And held it for the wind to blow away.
She could not tell which dust was which of us,
For it was dust one color: it was gray--
The dusts of John, Gray Lizard, and of me
Mingle and blow through our eternity. (p. 129)

Here Stuart uses Whitman's word eternity. John is caught up with the saurians in the eternal flow. Kathaleen sees the flow as existing in "four full seasons of the sun," and resigns herself to the mystery, admitting that this "change of man may be for many reasons" (p. 127). There is, on the one hand, an endless succession of golden minutes or life-spans: "Birth of my twelve has been my resurrection!" (p. 172) On the other hand, there is the eternal flow of life: "I shall be the growing leaf again/ Soon as this templ'd clay has

³⁷ Whitman in the Light of Vedantic Mysticism, p. 56.

come undone" (p. 179). One hardly knows what to do with the "twelve" that crops up again. It is as though Stuart were affirming the necessity of a Christian resurrection for the golden minute, the span of limited vision. Whether he is or not, there is always Whitman's "perpetual transfer" between the golden minutes and the eternal flow, the influx and efflux, the liquid stems of blades of grass.

Stuart sees the destiny of America to be a matter of blood, a succession of golden minutes: "Are we not of the blood in our sires' veins?" (p. 210) Mortals come and go, but they must not close their eyes to "the beauty of death-world" (p. 123). Those in the "city of the dead" are to be envied rather than pitied (p. 237). Death, being "compounded under sprout and thyme" (p. 206), is luckier than one might think. The process of compounding is illustrated in the rotting down into the elements of Flem Spry's old house (p. 188). Everywhere there is life in the midst of decay--life, in Whitman's words, as the "leavings of many deaths."³⁸

The scope of Stuart's ontological scheme is much more complicated and detailed than is represented here. The purpose for this study has been to establish that there is such a scheme, and to explain something of its genesis. As indicated earlier, Beyond Dark Hills is important because it is a sourcebook for origins. It contains early observations about such things as man, nature, death, religion, and God,

³⁸Complete Poetry and Prose, I, 112.

and makes evident Stuart's need for working out a philosophy of some kind. The working out of the philosophy is done through his first three volumes of verse, and Whitman, as the model, becomes increasingly influential in each additional volume. Further, those who have criticized Stuart for what appears to be his formlessness need look once again at Whitman. Stuart was so impressed by Whitman's technique of symphonic development of theme that he borrowed it. Like Whitman, Stuart develops a number of themes at one time. He moves from one to the other, but does not abandon them. Instead, each is cast aside and recalled at what appears to be the poet's convenience. One can learn much about both Whitman and Stuart by reading Malcolm Cowley's Introduction to the Deathbed Edition of Leaves of Grass. He can learn, for example, that in Cowley's discussion of Whitman's faults can be found virtually all of the faults that critics and reviewers found in Stuart up to and including Album of Destiny.

Harvest of Youth and Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow modulate between life and death. Each contains numerous examples of raw naturalism, and although the latter can be appreciated for its pantheistic impressions, death is final in both. Not until Album of Destiny does Stuart come full circle. To the life-death syndrome, the impasse with which he ends Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, he offers a solution. In Album of Destiny he adjusts his vision and sees in terms

of the whole. The book, however, proved much too grave for the psychological moment. Stuart's readers were still laughing hilariously over the humor in Taps for Private Tussie. Stuart was chagrined, to say the least, for Album of Destiny was his planned attempt to arrest his declining reputation as a poet. He had developed his "brain-child" with great care, but then the role of the philosopher-poet seems far removed from that of "a farmer singing at the plow." He was obviously out of character.

CHAPTER III

THE BEAUTY OF WORDS: A CONCEPT OF THE IMAGE

A detailed study of Stuart's imagery would be necessarily long and involved. Such a study would have to consider tree-imagery, bird-imagery, flower-imagery, crop-imagery, animal-imagery, water-imagery, images of evil, images of death and sterility, and various kinds of images having to do with both birth and rebirth. One need not go into such detail, however, to find some of the basic assumptions underlying Stuart's concept of the image.

First and foremost, it is essential for Stuart, as it is for William Carlos Williams,¹ that imagery lie somewhere in the interreliance of man, nature, and thing. For the artist, it is indeed in things that the power of the image lies. Stuart attempts to lift his W-Hollow milieu to the level of poetry, and in that attempt the images come spontaneously and naturally from the milieu. The reader could just as well be transported and set down in the middle of W-Hollow, for that is in effect what Stuart hopes to achieve through his imagery--imagery amounting to sensuous encounter resulting from the poet's early and elementary fascination with words.

Archibald MacLeish says that a poem begins in "the

¹
Linda Welshimer Wagner, The Poems of William Carlos Williams (Middletown, Connecticut, 1964), p. 31.

Wen Fu, not in isolation, but in relationship."² That is, the poem is something that "traffics" between man and his milieu. MacLeish quotes one of Mallarmé's letters to Degas: "Poetry is not made with ideas: it is made with things or words that signify things."³ For MacLeish, as for Mallarmé, poetry is made of words themselves, of words as sensuous events. Words, nevertheless, are double constructions: "They are sounds which are also signs for meanings and signs for meanings which are also sounds."⁴ MacLeish recognizes a necessary marriage between phonetic or phonemic content and morphemic or word content.⁵ Language, in the elementary linguistic sense implied here is highly sensuous. The sound and the sign combined make the word a word, and neither can exist without the other. Knowing this, says MacLeish, the poet "goes to the 'things' of the world not to have thoughts about them but to discover them and so to discover himself

²Poetry and Experience (Boston, 1961), p. 6. MacLeish is using his background in Chinese poetry. He is specifically echoing a Fu by Lu Chi, a Chinese poet and general who lived around the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth. The Fu is a prose poem written about literature, and specifically about the poet's art. MacLeish uses Lu Chi, he says, because Lu Chi "speaks to our condition as contemporary men" (p. 4).

³Ibid, p. 22.

⁴Ibid., p. 29.

⁵This is taking into consideration the usual definition that a phoneme is the smallest element of structure making a difference in the larger structure of the stream of speech, and that a morpheme is the smallest element that makes a lexical difference.

looking at them."⁶

Mallarmé, on the other hand, says that poetry is either made by things or by words that signify things. The difference seems to be a crucial one, at least it appears to be for John Crowe Ransom:

An idea is derivative and tamed. The image is in the natural or wild state, and it has to be discovered there, not put there, obeying its own law and none of ours. We think we can lay hold of the image and take it captive but the docile captive is not the real image but only the idea, which is the image with its character beaten out of it.⁷

Ransom is talking about a physical poetry with a "thing" content, but words are not physical things. Very early in his career Stuart made these observations: "I wanted to put things into words. Words were living things. Verse was living words combined to make a living body and a living force that would be felt" (BDH, p. 219). Stuart's emphases here are on words, on things, and on the characteristic feature of living--"living words," "living things," "living body," and "living force." He obviously wanted life in whatever it was that he considered to be the task of the poet. He was confused. Regardless of how much life there might be in words, he knew that words and physical things were not the same: "Words are marvelous things. They are something which you can do anything with but take hold of with your hands" (BDH, p. 34). He knew what he wanted, but

⁶Poetry and Experience, p. 21.

⁷"Poetry: A Note on Ontology," The World's Body (Port Washington, New York, 1964), p. 115.

he did not know how to get it.

Stuart has tried time and again to shake loose from words and "stand naked" in the world of things. In The Year of My Rebirth he begins with things and tries to work back to the poem: "This grass is a poem. Each blade is a letter, a clump is a strong, selective, poetic word. This yard, an oasis of tender green, is a small spring lyric."⁸ He has persisted in asserting that poetry exists in things--beyond words. These lines from an early story sufficiently illustrate where the poem is, and what the poet's task is:

Life is here, music is here, love is here. Poetry is here in the music of the wind in the saw-briars and the great magnificent sweep of dead leaves that cover the earth now. There are thousands of lines of poetry in the wind here. It is poetry that never grows old. One only has to take a pen and copy the melody from the wind, the words from the earth. It is life here, great life.⁹

The melody comes from the wind and the words belong to the earth; but for Stuart the melody of the wind and the words of the earth are living things. As the rhythms of the four sentences indicate, he was trying to "copy" in some way, even though he knew that his efforts were futile, that the image tamed is not an image at all but an idea.

Stuart has recently mailed to the writer his latest

⁸p. 65. This journal, perhaps because it was written while he was recuperating from an almost-fatal heart attack, contains some of Stuart's most profound observations about life and art.

⁹"Ascension of Autumn: A Rhapsody," The Southern Literary Messenger, I (January, 1939), 18.

attempt to "stand naked" in a world of things. The attempt is a five-page typescript, and is written in a very poetic prose. As an effort to capture or arrest the poet in a world of autumnal things, the typescript is significant not only because it is a recent affirmation of Stuart's obsession to get beyond or behind language, but also because its very execution illustrates once again that the language of good prose, as far as Stuart is concerned, is essentially the same as the language of good poetry. The first paragraph places the poet within the autumnal world:

The whole earth around me now is in rhythm. It is an autumn poem with rhythmic measure. Autumn, fast winds, slow winds and no winds accent this physical poetic masterpiece! Try walking in and on and over a poem like this just one time! Hear it chanted! Get full of it, as I am now, and see if you can describe how you feel! You just try putting autumn's poetic rhythms into words.¹⁰

The autumnal poem is a poem of "rhythmic measure," with rhythms that are wholly natural and harmonious. It is a "physical poetic masterpiece," beyond ideas and beyond words. Stuart, at this point, sounds remarkably like Coleridge, who says that "nature itself would give us the impression of a work of art, if we could see the thought which is present at once in the whole and every part."¹¹

¹⁰"Oh, What a Poem I Am In," unpublished typescript enclosed in a letter to the writer, December 8, 1969. See the Appendix.

¹¹"On Poesy or Art," Modern Criticism: Theory and Practice, ed. Walter Sutton and Richard Foster (New York, 1963), p. 37.

On the first page of the typescript the poet places himself in the forest. The second page continues the autumnal experience there, an experience of trees, birds, winds, and leaves. The birds become "periods to hold poetic lines on this poetic autumn earth." Any section of the typescript can be cast into lines by simply following the pauses:

Here are the slopes of sterile earth--
 covered with sedge--good old brown broomsedge--
 a cover for the rabbit, grouse and quail.
 And all this sedge is now a-quiver--
 in autumn rhythm that cannot go on for ever.
 Trees in motion, falling leaves--
 winds that laugh and winds that grieve--
 winds that make the sedgegrass quiver--
 autumn winds, yes, autumn winds
 that can't go on forever.

The slopes of sterile earth, the quivering sedgegrass, the falling leaves, and the trees in motion are details that an artist painting an autumn scene would surely have on his canvas. One need only follow the dashes, marking breath-units, to realize that a poet's control over his imagery lies inevitably in his control over language. The essence of Stuart's concept of the image is here, as is the essence of his concept of prosody.

The images continue throughout the poem--tough-butted white oaks, leaves on the skin, wrinkles in the water, cranes, shikepokes, and buttercups. The sketch ends with the poet's once again affirming his place in "autumn's rhythmic rhyme." It is, he says, "a part of me and I a part of it--this poem since my birth." The leaves splashing in the face may convey "poetic messages," and the poet may imagine birds and leaves

to be dots and dashes punctuating "this earth's big poem," but Stuart knows that the poetry cannot be lifted from the earth. Because the rhythms belong to the flowing of water, to the flight of birds, to the swaying of trees, and to the functions of all natural phenomena, they cannot be lifted from the earth either. Likewise, the images, riding the rhythms of these natural things, are bound to the earth. Stuart would agree with Ransom that the image is wild in nature and cannot be tamed.

To "stand naked" in such an autumnal world is not to write poetry. Rather, it is to be in poetry, to be of poetry, or perhaps even to be poetry. Whatever the case, it emphasizes Stuart's problem. For him poetry appears to be in things, but Mallarmé says that it may be in words that signify things.

Ralph Waldo Emerson first published his optimistic, idealistic philosophy in Nature (1836). In explaining his philosophy he stated a formula that goes far in accounting for Stuart's concept of the image. He says, 1.) that words are signs of natural facts, 2.) that particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts, and 3.) that nature is the symbol of spirit.¹² Emerson sees the world in terms of emblems, and considers all of nature to be a metaphor of the human mind. Emerson, by the time he published "The Poet" (1844), had extended and clarified his philosophy

¹²The Complete Works (Boston, 1884), I, 31.

considerably. In "The Poet" he declares the poet to be a Namer or Language-maker. He says that every word was once a poem, and that every new relation is a new word. The poem itself he explains as "a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing."¹³

Stuart's God-in-nature mystique, his view of man in nature, his penchant for animating trees, grass, and other things in nature, along with such metaphors as the metaphor of the grass in The Year of My Rebirth and the metaphor of the poem in "Oh, What a Poem I Am In,"¹⁴ all tend to identify him with Emerson's formula, and to make him the ideal poet of Emerson's essay. Stuart's much-used expression that images are in the "album of the brain" also appears to be emblematic. It is likely, in spite of the proposed identification, that Stuart did not borrow his concept of the image from Emerson. He likely did not borrow it, directly, from anyone. Rather, as indicated earlier, he had an obsession with Walt Whitman about the time that he attended classes at Vanderbilt. By that time he had read the King James Version of the Bible at great length. He had also read widely: one finds vestiges of all the great nineteenth-century English writers in

¹³The Complete Works, III, 15.

¹⁴The metaphor is structural or functional, and the entire poem is a metaphor. For a discussion of symbolic metaphor see Wagner, pp. 47-48.

Stuart's poetry, as well as vestiges of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American writers. Time and again he has asserted that he has consciously copied no one. He didn't copy Emerson; nor did he copy Whitman. He, in his overwhelming fascination, simply absorbed Whitman, who happened to have been heavily influenced by Emerson. T. S. Eliot, in "The Music of Poetry," explains the kind of thing that took place:

...it is only the study, not of poetry but of poems, that can train our ear. It is not from rules, or by cold-blooded imitation of style, that we learn to write: we learn by imitation indeed, but by a deeper imitation than is achieved by analysis of style.¹⁵

Eliot is talking about versification, but not about versification alone. The "deeper imitation" amounts to a level of absorption on which such things as versification, imagery, and structure cease being distinguishable.

From the earliest, Stuart has been attracted by the sister arts--music and painting. In Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow (1934) he is "a farmer singing at the plow" (p. 3). His prose and his poetry contain remnants of church hymns, square-dance calls, and numerous references to music in natural things. His people, he says, sing the old ballads that have been handed down for generations. Each of the ballads tells a story, and tells it in words. He was not trying to escape his sources of song when, in 1932, he got

¹⁵On Poetry and Poets (New York, 1957), p. 19. "The Music of Poetry" was the third W. P. Ker Memorial Lecture, and was delivered at Glasgow University in 1942.

the idea for his Album of Destiny. The idea of painting pictures, outlined in his defense of that book,¹⁶ is in effect a plan to make greater use of the sources. The photographs found in the family album were very much like the images on the "album of the brain" in that both were illusions of a sort. The details were in the pictures also, and they were vivid. Using the idea of creating illusions through pictures, Stuart set out to "picture" his W-Hollow milieu. Each picture would be contained in a single poem, and the whole gallery of pictures, taken in the four seasons of the year, would create illusions of W-Hollow on the one hand, and Man in the universe at large on the other.

It was at this point that Stuart found Whitman useful. Whitman had gone to Emerson for his theory and attitude toward words. He found in Emerson such ideas as these:

1.) "Bare lists of words are found suggestive to an imaginative and excited mind."¹⁷ 2.) "Nature offers all her creatures to him /the poet/ as a picture-language."¹⁸ 3.) "The etymologist finds the deadeast words to have been once a brilliant picture. Language is fossil poetry."¹⁹ Whitman, using Emerson's ideas about picture-language and lists of words,

¹⁶"Why I Think Album Is My Best," pp. 32-34.

¹⁷"The Poet," Complete Works, III, 22.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 26.

set out to inventory the universe, to name it into existence. His catalogues are long lists of words, words that both sound and signify. Locked in the words, Whitman thought, is the vicarious experience of the poet, the opportunity to know life or Being in all of its details. Whitman's attitude toward words, showing an obvious Emersonian influence, is treated in the twenty-fifth section of "Song of Myself." The attitude is also treated in "Poem of the Sayers of the Words of the Earth" (1856):

Earth, round, rolling, compact--suns,
moons, animals--all these are words,
Watery, vegetable, sauroid advances--beings,
premonitions, lispings of the future,
Behold! these are vast words to be said.

Were you thinking that those were the words--
those upright lines? those curves, angles, dots?
No, those are not the words--the substantial words
are in the ground and sea,
They are in the air--they are in you.²⁰

"Poem of the Sayers of the Words of the Earth" invites comparison to Stuart's "Oh, What a Poem I Am In," and to any number of poems and prose selections by Stuart. The birds that dot the sky are periods in the poem, for the poem is not on paper but rather is explicable in terms of Whitman's doctrine of inner and outer meanings. Whitman's "vast words to be said" can just as well be sung or chanted, as Whitman illustrates in "Song of Myself." Eliot, on the other hand,

²⁰Leaves of Grass, 1856 Edition. Quoted in Gay Wilson Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook (New York, 1946), p. 433. In the 1881 Edition the title was changed to "Song of the Rolling Earth" and the first three lines were dropped.

says that the poem consists of one person talking to another, and that singing is simply another way of talking.²¹ Whitman chants the names of things to produce a particular emotional effect in the reader, one corresponding in some rough way to the emotion of the chanter or singer. The words chanted are stimuli, each having its referent in the emotion of the reader.

Gay Wilson Allen believes the discovery of the catalogue method to mark the beginning of Whitman's new system of prosody.²² Whether this is the case or not, Whitman came to think of himself as a painter of pictures. As painter he relied on the James-Lange Theory; that is, he expressed emotion either by naming the sensations of which the emotion consists, or he indirectly portrayed the emotion by naming the concrete objects which can be counted upon to produce the sensations.²³ The objects named in Whitman are usually simple and concrete, and he mostly names the object without attempting to describe it further. He took great care in choosing his "magic words."

Richard Maurice Bucke collected and published a volume of Whitman manuscripts, many of which reveal Whitman's intentions--stylistic and otherwise. Bucke printed four lines

²¹"The Music of Poetry," p. 23.

²²American Prosody (New York, 1966), p. 236.

²³Ibid.

of Whitman's "Pictures" in his collection:

O Walt Whitman, show us some pictures;
 America always Pictorial! And you Walt Whitman
 to name them.
 Yes, in a little house I keep suspended
 many pictures--it is not a fixed house.
 It is round--Behold! it has room for America,
 north and south, seaboard and inland, persons...²⁴

"My Picture-Gallery" is dated 1880, and appears to be a revision of the lines from "Pictures":

In a little house keep I pictures suspended,
 it is not a fixed house,
 It is round, it is only a few inches from one side
 to the other;
 Yet behold, it has room for all the shows of the
 world, all memories!
 Here the tableaus of life, and here the groupings
 of death;
 Here, do you know this? this is cicerone himself,
 With finger rais'd he points to the prodigal
 pictures.²⁵

The "little house" sounds much like Stuart's "album of the brain." It is obviously the mind, and the images collect there for dispersal. Whitman's pictorial method consists of arranging his words into lines or verses in such a way that each line or verse presents a picture of some characteristic scene, event, group, or person.

Emory Holloway has also been interested in Whitman's pictorial method, and has made some observations about his finished "Pictures":

Each is a microcosm of the whole Leaves of Grass, which the author looked upon less as a book than as a picture

²⁴ Notes and Fragments (London, Ontario, 1899), p. 27.

²⁵ Complete Poetry and Prose, I, 355.

of himself in all his cosmopolitan diversity. And the more we learn of the facts of Whitman's comprehensive life, whether experience, reading, or meditation, the more we realize that before each thumb-nail picture was set down on paper it had really been hung, as a personal possession, on the walls of his "Picture-Gallery."²⁶

Whitman apparently, turning to Emerson's theory of symbols, identified his own ego with the creative processes in nature, and through vicarious exploration of all forms and levels of existence, he evolved his technique of panoramic imagery.

The ultimate question, at any point, is that of what all of this has to do with Stuart. The answer is complicated, but it is also rewarding. What Stuart has written in and about Beyond Dark Hills shows that he early knew the value of painting scenes. His term paper for Dr. Mims was full of scenes carefully executed. About writing the term paper, he says, "Blindly I beat the words out. They fell like drops of blood. I beat them with a hammer to make them paint the small pictures I have gathered in the album of my brain."²⁷ The "small pictures" which Stuart says he has "gathered," and which exist or are stored in the "album of my brain," convince one that he early thought and talked about imagery via the picture. His method was from the beginning pictorial, relying on his command of words to execute scenes. He knew

²⁶Pictures (London, 1927), pp. 10-11. See Holloway's Introduction for the importance of the image in Whitman's style.

²⁷To Teach, To Love (New York, 1970), p. 159.

Whitman well by the time he wrote Beyond Dark Hills, as his writing of the long poem "Whispering Grass" indicates, and what he says about pictures sounds remarkably like Whitman's pictures suspended in "a little house" which is "only a few inches from one side to the other." Stuart knew that the word as sound was sung or said, but the word as sign proved to be another matter. The image, he discovered, can only be lifted from the "album of the brain" by singing or saying words that signify very concrete things.

Stuart experimented with his scene-painting, and found his prose scenes to have the sweep of good poetry:

Mellow is the wind
 and yellow are the leaves
 and yellow is the mist
 about the pools
 of leaf-strewn water.
 Scarlet are the leaves
 and scarlet are the patches
 of shoe-make woods
 in the pasture lands
 and the snow-briar stools.
 Almost yellow is the tobacco
 and yellow is the corn,
 but scarlet the cane tops
 and the cane blades.
 The earth is scarlet and yellow.
 Look at it!
 The whole earth
 around us
 is scarlet and yellow,
 the waters
 and the mists
 and the briars
 and the trees!
 Yellow the noonday September sun,
 scarlet the setting September sun,
 and scarlet is the sky

around the setting sun.²⁸

His concept of the image is closely bound to his philosophy of Being, and nowhere is this pointed out more effectively than in his last two volumes of poetry--Kentucky Is My Land (1952) and Hold April (1962). Although neither book makes a significant contribution to advancing Stuart's practices concerning imagery beyond the point he reached in Album of Destiny, each contains valuable insight into his thinking about the image, the word, and the poem.²⁹ In "Kentucky Is My Land," a title poem, one encounters again the idea of poetry as sound and picture, existing somewhere beyond words:

The lonesome streams in the narrow-gauged valleys,
Sang poetic songs without words.
And the leafless trees etched on gray winter skies

²⁸BDH, p. 261. This is one of sixteen of Stuart's prose scenes in Beyond Dark Hills that I have cast into lines. Nothing has been changed in the adaptation. Even punctuation remains the same. Such purple patches are found throughout Stuart's prose, and in some instances he has himself recast his prose into lines and published them as poetry. He says, for example, that the long prose poems "Kentucky Is My Land," and "My Land Has a Voice" were both done as prose and were later cast into lines (Letter to the writer, October 13, 1969).

²⁹Kentucky Is My Land is especially interesting because of the two long prose poems--"Kentucky Is My Land" and "The Builder and the Dreamer." They are illustrations of Stuart's idea that both good poetry and good prose must be succinct and directional. "Kentucky Is My Land" has been reprinted on large wall placards, by courtesy of Ashland Oil and Refining Company, and distributed to public schools throughout the state of Kentucky.

Were strong and substantial lines of poetry.³⁰

The poet ends his poem by declaring that "bluegrass beauty" is not akin to poetry, but "is poetry." He also declares, as he does in "Clay from the Heart of It" (p. 60) and numerous other poems, his belief in the essential oneness of all things. Each refrain of the wind is poetry, and the poet may be man or oak:

Today, I am the master of this tree,
To chop it down, to split its fibered seams;
Tomorrow, Plum Grove oak will cover me
And its tenacious roots will break my dreams.
("The Plum Grove Oaks," p. 61)

Robert Hillyer, one of Stuart's friends, writes of the dream-like quality of the poem.³¹ The poem for Hillyer is dream-stuff. For Stuart it is not the poem that is dream-stuff; it is life. As in "The Great White Silence" (p. 67), we live in the dream that we are dreaming. In "Summer Has Faded," summer is "a written book that we have read" containing "sentences of green beneath blue skies" in which each word is "now a leaf of dying red" (p. 66). In poem number six of "The Last Leave Home," the poetry is in what Stuart refers to as "this brain-embedded world of mine" (p. 82). The long poem "The Builder and the Dreamer" is an account of Ben Tuttle's building the dream in which he lives.

³⁰ Kentucky Is My Land (New York, 1952), p. 14.
Further references to KIML included in the text.

³¹ First Principles of Verse (Boston, 1950), p. 18.

Nature is his model: he "looked to Nature's book for guidance" to build his dream (p. 89). He listened to the "voice of Nature speak," and read "her message" in the sky, in blades of grass, and in flowers (p. 92). His dreams, we are told, "were great in childhood" (p. 85). As it turns out, the greatest of his dreams is to build a dream-forest, a dream-forest in which he will live. As far as the relationship of the poet and the dream are concerned, Stuart defines it about as well as it can be defined. In "This February Night" he has the water speak to the poet:

Record your little rhyme for those asleep
For spring will wake soon after February.
And winter unrecorded will not keep. (p. 66)

As in "The Great White Silence," the poet lives in and is a part of poetry. The poet's job, according to the water in "This February Night," is that of the chronicler; he records the dream.

Stuart is obviously serious in his attempt to "stand naked" in a dream-world. His most recent volume of poetry indicates that he is. In "Two Leaves" he says, "you and I are two leaves drifting by" in the wind.³² In "Be in a Joyful Mood" he says that the "highest mind today is not enough," for we are "part of all this harmony" of the universe (HA, p. 106). "Small Wonder" is a miniature "Song of Myself" in which the poet celebrates his essential oneness with the

³²Hold April (New York, 1962), p. 107. Further references to HA included in the text.

earth, and about which he says, "I am a part" (HA, p. 104). His "gladness of the earth" is a gladness of being at one with the earth, of being in the dream. In "Boy or Calf" it is a gladness of being somewhere between "the birth of bud and fall of leaf" (HA, p. 69). In "Dawn" it is a gladness of being an "infinitesimal, borrowed part" of "transitional earth" (HA, p. 62), of being a "living portion of earth's flesh" and "a kingdom within myself" (HA, p. 60). The idea of essential oneness is perhaps best stated in "Man and His Valley":

I do not understand
Infinite wisdom of this workable plan
That everything is oneness with the land,
When you are valley and I am the land. (HA, p.26)

Because he does not understand, he says in "Why Ever Grieve," those "wordless blueprints from eternity," he relies on Nature to "reproduce the broken parts" and make them whole again (HA, p. 21).

In "Summer Writes Another Book," Summer, "a linguist who writes in many tongues," holds the pen of the poet (HA, pp. 28-29). Morning glories, growing up stalks of ripened corn, are "lyric poetry in this book." Rows of corn, cotton, and wheat stubble are "strong, substantial sentences." There are also "structural sentences in the sky/ And on the lonesome leaf." The poet, according to his own theory of Being, is in the morning glories, the stubble, and the leaf, and they are part of him; hence the difficulty of talking about the poet as though he were a thing apart, and about the

poem as though it were some kind of recognizable entity.

Stuart's emphasis on life as dream-stuff, his brain-embedded world, is in itself sufficient reason for his finding Walt Whitman appealing. With Whitman he says, "the substantial words are in the ground and in the sea,/ They are in the air--they are in you."³³ Ben Tuttle's dream-forest should be considered among Stuart's major attempts to "image" the mystery of Man's Being, but the nature of the dream for all men, caught up in the mutability of all things, is perhaps best summarized in "Hold to a Living Dream":

Remember stones will crumble, dirt will loose
An avalanche of dream in tender spring
To bud and flower into a luscious fruit...
Winter, this dream will not be anything.
Only your dream has value and can last, (KIML, p.54)

Stuart's comprehensive portrait is that of Man caught up in the flux, coming and going with the seasons of the year, and there is only the dream--a world in the "album of the brain"--to be recorded.

Stuart's concept of the image, in the final analysis, becomes a matter of metaphysics. Transcendentalism, via Whitman, is obvious, but one wonders about Stuart's concept of reality. All things, like the tree in the forest that does not fall unless someone sees or hears it, apparently exist in the mind or not at all. The peculiar thing about such an idea is that it has to be true; at least it has to

³³ Leaves of Grass, 1856 Edition. Quoted in Gay Wilson Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook, p. 433.

be true from the viewpoint of any one individual. When a man dies, the universe dies with him. The image is always on the "album of the brain" of a man who is alive. It is at this point that Mallarmé and the Chinese poet Lu Chi make sense, as do his "pictures suspended" in a room large enough for all of the "shows of the world." It is the point at which the poet kicks loose from the earth long enough to view himself among the things of the earth, and in doing so takes time to imagine what the things of the earth would look like without him. Stuart's method is pictorial because he too has imagined what the things of the earth, and particularly the things of his W-Hollow milieu, would look like without him.

CHAPTER IV

A RECORD OF THE DREAM: THE IMAGE IN PRACTICE

The poet, in using the pictorial method, does not limit his appeal to the eye. The picture, on the contrary, may appeal to any or all of the senses. Stuart seems to have learned this gradually, as indicated by his early tendency to speak of the poet-singer and the poet-painter as being somehow exclusive of each other. There is a progression in his development of the pictorial method, and with that progression there is an acceptance of the mutuality of what he early considered to be separate roles of the poet.

The poems written before Stuart's discovery of Whitman, high school and undergraduate poems in Harvest of Youth, contain very convincing experiments in versification and prosody.¹ By contrast experiments in imagery often fail. "Undulated Season," a free-verse poem, is one of the more successful experiments in imagery. Section four paints an autumn scene:

nasal Autumn
tweaking winds in bare twigs
plum leaves in a golden shower
rustle with the wind
down alleyways
called time
 birds fly to bare plum twigs
 to chat of love
 one by one they come

¹The primary distinction between the two for purposes of this study is that verse is metered language.

remembering the glossy green
of their season
mating (p. 29)

"Railroad Sounds" is another fairly successful poem, and largely because Stuart does in it what he later learned to do well. That is, he makes reference both to the sense and to the object. Throughout the poem he repeats, "I have heard," and he follows the repetitions with such expressions as "groans of heavy engines," "drive wheels slipping," "the lonesome whistle screaming," "oozing steam from slick pistons," and "the swinging and banging of box car doors." "These sounds," he concludes, "I have loved" (p. 31). The imagery in "Vagabond Houses" depends on metaphor. The houses are "Aged vagabonds/ Resting by a road," and they are "Black drops of ink/ Resting by a road" (p. 33).

Some of the most successful imagery in Harvest of Youth is found in the third section, "Sonnets: Juvenilia." Again the imagery is made effective by naming both the sense appealed to and the object:

Nocturnal things have been my loves: moon-downs,
Valleys of fog and sleepy mountain towns,
Dew on the grass and play of wind upon
The hill. Night sounds I have loved: the cold
Nosing winds in November corn stubbles;
The zoom of wires and water that troubles
Creek mosses and ferns. ("August Night," p. 47)

There is nothing sophisticated about the imagery here. It is simple and direct. The imagery sometimes comes via the

symbol,² and the symbol remains just as simple and unsophisticated as the thing symbolized. Stuart, for example, often uses the river as a symbol of life: "And a river young will wear a way to go/ Until it cuts a channel to the sea" ("Batter Me Down, Life," p. 48). In "A Skeptic's Plea" the poet simply lists or enumerates:

If there is life beyond this life, let it
Be this: The friendly Earth my boyhood knew
With quaint old upland peach trees in the dew;
High wind, a gust of rain, a shattered bit
Of Heaven in a sleepy willow brook; (p. 53)

The poet is naming the objects in his milieu: dew-covered peach trees do have a certain sensuous appeal, as does a willow-covered brook. Stuart often uses the simile: "And like Indian Summer leaves, our life days burn/ With candle flames" ("Louise," p. 53). He also uses personification, metaphor, apostrophe, metonymy, synecdoche, and other devices of duality commonly found in handbooks on poetry. They help to get the images before the reader, and in doing so they lend structure to the poem.

Because the preoccupation with Whitman began around the time Stuart was at Vanderbilt, one would expect Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, done immediately after Vanderbilt, to show evidence of the preoccupation, and it does. Stuart himself has described Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow in terms of

²The symbol, as referred to here, primarily differs from the metaphor in that the symbol is recurrent. In both cases two things partake of each other and all the while remain two distinct things.

the senses: "The book was finished, dreams and signs and sounds and feeling that would not come again" (BDH, p. 375). Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow is important not only because of what it contains of Stuart's practices concerning the image, but also because it records the initial stages of his attempt to reconcile the poet as singer with the poet as painter. Not until Album of Destiny does he reconcile the two roles to the extent that he stops talking in terms of either-or.

In Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow Stuart conducts what appears to be a running commentary on his role as poet, and although there is no assurance that the poems are arranged in any particular order, the progression of comments does reveal Stuart's shifting concept of himself from that of singer or painter to that of singer and painter. After the initial identifications in the first three sonnets--the farmer poet, his subjects and the nature of his song--there is an apparent groping or probing for the craftsmanship that characterizes Album of Destiny. At the outset the poet is very much the singer: "This land is mine, I sing of it to you" (p. 6). The singer of land is also the singer of people: "These are my people and I sing of them" (p. 20). He knows the nature of his song: "The song is in my heart enough to sing,/ A little song to fit this pasture world" (p. 36).

The next group of references in Stuart's commentary pertains to his words. "My words," he says, "are wind-words

lying on the land" (p. 74). Earlier he has said to his father that words "are facts as stars are facts" (p. 29). One cannot place his hands on the stars either. The figure of speech, on the other hand, indicates much about Stuart's attitude toward words. The star and the word are beautiful, but both remain for the most part mystifying. The next reference to words concerns what the poet does with them: "Trying with words to mock a bird that sings" (p. 114). The job of the poet, as indicated here, is to reproduce the bird's song, not to write about the bird.

From the beginning of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow references to the poet's art diminish in number, and throughout most of the book the poet practices his craft without commenting upon it. It is not until near the end of the book that the poet resumes his commentary. There, in the last section, he presumes himself dead. He is, as a dead man, looking back at life and at his art. The posture of the dead man allows Stuart to make a significant summary of both his life and his art. He addresses the earth:

Earth, I have come to play my little part
Among the lowly folks, for I belong
To them--it is for them I sing my song;
It is for them I give my rustic art. (p. 313)

Many of the poems near the end of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow are addressed to Donald Davidson, who presumably is still living. To Davidson the poet attempts to justify his art:

Once, Davidson, I went to you with lays;
 I read you plow-boy lays no man had heard;
 I read you lays of my kin's rustic ways;
 I read old tunes to you like a fluting bird. (p. 338)

The poet, at this point, is still a singer, affirming that his subject matter has not changed.

The final references in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow are not to song. Rather, they are to the poet's words-- words used in sketching, in drawing, and in making pictures:

No Sir, I never tried to write a book.
 My pencil traced the sounds of high winds blowing
 And sketched a willow-aggravated brook
 And made some pictures of the green grass growing;
 Word-drew a peddler in a thread-bare suit;
 Word-drew a new moon piece of cleared ground;
 It pictured oak-brown leaves and red plum fruit;
 White windy skies and water's lonely sound. (p. 347)

The last reference also concerns the poet's words. In it Stuart is still trying to justify his art, and is defending himself against accusations concerning his borrowings:

Don Davidson, if I have stolen words
 To write in books, you must erase my name;
 For words to me were big as skies to birds
 And rhymes beat in my head hot as a flame.
 Don Davidson, I did not ask them come.
 But I sat by the plow and wrote them down.
 I rhymed them to the slow beat of a drum
 And to the whirs of dead leaves drifting down.
 Why should I steal my words from books, I ask?
 I carried brains and baskets filled with words;
 I spun my rhymes--(To me it was no task)--
 Words were to me I've said as skies to birds.
 If ever I stole words from some dead poet,
 Since I am dead I do not want to know it. (p. 348)

The shift in emphasis is from song via the word at the beginning of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow to the picture via the word at the end. In either case, Stuart recognizes that the word is the artistic medium. By the end of the book he is

obviously thinking of pictures to be hung in his W-Hollow gallery. In practice Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow proved to be a book of adjustment. The art of picturing explored there is finally perfected in Album of Destiny.

The images in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow are produced primarily in four ways: 1.) by naming the sense appealed to and sometimes the object referred to, 2.) by using various rhetorical figures or devices, 3.) by placing objects in a context and naming them there, and 4.) by simply naming objects in lists or catalogues, producing a panoramic effect.

The sense appealed to is often named in a simple statement: "I love to hear the foxes slipping by" (p. 206). There are numerous examples of the poet's loves and hates. He hates, he says, "to see a dead rat in the rain" (p. 207), and loves "the smell of dead leaves in the rain" (p. 207). He loves to hear the "sounds of rabbits' feet upon dead leaves" (p. 337). There are also images of touch: "I love to break the tall weeds with my feet/ And tramp pokeberry stalks and cresses under" (p. 131). In another place he says, "We walk barefooted on mulch in the field" (p. 7). He feels and smells dead oak leaves (p. 149). He places his hands upon "green, growing weeds," and finds his life in touching them (p. 125). His cornfield images appeal to a number of the senses:

When jewelled-dew drops from the blades of corn
 It's fine to hear a fresh breeze oozing through,
 Filled with the fragrance of the silking corn,
 Kissed by the dew a-dripping from the corn-- (p. 8)

The following account of an experience in the woods is filled with images of touch, sight, and sound:

I put my hands against your leaves and feel
 The tender ribs that hold heart-shapes to leaves,
 I kick the last-year dead-leaves with my feet;
 I put my hands to cold green bark on trees.
 I hear the willows swishing in the wind;
 I see the white clouds floating in the brook;
 I see September's leaves now drifting in
 The briars-- (p. 143)

Stuart writes in the first person, and in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow Stuart the poet and Stuart the man are never far apart. Stuart the man also delights in sensuous encounter with the natural things of his milieu.

The rhetorical figures in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow are numerous. Stuart's imagery depends heavily on similes, metaphors, and symbols,³ and the figures often make use of commonplace objects. For example, stones are "dishpans with their bottoms up," and a quarter moon is a "brass drinking cup" (p. 105). Elsewhere the moon is a "block of white-ash wood caught in the leaves" (p. 160), and the poet, presuming himself to be dead, is "a gray stone lying in the grass" (p. 168). Dogwood trees are ships which "spread their white

³Whether the symbol is a rhetorical figure or not makes little difference here. As indicated earlier, it relies for its effect upon a concept of polarization similar to that in the metaphor. For that reason, it need not be treated as distinctly different. The matter of recurrence can be, and often is, a highly subjective thing.

sails" (p. 70), and the grave is "Earth's jail-house behind the heavy doors" (p. 314). The wind is a "blowing bellows" (p. 277), and death is an "uninvited guest" who drives a surrey pulled by two black horses (p. 279). The dead people buried in Plum Grove Cemetery are a "thousand seeds" of which "never one will sprout" (p. 234).

Stuart has many ways of "imaging" life. It is "a stream flowing toward the sea" (p. 107). It is also the season of a flower from blossom to decay (p. 16). At other times life is a furrow made by a plow (p. 18), and a young man is "an oak bud bursting into bloom" (p. 268). Equally as impressive are Stuart's images of death and the dead person. In addition to those listed above, there is the crushed petal (p. 270), the drawing of a curtain (p. 37), a trip down the hill, and the coming of autumn (p. 346). Death may also be symbolized by the falling of a leaf or a journey west, but an extensive treatment of Stuart's symbolism is beyond the scope of the present study.

Stuart's pictures are scenes, a composite of which make up the pastoral world of W-Hollow. The following fire-side scene is one of the very few instances in which he takes the reader inside a house or any other building:

And cozily we sat by our fireside
 And ate of corn and supped of berry-wine;
 We sat and let the snow-bound world drift outside;
 We sat and watched through frosted window panes
 The snow flakes drifting through green tops of pines.
 (p. 6)

The scene is a miniature of Whittier's "Snowbound," and

possesses something of the nostalgia of that poem. Equally as rare as his indoor scenes are Stuart's attempts to capture facial or physical features of any one individual. Portraits of people are either missing or are greatly exaggerated in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. About as close as the poet ever comes to painting such a portrait is represented by this attempt by an old mountaineer to describe God:

I wot my God Almighty smoked a pipe,
And with his bony fingers combed and wiped
The backer ashes from his long white beard.
God Almighty was a little man, I heerd-- (p. 55)

Such a portrait is delightful because of the mountain dialect, and because of the details--bony fingers, tobacco ashes, and white beard--that could be used in describing the mountaineer himself. God is humanized in terms of the mountaineer's own existence.

Stuart paints best when he is looking at natural scenes. Such pictures as the one of birds flying south (p. 10) and the one of pansies growing among chips of cowdung (p. 111) are impressive because of their sensuous detail. They are compact and concentrated scenes. The following sonnet, by contrast, paints a scene that is more comprehensive:

The multi-colored leaves are dying now,
Some hang like golden jewels to the bough,
And with the wind the pretty leaves go flying,
Over fields empty and forgotten now.
And in the wind the bare tree-tops are sighing,
Rabbits have found new drifts for sleeping now
Where briars have caught the leaves and held them down,
Cattle sleep now beneath the green pine bough
When there is not room in the stack and mow,

And cattle bed on dead leaves drifted down
 In briars--And overhead day-drifting skies
 Are filled with flying leaves and wild-bird cries.
 The birds at night sleep in the shocks of fodder
 On rugged hills beside the Sandy water. (p. 11)

The poet attempts to unify the scene with the leaf, or with leaves, but whether all of the details stay on the canvas is questionable. They likely do not. He might have succeeded had he started with the cattle bedded on the ground and then proceeded to paint around them.

The sonnet form, for a painter-poet, has distinct advantages. For the narrator of incidents, as Stuart learned even before Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, the sonnet is suitable for purposes of compression, limiting greatly the number of details in any one incident. The incident recounted, in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, often becomes the scene painted, and it was the recognition of this as a possibility that brought about Stuart's increased emphasis on scene-painting. The sonnet form--the rectangular shape that appears on paper--very much resembles the shape of the painter's canvas, making it easy for the poet to think of himself as a painter. The sonnet, for Stuart, became a field to be filled, and although it did not allow him to abandon words and turn to the pure poetry found only in the objects of nature, it did allow him to think and to construct with things rather than with words foremost in the mind. The problems for one who paints with words are numerous. Line, balance, and proportion must remain highly

suggestive rather than controlled. And for Stuart, this proved to be beneficial. He learned to paint by suggestion, as Whitman had done; that is, he learned to fall back on Emerson's idea that each word could be a poem. He learned that by listing or juxtaposing his words he could paint a scene. He learned that a list of words could signify a list of objects or things, and that by selecting and arranging his words in sequence, he could exercise considerable control over his painting.

Stuart compiles many lists in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. He fills sonnet after sonnet with lists of things that he hates, loves, sees, hears, smells, wants or does not want. One sequence on leave-taking alone contains eleven sonnets in which he simply lists things, naming his W-Hollow milieu into existence (pp. 339-344). He categorizes people who are buried in Plum Grove Cemetery:

Here sleep the good and bad and rich and poor,
The sinister wife, the maid, the wretch and whore;
The soldier, farmer, merchant, and the thief; (p. 271)

The titles on the grave markers constitute a different list:

Some have grave markers giving their brief past;
Telling their titles such as husbands, wives,
Sisters, uncles, aunts, and brothers, mothers,
Soldiers and infant sons and infant daughters. (p. 236)

There are other listings of these Plum Grove dead, and each time the titles change to fit the immediate context.

The lists often contain highly sensuous detail, as in this list of things seen:

I see the blood of autumn in the wind,
The wine-red blood of apple tree and peach;
The yellow blood of poplar tree and beech;
I see the blood of autumn drifting in
The fence rows and the stools of green briar
thickets;
I see trees still a-bleeding down red drops;
Black-oak, birch, elm, black gum; from their
tall tops
The blood drips like fresh water from old spickets.
(p. 217)

As the first and last lines indicate, such a listing does not exclude using figures of speech, but rather may encourage it, depending somewhat upon the purpose behind the listing. The list itself may consist of practical things like tools:

And we must gather now the rakes and plows,
And mattocks, spades, pitchforks, and garden hoes,
Stack them away just as the summer goes; (p. 184)

The list may consist of different kinds of one thing, such as different kinds of leaves:

The sourwood leaves hang clustered red as blood,
The dogwood leaves are falling to the ground,
The poplar leaves drift in a windy flood,
From their tall tops drift slowly to the ground.
(p. 183)

Stuart sometimes uses the same sonnet to narrate an incident and paint a picture. In this sonnet, for example, Elizabeth's coming late is an appropriate occasion for listing flowers:

You came too late to see us, my Elizabeth,
Wild roses by the rocks have lost their bloom;
And their soft petals now have curled beneath
The barren stems to meet a dead-leaf doom.
You came too late to see the blood-root in
White blooms along the worm rail fence corners;
Too late to see wild yuccas in the wind--
You came too late to see wild lady's-fingers.

But you are here to see the wild larkspur;
 Blue beggar lice, and wild wind-loved jonquils.
 You have come to my Kentucky where
 The goldenrod are turning on the hills.
 Susans are yellow as a brush-pile flame;
 You have come late, but I am glad you came. (p. 166)

In addition to what it says the poem is highly suggestive with implications of Elizabeth's coming late found in the flowers.

The following is one of the sonnets of leave-taking. In what appears to be a random listing, Stuart paints his pastoral world:

Farewell to birds a-roosting in the fodder;
 Farewell to naked hills with white-rock seams,
 To black leaves drifting on the slushy water;
 Farewell to all my native hills and streams--
 The dark hills there against the threatening skies;
 And cold white leghorn chickens in dark trees;
 The trains of crows and their soft searching cries,
 Farewell to all and cold snakes under leaves;
 Farewell to ragweed fields where rabbits hide
 And high rock cliffs where foxes make their dens;
 Farewell to straw-pens where the quails abide;
 Farewell to smoke from huts of hunting men;
 Farewell to winter winds that make their moan;
 Farewell to families by their warm hearthstone.
 (p. 189)

Surely, such a poem indicates that Stuart is the poet as Namer, but he is more than that. For each object named he also names a characteristic feature, which leads to a characteristic relationship. The characteristic relationship, in turn, not only gets more objects into the picture but also gives each object an appropriate context. For example, "crows" roost in "fodder," "hills" have "white-rock seams," and "leaves" drift on "water." Things named are characterized in more detail by the word in the position of

the adjective. The "hills" are "naked," the "leaves" are "black," the "water" is "slushy," the "skies" are "threatening," and the crows have "cries" that are "soft" and "searching." Such details have significant sensuous appeal and impose definite limitations and restrictions upon the reader. Smoke, for example, is necessarily very general, but smoke "from the huts of hunting men," in contrast to smoke from the smoke-stacks of steel mills and iron foundries, is what one would expect in a pastoral world. Through naming the objects, relating the objects, and qualifying the relationships, Stuart, in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, paints the pictures that hang in his W-Hollow gallery.

In assessing imagery in Album of Destiny one need look at what Stuart has said about the book as well as what he has done in it. When he wrote it, he was most certainly thinking of the book as a picture-gallery containing five groups of paintings: "This was the idea for my book. Take these people whose photographs had been made in the spring-time of their lives and write portraits of them in verse."⁴ He planned four portraits of them, he says, to show what happened to them as the years passed. The idea, then, was that there be more than one album or picture-gallery. There were to be four albums of pictures of the same people and a final album devoted to their children. When his portraits

⁴"Why I Think Album Is My Best," p. 32.

were completed, they would represent the stages of man's life, the seasons of the year, and through representing the children in an album of their own he would complete the ancient life-death-resurrection pattern. As Stuart himself says, each additional album after the first was to show "what happened to them."⁵ Stuart wanted to get away from painting still lifes and to produce in their stead a cinematic effect that would correspond to the panoramic quality that he had learned how to produce in the individual poem by listing or cataloguing physical details. Album of Destiny, as Stuart planned it, would be a "moving picture" in which the reader saw one generation grow up and finally die off, much in the way that a leaf or flower does. The picture, however, would not stop there. It was to have no end, as does the film at a cinema. It would simply start all over again in a "resurrected spring."

Stuart apparently believed that he could accomplish what he had planned. He shifted the voice, replacing that of the poet with the voices of the fifty characters in the portraits. The characters talk to and about each other. Furthermore, the running commentary that is so much before the reader in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow all but disappears in Album of Destiny, suggesting that the poet was more willing to let his art redeem itself. What commentary there is belongs to the characters, and not to the poet. For example,

⁵"Why I Think Album Is My Best," p. 33.

Worth Sutton, in one instance, says to his brother Randall:

My songs come from the stubble and the flower;
 They come from cornfield dirt and fighting blood.
 My songs come from the thrush note and the shower,
 From the green ragweed blood in solitude.
 These are American songs, for in my moods
 I sing America from American blood,
 With words that drip with blue Kentucky mud.⁶

6

AD, 213. There is little point in indicating titles for the poems in Album of Destiny. Titles are captions that give directions, something like the directions that one would expect in a play script. The caption for this poem, for example, is "Worth to Randall," and for the next one it is "Araminta Sutton to Worth." Such directions are best given in the text. Titles that might be of some value to the reader will be indicated.

In Album of Destiny Stuart experiments lavishly with dialogue and with the poem as drama. The following dialogue between a mother and her son relies on the playwright's convention of labeling the change in speakers:

MILLIE SEYMORE FRAINWOOD AND HER SON

Son: Mother, you said my Daddy would be home
 Before the yard was green with grass again.
 The yard is green, why hasn't Daddy come?
 And when he comes, will Daddy ride the train?
 Mother: My Son, your Daddy is somewhere at sea
 And he'll be home soon as the war is won.
 Son: Then Daddy will come home to you and me!
 Mother: Yes, yes, your Daddy will be home, my Son.
 Son: And when he comes I want to meet the train,
 Show him my dog, my marbles and my gun!
 Mother: When he comes home we'll go to meet his train;
 Your Daddy will be proud of you, his Son!
 Voice: Mother, you know your husband won't be home,
 Only four Frainwoods fight for Liberty;
 Your son will wait and wait for him to come...
 Two Frainwoods fell on land, one lost at sea!
 (p. 250)

There is need for a study of dramatic technique in Album of Destiny. Such a study, however, is beyond the scope of the present work.

In the next sonnet Araminta Sutton replies:

Sing out, wild heart! Sing in your windy mood,
 Sing to the playful wind, sing your gay song,
 Sing out, wild blood, sing songs of your wild blood;
 Sing out, sing gay, sing, sing, go sing your song.
 This is your life, this is your native land;
 These are your hills, your rivers, and your bottoms.
 Sing out your songs, your people, and your land,
 Through winters, springs, the summers and the
 autumns.
 Sing, sing, of ox carts, wagon wheels, and plows,
 Sing of the little world where you belong,
 The round-log shacks, cornfields, mules, and
 spotted cows.
 Sing, poet, sing, sing, sing wildly wild your song.
 Remember song was in you from beginning,
 Back in your sires in drinking and in sinning.

(p. 213)

References such as these have no weight as commentary on the poet's art. Rather, they are musical interludes, celebrations in which the significance of song lies in the activity of singing in much the same way that the significance of life lies in the activity of living. The same kind of significance is found in the activity of the dance:

On with the dance though time be slivered glass!
 On with the dance until the break of day!
 On with the dance before we mortals pass! (p. 104)

Here the dance is symbolic of life, and the significance of either is simply that of being in it.

Worth Sutton's "words that drip with blue Kentucky mud" are, as he says, the words that belong to the songs of an old agricultural or frontier America--songs of frontier America arrested in Stuart's W-Hollow. Araminta and Worth both list the objects belonging to that frontier world. It is a pastoral world, and so much so that Stuart tries to

capture it in one symbolic portrait:

FOR VOLGARES WELCH

Young shepherd with your sheep in tumbled hills,
Whistle your tunes soft as the spring winds cry
Among pine fingers, over April rills
Where wild white-breasted birds go winging by
With sedgegrass straws to build in stools of
briars.

Shepherd of tumbled hills, your cloud-white flock
Nipping the thin grass by the rusted wires
And climbing high upon the jagged rock
To whet away the hoofs they do not need...
And rustle sourwood leaves of purplish-red
And cool the flock, for night does not come soon.
Whistle your tunes, young Shepherd, to your flock
In tumbled hills before you have to keep
Vigil for lambs and ewes from dog and fox
Corraled on the highest peak in quiet sleep.

(p. 244)

Using the shepherd and his sheep, conventions of the ancient pastoral, the poet paints in miniature a telling portrait of his Album of Destiny.

In Album of Destiny, as in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, Stuart often names the sense, and there are often lists of things loved, hated, seen, heard, smelled, and touched. Luster Stark, lying in bed and listening to sounds that come from outside, hears the "rattle in the green leaves' throats" (p. 41) and Wincie Sutton says to Worth:

The monotone of rain you love to hear,
Drops beat the dirt like drums far in the night.
You love to put your hands on the green tree
And feel the ooze of water on the bark. (p. 214)

The hand feeling the "ooze of water" on the bark of the "green tree" is powerful in its direct sensuous appeal.

John Sutton lists the things that he loves to smell, again

identifying the poet as Namer.⁷ In one poem the list includes goldenrod, stagnant water, mushrooms, buttercups, needle-and-the-thread, sassafras, vines, possum grapes, wild honey-suckle winds, chigger-daisies, wilted corn, and rotten apples (p. 78).

The ultimate for the reader is that he be able to stand at a distance and view himself among--and examining--the objects. That would be to escape the words, to get beyond language and vicarious experience, and to the point of experiencing the world of physical objects firsthand. In order to make the objects more accessible to the reader, Stuart has his characters view each other among the objects, and talk to each other as though they were not only there, but as though they could be nowhere else. John, for example, sees his wife Kathaleen as an extension of the objects around her: "You, lithe, blue-eyed with golden wheat-straw hair,/ You with your fine-curved lips and leaf-tan face" (p. 79). Jack Porter, with his image of the path, illustrates the problem that exists for Stuart the poet: "The path that leads me to my highland home/ Has left its twisted image on my brain" (p. 148). The world of the real path is a hard

⁷The section of poems entitled "Songs of the Summer Sun" constitutes one long list of names of things found in Stuart's W-Hollow. This section of Album of Destiny alone is convincing evidence of the extent to which Stuart had come to think of himself as the Namer and Sayer of words. Further, it is also evidence of the extent to which he had come to rely on panoramic imagery, that is, in simply naming the objects in a list and thereby evoking sensuous response.

physical world. The world of the image on the brain is a world apart. Somewhere between the two worlds there must exist a bridge, and for the poet the bridge is language. As Stuart knows, one learns in a first course in semantics that the symbol or word is not the thing symbolized.

As his many kinds of lists illustrate, Stuart has examined carefully the possibilities and the limitations of symbolism. Emerson's idea of the word as emblem is illustrated in the following sonnet by one of Stuart's characters who is somewhere in the South Pacific:

DELMAR LANDGRAVES

These are the symbols of the land I love:
 Log cabins on high banks of yellow clay,
 A stream of water threading through a cove,
 Tobacco barn's slow sagging to decay;
 An apple orchard where the rabbits hide
 In greenbriar clusters in the unkept balk,
 A frontyard paling gate that can't swing wide,
 Gnarled shade trees where the old folks sit and talk.
 These are the scenes embedded in my brain:
 The cabin's chimney made of cornfield rocks,
 The sunflowers reaching to the windowpane,
 The garden palings rowed with hollyhocks.
 These are the symbols of the land that's mine,
 Encircled by hills reaching for the sun,
 And friendly fingers of the cliff-grown pine
 That swish clean wind where mountain waters run.
 (p. 227)

It is likely unfair to the poet to talk about such a poem as "Delmar Landgraves" without considering the complete poem, including versification. In the first place the poet is obviously composing by line. All except two lines are end-stopped, and the reason is that the line is a unit

containing a single image.⁸ In each of the two exceptions the image is completed in the second line. As the basic unit of composition in the poem, the line not only limits or defines the image, but as the end-stops indicate, it is both a thought unit and a rhythmic unit. The result of such composition is that the images are clearly defined by time. They correspond to the line as a unit of composition, and are completed within the line. Thus the panoramic effect of Stuart's imagery is greatly enhanced.

In Album of Destiny, as in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, Stuart used as many means as he could to get his pictures before the reader. The remarkable thing is that he still did not manage to paint lines into the faces of any of his characters. Jackie Sizemore's description of the devil, a companionpiece to the mountaineer's description of God in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, is about as close as he came:

As sure as God, I know I seen the Devil
A-going up the road, and on his back
He carried a pitchfork, pick, longhandled shovel,
A coffee pot and ragged coffee-sack. (p. 100)

Stuart seems incapable of seeing people as people. As in Jim Higgin's description of Murt Higgins, the person being painted gets lost:

⁸Also excepted are lines one, nine, and thirteen. These, breaking the sixteen-line sonnet into octet and two quatrains, group the images and reiterate an expression that has the effect of a refrain.

She was five ten with eyes of dark midnight
 With high cheekbones and hair black as charcoal;
 Her teeth were white as March percoon is white,
 Her fingers tapering limbs of marigold. (p. 153)

The reason for his not being able to see people as people likely lies within his philosophy of Being. Pat Hennessey sees the explanation in the stem of an apple, and explains the apple tree as "maker of a dream":

An apple coming through such slender stem!
 And when my mother came, I stood beside her.
 She was the tree and I was fruit born of her. (p. 93)

As Whitman had done before him, Stuart hurled his ego into the objects he found in nature and came to identify it with the creative processes that he found there. The mysterious creation of an apple through such a slender stem is appropriately symbolic of the mystery of all creation. Woman, too, he says, is "builder of a dream." Significantly, the mystery does not belong to men, for they cannot explain it. Both the mystery and the ego of the poet are wild and primitive, as indicated in this poem from Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow:

The rain falls from the slack-pile heavens to
 An earth that's covered with dead grass and leaves.
 The rain falls down among the barren trees.
 The lightnings scar the heavens--flashes through
 Dark pages of the earth--the grass blades quiver,
 And strong trees bend to reckless elements.
 Ah, I would love to say: Storm rage forever!
 I love to see your lightning cut the sky!
 I'd love to see your naked woods washed clean!
 I love to hear your wind and waters cry!
 I love that cool incessant monotone;
 This would make me go wild and live alone!
 The passionate surging of the elements!
 Surgings like passions of primitive men! (p. 156)

Here too, after line six, the poet composes by line. The last three lines make clear what there is in the raging storm that attracts the poet. In Freudian terms the ego, which is primitive and wild, is held in check or civilized through some mysterious interaction with the id and the superego. The poet, nevertheless, sees himself as belonging there--there in the "passionate surging of the elements." The passions of the elements are like those of primitive men, we are told. They are like those of Stuart's ancestors--those "tall figures of the earth" who fought back the wilderness.

A quick glance at line five opens up many new possibilities for exploration. Not only is the ego of the poet to be identified with the storm, but so is his poetry. The earth is a book, and for Stuart poetry exists in that which is alive to the senses--beyond words. In the passionate surging of the storm one finds the image. It is there that the poet, in the process of discovering himself among the objects, catches a fleeting glimpse of what he really is. After the storm, there remains only the "image on the album of the brain." From that image the poet creates his own storm, one that is to be experienced vicariously by others. To say that the poet's storm is the storm in nature would be misleading. As Stuart knows, a lion in the cage is not the same as a lion in the jungle.

CHAPTER V

THE SYLLABLE AS KING: A SEARCH FOR FORM

Prosody is the musical element in poetry, and versification is the poet's means of measuring his music into units that can be repeated for the sake of similarity and at the same time varied for the sake of contrast. According to Karl Shapiro, "When poetry shows--as it need not--some sort of definite regularity in prosodic form--some pattern of lines, pitches, quantities, or stresses, for example--the result is verse."¹ The syllable is doubtlessly the kingpin of versification even though it is not the syllable alone but its relationship to other syllables that gives it its value. Syllables, depending upon the nature of their relationship, combine to make feet, but the foot has no independent existence either. The foot's existence is always determined by its relationship to other feet, and it is in this relating of the foot to other feet that the poet composes the line. Within the line each stressed syllable has its own peculiarities, only one of which is position. In the line pattern itself is static and graphic, but rhythm is dynamic, possessing movement and life. Because this is the case, the Russians say, "Verse is organized violence committed

¹Karl Shapiro and Robert Beum, A Prosody Handbook (New York, 1965), p. 6.

on everyday language."²

A poet's verse techniques depend very much upon his concept of the poem, and upon his concept of the poet's function. Stuart's concept of the poem remains ambiguous. It is something in the wind, in the trees, and can apparently exist anywhere. In The Year of My Rebirth he speaks of a medical report as a poem: "More than any poem I had ever written, it sang with life" (p. 287). Although the statement was made while Stuart was recovering from a severe heart attack, it deserves careful consideration. As indicated earlier, the poem as Stuart conceives of it is beyond words. "Oh, What a Poem I Am In" comes as close as anything else Stuart has written to explaining his concept of the poem. The rhythms in "Oh, What a Poem I Am In" are not the rhythms of words or of language; at least Stuart does not intend them to be. He intends them to be the rhythms of living things in the world of nature. The poet in the poem also "sings with life." The poem attempts to capture the harmony that characterizes all things composing the essential oneness of the universe.

Equally as ambiguous as Stuart's concept of the poem is his concept of the function of the poet. For Stuart the poet is both a singer and a painter. Even though the poet may appear to be more one than the other in any particular

²René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York, 1956), p. 171.

poem, Stuart's Album of Destiny makes it fairly clear that the poet is always both. As painter and singer he is a recorder. The painter's concern for visual representation finds its fulfillment in the singer's concern for the representation of sounds; that is, the two are necessarily complementary and not mutually exclusive. The idea of recording is consistent with Stuart's role as chronicler, with his getting a place and its people on record once and for all. In this sense what he writes is not so much poetry as it is a record of poetry. Like Whitman, he seems never to have been sure about what it is that he wants from the primal force, but it appears to be very like what Whitman expresses in "Had I the Choice":

These, these, O sea, all these I'd gladly barter,
 Would you the undulation of one wave, its
 trick to me transfer,
 Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,
 And leave its odor there.³

Stuart has recently written, "When the ideas for poems come upon you, stop everything and let them enter. Then, record them."⁴ The statement contains two important considerations. First, the ideas for poems "come." As Stuart has said in an interview with Everetta Blair, "The writing just comes out of me. I have never tried to develop a style.

³Quoted in F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (London, 1941), p. 565.

⁴Letter to the writer, September 2, 1969. See the Appendix.

I just feel the compulsion to write and I write."⁵ The second consideration is that of being a recorder, and Stuart has said in many places that he is recording the lives of the people he knows.⁶ Neither of the two considerations need appear farfetched--especially when one compares what Stuart says to similar statements made by Eliot and Whitman. Stuart speaks of a medium:

Poetry, how can these wonderful human beings pass?
Can't we get a few in song? I am just your medium.
You flow through my veins and through the gateway of
my brain. How can we let them pass, people of my
generation, I have learned to know and love? Can't
we catch a fleeting glimpse of them as they pass from
the fluffy green of spring to the dying autumn grass?
Can't we do these things while it is my season and
my generation before the glorious or the tragic end!
(BDH, p. 385)

One must ponder such a passage at some length. Certainly Stuart thinks of himself as the inspired poet for whom writing is a compulsion. Time and again he insists that poetry controls the poet, that it crowds its way into the "album of the brain." His metaphor of the album appears to have much in common with Eliot's metaphor from chemistry: "The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together."⁷ Stuart could have written

⁵ Quoted in Blair, Jesse Stuart: His Life and Works, p. 45.

⁶ "Autobiographical Reminiscence," p. 59. Such references are actually quite numerous.

⁷ "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays (New York, 1950), p. 8.

this statement from the Preface to Whitman's 1855 Edition of Leaves of Grass: "The great poet has less a mark'd style and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself."⁸ As Stuart says in the above quotation, being a medium is made necessary by a realization that one's loves are constantly threatened by mutability. Even though he developed an ontological scheme in which there is no loss or waste, there is always change, and the greatest of changes--the most persistent of Stuart's preoccupations--is death.

Knowing, however, that the "image on the album of the brain" of a dead poet is of no avail to anyone, Stuart has continued to write. Often criticized but seldom explained, he has insisted on tracing⁹ forms in nature. In several

⁸Complete Poetry and Prose, II, 274.

⁹See MWBTP, p. 347. The two sonnets there contain considerable information about Stuart's attitude toward his craft. There is always the possibility that the mask of the poet is not serious, but as early as Beyond Dark Hills Stuart was saying that life, even for the writer who devotes his life to writing, cannot be gotten from a book (BDH, p. 109). In the first of the two sonnets from MWBTP he says that it is life that he tries to put into a book, although he admits that he himself has never seen a brook or a "wind-grass tambourine" in any book. Because a book contains no life, it is word-stuff, he says, to be bought and sold. He poses the question of why one writes a book and answers it with two questions: "Why do the stars give light?/ Why does the body's heart keep pumping?" In the second of the two sonnets Stuart uses a number of words--trace, sketch, paint, picture, and word-draw--in an effort to explain how he tries to get life into his writing. It is life that he wants. As he says, that is where the poem is--in life. Insisting that life cannot be gotten from a book, he resorts to tracing the forms he has found in nature. The idea of tracing is appropriate, for Stuart wants to trap life or cage it with the poem. Like Whitman, he yearns for something to breathe the breath of life into his work.

instances he has deliberately cultivated the idea that he is artless, insisting that it is life rather than art that interests him. He has said, for example, "I cannot write anything according to pattern."¹⁰ At Princeton University he told an audience that he could not scan verse at the time he wrote Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow.¹¹ Although such a statement tends to startle, it need not do so, at least when one compares it to similar statements made by other poets. Eliot, for example, says, "I have never been able to retain the names of feet and metres, or to pay proper respect to the accepted rules of scansion."¹² In organic poetry the form comes from within, and in spite of his use of conventional forms this seems to be what Stuart's tracings are all about. He doesn't write about such things as versification, and he doesn't talk about them. After all, he says, "Writing is the last thing one who actually writes wants to talk about."¹³ Poetry just comes, and Stuart has never been willing to say much more than that. "When words come," he says, "I write. I do not

¹⁰"When Not to Take Advice," p. 11.

¹¹Foster, Jesse Stuart, p. 157.

¹²"The Music of Poetry," p. 18.

¹³"Please Mr., No More Mss.," Saturday Review, XXXXII (October 17, 1959), 16.

write until the moods occur; then I cannot control myself."¹⁴

Eliot viewed the Twenties and Thirties as a period in which poets were searching for a proper modern colloquial idiom.¹⁵ Spearheaded by the Imagists, it was a time in which being a poet became synonymous with being a craftsman.

Stuart too, as indicated by his courtships in Harvest of Youth (and in spite of what he has said to the contrary), wanted to be a craftsman. He courted the writers of vers libre, the Imagists, the Symbolists, the Traditionalists, and other groups. His courtships were legion, but none of them lasted. When he came home from Vanderbilt in 1932 he had decided, he says, to end the courtship for craft: "I decided to be what I am."¹⁶ Blair says, "The young Stuart [the Stuart of Harvest of Youth] experimented lavishly with verse forms with results that were interesting and sometimes dramatic."¹⁷ There is little doubt that he was searching for idiom, and he finally found it in the speech of the people in W-Hollow and the surrounding area. One sees in Stuart's juvenilia an early beginning at trying to strike

¹⁴"Autobiographical Reminiscence," p. 59.

¹⁵"The Music of Poetry," p. 32.

¹⁶Letter to Ruel Foster, May 17, 1963. Quoted in Jesse Stuart, p. 54.

¹⁷Jesse Stuart: His Life and Works, p. 68.

some kind of functional balance between the forms of tradition and the speech patterns of his own people.

Because some of the work in Harvest of Youth goes back to when Stuart was sixteen, one can hardly expect it to show any great accomplishment. What it does show is something of the seriousness with which the young poet experimented. The first poem in the collection is presented here in its entirety because it is in many ways typical of early Stuart.

HOUSE ON THE HILL

What's become of the house on the hill?
Weeds choke the corn; the garden's dead;
The burdock grows at the rotting sill;
Smart weeds grow in the tulip bed
Life too has grown curiously still
Since something is wrong on the hill.

Last spring we knew how Lucy kept
The yards alive, the hedge in trim,
The garden clean, the walkways swept,
And how she did the chores for him
Who worked till nine before he slept:
The way man passes time unwept.

Now John is dead since Lucy died.
Once things went well and he went right,
But then he wed the other bride
Who snarls him with her subtile might.
He never says a gay good-night,
He pauses time in moody light.

She grew so wily she would dare
To go to town and go alone
With Lucy's tulips in her hair.
Since she had now some bolder grown
John sat at home and sat alone
Obeying her defiant tone.

She thought that Lucy's ways were vain.
What Lucy did she would not do.
She found his faults with much disdain;
He lost heart trying, lost her too:

His fate was near. He fell into
Strange company and careless grew.

While now he drinks to drown his care;
One life he thinks--I live today--
He dreams of her in the old house there
A girl so different to his way.
Strange to think people would say:
"He'll be alright with her away."

Here's what's wrong with the house on the hill:
Why the corn's unkept and the garden dead;
Why burdock grows at the rotting sill;
Why smart weeds grow in the tulip bed;
The saloon is his desire for ill
Since her white body haunts him still.
(pp. 13-14)

Such expressions as "wed the other bride" and "careless grew" stand out as violations of what is otherwise a poem of colloquial diction. What one can notice with profit, however, is that Stuart counted syllables at an early age. In some lines there are seven and in others there are nine, but usually there are eight. He appears to have been aware of common conventions for measuring within the line. The second stanza relies heavily for its rhythms upon the iamb:

L̄ast sprīng | we knēw | how Lū | cy kēpt
The yārd̄s | alivē, | the hēdgē | in trīm,
The gār | den clēan, | the wālk | wāys swēpt,
And hōw | she dīd | the chōres | for hīm
Who wōrkēd | till nīnē | befōre | he slēpt:
The wāy | mān pās̄s | es tīmē | unwēpt.

There are likely three spondees; otherwise the iambs seem quite regular. When he crowds nine syllables into the line, the result is some anapests:

Whāt's | becōme | of the house | on the hill?

The last stanza is especially interesting. The first line is difficult to scan:

Hēre's | whāt's wrōng | with the house | on the hill:

The line can be read so that the first four syllables consist of two dactyls and the last five of an iamb followed by an anapest, but such a reading seems unlikely. The second line has ten syllables:

Why | the cōrn's | unkept | and the gār | den deā;

An alternate reading could be anapest-iamb-anapest-iamb. Again, such a reading seems unlikely.

One also finds in this early poem Stuart's tendency to pause or use the caesura in the middle of the line, and at the end. The two stresses on either side of the caesura are somewhat reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon strong-stress, even though the Anglo-Saxon line was highly alliterative and could have any number of unaccented syllables:

She thought | that Lū | cy's wāys | were vāin.

What Lū | cy dīd | she wōuld | not dō.

She found | his fault̄s | with much | disdain;

He | lōst heart | trȳing, | lōst hēr | too:

His fatē | was nēar. He fēll | intō

Strānge cōm | panȳ | and carē | less grēw.

At least four things that are evident here become important to Stuart later. First, the heavy end-stopping becomes characteristic of his treatment of the line. Second, as in

the first two lines, the sentence and the line often correspond. And third, the center of the line is used, with the last half often consisting of a modifying clause or phrase. Finally, the stanza indicates something of the importance of rhyme to Stuart's early verse. A stanzaic analysis of "House on the Hill" shows rhyme to be regular. The pattern used is ABABBB. All rhymes in "House on the Hill" are masculine, although Stuart resorts to various kinds of rhymes elsewhere in his early poems. His verse has always contained small words and short sentences. A preponderance of monosyllables tends to force the poet to rhyme the last stressed syllable, which in Stuart's case is usually the last word in the line.

The remainder of the poems in the first section of Harvest of Youth--except "Lilac Elegy," "Sleep," and "For Warriors Dead"--are all done in quatrains. "What There Is to an Old House" is done in four-three measure, and the rhyme scheme is ABAB. It probably isn't regular enough to be considered common measure, and the repetends, along with the refrain, convince the reader that Stuart is trying the stanza form that Coleridge used in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." He is, in effect, trying the literary ballad. "Free God" is also done in four-three lines with an ABAB rhyme scheme. Here Stuart is

experimenting with control over the line, as indicated in such quatrains as this one:

I found him in the water;
 I found him in the air;
 I found him in Sinful flesh;
 I found him everywhere. (p. 20)

"Epitaphs" is another exercise in writing the quatrain, as is "I Know the Gypsy Wind too Well." The latter is remarkably regular:

I know | the gyp | sy wind | too well.
 On her | a dream | I made.
 While yes | terday | she blew | me sun,
 To-day | she blows | me shade. (p. 21)

"For Elmer Heaberlin" (p. 20) is done in four-stress lines with only the second and fourth lines rhyming. "Last Lover" (p. 21) and "The Winner" (p. 24) are heroic quatrains--five-stress with an ABAB rhyme scheme--the stanza form used in Gray's "Elegy." "Lilac Elegy" is done in five-stress couplets, most of which are heroic; that is, the couplet is closed rather than enjambed into the following couplet. The couplets are nevertheless grouped by three's, making stanzas of six:

O exiled Mother of Earth! O she is dead!
 The lilac winds are choking in my head.
 And times I may repass this way again
 Music will be recurrent on my brain...
 Malignant hands in the lilac bough
 Never so cold as now. (p. 23)

"Sleep" (p. 24) is five-stress and is one of Stuart's

experimental sonnets.¹⁸ "For Warriors Dead" (p. 24) is irregular, but is basically five-stress with an ABABCD CD rhyme scheme, making it a common octave.

Although the first section of poems in Harvest of Youth is entitled "Out of the Night," and although it strains for an elegiac tone, nowhere is there convincing evidence of a debt to W. E. Henley. On the other hand, the second section of poems is entitled "Slabs from a Sun-Down World," and Stuart has many times admitted his debt to Sandburg. The poems in the second section are very different from those in the first.

RIVER RAILROAD MAN

Shovel under this old river railroad man with
 reverence.
 He slept river nights of his life working
 After days of work on river railroads.
 Now he goes to his long sleep.
 Still, heavy trains sweep on to their destiny
 For his life is in them and lives.
 His blood is in the smoke.
 His blood is in the steel.
 He heard mean winds strike the cold wiring on
 zero mornings.
 And whistle through the lonesome tree tops.
 He heard moaning engines climb steep river grades
 And he heard the click of steel battering steel.
 Now these same sounds that once he heard
 Will continue to whine over his cool tomb

¹⁸"Sleep" also appears in Beyond Dark Hills, p. 160. The two versions are considerably different. The one in Harvest of Youth contains only thirteen lines. That it does likely explains why Stuart included it here rather than in the section of sonnets. In Beyond Dark Hills it is much improved. It contains fourteen lines with a break between the octave and the sextet, and is in effect a sonnet. The differences between the two versions, the extensive revision, and the fact that Stuart did not place it with his other experimental sonnets in Harvest of Youth all afford interesting evidence that Stuart does revise.

Where he will lie cold
And dream of picks and shovels. (p. 27)

Although "River Railroad Man" appears at first glance to amount to so much prose, it is not as formless as it looks. It is doubly important, along with other poems in the section, because it shows Stuart exploring techniques that are unrelated to counting syllables--techniques that eventually become very much a part of his mature work.

The first thing worth attention in the poem is that the lines are grouped into four sections of four lines each, and that each of the four units is tied together by its own repetitions and parallels. The first is unified by a number of devices:

Shovel under this old river railroad man with
reverence.

He slept river nights of his life working

After days of work on river railroads.

Now he goes to his long sleep.

The markings indicate the repetitions of r and s. For larger units of repetition one should look at "river railroad" in lines one and three, at "slept" and "sleep" in lines two and four, at "working" and "work" in lines two and three, at "nights" and "days" in lines two and three, and at "he" and "his" occurring in lines two and four and pointing back to "man" as antecedent in line one.

The "Still" that begins line five marks a transition

from man to trains, and therefore leads to a statement of immortality. The second section is notable for its grammatical parallels:

Still, heavy trains sweep on to their destiny
 For his life is in them and lives.
 His blood is in the smoke.
 His blood is in the steel.

The statement in line two--"his life is in them"--is followed by two lines that are grammatically identical. The result of paralleling so closely is a kind of chanting or rhapsodic effect which Stuart later uses with great skill.

In the third section of the poem there are vowels and consonants repeated, and there are such near-pairs as "mornings-moaning" and "climb-click." Most important is the repetition of the initial "He heard":

He heard mean winds strike the cold wiring
 on zero mornings.
 And whistle through the lonesome tree tops.
 He heard moaning engines climb steep river grades
 And he heard the click of steel battering steel.

The transition is obviously back to the man who heard the sounds, and the reiteration carries over into the last section of the poem:

Now these same sounds that once he heard
 Will continue to whine over his cool tomb
 Where he will lie cold
 And dream of picks and shovels.

Not only does the reiteration of "he heard" carry over.

The sounds referred to in "these same sounds" are found in

the preceding section. One sound is named in each line.¹⁹

Other poems in the free-verse section deserve some attention because of their experimental nature. In "Fantasy in Black," for example, there is an unusual seven-line sentence in which the subject-verb sequence is suspended until line six:

When Tomorrow has come
And Rain and Death
Swish through the doorway
Of the hold I have built against the wind
And the hosts of the air,
There will be but emptiness and night
Since I am an atom and a builder. (p. 27)

The lines are heavily enjambed with only one marked by a comma. What the poem relies on for its effectiveness is the syntactic break. Such breaks are marked by conjunctions and prepositions. The second line is very regular and natural--one stress balanced against another. In the entire sentence the first five lines comprise a subordinate clause which contains its own subordinate elements. The last line is also a subordinate clause. Utilizing syntactic breaks in this way has its advantages, the greatest of which is that the rhythms of the poem are the natural rhythms of the language, provided that the syntax is not distorted.

¹⁹Much more obviously needs to be said about the poem, but the purpose here is merely to indicate something of the nature and scope of Stuart's experiments and to point out techniques that were later developed in his mature poetry. His grouping by lines of four indicates that he has not shaken himself loose from the quatrain as a verse form. On the other hand the prosodic techniques differ from anything in the first section.

"Undulated Season" is a haunting poem, and in it Stuart practices repeating his patterns:

we knew her
but she is gone
we dare not speak of her
we dare not speak for her
since she is gone (p. 29)

Lines two and five parallel closely, and the effectiveness of the parallel is enhanced by another parallel between the two lines in which only the preposition changes. In the next section of the poem Stuart tries the chiasmus:

yellow the winds drift
the winds drift yellow
time is strewn yellow with plum leaves (p. 30)

There are other experiments in how to make a poem without relying on meter that are equally as interesting. "Black April" contains lines in which the poet interchanges two words but retains grammatical balance:

He drove
A white horse with black feet,
A black horse with white feet, (p. 34)

Substituting the positions of single words in this way is very much like what a linguist does when he uses minimal pairs to identify single phonemes. In each pair there are the likenesses, but there is also the one phoneme that differs. It is the contrast that gives the phoneme an identity and thereby marks it as different. "Black April" ends with parallels that depend for their effectiveness upon such a minimal difference:

Life from the richest earth;
 Life from a daring dust;
 April life from the bosom
 Of Flint Sycamore. (p. 37)

Other poems in "Slabs from a Sun-Down World" deserve considerable attention. The third section of the poem "Initial-Scarred Trees" (pp. 37-38) depends upon reiteration for its effectiveness, and the last section builds some complex parallels within and among lines. "Steel Gang" (pp. 38-40) contains a number of reiterations and parallels, as does the poem "My City" (pp. 40-44). The difficulty is that the poems are long and the rhythms of one section often fail in the next. The result is a fluctuation between poetry and prose that hampers the integrity of the entire poem. "Railroad Sounds," shorter than most of the others in the section, is such a poem:

I have heard mean groans of heavy engines
 Striking the emptiness of night.
 And I have heard the drive wheels slipping
 At Black Mountain when the track was sanded.
 Those sounds I have heard and loved.

I have heard the lonesome whistle screaming
 When a bright /sic/ was leading,
 A red light trailing,
 And the naked train moaned with the wind.

I have heard the oozing steam from slick pistons,
 And swinging and banging of box car doors;
 And I have heard the winter winds
 Whip the frozen wiring
 And tear across the bitter sky.
 These sounds I have loved.

But when
 the depot crowd begins to gather
 And the train moves on,
 I hate to hear friend and lovers say:
 "Good-bye till we meet again...Good-bye." (pp. 31-32)

One could likely chop off the last paragraph. Further, the second paragraph seems weaker than the first and the third, both of which have something going for them. The most obvious thing that is going for them is the repetition of "I have heard." In both paragraphs the naming of things heard has the effect of paralleling the lines, and the last sentence in each paragraph, corresponding to the line, makes a useful summary of both the content and the reiterated sounds.

What Stuart learned about versification and prosodic techniques in the first two sections of Harvest of Youth, he combined in the third section, and in doing so produced by far the most valuable phase of his experimentation.

"Sonnets: Juvenilia" contains twenty-five unconventional but thoroughly experimental sonnets. They are mostly fourteen lines,²⁰ and there is no particular division between octave and sextet. The length of the line often varies, and there are various rhyme schemes. Stuart has explained a number of times why he began using the form.²¹ He has

²⁰After Harvest of Youth Stuart varied the number of lines from thirteen to seventeen.

²¹See, for example, "When Not to Take Advice," p. 11. The reasons Stuart gives for beginning to use the sonnet do not explain why he has continued to use it. There are primarily three reasons for his continuing to use it. The first is that he found the sonnet ideal for narrating incidents. How important this became to him is borne out in Beyond Dark Hills (p. 378). A second reason is that he came to think of the sonnet as a visual background or field in which to paint his pictures. A third reason comes to mind here: his early sonnets tend to consist of three quatrains and a couplet, the limits of which are also boundaries for sentences. This also marks them by punctuation.

also been heavily criticized for continuing to use it.

Among the critics are Carl Sandburg:

"Stuart," he said, as he put his arm around my shoulder, "you are a young man with a great talent. Get out of that tight verse form! I cannot connect the sonnet with you! How did you ever start writing in that damn restricted form?"

"Because a man visiting Vanderbilt University when I was a student there told me not to use it," I said.²²

Whatever his reasons for using the form, in it he would find a medium successful enough to make him a widely read poet upon publication of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. In Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow and Album of Destiny combined there are 1,018 of Stuart's unconventional sonnets. Only in the Prologue and the Epilogue to Album of Destiny does one find anything but sonnets until publication of Kentucky Is My Land.

That Stuart deliberately set out to resurrect the sonnet as a form is in itself interesting, and that he cared to preserve only the general lineaments of the traditional form is encouraging. American writers, until the last two or three decades, treated poetic form as grammarians watching

²²For Sandburg's rebuke see "Sandburg, My Hero," pp. 42-43. Stuart may be right about being rebuked at Vanderbilt, but the twenty-five sonnets in Harvest of Youth were written before Vanderbilt as any chronology of Stuart will show. Harvest of Youth was published in 1930; Stuart was at Vanderbilt during the academic year of 1931-1932. He was also rebuked at Lincoln Memorial. He tells in Beyond Dark Hills (pp. 205-206) how an English teacher advised him to get away from "sedge and muddy waters and the night wind." Sandburg, in his rebuke, also told Stuart: "Your stories... are your poetry. You're not hidebound to poetic forms in your stories."

over their rules and insisting that they not be broken. The advent of modern linguistics--insisting on describing what is and prescribing nothing--has had a great impact on shaping attitudes toward language as literary medium, and as Wellek and Warren indicate, toward the whole idea of form.²³ Eliot too has had some influence. In his essay "The Music of Poetry" he recognizes what he calls the "inner unity" of the poem as unique and the "outer unity" as typical. Forms, he says, have to be broken and remade because language is always changing. Eliot sees a necessity for returning to set patterns and forms, but always for the purpose of pulling away. "In a perfect sonnet," he says, "what you admire is not so much the author's skill in adapting himself to the pattern as the skill and power with which he makes the pattern comply with what he has to say."²⁴

In Harvest of Youth Stuart's sonnets are exercises in making the pattern comply, and the first sonnet in the section is in many ways typical of his experiments:

LONELINESS

I still remember when you went away
 On that red morning in the summer drouth,
 When dry winds blew from out the lonely south;
 I still remember all you had to say.

²³See particularly Chapter 12, "The Mode of Existence of a Literary Work of Art," and Chapter 17, "Literary Genres," in Theory of Literature for discussions on formulation by norm.

²⁴On Poetry and Poets, p. 30.

Vines then that draped the cottage wall
 Have turned buff colored in the sun;
 Beech leaves are slowly dropping one by one;
 And south-going birds only stop to call.
 The loneliness and Life's little things bring back
 You to me again. The ghosts of autumn rains
 Tapping the roof, beating the window panes,
 Gambling with Night's deserted waste of black,
 I cannot forget. My life is lost in you
 As azure skies are lost in windless blue. (p. 47)

As the sonnets in Harvest of Youth indicate Stuart experimented widely with rhyme. The rhyme scheme in "Loneliness," ABBA, CDDC, EFFE, GG, is the one he finally settled for. The pattern consists of three brace stanzas and a couplet, and Stuart used it extensively in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow and Album of Destiny. The rhyme begins as that in an Italian sonnet, but the similarity ends at that point. It does aid, and often very effectively so, in grouping the lines into units of four. In "Loneliness," as in many of the other sonnets, punctuation and syntax also help in grouping the lines:

I stiġl | remēm | ber when | you wēnt | away
 On thāt | red morn̄ | ing īn | the sūm | mer drouth,
 When drȳ | wīnds blēw | from out | the lōne | ly south;
 I stiġl | remēm | ber alĪ | you hād | to sāy.

That "I still remember" is repeated in the fourth line, that the second and third lines begin and end on phrasal and clausal juncture points, and that the fourth line repeats the pattern of the first is all convincing evidence that the poet is relying on his extensive exercises in writing

the quatrain. Counting somewhat on metrical accent in scanning, one can also see--considering the syntactical arrangement of each line--that the poet is composing by line. That lines two and three each add an idea to the idea in the first line indicates this also. As the scansion shows, the poet is both measuring lines and grouping the lines into quatrains.

The second quatrain in "Loneliness" contains two significant shifts--one in subject and one in time:

V̄ines then | that dr̄aped | the cōt | t̄age w̄all
 Have t̄urned | buff cōl | ored īn | the sūn;
 Bēech lēaves | are slōw | ly dr̄op | ping ōne | by ōne;
 And sōuth- | gōing | bīrds | only st̄op | to cāl̄l.

The first shift, that of subject, is from "you" going to the conditions or effects of going. The shift in time comes between the second and third lines of the quatrain. The meter is much less regular in this quatrain, and the first two lines are shortened to eight syllables each. As in the first quatrain, the last line here is conclusive.

The third quatrain in "Loneliness" contains some awkward syntax, and all for the sake of forcing the rhyme:

The loneliness and Life's little things bring back
 You to me again. The ghosts of autumn rains
 Tapping the roof, beating the window panes,
 Gambling with Night's deserted waste of black,
 I cannot forget.

Trying to create pauses in the middle of the line, the poet only succeeds in over-running the end of the line, in dis-

rupting the meter, and in forcing rhyme. The third and fourth lines are notably successful because of the inverted foot in what is otherwise a regular pattern of iambs:

Tapping | the roof, | beating | the win | dow panes,

Gambling | with Night's | desert | ed waste | of black,

Placing "I cannot forget," even though it is in the emphatic position in the sentence, so far away from "The ghosts of autumn rains" is not excusable. That the object of the verb comes first is understandable, but prolonging the subject-verb sequence for three lines results in a loss of sense for the entire sentence.

The last two lines--the closing couplet of the sonnet--consist of one sentence, provided that the first part of the first line really belongs to the preceding quatrain:

My life | is lost | in you

As az | ure skies | are lost | in wind | less blue.

The couplet returns to carefully measured lines. The problem of the first line of the couplet in relationship to structuring the last quatrain is easily solved:

The ghosts of autumn rains
Tap on the roof, beat on the window panes,
And gamble with Night's deserted waste of black.
I cannot forget: my life is lost in you
As azure skies are lost in windless blue.

Such a rendering is more consistent with the beginning of the poem. One has no right, of course, to tamper with another man's work in this way. Whether one tampers or not, "Loneliness," considered as three quatrains and a couplet,

contains a progression of thought that may be paraphrased thus: You went away and that has had its effects, but because little things remind me of you I cannot forget.

Sometimes the structuring by quatrain and a closing couplet is enhanced by beginning the first line of each division with the same expression. In "The Wind Has Ways" (p. 55), for example, the first line begins with "The wind has ways," and the fourth begins with "The wind," which is the immediate antecedent for the pronoun beginning line five. Line nine, the first line of the third division, also begins with "The wind has ways," and line twelve begins with "When the wind's way." The closing couplet begins with "The wind's last way." That these reiterations appear where they do very readily breaks the poem into three quatrains and a couplet. This is the case even though the rhyme scheme in "The Wind Has Ways" is Shakespearean. Regardless of the rhymes used, the sonnet very early came to mean three quatrains and a couplet to Stuart.

By the time he did Harvest of Youth Stuart was capable of controlling the iambs throughout the sonnet; "Old Lowland Meadows" (p. 56) is evidence enough of that. Rhyme gave him some trouble, but he learned to use different kinds and to vary the effects. He used feminine rhyme in "Cool Fingers Sloped in Farewell" (p. 50), and he used slant rhyme or near rhyme in "The Wind Has Ways" (p. 55). He varied the lengths of lines from four-stress, as in

"August Night" (p. 48), to six-stress, as in "Calloye" (p. 58).²⁵

Even though the experimental sonnets in Harvest of Youth constitute the best work in Stuart's juvenilia, one can hardly expect them to be greatly accomplished. Experiments are important because they identify a direction and often lead to something better. This appears to be the case with Stuart. He did not discard what he learned about repeating and paralleling in his free-verse experiments. One finds in the sonnets numerous examples of repeating a pattern, and parallels are equally as plentiful:

They see my eyes heavy-lidded, wet with dreams;
They see my candle soul send forth its beams
("My Mountain Home," p. 50)

Not mine the clean white robes that angels wear:
Not mine the stern oblivious paradise...
("Heaven Enough," p. 54)

Can you remember a dread that banished?
A love that faded?...a joy that vanished?
("To Edith," p. 49)

For convincing evidence of successful repetitions of various sizes and kinds one need look at "To Edith" in which "Do you remember" comes at the beginning of lines one and four,

²⁵The French have written the sonnet in Alexandrines, and Hopkins has experimented considerably with them. Stuart, although some lines are Alexandrines, often fails to write with a caesura after the third iamb in the line. It is also interesting that when he composes by quatrain and cuts the lines to four iambs each, he writes in the "In Memoriam" stanza: that is, he does when he uses his preferred rhyme scheme. For a discussion of the use of the Alexandrine by Hopkins and the French see Patrick Cruttwell, The English Sonnet (London, 1966), pp. 48-51.

near the end of seven, and changes to "Can you remember" at the beginning of line thirteen. One should also look at the reiterations in "Heaven Enough" (p. 54), in "It Will Not Matter Much" (p. 55), and in "The Wind Has Ways" (p. 55). In each case the reiterations successfully lend structural unity to the entire poem.

In some of Stuart's experimental sonnets there is an obvious attempt to isolate and repeat specific vowels and consonants. In spite of this, he prefers to repeat individual sounds embedded in larger units and thereby avoid any possibility that the sounds will call attention to themselves. "The crow's deep clarion call," in "Personae" (p. 59), is an exception, but here Stuart is exploring ways to hold a twelve-syllable line together. More typically one gets something like this: "They fight, they drive, flinch not, for they are unafraid" ("Two Lives," p. 57). Sometimes the predominant sound exists both in and out of repeated words and their derivatives:

Like some deep singer in the voiceless you fling
 Futility to wind and march and sing and sing.
 ("To Muddy Waters," p. 54)

In "Returned" he also experiments with holding a twelve-syllable line together and finds that alliteration is one way of doing it:

To visit favorite haunts, to /sic/ familiar faces,
 Live now as I did then and feel at least as free.
 (p. 52)

Something is obviously missing from the last half of the first line; balance alone demands that something be inserted there.

In the first section of Harvest of Youth Stuart experiments with writing verses, and in the second section he experiments with prosodic techniques. In the third section he brings the results together and experiments with writing poetry. In the last section he falls back on his exercises in writing the quatrain. In "Words," one of the few departures from the quatrain, he practices his duples and triples:

Wōrds are | like bīrds
 Gōing | to the sōuth;
 Thēy will | retūr | agāin
 With lovē | in the heart
 And sōng | in the mōuth. (p. 65)

In "Lincoln Weeps" (p. 68) he practices writing feminine rhymes, and in "Sleep Spell" he works on patterns within the line: "Falls the rain, the rain is falling," and "Whines the wind, the wind is whining" (p. 69). "Carver Life" (pp. 70-71) is an exercise in using internal rhyme accompanied by the caesura. "November Night," another departure from the quatrain, is immediately identifiable with the experiments in reiterating and paralleling that characterize the second section:

I shall remember this moon
 Low burning on a dusky world and up the eve-
 ning sky.
 I shall remember at noon,
 In the morning, and at other times when Novem-
 ber winds pass by.
 I shall remember this night:
 The recurrent loneliness, you, and the heavy
 words you said.
 I shall regard with delight
 These bearable words and you, after I'm long,
 long dead. (p. 79)

One can only conjecture about why Stuart ends his collection of juvenilia by falling back on the exercises conducted in the first two sections. The poems may simply have been earlier exercises added to the collection to make a few more pages. On the other hand, Stuart gave the last section the same title that he gave the book: "Harvest of Youth." That he did this could indicate that he considered the poems of the last section to be among his best, but a more likely explanation is that he knew that he was not ready to write with distinction and therefore fell back on the early exercises to explore them and to find ways of improving them. Further, that he called the last section "Harvest of Youth" may indicate that he thought of it as both a summary and a transition--a springboard from which he would launch into something better. Significantly, it was in doing the experimental sonnets of the third section that he found the medium that would gain him a reputation as a poet. After Vanderbilt he would write with distinction.

CHAPTER VI

THE POET AS CRAFTSMAN: A STUDY IN TECHNIQUE

Stuart's resolution to be himself after Vanderbilt must be viewed with considerable caution for the simple reason that he remained ambiguous about what he thought himself to be. He apparently had no delusions about Harvest of Youth, and he knew moreover that it would take something more substantial to make him a poet. As disappointed as he might have been with his early experiments, he was confident enough to have some of the sonnets reprinted in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow.¹ Further, the greatest evidence that Stuart had confidence in Harvest of Youth lies in the fact that Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow consists of 703 sonnets, the form with which he experimented most diligently in his first book. His progression as a craftsman begins with Harvest of Youth (cautious experiment), works through Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow (spontaneity), and climaxes in Album of Destiny (maturity and control).

In Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow Stuart tends to move away from emphasis upon the iamb as an arithmetical norm

¹See Hargis Westerfield's Introduction to Harvest of Youth.

from which to make controlled departures.² Continuing to count syllables, he explores ways of creating patterns of sounds and musical effects that derive from the thought and structure of the line. Thus, reiterations of various kinds set up recognizable sound patterns. He never completely abandons the iamb: the nature of the language will not allow it, at least not for very long.³ Rather, he develops a system of parallels and phonic reiterations that remind one of Whitman, and for which Whitman appears to be the model. Parallels and phonic reiterations do not necessarily exclude accentual patterns, but what seems strange is that Stuart, while using Whitman's prosodic techniques, would persist in

²For a discussion of meter as arithmetical norm see Yvor Winters, "The Audible Reading of Poetry," The Function of Criticism (Denver, 1957), p. 82. Winters says, "Meter is the arithmetical norm, the purely theoretic structure of the line; rhythm is controlled departure from that norm."

³There are a number of considerations here, one of the most important of which is the placing of function words immediately before form classes for the sake of forming syntactic units (e.g., a horse, the man, that place, from them). In addition to the matter of syntax, and related to it, is the nature of stress in the English language. We front the stress in English (e.g., fáther, rébel). This tendency to front the stress is remarkably persistent, and is accounted for in Verner's Law. See Albert C. Baugh, A History of the English Language (New York, 1957), pp. 22 and 69. These are likely, at least in part, what constitutes the explanation that Winters refers to in his "Audible Reading of Poetry." As he says, "English verse is predominantly iambic in structure" (p. 91). Because it is predominantly iambic, he adds, "rhythm ceases to be rhythm, and becomes merely movement, whenever the norm itself is no longer discernible" (p. 94).

writing sonnets, and in counting syllables. The result of such a strange admixture is that the style which Stuart achieves in his rhythmic handling of language is peculiarly his own.

Stuart's interest in sounds is an old one. He has always had his ear attuned to the sounds around him. As early as his carnival days, he was listening discretely:

I heard different sounds from those made by the
whippoorwills and katydids and of waters falling
and crickets singing....I heard voices all day long.
I heard cries of anger and fits of laughter. Voices
all day long and part of the night. (BDH, p. 116)

Often, while experimenting with sonorous effects, he plays with sounds for the sheer delight of hearing them:

The wind blows high tonight--the wind blows strong,
The yellow leaves fall on the Sandy water,
The leaves are grains of meal that sift among
The naked boughs and the buff-colored fodder,
The moon rides high--a grain of yellow dent,
The oak trees rock--the yellow dent goes by,
He smiles at silent fields in half-contempt--
The wind and trees sing him a lullaby:
"Tra-la--tra-la--tra-la--the moon is high,
Tra-la--tra-la--tra-le--the moon is corn,
O corn-moon, do you hear the hunter's horn?
O corn-moon, do you hear the dead leaves sigh?
Tra-la--tra-la--tra-le--tra-le--tra-le--
Tra-le--tra-li--the moon is yellow corn."
(MWBTP, p. 185)

The lullaby is obviously a source of delight, but some of the rhythmical effects elsewhere in the poem deserve attention.

Punctuation is the key to analysis of sound patterns in the poem. The caesura (marked by the dash) in the first line is equivalent to a line-end pause. The result is that the second half of the line repeats the grammatical pattern

of the first and sets up or initiates a controlling rhythmic pattern for the poem. The grammatical pattern is repeated in the first half of line five, on both sides of the caesura in line six, in the last half of eight, in the last half of nine, and in the last half of the last line. In addition to repeating the grammatical pattern, which is characterized by a change from subject-verb-adjective to subject-verb-complement, the words are repeated in one place or another. "Moon" is substituted for "wind" in line five, and the verb of being is substituted for the action verb in line nine. Variations are thereby closely controlled. By placing the dash in the middle of the line the poet modulates the basic rhythms of the poem. In the first line the second half echoes the thought of the first, and in doing so receives both weaker stress and lower pitch. The result is that stress tends to be weaker and pitch to be lower after the caesura in the other lines of the poem--in lines five and six, for example. Such deliberate modulation of sound presupposes the poem as voice, as "audible reading." One should never lose sight of the fact that the poem, for Stuart, exists somewhere beyond words. "Tra-la--tra-la--tra-la" has no meaning, and hardly sounds like the wind in the tops of trees. The most that one can say is that there is an exclusive rhythmic pattern; that is, there is a rhythmic pattern that exists exclusive of lexical meaning.

Elsewhere Stuart has come even closer to representing

sounds that exist beyond rather than in words. Here he tries to catch the rhythms of a beating drum:

Dead leaves and damp--her bare feet touch the leaves.
 The high winds blow--black pine trees wave and sigh.
 The oak limbs crackle and a tree-top weaves
 Black fingers patterned on the silver sky.
 She waits--her lover comes--her brown-skin comes--
 She knows he will come by a moon-lit stream--
 Her steps are lighter than a far-off drum
 Of rain against the leaves--she waits--she dreams--
 "Tata-tatum--tata-tatum--tum--tum--
 Tata-tatum--tata-tatum--tum--tum--
 Her lover comes--her brown-skin lover comes--
 He proudly marches to the old war drum.
 "Tata-tatum--tata-tatum--tum--tum--"
 Her lover comes--her proud young lover comes.⁴

The caesura in the middle of each of the first two lines serves as sufficient stop or pause to build up a short and tight rhythmic unit which is released by running line three over into line four. The rhythmic unit is tightened again in line five, released in six and seven, and tightened again in eight. The release comes again in line twelve. The drum beat itself enhances the short and tight rhythmic unit at other places in the poem. The caesura once again clearly marks the unit. The "tum" at the ends of lines weakens in stress and lowers in pitch with a characteristic modulation downward. The remarkable thing is that there are iambs. The repetition of "her lover comes" characterizes

⁴MWBTP, p. 180. Stuart continues and improves upon this practice in Album of Destiny. See, for example, the last sonnet in "Songs of the Silent Snow," where the dripping rain becomes confused with the ticking of a clock (p. 172). See also "A Winter Dirge for Rene Madden Crump," where rain becomes tears dripping on the earth, mourning the death of a beautiful woman (p. 203).

the iambic pattern over which the rhythms of the poem are controlled. The result is a kind of counterpoint in which the iambs buck against the larger rhythmical unit and, in doing so, produce rhythmical effects that are very pleasing.

How much Stuart emphasizes the dash in marking the caesura is indicated by his placing dashes at the ends of lines. The pause there is the same as that within the line, and the consequence is that the emphasis is placed on movement, on stopping and starting, on punctuating a stream or continuum of sounds as voice or speech:

She waits--her lover comes--her brown-skin comes--
 She knows he will come by a moon-lit stream--
 Her steps are lighter than a far-off drum
 Of rain against the leaves--she waits--she dreams--

Rhythm depends upon repetition, and in this case one should look beyond the beating of the drum. He should look at line five:

She waits--her lover comes--her brown-skin comes--

He should look at line eight:

Of rain against the leaves--she waits--she dreams--

He should look at line eleven:

Her lover comes--her brown-skin lover comes--

And finally he should look at line fourteen:

Her lover comes--her proud young lover comes.

These lines indicate something of the effectiveness of Stuart's use of repetition in building rhythmic patterns. According to C. Alfonso Smith,

In prose, a word or group of words is repeated for emphasis; where in verse, repetition is chiefly employed not for emphasis (compare the use of the refrain), but for melody of rhythm, for continuousness or sonorousness of effect, for unity of impression, for banding lines or stanzas, and for purposes of suggestiveness.⁵

Unfortunately, one has no choice but talk in generalities when the subject is rhythm. As Harvey Gross says in the Introduction to his collection of essays on prosody, the matter is "too tenuous and variable for exact analysis."⁶

Stuart relies more heavily upon alliteration and assonance in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, but his foremost prosodic principles are those of reiterating and paralleling. He never abandons the sonnet, and end-rhyme becomes merely one of several forms of reiteration. The following lines contain something of Stuart's alliterations and reiterations:

Sweet summer here with bud and bloom and breeze
 And tall bronze men beneath wind-laps of grain--
 Sweet summer here with wind among the trees,
 With wind among the flowers and honey bees--
 Among the flowers--beneath the stars above--
 The silver wind plays with the stars above,
 With flowers and moonlight on the leafy trees--
 Plays with the ferns and trees and clouds above
 And summer fields that I have learned to love.

(MWBTP, p. 7)

The alliterating b and s sounds are obvious, and the initial "Sweet summer" is repeated in line three in order to establish mellowness of tone. The major reiterative device

⁵C. Alfonso Smith, Repetition and Parallelism in English Verse (New York, 1894), p. 9.

⁶The Structure of Verse: Modern Essays on Prosody (Greenwich, Connecticut, 1966), p. 13.

is the preposition: "with bud and bloom and breeze," "With wind among the flowers," "with the stars above," "With flowers and moonlight," "with the ferns and trees and clouds," "beneath wind-laps of grain," "beneath the stars above," "among the trees," "among the flowers and honey bees," and "Among the flowers." Granted, there are other reiterations, but the prepositional phrase has its own characteristic intonation contour. It is that contour that goes far in shaping the rhythmic patterns of the above lines.⁷

Reiterations are not usually as scattered as those in the poem above, but rather are often remarkably systematic. Numerous poems in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow contain initial reiteration. These lines from one of the sonnets of a sequence that Stuart did about his father are typical:

And now his love is wind among the corn;
His love is whispering, talking, green corn blades.
His love is cornfields when the summer fades,
Oak leaves to red and fodder blades to brown.
His love is autumn raining dead leaves down
And going out on autumn morns to salt the stock.
He loves his mules and whispering corn at night--
Buff-colored corn in full autumn moonlight. (p. 28)

The reiteration of "His love" is either different enough or broken enough in lines one, four, six, and eight to make it effective. Reiterations other than the initial ones are also important. "Corn," occurring throughout the lines, is

⁷For purposes of this study paralleling is grammatical and consists of placing grammatical constructions alongside each other. Reiterating, on the other hand, is merely the repeating of any unit of structure. The units need not be (but may be) placed side by side.

a notable example.

Especially marked by initial reiteration in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow are the sonnets in which Stuart constructs his catalogues. As many as ten of fourteen lines sometimes begin with the same expression. This poem from the farewell sequence is typical:

Farewell to Springtime in Kentucky hills;
Farewell to dogwood blossoms and percoon;
To blood-root in the wind and daffodils;
To wild plum blossoms and white April moon.
Farewell to walnut trees beside the river;
Farewell to April's sky-blue singing brooks;
Farewell to young thin April leaves that quiver;
Farewell to white clouds mirrored in the brooks.
Farewell to Spring wheat waving in the wind
And rank potatoes bursting from the ground;
Farewell to shower-clouds watery-thinned
And to the far-off cow bell's lonely sound.
Farewell to April and bright bull-tongue plows;
Farewell to green pastures and spotted cows. (p. 340)

Here the initial reiterations and the line-end punctuation indicate rather definitely that the line is the rhythmic unit, and that it is also the unit of sense. In this poem the sentence and the line correspond, and even where they do not, as in lines two and three, they are punctuated as though they did. Lines nine and eleven, although they are not punctuated at the end, are marked by syntactic breaks before the subordinate conjunction that begins the next line. The intonation contour is completed at the end of the line.

Sometimes in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow Stuart re-iterates or repeats the entire line:

I do not know if these are things they wanted.
I do not care if these are things they wanted.
(p. 282)

Lines five and seven, and thirteen and fourteen, contain similar examples within the same sonnet. Some of the poems that rely heavily upon reiteration of the whole line are effectively done. The following is typical of such poems:

When he marched on the poppy fields of Flanders,
 When he marched on the shell-torn land of France,
 Two ghosts, tall ghosts, kept step with him in
 Flanders,
 Two ghosts, tall ghosts, kept step with him in France.
 One on each side they marched by him in Flanders,
 Went marching, marching, marching endlessly.
 One on each side, they saw him laid in Flanders,
 They marched away together there--those three;
 And one tall ghost was dressed in Northern blue,
 And one tall ghost was dressed in Southern gray,
 Beside a youth in khaki they went marching,
 Beneath the stars and stripes they marched away.
 Down through all times these three go marching,
 marching,
 Go marching, marching, marching endlessly. (p. 302)

The rhythms of such a poem are extremely pleasing, and the pleasure derives from the effects produced by making line two reiterate five, and by making line ten reiterate nine. In a longer poem, the poet can reiterate the same line over and over again. Or he can reiterate or repeat an entire stanza, as is often done in the case of the refrain.⁸

Stuart, because of the limited size of the sonnet, reiterates different lines and often places them back to back. Lines placed back to back in the "marching" sonnet above indicate the extent to which the line, by the time of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, was becoming the rhythmic unit and the unit of

⁸Whitman often does it. See "By Blue Ontario's Shore," Complete Poetry and Prose, I, 307. Also see "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," p. 298.

own reiterative effects. End-rhyme makes its own demands upon the poet, but occasionally one encounters something like this:

The poplar leaves drift in a windy flood,
From their tall tops drift slowly to the ground.
(p. 183)

The word "drift" is repeated, and it is in both cases followed by a prepositional phrase.

The object here is not to account for all of Stuart's reiterative devices; they are far too numerous for that. The most that can be hoped for is that the devices which are consistently and effectively used, and which are readily explicable, be identified and illustrated in one way or another. In addition to the usual repetitions--the single word within the line, the line, line-initial patterns, line-medial patterns, and line-final patterns--there are significant devices which Stuart relies upon in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow in order to produce and control the rhythms of his poems. One of those devices is what Gay Wilson Allen refers to as grammatical rhythm.⁹ The device simply consists of building or producing rhythmic effects through repeating a particular part of speech or grammatical construction. The following lines contain a notable example:

Sweet summer here with wind among the trees,
With wind among the flowers and honey bees--
Among the flowers--beneath the stars above-- (p. 7)

⁹For a discussion of this and other devices see Walt Whitman Handbook, pp. 408-409.

The preposition is the reiterated part of speech setting up and progressing rhythmic control: "with wind among the trees,/ With wind among the flowers." One tends to insert "with wind" in the third line, before "Among the flowers," and before "beneath the stars." As a reiterated part of speech the preposition is very successful in building and maintaining the rhythmic structure of the poem. Equally as interesting are these lines from a sonnet about Mae Marberry, a flower picker:

A slender child, she gathers flowers today,
 She gathers blue sweet-williams from the woods
 Where trees are still unleafed and woods are gray.
 She gathers wild-flowers from these solitudes,
 Wind-flowers and sweet-williams while she may.
(p. 24)

The subject-verb-object sequence is reiterated as a unit, but the noun in the position of the object carries over into line four and continues the rhythms: "she gathers flowers," "She gathers blue sweet-williams," "She gathers wild-flowers," "Wind-flowers and sweet-williams." The objects alone are these: "flowers," "sweet-williams," "wild-flowers," "Wind-flowers," and "sweet-williams." The subject-verb-object pattern itself is rhythmic when repeated as it is here. Any one of the three--subject, verb, or object--may continue to carry the rhythms once the pattern has been established.

Another rhythmical device that Stuart uses in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow is that of logical rhyme or logical rhythm. The device consists of naming things that are in their logical

places or things that are in the process of doing what they logically do. Grass, for example, grows, and rain falls.

Do you hear the creaking of the big ox cart
Over the Kentucky wilderness road?
Ah, don't you hear the creaking heavy load
And cattle panting under the heavy load? (p. 203)

In these lines Stuart does a number of interesting things, including repeating "heavy load" at the end of the line. One would expect a heavy ox cart to creak, and one would expect the oxen pulling the cart to pant. They are evidence that the load is heavy; otherwise they would not be doing what they logically do. Stuart's lists and catalogues also lend themselves to the use of grammatical rhyme:

Farewell to birds a-roosting in the fodder;
Farewell to naked hills with white-rock seams;
To black leaves drifting on the slushy water; (p. 189)

Birds logically roost, and leaves logically drift on water. The device could prove hampering in these lines if it were tightened up so that a logical rhyme occurred in each line. Other kinds of reiterations are numerous. Line-initial reiteration is obvious, and the end-rhyme is apparent. The verbals positioned in the middle of lines one and three make for heavy reiteration at the beginning of the line, in the middle, and at the end.

Stuart also reiterates cognates for rhythmic effect, and he finds the device very useful:

And I can sing my lays like singing corn,
And flute them like a fluting gray corn-bird; (p. 3)

In line one the adjective "singing" is derived from the verb

"sing," which precedes it in the line. In the third line the adjective "fluting" is derived from the verb preceding it. That the poet derives his words in the same way, and that he sets the derivatives at about the same position in the line in their relationship to the preceding verb, aids in rhythmic control of the line, and ultimately in control of the entire poem. A similar passage appears much later, in the Plum Grove section:

To hell with singers' sentimental songs,
 Let them go sing for men where they belong.
 Give us a singer that will sing for us--
 The truth of us--then listen to his song
 For we must sleep--and our sleep shall be long!
(p. 284)

Line one contains "singers'...songs." Line two contains "sing," and line three contains both "singer" and "sing." Line four ends with "song." In addition to repeating derivatives in this way, Stuart also takes a simple word like corn and compounds it into several forms such as corn rows, corn blades, cornfields, and corn shocks:

And now his love is wind among the corn;
 His love is whispering, talking green corn blades.
 His love is cornfields when the summer fades,
(p. 28)

The compounds here are not derived in the sense that "sings" and "singer" found in the preceding lines are derived from the verb meaning to sing. Both processes inescapably have to do with the forming of words, with units of sound to be repeated, and in that respect serve the same purpose rhythmically.

To progress from an investigation of reiterative devices in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow to an investigation of devices of paralleling in Album of Destiny is not to experience a major break in the development of Stuart's prosodic techniques. Album of Destiny contains all of the techniques found in Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, but in the latter book certain emphases change. For example, the numerous caesuras are no longer marked by the dash. The great number of dashes found throughout Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow all but disappear. The few that remain exist primarily to indicate a break or change in voice--to momentarily interrupt what is otherwise a series of closely paralleled lines:

I shall not miss our neighbors and our mules;
 I shall not miss our cattle, fields and trees;
 I shall not miss my home, my folks, farm tools--
 While battering steel, I shall not think of these.
(AD, p. 44)

The last in the series of parallels here has the impact of a summary or conclusion, and it is prolonged by inserting the dash, and by following the dash with "While battering steel." This throws the expression paralleling those in preceding lines to the very end.

In Album of Destiny the dashes disappear for two major reasons. The first is that Stuart increasingly relies on ellipsis marks to indicate a break or change that results in momentarily suspending the general rhythmical pattern:

I shall return to feel Kentucky heat
 And April showers that quickly cool the air,
 Return to tramp my hills on tireless feet...
 I wish to God tonight that I were there! (p. 134)

The shift is made obvious by the ellipsis marks. In some cases the ellipsis not only indicates a shift but also marks an added or heightened elliptical effect:

Mace Bushman told me when he married me
 He'd take me far away from whistle screams,
 Said he would take me where we would be free
 In his Kentucky....Such an idle dream!
 To hear the Pittsburgh whistles scream again
 Would fill me, thrill me...music in my ears!
 And clouds of smoke, my eyes filled up with tears.
(p. 138)

In these lines Bettie Coyle Bushman is both telling her story and commenting upon it. The ellipsis marks are used to separate the story from the commentary. A second reason for the near-disappearance of the dash is that Stuart turns away from breaking the line. More than in previous work, the line becomes the unit of structure and the unit of thought in Album of Destiny. Occasionally, Stuart doesn't bother with the appropriate end-punctuation. He simply uses commas:

I did not plan this winter for the dead,
 I did not make this rain and send the snow,
 I did not send each to his narrow bed
 To lie forever with the dirt below.¹⁰

Continuing to organize his sonnets by quatrain, Stuart sometimes punctuates the second and fourth lines with other than commas, even though each line contains a complete sentence:

¹⁰p. 167. Such a practice, composing by line, also leads to inserting commas where they do not belong:

This tough-shelled whiteoak sprout with emerald bud
 That rots into the earth above his face,
 Will grow from dust of him and drink his blood
 And blossom prettily in wind-blue space. (p. 236)

Tonight we have forgotten slopes we've plowed,
 We have forgotten corn our hands have wrought;
 We have forgotten sun and rain and cloud,
 We have forgotten battles we have fought. (p. 55)

Another characteristic arrangement of lines within the quatrain is that of making the sentence and the quatrain correspond. The first line often makes an assertion, and the next three each contain a subordinate structure that parallels the structure in the first. In the following example each line except the last is marked off by a comma:

And I remember how we vowed by waters,
 And how we pledged eternal troths of love,
 And how the ferns did kiss the foaming waters,
 And what it was to live the spring of love. (p. 125)

There are also instances of making the line and the sentence correspond in which Stuart over-runs the end of the quatrain for the sake of paralleling four lines and then releasing the rhythms in the fifth:

We pluck the wild purple thistle blossom,
 We love the smell of heated pasture grass,
 We love the sun that wilts the shoe-string vines,
 We love the summer dome of high blue grass
 Where sun rays drip the color of old wine. (p. 76)

Again, the line is the unit of structure and the unit of thought. The pattern of rhythms is broken or released by enjambling the fourth line into the fifth.

Such treatment of the line as is illustrated in the above passages poses numerous interesting possibilities. In the first place, the obvious impact of Whitman on Stuart becomes even more obvious in Album of Destiny. The foremost technique is that of the parallel. The parallel, says Gay

Wilson Allen, arises from the same psychological impulse as does the catalogue, and achieves the same general effects of "poetic identification."¹¹ That the line becomes the unit of rhythm and the unit of thought is no accident. Stuart's need to be a pioneer, to be an individual, would not allow him to settle for traditional prosodic techniques alone. There is no way of knowing how much he relied on Whitman. The King James Version of the Bible likely influenced him greatly. In Hebrew poetry also the line, says Allen, was the unit, "and the second line balanced the first, completing or supplementing its meaning."¹² A further possibility is found in primitive poetry. As Allen says, parallelism is apparently found in most primitive poetry, and most translations of Indian songs and chants contain parallels.¹³ In his work from Harvest of Youth to the present Stuart has never abandoned his concern for the primitive. Further, W-Hollow, in both his poetry and his fiction, is a primitive place where man is "brother to the tree."¹⁴ Mary Washington Clarke's survey of folklore in Stuart's writing is in effect an index to his knowledge of primitivism.¹⁵ His early

¹¹Walt Whitman Handbook, p. 399.

¹²Ibid., p. 389.

¹³American Prosody, p. 174.

¹⁴Such references are numerous. See AD, p. 73.

¹⁵The survey referred to here is Jesse Stuart's Kentucky. Clarke has also published papers on folklore in the writings of Stuart.

preoccupation with the ballad, which relies for much of its effectiveness upon repetends and refrains, also likely had considerable influence on Stuart's adopting the parallel as foremost prosodic technique. Finally, in the larger context of his trying to lift his W-Hollow milieu to literature, the parallel appears to be a natural thing. W-Hollow people are close to the soil, possess limited vocabularies, rely heavily on memory, and practice an economy of language that lends itself well to paralleling.

The parallel consists of repeating grammatical constructions, and to repeat the construction is to repeat the rhythms. The main principle involved is that of controlling thought, and the parallel balances thoughts alongside each other. For Whitman, the unit of sense was the measure of the line,¹⁶ and that this is a major concern of Stuart's has already been demonstrated. The line makes an independent statement, and is often either a complete or elliptical sentence. Repeating the thought, with some variation, produces the effect of chanting, and is rhapsodic. Whitman used the parallel construction to bind lines together and thereby form units similar to the stanza in conventional versification.¹⁷ Stuart, by contrast, uses the sonnet form to shape externally. He uses the parallel construction to shape from

¹⁶Walt Whitman Handbook, p. 393.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 397.

within, constantly pushing outward toward the external form. Such a technique becomes his "measure of freedom" in bucking against traditional form, and in doing so allows him the individuality that he has persistently stressed as more important to the poet than to any other person.¹⁸ Coleridge says that organic form shapes as it develops itself "from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such as the life is, such is the form."¹⁹ In Coleridge's sense, Stuart can never be called an organic poet. Regardless of what one chooses to call him, he pushes toward organicism and settles for a compromise: a maximum of shaping from within toward a minimum of form from without.²⁰ This does not, it seems, completely exclude Stuart from believing, as Whitman did, that a poetic experience "will find its own natural rhythm

¹⁸"Meeting Mr. New England, America's Greatest Poet," Educational Forum, XXIII (1959), 291-292. In this article Stuart reports a discussion between Frost and himself about the poet as an individual. He says, "The first question Robert Frost asked me was what I thought of schools of poetry. I was slow to tell him what I actually thought, but he wasn't very slow about telling me what he thought. He disagreed with all of them." Stuart, of course, agreed with Frost, and was quite happy when Frost told him, "He thought every poet should be an individualist."

¹⁹Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare and Some Other Poets and Dramatists (London, n.d.), pp. 46-47.

²⁰There is at this point a question of how minimal the sonnet is as external form, as form from without. It should be kept in mind that the sonnet for Stuart is a field to be filled, and the poet's task consists of filling it. The field itself is merely accepted.

in the act of expression."²¹

In the envelope of thought parallelism, says Allen, "the initial line states an idea or a proposition, succeeding lines state parallel thoughts regarding the first line, and the final line states a concluding thought."²² Stuart's parallels, because of the size of the sonnet form, are characterized by a limited number of lines--usually two or three. In Album of Destiny he never develops the envelope as Whitman did, for example, in "Joy, Shipmate, Joy."²³ On the other hand, he does employ similar techniques of paralleling.

Stuart uses synthetic or constructive parallelism,²⁴ in which the second line, and sometimes more than one, supplements or completes the first:

Better to give companionship to man
Than take your strong proud body back to earth;
(p. 111)

He also makes use of synonymous parallelism, in which the second line enforces the thought of the first by repeating and echoing it in a varied form:

Descend upon us, night of green spring love!
Descend upon us, O, Great Night of Love. (p. 102)

²¹Walt Whitman Handbook, p. 410.

²²American Prosody, p. 225.

²³Complete Poetry and Prose, I, 428.

²⁴See Allen's Walt Whitman Handbook, pp. 389-392, for a discussion of the various kinds of parallels.

He uses antithetic parallelism, in which the last line must deny or contrast what comes before it:

There is no need to speak for death of flowers,
There is no need to speak for butterflies
That used to flit and while away the hours
On dotted silken wings beneath blue skies.
But there is need to speak for you, my love. (p. 123)

Stuart also uses climactic parallelism, in which the last line takes up words from the first line and completes the statement that began there:

I go into the fields before the dawn.
I go into the fields to husk my corn. (p. 113)

Whether this is effective climactic parallelism or not depends on whether the last line completes a statement or simply adds one. A paraphrase looks like this: Before dawn I go into the fields to husk my corn. There is little doubt about the intention in these lines:

Come on, my brothers, unafraid of hell,
Come on and meet each dark slump on the wind; (p. 215)

As climactic parallelism the lines are effective.

Stuart's success in using parallels does not depend entirely upon his hewing to the four kinds illustrated here. What he does best may be conceived of as departures from and variations upon them. He is always in the position of having to consider the demands of the sonnet as form. With such restrictions in mind, he looks for and finds ways of gliding on and off parallels, of springing them loose once a rhythmic pattern has lost its effectiveness and threatens to become monotonous. He frequently makes a simple synonymous parallel:

I want to sleep where kindred dust reposes,
I want the land they own to sleep upon. (p. 104)

He sometimes confuses the synonymous parallel and the synthetic parallel:

She will be gayer than swift dashing water,
Gayer than April wind in spring-bloomed phlox.
(p. 105)

He often springs the end of the second line loose in a synonymous parallel, and lets the next two or three lines make the statement that repeats or echoes the statement in the first line:

Peace comes to me tonight among these hills;
Peace comes with darkness and the sullen skies,
With calling of the valley whippoorwills
And light in darkness of fireflies. (p. 64)

The rhythmic success of such a structure depends upon much more than the similarity of the first two lines. Part of the rhythmic effect is carried over into the third line, and largely through the preposition. The "And" at the beginning of the fourth line replaces the "With" at the beginning of the third. The result is that the first two lines begin with a synonymous parallel, and the next two lines pick up some part of that parallel and form what appears to be another parallel. The parallel in the last two lines becomes a variation upon the parallel in the first two. Rhythmically, the result is pleasing because something of the first parallel is retained, but also because something new is added. There is both similarity and difference, likeness and unlikeness.

In Album of Destiny Stuart's practice of composing by line, and then grouping the lines into quatrains, has considerable influence on what he does with parallels. The quatrain and the parallel seem to go together or to correspond, and there are various kinds of arrangements within any one quatrain:

Over the wastelands, to my neck in briars,
Over the hollows and their swollen creeks,
And through white streaks of light from stars'
white fires,
I run on iron legs with wind that speaks! (p. 60)

The paralleled lines build up to an emphatic and climactic statement. The statement is held until the end, and the climactic statement itself does not parallel the other lines at all. The result is a kind of dramatic or rhetorical emphasis that is pleasing. The opposite effect to such structuring is to place the emphatic statement first and let the paralleled lines follow and fall away from it:

Ettie will be loved by Sammie Raines
As long as beats this mountain heart of mine,
As long as living blood flows through these veins
And winds disturb the needles of the pine. (p. 205)

The difference may be little more than that which exists between a periodic and a loose sentence, but that does not make it any less a pleasing difference.

Other arrangements of the parallel within the quatrain are equally as impressive:

Beat down on us, you welcome summer rain!
Beat down on roots of corn you failed to feed
In months of drouth that shriveled all our grain!
Beat on our dying corn, our growing weed! (p. 85)

The second line is enjambed into the third, and the fourth parallels the first two. By extending the second line, enjambling it into the third, the pattern is broken and picked up again in the fourth line, giving it an emphatic edge that would otherwise be missing. A similar effect may be created by paralleling the first three lines and enjambling the third into the fourth:

Too long a man must sleep where he is lain,
Too long to sleep beneath a blinded moon,
Too long beneath the spears of stabbing rain
That penetrate the walls of his cocoon. (p. 195)

The fourth line is an extension of the third. It completes the statement and glides off the rhythmic pattern that characterizes the first three lines. The two paralleled lines may exist in the middle of the quatrain:

Down in this hollow's deep dark solitude
Where sun rays filter through the wind-swayed trees,
Where jarflies churr and snakes crawl through the
wood,
I pillow myself on the grass with ease. (p. 235)

In a case such as this the third and fourth lines appear to be a way of postponing the closing statement in order to gain or build dramatic and rhetorical emphasis.

The parallels in the quatrains found in Album of Destiny are of various kinds and degrees. They may be relatively relaxed:

I told the wine-green April life was here,
That swift bright April life among our men,
A swift blood season of the fleeting year,
A glorious season not to come again! (p. 61)

The parallels may be relatively intense:

Roll over, clouds, like ledges of thick stones!
 Roll over me, dark clouds--roll over fast!
 Roll over me tonight--I am alone;
 Far in these windy woods I am alone! (p. 170)

The parallels may exist in pairs of lines, with the second pair making a statement which is synonymous with the statement in the first pair:

She should have known her body could not last
 The stronger wine, the dance, the midnight hours;
 She should have known that she could live too fast
 And rush the season for her fragile power. (p. 196)

The parallels sometimes over-run the limits of the quatrain:

Come Kathaleen, for soon we two shall lie
 Under the winds that blow and feet that run;
 Under the dirt we furrow in today;
 Under the weeds we strike down with our hoes;
 Under the dead-leaf rich Kentucky clay;
 Under the wordless songs that the wind blows. (p. 31)

The paralleled lines here are subordinate clauses, but they may just as well be coordinate clauses:

Lull, beetle, lull, white frost is near at hand,
 And white clouds shimmer through the heaven's blue,
 And water flows in meadow streams cold-blue,
 And yellow leaves drift on the sawbriar land. (p. 124)

It would be misleading to conclude this discussion with having only presented something of Stuart's parallels as though they existed in isolation. The structuring by parallel does not consist of making one parallel structure fit one quatrain which just happens to appear in one sonnet. Rather, the parallels exist as integral parts of the whole poem. They may be, and often are, numerous, as they are in these lines:

Great summer Sun of Heaven, shine upon us!
 Throw golden rays, great Sun, on our bronze shoulders!

We're grateful, Sun, for golden rays upon us,
 And knotted body muscles hard as boulders!
 We're grateful, Sun, for life, for earth, for bread.
 We're grateful, Sun, for brother-trees, for skies,
 For land to give us birth and hold our dead;
 We're grateful for the white rain in our eyes,
 We're grateful for the sting of blowing wind.
 We're grateful for our march toward the sun,
 Marching in the strong clay temples we are in,
 Marching, marching, marching to the sun;
 Marching in love with life and unafraid;
 Youth strong American with dreams ahead! (p. 73)

In many ways the lines above, in which John Sutton addresses his wife Kathaleen, afford a fitting summary of the preceding discussion. All lines of the sonnet are end-stopped, and composition is obviously by line. The first four lines are grouped into a quatrain, although the next break is not as clear as the first one. Repetitions and parallels are numerous--perhaps too numerous.²⁵ Granting, however, that the poem may be overwritten, one nevertheless can see the essence of Stuart's mature work in it. The iambs are frequently strong, as they are in line seven. The lines of the sonnet contain ten syllables each.²⁶ The rhyme is traditional, and the sonnet form itself likely goes back as

²⁵ Ruel Foster's criticism should be pointed out here. He contends that the success of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow is largely due to the spontaneity with which Stuart writes about his "bronze men of the earth." He likewise contends that too much form--too much striving to be a craftsman--is the major reason for Stuart's declining reputation after Album of Destiny. See particularly Jesse Stuart, p. 67.

²⁶ Lines two and four contain eleven syllables each because of the feminine rhyme.

far as the first half of the thirteenth century.²⁷ The Whitmanesque or free-verse prosodic techniques are imposed upon what is otherwise traditional versification,²⁸ leaving little doubt that Stuart is a craftsman. The old mystique of the untutored singer cannot account for the craftsmanship in Album of Destiny. For a convincing explanation, one must go back to Beyond Dark Hills, Stuart's early autobiography. In Beyond Dark Hills he says, "I wanted to be different, not for the sake of being different but being different for something" (p. 229). The craftsmanship in Album of Destiny is Stuart's being different "for something." It is his way of trying to be both a poet and a self, for the poet, as Stuart knows, is ultimately a man. He is not a function.

²⁷See Cruttwell, p. 6. He says that the inventor of the sonnet form appears to have been a poet at the court of Emperor Frederick II in Sicily, and Frederick died in 1250.

²⁸All of the techniques used by Stuart can likely be found somewhere in the work of practitioners of traditional versification. The contention here is that the practices in Album of Destiny have their origin in the experiments found in Harvest of Youth, and that Stuart's discovery of Whitman gave an added impetus toward the direction that he finally took.

CONCLUSION

Any conclusions about Stuart at this point in his career would be premature. One can only make tentative observations about where he appears to be at the moment. As demonstrated in the text of the study, he went through a period of exploration, and into a period characterized by a spontaneous outpouring of literally thousands of lines. The period of spontaneity was followed by a concentrated effort to become a craftsman. Album of Destiny is unique because of Stuart's sustained effort, the only one like it in modern American poetry, to impose free-verse prosodic techniques upon a very traditional and conservative verse form. Paralleling the progression or genesis of craftsmanship, there is the working out of an ontological view--an attempt to make mankind and the universe at large mutually meaningful. Also paralleling the development of Stuart's craft is his evolving concept of the image, a concept which in Album of Destiny results in a pictorial method remarkably similar to the one worked out by Walt Whitman.

Stuart's primary problem has always been (and continues to be) that of how to be a natural poet in a world that demands of its poets that they be craftsmen--artificers. In "I Wish I Had Written 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' by Robert Burns," he explains once again that his admiration for the poetry of Burns is genuine. Burns, he says, "is one of

the great poets of the world, a natural poet and he has always given enjoyment to more people than any other poet living or dead."¹ Here, as elsewhere, Stuart implies that being natural is an important source of joy, and that this is so seems to be his greatest reason for praising Burns.

One comes away from such books as The Year of My Rebirth with a realization of Stuart's distaste for contriving, for being an artificer. He also comes away with a realization that for Stuart the poet is "nature's child," a medium and a bridge between a natural world and a populace who has lost contact with that world. He sees about him, symbolized in the stereotype of the effeminate artist,² a world that he cannot accept, and this has done much to keep him adding to his chronicle. Using an isolated community as a vehicle for expression, he exalts the "old verities" that William Faulkner talked about when he gave his Nobel Prize speech in 1950. The "old verities"--love, honor, pity, pride, compassion, sacrifice, endurance, courage, and hope--according to Faulkner, are things of the heart.³ At about

¹I Wish I'd Written That..., ed. E. J. Woods (New York, 1946), p. 293.

²See Beyond Dark Hills, pp. 142, 153-154, for an early statement about the effeminate artist. Piano Player, Stuart's roommate at the Radner home during the steel mill days, is very like the stereotype to which Stuart objects.

³For Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech see William Faulkner, Essays, Speeches and Public Lectures, ed. James B. Meriweather (New York, 1965), pp. 119-120.

the same time that Faulkner was writer-in-residence at the University of Virginia, he was asked to explain to what extent he was trying to picture the South and Southern civilization in his writing. He replied: "I was just trying to write about people, which to me /is/ the important thing. Just the human heart, it's not ideas. I don't know anything about ideas, don't have much confidence in them."⁴

The "old verities" are the same for Stuart as they are for Faulkner, and like Faulkner Stuart sees that the times are out of joint, that the human heart is in conflict with itself. Also like Faulkner, Stuart believes that mankind can and will prevail. He echoes Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech in The Year of My Rebirth: "Man is powerful. Man will rise to an occasion. Man will endure because he can adjust himself to existing circumstances until he has his chance to change them" (p. 312).

The chronicle has been successful. Stuart has published voluminously. He has written in haste, and all that he has written is one writing. His prose has received much greater acclaim than has his poetry, but that may make little difference since one is necessarily an adjunct to the other. Stuart sees no clear point of cleavage between the poem and the story. Gay Wilson Allen admits that he doesn't see one

⁴Faulkner in the University, ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1959), p. 10.

either: "The exact distinction between poetry and prose has never been satisfactorily made, and probably never can be."⁵ What Allen says is especially applicable to Stuart, whose prose and poetry are of the same time and the same place. In recent correspondence, Stuart explains how he has recast stories into lines,⁶ indicating that the similarities are in actuality greater than those of time and place. The similarities extend to and include matters of structure and form.

While this study was being done Stuart published a short article entitled "Memory Albums." The article is valuable because it consists primarily of a summary of his pictorial method--a method which is not limited to his poetry but rather also characterizes the "slice-of-life" technique that he uses in composing his stories:

I believe that a man can memorize a rosebush full of blooming roses, for here is a beautiful picture complete within itself. It is just as complete as "In Flanders Fields," by John McCrae, or "I Have a Rendezvous with Death," by Alan Seeger, World War I poems I memorized in Greenup High School from 1922-1926. ...words and lines in these poems form pictures in my mind which I could see when I recited them forty years ago or recite them today. In these poems, I see the same pictures forty years ago and today. Thus, along with words, I have memorized pictures.⁷

He says that he has memorized, not that he has remembered. The distinction is important to Stuart's pictorial method.

⁵American Prosody, p. xliv.

⁶Letter to the writer, October 3, 1969. See the Appendix.

⁷Tennessee Teacher, XXXVII (February, 1970), 9.

To remember a rosebush may be a very general thing. To memorize a rosebush is a matter of specific detail--a matter of line, of space, of proportion, of color, and of balance. Stuart says that he has memorized his valley "down to the smallest details." Paths, trees, and waterholes, he says, often change and play "havoc with that memory of mine that once photographed them to perfection."⁸

The question of where Stuart has been is not as difficult as the question of where he is at the moment. There is one thing for sure, and that is that he is writing. The refusal to recognize any great differences between prose and poetry has led to an interest in the long prose poem. He says in a recent letter that he has been asked to break up a dozen of his short stories and "put them into lines."⁹ In addition to the current interest in the possibilities of the prose poem, he is very interested in the poem as an instrument of satire. He has written at least a hundred poems that have never been published, many of which are what he refers to as his "bird poems."¹⁰ The "bird poems" are satirical poems. "I believe we can wield satire through poems," he says in a letter dated November 11, 1969. In December of 1969 Esquire

⁸"Memory Albums," p. 9.

⁹Letter to the writer, September 9, 1969. See the Appendix.

¹⁰Letter to the writer, September 6, 1969. See the Appendix.

published a small collection of Stuart's satirical poems entitled "Appalachian Suicide." Some of the poems are about John L. Lewis:

When Czar John-L becomes a heavenly sprite
 And over his clay temple daisies grow,
 When he has gone to meet his endless night,
 Who'll weep for him with heads in grief bowed low?
 His power and his oratory gone
 Into that lonesome cell of his last mine,
 Will a miner's widow grieve for him alone?
 Beside his bier will miners stand in line?
 His going into his eternity
 Will leave ten thousand monuments behind;
 Deserted coal camps where the wind blows free
 Will speak for him at peace and out of mind.
 His bubble brilliant as a buttercup
 Dew-pearled in sunlight of an April spring,
 But too much power blew his bubble up
 And then it burst into an ugly thing.¹¹

Some of the poems are about President Lyndon B. Johnson:

When a whirlybird dropped from the skies
 To an humble shack in the vale below,
 "Poor people" were not taken by surprise,
 Photographers were there "ready to go."
 A tall man with Disciples of his Creed
 Swarmed in like flies to shake "poor peoples'" hands,
 Cameras clicked, the tall man spoke of need:
 "No poverty like this in all the land,
 A billion dollars will cure all your ills."
 For thirty years his Party had had power
 And poverty was found among our hills
 In this contact and in his glory hour.
 So handsome, clean, above all mortal sin,
 This soft-voiced man who never did a wrong
 Walked to his whirlybird and climbed therein,
 So simply and all poverty was gone.¹²

One of the interesting things about these recent poems is that they are very definitely part of the chronicle. In

¹¹LXXII, 104.

¹²Ibid.

order to write about the President of the United States Stuart brings him to W-Hollow. What the President does in and to W-Hollow is what makes him important enough to write about. Stuart remains the writer of place, and there has never been a place quite like W-Hollow:

My land has a voice and a beauty that forever warms and inspires one to poetry and song! These things are durable. Appalachia will not be destroyed. England for nearly two thousand years has remained England. Scotland has remained Scotland; Wales has remained Wales, and Ireland has remained Ireland. Appalachia remains Appalachia, a distinct and integral part of unchanged America.¹³

Stuart continues to publish what he writes. He says that he expects to have his Collected Poems published in 1971, that he plans to publish four more books in the next two years, and that his interest in publishing poems--having wavered after his disappointing experience with Album of Destiny--is returning.¹⁴ The difficulty with Stuart's publishing, however, will not be resolved by his Collected Poems, nor by any other effort to increase the already sizeable bulk of his work. Bulk in itself is at the present time a deterrent to a wide appreciation of his poetry. The poetry has often been hurriedly written, as in the case of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow. Malcolm Cowley's review of

¹³"My Land Has a Voice," Mountain Life and Work, XXXXVI (April, 1968), 12. The article is excerpted from a speech that Stuart gave at West Virginia University.

¹⁴Letter to the writer, September 6, 1969. See the Appendix.

that book contains a fair estimate of the entire problem:

"He writes entirely too much for his own good or the reader's. At least half the time, he is careless, trite or perfunctory."¹⁵ What is needed for the general reader is a carefully-edited Selected Poems. Such a collection would bring out the main tendencies in Stuart's work, would place emphasis on his most successful poems, and would set aside a great number of poems that tend to obscure his excellence as a poet.

Stuart knows that his work needs to be edited, and because he does the decade of the Seventies could very well be the crucial decade of his career as a poet. One can only hope that his poetry will endure, and that through enduring it will gain the kind of recognition that it deserves. It should endure, and there are several reasons why it should. In the first place, it is part of one of the most elaborate chronicles ever written in America about a single place. Second, as part of the chronicle, it likely contains more information about a fairly isolated community than any other single source. Third, it contains a record of Stuart's own life--a fascinating life by anyone's standards. And finally, Stuart's poetry should endure because some of it is good poetry, is well-written, and can therefore be a great source of pleasure to future generations of American readers. The

¹⁵"Man with a Hoe," The New Republic, LXXX (October 31, 1934), 342.

story of W-Hollow has not ended, and Stuart himself will never let it die. If and when the details of his valley are memorized or photographed--fixed in the "album of the brain"--by thousands of readers, Stuart will have succeeded in what he set out forty years ago to do. He will have made his valley immortal, and in doing so will have gained immortality for himself. What greater epitaph could any writer want for his stone than this: "He Made His Valley Immortal"?

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APPENDIX

The Appendix contains basically four kinds of unpublished materials. First, there is a five-page typescript from which various quotations have been used in the text for sake of illustration. Second, there are histories of single poems. The histories are included here because they are interesting in themselves, because they indicate something of the conditions that motivate Stuart to write, and because they indicate that the individual poem, coming from actual events, belongs to the larger context of Stuart's chronicle. Third, there are letters. Some are quoted in the study and some are not. Because they are personal correspondence, some of the information in them is of a personal nature. However, they all contain valuable observations made by Stuart about himself and about his craft. Most contain answers to specific questions that I have asked. The letters included here were written just before and following a mild heart attack that Stuart suffered in the fall of 1969. Finally, I have included a chronology of significant publications, awards, and other events. The chronology is in no way exhaustive, and purports to be no more than a convenience for the reader in his study of the text. All of the materials in the Appendix, for that matter, have been selected with that end in mind.

OH, WHAT A POEM I AM IN

The whole earth around me now is in rhythm. It is an autumn poem with rhythmic measure. Autumn, fast winds, slow winds and no winds accent this physical poetic masterpiece! Try walking in and on and over a poem like this autumn one just one time! Hear it chanted! Get full of it, as I am now, and see if you can describe how you feel! You just try putting autumn's poetic rhythms into words!

There is a special rhythm to the wing beats of wild birds on the wind--slicing the October wind which I believe has color! People say the wind doesn't have color but this wind, which is a part of this poem, rhythm and wing beat, I think is the color of white wine. Maybe, it isn't but it looks this way today.

And I feel and know rhythm in this autumn earth poem as I walk under trees--a forest of giant and small trees--many species of trees--and now with many colors of leaves. And I know the earth around--now in a maze of colors--is in rhythm. I know it is! And there are beats and light beats--soft beats and little hard beats as I look up to the tops of trees--out through multi-colored peepholes to the sky. And the leaves come down with rhythmic rustles of the wind which is like white wine--I breathe deep and don't drink it. Leaves, leaves, leaves come down and hit my face.

Sway trees--ride on the wind, leaves! Tree branches

play! Claw with your fingertips--your leafy fingertips--
 sough with your green-bark lips--rhythm through the feathery
 leaves--rhythm through the green pine needles--rhythmic
 wind that soughs, sings and wheedles--now through--sough
 through--wheedle through--needle through winds and leaves
 and trees. I'm memorizing you. What a poem you are! Fit
 to be read to sun and moon and star! A poem that won't be
 read but will be from memory said! Down leaves and hit my
 face! Fly leaves just anyplace. Ride on the wind that's
 blowing out and blowing in. Leaves, leaves, so many colored
 birds--riding on the winds over this autumn earth--so many
 birds, so many periods for my written words--periods to hold
 poetic lines on this poetic autumn earth.

I'm out of the woods and leaves and to this place--
 where only white wine wind can hit my face! Here are the
 slopes of sterile earth--covered with sedge--good old brown
 broomsedge--a cover for the rabbit, grouse and quail. And
 all this sedge is now a-quiver--in autumn rhythm that cannot
 go on forever. Trees in motion, falling leaves--winds that
 laugh and winds that grieve--winds that make the sedgegrass
 quiver--autumn winds, yes, autumn winds that can't go on
 forever. Don't be frightened, rabbit, quail and grouse--
 you've just got the wind a-coming in your house--playing with
 sedge that you hide in--playing with sedge enough to make it
 quiver! All earth is rhythmic now but this can't be forever!
 Winds will get tired and want some rest. They will lie down

upon the leaves they have blown to the ground. It will be best for earth, trees, leaves, when winds lie down to get some rest.

Some putting sounds of dots and dashes--the silver maple leaves now trembling in the sun--white dots--white dashes on the winds make splashes. Sure these carry messages that chipmunks and mice will read. Sounds on the wireless birds and wildlife will heed.

I see the silver wires up there--electric--telephone, up trembling in the sun--must be large silver gossamer wires, giant spiders have spun. I look for spiders but they are not up there and not coming down the air--with anchored strands they are unravelling everywhere.

Oh, what a poem I am in! Over my head--under my feet--and on each side of me--up level with my eyes. Here is that rhythmical earth poem which is man-size--a poem for eternity. Sway through, play through--slow through--blow through poetic leaves for me to catch hold! Come over multi-colored leaves and dash and splash my face. Give me poetic messages you are sending out where tree branches and the sedge are bending.

Look at my Sandy River like a sea! The winds have blown small waves of destiny! Can you believe that winds can wrinkle water--wrinkle soft surface of the Sandy River--to make the crane and shikepoke shake with laughter?

Can you believe the winds have placed upon my Sandy

River leaf galleons and multi-colored ships to sail forever?
 No, they won't sail forever--where rhythmic waters tremble--
 old leaf ships will overturn and sink and winds will bring
 new ones to re-assemble.

Laugh on you long-billed crane! Stand propped upon
 a Sandy River floating log! As long as you stand there you'll
 leave the little fish alone. Feathery up on silken climbing
 wings--slow flying, up and up into the autumn rhythm until
 you are a part! And little homely shikepoke takes over where
 you stood--your leaving didn't break a heart!

Along my Sandy River,
 The reeds and waterlilies quiver,
 The golden eyes of daisies plead.
 Soil, water, sun are all they need
 To spread a white and golden sheet
 Over a bottom for the tall cranes' feet,
 A lush green carpet for the tall cranes' feet.

Away from water--away from Sandy River to my woods
 where tough-butted white oaks long have stood--tough trees
 that gather little sustenance from the clay--a stubborn tree
 that likes to have its way. A tree from childhood all mixed
 up. Sometimes I think old tough-butt thinks it is a butter-
 cup. But legend has it that this tree--growing in our hard-
 wood tree country--wanted to be an evergreen--but old
 Mother Nature intervened. And this is why I have come here
 to see my white oak trees. And true to form they will not

shed their leaves--winds blow through--slow through--their
finger twigs--as tough as wires--as sharp as briars they
hold their leaves.

If winds prefer--just let them grieve--poem of
rhythmic earth--these white oaks are some chosen part. A
lyric in this earth's big poem--to memorize with mind and say
with heart. These hardwoods trying to be evergreens. Well,
in the spring the new buds push away the winter leaves. And
spring wind laughs but never grieves.

Today I am as high as wind is high! I am a part of
autumn's rhythmic rhyme--a part of this, the greatest poem
of our time. I will stay out here until the winds lie down
to rest. And rest for them will be the best. I will be here
a part as falls the leaf--a dot--a dash upon my face with a
message beautiful and brief. This stops the rhythm of my
magic earth which is a part of me and I a part of it--this
poem since my birth!

--Jesse Stuart--

HOUSE ON THE HILL

I wrote "House on the Hill" in the autumn of 1929 when I was fresh out of Lincoln Memorial University and doing my first high school teaching at Warnock High School, Warnock, Kentucky. I was the faculty, high school principal and custodian. I taught fourteen high school students in a barn. So eager for an education, these excellent students almost worked me to death. But in this isolated area (it was then) with dirt roads that would freeze and thaw and become impassable in autumn and winter, we had to create our own recreation. The spare time I had (which was little) I wrote many poems. "House on the Hill" was one of these. I never sent this poem to a magazine.

While living with Mr. and Mrs. Alt Taylor at Warnock, I put my first collection of poems together, which included high school and college poems. I titled this collection Harvest of Youth. This collection was privately published. Three hundred copies were supposed to have been published. But I actually received only fifty copies. Of this number, there are fewer than ten copies around of the original publication.

One of my former pupils, Lee Pennington, who is an excellent poet, took a liking to Harvest of Youth, which was really my first book and was published in 1930 when I was 23. He thought it should be reprinted. I had tried to hide

this little book of 70 pages of youthful verse. I never mentioned to anyone I'd written it. I never had a copy of it myself--never kept it around. And I thought I'd destroyed it completely. But it wouldn't die.

Lee Pennington arranged for Council of Southern Mountains to reprint 2000 copies, which sold in one year. It is out of print now--and probably will never be reprinted. "House on the Hill" is the first poem in Harvest of Youth, this little unknown book--my first born.

THE CITIES

I wrote "The Cities" when I was a graduate student at Vanderbilt University 1931-1932. At this time I had only been in five large cities: Cincinnati, Ohio; Louisville, Kentucky; Birmingham, Alabama; Knoxville and Nashville, Tennessee. I remember Nashville as a gray and desolate city in winter from the time when I was a student at Vanderbilt and living on one meal a day. I remember that I sent "The Cities" to several small poetry magazines but each editor rejected it immediately. It was after Donald Davidson, my teacher at Vanderbilt University, told me, "Stuart, you are cut out for bigger magazines," that I sent "The Cities" to Scribner's Magazine, where it was accepted and published. I was paid good 1935 dollars for it, which I could hardly believe in that year of the Great American Depression.

In 1935, the year after the publication of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow (1934) I visited New York City, Baltimore and Philadelphia. New York was so large it scared me. I had the strange feeling that I had been right in my writing "The Cities." I got many nasty letters of criticism, some signed, others were not, when this poem was published. But it made Best Poems by Thomas Moulton in Great Britain. This pleased me but I was confused since this poem had been turned down by so many little poetry magazines in America.

Today, thirty-seven years after this poem was written

and thirty-four years after it was first published, there are many Americans who will agree with my critical attitude toward cities--for now, movements are on to beautify cities, to make them more desirable places in which to live.

POEM FOR MY DAUGHTER

On a stormy night in late summer 1943, I sat on our front porch until long after midnight while rain poured from low black skies. Lightning flashed around me, and thunder rumbled loud enough to shake the earth. I was in a terrific mood. I wrote a poem, 160 lines, for our daughter. "Poem For My Daughter" was later published in Commonweal Magazine.

Our daughter, Jessica Jane, was a year old and in her cradle when I wrote this poem. She was asleep and unmindful of the storm raging around and over our house. She had been born under difficult circumstances. Naomi, her mother, and I had been in an automobile accident in Villa Amada, Chihuahua, Mexico. Naomi was pregnant. A rear tire blew out and we turned over seven and one-half times. Naomi's back was broken. Our friends, Mr. and Mrs. William A. Voiers, were injured too. He suffered brain concussion and a broken back. I was knocked out but came to my senses and pulled Naomi and Mrs. Voiers from the wrecked car.

When we arrived home by train, for the car was demolished, the ambulance met our train and took Naomi home. I turned on the radio and a voice said: "Stand by for important news. The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor." I knew this meant war.

Naomi was in one cast--then another--and then a brace before our daughter, Jessica Jane, was born. She was

the only child we could have. Now this little girl was in a cradle and I was worried. I knew I would be in World War II.

In my mood during this raging storm, I wondered what would happen to our daughter. While storm winds blew and rain poured from the low dark clouds, I wrote about Jessica Jane. I was a disturbed father. The war was already on! And as soon as I could, I would put all work aside and be off to the war.

I did navy boot training and was later made an officer and served my country in World War II. The baby daughter I was writing about is now the author of two books of poems and will soon have her Ph.D. in Medieval Italian. She speaks Italian, French, Greek--and has translated many Greek and Latin poets. Her translations have been published in quality magazines in America. But I captured this mood about her, my deep feelings for her at the age of one, on the stormiest night I ever knew in Kentucky.

BALLAD OF LONESOME WATERS

On a lonely evening in Kissiam Hall, Vanderbilt University, in the Autumn of 1931, I wrote "Ballad of Lonesome Waters." This poem I sent many times to small magazines but it was always rejected. I never knew how a poem could be returned so quickly.

There were so many things said about Lonesome Waters among my people--that if a man ever drank of mountain lonesome waters--as I had--that he would return sometime to drink of these waters. While at Vanderbilt I often wanted to return to my home and drink of lonesome water. I was living on a meal a day at Vanderbilt, while at my home I always got three good meals each day--why wouldn't I be homesick to return to my Kentucky hills to drink of lonesome waters?

Even after poet Donald Davidson, who was my great teacher at Vanderbilt University, said for me to send to the "big magazines"--that I was "not cut out for the small magazines"--I was reluctant to send "Ballad of Lonesome Waters" to a big magazine. I waited--no rush--for I was tired of being rejected. After leaving Vanderbilt this poem remained in a stack of other written material nearly four years. Finally, I sent "Ballad of Lonesome Waters" to Esquire--a magazine that published very few poems. It had, so I thought, hardly time to get to Chicago until I received a nice check

for this poem, in depression days in America. I still can hardly believe that this poem sold to Esquire for solid and wonderful depression dollars. But it did.

DESERTED COAL-MINE CAMP

Was there ever a reason why I should not have written "Deserted Coal-Mine Camp"? My father was a coal miner who could not read and write. I was born in a one-room shack near the coal-mine entrance where my father used to dig coal. He used to bend over and walk in the dark coal mine with a carbide lamp on the bill of his cap. As a small boy I walked behind him into the mine. I felt the drops of sulphur water dripping from the mine roof. I watched the tiny flames from carbide sway with the wind puffs of air moving toward the mine's entrance.

In later years I went back where my father used to dig coal in this mine. The place was deserted now. The mine was closed. The place where the old scales used to be, where the wagon loads of coal were weighed, was a dent in the earth. The mine tracks were gone. The bank ties that supported the little iron rails had rotted and steel rails had rusted. Sulphur water ran in a trickling stream through the ugly mouth where the coal mine's entrance used to be. When my father had taken me in this mine (when I was a small boy) he told me mine rats were the miner's best friends, for when they sensed the mine was ready to cave in, miners saw them leaving the mine and miners knew it was time for them to go, too. I was impressed when I visited this old mine--impressed with memories of the past--and I sat down under

the shade of a tough-butted white oak in this spot of desolation and wrote this poem. It was published in Voices, one of the small poetry journals.

MOUNTAIN FUNERAL

In the spring of 1927, when I was a student at Lincoln Memorial University, I was invited to the home of a college student. My freshman year was nearly over. I'd not gone anywhere. I'd worked a half day, five weekdays and all day on Saturday, to defray my expenses, for I entered Lincoln Memorial University on \$29.30. I had no help from anyone. I received no scholarships and received only \$2.00 from home.

To me, this invitation was great. No one had invited me to his or her home before. So I went with my classmate to Sneedville, Hancock County, in East Tennessee.

On our way, over a winding gravel road, in an ancient Dodge, across a desolate mountain county in East Tennessee--we came to a place where there was a funeral. We stopped to join the crowd of relatives and friends of the deceased gathered there. There were five college students in our car. I will never know why we stopped unless it was the East Tennesseans' respect for their mountain dead. I was a stranger in this land. I saw the man, a stranger to me, for the first time, in his coffin--I asked a few questions among people gathered there. I was a much disturbed and moody young man when we got in our ancient car to drive on to Sneedville. I was moody and silent among my college classmates. I wrote "Mountain Funeral" in the car. It was finished when we reached Sneedville.

My being Editor of the Blue and Gray, college paper at Lincoln Memorial University, I first published "Mountain Funeral" in this college publication. And I was criticized for this. "Stuart, why use funeral poetry in the Blue and Gray?" But this same poem was reprinted in the New York Times, October 19th, 1952, twenty-five years after I wrote it. I was nineteen when I wrote this poem.

W-Hollow

Greenup, Kentucky

July 26, 1969

Dear Jim and Wanda:

Have just received your fine letter. You're really going after your Ph.D. and how smart you are! You just about have to have one.

Of course you can bring your advisor down here. I think this is the thing to do. I would like to meet him. I think we should meet.

I had no influence on expanding the sonnet to 16 lines. It was more convenient. I also had another idea about the sonnet which I didn't use, but may use later. Ten lines in what is called the octave--and eight in the sextet. Make it the octet. This makes the sonnet a better form, less cramped, more flexible. I might do the four stanzas with a couplet for closing.

I never knew until your letter the English had written the sixteen line sonnet. But I remember a line from the Old Testament: "There is nothing new under the sun."

I think it would be nice if you and Jane could have an hour's conversation about your degrees. She's in Holland now--has been gone 19 months--won't get home until September--about 21 months away. I think she's getting

tired and homesick.

Yes, I agree--an obsession for the Ph.D.--or an education--which I had--and man will come through--

It will be good to see Jim and Wanda again.

Sincerely,

Jesse

P.S. You're doing the first Ph.D. dissertation ever written on my poems. I'm glad you are doing this and I will be happy to read it. Will you read the last poem in Kentucky Is My Land--"The Builder and the Dreamer"? Ed Kuhn, my longtime editor, didn't publish Kentucky Is My Land. Dutton did. Ed Kuhn read that poem this year and said it was a great one.

W-Hollow

Greenup, Kentucky

August 19, 1969

Dear Jim:

I can answer all three questions you have asked me. First, I'm going to try to find an article I did on Carl Sandburg and send it to you. He was one of my (very few) literary heroes. I'll see if I can find this tomorrow and send it to you.

Second, will you check in The Year of My Rebirth and read the tribute I paid to Robert Burns? He influenced me; he meant everything to me.

Third, Edgar Lee Masters--friend that he was in later years--a man I loved--I never knew too well in school and college and he never really influenced me. I know this is strange but it is true.

Did Wanda go with you to Murray? Nice people there. I probably have more material there than any other American writer has in a given place--and I will have more there.

Sincerely,

Jesse

W-Hollow

Greenup, Kentucky

August 25, 1969

Jim LeMaster

Defiance College

Defiance, Ohio

Dear Jim and Wanda:

Each time I write you I want to compliment you, Jim, on going ahead with your Ph.D. and you, Wanda, on your going to college. You cannot do anything better than to improve yourselves while you are younger.

Now, Jim, you asked me about Edgar Lee Masters' influence. I have to do some reasoning here. If he influenced me, as early reviews of Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow pointed out, then the influence would have to have been a subconscious influencing. I must have read parts or all of Spoon River Anthology and other poems by Masters. I know I certainly didn't lean toward him. He had written a very mean book about Abraham Lincoln...only Allen Tate had praised...then, and I knew that Masters wasn't for me. So I do not remember any influence.

A few days after I finished my first novel manuscript, Trees of Heaven, in October of 1938, Naomi and I were married secretly (about everything was against me then, even Naomi's mother, and Naomi was 31 and I was 32...time

for us to get married). I finished this manuscript, borrowed money and took it through to NYC and stayed in the YMCA (a very reasonable place) across the street from the old Chelsea Hotel.

At the YMCA I was told there was another writer who lived across the street, and who came over to the YMCA pool to swim. I'd told someone at the YMCA that I had had three books published and stories and poems in magazines. Said the man: "There is another writer; you may not have heard of him but he lives over there in the Chelsea Hotel. His name is Edgar Lee Masters."

I went across the street to meet him. And I did.

"Mr. Masters, I am secretly married," I told him.

"It might work, son," he said. "It might work."

He had been married twice, both wives living and he lived with neither. Had children by both marriages.

"And I have been accused in book reviews of imitating you in my book, Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow," I said.

"I've read that book, son," he said. "It's a damn fine book. It might even be a great book. I don't know much about books, son. But let me tell you one thing...pay no attention to the critics. They're all a bunch of god-damned liars."

These are the man's words. He and I formed a lasting friendship...it lasted until he died. And believe me, he was a man the critics were after. I never saw anything like it.

Then he said, later, when I went to New York again (I always went to see him, and later took Naomi Deane with me. We loved him and he was fond of us.)--he said to me: "If you ever make any money from writing save some of it."

I didn't know he was having a hard time making a living. I don't mind one bit that it be said he influenced me. I would rather it be said for him than some of the others. He detested Frost and Sandburg and they detested him. Among all the early giants among American writers I met...if they could be called "giants"...Masters was the man who appealed to me most. Masters was really an attorney and a good one.

Sincerely,

Jesse

W-Hollow

Greenup, Kentucky

August 26, 1969

Dear Jim:

Remember, I told you I had seven poems accepted, one from Harvest of Youth and six from Kentucky Is My Land, for a volume of Great Poems and the histories behind them-- I've written the histories behind them and I am sending you these.

For, I believe my methods of writing these, which is so typical of my writing, will help you. Deep feelings push me, and I do them "now or never." In earlier days, sometimes on a poetic binge, I'd write all night. A poem had to have form, choice words--poetic words. It had to have beauty and it had to say something.

Sincerely,

Jesse

Route 1

Fredericktown, Ohio

8/30/69

J. R. LeMaster

Defiance College

Defiance, Ohio 43512

Dear Mr. LeMaster:

Immediately after receiving your letter Jesse Stuart called me to ask me down to the Stuart-Hilton reunion tomorrow. He explained some interesting things about you. Said you and I have a common origin: Kentucky, Pike County, Ohio, etc. And a common interest in Jesse. Right now I share something of your problem. I'm researching for a book about Jesse.

I'm happy to help you all I can but can't do it to advantage in a letter. I suggest you get my thesis from O.U. Then get Ruel Foster's book, Jesse Stuart, and Mrs. Everetta Love Blair's book, Jesse Stuart: His Life and Works. All have sections about Jesse's poetry. (I don't recommend Pennington's book on Jesse's poetry. I think the book on symbolism is 100% wrong. Yet, I like Lee Pennington. Good friend.)

You have selected a good subject. Jesse's poetry comes from his gladness of the earth.

Jesse speaks so well of you. I'd be happy to meet

you and talk over our research problems sometime. I've had to hurry this. Thanks for writing.

Sincerely,

Lee O. Ramey

St. Mary's Hospital
Huntington, West Va.
September 2, 1969

Dear Jim:

When the ideas for poems come upon you, stop everything and let them enter. Then, record them. All you have sent me will be published. "Blue Soldier," "Let There Be Love," "Notes on Married Love," and "Gypsy Wind" are all excellent.

Paul Flowers' column is from his "Greenhouse," a very famous feature in its day. He's now retired. In this column, Paul was merely being sarcastic. He got to the place where he was disliking mumble-jumble, so-called poetry. He singled out mine as being well written. If I remember correctly he was fond of Whitman and Browning.

No, I never knew your father was so like mine--pertaining to education. If I can I will obtain a copy of a published genealogy (April 1963) in The Registrar, Kentucky's finest historical magazine. The Stewarts and the allied families by William Stewart have come through, from 1750 up--Stuart all the way. They intermarried with others. So many soldiers--so many died. It tells how they reached what is Lawrence County, Kentucky today. But so many moved in before 1821 when it was still Greenup County.

I never knew enough about Vachel Lindsay to comment

on him. I liked his poems in his day and time. Masters liked him. Sarah Teasdale and Vachel Lindsay were married to others but madly in love with each other--both committed suicide. I worked in later years with John Gould Fletcher--never met a man who was fonder of me. He was another of the helpless. He had no humor. He was tragic. I forgave him his terrible review of Bull-Tongue Plow.

Jim, I'm in St. Mary's Hospital, intensive care and cardiac unit. How long I'll be here I don't know. I'm permitted little time between sleeping pills to write.

Sincerely,

Jesse

St. Mary's Hospital
Huntington, West Virginia
September 6, 1969

Dear Jim:

Since you are doing research on my poems, I am going to tell you that in the autumn of 1969 and in the year of 1970 I'm going to put on an extensive drive in poetry. I plan to put special effort into getting my collected poems published in 1971. I have books lined up for publication this autumn (one) and next year three (one of these a junior book)--so I have two years planned ahead. This may not work. But it does have a good chance of working.

Beginning very soon, I plan to send poems to magazines--maybe small ones. I can put 100 or more poems on the road--not published--and I have nearly this many unpublished "bird poems." Then, I'm making, I hope, with good spreads, two anthologies. I know I am making one. I'm fairly sure of the other. I'm putting special emphasis on poems instead of stories--we shall see.

Sincerely,

Jesse

St. Mary's Hospital
Huntington, West Virginia
September 9, 1969

Dear Jim:

Since you must be given an oral examination regarding my poetry, I am going to send you this information on Album of Destiny. It took me eleven months to write Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow--which was for recreation and pleasure. I never expected it to be published.

It took me, writing off and on, eleven years to complete Album of Destiny. This is the longest I ever worked on one of my books. I actually had the idea for this book and began writing it before I ever started Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow.

I spent more time on each poem in the seasonal units--spring, summer, autumn, and winter--than I spent on a short story. These poems are well done. Foster's feeling about these was that they were too well done. I believe I am right. I do not have his book here. Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow, published in 1934--came out in peace-time. Album of Destiny, published in 1944 (a bad time for a book of poems) came out in the war years--paper scarce, review space in papers and magazines scarce, and few people left to review books. This made a difference too.

Adding more to questions you have asked, since I won't

get to leave the hospital and go home for two more weeks yet, in my youth most everything I did was poetry. Poetry (and its various and varied forms) was not big enough to carry all my ideas. So I turned to the story and the novel.

Critics have pointed out that my prose is poetry. I don't know about this. I do know I've been asked to break up a dozen of my short stories and put them into poems.

I am sending you eight poems from Album of Destiny with histories behind them. This, I think, will interest you.

Sincerely,

Jesse

St. Mary's Hospital
Huntington, West Virginia
September 11, 1969

Dear Jim and Wanda:

Stay clear of hospitals if you can. They save people from disasters--but a hospital is so confining. My cardiograms show that I had a mild heart attack. There is nothing you can do to help me. Thank you for your offering, and sympathies. I will be returning home in the not-too-distant future. I'm permitted to sit up three times per day now and thirty minutes each time.

Back to Album of Destiny. I could really get a selected small book of poems from this book, and the histories behind them. Because I worked so long on each poem, I had help on this book too. Do you remember Louise Townsend Nicholls--poet? She was an editor at E. P. Dutton and Company. She helped. And William Rose Benet, who used to write a column in Saturday Review of Literature--a brother to Stephen Benet--also helped. And my wife helped. She was such good help that she was offered a job (editorial) with E. P. Dutton and Company.

Sincerely,

Jesse

St. Mary's Hospital
Huntington, West Virginia
September 12, 1969

Jim LeMaster
English Department
Defiance College
Defiance, Ohio

Dear Jim:

Your logic appears good in this letter regarding what happened to my poetry and to poetry of other poets of the period. You build your case! It will be up to them if you have critics--and you probably will--to attack you. Let them attack. Let them dispute. Let them try to tear down.

It is a tragic fate young Americans followed; older Americans switched to follow the New Criticism. Today, Dr. Harold Richardson, who hates the New Criticism with a passion, says it's cracking at the seams and going out. But it left destruction in its wake. Such great American writers as Mark Twain and Thomas Wolfe were ruled out. The New Critics and their followers placed themselves in their places while they had done so little. There were too few American critics who met this challenge. They let "New Criticism" over-ride everything.

I am thinking that you have possibilities of expanding your dissertation into a book. Perhaps when you have

finished and have your Ph.D. you can make some changes to convert it. And I wonder about some contacts with your Ohio State University Press-or others you may have in Ohio.

In Kentucky we have about eight schools joined together, six state schools and two private, to form the University Press of Kentucky. I have been invited to attend the first meeting--and if I am able in time I hope to be there. This will be in October--on or about the 17th.

I would like to go to see their plans. It should be a big press. I have a few friends, including a daughter (her translations), whose books have to be published by a state press. And I have friends who will do important books, and for these I would like to say a word.

Sincerely,

Jesse

St. Mary's Hospital
Huntington, West Virginia
September 14, 1969

Dear Jim:

If I can find you an old article (never published) about having Harvest of Youth published, when I get out of this hospital and home, I'll send it to you. It's a mean article. I tried to kill Harvest of Youth but didn't succeed. It was dug up by Lee Ramey in his thesis on me.

The credits I gave in Harvest of Youth--I've told Dr. Woodbridge and I've argued with him over this matter--are correct. I don't lie. Maybe sometime, in an old trunk which I have, I might find a little scrapbook that will shed a lot of light. My memory isn't now nor wasn't bad then.

This is Foster's idea--not mine--that Bull-Tongue Plow is my apogee. This is a matter of opinion. Today I've been looking over, here in the hospital, a book--Album of Destiny. I've been checking a number of poems from this book (not MWBTP) to be published in a poetry anthology for colleges in 1970 or 1971--about 16 of these poems. Some group, isn't it? Then, I have new, unpublished satirical poems--a large book of these. Too bad my collected poems has not been published--will be in 1971. I do not agree with Foster as much as I like and respect this man.

On your third question, I can't answer this one. I'm disturbed over it. I've given poetry and prose my best. If prose outshines poetry, I cannot help this. But I do regret it.

In the last twenty years I have not gone with the fads and foibles--and crazy schools of poetry in this country. I have had to be myself. I have remained true to my beliefs, published or not. To hell with the publishing. I've had approximately 1908 poems published--more to be published. It's true--but there are few markets that I would even send to. What is currently poetry, so-called, really isn't poetry. Time will show.

Back to Bull-Tongue Plow. There are people so attached to this book that they wouldn't try another book of my poems. There are people so attached to The Thread That Runs So True that they wouldn't try Mr. Gallion's School. Edgar Lee Masters had this problem over Spoon River Anthology. People wouldn't buy his poetry books that followed.

Sincerely,

Jesse

W-Hollow

Greenup, Kentucky

October 3, 1969

Dear Jim and Wanda:

How are you? I hope that the going is not too rough, and that you both have health.

Jim, I am afraid I didn't answer a question you asked me in this excellent letter you have written. I wrote "Kentucky Is My Land" as poetic prose. Naomi Deane read it and said: "Jesse, this is poetry." "Then you help me. Let's break it up and put it in a poem," I said. We did. I did most but she helped me. This poem is so popular in this state that I have made it public domain. I'd like to have a copy of it (published by Ashland Oil and given to schools over the commonwealth) sent to you.

"The Builder and the Dreamer," which Ed Kuhn, a later editor, says is a great poem, I did not write first in prose. I wrote it the way it now stands. These two poems, "Kentucky Is My Land" and "The Builder and the Dreamer," were created differently.

It's great to have a poet do a dissertation on my poetry--the very first dissertation on my poetry too. The chapter headings you are using are "honeys." Not many of my poems were written in prose first--I remember only two: "Kentucky Is My Land" and I broke an article up (have you

read this? all 22 pages) titled "My Land Has a Voice." The article was first published in Arizona Quarterly. I wrote the article in a day. I was one week doing the poem. These are the only two I remember. It has been suggested that some of my stories be broken up--like "Fast Train Ike" in Come Gentle Spring-- and "Battle Keaton Dies"--and the story you liked and selected a poem from--sometime I'll think of six or seven others. There's one story in Men of the Mountains too.

Sincerely,

Jesse

W-Hollow

Greenup, Kentucky

October 4, 1969

Dear Jim and Wanda:

Wonderful, your idea! The situation is close--very close. Today is October 4th. It's definitely to be published October 14th. I've hoped for advanced copies sooner.

Maybe it would be better if I can have copies sent directly to you from the publisher. This will save time.

Did you know there were only 2,600 or 2,800 (I forget which) copies of Beyond Dark Hills published--and it was five or six years selling out. I've had to use (no other way) some of the first of Beyond Dark Hills in To Teach, To Love. With the exception of a very few, this will not matter. This will be new reading. When you read this book you will see why I had to use this. Yes, this is a needed book, now.

Sincerely,

Jesse

W-Hollow

Greenup, Kentucky

November 11, 1969

Dear Jim and Wanda:

Don't forget to check my eight poems in December Esquire, which is on the newsstands now. Check a copy of Esquire before all copies sell. I have eight poems in the December Esquire and this is something for a magazine that seldom uses poems. I believe, Jim and Wanda, that both of you will like these poems and agree with the philosophy. I think we can wield satire through poems. I think I'm right on old John L. Lewis, labor czar, and on Pres. LBJ. These poems hit hard.

Sincerely,

Jesse

CHRONOLOGY OF JESSE HILTON STUART

- 1907 Born on August 8 to Mitchell and Martha (Hilton) Stuart in W-Hollow, near Riverton, Kentucky
- 1925-1929 Student at Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee
- 1929 Principal of Warnock High School
- 1930 Harvest of Youth
Principal of Greenup High School
- 1931-1932 Graduate student at Vanderbilt University
- 1933 Principal of McKell High School
- 1934 Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow
Jeanette Sewal Davis poetry prize
- 1936 Head O' W-Hollow
- 1937 Guggenheim Fellowship for European travel
- 1938 Beyond Dark Hills
Teacher at Portsmouth High School, Portsmouth, Ohio
- 1939 October 14, married Naomi Deane Norris
- 1940 Trees of Heaven
- 1941-1943 Superintendent of city schools, Greenup, Kentucky
- 1941 Men of the Mountains
Academy of Arts and Science Award
- 1942 Birth of Jessica Jane Stuart
- 1943 Taps for Private Tussie, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in December and winner of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Award
- 1944 March-August, U.S. Navy; left service as a Lt.(j.g.)
Mongrel Mettle and Album of Destiny

- 1944 Honorary Doctor of Literature, University of Kentucky
- 1946 Foretaste of Glory and Tales from the Plum Grove Hills
- 1949 The Thread That Runs So True, selected as the best book in 1949 by the National Education Association
- 1950 Hie to the Hunters and Clearing in the Sky and Other Stories
Honorary Doctor of Humanities, Lincoln Memorial University
- 1952 Honorary Doctor of Literature, Marietta College
Kentucky Is My Land
- 1953 The Good Spirit of Laurel Ridge and The Beatinest Boy
- 1954 A Penny's Worth of Character and Red Mule
Honorary Doctor of Laws, Baylor University
Poet Laureate of Kentucky
October 8, heart attack in Murray, Kentucky
- 1956 Jesse Stuart Memorial dedicated, Greenup, Kentucky
The Year of My Rebirth
Principal of McKell High School
- 1958 Plowshare in Heaven
September issue of the American Book Collector devoted to Jesse Stuart
Summer, taught in the Graduate College of Education, University of Nevada
- 1959 Honorary Doctor of Literature, Morris Harvey College
- 1960-1961 Visiting lecturer and professor, American University, Cairo, Egypt

- 1960 God's Oddling and The Rightful Owner
- Jesse Stuart: A Bibliography (Lincoln Memorial University Press), first attempt at a full-scale bibliography of Jesse Stuart
- Jesse Stuart Room established in the Murray State College (later University) Library
- 1961 Awarded \$5,000 prize of the Academy of American Poets
- Andy Finds a Way
- 1962 Hold April
- Honorary Doctor of Literature, Marshall University
- 1963 A Jesse Stuart Reader
- 1964 Save Every Lamb
- Honorary Doctor of Literature, Eastern Kentucky
- Honorary Doctor of Literature, Northern Michigan University
- 1965 A Jesse Stuart Harvest and Daughter of the Legend
- 1966 My Land Has a Voice and A Ride with Huey, the Engineer
- Dedication of Jesse Stuart High School, Valley Station, Kentucky
- February American Book Collector devoted to Jesse Stuart
- Honorary Doctor of Literature, Berea College
- 1967 Mr. Gallion's School
- Eve Blair's Jesse Stuart: His Life and Works and Lee Pennington's The Dark Hills of Jesse Stuart
- W-Hollow Harvest, edited by Dave and Phyllis Brandenburg
- 1968 Mary Washington Clarke's Jesse Stuart's Kentucky and Ruel Foster's Jesse Stuart

- 1968 Honorary Doctor of Pedagogy, Murray State University
- 1969 Jesse and Jane Stuart: A Bibliography (Murray State
University) and Come Gentle Spring
- 1970 To Teach, To Love