To Make the Eye Secure: the Criticism, Fiction, and Poetry of Allen Tate.

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TO MAKE THE EYE SECURE: THE CRITICISM, FICTION, AND POETRY OF ALLEN TATE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in The Department of English

by

Richard J. O'Dea
B.A., St. Louis University, 1947
June, 1964
The writing of this dissertation has put me under many happy obligations. Of the members of the Louisiana State University faculty I am especially indebted to Professor Donald E. Stanford without whose cheerful encouragement, learned guidance and persistent prodding I should never have completed this study. To Professor Lewis P. Simpson for his great erudition generously shared not only in the classroom but casually and pleasantly on the stairs, in the halls, or over a cup of coffee I am truly grateful. I remember with gratitude the penetrating remarks and criticism of greatest value given by Professor Fabian Gudas. I am sincerely indebted to Professor Thomas A. Kirby who generously took time from his many pressing duties to advise and direct me during Professor Stanford's absence. Finally I am obligated to all those faculty members who either directly by their teaching or indirectly by friendly association helped to make my years of study as pleasant as they were formative.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an attempt to discover a center of unity in Tate's criticism, fiction, and poetry. Other studies have isolated individual themes - the old South, the fragmentation of modern life, morality, and religion - but have failed to relate these themes to a common center. Several studies have attempted to relate Tate's early work to his recent conversion. No study has discovered a single philosophical center from which secondary themes follow and which controls both the content and form of Tate's fiction and poetry. This philosophical center is epistemological, the problem of knowledge.

Investigation of Tate's critical writings reveals that he treats every subject from an epistemological perspective. His early essays treating the tradition of the old South conclude that the South's integrated culture resulted from a perfect mode of knowledge, a total vision of reality. Modern man because of historical circumstances is incapable of this perfect mode of cognition. Tate also founds his aesthetics upon his epistemology. The perfect work of literature contains total knowledge of the world because its author possesses total cognition. The modern
writer is incapable of perfect cognition and, consequently, is incapable of writing perfect literature. The tragic situation of modern man trapped by history in an age in which total cognition is impossible is the dramatic situation of the protagonists of Tate's poetry and fiction. Tate's epistemology, which demands a single act of cognition ("seeing") in which past and present, singular and universal are known, is also the basis of the form of his poetry. In his pre-conversion poems, he eliminates all abstract statement and forces the symbol or image to support the idea.

After discovering Thomism and embracing Catholicism, Tate continues to write from an epistemological perspective. He rejects, however, historical determinism and judges that total knowledge depends upon a way of knowing, Thomistic abstraction. If the modern poet writes as he knows, beginning with sense data, he too can write perfect literature. Tate writes three poems and several essays from this new perspective. Neither poems nor essays are entirely successful.

The philosophical center of Tate's better work - criticism, fiction, poetry - is epistemological, the problem of knowledge. The supposition that perfect knowledge is impossible in the modern world creates great dramatic force in Tate's pre-conversion poetry and fiction and the
poetic form based upon his early theory of cognition - a form that strives to embody the universal in the singular - gives to his poetry structural tension and power. Tate's adoption of a new philosophical position from which he writes poetry inductive in form and allegorical in content, seems to have dulled his creative genius which for stimulation requires an insoluble problem, an inescapable position, the problem and position of the impossibility of total knowledge in the modern world.
INTRODUCTION

The mutability of the human condition need not inevitably be tainted with sadness. Of necessity the years have changed Allen Tate, but not for the worse. The turgid, confusing style of his early essays has been polished to an almost Augustan smoothness. The belligerent and intolerant tone of his early criticism has been replaced by a becoming humility and charity, or, at least, urbanity. As the style and tone changed, so too has changed the attitudes of his critics. The early notices were brief and perfunctory; some even abusive and heavily sarcastic.¹ But since the publication of Cleanth Brooks' *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* in 1939, Tate has been the subject of a number of long and serious studies, the most important of these being J. M. Bradbury's *The Fugitives* and R. K. Meiners' *The Last Alternatives*. The latter is a book-length study and at least for the present is the best work on Tate.

In each of these later studies the critic attempts to discover either in Tate's poetry or in his criticism some one unifying principle. Each attempts to discover a different center of unity, a different solution to the perennial problem of the one and the many. Only two of the critics agree upon a common center; Vivienne Koch and Richard Foster both consider Tate to be a romantic. For them it is this latent romanticism, present even in the apparently classical work, that gives to Tate's creative and critical thought a unity.

The study of each critic has its own particular value and no one of them completely eliminates the others. While one might disagree with, for example, Koch's conclusion, nevertheless her study of Tate's poetry has many valuable insights. The very diversity of the conclusions arrived at by the authors of these books and articles attests to the complexity and density of Tate's creative and critical thought.

Nor does Tate himself provide much help in the


search for a central unifying principle of art and of criticism. With becoming modesty he introduces one of his books by disclaiming any system of thought.

It will be obvious to anybody who has done me the honor of reading my essays over a number of years, that I had to learn as I went along. But it was always necessary to move on, in the intervals between essays, and to think about something else, such as a room where one might write them, and whether the rent could be paid. Another matter for the mendicant poet to think about was poetry itself, and even how he might write some of it. I could echo without too much self-revelation Poe’s famous (and humorless) excuse for having published so little verse: there is too much else that one must do - a distraction that frequently includes the prospect of not doing anything. I am not sure that I wanted to write more than three or four of these essays; the others I was asked to write; one can do what one does. I never knew what I thought about anything until I had written about it. To write an essay was to find out what I thought; for I did not know at the beginning how or where it would end.

Tate is not unduly modest, for he is no systematic thinker. As one of his critics remarks, it is far easier to tell what he is against than what he is for. This is not to say that Tate is unintelligent, but that his intelligence is intuitive rather than analytic. His essays are studded with startling and valid insights.

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but these same essays are singularly devoid of inductive and deductive reasoning to support the isolated conclusions.

Ransom, Tate's early mentor and life-long friend, has not been remiss in censuring this failure in systematic thought.

I do feel entitled to impeach your treatment as exposition. I feel you are in contact with red-hot truth, for you continually drop glowing and impressive sparks whenever you wax critical. But you tend to rely successively on the sparks, when we want a continuous blaze. In other words, you get hold of a beautiful intuition and immediately antagonize your followers by founding a Church thereon...I should think you ought to get your own consent to a little subordination among your (seemingly) perfectly insubordinate ideas. It is poetic, Modern, and pluralistic to exalt each in turn to the pinnacle; but the net result is confusion.

But in spite of Tate's admitted inconsistency and lack of formal logic, there is, I believe, in all of his work - criticism, fiction, poetry - a unifying principle or unifying problem. Furthermore, I do not believe that any one of Tate's critics has discovered this center of unity. The romanticism, authoritarianism, classicism, historicism that each critic stresses are...

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all present in Tate's work but are present as corollaries of a more basic principle. It is my purpose in this study to discover the essential principle in Tate's critical writings and to observe its application both in his fiction and in his poetry. Obviously, it would be an injustice to a man who admittedly is not a professional philosopher to ignore other facets of his genius. Consequently, having once established by means of the critical writings Tate's intellectual center of unity, I shall indicate it but briefly in the analysis of his fiction and poetry. One central principle or problem may well be the efficacious cause of Tate's creative achievement, but to understand the achievement itself more than a knowledge of the intention is necessary. Total understanding, Aristotle informs us, requires knowledge of the four causes; efficient (Tate), final (his center of unity), and matter and form (the poem or story). It is in its existential state that art is art, that form has been impressed upon matter. The purpose of my analysis of the fiction and poetry will not be the mere demonstration of an idea but rather the demonstration of a highly complex and successful art form in which all of the parts have been integrated by the artist to a unified whole.
What is Tate's intellectual center of unity? It is a problem not a principle, a problem not uniquely his. It might be interesting - but of little value in this study - to trace the same problem from Coleridge, who hoped his philosophy and poetry would neutralize each other, through Keats, who desired to prove the axioms of philosophy on his pulses, to Arnold, who sought a total integration of life in art. Plato constructed his philosophical system in an attempt to solve this problem which has troubled philosophers even to the present day. Tate's center of unity is, I believe, the same problem, the problem of knowledge. All of the ills of the twentieth century he sees as arising from a partial and imperfect knowledge. Modern man and modern society are fragmented because of flawed knowledge. From imperfect vision (the terms "seeing" and "knowing" are used synonymously by Tate) stem the aimless motion, the materialism, the atheism, the split personality, the failure in art and life of modern man. Because of his lack of what Schopenhauer calls pure contemplation and what the Oriental religions define as absorption, modern man is alienated from his own tradition, from nature, from God.

Tate is not unlike Socrates in his belief that
virtue, at least social and artistic virtue, can be achieved through knowledge. However, unlike Socrates, Tate is trapped in a set of historical circumstances that render the acquisition of true knowledge impossible. This is the tragic situation of nearly all the protagonists of the fiction and poetry. These sensitive and intelligent observers are painfully aware of the insufficiency of modern life. They are equally aware of a Golden Age now past in which life was an integrated whole. But the motives that inspired men in the heroic age no longer inspire modern man. He lacks the "arrogant circumstance" in which he might attain total knowledge.

Because they are trapped by history in an unheroic age, both Tate and his protagonists rage with a hopeless violence against their deterministic fate. Perhaps the objects of his satire, those hollow optimists whose heads are stuffed with abstractions, are more fortunate than are he and his protagonists. The former, at least, like the modern politicians, do not realize that they live in hell.

Tate's conversion to Roman Catholicism presents something of an objection to the thesis that the problem of cognition is the intellectual and artistic
center of his thought. If faith is the term toward which Tate's thinking tended, then a Newman-like search for authority might well be his intellectual center. I first considered the center of his thought to be a reversal of the scholastic dictum, fides quaerens intellectum, a kind of intellectus quaerens fidem. Nor was I alone in this belief. However, more careful reading of the essays and poems written after his conversion, has forced me to change my opinion, and I believe that my analysis of both will demonstrate the validity of the cognition thesis.

Furthermore, Tate's present position is an anomalous one. He has divorced Caroline Gordon and remarried. By reason of his second marriage he is excluded from the reception of the sacraments. Theologically his act deprives him of the virtue of charity; he retains, however, faith and hope. But this is a moral and canonical question and need not detain us. It is also a question of little practical import, for Tate's literary output in the last ten years has been negligible. It is my contention that Tate's conversion to Catholicism, far from

being a term of intellectual movement, was rather a hindrance to his art and marked the conclusion of his creative career. With the resolution of his problem by faith, Tate lost the source of his poetic inspiration. Both the essays and the poetry stemming from faith are inferior to his earlier work. Faith did not provide Tate as it did Eliot with an inspiration for an "Ash Wednesday." Whatever may be the personal disposition of his soul, Tate's poetic sensibilities seem never to have moved beyond "The Waste Land."

With the mention of Eliot's poem, the question of influences arises. It is all too easy to write Tate off as a derivative poet and thinker, an odd mélange of Eliot and Ransom. To do so is to ignore the obvious fact that contemporaneous writers are bound to share common themes and common attitudes. The French symbolists, Freud, a post-war tedium vitae and despair, an impatience with familiar forms and worn ideas were all part of the zeitgeist of the 1920's. It is, then, extremely difficult to determine whether two writers are similar because one influenced the other or because both drew from a common source. I believe that in the course of this study it will become apparent that although
Tate may have learned from Ransom, Eliot, Ford Madox Ford - from whom, incidentally, he says he learned everything he knows about writing and others, he quickly changed what he learned to something uniquely his. No reader could ever mistake Tate's mature poetry for Ransom's or Eliot's. I shall, then, treat influences but incidentally, noting the differences rather than the similarities.

In summary, I purpose in this study to establish a center of unity in Tate's thought. This center is, I believe, an epistemological one, the problem of total cognition, of grasping the object concretely with all of its temporal ramifications. I shall prove the existence of this center from the critical essays. Having once proved its existence, I shall place only incidental emphasis upon it in the consideration of the fiction and poetry.

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SECTION I

THE CRITICISM OF ALLEN TATE

In the preface to his collected essays Tate warns the reader to expect no unity: "The book can therefore be expected to have as little unity as my previous critical volumes: if my interests of the moment happened to coincide with an editor's, an essay or a review was the result."9

Though Tate admits no unity, yet a unity of theme does exist in these essays no matter how diversified their subject matter. The subject matter of the essays I shall divide into four general headings: tradition, aesthetics, practical criticism, and faith. The third division I shall treat briefly, not because Tate's practical criticism is unimportant but because these excellent studies must be read to be appreciated. In them Tate's ideas are not so much in evidence as are his marvelously critical sensibilities and unerring good taste. The

9. Collected Essays (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959), p. ix. This edition of the collected essays is regarded as the "official" edition. In referring to it I shall give in the footnote the title and pagination of the essay being considered. To avoid an awkward series of ibid., I shall give the page of the quotation in the text.
order that I shall follow in this first section is almost a chronological biography of Tate's mind: his thinking on tradition, aesthetics, poetry, and Catholicism.
The word "tradition" immediately calls to mind T. S. Eliot and his essays on the subject. Undoubtedly Tate read them and was influenced by them, but his own essays on tradition differ considerably from Eliot's. Both writers relate tradition to history; Tate by the "long and short view," Eliot by the "historical sense." Both seem to give to their terms the same definition; in Eliot's words "the historical sense involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past but of the present." 10 For Eliot, however, tradition is an objective thing to which the modern poet conforms and to which he adds: "We say: it [the new poem] appears to conform, and is perhaps individual, or it appears individual, and may conform; but we are hardly likely to find that it is one and not the other." 11 Tradition is a body of thought, experience, and art that can increase but which abandons

11. Ibid., p. 51.
nothing in its growth: "which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen." Thus, though the poet within the tradition possesses a conscious habit of mind which simultaneously grasps past and present, yet tradition itself is objective, is that which is known, not a mode of knowing.

Tate uses many of Eliot's terms. Certainly he believes that true knowledge somehow perceives the temporal sequence not as a series but as a whole. Nevertheless his concept of tradition is essentially different from Eliot's. To Tate tradition is not an object known, but is a way of knowing. It is the very process by which reality is totally perceived; it is the subjective act of the knower.

Tate, like Eliot, or perhaps because of Eliot, views modern civilization as a wasteland, a positivistic jungle of endless means without ends. Because the members of this wasteland have no final purpose, they are concerned only with immediate, measurable results. Hence their lives are fragmented into a thousand means without

12. Ibid., p. 57.
final cause; they are unceasingly restless, revolving around and around like the damned souls of Dante's *Inferno* because they have no fixed destiny. Infected as they are by positivism, they are cut off from tradition, for they view history as a measurable quantity subject to abstract laws, and fail to perceive the concrete qualitative differences of the past. Fragmented modern men lack not only knowledge of the past but even of the present. They are blind, or at least myopic, and have but a partial vision of reality; for they lack, as Tate tells us in *The Fathers*, the great inner metaphor that makes total knowledge possible.

To rediscover total knowledge and the conditions requisite for its existence, Tate returns to his own tradition, that of the South. In four essays written over a period of fifteen years, he worries the problem. His two most recent attempts at a solution: in 1959, "A Southern Mode of the Imagination,"13 and in 1962, "William Faulkner,"14 add little that is significant to his thought and echo the same themes which he developed more fully in earlier essays.

Tate made his first attempt to define tradition and to establish its relationship to cognition in 1930 in "Religion and the Old South." The title gives some hint as to the direction of the solution. The style of the essay is brilliant and explosive; Tate packs, with precious little exposition, nearly all his thinking on cognition, history, and the South into this single essay. Most astounding is the conclusion, a total reversal of the case presented, a deduction that in no way follows from the premises.

There are, Tate informs us, three ways of viewing reality: the religious, the scientific, the symbolist-Bergsonian. Of the three only the religious view grasps total reality. The method of science is to abstract from reality its predictable and measurable qualities. The method of Henri Bergson and the symbolist poets is to abstract the unpredictable and wholly contingent qualities. Only the religious mentality grasps the total complexus of qualities as they exist in reality; only the religious mind views reality as an object of contemplation.

Tate, in distinguishing the modes of cognition, uses a myth or fable to illustrate his thought. He

compares reality to a horse. Thus religion contemplates the whole horse; science abstracts mechanical horse power; Bergson and the symbolists concentrate upon the variations in the horse's actions.

Having distinguished the three modes of cognition, Tate then applies them to history. There is a certain inconsistency in his application since he abandons the symbolist-Bergsonian mode of cognition. Hegel and the modern historians are guilty of viewing history scientifically, of reducing the concrete past to a series of causes and effects. This "long view" errs for it omits concrete contingency, and its cognition is so abstract that Christ and Adonis appear as but different manifestations of a vegetation myth. The "long view" of history destroys tradition. Opposed to abstract history is the "short view" (Hesiod's and Cynewulf's) which grasps the past with all its concrete qualities. Historical vision of this type is religious and achieves total cognition, which is capable of viewing Christ truly as unique and separate. This is tradition.

Europe was able to preserve tradition - total cognition - because it was able to defend religion against the attack of science in the form of Occam's razor. It
accomplished this defense by inventing dogma, an abstraction of the myth that is religion.

Tate then applies his cognitive premises to the South which once had a tradition because the Southern mind was capable of viewing reality whole, of seeing, to use Tate's metaphor, the "whole horse" as an object of contemplation and not merely as a thing to be used. The South turned the same fullness of vision upon the past: "They looked at history as the concrete and temporal series - a series at all only because they required a straight metaphorical line back into the past, for the series, such as it was, was very capricious, and could hardly boast of a natural logic." (p. 319)

But the tradition broke down and was lost. Why? If Tate is to be consistent, the failure of Southern tradition must somehow be linked to a failure in cognition. He is consistent, and he traces the Southern failure precisely to this cause: "Because the South never created a fitting religion, the social structure of the South began grievously to break down two generations after the Civil War." (p. 316) Not only did the South lack a proper religion, it also failed to devise a dogma to defend the religion it had against Northern abstractionism:
"Not having a rational system for the defense of their religious attitude and its base in a feudal society, they elaborated no rational system whatever, no full-grown philosophy; so that, when the post-bellum temptations of the devil, who, according to Milton and Aeschylus, is the exploiter of nature, confronted them, they had no defense." (p. 320)

The Southern mind never fully comprehended itself because of a false religious symbol, a symbol inadequate for an agrarian society which required a feudal religion. Unfortunately, it had the symbol of a capitalistic religion: "The South's religious mind was inarticulate, dissenting, and schismatical. She had a non-agrarian and trading religion that had been invented in the sixteenth century by a young finance-capitalist economy: hardly a religion at all but rather a disguised secular ambition." (p. 316)

Tate concludes with an amazing non sequitur. Having stated the premise that there can be no tradition without the proper religious symbol, he then admonishes the South to recapture its lost tradition by violence. The whole argument up to this point seemed necessarily to lead to the conclusion that only an appropriately
feudal religious symbol would restore and preserve the Southern tradition. For some reason Tate avoids the logic of his own premise; perhaps because he feels that such a solution is impossible in the *fourmillante cité* that is modern society.

However, it is not Tate's failure in logic that is of importance but rather the epistemology that he has devised. There are in this system three degrees of knowledge; scientific, contingent, and religious. The first and second degrees are imperfect knowledge; the former too abstract, the latter too variable. The third degree of knowledge alone provides the whole truth, not only of external reality but also of history.

Eleven years later on a radio-panel discussion Tate expressed the same theory in simpler and clearer language: "But, apart from biographical considerations, don't you think that Pascal feels that the spiritual life has a supremacy and is a separate order of truth and is not to be invaded by scientific truth? It's a different order of truth altogether."

Briefly, then, Tate begins to devise a system of ideogenesis that he will add to and modify but which he will never change essentially, a system in which the mind attains total truth by means of an inner religious symbol. This symbol can exist only within a traditional society and conversely preserves the society in which it exists. From this position arise both the tragedy and crisis of modern society, for its members are doomed to remain fragmented by half-knowledge, the inner religious symbol being non-attainable in contemporary circumstances. The stark despair of this situation creates a kind of existential anguish, an anguish that sets the mood of each of Tate's major poems. In them the protagonist is trapped in a shadow world much like Plato's cave; he is conscious of a non-attainable past in which men saw the whole of reality, but he is equally and despairingly conscious of his own predicament, a predicament from which there is no escape, of which "violence" is rather a description than a solution. The crisis of half-knowledge, of imperfect vision creates the tension of "The Ode to the Confederate Dead," "The Cross," "The Mediterranean"; the same crisis is the situation of the characters in Tate's fiction, of John Hermann
in "The Immortal Woman," of Lacy Buchan in The Fathers. To Tate it is the crisis of modern civilization, of a society fragmented by the half-knowledge that abstractionism gives. Salvation will come to the individual, will come to society, through total knowledge. It is difficult to understand how Meiners can justify his thesis that Tate's intellectual and artistic center is a moral one. Explicitly in his expository prose, implicitly in his imaginative work, Tate seems almost Gnostic. He is moral only in the sense that Socrates was moral, for both equate virtue and knowledge. To Tate both religion and a consciousness of evil are essential not for morality, which may or may not be an accidental adjunct, but for cognition. Without the inner symbol that an accepted faith provides, total knowledge of reality is impossible. Tate's concept of cognition is analogous to Arnold's concept of culture—"the sheer desire to see things as they are"—though Tate omits the volitional quality which Arnold defines as the essential part of culture: "The desire for removing human error, clearing human confusion, and diminishing human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it, - motives eminently such as are called social, - come in as part of the grounds of culture, and
the main and preeminent part." It is not that Tate omits these social qualities of Arnold, but that in his system knowledge and volition are one.

Five years later in 1935 Tate returns again to the same problem of cognition, but he views it from a slightly different perspective. "The Profession of Letters in the South" does not make pleasant reading. Tate is irritable and scolding and his tone manifests itself in a slangy diction that is bitter rather than sprightly. Words like "racket" and "jabber" are oddly at variance with the involved periods.

What particularly exacerbates Tate is the isolation of the American artist. France, even today, treats the man of letters with respect and admiration, and regards him as an integral part of society. But not only the isolation of the American artist disturbs Tate; he is even more annoyed at the artist's dependence upon a competitive market controlled by the North, so that Southern writers are forced to be subservient to Northern reviewers. He makes a number of practical suggestions, the most important being a publishing center in the South.

Tate's financial difficulties may be of interest but not of importance. The querulous, carping tone, the practical suggestions are but obiter dicta. The substance of the essay centers once again on the problem of cognition, and Tate presents an interesting addition to his epistemology. His major concern is with the failure of the South to produce a great literature. At first glance all the requisites were there: a tradition, a cultured and educated aristocracy with leisure and intelligence, an organic society, an agrarian economy, a religion "nearer to Aquinas than to Calvin, Wesley or Knox." (p. 269) And yet the South failed to create anything of significance. Tate assigns three causes to this failure - a political, an economic, and an epistemological. The first and second are accidental causes; the third is essential.

The first cause of the South's failure to produce a literature was, according to Tate, that genius concentrated upon politics rather than upon the arts: "Assuming, as I do not think I am allowed to assume very confidently, that this society was a good soil for the high arts, there was yet a grave fault in the intellectual life. We like to think that Archimago sent the nightmare
down from the North. He did. But it was partly rooted in the kind of rule the South had, which was aristocratic rule. All aristocracies are obsessed politically. (Witness Henry IV, Parts One and Two; Henry V.) The best intellectual energy goes into politics and goes of necessity; aristocracy is class-rule; and the class must fight for interest and power." (p. 271)

The second is not, Tate informs us, peculiar to the South; it can be traced back to Lord Chesterfield and the breakdown of feudal society: Milton, invited by the Earl of Bridgewater to write *Comus*, was "at home" at Ludlow Castle. As a poet he was "a spiritual member of the society gathered there." (p. 275) This was a traditional and integrated society as yet unfragmented by capitalism. Quite the opposite is true of Johnson and Chesterfield. They participated in no social and spiritual community; their relationship was purely monetary: "For the flattery of a dedication the nobleman was loftily willing to give his patronage, a certain amount of money, to an author who had already completed the work, an author who had faced starvation in isolation from society...The Earl of Chesterfield was a capitalist, not a feudal noble as Egerton to some extent still was:
Chesterfield had lost the community; he required of the arts a compliment to the power of his class." (p. 276) Thus Tate traces the isolation of the artist to an economic cause. I do not wish to force his thought; however, he does seem to be restating in negative terms his former thesis that for total vision - and this includes artistic as well as cognitional - spiritual community in a traditional society is necessary.

The third cause of the South's literary failure is the essential cause, for even if the political mania and economic isolation had been absent, yet the South would have failed because of fundamental flaw in its mode of cognition. The Southerner could not fully understand himself nor could he have a profound realization of Southern life. He was doomed to a superficial kind of knowledge because he was cut off from the soil by the Negro. A great culture, Tate declares, demands a self-image arising from the soil, and only a free peasantry provides it: "All great cultures have been rooted in peasantries, in free peasantries, I believe, such as the English yeomanry before the fourteenth century: they have been the growth of the soil. This, of course, was not the case in the South. The white man
got nothing from the Negro, no profound image of himself in terms of the soil... The citizen of Natchez lived in a place but he could not deepen his sense of life through the long series of gradations represented by his dependents, who stood between him and the earth." (p. 273)

Tate advances his epistemology one step: to possess full knowledge man must live in a traditional society that provides him with the proper religious symbol, but this inner symbol is inadequate. He also needs for exact self-knowledge and for a profound sense of life an image that arises from the soil. Tate seems to be attempting to define some form of dualism, an epistemology dependent upon two poles, myth and place, one inner and the other outer. His thinking is certainly not developed, nor does it possess clarity. However, it does appear to be a vague attempt at solving the subjective-objective character of knowledge.

A year later in 1936 in the Phi Beta Kappa address delivered at the University of Virginia, Tate expands and modifies his thinking on cognition. "What Is a Traditional Society?"¹⁹ is remarkably lucid and urbane; it is marred by none of the crabbed constructions

and vitriolic diction that taints "The Profession of Letters in the Old South." Tate immediately advises his audience that he speaks not as a literary critic, not as a poet, but as a moralist. If he believes this, he deceives himself, for once more his concern is epistemological not moral. It is knowledge, not proper conduct, that concerns him.

The problem he considers in this address is the fragmentation of modern life in which a man's life and his work are separate entities with no vital relation between them. In a traditional society the two are inseparable: "The presiding spirit [Jefferson] of that tradition was clear in his belief that the way of life and the livelihood of men must be the same; that the way we make our living must strongly affect the way of life; that our way of getting a living is not good enough if we are driven to pretend that it is something else; that we cannot pretend that it is something else; that we cannot pretend to be landed gentlemen two days of the week if we are middle-class capitalists the five other." (p. 295) In delineating this tradition Tate seems again to echo Arnold's humanistic ideal of self-perfection: "They were so situated economically and
and vitriolic diction that taints "The Profession of Letters in the Old South." Tate immediately advises his audience that he speaks not as a literary critic, not as a poet, but as a moralist. If he believes this, he deceives himself, for once more his concern is epistemological not moral. It is knowledge, not proper conduct, that concerns him.

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politically that they were able to form a definite con-
ception of their human role...They knew what they wanted
because they knew what they, themselves, were. They
lived in a social and economic system that permitted
them to develop a human character that functioned in
every level of life, from the economic process to the
country horse-race." (p. 297)

But the basis of this ideal society was not
economic, neither was it political. The traditional
society described by Tate existed because its members
possessed a total vision of reality. Tate, in describing
this vision, outlines three modes of cognition. The first
and perfect mode is the religious imagination which is
timeless and unhistoric. Essential to this mode is the
major myth of religion. The second and inferior mode
is the historical imagination, a religious imagination
mancuén. By means of the minor myth of history a know-
ledge of reality sufficiently adequate to sustaining a
traditional society is possible. The third mode of
cognition that is totally inadequate for human life and
which attains no reality is positivism. In this third
mode of cognition there is no inner myth, no imagination,
no truth. It is a mockery of knowledge and to it can
be traced all the evils of modern life. This third mode is the scientific method, a rootless abstraction attached neither to inner myth nor to outer reality: "It is just abstract method - from which plain, abstract, inhuman history differs not a hair . . . The historical method then may be briefly described - by one who does not believe in its use - as the way of discovering historical 'truths' that are true in some other world than that inhabited by the historian and his fellow men: truths, in a word, that are true for the historical method." (p. 299)

To give dramatic force to his argumentation, Tate turns to Eliot's "The Waste Land." In his analysis of the "A Game of Chess" section, he demonstrates great skill in a criticism that is brilliant, illuminating, and sensitive. Without doubt, Tate, when he turns his hand to practical criticism, proves that he is one of the best of contextualist critics.

Tate views "The Waste Land" as a symbol of man at the present time, and he does not hesitate to make the meaning of that symbol explicit: "What does this mean? It means that in ages which suffer the decay of manners,
religion, morals, codes, our indestructible vitality demands expression in violence and chaos; it means that men who have lost both the higher myth of religion and the lower myth of historical dramatization have lost the forms of human action; it means that they capitulate from their human role to a series of pragmatic conquests which, taken alone, are true only in some other world than that inhabited by men." (p. 301)

Once again Tate analyzes the modern predicament in epistemological - not ethical - terms. Modern man moves aimlessly, lives an empty and fragmented life because he does not know, cannot see where he is going, cannot comprehend himself and the temporal relation of the present to the past. Time, human nature, art, labor, life, his own existence are all incomprehensible to him. Integrity of life will come to modern man only when he achieves totality of vision.

The ideogenesis outlined by Tate in this address differs little from that formulated in 1930 in "Religion and the Old South." However, he does make certain modifications: the historic myth is now adequate as an inner symbol and the "image from the soil" theory
is replaced by economic condition. Thus the loss of the higher and lower myths of religion and history are now attributed to a fragmented economy: "The middle-class capitalist does not believe in the dignity of the material basis of his life; his human nature demands a homogeneous pattern of behavior that his economic life will not give him. He doubtless sees in the remains of the Old South a symbol of the homogeneous life. But the ante-bellum man saw no difference between the Georgian house and the economic basis that supported it. It was all of one piece." (p. 302)

These modifications, however, are slight and the same duality remains, an inner universalizing symbol and outer experience. Tate holds desperately to these two poles, avoiding pure idealism on the one hand and raw empiricism on the other. He concludes his address

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20. The term "duality" here and throughout this study refers to the source of cognition and not the kind or value of knowledge. Obviously there is nothing original in Tate's division of knowledge into value types. Plato established two modes, ἐπίστημή (knowledge) and ἴδια (opinion); Aristotle and Aquinas held a distinction between sapientia and scientia; Kant, Fichte, Novalis, Goethe and their Scotch spokesman Carlyle divided cognition into reason and understanding; Newman distinguished between real and notional assent; today Karl Barth holds a like distinction. It is Tate's explanation of the source of his various degrees of knowledge that is both original and interesting, and that establishes the cognitive crisis of the protagonists in the poems and fiction.
with an attempt to bind together into one unit the inner myth and the outer economic circumstance: "The higher myth of religion, the lower myth of history, even ordinary codes of conduct, cannot preserve themselves; indeed they do not exist apart from our experience. Since the most significant feature of our experience is the way we make our living, the economic basis of life is the soil out of which all the forms, good or bad, of our experience must come." (pp. 303-04)

What Tate demands of knowledge is, I believe, clear enough; however, the argument by which he demonstrates his system is still somewhat deficient and is dangerously close to a vicious circle. If the two myths of history and religion provide man with the whole truth - Tate tells us that they do - whence then arises the error that separates man's life from his livelihood? Isn't the lesser truth that sees life and its economic basis as one already contained as a conclusion in a premise in the higher and total truth provided by the myth? Tate's attempt to preserve realism and to avoid solipsism is admirable; the insight is valid, but the logic is faulty.
Since Tate is an intuitional rather than a systematic or analytic thinker, the logic or lack of it in his exposition is not as important as is his conclusion. He presents his readers with a dualistic system of epistemology in which inner symbol is related to and dependent upon outer experience; in which thought and action are one in tradition. He also gives them a hierarchy of knowledge that is analogous to that of the classical scholastic system in which there are three degrees of certitude. The first degree is moral certitude based upon the usual actions of men; history provides this certitude. The second degree is physical certitude based upon the laws of nature; for example, the law of gravity which only a direct and miraculous intervention of God, the First Cause of all causes, can suspend. The third degree is metaphysical, based upon the very essences of things. It, for the scholastics, is absolute and immutable, for even God cannot change essences.

The mental process by which one attains certitude is abstraction. The mind removes from the external object grasped by the senses the concrete and individuating details so that the concept which remains
has only common or general qualities. Just as the cer-
titude attained by abstraction has three degrees, so too
does abstraction. The first degree prescinds from the
singularity of a material object and considers matter
as matter, not as this or that matter. This is the
degree of the physical sciences, chemistry, physics,
biology. The second degree abstracts the concept of
matter and retains only the notion of extension. Its
certitude is mathematical – Descartes attempted to base
his metaphysics on this second degree. The third degree
abstracts extension and retains only the concept of ex-
istence, being as being. Its certitude is metaphysical
and transcendental; that is, it transcends the categories
of Genus and Species and can be predicated analogously
of all existing and of all possible beings. The know-
ledge of the first and second degrees is universal and
can be predicated univocally only of those beings within
a given species.

I do not intend by this lengthy excursion into
scholastic epistemology to imply that Tate follows the
system, but merely to indicate that he gives us something
analogous to it. Positivism by means of abstraction
arrives at a partial and imperfect knowledge of reality.
The myth of history attains a full and adequate knowledge, but a knowledge limited to time and to the realm of historical event. The myth of religion achieves a timeless and unhistoric knowledge.

I am aware of the ever-present temptation to read into another man's thought one's own ideas; to translate his vocabulary into one's own terms. However, what should begin now to be evident is that Tate is struggling with the perennial problem of the universals, a problem that has haunted Western philosophy from the time of Plato. Like a modern-day Abelard, Tate in probing his tradition is intolerant of sociological and economic methods. His mind is philosophical and demands ultimate answers; consequently he traces the difference in action between a traditional and modern society to a difference in knowing. He is satisfied, apparently, with his explanation; he is not satisfied with his analysis of the process of knowledge. That total knowledge once existed he is certain; he is not so certain how it existed or whether it can ever exist again.

The problem of knowledge, then, is central to Tate's thinking not only on tradition and modern society, but also on aesthetics. The same problem forms
the core situation of his poetry and fiction. From it arises much of the symbolism and imagery of his poetry. In so far as Tate has a center of unity, the problem of knowledge is that center. Other critics have attempted to make of Tate a metaphysician and to reduce his creative and critical work to certain first principles. Thus Howard Nemerov finds the Parmenidean problem of the One and the Many to be the central metaphysical dilemma of Tate's poetry: "Metaphysical poetry is a poetry of the dilemma, and the dilemma which paradoxes and antitheses continually seek to display is the famous one at which all philosophies falter, the relation of the One with the Many, the leap by which infinity becomes finite, essence becomes existence; the commingling of the spirit with matter, the working of God in the world.\textsuperscript{21} Nemerov's essay is admirable, and his division of the structure of Tate's poetry into "essence and commentary" is enlightening. However, I feel that, although Tate's poetry may be metaphysical, his thinking is not. Metaphysics is an attempt to explain reality; epistemology is an attempt to explain our knowledge of reality.

Perhaps Delmore Schwartz is closer to an essential analysis when he reduces Tate's ideas, drawing largely from "Religion and the Old South," to an attitude toward nature which is neither a mystical giving over of oneself nor a scientific series of patterns but rather facing nature with a series of ideas founded on concrete past experience. "One must have deep inside one's being a vast metaphor controlling all the rest; it is such vast metaphors, the symbols by means of which we are enabled to live our lives, which constitute the essential subject of Tate's poetry. Not, however, in a simple way: the metaphors are grasped by the poet existentially, and by this is meant that the poet contemplates the metaphors by which he lives with an intense sense of the concrete circumstances of his being."22 Excellent though the analysis may be, it is, I believe, too limited in the sources used. A careful reading of more of the essays might lead Schwartz to change his conclusion that Tate writes from a metaphysical base. One does not face nature with a series of ideas; the inner symbol is not an object known, not a metaphysics, but is that by which one knows.

In a sense it is the very act of knowing.

F. Cudworth Flint falls into the same error of confusing epistemology and metaphysics when he writes, "He [Tate] has formulated...what appears to be a metaphysic arising from his own experience." The error of reducing Tate's thought to one principle - and it is not peculiar to the critics just quoted - is partially Tate's own fault. Brilliant though his essays are, they are equally difficult because of a certain intuitionalism in exposition, and penetrating but tangential asides. It is easy enough to seize upon an aside or a random conclusion and hold it up as a first principle. Even Cleanth Brooks does not escape this temptation when he discovers the historical thesis of the past viewed as quality rather than quantity to be an essential principle and applies it most satisfactorily to his explication of "Aeneas at Washington." Certainly this historical distinction is present both in Tate's prose and poetry; however, it is present as a conclusion and not as a principle. The quantitative and qualitative ideas of history both result from a certain type of cognition, and point as effects to their respective causes. Only by seeking out the key problem in each essay, the


dramatic situation or attitude of the protagonist in each poem and in each work of fiction can we arrive at a center of unity that is not a principle but a problem. The subjects change; the tone, a problematical one, does not change.

In 1945 in "The New Provincialism," irritated by the world planners, Tate returns to the subject of tradition. Influenced by Christopher Dawson's theology of history, he discovers a new villain, "the decadent humanism of the Greek half of our tradition." (p.286) The historical cause of modern evil may vary - Tate has a rather naive tendency to trace economic and social conditions to one source26 - but the effect is ever the same, positivism: "We do not ask: Is this right? We ask: Will this work?" (p.286)

But Tate's basic thinking is little influenced by Dawson and it remains essentially the same. Only the name of the historical cause of the modern dilemma


26. Eliseo Vivas, in another context, takes Tate to task on exactly this point. "Mr. Tate traces to Descartes man's usurpation of the angelic imagination. It seems to me that this is to credit a philosopher with far more power than any one man, even a Descartes, could possibly have wielded. Descartes was not possible without conditions of an extremely complex nature which existed prior to his advent." "Allen Tate As Man of Letters," Sewanee Review, LXII (Winter, 1954), 141.
changes - the decadent Greeks, Descartes, Emerson, Bacon, Occam. Having established the cause for the world situation, Tate now applies his former thinking about the South to this wider crisis. To do so he coins two new terms, "regionalism" and "provincialism." The bottles may be new but the wine is old - the historical myth and pragmaticism. Literature - except in the South - he warns us, is becoming provincial and Dos Passos is the prime example of it: "New Crusoes, new Captain Singletons, new Gullivers will appear, but Gullivers who see with not through the eye. It will not be a 'national' literature, or even an 'international'; it may be a provincial literature with world horizons, the horizons of the geographical world, which need not be spiritually larger than Bourbon County, Kentucky: provincialism without regionalism." (p.283)

Provincialism and regionalism are, then, two modes of cognition, the former a seeing (knowing) with the eye; the latter a seeing through the eye. The quantitative vision of pragmatism is a limitless abstraction: "The provincial attitude is limited in time but not in space." (p.286) The qualitative vision of
the historical myth is concrete and timeless: "Regionalism
is thus limited in space but not in time." (p.286) But
regional cognition can be lost: "When the regional man,
in his ignorance, often an intensive and creative ignorance,
of the world, extends his own immediate necessities into
the world, and assumes that the present moment is unique,
he becomes the provincial man. He cuts himself off from
the past, and without benefit of the fund of traditional
wisdom approaches the simplest problems of life as if
nobody had ever heard of them before." (p.286) Tate is
expressing in new terms his old "image from the soil"
thory.

Tate dramatizes the same idea in his novel,The Fathers. Major Buchan and his daughter Susan both
extend their immediate necessities beyond the world
of Pleasant Hill, which they erroneously conceive as
timeless. Mrs. Buchan, on the contrary, possesses
regional cognition through which she sees reality
whole: "'He's here on business,' my mother said, and
looking back to that remark I know that she was a per­
sion for whom her small world held life in its entirety,
and, who, through that knowledge, knew all that was
necessary of the world at large." 27

Tate concludes "The New Provincialism" with a direct application of his terms to the Southern novel. The provincial view of the South created a series of second-rate novelists much praised by the provincial critics of the North. The regional view produced great writers: "Stark Young, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Katherine Anne Porter, Robert Penn Warren, Caroline Gordon, Ellen Glasgow...and William Faulkner, who is the most powerful and original novelist in the United States and one of the best in the modern world." (p.292) But Tate adds gloomily that the South will ultimately be infected by the provincialism of the North: "From now on we are committed to seeing with, not through the eye; we, as provincials who do not live anywhere." (p.293)

Note again that Tate always equates "seeing" and "knowing"; this concept is basic to understanding much of his imagery, a kind of visible thought.

Tate telescopes the myth of religion and of history into one concept, regionalism. The three modes of cognition he reduces to two, the regional and the provincial. However, the dualism in his epistemology

remains, the inner symbol and outer experience; and he has added one new concept, the direct dependence of successful art upon total cognition. There is once again a faint Arnoldian echo in this, an echo of literature as a true criticism of life. By equating knowledge and artistic creation or, at least, making art depend upon knowledge, Tate prepares the groundwork of his aesthetics.

Thirteen years earlier in 1932 he had formulated, under the influence of Eliot, quite a different theory of aesthetics. In two essays of practical criticism, "Emily Dickinson" and "A Note on Donne," Tate, working from Eliot's principle that poetry is thought realized in emotion, probes the historical conditions and psychological state that make this realization possible. He begins, quite wisely, with the assumption that Donne and Dickinson are great poets; and furthermore, that they are very much alike. They are alike in that they "perceive abstraction and think sensation." (p. 204) This rare sensibility, granting the existence of talent, demands a certain historical situation, a

29. Ibid., pp. 325-32.
situation in which a great idea is breaking up. Donne lived in this situation and so too did Dickinson. Religious ideas no longer retained their status as symbols or myths but they were still an available "source of ideas . . . imbedded in a complete and homogeneous society." (p.209) These ideas having lost their symbolic quality enter into the poet's vocabulary: "Dante could afford to be philosophical; the terms were a system that he acknowledged as truth. But it is different with Donne; the vocabulary is merely vocabulary, and it lacks the ultimate, symbolic character of a myth." (p.331) The ideas are still within the poet's culture and the poet is disciplined in them; since he is no longer totally committed to them, they act only as a fixed point of reference for his sensibility, but they are still strong enough to protect him from a romantic yielding to nature or to himself: "But, I believe, Miss Dickinson and John Donne would have this in common: their sense of the natural world is not blunted by a too rigid system of ideas; yet the ideas, the abstractions, their education or their intellectual heritage, are not so weak as to let their immersion in nature, or their purely personal quality, get out of control. The two poles of the mind are not
separately visible; . . . There is no thought as such at all; nor is their feeling; there is that unique focus of experience which is at once neither and both." (p. 210)

Tate gives, then, a very lucid definition of the unity of sensibility; he goes beyond Eliot and establishes both the psychological and historical reasons for the existence of integrated sensibility. His opinion is quite different from that held in "The New Provincialism," but he does not hold it without certain misgivings. He is only too aware of Dante and Milton, poets who held a body of truths as absolute, as symbolic. He cannot quite relinquish the idea of the inner myth's necessity for knowledge and for art, and so his remarks are not without qualification: "The ideas, in fact, are no longer the impersonal religious symbols created anew in the heat of emotion, that we find in poets like Herbert and Vaughan. They have become, for Donne, the terms of personality; they are mingled with the miscellany of sensation. In Miss Dickinson, as in Donne, we may detect a singularly morbid concern, not for religious truth, but for personal revelation. The modern term is self-exploitation. It is egoism grown irresponsible in religion and decadent in morals. In religion it is blasphemy;
In society it means usually that culture is not self-contained and sufficient, that the spiritual community is breaking up." (p.208)

In his political, economic, historical thought, and even in his practical criticism when he abandons the text to draw general conclusions, Tate for thirteen years was remarkably consistent. The terms vary over the years; the divisions of the cognitive modes increase or decrease, but the epistemology remains essentially the same. The ideal knowledge is dualistic, depending upon an inner symbol - now religion, now history, now regionalism - and upon outer experience - an image arising from the soil, an economic situation in which life and livelihood are one. Ideal knowledge is timeless, attains external reality not only concretely and contingently but as a continuum in which past and present are one. By means of ideal knowledge, unity and purpose of individual and social action are achieved, the personal life of the citizen and the communal life of society are integrated. Imperfect knowledge is abstract, infinite in quantity but isolated in time; it is rootless and unrelated to external experience. As a total abstraction it is purely logical, exists only in the mind, is never
ontological. This is the knowledge that positivism gives. Because it abstracts life from livelihood, means from ends, past from present, practical from contemplative, quantitative from qualitative, virtue from action, it fragments man's life, fragments society, creates a vast inhuman, mechanized hell. The sensitive man realizes that he lives in hell, realizes that men did not always live so, realizes that for himself there is no exit from hell because the one escape, total knowledge, is for him impossible.

We too back to the world shall never pass
Through the shattered door, a dumb shade-
harried crowd
Being all infinite, function depth and mass
Without figure, a mathematical shroud.30

(Last Days of Alice)

30. In quoting Tate's poetry I shall use the same procedure as used with the essays, giving in the text itself the name of the poem and the page. The edition I shall use is the most recent, Poems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 116.
CHAPTER II

THE AESTHETICS

The generic title "New Critics" implies a similarity among those so named, a common body of critical principles, and a standard methodology. And such an implication is not totally incorrect, but it does require qualification, a qualification too seldom made by students of the new critics. In general, scholars attempt to formulate a historical synthesis by tracing certain critical themes to a common source. They tend to view T. E. Hulme as the fountainhead of the new criticism and his "Romanticism and Classicism" as the basic seminal work. They consider T. S. Eliot as his chief disciple, the one who expanded and developed Hulme's original but tenuous insights. According to this view the main body of modern critics would be analogous to the medieval commentators on Aristotle with Eliot holding Aristotle's place and the commentators providing useful but unoriginal elaborations of their master Eliot. Robert W. Stallman's study of "The New Critics" is a good example of this procedure, though it is not a unique one. He begins his critique by establishing the one theme basic to all modern
criticism.

There is one basic theme in modern criticism; it is the dissociation of modern sensibility. The loss of a spiritual order and of integrity in the modern consciousness is T. S. Eliot's major premise. The issue of our glorification of the scientific vision at the expense of the aesthetic vision is the central theme in both the poetry and the criticism of the Southern poets-critics. It is this theme of spiritual disorder which the late Paul Valéry exploited; it shows through the current of the critical writings of I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, Yvor Winters, R. P. Blackmur, and the Southern critics. The New Critics, while differing among one another in theory or in practice, are as one through the unifying relation of this obsessive burden.1

Stallman devotes the remainder of his article to a grouping of critics under certain secondary themes. His study is valuable as a synoptic view - one of the most complete - of the modern critics. There is, however, the almost unavoidable danger in a study of this kind of blurring the differences in establishing the similarities. If critics as dissimilar as Tate, Blackmur, Burke and Winters are lumped together, critics as similar as Tate, Ransom and Eliot become almost identical. In establishing the central principles of one of these three, the meta-critic presumes that he understands those of the other two. Thus W. K. Wimsatt equates Ransom's "structure" and

"texture" to Tate's "extension" and "intension."²

John Bradbury finds that Tate is influenced by Eliot when he writes on tradition and by Ransom when he writes on poetics.³ There is, I suppose, a certain justice in this. The New Critics tend to quote one another with approval and usually direct their attacks at those outside the fold, the academic scholars and the scientists. Their own differences rarely get into public print.⁴ However, my main concern is not Tate's similarity to Eliot or Ransom but his originality, his own unique criticism, if there be one.

To identify this original element it might be well to begin by attempting to isolate the dependent or similar elements. I am well aware of the risk involved in this procedure, for even identical terms do not in their independent context have identical meanings. Tate uses many of Eliot's and Hulme's terms but he places a special emphasis upon the cognitive quality of these terms. His use of the key term, "tradition," as we have seen, is an example of such a usage.

⁴. An exception to this rule is the correspondence between Tate and Ransom quoted by Louise Cowan. From it emerges Tate's youthful and overly vain sensitivity rather than any basic conflict in ideas. Op. cit., passim.
Both Eliot and Tate are in perfect agreement concerning the essential social and aesthetic evil of the twentieth century, dissociation of sensibility. From this socio-aesthetic principle flow certain conclusions: dissociation of intellect and emotion, confusion of faith and reason, the dichotomy between art and science, the necessity of a cultural point of reference, preferably religious.

The motif, ubiquitous in modern criticism, of dissociation of sensibility was first formulated by Eliot in the essay, "The Metaphysical Poets." Today it seems strange that this slender essay could have had such far-reaching and revolutionary critical effects. Since the formulation has become a locus classicus of modern criticism, it merits full quotation.

In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden. . . . But while the language became more refined, the feeling became crude. The feeling, the sensibility, expressed in the Country Churchyard (to say nothing of Tennyson and Browning) is cruder than that in the Coy Mistress.5

Tate repeatedly rephrases this principle in various contexts, some of which we have already seen. He applies it not only to literature but to economic and social conditions as well. This is the principle basic to his thought on the Old South and tradition; but as we have seen, he expands the principle, gives various historical explanations for the existence of this psychological condition, and twists it into an epistemological context that is little more than implicit in Eliot. Perhaps Tate's clearest statement of dissociation is framed in scholastic terminology in "The Angelic Imagination."^6

Here we have the Cartesian split -- taste, feeling, respect for the depth of nature, resolved into a subjectivism which denies the sensible world; for nature has become geometrical, at a high level of abstraction, in which "clear and distinct ideas" only are workable. The sensibility is frustrated, since it is denied its perpetual refreshment in nature. (p.442)

The dissociation of intellect and emotion is hardly a distinct conclusion but rather a rephrasing of the initial statement, a fuller definition of sensibility. Eliot, in the same essay, indicates the unification of sensibility in Chapman and Donne in these words: "In

Chapman especially there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling, which is exactly what we find in Donne. Tate's paraphrase of this, in discussing Emily Dickinson's poetry, is that "she perceives abstraction and thinks sensation." But note the slight variation. For Eliot, the poet recreates thought into feeling; his act is a reflective, conscious act, one which the philosophers would call reflective judgment. Tate, however, eliminates conscious reflection; sensation and thought are perceived in one and the same act, an act termed simple apprehension by philosophers. Even when directly borrowing from Eliot, Tate modifies the principle in favor of a more unified epistemology.

Eliot formulates another basic principle in an essay on William Blake in which he establishes the necessity of a culture of traditional and unified religious ideas for the genius of the poet. Blake lacked a traditional culture and his art suffered as a consequence. "What

9. I know of no philosopher who holds this theory. Scotus approaches it with his haecceitas (Hopkins's "inscape"). The Thomistic theory is that the universal is known by the first act of the intellect and the universal as existing in the concrete object is known by a second reflective act of judgment.
his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet. 10

Tate applies one principle of dissociated sensibility to Donne and Dickinson, as we have seen, in words almost directly quoted from Eliot: "A culture cannot be consciously created. It is an available source of ideas that are imbedded in a complete and homogeneous society." (p.209) Tate expands the concept of dissociation to conclusions that are only latent in Eliot's use of it. This principle provides Tate with a basis for value judgments of poets and enables him to establish a literary hierarchy. Poets of the first rank would be Dante and Milton who had an accepted faith, for whom religion functioned as an inner myth. Poets of the second rank would be Dickinson and Donne who had a source of ideas imbedded in a homogeneous society but for whom religion had ceased to function as a myth. The third class of poets would be the romantics who had lost all concept of religion. As a consequence their poetry derived either from personal sensation conceived as a center of consciousness or from philosophical egoism (Shelley and Byron)

dramatizing itself against a background of society or history. With the advent of romanticism the dissociation of sensibility is complete; there are ideas, there are sensations, but there is no thought sensation or sensed thought.

Tate applies this principle repeatedly in his literary evaluations. Since the principle is one of historic determinism, modern poets according to its canon have no chance of high evaluation. Ironically, Tate himself is doomed to mediocrity by his own principle. Pound, MacLeish, Bishop, Robinson, Cummings, Crane, though praised for certain metrical niceties, are yet damned in the over-all picture. Of Cumming's poetry Tate writes, "No single poem introduces the reader to an implicit body of idea beneath its surface, a realm of meaning detached once and for all from the poet." ¹¹ Of Bishop he remarks, "Where shall the poet get a form that will permit him to make direct, comprehensive statements about modern civilization? Doubtless nowhere. As a feat of historical insight the 'form' of 'The Return' is commonplace; yet the poem is distinguished." ¹² Pound's


poetry he discovers to be provincial rather than regional: "Mr. Pound is a typically modern, rootless, and internationalized intelligence. In place of the traditional supernaturalism of the older and local cultures, he has a cosmopolitan curiosity that seeks out marvels, which are all equally marvellous whether it be a Greek myth or the antics in Europe of a lady from Kansas."\(^1\) As an explanation of the failure of Robinson's narrative poems he offers: "Our age provides for the poet no epos or myth, no pattern of well-understood behavior, which the poet may examine in the strong light of his own experience."\(^2\) Tate's final judgment of MacLeish's "Conquistador" is a gesture of impatient dismissal: "It is the present fate of poetry to be always beginning over again. The kind of 'culture' in 'Conquistador' is purely literary; the kind of experience in it is the sentimentality of moral isolation. The refinement of the craftsmanship hovers over a void."\(^3\)

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 146.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 199.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 209.
But it is his friend, Hart Crane, that Tate sees as the tragic figure of modern poetry, tragic in the Greek sense of being doomed by historical fate to failure; tragic in his suicide, a direct result of his romantic egoism. Crane was influenced by Rimbaud but, while Rimbaud achieved disorder from order, with Crane "the disorder is original and fundamental. That is the special quality of his mind that belongs peculiarly to our own time." Crane's poetry suffers not from surface defects but from a "defect of vision." And because he could not know, not only his poetry was condemned to certain failure but his very suicide was inevitable. "Suicide was the sole act of will left to him short of a profound alteration of his character. I think the evidence of this is the locked-in sensibility, the insulated egoism of his poetry." Tate writes not only of Crane but of the twentieth century. The tragedy is not that of one man but of us all. Tate composes a dirge, a dirge for Crane, but even more so for the future of modern poetry. There is, there can be no hope of great

17. Ibid., p. 29.
literature in an age of dissociation. Tate elegizes the frustration of his own genius as much as the loss of Crane, and in his elegy there is no word of solace, no glimmer of hope, no possible solution.

In the great epic and philosophical works of our tradition, notably the Divine Comedy, the intellectual groundwork is not only simple philosophically; we not only know that the subject is personal salvation, just as we know that Crane's is the greatness of America; we are given also the complete articulation of the idea down to the slightest detail, and we are given it objectively apart from anything that the poet is going to say about it... It is a game of chess; neither side can move without consulting the other. Crane's difficulty is that of modern poets generally: they play the game with half of the men, the men of sensibility, and because sensibility can make any move, the significance of all moves is obscure. 18

Meiners asks the obvious question, "If the poet's discipline in the mysteries of form and his ability to objectify his sensibility in form is a matter of history, what is the sense of trying to write poetry?" 19

Neither Meiners nor Tate offers an answer.

Undoubtedly many other parallels between the thought of Eliot and Tate can be drawn but these, I

18. Ibid., p. 33.

believe, are the essential ones. What should be noted is that Tate always pushes the principle beyond Eliot's application. I do not think that Eliot would ever be so desperately pessimistic about the future of modern poetry. Certainly he never is in print. Furthermore, Tate insists upon a certain unity of vision, a type of cognition that is utterly foreign to Eliot's thought. Even when he borrows, Tate places a uniquely personal slant on the loan.  

The relationship between Tate and Ransom is so close that most commentators consider them to be identical in thought. Since Tate and Ransom developed their aesthetics together during the early Fugitive period at Vanderbilt, it is extremely difficult to say who influenced whom. Ransom was older and had the advantage of being  

20. It is not my purpose here to criticize Tate's position, nor am I qualified to comment on his philosophy of history. However, there seems to me to be a somewhat unorthodox procedure in Hulme, Eliot, and Tate by which a philosophy of historical determinism is deduced from aesthetic judgments upon individual poems. The poem is judged by an a priori set of principles, and then its worth or lack of worth is explained by historical circumstances. Although there is a very definite relationship between cause and effect, yet in this method is history ever proved to be the sole cause of the poet or of his poem? Does this procedure not smack slightly of the old logical fallacy, post hoc ergo propter hoc? Finally, is not this philosophizing about conditions outside the text precisely the sort of thing for which Tate and the other New Critics so berate the scholars? It is a procedure too gratuitous, too abstract, too Cartesian.
Tate's instructor, but as he himself admits, he learned as much as he taught. It was Tate and not Ransom who introduced Eliot's work to the Fugitives and defended it against their attacks. (Eliot from the Fugitive days has been a point of departure for Tate and Ransom.) Apparently, though Tate defended Eliot and "The Waste Land," he never convinced Ransom, who easily accepted Eliot's dicta on tradition (because it coincided with his own thinking), but could never accept Eliot's aesthetics. For Ransom "The Waste Land" is a literary failure, all texture and no structure. It exemplifies the worst in modern poetry and is ontologically incomplete: "Poetic texture without logical structure is not the right strategy." Stronger than his dislike of Eliot's structureless verse is his dislike of Eliot's critical and aesthetic approach. He mistrusts Eliot's historical criticism, for it remains a historical judgment, not a critical judgment. He asks, "What is a historical critic exactly? And how does historical learning offer any basis for criticism?" Ultimately this sort of criticism

causes Eliot to become "a practitioner of Arnold's 'touchstone' method of judging poetry."^24

However, it is Eliot's theory of the poet's depersonalization that most annoys Ransom. He begins his attack by taking exception to the clumsy chemical metaphor used by Eliot to introduce his theory in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and concludes that Eliot has reduced the whole poetic process to automatism. Nor can Ransom tolerate Eliot's loose and unpphilosophical talk about intellect and emotions. Emotions play no part in criticism, for the critic cannot discuss them objectively since they are totally subjective. The only judgment the critic can justly and philosophically make concerns not the emotions but the objects of the emotions. Ransom can find no rational justification for Eliot's famous statement concerning thought reduced to feeling, nor can he discover any special unity of sensibility in the metaphysical poets. He concludes, "'Feelings' and 'emotions' are the jargon of poetic theory with the new critics, and with the best ones it is Eliot's usage which provides the sanction. The half-communication that results is painful to the

24. Ibid., p. 146.
humble reader and suggests that there is something esoteric to the vocation of criticism, and that Eliot is initiated but the humble reader is not."

Ransom calmly and heretically affirms the value of paraphrase, apparently judging it to be no fallacy. Paraphrase reveals the structure of the poem; analysis considers the texture. He holds a strict dualism, and admits no Hegelian synthesis of thought and feeling, structure and texture. The mind cannot feel thought, nor can it think sensation. "We must not like some philosophers become the fools of the shining but impractical ideal of 'unity' or of 'fusion.' The aspiration here is for some sort of fusion of two experiences that ordinarily repel one another: the abstracted exercise of reason in hard fact and calculation; and the inclusive experience of literally everything at once. But we cannot have our theory magical and intelligible at the same time."  

Finally, Ransom rejects Eliot's easy distinction between philosophical belief and poetic assent. Ransom comments, "Had Mr. Eliot served his 'literature' with half

25. Ibid., p. 158.
26. Ibid., p. 184.
the seal he served his 'religion'! He believes in believing the religious dogmas, not the affirmations of poetry. I can see no necessity for waiving the intellectual standards on behalf of poets. If Dante's beliefs cannot be accepted by his reader, it is the worse for Dante with that reader, not a matter of indifference as Eliot has argued. If Shelley's argument is foolish, it makes his poetry foolish."^{27}

It should be apparent that Ransom's position is anything but identical to Tate's. Implicit in his rejection of Eliot is a rejection of many Tatean themes - historical criticism, religious myth, unity of knowledge, dissociation of sensibility. Nor is that all; Ransom is not hostile to the positivist philosopher, John Dewey; he rather admires science and the methodology it has established, and he sees little difference between hypothesis and revelation; he is grateful for the orderly thinking of science. If all this is not clearly a rejection of Tate's position, Ransom makes that rejection explicit. In the Acknowledgment prefixed to The World's Body, Ransom mentions obligations to Allen Tate and owns to sharing his views on poetry. In The New Criticism,^{27} Ibid., p. 208
however, he cuts the aesthetic ties gently but decidedly:

Eliot is one of the foci of a distinguished group of literary men with whose sentiments I have always had complete sympathy; I am convinced of their rightness, but not of what I should call their righteousness; for they do not propose to have commerce with the world. Mr. Allen Tate begins a recent essay by remarking: [Tate repudiates the sciences for the spiritual disorder they have created.] I have said probably nearly as much, and more than once; but increasingly now I feel that such a policy is too luxurious for my blood."28

Tate and Ransom are poles apart on nearly every essential aesthetic principle. Ransom is a dualist, a strict rationalist, a critic who, in principle at least, refuses to go outside the text. He and Tate are at one only in saying that poetry gives knowledge; but Ransom's definition of this knowledge - the logical content of the poem's structure - is certainly not Tate's definition. In recent years Ransom seems willing to drop the theory of knowledge in poetry and to settle for a triad or trinity rather than for a dualism. His trinity is heart (emotion), head (intellect), and feet (meter), each speaking a separate language. The poem is this and no more, no concrete universal: "The difference between Mr. Wimsatt and

28. Ibid., p. 200-01.
me is that I abandoned much sooner than he does the attempt to make the concrete universal formulation work."29

Ransom always demands a clear definition of terms, a philosophical justification for theory, and a logical development of theme. He has no room in his system for mysticism or the occult. All is logical, neatly divided, and substantiated by the philosophy of Kant, "the apostle of aesthetic humanism" who reconciled the inner and outer world. Ransom is a systematic philosopher, and both his poetics and methodology seem far closer to Winters's than to Tate's. For many years Ransom and Winters have battled; however, I cannot but feel that they have a mutual respect and admiration for each other, and if they are able to disagree, it is a debate within a system that both agree upon, a system that demands clarity, rationality, definition, and logical defense. Both of these great critics are far closer to the sensibility of the eighteenth century than to that of the twentieth. Tate and Eliot belong in this century and, though they do not propose to have commerce with the

world, yet they share all the defects of that world they scorn.

I have often wondered why Tate refuses to apply his principle of historical determinism to the poetry of T. S. Eliot. In his frequent references to Eliot he is always respectful (an unusual emotion for Tate); when he directly considers Eliot's poetry, he confines his critique to a careful and laudatory study of the metrics, and contents himself with but one generalization, a paraphrase of Eliot's own principle of the poet's depersonalization: "For poetry, of all the arts, demands a serenity of view and a settled temper of the mind, and most of all the power to detach one's own needs from the experience set forth in the poem." 30

For some reason, never revealed by Tate, Eliot escapes the inevitable failure of the twentieth-century poet, the failure of Crane, Pound, MacLeish and the others. Eliot by some trick of historical circumstance avoids dissociation of sensibility. How? Tate does not tell us. It may be - and this is pure speculation on my part - that Tate judges Eliot to be like Donne and Dickinson, disciplined in a creed, possessing, if not religious myth, at least the traditional religious ideas. Perhaps

Tate feels that the modern poet can escape the doom of historical determinism by faith. If Eliot was converted to Anglo-Catholicism, then faith is not impossible. If Eliot's poetic sensibility unified by faith could create a religious poem, "Ash Wednesday," in the twentieth century, then complete poetry is possible even today. The fact of Eliot belies the theory of historical determinism, and Tate does not hesitate to recognize Eliot's achievement: "It is evident that Eliot has hit upon the only method now available of using the conventional religious image in poetry." (p. 348) The achievement of T. S. Eliot may well be the motivating factor in Tate's own conversion, for by his conversion Eliot achieved, in Tate's judgment, a unification of poetic sensibility and, of necessity (in Tate's system), a unification of knowledge. If such is the case, then Bradbury's severe judgment may be closer to the truth than are those of Meiners or Foster. To Bradbury Tate's interest in religion is essentially non-religious: "Thus Tate, too, accepts his religion in a metaphorical sense only. There is a difference, however, for Ransom's approach is essentially humanistic, Tate's ministerial. Ransom is interested in sanctions for a full life of the 'sensibility,' the faculty by which 'man not only lives his animal life but enjoys it' (Ransom's italics); Tate is interested in
the authority it confers." Meiners opposes this judgment. To him Tate's essential and enduring attitude is "...a fundamentally religious attitude." Richard Foster goes even farther afield into a rather shaky theology of conversion - of which I am equally guilty in this "speculation." He is not bold enough to attribute Tate's conversion to literary reasons - a prudent reservation - but I believe this is exactly what he does despite the verbal reservations, and I am not certain that he is wrong, though I do not agree with the specific literary reasons he proposes.

Allen Tate's conversion, a few years ago, to orthodox Christianity, juxtaposed with his colorful and instinctive romanticism of mind and sensibility assumes the role, for the modern romantic, of a kind of technical or symbolic salvation from Matthew Arnold. For Arnold had seen the romantic future of poetry and its critics coming, and if you were a committed traditionalist and anti-romantic you had to scorn and fear that vision and the pseudo-religious devotions it implied. Of course one does not convert for literary reasons -- that is, to control or thwart one's tendency to turn into a romantic. But one does convert out of felt metaphysical need and a sense of guilt, though sooner or later these may get translated into the intellectual term of theology and its dependent ethical and political systems.

Speculation of this kind can never be more than speculation. The ultimate reason for a man's conversion is the action of God's grace upon his soul. To attempt to explain it by human motives, metaphysical or literary, is to misunderstand the nature of the Act of Faith. However, grace and nature work together in a real conversion, and often spiritual and human motives become confusedly intertwined. Perhaps it would be best to conclude this speculation with the observation that Tate's criteria both for total knowledge and superior poetry demand the myth of religion.

Before this speculation arising from Tate's attitude towards Eliot, I had considered Tate's dependence upon Eliot and Ransom. His debt to Eliot is greater and more obvious than that to Ransom, who, whatever his original theories might have been, is no longer in agreement with Tate. I think it is safe to conclude that Tate's early discovery of Eliot ended Ransom's influence, and that Ransom has had little influence on the mature Tate.

Granting Eliot's influence, what is original in Tate's aesthetics? Almost unanimously the critics agree that Tate's theory of poetry as knowledge forms the basis
of his aesthetics. Tate is not unique in holding this theory; indeed it is one of the central tenets of the new critics, but Tate develops it more fully and considers it to be more essential than does any other contemporary critic. However, the isolation of a theme is neither the explanation nor the understanding of that theme, and the majority of Tate's critics do not go beyond the declaration of its existence. Those who do examine what Tate means by this theory usually conclude their analyses by defining Tate in relation to Ransom, Eliot, or even Winters. They draw analogies, but they do not define Tate by Tate. Thus, as we have seen, Wimsatt explains Tate by explaining Ransom. Murray Krieger is even more synthetic in his analysis and serenely lumps Tate, Ransom, and Winters together - what a violent yoking of opposites - and then proceeds to explain what they mean by telling us what Vivas means: "If we yield up the word knowledge, or the word truth, we might then

34. A divergent opinion is Clifford Amyx's. He believes that Tate's essay "Tension in Poetry" is a clear statement of his aesthetics. He concludes that the most valuable contribution to aesthetics in the twentieth century is Tate's division of poetry into the categories of "extension," "intension," and "tension." "The Aesthetics of Allen Tate," Western Review, XIII (Spring, 1949), 135-44.
see these theorists as meaning something much like what Eliseo Vivas means when he speaks so often of poetry as presenting us with 'the organization of the primary subject matter (or the data) of experience.'

Hoyt Trowbridge simplifies the problem by informing us that Tate's theory and method are Platonic: "It [poetry] is the most complete mode of discourse because it unites extension and intension, abstraction and concreteness, the symbol and the icon — science or pure prose, and myth or pure poetry. 'Tension' is Mr. Tate's name for this synthesis of meanings... That these concepts are Platonic universals, dialectically applied, must be apparent to every reader."

Trowbridge is not the only critic to reduce Tate's poetic knowledge to Platonic ideas. Not all critics, however, agree that Tate is a Platonist; Rudd Fleming, for example, using "The Hovering Fly" as his chief source, discovers Tate to be a modern existentialist, a devout follower of Edmund Husserl.

The lack of unanimity among the critics as to what Tate


mean, is almost a classic case of **tot sunt sententiae quod sunt auctores**. If it is the task of the critic to clarify and explain an author, then we can hardly abuse Tate's critics for resorting to philosophical categories and comparisons. It is so much easier to understand Plato or Husserl or Thomas or Aristotle or Ransom than to understand Tate. Even so exact a scholar as Meiners is driven to explaining Tate's meaning by telling us what Maritain says St. Thomas means.\(^{39}\) The cause of much of this confusion is Tate's own fuzziness of thought; however, the critics are at fault in failing to relate his aesthetic to his social and historical thought. If the problem of knowledge is the center of unity in the essays on tradition, in the poetry and fiction, it would seem a

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39. Op. cit., p. 63. Meiners sprinkles his study with philosophical terminology. I am not qualified to judge whether his frequent allusions to Kant are or are not correct. However, he repeatedly misinterprets St. Thomas and confuses the meaning of Thomistic terms, learnedly quoted in Latin. For example, *esse* is in the Thomistic system the active principle; *essentia* is the passive principle. Meiners translates *esse* as essence. The basic metaphysical principle in Thomism is the real distinction *cum fundamento in re* between *esse* and *essentia*. Without this distinction the *analogia entis* referred to by Meiners is impossible. Consequently, I am led to conclude that he does not understand Thomism and that his attempts to relate Tate's ideas to those of St. Thomas clarifies nothing. He misinterprets one to explain the other.
valid conjecture that the same problem might well be the basis of his aesthetics. Furthermore, the tentative epistemology devised by Tate as a solution to the problem of knowledge might be presumed to be at least latent in his ideas concerning poetry as knowledge.

All this would seem to imply that by clarifying Tate's fuzziness of thought and by applying his epistemology to his aesthetics I shall be able to present a clear and unified exposition of his theory of poetry as knowledge. Such, unfortunately, is not the case. Tate never does solve his problem and his essays over the years repeat but never clarify or develop his position. I see, then, no advantage in a chronological survey of his writings. In any event, this has already been done by others with no marked success in clarifying the issues. In attempting to synthesize his aesthetics I shall give and explain his answers to three questions: What is not poetry? What are the types of poetry? What is poetry?

If Tate is somewhat vague about the positive aspects of poetry, he is never vague about what it is not. Tate has always been a terminalist critic, scornfully rejecting instrumentalism of any kind. Ironically, his thought is ordered, logical, and devastatingly clear when refuting an adversary; logic, however, deserts him in the exposition of his own position. Jacques Barzun gives a
not unfair description of Tate's method of attack:
"If indignant, he must be savage in his indignation, not
superior. . . . He picks up an offending quotation with
rubber gloves and a pair of tongs, denying all solidarity
with his opponents."^40 Who are Tate's opponents? In
general, anyone who would use poetry as a means to some­
thing other than poetry. As early as 1926 he was quite
clear that poetry was absolute, was an end in itself,
could never be yoked to science. In his rejection of
Edwin Muir's theory that science would replace the lost
mythologies of poetry, he demands a poetry rooted in
concrete reality: "It [Muir's theory] ignores the hopeless
breach between the abstractionism of science, however
familiar this may become, and the object itself, for
which abstractionism stands and to which it is the busi­
ness of the poet to return."^41 If poetry is distinct and
must remain distinct from science, it is equally distinct
from politics; an end in itself, it can never serve
politics from the auxiliary position in which Edmund Wilson
would place it. Such a union would result in propaganda,
not poetry.^42

^40. "Mr. Tate's 'Radical Dualism),'" *Saturday Review of
Literature*, XXIV (May 31, 1941), 7.
^42. "Poetry and Politics," *New Republic*, LXXV (August 2,
1933), 308-11.
In "Confusion and Poetry," Tate strikes out at the heresy that poetry is emotion. He reaffirms Eliot's principle that the poet's emotions have no poetic value in themselves but are elevated to poetry only when joined with thought. Because they do not understand this basic principle, the New Humanists like More and Babbitt and the romantic critics like Van Wyck Brooks and Mumford turn poetry into religion. Tate in this condemnation applies to specific critics Hulme's censure of romanticism as "spilt religion." If poetry is not emotion, according to Tate, neither is it religion.

In "Literature as Knowledge" he establishes a dilemma fundamental to his poetics, the subjective-objective content of poetry. Arnold, I. A. Richards, and Charles W. Morris in their failure to solve the dilemma reduce poetry to "irresponsible feelings." Their failure is caused by the neo-classical principles they apply to poetry, a fatal dualism of subject and form, content and emotion. Arnold fathered this heresy with his fallacious conception of "poetic language as a rhetorical vehicle of ideas." His abortive attempt to save poetry from science reduced it to something less than science: "Poetry is descriptive science of experience at that level, touched

43. Sewanee Review, XXXVIII (April-June, 1930), 133-49.
with emotion." (p. 18) Arnold by reducing the poetic quality of the poem to external decoration gave the case away to science. Richards and Morris, working from the same neo-classical dualism, conclude that the content of poetry has no external denotatum, is not relevant to objects and situations. Cut off from external relevancy, poetry for them "becomes either nonsense or hortatory rhetoric." (p. 34) Before offering his own solution to the problem, Tate sets up the dilemma that traps Richards and the others.

The confusion and contradiction that we saw in Mr. Morris and in the early Richards came of trying to square a theory of interest-value with a theory of emotional projection which was not firmly based upon positivist knowledge. That contradiction is the clue to the "unintelligibility" of the doctrines if held separately. If you take the first alone, eliminating the second, you eliminate the "mind" and you get pure positivism: in thus eliminating cognition, you lose "everything in which we go beyond the animals." If you take the second alone, and eliminate the external world in any of the four meanings that Mr. Richards gives to the phrase, you have a knowing mind without anything that it can know. (p. 46)

David Daiches is the object of Tate's attack in "The Present Function of Criticism." He begins the essay with a vicious salvo against positivism: Comte,

Dewey, Arnold, historical scholarship, the graduate school, the vulgar middle class, I. A. Richards, Carnap, and Morris he dismisses with withering scorn. Having vented his savage indignation on better than half mankind, he turns a more refined rage upon the "doctrine of relevance." This doctrine would measure literature by something other than literature. It is an implicit admission that literature in itself and by itself is unreal, is unscientific, is an embarrassment to the modern pragmatic mind. To save literature the positivist would make it relevant to history (Daiches), to naturalism (Edmund Wilson), would make it designate but not denote (the "amiable insanity" of Carnap and Morris), would make it a therapeutic ordering of our minds with lies (Richards). Tate admits no rival claims; literature is absolute in its own knowledge; it is relevant to nothing but itself: "This essay has been written from a point of view which does not admit the validity of the rival claims of formalism and history, of art-for-art's sake and society. Literature is the complete knowledge of man's experience, and by knowledge I mean that unique and formed intelligence of the world of which man alone is capable." (p. 15)
In summary, Tate rejects instrumentalism of any kind. To him the value of poetry is terminal; poetry is an end in itself. It does not need to be defended by psychology, history, science, politics, naturalism. It is not useful for something else, is not relevant to something else. Poetry is not the poet's emotion, is not an intuition into nature, is not the poet's subjective world. Poetry is "a special, unique, and complete knowledge." (p. 8)

Tate's answer to what poetry is not is clear and complete. His answer to what the types of poetry are is less specific; it is rather a series of value judgments to be used as general norms. Thus in "Tension in Poetry" he sets up three categories of poetry, two of incomplete and imperfect poetry, the third of complete and perfect poetry. He begins his essay - so admired by Amyx, so ridiculed by Trowbridge - by separating poetry from mass communication: "I am attacking here the fallacy of communication in poetry." (p. 77) Having declared that poetry is not communication - Miss Millay's verse fares very badly in this section - he distinguishes between poetry of denotation and of connotation. Metaphysical poetry is a poetry of denotation in

which the poet stretches the meaning of his poetic language to its ultimate logical extension. Symbolist poetry is a poetry of connotation in which the poet forces his images to their ultimate intension. Neither poetry is complete: "It would be a hard task to choose between the two strategies, the Symbolist and the metaphysical; both at their best are great, and both are incomplete." (p. 36) Complete poetry combines "extension" and "intension;" it is a poetry of "tension." "The remotest figuervative significance that we can derive does not invalidate the extensions of that literal statement. Or we may begin with literal statement and by stages develop the complications of metaphor: at every stage we may pause to state the meaning so far apprehended, and at every stage the meaning will be coherent." (p. 83)

In "Tension in Poetry" Tate divides poetry according to qualities intrinsic to poetry, "extension," "intension," and "tension." In "Three Types of Poetry" he divides poetry according to the faculties of the poet. The two imperfect types, allegory and romantic irony, proceed from the poet's will; the third type, "the creative

spirit," proceeds from the poet's imagination.

In this essay I propose to discuss three kinds of poetry that bring to focus three attitudes of the modern world. I do not say all three attitudes, because there are more than three attitudes. And there are more than three kinds of poetry.

The first attitude is motivated by the practical will: in poetry until the seventeenth century it leaned upon moral abstractions and allegory; now, under the influence of the sciences, it has appealed to physical ideas. It looks from knowledge to action. The second attitude has been developed from the second phase of the first; it is a revolt against the domination of science; and in poetry it has given us the emotion known as "romantic irony." The third attitude is nameless because it is perfect, because it is complete and whole. Criticism may isolate the imperfect, and formulate that which is already abstract; but it cannot formulate the concrete whole. There is no philosophical or historical name for the kind of poetry that Shakespeare wrote. I shall call it, in this essay, the creative spirit. (p. 91)

Allegory, like The Faerie Queen, is either didacticism or propaganda. The poet, imitating the scientific imposition of will upon nature, reduces his subject matter to a series of preconceived abstractions. A restatement in paraphrase of these abstractions exhausts their meaning, for "they stand, not in themselves, but merely for something else." (p. 97) Allegory does not invite the contemplation of "the vision of the whole of life" but rather addresses itself directly to the reader's
moral will. It is a form of rhetoric, a "pseudo-explanation of unimagined material." (p. 94)

With the rise of science, the romantic poet was deprived of the magical fictions by which he could affirm his will allegorically. He revolted and pitted his individual will against all forms of order, confusing order with science. He imposed his will rhetorically upon his material and built up a series of explanations congenial to his unscientific nature. Thus Shelley's poetry is filled with explanations for material he cannot experience. Shelley imposed explanations upon his material; the explanation never rises from the depth of the situation or material itself.

Great poetry like that of Shakespeare is the inner meaning of experience; it is a vision of the whole of life. Its "meaning is nowhere distinct from its specific quality." (p. 97) Edgar's reflection, "Ripeness is all," is neither true nor false; it is "experienced." "The specific merit of Edgar's statement as general truth or falsehood is irrelevant because it is an experienced statement, first from Edgar's, then from our own, point of view; and the statement remains experienced, and thus significant and comprehensible, whether it is true or
false." (p. 93) Poetry of this quality proceeds not from the will of the poet but from his imagination: "The power of creating the inner meaning of experience is a quality of the imagination." (p. 98)

It should be noted that Tate in his attacks upon false concepts of poetry and in his classification of poetry sets up a dualism and then resolves it into a unity. Complete poetry is neither extension nor intension but a union of both, tension. Perfect poetry is neither the abstract meanings of allegory nor the abstract ego of the romantic poet, but is "the middle ground of vision, and, with respect to itself, the vision of the whole, is not susceptible of logical demonstration." (p. 113) Just as Tate, in his essays on tradition, rejects the partial knowledge of abstract science and of contingent symbolism, and requires a total knowledge encompassing both the abstract and the contingent, so too he rejects incomplete poetry that is either abstraction or pure sensation and requires that perfect poetry be a fusion of the abstract and the concrete. Poetry is the union of intellect and emotion, the union of the universal and the singular; it is the whole knowledge of the whole world.

Tate's adaption of Eliot's ideas, his violent opposition to instrumentalist critics, his divisions of
poetry are not unrelated to his theory of poetry as knowledge. Rather are they a preparation for and a proof of this theory. A statement or theory may be proved by deduction or induction. It may be established by removing all opposing conclusions - a kind of proof by elimination; a Socratic removal of error that the truth may appear. Tate's conclusion to "Three Types of Poetry" demonstrates this procedure.

Since I have not set out to prove an argument, but to look into arguments that seem to me to be wrong, I will state a conclusion as briefly as possible: that poetry finds its true usefulness in its perfect inutility, a focus of repose for the will-driven intellect that constantly shakes the equilibrium of persons and societies with its unremitting imposition of partial formulas. When the will and its formulas are put back into an implicit relation with the whole of our experience, we get true knowledge which is poetry. It is the kind of knowledge which is really essential to the world, the true content of its phenomena, that which is subject to no change, and therefore is known with equal truth for all time. Let us not argue about it. It is here for those who have eyes to see. (pp. 113-14.)

Over the years this formula varies but little. In treating the knowledge that poetry gives, Tate proves by elimination and concludes with statement. He carefully analyzes and refutes the proponents of other theories and then terminates his essay with a statement - "not susceptible of logical demonstration" - of his position. The wording of these statements remains fairly constant.
Commentators on Tate have attempted to follow the development of his theory by making a chronological survey of its expression. But so far they have by this method failed to demonstrate a growth or change in Tate's thinking or to clarify the meaning of the theory. Bradbury finds that Tate never achieves a solution but escapes into suprarationalism.\(^{48}\) Meiners expresses the same conclusion in terms somewhat more favorable to Tate: "Yet I believe it was this very retreat from certainty on purely aesthetic and historical grounds which later lead him to despair of finding any certainty on these terms, and to commit himself to a traditional metaphysics, an explicitly religious position."\(^{49}\) And as we have seen, Richard Foster explains Tate's conversion in similar terms.

Perhaps these critics are correct; I have already inferred that religion appears to be the only escape from Tate's system of historical determinism. However, I do not think that Tate's "knowledge" is so mysterious as to defy rational explanation. If Tate himself never attempts a logical exposition of it, he does, nevertheless, provide a system of epistemology in


his essays on tradition, and it is not unreasonable to presume that this same epistemology is implicit in his poetics.

Tate's first and most ambitious attempt to establish a poetics is his essay "Poetry and the Absolute." He begins it by establishing a distinction between an ontological absolute and a created absolute, between metaphysics and art. In so doing he declares his independence of Ransom.

For in explaining the relation between the poet and his world, Mr. Ransom fails to touch the relation between the poet, or reader, and the poem. This relation conduces to an absolutism. The problem of which lies outside the metaphysical enquiry into the nature of reality. To understand this relation is doubtless the chief end of criticism. And here the pertinency of the terms, monism and dualism, obviously disappears. 50

Tate proceeds on the assumption that the mind has an "irresistible need" for an absolute other than that provided by philosophy. Experience is disordered and is transient; the poet orders experience and renders it static by form. The poet thus establishes for himself and for the reader an absolute unity of

50. Sewanee Review, XXXV (January, 1927), 41.
an experience, his reaction to it, and his immediate perception of it within the medium of language. This absolute, freed from the disorder and disturbance of ordinary human experience, is a perfect communication:

"If the perceptions which go to make up the poem, however, are perfectly realized, presented free of the disturbances out of which they have sprung, the poem will provide the same experience for others."\(^{51}\) Tate does not tell us why the absolutes of philosophy fail to satisfy the "irresistible need for absolute experience." Perhaps "experience" is the key word. Philosophical absolutes describe the metaphysical order of the universe, and description is a step removed from experience, from immediate and total perception. But the poem, though it presents experience freed from contingency, does not falsify experience. It is real knowledge of the world: "The world of 'The Funeral' is a section of the known world, the world knowable through Mr. Ransom's, or the history of philosophy's general possibilities of knowing anything -- it is irrelevant which one. But there is a particular quality of a poem that makes it wholly unlike the portion of the

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knowable world for which it stands; as a portion it is complete, it is finite." All this is not very easy and has exacerbated more than one critic. What exactly do we know and how do we know it, and to what does our knowledge refer? Forster sees separation of art from the world to be "spectral exoticism," and the knowledge that art provides to be almost mystical, a "unique, unreferential, intransitive" experience.

Tate frequently returns to the theme of poetry as knowledge in reviews and essays in Poetry, The New Republic, The Nation; but his treatment is only incidental. In 1940 in "The Present Function of Criticism," as has been noted, he attacks the heresy of relevance and concludes the essay with this definition of literature:

"Literature is the complete knowledge of man's experience, and by knowledge I mean that unique and formed intelligence of the world of which man alone is capable." (p. 15) This is uncompromising enough but leaves the reader still somewhat in the dark. In the following year "Literature of Knowledge" appeared, and we might expect that it would offer something more illuminating, some explanation or

52. Ibid., p. 45.

development of the concept of literature as knowledge. However, the major part of the article is devoted to a refutation of Richards, Morris, and Coleridge. As he nears the conclusion, though, Tate concentrates upon the knowledge theory. He approves of Richards's later work, *Coleridge on Imagination* and accepts both the antithesis Richards discovers in poetry and the Hegelian synthesis he attempts to achieve by means of the imagination. According to this antithesis the mind of the poet either reads nature as a symbol of something behind nature or creates a nature of his own feelings. The first supposition eliminates the mind; the second eliminates the known object. What knowledge, then, does poetry give? Tate answers, "It is neither the world of verifiable science nor a projection of ourselves; yet it is complete." (p. 47) The completeness is not "the order of experimental completeness aimed at by the positivist sciences." This "completeness" is abstract and no one can experience it. (Here, fifteen years later, Tate explains why the "absolutes" of philosophy mentioned in "Poetry and the Absolute" fail to satisfy man's need for an absolute.) Literature is not of the experimental order but is of the "experienced order; it is, in short, of the mythical order." Tate returns to Richards for a definition of myths. They are not an escape from the hard realities of life, but "they are these hard realities in projection,
their symbolic recognition, co-ordination and acceptance." (p. 47) He then concludes with a warning against a too rational criticism that tends to look beyond the poem. This is "learned ignorance;" the interest value of the poem is a cognitive one and "in the poem, we get knowledge of a whole object." (p. 48) Pragmatic criticism reduces literature "to a formed realm of our experience, the distinction of which is its complete knowledge, the full body of the experience that it offers us." (p. 48)

Before attempting an analysis of the theory of poetry as knowledge, I should like to consider one more text important both in itself and for the date of its composition. "Reflections on American Poetry: 1900-1950" was first published in 1956. It is an essay ignored by all of Tate's major critics, possibly because it destroys so many neat theses. Writing after his conversion and after his scholastic essays, Tate nevertheless returns to his former vocabulary, avoids scholastic explanations and religious escapes. Although he is not specifically formulating a theory of poetry, yet he presents one of the clearest expositions of his poetic theory. He does in this essay what he fails to do in others; he distinguishes between the poem and the poet, the knowledge in the poem and the knowledge necessary to the poet to create the
poem. The knowledge in the poem is of the human condition; the reader grasps this knowledge by means of language and rhythms.

The best American poets (Crane is one of a handful) have tried to discover new and precise languages by which poetry now as always must give us knowledge of the human condition -- knowledge that seems to reach us partly in the delight one gets from rhythms and insights that one has not already heard and known. What particular qualities go to make up an original poet now or at any time, I shall attempt to describe. It has seemed to me that the best American poets of our age have used a certain mode of perception, that I have named the aesthetic-historical.

What poets know and how they know it are questions that go beyond the usual scope of criticism, for what a poet of the past knows is viewed historically, not for what it is, and we take it for granted. But with a poetry which is near us in time, or contemporaneous, much of the difficulty that appears to be in the language as such, is actually in the unfamiliar focus of feeling, belief, and experience which directs the language from the concealed depths that we must try laboriously to enter. 54

Thus the poet renders (Tate refuses to use the word communicate) the knowledge he has gained of the human condition by means of form. He gains this knowledge by means of a certain mode of perception, the aesthetic-historical. Tate does not mean by this term a philosophy

of art but rather a mode or type of cognition: "I have used the word aesthetic not to point to a philosophy of art... I mean a mode of perception, a hyperaesthesis that began with Poe and Baudelaire and that produced in our generation concentrated metaphors like Crane's." This form that the modern poet uses makes possible a rendering of his perception: "This controlled disorder of perception has been the means of rendering a direct impression of the poet's historical situation."55 Tate, recalling perhaps his early distinction between the ontological and created orders, refines his description of the creative process even further: "The verbal shock, the violent metaphor, as a technique of magic, forces into linguistic existence subjective meanings and insights that poets can no longer discover in the common world."56 This I take to mean that Tate no longer distinguishes the created from the ontological order but views language as a special mode of existence. Secondly, I believe that he restates here a theory which he had advanced in "Longinus and the 'New Criticism,'" that style and subject cannot

55. Ibid., p. 67.
56. Ibid., p. 69.
be separated but form a unit which if divided really or logically destroys the existence of both.  

In summary, Tate would seem to hold a quasi hylomorphism. The poem is a unit, an unum per se composed of matter (the poet's knowledge, insight, perception) and form (metaphor, meter, language). However, one does not exist without the other; both come into being at the same time. The poet's mode of cognition is such that he perceives or knows in the act of creating. His knowledge is a special concrete form of knowledge. To return to Tate's early epistemology, the poet perceives by means of an inner myth and by means of outer reality. The knowledge gained by this act of perception is neither abstract like that of science nor contingent like that of pure sense perception. It is both abstract and concrete, achieved in one act of cognition, and it must be rendered in the same fashion in which it was gained; subject and style become one in form. Rendered formless, this knowledge becomes abstract and partial. This, I confess, is the clearest exposition I am capable of giving to Tate's theory of poetry as knowledge, and even this exposition may do violence to his thought. But if Tate does not mean this, he does mean something very much like it. He has to admit the existence of dualism but he refuses to accept

either side of that dualism alone; always - in the poem, in the act of knowledge - the duality is reduced to a unity, to an unum per se. He admits a dualism that resembles the act and potency of Aristotle, the essence and existence, substance and accidents, matter and form of St. Thomas. The dualism can be separated by the mind but cannot exist separated in reality. Tate transfers this metaphysical distinction, which is valid only in the ontological order, to the logical and psychological orders. The logical parts of the poem must exist as an ontological unity. The separate psychological acts of the mind must exist as one ontological act only. Tate continually demands in one order that which is valid only in another order. All orders of logic, ontology, psychology are reduced by Tate to the order of epistemology. He confuses the existence that either a real or possible being has in man's mind and in objective reality. It is this confusion of epistemology, psychology, ontology, of sensate acts and intellectual acts, of the faculties from which these acts proceed that makes Tate's thought so extremely difficult to comprehend, to unravel. It is the synaesthesia of Baudelaire carried beyond the senses to the spiritual faculties of man. An example of this is Tate's use of the verb "see" to mean a special mode of
cognition; a mode that is both intellectual and visual. It is Eliot's dissociation of sensibility pushed to philosophical absurdity, an absurdity in which the eye thinks and the mind sees. Tate's philosophy of art, his philosophy of knowledge are closer to Baudelaire's "Correspondences" than he might care to admit. Odors may not be soft as oboes and green as a plain, but spirit and sense do become confusingly intermingled.

Tate concludes his survey of American poetry with an implicit criticism: "Modern American poetry, limited in scope to the perceiving, as distinguished from the seeing, eye, has given us images of the present condition of man that we cannot find elsewhere; and we ought to have them."\(^58\) The distinction between perception and seeing implies a defect in poetic cognition. This implication is reinforced by the use of the word "hyperaesthesia" earlier in the article, a pejorative word in Tate's vocabulary. He changes "hyperaesthesia" to "sensibility" in the introduction to Modern Verse in English, but he does not alter the distinction between perception and seeing. Tate continues to hold Eliot's principle of the dissociation of sensibility, and he refuses to soften his severe judgments formerly made of

\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 70.
modern poets. They suffer from a "defect of vision," which of necessity results from an aesthetic-historical mode of perception. Only an aesthetic-religious mode of seeing, as distinguished from perceiving, can grasp total knowledge, can create complete poetry. This is the last published article in which Tate considers the problem of poetic cognition and the position he holds, despite conversion, despite Thomistic philosophy, is exactly the same as he had held nearly thirty years earlier. Tate does not seem to have discovered in religion the escape from historical determinism that he once hoped for. No man in the twentieth century can "see." No poet can write great, complete, pure poetry. The best the poet can do is to indicate the hell that is the human condition in our age.

Tate's theory of poetry as knowledge has always generated opposition. Francis Roellinger points out Tate's failure to supply an external referent for his knowledge. By placing knowledge in the poem rather than in the object or in the knowing mind, Tate denies external verification and destroys criteria by which true knowledge can be distinguished from false. 59

Murray Krieger comments ironically: "Indeed, this knowledge given by poetry is not, for our theorists, to compete with any other kind of knowledge. It is simply different from propositional knowledge and has to do with a world differently conceived in accordance with the difference of purpose. It is, then, a knowledge which has its own rightful place, a knowledge of experience with its fullness."60

Tate himself is not unaware of the problem of relating poetic knowledge to the real world. In two remarkable essays, neither a direct consideration of the problem, he suggests a possible relationship. "Yeats's Romanticism"61 is an excellent study of Yeats's poetic method. Tate obviously admires Yeats whom he ranks above Eliot or Pound and compares to Dante. Yeats is in the tradition; he is unromantic; he has bridged the gap between sensibility and intellect. How did he overcome the modern curse of dissociated sensibility? According to Tate: by means of his mythology, which is not so much a mythology as "a dramatic framework through which is

made visible the perpetual oscillation of man between extreme introspection and extreme loss of the self in the world of action." (p.222) The system is the vehicle of profound insights; it is the means by which Yeats attains a knowledge of the world. So far the knowledge is in Yeats's "seeing" mind. How does it get into the poem and from the poem into the mind of the reader? It is embodied in the poem by means of imagery and symbol, which in turn act upon the reader so that he too can "see." "If we begin with the poetry we shall quickly see that there is some source of power of illumination which is also in us, waiting to be aroused; and that is true of even the greater number of fine poems in which the imagery appears upon later study to lean upon the eccentric system." (p.219)

"The Hovering Fly: A Causerie on the Imagination and the Actual World"62 is one of Tate's most remarkable essays and one of his most significant attempts to relate literature to the actual world; but it is also one of his most difficult essays to discuss. Perhaps this is the reason that most commentators dismiss it as "occultism."

It is not that; rather is it a demonstration through practical criticism of the abstract statement that literature is knowledge. Tate does not tell the reader, but he attempts to lead the reader to vision, to make him see. He frequently does this with a text — with Flaubert, Dante, Donne, Yeats, Eliot. And Tate is at his best when considering a specific literary work; at the conclusion of the essay we agree with his abstract thesis not because of rational conviction but because of an experience through which he has lead us by means of practical criticism. Tate begins this essay with the assumption that literature reveals to us the actual world. This actual world can be the external empirical one or it can be the internal subjective one: "It is, in fact, no mere quibble of idealism if we decide to call the subjective field not only the world but the actual world, taking our stand on the assumption that it sufficiently reflects or gathers in or contains all that we can ever know of any other world or worlds that appear to lie beyond it." (p.150) The actual world revealed by literature is not the actual world reported by the senses.

at any given moment. Literature gives us an actuality that is coherent and moving, and it does this by means of the imagination which unifies and renders profound the world of observation, and it appeals in turn to the reader's imagination. Tate informs us somewhat gnomically, "We may look at the hovering fly; we can to a degree know the actual world. But we shall not know the actual world by looking at it; we know it by looking at the hovering fly." This means "that in terms of the dramatic imagination the world and the fly are the same thing." (p.156)

Lost I should appear more gnomic than Tate, let me hasten to explain the "hovering fly." Tate is considering the death scene in Dostoevsky's The Idiot. The two lovers, Myshkin and Rogozhin, stand beside the bed of the girl they love. Nastasya lies dead upon the bed. The room is silent; suddenly the silence of sorrow and death is shattered by the buzzing of a fly, a converted symbol whose abundant and sinister life stands for Nastasya's privation of life. The fly symbol, a product of the imagination, gathers into a single unity all of the dramatic events of the novel. The fly compromises
our human order but it also extends that order; it "distends both visually and metaphorically, the body of the girl into the world. Her degradation and nobility are in that image. Shall we call it the actual world?"

(p.159) Tate is telling us that we cannot see the actual world with its multitudinous relationships unless we view it through an image - recall his distinction between seeing with and through the eye - an image that in one instant reveals reality with all its temporal and eternal complexities.

As we face the morning's world we see nothing, unless we have the peculiar though intermittent talent for it, so actual as Dostoevsky's fly or Prince Andre's empty heavens. For if the drift of this essay have anything of truth in it, then our daily suffering, our best will towards the world in which we with difficulty breathe today, and our secret anxieties, however painful these experiences may be, must have something of the occult, something of the private, even something of the willful and obtuse, unless by a miracle of gift or character, and perhaps of history also, we command the imaginative power of the relation of things. (pp.159-60)

Positivism cannot report the actual world as it is; it can only describe its "physicalism," can look at it with the practical reason. To see the world requires a fusion of faculties or methods - grammar, philosophy, rhetoric. Looking with just one reveals not the actual world but a partial world. Only the imagination as exercised in literature achieves the fusion of the three modes,
sees the actual world, permits the reader to see that world.

Are we not saying something very old when we assert that we may know an actual world in the act of seeing the hovering fly? We are saying that our minds move through three necessities, which, when in proper harmony and relation, achieve a dynamic and precarious unity of experience. Now that our oration is over I may say quite plainly that the three necessities -- necessities at any rate for Western man -- are the three liberal arts. And any one of them practiced to the exclusion of the others retires a portion of our experience into the shadows of the occult, the contingent, the uncontrolled. (p.162)

The knowledge that literature gives has, according to Tate, many referents to the world. It refers to the contingent world of the senses, to the subjective world of abstractions formed by the intellect, to the world of personal emotions, to the subjective-objective world of temporal and causal relationships. No one of these is the actual world; the actual world is all of these worlds fused by the poet's imagination into a harmonious unity. The actual world as such exists only in literature and this actual world gets into the reader's imagination through language, meter, but most of all through symbol, through the "hovering fly." Tate borrows Coleridge's unifying power of imagination but he does not use it in quite Coleridge's way. The original vision of the poet is not by means of the imagination but is a mode
of cognition, a "seeing." Only Donne, Dante, Yeats, Dostoevsky - artists not of our dissociated age - can see this actual world. They can give knowledge because they have knowledge; the modern poet gives "images of the present condition of man"; he does not give knowledge of the actual world. The modern poets have imagination, but nevertheless they only "perceive." Presumably then the imagination is not a faculty of cognition but is the faculty by which the poet transfers his knowledge into the poem. Imagination is the faculty the poem illuminates in the reader who then sees the actual world. Imagination is a means to seeing but is not the act of seeing.

Much of the difficulty in understanding Tate's position is caused by his neglect of clear distinctions. He is always concerned with a dualism of which he demands a unity, but the dualism in any given essay is elusive; it changes and becomes ambiguous. There is the dualism of cognition itself, of the intellect and sensation or feeling; the dualism of subjective and objective; the dualism of subject and style; the dualism of the created and ontological orders. Tate recognizes these dualities but only as logical fictions, as entities of the mind. In reality all dualisms are ontological wholes. Knowledge is both universal and concrete, timeless and contingent. Total knowledge is attained not by multiple acts of the intellect
and senses but by one act that is both intellectual and sensate, a thinking sensation, a "seeing." Poetry is neither subjective nor objective; it is a fusion of the mind of the poet and of the external object. Poetry is neither style nor subject, form or content, structure or texture. It is style and subject as one, as discovered simultaneously, as existing together, as incapable of existing separately. The knowledge that poetry gives is not the abstract proposition of the intellect, not the contingent world of the senses, not the rhetorical device used by the poet. It is the abstract, concrete, and rhetorical fused into one by the imagination.

What Tate requires in epistemology and in poetry is the opposite of dissociation, union. It is this same fullness or completeness that he demands of criticism. His ideal is not a vain one. Nearly all philosophical systems have attempted to resolve the problem of the One and the Many both in epistemology and in metaphysics. Kant's solution was the a priori synthetic judgment. St. Thomas, following Aristotle, formulated an ideogenesis of abstraction. But neither Kant nor Thomas was so psychologically naive as to attempt the union of concrete and abstract in one cognitive act. It is Tate's great psychological naiveté, his ignorance of faculties, his confusing of the logical,
ontological and psychological orders, his failure to distinguish the material from the spiritual that renders his system bewildering and, in the final analysis, philosophically absurd. And finally, we might question the assumption upon which the system is based, the dissociation of sensibility. Was there ever a Golden Age in which men viewed reality whole, in which poets did not "perceive" but "saw"? Theologians do not grant intuition to Adam and Eve in Eden before the Fall. Even in that Golden Age — as Milton well recognized — man knew by ratiocination and only angels and devils enjoyed intuition. And if we can question the truth of dissociation, what proof do we have that the individual talent can be explained by the historical circumstance?

I have no ready answers to these questions and answers really are of little import. Tate's system is analogous to Yeats's mythology. The myth, eccentric or not, worked for Yeats. The system works for Tate. It provides him with many valuable insights, with a poetic technique — the violent metaphor that forces the universal into the concrete image — and it provides him with the dramatic psychological or epistemological situation of the protagonist trapped by history in an age in which vision, "seeing," is impossible. Unfortunately, the system traps
Tate himself and historically determines him to write imperfect, incomplete poetry; to perceive but not to see the world. His is the fate of being born out of time. He looks back not in anger but in envy and despair.

What were they like? What mark
Can signify their charm?
They never saw the dark;
Rigid, they never knew alarm.

Do not the scene rehearse!
The perfect eyes enjoin
A contemptuous verse;
We speak the crabbed line. ("To the Romantic Traditionists," p. 7)
CHAPTER III

THOMISM

Edmund Wilson writes of the shock of recognition experienced by certain American writers when they encountered their own ideas in another writer. Such a shock must have been Tate's when he read Maritain's *The Dream of Descartes*. For years he had attempted to formulate an epistemology and to apply it to his poetics by means of his theory of poetry as knowledge. With the reading of Maritain he discovered, apparently for the first time, that a school of philosophy had had for nearly eight hundred years a coherent and convincing system of cognition, a system that takes account of sensation and intellection, that clearly and distinctly separates faculties, their acts, and the objects of these acts. And, for Tate, the authoritarian and traditionalist, this system possessed the special merit of being rooted in an even remoter antiquity than that of the Middle Ages; it traced its heritage back to Aristotle. Nor is this all; Maritain provided Tate not only with a wonderfully complete epistemology, but also
presented him with a convincing philosophical explanation of the dissociation of sensibility. According to Maritain, Descartes was the archvillain who separated man's soul from his body, man's intellect from his sense perceptions. Tate generously acknowledges the gift with an honesty and humility unique in all his writings: "My debt to Mr. Maritain is so great that I hardly know how to acknowledge it." If this seems slight praise, it seems so only taken out of the context of Tate's usual arrogance. He is patient and restrained with Ransom; he is respectful to Eliot. He is intolerant of nearly every other critic and philosopher whom he mentions. Never before, to my knowledge, had he acknowledged an intellectual debt.

Tate does not tell us when he discovered The Dream of Descartes nor what other books by Maritain he read. He refers only to The Dream of Descartes and to Situation de la Poésie by Maritain and his wife, Raïssa. In any event he delivered his first Thomistic essay, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe," as an address to the Poe Society of Baltimore on October 7, 1949. He followed this in the next year with "The Angelic Imagination;" and in 1951 he

read "The Symbolic Imagination: The Mirrors of Dante" as a Candlemas lecture at Boston College. The three essays can be considered as companion pieces, all written under the influence of Maritain.

In the first two essays, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe" and "The Angelic Imagination," Tate considers Poe as a transitional figure, the first American artist to understand the disintegration of the modern personality and one of the first to experience that disintegration in his own personality. Poe is the subject of the essays; Hulme and Eliot provide the basic assumption of modern dissociation; Maritain furnishes the terminology and the philosophical system. Tate's thought in the essays is not new, but his expression of that thought is. As we have seen, Tate had been concerned for years with the crisis of modern dissociation of sensibility. He had noted this disintegration of personality in many different forms and had offered various explanations of the fact. Essentially he had repeated over the years that dissociation is caused by a fault of cognition, a flawed vision to which modern man and the modern poet are determined by historical circumstances. This epistemological explanation was the basic principle by which he evaluated poets. Nor are his

Thomistic essays the first in which Tate applied the same principle to Poe. Both George Posey and Mr. Jarman of *The Fathers* are compared to Poe as men suffering from personality disintegration. The tragic flaw of George Posey is the same hypertrophy of feeling that Tate attributes to Poe. In the novel he describes the malady; he lacks at that time (1938) both the terminology to express it and the philosophy by which he can explain it. He uses both the new terminology and philosophy in "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe" and in "The Angelic Imagination."

Maritain's central thesis in The Dream of Descartes[^1] is that Descartes by his methodical doubt separated man from his body. This separation left the intellect cut off from sense perception, the roots of knowledge. Man was no longer a being of sensation and intellection but an angel inhabiting a machine. Tate applies this Cartesian split to the Aristotelian triad, intellect, will, and sensation, and considers the effects of the split upon Poe's work. In "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe" he considers Poe's hypertrophy of feeling; in "The Angelic Imagination," Poe's hypertrophy of will and especially of intellect.

[^1]: The Dream of Descartes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945).
Tate begins "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe" with D. H. Lawrence's observation that because Poe's lovers have failed in life to subdue their women through the body to the biological level "at which sanity alone is possible," these women retaliate in death by returning to devour their men. Tate refines this thesis, centering his observations around Poe's recurrent symbol of fire. All of the heroines burn with a "hard gem-like flame - bodyless exaltation of spirit." (p.460) The lovers of the tales are inert, only one ever conceives a child, Morella, but she proves to be only the vampire of Morella herself returned from the tomb. Poe's heroes and heroines are "undead"; they never enter into a normal human experience but prey upon each other with a "pure" demoniac love. The reason for this is Poe's hypertrophy of sensitivity into sensation. Intellect and will extend beyond human moral limitations and, "circumventing the body into the secret being of the beloved, [try] to convert the spiritual object into an object of sensation: The intellect which knows and the will which possesses are unnaturally turned upon the centre of the beloved which should remain inviolate." (p.463) The mysterious exaltation of the spirit so common to Poe's lovers is hardly the "pure" love that the nineteenth century saw it to be. "It inhabits a human body but that body is
dead. The spirits prey upon one another with destructive fire which is at once pure of lust and infernal." (p.461)

Tate illustrates his thesis with examples drawn from "Ligeia," "William Wilson," "The House of Usher," and "Morella." He sees the basic theme of "The House of Usher" to be one of symbolic incest. Since Roderick, a man of hypertrophic sensation but of no sensibility, can never quite achieve complete spiritual oneness with his sister, he destroys her; and she, the "undead," returns to suffocate him in a sexual embrace. Unity of this kind can be achieved only in mutual destruction. Symbolically, the fissured house becomes one only in dissolution.

The reason for Poe's horrifying vision of social reality is his dehumanization. There was no sensibility to link him to the world of men, only an awful Usher-like sensation. "He is like a child -- all appetite, without sensibility; but to be in manhood all appetite, all will, without sensibility, is to be a monster; to feed spiritually upon men without sharing with them a real world is spiritual vampirism." (p.469) Poe's impoverished sensibility explains the Gothic ornateness of his tales; he creates a fantastic dead world because he has no real perception of reality. Poe is the locked-in ego that feeds
If the effects of Poe's hypertrophic sensation are terrifying, the effects of hypertrophic intellect are even worse. In "The Angelic Imagination" Tate considers these effects. He sees Poe as a great transitional figure, a man conscious of the fragmentation of modern society but as yet incapable of capturing this insight imaginatively in the complex dissolution of language that Rimbaud, Crane, Stevens, and Thomas achieve. Poe's chaotic world is held firmly in check by the superimposed order of eighteenth-century rationalism, but if the surface is controlled, the depths boil in confusion.

The dominating theme, subconscious until his last works, in all of Poe is "the angelism of the intellect." This idea in Poe seems to involve simultaneously epistemology and metaphysics. Poe, working in the Aristotelian triad, can never quite unify feeling, intellect, and will. He divorces the will from the "human scale of action" and thus from morality and from possibility. Ligeia does not yield to the known world's causes and effects. She is beyond them. In the second divorce (that of intellect from feeling) Poe falls into the Cartesian vortex. Since the intellect can know intuitively like the angels, it needs no demonstration
for truth. Not only can the intellect know intuitively, but it can create. Poe transfers Pascal's analogy of the moral interaction within the Mystical Body to the physical universe. These ideas Poe presents in three colloquies, "The Power of Words," "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," and "The Conversation of Eros and Charmion." Thus Agathos of the second colloquy, while yet a mortal man, created by his love and passion a "wild star." But it is in Eureka that Tate finds the philosophical statement of the vision that lies submerged in all of Poe's fiction: "The image of the abyss is in all of Poe's serious writings: The mirror in 'William Wilson;' burial alive; the 'tarn' into which the House of Usher plunges; the great white figure towards which Pym is being borne by a current of the sea; the pit over which the pendulum swings; the dead body containing the living soul of M. Valdemar; being walled up alive; the vertigo of the maelstrom." (p.452) Tate finds Poe's core thesis in Eureka: "In the original unity of the first thing lies the secondary cause of all things, with the germ of their inevitable annihilation." Eureka is a philosophy of annihilation. Just as all matter, animate or inanimate, proceeds from the first point of creation, all atoms tend to rush back to an ultimate point of unity. Total unity
is achieved in utter nothingness, the return of matter to the point of origin, God. But this return is not of matter alone. God becomes God once again only when His divinity, diversified in human souls, is reassembled to a spiritual point. "Think [says Poe] that the sense of individual identity will be gradually merged in the general consciousness -- that Man, for example, ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah." Tate sees this centripetal pantheism to be an annihilation of God Himself: "If Poe must at last 'yield himself unto Death utterly' there is a lurid sublimity in the spectacle of his taking God along with him into a grave which is not smaller than the universe." (p. 452)

Poe, then, is the first man of letters to recognize the disintegration of the modern person; he recognizes it and he embodies it in himself. But he could only state its existence; he is incapable of realizing it imaginatively. For him synaesthesia and the magic of words remain an idea in his speculative

intellect. His ideas are realized today imaginatively by the modern poets who deliberately derange the senses and attempt to create a world from words that have no relation to reality. But if Poe possessed only the ordered language of the eighteenth century, nevertheless he cannot entirely conceal his disintegration. His hypertrophy of feeling emerges in the latent vampire symbol and in the decay of his style when he is confronted with the human situation. He cannot describe a living reality because his sensibility is completely impoverished. Consequently, he lapses into bathos, a "thick decor that simulates sensation." (p. 469) "Everything in Poe is dead: the houses, the rooms, the furniture, to say nothing of nature and of human beings." (p. 469)

Cut off from sensation, Poe's spiritual faculties become hypertrophic and dehumanized. His will thrusts itself beyond the scale of human action, beyond death itself. Thus his heroines and heroes are "undead," are wills inhabiting dead bodies. Their hypertrophic wills cannot accept the limitations of human love; they eschew the carnal love of the human condition and circumvent the body to consume, vampirishly, the inner spirit of the beloved.

Poe's hypertrophic intellect, isolated from his
impoverished senses, becomes angelic, seeks to know intuitively without the aid of the senses. But what is natural in an angel, intuitive knowledge, is monstrous in a man; and Poe's human intellect thrusts even beyond angelism to superangelism, the power to create by thought. In Poe this dehumanization remains in the conceptual order; he defines his vision of the disintegration and dehumanization of society in the language of exposition. Today, eighty years later, Poe's premonition has become a reality; language itself is corrupted. The modern poet, cut off from the world of nature by his hypertrophic feeling, is a superangel who creates a world by words: "But if Poe's language is never that idolatrous dissolution of language from the grammar of a possible world, which results from the belief that language itself can create a reality: a superstition that comes down in French from Lautréamont, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé to the Surrealists, and in English to Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, and Dylan Thomas." (p.437)

It seems strange that these powerful and remarkably clear essays of Tate aroused so little critical interest. They are, I believe, two of the best studies

6. John Paul Pritchard, for example, writes these essays off with one sentence: "Tate's more recent work has shown an almost Emersonian mysticism." Criticism in America (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), p. 249.
Tate ever made, and I regret that his proposed book on Poe has not as yet been published. Oddly enough the very sureness of Tate, the ease with which he handles ideas, the clarity of his distinctions, the assurance of his style in these essays seem to bore the critics rather than to move them to praise. Perhaps by 1953 - the year in which The Forelorn Demon was published - the critics had had enough of dissociated sensibility. At any rate, most of the notices are perfunctory. Arthur Mizener is extravagant in his praise of Tate as the outstanding man of letters of the twentieth century. However, he fails to detect the new vocabulary, the clarity of thought, and the distinction of style. Eliseo Vivas in his review of the book, as we have seen, admires Tate's intelligence but admonishes him for the philosophical naïveté that attributes so much damage to Descartes. He too fails to recognize the Thomistic terminology and thought. Foster, concentrating too attentively on his thesis about Tate's romanticism, misses the Thomistic tone and the possible connection this intellectual "conversion" may have with Tate's actual conversion. His only comment is: "It seems, actually, that Tate has become his own Montressor, that in the end

he has lain down almost willingly where he never wanted to -- in darkness with his cousin Mr. Poe." This is a neat but erroneous trope.

These two essays of Tate's are significant not only for their new terminology and distinction of style, but also for several incidental conclusions that he draws. He is almost amusingly condescending when he speaks with the clarity of his new vocabulary of Eliot's confusion: "I am nevertheless surprised that Mr. Eliot seems to assume that coordination of the 'various emotions' is ever possible: the word gives the case away to Poe... I suppose Mr. Eliot means by it a harmony of faculties among different orders of experience." (p. 434) And Tate rejects as ridiculous Poe's idea that the imagination is a cognitive faculty and, with Poe, he rejects Coleridge: "This is not far from the 'esemplastic power' of the Primary Imagination, a Teutonic angel inhabiting a Cartesian machine named Samuel Taylor Coleridge." (p. 444) He places knowledge in the intellect and harmonizes sensation and the "higher truths" by means of analogy: "He [Poe] may have meant analogy to the natural world, the higher truths emerging, as they do in Dante, from a rational structure of natural analogy: but he could not have meant

all this." (p.444) In rejecting Poe's angelism, an intellect exhausted because it has no real object, Tate gives a literal translation of the Thomistic principle upon which the psychology of abstraction is founded, *nil in intellectu quod non prius fuit in sensibus*. Tate's rendering of this principle is: "The human intellect cannot reach God as essence; only God as analogy. Analogy to what? Plainly analogy to the natural world; for there is nothing in the intellect that has not previously reached it through the senses. (italics mine) (p.453) Tate has at last found an answer to his problem of knowledge, a solution that establishes a knowledge rooted in concrete reality but capable of the highest and most abstract truth: "Had Dante arrived at the vision of God by way of sense? We must answer yes, because Dante's Triune Circle is light, which the finite intelligence can see only in what has already been seen by means of it. But Poe's center is that place -- to use Dante's great figure -- 'where the sun is silent.'" (p.454)

Poe for Tate is the prototype of modern man and of the modern poet. As modern man he suffers from a dissociation of sensation, intellection, and volition; as modern poet he attempts to express this dissociation in ordered eighteenth-century prose. Dissociation of person-
ality does not in Poe become dissociation of language. However, the modern writer extends the dissociation of his personality even to language.

If Poe is the prototype of the modern angelic imagination, Dante is the prototype of traditional man, of the integrated personality and of the integrated poetry. "The Symbolic Imagination" is Tate's answer to the crisis he reviewed in "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe" and "The Angelic Imagination." This excellent and thoroughly satisfactory essay, like those on Poe, failed to attract more than perfunctory attention from the reviewers. Both Bradbury and Meiners seem to miss the significance of these Thomistic essays, especially the significance of "The Symbolic Imagination." They consider them to be Catholic in position, confusing or failing to distinguish between philosophy and theology, reason and faith. It is quite possible, as the example of Mortimer Adler attests, to accept Thomistic philosophy without accepting the Catholic Church. It is true that St. Thomas attempted to reconcile faith and reason. His synthesis was an answer to the double-truth school of philosophy of the Sorbonne which held that a proposition could be true in philosophy and false in theology. Nevertheless, Thomas's philosophical system can be accepted in and by itself. It is from the philosophical
position that Tate writes; his essays are neither Catholic nor non-Catholic. They are Thomistic.

"The Symbolic Imagination" begins with an attack upon modern poets in which he rephrases the judgment made in the former essays.

The abstraction of the modern mind has obscured their way into the natural order. Nature offers to the symbolic poet clearly denotable objects in depth and in the round, which yield the analogies to the higher syntheses. The modern poet rejects the higher synthesis, or tosses it in a vacuum of abstraction. If he looks at nature he spreads the clear visual image in a complex of metaphor, from one catachresis to another through Aristotle's permutations of genus and species. He cannot sustain the prolonged analogy, the second and superior kind of figure that Aristotle doubtless had in mind when he spoke of metaphor as the key to the resemblances of things, and the mark of genius.

6. Another way of putting this is to say that the modern poet, like Valéry or Crane, tries to seize directly the anagogical meaning, without going through the three preparatory stages of letter, allegory, and trope. (p. 414-15)

The modern poet is cut off from external reality; he is a superangel who creates a work of words which have no relation to objects.

The symbolic poet, on the contrary, may portray the highest truth, even mystical vision, but he does so by way of the senses. He begins with the body of this world and by analogy leads his reader to the vision of the invisible. He follows the advice of St. Paul: "Ever since
the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in things that have been made." (Romans, I/20)

Despite the timeless orders of both rational discourse and intuitive contemplation, it is the business of the symbolic poet to return to the order of temporal sequence -- to action. His purpose is to show men experiencing whatever they may be capable of, with as much meaning as he may be able to see in it; but action comes first. Shall we call this the Poetic Way? It is at any rate the way of the poet, who has got to do his work with the body of this world, whatever that body may look like to him, in his time and place -- the whirling atoms, the body of a beautiful woman, or a deformed body, or the body of Christ, or even the body of this death. If the poet is able to put into this moving body, or to find in it, a coherent chain of analogies, he will inform an intuitive act with symbolism; his will be in one degree or another the symbolic imagination.

(p.412-13)

The remainder of the essay is an examination of Dante's use of the mirror, a common object, in the Paradiso. The eyes of Beatrice are like a mirror; in them Dante sees himself and sees the world in reverse. Later at the source of all light, in the very central circle of the Trinity, he sees the reflection of himself. The Trinity is the source of light by which all else is seen, as, for example, a candle placed behind three mirrors is that by which we can see the triple reflections in the mirrors themselves (the example is Beatrice's).
Thus all reality, all the saints, and Beatrice herself are mirrors which either reflect the "point of light" or reflect the world as it is in reverse. Finally, Tate speaks of the dramatic force of the epic moving Dante from the "dark wood" to the fullness of blinding light where he finds himself in the center of God's love. The climax has been rooted in a very simple symbol, a mirror. Step by step Dante has expanded this symbol through the Paradiso. The symbol expands to allegory, to analogy, to anagoge, but retains its startling force because it is rooted in human experience in a concrete and simple artifact.

Tate's exegesis is ingenious and satisfying and my summary in no way does it justice. However, Tate's excellence in practical criticism is not the point at issue. What is at issue is the philosophical principle underlying the explication. First there is in Tate the basic assumption that unless a poet grasps reality whole in a complete act of cognition, he is incapable of writing complete poetry. Modern poets fail as poets because they fail as men. They attempt to know as angels, despising the common object grasped by sensation. They transfer their erroneous cognition to their poetic method; their metaphors and symbols are rootless abstractions, katachreoses stretched
from one abstraction to another. The symbolic poet realizes that all knowledge begins with sensation, that there is no concept, however, lofty it be, that was not first in his senses. He knows by a combination of acts; by sensation, by intellection, even volition in choice or judgment. Consequently, his knowledge of reality is total; it is not the bodiless abstraction of false angelism; it is not the totally sensate knowledge of an animal; but it is human knowledge, knowledge at once spiritual and material, abstract and concrete. Neither the body alone nor the soul alone knows, but man - a union of body and soul - knows. Chesterton with his usual clarity and vigor expresses this difficult concept with simplicity and imagination.

He [St. Thomas] lays down the almost startlingly modern or materialist statement; "Everything that is in the intellect has been in the senses". This is where he began, as much as any modern materialist who can now hardly be called a man of science; at the very opposite end of enquiry from that of the mere mystic. The Platonists, or at least the Neo-Platonists, all tended to the view that the mind was lit entirely from within; St. Thomas insisted that it was lit by five windows, that we call the windows of the senses. But he wanted the light from without to shine on what was within. He wanted to study the nature of Man, and not merely such moss and mushrooms as he might see through the window, and which he valued as the first enlightening experience of man. And starting
from this point, he proceeds to climb the House of Man, step by step and story by story, until he has come out on the highest tower and beheld the largest vision.9

The poet of the symbolic imagination, the complete poet, writes as he knows. He roots his poetry in the common thing, the object perceived by his senses. If he chooses a symbol, he chooses, like Dante, a common one, one familiar to men. And though it is simple and common, the poet can, like Dante, lead his reader to ecstatic heights. If he uses a metaphor, one term must be rooted in time and place though the other term may extend into eternity and infinity. For the poet as for knowing man "there is nothing in the intellect which was not first in the senses."

These three essays are, then, something of old wine in new bottles. Basically the same ideas are here that we have seen in Tate's work as early as 1928: the modern crisis of dissociation resulting from flawed cognition; the crisis of modern poetry that produces no great poetry but a poetry of angelism, a poetry that corresponds to the flawed angelic cognition of modern man. But the expression of these ideas is marvelously new and clear.

No longer does Tate offer clumsy metaphors about "whole horses," higher and lower myths, qualitative and quantitative knowledge, images arising from the soil. He has at his command a terminology and a system of thought by which he can explain exactly what he means.

Is there anything new in these essays besides the vocabulary? The absence of any reference to historical determinism is new. Tate has replaced determinism with Thomistic causality. Descartes (a new historical villain) is the cause of modern dissociation. And with the introduction of causality Tate discovers an escape from the modern dilemma. He now realizes that no vague and inaccessible myth is necessary for total cognition. Modern man has the same faculties that pre-Cartesian man possessed. He has but to exercise his full potentiality, all of his apprehensive faculties, the exterior and interior senses, the agent intellect, the possible intellect, the judgment, and he can know totally and fully. If he avoids the cause, angelism, he can avoid the effect, dissociation. The modern poet, victim of the angelic imagination, can, by a use of all his faculties, gain the symbolic imagination of Dante. The success or failure of the poet does not depend upon exterior historical
circumstances, but upon an interior disposition of the poet, a determination to use the totality of his being in writing poetry. He must begin his poem where he begins to know: in the concrete object perceived by his senses.

Implicit in Tate's rejection of the angelism of modern poetry is a rejection of his own poetry and poetic method founded upon a false principle of cognition. Synaesthesia, katachresis, the violence that attempts to compress the abstract into the concrete symbol is the poetry of angelism. Tate, at least for the moment, has solved his epistemological problem. Total knowledge is possible for modern man if only he will sacrifice the fallacy of angelism and will accept his humanity. Not by violence (as Tate once suggested) will man be saved, but by humility, the acceptance of himself as he is, body and soul. With this realization Tate abandons the tragic situation of the protagonist of his poems and fiction. Man is not a "stag charged both at heel and head," a victim of an irresolvable dilemma. The situation is false as is the assumption of historical determinism upon which it is based. "The Symbolic Imagination" was written in 1951. The next year Tate issued "The Maimed Man," the first part of a long poem, a poem that was to proceed by letter,
allegory, and trope to anagogical meaning. In it Tate was to exercise his new symbolic imagination. Hardly in the midway of his mortal life, Tate at the age of fifty-two abandoned the dark wood of the moderns and turned to "fresh woods and pastures new."

Teach me to fast
And pray, that I may know the motes that tease
Skittering sunbeams are dead shells at last.
Then, timeless muse, reverse my time; unfreeze
All that I was in your congenial heat.  

CHAPTER IV

CATHOLICISM

This concluding chapter on Tate's criticism will, of necessity, be brief. The center of unity of his thought, the problem of knowledge, I have already demonstrated; the center of unity of his fiction and poetry is the same basic epistemological problem which I shall treat in the next two sections. Tate's writings from a strictly Catholic point of view - theological rather than philosophical - are few, too few, in fact, to give support to any convincing hypothesis. And the fact remains that Tate as a living author could at any moment explode a too hastily formulated hypothesis with a fresh burst of creative or critical activity which would necessitate a reassessment of his Catholic writings. Until that time or the time of his death no final assessment can be validly made.

However, from the evidence of the last twelve years, I believe that certain tenuous and temporary conclusions may be drawn. In general, I believe that whereas Tate's highly eccentric and personal system of
poetics and philosophy - like Yeats's mythology - provided him with valid and original insights, (particularly in his practical criticism and in his early poetry), Catholicism, on the contrary, fails to provide equal critical and poetic stimulation. Tate's Catholic essays either verge on the erroneous or repeat mere catechetical statements that lack development of thought and originality of expression. And what is true of Tate's Catholic prose is equally true of his Catholic poetry. "The Maimed Man," "The Swimmers," and "The Buried Lake," though pretentious and difficult, collapse, as we shall see, under analysis.

I am aware that this interpretation is open to contradiction; however, there are no critics - even Meiners - who seem inclined to contradict it. The critics either patiently await greater critical and poetic activity from Tate before they draw conclusions, or they remain silent, respecting Tate for his past accomplishments. What is not subject to contradiction is the fact of Tate's long inactivity since the time of his conversion to Catholicism.

Many cogent reasons might be advanced to account for this inactivity: his age (sixty-four); his unfamiliality with a new body of thought and belief with which he might
justifiably wish to acquaint himself better before venturing upon new work; his domestic problems (he recently divorced Caroline Gordon and has since remarried); his university commitments. Any one of these reasons and certainly the complexus of them all might serve as a reasonable explanation of Tate's recent inactivity and - if we grant the supposition - of the inferior quality of his Catholic writings. However, I should like to advance one more supposition: that Tate's peculiar sensibility is one of crisis rather than of possession, of exploration rather than exposition.

William Van O'Connor distinguishes between poetry of exploration and of exposition.¹ The distinction is an interesting one and one that can easily be applied to Tate's criticism and poetry. Tate's sensibility seems to demand a problem for which there is no solution, a situation from which there is no escape. The force and excitement of Tate's early critical writing derive from the suspense of search. Tate continually seeks an answer to the problem of knowledge; in that search he examines and rejects the solutions of other critics and philosophers.

His final assertion is not so much an answer as an indication that the answer must lie in a certain direction. The protagonists of the poems, too, are seekers; and their search leads them to a dramatic situation of great tension, a situation historically determined and one from which there is no escape. There is no resolution, because there can be no resolution. The protagonists of the poems are trapped in the frozen lake of history, a lake that suspiciously resembles Dante's ninth circle of the Inferno where the sinners lie buried in ice "sounding their teeth like storks." If Poe's latent vampire symbols imply a dehumanized sensibility, Tate's frequent allusions to Dante's Inferno might imply an infernal sensibility that views modern society as hell. More than once Tate affirms the damnation of modern man as a present reality: "Is the man of letters alone doomed to inhabit that city? [Baudelaire's fourmillante cite] No, we are all in it. . .The special awareness of the man of letters. . .he brings to bear on all men alike: his hell has not been 'for those other people;' he has reported his own."²

But there is this great difference between Tate and Dante: Dante's sinners are dead; Tate's protagonists are "undead." Dante wrote a Divine Comedy in which

redemption is possible for the worst living sinner;
Tate writes a human tragedy in which just and unjust are
dammed alive.

There is in Catholic dogma no room for historical
determinism, for death in life. The fruit of the
Crucifixion and of the Resurrection is the "death of
death, the ruin of hell." Presumably Tate accepted the
dogma of God's universal salvific Will when he accepted
Catholicism. He must also have accepted the doctrine of
free will and of efficacious grace. These three doctrines
leave little room for death in life, for a damned society.
Tate's acceptance of Catholicism implies, then, a rejection
of historical determinism. With this rejection he
lost the key character of his major poems, the historically
determined protagonist. He could no longer write
either a criticism of crisis or a poetry of crisis. With
the forced abandonment of the poetry and prose of crisis
(of exploration), he had to turn, if he were to write, to
a poetry and prose of exposition. In Catholicism he discovered truth and there was nothing to do but share that
truth, expose it to others.

Certainly Tate tried to do exactly this. He failed, I believe, because his poetic and critical sensibility is one of exploration, one that demands - or that
has come to demand from long exercise - a crisis for inspiration. In the Catholic vision of life there are no Tatean crises. The only irrevocable and inescapable evil is final impenitence. In Catholic dogma there is no Golden Age; man is limited, is fundamentally the same in any age, but in any age in which he lives grace sufficient for salvation is present if he but wills it.

Unlike his great mentor, Eliot, whom he followed into orthodoxy, Tate has not found orthodoxy a fruitful muse. Why? In what way does Tate differ from Eliot? In that Eliot even in "The Waste Land" is not too far from orthodoxy, not too removed from a poetry of exposition. He concludes "The Waste Land" with fragments of orthodoxy, with the beginnings of hope: "Datta," "dayadhvam," "dāmyata," and the line "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." In his conclusion Eliot points out the way to escape "The Waste Land." Tate, until his conversion, never even hints at the possibility of escape from our modern hell. Conversion for Eliot constituted no revolutionary change, and so he could continue to write from a different but not radically different point of view. But conversion for Tate demanded a complete reversal of position, a change from pessimism to optimism, from despair to hope, from determinism to freedom. It demanded, perhaps,
more than his artistic sensibility was capable of sustain-
ing, the acceptance and defense of a position neither emotion-
ally nor rationally coherent with his former views.

Exactly what Tate expected to find in Catholic orthodoxy I cannot say. If he had hoped to discover some modern Dante, he was sadly disillusioned. In "Orthodoxy and the Standard of Literature" he voices that dis-
enchantment. He addresses the problem of the modern Catholic writer and asks why such a writer is not like Dante. His answer has a familiar ring: "He suffers from a certain disjunction of belief and experience." 3

Apparently even orthodoxy is not enough to overcome modern dissociation. As the cause of this Catholic dissociation Tate offers something more specific and less irrevocable than historical determinism; namely, the standards of society and the interference of the clergy. Tate is none too optimistic about changing either, but of the two clerical interference seems to be the more in-
transigent: "The subject of the imaginative writer is necessarily men as they are behaving not as they ought

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to behave. For this reason, there is a standing quarrel between the imaginative writer and the Church. It will continue forever. . . Our clerical friends are constantly telling us that there are certain aspects of the human condition that are better glozed.\(^4\) Tate continues in the same depreciating tone. The Catholic poetry magazine, Spirit, is to him (and to anyone else who has bothered to read it) pretty awful. The verse of the would-be poets is vague and pious and could be written even by Baptists.

The standard of literary taste among Catholics is atrocious; Tate exemplifies his point by the popularity of Cardinal Spellman's The Foundling. He treats the poor, illiterate Cardinal rather severely. Perhaps Spellman read Tate's article and took his advice to heart. At any rate, he has written no more novels. Tate concludes his remarks on Catholic literary taste with two suggestions for raising its standards: books and poems should be judged not by their subject matter but as works of art; and the Catholic critic and reader should not seek out statements of doctrine (the fallacy of the message hunter) but should look for "doctrine experienced."

\(^4\) Ibid.
All in all, "Orthodoxy and the Standard of Literature" is a rather slender essay that does little more than point out the obvious. The Foundling, a sentimental second-rate novel, was written by Cardinal Spellman to raise funds for an orphanage. I rather suspect that most Catholics bought the book for much the same reason they contribute to the Community Chest - it was for a good cause. The clerical reviewers of the Cardinal's diocesan newspaper naturally praised the book. The more serious Catholic reviews - America, Commonweal, Thought - tactfully avoided all mention of the book. Tate might have been more just had he done the same thing.

However, it is not what Tate says but what he does not say that slants the article. Tate fails to give the whole case. In 1952 Graham Greene's The End of the Affair was selected by the Catholic Literary Guild as the outstanding Catholic novel of the year. I do not intend to weigh the merits of this choice; this is not the point. The point is that Greene's novel of marital infidelity could hardly have been selected by reason of its subject or statement of doctrine or treatment of women as they ought to be. Greene and Evelyn Waugh in England, Francois
Mauriac and Bernanos in France, Gironella in Spain, J.F. Powers in America have not been writing about man as he ought to be, neither have they been glozing man's capacity for evil. I do not intend to write an apologia for Catholic literature, but merely to point out that Tate is either unfair or uninformed. We agree that The Foundling is a poor book, that the poetry in Spirit is pretty awful stuff, that the clergy often pontificate upon subjects about which they know nothing. All this tells us very little about Dante and the modern Catholic writer. There are, I suppose, in every religion some who prefer to read the Cardinal Spellmans and the Edgar Guests. I imagine there were members of the clergy who disapproved of Dante and members of the laity who preferred the prevalent version of The Foundling. All that this tells us is what we already knew, that fifty percent of the population is below average. The modern Catholic writer has a problem, but Tate has not seen it. Is not the real problem the definition of Catholic writer? I believe the definition entails more than membership in a Church. The Idiot, no matter who wrote it, is more profoundly Catholic than The Foundling, The Cardinal, or Tom Playfair. But I am wandering from the point which is that Tate in this article is unoriginal, overly obvious,
incomplete, and unfair or uninformed.

Perhaps Tate's error is that he expects the Catholic writer to be different. If he does, he has never quite rid himself of the higher myth of religion. I am not at all certain that the serious writer, in opposition to the propagandist, should be different because of his religion. If Frost and Lowell, Mauriac and Gide, Greene and Golding write about man as he is and not as he ought to be, how are they to differ?

However, I may be unfair and may expect too much from a short and perhaps hastily composed article. But "Christ and the Unicorn" is an address delivered upon an important occasion, the Third International Congress for Peace and Christian Civilization held in Florence, Italy, June 23, 1954. The other speakers were well-known authorities in the fields of philosophy, theology, patristics, history, political science: Etienne Gilson, M. C. D'Arcy, Jean Daniélou, Robert Grosche, and Guido Piovene. In this assemblage and on this occasion we might expect an exceptional effort from Tate, and to speak truth his address is in no way mediocre. The style is one of classical balance: urbane but dignified, learned but modest, profound but lucid. Style and content are in perfect harmony. As the thought clarifies and reaches a
conclusion, so too does the formerly opaque metaphor of the unicorn clarify and illustrate perfectly the thought. The address reveals Tate at his rhetorical best in perfect classical control of both content and structure.

The problem which he considers is the crisis in the unity of culture and revelation. He quickly dismisses obvious and local manifestations of this crisis as superficial and symptomatic of a deeper malady. He considers American materialism to differ in no way from European materialism, and American separation of Church and State to be founded upon the French concept of the Utopian State. Both Europe and America are haunted by the same demons, Gnosticism and Manichaeanism. The Gnostic demon tempts man to pride of intellect, to the dream that unaided reason can achieve a Utopian state.

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5. Tate's use of these terms seems to me to be highly personal. Most theologians would be hard put to distinguish Gnosticism from Manichaeanism. Both systems attempt to find a positive source of evil in order to preserve the sanctity and transcendence of God. Both are religions of salvation based upon knowledge, and both regard the world and the body as evil. Gnosticism states that man's only refuge is in a very lofty God, the great Silence and the Abyss, and that man must wait for gnosis, for only by this higher and mystical knowledge can he gain heaven. Manichaeanism too states that man is saved by nous. The apocatastasis or return to the original state is a liberation of the good substance (light self) from the evil substance (dark self). The systems seem essentially the same - both tempt man to pride of intellect.
The second demon, Manichaeanism, follows the first and tempts man with the failure of the Utopian state (it always fails) to complete pessimism, to the belief that man is totally corrupt and can be controlled only by the slave state.

Another name for the Utopian demon is Gnosticism, or the belief in the omnipotence of reason in the political order. The perspective that this second name for Utopia opens up is known to us all. What we are perhaps not so familiar with is the part played by another demon who supervenes upon the failure of the rationalistic society: his name is Manicheanism, the twin brother of Gnosticism. When the belief in the perfectibility of man in and by means of a rationalistic society ends in slaughter, we go to the other extreme; and, deciding that man is not merely imperfect but actually a vicious imbecile, we frantically call in the kind of order represented by the omnimemptent state. The western world knows by this time that it cannot have the Gnostic society. Its present agony is an agony of fear lest it have to accept the Manichean, or Communist, society.6

Tate sees the modern state as faced with a false dilemma, the choice of Gnosticism, which it knows will fail, or Manichaeanism, which it recognizes as evil. According to Tate, the dilemma is false because Gnosticism and Manichaenism are not two horns of a dilemma but one. Both are unrealistic concepts of the State; one is too optimistic, the other too pessimistic. The Gnostic-Manichaean demon

is a unicorn that attacks the state from two sides. The fallacy of the dilemma is obscured by historians who divide East against West. The conflict is not geographical and exterior; it is spiritual and interior.

What, then, is the work before us? It is not a work which we can limit to the historical task of "defeating Russia." Russia once defeated in another great Manichean war, where should we then be? Should we not have to defeat Russia in ourselves? Some of our intellectual confusion comes of the part we have consented to play in the historical melodrama foisted upon the twentieth century by Spengler and Toynbee, who have pitted East against West in a relativist fantasy of equal civilizations equally doomed: and this has helped to abort our true sense of what we are. The adjective in the phrase "Western Civilization" is not substantive; it is merely geographical; and all that it allows us to do is to stare blankly at points of the compass.  

To escape the Gnostic-Manichaean unicorn, the West must choose, according to Tate, the Christian State. Only by this choice can Western society be saved from false Utopianism or Communism. The choice is a realistic one that promises neither too much nor too little. Christ did not promise Heaven upon earth, but He did promise that the Gates of Hell would not prevail.

If the choice of the Christian State seems easy in theory, it is not so in fact. The choice involves

more than human volition:

The problem is not, of course, so simple; and that is the trouble. Choice, I take it, is an action of the free will, and the will is not free unless it is informed by a prior activity which our forbears on both sides of the Atlantic taught us to acknowledge as grace. For men in the Christian tradition, perhaps for all men in advanced societies, the simplicity of natural grace is inadequate; we require as the dynamic synthesizer of our soul nature the activity of a higher power: Divine Grace, which can be fully known only through the Christian Revelation. Without this unique prime mover of the moral will we have a limited choice. We are faced with a dilemma either horn of which leads to disaster; or we may oscillate between the horns, or even try to impale ourselves upon both at the same moment.

Briefly stated, Tate's solution to the problem of the unity of culture and revelation is: to avoid excessive confidence in human reason (Utopianism) on the one hand, and excessive pessimism (Communism) on the other; and to choose the realistic middle ground of the Christian State. In this simplified form - and it is, I believe, a valid simplification - Tate is stating the obvious truisms: avoid evil and do good, and in medio stat virtus. It may not be a bad thing for a speaker limited to a fixed time to do nothing but state obvious truths. I have no argument with truth, no matter how obvious, but I do object to an

8. Ibid., pp. 178-79.
oversimplification that distorts the truth. We have seen that Tate is prone to oversimplify historical and philosophical causes, to blame one or other man - Descartes, Emerson, Dewey - for results brought about by a complex series of causes. In "Christ and the Unicorn" he seems to me to oversimplify his solution, the choice of the Christian State. I do not understand, nor does Tate explain, the term "natural grace." Nor am I sure what Tate means by the need of "Divine Grace" to choose the Christian State. Is he speaking of Christ, the Church, or the State? He omits, I believe, a necessary distinction: to make an act of faith in Christ requires the assistance of God's grace; to make a choice of a form of government does not. Moreover, Tate omits a second necessary distinction between the perfect society of the state and the perfect society of the Church. The purpose of the state is terrestrial, the common good of its citizens; the purpose of the Church is celestial, the eternal salvation of its members. Christ did not promise, as Tate seems to imply, that the Gates of Hell would not prevail against the state, but that they would not prevail against His Church. What Tate says is clear, and he says it eloquently; but he sacrifices exactness for a false clarity. His solution has the ring of a pat catechetical answer applied to a set of circumstances to which
the answer is not suited. It is too simple, too innocent of complexity. Whatever complexity Tate's address may seem to have derives not from the thought but from the use of learned terms (Gnosticism and Manichaeanism), and from the clever unicorn metaphor. Tate, in attempting to simplify, confuses two orders: the order of nature and the order of grace.

This same oversimplification with its resultant confusion is present in another Catholic address of Tate's, "The Man of Letters in the Modern World." The address

9. Tate's description of "Divine Grace" as a "dynamic synthesizer of our dual nature" is not exactly correct and implies a concept of grace condemned by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical Humani Generis. Tate seems to be saying that disintegration of the human personality can be cured only by grace. If he means this, he is implicitly denying the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. Grace is a supernatural gift of God which is in no way due to human nature. If, however, human nature is incomplete, is dissociated because without grace, then grace is due to that nature to complete it. In short, grace is not supernatural but natural. However, we should pardon Tate this lapse. Even so excellent a theologian as Père Henri DeLubac made the same error. I do, however, question Tate's prudence (and humility) for his cavalier treatment of such a difficult and technical point.

contains many excellent things presented in a strikingly urbane and lucid style. I shall not attempt to summarize its contents; many of the ideas on the fragmentation of society caused by Descartes's abstractionism (again the great historical simplification!) we have already seen.

Of particular interest is Tate's distinction between communication and communion, the theme of his address: "A marked difference between communication and communion I shall be at some pains to try to discern in the remarks that follow." (p.380) For Tate, communication is the use of language as a means to something other; it is partial and incomplete communion: "Communication that is not also communion is incomplete. We use communication; we participate in communion." (p.385) Tate is not so clear in defining communion, and his use of the word is ambiguous. Thus he tells us: "Neither the artist nor the statesman will communicate fully again until the rule of love, added to the rule of law, has liberated him." This rule of love necessary for communion is realized "only through the love of God." (p.386) From this it would seem that Tate is speaking of the supernatural order, an order dependent upon God's action on the individual will. He seems to say that without God's gift of charity communion
among men is impossible. But later in his address he uses communion in a sense totally different and unprepared for; he applies it to the literary order. This non-defined use is extremely confusing. Is communion an act of religion or is it a literary device? Is literature itself a religious act?

Another way of looking at the question, What do we propose to communicate and to whom? would eliminate the dilemma, withdrawal or communication. It disappears if we understand that literature has never communicated, that it cannot communicate: from this point of view we see the work of literature as a participation in communion. Participation leads naturally to the idea of common experience. Perhaps it is not too grandiose a conception to suggest that works of literature, from the short lyric to the long epic, are the recurrent discovery of the human communion as experience, in a definite place and at a definite time. (p.388)

What Tate says sounds very lofty and religious, but what exactly does he mean? Is communion a natural act or a supernatural act? If natural, why does Tate introduce it with supernatural overtones? Does it depend upon God or upon literature? If upon literature, must the writer be inspired as were the authors of the Bible? Does literature address itself to the mind of man as knowledge or to his will as a motivation to love? Tate, I believe, confuses orders; in Hulme's terms, he spills religion. He extends his term "communion" too far. The word in itself
contains the connotation of sacramental communion, the union of Christ with the individual soul. Tate extends this connotation to the denotation of the word, not to denote the union of Christ and the individual, but the union of individual to individual. He further complicates the issue by introducing the love of God. In so doing, he confuses rather than elevates the position of the man of letters in the modern world. Tate may have in mind an analogy of the human to the divine order. By failing to make it explicit, he falls into a kind of intellectual synaesthesia.

I am aware that this theory of "communion" through literature is not peculiar to Tate. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. lists its proponents and gives an excellent summary of the theory.

And so I move to a third possibility for modern criticism, a recent challenge to the expansive and didactic myth which is a kind of opposite to a new 'communication' theory -- not a theory of means, but a theory of the most terminal thing possible. The persons I chiefly associate with such a theory are Allen Tate and Father William Lynch, the editor of Thought, and Malcolm Ross. To speak broadly, the new theory is a new plea for concreteness in answer to exorbitant didactic claims, just as in the 1920 the neo-classic poetics of the verbal object was a reaction against the hazy horizontalism of both romantic feeling and socio-real crusading. The new theory, as I understand it, is a plea for a kind of substance in poetry, something more solid, more real, and better, than the hollow symbol,
the merely phenomenal grandeur of myth. Hence the new something has to be something showing a better claim to historicity. The argument seems to say that just as Christian sacramentalism and the sacramentally symbolic view of the universe differ from the mythic view in their having an actual world and both a general immanence and a specific Incarnation of God in the world, so a sound poetry, and especially a sound Christian poetry, ought somehow to be a more substantively real thing than the apparitions of the post-symbolist phases.\textsuperscript{11}

Wimsatt is not entirely sympathetic with this theory and has difficulty in understanding its real meaning. I concur completely with his final judgment: "but on the other hand, what could the new substantive and incarnational theory of poetry mean? Except that the only good and genuine poem is Christ Himself? Or the Mystical Body of Christ in the Church itself?"\textsuperscript{12} The fact that Tate is not alone in confusing literature and religion, does not exonerate him. He seems to me in his essay to do with theological terms what he once did with philosophical - to fail to make the necessary distinctions, to demand that one term have a complexus of meanings. Tate's use of "communion" is analogous to his use of "see." This syndetic use of words may be permissible in poetry; in prose


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 15.
it is an unwarranted violation of clarity opposed to the most basic concept of exposition. It is either deliberate obfuscation or initial misunderstanding of the terms involved. I do not wish to accuse Tate of deliberate obscurity; I do, however, think that he is fuzzy in his theological thought. What he attempts in this essay is beyond his knowledge of the subject. Before he attempts to fuse two orders, he should thoroughly master both. At the time of the composition of "The Man of Letters in the Modern World" he was not yet master of both literature and theology. He may be now.

What conclusions can we draw from Tate's Catholic essays? In strict honesty, very little. The evidence is too slight. In these essays Tate seems to be somewhat ill-at-ease with Catholic concepts. He obviously knows the terms of Catholic theology but his use of them is slippery and confused. His statement that there is no free will without divine grace (in "Christ and the Unicorn") is, I believe, an example of this slippery use. The denial of free will is the Manichaean heresy condemned by St. Augustine and the Church; the denial of the necessity of grace is the Pelagian heresy also condemned by Augustine. The Catholic position is that the will is free without grace and remains free even when moved by grace. Tate's position is neither Pelagian nor Manichaean but a
fusion of the two - a unicorn. It is reversal of the Catholic position from freedom with grace to no freedom without grace. The point is a fine one - even Augustine admits this - and Tate can be easily excused for slipping on such thin ice. He might, however, have been more prudent had he informed himself better before venturing into such a specialized subject. In any event, Tate has not added to his Catholic essays. Perhaps he has been warned off by lynx-eyed clerics eager to spot heresy. Perhaps he has found the Catholic atmosphere uncongenial and uninspiring to his particular genius. I am inclined to favor the latter view. For a poet and critic of crisis, possession of dogmatic truth must pose a very real problem. Tate whose unique genius is one of exploration may well find exposition impossible. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that since his conversion he has produced very little; a few scattered reviews and three parts of a long poem as yet uncompleted.

In concluding this section on Tate's criticism I should like once more to summarize his thought. His basic assumption is that Eliot's principle of dissociated sensibility is a fact in modern society. Tate began in the late twenties to search for the cause of this gratuitously assumed fact. He studied his own Southern tradition and from his study formulated the principle of tradition's dependence upon total cognition. He then
faced an epistemological problem, the definition of total
cognition and of the conditions necessary for its
existence. Total cognition Tate decided is a fusion of
abstract and concrete, of intellection and sensation; it
is reality "seen" whole. The act of cognition he compared
to seeing, an act simultaneously intellectual and sensate;
and he posited as a necessary condition for this act:
first, the myth of religion; later, the myth of history.
Neither myth, Tate said, is available to modern man. The
impossibility of total cognition for modern man (because
of historical determinism from which he cannot escape),
Tate considered to be the modern crisis, the inescapable
dilemma. In this crisis he placed the protagonists of his
fiction and poetry.

Applying his epistemology to poetry, he held
the essential quality of poetry to be total knowledge.
Using this principle as a criterion, he judged that poetry
to be complete which contains total knowledge, a complete
vision of the world. Such complete poetry, he concluded,
is impossible in the twentieth century because the modern
poet is incapable of total cognition.

Upon discovering Maritain in 1949, Tate adopted
a new system of thought, Thomism. He abandoned his con­
fused and confusing epistemology and historical determinism,
but retained Eliot's principle of dissociation which he
restated in Thomistic terms. In Thomistic terminology he
also restated his theory of poetry as knowledge. To distinguish complete from incomplete poetry, he introduced the distinction of the angelic from the symbolic imagination. He considered neither the angelic nor the symbolic imagination to result from historical circumstances but rather from the misuse or the correct use of Thomistic abstraction. By imitating in the composition of poetry the cognitive process, Tate concluded that even a modern poet could write complete poetry, poetry rooted in concrete reality.

With Thomistic epistemology Tate solved two problems: the problem of total knowledge in the modern period and the problem of a complete poetry in the same period. With his acceptance of the Thomistic solution, which made both total knowledge and complete poetry realizable realities even for modern man and the modern poet, Tate abandoned as unreal the crisis which had informed his criticism, fiction, and poetry—the crisis of the impossibility of vision, of total knowledge in the present age. With the abandonment of his core epistemological situation, Tate implicitly renounced his own early poetic technique. "The Symbolic Imagination" is a preface to a new kind of poetry. "The Maimed Man," "The Swimmers," and "The Buried Lake" are examples of this new poetry, a poetry of exposition rather than explora-
tion, of possession rather than crisis; a poetry that begins with concrete reality and moves through allegory to anagogic vision.

In 1951 Tate entered the Catholic Church. From a Catholic perspective he wrote the three not quite satisfactory essays we have considered and three parts of a long poem. Since 1953 he has published no poetry and very little criticism. In 1958 he co-edited with Lord David Cecil Modern Verse in English: 1900-1950, an anthology of English and American verse. Tate assembled the selections and wrote the introduction to the American section of the anthology. In his introduction, which we considered in Chapter II, he seems to return to his early position that total knowledge and complete poetry are impossible in the modern age; he carefully avoids the use of both Thomistic philosophical and Catholic theological terms. In recent reviews - one on the occasion of Faulkner's death,\textsuperscript{13} another a review of Donald Davidson's The Long Street,\textsuperscript{14} a third on the Southern novel\textsuperscript{15} - he returns to his early themes on the South: regionalism and provincialism, the necessity of tradition, the myth of the

\textsuperscript{13} "William Faulkner," \textit{New Statesman}, LXIV (September 28, 1962), 408.


Old South as a Golden Age.

Tate's present state of mind is, then, somewhat ambivalent; he hovers in a no-man's land between an orthodoxy which he cannot or does not fully embrace (or, at least, finds inconvenient and un congenial), and a certain nostalgia for his own literary past (his thought on tradition, myth, dissociation, and a Golden Age of vision). Apart from a rare bookreview he has published nothing and seems content to busy himself with his lectures at the University of Minnesota and to act as the elder statesman of American letters. However, this apparent inactivity of recent years may be deceptive; Tate may be at work on his long-promised critical study of Poe; he may be nearing the completion of the long poem begun in 1952. But until he publishes one or both or something unexpected, we must conclude that his productive period is at an end. It was a long and fruitful period extending from 1928 to 1951; a period of criticism, fiction, and poetry; a restless, searching period with a problem at its center - the problem of knowledge, the search for vision in an age of perception. Perhaps, having at last found an answer to his problem, Tate now feels that he can rest in the possession of the long-sought-for "seeing."
Under the summer's blast
The soul cannot endure
Unless by sleight or fast
It seize or deny its day
To make the eye secure.16

SECTION II

FICTION

Two short stories and one novel comprise the whole of Tate's fiction, a quantity so limited as to be ignored by most critics or considered as an exercise practiced for the sake of his poetry. Among the many commentators on Tate's poetry and criticism only Bradbury cursorily and inaccurately considers the short stories. Tate's novel fares somewhat better. In addition to the usual short notices, there are three serious studies of *The Fathers*: those of Meiners, Bradbury, and Mizener. Slight though Tate's fiction may be and neglected by the critics, yet it is not unimportant. It serves as an excellent transition from his criticism to his poetry, and is itself worthy of consideration.

In the detailed study of Tate's criticism in Section I, we have seen his concern with the traditions

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1. "It is possible that his fine historical novel of the antebellum South, *The Fathers* (1938), has served Tate sieve for draining off this long-nourished interest into the more flexible formal unit of experience of the story."

of the Old South and with the problem of knowledge. The Southern past is the subject matter of the short stories and the novel; the problem of understanding that past is the theme of all three. Closely allied to Tate's theory on history and cognition is his theory of literature as knowledge. Only literature, he holds, can provide a true and complete vision of reality. It is, I believe, Tate's intention to present in these three fictional works that complete vision of the past which abstract and formal history cannot provide. If we recall the distinction formulated by Tate in "Religion and the Old South," we might say that he intends to view the past qualitatively, not quantitatively.

Tate's fiction is an excellent example of his theory embodied in artistic form. And because the fictional form is larger and more leisurely than is that of his compact lyric poetry, the symbols and dramatic situations are more obvious. The repeated references to vision - "beetle-like eyes," "vacant eyes," "eyes staring into space" - in both "The Immortal Woman" and The Fathers are symbols of abstractions of modern cognition that also appear in the poetry. The use of aimless circular motion as a symbol of the purposeless direction of modern society appears in the fiction as does the use of night and darkness
as symbols of evil and incomprehension. For example the action of the first part of The Fathers (the "Pleasant Hill" section) takes place in broad daylight to indicate that Lacy Buchan, the narrator, fully comprehends it. As the action becomes more involved, the symbolic twilight- and night-scenes increase and Lacy becomes more and more perplexed and confused, comprehends less and less of the action. The use of light and darkness to symbolize comprehension and perplexity is obvious in the novel. It is not so obvious in Tate's poetry, and unless the reader is aware of the meaning of the symbols, the poems appear incomprehensible. Above all else, Tate's fiction emphasizes his epistemological center, his invariable and constant concern with the problem of knowledge.
CHAPTER I

THE MIGRATION

Tate's short story, "The Migration," though published a year later (1934) than "The Immortal Woman," is much the inferior of the two stories. Of it Bradbury writes:

As fiction "The Migration" is not impressive. The form is pure narrative -- all "pictorial" in Henry James's terms, nothing "scenic." There results no presented drama, no reader commitment. Since the style is a sparse antipoetic recreation of mid-nineteenth-century agrarian prose, no special interest accrues from diction without metaphor and without intimacy.\(^2\)

I agree with Bradbury that "The Migration" is not impressive. It lacks complexity and tension. It is narration of the simplest kind, a series of chronological events. By way of theme Tate develops his idea that the best virtues of his Southern tradition derive not from the feudal class, not from the idle and new rich, not from the poor whites, but from the hard-working and hard-headed Scotch-Irish middle class stock.

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1. Yale Review, XXIV (September, 1934), 83-111.

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The events are narrated by Rhodam Elwin, eldest son of Rhoda Elwin. They purport to be a biography of his father, "a remarkable man," but they involve the entire family and whole strata of Tidewater society. The narrator begins with his father's birth, in County Antrim, Ireland, in 1742. Rhoda Elwin was of the poor Scotch-Irish tenant class and at thirteen, after his father's death, was forced to make his own way in the world. After working a year in Bristol, he begged passage on a tobacco ship and landed in Port Tobacco, Maryland, in November 1757. He was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker in Annapolis for six years and during this time managed to save seventy pounds sterling. Working as his own man, he added four hundred pounds to this sum and in 1770 married Miss Emily Ransom and settled with her on a farm near Fredericksburg. He entered the War of Independence a private and returned a captain. Later, because of a dislike for the feudalism in Virginia and because of the Western boom, he moved to Edgecombe County, North Carolina, "a State less ridden by aristocratical habits and traditions." From 1788 to 1797 he cleared his holdings and expanded them to a thousand acres. In the latter year his bounty claim was certified: a little over three thousand acres lying in
Summer County, Tennessee. In 1796 with two other families he moved to this bounty claim, subdividing and selling to the other families certain sections. Here at about sundown of August 23, 1820 Rhoda Elwin died. At his request they carved upon his tombstone: "Farewell my wife and children all / I am gone away beyond recall / Ask not for me it is in vain / You call me to your side again."^3

Obviously this brief outline of the story omits much, but it should reveal that in this rags-to-modest-riches saga there is no attempt at character delineation. All is narrated from the extraordinarily unsophisticated point of view of Rhodam Elwin. Elwin thinks in singulares and sees only events and concrete details. He never generalizes, never draws conclusions from the events he narrates. He "sees" his life exactly as it is, not as an abstract series of causes and effects. Rhodam's vision of reality is qualitative not quantitative.

If we recall Tate's dread of the abstract statement, we may be able to read this narrative as a series of concrete universals, or as a series of external

facts that manifest an interior state. Tradition for Tate was something lived rather than something expressed through abstractions; and "The Migration" is the narrative of a living tradition, Tate's own.

What elements compose this tradition? Rhoda Elwin is cautious and independent; he has excellent prudential judgment; he has modest ambitions and a strong sense of obligation to his land. He detests the tobacco farmers, opportunists who would ruin the land for the sake of quick wealth. At the time of his death the tradition established by him and others like him is already beginning to crumble and the county was "filling up with tobacco-makers and Baptists." The only irony ever expressed in this simple man's life appears in his death-bed admonition to the freed Negro and then to his grandson, "Chew tobacco if you will but never grow it."

A deep respect for education is a part of this tradition. Young Elwin attends whatever primitive school is available and his final accomplishments are not insignificant: he knows no Greek but he can read any Latin author at sight. Religion plays a less important part; it is a type of free-wheeling and liberal Methodism which allows boys to know women by the time they are fourteen
but forbids them to touch a virgin: "My father's views on the subject were simple and direct. Never take the maidenhead of a young lady whose family might conceivably be friends of your own family, and if possible never touch a virgin at all." Though not puritanical this tradition wears a certain somber stolidness that seeks out the good solid middle-class virtues and avoids excesses in economics and religion, politics and social life. It is a kind of natural via media to the good life.

In this bare narration of events one family becomes, then, typical of the best in Tate's own origin and tradition; and the events, innocent of rhetoric, argue their own case.

Is Tate successful in what he attempts here? Certainly he has carefully researched his material, and has described minutely and exactly the details of food, camp meetings, local superstitions, the Negro slave life and its practices. One feels that Tate must have studied old bills of sale, agrarian records, details on the construction of houses and barns, on the planting of crops, the market value of them and innumerable other details. All this exact scholarship he employs to give verisimilitude to the simple, solemn narration. That troubles the

4. Ibid., p. 96.
reader, however, is a lack of coherence in the narration. The larger outline is simple and clear enough, a chronological account of movement. It is the development of the static sections that is incoherent. The lack of selectivity, the mass of seemingly unrelated particulars in each paragraph destroy any unity of impression which Tate may have intended. Some sections of the narrative read like a term paper from which the writer is unwilling to omit the slightest particle of his research. In brief, the matter does not seem to be imagined nor grasped as a totality. Much of the detail is necessary to give verisimilitude but much more seems needless and weighs down the narrative. Tate's imagination works best (as will be immediately demonstrated from "The Immortal Woman.") when confined within more limited boundaries and controlled by a more complex and difficult form.

Tate is not successful in "The Migration." He does not select; he amasses too many details and fails to relate them coherently. He establishes no complication and advances the narrative in time and place only. He writes a narration that has motion but no action, that has extension but no beginning, middle, and end.

But though "The Migration" may be a failure,
yet it is not a waste. The details that Tate assembled so patiently, he will use to better advantage in The Fathers. In writing of his own Southern tradition in "The Migration," he is almost naively uncritical. He approves of everything in the tradition. By the time he writes The Fathers, some four years later, he will have reassessed his tradition in more thoughtful and objective terms, will have come to realize that even in the Old South there was a latent evil suppressed by a rigid social system.

But "The Migration" is of interest for more than its impressive research. In the story Tate dramatizes his theory of knowledge. Why does Rhoda Elwin never draw a conclusion, never generalize from particular incidents? Why does Tate, a conscious and skilled artist, heap detail upon detail? Does he merely attempt "a sparse antipoetic recreation of mid-nineteenth-century agrarian prose" as Bradbury concludes? I think not. Rhoda Elwin is a type of integrated man; unlike modern dissociated man he "sees" events not quantitatively and abstractly but qualitatively and concretely. He views the past as a temporal sequence, not as a series of causes and effects. Rhoda Elwin is the antithesis of
modern man who perceives life as an abstraction. Elwin sees life as a fabric woven from a thousand details and events. Elwin, the narrator, writes as he knows, and he knows reality whole and total.

Tate creates a fictional character who narrates the events of a fictional family for a reason. Following his theory of literature as knowledge, he believes that he can communicate in fiction a truth of the past which he could not communicate in history. The style, the wealth of detail, the absence of generalizations may not be successful, but they are deliberate. "The Migration" derives directly from Tate's epistemology.
"The Immortal Woman" is a remarkable first story -- one of Tate's most successful achievements. It possesses a Jamesian complexity that demands close reading, for each detail is significant. Even so careful a critic as Bradbury -- one of Tate's most intelligent and, perhaps, best critics -- has misread the story. Despite his remarkable synthetic grasp of Tate's ideas, he seems to have read "The Immortal Woman" too rapidly and to have overlooked or completely missed certain essential details. Bradbury writes: "The point of view in this story provides an immediate challenge, for the narrator, a Civil War veteran invalided, comes from the North, of an impoverished Pennsylvania family now located in Georgetown."  

Bradbury fails to note the age of the old house, the narrator's boyhood wanderings through the Smithsonian, the Fisheries, the Army Medical Museum. He also fails to note that one of Aunt Charlotte's friends,  

1. Hound and Horn, VI (July, 1933), 592-609.  
Mrs. Ritter, drives a Cadillac. Finally, he fails to note that the narrator "came back from overseas, paralyzed." By missing these details, he has missed the point of view. John Hermann, the narrator, is a World War I veteran, and the point of view is that of one of Tate's typical protagonists: a man of the twentieth century looking back into the nineteenth.

Bradbury's misreading of the story results from two oversights. The first concerns the narrator. John Hermann is a rare phenomenon in Tate's imaginative work. He is a man of the present capable of comprehending the past but afraid to do so. Unlike the protagonist of the "Ode to the Confederate Dead," he actually can and does penetrate the past. Secondly, Bradbury misses (or neglects to mention) the significance of Hermann's war injury: he is a maimed man, incapable of entering fully into life, but not incapable of observing it. He is symbolic of intelligent and sensitive twentieth-century man, trapped between two worlds -- "paralyzed." Men of this kind are, like Lacy Buchan of The Fathers, "straddling two ages." Too sensitive to accept their own age, they are barred by time from entering the past. Hermann's injury is a symbolic wound of time, a wound that the entire modern age bears. These misreadings lead
Bradbury to misinterpret the meaning of the story: "The story's ending turns what has been ostensibly an indirect chronicle of a life, and a disturbed way of life, into naked allegory."^3

What does Tate attempt in this story? First, he attempts realism in the description of character and action. Next he attempts to give to this literal level a secondary meaning so that each concrete detail and each action has a symbolic or allegorical significance. Thirdly, he attempts an amazingly complex point of view in which there are three levels of comprehension: that of Aunt Charlotte, who understands nothing, who experiences nothing beyond sense data; that of Mrs. Dulany, who knows the past but cannot relate it to the present; that of the narrator or central intelligence, who finally comprehends all. Fourthly, he attempts an outer-inner or subject-object form according to which the action of the story moves from the street back to the invalid in the house and back again to the street. It is the order of cognition; the object seen, the object reflected upon, the object comprehended. In a sense, the story is an

3. Ibid., p. 150.
allegory of human knowledge in which Charlotte represents sense knowledge, Mrs. Dulany memory, and Hermann the intellect reflecting upon and unifying both into comprehension or understanding. Be this as it may, the action or conflict of the story is resolved when the inner observer, John Hermann, is united to the outer object, the "Immortal Woman," in total comprehension. Last of all Tate attempts to create a special atmosphere or tone to give his story credence, and by this mood to focus the reader's attention upon certain significant details.

Since the atmosphere of the story is the most easily recognized achievement, it might be well to reverse the above order and to consider this first. Tate creates and emphasizes a mood of isolation and of alienation that recalls Hawthorne. The scene is a single decaying street in Georgetown where only the leaves renew themselves, where "the same damp trickle has held to the same patch of grey moss as long as I can remember."  

Time has become static in this changeless street, and past and present merge oddly into one in the trees, a symbol of continuity: "They know something that we never hear

and they contain years that we cannot see." The invalid narrator and his aunt are isolated and alone: "We see few people. Nothing happens. We never visit and no one comes to our house. I think none of the neighbors ought to be living here." Again and again Tate emphasizes through a series of concrete details this cut-offness, this social, physical, even temporal isolation. It seems needless to enumerate instances. One image, however, deserves notice for it recalls Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury whose watch ticks away with the hands torn off. Unlike Faulkner's hero, Tate does not quite murder time, but he does arrest it: "But to be there with them together, the old lady and the old house - that is to be entirely alone, with my watch ticking on my wrist, and arrested in time....there should be the student, the gate, and my watch ticking; then my watch ticking alone." 6

The focal point of the story is an empty house and an old woman in black who comes each autumn to sit and look at the house. The fact that Hermann is an invalid, that the street is isolated, that he and his aunt are poor and have no visitors explains his great fascination with

5. Ibid., p. 593.
6. Ibid., p. 604.
any change, any movement on the street. His own injury, bits of information from his boyhood (like the afternoons spent wandering through the Smithsonian), his sensitive reaction to beauty, to light and shade, his gentle patience with his silly old aunt indicate a poetic sensi-
tivity.

To make the story credible, Tate had to create a creditable narrator; one with sufficient time and reason to study the seemingly insignificant comings and goings of an old woman; with sufficient perception to interpret these events. John Hermann, a sensitive cripple, is the ideal narrator and central intelligence. Tate devotes less attention to the other inhabitants of the house, Aunt Charlotte and Mrs. Dulany, because their function is less important to the plot. The characters who appear on the street - the old woman, her husband, a doctor, a young man - Tate describes in visual terms only because they are seen but never heard. Naturally "see" and all its verbal variations are bound to appear in a story in which the narrator observes life from a second-story win-
dow. However, on the second page of the narrative, while giving an exact visual description of the old Georgian house, the narrator says, "I have never seen the inside." This opaqueness of the interior of the house is repeatedly
emphasized throughout the story. At the conclusion of the story the narrator says, "I had seen into the old house, and there was the old lady, that cavernous bird of passage, across the street." The expanding awareness of the narrator is externalized through visual imagery. Each time he describes the old lady he adds some visual detail. He sees at first only the most obvious details: "Stringy, dead-looking grey hair fringed the edge of the small black hat that she wore close to her temples, and her thick glasses gave her eyes a fixed stare. She seemed to sink into the faded anonymity of the street." Later he views her in action talking to her husband and to the doctor, and he hears her name spoken by the negro driver (the single sound from the street), "Miss Jane." As the narrator learns more, he sees more, and when the old lady next appears he notes her walk and other concrete details that tend to become more symbolic with his increase of understanding: "...it struck me for the first time how she walked - as if she were being propelled from outside, by a force that she neither knew nor could control - like a dressmaker's form in the sewing-room, moving with an even glide." Next he notes, "The crazy stare through the

7. Ibid., p. 595.
8. Ibid., p. 594.
thick rimless glasses - she had merely been put together by all past generations, and she saw no need of doing anything about it; I mean that she could not have known she had a self."9 As Hermann's comprehension increases, the visual details which he notes become more and more symbolic of the Old South: "The old lady was as good as ever...like the old house...in a kind of perfection I had not known before."10 His final statement is one of full comprehension, of total vision: "Damnation had read itself out to me... Though I knew it was impossible I could not bear to think of her dying in the old house. I kept thinking foolishly enough, that she might be saved. But she had no place to die. She could neither die nor live."

To the extent Hermann sees, he knows. When he fails to see, he fails to know: "There are times when my sight grows dim and my head whirls; I grip the wheels of my chair, move a few feet very rapidly; objects begin to reappear. I think I know things only in action."11 Tate does not limit this relationship between sight and comprehension to his narrator. Mrs. Dulany's "right eye suddenly

9. Ibid., p. 597.
10. Ibid., p. 607.
11. Ibid., p. 612.
squints, and that side of her face twitches spasmodically until she holds it a moment with her hand." Aunt Charlotte "looked up, her eyes blank, like a surprised beetle."

The narrator, John Hermann, finally comprehends the symbolic meaning of the old woman and the old house. However, his aunt and Mrs. Dulany do not, and Tate represents their incomprehension by faulty vision. "When Aunt Charlotte broke the silence I knew that I had heard everything that Mrs. Dulany had said: I was brought up sharply against the innocence of my poor aunt, who had heard not a word of it, I mean really heard it. And yet I was convinced that Mrs. Dulany herself, could the question have entered her mind, would have seen nothing that was not perfectly plain. I knew, however that as Aunt Charlotte spoke Mrs. Dulany was squinting her eye, and her face was twitching."

Tate's use of a triple level of comprehension resembles, for example, James's device of expanding awareness employed in The Ambassadors. Lambert Strether begins on the lowest level of awareness, that of Waymarsh. His awareness quickly expands to that of Maria Gostrey, Little Bilham, Chad, and finally to the near perfect awareness of Madame de Vionnet. Similarly, Tate's narrator begins

12. Ibid., p. 609.
at the lowest level of awareness, Aunt Charlotte's. From her he learns only vague and surface details, that the house has long been vacant and that the old woman has been coming every autumn for years. Then Mrs. Dulany enters the action. Although she is not old enough to have been a part of the tradition of the old South, yet she does remember that tradition. She lived in the years of its decay; like Lacy Buchan of *The Fathers*, she "straddles two ages." And because she was never integrated into that tradition, she, like Lacy, has faulty vision, incomplete awareness. But she does possess the awareness of memory, and John Hermann learns from her, combines what she recalls with what he observes, and arrives at full comprehension.

Thus, as John Hermann looks out of the window and observes the figures below, Mrs. Dulany reminisces to Aunt Charlotte about the house across the street; and the movement of the story shifts from what is seen from the window (the outside) to what is overheard of Mrs. Dulany's reminiscences (the inside). Finally the inner narration of memory and outer details are fused by intelligence into total comprehension. The narrator realizes that the old woman and the house are terrible because they both possess
a perfection of a former age which is now out of time and
out of place; they represent a deracinated tradition.
The woman's gliding walk symbolizes the fixed culture of
the old South. Her inner fury, her perfection "as perfect
as a cyclone, as terrible, with the same suffocating
vortex inside" is awesome only to the abstract mind of
the modern narrator. But Hermann is compassionate and
with regret he realizes that the large man, her husband,
comes no more for her because he is dead; dead too is the
doctor. Nothing of the past remains for her; she and the
house are alone - anomalies from another age. The "new"
man who comes for her, a younger relative, is "like a
tower of new brick" and the simile recalls the mechanical
similes used by Faulkner to describe Popeye. This new
man symbolizes abstract, industrial society. Unlike the
older man, he sees nothing but a useless old house and a
helpless old woman, and he leads her away into oblivion.

Tate has combined in this intensely complex
story two methods, that of James and that of Joyce. To
exact Flaubertian detail and naturalistically motivated
characters, he has added a deeper meaning of symbol. The
story can be read upon the first level; here detail is
never forced to fit symbol, yet the symbol is there. Aunt
Charlotte is a giddy old woman, but she is also a symbol
of the obtuse modern age with blank vision and "aimless" motion. Mrs. Dulany is caught between the traditional past and the traditionless present; she represents transition. The narrator is the sensitive modern man, trapped in time, "paralyzed," incapable of action but capable of understanding the perfection of the past.

"The Immortal Woman" is an entirely successful story. It is also an example of Tate's fascination with the problem of knowledge. The framework of the story, the crippled, confined narrator observing from his window events occurring outside, is an analogy of the process of cognition: the inner mind observing external data. The three persons within the house are analogous to the three cognitive faculties: Aunt Charlotte represents sensation; Mrs. Dulany, memory; John Hermann, the unifying power of intellect. As he does in "The Migration," so too in "The Immortal Woman" Tate stresses the importance of concrete visual detail in the process of cognition. Full comprehension, total knowledge is not abstract; it is rooted in the concrete singular. Hermann "sees" when the visual details become symbolic. (Recall Tate's enigmatic phrase, "we know the world through the hovering fly." He demonstrates the meaning of this phrase in "The Immortal Woman.") When the external object ceases to be merely visual and becomes a symbol of something else, we have "seen" the world; we have total knowledge.
CHAPTER III

THE FATHERS

Arthur Mizener, writing in Accent almost ten years after the publication of The Fathers, notes that the book "sold respectably in both the United States and England, perhaps because people expected it to be another Gone With the Wind."¹ The ladies who expected a Rhett Butler and Scarlet O'Hara from Tate must have been cruelly disappointed in George Posey and Susan Buchan and, I imagine, sadly confused by the whole novel.

And if the general public found The Fathers disappointing, no less so did the reviewers. Generally they dislike the book, find it lifeless, too symbolic, too abstract. They regard the point of view of the narrator, Lacy Buchan, as a clumsy and stale convention. They judge the characters to be abstractions; and one critic discovers a certain sinister and undemocratic note in Tate's treatment of the Civil War.² Even those critics who approve the book with faint praise give the impression that they

². Time, XXXII (September 8, 1938), 68.
do so not because of the merits of the novel but because of Tate's fame as a poet. An occasional reviewer quite obviously has not even read the book.  

Few critics, though, are as forthright as Mina Curtiss who damns The Fathers to that class of books which "reread anywhere between ten and fifty years later, seem doubly dated, first with the deadness of the period they tried to reproduce and secondly with the style and mannerisms of the time in which they were written."

The Fathers was not a popular success but it has not fallen into the limbo of unread books. Quite contrary to the judgment of Mina Curtiss, with the passage of time the novel has come to be appreciated and understood, and now enjoys a certain modest success. In 1960 it was reissued by Alan Swallow in America and by Eyre and Spottiswoode in England. In 1948 it was translated into French by Marie Canavaggia under the title Les Ancêtres; and in 1963 by Marcella Bonsanti into the Italian, I Patri.

3. New Yorker, XIV (October 1, 1938), 65. The anonymous reviewer refers to the "warmth" of Tate's characters, a peculiarly inappropriate word to apply to Tate or his characters.

4. Nation, CXLVII (October 8, 1938), 358.
And just as popular acclaim has increased over the years, so too has critical acclaim. The first and perhaps best study of Tate's novel was Arthur Mizener's "The Fathers and Realistic Fiction." It is an excellent piece of criticism, comprehensive without being superficial, penetrating without being limited. Mizener concentrates upon the plot of the novel, the action involving a conflict of personalities and a conflict of cultures. His intention is to rescue the novel from the realm of "lyric and personal response to experience." His careful analysis of the plot justifies his final judgment: "The motive of The Fathers' action is a meaning, and the life of that meaning is action. It is an imitation of life." 5

Bradbury studies The Fathers with a care equal to Mizener's; however, his final evaluation is not as favorable. He appreciates the novel's complexity, the sound plot, the careful writing, the pervading myth of the South. He sees the novel as an index of Tate's strengths and weaknesses as a creative artist. The weaknesses, he believes, derive from Tate's lack of a sense of "felt life"; consequently he cannot create convincing characters (George Posey, Jane Posey, Susan and Lacy Buchan and the minor characters tend to lapse into lifeless abstractions); nor can he describe an emotional crisis in

convincing terms. Bradbury concludes that, interesting though The Fathers may be, yet it is not satisfactory fiction: "Fiction requires an intuitive feel for the living, an ability to project into other and essentially foreign lives. In these senses, Tate is inherently weak."6

Meiners has written the most recent and longest study of The Fathers.7 He is heavily dependent in his analysis upon Mizener; in fact, his outline of the symbolic mode is almost a paraphrase of Mizener's study. His main purpose, however, is to refute Bradbury's accusation that the novel lacks "felt life." To do so, Meiners stresses the dual point of view of the narrator, Lacy Buchan; some scenes Lacy describes as a participator, as a boy of seventeen; other scenes he describes in retrospect, as an old man looking back to the events of his youth. Meiners apparently feels that this explanation of the narrator's point of view answers Bradbury's objection, for if the characters seem abstract or symbolic or unreal, they seem so to Lacy too. He sees them as symbols and so he describes them as symbols. Inconsistencies in characters Meiners explains away in the same fashion; at one

time the young Lacy sees and describes; later the older Lacy remembers and describes. The explanation is neat, perhaps so neat that it causes Meiners to contradict himself. For example, he admits that George Posey's daughter is annoyingly unreal, is too much like Pearl of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. Why, I wonder, should he find this a fault? After all, if Little Jane is unreal and like Pearl, isn't she so because Lacy Buchan sees her as unreal and like Pearl?

Mizener gives us an excellent analysis of the plot of *The Fathers*; Bradbury explores the use of symbols; Meiners stresses the point of view of the narrator and attempts to explain away the weaknesses which Bradbury notes. Excellent though these studies are, yet they are incomplete. No one of these three critics attempts an analysis of the main characters in *The Fathers*; until this is done, Bradbury's objection that the characters are mere abstractions seems to stand unanswered. I should like to center my discussion of the novel on the two main characters, Lacy Buchan and George Posey, because such a discussion will not repeat the work of other critics and will be a useful means of relating the novel to Tate's central epistemological problem. However, before beginning the analysis of Posey and Buchan, I think a brief summary of the novel may help to make the analysis more intelligible.
Tate is explicit enough in his intention: "I wished to make the whole structure symbolic in terms of realistic detail, so that you could subtract the symbolism, or remain unaware of it without losing the literal level of meaning, but if you subtract the literal or realistic detail, the symbolic structure disappears." 8

The narrator of *The Fathers* is Lacy Buchan, an elderly doctor who relates events in which he participated fifty years earlier. He limits his narration to a fourteen month period beginning with the death of his mother and ending with the suicide of his father. He divides his narration into three sections according to the movement of the central action: Pleasant Hill in Fairfax County, Virginia; Washington, D. C., during the hectic pre-Civil War days; and a return to Pleasant Hill during the war itself.

In the first section, Lacy describes not only the way of life of the Buchan family (his father Major Buchan, his sister Susan, his brother Semmes on the family plantation, Pleasant Hill), but he also reflects upon the whole social structure of antebellum Virginia. He prepares the reader for the ultimate destruction of that society (symbolized in the burning of Pleasant Hill) by indicating its

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deficiencies. Pleasant Hill is a civilized world controlled by a strict public code of honor which so subordinates personal emotions to custom that the individual no longer acts or feels outside the ritual of society. Antebellum Virginia presents a static society that carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. Lacy Buchan seems to say that its destruction by the North is accidental. Virginia is already dying, and the Civil War but hastens its inevitable death. The malaise of Virginia is, according to Lacy, reducible to an epistemological flaw, the inability to conceive of change, to realize that any other kind of life is possible: "People living in formal societies, lacking the historical imagination, can imagine for themselves only a timeless existence." (p.80)

Into this rigidly formal society which lives by ritual rides George Posey, an entirely personal man, guided by no code, living by no ritual, subject only to his violent emotions. Posey begins a series of violations of the Virginia code which culminates in a demand for the hand of Susan Buchan. Major Buchan is unwilling to permit the marriage, but he is helpless before Posey who ignores the ritual of the code. Posey marries Susan; and with the marriage begins the slow, tragic decline of the Buchan family.
At Posey's urging (he has become involved in some mysterious but highly profitable transactions between the North and South) the Buchans leave Pleasant Hill and take up residence in Washington, D. C. With this change in setting, the narrator, Lacy Buchan, begins the second section of the novel, "The Crisis." In Washington Major Buchan remains unchanged; his perfect courtesy and daily reading of the classics are oddly at variance with the hectic conditions in the capital city. Gradually his family begins to break up. Semmes, and later Lacy, joins one of the hastily formed Virginia brigades. The Major forbids this, firmly believing that he and all like him can remain neutral, can continue to live the same tranquil life of pre-war days. His sons refuse to obey him; and, heart-broken and bewildered, Major Buchan returns to Pleasant Hill alone. Lacy moves into the Georgetown home of his brother-in-law, George Posey. This move marks the beginning of the third section of the novel, "The Abyss."

The Posey house at Georgetown is like something from one of Poe's Gothic tales. The Poseys are isolated eccentrics cut off from the world and from each other. Mad Uncle Jarman Posey is writing a universal history (Lacy compares him to Roderick Usher); George Posey's mother and aunt remain sealed in their rooms. Susan, Lacy's sister and George's wife, is gradually losing her control in this
mad, too personal world. Nothing in her Pleasant Hill background with its public code of honor and ritual, prepared her for this isolation. Then Lacy falls in love with young Jane Posey, George's sister, also loved by Semmes Buchan. Susan cannot tolerate the thought of another Buchan damned to her grotesque life, and she urges Yellow Jim, Negro half-brother of George, to rape Jane. He does so, and Semmes, acting predictably according to his code of honor, kills Jim. George Posey, acting unpredictably as always, shoots Semmes. Susan goes mad; Lacy wanders off in a state of shock, somehow finds his way back to Pleasant Hill and lapses into a coma for six weeks. He awakes from his illness to learn that his father has hanged himself when the plantation was surrounded by Yankees. George Posey, violent as always, strikes the Yankee Colonel, who retaliates by burning Pleasant Hill to the ground. The novel ends with Posey leaving for Georgetown and Lacy returning to his brigade.

This skeletal outline of the action gives no indication of the novel's great complexity. The Fathers, apart from its value as a novel, is a remarkable work in that nearly everything Tate has written or would write is in it: the Flaubertian attention to detail of "The Migration," the Joycean symbolism of "The Immortal Woman," the
ideas expressed in his essays on tradition, prose versions of many of his poems, and the symbols and images of his poetry - night, darkness, aimless motion, the vortex, water, the panther, the vague eyes representing abstractionism. And binding all the divergent elements together into a unity is Tate's epistemology. Indeed, the novel can be called a tragedy of incomplete knowledge. Lacy, even after fifty years of reflection, does not fully understand the events he narrates. Major Buchan is driven to suicide because he cannot comprehend change; Susan Posey goes insane because she cannot understand a way of life different from that of Pleasant Hill; George Posey murders his brother-in-law, drives his wife mad and his father-in-law to suicide because he cannot understand them nor himself.

But it is not the complexity of the novel, not the symbols, not the ideas that need defense. The reviewers, and specifically Bradbury, criticize Tate's lack of "felt life," his inability to create a convincing character. If this accusation is true, no amount of complexity can compensate for it. The critics sympathetic to Tate concentrate, perhaps too much, on the symbolic mode and ignore Tate's very real ability to create characters who are psychologically convincing. To illustrate Tate's ability, I should like to consider the two main characters
of *The Fathers*, Lacy Buchan and George Posey. Both have symbolic significance, but both are far more than symbols; they are psychologically convincing characters.

As has been already stated, Lacy Buchan writes from a dual point of view, the immediate present of the boy and the reflective past of the old man. Within this framework Tate's control of time is both unusual and interesting. The novel does not, especially in the "Pleasant Hill" section, follow a forced chronological order. Like Proust, Lacy notes Bergson's distinction between mechanical and psychological time, and he follows the latter in his *recherche du temps perdu*. The past of psychological time is tied in memory to events and sensations of no significance, and thus "a whiff of salt fish" can recall the death of Lacy's mother; or the events of the past are attracted like bits of metal to a magnet around some great revelatory scene of almost traumatic force. Lacy writes, "I mark the beginning of my maturity with a scene, and another marks its completion, and you will understand that neither of them properly speaking was an experience of my own, but rather something sheer, out of the world, easier to bring back than the miseries and ecstacies of my own life. To this day I can see without effort the dark moustache of dead Mr. Jackson lying in Colonel Ellsworth's blood, the two bloods mingling there at the foot of the stairs." (p.117-18)
The scene is unforgettable because it synthesizes into one moment of startling awareness a whole series of events both past and present. Just as all the bits of information and moments of incipient awareness gained from others merge into a unity of total awareness for Lambert Strether when he sees Chad and Madame de Vionnet on the river, so, too, for Lacy almost forgotten things which have touched only his sense awareness are recalled and are understood at a deeper level of awareness in this scene. The scene unifies and makes comprehensible in Lacy's psyche what had existed before only in time.

Lacy is aware not only of the significance of the great illuminating scenes but of the lesser import of psychological association. Early in the narration he remarks, "In my feelings of that time there is a new element - my feelings now about that time: there is not an old man living who can recover the emotions of the past; he can only bring back the objects around which, secretly, the emotions have ordered themselves in memory, and that memory is not what happened in the year 1860 but is rather a few symbols, a voice, a tree, a gun shining on the wall - symbols that will preserve only so much of the old life as they may, in their own mysterious history, consent to bear." (p.22)
This is obviously a statement of Eliot's objec-
tive correlative; it also reasserts the symbolic level
of the novel, but it does more. The objects that func-
tion as symbols and that so much annoy Bradbury and
fascinate other critics, are real, existential objects;
but, more important, they are facts of psychological
consciousness. This inner-outer duality of the literal
level of the novel manifests an extraordinary imaginative
control of the subject matter, a writing at once on the
level of pragmatic experience and of psychological associ-
ation. Tate is not unlike Joyce in employing this
duality, and while reading Tate one recalls the soap in
Bloom's pocket and the stream of associated ideas that
flow from his consciousness of it.

From the care that the author lavishes upon
Lacy, upon the subtle logic of his memory, upon his ex-
panding awareness, we should begin to recognize that
Lacy and Lacy's mental processes are a central focal
point of this story. The action is significant, but
Lacy's reactions to that action are more significant.
Lacy is caught between two worlds, "Pleasant Hill" and
the new "Crisis." Both worlds hover perilously on the
brink of the "Abyss." How does Lacy resolve the con-
flict? He does not; and this, I think, is Lacy's unique
tragedy: the tragedy of modern man as Tate sees him, the tragedy of the protagonist of the "Ode to the Confederate Dead," of John Hermann in "The Immortal Woman." Lacy knows too much to accept his father's inadequate code; he admires and loves the violent, codeless George Posey, the man of direct and immediate action, but he realizes only too well George's tragic faults; he knows too much to accept either - and so he accepts nothing.

George Posey, as the central character of the novel's action, is of fascinating interest. Posey is far more than what Lacy sees, far more than a symbol. He is difficult to understand because he is so uniquely complex. George is enormously gifted. His physical appearance is striking; his courage, horsemanship and marksmanship are superb. These remarkable physical attributes alone would make him a romantic beau idéal, but his qualities of intellect and will are even more remarkable. He has great financial ability; he is perceptive of people and situations. He sees with great clarity through the code of Pleasant Hill, of the Major, of John Langton. The Code is too ridiculously unreal to merit more than his contempt. Since he is alone and codeless, he realizes that neither side in the Civil War is totally right. His intellect is unmoved by his emotions. However, since it is necessary to choose sides, he serves the South with
great skill and with great financial gain to himself. But he remains uncommitted to the Code of the South, just as he once had judged with withering scorn the overly innocent Virginians who "do nothing but die and marry and think about the honor of Virginia," so in the greater conflict he sees with equal clarity and scorn the inadequacy of the Confederacy: "Mr. Semmes, your people are about to fight a war. They remind me of a passel of young 'uns playing prisoners' base." (p.137)

Lacy is soon infected by Posey's clarity of vision and comments upon his family code, "We are like children playing drop-the-handkerchief; the conventions make the emotions that we are willing to die for, as children eagerly run themselves to exhaustion round a ring." (p.180)

But for all his gifts, George Posey is flawed. If this character flaw, which makes him an essentially tragic figure, is merely a static symbol, then both George and the novel are failures. But Posey is more than a symbol; he lives his own secret life and that life has its own warped psychology.

Posey cannot surrender to any accepted code of manners or of conduct; he must always receive "the shock
of the world at the end of his nerves." His reaction to any given situation is one of immediate and violent action, an action confined and controlled by no code, by no system understood by others. Posey is alone, is entirely personal, is uniquely singular; and since the singular is incomprehensible to men who know by means of universals, Posey remains a mystery to his father-in-law, his brother-in-laws, even to his wife. He is a failure as a lover for, locked in his own ego, he is unable to share. Why?

Posey suffers, I believe, from a form of hubris which, as in the heroes of Poe's tales, manifests itself in a hypertrophy of intellect and will. Since he lacks sensibility to link him to the world of men, his intellect and will extend themselves beyond human moral limitations. George is always sincere, sincere with a horrifying, inhuman sincerity. In an essay written ten years later, Tate was to give a description of Poe that could easily be applied to Posey: "He is like a child - all appetite without sensibility; but to be in manhood all appetite, all will, without sensibility is to be a monster; to feed spiritually upon men without sharing with them a real world is spiritual vampirism."9

The similarity is, I think, not accidental. Twice Tate mentions Poe in the novel, and compares the Posey home in Georgetown to the House of Usher. George's uncle, Jarman Posey, is "a kind of Roderick Usher, whose nerves could bear whatever reality they received from the dormer windows at the top of the house. There is much less fantasy in Poe's creation than most people think: Usher was just like Mr. Jarman." (p.178)

The Posey family is a symbol of the locked-in-ego, one which Lacy does not hesitate to explain to us: "The Posey ladies were not eccentric, not 'two peculiar old ladies,' but rather excessively refined sensibilities that had let their social tradition lapse in personal self-indulgence in which a draught under the door, the light sifting through the blinds, the remote threat of rain - into which, of course, they would not have ventured - became the overwhelming concerns of life." (p.184)

The family is a symbol, but it is a sociological fact as well and this fact has its psychological effects. There is more Freud than Eliot in the brutal father and the neurasthenic mother to whom George is almost unnaturally devoted. George Posey may be a complex mass of conflicting traits, but he is a psychologically convincing character created with great inner logic. George really is sincere; he never intends evil: "It is never, my son,
his intention to do any evil but he does evil because he has not the will to do good." (p.267) It is this privation of good, a privation of human sensibility that flaws George. He is a tragic figure, and there is a great sadness in his final words to Lacy after his moment of self-realization: "It's not far enough . . . Georgetown." (p.306) Having finally realized that he has destroyed the entire Buchan family, he also realizes that like Uncle Jarman he is incapable of too much reality, and he withdraws into the sealed-in life of his youth.

Both Lacy Buchan and George Posey are, I believe, thoroughly satisfying characters. They themselves and many of their actions can be interpreted as symbols, but they are also characters in depth who think and act according to the inner logic of their own psychological dispositions. They are not puppets jerked about irresponsibly by the author to demonstrate his theories.

I have said that The Fathers is a tragedy of insufficient knowledge, of flawed cognition. Each of the characters fails because of a lack of perception, because of his inability to comprehend persons and events. But in this novel Tate extends his epistemology beyond the confines of North and South, traditional and modern
society. He extends it to include all men of all times, and in this way he gives to The Fathers a universal significance. He makes lack of knowledge the tragedy of man himself. Man in every age attempts to build a Pleasant Hill, a defense against evil, and he is erroneously optimistic that he has succeeded. This false optimism that ignores the existence of evil is civilization: "Excessively refined persons have a communion with the abyss; but is not civilization the agreement slowly arrived at, to let the abyss alone?" (pp.185-86)

It is not accidental that Tate concludes his novel with a section entitled "The Abyss." The failure of the old South, the failure of the new North, both are the refusal to recognize man's ineradicable evil. This essential flaw in the comprehension of reality opens the door to the ultimate triumph of the abyss.

At one point in the narration Lacy asks, "Why cannot life change without tangling the lives of innocent persons? Why do innocent persons cease their innocence and become violent and evil in themselves that such great changes may take place?" (p.5) The answer to his question is found in the metaphor of night. It is a lengthy meditation but one central to Tate's thought and certainly central to the meaning of the novel:
There are days when we consciously guide the flow of being towards the night, and our suspense is a kind of listening, as if the absence of light, when it comes, will be audible just because sight and touch are frustrated. Of course this is what we all know. But how many of us know that there are times when we passionately desire to hear the night? And I think we do hear it: we hear it because our senses, not being mechanisms, actually perform the miracles of imagination that they themselves create: from our senses come the metaphors through which we know the world, and in turn our senses get knowledge of the world by means of figures of their own making. Nobody today, fifty years after these incidents, can hear the night; nobody wishes to hear it. To hear the night, and to crave its coming, one must have deep inside one's secret being a vast metaphor controlling all the rest: a belief in the innate evil of man's nature, and the need to face that evil, of which the symbol is darkness, of which again the living image is man alone. Now that men cannot be alone, they cannot bear the dark, and they see themselves as innately good but betrayed by circumstances that render them pathetic. Perhaps some of the people in this story are to be pitied, but I cannot pity them; none of them was innately good. They were all, I think, capable of great good, but that is not the same thing as being good. (pp.218-19)

The lesser failures in knowledge on the part of the characters manifest their single great failure, the failure to recognize the existence of evil. Neither the great sincerity of George Posey nor the code of Pleasant Hill is adequate protection against the abyss of evil, for the abyss is already within man. This is the tragedy of *The Fathers* and it is the universal tragedy of man.

In elevating his epistemology to the perception of good and evil, Tate gives to *The Fathers* a universal
significance. He places it in the American tradition of Hawthorne, Melville, and Twain who view the eternal dilemma of man good but not wholly good, who see, as does Virgil, the *lacrimae rerum*. 
Twentieth-century America has been labelled with numerous sociological and psychological epithets — "The Lonely Crowd," "The Status Seekers," "The Age of Analysis," "The Age of Anguish." Tate would, I suppose, admit the validity of any or all of these epithets; but he would view them as symptoms of a more essential disturbance — pragmatic knowledge. Because the twentieth century is the age of imperfect knowledge, it is an isolated, rootless age. The scientific and pragmatic perception of reality abstracts life from livelihood, means from ends, past from present, practical from contemplative, virtue from action; it fragments man's life and it fragments society; it creates a vast, inhuman, mechanized hell.

This modern hell is the subject of all of Tate's poetry prior to his conversion. The tortures he describes vary — urban life, terrified incomprehension, blind optimism, — but they are always the tortures of hell; and Tate, like a modern Dante, leads his reader
from circle to circle; but unlike Dante, Tate discovers no escape, for Tate believes that total cognition alone can liberate man from modern hell and total cognition in the present historical situation is impossible. Tate's poetry is highly cerebral, but it is not without passion, the savage indignation of the intellectual viewing hopeless chaos. At its best, it possesses a cold rational fury that is unique, immediately identifiable, and capable of an almost prophetic grandeur. At its worst, it is querulous and irritable.

Tate, like many modern poets, is never far from satire, for his poetry can be read as a penetrating and disturbing analysis of the modern ego. But Tate cannot maintain the objectivity necessary for successful satire. He becomes tragically involved in what he scorns; and, like a refrain, despair echoes through his work. It is this tone of desperate intellectuality that gives to his poetry its toughness of fiber and philosophic density. Tate is never content to examine surface manifestations of the modern malaise. He sees twentieth-century society as sick and knows that the disease has dozens of external symptoms. He is irritated and disturbed by these symptoms, but he traces them all to one fundamental disease, to flawed cognition. Tate is philosophic in that he seeks a
basic cause, a principle of unity.

If we apply the problem of the One and the Many to Tate's poetry, imperfect knowledge would be the One and the multiple fragmentations resulting from this imperfect cognition would be the Many. Although he does not offer a solution to the modern crisis, yet he does offer a philosophic principle of unity. Tate's epistemological center gives consistency to his poetry; the problem of knowledge is either the dramatic situation or the implied theme of all of his pre-Catholic poetry. From this problem derive the images: Plato's Cave, a symbol of the shadow world of abstraction; excessive white or yellow light, a symbol of the quantitative vision of science; night and twilight, symbols of the partial vision or blindness of modern man; motion, symbol of the directionless action of modern life. Tate uses the sea and water as Arnoldian symbols of wholeness and integrity. However, his use of water can be ironic like Eliot's in "The Waste Land" - the water that could save, drowns or becomes a hell of frozen ice.

The recurrent Christ images - "the long-gestation Christ" and "The Holy Runt" ("Fragment of Meditation," p.87), "In Christ we have lived" ("Causerie," p.80), "every son-of-a-bitch is Christ" ("Retroduction to American
History," (p.74), "mummy Christ" ("To Denis Devlin," p.52) - have an obvious shock value. Do they indicate a basic concern with religion in Tate's early poetry? Many commentators feel that they do and that the unifying center in all of Tate's work, both before and after his conversion, is religious or moral. I disagree with this opinion. Tate often uses religious concepts and images (we have already seen his use of good and evil in The Fathers). As I attempted to show in Section I, religion (and all the various shades of meaning which the word implies), is for Tate a means to cognition. Even after his conversion, his thinking on religion is not exact. Tate's thought is always dangerously near to the Socratic fallacy that man can be saved by knowledge alone. It is

1. As I have already indicated in Section I, I shall use the most recent edition of Tate's poetry, Poems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960) when quoting. To avoid a cumbersome use of footnotes, I shall cite the name of the poem and the page in the body of the text.

2. As we have already seen in Section I this is the opinion of Meiners, Bradbury, and - with qualifications - Foster. It is also the opinion of Katherine Bregy, "Allen Tate: Paradoxical Pilgrim," Catholic World, CLXXX (November, 1954), 121-25 and of Sister Mary Bernetta, "Allen Tate's Inferno," Renascence, III (Spring, 1951), 113-19.

3. See the analysis of "Christ and the Unicorn," Section I, Chapter IV.
the failure of modern man to recognize good and evil, his failure to recognize Christ that Tate bewails because such failures are manifestations of inadequate cognition. Tate concentrates upon the intellect to the neglect of the will; cognition, not volition, is for him the essential act by which man is integrated and saved. I hope to make this distinction between religion and cognition clearer in the explication of Tate's poetry, specifically in the explication of "The Cross." The subject of the poem is the most basic Christian symbol; the theme, however, is epistemological, not religious.

Since the theme and dramatic situation in Tate's poetry are always the same, I have divided his poems according to subject matter: time, death, fragmentation, and religion. In each of the chapters to follow I will explicate two poems which I have selected because they exemplify Tate's better work, and because they have not been treated or have been treated inadequately by other commentators. In the fourth chapter on religion, I shall explicate the three sections of the long poem begun after his conversion. The proportion of space devoted to these last poems may seem inordinate, but it is justified, I believe, by the fact that no critic has given them more than passing notice.
Explication is, at its best, difficult to follow. Tate's poetry by reason of its density and its obscure and personal metaphors is particularly difficult. All of the poems explicated may be found in the appendix, and I would suggest that each poem be read before reading the explication. In the explications themselves, I may seem to belabor the meaning of the poem. My reason for doing so is that many of Tate's critics by their vague remarks add little to the understanding of poems already difficult because of their compression. Tate, faithful to his own epistemological doctrine of "seeing" thought, attempts to compress abstract ideas into visual symbols. If the idea or ideas contained in the symbol are missed by the reader, the poem remains an unintelligible jumble. There have been many studies of Tate's poetry and many explications of his poems, but one critic writing in 1961 still finds them difficult and obscure.  

4. "I think much of that difficulty of Tate's poetry will remain, no matter how familiar the ideas may become. Cleanth Brooks, as he relates Tate's poems to intellectual themes from Tate's essays, says that this is necessary since 'the surface of the poem, in its apparently violent disorder', may carry the unwitting reader off at tangents. This may be so, but I am not sure that the reader can avoid being carried off no matter how much he learns about Religion and the Old South."  John Thompson, "Allen Tate 1961," Poetry, XCIX (November, 1961), 121.
difficult but I hope to show that they are neither obscure nor unintelligible.

In explicating the poetry, I hope to make even more evident the basic epistemological center of Tate's thought. The discovery of the theme or dramatic situation of a poem is, however, only the beginning of criticism. Consequently, I shall not limit my analysis to this single aspect of the poems, but shall attempt, as I did in Section II on Tate's fiction, to consider the poems in their entirety.
CHAPTER I

TIME

In both "The Mediterranean" and "The Wolves," Tate is concerned with the concept of time, the complete and simultaneous knowledge of past and present. As we have seen in Section I, Tate believes that such a unity of past and present was once possible in a traditional society. In "The Mediterranean" the modern protagonists achieve this unification of time in a fleeting vision of the heroic past, but because they are modern men, they cannot retain the unification of past and present and sadly return to the isolated and quantitative time of the present age.

In "The Mediterranean" Tate treats an apparently insignificant event, two men sailing across a wide bay into a tranquil cove; but the real subject of the poem is the escape from the unheroic and isolated present into the heroic and integrated past. Somehow the protagonists (referred to only as "we") experience a momentary vision of the past but the vision fades and they must return to the present, to a country that from its description seems to be the modern South. In this poem, Tate dramatically
presents his ideas of qualitative and quantitative time and the problem they create. The exact visual imagery of the poem is a symbol of intellectual vision, a "seeing" thought. The actual motion of the boat is symbolic of a movement back into the past. The modern protagonists, "we," move from the quantitative time of the present age, "time's monotone," through the "margin" into "antiquity's delay," the qualitative time of the past. The "secret need" of rootless, modern man is nourished by the past, by the "very plates Aeneas bore." The aimless motion of a society without purpose is "derelict," and the protagonists out of modern society, having at last discovered the past, "Drop sail, and hastening to drink all night / Eat dish and bowl to take that sweet land in!" Aeneas and his men by devouring the plates removed the curse of the Harpies. Momentarily the curse is removed from the men out of "time's monotone," but the curse is only briefly lifted: "We for that time might taste the famous age / Eternal here yet hidden from our eyes." (This inability of man to fuse present and past in one "smooth essential flow" is a frequent theme in Tate's poetry.)

The protagonist of the "Ode to the Confederate Dead" cannot taste the past even briefly; he can but praise the vision of the dead, can but see the present, "Cursing only the leaves crying / Like an old man in a storm." He,
modern man, "a mummy in time," cannot see for he too is cursed, "the patient curse / That stones the eyes."
(p.22)

In the "Horatian Epode" the poet has escaped the monotone of the present by way of Webster's vision of good and evil in The Duchess of Malfi, but the present reasserts itself "And the katharsis fades in the warm water of a yawn." (p.72) In the Autumn section of "Seasons of the Soul" the poet cannot regain even his own past. In a dream-like vision, he sees father, mother, and others like ghosts who cannot see him, "Who had no look or voice / For him whose vision froze / Him in the empty hall." (p.33) Like the lover on the train in "Retroduction to American History," modern man locked in his ego has no spiritual vision, "His very eyeballs fixed in disarticulation." (p.75)

In "The Mediterranean," however, the "landless Wanderers" have escaped, have achieved the unification, if but passingly, of past and present. As a result, their forefathers "live" and the "Ocean" is "breathing," a living symbol of spiritual communion. But as in Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" the vision fades, so too does this vision falter; and the stanza which began in sound and image with such joyous tranquility "Let us lie down once more by the breathing side / Of Ocean, where our live forefathers
sleep / As if the Known Sea still were a month wide," suddenly halts with, "Atlantis howls but is no longer steep!" The sibilants, the sharp caesura, the final bathetic "steep" all bring an end to the vision. The protagonists return to the present to "the fair land" (the modern South) that will "unman our conquest," a present without vision or hope because modern science has "cracked the hemispheres with careless hand." The final stanza concludes with a richness of imagery, a heaviness of vowels, and a smooth forward flow that is almost Keatsian. But again the sharp caesura, the internal rhyme, and the punctuation bring the languid movement to a violent halt. The final "in that land were we born" is a lament. Louis Rubin sees in this concluding stanza a harmony between poet and nature: "A scene has been described; the ultimate act is one of contemplation." Vivienne Koch has a different view: "The poem ends with a vision of the fecund and luxurious exhaustion of the South - the South conceived as the inheritor of classical culture by a kind of mystical primogeniture." Both read-

ings have a certain validity. However, the last two lines of stanza eight and the whole of stanza nine seem to come as a forlorn answer to the question asked in the caption, "Quem das finem, rex magne, dolorum?" There has been a momentary escape from sorrow, but the final answer of the poem is "numquam!" Because modern man has shattered the union of the past and present by destroying the myth of history, there will be no end to his sorrows. The "bara-rous brine / Whelms us to the tired land." The momentary vision fled, we return to a world where history gives no vision but "pares / The nails of Catullus, sniffs his sheets, restores / His 'passionate underwear.'" (Retroduc-
tion to American History," p.74)

In form, "The Mediterranean" exemplifies Tate at his best. The first four quatrains are one descriptive sentence. The fifth asks a question; the sixth and seventh present a partial answer. The first two lines of the eighth quatrain interrogate the present; the third line

3. I am indebted to Lillian Feder for locating this line in the Aeneid. She discovers Tate's change of laborum to dolorum. I do not agree with her thesis that Tate is a classical poet, but her article is stimulating and original. "Allen Tate's Use of Classical Literature," Centennial Review, IV (Winter, 1960), 89-114.
explains the impossibility of solution, and the final line and the ninth concluding quatrain in one unbroken sweep give the woeful answer to the central problem of the poem. There seems little need to belabor the metrics. They are handled with consummate skill. Caesural pause, rhetorical and metrical stress, the variation of vowel sounds - all make one wonder why critics have spoken of Tate's rough and tortured verse. What does seem to emerge from the form is that Tate is most successful when he confines his subject matter to strict and careful pattern. The dramatic quality of the poem, the accurate visual imagery which functions, as does Joyce's, on both a realistic and a symbolic level, the action itself again achieving a dual function, the classical allusions to Aeneas and to Odysseus fuse into an amazingly concrete and complex whole. This is, perhaps, as close as art can come to the concrete universal.

Tate's approach to time in "The Wolves" is slightly different from his treatment of it in "The Mediterranean." In the latter poem, the unifying vision of the protagonists is a conscious though momentary one. In "The Wolves" the protagonist is subconsciously aware of a racial memory, of a traditional guilt. In this poem Tate emphasizes the fact that man's total consciousness must embrace both past and present. Since modern man's
flawed cognition cannot consciously effect this unification, his subconscious self reminds him of his racial past. The lucid but abstract perception of modern science may attempt to isolate man in a fixed moment of time, but because man's existential reality includes more than the isolated moment, he is ill at ease and haunted in his neat, abstract, and partial concept of himself. His subconscious self hints to him by dreams, myths, and symbols that there is another room to the self, a room containing beasts that his conscious and rational self refuses to recognize.

There is in Tate's poetry a recurring theme of racial, not personal, guilt in which the protagonists share as they share in tradition. The protagonists of the guilt poems are only subconsciously aware of inherited guilt. It is a stigma born into the conscious self by the blood, by dreams, by fear, by the night. Thus in "Sonnets of the Blood" the poet writes, "this prowling of the cells, litigious love / Wears the long claw of flesh-arguing crime." (p.166) In the third sonnet of the series he is more explicit: "Dignity's the stain / Of mortal sin that knows humility." (p.167) At time, like a Hemingway hero or a Macbeth, he complains, "I've done no rape, arson, incest, no murder / Yet cannot sleep." (Cau-
serie," p.78) In "A Dream" a nine-year-old boy, the man he is to be and his great-grandfather all seek out the devil who is suspiciously like Edmund Wilson ("none so unbaptized as Edmund Wilson the unwearied / That sly parody of the devil"), and the boy's dream ends with a shattering consciousness of guilt: "Spoke from the deep coherence of hell - / The pines thundered, the sky blacked away, / The man in breeches, all knowledge in his stare, / A moment shuddered as the world fell." (p.44) In the classically beautiful "Ode to Fear," the guilt is clearly original sin, "God's hatred of the universal stain." (p.104) Try as they will, men can never quite blot out the sense of guilt from their subconscious. It haunts them even though they "Tuck in their eyes and cover the flying dark with sleep like falling leaves." ("Ditty," p.109) Only the living-dead, like the after-dinner speaker in "The Meaning of Death," rid themselves of it. Thus the living-dead lover in "Retroduction to American History," "Ticket in hand, he pumps his body / Toward lower six, for one more terse ineffable trip, / His very eyeballs fixed in disarticulation. The berth / Is clean; no elephants, vultures, mice or spiders / Distract him from nonentity: his metaphors are dead." (p.75)

It is difficult to trace Tate's poetry to Freud's
archaic vestiges or to Jung's "collective a priori beneath the personal psyche." Nowhere in his critical prose does Tate refer to either of those hypotheses. However, it may prove an interesting and enlightening introduction to "The Wolves" to quote from Jung. He has described a personal dream in which he wanders from story to story in a house, each level more ancient than the former. He comments, "It was plain to me that the house represented a kind of image of the psyche - that is to say, of my then state of consciousness with hitherto unconscious additions. Consciousness was represented by the salon...The ground floor stood for the first level of unconsciousness. The deeper I went, the more alien and the darker the scene became. In the cave, I discovered remains of a primitive culture, that is, the world of primitive man within myself...a world which can scarcely be reached or illuminated by consciousness."4

The dramatic situation of "The Wolves" finds the speaker alone in a room separated by a "white door" from "wolves in the next room waiting." The situation is established in a single sentence of six free iambic pentameters. The seventh line comprises two simple sentences which give universality to the situation and emphasize its

terror: "It has all been forever. Beasts claw at the floor." The speaker has consciously "brooded on angels and archfiends," but has never consciously brooded upon the latent depths of evil within himself: "But no man has ever sat where the next room's / Crowded with wolves."

Again the conscious self of the speaker looks outward toward the heavens, "And whistled when Arcturus spilt his light." There is an irony in the use of "Arcturus," the Bear Star, for even in conscious contemplation of the heavens, the subconscious animal symbolism projects itself and man must return to "the wolves." Why? For "this / Is man," and "The day will not follow night." The speaker then makes the symbolism of house, door, wolves and star explicit. For man there is no escape from what he is; he must face the truth of his situation, his ancestral guilt. The poem closes with a terrifying image, one almost antithetical to the dead lover on the train whose berth was free of vultures, mice, and spiders. Man must consciously pass through the "white door" into the subconscious and accept what he is, the existential whole, not only the conscious image of himself: "go to the door, / Open it and see whether coiled on the bed / Or cringing by the wall, a savage beast / Maybe with golden hair, with deep eyes / Like a bearded spider on a sunlit floor / Will snarl - and
man can never be alone."

Tate has created a remarkably eerie and dream-like atmosphere, one not quite so delicate as de la Mare's "The Listeners," but not unlike it in tone. He establishes this tone not by a verse pattern and rime scheme but by the use of symbol and rhetoric; by a studied balance of periodic and tersely emphatic sentence structure; by symbol combined with explicit statement. The horrifyingly beautiful final image and the concluding statement at once climax and summarize the method. The final "and man can never be alone," is immensely sad in its falling hopelessness.

This poem is, perhaps, one of the most successful examples of Tate's unpatterned verse. The success arises from a carefully constructed rhetoric and a control of symbol that compensates for its lack of form. This freer mode of "commentary" as employed by Tate shows to its best effect in the short poems. When he employs it in longer poems - poems that is like "Causerie" which run to more than thirty lines - he too often tends to lose his sustaining power, and his poems become a series

5. Howard Nemerov divides Tate's poems into essence (the strictly patterned and controlled poems) and "commentary" (the more formless and discursive poems). op. cit., p. 53.
of brilliant fragments interlaced by too topical, too personal allusions. The lofty Swiftean scorn descends to mere scolding. The "Ode to the Confederate Dead" is a brilliant exception to his usual performance.

It might be noted that although Tate scorns Edmund Wilson's Freudianism, yet he must have been aware of the great influence that the new science of psycho-analysis had had upon literature from the 20's onward. What is unique in Tate is his imaginative use of this matter. By analysis Freud had attempted to resolve the anxiety that arises from an id-ego conflict. Jung, through dreams and myths, sought to arrive at a basic racial memory or experience underlying the conscious knowledge of the persona. Tate, intentionally or not, uses the same method, not to liberate man from anxiety, but rather to force him to the acceptance of guilt. It is a technique that follows almost as a scholion from Tate's theory of tradition and of time. To men deprived of dogma and of belief in God, Tate presents the psychological proof of the existence of evil. If we cannot have absolute good, at least we can settle for universal evil.

It should be noted that in both "The Mediterranean" and "The Wolves" Tate establishes a problem, the epistemological problem of total knowledge. He confines
the problem in these poems to the full awareness of time. In the former poem the protagonists are aware that a conscious and total grasp of time in the present age is impossible. In the latter poem, the protagonist is equally aware that his conscious knowledge does not include his total self; he realizes that to know himself (and man) as he is, he must enter into his subconscious self, must open the door to the next room and accept what he finds, his own racial past.
CHAPTER II

DEATH

Like Time, the grinning death skull haunts Tate's poetry. One has but to scan the titles of his poems to see how many treat the subject. Even in poems that do not treat it directly, death is introduced in the figures of speech: "as if the sleepy dead / Had never fallen to drowse" ("To a Romantic," p.139); "And the sapphire corpse undressed by Donne" ("Progress of Oenia," p.148); "A corpse is your bedfellow" ("Retroduction to American History" p.75). The ever-present allusion direct or otherwise to death or to death-in-life may be the quality in his poetry that encourages critics to compare Tate to Donne.

What, one might ask, is the reason for this morbid concentration? Death in Tate's poetry seems to have at least three functions: it shocks the reader into an awareness of the inadequacy of his philosophy; it is the beginning of reality - "Time begins to elucidate her bones," ("Obituary," p.162); and it is used to emphasize the life-in-death theme - "Our property in fire is death in life" ("Sonnets of the Blood," p.167). The answer to the ques-
tion in "The Oath" - "Who are the dead?" is implied in Lytle's oath: "Then Lytle turned with an oath - By God it's true!" (p.107). Lytle and the questioner are the living-dead. "The meaning of Death" is a life of shadow without substance: "In a long night when learned arteries / Mounting the ice and sum of barbarous time / Shall yield, without essence, perfect accident. / We are the eyelids of defeated caves." (p.124). In "The Anabasis" the fear is lest we "Should join, before our place, / Death's long anabasis." (p.133). In "To a Romantic" the reader is told "The dead are those whose lies / Were doors to a narrow house." (p.139).

It is the first function, to shock the reader, that Tate intends to use in his early (1924) and much admired "Death of Little Boys." Seemingly the poem presents the dilemma caused by the death of a little boy - the universal "boys" becomes singular in the third stanza - but as we might suspect, the crisis centers upon the observer's loss of emotional control, upon his inability to grasp and to comprehend the "event." Like the lover on the train, "his metaphors are dead."

The first quatrain might be deceptive were it not for the title. The death that little boys, "patient at last," accept like sleep has a shocking effect upon the
committed observer. It "will rage terrific as the sea; / Their bodies fill a crumbling room with light." The event can be, if understood, a cause of enlightenment. The observer becomes one with the dead boy ("Gold curls now deftly intricate with gray"), and he stares in fear through the window upon "one peeled aster," the universal symbol of death. The third stanza limits the death to one boy by its concrete detail, "the ultimate dream" creeping upward but "round his sturdy belly gleam / Suspended breaths, white spars above the wreck." In the fourth stanza, as the "guests come in to look" and manifest stereotyped sorrow ("turn down / Their palms"), the protagonist loses all control; his world totters about him, "Reels like a sailor drunk in a rotten skiff."

Whatever the allusion is here - many possibilities have been suggested; Hamlet, Milton, Poe, Hans Anderson, Rimbaud - the total disintegration of the observer is obvious. A kind of idiot response follows: "The bleak sunshine shrieks its chipped music then / Out to the milkweed amid the fields of wheat." Then the answer that is no answer, insane incomprehension is followed by inane motion: "There is a calm for you where men and women / Unroll the chill precision of moving feet." From the first stanza the poet has established an ironic anti-
thesis. The single source of tranquility, of light, of solidity is the dead boy. But the observer's world is "crumbling," "torn in two," "fear," and the final "delirium" invade it. The modern protagonist cannot comprehend death; he has no answer to its question. He can only escape from it by routine motion, "the chill precision of moving feet." Without the greater myth of religion or the lesser of history, even the most significant event is incomprehensible to him. He cannot know.

The form, pentameter quatrains, is strictly controlled; the diction is highly concentrated and demands the closest attention. For example, the little boys "surrender their eyes immeasurably to the night." The unexpected use of the adverb, "immeasurably," concentrates the reader's attention upon the act of dying and away from the expected but vaguer "night." It prepares the reader for the final irony, that death immeasurable in the best of circumstances can certainly not be measured by turned-down palms and chill, precise movement. Each line demands its context: "Gold curls now deftly intricate with gray" is meaningless without "you... torn in two," which reveals personal involvement and is further explained by "extends a fear to you." Tate makes no abstract statement, but the poem is no less intellec-
tual for all that. The density and compression of the imagery force the universal into the concrete dramatic situation. If abstract clarification is to be had, it must be earned by the reader's contemplation of the experienced poem.

As has been emphasized before, the reader of Tate's poetry must not expect a neat division of theme and subject matter. The subject matter may vary but the theme remains constant. In "Death of Little Boys" Tate dramatized modern man's inability to comprehend the event of death. "The Meaning of Death" explains, perhaps, the reason for that incomprehension.

Howard Nemerov discovers in Tate two general sorts of poetry: "The first is reflective, meditative, rhetorical in manner, executed often in a considerably distorted blank verse and given over to the explicit discussion of theme: such poems as 'Causerie,' 'Fragment of a Meditation,' and 'Retroduction to American History' are of this kind. The other manner is characterized by brevity, concision, great formality of rime and meter and (for the reader) those difficulties which must go with subtle thought of which the connections are allowed to remain implicit by a kind of lyrical absolutism: 'Ode to
Fear,' 'The Traveler,' 'The Paradigm,' 'The Cross.'

"The Meaning of Death" and its antithetical poem "The Meaning of Life" fuse these two modes: the rambling commentary of the body of the poem is concluded by an image of great power and concentration. The captions of the two poems indicate only the method of commentary, "An after-dinner speech," and "A monologue." In the latter poem the poet seems to say that life needs no commentary: "There's that other / Which may be called the immaculate / Conception of its essence in itself." The modes of commentary upon life vary, but life itself is an enormous, blind force that needs no explanation, that neither needs to comprehend nor to express itself. Tate concludes the rambling commentary with an image of great power: "One's sense of the proper decoration alters / But there's a kind of lust feeds on itself / Unspoken to, unspeaking; subterranean / As a black river full of eyeless fish / Heavy with spawn; with

a passion for time / Longer than the arteries of a cave." If this is life, we may begin to suspect that death is pure commentary, pure decoration.

The title of "The Meaning of Death" is ironical for what the after-dinner speaker is attempting to define is a way of life; what he does describe is Tate's conception of death: "Let that be life - time falls no more." Apparently the speaker is addressing the modern world that would reduce all things to the clear and distinct ideal of Cartesian abstractionism. Light becomes in the poem the symbol of this mathematical ideal: "Let light fall, there shall be eternal light / And all the light shall on our heads be worn." At this point in the poem, the speaker admits a concession: "Although at evening clouds infest the sky / Broken at base from which the

2. Cleanth Brooks explains this image in the following manner: "The blood is associated with 'lust,' is subterranean (buried within the body), is the source of 'passion.' The reference to the fish may be also a fertility symbol. But the fish are 'eyeless' though 'heavy with spawn.' The basic stuff of life lacks eyes -- cannot see even itself; and filled with infinite potentialities, runs its dark, involved, subterranean course." op. cit., p. 106.
lemon sun / Pours acid of winter on a useful view."
The "acid" and the "useful view" would seem to express, as does the black river image in "The Meaning of Life," a favorite but never too explicit theme of Tate's, that the super-ego of modern optimism can never quite suppress the "unspeaking subterranean" force of the id. Again and again Tate creates a nightmare atmosphere in his poems, a dream world in which past, present, and future merge into one. At night "lucent madness" emerges from the subconscious to shake our rational sanity. In his "Ode to Fear" Tate discovers truth and memory and a sense of universal guilt in the emergence of the subconscious that night brings: "Night peering from his dark but fire-lit head / Burns on the day his tense and secret light. / Now they dare not gloss your savage dream, O beast of the heart." (p. 103)

In "The Meaning of Death" evening brings to the speaker's timeless world a "lemon sun" that sours his superrational vision. But the speaker, and presumably all of us his auditors, refuses to heed the warning of the subconscious, and he reverses the "lemon sun" image and turns its acid light upon the past. He "would have more than living sight." He repudiates time, repudiates the
vulgar past with its "vice and virtue, hard sacrifice and crime." The glare of his ominous light turns to the future ("Tomorrow"), and the verse itself suddenly tightens to regular iambic couplets that echo the joyous note of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality."

But even in this rapturous vision of a future freed from "the past, its related errors, coarseness / Of parents, laxities, unrealities of principle," the speaker is trapped by the memory of his own past when at night his mother taught him "the mixed modes of an ancient fear."

Again he admonishes his audience to "think of tomorrow." It is to be a time when "desire and act" are reduced to "simplicity" founded upon the "best hypotheses." "Ritual" will be avoided lest it "corrupt our charity." All, even charity, is to be useful in this world. The final image links the poem to its counter poem, "The Meaning of Life." The opposite of life is "when learned arteries / Mounting the ice and sum of barbarous time / Shall yield, without essence, perfect accident. / We are the eyelids of defeated caves."

As in "The Oath," the final irony here is the speaker's inability to recognize his own death. The modern "angelic imagination" has rendered all clear, has destroyed
personal guilt, the "universal stain," evil, ritual, tradition, the subconscious. By removing the essence, it has reduced men to zombies, the living-dead appearing only to have life. The modern age has sealed the cave of life with its "black river full of eyeless fish / Heavy with spawn." This is the meaning of death.

The mode of commentary gives to this poem a certain freedom and an almost flaccid clarity. However, the mode of commentary is more successful in this than in other like poems. Tate gives to the poem a tight unity of theme and links various sections to each other by his use of light imagery. As in "The Meaning of Life," he concludes the poem with an immensely powerful and complicated image that by its very density accomplishes "the immaculate / Conception of its essence in itself." This final image almost justifies the poem but not quite. The formlessness, the lack of strong rhetoric, the absence of tension reduce the poem, save for the final image, to a near prose statement.

In both "Death of Little Boys" and "The Meaning of Life" Tate's subject is death - the real death of a boy, the spiritual death-in-life of the modern optimist blinded by the too-bright, abstract light of science. In both poems the theme is the flawed vision of the protago-
nist. In "Death of Little Boys," the protagonist cannot comprehend the great reality of death and hides his confusion in aimless and routine motion. In "The Meaning of Life," the after-dinner speaker is a living-dead man who is too blind to recognize his own condition. Although he ironically imagines his zombie existence to be the fullness of life, yet his subconscious self troubles his ignorance with an insinuating fear which he dismisses as childish. He is so blind that he mistakes error for truth and truth for error.

All modern men (according to Tate) suffer from incomplete knowledge. The more sensitive and perceptive moderns like the protagonists of "The Mediterranean" at least realize their predicament. Less perceptive moderns like the after-dinner speaker are totally unaware of their tragically flawed cognition.
CHAPTER III

FRAGMENTATION

By now the reader must be aware that in Tate's tragic vision of life all problems are aspects of one great problem. Life in modern society is hell, but hell has a variety of tortures and increasing depths of misery. Tate, like Dante, would lead us by descending circles to the very core of hell. He will not mislead "the banker and the statesman into the illusion that they have no hell, because as secularists, they have lacked the language to report it." Nor will he spare himself; he, too, is trapped in the modern dilemma, "his hell has not been for those other people: he has reported his own."¹

Part of this hell is modern man's horrible inner fragmentation. With no inner principle of unity, he is like an idiot with no values, with nothing but timeless, unrelated (because there is nothing to relate to) sense experience. "The idiot greens the meadow with his eyes, / The meadow creeps implacable and still; / A dog barks, the hammock swings, he lies. / One two three the

cows bulge on the hill." ("Idiot," p.157) Benjy Compson of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is modern man, the living dead; "now in the idiot's heart a chamber stinks / Of dead asters." Unreal scientific abstraction has caused this hell: "Being all infinite, function depth and mass / Without figure, a mathematical shroud." ("Last Days of Alice," p.116) Science has turned us into "Plato's kept philosopher, / Albino man bleached from the mortal clay." ("More Sonnets at Christmas," p.55) Our unreal society exists by the logic of hell, by an insane rationality: "In an age of abstract experience, fornication / Is self-expression, adjunct to Christian euphoria, / And whores become delinquents; delinquents, patients; / Patients, wards of society. Whores, by that rule, are precious." ("Causerie," p.82)

Of the many forceful presentations of this theme, Yvor Winters finds "The Subway" to be one of the best: "The feeling is quite specific and unparaphrasable, but one may indicate the nature of it briefly by saying that it is a feeling of dignity and of self-control in the face of a situation of major difficulty, a difficulty which the poet fully apprehends."²

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"The Subway" is a sonnet, and again we note Tate's masterly control of a difficult form. But even the use of this form is a subtle irony, for the problem presented in the octet finds no solution in the sestet. The octet is an imaginative vision of the subway. It begins with an exact detail, "accurate plunger," but the description becomes progressively more hellish and less and less concrete. By the fifth line the "accurate plunger" has become a "musical steel shell / Of angry worship." The direction of the descent is clearly fixed by the closing line of the octet, "Into the iron forestries of hell." The imagery of the octet has become progressively more violent, progressively less controlled, until it achieves the ultimate violence of this final line.

The octet is at once a cause and a symbol, a symbol of the quantitative abstraction of space that is modern society, a mechanism that extends and extends even to hell itself. It is a cause of the emotional state of the protagonist described in the sestet. Having emerged from the "iron forestries of hell," he is "broken." The ever expanding quantity without quality has shattered his rationality, so that he too has "become geometries, and glut / Expansions...In the cold revery of an idiot."
In "The Subway" Tate dramatizes his theory of quantity without quality, of provincialism without regionalism. The modern mathematical mind abstracts quantity from total reality; because this concept of quantity is abstract, it is capable of infinite theoretical extension. The builders of the modern city attempt to realize this unreal mathematical abstraction in the reality of urban life. The result is a vast, impersonal, mechanized hell. The protagonist of "The Subway" having been plunged downward into a seeming infinity of depth, emerges from the subway to discover the same infinite extension in the steel skyscrapers: "Dense altitudes tangential of your steel." Below and above the protagonist is an infinite extension of steel. He cannot comprehend this infinity, cannot retain his personal identity in this impersonal world which seems insane to him. Dazed, his consciousness merges with the limitless expansions, and he loses sanity. The last word of the poem's final line is "idiot."

The theme of "The Subway" and of "The Last Days of Alice" (pp.115-116) is the same. "The Subway," however,

3. See Section I, Chapter I, pp. 40-43.
is a far more successful poem. The restricting sonnet form forces Tate to compress and control his theme. He limits the poem to cause and effect - the ride on the subway and the protagonist reduced by it to idiocy. The poem is dramatic and powerful; it needs no commentary and Tate provides none. "The Last Days of Alice" (thirty-two lines) has a less restricting form which allows Tate to expand his theme. He does so by too much commentary, too many images, and too many restatements of the same theme. As a result, he loses control and the poem loses its force and coherence. "The Subway" is proof, I believe, that Tate is most successful in his poems of exact and limited form. The theme of "The Subway" provides one more proof that the center of Tate's work is epistemological: modern man is fragmented, is broken by a false, abstract perception of reality.

"The Cross" may seem an odd companion piece to "The Subway" - a dramatization of the hell that is mechanized life. Both poems are, however, related in theme, and "The Cross" presents but another aspect of the fragmentation of modern man, the dichotomy between faith and reason, the awful fissure in the soul torn by doubt and grasping at hope. It is not a religious poem even though its subject is. In it Tate writes from the perspective of non-belief,
not from belief. In the second line of the poem he establishes the sceptical position of the protagonist: "I cannot see the whole of it."

"The Cross" contains several submerged allusions to scripture: "I have come to cast fire upon the earth and what would I but that it be kindled," and "For God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten son; that whoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting." The latter quotation is almost a prose paraphrase of the problem posed in the poem.

In establishing the point of view of the protagonist of the poem, we must remember that Tate's poetry and fiction usually have two types of protagonists. There is the stone blind modern optimist like the speaker in "The Meaning of Life." More frequent, however, are protagonists like John Hermann, Lacy Buchan, the speaker in the "Ode to the Confederate Dead," and in "The Mediterranean," sensitive men who realize their tragic situation. The protagonist of "The Cross" is of the latter type, a recorder of a problem to which there is no possible solution.

In the first three lines of the poem Tate establishes the position of the protagonist and involves him in a universal dilemma. Faith is a "place" - a position of belief from which "some men" survey reality.
This is not the position of the poem's narrator: "I cannot see the whole of it / Nor how I camethere." The speaker faces the same crisis as the protagonist of the "Ode to the Confederate Dead," and of Lacy Buchan in The Fathers, but a crisis resulting from another and more universal situation. Some men still live within the Christian tradition; they know. The "I" of the poem doesn't know, cannot ever understand how he became involved in this crisis. His partial acceptance or knowledge of the Christian tradition is involuntary.

Having established his own position, the protagonist clarifies and extends it. He locates this "place" in time by the brilliant volcano image. The image has undoubted reference to the events of Good Friday, the darkness that covered the earth. This event, the death of Christ, was cataclysmic; it reversed history, contradicted all that men had formerly lived by. The violence of the event is reenforced by the violent imagery, a reversal of the Good Friday darkness, a kind of inverse analogy by which the Christian message bursts so blindingly upon the pagan world as to render that world's light black. The sun, center of that Mediterranean world's culture, a "kingly sun" deified by the pagans, is blotted out by the brighter Son of God. But not all saw His
brilliance. The sun is "hateful night" only "For those, once seeing, turning back." Their predicament is a bit like that of Keats' knight in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," the world of the imagination destroyed for him the world of reality. For those who have seen (believed) the Christian message, there is no return to pagan naturalism. "He who takes his hand from the plow and looks back is not worthy of the kingdom of heaven." The protagonist and, by extension, modern man are not in this position. They have never seen the whole of it, have never believed or disbelieved.

In two quatrains Tate has established the protagonist's position and has by means of a violent image given the historical reason for this position. The deceptively simple tetrameter iambics are handled with great skill. Tate shatters regularity in lines four and five by a substitution of spondees and trochees in the initial feet. The shift in rhythm emphasizes the violence of the event.

The third quatrain is regular in metrics and abstract in imagery. It is a causal statement, the reason why those who have seen cannot turn back: "For love so hates mortality / Which is the providence of life / She will not let it blessed be / But curses it with mortal
strife." The word "love" is ambiguous, for all love, even profane, hates mortality. Donne's lovers are forever attempting to circumvent death, to make their love immortal. Love of life, too, hates mortality; thus Achilles could tell Odysseus that it was better to be a slave in the world of men than king of the world of shades. The love mentioned in the poem has direct reference, I believe, to the love of Christ which will not allow man to wallow in mortality, which brings not peace but a sword. This love promises immortality to those who believe: "And everyone that liveth and believeth in me shall not die forever."

The fourth quatrain concludes the sentence begun in the third with a striking image: "Until beside the blinding rood / Within that world-destroying pit / - Like young wolves that have tasted blood, / Of death, men taste no more of it." Lines one and two of the quatrain explain and clarify the initial image of the poem, "Flame burst out of a secret pit." The flame that stands above the pit is the cross; the pit is the love of God that is "world-destroying" because it destroys pagan naturalism. The "wolves" image is of immense power. It

4. Meiners reads "secret pit" and "world-destroying pit" to mean hell. His interpretation would have Christ coming to the world from hell. I do not think that the context justifies this interpretation. op. cit., p. 148.
is totally unexpected and yet perfectly just. It is
metaphysical in the sense that it is a logical extension
of the "blinding rood," (blood is to the wolves as im-
mortality promised by Christ is to men). It acts both
as a brake and a shock that force the reader to rethink
the abstract proposition. The "blood" relates directly
to the cross and suggests the blood of the Lamb in which
men have been washed. From what have the wolves or men
been weaned? From the easy naturalism that makes a god
of this world: "The kingly sun to hateful night / For
those, once seeing, turning back." The wolves once
weaned can never return to the milk of naturalism which
cannot promise immortality.

The fifth quatrain states the crisis of the
poem, a crisis that applies not to all men (for some
know) but to men who, like the protagonist, "cannot see the
whole of it / Nor how I came there." The dilemma is not,
I believe, moral, not a choice between salvation or damna-
tion. Rather is it a cognitive dilemma. Was Hamlet's
crisis moral or intellectual? Was it his belief in the
"canon 'gainst self-slaughter" that deterred him from
suicide or rather was it the possibility that the canon
might be true, "the fear of something after death"? If he
had had faith, the problem never would have presented itself to him. If the protagonist of the poem and others like him really saw this as a choice between salvation and damnation, they would possess faith. It is their not seeing the choice that presents the problem. So here on the edge of the grave, "All life before in the black grave," they face the last alternatives of life - mortality or immortality - when mortality itself is no longer theirs to choose, "without a life to save." There is in this quatrain a metaphysical punning with words. Life is not "before" but behind; ironically only the grave is before them. Life is used three times: twice to signify its opposite, death, and once to signify life in the more metaphysical sense of existence demanding explanation. In these extremes man is blind; he has been blinded by the cross, he has been weaned from natural salvation. The line "Being from all salvation weaned" follows "without the life to save" or mortality, and logically relates to and clarifies the "young wolves" image explaining from what they have been weaned. The next image, "A stag charged both at heel and head" harmonizes in tone with the hunter wolves and represents man's predicament. Modern man's blindness makes him sceptical of immortality, but his Christian tradition
destroys his hope of pure naturalism. Neither pagan nor Christian, he is at bay.

The concluding lines - "Who would come back is turned a fiend / Instructed by the fiery dead" - reinforce the dilemma. Even if those blind and in so severe a place had evidence of immortality - evidence from the returning dead - they could not or would not believe. The Hamlet-like situation recalls Hamlet's own particular problem in accepting the ghost as his father. The gospels emphasize the same idea that for those who do not believe even the dead returning to warn them would not be enough: "And he said to him: If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe, if one rise again from the dead."^5

"The Cross" does not present a moral problem but an intellectual one. Modern men, like the protagonist, can neither accept nor reject the Cross. Concerning the ultimate questions of life they are torn by indecision. For them Christianity is a curse, for it gives none of the consolation felt by those who know, and yet its very

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5. Meiners offers a different interpretation: "It is not possible to escape the world-destroying pit nor to think one's way out of it. Once there, the inhabitants - those I imagine who have earlier faced 'the last alternatives' and have failed to deal with them - make certain of our loyalties by making our forms identical with theirs." op. cit., p. 152.
historical existence makes impossible a return to pagan life. Like Wordsworth they can well say, "I'd rather be / A Pagan, suckled in a creed outworn." Even the title of the poem is ironic; the Cross really is a cross to modern man. The antique pagan was a far happier man than is the modern sceptic.

Of the poem's imagery Frederick Morgan writes, "What should be clear is that the imagery of 'The Cross' is a sort diametrically opposed to that of Ezra Pound or William Carlos Williams, or of a lesser poet like Theodore Roethke. For in Mr. Tate's work, it is not the image that is sharpened, but the insight that is the result of the image interacting with the thought...In these poems the image hardly ever retreats (as it does so often in Auden, for example) to the politeness of mere illustration." 6

The images of the poem are, I believe, highly successful because they derive from the thought. They are violent; they are unexpected but they are perfectly just. Each is a startlingly concrete realization of an abstract statement. Each tends to force the reader to pause, turn back upon the idea and reapply it to the image. In the

6. Frederick Morgan, "Recent Verse", Hudson Review, I (Summer, 1948), 263-64.
context the image cluster is also just: "blood," "wolves," "stag," "weaned" flow from the basic situation, a violent one. And although these images are not linked one to the other by strict logic, yet one tends to clarify and reinforce the other. Thus "weaned" clarifies and reinforces "blood," "stag" reinforces and is reinforced by "wolves."

The poem is perfectly controlled by the strict and exact use of syntax. Tate uses the present participle six times. This use of the verbal binds the poem into a tightly coherent unit, and forces the reader to carry the thought from quatrains to quatrains, for at each occurrence of the participle he is forced back to the noun modified. The poem is not easy, but it is not obscure. Its syntax is perfectly ordered, but it is a syntax that demands careful reading.

Finally, the poem seems to owe some of its undoubtedly success to the precision of the abstract thought. With the crisis clearly in mind, the reader is able to appreciate the beauty and suitability of the images. The images in turn reinforce and deepen the meaning of the thought, metamorphizing, as it were, the abstract into the concrete. The poem is a brilliant success.

Both "The Subway" and "The Cross" treat fragmentation in modern society. The former poem views urban life -
itself a result of partial and abstract knowledge — as the cause of the protagonist's loss of sanity. The latter poem dramatizes the predicament of modern man who can neither accept Christianity nor return to pure paganism. Both poems emphasize the fact that the fragmentation of modern life results from flawed cognition, from insufficient knowledge.

This third chapter concludes the treatment of Tate's epistemological problem, a center of unity in his work from 1927 to 1953. After his conversion, Tate ceases to write a poetry of exploration and begins to write a poetry of exposition. In his post-conversion poetry Tate writes from the perspective of faith, from possession of the truth. His poetry of possession is less dramatic than his pre-conversion poetry; it is a poetry of reflection upon and reassessment of the past. In form it is allegorical narrative written in Dante's terza rima. The epistemology upon which this poetry is based is Thomistic, that developed by Tate in his essay on Dante, "The Symbolic Imagination."
CHAPTER IV

RELIGION

In 1952 and 1953 Tate published the first, third, and sixth parts of a proposed long poem, "The Maimed Man," "The Swimmers," and "The Buried Lake." He omitted "The Maimed Man" from Poems, published in 1960. All three parts are written in terza rima, all begin with a classical invocation, and all are deeply allegorical. Sections I and VI are dream allegories; Section III is the narrative of an event in the poet's boyhood. It seems to be the poet's intention to review the actual and poetic experiences of his life ("Where Myrtle twines with Laurel") with the eyes of a new vision, that of faith. No longer does he search for a solution to the problem of knowledge; he now attempts to express the faith he possesses.

"The Maimed Man"1 is both a poem and a retraction, almost in the classical tradition of Chaucer, Boccacio, and other Medieval writers. The poet rejects

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and repents the past and announces a new approach to his art. The invocation is involved and somewhat ambiguous. "Laurel," the symbol of reason, is invoked; "Myrtle," the symbol of sense, is rejected. The Blessed Virgin as "Morning Star," and "that first mother who returned the maid" is to be viewed by reason. The poet in the tradition of the ascetics and mystics would be freed from the domination of sense by means of mortification: "Teach me to fast / And pray, that I may know the motes that tease / Skittering sunbeams are dead shells at last. / Then, timeless muse, reverse my time; unfreeze / All that I was in your congenial heat." Freed from sense, led by reason, he reverses time to review his past and somehow in the reviewing to do penance, "to appease."

The invocation completed, the poet turns to an experience of his youth. He begins realistically enough ("as I sauntered down our street"), but quickly changes to dream-allegory, and sees "a young man there, headless, whose hand / Hung limp." However, he experiences no terror at the sight of this spectre. Upon closer observation he sees that "The Unbending Citizen" is not only headless (without intelligence) but that his heart is visible and "Blue grass instead of feet grew in the slot," (rooted in Southern tradition). It then becomes clear from the poet's
words to the stranger that this is the poet himself or a vision of himself. The poet interrupts the narrative at this point with a second invocation which he concludes with a prayer, "and let me touch the hem / Of him who spread his triptych like a fan."

He then returns to "The Scarecrow" and discovers who he is in another dream vision: "I did not know until I saw in the waving mirror... a black trunk without bloom / Body that once had moved my face and feet. / My secret was his father, I his tomb." The poet then rejects his former pride and those things upon which it was based, his poetry, his atheism, his pride in family, his ideas about qualitative time: "iambics willed and neat," "God's image made uncouth," "Shade of pompous youth, / Clutched shades forbearing in a family well," "and could not tell / Natural time."

Having rejected this false past and "modest hybrid," he once again addresses the "Virgin Muse." In the past he had played "swimmer of night." Now he would be led "up a deeper stream," to become a "Swimmer of Noonday." From the emphasis he places upon Virgin, the muse of this and the other two sections would seem to be the Virgin Mary. The ambiguous "Mother of silences" of "Season of the Soul," has become the Mother of God.

But apart from a new perspective of belief,
what does the poet (Tate) propose to do, for this section is an introduction to a "long poem"? He proposes to write a new type of poetry and he rejects his former "willed" (or perhaps "angelic") iambics and his corruption of "natural" time. He rejects his epistemological theme and proposes to write not only from a new perspective of belief but from a new intellectual perspective, an Aristotelian-Thomistic rationalism that demands that the roots of vision be anchored in sense.

"The Maimed Man" appeared in 1952. From 1949 to 1951, Tate wrote three highly significant essays: "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe," "The Angelic Imagination," and "The Symbolic Imagination." They reveal a strong neo-Thomistic influence especially that of Gilson and Maritain. In Thomism Tate discovers a solution to his epistemological problem. From Dante he learns how to apply Thomistic principles to poetry. Dante, as a good Thomist, rooted his symbolism in the common thing. He realized that the human intellect and will are committed by feeling to the accidents of St. Thomas. Only the angelic mind suffers none of the limitations of sense. Modern poets (presumably Tate would include his own early verse) make this error of angelism:

2. See Section I, Chapter III.
"Another way of putting this is to say that the modern poet, like Valéry or Crane, tries to seize directly the anagogical meaning, without going through the three preparatory stages of letter, allegory, and trope."³

Presumably, then, "The Maimed Man" and the two poems that followed it are attempts by Tate to realize creatively the Thomistic principle, "Nil in intellectu quod non prius fuit in sensibus," to write a symbolic poetry like Dante's, a poetry of allegory with a clear action "which is one thing, but always seen in at least two ways."⁴ His new poetry is to be a poetry of humility: "Its humility is witnessed by its modesty. It never begins at the top; it carries the bottom along with it, however high it may climb."⁵

Do "The Maimed Man," "The Swimmers," "The Buried Lake" achieve this goal, the retention of the common object in the anagogic vision?

Before answering this question, it might be well to consider "The Swimmers" and "The Buried Lake" in some detail. The first of these poems forms the third section

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4. Ibid., p. 425.  
5. Ibid.
of the longer poem; the second is the sixth section of the not-yet-completed whole.

"The Swimmers" in title and in content is allegorical, and narrates one action seen "in at least two ways." The title of the poem is an appropriate noun for the five boys, and an allusion, perhaps, to the "swimmer" of "The Maimed Man." Again, the form is Dante's terza rima but, unlike the dream-allegory of "The Maimed Man," "The Swimmers" is an objective narrative. The location, Montgomery County, and the time, July, 1911, are exactly specified. The invocation in a series of lines weighted by vowels and smoothed by liquids establishes the theme: "Replenish me the spring of love and fear / And give me back the eye that looked and fled / When a thrush idling in a tulip tree / Unwound the cold dream of the copperhead." Tate advances the narrative with colloquial diction and exact concrete description; he describes himself with a pun, "and Tate, with water on the brain."

The five boys see a posse of twelve riders. Later the posse returns, "all but the leader. It was night / Momently and I feared." Presumably the leader was Judas and the posse has hanged a Negro. At this point the clarity of the narrative dissolves and the syntax becomes needlessly obscured: "eleven same / Jesus-Christs un-
membered and unmade, / Whose Corpse had died again in dirty shame." The sheriff and a stranger drag the body of the hanged man back along a dusty road to town. Tate, suddenly alone (how or why is not too clear) follows the "three figures in the dying sun" to the public square. The concluding stanza lapses into an almost Ransomesque cuteness. I cannot but feel that the feminine rhymes are inappropriate and the public admission of guilt vague and unprepared for.

The Christ symbol in modern literature is frequent enough to be almost trite. Faulkner's use of it as a quasi half symbol or not fully completed metaphor seems more powerful and really more profound than Tate's too explicit allegory. When everything is diagrammed and nothing left unsaid, we wonder if, really, all this was worth saying, or, rather, had not been said often and well before: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me."

A second problem arises from this explicit allegory: both littera and figura, as Tate himself demands, must be almost mathematically clear. Here one may ask why Judas was the leader of the posse and how the twelve apostles crucified Christ. Exactly what does the leader's desertion symbolize? Of course, the apostles as sinful men shared in the universal guilt, but how does the leader's
disappearance symbolize the unique crime of Judas? Is not the capitalized "It" referring to the Negro's body an unearned grammatical trick to stress the Christ symbol? Joseph of Arimethea and Nicodemus in removing Our Lord's body from the cross and placing It in a tomb performed an act of love and adoration. What exactly is the act of the sheriff and the stranger who drag the corpse back through the dust? It might be mentioned in passing that "horny" to describe the feet of the corpse is a cliché after Wallace Stevens' "The Emperor of Ice Cream." Some of Tate's pre-Catholic moroseness appears in "sullen fun / Savage as childhood's thin harmonious tear." Why, we wonder, is it sullen and savage for five boys to go swimming in the dead of summer?

The poem, then, seems to fail technically because of a lack of consistency and clarity in the narration (littera), and because of somewhat unnecessary ambiguity in the allegory (figura). Even the verse seems uncertain, and the variation of end-stopped and run-over lines, of masculine and feminine rhymes, seems to exist more for the sake of the form than for rhetorical or metrical emphasis. Finally, the slender narrative does not seem to earn the response that the allegory would demand. The poem borrows profundity and vision from the gospel narration.
In a sense, Tate plays upon a stock religious response in his reader. "The Swimmers" contains beautiful, individual lines, but it fails both as narrative and as allegory.

"The Buried Lake" is a dream-allegory of the poet's life dedicated to the "Lady of light." The caption, "Ego mater pulchrae dilectionis, et timoris, et agnitionis, et sanctae spei" (I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope) is from Ecclesiasticus, in which the mother represents Truth; in the Catholic liturgy, however, the quotation is applied to the Blessed Virgin and is a frequent refrain in the prayers recited on her feast days. The order of the poem is the reverse of the caption; the poet experiences sin, fear, and death before attaining pure love. In an unreal hell, the hotel of a dream, into which the poet is admitted by Cerberus, "where a sick dog coughed out a sickly cark / To let me in," he attempts to exercise his art ("to play my violin"), but carnal, impure love ("Small dancing girl") silences his art. He then attempts philosophy ("My friend John Locke" - a symbol of false knowledge), but this too fails him ("And went as mist upon the Browning air"). Another attempt at art ("the grey sonata") is interrupted by a "stately woman." As the poet holds her in his arms, she turns into a "searching skull whose drying teeth / Crumbled me all night long and I was dead." This seems to
be an allusion to St. Paul's "By sin death entered the world." It is also the poet's first encounter with fear. The poet is in a desperate condition of spiritual blindness ("while sight within me caved"), and is deprived of grace ("All grace being lost"). Then Santa Lucia, Holy Light, comes to him. He first resists her music, then attempts to misinterpret it into a nature or vegetation myth; finally he accepts it: "Light choir upon my shoulder, speaking Dove." The poet has by way of impure love, sin, fear, and death finally attained the "fair love, knowledge, and holy hope" of the caption through Divine Revelation and grace: "The dream is over and the dark expired. / I knew that I had known enduring love."

It is now eleven years since Tate published "The Buried Lake." The once promised "long poem" may never be completed and we have only three fragments to judge. From these three it is impossible to imagine the intended nature of the unified whole. But the fact that Tate in 1960 published only parts three and six, rejecting part one, seems to indicate that he intends them to stand as complete poems. He himself tells us that they "are nevertheless complete in themselves." 6

6. "The new poems, 'The Swimmers' and 'The Buried Lake,' though parts of a larger whole, are nevertheless complete in themselves; so I ventured to include them here." "Note," Poems, [p. vii].
This may be significant. Modern poets have been far more successful with short lyrics than with longer poems. Perhaps the rejection of formal logic and of traditional rhetoric has rendered impossible the order and coherence necessary in a long poem. Instead we have ontological chunks, existential fragments. Only in the novel and drama have the moderns been able to present a sustained vision.

Allegory demands the most exacting and painstaking order. Each simile, each action become lesser fragments that form the whole mosaic. No critic of Dante is more aware of this than is Tate, but awareness is not achievement. Dante's precision and clarity on the literal level, which merges into a unified vision on the allegorical level, are wanting in Tate's three fragments. "Blue grass in the Slot" is not exactly Dante's "common object." Exactly of what it is a figura (Eliot's "Hollow Men," Yeats's "A Tattered Coat Upon a Stick," Kentucky blue grass) is not clear.

Presumably Tate wrote these fragments from the viewpoint of the Christian vision of reality. Are they really Christian? Has an Aristotelian-Thomistic rationalism baptized Tate's poetry? Although the Blessed Virgin is invoked, though faith, grace, love, fear, the Christ symbol inform these poems, still they do not to me seem entirely
Christian. The form may be Dante's terza rima; the vision is not his. Tate's vision, like that of so many modern writers, is one of bleak pessimism.

Tate had long been troubled by our generation's loss of the sense of evil. Dante and the Church of Dante never denied the existence of evil, and it is their definition of evil as the negation of good that Tate seizes upon. It is not without significance that his religious sensitivity has discovered inspiration only in the effects of sin, as "The Cross" and "The Swimmers" manifest. His essentially Platonic or Manichean sensitivity that concentrates upon the negation of good rather than upon good, that lingers in shadow rather than in light seems to me to be an Albigensian distortion of the essentially joyous Christian vision. He seems insensitive to the historic and spiritual fact that Christ has risen and is triumphant over sin and death. He seems to ignore Paul's Epistles, and proceeds as though the gospels concluded their narration on Good Friday. The pagan me miserum never once moves toward the Christian Alleluia.

Both in form and in content Tate's three Catholic poems are unsuccessful. The form fails both in the clarity necessary for allegory and in the use of the terza rima. The content - intended to be Catholic - is too bleak and
pessimistic to be completely Catholic. It would appear, then, that Tate's reputation must stand, at least as of now, upon his poetry of unbelief. He is essentially a poet of anger and of anguish whose singularly hopeless vision of modern life achieves tremendous power when confined and controlled by strict form. His imagination seems most excited when faced with a no-exit situation, a crisis from which there is no escape. His conversion may have presented him with a personal exit, but it has not helped his poetry.
CHAPTER V

EVALUATION

In each chapter of this section I have explicated and evaluated the poems considered, attempting to treat only Tate's more successful poems. In this final evaluation, I shall of necessity, repeat some of my former observations; but I feel that the more general remarks which I am about to make are supported by the close study of the corpus of Tate's poetry. I shall divide this critique into matter and form, into what Tate says and how he says it.

Tate's view of reality is singularly macabre; it has a certain monotone that shades down to gray or black. In spite of the frequent light symbolism, there is no light here, only the glare of hell. In "Dover Beach" the misery and anguish of Arnold are relieved by the existence of love. Not so the tragic vision of Allen Tate. Forceful and violent as are some of his poems, still the whole corpus begins to read like a prolonged commentary upon Milton's "But cloud instead and ever-during dark /
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men / Cut off."

Kenneth Burke judges the central flaw of Tate's poetry to be its unrelieved funereal tone: "In poetry with religious hankerings, we get austere purgatorial moods (forgetful that, whatever this world is, it is not wholly the disembodied state of purgatory). ... seeing everything, as it were, as a projection, or attenuation of the mood one might feel when delivering or hearing a funeral oration." ¹

It may not be unjustified to pause for a moment to examine the validity of Tate's judgment of modern life. He tells us that it is a hell and that this hell exists in spite of our inability to recognize it or to express it. Yet thinkers more profound than Tate judge our modern society quite otherwise. Karl Barth seriously doubts that behind the official facade of the Middle Ages there was more sincerity, more happiness, more unity of life than there is today. The rather extraordinary religious renaissance both here and in Europe, the presence of outstanding religio-philosophical minds such as John Courtney Murray, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, Hans Küng, the ecumenical spirit of the times would seem to indicate that

¹ "Tentative Proposal," Poetry, L (May, 1937), 100.
the modern world is not quite the victim of science, that modern man is not quite so much a Godless Cartesian thinking machine as Tate visualizes him.

Modern man undoubtedly was injured by the industrial revolution - and undoubtedly has lost some of his individuality in the vast corporation for which he works or in the impersonal urban development in which he lives. The abstractionism of science, the loss of tradition may have played a part in this. It seems at least possible, however, that Tate may not always view reality as it really is, that he may be haunted by his own private devil compounded of Eliot, Poe, and Baudelaire. Tate's imagination may well be a captive in Eliot's "The Waste Land," unredeemed as yet by an "Ash Wednesday."

We have noted that the principle of dissociated sensibility is basic to Tate's thought. The same principle prevails in his poetry. But whose authority or what evidence supports this theory? And can it justly be called a principle? The phrase, dissociated sensibility, is Eliot's. He uses it to distinguish the quality of Metaphysical from Victorian poetry. Eliot's insight may be valid, but it certainly cannot be accepted as a proven fact. Yet Tate never questions the truth of Eliot's statement. From his earliest essays consistently through the body of his work,
he presumes the dissociated sensibility of modern man to be a fact. As a result, his vision of modern society is distorted by this a priori assumption.

Finally, there is in Tate a disturbing element that is not easily separated or identified, an almost chthonic spirit which Jung calls the other face of God, the dark side of the God image. This Manichaean sensibility seems so to fuse good and evil that the reader uneasily wonders about the nature of Tate's God, "sick of the world's rot / God's hideous face." ("The Eagle," p. 114)

As we noted in the explication of his poetry, Tate is frequently very successful in poems of tightly controlled form. These successful poems are, in a sense, an artistic realization of Tate's theory of knowledge. Not only the dramatic situation of the poems but also the very form of the poems derive from his epistemology. In these successful poems (and in some not so successful) Tate eliminates abstract statement and forces the symbol or image to support the idea. In the successful poems the symbol is recognizable to the reader. In the less successful poems the symbol is an incomplete metaphor, a vehicle without tenor. To complete the metaphor the reader is forced to search for the tenor in Tate's prose. To judge the form of Tate's poetry is to express a value judgment on most modern poetry. Such a judgment in the face of
modern criticism runs the risk of appearing both extremely naive and extremely presumptuous, but it is supported, nonetheless, by the rational philosophy of our Western tradition.

If poetry is to be Alexandrine, a highly esoteric and learned system for experts, then Tate's work must stand in the forefront of modern poetry. He himself demands only a knowledge of classical literature and philosophy to comprehend and to appreciate Eliot and Donne, and, presumably, Tate. But such knowledge does not enable us - as I sincerely doubt Tate's does - to identify a corrupted single line ("dolorum" for "laborum" in "The Mediterranean") from Vergil's Aeneid, or to recognize and locate a single verse from the Divine Comedy. We may all have a certain abhorrence of the scholarly footnote, but at least it is an honest identification. Once the critic or graduate student has tracked down the reference, rendered it into English, revealed its relevance, Tate's poem begins to become comprehensible. But should a poem need this explication to become comprehensible?

To be more specific, when the reader has read Tate's expository prose, has come to recognize the unique and untraditional terminology - "quantitative extension of science, qualitative value of religion" - then the individual poems become powerful symbols of these ideas. Are
the poems, however, comprehensible without the exposition? I think not. At least, they do not appear to be so to some of our leading critics, nearly all of whom approach Tate's poetry through his prose. For example, Delmore Schwartz devotes more than half of his study of Tate's poetry to an analysis of his ideas. He concludes that Tate's poetry cannot be read in isolation from the rest of his work. To be understood, a poem of Tate's must be read in the context of his criticism, novel, and other poems.² Cleanth Brooks, a strict contextualist critic, is forced to devote three pages to an explanation of Tate's concept of qualitative and quantitative time before he can begin his explication of "Aeneas at Washington."³ Even in a highly successful poem like "The Mediterranean," there are certain images that must be explained by Tate's criticism. In explicating the poem, I was forced to return to Tate's criticism to explain "time's monotone," "secret need," "derelict," and "We've cracked the hemispheres with careless hand."

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That men communicate with men by universally accepted signs may be a naive epistemology, but it is a traditional one. When a scientist or a philosopher needs a new sign, he defines it for his reader. So does Tate, but too often he does so in his expository essays, not in the poem itself. His own critical tenets demand that the poem stand as an experienced whole. As a new critic he abhors the use of sociology, history, biography for interpretative and critical evaluation. But his own poetry, I propose, often demands either his own exposition or his own exegesis - often but not always.

The creation of a world of private symbols, the use of erudite and slightly varied allusions and quotations may be a poetry of men speaking to angels but hardly of men speaking to men.

Art will always attempt to create the concrete universal, but it must follow the laws of human cognition if it is to speak to men who grasp the universal by abstracting it from the concrete singular. The action, the tension, the emotion of the artifact may be, must be

4. "In a manner of speaking, the poem is its own knower, neither poet nor reader knowing anything that the poem says apart from the words of the poem." "Narcissus as Narcissus," op. cit., p. 250.
singular, but in a literature for men it must be expressed in universal signs, signs that can be recognized by the average literate man. If it degenerates into a private language, into esoteric symbols and highly erudite references, it becomes, perhaps, an acrostic for critics, graduate students, and angels (though they must weep while they intuit), but not a language of men speaking to men, not an artifact to be contemplated and enjoyed in se.

Somehow this judgment seems harsh and petty in the face of Tate's not insignificant achievement. Certainly it implies no derogation of his courage and unflinching constancy. He demands of the man of letters a knowledge, a precision of mind, a technical skill that are almost Miltonic. Nevertheless the evaluation of his work must be made from a traditionally rational position: that men can communicate to men only in language of universal signs ordered in recognized grammatical syntax. Tate's poetry often fails to do this and depends for comprehension upon his prose. When this occurs, he fails as an artist, for he fails to impress form upon matter thus rendering it intelligible. The human intellect can fail to comprehend being for two reasons: either an over-abundance of reality as in God Who is pure act, or a deficiency of reality, as is pure matter. To use Tate's own
image, God blinds us by the brilliance of His being; matter eludes us by reason of the depth of its shadow. Tate does not, I think, so much blind us by the clarity of his vision as confound us by the obscurity of his shade. In the shadow it is possible there is not all substance.

It might be more charitable and certainly more wise to allow Tate's friend and teacher, John Crowe Ransom, to express a similar judgment. In speaking of modern poets - "Not...Robinson, Frost, Bridges, Yeats, perhaps even Hopkins" but "Pound, Eliot, Tate, Stevens, perhaps Auden" - Ransom says:

Being technically experienced, they have command of their own imagination, and when they seek indeterminateness of the positive sort, such as is denoted by the iconic signs, they do it directly. They have power. . .But they are committed on principle to an unprecedented degree of indeterminateness in the meaning, and their poetry is let down on that side too. The latter indeterminateness yields brilliant images; but it tends to logical inconsequence.

The dense and brilliant yet obscure world of modern poets may reflect a certain initial ontological sense. Their most actual world, as they sense it, resists mastery, is more mysterious than intelligible, perhaps is more evil than good. It is a world of appearances, and suggests, for example, the world of Heraclitus; as if they had knocked the bottom out of history and language and become early Greeks again; but not of the Eleatic persuasion. . .
Their early Greek is pluralist, relativist, and irrational... A thing that is in startling exception occurs now and then in the practice of every one of the poets: the perfect poetic phrase. This phrase, which may well stand isolated in the context of indeterminacy, will lack nothing that is achievable of realizing the virtue intended by the traditional technique. It is a touchstone. The occasion of so sudden a flight may be simple nostalgia, looking backward.5

And now having stated two objections against the corpus of Tate's poetry from an absolute position, I should like to qualify them, for true absolutes exist only in the mind of God and in Plato's world of ideas. The world of men is a confusing melange of good and evil, of success and failure. I should like to conclude this chapter with Tate's success rather than his failure. Tate, who has taught me by his failures as much as by his successes, deserves this courtesy.

If the subject matter of Tate's poetry is the unredeemed blackness of modern hell, he has, after all, a right to his uniquely tragic vision. It is a vision shared by many modern writers, Hemingway, Pound, Eliot, to name but three. But Tate seems more emotionally involved than do any of these. His vision of a sadly unheroic, non-Christian modern world is made doubly tragic because of his

5. The New Criticism, pp. 334-35.
sense of tradition. Once the world was Christian; once men did live a full and unified life. The impossibility of ever reentering that Golden Age is Tate's peculiar tragedy. He sees himself and his age in a no-exit situation. Much of the violence of his poetry derives from this despair. Whether or not we agree with this vision is not the point, it is Tate's vision; it was almost the zeitgeist of the late twenties and early thirties; and Tate remains its most powerful spokesman.

Though tragic in his vision to the point of monotony, Tate is never frivolous, never decadent. His concern is with great issues, with "last alternatives." He is intellectually too honest and has too much artistic integrity to attempt facile solutions as does Archibald Macleish. There is a hard intellectualism in Tate's poetry that saves even inferior poems from triviality. Always we feel, as does Blackmur, that his poetry is "troubled by knowledge that has not quite got into it." Because of this knowledge that hovers just beyond the poem, even the unsuccessful poems seem more significant than they are.

When the knowledge does get into the poem, the result is brilliant. It gets into most of the poems that

I have discussed here, short poems of enormous power, perhaps the greatest of which is "The Cross." In this poem absolute classical control of diction, syntax, and form fuses the apparent irreconcilables, the ontological image and the abstract statement, into one perfect unit. In this poem everything is there; we need no explication from the essays. It is an artistic whole. In such intense short lyrics as "The Cross" Tate is at his best; he attains an almost perfect control and a tremendous tension from the violent but successful concretizing of the abstract. If he fails to do this in the longer poems, it is, perhaps, because such tension and such control cannot be sustained. But even in his less successful poems, he gives us shockingly powerful images and hauntingly flawless lines as perfect as any in our language: "When the thrush idling in the tulip tree / Unwound the cold dream of the copperhead."
CONCLUSION

Tate's career as a man of letters in the modern world from 1927 to 1953 has been a continuous search for a solution to the problem of knowledge. He began the search when he accepted Eliot's supposition of the fragmentation of modern society. To establish the cause of modern disintegration, Tate investigated the integrated society of the old South. He theorized that the old South had been an integrated culture because it had possessed a total vision of reality, a mode of knowledge that grasped past and present, concrete circumstances and universal concept in a single act of cognition. This Southern mode of cognition consisted, according to Tate, in some form of subjective-objective dualism - a religious myth and an image arising from the soil. (The conditions necessary for total knowledge vary, but the duality is consistently postulated.) Thus Tate discovered an epistemological cause for what he assumed to be an existing fact. If the cause of the old South's integration was total cognition, the cause of the fragmentation of modern society must be partial cognition. In his investigation of the old South Tate had discovered an explanation for the fact of modern fragmentation; he had not, however, discovered a
solution for this modern crisis. On the contrary, he concluded that total cognition in the present age is impossible, that modern man is historically determined to imperfect knowledge and, consequently, to fragmentation.

Tate made the tragic condition of modern man the dramatic situation of the protagonists of his fiction and poetry. The protagonists desire desperately to comprehend the past, to understand death, to believe in Christ; they desire to "see" as men saw in the past, but they know that they cannot. They know that in the modern "arrogant circumstance" vision is impossible, that for them there is no way "to make the eye secure."

Tate applied his epistemology not only to the dramatic situation of his poetry but also to its form. Perfect knowledge is "seeing," the grasp of the universal and the singular in one act of cognition. If "seeing" is impossible for modern man, at least the modern poet can imitate in his poem the act of "seeing." In his poetry Tate imitated this ideal act of cognition by compressing his syntax, eliminating abstract statement, and forcing the symbol or image to contain the idea. By eliminating the statement of the idea, he embodied in the symbol both the universal and the singular; in one act he
attained, as it were, total knowledge. Often he achieved great success in this compressed form - perhaps when either the idea or the symbol is easily available to his reader. Occasionally he failed and his unsuccessful poem is like an uncompleted metaphor demanding an external referant.

Tate founded his aesthetics upon his epistemology: man grasps complete knowledge of the world through great literature, for great literature enables man to see the universal in the singular symbol, to see the world through Dostoevsky's "hovering fly." Great literature, however, is impossible in the modern world, for the modern writer has flawed cognition and can embody only a partial vision of reality in his work.

In 1949 Tate discovered Thomism and in Thomistic epistemology he found a solution to his problem of knowledge - the abstraction of the universal concept from the singular object by an act in which both the intellect and the senses participate. Applying his newfound epistemology to poetry, he labelled poetry based upon imperfect cognition "angelic." In condemning "angelic" poetry, he implicitly condemned his own poetry and rejected his earlier technique. Poetry based upon Thomistic epistemology he labelled "symbolic," and praised Dante as an exemplary practitioner of this perfect poetry.
In 1952 Tate began a long Catholic poem in terza rima. "The Maimed Man," "The Swimmers," and "The Buried Lake" presumably are "symbolic" poetry based upon Thomistic epistemology. These three post-conversion poems are, like Tate's pre-conversion poems, written from an epistemological perspective. They differ from the earlier poems in that their epistemological position is not a problem but a solution, not a position of crisis but of possession.

With the resolution of the problem that had so long troubled Tate's thought, both his prose and poetry acquire a certain slackness, a lack of the anguished tension that had characterized his earlier work. In seeking "to make the eye secure," Tate achieved his greatest success. Ironically, having made the eye secure, he seems to have lost the inspiration that his genius requires.
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APPENDIX

THE MEDITERRANEAN

Quem das finem, rex magne, dolorum?

When we went in the boat was a long bay
A slingshot wide, walled in by towering stone -
Peaked margin of antiquity's delay,
And we went there out of time's monotone:

Where we went in the black hull no light moved
But a gull white-winged along the feckless wave,
The breeze, unseen but fierce as a body loved,
That boat drove onward like a willing slave:

Where we went in the small ship the seaweed
Parted and gave to us the murmuring shore,
And we made feast and in our secret need
Devoured the very plates Aeneas bore:

Where derelict you see through the low twilight
The green coast that you, thunder-tossed, would win,
Drop sail, and hastening to drink all night
Eat dish and bowl to take that sweet land in!

Where we feasted and caroused on the sandless
Pebbles, affecting our day of piracy,
What prophecy of eaten plates could landless
Wanderers fulfil by the ancient sea?

We for that time might taste the famous age
Eternal here yet hidden from our eyes
When lust of power undid its stuffless rage;
They, in a wineskin, bore earth's paradise.

Let us lie down once more by the breathing side
Of Ocean, where our live forefathers sleep
As if the Known Sea still were a month wide -
Atlantis howls but is no longer steep!
What country shall we conquer, what fair land
Unman our conquest and locate our blood?
We've cracked the hemispheres with careless hand!
Now, from the Gates of Hercules we flood

Westward, westward till the barbarous brine
Whelms us to the tired land where tasseling corn,
Fat beans, grapes sweeter than muscadine
Rot on the vine: in that land were we born.
THE WOLVES

There are wolves in the next room waiting
With heads bent low, thrust out, breathing
At nothing in the dark; between them and me
A white door patched with light from the hall
Where it seems never (so still is the house)
A man has walked from the front door to the stair.
It has all been forever. Beasts claw the floor.
I have brooded on angels and archfiends
But no man has ever sat where the next room's
Crowded with wolves, and for the honor of man
I affirm that never have I before. Now while
I have looked for the evening star at a cold window
And whistled when Arcturus spilt his light,
I've heard the wolves scuffle, and said: So this
Is man; so - what better conclusion is there -
The day will not follow night, and the heart
Of man has a little dignity, but less patience
Than a wolf's, and a duller sense that cannot
Smell its own mortality. (This and other
Meditations will be suited to other times
After dog silence howls his epitaph.)
Now remember courage, go to the door,
Open it and see whether coiled on the bed
Or cringing by the wall, a savage beast
Maybe with golden hair, with deep eyes
Like a bearded spider on a sunlit floor
Will snarl - and man can never be alone.
DEATH OF LITTLE BOYS

When little boys grown patient at last, weary, 
Surrender their eyes immeasurably to the night, 
The event will rage terrific as the sea; 
Their bodies fill a crumbling room with light.

Then you will touch at the bedside, torn in two, 
Gold curls now deftly intricate with gray 
As the windowpane extends a fear to you 
From one peeled aster drenched with the wind all day.

And over his chest the covers in the ultimate dream 
Will mount to the teeth, ascend the eyes, press back 
The locks - while round his sturdy belly gleam 
Suspended breaths, white spars above the wreck:

Till all the guests, come in to look, turn down 
Their palms, and delirium assails the cliff 
Of Norway where you ponder, and your little town 
Reels like a sailor drunk in a rotten skiff.

The bleak sunshine shrieks its chipped music then 
Out to the milkweed amid the fields of wheat. 
There is a calm for you where men and women 
Unroll the chill precision of moving feet.
THE MEANING OF DEATH

An After-Dinner Speech

I rise, gentlemen, it is the pleasant hour.
Darkness falls. The night falls.

Time, fall no more.
Let that be life - time falls no more. The threat
Of time we in our own courage have forsworn.
Let light fall, there shall be eternal light
And all the light shall on our heads be worn

Although at evening clouds infest the sky
Broken at base from which the lemon sun
Pours acid of winter on a useful view -
Four water-towers, two churches, and a river:
These are the sights I give in to at night
When the long covers loose the roving eye
To find the horror of the day a shape
Of life: we would have more than living sight.
Past delusions are seen as if it all
Were yesterday flooded with lemon light,
Vice and virtue, hard sacrifice and crime
In the cold vanity of time.

Tomorrow

The landscape will respond to jocund day,
Bright roofs will scintillate with hues of May
And Phoebus' car, his daily circuit run,
Brings me to the year when, my time begun,
I loitered in the backyard by the alley;
When I was a small boy living at home
The dark came on in summer at eight o'clock
For Little Lord Fauntleroy in a perfect frock
By the alley: mother took him by the ear
To teach of the mixed modes an ancient fear.
Forgive me if I am personal.

Gentlemen, let's
Forget the past, its related errors, coarseness
Of parents, laxities, unrealities of principle.
Think of tomorrow. Make a firm postulate
Of simplicity in desire and act
Founded on the best hypotheses;
Desire to eat secretly, alone, lest
Ritual corrupt our charity,
Lest darkness fall and time fall
In a long night when learned arteries
Mounting the ice and sum of barbarous time
Shall yield, without essence, perfect accident.

We are the eyelids of defeated caves.
THE SUBWAY

Dark accurate plunger down the successive knell
Of arch on arch, where ogives burst a red
Reverberance of hail upon the dead
Thunder like an exploding crucible!
Harshly articulate, musical steel shell
Of angry worship, hurled religiously
Upon your business of humility
Into the iron forestries of hell:

Till broken in the shift of quieter
Dense altitudes tangential of your steel,
I am become geometries, and glut
Expansions like a blind astronomer
Dazed, while the worldless heavens bulge and reel
In the cold revery of an idiot.
THE CROSS

There is a place that some men know,
I cannot see the whole of it
Nor how I came there. Long ago
Flame burst out of a secret pit
Crushing the world with such a light
The day-sky fell to moonless black,
The kingly sun to hateful night
For those, once seeing, turning back:
For love so hates mortality
Which is the providence of life
She will not let it blessed be
But curses it with mortal strife,
Unless beside the blinding rood
Within that world-destroying pit
- Like young wolves that have tasted blood,
Of death, men taste no more of it.
So blind, in so severe a place
(All life before in the black grave)
The last alternatives they face
Of life, without the life to save,
Being from all salvation weaned -
A stag charged both at heel and head:
Who would come back is turned a fiend
Instructed by the fiery dead.
THE MAIMED MAN

Didactic Laurel, loose your reasoning leaf
Into my trembling hand; assert your blade
Against the Morning Star, enlightening Thief
Of that first Mother who returned the Maid.
Beguiling myrtle, shake no more my ear
With your green bough: because I am afraid
Of him who says I have no need to fear,
Return, Laurel! Dying sense has cast
Shadow on shadow of a metal tear
Around my rim of being. Teach me to fast
And pray, that I may know the motes that tease
Skittering sunbeams are dead shells at last.
Then, timeless Muse, reverse my time; unfreeze
All that I was in your congenial heat;
Tune me in recollection to appease
The hour when, as I sauntered down our street,
I saw a young man there, headless, whose hand
Hung limp; it dangled at his hidden feet
I could not see how, in the fading band
Of low light; nor did I feel alarm
But felt, under my eyelids, grains of sand.
As, from their childhood, all men speak the charm
And secret double of night in wakeful day,
I thought that he could never do me harm
And gazed in stupor at the rusty play
Of light where once had stood the human head.
I thought what civil greeting I might say;
And could I leave the astonished oath unsaid
That stuck to my palate in a gagging lump?
Who could have told if he were live or dead?
Retreating sideways to a ragged clump
Of buckberry bushes in the vacant lot,
I looked more closely at the purple stump --
At the heart, three buttons down below the clot,
Then down to where, the rigid shanks depending,
Blue grass instead of feet grew in the slot.
"If you live here," I said to the unbending
Citizen, "it will not seem to you
Improper if I linger on, defending
Myself from what I hate but ought to do
To put us in a fast ungreening grave
Together, lest you turn out to be true
And I publicly lose face." What could save
One's manly honor with the football coach --
My modest hybris, were I his known slave?
Our manners had no phrase to let me broach
To friends the secret of a friend gone lame.
How could I know this friend without reproach?
What a question! Whence the question came
I am still questing in the poor boy's curse,
Witching for water in a waste of shame.
Thence, flow! conceit and motion to rehearse
Pastoral terrors of youth still in the man,
Torsions of sleep, in emblematic verse
Rattling like dice unless the verse shall scan
All chance away; and let me touch the hem
Of him who spread his triptych like a fan.
Meanwhile the scarecrow, man all coat and stem,
   Neither dead nor living, never in this world --
   In what worlds, or in what has essenced them,
I did not know until one day I whirled
   Towards a suggesting presence in my room
   And saw in the waving mirror (glass swirled
By old blowers) a black trunk without bloom --
   Body that once had moved my face and feet.
   My secret was his father, I his tomb.
(By I I mean iambics willed and neat;
   I mean by I God's image made uncoth;
   By eye I mean the busy, lurked, discrete
Mandible world sharp as a broken tooth.)
   And then rose in the man a small half-hell
   Where love disordered, shade of pompous youth,
Clutched shades forbearing in a family well;
   Where the sleek senses of the simple child
Came back to rack spirit that could not tell
Natural time: the eyes, recauld, enisled
   In the dreamt cave by shadowy womb of beam,
Had played swimmer of night -- the moist and mild!
Now take him, Virgin Muse, up the deeper stream:
   As a lost bee returning to the hive,
Cell after honeyed cell of sounding dream --
Swimmer of noonday, lean for the perfect dive
To the dead Mother's face, whose subtile down
You had not seen take amber light alive.
THE SWIMMERS

Scene: Montgomery County,
Kentucky, July 1911

Kentucky water, clear springs: a boy fleeing
To water under the dry Kentucky sun,
His four little friends in tandem with him, seeing

Long shadows of grapevine wriggle and run
Over the green swirl; mullein under the ear
Soft as Nausicaa's palm; sullen fun

Savage as childhood's thin harmonious tear:
O fountain, bosom source undying-dead
Replenish me the spring of love and fear

And give me back the eye that looked and fled
When a thrush idling in the tulip tree
Unwound the cold dream of the copperhead.

- Along the creek the road was winding; we
Felt the quicksilver sky. I see again
The shrill companions of that odyssey:

Bill Eaton, Charlie Watson, "Nigger" Layne
The doctor's son, Harry Duesler who played
The flute; and Tate, with water on the brain.

Dog-days: the dusty leaves where rain delayed
Hung low on poison-oak and scuppernong,
And we were following the active shade

Of water, that bells and bickers all night long.
"No more'n a mile," Layne said. All five stood still.
Listening, I heard what seemed at first a song;

Peering, I heard the hooves come down the hill.
The posse passed, twelve horse; the leader's face
Was worn as limestone on an ancient sill.

Then, as sleepwalkers shift from a hard place
In bed, and rising to keep a formal pledge
Descend a ladder into empty space,
We scuttled down the bank below a ledge
And marched stiff-legged in our common fright
Along a hog-track by the riffle's edge:

Into a world where sound shaded the sight
Dropped the dull hooves again; the horsemen came
Again, all but the leader. It was night

Momently and I feared: eleven same
Jesus-Christers unmembered and unmade,
Whose Corpse had died again in dirty shame.

The bank then levelling in a speckled glade,
We stopped to breathe above the swimming-hole;
I gazed at its reticulated shade
Recoiling in blue fear, and felt it roll
Over my ears and eyes and lift my hair
Like seaweed tossing on a sunk atoll.

I rose again. Borne on the copper air
A distant voice green as a funeral wreath
Against a grave: "That dead nigger there."

The melancholy sheriff slouched beneath
A giant sycamore; shaking his head
He plucked a sassafras twig and picked his teeth:

"We come too late." He spoke to the tired dead
Whose ragged shirt soaked up the viscous flow
Of blood in which it lay discomfited.

A butting horse-fly gave one ear a blow
And glanced off, as the sheriff kicked the rope
Loose from the neck and hooked it with his toe
Away from the blood. - I looked back down the slope:
The friends were gone that I had hoped to greet. -
A single horseman came at a slow lope

And pulled up at the hanged man's horny feet;
The sheriff noosed the feet, the other end
The stranger tied to his pommel in a neat
Slip-knot. I saw the Negro's body bend
    And straighten, as a fish-line cast transverse
    Yields to the current that it must subtend.

The sheriff's Goddamn was a murmured curse
    Not for the dead but for the blinding dust
    That boxed the cortège in a cloudy hearse

And dragged it towards our town. I knew I must
    Not stay till twilight in that silent road;
    Sliding my bare feet into the warm crust,

I hopped the stonecrop like a panting toad
    Mouth open, following the heaving cloud
    That floated to the court-house square its load

Of limber corpse that took the sun for shroud.
    There were three figures in the dying sun
    Whose light were company where three was crowd.

My breath crackled the dead air like a shotgun
    As, sheriff and the stranger disappearing,
    The faceless head lay still. I could not run

Or walk, but stood. Alone in the public clearing
    This private thing was owned by all the town,
    Though never claimed by us within my hearing.
THE BURIED LAKE

Ego mater pulchrae dilectionis, et timoris,
et agnitionis, et sanctae spei.

Lady of light, I would admit a dream
To you, if you would take it in your hand.
Will you not let it in a gentle stream

Of living blood? How else may I remand
Your light if not as pulse upon your ear?
Since I have dreamt this dream at your command,

If it shall bring my edge of darkness near
I pray you do not let the edging slough
To blind me, but light up my edge of fear.

The Way and the way back are long and rough
Where Myrtle twines with Laurel - single glow
Of leaf, your own imponderable stuff

Of light in which you set my time to flow
In childhood, when I tried to catch each flake
And hold it to deny the world of snow.

- The night was tepid. I had kept opaque
Down deeper than the canyons undersea
The sullen spectrum of a buried lake

Nobody saw; not seen even by me;
And now I pray you mirror my mind, styled
To spring its waters to my memory.

I fumbled all night long, an ageing child
Fled like a squirrel to a hollow bole
To play toy soldier, Tiny Tim, or the mild

Babes-in-the-Woods: sunk in their leafy hole,
The terror of their sleep I could not tell
Until your gracing light reduced the toll.

I stumbled all night long on sand and shell
By a lakeshore where time, unfaced, was dark;
I grazed with my left foot a pinched hotel
Where a sick dog coughed out a sickly cark
To let me in. Inside I saw no man,
But benches ranged the wall as round a park -

Sputtering gas-jet, ceiling without span,
Where thinning air lay on my cheek like tin;
But then exulting in my secret plan,

I laid my top hat to one side; my chin
Was ready, I unsnapped the lyric case;
I had come there to play my violin.

Erect and sinuous as Valence lace
Old ladies wore, the bow began to fill
The shining box - whence came a dreaming face,

Small dancing girl who gave the smell of dill
In pelts of mordents on a minor third
From my cadenza for the Devil's Trill.

No, no! her quick hand said in a soft surd.
She locked the fiddle up and was not there.
I mourned the death of youth without a word.

And could I go where air was not dead air?
My friend Jack Locke, scholar and gentleman,
Gazed down upon me with a friendly glare,

Flicking his nose as if about to scan
My verse; he plucked from his moustache one hair
Letting it fall like gravel in a pan,

And went as mist upon the browning air
Away from the durable lake, the blind hotel,
Leaving me guilted on a moving stair

Upwards, down which I regularly fell
Tail backwards, till I caught the music room
Empty, like a gaol without a cell.

"If I am now alone I may resume
The grey sonata" - but the box was gone;
Instead I heard three footfalls, a light broom
Dusting the silted air, which now put on
(like Pier Francesca sunning a shady wall)
A stately woman who in sorrow shone.

I rose; she moved, she glided towards the hall;
I took her hand but then would set her free.
"My Love," I said. - "I'm back to give you all,"

She said, "my love." (Under the dogwood tree
In bloom, where I had held her first beneath
The coiled black hair, she turned and
smiled at me.)

I hid the blade within the melic sheath
And tossed her head - but it was not her head:
Another's searching skull whose drying teeth

Crumbled me all night long and I was dead.
Down, down below the wave that turned me round,
Head downwards where the Head of Qo'd had sped

On the third day; where nature had unwound
And ravelled her green that she had softly laved -
The green reviving spray now slowly drowned

Me, since the shuttling eye would not be saved.
In the tart undersea of slipping night
The dream whispered, while sight
within me, caved,

Deprived, poured stinging dark on cold delight,
And multitudinous whined invisible bees;
All grace being lost, and its considering rite,

Till come to midmost May I bent my knees,
Santa Lucia! at noon - the prudent shore,
The lake flashing green fins through amber trees -

And knew I had not read your eye before
You played it in the flowing scale of glance;
I had not thought that I could read the score,

And yet how vexed, bitter, and hard the trance
Of light - how I resented Lucy's play!
Better stay dead, better not try the lance
In the living bowl: living we have one way
For all time in the twin darks where light dies
To live: forget that you too lost the day

Yet finding it refound it Lucy-guise
As I, refinding where two shadows meet,
Took from the burning umbrage mirroring eyes

Like Tellico blue upon a golden sheet
Spread out for all our stupor. Lady coming,
Lady not going, come Lady come: I greet

You in the double of our eyes - humming
Miles of lightning where, in a pastoral scene,
The fretting pipe is lucent and becoming.

I thought of ways to keep this image green
(Until the leaf unfold the formal cherry)
In an off season when the eye is lean

With an inward gaze upon the wild strawberry,
Cape jasmine, wild azalea, eglantine -
All the sad eclogue that will soon be merry:

And knew that nature could not more refine
What it had given in a looking-glass
And held there, after the living body's line

Has moved wherever it must move - wild grass
Inching the earth; and the quicksilver art
Throws back the invisible but lightning mass

To inhabit the room; for I have seen it part
The palpable air, the air close up above
And under you, light Lucy, light of heart -

Light choir upon my shoulder, speaking Dove
The dream is over and the dark expired.
I knew that I had known enduring love.
VITA

Richard John O'Dea was born in Spokane, Washington in 1923. He entered St. Francis Xavier Novitiate in 1941 where he studied classical languages for four years. From 1945 to 1948 he studied philosophy at St. Louis University where he took his A. B. and Ph.L. degrees. From 1948 to 1951 he taught classical languages at Seattle Preparatory School in Seattle, Washington. In 1951 he began theological studies at Milltown Park (a Jesuit Pontifical University) in Dublin, Ireland. He completed these studies at the Catholic Institute in Lyrons, France in 1956 where he received his S.T.L. degree. He acted as principal of Gonzaga Preparatory School in Spokane, Washington until the fall of 1960 when he began graduate studies at Louisiana State University.
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Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: To Make the Eye Secure: The Criticism, Fiction, and Poetry of Allen Tate

Approved:

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Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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