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ROMANTICISM AFTER ELIOT: THE CONTINUANCE OF THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN POETRY

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ROMANTICISM AFTER ELIOT: THE CONTINUANCE OF THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN POETRY

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T. S. Eliot, through his criticism and his poetry, attempted to change the directions of twentieth-century poetry. His aim was to replace the poetry of the continuing Romantic movement with a highly scholarly, allusive poetry that had its foundations in the Metaphysical traditions of the early seventeenth century. In this aim, Eliot failed because the course of poetry that he advocated proved to be an inappropriate response to the chaos that served as a backdrop to all twentieth-century poetry.

Eliot's poetic career exemplified the successful quest, based on tradition and religion, to find an orderly response to the chaos; however, Eliot's success was one that few poets could duplicate and therein lay his failure. A more acceptable response to the chaos was that exemplified by the poetry of Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams, in which the constantly adapting quest itself became a more reasonable response to the chaos than was an Eliot-like culmination of the quest. Crane and Williams conceived their poetry as a deliberate attempt to combat the changes that Eliot tried to create in twentieth-century poetry. Through the success of their own poetry, they underlined the temporary nature of Eliot's influence while reinforcing the dominance of the Romantic movement.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The critical debate concerning whether or not we are still in the grip of the Romantic movement has served as a backdrop to twentieth-century poetry. Until about the time of the First World War, it was generally conceded that the dominant trend in poetry continued to be Romantic; not long after the war, critics and poets began to speculate on the possibility of a new poetic movement having recently taken place--a movement equal in significance to the Romantic movement, whose origins lay more than a century in the past. On one side of the debate is the major figure of T. S. Eliot. For those who contend that we are living in a post-Romantic age, his poetry and criticism serve as the starting point. Eliot's advocates see The Waste Land in particular as the decisive statement of the new movement--in much the same way that the Lyrical Ballads signaled both an end to Classicism and the birth of Romanticism.

The advocates of a post-Romantic movement have dominated literary criticism since The Waste Land appeared in 1922, and even as early as The Sacred Wood, which was published in 1920. In addition to Eliot, Cleanth Brooks has been outstanding among the post-Romantic critics, and such major critics and poetic-critics as John Crowe Ransom,

Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, W. K. Wimsatt, I. A. Richards, and William Empson have added their support. These same men are also developers of a method of criticism that came to be known as the New Criticism, which grew to dominate twentieth-century critical theory. In their nearly total domination of the critical discussion of literature, the New Critics were able to foster the impression that their ideas concerning a post-Romantic revolution were beyond debate.

There has been, however, another side to the debate, a side in which the unbroken continuation of Romanticism has been advocated. Critically, this side of the debate has been spearheaded by Karl Shapiro, but due to the pervasive influence of the New Critics, Shapiro and like-minded critics have had an uphill struggle in gaining widespread support for their views. If one were to examine the critical debate only, the result would appear to be hopelessly one-sided. But such an approach would ignore the actual poetic situation. From the very publication of The Waste Land (even from the time of earlier poems such as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"), there were major poets who fought against the direction in which Eliot was taking poetry. They fought against Eliot and the post-Romantic tide not with criticism, in which they were comparatively weak, but primarily with poetry of their own.

Foremost among the poets who deliberately countered Eliot were Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams, whose works remain an affirmation of Romanticism. Both men reacted strongly against the direction in which Eliot was taking poetry, and in one sense, their poetry can be seen as a rebuttal to Eliot. Crane and Williams recognized the importance of Eliot's poetry and realized the influence he would have on their generation. Thus, they understood the magnitude of the task before them. Eliot's success forced them to be even more successful, and at the same time, they had to guard against his influencing them. When Crane died a few months short of his thirty-third birthday, he had already achieved some recognition as a major poet, but The Bridge was commonly criticized as a magnificent failure. Recognition of Williams' true stature was slow in coming. He was possibly the last great poet of his generation to be accorded major status. Gradually, critical opinion toward Crane and Williams swung in their favor, accompanied by a gradual shift away from Eliot's bias toward Romanticism.

The diminishing acclaim for Eliot's poetry can be attributed, at least in part, to the predictable pendulum swing of critical opinion, and it is possible that before the twentieth century is over, we will see a revived interest in Eliot. For the moment, however, it can be said that Eliot has had surprisingly little influence on present-day poetry. Of the poets who first took up his

cause, only Robert Penn Warren is left, and his poetry shows a steady disengagement from the Eliot programme. The New Critics who were Eliot's strongest supporters show a lessening certainty that the Eliot programme has indeed become a lasting reality. Even Cleanth Brooks, in his revised introduction to Modern Poetry and the Tradition, appears to have backed away from his 1939 statement "that we are witnessing (or perhaps have just witnessed) a critical revolution of the order of the Romantic Revolt."[1]

One of the principal reasons for the collapse of the post-Romantic movement was that it did not provide a satisfactory response to a century whose manifest characteristic was chaos. Twentieth-century Romantics and post-Romantics alike responded to the ubiquitous chaos by trying to achieve a sense of order, by searching for a stable center that would hold in the midst of chaos. Like medieval knights in their quest for the Holy Grail, twentieth-century writers searched for stability, but unlike the medieval knights who never culminated their quest, a large number of twentieth-century poets felt that they had achieved an end to their search. The post-Romantics believed they found a stable center for their poetry in a sense of literary tradition. For them, the Metaphysical

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[1]Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), pp. xxx-xxxi.

tradition of the early seventeenth century provided a still-point in the chaotic world, and in turn helped to still that chaos. By replacing the Romantic tradition with Metaphysical tradition, they were replacing a tradition that advocated change and looked positively upon mutation, with a tradition that admired and fostered stability. But the problem with the anti-Romantics' discovery of a stable center was that they were unable to participate further in the quest.

The twentieth-century Romantics, however, never achieved the stability for which they searched. They wrote with a sense of tradition, but for them, tradition never provided the stabilizing effect that it did for the post-Romantic poets. The Romantics of the twentieth century are commonly seen as inheritors of the Whitman tradition. They may have admired Whitman's poetry and felt that he was a dominant influence on twentieth-century poetry, but they did not see their affinity with his poetry as a source of order. If anything, it showed the Romantics that there were no easy solutions to the chaos of their century. The never-ending quest of the Romantics commonly caused their personal lives to be more unsettled than they might otherwise have been, but like the medieval quest for the Holy Grail, their quest itself gained prominence over the object of that quest. The continual search for an answer to the chaos was well suited to a Romantic world view. At the heart of

Romanticism was a belief in the organic nature of the world. Continual, unstructured change not only was accepted, but was cultivated as preferable to a mechanistic, predictable world order inherent in the Metaphysical tradition. In a continually shifting situation, there could be no stable center. If there was a center, it could not hold in the face of constant change. Rather than try to bring final order to the chaos, the Romantics responded to the constant change that it entailed. They were no more comfortable with chaos than were the post-Romantics, but their constant search for order meant that their poetry could change in the face of chaos. Their poetic responses would be pertinent to an organic world situation. The post-Romantics created some of the most important poetry of the twentieth century, but their poetic responses to the chaos could be only temporary.

The tremendous influence that Eliot once had on Modern poetry proved to be temporary because few poets could follow his programme to completion. This programme, based on the stabilizing effects of religion, scholarship, and the Metaphysical tradition, enabled Eliot to bring an order to the chaos; however, only a minority of poets have been able to duplicate Eliot's successful quest for order. His programme for Modern poetry did not allow for the constant change inherent in the chaos. In contrast, Crane and Williams did not abandon Romanticism. Thus, the acceptance

of constant change that was part of Romanticism enabled them to write a poetry based on a never-ending quest for order. The poetry of Crane and Williams serves as the modern example of the quest itself gaining importance over any successful culmination of the quest. In Modern poetry, the quest for order embodied a more appropriate response to the chaos than did the possible attainment of that order.

CHAPTER II

RESPONDING TO ROMANTICISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Late in the eighteenth century, a rebellion took place that would change the course of world history as significantly as any event or idea that came before it. Founded on the idea that the individual was paramount and that the world moved on organic principles rather than on the mechanistic principles envisioned by the eighteenth-century Neoclassicists, the Romantic rebellion grew to dominate not only literature, but painting, sculpture, music--all the arts--and extended its influence to the nonartistic world as well. Romanticism was more than merely a convenient term used to identify certain characteristics of a certain period: it was a revolutionary way of thought that dominated the nineteenth century. Not until the twentieth century did the observers of the ebb and flow of literary periods begin to question the continued dominance of Romanticism.

In 1930, Edmund Wilson published Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature 1870-1930. Wilson's thesis is that just as Romanticism was an antidote to seventeenth and eighteenth-century Neoclassicism, so Symbolism was an antidote to nineteenth-century naturalism. In defense of this thesis he writes,

> Symbolism corresponds to Romanticism, and is in fact an outgrowth from it. But whereas it was characteristic

> of the Romantics to seek experience for its own sake--love, travel, politics--to try the possibilities of life; the Symbolists, though they also hate formulas, though they also discard conventions, carry on their experimentation in the field of literature alone; and though they, too, are essentially explorers, explore only the possibilities of imagination and thought. And whereas the Romantic, in his individualism, had usually revolted against or defied that society with which he felt himself at odds, the Symbolist has detached himself from society and schools himself in indifference to it.[1]

Thus, Wilson equates the significance of the Symbolist movement with that of the Romantic movement; however, he still views Symbolism as an outgrowth of Romanticism. It might be argued that Wilson's view of the relationship between Romanticism and Symbolism merely supports the organic concepts of Romanticism, in this case, the mutation of one literary movement to form a new, yet derivative movement.

Despite the prominence of Wilson, his theory about the continuation of Romanticism has remained on the periphery of the debate. Center stage has been occupied by those debating the traditions of twentieth-century literature, and T. S. Eliot is foremost among those engaged in the debate. Concentrating on the traditions of Modern poetry, Eliot's aim was twofold--to break the dominance that the Romantic tradition had enjoyed for so long and to

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[1]Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 265. (Subsequent references will appear in the text.)

replace it with the more distant tradition of the Metaphysical poets.

Eliot's plan for Modern poetry--what he called "my programme for the metier of poetry"[2]--became a combination of the anti-Romantic and the pro-Metaphysical. In his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot denigrated the Romantics' emphasis on the individual and especially their concern for the poet himself, and proposed instead his impersonal theory of poetry.[3] In an essay dealing with the Metaphysical poets, Eliot coined the term "dissociation of sensibility" to describe what he saw as a disunity between experience and feeling that began in the seventeenth century and "from which we have never recovered" (Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," pp. 287-88). He abhorred the sentimentality he saw arising in the early eighteenth century, climaxing with the Romantic poets (Eliot, "Metaphysical,"

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[2]T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in Selected Essays, 3rd ed., by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 16.

[3]Eliot, p. 17. "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he [the poet] is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."

p. 288). He argued against making critical judgments[4] and replaced judgment with literary theory and methodology. The poetry that Eliot wrote was scholarly, requiring an extensive literary background to comprehend. He made no apologies for the difficulty of his poetry. Instead, he argued in his criticism for a more difficult, allusive poetry.[5] Consistently, Eliot's programme embodied his preference for what he believed were the Metaphysical traditions of poetry.

Eliot's success in his attempt to stop the tide of Romanticism and replace it with the Metaphysical tradition is doubtful. He sought to counter the chaos of the twentieth century by spearheading a poetic programme that emphasized the non-Romantic qualities of unity and stability, and although he wrote some of the best poetry

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[4]T. S. Eliot, "The Perfect Critic," in The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism, by T. S. Eliot (London: Methuen & Co., 1920), p. 11. "But in matters of great importance, the critic must not coerce, and he must not make judgments of worse and better. He must simply elucidate: the reader will form the correct judgment for himself."

[5]Eliot, "Metaphysical," p. 289. "It is not a permanent necessity that poets should be interested in philosophy, or in any other subject. We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate, if necessary, language into his meaning."

and most influential criticism of his age, the success of his programme now appears to have been short-lived. Eliot was able to revive interest in the Metaphysical poets of the early seventeenth century; he was not able permanently to supplant Romanticism as the dominant influence on twentieth-century poetry. Among many of those who at one time supported his programme, the continuity of Romanticism is eventually coming to be accepted.

One of the principal critics of our century who once saw a realignment of Modern poetry--a moving away from Romanticism and a moving toward the Metaphysical writers so strongly advocated by Eliot--is Cleanth Brooks. Brooks believed that the poetry published about the time of the First World War was revolutionary to the point of causing a shift in our conception of the traditions of twentieth-century poetry. This belief was most directly stated in the original "Preface" to Modern Poetry and the Tradition.

> The prevailing conception of poetry is still primarily defined for us by the achievement of the Romantic poets. Certainly every one-volume history of English literature still conceives of the Romantic period as the one, far off, divine event toward which the whole course of English poetry moves. The modern poetry of our time is the first to call that view seriously in question.
>
> The thesis frankly maintained in this study is that we are witnessing (or perhaps have just

> witnessed) a critical revolution of the order of the Romantic Revolt.[6]

Brooks's aim in Modern Poetry and the Tradition is much the same as Eliot's aim in his own poetry and criticism, to establish the Metaphysical poets as the major tradition of twentieth-century poetry, and in so doing, to change our long-standing attitude toward the Romantics.

The emphasis on tradition in Brooks's study is obvious even from the title, and many of the chapters deal with topics either directly or indirectly related to Metaphysical poetry--metaphor, tradition, wit, high seriousness, Metaphysical poetry itself, and the relationship between Modern poetry and tradition. The concern with tradition is particularly in keeping with the Eliot programme, and Brooks's statement in his "Preface" is written mainly in deference to the poetry and criticism Eliot had written by 1939--Prufrock and Other Observations, The Waste Land, Ash-Wednesday, The Sacred Wood, For Lancelot Andrewes, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, and After Strange Gods. Brooks's fourth chapter, however--"Symbolist Poetry and the Ivory Tower"--appears to have been written largely in response to Wilson's Axel's Castle. While Wilson argues that Symbolist poetry as a

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[6]Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition (1939; rpt. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), pp. xxx-xxxi.

movement corresponds to and grows out of Romanticism, Brooks takes the stand that the Symbolist tradition and the Metaphysical tradition are both parts of the same basic movement. On this point, the views of the two critics are irreconcilable and Brooks's view has come to receive the greater attention. While Symbolism has been a major influence on the central poets in this debate, Eliot included, it has not generally been considered a radically new departure of the type Brooks is considering in his book.

And who are the central poets of the debate, according to Brooks? Eliot, of course, holds the primary position, and the characteristics of his poetry are seemingly used to measure the works of the other poets under consideration. Yeats and Auden come under consideration as Brooks stresses the Metaphysical aspects of each one's poetry. Three other poets--John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren--are seen as contributing significantly to the revolution that supplanted Romanticism. All three men began their careers at Vanderbilt, where they distinguished themselves as the Fugitive poets. They went on to found the Agrarian Movement and eventually became central figures in the New Criticism.

That Donald Davidson was also one of the Fugitive members may be at least partial reason for Brooks's including him in the discussion. Davidson's poetry does not rank with that of Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, and

Hart Crane; nevertheless, Brooks groups all four writers as not having contributed significantly to the new revolution. Robert Frost receives praise for his poetry that displays Metaphysical tendencies, but this poetry is seen to represent a minority of his work; and Frost's poetry in general is not accorded the same acclaim that is given to the Eliot/ Fugitive group. The poetry of Archibald MacLeish is praised, but is quickly dismissed. William Carlos Williams and e. e. cummings are not even given consideration. By the conclusion of Modern Poetry and the Tradition, one realizes that in Brooks's view the new revolution in poetry comprises Eliot, Ransom, Tate, and Warren, with limited contributions from Yeats and Auden.

In 1947, eight years after the publication of Modern Poetry and the Tradition, Brooks continued his advocacy of the Metaphysical tradition in The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry; however, he did not limit himself solely to the Metaphysical poets. He deals with poetry by Donne, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson, and Yeats. The arrangement is generally along historical lines, although the critical method is avowedly nonhistorical. Brooks deliberately pays little attention to the historical backgrounds of the poems, defending this seeming neglect by stating that sufficient recent emphasis had been placed on reading poems in historical contexts and warning of the danger in poems becoming significant only as

"cultural anthropology."[7] Brooks claims to have recognized the importance of historical contexts and to have taken them into account, but his emphasis lies elsewhere.

What becomes apparent before long is that Brooks's emphasis is on a critical approach to poetry that would eventually become known as the New Criticism. He describes this approach in his "Preface," uses it to explore the wide range of poems previously listed, and then goes on to defend his approach in his concluding chapters. Brooks does not mention "New Criticism" by name, but he does write about his "honest attempt to work close to specific texts" (Brooks, Urn, p. ix) and his desire to begin "by making the closest possible examination of what the poem says as a poem" (Brooks, Urn, p. xi). In other words, the same critical standards are to be applied to all poems despite their historical contexts.

If Brooks was the shaping force behind the New Criticism, Eliot was its spiritual leader. The New Critics came to hold Eliot's poetry as central to the movement away from Romanticism, and his criticism often set the course for New Critical thinking. In particular, Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" provides the basis for the New Critics' anathema on the biographical approach to

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[7]Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947), p. x.

poetry. As Donald Hall writes, "Eliot wanted us to 'ignore the man'--and from his wish arises the New Critics' dogma indexing the biographical heresy."[8]

Eliot's emphasis on the Metaphysical traditions of Modern poetry was also adopted by the New Critics, and it gave rise to a seeming inconsistency between an expressed desire to avoid the historical approach to poetry and a central concern for the traditions of Modern poetry. The distinction between tradition and historical background needed clarification, and Brooks attempted to make it in The Well Wrought Urn. In reconciling New Critical methods with an advocacy of a new tradition, Brooks claims that the chapters of his book look forward to a new history of English poetry, while the discussions of those chapters do not attempt to write that history. While extreme, it could be argued that Brooks's advocacy of the Metaphysical tradition is an attempt to rewrite literary history, but the greatest danger in his methods lies in applying Metaphysical standards equally to all poetry. Such a practice would be no less dangerous than judging each poem only by the standards of its own day. As Brooks notes, this would ultimately lead to each poet's demanding that he be measured by his own standards (Brooks, Urn, pp. 206-10). What Brooks sought was an

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[8]Donald Hall, Remembering Poets: Reminiscences and Opinions: Dylan Thomas, Robert Frost, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 103.

instrument that would allow for critical precision when applied to any and all poetry; what he hit upon was poetic structure. If Brooks did indeed examine poetry of various periods through a single instrument and subsequently found an affinity between the Metaphysicals and the Moderns, so be it; he would be false to his aims, however, only if he developed his methods with a preconceived appreciation for Metaphysical poetry and then judged all poetry on the merits of the Metaphysicals. At that point he would be open to the claim that he was deliberately setting out to rewrite the history of literature.

Whatever course he followed, the effect, according to Brooks, was the necessity to revise drastically our conventional perception of the course of poetry, to replace the Romantic with the Metaphysical as the main tradition of Modern poetry. The connection between literary history and Brooks's New Critical methods remains, but Brooks explains it this way: "The truth of the matter is that an increased interest in criticisms [sic] will not render literary history superfluous. It will rather beget more literary history--a new literary history, for any revised concept of poetry implies a revised history of poetry" (Brooks, Urn, p. 214). In this statement, Brooks is essentially expanding to criticism what Eliot had earlier stated about poetry in "Tradition and the Individual Talent"--that each new poem revised our opinion toward all the poems that came before

it.[9] But where Eliot sometimes seems to be deliberately setting out to revise the history of literature, Brooks's revisions of literary history seem largely unintentional--an unavoidable side effect of his critical methods. Brooks, therefore, is able to have it both ways: he is able to adhere to the objective, even-handed methods of New Criticism, to avoid historical discussions, and at the same time to alter the history of poetry in ways that help support his concept of poetry.

True to his avowed methods, Brooks concentrates on the poetry rather than on the criticism of those writers who he feels contributed to the revolution that superseded Romanticism. Three of the poets he discusses in Modern Poetry and the Tradition--Ransom, Tate, and Warren--also became major critical forces in the New Criticism. Although these three writers began their association at Vanderbilt after the war, the group that was to become known as the Fugitives had been meeting since 1915. The meetings began as social gatherings at which poetry was discussed, and some of the members tried their hand at writing. The war forced a temporary disbandment of the group and by the time they reassembled, Ransom had published his first book of poetry,

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[9]Eliot, "Tradition," p. 15. "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead."

Poems about God. When Tate began attending the meetings as a senior in 1921, Ransom's publications and status as a faculty member had already established him as the group's leader. In 1922, the first volume of The Fugitive appeared, providing an outlet for poetic endeavors. A year later, Warren was asked, as a sophomore, to join the group. During their history the Fugitives claimed numerous members, including Donald Davidson, Merrill Moore, and Laura Riding, but it was Ransom, Tate and Warren who showed the greatest potential, who would go on to exert the greatest influence on the course of Modern poetry.

At their meetings, the Fugitives developed their ideas by informal discussion, trial and error composition, and mutual criticism; and pretty much devoid of personal contact with literary people outside the group, they were able to develop a sophisticated understanding of how poetry works. Many major poems written at Vanderbilt appeared in The Fugitive. Ransom published "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter," "Necrological," "Janet Waking," "Piazza Piece," and "Captain Carpenter"; Tate published "Aeneas at Washington," "Ode to the Confederate Dead," "Mr. Pope," and "The Swimmers"; and Warren published "Bearded Oaks" and "The Ballad of Billie Potts." Most of the poems fall into the Eliot programme, being objective, scholarly, intellectual, and allusive.

As Louis D. Rubin notes, the Fugitives and Eliot share a common tradition,[10] but the attraction of Eliot and his programme was not immediate among all the Fugitives. Ransom showed the greatest reluctance and wrote negatively about The Waste Land when it first appeared. Tate was an early champion of Eliot, and the meetings were sometimes built around a debate on the merits of what Eliot was doing in poetry and criticism. Oddly enough, Tate also championed Hart Crane (who had poems published in The Fugitive) and supported Crane and Eliot as members of the Symbolist school. There were other points of dissension. In opposition to Tate, Ransom usually defended the English tradition of meter and rhyme. Tate supported the experimental nature of Modern poetry and served as advocate for many American writers.

Although the Fugitives sometimes disagreed over certain writers or over the techniques of poetry, there was much more about which they were in harmony. Their Southern

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[10]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "The Serpent in the Mulberry Bush," rpt. in Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs, eds., Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 363. "With certain reservations one can say that 'Seasons of the Soul' is Tate's own telling of the Waste Land. The poem is renewed evidence of the accessibility to a common tradition shared by Tate and the Southerners on the one hand, and Eliot and his followers on the other. The Southerners, Fugitives and Agrarians both, in many ways have said for their time and place what Eliot has been saying for the same time but another less particularized place."

heritage and the importance they placed on the South as a spawning ground for great literature held them together. So too did their disdain for the sentimental, nostalgic sort of literature that had long been prevalent in their region. Undoubtedly, their aversion to ante-bellum literature caused in them a sense of isolation in their own region, but at the same time they cultivated their Southern heritage to produce poetry of a critical significance that the South had not previously experienced. They were Southern writers without being regionalists or local colorists. Good fortune brought them to Vanderbilt at the same time, but a considerable intelligence and specific ideas about the characteristics of good poetry helped to make them an integral part of the Southern renaissance. They believed in an intellectual poetry, they emphasized the importance of the Metaphysical traditions to Modern poetry, and they advocated a critical approach to poetry that concentrated closely on the poem itself.

Like Eliot, the Fugitives wrote a scholarly poetry that found its main proponents in the universities. The ties with academe remained strong throughout their careers, and most of the Fugitives spent time in the universities even after the group officially disbanded in 1925.

Donald Davidson stayed on at Vanderbilt for several decades. Tate and Warren both have had distinguished teaching careers spanning many years--Tate primarily at the

University of Minnesota and Warren primarily at Yale--but it was Ransom who had his greatest influence through university teaching positions. First at Vanderbilt and then at Kenyon, he taught numerous students who went on to become influential writers and critics themselves. His students included, in addition to the Fugitive writers, Randall Jarrell, Peter Taylor, and Robert Lowell. While the Fugitives originally gathered at Vanderbilt by coincidence, young people with serious literary intentions began attending Kenyon specifically because of Ransom. Their ideas concerning Modern poetry were given direction by Ransom, and it is impossible to estimate how many of his students became teachers, poets, and critics--disseminating the influence of Ransom in an ever-widening circle.

Hyatt H. Waggoner comments that Ransom's influence was enormous--"all out of proportion, really, to his actual accomplishments as a critic."[11] That influence was due, in large part, to the many exceptional students that Ransom encountered in the classroom, but a great deal of that influence was also the result of Ransom's control of The Kenyon Review. Ransom founded the review in 1939, and it appeared regularly for more than thirty years, presenting editorials, poetry, reviews, and essays that helped, along

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[11]Hyatt Howe Waggoner, American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968), p. 537.

with frequent summer colloquies, to make Kenyon a center of New Criticism. Many of Ransom's former students were contributors to the review, but not all of the contributors were advocates of the New Criticism or the Eliot programme. Dylan Thomas was represented by a poem in the review's first year, and even William Carlos Williams appeared as early as the third issue with an essay on Lorca. Generally, however, most of those who appeared within the covers of The Kenyon Review had an inclination toward the Eliot programme or at least had little sympathy toward the idea of a twentieth-century Romanticism.

Allen Tate was one of those who studied under Ransom, became a frequent contributor to The Kenyon Review, and made a reputation for himself as a professional man of letters. Although he was a poet, novelist, biographer, and editor, Tate's greatest influence has been in his role as critic. Some of his essays, such as "Tension in Poetry," have become classics in the New Critical approach to poetry. He was quick to see the excellence of young Moderns as diverse as Hart Crane and Eliot, yet from his days at Vanderbilt he was a supporter of the Eliot programme. Tate's critical approach was decidedly New Critical and he shared the New Critic's bias toward Metaphysical poetry. His criticism, however, does not dwell on the Metaphysicals to the exclusion of other writers. While Eliot almost totally ignored American poetry and even Ransom was guilty, although

to a lesser degree, of giving American poetry too little attention, Tate concerned himself with both contemporary and nineteenth-century American poets.

Tate was inimical toward Romanticism. This is exemplified in his criticism toward Hart Crane, one of the major twentieth-century voices of Romanticism. Tate respected Crane's poetic genius, abhorred his way of life for its self-destructiveness, and considered The Bridge a magnificent failure for what he considered a lack of coherent structure; yet he could still say that The Bridge contains "some of the best poetry of our generation."[12] Tate's criticism of Crane is interesting for the connection he sees among the disorder of The Bridge, Crane's mind, and the times in which the poem was written. Tate writes that in an earlier time,

> Rimbaud achieved 'disorder' out of implicit order, after a deliberate cultivation of 'derangement,' but in our age the disintegration of our intellectual systems is accomplished. With Crane the disorder is original and fundamental. That is the special quality of his mind that belongs peculiarly to our own time. His aesthetic problem, however, was more general; it was the historical problem of romanticism. (Tate, p. 310)

In the same essay Tate tells us that Crane was a spokesman for his age (Tate, p. 320). Apparently for Tate,

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[12]Allen Tate, "Hart Crane," in Essays of Four Decades, by Allen Tate (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1968), p. 320.

that age was manifest by chaos and dissociations,[13] and the poet's job was somehow to bring order to it. The solutions Tate seized upon were in line with the solutions advocated by Eliot--the cultivation of spiritual values through religion and the development of a sense of tradition--the Metaphysical tradition. In Tate's view, the very nature of Romanticism excluded it from partaking in the solutions he advocated. Romanticism was not only inadequate to deal with the chaos; its dominance in the nineteenth century was largely responsible for the absence of order that confronted the poet of the twentieth century.[14]

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[13]Rubin, p. 360. In discussing Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead," Rubin comments on the theme of dissociation found in that poem. "Modern man of the dissociated sensibility, isolated from his fellows, caught up in a life of fragmented parts and confused impulses; thus Allen Tate's Southerner waiting at the gate of the Confederate cemetery contemplates the high glory of Stonewall Jackson and the inscrutable foot-cavalry of a day when ancestors of that Southerner knew what they fought for, and could die willingly for knowing it."

[14]Allen Tate, "The Man of Letters in the Modern World," p. 15. In this essay, first delivered as the Phi Beta Kappa Address at the University of Minnesota on May 1, 1952, Tate says: "The general intelligence is the intelligence of the man of letters: he must not be committed to the illiberal specializations that the nineteenth century has proliferated into the modern world: specializations in which means are divorced from ends, action from sensibility, matter from mind, society from the individual, religion from moral agency, love from lust, poetry from thought, communion from experience, and mankind in the community from men in the crowd. There is literally no end to this list of dissociations because there is no end, yet in sight, to the fragmenting of the western mind."

Tate and Ransom were instrumental as advocates of the New Criticism, with its emphasis on the Metaphysical rather than Romantic traditions of Modern poetry, but it was a textbook entitled Understanding Poetry that was most effective in giving the New Criticism the wide currency that it came to hold. Understanding Poetry, written by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren while they were both teaching at Louisiana State University, appeared in 1938 and provided one of the first discussions of the critical principles that would eventually be called New Critical. In 1938, the term "New Criticism" was not yet being used.

Brooks and Warren state their principles for the satisfactory teaching of poetry thus:

> 1. Emphasis should be kept on the poem as a poem.
> 2. The treatment should be concrete and inductive.
> 3. A poem should always be treated as an organic system of relationships, and the poetic quality should never be understood as inhering in one or more factors taken in isolation.[15]

Forty years ago, the methods proposed by Brooks and Warren were revolutionary. The authors even felt it necessary to warn against the substitutes for teaching poetry, a warning that need hardly be uttered today. At the time, they justifiably felt it necessary to warn against paraphrasing logical or narrative content, studying biographical and historical materials, and using inspirational and didactic

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[15]Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, eds., Understanding Poetry (New York: Henry Holt, 1938), p. ix.

interpretations as substitutes for teaching poems as poems (Brooks and Warren, p. iv). Today, the teaching of poetry generally has come to follow these criteria. A whole generation of poetry readers has grown up in a period when New Critical methods have been dominant. In support of this dominance, John Edward Hardy states in Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South, "The three Understanding anthologies have, indeed, been primarily effective, if not ultimately causative, in bringing about a pedagogical revolution."[16]

Through successive editions published in 1950 and 1960, there have been deletions and additions of poems in Understanding Poetry, and a postscript to the "Letter to the Teacher" has been added, but the New Critical approach remains intact. After forty years of use as a textbook, Understanding Poetry has reached more readers than any purely critical work would be capable of reaching. Even though it might be argued that a major piece of criticism will touch a more influential audience than an anthology of poetry, the textbook anthology has the advantage of reaching its readers at a time when their ideas about poetry are still forming. This ability to influence is especially true of Brooks and Warren's anthology, since it is much more than

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[16]John Edward Hardy, "The Achievement of Cleanth Brooks," rpt. in Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs, eds., Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 414.

a naked collection of poems. Each section of the book is provided with a critical "Foreword," and a substantial number of the poems are analyzed by New Critical methods. The main danger of such an arrangement is that it will not stop at instruction and will, instead, become indoctrination to a critical method that staunchly supports the values of the Metaphysical writers.

Robert Penn Warren, as Fugitive, as Brooks's coeditor in Understanding Poetry, and as poet, critic, and novelist in his own right, occupies an interesting position in the debate over the traditions of Modern poetry and the fundamental value of the New Critical approach to poetry study. The admiration that Warren, Ransom, and Tate had for one another remained steadfast throughout their lives. As coeditor of Understanding Poetry, Warren was instrumental in introducing countless students to New Critical methods. It is Warren more than any of the others, however, who is often accused of abandoning the methods that he once so ably defended. Hilton Kramer has commented on this change in Warren: "In the poetry and criticism and journalism, if not always in the fiction--one of the stalwarts of the New Criticism likewise proved to be one of its most eloquent defectors."[17]

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[17]Hilton Kramer, "Allen Tate: Lost Worlds," New York Times Book Review, 8 Jan. 1978, p. 3.

Warren's defection lies particularly in his lack of bookishness and in his preference for working in the American tradition of literature rather than in the Metaphysical tradition--characteristics that also take him outside the more encompassing Eliot programme. Warren received more formal education than most other proponents of the Eliot programme, and he has spent most of his career teaching in major universities; but his poetry is hardly the sort of classroom literature that Eliot's is. It is certainly less allusive and as Hyatt H. Waggoner says in reference to "The Ballad of Billie Potts," "The very last thing 'Billie Potts' suggests is the library" (Waggoner, p. 546). The same can be said for the majority of Warren's poems. His poetry has received critical acclaim, but it does not need the background of the classroom to be appreciated.

The more significant break with the Eliot programme comes in Warren's choice to work within the traditions developed by nineteenth-century American writers. Warren appears to have more in common with the Romantic tradition than with the Metaphysicals preferred by Eliot and Warren's compatriots at Vanderbilt. Warren's leanings have not gone unnoticed by those compatriots. As early as 1924, Tate dedicated a poem to Warren entitled "To a Romantic"; yet despite their fundamental differences of opinion, they remained lifelong friends. Other critics pointed out Warren's Romanticism. Again, commenting on "Billie Potts,"

Waggoner notes "Warren's role as a bridging figure between the Fugitives and the more persistent and rooted romantic and transcendental tradition of Emerson, Whitman, Lindsay, Hart Crane, and Cummings" (Waggoner, p. 550). Waggoner also comments that in the volumes of poetry published since Brothers to Dragons, Warren continues a steady progress toward the Romantic, the direct, the personal, and the visionary in poetry (Waggoner, p. 555).

As time goes on, Warren becomes more and more a pivotal figure between the Eliot programme and the twentieth-century Romantics. His poetry is persistently identified as Romantic, but his most influential criticism (if Understanding Poetry may be classified as a critical work) is firmly a part of the New Critical program. Still, Warren has never been openly antagonistic toward the Eliot programme. There have been, however, deliberate attempts from other quarters to refute Eliot and those aspects of the New Criticism that support his programme. Eliot's poetry is seen as a danger to prospective poets in much the same way that Milton's poetry was originally seen as dangerous by

Eliot.[18] Eliot's detractors cannot deny the original impact that his poetry had, but they warn against the allusive, scholarly, academic type of poetry for which Eliot was exemplar.

The opponents of the Eliot programme argue against the impersonal theory of poetry and against the New Critical trend of replacing judgment with theory, but primarily they oppose Eliot's attempt to establish the Metaphysical

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[18] T. S. Eliot, "Milton I," in On Poetry and Poets, by T. S. Eliot (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1943), pp. 156-57. In this essay, first contributed to Essays and Studies of the English Association, Oxford University Press, 1936, Eliot writes: "Many people will agree that a man may be a great artist, and yet have a bad influence. There is more of Milton's influence in the badness of the bad verse of the eighteenth century than of anybody's else: he certainly did more harm than Dryden and Pope, and perhaps a good deal of the obloquy which has fallen on these two poets, especially the latter, because of their influence, ought to be transferred to Milton. But to put the matter simply in terms of 'bad influence' is not necessarily to bring a serious charge: because a good deal of responsibility, when we state the problem in these terms, may devolve on the eighteenth century poets themselves for being such bad poets that they were incapable of being influenced except for ill. There is a good deal more to the charge against Milton than this; and it appears a good deal more serious if we affirm that Milton's poetry could only be an influence for the worse, upon any poet whatever. It is more serious, also, if we affirm that Milton's bad influence may be traced much farther than the eighteenth century, and much farther than upon bad poets: if we say that it was an influence against which we still have to struggle."

In 1947, eleven years after the first "Milton" essay, Eliot delivered the Henrietta Hertz Lecture to the British Academy. Again, his topic was Milton. In this essay--"Milton II," included in On Poetry and Poets--Eliot seems to have formed a more favorable opinion of Milton's influence on young writers. He writes, "I consider him a great poet and one whom poets to-day might study with profit." (p. 169)

tradition as the clearly dominant or only viable tradition of Modern poetry. Instead, they support Romanticism, especially nineteenth-century American Romanticism, as the central tradition of Modern poetry. They do not deny that the Metaphysical poets have had an impact on the Modern period, but where Eliot, Brooks, and others see one stream of Modern poetry, their detractors see two streams, one the Metaphysical tradition and one the Romantic tradition. The poetry in the Romantic tradition, in their view, is dominant and Whitman is the seminal figure.

The critic who has most actively championed the Romantic traditions of Modern poetry (or the Whitman Tradition as he names it), is Karl Shapiro. Primarily a poet, he has spent his reluctant critical career refuting everything that Eliot stands for. Shapiro's criticism is characterized by a bluntness and a head-on approach when discussing the critical methods and theories of Eliot and others with whom he disagrees. It is markedly different from the measured tones of the Eliot programme.

Shapiro's initial attack on Eliot's critical dominance is Start with the Sun, a collection of critical essays written by Shapiro and two colleagues, James E. Miller, Jr. and Bernice Slote. Their intention is to balance, if not replace, the contemporary influence of the Metaphysical tradition with Romanticism, particularly American Romanticism. Significantly, Start with the Sun is

subtitled Studies in the Whitman Tradition. The authors feel that the main traditions of twentieth-century poetry are found in Blake, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Emerson, and Thoreau, but that Whitman is the major poet of the tradition. In the opening chapter of Start with the Sun, entitled "The Whitman Tradition," Bernice Slote presents the theory that underlies the entire book:

> There are two main streams of poetry in our time, not one. Both are reputable. The Eliot tradition is, in fact, only the more vocal half of modern poetry; and the other tradition, though generally unrecognized, is a definable force, different from but equal to its companion way of poetry. I shall call it the Whitman tradition, from the poet who is its focal point--though it would be a fair comparison to call it the New Paganism.[19]

This New Paganism is defined largely in terms of what is characteristic of Whitman's poetry. According to Slote, it involves an unsophisticated joy and wonder in the natural world, it believes in the body equally with the soul; it is affirmative in its constant sense of life (Miller). Obviously, these characteristics are in general opposition to the critical stand and poetic practice of Eliot and his followers. Taking no pains to disguise her dislike for the Eliot programme, Slote dubs it the "New Puritanism" and lists what she sees as its characteristics. According to her, the characteristics include intellectual complexity,

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[19]James E. Miller, Jr., Karl Shapiro, and Bernice Slote, Start with the Sun: Studies in the Whitman Tradition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), p. 4.

concentration into cubicles of wit, a wasteland derogation of possibilities, lack of physical joy, rigorously honed intellectualism, worship of the soul being replaced by worship of the mind, connotations of harshness, obscurity, and dogma, and an overall coloring of intellectual pride and wry despair (Miller, pp. 3-4).

The tone of Start with the Sun may be harsh, but the Shapiro group was faced with a situation in which their opponents hardly even acknowledged their argument. So pervasive was the Eliot influence that the general critical climate barely allowed for anything other than the Metaphysical traditions of Modern poetry. For the most part, the few spokesmen for a twentieth-century Romanticism were ignored; their sometimes strident tone became necessary to make their presence known.

Such is the tone of a critical work published by Shapiro in 1952, In Defense of Ignorance. If the purpose of Start with the Sun is to propose an alternative tradition for Modern poetry, the purpose of In Defense of Ignorance is no less than to overthrow the view of Modern poetry advocated by Eliot and those of like mind. Shapiro proceeds in his usual brash manner, taking as his first step the elimination of Eliot. The task presented special problems. In his initial essay, "T. S. Eliot: The Death of Literary Judgment," Shapiro explains the predicament:

> Eliot created a literary situation deliberately; he and his 'situation' are fabrications, and very plausible fabrications at that. In other words, Eliot invented a Modern World which exists only in his version of it; this world is populated by Eliot's followers and is not a reality. The Eliot population consists of a handful of critics and professors and a few writers of Eliot's generation, though one would think, reading modern criticism and teaching from modern literary textbooks, that there really is a kingdom of Modern Poetry in which T. S. Eliot is the absolute monarch and Archbishop of Canterbury in one.[20]

In trying to overthrow the Eliot view of Modern poetry, Shapiro was first confronted with the task of toppling Eliot from his position as arbiter of literary taste. The method Shapiro hit upon was to deal with the "poetry as poetry, as if Eliot had never published a single law or set up a single guidepost to correct taste" (Shapiro, p. 42). It had become commonplace to criticize Eliot for a discrepancy between his critical dicta and his poetic practice, but Shapiro's plan moved a step beyond this approach. His plan was to ignore the theories of Modern poetry as developed by Eliot and his followers, and to replace these theories with judgement. The result, Shapiro hopes, would be a fresh look at Modern poetry in which the poets would be judged on the merits of their poetry instead of their adherence to a theory built around literary traditions.

Shapiro is not taking issue with the practice of the poet-critic. He does believe, however, that Eliot and the

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[20]Karl Shapiro, In Defense of Ignorance (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 36.

New Critics have gone astray when, instead of concerning themselves with criticism, they establish theories about the traditions of Modern poetry and then make their judgements according to a poem's adherence to those theories. Shapiro sees slavish adherence to theories about tradition leading to obvious errors of judgement. As an example, Shapiro cites Eliot's advocacy of Kipling and Donne while disparaging Whitman and Milton. He might just as well have added Eliot's excessive praise for Djuna Barnes' Nightwood while almost completely ignoring William Carlos Williams. In order to remain true to the theory that he had been instrumental in establishing, Eliot was forced to discount the nineteenth-century Romantics and ignore their twentieth-century inheritors. Therefore, while calling attention to the dangers of passing critical judgment on individual writers, Eliot's critical theory essentially had the effect of forcing him to make blanket judgmental decisions covering whole traditions of writers.

So far, Shapiro's attack on Eliot has not been answered by Eliot's followers, but this silence should be taken as a sign that the supporters of Romanticism have won unanimous approval. The efforts of Shapiro and those who think as he does have caused a lessening of the Eliot programme's unquestionable dominance of the traditions of Modern poetry. Major criticism is supporting the importance of those writers that Shapiro touted--D. H. Lawrence, Hart Crane, Dylan Thomas, Henry Miller, And William Carlos Williams among others. Even

Brooks appears to have tempered his earlier stance on tradition and New Critical methods. In 1965 he wrote "A Retrospective Introduction" to Modern Poetry and the Tradition in which he says, "A wider experience, a more catholic taste, perhaps simply the caution of middle age, now suggest qualifications of the more one-sided judgments and alterations of the sometimes peremptory tone" (Brooks, Modern Poetry, p. vii). Brooks here still champions the Metaphysicals and their influence on Modern poetry, but he is now willing to take into account the influence of the Romantics on Modern poetry and even gives passing notice to the viewpoint Shapiro expressed in In Defense of Ignorance. Brooks's change appears to be a genuine attempt to broaden the scope of his earlier theories, without abandoning the core of those theories. His change goes so far as to express a desire to place more stress on the extent to which Eliot and other Modern poets built upon the Romantic tradition and incorporated structural devices that were part of the general Romantic tradition (Brooks, Modern Poetry, p. xiv).

What Brooks refuses to abide is Romantic theory, with its emphasis on the poet and the process of composition. Many of the characteristics of the Romantic poets and the criticism of those who have supported them remain objectionable to Brooks, but he appears willing to consider the influence of Romantic tradition on twentieth-century poetry and to consider the values of Romantic poetry itself. As one

would expect, his method is to apply New Critical methods to Romantic poetry, but in the process he is able to uncover considerable value in the poetry and in the tradition that spawned it. In later critical works, Brooks softens his early stand on the study of poetry further. In A Shaping Joy, a collection of essays published in 1971, his mood of qualification extends all the way to New Critical theory. He expresses his unease over the label "New Criticism" and suggests broadening its usual definition so that it might better be called "structural" or "formal criticism." Since Brooks and other New Critics have been talking in terms of structural and formal criticism for some years, the suggested change of names heralds little difference in what had become New Critical practice. Brooks continues to emphasize the need to study the poem as a poem, and to distinguish the final work from its composition and its effect on the reader; he does make concessions, however, to what was originally taboo to the avowed methods of New Criticism. Seemingly without reluctance, Brooks admits that there are times when it is necessary to take into account how a writer is qualified by his age and how the reader can influence his composition.[21]

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[21]Cleanth Brooks, A Shaping Joy: Studies in the Writer's Craft (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. xiii.

Even if Brooks had modified somewhat his support of the view that a major poetic revolution in this century has superseded the Romantic trend of thought, the anti-Romantic views expressed by those of the Eliot programme still have had the widest currency. This currency has resulted not so much from the undeniable accuracy of the anti-Romantics' theory as it has from the wide dissemination their views have received. The majority of the writers about poetry in the last fifty years have been supporters of the dominance of a new movement. In addition, many of these critics--Tate and Eliot, for example--also have been respected poets whose poetry supported their criticism and vice versa. Add to this situation the fact that many of these same people have been influential teachers, anthologists, and editors of literary reviews, and it becomes clear why their views appear to dominate the literary scene. In response to this connection between critic and editor, Bernice Slote writes, "Most of the writers <u>about</u> poetry have been themselves a part of the New Puritanism, and the circle of critical journal to critic to poet to journal has been unbroken" (Miller, p. 5).

The situation has been gradually changing, in large part because of the efforts of Shapiro and those who have worked with him. Shapiro may be the most outspoken advocate of the Romantic movement's continued strength, but there have been numerous others supporting his position. Some of these critics, such as Harold Bloom, have been insistent on the

excellence of Romantic works in the twentieth century, while at the same time allowing for the simultaneous existence of a second tradition.[22] Other critics, such as Nathan Scott, have insisted on the unbroken, unchallenged progression of Romanticism. Scott, who calls the twentieth-century quarrel with Romanticism a "family quarrel," writes: "The fact remains that the great tradition of twentieth-century literature is, fundamentally, a product of the Romantic dispensation."[23] Louis Simpson appears to have taken his cue from the Shapiro group's concern with the Whitman tradition and has updated their theory. Commenting on an anthology of contemporary American poetry, he notes that the poetry represents a strengthened renewal of Romanticism.

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[22]Bloom has been an unabashed advocate of the dominance of twentieth-century Romanticism, providing book-length studies of the Romanticism of Yeats and Stevens. [Harold Bloom, Yeats (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) and Harold Bloom, Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977)]. He has also done more wide-ranging studies on the Romantic tradition, following the Romantic thread through the poetry of Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Emerson, Whitman, Yeats, Lawrence, Stevens, and Crane. [Harold Bloom, The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971)]. Despite his concentration on the Romantic tradition, Bloom has not grown antagonistic toward the Modern poetry of the Metaphysical tradition.

[23]Nathan A. Scott, Jr., The Broken Center: Studies in the Theological Horizon of Modern Literature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 11.

Like Shapiro, Simpson detects the influence of Whitman, and also sees William Carlos Williams as a major influence.[24]

Although most of the criticism supporting a twentieth-century Romanticism has concentrated on American poetry, modern Romanticism has not been limited to America. One of the most indicative pieces of criticism, dealing with the whole spectrum of poetry written in English, comes in the 1973 edition of The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry. In an introduction intended for beginning students of poetry, Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair trace the beginnings of Modern poetry to Romanticism. While characterizing Romanticism primarily by its emphasis on individuality, Ellmann and O'Clair state that "to this extent at least we remain within the purview of the Romantic movement."[25] Tellingly, the editors begin their anthology of Modern poetry with a selection of poems by Whitman, apparently endorsing him as the beginning point and major influence of Modern poetry. When considering the effects that Understanding Poetry had on a generation of readers, it is fair to assume that The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry will have somewhat of a counterbalancing effect. Both anthologies are aimed at

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[24]Louis Simpson, Three on the Tower: The Lives and Works of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams (New York: Morrow, 1975), p. 311.

[25]Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair, eds., The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1973), p. 1.

the same general type of audience, but a generation apart. It is presumptuous to assume that any anthology will ever equal the influential position that Understanding Poetry held, but it does appear that many of this generation's poetry students will be schooled in the acceptance of Romanticism as the dominant tradition of twentieth-century poetry. At one time, a standard Modern poetry anthology taking this stand would have been met with skepticism or downright unacceptance. The very appearance of such an anthology is indication that the critical temper has changed. It is no longer too much to ask readers to accept the possibility of two major traditions in Modern poetry; it appears that we are at the point where the idea of Romanticism as the dominant tradition can be proposed with a good chance of acceptance.

If one were to look solely at the criticism written during the first three quarters of the twentieth century, the poetry of the Eliot programme would appear to have an overwhelming superiority. This situation belies poetic realities. Where the poetry of the Romantic tradition has lagged behind the poetry of the Eliot programme is purely in the amount of critical attention paid to it. Scholarship naturally gravitated toward the academic poetry written by Eliot and his followers, and many of the poets who fall in the Eliot programme were themselves major critics. Nowhere among the twentieth-century inheritors of the Romantic

tradition has a poet-critic appeared to equal either the skill or stature of Eliot, or even Tate. Critical recognition is finally catching up with the realities of Modern Romantic output, but it has done so largely without the critical help of the major Romantic poets. Many of the preferences that helped to place a writer within the Romantic tradition--an aversion to scholarship, an extreme naturalness that is often the result of little or no university training, emphasis on individual solutions to his problems--all tend to make the Romantic shy away from making critical pronouncements or developing critical theories on his own. It is not in the Romantic nature to write formal criticism promoting his beliefs. As often as not, his critical comments must be gleaned from letters, interviews, and casual remarks. The Romantic has neither the training, the determination, nor the desire to produce major criticism.

That those of the Eliot programme wrote the major criticism is obvious. When it comes to the poetry itself, there is less certainty. It is fruitless to argue whether the Romantics or those of the Eliot programme wrote the better poetry; both groups have produced major poetry, but it now appears as though the Eliot programme did not produce a permanent revolution of the type Brooks once predicted. The Romantic tradition has ultimately provided a more appropriate

response to the situations that confronted the poet in the Modern period.

CHAPTER III

THE ELIOT PROGRAMME FOR MODERN POETRY

In the opening of "The Second Coming" in 1919, W. B. Yeats succeeded in capturing the mood of the times:

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.[1]

For the Modern poet, those times were characterized by an overwhelming chaos. His world lacked a stable center available to earlier generations and at the heart of his poetic endeavor was an attempt to find a way to survive the chaos or to bring an order to it.

For some writers, such as T. S. Eliot, the causes of this chaos reached as far back as the dissociation of sensibility that he believed followed the Metaphysical period. The Romantic Rebellion especially was seen as contributing to the chaos because it helped to break down a fixed social order that had existed for centuries. Not only was the great chain of being no longer a viable world view,

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[1]W. B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats: Definitive Edition, With the Author's Final Revisions (New York: Macmillan, 1956), pp. 184-85.

but the Romantic stress on the individual's preeminence denied that very individual the comfort of a predictable, stable social order. In the extreme, the individual's strongest allegiance was to himself, rather than to a higher authority such as church or state. At one time, religion provided a center of stability, but by the Modern period its decline had reached profound depths. J. Hillis Miller describes the deepening loss when he writes, "If the disappearance of God is presupposed by much Victorian poetry, the death of God is the starting point for many twentieth-century writers."[2]

It cannot be said that twentieth-century poets were antagonistic or even uncaring about the significance of religion, for religious concern pervades Modern poetry. Cleanth Brooks supports this contention when he writes, "Indeed, I must confess my suspicion that the decisive issue lying beneath the kinds of modern poetry has to do with that cloudy and difficult topic, religion."[3] That concern for religion, however, has not been characterized by an earlier age's calm confidence in its centrality. The Modern poet's concern for religion has been characterized by an agonizing search to rekindle the certainty of belief. The

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[2]J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 2.

[3]Cleanth Brooks, A Shaping Joy: Studies in the Writer's Craft (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), p. 54.

search is felt in poetry as diverse as that of Eliot and of Hart Crane, cutting across the boundaries of poetic philosophy.

While some poets tried to revive the old centers of stability, others turned in new directions for their solutions. Even before the turn of the century, science seemed to offer new hope. Through science it was hoped that the mysterious would become known, that the haphazard would become predictable, and that man's understanding of himself and his relationship to his surroundings would become fixed. Many poets of the Romantic tradition--Whitman and Hart Crane, for example--embraced science and incorporated its wonders into their poetry. Its use was not to still the chaos; science rather was seen as having aims similar to those of their own poetry. Both poetry and science could be used to unravel universal truths. For other literary figures such as Brooks and Warren, science and poetry had widely dissimilar aims. In Understanding Poetry we are told that the aim of science is to convey information, and that the aim of poetry is to convey attitudes, feelings, and interpretations.[4] The dichotomy expressed by Brooks and Warren may be in part a continuation of the Agrarian mistrust felt for science because of the industrialization and the economic changes

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[4]Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, eds., Understanding Poetry (New York: Henry Holt, 1938), p. 5.

that it brought about. In general, it became obvious that science alone could not effectively counter the chaos. Mistrust of it intensified as it became evident that new scientific discoveries, such as those contributing to modern warfare, would be applied in ways that, as often as not produced chaos.

For many, the ultimate betrayal of science came early in the twentieth century with the essential role it played in the horrors of World War I. More than World War II with its atomic bomb, the First World War became the major event in imbuing the world with a sense of chaos and despair. Few escaped its effects. Louis Simpson conveys a feeling of the post-war hopelessness when he tells us that the war caused a loss of confidence in government, God, and culture, and made it acceptable to say that you did not give a damn about culture because it only led to all that.[5]

The decline of religion and the chaos underlined by the war had a particularly strong effect on the career of Eliot. Although he attempted to turn to religion and the past for a sense of order, the war left its mark on him.

It was in the chaotic years around World War I that Eliot's literary career took shape. Events in both his literary and his personal life would have a major bearing on

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[5]Louis Simpson, Three on the Tower: The Lives and Works of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams (New York: Morrow, 1975), p. 119.

his development as critic and poet. The war intruded directly on Eliot's life in 1914, the year when he was studying on a traveling fellowship in Germany at the time when the war broke out. Instead of returning to the States, he decided to settle in London. There he began his close association with Ezra Pound, and it was through the intervention of Pound that "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was published in the June, 1915, issue of Harriet Monroe's Poetry. Although Eliot had written and published poems as a student, and "Prufrock" was itself completed in 1911, the appearance of this poem in Poetry marked the publication of Eliot's first paid poem. (He received eight guineas.) Before the war was over, Eliot published his first collection of poetry--Prufrock and Other Observations--and his reputation in the vanguard of a new poetic movement was being established.

This early poetry set the standards for the poetry that Brooks saw constituting a new revolution in poetry. Some of the characteristics, such as the tremendous allusiveness, are immediately evident. The number and range of the allusions, one of the most constant characteristics of Eliot's poetry, in turn embodies other trademarks. One is the scholarly nature of the poetry. As I. A. Richards notes, the use of allusions is one reason Eliot's poetry is often accused of

being over-intellectualized.[6] The sheer number of allusions in Eliot's poetry can be exasperating (in The Waste Land alone, Edmund Wilson counts allusions to or imitations of at least thirty-five writers, many several times),[7] but Eliot's use of allusions is not merely a flaunting of his own extensive reading. They serve as an economical way to add layers of meaning to a poem while using a minimum of lines. Their effective use does, however, depend upon the assumption that the poet and his readers share a vast body of knowledge. This learned approach to poetry contrasts markedly with that of the Romantic poets, who admired no one more than the innate poetic genius who sprang from a background of little or no formal schooling.

A second characteristic associated with the allusions is Eliot's conscious concern for literary tradition. From "Prufrock" on, it is obvious that he writes with a conscious awareness of past literature, making use of that literature through the allusions to create new meanings from it and very particularly locating his own poetry in the stream of literature. Even the choice of literatures he makes for his allusions tells much about which writers and which traditions he admires.

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[6] I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1925), p. 290.

[7] Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 110.

Tradition itself occupies a central position in Eliot's poetry. In constrast to the Romantic emphasis on the individual, Eliot substitutes the individual's subservience to the tradition. This substitution goes hand in hand with the deliberately impersonal poetry that Eliot aimed at writing. Again it is Eliot's desire to keep the poet in the background. In protecting his own privacy, he adamantly insisted that no biography be written. In the poems, the reader never encounters the self revelation of Romantic poetry. Because of its sentimentality, Eliot derides it, emphasizing instead calm reason.

The result is a poetry that is not only academic, but one that is frequently accused of being cold. As has been noted, Bernice Slote detects a "lack of physical joy" in Eliot's poetry,[8] but the pessimism, especially prevalent in the early poems, has deep-rooted causes. There is Eliot's unfortunate marriage to Vivien Haigh-Wood in 1915, but a more important cause of the pessimism is the debilitating character of the times in which Eliot was writing. The poetry displays a despair about possibilities--a sense of helplessness in the face of overwhelming chaos. Stasis dominates "Prufrock," only gradually giving way to activity. The Waste Land, despite its generally being taken

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[8]James E. Miller, Karl Shapiro and Bernice Slote, Start with the Sun: Studies in Cosmic Poetry (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), p. 3.

as the ultimate despair, at least introduces the stirrings of the search to bring order to the chaos. Futile as that search may seem, it provides a beginning that finally bears fruit with Ash-Wednesday and later poems.

Eliot's poems are not the product of incisive moments of inspiration. Rather, they are the deliberate results of a poetic theory that he developed early in his career. The four or five years following World War I saw the emergence of Eliot as both major critical voice and major poet. By the time The Waste Land was published in October, 1922, Eliot's criticism had already laid out the directions his "programme for the metier of poetry" would take.

Several of the early essays have become classics essential in understanding the broad aims of Eliot's poetry. The most central to his programme, and one of the earliest of Eliot's essays, is "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which appeared in 1919 and was later anthologized in The Sacred Wood. In this essay, Eliot emphasized the relationship between past and present poetry--the necessity of the poet to write with an awareness of the traditions in which he writes, an awareness of how that tradition influences his poetry, and how he in turn

influences the tradition.[9] Although Eliot does not directly mention Romanticism in his statements on tradition, the ultimate purpose of the essay is to check the continued dominance of the Romantic tradition. Eliot hardly mentions Romanticism, but "Tradition and the Individual Talent" challenges many of the central tenets of Romanticism. One of the main challenges is to the Romantics' emphasis on the individual (especially the poet) in his relation to his society. In Eliot's programme, the poet acts only as a catalyst in the poetic process, being essential for the

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[9]T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in Selected Essays, 3rd ed., by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 15. "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities."

creation of the poem, while evidence of his particular personality is absent in the final product.[10] As part of the impersonal theory, Eliot challenges Romanticism on another front--in the relationship between emotion and poetry. Taking as his point of departure Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity,"[11] Eliot claims that poetry "is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquillity" (Eliot, p. 21). Eliot goes on to say that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from personality" (Eliot).

Despite a general antipathy toward Romanticism, Eliot did on occasion speak favorably about individual Romantic writers. He may have taken issue with Wordsworth's

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[10]Eliot, p. 18. "The analog was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected: has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material."

[11]William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of 'Lyrical Ballads,' 1800," in William Wordsworth: Selected Poetry, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Modern Library, 1950), p. 693.

definition of poetry, but he still called Wordsworth and Coleridge "the two most original poetic minds of their generation."[12] It appears that he even borrowed from some of their ideas. Eliot's own impersonal theory shows considerable resemblance to a statement made by Keats in a letter to Richard Woodhouse dated October 27, 1818.

> As to the poetic Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself--it has no self--it is every thing and nothing--It has no character--it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated--It has much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity--he is continually in for--and filling some other Body--The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute--the poet has none; no identity--he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures.[13]

Obviously, Eliot found useful certain ideas expressed by Romantic writers, but the early criticism shows Eliot

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[12]T. S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), p. 70.

[13]John Keats, The Letters of John Keats, 4th ed., ed. Maurice Buxton Forman (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 226-27.

in stiff opposition to the wider spectrum of the Romantic tradition. In 1921, Eliot published a review essay entitled "The Metaphysical Poets." Nearly as central as "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in the Eliot programme, this essay clearly establishes Eliot's preference for the Metaphysical tradition, especially as it contrasts to the periods that followed it. The criticism shows that it is not so much the poetry of individual writers that Eliot cannot abide. His programme has a much broader foundation, involving a way of thinking that developed between the times of the Metaphysical and Victorian periods.

The Eliot programme asks us to assume that the poets of the early seventeenth century represented the "direct and normal development of the precedent age," and it also asks us to consider whether or not their virtues were "permanently valuable, which subsequently disappeared" (Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," Selected Essays, p. 285). To Eliot, the Metaphysical writers were the last to be securely within the main tradition of English literature. As described in "The Metaphysical Poets," the break in this main tradition was aggravated by the particularly strong influence of Milton and Dryden, and it had two aspects. The first Eliot called the "dissociation of sensibility," an inability on the poet's part to unify his experiences, to create new wholes from disparate experiences. The poets who wrote before this dissociation set in were able to unify

their experiences and were therefore able to transform thought into feeling. The second aspect of the break in tradition, which did not become manifest until early in the eighteenth century, involved a poets' revolt against the ratiocinative and descriptive. Instead, Eliot tells us, the poets reflected--thinking and feeling in fits. This reflecting in turn led to an age of sentimentality rather than reason (Eliot, "Metaphysical," pp. 286-88).

The Eliot programme for Modern poetry had been mapped out before the publication of The Waste Land in 1922. After this point, much of the criticism is an elaboration of the early theories, and an application of these theories to particular writers. Eliot also went on to write a large body of social criticism in which he extended his theories of tradition and order beyond literature to culture and religion.

This order that Eliot had in mind was molded after what existed during and prior to the Metaphysical period. It was built mainly around the idea of a unified sensibility. Despite his warnings against judgment, Eliot was prone to judge poets on the basis of whether or not they exhibited this unified sensibility. For example, he was generally antagonistic toward Shelley but found it worth favorable note that in a few passages from "The Triumph of Life" the

poet was struggling toward a unified sensibility.[14] The inference is clear; if the Romantics had been more consistently successful in unifying their sensibilities, they would have been favored by Eliot and placed in the main tradition of English poetry.

It is in this same tradition that Eliot labored to establish himself, but beyond the implications for his own poetry, it is the underlying purpose of Eliot's poetry and his criticism to re-establish the pre-Romantic tradition as the dominant tradition in his own time. The method of restoring the pre-Romantic tradition is, in Eliot's view, to impose an order upon reality that had been destroyed with the dominance of Romanticism. In an essay entitled "Poetry and Drama," Eliot writes, "It is a function of all art to give us some perception of an order in life, by

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[14]Eliot, Use of Poetry, p. 25. Of the Romantics' effect on tradition, Eliot says about Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley:

"A great change in the attitude towards poetry, in the expectations and demands made upon it, did come, we may say for convenience towards the end of the eighteenth century. Wordsworth and Coleridge are not merely demolishing a debased tradition, but revolting against a whole social order; and they begin to make claims for poetry which reach their highest point of exaggeration in Shelley's famous phrase 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind.'" [sic]

Eliot, "Metaphysical," p. 288. "The sentimental age began early in the eighteenth century, and continued. The poets revolted against the ratiocinative, the descriptive; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced; they reflected. In one or two passages of Shelley's Triumph of Life, in the second Hyperion, there are traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility."

imposing an order upon it."[15] He goes on to elaborate,

> For it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no farther. (Eliot, "Poetry," p. 94)

From these statements it is obvious that Eliot did not conceive of the desired order as residing in art itself. The inherent order lay in the observable world, though it was an order that did not readily manifest itself. No art for art's sake here: the purpose of art is to draw out the hidden order. As J. Hillis Miller describes the process, "Art for Eliot imposes pattern in order to reveal one which has been there invisibly all along. This pre-existent order is shy to reveal itself and can be brought to light only by a created order, the 'musical design' of art" (J. Hillis Miller, p. 144). Art, like the artist, apparently serves as a catalyst to produce the desired effect.

The search for an order to combat the chaos underlies all of Eliot's major poetry. Eventually, he succeeded in combating the chaos, but despite winning the battle, he lost the war. The poet who advocated an impersonal theory of poetry achieved a spiritual condition of reconciliation and stillness in his own mind that was manifest in the poetry;

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[15] T. S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama," in On Poetry and Poets, by T. S. Eliot (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1943), p. 93.

however, even though he arrived at this order, he failed in his attempt to break the dominance of the Romantic tradition. In his search, Eliot attained the Holy Grail, but the land was not restored to fruitfulness. To Eliot and the followers of his programme, it may have appeared so, but the sight was a mirage spawned by a personal success.

In the quest for order, the search was different for each quester. Those who followed the Eliot programme could be assured some degree of success. For those outside the programme, it was a quest without end. Unfortunately for the Eliot programme, success in bringing order to the chaos was not an entirely desirable solution. In the quest for the Holy Grail, it was the search itself that grew in importance until the object of the search--the Grail--receded to a secondary importance. The quest gave purpose and direction to life; it was the muse that inspired poetry. It is no accident that once Eliot attained success in his quest for order, he ceased to write poetry. A continual search for order proved to be the most productive response to a situation that was in constant flux, although it was a response fraught with the most intense frustrations. Unfortunately for the success of the Eliot programme, reaching the desired order, unlike success in the quest for the Grail, did not have a salutary effect throughout the land.

In his first major poem, "Prufrock," Eliot shows no progress in his quest toward the desired order. At best, the poem defines those conditions that must be overcome, but presents no solutions. From its opening lines, a mood of inactivity dominates the poem and its persona. The initial image in "Prufrock," the evening pictured in terms of an anesthetized patient, is indicative of the stasis stressed throughout the poem, the first of several images to convey this lack of movement. As is usual for Eliot's method, the poem does not convey its meaning through an identifiable narrative line. One cannot even trust the physical or mental wanderings of the persona to discover a logical order of events. Rather, Eliot creates poetic order out of the seeming chaos of juxtaposed images and allusions. The images accumulate and branch to emphasize and also to expand ideas. The inactivity first expressed by the etherized patient image is supported very shortly by the image of a cat settling down to sleep. Reluctance to take action is expanded to the absolute inability to initiate any movement with the image of Prufrock pinned to the wall like an insect. The persona becomes immobilized by forces beyond his control; struggle becomes hopeless. As Elizabeth Drew points out, Prufrock finally resigns himself to the hopelessness of struggle when he cries, "I should have been a pair of ragged claws /

Scuttling across the floor of silent seas."[16] Drew identifies this crab image as a "longing for uncomplicated animal existence," and makes the point that the animal is unable to move forward.[17] Image builds upon image until the hopelessness of struggle becomes a pessimistic reality.

Eliot uses the same accumulative method with his allusions and the musings of his persona. The allusions, especially, work in a subtle way. In "Prufrock," they do not all refer to a single event, nor are they drawn from a single period or school of literature. The allusions force the reader's mind to shuttle back and forth along a literary time line, the allusions being unified only by their contributing to the poem's dominant mood of hopelessness. For example, the epigraph, taken from Dante's Inferno, moves the reader to the underworld. There, the flame of Guido describes it as the depth from which no one ever returned alive. Later, there is an extended allusion to Hamlet, who, like Prufrock, is fraught with indecision and paralysis. Eventually, Prince Hamlet does take action and Eliot's protagonist distinguishes himself from the prince, identifying himself instead with Polonius.

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[16]T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), p. 5.

[17]Elizabeth Drew, T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry (New York: Scribners, 1949), p. 36.

> No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
> Am an attendant lord, one that will do
> To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
> Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
> Deferential, glad to be of use,
> Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
> Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
> At times, indeed, almost ridiculous--
> Almost, at times, the Fool. (Eliot, "Prufrock," p. 4)

Other allusions emphasize the hopelessness of Prufrock's condition by contrasting their worlds of action to Prufrock's inactivity. Elizabeth Drew stresses this use of the allusions when she writes, "John the Baptist, Lazarus, Hesiod's Works and Days, Michelangelo and Shakespeare all 'disturb' Mr. Prufrock's pitifully enclosed universe" (Drew, p. 35).

While images and allusions help to convey Prufrock's world, it is ultimately the thoughts of Prufrock himself that convey to the reader the depths of his despair. Continually, we see Prufrock gingerly edge toward a decision to act (it would be going too far to say that he nears action itself), only to pull back in fear of the results a decision might precipitate. He finds a certain surety in his own hopelessness despite an awareness that his current attitude will not do. Again and again he asks, "Do I dare?" (Eliot, "Prufrock," p. 4) but the answer always comes back "No"--putting off, rejecting, avoiding a decision that might result in change. In a moment of self-mockery he asks, "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?" (Eliot, "Prufrock," pp. 4-5).

Parting his hair behind is the sort of universe-disturbing decision that he has in mind. For Prufrock, the slightest change brings with it the greatest trepidations, and he reaches no decision.

In Eliot's quest to bring some order to the chaos, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" expresses only the most rudimentary beginnings. The poem makes clear the difficulty of the task before the quester, without offering solutions or even pointing the direction toward a solution. No hope is proffered; there is only longing that ends in despair and resignation. The mere establishment of the conditions to be overcome, however, constitutes a starting point. "Prufrock" leaves no illusions about easy solutions for the quester to pursue. It remains for the later poems to define those first steps out of chaos toward order.

Progress proved to be slow and pessimism continued to dominate Eliot's poetry at least through "The Hollow Men." Nathan Scott describes this period as one whose predominant impression was "stoppage and closure."[18] Elizabeth Drew describes the best poems between "Prufrock" and "Gerontion" as being "concerned with the dramatic opposition of the world of today to sources of vitality and order from which it is not cut off and of which it has the most urgent need"

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[18]Nathan A. Scott, Jr., "Eliot and the Orphic Way," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 42 (June 1974), 215.

(Drew, p. 37). By the time of the appearance of The Waste Land in 1922, Eliot's poetry had established a reputation for pessimism and despair, and for a spiritual quest for a way out of the conditions that caused the despair.

The Waste Land presents a barren landscape that is in part a result of its ruler's own barrenness and in part a mirror of his condition. And throughout the poem, the physical infertility of the land and its inhabitants is a reflection of the spiritual sterility that dominates the quester confronted by the waste land conditions. Ray Olderman, who describes these conditions in his study of the American novel in the sixties, Beyond the Waste Land, writes in some detail:

> In the waste land all energies are inverted and result in death and destruction instead of love, renewal, or fulfillment. Water, a symbol of fertility in a normal land, is feared, for it causes death by drowning instead of life and growth. Wastelanders are characterized by enervating and neurotic pettiness, physical and spiritual sterility and debilitation, an inability to love, yearning and fear-ridden desires. They are sexually inadequate, divided by guilts, alienated, aimless, bored, and rootless; they long for escape and for death. They are immersed in mercantilism and materialism; their lives are vain, artificial, and pointless. Close to being inert, they are helpless in the face of a total disintegration of values. Life constantly leads to a reduction of all human dignity; the wastelander becomes idealless and hopeless as he falls prey to false prophets.[19]

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[19]Raymond M. Olderman, Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 11-12.

The quester in Eliot's poem starts from inactivity--not just an acceptance of his condition--but an actual preference for it. The poem is a depiction of the progress made in overcoming the conditions described by Olderman, loosely plotting the quester's movement from a Prufrock-like inactivity to a state where he becomes aware that these conditions need not be permanent.

For the first time, Eliot uses the actual Grail legend as the central metaphor around which to build his search for the belief that will turn pessimism into hope. The method, however, is not to use a straightforward, narrative re-telling of the legend. As in the poems prior to 1922, Eliot uses the method of seemingly random juxtapositions in which it is the reader's job to recognize the relationships among them. Cleanth Brooks, originally an unfavorable critic of The Waste Land, describes the poem as "full of such juxtapositions, offered dramatically and sometimes crashingly, without comment by the author" (Brooks, Shaping, p. 58). Brief scenes from contemporary life, imbued with personal allusions, are startlingly juxtaposed to references to the antiquity of the Grail legend.

As far back as the Grail legend can be traced, writers have been suiting it to their own purposes, altering details of the legend and emphasizing certain aspects over

others.[20] Eliot, for the most part, interprets specific features of the Grail story in a conventional way, but his emphasis and the unconventional juxtapositions of material allow for a very individual use of the legend.

Within the mosaic of allusions upon which The Waste Land is built, references to the Grail legend surface and fade in a recurring pattern that obliquely reveals the poem's theme of death and the possibility of regeneration. The waste land surroundings parallel those of the Grail legend, and numerous other key elements from the legend are

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[20]Several features of the Grail legend have remained constant--the Waste Land, the Fisher King, a Hidden Castle with its solemn Feast, a Feeding Vessle, and a Bleeding Lance and Cup--but as Jessie Weston points out, no prototype has been found to supply all these features. [Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1957), p. 3.]

Elizabeth Drew has provided a convenient outline of the main features of the Grail legend used in medieval literature, a period when the greatest use was made of this legend. She writes, "The legend appears in various confusing forms in medieval literature, but it always concerns a land which has been blighted by a curse so that it is arid and waterless, producing neither animal nor vegetable increase. Its plight is linked with that of its ruler, the Fisher King, who, as a result of illness or of a wound, has become sexually impotent. The curse is removed when a Knight appears who must ask the question as to the meaning of the Grail and the Lance--said in Christian terms to be the lance which pierced Christ's side at the Crucifixion, and the cup from which he and the disciples drank at the Last Supper. In some versions the mere asking of the question cures the King and saves the land. In others, the knight must go through various ordeals, culminating in that of the Chapel or Cemetery Perilous." [Drew, pp. 60-61.]

found in the poem. The Hanged Man, Tiresias, even the Chapel Perilous with its ritualistic questions to be put by the quester are part of the poem; but it is the Fisher King who plays a dominant role in Eliot's waste land. Eliot's presentation of the Fisher King is largely conventional, although the centrality of the Fisher King in Eliot's work is not consistent with the use made of the Fisher King in the Grail legend; Eliot's use of the material, however, shows that he did not feel bound merely to recreate his sources; instead, he suited them to his own purposes.

For Eliot, the Fisher King suited his purposes well because his condition so adequately expressed the pessimistic sense of despair that at this period lay at the heart of Eliot's poetry. As the result of an unspecified illness or wound, the Fisher King has become sexually impotent. The horror of the King's condition is that it is mirrored in his land. Like its king, the land lies in an infertile state; it is arid, and only the revival of the Fisher King will restore the land to fruition.

Within the general legend, the responsibility for the restoration of king and his lands lies with the quester, although, as with Gawain, the quester may not be fully aware of his task. In nearly all variations of the legend, the quester's task involves a prescribed set of questions about the nature of the Grail. The very act of asking the questions is usually enough to effect a cure. In some

versions of the legend the revival of the land comes about by healing the king, in others by restoring water to the arid land and thereby restoring its fertility.[21]

As in the poems prior to 1922, the central task in The Waste Land is to initiate some movement away from the paralysis that engulf both the land and its inhabitants. As is evident in the opening lines of The Waste Land, the inhabitants are discouraged by the arrival of April with its spring rains that promise restoration of the land. They are complaisant in the death-like conditions of winter.

Whereas water is conventionally seen as a source of revival, in The Waste Land it takes on a dual, contradictory meaning. On one hand, it offers hope for the land's recovery, but on the other hand, it becomes a source of death through drowning. The fear of having to undergo death as a prelude to revival (combined with a natural inclination toward the status quo) makes The Waste Land inhabitants doubly reluctant to welcome the opportunity afforded by the rains. This fear is supported in "A Game

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[21]The Peredur version of the quest closely resembles that of Chrétien. In both, the hero fails to ask the meaning of what he has seen in the Castle of Wonders and is told the consequences. The King will not be restored to health and his lands will remain enbroiled in a war that will cost many lives. In the Parzival version, the stress is laid on the suffering King. But blame and punishment are placed on the hero for failing to ask the prescribed questions. The land is not affected, either by the wound of the King or by the silence of the hero. [Weston, pp. 18-19.]

of Chess," where Eliot alludes to Ophelia's farewell speech. In this final allusion, death by water points to the fears that the waters may bring only death without regeneration.

In the final section of The Waste Land, "What the Thunder Said," Eliot maintains the ambiguity of the water symbol, but there are glimmers that acceptance of regeneration through the waters may become an actual possibility. The waste land finally may not be an eternity; rather, as Louis Simpson notes, it may only be a purgatory (Simpson, p. 144). The inhabitants of the waste land may not, by the end of the poem, feel the reviving rains, but they do experience positive signs of revival.

The last section opens with a stanza built on the crucifixion of Christ. The allusion is consistent with the central motif of the Fisher King: the death and subsequent resurrection as the means by which others might be saved. The images turn more hopeful, yet without that hope becoming a reality. We have the protagonist on his way to the Chapel Perilous accompanied by a series of speculations on what might be if there were water. But there is no water, only rock, and the hope remains unrealized. At best, there is only the anticipation of rain. Damp gusts stir, black clouds gather, and most important of all, the thunder sounds. As a harbinger of rain, the thunder advises to give, sympathize, control. In the final stanza, the Fisher King, represented as the man with three staves from the Tarot pack, sits upon

the shore fishing, the arid plain stretching behind him. As a final utterance, the thunder offers the words "Shantih shantih shantih."[22]

Despite the unrelieved state of the Fisher King, the barrenness of the land, and the failure of the quester to attain the Grail, the conditions expressed in the final stages of The Waste Land represent an advance over the initial stages of the poem. To be sure, the waste land is every bit as fruitless as it has ever been, but the inhabitants have progressed from an aversion to spring's return to an awareness that revival is an alternative. This awareness, however, may still fall short of desire. A general state of pessimism still pervades. As Nathan Scott notes, the pilgrim in The Waste Land gives no answer to the thunder and "knows himself to be irredeemably consigned to the arid plain stretching before him" (Scott, p. 216).

With "The Hollow Men," the first major poem to appear after The Waste Land, Eliot continued his quest for spiritual belief. Signs of hope appear, but hope is not yet attained. Pessimism and stagnation still dominate the world of "The Hollow Men"; and at a point nearly ten years after "Prufrock," these conditions give indications of calcifying into a permanent reality.

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[22]Eliot, "The Waste Land," Complete Poems, p. 50. "Shantih," the Sanskrit word for peace.

Like the earlier poems, "The Hollow Men" is highly allusive, depending for its meaning on the reader's comprehension of the unexpected and original juxtaposition of the allusions. Unlike the earlier poems, "The Hollow Men" is built primarily on allusions to just four literary works or historical events--the assassination of Caesar as presented in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, Dante's Divina Comaedia, Conrad's Heart of Darkness, and the historical account of the Gunpowder Plot. The allusions to these sources are united by their common association of treachery, darkness, and death; and by concentrating on these particular sources, Eliot creates a world of pessimism where signs of hope are fleeting at best.

Through the voice of the thunder, The Waste Land provided guidance on how to overcome the paralysis that gripped the land and its inhabitants. The quester waits for the reviving rains, which finally do not arrive. In "The Hollow Men," progress toward a way out of the pessimistic stagnation carries a degree of uncertainty. On the one hand is the deepening pessimism caused by the great length of time through which hope has remained allusive. The preponderance of the conditions is heightened because they follow a number of years and a substantial canon of poetry through which pessimism has dominated. Standing on its own, "The Hollow Men" does not quite reach the despair it does when seen in conjunction with the earlier poetry, for there

is a single ray of hope in the direct eyes. They stand in contrast to the hollow men, standing for the hope of redemption, whereas the hollow men stand for the single, final, and most condemning act, despair. Although there is no hope in the conclusion of "The Hollow Men," if taken alone, the poem offers a small advancement over The Waste Land with at least the appearance of a redeeming symbol. But it is left for later poems to take advantage of such symbols that will lead the quester out of the sterile land and revive the accompanying state of its inhabitants.

In the quest for stability, Eliot's poetry exhibited little reason for optimism through "The Hollow Men." With the appearance of Ash-Wednesday in 1930, the poetry began to show signs of change. The year 1927 was the one in which Eliot took up British citizenship and was baptized into the Anglican Church. The stability that he attained in his personal life appears to be reflected in the poetry, despite his attempt to remain the least personal of twentieth-century poets.

Ash-Wednesday is Eliot's most overtly religious poem, and the course of the poem reflects the personal struggle for belief that Eliot himself endured. It expresses the difficulty of turning to God, but the difficulty is not presented as insurmountable. For the first time in Eliot's major poetry, the pessimism of despair does not dominate the entire length of the poem. There is progression toward a

stable center, and finally, there are indications that the signs of hope might be accepted.

Elizabeth Drew notes this movement toward hope:

> The emotional condition may seem little different from that in The Hollow Men, but the attitude toward the condition is changed completely. The complete passivity of the opening poem has nothing in it of negative frustration. In place of hopeless abandonment to the blighting power of the Shadow, the compulsion to evade and escape, there is the willed renunciation and patience of a chosen attitude. (Drew, p. 99)

In the first section of Ash-Wednesday, the time for certainty is past and the persona gives up the struggle ("I no longer strive towards such things" /Eliot, "Ash-Wednesday," Complete Poems, p. 50/), and accepts his condition as one who will never achieve the stability afforded by belief. Fortunately, this moment of despair is short-lived, a despairing condition that achieved permanence in earlier poems becomes but a momentary lapse in Ash-Wednesday. A new dominant figure appears--the Lady and her garden--and provides, in Drew's words, "a new symbolic centre, in which the poet finds a renewal of life" (Drew, p. 98). The likelihood of a permanent despair appears to be past. Although the poem depicts the rising and falling hope that parallels the presence or absence of the Lady, the over-all movement is away from despair. Unlike The Waste Land and "The Hollow Men," gone is the danger that the infertile conditions will become a permanent condition.

The most hopeful aspect of Ash-Wednesday is the return of will. In an emotional reversal, the persona accepts the quest for spiritual regeneration and develops a desire for God. Success remains an uncertainty, but despair is no longer a lasting possibility. The waste land has ceased to exist because the quester actively takes up the quest. He realizes that final success cannot be achieved without God's grace, but the desire for that help is a major prelude for receiving it. The signs, especially in the form of the Lady, are hopeful that this help will be forthcoming.

Eliot's last major work in his quest was Four Quartets. As the various sections of Four Quartets appeared over a period of six years,[23] it became apparent that Eliot's poetry finally achieved the stable center toward which it strove through more than two decades. The chaos that had once thwarted the quester is still present, but it no longer stands as an impossible barrier between quester and his goal. Opposites, paradox, and negation are no longer the cause of chaos. Ironically, they are the materials from which Eliot constructs the new stability. Four Quartets concerns the reconciliation of opposing states that were formerly the cause of chaos. For example, "Burnt Norton" begins with the reconciliation of time.

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[23]"Burnt Norton" appeared in 1936. "East Coker" was published in 1940, "The Dry Salvages" in 1941, and "Little Gidding" in 1942. The individual sections appeared as a unit in 1943 under the title Four Quartets.

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past.
> If all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable. (Eliot, "Four Quartets," Complete Poems, p. 117)

Eliot had expressed a similar idea in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," but for the first time he felt able to dramatize this theory in poetic form. Past, present, and future all move toward a unity that Eliot describes as "the still point in a turning world" (Eliot, "Four Quartets," p. 119).

As Elizabeth Drew notes, "Keeping within these controlling metaphors of the part and the whole; sickness and health; heat and cold; and 'up and down,' Eliot points to the resolution and reconciliation of these opposites" (Drew, p. 172). The Fisher King was unable to experience rebirth in The Waste Land, but in Four Quartets the cyclical nature of death and regeneration is finally accepted. "East Coker" begins with the line, "In my beginning is my end" (Eliot, "Four Quartets," p. 123); it ends with the words, "In my end is my beginning" (Eliot, "Four Quartets," p. 129). The lines carry a multiple meaning. They refer not only to the life cyle of birth and death, but they also have a personal meaning. It was East Coker that Eliot's ancestors left for America, and now Eliot has returned to the place of his beginnings. Thus, the poem depicts a personal journey as well as a universal journey.

The journey is spiritual as well as physical. Eliot's poetry began in pessimism, and inactivity, and despair. That journey of his poetry was a quest for the stable center--the still point--that would counteract the chaos that caused despair and locked the quester to inactivity. With the publication of Four Quartets, Eliot demonstrated that he had arrived at the still center. It comprised a spiritual belief that unified the chaos, but that belief was also the state that enabled him to engage in a successful quest. At the same time, the spiritual belief that Eliot arrived at was both means and result.

Although Eliot argued for an impersonal poetry, the course of his poetry reflects the personal journey that he pursued to still the chaos he felt as an individual. Ultimately, he had to alter the precepts he set forth in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," because he found it necessary to confront the chaos on a personal level. As contemporaries, Eliot and the twentieth-century Romantics, who advocated a personal poetry, were subject to many of the same influences. The major influence for both was the chaos that characterized their age, and neither those who supported nor those who opposed the Eliot programme could escape its influence. Despite Eliot's protests that his poetry was not meant to express the disillusionment of his age, it did come to be seen that way. Followers and opponents set out on a quest to escape this disillusionment,

and Eliot succeeded. His poetry chronicled the quest he undertook and was also the embodiment of that quest. Four Quartets concluded Eliot's poetic search, but it was a Pyrrhic victory. Having attained the Grail, there would be no more poetic quests; Four Quartets became Eliot's last major poem. It served as a satisfactory conclusion to his personal quest; but it neither ended the Romantic way of thought, which Eliot held to be at the heart of the chaos, nor did it set out the path for others to follow in their own quests. For Eliot's Romantic contemporaries and for those who came after him, the Grail remained elusive.

CHAPTER IV

HART CRANE'S AFFIRMATION OF THE ROMANTIC TRADITION

Although Eliot and the followers who adhered to his programme for poetry seemed to dominate Modern poetry by way of the critical attention they received, a simultaneous course of poetry existed that was in direct opposition to the aims of the Eliot programme. Those opposed to Eliot, Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams foremost among them, saw Whitman as the fountainhead of their poetic tradition. In place of Eliot's emphasis on the English Metaphysical tradition, they supported the Romantic tradition, and especially the American Romantic tradition. They saw Eliot as a major hindrance to the acceptance of the poetry they were writing. They recognized the strength of Eliot's poetry and constantly had to be on guard against its pervasive influence, but their dispute with Eliot was not built on the relative merits on his poetry. They disputed the directions in which Eliot was taking Modern poetry and the way that he and his followers excluded poetry outside the Eliot programme from serious consideration. He made their task doubly difficult, requiring that they overcome the critical prejudices that his programme fostered while prevailing within the chaos under which all twentieth-century

poets labored. To the twentieth-century inheritors of the American Romantic tradition, Eliot was a major contributor to the chaos that confronted them.

For Hart Crane, however, Eliot was not always a burden to be overcome. In the early stages of his career, no other poet (even Whitman) had more influence on Crane than Eliot. Despite the lack of the formal education usually associated with those who were drawn to Eliot, Crane was barely twenty when he began to read Eliot seriously and to suggest him to new-found friends such as Allen Tate. Partly, Crane used Eliot to direct his reading to a variety of other writers--Laforge and the minor Elizabethans--but in large part Crane had a genuine appreciation for Eliot himself. In Crane's correspondence until approximately 1922, Eliot is the most consistent name to appear in lists of Crane's reading.

One of the earliest references Crane makes to Eliot in his correspondence is a letter to Gorham Munson dated November 22, 1919. He notes that Pavannes & Divisions, T. S. Eliot, Maupassant, and The Little Review were his steady companions.[1] A month later, he told Munson that increasingly, he was turning to Pound, Eliot and the minor Elizabethans for his values (Crane, p. 28). During this period, Whitman figured in Crane's reading, but Eliot

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[1]Hart Crane, The Letters of Hart Crane: 1916-1932, ed. Brom Weber (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1965), p. 24.

remained the dominant influence. Not only did he dominate the direction of Crane's reading, Crane also recognized the tremendous influence Eliot was likely to have on contemporary poetry, was wary of the magnitude of that potential influence. On October 13, 1920, Crane wrote to Munson, "Eliot's influence threatens to predominate the new English" (Crane, p. 44). At the time, the prospect of Eliot's dominating Modern poetry concerned Crane, but it did not have the unsettling effect it would have just a few years later.

Eliot's influence is obvious in Crane's early poems. Echoes of Eliot are evident in both the subject and technique of a poem such as "Porphyro in Akron," which was written a year following the appearance of "Prufrock." As in "Prufrock," pessimism pervades "Porphyro," breeding an inactivity that results from the poet's persona's inability to practice his craft because of an unaccepting public. Not only are the inhabitants of Akron unwilling to hear the poet; the bleak surroundings they create make it doubly difficult for the persona to develop a poetic frame of mind. The deadened atmosphere is inhospitable to poetry and Porphyro must "whisper words to myself / And put them in my pockets."[2]

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[2]Hart Crane, The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane, ed. Brom Weber (New York: Liveright, 1933), p. 144.

He is relegated to reading his poetry behind the closed doors of a hotel room.

Crane uses the same techniques as Eliot used to create his pessimistic landscape. His use of images is especially reminiscent of "Prufrock" and its "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels."[3] In neither poem is the narration straightforward. Images are juxtaposed so as to create a particular atmosphere rather than to provide a detailed narrative. Prufrock and Porphyro witness similar scenes in their wanderings through the city. Porphyro observes a shift of rubber workers trudging home after work, while Prufrock tells us, "I have gone at dusk through narrow streets / And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes / Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows" (Eliot, p. 5). The hopelessness of each persona is expressed in a similar way. Prufrock tells us, "I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas" (Eliot, p. 5); Porphyro tells us, "I will go and pitch quoits with old men / In the dust of a road" (Crane, Complete Poems, p. 144). These images are used to convey ideas as well as to create a tone, and even the sound of the lines is similar.

While the two poems have much in common, the most typical Eliot characteristic used by Crane is the

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[3]T. S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), p. 3.

juxtaposition of past and present--laying the ugliness of contemporary Akron against the beauty of the past. One instance of this is the comparison between the present-day lives of Akron's Swedish and Greek immigrants, and their memories of homelands rich in beauty and history. But the dominant juxtaposition of past and present is the comparison between Crane's modern-day Porphyro and Keats's Porphyro, who escapes with the beautiful Madeline in "The Eve of St. Agnes." This central allusion--used in the way that Eliot uses numerous, more concise allusions--underlies the poem and emphasizes the failure of Crane's persona through its comparison with the success of Keats' Porphyro.

This very early poem is not one of Crane's major achievements, but it best demonstrates the close ties he once had to Eliot. Judging by his earliest poetic efforts and the occasional criticism that can be gleaned from his letters, one would have expected Crane to continue as one of Eliot's fervent supporters, but he did not. Crane was attracted to Eliot at a time when he was in the process of educating himself through his own reading. The erudition of Eliot's poetry led Crane to writers whom he needed to know in order to understand Eliot's poetry. The help that Eliot gave Crane in his self-education is in large part responsible for Crane's being attracted to him, as in Crane's intuitive recognition of a new and exceptional poetry that would have a marked influence on the poetry of

his time. But Eliot was only one influence on Crane's reading. Before long, Crane began to recognize that although Eliot's poetry had its strong attractions for him, the ideas behind that poetry were incompatible with Crane's developing thoughts about poetry.

The temptation to imitate Eliot was strong, especially in matters of style, but Crane made a conscious struggle to free himself from the influence. Allen Tate, who had close ties to both men, claims that Crane "had to fight his way through Eliot in order to develop his own style--a not unusual situation in the history of poetry as well as of the novel."[4] "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" is one of the major early poems that exemplifies this struggle. The major similarity between Crane's poem and Eliot's poetry is once again the striking juxtaposition of past and present. The myth of Faustus and Helen underlies the contemporary situations of the poem. Crane's modern-day Helen is glimpsed behind the window of a streetcar. In the second section the scene shifts to a jazz club, and in the final section death arrives in the form of a gunman. The seeming incongruity of modern scenes and ancient myth startles, but is effective in underlining the eternal truths of the myth.

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[4]Allen Tate, Six American Poets from Emily Dickinson to the Present: An Introduction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), p. 4.

Like Eliot, Crane uses the material from the past to help define the present situation, but in the period 1922/23, Crane was already reacting against the pessimism that characterized Eliot's poetry. "For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen" was as much a response to Eliot's pessimism as it was an expression of his attitude toward the times. During the time he was writing it, Crane wrote to Tate:

> The poetry of negation is beautiful--alas, too dangerously so for one of my mind. But I am trying to break away from it. Perhaps this is useless, perhaps it is silly--but one does have joys. The vocabulary of damnations and prostrations has been developed at the expense of these other moods, however, so that it is hard to dance in proper measure. Let us invent an idiom for the proper transposition of jazz into words! Something clean, sparkling, elusive! (Crane, Letters, p. 89)

Less than a month later, Crane again wrote to Tate to discuss his aims concerning Eliot. More and more he seems concerned with countering Eliot and guarding against coming too strongly under his influence. Crane writes:

> What you say about Eliot does not surprise me,--but you will recover from the shock. No one ever says the last word, and it is a good thing for you, (notice how I congratulate myself!) to have been facing him for four years,--and while I haven't discovered a weak spot yet in his armour, I flatter myself a little lately that I have discovered a safe tangent to strike which, if I can possibly explain the position,--goes through him toward a different goal. You see it is such a fearful temptation to imitate him that at times I have been almost distracted. (Crane, Letters, p. 90)

In the poetry and correspondence of this period, it becomes obvious that the aim was to provide an alternative to Eliot's pessimism and the vehicle was to be "Faustus and Helen." With the poem nearly completed, Crane wrote to Charmion Wiegand,

> I find that I have derived considerable stimulation from Secession. Without it, there would be only the vague hope that the steady pessimism which pervades The Dial since Eliot and others have announced that happiness and beauty dwell only in memory--might sometimes lift. I cry for a positive attitude! When you see the first two parts of my "Faustus & Helen" that comes out in Broom in Feb. or March, you will see better what I mean. I've about finished the third and last part now, and am pleased at the finale. (Crane, Letters, p. 117)

Crane does not use the juxtaposition of past and present to condemn the present by comparison with the past. He expresses a consistent optimism about the present and the future, which is counter to the pessimism offered by the Eliot programme. Eliot's pessimism, dominant in the poems that Crane saw by the time that he wrote "Faustus and Helen," did not result merely from that longing we all have for a distant time when all things seem somehow better. For Eliot, the past shone brighter than the present because of the greater social order and individual certainty it appeared to have. The breakdown of order--quickened by the Romantic revolution, manifest in a dissociation of sensibility, and culminating in the chaos of the early twentieth century--caused Eliot's disaffection with the present. For him, only

the past offered an escape. Crane reacted to the same feeling of chaos, but voiced hope of overcoming it. He saw the danger residing in the Philistine mentality that threatened to destroy poetry as well as to destroy the beauty and knowledge that are its foundation. In the marriage of Faustus and Helen, Crane saw hope for successfully checking the Philistine tide. The marriage of knowledge (represented by Faustus) and beauty (represented by Helen) would be a strong enough force to overcome any challenge presented by Philistinism.

Although Crane's style and methods were still reminiscent of Eliot's poetry, his poetic ideas started to move away from and even oppose Eliot's ideas. Rather than lament the contemporary situation, Crane offered a positive alternative. He felt that the knowledge and beauty of poetry were strong enough to keep the chaos in check. The beliefs expressed in "Faustus and Helen" strongly echo Keats's "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'--that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."[5] Crane's expression of such a Romantic philosophy is one more indication that he was parting from Eliot's influence and his strong anti-Romantic bias. Referring to Part III of "Faustus and Helen," R. W. B. Lewis comments on the split between Crane and Eliot

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[5]John Keats, The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Keats, ed. Harold Edgar Briggs (New York: Modern Library, 1951), p. 295.

by describing the poem as "a valiant effort to examine the grounds of Eliot's 'philosophic pessimism,' and to give expression to the widely different judgment of history and human possibility that Crane nonetheless held."[6] In a similar vein, Sherman Paul argues that Eliot's The Waste Land and Crane's "Faustus and Helen" were both prompted by the tragic event of World War I, but that Crane affirms the renewal of life; that "Faustus and Helen" answers Eliot's response to the destruction and death of World War I with his own faith in the death's vital agency.[7]

Crane was certainly moving away from Eliot during the time that he wrote "Faustus and Helen," but Eliot's publication of The Waste Land considerably accelerated the split. Eliot's deepening pessimism and Crane's drift toward Romanticism made the breach unbridgeable. On January 5, 1923, after The Waste Land had appeared, Crane wrote to Munson,

> There is no one writing in English who can command so much respect, to my mind, as Eliot. However, I take Eliot as a point of departure toward an almost complete reverse of direction. His pessimism is amply justified, in his own case. But I would apply as much of his erudition and technique as I can absorb and assemble toward a more positive, or (if [I] must put it so in a sceptical age) ecstatic

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[6]R. W. B. Lewis, The Poetry of Hart Crane: A Critical Study (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 109.

[7]Sherman Paul, Hart's Bridge (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 78.

> goal. Certainly the man has dug the ground and buried hope as deep and direfully as it can ever be done. (Crane, Letters, pp. 114-15)

Crane's initial reaction to The Waste Land was one of disappointment; and he also seriously underestimated the impact it would have. He wrote to Munson, "What do you think of Eliot's The Waste Land? I was rather disappointed. It was good, of course, but so damned dead. Neither does it, in my opinion, add anything important to Eliot's achievement" (Crane, Letters, p. 105). The Waste Land would not only become the centerpiece of Eliot's poetry, but it would play a major role in the development of Crane's major poem, The Bridge. Crane conceived The Bridge in large part as an answer to The Waste Land, meant, as Robert Andreach points out, to be a reaffirmation of man's spiritual potentialities, which Crane saw as being rejected by The Waste Land.[8] Crane deliberately conceived The Bridge to be an optimistic alternative as well as a refutation of

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[8]Robert J. Andreach, Studies in Structure: The Stages of the Spiritual Life in Four Modern Authors (New York: Fordham University Press, 1964), p. 10.

the negativism and "poetic determinism" that dominated the Eliot school of poetry.[9]

Although Crane's poem was meant to oppose Eliot's philosophy, Crane did not feel the bitter antagonism toward Williams and Karl Shapiro. Eliot's poetry continued to influence Crane's reading. Crane showed particular pleasure when Eliot accepted "The Tunnel" section of The Bridge for publication in Criterion and he continued to hold the attitude that Eliot was the major poet of his age against whom other poets would be measured. There are even occasions when Crane's infrequent excursions into the realm of criticism echo Eliot's own poetic theories. For example, in

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[9]Crane, Letters, p. 236.

In 1926, Crane wrote to Gorham Munson at a time when the last section of The Bridge was completed and five or six other sections were just emerging. Crane expected the project to take at least another year. Concerning the poem and its relationship to Eliot, he wrote, "In a way it's a test of materials as much as a test of one's imagination. Is the last statement sentimentally made by Eliot,

'This is the way the world ends,
This is the way the world ends,--
Not with a bang but a whimper.'

is this acceptable or not as the poetic determinism of our age? I, of course, can say no, to myself, and believe it. But in the face of such a stern conviction of death on the part of the only group of people whose verbal sophistication is likely to take an interest in a style such as mine--what can I expect? However, I know my way by now, regardless. I shall at least continue to grip with the problem without relaxing into the easy acceptance (in the name of 'elegance' nostalgia, wit, splenetic splendor') of death which I see most of my friends doing."

an essay entitled "General Aims and Theories," Crane writes, "I would like to establish it [the poem] as free from my own personality as from any chance evaluation on the reader's part. (This is, of course, an impossibility, but it is a characteristic worth mentioning)" (Crane, Complete, p. 220). The idea is little more than a rewording of Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry. In practice, Crane made little attempt to employ the theory, but his statement shows him still to be uneasy about breaking with Eliot's guidelines. The Bridge itself echoes The Waste Land in several ways, in many of its images and also in the Eliot-like juxtaposition of those images. The complex structure of The Bridge echoes the structure of The Waste Land, demanding that the reader recognize the many allusions as well as comprehend the relationships between the seemingly discordant images.

The similarities between Eliot's poetry and The Bridge are largely limited to matters of style; by the time Crane was writing The Bridge, the philosophies of the two poets had grown apart. Crane's poem is optimistic, hopeful, imbued with the spirit of America and confidence in technology and the machine age. Eliot's poetry is just the opposite. But the irreparable difference between Eliot and Crane was Crane's siding with the American Romantic tradition. In The Bridge, Whitman replaced Eliot as Crane's mentor.

Crane's movement to the Whitman tradition was deliberate. Early in the composition of The Bridge, he recognized his affinity to Whitman and expressed as much to Gorham Munson, saying, "I begin to feel myself directly connected with Whitman. I feel myself in currents that are positively awesome in their extent and possibilities" (Crane, Letters, p. 128). The long period of composition of The Bridge did nothing to diminish Crane's loyalty to the Whitman tradition; if anything, time strengthened the ties between the two poets. In 1930, Crane wrote a critical essay entitled "Modern Poetry," which concludes:

> The most typical and valid expression of the American psychosis seems to me still to be found in Whitman. His faults as a technician and his clumsy and indiscriminate enthusiasm are somewhat beside the point. He, better than any other, was able to coordinate those forces in America which seem most intractable, fusing them into a universal vision which takes on additional significance as time goes on. He was a revolutionist beyond the strict meaning of Coleridge's definition of genius, but his bequest is still to be realized in all its implications. (Crane, Complete, p. 236)

By accepting the Whitman tradition, Crane was not only breaking away from Eliot, but he was settling himself in direct opposition to the Eliot programme. Bernice Slote, in Start with the Sun, defines the Whitman tradition:

> This tradition does have the pagan joy and wonder in the natural world, the living cosmos. It believes in the body as well as the soul, both in a unified duality that also combines emotion and intellect, good and evil. It is religious, physical, passionate, incantatory. It is

> affirmative in its constant sense of life.[10]

The incompatibility of such a stance with the Eliot programme is obvious. Once dedicated to the Whitman tradition, Crane was simultaneously excluding himself from the sort of order that Eliot was able to achieve in his later poems. Yet, both Crane and Eliot recognized the dangers presented by the chaos of their time. They felt the same lack of order that required from them a poetic response. In "General Aims and Theories" Crane wrote,

> It is a terrific problem that faces the poet today--a world that is so in transition from a decayed culture toward a reorganization of human evaluations that there are few common terms, general denominators of speech that are solid enough or that ring with any vibration or spiritual conviction. The great mythologies of the past (including the Church) are deprived of enough facade to launch good raillery against. (Crane, Complete, p. 218)

The year 1928 saw him writing to Munson,

> The spiritual disintegration of our period becomes more painful to me every day, so much so that I now find myself baulked by doubt at the validity of practically every metaphor I coin. In every quarter (Lewis, Eliot, Fernandez, etc.) a thousand issues are raised for one that is settled . . . . (Crane, Letters, p. 323)

Crane's quest for a response to the surrounding chaos could never lead him to a still center point of the type Eliot achieved. Instead, his working within the Whitman

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[10]James E. Miller, Jr., Karl Shapiro, and Bernice Slote, Start with the Sun: Studies in Cosmic Poetry (Lincoln, Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1960), p. 4.

tradition assured a continual quest and a constant disorder. Paul Zweig notes that in Specimen Days, "One glimpses Whitman half blundering, half steering himself toward one of the literary inventions of the modern age: formal fragmentation, stream of consciousness, disorder as a form of order."[11] This is an accurate description of Crane's own search for order through The Bridge, but it is precisely this method of responding to the chaos that brought so much criticism on Crane's poem. Allen Tate's criticism is characteristic: "His world has no center, and the thrust into sensation is responsible for the fragmentary quality of his most ambitious work."[12] Those like Tate could not accept the struggle for order as successful poetry unless that struggle moved steadily toward a conclusion. Criticizing The Bridge for its seeming lack of structure or its Romantic tendencies, a number of critics concurred

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[11]Paul Zweig, "Spontaneity Imitator," rev. of Walt Whitman: Daybooks and Notebooks, ed. by William White, New York Times Book Review, 16 April 1978, p. 9.

[12]Allen Tate, Essays of Four Decades (New York: William Morrow, 1968), p. 321.

with Tate's negative response.[13] A common response was to judge The Bridge as a "magnificent failure," emphasizing the "failure" half of the judgment. At the center of their criticism, these critics felt that the chaos was tamable, and refused to credit a poet who did not succeed in taming it. They refused to accept the futility of the task and recognize that success could be judged by the continuous response to the chaos and not strictly by the final result. They could not accept, as Eugene Nassar expressed it, that

> The poet is confident of no visionary kingdom, higher reality, truth, or immortality at the end of a personal or collective voyage--only of the cyclic alternation between a sense of order (whether personal or collective) and a sense of chaos.[14]

The Bridge is not what one would think of as an easily defined poem. It tends to defy any sort of orderly approach,

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[13]Several critics echoed Tate's opinion of The Bridge, praising Crane's ambition and various individual parts of the poem, but finding the overall poem flawed. A list of the more influential of these critics follows.

Blackmur, R. P. Form and Value in Modern Poetry. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957.

Cowley, Malcolm. "A Preface to Hart Crane." New Republic, 62 (23 April 1930), 276-77.

Deutsch, Babette. "Poet of a Mystical Atlantis." New York Herald Tribune Books (2 May 1948), p. 3.

Matthiessen, F. O. "American Poetry, 1920-40." Sewanee Review, 55 (January-March 1947), 24-55.

Winters, Yvor. "The Progress of Hart Crane." Poetry, 36 (June 1930), 153-65.

[14]Eugene Paul Nassar, The Rape of Cinderella: Essays in Literary Continuity (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 190.

for its organization is hardly obvious and its theme is not reducible to concise statements. It is a long poem that grew and mutated over the long course of its composition--approximately seven years--hardly beginning as the major work that it became. When Crane first considered writing The Bridge, in the winter of 1923, he saw it as a continuation of "Faustus and Helen," which he had just completed. Even more surprising in light of its eventual outcome, Crane expected The Bridge to be about the same length as the earlier poem.

The Bridge proceeded by fits and starts, with no overall plan emerging until long after it was begun. In the first year of work, 1923, Crane wrote some lines that eventually became part of the "Van Winkle" section, and he wrote several versions of "Atlantis" that were later discarded. Oddly enough, the "Atlantis" section would become the poem's concluding section. At this point, Crane put The Bridge aside and did not come back to it until the winter of 1926, when he again took up "Atlantis" and also worked on "Ave Maria." It was in this creative period that Crane developed his larger plan for The Bridge. And then a tremendous burst of creative energy occurred, of the sort that has often characterized Romantic poets; the sort of creative burst that Romantics will point to as proof of the innate genius of poetry coming on without precedent and often being visited upon poets who have had little formal training. While on the

Isle of Pines in the Caribbean, during a one-month period Crane wrote the majority of The Bridge. He revised "Atlantis" and "Ave Maria," wrote "Proem," "The Tunnel," and began "The Harbor Dawn" and "The River."

Back in New York state, Crane spent a nine-month period of inactivity, but then completed "Van Winkle" and "The River" by July, 1927. At this time Crane had in mind the final order of the entire poem, although a few sections had yet to be written. But then followed two years when nothing was written until in 1929, Harry Crosby promised to publish The Bridge through his Black Sun Press. Assured publication seemed to give Crane new drive. By September he had written "Cape Hatteras," and had begun work on "Quaker Hill" and "Indiana." On December 26, 1929, he wrote to Caresse Crosby, "I am hastily enclosing the final version of 'Quaker Hill,' which ends my writing on The Bridge. You can now go ahead and finish all" (Crane, Letters, p. 347). Thus, The Bridge came to be.

Despite the fact that Crane did not work on the sections in order, completing them instead in a seemingly random sequence and sometimes working on several sections during the same period, he was not unmindful of the need for a deliberate order. In a letter to his patron, Otto Kahn, he describes the efforts he puts into organizing the poem.

> What I am really handling, you see, is the Myth of America. Thousands of strands have had to be searched for, sorted and interwoven. In a sense I have had to do a great deal of pioneering myself.

> It has taken a great deal of energy--which has not been so difficult to summon as the necessary patience to wait, simply wait much of the time--until my instincts assured me that I had assembled my materials in proper order for a final welding into their natural form. For each section of the entire poem has presented its own unique problem of form, not alone in relation to the materials embodied within its separate confines, but also in relation to the other parts, in series, of the major design of the entire poem. Each is a separate canvas, as it were, yet none yields its entire significance when seen apart from the others. (Crane, Letters, p. 305)

This same letter provides a more specific example of the deliberate plan Crane had in mind. In references to the "Powhatan's Daughter" section, he describes how he sees Pocahontas as a mythological nature symbol, representing the physical body of the American continent. The five subdivisions of "Powhatan's Daughter" were planned as a gradual exploration of that body. Crane tells Kahn that he felt it poetically ineffective to approach the material in a purely chronological way. That approach was available in any history book. What Crane was after, he writes, "is an assimilation of this experience, a more organic panorama, showing the continuous and living experience of the past in the most vital substance of the present" (Crane, Letters, p. 305).

Long before The Bridge took its final form, Crane was deliberately plotting the various sections so that they would form a unified whole, each part contributing in turn

to the entire work. He first described his plan to Kahn on March 18, 1926.

> There are so many interlocking elements and symbols at work throughout The Bridge that it is next to impossible to describe it without resorting to the actual metaphors of the poem. Roughly, however, it is based on the conquest of space and knowledge. The theme of 'Cathay' (its riches, etc.) ultimately is transmuted into a symbol of consciousness, knowledge, spiritual unity. A rather religious motivation, albeit not Presbyterian. The following notation is a very rough abbreviation of the subject matter of the several sections:
>
> I Columbus--Conquest of space, chaos
> II Pokahantus [sic.]--The natural body of America-fertility,etc.
> III Whitman--The Spiritual body of America (A dialogue between Whitman and a dying solider in a Washington hospital; the infraction of physical death, disunity, on the concept of immortality)
> IV John Brown (Negro porter on Calgary Express making up berths and singing to himself (a jazz form for this) of his sweetheart and the death of John Brown alternately)
> V Subway--The encroachment of machinery of humanity; a kind of purgatory in relation to the open sky of last section
> VI The Bridge--A sweeping dithyramb in which the Bridge becomes the symbol of consciousness spanning time and space. (Crane, Letters, p. 241)

As one can see, many major changes would take place before The Bridge was completed approximately four years later. "John Brown" would be deleted, "Whitman" would become "Cape Hatteras," "The Bridge" would be replaced by "Atlantis," and several unplanned sections would be added. Despite the changes, however, the general method would remain constant. Historical persons would represent aspects of the national character; actual, specific places and

events would stand for the history of America. Although Crane avoided writing a history of America, parts of that history would be used to help define the present, and the present (1920's) would serve to offer hope for the future. The blend of these elements would constitute the subject The Bridge--the American spirit, or as Crane described it, "the myth of America" (Crane, Letters, p. 305).

It can be seen that the structure of The Bridge is hardly arbitrary; yet The Bridge came under its most severe criticism for its structure. Some critics even expressed bewilderment over its organization. One can imagine the frustration Crane felt when so many critics were unable to comprehend the reasons for the particular order he gave to the poem. The negative criticisms were especially frustrating to him in light of the fact that many of those same critics were supporters of Eliot and expressed no similar criticism against The Waste Land.

Of the several people who found fault with The Bridge's structure, the criticism of two men was especially troubling to Crane. One of these men was Yvor Winters, the critic whom Crane specifically singled out to receive a review copy of the finished poem. The other man was Allen Tate. Crane and Tate had corresponded before either man received critical attention. Crane was the first to direct Tate to Eliot, and Crane had even shared a house with the Tates during the winter of 1926. Crane respected the judgment of Winters and

Tate, and received their criticism as coming from astute readers as well as personal friends. When they faulted the structure of The Bridge, Crane experienced a personal betrayal.

Both critics pointed out the lyrical structure of The Bridge, but they saw the poem as a series of individual lyrics instead of seeing it as a single, sustained lyric. Winters' criticism was typical in its condemnation of some sections ("Cape Hatteras" and "Quaker Hill") for not contributing to the unity of the entire poem, but it is telling that Winters faults The Bridge most for being too much like Whitman's poetry. He states, "It should be apparent from the looseness of the progression--and it will be more apparent after an inspection of the variety of meters--that the book as a whole has no more unity than 'Song of Myself.'"[15] Tate felt that the structural faults had wider-ranging implications in that a lack of structural clarification led to the theme of the poem being emotionally confused (Tate, Essays, p. 316). But as Sherman Paul notes, much of Tate's objection to The Bridge is based on his allegiance to Eliot's views (Paul, p. 167). The fact that Crane was consciously attempting to refute Eliot at the same time he was deliberately evoking the Whitman tradition seemed not to influence critics such as

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[15]Yvor Winters, "The Progress of Hart Crane," Poetry, 36 (June 1930), 155.

Tate and Winters. Their support for the Eliot programme overshadowed their ability to deal with The Bridge on its own merits and at times they faulted Crane for accomplishing exactly what he set out to do.

At least part of the problem stems from a misinterpretation of Crane's subject matter and his attitude toward it. Tate, among others, felt that the subject of The Bridge was "the greatness of America" (Tate, Essays, p. 316). Those who read The Bridge as a tribute to America's greatness usually faulted it for being a modern-day recapitulation of Whitman singing the praises of a twentieth-century instead of a nineteenth-century America. The Whitman connection has a solid basis in the homage that Crane pays to Whitman, particularly in the "Cape Hatteras" section, but Crane is hardly writing in imitation of Whitman. Crane's debt to Whitman lies in his attitude toward his subjects and his optimistic spirit.

Because Crane was dealing with modern America and because his central metaphor was the Brooklyn Bridge, the poem is too often interpreted as a protracted celebration of the scientific progress of America. Some would have it that Crane inserted science and the machine into the void created by the abdication of religion, just as Matthew Arnold was able to substitute poetry for religion and Eliot was able to revive religion in order to give order to his life. Science, technology, and the machine play a part in Crane's

poem, but their use is complex, much more subtle than a simple poetic praise of the machine age.

Dickran Tashjian notes that Crane was among the first twentieth-century poets, along with Williams and a few others, to direct his full attention to the rapidly accelerating technology of his environment.[16] This view of Crane and technology is true as far as it goes, but Crane himself is able to shed more light on what he perceived to be the exact relationship between poetry and science. In his essay "Modern Poetry," Crane stresses that science is not inimical to poetry--that although there is a "shifting emphasis of the Western World away from religion toward science," the basic concerns of science are also those of poetry as well as of painting. Those concerns are "analysis and discovery." Crane goes on to say that "the function of poetry in a Machine Age is identical to its function in any other age; and its capacities for presenting the most complete synthesis of human values remain essentially immune from any of the so-called inroads of science" (Crane, Complete, pp. 261-62). R. W. B. Lewis accurately summarizes Crane's attitude toward science in saying, "He [Crane] felt, like Emerson, that technology was, after all, not really hostile to poetry, if only because

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[16]Dickran Tashjian, Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde 1910-1925 (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), p. 261.

nothing was hostile to poetry, or at least nothing was immune to it" (Lewis, p. 236). The integration of science, technology, machine, and poetry provided a degree of order for Crane, but it was an order built on flux. The constant change that science precipitated precluded the kind of still center at which Eliot was able to arrive. The order that Crane achieved in the relationship between science and poetry was an acceptance that change would be continual and that in order to survive, poetry would need to involve constant action and reaction.

This constant adaptability to change was in large part what led him to his subject matter. Assuredly, The Bridge concerns the greatness of contemporary America. Specific persons who contributed to America's greatness appear in the poem; in the 1920's the Brooklyn Bridge itself was without question still one of the marvels of American engineering, but The Bridge is no more a celebration of America's tangible greatness than its central image, the Brooklyn Bridge, is meant to celebrate the progress of American engineering know-how. The subject of The Bridge is an internal matter, rather than the external manifestation of American greatness. The subject of The Bridge is the intangible spiritual attitude of hope, which was meant to stand in direct contrast to Eliot's poetry of despair. As R. W. B. Lewis describes Crane's subject,

> To put it as flatly as possible, the emergent subject of The Bridge was not the actual or even the latent greatness of an actual and contemporary America. Its subject was hope, and its content a journey toward hope: a hope reconstituted on the ground of the imagination in action; while the thing hoped for was the creation in poetry of a new world--forged out of the old and fallen world, which had failed him, by the very vigor of the poet's own transfiguring vision. (Lewis, p. 231)

Crane's Romantic inclinations enabled him to attempt a poem that was built on change and mutation instead of stability. He was able to accept the journey itself as the ultimate subject of his poetry and not demand arrival at a final destination.

Given the disorganization of Crane's own life, it was inevitable that he would move away from Eliot and fall under the influence of the Romantics, whose outlook as well as style of living was more in line with his own. Early on, Crane sensed the fundamental difference between himself and Eliot. It was the difference between hope and despair. Crane felt the attraction of Eliot's negativism, but he refused to give in to the mood that characterized "Prufrock" and The Waste Land. To do so, he believed, would be the easier course, but would run counter to his principles.

This does not mean that Crane was able to put Eliot out of mind. Eliot's presence can be felt behind much of The Bridge, as in the "Indiana" section where Crane attempts to counter the anti-Romantic aspects of Eliot's programme. Roy Harvey Pearce, in The Continuity of American Poetry, describes Crane's opposition to Eliot in terms of the

different quests each man undertook. Referring to "Indiana," Pearce writes,

> Here Crane, against what he took to be a 'whimpering' Eliot, is defining the true quest upon which modern man must embark--a quest not for a myth which would make for discipline and ritual, but rather a myth (as I shall presently point out, not really a myth) which would make for 'spontaneity,' for sheer creativity.[17]

It is hard to argue that "Indiana" is not one of the weakest sections of The Bridge. It possesses a sentimentality uncharacteristic of Crane and displays little of the vigorous and unique use of language that is Crane's trademark. Still, the subject of the prodigal son forsaking the security of home to follow his own quest is very much in that Crane tradition. The sea creates an undeniable wanderlust in the protagonist, here named Larry. Giving in to this wanderlust leaves him open to a greater danger of failure than had he stayed in Indiana, but it also holds out the hope of greater success. When Crane left the security of a future in his father's successful business for the life of a poet, he was essentially making the same choice as his protagonist. He dared to take the chance of succeeding as a poet.

It is debatable that "Prufrock" had a greater influence on Crane than did The Waste Land, owing in part at least to

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[17]Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 106.

Crane's failure to comprehend the importance of The Waste Land in Eliot's programme. There are echoes of "Prufrock" throughout The Bridge, particularly in lines where both image and sound recall "Prufrock." R. W. B. Lewis points out one especially notable example: the similarity between the last line of "Prufrock," "Till human voices wake us and we drown" and the last line of the second stanza of "To Brooklyn Bridge," "--Till elevators drop us from our day . . . ." As Lewis notes, structure and cadence are the same, and each presents a comparable paradox, but the lines are used for different effects. Prufrock is used as an example of "pathetic romantic folly," a person who lives in the deadened world of reality instead of actually experiencing his romantic dream of renewed youth and idealized death in the sea. On the other hand, Crane uses the elevator to take us not only to the deadening world of daily office work, but also away from the poetic vision of the morning gulls pivoting overhead. It is a situation that the poet must, in Lewis's words, "blend all his energy to alleviate," a situation "of genuine spiritual disaster" and not just the folly that Prufrock commits (Lewis, pp. 232-33). Where Eliot's protagonist suffers through resignation, Crane is moved to action. The lines are a good example of how Crane uses a subtle reference to Eliot in order both to contrast and to help convey his opposing ideas.

In the "Cape Hatteras" section of The Bridge, Crane is most emphatic in his break with Eliot. There, the poet confronts the waste land world of Eliot and unequivocally rejects it. The poet has been shunted "to a labyrinth submersed / Where each sees only his dim past reversed (Crane, Complete, p. 88). This labyrinth is the streets of a modern city where the poet's vision is stunted in both the literal and poetic sense by the buildings rising up around him. The poet calls upon Whitman to show him the way out of this wasteland world. The escape does not mean simply transferring the poet to a pastoral setting where he does not have to confront the city labyrinth. What the poet desires is the all accepting vision of Whitman, which is able to make poetry from everything it confronts--the ugly as well as the beautiful. The state he aspires to is described as that state already achieved by Whitman, who not only accepts all that he sees but also becomes part of it. The poet describes the strived-for condition in the following lines.

> For you, the panoramas, and this breed of towers,
> Of you--the theme that's statured in the cliff.
> O Saunterer on free ways still ahead!
> Not this our empire yet, but labyrinth
> Wherein your eyes, like the Great Navigator's
> without ship,
> Gleam for the great stones of each prison crypt
> Of canyoned traffic...Confronting the Exchange,
> Surviving in a world of stocks,--they also range
> Across the hills where second timber strays
> Back over Connecticut farms, abandoned pastures,--
> Sea eyes and tidal, undenying, bright with myth!
> (Crane, Complete, p. 89)

The central and major portion of "Cape Hatteras" is taken up by what appears on the surface to be a discourse on the history of flight. It begins with the Wright brothers and concludes with the aerial dogfights of World War I. Crane's choice of flight is appropriate for several reasons. First, it perfectly epitomized the vanguard of technological sophistication in the 1920's, and as the reference to aerial warfare points out, the technological advances also have a dangerous application. The danger, however, resides in man's application of the technology rather than in the technology itself. Like Whitman, Crane was fascinated by the advancements of science and strove to include them within the domain of poetry. The second reason that flight is appropriate to "Cape Hatteras" is that it continues the central image of the curve in space, introduced in the "Proem" by the gulls and embodied in the Brooklyn Bridge itself. This arc represents the poetic vision that the poet hoped to achieve with the help of his mentor, Walt Whitman.

Crane made little secret of his indebtedness to Whitman, calling upon him by name as well as alluding to his poetry. "Cape Hatteras" begins with a quotation from "Passage to India"--"The seas all crossed, weathered the capes, the voyage done...,"[18] and it concludes with an

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[18]Walt Whitman, Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, ed. James E. Miller, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959), p. 293.

invocation to Whitman in which he figures, in Roy Harvey Pearce's words, "as at once father-figure, the poet's self, and God" (Pearce, p. 107). Between these points, Whitman is the controlling force behind the poem: providing allusions, serving as object of the poetry, and guiding the poet's attitude toward his subjects. R. W. B. Lewis claims that "Rarely has a modern poem been so nourished and permeated by the actual writings of another poet," noting the substantial number of Whitman's poems that Crane makes use of--"Passage to India," "Recorders Ages Hence," "Starting from Paumanok," "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," "Song of Myself," "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "Years of the Modern," "Song of the Open Road," "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night," and "Whoever You are Holding Me Now in Hand" (Lewis, p. 328).

On the surface, a list of this type makes it appear that Crane's poetry is every bit as allusive as Eliot's, that both of them rely heavily on literary borrowing. There is, however, a considerable difference in Crane's use of Whitman and Eliot's use of the English Metaphysicals or French Symbolists. While the sources of both men's allusions tell us much about their respective interests, Eliot's references are used mainly to add another perspective to the meaning of the poem. They add meaning and help understanding, provided that the reader is familiar with the source of the allusion and is able to follow the connection between source and poem

that exists primarily in Eliot's mind. In "Cape Hatteras," Crane's source becomes the underlying subject of the poem. At a time when Crane had already completed much of The Bridge but was still planning "Cape Hatteras," he told Otto Kahn that the unfinished section would "be a kind of ode to Whitman" (Crane Letters, p. 308). Using "ode" in a very liberal sense, Crane succeeded in following through with that plan.

The choice of Whitman's poetry as a source for "Cape Hatteras" is homage in itself, but the poet of The Bridge is striving toward a closer relationship with the older poet. He pays his respects and also desires a union between the two in which Whitman will serve as mentor and the younger poet will eventually become one with him when he gains Whitman's poetic vision. The relationship is not the scholarly understanding toward which Eliot strove. Crane is seeking a spiritual kinship. Three times he addresses Whitman as "Panis Angelicus," giving Whitman the unusual and even startling title of angelic or holy broad. Where Crane is the communicant, Whitman plays the role of both priest and communion itself. The result is an ultimate union in which Crane and Whitman become one.

Although the connection between Crane and Whitman is most evident in "Cape Hatteras," Whitman's presence is pervasive. "Passage to India" looms especially large as a poem that gained Crane's interest. It figures so heavily

in The Bridge that R. W. B. Lewis notes that "There seems no doubt that the most seminal of Whitman's poems for The Bridge as a whole and for many particular moments in it was 'Passage to India'" (Lewis, p. 243), and Hyatt H. Waggoner claims that in The Bridge Crane was rewriting Whitman's poem.[19] In addition to "Cape Hatteras," "Passage to India" figures in "Lachrymae Christi" and particularly in "Ave Maria." The latter is written in the form of a monologue, spoken by Columbus on his return to Spain after his first voyage. The subject matter itself is obviously influenced by Whitman's poem, but as R. W. B. Lewis points out, the connection is more extensive in that "The language and feeling of the section, and the quality of the experience being undergone, are in good part Whitmanian" (Lewis, p. 256).

The relationship between Crane and Whitman can be overt as in the shared subject of Columbus, but it can also be quite subtle. Both Crane and Whitman are often misinterpreted as being single-minded proponents of technological advancement and the material conquest that accompanies it. A line such as Crane's having Columbus say "I bring you back Cathay!" (Crane, Complete, p. 48) gives credence to this interpretation, but as Lewis tells us, this central line of The Bridge, one embodying the action of the poem, should be

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[19]Hyatt Howe Waggoner, American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 180.

interpreted as a statement of spiritual attitude rather than material conquest. The poet-seeker of The Bridge has set out, like Crane's Columbus, to restore the spiritual attitude that blind devotion to material conquest had overcome (Lewis, p. 259). Poetry, of course, is the source of this reinvigorated spiritual attitude. The Whitman that Crane was relying on when he wrote The Bridge is the Whitman of "Democratic Vistas," which itself argues against materialism per se. This is the work that Crane chided Allen Tate for not having read when he criticized The Bridge, for Crane felt that he would be better understood if his reviewers better understood his relationship to Whitman (Crane, Letters, p. 354).

As earlier noted, the relationship between Crane and Whitman is quite different from the relationship between Eliot and his sources. Where Eliot used a line of poetry to add meaning to his own poem, Crane's interest in Whitman is directed as much toward embodying the spirit of the poet himself as toward using Whitman's poetry to give meaning to The Bridge. In writing on the Whitman tradition, Bernice Slote comments on this relationship between poet and source:

> Here it is necessary to say that we do not mean that Whitman 'influenced' Lawrence, Crane and Thomas in the sense that he told them through Leaves of Grass what they must think and write. It is true, of course, that in each of these poets some specific admiration of or engagement with Whitman is expressed, directly or indirectly. In each we may find obvious

> resemblances--not only with Whitman but with each other. Yet we must discount any feeling that a tradition is necessarily successive instruction. No doubt all who admire Whitman learn from him, but we may better call the relationship an affinity rather than an influence. (Miller, p. 8)

It is this unique relationship between Crane and Whitman that caused some critics to deem The Bridge unsuccessful. Yvor Winters is a case in point when he concludes his review of The Bridge with the following words,

> And one thing he has demonstrated, the impossibility of getting anywhere with the Whitmanian inspiration. No writer of comparable ability has struggled with it before, and, with Mr. Crane's wreckage in view, it seems highly unlikely that any writer of comparable genius will struggle with it again. (Winters, p. 165)

The fifty years since Winters wrote this have proved the error of his conclusion.

Judged purely on its poetic merits, The Bridge, admittedly, is an uneven production, but its successes far exceed its failures. Unjustly, it has been criticized for its affinity to Whitman's poetry, an affinity that was entirely deliberate and appropriate; and for lacking a structure that it was never intended to have. While The Bridge was still in its planning stages, Crane wrote to Gorham Munson that he planned its form to be symphonic (Crane, Letters, p. 125). Although The Bridge went through innumerable changes during its composition, the plan for its structure remained constant. In 1926, referring to "Atlantis," which was planned to conclude the poem, Crane

wrote to Waldo Frank that "Atlantis" is symphonic in including the convergence of all the strands that would be treated separately in the preceding sections (Crane, Letters, p. 232). As is indicated by his letters, structure was very much on Crane's mind, even though he was eventually criticized for failing to provide The Bridge with a unified structure. The problem lies not so much with the structure of The Bridge as it does with the critics' failure to agree with Crane on the structure that he deliberately chose. Crane's frequent mention of structure may be an indication that he anticipated such criticism. His own defense of his choice of structure, presented to Otto Kahn in 1929, seems adequate in his description of each section of the poem as a separate canvas, none yielding its complete meaning except when seen in relation to all the others (Crane, Letters, p. 305). In dealing with the myth of America, this type of structure is appropriate, far more appropriate, for example, than the narrative epic structure used by Joel Barlow in his American epic, The Columbiad.

The symphonic structure of The Bridge suits Crane's purposes. This type of structure, with its repetitions and recurring motifs, adapts itself well to the protean subject of the poem. Because of its scope and diversity, the myth of America demands to be approached from many different directions; but unlike a symphony, the subject of Crane's poem could have no definable end point. Crane never felt

that when his poem was completed, he could point to it and say, "Here, this is the myth of America, fixed and final." The best he could hope for was achieving the poetic vision that would enable him to deal with the myth of America. If the myth of America is the subject of the poem, attaining the poetic vision necessary to handle this subject is its theme. The Bridge concerns the continuing process of gaining poetic vision; it depicts the education of a poet. But even this vision, if attained, could not be final. R. W. B. Lewis comments on this lack of finality in The Bridge:

> The Bridge concludes not with an exclamation of achievement, not with a statement of finality, but with a question: Is it Cathay? For--and this is something Crane knew much more deeply and painfully than Emerson--vision is never final, nor can it ever be sustained. It breaks each morning; and when recovered, it must press ever forward towards new thresholds, new anatomies. (Lewis, p. 242)

Through The Bridge, Crane embarks on a quest-journey for the poetic vision that will reveal the myth of America to him. Success in this quest would have stilled the chaos that intruded upon him from every side; capturing the myth of America would have given order to the chaos, but such a final destination remained elusive. The quest begins very early in the poem, at the point when "elevators drop us from our day" (Crane, Complete, p. 45) and continues without arriving at a conclusion as the poem progresses. Eugene Nassar points out that in "Ave Maria" the mind is building a myth from its own resources to combat the "disorder, chaos, and abyss," which

are identified as the enemy of the spirit (Nassar, p. 156). By creating a myth whose foundation is in the imagination, Crane introduces the possibility of order from within, even if that order does not exist in the chaotic reality over which the poet has no control. This first section of The Bridge, as noted by Nassar, "does not in sum present itself as a poem of a mystic integration achieved, but of the desire for integration of dualistic experience. And the desire is the only absolute Crane knows (Nassar, p. 157). Ultimately, this desire need not reach fruition because the quest itself becomes the controlling force of the poem.

Like a thread winding its way through the poem and binding it together, the quest motif is prominent again in the second section, "Powhatan's Daughter." The five sub-sections take the quest in various directions in an attempt to arrive at a poetic vision, but as Lewis observes, the vision here is experienced and then lost, as "Powhatan's Daughter" proceeds on "a multiple imaginative quest-journey, westward in space and backward in time, to the poet's child-hood and the nation's pre-history, in search of that lost vision with which the poet is convinced he has a rendezvous" (Lewis, pp. 287-88). The shifts in direction may at first seem abrupt, but they exemplify the symphonic structure that Crane used to develop his motif. For example, "Harbor Dawn" is placed in contemporary times looking across the East River toward the city skyline. Abruptly, "Van Winkle" takes us

back into the folklore of America--relying on our awareness of an existent myth--but surprisingly, Crane places Rip in twentieth-century New York on his way to board the subway. He is moved out of his time and place, just as the poet is without the myth that would counter the chaos. "The River" provides another shift in the quest-journey, moving us by express train westward to the Mississippi River, where the physical journey continues down river. The physical journey westward and then south is overlaid with a journey in time also. Ironically, it is an invention of the machine age, the locomotive, that takes the poet backward in time to the ancient river, thereby reversing progress. In "The Dance," the poem moves to the time of Pocahontas, who figures as both real and mythological person. As Nassar explains, the hunger for this unattainable bride "can be satisfied only by the imagination's sometimes escape from the evils of reality" (Nassar, p. 164). In this sense, Pocahontas is like the longed-for order of the quest that cannot be arrived at in the world of reality. "Powhatan's Daughter" ends with "Indiana," a jump forward in time from the preceding section when the son is about to embark on a journey eastward to the sea, retracing the steps of his ancestors who originally came from the East to Indiana. The son is thus completing a return journey begun by his mother, who has returned to Indiana from the West.

> But we,--too late, too early, howsoever--
> Won nothing out of fifty-nine--those years--
> But gilded promise, yielded to us never,
> And barren tears...
>
> The long trail back! (Crane, Complete, p. 78)

Nassar points out that the mother desired order, as does the poet, hence, the reason for her return to Indiana (Nassar, p. 165). But that order is broken as the son himself is about to depart.

In each section of The Bridge, Crane remains constant to his methods. A multitude of persons, ages, and places appear, all having America as their focal point, while the poet's personal quest for poetic vision remains the underlying theme of The Bridge. Even in the "Atlantis" section (the concluding section of The Bridge, although it was not the last written), the quest for poetic vision is not concluded. The section does, however, attempt to unite the many motifs that preceded it. It is not the tidy tying up of loose ends that one might expect, however. Instead, Crane joins the strands in an incantatory prayer of exuberance exceptional even for Crane. R. W. B. Lewis describes this synthesis:

> The almost overpowering difficulty is rather that this is a work of total synthesis, one which at every point is trying--and successfully, I believe--to say everything at once, not only to suggest but verbally to enact a pervasive universal harmony whereby every aspect of reality is linked with everything else. (Lewis, p. 370)

The physical Brooklyn Bridge stands for this synthesis through its cables, which link all the various parts that

make the bridge. The bridge dominates "Atlantis" more than any other section except "Proem." Its sweeping line, created by the support cables, is a dominant image. As always, the arc stands for the poetic vision Crane strove to achieve. "Atlantis" begins with this arc image: "Through the bound cable strands, the arching path / Upward, veering with light, the flight of strings,-- / Taut miles of shuttling moonlight syncopate / The whispered rush, telepathy of wires" (Crane, Complete, p. 114). The arc and its strands bind and they also sing the song of poetic vision: "And on, obliquely up bright carrier bars / New octaves trestle the twin monoliths / Beyond whose frosted capes the moon bequeaths / Two worlds of sleep (0 arching strands of song!)" (Crane, Complete, p. 114). The last line recalls the lines in the "Proem": "0 harp and altar, of the fury fused, / (How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)" (Crane, Complete, p. 46). That the poem begins and ends with nearly the same invocation is an indication that Crane recognized the impossibility of his seeing the quest come to an end. Again, Lewis accurately expresses the dilemma that Crane wrestled with and finally accepted.

> For 'Atlantis,' Crane's hymn of praise to the creative imagination arises from the knowledge that vision is precarious at best, and that it is never final. It scarcely endures beyond the moment of its utterance; one must always struggle to recover it and then to go beyond it. This is a radical truth, and one has only to stare out at the world for half a minute to be convinced of it. The visionary imagination at its farthest thrust

> works only in questions or tantalizing whispers. But the vision lasts at least as long as the questions, and it is sustained by their intensity; while it lasts, the questions sound like their own answers. (Lewis, p. 373)

Thus, The Bridge ends without the desired order having been achieved. The myth of America, which would have provided that order, remains elusive, but there is no feeling of failure. The poetic vision that Crane hoped would create the myth of America is an ongoing process. That the myth is not fixed is no fault of the poet's vision. The failure, if it can be called a failure, lies in the very nature of the myth, rather than in Crane's poetic vision. Early on, when Crane decided upon using a symphonic structure, he accepted the fact that the myth could not be dealt with linearly. It would always defy order. By approaching the myth from many directions at once--shuttling back and forth in time and place--Crane was using his best alternative. The recurring motifs bind the divergent times, places, events, and persons into a unity of ideas, but the progress is without end.

In The Bridge, as in the earlier poems, Crane set out a Romantic course for himself at a time when Romanticism was coming under increasing attack by the critics. Some of that criticism was aimed directly at Crane, the most notable of which came from Allen Tate. Commenting on Crane's affinity to Rimbaud, Tate writes,

> The fact that you posit The Bridge at the end of a tradition of romanticism may prove to have been an accurate prophecy, but I don't yet feel that such a statement can be taken as a

> foregone conclusion. A great deal of romanticism may persist--of the sort to deserve serious consideration, I mean. (Crane, Letters, pp. 352-53)

A common theme running through much of the criticism of Crane is that his was a great poetic talent that was thwarted by his obstinate Romanticism. These critics felt that once liberated from the confines of Romanticism, Crane's poetry could suddenly expand to new horizons. They refused to accept the possibility that Crane could be right in choosing to cultivate the Romantic tradition of poetry. Such a critical attitude can be seen in Sherman Paul's book-length study of Crane. Writing of the early poems, Paul says, "Yet in 'Porphyro in Akron,' the most ambitious of the early poems and the most 'modern' in matter and form, he still tries to maintain a romantic posture. His tenacity is remarkable" (Paul, p. 28). Paul is right in his observation of Crane's tenacity, but he is wrong in the accompanying implication that Crane would eventually have to let go.

The argument of such critics is concerned with Romantic poetry, rather than with the total quality of Crane's poetry itself. Their concern appears to be misguided, unless they hold the assumption that Romantic characteristics in poetry are wrong by their very nature. This attitude is demonstrated by F. O. Matthiessen in a critical survey of American poetry that he wrote in 1947. While praising Tate's review of The Bridge, Matthiessen writes, "Crane's failure was that of the romantic ego to find any sanctions outside

itself. His 'vision' had degenerated into sensationalism."[20] In this matter, Matthiessen and Tate, along with those of the Eliot programme, felt that the personal poetry of Romanticism is inherently wrong. They felt that poetry should be moving away from the Romantic concern with the individual and the Romantic emphasis on the poet as poetic subject. There is no doubt that Crane's poetry is guilty of the Romantic "error" of personal poetry. For example, commenting on "Voyages VI," R. W. B. Lewis writes that it

> contains, among other things, as direct and dramatic a statement as one can find about the nature of the Romantic tradition--one is inclined to say, about the nature of modern poetry, and of a large range of modern literature generally. It bespeaks what is probably the key historic event in that tradition: the emergence of the poet--replacing the king or prince--as the hero of poetry; and of the exacting process of the creative imagination as the drama that most absorbs the poet's attention. (Lewis, p. 175)

Crane himself was aware of the difficulties facing the Romantic poet. Not only were many of the most powerful critics of his time antithetical toward Romanticism, but the personal approach of Romantic poetry presented a fundamental dilemma of its own. R. W. B. Lewis describes it as "the tormentingly problematic relation between a subjective vision and an external, historical reality" (Lewis, p. 227). Reacting to this dilemma, Crane writes,

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[20] F. O. Matthiessen, "American Poetry, 1920-40," Sewanee Review, 55 (January-March 1947), p. 38.

> The validity of a work of art is situated in contemporary reality to the extent that the artist must honestly anticipate the realization of his vision in 'action' (as an actively operating principle of communal works and faith), and I don't mean by this that his procedure requires any bona fide evidences directly and personally signalled, nor even any physical signs or portents. The darkness is part of his business. It has always been taken for granted, however, that his intuitions were salutary and that his vision either sowed or epitomized 'experience' (in the Blakeian sense). Even the rapturous and explosive destructivism of Rimbaud presupposes this, even his lonely hauteur demands it for any estimation or appreciation. (The romantic attitude must at least have the background of an age of faith, whether approved or disproved no matter). (Crane, Letters, p. 260)

For Crane, the poet's role should be observable in calling attention to an external reality that might otherwise go unnoticed or be misinterpreted. Where Eliot's poet is merely the catalyst, Crane's is one of the primary elements that is detectable in the final product. Even after The Bridge was completed, the experience of negative reviews did not diminish Crane's certainty that he was following the right course. In a letter to Allen Tate, he re-emphasizes his dedication to personal poetry.

> [Genevieve] Taggard, like Winters, isn't looking for poetry any more. Like Munson, they are both in pursuit of some cureall. Poetry as poetry (and I don't mean merely decorative verse) isn't worth a second reading any more. Therefore--away with Kubla Kahn, out with Marlowe, and to hell with Keats! It's a pity, I think. So many true things have a way of coming out all the better without the strain to sum up the universe in one impressive little pellet. I admit that I don't answer the requirements. My vision of poetry is too personal to 'answer the call.' And

> if I ever write any more verse it will probably be at least as personal as the idiom of White Buildings whether anyone cares to look at it or not. (Crane, Letters, p. 353)

As one who was writing a poem about the quest for poetic vision, there was no other course open to Crane except to pursue a personal poetry. The pre-Romantic quester stood for an ideal, but the Romantic poet-quester in Crane's work was important both for the ideal he represented and also for the individual person he was. Crane's quest for vision served as an example of what lay before the poet in his times; yet, it also was exactly what it appeared to be--Hart Crane's search for a poetic vision that would grant him a personal response to the chaos. In Vision of the Voyage: Hart Crane and the Psychology of Romanticism, Robert Combs discusses the poet's need to restore order. He tells us that the arguments about The Bridge as a visionary poem "derive from the unexamined belief that some Truth or Faith is needed to piece together our broken world."[21] Ultimately, Crane did not match all the pieces, but no Romantic could hope to achieve this goal. His poetry, however, remains one of the foremost examples of the Romantic quest for order in twentieth-century poetry.

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[21]Robert Combs, Vision of the Voyage: Hart Crane and the Psychology of Romanticism (Memphis, Tenn.: Memphis State University Press, 1978), p. x.

CHAPTER V

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS' REFUTATION OF THE ELIOT PROGRAMME

When Crane committed suicide in 1932, he was thirty-three years old. Williams was thirty-nine at that time. Neither had yet attained the reputation of a major poet, although Crane had by that time attracted greater critical attention than did his older contemporary. Despite the fact that neither had achieved great acclaim or unqualified success, each was aware of the other's work. Many years after the fact, Williams described how, as an editor, he had rejected a poem by the then unknown Hart Crane. He lamented, "I once turned down a poem by a young writer. Turned out his name was Hart Crane! Too bad we couldn't have been the first to publish him. But I still think the poem was no damned good."[1] That was their first contact. In 1916, Williams and Alfred Kreymborg accepted some poems by Crane for a magazine they were editing called Others. Unfortunately, the poems were not published, but these occasional contacts kept Williams and Crane each aware of the other's progress.

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[1]Linda Welshimer Wagner, ed., Interviews with William Carlos Williams: "Speaking Straight Ahead" (New York: New Directions, 1976), p. 35.

Although Joseph Slate has written that the two never met,[2] Geoffrey Wolff describes a single meeting in his biography of Harry Crosby entitled Black Sun.[3] The Crosbys were sailing for Europe and Crane threw a going-away party for them at his Brooklyn apartment. In addition to Crane and the Crosbys, the guests included e. e. cummings, Walker Evans, Malcolm Cowley, Matthew Josephson, and Williams. This is most likely the only face-to-face meeting they had. There is not evidence that Williams recorded his impressions of Crane, but the vastly different lives of the two men would have made it unlikely for them to seek one another's friendship.

Their association was centered solely around their poetry. Two months after Crane's death, Williams published an obituary essay in Contempo. Sherman Paul feels that in the essay Williams paid Crane "the genuine respect of unsparing criticism,"[4] but a look at the essay itself shows it to be strongly, if not unfairly critical of Crane. Williams criticizes the poetry for Eliot's obvious influence

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[2]Joseph Evans Slate, "William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, and 'the Virtue of History,'" Texas Studies in Language and Literature, 6 (1965), 487.

[3]Geoffrey Wolff, Black Sun: The Brief Transit and Violent Eclipse of Harry Crosby (New York: Vintage, 1976), p. 321.

[4]Sherman Paul, Hart's Bridge (Urbana, Ill,: University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 52.

and for its lack of objectivity. In a unique twist, Williams declares that "one should be as savage as he is able toward the dead--since they have such an advantage over us. Only stupidity spares them in order to go on flattering itself."[5] Once the poet is dead, Williams feels, his poetry belongs to the past and it becomes necessary for living poets and critics to be hard on him. If not, the poet might rise to a position where his poetry will constitute a sacred tradition, impervious to criticism and in control of future poetry. It was the Eliot-like emphasis on tradition that made Williams especially wary, and thus the reason for the severity of his criticism; he felt the need to be severe with any poet whose work might be turned into a tradition. Even in later years, after a general acceptance of Crane's position as a major poet, Williams was still severe in his criticism of the poet with whom he is now often associated. In the course of a 1946 essay on Karl Shapiro entitled "Shapiro is All Right," Williams takes time to comment on Crane's short-lived creativity. He calls Crane's method "never more than an excrescence" and claims that his suicide was the result of having taken that method as far as it possibly could go. The largely fruitless year

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[5]William Carlos Williams, "Hart Crane (1899-1932)," Contempo, 2 (5 July 1932), 4.

in Mexico is offered as evidence that Crane's methods left him nothing more to write; there was no longer any outlet for his work, hence the suicide.[6]

The common aims of their poetry were never evident to Williams. Instead, he continued to concentrate on the differences of method. In 1928 he wrote to Pound,

> As to the Hart Crane-Josephson group--to hell with them all. There is good there but it's not for me. As it stands, Crane is supposed to be the man that puts me on the shelf. But not only do I find him just as thick-headed as I am myself and quite as helplessly verbose at times but that he comes up into clarity far less often. If what he puts on the page is related to design, or thought, or emotion--or anything but disguised sentimentality and sloppy feeling--then I am licked and no one more happy to acknowledge it than myself. But really I do not feel so violently about the group. I am quite willing that they shall be what they are for there is nothing there that I expect to be caught copying for the next twenty years. To hell with them. But if I can help them, I will. Ha, ha![7]

What Williams saw as "disguised sentimentality and sloppy feeling" seemed absolutely contrary to his own objective methods. But rather than a contrast between sentimentality and objectivity, the contrast is more one of subjective and objective methodology. It was the passionate involvement

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[6]William Carlos Williams, "Shapiro is All Right," in Selected Essays (New York: Random House, 1954), pp. 261-62.

[7]William Carlos Williams, The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams, ed. John C. Thirlwall (New York: McDowell Obolensky, 1957), p. 104.

of Crane's poetry that appears to be at the heart of Williams' objection. Joseph E. Slate uses such phrases as the "complete loss of self in the poetic passion" and a "taste for passionate commitment" to describe Crane's method (Slate, p. 488). Williams' deliberate, objective restraint would naturally balk at such subjective involvement.

Crane's subjective passion suited his choice to follow the route of the cosmic poet, to deal with ideas directly. In Sherman Paul's words, Crane decided "to follow the high road of vision" in contrast to "Williams' proposal to ground poetry in the everyday world of one's immediate contacts" (Paul, p. 52). Williams' objectivity suited his choice to concentrate on his tangible environment instead of on abstract ideas. In a more reflective mood, he writes about Hart Crane,

> Oh yes, about Hart Crane. I don't think I ever met Crane. I may have met him, he may even have been out here to Rutherford but I can't for the life of me remember it. We had a lively correspondence for a year or so toward the beginning of his New York period, but nothing much came of it. I remember I bought a water color through him painted by a friend of his [William Sommer] back home. That too must be up in the attic. I liked the man but I stuck on his verse. We were too far apart there. I have some letters of his in the file. I'll see what is in them. I was stumped by his verse. I suppose the thing was that he was searching for something inside, while I was all for a sharp use of the materials. We just were on different tracks. This has no bearing on what you're doing but since I'm writing a letter I'm just putting down whatever occurs to me. (Williams, Selected Letters, p. 186)

The contrast between ideas and objects was central to the differences between Crane and Williams, but there are also the more obvious differences of style. Crane was more conventional--more traditional--in his use of rhyme and meter. Once Williams outgrew his initial Keatsian period, he never turned back. He was a constant experimenter in the sound of poetry, developing theories of meter that he dubbed the "variable foot" and working in the realm of prose poetry.

Yet, despite these serious differences, Williams and Crane were at heart kindred spirits. Joseph Slate notes a number of important similarities between the two poets, including their having been "part of the artistic surge preceding the 1920's, part of the New York-Paris literary world, part of the Whitman tradition, part of the avant-garde and the self-consciously modern world, and part of the small group that saw in the American past the possibility of achieving a uniquely American culture" (Slate, p. 489). Their two most important points of similarity are an acceptance of Whitman as the seminal poet of twentieth-century poetry and a shared aversion to the Eliot programme. Their dispute with Eliot, particularly with The Waste Land, led both Crane and Williams to undertake major poetic projects intended largely to counter his influence.

Williams was given a copy of Whitman's poems in 1913, but they seem to have had little immediate impact on him.

Although early poems use structured versification and are crowded with classical allusions, it was not long before Williams recanted these first directions and set out along a different path. Even in the early stages, as Louis Simpson tells us, the contact with Whitman's poetry did guide Williams toward free verse.[8] As someone who constantly experimented with ways to make poetry new, Williams was naturally attracted to the poet who broke the long dominant meters of poetry in English. Like Whitman, Williams fought to break with the past, including the verse forms of the past. In his essay "Against the Weather: A Study of the Artist," Williams expresses his feelings toward the impact Whitman had on conventional versification.

> He broke through the deadness of copied forms which keeps shouting above everything that wants to get said today drowning out one man with the accumulated weight of a thousand voices in the past--re-establishing the tyrannies of the past, the very tyrannies that we are seeking to diminish. The structure of the old is active, it says no! to everything in propaganda and poetry that wants to say yes. Whitman broke through that. That was basic and good. (Williams, "Against the Weather: A Study of the Artist," Selected Essays, p. 218)

In another essay, Williams describes the free verse of Whitman as an assault on the very citadel of the poem itself and a direct challenge to all living poets to show cause why

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[8]Louis Simpson, Three on the Tower: The Lives and Works of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams (New York: Morrow, 1975), p. 246.

they should not do likewise.[9] Whitman fired the opening gun, and Williams continued the attack, regularly measuring the progress of poetry by the degree to which it broke with past versification. Each man welcomed change as strengthening rather than weakening his poetry.

Although Williams calls Whitman "a key man to whom I keep returning" (Williams, "Against," p. 218), he did not set Whitman up as the fountainhead of a tradition that required slavish adherence. Instead, Whitman served more the role of a spiritual inspiration. James E. Miller, Jr. makes the claim that Williams felt himself a continuation of Whitman,[10] and thus he was--a continuation, not an imitator of Whitman--in democratic spirit, in subject matter, in use of language as well as in versification. Whitman's use of language had a particularly strong effect on Williams. For Williams, the language of poetry had to be as new and contemporary as the versification itself. This is one of the things that he learned from Whitman. Old uses of words were inappropriate if the poems were indeed to be new. Randall Jarrell notes the link between Whitman and Williams

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[9]William Carlos Williams, "An Essay on Leaves of Grass," in Leaves of Grass: One Hundred Years After, ed. Milton Hindus (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1955), p. 22.

[10]James E. Miller, Jr., The American Quest for a Supreme Fiction: Whitman's Legacy in the Personal Epic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 131.

when he comments that "the hair-raising originality of some of Whitman's language is another bond between the two."[11] Whitman himself was aware of the link and wrote in an essay on Whitman:

> A new order had hit the world, a relative order, a new measure with which no one was familiar. The thing that no one realized, and this includes Whitman himself, is that the native which they were dealing with was no longer English but a new language akin to the New World to which its nature accorded in subtle ways that they did not recognize. That made all the difference. (Williams, "Essay," p. 27)

Versification and language embody the outward manifestations of poetry, but Whitman also influenced Williams about the democratic spirit from which that poetry was written. James E. Miller, Jr. claims that Whitman's democracy "was perhaps the most enduring in its impact on Williams, in both his poetry and fiction" (Miller, p. 128). In Spring and All, Williams exhibits his admiration for Whitman in terms of his democracy:

> Whitman's proposals are of the same piece with the modern trend toward imaginative understanding of life. The largeness which he interprets as his identity with the least and the greatest about him, his 'democracy' represents the vigor of his imaginative life.[12]

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[11] Randall Jarrell, Introd., Selected Poems by William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. xiv.

[12] William Carlos Williams, Spring and All, in Imaginations, ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970), pp. 112-13.

Both Whitman and Williams were steadfastly American. Williams cultivated and sometimes exaggerated the difference between English and American, having little patience with those American poets who would choose the English tradition over the American. He placed himself in the Whitman/American tradition of direct experience as opposed to what he saw as the opposite and more English tradition of understanding through study. Even in the language of his poetry he was scrupulously American. He saw his experiments with language in light of the growing difference between the English and American languages. His poems are self-consciously American; Karl Shapiro has called him "our first American poet since Whitman."[13]

If Whitman embodied Williams' love for America and democracy, the poet he saw most in opposition to the things he loved was Eliot. Williams objected to Eliot for many reasons, but the root of his objection was Eliot's Anglophilia. Williams himself had no animosity toward England; he simply found incomprehensible the idea of leaving America for England. Because he valued locality as he did, such a move would have been impossible for him, and he saw a personal betrayal in those who made the move. Throughout

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[13]James E. Miller, Jr., Karl Shapiro and Bernice Slote, Start with the Sun: Studies in Cosmic Poetry (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), p. 219.

his life, Williams resented that his English father never became an American citizen; thus the intense reaction to Eliot had personal as well as philosophical origins. Eliot's expatriation was something that he never forgave nor fully understood. In an interview with Linda Wagner many years after Eliot's departure, Williams displayed the argument he still had with Eliot's rejection of his native country. "He [Eliot] walked out on America," Wagner quotes Williams as saying. "He tried to become English and take advantage of it. Imagine giving up America--gosh!" (Wagner, p. 33). To Williams, Eliot's act was tinged with disloyalty. One did not turn his back on the native country. Despite the many disagreements he might have had with American life, there was never any question of Williams' Americanness. In Randall Jarrell's introduction to Williams' selected poems, the younger poet-critic writes that Williams was "so American that the adjective itself seems inadequate . . . one exclaims in despair and delight: He is the America of poets" (Jarrell, p. xi).

Undoubtedly, this designation would have pleased Williams. His goals were such that he would not have found them tarnished by being designated an "American poet." Yet he wanted to be the principal spokesman for modern American poetry. As Louis Simpson notes, part of Williams' Eliot problem was rooted in jealousy. It involved Williams' friend and one-time classmate Ezra Pound. Not only did

Pound's friendship with Eliot displace Williams, but in the supreme irony, Pound discovered the American poet he had been hoping for in Eliot, not Williams, and considered Eliot first, Williams second (Simpson, p. 253). It is one of the paradoxes of Williams' life that he was not offended so much by Pound's personal defection as he was offended by Eliot's defection to England. The war between Williams and Eliot was decidedly one-sided in that Eliot almost totally ignored Williams. This rebuff sometimes drove Williams to personal invection as when he wrote in a 1933 letter, "For me, without one word of civil greeting (a sign of his really bad breeding, which all so-called scholars show--protectively), he reserves the slogan 'of local interest perhaps'" (Williams, Selected Letters, p. 141). In a similar vein, Williams uses an essay on Karl Shapiro as the occasion to snipe, "Well, you don't get far with women by quoting Eliot to them" (Williams, "Shapiro," p. 259).

A large part of Williams' attitude toward Eliot stemmed from Eliot's rejecting his American dialect for the English. In a move he saw as begun by Whitman, Williams sought to establish a distinctly American voice in his poetry. His aim was not the defeat of English poetry, but an American poetry free of English influence. Williams writes in Paterson, Book V, "We poets have to talk in a language which is not English. It is the American idiom. Rhythmically it's organized as a sample of the American

idiom. It has as much originality as jazz."[14] For Williams, America was the future, not only in technology, but also in poetry; therefore, the future voice of poetry was to be American. Eliot's defection slowed the progress he hoped to make, and in his Autobiography Williams tells us, "If he [Eliot] had not turned away from the direct attack here, in the western dialect, we might have gone ahead much faster."[15] Williams never played it safe. He found it better to experiment and fail than to repeat the same successes, and he felt that in the language of his poetry Eliot was playing it too safe. In a conversation with John C. Thirlwall he is reported to have said:

> It's all linked up in my mind with Eliot's walkout on the liberal feelings of America, which I believe in. And in walking out he left modern poetry behind. The Four Quartets are very important to me. I look at them and at The Waste Land with great interest. The Waste Land was a bitter poem: he had not yet changed . . . we were breaking the rules, whereas he was conforming to the excellencies of classroom English. (Wagner, p. 64)

The academic orientation of Eliot's poetry was especially disturbing to Williams. He knew that it was ground upon which he could not compete with Eliot, but the frustration lay in the fact that he believed the

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[14]William Carlos Williams, Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 225.

[15]William Carlos Williams, The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions, 1948), p. 175.

academic/intellectual concerns were absolutely alien to the directions he wanted to take Modern poetry. When Eliot captured the readers' and critics' attention, Williams felt threatened. In Eliot's success, Williams read his own failure. His democratic principles and advocacy of the local were endangered by the academic orientation of Eliot's poetry. In his essay on Whitman, Williams described his feelings:

> The case of Mr. Eliot is in this respect interesting. He began writing at Harvard from a thoroughly well-schooled background and produced a body of verse that was immediately so successful that when his poem The Waste Land was published, it drove practically everyone else from the field. Ezra Pound, who had helped him arrange the poem on the page, was confessedly jealous. Other American poets had to take second place. A new era, under domination of a return to a study of the classics, was gratefully acknowledge by the universities, and Mr. Eliot, not Mr. Pound, was ultimately given the Nobel Prize. The drift was plainly away from all that was native to America, Whitman among the rest, and toward the study of the past and England.
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> Though no one realized it, a violent revolution had taken place in American scholarship and the interests from which it stemmed. Eliot had completely lost interest in all things American, in the very ideology of all that America stood for, including the idea of freedom itself in any of its phases. Whitman as a symbol of indiscriminate freedom was completely antipathetic to Mr. Eliot, who now won the country away from him again. (Williams, "Essay," p. 24)

Eliot's poetry was for the classroom, whereas Williams desired a more democratic, wide-spread audience. Lines taken from "January Morning" express Williams' idea of the

proper relationship between poet and audience.

> I wanted to write a poem
> that you would understand.
> For what good is it to me
> if you can't understand it?
> But you got to try hard--[16]

Williams' poetry was not deliberately exclusive in the way that Eliot's was; yet Eliot's audience expanded while his own diminished. Still, Williams remained true to his principles.

One of those central principles was his often-quoted dictum, "No ideas but in things" (Williams, "A Sort of a Song," in Selected Poems, p. 189 and also Williams, Paterson, p. 9). Eliot's theories and poetry ran counter to this concern for the immediate with their emphasis on the past. To Williams, he sapped the life from poetry. Only by concentrating on the here and now, the observable, could poetry be constantly infused with new life. J. Hillis Miller describes Williams' feelings:

> Any form which is disjoined from the living earth is without value. An example of this is the academic mind, dry and abstract, imposing its dead forms on life. T. S. Eliot represents aridity of this sort in poetry, a return to European ideas and poetic forms, an attempt to perpetuate the past, ignoring the novel vitality of present.[17]

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[16]William Carlos Williams, "January Morning," in Selected Poems by William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 4-5.

[17]J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 330.

It is true that Williams wrote with an awareness of the past insofar as he was conscious of following in Whitman's footsteps. With Williams, however, there was no yearning for a return to times past. He attempted to continue the spirit of Whitman, particularly in his staunch Americanism and his sense of experimentation with the language, rhyme, and meter of poetry. Williams felt that in opposition to this spirit, Eliot's insistence on tradition was undoing the progress that began with Whitman. In response to being asked if he still felt that English influence on Eliot sets us back twenty years, Williams replied, "Very definitely. He was a conformist. He wanted to go back to the iambic pentameter; and he did go back to it, very well; but he didn't acknowledge it" (Wagner, p. 63). Williams saw Eliot's adoption of England as a backward step and his embracing the Metaphysical tradition as an ever further regression.

Williams' dispute with Eliot was centered on general poetic theory, but the clearest expression of his feelings is found in his reaction to specific poems--"Prufrock" and The Waste Land most notably. Halfway through the composition of the "Prologue" to Kora in Hell,[18] "Prufrock" appeared, and Williams felt a personal threat as well as a threat to everything he stood for as a professional poet. Forty years

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[18] Kora in Hell had already been completed at the time Williams was working on the "Prologue."

later, he recalled the intensity of his reaction to Eliot's poem.

> I had a violent feeling that Eliot had betrayed what I believed in. He was looking backward; I was looking forward. He was a conformist, with wit, learning which I did not possess. He knew French, Latin, Arabic, god knows what. I was interested in that. But I felt he had rejected America and I refused to be rejected and so my reaction was violent. I realized the responsibility I must accept. I knew he would influence all subsequent American poets and take them out of my sphere. I had envisaged a new form of poetic composition, a form for the future. It was a shock to me that he was so tremendously successful; my contemporaries flocked to him--away from what I wanted. It forced me to be successful.[19]

Williams' reaction to "Prufrock" may seem harsh, but the appearance of The Waste Land was even more difficult for Williams to accept. It was a direct affront to everything he stood for and caused a major re-evaluation on his part. Joseph Slate describes what The Waste Land meant to Williams, as well as to Crane: "the disintegration of what had been built up toward an American culture, the necessity for beginning over again on a higher plane, and the need to hide their personal sense of defeat in action" (Slate, p. 493). That action took the form of The Bridge for Crane and Paterson for Williams, but Williams also made frequent, direct comments about his feelings toward The Waste Land. In a 1960 interview, he recalls that he, along

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[19]William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of a Poet, ed. Edith Heal (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 30.

with Pound, admired Eliot, but that he was "intensely jealous of this man, who was much more cultured than I was, and I didn't know anything about English literature at all" (Wagner, p. 47). Williams' recollections seem to have tempered with time, and he is much more gracious toward Eliot than he was years earlier when he wrote his Autobiography. In this document he treats his reaction to The Waste Land at some length. In chapter 25, entitled "The Waste Land," he states:

> These were the years just before the great catastrophe to our letters--the appearance of T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land. There was heat in us, a core and a drive that was gathering headway upon the theme of a rediscovery of a primary impetus, the elementary principle of all art, in the local conditions. Our work staggered to a halt for a moment under the blast of Eliot's genius which gave the poem back to the academics. We did not know how to answer him. (Williams, Autobiography, p. 146)

Several chapters later, he continues,

> Then out of the blue The Dial brought out The Waste Land and all our hilarity ended. It wiped out our world as if an atom bomb had been dropped upon it and our brave sallies into the unknown were turned to dust.
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> To me especially it struck like a sardonic bullet. I felt at once that it had set me back twenty years, and I'm sure it did. Critically Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of an escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art form itself--rooted in the locality which should give it fruit. I knew at once that in certain ways I was most defeated.
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> Eliot had turned his back on the possibility of reviving my world. And being an accomplished craftsman, better skilled in some ways than I

> could ever hope to be, I had to watch him carry my world off with him, the fool, to the enemy.
>
> If with his skill he could have been kept here to be employed by our slowly shaping drive, what strides might we not have taken! We needed him in the scheme I was half-consciously forming. I needed him: he might have become our adviser, even our hero. By his walking out on us were stopped, for the moment, cold. It was a bad moment. Only now, as I predicted, have we begun to catch hold again and restarted to make the line over. This is not to say that Eliot has not, indirectly, contributed much to the emergence of the next step in metrical construction, but if he had not turned away from the direct attack here, in the western dialect, we might have gone ahead much faster.
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> It was fair enough, I had to admit. But to have the man run out that way drove me mad. I have never quite got over it in spite of Pound's advocacy and the rest of it. The Criterion had no place for me or anything I stood for. I had to go on without it. (Williams, Autobiography, pp. 174-75)

When Williams said in an interview that both Pound and Eliot rejected Whitman as a master, that he did not have anything to teach them because they did not know that it was the idiom itself he was teaching (Wagner, p. 43), he shows his concern for a poetic language that he hoped would be distinctly American. Eliot's rejection of Whitman, the American idiom, and the American continent were all one for Williams. When he championed one of these, the other two were implied, but he was no simple-minded patriot. His criticisms of America were as harsh and as deeply felt as those of any contemporary. But because of his steadfast dedication to the spirit of what he believed Whitman

embodied, there was never any chance that he would yield to the basic flow of the Eliot programme.

There were unbridgeable gaps between Williams and Eliot, but the two men did share more than Williams was wont to admit. Their most fundamental similarity, often expressed in their work, is a disillusionment with contemporary society. In "Eliot as Enemy: William Carlos Williams and The Waste Land," Kenneth Johnson identifies numerous pieces by Williams that express this disillusionment. Johnson points out that the autobiographical hero of Voyage to Pagany sees himself dwelling in darkness and despair; that The Great American Novel emphasizes the failure on all levels of American society; that In the American Grain stresses the point that in the American experience, thoughtless destruction of beauty occurs over and over again; and that the poem "To Elsie" is largely a diatribe aimed at many aspects of American society.[20] James Breslin claims that Williams' work in the first few years of the twenties "grew out of his own experience of postwar disillusionment."[21]

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[20]Kenneth Johnson, "Eliot as Enemy: William Carlos Williams and The Waste Land," in The Twenties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama, ed. Warren French (Deland, Fla.: Everett Edwards, 1975), p. 378.

[21]James E. Breslin, "William Carlos Williams and the Whitman Tradition," in Literary Criticism and Historical Understanding, ed. Phillip Damon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 161.

Breslin identifies a passage from the Autobiography that he feels exemplifies this disillusionment:

> Damn it, the freshness, the newness of a springtime which I had sensed among the others, a reawakening of letters, all that delight which in making a world to match the supremacies of the past could mean was being blotted out by the war. The stupidity, the calculated viciousness of a money-grubbing society such as I knew and violently wrote against; everything I wanted to see live and thrive was being deliberately murdered in the name of church and state. (Williams, Autobiography, p. 158)

Part of that postwar disillusionment, of course, resulted from the appearance of The Waste Land. With this poem, Eliot contradicted what Breslin calls "Whitman's myth of plentitude with the myth of sterility" (Breslin, p. 161). The poem was a betrayal of Williams because he had hoped that he and Eliot might, in their shared disillusionment with society, work toward the same ends. But even in this shared attitude toward their times, there were significant differences. Johnson argues that Eliot's disgust with contemporary society gained complete mastery over him, while it did not with Williams. The reason for this was that Eliot was not able to turn the shortcomings of the temporal world to his advantage. Being obsessed with purity, Eliot turned to the past, where he believed a theoretical purity to exist. On the other hand, Williams never sought an ideal purity. He always gave allegiance to the temporal world, even while railing against its flaws (Johnson, p. 378).

Despite his occupation as a doctor, Williams saw himself, if not as one of Whitman's roughs, at least as an integral citizen of the eastern New Jersey towns that he served. As a doctor he saw humanity in its rawest forms and found beauty in the depressed lives of his patients, turning it into poetry. As Shapiro notes, Williams put his poetry in direct relationship with his daily experience (James E. Miller, Jr., Start, p. 221). There was no self-serving altruism in his acceptance of all humanity.

Although Williams and Eliot shared a disillusionment with modern society, in nearly every instance Williams turned against whatever Eliot represented. Even in the approaches they used to explore poetry, there was a marked difference. Williams' theories had little of the unified and methodical Eliot programme about them. In his poetic theory, Williams was much more like Whitman. If his ideas, even when published as essays, led to contradictions, so be it. Dead ends caused no despair. Williams was content to be Emerson's "man thinking."

His ideas on poetry grew with a kind of Romantic organicism; yet once he hit upon a compatible philosophy, he could stick to it with an utter tenacity, as he did in his theories about prosody. When his first collection , The Tempers, was published in 1913, it showed little indication of the commitment to free verse that would characterize all later volumes. Gorham Munson notes that he sounded like

Pound, with a heavy influence from Browning.[22] Williams' first work was hardly the beginning one would expect for a poet about whom Randall Jarrell would much later write, "About Williams' meters one remark might be enough, here: that no one has written more accomplished and successful free verse" (Jarrell, p. xvii).

Metrical patterns and rhyme schemes disappeared, although this is not to say that Williams ignored the sound of poetry. On the contrary, he was supremely conscious of it. A poem such as "The Dance" in Pictures from Brueghel demonstrates a very close bonding of sound and sense. All of the conventional sound-enhancing techniques are still used, except for metrical and rhyming patterns. Even when he is using actual, personal letters verbatim, as he did in parts of Paterson, Williams is not ignoring the sound qualities of what he wrote. As Daniel Hoffman describes it, Williams

> was determined to grapple with the realities of industrial America and to use the rhythms of actual speech rather than what seemed to him the arbitrary metrics of poetic convention. Williams became our foremost practitioner of poetry as speech, in this going beyond even Pound, who never forswears, as Williams does, the rival aesthetic of poetry as song.[23]

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[22]Gorham B. Munson, "William Carlos Williams, A United States Poet," in Destinations: A Canvass of American Literature Since 1900 (New York: J. H. Sears, 1928), p. 102.

[23]Daniel Hoffman, "Poetry: After Modernism," in Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, ed. Daniel Hoffman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 453.

In Williams' hands, even the seeming mundane prose becomes poetry. His prosody covers a span as wide as that of any other twentieth-century poet. His poems range from the prose letters and the general expansiveness of the five books of Paterson to the spareness of "The Red Wheelbarrow" and "I Saw the Figure Five in Gold."

Constantly experimenting with the form of the poem, Williams sought to remake the poetic line. Once again, Williams looked back to Whitman as the beginning point for his experiments to rework the line. In a letter to Henry Wells, he states that

> he [Whitman] started us on the course of our researches into the nature of the line by breaking finally with English prosody. After him there has been for us no line. There will be none until we invent it.[24]

For Williams, the reinvention of the poetic line became a lifelong quest, a quest that could have no final conclusion because any end to this quest would only result in a new system of patterns just as restrictive as those of English prosody. The process of reinventing the line would have to be ongoing, changing as the inhabitants' speech patterns themselves changed.

The key to Williams' new line was the speech patterns. How could the poems of a twentieth-century New Jerseyite be

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[24]Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 336.

expected to conform to a line developed centuries away in time and a continent away in distance? Any such attempt to make the modern line conform would unavoidably result in artificiality. In discussing the relationship between speech and poetic line, Williams wrote,

> It is a contortion of speech to conform to a rigidity of line. It is in the newness of a live speech that the new line exists undiscovered. To go back is to deny the first opportunity for invention which exists. Speech is the fountain of the line into which the pollutions of a poetic manner and inverted phrasing should never again be permitted to drain. (Williams, Selected Letters, p. 134)

In Williams' theories, the attempt to marry modern speech to archaic patterns would seem as false as Robert Frost's forcing his New England farmers to speak in an exactly regular iambic pentameter or Eliot's own verse experiments concerning dialogue.

As was so often true in Williams' career, his ideas on the line were also developed, at least in part, as a way of countering Eliot's influence. In the beginning, Williams hoped that Eliot would provide help in remaking the line. He soon realized that Eliot would instead be a force to overcome, but he always recognized the potential influence Eliot could have had for his cause and lamented the lost opportunity of his help. As late as 1952, he wrote to Robert Lowell, "Eliot could have saved me many years with that [the line] had he been willing to remain here and put his weight behind the working of the thing out" (Williams,

Selected Letters, p. 313). For Williams, his Eliot problem was many-sided. First there was Eliot's desertion of the cause to remake the line, and then there was the opposition his theories and poetry provided, however unintentional. Because Eliot denied the worth of Whitman's poetry, Williams felt an added pressure as he tried to complete his work on the line begun by Whitman. In an oblique admission of the influence that Eliot had, Williams bemoaned that The Waste Land had stopped cold the advances he was making on the poetic line, and it was only later that he and his like-minded colleagues began to catch hold again and could renew their efforts to remake the line (Williams, Autobiography, pp. 174-75).

Williams claimed that Eliot's poetry showed he was aware of the need to suit poetry more to contemporary speech, that his verse was "concerned with the line as it is modulated by a limited kind of half-alive speech," but that his work seduces one by the wearing effect of "forced timing of verse after antique patterns" (Williams, Selected Letters, pp. 134-36). Obviously, Williams is talking about the conventional metrical foot and its inappropriateness to twentieth-century poetry. Although he never provided a clear, detailed account of his attempts to remake the line, most comments that he made on his experiments center on what he called the "variable foot."

His beginning point for the development of the variable foot was Whitman, Williams saying that "He [Whitman] knew nothing of the importance of what he had stumbled on, unconscious of the concept of the variable foot."[25] But Whitman merely broke the ground for the work that Williams felt needed to be done. Williams soon became disenchanted with free verse of the Whitman sort, finding it too undisciplined. What he searched for was something that lay between free verse and the poetry built on English meters. The key lay in the poetic foot, and it is here that Williams concentrated his effort. He needed a poetic foot that allowed infinite variation within a certain degree of order. Rather than forcing the poem to fit a predetermined rhythm, the patterns of speech themselves would dictate the rhythms of the new foot. In 1932, Williams described his aims to Kay Boyle, explaining,

> It seems to me that the 'foot' being at the bottom of all prosody, the time has come when that must be recognized to have changed in nature. And it must be seen to have changed in its rhythmical posers of inclusion. It cannot be used any longer in its old-time rigidities. Speech for poetry is nothing but time--I mean time in the musical sense. That is where the real battle has been going on. (Williams, Selected Letters, p. 136)

It was not until the early 1950's that Williams' new poetic foot reached a satisfactory form. The variable foot

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[25]William Carlos Williams, "The American Idiom," New Directions, 17 (1961), 251.

became a line of no set length (although it tended to stretch out in Whitmanesque fashion) and it comprised entirely natural American speech. Its most singular physical feature was a breakdown of each line into three successive steps, each step indented farther than the last. A combination of sound and sense dictated the breakdown of each step; therefore, the form itself could never gain control over the poem. Natural speech patterns were the first priority in this foot that measured neither syllables nor stress. With the variable foot, Williams felt that he had a system that would allow for order within free verse.

According to Williams' own testimony,[26] the first poem to use the form, which completely satisfied him, was the section of Book II, Paterson that begins

> The descent beckons
> as the ascent beckoned
> Memory is a kind
> of accomplishment
> a sort of renewal. (Williams, Selected Poems, p. 77)

Among other poems to use the form are "The Gift," "The Turtle," and one of Williams' most famous poems, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower." Among his many achievements, Williams was especially proud of his variable foot. When asked by

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[26]Paul Engle and Joseph Langland, eds., Poet's Choice (New York: Time Life, 1962), p. 4. In a brief note on his choice of "The Descent" as his favorite poem, Williams wrote, "I write in the American idiom and for many years I have been using what I call the variable foot. 'The Descent' is the first poem in that medium that wholly satisfied me."

an interviewer the year before his death what of special value he had left to younger poets, Williams replied, "The variable foot--the division of the line according to a new method that would be satisfactory to an American."[27]

For Williams, the variable foot provided a way to account for the diversity of American speech while at the same time imposing some degree of poetic structure on that speech. Louis Simpson is correct when he says, "Williams was the poet--after Whitman--who gave American poets the confidence to use their own patterns of speech in poetry" (Simpson, p. 306). In effect, the common speech patterns set the structure, yet it is not quite free verse; there is still some regularity, even if it is just the arrangement of the line on the page. Williams made the claim that the poetic foot he developed "varies with the demands of language," permitting "the poet to use the language he naturally speaks, provided he has it well under control and does not lose the measured order of the words" (Pearce, pp. 344-45).

In his continuing attempt to marry poetry to the reality of experience, Williams, unlike Eliot, based his poems on his immediate surroundings. Eventually, he did this in deliberate opposition to the scholarly,

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[27]James Guimond, The Art of William Carlos Williams: A Discovery and Possession of America (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1968), 224.

tradition-conscious type of poetry that Eliot was writing, but it did not begin for those reasons. It began simply as the natural thing to do. Reflecting on The Tempers, Williams said,

> I came to look at poetry from a local viewpoint; I had to find out for myself; I'd had no instruction beyond high school literature. When I was inclined to write poems, I was very definitely an American kid, confident of himself and also independent. From the beginning I felt I was not English. If poetry had to be written, I had to do it my own way. (Williams, I Wanted, p. 14)

The idea of using the familiar as the basis of poetry was certainly not an idea developed by Williams, but it was an idea that he felt needed reasserting. In a letter to Horace Gregory, Williams argues that the intellectuals (singling out Eliot by name) needed to recognize the daily, local culture of the United States; that one had to look to the local in order to discover the universal. Williams claims that he took his ideas of the local from Dewey,[28] but the idea had currency long before Dewey. Essentially, Williams was following in the footsteps of the Romantics,

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[28]Williams, Selected Letters, p. 224. Williams also refers to Dewey in this context when in his Autobiography, he writes, "That [writing about those things close to the poet that he knows in detail] is the poet's business. Not talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particular to discover the universal. John Dewey had said (I discovered it quite by chance), 'The local is the only universal, upon that all art builds.'" [Williams, Autobiography, p. 391].

who, at least in theory, advocated poetry based on the common man and his speech. Williams' ideas on the local were expressed in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," as well as by Emerson, who wrote in "The American Scholar": "Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wondrous than things remote. The near explains the far. The drop is a small ocean."[29]

Throughout his career, Williams voiced his ideas advocating poetry built on the local,[30] but he never lost sight of the ultimate goal--to transcend the local in order to reach the universal. Eliot's off-hand comment that Williams was a poet of some local interest stung Williams because of its condescending nature, but also because it ignored the universal aim of his poetry that was nevertheless dedicated to the local. Although Williams' poetry was founded on the poet's immediate locale, rather than on the literary traditions that formed the basis of Eliot's poetry, Williams was no less concerned than Eliot with the universal truths of all poetry. To Williams, the local merely embodied the universal; concentrating on individual

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[29]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Journals, ed. Louis Mumford (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 46.

[30]Williams' discussion of the local can be found in the Autobiography, pages 146, 174, and 391 as well as in his essay "Against the Weather: A Study of the Artist" pages 197-98 in his Selected Essays.

uniqueness was merely Williams' way of arriving at the universal. In support of Williams' theories, J. Hillis Miller claimed in his discussion of Williams, "The particular is the universal. The same forces stream through it as stream through all existence" (J. Hillis Miller, p. 311). Instead of being interpreted as the poet's sensory experience being rooted in a single place, Williams' concentration on the local wrongly came to be interpreted by those like Eliot as a sort of local color--Williams becoming the poet of northeastern New Jersey. He concentrated on the place he knew and the things of direct experience, choosing to work through the concrete in order to interpret the abstract.

In choosing to deal with the realm of ideas through the concreteness of things, Williams was again following a basically Romantic approach. Even though he did not want to consider himself a poet of the Romantic movement, there is much about Williams' approach--in addition to his Whitman advocacy--that does in fact tie him to the Romantics. One of the most obvious links is the personal character of his poetry. Williams' emphasis on the local is one aspect of the personal that stands opposite to Eliot's impersonal, scholarly emphasis on tradition. Also in line with the personal nature of Williams' poetry, one often finds the poet himself as the poetic subject. In both "Asphodel" and Paterson, as well as other, lesser poems, one finds the

poet moving throughout the poem in the form of the poet-hero. He is the subject. This poet-hero of Williams' poetry is consistent with the characteristic Romantic role of the poet.

Like the Romantics,' Williams' poetry turns inward in an attempt to explore the universal. What gives a poem its importance is the mind of the poet working on his material. The things of his poems are given importance first by the poet's seemingly simple act of selecting them for his poems, and second by his attitude toward them. The things of "The Red Wheelbarrow" have no inherent importance. They achieve importance because the poet has caused us to focus our attention on them. Williams' poems concern the creative impulse of the poet, emphasizing the imagination and its spontaneity. Thus, the protean nature of his major poem, Paterson. Like Leaves of Grass, Paterson grew by accumulation, the original plan falling victim to the spontaneous ideas of the poet during the years of composition. Like The Prelude, Paterson came to chronicle the growth of the poet's mind. The poem remained a work in progress, ending only with Williams' death, just as the growth of the poet's imagination could end only with death.

Some might feel that Paterson, as a work that developed through such an accumulative process, lacks a definable order; however, Williams was conscious of his poetry as an effort to counter the chaos that confronted the

twentieth-century poet. Recognizing that this chaos would not be tamed by the more conventional responses based on religion, politics, or social orders, Williams elected to enlist the power of the chaos itself. He would turn the chaos back on itself, using it for his own purposes in the way that the Romantics were able to perceive mutation or order-defying natural disaster as positive occurrences. Glaucho Cambon discusses Williams' approach to the chaos as one in which he actually tries to induce "the seething formlessness of contemporary American reality, in a dramatic confrontation of form with the formless." If it is successfully included, the formless becomes the raw material for form. The success lies in his poetry's inclusion of the formless instead of its becoming part of the chaos itself. The result, as Cambon states, is "a triumph of form on a new level."[31]

The chaos that he sees around him does not overwhelm the poet-hero of Paterson, because he develops the ability to live with it. He develops a frame of mind in which the chaos loses its destructiveness. Roy Harvey Pearce notes that Book I of Paterson contains passages of cadences more uniform than those of the succeeding books, and that following Book I, the poem seems to be more disintegrative.

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[31]Glauco Cambon, The Inclusive Flame: Studies in Modern American Poetry (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 192.

In Pearce's view, the seeming descent into chaos is a result of the poet-hero's "increasing power to deal with the chaos of modern life." To Pearce, the poet of Paterson comes to accept the impossibility of ultimately taming the chaos. The realization that he cannot give unity to his world "torments," but also "delights" him because "he is thereby thrown back (somersaulted, in Williams' closing words) upon himself and his heroic ability to live with disunity even as he longs for unity" (Pearce, p. 121).

Both Williams and Eliot sought to develop a response to the chaos of their times, but in Paterson, Williams was also responding to Eliot. The poem contains many references to Eliot, from subtle allusions and parody to direct references by name. Eliot hovers throughout the poem. Never far from Williams' mind, he is thus one of Paterson's shaping influences. Some critics, such as Brooks, Jarrell, and Shapiro, even have accused Williams of writing an Eliot-like poetry, especially in matters of structure and technique,[32]

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[32]Cleanth Brooks, A Shaping Joy: Studies in the Writer's Craft (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 61. In this work, Brooks asserts that the structure of The Waste Land is ubiquitous in modern poetry, including the poetry of Williams. He notes in particular the structure of unanalyzed juxtapositions whose meanings are not commented on or explained by the author.

Jarrell, p. xvi. Jarrell's introduction to Williams' Selected Poems contains a discussion of the similarity of structural devices found in Paterson and Four Quartets.

James E. Miller, Jr., Start, pp. 214-218. Miller describes Paterson as an example of The Waste Land technique.

but Williams was consistent in his basic rejection of Eliot's methods in responding to the chaos.

One major difference is the way in which Williams uses history. There is an obvious abundance of historical material in Paterson, most of it local or personal history. The reader is shuttled among accounts of the early settling of the area, including Alexander Hamilton's plans for a major industrial center at Paterson; recurring allusions to local inhabitants such as Sam Patch, who began his famous jumping exploits at the Paterson Falls; historical documents and letters; and even personal letters from Williams' ancestors and contemporary admirers such as Allen Ginsberg, who was a resident of Paterson at the time of his correspondence. The arrangement of all of these historical materials is neither chronological nor thematic. They are scattered throughout Paterson, in Roy Harvey Pearce's words,

> presented as so much disjecta membra and are allowed to have meaning only as they fit into the poet's scheme of things. (Which is the opposite situation to that of the 'Waste Land.') In this poem everything must be present; not even in imagination can we be elsewhere than where we actually are. (Pearce, pp. 336-37)

Williams' objection to Eliot's use of historical material was based both on Eliot's bias toward English history and his emphasis on history as tradition. As has already been noted, Williams, the most American of American poets, viewed Eliot's preference for England over America

as traitorous. In "The Poem as a Field of Action," Williams expresses his opposition to Eliot's English bias, writing, "To the English, English is England: 'History is England,' yodels Mr. Eliot. To us this is not so, not so if we prove it by writing a poem built to refute it--otherwise he wins!!" (Williams, Selected Essays, p. 241). In Paterson, the poem upon which Williams built his refutation, he was also conscious of the need to counter Eliot's history-as-tradition attitude. That Eliot, a native of St. Louis, would try to place himself within the English tradition was nearly incomprehensible; that he would try to include all poetry in English within that tradition was contrary to the facts as Williams saw them. In Book I Williams writes (apparently with Eliot's tradition-consciousness in mind), "My surface is myself. / Under which / to witness, youth is / buried. Roots? / Everybody has roots" (Williams, Paterson, p. 32). Later in the library section of Book III, Williams explores the poets' relationship to the past, particularly the literary tradition. The poet-hero enters the library to see if its books offer anything that he can use. The implied answer is, as Benjamin Sankey tells us in his Companion to William Carlos Williams' Paterson, that the poet cannot think of himself as continuing the work of the past, of belonging to a tradition. It must be accepted that his own age makes entirely new demands and that he must invent forms

appropriate to the new needs.[33] On these matters of tradition, Williams is consistent. Broad traditions are not nearly so important as the personal history that goes into shaping the poet; the present is of primary importance and history gains importance only in proportion to the help that it can give us in understanding the present. Despite its use of historical materials, Paterson is not an interpretation of history. Louis B. Martz's words on In the American Grain apply equally well to Paterson: "The point is not history but rather a search in the memory of America to discover, to invent, symbols of the ideals from which Williams' life and writings have developed.[34]

The historical material in Paterson is used to help define the immediate locale and its inhabitants. The local remains in the forefront, and through its use in Paterson, we have Williams' major response to the chaos of his times. For Williams, the quest had to begin in particulars. Walter S. Peterson said of Williams' approach, "Only a start made of particulars can ever lead to fulfillment of the

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[33] Benjamin Sankey, A Companion to William Carlos Williams' Paterson (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1971), p. 116.

[34] Louis B. Martz, "The Unicorn in Paterson: William Carlos Williams," Thought, 35 (Winter 1960), rpt. in William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. J. Hillis Miller (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 78.

quest."[35] His decision to use the immediate surroundings appeared to be the only rational choice open to him. Choosing the local seemed so natural that it hardly constituted a choice. Direct experience was a necessity for Williams, but it was never a hindrance because he was able to find limitless depths in the local. Williams was able to see infinity in the minutiae of his surroundings. On his choice of the particulars, he writes in his Autobiography,

> I wanted, if I was to write in a larger way than of the birds and flowers, to write about the people close about me: to know in detail, minutely what I was talking about--to the whites of their eyes, to their very smells.
>
> That is the poet's business. Not to talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particulars to discover the universal. (Williams, Autobiography, p. 391)

In Williams' immediate experience, northeastern New Jersey provided a multitude of locales upon which to base his poem. Although he was not a resident of Paterson, that city was used for a number of reasons, which Williams enumerates in the Autobiography.

> I thought of other places upon the Passaic River, but, in the end, the city, Paterson, with its rich colonial history, upstream, where the water was less heavily polluted, won out. The falls, vocal, seasonally vociferous, associated with

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[35] Walter Scott Peterson, An Approach to Paterson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 16.

> many of the ideas upon which our fiscal colonial policy shaped us through Alexander Hamilton, interested me profoundly--and what has resulted therefrom. Even today a fruitful locale for study. I knew of these things. I had heard. I had taken part in some of the incidents that made up the place. I had heard Billy Sunday: I had talked with John Reed: I had in my hospital experiences got to know many of the women: I had tramped Garret Mountain as a youngster, swum in its ponds, appeared in court there, looked at its charred ruins, its flooded streets, read its past in Nelson's history of Paterson, read of the the Dutch who settled it.
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> I took the city as my 'case' to work up, really to work it up. (Williams, Autobiography, p. 391-92)

The intention behind Williams' use of the local was to reach the universal that would contribute a sense of order to the chaos around him. He shared this final aim with Eliot, but his use of the local was directly opposed to Eliot's methods, and deliberately so. As Peterson writes:

> In Paterson, of course, Williams does know how to answer Eliot, and, in his Whitmanesque affirmation of the local, he had made truly possible a rediscovery of the primary impetus of both life and art. (Peterson, p. 62)

Sister Bernetta Quinn concurs when she says that Williams disagrees with Eliot's assertion in Four Quartets that place is only place and that what is actual is actual only for one place. On the contrary, Williams believes that only in some place does the universal ever become actual; therefore,

place is the only universal.[36] The choice of a place that will yield the universal is limited only by the poet's knowledge of it, for only a true intimacy with a tangible locale and its inhabitants will provide the vision necessary to see through the readily observable and reveal the universal. Eliot came closest to this approach in Four Quartets with the individual titles culled from his personal experience, but even here he resorted to meeting the universal head-on by relying on the universal domain of tradition, religion, and academic scholarship.

Williams rejected both the church and the university as a viable source of order. For previous generations they may have provided a stable center with their rigid, comforting structures, but Williams and others with leanings toward Romanticism found even the basic idea of trying to bring order to the chaos to be flawed. About Williams' attempt to bring order to the chaos, Walter Sutton has written:

> As an artist and man of science, Williams recognizes that man lives in the flux and welter of time, caught in its distractions and fragmentations, and that he must find his identity there. No vision of mystic unity can bring a resolution of multiplicity. Striving for unity or at least a sense of his own identity, the most a man can achieve is episodes, or fragments, as Williams comments in his author's note to

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[36]Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), p. 91.

> Paterson. Religious mysticism offers no real solution to the twentieth-century intellectual poet.[37]

In Paterson, Book II, Section Two, Williams presents his most direct condemnation of religion. The scene is the park overlooking Paterson Falls. A preacher delivers a sermon centered around the belief that the private capitalistic interests, initiated by Hamilton, have succeeded only in making the country a private preserve at the expense of the people and to the detriment of the land. But despite what Williams sees as the failure of capitalism, no one offers a new vision to replace that of Hamilton. No one in the park pays much attention to the preacher. The conventional religion that he offers is a failure, and Dr. Paterson realizes that the only hope lies in the poet. However, he is "blocked" (to use the first word of Section Two) by the dominant capitalism and institutional religion.

The sermon section presents a strange combination of Poundian economics and anti-Eliot bias countering his dependence on established religion, but throughout Paterson Williams rejects the emphasis on academic scholarship that was supported by both Pound and Eliot. Williams' attack on academe is more evenly distributed throughout Paterson than is his attack on religion. Louis Martz points out, "The more we read and reread Paterson, the more it emerges as a

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[37]Walter Sutton, "Dr. Williams' 'Paterson' and the Quest for Form," Criticism, 2 (Summer 1960), p. 243.

subtly devised protest against the cosmopolitan, the learned, the foreign aspects of such poems as The Waste Land, Four Quartets, and The Cantos" (Martz, p. 77). As support for this assertion, Martz quotes from a section of Book I, which reads

> Moveless
> he envies the men that ran
> and could run off
> toward the peripheries--
> to other centers, direct--
> for clarity (if
> they found it)
> loveliness and
> authority in the world--
>
> a sort of springtime
> toward which their minds aspired
> but which he saw,
> within himself--ice bound
>
> and leaped, 'the body, not until
> the following spring, frozen in
> an ice cake.' (Williams, Paterson, p. 36)

The "he" of the section is the poet, who, like Sam Patch alluded to in the final lines, must chance the descent. The poet's descent, as Martz points out, "is a descent, through memory, to the sources of the self" (Martz, p. 78). In Paterson, Williams is attempting to work out the sources that have developed his life, and hence, his writing. The allusion to Patch, who was in fact found floating in a cake of ice the spring following his fatal leap from the Genessee Falls, underlines Williams' recognition of the precariousness of his approach, made doubly so by the following Eliot attracted while working to eradicate the self in poetry; but the attempt had to be made. Williams sometimes attacked

Eliot's erudition more directly, as in Section Three of Book II:

> That the poem,
> the most perfect rock and temple, the highest
> falls, in clouds of gauzy spray, should be
> so rivaled . that the poet,
> in disgrace, should borrow from erudition (to
> unslave the mind): railing at the vocabulary
> (borrowing from those he hates, to his own
> disfranchisement)
> --discounting his failures .
> seeks to induce his bones to rise into a scene,
> his dry bones, above the scene, (they will not)
> illuminating it within itself, out of itself
> to form the colors, in the terms of some
> back street, so that the history may escape
> the panders. (Williams, Paterson, p. 80)

The above lines could be seen as a refutation of scholarly methods in general, but the "dry bones," which are important in The Waste Land and Ash Wednesday, make it certain that Williams had Eliot in mind.

Attacks on academe are found throughout Paterson, but Book III--"The Library"--contains the most concentrated attack. Innundated by stimuli on the streets and parks of the city, deafened by the roar of the falls, the poet enters the library in hope of finding some solution to the chaos that surrounds him outside. He finds no solutions in the library. While he hoped to find some interpretation of the sound made by the falls, the poet discovers, as Pearce tells us, only more evidence of language gone dead, killed off by those whose profession it is to use it (Pearce, p. 123). The solution lies not in books, but in his wandering mind. He must, like the Romantics, trust in his own imagination.

The first line of Williams' "Preface" to Paterson reads, "Rigor of beauty is the quest. But how will you find beauty when it is locked in the mind past all remonstrance?" (Williams, Paterson, p. 3). There are many aspects to this quest, but central to it is what Benjamin Sankey describes as Paterson's major theme--"The poet's attempt to find a language by which to express the beauty that is 'locked' in the mind" (Sankey, p. 27). Paterson itself then serves a dual purpose. It records the poet's search for an appropriate language, and it exemplifies the use of that language within its own borders.

Williams was searching for a language that, according to Joel Conarroe, was "capable of giving adequate expression to the America he knew intimately."[38] Williams perceived a divorce between what was accepted as the official, poetic language and American experience. He hoped to bridge the separation by developing a poetic language appropriate to American experience. He needed, in Walter Sutton's words, "to achieve an order of words compatible with the time, and language, flux in which he lives" (Sutton, p. 244). Williams' America was imbued with chaos, and he was confronted with either trying to use language as a way of ordering the chaos, or using a language that would reflect

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[38]Joel Conarroe, William Carlos Williams' Paterson: Language and Landscape (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), p. 4.

what he saw. He chose the latter. As James E. Miller, Jr. writes, "The loudest language of Paterson is the language of chaos, of criticism, the language which the poet finds as the reality of Paterson, the reality of America" (James E. Miller, Jr., American Quest, p. 143).

In Paterson itself, the falls represent the confusion of sound from which the poet must build his response. As Williams writes in The Autobiography, "The Falls lets out a roar as it crashed upon the rocks as its base. In the imagination of this roar is a speech or a voice, a speech in particular; it is the poem itself that is the answer" (Williams, Autobiography, p. 392). The chaos of the falls, however, is unrelenting. The torment of language is inescapable. It inundates his mind and allows the poet no chance to order it:

> Caught (in mind)
> beside the water he looks down, listens!
> But discovers, still, no syllable in the confused
> uproar: missing the sense (though he tries)
> untaught but listening, shakes with the intensity
> of his listening . (Williams, Paterson, p. 81)

To escape the unceasing rush of sound, the poet flees to the library, but as we have already seen, the learning that it represents offers no more help than did the sermon in the park.

Instead of these external aids, the poet learns that success lies in inner quest. Only a freeing of the imagination, accomplished through the use of personal experience, will enable the poet to respond to the chaos

of the falls. He must start his quest in the particulars. Walter Peterson argues that meaning is found only in an imaginative and loving marriage with things of the local world, and an awareness of this marriage is not only the source but also the end of the poet's quest (Peterson, p. 43). No particular order, tradition, or religious system will order the chaos. The falls continue to flow, and what Paterson finally demonstrates is that only by an individual, constantly changing response can the chaos be kept from overwhelming the poet.

Paterson details Williams' personal quest. Although it fails to arrive at a conclusion on how to order the chaos, success lies in its exploration of the chaos, using the chaos itself to construct the quest. The form of Paterson is open-ended, even as such a quest as Williams undertook is never ended. Success lies in how the poet responds to the chaos--how he pursues the quest--and not in any final destination. As Williams wrote in Paterson, "The dream / is in pursuit!" (Williams, Paterson, p. 222).

CHAPTER VI

THE CONTINUANCE OF ROMANTICISM

Both Eliot and Williams achieved a personally acceptable success in their quest to combat the chaos that confronted the poets of their generation. Williams' success lay in the individualized, personal quest itself, while Eliot's success lay in the unifying effect of the more universally applicable institutions of literary tradition and religion. Ironically, it was Williams' individual approach that eventually gained wider currency. This is not to say that Eliot failed. During his own lifetime no writer commanded more attention in the combined fields of poetry and criticism than did Eliot. His was the voice that inspired poets or at least caused strong reaction. Each of the major poems--"Prufrock," The Waste Land in particular, Ash Wednesday, Four Quartets--was a remarkable achievement and caused the poetry-conscious public to re-examine its attitude toward the times in which it lived. The criticism that Eliot generated and events such as the popularity of his American reading tour and his receiving the Nobel Prize hardly anticipated the temporary nature of his influence. When Edmund Wilson published Axel's Castle in 1931, he was able to write with assurance, "Eliot, in ten years' time, has left upon English poetry a mark more unmistakable than that

of any other poet writing in English."[1] While Exile's Return appeared three years later, Malcolm Cowley wrote in a similar vein, "No other American poet had so many disciples as Eliot, in so many stages of his career. Until 1925 his influence seemed omnipresent, and it continued to be important in the years that followed."[2]

But the influence of the sort that Wilson and Cowley write about--that of influencing young writers in the style and vision of their poetry--had a less permanent effect than other aspects of Eliot's influence. While Eliot's support of the Metaphysical poets at the expense of the Romantics failed in its primary aim, to check permanently the tide of the Romantic movement, it did have lasting secondary effects. The most obvious is the welcome resurrection of many early seventeenth-century poems and several poets, particularly John Donne, to major status. Each year since Eliot's death, the Romantic movement has made itself more strongly felt, but interest in Metaphysical poetry has also continued strong. This interest in the Metaphysicals also had the secondary effect of helping to create an atmosphere in which new approaches to poetry, such as the New Criticism, were able to thrive. Eliot shared major responsibility for

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[1]Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 5.

[2]Malcolm Cowley, Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's (New York: Viking, 1934), p. 112.

calling attention to particular poetry--the French Symbolists as well as the Metaphysicals, for example--but a more pervasive effect lay in his influence on the general attitude toward the study of poetry. With his advocacy of the more academically oriented Metaphysicals and the popularity of his own allusion-laden poetry, Eliot paved the way for the academic, objective criticism that came to dominate his own time and still continues to influence the study of poetry.

An unexpected secondary effect of Eliot's programme, as we have seen in earlier chapters, was the effect it had on poets whose deliberate intent it was to blunt that programme. Their opposition to Eliot was a rallying point. Without him as the focus of opposition, the poetry of numerous writers, Crane and Williams most notably, would have been vastly altered, if it had existed at all. Ironically, Eliot's influence lives on in an unintended way through these writers who have replaced him as a major inspiration of young poets.

While those who opposed Eliot have come to be the more major influence, Eliot's influence is still strongest felt by those who are in their early years of the critical study of poetry. The students who commit themselves to understanding Eliot are forced by the allusions alone to read a wide spectrum of other literature. For a time, anyway, it is not unusual for Eliot to control the reading of honors

undergraduates and graduate students. The Eliot programme dictates that the reading will slight the Romantics, American writers, and Modern poets while concentrating on those writers who support Eliot's critical theories. By continuing to influence the reading of young scholars, Eliot gives the advantage to his own critical theories at a time when a person is just developing his own critical ideas.

Eliot's greatest permanent success lies in the poems themselves. No other poet of the twentieth century can claim a poem having the immediate impact of The Waste Land and no other poet can claim the number of major poems that Eliot can. While some poets, such as Crane and Williams, produced a single major work that dwarfs the rest of their production, and others, such as Frost, Stevens, and Auden, produced a body of work that qualifies them for a position among the first rank of poets, only Eliot produced a series of long, important works spanning nearly thirty years, from "Prufrock" in 1915 to Four Quartets in 1942. Even if these poems have not permanently altered the style of twentieth-century poetry and even if the philosophies that lay behind them did not eventually prove to be permanent, the poems remain a major artistic accomplishment. Eliot contributed to the atmosphere that made the New Criticism possible, and when explicated within strict New Critical guidelines, the poems are a success.

Unfortunately, Eliot did not intend the poems to stand alone; he intended them to exemplify a lifelong poetic philosophy and planned that they would combine with his criticism to stem the tide of the Romantic movement. Ironically, it is in long-range influence that the poems fall short. While Eliot's call for an impersonal poetry was heeded into the 1950's, it has had little attraction for the poets since then. The impersonality of a poet's work is hardly a consideration any longer; ironically, a more common critical concern has become the autobiographical nature of Eliot's own poetry. The entire body of Eliot's major work may be seen as the chronicle of the poet's personal quest as he embraces, first, tradition and, finally, religion as a way of ordering his individual chaos.

Few critics have gone as far as Robert Craft, who calls Eliot "the most personal and autobiographical of poets,"[3] but Louis Simpson is not unique when he claims that the way to the universal is through the particular and that no poem strikes us more vividly as a force of personal utterance than does The Waste Land.[4] Eliot wrote nearly the entire poem while he was recuperating from a nervous breakdown at a

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[3]Robert Craft, "Concorde Diary," The New York Review of Books, 25 (17 August 1978), 153.

[4]Louis Simpson, Three on the Tower: The Lives and Works of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams (New York: Morrow, 1975), p. 150.

sanitorium in Lausanne. The demands of rising at 5:00 a.m. to give himself time to write before leaving for his job, a full day spent at the bank working with the war debts of German nationals, and the homelife where he had to face the increasing difficulties of life with an insane wife eventually proved too much of a strain, and Eliot was ordered to seek a complete rest to avoid the nervous breakdown that his doctors felt was inevitable. On one level, The Waste Land is the personal narrative of Eliot's attempt to sort out his own mental chaos. Robert Sencourt describes it as "the poem of a man working his way through a nervous breakdown and dealing partly with his own memories and partly with a mass of material--both classic and contemporary--too vast for him to digest."[5] On a more superficial level, the poem draws for its images on the personal experience of Eliot's daily life, from the London scenes he witnessed to his private life with Vivienne. What is true about the personal, Romantic nature of Eliot's most intentionally anti-Romantic poem is true of his other poems as well. His poetic theory was not always exemplified by his poetic practice. As Leonard Unger describes this discrepancy in his T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns, "His criticism urged a program of the classical, the traditional,

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[5]Robert Sencourt, T. S. Eliot: A Memoir (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1971), pp. 102-03.

and the impersonal, while he was producing a poetry which is poignantly romantic, strikingly modernist, and intensely personal."[6]

Considering the initial reaction to him in the 1920's, Eliot attracted surprisingly few permanent followers. While some, such as Tate, remained consistent in their association with Eliot, others, such as Robert Penn Warren and Robert Lowell, followed the more common course of having an initial attraction to Eliot and then abandoning him once they attained their own voice. Shapiro is being extreme when he writes that "No poet with so great a name has ever had less influence on poetry,"[7] but a critical consensus that the Eliot revolution was either short-lived or never occurred at all was developed. Even Brooks, who heralded the Eliot revolution in Modern Poetry and the Tradition, eventually admitted that what he saw as the Eliot revolution was overwhelmed by the continuing tide of Romanticism. In 1964, Brooks published an essay entitled "Poetry since The Waste Land," in which he states,

> But pervasive as the influence of Eliot has been, it has not been the sole modern influence, and the tide that turned against it some years ago is now at full flood. One searches, therefore, for modes more general than those associated with the Eliot

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[6]Leonard Unger, T. S. Eliot: Moments and Patterns (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 9.

[7]Karl Shapiro, In Defense of Ignorance (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 37.

> revolution--modes indeed general enough to reveal themselves in the poetry of William Carlos Williams and even that of the Beatnicks.[8]

And what caused Eliot's failure to become the major influence in the post-Waste Land era? One cause is that at the time Eliot was finding his way out of the waste land, so were others; yet Eliot had the misfortune to be associated permanently with the negativism of The Waste Land. Eliot was speaking neither to his generation nor for the generation that came after him. They did not share his pessimism. Another cause for his lack of influence is that he misjudged the times. Despite his attempts to thwart the Romantic influence, the twentieth century became the century of the common man, and as Louis Simpson tells us, Eliot's hostility to the masses caused his political ideas to be ignored (Simpson, p. 317). Finally, the most important reason for his lack of influence is centered around his impersonal theory of poetry. The veneer of impersonality made it impossible to attract a following similar to that of Whitman or even Williams--a following that would be based on the poetry, but also one that would be cemented by the personality of the poet himself, whose life was seen to embody the philosophies behind the poetry. On the other hand, those who would support Eliot's impersonal theory are

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[8]Cleanth Brooks, A Shaping Joy: Studies in the Writer's Craft (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 54.

unable to follow in his footsteps because of the highly personal way in which he responded to the chaos. The combination of tradition and religion was Eliot's route to the order after which he quested; but few who sought a response to the chaos could take that same route.

A more applicable route was the one taken by Crane and Williams. With Whitman as their guide, each poet pursued an individual quest, coming to realize that the quest itself was more important than any ultimate order grounded in tradition or religion. Crane set the initial example of trying to counteract the Eliot programme through an alternative poetry. His own poetry, with its epic ambitions, structured versification, and experiments in sound-dominant lines has given rise to few imitators, but his poetry is early proof that success could be found outside the Eliot programme. His courage stands as an example for the Romantics who came after him, but the style of his poetry and the untimeliness of his death stand in the way of his attracting the following that Williams gathered. The Romantics of the second half of the twentieth century pay him tribute, as Lowell did in his poem "Hart Crane," but it was left for Williams to exert the degree of influence that Eliot worked so deliberately to establish.

During the early 1950's, it would have been heresy even to intimate that Williams' influence equaled that of Eliot, but starting with the decade of the sixties, the

pervasiveness of Williams' influence was not only taken for granted; he was often seen to have superseded Eliot as the dominant influence on young poets. By 1975, Reed Whittemore felt justified in writing in his biography of Williams that in the middle to late fifties, a "Revolution of the Word" had taken place and that Williams was one of its strongest prophets. This revolution was seen as replacing "the world of the Tates and the Eliots and their 'PR pupils.'"[9] The change was apparently sensed on both sides of the Atlantic, for an anonymous reviewer, bemoaning the fact that so little of Williams' work was available in England, wrote in 1967, "At this point, Williams is decidedly 'in' and, for good or ill, has replaced Eliot in the affections of younger readers."[10]

Similar sentiments come from many sides--from poets, critics, and from those who combine both disciplines. For example, Hyatt H. Waggoner claims that in American poetry by the mid 1960's, Pound and Williams were the only major poets of "Modernism" who continued to have an influence among the younger poets.[11] Daniel Hoffman claims that by the late

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[9]Reed Whittemore, William Carlos Williams: Poet from Jersey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), p. 320.

[10]"The Williams Grain," Times Literary Supplement, 13 April 1967, p. 305.

[11]Hyatt H. Waggoner, American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 615.

1950's, Williams had replaced the "energizing force" of Pound, who had established himself as the major influence following Eliot's dominance.[12] Even Robert Lowell, who had begun as a talented poet schooled in the Eliot camp, came to recognize the importance of the Williams influence. In a 1962 essay that appeared in The Hudson Review, Lowell notes that those of the group to which he belonged (Tate, Ransom) saw Williams as a poet of the revolution that had renewed poetry, but that they considered him merely a byline. By 1962, Lowell changed his initial beliefs to a certainty that time had passed by the Tate-Ransom group. "Once more," Lowell writes, "Dr. Williams is a model and a liberator." He calls Williams "part of the great breath of our literature," describing Paterson as "our Leaves of Grass."[13] Of course, the dating of Williams' rise as a major influence can hardly be precise, but there is remarkable consistency about his importance as a growing influence on American poetry after the mid-century.

Of the so-called schools of poetry that developed after mid-century, one thing that they had in common was their

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[12]Daniel Hoffman, "Poetry: Schools of Dissidents," in Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, ed. Daniel Hoffman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979), p. 515.

[13]Robert Lowell, "William Carlos Williams," The Hudson Review, 14 (Winter 1961-62), 530-36; rpt. in William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. J. Hillis Miller (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 158.

aversion to the Eliot programme. The Beat Generation on the West Coast, the Black Mountain poets in North Carolina, and the New York School of poets each helped to reaffirm the Romantic movement, most obviously through their reestablishment of the poet as central to their poetry. Ironically, it was Pound, through The Pisan Cantos, who made the greatest impact in breaking the dominance of Eliot's dictate about the impersonality of poetry, but the later developing schools solidified the movement away from Eliot. After World War II, Williams began to gain the recognition so long denied him because of the strength of the Eliot programme, and each of these schools, the Beats and the Black Mountain poets in particular, looked upon Williams as a principal influence.

The Beats were an easy mark for criticism because of their public posturing and their unorthodox ways of life, but they, more than any other group of poets in the twentieth century, gained a wide public following. One positive result of their popularity was (as noted by Louis Simpson), that thousands who had never read Williams' poetry now knew of him as the spiritual father of the Beats (Simpson, p. 310). Williams did what he could to bring the Beats to public attention, but he himself benefited at least as much from the relationship as did the younger poets. The Beat Generation of poets, including Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti,

Gregory Corso, and Jack Kerouac, looked upon Williams as a leader not in the sense that they attempted to imitate the style of his poetry, but rather in the sense that they hoped to continue the spirit of his work. They, like Williams, saw themselves as the direct descendants of the Whitman tradition; they actively opposed the Eliot programme; and they wrote their poetry to continue Williams' efforts at expanding the forms and the language of contemporary poetry.

Of all the Beat poets, the one with the closest ties to Williams was Allen Ginsberg. His poetry began with lyrics modeled after Donne and Shelley, but Ginsberg soon fell under the spell of Williams and began a correspondence with him while still an unknown young poet. Several of these letters, taken verbatim, became part of Paterson and by 1952 Williams was returning Ginsberg's interest, writing in a letter, "I've become interested in a young poet, Allen Ginsberg, of Paterson--who is coming to personify the place for me."[14] When "Howl" appeared in 1956, it was Williams who wrote the introduction. More than any other poet, it is Ginsberg who took up where Williams left off and has since attempted to keep the spirit of Whitman alive through his bardic voice.

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[14]William Carlos Williams, The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams, ed. John C. Thirlwall (New York: McDowell Obolensky, 1957), p. 312.

The Black Mountain poets constituted a second school that reaffirmed the spirit of Williams. They were allied with the Beat poets in that they advocated using American colloquialisms and natural speech rhythms in their poetry. They too were opposed to the veneration of tradition and wrote a poetry that countered the authoritativeness of academically oriented poetry. Their magazine--The Black Mountain Review--published Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac, and Ginsberg was a contributing editor.

The Black Mountain school counted Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, and Denise Levertov among its most widely published members, and Charles Olson was the school rector who held the group together. It was also Olson who was most conscious of continuing the spirit of Williams. He echoes Williams in many ways, one being, as J. Hillis Miller points out, the Williams-like rejection of visual imagery as being too abstract. In place of using words for their pictorial effect, Olson and Williams use words, as Miller writes, "to energize the mind in certain ways, and express in their sonority some quality of matter, thickness and weight, or airy delicacy, or any one of the other innumerable textures which our senses may know through words."[15] Another way that Olson evokes Williams is in his attempt to

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[15]J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 312-13.

create poetry by using the local to reveal the universal. Echoing Williams' "no ideas but in things," Olson assures his readers that the style of his poetry is "our anti-cultural speech, made up / of particulars only" (Charles Olson as quoted in Hoffman, p. 529).

Others of the Black Mountain school wrote with a conscious awareness of Williams as their mentor. They all continued the American Romantic tradition, particularly in the poems of Robert Duncan, but Denise Levertov, like Olson, was especially conscious of Williams. Although she was reared in Britain and published no books for eleven years after she came to America, Levertov eventually transformed herself, in Daniel Hoffman's words, "into a new-style Romantic American poet" (Hoffman, p. 533). Hoffman goes on to state that Williams became her principal master and that she, like Williams, came to write "a poetry of process whose achieved forms are improvisations revealed by the occasion of each poem" (Hoffman, p. 534).

While the New York School of poets--John Ashbury, Frank O'Hara, and Kenneth Koch--are less concerned with their indebtedness to Williams than were the Beats or the Black Mountain poets, they nevertheless continue in the Whitman tradition and have created a poetry that demonstrates the antithesis of Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry. Hoffman describes their intensely personal methods: "Each in his own fashion attempts to cram into each poem a whole

universe--not of experience, but of the associations his own sensibility reaches or confects in response to almost any given stimulus" (Hoffman, p. 553). In the poetry of O'Hara and Ashbury especially, the mind of the poet becomes the poem's recurring subject. We witness the mind responding to stimuli without its revealing any discernible pattern or method. The reactions are as various as are the situations. We have a persona as full of surprises as Whitman's comfortably contradictory persona or Emerson's man thinking, and yet one that is even more subjective.

Apart from the various schools of poetry, the trend away from the Eliot programme has also been nearly as consistent. Many of these poets began in the Eliot programme and turned from it after they had already established themselves; most of these poets who broke with Eliot did so because they could no longer accept his theories of impersonality. Of all recent poets, none had so far to go in making the change as did Robert Penn Warren. The last of the Eliot generation and one of the founders of the New Criticism, he has taken a more personal and even autobiographical turn, and even his criticism has moved from New Critical dictates to a more historical perspective. Warren exemplifies the transition common to so many poets of the subsequent generation; yet he has not necessarily served as a leader among them.

Other poets who began in the Eliot programme and later turned from it--Louis Simpson, John Berryman, Robert Lowell--made the change because of the necessities of their poetry, discovering that the impersonal theories imposed artificial restrictions. Simpson's early works were built on the principles of Eliot, being impersonal and also highly rhymed and metered. Then with his At the End of the Open Road in 1963, the turn away from Eliot was abrupt and permanent. With this volume, Simpson turned to the Whitman tradition, as even the title itself implies. The poems became less structured, less academic, and more personal.

The change in Berryman's poetry, although not as abrupt, was no less drastic. Berryman began by writing intellectual verses in an objective tone, but with the Dream Songs he appears to have discovered that he could explore the chaos of his generation through the local of his personal sufferings and emotional distress. Along with so many other poets of his generation--Roethke, Lowell, Plath, Sexton, and Ginsberg--he used his madness as the lens through which he examined his age. Unlike Delmore Schwartz and Lowell, Berryman never went as far as their confessional poems in making his personal moments the subject of poetry, but the turn to personal authenticity gave his poetry a power that it previously lacked. As Hoffman writes, "In the great Romantic tradition the poet is at the center of the poem: replacing the public man as hero, the poet, as the man of

feeling, tells us how it is to live in this world" (Hoffman, "Poetry: After Modernism," p. 495). In this sense, Berryman resides firmly in the continuing Romantic tradition.

While the above named poets reaffirmed the influence of Romanticism on the twentieth century, it was the career of Robert Lowell that constituted Romanticism's major triumph. Lowell began his career as the heir apparent of the Fugitives. He sought out Ransom and Tate, studying under Ransom at Kenyon and having his first book of poetry introduced by Tate. The early poetry was built on strict rhythms and meters. It drew on European rather than American traditions. Before 1950, Lowell's poetry was studiously impersonal. Then in the 1950's, the poetry underwent an extreme change. Hoffman attributes the change to a trip Lowell made to California in the mid-fifties, where his readings were unenthusiastically received and where he was influenced by California poets such as Snyder and Ginsberg. It appears that Lowell came to the realization that he had exhausted what his formal training made it possible for him to say (Hoffman, "Poetry: After Modernism," pp. 483-84). From then after, Lowell turned to the rival tradition.

Even earlier than his California trip, however, Lowell was showing a tendency toward personal poetry. This tendency was evident in The Mills of the Kavanaughs (1951), in which he drew on his personal conflicts, but disguised

these conflicts behind an objective persona. The personal nature of the poetry continued to grow, and eventually Lowell became the foremost confessional poet. In the confessional poems, Lowell no longer felt the need to disguise his personal experiences behind altered personas, allegory, or myth. On the contrary, he seemed almost compelled to write the undisguised truth about his most intimate experiences. The chaos of his own troubled mind was dealt with directly, as, for example, in "91 Revere Street" from Life Studies, which was written at the suggestion of his therapist that he write a journal based on his childhood experiences. During this confessional period, Williams became the dominant poetic influence on Lowell's work, having solidly replaced the Eliot programme. According to Helen Vendler, Williams influenced Lowell's poetry in turning it from Europe to America, in making it more open and more metrically free, and in doing away with the rhyme. It appears that Paterson even served as a precedent for Lowell's incorporating private letters in his own verse.[16] Lowell changed to accept the American traditions, and as part of that acceptance, grew to admire Williams' emphasis on the American language. Hoffman quotes Lowell as saying, "It's

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[16]Helen Vendler, rev. of Robert Lowell: Life and Art, by Steven Gould Axelrod, The New York Review of Books, 26 (Feb. 1979), p. 3.

as if no poet except Williams had really seen America or heard its language" (Robert Lowell as quoted in Hoffman, "Poetry: After Modernism," p. 484.

The career of Robert Lowell typifies the transition undergone by many of the poets whose generation followed closely after the Eliot generation. They began under the influence of the Eliot programme, but by the time their poetry reached its maturity, they discovered the limitations imposed by Eliot. Characteristically, they exhausted the Eliot programme while still not finding a satisfactory solution for the chaos that threatened to overwhelm their lives; thus, the turn to Romanticism and its greater possibilities for exploring the personal responses to the chaos. By rejecting Eliot, they relinquished the burden of having to reach a chaos-ordering conclusion and were able to supplant this with the exploration, or quest, itself.

Of course, not all poets of Lowell's generation began under the Eliot influence and then later converted to the Romantic tradition. Some, such as Anthony Hechet, have remained true to Eliot's precepts, continuing the Ransom-like form of poetry while ignoring the Whitman-like optimism. Other poets of the same generation had no need to change because they never fell under Eliot's influence in the first place. James Dickey began writing with the assumption that the personality of the poet contained the

ingredients that gave vitality and uniqueness to poetry, and he has remained consistent in that assumption. Dickey's independence of Eliot and his followers is all the more remarkable in that he did his college work at Vanderbilt, the institution that spawned the Fugitives, and to a large degree, shaped the New Criticism. Like Dickey, Donald Hall has written a poetry emphasizing the personality of the poet. His most recent prose work, Remembering Poets, and his editorship of The Oxford Book of American Literary Anecdotes reaffirms his dedication to the importance of the poet himself as an essential topic. Also in the Romantic tradition, A. R. Ammons followed a career in which Whitman, rather than Eliot, has exerted the principal influence since Ammons' earliest poetry. Ammons, more than any other poet, displays Whitman's democratic sensibility. His book-length poem, Sphere: The Form of a Motion, more closely resembles "Song of Myself" than does any other modern work in its form as well as in its content, which embraces the natural sciences of astronomy, botany, and biology, as well as the more traditional poetic topics.

In witnessing the poets who have turned their backs on the Eliot programme, it is ever more evident that the Eliot programme was a significant but temporary phenomenon, subsumed ultimately by the more inclusive Romantic tradition. The feeling of chaos that inspired Eliot's poetry, however, has remained constant and has continued to

exert its influence. As Daniel Hoffman writes, "Whether that chaos is internalized in their work or exiled from it, the best poetry of the period [the generation following World War II] is written under its pressure" (Hoffman, "Poetry: After Modernism," p. 467).

Eliot's programme became a temporary phenomenon because it was not translatable into the needs of others who were facing the chaos. The solution of an impersonal, academic poetry founded in the Metaphysical tradition and leading to a religion-centered sense of order could not be adapted to the individual needs of all the poets who followed Eliot. Romanticism suited those needs because it allowed the poet to center his work in his own personality and it deemphasized the importance of arriving at an ultimate solution. Romanticism allowed the quest to reassert its importance over any successful conclusion to that quest. The example of Whitman and his questing, Romantic poetry proved to be too powerful for Eliot to overcome, and today the Whitman influence is greater than at any other point in the century. With Whitman's increasing influence, Crane and Williams have also grown in importance. Crane serves as the earliest example that success could be achieved outside the Eliot programme. He stands for the courage that was needed to embrace Whitman and to say no to Eliot at a time when all were rushing toward him. Williams has himself grown to embody the Whitman spirit in the twentieth century;

and while Eliot has declined as an influence on contemporary poetry, Williams now exerts the commanding influence that Eliot once had and lost.

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