an assessment of Burke the critic—and he is one of the best modern critics—must begin with a study of the assortment of "demonstrations" which constitute his original contribution to *Secession* and *S 4 N*.

S 4 N, like *Secession*, was founded upon the conviction that opposing points of view would by an alchemy of the spirit produce a cultural unity: "That out of a comparison of opposed viewpoints (with attendant attacks and counter-attacks, and with subsequent experimentations and reactive critiques) comes aesthetic progress." This deliberate opposing of points of view resulted in a fascinating variety of essays, stories, and poems, but did not account for the fact that where views differ, personalities might also clash. Such is the sad and final realization of the magazine's editor in the last number; dissatisfaction among members of the editorial board had made a continuation of the magazine unlikely. During its career, many lively critical articles were published, some of them written by former editors of *Secession* and *Broom*; some original writing (such as Cummings' satirical poem, "Beauty Hurts Mr. Vinal") also found its way to its pages. Something in the nature of a summary of *tendenz* writing is to be found in the double number of September 1923-January 1924, which was given over entirely to essays on the work of Waldo Frank. Frank's place among the critics of the twenties was high; and this survey of his work is valuable at least in indicating the high regard with which he was considered.

These magazines—*The Seven Arts*, *Broom*, *Secession*, and *S 4 N*—point to a fact both interesting and disturbing. In their various ways they suggested that the need for revaluation of our culture was urgent. But their offerings were so often hindered by personal difficulties and indiscretions that they generally failed to furnish a sure or even an intelligent directive. *The Seven Arts* was perhaps the most consistently well edited and offered the best organization of critical and philosophical thought in our generation. All of these magazines, however, illustrate the search for a new intellectual and cultural incentive and for some form of synthesis of the tendencies of our time.

MODERN POETRY

and the Little Magazine

CHAPTER VII

PERHAPS more than anywhere else, experiment in the twenties was reflected in the forms poetry assumed and in the poet's campaign against traditional metrics and forms. Ezra Pound's principal battle in the early years of *Poetry* and *The Little Review* was against the "prosaic" in poetry; and he regarded the traditional respect for rhyme, stanzaic pattern, and metrics as barriers to true poetic understanding. The reasons for the poet's revolt are not hard to find; within certain limits, and with certain qualification, they thought of the science of versification as another of the barriers which tradition had set up against individualist expression and experiment.

Our modern poets in the main looked upon the mass of Romantic verse as damaged both in form and in purpose by the requirement that the poet be insincere—that is, that he frequently substitute a conventional or traditional feeling for things for his more direct or more complex comprehension of them. Much poetry had turned out to be preaching but thinly disguised as versified sentiment. This over-all objection to the influence of traditionalism upon poetic speech was directed especially against those poets whose sentiment was not only traditional but also "literary"—that is, who borrowed their sentiments from books. This is what caused Pound to say to Harriet Monroe: "Every *literaryism*, every book word, fritters away a scrap of the reader's patience, a scrap of his sense of your sincerity. When one really feels and thinks, one stammers with simple speech. It is only in the flurry, the shallow frothy excitement of writing, or the inebriety of a metre, that one falls into the easy, easy—oh, how easy!—speech of books and poems that one has read."[1]

[1] Quoted by Monroe, *A Poet's Life*, p. 267.

Another, related, problem which the modern poet considered in his war on tradition was that of the "structural cliché." In the eyes of many of our poets, structural conservatism was associated with artificiality of sentiment. That is, the balance of rhyme, meter, and stanza with the poet's sentiment seemed to foster an insincerity of thought and emotion. Thus, the experimental attitude was directed against the platitude which the regularity of metrical pattern defended against any "barbarous" interference. Critics of twentieth century literature point often to its preoccupation with form and technique and its neglect of content. In a sense this was true because the modern poet was very sensitive to the limits of traditional and conservative communication. In his eyes traditional poets did not wish to speak for themselves; they simply wished to hand back what they had already received, wrapped in a neat package and tied with old string. Distrust of conservative versification had a beginning in the larger distrust of conservative thought and the compact regularity of trite sentiment. Form and content were inseparable for the rebel; and the language of the conservative impressed him as being the servant of insincerity.

Of course, each period of literary history has its share of experiment in form and technique. But it was natural enough for poets of the twentieth century to look about for some means of breaking the tyranny of sentiment which seemed to them to be the major barrier to genuine poetic expression. It was not so much the artificial limits which any literary form places upon a writer's materials: these limits are in a sense the watermark of the arts. Rather, it seemed that sweet expressions found too comfortable a nest provided for them. The writing of poetry had become too maternal; it lacked vigor. What E. A. Robinson had said in the 1890's seems to be a wish which all young poets possessed. Robinson had pleaded for

> . . . a beacon bright
> To rift this changeless glimmer of dead gray,
> To put these little sonnet men to flight
> Who fashion in a shrewd mechanic way
> Songs without souls, that flicker for a day,
> To vanish in irrevocable night.[2]

[2] E. A. Robinson, "Sonnet," Sonnets, New York, 1928, p. 21.

II

In order to oust the platitude from literature, the modern poet suggested several reforms in metrics and a restatement of the values of the metaphor. He sought most of all to avoid the cliché and the commonplace. He believed that the simple logic of declamation and the simple correspondence of the decorative simile were false leads, giving the reader the mistaken impression that tradition was flawless and luminous, like a Watteau canvas.

The controversy over imagism and free verse was only a preliminary scuffle. Imagism was designed to give the poet respect for the purity of an image, to force him to give up many of his stock notions of beauty and sentiment. To hold the image within the limits of essential being; to avoid external or artificial references to the "meaning" of the image; to affirm always that "Poetry should not mean, but be": these are the minima of imagist poetry. And they had been stated and illustrated by the predecessor of imagism, the British intellectual, T. E. Hulme, who died in the First World War, in 1917, and did not therefore live to pass upon the use of his suggestions and principles. Hulme had written only five poems in his life, but they were admirable examples of what the imagists wanted to do. Hulme's interest in some reform of poetic usage was often demonstrated in conversations he had with F. S. Flint and others in London. From these talks, and in Hulme's essays on poetry, the gospel of imagism was formulated. And in the pages of the London *Egoist*, Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*, and other magazines of the second decade (as we have already shown), the principles of imagism were stated and restated, illustrated and advanced.

The results are no longer very impressive. Imagism seems to have been another attempt on the part of practicing poets to defend (and, perhaps, to advertise) what they were doing. But imagism was not without its lasting effect upon poetic practice. Its chief influence was its assertion of the visual quality in experience and its tenacious guardianship of the pure image against the incursion of extraneous, extrapoetic materials—reflections and effusions which destroy the precise outlines of a sensory experience. Allowance is made, of course, for the fact that no sensory experience is without its intellectual accompaniment; a percept without a concept is empty. The full nature of the image is well expressed in Ezra Pound's definition: the image is "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."

The advocates of free verse attacked the problem from a similar point of view. The *vers librist* was above all indignant over the suggestion that his verse was formless. He insisted that the form of any expression is implicit in the nature of the poet's attitude toward what he wanted to say—that a pattern resided within, was not superimposed upon, the poetic material. There was neither logic nor aesthetic value in fixed forms. They worked against sincerity of expression by announcing beforehand the form which it was to assume. The conservatives agreed but insisted that traditional form was not as much a handicap as it seemed. Conrad Aiken's remarks in *The Poetry Journal* stated their case: "A poet always uses the maximum subtlety of form which he can completely fuse with what he has to say."[3] More than anything else, however, the advocates of free verse regarded it as a "democratic expression," a kind of verse that "the people will understand," and one which was ideally suited to the "formlessness of modern life." The work of the "Whitmanists" in *Poetry* and *The Midland* seemed substantially to develop this thesis. Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg, Edwin Ford Piper, Edgar Lee Masters, and Arturo Giovannitti all used Whitmanesque free verse as a means of direct communication. It seemed to them a means of avoiding insincerity, of stating the fact or announcing the sentiment without formal delay or abstract equivocation. This is why the *Spoon River Anthology* of "Webster Ford" was so highly regarded by Ezra Pound and the *Egoist* group in England: "The author has escaped from the stilted literary dialect of *The Atlantic Monthly*. He has endeavored to write the spoken language. He has not escaped a few dozen *clichés*, *clichés* of political journalism, *clichés* still hanging over from his 'poetic diction' period."[4]

As for opposition to free verse on the grounds that it was patternless, this of course had to be answered. Professor John Livingston Lowes, for example, could not see that the loose structure and capricious patterns of imagism and free verse were different in any sense from prose description. He argued that many passages in Meredith's novels might easily be arranged in the free verse line and compare favorably, as poetry, with the poetry appearing in the "new journals."[5] But all pattern is the exercise of the imagination upon subject and feeling. As T. S. Eliot said, "It is not our feelings, but the pattern we make of our

[3] "Illusory Freedom in Poetry," *The Poetry Journal*, v, 190 (May 1916).
[4] Pound, "Edgar Lee Masters," *Reedy's Mirror*, xxiv, 11 (May 21, 1915).
[5] "An Unacknowledged Imagist," *Nation*, cii, 217-19 (February 24, 1916).

feelings which is the center of value."[6] Within each line, modern poets argued, the poetic phrase, the very nature and sound of the words, dictated the reading and governed the comprehension of the poetic idea. To impose upon the line an artificial restriction—one not emotionally grasped or imaginatively controlled by the poet—was simply to deny him the right to fashion his line independently and genuinely. As Laura Riding and Robert Graves have put it, "The whole trend of modern poetry is toward treating poetry like a very sensitive substance which succeeds better when allowed to crystallize by itself than when put into prepared moulds."[7]

The writing of imagist and free verse was not without its share of charlatans. Much bad verse was written under the new dispensation. But the controversy acted as an incentive to future experiment. The advantages of the traditional forms, while not neglected—*The Masses* group under Max Eastman, for example, preferred the form of the sonnet—were generally suspect. For more than one reason the moderns approved of the revolt; it called their attention to the possibility of experiment with a variety of forms and meanings; it turned the poet's attention to words and images *per se*; it challenged him to produce originality of thought rather than cleverness of structure; it set up the cliché in the pillory of contemporary scorn.

What is the real difference between the cliché and the metaphor? The easy answer is that the cliché is simply an outworn metaphor, which perhaps has intrinsic value but is now dead as last year's Number One song hit. The differences are more subtle than that. Continuous usage has given the cliché a simple and easy intellectual content; in fact, its meaning is taken for granted and lacks almost all challenge to the poetic imagination. Further, the cliché has become communal, while the metaphor is personal in its use. Modern poets were impressed in the twenties by the importance of aesthetic independence; they wished above all to avoid giving up their birthright by handing it over to tradition. This desire was not motivated solely by a sense of Bohemian exclusiveness. The force of language needed to be secured against any softening of the aesthetic temperament. The poet's sense of difference and his respect for that difference caused him to protect at all costs the use of the metaphor as a source of new and plural mean-

[6] Quoted by Elizabeth Drew, *Directions in Modern Poetry*, New York, 1940, p. 232.
[7] Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *Survey of Modernist Poetry*, London, 1927, p. 47.

ing. Abuses of this conviction caused some critics to condemn the modern movement in poetry; it was made ridiculous, according to one critic, by "tricks of the minor 'new' poet who having learned to look within himself for inspiration thinks that everything he finds on looking within is poetry, as he finds it."[8]

There were contradictions in the position which modern poets assumed—contradictions are plentiful throughout modern literary history. Free verse was used on the one hand for its close approximation to the "common speech"; it was used by the experimenter as a means of achieving a high degree of singularity of speech. Imagism began as the most objective of verse; it was incorporated into the verse of those who regarded the image as the best means of articulating poetic individualism. Note that in the subsequent development of both free verse and imagism, the hardiest of individualists scorned the verse of Masters, Lindsay, and Sandburg. They regarded the French symbolists as their true masters, because these latter seemed to deal with language and metaphor with greater subtlety and with less regard for their values as communicative means.

Eventually the modern conception of the metaphor was to provide an important challenge for the experimentalist poet. Its plurality of meanings gave the performer the reputation of virtuoso, especially since he only rarely indicated the exact meaning which the reader ought to accept. The wide variety of metaphoric usage can be seen in the following illustrations, drawn from the little magazines: Louis Grudin's

> She hung from his arm like a slain snake,
> while he stared through the waves of
> evening for her wake; like an oracle
> over a fowl, he studied her circlings.[9]

Evelyn Scott's

> My joy,
> Sharper than the blades of swords,
> Ran,
> With a white cry,
> Naked through the morning.
> I quenched all the stars
> And went on
> Beyond them.[10]

[8] Richard C. DeWolf, *The Minaret*, I, 77 (November 1916).
[9] Louis Grudin, "Solitaire," *Rhythmus*, I, 1 (January 1923).
[10] Evelyn Scott, "Touch," *Rhythmus*, I, 40 (February 1923).

Eugene Jolas'

> At night, when she went to her home in the suburbs,
> She found a rain-dull tedium nodding its bald head
> Against the bleak curtain of her old-maid loneliness.[11]

T. S. Eliot's

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherized upon a table;[12]

and Ezra Pound's

> And we sit here
> under the wall,
> Arena romana, Diocletians, les gradins:
> quarante trois rangées en calcaire—
> Baldy Bacon
> bought all the little copper pennies in Cuba
> Un centavo, dos centavos,
> told his peons to "bring 'em ini."[13]

Whatever else may be said about this random sampling of modern, little magazine verse, the variety of statements and of poetic usage should impress one immediately. The metaphor is in each an imprecise expression of meaning, and leads the reader away from direct paraphrase. Most of all, the metaphor is freed from its confinement within logical statement and—in many cases, not all—remains a fluid suggestion of a variety of meanings located within the linguistic origins of the words, the allusiveness of the figure, or the "inappropriateness" of the comparison.

Experimentalism in poetry was a challenge to language to rid itself of traditional clichés. In the estimate of the poet, these clichés did not make meaning clear; they made meaning deceptively easy, when what the reader needed was an awareness of complexity. There is no riddle in this. The poet's apprehension of reality was as of a flux of perceptual material, momentarily caught within the boundaries of attention. Fluctuation of sensations caused many strange groupings of ideas, which seemed not actually to exist and yet made a powerful impression

[11] Eugene Jolas, "Futility," *Rhythmus*, II, 50 (May-June, 1924).
[12] T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *Poetry*, VI, 130 (June 1915).
[13] Pound, "Another Canto," *transatlantic review*, I, 12 (January 1924).

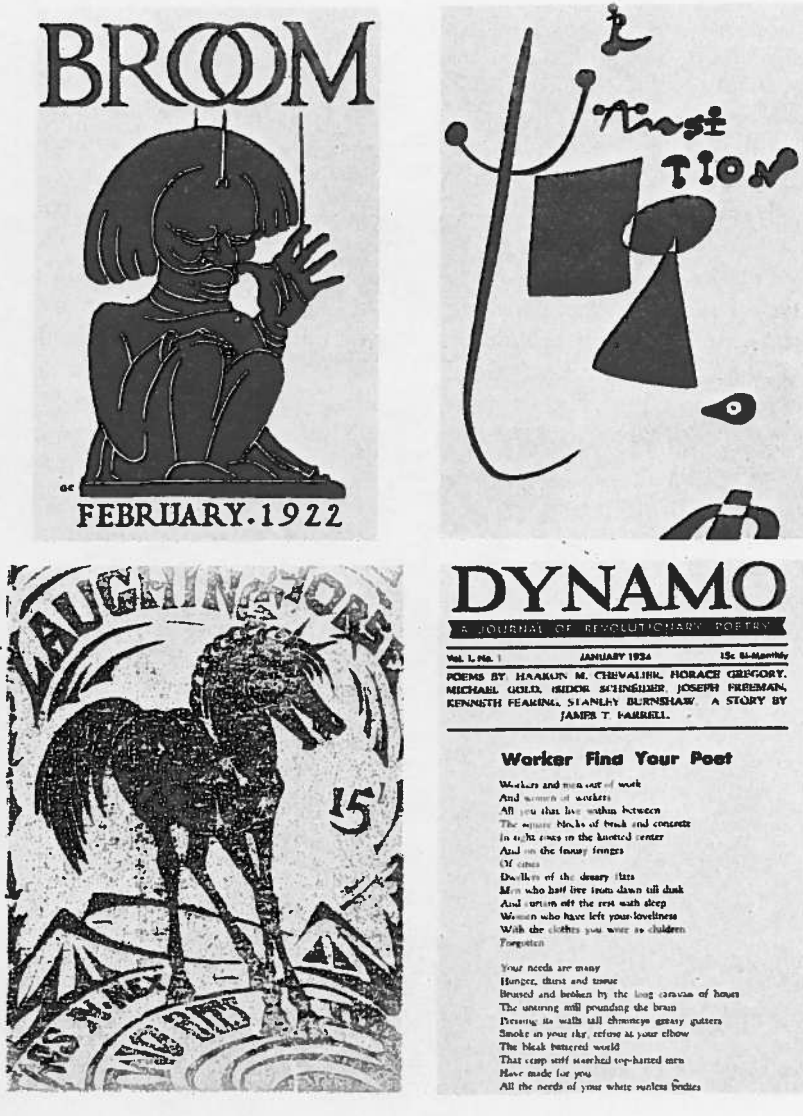
upon the poet. Hence the novelty of much modern poetry is primarily a recognition of the diversity and looseness of incidental associations. The metaphor is likewise an "untrue" statement of fact. The more complex appearances become, the more unusual the metaphor, the more remote from our habitual associations. Modern metaphor is "shocking"; that is, one does not appreciate it by a simple nod of recognition; one does not simply fit it with one's stock notions of "what so-and-so said the other day about the tariff." It violates such conventional recognition, and aims essentially to make the reader discard it altogether, to reform his attention and to reconsider his standards of acceptance. In some cases, the poet may trick him into dropping his platitudes, only to have him find that the metaphor is merely ambiguous and without any reducible meaning of any kind. It is on these terms that one may judge the seriousness of the modern metaphor: its intrinsic value (which is in one sense implicit in the "way of saying") and its value after the reader has acceded to its demands, not before.

III

It is with the structure of the metaphor and the texture of the line that most poetic theory is concerned. The "Fugitive" group of poets in Nashville, Tennessee, established their own magazine for the purpose of practicing poetry and coming to some theoretical agreement about its function: "The Editors of *The Fugitive* are amateurs of poetry living in Nashville, Tennessee, who for some time have been an intimate group holding very long and frequent meetings devoted both to practice and to criticism. The group mind is evidently neither radical nor reactionary, but quite catholic, and perhaps excessively earnest in literary dogma."[14]

From its beginning in 1922 until its end in 1925, the black-and-gold-covered *Fugitive* puzzled its observers. The first two issues presented a startling array of pseudonyms—such names as "Marpha" and "Henry Feathertop"—thus suggesting to several New York critics that all of the poems were written by John Crowe Ransom. Within the first year, Southern reviewers, troubled about a cryptic editorial, nervously wondered whether the periodical was repudiating the South. Nor was it long before some were crying out against what they thought was

[14] Editorial, *The Fugitive*, I, 34 (June 1922).



Four little magazine covers

John Crowe Ransom

The Fugitive group, 1930-1931. Reading from top to bottom: Andrew Lytle, John Crowe Ransom, unidentified, Thomas Warren, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Mary Davidson, Mrs. Robert Penn Warren, Mrs. Donald Davidson, Caroline Gordon.

"obscurity" or "unintelligibility." Today, some are still befuddled, believing that the magazine was connected with the agrarian movement.

The Fugitive was never filled with the work of one person masquerading under various signatures; it never repudiated the South; it was never unintelligible; it was never a regional or agrarian magazine. What *The Fugitive* stood for one can easily determine by remembering the early work of its chief contributors: Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Merrill Moore, Laura Riding, and Robert Penn Warren.

The magazine was established by a group of seven, all of whom lived in or near Nashville. Some of these seven—Donald Davidson, James Marshall Frank, Sidney Mttron Hirsch, Stanley Johnson, John Crowe Ransom, Alec B. Stevenson—had been meeting for several years to talk of poetry and philosophy, gathering every other Saturday night at the home of Mr. Frank. Allen Tate, who was introduced to the group as a Vanderbilt undergraduate in 1921, has given us a casual and swift glimpse of these meetings in "*The Fugitive*—1922-25," published in the April 1942 *Princeton University Library Chronicle*. He tells how the young men grouped themselves, somewhat formally, around the chaise longue of the invalided Dr. Hirsch, who, with a grand and authoritarian manner, a manner doubtless accentuated by his pince-nez and "curled Assyrian hair," directed the conversation. "He was a mystic and I think a Rosicrucian, a great deal of whose doctrine skittered elusively among imaginary etymologies,"[15] says Tate. For some time before Tate became a member, the group had been in the habit of writing verse and reading to one another, with Dr. Hirsch sternly ordering the program and calling for criticism of each piece. It was Hirsch who suggested the poetry should be printed as a co-operative undertaking in a magazine, and it was he who suggested the name *The Fugitive*.[16]

That first April 1922 number contained seventeen poems. For the sake of the record we list these works and their authors.

Ego	by *Roger Prim*
Night Voice	(John Crowe Ransom)
To a Lady Celebrating Her Birthday	
The Handmaidens	

[15] Allen Tate, "*The Fugitive*—1922-1925," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, III, 76 (April 1942).
[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

I Have Not Lived	by *Marpha* (Walter Clyde Curry)
A Demon Brother The Dragon Book Following the Tiger	by *Robin Gallivant* (Donald Davidson)
Sermons An Intellectual's Funeral The Lighted Veil	by *Jonathan David* (Stanley Johnson)
To Intellectual Detachment Sinbad	by *Henry Feathertop* (Allen Tate)
The House of Beauty To a Wise Man	by *Drimbonigher* (Alec Brock Stevenson)

The pen names in several instances were whimsically apt descriptives of the men who assumed them. Roger Prim, who read his verse "in a dry tone of understatement,"[17] possessed a decisive and fierce "primness" that made him something of a leader, though he never pressed his right to command. Robin Gallivant was in 1922 a light-hearted, buoyant romantic who liked to tell of the strange mysteries of far countries, but soon he gave up most of his romanticism. Henry Feathertop was a little proud and vain, as he exaggeratedly admits: "My conceit must have been intolerable."[18] Since the pseudonyms were dropped with the appearance of the third issue, one can guess that they were assumed not so much from a desire to conceal identity as from sheer playfulness.

Walter Clyde Curry, Merrill Moore, William Y. Elliott, and William Frierson were added to the original seven in late 1922 and the early months of 1923. Later still Jesse and Ridley Wills, cousins, and Robert Penn Warren, Laura Riding, Andrew Lytle, and Alfred Starr were elected to the *Fugitive* ranks.[19] "Red" Warren, one of the alert editors of the recently defunct *Southern Review*, and one of our most distinguished poets and critics, was only sixteen when he was admitted into the group. During his first year with the fugitives he roomed with the frolicking Allen Tate and Ridley Wills. Catching from Tate a fine admiration for T. S. Eliot, Warren decorated their room with murals depicting the inspiring sights of *The Waste Land*. "I remember particularly the rat creeping softly through the vegetation, and the typist putting a record on the gramophone."[20]

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 81.
[19] Letter, Donald Davidson to Charles Allen, May 10, 1939 (unpublished).

Laura Riding, one of our best contemporary poets, was elected to membership during the last year of the magazine's career. At that time she was the wife of a history professor, Louis Gottschalk, of the University of Louisville. After winning a $100 prize offered by the magazine in 1924, she became a frequent contributor, though her personal connection with the group was somewhat remote.

Merrill Moore, we may well imagine, is the most prolific versifier living. He has written over fifty thousand sonnets since he published his first one in *The Fugitive*, written them in spare moments taken from his successful practice as a psychiatrist in Boston. He always appeared at the Saturday readings with at least ten poems, and once he came with twenty-one.

These were the persons, along with the original seven, who were responsible for the bulk of the material that was published in the magazine's nineteen numbers. Few were the others who gained admission to *The Fugitive*'s pages; only infrequently do we find such names as Witter Bynner, David Morton, William A. Percy, Robert Graves, Louis Untermeyer, John Gould Fletcher, and L. A. G. Strong. Of the outsiders perhaps Hart Crane deserves special mention. Tate, early in his career, became a warm admirer of Crane's work, and at Tate's request, *The Fugitive* presented Crane's "Stark Major" in August 1923, and other poems, including the "Lachrymose Christ," in 1924 and 1925.[21]

The magazine was a natural outgrowth of friendship, a unique phenomenon in the history of the recent little magazines. As such there was none of the pretense, the crusading, the yielding to outside pressures, which we find in some other little magazines. It was admirable in its self-sufficiency, in its unconcern for renown. If fame came, and it certainly did, it was not because *The Fugitive* blew its own trumpet. Fame came because the magazine printed some of the best poetry then being written in America. Merrill Moore, the most frequent contributor, flooded the magazine with his experimental and exciting sonnets. Davidson, with such poems as "Advice to Shepherds," "A Dirge," "Echo," and "Hit or Miss," appeared almost as frequently as Moore. Laura Riding explored with a hard, brilliant intensity in most of the later issues. Some of Ransom's best known work, such

[20] Tate, "*The Fugitive*—1922-1925," p. 82.
[21] Letter, Davidson to Allen, May 10, 1939 (unpublished).

as "The Amphibious Crocodile," "Lady Lost," "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter," and "Captain Carpenter," first appeared in The Fugitive. But there is little point in reciting titles. One might go ahead for pages glibly mentioning the poems of Tate, Warren, Curry, Shipley, Johnson, and Stevenson, but he could never succeed in tapping The Fugitive's quality. The verse that appeared here must be read, not simply talked about.

Since The Fugitive's aim has often been misunderstood, we quote an editorial, written by Ransom, that fairly and accurately states the magazine's purpose:

"The Fugitive exists for obvious purposes and has the simplest working system that we know of among periodicals. It puts in a single record the latest verses of a number of men who have for several years been in the habit of assembling to swap poetical wares and to elaborate the Ars Poetica. These poets acknowledge no trammels upon the independence of their thought, they are not overpoweringly academic, they are in tune with the times in the fact that to a large degree in their poems they are self-convicted experimentalists. They differ so widely and so cordially from each other on matters poetical that all were about equally startled and chagrined when two notable critics, on the evidence of the two previous numbers, construed them as a single person camouflaging under many pseudonyms. The procedure of publication is simply to gather up the poems that rank the highest, by general consent of the group, and take them to the publisher."[22]

Here is the true and best statement. Certainly the entire group refused to acknowledge "trammels upon the independence of their thought" and they were "self-convicted experimentalists."

Why did these men wish to think of themselves as "self-convicted" experimentalists? From what were they revolting? A clue is furnished in the name of the magazine. When Dr. Hirsch suggested the title, he undoubtedly was remembering, as Tate has mentioned, the ancient etymology: "A Fugitive was quite simply a Poet: the Wanderer, or even the Wandering Jew, the Outcast, the man who carries the secret wisdom around the world."[23] If one wishes, however, he can correctly read more into the choice of the name. One can assume that these poets were fleeing from, or attacking, the shackles of sentimental Southern poetry of their day (pillars in the moonlight, pale, mysterious ladies, Uncle Tom, sing-song lassitudes, etc.). In writing their

[22] John Crowe Ransom, Editorial, Fugitive, I, 66 (October 1922).
[23] Tate, "The Fugitive—1922-1925," p. 82.

verse, as Davidson says, they were fleeing from "poet-laureating, the cheapness and triviality of public taste, even among those supposed to be cultured; the lack of serious devotion to literature, to the arts, to ideas."[24] And they were against "professional Southernism," but by no means against the South, as many observers of the time believed. Rather, as their later agrarian symposium proved, theirs was a respect for the South, or at least a hope for what the South might become.

At the time, however, these poets showed no concern with promoting a scheme for reconstructing Southern life, except insofar as they wished to inject a fresh note into its verse. Thumbing through the magazine, we find little prose, and that little is concerned with aesthetics and astute book reviewing. There is absolutely no evidence that the periodical was agrarian or self-consciously regional. It is not our purpose to tell how several of the group—notably Tate, Davidson, and Warren—later became ardent advocates of literary regionalism, or how they supported the theory that a writer should use the materials of the place, the cultural entity with which he is best acquainted. This is a story in itself and has no relation to the Fugitive activity. Nor is it pertinent to consider here that some members later coalesced to sponsor the Southern agrarian movement.

What needs emphasizing, however, as both Davidson and Tate have insisted, was the fortuitous gathering in Nashville of a group of talented Southerners, most of them native to Kentucky and Tennessee.[25] These men not only shared a close sympathy for their historical heritage (a heritage which had a "use for the dramatic and lyrical arts"[26]) but they also shared a brave and intense need to attack the ubiquitous sentimentalities that had taken evil root in their native soil. This was a closely knit group, and the sense of solidarity tended to harden and sharpen the imaginative thinking of the individual minds. It is not too surprising, therefore, that people have noticed similarities in the work of the group.

A few critics are convinced that these similarities derive from the influence of T. S. Eliot and Hart Crane. There may be an element of truth in this observation, especially in reference to Warren and Tate, but that element can be easily overemphasized. There is good

[24] Letter, Davidson to Allen, May 10, 1939 (unpublished).
[25] *Ibid.*; see also Tate, "The Fugitive—1922-1925," p. 83.
[26] Tate, "The Fugitive—1922-1925," p. 83.

evidence (the words of the poets[27]) for believing that they worked out for themselves some of the cacophonous and "metaphysical" techniques.

The phrase "metaphysical manner" is dangerous and tricky. Following Cleanth Brooks' brilliant definition in *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* we may define "metaphysical" as the blending of the intellectual with the emotional approach (i.e., irony, satire, ideas, "meaning," juxtaposed with feeling); as the designing of a tight functional structure (the fusion of idea, tone, and imagery into an integral whole); as the striving for "maximum density" (i.e., the inclusion of a wealth of disparate allusion into any given stanza); as the making of the surprising image (i.e., the extended image which carries the thought; the compressed, elliptical image; the pitting of opposites within the image).[28] In varying degrees, all of the group except Moore and Riding exploited this ancient tradition introduced by Donne.

Warren, discussing "Pure and Impure Poetry" in the Spring 1943 issue of *The Kenyon Review*, summarizes and defends ten "undesirable" characteristics which most critics believe should not appear in "pure" poetry (that is, acceptable poetry). Nine of these ten qualities describe the structure and content that Warren, Tate, Ransom, and, to a lesser degree, Davidson, seek in their work.

1. ideas, truths, generalizations, "meaning"
2. precise, complicated, "intellectual" images
3. unbeautiful, disagreeable, or neutral materials
4. situation, narrative, logical transition
5. realistic details, exact descriptions, realism in general
6. shifts in tone or mood
7. irony
8. Metrical variation, dramatic adaptation of rhythm, cacophony, etc.
9. subjective and personal elements.[29]

Perhaps, too, one can see in these four men and in Laura Riding similarities of attitude and theme. All perceive in our rationalistic society a weight of vulgarity and stupidity, and they take a sardonic

[27] Letter, Davidson to Allen, July 18, 1941 (unpublished).

[28] Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, Chapel Hill, 1939, pp. 39-49.

[29] Robert Penn Warren, "Pure and Impure Poetry," *Kenyon Review*, v, 246-47 (Spring 1943); see also William Van O'Connor, "Tension and Structure of Poetry," *Sewanee Review*, LV, 555-73 (Autumn 1943).

delight in slashing at these vices. All notice symptoms of disunity in themselves, and they struggle fiercely to integrate their natures with the avalanche of complex, unrelated scientific fact that presses against them with a demand for immediate assimilation. Hence the oblique and many-sided approach to their varied material, the abrupt shift in tone, and the use of dense inclusiveness. The world must be examined from as many views as possible.

But one can make too much of the likenesses of theme and attitude, as well as of technique. For the fugitives attacked the vapidities of the world and of Southern literature with individual force and temperamental emphasis. Though Davidson shows many of Ransom's characteristics, especially the irony, satire, and magnificent wording, he is a warmer, less intense, more lyrical spirit. Warren, probing the brain for its tortured, almost demented incertitudes, was more drawn toward native subjects than any other poet of the group and was at the same time more profoundly metaphysical than even Tate. And Merrill Moore, with sly, racy prankishness whipping through his lines, barely manages to skim the periphery of the great tradition. Laura Riding during her early years was not as rigidly denotative or as madly analytical of human nature as she has been of late, but she showed even in 1924 and 1925 a compulsion toward the literal, unimagistic abstraction that makes her more complex and masculine (and therefore more "difficult") than the other fugitives. Indeed, when one considers the variety of approach, he is almost inclined to dismiss any attempt at cataloguing.

A co-operative magazine generally has little chance of surviving for more than a few months. The editorial fights that characterized Secession are the usual thing. But the fugitives showed a rare spirit. They were gentlemen who had been friends over a period of years. There was no question of *The Fugitive* becoming a point of bitterness among them, and when it finally ceased publication in December 1925, the reasons were not dissent or lack of money.[30] The editors discovered that they had responsibilities which would no longer permit the labor

[30] Letter, Davidson to Allen, May 10, 1939 (unpublished). The average cost of *The Fugitive* was less than $100 per issue, an expense which was largely taken care of by a small newsstand sale and the one-dollar bills which came from the 300 yearly subscribers. The poetry prizes, offered after the first year, were made possible through the assistance of various patrons, among the most prominent of whom were the Associated Retailers of Nashville, Ward-Belmont College, and Mr. Joel Cheek. For a period of about eighteen months, previous to December 1924, when the magazine was tried as a 32-page bimonthly, Mr. Jacques Black contributed a large share of the necessary money.

and time of publishing a magazine, and one can readily see why. For the periodical had rocketed its poets into the national literary spotlight. Ransom, Tate, Warren, Moore, and Riding had gained a degree of acceptance in the public grace. Davidson published his *Outland Piper* in 1924, and Ransom his famous *Chills and Fever* in the same year. *The Fugitive* had fulfilled its proper function.

Moore, Riding, Warren, and Davidson were the four who received first publication in the magazine, but it was *The Fugitive* that really established the careers of the entire group. The magazine is best viewed as a means by which an entire flank of modern American poets gained recognition; for, though some of the work in the periodical was fledgling and trivial, much of the most estimable verse of Ransom, Warren, Tate, Davidson, Riding, and Moore appeared there. The alert reader feels no inclination to cavil with Mr. Tate's judgment of the *Fugitive* years: "I think I may disregard the claims of propriety and say quite plainly that, so far as I know, there was never so much talent, knowledge, and character accidentally brought together in one American place in our time."[81]

IV

Modern poetry has above all helped to throw off the cloak of false piety from poetic expression. Since contemporary poets emphasized "the newness of the matter," they found that the old metrical patterns could scarcely accommodate their novelties and were forced to rely upon their own inventiveness and experimental sense. Ransom sees some disadvantage in this condition: "But at least our poet is aware of his own age, barren for any art though it may be, for he can't write like Homer or Milton now; from the data of his experience he infers only a distracting complexity."[82]

The private aesthetic values in such communication, though they may not give the poet great audiences, will at least satisfy him on the score of integrity; any oversimplification of his feeling would inevitably lead to triteness of statement. This consideration of the poet as above all a private person, best equipped to remain honest and original within the seclusion of his own sensibility, is a defense against the demand that the poet take the stump for humanity in general or the proletariat in particular. It is justified by the surprising discovery that

[81] Tate, "The Fugitive—1922-1925," p. 83.
[82] Editorial, *The Fugitive*, III, 36 (April 1924).

the poet's environment is a complex one and that he can best understand and reveal its complexity by accepting no social or sentimental compromise with it. Such a position is indispensable to the full use of the poet's intellectual and emotional resources. He ought not to write within easy distance of Bartlett's *Quotations*, a dictionary of rhyme, and the latest interpretation of Lenin on Marx on Bakunin.

The Fugitive is the best argument against its detractors. Since it was published in a university community, its sponsorship of revolt was neither reckless nor unguarded. Since those who wrote for it were poets endowed by nature, the sincerity of its poetics seemed all but proved by the excellence of its contents.

The little magazines are well supplied with other statements of poetic purpose. There were the extreme conservatives of the type of *The Journal of American Poetry*, which looked wistfully back at the glorious prewar days when poets did not substitute eccentricity for charming poetic statement. There were the innumerable statements made by states laureate, who published their own little poetry magazines in the interests of the beautiful and nothing but the beautiful. There were poetry magazines in the late twenties and in the thirties which regarded poetry as just another way of announcing Marxist doctrines. To each of these statements (which overwhelmed the nation's readers by the weight of sheer numbers) were added the temperamental disposition and the political and aesthetic interests of its spokesmen.

It was the integrity of the poet which impressed most critics, though the quixotics of some modern poets distressed the more conservative. Released at least temporarily from conventional metrics, poetry of all the arts seemed best suited to express the age. Poetic activity was marked by a fury and quantity which apparently knew no bounds. This activity was motivated in part by a defiance of the world of convention and business, in which the use of the metaphor was limited to the billboard or the magazine advertisement. Maxwell Anderson, for example, thought it altogether possible "that poetry and art are out of place in the new tradesmen's civilization about to be erected on the ashes. If so we [the editors of *The Measure*] are atavistic. We are born too late, and can't help it."[83] Poetry, in Anderson's opinion, is not the product or expression of a school, but "the output of a keen, egotistical, independent intelligence backed by an extraordinary surcharge of emotion."[84]

[83] Editorial, *The Measure*, I, 24 (March 1921).
[84] Editorial, *The Measure*, II, 17 (April 1921).

Since much of the poetry of our day has been taken up by statement and counterstatement regarding the importance of the aesthetic imperative, poetry may be considered the most advanced of the advanced guard literary arts. The guardians of tradition were considerably reduced in rank; the bulk of the defense of tradition was puerile and useless. Among the ablest of the conservative critics who abhorred "unsightly esotericism" in the arts, Conrad Aiken stands out as quite capable of defending the limits and discipline of traditional form, though his own poetry does not always document his criticism. His opinion, announced as early as 1912 in *The Poetry Journal*, was not unreasonable, though he objected to free verse as an unpardonable excuse for inadequate art. Free experiment, Aiken says, is often a giving-in to "aesthetic fatigue." A strong and competent imagination will not need to resort to forms outside of the traditional ones in order to compensate for its "subjective limitations."[35]

But many of the traditionalists played the theme of "nobility, truth, and goodness" until it must have bored even them. *The Journal of American Poetry*, for example, was established because "the decadent school" had made poetry so unrespectable that it had almost disappeared altogether. The *Journal* would like to disabuse the public of the notion that poetry need be ignoble before it can be published. Thus the definition of poetry as "verse which is exalted in mood and uses poetic diction" is offered as a substitute for modern poetics. London's *Decachord*, though essentially conservative in its point of view, nevertheless offered much intelligent opinion and seemed interested in the "metaphoric purity" of modern poetry. *L'Alouette* expressed itself with some acerbity: "Between the urbane sterilities of our bearded Brahmins and the psychoanalytical clinics of our younger intellectuals, American poetry fares badly indeed."[36]

Inferior criticism was as usual marked by vagueness of idea and a kind of foolish lyricism and archaism:

"The poet who would be read, loved and remembered must listen to the shouts and sighs of humanity at midday, must comfort them under the pyramiding burdens of even. . . ."[37]

"The soul, in its quest for beauty, may find its sustenance in a flower, a sunset, a picture, a strain of music, or a poem. It is a common need—shared by the laborer in the fields, the woman drooping

[35] Aiken, "Illusory Freedom in Poetry," p. 187.
[36] Editorial, *L'Alouette*, I, 20 (January 1924).
[37] Editorial, *The Buccaneer*, II, 24 (Winter 1926).

over tasks at home or shop, and the toiler lost in the maze of industrial life."[38]

Such criticism may be considered a part of social rather than literary history. It accounts for a wide variety of mediocre versifying which was published in the name of American poetry. Hundreds of little poetry magazines flourished (and still flourish) in our country on trite appeals to widely shared sentiment, one step removed from birthday telegram No. 8. They were the "backbone" of the nation's literary life. Affecting a love for garrets and for the beautiful, they echoed the commonplaces of our time. Triteness is not necessarily a vice of conventional verse; ultimately the quality of a poem must be measured in terms of the vividness and freshness of its language, its use of the music of the line, the quality of its statement. This is why the struggle for unconventionality in poetic statement is valuable and important; it helped to divide poetry into three types—the mediocre, the competent but unoriginal, and the aesthetically acceptable. The first may be dismissed, for it can readily be recognized in whatever form it appears. The second is marked by an aptitude for imitation and a self-consciousness which is too often covered by generalizations about nature and the Self. The third is the verse which we have been discussing in this chapter. Disputes among important poets—such as the quarrel which Winters and Ransom conduct in their contributions to magazines and in their books—can be explained by the fact that poets are ever mindful of the justice and correctness of their private emotions. However we may ultimately assess the value of modern poetry, the distinction between mediocre and important verse will always be clear.

The qualities and the very texture of modern verse underline the experimental tendencies of our time. Obscurity of meaning is often the responsibility of the reader. Seldom does obscurity exist in and for itself. It is part of the texture of our verse because no strict line of demarcation has been set for the poet's sensibility. And he may be introducing a "new knowledge" simply by pointing out the false simplicity of the old. Likewise, the aesthetic incentive for obscurity has been closely allied with the extremely wide range and the tenuous equilibrium of the poet's sensory experiences. The modern poet may be pardoned the ambiguity of his expression if only it be discovered that our own general range of comprehension has been greatly underestimated in the past.

[38] Editorial, *Westward*, I, 1 (August 1927).