STYLE AND MEANING
IN THE POETRY OF LOUISE BOGAN

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
California State College, Hayward

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in English

by
Carol Markos
July 1970
STYLE AND MEANING
IN THE POETRY OF LOUISE BOGAN

by

Carol Markos

Approved:

Date:

Gwendolyn Staifers
July 14, 1970
Robert J. Williams
July 16, 1970

Committee in Charge

July 20, 1970
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THEMES OF OPPOSITION</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. EFFECTS OF STYLE</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE RATIONALIST POINT OF VIEW</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Louise Bogan published poetry and literary criticism from 1923 to 1968, less than two years before her death, a span of forty-five years that probably few poets equal. But though she received high critical acclaim, she never gathered a large following, perhaps because her poetry lies outside the most common modern schools and movements. She was poetry editor of The New Yorker for many years, and she won the Bollingen Prize for poetry in 1955, but the body of her work is as modest as her audience. Her final volume of collected poems, all that she wanted preserved, The Blue Estuaries, Poems: 1923–1968, contains only 103 poems. Yet these poems are so well written that they may win her a larger audience eventually.

Most of her critics have given her work praise and admiration, though their comments have generally focussed only on her style. Her style is perhaps the most immediately notable feature of her work. Tightly disciplined, usually rhymed and metrical, it is uncommon for the twentieth century, and almost all the critics immediately suggest a comparison to Renaissance verse.
When they do comment further, they usually sum her up in a sentence or two, commonly noting that she is passionate, bitter, intellectual, and intense.

Louise Bogan's most notable admirers, Theodore Roethke and Yvor Winters, have gone beyond an appreciation of the style of her poetry to comment on the more substantial matter of its meaning. Winters, always the severe and demanding critic, believes her to be one of the few who with great effort have managed to free themselves from "the philosophical misconceptions of the age."¹ The effort requires the poet to be a metaphysician "in a profound and serious way." But he believes that while she has achieved this much, she falls just short of the greatness she might have achieved through a richness of wisdom and breadth of experience just beyond her range. For her the poem is limited to a sharply defined segment of experience.

That sharply defined segment has the benefit of the steady light of contemplation. Roethke notes that she is not a poet of the immediate moment but "of the time after, when things come into their true focus, into the resolution, the final perspective."² It seems that


very often the time after is used to disguise and place at a distance the immediate experience. The emotional intensity remains, but the situation that gave rise to it is concealed under images. She writes veiled confessional poetry. She admits that what drives her pen is "The Daemon" of personal revelation:

Must I tell again
In the words I know
For the ears of men
The flesh, the blow?

Must I show outright
The bruise in the side.
The halt in the night,
And how death cried?

Must I speak to the lot
Who little bore?
It said Why not?
It said Once more.

It would be pointless to attempt to deduce the personal experience behind each poem, but the reader can assume that the themes and conflicts that run through her work are directly connected with her experience.

The central theme and source of the passion, bitterness, and intensity is the attraction of the opposing poles of passion and intellect. An early reviewer noted this "conflict between emotional intensity

---

3Louise Bogan, The Blue Estuaries, Poems: 1923-1968 (New York, 1968), p. 114. All subsequent references to the poems of Louise Bogan will be from this volume.
and intellectual analysis almost equally violent,"\(^4\)
though other reviewers have noted only one or the other
as a significant force in her work and have not commented
on the deep conflict between the two attractions. How­
ever, the conflict remains a persistent theme throughout
her work. Her ordered, disciplined style reflects her
desire for intellectual control and imposes some control
on her intense emotions. There is sometimes a suggestion
of melodrama or hysteria in her verse and it seems likely
that if she had chosen the looser forms of her contem­
poraries, her poetry might have suffered.

In the following chapter, I will explore these
two mutually distracting forces as they appear in her
poetry and the resulting struggle between them that is
the source of much of the bitterness and intensity in
the language. Apparently Miss Bogan was able neither
to reconcile the two attractions nor to choose between
them. Individual poems favor sometimes one, sometimes
the other, as a higher good. But as close examination
of her themes in the following chapter reveals, it seems
that passion or emotional involvement has more of her
allegiance, conscious or unconscious, than the intellec­
tual control she so much desired.

\(^4\) Eda Lou Walton, "Verse Delicate and Mature,"
Nation CXXIX (Dec. 4, 1929), 682.
Nevertheless, her tightly ordered, disciplined style leaves another impression entirely; it indicates a controlled, disciplined mind. In Chapter III, I will attempt to describe the elements of her style and demonstrate that the style she has consciously chosen partially controls the content of her work. Yvor Winters has argued that "Poetic morality and poetic feeling are inseparable; feeling and technique, or structure, are inseparable."\(^5\) Certainly in Miss Bogan's poetry there is a close relationship between technique, feeling, and "poetic morality." Her poetry is evidence that she feared the attraction of passionate entanglement as much as she desired it. Her technical control and precision represent her effort to gain control over passion.

Finally, in Chapter IV, I will attempt to assess her relationship to her contemporaries in the larger literary scene, especially by examination of her criticism, and place her with those who might be called classicists or rationalists, in contrast to the dominant trends in twentieth century poetry. Her literary criticism as well as the style of her poetry link her with the contemporary tradition that emphasizes

rational content, rational structure, and the importance of tradition.

Her strong attraction to both passion and intellect create a complex relationship between theme and style; sometimes they reinforce each other, sometimes they contrast. The tension created by the opposing forces is never finally reconciled in her work.
CHAPTER II

THEMES OF OPPOSITION

Louise Bogan's most persistent theme is the opposition of two mutually exclusive choices. One is emotional involvement; the other is controlled detachment. The contrast appears in different guises—emotion and mind, change and stasis, life and death—but they can generally be placed under the larger groupings.

The contrast often appears in a search for an enduring, unchangeable value, or in the loss of that value. The first poem in *Blue Estuaries*, "A Tale," relates the search for the enduring, apparently in death:

This youth too long has heard the break
Of waters in a land of change.
He goes to see what suns can make
From soil more indurate and strange.

* * *

Seeking, I think, a light that waits
Still as a lamp upon a shelf,—
A land with hills like rocky gates
Where no sea leaps upon itself.

The search fails finally, because the only static state is hell, "Where something dreadful and another/ Look quietly upon each other." But the desire for the steady light (knowledge? enlightenment?), the hills
like gates that delimit and contain, a sea without contradictions and confusions, is a very strong one is it leads even to death. The final poem in the collection, "Masked Woman's Song," moves in the other direction, and the initial state of assurance is destroyed by passion:

Before I saw the tall man
Few women should see,
Beautiful and imposing
Was Marble to me.

And virtue had its place
And evil its alarms,
But not for that worn face,
And not in those roped arms.

In both poems there is pain or danger or dissatisfaction with what is changing and unpredictable, but the apparent safety of imposing marble or rocky gates is deceptive— they fail to protect.

The failure of this striving for a higher enduring good is appropriately realized in one of the early poems where she speaks as "The Alchemist" (p. 15) attempting to transmute gross experience into a higher, purer form. Like alchemy, the attempt is doomed to fail:

I burned my life that I might find
A passion wholly of the mind,
Thought divorced from eye and bone,
Ecstasy come to breath alone.
I broke my life to seek relief
From the flawed light of love and grief.

With mounting beat the utter fire
Charred existence and desire.
It died low, ceased its sudden thresh.
I had found unmysterious flesh--
Not the mind's avid substance--still
Passionate beyond the will.

The alchemist, like the youth in "A Tale" or the Masked Woman, fails to find a suitable alternative to "the flawed light of love and grief." The impossibility of achieving the "ecstasy come to breath alone" could lead to the almost hysterical rejection of "I Saw Eternity" (p. 50) where the poet makes the accusation, "O beautiful Forever!/ . . . you have spoiled my mind." More frequently there is a stoic rejection of "time's decrees":

Come, break with time,
You who were lorded
By a clock's chime
So ill afforded

Take the rock's speed
And earth's heavy measure.
Let buried seed
Drain out time's pleasure,
Take time's decrees.
Come, cruel ease.  ("Come, Break With Time," p. 51)

The sharp turn of thought in this final phrase, characteristic both of the Metaphysical poets and twentieth-century ironists, sums up Louise Bogan's dilemma. The only ease is cruel, as the light of love is also grief. Either choice, as far as there is any choice, is at best a reluctant one.

The ambiguous nature of the choices is variously conveyed in two important poems which use the same
device of an ocean voyage as an escape from painful human situations. Both show the escape to be temporary. The earlier, "Putting to Sea" (p. 84), sees a clearer possibility of escape. The first four stanzas describe embarkation on a stormy autumn night, "Flung out from shore with speed a missile takes/ When some hard hand in hatred flings a stone." But a respite from the heat of passion is foreseen once the "whole silence" will be reached. What sort of relief this will be is implied by language which defines the navigation: "The Way should mark our course within the night,/ The streaming System, turned without a sound." These two lines suggest a fixity man can depend on and even use to order his own way. The System is "turned," apparently, then, by a conscious creator. All seems as ordered as the Great Chain of Being and as certain. The conception is rational and intellectual. Both this concept of the ordered, fixed universe and the diction that defines "this bare/ Circle of ocean which the heaven proves/ Deep as its height" suggest the serious thought of certain Metaphysical verse.

The verse form is also appropriate to the description of an ordered, conscious life. The abab rhyme scheme is almost completely regular, with loves/proves the only slant rhyme in the whole poem. The iambic meter is also regular; the only variation in these first
four stanzas are trochees at the beginning of some lines. Alliteration and echoed vowel sounds also contribute to the tight sense of order and control. But none of these devices—meter, rhyme, alliteration—is obtrusive. Run-over lines mute the rhyme scheme, alliteration is used in moderation, and subtle variations in the rhythm are skillfully suited to the content. The form is controlled, but not oppressive; it reinforces the presentation of an ordered universe.

After these opening stanzas, another voice interjects with a reminder that the ship will eventually come to land again, "a beach bright to the rocks with love" which will replace the "heart-loathed love" of summer. The speaker is enthusiastic, but the description of the tropic island is grating and hard:

Where, in hot calms, blades clatter on the ear,  
And spiny fruits up through the earth are fed  
With fire; the palm trees clatter; the wave leaps.

The meter that was so regular for the first stanzas becomes less regular; "clatter," used twice here, is the key word both for its sound and sense. This projection of coming autumn loves is no comfort to the speaker of the poem who is only reminded of the loveliness of the summer land now left behind. Again the modulation in rhythm is appropriate to the shift in tone in this passage. It has neither the smooth regularity of the first section nor the harsh dissonance
of the second. The lines have strong caesuras and move slowly over images of trees and flowers seen at close range. But the final line unites them all in a single concept, "... and fluid green/ Once rained about us, pulse of earth indeed." The regular rhythm returns here.

All three of the situations or conditions considered here are qualified to some degree, not presented simply. The anticipated tropic island that suggests passions that will be encountered in middle age is the most undesirable; it is coarse and hot and "the flamy blooms burn backward to their seed." Yet it is considered desirable by the voice that describes it (probably another aspect of the poet's state of mind) and has at least some of the expected appeal of a tropic island, and it is "bright to the rocks with love." Set in contrast is the remembered land (of youth and young love) of fluid green, with "pear and violet, / The cinquefoil." But the elm and lime had "fruitless boughs" and the love that grew there is the heart-loathed love, the stupid love of a sodden summer that finally turned to hatred. As respite from both these the voyager would "learn, with joy, the gulf, the vast, the deep." The ocean voyage of the mind would be ennobling and calming, but even this route is flawed: "What choice is this--
profundity and flight." The ocean "which the heaven proves deep as its height" is also "barren with despair." Ultimately the mind's voyage must beach on the shores of passion. This constant awareness of flawed possibilities, the attraction of rejected alternatives, of the imperfection of any choice, keeps the poet from the unalloyed raptures of more sentimental poets. Choices are always difficult and complex.

"Psychiatrist's Song" (p. 134) is a late poem that uses some of the same elements as "Putting to Sea." There is a traumatic experience in the past to escape, sea voyage as a way of escape, and islands of new experience to be reached. There are important differences, however. The meter and rhyme that gave form to "Putting to Sea" are not used here. The quiet speaking tone is more appropriate to the psychiatrist's voice than the more rhetorical form would be, but the effect is also to remove one device that reinforced the concept of ordered thought in the earlier poem. The free verse used here is not entirely loose, however. The first stanza especially has structure in the arrangement of line length, or rather in the number of accents to a line, an arrangement that is visual or sculptural in its effect. But the most important difference is that the voyage itself no longer offers any respite or alternative; it is a journey in a "boat
without oars,/ Trusting to rudder and sail." Landfall again is the tropic island, but this time subtle and more menacing. First seen from a distance, it appears as a natural and fruitful grove of mango trees, but it immediately arouses a suggestion of danger and then evil, sotto voce: "But far away are the mango trees (the mangrove swamps, the mandrake root . . .)." There is none of the obvious clatter of "spiny fruits" and "flamy blooms," but perhaps more to be feared from, "closely waiting,/ A hill all sifted over with shade/ Wherein the silence waits." The quiet warning is so disquieting there remains only one final alternative of death, the appeal in the last stanza:

Farewell, phantoms of flesh and ocean!  
Vision of earth  
Heal and receive me.

The "Psychiatrist's Song" seems closer to experience than "Putting to Sea." The speaking tone is more personal and there is nothing in it that seems only theoretical; the menace of the island is a felt reality. It is in this more personal version of the image that the rational alternative is almost abandoned. This later version is far more pessimistic than "Putting to Sea" since there is not even the possibility of "profundity and flight" which that poem offered. The alternative to emotional pain is not the intellectual detachment of the alchemist putting to sea, but only
[Page 15 is missing from the library's copy. This page is intentionally left blank.]
This philosophical consideration of mortality is more detached, more nearly a matter of general speculation than is usual in Miss Bogan's work. The poems more often view death as release and freedom from pain. But while death is often invoked as a benefactor (so often as to suggest a strong suicidal tendency) it is also feared or seen as loss. The speaker in "My Voice Not Being Proud" (p. 13), a woman whose lover has died, sees death as the peace that will end her grief, but the last two lines imply much more:

As you lie, I shall lie;  
Separate, eased and cured,  
As you lie alone, I shall lie,  
O, in singleness assured,  
Deafened by mire and lime,  
I remember while there is time.

The word deafened suggests first of all the more literal meaning of deadening sound by stopping the ears. But deafened also suggests a loud penetrating sound, as a cry—the anguish of death, perhaps both her own and that of her lover. Mire and lime also suggest the dread of death and physical decay. And with the final line, "I remember while there is time," we realize that the ease that comes with loss of consciousness will be real loss. Here again the alternatives, life and death, are flawed possibilities.

The one poem in which resistance to death is clearly stated is the first of two sonnets comprising
"Fifteenth Farewell" (p. 24):

You may have all things from me, save my breath,
The slight life in my throat will not give pause
For your love, nor your loss, nor any cause.
Shall I be made a panderer to death,
Dig the green ground for darkness underneath,
Let the dust serve me, covering all that was
With all that will be? Better, from time's claws,
The hardened face under the subtle wreath.

But the insistence on life here is motivated primarily
by defiance and it certainly implies a temptation to
yield to the escape of death. The suggestion in the
last line and a half of this passage that emotions re­
pressed or stifled in experience be sublimated in poetry
is grounded more in unhappy emotional experience than
in intellectual contemplation.

But whether dealing with love, death, or anguish,
she is conscious of the ravages of time. The recurring
motif of the frozen instant of time seems to represent
the shock of some emotional experience that makes time
stand still in memory. ("Psychiatrist's Song" most
strongly furnishes the clue for this interpretation.)

But the moment of memory that the mind can hold can also
bestow changeless preservation, described in "Division"
(p. 32):

Long days and changing weather
Put the shadow upon the door;
Up from the ground, the duplicate
Tree reflected in shadow;
Out from the whole, the single
Mirrored against the single.
The tree and the hour and shadow
No longer mingle,
Fly free, that burned together.
Replica, turned to yourself
Upon thinnest color and air--
Woven in changeless leaves
The burden of the seen
Is clasped against the eye,
Though assailed and undone is the green
Upon the wall and the sky:
Time and the tree stand there.

This is her intellectual, analytical self, speaking in words clear and sharp in focus. However, a contemplation of Time, that "diagram of whirling shade" always changing and destroying, is not always so calm and dispassionate. Time is "betrayal as common to all, as a betrayal by life itself . . . the ultimate truth." Her reaction is a bitter hatred of human fate or at best a stoic acceptance of "Time's decrees" and death's "cruel ease." But Time is a constant force to contend with, whether it moves too fast or too slow, whether it salvages or destroys.

The ambivalence that is so prevalent in the poetry sometimes is made evident even by the placement of opposing poems on facing pages. "If We Take All Gold" (p. 30) advises repression, burying old grief:

If /sorrow's gold/ be hid away
Lost under dark heaped ground,
Then shall we have peace;

But on the facing page we find "The Drum," a far more memorable poem:

6 Walton, p. 683.
The drum roars up.
0 blood refused,
Here's your answer,
The ear is used.

A miss and a beat
The skin and the stick
Part and meet,
Gather thick.

Now they part,
Now they're meeting.
There's not on the heart
So much beating,

Use up the air
To the last drop,
To the last layer,
Before you stop.

Whatever is toward
It's the drums I'll have,
Dying a coward
Or living brave.

This is a call for expression, not repression. The tight, terse, metrical form and the metaphor of the drum seem especially appropriate to define her own poetry in which rhyme, sound, rhythm and compression are important. And much of her work does seem to be veiled confessional poetry.

"Henceforth, From the Mind" (p. 64) and "Homunculus" (p. 65) are another such pair. The first advises a closing-in for the aging man who must eschew youthful joy, passion, and wonder:

Henceforth, from the mind,
For your whole joy must spring
Such joy as you may find
In any earthly thing.

...
Henceforth, from the tongue,
From shallow speech alone,
Comes joy you thought, when young,
Would wring you to the bone.

But this limited version of life is belied by
"Homunculus." The man-like creation has wisdom,
speech, and song but still is not man:

It lacks but life: some scent,
Some kernel of hot endeavor,
Some dust of dead content
Will make it live forever.

Too much of the control and limitation suggested by
"Henceforth" would be diminishing; but the humanizing elements—"Some kernel of hot endeavor,/ Some dust of dead content"—are painful.

The irresolution continues through the later poems until the final "Masked Woman's Song." It does become more subtle and less likely to be expressed in bald terms. There is no more attempt at alchemy to find "a passion wholly of the mind." The voice becomes quieter. But the split remains. More frequently the requirements of the heart are accepted and the too cool control rejected, as in "Masked Woman's Song" and more convincingly in "Morning" (p. 131), another late poem:

1.
The robins' green-blue eggs
Being the complementary color
To the robins' rosy breast—
Is it a vision in the eye, a resolution in the blood
That calls back these birds, to cherish and to guard?

2.
The clever and as though instructed
Tendril of convolvulus
Having chosen the rosebranch for the support of its ascending spiral
Succeeds in avoiding
All but the smaller thorns.

Though both the robin and the convolvulus are literally following only instinct, the poet sees a difference in the source of their action. The robin is guided by "a vision in the eye, a resolution in the blood"—esthetic and emotional motives. The convolvulus is merely "clever and as though instructed," lacking the deeper personal involvement.

But though she accepts here "a vision in the eye, a resolution in the blood," until the end she protests the cruelties of love and the enduring hurts of emotional involvement. The protests and desires to escape are inextricably mixed with the attractions and desires to enjoy. Despite the shifts, the contradictions, the opposition of the alchemist putting to sea and lover entangled in situations, it is the side of passionate involvement that predominates. It is evident that the poet desired control and detachment but never achieved them.
CHAPTER III

EFFECTS OF STYLE

Style and technical mastery keep Miss Bogan's poetry from becoming romantic or even melodramatic. The persistent desire she felt to exercise control over compelling emotions is realized in her poetry through her exquisite craftsmanship. The twentieth century has been a time for all manner of experiments in loosening and changing traditional verse forms. Yet in her long career as poet, Miss Bogan has rejected for her own use many of the experiments in form that moved other poets in so many directions. She followed her own bent and observed her own rules.

Yvor Winters has labeled Louise Bogan as one of "the Reactionary Generation;" her masters seem to be not Pound or Eliot, Williams or Stevens, but Donne, Jonson, and Campion. She does not retain and reshape poetic techniques of the previous generation as Frost did, but looks back to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. However, she does not imitate, for the influence of this century remains,

---


22
[Page 23 is missing from the library's copy. This page is intentionally left blank.]
seems at first deceptively simple, but this is partly a result merely of the form of the poem: the four-line stanzas, trimeter lines, obvious rhymes, and fairly direct sentence structure:

Time for the wood, the clay,
The trumpery dolls, the toys
Now to be put away:
We are not girls and boys.

The apparent simplicity is appropriate to the theme—the childish attachment to temporal things. But the conceit is pursued to a chilling conclusion:

But we must keep such things
Till we at length begin
To feel our nerves their strings,
Their dust, our blood within.

The dreadful painted bisque
Becomes our very cheek.
A doll's heart, faint at risk,
Within our breast grows weak.

Our hand the doll's, our tongue.

This last line (not the final line of the poem), set apart as it is from the four line stanzas, is climactic. The last phrase, "our Tongue," an incomplete phrase, suggests the voice choked off to silence.

Sometimes the conceits are more simple and brief, focussing on the image and the single correspondence between reality and image rather than exploring the comparison in detail. "The Crows" (p. 17) is one of these, a bare description of a spare image:

The woman who has grown old
And knows desire must die,
Yet turns to love again,
Hears the crows' cry.

She is a stem long hardened,
A stem that no scythe mow.
The heart's laughter will be to her
The crying of the crows,

Who slide in the air with the same voice
Over what yields not, and what yields,
Alike in spring, and when there is only bitter
Winter-burning in the fields.

Only occasionally, as in the first two stanzas of
"Memory" (p. 18), does the imagery suggest more the
ornamentation and suavity of the Elizabethans rather
than the seventeenth century Metaphysicals. Miss
Bogan uses metaphor as meaning, not as decoration.

In her use of rhythms and structure, she has also
learned from an earlier tradition. While most modern
poets have experimented endlessly with free verse,
colloquial rhythms, and ways of loosening the metrical
line, Louise Bogan uses free verse only occasionally,
and most of her poetry echoes the rhythms of the
Renaissance, of the song and sonnet. There is probably
a connection between her choice of the strong rhythms
and tight rhymes of Elizabethan poetry and her obvious
interest in music. Her titles alone indicate her
interest in the song: "Song," "Juan's Song," "Girl's
Song," "Spirit's Song," "Song for a Slight Voice,"
"Chanson Un Peu Naive," "Song for a Lyre," "To be Sung
on the Water," "Song for the Last Act." Within the
poems there are frequent references to music and musical
instruments. Her interest in music apparently satisfies itself partly in the manipulation of rhythm and rhyme in her poetry. The use of traditional rhythms is not mere imitation; she uses the metric patterns with dexterity. "Rhyme" (p. 81) is built of brief stanzas with four dimeter lines. The structure could easily lead to a sing song effect, but skillful variations in the rhythms and the use of feminine rhymes, especially in the last stanzas, prevent monotony.

"Come, Break With Time (p. 51) is directly influenced by the Elizabethan song tradition, with its loosened rhythm and feminine rhymes:

Come, break with time,
You who were lorded
By a clock's chime
So ill afforded.
If time is allayed
Be not afraid.

I shall break, if I will.
Break, since you must.
Time has its fill,
Sated with dust.
Long the clock's hand
Burned like a brand.

Take the rock's speed
And earth's heavy measure.
Let buried seed
Drain out time's pleasure,
Take time's decrees.
Come, cruel ease.

Here theme, tone, diction, rhythm, and even the sharp turn of thought in the final phrase, "cruel ease," suggest the earlier tradition. "Exhortation" (p. 67)
is another that could almost have been lifted from the late sixteenth century. Its theme recalls Wyatt's or Raleigh's renunciation of court life:

Give over seeking bastard joy
Nor cast for fortune's side-long look.
Indifference can be your toy;
The bitter heart can be your book.
(Its lesson torment never shook.)

Know once for all: their snare is set
Even now; be sure their trap is laid;
And you will see your lifetime yet
Come to their terms, your plans unmade,—
And be belied, and be betrayed.

Miss Bogan also uses the sonnet but varies the rhythm to suit the purpose of the poem. The opening line of "Simple Autumnal" (p. 40) perfectly unites both theme and tone for the poem: "The measured blood beats out the year's delay." The slow, steady rhythm establishes the sense of the slow, steady passage of time that will not yet erase an abiding grief. The solemnity of tone that pervades the poem is set up by this first line. In another poem, "Sonnet" (p. 26), she uses a much rougher sound as it suits her theme:

Yet will the desperate mind, maddened and proud,
Seek out the storm, escape the bitter spell
That we obey, strain to the wind, be thrown
Straight to its freedom in the thunderous cloud.

But whatever the theme, whether it recalls the tradition or seems entirely personal, she has mastered her chosen forms and meters so thoroughly that they are her own,
not imitations. Tradition does not dominate in this sestet from the sonnet "Fifteenth Farewell" (p. 24):

Cooler than stones in wells, sweeter, more kind
Than hot, perfidious words, my breathing moves
Close to my plunging blood. Be strong, and hang
Unriven mist over my breast and mind,
My breath! We shall forget the heart that loves,
Though in my body beat its blade, and its fang.

The measured rhythms are used with structured forms. Miss Bogan uses not only the sonnet but other carefully constructed forms, again, frequently similar to Renaissance models. Some are based on variations of a key phrase, as in "Henceforth, From the Mind" or "Song for the Last Act." A varied refrain ties together the three stanzas of "Canson Un Peu Naive." But even where there is no traditional form like the sonnet or song stanza to shape it, her poetry has form, is not random or wandering. She plays her tennis with a high, taut net.

One reason for her use of the traditional forms is made clear in "Single Sonnet" (p. 66). She appeals to the sonnet, which she addresses as "You great stanza, you heroic mould," to lend its strength to her poetry:

Staunch meter, great song, it is yours, at length,
To prove how stronger you are than my strength.

She does not find traditional forms constricting as many modern poets do; she finds strength in already polished techniques.

Despite the acknowledged debt to the "great stanza"
and other traditional forms, it is somewhat surprising to find that there are, after all, only six sonnets in The Blue Estuaries, and a limited number of poems that directly follow the early models. What is more important than the specific forms and structures is the working reliance on the necessity of form in some way to shape and organize the content of a poem, both in the structure of the whole poem and the structure of the line. Even when she uses free verse, her verse has form, even within the line. It is never so loose as to suggest merely prose broken into verse lines, though, as in "Psychiatrist's Song," the subtle variations can suggest a quiet speaking tone more appropriately than a metered verse would. Yvor Winters claimed that she had "little or no understanding of free verse." However, that was in 1929, and she has kept only a few early examples of unmetered verse. In later poems it seems to me evident that she has mastered the technique. Rhythm is immediately apparent in her free verse line; it is not organized by the syllabic count or some buried principle of order that would require lengthy analysis. It seems sculptural, not because it is shaped on the page, but because of the relation of line length and rhythm—the contrast of a short line

---

8 Winters, "The Poetry of Louise Bogan."
set off by a long, a gradual lengthening and decline or a building to climax. Within the line the form is musical, with subtle variations of tempo and movement.

The two sections of "Morning" are striking variations in rhythm designed to serve the meaning.

The first stanza approves what is beyond the rational:

The robins' green-blue eggs
Being the complementary color
To the robins' rosy breast--
Is it a vision in the eye, a resolution in the blood
That calls back these birds, to cherish and to guard?

The first three lines, which present fact, have no strong rhythm, but they are ordered in three lines of three stresses. The final two lines have an almost songlike rhythm. Each four-stress line is divided in the middle by a strong caesura, and the halves roughly echo each other rhythmically. The gently rolling rhythm is suited to the lyrical affirmation of the verse.

The second stanza, which satirizes superficial cleverness, has a very different movement:

The clever and as though instructed
Tendril of convolvulus
Having chosen the rosebranch for the support of its ascending spiral
Succeeds in avoiding
All but the smaller thorns.

There is no chance of making anything songlike of this.

The second line has a melodic sound but it is surrounded
by the flat first and third lines. The short final lines, coming after the involved third, have an effective deflating jab.

This is free verse that is more formal than free; it is more carefully crafted than a metrical form might be.

As important as freedom from traditional meter is freedom from traditional diction gained in the twentieth century. Here again almost every important poet made use of the new freedom, and again Louise Bogan felt no need for it. She rarely uses a colloquial or conversational vocabulary. And again her diction places her with the Plain Style poets of an earlier tradition. It is spare, bare, language, with the simplicity of dignity, never pompous or inflated:

Dark, underground, is furnished with the bone;
The tool's lost, and the counter in the game.
Eaten as though by water or by flame
The elaborate craft built up from wood and stone.
("Sonnet," p. 48)

Eliot noted that simplicity of language was one of the characteristics of the Metaphysicals. In many of Miss Bogan's poems, her diction cannot be distinguished from theirs though she does not use the inverted structures of earlier poetry. The seriousness and purpose of the language are so marked that it is a relief to come upon a different level of language in
"Several Voices Out of a Cloud" (p. 98):

Come, drunks and drug-takers; come, perverts unnerved!
Receive the laurel, given, though late, on merit;
to whom and wherever deserved.

Parochial punks, trimmers, nice people, joiners true-blue,
Get the hell out of the way of the laurel. It is deathless and it isn't for you.

Although Louise Bogan has learned from the earlier tradition, she does not attempt to imitate it. She uses techniques that suit her purpose and talent from various sources, and she owes more to her own century than an occasional quirk like "Several Voices." It is true that she only rarely uses distinctly modern rhythms and seldom uses free verse, that her language is rarely colloquial, that she does not rely on associational techniques for structure, that she is not an imagist. But one modern development that particularly suits her is compression, learned from Pound and the Imagists. It is so appropriate to her poetry—with its toughness, spareness, and tight rhythms—that it scarcely seems an outside influence but more nearly a result of Miss Bogan's own bent. Perhaps so. It does reinforce the impression of control and intellectuality. However it is in this trait that she is unlike her Renaissance masters. Eliot notes that while their diction was simple, their sentences were often complex, following the complexities of their thought. Miss Bogan
[Page 33 is missing from the library's copy. This page is intentionally left blank.]
imagist, and scenes and images always serve the idea. The scenes and images seem to be real; they are not merely symbolic landscapes. Yet she manages this without much detail or lavish description. "Medusa" (p. 4), dealing with her theme of a static state in contrast to living change, is presented entirely in visual terms. The description is not rich but it is very accurate and effective:

I had come to the house, in a cave of trees,
Facing a sheer sky.
Everything moved,—a bell hung ready to strike,
Sun and reflection wheeled by.

When the bare eyes were before me
And the hissing hair,
Held up at a window, seen through a door.
The stiff bald eyes, the serpents on the forehead
Formed in the air.

This is a dead scene forever now.
Nothing will ever stir.
The end will never brighten it more than this,
Nor the rain blur.

The water will always fall, and will not fall,
And the tipped bell make no sound.
The grass will always be growing for hay
Deep on the ground.

And I shall stand here like a shadow
Under the great balanced day,
My eyes on the yellow dust, that was lifting in the wind,
And does not drift away.

The details here are not particularized, but the scene is so clearly described that it is easily imagined. Many of the details in her other poems indicate a real observation of natural setting; description is usually somewhat sparing, but it is precise, as in these last
two stanzas of "Old Countryside" (p. 52):

Long since, we pulled brown oak-leaves to the ground
In a winter of dry trees; we heard the cock
Shout its unplaceable cry, the axe's sound
Delay a moment after the axe's stroke.

Far back, we saw, in the stillest of the year,
The scrawled vine shudder, and the rose-branch show
Red to the thorns, and, sharp as sight can bear,
The thin hound's body arched against the snow.

Though the traditional methods of metaphor and discourse are more usual for her, occasionally Miss Bogan turns to surrealism. However it is consistent with the body of her work that even her surreal poems are not the disconnected, loosely evocative images of much modern poetry. Her scenes can be visualized and form coherent pictures although outside the realm of literal reality. "The Dream" (p. 103) has the logic and reality of a dream, and "Medusa" presents its dream-like scene with completely real detail. Even when the scene is not realistic, it adheres to its own logic.

After all the techniques and traits of style have been analyzed, it must be recognized that her primary talent is a superb ear for both sound and rhythm—a gift that cannot be entirely analyzed. Second, her craftsmanship and artful, conscious control of her medium is evident. She relies heavily on techniques learned from an earlier tradition, but she has merged these with modern developments and has blended them
through her own special talents into a unique style.

Her style alone is evidence that she does not believe in the spontaneous, free poetry of immediate emotional response. It is marked by form and control. To some extent this style is deceptive because the poetry seems more intellectual than it actually is. Careful study of the poems shows that her desire for rational control was never entirely achieved, and she never found the balance between passion and the mind. A poem that in its content favors passion and submission to emotional response is qualified if it is written in a controlled, ordered manner. The style, finally, is part of the meaning.
CHAPTER IV

THE RATIONALIST POINT OF VIEW

Louise Bogan's career as critic, like her career as poet, spans more than forty years. The two complement and illuminate each other. Her prose criticism and literary associations have some of the duality of her poetry, but for the most part, her criticism places her with those few critics and poets who might be labeled classicists or rationalists.

The drastic changes in poetic style in the twentieth century were such a strong rejection of nineteenth century poetry that for a long time Modernism was seen only in contrast to Romanticism. More recently it became apparent that the modern tendencies are at base an extension of romantic ideas. Randall Jarrell has claimed that the "change from romantic poetry was evolutionary, not revolutionary."\(^9\)

He goes on to list the following thirteen characteristics of modern poetry that derive from romantic ideas:

1. Prizing of experimentation, originality
2. Formlessness, both external and internal

---

\(^9\) Randall Jarrell, "The End of the Line," Nation, CLIV (Feb. 21, 1942), 158.
3. Heightened emotional intensity
4. Obscurity
5. Lack of restraint or proportion
6. Emphasis on details—on parts, not the whole; particulars, not generalization
7. Preoccupation with the unconscious, dreams, the irrational
8. Preoccupation with sensation, perceptual nuances
9. Irony
10. Neo-primitive elements
11. Critical attitude toward contemporary society
12. Individualism, isolation, alienation
13. Dislike of science, industrialism, humanitarianism, and progress—the main tendencies of Western development

The emphasis is on the irrational, the individual, the original.

Somewhat outside the main stream of modernism are the poets who put more emphasis on the primacy of the mind and of reason rather than the primacy of emotion and intuition. They are modern and they make use of modern developments and methods. But poets like Louise Bogan, Yvor Winters, J. V. Cunningham, Randall Jarrell, Edgar Bowers, and Thom Gunn stand in marked contrast to poets like Hart Crane, e. e. cummings, and Allen Ginsberg, who derive from the Romantic tradition.

Donald Stanford has defined the issue by distinguishing true classicists from Eliot and some of his
literary associate's whom Eliot described as classicists. Stanford quotes Eliot's definition of modern classicism:

There is a tendency—discernible even in art—toward a higher and clearer conception of Reason, and a more severe and serene control of the emotions by reason.

Eliot preferred the world of Virgil because it was a civilized world of dignity, reason, and order. Yet, as Stanford points out, Eliot and those he identified with the new classicism—T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Charles Maurras—did not honor the virtues of reason and order in their own literary and political practice. On the other hand, four who are genuinely in the classical tradition are Robert Bridges, E. A. Robinson, Yvor Winters, and J. V. Cunningham. Stanford demonstrates that their writings and beliefs are much closer to the established concept of classicism. Their poetry is logically organized and has controlled feeling and meaningful paraphrasable content. They fit Eliot's classical standard more closely than Eliot himself did. Judged by Stanford's criteria, Louise Bogan could certainly be considered one of the true classicists.

As a classicist, she admires learning, toughness, and discipline. In Yeats she approves "this intellectual

---

energy, this 'whirling' yet deeply intuitive and ordered mind, with its balancing streak of common sense,"¹¹ and she shows us a man who was able to act in the world and was tough enough to endure the consequences of his actions. While she praises in many writers a lyric gift, a fine sensibility, or a novelist's acute observation of character, her highest praise is for those who have shaped and disciplined their talent to produce great and original art. At the opposite pole is art which oversimplifies. Miss Bogan criticizes both H. D. and Robinson Jeffers for their oversimplification. H. D., in her version of Ion, makes Euripides into an Imagist, and has excised whatever is dark or bitter in the play to leave only a beautiful shell. Robinson Jeffers, on the other hand, in his version of Medea, has taken from Euripides any trace of compassionate psychological insight and has left only a nightmare of insanity screwed up to the pitch of hysteria. Either kind of oversimplification is an instance of romantic excess. She prefers the more complex and realistic Euripides.

The chief spokesmen for the rational or classical tradition in this century are Yvor Winters and J. V.

¹¹ Louise Bogan, Selected Criticism (New York, 1955), p. 92. All subsequent references to the criticism of Louise Bogan will be from this volume unless otherwise noted.
Cunningham. Their criticism has served to define and broaden this direction. Their theory is characterized by three points of emphasis: rational content, rational structure and form, and the importance of tradition.

Louise Bogan in a review of Hart Crane criticized "One modern critical tendency: the desire to lift the poet out of his true place and ascribe to him the function of seer; to accredit to a work of literature some mystical revelation" (p. 40). The poet is a man speaking to other men with rational thought. "Even pure and burning miracle pall, whereas irony and gumption live forever" (p. 63). Yvor Winters is even more insistent that the poet avoid the irrational and unprovable. There must be a paraphrasable content (though the paraphrase is by no means the equivalent of the poem) and that content must bear scrutiny. If the ideas on which a poem is based are silly, then the poem is silly. And Winters insists that all the contents of a poem must be justified. He cites seven types of pseudo-reference that violate this principle, all damaging to the poem to some degree. ¹² He deplores a preoccupation with "the fringe of consciousness, . . . a tendency to identify, under the influence, perhaps,

of scientific or of romantic monism, subconscious stimuli and reactions with occult inspiration, to confuse the divine and the visceral."\textsuperscript{13} He insists that a good poem make "a defensible rational statement about a given human experience . . . and at the same time communicate the emotion which ought to be motivated by that rational understanding of that experience."\textsuperscript{14} The last half of this statement makes it clear that Winters is by no means merely a didactic critic. In fact, he demolishes the didactic theory of literature as simplistic and insufficient for an understanding of literature. Above all, he insists on the necessity of making judgements—about ideas and about poems.

The rational poet believes in the importance of form both in the structure of the whole poem with its relations and connections of ideas and in the form of the sentence which relates ideas syntactically. This is not a dominant position in twentieth century poetry. Early in the century, T. E. Hulme, basing his ideas on Bergson, denied the necessity for syntax in poetry since syntax serves explanation, logic, and intellect which he believed were not the province of poetry.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 53.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 11.
What poetry should deal with is "intensive manifolds," a view from inside, as it were, a revelation of what cannot be explained or diagrammed. As he explained, "To deal with the intensive you must use intuition." For this the irrational sequences of dreams or the juxtaposition of images would serve; syntax was not necessary, though its forms might be used for the sake of rhythm or the pauses of punctuation. Hulme's insistence on avoiding the intellectual and analytical also led to an insistence on avoiding the abstract in favor of the concrete which was considered more specific. Suzanne Langer also sees poetry as non-rational, "the creation of illusory events," just as Bergson called a poem not the thought a man had but a man having thoughts. Again there would therefore be no real need for syntax since there would be no need to express complex relationships. If a poet used syntactical forms, the forms would be empty.

Some rules and methods rise out of these and similar theories:

1. Few or no abstract terms should be used.
2. A poem should always seem spontaneous.
3. Imitative forms: Loose forms may be used to

---

present the looseness of a reality (as in Joyce's use of stream of consciousness or Whitman's description of America).

4. Associationism: juxtaposition of fragments of thought or images as they come to mind without connectives or logical sequence

5. Surrealism: creation of an unreal world without logic

The rational poet would not accept these methods completely since they implicitly deny that the rational mind is as important as immediate perception and emotional response.

Mastery of structural or metrical form is one of the qualities Miss Bogan admires, but she has no narrow rules that apply equally to all writers. She sees form as a necessary concomitant of meaning or purpose. "When Rimbaud wished to express pathos, he immediately and instinctively went back to form" (p. 166). But special kinds of form cannot merely be used mechanically:

The results of imitating a poet, whose form is distorted because it is bearing more condensed meaning and emotion than it can bear, may be observed in the imitators of Hopkins. The tricks are managed, but the true effects not in any way approached. (p. 166)

Baudelaire is an example of a poet who used traditional forms but to serve his own end. In his work, "classic form was used with passionate feelings and imagination and the results are superb and inimitable poems" (p. 166).

Although the use of specific sharp detail is one
of the chief contributions of modern poetry, contrary to Hulme and Pound, the abstract word still does have meaning. T. C. Pollock has pointed out that "abstract and generalized linguistic forms are more useful than are concrete for making specific references." 16 Such terms are the result of rational analysis of actual experience and those who value highly the mind do not reject them. Moreover even those poems which carefully avoid direct use of abstraction, often do through their total effect imply some abstract or generalized concept. Too complete an avoidance of abstract ideas and the process of thought is a severe limitation of human experience (just as avoidance of the sensual or emotional would be). J. V. Cunningham has devoted a chapter of Tradition and Poetic Structure to the discussion of logic as appropriate in the lyric, not antithetical to it. "The experience of the poem is the experience of syllogistic thinking with its consequences for feeling, attitude, and action . . . . It is a poetical experience and a logical and it is both at once." 17

Perhaps the most compelling statement that Winters

16 As quoted in Davie, p. 13.

makes for the primacy of the rational is in the poem "Sir Gawain." The lady of the Green Knight is amoral, passionate, and natural, and the values she represents are presented as good and attractive; but Gawain must finally save himself by rejecting complete surrender to this realm and emerging on the "drying hill" of discipline and judgment. Or as Cunningham would put it, Sir Gawain "returns to the park of logic from the forest of revery." The forest and the lady are not rejected, but neither is the park nor the drying hill.

Much as Louise Bogan was attracted by the tangles of the forest, she chooses controlled discipline for her writing. She is not afraid of syntax and abstraction and very carefully and consciously imposes form on her material. Even in a poem like "Baroque Comment" (p. 76) which is a catalogue using very little syntax, there is an underlying structure that builds and develops to the final line, and that structure and arrangement carries much of the meaning. The effect is not in the accretion of items as in the Whitmanian catalogue but in their arrangement and combination. Usually she worked more directly, either through metaphor or image or direct statement. Abstract

---

18 Cunningham, p. 58.
statement is concise and never wordy or prosaic, but it is present and unashamed.

The third characteristic of the rational poets is a respect for tradition, however differently apprehended or applied. This does not mean that they are "traditional poets;" they do not necessarily use the forms or conventions of their nineteenth century predecessors. And a respect for tradition does not mean using bits and pieces out of a jumbled bag of poetic tricks collected over the ages. Nor does it mean using strings of allusions and borrowed phrases from other ages and cultures in the manner of Eliot or Pound. Yeats used the myths and folklore of the past to find a psychological common denominator, but this is also a limited use of tradition. Respect for traditions is a respect for the heritage of conscious, thinking men and the many currents of thought that have directed man.

Cunningham makes it clear that tradition is not history though it issues from the historical process. But the process is always going on. As Eliot pointed out, each new bit added to our body of literature in some subtle way changes our apprehension of what has gone before. A tradition is, according to Cunningham,

... a context of notions, often jumbled and sometimes not too consistent with one another,
together with the methods and attitudes by which these notions are grasped and applied. 19

No writer is free of tradition; he does not live in a vacuum. But the modernist tendency has been to reject as much as possible what seemed to be imposed by the past or the weight of tradition, in favor of originality and personal statement. Some of the search for originality may be illusory, owing more to convention, either contemporary or past, than at first appears. And in a sense the poet who takes seriously the writers of the past is taking literature seriously.

To some extent, every change in literary patterns is a rejection of previous traditions. But the romantic movement of the nineteenth century was a very conscious and effective rejection of the classical background that had been important to English literature since the Renaissance. It was partly a rejection of the mythological machinery and classical allusion, partly a rejection of formal rules and models and all limiting principles. The twentieth century rejected as well what had become romantic cliches—"pretty" poetry, what Louise Bogan called "whimpering Georgian bucolics." Some of the antipathy to traditional poetry

19 Cunningham, p. 19.
has been democratic, in the manner of Whitman and Sandberg. Eliot and Pound gave another direction, an esoteric blend of allusions from both Eastern and Western cultures. Most modern poetry follows neither of these courses; it is personal and individualistic. For the most part it consciously rejects the past and strives primarily for originality. Certainly there is no complete break with the past, but there is no great debt to it. On the other hand, Louise Bogan makes undisguised use of traditional forms and metrics, though her poems are certainly not merely imitations, as has been pointed out. She cannot be tagged with a single label, such as Traditionalist, and her debt to traditional sources seems not to limit her. Her response to imaginative writing is complex and various. She is not a "champion of a special cause" as she accuses Allen Tate of being: "To him the modern world is a damned world, since a set of special values has disappeared from it." (p. 66) There is no hint of such rejection in Miss Bogan. She respects the values of the past but sees value as well in the present, avoiding the wasteland outlook and deploring the misanthropy of Robinson Jeffers. She finds much to admire in twentieth century poetry. As noted above, what she does reject is the "prophetic garment" for the poet, the poet as "seer," literature as "mystic revelation." Beyond this,
she is open to a wide range of literature.

It is "salt and range" that she admires as the gift of T. S. Eliot to modern poetry. By taking what he could use from the long history of literature, he opened up that heritage for other poets. Miss Bogan's poetry has not a very wide range of material or movement, but she appreciates the importance of diversity for poetry as a whole.

There is no doubt that Louise Bogan is linked to the Rationalist attitude I have been defining. Her poetic style and critical writings both evidence her respect for rational content, rational structure, and the importance of tradition—the three points of emphasis that seem to distinguish the rational tradition of Winters and Cunningham.

Critics who value form, tradition, and complexities are sometimes accused of being excessively stuffy and scholarly, but the accusation does not fit Miss Bogan. She faults the French neo-classic poetry of the turn of the century for being too limited by "truth, utility, and good sense" (p. 159), and she sees a need man has for something beyond the merely sensible.

There is an aspect of her thought that is removed from the rationalism of Winters and Cunningham and closer to the mystical emotionalism of her friend and
admirer, Theodore Roethke. In an essay entitled "The Secular Hell" (pp. 305-315), she traces the recurrent theme of dark mysteries and broken taboos. The theme may be carried in classic myths, witchcraft and witch hunts, Gothic novels, or even in modern murder mysteries. She sees a need of the unconscious, often served by religious ritual, to face the demonic or the numinous, and the result is a release of emotional or psychic energy in "the passions." When the myth of dread appears in contemporary literature, the protagonist is often a suppressed personality who must find a means of release.

On a higher level, she sees the possibility of truly mystical experience. For twentieth century man it can be a corrective for a barren way of thinking that is overly logical, non-spiritual, or materialistic. The mystic's "staunchless compassion for all life" can help other men find life more spacious and abundant. Of Yeats's late poems she says,

... they touched the borders where poetry becomes the ultimate evocation, and the regions where religion rises from universal mystery. (p. 136)

This interest in the unconscious or mystical does

---

not dominate Miss Bogan's prose writings, however. She remains basically directed by rational tenets, though occasional essays remind us that she is not completely committed to them. Both her prose and poetry reflect her internal conflict.
The conflict between emotion and intellect is unresolved in Miss Bogan's own poetry, but her deepest admiration goes to those who have managed a harmony of the two. Gerard Manley Hopkins and W. B. Yeats both have her highest praise and in both she admires the blending of passion and intellect.

She writes of Hopkins with awe, giving us a compelling portrait of "an intellect at once passionate, cool, sincere, and undeviating, and of a spirit fiery beyond description." (p. 43) His mind ranges over language, literature, art, music, and a whole spectrum of human knowledge and concern with impressive depth and brilliance. But it is not merely the range of interests which impresses her; it is the discipline and amount of knowledge which inform it. His experiments in metrics and technical innovations were so far ahead of his time that he could not be read by his contemporaries. Yet this originality and invention came from a scholar who was "curious and learned in prosody" and a continuing student of Greek metrics. As a critic he had a keenly original mind that often anticipated later
critical theories, and he insisted on close and careful reading of a work to be judged. He faulted the poetry of his friend Coventry Patmore wherever he detected ambiguity, incomplete sense, bad phrasing, affectation, or insincerity. In short, Miss Bogan describes the critic Hopkins as a forerunner of Yvor Winters. But whatever is learned, disciplined, and strict in Hopkins is transmuted by his "fiery spirit" into a new kind of gold. Both prose and poetry show his "disciplined honesty and intensity of conviction" (p. 49); mind and spirit together blend in a "rich nature" of compelling complexity.

In Yeats, the balance struck between mind and spirit is a different equilibrium. The "whirling" intensity of his nature seems most evident, but it is backed by an "ordered mind" that is both "vigorous and subtle." Some of the theories, symbolic structures, and preoccupations that absorbed Yeats's mind seem silly from our perspective, but in the light of psychological speculation about man-made symbols, the psyche, and the unconscious, his theories seem less eccentric. Miss Bogan points out that his Anima Mundi resembles Jung's racial unconscious (p. 103), and her interest in the dark mysteries discussed in "The Secular Hell" could find example and illustration in Yeats. Perhaps Yeats's theories were an attempt to explain his
intuitions. At least Louise Bogan feels that he did integrate all manner of his concerns:

The difficult balance, almost impossible to strike, between the artist’s austerity and "the reveries of the common heart"—between the proud passions, the proud intellect and consuming action—Yeats finally attained and held to. It is this balance which gives the poems . . . their noble resonance. (p. 99)

T. S. Eliot has argued that poets since the seventeenth century have suffered from a dissociation of sensibility, thought and feeling separated in an un-integrated personality. The metaphysical poets possessed a sensibility which could "devour any kind of experience." An idea was apprehended "as immediately as the odour of a rose." This integration of all the faculties is the power Louise Bogan admires in Yeats and Hopkins. Perhaps it was admiration for the wholeness of Renaissance sensibility that led her to learn so much from Renaissance poetic techniques. If she does not quite achieve the wholeness herself, it is not for lack of trying. Her work is comprised of passion, mind, and craftsmanship in curious combination. With less craft and control, her poetry might have become melodramatic or hysterical, a danger not entirely avoided. With less passion, her poetry might seem only artful or artificial, but this does not happen.

The sense of personally felt reaction is always present. If there is imbalance in her work, the weight is on the side of excessive emotion rather than excessive intellectuality, and this despite the immediate impression the reader has of control, learning, and craft. Louise Bogan appears in her writing as a woman of great intelligence and passion, with a certain force of will. The play and conflict of these forces have created much of the content of her poetry, and the tensions between meaning and style have partially served to define it. Finally her failure was a failure to integrate the two so that both faculties could operate together.
LIST OF WORKS CITED


________. "The Mystic Experience," Nation, CLXI (July 7, 1945), 15.


