



Allen Tate

(1899-1979)

Seasons of the Soul (1944)

To the memory of John Peale Bishop, 1892-1944

*Allor porsì ola mano un poco avante,
e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno;
e il tronco suo grido: Perche mi schiante?*

I. SUMMER

Summer, this is our flesh,
The body you let mature;
If now while the body is fresh
You take it, shall we give
The heart, lest heart endure
The mind's tattering
Blow of greedy claws?
Shall mind itself still live
If like a hunting king
It falls to the lion's jaws?

Under the summer's blast
The soul cannot endure
Unless by sleight or fast
It seize or deny its day
To make the eye secure.
Brothers-in-arms, remember
The hot wind dries and draws
With circular delay
The flesh, ash from the ember,
Into the summer's jaws.

It was a gentle sun
When, at the June solstice
Green France was overrun
With caterpillar feet,
No head knows where its rest is

Or may lie down with reason
When war's usurping claws
Shall take the heart escheat--
Green field in burning season
To stain the weevil's jaws.

The southern summer dies
Evenly in the fall:
We raise our tired eyes
Into a sky of glass,
Blue, empty, and tall
Without tail or head
Where burn the equal laws
For Balaam and his ass
Above the invalid dead,
Who cannot lift their jaws.

When was it that the summer
(Daylong a liquid light)
And a child, the new-comer,
Bathed in the same green spray,
Could neither guess the night?
The summer had no reason;
Then, like a primal cause
It had its timeless day
Before it kept the season
Of time's engaging jaws.

Two men of our summer world
Descended winding hell
And when their shadows curled
They fearfully confounded
The vast concluding shell:
Stopping, they saw in the narrow
Light a centaur pause
And gaze, then his astounded
Beard, with a notched arrow,
Part back upon his jaws.

II. AUTUMN

It had an autumn smell
And that was how I knew
That I was down a well:
I was no longer young;
My lips were numb and blue,
The air was like fine sand
In a butcher's stall
Or pumice to the tongue:
And when I raised my hand
I stood in the empty hall.

The round ceiling was high
And the gray light like shale
Thin, crumbling, and dry:
No rug on the bare floor

Nor any carved detail
To which the eye could glide;
I counted along the wall
Door after closed door
Through which a shade might slide
To the cold and empty hall.

I will leave the house, I said,
There is the autumn weather--
Here, not living nor dead;
The lights burn in the town
Where men fear together.
Then on the bare floor,
But tiptoe lest I fall,
I walked years down
Towards the front door
At the end of the empty hall.

The door was false--no key
Or lock, and I was caught
In the house; yet I could see
I had been born to it
For miles of running brought
Me back where I began.
I saw now in the wall
A door open a slit
And a fat grizzled man
Come out into the hall:

As in a moonlit street
Men meeting are too shy
To check their hurried feet
But raise their eyes and squint
As through a needle's eye
Into the faceless gloom,--
My father in a gray shawl
Gave me an unseeing glint
And entered another room!
I stood in the empty hall

And watched them come and go
From one room to another,
Old men, old women--slow,
Familiar; girls, boys;
I saw my downcast mother
Clad in her street-clothes,
Her blue eyes long and small,
Who had no look or voice
For him whose vision froze
Him in the empty hall.

III. WINTER

Goddess sea-born and bright,
Return into the sea
Where eddying twilight

Gathers upon your people--
Cold goddess, hear our plea!
Leave the burnt earth, Venus,
For the drying God above,
Hanged in his windy steeple,
No longer bears for us
The living wound of love.

And now the winter sea:
Within her hollow rind
What sleek facility
Of sea-conceited scope
To plumb the nether mind!
Eternal winters blow
Shivering flakes, and shove
Bodies that wheel and drop--
Cold soot upon the snow
Their livid wound of love.

Beyond the undertow
The gray sea-foliage
Transpires a phosphor glow
Into the circular miles:
In the centre of his cage
The pacing animal
Surveys the jungle cove
And slicks his slithering wiles
To turn the venereal awl
In the livid wound of love.

Beyond the undertow
The rigid madrepor
Resists the winter's flow--
Headless, unageing oak
That gives the leaf no more.
Willfully as I stood
Within the thickest grove
I seized a branch, which broke;
I heard the speaking blood
(From the livid wound of love)

Drip down upon my toe:
"We are the men who died
Of self-inflicted woe,
Lovers whose stratagem
Led to their suicide."
I touched my sanguine hair
And felt it drip above
Their brother who, like them,
Was maimed and did not hear
The living wound of love.

IV. SPRING

Irritable spring, infuse
Into the burning breast

Your combustible juice
That as a liquid soul
Shall be the body's guest
Who lights, but cannot stay
To comfort this unease
Which, like a dying coal,
Hastens the cooler day
Of the mother of silences.

Back in my native prime
I saw the orient corn
All space but no time,
Reaching for the sun
Of the land where I was born:
It was a pleasant land
Where even death could please
Us with an ancient pun--
All dying for the hand
Of the mother of silences.

In time of bloody war
Who will know the time?
Is it a new spring star
Within the timing chill,
Talking, or just a name,
That rises in the blood--
Thin Jack-and-Jilling seas
Without the human will?
Its light is at the flood,
Mother of silences!

It burns us each alone
Whose burning arrogance
Burns up the rolling stone,
This earth--Platonic cave
Of vertiginous chance!
Come, tired Sisyphus,
Cover the cave's egress
Where light reveals the slave,
Who rests when sleeps with us
The mother of silences.

Come, old woman, save
Your sons who have gone down
Into the burning cave:
Come, mother, and lean
At the window with your son
And gaze through its light frame
These fifteen centuries
Upon the shirking scene
Where men, blind, go lame:
Then, mother of silences,

Speak, that we may hear;
Listen, while we confess
That we conceal our fear;

Regard us, while the eye
Discerns by sight or guess
Whether, as sheep foregather
Upon their crooked knees,
We have begun to die;
Whether your kindness, mother,
Is mother of silences.

ANALYSIS

"We become aware, then, that in Tate's recent poetry the traditional influences (whether of structure, idea, or both) operate only as qualities, not as models. Thus, one is barely conscious of the Dante influence in the impressive 'Seasons of the Soul,' but it is there in the deeply religio-ethical purpose of the poem as well as in the implied descent of the poet into his own hell. In the same poem the influences of the *Pervigilium Veneris* is felt in the erotic elements as well as in the subtle use of refrain. 'Seasons of the Soul' can, I think, be thought of as the summation of Tate's present position. It is an instructive guide to his technical practice; it is a map to his present values, even though it merely poses a problem. But it is by the way in which a problem is framed that the nature of its solution is implied. Let us examine the frame.

The scheme of the poem is simple: the four seasons correspond to the four elements of the ancients. Thus the chronicle is of the four ages of man in relation to the four aspects of the universe he inhabits. More specifically, however, it is modern man whose spiritual biography Mr. Tate records. Summer is the first season: the background is now:

It was a gentle sun
When, at the June solstice,
Green France was overrun
With caterpillar feet.
No head knows where its rest is
Or may lie down with reason
When war's usurping claws
Shall take the heart escheat--

This suggests another summer (the summer of childhood which is identified with the summer of classical antiquity in its clarity and innocence) when 'The summer had no reason: / Then, like a primal cause / It had its timeless day.'

In Autumn, technically the most interesting section, the surrealist device of a dream is employed to enable the poet to prophesy, as it were, a vision of his own old age which is revealed to him as a trap. He is caught in a deep well, an empty house (the house of the past) peopled only by ghosts, his ancestors, who refuse to recognize him. The house of the past is not real. 'The door was false--no key / Or lock . . . yet I could see / I had been born to it / For miles of running brought / Me back where I began.' The failure of parents to recognize a son is another way of stating the problem of identity. We have seen how in his earliest writing this question engaged Tate. Now the dilemma is extended to the profoundest sort of personal epistemology: If your progenitors do not know you, if you are cut off from communication with your contemporaries ('I was down a well'), if, in short, there is no objective recognition of your identity, who are you? Along with this return to a study of his past, Tate also reverts to the more sensuous and concrete imagery of the early 'romantic' poems, an imagery determined by inner, emotional connections and not by logical ones. I think especially of the father-mother imagery of Section II and the sea imagery of Section III.

From the frustration of this cyclical returning upon himself, the poet in 'Winter,' a strikingly beautiful section, pleads with Venus to return to her element. Christianity ('the dying God above / Hanged in his windy steeple') is dead and 'No longer bears for us / The living wound of love.' There is every reason to suppose that we must take this as Tate's mature view of the religious problem, a problem which he could not resolve with such brutal finality in the middle years. In 'More Sonnets at Christmas,' composed a little before 'Seasons of the Soul,' he had implied the dismissal:

Ten years is time enough to be dismayed
By mummy Christ, head crammed between the knees.

The violence of this image, its quasi-obscenity, even, is the measure of the distance Tate traveled in the ten dismaying years from the time when the question of anti-miraculism disturbed him. It is clear enough now that, as Tate once flippantly remarked, the question of Mr. Eliot's submission to the Thirty-nine Articles was never to be a live option in his own poetry.

But the pagan values are dead, too ('All the sea-gods are dead'). There is sex: The pacing animal who turns 'The venereal awl / In the livid wound of love.' Again, a strange surrealist image connects the general with the poet's particular plight: In a grove under the sea the poet seizes the branch of a madrepora from which drips a 'speaking blood / From the lived wound of love':

We are the men who died
Of self-inflicted woe,
Lovers whose stratagem
Led to their suicide
I touched my sanguine hair
And felt it drip above
Their brother who, like them,
Was maimed and did not bear
The living wound of love.

The 'living wound' of love would seem to be suggested by the famous Proem to *De Rerum Naturae* in which Lucretius, looking on a war-torn Italy, calls upon Venus (as a fertility-principle) to inflict upon Mars the eternal wound of love (*aeterno vulnere amoris*) and thus win peace and increase for the Romans. For Tate the 'eternal wound' becomes the 'living wound' and I take the implication to be that Love, growing from a 'livid' wound into the 'living' wound is the only possible power which can rescue man from his otherwise maimed existence. The passionate and suppliant address to Venus makes clear that she is the complex erotic symbol around which cluster the poet's hopes for various kinds of regenerations:

All the sea-gods are dead
You, Venus, come home
To your salt maidenhead.

This reading, I think, is confirmed by the next section 'Spring,' a liturgical chant (still within the frame of the ten-line iambic trimeter stanza) to the Mother of Silences, a figure who simultaneously suggests the principle of the Virgin (the Mother, Life) and the principle of Death (the Mystery): the figure, significantly, never speaks. The symbol has a certain obscurity not altogether relieved by the following passage:

Come, mother, and lean
At the window with your son
And gaze through its light frame
These fifteen centuries
Upon the shirking scene
Where men, blind, go lame:

Now the mother appears to be Saint Monica as she appears in Book IX of St. Augustine's *Confessions*. Mother and son stand alone 'leaning in a certain window, from which the garden of the house we occupied at Ostia could be seen'; cataloguing a set of earthly conditions, which, could they be 'silenced,' would enable them to arrive at a apprehension of the 'hereafter.' Soon after, Monica dies and leaves Augustine with a living wound 'from having that most sweet and dear habit of living together suddenly broken off.' Thus the Mother of Silences is a particular mother (St. Monica), the Virgin, the Mystery, and through Augustine's unmentioned wound she is identified further with the principle of Love. Love, then, is the luminous agency common to all the referents of the symbol. Yet, in the end, one feels that the hope of

regeneration through Love is reluctantly abandoned and death is sought as the only certain 'kindness' to which men can aspire.

'Seasons of the Soul' will stand as a major event in Tate's career as a poet. It is lyrical, sensuous and tragic. It is, for whatever meaning that chameleon term may still carry, romantic. In 'Tension in Poetry,' an interesting essay written some years ago, Tate distinguishes the metaphysical from the romantic poet in the following way: 'The metaphysical poet as a rationalist begins at or near the extensive or denotative end of the line. The romantic or Symbolist poet at the other, intensive end; and each by a straining feat of the imagination tries to push his meaning as far as he can toward the opposite end, so as to occupy the entire scale. . . . ' But there is to be recommended a 'poetry of the center,' that is, 'poetry of tension in which the strategy is diffused into the unitary effect.' I am not sure after several rereadings how this strategy is implemented. Indeed, the concept of 'tension' has been used by some critics, although not by Mr. Tate, to get around critical problems more taxing to unravel than to designate as illustrative of 'tension.'

However, if there is a poetry of tension and if there is a living practitioner of this awesome and marvelous feat of poetic balance between the classic and the romantic, the metaphysical and the Symbolist among us, surely it is Tate himself. But it has become increasingly evident that the idea of the poet as the daring young man on the flying trapeze is giving way to a less perilous but more fruitful enterprise: the paradoxical roles of suppliant and teacher have lost their separate identities in a profound and humble appreciation of what de Unamuno calls 'the tragic sense of life.' In 'Winter Mask to the Memory of W. B. Yeats' (1943) Tate writes:

I asked the master Yeats
Whose great style could not tell
Why it is man hates
His own salvation,
Prefers the way to hell,
And finds his last safety
In the self-made curse that bore
Him towards damnation:
The drowned undrowned by the sea,
The sea worth living for.

Vivienne Koch
"The Poetry of Allen Tate"
The Kenyon Critics
ed. John Crowe Ransom
(Kennikat Press 1951) 260-64

"If in the Confederate Ode there is regret and irony over 'the failure of the human personality to function objectively in nature and society,' then in Tate's poem 'Seasons of the Soul' the malady has attained the proportions of desperation. The poem is Tate's equation of the present-day dissociation of sensibility with the medieval Hell. It begins with a quotation in Italian from Canto XIII of the *Inferno*, and the English equivalent is to this effect:

Then I reached out my hand before me
And severed a twig from a thorn bush;
And the trunk shrieked, 'Why do you tear me?'

The passage is that in which the poet is conducted to a wood in which the souls of lovers who died by committing suicide have become trees, and which are eternally rended by Harpies which feed on the branches. 'Seasons of the Soul' is in four parts, and in the course of the poem the pestilences of modern man are set forth, each in its anguish. War--...Rootlessness, a world people by ghosts--...Godlessness--...Bestiality-- ... In the last section of the poem, 'Spring,' the poet recalls his childhood... As Vivienne Koch has pointed out, 'the mother of silences' appears to be a figure symbolizing both the Virgin and death. In time of pestilence, the poet says, who knows what is to come, death or salvation? 'In time of bloody war / Who will know the time?' he asks. 'Its light is at the flood, / Mother of silences!'

With certain reservations one can say that 'Seasons of the Soul' is Tate's own telling of the Waste Land. The poem is renewed evidence of the accessibility to a common tradition shared by Tate and the Southerners, Fugitives and Agrarians both, in many ways have said for their time and place what Eliot has been saying for the same time but another less particularized place. The theme of 'Seasons of the Soul' could hardly be better explicated than in recent remarks by Eliot in his *Notes Toward A Definition of Culture*:

We can assert with some confidence that our own period is one of decline; that the standards of culture are lower than they were fifty years ago; and that the evidences of this decline are visible in every department of human activity. I see no reason why the decay of culture should not proceed much further, and why we may not even anticipate a period of some duration in which it is possible to say that it will have no culture. Then culture will have to grow again from the soil; and when I say it must grow again from the soil, I do not mean that it will be brought into existence by any activity of political demagogues.... Culture is the one thing that we cannot deliberately aim at. It is the product of a variety of more or less harmonious activities, each pursued for its own sake.

Eliot's proposed course of action for modern man is well known: it is the deliberate and disciplined cultivation of spiritual values, through religion. That he feels that his advice will not be followed, and that disaster will result, in no way diminishes his belief that only through God can civilization survive. For the Southerners, Agrarianism was one way of saying this, too. Though *I'll Take My Stand* did not base its recommendations upon a religious revival, the role of religion in the agrarian life was insisted upon. Significantly, too, Tate's essay on the Southern religion, calling for the spiritual values of wholeness and unity through religion."

Louis D. Rubin, Jr.
"The Serpent in the Mulberry Bush"
Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South
ed. Louis D. Rubin
(Johns Hopkins 1953) 352-57

"Though it is true that 'Seasons of the Soul' is a tragic poem, it is not therefore a morbid one. Both Vivienne Koch and Richmond C. Beatty, in 'Allen Tate as Man of Letters,' whose interpretation of the poem is similar to hers, emphasize the mood of despair. Yet 'Seasons of the Soul,' while it deals with suffering and loss of faith, also portrays the heroic contest man has always fought against the despair which has seemed overpowering. He has even descended into hell to find knowledge of love, the source of life.... Often in Tate's poetry his bitterest condemnation of man's conduct spring from his recognition of the contrast between man's heroic potentialities, his creative energies, and what Tate calls his 'tragic fault,' his misuse of these qualities. The ancient symbols of Venus and Sisyphus represent the two ways man may take. Tate implies at the end of the poem that man may accept death, but his invocation to Venus is a moving and powerful affirmation of the potentialities of life."

Lillian Feder
"Allen Tate's Use of Classical Literature"
The Centennial Review 4:89-114 (Winter 1960)

"T. S. Eliot warned against 'autotelic' criticism, and nearly everyone has his favorite example of the type; the fact that we have an 'age of criticism' is too well documented to dispute and the dangers of 'criticism' smothering its subject are obvious even without Randall Jarrell to point them out. In writing a long chapter about one poem in a study like this, therefore, the hazard one accepts is apparent. But in the case of 'Seasons of the Soul--a difficult, much neglected, and, when not neglected, misunderstood poem--the risk seems justified. Most of the major poems of our time have received their share of attention; 'Seasons of the Soul' should not be an exception, and it is worth taking risks to try to understand it.

It is, I believe, Tate's most important poem. It is more ambitious than even the 'Ode to the Confederate Dead,' and it is more perfectly achieved. At this writing, Tate has published three sections of a long poem which promises to be the climax of his poetic career, and I shall comment briefly upon this work later. But if the sections in that poem interlock as closely as those in the 'Seasons,' and it seems they do, it is foolish to attempt any final estimate of it at this time. In these circumstances, 'Seasons of the Soul' is the

culmination of Tate's poetry; it is the finest example of his later style; it concentrates his themes and displays his skills more than any other poem he has written.

It is one of the most brilliant performances of the time, and the fact that it has been praised less than it deserves is a commentary on the taste and discretion of the time. 'Seasons of the Soul' is not eccentric, and the poems which have often exercised the admiration of the century are--whatever other virtues they certainly possess--eccentric: *The Waste Land* and *Cantos* may serve for examples. For in 'Seasons of the Soul' there is little of the straining after wit which marred some of Tate's earlier poetry. Some passages and phrases are shocking, but the shock is never mere textural agitation; it develops from the force of the conception. Furthermore, the sheer *control* in the poem is amazing. The trimeter line is difficult in a short poem; I know no other poem where it has been sustained at this length and in such intricate form. That the poem is a whole and not a series of fragments is witness to Tate's management of the medium. The control, in short, of both conception and technique is of the quality we expect in great poetry.

I have argued that Tate's sensibility has always been fundamentally religious. Seemingly denied access to any religious position in earlier parts of his career, Tate has turned to society and to tradition for the benefits ordinarily associated with religion. That is, he has, in his own words, sought his salvation in history. But the historical vision proved inadequate and this sense of inadequacy, clearly seen in his later critical writing, may sharpen the focus on 'Seasons of the Soul.' Among other things, one can see in the poem the failure and dismissal of the purely historical vision. To refer to the sub-title of this chapter, 'Seasons of the Soul' is the end of the historical vision: the historical myth has failed. It might be said without too much exaggeration that World War II put the death-seal to Tate's already-dying version of history as myth hardly less emphatically than World War I proved the final treachery to Henry James's ideal of society.

The poem has received some scattered comment and some rather partial if occasionally shrewd readings, an insight which is partially valid has been built into a general commentary and has become distorted if not downright false in the process. No one has really gotten to the heart of the poem. There is a certain formal intricacy that has eluded its critics and its symbolism has been too subtle for most of the commentators. Of all Tate's poems, this one is least suitable to criticism by quotations or hasty summary; it must be considered whole.

Finding an entry to the poem is difficult because of its firm construction and the way in which the parts of the poem interpenetrate and amplify each other. Cleanth Brooks, with his usual sagacity, suggests beginning with the epigraph, which is taken from the *Inferno*. Dante is writing of the punishment of the violent--those violent against God, nature, art, their fellow men, or themselves. The implication is clear: 'Seasons of the Soul' will be concerned with, among other things, the peculiarly destructive violence of modern man. The epigraph comes from Canto XIII, lines thirty-one to thirty-three:

[Binyon's translation:

Then I stretched forth my hand a little, and bent
And plucked a puny branch from a great thorn.
And the trunk cried out: "Why hast thou me rent?"]

This is Dante's adaptation of one of the epic conventions: a human soul has been imprisoned in a tree, in this case a barren thorn tree symbolizing death by suicide. The suicide has exercised his will to deprive himself of it; he has denied his freedom by reducing himself to the vegetable level and now his outward form renders his inward condition. Tate takes the episode and extends its significance: modern culture has denied its specific humanity and the denial has become externalized and concrete in the forms of civilization.

To understand the epigraph and its possible extensions, however, is still too constructed an insight to afford a real approach to this complex poem; it is not even enough to see that the epigraph supplies a certain governing conception. Neither Miss Koch nor Mr. Beatty seems similarly troubled; they find the plan of the poem simple: the four seasons correspond to the four elements and the result is the spiritual biography of modern man. This indeed seems wondrously simple, and perhaps it is supported by several

lines of reasoning. In the first place, Dante alludes to the Empedoclean doctrine of elements in the twelfth Canto of the *Inferno*.

Perhaps Miss Koch and other critics also have in mind Tate's echoes of T. S. Eliot in this poem, and perhaps they remember particularly the use of the elements Eliot employs in *Four Quartets*. However, I do not think the elements enter Tate's poem in any obvious sense, except to lend a certain universality to the themes, but that universality is there without reference to the elements. The symbolism of the elements does not penetrate the poem deeply nor is it easily recognized. The controlling figure is rather that of the endless and futile recurrence of the seasons, a general pattern which is reinforced in passages such as the 'circular delay' of the second stanza of 'Summer' and the 'circular miles' of the fourth stanza of 'Winter.'

With the Dante epigraph the situation is somewhat different; as Brooks says, the poem is 'a tissue of Dante references.' But to realize that an understanding of Dante is fundamental to an understanding of the poem is only a beginning. It will also help to realize that Tate at times echoes passages from *Ash Wednesday* and *The Waste Land*. It is undoubtedly useful to remember some specific passages from *The Education of Henry Adams* as well as the general tenor of Adams's historical despair. Certain passages from Baudelaire, from Augustine, and from other sources may have some relevance. But this is a series of texts, not a poem. It is not a useless thing to understand the texts which have enriched a poet's mind, but we may be tempted into thinking we have understood the poem when we have understood the allusions. This is a shaky approach to any poem; applied to 'Seasons of the Soul' it is impossible: the meaning of this poem is completely contained in its form and the style which gives it shape. It is through that aperture we must not only finally understand it but also find an approach to it. So perhaps we should ask: what is there about the style of these sections which impresses one with a sense of continuity?

Careful observation will reveal a direct parallel between three of the four sections which is as remarkable as it has been unnoticed: the 'Summer,' 'Winter,' and 'Spring' sections all open with the formalized conventionality of an apostrophe or an invocation. This is a matter of structure and of style as opposed to the symbolism of the four elements which plays in the background and which is *not* a structural or stylistic element, but a conceptual framework from which some images draw enrichment. Some examination of these invocations will be well repaid.

What, we may ask, is being invoked? And why does the 'Autumn section vary from the pattern? And are these merely rhetorical whims with no real significance? The last question requires a negative answer; the others need further amplification.

The invocation has been a rhetorical commonplace for a good many centuries. But rhetorical figures were not originally whimsical or merely conventional: the address to the deities, or to the muses, was a serious business. The invocation is especially associated with the epic tradition in which the poet implores aid to treat his heroic subject properly. Even if we take the address to Summer and Spring as mere apostrophes, the apostrophe is still an address to a second person, traditionally a personification or a hero from the past. In both invocation and apostrophe the element of supplication is very strong: the poet seeks to transcend the confines of his own ego and to make contact with a tradition, or a representative of a tradition, which will enlarge his vision.

Consequently, there is in Tate's use of the form a fundamental irony. He has always been fond of the formal irony, as I have remarked; his 'Ode to the Confederate Dead' is not a public and heroic celebration; Tate's ode is muttered by a man standing alone at the gate of a graveyard. Similarly here: in the first section, Tate addresses Summer as the symbol of the present which grows out of the past. But as the Dante allusion of the last stanza makes clear, the present is hell; it does not sustain, but destroys. Is it too much to say that on careful reading we may see the death of the traditional society?

In the 'Winter' section we have the most obvious example of the form: there is a direct invocation of Venus. Now the Venus symbolism has been the most consistently misread and misunderstood aspect of Tate's poem, and we can say here at least this much: the figure of Venus as Goddess of Love is extremely ambiguous. Furthermore, this is no simple or direct invocation to some soothing 'spirit of love' to heal the

wounds of our modern woe. More detailed reading will support this, but for now we may say that in 'Winter' there is an invocation of an impotent deity.

In the final section, Spring is invoked as the principle of naturalistic regeneration. By an extensive metaphor, the naturalistic regeneration is transformed into religious regeneration. This is not simple piety, and this regeneration is uncertain; it involves difficulties and dangers. And so, as Eliot's spring is cruel, Tate's is irritable and beguiling. But this parallel should not lead us to believe that Tate is rendering his own *Waste Land*; the matter is more complex.

So, I see the forms of these three opening passages in a generally ironic light which illumines the entire poem. There are three invocations, and none of them proves efficacious; the vision in each situation proves impossible to attain. And so, the governing irony of the poem seems to me the desperate need to find some principle outside of man which will redeem him and guarantee his full humanity, which need is opposed by the impossibility of finding such a principle.

And what about 'Autumn'? That is the exception to my neat schematism: can it be accounted for? I believe it can. The "Autumn" section is devoted to the personal past, and an invocation or apostrophe presupposes a second person. Consequently, the general egocentricity of modern man becomes more personal and threatening in this section, for there is nothing outside the personal past. This accounts for much of the hallucinatory quality of the passage where the poem becomes more personal than at any other place, and where the 'I' is more directly threatened than in any other section.

These assertions, though sweeping, give a formal center rather than a simple conceptual center to which we can relate the other details of the poem. With them in mind we can now approach the text more directly.

The epigraph sets the tone, still it is a warning that we are dealing with the world of the *Inferno*. The apostrophe in this first stanza is the weakest of the three; indeed, it is hardly an apostrophe at all but merely a direct address. Perhaps this is because the section deals with the present, which is continually shifting, constantly being transmuted from the past to the future. As such, it is treacherous, and the subtlety of the refrain underlines the precarious feeling. The last lines of the stanza vary, but each one concludes with the word 'jaws,' giving a sense of both shiftiness and finality.

That it *is* the present which is being addressed the first two lines make clear. Summer is the season of maturity, and the flesh, the physical body, is viewed here rather like the mature ear of corn. Perhaps this is straining, this forcing together of the human and the vegetable, but it is dramatically supported by Dante's demonic vegetable-man of the epigraph. The 'present' for 'Seasons of the Soul' is World War II. The question seems to be: shall we lend out bodies, our physical beings, whole-heartedly to this present moment? Or rather: in a time like this, is there any way to avoid it?

The violence of the human condition is graver than the literal war; it is this inward violence which reaches its outer, brutal representation in physical war. This extension from the immediate present to the more general human condition is clearly present in the language. The juxtaposition of the various nouns--body, heart, mind, soul--in the first two stanzas is done with great precision; it imposes a philosophical question in general language. This is not the weakness it might first appear to be. Tate is introducing his themes, and his linking of the body-mind-soul relationship with the problem of time will be the subject of much of his development. The philosophical question here might be put: how is a fully human version of man to be preserved in this time? This reading is supported further by the admonitory phrase beginning 'Brothers-in-arms, remember' in the second stanza, where the issue is even more clearly generalized.

The difficulty of this first stanza is intrinsic, and not the result of needlessly abstruse terminology or involved conceits. I think we must risk a paraphrase of the first stanza: our chaos presents an imminent threat to the physical existence of man. But, more pointedly, if we yield our bodies to the present moment, then the heart, that mysterious center of man's being, is also endangered. In resigning our physical welfare to the chaotic present we have also allowed the narrowly rational will to dictate our course and have placed rationality itself in jeopardy. The danger is that the mind, immersed in the present moment, will

become debased and prey on the whole being of man until it establishes itself as king. Then we have the mind as hunter, diligently searching out the meanings of existence with no check except itself. In such a condition it becomes itself a prey 'to the lion's jaws,' to the inexorable passage of time.

This thought is familiar in Tate's work, but it is emphatically not irrationalism. It is the fear that man will debase his own being, that mind, heart, body will all be destroyed in the process. Furthermore, this stolid prose does not do the poem justice. The stanza moves very rapidly in trimeter lines to the conclusion in spite of the abstract language, and this conclusion is held up until the final line, which is varied as the refrain theme throughout the poem. One of the most impressive features of Tate's technique is the way he uses the refrain; the extremely rapid movement of the short lines is repeatedly held up and checked by unexpected, important rhyme words and the play of syntax against the tight structure until the refrain seals the conclusion. The refrain is never an artificial addition to the verse; it is beautifully managed throughout.

The first stanza, then, sets the issue, at first abstractly. It poses the possibility that the reason, in its eager conquest of all meaning, will diminish man to the level of the beast--or the vegetable. The result is the literal violence of war and the more subtle violences perpetrated against the self and nature traced in the rest of the poem. Thus, the two metaphors of the stanza work as illustrations of the abstract theme. In the first, the mind is the rapacious birds of prey tearing at man's being; in the second, the mind as hunting king, having destroyed its own ground of being, itself falls to the 'lion's jaws,' which are finally the same as 'time's engaging jaws' in stanza five. The figures are introduced suddenly and shift rapidly, which might seem a flaw; but their primary purpose is to bring the theme suddenly and forcefully to visual status. While that is no virtue in itself, it does set the theme where it can be seen. This is typical of Tate, of course; the poem progresses primarily by viewed action and it is necessary that he particularize the earlier abstractions rapidly.

There is an important passage from Tate's essay 'Understanding Modern Poetry' which should be exhibited. It comes from a surprising context, for Tate is commenting on one of W. H. Auden's metaphors. He writes: '...all the complications can be returned without confusion or contradiction to a definite, literal, and coherent field of imagery...when the poet wishes to extend his meaning, he does it by means of this field of metaphor, not by changing the figure, which is: the hunter debases his human nature (Love) in his arrogant, predatory, conquest of the world, and Love itself becomes not merely morally bad but evil.' (*Collected Essays*, p.127)

In spite of the admittedly strange way in which the quotation is pulled from context, it serves, I believe, as an almost exact statement of the general theme of 'Seasons of the Soul,' the theme which is cryptically set forth in this opening stanza. If human nature becomes debased, human actions become evil. Even love becomes evil. This perception is vital to the poem, and particularly to the later Venus symbolism.

It is in the world of summer, a timeless present with no past, that human nature may most easily become predatory. Stanza two analyzes the season more closely. The use of the verb 'blast' in an archaic sense to emphasize the desiccating heat of summer is unusual, yet it modulates into the image of the hot winds of the concluding lines in a way a weaker verb could not. Again, the debilitating character of the present is emphasized; the world of the poem begins to resemble more and more the world of the *Inferno*.

The second through fourth lines of the stanza announce Tate's subtle variation on the *carpe diem* theme. Miss Feder has written: 'This is not merely a variation and extension of the phrase *carpe diem*, but a significant application of its meaning and associations in a new context. The soul, says Tate, must have vitality and courage despite man's mortality. All the associations of the *carpe diem* theme...are evoked through Tate's use of the phrase. It suggests the intensity and tragedy of man's struggle...to wrest from life satisfaction and meaning. Tate's unique adaptation of it reveals the plight of man's soul in our time: it must struggle for and seize the place that has been denied it or give up entirely.' ("Allen Tate's Use of Classical Literature," p. 111)

This is a fine reading; Miss Feder sees the interplay between the present moment and the past which is constant in Tate's verse. But her insight into classical qualities, which allows her to see neglected elements of Tate's poetry, has also narrowed her range of perception. There can be no doubt that Tate uses a

traditional commonplace in these lines. There is plenty of room, however, to doubt that he makes use of it simply to evoke that theme. The poem here yields more than any demand for the soul to gird up its courage. It yields, for one thing, the impossibility of seizing the day in this summer world.

Notice how the phrasing vanishes into an entirely different type of thought. The fifth line presents one of Tate's typical images of vision: 'to make the eye secure.' It means: only if the soul 'seizes the day'--only if it establishes its rightful position in the human entelechy--can the whole vision, the ability to see not merely discrete particulars but the dignity of the human situation, be guaranteed. The soul cannot do this, as it could for the classical writers, as its natural right. It must do it by 'sleight'--by subterfuge--or 'fast'--by religious discipline.

As if these difficulties were not enough, Tate immediately plunges the *carpe diem* into the inferno, invoking Dante to raise what seems to me the question of whether there is any day left for the soul to seize. 'Brothers-in-arms,' he expostulates his fellow inhabitants of a warring world of summer, 'remember / The hot wind dries and draws.' Again, the formal address is ironic, and the shift from the tone of the opening line is quite radical. Tate does not dismiss the heroic *carpe diem* theme. He holds it as a desperate possibility but the language makes the difficulties and ambiguities apparent. Here is the hot wind, and surely it is Dante's wind, though I cannot see that it makes much difference whether this is the hot wind from the deserts of World War II, or the wind of Dante's Canto V which eternally blows Francesca da Rimini as punishment for her carnal disenthronement of reason, or even the wind which blows the hot rain on Brunetto Latini in Canto XV in punishment for his violence against nature: all are the same wind. It symbolizes violence, a violence which dries the flesh and shrinks man to less than he is. The heroism of the soul's struggle with its fate may well become, in this poem, that strange modern hubris which reduces man to less than he is and leaves his bones at the mercy of the summer.

In the third stanza Tate returns immediately from the only half-imaginary hell to the immediate present. He evokes the first days of the second world war, not merely in a topical manner but as developments of themes which have been bluntly stated to this point. The sun seems gentle and benign, but it beguiles, and hides destruction. The allusion in the first lines is, of course, to the invasion of France in the first two weeks of June, 1939, by the mechanized troops of Germany. The connotative extensions are very rich. The adjective here is one of Tate's typically forceful compressions. 'Green France': why green? Green is the color of growth, and summer is the season of growth. Yet the word has overtones of death--witness Sir Gawain's experience--and a life-death ambiguity revolves here. The caterpillar--here the image of mechanization turned horribly barbaric--is the natural predator of vegetable life; and there is a further extension of the adjective 'green.' France here is viewed as not only dynamically alive but, paradoxically, as barely vegetative. As the vitality of the culture becomes debased, this vitality, the product of years of civilization, is destroyed.

The rest of the stanza deals with the betrayal of reason, its inability to redeem an impossible situation when it itself has become perverse. The use of 'escheat'--an archaic and technical term--is interesting. War, usurping the proper condition of man like an arrogant and plundering lord, shall leave the heart without heirs. Since one of Tate's major preoccupations has been with tradition--with the possibility of unity in the generations of men--the escheated heart is perhaps the final degradation. The green field, the slow and elaborately articulated forms of the past, have fallen to the devouring jaws of the barbarized present; life itself becomes the prey of vermin.

With the death of the European civilization, the symbolic death of what Tate has called the only classical culture America ever knew is also accomplished. For the movement, in the fourth stanza, back to the theme of the South on which Tate has focused for so long is significant. The inferno becomes far more personal than in the earlier stanzas, moving rapidly toward the surrealistic and highly personal hell of 'Autumn.' Much of Tate's writing has been on the theme of tradition, but here a chilling note enters that theme. In this fourth stanza 'we scrutinize the high, empty skies of summer's measureless moment and find that the past has become invalid. This is a particularly disquieting pun; the past is both *invalid* and *invalid*. These significances govern the lines which follow, which form a little parable: Balaam, the recalcitrant prophet who brought blessing to the Chosen People, and his ass have become one. In the story related in *Numbers*, the ass saw the angel of God before Balaam. Here Balaam and the ass have become equally

blind, or astigmatic, or visionary; all that was human has become animalistic. Even 'the dead,' the progenitors of the tradition, are 'invalid': they are infirm and impotent, unable to speak to this present.

The summer, this eternal present, seems somewhat like the timeless day of the past in 'The Mediterranean.' But in the fifth stanza there is a different emphasis. That season, the past with its easier pleasures, had kept an appointment with 'time's engaging jaws.' It is the most forceful use of the refrain in the section, and it is final. That past *is* past. I think Tate is saying that when the present has become brutal and fantastic it is unlikely that there is enough remaining of the living past to build upon, or enough humanized mind to build anything.

The past is equated with childhood: the personal past and the cultural past again impinge on one another, and both are brought to catastrophe at the same moment. The 'liquid light' of that time, when the mind easily fed on the past, has failed. But there seems to be the further implication that the child must grow; there is an inevitable growth from childhood, with no possibility of return. This is similar to the theme of 'The Cross'; the impossibility of moving back to the past is more apparent than it has ever been in Tate's work. Those critics who would place Tate in the position of longing rather simple-mindedly for the good old days have simply not taken some of these implications seriously, or have not even seen the implications. This is not only the end of childhood's day--the 'southern summer' of the precious stanza--it is also the end of the day of history. 'Time's engaging jaws': it is nearly absolute; history has proved treacherous; the situation is tragic.

The final stanza of 'Summer' is the most explicit reference to Dante in the section and it has great force, as Tate forces Dante to reveal our hell as well as his. If history, at least in the Christian conception, is apocalyptic--if it is teleological and will finally reveal the ultimate glory--then here we have a horrid reversal of the idea. Dante had to descend into hell with Virgil as his guide to advance to paradise. Here there is no assurance of that end. Reason has ceased to guide when it has become predatory. Here is an apocalypse which might come from a painting by Hieronymus Bosch. For the men have descended from the 'summer world,' and the phrase carries all the implications which have been built up around the season. The stanza, at least in its last lines, is close to a literal rendering of lines seventy-seven through seventy-nine of Canto XII of the *Inferno*. They are somewhat more relaxed, gradually moving toward the more narrative style of 'Autumn,' but the tension still moves in the background. Tate has placed the men of 'our' world into the 'vast concluding shell' where Chiron, the centaur, is completely astounded to see any mortal being. As Babette Deutsch remarks, the implication is that we now live in hell. It is, however, a hell of a particular kind, where we do not know what, or who, we are. Dante knew very well what his talking tree represented; when the laws, as Tate says, are identical for Balaam and his ass, there is no way to tell the hell from the life. It has all run together.

'Summer,' then, is primarily concerned with the problem of identity with its urgent overtones. The last stanza is a modulation to a frighteningly personal version of this problem of identity, for in the next section hell becomes the personal past. The transition is never completely made, and I question whether the final use of the 'jaws' refrain in the nearly narrative style of the sixth stanza is quite effective. It loses much of the force which it had as a rhetorical and conceptual counterpart to the general movement in the earlier stanzas, particularly in the extremely forceful fifth stanza.

But perhaps it is too much to ask for a transition at this point. It may be that the meaning of such a world is that it has no transitions. In any case, the 'concluding shell' of Dante's hell extends, in the 'Autumn' section, from the world of the present to the intimate past.

There is an astonishing shift of styles between 'Summer' and 'Autumn.' The verbs here are continually past tense; the verse becomes almost completely narrative; a surrealistic strangeness comes into the tone which is completely unlike the nearly reflective language of 'Summer.' Accompanying this is a corresponding shift in texture. In spite of the 'hallucinated dread' which pervades the section and which, as F. O. Matthiessen noted, Tate had used before, 'Autumn' far more concrete, far more discernible in terms of the physical world, than the other sections. It has a less formal character; there is no listener implied. The fact is emphasized by the lack of any formal address at the beginning and by the intimate tone. This is a man talking to himself, seeking to comprehend a past which threatens momentarily to become madness.

Furthermore, the nature of this dread is quite specific: it is the strange if not uncommon occurrence of dreams where one is lost in the past and one's own family, one's ancestors, give no sign of recognition.

Tate had not only used this technique before, he uses it in the long poem now in process. The interesting thing is that this surrealistic dream technique has a peculiar force when it is used as a vehicle to the tenor of some of Tate's most habitual themes. I am thinking of ideas present throughout his career, though with varied emphasis: the necessity of tradition, the regional consciousness, the family-centered society. I would like to introduce a few relevant passages from one of his most recent essays to demonstrate a powerful stylistic and thematic irony which plays around 'Autumn.'

The essay is 'A Southern Mode of the Imagination.' It was published in 1958, some fifteen years after the completion of 'Seasons,' though the point could be made as easily with passages from *Stonewall Jackson*, for instance. Tate writes: 'This pre-industrial society meant, for people living in it, that one's identity had everything to do with land and material property, at a definite place, and very little to do with money. It was better for a person, however impoverished, of my name, to be identified with Tate's Creek Pike, in Fayette County, than to be the richest man in town without the identification of place. (*Collected Essays*, p. 558) And further: 'The centre of the South, then, was the family, no less for Robert E. Lee than for the people on Tate's Creek Pike; for Virginia was a great aggregate of families that through almost infinite ramifications of relationship was almost one family.'

Now the point is that Tate has repeatedly made the problems of personal identity turn on geographical location and family ties. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that those are qualities he sees in the Southern mind, but I believe they are also modes of his perception. Consequently, when he moves in the nightmare of 'Autumn' as a man of the Summer world into his past, and his progenitors fail to recognize him, it is a situation which can only be described as appalling. There is no chance to establish personal identity. If the eternal isolation of the present in 'Summer' offers no spiritual nourishment, we see here that the tradition and the personal past also hold out little hope. The result is ironic and even tragic: what other alternatives are there? The hallucination in 'Autumn' becomes a general symbol of modern experience.

Tate has written in the same essay that 'the traditional Southern mode of discourse presupposes somebody at the other end silently listening: it is the rhetorical mode.' He goes on to connect this mode with the mythical consciousness and with the lack of *self*-consciousness of the Southern or regional mind. Now the further subtlety which I propose to see in 'Autumn' may be a deduction from such passages, but it is *in* the poem. This section only, of all the sections, is not highly rhetorical, but narrative. It implies, I believe, that the myth has failed. There is no one 'listening at the other end' and there is no human communion but frustrated isolation. This point, and the other points I have raised in connection with the general pattern of 'Autumn,' are crucial; the major difficulties of the section are general rather than textual.

The shift from the last stanza of 'Summer' to the first of 'Autumn' has been anticipated by the descent to hell recalled in the Dante reference. The private hell has shrunk to the dimensions of a well. A further connection with 'Summer' is established by the reference to the air 'like fine sand' which is something like the air of Canto XIII of the *Inferno*.

The well changes, dream-like and without transition, to an empty hall. The second stanza describes it in a beautiful passage of narrative verse in which every physical perception has extreme connotative extensions. The ceiling is high, like the domed sky of the summer. The gray light is 'like shale,' and Tate's habit of unusual predication is recognized. The light is 'thin, crumbling, and dry': it will not afford a full vision, but only a shadowy perception. The hall is absolutely bare; there is no rug, no 'carved detail / To which the eye could glide.' In verse of extraordinary physicality, Tate presents an absolute lack of physicality. There is nothing here to which one can attach; there are no properties to aid in identifying oneself. The entire section maintains this paradox of unreality-within-reality, and the sight slides swiftly with the words past the closed door to the recurrent refrain: 'The empty hall.' Its emptiness is the essence of its terror.

The third stanza traces an attempt to move out of this nightmarish past. This world has a perpetual 'autumn weather' and 'autumn smell,' qualities amplified by the middle lines of the second stanza. Here people neither live nor die; as autumn poises half into summer, half into winter, so the ghosts of this world exist. It is impossible to get to the world of the living, yet one cannot remain caught in a past where nobody recognizes one. Here is one of Tate's most terrifying polarities; the "I" is caught between life and death. And caught in this position, 'I walked years down / Toward the front door.' Tate forces his spatial and temporal images together and the trip through the empty hall is the trip through the past.

The fourth stanza re-emphasizes the deceitfulness of the past, and it is not unlike Gerontion's reflections on the cunning corridors of history. The door of the house is false; one is effectively caught in the past: it is not a question of will. And then come the most frightening moments of the section. In the remainder of this stanza and the fifth Tate re-incarnates the shapes of the past: his father, mother, people long dead. None of them recognize him, and the past, the permanent pre-supposition of the present, is impenetrable. These are some of the 'invalid dead' of 'Summer.'

The fifth stanza proceeds with another reference to Dante, which Babette Deutsch correctly identifies as the moment in the fifteenth Canto when the dead stare at Dante as 'an aged tailor does at the eye of his needle.' But in Dante's poem the dead squint quizzically at *him*; here they stare into a 'faceless gloom.' They do not recognize the "I," nor do they see him. There is for them no future; there is for him no real past though he is trapped in a nightmare of the past.

The final stanza maintains the frustration. The ghosts of the past come and go and none of them see the "I." The echo of Wyatt's 'They flee from me' is intriguing: here it is the mother's eyes that are 'long and small'; in Wyatt's poem the arms of the former mistress are long and small. In Wyatt's poem, love has vanished; passion has turned to contempt. In Tate's poem, a mother's love for a son has been transformed into something chilling. The glance from his mother's eyes is unseeing, and the entire vision is numb and impotent. The protagonist is frozen 'within the empty hall.' Memory and tradition have come equally to nothing. It is not surprising, therefore, that 'Autumn' should break off with no lead into the 'Winter' section: there is no place to go. The texture of this section is not, of course, isolated from either the previous section or the following ones, but the shift back to the rhetorical manner in 'Winter' demonstrates more clearly than any amount of argument just how frozen the world of 'Autumn' is.

One point should be emphasized before moving on. I have repeatedly used such words as 'hallucination,' 'nightmare,' 'surrealistic' in dealing with this language, and it should be made clear that it is not the poem which is surrealistic; it is not even 'expressive form.' This hallucinatory quality has been strong in Tate's poetry. In most places, and certainly in 'Autumn,' the language itself is precise enough: it is the represented experience which approaches madness. This is at the opposite pole from romantic irony; the hallucinated movement of the poetry represents the more general madness of the human condition itself.

'Winter' is an impressive piece of poetry, and for me it stands out even in a generally fine poem. It, with 'Spring,' has occasioned more critical comment than the preceding sections. Although some of the comments--particularly those by Misses Koch and Feder and Mr. Matthiessen--are wonderfully suggestive, the meaning of the section is far richer than Tate's critics have discerned. It has been suggested that the figure of Venus is the erotic embodiment of Tate's hopes of regeneration or that 'Winter' is his final rejection of religion. Both views are pathetically inadequate. No one--with the possible exception of F. O. Matthiessen--has discerned the meaning of the refrain, and Matthiessen's comments were contained in a brief review where he had no time to develop them.

The best place to begin a study of 'Winter' is with the Venus figure. She dominates the style of the opening stanzas; the invocation is both very strong and very important; it establishes a controlling tone which penetrates the entire passage.

In his Venus symbolism, Tate has come in at the end of a long and exceedingly ambiguous history, which he exploits for his own ironic ends. In the first place, any reader of the classics knows that the Roman Venus is a rather watered-down version of the Greek Aphrodite. Indeed, it is safe to say that a

classicist will consciously penetrate past Venus to the figure of Aphrodite. But even in her limited Roman role Venus had a special significance, for she was the genetrix of the Roman peoples through her son, Aeneas; she was the progenitress of a tradition. Tate has often referred to Aeneas in this role, but those who are invoking Venus here are the dying ends of a tradition. They are calling to Venus to return and revivify that which seems dead. There is little hope that the invocation will be, or can be, heard.

When dealing with the Goddess of Love in her Greek role we have an extremely tricky situation and I will not attempt any complete statement of it. At least this much, however, must be noted. Very early in Greek history at least two roles were assigned to Aphrodite: that of Pandemos and that of Urania. As the first, she ruled over childbirth and fruitfulness, sexual relations, and human commerce: it would not be too much to see her here as goddess of *eros*. In her role of Urania she is the heavenly one: this is a transcendent, divine love; indeed, it is *agape*. This vital division within the nature of love, mirrored in the symbolic Goddess of Love, has beguiled Western thought almost from its inception.

That Tate makes use of this ambiguity and the additional role which the Goddess of Love often assumes as Goddess of Death I have no doubt. In his essay 'A Reading of Keats,' which was published in 1945, or shortly after the appearance of this poem, Tate writes: '...there is no reason to believe that he [Keat] ever felt the imaginative shock of reading *The Symposium*, and of experiencing first hand an intuition of a level of experience that the Western world, through Platonism and Christianity, had been trying for more than two millennia to reach. He apparently never knew that the two Aphrodites were merely the subject of Pausania's speech, one of the preliminaries to Socrates's great dialectical synthesis.' (*Collected Essays*, p. 181)

Thus, earthly love between men cannot exist as love unless divine love also exists; Pandemos presupposes Urania; *agape* sanctifies *eros*. Tate expressed this point most explicitly in the essays he wrote shortly after 'Seasons' was written and a similar idea is crucial to 'Winter.' For when Venus is invoked it is a plea for her to return and give identity to her people. And yet, this is impossible in the terms of the poem, as will become clear. To make Venus merely an erotic symbol, a general symbol of 'love,' or to see in this passage a simple dismissal of religion--all of these positions have been advocated by critics--is plain nonsense which misses most of the poem's meaning.

Miss Koch, however, is absolutely correct in one statement. She identifies the 'living wound of love' in the refrain as springing from the proem of *De Rerum Natura*. Here Lucretius implores Venus to inflict upon Mars the *aeterno vulnere amoris* and restore peace to the Romans, which seems to parallel Tate's poem. Now Tate *does* echo Lucretius, but he does so ironically; this is easily demonstrated.

In 'Spring' there is a corresponding address to an ambiguous 'mother of silences' who resembles the Virgin in at least some ways. It is obvious to the most amateur student of comparative religion that there is a definite relation between Venus and the Virgin, but let me use the words of Henry Adams, whose spirit moves subtly around this poem and whose language very likely has something to do with Tate's symbolism:

The Woman had once been supreme; in France she still seemed potent, not merely as a sentiment, but as a force. Why was she unknown in America? For evidently America was ashamed of her.... In any previous age, sex was strength.... Singularly enough, not one of Adams's many schools of education had ever drawn his attention to the opening lines of Lucretius, though they were perhaps the finest in all Latin literature, where the poet invoked Venus exactly as Dante invoked the Virgin:

"Quae quoniam rerum naturam *sola* gubernas."

The Venus of Epicurean philosophy survived in the Virgin of the Schools--

"Donna, sei tanto grande, e tanto vali,
Che qual vuol grazia, e a te non recorre,
Sua disianza vuol volar senz' ali."

Adam's quotation of Dante is from St. Bernard's prayer to the Virgin in Canto XXXIII of the *Paradiso*. It is not at all certain that Adams himself perceived the incongruity of his parallel; he probably did not.

Tate has undoubtedly perceived what Adams apparently never did, that to equate Lucretius's Venus and Dante's Virgin is in one way ludicrous. For the invocation to Venus, so piously appended to *De Rerum Natura*, is hollow in spite of its beauty. Lucretius will have nothing to do with deities, and his poem leaves little doubt of his view of religion. His Venus is simply the allegorized principle of harmony in nature. He has really kept Aphrodite Pandemos--and even her in a weakened form--and cut himself off from Aphrodite Urania.

But notice that Dante himself made the Epicurean philosophy the arch-heresy from which all other heresy springs, and for a simple reason: it denied the divine dimension. When Tate uses Venus, therefore, it is primarily to reveal the hollowness of our state. The invocation to the Goddess of Love is ultimately meaningless and our love has degenerated to lust and bestiality; the imagery of the later stanza makes this amply clear.

Venus is invoked here in her connection with the sea, a relationship which is well-established though ambiguous. This is the Venus of the Botticelli painting, who was born from the sea. The plea is for her to return to 'your people.' Consequently, the collective voice uttering the plea must be seen as immersed or engulfed in the sea. The sea, of course, is an important image in Tate's verse; he uses water symbolism constantly. It usually represents what might be called the unqualified 'stuff,' the vital principle of life. Yet it is dangerous; life unqualified is not life and the water of baptism may be death by drowning.

Howard Nemerov suggests that water often functions for Tate as a symbol of generation which may, however, solidify into ice: the vital force of life may harden into lifeless convention. Civilization may quite literally die of hardened arteries. The water symbolism of 'Winter' is large since it gathers significance from the immediate context, from traditional associations, and from Tate's use of it elsewhere. Thus, 'Winter' comments on the fundamental, if obscure, aspects of human nature, often in sexual terms. The Venus symbolism and the water merge; Tate sees love as a basic constituent of human nature, but one which can become debased. The section is not only a comment on a general 'hollowness' of modern man but on the specific hazard in which man has placed his nature, his very being.

The plea in the first stanza is for the 'cold goddess' to return to her people. Surely the 'cold' is an unusual adjective if Venus is to be viewed as primarily beneficent. The further irony of linking her with Winter emphasizes the ambiguity of her role and colors the whole meaning of human love as it appears in this section.

The first stanza concludes with a brutal crucifixion image. The 'drying God above / Hanged in his windy steeple' is Christ, who would seem to be here not only one of Frazer's hanged gods, but mummified and absolutely impotent. But notice that the 'living wound of love' must grammatically be connected with this 'drying God.' After this stanza the refrain shifts to the 'livid wound of love' and the 'living wound' only returns in the final stanza. Perhaps the implications are not as clear as they seem, but my reading of this would be: the 'living wound' is not connected with Venus in her present role. Venus is, in her shrunken condition, the goddess of the 'livid wound': of the bestialized love of the later stanza. Surely the 'living wound' must be connected with the crucifixion and with the wound sustained by Christ. That the 'drying God' no longer bears the living wound 'for us' does not deny that the God hears the wound; this is a subjective apprehension by the collective voice of the poem, and it is an ironic comment on modern man.

Consequently, I do not agree at all with those who have seen here a simple 'rejection of religion.' I do believe that there is a comment on the difficulty, the near impossibility, of belief. But the following stanzas demonstrate the equal, if paradoxical, necessity of belief. The situation is again similar to that of "The Cross," but it is even more intense. I believe that Tate's critics have mistaken his ironical methods for his own rejection of any religious reference. Therefore, they see 'Winter' in particular, and the whole poem in general, as reflecting a scene of the most complete disillusionment. I reject this reading, and see the passage primarily as a sardonic pronouncement on modern man's vision of himself.

This vision is amplified in the rest of the section. The second stanza immediately extends the frame of reference. "All the sea-gods are dead." It is a flat statement which qualifies all that follows. The simple animism of the past with its purely naturalistic regeneration is impossible as a contemporary object of belief. But this predication also qualifies the role of Venus, for in her role of goddess of erotic love, she, too, has failed, and the succeeding stanzas make this clear. If she is to return and revivify modern love, it must be in her role of Urania. But Venus is unlikely to bear this weight. Although she is apostrophized to return to her 'salt-maidenhead'--i.e., to re-activate the 'sea' from which she was born--there is little hope that she will do so. The sea is the 'given' of our experience; it is the surd, the 'burnt sea of universal frame' to use the words of another poem, 'Shadow and Shade.' And this 'sea' which is fundamental to our experience has become 'anonymous.'

The vital adjectives in the middle lines of the second stanza progressively modify the nature of this 'winter sea.' On one level the 'tossed, anonymous, shuddering' sea is a visual description; on another it is a value judgment and a behavioral description of modern life. The sea, which is the essential, has become meaningless. It is anonymous, constantly shifting; it is nervous and offers no substratum. It is a 'shade of lovers,' perhaps the most interesting phrase in the stanza. The sea, therefore, qualifies every act of mankind, for man is by essence a creature made to love. If that essence itself has degenerated, then the love has become mere lust; man's very essence has become brutalized. We are back to the image of the predatory mind-as-hunter of 'Summer' and the terrible probability that life not only conceals evil but has become essentially *pointless*; there is now the possibility that life has gone bad at its center.

The language moves swiftly to dramatize the possibility, and the figure of Venus becomes even more ambiguous. The dove, a bird sacred to Venus and representing her calm and peaceful mien--to which sailors often prayed as opposed to the angry Poseidon--had become a shark. The sea is not calm; Venus has not brought peace. Perhaps the sea has become so debased that Venus, in her divine dimension of *agape*, cannot return to it. For this sea is now surely Melville's sea; it is treacherous and it contains that sly and predatory cannibal, the shark. Tate's 'Winter' is not far from 'the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war....' The shark is now the constant companion, and the 'living wound' has been transformed into the 'livid wound': an ugly, bruised, and pale wound which emphasizes that love, though fundamental to human nature, has been changed into something sub-human.

Stanza three opens with an explicit announcement: this is the winter of the soul, and insofar as it can be described what follows is its description. This is the *deadest* time. Not only has the personal vision failed in 'Autumn,' but the environment dies here. The sea flows in its 'hollow rind' and the image, recalling the depth of Dante's hell as well as the worthless husk of a fruit, emphasizes its pointlessness. And how shall these depths be explored? Dante had to invoke the aid of the Virgin to attain a vision of the deity; there is nothing here to invoke, not even a Virgil-as-reason to enlighten the mind. Therefore the poet cannot, any more than anyone else, 'plumb the nether mind.' But in his isolation, in an environment where the depths of lie seem to have gone bad, it is perhaps easier for the poet to become 'sea-conceited.' Tate puns on 'conceit,' using it both in its more usual sense of ego-centricity and in the sense of eccentric intellectuality. Faced with the predicament of 'Winter,' there is the inevitable temptation to attempt to push the intellect with the intuition, to the depths.

But all is eternal winter; here there is no hot wind of the upper regions of hell as in 'Summer.' Here the very stuff of life has become co-extensive with the depths of Dante's hell. Tate combines several of Dante's punishments, but we are still in the world of circle seven of the *Inferno*: the bodies of the violent 'wheel and drop' endlessly and mindlessly, and the heat of passion has become the 'cold soot' of the 'livid wound of love.' Without the sustaining power of the divine dimension, love has degenerated first into passion, then into a cold and sullen pantomime.

The tone shifts in stanza four and we have to imagine a scene: a small island in a cove, on which 'we' stand, looking out to the 'winter sea' of the preceding stanza. Standing on the island, one looks out beyond the undertow, that current which is running out though the waves break in; it is the symbol of ambiguity and treachery, still another reflection of the uncertainty of this life. The 'gray' sea-foliage is the coral reef;

it is life which has solidified. It becomes in the next stanza a particular variety of coral, the madrepora, on which Tate puns.

The reef glows; it seems to promise something: it seems to be living, to offer protection from the coldness and uncertainty of the sea. Yet it is hardened, and the glow which it gives off is reflected into the 'circular miles,' the cyclical return of the now-meaningless moments of our existence. The 'phosphor glow' is an *ignis fatuus*; it seems to promise something which it does not have to offer. Combined with the geographical-temporal 'circular miles' it is still another symbol of frustration.

On this sea island there is, illogically enough, a caged jungle animal, and his actions give the impression that this is one of the great cats. It is, I should imagine, both the lion of the first stanza of this poem and the jaguar which Tate used as the symbol of the ego-centric soul become self-predator in his famous 'Ode to the Confederate Dead.' The image is effective in itself, but its sudden appearance with no logical or imagistic preparation is a bit jarring in this section. Still, the representation of bestial and demonic solipsism is plain; even the environment is unavailable in 'Winter,' and the animal is isolated and debased. It is difficult to know which quality has produced the other, for the violence of the sexual image at the close of the stanza is very startling.

There is also a strong element of fraud: he '*slicks his slithering wiles.*' The alliteration intensifies the inevitable connotations of chicanery. Love, degenerated to lust and disease, is turned toward others and the self; fraud and self-violence are joined in bestiality. Can Venus, without the 'drying God,' redeem this? I believe not, and this is not an argument from metaphysics or theology but from the poem. Venus has vanished from the language as much as the drying God: she is impotent before this image of self-violence, which moves quite naturally into the Dantesque language of the next stanza.

The scene has shifted beyond the 'sea-foliage' of the reef and we find ourselves under the sea. In an unearthly setting, the language moves back to the epigraph, and Tate utilizes--in an extremely strange context--the very traditional situation in which the tree cries out when wounded. But this tree is not really living; it is stone: 'madrepore.' It is an unusual word; literally, it is a certain type of coral, the 'mother-stone'--a reference to the way the polyp grows. There may also be some qualification here of the 'mother' in the refrain in the final section, as Mr. Alwyn Berland says, though I would be cautious of saying that the 'mother of silences' refrain 'flows from' this usage of the madrepora. The madrepora is primarily a symbol of death-in-life and it operates in this context as a commentary on the inefficacy of history and tradition.

In view of all this a complete reading of the stanza will have to take notice of the following: that the reef, or madrepora, should serve as a protection to the island itself, which may be identified with the boundaries of the individual ego. Furthermore, this is a comment on history: an historical tradition should have given a bulwark against the various horrors of the 'winter sea.' But this reef has failed, it 'gives the leaf no more.' In this setting and under these conditions the tradition has failed. The historical myth is inadequate. It does not produce fruit, and it is rigid, stonelike, and unyielding.

Lost in this juncture between the present ('the winter sea') and the past ('rigid madrepora'), the 'I' seeks once more to forcibly seize the past, and breaks off a branch from the reef, which gives easily under pressure. The collective voice of the earlier stanzas has once more become singular; blood drips from the stone-like branch, as it did in Dante's wood of suicides, and a voice is heard from the crippling 'livid wound of love.' The maimed past thus speaks to the maimed present in the words of the final stanza of this brilliant section.

The sixth stanza brings us back to the epigraph, to a whole tissue of Dante associations, and to the accumulated weight of the preceding sections. The 'livid wound' bleeds and drips down 'upon my toe' in a sort of grotesque dumb-show of the shedding of blood in the Christian doctrine of salvation. The blood speaks and the statement is explicit. Dante's world of the self-violent is positively identified as a failure of love. The 'I' reaches up, touches his 'sanguine hair' which identifies him as suffering from the same wound; he is 'their brother'; he is crippled by the 'livid wound' which the ego, the personal past, and the tradition bear equally at this point. The livid wound is, thus, the very antithesis of the 'living wound' which

here returns to dominate the final measure with the implication that it alone can heal. As we have seen, that 'living wound' is closely identified with the 'drying God,' with Christ and the Christian tradition. Venus is not the hope for regeneration, a power she had lost as long ago as Lucretius. She is most closely and naturally associated with passion in this section; and passion, without the dimension of *agape* (which Venus once signified, but does so no longer) is degrading.

I think that without pressing the theological argument we can see an appeal to very nearly an overt Christian view of love and redemption. It is almost as close to a 'conclusion' as the poem comes. Even that conclusion is jeopardized in the final section, but the implications are clear: only if the 'livid' wound of love grows into the 'living' wound can experience be redeemed. Whether this will indeed take place is entirely another question.

In the final section, Tate invokes spring in a manner similar to the opening lines of Eliot's *Waste Land*. Spring should be the season of rebirth, yet the people of the *Waste Land* prefer the deadness of winter which brings no false hopes or confusing desires. But Tate alters this in his 'Spring.' After the 'winter sea,' after the vision of decay and the tentative hope of regeneration which concludes 'Winter,' one might expect 'Spring' to bring the regeneration to its fruition. It does, but paradoxically: what is born is silence, a silence which encompasses all of the previous themes, modifies them, but offers no final answer.

Tate's spring is even more treacherous than Eliot's. The invocation pleads for an infusion of the 'combustible juice' into the 'burning breast.' Oddly enough, this is not really a plea to heal the cold wound of winter, but rather a petition to give more fuel to a flame which already burns and chars the soul--not a cure, but an opposing evil. I see no way to get around the overtones of passion that 'burning' inevitably entails; here is the desire for a burning passion to supplant the cold and sullen passion of winter and to maintain the round of the seasons. It is a desperate search for regeneration which leads ever deeper into hopelessness.

This seems to be the implication of the early lines of the first stanza, but it is immediately qualified by the Christian commonplace (similar to Raleigh's 'The Lie') which sees the soul as the body's guest. But it is a liquid, fluid guest; its situation is hazardous and it threatens to escape. A Christian observation modifies the pagan vegetation-myth feeling of the opening lines. As the two merge in the transformation of the 'combustible juice' into the 'liquid soul' there is the beginning of an uneasy balance between the natural and supernatural views of rebirth. This immediately gains force in the further ironic modification of the *carpe diem* theme which appeared earlier. Here the *carpe diem*, with its corresponding tragic vision, is not sufficient to redeem; the soul flees, and there is nothing to maintain a conventional heroism.

There is nothing to 'comfort this unease.' The 'unease' is the present moment with all the accrued weight of the preceding sections, and the almost total frustration of any redemption. It is an impasse, and like 'a dying coal / Which hastens the cooler day / Of the mother of silences.' The apparent sense of relaxation is misleading, for this is not an escape. The difficulties of our treacherous present and the corresponding intensity of feeling they elicit are like the flame which destroys the coal. It is similar to the stock Elizabethan image: that which feeds the flame--passion--also consumes the fuel--which is life. The flame cannot revivify when the fuel is consumed; nor can one retreat from the present world of the 'Seasons.' The text need not be forced to see here still another of those uneasy junctures where the present and past cancel each other out. It is impossible to retreat into the past, or to the Venus of the more permissive religions; yet it is impossible to believe in that 'drying God' of 'Winter.' Thus caught, where no regeneration can be claimed, the ruling figure becomes the equivocal 'mother of silences.'

I believe Miss Koch is probably correct when she says that the figure combines the elements of the Virgin and death, of life and mystery, and when she connects the mother of silences figure with St. Monica. But it is not enough to see here, as Miss Koch does, only a somewhat awkward 'principle of love.' This leaves one inevitably at a loss, with no real way of dealing with the poem. Let us view the matter more closely, beginning with this vital 'mother of silences.'

We have seen the failure of an erotic love in earlier parts of the poem. What is posed, both in the 'mother of silences' figure and in the entire texture, is the question whether the missing dimension of

'Winter' can be attained, the *agape* or divine love which must give meaning to individual acts of love. It is certain that this poem does *not* secure that dimension. It is not a confession of faith. But it is not a confession of unbelief either. The poem does not exist at the liturgical, but at the experiential level, and the question this language raises should not be mysterious. The question is whether divine love can any longer be felt in man's experience. Though the language forces the conclusion that this dimension of love is probably beyond our apprehension, yet it is certainly precisely this dimension of love which is in view.

There is more significance to the 'mother of silences' figure. She is the mother of silences in the sense that in this world there is no way to answer the ultimate questions, the 'last alternatives.' Man needs some divine dimension of love; only then will the senseless wars, the subtle and unabated violences which men work on men, come to an end. Modern man has lost this love; he cannot answer such questions. It is not difficult to think that Tate's 'mother of silences' is very much like Baudelaire's 'Mere des souvenirs, maitresse des maitresses,' the beguiling figure who governs the past in 'La Balcon.' She is also similar to Eliot's 'Lady of Silences' in the second section of *Ash-Wednesday*, a symbol of mediation between carnal and spiritual love, *eros* and *agape*, is even more urgent; in echoing Eliot's passage he emphasizes the need.

In stanza two of 'Spring' Tate moves back once more into a vision of the past. The 'I finds himself 'in my native prime.' This is the semi-mythical South in its continuity with the classical past. The 'orient corn / All space but no time' is a hint that though the society was regional, and offered great promise ('reaching for the sun'), the vision of unity is not guaranteed by any society. Yet 'it was a pleasant land'; it was closer to maintaining the whole vision of man than the present world, and any attribution of pleasure in the context of 'Seasons of the Soul' is startling enough. There 'even death could please / Us with an ancient pun.' In terms of the mythology of 'Winter,' there is a shadow of the unity of divine and human love. It is the Elizabethan pun on sexual climax and death; it is, in terms of Greek mythology, the union of Aphrodite and Persephone. Most pointedly, for Tate, it is the possibility of the completion of the analogical ladder, where human passion is grounded and completed in divine love, as it is in the figure of Beatrice in the *Commedia*. It is this type of love that is the central question of 'Spring': can this type of love once more, in 'time of bloody war,' be reached? The answer is silence.

The third stanza re-introduces the historical moment, a time of war which symbolizes our condition; a return to the myth of that 'pleasant land' is impossible. The catastrophes of history have made return impossible, and 'who will know the time?' The question has something of this force: who can now invoke history? and who can now claim to know the present if we are cut off from the past?

Beginning with the third line of this third stanza, the last eight lines must be read as a grammatical unit which, from the arrangement of the text, must be seen in some measure as a response to the question in the first two lines. But in what measure are they a response? If these eight lines are taken as a unit which answers to the first two, the 'time' of the second lines seems to be the spring season itself, with its overtones of growth and rebirth. The question then becomes, who can 'know' this time? The verb 'to know' carries the weight it customarily bears in Tate's poetry: the nearly New Testament sense of knowledge unto salvation. If we read in this manner, the ambiguous 'it' of the third line becomes clearer: 'Is it a new spring star / Within the timing chill / Talking, or just a mime, / That rises in the blood.' 'It' is the vague feeling that the whole process of history, though deceptive and 'chilling' as in 'Winter,' *must* have some significance. Is there any rebirth? Or is it only an irrational urge felt somewhere in the blood with not a whit of certainty? Does the 'time,' the spring, have any significance? And does the 'spring star' speak? Around the image of the spring star there are several associations, at least two of which can be seen without straining: Venus as a symbol of natural rebirth in spring, and the star of Christ's nativity with its extensions into the idea of resurrection.

The question is, then, is this whole cluster of rebirth hopes, the aspirations after redemption and regeneration which have beguiled men throughout history, only a puppet show? Is it only a mocking pantomime in the blood? Here the question mounts to its crucial moment: 'Its light is at the flood.' The refrain, 'Mother of silences!' is truncated, and the emphatic apostrophe has the force of desperation.

The light of this spring star, burning with the possibilities of rebirth, has a peculiar effect. The opening of the fourth stanza frames the case: 'It burns us each alone / Whose burning arrogance / Burns up the

rolling stone, / This earth....' The light of the spring star burns more than it illuminates, and any possibilities of rebirth are jeopardized. 'It' seems to hold out a promise of rebirth, but it is not guaranteed. The emphasis on 'burning' in the first three lines is very strong; the word is repeated three times in one form or another. 'It--the light of the star, he possibilities of redemption--'burns us each alone.' Isolated from our fellow men the ultimate questions, which should offer salvation, become not only painful, but destructive. Our 'arrogance' and violence is a 'burning' passion which threatens to 'burn' the very earth; the brutal image of the caged beast in 'Winter' is the symbol of the condition. What should unite man to men and man to himself in fact separates. Redemption, if the Christian scriptures can be believed, is the gift of God, yet here that gift is uncertain; it does not unite men in love but isolates them.

In this condition, nature itself--the earth--becomes Plato's dark and imprisoning cave in which each soul is isolated and held prisoner. If the spring star's light cannot be believed, if there is no divine dimension, then we have only the 'Platonic cave / Of vertiginous chance' in which what should have been a light of redemption instead casts insubstantial shadow. We have, in other words, only the dizzying and senseless cycle of the seasons with nothing to redeem them. Everything in such a world is contingent; in the words of earlier lines there is nothing to which the eye may glide, nothing to make the eye secure.

Tate summons the myth of Sisyphus in the last lines of this stanza to put the epitaph to this state: 'Come, tired Sisyphus, / Cover the cave's egress / Where light reveals the slave, / Who rests when sleeps with us / The mother of silences.' It is a brilliant symbol of the frustration dramatized in earlier parts of the poem. The lines gather in, as Lillian Feder has noted, the frustration of both the Sisyphus legend and Plato's myth of the cave. The lines go beyond their immediate and overwhelming sense of frustration, however: 'the 'slave,' which must be connected with both Plato's chained souls and with Sisyphus, symbolizes the soul; he 'rests when sleeps with us / The mother of silences.'

Here is the only case where any type of delivery seems even conditionally assured in the entire poem. Notice, too, that these final two lines have a subtly erotic overtone in addition to the air of religious mystery. It is once more possible to see that only the union of the two loves, the sexual and the divine, can alleviate the eternal frustration. That is the solution: it has not been attained here.

The issue is more pointed in the opening of the fifth stanza. Here the 'mother of silences' is bluntly addressed as 'Old woman,' and the plea is made to her to 'save / Your sons who have gone down / Into the burning cave.' Here the figure of St. Monica which Miss Koch cleverly discerned enters strongly. The scene at the window is an allusion to Book IX of the *Confessions*, where Augustine and his mother review the earthly conditions which must be overcome to understand the hereafter. Therefore, imbedded in the deceptively simple passage there is another comment on all which has gone before. What is seen from *this* point--which is not Augustine's window, though it may be Baudelaire's balcony--is the 'shirking scene.' The adjective implies fraud, even depredation. All of the images of violence and even obscenity which have crowded so closely into the former sections are re-evoked. Here men are blinded and maimed by their own violence, and blinded and maimed they have willingly descended into Plato's burning cave and the hell of the Epicureans.

The refrain in the fifth stanza moves directly into the final stanza, which condenses the issue of the entire poem. The plea is made to the mother of silences to 'Speak, that we may hear.' She is to speak in answer to that terrible question of the last lines: have we, as dumb sheep, begun to die? Is this death eternal? Is there anything beyond the silence? The questions are necessary, for 'the eye'--man's powers of both sight and understanding--is not really equipped to deal with such alternatives, and cannot really tell whether 'we have begun to die.' That question is more than just alarming; it implies that this death is inevitable, that it is subtle. It implies that this is more than physical death (though it is that, too) for we do not usually require special knowledge to discern physical death. It is a moral death, a death which consists in debasing human nature until men huddle together like sheep. The issue is, then, terrible; in the face of it 'we conceal our fear' and continue to turn the endless, the senseless, cycle of the seasons.

The last stanza is among the finest things Tate has written, though one feels a bit foolish making the comment: there is no poem I know which has evoked such a vision of modern man in verse of comparable

firmness and uniform excellence. The doubling of the 'mother' in the final address is completely effective in stiffening the poignancy of the question, and the silence which follows it is almost stifling.

The poem sounds the complete death of history and society as a mode of salvation: that blessing is to be found only in the 'mother of silences,' who is as mute and unresponsive as the brooding figure Henry Adams commissioned from St. Gaudens for the grave of his wife, a figure which might be the concrete representation of Tate's fine image. To the terrible question there is no answer. It is the perfect end to that phase of Tate's work before he carried his critical and poetic themes into the religious conceptions toward which they had been straining for so long."

R. K. Meiners

The Last Alternatives: A Study of the Works of Allen Tate
(Alan Swallow 1963) 154-83

"The real capstone of Tate's career to date (not enough of the projected autobiography in terza rima has been published to allow one to judge it) is 'Seasons of the Soul,' a poem which has attracted considerable critical attention--from, among others, Vivienne Koch, Lillian Feder, and R. K. Meiners. Miss Koch at her most perceptive mentions the descent of the poet into his own hell in this poem, and she approaches its theme when she says that it chronicles 'the four ages of man in relation to the four aspects of the universe he inhabits'; each section is 'placed' in one of the four elements of the ancients. Since Miss Feder's chief concern is to demonstrate Tate's classicism, her account of the poem corrects Miss Koch only at those points where Miss Koch is too eager to show that Tate is a romantic. Meiners goes beyond Miss Koch when he suggests that the four ages of man are not so much a simple sequence as they are recurrent. As in so much modern criticism one wishes that all involved had talked over their readings together before committing them to print.

Seasons of the soul are recurrent obsessions. In the same way that season follows season, man turns over in his mind, year after year, the terms and conditions of his existence. Part One of the poem, 'Summer,' is the record of the obsession of Active or Political Man; Part Two, 'Autumn,' of Solipsistic Man; Part three, 'Winter,' of Sexual Man; and Part Four, 'Spring,' of Religious Man. I am paraphrasing crudely, well aware of the truth of Tate's observation that after all the readings are made a residue remains, the residue being what the poet was thinking as he wrote. He may have been thinking of the Four Last Things: Judgment (Summer), Death (Autumn), Hell (Winter), Heaven (Spring).

But taking the other tack, all four men can be seen to be the same man as all the seasons are part of a single cycle. Miss Koch is right in suggesting a kind of progress from part to part; it is an orderly sequence. This can be demonstrated if the reader of the poem imagines himself beginning at 'Autumn,' 'Winter,' or 'Spring' instead of 'Summer.' The resulting sequences do not correspond to any man's development; the actual sequence is logical, restrained, 'classical,' in Miss Feder's sense. In our century of uneasy peace, war, disarmed and re-armed armistice, war resumed, turning hot and cold in turn (and maybe turning, finally, apocalyptically hot), a man is not a man until he is political, until he says his lines on that particular great stage of fools.

Part One, 'Summer,' is a poem about political responsibility; Hardy, Yeats, Auden, Empson, and Dylan Thomas have written similar ones. If we throw ourselves into political activity, especially the ultimate political activity of violence against fellow human beings, what happens to our hearts and heads? Intellect destroys charity (we are persuaded that the enemy within is the enemy without, that the Old Adam is the External Enemy) and perhaps even destroys itself:

Shall mind itself still live
If like a hunting king
It falls to the lion's jaws?

Howard Nemerov has shown that a broader version of this theme is a central concern of Tate's, as in 'The Meaning of Life': 'There is that / Which is the commentary; there's that other, / Which may be called the immaculate / Conception of its essence in itself.' This is metaphysical realism or nominalism according as warmth is accorded essence or commentary, idea or action, blueprint or building.

The image of pure engagement is not for Tate the image of the just man in the just war: 'It was a gentle sun / When, at the June solstice / Green France was overrun / With caterpillar feet.' Tate has no Just Man, like Milton's Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samson, and Christ; in Part One he is still showing an industrialized society destroying a relatively agrarian one. Or looked at another way, the Nazis really believed their propaganda, the French did not. We ought to prefer the demoralized French to the dehumanized Nazis if for no reason other than the prudential one. A dehumanized view of man is always a loser in the long run.

Similarly, the view of man as innocent is only a recollection, as of a First Summer:

When was it that the summer
(Daylong a liquid light)
And a child, the new-comer,
Bathed in the same green spray,
Could neither guess the night?
The summer had no reason;
Then, like a primal cause
It had its timeless day
Before it kept the season
Of time's engaging jaws.

The only adequate view of man is the Christian one; at the end of Part One we see Dante and Virgil--'Two men of our summer world'--meeting Chiron in the seventh circle of hell. This concluding seems to me forced. But Part Two, 'Autumn,' is completely successful. The actual season is the season of the poet's birth (and the Gettysburg Address), the season of the 'Ode' and 'The Immortal Woman,' the season that corresponds to twilight. The poet dreams of falling down a well into a strange house:

I counted along the wall
Door after closed door
Through which a shade might slide
To the cold and empty hall.

Presently he finds his 'father in a gray shawl,' and then his 'downcast mother / Clad in her street-clothes, / Her blue eyes long and small,' and neither recognizes him.

Meiners says that in the movement from Part One to Part Two 'the private hell has shrunk to the dimensions of a well.' There is indeed a shrinking or diminution, but not a qualitative one. The point is that the private hell is a microcosm of the public one. The private man who dreams that his parents don't recognize him is identical with the man who can't falsify himself by becoming *engage*, if doing that involves the killing of charity and intelligence. The mother of 'Mother and Son' who asks her son to say that the time is beautiful is rather like the political spirit of the 1930's and the 1940's which tried with some success to enlist the poets on the side of righteousness. The responsibility of the poet, Tate said in 1950, is 'to write poems, and not to gad about using the rumor of his verse...as the excuse to appear on platforms and to view with alarm.' Since Tate was not of an age to be in combat in either world war that part of the question is academic; but he could well be proud of the wartime records of the two poets--Robert Lowell and Anthony Hecht--who apprenticed themselves to him. During World War II, Lowell was thrown into jail as a conscientious objector and Hecht served in the infantry.

Meiners says that after Part Two 'there is no place to go,' that Part Two breaks off with no lead into Part Three. But of course there is a place to go. Part Three, 'Winter,' is about sex, which is precisely where the alienated man goes, if not to drugs, drunkenness, beatness, and physical violence. And 'sex' I think is the right word; here as with Eliot's carbuncular young man and Auden's Herod (who hasn't 'had sex for a month') desire is hardly involved:

Goddess sea-born and bright,
Return into the sea
Where eddying twilight

Gathers upon your people--
Cold goddess, hear our plea!

Venus came from the sea, but to ask her to return to it is rather like asking God the Father to undo the Incarnation. A return of Venus to the element of her prenativity is, nevertheless, better than a desiccated religion:

Leave the burnt earth, Venus,
For the drying God above,
Hanged on his windy steeple,
No longer bears for us
The living wound of love.

God is killed nowadays by abstraction, by reduction to a Principle, by hanging by the neck until dead in a windy steeple, where there should be a bell. God no longer bears the wounds of Christ on the cross, but is dead in the way the sea gods of the next stanza--Neptune, Nereus, Poseidon, and Proteus--are dead. Noone can say Venus is dead (it is like Katherine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools*, where people worried about sex are not worried about storms or shipwreck)--she still provides

Shade for lovers, where
A shark swift as [her] dove
Shall pace our company
All night to nudge and tear
The livid wound of love.

The stigmata of the first stanza become like gonads in all the stanzas of Part Three except the final one; the stigmata of a modern saint, Lawrence's or Hemingway's or Henry Miller's, are sexual organs.

And how the winter sea:
Within her hollow rind
What sleek facility
Of sea-conceited scop
To plumb the nether mind!
Eternal winters blow
Shivering flakes, and shove
Bodies that wheel and drop--
Cold soot upon the snow
Their livid wound of love.

The winter sea is the element of twentieth-century sexually oriented man; he has Freud, and Art too--the 'sea-conceited scop / To plumb the nether mind'--but they do not seem to do much good; he is in Dante's seventh circle of hell, and procreation is 'cold soot upon the snow.'

The final three stanzas of Part Three are Tate at his most violent.

Beyond the undertow
The gray sea-foliage
Transpires a phosphor glow
Into the circular miles:
In the centre of his cage
The pacing animal
Surveys the jungle cove
And slicks his slithering wiles
To turn the venereal awl
In the livid wound of love.

The reader is asked to plunge beneath the water and observe what the shark of the earlier stanza would see. He--we--see Shelley's underwater foliage in winter dress. The shark finds his victim.

"The Venereal awl' is very odd; none of the critics of the poem has been patient enough with it. It cannot be a periphrastic expression for penis, nor can it be a weapon (though it is turned in a wound as a weapon might be), for this is shark, not a swordfish. It must be a mouth; awl-like because the shark twists as it attacks, like a bomber peeling off. The shark does seem to eat whatever is in the 'jungle cove' unless all that slicking of slithering wiles is frustrated. And the eating if it does take place is like a sexual act; this shark is a real monster. It is the aggressor, and male in so far as it turns the venereal awl or kills, but it is also female--its part is the hollow part. The passage calls for moral interpretation. The masculine principle in the modern world is perverted to acquisitiveness and destruction and the female principle is perverted to mindless and genderless gorging. And this is only to speak of the shark, and not the victim.

The image owes a lot to (it might even have its source in) the story of the death of Hart Crane as Tate tells it in one of his magnanimous tributes to that poet: 'Toward the end of April, 1932, he embarked on the S.S. *Orizaba* bound from Vera Cruz to New York. On the night of April 26 he got into a brawl with some sailors; he was severely beaten and robbed. At noon the next day, the ship being in the Caribbean a few hours out of Havana, he rushed from his stateroom clad in pajamas and overcoat, walked through the smoking-room out onto the deck, and then the length of the ship to the stern. There without hesitation he made a perfect dive into the sea. It is said that a life-preserver was thrown to him; he either did not see it or did not want it. By the time the ship had turned back he had disappeared. Whether he forced himself down --for a moment he was seen swimming--or was seized by a shark, as the captain believed, cannot be known.' Caroline Gordon's novel *The Malefactors* (1956), in which the names are fictitious but in which there is masterful representation of Tate's speech inflections, has the following bit of dialogue near the end; Tom Claiborne is speaking to Catherine Pollard:

"Tell me, do you pray for Horne Watts?"
"Yes."
"How long have you?"
"From the day I heard he had committed suicide."

Part Three like Part One ends with a translation of Dante. A passage from the thirteenth canto of the *Inferno*, which is also the epigraph to the whole poem, is translated as follows:

I seized a branch, which broke;
I heard the speaking blood
(From the livid wound of love)

Drip down upon my toe.

Only the blood of suicides can speak; the blood says:

"We are the men who died
Of self-inflicted woe,
Lovers whose stratagem
Led to their suicide."

'Seasons of the Soul' is not dedicated to the memory of Hart Crane, the literal suicide, but to the memory of John Peale Bishop, a man much closer to the common lot. The implication is that every man is more or less suicidal. We are all, like Scott Fitzgerald, the subject of Bishop's best poem, mediocre caretakers of our talents.

Meiners compares the beginning of Part Four with the opening lines of *The Waste Land*:

Irritable spring, infuse
Into the burning breast

Your combustible juice
That as a liquid soul
Shall be the body's guest
Who lights, but cannot stay
To comfort this unease
Which, like a dying coal,
Hastens the cooler day
Of the mother of silences.

Spring is irritable because it cannot stay, cannot settle down; it is much closer to Frost's 'nothing gold can stay' than to Eliot's 'cruellest month.' Spring is the life principle associated in Tate's mind, as Howard Nemerov has shown, with liquid and fluid states and Becoming as solid and rigid states are associated in his mind with Being and death. 'The cooler day / Of the mother of silences' is like Ransom's 'kinder saeculum' in 'The Equilibrists' that begins with death. Death is the mother of silences (compare Wallace Stevens' death, who is the mother of beauty in 'Sunday Morning'--a Yeatsian idea) in the sense that she hushes us all, but lovingly, as a mother hushes her children.

In the second stanza of Part Four we have a picture of innocence to place beside the other picture in Part One. Here Tate accuses himself of interpreting history in spatial terms--a history without time or death in it, as if he were George Posey running away from Sarah Buchan's funeral.

It was a pleasant land
Where even death could please
Us with an ancient pun--
All dying for the hand
Of the mother of silences.

The 'us' is everybody who wrote or thought about death as orgasm. The tone of the next to last line rejects the 'ancient pun' as frivolous or, one might say, a young man's substitute for orthodox eschatology; the remaining stanzas of Part Four are as orthodox as the poem gets. In wartime death is everywhere, thoughts of the moment of death occupy everyone, 'It burns us each alone,' but man in Plato's cave of Becoming, man who is enslaved to his body as Sisyphus is to his rock, can rest when he accepts the idea of death easily.

The last two stanzas introduce two specific mothers of silences; one, St. Monica, Miss Koch has identified, and the other is very like the mother of 'Mother and Son':

Speak, that we may hear;
Listen, while we confess
That we conceal our fear;
Regard us, while the eye
Discerns by sight or guess
Whether, as sheep foregather
Upon their crooked knees,
We have begun to die;
Whether your kindness, mother,
Is mother of silences.

The kindness in the earlier poem was 'her harsh command / That he should say the time is beautiful'; the kindness here I take to be the gift of life. Is death also a gift? Tate raises the question, but does not answer it."

George Hemphill
Allen Tate
(U Minnesota 1964) 35-44

"'Seasons of the Soul' moves beyond nostalgia into the center of a new 'dark wood' where death and violence threaten to overwhelm the values of a whole society. Written during World War II and dedicated to his friend, the poet, John Peale Bishop (1892-1944), this is a work of such depth and richness that it rightfully belongs with such source poems of our generation as *The Waste Land*, Aiken's *The Coming Forth by Day of Osiris Jones* and Pound's *Cantos*. When it was first published in *The Kenyon Review* in 1944, Tate was deep in religious and psychological thought. From legend and history, actuality and dream, images press together in a sharpened form. There is no easy approach. Divided into four parts--'Summer,' 'Autumn,' 'Winter,' and 'Spring'--these seasons of the soul do not represent divisions in time, or move with the life of man. The substance of the poem is in its whole-circular, without beginning or ending. There is no time passing, only a sense of its recurrence and futility.

An epigraph from the *Inferno* (Canto XIII) carries Dante's symbol of death by suicide--a human soul imprisoned in a tree--and suggests the tone of man's violence against himself by his own deeds, his own choices, his own decisions. Each season shows the soul of man in different incarnations; as a political figure (summer), an abandoned sufferer (autumn), a sexual being disillusioned by love (winter), a man desperately appealing before death for spiritual insight (spring).

'Summer,' in short and rhymed stanzas, uses a pattern which few modern poets would attempt:

Summer, this is our flesh,
The body you let mature;
If now while the body is fresh
You take it, shall we give
The heart, lest heart endure
The mind's tattering
Blow of greedy claws?
Shall mind itself still live
If like a hunting king
It falls to the lion's jaws?

'Summer' celebrates the present, which has grown out of the past. When the body gives itself up to violence (war) must the mind and heart follow its destruction, and 'fall to the lion's jaws?'

Tate moves from allegory to reality:

It was a gentle sun
When, at the June solstice
Green France was overrun
With caterpillar feet,

. . . and the consequences of war's confusion; 'no head knows where its rest is,' 'the summer had no reason.'

'Autumn' creates the dream picture of a personal hell, a narrow dreadful descent, ending in a familiar house where he meets faces of the past, who do not recognize him--

My father, in a grey shawl,
Gave me an unseeing glint
And entered another room!
.
I saw my downcast mother
Clad in her street clothes,
Her blue eyes long and small.

This description of loss of identity which leads to madness, stands apart from the rest of the long poem, in its personal story--no apostrophe, no invocation, no suggestion of a voice to be answered--simply the defeated man again talking to himself.

'Winter' brings a realization of the violence man can do to his own creative impulses. He turns to ancient gods, as a last resort. The lewd goddess Venus brings only the *livid* wound of love, as against the *living* wound which he craves. All her insignia are death-dealing-- a shark for a dove, hollow rind of the winter sea, and

Beyond the undertow
The gray sea-foliage
.
The rigid madrepore
Resists the winter's flow.

In 'Spring,' an 'irritable' season, infusing warmth, burning but not lighting the way, there is an appeal to the 'Mother of Silences.' This arresting figure is identified variously as a mediaeval saint, the Virgin, or a symbol of spiritual love. Her 'silences' suggest that there is no adequate answer. Nevertheless the poem ends with a passionate invocation to her, no longer ironic, needing no evasion--not even of courage.

Speak, that we may hear;
Listen, while we confess
That we conceal our fear;
Regard us, while the eye
Discerns by sight or guess
Whether, as sheep forgather
Upon their crooked knees,
We have begun to die.

Once in a symposium on religion Tate said that all his poems were about the suffering that comes from disbelief. Civilizations as well as men rise and fall as they hold fast to or lose an active faith. We need mediation between the carnal and the spiritual, between *eros* and *agape*. When man is debased into violence all human actions become evil, even love."

Katherine Garrison Chapin
"The Courage of Irony: The Poetry of Allen Tate"
The New Republic 153:4-5, 22-24
(24 July 1965)

"The dilemma dramatized by 'The Cross' is not to be resolved by natural love. The facile vitalist philosophy that Venus represents in 'Seasons of the Soul' cannot compensate for the loss of faith. Tate recognized early 'that nature could not more refine / What it had given in a looking-glass,' as he puts it later in 'The Buried Lake.' The violence of a love without faith leads only to a terrible nihilism. Yet the buried city of the memory and the buried lake of the heart can continue to sustain the human order, even when they remain submerged. By bringing them to the surface, the imagination can begin to recover that sense of time and history which restores the understanding....

At the end of 'Seasons of the Soul,' Tate announces a stunning shift in perspective. Alluding to the famous scene in *The Confessions*, he imagines that St. Augustine and his mother have directed their gaze out the garden window at Ostia across fifteen centuries to the disorder of the modern world. In the concluding verses of the poem, he attempts to summon up a new beginning for a dying civilization. This new beginning is based on meditative silence, not on political upheaval or some hope for a return to the tranquility of past eras. The changes that must occur, if the world is to be saved, will take place in the souls of individuals rather than in institutions. Tate has abandoned all notions of saving society by any means other than spiritual. The shift, moreover, is definitive. Henceforth, Tate's imaginative order is Augustinian in its essential nature....

The world has been given over completely to 'lust of power.' In a letter to Tate, Donald Davidson describes 'the *four* parts of "Seasons of the Soul" as reflecting *throughout* the disastrous implications of World War II.' War is symptomatic of even greater disorders in man. As long as man must be condemned to live as an object among other objects, he cannot expect to escape from the cycle in which every season is destructive of life.

The correspondences between Tate and Spengler should not be pushed too far; much of the imagery connected with the seasons is traditional or obvious and requires no arcane source to explain its presence. Nevertheless, the imagery, like the verse form, does have an important role to play in the poem as part of a major motif. Both serve to point to one way of seeing the present in relation to the past. The organic cycle, as espoused by such thinkers as Spengler, or his master Nietzsche, is a more widely accepted tenet among modern intellectuals that is often recognized. The repetition of similar states that makes up the Nietzschean 'eternal return' of things back to their original condition makes a matter a subjective form, opposed to time, which is conceived of as objective. These conceptions are familiar; they are part of the symbolic system that comprises the historical imagination. But the real question that confronts a reader of Tate's poem is whether or not these physical states of recurrence are also to be attributed, in Spenglerian and Nietzschean style, to the soul. Is man irrevocably trapped in an historical cycle? Will the concluding poem, 'Spring,' be followed by the same 'Winter' that preceded it?

A progressive theme acts as the contrasting motif in the poem, but this pattern is not a simple upward movement. It proceeds downward first, then upward to a level higher than its point of departure. It is the movement that William F. Lynch, in a book greatly influenced by Tate, has called 'the Christian imagination.' In order to rise, a person must first submit, descend into experience, and accept his human condition. Only then is it possible to emerge and proceed to a higher order.

The interplay of cycle and progression is notable in Tate's poetry as early as 'Ode to the Confederate Dead,' where nature is simultaneously viewed as an eternal cycle of 'casual sacrament' and as a realm whose 'crazy fingers' and 'screech-owl's call point to something higher than nature itself. As in the 'Od,' the conflict between cycle and progression is not definitively resolved in 'Seasons of the Soul.' Even 'Spring,' the last part of the poem, is about a descent into submission rather than a rise to glory. The images of entrapment--the wartime horrors of 'Summer,' the fall down the well in 'Autumn,' and the suicide victim of 'Winter'--are echoed by Jack and Jill and Sisyphus in 'Spring,' figures who attempt to go up first and are driven downward instead. The sheep who have dropped to 'their crooked knees' in 'Spring' are, on the other hand, descending in order eventually to rise.

'Summer' is about the maturity of the physical body, the period of early manhood and energy: 'Summer, this is our flesh, / The body you let mature.' The season is one that Tate describes later in the poem as 'all space and no time,' when temporality is arrested in an idyllic moment of light and things have reached the term of their natural growth. In an early poem, 'Idyl,' Tate calls summer the 'eucharist of death,' and he shows the partaking of its seemingly eternal stillness as a means of bringing forth a vision of the arrested sun. It is the season of spatial clarity, freed for an interval from the demands of time. But in our era, summer has become sinister:

If now while the body is fresh
You take it, shall we give
The heart, lest heart endure
The mind's tattering
Blow of greedy claws?
Shall mind itself still live
If like a hunting king
It falls to the lion's jaws?

In time of war it is the physical body that is directly endangered, but the poet recognizes a greater peril: the loss of the heart to the narrowly rational mind. The intellect cannot stand alone, it will succumb too easily to the lion of physical violence it seeks to subdue. The mind's spatial clarity cannot be exercised properly when faced by the urgency of a terrible violence and a desperately accelerated rate of change. The contemporary soul is faced by two alternatives for keeping the reason whole:

The soul cannot endure
Unless by sleight or fast
It seize or deny its day
To make the eye secure.

One may plunge directly into the mad rush of time, *carpere diem*, or seek cover from the hot sun of violence by closing one's eyes to it. Neither alternative is satisfactory; the mind is trapped if it would attempt to preserve its spatial control over the soul and body.

The lion of violence is surely meant to recall Dante's encounter, at the mature age of thirty-five, with the three beasts in the dark wood. Yet Dante was able to pass by the lion and the leopard that confronted him, stopped only by the she-wolf of lust. Tate's world is assaulted by a new kind of violence at a level of intensity undreamed of by Dante. It is a war that both 'dries and draws' the body toward a violent end, leaving a fasting from or grasping at time as respective reactions to each effect. Both body and soul are endangered by the 'hot wind' of the modern hell earth has become.

In the third stanza of 'Summer,' the lion of violence has become a voracious army of mechanically driven insects. The body--attacked by the feet and jaws of two hungry varieties of insect--keeps the head from any hope of rest or coming to terms with its own rational needs. In Dante's Hell, men lost the good of the intellect. In Tate's world man has lost even more, for he can no longer bring senses, understanding, and will into a coherent relationship. The inner and outer man are divided by 'war's usurping claws.' The summer has become a twilight era, dominated by an abstract spatiality that turns all things into empty equalities. In childhood, the timeless world of the 'become,' the 'liquid light' of a timeless world, was life-sustaining. Now summer innocence has been destroyed by a sort of time-driven plague. The green world has been eaten alive by the destructive caterpillars of the German appetite; France, the land of clarity and rational thought, has fallen to armies that combine the European caterpillar, devourer of the leaf, with the southern cotton weevil, devourer of the boll. Between them, these two varieties of insect--like the invading Nazis--destroy both outer and inner being.

The importance of the element of air in the elaboration of this invasion crisis is not immediately evident. The hot, desiccating wind of an infernal time is of course an allusion to Dante's underworld landscape. The lines on the southern summer sky remind us that the South also fell to an invading enemy and was ravaged by men pressing their own idea of morality on another people. Yet even beyond this historical allusion there lies a further concern with the terrors of invasion. The easy familiarity of the summer sky has become nightmarish, a realm to be watched nervously with 'tired eyes' for signs of the enemy. It was in England especially that a whole population was forced to serve as sentries during the blitzkrieg and bombings. World War II was the first conflict to involve total populations. A deeper source of concern is hinted at by Davidson, who seems to have understood Tate's 'sky of glass, / Blue, empty, and tall / Without tail or head' as an allusion to Major Alexander P. Seversky's *Victory Through Air Power*. What Seversky insisted upon was the radical change in military strategy wrought by the airplane. America's once 'impregnable ocean ramparts' are no longer an effective barrier against a massive air strike.

Seversky's predictions are now commonplace fact, and the terrors he evokes have been replaced by even greater ones. Nevertheless, the radical nature of this new means of warfare is too easily overlooked; it is an important part of what Tate is saying. What he evokes in 'Summer' is a world that has been suddenly altered almost beyond imagining. The sky is no longer a comfort but a threat. The element of air is a new medium of destruction. The world is paralyzed; it has become a battlefield where all places are equally vulnerable. The sky no longer stands for transcendence or infinity; it has become a place of pure mathematical space

Where burn the equal laws
For Balaam and his ass
Above the invalid dead,
Who cannot lift their jaws.

The dead can no longer advise the living, through precept or exemplary action, how to face such terrors of total destruction. The same invasion that destroyed France can just as easily overcome the remainder of the world.

The allusion to Balaam in the Book of Numbers, at first glance a minor reference to a minor biblical event, is of great importance to the theme of 'Summer.' Its meaning lies in an implicit link with Tate's Virgilian poems of the thirties, for the Hebrews were landless wanderers driven by a prophecy, like Aeneas and his followers. The invasion of the Hebrews in their march toward the Promised Land is in sharp contrast to the German invasion of 'Green France.' The Hebraic sense of a historic destiny, the struggle to gain a national homeland, the journey filled with hardships, all of the search for a place where a society of men could find its proper identity--these the Jewish and Trojan experiences have in common. The earthly paradise of a 'land of milk and honey' that the Israelites sought in Canaan has its parallel in the founding of Rome and the settlement of America, but the invasion of France in the name of an abstract Aryan destiny is very different from the appeal to transcendent destiny characteristic of these other invasions.

Balaam's story is a clear attempt to demonstrate the divine sanction of the Israelite march through Transjordan. Sent by their enemies to curse the Hebrews, Balaam is made to bless them instead. His ass sees the implications of Jahweh's command before he does, and the beast talks to his master as a sign of the miraculous disclosure of the divine mandate. But the modern sky 'burns' with the terror of total war and an invasion not of men but of machines. Balaam prophesied an eventual Israelite victory. Now man and ass are equally helpless, equally inarticulate, equally blind. The unspeakable monstrosity of this false destiny of the Aryan race can be met by no power other than one equally hellish. The empty dome of the summer sky holds no promise of salvation from a divine presence, and whole cultures are menaced by the rapacious mechanized power of the modern invader.

Unlike the Israelites, the Trojans, and the exiles who sailed to the New World, the modern can find no refuge, no land that will shelter him from the threat of instant annihilation. The poet turns at this point to consider another 'invasion,' this time a descent into the abyss rather than an escape from it. He recalls the journey of Dante and Virgil, two men who descended imaginatively into Hell for a prophecy of the future. The 'vast concluding shell' of Dante's *Inferno*, like the modern 'sky of glass,' presents a frightening spectacle; the two men can no longer confront the 'liquid light' of the 'summer world' they left behind. Instead, they watch their shadows 'curl' as the light dies before them and 'confound' (that is, either 'curse' or 'confuse') the region they have been permitted to enter.

Stopping, they saw in the narrow
Light a centaur pause
And gaze, then his astounded
Beard, with a notched arrow,
Part back upon his jaws.

Several commentators have pointed out that the centaur is Chiron, the wise teacher of certain Greek heroes. In the context of Canto XII of the *Inferno*, however, the allusion takes on an added dimension, for the episode occurs in the realm of the violent, presided over appropriately by centaurs. Chiron, the only one among these men-beasts in Greek mythology who would control the violent centaur nature, is astonished to see Dante in his domain, for no living person has ever descended there before. Dante's invasion of this part of the *Inferno*, even if divinely sanctioned, could not be carried out without valor. In order to emerge safely from it, he must learn, as Chiron once did, to escape the violence within himself.

Dante's journey takes him down into the depths that no living man had ever before faced. Like the protagonist of 'The Wolves,' he has crossed the threshold of fear. In some ways, Dante is alone, and his solitude seems to be underlined by the curious way that he appears in this canto (*Inferno*, XII). In the entire section, Dante never speaks a word--an exceptional situation in a poem about a poet. It is Virgil, the voice from the past, who requests an escort from Chiron. Both the Roman poet and the master centaur are part of the understanding that is accessible through the historical imagination, but there is a knowledge

beyond their classical wisdom. Dante's living presence, even in silence, is testimony to a world beyond their grasp.

Nessus, their centaur-guide, leads Dante and Virgil past a blood-immersed group of murderous tyrants, petty princes, and highwaymen. The entire canto is given over to those who are guilty of violence against other men, but the majority of the damned are political figures. Tate's choice of this particular canto seems to indicate his judgment of the inhuman violence of modern politics. Virgil, Chiron, and Balaam stand as those voices of prophetic wisdom from the past that can no longer be redemptive for modern man. Like Dante, the contemporary poet is a silent witness of horrors he cannot control. He must attempt to conquer within himself the inhuman impulses to which he is often driven by the modern world.

'Summer' acts as a prologue to the other sections of 'Seasons of the Soul.' It is concerned with the public and the political as manifesting presences of a world crisis. The first part is unique, for it alone of the four is dominated by masculine figures. The kind of wisdom they represent, as masculine versions of the soul's self-understanding, has been severely impaired by the overwhelming violence of the world order. The feminine side of the soul, figured in the mother of 'Autumn,' Venus in 'Winter,' and the 'mother of silences' in 'Spring,' shows a different response. These figures form a triad in a progression that dramatizes the various levels of spiritual understanding. They also stand as examples of the earthly mother, Mother Nature, and a mysterious spiritual mother who replaces Virgil and Chiron as preceptors at the end of the poem.

'Autumn' is about violence in the private world of familial memories. Dante's Hell finds its counterpart in the rabbit hole down which Alice plunges in Wonderland. Dante's silence in Canto XII of the 'Inferno' is matched by the protagonist's silence in 'Autumn.' He sees the ghosts of his immediate past, but no one will speak to him or to anyone else. Time has become space--'I walked years down / Towards the front door'--and space is time frozen by silence. The look of the father is Medusan; it petrifies the young man standing in the hall. One is reminded of earlier poems, such as 'A Pauper' and 'The Paradigm,' where the mother and father cannot communicate with each other or where lovers are frozen into a spatially projected confrontation that never ends in a meeting. The gloomy hall with its opening and closing doors recalls the Posey mansion in *The Fathers* as well as the room in which Alice is trapped after her fall down the rabbit hole. It is a prison corridor, haunted by the abstractions of family life rather than by any love. Detail is vague--there is nothing the eye can focus on--but the sense of smell, taste, and touch are curiously heightened. The fleeting shades 'raise their eyes and squint / As through a needle's eye / Into the faceless gloom.'

An allusion to Dante ('Inferno,' XV), this simile gives an important clue to the nature of Tate's vision in 'Autumn,' for the person Dante meets in the dark realm is none other than Brunetto Latini, who was himself a poet and a mentor of the author of *The Divine Comedy*. The canto is disturbing for Dante, for it presents a moral ambivalence in the life of a man whom he held in great respect as a teacher. Tate's family, discovered at the bottom of a dry well, stands for a paternal emptiness that is a kind of violence in itself. It is not simply a literal allusion to an unhappy childhood; the nightmarish world of 'Autumn' shows that violence and alienation have touched the very heart of the family, the foundation of all societies. Dante's horror at seeing his esteemed teacher among the damned is paralleled by the terrified vision of a man whose memory discloses the spiritual slaughter (the air reminds the speaker of 'a butcher's stall') of his entire childhood household in a self-imposed, hellish family imprisonment. The fall into the dry well is a visit to the underworld and a descent into the grave.

The dried-up well of 'Autumn' can offer no source of life to the poet, yet the cyclical energies of the natural world have even less power of renewal. In 'Winter' Tate presents further evidence of the alienation of man from those larger dimensions that once sustained him. The myths that once ordered the universe for man have perished. Venus, the 'goddess sea-born and bright,' is implored to

Return into the sea
Where eddying twilight
Gathers upon your people--
Cold goddess, hear out plea!

Leave the burnt earth, Venus,
For the drying God above,
Hanged in his windy steeple,
No longer bears for us
The living wound of love.

Lucretius' 'eternal wound of love' and his lovely invocation to *De Rerum Natura* are contrasted in this opening stanza with the decline of the West (Venus' 'people' were, of course, the Romans) and the impotence of Christianity. What has been lost is any sense of the transcendent, and so the poet turns for a moment to entertain a naturalistic vision such as Lucretius presents. Nature has become 'the tossed anonymous sea.' It provides 'shade for lovers,' but it includes the shark of violence as well as the dove of peace. Tate may have in mind the example of Hart Crane, who celebrated the sea as mother and lover only to commit suicide by drowning. Crane's romanticizing of the sea lost sight of its destructive powers. The beautiful invocation of *alma Venus* at the beginning of Lucretius' poem cannot conceal the fact that for modern men, as Tate has noted, Mother Nature has become an 'it.' In attempting to re-mythify nature, the modern poet has chosen death over life. Having rejected historical religion as a means of salvation, he takes on a mystical naturalism, combined with a superficial form of depth-psychology as his guide:

And now the winter sea:
Within her hollow rind
What sleek facility
Of sea-conceited scop
To plumb the nether mind!

However, the poet who explores these depths finds a kind of damnation in love rather than a salvation. The images that characterize this sea-love remind one of a scene of punishment from Dante's 'Inferno':

Eternal winters blow
Shivering flakes, and shove
Bodies that wheel and drop--
Cold soot upon the snow
Their livid wound of love.

The naturalistic attempt to find a satisfactory order for human desires produces an underwater form of 'ignis fatuus,' the 'phosphor glow' of a goal deceptively glimmering in 'the circular miles' of a purely cyclical reality. The 'pacing animal' that would pounce upon his victim is trapped in a cage; the attempt to escape into the recurrent order of nature simply leads to another kind of trap. Indeed, man has become like the 'rigid madrepore,' the 'mother-stone' of a petrified life-force that 'gives the leaf no more.' In his wild embracing of the cold sea, the modern poet who would choose this alternative becomes a kind of 'headless, unageing oak' that reminds one of Dante's Pier delle Vigne in Canto XIII of the 'Inferno.' Because it is a rejection of all transcendent dimensions, this neo-Lucretian naturalism leads to a death of the self. Tate calls it a 'strategem' that leads to 'suicide.' But at the same time he recognizes his own implication in the same indictment; he, too, has become a victim of the same 'self-inflicted woe' that led to the death of a Hart Crane:

I touched my sanguine hair
And felt it drip above
Their brother who, like them,
Was maimed and did not bear
The living wound of love.

The poet recognizes that he has not escaped the fate of others who have yielded to the deceptive allurements of a philosophy centered on nature or some immanent life-force. The vision of a Spengler, taken at face value, is a strange form of death wish, impressively elaborated in the imaginative presentation of a supposedly organic world.

The kind of love Tate rejects in 'Winter' is not self-love. It is rather a desire to become part of something larger than the ego that leads to both self-denial and self-hatred. Pier delle Vigne wished to be loyal to his prince, and it was the thought that a false accusation had destroyed his honor that led him to his death. Such a love does not value the self sufficiently. It seeks to punish failure and has no place for self-forgiveness. By refusing to recognize any seed of transcendence within his own soul, modern man has condemned himself to an irrational grasping after any available means of restoring his integrity, whether in sex, nature, or death. The kind of violence that produces universal destruction is possible only because man has lost patience with mankind and wishes to impose perfection on the earth at once, even at the cost of annihilating himself. The invasion of France in 'Summer' and the suicide of Pier delle Vigne in 'Winter' are manifestations of the same self-hatred; they share in a thematic unity that organizes all four seasons of the soul.

The first three sections of the poem trace a downward movement that is a search for causes. The violence against a whole people can be traced back to violence against the family, and that, in turn, has its roots in violence against the self. It is in 'Spring' that the poet attempts to see his way out of the cyclical trap that characterizes the first three sections. Through it Tate seems to be looking for some small but unmistakable sign of self-renewal. In this, the most Augustinian of all of Tate's poems before his conversion, there is a rich collocation of images that seem to come directly from the Augustinian tradition:

Irritable spring, infuse
Into the burning breast
Your combustible juice
That as a liquid soul
Shall be the body's guest
Who lights, but cannot stay
To comfort this unease
Which, like a dying coal,
Hastens the cooler day
Of the mother of silences.

Combining Sir Walter Raleigh's picture of the soul with Shelley's image of the mind as a dying coal, Tate sees the end of his quest in a light internal to himself, not in an '*ignis fatuus*' toward which he must strain. Nature can be the spark that will ignite a new understanding in the heart, but something greater is required to 'comfort this unease.' The hoped-for reintegration of the self will not come all at once; it requires a kind of patience that comes in wooing silence.

Thinking back to the days of his youth, the poet recalls 'a pleasant land / Where even death could please / Us with an ancient pun.' The remembered past includes a time when death and the act of love were associated aspects of a unified sensibility. The kind of death that will return one to the bosom of 'the mother of silences' is also an act of love and a call for assistance, a yielding to powers beyond oneself. The 'hand' of the lady is granted in a marriage of the two components of the soul that allow her to work her hand in gaining its salvation. But the real problem is not in knowing the idyllic past or in expecting some utopian future. It is a question of recognizing what is happening in the present, of interpreting events as part of a larger pattern:

In time of bloody war
Who will know the time?
Is it a new spring star
Within the timing chill,
Talking, or just a mime,
That rises in the blood?

In such terrible times, enlightenment is perhaps imminent for those who have the patience to explore and observe the events around them. The poet asks the crucial question that has run throughout "Seasons of the Soul." Does history lead somewhere, or is it, like the nursery rhyme, a pattern of blindly executed rises and declines of civilizations? Is meaning revealed through events, or are they 'just a mime, / That rises in the blood,' following the systaltic beat of the heart from high to low and back again?

The question is not answered in the poem itself. In the following stanza, Tate introduces a complex weaving of the vain efforts of Sisyphus with Plato's image of the cave to suggest that it is man himself who does not want to find meaning in the world he inhabits. He would use the earth, again and again, to block out all light of transcendence, even as he arrogantly attempts to assert his superiority to all natural limits. For the light of transcendence reveals the 'slave' in man, his frailty and failings as well as his subordination to higher forces. Like Sisyphus, man attempts to go beyond the pull of the earth only to find himself obliged to begin his futile push all over again. He cannot escape from this gravity; his only hope is in submission, like the sheep who keel on 'crooked knees.' Confession is not the arrogance of self-assertion but the humility of recognizing that one has 'begun to die.' Yet to confess is not to achieve salvation if the final result is mere self-abasement. Some model of transcendence must be present in man's meditations to lift him from his bestial humility. He must learn to join his will with another form of gravitational force.

Despite the wartime darkness that prevails in most of 'Seasons of the Soul,' it is the first of Tate's mature poems to end with an image suggestive of a resurrection. In the last two stanzas, Tate combines several figures--Venus, the Virgin Mary, Monica, and the Cumaean Sibyl who led Aeneas down to his underworld vision:

Come, old woman, save
Your sons who have gone down
Into the burning cave.

They are clearly intended to suggest both the pagan and Christian figures of the holy mother; and their presence at this point in the poem is of great significance, for it evokes a neglected motif in Tate's poetry....

Through his work on 'The Vigil of Venus,' Tate found a more convincing image of the feminine. The climax of all these figures is the 'mother of silences' in 'Seasons of the Soul.' As early as 1933, in an article entitled 'Poetry and Politic,' Tate refused to give up the figure of the Queen of Heaven, such as she appears in the verses of a medieval poet like Thibaut-le-Grand, and he described her as the kind of figure that a poet must have for his muse: 'Our model is the Virgin if she will consent to instruct us.' The silence that is longed for in 'Spring' is the ability to listen and confess to such a muse. She is superficially like Eliot's 'Lady of Silences' in 'Ash Wednesday,' but as poetic images, they are different in kind. Tate noted, concerning this very figure in 'Ash Wednesday,' that in Eliot 'there are images of his own invention which he almost pushes over the boundary of sensation and abstraction, where they have the appearance of conventional symbols.' But Tate's 'mother of silences' cannot be pushed toward abstraction because she is grounded in an historical figure, Monica, the watchful guardian of a wayward son.

Monica is a paradoxical figure. In the pages of *The Confessions* she is consistently treated with great reverence, and yet one senses that she must have seemed to be both 'terrible mother' and 'blessed mother' to her tortured child. Though a gentle woman, she apparently possessed some of the determination that Tate depicts in the more imposing personalities of the mother in 'Sonnets of the Blood' or 'Mother and Son.' For Augustine she was the source of his great dilemma. As Romano Guardini points out, she was for her son 'the living representative of that demand which it is possible to fulfill only after first coming to grips with the all-essential (a circumstance, by the way, which does not prevent Monica from exercising also a negative influence).' Thus his 'mother, with all her worries, is burdensome to him,' yet it is from her that Augustine learns finally now to live. The lesson of the mother, who 'hovers over [him] with growing concern,' is virtually a tyranny; and 'regarding the manner in which all this takes place, we cannot shake off the impression of a certain ruthlessness on her part.' The powerful personality of Monica was one against which Augustine fought, even as he recognized his need for her influence. The greatest thing she taught him, however, was how to die, and an important climax in *The Confessions* is the scene in which she so willingly accepts her death. In 'Sonnets of the Blood,' Tate has caught this same understanding, even if he does not have Monica in mind:

Your blood is altered by the sudden death
Of one who of all persons could not use
Life half so well as death.

Let's look beneath
That life. Perhaps hers only is our rest--
To study this all lifetime may be best.

The paradoxes of Monica were not new to Tate, then, when he composed 'Spring.' The powerful influence of a mother to whom the son refuses to yield, presented in 'Mother and Son,' is reversed in 'Seasons of the Soul,' where the speaker has learned, as Augustine did, to accept the figure of the mother freely because he recognizes for the first time all that she stands for. If, as Guardini says, Monica took on a symbolic dimension in Augustine's mind that 'was of utmost importance in his life, far outstripping the usual limits of maternal help, advice, and exhortation,' then an understanding of the 'mother of silences' as symbol is crucial to an interpretation of Tate's poem. Guradini describes her influence this way:

His mother's influence on Augustine's life was of the spirit, or rather, of the Holy Spirit, an influence revealed most clearly later, in his image of the Church. She is the great holy Mother. It is she who draws the natural man into her inexpressible, only-to-be-believed depths that are at once grave and womb, bearing him through the already liturgically suggested act of baptism into the new Christian life. For Augustine, Monica seems to have been the representative, the living embodiment of the Church.

Guardini notes in Augustine's writings an interesting coming together of several images and several goddesses. Commenting on a passage in Book V, Chapter 8 of *The Confessions*, he elaborates on this complex image: 'The physical mother, longing to bear her child also into the new life of grace, pouring the water of her tears on the oldest mother of all, Earth, in the sight of the all-renewing God[.] Finally, now in apocalyptic dimension, the oneness of mother and Church at the end of Book Nine. In the place of the Earth-mother, a new maternal figure appears: the eternal, all-embracing abundance of the Heavenly Jerusalem, which is none other than the Church fulfilled.'

These parallels suggest a coincidence of vision between Tate and Augustine rather than a direct influence. The value of the Augustinian motifs in any consideration of Tate is that they reveal some important dimensions in his poetry where they might not otherwise be suspected. For like Augustine, Tate is concerned in his poetic quest with finding the right society. He saw glimpses of it in the vanishing Old South. In 'Seasons of the Soul,' faced with the imminent collapse of all human communities on the face of the earth, he is groping toward a new image of culture, one that is incorporated in the concrete experience of a spiritual family and a new spiritual mother. Yet he has not yet made the final decision to enter this new society; 'Seasons of the Soul' does not describe a conversion but a threshold experience like that of 'The Cross.' The war has forced modern man to make an urgent choice. He can opt for the kind of natural cycle that the seasons and the four elements stand for, or he can look for some discipline that will show him how to approach death in a completely different fashion.

If the notion of the two cities can be extended to include the two mothers, it would seem that Tate's verse also demands a further discrimination of two silences. In all of his poetry up to and even including 'The Vigil of Venus,' Tate sees silence as an inability on the part of the modern poet to speak out. 'Spring' offers a sudden reevaluation of the meaning of silence. Tate has moved to an appreciation of the contemplative mode of speechlessness; and in so doing, he has returned to yet another Augustinian theme. Joseph A. Mazzeo speaks of Augustine's great originality in adapting the language of rhetoric and eloquence to his metaphysics and theology and shows that a 'movement from words to silence, from signs to realities is the fundamental presupposition of Augustinian allegorical exegesis.' Thus 'the world that Scripture described was itself a further silent, wordless allegory of the eternal. The whole created world is a set of symbols of the divine, a sublime poem whose words are things, whose silent voice is the voice of its creator.'

For Augustine, 'true rhetoric culminates in silence, in which the mind is in immediate contact with reality.' This is the kind of silence, Mazzeo goes on to show, that dominates the crucial events of Augustine's autobiography, where silence is 'nothing else than listening to the instruction of the inner teacher,' and to move through love 'to that silence from which the world fell into the perpetual clamour of life as fallen men know.' It is of primary importance that Tate came to renounce the strain of trying to

speaking out to an uncaring world and sought in silence the perspective he needed to recapture those lost dimensions of myth and imagination whose lack he so insistently deplored.

The specific reference to *The Confessions* in 'Spring' comes in the penultimate stanza of the poem:

Come, mother, and lean
At the window with your son
And gaze through its light frame
These fifteen centuries
Upon the shirking scene
Where men, blind, go lame.

Monica's sibylline vision of what is to come reveals, fifteen centuries later, a dismal scene. Man has lost both his intellect, in a spiritual blindness, and his body, in a lameness of his own physical nature. As Augustine reports, in his moving account, mother and son sit in a window overlooking the interior garden that was a typical feature of Roman houses. The setting reminds one of the garden within the heart, the lyric moment of recovery that is about to follow in the search for spiritual paradise. The two are far removed from the noise of the street crowds and their long journey from Milan to Ostia; they rest in preparation for the sea voyage that will take them back to Africa.

One senses immediately that Monica's repose is preparing her for a quite different voyage. Yet far from communing without words, mother and son use language as a means of reaching understanding, for after their contemplation they return 'to vocal expressions of our mouth, where the word spoken has beginning and end.' This experience of beginning and end leads to a perception of the Word of God, 'who endureth in Himself without becoming old, and maketh all things new.' Thus the 'mother of silences' is not herself silent. The poet asks her both to speak and listen:

Speak, that we may hear;
Listen, while we confess
That we conceal our fear;
Regard us, while the eye
Discerns by sight or guess
Whether, as sheep foregather
Upon their crooked knees,
We have begun to die.

She is his confessor, the person who both listens and advises and shepherds the sinner into right actions. She herself is neither brooding nor silent, but a vigorous figure of motherly involvement in the fortunes of her sons. She is both the sibylline prophetess who points toward the future and the spokesman for a world greater than the bounds of the conscious self. It is Augustine's description of their conversation, however, that gives the key to Tate's poem as a whole, for in this mystical moment of contemplation the notion of silence receives its definitive articulation:

We were saying then: If to any the tumult of the flesh were hushed, hushed the images of earth, and waters, and air, hushed also the pole of heaven, yea the very soul he hushed to herself, and by not thinking on self surmount self, hushed all dreams and imaginary revelations, every tongue and every sign, and whatsoever exists only in transition, since if any could hear, all these say, We made not ourselves, but He made us that abideth forever--If then having uttered this, they too should be hushed, having roused only our ears to Him who made them, them, and He alone speak, not by them, but by Himself, that we may hear His Word, not through any tongue of flesh, nor Angel's voice, nor sound of thunder, nor in the dark riddle of a similitude, but might hear Whom in these things we love...were not this, Enter into thy Master's joy?

This silence is a putting behind of 'the images of earth, and waters, and air,' the elements that form the physical motifs of the first three parts of Tate's poem. The poet wishes to hear from the lady he addresses

'Whether your kindness, mother, / Is mother of silences.' The complex figure of the old woman and mother who can save her sons as they descend into 'the burning cave' is a reminder that her guardianship in enduring love is extended to every stage of the journey. The confession as to the end of "Seasons of the Soul" is an admission of helplessness and dependence. It is the first movement toward conversion. Louis Dupre has noted the necessity of finding this new perspective through silence that allows one to see himself for the first time: 'To know oneself is to remember oneself and to remember oneself entirely is to remember one's origin. At this point immanence turns into transcendence, and autobiography into confession.'

The meaning of confession in 'Seasons of the Soul' is tied closely to the ability to remember and to speak. In poems like 'Sonnets at Christmas' and 'Autumn,' Tate has explored the deep-seated experience of guilt that seems to be central to a discovery of the true self. In guilt and fear, man paradoxically comes to a realization of his dependence on another, and in that realization he opens the way to his acceptance of that part of himself which transcends the natural world. History, confession, alienation, fear, and love are all brought together in the last lines of 'Seasons of the Soul' through the centrifugal force of the Augustinian perspective. But the moment of silence introduces a further theme: the rediscovery of the self through the soul's powers of memory, understanding, and will. They are the guardians of man's psychic integrity, opposed to an unsubmitive rationality driven by a narrow egoism. Echoing Blake, Tate calls this egoism 'seeing *with* rather than *through* the eye.'

The loss of the ability to see things in their analogical relation to a significance beyond them is the subject of a poem Tate published after 'Seasons of the Soul' and before his conversion to Catholicism. 'The Eye' is a negative confession, a last purging from the modern soul of its blindness. The poem is a parody of a mystical experience; in a succession of perceptions, it leads from the child's to the mature man's vision of emptiness. In place of silence, modern man's 'ascent' has taken him to a vision of nothingness. What he has lost is the tradition, emanating from St. Augustine, of dealing with the world as a text. In speaking of the exegetical techniques of the Middle Ages, Beryl Smalley has compared the ability to see through the letter with the 'pierced technique' in medieval art, where we are 'invited to focus our eyes not on the physical surface of the object, but on infinity as seen through the lattice.' This, she says, 'is also an exact description of exegesis as understood by Claudius, if we substitute 'text' for the 'physical surface' of the artists' material and 'truth' for infinite space. We are invited to look not at the text, but through it.' Like 'The Meaning of Death,' Tate's 'The Eye' offers a direct picture of what happens to the soul when letter is preferred to spirit, the City of Man to the City of God."

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