FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

A STUDY OF THE BOLLINGEN PRIZE
IN POETRY

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A reputable literary award is an invaluable aid in book selection, for such an award signifies approval by experts. This recognition is especially significant in a field such as poetry, where many of the publications are issued by vanity presses, receive little publicity, and few if any reviews. For the librarian who has not had special training in this particular area and does not have time to read widely enough to develop mastery in all areas, literary prizes render assistance in selecting works which will best serve the needs of a particular library.

The award selected for this paper was the Bollingen Prize in Poetry, one of the major literary awards and one of the few to be offered by a university. The purpose of this study is to present a brief history of the award itself and to give a critical evaluation of the works of the recipients.

The procedure followed was first to secure information concerning the history of the Bollingen Prize in Poetry. The next step was to collect from the basic biographical sources information on the authors who received the award. Third, the specific books which received the
award were evaluated through a study of the reactions of critics as found in the reviews listed in *The Book Review Digest*. The fourth step was to give a general critical over-view of the works of those authors who received the award for the body of their work as it was secured from the books listed in the *Essay and General Literature Index*.

The results of this study will be presented in five chapters: a discussion of the Bollingen Prize in Poetry, biographical information on the Bollingen recipients, an evaluation of the Bollingen Prize-winning books, an evaluation of the Bollingen Prize-winning poets who received the award for the body of their work, and a final summary.
CHAPTER I

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOLLINGEN PRIZE IN POETRY

The Bollingen Prize in Poetry has come to be regarded as one of this nation's outstanding literary awards, but its history in the early years was a tempestuous one. The purpose of this chapter is to give a general account of the establishment and development of the award and a listing of its recipients.

The beginnings of the move toward the establishment of the Bollingen Prize were made in 1936, when through private generosity, a Chair of Poetry was founded at the Library of Congress. Six years later in 1942, the incumbent in the Chair of Poetry was Allen Tate; the Librarian of Congress was Archibald MacLeish. Both men, poets themselves, were eager to see a development of increased interest in American literature. When Tate suggested the establishment of a group to be known as the Fellows in American Letters of the Library of Congress, MacLeish heartily approved. As later described by Malcolm Cowley, the purpose of this group was to afford a medium through which to achieve "a living re-
relationship between the Library and the artists and writers of our time."¹ In 1944, MacLeish appointed the first of these groups and empowered the members to "advise the Librarian concerning the strengthening of Library of Congress collections, promotion of bibliographical projects in American literary material, and to advise the Librarian of Congress on the choice of the annual incumbent for the Chair of English."²

From this group of Fellows in American Letters came the idea of establishing annual awards for the encouragement of American poets and, after careful investigation, the suggestion to approach the Bollingen Foundation for funds with which to sponsor such a prize.

Established by Paul Mellon, the wealthy philanthropist son of Andrew Mellon, the Bollingen Foundation is a benevolent educational organization which also publishes books of a scientific and cultural nature on a non-profit basis.³ Although later disclaiming any connection with the actual awarding of the Bollingen Prize, the Foundation granted the Library of Congress a fund of ten thousand dollars with the stipulation that the award

would consist of one thousand dollars per year for ten years to “the author of that book of verse, published during the previous calendar year which, in the judgment of the Fellows in American Letters, represented the highest achievement of American poetry during the year.”

The Fellows were accorded the privilege of refusing to make the award in a year when no poetry worthy of it had appeared. The one restriction relative to recipients is that the prize must be made to a poet who either is or was formerly a citizen of the United States.

The name, Bollingen, according to Robert Hillyer, is that of the Swiss lakeside retreat near Zurich where Dr. and Mrs. Carl Jung have frequently entertained such notables as Paul Mellon and where it is reported that Mellon's first wife was once a patient.

In 1949, an eminent committee of judges composed of Conrad Aiken, W. H. Auden, Louise Bogan, Katherine Ann Porter, Katherine Garrison Chapin, T. S. Eliot, Paul Green, Robert Lowell, Karl Shapiro, Allen Tate, Willard Thorpe, and Robert Penn Warren awarded the Bollingen Prize. The first recipient was Ezra Loomis Pound, who was even then

1 Robert Hillyer, "Treason’s Strange Fruit, the Case of Ezra Pound and the Bollingen Award," The Saturday Review of Literature, June 11, 1949, p. 10.

2 Ibid.

in a mental clinic. At the time of the award the judges
issued the following statement:

The Fellows are aware that objections may be
made to awarding a prize to a man situated as is
Mr. Pound.
In their view, however, the possibility of such
objection did not alter the responsibility assumed
by the jury of selection.
This was to make a choice for the award among
the eligible books, provided any one merited such
recognition, according to the stated terms of the
Bollingen Prize.
To permit other considerations than that of a
poetic achievement to sway the decision would destroy
the significance of the award and would in principle
deny the validity of that objective perception of
value on which any civilized society must rest.\(^1\)

The group found it necessary to issue this state-
ment because of Pound's wartime activities. At the out-
break of World War II, he had been living in Italy for
many years, and having denounced the United States for
its usury over a long period, he found himself in sym-
pathy with the Fascists. He made broadcasts for them
censuring and repudiating his homeland throughout the war,
and because of these activities, he was indicted for trea-
sion in 1942. He was brought back to the United States for
trial at the end of the war, but doctors said he was not
sane and could not be tried. At the time he received the
Bollingen Prize, he was undergoing psychiatric treatment
in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington, D. C.

Immediately after the announcement, loud cries
arose from all sides. The New York Times led off by giv-

\(^1\)Ibid.
ing the award front-page coverage with a bold-faced caption which read “Pound, in Mental Clinic, Wins Prize for Poetry Penned in Treason Cell.”¹ The fray was beginning to slacken when the Saturday Review of Literature in the person of Robert Hillyer took up arms. He termed Pound’s poems “vehicles of contempt for America, Fascism, anti-Semitism and . . . ruthless mockery of our Christian war dead.”² About the Pisan Cantos he wrote:

In general, they are merely the landslide from the kitchen midden of a heart long dead: broken memories, jagged bits of spite, splinters of a distorting glass wherein the world is seen as it is not, a hodge-podge of private symbols, weary epigrams, anecdotes, resentments, chuckles, and the polyglot malapropisms that pass for erudition among the elite.³ Finally he attacked Eliot as an expatriate and firmly stated that though nothing could be done to eradicate the disgrace of the award, it could be alleviated by dropping Eliot from the Board.

The critic Malcolm Cowley questioned Hillyer’s motives in coming out so vociferously against Pound and suggested that perhaps Hillyer might be attempting to discredit two of Pound’s supporters, Auden and Eliot, whom he considered his own poetic rivals.⁴ At the height of the battle early in 1950, David Dempsey characterized

¹Ibid.
²Hillyer, loc. cit.
³Ibid.
⁴Cowley, loc. cit.
the three points of Hillyer's attack as: "(1) Pound was a bad man; (2) Pound was a bad poet; (3) the Fellows were foisting on the public a cult of unintelligibility."¹ In Dempsey's opinion, Hillyer had defeated his own purpose, poetry was all the more alive for its battering, and Ezra Pound had become the most read poet of the year.

On December 17, 1949, an article appeared in the Nation stating that the Saturday Review of Literature had not printed a letter written by John Berryman in reply to Hillyer's attack on the Pound award and signed by seventy eminent authors. The article accused the Saturday Review of Literature editors of thinking that poetry not understood by the common man is undemocratic, of being antagonistic toward modern poetry, and of widening the rift between artist and public.

On December 31, Norman Cousins and Harrison Smith, editors of the Saturday Review of Literature, answered the Nation's accusations in a full-page statement. They explained that they had not published Berryman's letter of protest because they knew it had already come out in Poetry magazine and had also been circulated in pamphlet form. They declared that neither they nor Hillyer had made any statement concerning undemocratic poetry, that they were not against modern poetry, but that they did ob-

ject to the "implied contention of the obscurantist school that if the public could read it, it probably wasn't poetry."  

They asserted that what they were opposing was coterie criticism, poets writing for each other in the "public-be-damned" attitude, and they concluded that "the main question, as we see it, is whether a private group of poets can utilize the prestige of the American government to advance its own school."  

Among the others who came out firmly against the Pound award were two who represented differing points of view. The writer for the Catholic World, though he questioned the literary merit of the Pisan Cantos, made his main line of attack the author's treason indictment. William Barrett in the Partisan Review took the position that though Pound was pathologically insane, he was not thereby excused for the vicious hatred in the Pisan Cantos. Though the book was good technically, he said, the judges should have taken the subject matter into consideration.  

Meanwhile the controversy had reached the floor of

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2Ibid.

3Ibid.


Congress, the first literary battle to enter the political arena since the disputed sponsorship of the Federal Writer's Project. Though Representative Jacob Javits of New York called for an investigation of the Pound award, hearings never were scheduled. Eventually, however, the Library of Congress was ordered to disassociate itself from any award.

Though the incumbent Librarian of Congress, Luther Evans, had opposed Pound's receiving the award, his statement was not available publicly until the appearance of his annual report in March of 1950. He had issued the following warning to the unyielding members of the Committee:

Reaction would be, for the most part, emotional rather than intellectual; public conscience would be outraged; the progress of poetry would be arrested for a generation; international relations, particularly with Italy, would be embarrassed; confidence in the Library of Congress which had given them corporate entity would be impaired; their faculties would be suspected, their motives would be rejected, their principles would be deplored; Congress would inevitably intervene.¹

Yale University proposed what has proved to be a most effective solution to the problem faced by the Library of Congress, when in February, 1950, it announced that it would take over the administration of the award. Dr. Charles Seymour, at that time President of Yale, commended the judgment of the distinguished members of the

¹Cousins and Smith, loc. cit.
Committee and invited them to nominate a second recipient.¹ The Bollingen Foundation continued to supply the funds. The only significant change in procedure was that instead of the Board's acting as a committee of the whole, an executive committee of five was to select the winner from the nominations submitted by the Board. At the present time the judges continue to be Fellows in American Letters of the Library of Congress, distinguished writers whose awards, in recent years, have excited no controversy and little comment.

Only a few echoes of the old discussion were revived when in March, 1950, Wallace Stevens was announced the recipient "in consideration of the poet's entire work."² According to the New York Times, "Critics noted today that the award to Mr. Stevens represented recognition of poetry quite unlike that of Pound's... Mr. Stevens' verse is widely read by all who like modern verse."³

The following year John Crowe Ransom received the award for his "contribution to American poetry"⁴ which

³Ibid.
Time defined as his "refusal to join the cult of obscurity adhered to by so many modern poets and for helping other famous pupils of his, Robert Penn Warren, Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, and Allen Tate."¹ When he was notified of the award, Ransom characteristically remarked: "I am surprised. There is nothing recent of mine for the committee to have considered and my old work is small in volume."²

In 1952, the judges elected Marianne Moore for her Collected Poems, a decision which met with general concurrence. The following year for the first time they split the award with Archibald MacLeish for his Collected Poems, 1917-1952 and William Carlos Williams for the body of his work as winners.

In 1954, when W. H. Auden, the English expatriate, was awarded the Prize, James T. Babb, Librarian of Yale University, made the following statement: "A tough thinker, Auden is a man who expresses himself acutely, and with poetic vivacity. In his identity as an American, he has become a permanent part of American poetry. The committee is delighted to honor him."³

¹"Contribution to Poetry," *Time*, February 12, 1951, p. 94.
In 1955, the Prize was again divided, this time between two women poets, Louise Bogan for Collected Poems, 1922-1953 and Leonie Adams for Poems: A Selection. Both of the last two winners of the Bollingen Prize in Poetry have been natives of the South. In commending Conrad Aiken, the recipient in 1956 for his A Letter from Li Po and Other Poems, the Awards Committee stated: "This volume stands as an important achievement in a life devoted to poetry, letters, and the journey of the spirit." In 1957, the judges cited Allen Tate for the "achievement of his poetic work both collected and current, and his lifetime devotion to the high defense of art."

CHAPTER II

BOLLINGEN PRIZE RECIPIENTS

Prior to a consideration of the work for which the Bollingen Prize has been awarded, brief biographical sketches of the recipients are presented in order to portray better these authors in relation to their writing. Listed in the order in which the awards have been made are Pound, the obstreperous experimentalist of modern poetry; Stevens, long-time vice-president of one of America’s largest insurance companies and winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry; Ransom, poet-critic-teacher extraordinaire of Gambier, Ohio; Marianne Moore, the versatile, charming first lady of American modern poetry; MacLeish, the poet-politician; Williams, the pediatrician-poet friend of Pound; Auden, the Englishman who became an American citizen; Louise Bogan, quiet and preferring anonymity; Leonie Adams, metaphysical and intense; Conrad Aiken, the professional poet; and Tate, one of the leaders in the Agrarian movement.¹

¹The Encyclopedia Americana (New York: Americana Corporation, 1957), XVII, 474, defines this movement as being motivated by writers who "viewed with undisguised alarm the tendency to accept for the South a stereotyped reproduction of the industrial civilization of the North."
Ezra Loomis Pound

Ezra Loomis Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho, in 1885. Educated in local schools, he spent his first two college years at the University of Pennsylvania. After this, he transferred to Hamilton College, where he received his Ph. B. degree in 1905. In that same year, he became a Fellow in Romanics and an instructor at the University of Pennsylvania, where he remained until 1907. During this time, he received his M. A. at Pennsylvania. He then became an instructor at Wabash College, but after four months, Pound, the non-conformist, was asked to leave because he was "too European."

Following this incident, Pound began his Europeanization in earnest with extended travels over the continent. During his English sojourn, he met and married his wife, Dorothy Shakespear. From 1917 to 1919, he was the London editor of the Little Review. In 1924, he and his wife settled in Italy where he remained until World War II. These years were taken up with work on several volumes of poetry and writing for various magazines. He plunged into the melee of World War II with Fascist propaganda broadcasts from Italy to the United States forces. When the Americans landed in Italy near the end of the war, he and East; and, while not advocating a literal re-establishment of the older agrarian civilization, they urged Southerners to solve their current problems in the light of their total tradition."
surrendered to them voluntarily and after spending some time in an army prison camp, he was returned to the United States in 1945, declared insane in 1946, and committed to St. Elizabeth's Hospital, where he spent his time reading widely and seeing many visitors and where he was still hospitalized when he received the Bollingen Prize in 1949. In February of this year he was released, and the pending treason indictments dropped because of his physical condition.

Pound's works, which are obscure in the sense that they are difficult and incorporate complex ideas in involved settings, have been published over the years since 1909. Among his early books are: Personae, Exultations, Provence, Canzoni, Ripostes, Lustra and Other Poems, Umbra, the Canto series, Homage to Sextus Propertius, and a number of prose works, the bulk of which are Fascist propaganda. Since 1948, when he came out with his Bollingen Prize winner, the Pisan Canti, he has completed Selected Poems, Patria Mia, Letters, and several translations of Confucius.

Pound's unusual personal appearance is indicative of a strong, individualistic temperament. He has reddish hair and a mustache which he has allowed to grow wildly. Always the center of a controversy, this man has been a major pace-setter in modern letters. Of him his friend T. S. Eliot wrote: "Pound did not create the poets: but
he created a situation in which, for the first time,
there was a modern movement in poetry in which English
and American poets collaborated, knew each other’s
works, and influenced each other.”

Wallace Stevens

Born in Reading, Pennsylvania, on October 2,
1879, Wallace Stevens was educated in local schools,
graduated from Harvard University, and went on to New
York University Law School. Unlike most of the prize-
winning poets, he never taught in an institution, but
was a businessman all his life except for the early
years when he practiced law. Admitted to the United
States Bar in 1904, he was an attorney until he became
associated with the Hartford Accident and Indemnity
Company in 1916. He became vice-president of the firm
in 1934, and up until his death in 1955, he still listed
insurance as his occupation.

Stevens’ writings consisted mainly of poetry.
Harmonium, his first book of verse to appear, was pub-
lished in 1923. Ideas of Order, Owls Clover, The Man with
the Blue Guitar, Parts of a World, Notes Toward a Supreme
Fiction, Three Academic Pieces, Transport to Summer, Primi-
tive Like an Orb, Auroras of Autumn, and Collected Poems

1Stanley J. Kunitz (ed.), Twentieth Century Au-
thors: First Supplement (New York: H. W. Wilson Company,


Having enjoyed prestige among his fellow poets for some time, Stevens won several prizes near the close of his life as evidence of the public recognition of his work. He was elected to the National Academy of Arts and Letters in 1946, received the Bollingen Prize in Poetry in 1950, the National Book Award in both 1950 and 1955, and also in 1955, the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry.

Stevens was a tall, heavy-set, crew-cut New Englander, and a good businessman. He maintained that he wrote best on the scraps of paper he carried with him in his pockets and that the ideas for his poems often occurred to him as he strolled about.

**John Crowe Ransom**

John Crowe Ransom was born on April 30, 1888, in Pulaski, Tennessee. He attended neighborhood schools and then Vanderbilt, from which he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1909. From there he went on to Christ Church College, Oxford, where he received his B. A. in *Litterae Humaniores* in 1913.

Ransom's love of literature led naturally to teaching, his only profession. After graduation from Oxford, he joined the English Department at Vanderbilt, where he remained until 1917, when he went into World War I as a First Lieutenant in Field Artillery. After
the war, he remained in France teaching at the French military school at Saumur until 1919, when he returned to Vanderbilt to remain there this time until 1937. Next he became Professor of Poetry at Kenyon College, where he is at present, and where for many years he has edited the Kenyon Review.¹

Perhaps because of his clarity of style, Ransom seems to be one of the most popular among modern American poets. His first important work, published in 1919, was entitled Poems about God. This was followed by Chills and Fever and Grace after Meat in 1924, Two Gentlemen in Bonds in 1926, God without Thunder in 1930, and a textbook, Topics for Freshman Writing in 1935. Since he began his teaching at Kenyon, he has had several textbooks and critical works published, but only one book of verse, Selected Poems, which appeared in 1945.

Ransom held a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1931 and 1932 and has won several awards. In 1951, he received the Russell Loines Award in Literature from the National Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1951 also, he received the Bollingen Prize in Poetry for his "contribution to American poetry."²

¹Robie Macauley has just been appointed editor of the Kenyon Review, but is on leave of absence until September, 1959, during which period Ransom will continue as acting editor.

Ransom's influence on American literature has been transmitted through various media. During his years at Vanderbilt as a student, he was one of the leaders of a group of artists who came to be known as the Fugitives\(^1\) and who have greatly influenced American literature. His editorship of the *Kenyon Review* places him in a position which enlarges this influence. *Time* described him as "one of the most powerful presences in modern poetry"\(^2\) and stated that his eminence as a poet is even surmounted by his worth as a critic and teacher. Since going to Kenyon College, he has made Gambier, Ohio, the site of the college, a literary center.

Ransom has all the characteristics of a Southern gentleman of the old school. Son of a Protestant minister, he is personally conservative and easy going. Donald Stauffer has described him as "suave, whitehaired, well contained"\(^3\) and in another article Ransom has been referred to as "slight, courtly."\(^4\)

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\(^1\) The Fugitives were a group of students and teachers at Vanderbilt University banded together in a "definite and seemingly determined attempt to join traditional metaphysical poetry with indigenous accents. . . . Their verse was alternately teasing and tortuous; the very richness of their allusive material made it difficult." *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1956), XVII, 114.

\(^2\) *Time*, January 7, 1957, p. 34.


\(^4\) "Books," *Time*, May 9, 1938, p. 67.
Marianne Moore

Born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1887, Marianne Moore attended Metzger Institute at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, received her B. A. degree at Bryn Mawr and went on to Carlisle Commercial College. She holds an L. H. D. from Smith College and Litt. D.'s from Wilson College, Mount Holyoke College, the University of Rochester, Dickinson College, and Rutgers.

In the years from 1911 to 1925, Marianne Moore held varied positions, none of which pointed very strongly toward a literary career. She taught stenography at the Indian School in Carlisle for four years, was an assistant at the New York Public Library for another four years, and for three years was editor of Dial.

Although she has written some critical essays, her work has been mainly poetry including Poems published in 1921, Observations in 1924, Selected Poems in 1935, The Pangolin and Other Verse in 1936, What are Years in 1941, and Nevertheless in 1944. Since 1950, she has written three books; Collected Poems, for which she received the Bollingen Prize, The Fables of La Fontaine, and one book of critical essays, Predilections, published in 1955.

Since she received the Dial Award in 1925, prizes in recognition of her work have come rapidly. Among them are the Helen Haire Levinson Prize in Poetry, Ernest
Hartsock Memorial Prize, Contemporary Poetry’s Patrons’ Prize, Bollingen Prize in Poetry, National Book Award, Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and the Gold Medal for Poetry from the National Institute of Arts and Letters. She held a Guggenheim Fellowship in creative writing in 1945, and was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1947.

About herself, Marianne Moore has written, “I am a Presbyterian and was brought up in the home of my grandfather, the Reverend John R. Warner, who was for twenty-seven years the pastor of Kirkwood Presbyterian Church, St. Louis.”\(^1\) Partially because of this influence, most of the books to which she had access when young were serious, and she developed a love for them which has endured. Among her favorite authors, she still lists Chaucer, Spenser, Sir Thomas Browne, Samuel Johnson, Molière, and Thomas Hardy.

Her activities reflect her work and interests which are numerous. Diminutive and dark-eyed, she is versatile and active; she plays tennis, takes an interest in drawing, dancing, music, theatre, photography, printing, and animals. Among her friends, she numbers such people as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Alfred Kreymborg. Her individualistic philosophy she has voiced in this

\[^1\text{Kunitz, } \text{loc. cit.}, \text{ p. 979.}\]
statement, "I feel that the unselfish behavior of individual to individual is the basis for world peace."¹

Archibald MacLeish

On May 7, 1892, Archibald MacLeish was born in Glencoe, Illinois, the son of Andrew and Martha Hillard MacLeish, who were only a generation away from Scotland. Sent to Hotchkiss School for his preparatory education, he received his B. A. from Yale in 1915, his LL. B. from Harvard in 1919, and his M. A. from Tufts College in 1932.

MacLeish's career has included activities ranging from law and politics to the academic. After serving in World War I and attaining the rank of Captain, he taught one year at Harvard and practiced law in Boston for three years. Though successful as a lawyer, he was personally dissatisfied and decided to take his family abroad for a time. After living in France and junketing about the continent for five years, he and his family returned to the United States and settled on a farm at Farmington, Connecticut. There he did some serious writing. In 1938, he became curator of the Niemann Collection of Contemporary Literature at Harvard and adviser to the Niemann Fellows. In 1939, he was appointed Librarian of Congress, an appointment which was hotly contested.

¹Ibid.
Spokesmen for the American Library Association, for example, contended that the man for this post should be a trained librarian and pointed out that MacLeish had at one time been chairman of the Congress of the League of American Writers, a Leftist organization. Despite opposition, his appointment was confirmed, and he served with distinction until 1944, when he became Assistant Secretary of State. In 1946, he served as American delegate to UNESCO.

MacLeish became an outstanding figure in American literary as well as political circles. In 1949, he was selected by Harvard as Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, one of America's oldest and most honored professorships. In 1952 and 1953, he was further recognized with the National Book Award, the Bollingen Prize, and the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry—all three of which he won for his Collected Poems, 1917-1952.

MacLeish's output includes plays, poetry, essays, and criticism. His first work, Tower of Ivory, was published when he was twenty-five, followed by The Happy Marriage, The Pot of Earth, Streets in the Moon, The Hamlet of Archibald MacLeish, New Found Land, Conquistador, Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller's City, Union Pacific, Panic, Public Speech, The Fall of the City, Land of the Free, Air Raid, America was Promised, The Irresponsible, The American Cause, A Time to Speak, Prophets of Doom, and
Next Harvard. During the years when his political activity was at its height, he wrote only one collection of poems, Act Five and Other Poems, but produced several volumes of essays; A Time to Act: Selected Addresses; American Story: Ten Broadcasts; Poetry and Opinion: The Pisan Cantos of Ezra Pound; and Freedom is the Right to Choose. In 1952, Collected Poems, 1917-1952, the three-time prize-winner, was published, followed by a verse play, This Music Cresent by Me Upon the Waters, and another collection of poems, Songs for Eve in 1954. His latest work is J. E.

MacLeish and John Crowe Ransom resemble each other somewhat in their personal makeup. MacLeish, like Ransom, is quiet, forthright, without pretension.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt called him a "scholar and a gentleman."¹

William Carlos Williams

September 17, 1883, was the birth date of William Carlos Williams. He was born in Rutherford, New Jersey, obtained his preparatory schooling in Geneva, received his M. D. from the University of Pennsylvania, and did graduate work in pediatrics at the University of Leipzig.

Williams' life as a pediatrician is not a leisurely one, but he has found time to write a number of

¹Kunitz, loc. cit., p. 886.
volumes, both prose and poetry. Poems, The Tempters, Al
Que Quiere, Kora in Hell, Sour Grapes, Spring and All,
Collected Poems, Adam and Eve and the City, and Complete
Collected Poems—all these came out between 1909 and 1941.
His prose works during this period were The Great American
Novel, In the American Grain, A Voyage to Pagany, The
Knife of the Times and Other Stories, An Early Martyr,
White Mule, and Life Along the Passaic River. Since
World War II, he has had the following books published:
The Wedge; Paterson, Clouds, Aliegeltinger, Russia. &c.;
Collected Later Poems; The Desert Music and Other Poems;
and A Dream of Love. In the same period, the prose has
been Make Light of It, Autobiography, The Build-Up, and
Selected Essays.

This towering volume of work has reaped many
prizes and honors. Williams received the Dial Award for
services to American literature in 1926, the Poetry
Guarantor's Prize in 1931, and the Loines Award of the
National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1948. He was
made a member of the National Institute of Arts and
Letters in 1950 and received the National Book Award for
Poetry. He holds honorary degrees from the University
of Buffalo, Rutgers, Bard College, and the University
of Pennsylvania. Though he was appointed Consultant in
Poetry to the Library of Congress in 1952, he did not
accept the office.
William Carlos Williams does not run true to the popular conception of a "poet." He is tall and bony, with graying hair, and his busy professional life has not prevented his being interested in everything from art to zoology. Critics complain that his work is done hurriedly; Williams maintains that he writes for himself.

Wystan Hugh Auden


Auden, like so many of the other prize-winning poets, has been in the academic world for his entire professional career. For a short time after graduation he was a schoolmaster. A brief interlude from his professional career was the year 1937, when he was an ambulance driver for the Loyalists in Spain. For some time prior to this, he had been associated with Stephen Spender and a small group of English poets who were Communists or had Leftist sympathies. His wife is Erika Mann, daughter of the great German novelist, Thomas Mann, and a well-known author in her own right.

About 1939 when Auden came to the United States, his viewpoint shifted from Marxism to Anglo-Catholicism.

1"Part-time Poet," Time, October 8, 1951, p. 118.
He held positions as Associate Professor of English at the University of Michigan and as William Allen Neilson Research Professor at Smith College. In 1956, he was appointed to fill the Chair of Poetry at Oxford.

The bulk of Auden's work is poetry, but he has produced essays, anthologies, and plays. Poems, his first published work came out when he was twenty-three; then came The Dance of Death; Look Stranger; Spain; and Letters from Iceland, which he did with Louis MacNeice. The Orators, a combination of poetry and prose, came out in 1932. Two plays, The Dog Beneath the Skin; or Where Where is Francis? and The Ascent of F.6 he wrote with Christopher Isherwood, and he edited the Oxford Book of Light Verse in 1938. With the exception of The Enchafed Flood; or The Romantic Iconography of the Sea in 1950, all his publications since coming to the United States have been poetry: For the Time Being, Collected Poetry, The Age of Anxiety; A Baroque Eclogue, Collected Shorter Poems, 1930–1944, Nones, and The Shield of Achilles.

Honors in both England and the United States have testified to the quality of his work. In England, he received the King's Poetry Medal in 1937. After coming to the United States, he was a Guggenheim Fellow, received the Award for Poetry from the American Academy of Letters, the Bollingen Prize, and the National Book Award.

Auden, who has been referred to by many people,
including Stephen Spender as a genius, is a rather large man, loose-knit with unruly red hair. He has been a close associate of Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, and Louis MacNeice.

**Louise Bogan**

On August 11, 1897, Louise Bogan was born at Livermore Falls, Maine, of Irish descent. Upon graduating from Mount St. Mary's Academy, the Boston Girls' Latin School, she attended Boston University for one year.

Married twice, she has not been particularly active in either the academic or literary world. In 1933, and again in 1937, she held a Guggenheim Fellowship abroad, and she has done a regular review of poetry for the *New Yorker* since 1931. Her only venture into the academic world was as visiting lecturer in poetry at the Universities of Washington and Chicago.

Although Louise Bogan's literary output has been slender, it has earned her a place among the first ladies of poetry in the land. In 1923, her first published work, *Body of this Death*, appeared. *Dark Summer, The Sleeping Fury, and Poems and New Poems* came in those years between 1929 and 1941. Her one book of prose, a critical work, *Achievement in American Poetry, 1900-1950*, came out in 1951; her last book was the Bollingen Prize winner, *Collected Poems*, published in 1954.
This small volume of work apparently makes up in quality what it lacks in quantity. In 1936, Louise Bogan received the Helen Haire Levinson Prize; in 1930, the John Reed Memorial Prize. A Fellow in American Letters at the Library of Congress in 1944, she was appointed to the Chair of Poetry there in 1945-46. She received the Harriet Monroe Poetry Award in 1948, and the Bollingen Prize in 1955.

Louise Bogan is described as slender, with thick dark hair, delicately aquiline features and deep-set brooding eyes.\(^1\) She has a somber strength and a strong nature. The editor of *Twentieth Century Authors* reported that it is difficult to secure the facts of her life since she prefers anonymity.\(^2\)

**Leonie Adams**

Born December 9, 1899, in Brooklyn, New York, Leonie Adams received her early education there and later attended Barnard College.

Like a number of the prize-winners, she has spent her professional life in academic circles, beginning her teaching career at Washington Square College of New York University in 1933. In 1935, she moved to Bennington College and from there to Columbia in 1944, where she

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\(^1\)Kunitz, *loc. cit.*, p. 156.

\(^2\)Ibid.
still teaches.

Like Louise Bogan, to whom she has often been compared, Leonie Adams' literary output has been small but well-received. *Those Not Elect*, her first book, was published in 1925, and in the period from 1929 to 1933, came *High Falcon*, *This Measure*, and *The Lyrics of François Villon*, which she edited and translated. *Poems: A Selection*, the winner of the Bollingen Prize, appeared in 1954.

The reception of these few works can be judged from the impressive number of awards and honors she has received. A Guggenheim Fellow in 1929, her next honor came in 1943, when she was appointed Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress. The Award for Lyric Poetry from the National Institute of Arts and Letters went to her in 1949, and she became a Fellow in American Letters in the same year. She is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and since 1951, she has been a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. The Bollingen Prize went jointly to her and to Louise Bogan in 1955.

Leonie Adams has been much encouraged by her friends and has said that if it had not been for them, she would never have had the courage to break into print. Dark-haired and intense, she has been called metaphysical and mystical.¹ She was a precocious child, writing in metres when she was seven. Even today she dislikes modern

¹Ibid.
free verse and prefers instead the traditional verse forms.

Conrad Potter Aiken

Conrad Potter Aiken was born on August 5, 1889, in Savannah, Georgia. His was a tragic childhood. When he was quite young, his father, a physician, killed his wife and committed suicide. Aiken went to Middlesex School, Concord, and to Harvard. He was a member of that famous class which included T. S. Eliot, Van Wyck Brooks, John Reed, Heywood Broun, Robert Benchley, Alan Seeger, Robert Edmond Jones, and Walter Lippmann. While at Harvard he wrote for the Harvard Monthly and the Harvard Advocate.

Aiken is the only poet discussed in this paper who never had any other profession than literature. He refused to serve in World War I on the grounds, that as a poet, he was engaged in an "essential industry."¹

In the forty-three years since 1914, Aiken completed a manuscript almost every year, and in many of these years he has produced several volumes. Among his books of poetry are: Earth Triumphant, Nocturne of Remembered Spring, The Charnel Rose, Priapus and the Pool, John Deth, Selected Poems, Landscape West of Eden, The Soldier, The Kid, Divine Pilgrim, Collected Poems, and the Bollingen Prize winner, A Letter from Li Po. His

fiction includes *Blue Voyage*, *Costumes by Eros*, *King Coffin*, *A Heart for the Gods of Mexico*, *Great Circle*, *Ushant*, and *Mr. Arcularia*. There are two works of criticism: *Scepticism* and *Gehenna*.

That quality as well as quantity is characteristic of Aiken’s work is evidenced by his awards. He received both the Pulitzer Prize and the Shelley Memorial Award in 1929. He held a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1934. He occupied the Library of Congress Chair of Poetry in 1950-51, received the National Book Award in 1953, and the Bollingen Prize in 1956.

An amiable, soft-spoken man, he is neither Bohemian nor eccentric. His one passion is the movies, though he also likes jazz. He has a wry humor, is short, stocky, and unobtrusive. He has lived away from the South for a long time; his home is Brewster on Cape Cod at present.

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**John Orley Allen Tate**

Winchester, Kentucky, was the birthplace of John Orley Allen Tate on November 19, 1899. As a boy he was sent to a private school in Louisville. In 1922, he was graduated from Vanderbilt, *magna cum laude*. There, as one of the founders of the famous little magazine, *The Fugitive*, he was a leader in the group which took its name from this publication.¹ In 1924, he married the novelist

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¹See p. 20.
Caroline Gordon.

Tate, like Ransom, another of the Fugitive-Agrarians, has also combined his literary career with teaching. When he was first graduated from college, he went into his brother's coal business, but "because he had his mind on poetry instead of coal, young Tate shipped some anthracite that should have gone a hundred miles North to the remote West. The company lost seven hundred dollars, and he was fired."  

In 1934, he became lecturer in English Literature at Southwestern College at Memphis. Four years later he went to Woman's College of the University of North Carolina as Professor of English. Since that time, he has been Resident Fellow in Poetry at Princeton, Lecturer at New York University, Visiting Professor of Humanities at the University of Chicago, and Senior Fellow of the Indiana School of Letters. Since 1951, he has been Professor of English at the University of Minnesota. He has been editor of the Sewanee Review, advisory editor of the Kenyon Review, and he served as a regular member of the Columbia Broadcasting Company's Invitation to Learning program in 1940 and 1941.

Tate has written biographies, a novel, poems, and a large number of books of criticism. His biographies in—


Tate is scholarly, sophisticated, and intensely earnest. Sometimes mild-mannered and almost shy, his friends say that he has strong convictions and a biting wit when the occasion arises. Converted to Roman Catholicism in 1950, he “remains unreconciled to pretty much everything: our literature, our civilization, our wars.”

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1F. W. Dupee, "Verse Chronicle," Nation, April 21, 1945, p. 466.
In considering the significance of any award, the contributions and the reputations of the recipients are major factors. In this study it is assumed that the reviewers' reactions to the books which won for their authors the Bollingen Prize afford an indication of the recipients' literary ability. To secure this information, the reviewers' opinions as located through references cited in *The Book Review Digest* are summarized in this chapter.

Ezra Pound, the first writer to whom the award was presented, received it for the *Pisan Cantos*. Consisting of ten of the one hundred cantos originally planned, the *Pisan Cantos* brings up to eighty-four the number which he has completed. Of these ten cantos, written while he was in an American concentration camp near Pisa in Italy, one reviewer commented:

> The whole design is gradually becoming plain. Pound's apparent intention is to present "ideas in action; the living ideas of the past to counteract the dead ideas of the modern world in which usury has triumphed. . . . They are a great mosaic of ideas in the words of men who had them; a device
Pound seems to believe retains their action.¹

As the founder of a school of poetry, Pound had a definite influence on such writers as William Butler Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams, and has always been a controversial figure in American letters. Since most of the reviews were written by poets, the points of view reflect the reviewers' respective allegiances to the various schools of poetry. Of the ten reviews listed in The Book Review Digest, only the one written by Louise Bogan, herself a Bollingen Prize winner and regular poetry reviewer for the New Yorker, was marked definitely favorable. In reality even she had few words of praise for the Pisan Cantos. After commenting on his "combination of sharp day-to-day observation, erudition, and humorous insight,"² she warned:

Pound's streak of charlatanry, in the cantos as a whole, was so interwoven with valuable insight that it was fairly negligible. What became really annoying was his growing tendency toward obsession . . . . Pound before the war lost control of his manias and became less than primitive.³

None of the remaining seven reviews received any symbol in The Book Review Digest, but upon actual reading, it is clear that four were slanted favorably, two unfavorable, and one was noncommittal.


The *Saturday Review of Literature*, avowed enemy of obscurantism, the term its writers apply to certain modern poetry, published an unfavorable review in which the critic reiterated Louise Bogan’s opinion on Pound’s sanity:

The controlled pitch that was once virile and strong is now flaccid and hysterical. His once viciously satirical eye and his once rich sensibility have somehow degenerated. . . . The man is intermittently, at least, mad; as a political opponent, he was ineffectual and pathetic.  

Other reviewers found little politics, but “fluid notation and reverie.”

Rolfe Humphries, for example, praised the poet’s work: “The Pisan Cantos are beautifully written; their obscurities, their eccentricities, no more pronounced than Pound ever was; the diction firm, sound, elegant, the music and the image adding up to the dance; the whole thing moving.” In the *Pisan Cantos* Humphries also found a renewal of Pound’s faith in the human race. None of the reviewers made more than a passing reference to the anti-Semitic, pro-Fascistic, anti-American content which was such a prominent issue after the award of the Bollingen Prize and which resulted in

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the transfer of the sponsorship of the award from the Library of Congress to Yale University.

Three years passed before the award was again made to an author for a specific book. In 1952, Marianne Moore, one of the best-known women poets writing today, was the recipient for her *Collected Poems*, which consists of poems from *What Are Years*, *Nevertheless, Selected Poems*, 1935, and some hitherto unpublished verses. The reception was enthusiastic. Ten of the reviews listed in *The Book Review Digest* were favorable and three indefinite. Critics praised her for her varied interests, her wide range of learning, the structure of her poems, her sense of humour, her reserved manner, and the lasting quality of her work.

According to reviewers, Marianne Moore draws many of her facts from natural history, museums, and art galleries and utilizes in the symbolic sense much information from the world of botany and zoology. The resulting variety is one of the factors which contributes to the seeming obscurity of her work. The reader is sometimes unable to follow her as she skips from one bit of information to another, and frequently must consult reference books for the meaning of many of the allusions before he can read with any satisfaction or understanding.

Described as a "syllabic line, with hidden and un-
accented rhymes,”¹ her verse structure makes her work difficult to read aloud and somewhat prosy. When she varies this, however, her poetic expression sometimes is of the first rank. About her intricate verse, based on simple experience, one reviewer wrote:

Here . . . are precision and wit, a passionate interest and a reserved manner, irony, craft, an elaboration that counterpoints succinctness; a muting of music and rhyme that sets off the occasionally imperious tone, the ne plus ultra of Alexandrian poetry.²

She received some of her highest praise from a reviewer who applauded her in verse:

A world of artifice and elegance believed in intensely enough displaces reality, Miss Moore, having no peer among feminine craftsmen, and of men but half a dozen, has accomplished quietly this miracle. America becomes articulate once more from Brooklyn. Salute to her "Collected Poems!" May it be read by all who value integrity and wit.³

The only review that could be construed as being even slightly unfavorable deplored "the impoverishment of subject-matter and the overbearing compulsion of tact,

¹ "Books," Time, December 10, 1951, p. 112.
which has brought it down here and there to noise."¹

In 1953, Archibald MacLeish and William Carlos Williams² were co-winners of the Bollingen Award. Mac-Leish received the prize for Collected Poems, 1917-1952, while Williams' award covered the body of his work. Though MacLeish's work was not reviewed so enthusiastically as Marianne Moore's, it was well-received. Of the nine reviews listed in The Book Review Digest, two were definitely favorable, two recognized good and bad points, and five were indefinite.

The critics praised MacLeish for his technical accomplishments, knowledge, psychological insight, and clarity. Of his technical ability, which was praised by all reviewers, Babette Deutsch wrote;

There are syllables that stir as with a private life of their own to evoke a subsea creature, the details that make a street shine in the eye and scream in the ear, the sweet winds and the salt, the lights and shadows moving over landscape or seascpe to say: the moment is going, hold it, you cannot hold it, remember it, and it will be different, remembered.³

Others mentioned the vast amount of research he did for such poems as "Conquistador" and "America was Promised."

¹Peter Duval Smith, "To Please Herself," New Statesman and Nation, December 1, 1951, p. 644.
²See p
His knowledge of words as well as ideas combined with his psychological insight have won him the eminence he now enjoys. The clarity of his verse has been hailed as a good omen and a departure from the so-called obscurantist precepts of the period to which he belongs.

The main objection to MacLeish's work seems to be his attempting to fuse a literary with a political career, which, some reviewers feel, is seldom effectively done. One reason they give for this failure is the lack of time and the inevitable mixture of political and po­etical ideas. Certainly MacLeish's political career has resulted in much social consciousness poetry, which is considered in some quarters little more than propaganda.

Giving as their reason the fact that MacLeish states more than he suggests, critics who belong to the Imagist group do not always approve of his work. Still other critics praise him for taking poetry out of the library and handing it to the many rather than the few.1

The editor of Booklist reflects the general attitude toward the book as a whole in this statement:

The stature of the man and the value of his work are made clear in this large volume. ... Together, now they the poems give us the history of a poet in our time, and a record of the deep convictions of a public servant whose verse can be read as counsel

and conscience.¹

Louise Bogan and Leonie Adams were co-winners of the Bollingen Award in 1954; the former for Collected Poems, 1922-1953, and the latter for Poems: a Selection. Louise Bogan’s book received favorable critical comment with four of the seven reviews listed in The Book Review Digest marked favorable and three indefinite.

Critics praised Collected Poems, 1922-1953, first because it made available once more poems which had been out of print for many years. The selection from earlier works was judged excellent and the new additions were also praised. The last section which consisted mainly of the new works, was termed the best.

Reviewers found that much of Louise Bogan’s craftsmanship lay in her imagery, technical facility, insight, and restraint. Ben Ray Redman referred to her imagery as precise² while others found it sombre. In form, her best works are traditional lyrics. Not being an experimentalist, she employs few technical innovations. Of the overall effectiveness of her poems, one reviewer declared: “She is also a musician, whose notes

³Ibid.
are as crystalline as those of Chopin's preludes.\(^1\)

Louise Bogan does not seem to the critics to be a naturalist, but rather a realist, and she has "an honest, yet piercing awareness of life as fundamentally tragic."\(^2\) When her mood of tragedy is lifted, it is not by gaiety, but by a sardonic wit. Her deep sincerity and psychological knowledge contribute to the full dimension of her poetic talent which is so amply displayed in this volume. Restraint plays a major role in the effectiveness of Louise Bogan's work. According to one critic, she "has practiced her art gravely and discreetly with controlled passion and steady devotion."\(^3\)

Apparently there were no outstanding objections to the work included in this volume. The only faults noted by the reviewers were minor ones, such as: "The reader is at first distracted by the trance-like state common to poetesses in the early part of the century, but soon you find she means what she says."\(^4\)

In summing up the value of the book, Leonie Adams, her Bollingen Prize co-winner for the year 1954, observed:


\(^2\)Redman, loc. cit.

\(^3\)Rexroth, loc. cit.

\(^4\)Leonie Adams, "All Has Been Translated Into Treasure," Poetry, LXXXV (December, 1954), 165.
The immediate significance of the book is two-fold. It provides in an admirable arrangement and with some fine additions, work whose excellence had been recognised, but which had been for some years out of print, and it provides occasion for calling it to the attention of the wider audience it deserves.¹

Leonie Adams' prize-winning volume, Poems: A Selection, consists of poems from out-of-print collections and a group of more recent lyrics. The Book Review Digest indicates a quite enthusiastic reception with six of the ten reviews listed favorable, three indefinite, and one favorable with reservations.

Critics praised Leonie Adams' work for its delicacy, beauty, and maturity. Several reviewers spoke of her severe delicacy, which, combined with traditionalism, gives her work a remote air. She was even compared to the pre-Raphaelite poets. Concerning her anti-modern spirit, one reviewer remarked:

Leonie Adams has beauty, a beauty that seems inhuman on the subway, and she has profundity, a profundity that knows not Baudelaire or Sade or Kierkegaard, and perhaps it is well to have at least one person writing this way in a naughty world.²

Much of the beauty of her poetry reflects what she sees in nature and many of her interpretations evolve from a pantheistic form of communication. Though a disciple of nature, she puts the full impact of passionate management into her writing. With the years this passion

¹Rexroth, loc. cit.
²Ibid.
has mellowed somewhat, and her poems display increasing wisdom and maturity.

Leonie Adams has been criticized for being too obscure and difficult. One reviewer felt that perhaps her work revealed a lack of human experience.¹ Concerning her remoteness from daily life, Louis Untermeyer commented, "It is a rarefied atmosphere which Miss Adams breathes and only a height-loving reader can venture with her into that thin air."² Untermeyer also censured her for the monotony of her tone and the soporific quality of her lines. John Ciardi effectively summed up the reaction of the critical world when he stated: "Her poetry is a difficult labor. Intensely compact, intensely intellectualized and rigorously ascetic, it comes true, but it does not come easy."³

In 1956, the Award went to Conrad Aiken for *A Letter from Li Po and Other Poems*. Eight of the ten reviews recorded in *The Book Review Digest* were favorable and two were indefinite; which would seem to indicate a most favorable reception for this volume. Many critics, however, found points on which they felt that Aiken was not at his best.

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²Redman, loc. cit.
³Ciardi, loc. cit.
Reviewers lauded Aiken for his pure poetic language, metaphysical aptitude, use of music and depth. Though there is some disagreement over his use of the language, Aiken has been described as an artist in words. Some critics feel that his melancholy, pure poetic language is very effective and that he uses it well in constructing beautiful images. One critic stated that so long as Aiken is concerned with the physical, he is dull, but that his real forte is in the metaphysical. This preoccupation with the realm of the mind perhaps accounts for some of the criticisms regarding his lack of emotion. The use of music, also noted adversely by some, is praised by other reviewers who feel that Aiken utilised musical phrases and beautiful harmonies effectively. They speak of his beautiful musical imagery, his sensitiveness to sounds, and his use of complex rhythms. 

John Holmes regarded Aiken's work as especially valid for depth because it has been "one long search for his soul." According to one review, though he does not quite reach the final heights of poetry, ... his power to speak memorably" classes him among the best

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2 Samuel French Morse, "In Love is the Beginning," The New York Times Book Review, December 4, 1955, p. 44.

of the time.  

Aiken was criticized adversely for his sentimentality, his musical language, and his endless detail. In speaking of the superabundance of sentimentality, Ned Gorman characterized parts of the book as "bathos turned in polished and musical rhetoric." This atmosphere was heightened by the fact that all seven sequences of poems in the volume were elegiac in tone. Of the too-rich musical content, one critic voiced the opinion that "poems lose poetry through a language that lacks the precious individual sound of words," that the reader is in danger of becoming so entrallled by the music of the selections that he loses contact with the meaning. The endless detail for which Aiken is criticized is not of the same quality as that of either Ezra Pound or Marianne Moore. Aiken's is that of total recall and results in such a surplus of padding that it is impossible to reach the theme.  

Other critics noted the lack of a theme and loss

\[\text{\footnotesize 1}\text{"Artist in Words," Times Literary Supplement, June 15, 1956, p. 361.}  
\[\text{\footnotesize 3}\text{Poetry, U. S. Quarterly Book Review, XI (December, 1955), 473.}  
\[\text{\footnotesize 4}\text{Gorman, \textit{loc. cit.}}  
\[\text{\footnotesize 5}\text{Ibid.} \]
of contact with life with the resulting loss of vitality. This lack of a definite theme was pointed out by several reviewers. John Holmes remarked that "the poetry is a sensuous catalog set to music that celebrates and laments as it itemizes."\(^1\) Randall Jarrell analogized: "Most of his work is an easy, approximate reverie; it is a planet without continents, islands, icecaps—all is sea."\(^2\) Another result of Aiken's preoccupation with rhyme and rhythm is his loss of contact with the living, breathing world. Some critics concluded that this isolation may bring him to write things which will amount to no more than mere jingles and that it has already produced a lack of emotion and a subsequent boredom.

Of Aiken's writing, one reviewer concluded:

> Mr. Conrad Aiken does not quite reach the final heights of poetry. But... only a few poets do in each century... Aiken has the power to speak memorably. There is continued delight in his poetry; with him we are in the hands of a most accomplished artist in words. Yet here our small doubts come... To be entranced is not far from being drugged, and with Mr. Aiken we are apt to succumb to a delicious assent in which we are so pleased by the sound that we begin to be less aware of the sense.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Holmes, loc. cit.


\(^3\) "Artist in Words," Times Literary Supplement, June 15, 1956, p. 361.
Of the eleven recipients of the Bollingen Prize in Poetry, five were designated on the basis of the body of their work rather than for any specific books. In each of the latter cases, the Bollingen Committee selected a poet whose contributions to contemporary American poetry were significant. In order to secure a measure of critical reaction to the works of these particular American poets, the references cited in Essay and General Literature Index were read and are summarized here.

Wallace Stevens, in 1950, was the first poet to whom the Prize went for the body of his work rather than for one specific book. His place in the field of American letters has not been the subject of so much controversy as that of Pound or Eliot, but his influence has made itself felt, and critics disagree on his merits.

One point on which most critics agree is that Stevens' vocabulary and command of rhetoric are unusual. His use of language has about it a freshness and exuberance which suggest complete mastery. He uses words in varying ways to suggest often not a picture, but a sound. Babette
Deutsch stated: "He can delight us equally with the eccentric propriety of his actual flora and fauna and that of his tropes, with the subtlety of his verbal patterns and that of his imaginings." ¹

Drawn by the problem of the inter-relationship of the arts, Stevens takes much of his imagery from music, painting, and sculpture. Richard Blackmun noted that his images never convey the meaning of a poem; they merely serve to elaborate it. ² Louis Untermeyer also observed that Stevens placed his emphasis not on the content, but on conceits and fragmentary phrases. ³

As Harriet Monroe observed, he was "quite free of literary allegiance to period or place." ⁴ Though a part of the Imagist movement, his use of the image set him apart from his contemporaries. His poems concern no especial section of the country; they are universal. Neither is there seemingly any relation between poems; each is an entirely separate entity.

According to Sister Bernetta Quinn, Stevens

main concern is "first of all with the structure of reality; secondly, with the way in which man knows his world; and finally with the transfiguration of that world as imagination acts upon it." Stevens was essentially an idealist, his world one in which he wished to face reality, but not be overwhelmed by it. In spite of this idealism, he was a serious poet and spoke in sober tone. In criticizing Stevens' philosophizing in poetry, Jarrell affirmed:

The habit of philosophizing in poetry—or of seeming to philosophize, of using a philosophical tone, images, constructions, of having quasi-philosophical daydreams—has been unfortunate for Stevens. Poetry is a bad medium for philosophy. 2

Another point on which Jarrell judged Stevens to be lacking is that of dramatic instinct. Jarrell's feeling is that Stevens' lack of contact with lives of people has sent him into the abstract and away from the dramatically imaginative.

In 1951 John Crowe Ransom followed Wallace

Stevens as recipient of the Award for the body of his

his work. Exemplifying the idea of the old school

Southern gentleman poet, Ransom is courteous and restrained, yet he is very much alive. He is the regional


poet with the universal concern, and though his work speaks for the South, its wider range is thoroughly evident.

Although he usually adheres to traditional verse forms, he uses them in unorthodox ways. A masculine quality about his verses gives them strength and vitality which over-ride the occasional lapse into preoccupation with the pastel-tinted days of the early South.

As a traditionalist, Ransom believes in defending poetry against the encroachments of science. He also believes in the unity of the arts and holds to the idea that the principles of painting should be the principles of poetry; that is, art deals with the object in view, not the feelings of the artist.¹

Like Stevens, Ransom belongs to the Imagist movement, but he does not employ shock techniques in either his use of words or the technical aspects of poetry, but rather in the overall meaning. By a pretense at ballad style, he lulls the reader, then suddenly introduces an idea which shocks him out of his complacency. Randall Jarrell characterized the varied subject matter of Ransom's poems as ranging from "Armageddon to a dead hen."² He also implied Ransom's idealism in the

¹Quinn, loc. cit.
Ransom has been criticized for a lack of emotion, excessive concern with the past, and technical monotony. Critics are of the opinion that he lacks the capability to speak directly, that no enthusiasm ever breaks through the shiny surface of his work, that his belief in tradition leads him too far in the direction of restraint and impartiality, that his concern with the past makes much of his work elegiac in tone, and that his use of conventional verse forms becomes monotonous. Most critics, however, would agree with Randall Jarrell that "it is only fair to say that Ransom is one of the best, most original, and most sympathetic poets alive; and it is easy to see that his poetry will always be cared for, since he has written poems that are perfectly realized and occasionally almost perfect—poems that the hypothetical generations of the future will be reading pages.

1 Ibid.

by page with Wyatt, Campion, Marvell, and Mother Goose.  

In itself, the volume of poetry Ransom has written is slight, but the influence he has had on the development of contemporary poetry in the South has been significant. As a preceptor in the Agrarian movement and leader in modern criticism, he has at times sacrificed his own creative output in favor of service as teacher for such poets as Allen Tate, Merrill Moore, and Robert Penn Warren. What Eliot was to the Imagists, Ransom was to the Agrarians.

William Carlos Williams was co-winner with Archibald MacLeish of the Award in 1953 and the third poet to receive it for the body of his work.

Williams used free verse almost without exception, which, in this case, Randall Jarrell defined as the absence of organization, metre, or rhyme. He used little metaphor and was not concerned with the beauty of the sound of his work. In this latter regard, one critic reflected that "the epithet that might most quickly characterize William Carlos Williams is happy champion of the vernacular." Yet another called his work the "staccato rhythms of American speech."  

Williams has been praised for his savage elo-

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1Jarrell, Poetry and the Age, p. 109.
2Ibid., p. 269.
quence, sensibility in the connotation of response, 
originality, and knowledge. He liked to tell the dis-
graceful, piercing "delightfully animal truth," and 
he did with a savage sincerity which belied his mild 
exterior. Babette Deutsch noted that:

The focus of his poetry is the provincial life 
of the Eastern seaboard. He is interested in the 
small towns along the Passaic, the suburban homes 
set in their neat grass plots, the festering, fasci-
cinating slums, the roads that carry a man away 
from them, the ferry that communicates with the 
other shore.  

Though in his busy professional life as a pediatrician 
he sometimes saw things which tended to embitter him, 
he learned much about humanity. Then too he read and 
studied widely.

Louis Untermeyer voiced the opinion of those 
who have criticized Williams' experimentation, his ex-
hibitionism, and his lack of imagination as follows:

Williams is erratic in his flights from reality; 
too often when he imagines himself skimming the 
clouds on his expressionistic Pegasus, he is merely 
sliding down the saddle of a wooden mount. . . . 
Stilted rhymes . . . elbow groping experiments; 
peculiarities of phrasing are crowded aside by re-
minders of Browning as calm and orthodox as "The 
Death of Franco at Cologne"!

Williams' belief that American art should be distinctive 
has been the basis and touchstone of his life's work and 

1Deutsch, op. cit., p. 99. 
2Ibid. 
3Untermeyer, op. cit., p. 343.
is partially the reason for his style and the content of his work.

In the following year, 1954, the Award was again given for the body of a poet's work, this time to Wystan Hugh Auden, whose place in the literary world is long standing. For many years, he was nucleus for a group of well-known British poets which included Louis MacNeice, Cecil Day Lewis, and Stephen Spender. He is a natural leader, the type of man about whom schools of thought evolve.\(^1\)

The "most versatile of the between-wars generations of English poets,"\(^2\) Auden's work ranges from simple ballads to fugues and chorales. He deals with verse facilely, varies his metrical scheme, and has a command of rhythm. Rolfe Scott-James called his verse "simple, direct, lucid, though often regarded as obscure."\(^3\)

Aside from skillful handling of structure, critics have commented favorably upon his sense of humour, his perception, imagination, and faith in the future of humanity. His sense of humour permeates his work, and some critics have acclaimed his light verse as

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\(^2\) Frankenberg, *op. cit.* p. 301.

his best. He has, on the other hand, been lauded as the most perceptive and brilliant poet of his generation. Lloyd Frankenberg asserted: "One of his great talents lies in the ability to reclothe abstractions; to particularize the principles—or lack of them—under which modern man lives."^1

His imaginative powers have led him to utilize unusual situations and have enabled him to put himself completely in the place of another creature, human or animal. The passionate nature expressed in his work goes hand in hand with his humanitarianism, his belief in the ultimate good of humanity, and his willingness to fight for this idea. Consequently, he is much concerned with theology and the place of the moral man in today's world. He is interested in politics, not as a partisan but as a seeker after the truth of man's relation to man, and he sets forth some of today's most serious problems in society, personality, and belief.

Critics of Auden's work, for the most part, have been muted, but D. S. Savage voiced the opinion that "Auden reached the limit of his achievement in his first book and thereafter fell into rapid and progressive disintegration."^2 Auden also has been taken to task for

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^1Frankenberg, op. cit., p. 304.

for occasionally becoming dogmatic in his zeal for attempting to clarify and understand man's place in society. One other critic declared with a certain amount of asperity that the world in which a great deal of Auden's poetry moves is that of the psychologist's and doctor's casebook.¹

Finally, Marianne Moore has expressed effectively the feelings of Auden's contemporaries in this statement; "As a champion of justice, he will always have a champion in the pages he has penned; and as the Orpheus of our mountains, lakes, and plains, will always have his animals."²

Allen Tate, the most recent recipient of the Award, was the second of the Fugitive group to achieve that honor, and like his predecessor, John Crowe Ransom, received the prize for his general works.

In Tate's work critics most frequently noted the structure of his poetry, his traditionalism, the balance between the classic and romantic, and his recognition of the worth of modern man. As to structure, Tate's poetry features traditional verse forms wielded with the compression of Eliot. His imagery comes most often as something of an afterthought. His diction is heavy, and

²Moore, loc. cit.
he has not much use for lyricism and melody.\footnote{Deutsch, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 195.} Of his
traditionalism, so frequently compared with Ranso\'s,
Charles Clinksberg affirmed:

\begin{quote}
Tradition is his god, and what he means by tradition is quite plain. It is the tradition of the aristocratic South when the ownership of property carried with it a measure of social responsibility, when leisure was a virtue and manners were gracious and culture was a prized though exclusive possession of the elite. If our age is disrupted by violence and anarchy, then that . . . is due to the decay of manners, morals, and religion.\footnote{Charles I. Clinksberg, \textit{American Literary Criticism, 1900-1950} (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1951), p. 170.}
\end{quote}

Another critic contended, however, that Tate\'s traditionalism has become a quality, not a model and declared that he is \textit{"a fugitive from the Fugitives."}\footnote{Vivienne Koch, \textit{"The Poetry of Allen Tate," The Kenyon Critics: Studies in Modern Literature from the Kenyon Review}, ed. by John Crowe Ranso (New York: World Publishing Company, 1951), p. 170}

In regard to this balance between the classic and romantic, a critic says that only Tate has achieved this poetic balance between the metaphysical and the Symbolist.\footnote{Koch, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 181.}

Like Ranso, Tate is set against the encroachments of modern science, holding that the attempt to explain all experience in terms of science does not take into account human experience.

Faults in the quality of Tate\'s work are condens...
rather well in this statement:

Tate's virtues were scarcely those of lyrical persuasion and grace of movement, but were those of masculine force and difficult poetic achievement; in reading many of his poems one gains the impression of verbal honesty and a poetic insight that had been too often distracted by the proximity of critical ideas.¹

Although the fate of the Bollingen Prize may have seemed in doubt in 1949 when at the very beginning of its existence the right of the Library of Congress to sponsor such an award was questioned, actually the ensuing publicity stimulated a wider and more popular interest in modern poetry and the controversy unified the efforts of a sizable group of talented poets.

From the beginning, the members of the Bollingen Prize committees, who serve by virtue of being Fellows in American Letters of the Library of Congress, have been eminent poets. They have evidenced consistently that they consider the selection a serious literary responsibility and, despite much inconvenience, have insisted upon the naming of the person best qualified for the award.

With the exception of Ezra Pound, who has not received many awards and honors in this country, the literary records of the various recipients of the Bollingen Prize in Poetry are in many ways similar. Four of the Bollingen winners have also received the
Pulitzer Prize in Poetry; five, the National Book Award; and two, the Russell Loines Award in Literature. Five have been Fellows in American Letters of the Library of Congress, and four have been appointed Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress, although William Carlos Williams declined the latter office. Five have been members of the National Academy of Arts and Letters, and six have held Guggenheim Fellowships.

Several poets—Wallace Stevens, John Crowe Ransom, William Carlos Williams, Wystan Hugh Auden, and Allen Tate, have received the award on the basis of the contributions of their work as a whole. Three of these—Ransom, Auden, and Tate—are teachers who have been notable for developing young literary talent and for helping to cultivate a healthful atmosphere conducive to artistic creativity. On the basis of the various awards received and other forms of recognition and on the basis of the available reviews, the Bollingen Prize winners appear to be poets who enjoy prestige in this country. It is significant that all eleven are included in various well-known anthologies.

In this, the final year for which the Bollingen Foundation originally pledged financial support for the Prize, it is gratifying to learn that the Foundation
considers the award of sufficient merit to continue its support indefinitely.¹

¹Letter from Donald C. Gallup, Curator of the Collection of American Literature, Yale University Library, June 30, 1956.
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1Articles listed were used in the preparation of Chapters I and II.

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1Titles listed form the basis of Chapter III.


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1 Titels were taken from Essay and General Literature Index and used as the basis for discussion in Chapter IV.


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