

# THE FUNCTION OF THE PAST IN ALLEN TATE'S "ODE TO CONFEDERATE DEAD"

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## Abstract

Allen Tate (1899-1979) was one of a group of poets known as the Fugitives or Agrarians who participated in the establishment of an independent American literature . One of the major characteristic features that coloured Tate's works is his reverence of the past of his region , the American South, as connected with the past of the European literary tradition that was prevailing in Europe before industrialism and science had dominated all fields of the modern life . In this respect he draws heavily on T. S. Eliot's (1888-1965) notion of the continuity of the literary tradition and the connection of the past with the present .

The aim of this research is to trace how the past appears in Tate's "Ode to Confederate Dead" and the role it plays in this poem .

The conclusion sums up the findings of this study.

In 1928 , Allen Tate (1899-1979) published his first volume of poetry , *Mr. Pope and Other Poems* , which he gave the tight discipline of some of the traditional stanzaic forms but loosened these forms with many surprising variations . Ferman Bishop thinks that "The emotional effect he [Tate] finally achieved was that contained in unusual density of subject matter straining for release from its controlling form." <sup>1</sup> Tate even

was trying for objectivity by "distancing." He achieved this through the use of a persona . This objectivity reflects his tendency away from romantic and personal self-expression that he would develop in his later poetry . In this stage , he was very much the experimenter, subject to many influences as he exploited the various qualities of poetic form . He had taken seriously his apprenticeship to poetry and

acquired a maturity of style within a very brief period .<sup>2</sup>

Morton Dauwen Zabel points out that Tate's ordeal as a poet "comes precisely in this articulation of detached critical intelligence with lyrical sensibility" and that "his first ten years of poetic expression were given to solving a problem larger than , yet implicit in , his private experience . It is fundamentally the problem of identity ." This problem is certainly dealt with in his first volume . Then Zabel elaborates more about this problem in Tate's early poetry , "The problem of Mr. Tate's early verse," Zabel goes on to say, "was the merging not merely of a critical with a lyric intelligence , but of private intuition in a deflated and skeptical age with idealism inherited from a rich and heroic past ."<sup>3</sup>

"Ode to Confederate Dead , " among other poems "emerges as Tate's childhood memories fought with his modernist aesthetics . Tate's reputation as a Southerner was of greater interest to critics than his modernism . Reviewers of his early

poetry recognized that the poet was under the hold of the modernist ideas but captivated by Southern themes living a conflict between commitment to a past tradition and the demands of modernism . John Gould Fletcher, to name one of them, saw that Tate was at his best when he wrote poetry about the historical imagination of modern Southerners . "Whenever he deliberately narrows his range of knowledge to that of the past alone , as in the impressive 'Ode to Confederate Dead , ' he is a major poet ."<sup>4</sup>

In Tate's poetry, "the reader, confronted by a texture of allusions and intricate phraseology ,is soon willing to accuse the poet of a poverty of emotion and a shoddiness of concept with deliberate obscurity, " as stated by Zabel . Zabel insists that it is part of any definition of poetry that "it must embody certain emotional states ,certain psychological appeals , which manifest themselves in unmistakable cadence , rhythm , and pattern . If spontaneity is subject ...to analytical

motives , the glow of passion is lost .  
" 5

There is an emotional and intellectual awareness of complexity . Tate dramatized in his poems the search for self-knowledge which suggests , in turn , the abyss that his generation had seen before them . "It is this ability to incorporate the tone of his age into the rhythm of his poetry that made his work so promising for the future," as Bishop argues .<sup>6</sup>

From the very beginning , Tate tried to surpass all others by the oddity of his images . He used "the reverie on half-forgotten glories by a dazed mind stumbling through time and space . There are hints of unsanctioned passions , madness, and exhaustion ; indefinite allusion to unfamiliar texts ; garbled metaphors...which suggest singular obtuseness where connotations are concerned," as John L. Stewart declares. All these prove his escape from the present to the glories of the past of the South that he lived in his imagination . Some of his poems are

autobiographical and confessional , but they seem to be based on imaginative rather than actual history. Stewart also suggests that in "Tate's first volume of verse , what first strikes one is the exceptional violence of the diction and imagery."

7

It seems that Tate also fell under the spell of Crane and his "fierce Latinity." Tate wrote his poems while he felt that he was in an exile and he looked back to his memory of the creeds and legends of his family and the Old South . The readers feel the poet's dismay at the disorder and vacuity of contemporary urban life and the indifference of the majority of Americans to art and values on which he had based his self-respect and his future .<sup>8</sup>

Tate used energetic metaphors and live "myths " in order to break through the patter of "abstract experience" and give man a picture of himself as a man . That is why , he was preoccupied with time and "specific moral problems ." Despite this, he did not show a living relation

between the present and the past without being honest to the present .<sup>9</sup>

One of the most important poems of all Tate's literary canon is "Ode to Confederate Dead " which was written during the twenties. It is the most anthologized of all his poems . It is the record of failure because, for Tate, the modern age had no sense of purpose and its religion had been deteriorated to social philosophy . Tate doubted that an artist could produce a statement incorporating a whole vision in such a condition . Thus he was stuck with eccentric, small , and scattered impressions of a subjective vision . When vision failed , he turned his attention to the past , for the past came to represent tradition . Tradition is important , for him , because of continuities of idea , religion , and purpose in culture – all the things that Dante and Virgil pressed into their art .<sup>10</sup> This poem is written in iambic meter with variation in the length of the line . It has a mounting rhythm and the shock of unexpected rhyme . The final version of the poem came in

1937 after it received some revisions and changes and it will be referred to in these papers. Both the image and sound are intended to shock the reader and make him feel the difference between the glorious past and the dizzy present.<sup>11</sup>

Tate remarked that the general form of the poem is an ode<sup>12</sup> "...even further removed from Pindar than Abraham Cowley . I suppose in so calling it I intended an irony : the scene of the poem is not a public celebration , it is a lone man by a gate."<sup>13</sup> Tate implied that the contrast between the personal quality of his ode and the public nature of the Pindaric expresses the "solipsism " of modern man . Lillian Feder argues that Tate's adaptation of the ode form implies that " if modern man is trapped by his personal conception of the world , so is the very character of the ode transformed by this view ." The man in the ode speaks for himself , and , if what he says represents others' thought , then he expresses their defeat , for they are cut off the from the heroic past and

the actual present , like him . <sup>14</sup> He has the "secret need " of the wanderers on the Mediterranean , and like them , he sets off in a lonely journey into the past . Tate expected his readers to be aware of the traditional odes , but not of their tone which implies that the poet speaks to and for a society united in victory . The traditional odes are poems in which a particular hero is considered as the bearer of a great tradition which explains Tate's choice of this particular form of classical literature.

15

**This "Ode " starts as an elegy . In fact, to know how Tate structured his poem, it is preferable to consult his essay " Narcissus as Narcissus " (1938) which was written about this poem in particular,**

The structure of the ode is simple . Figure to yourself a man stopping at the gate of a Confederate graveyard on a late autumn afternoon . The leaves are falling ; his first impressions bring him the ' rumor of mortality ' ; and the desolation barely allows him , at the beginning of the second stanza , the conventionally heroic surmise that the dead will enrich the earth , 'where these memories grow .' ...The crab is the first intimation of the nature

of the moral conflict upon which the drama of the poem develops : the cut-off-ness of the modern 'intellectual man' from the world .

The next long passage or 'strophe' beginning 'You know who have waited by the wall ,' states the other term of conflict. It is the theme of heroism ... this heroism is a formal ebullience of the human spirit in an entire society , not private , romantic illusion ....<sup>16</sup>

Tate goes on to state that "The structure then is the objective frame for the tension between two themes , "active faith" which has decayed , and the "fragmentary cosmos " which surround us .<sup>17</sup> Tate also stated that " That poem is 'about' solipsism , a philosophical doctrine which says that we create the world in the act of perceiving it ; or about Narcissism , or any other ism that denotes the failure of the human personality to function objectively in nature and society . "<sup>18</sup>

Row after row with strict impunity  
The headstones yield their names to the element,  
The wind whirrs without recollection;  
In the riven troughs the splayed leaves  
Pile up, of nature the casual sacrament  
To the seasonal eternity of death;<sup>19</sup>

The poem begins by locating the speaker in a cemetery , viewing the stones that "yield their names to

the element." Then , he feels the wrongness in the fading names, the fading memories . No one can punish the stones which do this with the "strict impunity." "The element itself is unfeeling ," as Harold Bloom states . A wind "whirrs without recollection" and thus is like the land and the people , among which the long-dead soldiers are buried and forgotten . Then , the leaves are introduced by the poet ; they are evoked and moved . They cover the ditches and sunken graves , they are a "casual sacrament," an observance of death, a "seasonal " reminder of its "eternity." The speaker feels that their movement is caused by a god somewhere , through "the fierce scrutiny / Of heaven ," and their noise reminds him of death and the meaning of mortality .<sup>20</sup> In the this stanza, Tate made an evocation of religion and deity . He did that by using words including "sacrament," "heaven," and "eternity." Desolation is also present , in the image of graves sunken to become "troughs," and the " ever –fading names on the stones ."

The only noise is that of the leaves , they produce a "muted death rattle."

21

"The speaker's outlook on nature provides one of the most important means of indicating the quality of his mind ," as Bishop points out . Tate here , like the Romantics , relies on personification . But , unlike them , he coloured his expressions with figures expressive of mechanism – " The wind whirrs without recollection." There is a balance between these two sides of the speaker's mind. That he could express himself in the vocabulary of commerce is because of the impact of the modern world with its industrialism . The personification of heaven reflects the range of the speaker's comprehension . But Tate made the expression of the speaker ambiguous "to allow for the doubts of modern man in his search for a controlling principle in the universe ," as Bishop argues .<sup>22</sup>

Autumn is desolation in the plot  
Of a thousand acres where these memories grow  
From the inexhaustible bodies that are not  
Dead, but feed the grass row after rich row.

(CP,20)

While the first stanza is dominated by death , the second is dominated by the search for identity . The speaker of the poem tries to break out the terror of this organic cycle by thinking of autumns that have come and gone , memory itself takes the quality of the grass that grows on the dead bodies . "The alternative to the closed temporal system that he views resides in some sort of spatial suspension , represented in part by the sculptured angels on the tombs," as Robert S. Dupree suggests. The latter also argues that there is a suggestion of what Tate called "the angelic imagination, an ability to penetrate into the essence of things without relying on their sensual manifestations ." The "brute curiosity of an angel's stare," which turns those who look on it to stone, is trapped in decaying matter , the "uncomfortable " statue assaulted by "the humors of the year." <sup>23</sup> The split between body and mind is implied in the sensibility of the protagonist as well as in the art of the grave sculptor's angel . "Like

the falling leaves , he too is 'plunged to a heavier world below,' a kind of mental hell in which, like Dante's damned shades , he exerts directionless and purposeless energies ," as Dupree states . The first and second stanzas are characterized by an astonishing power and compactness. <sup>24</sup>

Indeed , the second stanza states that the speaker's meditation is about the inability of man's physical being to resist the effect of time . The men , that are lying in the cemetery , are lying without personal identities . They are merely "memories" of mass actions . Their identities are merged in the concept "Confederate" which includes even their onlooker because he is also merged in this grouping of men and ready to die and join them. The speaker fears that the bodies are capable of being exhausted . The bodies became part of the process of nature but without individual identity . So, the antagonism , in this section, is expressed between time , personified in "November" , and the idealization of mankind, represented by the stone

angels . Bishop argues that "Time is conceived of as freedom of opportunity as opposed to the determinism of idealization." The speaker implies that the consistency of the idealization , the overstressing of the purely rational, is at the heart of the spiritual illness of modern man .<sup>25</sup>

One should point out that the image of the "bodies" that are "not/Dead" as fertilizer that "feed the grass" is an image and idea in an agrarian culture that stands for the heroes who scarified themselves for their land and beliefs . On thinking of how the dead bodies , never gone , enrich the grass of the "thousand acres," the speaker urges "Think of the autumns that have come and gone!" Bloom puts it in a clear way when he says that "The time and the moth [that stands for it] carry , the *current* time , work their inexorable damage on memory and the images of religion and honor that occupy the graveyard . Tate characterized the modern passage of time just as he would the condition of modernity itself

” 26

The brute curiosity of an angel's stare  
Turns you, like them, to stone,  
Transforms the heaving air  
Till plunged to a heavier world below  
You shift your sea-space blindly  
Heaving, turning like the blind crab.  
(CP,20)

Here , the speaker assures the reader that the gaze of the angels staring out "Turns you, like them, to stone," and in so doing , takes the reader into the "heavier world below ," a "Hades, " perhaps , or an "ocean," since the next image is that of a blind crab which is moved , like the leaves , by forces both "divine and uncontrollable," as Bloom states . The wind is moved by the "brute curiosity " of an angel's stare , and the "sea-space" of a "netherworld, or death, " as Bloom points out.<sup>27</sup> The poet , here ,stressed on "the ability of the idealization to drive the individual back upon his primitive impulses , symbolized by the crab . But the emphasis in the later version is stronger," as Bishop conceives . The poet uses figures of motion, although the hearing and turning are primitive and apparently



futile, which give the reader at least the benefit of some action .<sup>28</sup>

After the end of the second stanza , the readers encounter a refrain of two lines and it is one of four others that were added later in the early thirties . It signals out images related to the leaves. The leaves have a role in the poem , but here they start "Dazed by the wind, only the wind," before they fly and plunge . The leaves, as in the first stanza , are propelled by some divine force and are "stunned , as if the wind is sudden , a cold brush."<sup>29</sup> The leaves can be considered as individuals and seem at first glance to be wholly determined by the wind . The speaker , though aware of the problems of his world , seems to have confidence in his individualism.<sup>30</sup>

You know who have waited by the wall  
The twilight certainty of an animal,  
Those midnight restitutions of the blood  
You know — the immitigable pines, the smoky frieze  
Of the sky, the sudden call: you know the rage,  
The cold pool left by the mounting flood,  
Of muted Zeno and Parmenides.

(CP, 21)

Tate declared in "Narcissus as Narcissus" that this strophe contains the other theme of the poem , which is the theme of heroism . It is heroism

"in the grand style elevating even death from mere physical dissolution into a formal ritual," as he explained .

<sup>31</sup> He also declared that this strophe is meant to convey "a plenary vision" and the presence of the exemplars of an active faith . This "plenary vision" appears in two ancient symbols : the warrior and the two ancient philosophers , Zeno and Parmenides . The warrior is the traditional symbol of heroism whom Tate concretized , in the stanza following the second refrain , through his list of names that are connected with the Civil War , but he does not limit him to this particular time , for he is a warrior whose heroism comes from a view of the world represented by the philosophical system of Parmenides and Zeno . Tate's warrior is a man who lives by a heroic code of conduct . Zeno and Parmenides represent the view which makes this code possible .

<sup>32</sup> The poet mentioned these two philosophers because they warned against what he called "solipsism." Parmenides warns against the subjective blindness of mere

dependence on the senses for knowledge of the world . Thus, Parmenides and Zeno , his disciple , represent , for Tate , an objective "whole " view of life which can be best lived in an agrarian society which not found in the present but in the past. Moreover , Zeno , in his thought and conduct, represents the heroic way of life . He opposed a tyrant, according to tradition, and was captured by his enemy . Zeno pit off his own tongue in order not to give the information demanded by his enemy . That is why , "muted Zeno," has a double meaning : "Zeno made mute by his own act of heroism and Zeno the heir and exponent of a philosophical system which regards the universe as the 'fragmentary cosmos of today,' " as Chapin argues . Tate's heroic vision is created out of the ancient past combined with the present . "It is a vision which suggests a continuity in human thought , conduct , and feeling, broken only in the world of today," as Chapin goes on to state.<sup>33</sup>

Bishop suggests that the speaker feels that his own waiting by

the cemetery for illumination makes him in some respect identical with ancient Greece . The speaker is a modern man who knows that the Greeks central problem is also his – the problem of man . The Greeks are equipped to understand , and the speaker emphasizes the range of his experience.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the speaker did not enter the cemetery but "waited by the wall." This monologue , the address, reminds the reader how much he or she knows about the act that led to the fate of the bodies that are within the wall . He wants to remind the reader of the war that they both know . The parallels between the Trojan War and the Civil war are asserted to show the great heroic deed of the southern dead soldiers. "The poet used a contradictory, apocalyptic , and instinctive terms for what is remembered : 'the twilight certainty of an animal' has overtones of the pursuit , the kill and the hunt . 'Those midnight restitutions of the blood' convey the sacrifice, the payment in

flesh , and the corporeal 'honor and the thickness,' " as Bloom believes.<sup>35</sup>

"The immitigable pines , the smoky frieze of the sky , the sudden call " are all evocations of the battlefield , the charge , the unyielding landscape that utilizes them even now . The dead bodies are a "cold pool left by the mounting flood," and the notion a world comprised of one substance (the philosophy of Parmenides ) , a philosophical oneness , is muted by the experience of defeat , division , and indifference .

<sup>36</sup> In the last seven lines of this stanza , the reader encounters the most obvious contradictions , when the speaker reminds him/her of the "unimportant shrift of death." The use of "shrift," now uncommon in typical speech , as pointed by Bloom , refers to the penance and absolution . Shrift conflates death and the divine . "In this case , the penance due for a life of sin–death and consequent afterlife , upon absolution –is unimportant to what is left," as Harold Bloom explains . The reasons for death , the "vision" and "arrogant circumstance,"

are praised , that which caused men to react and to hurry "beyond decision." But it is bitter praise of a system that "should be yours tomorrow " but will never be . Then comes the refrain that follows this stanza . This time , the speaker sees the leaves , and do not hear them, and this makes him standstill. The leaves "expire " ; they are already dead and they are falling from the tree . The leaves here stand for the bodies in the round that are also already dead . Yet , the speaker implies that the bodies (the soldiers) are not dead until their memory falls as well . Bloom suggests that "the leaves become a correlative, in this way . The leaves are not dead until they plunge , hit the ground , and rot."

<sup>37</sup>

Lillian Feder believes that Tate's repeated reference to the leaves in this "Ode" recalls the leaf image in the *Iliad* . In the "Ode," the image of the leaves provides the answering strain to the quest for heroism in history , in man ,and in society . Tate expressed that this

"Ode" is a section of history made into experience . "The lone man, striving to be one with those who waited by the wall , tries to transform the leaves into fighting men. But the man is unable to do that and his inability suggests that the certainty of man's tragic fate overpowers any thought of his heroism," as Feder argues .The man at the gate cannot identify himself with the leaves and they become a symbol of his mortality and his loneliness.<sup>38</sup>

**Turn your eyes to the immoderate past,  
Turn to the inscrutable infantry rising  
Demons out of the earth — they will not  
last.**

**Stonewall, Stonewall, and the sunken  
fields of hemp,  
Shiloh, Antietam, Malvern Hill, Bull Run,  
Lost in that orient of the thick-and-fast  
You will curse the setting sun.**

(CP, 21)

Here , the speaker asks the reader to turn his eyes to the "immoderate past" to remember the hazy soldiers , indeterminate in their presence , even hellish , as "Demons , " and in spite of terrifying presence , "they will not last." The next lines are litany of battles , only one of which the Confederate forces won , at Bull Run ,

but it was a limited victory that led to subsequent doomed campaign of invasion.<sup>39</sup>

The speaker also begins to recall the famous Civil War names , in an attempt to find meaning in the individuals and events of that struggle . He tries to find the qualities of men like Jackson and those of Albert Sidney Johnson of Shiloh because he resists the deterministic implications of mass movements of men . "The last two lines of this stanza allow the speaker to project his own mind into the mind of Tiresias , " as Bishop declares.<sup>40</sup>

The third refrain comes then and it builds on the image that concludes the previous stanza , "Cursing only the leaves crying / Like an old man in a storm , " with the play of the enjambment signaling the lines' two possible meanings : either the sound of the leaves is like a crying , or the man is crying .<sup>41</sup> The reader can imagine the "the shout" and "the crazy hemlocks point / With troubled fingers to the silence which / Smothers you, a mummy , in time , "

(CP,22) the sound segues into a daydream . Thus , just as earth covers the dead bodies of the men , the land points to horrible quiet which envelops the reader , whom Tate's speaker likens to a mummy , another form of a corpse . The soldiers are buried by silence which , like the headstones , gives them up and their society to forgetfulness . While the reader and the speaker hear all of this , the hound , an icon for Tate's remembered South , perhaps hears only the wind and none of what it says . The hound , unlike the jaguar which follows, is not actively hunting , is not rapacious in the way other figures in the poem are .<sup>42</sup> The "mummy," as it is personified here , suggests the personal element in the mind of the speaker . It also raises the problems of the decline of civilization , the futility of man's effort to defeat the operation of time , and the relationship of man and the hereafter. The mummy and the hound are closely juxtaposed and both express the tension between freedom and necessity which is upper

most in the speaker's mind.<sup>43</sup>

Now that the salt of their blood  
Stiffens the saltier oblivion of the sea,  
Seals the malignant purity of the flood,  
(CP, 22)

This stanza is characterized by Tate's startling use of oxymoron . In it, there is also a radical shift that Tate himself has spoken of in "Narcissus as Narcissus." Here begins the second division of the poem . In the previous stanza , the reader encounters the use of the pronoun "you" which is shifted now into "we" because the poet wants the reader to share this vision with him . Tate's question , "How shall we set about restoring the values that have been lost?," is already posed in the poem . The poet directs this question to the young men who stand by the gate. At this point, one becomes aware of some sort of community standing behind the protagonist , those "who count our days and bow / Our heads with a commemorial woe" (22) during the ceremonies offered for the dead .<sup>44</sup> Dupree argues that "the ritualistic gestures are still carried on , although , perhaps , as a 'grim felicity' that is

distinct decline from heroic action .”  
”What has been changed in the perception the poem,” Dupree adds,  
”offers the image of nature .  
Previously, nature was the inhumane cycle of a world without past or future .  
Now, there is something in nature which suggests a recall of man’s heroic energies.” And this something is expressed in the last five lines of this stanza through the use of the image of the "spider, " "willows, " "screech –owl, " and the "lyric seeds.”<sup>45</sup>

What shall we say of the bones, unclean,  
Whose verdurous anonymity will grow?  
The ragged arms, the ragged heads and eyes  
Lost in these acres of the insane green?  
(CP,22)

Both of the questions above are about the problem of identity . The true essence of the men has been merged with something larger body of values , as suggested by the merging of "the salt of their blood" with the ocean . But there remains the question of the individual whose meaning must have to do not only with the "malignant purity" of his ideal essence , but with his uncleanness as well . Tate lessens the intended effect

of shock by allowing his speaker to merge the soldiers with the nature in which they rest. The speaker , perhaps , is also thinking of himself and his dilemma as being lost in the "acres of the insane green.”<sup>46</sup> This stanza also poses the essential question of the poem –what to do when life ceremony , tradition , and all their trappings fail us? The speaker asks of the lush field , the "insane green," that is now all left of once chivalrous men , what can "we" say , "we" who have failed to feel their presence and have made them , like the leaves , scarcely a whisper ?<sup>47</sup>

The last five lines of this stanza bring the image of spider , owl , and willows . These are conventional death symbols that have implications of determinism . They imply the history of which the men are a part. Another aspect of their meaning is suggested by the synesthesia of "invisible lyric ." The physical and the spiritual are mysteriously brought into relationship even by the song of the screech owl .<sup>48</sup> Life continues and the world is pitiless in its way, in its urge

to unity. Then comes the refrain on the leaves which states that , "We shall say only the leaves/ Flying , plunge an expire "- and they will blindly insist that only leaves –not men –die.<sup>49</sup>

We shall say only the leaves whispering  
In the improbable mist of nightfall  
That flies on multiple wing;  
Night is the beginning and the end  
(CP,22)

The speaker states that the possibility of creativeness seems much more remote and what he can do is only to contemplate . The voice of the personified leaves is now reduced to a mere whisper which implies that there is one individual choice for him , only the determinism of science . He has a limited possibility of action and, thus, his capacity for struggle is limited . The speaker sees himself as a less important man than his predecessors .<sup>50</sup> Those who merely go through the motions of the ritual of "grim felicity" can see nothing more than that "Night is the beginning and the end," and this includes him . Birth and death became "the end of destruction," and

between them is the "mute speculation" of Zeno and Parmenides and the angel's stare "That stones the eye ." The toothless dog is replaced by the energetic jaguar who "leaps / For his own image in a jungle pool , his victim ." The solipsistic self now replaces the cycle of nature .<sup>51</sup>

What shall we say who have knowledge  
Carried to the heart? Shall we take the  
act  
To the grave? Shall we, more hopeful, set  
up the grave  
In the house? The ravenous grave?  
(CP.22)

These final lines of this stanza are a mass of paradoxes , all asking on the failure of something which might be a belief , a system , or a cause . Bloom points out that "the fatalism of the last two lines is just like that of Thomas Hardy . Tate questions fail . He states that if the modern men are more hopeful , they put the grave in the house in order to shorten the trip ."<sup>52</sup> The protagonist or the poem stands between two communities , the city of the living and the city of the dead , and he does not know how to bring them together in any meaningful way or fashion . He

carries the instinctive knowledge that has been "carried to the heart, " but he is also haunted by the specter of rationalism - "muted Zeno and Parmenides, " who , like the jaguar , look into the "cold pool" of a method that removes them from life . He never enters the cemetery and cannot participate in the space occupied by the dead, and he is himself repressed by time . In this state , the speaker is typical of the modern man in his mummy-like condition .<sup>53</sup>

Leave now

The shut gate and the decomposing wall:  
The gentle serpent, green in the mulberry bush,  
Riots with his tongue through the hush —  
Sentinel of the grave who counts us all!

(CP,23)

This stanza ends the poem and, as Tate emphasized in his essay , it introduces an image that complements that of the owl and the serpent. The serpent is a symbol of time that moves and changes quickly . The command to the protagonist, to leave the "shut gate and the decomposing wall," is equally important . This man at the gate is not the poet but the skeptical historian who meditates on the past of Western

Civilization. The gate and the wall separate the living from the dead , but two important "sounds" in the poem – the screech –owl's call and the "rioting" of the "gentle serpent" –are pleas to some kind of life . "It is the life of myth , of speech through imagination that is neither mutely paralyzed, as the mummy , nor rendered to a meaningful noise in the motion of the leaves," as Dupree states. "By yielding the time and participating in the past through memory," Dupree goes on to state, "man can at least survive through makeshift devices of his secular imagination , even in declining civilization."<sup>54</sup>

The Confederate cemetery therefore becomes a kind of "Eden from which man is finally locked out," as Bishop states . The figure of the serpent seem natural in this context because it is not only linked with time , but also with awareness and with evil . It is a "gentle serpent" –a silkworm –and it permits the reader to suggest from it the thread of life and death as well as scientific



determinism . In the last line of the poem , the poet uses the pronoun "who" to personify the grave . He seems to suggest that only by identifying himself with the grave , he can comprehend it . This personification is appropriate to a man of modern science .<sup>55</sup>

One of the most important notes about this poem is that of Radcliffe Squires :

The speaker of the poem is imprisoned in the self and imprisoned therefore in darkness ; the "Ode " is the darkest of Tate's poems , containing no single image of light . That is noteworthy in a poem by a poet who is addicted to images of light . No , what one finds is 'blind crab,' 'twilight certainty,' 'midnight restitutions,' 'Night is the beginning and the end.'<sup>56</sup>

Tate himself expressed in "Narcissus as Narcissus" that the man in it suffers from the "locked –in ego."<sup>57</sup> The poem reveals modern man's inability to grasp the glory of the Old South and it also makes clear the inability of modern man even to conceptualize the mythic action of Confederate soldiers . The vagueness of time out of the natural cycle creates a temporal gap that separates the

present from the past . Tate believed that modern man locates himself outside nature. "The cemetery represents an agrarian way of life," as Anthony Stanonis suggests , while the falling leaves symbolize the buried Confederates who participated in a seasonal and spiritual cycle of life and death . The leaves, like the bodies of the soldiers , remain alive within the seasonal cycle . For Tate , men of the modern world are unable to grasp the mythic warriors because "they rationalize experience and therefore fail to comprehend the unseen mythic cycle of death and rebirth that gives a continuous importance to their actions," as Stanonis suggests. "Such a person," Stanonis adds, "remains blind to the wholeness of experience attained through a combination of intellect and emotion as well as the natural and supernatural ."<sup>58</sup>

By not entering the cemetery , the man in the "Ode" fails to participate in a traditional , agrarian lifestyle in balance with the cyclical occurrence of life and death. Tate's age was an exile from the sacred

burial grounds in which his ancestors rested . Stanonis thinks that "the closed gate represent a childhood and young adulthood isolated from the molding power of Tate's forefathers." Tate , for this reason , mentioned the names of the old soldiers who died in the Civil War in order to express his personal longing and admiration for the Old South , which is clear throughout the whole poem .<sup>59</sup>

"Ode to Confederate Dead " cannot be understood without the frame –work of the classical world . Like " The Mediterranean" and " Aeneas at Washington," which are published in his second volume *The Mediterranean and Other Poems* (1936), it "speaks of the present only in relation to the past , and its view of the past is the epic view of a poet , not a historian," as Feder argues.<sup>60</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In " Ode to Confederate Dead, " the past plays an important role in setting the reader's awareness about the present situation of modern man

which is corrupted by the determinism of science and the consequent loss of faith and ethics . Tate escaped, in this poem, to the past of the Old South because he felt that it was better than the present and to imply that it is continuous . He was aware that any improvement of the present should emerge through a real comparison with the past with its European principles . To achieve this continuity between the past and the present , he exploited , in this poem, the classical material in a way in which he connected it to the past of his region . If anyone says that the present is also tackled in this poem, he should remember that Tate stands in the past and sees the present and the future from this angle .

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ferman Bishop , *Allen Tate* (New Haven : College and University Press Publishers , 1967) , pp . 61-2 .

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. pp. 20-32.

<sup>3</sup>Morton Dauwen Zabel , " The Creed of Memory, " *Poetry* 40 , no. 1 [Apr., 1932]:36-7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20578487> (accessed Oct. 1, 2010)

<sup>4</sup>As quoted in Thomas A. Underwood , *Allen Tate : Orphan of the South* (Princeton : Princeton University Press ,2000) , p. 138 .

<sup>5</sup>Morton Dauwen Zabel , " A Critic's Poetry, " *Poetry* 33 , no. 5 [Feb., 1929]:281-82, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20576899> (accessed Oct. 1, 2010)

<sup>6</sup>Bishop , pp . 73-4 .

<sup>7</sup> John L. Stewart , *The Burden of Time : The Fugitives and Agrarians* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1965) , pp . 364-71 .

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. , p. 376 .

<sup>9</sup>Cleath Brooks , "Allen Tate's Poetry " in *Allen Tate and his Work : Critical Evaluation* , ed. Radcliffe Squires (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press , 1972 ) , p . 156 .

<sup>10</sup> Radcliffe Squires , *Allen Tate : A Literary Biography* (New York : Merrill Company, 1971 ) , pp . 75-6 .

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. pp. 76-7.

<sup>12</sup>An ode is a long lyric poem with a serious subject –matter and treatment , elevated in style , and elaborate in its stanzaic structure . The prototype was established first by the Greek poet Pindar , whose odes were based on the songs of the chorus in the Greek drama . he wrote his odes in complex set . The regular or Pindaric ode in English was introduced by Ben Johnson in 1629 . It is a close imitation of Pindar's form , with all the strophes and antistrophes written in one stanza form and all the epodes in another . M. H. Abrams , *A Glossary of Literary Terms* , 7th edit. (Boston : Heinle and Heinle , 1999) , p. 198 .

<sup>13</sup> Allen Tate , *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago : The Swallow Press, 1968) , pp. 427, 602 .

<sup>14</sup> Lillian Feder , "Allen Tate's Use of Classical Literature " in *Allen Tate and his Work : Critical Evaluation* , ed. Radcliffe Squires , pp. 179-80 .

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Tate , *Essays of Four Decades* , pp.598-99.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 595-96 .

<sup>19</sup> All further quotations from Tate's "Ode to Confederate Dead" will be made to Allen Tate, *Collected Poems, 1919-1976* (New York : Farrar Straus Giroux , 1977 ) . Henceforth, it will be marked by (CP) followed by page number. This quotation is found in page 20 .

<sup>20</sup>Harold Bloom , *Allen Tate : Comprehensive Study and Research Guide* (Philadelphia : Chelsea House Publishers , 2004) , pp. 18-19 .

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Bishop , p. 86 .

<sup>23</sup>Robert S. Dupree , "Tate's Parody of Religious Ideals," in *Allen Tate : Comprehensive Research and study Guide* , ed. Harold Bloom , p. 48 .

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Bishop , p. 86 .

<sup>26</sup>Bloom , p. 19 .

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. , p. 19 .

<sup>28</sup>Bishop , pp. 86-7 .

<sup>29</sup>Bloom , pp. 19-20 .

<sup>30</sup>Bishop , p. 87 .

<sup>31</sup>Tate , *Essays of Four Decades* , p. 599 .

<sup>32</sup> Katherine Garrison Chapin , "The Courage of Irony : The Poetry of Allen Tate" in *Allen Tate and His Work* , ed. Radcliffe Squires , pp. 181-82 .

<sup>33</sup>Ibid. , p. 188 .

<sup>34</sup>Bishop , pp. 87-8 .

<sup>35</sup>Bloom , p. 20 .

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid. , p. 21 .

<sup>38</sup>Feder , pp. 181-83 .

<sup>39</sup>Bloom , p. 21 .

<sup>40</sup>Bishop , p. 89 .

<sup>41</sup>Bloom , pp. 21-22 .

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Bishop , pp. 89-90 .

<sup>44</sup>Dupree , p. 50 .

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Bishop , p. 90 .

<sup>47</sup>Bloom , p. 22 .

<sup>48</sup>Bishop , pp. 90-1 .

<sup>49</sup>Bloom , p. 22 .

<sup>50</sup>Bishop , pp. 91-2 .

<sup>51</sup>Dupree , p. 51 .

<sup>52</sup>Bloom , p. 23 .

<sup>53</sup>Dupree , pp. 51-2 .

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Bishop , p. 92 .

<sup>56</sup>Squires , *Tate : A Literary Biography* , P.80.

<sup>57</sup>Tate , *Essays of Four Decades* , p. 598 .

Tate draws here on Freud's theory of psychoanalysis in which he gave a map of the

human mind . Freud stated that there are three components of the mind : First, there is the " superego " which is the internal voice which stops the child from doing things he should not do , or makes him feel guilty for having done things he should not have done when he does them . The is internal voice is generated from the fear of the father . Second , there is the " id " which is an "amorphous " , unstructured set of desires in the mind of the born child which has the demand "I want " to represent the total sum of the content that fills his mind . The last one is the " ego " which is the individual's image of himself as a self –conscious being . Or "it is that which is conscious in the person , that which experiences and sense the outside world and which represent reality to the self," as Pamela Thurschwell defines it . Pamela Thurschwell , *Sigmund Freud* (London : Routledge , 2000) , pp. 48,82 .

<sup>58</sup>Anthony Stanonis and Allen Tate , " 'Take Him East Where Life Began ' : The Role of Virginia in Shaping the Early Writings of Allen Tate ," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 2004 , 40-1, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4250158> (accessed Oct. 1, 2010)

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Feder , p. 183 .

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خلاصة البحث الموسوم :

وظيفة الماضي في قصيدة "قصيدة إلى الحليف الميت" لأن تيت

ألن تيت (١٨٩٩-١٩٧٩) كان واحداً من مجموعة الشعراء الأمريكيين الذين يعرفون بالهاريين (الهروبهم إلى الماضي) أو الرعويين والذين ساهموا بشكل فعال في التأسيس لأدب أمريكي مستقل . واحدة من أهم الخصائص التي ميزت شعر تيت هي تعظيمه لماضي منطقته (الجنوب الأمريكي) والذي كان مرتبطاً بالماضي الأوروبي وتراثه الأدبي قبل أن يؤثر عليه التطور العلمي والصناعي . إن تيت في هذا المجال أظهر تأثيراً كبيراً بدعوة تي أس أليوت (١٨٨٨-١٩٦٥) إلى اعتبار التراث الأدبي واحداً ومستمرّاً وكذلك العلاقة المستمرة بين الحاضر و الماضي . يهدف

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هذا البحث إلى بيان كيفية تجسد الماضي في قصيدة "قصيدة  
إلى الحليف الميت" والدور الذي لعبه في هذه القصيدة .  
تلخص الخاتمة نتائج البحث .